Parental Opınıons on Adaptatıon Problems Durıng the Transıtıon From Preschool to Prımary School in Inclusıve Multıcultural Educatıonal Envıronments

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Abstract: The aim of this study is to examine parents' views on adaptation problems experienced during the transition from preschool to primary school in multicultural educational settings. The study was conducted using a phenomenological design, one of the qualitative research methods, and data were collected through a semi-structured interview form. The study group consists of parents of students enrolled in public and private primary schools affiliated with the Ministry of National Education in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus during the 2024–2025 academic year. Participants were selected through the snowball sampling method, a type of non-probability sampling. The data obtained from the semi-structured interviews with parents were analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings reveal that the main problems children face during the adaptation process include social communication difficulties, language differences, and emotional reactions. In terms of academic adaptation, school refusal behavior is particularly noteworthy. The findings indicated that home-based activities such as language use, reading, audiovisual and artistic activities positively contribute to children's adaptation. Teachers' affection and communication skills emerged as significant support factors during the adaptation process. However, deficiencies were observed in the availability of cultural support and adaptation programs. The study concludes that it is essential to develop and implement culturally inclusive adaptation programs.

Keywords: Preschool period, transition to primary school, inclusive education, adaptation problems.

INTRODUCTION

The preschool and primary school years constitute critical stages in children's emotional, social, and cognitive development processes (Aydemir, 2023). The transition from preschool to primary school involves not only the acquisition of academic skills but also the child's adaptation to a new social environment, a new teacher, a different educational setting, a changed curriculum, peers from diverse cultural backgrounds, and the overall school culture (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000). During this period, school adjustment problems may manifest in various forms such as anxiety, crying, aggression, withdrawal, and difficulty in self-expression (Yıldız & Dağlıoğlu, 2017). These issues may become more complex,

particularly for children from different cultural backgrounds. Factors such as language differences, conflicts between traditional values, and a sense of cultural belonging are among the elements that make adaptation more challenging in multicultural educational environments (Gay, 2018). It is highly important for children to recognize and embrace their own cultures at an early age for healthy development (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014). However, schools are typically settings where children from diverse cultural backgrounds coexist, which can make the adaptation process more difficult and complex (Garcia Coll & Marks, 2012). In this context, conflicts between cultural identity and school environment may negatively affect children's social relationships and academic achievement (Yıldırım, 2023). Research indicates that cultural diversity within school environments during the transition from preschool to primary school can create both opportunities and challenges for children's adaptation (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2010; Calzada et al., 2009). Moreover, cultural support and educational practices provided by schools are emphasized as important factors that facilitate the adaptation process (Gay, 2010; Küçüker, 2020). Parents' experiences and perceptions regarding their children's school adaptation play a critical role in determining how this process unfolds (Akkaya & Yıldız, 2020). The way parents reflect their cultural values within the school environment can be a key determinant of the social adaptation challenges faced by their children (Kaya, 2018). At this point, strengthening parent-school collaboration can enable children to preserve and develop their cultural identities while adapting to school life (Yıldırım & Demirtaş, 2019). In this regard, it is necessary to enrich teacher training with multicultural education content and to ensure active parental involvement in school processes (Eren, 2015). Parents have the opportunity to directly observe the challenges their children face, their communication with teachers, and the cultural interactions that occur within the school environment. Therefore, examining parents' views on adaptation problems experienced in multicultural educational settings can contribute significantly to shaping educational practices and enhancing teachers' cultural awareness (Souto-Manning, 2013). Accordingly, developing strategies and practices in areas such as cultural sensitivity, language development, parent-school collaboration, and teacher training can support children's holistic development. For these reasons, this study aims to analyze the adaptation problems encountered during the transition from preschool to primary school in multicultural educational environments from the perspective of parents; to identify the prominent challenges and support needs during this process; and to contribute to the development of more effective transition programs. This research seeks to answer the following questions:

According to parents' views:

1. How does your child's cultural identity affect their school adaptation?

2. Did your child experience any positive or negative situations related to their own culture when starting school?

3. How do your child's post-school behaviors, related to adaptation problems, affect your family relationships?

4. What kind of activities do you carry out at home to help your child adapt to school?

5. To what extent do you think teachers are effective in helping your child adjust to school?

6. Are there support programs for different cultures in the school your child attends?

7. Has your child participated in an adaptation program at their school?

8. What types of practices would you like to see in schools for parents from different cultural backgrounds?

METHOD

Research Design

In this study, a qualitative research method—specifically, the phenomenological design—was employed to examine parental views regarding adaptation problems experienced during the transition from preschool to primary school in multicultural educational settings. Within the framework of this design, interviews were conducted to gather data on parental perspectives concerning the adaptation challenges encountered in multicultural environments. Phenomenology is a qualitative research approach that seeks to explore how individuals perceive and experience a particular phenomenon and the consciousness it produces (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2021).

