

*Full Length Research Paper*

# The difficulties experienced by teacher candidates in their own process of elementary reading and writing education, and their current solution

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The purpose of the current research is to identify the difficulties which teacher candidates studying elementary school teaching experienced in their past elementary reading and writing education and which cannot be forgotten, and to find out their solution for eliminating these difficulties. The study group of the research is composed of 118 teacher candidates selected by criterion sampling as a type of purposive sampling. Qualitative method was used for the research. Semi-structured interviews were made with the teacher candidates which involved three questions about the difficulties they experienced in the process of elementary reading and writing, and the solution they offered for eliminating these difficulties. The data obtained from these interviews were analyzed by the content analysis method. The research revealed that out of the 118 teacher candidates, 91 were happy and 27 were unhappy; the difficulties they experienced in the process included fear of failure, teacher related problems, inadequacies in the physical environment, learning process being boring, comparisons with other students, lack of family support, and too much homework; and their solution offered for eliminating these difficulties included making the education process effective, positive approach by teacher, fairness of teacher, cooperation with parents, and avoiding too much homework.

**Key words:** Teacher candidate, process of elementary reading and writing education, difficulties, solution offered.

## INTRODUCTION

Today, when information and communication technologies rapidly advance and information changes quickly, the importance of reading and writing skills in the lives of individuals steadily increases day by day. Effectiveness of the reading and writing skills of individuals provides an opportunity for social development and improvement. It is necessary to realize

an effective literacy teaching for the development of individuals who think, understand, inquire, learn, use knowledge and solve problems (Yangın, 2013). The organized process for individuals to learn reading and writing begins with the first grade of elementary school. The knowledge, skills and habits acquired through the first reading and writing education directly affect the

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academic achievement of the students in the progressive stages of education, especially primary school (Sağırlı, 2015). According to Erikson (1968), in this period when inferiority complex develops against studiousness, children will learn through their school experiences the skills they would need for their future roles as adults. However, they come to the classroom environment with a certain accumulation of numerous experiences and information that they have been collecting from their environment since their birth. Therefore, the duty falls primarily on teachers for planning the educational activity by taking past experiences of children into consideration. First grade teachers should possess the necessary knowledge and skills so that they can realize the importance of elementary reading and writing education and implement the process aptly by considering the characteristics of students in this specific period. Those children who intensely feel incompetent in school become shy, dependent on their family, and suffer great difficulties in adapting to their environment (Erikson, 1968). The manner of approach to children and reactions shown to them lay the foundation of their future experiences. Especially in the current times, majority of children are unconsciously exposed to an extreme use of technological products. As children now use technological products recklessly and more actively than their parents and even than their teachers, it becomes gradually more difficult for teachers to identify children's level of readiness and get to know them better, taking their individual differences into account. Students are expected to be mentally and physically active in the process of learning. Activities such as asking questions, arousing interest and curiosity, questioning, reflection, problem-solving, explanations of concepts, etc. are carried out with students for their active learning. Their prior knowledge is triggered and their mind is activated to ensure learning.

In the process of learning-teaching within the context of those curricula that embrace the philosophy of constructivist approach, an individual makes sense of, and integrates, new knowledge that they will gain by using their existing knowledge, and after these steps, they restructure their knowledge in their minds (Güneş, 2013). Those teachers who follow up the developments in the technologies of information and communication, who are open to novelties, and who have developed themselves in terms of their profession will take the developmental characteristics and individual differences of their students into consideration, plan the environment of learning-teaching based on their interests, wants and needs, and thus play their part as guide who facilitates the learning of each student. It is very important to examine, evaluate and enhance the first-grade elementary reading and writing education processes as the basis of the period when making contributions to the emotional and social development of individuals and gaining them reading-writing skills and scholastic knowledge. Acquisition of reading and writing skills is

among the primary objectives of basic education (Şahin, 2012). The teachers who are to guide students in this process must be qualified and well-equipped. Since classroom teachers have great responsibility to help the students gain these skills, training competent prospective classroom teachers is very important (Gömleksiz, 2013). There have been many studies about teaching literacy and teacher candidates (Gömleksiz, 2013; Karadağ ve Akkaya, 2013; Kızılaslan Tunçer, 2013; Üst, 2015; Aytan, 2017; Özdemir ve Erdoğan, 2017). The part that form teachers and teacher candidates play in social development and change should therefore be realized and contributory efforts should be supported.

