



Determining Characteristics of Students with Difficulties in the Literacy Learning Process, and the Difficulties They Experience in that Process: A Mixed Methods Study

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to determine the characteristics of students with difficulties in the literacy learning process and to identify the difficulties they experience during that process. The mixed method was applied in the study and the data were gathered through questionnaires and interviews from class teachers employed in central Bursa. A total of 1068 teachers completed the questionnaire and interviews were conducted with 48 teachers. It was determined that students had greater difficulties at the syllable formation stage; that a large section of students acquired literacy skills in second grade and that another section could not acquire these skills at primary school; that very few of the students had received preschool education and that their ages were below those of their peers; that generally, parents did not support the students; that students had difficulty in learning certain sounds and that they confused some sounds; and that they had more difficulties with open syllables, with words in which consonant clusters occur together and with applying sentence rules. At the end of the study, it is recommended that the acquisition of literacy skills be enabled by providing training via support courses for students, and that technology-supported materials be made available to serve teachers and students.

Keywords

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Introduction

The progress of a society and its attaining the status of contemporary civilization depends upon the power possessed by people who have improved themselves and who are equipped with the knowledge and skills required by the age. The raising of individuals who possess the qualities specified is possible through formal education institutions and the education programmes conducted in those institutions. The standards of behaviour to be acquired by students, the information to be taught, the skills and attitudes, the teaching-learning activities and the evaluation processes are all determined by education programmes (Gültekin, 2013). Due to the fact that the educational activities conducted in schools are based on literacy skills (Demir & Ersöz, 2016), it can be said that the acquisition of these skills forms the basis of the education process (Şahin, 2010).

Reading, which is defined as the activity of recognising and making sense of the symbols in writing, is related to the concept of writing (Condon & Hovda, 1984; Çaycı & Demir, 2006). This

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relationship is a mutually supportive and interactive one (Defort, 1981). In this context, the skill of reading and writing may be defined as picking out the sounds of the alphabet, recognising the letters and the relationships that exist between them, and ultimately, through vocalisation and writing, comprehending the content of the text (Özcan & Özcan, 2014). The skill of reading and writing, which is the basis of accessing and learning information, is one of the basic skills that has an essential place in affecting the lives of individuals and in their adaptation to their environment (Akyol & Kayabaşı, 2018).

One of the basic elements of the education process is the teaching of pre-literacy. If the student cannot succeed in the reading-writing process, he or she will experience problems throughout his or her educational life and also in other areas of life (Başar, 2013; Ertürk, 2017). The aim of literacy teaching, which begins in the first grade of elementary school, is for students to acquire skills aimed at using Turkish correctly, finely and effectively, using methods, tools and materials suited to their development characteristics (MEB, 2019; Yangın, 2007). For, learning literacy has a direct and powerful relationship with a student's characteristics (Jones & Reutzel, 2015). In a study conducted by Irvin and Angelis (2003), it was concluded that a well-planned classroom and materials that attracted the students' attention strengthened their reading, writing, speaking and thinking skills. Since each student's way of learning is different, materials which contribute towards students' rapid and complete learning must be used. Research findings reveal that the use of various materials by teachers during the learning process increases student success (Garg & Karush, 2014). Children's learning skills are different from those of adults. Awareness of this fact by teachers will develop the teaching-learning process (Krisell & Counsell, 2017). If the means and methods applied by teachers in literacy teaching are comprehensible and suited to the students, this will have an effect on the students' motivation for their lessons and for reading and writing (Bunn, 2013). High-quality implementation of literacy teaching is a critical obligation for teachers and teacher educators (Brooks, 2007). In this respect, Craig (2003) also recommends that teachers adopt an approach that diversifies teaching and that studies should be made which aim at increasing students' skill levels regarding phonological awareness and writing.

The first preparations for the reading-writing skill, which is a universal skill (Gray, 1969), develop automatically in the flow of life during the preschool period, and children's first experiences in this regard begin with their communication with their home and immediate environment (Turner, 2018; Parlakyıldız & Yıldızbaş, 2004). Indeed, it can be said that the development of children's literacy skills goes as far back as their infancy (Uyanık & Kandır, 2010). While some children receive adequate support for pre-literacy skills from their families and immediate environment, other children who do not receive this support begin school without being aware that language has a written form that is made up of symbols (Çelenk, 2008). This situation results in differences among students in the class in terms of readiness for learning to read and write. Whether or not students are ready for learning is very important for them to be able to acquire literacy skills at the required quality level (Yangın, 2007). If the necessary prerequisites for literacy skills have not been gained when students start school, they will begin to experience difficulties (Duran & Sezgin, 2012).

It is known that in Turkey country, many students at primary school level have reading difficulties (Yılmaz, 2008). It is inevitable that students who have not acquired literacy skills at an adequate level will also experience difficulties in other lessons and areas (Akar, 2008). Moreover, these students may have problems in attaining the higher educational standards of their peers (Heath & Hogben, 2004). Students whose reading ability, which is also accepted as a criterion of success at school (Akar, 2008), is not developed make many reading errors, and these are directed towards the students' attention for reading, which also inhibits their understanding of the text read. Students' reading fluency while reading depends on their being able to give meaning to the symbols they see in their minds, which also depends on their prior recognition of those symbols (Meisinger, Bloom, & Hynd, 2010; Çaycı & Demir, 2006). Students in this situation generally have problems in recognising words (Yılmaz, 2008). Researchers suggest that students' phonetic awareness, word recognition and analysis skills need to be supported. This situation will support their understanding of texts by ensuring that they read familiar words in context (Martin, Martin, & Carvalho, 2008).

Demir and Ersöz (2016) examined the difficulties experienced by students in learning to read and write, and the reasons for these difficulties are classified as difficulties originating from students, parents, teachers, the programme and the school. It was determined that difficulties stemming from students were the perception and adaptation problem in students, insufficient physical development, rapidly getting bored, discipline problems, low reading speeds of students, and inadequate self-care abilities in students; difficulties originating from parents were their hasty behaviour regarding their children's transition to reading, their lack of understanding of their children's development levels, and their teaching of letters instead of sounds to their children; problems stemming from teachers were lack of group understanding among teachers, differences in level among classes, and teachers' haste in the transition to reading and writing; difficulties arising from the programme were the long adaptation period and children at young ages being accepted into school; difficulties stemming from the school were inadequate educational material, deficiencies in play areas, etc., unsuitability of desks, boards and washbasins for children, crowded classes and inadequacy of classrooms. Sidekli and Yangın (2005) stated that students experienced difficulties in acquiring reading and writing skills due to such factors as family reasons, insufficiency of suitable literacy materials at home, lack of student motivation and cognitive weakness. In a study conducted by Akyol and Yıldız (2010) focusing on a student who was having difficulties in reading and writing, it was determined that in writing, the student made errors related to inability to remember, to confusion and to skipping. By performing kinaesthetic and tactile exercises like making letters from modelling clay, cutting letters out of cardboard, and writing letters on the board or large pieces of card, effective results were obtained.

