Research Article

Determining the Difficulties Children with Special Needs Experience during the Transition to Primary School[*]

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Abstract

This study purposes to define the difficulties children with special needs experience during the transition from preschool education to primary school education based on teacher opinion using the mixed-methods design. The population for the quantitative data collection method in the study includes classroom teachers from public primary schools in Ankara. The research group consists of 209 classroom teachers from various primary schools for the quantitative stage. The participants in the qualitative research are 43 first-grade classroom teachers who work in public schools with inclusion practices. In order to collect data for the study, the Determining Difficulties in the Transition to Primary School (DDTPS) measurement tool and focus-group interview methods were used. The measurement tool was developed by the researcher. Results show that in teachers' opinions, no significant difference is determined according to the variables of teachers' gender, education level, or special education training. According to the qualitative research findings, six main categories have been prepared: supportive infrastructure, continuity and system, communication and relationships, transition preparedness, the child's preparedness, and the family's preparedness.

Keywords

Transition • Children with special needs • Preschool teachers • Primary school teachers • Starting school

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Transition is defined as the process that represents an important move from infancy to adulthood, or as a transition from one environment to another (Rous, Myers, & Striclin, 2007). Hutinger (1981) defined transition as a placement that depends on planned methods and applications for adaptation from one program to another (as cited in Rule, Fiechtl, & Innocenti, 1990). In another definition, Fabian (2007) stated that transition does not have a unique definition but generally refers to the transition process between education stages, whereas Coleman (1993) defined transition as a systematic process with a special aim that allows children with special needs or who are in a risk group to move between programs (as cited in Seo & Kang, 2001). The terms sending program and receiving program are frequently seen in transition definitions and processes. In the literature, the transition to kindergarten/primary school is referred to as the receiving program and leaving preschool is regarded as the sending program (Wolery, 1999).

Transition has two meanings in the literature. In the first classification, Kagan (1992) defines vertical and horizontal transitions. Vertical transition is the consecutive transition of children and their parents from one system to another (e.g., from hospital to early-childhood intervention program, to special therapy programs, or to specialist preschools). Horizontal transition is the simultaneous participation of the child and their parents in activities outside the home after school under the control of other people (e.g., participating in special training) (Rosenkoetter, Hains, & Fowler, 1999; Rosenkoetter, Whaley, Hains, & Pierce, 2001).

Shotts, Rosenkoetter, Streufert, and Rosenkoetter (1994) defined early transition points within the context of vertical transition as the transition from hospital to an early intervention program, from the early intervention program to a preschool program, and from the preschool program to kindergarten/primary school education. Wolery (1999), who wrote the second classification, defined three types of transition classes. First are transitions that are defined as sending and receiving programs. These transitions include transitioning from hospital to home or to early intervention programs, from early intervention program to preschool education, and from preschool education to kindergarten/primary school. The transition services here include preparing the parent and child, supporting them, and maintaining communication after the transition. Second is the daily transition conducted for therapy or care services outside the home. The variety of daily transition actions is explained with an example wherein a child with special needs attends physical rehabilitation twice a week and also needs to participate in mother-child training programs at certain times of the day. During the education period, the transition to a general education class, special education class, and domain class (science, math, etc.) can define daily transitions. Third are in-class transitions that are conducted in the same environment. These include the transition of a child from one activity corner to another, or from one playground to another (Wolery, 1999).

While the transition from hospital to home is the first step for at-risk children and children with disabilities, the transition from a preschool program to kindergarten/ primary school is defined as a basic lifestyle change for children. School-life transitions include changes in role, identity, and expectations beyond their symbolic meanings; new charges are undertaken by the child and parents so these changes not only influence the child but also the parents, and this notion includes every individual undergoing this transition (Dockett & Perry, 2007a; Quintero & McIntyre, 2011). A smooth and successful transition process leads to positive long-term results in a child's development, and the child may adapt quickly to school. If the transition process is difficult and problematic, the child's adaptation to school is disrupted, which influences the education process of a child with special needs and insufficient opportunities in academic and social fields (Stormont, Beckner, Mitchell, & Richter, 2005; Yeboah, 2002).

The importance of the transition to school for at-risk children has been identified as a critical component of long-term success (Entwistle & Alexander, 1998). Ramey and Ramey (1998) stated that transition experiences for children that are as smooth as possible contribute to their future school life, development, and achievements. The transition to school has been perceived as a developmental process; early childhood education and primary school education are different educational phases. During this period, children face changes in their academic and social environments. Their peer groups, families, teachers, schools, and community are all involved in this transition process and interact with one another (Dockett & Perry, 2003; Ramey & Ramey, 1998; Yeboah, 2002). Children with special needs, their families, their teachers, and school personnel need preparedness and support for a successful transition to school (McIntyre & Wildenger, 2011).

Ramey and Ramey (1998) mentioned that at-risk children and children with disabilities need additional support to improve their basic academic achievement and social competence in their new setting. Improvements in these skills can be vital for their future success in school. Careful planning is essential to minimize the transition effects on these children. Not only do academic and social skills influence a successful adaptation to school, so do the factors of emotional and behavioral competences of the child, family, teacher, and community. Because of these factors, children with developmental delays or disabilities may require additional support to facilitate a successful entry to primary school (McIntyre, Blacher, & Baker, 2006; McIntyre & Wildenger, 2011; Ramey & Ramey, 1998; Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000). If interactions among these factors encourage collaboration, coordination, and continuity in meeting children's developmental and educational needs, children will demonstrate success in social and academic competence; preparedness for school is connected to a successful transition (Pianta & Kraft-Sayre, 1999; Ramey & Ramey, 1998; Yeboah, 2002).

Margetts (1999) emphasized that a child's individual experiences and developmental differences should be taken into consideration in transitioning to school, and beginning school should be evaluated as a natural process that develops itself. Schools with inclusion capabilities explain that the transition can be more stressful for children, parents, and consultants because these schools' expectations for children and their parents are greater and the transition process includes various changes (Chadwick & Kemp, 2002; Fowler, Schwartz, & Atwater, 1991; Hains, Fowler, & Chandler, 1987; Rosenkoetter et al., 1994; Rosenkoetter, Hains, & Dogaru, 2007). Hains et al. (1987) stated the factors influencing the transition to success to be not only related to the child, but also to the parents, the quality of the sending and receiving program, specialist and teacher expectations, specialist and teacher behaviors, and social elements.

Chadwick and Kemp (2002) defined the factors influencing the transition process of children with special needs to a general education environment to be intrinsic and extrinsic. Extrinsic factors are the school being moved to, teacher approaches toward the inclusion program, parental concerns, support services, and cooperation related to an effective transition process. Intrinsic factors are academic preparedness, social skills, and the satisfaction expected from the new education program pertaining to each child. Hanson (1999) stated that the factors influencing the transition process are the subjects of the receiving and sending programs and policies between two programs, as well as the preparations conducted by the receiving/sending programs and parents, the information exchanged, parental support, the child's preparedness, and staff training. When children start kindergarten or primary school, they encounter new practices and situations. Fabian (2002) classified the discontinuity experienced during home–school and school–school transitions in three ways: (a) physical discontinuities (size of the building/class, residence, classroom size, etc.); (b) social discontinuities (identity changes, the children and adults they are in contact with, etc.); and (c) philosophical discontinuities (learning and training approaches, areas, etc. as cited in Dockette & Perry, 2007b).

Pianta (2004) defined four important areas in kindergarten/primary school transitions: (a) an increase in academic expectations; (b) differences between the school environment and other school/home experiences; (c) less parental participation; (d) children not spending enough time on their personal care (as cited in Dockette & Perry, 2007b). Huttinger (1981) defined four factors that influence the transition in terms of the time assigned for the activities of: (a) teacher willingness to study with children who have special needs, (b) administrative participation, (c) teacher training, and (d) parental participation.

