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39. Investigation of the readiness level of Syrian students having received preschool education and not having received preschool education for primary education¹

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Abstract

The current study aims to determine the readiness level of Syrian students having received and not having received pre-school education for primary education. To this end, on the basis of the main research question “What are the opinions of primary teachers about the readiness level of Syrian students having received and not having received pre-school education for primary education?”, their level of readiness was investigated in terms of their cognitive, physical, socio-emotional, language and self-care skills. The current study employed the case study design, one of the qualitative research methods. The study group is comprised of 15 primary teachers teaching first graders including Syrian students attending schools in the city of Şanlıurfa, which is located in the Southern Anatolian region of Turkey and where the Syrian population is intense. The participating teachers were selected by using the criterion sampling method. The data were collected through the semi-structured interview technique. In the analysis of the collected data, the content analysis method was used. As a result of the study, it was concluded that the Syrian students having received pre-school education are more ready for primary education in terms of their cognitive, physical, language, socio-emotional and self-care skills and that the Syrian students not having received pre-school education encounter many problems in the first grade of primary education.

Keywords: readiness, preschool education, Syrian students

Okul öncesi eğitim alan ve almayan Suriyeli öğrencilerin ilkokula hazırbulunuşluk düzeylerinin incelenmesi

Öz

Bu araştırma okul öncesi eğitim alan ve almayan Suriye uyruklu öğrencilerin ilkokula hazırbulunuşluk düzeylerinin belirlenmesini amaçlamaktadır. Bu kapsamda “Okul öncesi eğitim alan ve almayan Suriyeli öğrencilerin ilkokula hazırbulunuşluk düzeyleri hakkında sınıf öğretmenlerinin

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görüşleri nelerdir?” temel araştırma sorusu ile bilişsel, fiziksel, sosyal-duygusal, dil ve öz bakım becerileri açısından hazırbulunuşluk düzeyleri araştırılmıştır. Bu çalışmada nitel araştırma yöntemlerinden durum çalışması deseni kullanılmıştır. Çalışma grubu ölçüt örnekleme yöntemi ile belirlenmiş Türkiye'nin Güneydoğu Anadolu bölgesinde bulunan ve Suriye uyruklu vatandaşların yoğun olarak yaşadığı illerden biri olan Şanlıurfa ili'nde görev yapan, sınıfında Suriye uyruklu öğrenciler bulunan 15 birinci sınıf öğretmeninden oluşmaktadır. Veriler yarı yapılandırılmış görüşme tekniği ile toplanmıştır. Verilerin analizinde içerik analizi yöntemi kullanılmıştır. Araştırmanın sonucunda okulöncesi eğitim alan Suriye uyruklu ilkököl birinci sınıf öğrencilerinin bilişsel, fiziksel, dil, sosyal-duygusal ve öz bakım becerileri bakımından ilkökula daha hazır olduğu, okulöncesi eğitim almayan Suriye uyruklu öğrencilerin ilkököl 1. sınıfta birçok sorunla karşılaştığı tespit edilmiştir

Anahtar kelimeler: hazırbulunuşluk, okul öncesi eğitim, Suriye uyruklu öğrenciler

Introduction

With the Syrian war that started in 2011, both Turkey and many countries in Europe started to receive immigration intensively. As Turkey is a neighboring country to Syria, it has naturally received more immigrants. From the very beginning of this process, great effort has been invested for immigrant children to be educated. However, since there is no planned immigration policy, it cannot be said that the desired level in education has been reached.

Educational services for Syrian children started to be provided in Arabic at the temporary education centers at first and only Turkish lessons were instructed by Turkish teachers. In 2013, the Ministry of National Education (MEB) issued a circular titled education and training services for Syrian citizens under temporary protection in order to create an institutional structure for the education of Syrian children (Aksoy, 2020). With this circular, Syrian child had the opportunity to access basic education in and out of the camps. In 2014, the scope of the circular was further expanded and the circular “Education and training services for foreigners” was published, and immigrant children gained the right to enrol not only in schools with Syrian children, but also in schools with Turkish children (MEB, 2014). Again, in order to facilitate the schooling of Syrian children and the adaptation of children who can have access to school, the PICTES project was started in 2016, and the project lasted for two years and was supported by the EU. Within the scope of the project, support was provided in areas such as teaching Turkish, carrying out teacher trainings, providing stationery and material support for children and support for their transportation to school.

