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The View of Teachers of First Graders Regarding Scheduling the Age of Starting School to an Earlier Time

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The aim of the study is to present the reflections of scheduling the age of starting school to an earlier time related to the experiences inside and outside the classroom, students, problems and solutions experienced in teaching-learning process according to the view of teachers of first graders. The study is a collective case study. Work group was determined according to measurement sampling among purposive sampling methods in qualitative research approaches. 14 primary school teachers working at public primary schools in spring term in 2012-2013 educational term around Turkey attended the research. The data of the study were collected via interview and observation forms developed by the researchers. Descriptive analysis technique was used for the analysis of the data. When analyzing the data, Elo and Kyngas's (2007) preparation, organization and reporting phases were taken into consideration. To validate the study, the findings were presented detachedly and quotations were taken directly from attendants' statements. In order to provide the reliability of the research, we followed the way Stemler (2001) called repeatability or single coder reliability. In this research, the reliability was provided by considering the percentage of both single coder and two coders. In the research, we gained such findings that teachers disapprove of scheduling the age of starting school to an earlier time; they think that this affect teaching-learning process negatively; students 69-month-old or younger cannot discharge self-care skills because of their physical inability; and this hampers conduction of Phoneme Based Sentence Method.

Introduction

People find themselves in social life from the time they are born. The social life is limited with immediate environment at first; however, it develops and starts to cover further environment in later periods. After a while, school time, a new and effective socializing

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process, starts. School time is the period that children get out from family environment and involve in exterior environment and social life (Yörükoğlu, 2003). The most important factor determining schooling of an individual in this period is the structure of the educational system.

Depending on the structure of educational system, school time starts with preschool education (compulsory or optional) or compulsory primary school. In turkey, children start school with preschool education depending on their parents' choice or compulsory primary school. In parallel with this situation, children's starting to primary school first grade can be directly without preschool education or – at the end of preschool education – attending first grade.

Starting to primary school which forms the first step of formal education and forms the base of later educational institutions and which is compulsory in many countries is one of the most important cornerstones in a child's life. Because primary school means, for many children, leaving home for the first time, spending most of the day with new friends and adults, attending activities with strict rules for the first time, being disciplined, obeying the teacher's directions, and especially learning reading, writing and arithmetic (Özarslan and Gündüz, 2013). In this sense, primary school first grade is quite important in terms of gaining basic skills such as reading, writing and arithmetic and having positive attitudes towards reading in future (Oktay and Unutkan, 2003).

Beside primary school which is of great importance in educational and social life of an individual, elementary school – first step of primary school – and age to start elementary school are also of great importance. In Turkey, with the amendment numbered 6287 on March 30, 2012 in Primary Education and Training Law numbered 222 dated January 05, 1961, formal education which was applied as 5+3+3 till 1997 and 8+3 and then 8+4 was constructed as 4+4+4 with the last amendment and made compulsory in Turkish National Educational System (Gözütok et al., 2013). With the amendment in 7th article of Ministry of National Education Regulations of Primary School Institutions, children who are 66 months old start school mandatorily; children who are 60 – 66 months old start school according to their parents' wish. In other words, with the new regulations, first step of primary education was reduced to 4 years from 5 years and named as elementary school. Moreover, age to start compulsory elementary school was reduced to age 5 (60 months) from age 6 (72 months).

Age to start compulsory education is between 3 and 7 in the world. Whereas age to start compulsory education is 6 in many countries, it is under 6 in 38 countries. Compulsory education starts at the age of 7 in 44 countries, at the age of 6 in 113 countries, at the age of 5 in 33 countries at the age of 4 in 4 countries and at the age of 3 in one countries. Age to start compulsory education is 6 in Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Germany, Ireland, Estonia, France, Italy, Austria, Romania, Portugal, Poland, USA, Australia, Korea, and Japan. It starts at the age of 7 in Bulgaria, Finland and Sweden; at the age of 5 in Hungary, the Netherlands and Malta; and 4 or 5 in England (UNESCO, 2011, as cited by Güven 2012).

The law amendment reducing the age to start compulsory primary education from 6 age (72 months) to 5 age (60 months) generated discussions in media organs and public, certain non-governmental organizations, educational unions and academic environments (Ankara University, 2012; Boğaziçi University, 2012; Gür at al., 2012; Eğitim Sen, 2012; Eğitim İş, 2012; ERG, 2012; Güneş, 2013; Güven, 2012; Müftüoğlu, 2012; METU, 2012; Turk Eğitim Sen, 2012; Turkish Doctors' Union, 2012). However, the topics of the discussions focus on school maturity and development features of the individuals and social structure. It is ignored what classroom teachers, who will involve in teaching – learning processes with these

students, will do in these processes, how they behave, how they solve the problems. It is a fact that whether classroom teachers have enough interest, information, skills, and educational processes about the development of the children in those ages is affective in reaching true judgements (Kesicioğlu, 2013).

