



Elementary 1st Grade Teachers' Views on the Practices in the 12-Week Adaptation and Preparation Process *

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Abstract

A functional preparation process that can be conducted before basal reading and writing practices in the 1st grade can be effective for children to start reading and writing successfully. This study aims to examine teachers' views on the practices in the 12-week adaptation and preparation process of 1st graders. Qualitative research method was used in the study. Holistic single case study design was employed in the study that was conducted in the spring term of 2012-2013 academic year. The participants were 1st grade teachers (n=66) and the data were gathered through an open-ended question survey. The data were analysed using the content analysis technique. A majority of the teachers participated in the study followed the 12-week adaptation and preparation process in their classes. The teachers thought that it was not suitable to teach two different age groups in the same class, and the remaining time after 12 weeks was not enough for teaching and reinforcing basal reading and writing.

Keywords

12-week adaptation and preparation process
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Introduction

In this age of information, one of the most important skills needed for following rapid developments and keeping pace with the age are reading and writing skills. These skills not only affect academic success, but also many areas of life. Starting school is one of the significant changes experienced in childhood. This change has critical importance in a child's future success.

"Most students meet social life when they start elementary 1st grade, and the experiences they gain in this grade form the base for their future life experiences" (Çögenli Gündoğan & Uçansoy, 2013: 106). Knowledge and skills acquired in elementary school years affects all levels of education as well as individuals' lives. "Today, reading is also important for their professional development and social life. Those who comprehend what they read reach the level of effective reading more quickly and thus, develop better in many aspects. The development in the reading skill also contributes the development of language and cognitive skills" (Stanovich, 1988, cited in Şenel, 2004: 48). To express themselves effectively in all courses, students need to comprehend what they read and express it in both oral and written language.

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1st grade should not be merely seen as a grade in which reading and writing are taught. Similarly, the period of basal reading and writing should not be perceived as a lean process in which only reading and writing are learned. 1st grade is a period when children acquire basic skills and develop patterns related to these skills for their physical and psychological development. It should be noted that this period is a process that has an influence on individuals' personal, social and professional development, and thus, may affect their entire lives. Emphasizing basal reading and writing practices in 1st grade should also have the aim of teaching the right skills with respect to the teaching-learning activities in addition to achieving general and specific aims. By means of the skills acquired in this educational process, individuals would achieve various aims of basal reading and writing including expressing feelings and opinions in spoken and written language, reading accurately and quickly while comprehending the text, writing in accordance with the rules, listening to others' based on certain rules and expressing what is listened (Erdoğan, 2011; Öz & Çelik, 2007).

Important factors come into play in acquiring basal reading and writing skills that have a significant role in individuals' lives. Among these factors, students' physical, psychological and affective readiness, teachers, and families come to forth. The new regulations in the Elementary Education Law (no. 6287) went in effect after being published in the Official Gazette on 11 April 2012, and a set of reforms was introduced with regard to the basal reading and writing process by the Ministry of National Education. With the 4+4+4 model being implemented as of the 2012-2013 school year, the elementary education age was changed to 6-13 year-olds, and children who turned the age of five were given the opportunity to start elementary education. As a result of this model, some students started elementary education without attending preschool. This model has brought the need to question whether students' physical, affective and cognitive readiness are suitable to basal reading and writing. In the 2013-2014 school year, the rule stating that children who turn five has to start school was made more flexible, meaning that it was left to the discretion of families. According to Canbulat and Küçükkaragöz (2013), there have been positive and negative arguments on students' adaptation and readiness for school when especially 60-month-old students started school with the implementation of this model. Yielding new behavioural changes and outcomes in education depends on students' level of readiness. Due to this model, some students had to start school before reaching to the sufficient level of physical, affective and cognitive readiness without having received preschool education

"It is problematic for students who have not acquired the necessary skills for reading and writing to start basal reading and writing education" (Cemaloğlu & Yıldırım, 2005: 3). 1st grade students' gaining basal reading and writing skills as desired is based on their levels of readiness for learning basal reading and writing. In order for students to be ready for writing in the basal reading and writing process, they should have various prerequisite skills such as finger muscles being well-developed, successful nerve-muscle and hand-eye coordination, using the tools required for writing (e.g. pencil, notebook, etc.) successfully, knowing the concepts of row, line, text, right, left, up, down, vertical, italic, in, out, bottom and top, being aware that the direction of writing is from left to right and from top to down, and properly drawing the lines of letters in the alphabet in the right direction (Yangın, 2007). The level of readiness not being sufficient may lead to a negative process of basal reading and writing as well as causing students to develop negative attitudes towards the school and teachers. For this reason, the students who would start 1st grade should be at the right level in terms of physical, affective and social development to be able to do basal reading and writing activities. According to Senemoğlu (2013), students' motivation level being high enables them to be interested in and feel the need of learning. Students' confidence in learning positively affects their learning. Besides, their age, level of cognitive development, general state of health and prior learning should also be at a sufficient level, which is also an important factor in learning. According to Bilir (2005), trying to teach something to children who are not ready to learn would not only be unproductive, but also gradually cause a feeling of failure, disappointment and incompetency in them. In addition, she argues that children going through such a negative process would not have the courage to do the tasks that their peers achieve even when they are mature enough.

