

What Do Children Think about Starting Primary School?

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Abstract: The current study aims to reveal preschoolers' and first graders' perspectives of primary school. A qualitative research design was employed, and multiple sampling methods were used to retrieve the participants. The participants were 15 preschoolers with an average age of 69 months attending and 15 first graders with an average age of 80 months. A semi-structured interview form developed by the researchers was used for the data collection. The results showed that most preschoolers had some knowledge of primary school. Their views of primary school generally focused physical characteristics of the school, lessons and rules, and daily routines. First graders said that they were learning new things in primary school and that they felt happy when they started school. They also stated that they need friends in primary school to be happy and that it is important to listen to their teachers carefully. The biggest difference between preschool and primary school was the lessons. They also remarked that they need to play more games in primary school.

Keywords: First Grade, Primary School, Primary Education, Preschool Education, Early Childhood

1. Introduction

One of the most important milestones of the early childhood period is starting primary school. School readiness refers to the competencies of a child showing s/he is ready for school and parental perspectives indicating that they are ready to support their children's learning (Head Start Early Childhood Learning & Knowledge Center, 2022). Before a child is fully ready for school, both the child and the family may experience several difficulties and anxieties. Concerns of children who have reached the age of starting school are generally related to leaving home, adapting to a new environment and the requirements of this environment, and peer relations (Gül Kapçı et al., 2015; Koçyiğit, 2014). Minimizing such concerns depends on how "ready" the child is for school. There are many definitions in the literature regarding the concept of being ready for elementary school (Katz, 1991; Oktay, 1983; Snow, 2006). Dockett et al. (1997) carried out one of the first comprehensive studies on parent, teacher and child views of school readiness and pointed out that adults' and children's understanding of school readiness might differ greatly. Definitions have changed over the years as research progressed and requirements differed. Definitions that focused more on academic readiness in the early years emphasized that social-emotional readiness should also be considered in the following years (UNICEF, 2012; Williams et al., 2019).

1.1. Problem Statement

Starting school changes children's role and status in society; it is a beginning to experience different things (Dockett & Perry, 2007). It is important to gain school readiness skills before starting school. School readiness is concerned with not only children but also families and educational professionals; therefore, it is necessary to hold a multidimensional perspective when investigating the subject (Büyüktaşkapu-Soydan, 2017). Understanding what is going on through the eyes of the child and knowing what they need and worry about often facilitates the success of school adaptation and readiness. There is a great number of studies on children's school readiness (Bayındır & Biber, 2019; Goble et al., 2019; Gündüz & Özarlan, 2017; Güzel & Özyurt, 2018; Koçyiğit, 2009; Kokkalia et al., 2019; Polat & Akşin-Yavuz, 2016; Tunçeli & Akman, 2014; Wright et al., 2019), their effective transition and school adaptation

(Dockett & Perry, 2001; Haymes et al., 1994; Kaya & Akgun, 2016; Ladd, 1996; McIntry et al., 2006; Nakamichi et al., 2019; O'Farrelly et al., 2020; Şepitçi Saribaş & Gültekin Akduman, 2019). Some studies focus on "ready children" (Büyüктаşkapu-Soydan, 2017) while some address parental attitudes, parent-child relations, and parental involvement for school readiness (Britto, 2012; Hill, 2001; Hill, Mann & Fitzgerald, 2011; Marti, et al., 2018) and others emphasize "ready schools" focusing on teacher-child relationship (Cannon, Jacknowitz, Karoly, 2012; Curby, Rimm-Kaufman & Ponitz, 2009; Mashburn et. al., 2008). Related to the readiness of the child, school and family; Burchinal, et al. (2006) worked with African-American children facing multiple risks and concluded that the language skills, parenting and childcare quality were protective factors in the acquisition of math skills and reduction of problem behaviors during the first 4 years of primary school. Similarly, Büyüктаşkapu-Soydan (2017) also underlie that child communication skills, the school environment, and paternal educational status are among the factors that affect children's school readiness. There seems to be a need to reconsider school maturity from a different perspective. The number of studies focusing on children's perspective of school and adaptation to school seems to somewhat limited except for some research (Dockett & Perry, 2003; Einarsdottir, 2003; Einarsdottir, 2010; Koçyiğit, 2014; Mirkhil, 2010). Due to the limited number of studies looking at school adaptation process through children's eyes, the current study might contribute to gain a better understanding of the subject.

1.2. Related Research

The way we evaluate school readiness is as important as the need to evaluate it. Before evaluating school readiness, factors that may affect this process should be considered in detail. Otrar (2019) expresses the factors affecting readiness for primary school as hereditary factors, sociocultural and socioeconomic status of the family, the child's psychological history (trauma, loss, migration, etc.), and the amount of participation in preschool education. While evaluating readiness for primary school, it is necessary to use a holistic perspective alongside the listed factors. Therefore, it is necessary to use non criterion referenced and criterion referenced techniques (Otrar, 2019). The aim of the measurement should be to see whether a child has reached the developmental level and gained the skills that s/he will be using during the first grade. However, in many countries as well as Turkey chronological age is considered as the only criterion for starting school and parents sometimes have a decisive role in their children starting school.