### Objectives of study

The purpose of the research is to identify those difficulties which the teacher candidates studying elementary school teaching experienced in the elementary reading and writing process and which cannot be forgotten, and to reveal their solution offered for eliminating these difficulties. For this purpose, answers were sought for the following questions:

1. Were you happy in the process of reading and writing education? Please explain your reason for being or not being happy.
2. What were the problems that you experienced in the process of elementary 1st grade reading and writing education?
3. What solutions did you offer relating to the problems that you experienced in the process of elementary 1st grade reading and writing education?

### METHODOLOGY

This section includes information on research design, participant characteristics, data collection, and analysis.

#### Research design

The qualitative research design was used for this study as it elaborates on the difficulties which teacher candidates experience in the process of elementary reading and writing education that lays the foundation of basic reading and writing skills, and their opinions about how those difficulties can be eliminated.

#### Study group

The study group of the research is composed of 118 teacher candidates studying elementary school teaching. The criterion sampling method as a type of purposive sampling was utilized in the selection of participants (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2011). Demographic characteristics of the study group are given in Table 1. Table 1 shows that 91 (77.12%) teacher candidates are female and 27 (22.88%) are male.

#### Data collection and analysis

Research data were collected by a "semi-structured interview form"

**Table 1.** Demographics of the Participant Teachers.

Gender	f	%
Female	91	77.12
Male	27	22.88

that was developed by the researcher. The most important facility that the semi-structured interview technique provides is that interviews can be maintained according to a pre-built protocol. More systematic and comparable data can thus be obtained (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2011). The participants were requested to complete a form consisting of three open-ended questions in writing. The content validity of the question form was analyzed and determined by two academicians who completed their doctorates and also professorship on elementary school teaching. The pilot experiment of the questions used in the interview was made with 30 teacher candidates. In the end of the pilot experiment, the questions were deemed to be suitable for the research. Participant privacy rights and that these rights would be respected were stated to teacher candidates, and then voluntary teacher candidates were included in the study. The participants answered the questions in about 10 min. The qualitative data obtained were subjected to content analysis. In this technique, similar data are brought together within the frame of certain concepts and themes, and they are arranged so as to be comprehensible by readers, and interpreted. The content analysis technique consists of the stages of data coding, identification of themes, arrangement of codes and themes, and definition and interpretation of findings (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2011). In the content analysis of qualitative data, firstly, the codes were identified and categories suitable to those codes were created. In the "Findings" section, the percentage-frequency values of the data were tabularized, and some selected statements of the participants were provided in tables.

## RESULTS

This section presents the findings obtained by analyzing the data from participant answers. The research findings are presented in tables. For some questions, participant answers can fall into more than one category. Opinions of the participants were brought together under common categories, and percentages, frequency values and relevant statements were provided.

**Question 1:** *"Were you happy in the process of reading and writing education? Please explain your reason for being or not being happy."* The answers given by the participants to Question 1 are provided in Table 2.

Table 2 shows that 91 (77.12%) out of the 118 teacher candidates answered, "Yes, I was happy", while 27 (22.88%) said, "No, I wasn't happy." The participants described their reason for being happy as including sense of achievement, love of teacher, learning process being fun, eagerness for learning, desire for appreciation by family and teacher, and emergence of skills, while others explained their reasons for not being happy as including dislike of teacher, sense of failure, learning

process being boring, too much homework, and oppression by family and teacher. As for those participants who attributed their past happiness to sense of achievement, some of their opinions about this include:

*"I'd learned how to read and write before attending the school. As I was the first reader in the classroom, I was the first to be rewarded by a red ribbon. This made me very happy."*

*"I'd been reading and writing before I went to the elementary school. It was making me happy to become successful compared with others in the class."*

*"I was happy as I'd been able to read before attending the school. I also didn't have much difficulty when learning how to write."*

*"I learned reading earlier than others in the class. Our teacher was attaching a red ribbon to those who managed to read and write, and I was one of those who got the red ribbon."*

*"I was a prominent student in the class because I'd rapidly learned reading and writing."*

Some of the opinions of those participants who attributed their past happiness to love of teacher include:

*"I was happy because my teacher was so kind and understanding."*

*"My teacher was very caring, and used to love me much. I was very happy for that."*

*"I was happy because my elementary teacher was caring for me well when I was learning how to read and write. My teacher was always supporting me."*

