



Analysis of studies on transition to primary school in Türkiye: a meta-synthesis

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Abstract

The importance of the school starting age during the transition to primary education, the effect of preschool education on this process, the problems encountered during the transition, and the shortcomings in preparing children for primary school emerged as key themes in this study. The study aimed to evaluate research conducted on the transition to primary school in Türkiye using a meta-synthesis method. A total of 47 studies on the transition to primary school were analysed to offer a comprehensive understanding of the process. The findings revealed that children's primary school starting age significantly impacts their academic success and social adaptation. Preschool education plays a crucial role in ensuring a smoother transition. However, several challenges were identified, including the lack of structured preparation programs, inadequate parental guidance, and varying teacher expectations. Overall, this meta-synthesis highlights that the transition to primary school is a multifaceted process influenced by developmental, educational, and environmental factors. Addressing these challenges through targeted interventions, policy adjustments, and stakeholder collaboration is essential to ensure that children begin their educational journey with a solid foundation for future success.

Keywords

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Introduction

Starting school is an important milestone in the lives of children, their families, and educators. A positive start to school is recognised as a key factor in children's later academic and social success. Global efforts have been devoted to developing primary school transition programs that foster positive connections between children, families, and schools. Although these initiatives represent important progress, it is crucial to recognise that various actors involved in school transition processes, such as children, parents, and educators, hold diverse experiences, expectations, and perceptions. The differences in experiences, expectations, and perceptions play a critical role in shaping how transitions are regulated, enacted, and supervised. Successful transitions rely on strong collaborative relationships among all stakeholders. Such collaboration requires acknowledging the varied meanings attributed to the transition and maintaining transparent communication to set and achieve common and consistent

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goals (Dockett & Perry, 2004). Given that the transition to primary school marks an important milestone in children's lives, addressing school readiness through research and policies is critical for ensuring that children benefit from the education system and experience well-being during the primary school transition (Dickens et al., 2006). In this regard, children's smooth transition to school, ease of adaptation, and positive primary school experience depend on their school readiness (Janus & Offord, 2000). Despite being a widely debated topic, school readiness is still frequently referenced in studies and discussions about transitioning to school (Dockett & Perry, 2009). It is a complex construct encompassing a range of cognitive, social, and emotional skills essential for successful adaptation to formal schooling. While often regarded as a broad concept in general discourse, school readiness functions as a theoretical construct in educational research, defined through various indicators of child development and environmental readiness (Dockett & Perry, 2009; Janus & Offord, 2000). As parents and educators navigate decisions on how best to support their children's transition to formal education, they often hesitate to determine whether their children are ready for school (Dockett & Perry, 2009). Early childhood educators hold varying perspectives on school readiness and its role in early childhood education. Some educators fully embrace this concept and design structured programs to help children adapt to the school environment. These approaches prioritise individual readiness, focusing on whether the child has attained the developmental milestones necessary for transition (Dockett & Perry, 2002; 2009). Other educators, however, focus on the changes that children experience when they start school, and they call for collaboration among families, teachers, researchers, and policymakers to foster positive transition experiences. They argue that instead of placing the entire burden on children being ready for school, schools should be prepared to accommodate children's needs (Centre for Community Child Health, 2008; Fridani & Agbenyega, 2013). School readiness encompasses individual academic and psychological competencies required for the planned education (e.g., cognitive, language, physical, social, and emotional development), as well as environmental factors (e.g., family dynamics, home environment, education, and institution) (Aminova, 2022; Moore, 2006). Although researchers acknowledge that children's readiness is only one element of a successful start, there is still a tendency to focus primarily on children's characteristics while neglecting contextual factors (Dockett & Perry, 2009). The transition to primary school represents a major shift for children. It often involves moving not only from home to school but also from caregivers, kindergartens, or preschools. This shift extends beyond physical spaces, encompassing changes from familiar early care settings to unfamiliar learning environments, from small, personalised interactions to larger, more structured ones, and from limited age groups to diverse age cohorts. In essence, this transition introduces children to a new paradigm of learning, education, and care. How well children are prepared for this transition profoundly influences their long-term developmental and academic outcomes (Centre for Community Child Health, 2008).

Given that preschool education is not compulsory in Türkiye, many children miss the opportunity for early childhood education. Therefore, children transition to primary school either directly from their homes or from kindergartens. Children with diverse backgrounds and unequal opportunities encounter various challenges in primary schools, while families, teachers, and schools may hold different expectations or face distinct problems. Challenges include difficulties in adapting to structured learning environments, lower self-regulation, weaker social skills, and limited academic preparedness compared to peers with preschool experience (Dockett & Perry, 2007; UNESCO, 2020). In this context, it is crucial to identify the underlying causes of these challenges and explore opportunities to improve the transition process. Moreover, preventing and appropriately addressing the problems that may arise during this critical period are essential for children's overall development and long-term success. Thus, a thorough review of research conducted over the past two decades can provide valuable insights into achievements, ongoing challenges, and areas requiring further attention. Accordingly, this study aims to synthesise existing research on the transition to primary school in Türkiye using a meta-synthesis method.

Background

School readiness is a construct widely referenced by educators and policymakers to describe a range of abilities that support children's transition to school (Jose et al., 2022). During the transition to primary school, children often feel a sense of maturity and excitement as they begin learning skills that once seemed difficult and mysterious, such as counting and writing, while also moving into a more formal learning environment (McTaggart & Astbury, 2005). The growing focus on early childhood education as a means to enhance school readiness during this critical period has highlighted the need for a clear, unified definition of school readiness (Snow, 2006).

It is well known that children's school readiness is associated with their later academic success, but less is known about its connection to other indicators of school success, such as social and emotional well-being (Gregory et al., 2021). In 2017, a training program involving 5,019 teachers in Australia revealed varying perspectives on school readiness, with preschool teachers emphasising social and emotional skills, while primary school teachers focused more on academic readiness (Rouse et al., 2020). Similar to findings in international research (Rouse et al., 2020), discrepancies between preschool and primary school teachers' perceptions of school readiness in Türkiye also highlight the need for a holistic approach. However, the Turkish context is distinctive given the non-compulsory nature of preschool education and regional disparities in access to early learning resources. With increasing pressure for academic accountability, there is a growing tendency to overemphasise children's readiness as they start school. However, this approach overlooks the key role of schools and society in shaping children's school engagement (Dockett & Perry, 2007). Some discussions on school readiness implicitly assume a threshold for cognitive and social development. Accordingly, older children transition better to school. However, age alone is insufficient; what matters is that children must reach the necessary developmental level to succeed in school (Stipek, 2002). School readiness has traditionally been addressed through a maturity-based framework tied to chronological age, leading to the development of readiness tests. The use of such assessments in determining school readiness prior to kindergarten enrolment has revealed two surprising inconsistencies. First, early childhood screening tools have limited, mixed predictive validity for school achievement. Second, delaying school entry does not necessarily lead to better school outcomes (Snow, 2006).

Considering school readiness from a developmental perspective, responsibility is placed on children for what they can or should be able to do. This narrow perspective creates a rigid framework where children who do not meet expected norms are considered unready. Additionally, this perspective imposes pressures on early childhood educators, who are expected to prepare children to align with external standards before they transition to primary school. In contrast, an ecological perspective considers school readiness in a broader context, emphasising the role of the environment in supporting children's transition. This approach highlights the importance of social and structural support systems in determining the best conditions for children's successful adaptation. It also reinforces that school readiness is not a fixed or linear process but a multifaceted, dynamic concept open to ongoing discussion (Rouse et al., 2020).

