

The School Adjustment Process of Preschool Children Displaced by Earthquake: A Phenomenological Study

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Abstract

This study explores the school adjustment experiences of children displaced by an earthquake, focusing on their perceptions of peer relationships, teacher interactions, and the broader educational environment. The study was conducted using a phenomenological research design. A study group of 10 children aged between 60 and 72 months was formed on February 6, 2023, after the earthquakes with magnitudes of 7.7 and 7.6 centered in Kahramanmaraş. Participants were selected using criterion sampling, a type of purposeful sampling that ensures the inclusion of individuals meeting the predetermined criteria. Data were collected using qualitative techniques, including structured observations, semi-structured interviews, and analysis of children's drawings. The findings indicated that earthquake-related trauma had a significant negative impact on school adjustment. Factors such as peer interactions, the structure and content of the school curriculum, and its implementation played a crucial role in adjustment. Furthermore, teacher attitudes and behaviors influence children's peer relationships, emotional well-being, and classroom experiences. The results, analyzed from psychological and developmental perspectives, provide recommendations for future research and interventions supporting disaster-affected children in educational settings.

Keywords: School adjustment, earthquake, pre-school education, phenomenological approach.

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Deprem Nedeniyle Göç Eden Okul Öncesi Çocukların Okul Uyum Süreci: Fenomenolojik Bir Çalışma

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Öz

Bu çalışma, deprem sonrası göç etmek zorunda kalan çocukların akran ilişkileri, öğretmen etkileşimleri ve genel eğitim ortamına ilişkin algılarını inceleyerek okula uyum deneyimlerini derinlemesine analiz etmektedir. Çalışma, fenomenolojik bir araştırma deseni kullanılarak gerçekleştirilmiştir. 6 Şubat 2023 tarihinde Kahramanmaraş merkezli meydana gelen 7.7 ve 7.6 büyüklüğündeki depremler sonrasında farklı bir şehre göç eden ve yaşları 60 ila 72 ay arasında değişen 10 çocuktan oluşan bir çalışma grubu oluşturulmuştur. Katılımcılar, belirlenen ölçütleri karşılayan bireylerin seçilmesini sağlayan amaçlı örnekleme yöntemi olan ölçüt örnekleme ile belirlenmiştir. Veriler, yapılandırılmış gözlemler, yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmeler ve çocuk çizimlerinin analizi gibi nitel teknikler kullanılarak toplanmıştır. Bulgular, depremden kaynaklanan travmanın okul uyum süreçleri üzerinde önemli ölçüde olumsuz bir etkisi olduğunu göstermiştir. Akran etkileşimleri, okul müfredatının yapısı ve içeriği ile uygulanışı uyum sürecinde kritik bir rol oynamıştır. Ayrıca, öğretmen tutum ve davranışlarının çocukların akran ilişkileri, duygusal iyi oluşları ve sınıf içi deneyimleri üzerinde etkili olduğu bulunmuştur. Psikolojik ve gelişimsel açılardan analiz edilen sonuçlar, afetlerden etkilenen çocukları desteklemeye yönelik müdahaleler ve gelecekteki araştırmalar için öneriler sunmaktadır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Okula uyum, deprem, okul öncesi eğitim, fenomenolojik yaklaşım.

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Introduction

Earthquakes are natural disasters that significantly impact not only physical structures but also individuals' psychological and social well-being, profoundly affecting societal structures. Due to their developmental vulnerability, children are particularly susceptible to the adverse effects of natural disasters. Research indicates that children exposed to natural disasters at an early age may experience anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, behavioral issues, and cognitive impairments, as well as difficulties in social adaptation (Hansel et al., 2013; Yavuz & Dikmen, 2015). The traumatic effects of disasters on children can further hinder their ability to adapt to new social environments (Maclean et al., 2016).

Research indicates that one of the most significant effects of natural disasters on children is the adjustment problems caused by the changes in their social environment due to migration (Leblebici, 2004; Ekici & Tuncel, 2015; Kaştan, 2015). Beyond physical adaptation to a new setting, children must also navigate social and cultural adjustments. This transition may result in loneliness, social exclusion, and difficulties in establishing peer relationships (Kaştan, 2015). Hansel et al. (2013) found that children who migrated following Hurricane Katrina exhibited persistent post-traumatic stress symptoms, particularly those who did not return to the disaster-affected region. These findings underscore the long-term psychosocial impact of post-disaster migration on children's school adjustment processes.