Backdating the age to start primary education affects the classroom teacher who is one of the most important shareholders of the process. Classroom teachers should deal with development properties of the children besides teaching early reading, writing, and arithmetic. Moreover, it should not be ignored that teaching success of reading and writing depends on teachers; hence, it is important for teachers to follow the developments in the field, update their information and know the methods effectively in terms of applications (Güneş, 2013). For this reason, it will be useful to analyze the experiences of classroom teachers who are to continue teaching-learning processes with the students who are in this age due to law amendment.

The aim of the study is to present reflections about effects of backdating of the age to start primary school on experiences in and out of classroom, students, problems and solutions in teaching-learning process according to elementary school first grade teachers.

Problem Sentence

According to primary school first grade teachers, how does backdating of the age to start primary school reflect on teaching-learning processes?

Sub-problems

What do teachers think about backdating of the age to start elementary school?

How does backdating of the age to start elementary school effect teaching process of early reading and writing?

What kinds of problems do students who start school when they are 69 months old or younger experience?

What kinds of differences are there between the students who are 69 months old or younger and older than them sharing the same educational program?

How are the self-care skills of the students who are 69 months old and younger?

Do classroom teacher have problems in early reading and writing process due to the age of the students?

How does backdating of the age to start school affect the application process of Phoneme Based Sentence Method?

Are there any differences between the students who are 69 months old or younger and much older ones in terms of basic language skills?

Method

Research Design

Aiming to identify how backdating of the age to start elementary school reflect on teaching learning processes according to classroom teachers' opinions, the study is a holistic single case study conducted with qualitative method. Qualitative research is the research that qualitative data collecting tools such as observation, interview and document analysis are used; a qualitative process is followed in order to present the perceptions and events in natural environment in a holistic manner (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2013). Qualitative researches are the researches that are conducted to evaluate a situation deeply and detailed (Yin, 2003; Woodside, 2010). The most fundamental aspect of qualitative researches is to analyze one or more situations deeply. In other words, factors about a situation (environment, individuals, events, processes etc.) are studied in a holistic manner and focus is on how they affect the situation and how they are affected by the situation (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2013). We employ qualitative method holistic single case study because it is aimed to identify how the backdating of the age to start elementary school affects teaching-learning processes and how students are affected from the situation.

Work Group

The work group of the study was determined according to criterion sampling a kind of purposive sampling methods in qualitative research approach (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2013). In the selection of the teachers in work group, we take some criteria into consideration such as having at least 10 years' experience in the profession, educating the first grade at least twice, having students younger than 69 months old in the classroom. 14 classroom teachers meeting these criteria, working at public schools in Turkey in 2012-2013 educational years attended the study. Qualitative descriptive approach requires describing the attendants in workgroup in detail (Creswell, 2012). Personal characteristics of the teachers attending to the study are given in Table 1.

Gender is an identifying factor in choosing a profession and continuing a profession. As seen in Table 1, only two of the teachers attending to the study are male, the others are female. The result is in fact an indicator of the perception in the society " teaching is a profession for women" (Akpınar, Yıldız and Ergin, 2006; Çermik, Doğan and Şahin, 2010; Ekiz, 2006).

Work experience is about the time of working as teacher professionally. In teaching, teachers who have worked for 5 years or more are accepted as "experienced". Experience in teaching is more important than experience in other professions because each teaching-learning process is a new experience for a teacher. Each experience guides teacher in planning, application and evaluation of new teaching-learning processes. So, the teachers attending the study are thought as "experienced" and they are expected to reflect their experience on teaching-learning process positively.

Table 1. Personal Characteristics of the Teachers Attending the Study

Number	Gender	Work Experience	Age	The number of Educating 1st Grade	Number of Students	Number of the students aged 69 months or younger
T1	F	18	41	6	23	2
T2	F	17	40	5	22	3

T3	M	17	39	3	25	8
T4	F	12	32	5	20	3
T5	F	12	34	5	22	3
T6	M	26	47	10	27	3
T7	F	34	56	6	26	4
T8	F	16	38	6	29	11
T9	F	23	45	9	27	9
T10	F	18	40	5	21	3
T11	F	21	44	6	22	4
T12	F	20	42	5	24	2
T13	F	16	37	5	25	2
T14	F	12	34	3	27	4

Age is accepted as a sign of maturity in teaching. It is assumed that experience of individual increases with their age. So, that the teachers are in a period which can be described as "young maturity" is important in terms of their performance in teaching-learning processes. Because when the teachers grow older, they become more dedicated to their school (Celep et al., 2004). That the dedication of the teachers increase is a positive situation effecting time and effort for educational activities. However, we know that the tendency to authoritarian control (Emir and Kanlı, 2009), professional depersonalization and emotional exhaustion increase with age; and these kinds of teachers are mostly in elementary schools (Yazıcı, 2009). It is not expected that excessive authoritarian tendency or professional depersonalization and emotional exhaustion have positive effects on teaching-learning process. Hence, the age of the teachers attending the study does not have negative effects on teaching-learning process.

