

Association Between Early Childhood Teachers' Job Demands and Teacher-Child Relationship: The Moderating Role of Work Climate

Junghyun Min, Weiyei Cheng, Sun Geun Kim, Kyong-Ah Kwon, Timothy G. Ford, Wonkyung Jang
University of Oklahoma



Happy
Teacher
Project



HAPPY TEACHER
PROJECT WEBSITE

BACKGROUND

- Early childhood teachers' increased job-related stress can lead to heightened conflicts with students (Whitaker et al., 2015).
- Negative working conditions in ECE settings (e.g., poor work climate) are negatively linked to teacher well-being and performance (Whitebook et al., 2017), and the work climate tends to mold children's classroom experiences through teacher-child interactions (Park et al., 2020).
- The impact of teacher-child relationships on academic achievement, social-emotional development, and classroom behavior has been extensively studied (Aboagye et al., 2020; Chen & Phillips, 2018).
- There is a noteworthy correlation between teacher job demands and classroom climate (e.g., negative reaction, interaction) (Sönmez & Betül Kolaşınli, 2021).
- However, few studies have explored what factors can buffer the negative impact of heavy job demands on teacher-child relationships that ECE teachers are dealing with in their workplace.

RESEARCH PURPOSE

The purpose of this study is to examine whether work climate moderates the relationship between job demands and teacher-child relationship.

METHOD

- Participants** 262 teachers from 38 ECE centers in Oklahoma from diverse racial and educational backgrounds (e.g., 22% African-American, 56% Caucasian, 7% Hispanic, 10% Native American; 16% high school or less, 44% associate's degree or some college, 40% bachelor's degree or higher).
- Procedures** Teachers completed a paper and pencil questionnaire on their background, job demands, job resources (e.g., work climate) and teacher-child relationship.
- Analysis**
- Descriptive statistics to assess teachers' demographic information.
 - Multiple regression with an interaction term to test the moderation model.
 - Covariates include program (e.g., Early Head Start/Head Start, public pre-K, etc.), child age, teachers' years of experience in ECE settings, etc.

RESULTS

Table 1. Multiple linear regression coefficients of job demands on teacher-child relationship with an interaction term of work climate

	Conflict in teacher-child relationship		Closeness in teacher-child relationship	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2
Intercept	0.22 (0.24)	0.28 (0.24)	0.18 (0.24)	0.16 (0.24)
Program (0=Not EHS/HS, 1=EHS/HS)	0.24* (0.12)	0.26* (0.12)	0.05 (0.12)	0.05 (0.12)
Age of Children (0=preschool, 1=infant/toddler)	-0.12 (0.12)	-0.13 (0.12)	-0.56*** (0.12)	-0.56*** (0.12)
Age of teacher	-0.00 (0.01)	-0.00 (0.01)	-1.28 (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)
Teaching Experience	-0.02* (0.01)	-0.02* (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)
Position (0=assistant teacher, 1=lead teacher)	-0.06 (0.12)	-0.05 (0.12)	0.16 (0.12)	0.15 (0.12)
Job Demands	0.22** (0.07)	0.22** (0.07)	0.13 (0.07)	0.13 (0.07)
Work Climate	-0.10 (0.07)	-0.09 (0.07)	0.26*** (0.07)	0.26*** (0.07)
Job Demands X Work Climate		0.11* (0.05)		-0.04 (0.05)

Notes: * p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001
Model 1: Baseline model / Model 2: Interaction term



Figure 1. Interaction of job demands and work climate in predicting conflict in teacher-child relationship

DISCUSSION & IMPLICATIONS

- Consistent with previous research, job demands showed a significant relationship with conflicts with children (Whitaker et al., 2015). While work climate was associated with closeness between teachers and children, our results showed that work climate buffers the relationship between job demands and conflict with children.
- Since the outcomes of conflict and closeness appear to vary depending on teachers' backgrounds, appropriate teacher education is necessary to alleviate these differences.
- Implementation of a supportive, communicative, and autonomous work climate may be critical in developing positive relationships with children which is important in cultivating healthy development of children.