School Adjustment in the Early Years: Children's Social-Emotional Problems in Different Countries and Applied Solutions

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Abstract

This research examined preschool children's social-emotional problems and school adjustment processes in different countries. Furthermore, this study compared the school adjustment programs and the teachers' solutions in other countries. A qualitative research method and case study design were used. The sample group consisted of 21 preschool teachers from Turkey, Italy, Lithuania, Hungary and Northern Ireland within the scope of the Erasmus+ project "Developing Social and Emotional Skills in Early Childhood" (SESDECE). A semi-structured interview form was used to obtain the research data. According to the data, it was revealed that separation anxiety, attachment disorder and poor communication with peers were the most common problems in the school adjustment process in all countries. It was determined that teachers in Turkey, Hungary, Lithuania and Northern Ireland used different adjustment programs and solutions during the adaptation. In contrast, teachers in Italy did not use a fixed adjustment program but enriched the first week's programs with activities such as meeting-adjustment activities. Teachers in all countries stated that school administrations support the process, but families should be more involved and a unique adjustment program should be applied to families.

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INTRODUCTION

Children interact with their immediate environment through their families since they are born. They leave this secure family environment for the first time when they start school. School is a new environment with new peer groups, teachers and principals for children. The first days of school are not only a process in which children have many new experiences but also a process to adapt to change and participate in society with their new identity (Dockett & Perry, 2002).

Schmerse & Zitzmann (2007) emphasized that the opportunities offered to children in early childhood at school will impact the child's reaching the highest level of potential in the following years. The new status and social-emotional experiences at school may reveal school adjustment problems in some preschool children. Due to most preschool children being separated from their families and alone in a different environment for the first time when they start school, school adjustment problems seen in preschool education mostly. In adapting to school, some children may have difficulties balancing themselves and the new school environment (Hyson, 2008). Children with school adjustment problems may struggle with communication, obeying rules, social relations and self-control (Campbell, 1995). Similarly, behaviors such as crying, separation anxiety, tantrums and school refusal can be seen in children in the first days of school (Dogan, Sabanciogulları & Aydin, 2008). In such unfavorable situations, the child will not be able to cope alone, so that he will expect the support of his family and teacher. Starting school is an adjustment process for the child, the family, and the teacher. Therefore, many factors such as parental attitudes, teacher attitudes, peer relations, the school's physical structure and environmental conditions can affect the adjustment process of children to school (Barger et al., 2019). The child's gender, health, age, development, temperament and behaviors constitute internal factors; on the other hand, relations with family and intimate environment, school environment and cultural differences constitute external factors (McBryde, Ziviani & Cuskelly, 2004; Yoleri, 2014). Cultural values and traditions also affect a child's school life. Since cultural expectations or norms can be effective in matters such as going to school, education, and career, especially children of immigrant families may have problems between their own culture and the culture of the new place they migrated (Birman & Espino, 2007; Tan & Goldberg, 2009). In addition to all these factors, another factor affecting children's adaptation is undoubtedly the pandemic process. Since the Covid-19 pandemic has changed the daily routine of all people, adults and children have had to adapt to new living conditions (Weir, 2020). Similarly, preschool children lived in isolation, away from their social environment and peers for a long time. After such a process, it has become inevitable for children who start school to have social and emotional problems such as being asocial, being selfish, and having digital addiction (Koc, 2022).

Considering the effects of the school adjustment process on the child, this process should be handled professionally. Many countries care about children's school adjustment and readiness, and they work on the school adjustment process at all levels of education. Because early childhood is the first step in preparing children for school before formal education; countries focus more on school adjustment during this period (Grimley & Bennett, 2000).

In recent years, various programs and applications have been used in the USA and other European countries to facilitate preschool children's adaptation process and prevent them from experiencing social-emotional problems. It has been observed that disadvantaged groups, such as those from different cultures and that have low socioeconomic status, are prioritized in the adjustment program (Pinar, 2021). Although the programs of European countries are composed of activities to facilitate adaptation to a different city or culture based on attachment theory (Pinar, 2021), the integration programs used by the USA mainly consist of practices for activities structured with family participation (Little et al., 2016).

In our country, the Ministry of National Education (MEB) has been implementing an adjustment program covering the first week of school to facilitate the adaptation processes of preschool children since the 2006-2007 academic year (MEB, 2022). In addition, since 2016 by the Ministry of National Education, with the financial support of UNICEF, Materials such as the School

Adjustment Program guide, teacher activity book, family activity, and handbook are also published (TEGM, 2019).