The practices that should be firstly conducted with 1st graders are those related to adapting to the school, and preparing for reading and writing. The adaptation process of students having preschool education is easier than others. Parents' attitudes are also important in this process. Students should be informed about the practices to be applied in 1st grade, and about the responsibilities they would take. Moreover, these practices should be introduced at home and school in the summer before starting 1st grade, and simple activities should be done if necessary. These students should have the skill of sitting at their seats and doing listening activities for longer periods of time. At the same time, they should be able to fulfil tasks such as doing their self-care on their own, cooperating with others, answering questions asked based on stories that someone tells, and guessing the beginning, end or middle of a story that they listen to. Additionally, health checks should be performed, students should be prepared socially and affectively, and their overall language skills should be supported (Myers, 2014; Roskos, Strickland, Haase & Malik, 2009; Good & Kaminski 2002). Students starting elementary school should be able to interpret visuals they encounter and tell the basic details in them. Parents encouraging students, supporting the skills required for their school success, and organising entertaining activities can also be effective (Otaiba, Lake, Greulich, Folsom & Guidry, 2013). The collaboration of parents, school administrators and teachers can play a significant role in facilitating 1st graders' adaptation process.

In the United States, the National Parent Teacher Association indicates that 1st graders should have a set of academic standards. For example, students should be able to accomplish tasks such as defining the events in a story by using key details, expressing feelings, participating in conversations on a set topic, defining people, places and objects in full sentences, explaining feelings and opinions by relating them to events, and using the materials presented in accordance with their aims. On the other hand, they should also take part in activities including listening to a story that is read aloud, re-telling it, listening to poetry, repeating a poem that they have listened to, and guessing the content of a story based on its title and images (PTA, 2011: 3).

Whether a child is ready to start elementary school should be thoroughly evaluated. While age is accepted as an important determiner for children to start school in many countries, particularly the United States, the factors related to developmental characteristics have been recently emphasized (Farran, 2011, cited in Şahin, Sak & Tuncer, 2014). In Turkey, age is taken as the primary criterion for children to start elementary school, and their developmental characteristics, strengths and weaknesses are not thoroughly considered. However, age is only a criterion for starting school, but it is not a reliable criterion which shows that a child is ready for school and would be successful at it (Şahin, Sak & Tuncer, 2014). In fact, the characteristics required for starting basal reading and writing practices and those needed for starting elementary school are different. In many European countries (Eurydice, 2012/13) and the United States (CDE, 2014), basal reading and writing practices start in preschool educational institutions. Since basal reading and writing activities start in preschool educational institutions in the United States, students come to 1st grade with skills such as writing and reading their own names and parents' names, writing proper nouns with a first letter in capital, reading and writing simple words and sentences, and having a proper handwriting (LF, 2014). 1st graders starting school with a certain level of literacy would facilitate the process of adaptation to school and also learning reading and writing. Similarly, in many European countries, basal reading and writing activities start in preschool educational institutions, and this process goes on until the end of 2nd grade. Consequently, children have a certain level of reading and writing skills as well as knowing spelling rules when they come to 1st grade (Eurydice, 2012/13; DESWG, 2012). Reading and writing are taught more effectively to students in 1st grade, which ensure the permanence of these skills. This process lays the foundations of a life-long literacy skill. Accordingly, children go through the process of adaptation to school in an easier way, and the preparation process for reading and writing takes on a different dimension. For example, while elementary teachers in our country prepare 1st graders for basal reading and writing practices, they start with teaching students how to hold a book, a notebook and a pencil. Do students need to wait until 1st grade to hold a book, a notebook or a pencil?

The schooling rate in preschool education being low in Turkey can be seen as one of the main factors causing an opportunity gap regarding the age for starting basal reading and writing education. According to the figures of 2012-2013 school year published by the Ministry, the schooling rate in preschool education is 30,93% for 3-5 year-old range, 44,4% for 4-5 year-old range and 55,35% for five year-old and above. In our country, it is estimated that nearly 0,1% of GDP is allocated to preschool education. In OECD countries, this ratio is 0,4% in average. The ratio that the World Bank suggests for Turkey is 0,23% of GDP (Korkmaz, 2014, 22). On the other hand, the preparation activities for reading and writing in the Turkish preschool education program are the practices conducted to increase students' level of readiness and facilitate their transition to elementary school. It never has the aim of teaching them how to read or write. Teaching of reading and writing as well as introducing letters and teaching how to write letters are not included in the program. The aim of preschool education is to equip students with the necessary skills for them to quickly learn reading and writing in elementary school, not teach them how to read and write, and thus, to support them to develop a positive perception for both reading and writing, and school (Ministry of National Education, 2013). In addition, even the instructions on what teachers should do within the scope of preparation for reading and writing are very limited in the preschool education program (Taşkın, Katrancı & Uygun, 2014). Both the schooling rates being low in preschool education and the program being limited in terms of preparing students for basal reading and writing are among the factors that should be considered for the elementary school starting age. According to the Board of Education and Discipline (2012), research studies revealed that six year-old children starting elementary school after having received preschool education get used to 1st grade more easily, are more open to learning, and have higher levels of learning motivation and listening capacity compared to those not having preschool education. Although preschool education has recently gained importance in our country, it has not become widespread across the country, and since most of the available schools are fee-paying schools, only middle- and high-income families can afford to send their children to these schools.