According to Article 7 of the Regulation Amending the Regulation on Preschool Education and Primary Education Institutions of the Ministry of National Education in Turkey (published in the Official Gazette numbered 30827, dated July 10, 2019), "Children who have completed 69 months as of the end of September of the year in which the registration is made should be enrolled in the first grade. In addition, 66, 67, and 68-month-old children whose parent have a written request from schools can also be enrolled in the first grade. With this regulation published in the Official Gazette of the Republic of Turkey and the 4+4+4 system, which started to be implemented in 2012 with the "Law on the Amendment of Primary Education and Education Law and Some Laws," children have been starting primary school before reaching 72 months of chronological age. First-grade teachers were expected to focus on game-based activities to facilitate children's adaptation to this new process. This expectation also caused some classroom teachers to have difficulties and the Republic of Turkey Ministry of National Education (MEB) encouraged primary school teachers to organize and implement programs that put emphasis on games through in-service trainings. These in-service trainings seemed to eliminate the problems experienced in the first years over time. However, age still seems to be a problem because younger children are more likely to have difficulties with transition to first grade (Boz & Yıldırım, 2017; Demir & Ersöz, 2016; Uzun & Alat, 2014).

In order for a child to adapt to school, his/ her attitude towards school and past experiences, peer relations, social-emotional experiences, and academic success must follow a positive course. There is a different pattern of adaptation to school for every child. While some children get through it in a shorter time and with fewer problems, some children may experience the opposite and a long-term and intensely problematic process (Ladd&Burgess,

2001; Leve et al., 2007) Child separation anxiety, inclusion in or exclusion from a new and larger system, the rules of the new system, new adults, personal independence, a secure attachment to teacher, peer acceptance and most importantly, and the developmental readiness of the child have determining effects on whether this process will work out for the child (Bart et al., 2007; Haymes et al., 1994; McInty et al., 2006). In order to make the smoothest transition to school for both children and parents, it is possible and necessary to support children and families through various programs. For instance, the adolescents who participated in the Chicago School Readiness Project, which has been implemented in Head Start centers since 2003, were reported to have better executive functions and higher academic achievement after 10-11 years. Although it did not seem to have a therapeutic effect on behavioral problems, but the children who participated in the program were more sensitive to emotional stimuli (Watts, et al., 2018).

It is necessary and important for the family to be informed about the problems that the child may experience upon starting school and the possible solutions to such problems. Visiting the school with parents and meeting teachers beforehand might help a child to feel more comfortable. Understanding children's excitement or worries about starting school is also important as it may support children to overcome the problems they might face due to chronological age (Dilcioğlu, 2016; Güzel & Özyurt, 2018).

1.3. Research Objectives

One of the aims of preschool education is to prepare children for primary school. Adult observations or evaluations alone are often not sufficient to gain insight of this transition. Consulting the views of preschoolers and first graders about primary school is very valuable because they are the very center of the subject. Therefore, the current study aims to examine the views of preschoolers' and first graders' views of primary school and school adjustment. In line with this purpose, preschoolers who will start first grade in the next academic year were asked what they think about primary school and first grade with a few detailed questions. First graders were also asked a few questions about what they think about primary school as well as their suggestions for their peers who will start primary school next year. The opinions of the children were evaluated separately and the similarities and differences between the two groups were discussed.

2. Theoretical Framework

Thanks to the developments in healthcare (e.g., electroencephalogram imaging), various studies in psychobiology and temperament point out that children's cognitive development is directly associated with school readiness (Blair, 2002; Lemelin et al., 2007; Wolfe & Bell, 2003). Therefore, we must underline that a neurobiological approach might be a better option to understand school readiness as a concept rather than relying on nativist and idealist theories of school readiness which take maturation as the center of development.

The emphasis on "ready to learn" in the statement "All children will start school ready to learn" in the American National Educational Objectives Panel (1991) has found an echo all over the world as a slogan. With the definition made in the panel, school readiness is connected to three developmental trajectories, which are child readiness, school readiness, and family and community support for readiness. While the child's preparation refers to the typical progress in all areas of health, well-being, and development, it also includes components such as family involvement, transition from home to school, supportive programs and environments that respect the individual differences of children. Family and community support covers issues such as health support during pregnancy, nutritional and care support, access to high-quality early childhood education and parental time for effective parenting, and the availability of environmental opportunities (National Education Goals Panel, 1991; Williams et al., 2019).

