

## An Examination of Preschool Teachers' Identification of Risk Groups and The Intervention Plans They Implement\*

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### Abstract


Individuals whose educational needs differ for various reasons can benefit from appropriate educational services through early assessment and diagnosis practices. At-risk children who fail to achieve adequate development in general education classes need more intensive education. For these individuals to benefit effectively from the education process, it is important to organize it according to their characteristics. Identifying the children in the risk group is possible through teachers' experience, observation, and assessment practices. In this context, if a class includes children who are considered to be in the risk group, the educational assessment process should be initiated. The aim of this study is to examine preschool teachers' identification of risk groups in their classes and the intervention plans they implement. Fifteen preschool teachers from the central district of Konya province of Türkiye participated in the study, which was conducted as a case study, a qualitative research method. Data were collected through interviews. The findings obtained from the data indicate that the preschool teachers participating in the study think early intervention is mostly aimed at children with special needs. However, children may be in the risk group due to familial, environmental, and individual factors, and preschool teachers mostly use observation and information obtained from the family while identifying these groups. The teachers stated that most socioeconomically disadvantaged children were present in their classrooms. The teachers stated that they do not implement a systematic planning process for the risk groups in their classes, but they make some changes in the education process according to the needs of the children.

**Keywords:** Early intervention, assessment, risk groups, intervention plan.

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## Introduction

Contrary to the view that children with special needs should be educated in separate schools, it has recently become more accepted that these children should continue their education together with their peers with normal development. Students not severely affected by disability face academic and social problems as a result of receiving education with their peers without being included in any assessment or educational practices (Kargin, 2007; Kargin, 2016). The inclusion of children with special needs in general education classes with their peers has been implemented through laws, regulations, and services for years in industrialized countries and developing countries, such as Türkiye (Rakap, Cig & Parlak-Rakap, 2017). According to the Regulation on Special Education Services in Turkey (2018), it is aimed to “plan and conduct [special education services] in a way that ensures interaction and mutual adaptation with the society, without separating the individuals in need of special education from their social and physical environments as much as possible.” In general education classes, it is very important to identify individuals with special needs or suspected to be at risk in order to provide them with educational support (Turnbull, Turnbull, & Wehmeyer, 2007; Spinelli, 2002; as cited in Kargin, 2007). The educational needs of individuals whose educational needs differ for various reasons cannot be met through regular education. For these individuals to benefit from educational opportunities in line with their educational needs, they need to go through several assessment processes (Çakıroğlu, 2018). According to Gürsel and Vuran (2010), early assessment and diagnosis of students enable them to benefit from appropriate educational services, while the implementation of early intervention programs minimizes the developmental and academic deficiencies that may occur.

Some students do not make enough progress with general teaching in the class. These students are defined as at-risk groups and need more intensive education (McAlenney & Coyne, 2011). In the school environment, children who are deficient or at risk of being deficient in terms of their individual characteristics and learning competencies should be identified, and necessary measures should be taken. For individuals who differ in terms of learning and their characteristics to benefit effectively from the education process, it is important to organize it according to their individual characteristics. For individuals having academic, behavioural, and physical problems in the classrooms to benefit from educational opportunities, it is necessary to adapt teaching and make changes according to individual characteristics (Gürsel & Vuran, 2021). Teachers believe that it is important to identify students who need more support based on the differences between children (Çuhadar, 2017). Students who gradually differ from their peers are identified through teachers’ experiences, observations, and assessment practices (Altun & Karasu, 2021). Assessment in early childhood, when development is the fastest, is very important to obtain information about children’s development and learning, to identify situations that require intervention, and to determine children with special needs (McAfee & Leong, 2011). Assessment in early childhood is a process with many purposes such as determining the individual characteristics of children, obtaining information about their development and academic skills, making a diagnosis, directing infants and children to appropriate programs, and identifying special needs, if any (Wortham, 2001). Assessment in early childhood involves a process of information gathering that includes observation, parent-teacher interviews, work samples, and environmental factors, besides standardized tests (Brassard & Boehm, 2007; Slentz, Early & Mckenna, 2008). It is getting more and more important to use data collected about individuals in the decision-making processes in order to increase the success of individuals in education. Data use is a way of informing teachers about students’ needs and adapting instruction based on this information (Van Geel, Keuning, Visscher & Fox, 2016). Teachers use the information gathered through classroom assessment to make instructional decisions in order to improve learning (Chen & Bonner, 2020). The assessment process plays an important role in identifying and screening individuals who may be with special needs and need a comprehensive assessment. Considering individual learning differences in learning environments is a practice that will improve the learning of all students (Frey, 2019). Information obtained from assessment is used to develop learning and behavioural supports that all students need to be successful in learning environments (Frey, 2019; McAfee & Leong, 2012). In this process, teachers apply pre-referral strategies such as monitoring/screening and response to intervention to determine whether individuals will benefit from special education services. Some children may fall behind their peers and need more support in the class though they do not need special education (McAfee & Leong, 2012). In the response to intervention approach, the emphasis is on providing early intervention for all children until a child

