



İlkokul ve Anasınıfı Öğretmenlerinin Karma Yaş Grubu Eğitimi Hakkındaki Görüşleri

Primary and Kindergarten Teachers' Opinions on Mixed Age Grouping Education

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Received: 17 November 2017

Accepted: 05 March 2018

ABSTRACT: The aim of this study was to examine kindergarten and primary school first grade teachers' opinions on teaching mixed age group of children. The participants were 10 kindergartens and 10 primary school first grade teachers. Phenomenological research method was followed. An interview form was used to collect the data. Themes were positive perspective on mixed age grouping in terms of teachers' implementations, positive perspective on mixed age grouping in terms of children's age differences, negative perspective on mixed age grouping in terms of teachers' implementations and negative perspective on mixed age grouping in terms of children's age differences. As a result; both primary and kindergarten teachers stated negative experiences regarding being not ready to teach mixed age group of children. Even kindergarten teachers knew how to plan activities for 36-72 years old children; they had challenges in teaching mixed age group of children. Primary school 1st grade teachers expressed that they don't know any about 60 months of age children's developmental skills, and school/classroom environment was also not convenient for these children. Teachers also expressed that there were some parents who insist on sending their child to primary school even if the child was not ready.

Keywords: early childhood education, primary education, mixed age group education, phenomenological study.

ÖZ: Ülkemizde okula başlama yaşının düşürülmesi ile ilgili gerçekleştirilen yasal düzenleme bir takım sonuçlar doğurmuştur Bunlardan biri de ilkökul 1. Sınıf ve anasınıflarında oluşan karma yaş grubu sınıflardır. Araştırmanın amacı anasınıfı ve ilkökul 1.sınıf öğretmenlerinin karma yaş grubu eğitimi hakkındaki görüşlerinin incelenmesidir. Çalışma grubu 10 anasınıfı, 10 ilkökul öğretmeninden oluşmaktadır. Olgu bilim yöntemi kullanılmıştır. Veri toplama aracı görüşme formudur. Analiz sonucunda; karma yaş grubundaki öğrencilerin yaş farklılıklarına ilişkin olumlu bakış açısı, karma yaş grubunda öğretmenin uygulamalarına ilişkin olumlu bakış açısı, karma yaş grubundaki öğrencilerin yaş farklılıklarına ilişkin olumsuz bakış açısı ve karma yaş grubunda öğretmenin uygulamalarına ilişkin olumsuz bakış açısı olmak üzere dört tema ortaya çıkmıştır. Anasınıfı öğretmenlerinden yalnızca ikisinin karma eğitim verme konusunda olumlu bakış açısına sahip olduğu belirlenmiştir. İlkokul 1. sınıf öğretmenleri arasında ise yalnızca bir öğretmen karma eğitim verme konusunda olumlu bir bakış açısına sahiptir. Araştırma sonucunda; öğretmenlerin çoğunun karma yaş grubuna hazır olmamalarından kaynaklanan problemler yaşadıkları belirlenmiştir.

Anahtar kelimeler: erken çocukluk eğitimi, ilkökul eğitimi, karma yaş grubu eğitimi, olgu bilim araştırması.

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Citation Information

Ertürk-Kara, H. G. (2018). İlkokul ve anasınıfı öğretmenlerinin karma yaş grubu eğitimi hakkındaki görüşleri. *Kuramsal Eğitim Bilim Dergisi [Journal of Theoretical Educational Science]*, 11(2), 279-295.