Readiness for primary school refers to the cognitive, social-emotional, and behavioral competencies children must have to be able to adapt to formal education (Lemelin et al., 2007). However, Ackerman and Barnett (2005) emphasize that the definition of school readiness might differ according to the person making this definition. For example, when it comes to school readiness, parents expect to be ready in terms of preacademic skills

(numbers, colors, shapes, etc.) whereas teachers expect the child to have the necessary social and emotional competencies. UNICEF (2012), which emphasizes the role of family and schools for children's school readiness, identifies three dimensions of school readiness. First, young children's interactive, play-based learning needs should be the center of both pre-school and first grade. However, the differences between preschool education programs and primary school programs, which often focus on more structured learning, might cause children to experience stress (O'Kane, 2016). Thus, "ready schools" as a second dimension, should have the necessary equipment and coordination to help children have a smooth transition from home to school, from kindergarten to primary school as much as possible. As a third component, ready families can be defined as families who can see and support the physiological and psychological needs of their children when they start primary school. Families should also participate in children's learning activities at school and home, help in the socialization the child and take a role as a stakeholder in the education (Pianta, 2003; Trans. Boethel, 2004; UNICEF, 2012). With the contributions of "ready schools" and "ready families", children's school readiness might be increased to the highest level possible, and the transition to primary school might be less challenging. Besides the preparations in order to ensure a smooth transition to first grade, children's school readiness should be regularly monitored and evaluated.

3. Method

3.1. Research Design

Basic education model in Turkey comprises the preschool education as the first step and the primary education as the second stage of education. Therefore, both preschoolers and first graders were included in the study. A phenomenological research design, as one of the qualitative methods, was employed to investigate children's views of primary school. As the current study aims to explore what children experienced and focuses on their experiences of primary school, a phenomenological design suits the purpose of the study because it is a practical way for studying emotional and intense human experiences (Merriam, 2013) to gain an in-depth understanding of the perceptions and meanings that individuals develop based on their experiences (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016).

3.2. Participants

Purposive sampling method was used to interview the participants. Purposive sampling is the deliberate selection of the participants based on the researcher(s)'s judgement of the participants' ability to explain a specific phenomenon (Patton, 2014). To retrieve the participants, all the institutions with at least one preschool class and at least one first grade class in Muğla, Turkey were listed, and a school was selected randomly for the convenience of the study. 15 preschoolers and 15 first graders were also selected randomly for the interview and parental consent was obtained for all children. The preschoolers' mean age was 69 months whereas the mean age for first graders was 80 months. The data was collected from a total of 30 children during 2018 Fall and 2019 Spring.

3.3. Data Collection

A preliminary version of the semi-structured interview form was developed by the researchers based on a review of the literature on the subject. The final version of the form was edited based on the opinions of 6 experts (3 preschool professionals and 3 primary school professionals). The form includes 7 questions for preschoolers and 9 questions for first graders. The questions in the data collection tool are listed below.

Questions for Preschoolers in Turkey:

1. Do you know which school you will go to after you finish this school (preschool)? Have you ever heard of primary school? What does primary school mean? If so, where did you hear it? Who told you?
2. What do you think primary school is like?
3. You are doing activities here. What can children do in primary school?

4. What do you need to be happy when you start primary school? Which of these would you most like to have in primary school?
5. What would you like to learn or know about primary school?
6. Do you want to go to primary school? Do you feel ready to go to primary school? If not, what kind of help do you need to get ready for primary school?

Questions for First Graders in Turkey;

1. You started primary school this year and are now about to finish first grade. What have you done in primary school so far this year?
2. What is in primary school? I want your detailed explanation.
3. What do children do in primary school?
4. What do you think a child might need to be happy in primary school?
5. Do you remember when you started primary school? It was your first time here. You met your teacher, your friends. How did you feel when you started primary school? What is the most important thing a child should know when starting primary school?
6. What is the difference between your preschool class and your primary school class? What have you been doing in first grade, what have you learnt in primary school this year, and what did you do? What would you recommend to children who will finish kindergarten and start primary school next year?
7. When I started primary school, I felt; now I feel (emotion cards are used).
8. What did you like most in primary school this year?
9. What do you want to happen in primary school?

The researchers obtained ethical approval and parental consent for all the participating children. Parents and school staff were informed about the scope of the study, the possibility of withdrawing from the study at any time, and the protection of their personal data. Consent forms regarding the student's participation in the research were obtained from each children's parent. Following that, the data collection was collected between 10-14 June 2019, during the last week of the academic year through one-on-one and face-to-face interviews with each child. To make students feel comfortable and make the data collection more reliable, the interviews were audio-recorded. The average of the audio recordings for one child was 11 minutes 27 seconds for preschoolers and 14 minutes 07 seconds for first graders. The audio recordings were transcribed verbatim.

3.4. Data Analysis, Validity and Reliability

The content analysis method was used for the data analysis. The transcribed data were coded by the researchers. The data were recoded by two coders who were not involved in the research process, and the coding reliability was calculated. For increasing reliability in qualitative research, it is important to provide consensus among coders (Creswell, 2013). The formula "Agreement / (Agreement + Disagreement) x 100" used by Miles and Huberman (1994) was used in the calculation of intercoder reliability. The intercoder reliability value was 82.1%, which was acceptable. The differences between the coders were re-examined, and a common decision was made, and the codes were clarified. The themes and codes obtained were tabulated using frequency values in accordance with the purpose of the research. The codes and themes were represented by direct quotations from the interviews to establish validity.