falls behind their peers or is diagnosed. The response to intervention approach is based on evidence-based teaching practices to make decisions about individuals in need of more intensive intervention. This approach aims to prevent unnecessary referrals to special education by providing access to quality education with a gradual increase in intensity for all children in general education settings (Fox, Carta, Strain, Dunlap & Hemmeter, 2010). The first step of the response to intervention approach includes general screening, assessment, and monitoring to learn about each child, ensuring quality education for all children. This stage meets the needs of 80% of students. The second step covers approximately 15% of students and includes large and small group interventions for children identified as needing additional support. The third step includes intensive individualized education practices for children who have not shown improvement despite intervention practices (Coleman, Roth & West, 2009).

In light of this information, if there is a child with special needs or a child suspected to be at risk in the class, the assessment process should be initiated. The educational assessment process includes screening-early identification, pre-referral process, referral process, and detailed assessment process (Kargın, 2007; Kargın, 2016). Identifying individuals with special needs or those suspected to be in the risk group in general education classes constitutes the step of early identification. The main purpose of the early identification step is to determine individuals who have difficulty in fulfilling the requirements of the school/class they attend, fall behind their peers, and need support (Turnbull, Turnbull & Wehmeyer, 2007; Spinelli, 2002; cited in Kargın, 2007). In the early identification process, teachers can use standardized tests (Gürsel & Vuran, 2021) as well as informal assessment tools such as observations, interviews, and checklists (Kargın, 2007). The aim of the second step of the assessment process, the pre-referral process, is to ensure that the student continues his/her education in the general education class without any diagnosis through adaptations to be made in the classroom before sending the student to the counseling & research centre (Kirk, Gallagher, Anastasiow & Coleman, 2006, cited in Kargın, 2007). In this way, unnecessary assessment of individuals who do not need more intensive training is prevented, and labelling as a result of detailed assessment is avoided (Sucuoğlu, 2017; Sucuoğlu & Kargın, 2006;). According to Sucuoğlu (2017), with the intervention program including various adaptation activities to be carried out by the teacher in the pre-referral process, it is aimed to ensure the child's active participation in class activities. In the pre-referral process, teachers should decide which behaviours to teach children as well as where and how to teach them. At this stage, the teacher prepares an intervention program by making adaptations in program objectives, teaching process, classroom management, and classroom environment. If the expected improvement is not seen following the implementation of the intervention program for a sufficient period of time for the student, the referral for detailed assessment is initiated (Gürsel & Vuran, 2021; Kargın, 2016).

Research on the identification of children in the risk group in the preschool period, the pre-referral process, and early intervention has mostly focused on the views and perceptions of early intervention. The views and perceptions of preschool teachers and pre-service teachers about early intervention (Akman, Karlıdağ & Özen, 2018; Kardeş & Akman, 2020; Küçük-Doğaroğlu & Bapoğlu-Dümenci, 2015; Tufan & Yıldırım, 2013; Wesley, Buyyşe & Tyndall, 1997; Yumuş & Tanju, 2015) and scientists' definitions of early intervention (Temiz & Akman, 2015) have been studied. The literature also contains studies on the pre-referral process in preschool education (Yazıcı, Akman, Mercan-Uzun & Akgül, 2020) and the identification of children (Aydoğdu, Akalın, Polat, İrice & Akpınar, 2016). On the other hand, research on the pre-referral process has mostly concentrated on classroom education (Altun & Karasu, 2021; Çuhadar, 2017; Işıkdogan-Uğurlu & Kayhan, 2018). In light of previous studies, the limited research on the pre-referral process and teachers' intervention practices in preschool education reveals the importance of the present study. In this context, this study aims to examine preschool teachers' identification of risk groups and the types of adaptations they include in the intervention plans they implement. This research seeks answers to the following questions:

- How do preschool teachers define the concept of early intervention?
- How do preschool teachers define risk groups?
- What assessment methods do preschool teachers use while determining risk groups?
- What are the early intervention practices of preschool teachers for children in the risk group in their classrooms?

