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Put the Mask on Yourself First: Work-related Wellbeing of Preschool Teachers in the “New Normal”

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Abstract

This single case study explores the preschool teachers’ work-related wellbeing regarding their satisfaction in adapting to the working conditions from the first incidence of the Covid-19 pandemic to recovery times in the “New Normal.” Teachers recruited as participants were eight preschool teachers working in private institutional preschools in İstanbul and Ankara. Data elicited from in-depth semi-structured interviews were analyzed in the cycling process, including the open, inductive, and deductive coding steps. Based on participants’ reflections, the pandemic’s timeline was divided into two splits: The first shock response and preparedness, as well as the recovery times. Following this timeline, the emergent indicators defining work-related wellbeing moved from negative to more positive as time passed. Situated within the socio-ecological framework, data analysis showed that preschool teachers’ wellbeing during the pandemic was affected by internal and external factors shaping personal and working life. Overall results pointed out that, before striving only for job requirements, teachers need to become capable of supporting their wellbeing in all layers of life by putting the masks on themselves first. **Keywords:** Work-related wellbeing; preschool teacher; covid-19 pandemic; new normal; socio-ecological framework

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Maskeyi Önce Kendinize Takın: “Yeni Normal”de Okul Öncesi Öğretmenlerinin İşle İlgili İyi Olma Hâlleri

Özet

Bu tek durum çalışması, okul öncesi öğretmenlerinin, Covid-19 pandemisinin ilk vakasının ortaya çıkmasından “Yeni Normal”deki iyileşme süreçlerine kadar çalışma koşullarına uyum sağlama konusundaki memnuniyetlerine ilişkin işle ilgili iyi olma hallerini araştırmaktadır. Katılımcı olarak seçilen öğretmenler İstanbul ve Ankara'daki özel kurumsal anaokullarında çalışan sekiz okul öncesi öğretmendir. Derinlemesine yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmelerden elde edilen veriler, açık, tümevarım ve tümdengelim kodlama adımlarını içeren döngü sürecinde analiz edilmiştir. Katılımcıların yansıtılmalarına göre pandeminin zaman çizelgesi iki bölüme ayrılmıştır: İlk şok yanıtı ve hazırlık ile iyileşme süreleri. Bu zaman çizelgesini takiben, işle ilgili iyi olma halini tanımlamada ortaya çıkan göstergeler, zaman geçtikçe olumsuzdan daha olumluya kaymıştır. Sosyo-ekolojik çerçeve içinde yer alan veri analizleri, pandemi sırasında okul öncesi öğretmenlerinin iyi olma hallerinin kişisel ve çalışma hayatını şekillendiren iç ve dış faktörlerden etkilendiğini göstermiştir. Genel sonuçlar, öğretmenlerin sadece iş gereksinimleri için çabalamadan önce, maskeleri ilk önce kendilerine takarak yaşamın tüm katmanlarında iyi olma hallerini destekleme yeteneğine sahip olmaları gerektiğine işaret etmektedir.

Anahtar Sözcükler: İşle ilgili iyi olma hali; okul öncesi öğretmeni; covid-19 pandemisi; yeni normal; sosyo-ekolojik çerçeve

1. INTRODUCTION

The importance of teachers' role in education system, as the front-line workers responsible for engaging students and promoting their learning, necessitates investigating the matter of work-related wellbeing of teachers (Viac & Fraser, 2020). Wellbeing, albeit a broad concept, provides the evaluation and understanding of an individual's satisfaction or dissatisfaction from the conditions and experiences they have (Diener, 2009). Moreover, it emphasizes the capabilities of individuals and the impact of social support to stay healthy and empowered even in diverse conditions. Specifically, teachers' work-related wellbeing points to the state of satisfaction constructed with the contribution of both themselves and the context they live in through the ongoing direct and indirect support across psychological, physiological, and ethical dimensions (Cumming & Wong, 2019; Cumming, 2016; Hall-Kenyon et al., 2014; Split et al, 2011).

Since 2019, the effects of the pandemic in education have caused to make significant changes in the routines to maintain the learning and teaching practices despite the obligatory constraints of a pandemic. To illustrate, with the lockdowns, schools were closed, and people were asked to stay at home to prevent the spreading of Covid-19 cases. Thus, stakeholders of the education, specifically teachers and students, faced one of the most challenging education conditions ever (Karan, 2021; Split, Koomen & Thijs, 2011). Even though the covid-19 pandemic had spread like wildfire in a global manner, it is not the only possible threat to current and future education systems and individuals' wellbeing (Dodds, 2019). Especially in crisis situations (i.e., earthquake, war, epidemic, etc.), trying to adapt to the changing needs of children and families in the functioning of education directly affects teachers' personal and work-oriented stress, while this also influences children's wellbeing (Rose & Roger, 2012). Thus, it is necessary to give priority to understanding and empowering teachers' wellbeing by supporting them to develop their professional and emotional competencies and self-regulation skills to endure adversities of the conditions (Rose, Gilbert & Richards, 2016).

