

12-14-2024

Support Early Childhood Educators Need to Strengthen Teacher Retention

Anne Zimpel
annezimpel3@gmail.com

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Support Early Childhood Educators Need to Strengthen Teacher Retention

Anne Zimpel

Concordia University, Saint Paul

ED 590 Research and Complete Capstone

Instructor: Dr. Kelly Sadlovsky

Second Reader: DeShawn Woods

October 12, 2024

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Abstract

Early childhood educators (ECEs), referring to professionals who work with young children in various settings, often face feelings of isolation and lack of a 'sense of community/belonging.' These connections are essential to providing high-quality care for young children (NAEYC 2020). Feelings of isolation and lack of connections lead educators to burnout and emotional exhaustion. This research paper focuses on how ECEs can engage as professionals to build confidence in current practices, lessen isolation, and increase retention to reduce burnout and emotional exhaustion. It is essential to support early childhood professionals so that they can offer quality care for children. A review of the literature sheds light on how ECEs connect with other educators and the stressors that can impact retention and quality of care. The findings suggest that there is a connection between retention and burnout. This can be addressed by offering support and being viewed as a professional (Shaack et al., 2020). Research also shows that the quality of care is also affected by emotional exhaustion in early childhood educators (Carson et al., 2016).

Keywords: Burnout, Turnover, Quality Care, Early Childhood Education

Chapter One: Introduction

Early childhood educators play a pivotal role in shaping young children's lives. Their dedication and expertise are essential for creating nurturing and stimulating learning environments (Boyd, 2013). However, the demanding nature of their work can often lead to burnout and emotional exhaustion (Herman et al., 2018; Lipscomb et al., 2021). To address these challenges and foster a stronger sense of community among early childhood educators, it is crucial to provide them with appropriate support. Researchers have provided numerous articles and research studies that show in detail the causes of burnout and retention in early childhood; in turn, this does affect the outcome of the level of quality care that is being provided (Bassok et al., 2021; Carson et al., 2016; Jeon et al., 2017; Schaack et al., 2020).

Definition of Terms

Burnout: chronic stress leading to physical exhaustion, emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and feelings of ineffectiveness (Carter, 2013).

Turnover: The number of persons hired within a period to replace those leaving or dropped from the workforce (Schaack et al., 2020).

Quality of Care: providing high-quality early learning programs that are safe, well-prepared, and intentional about ensuring children's success (NAEYC, 2020).

Early Childhood Education (ECE): working with children ages birth through eight and their families. This may include programming in child care centers, home-based care, Head Start, and public schools (NAEYC, 2020).

Importance of Topic

Often, early childhood teachers work in many different types of classroom settings. These settings vary between private center-based care, family child care, Head Start, and public school

systems. According to the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC, 2020), effective early childhood educators are critical for looking at the early childhood profession's vision that each child, from birth through age 8, has equitable, high-quality learning and care environments. Educators demonstrate and promote young children's development, learning, and well-being in ECE (NAEYC 2020). It is important to note that early childhood educators have an essential role in children's education. However, it must be noted that it can differ across different early childhood settings (Carson et al., 2016).

Early childhood educators feel burnout and emotional exhaustion for many different reasons. Some of those stressors are lack of acknowledgment, feelings of isolation, lack of professional support, self-efficacy, low salaries, and the emotional impacts of working with families of young children (Herman et al., 2021; Lipscomb et al., 2021). Research shows that varying degrees of these stressors can impact teacher retention (Bassok et al., 2022; Jeon et al., 2017; Schaack et al., 2020). Early childhood turnover rates are exceedingly high among ECE teachers in the United States who work across all types of early childhood settings; this has been found to undermine the quality of programming offered (Schaack et al., 2020).

Scope of Research

This research will investigate the relationship between early childhood educators' sense of community and their retention within the field. Specifically, it will examine how factors such as support and a sense of belonging in the early childhood field influence job satisfaction, burnout, and intention to stay in the profession. Looking at these factors, there will be ways to foster a strong sense of community among early childhood educators, ultimately reaching improved retention rates and a higher quality of care for the children in their care.