Schools are not only educational institutions but also environments where children engage in social interactions, develop a sense of belonging, and assume social roles (UNICEF, 2016). Entering a new school setting requires children to navigate unfamiliar social relationships and cultural dynamics, and successful management of this process is essential for their overall development. Odinko (2016) describes school adjustment as the beginning of a lifelong process of adjustment. School adjustment encompasses children's participation in social-emotional, behavioral, and academic processes (Canbulat, 2017). Research indicates that school adjustment is closely linked to social competence, and children with strong adaptation skills tend to achieve higher academic success (Bayraktar et al., 2012; Chan, 2012; Herndon et al., 2013; Ladd & Price, 1987; Seven, 2011). Furthermore, early childhood school adjustment significantly influences primary school success and overall academic performance (Cook et al., 2017). Thus, a child's ability to adapt to a new school and social environment is crucial for their future adjustment to new situations.

The school adjustment process is a complex phenomenon that significantly influences children's socio-emotional development and overall well-being (Odinko, 2016). While transitioning to a new school may be a natural process for some children, it can be particularly challenging for those who have experienced trauma. The adjustment process is even more demanding for children who migrated due to an earthquake, as they must cope with separation from familiar environments and establish new social connections. Key factors influencing school adjustment include teacher support, peer relationships, and the quality of the educational environment (Başaran et al., 2014; Uysal et al., 2016). The relationships children establish with their teachers and peers, participation in classroom activities, and the physical environment all shape their perceptions of school and directly impact their adjustment process (Uysal et al., 2016). Child-centered educational approaches that encourage active participation in activities help reduce stress levels and foster positive attitudes toward school (Frost et al., 2012; Özdemir & Kalaycı, 2013; Koçyiğit, 2014; Kaya & Akgün, 2016).

Research highlights that children who have experienced migration and trauma benefit from supportive school environments, leading to improved social and academic outcomes (Drange & Telle, 2010; Frost et al., 2012; Sibley & Kalina, 2017). Teachers' responsiveness and supportiveness are crucial in helping children affected by trauma adjust emotionally and socially (Pianta & Steinberg, 1997). UNESCO's (2011) report emphasizes that quality education provided in schools serves both protective and rehabilitative functions for migrant children. Additionally, peer support strengthens social bonds, whereas negative experiences such as bullying and exclusion hinder school adjustment (Rubin et al., 2006; Kılcan et al., 2017).

This study aims to explore the school experiences of children aged 60-72 months who migrated due to the earthquakes that struck Kahramanmaraş, Turkey, on February 6, 2023, with magnitudes of 7.7 and 7.6. The study investigates children's perceptions of their new school environment, peer

relationships, teachers, and educational programs. By specifically analyzing children's perceptions of peer relationships, teachers, and the school program in their new schools, we aim to provide a more comprehensive evaluation of their school experiences. In the preschool years, which are a critical period for development, it is important to minimize the long-term effects of traumatic experiences caused by disasters to prevent them from leaving lasting marks in their future lives. In this context, addressing the experiences of children trying to adapt to new educational environments after a disaster through qualitative research methods will contribute to the development of practices and policies for preschool education following a disaster. It is expected that the research findings will contribute to the structuring of inclusive and supportive educational environments by raising teachers' awareness of this issue. In line with this purpose, the following research questions will be addressed:

- How do children perceive their peer relationships in their new school environment following post-earthquake migration?
- What are their perceptions of their teachers?
- How do they perceive the educational environment?

Method

Research Model

In this study, which aims to examine the school experiences and adaptation processes of preschool children who migrated from their cities after the 7.6 and 7.7 magnitude earthquakes that occurred on February 6, 2023, centered in Kahramanmaraş, Turkey, a qualitative research approach has been adopted. The research was conducted with a phenomenological research design aimed at deeply understanding the participants' experiences. The goal of the phenomenological technique is to directly gather people's experiences, ideas, feelings, and perceptions about a phenomenon. This design provides an appropriate framework for understanding the participants' school experiences and the challenges they face (Creswell, 2015).