Transitions are considered to be important and critical times both for children with special needs and their parents (Ramey & Ramey, 1998; Rosenkoetter et al., 1994);

transitioning had also been considered as an important factor in previous education environments (Conn-Powers, Ross-Allen, & Holburn, 1990) and early intervention studies (Rosenkoetter et al., 1994; Salisbury & Vincent, 1990). What is experienced in the transition process is commonly agreed to influence the development, learning, consistency, and performance of the child (Ramey & Ramey, 1998). Therefore, the transition process is important for every child (Yeboah, 2002). Chadwick and Kemp (2002) stated that transitioning from one program to another program with inclusion practices is obligatory, and hence the first and most important steps of inclusion are the factors of transition. The most important criterion of inclusion is a successful transition, and thus exists the need to conduct basic domain transition studies for children with special needs (Chadwick & Kemp, 2002; Kemp, 2003).

When analyzing studies in Turkey on the transition period, limited research is found. Some of these are as follows: *Transition Plans, Changing Roles and Expectations*, a conference paper by Akçamete (1999); *Arranging Personalized Transition Plans for Mentally Disabled Individuals in the Process of Transitioning from School to Work Life* also a conference paper by Gürsel and Ergenekon (2000); *Preparing a Transition Plan for Disabled Teenagers' Access to Social Life*, by Bayhan San and Şipal (2003); two review articles, one by Ergin and Bakkaloğlu (2015) about transition strategies in preschool inclusion classes and the other by Kargın, Akçamete, and Baydık (2001) on detecting the needs of families with preschool children; an analysis by Gürsel, Ergenekon, and Batu (2007) of the opinions of teachers and administrators in a primary and professional school regarding actions that provide children experiencing developmental delay with professional skills in the transition period from school to work life; a study by Bakkaloğlu (2008) on a scale for evaluating the transition skills of preschool children between three and six years old who experience developmental delay; one by Çiftci, Tekinaslan, and Bircan (2009) defining the needs of families with disabled children during their transition to nursery school; and five articles by Bakkaloğlu (2013) about the lives of parents with disabled children during their transition from early intervention to preschool and the services given by related institutions and its problems. In addition to these studies is an article from Bakkaloğlu (2004) on defining the effects of activity-based intervention programs on transition skills, two doctoral theses by Odluyurt (2007) on the effects of teaching with simultaneous clues hidden in the activities for teaching preparedness skills in first and second primary-inclusion classes, and a master's thesis by Altın (2014) analyzing the lives of mothers who have children with special needs during the transition from preschool to primary school.

While the number of studies on transitioning has recently increased in Turkey, no findings exist in the literature for studies on transitioning from early childhood to primary school. The absence of studies focusing on the difficulties of this transition

for children with special needs also leads to a lack of information on this period. Therefore, this study will present a general profile of the positive and negative cases that exist during this process and will determine the existing situation regarding the transition period to primary school in Turkey. The study will help establish the basic structure for transition policies and programs/activities to be carried out by determining the factors affecting the transition to primary school for students with special needs in Turkey. This study will provide preschool teachers with information about the difficulties encountered during the transition and help them determine which transition skills are appropriate for their students; furthermore, they will be able to guide the children with cooperation and support during the period between preschool and primary school concerning relevant areas.

The transition to preschool education has special importance as it is the first time that children are separated from their parents, whereas primary school education is another important step because it is the child's first formal academic education (Dockett & Perry, 2007a; Yeboah, 2002). Both the school and preschool processes are new environments for a child, and these social environments naturally include various and new situations that a child needs to adapt to. The formation of a transition plan is important for it to be successful, and unsuccessful transition processes can negatively influence the entire future of a child's school life (Chadwick & Kemp, 2002; Entwistle & Alexender, 1998; Hains et al., 1987). In order to affect a positive and efficient transition process, the individual needs, skills, and interests of each child should be taken into consideration, and parents, teachers, schools, and social factors should be considered during this process. In order to increase the efficiency of the education programs provided for individuals with special needs, one needs to seek solutions by determining the current problems and difficulties while transitioning from one program to another. Especially for transitions, when successful inclusion is considered as the first step and criterion, the transition process needs to be defined and any experienced difficulties eliminated. In light of this concern, this study aims to define the difficulties experienced by children with special needs during the transition from preschool education to primary school education based on teacher opinions.

Method

The general aim of the study is to define the difficulties that children with special needs experience during the transition from preschool education to primary school education based on teacher opinions. Within the context of this aim, an explanatory mixed-method design has been used. In order to define the difficulties children experience, quantitative data has first been obtained and a qualitative data collection method used to explain the details of the quantitative findings in order to determine the different statuses of the resulting factors (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007).

Study Group

The sample group of the study includes classroom teachers from formal primary schools in Turkey's province of Ankara. In order to form a sample, the schools of the population are divided into three groups through stratification sampling using the school list provided by the Ministry of National Education's (Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı [MEB]) Basic Education Directory. The schools in each group are defined based on whether or not they have an inclusion program and according to the highest number of inclusion students. Accordingly, 20 primary schools from each of the counties of Çankaya, Keçiören, and Mamak (60 schools in all) were selected at random. In total, 36 primary schools (12 from each defined county) voluntarily participated in the research. The research group consists of 209 (137 female and 72 male) classroom teachers from various primary schools associated with MEB: 59 (26.7%) from Çankaya, 75 (33.9%) from Keçiören, and 75 (33.9%) from Mamak. Teachers' classroom experience has been categorized as follows: 1–12 years ($n = 62$, 30.09%), 13–22 years ($n = 67$, 32.52%), 23-32 years ($n = 56$, 28.18%), and 33-42 years ($n = 21$, 10.19%). It was determined that 147 (71.01%) teachers have undergraduate degrees while 60 (28.99%) teachers are graduates of a two-year degree program. Although 92 (45.77%) have special education training, 109 (54.23%) have no special education training. One-hundred-eleven teachers (%53.9) have previously worked with children who have special needs. According to the data obtained from the teachers, 28 (13.39%) children are determined to have an intellectual disability, 10 (4.78%) are classified with a learning disability, seven (3.34%) are hearing impaired, six (2.87%) have attention deficit disorder, eight (3.8%) are physically handicapped/ have a chronic disease, five (2.38%) have a speech disorder, four (1.90%) have autism, and two (0.95%) are visually impaired. Seventy teachers in the study have students with special needs.

Typical sampling, a directed sampling method, has been used in the qualitative part of the research. Typical sampling aims to get an idea about a defined field by studying average situations; it does not aim to make generalizations by reaching numbers of people (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2008). In addition, the aim of typical sampling selection in a research is to understand a field by studying average states rather than generalizing obtained results. The participants of the research are 43 first-grade classroom teachers (20 male and 23 female) who work in public schools with inclusion practices. Eight focus-group sessions that included at least four participants in each have been held: three sessions with four teachers, two sessions with five teachers, two sessions with six teachers, and one session with nine teachers. Nineteen (44%) teachers in the qualitative research group stated having worked for 13–22 years; 12 (28%) for 23–32 years; 9 (21%) for 1–12 years, and 3 (7%) for 33–42 years. Ten (23%) teachers graduated from a two-year program and 33 (77%) graduated with an undergraduate degree. When teachers' students are examined according to the type

of disability, 12 were determined to be intellectually disabled students, 10 to have attention-deficit/hyperactive disorder, four with speech problems, four with physical handicaps, one with a behavior problem, one with a reading/writing problem, and one with a learning disability.

Data Collection Tool

In order to collect data for the study, the Determining the Difficulties in Transitioning to Primary School (DDTPS) measurement tool and focus group interview method were used.

