

## Immigrant Mothers with Preschool Children in Northern Cyprus and Their Attitudes Towards Their Children<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

This study examined the attitudes of immigrant mothers with preschool children in Northern Cyprus towards their children from the points of view of mothers and teachers. The results were categorized under three main themes, which were “communication,” “discipline,” and “adaptation.” The study employed the case study method, which is one of the qualitative research methods. It was conducted with 35 immigrant mothers with preschool children and seven classroom teachers working in the preschool attended by the children. The researcher assumed the role of an observer in addition to collecting data. The mothers included in the study had lived in Northern Cyprus for eight years or less and were not citizens of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. The data, obtained through face-to-face interviews and observations, were analyzed using the descriptive analysis technique. The study concludes that immigrant mothers with preschoolers living in Northern Cyprus need support in terms of how to communicate effectively with and discipline their children and how to adapt to society. Also, our findings indicate that mothers are open to improvement when they receive support. On the other hand, it was observed that the support they received was only from their school. Therefore, the experience and qualifications of school administrators and teachers affect the support that parents receive, and if the administrators and teachers are not well equipped or interested, immigrant parents needing support may fail to improve themselves and to develop effective parenting skills.

**Keywords:** *Immigrant mothers, preschool, education, children, Cyprus.*

### Introduction

The island of Cyprus is constantly affected by the phenomenon of immigration and is described in many sources as an island of immigration (Bağışkan, 2005; Keser, 2006). The presence of the immigrant workforce is evident in Northern Cyprus (Göynüklü, 2012). When the immigrant population living on this island is analyzed, it is seen that there are immigrants from Turkey, Pakistan, Turkmenistan, Philippines, China, Vietnam, Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, Bangladesh,

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Kazakhstan, and African countries (Göynüklü, 2012). Considering the immigrant population in Northern Cyprus, it can be said that most of the immigrants are from Turkey. The reason for this is thought to be the short distance between Turkey and Northern Cyprus as well as the use of the same language (Turkish) in both countries (Cağlayan, 2006). Considering the professions of the immigrants, it is seen that most of them are employed in sectors such as construction, industry, agriculture, service, home services, and cleaning services as shop assistants, gardeners, cleaning staff, waiters, tailors, drivers, etc. (Göynüklü, 2012).

Immigrants, regardless of their country of origin, face challenges related to cultural differences and adaptation to a new country. They carry with them the values, rules, structures, and parenting styles of their own culture. Hence, intercultural interaction between immigrants' culture and the culture of the receiving country may take place. Studies related to cultural adaptation indicate that immigrants adapt many values and behaviors of their own culture to the receiving culture (Peterson et al., 2003; Lordoglu & Etiler, 2014). Each culture has a unique structure. Social structure, social rules, and social values shape individuals' parenting styles. For this reason, parenting can vary across cultures. In the new culture, certain values, behaviors, and processes, as well as parenting styles, may need to be reshaped. Needs, implications of cross-cultural situations, and expectations can shape parenting styles.

Parenting styles can be discussed under three headings: authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive (Sorkhabi, 2005). In the authoritative parenting style, there are rigid, inflexible rules for the child, who is expected to be obedient, and parents are demanding but not responsive to their children. In the authoritarian parenting style, there are rules and boundaries but also behavioral autonomy for the child, and parents are demanding and responsive. In the permissive parenting style, there are hardly any boundaries and rules for the child, and parents are not demanding but responsive (Sorkhabi, 2005). Cross-cultural interaction not only shapes parenting styles but also affects parents' problem-solving methods. The parent-child relationship is an aspect that helps to see cross-cultural differences and adaptation. Not only do parenting practices vary across cultures but also the opinion about the best parenting style can also differ from culture to culture (Zevulun et al., 2019). In addition to culture, education level, environment, and socio-economic status can also have an impact on parenting practices (Gür et al., 2018). Furthermore, parenting styles and parents' behaviors can also be affected by the poor conditions under which parents live.

It is known that children are affected the most by immigration and have difficulties adapting to a new environment. In the receiving country, children encounter a new education system, a new social life, and a different language and culture. They are greatly affected by the socio-cultural differences brought about by immigration and, therefore, experience serious adaptation problems (Lordođlu & Etiler, 2014; Őiřman & Balun, 2020).

Young children usually fail to express these challenges, and with the advancing age, their feelings and emotions about these challenges can become a part of their identities. For this reason, the behaviors and impressions of mothers and teachers with whom children spend the most time are important. Considering that these children will become adults of the future and based on the importance of the healthy upbringing of children, it should be accepted that providing the necessary support for children and their parents is a must. The support to be provided to immigrant families should not bring to mind financial support alone. It can be said that there is a need to improve the support provided to immigrant parents. And this is only possible through studies that reveal their needs, especially studies to be conducted with effective communication with immigrants. Studies to be conducted with immigrant children and their parents are expected to guide experts as well as policymakers and practitioners in this field on the measures to be taken and the strategies to be developed.

### **Literature Review**

The preschool period covering the ages of 0-6 is the process in which the foundation of learning is built. The most important people in the life of the child in this period are teachers and parents (Lindberg & Ođuz, 2016). The preschool period is a critical period for personality development; therefore, for children to grow up as self-confident and healthy individuals, special attention should be paid to education in this period (Can & Serençelik, 2017; Gür, 2018). For children to grow into healthy adults and develop positive attitudes towards learning, they must receive support from their environment (Ministry of National Education, 2013). This is an even greater need for immigrant children.