4. Findings

The findings of the current study that aims to examine the views of preschoolers' and first graders' opinions of "primary school" presented respectively. Figure 1 shows the views of children attending preschool education showing whether they know the school they will go to after preschool and from whom they learned it.

Figure 1. Preschoolers' views of primary school and where they heard it from

Do you know the school you will go to after preschool?	No idea (2)		
	I don't know (3)		
	I know, primary school (10)	From parents (10)	
		From older siblings (2)	
		I don't remember (2)	
		From the cartoons (1)	
	From friends (1)		

As seen in Figure 1, 10 of the preschoolers stated that they would go to primary school after preschool, 3 stated that they did not know which school they would attend, and 2 stated that they had no idea about this. The children who knew they would go to primary school said that they heard it from their parents (f=10), older siblings (f=2), friends (f=1), and cartoons (f=1). There are two children who did not remember where they heard it from. In Table 1, the associations of preschoolers of primary school are presented.

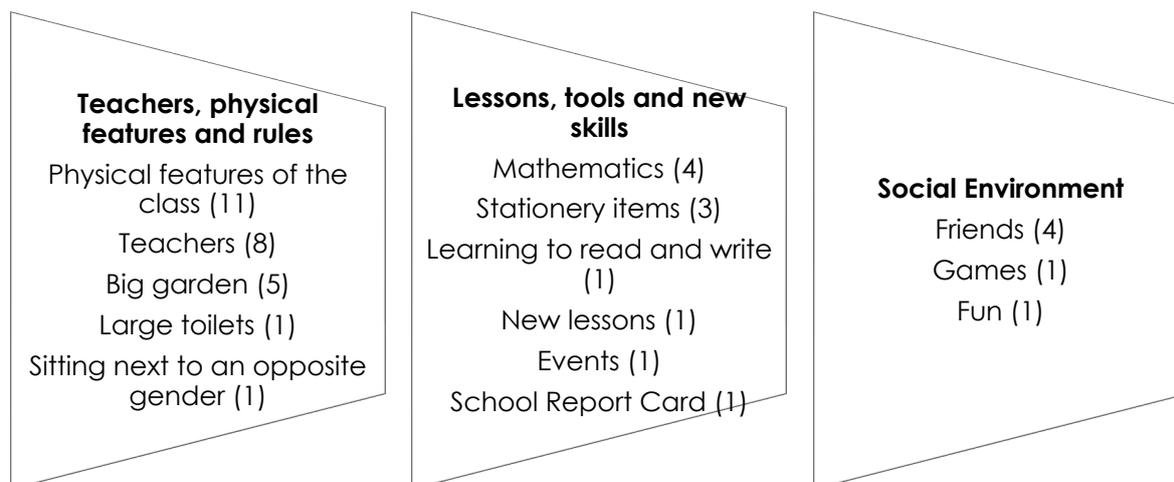
Table 1. Preschoolers' associations of "primary school."

Opinion on the concept of primary school	f
I don't know	5
Classroom environment	3
Learning to read and write	2
Big school	2
Games	2
Mathematics	1
All lessons	1
Good teachers	1
Recess	1

Table 1 shows that the number of preschoolers who have no idea of primary school (f=5) is higher. Their associations of primary school are to be in a classroom environment (f=3), learning to read and write (f=2), goint to a big school (f=2), playing games (f=2), doing math (f=1), all courses (f=1), good teachers (f=1) and recess (f=1).

In Figure 2, what the preschoolers thought about the school environment in primary school are summarized.

Figure 2. Preschoolers' opinions of what "primary school" is like



As seen in Figure 2, when asked what they thought about primary schools, the preschoolers referred to the themes of teachers, physical features and rules (f=26), lessons, tools, and new skills (f=11), and social environment (f=6). In the theme of teachers, physical features, and rules, children mentioned physical features of the class, teachers, big garden, large toilets, and one girl-one boy seating arrangement. The physical features of the classroom was the most-mentioned category of this theme. Lessons, tools, and new skills theme consists of math, stationery, learning to read and write, new lessons, activities, and report cards. Maths was the most-mentioned category of this theme. The social environment theme includes codes for friends, games, and fun. In the theme of social environment, friends was the mostly-mentioned category. Table 2 demonstrates the differences between preschool and primary school perceived by the preschoolers.

Table 2. The differences between preschool and primary school perceived by the preschoolers

Theme	Category	f
Classroom	Board	13
	Stationery	12
	Desks and chairs	12
	Books	2
	Computers	2
School	Big garden	1
	Canteen	1
Classes and rules	Courses	2
	Homework	2
	Too many rules	2
	Recess	2
	No toys	1

As seen in Table 2, the differences between preschool and primary school reported by the preschoolers are themed as classroom (f=41), school (f=2), and Classes and rules (f=9). The classroom theme includes the codes of the board, stationery materials, desks and chairs, books, and computers. According to most preschoolers, "board" was the biggest difference between preschool and first grade. The codes for school include "big garden" and "canteen" whereas the classes and rules theme includes courses, homework, too many rules, recess time and the absence of toys. Some expressions are presented below.