## Method

### Research Design

In this research, a qualitative case study methodology was used to identify risk groups of preschool teachers and examine the intervention plans they implemented. A case study is an in-depth examination of a limited system or systems using multiple sources of information (Cresswell, 2013). The aim of a case study is to describe one or more situations in depth (Johnson & Christensen, 2012). According to Merriam (2009), a case study is an “in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system” (p.40). This study was designed as a case study because it examined in depth preschool teachers’ identification process of risk groups in their classes using different data collection methods.

### Participants

15 preschool teachers working in kindergartens and nursery schools affiliated to the Turkish Ministry of National Education (MoNE) in the central district of Türkiye’s Konya province participated in the study. Teachers were included in the study through convenience sampling. Convenience sampling is a sampling method in which participants who are willing to participate in the research and who are easily accessible in terms of time and space are selected (Johnson & Christensen, 2012; Merriam, 2009). The researcher informed the preschool teachers about the study, and data were collected from teachers who volunteered to participate in the study.

Table 1.

Sociodemographic Information of Teachers

Variables		n
Gender	Female	15
	Male	0
Age	20-25	0
	26-30	7
	31-35	7
	36-40	1
	41 and above	0
Education Level	Associate degree	0
	Bachelor’s degree	13
	Master’s degree	1
	Phd	1
Professional experience	1-5 years	0
	6-10 years	5
	11-15 years	9
	16-20 years	1
School Type	Kindergarten under elementary school	8
	Independent nursery school	7
Having taken an early intervention course in undergraduate or graduate education		3

According to Table 1, a total of 15 preschool teachers participated in the research. All of the teachers participating in the research are female. Of the teachers participating in the study, 7 (46.5%) were 26-30 years old, 7 (46.5%) were 31-35 years old and 1 (7%) was 36-40 years old. Of the teachers participating in the study, 13 (86%) had a bachelor's degree, 1 (7%) had a master's degree and 1 (7%) had a doctorate degree. 8 (53%) of the teachers work in kindergartens attached to primary schools and 7 (47%) work in independent kindergartens.. It is seen that 3 (20%) of the teachers participating in the study took early intervention courses in their undergraduate or graduate education.

### Data Collection Tools

Data were collected through interview, a qualitative research data collection method. A semi-structured “Teacher Interview Form for Risk Groups” was used to examine preschool teachers’ identification of risk groups. The interview form consists of two parts: demographic information questions and questions

about the sub-problems. In addition to the use of structured question patterns, semi-structured interview allows flexible asking of questions to reveal situations that need to be explored when specific information about the research is requested (Merriam, 2009).

**Validity and Reliability**

When developing the interview form, a literature review was carried out, expert opinion was obtained, and pilot interviews were conducted with three teachers. No changes were made to the interview form based on the data obtained from the pilot interviews. Data were collected in the 2019-2020 fall semester. The interviews were conducted in a quiet environment where the researcher and the teachers were alone. With the consent of the participants, the interviews were voice-recorded. The interview voice recordings were transcribed by the researcher. For the reliability of the study, the researchers listened to the interview recordings again, respondent validation was performed, and the percentage of agreement between the codes and themes created by the researchers was calculated. For the validity of the research, a literature review was carried out, expert opinion was taken, and pilot interviews were conducted when creating the interview and document review forms.

**Data Analysis**

The data were analyzed using content analysis method. Content analysis is “used to refer to any qualitative data reduction and sense-making effort that takes a volume of qualitative material and attempts to identify core consistencies and meanings” (Patton, 2002 p. 453). Content analysis mostly refers to analyzing interviews, diaries, and documents. This study used inductive analysis approach, since the codes and themes were not predetermined. Inductive analysis refers to the identification of patterns, themes, and categories in the analysis process (Patton, 2002). Table 2 provides a summary of the codes and categories obtained from the data.

Table2.

Summary of codes and categories obtained from the research

Preschool Teachers’ Views on the Concept of Early Intervention	
Category	Code
Early intervention	Taking precautions before a negative situation arises
	Intervening if there is any problem
	Program implemented for children with special needs
	I don’t know about early intervention
	Children in the risk group (lower socio-economic level, divorced family, children with parents in prison)
	Children who cannot benefit from education in unfavourable conditions
For Whom Early Intervention Should be Aimed	
Category	Code
For whom early intervention should be aimed	Children with special needs
	Socioeconomically disadvantaged children
	Children with developmental delay and their families
	Those in the risk group in terms of family factors
	Children with health problems
Preschool Teachers’ Views on Risk Groups	
Category	Code
Familial factors	Socioeconomically disadvantaged group
	Children of divorced parents
	Indifferent parental attitude
	Low parental education level
Individual factors	Children with special needs
	Children with developmental delay
For the definition of the risk group	Group more affected by adversity
School and environment factor	Peer bullying