In the Turkish Lesson Teaching Programme (MEB, 2019), it is required that learning outcomes should be organised within a hierarchy in a way that will contribute not only to the development of students' basic language skills, but also to that of their high-level cognitive skills, and that the literacy learning process should be completed in the first grade of primary school. For the other grades, it is recommended that students' literacy skills should be developed and that they should acquire idiosyncratic writing habits. Within this scope, a Catch-up Programme for Primary Schools (İYEP) is implemented by the National Education Ministry, intended for third-grade students who have been unable to acquire literacy skills in the first grade. Reading and writing teaching is carried out in line with the Turkish lesson learning outcomes of this programme, which includes the subjects of Mathematics and Turkish, and with the activity book prepared for the students. İYEP confirms the presence of students who have not been able to acquire reading and writing skills in the first grade of primary school. When considered together with the fact that the Ministry organises the Turkish lesson learning outcomes within a hierarchy, this situation reveals that students' learning of literacy skills in the first grade of primary school is important especially for the subject of Turkish in higher grades. In this study, the difficulties experienced in the process by students who have not been able to acquire literacy skills are revealed with a large study group. The findings of the current study will contribute to students' ability to learn reading and writing in the first grade of primary school. In particular, if class teachers can learn at which stages of the literacy learning process students experience difficulties, this will enable the Ministry's objectives to be achieved by supporting students' literacy learning in the first grade.

The rapid changes occurring in the world affect the lives of individuals, and it is possible for individuals to keep pace with these changes through education and training (Gömleksiz & Kan, 2012). Students' acquisition of literacy skills is a prerequisite for performing the academic duties they will encounter in the education process (Gündüz & Çalışkan, 2013). The difficulties that students encounter in acquiring literacy skills will have an adverse effect on their success in future grades and in other subjects, and, therefore, on their whole lives (Tahiroğlu & Aktepe, 2016). For this reason, importance must be given to students who have difficulties in learning to read and write. The aim of this study is to reveal, by means of mixed methods, the characteristics of the aforementioned students and to identify the difficulties they experience during the reading-writing process. If teachers can first learn students' characteristics, at what stage they have more difficulties in this process, which sounds they find it hard to learn, which sounds they find it hard to combine and where they have difficulties in writing, they will be able to take the necessary precautions without delay. This will also ensure that students derive more benefit from the teaching-learning environment and that teachers will be better equipped to deal

with difficulties. Moreover, in this study, as distinct from similar studies, by recruiting a large study group, the views of teachers employed in various socio-economic areas were obtained, and during the qualitative data collection process, detailed information was accessed. In light of these data, answers were sought to the following questions in the current research:

- What are the socio-cultural features and characteristics related to literacy skills of students with difficulties in acquiring reading and writing skills in comparison with their peers?
- With regard to students who have difficulties in the process of acquiring literacy skills, what are the difficulties they experience in this process when compared to their peers?
- With regard to the characteristics of students who have difficulties in the process of acquiring literacy skills, what are the difficulties they experience in this process when compared to their peers?

Method

Research Model

This study was conducted with the mixed methods design, defined as a technique which combines the quantitative and qualitative research methods, approaches and concepts in social science research in one single study (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004), and in accordance with Creswell's sequential explanatory (QUAN→qual) design. In this design, after quantitative data are gathered and analysed, qualitative data are collected. The researcher first begins his research with the quantitative data collection process, and then, in light of these data, continues his research with the qualitative data collection process in order to obtain deeper information (Creswell & Clark, 2015). The quantitative and qualitative data gathered are interrelated and are generally combined in the data interpretation and discussion sections. In this design, especially unexpected research findings or relationships are revealed (Baki & Gökçek, 2012). In this study, firstly, the quantitative data were gathered and analysed, and then the interview questions were prepared in the light of these analyses. Since the quantitative data were effective for the preparation of the interview questions, and since also, the study group from which the quantitative data were gathered was large, quantitative data predominate in this study.

In this design, in which data are presented and analysed by using various tools, quantitative and qualitative data are used (Halcomb & Hickman, 2015; Baki & Gökçek, 2012) and the basic assumption of the method may be stated as the fact that the implementation of quantitative and qualitative approaches together can explain a research problem more comprehensively than the implementation of each method alone (Creswell, 2014).

Students' difficulties in the literacy learning process are due to a wide variety of reasons. In order to determine these reasons, it was considered necessary to obtain information from a large sample population. Therefore, the study process was conducted in accordance with the sequential explanatory design, also called the QUAN→qual approach. Firstly, data were collected from a large sample population with a quantitative data collection tool, and then, in light of these data, qualitative data were gathered. These data are discussed in the discussion section of the study.

The sections of the study for the study group, the data collection tools, and the collection and analysis of the data are presented separately for the quantitative and qualitative dimensions of the research.

Quantitative Section

Research Group

Participation in the questionnaire study by all class teachers employed in Bursa was targeted. After the necessary permission had been obtained, the Bursa Provincial Directorate of National Education and 17 district directorates of national education were contacted and the questionnaire was officially announced to all class teachers by signature. Next, the required reminders were given three more times by email to all schools by the district directorates of national education. However, the completion of the questionnaire by all the teachers could not be implemented. Out of a total of 6012 class teachers employed throughout Bursa, 1068 class teachers were reached for this purpose.

Quantitative research data gathered relating to the participant teachers are shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Characteristics of Questionnaire Group

	1-4	5-8	9-12	13-16	17-20	21-24	25 +	
Professional Seniority (years)	4.3%	10.48%	20.31%	12.92%	16.57%	16.19%	19.19%	
	46	112	217	138	177	173	205	
	Once	Twice	3 Times	4 Times	5 Times	6 Times	7+	
Number of Times First Graders Taught	4.77%	12.07%	18.07%	21.81%	16.1%	9.08%	18.07%	
	51	129	193	233	172	97	193	
	Yes	No		1st Grade	2nd Grade	3rd Grade	4th Grade	
Status of Applying Sound-based Sentence Method	94.94%	5.05%	Class Taught this Academic Year		28.46%	21.44%	25.28%	24.81%
	1014	54		304	229	270	265	
Status of Teaching Combined Classes	41.19%	58.8%		Female	Male			
	440	628						
Status of Graduation from Primary School Teaching Department	76.12%	23.87%	Gender	67.50%	32.49%			
	813	255		721	347			

Examination of Table 1 reveals that 20.31% (217) of the participating teachers had 9-12 years of professional seniority; that 21.81% (233) of teachers had taught first graders 4 times; that 94.94% (1014) of teachers applied the sound-based sentence method; that 28.46% (304) of teachers were teaching first graders in the year that the study was conducted; that 58.8% (628) of teachers had not taught combined classes; that 76.12% (813) of teachers had graduated from a Primary School Teaching Department; and that 67.50% (721) of the teachers were women.

Data Collection Tool

Questionnaire for determining characteristics of students with difficulties in learning literacy: The data for characteristics of the students with regard to the socio-cultural and reading-writing processes were gathered with the Questionnaire for Determining Characteristics of Students with Difficulties in Learning Literacy, composed of a total of 19 questions, 7 of these to determine participants' data and 12 to determine students' characteristics. The questionnaire was prepared by obtaining support from the views of one instructor and four class teachers with experience in the field and from the literature (Arı, 2014; Deniz, Yorgancı, & Özyeşil, 2009; Kara & Gözcü, 2015), and finalised by conducting a pilot study with 40 class teachers. In the questions related to participant data, factors such as professional seniority and gender were included, while in the questions related to student characteristics, questions were included inquiring about matters such as whether students with difficulties in the literacy learning process had received preschool education, students' age characteristics, students' attendance status, students' habits in bringing school tools and materials to school, at which stage of the literacy learning process students had greater difficulties, guidance activities carried out for the students, and parents' characteristics of students with difficulties in learning literacy.