In terms of cognitive, physical, social and affective development, some of the behaviours that children starting elementary school would perform are as follows: Cognitive development: Children can express themselves, speak in front of a group when necessary, name five sounds in the alphabet, count from 1 to 10, indicate the order of objects, comprehend a text and conversation they listen to, say the day of the week, say their left and right, are ambitious to learn and explore, and need a long time to make a judgement and a decision (Selçuk, 2013; TTB, 2012, Yavuzer, 2012). Physical development: Children can write letters, are skilful in handiworks since their small muscles are developed, can hold a pencil, construct functional structures with toy blocks, are capable of doing activities such as running, climbing and jumping (Senemoğlu, 2013; TTB, 2012; Yavuzer, 2012; Yavuzer, 2011; Şenel, 2005; Gökçen, 2004; Çelenk, 1999). Social development: Children have one or two close friends, are also willing to play with other children, have their favourite friends mostly from the same gender, have small game groups that are not well-organized, can often fight, have resentments that do not last long and are easy to forget, and can take some responsibilities. They can wait their turn, and explain the rules of a game to others (Yavuzer, 2012; Yavuzer, 2011; Şenel, 2005; Gökçen, 2004; Korkmaz, 2014). Affective development: Children can express their feelings of anger, love or happiness, often have bursts of anger, jealousy is common among their friends, they love their teachers and are committed to them, and thus, they expect approval from their teachers, they see learning as an exciting experience, their confidence increase as they achieve (Yavuzer, 2012; Senemoğlu, 2013; Yavuzer, 2011).

The decision of the Ministry of National Education that requires 60-month-old children to start elementary 1st grade as of 2012-2013 school year has brought various problems in our country where preschool education is not compulsory. All 60-month-old children, either have preschool education or not, are put into the same classroom and start the process of basal reading and writing. A 12-week period has been allocated to the adaptation of students to school and their preparation for basal reading and writing. This situation has made the preparation practices for basal reading and writing even more important. However, teachers do not have the necessary training to address the

learning experiences within this process. Determining the problems that teachers can encounter in this process through scientific studies can contribute to the program development works to be conducted in this area.

The primary aim of this study is to identify 1st grade teachers' views related to the practices in the 12-week adaptation and preparation process that is the first step of learning basal reading and writing. Based on this aim, the research questions addressed in this study are as follows:

1. To what extent was the 12-week adaptation and preparation process implemented according to the teachers' views?
2. What are the teachers' views on the introductory seminar organized towards the adaptation and preparation process by the Ministry?
3. What are the positive and negative aspects of two different age groups (i.e. 60- to 66-month-old and 66- to 72+-month old) being in the same class according to the teachers' views?
4. Is the time remaining after the 12-week adaptation and preparation process enough for teaching basal reading and writing according to the teachers' views?

Method

In this study, holistic single case design, which is one of the qualitative research methods, was employed. In this design, a single unit of analysis (a program, an individual, an institution, etc.) on a topic is examined (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2011: 290).

Participants

The study was conducted with 1st grade teachers working in the city centre and districts of Denizli. Maximum variation sampling, one of the purposeful sampling methods used in qualitative studies, was employed. In maximum variation sampling, the aim is to form a relatively small sample and reflect the variation of individuals that are stakeholders of the problem under investigation in this sample to the maximum extent (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2011: 108). Within the scope of the 4+4+4 model implementation, Denizli Provincial Directorate of National Education divided the schools in the city centre into five regions based on their socio-economic levels. Three schools from each of these regions and two schools from each of the five districts were determined. The study was conducted with the participation of 66 teachers (female=32, male=34) from 25 elementary schools in 2012-2013 school year (the first year of the 4+4+4 model).

Data Gathering Tool

For data gathering, an open-ended question survey for 1st grade teachers' views on the 12-week adaptation and preparation process that was developed by Susar Kırmızı and Tarakçı (2013) was used. In the development of the open-ended question survey, the literature was firstly reviewed, and face-to-face interviews were then conducted with the teachers. To take expert opinion, the questions developed were presented to three faculty members, a Turkish language teacher and two elementary teachers. The form was finalised based on the suggestions offered by the expert group. Consequently, the data gathering tool consisting of a total of five questions and a personal information form was developed. To reveal the consistency of the codes identified within the scope of this study, an agreement percentage was calculated for each question. In this calculation, Miles and Huberman's (1994) formula ($\text{Reliability} = \frac{\text{Agreement}}{\text{Disagreement} + \text{Agreement}} \times 100$) was used. The agreement percentages calculated in this study are as follows: 86,36% for the first question, 87,87% for the second question, 89,39% for the third question 91,54% for the fourth question, and 84,27% for the fifth question.

Data Analysis

1st grade teachers working at the selected schools were asked to fill the open-ended question survey on a voluntary basis. The teacher views in the qualitative dataset were transcribed. The qualitative data obtained from the teachers through the open-ended question survey were analysed using content analysis and evaluated with open coding method (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2011). The transcribed data were coded after being carefully read by the researcher, which was repeated by the help of another faculty member. The codes that were determined were compared, and the related ones were combined into themes. Quotations were included to support the researchers' interpretations and indicate the teachers' views. These quotations also contain information related to the participants. The abbreviations used in the quotations were sequence numbers (1, 2, 3, ...), the teacher's gender (F for female, M for male), the age of their 1st grade students in months (60-66, 66-72+), and the place where the teacher works (city centre, district). For example: (10,F, 60-72, District); 10: sequence number, F: female, having 60- to 72-month-old students in class, District: the place where she works.