The basic duty expected from a first grade teacher is to teach students how to read and write. But teaching early reading and writing is not easy by its nature; moreover there are many factors that make it more difficult. The early reading-writing experience of the teacher is one of these factors. In general, individuals doing the same thing again and again have more chance to be successful in each repetition. They are getting proficiency in their profession. It is seen that the teachers attending the study are experienced and expert in their profession.

The number of the students in a classroom is one of the most important factors affecting teaching-learning process in terms of communication, classroom management, dealing with individual differences. Johnson (2002) describes the classroom having 20 or less students as small, and describes classrooms having at least 31 students as big (cited by, Güçlü, 2002). We can say that the numbers of the classrooms in our study are appropriate in terms of teaching-learning process. It is known that the communication between teacher and students is much in the classrooms having less students (Blatchford, Bassett and Brown, 2005; Yaman 2010). Especially, in early reading and writing process having more students is not desired by the teacher who has to deal with the students one by one. The classrooms of the teachers attending the study are not crowded. But, it is assumed that it is difficult to teach early reading and writing in the classrooms having more than 25 students.

Chronological age is of great importance in teaching early reading and writing because it is expected to be parallel with physical, mental and social development. However, chronological age is not the single determiner of the teaching early reading and writing process. Despite the chronological age, there may be some individuals under or above the chronological age depending on personal differences (Akyol, 2010). In the study, because it is aimed to analyze the experiences of the students aged 60-69 months and their classroom teachers in teaching

learning process, the chronological age is accepted as a measure. According to the measure, in the classrooms of the teachers attending the study there are at least 2 – in average 4- students younger than 69 months old.

Data Collection

Data of the study was collected with the interview and observation forms developed by the researchers. The most frequently used data collecting technique in qualitative researches is interview (Mason, 2005). In this study, an interview form structured with open-ended questions was used. Before preparing the questions in the data collection tool, we scanned the literature and analyzed the similar studies. Then, being consistent to the aim and the sub-problems of the study, a scheme form aiming to identify what the students 69 months old and younger experience in early reading and writing processes, how they are effected, what the teachers experience about these students, and how they direct the process was constructed. In order to validate the interview form prepared by the researchers, the form was evaluated by two field experts in terms of being understood and covering the topic which is studied; and put into the final form in the directions of suggestions. In the final form, there are four questions aiming to identify the personal characteristics of the teachers attending the research; and 8 questions aiming to present the reflections of backdating of the age to start primary school on teaching early reading and writing process and the experiences in the process.

Table 2. Interview Places and Duration

Attendant	Interview Place	Interview Duration
T1	Teachers'Lounge	10 mins.
T2	Teachers'Lounge	8 mins.
T3	Teachers'Lounge	9 mins.
T4	Teachers'Lounge	13 mins.
T5	Classroom	9 mins.
T6	Classroom	17 mins.
T7	Classroom	15 mins.
T8	Classroom	10 mins.
T9	Classroom	18 mins.
T10	Classroom	15 mins.
T11	Teachers'Lounge	10 mins.
T12	Teachers'Lounge	12 mins.
T13	Classroom	7 mins.
T14	Classroom	12 mins.

In order to collect and diversify the data, we used an observation form beside the structured interview form. While forming the observation form, the same process preparing the interview form was followed by the researchers. In the observation form, there are four items about the personal information of the student being observed; and 19 items describing students' physical, mental and social developments and some of their behaviors in the process of early reading and writing. For each of the items in observation form, we prepared a 4-scale measurement; 1: low, 2: medium, 3: good and 4: very good. So, the situation observed was standardized for each observation and observer.

The data of the research was collected in March- April- May, 2013. Interviews – one of the data collection tools of the research- was held by a researcher and recorded with the help of a tape recorder. The interviews with the teachers were 8-10 minutes on average. Following is

the information about where the interviews were recorded and how long they took.

Observations -another data collection tool of the research – cover 20 students aged between 60 and 69 months old. The students chosen randomly from the classrooms of the teachers attending the study were observed by a researcher for three weeks and three hours a week. In other words, these students were observed in Turkish Language courses 3 hours a week, 9 hours in total.