Parents play a pivotal role in facilitating children's transition to school, acting as their first and most influential teachers. Children, their families, communities, early childhood services, and schools all share the responsibility of preparing children for the transition to school (Jose et al., 2022). The responsibility for ensuring a child's readiness and smooth transition to school lies not only with the family but also with society (Janus & Offord, 2000). Thus, a successful start to school is a social and collective effort. Children cannot navigate this transition alone, and perceived readiness is only one of many factors influencing its effectiveness. Schools and society play crucial roles in supporting children's engagement during this transition and ensuring their sustained participation in school. Children and their families are more likely to engage successfully with school when they feel valued and respected within both the school and the broader community. Conversely, when children and families feel excluded or unsupported, the negative effects extend beyond the individual level to impact society as a whole (Dockett & Perry, 2007). A strong, well-established bond between families, schools, and society

benefits not only children and their families but also schools and society. Schools face significant challenges when children start school without fundamental skills and experiences. Consequently, schools must invest additional efforts to overcome these initial differences among children (Cunha et al., 2006; Karoly et al., 2005). Indeed, insufficient readiness, whether on the part of the child, school, or society, greatly increases the cost of school transitions. Efforts to compensate for inadequate readiness later on are both less effective and more costly than providing proactive strategies and programs to ensure a smooth transition. Thus, it is in the best interest of schools to ensure that children begin their education prepared for immediate learning (Bruner et al., 2005; Cunha et al., 2006).

Institutions for Early Childhood Education in Türkiye

Early childhood education institutions in Türkiye operate in various forms, including independent kindergartens, kindergartens integrated within other educational institutions, and practical classes in vocational and technical secondary schools with child development and education departments. The primary objective of early childhood education is to foster children's physical, mental, and emotional development while instilling positive habits that facilitate their transition to primary education. Equally important is the goal of creating an equitable development and learning environment for children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Additionally, preschool education aims to ensure that children develop fluency and accuracy in speaking Turkish. In the 2019-2020 academic year, the net enrolment rate for 3- to 5-year-old children was 41.8%, the net schooling rate for 4- to 5-year-olds reached 52.4%, and the net schooling rate for 5-year-old children was 71.2% (Ministry of National Education [MoNE], 2020). Considering the age and regardless of the level of education of the child, the net enrolment rate for 5-year-olds was recorded at 75.1% in the same academic year. The fact that the net enrolment was nearly four percentage points higher than the schooling rate demonstrated that approximately 4% of 5-year-old children attended primary school (Ergün & Arık, 2020). Although preschool education is currently not compulsory, Türkiye's Eleventh Development Plan and Education Vision outlined an initiative to make preschool education mandatory for 5-year-olds by 2023 and achieve a 100% net enrolment rate (MoNE, 2018; Strategy and Budget Department, 2019). However, in the 2020-2021 academic year, the net enrolment rate for 5-year-olds in early childhood education declined from 71.2% to 56.9% due to the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is also important to note that these net enrolment rates do not fully capture the exact number of children excluded from education. Some 3- to 5-year-olds may have enrolled in primary school, although they were within the theoretical preschool age range (Tunca et al., 2021). Policies pursuing compulsory preschool education for 5-year-olds by 2023 reflect a broader commitment to enhancing school readiness. However, research in Türkiye (Tunca et al., 2021) highlights that persistent regional disparities and socio-economic barriers hinder equal access to preschool education, emphasising the critical need for targeted interventions to complement these policy goals. Furthermore, UNESCO's COVID-19 Education Intervention report warned that the highest dropout rates due to the pandemic would be observed at the preschool level (UNESCO, 2020). Therefore, establishing robust systems to ensure uninterrupted access to early childhood education, even in times of crisis, is crucial. Without such measures, at-risk children may be deprived of the long-term social and economic benefits of early education, a critical period for cognitive and emotional development (ECDAN, 2020; Tunca et al., 2021). To summarise, both the preschool participation rate for 5-year-olds in the 2019-2020 academic year and the policy efforts to mandate preschool education by 2023 reflect Türkiye's commitment to enhancing educational equity. However, the pandemic-related decline in enrolment exposed systemic vulnerabilities, highlighting that the challenges faced by children transitioning to primary school cannot be examined solely from the perspective of individual school readiness. The rationale for this study stems from the necessity of examining this transition as a complex interaction between child-related and environmental factors. In particular, exploring the effects of social policies and educational strategies will provide valuable insights for improving current practices. Therefore, this study aims to identify the challenges associated with school transitions and propose potential solutions within this framework.

Significance of the Study

As in all fields, social sciences are experiencing rapid advancements, leading to continuous evolution in research techniques. Existing research methods are refined, while new approaches are emerging. In this context, the meta-synthesis method has been developed to collectively evaluate qualitative studies on specific topics (Polat & Ay, 2016). The findings of this study will provide valuable insights for future research by systematically analysing and synthesising the sample groups, objectives, and purposes of studies on the transition to primary school in Türkiye, as well as the methods employed, the research processes followed, and the results obtained. Rather than reviewing 47 separate studies individually, researchers can gain a consolidated understanding of trends in studies on the transition to primary school in Türkiye by analysing this meta-synthesis. This will enable them to design their research in a more structured and informed manner. Additionally, this study will help researchers assess the growing body of qualitative studies on this subject in Türkiye in recent years. By gaining a clearer understanding of previously examined variables and methods, researchers will be encouraged to explore diverse research approaches rather than conducting redundant studies. When reviewing research on the transition to primary school in Türkiye, it is evident that many studies address similar problems. Various quantitative and qualitative findings have been generated through individual research efforts. However, there is currently no meta-synthesis study that synthesises qualitative research findings to provide a comprehensive overview of the transition to primary school in Türkiye. In this respect, this study is significant as it is the first of its kind.

The concepts of school transition and readiness remain topics of ongoing debate and exploration, raising critical discussions due to unanswered questions. Thus, it is essential to obtain comprehensive and precise information to establish a shared consensus on the subject. Only by doing so can effective policies and practices be developed in the best interests of children, who are the primary stakeholders in this process. By synthesising past studies on school transition, this research aims to generate valuable insights for future investigations. This study aimed to analyse theses, articles, and papers related to the transition to primary school in Türkiye using the meta-synthesis method. The research questions were as follows: Considering the studies on starting primary school conducted in Türkiye,

1. What were the primary research objectives?
2. What types of research designs were employed?
3. What methodologies were used, and how was the research process structured?
4. Which sample groups were selected?
5. What data collection tools were used, and for what purposes?
6. What measures were taken to ensure credibility and dependability?
7. What were the key findings?
8. What recommendations were proposed?

Limitations of the Study

This research, which examines studies conducted by Turkish researchers between 2009 and 2020 in Türkiye, is limited to 47 studies. As this study specifically investigates the concept of transition to primary school, data that are not directly related to this topic were excluded from the analysis. This study is further limited to qualitative research within the scope of the meta-synthesis method. The main reason for this approach is that qualitative studies aim to provide an in-depth understanding of the context, capturing individuals' experiences, perceptions, and emotions regarding the transition to primary school in a comprehensive manner. As meta-synthesis seeks to construct a new framework by synthesising researchers' interpretations, only qualitative studies were included in this analysis. Quantitative studies, which primarily emphasise descriptive and statistical findings, were excluded, as qualitative research offers richer insights into participants' lived experiences and educational processes.

