Preschool Teachers' Teacher-Child Communication Skills: The Role of Self-Efficacy Beliefs and Some Demographics

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate to what extent self-efficacy beliefs and some demographics (years of experience and type of the institution) predict preschool teachers' teacher-child communication skills. Another purpose of this study is to examine whether preschool teachers' teacher-child communication skills change according to their educational level. Data were collected from in-service preschool teachers (N=304) working at 78 different schools in Ankara by using two different questionnaires and analyzed by using One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) and multiple regression analysis. Findings indicated that preschool teachers' self-efficacy beliefs were positively and strongly correlated with their communication skills. Preschool teachers' self-efficacy beliefs also a significant predictor of their teacher-child communication skills, while years of experience and the type of institutions did not make a significant contribution to preschool teachers' teacher-child communication skills. Findings also revealed that preschool teachers' teacher-child communication skills did not change with respect to their educational level.

Keywords: Early childhood education, preschool teachers, self-efficacy beliefs, teacher-child communication.

1. Introduction

People around a child such as parents, peers and adults are vital determinants of the child's social development because children learn many things about the world even by merely observing and modelling other people (Bandura, 1986). The early childhood teacher is one of those adults who take part in the child's microsystem which includes relationships between the developing children and the people in their proximal environment such as home, school and peers (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). That is why early childhood teachers have a big role in forming future generations and taking part in developing individuals and contributing to the education system (Gürşimşek, Ekinci-Vural, & Selçioğlu; Demirsöz, 2008).

In supportive learning environments, children feel safe and are sure about the value and love given to them by other people. The most significant element of this environment is the respectful relationship established between the child and teacher (Ministry of National Education [MoNE], 2013). In fact, establishing astrong relationship between the educator and the child plays a great role in the child's social, individual, behavioral and academic development as well as in their education (Early Childhood Learning Knowledge Centre, 2006; Francesco, 2011; Trawick-Smith, 2014; Tutkun, 2015). The positive relationships are based on sensitive interactions, especially verbal interactions, between the teacher and the child (Gable, 2002; Gruber, 2007).

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In fact, establishing positive relationships with children require having adequate communication skills for preschool teachers (Jonsson & Williams, 2013; Tepeli & Arı, 2011). As Kottler, Zehm and Kottler (2005) stressed, it is a surprising reality that highly successful teachers are very different from others personally and professionally. These qualified teachers adopt different strategies and have different opinions about student discipline. They organize their teaching environment and teaching-learning process according to their adopted strategies and ideas. However, they share a common critical feature: They are all successful communicator

Table 1. Items of effective teacher-child communication in early childhood education				
Communicative Language	**Listening**	**Empathy**	**Message**	**Non-verbal Communication**
using positive language rather than negative language (Kaltman, 2006) and using an accurate grammar (Beaty, 2008)	listening to children actively and showing interest to what is told by the child (Kottler et al, 2005)	to be honest and transparent in expression of feelings (Dökmen, 2008)	conveying clear and appropriate messages to the child in terms of the child's age and previous experiences (Kail, 2003).	using body language and voice tone effectively (Fernandes, 2014).
greeting and seeing off each student individually at their arrival and departure times (Beaty, 2008)	crouching down and make eye contact with the child because children focus on people's faces when communicating with them (Kaltman, 2006)	trying to understand the child's negative feelings rather than denying or sliding over them (Kaltman, 2006)	using "I message" rather than "You message" (MoNE, 2013).	to be sure about whether her/his voice tone matches his/her message. Especially, when an important request is being made, speaking firmly and telling the child about the reason of the request (Schenck, 2009).
calling every student by their names (Fernandes, 2014)	listening to the child without interrupting him/her when s/he is speaking and waiting for the end of the child's talk to respond (Beaty, 2008)	accepting the child with her/his current beliefs or comprehension without any judgment and criticism (Cooper, 2011)	using repetition when the child has a trouble in understanding the message (Jonsson & Williams, 2013; Kail, 2003).	winking, handshaking, touching the shoulder, nodding and especially an intimate smile to motivate children (Kaltman, 2006)
asking open-ended questions (beginning with interrogatives such as "Why", "How", "What", "Which", "Who", etc.) rather than simple "Yes" or "No" questions (Gjems, 2010).	using some body movements called acceptance reactions such as nodding, smiling and bending down (Yavuzer, 2014)	sharing his/her happiness and motivating the child to express his/her verbal or nonverbal messages, when the child succeeds in his/her attempt (Dökmen, 2008).	conveying the message which includes information related to unaccepted behavior to the child without any criticism, accusation and threat (Gürşimşek, 1999).	
to be a model by using courtesies like "Please", "You are welcome" and "Thank you" (Schenck, 2009)	using of door openers like "I see", "Really?", "Tell me more", "This is interesting" is another way of effective listening (Schenck, 2009).			