Study Group

The study group consisted of parents whose children were enrolled in first grade during the 2024–2025 academic year in public and private primary schools affiliated with the Ministry of National Education in the districts of Nicosia, Kyrenia, Famagusta, Güzelyurt, Lefke, and İskele in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. Participants were selected using the snowball sampling method, a type of non-probability sampling. This technique was chosen to facilitate access to parents who were willing to participate in the research.

Data Collection Tools

The data were collected using two tools: a Personal Information Form, designed to gather demographic information about the parents, and a Semi-Structured Parent Interview Form, developed by the researcher to explore parental views on adaptation problems during the transition from preschool to primary school in multicultural education settings. These tools are explained in detail below.

Personal Information Form

The Personal Information Form included demographic details about the parents such as age, nationality, educational background, marital status, and the name of the school their child attends. This form was administered individually to each parent.

Semi-Structured Parent Interview Form

Based on an extensive review of the literature conducted by the researcher, a semi-structured parent interview form was developed and administered to the parents of students attending first grade. To ensure content validity, the questions in the form were reviewed by field experts, and necessary adjustments were made accordingly. The final version of the parent interview form consisted of eight questions, approved by subject matter experts.

Data Collection

Data collection was carried out during the 2024–2025 academic year. Parents of primary school students who were interviewed were informed about the purpose of the study, and they were assured of the confidentiality of their personal information. Interviews were conducted with volunteer participants. Data were collected through both face-to-face interviews and online via Google Forms.

Analysis of Data

The data obtained from the interviews were analyzed using the thematic analysis method, which is appropriate for qualitative data analysis. Thematic analysis is a method used to identify meaningful and recurring patterns (themes) within participants' statements. In this process, the experiences of parents regarding adaptation challenges in multicultural settings during the transition from preschool to primary school were examined in terms of common meanings. The interview data were transcribed, and each transcript was read multiple times to identify meaningful expressions. These expressions were grouped into semantic units and coded into main themes and subthemes based on shared characteristics. Parents' views were then described under each identified theme, and their statements were used to support the findings. To increase the reliability of the results, member checking was employed, and several interview transcripts were compared with the coding of an independent researcher to ensure inter-coder consistency.

RESULTS

In this section, parental views regarding adaptation problems during the transition from preschool to primary school in multicultural educational settings are presented. The findings are organized in alignment with the sub-objectives of the study and are supported by interpretations.

Table 1. The Effect of the Child's Cultural Identity on School Adaptation

Main Theme	Sub-theme	Examples of Parental Statements	Participant Code
Cultural Identity and Adaptation	Positive Effects	"It has a positive effect. The child can easily share with their friends."	K4
		"It has a positive effect. Friends are curious about their culture, and the child enjoys talking about it."	K16
		"It is mostly positive. The child likes to talk about our culture with peers from different backgrounds."	K20

Negative Effects	"It has a negative effect. There is confusion with other cultures."	K11
	"It negatively affects the child because they have difficulty making friends."	K18
	"It is negatively affected because the child cannot speak Turkish with the same accent."	K13

The results presented in Table 1 indicate that cultural identity can have both positive and negative effects on a child's adaptation process. While some parents stated that their children were able to express themselves comfortably and strengthen their social relationships by becoming familiar with different cultures, others emphasized that language differences and difficulties in forming friendships negatively impacted their children's adaptation. This situation highlights the importance of culturally sensitive educational approaches.