Findings

To answer the research questions of this study, eight codes, fourteen sub-codes and four themes were revealed based on the findings. These themes, codes and sub-codes are presented in Table 1

Table 1. Themes, Codes and Sub-Codes Revealed from the Data

Themes	Codes	Number of Teachers Stating Views for the Codes	Sub-Codes	Frequency of Sub-Codes
<i>Theme 1:</i> Reasons for implementing or not implementing the adaptation process	1. Reasons for implementing the process	37	1. Legal obligation	4
			2. Students' needs	15
			3. Believing that it is for students' benefit	5
	2. Reasons for not implementing the process	15	1. Difficulty of the process	18
<i>Theme 2:</i> Views on the Seminars	1. The seminars not being contributive	34	2. Insufficiency of the content	9
			1. Insufficiency of the seminar content	3
			2. The seminar not being practical	26
	2. Benefits of the seminars	17	3. Criticisms on planning and presentation	9
			1. Positive sides of being in the same class	24
<i>Theme 3:</i> Two different age groups being taught in the same class.	2. Negative sides of being in the same class	51	1. Anxiety of not being able to succeed	28
			2. Having physical inadequacy	11
			3. Not being ready to learn	9
			4. Concerns related to social development	12
<i>Theme 4:</i> The remaining time for teaching basal reading and writing	1. The remaining time being sufficient	17	1. Problems experienced by 60- to 66-month-old students	28
	2. The remaining time not being sufficient	47		

Findings for the First Research Question and Interpretations

With respect to the first research question of the study, the theme "reasons for implementing or not implementing the adaptation process" was formed. This theme included sub-codes which were "legal obligation, students' needs and believing that it is for students' benefit". The quotations from the participants' statements related to these sub-codes are as follows:

Legal obligation: "(...)I allocated 12 weeks for the preparation activities. I had to follow the program as it was because it was the decision of the Ministry [3, F, 66-72, Denizli-City centre]" "(...)I didn't start teaching basal reading and writing. I firstly implemented the preparation activities for the adaptation process. I taught in accordance with the program [37, F, 66-72, Denizli-City centre]" "(...)We followed the program as stated in the adaptation process for basal reading and writing [18, F, 66-72, Denizli-City centre]" "(...)I allocated the adaptation process to the preparation activities as required [12, M, 60-66, Denizli-City centre]"

Students' needs: "(...) I implemented the 12-week period because there were 60- to 66-month-old students in my class. [17, M,60-66, Denizli-City centre]" "(...)I implemented the adaptation process because there were younger students who didn't receive preschool education. [24, F, 66-72, District]" "(...)The students were not ready for basal reading and writing. Of course I implemented preparation activities. [27, M, 60-66 and 66-72, İlçe]" "(...)I implemented preparation activities, which yielded positive results since the students were 66 months old. [8, M, 66-72, District]"

Believing that it is for students' benefit: "(...)I started with the preparation activities since I believed the benefits of them. [43, F, 66-72, Denizli-City centre]" "(...)I allocated the necessary time to the preparation activities. It was beneficial. We have progressed slowly and in a safe speed. [65, F, 66-72+, Denizli-City centre]"

32 teachers who participated in the study stated to have implemented the 12-week adaptation and preparation process in their classes. Four of these teachers indicated that they implemented the process due to obligation while 15 said they thought it was necessary and that was why they implemented it. On the other hand, 15 teachers who stated to have implemented the adaptation process as planned asserted that the students needed the activities in this process because they were 60 to 66 months old and some of them did not receive preschool education. Five teachers said they implemented the process since they believed it would contribute to the students' development. In addition, eight teachers stated that they implemented the process, but did not provide any explanation regarding the reasons behind it. "(...) I allocated the first 12 weeks to the preparation activities. [14, F, 60-72, District]" "(...)For 12 weeks, we had activities such as painting, dramatization and line completion. [26, F, 66-72, District]" "(...) I allocated time to the preparation activities. [21, F, 60-72, Denizli-City centre]" The teachers also stated that in the adaptation process, students from different age groups had different needs. While they considered the adaptation process necessary for 60- 66-month-old students, they found it long, boring and too easy for students in a higher age group. Some of the teacher statements on this issue include the following: "(...)I implemented the adaptation process. Because there were students who were younger and did not attend preschool. [24, F, 66-72, District]" "(...)We allocated time for the preparation activities. The children who attend the preschool the previous year got bored. They were tired of those activities. The 60- to 66-month-olds were surprised and didn't know what to do. [60, M, 66-72+, Denizli-City centre]" As is seen in the quotations, the teachers experienced problems due to the fact that the adaptation process was not planned in accordance with different age groups.

Teachers are obliged to use effectively the 12-week adaptation and preparation process planned by the Ministry both for adaptation to school and preparation for basal reading and writing. The adaptation and preparation activities have a special importance for particularly the younger students getting ready for basal reading and writing and showing eagerness in this process. Basal reading and writing are the basic skills that individuals would need for their whole life. This process, if completed successfully, would be influential in their lifetime literacy. According to Yazgın (2007),

students acquiring the basal reading and writing skills at a desired level depends on their level of readiness. In order for students to be ready before they start basal reading and writing activities, they should have a successful nerve-muscle and hand-eye coordination, and be able to use the tools required for writing (e.g. pencil, notebook, etc.) successfully.