Immigrant children attending preschools experience problems related to the language and culture of the new country and adaptation to the new culture (Gür et al., 2018). On the other hand, the priority of immigrant parents is to work and to meet their food and shelter needs (Gür et al., 2018;

Campbell, 2008). When teachers summon immigrant parents to the school to discuss children's problems or academic achievement and to get their support, immigrant parents often remain indifferent to the school and their children's education (Gür et al., 2018; Campbell, 2008). Immigrant children are not only deprived of necessary educational materials but also do not receive sufficient attention due to the location of their housing and crowded families (Gür et al., 2018; Gür, 2017)

Parents' attitudes towards their children affect their future behaviors in society. In other words, children's future expectations, self-efficacy, education, career, success, status, communication skills, and parental skills in the future are affected by the way they are treated by their parents. Therefore, it can be stated that the awareness of parents on this issue should be increased; in other words, parent training is necessary.

Parent training is defined as a program aimed at developing healthy relationships between parents and their children and guiding parents in child development and education (Gürsoy & Yıldız Bıçakçı, 2007). Parent training enables parents to improve their relationships with their children and aims to reduce child neglect and abuse as well as preventing the development of undesirable behaviors in children. Besides, it contributes to supporting children in all areas of development (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2013). It is, therefore, of great importance that parent training is carried out in line with parents' needs.

For immigrant populations, parents' age at arrival, education level, income, and cultural background play an important role in their parenting behaviors. Being uneducated and having a lower socioeconomic status means more and greater challenges to face in the adaptation period (Gür, 2017). Parents' age is another factor with great influence. Parents who migrate when they are adults and never attend school in the receiving country become confused about what to expect of their own children in the new cultural context (Glick et al., 2012). Cultural background is another factor that shapes parenting attitudes. While some parenting values are universally shared (basic emotional needs of young children, caring, keeping the child safe, learning the language of the receiving country, etc.), some are different (Bornstein, 1995). For example, while some cultures give importance to academic success and self-reliance, others may attach greater importance to close relationships with siblings and relatives (Glick et al., 2012).

Challenges affect thoughts and behaviors, and life experiences prepare the ground for different perspectives in life (Çift & Canan, 2016). Immigrant parents face not only challenges related to

their own acculturation but also play a special role for their children; their interaction with society shapes their attitudes towards their children immensely. Difficulties they face, their needs, and the support they receive from the environment dictate their way of parenting. So, parenting styles may vary among immigrant parents.

Although immigrants in different countries have similar problems, needs, etc. (Sirkeci & Yüceşahin, 2020), there may still be differences. Therefore, it is important to carry out nationwide research, especially on immigrant children, who will shape the future and become the adults of the future. Especially parents' attitudes towards children affect their future behaviors. The literature review demonstrated that there are very few studies examining immigrant parents and children living in Northern Cyprus and that no study has been conducted to investigate immigrant parents' attitudes towards their children from the points of view of both parents and teachers.

### **Context of the Study**

Considering that migration is now a reality in our age, that the first years of a child's life set the stage for his/her future growth, and that parents' attitudes towards their children affect the next generation, studies to be carried out for immigrant parents with preschool children are highly important. In this context, obtaining information about the way parents communicate with their children, about the discipline strategies they use to manage their children's behaviors, about the challenges they face in adaptation, and about their expectations are important for both developing more effective policies for them and raising immigrant children as healthy and competent individuals.

The present study aimed to reveal immigrant mothers' attitudes towards their children, the difficulties they face, and their expectations, through face-to-face interviews. Besides, to obtain in-depth information regarding these issues, interviews were conducted with the teachers of the children, who knew the mothers very well. The fact that the first researcher is a teacher in the kindergarten where the research was conducted and was able to support the statements of the mothers and teachers through observations is a strengthening factor for the research findings. The research was carried out only with mothers to obtain information more easily for reasons that interviewing mothers and summoning them to the school are easier, teachers usually communicate with mothers and fathers are less involved in their children's education.

## **Method**

### **Research Design**

The present study employed the phenomenology method, which is one of the qualitative research methods. Phenomenology is a powerful research strategy for exploring challenging problems and behaviors (McMillan, 2000; Neubauer, 2019). The data were obtained through face-to-face interviews with the participants. Also, the researcher's observations were used to support the obtained data. Face-to-face interviews, conducted with mothers and teachers, were recorded on a voice recorder with permission from the participants. To support the obtained data, observations were made during in-class and out-of-class events held throughout the year with the participation of parents. Both interviews and observation are powerful data collection techniques that are frequently used together in qualitative research designs. Through open-ended questions, researchers listen to participants as they describe their thoughts and behaviors and try to get the answers with participants' own words. Through observations, researchers obtain knowledge about participants' natural behaviors (Bachman & Schutt, 2020). The method preferred in this research was interviews and observation. For a kindergarten teacher who is the first researcher, interviewing and observations can be easily applied and rich data can be obtained.

