

Comparison of Teachers' Attitudes to Family Participation in Different Early Childhood Approaches*

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine the teachers' attitudes working in preschool education institutions that implement the practices of Montessori, Reggio Emilia, and the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) program. This study was carried out in descriptive research (survey) method. The study group was composed of 81 teachers working at Montessori, Reggio Emilia-inspired and MoNE preschools in Kadıköy, Maltepe and Ataşehir districts of İstanbul. "Attitude Scale for Family Participation Studies for Teachers" was used as a data collection tool. In the analysis of the data, Kruskal Wallis and Mann Whitney U tests were used. As a result of data analysis; the attitude scores of the teachers working in the Reggio Emilia-inspired preschools were higher than the Montessori-inspired and MoNE preschools. In this context, it was detected that the Reggio Emilia approach is determinative on the teachers' attitudes regarding the family participation practices in preschools included in the study. According to the findings of the research, it was concluded that family participation studies of different educational approaches should be considered and implemented as an integrated approach according to the needs in Turkey.

Keywords: Family participation, different approaches, preschool education.

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Farklı Erken Çocukluk Yaklaşımlarında Aile Katılımına Yönelik Öğretmen Tutumlarının İncelenmesi*

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Öz

Bu araştırmanın amacı, Montessori ve Reggio Emilia yaklaşımlarını temel alarak uygulamalar yapan okul öncesi öğretmenleri ile Millî Eğitim Bakanlığı (MEB) programını uygulayan öğretmenlerin aile katılımına yönelik tutumlarını incelemektir. Bu çalışma, betimsel araştırma yöntemlerinden tarama modelinde yürütülmüştür. Araştırmanın çalışma grubunun belirlenmesinde amaçlı örnekleme yöntemi kullanılmış ve İstanbul iline bağlı Kadıköy, Maltepe, Ataşehir ilçelerinde bulunan Montessori ve Reggio Emilia ilhamlı anaokullarında ve MEB okul öncesi eğitim programını uygulayan kurumlarda görev yapan toplam 81 öğretmen araştırmanın çalışma grubunu oluşturmuştur. Veri toplama aracı olarak "Öğretmenler İçin Aile Katılım Çalışmaları Hakkında Tutum Ölçeği" kullanılmıştır. Elde edilen verilerin analizinde ise Kruskal Wallis ve Mann Whitney U testlerinden yararlanılmıştır. Verilerin analizi sonucunda; Reggio Emilia ilhamlı okul öncesi öğretmenlerinin tutum puanlarının Montessori yaklaşımını temel alarak uygulamalar yapan ve MEB okul öncesi eğitim programını uygulayan öğretmenlerin tutum puanlarından yüksek olduğu belirlenmiştir. Bu bağlamda araştırmaya dahil edilen okul öncesi öğretmenlerinin aile katılım çalışmalarına yönelik tutumları üzerinde Reggio Emilia yaklaşımının belirleyici olduğu tespit edilmiştir. Araştırmadan elde edilen bulgular doğrultusunda farklı eğitim yaklaşımlarına ait aile katılım çalışmalarının ülkemizde ihtiyaca göre bütünleştirilmiş yaklaşım olarak ele alınıp uygulanması ve desteklenmesi gerektiği sonucuna ulaşılmıştır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Aile katılımı, farklı yaklaşımlar, okul öncesi eğitim.

* Bu makale, "Montessori, Reggio Emilia ve MEB Okul Öncesi Eğitim Yaklaşımlarında Aile Katılımına Yönelik Öğretmen Tutumlarının İncelenmesi" başlıklı yüksek lisans tezinin bir bölümünden üretilmiştir.

