# Preschool Teachers' Views on in-Classroom Transitions in Inclusive Preschool Classrooms*

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## Abstract

*The aim of this research is to examine in-classroom transitions in inclusive preschool classrooms and to identify teachers' needs for in-classroom transitions. The research was conducted based on descriptive analysis in the qualitative research model and it was tied to put forward by the views of preschool teachers about transitions. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 15 preschool teachers working in independent kindergartens in different districts of Ankara. For this purpose, the study group was asked open-ended questions about in-classroom transitions and by this way their opinions about transitions were examined in depth. 11 themes were obtained from interviews and the data obtained were analyzed with an inductive approach. The findings were discussed within the framework of the literature.*

*Keywords: Preschool, in-classroom transition, mainstreaming/inclusion, children with special needs*

## Introduction

Preschool programs are the first stage of formal education and serve to provide children with the necessary skills for their healthy development (Ministry of National Education [MoNE] Preschool Education Program, 2013). Inclusive preschool practice is a service model in which young children with special needs continue to receive services in the same environment as their peers and the model is accepted because of their positive effects on both children with special needs and typically developing children (Sucuoglu & Bakkaloglu, 2015). In inclusive environments, diversity is valued, all children work, speak and share (Winzer & Mazurek,

1998). The best time to start accessing inclusive environments is the preschool period. Therefore, it is argued that inclusion is a very successful model for the provision of preschool services (Sucuoglu & Bakkaloglu, 2015).

Preschool programs are full of activities that help to support the child as a whole which repeats day by day and outlines a school day. During the school day, there are also events that connect, organize and end two ongoing activities. These are in-classroom transitions. They include cleaning and gathering times, meeting in large groups, moving with/in the groups, arriving and leaving the school, and inevitable waiting times (Malenfant, 2006).

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When transition is on, two actions take place at the same time: an activity ends and a new one starts. According to Hume, Sreckovic, Synder, and Carnahan (2014) there are three types of transitions in preschool classes: inter-staff transition (i.e. changes in the teacher conducting the activity), inter-activities/subjects/teaching methods transitions (i.e. transitioning from art activity to music activity or transitioning from big group to small group or etc.) and inter-environment transitions (i.e. from the toilet to bedroom for rest or etc.). The fact that many different activities take place in preschool settings and that most of the children attend kindergartens for more than 30 hours per week reveal the necessity of paying attention to in-classroom transitions (Malenfant, 2006).

According to McHugh (2007), in-classroom transitions are rehearsals for transitions that will be encountered throughout life and transitions experienced in the school settings are learned to deal with them in real life. In terms of educators, in-classroom transition processes can offer teachers special opportunities to deal with each child individually. For example, when a child comes to class/leaves school or goes into feeding time, the teacher finds opportunities to focus on him/her and takes care of him/her (Malenfant, 2006). In the same way from the children's point of view, in-classroom transitions are important times that allow them to communicate with other, resolve conflicts, gain more autonomy, learn and practice social skills and so on (White & Warfa, 2011).

When the studies focusing on in-classroom transitions in preschool classes are examined, it is seen that the two important points emphasized are *use of time* and *occurrence of problem behaviors* (Buck, 1999; Coleman, Crosby, Irwin, Dennis, Simpson & Rose, 2013; Hemmeter, Ostrosky, Artman & Kinder, 2008; Sveinbjörnsdóttir, 2010). From the context of use of time or time management, transitions become a real issue on a school day with the tasks that teachers must to do to support the development of all children and multiple transitions between these activities (Rawlings Lester, Allanson & Notar, 2017). When the relationship between in-classroom transitions and school time is examined, it is determined that children spend 20-35% of a school day within transitions (Ergin & Bakkaloglu, 2019; Ferguson, Ashbaugh, O'Reilly & McLaughlin, 2004; Ostrosky, Jung, Hemmeter & Thomas, 2003). According to Behar-Horenstein, Isaac, Seabert and Davis (2006), instructional activities are carried out on a school day aiming the holistic development of children, but almost 39% of the academic learning time is lost due to non-instructional activities. As can be seen, since most of the time lost in classrooms is due to in-classroom transitions (Russo, 2014), school time can turn into idle times as a result of inability to manage the classroom (Marzano, Marzano & Pickering, 2003). On the other hand, easily and quickly carried transitions increase the time allocated to education (Banerjee & Horn, 2013; Barbetta, Norona & Bicard, 2005).

Moreover, it is frequently reported that in-classroom transitions are a risk factor that facilitates the occurrence of problem behaviors (Hume et al., 2014; Sterling-Turner & Jordan, 2007). It is known that, especially for children with special needs in inclusive settings, in-classroom transitions are difficult and cause problem behaviors due to many factors such as not wanting to change, confusion about what to do, avoiding unwanted tasks/transitions, not wanting to finish the activity, not preparing the materials needed (Banda & Kubina, 2006; Banerjee & Horn, 2013; Sterling-Turner & Jordan, 2007). The necessity to cope with the problem behaviors occurred during the transitions which are not carried out effectively leads to the waste of school time (Banerjee & Horn, 2013; Gettinger & Seibert, 2002).