The number of registered Syrians in Turkey is 3 million 684 thousand 412 people (23 June 2021). The Ministry of National Education announced on 30 June 2020 that 35,553 Syrian students were educated in kindergartens and 338,807 Syrian students were educated in primary schools. In September 2019, it was reported that the number of Syrian babies born in our country was around 450 thousand (UNCHR, 2021). According to the reports, although it is seen that Syrian students are concentrated at the primary education level, the number of Syrian babies born in our country is also an issue that should be seriously considered. The absence of a specific date for the return of Syrian immigrants to their country requires the preparation of education plans considering that these children will continue their lives in Turkey. Although migrant families in Turkey prefer to live in areas close to Syria in the first place, they are scattered in many cities today. However, the regions where these families live are generally socioeconomically poor regions. This causes children to stay away from rich environmental experiences and the mother tongue of the country they live in, and makes these children disadvantaged at the

beginning of their education. When the language used at home is different from the language used at school, the child's level of readiness for school can be adversely affected (Bekman et al., 2011). Problems such as the lack of sufficient resources for migrant children in host countries, the inability to benefit from education services to the extent necessary, not knowing the language of education and cultural differences endanger the future of migrant children and pose a risk for the countries they live in (Human Rights Watch, 2015). If appropriate interventions are not made to these negative situations in the pre-school period, these children may not be ready for primary education and their developmental well-being can be adversely affected. Studies emphasize the importance of well-planned pre-school education programs in minimizing these negative situations experienced by immigrant children and in adapting to the migrated society (Erdemir, 2021a, 2021b; Karlı Çalamak & Erdemir, 2019). However, Pieloch McCullough and Marks (2016) state that learning the language of the country they live in and benefiting from educational services are two important points that will increase the living standards of immigrant children and facilitate their adaptation to the country they live in. Therefore, it is seen that there is a need for research in this field in order to reach the desired efficiency in the studies carried out in terms of the preparation of policies to facilitate the transition to preschool education and primary education, which are the first stage of children's education, and the adaptation of Syrian children.

Preschool education and readiness

Development continues as a whole and each stage prepares the person for the next stage. Preschool education also prepares the child for primary education. For immigrant children, school readiness means the preparation of teachers, pre-school education programs and the readiness of families, in addition to their gaining cognitive, social, emotional and physical skills that ensure academic success in primary school (Mathur and Parameswaran, 2012). In the study conducted by Currie (2001) to determine the components of readiness, according to the opinions of preschool teachers, the most important components are "readiness in terms of physical development", then "being able to express oneself verbally", "being interested in new situations" and "following the classroom rules". One of the main goals of preschool education is to prepare children for primary school and to provide a common educational environment for children coming from unfavourable environments (MEB, 2013). There are also many studies showings that pre-school education prepared within the scope of this goal has a significant effect on the level of readiness for primary education (Koçyiğit and Saban 2014; Uzun and Alat, 2017). Siraj Blatchford, Sylva, Taggart, Melhuish, Sammons, and Elliot (2003) stated that preschool education has many benefits because it supports development in many ways, the longer the education period, the greater the effect on cognitive development, and the greater the benefit for disadvantaged children than their peers. Although the pre-school enrolment rate of Syrian immigrants has increased over time, it is seen that this rate is quite low in the preschool period when compared to the primary school enrolment rate. For this reason, the inclusion of immigrant children in quality pre-school education before starting primary education is important for the integration of these disadvantaged children into society and their readiness for primary school.

There are certain dimensions of children's preparation for primary school. These are physical development for a healthy development, cognitive development for success in learning, language development for expressing oneself easily and understanding what is being said, social-emotional development for leaving home easily, for being able to be with peers and different adults, development of self-care skills for fulfilling his/her own responsibilities and environmental factors including the family (Oktay, 2018). In studies on children exposed to war and migration, both cognitive and psychosocial problems have been observed, such as anxiety, peer conflicts, difficulty in concentrating