Considering the abovementioned importance of wellbeing of teachers, in this study, we particularly focused on the work-related wellbeing of preschool teachers working in Turkish private schools who attempt to preserve their wellbeing in the period of “New Normal” with pandemic. We consider the findings of this study might shed light on how teachers could cope with other possible deranging threats such as natural disasters or wars to continue their profession. The theoretical framework of this study conceptualizes the concept of work-related wellbeing, particularly for preschool teachers, and then explains the basic features of being a teacher at Turkish private preschools. Then, the methodology section explains how the study explores the participants' experiences and reflections as a particular case. Finally, the findings section follows by a comprehensive discussion in

conjunction with the national and international literature to demonstrate how preschool teachers preserve their wellbeing at the expense of the Covid-19 pandemic and adapt to the new normal.

1.1. Work-Related Wellbeing of Preschool Teachers

The prevalent use of wellbeing from various disciplines makes its conceptualization difficult for researchers (Diener, 2009). Wellbeing is generally defined based on the satisfaction or dissatisfaction in certain domains of life and conditions, such as health, education, security, relations. To measure wellbeing, researchers define and measure objective and/or subjective indicators within each domain. Accordingly, researchers studying the concept of wellbeing direct their attention to the contribution of multidisciplinary fields such as philosophy, psychology, physiology, or organizational science for studying this concept while synthesizing both objective and subjective indicators (Ben-Arieh et al., 2014). Specifically, subjective wellbeing refers to the one's reflections on the areas of life and personality regarding his/her life satisfaction and positive affect (Diener, 1984).

According to recent studies (Hanno et al., 2021; Johnson et al., 2020), teachers' wellbeing impacts the quality of education by influencing their skills in learning and teaching practices. When teachers' stress level increases, their responses to children and interaction with them is influenced negatively (Whitaker, 2015), learning conditions become unstable for young children (Grant et al., 2019). Along with the existing conditions, teachers also try to cope with different kinds of challenges in their both professional and personal lives (Jeon et al., 2018; Whiteaker et al., 2013). Thus, it is essential to investigate on teachers' work-related wellbeing from ecological perspective to take the impacts of different layers of their lives into account.

As a social being, people are influenced by different factors in their lives involving their family, neighborhood they live in, their work conditions and policies. Additionally, the current wellbeing literature feature the capabilities and autonomy of individuals for life satisfaction to heal the conditions they have instead of solely focusing on the challenges of life creating burden and stress (Ben-Arieh et al., 2014). Hence, this study explores teachers' satisfaction regarding work-related wellbeing in an interaction to their subjective attributions promoting or limiting capabilities, and their kind of interactions with social network in different layers of life (Cumming, 2016). Thus, in this study, preschool teachers' wellbeing is explained by the definition of Cumming and Wong (2019) as "A dynamic state, involving the interaction of individual, relational, work–environmental, and sociocultural–political aspects and contexts" (p. 276).

1.2. Wellbeing in Nested Systems

The holistic and comprehensive conceptualization of wellbeing is nested in the ecological systems theory (EST) of Bronfenbrenner (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Cumming & Wong, 2019; Viac & Fraser, 2020). EST is functional to conceptualize the wellbeing from broader perspective with the contribution of interdisciplinary fields because the wellbeing of an individual is constructed with the direct and indirect reciprocal interactions between and within the different layers of ecological systems from micro to macro systems (Diener, 2009; Viac & Fraser, 2020; Split et al., 2011; Cumming, 2016; Hall-Kenyon et al., 2014). The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) provides a model for the occupational wellbeing of teachers (Viac & Fraser, 2020). Accordingly, the teachers' occupational wellbeing is conceptualized under three sections. The parts include conditions at the system or school level influencing teachers' occupational wellbeing, components of teachers' cognitive, subjective physical, mental, and social wellbeing and finally expected inward and outward outcomes of teachers' occupational wellbeing. All these reciprocally interact to influence teachers' sense of identity, feeling of worth, and work satisfaction (Rose et al., 2016).

EST and occupational wellbeing framework guide this study to investigate on how preschool teachers perceive their subjective wellbeing and cope with the conditions they have in an interaction with children, families, school program and educational policies regarding the functioning of education system in "New Normal" emerged after covid-19 pandemic. Undoubtedly, this aim necessitates to describe the working conditions of teachers in a detailed manner.

1.3. Being a Teacher at Turkish Private Preschool

Working with children in preschools with extreme care and attention can create an additional burden on teachers' emotional and physical wellbeing (Hall-Kenyon et al., 2013). Taking this role is complex work requiring having various skills in structural and processing factors to determine and implement what is the best way of supporting. Depending on the working conditions and the quality of interactions, the aspects of work-related wellbeing,

including self-efficacy, life satisfaction, financial stability, autonomy, emotional and physical health, are influenced either positively or negatively (Hall-Kenyon et al., 2013).