Transitions can be a source of stress not only for children but also for teachers (McIntosh, McIntosh, Herman, Sanford, McGraw, & Florence, 2004). Children's participation in activities and behaviors of working on a task depend on how smoothly teachers pass from one activity to another. Therefore, it is necessary to make transition plans by teachers in order to effectively implement transitions (Banerjee & Horn, 2013; Coleman et al., 2013; McIntoch et al., 2004). The use of *transition strategies* to facilitate transitions in these planning will facilitate teachers' work and guide them to manage the classroom without allowing the formation of

problem behaviors (Russo, 2014). A transition strategy is a support that makes it easier for children to adapt to the transition and it can be provided before, during or after the transition (Hume et al., 2014). In the literature, transition strategies teachers can use to facilitate transitions are divided into three groups: visual (i.e. activity schedule, social story, video model and etc.), auditory (i.e. reminder, song-music and etc.) and positive classroom management practices (i.e. offering options, arranging physical environment and etc.) (Ergin & Bakkaloglu, 2015). The predictability of the daily flow is increased by the use of transition strategies, thus enabling active participation in the transition; on the other hand, more time can be devoted to educational activities because the time lost for problem-free transitions is reduced (Hume, 2008; Sterling-Turner & Jordan, 2007).

Routines and in-classroom transitions that help to establish the classroom layout are a central concern for educators. Therefore, teachers are required to plan in-classroom transitions in advance in order to obtain the desired learning outcomes. Studies have shown that planning for transitions has a direct impact on the social, emotional and cognitive development of children (Ostrosky et al., 2003). As it is seen, in order to create a balanced way of supporting the healthy development of children in all developmental areas, teachers need to pay special attention to in-classroom transitions (Malenfant, 2006). Since one of the factors facilitating the emergence of problem behaviors that teachers have difficulty in dealing with, especially in inclusive settings, is the transitions (Coleman et al., 2013; Hemmeter et al., 2008), the purpose of this research is to examine the transitions within the framework of preschool teachers' opinions and to determine their requirements regarding the transitions.

It is important to investigate in-classroom transitions based on the views of preschool teachers in service. In Turkey, there are limited studies about in-classroom transitions in inclusive settings (Ergin, 2016; Ergin & Bakkaloglu, 2015, 2019; Gulboy & Yucesoy-Ozkan, 2017). In spite of there is only one study about transitions held in non-inclusive preschool setting from the views of pre-service teachers

(Korkmaz, Esen Coban and Koyuncu Sahin, 2018), there is no study about transitions in inclusive preschool setting that based on qualitative methods. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine in-classroom transitions in inclusive preschool classrooms and to identify teachers' needs about this issue. It is thought that the findings obtained from this study will contribute to increase the competence of preschool teachers' in in-classroom transitions and help to eliminate the deficiencies in pre-service and/or in service.

## Method

In this research phenomenological approach, one of the qualitative research methods, was used in order to provide detailed data to examine in-classroom transitions in inclusive preschool classes from the views of preschool teachers. Phenomenological approach is aimed at examining the individual's experience of an event or phenomenon in depth (Giorgi, 2009). To reveal the phenomenological experiences of preschool teachers semi-structured interview technique was used. Interviewing is one the basic qualitative data collection methods to understand different point of views (Patton, 1992). One of the interview techniques is semi-structured interview. In this technique, the researcher prepares the questions in advance but it is allowed to discuss the questions by providing partial flexibility to the interviewees during the interview process (Ekiz, 2009).

### Study Group

In this study, the study group was determined by using convenience sampling method. Convenience sampling gives researchers the opportunity to choose a situation that is close and easy for them to access because of speed and practicality reason (Yıldırım & Simsek, 2005). This research was conducted on 15 preschool teachers working in inclusive preschool classes in independent kindergartens in Altındağ, Ayaş, Keçiören, Mamak and Yenimahalle districts of Ankara in the 2017-2018 academic year. All of the teachers in the study group were female and they have a bachelor's degree in preschool teaching. The teachers in the study group have at least one child with special

needs in their classes. The mean of their working experience is 10,53 years (range= 6-25 years). Children with special needs are in the age range of 48-73 months ( = 59.03) and 3 of them are girls and 12 are boys. These children with special needs are diagnosed with mental disability (n=2), autism (n=6), language-speech disability (n=1), physical disability (n=1) and multiple disability (mental disability plus autism and mental disability plus language-speech disability) (n=5).

*Data Collection Tool*

In this research, 'Interview Form for In-Classroom Transitions in Inclusive Pre-school Classes' was developed by the two researchers in order to obtain teacher opinions and this semi-structured interview form was used in the interviews. In the process of preparing the tool, first of all a detailed literature review was conducted. Then, a draft form was prepared. After that, this form was presented to 13 professionals, two of them working in preschool and 11 of them working in special education area. In line with the opinions and suggestions received from these professionals, it was determined that the research would serve its purpose, was understandable and feasible. So the interview form was finalized. This interview form consisted of two main sections. In the first part, socio-demographic information about preschool teachers (age, department, year of experience and etc.) and children with special needs (age, diagnosis, inclusion experience and etc.) were collected. In the second part, 13 questions were listed and asked to examine the transitions in inclusive preschool classes.

*Data Collection and Analysis*

The opinions of the study group about the in-classroom transitions were taken by the second researcher through face to face interviews. During the interview, a voice recorder was used with approval from all participants. Interviews were conducted in the participants' schools at their free times and the interviews lasted between 5 min 58 sec and 18 min 30 sec ( =11 min 53 sec).

In the process of analyzing the data, firstly the recorded data were transferred to the computer in the form of an audio file and all of the interviews were written on the computer as a Microsoft Office Word file. At the end of this process, a data set consisting of 6950 lines and 76 pages was obtained. During the transcription process, three interviews (20%) were randomly selected and another four researchers again rewrite the interviews to ensure the reliability of the data. In this process, 100% reliability was obtained. In addition, confidentiality of the participants was ensured by using codes such as T1, T2 for the study group.