and remembering, and difficulties in introverted and extroverted behaviors (Buchmüller et al., 2018, 2020). When it comes to school adaptation in terms of Syrian children, it has been stated in studies that the biggest obstacle for these children to have access to education is economic problems (Taştan and Çelik, 2017), followed by factors such as language problems, cultural differences, teacher attitudes and academic readiness (Yiğit, Şanlı and Gökalp, 2020; Yüce, 2018; Eren, 2019; Sarıtaş, Şahin and Çatalbaş, 2016). Early childhood is vital for children to develop language and early literacy skills (Snow and Tabors, 1993). Again, many studies have been done on the acquisition of second language and it has been revealed that certain periods have critical importance in language acquisition. According to Demirezen (2003), although language learning before the age of 12-13 is more advantageous, language learning and acquisition becomes more difficult after this age due to changes in the nerve structure of the brain. Taştan and Çelik (2017) also stated that Syrian families avoid using Turkish in daily life. It is considered important to plan a program to facilitate adaptation to school, to alleviate parents' concerns and to protect children's mother tongue so that the language barrier can be overcome (Seta and Theirworld, 2017). The preschool period offers many advantages in terms of development areas and supports children significantly in order to reduce the problems that occur more in the later period, such as language problems and undesirable behaviors. In the summer school intervention program for Syrian children by Erdemir (2021), significant improvements were achieved in all the development areas of cognitive, social-emotional, language, physical and self-care skills of all the children who participated in the program compared to those who did not. Communication with parents during this period will also accelerate the Turkish learning process. One of the factors affecting children's adaptation to and readiness for school is the environment. Until the child starts school, the most important environment is the family environment. Studies show that socioeconomic level negatively affects the rich environmental opportunities to be presented to children (Arnold, Gowani, Bartlett and Merali, 2007; Oktay, 2018; Samms- Vaughan, 2004). When this is examined in terms of Syrian children, it is seen that these children have come to Turkey by experiencing severe traumatic situations, completely devoid of rich environmental opportunities. This situation has affected the children who are disadvantaged in terms of language even more negatively. With the rich and stimulating environment they will offer; preschool education institutions and teachers will enable these children to start school on equal terms with their peers by minimizing the disadvantaged situation they are in.

The significance and purpose of the study

Many studies have been found on the education of Syrian migrant children, whose number is increasing with each day. However, it is seen that the majority of these studies have been focused on primary and middle education of these children and that limited number of studies have been found to be focused on pre-school education. Yüce (2018) examined the factors affecting the adaptation of Syrian immigrants under temporary protection to school, and Yiğit, Şanlı and Gökalp (2021) examined the obstacles to the adaptation of immigrants to school according to teachers and administrators, but no study that examined the readiness of immigrant children according to their pre-school education status was found. The current study aims to determine the readiness level of Syrian students having received and not having received pre-school education for primary education in terms of cognitive, physical, social-emotional, language and self-care skills. Thus, it is thought that the study will contribute to the field and the programs to be prepared by drawing attention to how immigrant children can make the best use of their right to education and the reflections of Syrian children's pre-school education on primary school, the development of children who have received preschool education, and the difficulties experienced by children who haven't received pre-school education.

The problem statement of the current study is “What are the opinions of primary teachers about the readiness level of Syrian students having received and not having received pre-school education for primary education?”. In this connection, answers to the following sub-problems were sought:

- 1) What are the cognitive readiness levels of Syrian students having received and not having received pre-school education?
- 2) What are the physical readiness levels of Syrian students having received and not having received pre-school education?
- 3) What are the language readiness levels of Syrian students having received and not having received pre-school education?
- 4) What are the social-emotional readiness levels of Syrian students having received and not having received pre-school education?
- 5) What are the self-care readiness levels of Syrian students having received and not having received pre-school education?

Method

Research design

In this study, an answer to the question “What are the opinions of primary teachers about the readiness level of Syrian students having received and not having received pre-school education for primary education?” was sought. Since a situation was intended to be examined in depth, the case study-exploratory case study-method was used. Case study is an empirical research method that investigates a current phenomenon in its real-life context and is used in situations where the boundaries between the phenomenon and its context are not clearly defined, and where more than one evidence or data source is available (Yin, 1984). Its difference from other research methods is that it allows the researcher to analyze a phenomenon and event in depth on the basis of “how” and “why” questions (Gay, Mills & Airisian, 2012). At the same time, case study is used to understand and illuminate current situations and problems. The case examined in this study is the opinions of teachers about the readiness of Syrian children who received and did not receive preschool education for primary education. Based on the classification made by Yin (2017), the holistic multiple case design was chosen in the current study. In a holistic multiple case study, there is more than one case that can be perceived as holistic on its own.