### **Participants**

The present study was conducted with 35 immigrant mothers with children attending Gönyeli Fazıl Plümer Kindergarten affiliated to the Ministry of National Education and Culture of Northern Cyprus and seven classroom teachers working in the same school. In addition to collecting data, the researcher assumed the role of an observer. The participating mothers had lived in Northern Cyprus for eight years or less and were not citizens of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. Participation in the study was voluntary.

The study employed the convenience sampling method, one of the purposive sampling methods. Convenience sampling is defined as a method where research data are collected from a conveniently available pool of respondents (Singleton & Straits, 2005). Information-rich cases may not be affected by the sample size; however, the information obtained from the sample should be suitable for the purposes of the research. Information-rich cases are the cases where the

researcher can obtain as much information as possible for the research. Here, there is diversity and depth of information (Baltacı, 2018). Convenience sampling is based on available, easily-accessible items. It is one of the most frequently used strategies in qualitative research (Baltacı, 2018).

It can be difficult to conduct face-to-face interviews with parents and get detailed answers from them. This is because mothers may not want to give detailed answers to a stranger they meet for the first time. It is thought that the same situation may also apply to teachers. Besides, in the interviews conducted with people whom the interviewer meets for the first time, time-related problems may arise. Also, conducting interviews at a place familiar to and at a time suitable for mothers was thought to be important to reach in-depth and rich information. In this context, it was preferred to interview the mothers and teachers at the school where the researcher taught. Demographic characteristics of the mothers, teachers, and the observer are given below: The following sub-headings should be used in this section.

**Table 1**

*Demographic Characteristics of Teachers*

Code	Age	Education	Y.of Experience
T1	45	Master's Degree	24
T2	51	Bachelor's Degree	30
T3	54	Bachelor's Degree	29
T4	38	Bachelor's Degree	16
T5	30	Bachelor's Degree	10
T6	48	Master's Degree	28
T7	32	Master's Degree	12

As can be inferred from Table 1, of the seven teachers participating in the study, three have a Master's Degree and four have a Bachelor's Degree. Besides, all seven of them have teaching experience of 10-30 years and are in the 30-51 age range.

**Table 2***Demographic Characteristics of Mothers*

<b>Code</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Education</b>	<b>Occupation</b>
M1	47	Primary School	Worker
M2	34	Primary School	Household Labor
M3	24	Primary School	Household Labor
M4	29	Primary School	Household Labor
M5	40	High School	Household Labor
M6	29	Secondary School	Cleaner
M7	37	Bachelor's Degree	Radiology Technician
M8	37	Primary School	Household Labor
M9	34	High School	Shelf Organizer
M10	26	Primary School	Household Labor
M11	26	Primary School	Household Labor
M12	33	Primary School	Household Labor
M13	35	Primary School	Household Labor
M14	38	High School	Household Labor
M15	38	Primary School	Household Labor
M16	37	Primary School	Household Labor
M17	30	Secondary School	Household Labor
M18	27	Secondary School	Household Labor
M19	29	Primary School	Household Labor
M20	27	Secondary School	Household Labor
M21	30	Secondary School	Cashier
M22	25	High School	Pastry Chef
M23	37	High School	Household Labor
M24	27	Secondary School	Household Labor
M25	29	High School	Household Labor
M26	29	High School	Household Labor
M27	22	Secondary School	Household Labor
M28	27	Secondary School	Household Labor
M29	35	Primary School	Household Labor
M30	40	Secondary School	Household Labor
M31	30	High School	Household Labor
M32	31	Primary School	Household Labor
M33	39	Primary School	Household Labor
M34	44	Bachelor's Degree	Household Labor
M35	38	Primary School	Household Labor

As can be inferred from Table 2, the participating immigrant mothers are in the 22-47 age range. Sixteen of the mothers are primary school graduates, nine secondary school graduates, eight high school graduates, and two university graduates. Twenty-nine are involved in household labor, and six are employed in the private sector. Four are Kurdish, 16 Arab, 11 Turkish, one English, one Yuruk, one Bosnian, and one Turkmen.

### **Information about the Observer**

The observer, a teacher working in the school where the research was conducted, obtained data through observations and face-to-face interviews.

*The School where the study was conducted:* Gönyeli Fazıl Plümer Kindergarten is located in the Gönyeli district of Nicosia. It is a public kindergarten. The school continues its educational activities with its 186 students, one principal, one deputy principal, nine classrooms, five subject-matter teachers, one special education teacher, two assistant classroom sisters, one secretary, and three auxiliary staff members. In the kindergarten, education is provided in nine classrooms: "4-year-olds" in two classrooms and "5-year-olds" in seven classrooms. The school is a single-story building, and there is a children's playground in its inner courtyard.

### **Validity and Reliability**

In the study, firstly, a question pool was created to develop questions to be asked to mothers and teachers. Then, five experts were consulted about the questions. After making necessary changes in the questions according to the feedback received from the experts, interview forms were developed for the pilot study, and the questions included here were asked to two mothers and two teachers. After the pilot study, the research process started.