Introduction

Mixed age grouping is a way of grouping children in the same classroom in which the children's age difference is larger than a year or more. This type of education is widely used by early childhood education approaches that emphasize concept of community, such as Montessori, Waldorf and Project Approach. For instance; in a Montessori class, the age at which children will be included is determined based on the child's developmental periods (Such as; 0-14 months of age children form group of infant, 14-36 months of age children form group of toddler, 3-6 age olds form group of early childhood, 6-9 age olds form group of elementary first stage, 9-12 age olds form group of elementary second stage, 12-15 age olds form group of middle school and 15-18 age olds form group of high school). One of the most important reasons why mixed age education can be preferred in the Montessori class is to keep the "individual education" on the frontline. In these classes, children do not try to learn the same theme at the same time, in the same way. The educational process progresses in the direction of the child's speed, need and interest. In Democratic Schools, which is another educational approach, there is no similar age grouping in the classes. The children's common interests determine the class's age range. The aim of forming a mixed age classroom is to improve the learning behavior of the children and to remove the age-related prejudices (Korkmaz, 2013). Project Approach which was developed by Katz and Chard (1993) is particularly suited to capitalizing on the differences among children in mixed age groups. Their work indicates that how the same topics can be fruitfully studied by children from 4 to 8 years of age in accord with their cognitive and social competencies. In a mixed age grouping classroom, older children could have the opportunity to help younger peers and support their development; leadership, prosocial behaviors and collaborative work have been observed to increase. Children whose knowledge or abilities are similar but not identical stimulate each other's perspectives and cognitive development; it relaxes the rigid curriculum and serves to student-centered education (Katz & Chard, 2000).

Mixed age grouping education can be associated with the studies of Vygotsky and Bandura. In social cultural theory, Vygotsky asserts that when a child forms an interaction at the zone of proximal development, she/he can interiorize the information which has just been learned. The zone of proximal development can be explained as the distance between the current level of development that allows the child to solve a problem by alone and the advanced level of potential development that the child solves the problem by cooperating with another child or an adult (Vygotsky, 1978). Bandura (1986), on the other hand, emphasizes the observational learning in social learning theory. According to him, watching older children and engaging with them help young children to engage in more complex processes (such as play, self-expression).

When the literature is examined, it can be seen that mixed age grouping has been studied as a subject by many researchers so far (Edwards, Blaise, & Hammer, 2009; Kasten & Clarke 1993; McClellan & Kinsey, 1997; Slavin, 1987; Whiting, 1983). Some of these studies have pointed to the effect of mixed age grouping on children's positive social behaviors (Bailey, Burchinal & McWilliam, 1993; Blasco, Bailey, & Burchinal, 1993; McClellan & Kinsey, 1997; Whiting, 1983). Bailey, Burchinal and McWilliam (1993) indicated in their longitudinal study that mixed-age settings may benefit younger

but not older children in terms of developmental progress, with the exception of social development, which appeared to be superior for both older and younger children in mixed-age groups. Also, the study of McClellan and Kinsey (1997), teachers who have experienced on mixed age group education were participated, presented that children's mixed-age grouping is highly significant in predicting increased levels of children's prosocial and friendship behaviors. Mixed-age grouped classrooms were also highly significant in predicting reduced levels of negative and aggressive behaviors among classroom children. Blasco, Bailey and Burchinal (1993) discussed the classroom type from a different perspective in their study. They evaluated the effects of mixed age and same-age classrooms on dimensions of mastery during play for young children developing normally and for children with disabilities. As a result, it was presented that children without disabilities were more likely to engage in social mastery than children with disabilities regardless of classroom condition, even after adjusting for developmental age. On the other hand, some of the studies have pointed that the diversity of the age group will lead to cognitive conflicts. These conflicts will stimulate children's eagerness to learn and support them to develop positive attitude towards school (Brown & Palinscar, 1986; Reeve and Brown, 1985; Stone, 1998; Veenman, 1996). Stone (1998) and Veenman (1996) argued how classroom type affects children's school achievement. They examined that mixed-age classrooms do not negatively affect student achievement, and students in these classrooms have significantly more positive attitudes toward school, themselves, and others.