Participants

The criterion sampling method, one of the purposive sampling methods, was used to determine the participants. The purposive sampling method is useful in discovering and explaining phenomena and events (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2021). Criterion sampling refers to the creation of the sample from people, events, objects or cases with the characteristics determined to be related to the problem. The criterion used in the current study for the selection of the teachers is their having Syrian students having received and not having received pre-school education in their classrooms. The study group is comprised of 15 primary teachers teaching first graders including Syrian students attending schools in the city of Şanlıurfa, which is located in the Southern Anatolian region of Turkey and where the Syrian population

is intense. The participation was on a volunteer basis. Information about the teachers participating in the study is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Characteristics of the participants

Teacher Code	Gender	Length of Service	Number of Syrian Students		
			Number of students having received pre-school education	Number of students not having received pre-school education	Total
T1	Male	7 years	2	5	7
T2	Male	5 years	3	4	7
T3	Female	1 year	2	6	8
T4	Female	1 year	4	4	8
T5	Female	1 year	1	6	7
T6	Female	28 years	4	5	9
T7	Male	15 years	2	4	6
T8	Male	5 years	3	6	9
T9	Male	4 years	3	4	7
T10	Female	1 year	2	2	4
T11	Female	2 years	4	4	8
T12	Female	1 year	2	4	6
T13	Female	1 year	1	6	7
T14	Female	5 years	3	5	8
T15	Male	4 years	5	4	9

Data collection

The data of the study were collected through semi-structured interviews, one of the qualitative data collection techniques. While preparing the interview questions, first, the relevant literature was reviewed and the open-ended interview questions to be asked to the teachers were formed. The prepared questions were submitted to the review of 4 experts (1 academician working in the field of preschool education, 1 academician working in the field of primary school education, 1 measurement and evaluation expert, 1 primary teacher) and in light of the feedbacks given by the experts, one more question was added to the questions to be asked and thus the interview form was given its final form to have six questions. A pilot study was conducted with 3 primary teachers who were not in the study group to check the comprehensibility of the questions and then the data collection process was initiated. The data were collected in the fall term of the 2021-2022 school year. The data collection process lasted approximately 15 days. The interviews were conducted face-to-face, with one teacher at a time. All of the participants were asked questions in the same order, and the interviewee was allowed to answer the questions as he/she wanted.

Validity and reliability

The participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time, that the process was confidential and that the information would only be used within the scope of the study. To protect the privacy of the participants, codes were used instead of their real names. Based on the answers given by the teachers during the interview, the questions were expanded and the answers given to the interview questions were recorded in writing. The notes taken were confirmed by the participant at the end of the interview and thus the data were verified. In order for the study to be reliable, the primary teachers having both children having received preschool education and children not having received preschool education in their classrooms were selected. In addition, in order to ensure consistency in the study, the coding of an expert and that of the researcher were compared. The interviews conducted in the study were recorded and archived. These archives can be made available for confirmation by other researchers when needed. Finally, in the study, an expert in qualitative research was asked to examine the study, and necessary corrections were made in the study in line with the feedback from the expert.

Data analysis

One of the most difficult parts of qualitative research is the analysis of data (Brantlinger et al., 2005). The data in the current study were analyzed through content analysis. The purpose of content analysis is to reach concepts and relationships that can explain the collected data (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2021). After the interviews were completed, they were transcribed and the answers to each question were collected on the same page to facilitate the analysis. For example, the answers given by all the participants to the first question were written on the same sheet of paper, one under the other. It was aimed to see the data of the same question as a whole, the coding was made in this direction, and 5 themes and 2 categories were created from the codes. The data analysis was conducted manually.

Findings

In this section, the findings and comments obtained as a result of the analysis of the data of the study are given. The findings of the study are supported by direct quotations from the participants' views. The real names of the participants are not used; instead, the code name representing each participant is used.

The categories and codes related to the theme of cognitive readiness level of Syrian students having received pre-school education and not having received preschool education are given in Table 2.

