

Views of Kindergarten and First-Grade Teachers on School Readiness

Nefise Semra Erkan*¹, Nurten Elkin¹, Derya Kavgaoglu¹


Sümeyye Öcal Dörterler² & Buse Kerigan²

* Corresponding author

E-mail: nserkan@gelisim.edu.tr

1. Department of Child Development,
Faculty of Health Sciences, Istanbul
Gelism University, Istanbul, Turkey

2. Department of Child Development,
Vocational College of Health Services,
Istanbul Gelism University, Istanbul,
Turkey

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed at investigating the views of kindergarten and first-grade teachers on school readiness. The study group of this study consisted of kindergarten (n=16) and first-grade teachers (n=16) working in public and private kindergartens and primary schools affiliated with the Ministry of National Education in Istanbul, Turkey. The phenomenology model, one of the qualitative research designs, was adopted in this study. The "Semi-Structured Teacher Interview Form" prepared by Erkan was used to determine the opinions of teachers on school readiness. The data obtained from the study were analyzed by using the content analysis technique. In addition to this, the opinions of kindergarten and first-grade teachers on school readiness were included with direct quotations. As a result of this study, it was determined that kindergarten and first-grade teachers had similar and different opinions on school readiness. Recommendations were provided in line with the findings obtained.

KEYWORDS

School readiness; transition to school; kindergarten teachers; first-grade teachers.

INTRODUCTION

Starting school is one of the most significant milestones in a child's life. In this process, the child steps into an institution and a different environment outside his/her family where he/she was born and grew up and where he/she feels safe in every sense. This new environment is a social environment different from home and includes its own rules, duties, responsibilities, and new life experiences. In this new social environment, the child encounters tasks such as participating in planned and programmed teaching activities required by formal education for the first time and learning literacy and basic arithmetic skills, which are the most important tasks of the first grade of primary education. The child's ability to fulfill the requirements of this process and adapt to this new environment requires a certain level of preparation (Erkan, 2011; Erkan et al., 2017; Erkan, 2019; Erkan & Kirca, 2010).

School readiness is often considered as the skills (cognitive, language, academic, and socio-emotional) that children have when they start school. School readiness refers to the child's skills and abilities that form the basis for school success. In the simplest terms, school readiness is the child's readiness for what the school expects and wants to teach (Parker et al., 1999). The main purpose of school readiness is to enable children to make a smooth transition to the first grade (Winter & Kelley, 2008). There is a strong correlation between children's readiness to learn and their future school success. The children who are less ready for the transition to the school than their peers are unlikely to close the achievement gap. In addition to this, there is ample evidence that school problems begin in kindergarten and early grades (Lewit & Baker, 1995). If children start primary school more prepared, they will benefit more from school. This way, educational costs will decrease, and the quality of education will increase as the number of drop-outs and grade repetitions decrease (Myers, 1992).

The ability of the children to fulfill the expectations, knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviors of primary education and to adapt to this new environment is closely related to their previous experiences. In this regard, preschool education has an important place in reaching the school readiness skills of the children (Lunenborg, 2011). As a result of the studies carried out in the literature, it was determined that the biggest responsibility in the readiness of the child for primary education belongs to the families and preschool education institutions (Erkan, 2011; Esaspehlivan, 2006; Kayılı & Arı, 2011; Koçyiğit, 2009; Ülkü, 2007). One of the most important factors that enable the child to start primary school with a high level of readiness and a positive school perception is the quality of the preschool education offered to him/her. In preschool education institutions, the children continue their education life in line with their developmental needs and are prepared for the primary school period. The primary school period is considered to be the beginning of the next formal education process.

In studies conducted with children benefiting from qualified preschool education, it was emphasized that a smooth transition from preschool to primary school was important because it determined the career direction and the quality of children's future school success in the long

run (Pianta & Kraft-Sayre, 1999). Alexander and Entwisle (1988) stated that the achievements of a child in primary school were the result of a successful transition from kindergarten to primary school. Bronfenbrenner (1979), Balaban (1985), and Edgar (1986) stated that the best results were achieved when parents, teachers, and children worked as equal partners during the transition to school. Effective transition to school programs become successful when they are connected with input from parents, preschool and primary school teachers, and children (Dockett & Perry, 2001; Graue, 1992). The most important task for children to make a smooth and trouble-free transition to school undoubtedly falls on teachers. With the beginning of schools, teachers also participate in the role of parents in their children's education. Teachers are the most significant element of the learning experience with their roles that establish a one-to-one relationship with the child and guide the children in the realization of learning tasks.

The transition from preschool to primary school takes place more easily when teachers bring the developmental needs of children to the school environment with different and appropriate approaches and correct practice methods. The fact that preschool teachers have knowledge about the educational approaches and learning environments applied in primary school and that they have experiences suitable for children in their classroom practices facilitate the transition of children to primary school (Yeboah, 2002). Successful teachers encourage children's learning efforts, model their learning, and help them increase their learning capacity. In addition to this, they organize the classroom environment according to the program objectives and develop plans according to the educational objectives. Therefore, knowing teachers' expectations about what skills, behaviors, and attitudes are necessary for children's school learning is critical. These expectations are highly influential on teachers' teaching practices and children's success at school. White (2013) argues that the teacher-child relationship, which is shaped by teacher qualifications, attitudes, and approaches, provides the structure of the child's perception of the school. Childs and McKay (2001) emphasize that the perspectives of teachers on children's readiness and transitions affect what they do in the classroom and the way they evaluate children's school entry. Educators' perspectives on the transition to school are closely related to their opinions on readiness. Teachers' perceptions of readiness are shaped by many factors, including their own expectations as learners and teachers, the structure of the school, the teaching conditions at the school, the expectations of schools from children, social forces, societal needs and values, children's past experiences, and external societal attitudes towards early childhood education (Lin et al., 2003; Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2000).