Table 2. Problems Experienced by the Child During School Adaptation Due to Cultural Background

Main Theme	Sub-Theme	Examples of Parent Statements	Participant Code
Adaptation Problems	Increased rules and restrictions	"There were rules at home, but we faced problems because there were more rules at school."	K5
	Impact of language and differences	"He is struggling. He is affected by language and cultural differences with friends from other cultures."	K8
		"He is having difficulties because he cannot speak Turkish fluently."	K7
	Shyness and introversion	"He is hesitant to share values from his own culture in the classroom environment."	K12
		"He does not talk about what he experiences at school; he has become introverted."	K2
	Social communication difficulties	"He had difficulty making friends with peers."	K9
		"The peer group excluded him."	K4

Teacher and peer changes		"He was upset about the change of teacher and the separation from his closest friend."	K6
		"He had difficulty accepting the new teacher and communicating with peers."	K16

According to parents' views, children's school adaptation process may be negatively affected by increased rules in the school environment, language differences, cultural diversity, and changes in teachers or peers. While some children have difficulty adjusting to the rules, limited language proficiency and cultural differences hinder social communication and lead to behaviors such as shyness and introversion. Moreover, changes in teachers or friends may trigger emotional reactions and social adaptation problems. These findings emphasize the importance of adopting supportive approaches that take individual differences into account in school settings.

Table 3. The Impact of School Adaptation Problems on Intra-Family Relationships

Main Theme	Sub-Theme	Examples of Parent Statements	Participant Code
Emotional Reactions	Crying and need for attention	"He becomes sad and doesn't want to do anything."	K9
		"He always cries when he comes home and doesn't talk about his problems."	K1
Behavioral Reactions	Lack of communication	"He has stopped communicating with us."	K11
Academic Adaptation Issues	School refusal	"He makes excuses like saying he is sick and doesn't want to go to school."	K15

According to parents' views, during the school adaptation process, children were reported to experience emotional difficulties such as feeling sad, crying frequently, and seeking attention. Behaviorally, a reduction in family communication and social withdrawal were noted. Academically, some children showed reluctance to attend school, often producing various excuses to avoid going. These reactions indicate the necessity of providing multidimensional support to children throughout the adaptation process.

Table 4. Activities Conducted at Home to Support the Child's School Adaptation

Main Theme	Subtheme	Examples of Parental Opinions	Participant Code
Home-Based Support	Language and Reading Activities	"We read storybooks related to the school environment" "We communicate that the school is a pleasant and enjoyable place."	K17 K20
	Visual and Auditory Activities	"We watch cartoons related to the school environment." "We discuss playing and sharing with peers, and to support this, we show cartoons."	K19 K1
	Artistic Activities	"We engage in drawing, drama, and role-playing activities to facilitate emotional expression." "We conduct drawing activities to help children express their emotions."	K12 K15
	Supportive Family Activities	"We prepare the backpack together." "We teach at home the etiquette rules that should be observed within peer groups."	K4 K1

According to parental opinions, during the school adjustment process, parents support language development by reading storybooks and using positive expressions about school. Children's social adaptation is encouraged through visual and auditory tools such as cartoons, while artistic activities (drawing, drama, role-playing) help them express their emotions. Additionally, parents engage in daily routines together, such as preparing school bags, and teach social skills like manners within the family environment. These findings indicate that family support plays a crucial role in children's school adjustment process.

Table 5. The Role and Impact of Teachers in the School Adjustment Process

Main Theme	Subtheme	Examples of Parental Opinions	Participant Code
Teacher Influence	Teacher's and Care	Love "Our teacher consistently showed high levels of care and affection."	K11

Communication Skills	"If the teacher has strong communication skills, the child adapts more easily."	K18
Cooperation and Support	"The teacher's collaboration and attention had a significant impact."	K14
Social Integration	"The teacher should facilitate the children's social integration with their peers."	K6

According to parental opinions, a teacher's demonstration of love and care, strong communication skills, collaboration with families, and support for social integration among students positively influence children's adaptation. These findings indicate that teachers have a critical role both in providing emotional support and facilitating social arrangements.

Table 6. Availability of Support Programs for Diverse Cultures in Schools

Main Theme	Subtheme	Sample Parent Statements	Participant Code
Cultural Support	Support Program Available	"Yes, there is a support program."	K16
	No Support Program	"No, there is no program being implemented."	K4

According to parents' views, it is observed that some schools implement support programs aimed at cultural adaptation, while others lack such programs. This situation indicates that practices addressing cultural diversity vary from school to school and that a standardized approach is absent. The widespread implementation of cultural support programs is important to ensure that all students receive equal support.

Table 7. Child's Participation Status in Adaptation Programs

Main Theme	Sub-theme	Examples of Parent Opinions	Participant Code
Adaptation Program	Participated	"Yes."	K1
	Did Not Participate	"No."	K13

According to parent opinions, some students participated in an adaptation program prior to starting school, while others were not included in such a program. This situation indicates inconsistencies in the implementation of adaptation programs across schools.

