



Evaluation of Primary Reading Teaching in Multigrade Classes According to Teachers' Views

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Abstract: Multigrade classes which are at least two or more grade's students are brought together in the same classroom and educational activities are carried out simultaneously by a single teacher. The main purpose of this study is how this practice, closely related to many teachers, students and parents, is evaluated by teachers. The aim of this study is to reveal how teachers explain this experience, its positive and negative aspects, and the difficulties experienced during sound-based sentence teaching. Semi-structured interviews were held with 7 teachers in order to evaluate primary reading instruction in multigrade classes according to teachers' opinions. The data regarding the participants selected by the criterion sampling method were transferred to the word environment on the computer and descriptive analysis was performed. The analyses were evaluated and interpreted. Teachers stated that teaching in multigrade classrooms is quite different from teaching in independent classrooms. They stated that this experience provides greater satisfaction at the teaching profession and increases the sense of belonging to the school. They also stated that it is important to step in the role of community leadership and to reside in the village. Among the positive aspects of teaching in multigrade classes; supporting students' social and emotional development; supporting cognitive development by more effective usage of peer teaching, and the small class member number. Among the negative aspects, there are time constraints, emotional difficulties experienced by teachers, insufficient readiness of students, upper classes to make fun of lower classes, physical limitations and material deficiencies. It has been mentioned that some teachers changed the order of the letters during the teaching reading, that the region where the school is located is a place with intense dialect, making the process difficult, and the difficulties of performing some sound recognition activities. In order to allocate more resources to the relevant schools in order to overcome the difficulties experienced in the multigrade classrooms and to enable the teachers to start the process more ready, it is recommended that the education courses in the multi-grade classrooms conducted at the university should be more practice-based. The participants in this study are teachers. A study can be conducted that addresses the students' perspective.

Keywords: Multigrade teaching, Teaching reading, Negative and positive aspects, Teachers' perspective.

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Introduction

It has been observed that elements such as digitalization, robotic coding and STEM have started to be discussed more widely in educational environments since Industry 4.0 was revealed to be a factor that will greatly affect the 21st century education systems. It is a very different topic of discussion that how education equality can be achieved in these countries, which are trying to integrate into Industry 4.0. It can be said that one of the important elements is education in multigrade classes, from the perspective of educational equality. In multigrade classes, students from at least two or more different grade levels are brought together and education activities are carried out simultaneously in the same classroom and by a single teacher (Berry & Little, 2006). In Turkey, due to the inadequacy of the number of teachers and classrooms in the past and due to the effect of migration from the village to the city, and the lack of students in the settlements, especially in village and town primary schools today (Basaran, 1998), teaching practice is carried out in multigrade classes (Sağ, Savaş & Sezer, 2009). This practice is used not only in our country, but also in many different countries. For example, there are multigrade class practices in South Africa (Joubert, 2007), in many Latin American countries such as Columbia (Rowley, 1992), Peru (Ames, 2006), in many Asian countries (Miller, 1991) such as Nepal (Suzuki, 2006), Malawi (Croft, 2006), Sri Lanka (Vithanapathirana, 2006), Vietnam (Son Vu and Pridmore, 2006; Pridmore & Vu Son, 2006), Ghana (Akyeampong, 2006); in European countries such as England, Norway, Northern Ireland, and France (Little, 2006).

From this point of view, it is seen that multigrade classes are practiced in many developed, developing and underdeveloped countries to meet social needs. Therefore, associating the phenomenon of “multigrade classes” with underdevelopment makes it difficult to understand the dimensions of the situation (Miller, 1991). For instance, it is stated that in 2000 in England, which can be considered in the category of developed countries, 25.4% of all classes were conducted as combining at least two grades and at least 25% of all learners had studied in a multigrade class. Also in France, in 2000, 34% of schools had a multi-grade class, while 4.5% they had a single teacher. In Ireland, 42% of schools have a multigrade class, while 64% of these schools have two classes combined, and 36% have at least three or more classes combined (Little, 2006). The situation of multigrade class practices in Turkey is summarized below according to 2018-2019 data.