Preschool education is not compulsory in Turkey and nearly half of the school-age children start primary school without going to any preschool education institution. In other words, some of the children start school without any preparation for primary education (Alakoç et al., 2016; UNICEF, 2012). As a result, the children, families, teachers, and school administrators face many problems and difficulties in the process of starting primary school. It is important to raise the awareness, support, and guidance of kindergarten and first-grade

teachers in reducing these problems in this important process that originates from our education system and directly affects the lives of children.

One of the objectives of preschool education is to prepare children for primary education (MoNE, 2013). In line with this objective, it is important to obtain the opinions of preschool teachers and first-grade teachers about school readiness and to organize the programs to be prepared in line with these opinions to increase the quality of education. When the literature was examined, it was determined that there were studies on the importance of readiness in education, the effect of preschool education on school readiness, and the opinions of parents and teachers on readiness (Bağçeli-Kahraman, 2012; Boz, 2004; Esaspehlivan, 2006; Harman & Çelikler, 2012; Koçyiğit, 2009; Ülkü, 2007). However, there were no studies investigating the views of kindergarten teachers and primary school first-grade teachers on school readiness.

Therefore, this study aimed at investigating the opinions of kindergarten and first-grade teachers on school readiness. It is considered that the results to be obtained from this study will provide significant outputs for the studies to be carried out on a successful transition to primary school, and, thus, the programs to be prepared will be arranged in line with these opinions and contribute to increasing the quality of education.

METHOD

This study aimed at investigating and comparing the opinions of kindergarten and first-grade teachers on school readiness.

Research Design

The phenomenology model, one of the qualitative research designs, was adopted in this study. Phenomenology studies focus on “phenomena that we are aware of but do not have an in-depth and detailed understanding of, and the data sources are individuals or groups that experience the phenomenon on which the study focuses and can express or reflect this phenomenon” (Büyükoztürk et al., 2013; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2005). The reason for using the phenomenology design was that this study aimed at reflecting the views of kindergarten and first-grade teachers on school readiness from their own perspectives and experiences.

Participants

The study group of this study consisted of 16 kindergarten teachers working in public and private kindergartens affiliated to the Ministry of National Education in Istanbul, Turkey, in the 2019-2020 academic year and 16 first-grade teachers working in primary schools. Appropriate sampling method and voluntariness criteria for participation in the study were taken as a basis in determining the kindergarten and first-grade teachers included in the study group. The demographic characteristics of the kindergarten and first-grade teachers constituting the study group were as follows:

All of the kindergarten teachers (n=16) in the study group were women and 81.2% of the teachers were 26-30 years old. 62.6% of the kindergarten teachers had a bachelor's degree, 18.8% had a master's degree, and 18.8% had an associate degree. 68.8% of the kindergarten

teachers had 0-5 years of professional experience while 31.2% had 6-10 years of professional experience. 75% of kindergarten teachers worked in a kindergarten affiliated with a private primary school while the remaining 25% worked in a kindergarten affiliated with a public primary school. 75% of the kindergarten teachers worked full time while the remaining 25% worked part-time. While 62.6% of the kindergarten teachers did not receive any training on school readiness, the remaining 37.6% received training.

While female teachers constituted 75% of the first-grade teachers participating in this study, the remaining 25% were male teachers. 87.6% of first-grade teachers were 26-30 years old. All the first-grade teachers (n=16) had a bachelor's degree. 87.6% of them had 0-5 years of professional experience while the remaining 12.6% had 6-10 years of professional experience. While 75% of first-grade teachers worked in public primary schools, the remaining 25% worked in private primary schools. 56.4% of the teachers worked half time and 43.6% worked full time. Most first-grade teachers (75%) received training on school readiness and the remaining 25% did not receive training on school readiness.

Data Collection Tool

The "Semi-Structured Teacher Interview Form" prepared by Erkan (2018) was used to determine the opinions of kindergarten teachers and first-grade teachers on school readiness. The Interview Form consists of two parts as "demographic information" and "questions to determine teachers' opinions on school readiness". There were eight questions for teachers in the demographic information form. There were 11 semi-structured questions in the form prepared to determine teachers' opinions on school readiness.

Data Collection Process

The data of this study were collected from the teachers working in the first grades of public and private kindergartens and primary schools affiliated with the Ministry of National Education in Istanbul, Turkey, in September and October of the 2019-2020 academic year. It was planned to collect the data by face-to-face interviews with the teachers. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic affecting the world, the teacher interview forms were completed online by the teachers who voluntarily agreed to participate.