Collection and Analysis of Data

The quantitative data of the study were gathered online with the support of a professional software company at the beginning of the 2017-2018 academic year. Permission for the study was obtained and for the online completion of the questionnaire, a guideline was prepared which was communicated to the teachers via the provincial/district/school administrations. The teachers completed the questionnaire in line with the guideline either by using either a computer or a telephone.

The questionnaire data were obtained through the system in Excel form and transferred to the SPSS programme, and the gathered data were analysed for frequencies and percentages.

Qualitative Section

Research Group

While the teachers to be interviewed were being determined, maximum variation sampling, one of the purposeful sampling methods, was used. In this type of sampling, the aim is to ensure a variety of individuals related to the research topic (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2008). Care was taken for representation of different socio-economic levels, the gender distribution of the teachers and the levels of the classes in which they taught, and whether the sound-based teaching method was carried out in the schools where the interviews were to be made. For this purpose, interviews were conducted with a total of 48 class teachers working in 16 elementary schools.

Qualitative research data gathered relating to the participant teachers are shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Characteristics of Interview Group

	1-4	5-8	9-12	13-16	17-20	21-24	25 +
Professional Seniority (years)	2.08%	8.33%	47.91%	6.25%	10.41%	16.66%	8.33%
	1	4	23	3	5	8	4
	Once	Twice	3 Times	4 Times	5 Times	6 Times	7+ Times
Number of Times First Grade Taught	4.16%	14.58%	25%	14.58%	14.58%	2.08%	4.16%
	2	7	12	7	7	1	2
	Yes	No		1st Grade	2nd Grade	3rd Grade	4th Grade
Status of Applying Sound-based Sentence Method	100%	0%	Class Taught this Academic Year	27.08%	22.91%	29.16%	20.83%
	48	0		13	11	14	10
Status of Teaching Combined Classes	37.5%	62.5%		Female	Male		
	18	30					
Status of Graduation from Primary School Teaching Department	81.25%	18.75%	Gender	64.58%	35.41%		
	39	9		31	17		

Examination of Table 2 reveals that 47.91% (23) of the participating teachers had 9-12 years of professional seniority; that 25% (12) of teachers had taught first graders 3 times; that all the teachers applied the sound-based sentence method; that 29.16% (14) of teachers were teaching first graders in the year that the study was conducted; that 62.5% (30) of teachers had not taught combined classes; that 81.25% (39) of teachers had graduated from a Primary School Teaching Department; and that 64.58% (31) of the teachers were women.

Data Collection Tool

Teacher interview form: A semi-structured type of interview form was prepared and a total of five open-ended questions were included in the form. To access the explanatory data, by preparing probe-type questions related to each question, detailed data were obtained from the participants. The interview form was prepared by obtaining support from the views of one instructor and four class teachers with experience in the field, from the answers given by the teachers to the questionnaire used in the current study and from the literature (Arslan, 2012; Aydın & Kartal, 2017; Giles & Wellhausen, 2005; Yüksel, 2010), and finalised by conducting a pilot study with 12 class teachers. In the form, questions were included such as "Which activities for learning the sounds do you carry out with students with difficulties in learning literacy?" and "Are there examples of the activities you carry out together with parents of students with difficulties in learning literacy, and if so, what are they?"

Collection and Analysis of Data

The qualitative data of the study were gathered by the researcher through face-to-face interviews during the second semester of the 2017-2018 academic year either outside lesson hours or during the lesson times when subject teachers entered the lessons of the class teachers interviewed. Each interview lasted about 20-25 minutes. The qualitative data were analysed with descriptive and content analysis methods. In descriptive analysis, data are summarised and interpreted according to the questions included in the interview process. In content analysis, however, the data summarised and interpreted in the descriptive analysis are considered with a descriptive approach by subjecting them to deeper processing, and previously unnoticed concepts and themes are revealed (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2008). In the data analysis, first of all the responses given by the participants to the interview questions were separated into themes according to the interview questions, after which the relationships among them were correlated and new concepts were attained. All these operations are presented in the tables in such a way that all participants' responses can be seen.

Validity and Reliability

In this study, in which the mixed methods design was used, the reliability and validity studies made for the quantitative and qualitative data are discussed separately. Şencan (2005) defines reliability as obtaining similar results with the measurement tool at different times and places from the sample to be chosen from the same main population, while he defines validity as the measurement data's accurately reflecting the characteristic that one wishes to be measured. For the reliability of the quantitative data, the preparation process for the data collection was defined in detail, and to ascertain whether or not the items included in the data collection tool were understood by the teachers in the same way, a pilot study was conducted. For the validity of the quantitative data, the literature was consulted and the views of an instructor and classroom teachers who worked in the field were obtained.

According to Yıldırım and Şimşek (2008), in qualitative studies, when the accuracy of research findings is dealt with, validity is treated as internal and external validity. While external validity is defined as the possibility of transferring research findings to other groups and environments and internal validity is defined as sufficiency in revealing the truth of the path followed while accessing the research findings, reliability is expressed as the repeatability of research findings and is dealt with as external and internal reliability. Internal reliability is defined as measuring different researchers' facts or events in the same way; external reliability is defined as the possibility of dealing with research findings in similar environments. In the study, the following measures were taken for external validity, internal validity, external reliability and internal reliability respectively: (i) The research group was presented in a detailed way and the participants were diversified as much as possible. (ii) Since they followed and conducted all aspects of the reading-writing process, the data were gathered from the class teachers and the responses given to the questions in the questionnaire and interviews were correlated. Since the questionnaire data were taken from the system, possible errors in manual data entry were avoided. The texts created at the end of the interviews were verified by sharing them with the teachers interviewed, and by encoding the data, what was stated by which teacher was presented in detail in the tables. (iii) The study process, research model, data collection and analysis, and what was done in the process were all explained in detail. (iv) It was ensured that the sample from which the data were gathered was as large as possible.

Results

The responses given by the participant teachers to the questions in the Questionnaire for Determining Characteristics of Students with Difficulties in Learning Literacy and the Teacher Interview Form are presented below under two headings.

Characteristics of Students with Difficulties in Learning Literacy

The responses of the teachers to the questions included in the questionnaire aimed at determining the characteristics of students who have difficulties in learning literacy are presented below in Table 3.

Table 3. Characteristics of Students with Difficulties in Learning Literacy

	Sound Learning Stage	Word Learning Stage	Stage of Forming Syllables from Sounds	Stage of Forming Words from Syllables	Stage of Forming Sentences from Words	Dictation Exercises
Stage at which Students Had Difficulties	23.03% (246)	7.49% (80)	47.1% (503)	14.33% (153)	1.12% (12)	6.93% (74)
	1st Grade	2nd Grade	3rd Grade	4th Grade	Could not Learn	
Grade Level at which Students Learned to Read and Write	26.78% (286)	61.99% (622)	7.87% (84)	0.84% (9)	2.53% (27)	
	All	A Large Percentage	A Small Percentage	None	Not Sent to Guidance Services	
Status of Identifying Students as Special Education Students	18.91% (202)	29.03% (310)	21.35% (228)	10.58% (113)	20.13% (215)	
	All	A Large Percentage	A Small Percentage	None		
Status of Students Receiving Preschool Education	4.96% (53)	20.13% (215)	60.58% (647)	14.33% (153)		
	Orientation Week	September	October	Later Months		
Period of Recognition of Students' Literacy Learning Difficulties	17.04% (182)	33.8% (361)	34.93% (373)	14.23% (152)		
	Younger	Older	No Difference		Present	Absent
School Starting Age of Students in Relation to other Students'	81.37% (869)	1.12% (12)	17.51% (187)	Parental Support	42.98% (459)	57.02% (609)