In Turkey, the latest enrolment rates for the early childhood education period shows 28,4% for 3-5 years period, 36,8% for 4-5 years period, and 56,9% for 5 years of age (Tunca, Kesbiç & Gencer, 2021). Among these children, 77,8% of children enrolled in public preschools while 12,7 % of them enrolled in private preschools. Even though all these schools depend on the Ministry of Education (MoNE) with centre-based governance, there are certain differences in the functioning of these schools including education programs, teacher hiring standards or fees, and salaries (Aslan, 2019; Gürler, 2020).

Working in Turkish private preschools has both advantages and disadvantages for the work-related wellbeing of teachers (Güler, 2020; Viac & Fraser, 2020). For structural factors, private schools usually have much more advantages in having variety and quality of educational materials, technology integrated activities and educational resources, structuring the program with alternative curriculums, providing foreign language support in the program. Also, private schools have less child-teacher ratio in the class, assistive staff or second teacher in the class, better school parent partnership opportunities, in-service education, and evaluation opportunities. On the other hand, when compared to public preschools, the ambiguity of working hours, distribution and allocation of daily work, job security and payment could be source of stress and burnout, which will also impact classroom processes and student's wellbeing. For provisional factors, the expectations from class teacher depending on the school and parent characteristics is higher when compared to public preschools. Teachers are usually responsible for both the caring and learning process of young children in coordination with the school staff, curriculum, and parents. In general, private schools are not the first place preferred by teachers in the level of preschool education in terms of personal rights, job security and working conditions (Güler, 2020; Korlu, 2020; Derman & Başal, 2010).

1.4. Current Study

As in all levels of education, the working conditions and satisfaction of preschool teachers are not independent of the different layers of society. In addition to the existing issues in early childhood education, Covid-19 Pandemic has created new issues for the operation of school systems in the lives of both children, parents, and teachers, which in turn affects the work-related wellbeing of preschool teachers (OECD, 2020). As never before, preschool teachers are under growing pressure to meet the demands of policies, institutions, parents, and children while also continuing to satisfy various social and emotional needs of children under unusual conditions. Even though rapidly spreading literature generally focused on the obstacles that emerged with pandemic (Lepp et al., 2021; Viac & Fraser, 2020; Allen et al., 2020; Aytaç, 2021), it is important to consider how teachers stay motivated to continue their jobs from the first phase of pandemic, which are preparedness and first response, to the "New Normal" in recovery times.

With the current study, in addition to the other studies conducted to search Pandemic influences focusing mainly negative impacts on teachers' wellbeing, it is aimed to focus on the changes in their wellbeing as in the timeline, from the first case of Covid-19 to the later times and how they develop abilities to cope with negative feelings. Teachers' experiences during this process will light up for similar threats like war, another pandemic cases, or natural disasters in the future they may face.

Particularly, the following research questions guided this study:

1. What are teachers' reflections on their work-related wellbeing regarding the satisfaction with the profession and their working conditions?
2. What kind of strategies do teachers follow to maintain their wellbeing to overcome the conditions of pandemic?

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Research Design

This study was designed as a single case study, which investigates preschool teachers' work-related wellbeing from the first phase of Covid-19 Pandemic to recovery times in "New Normal". According to Merriam (2009), a case study describes and analyses the bounded system in-depth. Covid-19 pandemic creates a bounded case for educational and subjective experiences of teachers in relation to the whole school system including curriculum,

policies, children, parents, and even materials. This study was designed to reveal explanatory information about the preschool teachers' work-related wellbeing during the pandemic period.

2.2. Participants and Data Collection

Participants of this study include eight preschool teachers working in institutional private schools that have branches in various cities across the country. These schools are much more systematic in that school administration and preschool teachers follow a particular curriculum and work in conjunction with other branches. The detailed characteristics of participants are illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1. General Information about the Participants

Participant	T1	T2	T3	T4	T5	T6	T7	T8
Education Level	Two-year Degree	Two-year Degree	Master	Under-graduate	Master	Master	Under-graduate	Under-graduate
Age	33	22	25	26	28	28	29	28
Experience (Year)	9	2	3	4	6	3,5	6	4
Age Group (Years Old)	5	3	4-5	4	3	3-6	4	5
Number of Children	8	13	20	9	10	14	4	10
Number of Teachers in the Class	1	2*	2*	2*	2*	2*	2**	2*
City	İstanbul		Ankara		İstanbul		Ankara	

* Both teachers are the main teachers as partners.