Analysis of the Data

In analysis of the data of the study, we used descriptive analysis technique (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2013). While analyzing the data, Elo and Kyngas's (2007) preparation, organizing and reporting phases were taken into consideration. According to this;

In Reporting Phase: At first, the interviews recorded were listened and typed with the help of computer. Based on the privacy policy of the attendants, the teachers interviewed were coded with "T" and numbers from 1 to 14. On the other hand, observation forms was ordered according to student observed, date of observation and observation order; and observation scores were compared.

In organization phase: In this phase at first, considering research questions and conceptual aspect of the research, we formed a framework; and we determined under which themes we will organize and present the questions. The data gathered from interview and observations were grouped and matched with the interview questions. Interview questions were accepted as main themes.

In Reporting Phase: In this phase, qualitative data were coded and grouped under themes and sub themes. We tried to present the data intelligibly. While analyzing the data, we aimed to support validity and contribute cogency (Wolcot, 1990), which is significant in qualitative researches, by quoting directly from the statements of the interviewees in order to make the topic clear. On the other hand, while explaining findings related to themes and sub-themes, we benefitted from the observation results. For this purpose we evaluated interview findings comparing to students' observation scores based on repeated observations. Finally, the findings were interpreted considering literature.

In order to provide reliability and validity of the research, we performed some processes.

The researcher presented the findings fair-and-square and quoted from the statements of the interviewee in order to provide the validity of the research. Because according to Kirk and Miller (1986), the validity in a qualitative research means that the researcher observes the event much the same and quite fair-and-square (cited by: Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2013). On the other hand, we benefit from data diversity and attendant confirmation which are additional methods suggested in order to increase validity (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2013). In order to provide data diversity, observations were conducted together with interviews. On the other hand, after analyzing data, the confirmation of the data were provided with 5 teacher determined randomly among the teachers in the research.

In order to provide the reliability of the research, we followed the method which Stemler (2001) named as replicability or single coder reliability. According to this, if the same coder or coders get the same scores when they try to code the same data set again, it is accepted that the score reliability is provided. According to Stemler (2001) the high percentage of

consistency between coder or coders shows that score reliability is high. In the study, the reliability is provided by comparing both single coder and two coders' notion agreement percentage. For notion agreement, we used Miles and Huberman's (1994) reliability formula: P(percentage of agreement)= Na(Notion Agreement)/Na(Notion Agreement)+Nd(Notion Disagreement)X100. As the result of the calculations, while the reliability was found as 95% for single coder, the reliability of the two coders was calculated as 91%; so the research was accepted as reliable. The codes which are notion disagreement for both single coder and two coders were revised and reached to an agreement.

Findings and Comment

The interview questions forming the sub-problems of the research were accepted as main themes. Eight main themes were formed such as teachers' notions related to age implementation; the effect of the implementation towards early reading and writing process; comparison of students who are 69 months old or younger and older ones; problems of the students who are 69 months old or younger and solutions; self-care skills of the students who are 69 months old or younger; the problems of the teachers in the process of teaching early reading and writing; the effect of backdating of the age to start primary school on implementation of Phoneme based Sentence Method; the difference between the students who are 69 months old or younger and the students who are older than that age in terms of basic language skills.

Teachers' notions related to the backdating of the age to start primary school are given in Table 3.

Table 3. Teachers' Notions Related to the Backdating of the Age to Start Primary School

Main Theme	Theme	Sub-Themes	Concepts
Teachers' Notions Related to the Backdating of the Age to Start Primary School	Positive	Mental	No problem in comprehension
	Negative	Physical	Weak small muscles, no hand craft, deficient in holding pencils and scissors, no self care skills, not tidying the goods, difficulty in activities
		Mental	Lack of attention, desire to play a game, lack of ability to obey the classroom rules, reading and comprehension problems, problems in concentration and perception, inability to sit
		Emotional	Lack of self confidency
		Adaptation	Inability to adapt to school, group's heterogeneity, difficulty of the courses, inability to attend to the activities, adaptation problems
		School and Environment	Environment of the school and the classroom is not suitable
		Parents	Mothers put the students off

When the answers given by the teachers to the question "As a classroom teacher, How do you evaluate the backdating of the age to start primary school?", it is seen that none of the teachers, except from only one teacher (T3) support the implementation. The teacher stating his/her support on the implementation states that he / she does not have any difficulty in comprehension and starts reading at the same time with other students. The teacher explains his/her notion as:

I did not face any difficulty in comprehension. We started reading at about the same time with

the other students. There was a time lag for about a month. (T3)