The sub-codes determined related to the second code of the first theme are lengthiness of the process and insufficiency of the content. The quotations from the participants' statements related to these sub-codes are as follows:

Lengthiness of the Process:“(…) We didn't put much emphasis on the preparation activities since the children got bored. [10 ,F, 60-72, District]” “(…) Since the school got boring for the students, I assigned them writing the letters as a line drawing activity. [13, F, 66-72, District]” “(…) “(…) Time is too long for adaptation. [32, M, 60-66 and 66-72, Denizli-City centre]” “(…) The first 12-week period was too long. [36, M, 60-66 and 66-72, Denizli-City centre]”

Insufficiency of the Content:“(…) The activities and the programs are incompatible, and look like a draft prepared rather quickly. I don't find the content very beneficial. [32, M, 60-66 and 66-72, Denizli-City centre]” “(…) I made the adaptation process for basal reading and writing longer this year compared to previous years. But it wasn't 12 weeks because the students got tired of the activities. [51, F, 60-72+, Denizli-City centre]” “(…) I think such a long preparation process don't contribute to learning reading and writing. [5, F, 66-72 Denizli- City centre]” “(…) The students who had attended preschool got very bored in this process and the activities were meaningless to them. [9, F, 66-72, District]” “(…) I started with these activities since I believed in the importance of preparation. Because I don't think that preschool activities should suddenly turn to 1st grade activities (writing, homework). I hate the preschool teachers exhibiting their own handiworks. [43, F, 60-66 and 66-72, Denizli-Centre]”

15 of the teachers participated in the study indicated that they did not implement the adaptation and preparation process. Eight of these teachers found it long, and 10 justified it with the insufficiency of the content. Some of these teachers agreed on both reasons.

According to the findings revealed in this study, 32 teachers implemented the 12-week adaptation process while 15 teachers did not. The reasons such as the 12-week adaptation process planned by the Ministry not being able to meet the needs, students getting bored of the repetitive activities, parents' expectation of starting the basal reading and writing practices as soon as possible, and teachers not being competent in meeting the needs of a lower age group not being caused problems in the implementation of the adaptation process. Furthermore, one of the teachers said the parents were the reason why he did not implement the process. “As I observed around, everybody started teaching basal reading and writing because that's what the parents expected [23, M, 66-72, Denizli-City centre].” The fact that the parents were not informed properly about the adaptation and preparation process caused difficulties, and even barriers, in the implementation during 12 weeks.

Findings for the Second Research Question and Interpretations

To answer the second research question of the study, the theme "views on the seminar" was revealed. In this theme, the codes "the seminar not being contributive" and "benefits of the seminar" were identified. The sub-codes of the first code included "insufficiency of the seminar content, the seminar not being practical" and "criticisms on planning and presentation". Some of the quotations from the participants' statements related to these sub-codes are as follows:

Insufficiency of the seminar content: “(…)It didn't have any contribution at all. We got bored since the activities were related to the preschool program. [6, M, 66-72, Denizli-City centre]” “(…)I don't think it had a contribution since there were no practices shown which were suitable for basal reading and writing in the seminar [23, M, 66-72, Denizli- City centre]” “(…)It didn't contribute a lot. Because the level of most children were not sufficient for understanding these activities. [26, F, 66-72, District]” “(…)There weren't many explanations [35, M, 60-66 and 66-72, Denizli-City centre]”

"(...)Not sufficient. [38, M, 66-72, Denizli-City centre]" "(...)The seminar wasn't very fruitful. It didn't teach me anything new. Neither did it contribute to the adaptation process. [48, F, 60-66, Denizli-City centre]" "(...)It had very little contribution. The seminar was on general issues. [62, F, 66-72+, Denizli-City centre]"

The seminar not being practical: "(...)The seminar that we were given didn't include anything for practice, and that's why it was useless. [10, F, 60-72, District]" "(...)The seminar that we were given was not related to the 12-week adaptation process. For that reason, we learned the process by experiencing it. [11, F, 66-72, District]" "(...)Because the seminar didn't contain any information for practice, it wasn't useful at all. [10, F, 60-72, District]" "(...)It didn't have any contribution because it looked like preschool education, and I didn't get any training on that. It was only theoretical, and the things we already knew. [61, M, 60-66, District]"

Criticisms on planning and presentation: "(...)The seminar wasn't very effective since the conditions (sound system) weren't good. [25, F,60-66 and 66-72, District]" "(...)The seminars given by the Ministry are inadequate and entirely for show. No planning at all. [32, M, 60-66 and 66-72, Denizli-City centre]" "(...)The seminar presented useful information. However, it would be better if they organized it in the September seminar. [1, F,66-72, Denizli-City centre]" "(...)I don't think the way these seminars are given is sufficient [43, F, 66-72, Denizli- City centre]"

The views related to the sub-codes identified revealed that 34 teachers stated to have found the seminars insufficient by showing reasons or not. According to the teachers' views, the seminars were mostly on general issues rather than 1st graders' adaptation and preparation process. This was a significant setback for them in terms of getting familiar with the 12-week process. As a matter of fact, three of the teachers stated that they were not able to obtain the necessary information from the seminars, and learned the nature of the process while implementing it in the classroom. 26 teachers who participated in the study asserted that the information provided in the seminars was not practical, but mostly theoretical. Moreover, the fact that the activities included in the 12-week adaptation and preparation process were similar to the features of preschool education practices, and the teachers were not familiar with such activities reduced the effectiveness of the seminars even more. In this regards, the seminars were not able to meet the teachers' needs. On the other hand, nine teachers stated negative views regarding the planning and presentation of the seminars. Some of the teachers provided views for more than one code. The teachers said the sound system, planning and timing of the seminars were not suitable. They also expected that the seminars should have been organized for smaller groups and emphasized practice, which could enhance the effectiveness of these seminars.

