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Examination of Teachers' Knowledge Levels of the Concept of Early Literacy in Terms of Various Variables

Halil Taş¹, Muhammet Baki Minaz²

¹ Inspection Board, Ministry of National Education, Ankara, Turkey

² Faculty of Education, Siirt University, Siirt, Turkey

Correspondence: Halil Taş, Inspection Board, Ministry of National Education, Ankara, Turkey
Tel: +905053126323. E-mail: egitimci1@hotmail.com

Abstract

The aim of this study is to determine the level of knowledge of primary school teachers about the concept of early literacy, to determine whether this knowledge level differs according to the teachers' gender, the type of school they graduated from and their professional seniority; to reveal the importance of early literacy skills for 1st grade students of primary school and how to increase teachers' early literacy knowledge levels. This research is a descriptive study of the nature of a survey model. In this study, in which quantitative and qualitative research techniques were used together, mixed method was used in data collection and analysis. The study group of the research consists of 52 primary school teachers who teach the 1st grade. While schools were determined through the disproportionate stratified sampling, teachers were determined through simple random sampling. The analysis of the qualitative data was conducted via content analysis while the quantitative data were analyzed via independent group t-test and ANOVA in this study for which data collection was provided via a semi-structured interview form developed by the researchers. Research findings reveal that primary school teachers have low knowledge levels regarding early literacy and their knowledge levels do not vary depending on gender, the type of school they graduated from and professional seniority. In classroom teaching departments, courses with well-prepared content on early literacy should be put in place, effective in-service training activities should be organized on the subject and classroom teachers should be exchanged frequently with their preschool teachers.

Keywords: Literacy, Early Literacy, First Reading and Writing, Early Literacy Development, Early Literacy Instruction, Primary School Teacher

1. Introduction

Literacy skills form the basis of lifelong learning skills as a critical process in human development process. Literacy skills also play an important role in the formation of thought in the process of making and sharing meaning (Delican & Ateş, 2022). As well as a great number of ideas suggested about when and how children acquire literacy skills from past to present, the consensus shows that some prerequisite skills should be attained for the acquirement of literacy skills in children (Gillen & Hall, 2003; Morrow, 2014). All prerequisite knowledge, skills, and attitudes

regarding literacy, which are expected to be acquired before children start school, are named emergent literacy or early literacy in the literature (Clay, 1966; Sulzby & Teale, 1991; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998).

Children start school with awareness to a degree about the structure and functions of language based on their experiences gained related to language in their daily lives (Sulzby & Teale, 1991). The concept of early literacy can be defined as a skill set and knowledge base that develops during infancy and is enriched with discovery and educational opportunities throughout early childhood (Lonigan, 2004). Early literacy skills such as lexicology, phonemic and writing awareness, letter knowledge and listening with understanding predict the reading skills during the primary school (Altun & Erden, 2016). Early literacy is a skill that can be continuously developed through teaching and learning of basic academic and behavioral skills (Yazıcı & Kandır, 2018). Many studies have reported that early interventions on language and early literacy skills are important for preventing later reading difficulties at primary school (Majorano, Ferrari, Bertelli, Persici, & Bastianello, 2022). Early literacy is what children know about reading and writing before they learn to read and write. The purpose is not teaching reading, instead, it is laying the foundation, so that children have the necessary skills when they are developmentally ready to read (Wyse & Parker, 2012).

Although the formal first reading and writing start with the 1st-grade primary school, prerequisite skills that set up a substructure for the first reading and writing skill are generally acquired during the pre-school period when children start school as ready for the literacy teaching (Masny, 1995). The teaching of reading and writing starting from the very beginning of the 1st-grade is planned based on the assumption that children possess these prerequisite skills. Recent studies carried out to determine the difficulties that children experience in the process of acquiring first reading and writing skills in primary school and the reasons of these difficulties (Akyol, 2018; Akyol & Temur, 2008; Altun & Erden, 2016; Çelenk, 2013; Demirel, 2006; Juel, 1988; Stanovich, 1986; Torgesen & Burgess, 1998) reveals the importance of early literacy skills gained in preschool period in order to have a successful first reading and writing process suitable for the purpose.