The teachers attending the research states that the implementation is not advisable by citing some physical deficiencies such as weak small muscles, no hand craft, deficient in holding pencils and scissors, no self-care skills, not tidying the goods, difficulty in activities. The significance of the physical competence in early reading and writing is often emphasized (Başar, 2013; Bilir, 2005; Duran, 2013; Gündüz and Çalışkan, 2013). Followings are some of the notions of the teachers attending the research:

...For example; they have difficulty in some kind of stuff such as cutting, sticking, tearing. They slog on holding scissors. Especially, one of them did not attend kindergarten, we had difficulty in both holding scissors and doing the activities. In short, he/she had much difficulty. While his/her friends were doing the activities easily, he/she could not do them. (T1)

...we have difficulty in doing the activities. For example, he/she cannot hold the scissors or cut. This is because he/she have not completed the development of small muscles. (T9)

... has not completed muscle development, cannot use books and notebooks properly. Even he/she cannot put his/her homework into the file. (T12)

Teachers do not find the implementation advisable because of such mental development problems as lack of attention, desire to play a game, lack of ability to obey the classroom rules, reading and comprehension problems, problems in concentration and perception, inability to sit. In fact, it is stated that starting primary school earlier than six age causes certain problems in terms of mental readiness (Turkish Doctors' Union). Following are certain teachers' notions:

I don't approve the implementation; because, They have problems in concentration and perception. (T14)

I don't find the backdating of the age to start primary school advisable; because, I have difficulty in reading and comprehension activities especially with the younger students. (T11)

Teachers state that student have certain problems such as inability to adapt to school, group's heterogeneity, difficulty of the courses, inability to attend to the activities, adaptation problems; so, the implementation is not advisable. Whereas students' skills of learning effectively and adaptation to school means readiness (Lewit and Baker, 1995). According to the statements of the teachers, it can be stated that the readiness of the students is not enough. Here are some teachers' notions:

... Secondly, it is not proper for two distinct age groups to be in the same class. While the older ones show success, the younger ones are overwhelmed. (T5)

... I evaluate it as bad; because they cannot adapt it. (T2)

...on the other hand, attention span of the young children is too short. They cannot adapt the lessons. (T11)

Undoubtedly that there are many factors affecting teaching reading and writing. However, it is stated that school maturity which means students' being ready for school physically, emotionally, mentally and socially (Yavuzer, 2010) is crucial, shows individual differences (Yazıcı, 2002); and just the individual reached this maturity can do what they are asked at

school (Ülkü, 2007). But, Güneş (2013) states that school maturity is related to old theories and lost its validity at present.

The information acquired related to the effect of the age implementation on the process of teaching early reading and writing are given in Table 4.

When the answers given by the teachers to the question "How did backdating of the age implementation effect the process of teaching-learning?", all the teachers – except from only one teacher (T3) – states that the process is affected negatively in terms of certain reasons. Following is the statement of the teacher stating that he/she is not affected from the process:

It was positive. I had delay just for a month. I did not have any difficulty in comprehension or start to read with the students who are 66 months old. (T3)

Followings are some teachers' notions who think that the teaching-learning process is tiring and have difficulty in stages:

Table 4. The Effect of the Age Implementation on the Process of Teaching Early Reading and Writing

Main Theme	Theme	Sub-Themes	Concepts
The Effect of the Age Implementation on the Process of Teaching Early Reading and Writing	Did not effect negatively	Delay	Delay for one month
	Effected negatively	Tiring	Tiring for teachers, students and parents; getting tired easily.
		Difficulty in stages	Difficulties in preparation stage, difficulty in line studies, they could not make syllables from phonemes, difficulty in learning, problems in writing
		Behaviour disorder	Trying to draw attention, getting ill-tempered or being introvert, caring other things, spoiling classroom order, inability to obey school or classroom rules
		Group's difference	Two different groups, learning slowly, dropping behind of the others, need to special care, the forming of level groups
		Worries	Worry of teaching, using the time of other lessons, inability to catch up with the other lessons, diverging from the program, lack of material

Of course it affected us in a negative way. In fact, we had many difficulties. It was a difficult process in terms of the teacher, the students and the parent. The parent worked very hard, made an effort. The child has just started to read, but he/she has many problems and he/she hardly read. Although the others can read the words they see, he/she has difficulty because he/she could not perceived spelling the letters and then combining the syllables together. (T1)

They were doing the line works difficultly. There were no problems in teaching phonemes. But there were many problems while writing. (T9)

Little children get tired easily because they have not completed their muscle development. (T11)