In the study, interviews were conducted with both parents and teachers, and the data obtained from the interviews were tried to be supported through observations. The first researcher (who is a teacher at the kindergarten) also observed the mothers at some events such as picnics, meetings, conferences, etc. The researchers analyzed the same qualitative data independently and compared their findings. Participating mothers and teachers were asked to confirm their statements. Thus, the possibility of misunderstanding was eliminated. Creswell (2016) suggests confirming results with participants. Similarly, including direct excerpts from interviews is seen as another factor that increases the validity of the research (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018). Therefore, direct excerpts from the interviews were included in this study. The fact that interviews were conducted with teachers working with immigrant groups for years increases the transferability of the results to other similar groups. Reliability is defined as the extent to which similar results can be obtained in the case that the research is repeated. In this study, interviews were conducted with both mothers and teachers, and the researcher also observed the parents; thus, the study data were supported by the data obtained from different sources. The fact that the researcher is a teacher at the school where the

study was conducted means that the researcher knew the study group well. The researcher recorded the interviews on a voice recorder, made observations through short videos and photographs, transcribed these records, and took notes during the observations and interviews. The fact that the researcher took detailed notes, recorded the data, and took notes is seen as factors that increase the reliability of the study (Creswell, 2016). Similarly, using the data triangulation method, coding performed by independent coders, and achieving consensus among coders are among the reliability strategies used in qualitative research (Creswell, 2016).

### **Data Collection**

Prior to the research, permission was obtained from the Ministry of Education and Culture of Northern Cyprus, and approval was obtained from the Ethics Committee of the relevant university. Since the study was a master's thesis, ethical approval was obtained from the Graduate Education and Research Institute. During the interviews, the participating mothers and teachers were asked open-ended questions about the quality of communication between mothers and their children (how they spend time together, whether they spend individual time together, the attitude of the mother when the child is telling her something important), about mothers' discipline strategies, and about the adaptation of the mothers to the environment (the difficulties they face and their expectations). The interviews took 30-40 minutes. The researcher's observations were written in an observation report by taking into account the in-class and out-of-class events held throughout the year with the participation of parents. To comply with the ethical principles, codes were used instead of the participants' names. The interviewed mothers were given codes such as M1, M2, M3, etc., and their names were not specified. Similarly, the teachers were given codes such as T1, T2, T3, etc.

### **Data Analysis**

The data were analyzed using the descriptive analysis technique. In the descriptive analysis technique, the data are evaluated according to the pre-determined themes, and the obtained results are interpreted (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018). For this research, the data was collected through interviews. Observations were used to support the data obtained through interviews. Themes were organized considering the questions used in the research process. Richer data was obtained by evaluating the observations in this method.

## Findings and Discussion

This section includes the findings obtained from the analysis of the interview data. Results were categorized under three main themes: “communication,” “discipline,” and “adaptation.” Each theme is explained below, and excerpts from the interviews, as well as observations, are given. Each theme was analyzed for the mothers' statements, the teachers' statements, and observations, respectively.

**Table 3**

*Themes and sub-themes developed during the data analysis*

Themes	Sub-themes
Communication	Individual Time Active Listening Time spent at home
Discipline	Actions for inappropriate behavior Actions for appropriate behavior Actions for the rules at home
Adaptation	Difficulties Expectations

### *Communication*

Sub-themes of the “communication” theme were “individual time,” “active listening,” and “time spent at home.”

#### *Individual Time*

When the mothers' responses to the question, "How do you spend time with your child?" were analyzed, the codes that emerged under the "individual time" sub-theme were "home-based activities" and "not spending individual time." Some excerpts from the mothers' responses to this question are as follows:

*"We always do the same things; we do not do anything other than that. We always sit together and watch TV. We cook together; she helps me with the housework; we make cakes, pastries, etc. "* (Home-based activities - M10).

*"We don't have much time. Sometimes, my husband takes the little one out, and I stay with him at home; then, we switch the children. We play or watch TV at home. By play, I mean, he sometimes*

*plays with his toys, sometimes does a puzzle, sometimes hides and wants me to find him. We sometimes watch the cartoon shows he likes, and sometimes the TV shows that I like."* (Home-based activities - M28).

*"I can't spend (individual) time with her because we have other children, too. Mostly, they spend time together, I can't spare individual time for her. I don't do anything, sometimes they look at books with her older sister. They play together. I'm not doing anything about it, but I care for her"* (Not spending individual time-M3).

From the mothers' responses, it can be inferred that they either do home-based activities with their children or they do not spend any individual time together. In addition, mothers engage in activities such as cooking, playing, and watching TV to spend time with their children. Also, some of the children try to involve their mothers in an activity or game they have designed (e.g., hide and seek). Mothers who said that they cannot spend time with their children stated that they meet the care needs of their children such as food and cleaning and that they only observe while their older kids support younger ones and do with them activities such as playing games and reading books. It can be said that although mothers do not make special arrangements to spend time with their children, they do the household chores together with their children and thus try to improve their communication with them. Similarly, those who stated that they were unable to spend time with their children due to having babies or working said that they asked for the support of their older children and thus improved communication and interaction among children. In this context, although children cannot spend any individual time with their mothers, which is quite common in western culture, they spend this time with their siblings and somehow meet their emotional needs such as being valued and interacting and communicating with others. In short, it is seen that the mothers have found appropriate solutions for spending individual time with their children.

### *Active Listening*

When the mothers' responses to the question, "How do you listen to your child when he/she is telling you something?" were analyzed, the codes that emerged under the sub-theme were "listening to communicate with the child" and "evaluating the child's desire to be listened as a negative situation."