Although there are various activities to support the children in the transition and adaptation, there may be deficiencies in the school adjustment in our country and other countries. When these deficiencies are examined in detail, some are determined to be in school adjustment. These are using a practical and child-friendly school adjustment program, regularly involving the family, providing a moderate transition to bond with the child, and the teacher's ability to effectively solve crisis moments. Other studies in the literature examine teachers' opinions on the school adjustment of preschool children (Ferreira et al., 2021; Basaran, Gokmen & Akdag, 2014; Pekdogan, 2017; Ustundag & Turkoglu, 2017). However, preschool children's school adaptation processes must be examined in comparison to teachers' views in different countries. Therefore, this research is a critical study to meet this need in the literature. In addition, this research may contribute to the teachers being more prepared for possible social-emotional problems in the new education period and obtaining information about practices in the school adaptation process of other countries.

This research examines the social-emotional problems of preschool children in school adjustment, the school adjustment programs and teacher solutions in Turkey, Italy, Lithuania, Hungary and Northern Ireland. As a result, the research sought answers to the following questions:

1- What are children's social-emotional problems in school adjustment?

2- What kind of solution(s) are used for children's social-emotional problems during adapting to school?

3- What is the role of the school administration in school adjustment?

4- What are the elements (features) of an effective school adjustment program in preschool education?

METHODS

This section contains information about the research model, participants, data collection tools, data collection procedure and data analysis.

Research Model

The research is a descriptive study designed with qualitative research techniques. In this study, case study design which is one of the qualitative research models was applied. Case studies are studies in which a current phenomenon is studied within its real-life framework and the results of a specific situation are revealed (Yildirim & Simsek, 2008). In this direction, this study tried to determine the situation regarding the school adaptation processes of preschool children in different countries.

Participants

In the study, maximum variation sampling, one of the purposive sampling methods, was used to examine the differences or similarities between the school adaptation processes of preschool children in different countries. The purpose of maximum variation sampling is to discover similarities and differences between situations with variation (Yildirim & Simsek, 2008). The study group of the research consisted of 21 preschool teachers from Turkey, Italy, Lithuania, Hungary and Northern Ireland. Participants were selected from schools in their countries by Turkey, the project coordinator country, within the scope of the European Union project (Erasmus+ KA201) titled "Developing Social and Emotional Skills in Early Childhood" (SESDECE).

Bursa Yildirim District Directorate of National Education is the project's coordinator, which covers December 2019-June 2023 and comprises five countries covered in this study (Turkey, Italy, Lithuania, Hungary and Northern Ireland). In addition, Bursa Uludag University is a partner and researcher in the project. The criteris used to determine the teachers participating in the project are being preschool teachers in their country and knowing at least an intermediate level of English. The teachers having one-to-one interaction with preschool children in different countries would effectively reveal the similarities and differences between the countries in school adjustment.

The study group in the research is a total of 21 teachers, seven from Turkey, five from Lithuania, three from Hungary, three from Italy and three from Northern Ireland. All schools that joined the project have female teachers in their preschool departments. Therefore, all of the teachers in the study group were women. The participants were 28-42 years old and all had bachelor's degrees. The teaching experience of the participants ranged from 7-20 years. All of the teachers in the study worked in public schools. While schools in Turkey and Lithuania were kindergartens, schools in Hungary, Italy and Northern Ireland also included primary schools. The teachers interviewed worked with children aged 48-72 months in the academic year in which the research was conducted.

Data Collection Tools

The case study is included in qualitative research and general observation, interview, focus group and document analysis techniques are used to collect data (Creswell, 2007). The study used semi-structured interviews and focused group interview techniques as data collection tools in this direction. A semi-structured interview form was prepared to identify the solutions used by preschool teachers for school adaptation processes in their own countries. In order to ensure the validity of the prepared interview form, the opinions of a child development expert and an English education expert were taken, and some statements were corrected. Afterwards, the interview questions form was corrected, due to the pre-practice study conducted with three preschool teachers who were not included in the research. Research data were collected from the teachers using a semi-structured interview form of four open-ended questions.

Data Collection Procedure

Since the research data would be collected within the project's scope, application was made for permission from the ethics committee before the project started. After the committee's approval, interviews were held with the teachers. The research data were collected with a semi-structured interview form in January 2022. Interviews were held with 21 preschool teachers selected from five different countries as participants in the project. While collecting the data, interviews were held in English, the common language, and some participants (3 people) stated that they would express themselves more comfortably in their native languages. Team coordinators who were more fluent in English in their country's team were also included in the interviews so that they would be able to express themselves while meeting with these participants. Individual interviews with the participants took approximately 20-25 minutes. These interviews were audio recorded with the permission of the participants. Besides the individual interviews, an online meeting was held with all the participants, and the data were collected by conducting a focus group meeting. As the participants interacted with each other in the focus group interview, they could add to their previous opinions in the individual interviews (Yildirim & Simsek, 2008). Thus, the research used semi-structured and focus group interviews to obtain high-quality data and increase the data's validity.