** One main teacher and one assistant teacher.

We interviewed with these eight preschool teachers between November 2020 and January 2021. The data collection timeline covers the periods including large scale response with governmental and school policies as well as recovery in "New Normal". We prepared a semi-structured interview protocol before the data collection; however, we revised some questions and added additional questions due to the policy level changes in the functioning of schools regarding pandemic at the time of data collection. We conducted the interviews in an online platform and recorded the audios with permission.

After the preliminary analysis of the interview data, we also prepared another set of questions and sent them to the participants via e-mail to learn about some objective indicators defining their working conditions including salary and job security. Hence, our data collection process involved synchronous semi-structured online interviews and asynchronous written interviews.

Before collecting data, Ethics Committee approvals were obtained from METU Human Subjects Ethics Committee on December, 2021, and participants' consent forms were gathered with signature.

2.3. Credibility and Trustworthiness

From the beginning of the research design and data collection, we tried to build meaningful and ethical relationships with participants without judgment by building emphatic engagement and having a sense of objective awareness. In a qualitative study, two possible primary sources of bias related to the researcher and the case may occur: (1) The effects of the researcher on the case, (2) the effects of the case on the researcher (Seymour, 2012). In this study, we dealt with the first bias type by a brief preliminary interview to meet participants and explain the aims of the study to participants. For the second type of bias, we kept a reflective

journal not to forget the aim of the research and keep in mind the necessities of being a reliable researcher in this study.

To improve the validity and trustworthiness of case study findings, we collaboratively designed the interview protocol and then shared with a colleague to ensure the validity and trustworthiness of the instrument (Moore et al., 2012). In addition, we carried out a pilot interview to check whether the interview questions were appropriate and sufficient to achieve the purpose of the study. As a result of the pilot test, we made necessary modifications to the interview questions and formed the final version. Due to pandemic precautions, we could not attend classroom observations to triangulate the data beside interviews.

To ensure the trustworthiness and credibility of the analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), we collaboratively coded all the interview data to get open-codes, categories, and themes. Collaborative coding process helped us to have shared interpretations, discussing provocative questions for richer codes by dialogic exchange of ideas, a chance for peer debriefing, and code checking. Moreover, we ensured peer debriefing by discussing and keeping records of each analytical step on the LogBook function of MAXQDA (VERBI Software, 2021). We also transcribed the entire interview data verbatim, representing all utterances made by participants without changing non-standard language usage or dialect, and without skipping over repetitions and backchannels (Paulus et al., 2014), which also enabled to ensure transferability. Moreover, we wrote analytic memos to monitor self-perceptions about our own beliefs, biases, perception throughout the interviewing and coding process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

2.4. Data Analysis

After transcribing the interviews verbatim, we considered each meaningful sentence as the unit of analysis and coded. The analysis process involved a series of coding and categorizing in three cycles. In the first cycle, we coded data inductively and manually (i.e., on Microsoft Word) for open coding. Manual coding helped us to become familiar with the data and gave the sense of ownership and control by manipulating hands-on materials. Accordingly, we created initial codes to create categories and themes. After open coding, we began to search overlapping features of initial codes and the themes addressed by related literature.

In the second cycle, we used a qualitative data analysis software, MAXQDA (VERBI Software, 2021) and continued the data analysis process digitally. In this cycle, the initial code list, categories, and themes were re-examined based on the literature defining the key points and indicators of teachers' work-related wellbeing. Then, we merged the initial codes by embedding them to the indicators from the literature to create the final version of the code list. At that stage, merged codes were listed hierarchically for determining categories based on either similarities or relations between codes. Then, each code, subcode, and category was explained on the memos so that each researcher could code the rest of the data accordingly by the following codebook.

In the third cycle, we deductively coded data based on the final version of the code list that emerged from the first and second cycles. Then, we, as a group of researchers, made debriefing on each coded segment until we reach a shared agreement on codes. For portraying the big picture of the phenomenon and interactions between components of the big picture, we displayed code frequency and code relation tables and created the code clouds. Hence, we could reach more analytical interpretations for the possible similarities, relations, and networks about the phenomenon as presented in the results and discussion.

2.5. Scientific Research and Publication Ethics

In the study, all the rules specified to be followed by the *"Higher Education Institutions Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Directive"* were complied with. None of the actions specified in the 2nd part of the Directive, titled *"Actions Contrary to Scientific Research and Publication Ethics"*, were carried out.

2.5.1. Ethics Committee Approval

Before collecting data, Ethics Committee approvals were obtained from METU Human Subjects Ethics Committee, and participants' consent forms were gathered with signature.