Some excerpts from the mothers' responses that fall under the code, "listening to communicate with the child" are as follows:

*"I listen to whatever he has to say. I sit and look into his eyes." (M14)*

*" I listen; if it's good, I say it's good; if it's bad, I say it's bad. I try to help him." (M2)*

On the other hand, some excerpts from the mothers' responses that fall under the code, "evaluating the child's desire to be listened as a negative situation" are as follows:

*"I try to listen to my son by saying 'Okay,' 'Don't do that again.' First, I listen to him; then, if I need to react, I react" (M12).*

*"I try to find out if she is lying by looking into her eyes." (M5)*

*"I listen to whatever she has to say. If she misbehaves, I talk to her; if she continues, I punish her." (M27)*

It was observed that the mothers who responded negatively to this question evaluated their children's desire to communicate with them not as something ordinary but as a negative situation. In addition, the observer observed that whenever the children asked their mothers to listen to them, they expressed a problem. In this context, taking into account the observations, the following can be stated: In some families, children are aware that their mothers listen to them on many issues. However, the opposite is also observed. Especially in crowded families, in families with small babies, or in families with working mothers, the child goes to his/her mother only when there is a problem/something important.

#### *Time Spent At Home*

The mothers' responses to the question, "How do you spend time with your child at home?" revealed that using technological devices as a means of spending time was quite common. Some excerpts from the mothers' responses to this question are as follows:

*"I help him with his homework. I check his homework and correct it if there is a mistake. He (sometimes) does painting. He plays games on the phone until he gets bored but after a while, I take the phone from him." (M16)*

*"We go out to the garden, I take him to the park. He plays games on the phone, watches TV, sometimes. But he usually prefers playing in the park." (M19)*

*"She usually plays with her siblings, not with me. Since I have a baby, I can't spare much time for her. She always plays on the phone or watches TV, sometimes I get mad at her." (M6)*

*"We are at home all day long, we cook, etc. She likes to spend time with technological devices. Since she has eye problems now, she is allowed (to play games on the telephone) for only one hour a day." (M10)*

*"He usually has a good time, usually on both the phone and the TV. He has a phone, with no SIM card, watches YouTube on it. He connects to the Internet on TV. When I say, 'Turn it off,' he sometimes doesn't." (M31)*

Here, it can be stated that technology is used by children in an uncontrolled way in immigrant families, as in many families today. However, it is also seen that children do activities such as spending time in the garden, doing homework, painting, and cooking. From the mothers' responses, it can be inferred that they mostly exhibit permissive attitudes towards their children.

The teachers' responses about the quality of the communication of immigrant parents with their children showed that mother-child interaction was insufficient in terms of time spent together, effective communication, and home-based activities. Some excerpts from the teachers' responses are as follows:

*"In families with many children, problems arise with children. They let their children use technology without setting limits. Children stay in front of the TV or spend time on the phone for long hours. Or, they spend long hours on the street." (T3)*

*"Usually, children spend time at home or outside alone or with their siblings. I don't think they spend much time with their parents. They use mobile phones too much for gaming or spending time." (T5)*

*"Children spend too much time with phones, televisions, and tablets. At school, they act or speak like the cartoon characters they see on the television and tablets. Televisions, tablets, and phones babysit children. Parents use technological devices to 'pacify' their children." (T7)*

The teachers' responses emphasize that parents do not spend quality time with their children and that they let their children use technology in an uncontrolled way. Here, it can be stated that teachers think negatively of mothers' communication with children. In this example, it is seen that since teachers evaluated the parenting styles of immigrant mothers within the framework of their own cultural norms, they could not perceive the solutions produced by the mothers correctly and that they interpreted the differences negatively. However, technology addiction and not spending quality time with children are today a common problem all over the world, especially in families with lower educational backgrounds (Gür, 2017). Nevertheless, it seems that the teachers evaluated this as a problem specific to immigrant families.

At a school seminar on the use of technology at home, the observer observed that mothers let their children use technological devices so that they could "spend some quiet time" and that some mothers did not have any problems with their children using technological devices. The observer also observed that while some mothers tried to improve themselves and communicate more effectively with their children by attending school seminars or parent-teacher conferences, some other mothers did not communicate with the school or some attended only a limited number of events, saying that they have to work to make money or that they had younger children to care for. And at these limited number of events which they attended, they remained passive; that is, they did not ask any questions at the seminars, they wanted to leave parent-teacher conferences before they were over, or remained silent in interactive group meetings. The observer got the impression that the mothers who asked questions at seminars, conferences, etc. needed support on how to build effective communication with their children. For example, one of the mothers asked, "*What's the harm in my daughter's spending good time with her elder sister instead of me? After all, she plays with her. Why is it so important that she spends individual time with me?*" while another mother stated at a parent-teacher conference that using technology makes children smarter and prevents children from misbehaving at home, noting that children cannot spend time otherwise, and waited for the teachers' approval.