After deciphering the semi-structured interviews, the themes were not predetermined and descriptive analysis was applied by adopting an inductive approach (Creswell, 2009). In the descriptive analysis, the subject or question taken as the basis is turned into a title, analyzes are made by making direct excerpts from the data appropriate to the title and it is aimed to explain the subject directly (Ekiz, 2009). In this research, the answers given to all questions by teachers were firstly studied independently by the two researchers. Then the themes and sub-themes were formed by combining similar codes. After that, the two researchers came together to compare the themes they identified and talked about similarities and differences that they identified. Lastly, a common decision was reached by re-examining the themes determined.

*Reliability-Validity*

According to Lincoln and Guba (2013), a research is evaluated with the information it adds to the literature and the solutions it presents to the problems encountered in life, provided that it is consistent and verifiable by other researchers. Therefore, the researcher should provide evidence that the findings are obtained; the validity of the results when similar situations and environments are provided; the findings are consistent and the data were collected with an objective approach (Patton, 2002).

In this context, in order to provide *credibility*, interviews with preschool teachers working in different socio cultural regions were conducted to ensure the diversity of participants and to provide confidence in the accuracy of the findings. In order to ensure that the findings can be *transferred to other contexts*, detailed descriptions of the research process have been made (Lincoln & Guba, 2013).

Before the interview, the researchers informed the participants about the research and stated that they could leave the research if they wish. In addition, the raw data obtained are stored in a way that allows the evaluation to different researchers. In order to ensure the *validity* of the study, it was ensured that researchers ignored their prejudices, motivations or interests both during the interview process and in the analysis process, and each stage of the study (data collection tools, analysis and reporting) was clearly written (Lincoln & Guba, 2013).

In order to ensure the *coding validity*, the number of consensus and disagreement were determined (Validity = Consensus / Consensus + Disagreement) on both encodings by the research team (Huberman & Miles, 1994). To calculate this, the links between the codes and the links between the categories and questions were checked by the research team. After the completion of regulations regarding the codes and categories, the research data was coded by the researchers and the encoder reliability was calculated. Moreover for the *scope validity*, expert opinion was taken regarding the questions asked to the participants in the interview.

## Results

In this study, which aims to examine in-classroom transitions in inclusive preschool classes, the data were collected with the help of semi-structured interview and descriptive analysis was performed. As a result of the findings, 11 themes were reached and listed in Table 1. These themes are discussed below and direct quotations from preschool teachers are included.

### Daily training flow

Within the scope of the research, the first theme determined at the end of the interview with the preschool teachers was related to the content of daily education flow. According to the opinions of the teachers, daily flow consists of welcoming the day, free play, activities, assessment of day, nutrition and rest routines. The types of activities included in daily flow are Turkish (n=11), art (n=10), play time (n=10), music (n=7), preparation to read & write (n=6), science (n=5), drama (n=3), physical activity (n=3) and mathematics activities (n=3); routines are feeding (n=9) and resting time (n=1).

### The times and reasons in daily training flow for children to have difficulties and problem behaviors

According to the findings of the teachers' views, there are times that force children during the day and cause problem behaviors. Three sub-themes were determined based on the teachers' views about the times of chaos and the reasons for the problem behaviors. Accordingly, the teachers who expressed their opinions in the study stated that children had difficulties and exhibited problem behaviors due to *activity itself* (n=11), *children's individual characteristics* (n=3) and *in-classroom transitions* (n=4).

According to the opinions of the teachers, one of the reasons that arises problems is due to the *activity* itself. According to the teachers who gave opinions in this direction, type of the activity, the way it is applied, the activities taking for a long time, the activities which requires sitting or waiting silently for a long time, the same type of activity to be done consecutively, the imbalance between active-passive activities causes difficulties for some children. For example, according to the teachers, children may have disagreements due to unstructured activities during free play and some problems may occur because they may remain uncontrolled for a while. Stating that problem behaviors can be experienced due to activity-related reasons, T9 said that *"In an activity such as a Turkish activity, when we are forced to be quiet, or when we are during a preparation to read & write activity, sometimes there are chaotic situations."* and T14 stated, *"Free time. In free play, there is no adult who intervenes or sets a rule. Children often want to play in their own way. In this process, some children want to play as their own way or play with the same toy. So this causes problems."*

**Table 1.**

*Themes Obtained from Interviews*

| |
|---|
| Daily training flow |
| The times and reasons in daily training flow for children to have difficulties and problem behaviors |
| Implementing in-classroom transitions |
| Number of in-classroom transitions made during the day and time allocated to these transitions |
| Changes/adaptations to manage in-classroom transitions |
| Effectiveness of implications for in-classroom transitions |
| Difficulties experienced by teachers during in-classroom transitions |
| Children who have difficulty during in-classroom transitions |
| Consequences of ineffective in-classroom transitions |
| Teacher requirements for in-classroom transitions |
| Recommendations for in-classroom transitions |

Secondly, another problem causing situation is due to the *individual characteristics of the children*. According to the teachers who stated that children exhibit problem behaviors due to their individual characteristics, not having social skills such as sharing or waiting the turn, desire to be the leader, obsession, being selfish or very active, being a boy and the age difference cause problems among children during the day. For example, according to T8, *"I have older children in my class. Some of the features of the children are different because of the age difference between them. Therefore, different problem behaviors emerge, or when a child works with me one to one, problem behavior does not emerge much, but when moving as a whole group, problems arise more frequently"* and T11 dictated that *"When I have a student with special needs, I experience some difficulties. The reason for this is that he does not look warmly at the structured activities and does not even want to participate at them. He can knock down toys. He distracts the children at that moment."*

