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Conceptualization, literature review, methodology, implementation, data analysis, translation, and writing

Abstract

In this qualitative study, ethical problems and ethical dilemmas caused by COVID-19 pandemic restrictions and teaching practices were investigated based on teachers' opinions. The study, which was carried out in October 2022 with 16 preschool teachers determined by the purposeful sampling method, was carried out face to face with a semi-structured interview form. Content analysis method was used in the analysis of the data obtained from the interviews. According to the findings: teachers conducted teaching mostly online during the epidemic and said that the effect was negative. The situations that they do not find ethical are the unequal teaching opportunities on the Internet and the inability to provide classroom management, and mostly family members get involved in online course activities. Children and families were warned about some issues and an attempt was made. Ethical dilemmas are mostly due to the difficulty of children in adapting to online education and the inability to communicate with families, and mostly the inefficiency of online preschool education. Administratively, mostly ethical problems are the lack of technological equality and the inability to be sensitive in epidemic measures. The views that the management does not act unethically are also in the majority. Finally, the teachers wished never to experience such a process again and thanked them for the study. It has been suggested to plan educational measures to overcome extraordinary situations such as epidemics with less damage.

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<u>*Research Article*</u>

Ethical Problems and Dilemmas Experienced by Preschool Teachers during the COVID-19 Epidemic[*]

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Abstract

In this qualitative study, ethical problems and ethical dilemmas caused by COVID-19 pandemic restrictions and teaching practices were investigated based on teachers' opinions. The study, which was carried out in October 2022 with 16 preschool teachers determined by the purposeful sampling method, was carried out face to face with a semi-structured interview form. Content analysis method was used in the analysis of the data obtained from the interviews. According to the findings: teachers conducted teaching mostly online during the epidemic and said that the effect was negative. The situations that they do not find ethical are the unequal teaching opportunities on the Internet and the inability to provide classroom management, and mostly family members get involved in online course activities. Children and families were warned about some issues and an attempt was made. Ethical dilemmas are mostly due to the difficulty of children in adapting to online education and the inability to communicate with families, and mostly the inefficiency of online preschool education. Administratively, mostly ethical problems are the lack of technological equality and the inability to be sensitive in epidemic measures. The views that the management does not act unethically are also in the majority. Finally, the teachers wished never to experience such a process again and thanked them for the study. It has been suggested to plan educational measures to overcome extraordinary situations such as epidemics with less damage.

Keywords: Preschool teacher, Preschool child, ethical problem, ethical dilemma, COVID-19 epidemic

1. INTRODUCTION

Upon the rapid spread of new coronavirus cases to the countries of the world, the World Health Organization (2020) described the situation as a Public Health Emergency of International Importance on January 30, 2020, and a pandemic on March 11, 2020. The first case in Turkey was announced by official authorities in March 2020. After the confirmation of the first case, the practices affecting many areas of life in Turkey are the measures such as the holidays of universities and schools, shift work in public institutions, the transition of places such as restaurants and patisseries to takeaway services, and the closing of crowded environments such as shopping centers and mosques to the public. Many posters, brochures and study guides, especially describing hand and respiratory hygiene, prepared by the Ministry of Health (2020) for virus protection, are published in the media, in open areas, at the entrance to institutions, workplaces, etc. The awareness of the public was increased by hanging them in visible places, professional content was prepared for health workers and teachers, and information and protection support was provided with presentations and trainings. These measures are important to prevent the spread of the epidemic (Russell, Zheteyeva, Gao, Shi, Rainey, Thoroughman, Uzicanin, 2016). It is especially critical in the education of young children, where hand hygiene and social distancing are less common. Preschool education institutions in Turkey provide full-time or part-time

services to children aged 3-6. With the sudden effect of the COVID-19 epidemic, the Turkish education system, including preschool education institutions, closed schools on March 16, 2020; has started to conduct teaching online, as in many countries (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2020). After the spring semester with distance learning in June 2020, kindergartens reopened in August 2020.

COVID-19 has been an unprecedented experience due to the inherent unpreparedness for a global pandemic and the need for rapid and multifaceted responses. The unpredictable effects of the pandemic have also caused unique challenges and problems in the lives of young children, leading to the implementation of preschool education in different ways (Muller & Baum, 2020; Silverman, Sibbald & Stranges, 2020; United Nations International Children's Emergency Found [UNICEF], 2020). Children in Early Childhood (EC) are the most vulnerable group as they often do not respond positively to online learning and are in a critical period of social, cognitive and mental development. Reopening schools for these young children at low risk of infection in the epidemic should be seen as an urgent priority (Silverman et al., 2020). Decisions and practices taken to protect children should not expose them to new problems.

The statement on the international platform as "The epidemic is a health crisis that is rapidly turning into a crisis of children's rights" drew attention to a very important ethical problem. With the closure of schools, unemployed parents and families are under pressure, with the addition of restrictions, the mental health and psychosocial effects of isolation, especially of children, are already evident. Stressed that urgent action should be taken to protect it from the knock-on effects of the crisis (UNESCO, 2020). On the other hand, steps must be taken very carefully in order for the regulations to be made in favor of young children to have positive effects.

UNESCO (2020), has recommended that, "in order to be safer in school reopening, it is important to collect quick information on how teachers, staff and parents are coping with the epidemic and closures, and to take this information into account to determine the most useful and applicable program." With the restrictions imposed on daily life during the COVID 19 epidemic, the periodic conduct of teaching with different practices has confronted teachers with new challenges. Preschool educators face many problems while working with children and families. This exposes them to many daily decisions with moral and ethical consequences.