Determining criteria for the DDTPS. The measurement tool was developed by the researcher because no measurement tool related to the primary-school transition process could be found for children with special needs. The measurement tool aims to determine the opinions of teachers in the research group on the difficulties regarding the transition to primary school and consists of a 7-point Likert scale for the teachers to complete. In the process of developing the tool, the literature was first scanned, and related research and theoretical studies were used. A comparative analysis of both native and foreign literature on transition was performed. The main literature considered in this framework is as follows: Bakkaloğlu (2004); Chadwick and Kemp (2000a); Chadwick and Kemp (2002); Daley, Munk, and Carlson (2011); Entwistle and Alexander (1998); Fowler et al. (1991); Rimm-Kaufman, Pianta, and Cox (2000); Rimm-Kaufman and Pianta (2000); Rous, Hallam, McCormick, and Cox (2010); Stormont et al. (2005). After the literature review, the area teachers were consulted to gather detailed information. In total, 20 teachers working with first-grade students were interviewed with the help of a semi-structured interview form. The form is comprised of seven open-ended questions for teachers about the difficulties that children face in their academic, social, and other development areas while starting first grade. Teachers' answers were analyzed, cases frequently defined as important were categorized, and thus question types for the measurement tool were developed. Following the literature review and interview study, a question pool of 98 items was obtained. To check the coherence of the scope of the measurement tool, eight experts working in private education and two experts studying measurement and evaluation (10 experts in total) were consulted. They were asked to indicate if the tool's items fairly represent the scope of difficulties experienced by students with special needs during the transition period.

An expert evaluation form with both open- and closed-ended questions was used for analyzing the experts' views. The experts were asked to evaluate the tool's items according to five points (1 = *not suitable at all*, 5 = *very suitable*) and to share their suggestions. The experts also added their corrections, opinions, and suggestions in the Explain Column for the ones they marked as "not suitable at all" and "partly suitable."

Afterwards, the average, standard deviation, and variation coefficients for the scores of each item on the tool as given by the experts were calculated. It was decided to keep items whose: average is greater than 4.25, standard deviation is less than 1.00, and variation coefficient is less than 25% (Büyüköztürk, 2004; Büyüköztürk, Akgün, Özkahveci, & Demirel, 2004). The items were rechecked according to the analysis results, and 104 items were finally created. These studies continued with Turkish language experts' observation of the items. Thus the scale became appropriate for testing with 30 volunteer-participant teachers. Exchanging ideas with teachers helped the measurement tool arrive at its latest form and be ready for application. The scale is scored from 1 = *not complicated* to 7 = *definitely complicated* with 4 = *no idea*. The column, Order of Importance, is the last column of the chart and contains the items of the scale. The interviewees were asked to answer the question, "In your opinion, which are the five most important items of difficulty for a disabled student starting first grade in each dimension?" by giving a score of 1 to 5 with 1 indicating the greatest importance.

The structural validity of the criterion was made using exploratory factor analysis. In order to examine the structural validity of the DDTPS's criterion and factor structure, the data were subjected to principal components factor analysis using the varimax axis-rotation method, a vertical rotation technique. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) and Bartlett tests were performed to determine the scale's appropriateness for factor analysis. In this context, the acceptable limit of the KMO test result should be .50 or higher, and the Bartlett sphericity test should be statistically relevant (Jeong, 2004). At the end of this part of the study, the result for the KMO test was found to be 0.86 and for the Bartlett sphericity test to be relevant ($p < .01$); these results confirm that the scale is applicable for factor analysis (Jeong, 2004).The analysis began with 104 items. In the first analysis, two dominant factors were detected whose self-values and variances were greater than the others. Analyzing self-values of the factors related to the scale found one to be 33.74 and the other to be 10.78. In addition, self-values for these two are higher than the rest. This indicates the scale to consist of two factors (Büyüköztürk, 2004). Thus it was limited to the two factors and the analysis was repeated using the varimax rotation technique with respect to the main components. After this operation, four items in the analysis were excluded and the factor analysis repeated. According to the results of the expanded factor analysis, the first factor, characteristics pertaining to the transitioning child, consists of 42 items and the factor-loading values for these items vary from .41 to .75 and correspond to 19.12% of the total variance. The second factor, characteristics related to the transitioning child's environment, includes 58 items. The factor loading values for these items vary from .34 to .79 and correspond to 23.98% of the total variance. Together, the two factors correspond to 42.10% of the total variance.

In this scale, the second factor is explained under four headings. To determine if the headings represent a factor or not, expanded factor analysis was performed again for the second factor. A total of 58 items that form the second factor were analyzed. The result of the KMO test was found to be .92, while the Bartlett sphericity test was found relevant ($p < .01$), proving that factor analysis can be done for the scale (Jeong, 2004). After varimax rotation analysis, items with factor values less than .30 and a difference of loading values greater than 0.10 and items related to multiple sections were excluded from the scale (Büyüköztürk, 2004). Factor analysis was performed on the remaining 42 items. The results of this analysis show that the 42 items are assembled under four factors, all of which possess high loading values (Büyüköztürk, 2004). According to the expanded factor analysis, the first factor (teacher) consists of 11 items. Factor loading values for its items vary from .63 to 0.83 and correspond to 17.65% of the total variance. The second factor (school) consists of 16 items. Factor loading values for its items vary from .54 to .76 and correspond to 17.18% of the total variance. The third factor (family) consists of 11 items. Factor loading values for its items vary from .56 to .70 and correspond to 13.21% of the total variance. Finally, the fourth factor (classroom) consists of eight items. Factor loading values for its items vary from .57 to .82 and correspond to 10.61% of the total variance. All together, these four factors correspond to 58.65% of the total variance.

The DDTPS measurement tool has been determined to consist of five factors and 84 items. This measurement tool has a modular structure where the first factor (characteristics pertaining to the transitioning child) consists of one factor and 42 items, and the second factor (characteristics related to the transitioning child's environment) consists of four factors and 42 items. These dimensions can be used and graded separately (Büyüköztürk, 2004). The reliability study for the criterion was determined using Cronbach's alpha of internal consistency. The Cronbach alpha coefficient for the first factor related to the column of characteristics related to the transitioning child's environment is calculated as .95; its second factor's Cronbach alpha coefficient = .93; its third factor, .91; and, finally, the forth factor, .89. Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the dimension of characteristics related to the transitioning child's environment for both the general and overall dimensions of the criteria is .97, and Cronbach's alpha for the dimension of characteristics pertaining to the transitioning child is .97 (Büyüköztürk, 2004).

Focus group interview questions form. In the qualitative data collection stage of the research information form, a participation consent form, focus group interview questions, an assessment form, and checklist for the focus group interview process were prepared. The information form includes questions related to demographical information for the teachers in the study group prior to the group interview. The participation consent form was prepared in order to explain to the teachers the aim

and method of the research in order to determine who would voluntarily participate in the research and to get permission from them for audio-video recording the interview. The Focus Group Interview Questions Form was established based on the literature (Forest, Horner, Lewis-Palmer, & Todd, 2004; Jewett et al., 1998; Kemp, 2003; Rous, Hallam, Harbin, McCormick, & Jung, 2007; Rous, Myers et al., 2007), and the findings obtained in the qualitative section of the research relate to the interview questions. Next, four experts working in the fields of early childhood and special education and two experts specialized in qualitative research examined and evaluated the questions on the interview form in terms of whether or not the form provides detailed information, covers the subject, has clear questions, is comprehensible, and can obtain the required information. After the pilot study, one interview question was removed. At the end of these studies, the focus-group interview process and interview questions were rearranged. Participants were asked 14 questions as prepared by the researcher, and their opinions on the related subject were noted in the conducted interviews. In addition, the teachers were asked to complete the assessment form, which consists of four structured and one open-ended question, to evaluate the focus-group management and process in order to get feedback for the focus-group process of the research.

Data Collection

In the first stage of the research, the researcher applied the DDTPS in teachers' extracurricular time in a place that was selected by and available to the teachers with an explanation related to the scale after the required authorizations had been received from the related institutions. The teachers preferred a classroom environment or staff room. The criteria were applied within 15–20 minutes. For the focus groups interviews (the second stage of the research), principals were contacted with the necessary permission, certain information related to the research was given to the principals, and the interview environment was determined. The chronological system of the focus group sessions (A = first session, B = second session, etc.) and code names (A1, B6, etc.) were defined according to number of participants in each session. All focus group sessions were determined to take 58 minutes. Written and signed consent documents were received from each participant in order to conduct the research. Schools, principals' rooms, libraries, and meeting rooms were selected for the focus group interviews. The session seating plan was arranged in a U-shape. The focus-group interview process checklist, which was developed by the researchers to include 18 items, is for helping the researcher prevent problems and failures during the interview process. In addition, the researcher took notes during the interviews, which is important for a study.