Data Analysis

A qualitative research method was used in the analysis of the data, and the responses provided by the teachers to the semi-structured questions were analyzed by using the content analysis technique. Content analysis is "a systematic and repeatable technique in which some words of a text are summarized with smaller content categories with coding based on certain rules" (Büyüköztürk et al., 2013). According to Yıldırım and Şimşek (2005), similar data are brought together in content analysis within the framework of certain concepts and themes, and these are organized and interpreted in a way that the reader can understand.

The data obtained as a result of the responses provided for the questions directed to the teachers were read repeatedly by the researchers, and coding categories were created based on the questions in the research form. The relevant literature was reviewed, and the coding key

was created by taking expert opinion. The data obtained from the teachers were coded separately by five researchers. The coding was done using explicit and hidden content so that the underlying meaning of the directly expressed concepts and expressions were determined together. The data were diversified to increase the validity and reliability of the study. In this study, the researchers were diversified by including participants with different characteristics, and kindergarten and first-grade teachers working in both public and private schools were included. Thus, the researchers had the opportunity to reveal different perceptions and experiences (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2005). In addition to this, direct quotations from the participants were included, member checks were carried out during the content analysis, the data were coded by the five researchers of the study, and the results were compared to ensure the reliability of the study. According to Büyüköztürk et al (2013), the reliability problem can be eliminated with the 80% agreement of two researchers. Researchers had a 100% agreement in the content analysis they conducted separately.

The data obtained were presented in tables. These data were first described using frequencies and percentages, and, then, interpreted by providing direct quotations of the opinions of kindergarten and first-grade teachers on school readiness. In this study, the kindergarten teachers were abbreviated as (KGT) and first-grade teachers were abbreviated as (FGT).

FINDINGS

The responses provided by the kindergarten and first-grade teachers to the interview questions and the tables regarding the findings obtained in line with these responses were presented in this section.

The responses provided by the teachers for the *“Is it only the duty of teachers to ensure the easy transition of children to primary school?”* question were presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Is it only the duty of teachers to ensure the easy transition of children to primary school?

Is it only the duty of teachers to ensure the easy transition of children to primary school?	KGT (N=16)		FGT (N=16)	
	f	%	f	%
Yes	1	6	0	100
No	15	94	100	100

*KGT: Kindergarten Teacher

**FGT: First Grade Teacher

As seen in Table 1, 94% of the kindergarten teachers and all the first-grade teachers (100%) responded to this question by saying “no, it is not only the duty of teachers”. In this regard, teachers in both groups stated that family members such as parents, older brothers, and

sisters, as well as school administrators and teachers, should cooperate and support each other and that ensuring the easy transition of children to primary school requires teamwork.

Some of the opinions of teachers on this question were as follows:

KGT12: This question is related to a well-known misconception. It is assumed by society that everything is in the hands of teachers and teachers are responsible for everything. Unfortunately, we do not have a magic wand, so we need support. This support should be sustained based on family, community, and school.

KGT9: No, it is teamwork and everyone in this team has an important position. The family and the teacher are in the foreground, the school and the administrators are in the background.

KGT11: It is never only the responsibility of teachers. It requires organization and should be sustained in a coordinated manner.

FGT1: Of course, not. It is never only the responsibility of teachers. It should be carried out together with the family, teacher, and the school staff. From the principal to the cleaning staff, a friendly environment should be created for the student.

FGT3: We need to consider the answer to this question comprehensively. The teacher is a very important element, but in some cases, unfortunately, it is not enough on its own. I can't say for every situation, but in some cases, we need support from families.

FGT16: Education is a phenomenon that happens at every stage of our lives and always begins in the family in which the child finds himself/herself. The transition to school is accomplished by educating the child in this direction. The more the family facilitates, inspires, and explains the readiness with examples, the more painless the student's adaptation to school will be. The responsibilities of teachers begin when the child comes to school. The more conscious the family is, the easier the transition and adaptation to school will be. It cannot be said that this process is only the responsibility of teachers.

The responses provided by the teachers for the *"Do parents play an important role in their children's transition to primary school?"* question were presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Do parents play an important role in their children's transition to primary school?

Do parents play an important role in their children's transition to primary school?	KGT (N=16)		FGT (N=16)	
	f	%	f	%
Yes	16	100	16	100
No	0	00	00	00

All the kindergarten and first-grade teachers who participated in this study (100%) stated that parents played an important role in their children's transition to primary school. Teachers

considered parents important in terms of supporting children's development and mentioned that cooperating and communicating with children was crucial.

Some of the opinions of teachers on this question were as follows:

KGT13 Yes, they play an important role. However, parents should not act themselves in this regard; they should communicate with the teacher and school.

KGT1: Definitely. They play a crucial role. If parents do not participate in the period of transition to primary school, the education provided in school does not become complete, with permanency not being ensured.

KGT 11: Of course. Children start to adapt to a new environment and system, and they need to feel safe. Families should support them in this regard.

FGT1: They, they do. In fact, everybody has an equal role. Parents' contribution is great at home. They should, however, cooperate with the teachers and school.

FGT4: Of course, parents are important in their children's transition to primary school. Until that stage, the development of children in different areas such as personal care, linguistic skills, or social interaction depends on children's parents.

FGT 15: Parents' attitudes have a great impact on their children. Children's transition to school is affected by how conservative, protective, sensitive, or disciplined their parents are. Family is the primary and most important factor in the transition to school, which is also the case for anything.