When faced with an ethical problem, it must first be determined whether it is an ethical responsibility or an ethical dilemma. Ethical responsibility is the rules that explain how people should behave when faced with a problem. Ethical dilemma is a state of moral conflict that involves determining appropriate behavior when faced with conflicting professional values and responsibilities. In the case of an Ethical Dilemma, one of two possible solutions with a moral basis is decided (NAECY, 2020). The US National Association for the Education of Young Children-NAEYC has declared its ethical responsibilities, principles and ideals to children and families, and has declared its most important responsibility as" providing care and education for every child in a safe, healthy, nutritious and caring environment." It also provides a common basis for resolving key ethical dilemmas in the care and education of young children (CECE, 2020; NAEYC, 2020). Codes of ethics define the core values of the field for professionals with specific obligations to their society and provide guidance on what to do when faced with conflicting responsibilities in their work. The most important principle of EC educators' responsibilities to children is "First of all, we will not harm children" (NAECY, 2020). The ethical principles of teaching as a profession provide a basic framework such as professionalism, responsibility in service, justice, equality, ensuring a healthy and safe environment, non-corruption, honesty, integrity and trust, objectivity, professional commitment and continuous improvement, respect and effective use of resources (Aydın, 2013). The conditions of teaching in ordinary and unusual periods of teachers may affect the applicability of these principles positively or negatively.

Studies conducted with preschool teachers in Turkey during the COVID-19 pandemic (Acar, Erbaş & Eryaman, 2021; Akkaş-Baysal, Ocak, & Ocak, 2020; Aral & Kadan, 2021; Erdemci & Elçiçek, 2022; Gülhan, Sevinç, Karan, Çetken & Menteşe, 2021; Güneş & Kaya, 2022) the problems experienced by teachers in online teaching in general, the content of the applied curriculum and preschool addressed the issues of evaluation of the curriculum. Similarly, studies conducted in other countries (Eadie, Levickis, Murray, Page, Catriona, Church, 2021; Jones, 2020; Nikolopoulou, 2022; Stoiljković, 2020) also focused affected the effects of the epidemic and teaching practices. In the current studies, no attempt has been seen to focus on what ethical problems and ethical dilemmas preschool teachers experience while conducting education during the epidemic, and how children are affected by administrative and family-related ones, and how teachers intervene by producing solutions.

This study focuses on identifying the ethical problems and ethical dilemmas that preschool teachers encounter during the COVID-19 epidemic and while teaching, where and from whom they originate, how children are affected by them, and solution attempts. The questions of the research carried out for this purpose are given below:

Research Questions
1. What was the way preschool teachers were working during the epidemic and how did it affect them?
2. What are the ethical problems that preschool teachers face during the epidemic?
3. What are the ethical dilemmas that preschool teachers face during the epidemic?
4. What are the ethical problems that preschool teachers have in terms of children in their classrooms?
5. What are the ethical dilemmas experienced by preschool teachers in terms of children in their classrooms?
6. What are the ethical problems and ethical dilemmas that preschool teachers experience with their families?
7. What are the ethical problems and ethical dilemmas that preschool teachers experience administratively?
8. What are the general evaluations, feelings and solution suggestions of the preschool teachers regarding the epidemic period?

2. METHOD

In this study, phenomenology, one of the qualitative research methods, were used to determine which ethical problems preschool teachers encountered while carrying out their duties during the COVID-19 epidemic period and in which situations they remained in ethical dilemmas. The aim of qualitative research is to reveal the perceptions and experiences of the participants (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016; Patton, 2018). Phenomenology, one of the main perspectives of qualitative research, aims to understand people's experiences (Van Manen, 2007). Phenomenology, which focuses on the explanation and description of phenomena (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016), reveals and explains the deeper, human aspects of a situation, deals with mood, feelings and emotions (Wilson, 2015). The most basic features of phenomenology are that it defines the basic meaning and essence of common experiences and includes philosophical discussions (Patton, 2018; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016).

Purposeful sampling, one of the most effective non-random sampling methods (Robinson, 2014), was used to determine the participants of this study. Inclusion criteria are being a preschool teacher and working in a school. 16 preschool teachers participated in the research. The potential participant group was limited to those who were active in teaching during the epidemic period. These participants were defined by demographic information. Teachers were asked about their education

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levels, branches and places of duty, as well as their working experience and the age group they teach. Table 1 presents the characteristics of 16 preschool teachers in the study. All of the teacher participants are undergraduate graduates, of which 14 are female and 2 are male. In terms of the type of school, 10 teachers work in public schools and six teachers work in private schools. Five teachers have working experience of 20 years or more, six teachers between 10 and 20 years, and five teachers between two and nine years. In terms of the teaching group, four teachers teach the five-six age group in kindergartens, and twelve teachers teach the Three-six age group in kindergartens.

Table 1. Demographics of preschool teachers

Participant	Gender	Education level	School type	Work experience	Department	Teaching group	Age group
teacher 1	Woman	University	State Primary School	20	Preschool	Kindergarten	5-6 years old
teacher 2	Woman	University	public primary school	21	Preschool	Kindergarten	5-6 years old
teacher 3	Woman	University	State Kindergarten	14	Preschool	Nursery	4-5 years old
teacher 4	Woman	University	public primary school	20	Preschool	Kindergarten	5-6 years old
teacher 5	Woman	University	Private Kindergarten	14	Child Development	Nursery	3- 6 years old
teacher 6	Woman	University	public primary school	30	Preschool	Nursery	5 years old
teacher 7	Woman	University	State Kindergarten	11	Preschool	Nursery	3- 6 years old
teacher 8	Woman	University	Private Kindergarten	10	Preschool	Nursery	3- 6 years old
teacher 9	Woman	University	State Kindergarten	14	Preschool	Nursery	4-5 years old
teacher 10	Woman	University	Private Kindergarten	3	Preschool	Nursery	3- 6 years old
teacher 11	Woman	University	State Kindergarten	14	Preschool	Nursery	3- 6 years old
teacher 12	Woman	University	Private Kindergarten	3	Preschool	Nursery	3-6 years
teacher 13	Man	University	public primary school	7	GPC*	Nursery	5-6 years old
teacher 14	Woman	University	Private Kindergarten	2	Preschool	Nursery	3- 6 years old
teacher 15	Man	University	Private Kindergarten	4	Preschool	Nursery	3-6 years
teacher 16	Woman	University	State Primary School	31	Child Development	Kindergarten	5-6 years old