Table 3. Continued

	Sound Learning Stage	Word Learning Stage	Stage of Forming Syllables from Sounds	Stage of Forming Words from Syllables	Stage of Forming Sentences from Words	Dictation Exercises
	Lower Level	Higher Level	No Difference		Will be Beneficial	Will not be Beneficial
Socio-economic level of Students in Relation to other Students'	63.39% (677)	0.84% (9)	35.77% (382)	Students' Starting First Grade One Year Later	93.91% (1003)	6.09% (65)
Length of Students' School Attendance in Relation to other Students'	Shorter	Longer	No Difference			
	53.37% (570)	2.53% (27)	44.1% (471)			
Status of Students Bringing Materials to School Compared to other Students	More Disorganised	More Organised	No Difference			
	83.15% (888)	0.28% (3)	16.57% (177)			
Educational Level of Students' Parents in Relation to that of other Students' Parents	Lower	Higher	No Difference			
	80.99% (865)	1.4% (15)	17.6% (188)			

Examining Table 3, it was stated by 47.1% (503) of participating teachers that students struggled more at the syllable formation stage; by 61.99% (622) of teachers that these students gained reading and writing skills in second grade but by 2.53% (27) that students could not acquire these skills at primary school; by 29.03% (310) of teachers that a large majority of these students were identified as special education students but by 20.13% (215) that these students were not sent to guidance services; by % 60.58% (647) of teachers that very few students had received preschool education; by 85.77% (916) of teachers that these students were recognised as having literacy learning difficulties in the period up to the month of October; by 81.37% (869) of teachers that the students were younger than their peers; by 57.02% (609) of teachers that the students did not receive support from their parents; by 63.39% (677) of teachers that these students were at a lower socio-economic level than that of their peers; by 53.37% (570) of teachers that these students had spent shorter periods at school than other students had; by 83.15% (888) of teachers that these students were more disorganised than other students regarding bringing school materials to school; and by 80.99% (865) of teachers that the educational level of these students' parents was lower than that of other students' parents. 93.91% (1003) of teachers stated that it would be beneficial for students in this situation to start primary school one year later.

Findings Related to the Students' Learning Processes in Literacy

The findings obtained in the interviews with the participants, under the headings of *sound learning, syllable formation, word formation, sentence formation and parental support* are presented in the tables below.

Problems encountered at the sound learning stage by students with difficulties in learning reading and writing, the reasons for these, comparison between the skills of uttering the sounds and writing the letters, and teachers' views on the practices they carried out for students in this direction are given below in Table 4.

Table 4. Data Related to Sound Learning Process of Students with Literacy Learning Difficulties

Thematic Codes	Teacher Codes	No.
Difficulties encountered in learning sounds		
Difficulty in Learning Sounds	T4/T5/T7/T8/T10/T11/T12/T13/T14/T15/T17/T18/T19/T24/T25/T26/T27/T28/T30/T31/T32/T33/T34/T35/T36/T37/T39/T40/T41/T42/T43/T44/T45/T46/T47/T48	36
Confusion of Sounds	T1/T2/T3/T6/T16/T17/T20/T21/T22/T23/T29/T38/T45	13
Forgetting Sounds	T17/T26	2
No Answer Given	T9	1
Reasons for difficulties encountered in learning sounds		
Family Indifference	T1/T2/T8/T12/T13/T14/T16/T17/T18/T20/T22/T25/T29/T30/T32/T34/T35/T38/T40/T41/T42/T43	22
Lack of Cognitive Ability	T9/T11/T13/T14/T15/T19/T24/T30/T31/T33/T35/T36/T37/T40/T41/T42/T43/T47/T48	19
Lack of Preschool Education	T2/T3/T12/T13/T19/T20/T21/T22/T23/T24/T27/T29/T30/T44/T45/T46	16
Being of a Younger Age	T2/T5/T6/T17/T24/T31/T33/T48	8
Attention Deficit	T1/T2/T3/T5/T26/T39	6
Physiological Reasons	T6/T8/T10/T28/T41	5
No Answer Given	T4/T7	2
Comparison between difficulties encountered in uttering sounds and in writing letters		
Learning Writing more Slowly than Reading	T5/T6/T8/T9/T11/T13/T14/T15/T20/T21/T22/T25/T26/T27/T28/T29/T31/T32/T33/T34/T36/T37/T38/T39/T40/T41/T42/T44/T45/T46/T47	31
Learning Reading and Writing at the Same Speeds	T4/T10/T12/T19/T23/T24/T30/T35/T48	9
Having Difficulty with Dictation Exercises	T1/T2/T16	3
No Answer Given	T7/T18/T43	3
Skipping Letters	T3/T17	2
Exercises carried out by teachers for students at sound stage		
Audio-visual Material	T1/T10/T11/T12/T13/T14/T17/T18/T20/T21/T22/T23/T24/T25/T27/T29/T31/T32/T33/T35/T36/T37/T38/T39/T41/T43/T44/T45/T46	29
Repetition	T1/T3/T5/T8/T14/T19/T40	7
Linguistic-literary Material	T2/T12/T30/T38/T39/T42	6
No Exercises Done	T4/T7/T9/T15/T28	5
Individual Exercises	T16/T26/T34	3
Games	T6/T7	2
Accentuation	T48	1
Drama	T47	1

Data related to the sound learning process of students with difficulties in learning literacy are grouped under four themes, namely, the problems they encountered, the reasons for these, comparison between uttering the sounds and writing the letters, and the practices carried out by teachers in this regard. 36 teachers said that problems were encountered in learning sounds, while 13 teachers stated that sounds were confused. Teachers who stated that problems were encountered in learning sounds indicated that students had difficulty in learning the consonants in general, while they reported problems in learning the letters 'b, ç, d, f, h, g, ğ, j, m, n, p, r, t' and 'v' in particular. Teachers who stated that letters were confused reported that the letter pairs *j* and *ş*; *s* and *z*; *b* and *d*; *e* and *l*; *m* and *n*; *l* and *n*; *b* and *p*; *s* and *ş*; *b* and *d*; and *r* and *y* were confused. While T20 said, "This year, there are problems stemming from the order of letters; the letter pairs *b* and *d*, and *m* and *n* are taught at similar times, which leads to confusion of these pairs of letters," T16 said, "Since the letters *l* and *n* are in the same group, there are problems with these letters, and then when the letter *m* comes from the other group, there is even more confusion." It was stated by 22 teachers that the problems encountered at the sound stage were due to lack of parental interest, and by 19 teachers that they were due to lack of cognitive ability. T18 said, "Separated parents have an effect; even if the child is very intelligent, there are problems when the mother and father are separated," whereas T42 said, "The fact that cognitively, they lag behind their peers is an important reason." With regard to the comparison between learning the skills of uttering the sounds and writing the letters, 31 teachers reported that the writing skill was acquired more slowly than the reading skill; 9 teachers stated that these skills were acquired at the same time. T20 said, "I considered them as writers who read; however, they can read but they cannot write," while T12 said, "In my opinion, the skills of reading and writing are gained at the same time." With respect to the practices carried out by teachers at the sound stage, 29 teachers declared that they used audio-visual material, while 7 teachers stated that they made use of repetition. While T32 said, "I use audio-visual material; I ask them whose name this sound appears in, and we find that student," T8 said, "I continually do repetition by reading tales in which the problem sounds appear."