Data Analysis

Firstly, the interviews were transcribed and organized for data analysis. An inductive type of content analysis was applied to the data. In inductive analysis, concepts and the relationships between these concepts are revealed from the data through coding (Yildirim & Simsek, 2018). Each interview form was coded as Turkey: TR, Lithuania: LI, Italy: IT and Northern Ireland: IR, Hungary: HU according to countries, and each participant was given TR1, TR2…Etc. The codes were given

according to their country. The final version of the code, categories and themes was created by consulting an expert in qualitative research.

Direct quotations from the interview were included for the research's external validity (transferability). In addition, the process was explained in detail. In order to increase the internal validity (credibility) of the research, the interview form was developed by examining the relevant literature and its consistency with the data of similar studies. In order to increase the external reliability (confirmability) of the research, care was taken not to make subjective judgments and the raw data and coding obtained were kept. In order to ensure the internal reliability (consistency) of the research, five randomly selected interview forms were recorded by an independent expert other than the researcher and the coding was compared. When the results were examined according to the difference and consensus formula of Miles and Huberman (2015), it was seen that the reliability level was 82%. A reliability level higher than 70% indicates that the assessment is reliable.

FINDINGS

This section presented the themes and categories obtained from the data in tables. These were explained with frequency (f) values and quotations were included. The findings were formed according to the questions asked about adaptation to school. In this context, the question "What are children's social-emotional problems in school adjustment?" was asked to preschool teachers in different countries in the research. The answers given to the question are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Frequency Distribution of Themes, Categories and Codes Related to School Adjustment Problems of Preschool Children

Themes	Categories	TR(f)	LI(f)	HU(f)	IR(f)	IT(f)	Total(f)
Social Problems	Not communicating with peers	4	2	2	2	2	12
	Not participating in plays or activities	4	2	1	1	2	10
	Lack of social skills such as cooperation, sharing	2	3	2	1	2	10
	Disobeying school rules	2	1	1	1	2	7
Emotional Problems	Separation anxiety	5	4	2	2	1	14
	Secure attachment	4	3	1	2	1	11
	Lack of managing emotions	3	3	2	1		9
	Low self-esteem	3	2	1	2		8
	Introversion	2	1	1	1	2	7
	Crying crises	3	2			1	6
	Anger out of control	2	2			2	6
	School fear	1	1			1	3
Habit and Education Problems	Sleeping and eating problems	2	2			1	5
	Difficulty coming to school regularly and willingly	1	2	1		1	5
	Lack of self-care skills	3				1	4
Academic Problems	Failure in cognitive activities	2	1	2		1	5
	Lack of attention	1				1	2

TR: Turkey, LI: Lithuania, HU: Hungary, IR: Northern Ireland, IT: Italy

According to Table 1, it was revealed that social problems, especially the problem of "Not communicating with peers" takes first place in school adjustment of children in all countries (f:12). Some teachers' views on the problem of not communicating with peers are given below:

HU-2. "*Children with adjustment problems cannot build deep relationships with their classmates. As such, they cannot adapt to the new environment and participate in the play. They are more disappointed than other children.*"

IT-1. "*These children avoid communication and engagement with their peers and adults. They are also very reluctant to do things together with other children and obey the rules.*"

When Table 1 was examined, it was revealed that "separation anxiety" was the most common emotional problem faced by all countries in the school adjustment process (f:14). This emotional problem was followed by secure attachment (f:11) and a lack of emotion management (f:9).