Observations that fall under the theme of communication also support the mothers' and teachers' statements. Nowadays, the uncontrolled use of technology among children is common. As parents' education level decreases, the rate of uncontrolled use of technology increases. Therefore, awareness should be raised in parents so that they can educate their children. According to TUIK's (Turkish Statistical Institute) 2015 data, the Internet is most commonly used at home (87.1%)

(TUIK, 2015). According to the results of the study conducted by Cakir (2013), many families think that the computer environment is harmful to their children; so, they set some limits and rules. However, the number of families raising awareness in their children regarding the harms of the Internet is not very high. Raising awareness in children on the subject, teaching them how to use technology correctly, and enabling them to find and adopt new hobbies are important (Gür, 2017). This is because the uncontrolled use of technology among children may lead to certain risks such as technology addiction (Livingstone, 2003). Therefore, it can be said that strong parental support for children is important for preventing and eliminating these risks (Ayas & Horzum, 2013). The mothers who participated in this study generally had low education and income levels. Parents from lower socio-economic backgrounds may have problems in building effective communication with their children (Gür, 2017). In this context, it can be stated that mothers need to receive educational support in terms of effective communication skills. On the other hand, teachers also need educational support regarding intercultural differences and the reflection of social problems on immigrant families. Hence, training programs, seminars, conferences, etc. to be held by the relevant ministries for teachers can help them make more objective assessments regarding immigrant families and thus, to be of more help to them.

### ***Discipline***

The sub-themes of the discipline theme emerged as "actions for inappropriate behaviors," "actions for appropriate behaviors," and "actions for the rules at home."

#### *Actions for Inappropriate Behaviors*

When the mothers' responses to the question, "How do you deal with your child's inappropriate behaviors?" were analyzed, the codes of "punishment" and "consulting the teacher" emerged.

Some excerpts from the mothers' responses are as follows:

*"First, I warn him; if he doesn't behave himself, I say 'I will punish you;' finally, I yell at him. Sometimes, I say, 'I'll tell on you to your teacher'"* (Punishment-M20).

*"I get angry, I don't want to hit her, but when she continues, I give her a smack on the butt."* (Punishment- M32)

*"I say 'Don't do that.' If he continues, I punish him by taking away his toys or the mobile phone."*  
(Punishment-M12)

*"I try to talk to him; I consult the teacher and treat him according to the teacher's advice. I do not consider myself very adequate in this regard, so I prefer to consult the teacher"*(M-33).

It can be stated that the participating mothers preferred to punish their children or consult the teacher in the face of inappropriate behaviors of their children.

#### *Actions for Appropriate Behaviors*

When the mothers' responses to the question, "How do you reward your child's appropriate behaviors?" were analyzed, the codes of "material rewards," "verbal rewards," and "showing interest" emerged. Some excerpts from the mothers' responses are as follows:

*"I ask her if she wants anything from me, then I buy it. If she has made me very happy, I reward her by buying a toy, biscuits, etc."* (Material rewards-M23)

*"I say, 'Well done, you are so smart.' I try to say nice things."* (Verbal rewards-M34).

*"We show interest in her because she likes attracting attention."* (Showing interest-M11)

It can be stated that the participating mothers rewarded their children or showed interest in them when their children behaved appropriately.

#### *Actions for the Rules at Home*

When the mothers' responses to the question, "How do you get your child to follow the rules at home?" were analyzed, the codes of "punishment," "bribing," and "doing nothing" emerged. Some excerpts from the mothers' responses are as follows:

*"I try to get him to follow the rule. When he isn't listening to me, I send him to his room. First I warn him, then I punish him."* (Punishment-M2)

*"Sometimes I bribe her. You see, we bribe her to do what we tell her to do. Otherwise, I can't get her to do what I tell her to do. Either I buy something she likes, or I give her the phone or one of her favorite foods."* (Bribing-M25).

*"He doesn't follow the rules at home, even though I warn him. I'm fed up now; so, I let him do whatever he wants to do- I don't do anything."* (Doing nothing-M35)

From the mothers' responses, it can be inferred that they do not use an effective discipline strategy. The teachers, on the other hand, gave the following answers regarding the mothers' discipline strategies:

*"I think that mothers are overprotective and having problems with setting limits (for their children). Some of the mothers do everything their children want."* (T2)

*"The mother thinks that she is disciplining her child by telling on them to their father. They can be either (over)protective or very indifferent to their children. They have problems finding the balance."* (T6)

*"Mothers cannot pay sufficient attention to their children. They either do whatever their children want or let them do everything they want."* (T7)

The teachers' statements seem to be consistent with the mothers' responses. Therefore, it can be stated that mothers need support on how to discipline their children.

The observer also obtained similar findings in his/her observations of the mothers. During a picnic held on Mother's Day, the observer found the opportunity to closely monitor a mother's attitudes towards her child and saw that the mother, overly concerned with what/how her child ate, the child's sweating, and falling while playing, was overprotective of her child. The observer also observed during the same picnic that two mothers threatened their children with telling on them to their fathers and that some mothers remained indifferent to their children's inappropriate behaviors. Another mother told her child that if he/she behaved him/herself at the picnic, she would buy a bar of chocolate when they went back home. It can be stated that the observer's observations were consistent with the statements of both the mothers and the teachers.

Baş (2015) found that the information source of most parents about how to raise their children was their parents. Lower education levels among immigrant parents usually lead to disadvantages in terms of effective parenting styles (Tarricone, 2009). Mothers from lower socioeconomic levels may not have the necessary qualifications to guide their children effectively (UNICEF, 2017). In a study, Olcay (2006) concluded that immigrant children were disadvantaged in terms of environmental stimuli offered by the family and suggested implementing programs focusing on

the home environment and parenting behaviors. The lower education and socioeconomic levels are, the more likely parents are to have inadequate and incorrect information about “raising the child well” (UNICEF, 2017), which indicates their need to receive training and guidance in this issue.