* Guidance and psychological counseling

2.1. Procedure

The interview questions created after the literature review were taken from three academicians in the field of educational sciences and two experts in the field of preschool, and necessary arrangements were made. Afterwards, a pilot study was conducted with three preschool teachers and the clarity of the questions was evaluated. After the final arrangement, the interviews of the research started. Semi-structured interviews (Creswell, 2013) were conducted with each of the preschool teachers. This study was conducted at the end of the epidemic period, when schools resumed face-to-

face education and restrictions on social and physical distancing were eased. Therefore, face-to-face interviews were conducted with the participants. Each interview lasted between 20 and 30 minutes. Before the interview questions, the teachers were informed about the purpose of the research and they agreed to participate in the research voluntarily. Interview questions include answers to designed to reveal how teachers work during the COVID-19 pandemic and how they are affected, what ethical problems and ethical dilemmas they face in this academic period, which of them are administrative or family related, what teachers do in these situations, and how children are affected by the practices in this period. Table 2 contains specific questions asked during the interview.

Table 2. Interview Questions

1. How did you do your job during the epidemic? (Face-to-face/remote etc.). How has this situation affected you?
2. What were the ethical problems you faced as an educator during the epidemic? What did you do about it? What do you think should have been done administratively?
3. What are the situations in which you are in ethical dilemma during the epidemic? Why are you in dilemma?
4. What were the ethical issues for the children in your class? What did you do about it? What do you think would have been more fair?
5. What were the ethical dilemmas about the children in your class? How did you behave?
6. In your opinion, if there were any unethical and dilemma situations for families regarding the teaching process during the epidemic, what were they? If an attempt has been made regarding this, what has been done? What would have been better?
7. What were the administrative ethical problems in your opinion during the epidemic? What could be done?
8. What else would you like to say?

The data were collected by face-to-face individual interview technique. Interview is the activity of expressing the feelings and thoughts of the individuals participating in the research on a certain subject. Through interviews, it is aimed to reach unobservable information such as the experience, attitude, thoughts, comments, mental perceptions and reactions of the individual about the research topic (Sönmez & Alacapınar, 2011).

The interviews were recorded in writing and read to the participant and the answers were confirmed. The privacy of the participant was protected by coding each interview form as T1, T2. The data were subjected to content analysis method. Codes, categories and themes (Creswell, 2013) were created by starting the exercise of making sense of the data. In order to ensure reliability in the analysis of the data of the research, the coding was done by three researchers. The categories were created by coding the data within the framework of the upper categories determined by using the questions of the research. While creating the data, codes and categories, they were read many times, and the codes and categories were rearranged. In the Miles and Huberman model, the consensus among coders is expected to be at least 80%. Consensus and similarity rate (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 2014) in the data coding of the research was calculated and the agreement percentage was found as .90. The findings were interpreted and tabulated within the framework of upper categories, categories and codes. At the last stage, examples from teachers' statements were given to support the upper categories and categories.

2.2. Ethical Issues

Ethics Committee Approval was obtained from Burdur Mehmet Akif Ersoy University with the decision number GO2022/882 at the meeting dated 05.10.2022 and numbered 2022/10 in order to carry out the research. Then, interviews were made with the directorate of national education and the school administration. Informed consent was obtained from preschool teachers. The purpose of the research, confidentiality and voluntary participation were detailed in the consent form. The teachers were told that they could not answer the question they did not want. The teachers answered all the questions and completed the interview.

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3. FINDINGS

In this study, the ethical problems and ethical dilemmas experienced by children, families and administration in the conduct of preschool education of the COVID-19 epidemic were examined according to the evaluations of preschool teachers. Theme category/theme, category and subcategories that emerged in the analysis of the interview data are given in Table 3.

Table 3. The total themes, categories and subcategories of the research

Theme	Categories	f	Subcategories	f
The way of working and the effect of teachers during the epidemic period	Method of teaching	16		
	Effect	13		
Ethical issues, administrative requirements and teacher intervention during the epidemic period	Ethical issues	29	Administration	12
			Behavior of families	10
			Course effectiveness	7
	Administrative requirements	10		
	teacher's initiative	6		
Situations where teachers are in ethical dilemmas	Online teaching	8		
	Communication and privacy	8		
	Online course intensity	5		
	Compliance with Pandemic rules and other	4		
Ethical dilemmas of teachers about children	Ethical dilemmas	16		
	Intervention behaviors	5		
Ethical issues and ethical dilemmas related to families	Family member attending class	17		
	Responsibility of the family	14		
	Communication with the family	14		
	Teacher's suggestions	4		
Managerial ethical issues	Ethical issues arose	12		
	What could be done?	9		
	No unethical situation	5		
General evaluation and feelings of preschool teachers	The epidemic period	9		
	Education period	8		
	Teaching from the Internet	7		
	Emotions	5		

Table 3 shows a total of 7 upper categories/themes, 22 categories and 3 subcategories of the research.

In Turkey, preschool education in public institutions serves as a kindergarten within primary schools and as a kindergarten in an independent building. During the COVID-19 pandemic, preschool education was mostly conducted online. Participation in this course is not compulsory. During the epidemic, kindergartens in its own building continued face-to-face teaching. In addition, kindergartens were opened in certain regions for the needs of families who continue to work during the epidemic. Table 4. presents the teachers' views on the way they carried out teaching in the said period and its impact.