Data Analysis

The following system determined whether the difficulties experienced by children with special needs during the transition to primary school significantly differ according to teacher characteristics: the first sub-dimension, characteristics pertaining to transitioning children, was examined using the parametrical test statistics (*t*-test for independent sampling); the second sub-dimension, characteristics related to the transitioning child's environment, was examined using the non-parametrical test statistics (Mann-Whitney U test). The study's degree of significance was acceptable at .05. The items of difficulty regarding transitioning to primary school are ordered according to their total weighted value (*TWV*), which was determined by the respondent groups' frequency and order of nomination.

The interview data analysis was conducted with induction analysis. As such, the voice and video recordings of each interview group were encoded after each interview and arranged as data sets. When this process was conducted, everything in the recordings was transcribed into a system of deliberate interviewee dialogues. At the end of this process, a data set was formed consisting of 3,682 lines and 101 pages. To realize a reliability study before the data analysis, two interviews were selected randomly from the data set and checked by an expert. Then data were separately encoded by defining line numbers. In the coding process, general coding was determined without defining any themes. Similar data sections from different parts of the interview but with similar meanings were encoded with the same codes and combined, then coded within the same themes. After the researcher's codes and themes and systems for determining whether adjacency and overage are present or not had been established, two experts studied the coding systematically. Then the study-related data that could create a significant component were combined and rearranged. In the research, direct quotations of the participants' opinions have been used and translated to English. In addition, as defined in the checklist for the focus-group interview process, a brief explanation of the participants' answers has been presented and they were asked to confirm its accuracy. In this way, confirmation of the participants' opinions was obtained.

Findings

Evaluating the Difficulties Children with Special Needs Experience during the Transition to Primary School in Accordance with Teacher Characteristics

Teachers' opinions regarding the difficulties children with special needs experience during the primary school transition have been evaluated by examining the teachers' characteristics. The analysis related to teacher's characteristics, the characteristics pertaining to the transitioning children, and the characteristics of their environment have been examined by taking the sub-dimension scores into consideration. The

difficulties and *t*-test analysis results for whether significance exists according to teachers' characteristics such as gender, education level, and special education training are presented in Table 1.

Table 1
T-Test Results for Teacher Characteristics Pertaining to Children in the Transition Process

Variables	n	$\bar{x}$	S	sd	t
Gender					
Female	123	229.14	43.20	184	1.87
Male	63	216.33	45.66		
Education Level					
Associate degree	57	226.52	43.25	182	0.292
Bachelor's degree	127	224.47	44.42		
Training					
Special education	79	225.77	44.70	176	0.057
No special education	99	226.15	43.75		

As seen in Table 1, when evaluating participant teachers' opinions according to their characteristics (such as gender), female teachers' average ($\bar{x} = 229.14$) was higher than male teachers' average ($\bar{x} = 216.33$). As a result of the *t*-test conducted for the significance between the two groups' averages, no significant difference was found between them ($t_{(184)} = 1.87$, $p > .05$). When examining variables related to teachers' education level, no statistically significant difference was observed in their opinions on the difficulties children with special needs experience during the primary school transition ($t_{(182)} = 0.292$, $p > .05$). When examining the variable of special education training, the average for teachers with special education training was $\bar{x} = 225.77$, whereas the average for teachers with no special education training was ($\bar{x} = 226.15$). As a result of the analysis, a significant difference was determined between these two groups ($t_{(176)} = 0.57$, $p > .05$).

The system for determining whether the difficulties experienced in the dimension of environmental characteristics of the transitioning child provide a significant difference according to teachers' characteristics is presented in Table 2, which includes the Mann-Whitney U test results.

Table 2
Mann-Whitney U Test Results for Teacher Characteristics Related to the Environment of the Transitioning Child

Variables	n	Mean Rank	Mean Sum	U
Gender				
Female	123	96.88	11,916.50	3,458.500
Male	63	86.90	5,474.50	
Education level				
Associate degree	57	89.93	5,126	3,473.000
Bachelor's degree	127	93.65	1,1894	
Training				
Special education	79	92.97	7,344.50	3,636.500
No special education	99	86.73	8,586.50	

In the dimension of the transitioning child's environmental characteristics, participant teachers' opinions display no significant difference based on gender ($U = 3458$, $p > .05$). When examining teachers' education levels, participant teachers' opinions on aspects related to transitioning children's environmental characteristics display no significant difference ($U = 3473$, $p > .05$). When examining teachers' opinions on whether having received special education training displays a significant difference, no significant difference is observed between the two groups ($U = 3636$, $p > .05$).

When analyzing the answers teachers gave, the most significant item of difficulty for the column of characteristics pertaining to the transitioning child is found to be *separating the child from family* (*TWV* = 38). This is followed by *not being independent in daily routines and acts* (such as going to the toilet, putting on clothes, drinking, etc.; *TWV* = 36), *not being able to introduce one's self* (*TWV* = 35), and *not controlling one's anger* (*TWV* = 32). In the column of characteristics related to the transitioning child's environment, the most significant item of difficulty is *lack of education materials supporting the learning process in the classroom* (*TWV* = 84). Other items teachers considered to be significant regarding transitioning are *classroom teacher's negative attitude toward disabled students* (such as anticipating failure from them, not wanting them in class; *TWV* = 71), *large class size* (*TWV* = 70), *teachers' lack of support for the disabled student in the class* (i.e., material, expert, and information; *TWV* = 62), *large number of disabled students in the class* (*TWV* = 60), *lack of elements supporting disabled students in the school* (i.e., specialized teachers, guidance counselors, etc.; *TWV* = 59), *family's ignorance regarding the child's education* (*TWV* = 54), and *teachers' lack of knowledge and skill in special education* (*TWV* = 45).

Findings Related to the Focus Group Interview Method

Six main categories have been prepared in accordance with the research findings: supportive infrastructure, continuity and system, communication and relationships, transition preparedness, child's preparedness, and family's preparedness. Table 3 lists the main and sub-categories related to the difficulties children with special needs experience during the primary school transition.

Table 3
The Main and Sub-Categories during the Transition to Primary School

Main Category	Sub-Category
Supportive Infrastructure	Information process Support Policy
Continuity and System	The differences between preschool education and the primary school setting The differences between special education institutions and primary schools
Communication and Relationships	Information process The communication with private special education institutions

Transition Preparedness	Teacher
	    Insufficient information related to special education
	    Time insufficiency
	    Teacher trainee program
	    In-service training
	    Teacher's attitude
	School
	    Physical infrastructure
	    Personal requirement
	Classroom
	    Peer acceptance
	    Physical structure

Child's Preparedness	Academic studies Leaving parent Adaptation Social skill Self-care
Parental Preparedness	Parents' acceptance of disability Educational level Spending qualified time with children Attitudes of other children's parent Attitudes of the parent Activity participation

Category 1: Supportive infrastructure. In accordance with the scope of the focus group interviews, classroom teachers stated having difficulty in the categories of information process, support, and policy with children with special needs in terms of the transition process.

Information process. Information process is presented as a sub-dimension of two main categories: supportive infrastructure and communication/relationships. Twenty-five participant teachers (A1, A2, A4, B1, B2, B3, B4, B6, C1, C2, C4, D2, D3, D4, E1, E2, E3, E5, F2, F5, G1, G3, G7, G8, H1) stated not having been previously informed about the transition of a child with special needs and that not until after they had started teaching the children had they determined through experience what the special need was. Three participant teachers (A1, A2, A4) stated that the preschool class had been aware of the child's status, but no manager had provided them with any official transfer.

