



The Quality of the Physical Environment to Support Early Childhood Teachers' Well-Being

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Background

Teachers in early care and education (ECE) settings are vulnerable, considering their work environment is physically demanding and psychologically challenging (Kwon et al., 2022; Randall et al., 2023).

The **poor quality of physical environments** with a less favorable **social climate** was significantly associated with **physical**, **psychological**, and **professional well-being** (Kwon et al., 2021). However, it has rarely received attention in research and practice.

The well-being of teachers is essential, considering the role they play in creating a positive classroom environment to support the development and learning outcomes for children (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Jeon & Ardeleanu, 2020).

Indoor Environmental Quality (Study 1)

We examined the quality of physical environments in ECE settings in Oklahoma, such as a **space for relaxation**, **noise levels**, **temperature**, and **lighting**, through a teacher survey (n=262) and observation (n=40) by a researcher in interior design and its association with ECE teachers' well-being (Study 1).

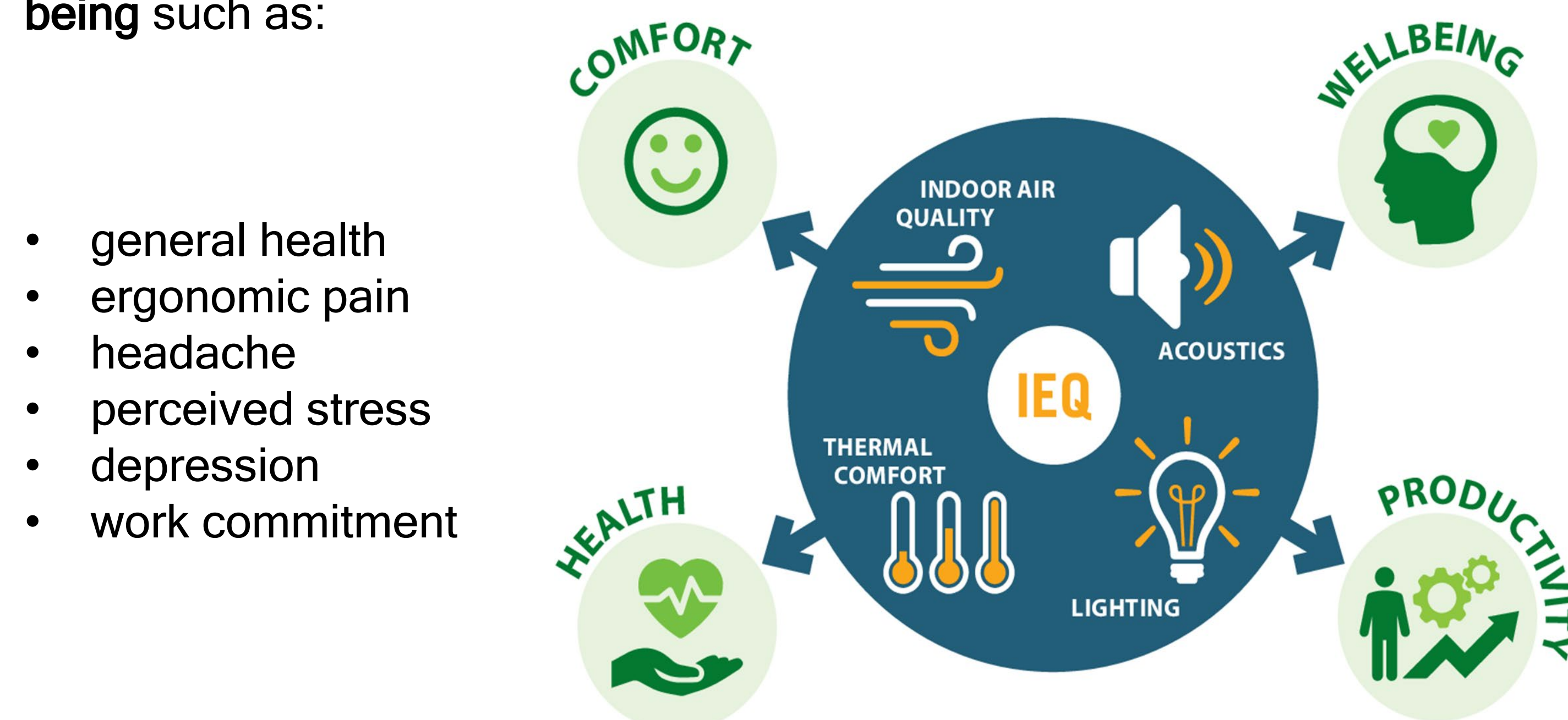
Findings from Study 1

Teachers work in **less-than-optimal** physical environments with:



- **Noise levels** higher than a recommended threshold for all observed classrooms
- 32% **no relaxation area** at the center
- 29% no place for **acoustic privacy**
- 19% no adult-sized furniture

According to correlation analysis, the total scores of teacher-reported **physical environment quality**, measured by the Environmental Preference Index (Ellis, 2013), were **significantly associated** with ECE teachers' **well-being** such as:



Wellness Room Intervention (Study 2)

Based on the observation data and best practices in the literature, we created a **wellness room** as part of a **holistic wellness intervention** to support teachers' health and holistic well-being.