Table 1
Statistics regarding the classes in Turkey with collective teaching

	4. Classes	3. Classes	2. Classes	Total
*Number of Teachers	1731	449	4423	6603
*Number of Students	31165	667	135924	

*Ministry of National Education, National Education Statistics-Formal Education, 2018/2019 (page 42)

There are 135924 students studying in multigrade classes and 6603 teachers working in these schools according to Table 1. Therefore, while the facts of education in the digitalized age are discussed in these countries as well as in Turkey, on the other hand, it is important for the education system in general, as well as for teachers and students, to reveal the phenomenon of multigrade classes and the situations brought about by this phenomenon.

The Teaching of Lessons in Multigrade Classes differs from classes that do not have this practice. In multigrade classes, the teacher has to explain the lesson to all classes. In this case, it cannot be expected that all lessons will be taught at the same level at all grade levels. Therefore, while the teacher teaches one group, he/she assigns the other group homework. This is called ‘class with teacher’ and ‘class with homework’. In the ‘class with teacher’; teacher and students study the lesson together, the important parts of the subject, the clues about the subject, the repetition of the parts that cannot be understood are explained, activities such as additional

exercises and experiments are carried out by teacher. Activities to be held during these lessons are planned by the teacher and lessons are taught within the framework of this plan. In the 'class with homework', students try to increase their knowledge and skill capacity by working on the details or sub-topics of the units and subjects they have previously learned by themselves (Doğan. 2000). Therefore, in multigrade classes, time is structured as when the lesson is taught with the teacher and when students are assigned homework.

This indicates that the social construction of time in the school environment differs in multigrade classes than in independent classrooms. The notion of 'time' in the school environment is examined from different perspectives such as physical/biological time, the relationship of time with social status, time as a property, time as expressed in education policies, time in education programs, time and social identity (Leaton-Gray, 2017). 'Time' has a very important place in the discourses on education (Berstein, 2000). Sorokin and Merton (1937) refer to the fact that allocating quantitatively equal time to students who are unequal in terms of conditions reproduces inequality. In the case of multigrade classes, it can be thought that, when less time allocated to education and training to the detriment of the more disadvantaged group, it will deepen the 'inequality'.

As a phenomenon closely related to many countries, the advantages and disadvantages of the multigrade class practice are discussed. The teaching method in multi-grade classrooms has not only positive aspects on the education and training of students, from the synergetic effect of students from different academic and age groups, and from the aspects of saving the school building and teachers but also has some negative effects (Doğan 2000; Öztürk 2003). It can be said that the most important advantage of multi-grade classrooms is that peer teaching, group work and independent study are the methods that are used effectively. These practices are a must in multigrade classes because group work is inevitable. During homework hours, students have to cooperate in groups or learn to work independently and individually. Having many students at different levels in a class makes it easier to form groups among students. In multigrade classes, students at different levels are constantly being taught together in the same classroom. In these lessons, the teacher can easily make students of the same level do the same activities regardless of their grades. It is very difficult or impossible to do this in independent classrooms.

It is possible to develop students individually in the fields they are interested and talented in and to prepare teaching environments according to individual differences if teaching in multigrade classrooms is well organized and conducted. Nevertheless, the fact that multigrade primary schools have some unique features and special conditions such as structure, function, implementation of programs, administrative structure and operation may cause some negativities (Abay, 2006). If the number of students is high, teachers teaching four classes together may have difficulty in implementing the education program by considering the readiness of the students in all classes. It is necessary to form two groups, one with homework and one with a teacher, in order to ensure order in the teaching of the lesson in multigrade-classed schools. When working with a group of teachers, the group to be assigned homework must be given homework at the beginning of the lesson and these homeworks must be checked again at the end of the lesson. These activities, which will be held within the 40-minute lesson period, can be considered as a disadvantage as they steal the time of the 'group with teacher'.

In multigrade classes, the teacher's workload is not just the students in the classroom. The teacher, who is authorized as the principal, apart from the education of students, has to organize official and administrative affairs, respond to incoming letters, attend meetings, and even take care of the cleaning of the school. Problems such as the commuting problems of teachers working in schools far from the city or district center, as well as the closure of roads in winter conditions can be counted among the disadvantages. Köksal (2005) lists the drawbacks

of teaching in multigrade classes as follows: The quality of the teacher's duties, powers and responsibilities increased, the teacher's effort to prepare for the lesson increased, it becomes difficult to reach all the objectives in the primary education program, most of the primary school teachers do not have enough knowledge and experience in the multi grade class practice that teachers do not receive as much guidance as necessary.