The responses provided by the teachers for the question "*Do parents, teachers, and schools need cooperation to conduct this transition healthily? Why?*" were presented in Table 3.

Table 3. The necessity and reasons for cooperation between parents, teachers, and school

Do parents play an important role in their children's transition to primary school?	KGT (N=16)		FGT (N=16)	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Yes	16	100	16	100
No	0	00	0	00
<i>Reasons for cooperation</i>				
In the family dimension	8	50	9	56
In the children dimension	3	19	2	12
In both family and children dimension	7	44	7	44

As seen in Table 3, all the kindergarten and first-grade teachers in this study (100%) noted that cooperation between parents, teachers, and school was necessary for children's transition to primary school and that they explained the reasons for cooperation under three dimensions: family, children, and both family and children.

The rate of kindergarten teachers who believed that cooperation was necessary for the family dimension was 50%, while the rate of first-grade teachers who thought the same was 56%. Of the kindergarten teachers who mentioned that cooperation was necessary for domestic reasons, 44% said that the children should be supported at home for the continuity of education, while 6% mentioned the domestic need for education to educate children at home. Regarding the first-grade teachers, 31% stated that cooperation was necessary for the continuity of education, while 25% considered cooperation a necessity for the domestic need for education.

The rate of kindergarten teachers who believed that cooperation was necessary for the reasons related to children was 19%, while the rate of first-grade teachers who thought the same was 12%. The kindergarten and first-grade teachers who mentioned the reasons related to children stated that such cooperation was necessary for children's need for development and education.

The rate of kindergarten and first-grade teachers who believed that cooperation between parents, teachers, and schools in children's transition to primary school was necessary for the reasons related to families and children was the same (44%). Of the kindergarten teachers who thought cooperation was necessary for the reasons related to families and children, 31% stated that education was teamwork and 12% noted the importance of guaranteeing children's success. Of the first-grade teachers, 37% reported that education was teamwork and 6% believed that cooperation in both children and family dimension was necessary for solving problems.

Some of the opinions of teachers on this question were as follows:

KGT2: They do because this is teamwork and families are not experts in this regard. They act in accordance with what they witnessed in their families. We need to educate families as experts in this field.

KGT10: Of course, because the first grade is a critical period for children as they start to learn everything. They may dislike the school and not succeed. Therefore, there should be cooperation.

KGT11: Because the education provided by teachers should be supported by families. Otherwise, the learning does not become complete, and desired results cannot be achieved.

FGT16: I always believe that cooperation between school-families-teachers will overcome students' problems. There can only be a few insoluble problems if we determine what is best for the children and perform what is necessary without any delays. In this stage, cooperation is critical and crucial.

FGT5: Yes, they do because children are in an interaction with parents, teachers, and school during this period, with each of them affecting one another. Education is not something that only starts and ends at school. For children to receive a proper education, teachers should contact parents in any case and guide them in how they can help their

children in terms of education at home. When a problem arises at school, teachers can contact parents and solve the problem together.

FGT15: A cooperation should happen. Families should use teachers' guidance in where, when, and how they will perform necessary activities. The school should take the responsibility of ensuring families are willing in this regard.

The responses provided by the teachers for the question "*Do you find the communication and interaction between kindergarten and primary school sufficient?*" were presented in Table 4.

Table 4. The sufficiency of the communication between kindergarten and primary school

The sufficiency of the communication between kindergarten and primary school	KGT (N=16)		FGT (N=16)	
	f	%	f	%
Sufficient	3	19	2	12
Insufficient	13	81	13	81
Varies by conditions	6	38	5	31

According to Table 4, the same rate of kindergarten and primary school teachers (81%) considered the communication between kindergartens and primary school insufficient. Of the kindergarten teachers, 38% thought that the sufficiency of the communication between kindergarten and primary school varied by conditions, while the rate of primary school teachers who thought the same was 31%. Moreover, 19% of kindergarten teachers and 12% of primary school teachers considered the communication and interaction between two institutions sufficient.

The same rate of kindergarten and primary school teachers (25%) who stated that the communication between two institutions varied by conditions reported that the communication was sufficient at private schools but insufficient at state schools. Of the kindergarten teachers, 12% stated that the communication could be sufficient if the kindergarten and primary school were in the same building, about which 6% of primary school teachers agreed, and that the communication could be insufficient on the contrary case. Furthermore, 6% of kindergarten teachers added that primary school teachers could not communicate with them sufficiently as the number of students in primary school classes was too high.

Some of the opinions of teachers regarding the sufficiency of the communication between kindergarten and primary school were as follows:

KGT3: I do not find it sufficient. For instance, I do not know anything about the schools where the children I educated enrolled at. There are unfortunately no classroom teachers who called me and asked for information from me. However, we do not prepare files about children and deliver them to classroom teachers.

KGT1: I find it sufficient at certain institutions (private schools). Children are followed after the kindergarten stage at private schools. However, I do not find it sufficient at state institutions.

KGT6: There is no such communication. It can only happen in the kindergarten of schools that also cover primary education, but there is no communication in independent kindergartens.

KGT2: I do not find it sufficient. Especially in primary school. Because the number of students is high while the number of teachers is limited, and there is no sufficient time. Teachers cannot spend sufficient time with every student.