Study Group

The study sample consisted of 10 children aged 60-72 months who had to migrate due to the earthquake. The participating children migrated from their city to the province of Antalya about two months after the earthquake and started at their new schools. During the period of the research, the participating children have been attending these schools for approximately three months. Participants were selected through criterion sampling, a form of purposive sampling ensuring the inclusion of individuals who met specific selection criteria (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This sampling method aimed to enhance internal validity and provide an in-depth understanding of participant experiences. The inclusion criteria were (1) being between 60-72 months old and (2) having been displaced following the February 6, 2023, earthquake. These criteria have been established to form a group consisting of individuals with direct experience. The method aims to enhance internal validity and deeply understand participant experiences.

Data Collection Tools and Process

The research was conducted in schools where children aged 60-72 months who migrated to Antalya after the earthquake between July 15 and September 15, 2023, were studying. Before data collection, the researcher explained the scope of the study to school administrators and teachers, obtained permission, and provided a written consent form to the children's families. The consent form detailed the purpose of the research, the process, the principles of voluntariness, participants' rights, and privacy protection. It was explicitly stated that the children's identities would be anonymized through code names (e.g., Gizem, Aslı, Didem, Fatih, Mert, Rüzgar, Yağmur, Nisa, Damla, Demir). The schools where the 10 approved children were educated were visited eight times in total, with visits occurring twice a week. To comprehensively understand the children's school experiences, multiple qualitative data collection methods were employed, including observations, semi-structured individual interviews, and the draw-and-tell technique, which allowed children to express their emotions and experiences visually.

Observation

Observations in the school environment were conducted using a semi-structured observation form aimed at understanding children's peer relationships, teacher interactions, and adaptation to the school program. The observation form consists of 10 items and evaluates three main dimensions: peer relationships (communication, cooperation, social participation, exclusion), teacher-child interaction (warmth, social supportiveness, individualized attention), and adaptation to the school program (participation in activities, emotional state, perception of the physical environment). The content validity of the form was ensured with the contributions of field expert academics and supported by the researcher's participation in classroom activities. One of the researchers conducted participant observations over a month, two days a week, during free play time, group activities, story time, mealtime, and individual work hours; by participating in class activities, they maintained the naturalness of the observation process with the children. Each session lasted an average of 50-60 minutes. Observations were supported by interviews with the classroom teacher, and the observation notes were recorded in the computer system on the same day. The content validity of the observation form was ensured by obtaining expert opinions. The researcher's active participation in class activities and interaction with children supported the internal validity by increasing the naturalness of the observations. Additionally, the researcher's active participation in class activities and interaction with the children supported internal validity by enhancing the naturalness of the observations.

Interviews

A semi-structured interview form consisting of 10 questions has been prepared to understand children's perceptions of their school experiences. The interview questions were created based on a review of the relevant literature and expert opinions, and a pilot application was conducted with five children to test their comprehensibility and validity. During the pilot application process, it was observed that the children had difficulty understanding some questions, and accordingly, two questions were simplified. The one-on-one semi-structured interview technique has been used as a data collection method that reflects the participants' emotions, thoughts, opinions, and experiences in the most detailed and comprehensive way (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004; Kuş Saillard, 2010). Each interview lasted approximately 40-45 minutes, audio recordings were made, and the entire process was conducted with the participants' consent. Based on the data obtained from the preliminary application, necessary adjustments were made, and the interview form was finalized, after which interviews were conducted with all the children in the study group.

Draw and Explain Technique

To support the observation and interview methods, the "draw and explain technique" has been used. Children were asked to draw with the instruction, "Draw a day at school," and these drawings were used in the analysis of emotional states. This technique is based on having individuals draw a picture on a given topic and then narrate the picture they have drawn (Driessnack, 2006). One of the most enjoyable and simple ways for children to express their feelings, thoughts, and dreams is through drawing (Skybo et al., 2007; Yavuzer, 2016). In the use of this technique, it has been noted that the limited vocabulary of preschool children and their ability to express their inner world more comfortably through drawings are significant factors (Montserrat et al., 2010).