Thirdly, according to the study group, another time that forcing children was the *transition time*. One of the teachers who shared that children exhibit problem behaviors due to the reasons arising from in-classroom transitions, T9 said, *"We may have some difficulty in transition times. When it is free time, toys are distributed by the way they want. Ehen the time is up, we say 'Kids, it's time to finish'. They want the game time to be longer. I'm giving them a little more time, five more minutes. We can stretch it a little. We're having trouble with the transition times. Not everyone wants to gather. They do not want to participate to do the transitioning. But we're looking at the watch and see the time is passing. We need to do all our activities. 'Come on, let's pick up' we tell them..."*

*Implementing in-classroom transitions*

Another important theme identified in this study is how preschool teachers carry out their classroom transitions. In order to expand this issue and get rich information, the teachers were first asked "What do you do about transitions? and then "Can you give examples of what you do to avoid problems in transitions?" In the analysis, it was determined that preschool teachers implemented some strategies in order to facilitate the transitions and explained the strategies they use. The strategies reported by teachers are listed in Table 2 in line with the classification made by Ergin & Bakkaloglu (2015).

As seen in Table 2, it is found that preschool teachers use some visual and auditory strategies and classroom management practices in order to facilitate in-classroom transitions. Accordingly, the preschool teachers mainly use verbal reminders (i.e. saying children what to do) (n=8), song-music (n=7) and play activities (n=8).

Relating to this issue, one of the teachers, T3, told that *"I have one ring. I usually use it. At the beginning of the year, I taught them what the purpose of it. When I use it, the children had to be quiet. When I steal it, they stop and listen to me. Then, we make the transition. Sometimes we do the transition with a song, or we have rhymes like we are hardworking bees and preparing our class right away…"* and another teacher T11 stated that *"I usually give the children a stimulus 5-10 minutes before finishing the previous activity. I think it's very effective. Because the child is preparing himself. When I do this, I make an easier and comfortable transition.*

**Table 2.**
*Transition Strategies Used by the Preschool Teachers*

| Type of the Strategy | *f* |
|---|---|
| **Visual Strategies** | |
| Flickering the lights | 1 |
| Photographic cues reminding the transition (i.e. pictures/symbols etc.) | 2 |
| **Audible Strategies** | |
| Verbal reminders | 8 |
| Singing songs-music | 7 |
| Finger plays-nursery rhymes | 4 |
| Bell-fife-tambourine | 3 |
| **Positive Classroom Management Strategies** | |
| Preparing play activity | 8 |
| Peer buddy system | 2 |
| Positive reinforcement | 4 |

*Number of in-classroom transitions made during the day and time allocated to these transitions*

Another issue determined in line with the opinions of preschool teachers is how much in-classroom transitions are made in daily flows and how much time is spent on transitions. According to the analysis, it was determined that the number of in-classroom transitions made by teachers during the day ranged from 2 to 8, and an average of 27 minutes (range=20-60 minutes) was allocated to complete them.

*Changes/adaptations to manage in-classroom transitions*

When the interview records were examined in terms of whether the teachers make changes/adaptations in their practices of transitions, it was found that the majority of the teachers (n=13) applied different techniques in transitions and two of the teachers do not make changes in their practices. Accordingly, teachers differentiate their practices according to the *type of transition* (n=10) and *from child to child* (n=13).

Firstly, when the opinions of the teachers who mentioned that they differentiate their practices according to the *type of transitions* were examined it was determined that teachers make different applications in transitions between activities/subjects/teaching methods. Teachers who stated that they differentiate their practices between activities/subjects/teaching methods reported that they make different applications according to the type of an activity (i.e. art activity, preparation to read & write activity and etc.) and whether an activity is an active or passive activity. According to the views of the four teachers evaluated under this theme,

answers such as *"I decide according to the current situation of children"* and *"I make differences according to the situation"* were also recorded. Moreover, according to all teachers who give opinions in the research, there are no inter-personnel transitions in their own classes.

Secondly, 13 teachers in the study group differentiate their implications *from child to child*. These measures include taking into account the individual characteristics of the child such as being compliant, prone to objection or being active; focus on children's lifestyle, family structure, gender, performance level, readiness and various individual differences such as the wishes of the child. Two of the teachers who explain that they make a difference from child to child, make differences in their practices considering whether the child has special needs or not. About this T11 commented like, *"I usually use transition strategies towards the whole group. Of course I have a student with special needs and a few more children without officially diagnosed. I might have to give them individual stimuli. For example, I'm more interested in teaching them behavioral techniques."* and T14 remarked that *"Since the child with special needs is a different child, I usually try to motivate him with reward. But my other children are able to do transitions with internal motivation. The child with special needs can be driven in more behavioral ways. Meanwhile I use the same methods to my other children I have to apply more behavioral methods to the children with special needs."*

*Effectiveness of implications for in-classroom transitions*

When the opinions of the preschool teachers in the study group about whether they

find the strategies they used effective or not were examined, it was seen that all the teachers (n=15) find the strategies they use as effective. According to the teachers, with the help of the transition strategies, the children are more motivated to do the transition and motivated to move and adapt the new activity.

*Difficulties experienced by teachers during in-classroom transitions*

When the interview records were examined in the context of the difficulties experienced by teachers, six sub-themes were identified. Accordingly, it was seen that the majority of teachers (n=6) have problems in *convincing children to make the transition and attracting their attention.* Among the other difficulties experienced are like that: *not being able to use the time effectively* (n=5), *ineffective management of the classroom* (n=4), had to cope with the *problem behaviors of the children with special needs* (n=3), *having to postpone academic expectations or failing to achieve the expected gains* (n=1) and *maintaining their own health* (n=1).