FGT15: I find it sufficient. With the development files and verbal expressions, we are informed by the preschool teachers.

FGT13: I do not find it sufficient. There is a circulation between private institutions but there is no such practice at state institutions. The primary school teachers do not have any preliminary information about the children.

FGT4: I do not find it sufficient. Kindergartens sometimes provide education based on playing games, but children experience different things when they start primary school. Kindergartens are comfortable and simple for children who experience challenges after starting primary school. The schools have no activities, interactions, or plans between primary schools and kindergartens.

FGT3: I regret to say that I do not find it sufficient. I do not even believe that there is sufficient communication. I do not know what is the case in the private sector but this is the case in the state institutions. Preschool teachers should support us in this regard, which can only happen in the presence of an official inspection and sanction when needed.

The responses provided by the teachers for the question “*Do you think the primary schools support children in their transition to primary school?*” were presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Whether primary schools support children in their transition to primary school

Whether primary schools support the transition to primary school	KGT (N=16)		FGT (N=16)	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
They support	2	12	1	6
They do not support	10	62	11	69
Varies by conditions	4	25	5	31

As seen in Table 5, 12% of kindergarten teachers and 6% of primary school teachers believed that primary schools supported children’s transition to primary school sufficiently, while the rates of kindergarten and primary school teachers who thought the otherwise were

62% and 69%, respectively. Furthermore, 25% of kindergarten teachers and 31% of primary school teachers stated that the support varied by conditions.

Kindergarten teachers who believed that the children were supported in certain conditions noted that such support was present in private institutions but absent in state schools. The first-grade teachers believed that the support for children was based on the attitudes of primary school teachers.

Some of the opinions of teachers on whether the primary schools supported children's transition to school sufficiently were as follows:

KGT8: Primary school is quite insufficient in this regard. Primary school teachers do not do anything for us. Unfortunately, they do not support us adequately.

KGT4: We should assess this question by the types of schools. We cannot set a certain criterion for every school. Private schools sufficiently support the children.

KGT16: I do not think the children are supported sufficiently. The attitudes and skills may change by teachers but from a general perspective, I do not think the children are sufficiently supported.

FGT9: This is a phenomenon that varies by teacher, so I cannot give a general answer.

FGT19: Most of the students are not even aware of why they go to school. The purpose and reason for going to school, what happens after graduation, or even when to go to school and when the class will end... Students enter classrooms with many facts they are not aware of. I do not think they are supported during this period.

The responses provided by the kindergarten and first-grade teachers for the question "What are the greatest challenges that you face as teachers?" were presented in Table 6.

Table 6. The greatest challenges teachers face

Do parents play an important role in their children's transition to primary school?	KGT (N=16)		FGT (N=16)	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
	Family-related	14	87	11
Children-related	3	19	8	50
Institution-related	4	25	6	38

As seen in Table 6, 87% of kindergarten teachers and 69% of first-grade teachers noted that the greatest challenges they faced were related to families. The rate of kindergarten teachers who believed that the difficulties they had were the experiences with the children was 19%, while the rate of first-grade teachers who thought the same was 50%. Of the kindergarten teachers, 25% reported that the challenges they experienced were related to their institutions; the rate of first-grade teachers who thought the same was 38%.

Regarding the family-related challenges teachers faced, 44% of kindergarten teachers and 50% of first-grade teachers mentioned the adverse attitudes and behaviors of families

toward teachers. Of the kindergarten teachers, 31% stated that families were close to communication, about which 19% of first-grade teachers agreed. Moreover, 12% of the kindergarten teachers stated that families had desires and expectations which were not related to the curricula (such as asking kindergarten teachers to teach reading and writing).

According to teachers' opinions on children-related challenges, 12% of kindergarten teachers stated that children had behavioral problems such as anger management and concerns about leaving the family.

Of the first-grade teachers, 19% mentioned that children had adaptation-related issues as they did not start primary school in a prepared form. Furthermore, first-grade teachers reported that 25% of children had linguistic problems.

The difficulties faced by teachers mentioning institution-related challenges indicated that the same rate of kindergarten and first-grade teachers (19%) had problems with the administrators in their institutions. First-grade teachers reported that such problems arose from administrators' act of comparing teachers and institutions, adding that they could not communicate with the administrators who did not help them at all. Furthermore, 19% of first-grade teachers stated that working in crowded classrooms was a challenge for them.

Some of the opinions of teachers about the greatest challenges they faced were as follows:

KGT6: Teaching a program not related to the curriculum on the collective demand of parents. For instance, teaching how to read and write.

KGT11: Children's readiness to primary school and families' expectations.

KGT7: I had challenges in the period children were adapting to school. Every school should have the equipment and materials for the adaptation week.

KGT9: I had challenges that were not related to the children but their families and environments.

FGT8: The parents' being close to communication. Neglecting the current state of their children, showing no attention to children.

FGT3: I can say the parents who claim they always know the best.

FGT4: What was challenging for me was the high number of students and the difficulty in teaching how to read and write as well as achieving control over the class. The management was not thoughtful, offering me no help when it was difficult for me. There is a linguistic issue. Students using a language other than Turkish between them or at home causes them to stay behind the program in Turkish class.

The responses provided by the teachers for the question "*What can be done to increase children's readiness for the first grade?*" were presented in Table 7.