Data Analysis

The qualitative data obtained within the scope of the research were analyzed using the content analysis method. The audio recordings obtained from the interviews were transcribed into text format on a computer and analyzed. For coding and categorization, the NVIVO 11 qualitative data analysis program was used; participant responses were examined in detail to create main themes and sub-themes. Interview and observation data were evaluated alongside the drawings made by the children, revealing their perceptions of school experiences. In the data analysis, the children's statements were reported using code names determined in accordance with the principle of confidentiality. In the analysis process, the data were evaluated in three stages: The first stage, open coding, involves examining the data line by line, dividing it into meaningful sections, and creating initial conceptual codes (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). At this stage, expressions reflecting the children's experiences were identified and used as initial

codes guiding the themes. The second stage, axial coding, is the process of relating and grouping the concepts identified during the open coding process under broader categories (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). At this stage, connections were established between the codes identified for peer relationships, teacher interactions, and the educational environment, and sub-themes were created. The final stage, selective coding, involves identifying the main themes in accordance with the primary purpose of the research and analyzing the relationships between these themes to create a holistic structure (Charmaz, 2006). In this process, the strongest themes related to children's adjustment to school have been identified and interpreted.

Various methods have been applied to enhance the validity and reliability of the research: Using data triangulation, interviews, observations, and children's drawings were evaluated together for cross-validation. This method has increased the reliability of the results by enabling the multidimensional analysis of the obtained data (Patton, 1990). For inter-coder reliability, the data were independently coded by two experienced qualitative researchers, and the consistency of the coding processes was calculated (Kappa value: 0.875) (Landis & Koch, 1977). The coding process was reviewed by an academic expert in the field, and necessary adjustments were made. These methods have strengthened the scientific consistency of the findings by ensuring the validity and reliability of the research.

Ethics Committee Approval

Ethics committee approval was obtained from Akdeniz University Social and Human Sciences Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee with decision number 326 on 10.07.2024.

Findings

The research data were examined under three main themes: 'Peer Relationships,' 'Teacher Relationships,' and 'Educational Environment,' to understand the experiences of children who were affected by the earthquake and started at a new school. To enhance the validity and reliability of the findings, the data triangulation method was employed; interviews, observations, and children's drawings were subjected to a cross-validation process for evaluation. The simultaneous analysis of three different data sources has provided a multidimensional perspective on children's school experiences and has strengthened the comprehensiveness and accuracy of the findings.

Findings on Peer Relationship Experiences

The findings related to the first research question, "What are the emotions and thoughts of participant children regarding peer relationships in the new school?" were examined under two categories: positive peer experiences and negative peer experiences. According to the results, three children (Gizem, Yağmur, Demir) reported positive peer experiences, while seven children (Ashi, Didem, Fatih, Mert, Rüzgar, Nisa, Damla) shared negative peer experiences.

Positive Peer Experiences

The positive peer experiences identified from the findings included "being invited to play, playing together, engaging in conversations, sharing toys, offering help, and adhering to social rules such as expressing gratitude, apologizing, and being polite." During interviews, a child named Demir expressed that he had positive experiences in his new school compared to his schoolmates in the earthquake-affected area. Similarly, a child named Yağmur shared affection for their peers at the new school while also mentioning missing their old friends.

Some participant statements highlighting positive peer experiences are as follows:

Gizem: "I have so much fun with my friends at school. My friend treats me very kindly and shares their toys with me."

Demir: "At this school, my friends are very kind to me. Once, during a game, someone bumped into me and made me fall, but they apologized. No one did that at my old school." After this statement, the researcher asked C10, "Do you miss your friends at the old school?" to which Demir responded, "Yes, I miss some of my friends very much, but I also like my friends at this school."

Observations revealed that children who spoke about positive peer experiences, such as Gizem, Yağmur, and Demir, were cheerful and energetic when interacting with their peers. These children appeared well-accepted by their classmates and actively participated in group play. During free play periods, they communicated effortlessly and played comfortably with their peers.

The findings from the analysis of drawings also supported these observations. For instance, Gizem drew a scene showing themselves playing happily with a friend. The vibrant colours and central placement of figures in the drawing conveyed a sense of trust and belonging, aligning with their statement: "My friends are very kind to me." Similarly, Yağmur and Demir created drawings reflecting enjoyable moments with their peers. Yağmur's drawing depicted playing with balloons in a joyful environment. In interviews, Yağmur stated, "I love my friends very much." The use of bright colours and expansive spatial arrangements in the drawing suggested positive emotions.

Negative Peer Experiences

The findings revealed that some children experienced negative peer interactions. These experiences were categorized under themes such as "exclusion from play, verbal harassment, lack of material sharing, and physical violence". Seven children expressed these types of experiences, reporting difficulties in gaining acceptance in their new social environment, struggling to make friends, and feeling excluded, which often led to feelings of sadness or anger. During the interviews, children named Aslı, Didem, Fatih, and Rüzgar expressed that they experienced "exclusion." Aslı mentioned being left out of classmates' games and feeling lonely. Didem stated that while their classmates played tag, they were excluded because they preferred playing with dolls. Similarly, Fatih shared that they did not want to attend school because they had not made any friends.