The teachers consider counselors (A4, B2), the administration (H1), primary care physicians (E1), parents (E5, G1, G8), the teachers of the sending program, and the teachers of private special education centers (H3) to be important to the information process; one teacher emphasized the timing factor in this process.

> We should be informed three to four months in advance during these months (in May) about the students who will come next year to start first grade. (E2)

Teachers stated wanting to know the child's diagnosis (B2, B4); students' qualifications (B5, G7, G8); their physical, social, and self-care skills (D3, D4, E5, H1, H3, G1); their personal and psychological characteristics (D4, F3); their intelligence levels (D4, E3, G6); parental information (F4); and the result of general check-ups (E1, E2, E5, F2, F4, F5). In addition, one teacher (A2) stated that an orientation program between preschool and first grade is necessary:

> There should be an orientation program between these two grades. Information should be obtained from this program. Of course our first demand from is that children's guidance program should be completed in the preschool setting and the level of their learnability should be determined so we can determine what can be done with this student. We start from scratch once we recognize the situation, or because we are not notified if it is known. Then we direct the student to the Counseling and Research Center (CRC).

Support. Thirty-one participant teachers argued that the teacher and student should be supported in the transition process. Some also stated this support can be provided by special education teachers ($n = 19$), counselors ($n = 3$), or academics ($n = 1$).

> If a counselor is present, has the chance to observe, and guides me on what can be done with this child, I can be more efficient and teach more applicable things rather than having them paint or do cutouts. (H1)

> This work should really be conducted by experts. (G5)

Policy. Eight participant teachers (A2, A4, B1, B3, B4, B6, G3, G8) stated having difficulty making a detailed assessment of the primary school transition.

> We had great difficulty using CRC and its criteria. In other words the problematic part for us may be less problematic for them. Their criteria are completely different. (B4)

Teacher G3 stated that no teacher opinions had been taken for detailed assessments, adding:

> This child doesn't speak to me. He has no communication. He has no friend to talk to in class. He doesn't even talk with his older brother. We've been together for nearly a year. However, when the child goes to the counselor, he comes back for inclusion. He places two blocks, everything is alright. Counselors do not ask us our ideas. They could call us and ask our opinions. I write my opinion on this tiny paper and this paper only covers five sentences. I have to write small. Even though no one takes this into consideration, I must obey. I am the teacher who deals with the child. Counselors only see the child for half an hour and then decide. (G3)

> I have one student. 27 of my students can read and write, but one doesn't know how. The parents don't care. The student went to preschool for two years. I talked to their counselor

many times. The counselor asked me to fill out a form. I asked the student to count, and they could only count to 20. The curriculum objectives include counting two by two, three by three, and four by four. But there's no three-by-three counting in the curriculum. (B6)

In the research, six teachers (A2, A4, B1, B3, B4, G8) stated that counselor assessments are delivered late, and thus there is a problem between student and teacher.

Because we're meeting for the first time and don't know a problem is present, we start from scratch. We direct the student to the CRC. The diagnosis takes a while to come back from the counselor and so the semester ends. (A2)

They asked for an observation report, but it comes at the end of the year. A year passes in vain. The report hasn't come yet—is the child in the inclusion program or not? We don't know. The semester is about to finish. (B3)

Category 2: Continuity and system. The teachers evaluated the differences among preschool education institutions, private special education institutions, and primary schools in this category.

The difference between preschool education institution and primary school. Nine participant teachers (A2, A3, C5, D2, D4, E2, G2, G8, H3) stated that preschool education institutions and primary schools differ from each other in curriculum and class plan, and that children with special needs have difficulty transitioning because of these differences.

You don't have to give children academic information at these institutions. What do children do there? They run around constantly expending their energy. Of course preschool teachers realize the situation, but there is a gap at this point: There are free-play environments and toys. Children jump around, run back and forth. They spend their energy. However, we must teach reading and writing by getting them to sit still. We ask them to learn reading and writing at a certain time. So these kinds of children are likely to get stuck. (A3)

If the preschool teacher is hard-working, it is really efficient. But if the children spend their time watching cartoons, they don't want to go onto learning. They only want to play games and paint. (G8)

Teachers stated that students have difficulty in primary school because the preschool curriculum is play-oriented; the primary school curriculum is more academic with more rules for the children to obey. In addition, some teachers (A3, D2, D4, E2, G8) underlined the difficulties related to the differences in the two settings:

I wish there were benches they could sit on. I couldn't get them to sit for two months. They are used to sitting on the rug. I couldn't get them to sit on benches. I have great difficulty on this topic. (D2)

They have difficulty getting used to the class environment. Discipline is another topic. Discipline in preschool is more flexible, and first grade covers more disciplined applications. (D4)

The difference between special education institutions and primary schools. Teacher G3 mentioned the following regarding teacher and academic study in special education institutions where children with special needs go to for support, which clearly explains one difference between the two settings:

For instance I tried to teach cursive, but the primary school teachers had taught block letters. (G3)

Category 3: Communication and relationships. Under the main category of communication and relationships, the following sub-categories were determined: informative process and communication with private special education institutions. In the information process, defined in the supportive infrastructure category, teachers emphasized the necessity of inter-institutional information exchange.

Communications with private special-education institutions. Two teachers (H3, G3) stated in the interview process that non-existent communication between institutions is a problem, and students attend these institutions for a long time with no data transfer between these institutions.

For instance special education institutions don't establish any communication. They talk to the child for 40 minutes. Is it a kind of formality? Ultimately the required payment is made. So it must be like, "Teacher, we made these activities with Nazan this week, so can you please make them as well?" (H3)

I don't know what they did with the child for a year, and they also don't know what we've done. What have you done with this child and what do I do? (G3)

Teachers stated not knowing what kind of activities to do with children in private special-education institutions, also underlining that there should be a mutual information exchange for students' education.

Category 4: Transition preparedness. Difficulties related to the dimension of teachers', schools', and classrooms' preparedness were determined under the main category of transition preparedness.

Teacher. In accordance with the classroom teachers' opinions, information on special education, time, teacher-trainee programs, and in-service training all being insufficient and teachers' attitudes are considered the main factors for difficulties that children with special needs experience. Ten participant teachers (A2, A3, A4, B2, B4, B5, E5, G3, G5, H1) stated regarding their own experience as inadequate for working in the special education field. Therefore, they could not satisfy students' special needs.

We weren't trained in this field. So it's impossible to teach somebody what we weren't trained in. (G5)

Knowing something and applying something are completely different things. Yes, counselors help us as an information base, but when you enter the occupation, when you are alone with the students in class, that is when it's difficult to apply this information. Or the application doesn't resemble the book information. Reality is different and more difficult. (A3)

During the interview process, 10 teachers (A1, B3, B4, B5, D2, E3, F2, G2, G3, G5) complained about limited class time and not being able to allocate time for students with special needs because of the curriculum work they have to complete. As a result, the students did not transition successfully.

I couldn't afford any time in a 40-minute lesson. I am educating first-grade students this year and I have 24 students. I must teach them to read and write. Parents' and others' expectations are to get the students reading as early as possible. So I cannot allow any special time. I think the child's inclusion has been unsuccessful. (G3)

Five participant teachers (G5, E2, H1, H2, H3) referred to the teacher-trainee program with one teacher (G5) stating they had not been trained in special education; four teachers (E2, H1, H2, H3) stated receiving theoretical information but that it hadn't benefitted them. During the interview, six teachers (B1, B4, B6, C5, D2, D3) referred to in-service training activities but stated that the seminars were inefficient with regard to time and content and had not been given by field experts.

The weeks-long training is only superficial. I think they don't provide the students any benefit. (C5)

Those giving the seminars also are not experts. So they aren't given efficiently. (D2)

Twenty-eight participant teachers (A1, A2, A3, A4, B1, B2, B3, B4, B6, C2, C3, C5, C6, D2, E2, E5, F2, F3, F4, F5, G1, G2, G3, G4, G5, G7, G8, H2) thought the students with special needs should be educated in special classes in general education environments:

These students should be supported, educated by experts in special sub-classes of the school environment at specific times, and be combined with normal students at certain times. (A2)

School. Fourteen participant classroom teachers (A1, A2, A4, C1, C5, C6, D1, D2, D3, D4, E1, E5, H2, G8) stated the schools to be physically unsuitable for physically handicapped students.