When the participants' responses regarding the discipline strategies mothers use, as well as the observer's observations, are considered, it can be stated that the mothers do not exhibit strictly authoritative attitudes towards their children. The participants' responses mostly indicated authoritarian or permissive attitudes. Also, mothers generally exhibited overprotective attitudes. Overprotective attitudes towards children are quite common among parents in Northern Cyprus, and such attitudes usually increase as the education level decreases. Permissive and authoritarian attitudes are observed more than authoritative attitudes among the local people of Northern Cyprus (Çarıklı, 2017). So, there is a cross-cultural interaction here: immigrant parents adopt these attitudes in their own families. Most parents aim to raise their children to be competent adults. However, the concept of competence may differ among cultures because cultural values, rules, customs, and life practices are effective in this concept (Bernstein, 2016). Immigrants are influenced not only by their own culture but also by the receiving culture. Therefore, while raising their children, the behaviors that they consider to be natural and correct are shaped by cross-cultural interaction, which, in turn, is reflected in their attitudes towards their children (Bernstein, 2016). In addition, it can be thought that immigrant mothers usually interact with local people who are in the same lower socio-economic group as immigrants themselves.

### ***Adaptation***

The sub-themes of "difficulties" and "expectations" emerged under the theme of "adaptation."

#### ***Difficulties***

The mothers' responses regarding the difficulties they face led to the emergence of three codes: "loneliness," "cultural adaptation problems," and "hesitations about how to treat the child." Some excerpts from the mothers' responses regarding the difficulties they face are as follows:

*"I'm alone; I can't leave my child anywhere when I have something urgent to do. I have no one but my children. My parents aren't here. My child is asking about her grandparents; I have difficulty answering it." "Since we are alone here, we cannot leave the children anywhere when we have to go somewhere. And, I feel ignorant about how to raise my child." (Loneliness-M6)*

*"When I first arrived in this country, I was shy because I was a stranger. But now I got used to it. I used to have difficulty when my children were not with me. We had debts, I couldn't bring my children. I had a lot of difficulties here, I didn't have a home, didn't have any properties. But now, thank God, everything is fine. Thank God I could bring my children here when I paid my debts. Sometimes, I have difficulty adapting to the people here. After all, cultures are different." (Cultural adaptation problem-M27)*

*"Sometimes, I have difficulty with how to treat my child. There is a big age gap between me and my child. I wish that I were an educated person, that I could have gone to school. (Sometimes) I cannot answer my child's questions. For example, he asks some English words. He knows several English words. But I don't. One day, when I couldn't answer a question he asked me and he said, 'Mom, you are so ignorant.' My own child said this to me! To be honest, I felt so sad at that moment. I wish I could help with his lessons, I could answer his questions." (Hesitations about how to treat the child-M35).*

Some excerpts from the teachers' responses regarding the difficulties faced by the mothers are as follows:

*"They may be having difficulties adapting to the culture here. Some difficulties may arise due to the differences in language, economic levels, education, attitudes towards children. Mothers who do not speak Turkish have difficulty communicating with the school. Some mothers are indifferent to their children. Sometimes we meet children who aren't cared for, who are on a poor diet, who wear dirty clothes. For some parents, their children are not a priority as they come here only to save money." (T1)*

*"Setting limits, rules, not being able to get the child to listen. Parents have difficulties regarding their children's eating habits, sleeping habits, or setting TV or tablet limits. They have a lack of information about how to treat their children. Of course, there are so many parents who do not behave like that but that is what I see in general." (T2)*

It can be stated that the teachers' statements were consistent with those of the mothers because the teachers also underlined cultural adaptation problems, communication difficulties, and the lack of information about how to treat the child. However, these problems can also be seen in other mothers, especially from lower socio-economic and educational backgrounds.

During a mid-semester evaluation meeting held for parents, the observer observed that one mother told another mother that she thought the culture in Cyprus was very "liberal," that traditions and customs were different from the country where she came from, and that she sometimes had difficulties adapting to the culture. Some mothers stated that they had no one to care for their children, so they could not attend school events or activities held for parents and that they were alone in Cyprus and asked for support from the school. Besides, the observer observed that some mothers had difficulties disciplining their children, that they consulted the teachers, the principal, or the deputy principal about how to treat their children and asked for seminars to be held on this subject. It can be stated that both the mothers' and the teachers' statements, as well as the observations, support each other. It can be said that although the mothers have problems with disciplining their children and they have cultural adaptation problems and hesitations, they try to learn from the school, and they are open to improvement, which means they are trying to do their best.

### *Expectations*

From the interviewed mothers' responses regarding their expectations for their children, two codes emerged: "educational expectations" and "social expectations." Some excerpts related to these codes are as follows:

*"I want my child to receive a good education. It is important to me that she is raised well. If my child has problems at school, I would expect them to be resolved. I'm sending my child to school because I'm expecting her to be better off than I am."* (Educational expectations-M11),

*"I want my child to have friends. It is important that he gets along well with his friends because my child usually withdraws into him. I want him to make friends. My child is introverted, I would like his teacher to change this."* (Social expectations-M20).