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Introduction

Parental attitudes and behaviors have a significant effect on many different skill areas, especially in social-emotional development. Nowadays, with the increasing interest in the importance of parents in connection with education processes, a new concept has been introduced, and the concept of family participation has taken its place in the literature in the last decade. Considering the fact that the first education process commence in the family, the educational mission of parents continues throughout life (McClelland & Morrison, 2003). The success of early childhood education which is structured, planned and organized within a certain program is realized with the cooperation of the school and the family (Zembar & Unutkan, 1999). Therefore, the active involvement in education is considered as one of the most crucial ingredients supporting school-family cooperation (Kurtulmuş, 2016). The purpose of parent involvement is to ensure continuity of education between home and school. Thus, it will be possible to achieve the desired behavioral changes in children in a safe and controlled manner (Tezel Şahin & Ünver, 2005). Moreover, studies have shown that family participation in the preschool period affects many variables such as a child's personality, language development, social-emotional skills, school success, and overall development (Cohen & Anders, 2020; Epstein, 2011; Henderson et al. 2007; Rimm-Kaufman et al. 2003; Sheldon, 2003; Taylor, Clayton & Rowley 2004; Wentzel, 2015). Nowadays, following the change in the perception of early childhood education in the world, many international programs place emphasis on school-family cooperation and family participation in supporting children's education. It is accepted that the role of the family in the cognitive, emotional, and social development of the child is of primary importance in different educational approaches that arise with the rising awareness of the importance of preschool education in the world (Greenwood & Hickman, 1991; Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006). Montessori and Reggio Emilia approaches, which come to the fore with family participation studies, emphasize that active participation of families in education is necessary in order to positively support children's development process (Yıldız & Durmuşoğlu, 2018).

Montessori education is widely applied in various countries and the number of Montessori-inspired preschools in Turkey is increasing day by day (Mutlu, et al. 2012). According to the studies carried out in Turkey, the Montessori approach has more positive effects on children's acquisition of concepts than the curriculum of MoNE. Additionally, meaningful differences have been reported amid children who acquired an education through the Montessori approach and MoNE's curriculum in school readiness, direction/position, self/social awareness, texture/material, quantity, positive behaviours and time/sequence areas (Eratay, 2011; Toran & Temel, 2012; Toran & Temel 2014). Family participation is considered as crucial dimension of the program and the parents are complementary to the education given to the child in the early childhood period (Korkmaz, 2005). Teachers attach great importance to family recognition and networking of families with each other through mutual information sharing. Thus, parents meet the teacher and observe the child's activities in the classroom behavior in connection with the child's, understanding based on the purpose of pedagogy and to support their children's holistic development (Oğuz & Köksal Akyol, 2006). Education programs are organized for families to understand the Montessori philosophy, objectives, and goals including family participation (Danışman, 2012). Taking into account of the literature, it is believed that the principles of the approach are effective through increasing family participation. According to the Caedmon School Report (2010), a six-month research project at the Caedmon School in New York City has reported that family participation rates have increased due to Montessori educational practices and that families have been involved in the project and the design of the school building voluntarily. In a research project carried out by Roth (2015) in a private Montessori Children's House in the Midwestern United States region, it was concluded that family participation studies conducted with 22 participating families helped parents feel more committed to the school. In addition, it was revealed that the family profile studies created within the scope of the technology network established in Montessori School, where children of low-income families continue to have effect terms of increasing school-family communication (Business Center, 2010). Yıldız (2018) revealed in the study that, Montessori Training Program for Mothers (MTPM) increased their children's mathematical skills while the same outcome was recorded with mothers supporting the development of their children's daily life skills.

The Reggio Emilia approach is based on the principle that school, family, and the community should work in cooperation (Edmiaston & Fitzgerald, 2000). Educational activities are carried out by the effective and harmonious collaboration of child-family-teacher elements (Smith, 2014). With the "open-door policy", families can easily enter and leave the school at any time and be part of the education by being both observers and participants in the classes (Edwards, 2002). Teachers can turn the presence of families into an effective learning opportunity for children. In this process, families share the interests of the child with teachers and employees of the school and act in cooperation with the school during the planning and evaluation stages (Amus, 2006). Kayır (2015) stated that in the scope of the project works which are inspired from the Reggio Emilia approach in Turkey showed that majority of teachers gave positive feedbacks on family participation and the benefits of documentation in the approach of that project studies also attract the teachers and families participating in the research. Similarly in the study conducted by Özalp and İnan (2020), teachers working in the Reggio Emilia-inspired kindergartens stated that, the families came to the school and they worked with their children and in that way, cooperation was carried out in family participation studies effectively. Participants used parent's bulletins, telephone, family participation activities, contact books, family trainings, and portfolios in establishing teacher-family relationships. Participants stated that families come to school and organize activities with their children, organize activities with their children at home, ask for material support for the projects planned to be carried out at school, and present the children's project work to their families through demonstrations or presentations. Akar Gencer and Gönen (2015) revealed in the study that, projects improve children's creativity. According to the participants, applications for the Reggio Emilia approach contribute to the communication skills of teachers in addition to their personal and professional development. Baldacchino (2010), in his research supporting this finding, examined three kindergartens in Prince Edward, which conducts Reggio Emilia-based practices. In the study, it was concluded that teachers' communication and collaborative working skills improved, their self-confidence increased and they discovered aspects that they were not aware of. In addition to these, according to the participants, practices based on the Reggio Emilia approach contribute to the formation of a happy, confident and creative society.