The notion of "communication" stemmed from "communis". "Communis" means "common" in Latin. Therefore "to communicate" implies "to make common"; in other words, it means "to make known" (Hasson, 2012). In its wider definition, communication is the system of information transfer among people and the unity of smiling, blinking, sometimes asking a question and sometimes telling a past experience (Katz, 2014).

On the other hand, communicating effectively is not a simple task. Especially communication with children requires teachers to have special abilities and training in terms of being able to communicate children in an age-appropriate and child-friendly way, to be positive and strengths-based and to address children's needs and address them holistically (Kolucki & Lemish, 2011) in order to accomplish and to meet educational expectations (Çetinkaya & Alparslan, 2011; Kayabaşı & Akcengiz, 2014) (for details please see Table 1). Hence, as National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) emphasized, a preschool teacher should frequently talk with children in a respectful and linguistically rich way. Moreover, since the communication process consists of proper organization of listening, asking, comprehending and reacting to activities according to developmental steps, individual characteristics and demands of the person communicated with (Copple&Bredekamp, 2009), the teacher should recognize every child in his/her class and be aware of their individual characteristics, desires and developmental needs (Duncan, Kemple, & Smith, 2000).

Having communication skills provides preschool teachers with numerous advantages (Erbay, Ömeroğlu, & Çağdaş, 2012; Kaltman, 2006; Stronge, 2007). As Stronge (2007) stressed, the management of complexities and adaptation to changes which derived from students, families, curriculum and other factors depend on individual capabilities and the background of the teacher. The communication skill is one of these characteristics and an indispensable part of satisfactory educational settings (Erbay et al., 2012; Hamre & Pianta, 2007). In fact, studies showed that effective teacher-child communication positively affects the social development and academic achievement of the child (Shan, Li, Shi, Wang, & Cai, 2014). In addition, the effectiveness of this communication is found to affect children's adaptation to school, improvement in different development fields and subsequent relationships with peers and adults (Erbay et al., 2012). Although teachers' communication skills have such a significant impact on children, some research indicated that many teachers lacked the understanding of the impact of effective communication with young children (Gjems, 2010; Jonsson & Williams, 2013; Soulis, 2009). Further, the findings of Gjems' research (2010) revealed that teachers had some difficulties in answering questions of children and inviting children younger than six years old to express their beliefs, previous experiences and thoughts. This issue raised a question mark in minds: What is the nature and level of communication between teachers and their students?

For a preschool teacher, due to different working conditions, the matter on which the teacher should focus can differ in private and public schools. In private schools, due to better facilitates, classrooms include less children. In this way, teachers generally focus less on discipline (Green, Muchin, Murphy & Zhu, 2008). Thus, in this study by considering different working conditions of private and public schools, it was thought that type of the schools (public/private) where preschool teachers work may be related to classroom climate and so preschool teachers' teacher-child communication skills. In addition to type of the institution where teachers work, preschool teachers' years of experience was considered as another variable that may be related to their communication skills. When the related literature was examined, it was encountered with some contradicting findings regarding years of experience. For example, the study of Erdem and Okul (2015) indicated that teachers' communication skills with their students did not differ in terms of their years of experience. On the other hand, in their study, Tepeli and Arı (2011) revealed that teachers with years of experience lower than ten years had higher communication skills than teachers with years of experience higher than ten years. In this study, by taking into consideration these contradicting findings related to years of experience and communication skills of teachers, in addition to type of institution where they work, preschool teachers' years of experience was considered another factor that might be in relation to their teacher-child communication skills.

Lastly, in the current study, another variable that may be related to teacher-child communication skills is self-efficacy beliefs of preschool teachers. In fact, when the person receives any message, he/she interprets the information from his/her frame. Therefore, individuals' values, attitudes, needs, beliefs and self-evaluations serve as a filter in their communication. Consequently, people's self-evaluations influence how they treat other people (Beebe, Beebe, & Redmond, 2005).