The process of teaching early reading and writing is a problematic process for students, teachers and parents. It can be said that starting primary school at an earlier age increases these problems (Duran, 2013; Gündüz and Çalışkan, 2013). In the decision of backdating of the age to start primary school, gradual transition was not applied; and all the people in the scope of the decision were obliged to attend the implementation. There are many problems

resulting from the classroom size containing two different age groups. Moreover, ıt is inevitable that this cause some behavior disorders. It is natural that teachers, students and parents worry in an environment created by these kinds of factors. The teachers attending the research agree that these reasons affect the process of teaching and learning in a negative way. Those are some of the notions of the teachers related to this topic:

I completed the process of teaching learning by relinquishing other courses. I could not teach such an important lesson as life sciences. Because, I had to teach reading and writing at 1st grade in order to get them ready for the 2nd class. (T12)

It affected negatively. He/she is far behind from his/her friends. He/she is interested in the things other than lessons. Hence, the environment of the classroom is ruined. (T13)

We had many difficulties because they are not at the same age. He/she obeyed the rules and adapted to school environment for two months. The noise in the classroom started to increase. Some of the students who were 66 months old referred to some other ways to draw attention. They get more aggressive or introvert. (T4)

…teachers are given a book for 3 months for the name of getting the students adapted to the school. There is nothing apart from these books. The books are complicated. It is not fair to give the books pressed 4 years ago. (T6)

Resources, materials, and equipments used in the process of teaching and learning are significant. In this scope, the books given to the teacher to use in the adaptation phase were the subject of critique (Gözütok et al., 2013). On the other hand, little children's behavioral disorders because of the problems occurred in the groups are the results of their inability to solve problems. The skill of solving social problems plays a crucial role in becoming socialized (Yılmaz and Tepeli, 2013). The fact that teachers find the materials inadequate and that face the problems of the children affects the process of teaching and learning in a negative way.

Findings related to the comparison of the students who are 69 months old or younger and the students who are older are summed in Table 5.

Table 5. The Comparison of the Students who are 69 Months Old or Younger and the Students who are Older

Main Theme	Theme	Sub-Themes	Concepts
The Comparison of the Students who are 69 Months Old or Younger and the Students who are Older	Older ones are ready	Physical	Muscles are developed, handcraft is proper
		Emotional	Willing to learn, curious about learning
		Mental	Comprehending easily, high perception, learning quickly
	Younger ones are not ready	Physical	Weak handcraft, problems in writing, getting tired easily
		Mental	Inability to comprehend phonemes, short attention, inability to understand instructions, low perception, getting bored easily
		Emotional	Inability to adapt, low desire to learn

Considering the question "How do you evaluate when you compare the students who are 69 months old or older and younger?", it is seen that the student who are 72 months old or older

are better than the others in every sense. Perception of the younger students is weak; their attention span is short; their adaptation skills are inadequate; they are weak physically; and they are unwilling. On the other hand, the older students are quite contrary. We can say that the age difference between students result in similar consequences, thus, age maturity in the process of teaching and learning is significant especially in terms of certain skills (Çelik, Boz, Gümüş, and Taştan, 2013; Gündüz and Çalışkan, 2013; Meral Kandemir et al., 2013; Örs, Erdoğan and Kipici, 2013). Following are some teacher statements:

...now the students 72 months old are ready for all the things. They can hold pencils, scissors effectively; they can do the activities easily; they do not have difficulty in anything... but we had many difficulties in 66 months old students. As I said before, for example, both in process of teaching and learning and in activities. For example, adaptation to school phase. It lasted for a month and a half. We could not make them ready in a month and a half. I could not teach the letters. (T1)

... you cannot teach the children 72 months old and younger than 72 months old in the same way. No matter what you do, students do not comprehend it. For instance, while you are teaching the phoneme "a", you say "aaaaa". They think that this is a game and scream in the corridor saying "aaaaa". But the children 72 months old are not the same. They can understand all the instructions and carry out. (T10)

There are significant differences. There is a difference for 1 year. There are problems in writing and speaking, and learning is really difficult in this period. (T13)

Findings related to the problems of the students 69 months old or younger and solutions are given in Table 6.

Table 6. The Problems of The Students 69 Months Old or Younger and Solutions

Main Theme	Theme	Sub-Themes	Consepts
The Problems of The Students 69 Months Old or Younger and Solutions	Problems	Attending the activities	Meeting with parents, parents support, special care,
		Communication	Peer complaint, peer compliance
		Self care	Toilet, shopping at the canteen, peeing their pants, inability get dressed, difficulty in shoe strings and zips, getting ill frequently, nutrition
		Development	Individual development, desks are large
	No problems	They do	Good