Methods

Research Design

Qualitative data offer deeper insights and enhance the interpretation of existing evidence derived from quantitative studies (Chrastina, 2018). Meta-synthesis is a secondary qualitative analysis method that systematically examines, explains, describes, and interprets qualitative findings. This method expands and advances qualitative knowledge (Tekindal & Tonbalak, 2021). However, meta-synthesis does not involve the secondary analysis of primary data from selected studies; instead, it focuses on synthesising and interpreting the findings of these studies. In other words, meta-synthesis entails the researcher's interpretation of the interpretations made by the original authors of the selected studies (Zimmer, 2006). In this study, meta-synthesis, a content analysis method, was used. Thematic analysis was chosen as the specific meta-synthesis approach to develop existing frameworks and generate new interpretations by identifying common themes across multiple studies. The themes identified were not limited to research objectives and recommendations but also covered a broader spectrum, including research methodologies, data collection tools, and reliability criteria. Meta-synthesis involves critically interpreting and evaluating qualitative research in a given field by identifying common themes and key patterns. It provides a comprehensive reference source by revealing both similarities and differences across studies, making it a valuable tool for researchers (Çalık & Sözbilir, 2014). Qualitative meta-syntheses are exploratory, descriptive, and interpretive in nature. They provide a better understanding of a phenomenon by connecting it to existing theoretical assumptions. This is achieved through the integration of multiple interrelated qualitative studies (Chrastina, 2018). As a result of meta-synthesis, new theories are put forward, conceptual models are developed, research gaps are identified, comprehensive insights are added to existing knowledge, and evidence is created for the current state of knowledge (Campbell et al., 2003). In meta-synthesis, a small number of studies are examined in depth, focusing exclusively on coding and synthesising the findings from previous qualitative research or mixed-method studies within a thematic framework (Dinçer, 2018; Polat & Ay, 2016). This approach relies on qualitative methods to construct deeper meaning through an interpretive approach (Erwin et al., 2011). The meta-synthesis method involves the following steps (Noah Jr, 2017): (1) Initial search: Locate relevant sources such as articles or research papers for inclusion in the study. (2) Preliminary analysis: Select documents that align with the objectives of the study. (3) Within-case coding: Analyse and identify themes or key topics that represent central ideas. (4) Cross-case synthesis: Highlight shared themes and patterns across different documents. (5) Results presentation: Present findings in a narrative format, going beyond numerical data. According to Sandelowski et al. (1997), the three different approaches to meta-synthesis are as follows: (1) integration of findings from multiple studies conducted by a single researcher in a related field, (2) synthesis of studies conducted by different researchers in a related field, and (3) quantitative summary of key elements in qualitative research. This study aimed to analyse studies on the transition to primary school conducted by Turkish researchers in Türkiye using qualitative methods and identify existing research trends in this field. Therefore, a meta-synthesis method was chosen to include studies conducted by different researchers.

Characteristics of Researchers

As with all research, understanding our positionality is essential, as it shapes our perspective on the data. The first and second authors are Türkiye-born scholars with expertise in childhood education. The first author specialises in early childhood education and has particular expertise in working with at-risk children. The second author specialises in primary education and literacy. Both authors recognise the significance of the transition from preschool to primary school and understand the potential challenges children may face during this process. This study was conducted collaboratively to ensure that the review remained contextually relevant and sensitive to the educational landscape in Türkiye. The combined expertise of both authors enriched the study, enabling a more comprehensive and well-rounded analysis.

Coding Steps

The following steps were followed in determining the studies to be included:

1. The Joanna Briggs Institute approach to qualitative synthesis was used as a guide to facilitate the selection of appropriate studies. The process involved developing search terms, conducting a systematic literature search, reviewing and selecting studies, appraising the quality of included studies, extracting data, and synthesising findings (Aromataris & Munn, 2020; Burston et al., 2023). Articles and theses published between 2009 and 2020 in the full text were searched using the keywords of “transition to school/primary school”, “starting school/primary school”, “primary school/school readiness”, “primary school/school preparedness”, “school maturity”, “transition to primary school”, and “school readiness” in the databases of National Thesis Centre of Higher Education Council, Google Scholar, ResearchGate, and ERIC. However, conference papers, posters, and thesis summaries were excluded from this study.
2. Following the database search, the researchers identified eight master’s theses, two doctoral theses, and 47 articles. However, 10 studies were excluded as eight were review articles, and two were conducted with school principals and preservice teachers.
3. Only studies employing qualitative research methods were included. Studies utilising quantitative research methods, such as exploratory, explanatory, and mixed-method research, were excluded.
4. A thematic synthesis approach was applied for the analysis. This step involved extracting and coding key concepts from each study, which reflected the transition to primary school. The final analysis was conducted on nine theses and 38 articles.
5. Some of the studies analysed in this research also addressed variables related to the 4+4+4 education system, primary literacy teaching, and school adaptation problems. However, the analysis in this study was limited solely to the transition to primary school.

Studies Included in the Meta-Synthesis

The code, author, year, title, publication type, research design, sample group, and data collection and analysis procedures of each study were analysed within the scope of meta-synthesis. Table 1 presents an overview of the general characteristics of the studies on the transition to primary school. As seen in Table 1, 38 of the studies are articles, two are doctoral theses, and seven are master’s theses.

Table 1. Characteristics of the studies analysed

	Code	Author	Type	Research Design Sample Group	Data collection and analysis
Studies included in the Meta Synthesis	S1	Öztürk & Bektaş (2018)	Article	Phenomenology Classroom and preschool teachers	Semi-structured interview Content analysis
	S2	Altın (2014)	Master thesis	Qualitative approach Mothers	Semi-structured interview Inductive analysis
	S3	Erbaşan & Erbaşan (2020)	Article	Case study Classroom teachers	Semi-structured interview Descriptive analysis
	S4	Arı (2015)	Master thesis	Case study School staff and children with special needs	Observation, interview, questionnaire, document analysis Descriptive analysis
	S5	Güzelyurt et al. (2019)	Article	Phenomenology Preschool teachers	Interview form Descriptive and content analysis
	S6	Koçyiğit (2014)	Article	Phenomenology Children	Mosaic approach Descriptive analysis

Table 1. Continued

Studies included in the Meta Synthesis	Code	Author	Type	Research Design Sample Group	Data collection and analysis
	S7	Pekdoğan (2018)	Article	Case study Classroom teachers	Semi-structured interview Content analysis
	S8	Güner & Kartal (2019)	Article	Nested single-case design Classroom teachers	Interview Descriptive analysis
	S9	Sezginsoy-Şeker (2015)	Article	Qualitative approach Classroom teachers	Structured interview Content analysis
	S10	Akbuğa (2018)	Master thesis	Qualitative approach Classroom and preschool teachers	Semi-structured interview Descriptive analysis
	S11	Kök et al. (2019)	Article	Case study Classroom teachers	Semi-structured interview Descriptive analysis
	S12	Ekinci & Bozan (2019)	Article	Phenomenology Classroom and preschool teachers	Semi-structured interview Content analysis
	S13	Taşçı & Dikici Sığırtmaç (2014)	Article	Case study Classroom and preschool teachers	Semi-structured interview Content analysis
	S14	Durmaz (2020)	Master thesis	survey model Classroom teachers and assistant directors	Interview Descriptive analysis
	S15	Koçak & İncekara (2020)	Article	Case study Classroom and preschool teachers	Semi-structured interview Content analysis
	S16	Kartal & Güner (2022)	Article	Phenomenology Classroom teachers	Semi-structured interview Content analysis
	S17	Çeliktürk Sezgin (2020)	Article	Qualitative approach Parents	Semi-structured interview Content analysis
	S18	Kutluca Canbulat & Yıldızbaş (2014)	Article	Descriptive survey Classroom and preschool teachers	Semi-structured interview Content analysis
	S19	Esen Aygün (2019)	Article	Phenomenology Classroom teachers	Semi-structured interview Moustakas' (1994) phenomenological data analysis
	S20	Sağlam & Besen (2015)	Article	Phenomenology Classroom teachers	Semi-structured interview Content analysis
	S21	Demir & Üstün (2018)	Article	Phenomenology Classroom teachers and parents	Semi-structured interview Descriptive analysis
	S22	Kahramanoğlu et al. (2015)	Article	Qualitative approach Classroom teachers	Semi-structured interview Descriptive analysis
	S23	Teke (2010)	PhD thesis	Survey Classroom teachers	Structured interview Descriptive analysis
	S24	Ari (2014)	Article	Case study Classroom teachers	Semi-structured interview Descriptive analysis
	S25	Koçyiğit (2009)	PhD thesis	Phenomenology Classroom teachers and parents	Semi-structured interview Descriptive analysis
	S26	Aslan & Çıkar (2019)	Article	Case study Classroom teachers and parents	Semi-structured interview Descriptive analysis