Although there are studies which emphasize the benefits of mixed age grouping, the related literature argues that there is also a negative perspective in this issue (Hall, 2007). Mason and Burns (1996) claim that mixed age classes have at least a small negative effect on children's achievement, as well as having potential negative effects on teacher motivation. Moreover, the class size is also a critical issue. Little is known about appropriate class size for mixed age education. When literature is examined, it is seen that studies are old dated (e.g. Marklund, 1962). So there is a need for up-to-date scientific evidence on the determination of appropriate class size for mixed age groups. The other issue is about teachers' perspectives. It is known that mixed age group education mean more planning, preparation, organization, less time for children's individual needs and less satisfaction with work. Parents concerns about their children's educational needs are in high level in mixed age grouping classes. Parents of the younger children worry their children won't be able to keep up. Parents of the older children worry their children's advanced needs won't be met (Veenman, 1996; Mason & Burns, 1996; as cited in Russell, Rowe, & Hill, 1998). There is also possibility that younger children can be overwhelmed or frustrated in a mixed age class. Teachers' and parents' supports and appropriate expectations will ensure that the younger one's progress without feeling unnecessarily pressured. Creating academically balanced (not overloaded with children with special needs), socially balanced (not overloaded with children at risk) and too much diversity (in a small class size, children will have limited choices for establishing same-age, same-sex friendships) and the possibility of neglect of older or gifted and talented students are also potential disadvantages of mixed age grouping education (Song, Spradlin, & Plucker, 2009).

Considering that mixed age grouping benefits and risks, the question "Which conditions should be provided for a qualified mixed age grouping education process?"

comes to mind. Demetre (1989, as cited in Okutan, 2012) stated that bringing children of different ages together is not adequate for a qualified mixed age grouping education. Some criteria's such as; the ratio of older children to younger peers, number of the teachers in the class, sharing of time, education program and education strategies are expected to be convenient for mixed age grouping education. Mason and Burns (1996) suggested that to benefit from mixed age grouping, it is important to examine the way it has been implemented in a particular school district. Teachers who teach in these classrooms do so by choice. The teacher must be well prepared to work in this condition and have the curricular materials and training necessary to effectively teach in this classroom. Katz (1995) also expressed on teachers' qualifications and stated that "Teachers have an important role to play in maximizing the potential benefits of the age mixture by encouraging children to turn to each other for explanations, directions, and comfort". At this point; the qualifications of classrooms physical environment and teachers who are teaching mixed age groups have been become critical. When the classrooms 'physical environment is examined; it can be seen that Turkish kindergarten classes have many learning centers, child size furniture and colorful stuffs and materials for 72 months of age children. Kindergarten teacher candidates take courses which give detailed information and skills about teaching 48-72 months of age children during their four-year undergraduate education. It can be said that they learn how to plan and do activities for young children. Also, with the help of the learning centers in kindergarten classes, they can support children's development individually. But, classroom environment changes acutely when children start to primary school. 2014/2015 education year statistics show that these classrooms are generally ordered for 27 children in Turkey (Ministry of Education, 2015). They consist of wood seats at which children sit in twos or threes. The lessons take 40 minutes and children can't stand up or walk at class during the lessons. It can be said that Turkish primary schools' physical environment (stairs, building, classroom order etc.) is not convenient for 60-72 months of age children's developmental levels (Bay & Şimşek Çetin, 2014). Also; primary school teacher candidates just take one course which gives general information about early childhood theories, approaches etc. during their undergraduate education. They don't learn how to plan activities for 60-72 months of age children. So; it can be said that mixed age grouping is so new for primary school teachers. After the regulation, Ministry of National Education distributed books which have activities for younger children to teachers to ease their adaptation to teach 60 months of age children. No course or extra education has been given to these teachers. Mixed age group education started at all primary school 1st grades without evaluating teachers' readiness, willingness or capacity to teach younger children.

However, it is known that mixed age grouping education has been preferred by some education centers in Turkey such as; Forest school (İstanbul), Beytepe preschool (Hacettepe University) and Ankara University's preschool etc., there is a lack of studies which present advantages and disadvantages of this type of education in Turkish children sample. Şimşek's (2014) and Okutan's (2012) dissertations attract the attention in this subject. While Şimşek (2014) focused on primary school teachers' perceptions about mixed age grouping education, Okutan (2012) aimed to compare mixed age and insulation classes according to children's developmental and creative skills. Apart from these studies, it is seen that mixed age classes were chosen as study sample more

frequent at studies which search about Montessori education method's effect on Turkish children (Aral, Yıldız Bıçakcı, Yurteri Tiryaki, Çetin Sultanoğlu and Şahin, 2015; Bayer, 2015; Beken, 2009; Dereli, 2017; Kayılı ve Arı, 2011; Keçecioglu, 2015; Toran, 2011). It is thought that with the decline of school starting age, the attention on mixed age grouping education will increase and many studies will search about its consequences. This study aims to determine teachers' feedbacks working at primary and kindergarten classes on mixed age group education which comes up with new legal regulation. According to this aim, the research question of this study is "What are primary and kindergarten teachers' perceptions about teaching mixed age group of children?"