Answering the questions "Is there any problem students 69 months old or younger face in the classroom? If yes, how do you solve these problems?", all the teachers – except from only one of them – reflect that they have problems in classroom. It is seen that they have problems mostly about self-care and toilet. This reflects on observation results. It is known that self-care skills is a crucial problem with the students in these ages (Başar, 2013; Gündüz and Çalışkan, 2013; Meral Kandemir et al., 2013). Followings are some of teachers' statements:

The biggest problem is toilet. On the other hands, the children in that age have difficulty in buying their need at the canteen. (T4)

You see the classroom although they are at the age group of six. Think that they are five. While playing a game, he/she comes, and "Sir, I have to pee; Sir, Ayşe has wetted her clothes;

Sir, Mehmet has pee his pants...” (T7)

At first, we suffered from self-care, meeting physical needs. They slogged tidying their clothes. In order to solve this problem, we make them wear casual clothes. This is so because they cannot fasten their zips and loop their buttons. They could not tie their shoe strings, I tied their shoe strings.” (T8)

One of the most important problems is toilet. They cannot hold their pees; some of them pee their pants. One of them pee his/her pants 6-7 times. I send him toilet in the lessons; otherwise he/she pee his/her pants. They cannot meet their vital needs. (T11)

Self-care skills of the students who are 69 months old or younger are given in Table 7.

Analyzing the answers given by the teachers to the question “What can you tell about self-care skills of the students who are 69 months old or younger?”, it is seen that little children cannot carry out self-care skills because of physical inadequacy; they have problems in especially meeting toilet needs (Başar, 2013; Gündüz and Çalışkan, 2013; Meral Kandemir et al., 2013) protecting their goods, feeding, and changing their clothes. It reflected on the observation results that the problems decreased but have not finished yet. It is understood that, in solutions of the problems, parents and teachers support the students. Here are some teachers’ notions related to this subject:

We have problems in toilet skills, looking after their clothes, fastening their zips, tying shoe strings, holding pencils etc…(T8)

Table 7. Self-Care Skills of the Students Who are 69 Months Old or Younger

Main Theme	Theme	Sub-Themes	Concepts
Self-Care Skills of the Students Who are 69 Months Old or Younger	Problematic	toilet	Desire to go toilet frequently, peeing their pants, obligatory change of the clothes, inability to go toilet alone
		Washbasin/Cleaning	Desire to g oto washbasin frequently, washing hands, low cleaning, cleaning after toilet, pediculosis
		Nutrition	Inability to feed alone, inability to eat food
		Clothes	Inability to zip or unzip, inability to loop the buttons, clothes cleaning, inability to tie the shoe strings
		Goods	They cannot protect their goods, they are messy, they cannot distinguish their clothes
	No problem	Themselves	They solve in several days

They slog on toilet training, cleaning their hands and clothes. They have not reached that maturity. On the other hand, in these dirt places, children have pediculosis in their hair. Their parents do not look after. (T14)

When there is a student who pee his/her pants, I don’t get him/her in. they get demoralized at some point. I waited outside in a room and called his/her mother. Their parents come here and either they bring them away or the parents bring here extra clothes and changed their clothes. I did so… for example; I unzip some of my students, or fasten their buttons. We dealt with these kind of things in the first semester. I do not have any problems now… (T7)

He/she could not manage to clean himself/herself. He cannot go to the toilet alone. He cannot manage to eat his/her meal. (T13)

They could not wear their coats. They all have this problem. I had to interfere in this period. They cannot distinguish their books, notebooks and goods; they cannot look after them. I collected their goods. They have difficulty in finding the parts in work books. (T9)

Teachers face some problems in the process of teaching and learning. Findings related to the problems teachers face in the process of teaching early reading and writing are given in Table 8.

Table 8. The Problems Teachers Face in the Process of Teaching Early Reading and Writing

Main Themes	Themes	Sub-Themes	Concepts
The Problems Teachers Face in the Process of Teaching Early Reading and Writing	There are problems	Mental	He/she learnt the letters difficultly, he/she does not know the writing of the letters, he/she learns slowly, he/she could not start reading and writing, inability to obey the rules, need to repeat, weak attention, low interest, dropping behind, he/she does not understand the phonemes, mental maurity
		Physical	Bad handwriting, difficulty in writing, he/she could not write what he/she was said
		Self Confidency	Lost his/her self confidence
		Groups are different	Different age groups, inclusion
	There is no problem	No problem	There is no problem

When analyzing the answers given by the teachers to the question "do you have problems in the process of teaching and learning? What can be the reason of this?", it is understood that students have problems especially because of mental deficiencies. Lack of attention and interest are the explicit ones. While attention span of an adult is 15-20 minutes, it is not advisable to expect the students in this age group to sit still for about 40 minutes and listen to the lessons or attend to the activities (Başar, 2013; Güve, 2012; Turkish Doctors' Union, 2012).