Table 1. Continued

	Code	Author	Type	Research Design	Data collection
				Sample Group	and analysis
Studies included in the Meta Synthesis	S27	Pişirir & Ayar (2020)	Article	Case study Classroom and preschool teachers	Interview Descriptive analysis
	S28	Susar Kırmızı (2015)	Article	Case study Classroom teachers	Open-ended question form Content analysis
	S29	Yazıcı et al. (2016)	Article	Case study Parents	Semi-structured interview Content analysis
	S30	Altun (2018)	Article	Phenomenology Inservice and preservice preschool teachers and parents	Semi-structured interview Descriptive analysis
	S31	Işıkoğlu Erdoğan & Şimşek (2014)	Article	Case study Parents, teachers, and children	Semi-structured interview Content analysis
	S32	Yüksel et al. (2016)	Article	Qualitative approach Children	Document review Content analysis
	S33	Özdemir & Battal (2019)	Article	Phenomenology Classroom teachers and parents	Semi-structured interview Descriptive analysis
	S34	Yapıcı & Ulu (2010)	Article	Qualitative approach Classroom teachers	Interview Descriptive analysis
	S35	Celebi Oncu & Unluer (2013)	Article	Qualitative approach Parents	Structured interview Descriptive analysis
	S36	Akman et al. (2017)	Article	Phenomenology Classroom and preschool teachers	Open-ended question form Content analysis
	S37	Uzun & Alat (2014)	Article	Phenomenology Classroom teachers	Semi-structured interview Content analysis
	S38	Buldu & Er (2016)	Article	Qualitative approach Classroom teachers, parents, and school manager	Semi-structured interview Grounder theory
	S39	Şahin et al. (2013)	Article	Qualitative approach Classroom and preschool teachers	Semi-structured interview Descriptive analysis
	S40	Parlak (2019)	Master thesis	Case study Parents and classroom teachers	Semi-structured interview Descriptive + content analysis
	S41	Erkan et al. (2018)	Article	Phenomenology Children	Semi-structured interview + child drawings Qualitative analysis
	S42	Sak et al. (2016)	Article	Qualitative approach Children	Semi-structured interview Content analysis
	S43	Kotaman (2014)	Article	Phenomenology Classroom teachers	Interview Qualitative analysis
	S44	Kumru (2014)	Article	Case study Classroom and preschool teachers	Interview Qualitative analysis
	S45	Toprakçı & Gülmez (2018)	Article	Qualitative approach Parents	Semi-structured interview Content analysis
	S46	Gürbüz (2019)	Master thesis	Phenomenology Classroom teachers	Interview Content analysis
	S47	İbileme (2019)	Master thesis	Phenomenology Classroom teachers and parents	Semi-structured interview Inductive analysis

Table 1. Continued

	Year	Year	F
Publication Year	2009	2015	5
	2010	2016	4
	2011	2017	1
	2012	2018	7
	2013	2019	10
	2014	2020	5
	Participants	Participants	f
Sample Type	Children	Preschool teachers	11
	Parents	Classroom teachers	35
	Individuals with special needs	Preservice teachers	1
	School administrators		
	The number of participants	The number of participants	f
Sample Size	1-50	151-200	1
	51-100	201-250	1
	101-150	251+	1

*The total number of sample types is higher than the number of studies, as some studies sampled different groups of individuals.

Data Analysis

The content analysis method was used to decode and analyse the qualitative data collected in this study. Content analysis is defined as the systematic coding of quantitative or qualitative data within the framework of specified themes and categories (Fraenkel et al., 2012). In this study, the data analysis process was conducted in two stages: coding and reporting.

Data coding process

First, each study included in this analysis was coded as S1, S2, S3, ..., and S47 to avoid redundancy. These numerically coded studies were thoroughly reviewed, and the extracted data were recorded in MS Word. The recorded data were then re-examined, unnecessary parts were removed, and a summary of each study was organised into tables as units of analysis. This table consisted of two parts (Table 1a and Table 1b). The first part of the table included (a) the study code, (b) the publication year, (c) the sample type, (d) the sample size, (d) the purpose, (e) the research design, (f) data collection tools, (g) data analysis methods, and (h) credibility and dependability measures. The second part of the table consisted of 11 sections under the headings of (a) the results of the study and (b) recommendations. These units were treated as themes and analysed individually in line with the research questions. Categories were created for each theme.

Although the researchers initially analysed the studies included in the meta-synthesis independently, they regularly convened to review the emerging categories and the codes under the categories. As a result of this systematic analysis, 23 categories were identified under seven overarching themes. These themes and categories are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Themes and categories derived from the analysis

1. Purpose of Transition to Primary School Studies
1.1. Revealing opinions
1.2. Comparing opinions
1.3. Investigating expectations/experiences
1.4. Determining the impact
1.5. Assessing the situation
1.6. Suggesting a solution
2. Data Collection Tools in Transition to Primary School Studies
2.1. Structured interview form
2.2. Semi-structured interview form
2.3. Unstructured interview form
2.4. Other (observation, document review, etc.)
3. Research Types in Transition to Primary School Studies
3.1. Studies using a qualitative approach but not explicitly stating the research design
3.2. Studies using a phenomenological design
3.3. Studies using a case study design
3.4. Other (interpretative qualitative research/narrative research)
4. Credibility and Dependability in Transition to Primary School Studies
4.1. Credibility measures
4.1.1. Detailed reporting
4.1.2. Member checking
4.1.3. Not including trustworthiness measure
4.2. Dependability measures
4.2.1. Peer debriefing
4.2.2. Direct quotations
4.2.3. Dependability coefficient calculation
4.2.4. Not including dependability measure
5. Data Analysis Methods Used in Transition to Primary School Studies
5.1. Content analysis
5.2. Descriptive analysis
5.3. Content analysis + Descriptive analysis
5.4. Studies using qualitative analysis without clearly stating the method
5.5. Other (inductive analysis, theory-building method, etc.)
6. Results of Transition to Primary School Studies
7. Recommendations in Transition to Primary School Studies
7.1. Recommendations for Practice
7.2. Recommendations for Future Studies

Reporting data

This study reports data in line with the identified themes. First, the data for each theme were organised into tables or graphs. These tables included categories, study codes, and frequencies to facilitate the visual interpretation and comprehension of the findings. After a general explanation was provided under each table or graph, the similarities and differences observed within the relevant theme unit were expressed with direct quotations to support the findings.

Credibility and Dependability of the Study

Special attention was paid to the following aspects to ensure the credibility and dependability of this study:

- A detailed reporting method was used to enhance the reliability of the findings. The stages of coding, category formation, and theme development were explained in detail. The data analysed were supported with tables and direct quotations. In particular, the step-by-step process of thematic analysis and the consensus-building approach between the researchers were clearly documented. This approach enhances the transparency of the study and allows for replication by other researchers.
- The publication year, sample size, research design, and data analysis methods of the studies analysed were presented in tables.
- The data coding process was conducted meticulously to ensure the reliability of the study. The researchers independently coded all 47 studies and compared their findings. Miles and Huberman's (1994) formula was used to assess coding consistency, yielding an inter-coder agreement coefficient of .90. This value indicates a high level of agreement in the coding process. Discrepancies identified during the coding process were discussed in regular meetings, and the final codes were determined through consensus.
- To avoid coding errors, data analysis was conducted over an extended period spanning from March 2020 to September 2020. All obtained data were summarised in writing.
- To enhance the reliability and validity of the study, two expert academics reviewed the study. The experts provided detailed feedback on the meta-synthesis, data analysis, creation of themes, and interpretation of the findings. In line with their feedback, the coding and analysis processes were reviewed, necessary revisions were made, and the findings were reported more systematically. This process improved the methodological rigour of the study and strengthened the reliability of the results obtained.
- A reflective approach was adopted to minimise the influence of researchers' personal perspectives and ensure objectivity in the findings. Throughout the research process, the potential impact of the researchers' personal experiences, perspectives, and biases on the data analysis was constantly assessed. To mitigate subjectivity in interpreting the findings, the researchers were encouraged to critically examine their positions, and reflexive notes were taken at each stage. This approach was deliberately implemented to enhance the credibility of the study and ensure a more objective interpretation of the findings.