Method

Procedures

One of the qualitative research methods, phenomenological method, was preferred. According to Creswell (2007), a phenomenological study describes the meaning of the lived experiences for many individuals about a concept or a phenomenon. A general phenomenological perspective is implemented in two ways. These ways can be followed together or separately. First implementation way is methodological. It defends that instructors can only understand the other people's experiences if they experience the phenomenon themselves. On the other hand, the second implementation way defends that knowing what people live and how they interpret the world is so critical. Interviews can be done in this implementation way to search how the phenomenon has experienced (Patton, 2014). The instructor followed second implementation way in this study, because it depends on each teacher's living and interpretation of mixed age group education (Creswell, 2007). Qualitative data source was interviews with kindergarten and primary school teachers.

Participants

Study group consisted of 10 kindergartens and 10 primary school first grade teachers who work in a middle Anatolian city. Convenient sampling was preferred as sampling method. The criteria in the participants' selection procedure were: (1) the teachers work at schools at which they teach children from different socio-economic backgrounds. The investigator supposed that this criterion will serve to give her broader information; (2) the investigator is working in this city. She knows the school environments; (3) the critical criterion was choosing participants who have experienced the mixed age group education. Therefore, 10 kindergarten and 10 primary school teachers were decided to be interviewed because they have experienced educating mixed age group in their classrooms. Mean of teachers' experiences is 15.5 years and the teachers' experiences change between 2-46 years. Because the investigator wanted to ensure that participants' will give deep information on this issue, she chose the teachers who have bachelor's degrees.

Data Collection Process

The interview technic was preferred to collect the data. The investigator interviewed with teachers who were willing to participate. It was aimed to learn teachers' opinions on teaching mixed age group and to reveal important aspects of

mixed age group education during the interviews. The interview form which was used in the interviews was prepared by the investigator and it consists of two open ended questions: (1) What is your experiences about teaching mixed age group of children in class? (2) What do you think about your qualification on teaching mixed age groups? Each interview lasted from 20 to 35 minutes. It was conducted in Turkish, audio-taped and put down on paper by the investigator.

Verification Methods

The verification method was used for the validity of this study is the expert approval. The interview protocol was examined by two experts who work on early childhood education. They both agreed on questions' appropriateness to the purpose. According to Creswell (2013), using multiple coders is generally preferred to ensure the reliability of the data set. The stability of responses to these coders is an evidence for the reliability. Two independent coders, who work on early childhood education, carried out the data analysis process independently and separately. Miles and Huberman (1994) stated that if the result of interrater reliability value is .70 levels then it can be said that interrater reliability is ensured. The interrater reliability value was .90. Also, kappa measure of agreement coefficient showed that the coders' harmony was nearly excellent (.93). In qualitative researches direct citations are commonly used to reflect the participants' opinions influentially (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2005). Investigator also presented direct citations of participants in this study.

Data Analyses

Because the data is so large, the investigator needed to comb out unnecessary data and tried to reach the essence. Reduction was made on the data. According to Creswell (2007), reduction enables the researcher to select the significant statements from the transcript and grouping them into themes. This process serves to discuss the meaning of the phenomenon experienced by participants. In this study, the investigator stated specific themes from the data and gave detailed examples of the experiences. To analyses the data, the transcribed data were read several times and reviewed in order to make sure about the clarity and completeness. Then, significant statements were selected that were important to the purpose of the study. Finally, statements that cited the same issues were grouped as themes (Creswell, 2007). Four themes were derived from the data of kindergarten teachers'. (1) positive perspective on mixed age grouping in terms of teachers' implementations (2) positive perspective on mixed age grouping in terms of children's age difference (3) negative perspective on mixed age grouping in terms of teachers' implementations and (4) negative perspective on mixed age grouping in terms of children's age difference. And four other themes were derived from the data of primary teachers'. (1) positive perspective on mixed age grouping in terms of teachers' implementations (2) positive perspective on mixed age grouping in terms of children's ages (3) negative perspective on mixed age grouping in terms of teachers' implementations and (4) negative perspective on mixed age grouping in terms of children's age difference.