Conclusion

This research paper asks the following question: In early childhood education, teachers feel isolated and lack a sense of community or belonging. This is leading to burnout and emotional exhaustion. What types of support for early childhood educators are needed to foster a stronger sense of community and strengthen teacher retention? The program question asks: What are ways to support early childhood educators so that support and professionalism are valued in the future and best practices are implemented? The research found that when ECE professionals receive the support they need for their emotional health, they will, in turn, help provide high-quality care for young children (Gerstenblatt et al., 2013). It is noted above that these feelings of isolation and lack of support can lead to burnout and emotional exhaustion. Early childhood teachers need support in what they need to do their job effectively while also providing students with developmentally appropriate practices (Cumming, 2016). The children and families who rely on early childhood education deserve quality care, and that can be supported by ensuring that early childhood educators and providers feel a sense of belonging and support from others while working in our classrooms (Osgood-Roach & Wevers, 2019). By exploring these aspects of teaching, researchers can gain valuable insights into how to support and empower early childhood educators so educators can provide quality care and education for young children. In the following chapter, research findings are analyzed and synthesized on ways early childhood educators can feel support, a sense of community, and ways to increase retention.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Early childhood educators (ECEs) are professionals who play a vital role in educating young children (NAEYC, 2019). ECEs understand the importance of child development and create nurturing environments. Early childhood educators implement engaging activities, promote positive interactions, and support children's curiosity and learning (NAEYC, 2020). There is a dedication to ECEs to provide high-quality care and education, which is essential for building solid foundations for young children in their care (NAEYC, 2019). This literature review investigates the existing research on early childhood educators, examining their professional challenges, rewards, and factors needed to influence job satisfaction, retention, and support.

Early Childhood Educators as Professionals

Boyd (2013) focused on how early childhood teachers were viewed as professionals. Through in-depth interviews with 32 early childhood educators, Boyd (2013) looked at the relationship between educational qualifications and teacher pay and conditions of employment. This study included early educators working in Head Start, community centers, and home-based programs in a large city in New England. This research resulted from an extensive study investigating child outcomes due to an early childhood professional training program. Experience in early childhood ranged from three years to 30 years. Many of the participants were first-generation immigrants and included 11 countries.

In this qualitative study, many teachers voiced their frustrations and perceptions that they were babysitters rather than teachers. It was stated that there was a concern with others viewing ECEs as lazy rather than hard-working or even unskilled rather than professional. The ECE teachers valued the training provided and recognized that they needed more. Frequently, it was

noted that they were not taken seriously by parents and did not understand that they were not just a babysitting service. It was noted that regardless of their level of education and experience with training, providers felt they did not receive recognition as professionals. A limitation of the Boyd (2013) study was that all but one interview was conducted at their place of work. This could have impacted what teachers disclosed as they were at their employment. The feelings of not being treated as a professional were also noted in another study by Schaack et al. (2022). It was noted that many ECE teachers often report feeling a passion for the work but also frustration from a lack of how society recognizes the importance of the job and how it failed to be viewed as a skilled profession. This lack of societal recognition affects the self-esteem of ECEs and their job satisfaction and retention, which are crucial for the quality of care and education they provide.

Boyd (2013) also researched the relationship between the quality of early education programs and child outcomes. The research concluded that regardless of education, experience, or professional development training, teachers and providers did feel that they did not receive recognition as professionals. This, in turn, caused more stress and a lack of belonging (Boyd, 2013). The research again laid out all types of providers, from Head Start to center-based and home-based educators. These stressors were felt amongst all groups. A research article by Osgood-Roach and Wevers (2019) examined what happened when Early Head Start (EHS) services were offered within family childcare environments. This data demonstrated that partnership with EHS significantly increased FCC providers' sense of professionalism and respect. EHS ensured that providers would gain training to support early childhood education and provide access to emotional and material support regarding their wellness and self-care (Osgood-Roach & Wevers, 2019). Often, parents can also lack support specifically for their FCC providers as professionals, which can cause stress. In the research done by Gerstenblatt et al.

(2013), the behavior described was being forced to choose between an income and then accepting disrespectful treatment from parents. It is widely accepted that childcare providers are seen as "babysitters." Many FCC providers felt their profession was undervalued despite many required responsibilities and expectations (Gerstenblatt et al., 2013; Herman et al., 2021).

Research suggests a movement toward professionalism in early education and childcare workers (Bass, 2020; Boyd, 2013). With this movement to professionalism comes increased training and education; however, low wages, few benefits, and sometimes poor working conditions remain unchanged (Boyd, 2013). As mentioned in this study, working on professionalism has resulted in education, training, and skill development (Boyd, 2013). When training is given to childcare providers, we, in turn, will still see an increase in quality care, but educators are still feeling burnout from low wages, long days, and stressful environments (Boyd, 2013).