Committee Name = METU Human Subjects Ethics Committee (HSEC)

Decision Date = 21.12.2021

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3. RESULTS

The interpretations based on the analytical cycles of analysis were explained based on the different layers of participants' lives to illustrate how preschool teachers reflect on their subjective wellbeing regarding their personal and work-related experiences, and how they stay motivated to stay in their jobs at the expense of the obstacles created by the pandemic. As a parallel to wellbeing literature, the codes emerged from findings illustrated the indicators categorized positive affect (i.e., Happiness, joy, contentment) and negative affect (sadness, anger, fear, anxiety), satisfaction from life and job (i.e., sense of fulfilment, gratification for working), self-efficacy skills (i.e., Capacity to concentrate on work, efficacy in classroom management, instruction, and student engagement), and social network. As the emergence and frequency of the findings referring to wellbeing indicators vary depending on the time experienced with the Covid-19 case, the presentation of the teacher's attribution to their subjective wellbeing follows a timeline from the first shock response and preparedness to the recovery times in "New Normal".

3.1. First Shock Response and Preparedness

The times from the first Covid-19 Case in Turkey in March 2020 to the end of the spring term in June 2020 refer to the first period of education during the pandemic. In this period, as the first macro-level response, all educational institutions shifted to emergency remote learning to operate educational activities safely. Along with the micro and macro level alterations in the operation of education centers, teachers developed strategies to continue their profession while attempting to preserve their subjective wellbeing in their personal and work life.

As examples of initial responses for the people in the charge of education, participant teachers' first reactions defining their emotions to experiencing the pandemic reflected mixed feelings including being nervous, stressed, upset, depressed, bored, and fatigued, but particularly "feeling shocked" with the obscurity of the pandemic. Even excluding the impacts of changing working conditions, the pandemic itself was considered a threat to become anxious for personal and familial health:

T8: I had a shock at first. How! How could it be... The first thing we heard was "the school will be closed", how will it be closed, ...So, I was really worried about how I would do it.

T1: ...You cannot see ahead... It scared me...In that case, I was worried and scared. But unfortunately, you must withdraw yourself from most things, like everyone else... You cannot go from place to place, you know, you must be alone because there are elders in your family. Unfortunately, you can experience the feeling of being stuck in there too much.

As seen, teachers were feeling alone and worried. They were also shocked with a very quick transition to online education in which they did not have any experience before. Moreover, teachers' reflections on their first experiences pointed to the connections with different layers of their life. Working from home made the borders blurred between personal and working life. Even though some teachers regarded this as an opportunity for having new hobbies or resting much more, some teachers inevitably reflected on this issue with negative statements such as disruption to family life and routines as illustrated below.

T6: I was very worried. I was teaching in front of the camera, and I was very uncomfortable when even the smallest voice of my child came from inside. I must be very good; nothing must spoil the mood. And it wore me out a lot at that time... I was preparing a presentation until midnight...

T7: It increased the time I would devote to myself. When I worked face to face, I was working longer hours and I did not have the opportunity to do much that required physical movement after coming home. But since I do not experience any physical fatigue as I sit and work all the time in the online process, I found different activities that I will reserve for myself at home. I took up many hobbies (laughs). I learned how to watercolor. I decorated my house (laughs). I've done all the things I postponed. So, I can say that my life has changed a lot in that respect.

Another problematic issue, emerged with interactions of children's and teachers' microsystems on mesosystem level, was the existence of third parties such as parents, making the teachers feel uncomfortable with the rising interactions.

T5: It was very exciting and nervous for my feelings because once there were families... when child comes to school, he comes to you as disconnected from his family and it is very easy to connect with the child in the classroom because he connects with you at that moment. But in online education, you are not his first point of contact... Instead of listening to me, he asks his mother what to do now. These were very reactionary for me, it was a new experience, I don't think I was very successful in this regard.

In terms of the functioning of education, the factors directly impacting the work-related satisfaction emerged reciprocally in both structural aspects and process aspects. For structural ones, the ambiguity of working hours, work overload, having access to tools, and adapting materials to online learning systems were stated as the sources of stress and burnout. Individually, lack of experience in emergency remote learning created dissatisfaction for teachers regarding their self-efficacy beliefs. Specifically, most teachers stated that using technological apps limited their efficacy skills due to inexperience, and not having access to the technological devices.

T7: My concern for online education was of course very high at first. In online education, the teacher must be active and constantly give feedback to the other party in some way. For example, when there is silence, it is a different situation. So, it's like the link is broken. It's like the teacher left. That's why, at first, for example, this challenged me a lot. I mean, I couldn't predict how long this activity would take in the online process. In terms of using time, for example, I have improved even more as time progressed.

For process factors, existence of supportive social network, reciprocal interactions with children, families and other staff were stated as necessary for preserving work-related wellbeing. All teachers regarded the functioning of education during the emergent remote learning process as inappropriate for the developmental needs of children. This situation in turn impacted their job satisfaction negatively due to difficulties in classroom management and adaptation of educational materials to online education for preschool children. However, teachers' knowledge and experience regarding the children's development and learning strategies eased their way to making alterations to provide a better learning context:

T5: Without their parents, there was absolutely no lesson with the children. Even if he had parents, it was not possible for you to bring him exactly to the thing in the classroom anyway, since the bond he formed with his parents was stronger than the teacher. But of course, I used some strategies... Unfortunately, you can't take the attention by explaining something verbally to children at the age of 3, it is not like in the classroom. Instead, the child must have something tangible in hand so that it stays with you. That's why we designed a concrete material that children could use in their hands, stand at the head of the table, whatever we were doing.