Findings

Findings Regarding Opinions of Kindergarten Teachers

Themes and codes derived from the data obtained from kindergarten teachers were presented at Table 1. Young children word refers 48 months of age children.

Table 1

Themes and Codes Derived From Kindergarten Teachers' Opinions

Themes	Codes
Positive Perspective on Mixed Age Grouping in terms of Teachers' Implementations	<p>Children whose school readiness skills are on high level adapted the class easily (2)</p> <p>Teachers shortened the activity time (2)</p> <p>The number of literacy activities have been decreased (1)</p> <p>The number of play and drama activities have been increased (1)</p>
Positive Perspective on Mixed Age Grouping in terms of Children's Age Difference	<p>Older ones;</p> <p>were a role model for younger peers (2)</p> <p>Older children paid attention to young children (2)</p> <p>Younger ones;</p> <p>Starting school earlier and going to ECE center 3 years long will be useful for primary school success. (1)</p> <p>Meeting a positive classroom environment earlier is nice if the child has a negative one at home (1)</p> <p>learned the rules earlier (1)</p> <p>started to take responsibility (1)</p> <p>Made friends when she/he is young (2)</p> <p>Improved their communication skills (2)</p> <p>General</p> <p>Classroom was a positive play environment for the child who can't play at home (2)</p>
Negative Perspective on Mixed Age Grouping in terms of Children's Age Difference	<p>Younger ones;</p> <p>cry and have difficulty on adaptation more than the others (7)</p> <p>are addicted to mum a lot (9)</p> <p>have difficulties on fine motor activities (9)</p> <p>There was huge difference at development of children even the age difference was a few months (5)</p> <p>Losing their self-confidence while studying with older children (2)</p> <p>Poor self-care skills (3)</p> <p>Short attention span (4)</p> <p>Getting bored because of having difficulties on doing activities (5)</p> <p>Not adapting the classroom or school rules (5)</p> <p>Being in competition environment earlier (6)</p> <p>Getting bored at teachers and school (3)</p> <p>Wanting to sleep and being tired easily (4)</p>

	Getting bored at activity times and affect to older children (4)
	Not staying at school 6 hours (3)
	Not expressing themselves well (4)
	Having difficulties on playing with all group (8)
	Older ones;
	pull youngsters down (3)
	want to be leader on play, younger ones can't participate actively (5)
	Don't want to make younger friends (8)
	General
	More individual differences (7)
	Finishing the activities at different times (6)
	Common toilets with primary school students (3)
Negative Perspective on Mixed Age Grouping in terms of Teachers' Implementations	There is only one teacher in a classroom (7)
	Teacher show interest and spend more time for young children (6)
	Doing different activities at the same time (7)
	Doing too many activities in a day (7)
	Not deciding which age will be based for the activities (8)
	My manager registers young children to preschool although the regulation says you don't have to if your school is not ready (2)

It was determined that a few of the kindergarten teachers' point of opinions on mixed age group education in terms of children's age differences and teachers' implementations were positive (2/10). One of the teachers' positive expressions was as following: K.3 "Children whose school readiness was high didn't have difficulty. But, I tried more to support children on fine motor skills and attention subjects. Activity time has been shortened in my class. I didn't plan detailed activities. I planned play and drama activities more than I did before. I divided activities into parts. I did literacy activities less than I did before. I tried to control my voice and explain activities more detailed. Classroom rules were explained more understandable and shorter". Most of the kindergarten teachers' point of opinions on mixed age group education in terms of children's age difference and teachers' implementations were negative (8/10). Some of the teachers' negative expressions were as following: K.8 "I had difficulties about young children's toilet behavior. They treated me as I was their mum, so they wanted me to show more interest in them" Also, K.6 stated "I had to do different activities at the same time. This was so difficult because I am the only teacher at class. Because I had no assistant, I had difficulty about supporting each child's work".