Table 7. What can be done to increase children's readiness?

The activities to be done to increase children's readiness	<i>KGT</i>		<i>FGT</i>	
	<i>(N=16)</i>		<i>(N=16)</i>	
	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>
In the children dimension	8	50	6	38
In the family dimension	5	31	6	38
In the teacher dimension	3	19	3	19
In the program dimension	4	25	5	31

As can be seen in Table 7, teachers answered this question in multiple dimensions which were children, family, teacher, and program dimensions. Of the kindergarten teachers in this study, 50% mentioned what could be done in the children dimension to increase school readiness, which was also stated by the 38% of first-grade students. The rate of kindergarten teachers who mentioned what to do in the family dimension was 31%, while the rate of first-grade teachers who did the same was 38%. The rate of kindergarten and first-grade teachers who mentioned what to do in the teacher dimension was the same (19%). Furthermore, 25% of kindergarten teachers and 31% of first-grade teachers mentioned what to do in the program dimension.

Based on teachers' statements about what to do in the children dimension to increase readiness, 50% of kindergarten teachers and 38% of first-grade teachers mentioned that children's all developmental areas should be supported. Additionally, according to teachers' opinions on what to do in the family dimension, 19% of the kindergarten teachers and 38% of the first-grade teachers said that families should be educated based on their needs through seminars, conferences, or meetings. Of the kindergarten teachers, 12% noted that parents should be encouraged in cooperating with the school.

Based on the participants' opinions on what to do in the teacher dimension, the same rate of kindergarten and first-grade teachers (19%) believed that in-service courses and seminars should be conducted to increase teachers' knowledge and skills regarding school readiness.

They also added that changes should be performed in contents, methods, and techniques of kindergarten and primary school programs to prepare children better for school.

Some of the opinions of teachers on what to do to increase children's readiness to first grade were as follows:

KGT5: "Children should not be put under pressure in terms of classes, mathematical processes, or reading-writing. Instead, children's education should be supported with music and rhythm."

KGT6: “Children should be provided voice training. Moreover, their pen-holding skills should be improved, and preliminary activities and aural training can be performed to improve children’s preliminary visual reading and writing skills.”

KGT1: “Parents should be particularly provided free education in this regard, which can be achieved in cooperation with municipalities. Then, teachers should be offered in-service training. There are teachers who have been working for more than 40 years. Current information should be certainly shared with them.”

KGT15: “School trips can be conducted for the children at an earlier age. Amendments can be done for the primary school environment which can be introduced later.”

FGT3: “We can use different methods and techniques. If we can get rid of the stereotypes, I believe we can create a difference in this regard. For that purpose, the internal motivation level should be increased.”

FGT14: “I think progress should happen on the social level. We should conduct informative social activities in terms of readiness for primary school. Society is equal to family, home, and children.”

FGT4: “If kindergarten becomes obligatory, it can be very beneficial for the children before starting the first grade.”

FGT11: “The primary school should be introduced to the children as they do not know what will happen, and this uncertainty causes concerns among them. Children should be informed, and trips should be planned.”

FGT7: “Children’s linguistic, early literacy, cognitive and self-regulation skills should be supported, and games that will help them be prepared from social and emotional perspectives should be designed.”

The answers provided by teachers to the question “*What are the challenges you faced in children’s transition to school?*” were presented in Table 8.

Table 8. *The challenges teachers faced in children’s transition to school*

The challenges teachers faced in children’s transition to school	KGT (N=16)		FGT (N=16)	
	f	%	f	%
Family-related	10	62	5	31
Children-related	9	56	12	75

As seen in Table 8, teachers answered the question “what are the challenges you faced in children’s transition to school?” in two groups as “family-related” and “children-related”. The rates of kindergarten and first-grade teachers who mentioned that the challenges arose from families were 62% and 31%, respectively. However, the rates of kindergarten and first-grade teachers who mentioned that the challenges were related to children were 56% and 75%, respectively.

Based on teachers' responses regarding the family-related challenges in children's transition to school, kindergarten teachers noted that parents were not open to communication and asked kindergarten teachers to teach how to read and write to their children. The first-grade teachers reported that they had problems in cooperating with the parents and that parents' lack of knowledge regarding their children's education created problems.

Teachers' responses regarding the children-related challenges in children's transition to the school indicated that 25% of kindergarten teachers and 56% of first-grade teachers believed the children had issues in the adaptation process due to not being ready for the school. Furthermore, 31% of the kindergarten teachers and 19% of the first-grade teachers had challenges due to certain reasons such as children's concerns, fears, the desire of staying with the family, and behaviors of crying, and emphasized that these issues were particularly common among the children who did not attend a kindergarten and started the first grade without getting ready and that concerns and fears arose from parents' excessive expectations from the school and teachers.

Some of the opinions of teachers regarding the challenges they faced in children's transition to school were as follows:

KGT 4: "The tantrums, excessive concerns and fears of children arising from their parents' expectations and oppressive attitudes."

KGT3: "I can mention children's concerns because children are not aware of what has happened or where they are. The fact that school is an abstract concept with uncertainties is the greatest difficulty children face."

KGT9: We observe the readiness of certain children to school. With the personal and group activities, children reflect their own knowledge and enlighten us. We convey these to their parents who act in a neglectful manner and make their unprepared children start the first grade."