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Table 4. The mode of work of preschool teachers during the epidemic period and its impact

Theme: Teachers' working style and impact during the epidemic period

Categories (f)	Codes	f
Method of teaching (16)	Online teaching during the pandemic period (T1, T3, T4, T6, T9, T11)	6
	The first six months are online then face-to-face teaching (T10, T12, T14, T15)	4
	Partly online, partly face-to-face teaching (T13, T16)	2
	Face-to-face half-term, then online teaching (T2, T7)	2
	Face-to-face training (T5, T8)	2
Influence (13)	Negatively affected (T1, T2, T4, T8, T9, T11, T12, T14, T16)	9
	It was fruitful (T3, T5, T6)	3
	There was no effect on (T15)	1

According to Table 4, opinions on the conduct of preschool education during the epidemic were collected in the categories of Teaching Style (16) and Effect (13). According to the findings, preschool education was carried out in five different ways in Turkey during the epidemic period, and the effects of these practices were mostly evaluated as negative.

T9: We conducted our training remotely during the epidemic. We didn't get much from the students. For some reason, the students could not get efficiency from us (state kindergarten, four- five years old teacher, 13 years of experience)

T16: Some distance education and some face-to-face training were given two days a week. This had a bad effect (State Primary School, Four- five years old teacher, 31 years of experience).

T7: Half-term face-to-face, 40 minutes online training three days a week every 12 weeks (Government kindergarten, Three-six years old teacher, 11 years of experience).

T8: We continued face-to-face training. Due to the epidemic, this situation affected us negatively (private kindergarten, Three-six years old teacher, 10 years of experience).

According to the opinions of the teachers, the situations experienced during the epidemic, what the ethical problems are, where or from whom they originate, how they affect the teacher, expectations and solution attempts. These determinations gathered under five categories and three sub-categories are given in the Table 5.

Table 5. Ethical problems experienced by preschool teachers during the epidemic period

Theme: Ethical issues, administrative requirements and teacher intervention during the epidemic

Categories (f)	Subcategories	Codes	f
Ethical issues (29)	Administration (12)	The lack of equal opportunities for teaching via the Internet (T4, T6, T7, T13)	5
		Lack of attention of teachers and school administration to vaccinations and tests (T10, T12, T14)	3
		Frequent opening and closing of schools disrupts education (T8, T16)	2
		The school administration must have additional courses (T14)	1
		The arrival of a teacher with virus symptoms at school (T10)	1
	Behavior of families (10)	Sending coughing and sick children to school (T10, T12, T14)	3
		Unauthorized participation of families in the lesson and to do the activities (T9, T11, T15)	3
		Families refuse or do not attach importance to online education (T4, T7)	2
		Maintaining the home state (clothing and behavior) of the family and children in the course (T2, T3)	2
	Course effectiveness (7)	Failure to ensure classroom management (T2,T3,T9,T11,T7)	5
		Activities are not productive because they are not performed face-to-face (T3, T11)	2
Administrative requirements (7)		More attention could have been paid to vaccines and tests (T12, T14)	2
		The management's follow-up of the process prevented problems (T1, T2)	2
		The Internet could have been given more importance (T4)	1
		A large class could have been given to match the social distancing (T16)	1
		The duration of education could have been balanced between private school and public school (T5)	1
Teacher's intervention (6)		Warning the child and the family about some issues (T2, T11, T15, T16)	4
		Preparing accelerated programs as schools open (T8)	1
		Switching off cameras due to income level difference (T13)	1

The categories in the table are, in order, Ethical issues (29), Administrative requirements (10), and Teacher intervention (6). Ethical problem category is divided into subcategories of Social and administrative (12), Behavior of families (10 codes), and Lesson effectiveness (7). According to the findings, while the majority of the ethical problems during the epidemic were the inequality in teaching opportunities and the inability to provide classroom management, the expectations were that sufficient internet could be provided and the solution attempts were to warn the child and family on some issues. Some of the views are that it is unethical for families to send sick children to school and to be included in the lesson without permission.

T15: To listen to the lessons given on the EBA (education information network) *platform with online teaching without the permission of the parents, to intervene, to be in front of the camera in every way without realizing that their home situation is in the online classroom environment (Private Kindergarten, Three-six years old teacher, 4 years experienced)*
T3: In online teaching, children had attention spans and family comfort, activities were not productive because they were not face-to-face (Public Kindergarten, Four- five years old teacher, 13 years experienced)

T6: Equal opportunities were not provided to everyone. Most people did not have a tablet, phone or internet (Public primary school, 5 years old teacher, 30 years of experience)

T14: Children who were coughing and sick were able to come to school. Families were not paying attention to this. The school administration was putting on an additional lesson. Teachers were not paying attention to vaccinations and tests. The school administration was a little insensitive about this (Private Kindergarten, Three-six years old, two years experienced).

Preschool teachers' views on the situations in which they are in ethical dilemmas while conducting education during the epidemic period are collected in four categories given in Table 6.