"Board": The teacher calls some children to the whiteboard (PRS10).

"Recess": We can go to the canteen on our own during break time (PRS2).

"No toy": We are not allowed to bring our toys with us (PRS9).

The opinions of preschoolers about what is done in primary school are divided into two main categories, which are lessons and skills (17) and daily routines (3). Lessons and skills category include studying (5), reading-writing (3), writing (3), mathematics (3), activity (1), painting (1), and listening to the teacher (1). Daily routines category includes taking a break (1), going to canteen (1), and playing in the garden (1). Some expressions are presented below.

"Writing": they learn to write; they can write whatever they want when they come home (PRS15).

"Going to the canteen": they can buy the food they want from the canteen (PRS6).

Table 3 shows the preschoolers' opinions of what needs to be done to make them feel good and happy in primary school.

Table 3. Preschoolers' opinions of what needs to be done to make them feel good and happy in primary school

Theme	Category	f
Social-emotional requirements	Having friends	3
	Loving my teacher	1
	Dad says he's proud of me	1
Tools	New things/stuff	4
	Pencil case	1
Playing games	Playing during recess	2
	Playing games	1
	Playing a lot in the garden	1
Academic requirements	Being hardworking	1
	Learning to read and write	1
	Studying hard	1
Physical requirement	Canteen	1

As shown in Table 3, we identified the themes of social-emotional requirements (f=5), equipment (f=5), playing games (f=4), academic requirements (f=4) and physical requirements (f=1). "The social-emotional requirements" theme includes the elements for making children feel good and happy in primary school, which are "having friends", "loving my teacher", and "my father tells me he's proud of me". "Having friends" was the most-mentioned category. The theme "tools and equipment" includes "new things/stuff" and "pencil box" codes, and new things/stuff was the most-mentioned code. The theme "playing games" included the codes of "playing games during recess", "playing games", and "playing a lot in the garden". "Playing games during recess" is expressed more in this category. The theme of "academic requirements" includes codes "being hardworking", "learning to read and write", "studying hard", and "being skilled". The canteen is included in the theme of physical needs. Some expressions are presented below.

"Having friends": having lots of new friends (PRS1).

"Pencil case": It would be better if we bought a pencil case with a Spiderman figure on it. I can be motivated by looking at it (PRS3).

The content analysis revealed "Social-emotional curiosity" (f=3) and "academic curiosity" (f=10) themes regarding what preschoolers want to know about primary school. In the theme of social-emotional curiosity, there are two codes, which are "knowing who the teacher is and what s/he is like" and "knowing every part of the school". The preschoolers mostly expressed their curiosity about the teacher in this category. The theme of "academic curiosity" includes the codes "how to write", "is math difficult or not?", "learning English", "learning to read", and "learning everything". The preschoolers seemed to feel most curious about "how to write" regarding academic curiosity. Some expressions are presented below.

"Knowing who is the teacher and what s/he is like": I would like my teacher not to be bad (PRS2).

"How to write": I would like to know how to write on the board (PRS12).

The preschooler's' views regarding their willingness to go to primary school and their readiness for primary school were also examined. It seems that all the children participating in the research want to go to primary school. 14 of the children told they were ready for first grade and 1 of them said s/he was not, which is a positive finding. The child who said, "I am not ready" stating as his reason that "I would like to know more, I don't want to be alone".

Table 4. First graders' opinions of the activities they do/did in primary school

Opinions of the activities in primary school	f	Opinion of the activities in primary school	f
We painted	7	We learned new things	2
We studied math	6	We wrote	2
We played games	6	English	1
We had lessons	5	Computer	1
We read books	4	We did reading exercises	1
We have fun with the teachers	3	Social studies lesson	1
Physical training	3	Learning the letters	1
We did our homework	3		

Table 4 shows that painting (f=7) was the most-mentioned activity by the first graders followed by math (f=6), playing games (f=6), doing lessons (f=5), reading books (f=4), having fun with the teacher (f=3), physical education (f=3), doing homework (f=3), learning information (f=2), and writing (f=2). English (f=1), computer (f=1), reading (f=1), social sciences (f=1) and learning letters (f=1) were expressed as the least practiced activities. Sample expressions are presented below.

FG 9: I had a lot of fun, learned new things, played games, played with dough, and did string painting.

FG 8: I didn't know my friends; I didn't even know my teacher's name. I got to know my teacher, I studied hard, I did the lessons very well, I got stars, I learned to read very fast.

Based on the answers of the first graders who were asked what one can find in primary school three themes emerged, which are the classroom (f=21), the school (f=10), and the courses (f=13). In the classroom theme, there are stationery items, teachers, computers, students, Atatürk pictures, flowers, and friends. "Stationery items" was the most-mentioned category in this theme. In "the school" theme, playground, canteen, tree, classroom, and recess codes were drawn. "Playground" is the most frequently mentioned code in the school theme. In the theme of "courses", there are codes for mathematics, painting, reading books, physical education, homework, and games. Mathematics and painting were the most-mentioned activities when the children were asked what happens during the classes. Table 5 shows the opinions of first graders on what children do in primary school.