According to an article by Bass (2020) published in *Young Children*, NAEYC understands the value of investing in early childhood education, especially for educators. This is essential in supporting outcomes for families of young children. The National Association of Young Children and 14 other leading national organizations representing early childhood education have created a consensus that states new professional standards and competencies for Early Childhood Educators. This will lead to a unified profession addressing the roles, qualifications, competencies, standards, and responsibilities. This is done by addressing the skills, preparation, and compensation needed for the profession. All recommendations are aligned with the NAEYC and their Professional Standards Position statement (2019). Bass (2020) understands that there is so much variation and quality across states and settings. She mentions how there needs to be a unified definition to support early childhood educators as a

profession. It is hoped that implementing this framework will be honored to ensure that the profession reflects the diversity of the young children it serves, along with ECEs being well prepared and compensated for the demanding work that comes with being an ECE. It is time for ECEs to be well-prepared and compensated (Bass, 2020). There is a disparity between the environments that early childhood educators work in, especially for Family Child Care Providers as being looked at as professionals (Herman et al., 2021)

Family Child Care Providers in Early Childhood

Family childcare (FCC) providers are integral to childcare options for families. Often, FCC providers do not get the same support as other early childhood educators. Research states that this stressor causes FCC providers to close (Gerstenblatt et al., 2013; Herman et al., 2021). This specific type of early childhood profession has been noticed in research as many FCC providers are closing, which causes a shortage of early childhood care for families. Child Care Aware of America (2023) conducted research data from December 2019- March of 2021. Child Care Aware of America found that 8,899 childcare centers closed in 37 states from which they had data. Simultaneously, 6,957 licensed family childcare (FCC) programs closed in 36 states. This represents a 9% loss in licensed centers and a 10% loss in licensed FCC programs.

According to Child Care Aware of America (2023), FCC providers care for small groups of children in a residential building. This type of care often has one or two providers and may offer non-traditional hours. Families often choose family childcare providers for the smaller ratios, in-home feel, and cost. According to Gerstenblatt et al. (2013), many of these characteristics that make family childcare attractive for families can also cause stress for FCC providers. It is this stress that can lead providers to burnout and emotional exhaustion. Family childcare providers have challenges others overlook in the early childhood field (Gerstenblatt et

al., 2013; Herman et al., 2021). Herman et al. (2021) and Gerstenblatt et al. (2013) noted the same stressors that caused emotional exhaustion for FCC providers. These cited challenges were lack of professional treatment, boundaries (personal and professional), self-care/well-being, and emotional impact. This was also supported by Jeon et al. (2018), who stressed the importance of professional support and resources for providers. This support for FCC providers does differ from one provider to another but could include training and development opportunities and provider networks (Jeon et al., 2018; Herman et al., 2021). Overall, many studies pointed to and defined the issue of professional status as a central issue to family care providers' well-being (Gerstenblatt, 2013; Herman, 2021)

Corr et al. (2014) examined how working in and being an FCC provider indulges the educator's mental health and well-being. Over a few months, research findings showed a vital concern about job stress, turnover, and educator well-being (Corr et al., 2014). This research was conducted in Australia with 16 providers, where all but one of the FCC providers were female. Participants worked in a range of 45-84 hours per week. All FCC providers were self-employed, except seven who worked for non-profit organizations. During this time, participants cared for between four and thirty children weekly. Corr et al. (2014) found that working conditions did influence the educator's mental well-being. It was found that relationships with FCC clients, training, and government played an integral role in FCC providers' mental health and well-being. When those relationships were positive, the rewards were seen to help promote educator mental health (Corr et al., 2014). The limitation of this study was that all FCC providers were actively working in FCC. This was not representative of those who had left the field. This study also overlooked the child-related stressors that were significant in stress for FCC providers. Access to

professional support, information, and services that reduce stress for FCC providers is crucial for educators in the early childhood field (Corr et al., 2014).

Boundaries: Personal and Professional

Boyd (2013) found differences in personal and professional boundaries between educators who work in center-based, Head Start, and FCC. Since FCC is operated out of a provider's home, it is not uncommon for personal and professional boundaries to be crossed (Vandenbroeck et al., 2021). Family childcare has unique features: most often, the provider is alone in their house providing care, and it has been documented that social isolation may be detrimental to job satisfaction (Vandenbroeck et al., 2021). While trying to manage these boundaries, FCC providers often feel isolated from others in their work. It is also hard to find support from other home-based providers (Herman et al., 2021). Many family childcare providers feel detached from others as they work long hours without help from other adults. Boyd (2013) found that almost all home-based educators worked over 55 hours per week; they started work at 6:00 AM and did not finish until 5:00 or 5:30 PM. Hours were longer than those of a center-based or public-school teacher. Boyd (2013) also stated that some providers are open 24 hours daily for care when families work overnight shifts. These hours in the home care work environment often blur personal and professional boundaries. This is added stress for in-home providers, showing that this can add to a provider's emotional exhaustion.