Findings Regarding Opinions of Primary School First Grade Teachers

Themes and codes derived from the data obtained from primary school first grade teachers were presented at Table 2 (young children word refers 60-66 months of age children).

Table 2

Themes and Codes Derived From Primary School First Grade Teachers' Opinions

Themes	Codes
Positive Perspective on Mixed Age Grouping in terms of Children's Ages	Young children learn communal living rules earlier (1) Young children take responsibility earlier (1)
Positive Perspective on Mixed Age Grouping in terms of Teachers' Implementations	Parents supported my classroom implementations at home (1)
Negative Perspective on Mixed Age Grouping in terms of Children's Age Difference	Younger ones; Can't defend themselves (9) Can't express themselves (7) Having difficulty on fine motor activities (8) Being late to finish the activity (8) Big difference between developmental levels (3) Hand muscles are not matured well (8) Short attention span (8) Being a play child but can't spending their childhood with playing (8) Feeling unsuccessful because of turning back to kindergarten (2) Can't leaving their mum (9) Not having toilet behavior (7) Can't sit on the seat during the lesson (7) Being tried and falling asleep (2) Having difficulties on math (5) Learning writing and reading late (4) Older ones; Not letting young children to attend play (8) Negative affect of young children on older peers on listening the teacher (7)
Negative Perspective on Mixed Age Grouping in terms of Teachers' Implementations	Crowded classroom size (30 children) (7) Can't decide the age level for the activity (6) Spending more time on activities (6) Parents force on children's academic success (3) Not being ready to teach mixed age group (7) Being early childhood education optional (2) Not know any about the "teacher" concept (5)

It was determined that only one primary school 1st grade teacher had a positive opinion on mixed age group education in terms of children's ages and teachers' implementations (1/10). The teacher's positive expression was as the following; P.3 "They learn communal living rules, they learn to take responsibility earlier, parents supported my classroom implementations at home" Almost all primary school 1st grade teachers had negative point of opinions on teaching mixed age group in terms of

children's ages and teachers' implementations (9/10). Some of these teachers' expressions were as following: P.2 "Six children were 68 months of age in my class. They were not so younger but this few months really caused different types of behaviors. Also, this month difference could be clearly seen on children's fine motor skills. They had difficulties on catching their friends" P.1 "Young children's' hand muscles are not matured well. Using fine motor skills is so important for writing. They are really having difficulties on hand writing. Because they can't write, they feel unsuccessful"

Discussion and Conclusion

Findings of the study showed that a few kindergarten teachers' opinions about mixed age group education were positive in terms of implementations in class. When teachers' statements were examined, it can be seen that these teachers made adaptation to mixed age group education and focused on play more than before in daily plans and shortened the structured activity time. Germeten (2008) in their study presented the teachers' opinions about teaching in a mixed group classroom. Teachers' stated that they did not have to think of what class children belonged to, but think of what kind of capacity they had, and their strong and weak qualities. Being flexible and working like stations were key components in these teachers' teaching process. Also, Beach (2013) presented in her study that all interviewed teachers associated mixed aged class with fewer routines and more flexibility than same-age settings and they expressed that mixed age class provided a positive challenge for them. They had to learn to adapt their practice to the varying needs and developmental levels.