Early literacy skills are a crucial foundation for future learning and development. Low early literacy rates are associated with negative factors such as social and behavioral problems and increased dropout rates (Kowalskia, Elliot, Guzman, Schuenke-Luciena, 2022). Children with the low early literacy skills are the most vulnerable to poor literacy outcomes (Kaminski, Powell-Smith, Hommel, McMahon, & Aguayo, 2015). Many studies have reported that early interventions in language and early literacy skills are important for preventing later reading difficulties at primary school (Majorano, Ferrari, Bertelli, Persici, & Bastianello, 2022). Literacy development starts early in life and is highly correlated with school achievement. The more limited a child's experiences with language and literacy the more likely he or she will have difficulty learning to read (Strickland & Riley-Ayers, 2006).

Early literacy includes all the knowledge, skills and attitudes that children have until they learn to read and write (Akyol, Şenol, & Yaşar, 2022). Early literacy skills that support the child's lifelong learning process and academic skills (Dickinson & Neuman, 2018) should be evaluated as a whole to effectively support them. Early literacy, which defines the prerequisite knowledge, skills and attitudes that children acquire in reading and writing before starting formal literacy teaching, is one of the basic skills that children should acquire to be successful literate (Sulzby & Teale, 1991; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998). Early childhood education aims to support children's whole development and their school readiness. Children develop a knowledge about reading, writing and learning before elementary school. This knowledge is called early literacy and it's a key factor for school readiness (Dere, 2019). Early literacy, which is one of the main predictors of reading skill in the early period (Kargın, Güldenoğlu & Ergül, 2017), indicates the existence of a literacy preparation process which should be followed well before the beginning of formal initial literacy teaching (Karaman & Aytar, 2016). Learning how to read is a complex process and contains wide range of skills such as oral language, vocabulary, identifying sounds, letters, and decoding (Altun & Sarı, 2018).

Early literacy skills contain social, environmental, cognitive, linguistic, and emotional forces (Campbell, Ramey, Pungello, Sparling, & Miller-Johnson, 2002). Vocabulary knowledge, letter knowledge, phonological awareness, writing awareness and comprehension skills are the most predictive skills in early literacy skills (Aarnoutse, Van Leeuwe & Verhoeven, 2005; Casey & Howe, 2002; Elliott & Olliff, 2008; Neuman & Dickinson, 2001; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998). Vocabulary knowledge, refers to the sum of words understood in reading, listening or writing and speaking (Çetin, 2020). Letter knowledge is the ability of children to understand that words are made of letters, that letter sounds are used when translating words into verbal language, and that different words are formed by combining different letters (Karaman & Aytar, 2016). Phonological awareness is the ability to distinguish the similarities and differences in the sounds that make up words (Bennett-Armistead, Duke, & Moses, 2005). Writing awareness is children's understanding of the function and form of writing and its relationship with verbal language (Justice & Ezell, 2001). Understanding is the inference or structuring of meaning from the text read by someone else or from the text that the child reads (Özdemir & Kiroğlu, 2019).

The results of the research show that early literacy skills are very important for first reading and writing skills starting in the first grade of primary school (Altun & Erden, 2016). Many studies have shown that children who start primary school without early literacy skills cannot make a good start to school and that these children face many problems in the process of acquiring their first reading and writing skills and these problems negatively affect future school life (Juel, 1988; Stanovich, 1986; Torgesen & Burgess, 1998). Children who have problems in the process of literacy are highly likely to experience problems in academic, social, behavioural and emotional aspects (Whitehurst, 2001). For this reason, it is important to take the necessary measures to improve children's early literacy skills before starting primary school to avoid problems in the initial literacy learning/teaching process.

Early literacy skills and initial literacy preparatory work can be considered as different paths to the same goal in the process of teaching literacy. Early literacy, usually acquired in the preschool period, is in parallel with preparatory studies to teach literacy in the 1st-grade of primary school (Taş, 2020). It can be said that the common aim of these two studies, which support each other, is to ensure that the first reading and writing process is passed smoothly and that a well-established teaching life with a good start is continued well. Broad agreement exists that teachers need professional knowledge for the successful mastering tasks that are typical for their profession (König, Hanke, Glutsch, Jäger-Biela, Pohl, Becker-Mrotzek, Schabmann & Waschewski, 2022). Therefore, preschool teachers and primary school teachers must have sufficient knowledge about the concept of early literacy. Although the concept of early literacy is mostly used in the preschool period, especially the primary school primary school teachers of the first grades are expected to be familiar with this concept in the preparation stage for the first reading and writing and to implement the applications required by this concept.