Table 2 continuing

Assessment Methods Used by Preschool Teachers When Identifying Risk Groups	
Category	Code
Assessment methods	Observation
	Family interviews
	Family needs assessment form
	Child information form
	Home visit
	Anecdotal record
	Getting information from the guidance and counselling service
Risk Groups Identified by Preschool Teachers in Their Classes	
Category	Code
Familial factors	Socioeconomic disadvantage
	Children from divorced families
Individual factors	Children with chronic illnesses
	Developmental delay
	ADHD
	Speech Difficulty
Preschool Teachers' Early Intervention Practices	
Category	Code
Early intervention practices	No intervention plan applied
	Interview with the parent
	Getting support from the guidance and counselling service
	Implementing an IEP if there is a student with special needs
	No plan but taking it into account in activities
	Family education seminar
Adaptation Activities in Preschool Teachers' Intervention Plans	
Category	Code
Adaptation activities included in intervention plans	No plan
	Trying to include them in games
	By special needs diagnosis
	Not in the plan/adaptation according to the situation
	Making changes in classroom layout
Benefits of Intervention Plans	
Category	Code
For the child	Supporting the child's development/achievement of learning outcome indicators
	Rise in acceptance by peers/sharing
	Early diagnosis
For the teacher	Self-development of the teacher
	Guidance for the teacher
For the family	Getting to know the child better
	Increased awareness of the family
	Effective collaboration with the family
	Increased quality time spent with the child
	Ease for the family to follow the child's development

### Findings

This section of the study presents the findings obtained regarding teachers' identification of risk groups and their intervention plans within the scope of the questions in the interview form.

Table 3.  
Preschool Teachers' Views on the Concept of Early Intervention

Category	Code	n
Early intervention	Taking precautions before a negative situation arises	5
	Intervening if there is any problem	5
	Program implemented for children with special needs	5
	I don't know about early intervention	5
	Children in the risk group (lower socio-economic level, divorced family, children with parents in prison)	3
	Children who cannot benefit from education in unfavourable conditions	1

When Table 3 is examined, delivering their views on the concept of early intervention, the preschool teachers mostly described early intervention as taking precautions in case a problem is likely to occur and after it occurs. They also expressed early intervention as the program implemented for individuals with special needs. The views that teachers lacked knowledge about early intervention were also among the findings. It was determined from their direct quotations that they used teachers' views on the concept of early intervention *taking precautions, intervening if there is any problem, program implemented for children with special needs, I don't know about early intervention, children in the risk group and children who cannot benefit from education in unfavourable conditions*. Teacher candidates define inclusion as a program for individuals with special needs. (Proctor & Niemeyer, 2001, p. 60). Preschool teachers' views on early intervention are shaped around the concepts of being at risk and developmental delay (Kimathi & Nilsen, 2023, p. 428). Quotes from the participants regarding the findings are as follows:

T1: *“Identifying problems in the lives of socioeconomically disadvantaged children, if any, and taking precautions...”*

T5: *“Developing activities suitable for children who have special needs...”*

T11: *“I don't know about early intervention, but it is like preventing a negative situation...”*

Table 4.  
For Whom Early Intervention Should be Aimed

Category	Code	n
For whom early intervention should be aimed	Children with special needs	10
	Socioeconomically disadvantaged children	8
	Children with developmental delay and their families	3
	Those in the risk group in terms of family factors	3
	Children with health problems	1

When Table 4 is examined, preschool teachers mostly mentioned children with special needs and socioeconomic disadvantages in their opinions about whom early intervention should be aimed at. In addition, it has been stated that children with developmental delay and children in the risk group in terms of family are also within the scope of early intervention. Direct quotes from the teachers revealed that early intervention was directed towards *children with special needs, socioeconomically disadvantaged children, children with developmental delays and their families, children whose families were in the risk group and children with health problems*. Late childhood and early adolescence are critical times for preventing anxiety disorders in at-risk children with anxiety disorders (Dadds & Spence, 1997, p. 634). With early intervention practices, children with autism gain new skills in the areas of receptive language, non-verbal imitation and verbal imitation (Smith, Buch & Gamby, 2000, p. 306). Quotes from the participants regarding these findings are as follows:

T2: *“Those who need early intervention education more than others should be children living in unfavourable conditions, children with disabilities, children with low socioeconomic levels...”*

T6: *“I consider the risk group as children who are exposed to negativities in the school environment. Children experiencing peer bullying, socioeconomically disadvantaged children, and children with specific learning disabilities...”*

T9: “Although the early intervention group primarily covers individuals with special needs, children with school phobia, children with familial disadvantages (in psychological and sociological terms) [should also be considered]...”