Self-efficacy belief which concerns skills in performing a task successfully is one of these self-evaluations of a person (Judge & Bono, 2001). Bandura (1977, 1986, 1993) described self-efficacy as the belief of a person about his/her capability in achieving a task successfully. In line with this description, Woolfolk-Hoy and Spero (2005) define teacher self-efficacy as the confidence of a teacher's capability in encouraging student's learning.

As on a variety of teaching related behaviors of teachers such as persistence in a duty, providing more encouragement to students (Gibson & Dembo, 1984), being more pleased with their job (Høigaard, Giske, & Sundsli, 2012; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010), and being more opento changes and innovations (Tarkın & Uzuntiryaki, 2012), self-efficacy beliefs of teachers also have an important role on the quality of teacher-child relationships (Chung, Marvin & Churchill, 2005; Yoon, 2002). As Çobanoğlu and Çapa-Aydın (2015) stressed, teachers with a high level of self-efficacy beliefs tend to create a positive classroom climate. In this positive classroom environment and positive relationships between teacher and children, effective teacher-child communication is featured (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; Jonsson & Williams, 2013). That is why teachers' self-efficacy levels may have an indirect effect on teacher-child communication. Moreover, as Rubin, Martin, Bruning, and Powers (1993) stressed, self-efficacy beliefs of people have a mediator role in their interpersonal communication. In line with this, how teachers comprehend their roles and abilities and their expectations from children may be effective in their interactions with children (White, 1993). During these interactions, teachers with high self-efficacy beliefs tend to be less critical and judgmental which are the main indicators of acceptance in effective communication toward their students when their students make an error (Ashton & Webb, 1986; Cooper, 2011; Gordon, 1974/2010). In addition, they tend to be more open to their students' ideas and tend to show their anger less to children when they confront with children's misbehaviors when compared to teachers with low self-efficacy beliefs (Ashton, Webb, & Doda, 1983).

Based on the belief of educating qualified teachers, enhancing their competence and professional skills is a prerequisite (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2009/2013). This study aimed to shed light on the preschool teachers' current self-reported communication skills and related factors. Indeed, as stressed in the literature, there is a need to conduct studies on teachers' communication skills and related factors (Bozkurt-Bulut, 2004). In this way, it may be possible to adopt new and effective communication strategies. In line with this, identifying the relationship between preschool teachers' teacher-child communication skills and their self-efficacy beliefs may provide an opportunity to consider these two variables as interdependent constructs.

For this purpose, the following four main research questions were tried to be answered.

1. To what extent do in-service preschool teachers have communication skills?
1. To what extent do in-service preschool teachers have self-efficacy beliefs?
2. To what extent does educational level of in-service preschool teachers affect their teacher- child communication skills?

•How well do self-efficacy beliefs, years of experience and type of institution where teachers work predict preschool teachers' teacher-child communication skills?

2. Method

2.1. Participants

The participants of the current study consisted of 304 preschool teachers (approximately 6.5% of the accessible population) selected by using convenience sampling method from the public (51.65%) and private (48.35%) early childhood education institutions under MoNE in three districts of Ankara (Keçiören, Yenimahalle, Çankaya). All of the participants reached in this study were females who had different educational level (see Table 2) and years of experience ranged between 0.5 and 40 years (M=12.35).

Table 2. Characteristics of the sample		
Type of the schools	*n*	*f (%)*
Public	157	51.65
Private	147	48.35
Missing	0	
Educational level		
High school graduate	61	20.1
Associate's degree	46	15.1
Bachelor's degree	178	58.6
Master's degree	19	6.3
Missing	0	

2.2. Data Collection Instruments

2.2.1. Teacher-Child Communication Scale (TCCS)

The first version of the "Teacher-Child Communication Scale" developed by Erbay et al. (2012) to measure preschool teachers' teacher-child communication skills consisted of a total of 28 items. After omitting 4 items, Saltalı and Erbay (2013) reported Cronbach alpha value of study for the TCCS as .88 (.81, .73, .72, .74, .86 for sub-dimensions). In this five-point Likert scale, teachers rated each question from (1) never to (5) always. In the present study, the Cronbach alpha value of the TCCS scale was found as .79.