Table 2. Theme: Cognitive readiness level of Syrian students having and not having received preschool education

Categories	Codes	n
Students having received preschool education	Recognizing vowels and numbers	6
	Concentrating on the lesson	12
	Level of the perception of the lesson	6
	Speed of transition to literacy	11
	Conceptual prior knowledge advantage	13
Students not having received preschool education	Difficulty in grasping letters	6
	Forgetting what has been learned in a short time	11

When the data in Table 2 are examined, it can be stated that the previous knowledge of Syrian students who received preschool education in preschool education institutions constitute the basis for their primary education; therefore, their conceptual prior knowledge is more advanced in primary school, and they can recognize vowels and numbers when they start primary education. In addition, attention is drawn to the fact that the duration of their concentration on the lesson is better, their perception and comprehension skills of the lesson are more advanced, and when they are evaluated in terms of the speed of transition to literacy, it can be said that the students who received pre-school education make progress more easily.

The explanations made by the participants T3, T4, T5 and T8 in this regard are as follows:

“...The students having received preschool are more ready to learn. They have more prior knowledge. My pre-school students came to school with the ability of recognizing some of the vowels and numbers ...” (T3)

“...Although their mother tongue is Arabic, they recognize some of the vowels in the literacy process. They know basic concepts such as triangle, square and rectangle ...” (T4)

“...The students having received pre-school education have higher levels of perception in the literacy process. My students having preschool education pay attention to the lesson more easily and they understand the lesson more easily. They are more successful ...” (T5)

“...I observe big differences between my students having received pre-school education and those not having received preschool education. My students having preschool education are able to understand and comprehend new information more easily. They are more ready for learning. Their prior conceptual knowledge is more ...” (T8)

The opinions of the teachers about the readiness level of the students who did not receive preschool education also indicate the same point. They also mentioned that Syrian students, who did not attend any preschool education institution before, have a harder time grasping the letters, fall behind the class level in the literacy process, forget what has been learned in a short time, and have deficiencies in their prior conceptual knowledge.

Some explanations made by the participants T5, T7 and T10 on this issue are as follows:

“...I have great difficulties in making progress with my students who did not receive preschool education. Those who did not receive preschool education progress more slowly than their peers having preschool education ...” (T5)

“...Students who did not receive preschool education have difficulty in understanding and comprehending basic concepts primarily due to the disadvantage arising from language skills. Distraction and poor retention of learned information ...” (T7)

“...My students who did not receive preschool education, on the other hand, have difficulties in understanding and perceiving some concepts. They have difficulty in learning and making connections due to the disadvantage arising from language problems ...” (T10)

The categories and codes related to the physical readiness level of the Syrian students who received and did not receive preschool education, which is the second theme, are given in Table 3.

Table 3. Theme: Cognitive readiness level of Syrian students having and not having received preschool education

Categories	Codes	N
	Pen holding skill	15

Students having received preschool education	Not having difficulty in line drawing activities	13
	Being able to write letters easily	12
Students not having received preschool education	Having difficulty in holding pen	12
	Not being able to connect lines	10
	Having difficulty in writing letters	11

When Table 3 is examined, it is seen that all of the teachers stated that the students who received preschool education have good pen holding skill and the majority of the teachers stated that the students who received preschool education do not have any difficulties while performing line drawing activities.

Explanations made by the participants T1, T4 and T9 on this issue are given below:

“...Of course, the physical development of my students having received preschool education is better, they are more successful in holding pens, drawing lines and writing letters properly...” (T1)

“...My students having received preschool education can perform skills such as holding pen properly, connecting lines, cutting, painting without difficulty...” (T4)

“...The students having preschool education have skills such as grasping the pen, drawing regular and irregular lines, knowing how to hold scissors...” (T9)

In the category of Syrian students who did not receive pre-school education, the majority of the teachers stated that they have difficulties in holding pen, connecting lines while doing line drawing exercises and writing letters.

Explanations made by the participants T4, T8 and T9 on this issue are as follows:

“...Most of my students who did not receive preschool education have difficulty in doing line drawing activities and cannot draw properly and in the desired manner. They have difficulty writing letters in the desired way ...” (T4)

“...They lag behind compared to those having received pre-school education...” (T8)

“...Those who did not have pre-school education have difficulty in performing skills that require fine motor skills, especially skills such as holding pen and grasping scissors, because they did not do it at home and did not go to kindergarten. ...” (T9)

The categories and codes related to the socio-emotional readiness level of the Syrian students who received and did not receive preschool education are given in Table 4.