Considering the data, children's separation anxiety in all countries, mainly due to the inability to establish a secure attachment with the mother, adversely affects the school adjustment process. Some teachers' views on separation anxiety are given below:

TR-6. *"Some kids are more sensitive. Especially if the mother has raised her child by being overly dependent on herself, the child experiences separation anxiety at a high level. When the child comes to school for the first time, he does not want to relinquish his mother's hand and resists entering the classroom alone."*

LI-5. "*The child does not feel safe because she enters an unfamiliar environment. When she came to school, she separated from his family very difficult. She is afraid that her mother will not come to get her back.* "

IR-1. "*If a child has an attachment problem, the child's school adaptation process is difficult. If the child has an anxious family, it affects the child. Uncertainties at home, not talking openly and honestly about school before school starts trigger the child's separation anxiety.*"

The second research question was, "What kind of solution(s) are used for children's social-emotional problems during adapting to school?" The answers given to the question are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Frequency Distribution of Themes, Categories and Codes of the Solutions to Children's Social-Emotional Problems

Themes	Categories	TR(f)	LI(f)	HU(f)	IR(f)	IT(f)	Total(f)
Introduction and giving information	Face-to-face meetings with parents	7	5	3	3	3	21
	Playing introduction game with children	7	4	1	2		14
	Personal files introducing the student	5		3	3		11
	Informative mini brochures and booklets	5		3			8
	Implementing family meet-up activities	1			2		3
	Short video in which the teacher introduces himself and his class				2		2
Interesting activities	Class activities such as music, drama, yoga	4	4	1	2	3	14
	Emotion awareness activities	3	5	2	2		12
	Decorating the classroom and preparing small gifts	4			2	3	9
	Out-of-school activities such as camping that the family and the child will attend together	2		3	3	1	9
	Start the day with circle time activities		5	3	1		9
	School promotion days where the family and the child will attend together	1			3		4
	Game support configured with technology					3	3
	Caring for pets and plants in the classroom		2	1			3
Adjustment program	Weekly school adjustment program	7					7
	Kimochis		5				5
	Safe steps to school program			3			3
	Seesaw digital school platform				3		3
Mutual trust and cooperation	Sharing information with parents regularly	4	4	1	3	1	13
	Gradually increasing time spent at school	4			3		7
	Individual meetings with the child and family		4		2		6
	Responsibility agreement between school and family					3	3

TR: Turkey, LI: Lithuania, HU: Hungary, IR: Northern Ireland, IT: Italy

When Table 2 was examined, the solutions presented by preschool teachers in Turkey, Lithuania, Hungary, Italy and Northern Ireland in school adaptation were observed. According to the opinions of the teachers, the most common practices were respectively, parent meetings (f:21), meeting games (f:14), game-based activities such as music and drama (f:14), regular information sharing with parents (f:13) and emotional awareness activities. (f:12). Apart from these, it was also revealed that some countries used special harmonization programs and solutions.

The data obtained were collected in four themes. According to the first theme, "Introduction and giving information", all countries organize a parent meeting to inform parents when school starts. The frequency of these meetings varies from country to country. Similarly, all countries play introduction plays in the first week of school. According to the interviews with the teachers, different ways are used for meeting and informing. While Turkey and Hungary prefer to reach parents by distributing brochures and booklets to inform parents, teachers in Northern Ireland send a video that briefly introduces themselves and the class to their students before school starts. Parents' questions about the school are answered by communicating with families through a digital platform called Seesaw, which includes the entire school. The view of a teacher from Northern Ireland regarding this is as follows:

IR-2. "*Children come to school with many questions in their minds. Children especially wonder about their teacher. Our teacher shoots a short video about herself and her class and sends it to families. After watching this video, most children come to school more eager on the first day. Also, before the school starts, we create class groups and communicate with the families on the Seesaw school communication platform.*"

When the studies conducted between countries on knowing and informing students were examined, it was seen that all countries received students' family and personal information during registration. However, the schools in Hungary filled out a file named "Who Am I?". This file detailed the child's personality and developmental characteristics, family information, and each child's interests. In Northern Ireland, a booklet called "Everything About Me" was filled out for each child, which provides information about the child in many different aspects, such as the favorite toy, name of the pet, and fears.

The second theme is "Interesting activities". According to this theme, almost all countries use class activities such as music, drama and out-of-school activities. Also, schools in Turkey, Italy and Northern Ireland decorate their classrooms, give small gifts Etc. They stated that they made the school more attractive in the first week by preparing it according to the data obtained from the interviews, Italy organizes an introductory party in the first week of school. In contrast, Northern Ireland organizes an "open school day" before the school opens and invites parents and children to examine the school and classes.