In this study, it is found that preschool teachers find it difficult to *convince children about transitions or to attract their attention.* According to the teachers who share opinions in this direction, teachers make efforts to draw attention to direct the children to the transition when some children in their classroom wanted to continue their activities during the transition; when every child wants to do what they want to do, when the teacher makes an effort to focus all the children's attention at a single point and when children do not ignore the expectations about the transition and so on. About this issue, T13 expressed her opinion by saying *"The children were brought up so selfish that their talking never ends and for example, when I say 'we are taking our pencils', I see the attitude of not hearing and caring of what I say to them."*

Another issue that preschool teachers have problems in conducting in-classroom transitions emerges as *ineffective use of time*. Accordingly, teachers cannot effectively use the time to be allocated for teaching. Some of the reasons for this is as follows: the fact that it may take a long time to attract children to the activity, that some children who do not want to participate will deliberately extend the time, and

that some transitions, such as transitions after free-of-play or art activities which requires gathering toys or materials art activity, require a long time by nature. For example, T9, who experienced problems related to transitions described her difficulty in saying, *"It takes time to motivate children who refuse the transitions."*

One more important issue for teachers in managing classroom transitions is *ineffective classroom management.* According to the expressions of the teachers, during the transitions, children can imitate each other's problem behaviours when they are altogether, so the teacher may have difficulty in re-gathering the attention of all children, re-establishing the class order and moving to the next activity. Similarly, when one of the children asks for something, the whole class wants to do the same thing at the same time. For instance, T7 believes that teachers can face various difficulties and she describes her difficulty by saying *"When transitions take long time, one of the children asks to drink water or go to the toilet, then all the children want drink water or go to the toilet."*

The other striking issue in which teachers have difficulties is *coping with the unwanted behaviors of the children with special needs*. According to the analyses, the reasons for what forces teachers during transitions are the problematic behaviours of the children with special needs; some attempts to disrupt the classroom order by other children while the teacher is caring/educating the children with special needs; refusing to participate the transitions; and avoiding the transition. One of the teachers, T4, expressed her opinion on the subject as *"I need to get his (children with special needs) attention first of all, take care of him first. In the meantime, the other children can also scatter, run and walk around aimlessly."*

It was determined that another problem the teachers face is *postponing or failing to realize academic expectations*. The participant teachers reported that they couldn't do the activities they planned directly in connection with not being able to use the time effectively, that the number of different types of activities they thought to do during the day was reduced and that the time of the gains to be given to the children was postponed. For example, T2 made a statement about the issue with this

statement; *"When we cannot complete the transitions successfully, the number of activities that we plan is decreasing because the adaptation period of some children will be so long."*

According to the opinions of the teachers, the last issue relating to the difficulties faced is *protecting their health*. One of the teachers who stated that transitions can cause health problems, T3 stated that when she uses a transition strategy, she makes her transitions easily and does not get tired of managing transitions in these sentences: *"Before I discovered this (bell), I had to use my voice a lot and I had pharyngitis."*. With this statement, T3 emphasized the importance of using an appropriate transition strategy and stated that she has a health problem when she is ineffective in conducting transitions.

*Children who have difficulty during in-classroom transitions*

According to teachers' opinions about whether there are children who have difficulty during transitions or not and if yes, the possible reasons for the difficulties, it is found that some children have difficulties in transitions. Also, four sub-themes have emerged regarding the reasons for children's difficulties during transitions. According to this, children have difficulties mostly due to *their individual characteristics* (n=13), *special needs* (n=7), *gender* (n=6) and *mixed age* (n=1).

Firstly, among the answers given about why children are having difficulties analyzed, *individual characteristics of the children* are found to be the most repeatedly mentioned factor. According to the teachers, children who are bored quickly, who do not know the rules, who are active, who are obsessed, who reject or ignore the transition, who are insatiable to play, who are selfish and who have insufficient social skills have problems related to transitions. For instance, T15 reported that *"I make the transition by encouraging children who have socialization difficulties. To give an example, when we move to our gymnastics exercise, I ask him to come to the group and blow our whistle."*. In addition, according to the teachers, children who do not like to do some type activities or who do not want to move from an unstructured to a structured activity are also forced to make transitions. For instance, according

to T3, *"Sometimes we have children who do not want to do art activities. They want to continue to play games when we are in transition to the art activity."*

Secondly, according to the teachers' views, *having special needs* emerges as another cause of having troubles related to transitions. For example, to draw attention to this issue T7 said, *"I do not think my student with special needs fully understands what I am saying. He pushes me a bit."*; T9 reported, *"My student does not want to give her paper. Sometimes he doesn't want to remove his paints to the box. He is running with a toy in his hand. We're playing chasing under the tables. He does not want to participate the transition"* and T14 said *"My pupil never accepts collecting of materials or finishing the activity because of the typical characteristic of autism. He has the motor skills but he doesn't want to. He does not participate in the transitions except for the art event."*

Thirdly, the *gender of the children* was also mentioned as a reason for having difficulty during transitions. According to these teachers, boys have more trouble during transitions. For example, according to T4, *"I do not want to make gender discrimination, but boys, especially who are more active, are more challenging. They can be challenged, especially when it is time to transition to passive activities. Girls are more helpful in transitions"*. In the same way according to T9, *"Boys can do different things during transitions. They take a toy and start playing, give away toys, take each other's pencils, books, pictures and activities."*

Finally, it was seen that the *age of the child* was among the reports of why children are forced during transitions. T14, who expressed his opinion in this direction, stated that *"Children who are younger than the others are working very slowly and are late to finish the transitions when compared to older and have some difficulty in transitions."*

*Consequences of ineffective in-classroom transitions*

In this research, teachers' opinions about the consequences of unsuccessful in-classroom transitions were gathered around four sub-themes. Accordingly, unsuccessful transitions lead to the

*emergence of problem behaviors* (n=11), *poor management of class* (n=10), *failure to carry out academic expectations* (n=6), and *inefficient use of time* (n=4).