Table 5.  
Preschool Teachers’ Views on Risk Groups

Category	Code	n
Familial factors	Socioeconomically disadvantaged group	5
	Children of divorced parents	1
	Indifferent parental attitude	1
	Low parental education level	1
Individual factors	Children with special needs	5
	Children with developmental delay	2
For the definition of the risk group	Group more affected by adversity	3
School and environment factor	Peer bullying	1

When Table 5 is examined, it is seen that teachers express risk groups under familial, individual, definition of risk group and school-environment categories. Teachers' views on risk groups such as *socioeconomically disadvantaged group*, *children of divorced parents*, *inconsistent parental attitude*, *low parental education level*, *children with special needs*, *children with developmental delay*, *group more affected by difficulties* and *peer bullying* were obtained from direct quotations. Divorce, conflict between parents, mental illness, poor hygiene and malnutrition are indicators of risk factors (Kimathi & Nilsen, 2023, p. 431). Prenatal stress, premature birth, learning problems, inconsistent child care, education and community experiences are among the risk factors (Goldstein & Brooks, 2013, p. 10). Quotes from the participants regarding these findings are as follows:

T4: “I think it is a risk for children to stay alone at home because their parents work. Indifferent parental attitude can be considered in this context...”

T6: “In my class this year, I have a student who has separation problems from the family, shows crying behaviour, and has phobia against school and social environments. I see this as a developmental risk and define it as social phobia...”

T9: “Children with developmental delay in terms of age due to lack of stimulating environment constitute the risk group in my class...”

Table 6.  
Assessment Methods Used by Preschool Teachers When Identifying Risk Groups

Category	Code	n
Assessment methods	Observation	10
	Family interviews	7
	Family needs assessment form	6
	Child information form	6
	Home visit	6
	Anecdotal record	4
	Getting information from the guidance and counselling service	2

When Table 6 is examined, it is seen that the assessment methods used by teachers when determining risk groups. The assessment methods used by teachers when determining risk groups *observation*, *family interviews*, *family needs assessment form*, *child information form*, *home visit*, *anecdotal record* and *getting information from the guidance and counselling service* were obtained from direct quotes. Classroom observation is necessary for teachers to plan intervention (Altun & Karasu, 2020, p. 603). Teachers make observations to obtain information from children and obtain information from families (Yazıcı et al., 2020, p. 239). Teachers determine children's risk situations by obtaining information from the guidance service (Işıklıdoğan-Uğurlu & Kayhan, 2018, p. 657). For early diagnosis, it is necessary to have an efficient and facilitated service together with education (Klein, Licari, Barbic & Zwicker, 2023, p. 6). Quotes from the participants regarding these findings are as follows:



T1: “I make observations in the play. If there is something I consider important that I need to record, I keep an anecdotal record. I meet with the families and get information...”

T8: “I use a development observation form. I visit parents. I visit students I feel at risk earlier. This way I have the opportunity to see the child in his/her own environment...”

Table 7.  
Risk Groups Identified by Preschool Teachers in Their Classes

Category	Code	n
Familial factors	Socioeconomic disadvantage	6
	Children from divorced families	4
Individual factors	Children with chronic illnesses	4
	Developmental delay	2
	ADHD	2
	Speech Difficulty	1

When Table 7 is examined, it is seen that teachers stated the children in the risk group in their classes in the category of familial and individual factors. The *socioeconomically disadvantaged group, child of divorced families, chronic illness, developmental delay, attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder, and speech difficulty* mentioned by the teachers in their classes were obtained from direct quotations. Teachers' classes include children with ADHD (Gözüm, 2020, p. 870). Children's language skills support early academic skills (Gözüm & Uyanık Aktulun, 2021, p. 4732). The socioeconomic level of the family has an impact on children's learning. The low socioeconomic level of families is a negative predictor of children's academic skills (Gözüm, Özberk, Ünsal kaya, & Uyanık Altulun, 2023). Poverty and having divorced parents are risk factors that an individual has from a familial perspective (Wright, Masten & Narayan, 2013, p. 17). Quotes from the participants regarding these findings are as follows:

T1: “My class contains children from divorced families and children whose parents are in prison. I see these children as a risk group...Children in need of special education should also benefit from early intervention...”

T2: “I have a student with Down syndrome...”