Problems encountered at the stage of forming syllables from words by students with difficulties in learning reading and writing, the sounds that caused the students problems and data related to syllables composed of three and four sounds, together with teachers' views on the practices they carried out for students in this direction are given below in Table 5.

Table 5. Data Related to Formation of Syllables from Sounds in Students with Literacy Learning Difficulties

Thematic Codes	Teacher Codes	No.
Views of teachers regarding problems encountered by students in syllable formation		
Open Syllables	T1/T2/T5/T8/T9/T11/T12/T14/T15/T16/T19/T20/T21/T24/T28/ T30/T31/T32/T33/T35/T38/T39/T44/T46/T47	25
Confusion of Letters	T4/T27/T29/T34/T36/T41/T42/T48	8
Incorrect Prelearning	T6/T17/T18/T22/T25/T26/T37	7
Forgetting Letters	T3/T4/T10/T17/T23/T29	6
Inability to Combine Letters	T7/T40/T43/T45	4
Physiological Reasons	T13	1
Views of teachers regarding sounds that students had problems with		
There are Letters that are Difficult to Learn	T1/T3/T4/T5/T6/T9/T11/T12/T14/T15/T17/T20/T22/T23/T25/T26/ T27/T28/T31/T32/T33/T34/T35/T36/T37/T39/T40/T41/T42/T44/T47	31
There are no Letters that are Difficult to Learn	T7/T10/T16/T18/T19/T30/T38/T43/T45	9
There are Confused Letters	T2/T8/T13/T39/T46/T48	6

Table 5. Continued

Thematic Codes	Teacher Codes	No.
There is Difficulty with Syllables Formed from Three/Four Letters	T21/T24/T29/T40	4
Views of teachers regarding syllables formed from three/four letters		
There is no Difficulty	T2/T4/T8/T9/T10/ T11/T14/T15/T21/T22/T23/T26/T28/T30/T35/ T36/ T39/T40/T41/T44/T45/T48	22
There is Difficulty with Some Syllables	T3/T5/T13/T16/T17/T18/T19/T20/T24/T25/T27/T29/T31/T32/T33/ T37/T46/T47	18
There is General Difficulty	T12/T34/T38/T42/T43	5
No Answer Given	T1/T6/T7	3
Exercises carried out by teachers for students at syllable stage		
Games	T1/T3/T4/T13/T21/T25/T30/T32/T34/T35/T36/T37/T40/T41/T46	15
Audio-visual Material	T13/T16/T17/T18/T22/T23/T26/T28/T37/T38/T39/T40/T41/T44	14
Table of Syllables	T5/T12/T14/T23/T33/T39/T42/T45	8
Accentuation during Reading	T7/T8/T11/T20/T46/T48	6
Syllable Cards	T19/T27/T43/T47	4
Repetition	T14/T15/T24	3
Drama	T29/T31/T39	3
No Answer Given	T2/T6	2
No Exercises Done	T9/T10	2
Individual Exercises	T15	1

Data related to the stage of forming syllables from letters in students with difficulties in learning literacy are grouped under four themes, namely, problems encountered, letters causing problems, syllables formed from three or four letters and the practices carried out by teachers in this regard. 25 teachers reported problems with open syllables in the syllable-forming process, while 8 teachers stated that letters were confused. T21 said, "There are problems with open syllables; this system is very boring, since after the first two groups the same things come around again," while T48 said, "Since the letters *n* and *m* appear in consecutive groups, they are confused." Furthermore, other participant teachers indicated that the letter pairs *v* and *h*; *d* and *b*; *p* and *b*; *e* and *d*; and *s* and *z* were confused. Regarding sounds at the syllable stage, 31 teachers stated that there were sounds that the students had problems with, while 9 teachers declared that the students did not have difficulty with sounds. While T3 said, "They find it difficult to form syllables from infrequently used letters; they have problems with the letters *g*, *ğ* and *j*," T19 stated that there were no sounds that the students had problems with. With regard to syllables made up of three or four letters, 22 teachers reported that no problems were encountered, whereas 18 teachers stated that difficulty was experienced with some syllables. T10 said, "In the conceptual logic of syllable formation, no problems are experienced in forming three- and four-word syllables," whereas T31 said, "There are problems when the letter *h* appears as the third letter in three-letter syllables; I use meaningful words for three/four-letter syllables." Considering the exercises performed by teachers for students at the syllable stage, 15 teachers stated that they used games, while 14 teachers reported using audio-visual material. T3 said, "We play bingo; we form syllables by choosing vowels and consonants," while T26 said, "I have used software containing videos, visuals and sounds".

Problems encountered at the stage of forming words from syllables by students with difficulties in learning reading and writing and teachers' views on the practices they carried out for students in this direction are given below in Table 6.

Table 6. Data Related to Formation of Words from Syllables in Students with Literacy Learning Difficulties

Thematic Codes	Teacher Codes	No.
Views of teachers regarding problems encountered by students in word formation		
Words Containing Consonant Clusters	T8/T13/T14/T17/T28/T31/T34/T35/T39/T40/T41/T43/T44	13
Reversion to Sound and Syllable Stages	T3/T9/T11/T12/T19/T21/T22/T33/T45/T46/T48	11
Multi-syllable Words	T4/T6/T7/T10/T16/T23/T27/T29/T38/T42	10
Words Unfamiliar to the Child	T18/T26/T27/T32/T36	5
No Answer Given	T1/T2/T5/T25/T37	5
No Problems	T15/T20/T30/T47	4
Low Reading Speed	T24	1
Exercises carried out by teachers for students at stage of forming words from syllables		
Games	T5/T6/T13/T14/T17/T30/T31/T33/T34/T37/T38/T39/T41/T46/T47	15
Audio-visual Material	T10/T11/T13/T24/T25/T26/T29/T35/T37/T40	10
Sentence Formation Activities	T2/T4/T21/T23/T28/T32/T36/T38/T43	9
Repetition	T7/T9/T12/T15/T16/T44/T48	7
No Answer Given	T3/T8/T18/T42	4
Dictation	T1/T22/T45	3
No Exercises Done	T19/T20/T27	3

Data related to the stage of forming words from syllables in students with difficulties in learning literacy are grouped under two themes, namely, the problems encountered and the practices carried out by teachers in this regard. 13 of the participating teachers stated that students had difficulties with words containing consonant clusters, while 11 teachers reported that they were obliged to return to the sound and syllable stages. T43 said, "They find it hard to put the syllables together; for example, when writing 'anne', they forget one letter *n*," while T45 said, "If they have not fully comprehended at the syllable stage, problems arise, and in this case, we are forced to go back." With regard to the exercises performed by teachers for students at the word stage, 15 teachers stated that they used games, while 10 teachers reported using audio-visual material. T17 said, "I use gamification as much as possible; when it is converted into a game they do not forget."

Problems encountered at the sentence formation stage by students with difficulties in learning reading and writing, the teachers' views on the implementation of sentence rules and the practices they carried out for students in this direction are given below in Table 6.