Boundaries that were either professional or personal were also noted in other early childhood settings. Jeon et al. (2018) explored the associations between potential factors of teachers' psychological well-being. The areas looked at for factors were teacher efficacy, work environment, and teachers' self-perceived depression, stress, and emotional exhaustion. In this study, 1,129 early childhood teachers served preschool children between three and four years

old. Early childhood teachers were surveyed from across the United States. Research from this study showed that work environment conditions and childcare chaos were consistently associated with teachers' well-being. Boundaries in and out of the classroom were complicated, contributing to job-related emotional exhaustion. Childcare chaos, a boundary, was the strongest predictor of psychological well-being. Overall, teachers were less stressed when they had access to more professional development. Limitations of the research were that although a large sample was analyzed, the response rate was low. It is possible that teachers who are suffering from emotional exhaustion did not want to participate in the study. Further studies were noted by the researchers on self-care and well-being and ways to improve both.

Self-Care and Well-Being

Early childhood providers will face many challenges, both professionally and personally. It is essential to understand that providers must meet their emotional needs (Carson et al., 2016). The well-being of a childcare provider does tie in with a provider's responsiveness toward the children in their care (Herman et al., 2021). Early childhood Educators must find ways to support their self-care and well-being. This can, in turn, be especially difficult for FCC providers who are providing care alone and cannot separate their home and workplace (Gerstenblatt et al., 2013). Finding self-care support is also challenging for early childhood teachers working in environments with poor conditions (Schaack et al., 2022). Cumming (2017) looked at the substantial number of children cared for by early childhood providers and their essential role in the early childhood development of the children in their care. The literature review found that having good social support was associated with better mental health. This support was found in good working relationships with staff, children, and their families (Cumming 2017).

Early Childhood Educator Retention

Early childhood educators' retention in the profession can help reduce turnover and, in turn, offer predictability for the children in their care. Grant et al. (2019) discussed high turnover rates of early childhood teachers; in turn, unsatisfied teachers, suffering from stress or emotional exhaustion, cannot promote children's development and are more likely to leave the classroom. Their results showed that teachers' well-being and perceived working conditions related to their intentions to remain at their jobs and their commitment to the profession. Teachers with better emotional regulation skills showed lower stress levels and higher retention levels. Teacher turnover, which can also interfere with teacher-child relationships, is expected due to teachers' stress and challenges (Lipscomb et al., 2021). In one study by Schaack et al. (2020), emotional exhaustion directly predicted teachers' intentions to leave the profession.

Similarly, Schaack et al. (2022) examined whether there was a difference in how early childhood education (ECE) teachers who stayed or left their jobs interpreted their job demands and resources. This study included 26 teachers who worked in seven ECE centers that provided care in a large, non-profit childcare center. All the classrooms where the teachers worked were open 12 months a year, for 11 hours each day. The teachers were also in a different study with wage enhancement. A new salary scale was implemented, and teacher wage increases were linked to teachers' educational attainment. The study then took 49 teachers who remained at the organization post-wage increase. In the end, 26 teachers were interviewed for the study; 12 left their jobs, and 14 remained there for at least a year after receiving the raise. This research was then conducted to understand how to reduce teacher turnover. This study looked at teachers' intentions to leave, working conditions, psychological functioning, and motivation to see if they were associated with teachers' turnover decisions.

In this qualitative study, teachers voiced many reasons for job stress, emotional exhaustion, and leaving their teaching profession. Many voiced concerns about job demands and expectations without being given vital resources that they deemed necessary to be effective teachers. Often, early childhood teachers have job expectations like those of elementary school teachers. However, teachers in this study need more key job resources such as paid planning time and training (Schaack et al., 2022). In the end, there was an unsettling nature of not feeling effective at their jobs, directly related to several teachers' turnover decisions. Teaching efficacy is defined as teachers' confidence in their ability to guide students to success. Teacher efficacy was a defining factor in decisions to leave the profession. If professional support and training are given, ECE teachers feel energized and energized. Overall, the study did indicate that the passion for working with children was their motivation to pursue the job and, at the same time, was emotionally rewarding. Ultimately, the other factors listed above can overshadow the passion that leads them to the teaching profession. One limitation of this study would be to include teachers from more organizations as this study just looked at one large organization.

In the research article, Bassok et al. (2021) examined early childhood educator turnover from all publicly funded and center-based early childhood programs in Louisiana. The data collected is part of the Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS). Participation in QRIS is mandatory for all Louisiana public-funded center-based programming. Also, the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) was used as an observational tool that measures child-centered warmth and sensitive interactions. The research results by Bassok et al. (2021) found that more than one-third of teachers observed in one year were not teaching the following year. There was also a substantial difference in turnover from those teachers working in school-based settings, which was one-fourth of the teachers, versus childcare teachers, which was nearly half.