Among the countries, Lithuania, Hungary and Northern Ireland attach importance to starting the daily activities in the school adjustment process. They said they made activities together, such as chatting and dancing, so children could express their feelings and thoughts. The views of a teacher from Lithuania about the day-start activities are as follows:

LI-3."*We have a ritual every morning with the children. When we come to school in the morning, we brew tea together, then everyone takes their tea and sits in our corner in the classroom. While sipping our tea, we talk about what they did at home last night, how they feel today and what we will do during the day.*"

Considering the "Adaptation programs" theme in the table, it was revealed that Turkey implements the integration week program prepared by the Ministry of National Education, and Hungary implements the "Safe steps to schools" program. Furthermore, Lithuania

implements the "Kimochis" program and Northern Ireland uses the "Seesaw" platform. It was observed that Italy needs a school adjustment program that it follows regularly. Some of the teachers' views on integration programs are as follows:

HU-3. "*We use the "Safe steps to schools" program for children starting in kindergarten. The duration of the program is one month. In this program, the day begins by doing morning gymnastics with music. Then we make circle time activities. In circle time, we discuss topics that attract children's attention. Therefore, they can express their feelings. Sometimes we read stories and do drama activities. In other activities we do during the day, we apply them in a way that supports the child's communication skills.*"

IR-3. "*For example, let's say a child had difficulty leaving his mother in the morning. As the child misses and wants to see his mother, at the same time, the mother is preoccupied with her child. We have a digital school platform called Seesaw that only school parents and teachers can access. The teacher uploads a photo of a happy memory of the child on that day. The mother can see, write comments, and the teacher can read the mother's comments to her child. It is a comforting event for both mother and child.*"

LI-1. "*Plays are a great tool to bring children together and help them to adapt. We generally use plays involving all children in the adaptation process. We also use the Kimochis program with the help of our school psychologist. The Kimochis program is designed to help children recognize and manage their emotions and build positive relationships. The activities in this program, which has toys for emotions, really contribute to children's social-emotional skills when applied regularly.*"

TR-1. "*We organize the activities during the adaptation week according to the age group, level of readiness, interests and needs of the children. We include introduction plays, music and drama activities in the program. Thus, we help them have fun and relax. We also include emotion awareness activities in the first weeks.*"

Concerning the "mutual trust and cooperation" theme in the table, it was seen that regular information sharing with parents was tried to be made in all countries, and individual interviews in Lithuania and Ireland supported this situation. In Turkey and Northern Ireland, they were gradually increasing time spent at schools for children who have difficulties adapting. In order to increase mutual trust in the school, schools in Italy signed a joint responsibility agreement between the family and the school, as a different practice. The opinion of one of the teachers in Italy on this issue is as follows:

IT-3. "*After the child's registration at the beginning of the school, a joint responsibility agreement is made between school-family-child. In this agreement, the responsibilities of the school, family and child are written. Knowing their responsibilities on both sides teaches mutual trust and respect for each other's roles.*"