In classroom management, the loss of desire in students during the teaching of the lessons, the shift of attention to other classroom activities, the limited time that the teacher can allocate for classes can be counted among the limitations. Problems such as insufficient physical structure of the classroom and insufficient materials can be added to the above deficiencies. Especially the primary reading and writing period has a critical importance at the point where the multigrade class practice suffers from the disadvantages mentioned above. Students' reading difficulties in the first years may negatively affect their school life in the following years (Türkmenoğlu & Başbuğ, 2017). According to Bloom (1979), since most of the learning tools used in school are language-based and must-read resources, the reading comprehension skill gained in the primary school years affects most of the learning that takes place in the following years. The negativities experienced in the primary reading and writing period can affect cognitive areas such as reduced school success, as well as social and affective areas such as insecurity and low motivation (Altun, Ekiz & Odabaşı, 2011; Uzunkol, 2013). The first reading and writing teaching is given in the Turkish lesson in the first grade in the combined classes. The student, who learns to read and write, obtains an important tool by comprehending these course subjects and solves their problems with this tool.

In this study, it is aimed to reveal how classroom teachers working in multigrade classes experienced teaching in multigrade classes for the first time; to identify the positive and negative aspects of teaching in multigrade classes; and to determine the difficulties experienced during primary reading education within the scope of teachers' opinions. In line with this main purpose, answers to the following questions were sought:

1. How do teachers describe their teaching experience in multigrade classes?
2. What are the positive aspects of teaching in multigrade classes?
3. What are the negative aspects of teaching in multigrade classes?
4. What are the difficulties experienced during sound-based sentence teaching during primary reading and writing teaching in primary schools with multigrade classes?

Methodology

The study was carried out based on qualitative research methods. In a qualitative study emphasizing the social construction of reality, it points out that participants may interpret reality differently (Merriam, 1998). In the study, which aims to reveal the current situation, questions such as what, how and why are focused (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2005). The criterion sampling method was used by considering the distinctive characteristics of the individuals who could participate in the research. In criterion sampling, individuals who meet the criterias, form the study group (Canbazoğlu-Bilici, 2019). In criterion sampling, individuals who meet the criterion form the study group (Canbazoğlu-Bilici, 2019). In this study, the criteria were determined as having worked in a school with a multigrade class in previous years and having provided primary reading and writing education in these schools.

In the interview, the semi-structured interview form consists of 15 questions. After receiving the opinions of 2 experts, a pilot interview was conducted. The pilot interview lasted 52 minutes. After the pilot interview, the questions were finalized. The pilot interview was not included in the analyses.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 7 people in line with the criteria determined in the study. The interviews conducted in Zoom were transferred to the computer as a Word file line by line, and then descriptive analysis was carried out. In descriptive analysis, the data is organized to answer the research problem (Aydm, 2019).

In the research, credibility, transferability, reliability and confirmability dimensions will be explained one by one in order to increase trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In order to ensure credibility, pilot interviews were conducted after the developed tools were reviewed by experts. As one of the researchers is a teacher who has taught in multigrade classes for a long time, he/she is well acquainted with the phenomenon. In addition, participant consent was obtained before the interviews. Inter-coder reliability was calculated (Miles & Huberman, 1994) and found to be .87. The findings were compared in detail with previous research. In order to ensure transferability, the contexts and experiences of the participants are explained in detail in the method part. The findings are expressed in as much detail as possible with direct quotations from the participants. To ensure the reliability, all the process and steps are explained in detail.