*"I was happy because my teacher was very good and understanding."*

Some of the opinions of those participants who attributed their past happiness to learning process being fun:

*"I used to take pleasure in going to school because the activities in the classroom were so beautiful and made me happy."*

*"My teacher used to bring various storybooks to improve our reading skills. We used to read those books by turns. This made me so glad."*

*"There was a free learning area. It was so joyful. Our teacher was performing many different activities."*

Some of the opinions of the participants who ascribed their happiness in the past to willingness for learning include:

*"My desire of learning was making me delighted."*

*"I was being happy by learning new things."*

*"I was happy because I was desirous of reading storybooks and various writings around me, and also learning new things."*

*"Learning new things was exciting me, I was feeling like a grown-up."*

Some of the opinions of those participants who believed

**Table 2.** The happiness status of teacher candidates in the process of reading and writing education, and their reasons.

Happiness Status	Reasons	f	%
Yes, I was happy	Sense of achievement	30	25.42
	Love of teacher	24	20.34
	Learning process being fun	23	19.49
	Eagerness for learning	19	16.10
	Desire for appreciation by family and teacher	3	2.54
No, I wasn't happy	Teacher misbehaviour	8	6.78
	Sense of failure	7	5.93
	Learning process being boring	7	5.93
	Too much homework	3	2.54
	Oppression by family and teacher	3	2.54

their past happiness was caused by their desire for being appreciated by their family and teacher include:

*"I was happy for filling my parents with pride and gaining the favour of my teacher."*

*"I was blissful as my teacher and my family appreciated me."*

*"As I'd learned reading before starting the school, I was always appreciated by my teacher and my family."*

Some of the opinions of those participants who attributed their reason for their past unhappiness to teacher misbehavior:

*"As my handwriting was poor, my teacher used to hit me on the head. I was very unhappy."*

*"My teacher was very nervous. I remember him being angry all the time in the classroom."*

*"I had great difficulty in reading and writing because my teacher used to shout a lot and I was scared."*

*"Our teacher used to care more for students of higher economic status while misbehaving and pushing us aside. I think I was one of the last 10 students to learn reading. It was a painful process for me."*

Some of the opinions of those participants who attributed their reason for their past unhappiness to sense of failure:

*"Most importantly, when there was a contest, I was getting anxious and fail. And this was making me unhappy."*

*"I was very unhappy as I learned reading very belatedly."*

*"I was unhappy because my handwriting was bad and I was unable to comprehend what I read."*

Some of the opinions of those participants who described their reason for their past unhappiness as the process of learning being boring:

*"It was not an enjoyable period. I wasn't having fun and I*

*wasn't happy because there was no activity."*

*"I wasn't happy because it was so boring to stop playing games and come to school."*

Some of the opinions of those participants who described their reason for their past unhappiness as too much homework:

*"It was so difficult for me to write down the same word for pages at home."*

*"Homework assignments were so weary to me. The teacher used to give pages and pages of homework."*

Some of the opinions of those participants who attributed their reason for their past unhappiness to over-pressures by family and teacher:

*"I was feeling under oppression. My family was forcing me too much for reading."*

*"The teacher was pressurizing me for reading each day."*

**Question 2:** "What were the problems that you experienced in the process of elementary 1st grade reading and writing education?" The answers given by the participants to Question 2 are provided in Table 3.

Table 3 indicates that the difficulties experienced by the teacher candidates in the process of elementary reading and writing education included the fear of failure, teacher related problems, inadequacies in the physical environment, education process being boring, comparisons with other students, lack of family support, and too much homework. Some opinions stated by those participants who believe that the problems experienced in the elementary reading and writing education are mainly caused by fear of failure:

*"Some of my friends learned reading earlier. I got worried about catching up with them. I was feeling like a loser as they were ahead of me, and this was very depressing."*

*"I had a great difficulty in reading. I was unable to write*

**Table 3.** The difficulties experienced by teacher candidates in the process of elementary reading and writing education.