Researches have shown that a significant proportion of children start primary school without the basic early literacy skills necessary for learning, that these children with a bad start have difficulty in learning to read and write and that these difficulties persist throughout their school life (Stanovich, 1986; Torgesen & Burgess, 1998; Whitehurst, Arnold, Epstein, Angell, Smith & Fischell, 1994). These results require that primary school teachers should be aware of early literacy and complete this missing skill in the first weeks of the first year of primary school. For, teachers' awareness of early literacy is important for children to start to read and write more easily, to learn to read and write more easily and to have higher academic success (Dennis & Horn, 2011).

The concept of early literacy has a special importance especially for the 1st-grade teachers. It can be said that teachers will have a more successful and smoother first reading and writing process to the concept of early literacy. To investigate the knowledge levels of primary school teachers regarding the concept of early literacy; it is thought to be important in terms of revealing the knowledge level of teachers about early literacy, determining the reasons for low level of knowledge and determining the ways to increase their knowledge level. In addition, it can be said that this determination is important both in pre-service and in-service teacher quality and for a qualified first reading and writing teaching. This study is important in terms of revealing the problems related to early literacy

skills in education and teaching process, especially in the first reading and writing process in the first year of primary school, and providing educators, families, policymakers and legislators with an insight to produce effective solutions. The fact that no previous study has been encountered on this subject adds a special importance to this research.

In this study, to determine the level of knowledge of primary school teachers regarding the concept of early literacy, to determine whether this knowledge level differs according to the gender of teachers, the type of school they graduated from and their professional seniority, to reveal the importance of early literacy skills for primary school 1st-grade students and how teachers' knowledge levels of early literacy It is intended to determine that it can be upgraded. For this aim, answers to the following questions were sought:

1. What is the knowledge level of primary school teachers regarding the concept of early literacy?
2. Is there a meaningful relationship between the knowledge level of primary school teachers regarding the concept of early literacy and their gender, the type of school they graduate and their seniority?
3. What is the importance of early literacy skills for 1st-grade primary school students according to primary school teachers?

2. Method

2.1. Study Design

This study is a descriptive study of the nature of scanning model. In the scanning model, which aims to describe an existing situation as it is, the event, individual or object subject to research is defined in its own conditions and as it is (Karasar, 2019). In this research, where quantitative and qualitative research techniques are used together, simultaneous transformational mixed method was used in data collection and analysis. The mixed method is that the researcher combines qualitative and quantitative techniques, approaches and concepts within a study or successive studies (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Sandelowski, Voils & Knaf, 2009).

2.2. Study Sample

The study group of this research consists of 52 classroom teachers who teach the 1st-grade of primary school. The schools were determined through the disproportionate stratified sampling. In disproportionate stratified sample, each after determining the number of samples selected from the stratum, an equal number of samples is selected ignoring the representation ratio in it (Schmidt & Hunter, 2014). Schools were grouped as low, middle and high level considering the administrative structure (province, district, and village), transportation facilities and socio-economic structure of the settlement where the school is located. A total of 52 teachers were selected from each group of schools by easily accessible sampling method. The most frequently used easily accessible or convenient sampling in qualitative research is based on available, fast and easy-to-reach items (Patton, 2005). The study was conducted in 9 schools, three of which were in each group. Demographic characteristics of the participants are given in Table 1.

Table 1: The demographic characteristics of the participants

<i>Characteristics of Participants</i>		<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>
Gender	Female	28	53.85
	Male	24	46.15

The type of school graduated	Education High School	9	17.31
	Class Teaching Department/Faculty of Education	24	46.15
	Other Departments of Faculty of Education	13	25.00
	Other Faculties	6	11.54
Seniority	0-5 years	7	13.46
	6-10 years	11	21.15
	11-15 years	10	19.23
	16-20 years	13	25.00
	21-25 years	6	11.54
	26-30 years	5	9.62

When Table 1 is examined, it is seen that the rate of participants in terms of gender is close to each other, the majority of the participants graduated from the Faculty of Education, Department of Class Teaching and the number of participants with 16-20 years of professional seniority is higher.