2.2.2. Preschool Teachers' Self-Efficacy Beliefs Scale (PTSS)

The "Preschool Teachers' Self-Efficacy Beliefs Scale" (PTSS) was developed by Tepe (2011) in order to determine preschool teachers' self-efficacy beliefs. The scale includes 37 items (five-point Likert scale from 1= Never to 5= Completely) and six sub-dimensions (see Table 2). The rate of the variance explained by total variance was 64.99% (Tepe & Demir, 2012). The Cronbach Alpha values calculated for each sub-dimension was .91 for planning of the teaching-learning process, .90 for communication skills, .90 for parental involvement, .87 for planning, .88 for organization of learning environments and lastly .87 for classroom management (Tepe, 2011).

In the current study, the Cronbach alpha coefficient value for the whole scale was reported as .95. As for the sub-dimensions, the Cronbach alpha coefficient values were found to be .87 for the teaching-learning process, .77 for communication skills, .83 for parental involvement, .88 for planning, .82 for organization of learning environment and .80 for classroom management (see Table 3).

Table 3. Data collection instruments and variables		
Instruments	Sub-dimensions	Cronbach alpha
TCCS (Erbay et al., 2012)	Teacher-Child Communication Skills	.79
PTSS (Tepe, 2011)	Teaching-Learning Process (TLP)	.91
	Communication Skills (CS)	.90
	Parental Involvement (PI)	.90
	Planning (P)	.87
	Organization of Learning Environment (OLE)	.88
	Classroom Management (CM)	.87

2.3. Data Analysis

In this study, the data was examined by using IBM SPSS 22.0 Package program. To understand how well self-efficacy beliefs and demographic variables predict teacher-child communication skills of preschool teachers both as a whole and separately, Multiple Regression Analysis was conducted. In addition, One-way between groups analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to determine whether teacher-child communication skills of teachers' change with regard to their educational level.

3. Findings

To what extent do in-service preschool teachers have communication skills?

Descriptive statistics indicated that, the mean value of preschool teachers' communication skills was very close to 120, which is the highest score that can be obtained from TCCS. In other words, according to the findings, preschool teachers in our sample have high level of communication skills (M=112.13, SD=5.38, Min=92, Max=120). When each item in TCSS was analyzed, it was found that preschool teachers had the highest mean scores in item 2 (M = 4.87, SD = .34), item 12 (M = 4.87, SD = .35) and item 22 (M = 4.87, SD = .36). It can be concluded that most of the participant preschool teachers did not talk with their students by using expressions that belittle him/her, harm his/her self-confidence or target the child's personality. Moreover, the teachers listened to their students by making eye-contact with them and let students hug them when they needed to. On the other hand, preschool teachers had the lowest mean scores in item 21 (M = 4.01, SD = .75), which is about showing anger and nervousness via gestures, facial expressions and voice tone to the child, item 1 (M = 4.41, SD = .69), which is about choosing a silent and calm environment to talk to the child, and item 15 (M = 4.42, SD = .81).

Which is about explaining to the student the naturality and temporariness of some feelings like rage, anger and jealousy, and the possibility that these feelings are experienced by everybody (see Table 4)?

Table 4. Mean values and standard deviations for the TCCS items		
Items (Rated from 1 to 5)	*TCCS*	
1 2 3 4 5 Never Rarely Sometimes Often Always	*M*	*SD*
1. When I want to talk with my student, I choose a silent and calm environment.	4.41	.69
2. When faced with undesired behaviors by the student, I talk to him/her by assuming statements that do not belittle him/her, harm his/her self-confidence or target his/her personality.	4.87	.34
3. I use simple, clear and comprehensible sentences when I talk with my student.	4.84	.42
4. When my student has some trouble in expressing her/his feelings, I use door openers like "I understand you", "Really?", "Interesting" or expressions like "Do you want to talk about that?", and "I'm interested in your opinions, I want to listen to what you will tell me" in order to encourage him/her to speak.	4.66	.53
5. I talk with my student without reflecting my anger and rage toward another person, case or event.	4.53	.58
6. When I listen to my student, I try to understand his/her current feelings and I express that to him/her.	4.77	.41
7. By means of my body posture, I show my student that I am ready to listen to him/her	4.77	.43
8. I pay attention not only to what the child is telling but also to her/his hand, arm and body movements.	4.68	.41
9. I listen to my student without using communication barriers like criticizing, making fun, shaming, advising and blaming.	4.80	.43
10. I use some expressions like smiling, nodding and "hmm" and "I am listening to you" in order not to make him/her feel that he/she is not listened to.	4.65	.80
11. I set an example in being a good listener for the student when I listen to him/her.	4.80	.40
12. I listen to my student by making eye contact with him/her.	4.87	.35
13. I listen to my student by going down to her/his eye level and standing at a minimum distance with him/her.	4.82	.40
14. I use expressions that indicate to him/her that I understand her/his feelings and thoughts correctly.	4.75	.48
15. I explain to my student that some feelings like rage, anger and jealousy are natural and temporary, and that these feelings can be experienced by everybody.	4.42	.81
16. I listen to my student by putting myself into her/his shoes and looking at events from her/his viewpoint.	4.44	.72
17. I use expressions which include imperative sentences when I talk with my student.	4.45	.50
18. When my student has a problem, I use some expressions like "Never mind, don't be upset, it will be ok in time" so that he/she doesn't get upset.	4.44	.55
19. When the student behaves in an undesired way, I show my anger toward the student by being cross and not talking to him/her.	4.80	.39
20. When I talk with my student, I use expressions that compare him/her with other children.	4.84	.36
21. When I am angry and nervous, I show that to my student via my gestures, facial expressions and voice tone.	4.01	.75
22. I let my student hug me when he/she needs it.	4.87	.36
23. I hug my student in order to show my love to him/her.	4.74	.51
24. I talk with my student by smiling.	4.78	.41