Table 4. Theme: Socio-emotional readiness level of Syrian students having and not having received preschool education

Categories	Codes	N
Students having received preschool education	Friendship relationships	12
	Sense of responsibility	9
	Obeying rules	9
	Sociable	7
	Remaining hesitant/timid	6

Students not having received preschool education	Difficulty obeying rules	9
	Reluctance towards the lesson	7

When the data in Table 4 are examined, it is seen that the teachers are of the opinion that Syrian students who received preschool education develop more sociable and more comfortable relationships with their friends, do not have problems in following the school rules and have stronger sense of responsibility.

Explanations made by the participants T1, T8, T9 and T13 on this issue are given below:

“...The students having preschool education can establish friendships easily, express themselves more easily and fulfil the responsibilities I have given to them...” (T1)

“...My students having received preschool education are generally adaptable and sociable...” (T8)

“...Students having received preschool education are more enthusiastic and have more positive attitudes. Those who attended kindergarten know the school and are aware that there are rules in the school ...” (T9)

“...Those who received preschool education are more successful in obeying the rules, and they have more advanced ability to take responsibility and fulfil them...” (T13)

In the category of Syrian students who did not receive preschool education, the majority of the teachers are of the opinion that that the students behave more shyly, tend to be violent against their friends, do not obey the school rules and are reluctant to attend classes.

Explanations made the participants T5, T6, T9 and T11 on this issue are given below:

“...My students who did not receive preschool education are reluctant towards the lessons, they do not want to write when they have difficulty in writing, show aggressive and non-compliant behaviors against the rules. ...” (T5)

“...The students who did not receive preschool education, on the other hand, do whatever they have learned at home at school. They do not obey the school rules ...” (T6)

“...My students who did not receive preschool education have poor command of Turkish and even I have students who do not speak Turkish. These students of mine cannot communicate with other children in the class. They may also resort to violence against their friends to attract attention. ...” (T9)

“...Only one of my students in the class did not receive preschool education. That student of mine is an introverted child who does not want to communicate with his/her friends, he/she does not want to leave his/her mother in the first weeks of school, now he/she is attached to me, he/she does not leave my side during breaks and starts to cry when a different teacher enters the class, thinking that I will go. ...” (T11)

The categories and codes related to the language readiness level of the Syrian students who received and did not receive preschool education are given in Table 5.

Table 5. Theme: Language readiness level of Syrian students having and not having received preschool education

Categories	Codes	N
Students having received preschool education	Turkish vocabulary	11
	Expression skill	13
	Comprehension skill	11
Students not having received preschool education	Difficulty in communicating	14

Weakness in expressive language skills	13
Not knowing Turkish	15

When the data in Table 5 are examined, it is seen that in the category of Syrian students having received preschool education, the teachers are of the opinion that their Turkish vocabulary is more developed and they have no difficulty in understanding and expressing themselves in Turkish.

Explanations of the participants T1, T2, T7 and T13 on this issue are given below:

“...The Turkish vocabulary of my students who went to kindergarten is more developed. They can express themselves more easily when communicating with their friends and me. They can make better sentences ...” (T1)

“...I think that the most important contribution of preschool education is the development of language skills. They usually learn Turkish in this process. They pronounce the words they learn more accurately. They participate in lessons more ...” (T2)

“...Students having received pre-school education understand the given instructions more easily. They have no difficulty in displaying the desired behavior ...” (T7)

“...I think that preschool education is very important for Syrian students, especially in the field of language development because the families of these students generally do not know Turkish. Children have a very difficult time when they enter the primary school environment from an environment far from Turkish. When students go to kindergarten, they socialize with many Turkish students and are exposed to Turkish. This makes it easier for them to learn the language. They learn many concepts in kindergarten. They do not have difficulty in primary school ...” (T13)

When the data in Table 5 are examined, it is seen that in the category of Syrian students who did not receive preschool education, most of the teachers stated that the students have difficulties such as not knowing the Turkish language, having difficulties in expressing themselves and comprehending.

Explanations made by the participants T4, T6, T7 and T12 on this issue are given below:

“...My students who did not go to kindergarten generally do not know Turkish, and those who speak Turkish do not have sufficient vocabulary. ...” (T4)

“...Those who did not receive preschool education do not know Turkish, do not understand the lesson, and cannot participate in the lesson...” (P6)

“...My students who did not receive preschool education have problems in speaking and understanding. They have difficulty following my instructions ...” (T7)

“...The most important problem experienced by my students who did not go to kindergarten is that they cannot use the language adequately. ...” (T12)

The categories and codes related to the self-care readiness level of the Syrian students who received and did not receive preschool education are given in Table 6.