Table 5. Opinions of first graders on what children do in primary school

Activities children do in primary school	f	Activities children do in primary school	f
Lessons	13	Physical training and games	5
Painting	6	Homework	2
Reading books	6	Listening to the teacher	2
Writing-Reading	6	Music	1

As seen in Table 5, lessons (f=13) were the main activity that first graders thought they do in primary school, which was followed by painting (f=6), reading books (f=6), writing-reading (f=6), physical education and playing (f=5), doing homework (f=2), listening to the teacher (f=2), and music (f=1).

The first graders were asked whether and what they remembered about their first day of primary school to reveal their feelings. 11 of the first graders remembered when they started primary school, 3 of them remembered a little, and 1 of them did not. Most of the first graders said they felt happy (f=10). They also felt curiosity (f=4), excitement (f=3), shyness (f=2), fear (f=1), surprise (f=1) and love (f=1) when they started school. Some expressions are presented below.

FG 3: *I felt shy; I loved my friends, sometimes I was afraid that I would do the lessons wrong.*

FG 5: *My teacher was never angry; I was very surprised, I was very excited.*

FG 15: *I was excited, I couldn't sleep at night, I was very happy, I was fidgeting around.*

Table 6 shows the suggestions of the first graders for children who are about to start primary school.

Table 6. First graders' suggestions for future first graders

What future first graders need to know about primary school	f	What future first graders need to know about primary school	f
Listen to the teacher carefully	3	Do not be afraid of the school	1
Get on well with her/his friends	3	Be honest	1
Learn and follow the rules	3	Be respectful	1
Work hard	3	Do not harm anything	1
Listen to the lessons carefully	2	Try to be successful	1

As shown in Table 6, listening to the teacher carefully (f=3), getting on well with friends (f=3), and learning and following the rules (f=3) were the most frequent suggestions. In addition, first graders also recommended that they should listen to the lessons (f=2), shouldn't feel afraid at school (f=1), should be honest (f=1), and respectful (f=1), and they should not harm anything (f=1), and know-how to be successful (f=1). Some expressions are presented below.

FG 1: *S/he should listen to the teacher carefully, or s/he will make a mistake.*

FG 4: *Shouldn't harm their friends.*

FG 7: *First, they should know the rules, do not be late, do not walk in the corridor before the bell rings, walk and do not run, do not harm anyone.*

When the first graders were asked what they need to be happy in primary school, most of them mentioned having friends (f=5) and doing lessons (f=5) followed by they need teachers (f=4), materials to be used at school (f=3), to do good activities (f=3), and to work hard (f=2).

When the first graders were asked what the difference between preschool and primary school is, most of them mentioned lessons (f=9). In addition, the first graders also underlined the absence of toys (f=4), less games (f=2), different classroom arrangement (f=2), the presence of a canteen (f=1), different lesson materials (f=1) and the recess time (f=1). Some expressions are presented below.

FG 1: *We used to play games all the time, but we don't play a lot here.*

FG 2: *In kindergarten, there were coloring and drawing exercises in books, now there are real lessons in our books.*

FG 4: *There were toys there; there aren't any here.*

FG 12: *There are no bells in the kindergarten, but there are toys; here, none of them is here but a canteen.*

Table 7 shows the views of the first graders about the activities they like most in primary school.

Table 7. First graders' favorite activities in primary school

Favorite activities in primary school	f	Favorite activities in primary school	f
Music, art, and physical education classes	8	Math	2

Being with friends	5	Doing homework	1
Being with their teachers	4	Going out to the garden	1
Book reading sessions	4	Going to school	1
Writing	4		

As shown in Table 7, the first graders reported music, painting, and physical education lessons (f=8) as their favorite activities, which were followed by being with their friends (f=5), being with their teachers (f=4), reading books (f=4), writing (f=4), doing math (f=2), doing homework (f=1), going out to the garden (f=1), and going to school (f=1).

When the first graders were asked what they wish to be in primary school, they said they want to play games more often (f=4), have more books (f=2), toys (f=2), many friends (f=1) and more math classes (f=1). Some expressions are presented below.

FG 11: *slide and park;*

FG 4: *toys;*

FG 5: *always playing ball*

Table 8 shows the suggestions of the first graders for children who will start primary school next year.

Table 8. First graders' suggestions for future first graders

Advice for children starting primary school	f
S/he should obey the rules	7
S/he should get along well with friends	5
S/he should love her or his teacher	4
S/he should be careful	2
S/he should work hard	2
S/he should not be afraid of making mistakes	1
S/he should not pollute the environment	1

As seen in Table 8, following rules (f=7) was the most-mentioned suggestion by the first graders for the those who will start primary school soon. This was followed by getting along well with friends (f=5), loving the teacher (f=4), being careful (f=2), working hard (f=2), not being afraid of making mistakes (f=1), and not polluting the environment (f=1). Some expressions are given below.