Table 6. Situations in which preschool teachers experience ethical dilemmas

Theme : Situations where teachers are left in an ethical dilemma

Categories (f)	Codes	f
Online Teaching (10)	Moving the teaching process to the screen while the screen is not normally used (T8, T6, T9)	3
	Teaching on the screen is inefficient, but it continues (T6, T9)	2
	Performing activities not in concrete, but in front of the screen (T6, T9)	2
	The fact that online teaching increases negative behaviors in a child (T1, T16)	2
	While the danger of screen addiction is emphasized, conducting education from the Internet (T8)	1
Communication and privacy (11)	Children acting at home while the camera is on in the course (T2, T3, T15)	3
	The dilemma in the efficiency of communication with students (T1, T2)	2
	Dilemma about family communication (T3, T7)	2
	The dilemma about the parent (T2, T16)	2
	The dilemma about privacy (T2)	1
	Involving a neighbor or someone else in the lesson on the Internet (T16)	1
The intensity of online lessons (5)	The dilemma caused by not wanting to study due to fatigue (T12, T15)	2
	Not wanting to do additional classes online due to fatigue (T12, T15)	2
	The school administration must have additional courses (T15)	1
Compliance with rules and other (4)	Refusal to undergo tests or go to the hospital despite symptoms of the virus (T10, T14)	2
	I was not left in an ethical dilemma (T5, T11)	2

In Table 6, the categories are listed as online teaching (8), communication and privacy (8), online course intensity (5), compliance with epidemic rules and other (4). Opinions are generally close to each other. According to the findings, teachers stated that they experience ethical dilemmas in preschool education being online and inefficient, communicating with children and families, conducting online education and complying with epidemic rules.

T1: I have been in dilemmas in terms of whether I can communicate efficiently with my students as I want. I didn't want the things I told to remain in the air (Public Elementary School, Five-six years old teacher, 20 years experienced).

T2: There have been situations when I have been in a dilemma about privacy, about parents. There have been cases when I have not been able to fulfill some of Veli's wishes. For example, asking for the lesson to be repeated

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when the student cannot attend the lesson during class time (State Primary school, Five-six years old teacher, 20 years experienced)

T14: People with flu or illness symptoms should not go to the hospital and get tested, saying I'm not sick (Private Kindergarten, Three-six years old teacher, two years experienced).

The two categories and codes in which teachers' views on situations affecting children and their attempts to solve them are collected are presented in Table 7.

Table 7. Situations in which a preschool teacher finds themselves in an ethical dilemma for the children in his classes

Theme:	Ethical dilemmas of teachers related to children	
Categories (f)	**Codes**	**f**
Ethical dilemmas (14)	Children have difficulty adapting to online teaching (T1, T3, T5, T7, T9)	5
	Staying away from the sick child who does not come to school clean (T10, T12, T14, T15)	4
	Being close to children who come to school clean (T10, T14)	2
	Thinking of online teaching as a dilemma (T6, T16)	2
	Parent's refusal of the school's COVID-19 test request (T8)	1
Intervention behaviors (5)	To say that the current situation is temporary (T1)	1
	Sending a message to the family for children to attend the lesson (T1)	1
	Sending a child who is sick to school back to his home (T8)	1
	To take care of the child who comes to school sick so that he is not badly affected (T15)	1
	Trying to learn the effect of online teaching course from family (T16)	1
Other (2)	There is no ethical dilemma (T11, T13)	2

Ethical dilemmas (14), Solutions (5) and Other (2) categories are listed in Table 7. According to the findings, the majority of ethical dilemmas are that children have difficulty in adapting to online education and avoiding children who are ill and not clean at school. The teacher's attempts to solve ethical dilemmas are in five different ways.

T1: my students were forced to adapt to, and this situation is temporary, I tried to comfort them by telling them we'd be back together soon (State Primary School, 5-6-year-old teacher, 20 years experience).
T8: When symptoms such as fever and cough occurred in children during the pandemic period, situations such as whether the child has COVID-19 or not created an atmosphere of panic at school. In this case, the parent was informed and asked to take the child out of school and take the test. But the fact that some parents did not want to take the test and brought the child back to school the next day created a dilemma at school. We also compulsorily sent the child back home (private kindergarten, Three-six years old teacher, 10 years experienced).
T15: I didn't want to be too interested in the student who was sick, but I was still interested, saying that this situation would affect the child badly. I was in a lot of dilemmas in this part (Private Kindergarten, Three-six years old teacher, four years experienced).

According to the teachers' views, unethical and dilemma situations related to families are presented in Table 8 as four categories.

Table 8. Ethical problems and ethical dilemmas experienced by preschool teachers about families

Theme: Ethical problems related to families and situations that create dilemmas

Categories (f)	Codes	f
Behavior in the lesson (17)	Family members getting involved in online course activities (T1, T3, T5, T6, T11, T16)	6
	Distractions of families during the lesson (T1, T2, T4, T11)	4
	The negative effect of the family's help in the activities on the child (T3, T11)	2
	The intervention of the family in front of the screen affects the teacher badly (T1)	1
	Inability of the illiterate family to be included in the lesson (T14)	1
	Parents' interference with the content of homework (T4)	1
	Teacher's involvement with parents in setting assignments (T11)	1
Responsibility of the family (14)	Working families do not spare time for children (T4, T12, T14, T16)	4
	Not providing the necessary technical infrastructure for online teaching (T2, T8)	2
	Not providing a separate room for the lesson (T2)	1
	The child is not prepared on time with appropriate clothes for the online lesson (T2)	1
	The negative effect of the noise at home on the lesson and the teacher (T1)	1
	Sending the sick child to school (T15)	1
	Not using the internet for educational purposes (T7)	1
	The events between the family during the lesson (T6)	1
	Discussions of families in online meetings (T13)	1
Communication with the family (14)	Experiencing a dilemma because families cannot be contacted (T2, T4, T9, T10, T12, T13, T14, T15, T16)	9
	Warn the family communication group so that the child and the environment are suitable for the lesson (T2,T4)	2
	Asking for help from the school administration for the family that could not be reached (T15)	1
	The fact that parents are not allowed to school negatively affects communication (T10)	1
	School holidays while working in the field of health and safety continues (T8)	1
Suggestions of the teacher (4)	It was possible to communicate with the teacher (T12, T14)	2
	Encouraging the family to give responsibility to the child (T9)	1
	Having a school or center open for family children working in the field of health and safety(T8)	1

The categories in Table 8 are Behaviors in the Lesson (17 codes), Responsibility of the Family (14 codes), Communication with the Family (14 codes), and Teacher's suggestions (4 codes). According to the findings, teachers experienced ethical dilemmas mostly because they could not communicate with the family, and some opinions said that the distraction and intrusive behavior of the parents in the lesson and not spending time with their children created a dilemma. Few opinions are that not making the child and home environment suitable for the lesson causes ethical dilemmas.