Like other teachers, T5 affirmed the role of parents' involvement in this process. Nevertheless, the negative feelings attributed to the events did not always continue in the same way. Even after the first experiences, teachers turned their perspectives to capabilities for the positive functioning of their own lives and working lives. Contextual and individual strategies contributed work-related wellbeing of teachers as protective factors during the pandemic.

T8: ...We had friends from computer teaching. They taught us a lot of things we couldn't do. If it wasn't for the pandemic, I still wouldn't know (laughs). Other than that, as I said, I wouldn't have much to do with technology. I am more involved now.

T6: We were sharing work with my co-workers. If I was preparing a presentation, a friend from another campus was preparing another presentation, and we were able to catch up on this. Brainstorming like that is amazing. There were good results.

T7: ...I felt that even though it was online, it was a classroom, so I understood it. That's how kids really regard it, even if it's from the computer...

As it can be seen, after adapting to the process, teachers had begun to develop their skills for learning and using technological apps with the support of school staff, which is also supported during the meetings for clarifying the way they follow in education. Besides teachers' individual strategies, macro level educational policies and the precautions taken by local administrations of institutions helped to become prepared with large scale response after first shock during especially face-to-face education period. Even though all precautions ease the way of

sustaining educational processes with safety, Table 2 specifically visualize the teachers' emotional reactions, usually clustered in the negative direction, about the implementation of new regulations. Dissatisfaction of teachers with new regulations usually emerge from the nature of practices as opposed to familiar working environment. However, in time, teachers found ways to cope with even these challenges as presented "Recovery Times" period.

Table 2. Teachers' Subjective Reflections Regarding the Precautions

Precautions	Satisfaction	Dissatisfaction	
Social Distance	Physical Arrangements	T6 There was no carpet in the classroom at first and the carpet was everything for us... It was very cold in the classroom like this, we were very tired, we could not sit on the floor, we could not rest, we were tired.	
	Activity Process	T8 It is also difficult to express emotions... Sometimes, for example, when teaching emotions, there were times when I took the mask down and showed my facial expressions. The child has a teacher, but 'who is the teacher?' really wants to see this.	
	Interaction with children	T6 So now we are happy again, that is, we are at peace again, but we lack that physical contact... as teachers, we cannot fully experience that emotional satisfaction.	
Hygiene	Mask	T2 I can't get enough in the classroom because of the mask, so I can't breathe. I say something, but the child is like, 'Is my teacher mad at me here? is he laughing?' can't understand.	
	Disinfecting	T6 In pandemic conditions, great attention is paid to the best food, unbelievably clean, hygiene, so this is very important for a teacher, after all, I think the issue here is not just children, but teachers.	
	Materials	T7 In order to ensure hygiene, we need to pay attention to many things. Children have personal materials, there was no such thing in the past... This is of course an extra challenge.	
Schedule	Activity Types	T2 We especially prefer outdoor places...at least to get that fresh air.	T5 In the past, our motto was "We play together, we share together", these have changed.

3.2. Recovery Times Along with the "New Normal"

Although the pandemic conditions were challenging, no negativity lasted forever. In socio-ecologically nested systems, government policies, school administrations, teachers, families, and children contributed to the normalization of the situation by finding some ways to deal with the situation inside them. In the beginning, ever-changing governmental policies on a macro level, that is, the lack of clarity in the opening and closing of schools, disturbed the teachers and caused confusion. However, teachers reflected their satisfaction for being at school with children:

T8: ...The processes that the state did and could not carry out really bothered me. I mean, going to school right now still scares me, but being in school makes me happy both professionally and in terms of the development of children...

Despite the precautions, opening of schools for face-to-face education created burden for teachers due to the fear of getting sick. However, when they compare the face-to-face education with emergency remote learning period, they stated that being in school contributed a lot to their professional development and job satisfaction.

T8: There was a fear at first, then people really get used to everything, and we got used to these conditions. And even later, when we switched to online education, we were sad and say "ohh online again...", because online education is hard, yes, it's healthy, yes, it scares me again. But when you think about the efficiency of the work, that teacher satisfaction, online education is not a very pleasant thing, really. I would not say I like it very much.

Another factor making teachers satisfied to stay at the school was social network. Seeing everyone going through the same process, sharing, and talking about experiences made the teachers understand that they were not alone, and felt good and relaxed. In addition, working with a partner, having an assistant teacher, and providing administrative support relieved the teachers. In this way, they established a more comfortable bond with the children, get motivated and had a more productive process.