2.3. Data Collection Tools

Data were collected with a semi-structured interview form developed by the researcher. The first part of the form which consists of two parts includes the questions containing the demographic information of the teachers while the second part includes open-ended questions aimed to determine the knowledge of primary school teachers about the concept of early literacy and their views on the place of early literacy skills in the first reading and writing process. Semi-structured interview forms consist of certain questions and the participants give answers to these questions in the manner they want and express their thoughts clearly (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018). While preparing the interview questions, attention was paid to its suitability for purpose, understandability and meeting the need. The draft of the interview, which was formed by taking the opinions of two lecturers, four primary school teachers, and three preschool teachers, was tried on three primary school teachers and three preschool teachers who were not included in the sample and the problems encountered were solved.

2.4. Data Collection

In this study, interview technique was used to collect data. The following questions were asked to teachers: "How would you define the concept of early literacy?", "Could you evaluate your knowledge level about early literacy?", "Do you think that you are sufficiently knowledgeable about early literacy?" and "What is the place of early literacy skills in the first reading and writing process? The face-to-face interviews, which lasted approximately 15 minutes, were held in a room provided by the school administration.

In the study, the principles of scientific research and publication ethics were meticulously followed; for this purpose, the Ethics Committee Approval was taken from Ordu University/Turkey. The participants were informed in detail about the research and participation in the research was based on voluntariness. During the research process, the participants' voice was recorded, and notes were taken by obtaining their permission. The real names of the participants were not used in the research, and the names of the participating teachers were coded as T-1, T-2, ... T-52.

2.5. Data Analysis

The qualitative data collected in the research were analysed by content analysis method. Content analysis is defined as a systematic, reproducible technique in which some words of a text are summarized in smaller content categories with codings based on certain rules (Büyüköztürk, Kılıç-Çakmak, Akgün, Karadeniz & Demirel, 2022). Analysis

of data was conducted based on stages including coding and sorting of data, development of themes/categories, the arrangement of data according to codes and themes, validity and reliability analysis of data and interpretation of findings. In the last stage, the codes and themes obtained as a result of the analysis are presented as percentages and frequency to facilitate comparison and interpretation.

The reliability of the data obtained from the research was through an expert opinion, participant confirmation, peer expert review and inter-coders reliability processes (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018; Baltacı, 2019; Creswell & Cheryl, 2017; Miles, Huberman &, Saldana, 2018; Silverman, 2006)). The validity and reliability of the qualitative dimension of the research were tested in the light of credibility, transferability, consistency and validity criteria (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018). In addition, the reliability level of the study was tried to be increased by demonstrating the research process in detail and keeping the raw data archived and ready for audit (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Teachers' definitions of the concept of early literacy were scored between 0 and 2, allowing a procedural analysis. There was an investigation into whether there was a significant relationship between gender, type of school and professional seniority variables and findings by grading "0" for incorrect answers, "1" for partially correct answers and "2" for correct answers. Independent group t-test was conducted to determine whether there is a significant relationship between teachers' gender and accurate definition of early literacy concept, while one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to determine whether there is a meaningful relationship between teachers' type of school and professional seniority and accurate definition of early literacy.

3. Findings

3.1 Findings Related to the Knowledge Levels of Teachers Regarding the Concept of Early Literacy

In this sub-problem; findings related to how teachers define the concept of early literacy, how knowledgeable they are about early literacy, what are the reasons for their low level of knowledge about the concept of early literacy, what are the sources/ways of obtaining information about the concept of early literacy, and how their level of knowledge about the concept of early literacy can be increased place is given (Table 2-6).

Table 2: Definitions of teachers on the concept of early literacy

<i>Definitions</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>
Learning to read and write at an early age	18	34.62
Learning to read and write before primary school	13	25.00
Learning to read and write before other children do	11	21.15
Preparing the child before first reading and writing	5	9.62
Readiness for the first reading and writing	4	7.69
Early development of children	1	1.92

Table 2 shows that 34.62% of teachers defined the concept of early literacy as learning to read and write at early age, 25.00% of them as learning to read and write before starting primary school, 21.15% of them as learning to read and write before other children do, 9.62% of them as preparation for the first reading and writing, 7.69% of them as readiness and 1.92% of them as early development of children. The results showed that the concept of early literacy is defined correctly only by 17.31% of teachers. Some examples of the class teachers' definitions are presented below:

Early literacy means that the child is ahead in every way (T-3).