Teachers who worked with toddlers were also 20 percent more likely to stop teaching than those working with older children. The CLASS data showed that the teachers who left had .33 points lower than those who stayed. This data showed that teachers who leave were not providing solid interactions with the children in their care. This research suggests that targeted support for new teachers is needed and would be a worthwhile investment. Due to the high levels of turnover, this research suggests that there needs to be policies that support teachers in childcare settings, and it should be of utmost priority (Bassok et al., 2021).

Burnout and Emotional Exhaustion

The most widely adopted model that looks at burnout is known as the Maslach Burnout Inventory. Maslach and Jackson proposed it. Angerer (2003) mentioned the work of Maslach and Jackson to define burnout within the work environment. Burnout is characterized by feeling emotionally drained, detached from others, and a sense of failure in the quality of work. Being emotionally drained can be caused by exhaustion. Angerer (2003) defines exhaustion as the feeling of being overextended emotionally and physically, and it is typically the first reaction to job stress. The research noted that when providers feel exhausted and not supported, this leads to burnout (Carson et al., 2016; Herman et al., 2021; Jeon et al., 2018; Lipscomb et al., 2021).

Early childhood providers will face many challenges, both professionally and personally. It is essential to understand that providers must meet their emotional needs. The well-being of a childcare provider does tie in with a provider's responsiveness toward the children in their care (Herman et al., 2021). Providers have shown that when their emotional needs are unmet, it can lead to burnout (Bassok et al., 2021). This burnout can ultimately lead to early childhood educators leaving the profession. Specifically, family child care can be isolating; it is essential to make sure that emotional needs are met, and many wish that they had a network of other

providers to look to for support and advice can be supported by (Herman et al., 2021). The emotional impact of providing care in-home care can lead to high-stress levels. This stress impacts the care of the children and the provider's well-being (Jeon et al., 2018). Early childhood educators in other settings also feel the emotional impact of high stress (Herman et al., 2018).

A research study by Jeon et al. (2018) explored the connections between professional background, teaching efficiency, and work environment regarding the psychological well-being of early childhood teachers. A total of 1,129 preschool teachers participated in this study. Of those teachers, 755 were from childcare centers and 346 from public prekindergarten programs across the United States. It is noted that the limitations of this study were that there was a large sample of randomly selected teachers, but the response rate was still low. Teachers who suffered from emotional exhaustion and burnout might have opted not to participate in the study.

This research study showed that general teaching efficacy was negatively associated with stress and emotional exhaustion. This factor indicates that when teachers have more positive beliefs about the impact of teaching, they are less stressed and exhausted. The impact in the classroom environment was noted as excellent, and where teachers need support to be in place to aid teachers in achieving positive social-emotional well-being. Childcare chaos was the strongest predictor of teachers' psychological well-being. Jeon et al. (2018) stress the importance of understanding what teachers identify as needs. Once that is done, teachers can be better supported. Limitations in this study included a low response rate and that teachers' past experiences could have influenced their psychological well-being.

Another comprehensive study by Lipscomb et al. (2021) looked at positive factors that predict work engagement to support early childhood teachers' work-related well-being. The sample consisted of 50 early childhood teachers from Head Start (35%), center-based (32%), and

licensed home-based (34%) programs. Teachers were primarily female (96%) and White (88%).

Most participants had been teaching at their current program for three years or fewer.

Recruitment took place in the Pacific Northwest. Teachers participated in the study as they desired professional development related to childhood trauma. The study looked at work engagement and positive well-being for early childhood teachers. It was found that teachers' self-efficacy and professional support led to more significant work engagement while dealing with children's challenging behaviors, compassion fatigue/work distress, education level, and professional development. Supporting teachers' work engagement will, in turn, benefit the children as well. The limitations of this study were the small sample size and the lack of diversity in terms of race, ethnicity, language, and gender.

A quantitative study by Carson et al. (2016) examined the aspects of childcare teacher burnout, specifically looking at how exhaustion throughout the day related to job satisfaction and quitting intentions. The results indicated that ECE's quitting intentions were positively influenced by emotional exhaustion. Participants in this study were 50 childcare female teachers from five non-profit childcare centers in a southern state. The childcare centers served low-to-middle-class families. The significant finding of this study was that emotional exhaustion directly impacted the teachers' end-of-day feelings of job satisfaction. The results from Carson et al. show the explicit connection between emotional exhaustion and the intention to leave the current job or the teaching profession. Recognition of emotional exhaustion among ECEs can aid in advancing ways to support teachers with rejuvenating strategies. A limitation of this study was the data collection tool used. This tool conflicted with working childcare teachers on daily response rates.