Problems	f	%
Fear of failure	50	42.37
Teacher related problems	20	16.95
Inadequacies in the physical environment	10	8.47
Education process being boring	9	7.63
Lack of family support	7	5.93
Too much homework	3	2.54

*properly as I was confused about the direction of some letters."*

*"As my handwriting was not intelligible, my teacher and friends were having difficulty reading it, and this was disturbing me."*

*"Reading and writing was very hard for me. I was feeling bad for that."*

*"When I didn't repeat at home what I learned in school, I was forgetting the directions of some letters."*

*"As the others in the class didn't listen to me when I was reading out too slowly, I was unwilling to read out, and I didn't like reading."*

*"There was a contest in the class. A red ribbon used to be put on those who achieved reading and writing. This was causing anxiety in me. I was very afraid of not being able to read and write and get the ribbon."*

Some opinions stated by those participants who believe that the problems experienced in the elementary reading and writing education are mainly teacher related:

*"It was so depressing to be offended by the teacher when I couldn't read and write properly."*

*"I was being upset so much by the fact that our teacher considered those who could read fast to be smart, and taught lessons at their pace. I was feeling sad due to this discrimination among students."*

*"As my teacher was elderly, he didn't understand us and was angry all the times. He was very nervous and I was scared. He used to tear off the page of my notebook to force me to correct my handwriting. But it didn't become any better."*

Some opinions expressed by those participants who believe that the problems experienced in the elementary reading and writing education are mainly resulted by inadequacies in the physical environment:

*"I didn't have those colour beans and sticks that students were supposed to have when learning reading and writing, and I was very upset for this. I got demotivated."*

*"Due to the class size, we didn't have sufficient books for reading."*

Some opinions expressed by those participants who think

that the reason for the problems experienced in the elementary reading and writing education is the boringness of learning process:

*"As I'd learned reading and writing before I started school, my teacher used to want me to help my friends all the times and I was getting bored to death due to this."*

*"I think that our teacher treated the reading and writing education too fast."*

*"We had learned about such concepts as suffixes, bases, plurals, etc. before reading a book. I didn't understand these and got seriously bored."*

*"I hadn't attended kindergarten and as it was my first school experience, I was comparatively slower at learning some things. But my teacher was moving along subjects too fast."*

Some opinions expressed by those participants who believe that the problems experienced in the elementary reading and writing education are mainly caused by a lack of family support:

*"I was very upset because my family didn't show much interest in me and my lessons in the process."*

*"I had difficulty in learning how to read and write because I didn't get much help from my family."*

*"As my mom and dad didn't have an interest in education, they couldn't help me much. I suffered a significant lack of interest in the elementary school."*

Some opinions stated by those participants who believe that the problems experienced in the elementary reading and writing education are mainly caused by too much homework:

*"We had too many homework assignments. I used to be tired by doing all of them or worried by not being able to do so."*

*"Our teacher used to give us too much homework and we used to write down many pages each day. I didn't want to attend school."*

**Question 3:** "What are your solution offers relating to the problems that you experienced in the process of elementary 1st grade reading and writing education?"

**Table 4.** The solutions offered by the teacher candidates for the problems they experienced in the first-grade elementary reading and writing education process.

<b>Solution Offers</b>	<b>f</b>	<b>%</b>
Making the education process effective	61	51.69
Positive approach by teacher	32	27.12
Fairness of teacher	16	13.56
Cooperation with parents	9	7.63
Avoiding too much homework	3	2.54

The answers given by the participants to Question 3 are presented in Table 4.

Table 4 lists the solutions offered by the teacher candidates against the problems they experienced in the elementary reading and writing education process as: making the education process effective, positive approach by teacher, fairness of teacher, cooperation with parents, and avoiding too much homework. Some opinions expressed by the participants who offer making the education process effective as a solution for the problems experienced in the elementary reading and writing education process:

*"In the learning process, each student in a class should be cared for separately. None of them should be omitted thinking they can't read anyway."*

*"Instead of demanding each child to learn in the same way and pace, attention can be shown to the different developmental characteristics of each child. Personal interviews can be made with them for discussing any skills not possessed."*

*"Calming down any student who experiences a problem by talking to them. Having them realize that they can succeed by doing again."*

*"Students should be guided to head towards their targets without giving up and to cope with the difficulties they come across. Teachers should find ways to make lessons enjoyable and comprehensible within the bounds of possibility."*

*"It is so important for a teacher to have a warm and sincere attitude. Different activities should be performed to help students that experience problems and also to ensure that others are not bored."*

*"Different activities can be organized to make reading and writing more enjoyable and entertaining for children."*

*"In this period, a teacher shouldn't cause children to compete. The learning process should be designed by taking the prior knowledge of each child into consideration."*