Table 8.  
Preschool Teachers' Early Intervention Practices

Category	Code	n
Early intervention practices	No intervention plan applied	10
	Interview with the parent	4
	Getting support from the guidance and counselling service	3
	Implementing an IEP if there is a student with special needs	3
	No plan but taking it into account in activities	2
	Family education seminar	1

According to Table 8, most of the preschool teachers participating in the study noted that they did not have intervention plans for the risk groups they identified in their classes. They stated the reasons for this as the absence of severe risk groups in their classes, non-diagnosis of children, and their avoiding labeling children. However, the teachers said that they made adaptations in the classroom, albeit not within the framework of a plan. Early intervention practices carried out by teachers, such as *meeting with families, obtaining information from the guidance service, implementing an individual education plan, adapting activities and holding family education seminars*, were obtained from direct quotes. Since the education level of parents positively affects the learning process of children, parental education should be given to parents with low education levels (Uysal Bayrak, Gözüm & Özen Altınkaynak, 2021, p. 174). Quotes from the participants regarding these findings are as follows:

T1: “If I am not working with a severe risk group, I do not implement an intervention plan. If the child already has special needs, we apply IEP. Apart from that, I do not have a written intervention plan, although I make various arrangements in activity plans and in the classroom. I do card-matching exercises for children with attention deficit...”

T9: “If it is an inclusion student, there is an IEP. But I have no other plans in the way you are asking...”

T13: “I try to involve the child in the game. If there is a situation that I cannot solve myself, I get support from the guidance counselor...”

Table 9.

Adaptation Activities in Preschool Teachers’ Intervention Plans

Category	Code	n
Adaptation activities included in intervention plans	No adaptation activities	10
	Trying to include them in games	8
	By special needs diagnosis	5
	Not in the plan/adaptation according to the situation	5
	Making changes in classroom layout	4

According to Table 9, most of the preschool teachers stated that they did not have intervention plans for children in the risk group. It was obtained from direct quotes that *teachers made adaptations by involving children in games and making changes to the classroom layout*. Environmental adaptation is one of the adaptation interventions in the classroom (Campbell, Milbourne & Wilcox, 2008, p. 101). Intervention practices that include appropriate games for diagnosed children are used in classroom adaptations (Schmidt, Hoffman, Mule & Briesch, 2023, p. 15). Quotes from the participants regarding these findings are as follows:

T14: “Unfortunately, I do not have an intervention plan. But I try to include them in the game according to the changing conditions. If I need to make changes in the classroom layout, I make changes in this regard.”

T15: “I do not have an intervention plan. Honestly, I don’t know anything about it. I just instinctively try to understand the child and the family. I try to push the child’s limits and connect him/her to the school with the things he/she likes. When I have a special education student, we work based on a plan. But I don’t have a plan for other situations...”

Table 10.

Benefits of Intervention Plans

Category	Code	n
For the child	Supporting the child’s development/achievement of learning outcome indicators	8
	Rise in acceptance by peers/sharing	7
	Early diagnosis	5
For the teacher	Self-development of the teacher	9
	Guidance for the teacher	8
	Getting to know the child better	7
For the family	Increased awareness of the family	6
	Effective collaboration with the family	5
	Increased quality time spent with the child	4
	Ease for the family to follow the child’s development	2

According to Table 10, it is seen that teachers stated the benefits of intervention plans under the categories of child, teacher and family. The benefits of teachers' intervention plans to *supporting the child's development, increase peer acceptance & make early diagnosis* were obtained from direct quotes. During the preschool period, children take important steps to improve their cognitive development and learning (Gözüm & Uyanık Aktulun, 2021, p. 4732). Teachers stated the benefits of intervention plans for teachers *as personal development of the teacher, guidance for the teacher and getting to know the child better*. Teachers make evaluations to determine the development levels of children and the personal development of the teacher (Gözüm & Özen Altınkaynak, 2021, p. 249). Teachers stated that intervention plans were useful in terms of *increasing family awareness, collaboration with the family, quality time, and families' monitoring of their children's development*. Quotes from the participants regarding these findings are as follows:

T6: *“If such a plan is made, I think it will be really useful. Risk groups are increasing day by day. I think it will guide both the child and the teacher...”*

T10: *“If there is a retardation in the child’s development and learning, it is useful for early diagnosis...”*