Quality Care

National Association of the Education of Young Children (2020) defines "developmentally appropriate practice" as methods that promote each child's optimal development and learning through a strengths-based, play-based approach to joyful, engaged learning. Educators who engage in developmentally appropriate practice foster young children's joyful learning and maximize the opportunities for every child to achieve their full potential (NAEYC, 2020). Boyd (2013) also looked at teacher/provider education and linked that with quality programs and child outcomes, which showed an increased quality of care. Cumming (2017) and Carson et al. (2016) found that there were increasing connections between early childhood educators' well-being and the capacity to provide this high-quality education. Vandebroek et al. (2021) also noted that quality care matters, and with high levels of care, long-term outcomes are substantial in social-emotional, cognitive development, and school achievement. Promoting educators' mental health and well-being is vital not only for the educator but also for retention and optimal quality care (Corr et al., 2014). There was also a connection between the education for FCC providers to support well-being and the children's social-emotional development (Vandebroek et al., 2021). FCC providers are crucial for supporting children's social-emotional well-being and development (Vandebroek et al., 2021). FCC providers feel emotional exhaustion, as many can feel detached from others, which can affect the quality of care for children in FCC provider's care (Vandebroek et al., 2021).

Grant et al. (2019) used national survey data of early childhood educators to examine the connection between teachers' working conditions, well-being, and motivation. The data collected was from the 2014 Survey of Early Childhood Educators: US project. This random sample included all 50 states where 7,500 programs were chosen. Surveys were completed by 1129

teachers, each from a different center, representing a 16% response rate. Among those teachers, there was a higher (80%) college education population, and nearly all teachers were female (97.2%). Early childhood teachers were either from non-profit centers or Head Start programs.

Teacher turnover during this study was over 30% annually among ECE providers, which can harm the quality of education and care that children receive (Grant et al., 2019). This research shows the importance of teachers' well-being and the quality of care for young children. Teachers care about their experience in the classroom, including how this environment helps or hinders their ability to help students. Retaining these teachers will help further the stability and quality of child care and education provided (Grant et al., 2019). One limitation of this study is that confounding factors could potentially produce the relationships examined in this study. A second limitation is the low response rate to the survey.

Boyd's (2013) research also delved into the relationship between the quality of early education programs and child outcomes. It was evident that both short and long-term gains are substantial. When early childhood teachers feel supported and experience less stress, they are better equipped to provide quality care. Regardless of their education, experience, or professional development training, teachers and providers expressed the need for recognition as professionals, which, in turn, led to increased stress and a sense of not belonging (Boyd, 2013). The research encompassed all types of providers, from Head Start to center-based and home-based educators, and found that these stressors were universally felt. Boyd (2013) discovered that across all sites, teachers and providers viewed their work as 'meaningful and rewarding,' providing many educators with internal validation in delivering quality education for young children. This was a significant factor in their decision to remain in the early childhood profession.

Stressors Impacting Quality Care

Herman et al. (2018) examined educator stress, burnout, coping and self-efficacy, and the efforts to support teachers. The study also looked to see if educators' feelings were about student outcomes and academic achievement. This study examined 121 teachers and 1,817 kindergarten to fourth-grade students from nine elementary schools in an urban Midwestern school district. OF this study, 95% were female, and 5% were male. The highest percentage of classes looked at were kindergarten at 23% and 25% first grade. Teachers in the high stress, high burnout, and low coping class were all associated with the poorest student outcomes (Herman et al., 2018). Nearly all teachers (93%) fell into classes characterized by high stress levels. Often, when teachers are stressed and are not coping well, the relationship between students likely will suffer, leading to adverse academic and behavioral outcomes (Herman et al., 2018). The findings of this study support that teacher stress and coping may impact not only the teacher's well-being but also the quality of care provided (Herman et al., 2018). There are some limitations to this study, which include not manipulating the variables. Herman et al. (2018) finally examined what supports and interventions educators need to reduce stress, burnout, and exhaustion.

Support for Early Childhood Educators

Carson et al. (2016) found that when childcare teachers use rejuvenation strategies daily, work-related stress is reduced. Based on the high number of teachers (75%) who used at least one rejuvenation strategy each day, it appears that early childhood educators recognize the importance of managing work stress in the classroom.

In the article *Why Do You Want to be an Early Childhood Educator?* (Garboden-Murray, 2013) wrote an article to examine the "why" for early childhood teachers. Garboden-Murray (2013) addresses the misconception of society's impression of early childhood educators.