Early literacy is the child's readiness to read and write in the first grade (T-7).

Early literacy is the learning of children to read and write at an early age (T-17).

Early literacy is the development of children before their peers in many respects (T-21).

Early literacy is readiness to read and write (T.32).

Early literacy is the children's learning to read and write before their peers (T-42).

The self-assessment results of teachers' knowledge levels about the concept of early literacy are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Knowledge levels of teachers regarding early literacy (self-assessment)

<i>Knowledge Level</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>
I have no idea	14	26.92
I have very little knowledge	20	38.46
I have little knowledge	11	21.15
I have knowledge	5	9.62
I have much knowledge	2	3.85

Table 3 shows that 26.92% of the teachers do not have the knowledge, 38.46% of them have very little knowledge, 21.15% have little knowledge, 9.62% have the knowledge and 3.85% have much knowledge about early literacy. From the table, it is seen that 86.53% of the teachers do not have enough knowledge about early literacy and 13.47% of the teachers have the knowledge about this subject.

The views of teachers (43) who were found to have low level of knowledge about the concept of early literacy (misidentified the concept of early literacy) regarding the reasons for their low level of knowledge are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Reasons for low knowledge level

<i>Reasons</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>
I did not take a course on this subject at the university	17	39.53
Ministry of Education did not inform us about this subject	10	23.26
It has never drawn my attention	7	16.28
I did not find it necessary	5	11.63
I could not find time	3	6.98
This skill should be taught by preschool teachers	1	2.33

Table 4 shows that teachers did or could not acquire knowledge about early literacy as 39,53% of teachers did not take course on this subject at the university, 23,26% of them were not informed by Ministry of Education, 16,28% of them were not attracted by the subject at all, 11,63% of them did not find it necessary, 6,98% of them did not find time and 2,33% of them believe that this skill should be taught by preschool teachers. Some examples of the explanations given by teachers regarding the reasons for their low level of knowledge about the concept of early literacy are presented below:

I did not take any courses on this subject while studying at university. The courses given at the university have nothing to do with the profession anyway (T-8).

No training was given to us by the Ministry during the candidacy period or in the following years. In-service trainings were held for touristic purposes, but this topic was not available (T-12).

The concept of early literacy is useless to classroom teachers. This is the job of preschool teachers. That's why it didn't interest me much (T-21).

Teaching is a very demanding and timeless profession. In this intensity, I could not spare time to learn the concept of early literacy, which is not directly related to our field (T-33).

I think early literacy should be learned by preschool teachers. We directly teach reading and writing. I do not see it as a necessary subject (T-46).

The views of teachers (9) who have a high level of knowledge about the concept of early literacy (correctly define the concept of early literacy) on how they acquired this information are presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Teachers' sources/ways of knowledge acquisition regarding the concept of early literacy

<i>Sources/Ways</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>
I learned from my friend who is a preschool teacher	3	33.34
I learned during my postgraduate education	2	22.22
I learned during in-service training courses	2	22.22
I learned while preparing for career advancement exams	1	11.11
I was curious and learned through research	1	11.11

Table 5 shows that 33.34% of the primary school teachers had knowledge about the concept of early literacy from their friends who are pre-school teachers, 22.22% from post-graduate education, 22.22% during in-service training courses, 11.11% while preparing for career advancement exams, 11.11% with curiosity and research. Here are some examples of teachers' answers to how they acquired knowledge about the concept of early literacy:

I saw this concept in an article about kindergartens and asked a friend who works as a preschool teacher (T-7).

You have to research and learn many subjects while doing graduate education. I researched this subject after a teacher gave homework on this subject (T-10).

I learned the concept of early literacy at an in-service seminar I attended. Actually, the seminar was for preschool teachers, but I also attended (T-21).

I was preparing for exams to become a school principal. In a source I read, this concept was mentioned and there were questions about it in the book (T-29).

I research everything related to my profession. Because I need to improve myself. I learned about this concept in a research I did on the internet. Then I read a few articles about it (T-51)

The views of the participants on how to increase the knowledge level of teachers about the concept of early literacy are presented in Table 6.