Table 7. Data Related to Formation of Sentences from Words in Students with Literacy Learning Difficulties

Thematic Codes	Teacher Codes	No.
Views of teachers regarding problems encountered by students in sentence formation		
Omitting Letters	T1/T2/T3/T6/T8/T9/T14/T15/T20/T22/T25/T29/T30/T34/ T35/T40/T43/T44/T46/T48	20
Interpolation	T17/T21/T23/T24/T31/T38/T39/T41/T47	9
No problems	T5/T7/T10/T13/T19/T26/T27/T37/T45	9
Low Speed	T4/T12/T14/T16/T18	5
To forget attachments	T11/T15/T28/T32/T33	5
Confusion of Letters	T8/T36/T42	3
Views of teachers regarding implementation of sentence rules		
Incorrect Use of Small and Capital Letters	T5/T11/T12/T14/T18/T21/T24/T27/T28/T33/T38/T39/ T46/T47	14
No problems	T1/T2/T6/T7/T8/T10/T13/T15/T16/T20/T30/T34/T35	13
General Difficulty with Rules	T11/T22/T25/T26/T31/T32/T37/T41/T42/T44	10
Inability to Leave Suitable Spaces between Words and Letters	T3/T4/T9/T17/T23/T24/T48	7
Inability to Write on Lines	T5/T9/T14/T39/T43/T47	6
Incorrect Separation of Words not Fitting at the End of Lines	T29/T36/T40/T45	4
Incorrect Use of Full Stops	T4/T19	2
Exercises carried out by teachers for students at sentence stage		
Dictation	T6/T10/T16/T22/T24/T26/T27/T33/T36/T39/T40/ T41/T42/T45/T46/T47/T48	17
Activities	T2/T4/T12/T14/T18/T28/T31/T32/T34/T43/T44	11
No Answer Given	T7/ T8/T9/T11/T13/T15/T29	7
Repetition	T19/T20/T21/T25/T37/T48	6
Games	T1/T5/T6/T26/T30/T35	6
Drama	T1/T6/T10/T16	4
Individual Activity	T3/T17/T23	3
Visuals	T38	1

Data related to the process of forming sentences from words in students with difficulties in learning literacy are grouped under three themes, namely, the problems experienced, the implementation of sentence rules and the practices carried out by teachers in this regard. 20 teachers reported that letters were omitted by students at the sentence stage, while 9 teachers indicated that interpolation occurred. T46 said, "They sometimes leave out letters when writing sentences; when the same two letters appear side by side, they omit one of them," while T41 said, "They read the beginning of the word correctly, but when adding the end they read something they have made up." With regard to sentence rules, 14 of the teachers stated that errors were made in using small and capital letters, whereas 13 teachers reported that no problems were experienced with sentence rules. While T12 said, "They confuse small and capital letters and use them in place of each other," T16 said, that there were no problems in this regard. Examining the exercises carried out by teachers for students at the sentence stage, 17 teachers reported doing dictation, while 11 stated that they did activities. T41 said, "After teaching the two sounds I begin dictation; I do a lot of dictations," while T4 said, "We form three tables containing the words, and we do an activity for making sentences from the words in these tables."

The views of teachers related to the contributions to the process by parents of students with difficulties in learning literacy are presented below in Table 8.

Table 8. Views of Teachers Regarding Parental Support for Students with Literacy Learning Difficulties

Thematic Codes	Teacher Codes	No.
Communication with Parents and Guidance	T1/T2/T4/T9/T10/T12/T13/T14/T19/T20/T23/T26/T34/T38/T46/T48	16
Monitoring of Activities and Homework	T3/T5/T8/T15/T24/T25/T27/T31/T33/T35/T37/T39/T40/T43/T47	15
No Parental Support Given	T7/T16/T17/T18/T22/T28/T29/T30/T32/T36/T41/T42/T44/T45/T47	15
No Answer Given	T6/T11/T21	3

With regard to the support provided by parents of students with difficulties in learning literacy, 16 teachers reported that they were in continuous contact with the parents and that they informed them about the literacy learning process and method, while 15 teachers declared that they received support from parents in monitoring homework and the activities they had prepared. 15 teachers, however, stated that they were unable to receive support from parents.

Discussion, Conclusion and Suggestions

The results of the current study, in which the aim was to ascertain characteristics related to socio-cultural and literacy skills of students with difficulties in the literacy-learning process and to reveal data about the literacy-learning process of these students, are discussed in this section in the order of the findings. According to Baki and Gökçek (2012), in a sequential explanatory design, which is the design method of the present study, findings related to the quantitative and qualitative questions of the research are generally combined in the discussion section. Therefore, the data related to this study are combined and interpreted in the discussion section.

Characteristics of Students with Difficulties in Learning Reading and Writing

47.1% (503) of the 1068 teachers who completed the questionnaire prepared with the aim of determining the characteristics of students with difficulties in the literacy-learning process stated that students had difficulties with syllable-forming; 23.03% (246) of them indicated that students had problems at the sound-learning stage; 14.33% (153) of them reported that students experienced problems with forming words from syllables; 7.49% (80) of them stated that students found it difficult to write the letters; 6.93% (74) of them reported that students had problems with dictation exercises; while 1.12% (12) of the teachers indicated that students had difficulties in sentence formation. 70.13% (749) of participating teachers reported that students had difficulties during the sounds and syllables periods. In a study conducted by Özsoy (2006), it was stated that students experienced problems at the syllable formation stage and that this resulted from the fact that the sounds had not been adequately differentiated by the students. These research findings confirm the opinion of Baydık (2002) that a large percentage of students having difficulty in reading have problems in phonetic skills. Ferah (2011) stated that in pre-reading/writing teaching based on sounds, the development of sounds, the ease of uttering sounds and similar issues in children also needed to be given attention. Therefore, it will be beneficial for studies to be conducted aimed at distinguishing sounds for children with reading and writing difficulties (Özcan & Özcan, 2014). In the Turkish Lesson Teaching Programme (MEB, 2019) it is recommended that firstly, the sounds should be made understood, and that as part of this, visuals, rhymes, songs and riddles should be utilised. For this purpose, all detailed audio-visual materials aimed at sounds should be prepared and made available to teachers. Chard and Kameenui (2000) stated that students' competence in knowledge of letters and sounds in phonological processes will facilitate literacy.

81.37% (869) of the teachers completing the questionnaire stated that these students were at a younger age than that of their peers; 61.99% (622) of them reported that students acquired the reading-writing skills in second grade; while 93.91% (1003) of them indicated that starting primary school one year later would contribute towards their literacy learning process. Sharp (2002) reported that younger students showed a worse performance than other students did. Children generally reach school

maturity at about six years of age, yet due to individual differences, the age of reaching school maturity may vary. Although development stages are the same for all children in all areas, children's performance at these stages can differ. For this reason, school maturity must not be reduced to the numerical value of age (Koçyiğit, 2009). Based on the findings of a study made by Tatal and Oral (2015), it is recommended that children who have reached a sufficient degree of maturity should be accepted into school by conducting school maturity tests that also measure factors, other than age, that affect readiness for reading and writing. When these data are considered together with the fact that 60.58% (647) of the teachers completing the questionnaire stated that only a few of these students had had preschool education, and that 14.33% (153) of them indicated that none of these students had received preschool education, allowing them to start primary school one year later and providing them with preschool education will contribute especially towards minimising difficulties they experience in the learning process. In a study by Yapıcı and Ulu (2010), conducted with the aim of determining class teachers' expectations of preschool teachers, 35% of the teachers who took part in the research stated that preschool teachers needed to do literacy preparation activities as part of the preparation for elementary school, and that especially in the preschool period, conducting sound exercises would facilitate the transition to reading. 17.04% (182) of the teachers participating in the present study stated that they could detect these students having problems in the literacy learning process during the orientation week; 33.8% (361) of them indicated that they had difficulty during September; while 34.93% (373) of them reported their having problems in October. In this context, in future revisions to be made to the Regulations on Preschool and Primary Education Institutions, students regarded by class teachers and school counsellors to be in this situation can be directed towards preschool education institutions from October onwards.