T5: ...Seeing the people made me feel very good socially because it's very good for me to have a workspace, a work environment, or your colleagues are in the same process as you... It was very pleasing for me to talk about what we went through last year; I realize that we all felt very unsuccessful, we felt alone at work, it was a challenging process for all of us... I was very relieved to see that.

On the other hand, teachers perceive the situation not only from their perspective but also from children's perspective. Since they had direct contact during the process, teachers usually reflected on children's satisfaction with the process, which in turn influences their work-related wellbeing. In the beginning of face-to-face education, it took time to adapt to the classroom rules and settle the school order.

T7: ...the home environment is not very systematic and regulated. However, school is a different environment. Children have friends at school, which motivates them...they enter a more disciplined and regular environment. I think it takes a while for children to adapt to such big changes.

The discourses of teachers especially emphasize that pre-school education is not limited to academic achievements, and socio-emotional relations occupy a great place. According to teachers, keeping social distance rules harmed teachers and children emotionally due to being have to staying away from each other.

T6: As early childhood teachers, the most difficult thing for us was not being able to touch the children. Of course, we touch, but not being able to hug and love like that...I can say that there is a bond again between us... However, it is very tough to connect with new children without touching them, not being able to hug them, also not being able to reject them... and not knowing what to do, made me very tired at that moment...

Although the presence of parents during emergency remote learning made it difficult for the teachers, it is better understood that parental support is essential for the younger age group. On the other hand, witnessing the process by the parents led them to understand the value of the teacher and to appreciate them. Being understood and appreciated positively affected teachers' wellbeing.

T1:...after progressing this in a good way, as I said, the parents had such very positive and lovely returns, either with such gratitude or thanks so much and said that "We really understood your value". Of course, that made us happy personally...it made me very happy for myself.

Most teachers participating in the study not satisfied with their salaries. The reason for this is the increase in the workload due to the pandemic, changing practices, the attitude of the school administration, decrease in job satisfaction and working at risk.

T6: Although I am not generally satisfied with salaries, it is important that I have no missing payment in my salary from the institution during the pandemic process... I willingly chose to work in a private school. I believe that I can perform a more satisfactory education and gain experience with the opportunities here...

It could be seen that the statements of the teachers demonstrated that supporting the development of the private school with the academic training offered to the teacher cannot be ignored. Teachers stated that they were satisfied to stay on job and would consider working in private schools only if the same conditions were met.

4. DISCUSSION

Since 2019, the whole world has been unanimous on one issue: the Covid-19 Pandemic. The pandemic has sparked similar feelings together around the world. The reactions to the spread of the pandemic and the methods of struggle were shaped by the interaction of different layers that affect life. But the emerging situation showed that promoting the wellbeing of individuals should be the focus of any regulation in crisis situations that might create similar situations later life (Dodds, 2019). For this reason, it has been understood that individuals, working in interaction with many people, especially schools and hospitals, must first support their own wellbeing and put their masks on themselves to be beneficial to others.

In this study, we focused on the work-related wellbeing of preschool teachers working in Turkish private schools during Covid-19 pandemic as a bounded case. Teachers work as frontline workers to sustain educational aims and goals even in crisis situations (Karan, 2021; Spilt et al., 2011). Based on the educational level and age groups, some teachers need to show outperforming performance to address the differing needs of children as in the case of early childhood education period. Moreover, the type of the school, either public or private, makes difference in the quality of working environment for teachers in terms of structural and process factors (Güler, 2020; Korlu, 2020; Derman & Başal, 2010; Viac & Fraser, 2020). As parallel to work-related wellbeing literature (Hanno et al., 2021; Johnson et al., 2020; Whitaker, 2015; Grant et al., 2019; Jeon et al., 2018; Whiteaker et al., 2013), the rising demands of private preschools created additional burden for the work-related wellbeing of participant teachers in terms of specifically job security and work-overload leading to stress and burnout. However, teachers' attributions to the process reflected that they stay motivated to continue their jobs while motivating themselves to cope with the process. Study results mainly presented the inward and outward outcomes of considering work-related wellbeing in the lives of participant teachers as feeling either stress and burnout or the motivation to stay in job while developing strategies to preserve wellbeing.

As parallel to the EST of Bronfenbrenner (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Cumming & Wong, 2019) and OECD's occupational wellbeing model (Viac & Fraser, 2020), we tried to understand subjective attributions of participants to their personal and work-related wellbeing while guiding them to regard the impacts of the situation in different layers of their lives such as personal life, working conditions, relations with children, parents and school staff, the influence of socio-cultural context, and macro level alterations in the administration of education system. Throughout the analysis, the meaning that the teachers attributed to their experiences became more positive over time, leading us to give the results within a timeline. Thus, we wanted to show how an unknown process becomes known and familiar over time, and how it relaxes the participants. Thus, this study and similar studies could help to get over the first shock more easily in possible future crisis situations.