If we have a student with a wheelchair, it is absolutely impossible to educate them in this school structure. They would need continuous help from a guardian. No elevator or suitable environment is present in this school. (C5)

> I also have another student in my class. The child uses a sit-down toilet at home. However, we have none in our school. When the student comes to school, he doesn't use our toilets. One day I was obliged to send the student home as it is close. In addition, the eighth grade students use the same toilets as first-grade students. This is abnormal. The sinks are at average height; however, the children's heights are closer to that of grade-school students. (D2)

In the interview findings, three teachers (A2, E1, G8) stated that their schools don't have enough social activities, the students are not successful academically, and the schools need to be arranged in a campus design.

> If the school doesn't meet the required qualifications, students are already negatively affected. For example, does the school have an auditorium? Are there any social activities just for entertainment? Is there a computer room in the school? Are there any gardens? There may be no perfect gymnasium but there can at least be a sports hall. In other words, the variety of these social activities renders the students more sociable. Not every student is successful academically. (E1)

Teacher A2 stated that the education programs were changed but the physical infrastructure of the education programs had not been, adding:

> Some schools are constructed as if no child would be there, as if we don't work with children but with adults. So we work in environments in which some changes were made on paper but not in reality. There are absolute deficiencies. In other words, some schools aren't suitable for these students. (A2)

> Physical environments should be organized. We have no playground even for 1stgraders. When our school was smaller, educational conditions were more suitable and had sandboxes and playgrounds. (A2)

As the school got larger, the special playgrounds and sandpits were removed. In addition, all of the participant teachers from Groups B and F referred to physical conditions. There are some positive physical conditions because the schools are new, but there's not enough equipment. Four participant teachers (E5, F3, F4, G7) stated there should be special education teachers, counselors, and medical professionals to support students with special needs.

> Having counselors is obligatory. (F4)

> We say that inclusion training should be done and teachers should prepare individualized educational plans (IEP). However we have no expert teacher to apply these plans in class or at school. So the teacher is always alone. The teachers try to apply the IEP alone. These teachers do not have enough training in this field so they need support. (E5)

Classroom. Eight classroom teachers (B1, B4, C1, D2, F2, F3, F4, G2) stated that the most important difficulty experienced by students with special needs with regard to classroom characteristics is not being accepted by their classmates.

The most important problem I encounter is that these students are marginalized by the others. This situation is the most common and is discouraging. The other students, thinking them to be inadequate, even exclude them from games. The others don't want to include these students in their games. (F2)

None of my students want to sit with that child. (B1)

Five teachers (B4, F1, F2, F4, G8) emphasized overcrowding and the difficulty of teaching in these classrooms:

Having a crowded classroom is more difficult. (G8)

The number of students is more important than classroom size. If there are more than 20 students, this negatively influences the quality of studying and participation. (F4)

Category 5: Child preparedness. Five participant teachers (A2, B2, B4, D2, D4) stated the difficulties of children with special needs to vary with the type of disability and include adapting, communicating, their academic studies, social and self-care skills, and struggling with leaving parents.

Some teachers (A3, B5, D2, E5, G8) stated that children with special needs have particular difficulty adapting when starting primary school.

Students with physically handicaps, intellectual disabilities, or behavioral problems have difficulty adapting to class. They are shocked when coming to school because they've always been with their parents playing games. Rules are difficult for all children, especially for students with special needs. They have difficulty obeying the rules. Normally developing students get used to school in a month. (E5)

My student can't adapt. I have one who came to my class in the 2nd semester. As she started late, she had great difficulty adapting. She sits with Melike, sometimes talking to her, but it's really rare. (G8)

Other teachers (A4, A2, B4, B5, C1, C2, C4, E2, G2, G8) stated that students with special needs have difficulty following class rules and adapting to school rules.

One child suffers from a lack of social skills, also disturbing the other students by talking because the subjects we teach don't hold his attention. For this reason I give him tasks like painting or other activities. At this point a problem arises because my other students say, "He's doing something different, I don't want to do this either." So this starts to disturb the other students. (C1)

They can't obey class rules. (B4)

Two teachers (B2, G1) stated having many difficulties with students with special needs:

I can't communicate with my student with special needs because they can't speak. We can't communicate with each other, he even says nothing when shown a pencil. However, he understands what I'm saying, can use the toilet alone, and is more consistent with his friends. It's a mental deficiency from birth. (G1)

According to teachers' opinions, students with special needs are determined to have difficulties in such academic areas as reading and writing activities, understanding and comprehending visual cases, and participation. Three teachers (F3, F5, and D2) stated these students' greatest difficulty in first grade to be reading and writing activities.

> The type of disability is really important. If a student is physically disabled and their hand muscles not developed, reading and writing activities are really difficult. (F3)

> All my other students can read and write with first-grade sources. As my student cannot read, he only looks at the books. In addition he got upset when he realized that other students can do what he cannot. This situation influenced his relationship with his friends. (H3)

One participant teachers underlined the difficulties of comprehending and understanding visual cases:

> They have real difficulty developing these academic skills. We try to plan our lessons with visual sources, but they still have difficulty. (E5)

Four teachers (A2, A4, B5, C4) stated that these students are not willing to participate in class and are not interested in the subjects. One stated:

> When I'm teaching something, nothing draws this student's attention. He doesn't look at the activities on the board. He thus neither looks at me nor the board. He's not interested. Moreover, he tries to do something different with the friends around him. (C3)

During the interview, four participant teachers (B1, B2, B5, C5) expressed the in-class self-care problems of their students with special need. Teachers (B1, B5) from one group expressed their opinions as follows:

> We experienced that when the student uses the toilet, we want him to dress before returning. Sometimes he comes back undressed. (B1)

> My student needs bathroom help. So their parents wait outside the class. (B5)

Two teachers (A2, A4) stated their students have difficulty leaving their parents, saying these students didn't want to leave their parents in the first weeks of the semester:

> Not wanting to leave the parents commonly occurs because they need their parents. So they don't want to leave. This situation occurred in the first two weeks of the semesters. (A4)

Category 6: Parents' preparedness. Sub-categories have been determined in this category such as parents' rejection related to the handicap, family's educational level, spending quality time with children, the attitudes of other children's parents, family attitudes, and activity participation.

Parents' acceptance of the disability. Twenty teachers (A1, A2, A3, A4, B1, B2, B3, B4, B5, B6, C3, D1, D3, D4, E1, E4, F2, G2, G5, G8) stated parents non-

acceptance of their child's disability negatively influencing the education process as he most important difficulty:

> Some problems relate to accepting the child's disability. Parents don't accept it. They consider their children to be normal and that they'll recover. Or they think the child will adapt and develop. They've said that, for example, their uncle also developed late in life. In addition, some traditional structures exist that are detrimental to the child's development. Then parents realize the problem and become more defensive. They try to hide the situation while trying to convince others to accept it, getting more and more defensive. When they meet us, some of them still don't want to believe the situation, so there's no point in the meeting. (A2)

> Parents don't want to accept the problem. When they realize they should take some measures, they think that developing later is better. They also expect the teacher to solve this problem without help from them. Unfortunately this is impossible. (B1)

Educational level. Five teachers (A3, B6, E3, F2, F4) express the family's education level to be significant in the difficulties students with special needs have transitioning. Parents with lower education levels have some communication and acceptance problems related to their children compared to parents with higher levels.

If parents are socially minded, they come together to solve the problem. However, if parents are not well-educated, they never take care of their children. They leave the child alone. These parents have difficulty understanding or opting for inclusion. (E3)

Parental attitudes. Other teachers (A4, B6, C2, C3, D2, D4, E2, E3, E4, F4, H1) mentioned families' protective and defensive behaviors and how they negatively affect the situation.