The Ministry of National Education (MoNE) program was prepared as a child-centered schedule. Family participation is expected in the education process and the diversification of the child's learning experiences is considered important. The program envisages the use of daily life experiences and opportunities of the immediate environment for educational purposes and places more emphasis on family participation than in previous programs. Within the scope of school-family cooperation, which has special significance in the MoNE Preschool education program, the child and the parents are considered as a whole and they should be included in the education. Furthermore, the flexible structure of a program enables the family participation dimension of the Montessori and the Reggio Emilia approach to teaching activities. In this context, it is aimed to take into consideration the characteristics of the family and the environment in which education programs are prepared and to ensure the effective involvement of the child and family in the educational process (MEB, 2013). The above-mentioned aims and principles of family participation in MoNE preschool education program coincide with the basic assumptions about the family participation dimension of Montessori and Reggio Emilia approaches. The educational approaches that form the basis of these programs are also reflected in the family participation studies and their importance varies in practice.

Although Montessori and Reggio Emilia education models are being widely used in Turkish preschools in recent years, there are no sufficient studies including the family participation dimension of these approaches in Turkish preschools. There has been many observations made out in the literature that these studies have not included in family participation in different educational approaches. Therefore, the current study is important in addressing family participation in different frameworks and it may contribute to the development of projects aimed at revealing the effects of family participation practices and enabling families to participate more effectively in education. In Montessori and Reggio Emilia approaches, it is assumed that the implementation of family participation can be taken as a model in order to increase the social awareness of families in Turkey. On the other hand, it is important to determine the programs increasing the family participation level in the preschools. In line with these objectives, the present research aims to determine whether the attitudes of the teachers implementing the practices of Montessori, Reggio Emilia approach, and MoNE program regarding family participation differ.

Method

Research Design

This study is descriptive research which is carried out using the survey model as it aims to examine teachers' attitudes towards working in institutions that implement Montessori-based, Reggio Emilia-based and MoNE program methods regarding family participation in terms of educational approach variables. The aim of descriptive research is to describe a phenomenon and its characteristics (Nassaji, 2015). This research is more concerned with what, rather than how or why something has happened. Therefore, survey tools are often used to gather data. In such researches, the data may be collected qualitatively, but it is often analyzed quantitatively, using frequencies, percentages, averages, or other statistical analyses to determine relationships. (Karasar, 2006).

Study Group

The study group of the research consisted of 81 preschool teachers in Kadıköy, Maltepe and Ataşehir districts of Istanbul province in the 2018-2019 academic year. In line with the purposive sampling method, 6 Montessori-inspired preschools, 3 Reggio Emilia-inspired preschools and 6 preschools that implement MoNE Program a total of 15 schools were determined. Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling approach. Preferred purposeful sampling is required when one or more specific cases are intended to meet specific criteria or have specific characteristics; depending on the purpose of the research, it allows for in-depth research by selecting information-rich situations (Koç Başaran, 2017). Table 1 shows the personal details of preschool teachers.