T1: Because the parents were also in the online class, they were also talking in the class. It was more difficult for me to teach in the noise. Because telling lessons in front of them is different from the one-to-one communication I established with my students at school, I was also struggling whether I wanted to or not (Public Elementary school, Five-six years old teacher, 20 years experienced).

T4: I was quite annoyed that some of the families did not give the online classes the necessary importance. Because although they did not prevent their children from getting an education, I would say that the housework they made them do, the parents doing things that would distract the child's attention, disrupted the child's concentration. I have had the necessary conversation with the families about this. But the result did not turn out quite the way I wanted. We found the common way with some families, but others were hopeless cases (Public Elementary School, Five-six years old teacher, 20 years experienced).

T15: They should not have sent their sick children to school, but they did. We tried to contact about this, but it was not effective. It was necessary not to be admitted to the school (Private Kindergarten, Three-six years old teacher, four years experienced).

Opinions on management-related situations during the epidemic period are presented in table 9 under three categories.

Table 9. Managerial ethical problems during the epidemic period

Theme:	Administrative ethical issues	
Categories (f)	**Codes**	**f**
Ethical problems (12)	The administrator's taking the sick child to school (T15, T14, T12)	3
	Experiencing a lack of environment at school (T8, T16, T14)	3
	The unequal technological opportunities (T6, T7)	2
	Some schools provide tablet and internet facilities to their students (T4)	1
	Management is very strict about mask, distance and cleaning (T10)	1
	Having difficulties in reaching students (T5)	1
	The lessons are not productive (T5)	1
What could be done? (10)	Mask, distance and cleaning measures could have been more sensitive (T12, T14, T15, P16)	4
	Equal technological opportunities would provide equality and full efficiency (T4, T6)	2
	In villages, the teacher could take homework (T5)	1
	A large classroom and open air environment could be provided (T2, T16)	2
	Class size could have been reduced (T14)	1
No unethical situation (5)	There was no unethical behavior of the management (T1, T2, T3, T9, T13)	5

The categories in Table 9 are Ethical problems experienced (12), What could be done (9), and No unethical situation (5), in order. According to the findings, statements about ethical problems during the epidemic period are in the majority, and solution suggestions are in the form of expectations from the management. Some of the opinions were also gathered in the category that there is no unethical situation.

T2: There were no problems administratively. The manager followed the process in a relevant way. But when the weather started to get better, classes could be held outdoors (Public Elementary School, Five-six years old teacher, 21 years experienced).

*T8: **Since** the dining hall and sleeping rooms are the only ones, there was a lack of environment in the pandemic (private kindergarten, Three-six years old teacher, 10 years experienced).*

T12: It was unethical for the administration to take the sick child to school because it made us worry too. The administration could have acted more sensitively (private kindergarten, Three-six years old teacher, three years experienced).

T16: Classes could have been held in larger classes because, despite the pandemic, there was a lot of contact with children, whether they wanted to or not, which was unethical (Public Elementary School, Five-six year old teacher, 31 years of experience).

Teachers' free evaluations and feelings about the epidemic period and preschool education were gathered under four categories and presented in Table 10.

Table 10. Assessments and feelings of preschool teachers about the epidemic period

Theme: General evaluation and feelings of preschool teachers

Categories (f)		Codes	f
Epidemic period (9)		I wish not to experience such a process again (T1, T4, T7, T10, T12, T16)	6
		The epidemic process was difficult (T3, T13, 3 T16)	3
Education period (8)		Face to face education must be (T2, T3, T4, T5, T9, T11)	6
		Distance education was inefficient (T2, T9)	2
Online Teaching (7)		Difficulty in communication (T3, T14)	2
		The technological infrastructure was not sufficient (T3, T14)	2
		Technological possibilities could be equalized (T6, T14)	2
		The opportunities of the students were not equal (T6)	1
Emotions (5)		Thank you (T1, T4, T8, T12)	4
		Good luck with your effort (T4)	1

In Table 10, the views in the categories are close to each other, as Epidemic period (9), Preschool education (8), Online education (7) and Emotions. According to the findings, while the teachers wished not to experience the epidemic period again, they said that preschool education should be face-to-face, there were difficulties in online teaching and communication, and finally they thanked for the study.

T3: The epidemic process was a difficult period, the families did not participate very effectively. There were difficulties in communication, timely attendance was not provided, there were attachment problems, but they were overcome in time. I always support face-to-face education in preschool education (State kindergarten, Four- five years old teacher, 13 years experienced).

T4: First of all, I would like to thank you and your esteemed teacher for preparing this interview, thank you for your hard work. Apart from that, the last thing I want to say is, I hope we will not face a problem like an epidemic again, and students and teachers will continue their education in schools. Because the education given at school is very important for me (State primary school, Five-six years old teacher, 20 years of experience).

T9: Education should always be face-to-face in the preschool period. The education process was inefficient due to the fact that students were distracted and could not concentrate in online education (state kindergarten, 4-5 year old teacher, 13 years of experience).