Findings

This section includes the purpose, research design, data collection tools, data analysis methods, credibility and dependability measures, results, and recommendations of the studies on the transition to primary school.

*Purpose of Transition to Primary School Studies***Table 3.** Purpose of transition to primary school studies

Aim		Research Codes
Revealing opinions	Revealing the opinions of primary school teachers about children who start school knowing how to read and write from the preschool period	S1, S5, S9, S10, S11, S12, S14, S15, S18, S20, S21, S22, S24, S28, S36, S37, S44, S46
	Examining the views of parents on their children's primary school readiness and maturity	S35
	Examining the social adaptation problems experienced by inclusive students in the transition from preschool to primary school in terms of family and teacher views	S40, S47
	Revealing first-year students' perceptions of their preschool and primary school experiences	S41
	Examining and comparing the opinions of parents, preschool teachers, and preservice teachers on school readiness	S30, S39
Investigating expectations/experiences	Investigating the expectations of primary school teachers from preschool education in the preparation process for primary school	S2, S7, S42, S43
	Examining primary school teachers' experiences in being prepared for primary school entrants	S16, S17, S19, S38, S45
Determining the impact	Determining the effects of the kindergarten curriculum on the readiness levels of first-grade students	S4, S13, S23
Assessing the situation	Examining the school readiness of 60-65-month-old students attending the first grade of primary school	S26, S32
	Examining the adaptation of children, parents, and teachers in the process of starting primary school	S8, S25, S27, S31, S33, S34
Suggesting a solution	Identifying the difficulties experienced by children who transitioned from preschool to primary school and the solutions to these difficulties through the eyes of their families	S3, S6, S29

When the studies included in the meta-synthesis were examined in terms of their research objectives, the following themes were identified: "revealing opinions, comparing opinions, investigating expectations/experiences, determining the impact, assessing the situation, and suggesting a solution". A significant number of studies focused on revealing the opinions of primary school teachers about children who started school already knowing how to read and write (N = 18), presenting the expectations of preschool teachers (N = 4), and sharing the experiences of primary school teachers who had a primary role during the transition to primary school (N = 5).

Some studies examined the challenges children faced during the transition from preschool to primary school and proposed solutions to these challenges from the perspective of parents (N = 3). Some studies explored parents' opinions on the transition to primary school and school adaptation of both normally developing children (N = 3) and children with special needs (N = 2), while comparing their opinions with those of other stakeholders.

Additionally, some studies investigated the effect of preschool education curricula on the readiness level of children starting primary school (N = 3). Some evaluated the adaptation of children who started primary school at an early age (N = 2). Some analysed the adaptation of the parents and teachers of these children to the transition to primary school (N = 6). These studies shed light on the mysteries of the transition to primary school.

*Data Collection Tools in Transition to Primary School Studies***Table 4.** Data collection tools in transition to primary school studies

Data Collection Tools	Research Codes
Semi-structured interview form	S1, S2, S3, S7, S10, S11, S12, S13, S15, S16, S17, S18, S19, S20, S21, S22, S24, S25, S26, S27, S29, S30, S31, S33, S35, S37, S38, S39, S40, S41, S42, S45, S47
Structured interview form	S4, S5, S8, S9, S14, S23, S34, S35, S43, S44, S46
Other (observation, document review, etc.)	S4, S6, S32, S41
Unstructured interview form	S28, S36

According to Table 4, semi-structured interview questions, used in 33 studies, were the most commonly used data collection method. Unstructured interview forms were used in S28 and S36. Additionally, structured questions, such as “How would you define ...? What skills do you think he/she should have?” were used in 11 studies. Four studies used alternative data collection techniques, such as observation and document analysis.

The majority of the studies analysed in our study used semi-structured interviews as data collection tools. Interview methods provided an in-depth understanding of the experiences of teachers, parents, and children during the transition to primary school, as well as the challenges they encountered. In particular, interviews with teachers highlighted the criteria they prioritise when assessing children’s competencies in academic and social-emotional development. However, incorporating more child-centred data collection tools—such as picture analysis, children’s drawings, and play-based observations—would offer a more direct reflection of children’s experiences. These approaches could enhance our understanding of how the school transition process is shaped from the child’s perspective.

*Research Types in Transition to Primary School Studies***Table 5.** Research design in the studies on transition to primary school

Research Designs	Research Codes
Studies using a phenomenological design	S1, S5, S6, S12, S16, S19, S20, S21, S25, S27, S30, S33, S36, S37, S41, S43, S46, S47
Studies using a case study design	S3, S4, S7, S8, S11, S13, S15, S24, S26, S28, S29, S31, S40, S44
Studies using a qualitative approach but not explicitly stating the research design (Qualitative approach/qualitative research methodology/a descriptive study in a survey design/descriptive survey model)	S2, S9, S10, S14, S17, S18, S22, S23, S32, S34, S35, S39, S42
Other (interpretative qualitative research/narrative research)	S8, S5

As seen in Table 5, 13 studies employed a qualitative approach without explicitly stating the research design. In these studies, the methodology was described using general terms, such as “qualitative research methodology” or “qualitative approach”, “descriptive study in a survey model”, and “descriptive survey method”. Additionally, 18 studies utilised a phenomenological design, while 14 studies were conducted using a case study design. Furthermore, two studies adopted alternative qualitative methods, such as “interpretive qualitative research” and “narrative research.”

It was observed that most of the 47 studies analysed in this meta-synthesis employed phenomenology and case study methods. The preference for these methods allowed for an in-depth exploration of the transition to primary school through individuals’ experiences. For example, qualitative research methods have provided valuable insights into teachers’ and parents’ perceptions of

school readiness and how these perceptions influence children's academic and social adjustment. However, there is a need for more longitudinal research to better understand the long-term impact of large-scale policy changes. Additionally, further mixed-method studies are necessary to examine the influence of the overall school system and environmental factors, rather than focusing solely on individual experiences.

Credibility and Dependability in Transition to Primary School Studies

Table 6. Credibility and dependability in transition to primary school studies

Credibility Measures	Research Codes
Not including trustworthiness measure	S7, S9, S10, S11, S13, S14, S15, S16, S22, S23, S28, S30, S31, S32, S35, S37, S39, S41, S42, S44, S45, S47
Member checking	S1, S2, S12, S19, S21, S24, S26, S29, S34, S38, S43
Detailed reporting	S1, S6, S8, S19, S24, S26, S36, S46
Dependability Studies	Research codes
Dependability coefficient calculation	S1, S5, S6, S7, S8, S9, S15, S16, S18, S20, S22, S26, S28, S30, S31, S33, S34, S36, S39, S40, S41, S46, S47
Peer debriefing	S1, S2, S8, S9, S10, S11, S12, S13, S17, S19, S20, S23, S26, S28, S33, S36, S38, S39, S40, S43, S47
Direct quotations	S1, S3, S4, S5, S6, S8, S12, S17, S18, S20, S21, S25, S27, S33, S36, S40, S45
Not including dependability measure	S14, S24, S32, S41, S42, S44
Others	S29, S35, S37

As seen in Table 6, the data were reported in detail in eight of the 47 studies to ensure credibility, and the findings were confirmed by the participants in 11 studies to ensure member checking. In 22 studies, there were no elements related to credibility.