In this study, the cases that teachers describe as *problem behaviors* as a result of unsuccessful transitions are children's reluctance, not attending to the activity being carried out, injuries and attention problems. On the other hand, difficulties that may be encountered while *managing the classroom* are defined are as situations that will disrupt the order of the class, such as failure to attract children's attention, alienation from teaching profession or falling motivation, fatigue and confusion. Also, it is determined that six teachers shared ideas in a way that they could not practice the *program gains* because they cannot do the planned activities due to ineffective transitions. Moreover, four teachers shared that they cannot *use the time effectively* because of not being able to start the next activity on time or starting late, deterioration of daily flow and decreasing the number of activities done during the day.

About the topic of unsuccessful transitions result in problem behaviors T10 stated that *"Children push one another during transitions"* and T14 told *"There will be a disorder in the classroom. In this turmoil, while I take care of some children others who finish their work can walk around in a dangerous way. This can cause physical injuries."*. In a same way, about the issue of ineffective transitions and the difficulties that the teacher will face in classroom management, T3 depicted that "*Chaos happens in the classroom. Nobody knows who did what. At the same time, there may be a problem in the classroom. They will be active. It would be very difficult to put them together. The teacher gets tired. When children are in noise, they no longer hear you after a while."*

In a similar way, about the relation between ineffective transitions and academic goals, T4 mentioned that *"There must be a decrease in learning. So learning becomes difficult. I think we can't give you the things we want to give. Because the easier the transition of the children, the more attention is achieved, the sooner the harmony is achieved, the faster learning takes place"* and T11 expressed *"This leads to distraction. It makes him unable to fully comprehend the activity we have given.*

*This affects the child's creativity, learning and many areas of his development."*

Regarding the consequences of unsuccessfully managed transitions on how much time is used for teaching, T2 told that *"When we fail to successfully complete the transitions, some children will have to adapt to the new activity, which will extend from the time it takes to reduce the number of activities. In other words, if there are 7 activities or 6 activities we planned, the number may fall."* and T6 put into words that *"When we ask kids to collect the toys at the time we are transitioning to other activity, at that time there may be the child's play and she/he may be doesn't want to finish it. Some of the children attend the transition bur some of them do not. This time there is a lot of turmoil. Inevitably, you are too nervous there. The activity you are going to do is then starting late and prolonged and you do not give time to other activities."*

*Teacher requirements for in-classroom transitions*

Another theme that emerged in this study is about teachers' needs for transitions. According to this, preschool teachers mostly need tools (n=7) to use during transitions. These are listed as puppets, slides, flashcards, prize boards, projections, music CDs, computers, loudspeakers and bell in order to address children's visual and auditory senses. In addition, three teachers expressed their desire for an adult support to assist transitions such as an internship student or personnel to do the cleaning; two teachers spoke of the need to change to different classes to perform different activities there and one teacher stated that she needed information and knowledge about transitions. On the contrary, three preschool teachers stated that they do not have any requirements for classroom transitions.

*Recommendations for transitions*

The last theme emerged in this study is about teachers' suggestions/opinions for transitions. These recommendations are listed in Table 3.

**Table 3.**

*Teachers' Suggestions/Opinions*

| Recommendations | *f* |
|---|---|
| The child's attention should be kept awake during the transitions | 5 |
| Preschool classes should consist of children of the same or similar age group | 3 |
| Transition strategies should be visualized | 3 |
| Teachers should implement different practices in transitions | 2 |
| The number of transitions should not be high | 1 |
| Transitions should be planned and programmed | 1 |
| Materials for transitions must be made available in advance | 1 |

## Discussion, Conclusion and Suggestions

With this qualitative study, the opinions of preschool teachers in inclusive classrooms were examined. According to the findings obtained from the interviews, it is found that the teachers follow a daily flow in accordance with the Preschool Education Program (MONE, 2013); both the teachers and children have problems due to in-classroom transitions; they use some strategies to make transitions effectively; they differentiate their practices for transitions; they appreciate their practices as effective; but they were not aware of the total time allocated to transitions throughout the day; a few teachers individualize transitions for children with special needs; they often need remarkable materials for transitions.

The first finding obtained from this study is related to the content of daily flow in preschool teachers' classes. In the current Preschool Education Program, it is emphasized that the most important element determining the quality of preschool education and the holistic development of children is the teacher. Also, it is stated that teachers should prepare various types of activities which can be implemented by individually or in small and large groups in order to meet the needs of the children (MoNE, 2013). In this study, it is seen that preschool teachers are implementing almost all of the activities in the program but mainly the Turkish, art and game activities in their classes. It is an important finding that half of the teachers use game activity both as a type of activity and as a strategy for facilitating transitions. As often mentioned in the literature, one of the funniest ways to complete the transitions successfully is taking advantages of game-based arrangements which will ensure children to be physically active during the transition period. With the help of the games played during transitions, children can use their energy in a positive way and they are provided to be relaxed, they are encouraged to participate in transition with an interesting and entertaining way, and they are not given any opportunity to exhibit any problem behaviors that the classroom transition can lead up to (Braniff, 2011; Orlowski & Hart, 2010; Russo, 2014). Coming back to another finding that the teachers take into account the age of children suggests us that they give the necessary importance to play activities. Because of the age of preschool children, learning through play is an integral part of the program and preschool education (MoNE, 2013) and it can be said that teachers understand and implement the program.