Findings

The findings of the research are listed below in terms of sub-problems:

1. How do teachers describe their teaching experience in multigrade classes?

In the interviews, the points emphasized by the teachers while explaining the teaching experience in multigrade classrooms can be summarized as follows:

Table 2

Experience of teaching in multigrade classrooms

Differences of the course process from independent classes
Satisfaction with the teaching profession
Increasing the teacher's belonging to the school
Community leadership role
Importance of living in the village

A teacher describes the process of teaching primary reading and writing in multigrade classes as follows:

“Being a 1st grade teacher is enjoyable not only for the multigrade classes, but for all detached classes, even this is the most enjoyable period of the profession. It makes us really happy to be able to see a product in return for something we have given to 1st grade education. Dear teacher, since the whole school belongs to us in the multigrade classes, we become the principal, teacher, servant of the school, whatever comes to your mind. We own the school. For example, our friends don't say ‘We are going to XXXX Primary School’, they say ‘We are going to T3's school’. You know, this is how they talk when they're out there. As we own it, we become a family with the children, there's a nice atmosphere that really isn't in separated classes or crowded schools. I see this happiness in the eyes of the children as well.” (T3, M, 33).

Therefore, T3 states that teaching in multigrade classes and primary teaching reading and writing have difficulties as well as providing satisfaction for the teacher. Another teacher explains the bond that the experience of teaching in multigrade classes creates with the school atmosphere, the mission they undertake and the role of community leadership as follows:

“Children's interest is a little different, which is a source of honor for us. Because children see “us” as role models. In this regard, I pay more attention to my actions, my words, and my work as much as it is possible. We are in constant cooperation with our villagers in this regard. They try to consult something on almost every subject when they have an official job or when they are filling out paperwork or on different subjects, they ask for help or they want to do it together. This is a "source of honor”

for us. In fact, we have better relations, we have sincere exchanges. I am very happy to be in a multigrade class atmosphere or to work in the neighborhood.” (T4, M, 31).

A teacher also mentions that if teachers who teach in multigrade classes live in villages, their contribution to students will increase (T6, M, 37).

“Although there is a great need for attention and support in terms of education, students are left alone. Of course, again, the teacher has a big job to do. If the teacher lives in the village -I think the multigrade class teacher should live in the village- he can take care of the students outside of the classroom. Because in the village, there is not much for the teacher to do.”

2. What are the positive aspects of teaching in multigrade classrooms?

The interviewed teachers mentioned some positive aspects brought by the multigrade class practice. Table 3 summarizes the positive aspects of teaching in multigrade classes:

Table 3

Positive aspects of teaching in multigrade classrooms	
In terms of social and emotional development	Students from different age groups can get to know each other Opportunity to model from peers Learning to cooperate and help each other Taking responsibility for each other's learning
In terms of cognitive development	Peer teaching can be used effectively
The atmosphere of school/classroom	Low number of students

They also mentioned that one of the positive aspects of primary reading and writing teaching in multigrade classes is that it is a system that allows students to learn from each other and that different classes get to know each other (T3, M, 33; T4, M, 31; T6, M, 37). A teacher emphasizes that students take responsibility for each other's learning and this contributes to the development of their sense of responsibility (T1, M, 36). A teacher also emphasizes that students' solidarity and cooperation skills are further developed (T5, F, 29). It is mentioned that peer teaching is used effectively during the cognitive development of students:

“Because there are 4 classes together when you start, the interaction with other children is stronger. The event we call latent learning takes place and older classes help 1st graders” (T3, M, 33).

However, there is also a participant who mentioned that the low number of students in multigrade classes provides benefits in terms of dealing with students one-to-one (T1, M, 36; T4, M, 31).

3. What are the negative aspects of teaching in multigrade classes?

The opinions of the interviewed teachers about the negative aspects of teaching in multigrade classes are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4

Negative Aspects of Teaching in Multigrade Classes	
Time	Having many classes together Solving the problems caused by not having a servant at school: cleaning, maintenance, repair etc. Time including correspondence due to the absence of a secretary Meetings, etc., which must be attended as a

	principal authorized teacher.
Emotional difficulties experienced by teachers	Feeling of inadequacy Remorse
Students start school with insufficient readiness	Their lack of kindergarten education ➤ <i>Difficulties in compliance/discipline with school rules</i> ➤ <i>Underdeveloped finger muscles</i> ➤ <i>Importance of sibling order</i> Parents' interest in education
Social-emotional development	Making fun of the lower classes by the upper classes
Physical facilities	The danger of the stove for 1st Classes Lack of physical space to hang material
Lack of materials	Lack of devices such as smart boards, projectors Lack of educational materials