FG 1: *S/he should be careful, not afraid to make mistakes in lessons*

FG 2: *S/he should be just like us, well-behaved and smart.*

FG 4: *S/he should love his or her teachers and should not harm their friends.*

FG 6: *S/he shouldn't tear down his or her friends' books and s/he should follow the rules at school.*

The first graders were also asked what they felt on the first day of primary school and what it was like to be at the end of first grade. Most children said they felt happy (f=7) when they started primary school. Some children told they were excited (f=5), shy (f=1), curious (f=1) or good (f=1) on the first day. Similarly, at the end of the first grade, most children felt happy (f=11), good (f=3), and not afraid (f=1) indicating an increasingly positive attitude towards school. Some expressions are presented below.

At the beginning of primary school:

FG 2: *I was a little scared*

FG 3: *I was happy and excited*

FG 12: *I thought I would be treated badly.*

At the end of 1st grade:

FG1: *I no longer feel afraid.*

FG 10: *I feel like I won the first prize.*

FG 12: *I feel good.*

5. Discussion

When preschoolers were asked about the primary school, most of them showed that they had some knowledge that they would go to primary school next year, which was told by parents mostly. Parents are the primary source of information in their children's lives until they start school. Parents who try to answer the questions about school correctly play an essential role in helping the child build a positive attitude towards school (Einarsdóttir, 2003; Koçyiğit, 2009; Koçyiğit, 2014). It is interesting that although most preschoolers somehow have an idea of primary school, most of them said "I do not know" when asked the concept of primary school. However, some children were able to identify the differences between preschool and primary school quite accurately defining it as a place where reading and writing is taught, as a larger school or as school for older children, which is in line with previous research (Koçyiğit, 2014; Rasmussen & Smidt, 2002; Yeo & Clarke, 2005).

The first graders focused on the teachers, physical characteristics of the school, the rules, lessons, tools and new skills, and the social environment when asked what primary school was. When the children were asked to report on what one could find or see in primary school, the first graders focused on the academic and social aspects of the school unlike most preschoolers who referred to the physical features of the school and the classroom, especially size, which may indicate their lack of knowledge and experience of primary school. Children who receive preschool education within the primary school campus or building might have a more complete picture of primary school in their minds and attending a few classes with the first graders might help them overcome their anxiety and fear. Similarly, Peters (2000) points out that the lack of continuity between the two institutions is one of the most important causes of difficulties in the transition from kindergarten to primary school. Therefore, visits to primary school and informative activities might be of great help for preschoolers before starting primary school.

For the differences between primary school and preschool, the preschoolers emphasized the desks and chairs, seating arrangement, garden and canteen, the rules and responsibilities, and the lack of games. Similarly, the first graders also emphasize the differences in seating arrangement, rules, lessons, and the scarcity of games and toys. These findings are in line with the previous literature suggesting that both preschoolers and first graders tend to describe preschool as a more structured environment with more learning and less game and free time (Fisher, 2009). The children also stated that they could only play during breaks, and it is a rule to be followed in primary school and that there is more time for play in preschool, which shows that they may well perceive the difference between two schools. In addition, they also pointed out that the teachers in primary school are more focused on teaching and have more authority compared to the preschool teachers, who are often perceived to have more supportive role. However, research indicates that children often do not question these role differences because they think it is in the nature of the primary school (Broström, 2003; Corsaro & Molinari, 2000; Eide & Winger, 1994, as cited in Einarsdóttir, 2007; Pramling & Williams-Graneld, 1993; Rasmussen & Smidt, 2002; Valeski & Stipek, 2001). Preschool children and first graders who were asked what was done in primary school expressed similar opinions. Both groups mentioned activities such as literacy, mathematics, and studying, which is in line with the findings of Pramling and Williams-Graneld's (1993).

Preschoolers, who were asked what needs to be done to make them feel better and happier in primary school, mainly focused on social-emotional and academic needs. The same question was asked to first graders, and they emphasized friendships and academic skills. Both preschoolers and first graders stated that they need academic and social skills to be happy at school, which is a part of school readiness. Readiness for school refers to the cognitive, social-emotional, and behavioral competencies that children must have to adapt to formal education (Lemelin et al., 2007).

It is essential for a child to feel comfortable and safe in a new environment to be able to establish new friendships feel socially accepted. A child needs to feel that s/he is loved and accepted by her/ his teachers as well as her/ his friends and to trust her/ him to get used to a new environment and to reach his/her full potential. A child who succeeds in the social

structure of the primary school will be able to focus on tasks more easily that require cognitive skills and performance and meet the expectations. Therefore, it will be difficult for a child starting primary school without his/her academic and social needs not being met to be happy and successful. Unlike the previous literature on school readiness which considered it equal to "academic readiness", recent studies emphasize the overall readiness of children including physical, social-emotional, and self-care skills. Therefore, school readiness must be taken as a multidimensional concept. One of the remarkable results of the current research is that the required skills for school that are identified based on the scientific studies converge with the skills that the children perceived as their needs.