Regarding the data in Table 2, the comparison of the adjustment programs and their contents used by the teachers of the five countries (Turkey, Italy, Lithuania, Hungary and Northern Ireland) examined in the research is given in Figure 1.
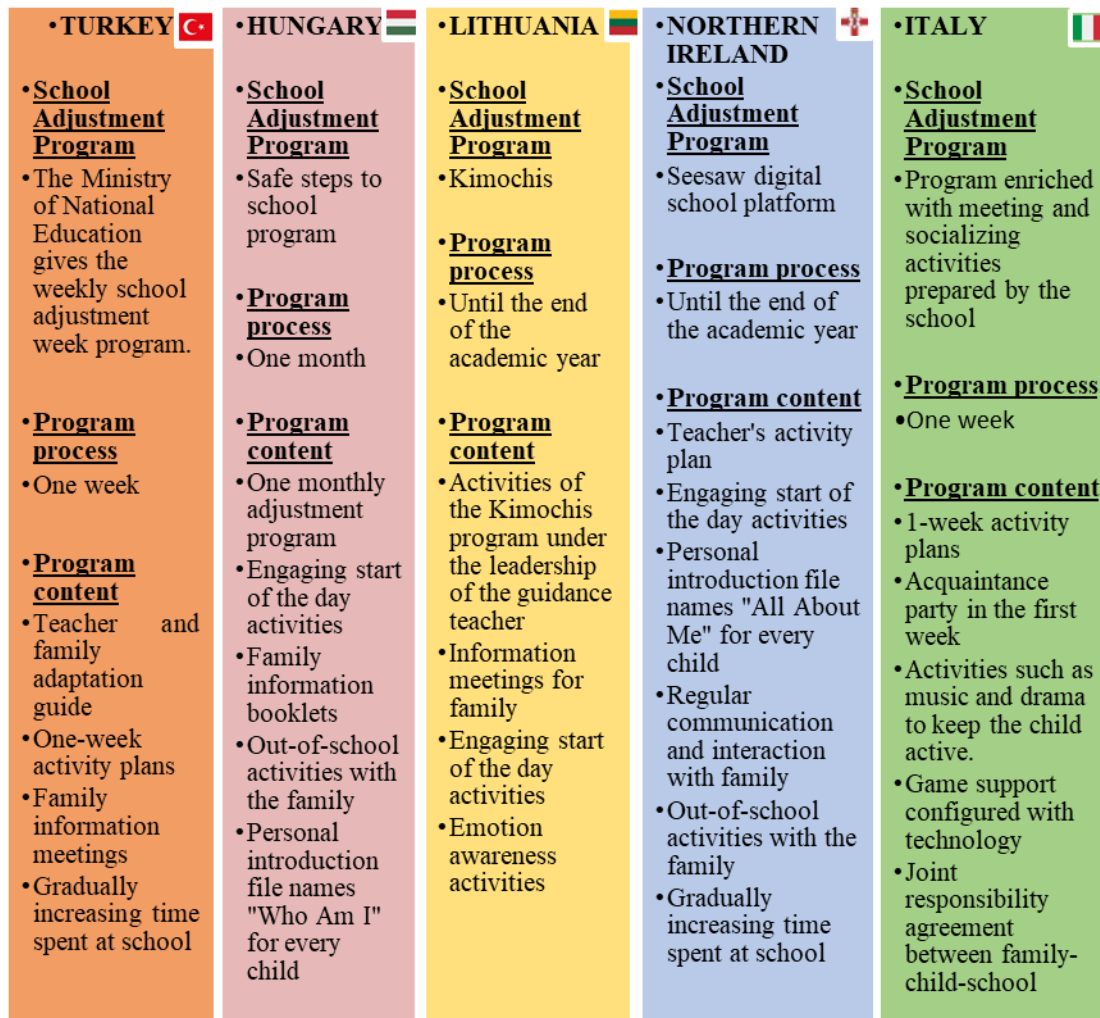
•TURKEY 🇹🇷	•HUNGARY 🇭🇺	•LITHUANIA 🇱🇹	•NORTHERN IRELAND	•ITALY 🇮🇹
•**School Adjustment Program**	•**School Adjustment Program**	•**School Adjustment Program**	•**School Adjustment Program**	•**School Adjustment Program**
•The Ministry of National Education gives the weekly school adjustment week program.	•Safe steps to school program	•Kimochis	•Seesaw digital school platform	•Program enriched with meeting and socializing activities prepared by the school
•**Program process**	•**Program process**	•**Program process**	•**Program process**	•**Program process**
•One week	•One month	•Until the end of the academic year	•Until the end of the academic year	•One week
•**Program content**	•**Program content**	•**Program content**	•**Program content**	•**Program content**
•Teacher and family adaptation guide	•One monthly adjustment program	•Activities of the Kimochis program under the leadership of the guidance teacher	•Teacher's activity plan	•1-week activity plans
•One-week activity plans	•Engaging start of the day activities	•Information meetings for family	•Engaging start of the day activities	•Acquaintance party in the first week
•Family information meetings	•Family information booklets	•Engaging start of the day activities	•Personal introduction file names "All About Me" for every child	•Activities such as music and drama to keep the child active.
•Gradually increasing time spent at school	•Out-of-school activities with the family	•Emotion awareness activities	•Regular communication and interaction with family	•Game support configured with technology
	•Personal introduction file names "Who Am I" for every child		•Out-of-school activities with the family	•Joint responsibility agreement between family-child-school
			•Gradually increasing time spent at school	

Figure 1. Comparison of preschool school adjustment processes in Turkey, Italy, Lithuania, Hungary and Northern Ireland

According to Figure 1, although the programs used between countries are different, there are similarities in activities with children and cooperation with families.

The third research question was, " What is the role of the school administration in school adjustment?" The answers given to the question are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Frequency Distribution of Themes, Categories and Codes Regarding the Role of School Management in School Adjustment

Themes	Categories	TR(f)	LI(f)	HU(f)	IR(f)	IT(f)	Total(f)
Staff Support	Support the school guidance service	7	5	3	3	3	21
	Support the classroom assistant	1	5	3	3	1	13
School's Physical Conditions	Arrangement of the physical structure of the school and the class quotas for the new term	6	5	3	3	3	20
	Material supply	5	5	3	3	3	19
	Updating the school's technological equipment					3	3
Educational Studies	Parenting educations	5	5	3	3	1	17
	Receive academic support from local institutions		5		3		8
	Teacher educations	4		1			5
	Personnel educations			3			3