Table 1

Personal details of the study group

Education Approach	N	%		N	%
Montessori-inspired	29	35.8	Public schools	15	18.5
Reggio Emilia-inspired	22	27.2	Private schools	66	81.5
MoNE program	30	37.0			
Age			Seniority		
Less than 25	25	30.9	1 to 5 years	30	37.0
Between 26 and 30	14	17.3	6 to 10 years	18	22.2
Between 31 and 40	31	38.3	11 to 15 years	18	22.2
Between 41 and 50	9	11.1	16 to 20 years	9	11.1
50 or over	2	2.5	20 years and over	6	7.4
Level of Education					
Associate Degree	37	45.7			
Bachelor Degree	38	46.9			
Master Degree	6	7.4			

As seen in Table 1, a total of 81 preschool teachers participated in the study. 35.8% of the teachers work in preschools that implement Montessori activities, 27.2% Reggio Emilia activities and 37% activities of MoNE program. 81.5 (66) of the teachers work in private schools whilst 18.5% (15) work in public schools. 30.9% (25) of the participating teachers are younger than 25, 17.3% (14) aged between 26 and 30, 38.3% (31) aged between 31 and 40, 11.1% (9) aged between 41 and 50, and 2.5% (2) aged 50 or over. 37% (30) of the teachers have an experience of 1 to 5 years, 22.2% (18) an experience of 6 to 10 years, 22.2% (18) an experience of 11 to 15 years, and 7.4% (6) an experience of 20 years or more. In addition, 45.7% (37) of the teachers have associate degree in child development, 46.9% (38) a bachelor's degree in preschool education, at the same time, 7.4% (6) a master degree in preschool education program.

Research Instruments and Procedures

“Attitude Scale for Family Participation Studies for Teachers” and “Information Form” were used as research instruments for the research. The scale that Bayraktar developed to examine the attitudes of preschool teachers towards family participation is a Likert-type scale consisting of 18 questions that measure “parents' interest in participation” and “participation level”. Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient was found to be 0.89 to determine the reliability of the scale. As the reliability coefficient of Likert-type scales should be close to 1, the reliability of the scale was found to be high according to this result (Bayraktar, Güven & Temel, 2016). Information Form developed by the researcher to determine the personal details of teachers (workplace, education approach, age, seniority, level of education). First of all, permission to use scale was received from Research Assistant Dr. Vedat Bayraktar during the data collection process. The other permission was received from Istanbul Provincial Directorate of National Education for the application process of the scale. Afterwards, the school headmasters were contacted to provide information about the scope of the research and the necessary permissions were obtained for the survey application. The participation of the preschool teachers included in the study group was based on the principle of volunteering. Writing consents were obtained from teachers who wanted to participate in the study. The completed scales were received by the researcher.

Data Analysis

The gathered raw data recorded with the consent of the participants were transferred to the SPSS 24 Program. Nonparametric tests were used for independent groups in order to determine whether the sum attitude points gained from the sub-dimensions of the scale differ according to an educational approach. These nonparametric techniques were chosen because they did not show the normal distribution in each category of independent variables. A normality test was performed for normality assumption. According to normality test results, when the number of people is more than 50, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov significance level is taken into account, and when it is less than 50, the Shapiro-Wilk significance level is taken into account. Significant significance ($p < 0.05$) means that the distribution of scores in the universe differs from the normal distribution. According to normality test results, descriptive statistics were analyzed at the stage where the distribution of scores in the universe differed from the normal distribution. In this respect, the fact that the average and the media are close to each other, and the coefficients of skewness and kurtosis between -1 and +1 are an indication that the data do not deviate excessively from normal (Büyüköztürk, Bököçlü & Köklü, 2009). It was concluded that the data did not show a normal distribution. In this context, Mann Whitney U and Kruskal Wallis H Tests were used since the mean scores of these samples were not normally distributed in all groups in relation to the unrelated and dependent variable samples (Kalaycı, 2006). In addition, Mann Whitney U test was used to determine the differences between the groups in the sub-dimensions of the attitude scale.

Results

The aim of the study is to determine whether the attitudes of the teachers working in preschool institutions implementing the practices of Montessori, Reggio Emilia approaches and MoNE program regarding family participation differ. The teachers' scale scores were continuous and the education approach variable was categorical. This mean scores were compared with the Kruskal Wallis H test because the measurements of the independent variables were not normal in all groups. The findings are provided in Table 2.

Table 2

Kruskal Wallis H Test Results of Teachers' Attitudes towards Family Participation according to Different Educational Approaches

	N	Mean Ranks	sd.	χ^2	p
Montessori-Inspired	29	32.81			
Reggio Emilia-Inspired	22	57.93	2	16.280	.000*
MoNE program	30	36.50			

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

As seen in Table 2, the attitude scores of the teachers who implement principles of different approaches regarding Montessori, Reggio Emilia, and MoNE programs showed a significant difference according to teachers' educational approach variables [$\chi^2=16.280$, $p<0.05$]. It is clear that teachers' attitude scores working in the Reggio Emilia-Inspired preschools were greater than other teachers' attitude scores. The data obtained were evaluated by Mann Whitney U test to reveal the differences between the groups. The findings are shown in Table 3.