All of the teachers stated that one of the most important disadvantages of teaching in multigrade classes is the time problem. The fact that all classes continue their educational activities together causes the attention of the classes to be more easily distracted, and these classes provide less benefit. Considering that students' attention can be distracted more quickly especially in 1st grade, this situation indicates a negativity regarding the lesson atmosphere (T4, M, 31; T6, M, 37). Similarly, questions from students in other classes during the lesson can cause both attention deficit and division of the lesson (T4, M, 31; T6, M, 37). From time to time, this confusion can continue as follows:

“There are 14 students in the class, but you say something to one, and the other student takes it. For example, one day I wrote a problem for the 4th graders. The second grade student who is a little smart, wrote it and solved it. He brought it and said, 'Teacher, I solved this'. Such incidents also happen” (T1, M, 36).

In multigrade classes, not only the time allocated to primary reading and writing, but also the difficulties of raising educational programs at all grade levels in a given time are mentioned:

“...the biggest problem is the lack of time, that is, the number of students is not high, but after all, when you continue as 'class with homework', we have a time problem with 1st grades compared to a normal detached classroom.” (T4, M, 31)

However, this problem should not be thought of as a simple problem arising from the fact that many classes receive education and training together. In addition to these, the fact that teachers have duties and responsibilities in matters not directly related to education, such as the administrative affairs of the school, cleaning and repairing the school, makes time management difficult for teachers (T3, M, 33; T4, M, 31). A teacher describes the difficulties of running formal school processes and teaching in multigrade classes as follows:

‘They call and say there is a meeting. They are constantly calling for a meeting. In such cases, you close the school. In my opinion, there should be an officer to carry out the official affairs of the multigrade classes in the national education directorate’ (T1, M, 36).

A teacher points out that especially the number of students in the class is determinant in time-related problems. On the other hand, two teachers mention that the difficulties and time constraints experienced due to the fact that 4 classes are together cause the teacher to not be able to do what they want over time, not being able to complete the program, and to feel inadequate

(T5, F, 29; T6, M, 37). Another teacher explains the psychological effects of this situation on him as follows:

"For them, I feel unwillingly uncomfortable with my conscience; they really do not receive education on equal terms with other children"(T1, M, 36)

One of the teachers mentions that she designed additional learning opportunities in all opportunities such as after school, during class breaks in order to balance this unequal time, (T2, F, 33). A significant part of the teachers mentioned the factors related to the fact that the students were not ready for education because they did not receive preschool education before (T1, M, 36; T3, M, 33; T4, M, 31; T6, M, 37). Another teacher mentioned that not taking kindergarten education is an important disadvantage, and that those who have older siblings have the chance to observe them, so they can get through this process more easily (T1, M, 36). The limited readiness of the students prolongs the adaptation period in the first year. The processes such as activities related to developing hand muscles in the first month and compliance with school rules take longer than other classes. This situation should be considered together with the time allocated for primary reading and writing teaching in first graders (T6, M, 37).

Another teacher points out that the support of parents is important in the process and this situation differs depending on whether the students have an obligation to participate in agricultural production. He states that in schools where students do not participate heavily in agricultural production, parents follow the education processes more supportively (T4, M, 31). One of the teacher states that parents are generally uninterested and have limited opportunities (T6, M, 37). Another teacher points out that the effort of the parents is extremely important in these groups, especially because of the problems related to training the curriculum. In addition, they mention that the expectation of the parents about the contribution of the students to the agricultural production affects the education-related processes:

"I live in a village that mostly does animal husbandry, for example, the biggest problem I have here is that children help their families unwillingly. I was very surprised at first. First year students can take 8-10 cows and take them to the herd. Parents are also a bit involved in this dimension. They think that the children can help us so that reading and writing education can be done later. We see the biggest difficulty here because we cannot get parent support" (T1, M, 36).

The same teacher expresses the difficulty of achieving achievements during teaching in multigrade classes, with the limited support of parents during the pandemic period:

"When we meet with the first grade teachers working in the detached classroom at the city center, there is an incredible interest from their parents. The parents of the students support them. For example, during this pandemic, we have been incredibly, very badly affected. The lack of internet in the villages and the limited availability of such opportunities limited us a little more. When we look at the friends at the center, they say that they attend parent-supported classes via Zoom. They are somehow making progress by sending homework to parents on Whatsapp. But our chance is a little less" (T1, M, 36).