It was indicated by 57.02% (609) of the participating teachers that parents did not provide support for these students in reading and writing; by 80.99% (865) of them that education levels of these students' parents were lower than those of other students' parents; by 63.39% (677) of them that these students' socio-economic levels were lower than those of other students; and by 83.15% (888) of them that these students were more disorganised than other students with regard to bringing school tools and materials to school. In a study made by Şahin (2010), 90.1% of teachers reported that in pre-reading/writing, since parents' education levels were low, they could be of sufficient help to their children. Plowman and Stephan (2005) stated that children with reading and writing difficulties possessed fewer books and generally received less support for literacy at home. The study findings stress the importance of the home literacy environment for children's literacy development. While a percentage of students starting primary school reach a competent level in terms of readiness for school by means of the facilities presented in their own homes, another group experience hardships due to inadequate and negative home conditions (Ertürk, 2017). According to the findings of a study made by Koçyiğit (2009), almost all participating teachers stressed the problem arising in the first grade of primary school from what children had gained from their parents regarding literacy skills, and the teachers, pointing out that being organised was important for children's school life and for their future lives, stated that parents needed to give their children responsibility in this matter by doing little familiarisation exercises at home. Therefore, especially in families with low socio-economic levels, it is important for children to receive preschool education in terms of achieving the aim of preschool education stated in the 20th clause of the Basic Law of National Education, namely, "to create a common habitat for children who come from environments and families with unfavourable conditions". For this reason, it will be beneficial for organisations and institutions that have been given social responsibility, such as public education centres, local authorities and media organisations, to contribute towards the proliferation of preschool education and towards informing parents about the literacy teaching process.

With regard to the identification of the students as special education students, 18.91% (202) of the teachers indicated that all the students were identified as special education students; 29.03% (310) of them stated that a large percentage were identified as special education students; 21.35% (228) of them declared that a small percentage were identified as special education students; 10.58% (113) of them reported that none of the students were identified as special education students; while 20.13% (215) of the teachers pointed out that they did not direct the students to the school counselling service. While these data reveal that a section of the students with difficulties in gaining literacy skills were

treated as special education students, they show that another section, however, were not regarded as special education students. Commodari and Guenera (2005) stated that children with attention deficit can experience difficulties in learning to read and write. Ifigenia, Jaime, Julien, and Cesar (2018) stressed that especially students having learning difficulties in reading and writing may be students with a need for special education and that combining the use of technology with classroom applications would be beneficial for these students. Identifying this situation, which is important with regard to preparing and implementing individualised teaching programmes prepared for special education students, is only possible by directing students to the school counselling service. The fact that 20.13% (215) of the participating teachers did not send students in this situation to the counselling service is an important problem, as it can prevent the education process from being conducted favourably for the students. Therefore, school managers must carry out the necessary inspections to ensure that students are directed towards counselling services.

With regard to students' length of attendance at school, it was stated by 53.37% (570) of the teachers that these students had attended school for shorter periods than the other students had. Students experiencing problems related to attendance at school affect the school success and sense of belonging to school of students at a young age in particular (Zorc et al., 2013). This situation reveals the importance of students' attendance at school, especially in schools where the sound-based sentence method is implemented. The fact that students could not learn the sounds given on the days when they did not attend school and that the number of these sounds progressively increases only makes the literacy learning process more difficult (Babayiğit & Erkuş, 2017). Since students who do not receive preschool education have started school without receiving support in the context of phonetic awareness skills, the shorter length of time that these students have spent at school will increase the difficulties they will experience. Therefore, school administrators, class teachers and counsellors must ensure the necessary surveillance and support for students, especially those in first grade, to attend school.

Findings Related to Students' Literacy Learning Process

Examining the findings related to the sound learning process, 36 teachers stated that the students had difficulty in learning the sounds, while 13 teachers reported that the sounds were confused. Considering the reasons for difficulties in learning the sounds, 22 teachers said that they were due to family indifference, while 19 teachers reported cognitive inability. With regard to comparing the skills of uttering the sounds and writing the letters, 31 teachers stated that the writing skill was acquired more slowly. When examining exercises carried out with students at the sound stage, 29 teachers reported that they used audio-visual material. Özcan and Özcan (2014) stated that in children with reading difficulties, phonetic awareness developed later, and that these children would have more difficulty in distinguishing sounds within words in particular. This opinion and the fact that in the quantitative findings of the current study, 23.03% (246) of the teachers mentioned the difficulty experienced at the sound stage support the research findings obtained in which the students had difficulty in learning the sounds and that they confused certain sounds. Therefore, Ferah (2011) emphasises the need for importance to be given to matters such as sound and word frequencies, development of sounds in children and ease of uttering the sounds in pre-literacy education based on sounds. Moreover, the frequencies of using sounds, and the characteristics of pronouncing and articulating the sounds must be given attention in the grounding of pre-literacy education (Özcan & Özcan, 2014). With regard to the inability to learn sounds, Adams (1994) stated that literacy education should not begin until the child has reached a certain level of cognitive maturity, while in a study conducted by Babayiğit (2017), it was concluded that family indifference had an effect on the inability to learn sounds. In this study, the participating class teachers stressed that parents did not support them or the students. The statement by 57.02% (609) of the teachers in the quantitative findings of the current study that parents did not give support in the reading-writing process is consistent with this finding. Therefore, informing parents of students starting first grade about methods will minimise problems stemming from parents. Furthermore, the fact that in the quantitative findings of the present study, 80.99% (865) of participating teachers stated that parents' education levels were low reveals the importance of informing parents about methods. With regard to the late acquisition of the writing skill, Collins, Lee, Fox, and Madigan (2017) stated that students showing poor performance in literacy skills will experience difficulty in writing. Writing, which is an important area of Turkish education, requires

skill more than knowledge, and this is acquired only through practice (Bayat & Çelenk, 2015). In a study made by Tural and Oral (2015), it was stated that writing success in students aged 73 months and over was greater than writing success in students aged 60-66 months. In another study conducted by Kartal, Balantekin, and Bilgin (2016), it was also concluded that school starting age had an effect on the acquisition of reading and writing skills. The findings of that study are consistent with those of the current study, in the quantitative data of which, 81.37% (869) of the teachers stated that the ages of the students studied were younger than those of other students. Yıldız (2010) stated that by means of using audio-visual materials such as video films, graphics, pictures, sound recordings and simulations in literacy teaching, rates of remembering the knowledge and skills gained in literacy learning will be higher. Consequently, the use of audio-visual material by a majority of teachers is consistent with the findings in the literature.