Some of the quotations related to the second code of the second theme, "benefits of the seminars", include the following:

Benefits of the seminars: "(...)It was useful in getting familiar with the characteristics of the age group. [63, M,66-72+, Denizli -City centre]" "(...)The lessons focusing on student development and techniques were useful. [12, E, 60-66, Denizli-City centre]" "(...)I learned about the books on adaptation that would be distributed and the adaptation process. [9, F, 66-72, District]" "(...) The seminar was beneficial. Particularly for the adaptation process. [16, M, 60-72, Denizli- City centre]" "(...) The seminar was good. However, it was difficult for us to have students from an age range of 60 to 72 months in the classroom [49, F, 60-66, Denizli- City centre]" "(...) It affected me positively. [65, F, 66-72+, Denizli-City centre]"

17 teachers who participated in the study stated that the seminar works were effective, either providing reasons or not. 11 of these teachers indicated that they had the chance to learn about the characteristics of lower age students with relation to child development. Six teachers found the seminar useful, but did not explain why. "(...) It made a significant contribution. [48, M, 60-72, Denizli- City centre]" It was also emphasized that sufficient information and introduction on the 12-week adaptation process could not be provided in the seminars.

Findings for the Third Research Question and Interpretations

To answer the third research question of the study, the theme "two different age groups being taught in the same class" was identified. This theme consisted of the codes "positive sides of being in the same class" and "negative sides of being in the same class". Some of the quotations obtained from the analyses on the first code include the following:

Positive sides of being in the same class: "(...) Both age groups are affected by different behaviours of each other. Students get the chance to change their behaviours. [22, M, 66-72, District]" "(...) Adaptation and cooperation. [38, M, 66-72, Denizli- City centre]" "(...) Maybe in setting an example and being protective. [48, F, 60-66, Denizli- City centre]" "(...) Some students may be affected by others and make more effort. Sometimes children feel they need to help each other or take care of younger ones. Thus, they can contribute to the progression of their younger friends by helping them. [37, F, 66-72, Denizli- City centre]" "(...) They make great effort to catch up with the older ones. [50, F, 60-66, Denizli- City centre]" "(...) We can see the difference between the two age groups better. [23, M, 66-72, Denizli- City centre]"

24 teachers who participated in the study stated that there were positive sides of lower age students starting school early. For example, lower age students taking their peers who are older by months as examples, making more effort to be successful in courses, and older students cooperating with, or protecting, younger ones were considered as positive sides by the teachers. According to the teachers, students in the lower age group take those in the higher age group as examples and make more effort to be successful in the activities. On the other hand, the lower age group's struggle to catch up with the higher age group causes tiredness and fear of not being able to succeed in the lower age group. Consequently, the code "negative sides of being in the same class" was revealed. This code is related to teachers' concerns towards both age groups being taught in the same class. The sub-codes for the code "negative sides of being in the same class" include "anxiety of not being able to succeed, having physical inadequacy, not being ready to learn, and concerns related to social development". Some of the quotations related to these sub-codes are as follows:

Anxiety of Not Being Able to Succeed:"(...) I think that the lower age students would feel overwhelmed with the anxiety of not being able to succeed. [5, F, 66-72 Denizli-City centre]" "(...) I think that the lower age students would feel stressed among others, and inhibit themselves in every topic. [13, F, 66-72, District]" "(...) While the higher age students achieve easily, the lower age ones learn failure. The first thing they say is 'I can't do it'. The little ones want to play when I'm trying to teach a lesson. [62, F, 66-72+, Denizli-City centre]"

Having physical inadequacy: "(...) The 66-month-old students getting tired easier than the other group slows down the process. [2, M, 66-72, Denizli-City centre]" "(...) The older ones are always ahead of the others in terms of readiness, the others should grow up. [6, M, 66-72, Denizli-City centre]" "(...) I think there is a huge gap among students from a larger age range. [10, F, 60-72, District]" "(...) When two age groups are in the same class, they would fail in physical and mental development since their levels of readiness wouldn't be the same. [18, F, 66-72, Denizli-City centre]" "(...) The younger ones have difficulty in concentration on activities and finishing their works. Since they didn't attend preschool, their muscles aren't developed, either. [25, F, 60-66 and 66-72, District]" "(...) Their hand muscles aren't sufficiently developed. They are not ready to school in terms of social maturity. When you want to change their seats, they don't want it. Their self-care skill is insufficient. They feel overwhelmed. [49, F, 60-66, Denizli-City centre]"

Not being ready to learn: "(...) It's difficult to decide on the level of the class, there are still students who want to play and spend time outside beside those who progress quickly. [9, F, 66-72, District]" "(...) For me, they should be in different classes because younger ones learn more slowly. [16, M, 60-72, Denizli-City centre]" "(...) Younger students easily get distracted. Younger students feel weaker with other students. [20, F, 66-72, Denizli -City centre]" "(...) A topic that is too basic for a group can be difficult and meaningless to another group. Students get bored in the class. [21, F, 60-72,

Denizli-City centre]" "(...) The lower age group had difficulty in adapting to the school culture. They had trouble in understanding issues such as arrangement and order, I spent most of time with them. I couldn't deal with the other students much. The lower age group is always weaker (speaking, visual reading, etc.) [48, F, 60-66, Denizli-City centre]" "(...) While there are not problems with the older students in comprehension, writing, expression and speaking, 90% of younger ones have problems. [32, M, 60-66 ve 66-72, Denizli-City centre]"