In terms of social-emotional development, he mentions that sometimes the older classes make fun of the mistakes of the younger classes, making it difficult for the younger classes. (T1, M, 36).

"Negatively, I can say the following; for example when all classes are together, children sometimes hesitate. Maybe classes with their own peers provide a more comfortable atmosphere for children. But they cannot move freely here because they are younger. When they make mistakes, misread, other classes laugh. This

undermines the child's self-confidence. This was the biggest disadvantage I saw at first. And this disappears when we maintain classroom discipline.”

All of the teachers emphasize the shortcomings of the physical environment:

“The physical environment is quite inadequate compared to other detached classes; it is insufficient in all multigrade classes. Since it is a village school, the classroom has a stove and there is no smart board. There is not enough material support. When I first started to work at this school, there was a chalk board. But with our own efforts and some supports, we found a projector and a white board. We do something with our own efforts, we try to find materials. Apart from these, I use photocopies, but multigrade classes are incredibly lacking compared to separate classes in this regard.” (T3, M, 33)

Many of the teachers also mention the physical facilities of the school, among the negative aspects of teaching in multigrade classes (T1, M, 36; T3, M, 33; T4, M, 31; T6, M, 37). Another teacher mentions the dangers of the stove for first grade students. He refers to the problems experienced in hanging the material on the wall due to the inadequacy of the physical space (T4, M, 31). Regarding the lack of materials in the school, teachers state that they try to overcome these needs with their own efforts.

“The materials are insufficient. For example, the first school I worked was closed for a long time and was opened later. The school was in ruins when I first went. We met with the villagers and the headman. We found several helpful friends. We found maps and 1st grade materials. We visited the stationery stores and tried to find materials. There is a serious lack of material, this is a fact. But it is not a serious problem for those who want to do this job. It takes extra effort, but it's not insurmountable for someone who wants to work in that village.” (S1, M, 36)

Another teacher mentions that he provides projectors and computers to the school with his own possibilities (T6, M, 37). The lack of materials in the school (no smart board, etc.) limits the activities related to letter recognition. They mention that in schools with smart boards, faster and permanent learning can be achieved with stimulating materials such as showing spellings and cartoons (T7, M, 39).

4. What are the difficulties experienced during sound-based sentence teaching during primary reading and writing teaching in primary schools with multigrade classes?

The opinions of the teachers about the difficulties experienced during sound-based sentence teaching in multigrade classes are summarized in Table 5.

Table 5
Difficulties experienced during sound-based sentence teaching in multigrade classes

Difficulties	The order of the letters Regions spoken with dialect Voice recognition activities distract other classes
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Some of the teachers mentioned that they changed the order of the letters during the sound-based sentence teaching:

“It was changed many times that I remember. There were times when I made changes from time to time. Let me tell you, after I gave a few consonants, I continued to give all the vowels. Or, when the sounds that are sometimes hard to say are at the beginning, I put them last in the list given to us. I started with the sounds that are easier to say. For example, the 'k' sound is at the beginning, but it is a little difficult to say, or there were times when I took it to the beginning because the 's' sound is easier.” (T3, M, 33).

The other three teachers state that they follow the order published by the Ministry (T1, M, 36; T4, M, 31; T5, F, 29). A teacher mentions that he tries to follow the program but sometimes he changes the sound order. He mentions that although there is no change in putting a sound at the end to the forefront, there are changes among the sounds in the same group depending on the ease of saying or the difficulty in comprehending a sound (T6, M, 37). At the same time, he emphasizes that the difficulties experienced during writing are more common in regions where dialect is spoken more (T6, M, 37). Especially, teachers working in dialect-speech regions mention that they spend a lot of effort in this process (T1, M, 36; T4, M, 31). One teacher mentioned that the methods and techniques used in the stage of recognizing the voice (for example, storytelling, drama, singing, etc.) distract other classes (T2, F, 33).