To what extent do in-service preschool teachers have self-efficacy beliefs?

Participant preschool teachers had also high level self-efficacy beliefs (M=167.40, SD=14.31, Min=118,

Max=185, Max score can be gathered=185). However, their mean score in the sub-dimensions of organization of the learning environment and in parental involvement were remote from maximum scores which could be obtained from these two sub-dimensions when compared to the mean scores in the other four sub-dimensions. Therefore, it can be said that participant preschool teachers feel more efficacious especially in communication skills, planning and classroom management rather than in organization of the learning environment and parental involvement (see Table 5).

Table 5. Mean values and maximum points for PTSS sub-dimensions				
Sub-dimensions	M	SD	Min.	Max.
TLP	41.54	3.47	30	45
CS	32.83	2.36	24	35
PI	21.63	2.87	11	25
P	27.15	2.96	17	30
OLE	21.90	2.56	13	25
CM	22.32	2.23	14	25
PTSS	167.40	14.31	118	185

To what extent does educational level of in-service preschool teachers affect their teacher- child communication skills?

In addition, to explore the effect of educational level on teacher-child communication skills of preschool teachers, subjects were divided into four groups according to their educational level (Group 1: High school graduate; Group 2: Associate's degree; Group 3: Bachelor's degree; Group 4: Master's degree). Findings obtained from ANOVA indicated that there was no significant statistical difference in the TCCS scores for the four groups [F $(3,300=1.5, p=.20]$ at the $p>.05$ level. (See Table 6).

Table 6. One-way ANOVA between groups for teacher-child communication skills				
Educational level	M	SD	$F(3,300)$	P
High School Graduate	112.68	4.87	1.538	
Associate'sDegree	113.19	4.32		
Bachelor'sDegree	111.59	5.78		.20
Master'sDegree	112.87	5.11		

Predictors of Teacher-Child Communication Skills

The contributions of overall self-efficacy beliefs (PTSS), years of experience (YE) and type of institution (TI) where teachers worked to teacher-child communication skills of preschool teachers (TCSS) were determined by Multiple Regression Correlation Analyses. Findings indicated that self-efficacy beliefs, years of experience and type of institution explained 39% of the variance in teacher-child communication skills. The multiple correlation *(R)* was .62 with R^2=.39 for teacher-child communication analysis (F=65.349, p=.000). Findings also signified that self-efficacy beliefs of teachers was the best predictor of teacher-child communication scores (β=.61), explaining 35% of the variance. On the other hand, years of experience (β=.06) and type of institution (β=-.05) made a unique contribution to explaining preschool teachers' teacher-child communication skills but their contribution was not statistically significant ($p>.05$) (see Table 8).

Table 7. Interco relations between variables										
	YE	TI	TCCS	PTSS	TLP	CS	PI	P	OLE	CM
YE	1									
TI	.500**	1								
TCCS	.067	-.125*	1							
PTSS	.105*	-.171**	.626**	1						
TLP	.071	-.163**	.589**	.916**	1					
CS	.038	-.132*	.538**	.834**	.792**	1				
PI	.131**	-.013	.474**	.810**	.657**	.565**	1			
P	.054	-.207**	.578**	.915**	.794**	.713**	.709**	1		
OLE	-.037	-.212**	.537**	.846**	.710**	.599**	.611**	.759*	1	
CM	.117**	-.125**	.533**	.876**	.761**	.695**	.642**	.768**	.741**	1
*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).										
**Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).										