### **Discussion, Conclusion, and Suggestions**

This research aims to obtain information about preschool teachers' identification of risk groups and the intervention plans they implement. The first sub-problem of the research is about how preschool teachers define early intervention. The preschool teachers participating in the study described early intervention as taking precautions before a negative situation occurs or in the presence of a problem (see Table 3). Teachers stated that special needs, socioeconomic disadvantage, developmental delay and family problems are within the scope of early intervention (see Table 4). They indicated children with special needs and socioeconomically disadvantaged children as risk groups, thinking that early intervention practices were aimed at individuals in this group. The findings obtained from this study on early intervention are like the research findings in the literature. The concept of early intervention includes practices that aim to reduce or eliminate the impact of risk factors in the lives of children who are disadvantaged or at risk for various reasons, by incorporating the child’s immediate environment in the process as well (Erdil, 2010; Johnson, 2006). In previous studies, preschool teachers stated that early intervention is for individuals with special needs (Kardeş & Akman, 2020; Tufan & Yıldırım, 2013) and that they have no knowledge about early intervention (Kardeş & Akman, 2020; Küçük-Doğaroğlu & Bapoğlu-Dümenci, 2015). On the other hand, the fact that studies with similar findings also involve views that early intervention involves practices for children living in unfavourable conditions/in the risk group (Küçük-Doğaroğlu & Bapoğlu-Dümenci, 2015; Temiz & Akman, 2015) and allows early recognition of deficiencies related to the development of children and implementation of relevant practices (Temiz & Akman, 2015; Tufan & Yıldırım, 2013) suggests that teachers have knowledge about early intervention. Akman et al. (2018) revealed that pre-service preschool teachers have a certain level of knowledge about early intervention. Considering that only three of the teachers participating in the study had taken an early intervention course during their undergraduate or graduate education, it can be said that the majority of the teachers had awareness on this issue even if they had not taken an early intervention course.

The second sub-problem of the research is about how preschool teachers define risk groups (see Table 5). The information available in the literature on risk groups and the views of the teachers participating in the present study are consistent. Risk factors are personal or environmental factors that increase the likelihood of undesirable outcomes such as school failure, mental illness, tendency towards crime, occupational instability, and poverty (Masten, 1994). According to Pierangelo & Giuliani (2007), a student who experiences perceptual or environmental concerns in social, academic, emotional, and behavioural terms as well as in terms of language or health in the school environment is in the risk group. Given the importance of accurately identifying children at risk, selecting appropriate individuals for intervention is essential to identify possible solutions to challenges (McAlenney & Coyne, 2011). Risk factors such as conflict between parents, mental illnesses, poor hygiene and malnutrition are stated as risk situations for preschool teachers (Kimathi & Nilsen, 2023).

The third sub-problem of the research is about which assessment methods-techniques to apply when determining risk groups of preschool teachers. Teachers use assessment methods such as observation, family interviews, family needs assessment forms, child information forms, and home visits to identify risk groups in the educational assessment process (see Table 6). Children who gradually differ from their peers are identified based on teachers’ experiences, observations, and assessment results (Altun & Karasu, 2021). Observation of students who are considered to be in the risk group, family interviews, and collecting information about students from various sources are among the educational assessment methods employed by teachers in the educational assessment process (Çuhadar, 2017; Işıkdogan-Uğurlu & Kayhan, 2018; Kargin, 2007; Yazıcı et al., 2020; Yazıcıoğlu, 2019). In addition, getting information and support from the guidance and counselling service about students is important in terms of working in collaboration during the educational assessment process (Kargin, 2007). The teachers participating in the present study also received support from the guidance and counselling service during the educational

assessment process and had awareness about collaboration. State-supported family-centered and collaborative care approach are critical to assess, diagnose and treat children (Klein, Licari, Barbic & Zwicker, 2024). However, the importance of using multiple assessment tools to collect information from various sources to determine the support needs of children in early childhood settings is emphasized in the literature (Aspden, Baxter, Clendon & McLaughlin, 2022). Teachers who participated in the study expressed the children in the risk group in their classes in two categories in terms of familial and individual risk factors (see Table 7). Socioeconomically disadvantaged children, children of divorced parents, and children with chronic diseases were identified as risk groups in the classes of the teachers participating in the study. These results are consistent with the research results available in the literature. Parental divorce, poverty, retardation in child development, having special needs, and chronic diseases were indicated among the risk factors (Masten, 2009; Rowe & Stewart, 2009; Wright et al., 2013). ADHD and speech difficulty were mentioned by teachers as an individual risk factor in the classroom. According to Gözüm (2020), teachers stated that children with ADHD should be intervened under the precautionary metaphor. According to the research examining the relationship between self-regulation, language and early academic skills in children, it is emphasized that supporting language skills is important in the development of early academic skills and self-regulation (Gözüm & Uyanık Aktulun, 2021). Based on these results, it can be said that children with speech difficulties are in the risk group.