When the studies included in the meta-synthesis were examined in terms of dependability, peer debriefing was conducted in 21 studies, and the consistency coefficient in the data analysis was calculated in 23 studies using the Miles and Huberman formula (1994). Six studies did not include any dependability measures, while three studies employed alternative dependability strategies. Additionally, participant statements were directly quoted in 17 studies.

The studies analysed in this meta-synthesis adopted various approaches in terms of reliability and validity criteria. In particular, studies involving teacher and parent interviews frequently employed direct quotations and participant verification (member checking) methods. While these methods enhance the reliability of perceptions related to the school transition process, it is important to acknowledge that children's experiences vary individually. Therefore, incorporating multiple data sources is essential to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the transition process. For example, instead of solely relying on teachers' statements to assess school readiness, a more holistic analysis could be achieved by integrating observations of children before entering primary school, administering developmental tests, and parent questionnaires. Such an approach would provide more well-rounded and insightful findings.

*Data Analysis Methods Used in Transition to Primary School Studies***Table 7.** Data analysis methods used in the studies on transition to primary school

Data Analysis Methods	Research Codes
Content analysis	S1, S7, S9, S12, S13, S15, S16, S17, S18, S20, S28, S29, S31, S32, S36, S37, S42, S45, S46
Descriptive analysis	S3, S4, S6, S8, S10, S11, S14, S21, S22, S23, S24, S25, S26, S27, S30, S33, S34, S35, S39
Studies using qualitative analysis without clearly stating the method	S41, S42, S43
Other (inductive analysis, grounded theory, etc.)	S2, S38, S47
Content analysis + Descriptive analysis	S5, S40

When the studies included in the meta-synthesis were examined in terms of data analysis, it was determined that content analysis was used in 19 studies. Two studies combined both content analysis and descriptive analysis, while three studies employed qualitative analysis without explicitly specifying the analysis method. Additionally, descriptive analysis was used in 19 studies, and three studies utilised other analysis methods such as inductive analysis and grounded theory.

*Results of Transition to Primary School Studies***Table 8.** Results of transition to primary school studies

Results	Research Codes
The age factor in starting school	S9, S14, S15, S18, S20, S21, S22, S24, S26, S27, S31, S33, S35, S36, S37, S46
The impact of preschool education	S1, S4, S10, S23, S30, S31, S36, S39, S40
Problems with starting primary school and the reasons for these problems	S3, S9, S21, S30, S36, S39, S40, S47
Inadequacies in preparation for primary school	S2, S5, S16, S18, S31, S36, S47
Primary school adaptation program	S8, S9, S13, S28, S37
Cooperation in school readiness	S7, S38, S39, S40, S45
Role of the environment	S2, S7, S12, S21, S30
Preschool education's being compulsory	S12, S20, S25, S37, S46
Teacher's role	S15, S34, S36, S44
The meaning of primary school for the child	S4, S6, S41, S42
The effect of literacy on transition	S11, S19, S36, S39
Expectations of primary school teachers	S7, S8, S34, S47
Indicators of readiness for primary school	S36, S38, S43, S44
Parents in starting school	S17, S27, S29
Strategies for facilitating the transition	S8, S39, S47
Teaching roles of the parents	S17, S29, S36
Negative perceptions about primary school	S6, S30, S45
The meaning of primary school for the teacher	S4, S25, S39
Information resources regarding primary school	S6, S42
The meaning of primary school for the parents	S17
Adaptation problems related to starting school	S32
Being a parent of a child with special needs	S2

When the studies included in the meta-synthesis were examined in terms of their results, as seen in Table 8, the most frequently addressed factor in the transition to primary school was the school starting age (N=16). This was followed by the impact of preschool education on the transition to primary school (N=9), problems associated with starting primary school and their underlying causes (N=8), and inadequacies in preparing children for primary school (N=7).

Additionally, several studies emphasised the necessity of a primary school adaptation program (N=5), the importance of cooperation in ensuring readiness for primary school (N=5), and the inclusion of preschool education in compulsory education (N=5). Other frequently examined factors included the role of the teacher (N=4) and parents (N=3), the indicators of readiness for primary school (N=4), the meaning of primary school for the child (N=4), the expectations of the teacher (N=4), and the impact of knowing how to read and write on the transition to primary school (N=4). Only a few studies reported results on strategies for facilitating the transition to primary school (N=3), information resources regarding primary school (N=2), teaching roles of parents (N=3), the meaning of primary school for teachers (N=3) and parents (N=1), the differences experienced by parents of children with special needs (N=1), negative perceptions about primary school (N=3), and adaptation problems related to starting school (N=1).

Recommendations in Transition to Primary School Studies

Table 9. Recommendations in transition to primary school studies

Recommendations	Research codes
Contact meetings	S1, S4, S5, S7, S9, S11, S13, S15, S17, S21, S24, S25, S27, S28, S33, S36, S37, S38, S40, S47
Curriculum development	S5, S7, S12, S13, S14, S15, S21, S22, S23, S24, S25, S27, S28, S36, S38, S41, S43, S45
Cooperation	S5, S7, S11, S15, S16, S20, S23, S25, S26, S27, S31, S34, S36, S39, S40, S45, S46, S47
Evaluation	S4, S10, S14, S15, S18, S20, S21, S22, S23, S24, S25, S26, S28, S33, S45
The importance of preschool education	S3, S20, S23, S25, S26, S28, S33, S37, S43, S44, S46
Adaptation process	S13, S17, S25, S28, S32, S40, S46, S47
Adult role	S6, S17, S19, S28, S30, S33, S42, S45
Age factor	S3, S14, S20, S26, S28, S33, S46
Undergraduate education	S1, S5, S18, S27, S34, S38
Disadvantaged groups	S1, S14, S25, S36, S46
The role of stakeholders	S12, S25, S28, S38, S42
The importance of literacy	S3, S12, S25, S28
Comparative studies	S6, S9, S10, S11, S17, S21, S23, S33, S38, S40, S45, S47
Studies with more participants	S2, S13, S27, S28, S31, S34, S38, S40, S47
Quantitative studies	S8, S33, S38, S40, S44, S47
The use of different data collection tools	S6, S11, S19, S28, S33, S37
Monitoring studies	S23, S31, S40, S42, S44
Practical studies	S2, S21, S47
Studies on teacher training	S16, S30, S34
Following the literature	S16, S28, S40
Developing the school readiness index/test	S23, S38, S43
In-depth studies	S27, S43, S45
Age studies in terms of various variables	S22
Studies regarding children with special needs	S2

When the recommendations of the studies included in the meta-synthesis were examined, as shown in Table 9, it was determined that these recommendations focused on both current practices and future research directions.

The recommendations for practice to improve the transition to primary school included organising contact meetings (N=20), developing transition programs (N=18), ensuring cooperation between stakeholders (N=18), developing assessment and evaluation tools to use during the transition to primary school (N=15), drawing attention to the importance of preschool education (N=11), implementing adjustments in the school adaptation process (N=8) and in the school starting age (N=7). Additional recommendations included paying attention to the roles of adults (N=8) and stakeholders (N=5), paying special attention to include the subject of transition to primary school during undergraduate education (N=6), paying attention to disadvantaged groups (N=5), and, finally, examining the impact of starting school knowing how to read and write (N=4).

The recommendations for future studies included conducting comparative studies (N=12), quantitative studies (N=6), and applied studies (N=3), including more participants in studies (N=9), conducting studies by using different data collection tools (N=6), investigating the age factor in terms of different variables (N=1), developing a school readiness index/test (N=3), conducting follow-up studies (N=5) and in-depth studies (N=3), conducting studies on teacher training (N=3) and children with special needs (N=1), and following the literature (N=3).

Discussion

This study used a meta-synthesis approach to qualitatively synthesise the results obtained through content analysis of studies conducted within a qualitative framework to examine the transition to primary school in Türkiye. Accordingly, the results from the 47 studies analysed were summarised and discussed below.