FGT16: "What was challenging during the orientation that I had with my students (especially those who did not attend a kindergarten earlier) was their attitudes indicating "Why are we here?" Adaptation occurs in every period of human life. I believe that even informing children about the primary school contributes to students' desires and energy."

FGT3: "Some of them are too young and have adaptation problems, staying behind the program.

FGT8: "I can mention families' attitudes toward their children due to cultural and socio-economic reasons, rather than the children themselves."

FGT14: "The absence of children's knowledge about the primary school and thinking the primary school as a kindergarten environment."

The responses provided by the teachers for the question "*What are the transitional activities and practices you used for the children's transition?*" were presented in Table 9.

Table 9. The transitional activities and practices teachers used

The transitional activities and practices teachers used	<i>KGT</i> (<i>N</i> =16)		<i>FGT</i> (<i>N</i> =16)	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Children-related practices	16	100	14	87
Family-related practices	2	12	6	37

As seen in Table 9, teachers grouped the activities and practices they used for children's transition to school under two general titles as children-related and family-related. All of the kindergarten teachers (100%) and 87% of first-grade teachers stated that they performed activities and practices for children's transition to school. The rate of kindergarten teachers who performed activities in relation to families was 12%, while the rate of first-grade teachers who did the same was 37%. The responses of teachers who reported they performed activities and practices for children's transition to the school indicated that 62% of kindergarten teachers and 87% of first-grade teachers conducted both intra-class and outdoor activities for that purpose. Furthermore, 12% of the kindergarten teachers included creative drama, 12% performed musical activities, and 19% conducted book-reading activities. There were no first-grade teachers who mentioned drama activities or musical and book-reading activities. Of the kindergarten teachers who stated that they performed family-related activities, 12% said they made efforts to establish positive communication with the families and help children adapt to the school smoothly with the assistance of families, which was also mentioned by 37% of the first-grade teachers.

Some of the opinions of teachers regarding the activities and practices they used in children's transition to school were as follows:

KGT9: "I often use the creative drama method. With drama, children learn adapting themselves to their groups and expressing themselves comfortably."

KGT7: "Adaptation games, artistic activities with puppets, music, and amusement, and rewarding activities creating trust in the adaptation process."

KGT15: "I make efforts to perform harmonization efforts with the classroom teachers. However, not every teacher and institution is eager in this regard. I am generally oppressed with the statement "Let's not do anything unnecessary."

FGT15: "I make efforts to establish positive relationships with families and comfort them so that they can comfort their children."

FGT6: "I plan educational games for the area that I want to support. I try to support their literacy skills using games."

FGT11: "I receive support from preschool teachers."

FGT9: "I perform games, family meetings, and family-children activities."

FGT10: "Musical-rhythm activities, outdoor games..."

DISCUSSION

This study compared and examined the opinions of kindergarten and first-grade teachers in terms of children's transition to school. Results indicated that kindergarten and first-grade teachers believed ensuring children's smooth transition to primary school was not the duty of teachers solely and added parents also played a key role in this regard. Teachers in both groups stated that parents and schools should collaborate, that the transition to school was teamwork, and that parents played an important role in supporting their children's development. In addition, teachers added that the reasons for collaboration included the importance of ensuring educational continuity, families' need for education, and children's academic success. It is important to sustain the education at home so that the changes in children's behaviors become permanent. Families' involvement in education contributes to the collaboration between school and families, helping improve students' knowledge and skills and increase academic success (Ministry of National Education (MEB), 2013). Studies indicated that the greatest responsibility in children's preparation for the primary school belonged to families and preschool education institutions (Erkan, 2011; Esaspehlivan, 2006; Koçyiğit, 2009; Ülkü, 2007). Family support is an important factor affecting every step of education. Yeboah (2002) found that the collaboration between schools and families was a significant factor in children's readiness and transition to primary school.

Results showed that most of the kindergarten and first-grade teachers found the communication between kindergarten and primary school insufficient. However, studies (Clarke & Sharp, 2003; Dockett & Perry, 2001) suggested that promoting continuity was a way of increasing positive transition experiences because children's experiences in the preschool environments are used to shape the basis of the educational program during the first years at school. Certain studies defined the absence of collaborative and respectful communication between preschool environments and schools as an obstacle against the continuity of education (Dockett & Perry, 2003).

Study results demonstrated that most of the kindergarten and first-grade teachers agreed on the idea that primary school did not sufficiently support children in their transition to school. Teachers also noted that this topic could vary schools and teachers and that such support was sufficiently provided as private schools.

The kindergarten and first-grade teachers in this study reached a consensus in terms of the challenges they faced in children's transition to school. Most of the teachers reported that the challenges were related to families and that families had negative attitudes toward the teachers. The families, particularly parents, played an important role in encouraging students' academic readiness through their own parenthood approaches, involvement in outdoor experiences, and the resources they provided to their children. Yaman (2010) found that almost all teachers considered the family variable as the greatest reason for the problematic behaviors.

Lara-Cinisomo et al. (2008) stated that preschool teachers emphasized the effect of families on children's readiness.