Table 3

Mann Whitney U Test Results regarding Teachers' Attitudes towards Family Participation according to Different Educational Approaches

	N	Mean Ranks	Sum of Ranks	u	z	p
Montessori-Inspired	29	18.52	537.00	102.000	-4.178	.000*
Reggio Emilia-Inspired	22	35.86	789.00			
Montessori-Inspired	29	29.29	849.50	414.500	-.313	.754
MoNE program	30	30.68	920.50			
Reggio Emilia-Inspired	22	33.57	738.50	174.500	-2.915	.004*
MoNE program	30	21.32	639.50			

* $p<.05$, ** $p<.01$

It is understood from Table 3 that the preschool teachers' attitudes towards the family participation practices showed a statistically significant differences according to the education approach category. "Montessori-inspired"-“Reggio Emilia-inspired” showed a difference according to the education approach category [$U=102.000$, $p<0.05$]. Besides that, "Reggio Emilia-inspired"-“MoNE program” showed a difference in the same category [$U=174.500$, $p<0.05$]. However, it was found that the attitude scores of the preschool teachers regarding the family participation studies did not show differences according to the "Montessori-inspired-MoNE program" category [$U=414.500$, $p>0.05$]. The results reveal that teachers working in the Reggio Emilia-Inspired preschools have higher scores towards the family participation in all categories and the whole scale. In this sense, an inference can be made that family participation is carried out more effectively in Reggio Emilia-inspired preschools and teachers have a positive view in line with the principles of approach. However, it is noteworthy that there are differences between the teachers' attitude scores working in Montessori-inspired and Reggio Emilia-inspired preschools. In this sense, the parents whose children acquire education in Montessori-inspired preschools may have lower expectations of participating in education or less information about Montessori education.

Discussion, Conclusion and Recommendations

The current study was carried out to compare the attitudes of preschool teachers implementing the family participation activities of Montessori, Reggio Emilia approaches, and MoNE program. According to the findings of this study, the attitude scores of the teachers implementing different methods regarding family participation statistically showed a significant difference. Clearly, the teachers working in Reggio Emilia-inspired preschools have more positive views on family participation levels than the teachers implementing the practices of the Montessori approach and MoNE program. There might be several possible explanations for the difference in attitudes between teacher groups. Firstly, the Reggio Emilia approach and its' principles might affect the level of family participation and strengthening the connection between school and home. Kayır (2015) similarly revealed that in the scope of the project works which are inspired from the Reggio Emilia approach in Turkey showed that majority of teachers gave positive feedbacks on family participation and the benefits of documentation in the approach, and that project studies inspired by the Reggio Emilia method also attracted the teachers and families participating in the research. Secondly, it is argued in the approach that families should be an essential part of the school rather than playing a limited role in a certain part of the school structure (Bennet, 2001). There are important messages behind respecting parents as “partners” according to the approach. Families can contribute positively to children's learning and development by providing a permanent and comprehensive learning environment and have the right to play a central role in making decisions about their child's care and education at all levels (Thornton

& Brunton, 2015). Additionally, studies (Baeck, 2010; Kurtulmus, 2016; Murray et al., 2015; Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006) have shown that including families in classroom activities, organizing home visits activities, and keeping positive interaction with parents at a high level play an essential role in carrying out family participation activities effectively. Considering the related literature, the main reason why a greater number of parents participating in Reggio Emilia-inspired preschools may be linked to the implementations, principles, and philosophy of the approach. Therefore, family participation practices are being carried out more effectively in the Reggio Emilia-inspired preschools, teachers and parents develop positive views in line with the principles of the approach. On the other hand, a significant difference was detected between the groups of the teachers working at "Montessori-inspired and Reggio Emilia-inspired preschools. In the research conducted by Özerem and Kavas (2013), it was found that the family participation level is moderate according to views of teachers who implement the Montessori method in Turkey, and the vast majority of teachers only provide information verbal or in written about the training programs to families. In the study carried out by Yıldız (2012) it was concluded that the parents of children who have acquired Montessori education have lower expectations about participating in education and this contradictory situation reflected that families could have little knowledge about the Montessori education. Therefore, the results mentioned above reveal that family participation programs should be encouraged in order to promote greater awareness for families in Turkey regarding the Montessori approach. Taking into account previous studies, the results obtained from the study appears to be in line with the literature.