Concerns related to social development: "(...) I think the lower age group fell behind in reading and writing practices. In the future, one group will enter puberty some time after the other. This is the most negative side in my opinion. [1, F, 66-72, Denizli-City centre]" "(...) Being in the same class makes them passive both physically and in terms of skills. This causes them to be more introverted. [17, M, 66-72, Denizli-City centre]" "(...) The higher age group can sometimes act like they are younger by imitating the lower age group [22, M, 66-72, District]" "(...) There are differences between levels. The older ones make fun of the younger ones who can't do something. [24, F, 66-72, District]" "(...) The younger students can lose their confidence thinking that they are incompetent. [40, F, 66-72, Denizli-City centre]" "(...) The younger ones are always one step behind. They can't develop their confidence. They can't do it. They have to try harder, they don't even participate in the games. [58, F, 60-66, Denizli -City centre]" "(...) The younger ones can not get along with the older ones. [50, F, 60-66, Denizli -City centre]"

51 teachers who participated in the study stated that different age groups being taught in the same class had various negative aspects. 28 of these teachers mentioned their students' concern for not being able to succeed, 11 teachers brought up the problems related to physical development, 9 of them complained about the lower age not being ready to learn, and 12 teachers were concerned about their students' social development. It was stated that the physical, affective and cognitive differences among the students caused problems in their learning and motivation for taking part in activities. In addition, according to the teachers, the social developments of the students in both age groups were negatively affected (as in older students imitating younger students' behaviours). On the other hand, the teachers stated that the 66-month-old students experienced the feeling of failure. The fact that 72-month-old students whose physical and cognitive development is higher are more active and perform better in in-class activities may cause a lack of confidence in younger students.

Findings for the Fourth Research Question and Interpretations

With regard to the fourth research question of the study, the theme "the remaining time for teaching basal reading and writing" which included two codes was formed. These codes were "the remaining time being sufficient, and the remaining time not being sufficient". Some of the quotations related to the first code include the following:

The remaining time being sufficient: "(...) The remaining time is sufficient, children are already taught some activities in this preparation stage. [32, M, 60-66 and 66-72, City centre]" "(...) Sufficient. [34, F, 66-72, City centre]" "(...) The remaining time is enough, but the 12-week process bores both the teacher and the students. [36, M, 60-66 and 66-72, City centre]" "(...) Sufficient because reading and writing are emphasized in 1st grade. [41, F, 66-72, City centre]" "(...) Since the method of reading and writing education is taught in the 12-week preparation process, the following period would be easy and quick. Therefore, it wouldn't affect the activities and there would be no need for repetitions. [43, F, 66-72, City centre]" "(...) Reading and writing can be taught in about four months. Thus, the time is enough. It will be sufficient for those having no problem with learning. [62, F, 66-72+, Denizli-City centre]" "(...) Sufficient. If implemented with no hurries, and reinforcing the steps, students can move on to reading and writing in a short time. [63, M, 66-72+, City centre]" "(...) The remaining time is sufficient for teaching basal reading and writing. The teacher should conduct the lessons without any hurries and calmly. [65, K, 66-72+, City centre]"

As revealed in the analyses, 17 teachers thought that the remaining time after the 12-week adaptation process was sufficient for teaching basal reading and writing. According to the teachers, the activities done in the 12-week adaptation process would facilitate the basal reading and writing process. These activities can prepare students to basal reading and writing. After sounds are taught to students following these activities, they can show a rapid progress in reading and writing.

The second code of the fourth theme was "the remaining time not being sufficient". This code consisted of two sub-coded which were "problems experienced by 60- to 66-month-old students and reinforcement of basal reading and writing". Some of the quotations related to the sub-codes are as follows:

Problems Experienced by 60- to 66-month-old Students:“(…) Following the 12-week preparation process, we are supposed to teach the sound 'e' and 'a' in the first week, 'l' and 't' in the second week, and 'i', 'o' and 'n' in the third week. We need to import foreign children to learn those sound in such a short time. [5, F, 66-72, City centre]” “For 60-66 months old children, it's not enough. Because we can't teach even a letter in a week. [21, F, 60-72, City centre]” “(…) Insufficient, we would need to speed up our plan and the younger students would be negatively affected. [23, M, 66-72, District]”

Reinforcement of basal reading and writing: “(…) “In the previous years, the time was enough to reinforce their writing. But now, for reinforcement, we may have a problem due to the summer break. [14, F, 60-72, District]” “(…) We used to have enough time left. Now, as soon as the children starts reading and writing, we will have the holiday and they will forget what they know. [10, F, 60-72, District]” “(…) It's enough for reading and writing, but not for reading and interpreting narratives. [19, M, 60-72, City centre]” “(…) The remaining time would be enough for teaching basal reading and writing. However, it wouldn't for using the Turkish coursebook. [33, M, 60-66 and 66-72, City centre]” “(…) It could be sufficient, but children may not acquire some concepts. 2nd grade would be like a part of 1st grade. [48, F, 60-66, City centre]” “(…) The remaining time could be enough for reading and writing, but reading comprehension and following instructions don't develop much. [51, F, 60-72+, City centre]” “(…) The time remaining after the 12-week is not enough. There would still be students who may not progress to reading and writing at the end of 1st grade. [26, F, 66-72, District]” “(…) How can reading rate develop in 1.5 months after the process that finishes in April? Students' reading rate would drop in the summer break. They would have difficulty in the 2nd grade. [30, M, 66-72, City centre]”