Table 6: Teachers' opinions about how to increase their knowledge level of the concept of early literacy

<i>Opinions</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>
In the teacher training departments of universities, courses should be given in this area.	18	34.62
In-service training courses should be given on this subject	14	26.92
Seminars should be held	9	17.31
This subject should be taught during candidacy	5	9.62
Teachers with high knowledge levels should be rewarded	3	5.77
Teachers should be tested periodically on this subject	2	3.85
Teachers with low knowledge levels should be punished	1	1.92

Table 6 shows that 34.62% of the participants suggested a course related to early literacy in all education departments, 26.92% in-service training courses, 17.31% seminars, 9.62% education during candidacy, 5.77% rewarding teachers with high knowledge levels, 3.85% periodically tests applied to teachers, and 1.92% punishing teachers with low knowledge levels to increase knowledge levels of the concept of early literacy. Some examples of teachers' explanations about what should be done to increase the level of knowledge about the concept of early literacy are presented below:

The place to learn this concept is at the university. For this reason, useful courses related to the profession should be put in universities and teachers should graduate ready for their profession (T-2).

The Ministry should train teachers with in-service training. The Ministry should remove in-service training seminars from being touristic trips and make them more functional (T-12).

Candidacy training has turned into a completely formality. Such concepts and their applications should be given in candidacy training. Thus, the teacher on duty will have the opportunity to apply what he has learned (T-20).

I think teachers should be tested on professional competence frequently. In this case, all teachers follow the developments and learn such concepts related to their profession (T-44).

3.2. Findings Related To The Relationship Between Knowledge Levels Of Primary School Teachers Regarding Early Literacy And Their Gender, The Type Of School They Graduated And Professional Seniority.

Data revealing whether there exists a relationship between knowledge levels of primary school teachers regarding early literacy and their gender is given in Table 7.

Table 7: Results regarding the relationship between knowledge levels of teachers regarding early literacy and their gender

Gender	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	t	p
Female	24	6.92	2.98	1.30	.15
Male	28	7.77	3.56		

Table 7 shows that there is no significant difference between the level knowledge of primary school teachers about early literacy and their gender at .05 confidence level [$t_{(52)} = 1.30, p > .05$]. Table 8 shows data revealing whether there is a relationship between the knowledge level of primary school teachers about early literacy and the type of school they graduated from.

Table 8. Results regarding the relationship between knowledge levels of teachers regarding early literacy and the type of school they graduated from.

	Sum of Squares	Degree of Freedom	Mean Squares	F	p
Intergroup	65.43	3	4.73	.52	.81
In-group	1305.63	49	14.99		
Total	1371.06	52			

Table 8 shows that there is no significant difference in the level of .05 trust between primary school teachers' knowledge level of early literacy and the type of school they graduated from [$F_{(3-49)} = .52, p > .05$]. Table 9 shows data revealing whether there is a relationship between the knowledge level of primary school teachers about the concept of early literacy and their seniority.

Table 9. Results regarding the relationship between knowledge levels of teachers regarding early literacy and their seniority

	Sum of Squares	Degree of Freedom	Mean Squares	F	p
Intergroup	89.82	5	7.32	.63	.74
In-group	1297.69	47	17.01		
Total	1387.51	52			

Table 9 shows that there is no significant difference in the level of .05 trust between the knowledge level of early literacy of primary school teachers with their professional seniority [$F_{(5-47)} = .63, P > .05$].

3.3. Findings Related To The Importance Of Early Literacy Skills For The 1st-Grade Primary School Students.

Teachers' views on whether having early literacy skills is important for primary school 1st-grade students are presented in Table 10.