The study identified key factors affecting the transition to primary school. These include the importance of starting age, the effect of preschool education, challenges encountered during the transition, and inadequacies in preparation. The findings highlighted the necessity of a primary school adaptation program, the importance of cooperation in readiness for primary school, the necessity of preschool education, the role of the environmental factors in the transition to primary school, the roles of teachers and parents, the indicators of readiness for primary school, the meaning of primary school for children, teachers' expectations, and the impact of prior literacy skills on the transition to primary school. However, only a few studies addressed strategies for facilitating the transition to primary school, the availability of information resources, the teaching roles of parents, the meaning of primary school for teachers and parents, the unique experiences of parents of children with special needs, negative perceptions about primary school, and adaptation problems associated with starting school.

According to Deveci and Aykaç (2018), the problems regarding the school starting age in Türkiye emerged with the implementation of the 4+4+4 education system introduced despite criticisms from many educators. This is because children are forced to learn how to read and write by starting primary school at the age of 5. However, considering individual developmental differences among children at this age, even a one- or two-month gap can be crucial. Thus, it comes as no surprise that the 5-year-old school starting age has led to various problems. As demonstrated in Table 9, several studies (S3, S9, S21, S30, S36, S39, S40, and S47) emphasised the challenges associated with early school entry and the underlying reasons, including developmental readiness and curriculum incompatibility. One of the main reasons for these problems is the lack of curricular adjustments despite lowering the school starting age and the maintenance of a curriculum based on literacy teaching. Lowering the school starting age also poses risks to preschool education. Children who receive a well-structured preschool education and undergo a quality early learning process tend to adapt more easily to formal schooling and achieve higher academic success. The studies analysed in this meta-synthesis highlight that preschool education plays a crucial role in children's transition to primary school. However, the non-compulsory nature of pre-primary education in Türkiye, along with regional disparities, results in unequal opportunities for children entering this process. In particular, children from rural areas and families with lower socio-economic status face limited access to preschool education. Additionally, many parents lack sufficient knowledge about how to prepare their children for primary school. As a result, these children are more likely to experience difficulties such as delays in learning processes, setbacks in social-emotional development, and challenges in adapting to the school environment.

To promote equal opportunities in education, preschool education should be expanded, and state-supported programs should be increased, ensuring that all children, regardless of their socio-economic background, receive adequate preparation for primary school. This finding aligns with the results presented in Table 9, where studies (S4, S10, S23, and S39) highlighted the positive impact of preschool education on children's readiness for primary school and their academic success. However, some studies report that younger children do not perform as well as their peers in the first years of school (for example, Crosser, 1991) while others claim that school entry age has little or no impact on academic performance (for example, DeMeis & Stearns, 1992). Additionally, research suggests that multiple interacting factors significantly influence school readiness beyond age alone. For example, some studies on gender differences suggest that younger boys are perceived to be at greater risk of academic failure than older boys or girls (Gredler, 1980). Young children from high socioeconomic backgrounds tend to be perceived as performing better than younger children from lower socioeconomic backgrounds (Shepard, 1997). Young children who attended preschool are perceived to be as competent as their older peers (Gullo & Burton, 1992). Teachers tend to treat younger children differently from their older peers (DeMeis & Stearns, 1992). These findings show that age alone is not a definitive predictor of children's success in starting school (Dockett & Perry, 2002). School readiness is influenced not only by the individual development of the child but also by educational policies, family support, and environmental factors. The studies analysed indicate that the non-compulsory nature of preschool education in Türkiye contributes to significant inequalities in school readiness among children. In particular, children from rural areas and low socioeconomic backgrounds face greater challenges in accessing early educational opportunities, which hinders their ability to develop essential cognitive, social, and emotional skills before starting primary school. As a result, some children enter primary school without being adequately prepared for its academic and social demands, making their adaptation process more difficult. Expanding preschool education and making it compulsory would be a crucial step towards ensuring that all children start school on equal footing.

Questions about the role of early childhood services in preparing children for school underlie the growing emphasis on accepting children as "ready" for school. Surveys among preschool and classroom teachers reveal both similarities and differences in their expectations of school readiness (Dockett & Perry, 2002). Hains et al. (1989) reported that classroom and preschool teachers have different expectations of what is required for a successful transition to school. While preschool teachers tend to prioritise functionally relevant classroom skills, primary school teachers focus more on specific abilities. Parents and teachers also differ in their views on what is most important for children starting school. This contrast is clearly reflected in Table 4, where studies (S30 and S39) show that parents tend to emphasise academic skills, whereas teachers place greater importance on social-emotional readiness. Lewit and Baker (1995) reported that over 75% of teachers surveyed identified physical health, adequate rest, and proper nutrition as essential factors for school readiness, while parents, in contrast, focused primarily on academic skills. However, both groups agreed on the importance of social skills, such as communication, enthusiasm, and understanding social norms like waiting in line. More recent studies conducted in Australia further support these findings, demonstrating that parents view early childhood services as essential for fostering children's social and emotional development, increasing school readiness, and providing a secondary assessment of academic skills (Lockwood & Fleet, 1999; Page et al., 2001). The findings of this meta-synthesis also showed that families predominantly focused on academic skills (e.g., recognising numbers and letters, holding a pencil) when evaluating their children's readiness for primary school. However, the literature underscores that social-emotional development is just as crucial as academic skills in ensuring a smooth transition to school. In Türkiye, guidance programs that actively involve parents in the transition to primary school remain limited. Strengthening family-teacher cooperation could help parents develop a more comprehensive understanding of school readiness, allowing children to be better prepared for this transition. For instance, awareness-raising seminars and informative materials for families could provide them with a more holistic perspective on their children's school readiness. The importance of collaboration between early childhood services and schools in ensuring a successful transition to primary education has long been recognised (Parr et al.,

1993). However, this collaboration can be hindered by differing priorities among stakeholders (Dockett & Perry, 2002). For example, parents who expect regular updates on their child's academic progress may feel disappointed when teachers inform them about their child's adjustment to school organisation and their emotional responses to school.

Similarly, teachers who are eager to discuss children's responses to school may feel disappointed when parents prioritise academic milestones. When different criteria are used to assess children's school readiness, conflicting judgments are likely to arise. Without effective communication tools to bridge these differences between parents and teachers, opportunities for meaningful collaboration may be lost, leading to confusion and anxiety instead of constructive cooperation (Dockett & Perry, 2004). Although teachers play a critical role in the transition to primary school, the studies analysed in this meta-synthesis indicate that teachers in Türkiye do not receive sufficient guidance and training support for this process. Primary school teachers demonstrate varying perspectives on school readiness, which complicates children's adaptation to school. While some teachers emphasise academic skills, others prioritise social and emotional development. This inconsistency highlights a lack of standardisation in education, resulting in children experiencing different transition processes depending on their teacher. Thus, teacher training programs should incorporate more comprehensive content on school readiness, child development, and transition strategies. Providing structured training in these areas would help standardise expectations and improve the overall management of the transition process.

Considering the studies included in the meta-synthesis, their main recommendations for practice focused on holding contact meetings, developing assessment and evaluation tools to use during the transition to primary school, carrying out curriculum development studies, ensuring cooperation among stakeholders, highlighting the importance of preschool education, making adjustments to school starting age and school adaptation processes, integrating the subject of school transition into undergraduate teacher training curricula, paying attention to disadvantaged groups, recognising the roles of stakeholders and adults, and focusing on the impact of starting school with literacy. These recommendations are comprehensively detailed in Table 10, which highlights practical suggestions such as organising contact meetings (S1, S4, and S7) and curriculum development (S5, S7, and S41) to enhance the transition process for children, parents, and educators. Family cooperation plays a crucial role in preparing children for primary school (Şahin et al., 2013). Education outcomes impact all elements of the education system. Table 9 further supports this observation, highlighting stakeholder collaboration (S7 and S38) and the role of preschool education in shaping positive educational experiences (S3, S20, and S33). The key stakeholders in education include teachers, administrators, NGOs working in education, research and development personnel from the Directorate of National Education, and families (Bay et al., 2013). Among the challenges related to school transition, stakeholder problems ranked third, including parental indifference, teacher in-service training, the attitude of administrators, teacher appointments, and teachers' perceptions of respect and professional status. These stakeholder challenges are explicitly addressed in Table 9, where studies (S7, S31, and S45) emphasised issues such as parental indifference, lack of teacher training, and administrative barriers affecting school transitions. Parental indifference is the most significant issue (Deveci & Aykaç, 2018). However, researchers and teachers emphasise that family engagement is the key factor in making the transition to primary school easier and more effective (Şahin et al., 2013). Curricular issues in primary education were also found to negatively impact overall education quality (Deveci & Aykaç, 2018).