Based on the findings of the current study we might infer that the preschoolers had academic and social-emotional curiosity about primary school. They seemed to focus on getting to know the teacher and the school and were especially curious about learning to read and write. A child who is eager to learn how to read and write will have the opportunity to satisfy this curiosity upon starting school. However, the child's curiosity about her/ his new school and the teacher at that school can be easily satisfied before starting primary school. Before starting primary school, children can visit the schools they will go to and meet their teachers, which might help to reduce the state of uncertainty and anxiety (Baştuğ & Hiçde, 2019; Koçyiğit, 2014; La Paro et al., 2000; Rous et al., 2010).

Considering children's willingness to go to primary school, all the preschoolers said they wanted to go to primary school, and all of them felt ready, except one child. It might be easier to start and adapt to primary when children perceive that they are ready for school. Similarly, in UNICEF's (2012) report, it is stated that school readiness has three dimensions, which are ready child, ready family, and ready school. The ready child dimension refers to the child's academic and developmental readiness for school. It is emotionally significant for the child to go to primary school willingly and feel ready to make a positive start (Lara-Cinisomo et al., 2004; Rouse et al., 2005). Another finding of the current study which showed that most of the children felt happy when they started primary school while some children said they were curious, excited, shy, afraid, and confused on the first day. The children also told that they were happy and feeling good at the end of the first grade, which suggested that most of the negative feelings turned into positive one over time. This might be the result of positive experiences during the first year of primary school. The literature suggests that children starting primary school have complex emotions (Fisher, 2009; Hong, Lu & Zhu, 2022). While learning new things and meeting new friends are positive experiences, being alone, wondering about the new teacher, fearing the unknown, being unsuccessful, being afraid of making mistakes and being punished are some of the biggest causes of negative emotions. Therefore, a strong and positive association between children's school life, relationships with peers and teachers, academic perceptions, and attitude towards school (Potter & Briggs, 2003; Pramling & Williams-Graneld, 1993; Valeski & Stipek, 2001) is not surprising at all.

When the first-grade children were asked about their favorite activities at school, they mostly mentioned music, painting, physical education lessons, and being with their friends. The children's preference of activities which make them feel active and free in primary school and the emphasis they put on spending time with friends is consistent with what they said when they were asked what they would like in primary school. It is not surprising that children want to play, have toys, friends, and books instead of structured and learning-centered activities. Play is a developmental need and "a magical key" for young children (Koçyiğit & Başara-Baydilek, 2015). Similarly, peer relationships are an essential element of early childhood because children who have positive peer relationships tend to show higher levels of school adjustment. Peers are as important as families and teachers in children's social environment (Gülay, 2010; Gülay, 2011; Gülay Ogelman & Aytaç, 2020; Kochenderfer-Ladd & Ladd, 2019; Şen & Özbey, 2017). Children, who become increasingly self-directed in primary school socialize with friends and they enjoy the things they can do together and independently during their time at school.

Lastly, the results showed that the suggestions of first graders for future students focused on the social-emotional dimension, such as obeying the rules, getting along well with their

friends, and loving their teacher. The child needs to be able to communicate, cooperate, express himself and follow the rules set by his/her teacher and friends in the classroom.

When the rules are followed, a child knows "what to do and when to do it", which helps the child to feel safe in a new environment. Children who are loved and accepted by their peers and teachers are more likely to develop confidence and a sense of belonging to the environment they are in. A new school environment where children feel comfortable and less uncertain positively affects children's adaptation and readiness (Alisinanoğlu, 2012; Gülay, 2010; Koçyiğit, 2014). Children's opinions are also valuable indicators of their social-emotional well-being and school adjustment.

6. Conclusion

Starting primary school is a milestone for every child because of the changing the physical environment, gaining more independence, and the growing expectations of adults. An extensive body of research focusing on children, school, and family to make a smooth and less challenging transition to primary school. Understanding starting primary school from the eyes of children might add a new and important perspective to this phase of development. Hearing children mostly talking about their excitement, the rules, the teachers and their wishes in a positive manner is good news. However, future studies might also be carried out at the very beginning of this transition to reveal the difficulties children face and to gain a deeper understanding of school readiness.

Limitations

The research is limited to interviews with children in terms of data collection method. Another limitation of the study is the limited time researchers had to interview the children. Future studies might work with more children and follow them from their preschool to the end of the first grade with a longitudinal design.

Recommendation

The results of the study showed that families or parents are one of the main sources of information for preschoolers. Therefore, parents should act with more caution while talking about primary school. Programs to support parents for helping their children to gain school readiness can be designed and implemented.

One of the striking results obtained in the research is that preschoolers have somehow heard "primary school" but do not seem to know exactly what it is. For this reason, it is important for preschool teachers to make introductory activities about primary school and to prepare children for this transition through field trips or stories.

Both preschoolers and first graders expressed similar ideas on what should be in primary schools converging on social and academic skills. Therefore, the programs or activities that aim to develop school readiness should consider those skills rather than focusing on academic ones only.

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Conflict of Interest

The Authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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