Physical violence emerged as a significant issue in the experiences of Damla, who explained that a classmate frequently hit them, causing both anger and sadness. Rüzgar recounted that classmates mocked them and used hurtful words, leading to feelings of distress. Nisa and Mert expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of material sharing in class. Nisa noted that their peers forcibly took their toys, causing anger, while Mert described peers' unwillingness to share as rude behavior.

Some participant statements highlighting negative peer experiences include:

Aslı: "My friends don't want to play with me. They always leave me alone."

Damla: "There's a kid in the class who keeps hitting me. I don't like them at all."

The researcher observed that students coded as Aslı and Fatih, who reported difficulties in peer communication, often exhibited shy behavior. These children were frequently excluded by their peers during free play activities.

The analysis of the children's drawings further supported these negative experiences. For instance, Aslı's drawing depicted themselves alone in the classroom while their peers played elsewhere. This visual representation aligned with the statement: "My friends don't play with me." The use of sad facial expressions and the isolated positioning of figures highlighted the sense of exclusion. Additionally, the dark tones in the drawing reflected the child's emotional state. Similarly, Didem's drawing portrayed themselves away from the school and their peers, emphasizing feelings of loneliness. The small size of the figures and the limited use of colours suggested a sense of detachment and exclusion. Fatih also depicted themselves as distanced from the school and classmates, illustrating their loneliness. Rüzgar, while drawing a peer mocking them with a happy facial expression, depicted themselves as sad, reflecting their emotional reaction to the teasing. Nisa illustrated a peer forcibly taking their toys, conveying their stress and frustration through the tense expressions in the drawing. Damla drew a scene of conflict with peers, stating, "They don't play with me," underscoring their sense of exclusion. The heavy use of lines and chaotic composition in the drawing reflected emotional tension and conflict. Negative peer experiences emerged as a critical factor significantly impacting the children's social adaptation. These findings emphasize the need for teachers to carefully observe interactions among children and intervene in situations involving exclusion or bullying.

Findings on Experiences with Teacher Relationships

The second subproblem of the study focused on the question, “What are the feelings and thoughts of participant children regarding their teachers in their new schools?” The participant children's experiences with their teachers were analyzed under two categories: positive and negative. Initially, the children were asked, “What do you think about your teacher at school? Why?” followed by the question, “How do you feel when you are with your teacher?” These findings, combined with observations and drawing analyses, provide significant insights into the influence of teacher-student relationships on children's school adjustment.

Positive Teacher Experiences

Findings from interviews, observations, and drawings reveal that seven children (Gizem, Didem, Rüzgar, Yağmur, Nisa, Damla, Demir) reported positive experiences with their teachers. Positive teacher experiences were characterized by “the teacher being cheerful and tolerant, engaging in physical affection (e.g., hugging or kissing), and teaching new knowledge.” These experiences contributed to the children feeling happy and valued.

Some participant statements highlighting positive teacher experiences include:

Didem: “My teacher treats me very well. She's always smiling. She doesn't give punishments.”

Gizem “My teacher knows everything. She teaches me new things. That's why I like her.”

According to the findings from interviews with the children, Didem, Yağmur, and Demir, stated that their teachers were always smiling and praised their teachers' warm and supportive attitudes. Especially Yağmur said, “My teacher always smiles and loves us.” “Even when we do something wrong, she doesn't get angry: she just talks to us.” Using this expression, she emphasized her teacher's cheerful and tolerant approach. Rüzgar and Nisa indicated their teacher's positive behavior by expressing that their teacher loves them and hugs them. For example, Rüzgar said, “My teacher says she loves me; she hugs me.” “I love my teacher too,” he said. Gizem and Damla, on the other hand, expressed that they liked their teachers because they taught them new information. In line with these findings, it is observed that the warm and supportive approaches of teachers play an important role in helping children adapt to their new school environment.