In this study, one of the other major finding is the number of in-classroom transitions made during the day is varying between 2 and 8 and it took about 27 minutes to complete them. When the researches about the preschool transitions are examined, it is stressed that the children make 15 to 20 in-classroom transitions during the day and close up to 1/3 of the time or in other words, almost one hour of the daily five-hour education class time is spent with transitions (Banerjee & Horn, 2013; Ergin & Bakkaloglu, 2019; Ostrosky et al., 1992; Sainato, 1990). However, in this study, it was found that there are fewer in-classroom transitions and teachers claimed that they complete the transitions in a short time. From this important point, it can be seen that in-classroom transitions can take longer period than teachers think and a high level of awareness of the completion time of transitions is needed. In line with the current preschool education program implemented in our country, children stay in preschool education environments for at least five hours and engage in activities that support their development. The long period of in-classroom transitions takes may lead the day to be filled with non-

educational activities. For this reason, it is thought that teachers are responsible from evaluating the school day and competently should plan the transitions carefully in advance and use the time carefully.

Another major finding in this research is related to the times when problem behaviors occur. According to the opinions of the teachers, it was reported that children were forced and exhibited problem behaviors due to the activity itself, characteristics of the child and transitions. Children may exhibit problem behaviors during transitions due to reasons such as inadequate learning skills, processing information, directing attention, perceiving stimuli, lack of social skills, and activities and expectations that are not suitable for the developmental level (Sterling-Turner & Jordan, 2007). 26% of preschool teachers who participated in this research stated that in-classroom transitions can force children and cause various problem behaviors. Since the issue of in-classroom transition is considered as one of the points where preschool children with or without special needs are challenged (Doyle, 1986; Ergin & Bakkaloglu, 2019; Hume et al., 2014), the research coincides with the literature. However, at this point, the necessity of planning in advance re-emerges. When the characteristics of all children are well known, when appropriate facilitating strategies are included, and most importantly, when effective planning is made for all transitions, it can be concluded that the problem behaviors will be kept to a minimum number.

One of the other finding of this research which needs to be carefully considered is how preschool teachers implement in-classroom transitions. Accordingly, teachers use a number of transition strategies to manage transitions. Among them, mostly suggested ones were using verbal reminders, creating game activities, singing and applying positive reinforcement. The finding of teachers' giving verbal reminders for both typically developing and children with special needs to regulate and facilitate the transition supports the finding that teachers are not using the strategies found effective as a result of different experimental studies (such as high probability requests, video prompting, before-after cards, activity schedules and etc.) (Ergin & Bakkaloglu, 2019). Since the use of

transition strategies make teachers' work extremely easy and help to make transitions done effectively and quickly, especially for teachers working with children with special needs (Ostrosky et al., 1992), it is thought that to eliminate problems that may be encountered during transitions, teachers should use transition strategies and teachers' knowledge of the subject is needed to be increased.

Another important finding which is related to how transitions are conducted, is that some of the teachers applies teaching to whole group in the same way during transitions and that they do not use some strategies in order to facilitate the transition of children with special needs. In this respect, the research has similar results with the researches emphasizing that the competence of teachers should be increased in order to work in inclusive classes (Akalın, Demir, Sucuoglu, Bakkaloglu & İscen, 2014; Odom, 2000). Since children with special needs may experience problems that may arise from their inadequacies, these children should be provided with clues to prepare and facilitate their transitions. For example, children who are diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder may have inability to resilience and resist to change. Other children with special needs also may encounter difficulties in transitions due to the problems arising from their needs and they may require a number of transition strategies to prevent problems (Park & Lynch, 2013; Sterling-Turner & Jordan, 2007). When teachers deciding on the most effective transition strategies, it would be appropriate to determine according to meet the characteristics of the children and the transition itself (Fox, 2009). When the difficulties experienced by children with special needs are considered, it is important to include effective transition strategies such as social stores, activity schedules, and activity boxes and so on (see Ergin & Bakkaloglu, 2015), and it is important to individualize, change or adapt the strategies when needed.

According to another striking finding determined is in-classroom transitions can force both the teacher and the child. In this study, the difficulties experienced by preschool teachers were examined and it was seen that the obvious problems experienced by the teachers are not being able to prepare the child for the transition, not

being able to use the time effectively, coping with problem behaviors and not meeting all the academic expectations. The teaching profession necessitates responsibilities such as planning activities, making easy transitions between these planned activities, making various arrangements including the provision of physical environment and learning materials and reducing non-educational activities (Weber, 1986). However, teachers state that in-classroom transitions are difficult because they have many tasks during transitions (Doyle, 1986) and children may exhibit inappropriate behaviors during this period (Buck, 1999). A remarkable finding in this study is that the children could not be prepared for transitions. It is thought that the problem of not being able to prepare children for the transition can be overcome by explaining the expectations, rules or behaviors that may arise for each transition in accordance with the developmental level of the child from the beginning of the year, by teaching, by reinforcing, by modeling and experimenting (McIntosh et al., 2004).

It is also very important for transitions to teach self-regulation skills. Self-regulation skills, including learning to focus and change attention, being with others and successfully controlling the behaviors needed to achieve goals can be associated with academic success, better relationships with others, and less behavioral difficulties. These skills help children successfully overcome many of the challenges they face (Rosanbalm & Murray, 2017). In this context, it can be said that children who have high level of self-regulation skills can easily and smoothly do the transition independently from adults. Therefore, it is considered that preschool teachers need to develop the self-regulation skills of young children.