Some opinions stated by the participants who believe that a positive approach by teachers can be a solution for the problems experienced in the elementary reading and writing education process:

*"I think that a teacher should be patient and understanding. They should be aware that behaving students according to their family's economic status would be inappropriate for a teacher."*

*"Instead of tearing off a page in a notebook, teachers should try to guide students properly without disheartening them. They should encourage them without offending them."*

*"A teacher should care for their students, believe that they can succeed, and also make them believe in this."*

Some opinions expressed by those participants who believe that fairness of teacher can be a solution for the problems experienced in the elementary reading and writing education process:

*"Each student should be provided with an opportunity, and they should be supported. Teachers should not immediately label students based on their learning how to read earlier or later."*

*"I think that those students who learn reading and writing belatedly should be prioritized and encouraged in the process of reading and writing education, and they shouldn't be compared with others."*

Some opinions expressed by those participants who bring the offer of corporation with parents as a solution against the problems experienced in the process of elementary reading and writing education:

*"Teachers should raise the awareness of parents about this process and keep in touch with them."*

*"Privately contacting the family of a student experiencing problems and informing them about what can be done at home without worrying them are the best solution offers."*

Some opinions expressed by the participants who assert that avoiding too much homework can be a solution for the problems experienced in the elementary reading and writing education process:

*"Students shouldn't be given homework that will tire them too much but just to help them learn."*

*"Best learning can occur in the classroom environment under teacher supervision. Therefore, pages-long homework assignments should be avoided."*

## DISCUSSION

In the first grade elementary, in which basic reading and writing skills are gained, the importance of the elementary reading and writing process should be known, this process should be implemented properly, the difficulties encountered should be identified, and detailed solution offered should be explored in order to eliminate those difficulties. The current research showed that out of the 118 teacher candidates, 91 were happy and 27 were unhappy in the process of primary reading and writing education. With the answers provided, they described their reasons for being happy as sense of achievement, love of teacher, learning process being fun, eagerness for learning, desire for appreciation by family and teacher, and emergence of skills, while the reasons for not being happy included dislike of teacher, sense of failure, learning process being boring, too much homework, and oppression by family and teacher. Those children who had already learned reading and writing before starting school and thus were able to read first in the class and got the red ribbon award became very happy while those who were afraid of, and oppressed by, their teachers because their handwriting was poor, those who panicked and failed in contests, and those who belatedly learned reading became very unhappy. The awards given by a teacher in the classroom environment strengthen students' sense of competence and achievement (Erikson, 1968). In the elementary school period, the manner of communication with an adult outside one's family plays a significant part in the formation of social competencies (Hamre and Pianta, 2001). The reason for those children who fail in contests to be unhappy is that they compare themselves with their friends and question their own competency (Bacanlı, 2010).

It was found out that the difficulties that the teachers experienced in future in elementary school were caused by teacher related problems, inadequacies in the physical environment, education process being boring, comparisons with other students, lack of family support, and too much homework; and their solution offered for eliminating the difficulties included making the education process effective, positive approach by teacher, fairness of teacher, cooperation with parents, and avoiding too much homework. The fact that, with their different methods of learning, students learn at different paces is due to their individual differences. Therefore, an effective learning-teaching process should be planned according to the developmental levels. As knowing how children learn influences how teachers will teach, a teacher should, to the extent possible, design their reading and writing syllabus according to how their students learn (Akyol, 2005). First grade elementary teachers who will guide and lead their students should obtain information about the past experiences and prior knowledge of students. As the attitude of individuals towards working is formed in this period, awarding and appreciation will

promote studiousness in children. When they are blocked or made to feel unsuccessful, on the other hand, this will feed their sense of incompetence (Erikson, 1968). Elementary school children are influenced by teacher-child and adult-child relationships in the process of social adaptation (Pianta, 1999). It is therefore necessary to ensure parent-teacher interest and support. The teacher-child relationship, that is, a teacher's closeness to children is also important for children to adapt to the school environment. Thus, children's relationships with form teachers should be taken into account in scholastic arrangements (Birch and Ladd, 1997).

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

It is suggested consequently that uniqueness and self-confidence of students, who are the minors of today and the majors of tomorrow, should be supported, their individual differences in developments should be regarded, and it should be ensured that they experience the joy of achievement by endeavor.

## CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

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