Findings related to the effect of backdating of the age to start primary school on the implementation of Phoneme Based Sentence Method are given in the Table 9.

Table 9. The Effect of Backdating of the Age on the Implementation of Phoneme Based Sentence Method

Main Themes	Theme	Sub-Themes	Concepts
The Effect of Backdating of the Age on the Implementation of Phoneme Based Sentence	Difficult	He/she should not start school	They did not attend kindergarten, we should return to the old system
		The group should not be mixed	They should be collected together
		Schools and classrooms should be improved	There should be materials, the schools should be improved
		Fear of unsuccessfullness	Younger ones should not start, loss of self confidency
	Not difficult	Easy	The groups can be homogenized fort he others

There is no emphasis on phoneme based sentence method and its phases in the contents of the answers given by the teachers to the question "Does age implementation brings challenges in

terms of application of the method? What should be done as a solution?" According to Güneş (2013), brain researches explain that reading – writing preparatory works should start from the birth, children should be taught reading writing in 4-5 ages, and the age 7 is too late. However, the fact that the teachers just states that there are problems in their answers, and they did not state anything related to the phases of the method is not enough to detail the subject. This can be caused by the fact that the teachers do not know the phases of Phoneme Based Sentence Method or this can also be caused by ignorance. Here are some teachers' notions about whether age implementation causes a challenge in terms of the application of the method:

Bringing. At first there should be some improvements in the basis. Physical conditions of the classroom and the schools should be improved and then such an implementation can be applied. (T14)

In my opinion, there should not be a mixed group. They should be separated or children 66 months old should attend kindergarten. (T2)

In order to solve toilet problems, they should adapt physical infrastructure. Books should be arranged according to age groups. (T9)

Findings related to the difference between younger students and older students in terms of basic language skills are shown in Table 10.

Table 10. The Difference between Younger Students and Older Students in Terms of Basic Language Skills

Main Themes	Themes	Sub-Themes	Concepts
The Difference between Younger Students and Older Students in Terms of Basic Language Skills	There is difference	Dropping behind	They are dropping behind in all fields, challange in teaching letters"ş, r, ğ, g, y", confusing the letters k-t, r-y, d-t
		Self expression	Weak vocabulary, challenge in speaking, difficulty in self expression, they cannot form a they cannot say their adress, managing speaking late
		Self confidence	They are shy, they are not self confident
		writing	Inability to write what they hear, inability to write what they speak, inability to write between lines

Teachers think that there is difference between two groups answering the question "Is there any difference between two groups in terms of basic language skills? If yes, what kind of differences is there?" These differences are high in dropping behind, inability in self-expression, lack of self-confidence, inability to write. This is reflected in observation scores collected in the research. Başar (2013) believes that the students will improve their writing even if they have challenges in writing.

Result and Suggestions

Following results are achieved in the research aiming to identify how backdating of the age to start primary school reflect in the process of teaching-learning early reading and writing according to teachers' notions.

(1) The teachers attending the research do not find backdating of the age to start primary school advisable. Teachers do not find physical and mental skills of the students in that age group sufficient.
(2) Backdating of the age to start primary school affects teaching-learning processes in a negative way. Students have challenges in the phases of teaching early reading and writing; they show behavioral disorders due to negative effect of the age; the fact that students from different age groups are in the same class affects the process of teaching and learning in a negative way.
(3) The students who are 72 months old and older ones are better in every sense. Perception of younger students is weak; their attention span is short; their adaptation skills are low; they are also unwilling and incompetent. For older students, the situation is the opposite.
(4) The students who are 69 months old or younger have challenges in attending the activities, communicating, and especially self-care skills.
(5) It is seen that the students who are 69 months old or younger cannot carry out self-care skills due to their physical inability; they have difficulty in meeting toilet needs, protecting their goods, feeding, getting dressed and undressed.
(6) Teachers have challenges in the process of teaching-learning resulting from students' mental inadequacy. Lack of attention and interest are the most explicit ones.
(7) According to the teachers attending the research, backdating of the age to start primary school makes the implementation of Phoneme Based Sentence Method difficult.
(8) It is seen that students who are in different age groups are also different from each other in terms of basic language skills. The difference is disadvantageous to younger students; moreover, it is high in dropping behind, inability to express them, lack of self-confidence, inability to write.

These can be suggested depending on these results:

(1) The age implementation should be softened in 2013-2014 educational term; moreover, it can be retreated.
(2) If the process goes on as it is, materials, resources and process should be revised.
(3) Regardless of age implementation, preschool education should be obligatory.
(4) Teachers should be informed about how they treat younger students and what they do.
(5) Further researches should be conducted on this topic.

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