Table 8. Independent contributions of overall self-efficacy beliefs, years of experience and type of institution				
Variables	**Teacher-child communication skills**			
	B β	*t*	*p*	
Constant	73.196		23.528	.000
Self-Efficacy Beliefs	.231	.614	13.312	.000
Years of Experience	.038	.067	1.268	.206
Type of Institution	-.574	-.053	-1.003	.317

R squares were examined for each sub-dimension to identify which sub-dimension best predicts overall teacher-child communication skills of teachers. For the teacher-child communication skills scores, the results indicated that self-efficacy beliefs in the teaching-learning process made the strongest and statistically significant unique contribution to explaining teacher-child communication skills (β=.20), by explaining 1.8% of the variance. Self-efficacy beliefs in communication skills was the second variable which made the strongest and statistically significant unique contribution to teacher-child communication (β=.16) by accounting for 1.3% of the variance (see Table 9).

Table 9. Multiple regression analysis results for teacher-child communication skills of teachers			
Teacher-child communication skills	**B**	**R²**	**P**
Teaching-Learning Process	.205	.018	.024
Communication Skills	.161	.013	.026
Parental Involvement	.048	.001	.473
Planning	.158	.006	.086
Organization of Learning Environment	.143	.007	.062
Classroom Management	.029	.000	.728

4. Discussion

Findings of the study revealed that preschool teachers who had high level self-efficacy beliefs had high level teacher-child communication skills at the same time. This finding is parallel with the literature indicating that as teachers' self-efficacy beliefs increase, their communication skills also increase (Hassall, Arquero, Joyce, & Gonzalez, 2013; Hullman, Planisek, McNally, & Rubin, 2010; Kesicioğlu & Güven, 2014; Shelton, 2013). Since having effective communication skills and high self-efficacy beliefs are two significant characteristics of effective teachers (Soulis, 2009) and two prerequisites for creating a positive classroom climate and positive relationships with children (Jonsson & Williams, 2013), the findings regarding the positive relationship between these two variables can be interpreted as a positive finding in this study.

Findings also revealed that while years of experience and type of institution where teachers worked did not make any significant contribution, self-efficacy beliefs of teachers made a significant contribution to preschool teachers' teacher-child communication skills. As White (1993) stressed, teachers' comprehension of their roles and skills may predict their interaction with children. Teachers who had high self-efficacy beliefs tended to have higher teacher-child communication skills because they may feel more self-confident. Their self-confidence may enable them to be more comfortable in explaining their feelings and thoughts or in responding to children. Moreover, as Gibson & Dembo (1984) stressed, teachers with high self-efficacy are more success-oriented. They may be aware of the fact that for adults who engage in young children effective communication is a cornerstone of success in child development and education (Shan et al., 2014). Therefore, preschool teachers with higher self-efficacy may give more importance to their communication with preschool children and make effort to develop their effective communication skills.

Besides, it is claimed in literature that high self-efficacious teachers tend to be more satisfied with their job (Høigaard et al., 2012; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010) and committed to the teaching profession (Canrinus, Helms-Lorenz, Beijaard, Buitink, & Hofman, 2012). Their satisfaction and commitment may reflect onto their communication with children, and thus they may be more open, eager to listen, effective and tolerant but less critical and judgmental in their communication with children.

When the contribution of each sub-dimension of self-efficacy beliefs to teacher-child communication was analyzed, it was revealed that self-efficacy beliefs in the teaching-learning process and in communication skills significantly contributed to teacher-child communication skills. Even if all sub-dimensions significantly and positively correlated with teacher-child communication, self-efficacy beliefs in teaching-learning process and communication skills made significant contribution to the explanation of teacher-child communication.