In the scope of this research, when teachers were asked whether there are children who had difficulties in transitions or not and the possible reasons for these difficulties, it was found that the children have difficulties due to their characteristics and their special needs. When transitions are more structured, more predictable (Hume, 2008; McIntosh et al., 2004) and when teachers know children very well and plan their transitions taking into account age, whether they have special needs, or

any factors that may affect transitions, the possibility of problems to be seen can be minimized (Fox, 2009). For this reason, when there is a child who has trouble in transitions, it is considered necessary that the teacher should not be passive about that, she/he should provide and teach necessary skills to the child and use one or more of the facilitating transition strategies.

In addition, another finding revealed by the examinations of the difficulties that children experience in transitions is that teachers report that boys have more difficulty in transitions and that the teachers experience various difficulties by referring to mixed age education. In literature, there is no research on the effects of gender or mixed age factors on transitions. At this point, it is thought that preschool teachers should increase their competence by participating in professional development activities which will facilitate their competence in working in settings consisting of mixed age children.

In this study, when the opinions of teachers about whether their use of strategies in transitions lead to effective results, it was found that all of the teachers reported that the strategies they used were effective. As suggested in the literature, effective transition strategies should be used in order to enable children to participate to transitions easily (Hume, 2008). However, it is seen that the finding of this and the finding of problems related to the transitions are contradictory. In other words, all of the teachers stated that they successfully carried out in-classroom transitions and reported that children exhibited problem behavior during the transitions. If transitions are executed successfully, it is expected that successful transitions will be made easily and quickly without any problem behavior. At this point, it can be thought that teachers have reported that they are sufficient for transitions with various concerns.

It was seen that the teachers gave similar opinions to the findings of the literature about what kind of results could occur if the in-classroom transitions were not carried out successfully. These results include exhibiting problem behaviors, difficulty in classroom management, failure to meet academic expectations and inefficient use of time. This finding shows that

teachers are aware of the negative effects of classroom transitions. At this point, in order to minimize and eliminate the negative effects of transitions, it is thought that they should apply different methods they have not implemented and plan transitions in advance. Planning is very critical for classroom transitions, but even when teachers plan classroom transitions, some children still find it difficult (Banerjee & Horn, 2013). In this case, it would be necessary to implement an individualized problem-solving process. In particular, it is thought that children with special needs can benefit from individual transition plans and practices to be prepared for them.

According to another finding of this research, it is seen that teachers need remarkable materials to use during transitions. One way to increase access and participation in classroom activities is through the use of tools (Richardson-Gibbs & Klein, 2014). The tools that can be used in transitions are very economical and some of them do not require any cost. For example, turning lights on, using a watch, countdown, activity boxes, puppets, singing songs-rhyme-finger plays, using bells-rings-whistles, creating game activities, collaborating with peers, offering options and organizing of the classroom has no fee. So, it is thought that teachers have little knowledge about strategies and they need to obtain more detailed information. As a finding of many studies in the literature, it has been determined that teachers need information about inclusion, more detailed information about the characteristics of children with special needs and the need to implement qualified practices (Akalın et al., 2014). But only one teacher in this study stated that she needs more information about transitions. Working together as a team of experts who work in different specialization areas in inclusive environments has effective results in meeting the educational needs of preschool children with special needs (Heron & Harris, 2001). Therefore, it is considered that it is important for teachers to work with other experts at the points of planning and implementing classroom transitions. Since the collaboration of the experts constitutes a source for the implementation of effective solutions and successful integration, it may be suggested that policy makers should make arrangements to exchange ideas and share information in order to meet the educational needs of all children at the maximum level.

Finally, when teachers' suggestions for classroom transitions are examined, it is seen that these opinions are shaped in line with the suggestions for colleagues. What is noteworthy here is that only a teacher thinks that transitions should be conducted in a planned manner. Repeatedly, this finding can be interpreted as teachers do not give importance to make planning. However, it is reported in the literature that prior planning plays a key role in the daily flow and since transitions are considered inevitable and often difficult times, the time allocated to planning will help maintain the order of the classroom, increase participation in the next activity and reduce unwanted behaviors (Hemmeter et al., 2008).

This research is important in terms of reflecting the classroom transitions in inclusive preschool classes in our country according to teachers' opinions. However, when interpreting the findings of this study, it is necessary to consider the limitations of the study. First of all, it can be said that findings of this study is limited with the interviewed teachers' perception of reality and bias about answering. There was no longitudinal monitoring or observation or experimental procedures. In the following research, the teachers can be observed and the consistency between what they say and their practices could be examined to reflect the real case. Secondly, in this study, the data is limited to 15 teachers working in independent kindergartens in Ankara. For this reason, it can be said that in the future studies there is a need for larger samples in pre-school classrooms from different private or public schools and from different provinces which will reflect the current situation of transitions in detail. It is also worth noting that this study was carried out according to the qualitative research method and it does not aim to generalize.

To sum up, when the findings of this study are evaluated as a whole, it is necessary that pre-school teachers working in inclusive classrooms should be graduated more equipped in order to carry out in-classroom transitions more effectively and smoothly. It is recommended to make educational planning, support teachers in pre-service and in-service in terms of

preventive classroom management, give importance to in-classroom transitions and learn effective strategies, conduct different professional development activities (coaching, feedback, etc.) with teachers and conduct future researches on these issues.

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