The researcher observed that children who spoke about positive teacher experiences actively participated in classroom activities, trusted their teachers, and willingly followed instructions. Furthermore, it was noted that these children were highly motivated, had strong communication with their teachers, and established a trusting relationship with them. Teachers displayed a patient, compassionate, and child-centered approach toward the children. The researcher's observations indicated that children who discussed positive teacher experiences participated more easily in class activities under their teacher's guidance and felt safe. The way teacher figures were emphasized in the children's drawings reflects the nature of the teacher-child relationship. In the children's drawings, teacher figures were often depicted in bright colours and in central positions. For example, Rüzgar depicted their teacher next to a large heart, which they stated represented their teacher. The vibrant colours in the drawing and the large heart figure symbolize the special bond the child has with their teacher. This drawing reflects the love and trust the child feels for their teacher. Similarly, in the drawings of Didem, the teacher is depicted larger and, in the center, compared to other human figures, and the teacher figure is highlighted in bright colours, expressing trust and attachment to the teacher. Yağmur and Nisa did not include a teacher figure in their drawings, yet in the interviews, they clearly expressed their love for their teacher. These findings suggest that teachers' warm, supportive, and encouraging approaches positively affect children's adaptation to their new school environment.

Negative Teacher Experiences

Three of the participating children (Aslı, Fatih, Mert), mentioned negative experiences with their teachers. These experiences were generally associated with behaviors such as “raising their voice to reprimand, anger, and punishment for mistakes.” The children indicated that these negative behaviors led to feelings of fear and anxiety. Aslı and Fatih expressed discomfort with their teachers' loud reprimands and anger. Mert described the situation where the teacher excluded misbehaving children

from games and activities as something that caused worry and even fear. Some participant statements about negative teacher experiences are as follows:

Aslı: "My teacher gets mad a little too much. She always reprimands loudly. Sometimes I am scared."

Mert: "My teacher doesn't let my friends play as a punishment. I am afraid she won't let me play either."

The researcher observed that children who expressed negative teacher experiences were generally more passive during classroom activities and hesitated to communicate with their teachers. It was determined that these teachers exhibited a more authoritarian attitude in classroom management and resorted to verbal punishment. In the children's drawings, the absence of teacher figures or their depiction in a distant position are details that indicate the negative experiences the children expressed. For example, Fatih drew the teacher figure far from themselves, reflecting emotional distance and lack of communication. This situation suggests that the teacher-student relationship is perceived as distant and negative. Aslı and Mert were observed not to include their teacher in their drawings. These negative experiences suggest that teachers' failure to display a supportive attitude or insufficient intervention in negative situations within the classroom led to the children feeling emotionally isolated. When the findings from teacher experiences are examined holistically, it becomes evident that teachers' supportive and tolerant attitudes facilitate children's school adjustment processes, whereas authoritarian and punitive approaches can make this process more difficult.

Findings Related to the Educational Environment

The third sub-problem of the research, "What are the feelings and thoughts of the participating children regarding the educational environment in their new schools?" is addressed under the categories of positive and negative experiences. The participants were asked, "What do you enjoy doing the most at school? Why?" and then "What do you dislike doing the most at school?" Four (Gizem, Rüzgar, Yağmur, Demir) spoke about positive experiences, while six children (Aslı, Didem, Fatih, Mert, Nisa, Damla) expressed negative experiences.

Positive Educational Environment Experiences

The positive perceptions of the participants regarding the educational environment were associated with game-based fun activities and the physical conditions of the school. The children stated that they enjoyed the game-based activities in the school program, which made them happy. Gizem expressed great enjoyment in the costume parties held at the school and emphasized that such events were not available in their previous school. Yağmur who stated that they loved playing most in the block corner, was observed re-enacting an earthquake during play with blocks, expressing the experiences they had during an earthquake. Rüzgar stated that the large garden of the school and the materials it offered made them very happy, especially enjoying activities in the garden with sand, shovels, and toy trucks. Demir mentioned that they played fun games at school. Some statements by participants who spoke about positive educational environment experiences are as follows:

Gizem: "We had a costume party at my school. I had so much fun. We didn't have such nice events at my old school."

Rüzgar: "My school is very big, very beautiful. There are very nice toys. The garden is huge. There is even sand, shovels, and trucks in the garden."