Indeed, self-efficacy beliefs in teaching-learning process made the strongest contribution to the explanation of teacher-child communication skills of preschool teachers. This finding is parallel with Pajares' (1996) viewpoint. According to Pajares (1996), self-efficacy beliefs of people have a determinant role on their behaviors and skill acquisition. High self-efficacy beliefs in communication skills and the teaching-learning process may make preschool teachers more diligent to be successful in their teacher-child communication skills. On the other hand, the relationship between self-efficacy beliefs in communication skills and the teaching-learning process can be explained by mastery experiences. According to Bandura (1977), while successful experiences enhance the level of self-efficacy beliefs, repetitive failures lead to a decrease as preschool teachers with high teacher-child communication skills tend to have successful experiences in their communication with children and tend to see the positive outcomes of their effective communication skills on the teaching-learning process. Therefore, his/her self-efficacy belief in the teaching profession, in the teaching-learning process and in communication skills may increase in direct proportion to his/her successful experiences.

On the other hand, results revealed that preschool teachers' teacher-child communication skills were not correlated significantly with their years of experience and type of institutions where they work. According to the social cognitive theory, how people behave is not only dependent on their genetic makeup. Observation and interaction with others enable people to discover that they can adapt and accommodate their behavior. In fact, people can enhance their communication skills by observing and interacting with others (Beebe et al., 2005). When the findings concerning years of experience and educational level were considered from this viewpoint, it may be said that communication skills are based on meaningful experiences of preschool teachers with children rather than their years of experience or educational level. For example, a beginning preschool teacher who has less professional experience may have chance to interact and communicate with children or may have more knowledge in some subjects like classroom management and the ways of establishing effective communication with children more than an experienced preschool teacher. Similarly, a preschool teacher who had a bachelor's degree had less school experience, but had more knowledge in some subjects like classroom management and the ways of effective-teacher child communication when compared to a vocational high school graduate preschool teacher. On the other hand, the preschool teacher who had graduated from a vocational high school might have had the chance to interact and communicate with children more than the others. The reason underlying such a result may also be related to effective communication courses in teacher education programs.

Effective communication is one of the courses which taken place in the preschool teacher education program as an elective course since 2007 by Council of Higher Education (CoHE). Consequently, due to the flexibility of the program, whether to integrate an effective communication course into the curriculum is under the initiative of faculties of education (CoHE, 2007). Preschool teachers in this study who had graduated from faculties of education before 2007 might not have taken any effective communication course while some of less experienced teachers in teaching profession had get the chance of taking this course. In line with this, to take effective communication course may compensate the effect of experience for less experienced teachers. This finding may lead to improvement of effective communication course as a must course in preschool teacher training program. Furthermore, in their teaching practices, teacher candidates may be followed up and evaluated in terms of development of their teacher-child communication skills. Gaining more and firsthand experience in the teaching profession by means of practice teaching may improve teacher candidates' skills in teacher-child communication.

5. Recommendations

By considering the findings of the present study and prior research concerning preschool teachers' teacher-child communication skills, their self-efficacy beliefs and related issues, it can be possible to make some suggestions to preschool teachers, school administrations and teacher education programs.

First of all, the results of the current study showed that preschool teachers had a high level of communication skills but some of them had trouble in some topics such as responding to the child, being empathic toward the child and showing their negative feelings. According to Peck (2012), the diversity among preschool children and their parents in terms of abilities, socioeconomic status and culture is gradually increasing. In order to focus on this diversity and in order to cope with the rapid increase, preschool teachers need to be more skilled in empathizing with children. Therefore, the findings of this study may make preschool teachers reflect upon their communication processes with children.

They may gain more awareness and knowledge in teacher-child communication in early childhood education settings through training programs. The preschool teachers who recognized their deficiencies in this respect may professionally develop themselves in teacher-child communication by participating in-service trainings or reading related literature. School administrations may attempt to organize or demand from MoNE for seminars and teacher training activities to be organized. In this way, preschool teachers may move their teacher-child communication skills to the highest level.

In addition, the findings of the current study may help in understanding the importance that self-efficacy beliefs of preschool teachers depend on improving their communication skills. Hence, when the importance of the current study is focused on from the viewpoint of teacher education programs, it can be suggested that there is need for training teacher candidates who have higher levels of self-efficacy beliefs and consequently have better communication skills. From this perspective, effective communication courses may be added as a must course and self-efficacy course may be added as a new course on all teacher training programs implemented in universities. Furthermore, in their teaching practices, teacher candidates may be followed up and evaluated in terms of development of their teacher-child communication skills. In addition, gaining more and firsthand experience in the teaching profession by means of practice teaching may improve teacher-child communication skills and self-efficacy beliefs of teacher candidates. Therefore, teacher training programs may provide teacher candidates with practice teaching for a long term.

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