Table 6. Theme: Self-care readiness level of Syrian students having and not having received preschool education

Categories	Codes	N
Students having received preschool education	Tidiness	8
	Cleaning habits	13
	Clothing habits	10
	Untidiness	13

Students not having received preschool education

Obeying hygiene rules

9

When the data in Table 6 are examined, it is seen that in the category of Syrian students having received preschool education, the teachers stated that the students are more organized, they pay more attention to their clothing, and they come to primary school with already acquired cleaning habits.

Explanations of the participants T2, T3 and T12 on this issue are given below:

“...My students who received preschool education obey the rules of cleaning, such as washing their hands before and after eating, or taking the classroom soap with them when going to the toilet...” (T2)

“...My students having received preschool education are more clean, meticulous and able to take care of themselves...” (T3)

“...My pre-school students pay more attention to their personal hygiene as well as their dressing, hair combing and nail cleaning ...” (T12)

When the data in Table 6 are examined, it is seen that in the category of Syrian students who did not receive preschool education, the teachers stated that they do not give the necessary importance to the cleaning rules and do not come to school tidy.

Explanations made by the participants T2 and T5 on this issue are given below:

“...Most of the students come to school tidy. Moreover, they do not pay the required attention to their personal hygiene ...” (T2)

“...The majority of my students who did not receive preschool education do not pay due attention to their personal hygiene. They do not care about particularly their hand-face cleaning. Parents are also negligent in this regard. Maybe if the children had received preschool education, they would have understood the importance of cleanliness earlier and started primary school more cleanly ...” (T5)

Discussion

In the current study, it was aimed to determine the readiness levels of Syrian students who received preschool education and Syrian students who did not receive preschool education in terms of the development of cognitive, physical, social-emotional, language and self-care skills. When the data obtained were considered under the theme of cognitive readiness level of Syrian students in two categories as the students who received preschool education and the students who did not receive preschool education, it was revealed on the basis of the interviews conducted with the primary teachers that preschool education directly and positively affected the cognitive readiness level of Syrian students for primary school. It was revealed that the cognitive skills of Syrian students who received preschool education, such as understanding instructions, perceiving, recognizing numbers, and noticing vowels, were more developed than Syrian students who did not receive preschool education. Studies show that there is a relationship between cognitive skills acquired in preschool and success in later primary school (La Paro and Pianta, 2000; Bodovski and Farkas, 2007; Duncan et al., 2007; Claessens et al., 2009). In the category of Syrian students who did not receive preschool education, it was stated that it is more difficult for the students to grasp the letters and they forget the information they have learned in a short time. When evaluated in the context of combining letters and speed of transition to literacy, it was stated that students who received preschool education were more successful in this process. The main reason for this situation is thought to be the planned and programmed presentation of activities that improve

children's cognitive skills in pre-school education institutions. Another remarkable finding in the study is that children who received preschool education have more advantages in terms of level of concentration and conceptual prior knowledge. This is thought to be because of the fact that children who receive preschool education enter the language learning process earlier because the child's knowledge of the language of the host country is an important factor in his/her concentrating on the lesson and forming his/her conceptual prior knowledge. It is thought that the cognitive readiness of Syrian children who started the first grade of primary school after having received preschool education is at the expected level, causing them to adapt more easily and have better academic achievement than their peers who did not receive preschool education.

When the category of physical readiness level of Syrian students having received preschool education and not having received preschool education is examined, it is seen that the students having received preschool education are at a very good level in terms of pencil holding and line drawing skills. Güzel and Özyurt (2018), in their study examining the concept of school readiness on the basis of teachers' opinions, concluded that preschool education supports all developmental areas of children and improves their pencil-holding skill. Başar, Doğan, and Şener (2020) stated that the majority of the participating children gained the ability to hold a pencil with the activities applied in the preschool period and since this skill forms the basis of print awareness, a positive attitude to be developed in this period will affect their literacy attitudes in the future. Simple line drawing activities for the development of fine and gross motor skills and pen holding, scissors using and cutting and pasting activities conducted during preschool education provide great convenience for children when they come to primary school. In the category of physical readiness of Syrian students who did not receive preschool education, children's difficulties in holding pen, drawing lines and writing letters cause these children to be involved in the literacy process late and to have adaptation problems in the classroom.