Also, a few kindergarten teachers' opinions about children's age difference were positive. When these teachers' statements were examined, it can be seen that they thought that children had positive gains regarding social (being role model, caring younger ones) and communication skills in mixed age class. Berry's (2004) study findings show parallelism with these findings. In her study, 15 head teachers' stated that mixed age group education provide opportunities to children in terms of benefiting from older children, working on challenging tasks and being role model. Similarly, with the teachers' in current study, they also stated that they chose more flexible daily plans in those classes. The teachers' opinions are supported by a number of study findings which showed that mixed age group education has positive impacts on children. One such study conducted by Kowalski, Wyver, Masselos and de Lacey (2005) observed 48 toddlers and 37 preschoolers in same age and mixed age groups. They concluded that mixed age group classroom served more social context to the children and the children in this classrooms played more complex symbolic play with older children comparing with children who played symbolic play in same age classroom. Marjanovic-Umek and Lesnik (1996) and Goldman's (1981) study also confirms that young children's positive interactions and symbolic play quality is increased when they interact in a mixed age classroom. Additionally, Jan Fagan (2009) concluded in her study that the nature of children's interactions was empowering for each individual as they provide opportunities for the younger to learn from older, while older and more experienced peers can lead the group in mixed age group classes. Edwards, Blaise and Hammer's (2009) study finding can be seen as a proof regarding being model to younger children. They interviewed with twelve Australian early childhood education teachers. The

interview reports showed that the young children, primarily toddlers, had learnt to safely use and manage the equipment which included climbing frames and carpentry tools and have become proficient users of these advanced materials. Similarly, with Turkey, it can be said that there are many countries in which there is still not much work on mixed age group education. In one of such countries, in Sweden, Sundell (1993) interviewed with the teachers who were at a large age span. It was concluded that the teachers commonly thought that the social contact and learning were beneficial in mixed age classes. Okutan's (2012) study finding confirms that 4-6 years of children have opportunity to increase their developmental behaviors in mixed age group setting. She also presented that studying in a mixed age class made a significant difference on children's creative skills comparing with insulation group. In the current study, the teachers mostly stated that mixed age class provided a play environment and gave the opportunity to make friends earlier. Gray (2011) and McClellan (1994) emphasize this case and state that as society changes; children have less opportunity to interact with other children outside of early childhood settings.

Most of the kindergarten teachers' opinions regarding mixed age group education was negative in terms of their implementations in class. The greatest concerns of teachers were related to planning activities for children with different ages. This finding shows parallelism with some studies' findings which have served similar aims. In these studies, teachers' stated negative opinions regarding teaching implementations. For instance, Bahtiyar Karadeniz (2012) presented that %89.3 of the participants' thought that there were many inconvenience about teaching children on different ages at the same classroom. Greenman and Stonehouse (1997) state that in a mixed age class within the early childhood education center, it becomes challenging to provide an interesting array of equipment, experiences and materials needed to accommodate the different age groups within the class when the age difference is huge. The solution of this problem was generally suiting the lowest age group so as to ensure the environment was safe for all. Unfortunately, this solution failed to meet the needs and challenges appropriate for older children. Doğan, Uğurlu and Demir (2014) investigated school managers' opinions in their study. Results of their study showed that behalf of the managers' opinions; teachers couldn't plan convenient activities for each child so children felt as if they are unsuccessful. Berry (2004) also presented that 60% of teachers they interviewed stated that they couldn't ensure that both year groups received their full curriculum. Also, %30 of them mentioned difficulties related to the range of abilities in a mixed age class.

Most of the kindergarten teachers' opinions regarding mixed age group education were negative in terms of children's age differences. Teachers mostly stated that young children were addicted to their mum a lot and also they had many difficulties because their fine motor skills have not developed yet. On the other hand, they mostly stated that older children didn't want to make younger friends. These findings were supported by some studies' findings in related literature. Doğan, Uğurlu and Demir (2014) also presented in their study, that young children couldn't spend time at class without their mum. Mums worried and didn't want to leave school because their children are so young and many mums had to stay in the garden or at class all day long. Beach (2013) concluded that all of the teachers participated to her study, agreed that a disadvantage of mixed age group education was that the play of older children was often

disrupted by younger children. This was seen as having the potential to hinder the quality of play. These teachers also expressed some other disadvantages, too. One of them was related to issues of safety. All the teachers believed that mixed age class exposed younger children to greater levels of risk through the nature of their interactions with older, more capable children and the provision of equipment that was too advanced or inappropriate for their age group. The other one was related to space. Almost half of the teachers stated that there is a need of space for infants and toddlers where they had the opportunity to retreat and feel safe.