Similarly, the findings of the current study, which did not provide a significant difference for the family participation in relation to the Montessori approach in connection with the Ministry of National Education program reveals that, it is important to consider the obstacles of family participation in the preschools. For this reason, examining the factors that prevent family participation mentioned in previous studies can be a guide in determining the reasons for the teachers' attitudes scores in the current study. Considering related researches, it has been determined that the factors adversely affecting the involvement might be grouped in different ways as barriers stemming from family and school. Köksal Eğmez (2008) determined in the study that family participation activities are not sufficiently carried out in preschool education institutions. Şahin and Turla (2003) similarly revealed that family meetings were held in preschool education institutions, individual interviews were carried out only in instances of problems, and also participation studies were not included in the early childhood education program of families. On the other hand, Ensari and Zembat (1999) argues that teachers and school administrators do not have detailed information about family participation programs in preschool education institutions and involvement is difficult due to lack of information about how to run the program. Koyuncu, Şahin (2018) reached a similar result as well. According to survey results generated from the preschool teachers and school administrators working in different regions and cities in Turkey showed that, since the school administration remained in the background regarding family participation and the management did not give the necessary importance and support to school-family cooperation, communication with families were blocked and family participation adversely affected. Additionally, it was detected that families' time problems, indifferent and unwilling attitudes towards school are the other obstacles of communication between school and family. Previous studies (Borg & Mayo, 2001; Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994; Kim, 2009; Sheldon, 2002) stated that the negative attitudes of parents towards family participation activities is an important obstacle in carrying out family participation. Erdoğan and Demirkasımoğlu (2010) emphasized in their study that most of the families are unwilling and passive about participating in the education process. Similarly, Koçyiğit (2015) revealed that parents are prevented from participating in the activities due to reasons such as indifference, unwillingness, and inability to allocate time for school. As it can be explicitly noticed, situations such as prejudice, non-adoption, indifference towards family participation activities are mentioned as factors that prevent family participation. On the other hand, the study carried out by Bilaloğlu and Arnas (2018), determined that, although families are willing to communicate with the school and participate in their children's education, they do not have enough information about family participation. Taking into consideration the results of previous studies, the lack of involvement of parents is a major obstacle to school participation and can be grouped as barriers stemming from parents or school administration. In line with the above-mentioned points, it is believed that these factors may affect the preschool teachers' attitude scores in the current study.

In conclusion, some recommendations can be made based on the research results. Collaborative effort might be attached to the importance of effective realization of family participation activities. Practices regarding family participation in preschool education institutions should be analyzed in detail and the problems encountered in the operation should be determined. Additionally, family participation programs should be encouraged in order to promote greater awareness for families in Turkey regarding the Montessori approach. Activities and environments that encourage family participation might be organized. Furthermore, implementations which will enhance proper development and enrich the relations of parents with the preschool should be planned. For instance, project-based and documentation activities inspired by the Reggio Emilia approach can be expanded in preschools since these practices increase school-family cooperation. In this context, family participation studies of different educational approaches should be considered as an integrated approach according to the need and should be implemented and supported. Different studies might be developed by taking inspiration from early childhood education approaches applied in the world to involve and inform the parents in preschool education. Principles and good examples of effective early childhood education programs should be considered and applied by the school managements. In this way, the positive examples of different approaches can be adapted as models to raise social awareness and encourage families in Turkey.

Limitations

Like any other studies, the current study had several limitations in itself. This research is limited to teachers working in preschool education institutions that implement Montessori, Reggio Emilia and MoNE program methods regarding family participation only in Kadıköy, Maltepe and Ataşehir districts of Istanbul province. Therefore, comparative studies should be conducted in a broader working group from teachers, school administrators, and families in different regions and cities should be formed to obtain more comprehensive results.

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