Garboden-Murray (2013) has learned that being an early childhood educator is the most misunderstood, dynamic, complicated, and rewarding work. It is valuable for early childhood educators to go deeper than "I just love kids" and to be able to name the reason for becoming thoughtful and growing teachers. It is too often that professional development courses and teacher evaluations talk about what and how teaching is done and why it is left out (Garboden-Murray, 2013). Teachers have a hard time naming their why, but when they do, they can show respect for themselves as individuals and, in the end, help the early childhood educator align with the why. Garboden-Murray (2013) calls this point the natural antidote to burnout.

Schaack et al. (2020) examined the job resources of 273 early childhood teachers in Colorado. Results found that supportive leadership can serve as another tool of social connectedness along with quality relationships that teachers have with each other. This study used an online survey emailed to all early childhood professionals enrolled in Colorado's Early Childhood Professional Development and Information System (PDIS). At the time, approximately 65% of the state's ECE teachers registered with PDIS. There were 2 306 completed surveys from lead teachers and 711 program directors. Approximately 64% worked in community-based ECE programs, 21% in early Head Start, and 15% in public school-based pre-kindergarten programs. Of those teachers, 78.5% worked more than 35 hours per week. The findings showed that teachers with more job control and greater collegiality within the early childhood setting reported lower levels of emotional exhaustion. Relationships within the work environment impacted teachers' feelings about their jobs and stress levels. Close and collaborative coworker relationships helped with feelings of burnout and also fostered greater fulfillment in their job. Support from solid leadership can play a role in fostering teacher retention. This can be done by inspiring and communicating a shared vision with their teaching

staff (Schaack et al., 2020). Strong leadership skills that seek to build a workplace community are strongly related to teacher retention and less burnout (Schaack et al., 2020). One limitation of this study was that Schaack et al. did not look at teachers' lives outside of their work and what stressors might impact their stress. This study was also primarily composed of female teachers. Finally, it did not have a representative sample of ECE programs and teachers, and self-selection bias cannot be ruled out.

Chapter ten of the Schmit (2020) text emphasizes the importance of self-care as a way for early childhood educators to support themselves in the profession. The chapter makes a compelling point that it is not selfish to take care of oneself. Advocating for oneself is crucial, as many classroom situations can cause stress. When early childhood educators can advocate for themselves, there will be a reduction in stress that can cause burnout and increase retention. The chapter also stresses that to support the well-being of children better, early childhood educators also need to begin supporting their own well-being. Educators often advocate for the families and children in their care but forget to advocate for themselves; educators advocating for themselves is just as important. The chapter concludes by highlighting that while self-care is not the only solution to the problems that educators face, it is a crucial step in reclaiming some joy and emphasizing the educator's happiness and emotional well-being.

Conclusion

The findings from this literature review indicated the critical role of support needed for early childhood educators in dealing with emotional exhaustion and burnout (Carson et al., 2016; Lipscomb et al., 2021). By providing adequate resources, professional development opportunities, and a supportive work environment, ECEs can be empowered to be advocates for themselves and continue to provide high-quality care for young children. Early childhood

educators must advocate for themselves as they often advocate for their students before themselves (Murray, 2013; Schmit, 2020). With ECEs advocating for themselves, educators can provide the quality care that young children and their families deserve (NAEYC, 2020). The following chapter will discuss the research found and how the research can be applied to early

Chapter Three: Discussion, Application, and Future Studies

Research has highlighted various insights into how early childhood educators can be supported while in the profession and numerous factors that impact retention, burnout, and emotional exhaustion. These findings show a connection between retention and burnout (Bassok et al., 2022; Jeon et al., 2017; Schaack et al., 2020). Early childhood educators' feelings of belonging and the sense of community contribute to lesson burnout and emotional exhaustion (Boyd, 2013). Supporting early childhood educators will help provide the quality of care that young children and families deserve (NAEYC, 2019). This chapter explores the discussion around early childhood educators regarding what has been learned from the research and what future studies can support the research.

Discussion

Early Childhood Educators (ECEs) support while in the profession benefits children, their families, and the programs in which they are employed (NAEYC, 2019). Research shows that varying degrees of these stressors can impact teacher retention (Bassok et al., 2022; Jeon et al., 2017; Schaack et al., 2020). The research also found that seeing the needed support and addressing these factors can increase retention and high-quality care that is developmentally appropriate (Herman et al., 2021; NAEYC, 2020). When early childhood teachers feel supported and experience less stress, they are better equipped to provide quality care. Regardless of their education, experience, or professional development training, teachers and providers expressed the need for recognition as professionals, which led to increased stress and a sense of not belonging (Boyd, 2013). It was stated in a study by Boyd (2013) that there was a concern with others viewing ECEs as lazy rather than hard-working or even unskilled rather than professional. One primary stressor for early childhood educators is not being treated as a professional (Bass,