Another result of the study was that teachers' opinions in terms of the activities to increase school readiness matched. Half of the kindergarten teachers and almost half of the first-grade teachers suggested that activities should be conducted in the children and family dimension to increase readiness. Teachers also recommended that all developmental areas of children should be supported in the children dimension, that the domestic need for education should be met through seminars, conferences, and meetings to prepare children for school, and families should be encouraged to collaborate with the school. This result was in accordance with the other results. Docket and Perry (2003) noted that certain educators discovered the parents of certain children felt lost after their children started to go to school and that efforts were made to establish support networks for both children and parents. Some of these educators defined the support for parents *as one of the best things to support the children*. Yeboah (2002) noted that determining children's developmental needs and developing relevant programs during preschool education to simplify the transition to primary school and increase children's readiness boosted the success rate during primary school.

The present study examined the responses of kindergarten and first-grade teachers in regard to the challenges they faced in children's transition to school and indicated that more than half of the kindergarten teachers stated these challenges arose from both families and children, while most of the first-grade teachers believed the problems were related to children. Uzun and Alat (2014) conducted a study and found that most of the problems teachers faced in relation to school readiness were related to "physical maturity, self-expression, acting in line with the instructions, following the rules, and meeting needs of using the toilet and self-cleaning". Wong (2003) found that the most common problem primary school teachers faced in transition to school arose from children's act of following the rules and regulations. These results were in accordance with the challenges kindergarten and first-grade teachers experienced in terms of readiness.

The kindergarten and first-grade teachers in this study grouped the transitional activities and practices under two titles as related to families and related to children. The responses of teachers who reported they performed activities and practices for children's transition to the school indicated that most of the kindergarten teachers and first-grade teachers conducted both intra-class and outdoor activities for that purpose. Furthermore, kindergarten teachers also included creative drama, musical and book-reading activities. The kindergarten teachers who stated that they performed family-related activities made efforts to establish positive communication with the families and help children adapt to the school smoothly with the assistance of families. Yeboah (2002) emphasized that domestic support was an important factor affecting every step of education and that school-family collaboration was a significant factor for readiness to primary school. The relevant literature review indicated that the transition activities that were performed the most and helped achieve success included the

orientation meetings conducted with families and children at the beginning of the academic year, meeting activities, and house and primary school visits (Dockett & Perry, 2001).

The results of this study are briefly as follows:

- Kindergarten and primary school teachers noted that ensuring children's smooth transition to school was not the duty of teachers solely and that it was teamwork by the group consisting of school, teachers, and family.
- All teachers in this study reported that parents had an important role in children's transition to school and that parents needed to collaborate with schools and teachers while fulfilling this role.
- All teachers in this study stated that collaboration between parents, schools and teachers was necessary. They added that such collaboration was necessary for reasons related to family and children. They also emphasized the importance of collaboration with the family to guarantee academic success.
- Most of the teachers in both groups said that they considered the communication between kindergarten and primary school insufficient. A small rate of kindergarten and primary school teachers stated that the communication varied by conditions and that this communication was superior in private schools.
- More than half of the teachers in both groups said that primary schools did not support children's transition to school sufficiently. Furthermore, a small rate of kindergarten and primary school teachers mentioned the dependence on conditions in this regard and added that more support was provided in private schools.
- Majority of the teachers in both groups stated that the most challenges they faced as teachers arose from families. They emphasized that families had negative attitudes toward the teachers.
- Most of the kindergarten and first-grade teachers stated that activities should be conducted in the children and family dimension to increase children's school readiness. According to them, children's development could be supported from various aspects, and families could be educated through seminars, conferences, and courses.
- Kindergarten teachers noted that the challenges faced in children's transition to school arose from families, while the first-grade teachers stated that the reason was the children.
- Almost all kindergarten and primary school teachers reported that they included intra- (creative drama, music, book reading, etc.) and extra-class activities to facilitate children's transition to school.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following can be recommended in line with the results:

- Courses and seminars can be organized to increase the awareness of teachers and families about the importance of school readiness, and school-family collaboration can be established.
- The communication between family, teacher, and school can be supported to facilitate the transition to primary school. Accordingly, teachers and school management have a great responsibility in this regard. Kindergarten and first-grade teachers and management can be educated in terms of effective communication with family, and exemplary practices can be observed if needed.
- Development portfolios can be regularly prepared at kindergartens and shared with first-grade teachers, and platforms, where teachers can gather and share their opinions about children, can be established.
- Preschool and classroom teachers can gather, and in-service educational practices where teachers can perform activities and longitudinal studies related to development, learning environments, program, and the process can be conducted.
- Measurement and assessment activities can be used more effectively during the preschool period, and children's readiness level can be determined, and the educational process can be planned accordingly.
- With the comprehensive programs that will support all developmental areas of children during early childhood, suitable learning environments and experiences can be provided to the children under risk, and children's readiness can be supported.
- In-service educational practices can be organized for the kindergarten and first-grade teachers in regard to the children's development, learning-teaching environments, school readiness, curricula, and relevant processes.
- The possibility of observing the preschool and first-grade class environments can be created for the teachers so that preschool teachers can learn about the needs and learning environment of the next step and classroom teachers can learn about the learning environment children come from before starting primary education.
- Not only the children and their families but also the schools should be ready. As the developmental characteristics of all children are different, schools can be physically prepared in a form to support the personal differences.

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