In the category of Syrian students having received preschool education under the theme of socio-emotional development of Syrian students having and not having preschool education, the students were found to have developed better relationships with their friends. The fact that play activities that could unite children regardless of their color, race and origin were included in the preschool education of these students may have caused them to be better at social relationships. It is also thought that the fact that group work activities were also frequently conducted during their preschool education may have developed their sense of responsibility and their tendency to obey rules. This result seems to concur with the results reported by Türkyılmaz and Pekdoğan (2019), Balat, Bayındır and Değirmenci (2021) and Erbay and Saltalı (2020). The preschool period has a special importance because it is the first period when these children start to be with the society after their families. Therefore, teachers have an important role for this process to run efficiently and effectively. In the category of Syrian students who did not receive preschool education, it is seen that there are shy behaviors, resistance to rules and reluctance towards the lesson. It is thought that it is normal for children who have not reached the desired level of socio-emotional development and readiness to exhibit these behaviors. Children's not knowing the language also makes this process more complicated. Teachers' planning activities in which these students can be easily involved is believed to facilitate the process.

Under the theme of language readiness of Syrian students, it is seen that children who received preschool education have developed expression skills. Their Turkish vocabulary and comprehension skills are also seen to be developed. All the teachers interviewed in the current study stated that their Syrian students learned to speak Turkish during their preschool education. Children are exposed to Turkish and can learn the language more easily through Turkish language activities and by interacting and

communicating with Turkish students while playing games during the pre-school education period. Ataseven (2019) examined the effect of the game program supporting language development of immigrant children and found that there occurred a significant difference in favor of the language development of the immigrant children in the experimental group and that these children behaved more comfortably in social life. Syrian children who did not receive preschool education, on the other hand, face difficulties in communicating and expressing themselves as they do not know enough Turkish. These children start primary school without enough command of Turkish since Turkish is not spoken at home. Poor language competence can cause serious problems. While the advanced level of receptive and expressive language of Syrian children who speak Turkish affects their primary school success positively, children who do not speak Turkish experience communication difficulties and failure in lessons during the primary school education.

In the theme of self-care readiness of Syrian students, it is seen that Syrian children who received preschool education have better self-care skills such as better cleaning habits and being more organized and tidier. Cultural differences play an important role in the development of these skills. Syria's being a warmer country due to its location has affected people's clothing habits. Preschool education institutions support the development of these skills through both explanations and demonstrations and activities. Applications in pre-school institutions such as washing hands before and after eating and certain rules to be followed while eating have led to the development of self-care skills of these children.

Limitations and implications for practice

This study has some limitations that should be considered by further research. First, the qualitative method was used in this study. Conducting quantitative or mixed studies for Syrian students will make it possible to generalize the study to the whole target population. Second, the current study was conducted with the participation of primary school. Similar studies can be conducted on teachers from different branches and different students.

In light of the findings of the current study, following suggestions can be made:

1. Preschool age Syrian children can be identified and the schooling rate can be increased in the preschool education period. To this end, research can be conducted not in the regions where Syrian population is intense but also across the whole country.
2. Students who start primary school without having received pre-school education can be identified and support education can be provided for these children to help them compensate for their missing skills.
3. Research can be conducted to determine the attitudes and views of families towards preschool education.

Conclusions

As a result, Syrian children who have received pre-primary education recognize letters and numbers more quickly, are better able to concentrate in class, and have higher levels of cognitive development in primary school. In terms of physical readiness, they have the developed ability of holding pen, they do not have difficulty in drawing and writing letters. In terms of socio-emotional readiness, they have better friendship relationships, they are more prone to share their belongings and food with their friends and

they can better communicate with their peers and teachers. In addition, they can learn to solve conflicts with their peers, to solve problems that may arise in relationships, to respect the rights of other children and to empathize. All these help the child to develop problem-solving skills in the future. In terms of language development, it is seen that Turkish vocabulary, expression and comprehension skills have improved, and they are more organized in terms of self-care skills. These results show that preschool education has many advantages in all the five developmental areas that make great contributions to the readiness of Syrian children for primary education. These results show that preschool education has many advantages in the preparation process of Syrian children for primary school. Therefore, taking necessary measures for the schooling of children in this group will facilitate the education system in our country. In the light of these results, it is important to plan a preschool education program suitable for Syrian children.

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