2020; Boyd, 2013; Schaack et al., 2022). These feelings were found to be valued by training that was provided for early childhood educators and support staff, recognizing that more support and training were needed (Boyd, 2013). Because early childhood teachers are leaving the field at an alarming rate, support and a sense of community/belonging are vital to retention (Bassok et al., 2022; Jeon et al., 2017; Schaack et al., 2020). Often, they are not just switching positions but leaving the profession altogether (Herman, 2021; Child Care Aware of America, 2023). This turnover is problematic for the programs and staff, especially for the children and families relying on quality care (NAEYC, 2020). Educators who engage in developmentally appropriate practice foster young children's joyful learning and maximize the opportunities for every child to achieve their full potential (NAEYC, 2020). This developmentally appropriate practice supports quality care for children and their families (NAEYC, 2020).

Application

The results from this literature review can be used to offer support for our early childhood educators that can strengthen teacher retention and reduce emotional exhaustion and burnout. Research suggests numerous factors can impact early childhood educators' emotional exhaustion and burnout. These factors alone or combined may be enough to cause early childhood educators to leave their positions or leave the profession entirely. Finding ways to support early childhood educators is a way to help with retention and enhance the quality of care being given. Early childhood educators often advocate so much for their students and families that advocating for themselves is pushed aside. Finding ways to help support early childhood educators is a way to enhance retention and support staff to provide the best support for teachers, which will increase the quality of care (Bassok et al., 2022; Jeon et al., 2017; Schaack et al., 2020).

Early childhood educators play a pivotal role in shaping the lives of young children, providing them with nurturing environments that foster growth, development, and learning (NAEYC, 2019). However, the demanding nature of ECE work can often lead to high-stress levels and burnout. Research consistently demonstrates that when early childhood educators feel valued, supported, and equipped with the necessary resources, they can better provide high-quality care and education to their students (Bassok et al., 2021; Boyd, 2013; Carson et al., 2016; Jeon et al., 2018). By prioritizing the well-being of early childhood teachers, we improve their job satisfaction and retention rates and create a more positive and supportive learning environment for children. Investing in professional development, mental health support, and adequate compensation for early childhood educators is essential for ensuring the overall well-being of both teachers and children.

Future Studies

After reviewing the research, it became evident that future studies are needed to contribute to the research on addressing challenges that early childhood educators face and what can be done to foster a stronger sense of community among early childhood educators. Researchers conducted many qualitative studies and concluded their findings from observations and interviews. Many of these were done with currently employed ECE teachers and were also not from a diverse population. Future studies with other methods or quantitative studies are needed to validate the need for support for burnout and emotional exhaustion of ECE teachers. Despite the existing research in the field regarding stressors that can cause burnout and emotional exhaustion, it is apparent that more research could be done on what supports are being used to enhance teacher retention. Many studies identify factors contributing to emotional exhaustion and burnout among early childhood educators.

Quantitative studies have examined the interconnected issues of emotional exhaustion, burnout, quality care, and teacher retention within the Early Childhood Education field. While these studies have yielded valuable insights, they often encounter limitations due to the small sample sizes of educators currently employed. To gain a more comprehensive understanding of the factors contributing to teacher attrition, it is essential to explore the experiences of educators who have already left the profession. By examining their reasons for departure, researchers can identify key areas that require attention and improvement to enhance teacher experiences and retention rates.

To further look at the factors influencing teacher retention, emotional exhaustion, and burnout in ECE, it is vital to investigate the significant role of the children and families that educators serve. The interactions between teachers and their young students and their engagement with families can profoundly impact teachers' overall well-being and job satisfaction. By examining the nature of these interactions, the challenges teachers face in these areas, and the available support systems, researchers can develop targeted strategies to mitigate the adverse effects and foster a more supportive and sustainable working environment for ECE educators that provides a developmentally appropriate learning environment.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the research analyzed for this Capstone focused on support strategies for early childhood educators that can enhance retention (Bassok et al., 2021; Grant et al., 2019; Lipscomb et al., 2021; Schaack et al., 2022). By investing in professional development and resources, we can enhance the mental and physical well-being of early childhood educators, which, in turn, positively impacts the classroom community (NAEYC, 2019). Research indicates that lower turnover rates in early childhood programs foster stronger relationships between

educators and families, leading to more comprehensive whole-child development (NAEYC, 2020). Well-supported teachers are more likely to possess effective classroom skills, creating a nurturing and stimulating early learning environment for young children (NAEYC, 2019).

Continued support and training for early childhood educators can empower them to implement developmentally appropriate practices, ensuring optimal learning experiences for young children (NAEYC, 2020).

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