4. DISCUSSION and CONCLUSION

The findings of this research show that preschool teachers experience ethical problems and remain in ethical dilemmas while teaching during the COVID-19 epidemic, and they take responsibility to solve them. The results of this study show that preschool teachers conduct teaching in five different ways during the COVID-19 pandemic. Teachers stated that they carried out their duties

mostly online, some of them online for the first six months, then face-to-face teaching. Two of the few views are blended and face-to-face teaching. Similarly in the literature, Means, Bakia and Murphy, (2014) defined online learning design options as fully online, blended, mixed and Web-enabled F2F (friedend 2 friend) (Trm. Hodges, Moore, Locke et al., 2020). UNICEF (2020) explained the situation in the countries as "According to the course of the epidemic, schools were reopened, closed again due to the spread of the virus, or hybrid teaching methods were tried". During the epidemic period, kindergartens designated for the children of working families in Turkey served (MoNE, 2020; 2022). Jones, (2020) and Silverman, et al. (2020) also determined that similar applications were made in the USA and Canada, Zorec and Peček (2022), in Slovenia. By contrast, in Taiwan, the outbreak was successfully controlled without widespread school closures (Everington, 2020). In the second finding of this research, teachers generally evaluated the effect of teaching practices during the epidemic period as negative, while a few said that they were productive. Results of similar studies (Jones, 2020; Yazıcı, Keskin & Gelişli, 2022) support this finding. In studies containing similar and different findings, it was determined that besides teachers' positive and negative feelings (Nikolopoulou, 2022), children enjoy being with their families and relatives (Zorec & Peček, 2022).

This research shows that preschool teachers experience ethical problems in online and face-to-face teaching during the epidemic. The majority of the teachers said that they do not find it ethical that the teaching opportunities are unequal, and some that the school administration, teachers and families do not comply with the epidemic rules. Similarly, in studies conducted (Aral & Kadan, 2021; Hughes, 2020; Jones, 2020; Nikolopoulou, 2022; Russell et al., 2020), technology and internet-related infrastructure problems is the dominant difficulty and the most common problem. Findings indicated that preschool teachers mostly did not find classroom management to be provided, and some of them did not find it ethical for families to participate in online classes and activities without permission. In support of this finding, Sezgin (2022) determined in his study that the lack of body language and the inability to create a classroom climate among teachers and children negatively affect focus. In Jones' (2020) research, parents said that the time spent by children in front of the screen is longer, children are bored and their social participation decreases. According to the findings, some of the teachers said that families do not care about distance education and that the child and family behave sloppy. In similar studies (Aral & Kadan 2021), it has been determined that parents experience negative emotions and effects and that the lack of participation is significant. Yazıcı, Keskin & Gelişli (2022) determined that online teaching has negative aspects in terms of teachers, children and families. According to the findings, teachers generally tried to maintain order and solve ethical problems by warning the child and family. Teachers tried to apply the principle of justice and equality (Aydın, 2013), one of the principles of professional ethics. In the other finding of this research, some of the teachers expressed their expectations from the administration in such a way that more importance could be given to the internet, and that they could pay more attention to vaccines and tests.

The results of this research expressed the situations in which preschool teachers were in ethical dilemmas during the epidemic, as the teaching process was moved to the screen when the screen was not used in the preschool, and it was continued even though it was inefficient. Similarly, Lavidas, Apostolou and Papadakis (2022) determined that digital tools used in preschool mathematics teaching were used less after face-to-face teaching. Another finding related to the ethical dilemma is the efficient communication of some of the teachers with children and families. In the literature, due to the negative effects of the epidemic in the social, emotional and communication fields (Yazıcı et al., 2022), other difficulties brought by the epidemic to daily life (Hughes, 2020), parents are biased towards online teaching, determined that it can lead to their reluctant and uninterested approach. Jones (2020) determined that parents with young children rarely attend ZOOM meetings and find it difficult to adapt to this teaching style. In the study, some of the teachers said that online teaching increased negative behaviors in children. Studies supporting this finding (Watts & Pattanaik, 2022) relates to the

negative changes observed in children during the epidemic period. The school administrator has a dilemma about the priority of granting permission to the grandmother who wants to accompany the child who has adjustment problems to school due to the epidemic rules (Muller & Baum, 2020). Some of the views in this research are the results of studies (Aral & Kadan, 2021) that support the findings of children's behaviors that create privacy problems when the camera is on, and that parents are indifferent to the problem of children's participation. Situations encountered during the epidemic provide teachers with guidance on how to apply ethical rules in extraordinary situations (Muller & Baum, 2020). The findings show that some of the preschool teachers are in ethical dilemma because they do not want to do the lessons and additional lessons online because they are tired. The sustainable well-being of preschool teachers is particularly important in the global pandemic (Eadie, et al., 2021). An ethical solution for teachers is that teachers in the risk group offer online teaching to children whose families prefer to stay at home, which can be a beneficial solution for both parties (Silverman, et al. 2020).

In this study, most of the preschool teachers stated that the children in their classrooms had difficulties in adapting to online teaching, but continuing this was an ethical dilemma. While trying to ensure that children are in safe, healthy and supportive learning environments (CECE, 2023) during the epidemic, teachers were stuck in ethical dilemmas between their professional values and responsibilities (NAECY, 2023). Similarly, studies (Çiçek et al. 2020; Jones, 2020; Zorec & Peček, 2022) determined that children hardly adapt to education, miss school, and often feel anxiety and fear. Nikolopoulou (2022), stated that limited resources/support at home and limited training in online methodology are disadvantages. With optimistic thinking, it can be expected that young children will be able to continue to develop flexibly and adaptively to new learning environments with clear and consistent directions (UNESCO, 2020).

In the research, some of the teachers' ethical dilemmas for children are that they stay away from the sick child who does not come to school clean. Few opinions are to be close to children who come to school clean and distance education is seen as a dilemma. Teachers experienced ethical dilemmas while trying to stay away from situations that would put the child at risk and create confusion, as per the professional boundaries and bilateral relations ethical code and standard. Here, they are caught between the child's feelings and responsibilities (Feeney & Freeman, 2018; NAECY, 2020). According to the findings, the behaviors of some of the teachers in solving ethical dilemmas are suggesting to children that the current situation is temporary, sending a sick child back to school, and take care of the child who comes to school sick. By applying the ethical principle of honesty, integrity and trust (Aydın, 2013), teachers treated children fairly and lovingly.