		TR	LI	HU	IR	IT	Total
Orientation Studies	Organizing parent meetings	6	4	3	3	3	19
	Organizing and auditing the adjustment program	3	4	3	3		13
	School promotional activities (brochure, social media, Etc.)	7		3			10
	Complete completion of the child's identification forms			3	3		6
	Planning of acquaintance and adaptation activities for children	3				1	4
Individual Support	Active communication between principal-teacher	4	2	3	2	2	13
	Involving the teacher in decisions about the school	1	2	2	1		6
	Principal's trust in the teacher	2			1		3

TR: Turkey, LI: Lithuania, HU: Hungary, IR: Northern Ireland, IT: Italy

When Table 3 is examined, the solutions applied by the school administrations in Turkey, Lithuania, Hungary, Italy and Northern Ireland during the adaptation process to the school are found. According to the data obtained, the school administrations of the countries generally support the school guidance service (f:21), improvement of the physical conditions (f:20), material supply for the activities (f:19), parent meetings (f:19) and educational activities for the parents (f:17). Notably, the teachers in Hungary benefited the most from the support of the school administration and were more satisfied than in other countries. The opinion of a teacher in Hungary regarding the role of school administration is as follows:

HU-1. *Our school administration works with and supports us in developing the kindergarten adjustment program. Our school principal attends parent meetings every year. Since our school administration prefers to work with teachers and parents, he organizes joint special activities and parent education meetings yearly."*

According to the data, in addition to the support of the school guidance service, schools in Lithuania and Northern Ireland also receive academic support from local institutions. Although it was stated that training for teachers and families is generally organized in all countries, personnel training is planned only in Lithuania. The opinion of a teacher in Lithuania is as follows:

LI-4. *"Unfortunately, some families, especially the parents of students who need special education, may not be open to communication and cooperation. We get help from outside psychologists and our school guidance service in such cases. The school administration cooperates with the Kaunas Pedagogical Psychology Service. From this institution, our parents can also receive advice directly about their children's problems during the adaptation process to school."*

The fourth research question was, " What are the elements (features) of an effective school adjustment program in preschool education?" The answers given to the question are shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Frequency Distribution of Themes, Categories and Codes of Teachers' Views on effective school adjustment program

Themes	Categories	TR (f)	LI (f)	HU (f)	IR (f)	IT (f)	Total (f)
Family involvement	Parents' involvement in the adjustment process	6	5	1	3	3	18
	A special adjustment program for parents	3	5		1	3	12
Keeping the child active	Game-based activities	2	2	2	1	1	8
	Drama, music and sporting events	3				3	6
	Nature and outdoor activities	2				3	5
	Introduction and trust activities	4	1				5
	Engaging in joint activities with the immediate environment					3	3
Sensitivity to Individual Differences	Gradually accustoming children to school	3		1	2		6
	Individual adjustment programs for children with special education needs			2			2

TR: Turkey, LI: Lithuania, HU: Hungary, IR: Northern Ireland, IT: Italy

When Table 4 was examined, it was noted that preschool teachers in Turkey, Lithuania, Hungary, Italy and Northern Ireland mentioned a qualified school adjustment program should include activities that will keep the child active. Also, it should include individual differences and family participation. According to the data, teachers mainly focused on including parents in the adaptation process (f:18) to increase the program's quality.

When the "sensitivity to individual differences" theme in the table was examined, preschool teachers in Hungary expressed the opinion of preparing an individual school adaptation program for children who need special education. In addition, some teachers in Turkey and Northern Ireland suggested an adjustment program in which school time is gradually increased for children with adjustment problems.

When the data in the table was examined, the "family participation" theme was especially emphasized in all countries. In the interviews, almost all teachers stated parents' importance in adapting to school. Although countries tried to include parents in their current programs, especially Lithuanian teachers emphasized that a particular school adjustment program should be implemented for parents for the school adjustment program to be effective. Some of the teachers' views on the necessity of an adjustment program for parents are as follows:

LI-2. *"Although our school administration made individual meetings with parents and children at the beginning of the school during the school adjustment process, parents are not very involved. Teachers should apply a separate program to parents on issues such as cooperating with their children and managing emotions."*

TR-4. *"We cannot think about the adaptation process to school without families. Especially families who meet at school for the first time, like their children, need an adaptation program too. For this, teachers can plan a meeting with the families on the first day, and a program with sample activities in the children's education program can be prepared. Even a one-hour activity plan can be applied to families. For example, the program's name may be my mom and dad are kids."*