Table 10: Teacher opinions on the importance of early literacy skills

<i>Opinions</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>
Prepares children for school	16	30.77
Facilitates the literacy learning process	11	21.15
Facilitates the work of teachers in the literacy teaching process	9	17.31
It increases academic success in the future	7	13.46
Supports students' areas of development as a whole	4	7.69
Not an important and necessary skill for elementary school	3	5.77
I'm not sure	2	3.85

In the examination made on Table 10; 30.77% of the teachers said that having early literacy skills prepares the children for school, 21.15% of them facilitate the literacy learning process, 17.31% of them early literacy skill facilitates the teachers' work in the literacy teaching process, 13.46% of them said that acquiring this skill will increase their academic success in the future, 7.69% of them said that this skill will support the development areas of students as a whole, 5.77% of them said that early literacy skill is not an important and necessary skill for primary school, 3.85% it is seen that they stated that they were not sure about this issue. Findings reveal that 90.38% of teachers emphasize the importance of acquiring early literacy skills for 1st grade primary school students. Some examples of teachers' views on the importance of early literacy skills are presented below:

Early literacy is a type of pre-literacy preparation. Therefore, I think that early literacy is very important especially for first graders (T-5).

Early literacy actually facilitates the work of teachers. Because a child who received early literacy education will learn to read and write more easily (T-9).

I can say that a student who comes ready for the first grade will experience a good literacy learning process. This will be very good for their academic success in the future (T-25).

I think early literacy should not be exaggerated. After all, it is the classroom teachers who will teach literacy. This concept may be important in preschool, but it does not work in the first grade of primary school (T-49).

4. Discussion and Conclusion

Considering the knowledge level of primary school teachers regarding the concept of early literacy, it was found that only 17.31% of the teachers defined the concept of early literacy correctly and 86.53% of the teachers stated that they did not have sufficient knowledge about early literacy. These results show that there is a lack of information about primary school teachers' theoretical background and content of early literacy. Although there are many reasons for this, it can be said that one of the most important reasons is that the universities' teacher training programs do not provide sufficient place or any place at all for early literacy teaching. The fact that teachers do not follow the developments in the field adequately and the in-service programs provided to teachers do not include the current developments adequately or place limited emphasis on early literacy also plays an important role in this low knowledge level. Some studies (Akdemir, 2013; Altun & Erden, 2016; Karaman, 2016; Küçükahmet, 2007; Şişman, 2017; Taşkaya & Uyar, 2017) support our interpretation in this direction. In the study conducted by Altun and Erden (2016), it was determined that most of the teachers do not have sufficient knowledge about early literacy. Ergül, Karaman, Akoğlu, Tufan, Sarıca and Kudret (2014) showed that teachers do not know the theoretical background and content of the concept of early literacy. Hindman and Wasik (2008) stated that teachers' inadequate and unqualified teaching for early literacy is based on their lack of knowledge about the

concept of early literacy. In the study conducted by Davis (2022), it was determined that teachers do not have enough knowledge about early literacy skills.

Teachers who participated in the study and correctly defined the concept of early literacy, 33.34% had information about the concept of early literacy from their friends who were preschool teachers, 22.22% of them from graduate education, 22.22% from the in-service training course, 11.11% while preparing for the career advancement examinations, 11.11% were curious and learned through research. These results show that teachers do not acquire knowledge about the concept of early literacy through a planned and regular education program and work but mostly through their efforts and informal ways. Considering that education is a purposeful planned, scheduled and regular activity, it can be said that teachers are not educated on an important issue such as early literacy. The demand for a planned, scheduled and regular institutional training is the common aspect of the teachers' suggestions to raise their knowledge level of early literacy. These recommendations reveal that teaching/informing about the concept of early literacy should be done in institutionally and formally, not through individual efforts and informal relations. In the study conducted by Crim, Hawkins, Thornton, Rosof, Copley and Thomas (2008) it was concluded that teachers should be trained in order to gain early literacy skills effectively.

In the study, it was found that there was no significant difference between the knowledge level of the concept of early literacy and gender. This is possibly a result of the same programs applied in the departments of university teacher training departments, the participation of all teachers to the same pre-service and in-service training activities without discriminating between women and men, and the same content determined by the ministry for school seminars educational activities. It is also possible that the application of pre-service and in-service training activities aimed at teacher training and teacher training to all teachers with the same content regardless of gender prevents the gender factor from affecting teachers' knowledge levels. Besides, teachers' occupational professionalism that excludes the gender factor, their responsibilities and obligations to educate students and acting as a non-emotional professional teaching consciousness in their occupational practices have also contributed to this result. This result obtained in the research is supported by other studies. In the studies conducted by Güner (2011), Işıkgöz, Yiğitsoy and Çiçekçe (2018), Karaman (2016), and Taşkaya and Uyar (2017), it was concluded that gender did not affect the knowledge levels of classroom teachers.