In the study, the majority of the teachers said that they could not communicate with the family and that they did not find it ethical for family members to interfere with the lesson activities on the Internet and they were in a dilemma. In similar studies (Aral & Kadan, 2021; Yazıcı et al., 2022), teachers defined that they have difficulties in communication, supporting children and families as a high level problem. Stoiljković (2020), on the other hand, emphasized highly positive attitudes when there is cooperation between the two parties. Teachers applied the NAECY and CECE principle of respecting and supporting families in their child-rearing duties (CECE, 2023; NAECY, 2023). In addition, as per the developmentally appropriate care and education standard, it has made an effort to adapt the child to the most appropriate learning environment (CECE, 2023). The findings indicated that some of the teachers did not find it ethical that parents showed distracting behaviors when they were on the screen or not, and that working families did not spare time for their children, and they were in dilemma. Feeney and Freeman (2018) stated that the most common ethical problems are those that concern families. By applying the ethical principle of respect (Aydın, 2013), teachers tried to communicate with the family in a way that supports the existence and integrity of the child and family. Acting with a sense of responsibility, teachers tried to convey lesson activities to children using

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multiple digital environments (Akkaş-Baysal, Ocak & Ocak, 2020). In the study conducted before the epidemic (Zayimoğlu, Kaya & Durmaz, 2016), the majority of teachers had problems with parents. Muller and Baum (2020) determined that children, families and staff experience alot of stress and show their worries and fears in verbal/nonverbal ways. Different studies (Akın & Aslan, 2021; Jones, 2020; Lavidas, Apostolou & Papadakis, 2022) evaluated the positive effects of the family's participation in the child's teaching activities as beneficial results.

In this study, the majority of teachers stated that there was no unethical behavior of the administration in the epidemic and online teaching. In the findings, the majority of the opinions that there are ethical problems in management. Some opinions are that it is unethical for the administrator to take the sick child to school and to experience a lack of environment in the school. Some of the teachers expressed their suggestions that they can be more sensitive in mask, distance and cleaning measures. The application supporting the finding of the research that a teacher takes homework from village teachers has been applied extensively in Reggio Emilia in Italy (Reggio Emilia, 2020). Feeney and Freeman (2018) generally advised educators to consider ethical tact, that is, solving a problem in a way that is acceptable to all parties involved. Teachers tried to implement the ethical principle of effective use of resources (Aydın, 2013) by expressing the expectation of providing an adequate environment in the school. At the international level, "depending on the course of the epidemic, countries are recommended to go to school conversion to reduce the class size, move classes to temporary or open spaces, in line with the general COVID-19 health strategy to protect school children, teaching staff, other employees and families, as measures to be taken. It was also emphasized that sanitation, water and sanitation facilities will play a crucial role in the safe reopening of schools" (UNICEF, 2020). Similarly, in the study (Sezgin, 2020), it was determined that there are difficulties in applying the epidemic rules administratively and in providing appropriate teaching environment and opportunities. In the study before the epidemic, Zayimoğlu, Kaya and Durmaz (2016) determined that preschool teachers mostly did not have problems with the school management, but according to some, they had problems. Torn between desperate families and teachers, a disregarded governor, and cautious health professionals, the administrator faces an unprecedented ethical dilemma (Muller & Baum, 2020).

Finally, preschool teachers generally wished not to experience such a process again and stated that preschool education should be face-to-face. Most of the teachers thanked for this study. Some opinions are that the epidemic process is difficult, few are that online education is inefficient, there are difficulties in communication, technological infrastructure is not sufficient, and technological opportunities are equal. Teachers' assessments and feelings summarize the epidemic period and findings regarding online teaching. Similarly, the pandemic has brought new challenges to work-related well-being (Gülhan et al., 2021), the sustainable welfare of preschool teachers is particularly important in the global pandemic (Eadie et al., 2021), the epidemic It affects preschool children badly (Watts & Pattanaik, 2022), preschool education should be face-to-face, teachers experience negative psychological effects, communication problems in teaching (Nikolopoulou, 2022; Zorec & Pecek, 2022) support the research results. UNESCO (2020), the lack of equality in technological opportunities has caused ethical problems in terms of school management, teachers, children and families. However, it should also be kept in mind that remote teaching has emerged unexpectedly and as a necessity during the epidemic period, as he summarized the picture of the epidemic.

The limitations of this study are that it was conducted with 16 preschool teachers working in private and state preschool education institutions, and parents and administrators were not included in the study. Other aspects of the issue will be included in future studies.

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4.1. Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to determine the way of conducting preschool education during the COVID-19 epidemic, the ethical problems experienced by children and families, and the solution proposals based on the opinions of teachers. The findings of this study support the relevant literature suggesting that epidemics will cause ethical problems with children in preschool teachers' classrooms, their families, and the teaching environment and have difficulty in producing solutions to these problems. The results of this study, the problems that preschool teachers have with families and children related to infrastructure and participation in online teaching during the COVID-19 epidemic, the efficiency of teaching, how the negative effects of the epidemic conditions change the behavior of children and families in face-to-face teaching, teachers reduce negativities, solve problems. It is important because it reveals the attempts to communicate with the family, their expectations from the management and solution proposals. While the teachers were experiencing the difficulties brought by the epidemic, they were tired of trying to carry out the education without interruption. It is recommended that teachers be rewarded with support and encouragement that will comfort them.

Ethics Committee Decision
This research was carried out with the permission of Burdur Mehmet Akif Ersoy University Social and Human Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee with the decision numbered GO2022/882 dated 05.10.2022 and numbered 2022/10.

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