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Various competencies, especially social-emotional skills, must be acquired to successfully experience the adaptation process to school in the preschool period (Zhang et al., 2018). Thanks to an effective school adaptation process in the preschool period, children gain many positive behaviors and necessary competencies and improve their academic success (Sylvester, 2007). Many studies have revealed that positive first experiences with school in the preschool period have a positive effect on the progress of the child and their future life success. On the other hand, children with school adjustment

problems may experience some psychological problems in the future (Dockett & Perry, 2016; Walker, 2009; Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000). Based on the opinions of teachers working in preschool institutions in Turkey, Italy, Lithuania, Hungary and Northern Ireland, the social-emotional problems experienced by preschool children in these countries during their adaptation to school and applied solutions were examined. According to the results of the research, it was revealed that the most common social-emotional problems in the school adjustment process in preschool children in all countries were separation anxiety, secure attachment and not communicating with peers.

As a consequence of the research results, is was observed that the nature of the emotional bond with the mother, mother-child communication and the mother's attitude was lying at the root of the separation anxiety problem in children. According to Jones, Lebowitz, Marin, and Stark (2015), the cause of separation anxiety in children is the thought of losing the mother. According to Jones, Lebowitz, Marin, and Stark (2015), the cause of separation anxiety in children is the thought of losing the mother. The bond that the child will establish with the mother will be effective in all the relations that the child will establish in his later years. Therefore, it could be argued that the adaptation process of the securely attached child would be more comfortable when he/she starts preschool. In the literature, many studies show that the bond established by the mother with the child and the parental attitude shown toward the child affect the child's adaptation to school (Connel & Prinz, 2002; Mo & Singh, 2008; Ozen-Altinkaynak & Akman, 2019; Sumer, Sayil & Berument, 2016).

In order to ensure adaptation to school, the child needs to acquire various social, emotional and self-regulation skills. Studies aimed at acquiring these skills in the adaptation process to school can contribute to children's adaptation to school in a shorter time and their love for school (Sepetci-Saribas & Gultekin-Akduman, 2019). When the applied solutions by the countries are examined, the general solutions are holding parent meetings, including activities such as icebreaker games, music, drama, yoga, doing emotional awareness studies and regular information sharing with parents are used. This situation shows that teachers in all countries prefer solutions that keep children and parents active in school adaptation.

According to the findings, it was found that teachers in Turkey enriched the adjustment program sent by the Ministry of National Education with activities such as meeting games and vigorous exercises. Besides, the "Kimochis" program was applied in the school adjustment process in Lithuania, the "Safe steps to schools" program was applied in Hungary and the "Safe steps to schools" program was applied in Northern Ireland. It was revealed that they used the school communication network called "Seesaw." It was revealed that Italy used a program prepared by each school itself, which included exciting activities such as decorating the classroom, music and dance. When the programs were examined, while Northern Ireland focused on informing the family and monitoring the child's adaptation process, Lithuania focused on recognizing, regulating and trusting their emotions. In addition, Hungary preferred a gradual program, and Turkey and Italy focused on exciting activities. Although there were intercultural differences, practices were carried out in a way that placed the child at the center of the adjustment programs implemented in all countries.

As a result of the data obtained, it was seen that the school administration supported the teachers in the adaptation process through the support of the guidance service, the arrangement of the physical environment, the organization of parent meetings and orientation studies. In addition, teachers suggested that parents should involve in the process for a qualified school adjustment program. Even a separate adjustment program should be applied to parents. This finding revealed the importance of including the family in the school adjustment process. Many studies have proved the effects of parents' attitudes on their children's school adjustment (Arabacioglu & Bagceli-Kahraman, 2021; Bulut, 2019; Barger et al., 2019; Pelletier & Brent, 2002; Ogelman et al., 2013). While parents enable their children to acquire the basic life skills expected by the school, it also facilitates or makes it difficult for the child to adapt to school in terms of their personality traits, school experiences, and expectations from their children and school (Magdalena, 2013). Polat & Atıs Akyol (2019) also stated that situations such as wrong parental attitude, excessive dependence on the mother, being single-parent and frightening the child with school might negatively affect children's adaptation to school. Accordingly,

for the school adjustment process to be positive, it was revealed that a school adjustment program should be prepared and implemented for families like children's adjustment programs. This result showed that all countries in the study lacked an integration program in which both the child and the family would be active simultaneously.

Addressing the school adaptation process from an international perspective is essential for children's school readiness. In line with this research, it could be suggested that all countries enrich their current programs with good practices or prepare a new international school adjustment program. In addition, a risk analysis could be made on the social-emotional problems obtained from the countries' children within the research's scope. Another suggestion could be that experts create a digital platform where solutions for these problems, experiences and examples of activities are included and used jointly in many countries.

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