Discussion, Conclusion and Suggestions

Teachers teaching in multigrade classes describe this process as positive in terms of elements such as their teaching professional satisfaction and belonging to the school. In the process of teaching in these schools, the importance of the teacher's role as a community leader and residing in the village is pointed out. Döş and Sağır (2013) also point out that it is a significant disadvantage for teachers not to reside in the place where the multigrade classes are located. Especially in these schools, where the needs of the school can be met through informal communication, it is seen that close and warm relations with the people of the school are established.

Participants in this study cited the following among the positive aspects of teaching in multigrade classrooms; social and emotional development supports students from different age groups to get to know each other, enabling peers to take models, teaching solidarity and helping each other and supporting each other by enabling them to take responsibility for their learning. In addition, it was mentioned that cognitive development is supported through peer teaching and the low number of students in the classroom is an advantage. Çoşkun and Çetinkaya (2018) mention the positive aspects of teaching in multigrade classes, such as helping upper-class students to lower-class students, the possibility of peer teaching, the low number of students in the class, and the acquisition of individual and study responsibilities. Dursun (2006) similarly states that there are some advantages of multigrade classes in terms of interaction, cooperation, cohesion and peer teaching. İzci, Duran, and Taşar (2010) think that teaching in multigrade classes supports students in terms of their social development. It is seen that teaching in multigrade classes is considered as an advantage especially in terms of social and emotional development when the studies are examined.

In this study, firstly, the time problem experienced during teaching in multigrade classes was put forward as a disadvantage. Similarly, the problem of time is addressed in many studies (Bayar, 2009; Çınar, 2004; Çoşkun & Çetinkaya, 2018; Dursun, 2006; Kuzu & Aslan, 2011; Kaya & Taşdemirci, 2005). Bayar (2009), Çoşkun and Çetinkaya (2018) mention in their studies that teachers experience problems such as attention deficit while they are dealing with a classroom. Döş and Sağır (2013) emphasize the time-consuming aspects of office work. Çoşkun and Çetinkaya (2018) refer to points such as students' late understanding of concepts and late acquisition of reading skills in multigrade classes. Secondly, the study also points to some emotional difficulties experienced by teachers when teaching in multigrade classes. Teachers state that they experience feelings such as "feeling of inadequacy" and "remorse" because they cannot provide equal learning compared to independent classes. In their study, Yılmaz and Köksal (2009) state that teachers who teach in multigrade classes cannot see enough support and guidance in the problems they experience. Third, in this study, students' starting school with insufficient readiness emerges with two sub-categories. The first of these is related to the fact

that students have not received kindergarten education. This situation emerges as difficulties in complying with school rules, insufficient development of finger muscles, and even less readiness, especially in families where the student is the first child. On the other hand, it is stated that the school readiness of the students decreases due to the low interest of the parents in education and the expectation of the families to contribute to the production of their children, especially in the regions where agricultural production is done. The readiness of the students (Çoşkun & Çetinkaya, 2018) and the indifference of the parents (Çınar, 2004; Dursun, 2006; Yıldız & Köksal, 2009) stand out among the problems at these schools. Sağ, Savaş, and Sezer (2009) also mention that one of the dimensions of the problems related to teaching in multigrade classes is related to the socio-economic environment. They mention that "lack of opportunities in terms of raising children" and "not being able to attract parents' attention in monitoring students' success and solving school problems" are some of the problems in multigrade classes. Fourth, one of the disadvantages in terms of social and emotional development is that students in the upper grades can make fun of students in the lower grades. Finally, the physical inadequacy of schools is a point emphasized by Döş and Sağır (2013) in their studies. The lack of material (Çınar, 2004; Dursun, 2006; Kazu & Aslan, 2011; Kaya & Taşdemirci, 2005; Yıldız & Köksal, 2009) is associated with the difficulties encountered during teaching in multigrade classes.

Some of the teachers who teach with sound-based sentence method in multigrade classes say that they changed the order of the letters but there are also teachers who follow the order given in the program. Especially in the regions where dialect is spoken, primary reading and writing teaching requires much more effort. While voice recognition activities are performed from time to time in multigrade classes, this situation can cause attention deficit on other students.

This study did not focus specifically on primary reading and writing teaching in multigrade classes. Studies can be conducted to understand how this practice works at other grades or in other learning areas and disciplines. This study focused on teacher opinions. Studies can be carried out to evaluate the situation from the perspectives of students and parents.

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