From these excerpts, it can be inferred that the interviewed mothers expect that their children receive a good education and are cared for at school, that their children's problems at school (if any) are resolved, that their children could make friends at school and that teachers support their children in this regard. Briefly, the most important of the mothers' expectations appear to be their expectation of support from the school and teachers. So, now that these are the mothers'

expectations, the question, "What are the teachers' expectations from the mothers?" naturally comes to mind. Some excerpts from the teachers' responses to this question are as follows:

*"I expect mothers to socially and culturally adapt to this country and to be in close contact with the school and teachers. It is also important to have educational toys and books appropriate for the child's age at home. (I believe) children should spend quality time with their parents. Attaching importance to cooperation between school and parents, working in a coordinated manner, and willingness to solve problems are also among my expectations. Just asking questions is not the solution; I think that mothers should continue to make efforts on the subject they need guidance and should regularly exchange ideas (with teachers)." (T4)*

*"I expect them to spend a lot of time with their children and show their children love and care. I expect them to spend quality time with their children." (T5)*

*"I expect them to adapt to the culture of this place and to eliminate the dilemmas their children experience. Rather than judging the culture here and trying to change it or just communicating with the people of their own culture, I want them to adapt to the culture (of this country) and to raise their children as individuals who can live in harmony with this culture. Besides, I expect them to be sensitive, not to remain indifferent, to their children's educational, emotional, and social needs." (T6)*

It can be stated that teachers expect mothers to pay close attention to their children, to spend quality time with them, to cooperate with the school, and to adapt to the culture of the country.

The observer, on the other hand, observed during parent-teacher conferences that mothers frequently emphasized their children's educational and social needs and asked for support and guidance from teachers. However, even though such problems were voiced, cooperation with teachers was usually not sustained, and efforts to resolve these problems remained inconclusive. In addition to all these, it was observed throughout the academic year that most of the mothers participated in educational activities organized by the school and tried to improve themselves in line with the guidance of teachers, but their efforts could not go beyond taking advice from the school or teachers as they had no other source to receive support from. Hence, it can be thought that mothers ask for short-term practical solutions. In this context, rather than face-to-face meetings alone, practical solutions such as informative letters, messages, informative booklets

about solving common problems, interaction through WhatsApp groups, and online interviews can be used together with face-to-face meetings. Thus, mothers can express their efforts to improve themselves and the results they obtain more effectively in face-to-face interviews, and information on the subjects they need support can be provided in a more practical way, as stated above.

In this context, it can be said that the support to be provided by the school is needed by these families. Based on previous observations and considering that parents need the support to be provided by the school, it can be thought that effective training programs on parental attitudes and behaviors to be offered by schools will contribute to parents in this regard. Aydın et al. (2017) stated that factors such as poverty, language problems, inadequate social support, cultural differences, and loneliness negatively affect immigrant mothers and children and underlined the importance of social events where immigrant mothers can socialize. Ereş (2015) emphasized the importance of the efforts to be made by school administrators and teachers to support the education of immigrant children. Yavuz and Mızrak (2016) stated that immigrant children experience educational difficulties and that teachers should receive in-service training to provide a higher quality educational environment for them. In a study investigating the views of teachers, Bozan (2014) concluded that teachers' dedicated and devoted efforts are a must in schools with high numbers of immigrants. Polat Uluocak (2009) emphasized the need for coordinated work among education, health, and social service institutions to ensure immigrant children's adaptation to school. Schools are key institutions in the process of immigrants' adaptation to life in a new society (Bourgonje, 2010). Immigrant families may have varying approaches to issues such as discipline, communication, and parenting attitudes. Educational and social support opportunities to be offered to parents are important both for parents' adaptation to the new society and for the healthy upbringing of immigrant children (Kowalczyk, 2010; Şenses, 2020).

Also, we must emphasize both the fact that children's behaviors are shaped from a young age and the need to attach importance to the preschool period. Therefore, to raise children well, mothers must improve themselves and have awareness of the needs of their children. What is expected from education is not only to provide children with knowledge and skills but also to raise individuals who can sustain the development of society, adapt to the rapidly changing world, and make the desired changes in their environment.

### Conclusion and Recommendations

The present study concludes that immigrant mothers with preschoolers living in Northern Cyprus need support in terms of how to communicate effectively with and discipline their children and how to adapt to society. Our findings indicate that mothers are open to improvement when they receive support and they try to find practical solutions for their problems. On the other hand, it was observed that the support they received was only from their school. Therefore, school administrators and teachers' experience and competencies affect the support that parents receive, and if they are not well equipped or if they remain indifferent, the immigrant parents who need support may fail to improve themselves and to develop effective parenting skills. However, to raise children well, parents must receive educational support, which should not be the responsibility of only schools. In this context, it can be stated that in-service training to be received by teachers and school administrators on immigrant parents and children, as well as seminars and social group work to be offered by various ministries (Ministry of National Education, Ministry of Health, etc.), will provide significant benefits. Besides, training, courses, or services to be offered by non-governmental organizations for immigrant mothers to improve themselves in subjects such as how to communicate effectively with their children, how to discipline them, and how to adapt to life in a new society, will provide important advantages.

The data obtained in this study are limited to 35 immigrant mothers and seven teachers. Nevertheless, based on the data obtained in this study, scales can be developed and more extensive research can be planned. This study can be considered a step for further island-wide research to be conducted with more immigrant mothers.

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