Upon examining the observations of the children who spoke about positive school environment experiences, it was determined that these children had positive relationships with their peers and teachers, were willing to participate in group activities, and their teachers exhibited more child-centered approaches in preparing and delivering activities. Clues to these positive experiences were also found in the children's drawings. The children's drawings frequently featured play corners in the classroom and garden activities. The scenes of playing with blocks in the drawings of the child coded as Yağmur were particularly noticeable. Demir expressed that the fun games in their new school made them very happy and mentioned that they were bored with the intense line-drawing activities in their old school. The dynamic movements of the children playing and the use of bright colours in Demir's drawings

reflect the child's positive emotional perceptions. Although Rüzgar expressed problems in peer relationships in both the interview and drawings, they showed overall happiness with school by highlighting their teacher with a different colour and drawing a large heart symbol.

Negative Educational Environment Experiences

Negative experiences related to the educational environment were addressed under the headings of limited outdoor space usage, the intensity of desk-based activities, and fears about extracurricular trips. Two children, although they stated that they enjoyed playing outside the most, mentioned that they did not go out to the garden very often. Damla expressed that staying in class created fear for them, reflecting the trauma they experienced during the earthquake in their words. Fatih, in their interview, stated that their teacher "always wanted them to stay in the classroom," associating the teacher's attitude with the restrictive nature of the program. Aslı mentioned that they were bored with constantly doing letter and line exercises and that such activities caused their hands to hurt. Mert expressed that they were afraid to participate in extracurricular trips, and this situation disturbed them. Some statements by participants who spoke about negative educational environment experiences are as follows:

Fatih: "You know, our house was destroyed. That's why I don't want to stay in class. I'm really scared that there will be another earthquake. But we stay in class more."

Damla: "My school in Hatay was destroyed. I think this school will be destroyed too. I don't want to be inside the school. It's nicer to play in the garden, but we always spend time in class."

Observations support these statements; it was determined that the children spent most of their time in the classroom and that the garden was rarely used. The researcher observed that structured and teacher-centered activities predominated in these classes and that the children generally spent their time inside the classroom. Children who spoke about negative educational environment experiences expressed that these experiences made them feel unhappy. The children's statements in the interviews are consistent with their drawings. In Mert's drawing, the child depicted themselves inside the classroom, which they considered a safe environment, supporting their concerns about the trips. Damla, expressing that staying in the classroom created fear, depicted the school building as "collapsing." This drawing reflects the child's trauma from the earthquake.

The findings indicate that the educational environment plays a significant role in children's emotional and social adjustment. Game-based activities and enriched physical environments were found to enhance children's positive feelings toward school, while the monotony in outdoor activities and space usage led to a decrease in children's enthusiasm for school. These findings emphasize the importance for educators to create a more sensitive educational environment, particularly for children who have experienced trauma.

Discussion, Conclusion, and Recommendations

This research examined the school adjustment processes of preschool children who migrated to their new schools due to the earthquake. As a result of semi-structured interviews, observations, and picture analysis, the themes of "peer relationships, teacher relationships, and educational environment" have emerged. These themes highlight the critical role of children's social relationships and school experiences in the adjustment process. The results of the research indicate that positive perceptions of peer relationships, teacher relationships, and the school program facilitate the adaptation processes of preschool children to school (Başaran et al., 2014; Kaya & Akgün, 2016; Kılcan et al., 2017; Özdemir & Kalaycı, 2013; Uysal et al., 2016).

Negative peer experiences, such as exclusion, verbal, and physical violence, and the non-sharing of classroom materials lead to social isolation and emotional distress. Peer rejection, shown to hinder social skill development and emotional well-being (Nakamichi et al., 2021), is more evident in children who have experienced traumatic events like earthquakes (Laurence et al., 2011). Conversely, positive peer relationships promote social acceptance and adjustment. Behaviors such as cooperation and assistance contribute to children feeling valued, aligning with research that social bonds with peers aid school adjustment (Johnson et al., 2000). On the other hand, it has been observed that positive experiences such as being accepted by peers, being included in games, and engaging in social behaviors