The fourth sub-problem aims to determine early intervention practices for children in the risk group in the classrooms of preschool teachers. Teachers who participated in the study talked about the early intervention practices they used for children in the risk group in their classes (see Table 8). As to the intervention plans and adaptations implemented by the teachers for children in the risk group in their classes, the majority of the teachers stated that they did not implement any intervention plans. Although the teachers made adaptations for various situations, this was not done as a systematic and planned process. They noted that if the child in the risk group had special needs, they implemented IEP plans, and made changes in the classroom layout, if necessary, even if they did not include them in the plan. It was also found that the teachers received support from the guidance and counselling service when they needed it. Research shows that although teachers make adaptations to ensure the adaptation of students at risk or with deficiencies to the classroom, this process does not proceed in a systematic and planned manner. Family education seminar is also mentioned among the early intervention practices implemented by teachers. Teachers decide instantly on the behaviours and skills to be acquired by students (Çuhadar, 2007). According to Kargın (2016), teachers should decide which behaviours will be acquired in the pre-referral process based on the information gathered during the early assessment process. In this context, they should prepare an intervention plan that involves adaptations in program objectives, instructional processes, classroom management, and classroom layout. Classroom teachers should resort to various ways to increase the participation of students who differ from their peers and who lag behind the program followed in the classroom. It is seen that the majority of teachers participating in the research did not implement an early intervention plan. Despite this, teachers stated that they included children in games, identified children's special needs, and made some changes in the classroom (see Table 9). The planned and systematic nature of this process, called the pre-referral process, aims to increase the participation of students at risk in general education classes (Sucuoğlu & Kargın, 2006). Previous studies show that teachers' classroom adaptations and arrangements are inadequate (Kargın, Güldenoğlu & Şahin, 2010; Korkmaz-Erşan & Sönmez-Kartal, 2020; Yazıcıoğlu, 2019) and their knowledge about adaptations is not sufficient (Kale, Dikici-Sığirtmaç, Nur & Abbak, 2016; Tufan & Yıldırım, 2013). The reason why most of the teachers stated that they did not have intervention plans or that they intervened instantly according to the situation may be their imperfect knowledge on this subject. As a matter of fact, in the study of Tufan & Yıldırım (2013), the preschool teachers said that they did not have any knowledge about adaptations. Kale et al. (2016) revealed that the preschool teachers did not have sufficient knowledge about the adaptation section in the activity plan in the 2013 Preschool Education Curriculum. In a similar study conducted with primary school teachers, it was observed that the teachers lacked knowledge about the preparation of educational assessment and intervention plans (Kuruyer & Çakıroğlu, 2017). Studies that reveal the importance of the education level of families have revealed that parental education level has a positive effect on parents' teaching roles (Uysal Bayrak et al., 2021) and supports their awareness on different subjects (Mercan, Papadakis,

Gözüm & Kalogiannakis, 2022). Therefore, it is thought that family education seminars contribute to teachers' practices by increasing families' awareness about early intervention.

The teachers expressed their views on the benefits of intervention plans for children, teachers, and families. The teachers stated that intervention plans have benefits for the child, such as supporting children's development, increasing peer acceptance, and allowing early diagnosis, and for the teacher, such as providing guidance and enabling to get to know the child better (see Table 10). The teachers mentioned the benefits of intervention plans in terms of supporting children's development and learning, peer acceptance and early diagnosis. It seems that developmental evaluation for children is important in terms of early intervention and support education program (Gözüm, Güngör & Özen Altinkaynak, 2021). In this way, if a child has a special condition, it can be revealed with early diagnosis. The teachers mentioned the benefits for the family, such as increased awareness about children and the establishment of effective collaboration. According to Altun & Karasu (2021), revealing the status of benefiting from the adaptations made for the student in light of systematically collected data is important for determining the accuracy of the judgment made about the student. Moreover, it is stated that when teachers establish effective collaboration with families, the likelihood of early diagnosis and correct placement increases (Işıkdoğan-Uğurlu & Kayhan, 2018). In this regard, when teachers carry out the intervention plan implementation process systematically, the benefits for the teacher, child, and family are likely to increase.

Based on the findings obtained from the study, the following suggestions can be made:

This study is limited to 15 preschool teachers working in preschool education classes affiliated to the MoNE. Multiple case studies may be conducted by including different school types in research. This research is limited to the views of preschool teachers. The views of families about the pre-referral process may be examined. Due to the nature of qualitative research, the number of participants in the present study is small. The study may be repeated with a larger sample. It had been planned to collect the study data through interviews and document analysis. However, document analysis could not be conducted due to the lack of intervention plans prepared by the teachers. Teachers may be informed about the pre-referral process, and the intervention plans they will prepare later may be examined. The study indicated the teachers' lack of knowledge about the pre-referral process. Trainings may be provided to increase teachers' competencies in this regard.

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