As a result of the macro-level policy effects, participants have entered a world they have never been familiar with the lockdown of the schools and being responsible for remote learning. Such a macro level alteration changed the nature of educational place and the interactions within it. Accordingly, on a micro level, teachers stated that their lives, interactions with family members, and daily routines have changed in a large extend. Like the study results of Maitland and Glazzard (2022), during the first times, working at home resulted in more negative feelings and emotions among participants because of developmentally inappropriate learning environment for young children, rising workload, blurred borders between personal and working life, regarding self-efficacy skills as limited, and parents' intervention to the learning process.

During the remote learning process, the increase in workload is mainly related to the private schools' concerns and policies in Turkey, aiming to make more profit by providing a lot of options to students in the teaching environment. However, while schools try to involve students into the lessons for long hours, teachers reported that they had to spend more hours in front of computers or laptops in addition to the long hours they spend preparing materials at home with a quite lower salary than teachers working at public schools. Due to the lack of

policies saving teachers' rights in the private sector as a macro level policy, it became difficult to be motivated to stay on job. As a result of the first experiences with pandemic, despite the over workload and dissatisfaction with their work and salary, they could not leave their jobs because of the concerns of not being able to find another job.

Additionally, the value of teaching profession in society has significant impact on teachers' wellbeing for feeling valued in the profession (Prilleltensky, 2020). As in the literature (Richards et al., 2020; Maitland & Glazzard, 2022), parents, who witnessed participants' teaching efforts to their children, showed their respect to the participants by praising their work, increasing teachers' subjective wellbeing.

In an interaction with nested contexts around teachers, receiving social and professional support from the experts, colleagues and administrators improved their subjective wellbeing. Teachers' colleagues and leaders' support are related positively with the internal motivation and wellbeing of individuals (Ainsworth & Oldfield, 2019; Manning et al., 2020; Hanno et al., 2021; Maitland & Glazzard, 2022). Even though at the first times there were so many uncertainties regarding the continuity of personal life and the alterations in working environment, teachers could see what they were supposed to do and how they can give better education to children in time while empowering self-efficacy skills with the development of some strategies supported by other staff and parents.

Even though uncertainties remain regarding for the decision to open schools for face-to-face education on a macro level, private schools attempted to make regulations with their advantages to improve structural and process aspects to become prepared to all conditions. With the development of policies and rules in a "New Normal" education system, the pathway that teachers need to follow has become clearer in time. Even though the health conditions of teachers and children in the schools were protected with precautions especially by the private schools, their over workload remained stable for a while. However, even though remaining over workload and uncertainties in their schools, changes in routines, and keeping social distance, teachers have begun to state more positive feelings while the time passes. Despite negative impacts of pandemics, teachers stated that they adapted to the "New Normal" and developed new skills to cope with the challenges they have faced with specifically motivation gained by children's positive response to them during the process.

5. CONCLUSION

The overall results of the study demonstrated that teachers' work-related wellbeing regarding the working context is shaped in an interaction with the internal and external factors in different layers of life as parallel to the holistic and multidimensional conceptualization of wellbeing (Ben-Arieh et al, 2014; Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Dodds, 2019; Cumming & Wong, 2019; Viac & Fraser, 2020). Even though the impact of the pandemic has decreased nowadays, and the earth started turning back to the old days before pandemics, covid-19 has not been the last threat to the people on earth. It is possible to face different pandemics in the future (Dodds, 2019) or natural disasters, which may influence people psychologically and economically including their wellbeing. In order to better explore what is going on in teachers' lives regarding the work-related wellbeing, future studies might consult the observatory techniques within school context. Moreover, governmental officials and school administrators need to be consulted in research processes as they are at the helm of storm in educational crisis situations. Above all, teachers' intrinsic motivation to keep alive hope and not give up creating solutions to the problems they face is one of the most influential buffering effect in their lives. Thus, it is essential to put their masks first on themselves for the wellbeing of them and the people around. Nevertheless, the findings of this study is limited to research context and participants.

Even though in-depth interviews provided taking subjective perspectives of participants into account as valuable aspect of wellbeing studies, further studies might include observation of classroom practices to better describe and explore the phenomenon regarding the work-related well-being of teachers. Moreover, collecting data with synchronous semi-structured online interviews due to the covid-19 precautions might be considered as another limitation of the study due to restricting building intimate relationship with eye contact and body language.

6. DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

Scientific Research and Publication Ethics: In the study, all the rules specified to be followed by the "Higher Education Institutions Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Directive" were complied with. None of the actions specified in the 2nd part of the Directive, titled "Actions Contrary to Scientific Research and Publication Ethics", were carried out.

Ethics Committee Approval:

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