Considering the recommendations for future studies, it was recommended to conduct follow-up, in-depth, and comparative studies, include more participants in research, conduct studies using different data collection tools, conduct quantitative research and applied studies, investigate teacher training and its role in school transitions, focus on children with special needs, develop school readiness indices/tests, keep up with the literature, investigate the age factor in terms of various variables. Most of the studies analysed in this study recommended the development of tests for readiness. However, while assessing what children know and what they are ready to learn next is a natural part of good

teaching, the use of readiness tests to prevent school entry may lead to unintended consequences for several reasons. First, it excludes low-performing children who most need learning opportunities provided in schools. Second, restricting school entry for less-prepared children increases curriculum demands, making kindergarten expectations misaligned with the developmental capacities of 5-year-olds. Finally, the growing emphasis on school readiness has fuelled the “red sweater” trend, where affluent parents delay their high-achieving child’s entry into kindergarten to gain a competitive advantage. The recommendations for further studies, including the development of readiness tests and longitudinal studies, are detailed in Table 10, where suggestions such as conducting comparative studies (S6 and S9) and developing readiness indices (S23 and S38) are prominently featured. Moreover, readiness tests may lack the necessary technical rigour required to make reliable predictions or placements (Shepard, 1997).

Given that children whose school entry is delayed are often cared for at home or receive less formal preschool education, they may benefit from a longer experience in relatively enjoyable environments (Dee & Sievertsen, 2015). In developed countries, delaying formal school entry has become increasingly common. These delays may confer developmental advantages through both relative and absolute age mechanisms. However, most studies indicate that delaying school entry does not provide longer-term educational or economic benefits (Dee & Sievertsen, 2015).

Conclusion

This study is one of the first studies to systematically analyse qualitative research on the transition to primary school in Türkiye and integrate its findings through meta-synthesis. In the existing literature, the transition to primary school is generally analysed through individual studies, and the results of different studies have not been evaluated in a holistic framework. This study makes an important contribution to the literature by synthesising the common findings of multiple studies and systematically revealing the role of school readiness, teacher-parent cooperation and educational policies in the transition to primary school. In particular, by showing how regional inequalities in access to preschool education in the Turkish context affect the transition to primary school, it provides guiding implications for policy makers.

This study synthesised qualitative research on the transition to primary school in Türkiye through a meta-synthesis approach, highlighting key themes and findings. The results underline the importance of school starting age, the role of preschool education, and the various challenges encountered during this transition period. Problems such as insufficient preparation programs, curriculum rigidity, and differing expectations among stakeholders were consistently reported. This study revealed that external factors such as the educational environment and teacher-parent cooperation are as influential as children’s individual characteristics in determining school readiness and shaping the transition to primary school. In particular, the non-compulsory nature of preschool education and regional disparities lead to significant inequalities in school readiness. These findings underscore the need for a holistic and inclusive approach that considers both child-related and environmental factors to ensure a smooth transition.

One of the most prominent themes identified was the positive influence of preschool education on children’s readiness for primary school and their long-term academic success. Nevertheless, disparities in access to preschool education and non-compulsory preschool policies in Türkiye continue to exacerbate readiness inequalities. The study also reveals that cooperation among stakeholders and the alignment of expectations significantly enhance children’s adaptability to formal schooling.

Based on these insights, it is evident that transitioning to primary school is a multifaceted process that requires comprehensive strategies that address educational policies, parental involvement, and school practices. Policies to standardise early childhood education and promote inclusive practices are essential. By aligning the roles of parents, teachers, and policymakers, the potential negative effects of an uncoordinated transition can be mitigated. The way parents communicate information about their children's transition to school through teacher interactions plays a crucial role. Parents serve as the primary observers of children's healthy transition. Therefore, further research is needed to explore the perceptions, attitudes, and knowledge of both parents and teachers regarding the transition to primary school.

In the existing literature, the transition to primary school is typically examined through the lens of individual factors, particularly children's cognitive and academic competencies. However, this study differs from previous research by demonstrating that school transition is not only a matter of individual maturity but is also shaped by multiple variables, including educational policies, teacher approaches, and family involvement. Moreover, this study goes beyond analysing school readiness as a concept and uncovers contradictions in the roles of teachers and parents in the transition process. In particular, the variation in teachers' perceptions and expectations regarding school readiness is linked to the way educational policies are implemented in Türkiye. In this respect, the study introduces a discussion on teacher-parent interaction and policy influence, which are often overlooked in the literature. The results of this study contribute not only to the theoretical literature but also provide concrete recommendations for shaping education policies. The results suggest that making preschool education compulsory would create a more equitable transition to primary school. Additionally, the emphasis on the need for teachers to collaborate more actively with parents during this transition could inform teacher training curricula. Despite the lowering of the school starting age, the study reveals that curricula and teacher training programs have not been sufficiently adapted to accommodate this change. In this context, the findings offer important insights for policymakers and education administrators, emphasising the need to approach the transition to primary school as a multidimensional process requiring coordinated reforms across different levels of the education system.

Recommendations

To facilitate the transition process, several recommendations for practice and future research emerge from this study. First, strengthening communication among stakeholders including parents, teachers, and school administrators through regular contact meetings and workshops is vital. Developing flexible and dynamic primary school transition curricula, tailored to varying developmental levels, will better accommodate children's diverse needs. Ensuring stability in preschool and primary school curricula is necessary. However, when revisions are required, the opinions of all stakeholders should be gathered during compulsory pilot implementations and curriculum development.

Compulsory preschool education, supported by sufficient infrastructure and resources, should be prioritised to provide equitable readiness opportunities. Additionally, enhancing teacher training on transition strategies and readiness indicators will better equip educators to support children more effectively. Increased collaboration between preschool and primary school educators can foster consistency in expectations and pedagogical approaches. Finally, fostering a culture where the transition to school is viewed as a shared societal responsibility involving educational institutions, families, and broader policy frameworks can create a supportive environment where every child embarks on their educational journey with confidence and adequate preparation. Considering that the family-child-teacher relationship plays a key role in the child's life, importance should be given to organising activities that actively involve families in the education system and conducting awareness-raising seminars to strengthen parental engagement.

For future research, longitudinal studies tracking the long-term effects of readiness factors on academic and social outcomes would offer valuable insights. Comparative analyses focusing on regional and socio-economic disparities in school readiness can guide targeted interventions. Furthermore, developing reliable school readiness indices and assessment tools specific to Türkiye's educational context could enhance diagnostic and preparatory processes.

Recommendations for future research include a deeper exploration of the socio-economic and regional disparities affecting access to early childhood education. Policy initiatives should prioritise making preschool education universally accessible and compulsory to reduce readiness gaps. Integrating professional development programs that equip teachers with strategies to address diverse readiness levels could further enhance transition outcomes. Further efforts should also focus on improving parental and teacher psychological readiness for primary school transition and developing mechanisms that facilitate the management of transitions between different educational institutions. By implementing these recommendations, both educational policies and teaching practices can be refined to ensure that every child has a smoother and more equitable transition to primary school.

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