47 teachers who participated in the study had some concerns about properly conducting the teaching of reading and writing in the time remaining after the 12-week adaptation and preparation process. While the frequency of the sub-code "problems experienced by 60- to 66-month-old students" was 28 times, the sub-code "reinforcement of basal reading and writing" occurred 26 times. The teachers stated that reading and writing could only be taught in the remaining period, and emphasized that problems could be experienced regarding the reinforcement of students' learning. They thought the time remaining after the adaptation and preparation process may not be sufficient to develop students' reading comprehension and interpretation skills. The teachers worried that the students' reading and writing skills would get worse during the summer holiday due to lack of sufficient reinforcement activities. Some of the teachers thought that all the letters would not be taught in the remaining period for teaching basal reading and writing. In addition, they stated that younger students could have difficulty in learning basal reading and writing in the remaining time because they have to learn two or more sounds a week. Considering that students have difficulty in learning some sound even in a week, they would have trouble when they have to learn two or three sounds a week. Trying to cover too many activities and various coursebooks was stated to be another factor that would make the process harder for students.

Discussion, Result and Suggestions

The data obtained from the teachers' views showed that most of the teachers implemented the 12-week adaptation and preparation process due to reasons such as legal obligation, students' need for this process and believing that this process would be beneficial. 15 of the teachers stated that they did not implement the 12-week adaptation and preparation process because they found the content simple and said that particularly students who received preschool education got bored. These results are consistent with previous studies. Erkuş, Çaylı and Babayiğit (2013) revealed similar results related to the length of the adaptation process. According to the results of this study, the students who attended preschool got bored during adaptation and preparation activities. In Demir and Ersöz's study (2013), the teachers regarded the three-month adaptation program as too long, and thought that students from different age groups being taught in the same class would cause problems in many aspects.

With respect to the teachers' views on the seminars introducing the 4+4+4 education system, they did not find the seminar practices sufficient. The seminar content not providing information towards practice, and sufficiency and functionality of the information were criticized by the teachers. At the same time, the participants stated that there were problems regarding the planning and the presentation of the seminars. Due to reasons such as not including practice activities towards learning about the 12-week adaptation process, not meeting the teachers' needs related to the 4+4+4 model, focusing on the same issues, and not having the necessary technological equipment for distance education, the effectiveness of the seminars was low.

The teachers considered two different age groups being taught in the same classes beneficial in that older students can set examples for younger ones. Apart from setting examples, the teachers had concerns regarding the two different age groups being taught in the same class. It can be argued that the teachers provided negative views on this issue. They stated that the physical, cognitive and affective development of the students in the lower age group was behind that of those in the higher age group, and thus, the younger students had difficulty in the teaching process. It was also emphasized that the younger students experiencing the feeling of failure negatively affected their psychology. The teachers thought that lowering the school starting age to five was not right. Besides, according to them, the two different age groups being taught in the same class was objectionable in terms of the social development of the lower age group. This result overlaps with the previous research on this issue. Aykaç, Kabaran, Atar and Bilgin (2014) stated that starting school at early ages caused various problems in issues such as adaptation, readiness, academic achievement and discipline. In his study in Uşak province, Başar (2013) observed 26 1st grade elementary teachers and had interviews with them based on the interview form he developed. According to the results, 60- to 66-month-old students had problems in carrying out their self-care skills and adapting to school at the beginning of the school year. However, they overcame these problems towards the end of the year. The results revealed are consistent with the previous studies (Tantekin Erden & Altun, 2014; Dereli, 2012).

Another result obtained in this study was that most of the teachers participated in the study thought the time remaining after the 12-week adaptation and preparation process was not sufficient for teaching basal reading and writing. The teachers also stated that even after students learned how to read and write, there might be other problems that would arise. For example, they had concerns such as not being able to properly reinforce basal reading and writing in the remaining time, not covering the coursebooks, basal reading and writing education being extended to 2nd grade, and having the summer break just after they start basal reading and writing activities. In particular, negative thoughts such as having to teach the sounds in the remaining time, the concern that basal reading and writing may not be adequately reinforced, and not being able to develop reading comprehension skills were provided as reasons for allocating less time to the 12-week adaptation and preparation process and starting to teach basal reading and writing by the teachers.

Based on the results of this study, various suggestions are offered. The 12-week adaptation and preparation process should be organized in a way which includes different activities considering students' developmental characteristics and the features of the school environment, and provides a flexible planning opportunity. The seminars prepared to train teachers should be held in way that meets teachers' expectations. In this regard, the Ministry should organize training programs involving mutual interaction for teachers. In accordance with the seminar topic, practice sessions in which teachers can take part should be held. Considering that students aged 60- to 72-month-old and over being taught in the same class may cause various difficulties, students in the 60- to 66-month-old age group and the 66- to 72+-month-old age groups should be given the opportunity to be taught in different classes. The concerns related to not being able to reinforce basal reading and writing although the time remaining after the 12-week process should be considered, and more time could be allocated to the reinforcement of basal reading and writing by shortening the 12-week process. The preschool education in Turkey providing only a limited preparation for reading and writing, and the schooling rate at this level being low can be regarded as determinant factors in deciding on the school starting age. The decision that lowered the school starting age to the end of age five should be reviewed considering the realities of Turkey. The data in this study were gathered from a sample in Denizli province. More teacher views on the 12-week adaptation and preparation process can be included by examining larger samples. New regulations can be done in elementary school programs as well as in preschool programs by taking into account the results obtained from studies focusing on students who start school at the end of age five and teachers' views. In addition, it would be useful to examine the applications in developed and developing countries related to the school starting age and the preparation practices for basal reading and writing.

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