> Families accept and indulge their children's demands. They always protect their child from falling or wandering off, always helping their child with what to wear and other activities. So these children can't even sharpen their pencils. Their muscles are not developed. That's when problems occur. (E2)

Two teachers (C3, E3) mentioned families' tendency towards violence in this dimension:

> The mother has accepted the situation. The father is a truck driver and wants his child to become what he did not. When this doesn't happen, he is not accepting and uses violence against the child. When the child has difficulty with homework, the father gets angry. (C3)

During the interviews two teachers (A4, E2) stated that the parents of children with special needs do not participate in activities:

> They generally don't participate in activities. (A4)

> They can't participate in the activities. When we decide to do something as a whole school, only the sociable families send their children. We cannot incorporate the others. We want to do something for them, but these activities do not allow for inclusion. (E2)

In the interview findings, two teachers (A2, A4) emphasized spending quality time with children:

> I don't know about these parents. I asked the children which television programs they watched. It's so sad. They all said they'd watched the soap opera with mother last night. No parent watches educational television programs. (A4)

Two participant teachers (D4, E1) underlined the attitudes of other children's parents:

> Parents who have normally developing children psychologically put pressure on us. (D4)

Discussion

The present study has highlighted the difficulties children with special needs experience during the transition from preschool education to primary school education as based on teacher opinion. The study is distinctive because it uses multiple research methods to help researchers better understand the difficulties and examine a broad range of questions. In addition, our qualitative analyses provide possible explanations for the quantitative results.

The first stage of the research evaluates whether the difficulties children with special needs have significantly differ according to teachers' characteristics using the DDTPS measurement tool. In the teachers' opinions, no significant differences were determined according to their gender, education level, or special education training. The first obtained finding relating to teacher characteristics is gender. When examining the teachers' opinions with regard to gender, no significant difference is found. Ansted (1996) examined the information and transition activities of principals, preschool teachers, and special education teachers in his research. He determined that gender shows no significant difference in transition processes or applications. This case is analogous with the current research results. Some of the transition research related to teachers' characteristic also show that participants are generally female (Ahtola et al., 2011; Barblett, Barratt-Paugh, Kilgallon, & Maloney, 2011; Jewett et al., 1998; La Paro, Pianta, & Cox, 2000; Lo Casale-Crouch, Mashburn, Downer, & Pianta, 2008; Quintero & McIntyre, 2011). The current research includes mostly female teachers.

Many of the teachers have undergraduate degrees. This situation is consistent with two research findings in the body of literature (Early, Pianta, & Cox, 1999; Early, Pianta, Taylor, & Cox, 2001). The researchers examined the teachers' characteristics and transition applications in the transition process, and no relationship was determined between education levels and the transition applications in the transition process. In the teachers' opinions, no significant difference was found according to

special education training. The obtained findings may be related to the quality of training teachers receive. One point teachers emphasized in the quantitative findings of the study was teachers' lack of knowledge and skills in special education. Blaska (1989) and Kemp (2003) also pointed out this finding in their studies. The qualitative findings expand on this quantitative result. Certain difficulties have been determined for the category of transition preparedness in the area of teachers' level of information: in-service training, teacher-trainee programs, and not enough time. In the body of literature, the child's disability, existing support services, and information acquisition related to educational methods have been defined as the teachers' responsibilities. A teacher's education, experience, and point of view related to disabled children are shown to be important factors in the transition process, and the difficulties of students with special needs are stated to increase when the classroom teacher is unprepared for a student with special needs (Conn-Powers et al., 1990; Hains et al., 1987).

Hains et al. (1987) stated that general education teachers have an important role in teaching basic academic skills and important factors in transitioning are consideration of teachers' education, experience, and point of view related to having a student with special needs in class. In addition, Haines et al. said that obtaining information related to a student's disability, education methods, and existing support services is the teachers' responsibility; students with special needs can have certain difficulties participating in a class where the generally educated teacher has insufficient knowledge about them. The literature has underlined that education and counselor services provided to basic classroom teachers is insufficient (Wolery et al., 1994) and that individualizing education and providing education in line with teachers' needs is important (Werts, Wolery, Synder, & Caldwell, 1996).Training should not be given just once for a certain period of time; sustainable, consistent, and continuous training should be provided (Buell, Hallam, Gamel-Mccormick, & Scheer 1999; Cook, 2001). Kemp (2003) has determined in his transition-related research that teachers suffer from not having enough time to meet both the needs of students with special needs and those of normal students in the area of teacher factors.

Research on situations related to transitions and transitioning have examined categories covered by the conceptual model of early childhood transition (supportive infrastructure, continuity and system, communication, transition preparedness, child and parent's preparedness). When examining studies conducted on these categories (Rous, Hallam et al., 2007; Rous et al., 2007), transitioning' negative situations have been evaluated alongside its positive situations. This research's results remarked that teachers generally present negative situations. The results from the conducted focus-group interviews support the findings obtained from the qualitative section of the research. Teachers stated in their opinions that both the child and the child's environmental factors lead to difficulties. These obtained findings are consistent

within the academic dimensions (Entwistle & Alexander, 1998; Malone & Gallagher, 2009; Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000; Rous, Hallam et al., 2007). Dockett and Perry (2003), conducting interviews with teachers, families, and children in the Research Project of Starting School, defined eight fields that influence the transition to primary school: acknowledgement, social adaptation, skills, attitudes and emotions toward school, rules, the child's physical characteristics, families' attitudes, and educational environment. Researchers Rous et al. (2007) have also used focus group interviews, stating in their research that the cases influencing the transition of the student with special needs are the child, parents, teachers, principals, and society; these fields have a key role in a child's preparedness and adaptability to the transition process.

For the category of supportive infrastructure, teachers stated commonly having difficulty with information and support. Similar findings can be found in the body of literature (Bursuck, 1989; Cook & Semel, 1999; Pavri & Luftig, 2000). Rous et al. (2010) determined in their research related to preschool teachers that one of the obstacles encountered in the transition process is not being able to access information related to the child's history. Chan (2009) stated that 90% of first-grade teachers want information from the preschool teacher about the child's performance, and this situation is a transition activity. A child's personal characteristics are stated to be an important factor in the school transition, and these include age, gender, ethnic background, intelligence level, disability status, cognitive development, social skills, mood, functional age level, relations with friends and relationship sustainability, preschool education level, past experiences related to school, level of participation in the transition process, and having a familiar playmate in class (Margetts, 2002b; Maxwell & Eller, 1994; Smart, Sanson, Baxter, Edwards, & Hayes, 2008; Yeboah, 2002).

Teachers stated that information related to a student with special needs should be transferred before the academic year begins (i.e., in summer time, prior to the educational teaching semester and in-service periods). The transition process should have an established time schedule (Kraft-Sayre & Pianta, 2000; Margetts, 2002a; Rosenkoetter et al., 1994), and the information process should establish an orientation class between preschool and primary school. Research related to the transitions from home-care to preschool and from preschool to primary school (Broström, 2002; Conn-Powers et al., 1990; La Paro, Kraft-Sayre, & Pianta, 2003; Rous, Hemmenter, & Schuster, 1999) shows orientation programs as an intermediary, the child's preparedness for and adaptability to transitioning, and the family's participation in school-family cooperation to be important factors in the transition process. According to these factors, an examination and determination of results is seen to be required in order to improve and be applied to the transition from early childhood programs to preschool and from preschool to primary school (Brandes, Ormsbee, & Haring, 2007; Chadwick & Kemp, 2000b; Mehaffie & Wolfson; 2007;

Rous et al., 1999). Teachers' opinions related to the information process are also considered a supportive sub-dimension for the category of communication and relationships. Chadwick and Kemp (2002) stated that consistent support is more important than just providing support in the transition process; staff support is one of these. When considering teachers' problems related to insufficient time, the demand for staff support is one solution for supporting transitioning children with disabilities. Vaughn, Reiss, Rothlein, and Hughes (1999); Walker et al. (2012); and Werts et al. (1996) have reported similar findings.