Table 8. Expectations and Implementation Recommendations for Parents with Diverse Cultural Backgrounds

Main Theme	Subtheme	Examples of Parent Opinions	Participant Code
Cultural Introduction	Cultural introduction activities	"Cultural introduction days, fairs, and theater performances can be organized."	K9
	Education and awareness raising	"Education should be provided, and respect for different cultures should be taught."	K12
	Language courses	"Turkish language courses need to be offered."	K6
	Seminars and parent training	"Parent education conferences and seminars should be held."	K13

Parent perspectives reveal a need for increased cultural introduction and awareness activities in schools to support the adaptation process to cultural diversity. Participants recommend organizing cultural introduction days, theater performances, and fairs; providing education to foster respect for different cultures; offering Turkish language courses; and conducting seminars and training sessions for parents. These views underscore the importance of comprehensive, school-based initiatives aimed at enhancing cultural inclusivity.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study examined parental perspectives on the adaptation challenges experienced during the transition from preschool to primary school within multicultural educational settings. The findings indicate that children's cultural identities, teachers' attitudes, school adaptation programs, and parental support at home are key determinants in the school adaptation process. Participating parents reported that children tend to be hesitant in sharing their cultural values in the classroom environment or face difficulties due to language and cultural differences. Conversely, it was also emphasized that children coming from similar cultural backgrounds tend to establish friendships more easily, which positively influences adaptation. This suggests that cultural proximity acts as a facilitator for social communication. Similarly, Van der Rijst, Leijen, and de Vries (2021) investigated the relationship between cultural mismatch, psychological safety, and learning engagement in multicultural classrooms, demonstrating that safe learning environments enhance students' academic participation despite cultural differences. The role of teachers emerged as one of the most influential factors in children's school adaptation. Teachers' affectionate, understanding, and communicative attitudes help children develop positive feelings toward school. Teachers' active listening, individualized approaches, and efforts to integrate children from diverse cultural backgrounds within the classroom are critical during the adaptation process. Parents indicated that these teacher behaviors significantly impact their children's willingness to attend school and their sense of

security. Correspondingly, Geerlings, Thijs, and Verkuyten (2021) explored the relationship between teachers' cultural beliefs and culturally responsive teaching practices, revealing that teachers' open and positive attitudes support inclusive education. Another noteworthy finding is the insufficiency of cultural support programs offered by schools. Most participants reported the absence of such programs in their children's schools, highlighting a lack of institutional support mechanisms during the adaptation process. Expanding adaptation programs and intercultural education would be a significant step toward enhancing school adaptation for both children and parents. Montgomery (2021) examined interactions among students from diverse cultural backgrounds during group work, noting that these interactions present both learning opportunities and various communication challenges. In Turkey, Kaptan (2016) found that cultural adaptation programs strengthen students' sense of belonging and improve academic success. Additionally, parental activities at home to prepare children for school were found to support the adaptation process. Positive conversations about school, reading storybooks, watching educational cartoons, and preparing school bags together shape children's expectations of school positively. However, some families reported difficulties such as children's reluctance to attend school or withdrawal, underscoring the importance of school–parent collaboration and emotional support. This aligns with Epstein's (2011) model of family–teacher collaboration. In Turkey, Demir and Özdemir (2017) demonstrated that active parental involvement in home preparation increases children's academic and social adaptation. The impact of children's school adaptation experiences on family dynamics is also significant. Adaptation challenges negatively affect parents' emotional well-being and communication, suggesting that the adaptation process should be addressed not only individually but also from a systemic perspective. Lastly, parents from diverse cultural backgrounds expressed a need for informative and support programs in schools. They advocated for cultural awareness activities such as cultural introduction days, seminars, and events, emphasizing that such initiatives would facilitate adaptation for both children and families. Gay (2010) argued that increasing cultural awareness in schools reduces conflicts and promotes adaptation. In Turkey, Öztürk (2019) found that cultural activities positively influence the adaptation of students and families to the school environment. Based on these findings, it is recommended that schools establish comprehensive and regular adaptation programs sensitive to cultural diversity, provide cultural sensitivity training for teachers, offer guidance to parents on home activities that support children's cultural identities and school adaptation, develop supplementary language support programs for children with limited Turkish proficiency, and adopt a multicultural and inclusive educational approach in education policies.

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