Only one of the primary teachers' opinions regarding mixed age group education is positive in terms of her implementations at class and children's ages. It is thought that the code parent support was remarkable in her statements. However, there are studies which present that parents' opinion about mixed age group education is negative (Mason & Burns, 1996; in cited Russell, Rowe and Hill, 1998; Veenman, 1996), current study presented that when parent support was available, teachers' opinions could be positive. Also, it was determined that the teacher thought that young children learn about social life earlier in mixed age class. McClellan and Kinsey's (1997) study support this finding. They found that mixed age classes in primary schools had a significant positive effect on children's pro-social behavior.

Most of the primary teachers' opinions regarding mixed age group education was negative in terms of implementations at class. Teachers stated that they are not ready to teach mixed age group and class size is not convenient for mixed age education mostly. According to Smit and Engeli (2015), there is a correlation between the teachers' attitudes towards mixed-age teaching and their implementations quality in class. So it is thought that feeling not ready for teaching can cause negative effects on children's learning. Külekçi (2013) also presented teachers thought that they found themselves suddenly trying to teach 60 months of age children who are not ready to success primary education programme goals. The teachers who participated in Beach's (2013) study stated that because there were many individual differences between children, crowded class size was a challenge for them. So, increased teacher to child ratios were suggested for mixed age group education. According to Germeten (2008), the teacher was familiar with planning activities for same age class, and when confronted with another system, he/she tends to follow the same teaching strategies. In a mixed age class, accommodated teaching strategy can work so this attitude will not be correspondence with the philosophy of accommodated teaching.

Most of the primary teachers' opinions regarding mixed age group education was negative in terms of children's age differences. Teachers mostly stated that young children's inadequacies in terms of social, emotional and motor development. Şimşek (2014) also presented that primary school teachers generally agreed that the disadvantages of mixed age group education for young children were that school and class rules were not obeyed, activities were finished later than older children because of underdeveloped fine motor skills and early literacy skills were not adequate to learn reading and writing. It was presented in the study that they also had difficulties at play, physical activities, math and life sciences courses. Örs, Erdoğan and Kipici (2013) also determined that children's inadequate developmental skills caused many adaptation problems. Also, they emphasized that educational aims of primary school 1st grade programme is not convenient for 60-66 months of age children in their study. So, they

suggested that 60-66 months of age children should go to kindergarten before starting primary school and children should study at different classes if their age is different. Aykaç, Kabaran, Atar and Bilgin (2014) also concluded that children started school earlier had much more adaptation problems and they got bored staying too long hours in class.

As a result; it was seen that both primary and kindergarten teachers have negative experiences regarding being not ready to teach mixed age group of children. Even kindergarten teachers knew how to plan activities for 36-72 years old children; they had difficulties in teaching mixed age group of children. Primary school 1st grade teachers expressed that they don't know any about 60 months of age children's developmental skills and school/classroom environment was also not convenient for these children. Teachers also expressed that there were parents who insist on sending their child to primary school even if the child was not ready. Being unsuccessful in a group of peers affected these children a lot. According to the investigator, the major factor that can help to fix this negativity is including early childhood education to compulsory education. Also, the good news was published at official gazette in October, 2016. According to this news, early childhood education is planning to be included in compulsory education till December, 2017. The other efforts can be as follow: primary school 1st grade teachers' knowledge about 60-72 months of age children development and education should be increased by professional development courses. UNICEF and MoE have some new efforts on this issue. With the collaboration of these two institutions, a study was started to develop school orientation programs for early childhood, primary and lower secondary education (UNICEF, 2015). Because this effort consists of all partners (teachers, managers, family, children, counselors etc.), it is thought that this study will be a good start for the field. Nonetheless, it is important to generalize the usage of these programs among the country. Undergraduate programs also should pay more attention on establishing this knowledge on primary school teacher candidates. Materials for 48 months of age children should be added to kindergarten classrooms. Classroom size should be decreased. Teacher child ratio should be increased especially in early childhood settings. And lastly, parents should be educated on the aspects of mixed age group education, how they can support their children to increase the education quality in a mixed age setting.

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