In the study, it was determined that there was no significant difference between the knowledge level of the primary school teachers about the concept of early literacy and the type of school they graduated from. Since the necessary information on early literacy could not be provided at the desired level through undergraduate programs, the departments or programs that teachers graduated from had no significant effect on their knowledge level. It is seen that as there is not an independent course on the concept of early literacy in classroom teaching undergraduate programs, pre-service teachers are not adequately trained in this subject before the service, this lack of pre-service is not solved within the service and accordingly, the teachers have heard/learned the concept of early literacy mostly from other colleagues and relatives in informal ways. Moreover, the fact that the majority of the teachers participating in the research stated that the lack of knowledge on this subject can be solved by putting courses in all departments that train teachers in universities and by providing in-service training courses and seminars, which also supports our explanations in this regard.

In the studies conducted by Taşkaya and Uyar (2017), Karaman (2016) and Güner (2011), no significant relationship was found between the competencies and knowledge levels of classroom teachers and the type of school they graduated from. One of the most important reasons for this inadequacy experienced by teachers is the lack of adequate teaching of early literacy in teacher training programs (Altun & Erden, 2016; Dickson & Caswell, 2007; Hsieh, Hemmer, McCollum & Ostrosky, 2009). Therefore, it can be said that the quality and quantity of the courses in teacher training programs from past to present are one of the important reasons for the problems related to the lack of knowledge of teachers (Akdemir, 2013; Küçükahmet, 2007; Şişman, 2017).

In the study, it was found that there is no significant difference between the knowledge level of the primary school teachers about the concept of early literacy and their seniority. Considering the reasons for the low knowledge level of teachers about early literacy and the procedures and principles of acquiring knowledge on this issue, the reasons why the seniority is not effective in this issue emerge. It is seen that most of the teachers have heard/learned the concept of early literacy mostly from other colleagues. Moreover, the explanations of the majority of the teachers participating in the research that the lack of knowledge on this subject can be solved by putting courses in all departments that train teachers in universities and by providing in-service training courses and seminars are parallel to our thoughts in this direction. The reason for this ineffectiveness can be explained by the fact that teachers do not acquire knowledge about the concept of early literacy either through pre-service or in-service through a planned and regular education activity, and they often acquire this knowledge through individual efforts and informal means. Besides, it can be said that the implementation of the same/similar programs in the teacher training departments of the universities for all teachers and the inclusion of all teachers in the in-service training activities which are determined by the ministry centrally with the same content have an impact on this result.

The results of the research reveal that 90.380% of the teachers believe that acquiring early literacy skills is important for primary school 1st-grade students. Most of the teachers stated that having early literacy skills prepared the children for primary school while it would also facilitate the learning and reading of the teacher and support the development areas of the students. In the study conducted by Altun and Erden (2016), the prospective teachers considered early literacy skills important because they supported children's readiness for primary school. Research shows that teaching and supporting early literacy skills favourably provides children with a strong and positive start to primary school (Balla-Boudreau & O'Reilly, 2002; Evangelou & Sylva, 2003; Israel, 2007; Taş, 2020). Many studies have shown that children who start primary school without early literacy skills cannot make a good start to school revealing that these children face many problems in the process of acquiring their first reading and writing skills and these problems negatively affect future school life (Juel, 1988; Stanovich, 1986; Torgesen & Burgess, 1998). For this reason, it is important to take the necessary measures to develop children's early literacy skills before starting primary school to prevent problems in the first reading and writing learning/teaching process and to support and develop these skills in the first reading and writing preparation process.

5. Recommendations

1. Undergraduate programs of class teaching should be revised to train primary school teachers who are knowledgeable about early literacy and thus, deficiencies should be eliminated.
2. In the primary school teaching departments, well-prepared courses on early literacy should be put in place and teachers should be provided with information about modern literacy methods and techniques based on scientific data instead of acquiring knowledge about early literacy skills.
3. With effective in-service training activities, teachers should be informed in detail about early literacy by experts.
4. Strong incentives should be created to enable teachers to follow developments in their professions, particularly early literacy.
5. It should be ensured that the teachers who will teach the 1st-grade of primary school come together with the preschool teachers frequently, and seminars and meetings should be organized for this purpose.

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