The teachers mentioned the curriculum differences between preschool and primary school education in reference to the classroom system. This finding is supported by other research results (Chun, 2003; Harper, 2005). Continuity and systems that occur during the transition process include children's experiences while transitioning from one environment to another. Accordingly, the behaviors the child acquired in prior education settings should be consistent with the current environment, and the new rules provided to children should be consistent with their previous experiences (Kagan & Neuman, 1998; Mangione & Speth, 1998). Without continuity between preschool and primary school education, a child may be influenced negatively while transitioning to primary school (Harper, 2005; Rous, Hallam et al., 2007; Yeboah, 2002). An absence of curriculum and classroom attendance are considered to be important continuity factors in literature (Barblett et al., 2011; Dockett & Perry, 2007b; Entwistle & Alexander, 1998; Margetts, 2007; Rosenkoetter et al., 2007; Yeboah, 2002).

In inclusion environments, the provisions for children and family-training programs, and the cooperation and communications between social institutions are considered to be important transition factors (Fowler et al., 1991; Pianta, Cox, Taylor, & Early, 1999; Rous, Hallam et al., 2007); cooperation and communication, information sharing between specialists, and planning are emphasized to be able to help determine available support and solve possible problems (Hains et al., 1987; Rous, Hallam et al., 2007). When cooperation exists between the special education teacher and general education teachers, general education can display positive effects on inclusion (Flores, 2012; Hwang & Evans, 2011). One defined problem in transitioning is the absence of cooperation and communication about transitioning in the body of literature (Barblett et al., 2011; Janus, Lefort, Cameron, & Kopenhanski, 2007; Jewett et al., 1998; Quintero & McIntyre, 2011; Wischnowski, Fowler, & McCollum, 2000).

Research has emphasized that some difficulties associated with the characteristics of students, teachers, schools, and classrooms exist in preparing for the transition process. Teacher attitudes area factor in the transition difficulties experienced by

students both in the qualitative and quantitative findings. Because the information provided to teachers in teacher-trainee programs is insufficient, the attitudes and perceptions of teachers toward the student with special needs is important (Avramidis, Bayliss, & Burden, 2000; Pinkerton, 1991) and may influence the student's success, especially in their first years; this can even lead to stress in children and their families (Hains et al., 1987; Pinkerton, 1991).

Chadwick and Kemp (2002) have found similar findings. Researchers have examined the transition process of students from preschool to primary school education within the framework of family, receiving/sending programs, and teachers' opinions. A 5-pointLikert type measurement tool (child, receiving/sending programs, transition process prior to starting school, first semester of school, and participant's characteristics) was used in the research. Forty-four percent of teachers had problems with inclusion and stated that the transition process of students with milder disabilities is quite difficult. In addition, a relationship between a smooth transition process and successful placement was found. In another study, Kemp (2003) construed the preschool transition of intellectually challenged students through the dimensions of the parents, principal, and teacher, examining the case through interviews. At the end of the research, teachers and parents were determined to have found the inclusion practice to be more ineffective compared to principals; only eight students' inclusion programs were found to be successful. When considering successful inclusion as an important factor of successful transitioning (Kemp, 2003), inclusion also encumbers the receiving programs. Avramidis and Norwich (2002) stated that in order to conduct a successful inclusion practice, the physical environment, sources, and educational adaptations should be reorganized. The body of literature states that while students should be prepared for school, the school should also be prepared for students. This is known as a *ready school*, which provides the required support and parent-teacher training, and is ready to individualize the education (Ackerman & Barnett, 2005; Dockett & Perry, 2007a).

Avramidis and Norwich (2002) underlined the importance of variables related to educational inclusion environments, stating that providing suitable physical arrangements, sufficient and suitable materials, and teachers with positive attitudes toward inclusion are also important factors. According to both the quantitative and qualitative findings of the study, the teachers explained that they don't have enough time to work especially with students who have special needs because of their workload and large number of students. An increase in class size and a skewed teacher–student ratio are some of the difficulties in terms of classroom structure while transitioning from preschool to primary school education (Margetts, 2002b; Wolery, 1989). Some of the findings show these factors to influence both the transition process and its efficiency (Early et al., 1999; Early et al., 2001; O'Kane & Hayes, 2006;

Shevlin, Kenny, & Loxley, 2008). In classrooms where disabled children and at-risk students are present, teachers should check the classroom and take care of activities individually, as well as have a small class size (Myers, 1997; O'Kane & Hayes, 2006; Stormont et al., 2005). One common finding from the qualitative and quantitative data related to transitioning difficulties has been determined as honoring friends. Another finding obtained in the research was also determined in Kemp (2003), who construed the preschool transitioning of mentally challenged children with Down's syndrome and developmental disabilities through the dimensions of parents, principals, and teachers, examining the case through interviews. As a result of the research, parents and teachers stated that normal children and a school structure that honors children with special needs reconsidered to be important factors in the success of the transition and inclusion processes under the category of school.

According to the opinions obtained from classroom teachers, adaptation, social skills, self-care, and desire not to leave the family are primary areas that define the difficulties students with special needs experience during the transition to primary school. Among the quantitative findings of the research, this finding also coincides with the results from the sub-scale of characteristics pertaining to transitioning children. The body of literature states that if students with special needs have less-developed social skills, they display problematic behaviors and have difficulty obeying class rules and communicating (Chadwick & Kemp, 2002; Salend & Lutz, 1984; Rice & O'Brien, 1990). In addition to students' academic skills, their socials skills (Chadwick & Kemp, 2000a; Chadwick & Kemp, 2002; Fowler et al., 1991; Harper, 2005; Johnson, Gallagher, Cook, & Wong, 2000; Kemp & Carter, 2005) and communication skills (Hains, Fowler, Schwartz, Kottwitz, & Rosenkoetter, 1989; Johnson et al., 2000; Kemp & Carter, 2005) are vital intra-class skills in the general education environment. Chadwick and Kemp (2000b) conducted the Early School Transition Program, which relates to students with special needs in general education environments being placed from preschool education to a special education center in Macquarie University. It had eight students with intellectual disabilities and speech disorders, and having students be away from their parents/guardians was an important factor in transitioning.

Parent preparedness is considered a significant difficulty in transitioning. The literature states parents' socio-economic level, characteristics (education level, age, ethnicity), relationships, and attitudes affect a child's preparedness for school (Smart et al., 2008); indeed, factors such as parents' work schedules, transportation problems, insufficient parental/teacher education, and the focus on problematic behaviors affect familial cooperation and family participation in the transition process (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 1999). Chadwick and Kemp (2002) referenced research in the body of literature; the insufficient information parents of students with special needs are given; placement

convenience; provision of sufficient support; and the anxious, stressful, angry, and disappointed feelings related to the break-off phenomena that occurs in the process. They added that parental support and participation is very important for providing students with emotional support. In addition, the research by Chadwick and Kemp (2002), which they conducted to determine factors affecting the transition process, emphasized that acknowledging the child's historical provision of support teams and the preparedness of school staff are both important in school preparedness. They underlined that the parents of other children in class should also be prepared, determining a significant relationship to exist between parental preparedness and success.

Suggestions

This research examines the difficulties experienced by children with special needs while transitioning to primary school and determined that both students and teachers have certain difficulties in the transition process. The obtained findings relate to the child and the characteristics of the child's environment. Although some orientation and adaptation programs have been conducted for children in Turkey, the absence of legal amendments covering schools, teachers, and parents on one hand, and the absence of planned transition applications and activities on the other, lead to problems in the transition process. Therefore, systematical transition studies and programs prepared among Turkey's educational setting is considered to be important, and this process should be examined carefully. In this study, teachers' opinions have been the main focus. Principals' opinions should be examined in future studies. In addition, the process of special education centers can be examined and studied over different grades. The findings obtained in this research are considered able to shed light on the establishment of future transition policies and experimental studies.

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