like helping, apologizing, and thanking others are effective in children's social acceptance and school adjustment. One of the most important factors affecting preschool children's adaptation processes to school is peer relationships (Rubin et al., 1998). Studies in the literature also emphasize that cooperation and helping positively affect young children's peer relationships (Ladd & Sechler, 2012) and that children who are accepted and liked by their peers can adapt to school more easily (Johnson et al., 2000). Problems experienced in peer relationships can cause changes in children's social competence, self-perception, and emotional well-being in the short term, while in the long term, they can lead to issues such as dropping out of school, committing crimes, loneliness, and depression, as noted in the literature (McDougall et al., 2001; Nakamichi et al., 2019; Shin et al., 2016; Wentzel, 2017). Gülay and Erten (2011) found significant negative relationships in their study regarding the importance of peer acceptance during the preschool period in the school adjustment process and how this acceptance affects variables such as a child's love for school, cooperative participation, and self-management. These findings highlight the necessity of developing children's skills in managing peer relationships. Research shows that children may be exposed to social exclusion during the adjustment process to their new schools due to migration, and this situation negatively affects the child's mental and emotional well-being (Kirmayer et al., 2011). Based on this information, it can be said that the social bonds and positive experiences that children form with their peers at school facilitate their adaptation process to school when they have to adapt to new schools in extraordinary situations.

According to the research findings, teacher-child relationships also significantly influence school adjustment. It has been observed that loving and supportive teacher attitudes facilitate the adaptation process to school by increasing children's sense of security. Physical contact, a friendly approach, and positive verbal expressions have facilitated the establishment of strong bonds with children. This finding is supported by research indicating that positive teacher-child interactions facilitate children's emotional well-being and school adjustment processes and that effective classroom management positively affects children's perception of school (Aykaç, 2012; Howes et al., 2008). Conversely, authoritarian and teacher-centered approaches have negatively affected children's motivation and adaptation to school. Alisic et al. (2012) also found in their research that non-supportive approaches negatively affected children's school motivation and social adaptation. This finding has revealed that children who go through traumatic processes need more sensitive and supportive teacher attitudes and that the individual needs of these children must be taken into account. The educational environment influences children's school perceptions and adjustment processes. Play-based activities and rich materials help children develop positive feelings toward school, consistent with research supporting child-centered approaches for adjustment (Kaya & Akgün, 2016). However, monotonous desk activities and discomfort in enclosed spaces are associated with post-traumatic stress effects. Due to the earthquake and the destruction of their homes, children who do not want to be in enclosed spaces and prefer to spend more time in the garden have also reported spending more time in the classroom as a negative experience. These findings highlight that the psychological impact of the earthquake on children affects their adaptation process to school and emphasizes their need for active participation and energy-releasing games. A child's reluctance to participate in outdoor excursions indicates the effects of the stress and anxiety caused by the earthquake. This situation indicates that the child is showing signs of post-traumatic stress and tends to avoid new environments and uncertainty. This finding helps us understand how children can react differently after traumatic events like earthquakes and how these reactions can reflect in their school lives. This situation highlights the need for educators and school administrators to adopt a sensitive approach to children's needs and develop strategies that support their adjustment processes, indicating that a personalized educational environment should be embraced. UNESCO (2011) also emphasized in its report the protective and restorative role of such educational approaches. In conclusion, instead of activities where the child is in a passive role, incorporating play-based, actively participatory activities and organizing physical conditions and materials by considering the individual needs of the children are effective in the children's adaptation process.

Although this study highlights key factors influencing school adjustment, it does not address variables such as children's personality traits, parental attitudes, or socioeconomic status. The limited number of participants also restricts the generalizability of the findings. Despite these limitations, the research has significant implications. The findings reveal that peer relationships, teacher-child relationships, and perceptions of the educational environment are decisive in children's school

adjustment processes. Negative peer experiences, particularly exclusion and violence, adversely affect social adaptation, while positive relationships foster social acceptance and value. These results stress the need for programs supporting social skill development. Teacher-child relationships directly influence emotional well-being and motivation. Loving, cheerful, and child-centered teacher approaches have increased children's attachment to school and mitigated the negative effects of traumatic experiences. In contrast, the authoritarian and teacher-centered approach has reduced some children's participation in school activities and increased their anxiety levels. Teachers must adopt empathetic approaches for children who have experienced trauma. The educational environment also plays a pivotal role. Play-based activities, diverse materials, and outdoor spaces encourage positive feelings toward school, whereas monotonous activities and enclosed spaces diminish interest. For children affected by the earthquake, play-centered and child-centered activities significantly ease school adjustment. Reorganizing educational programs to meet traumatized children's needs and ensuring safe, supportive, and inclusive school environments are vital. Teachers adopting empathy-based strategies and implementing individualized approaches can strengthen children's emotional and social adjustment. Based on the research findings, the impact of children's personality traits, family structures, and environmental factors on school adjustment processes can be examined. Mixed research methods can be useful for a more comprehensive understanding of these processes.

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