The wellness room is a **multi-sensory space**, which **teachers** could use for **respite** throughout the day to help **reduce occupational stress**.

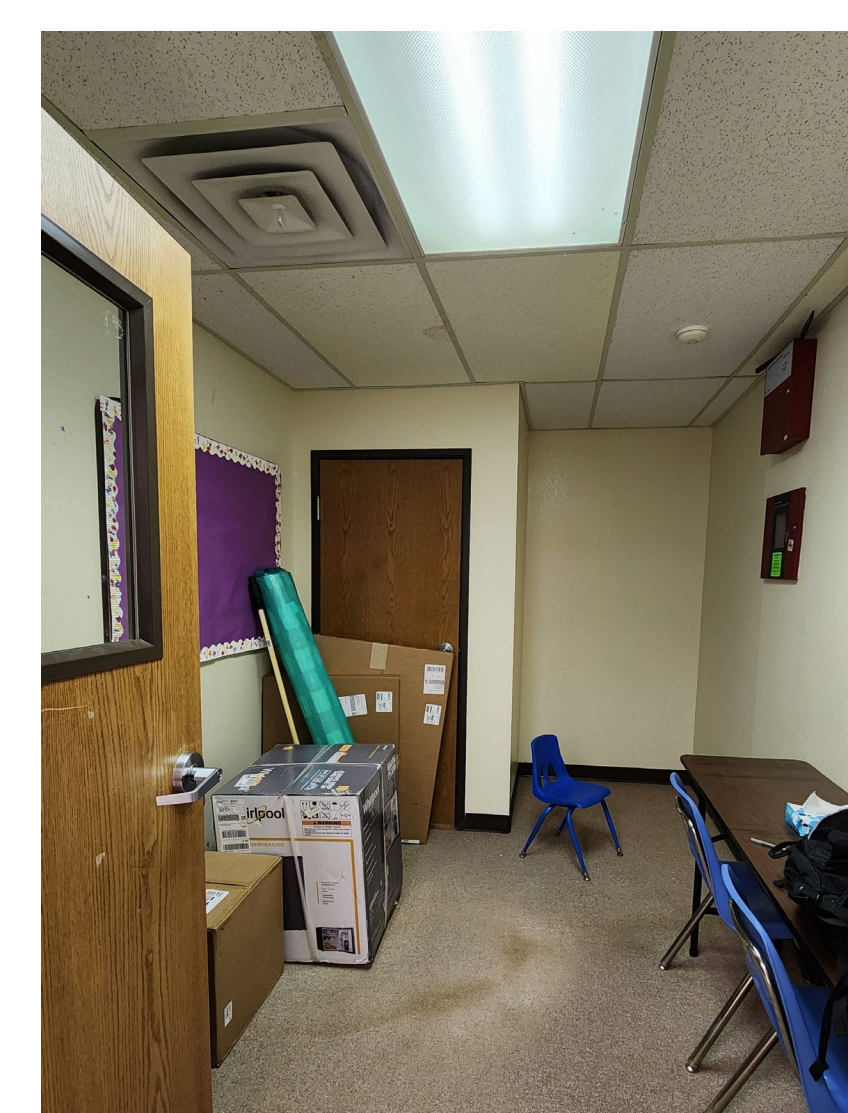
Each room was carefully curated to include:

- Recliner to promote **circulation** in lower extremities and to **relieve back stress** associated with lifting and stooping;
- 40" Smart TV with a 20-minute slide presentation cycling through **nature scenes** and **sounds** providing **positive distractions** and restorative properties;
- Yoga mat for stretching (pre-recorded **yoga stretching exercises** can be accessed from the Smart TV), **meditation**, and **prayer** to provide **emotional regulation**;
- Air diffuser as **aroma therapy** for **stress reduction**;
- Small refrigerator stocked with bottled water for **hydration** to support **mental clarity**; and nutritious snacks.
- Dimmable floor lamp to allow for **lighting control** to support **rest**;
- Sound machine to **mask noise** interference; and
- **Nature scene artwork** to support **biophilic design restoration**.

Before & After Photos from Two of the Participating Centers



Rural Center #1 Before



Rural Center #2 Before



Rural Center #1 After



Rural Center #2 After

Preliminary Findings from Study 2

We described this process and explored participating teachers' experiences with the wellness room in Study 2.

During group-interviews, many participants responded favorably regarding the wellness room, noting that it **supported** their **ability** to **relax** and **recharge**.

*"The **wellness room** was such a **blessing**. It really helped on those harder days when I just needed a few extra minutes."*

*"The **wellness room** and **healthy snack** **made me enjoy the day a lot more**."*

*"Wellness room is useful to let the teachers **relieve stress** and **spend time alone**."*

*"The **wellness room** and **healthy snacks** were **delightful**, and **really made us feel cared about**."*

*"I **absolutely love** the **wellness room** and the **ambiance**."*

96% of the participants responded satisfaction with the wellness room. However, a few participants reported that they could not use the wellness room as much as they wished because they did not have **support staff to manage their classroom** while they were using the wellness room.

This indicates that a policy to support regular breaks is vital to teachers' wellness.

References & Acknowledgments



Scan for References

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