Examining the findings related to the process of forming syllables from sounds, 25 teachers reported that students had difficulty in forming open syllables. With regard to the sounds with which students had difficulty, 31 teachers stated that when forming syllables, students struggled with the sounds *b, ç, d, f, h, g, ğ, j, m, n, p, r, t* and *v*, while 9 teachers reported that the sounds *j* and *ş*; *s* and *z*; *b* and *d*; *e* and *l*; *m* and *n*; *l* and *n*; *b* and *p*; *s* and *ş*; *b* and *d*; and *r* and *y* were confused. 22 teachers stated that no difficulties were experienced with syllables formed from three or four letters. Considering the exercises conducted with students at the syllable stage, 15 teachers stated that they used games, while 14 reported that they used audio-visual material. In the Turkish Lesson Teaching Programme (MEB, 2019), it is stated that the closed syllables should always be learnt first, followed by the open syllables. Kartal (2013) recommended that activities should be prepared to prevent problems that can be experienced during the transition from closed to open syllables. There is insufficient research covering the 6-12 age group into which sounds are acquired first by students and at which stages they have difficulties in learning the sounds (Özcan & Özcan, 2014). It is stated that for learning literacy, phonetic awareness is also related to naming the letters in which it is insufficient (Lonigan, Burgess, & Anthony, 2000). In the present study, it is seen that the difficulty in learning the sounds included in the findings for the sound stage and the confusing of certain sounds at this stage also appear at the syllable stage. Again, in the quantitative findings of the current study, 47.1% (503) of the teachers reported that the students had difficulties at the syllable-forming stage. These data reveal the importance of students' acquiring the necessary learning outcomes before moving on to the next stage of the process. Wohlwend (2008) stated that combining literacy learning with games will reinforce students' learning skills. The research findings revealing that teachers use games in teaching reading and writing are consistent with the literature.

Regarding the word formation process, 13 teachers reported that difficulties were experienced with words containing the same sounds together, while 11 teachers stated that they had to return to the sound and syllable stages. Examining the exercises performed with the students, 15 teachers stated that they used games, while 10 reported that they used audio-visual material. Students may make mistakes in reading and writing such as letter errors, syllable elision and making up words from one syllable (Can & Yavuz, 2017). These errors may result in the necessity to revert to the sound and syllable stages. Moreover, the fact that in the quantitative findings of the current study, it was stated by 53.37% (570) of the teachers that these students had attended school for shorter periods may also result in a return to the sound and syllable stages. Therefore, students' attendance at school is important for them to acquire the learning outcomes for literacy education in every term. Teaching with games is effective in the literacy education process (Babayiğit, 2016). On the other hand, a study was conducted by Steele (2006) which aimed to determine the effects of music on reading in students with reading difficulties. 39 students who had reading problems were separated into experimental and control groups and sent to camp. During the six-week training period, one of the keywords found in the songs taught was given to a child, who was asked to analyse it. In order to make the analysis easier, the keyword was also supported with visuals and successful students were allowed to play one of the rhythm instruments, such as a drum or a xylophone, etc., placed before them. Following the research, it was recorded that the experimental group showed more progress than the control group (as cited in Çaydere & Alır, 2017). In light of these data, it can be said that music activities will be beneficial while conducting word activities with students experiencing difficulties in learning to read and write.

At the sentence stage, 20 teachers indicated that the students forgot the sounds, while 14 teachers stated that small and capital letters were incorrectly used. Examining the exercises carried out with the students, 17 teachers stated that they did dictation, while 11 teachers reported that they performed activities. Several studies have revealed powerful and significant relationships between applying spelling rules and reading performance (Weiser & Mathes, 2011). In a study carried out by Arslan (2012), it was determined that while teaching spelling, teachers conducted writing, checking, examples, correction and one-to-one practical exercises. In a study conducted by Ateş, Çetinkaya, and Yıldırım (2014) aimed at determining the views of class teachers about students with writing difficulties, the class teachers stated that these students were behind their peers in the skill of writing and that they did not write according to the rules of spelling. In another study made by Gültekin and Aktay (2014) on the subject of dictation exercises in pre-literacy teaching, it was determined that problems were experienced such as omission of letters and syllables in writing, inability to apply the rules of spelling and incorrect use of punctuation marks, fear of making mistakes in insecure children, and unhappiness and crying in children with writing difficulties. The findings of the present study confirm these findings. The fact that students forgot sounds at the sentence stage, even though the teachers stated that they reverted to the other stages of the literacy teaching process, is an important problem. For this reason, effective and lasting exercises for students at the previous stages of literacy teaching must be carried out in order to prevent problems at the sentence stage. In Norway, a computer programme named MultiFunk was developed to assist students with reading and writing skills, which contained texts suited to their areas of interest, and students included in the experimental group for which this software was applied showed a better performance than students in the control group with regard to literacy skills (Fasting & Lyster, 2005). In this sense, considering that teachers in the study group preferred to do dictation and activities, it can be said that their lack of inclusion of technology use is a deficiency.

Regarding parental support in learning reading and writing, 16 teachers stated that they were in contact with parents and that they guided them, 15 teachers reported that parents monitored activities and homework, while 15 teachers indicated that they received no support from parents. According to the study conducted by Koçyiğit (2009), almost all teachers stressed that the reading instruction given by their parents caused children problems in the first grade of primary school. In Bayat's (2014) study, it was concluded that parental support for literacy teaching was important and that in cases where this support was not provided, less able students in particular experienced problems. In the quantitative findings of the current study, 57.02% (609) of teachers stated that they did not receive support from parents. While this is a problem in itself, in cases where parents do provide support, the process may be negatively affected by incorrect attitudes and behaviours of parents. Therefore, informing parents about methods will prevent potential problems. According to the research conducted by Koçyiğit (2009), it is recommended by teachers that children need to be aware of sounds for their linguistic development, and that to enable this, parents should read a large number of folktales, stories, poems and rhymes to their children. Considering that parents of students who have reading and writing difficulties feel emotions of sadness, hopelessness and anxiety (Can & Yavuz, 2017), it may be said that students' lack of success and parents' hopelessness and sadness are factors that trigger each other. In this context, informing parents about the literacy learning process will obstruct this negative cycle.

With reference to the research findings, the following recommendations are made regarding students with difficulties in learning reading and writing: (i) To minimise the problems arising from students' difficulties in literacy learning, decisions can be made regarding students' registration by conducting school maturity tests on students receiving preschool education at school, and on those without preschool education during the registration period for primary school, carried out by school counsellors employed in primary schools; (ii) Considering that students have more difficulties at the sound and syllable-forming stages, if all students benefit from preschool education to increase their phonetic awareness, this will minimise difficulties that might be experienced; (iii) Since the fact that a percentage of students go on to secondary school without acquiring literacy skills in primary school will have a negative effect on their utilisation of the teaching-learning process, legal requirements should be put in place for these students to receive additional training in the form of support courses; (iv) Opportunities should be given for class teachers to know in advance the difficulties that students can encounter in the acquisition of literacy skills and for them to take the necessary precautions. For this

purpose, in-service training on the subject can be given to first-grade class teachers at the beginning of the academic year during the seminar period; (v) Technologically-supported materials aimed at students with difficulties in reading and writing can be prepared and presented for the use of teachers and students together with the teachers' and students' books distributed by the National Education Ministry; (vi) A programme, aimed at students who are currently studying in primary schools but have not yet been able to acquire literacy skills, that includes components such as poems, songs, rhymes, materials appealing to audio-visual and tactile senses, technological tools, etc. can be prepared and tested in an experimental study; (vii) The fact that during the data collection process, permission could not be obtained for collecting information about the teachers' identities and the schools where they worked, creates a limitation of this study. A study could be conducted by accessing this information and selecting the teachers to be consulted as the data source in the qualitative section of the study.

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