

A COMPREHENSIVE EVALUATION OF STUDIES ON THE

DIFFICULTIES EXPERIENCED BY CLASSROOM TEACHERS WORKING IN MULTI GRADE CLASSROOMS IN TURKEY



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ISBN: 978-625-372-940-0

1st Edition

Page Layout By: Gozde YUCEL

Publication Date: 25.12.2025

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Güzeltepe Mahallesi Abidin Daver Sokak Sefer Apartmanı No: 7/9 Çankaya /
Ankara



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1. Introduction

Primary education in Turkey is a stage provided by the state as compulsory and free of charge. The education system, which operates on the principle that every individual should have equal rights to education, must ensure that all citizens benefit from this service by providing equal opportunities without discrimination. This structure, based on the principle of equal opportunity in education, aims to guarantee access to quality education for every individual, regardless of their socioeconomic status. In this context, the state must not only provide education as a service but also develop various policies to improve the quality of this service and offer students better environments/opportunities. One of the fundamental objectives of education systems is to prepare individuals, and therefore society, for the future. The sustainability of economic development, the capacity to benefit from technological advances, and the improvement of social welfare levels depend largely on the effectiveness and functionality of education systems. Therefore, when formulating education policies, individual differences and the needs of society must be taken into account, and education must be made accessible and high-quality for everyone (Kök, 2025).

Teaching conducted by a teacher to a group of students formed by combining multiple classes is called teaching in combined classes (Köksal, 2003). In another definition, teaching in combined classes involves students of different ages, grades, and abilities being taught within the same group (Little, 2001). The teaching method is the most important difference that distinguishes combined classes from independent classes. Unlike in independent classes where normal teaching takes place, students in combined classes spend a significant portion of their lessons studying and learning on their own. Therefore, students in combined classes take on more responsibility for their own learning than those in normal classes (Fidan and Baykul, 1993).

The combined class approach is an application for the first 4-year period of the 12-year interrupted compulsory education within the Turkish education system. The ways of forming combined

classes vary according to the number of teachers and classrooms. In single-teacher schools, 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 4th-grade students are combined and taught by one teacher. This is the most difficult form of combined class to manage. In schools with two teachers, under normal conditions, it is recommended that 1st and 2nd grade students be combined into one group and 3rd and 4th grade students into another group. In schools with three teachers, under normal conditions, it is recommended that 1st grade students be taught independently, 2nd and 3rd grade students be taught together as one group, and 4th grade students be taught independently (Erdem, 2008).

Graduates of the classroom teaching department of Education Faculties Teachers are generally assigned to elementary schools that implement combined classes for their first assignment. It has been observed that classroom teachers who begin their careers through initial assignment experience certain difficulties when appointed as principals due to their low service points and almost complete lack of administrative experience (Dal, 2016). Although the number of combined classes has decreased with the spread of the transportation-based education system, it is still preferred in Turkey for economic and geographical reasons and continues to be an important part of the education system (MEB, 2022).

Combined class practices in Turkey are an activity aimed at ensuring equal opportunities in primary school education. The state aims to ensure that all children have access to school within the framework of compulsory and free education. The fundamental goal here is to ensure that no student in rural and disadvantaged areas is left out of school and excluded from the education and training process. Along with this, shortages in the field, such as the number of classrooms and teachers, bring certain difficulties and cause academic and administrative problems, especially in single-teacher schools. While the steps taken to ensure equal opportunities are valuable, it is also crucial to take steps towards equal resources. It can be said that increasing resources is essential for improving the quality of education and ensuring that education is of high standard.

2. Multi-Grade Classroom Practice

Combined classes involve two or more classes coming together to work as a group under the leadership of one teacher. Teaching activities conducted in this manner are referred to as “teaching in combined classes” (Ocakcı & Samancı, 2019). In combined classes, students of different ages and grade levels come together in the same classroom and are taught by the same teacher. The combined class approach is generally preferred in areas with low student numbers, difficult geographical conditions, and a shortage of teachers (Little, 2001). As a result of socio-economic realities, the combined class approach has emerged as a necessary practice, and educators focus on its advantages and disadvantages. For example, if teaching is carried out well in combined classes, it may be possible to develop students individually in areas where they are talented and interested and to prepare a teaching environment according to individual differences (Akbaşlı and Pilten, 1999). Similarly, Gelebek (2011) states that combined classes have certain educational advantages and limitations due to their unique structure. In these classes where students of different age levels are educated together, students may find more opportunities to develop themselves in the areas of social development and individual learning skills compared to students in separate classes. However, the economic and physical conditions of combined classes have made them less desirable.

The combined class approach is not solely a necessity. When properly planned, it can have positive effects on students' social, psychological, cognitive, and emotional development (Veenman, 1995). In Turkey, there are several reasons that necessitate the combined class approach, which is widely practiced in the education system. These can be listed as follows (Dursun, 2006; Karaman, 2006; Şahin, 2007; Taşdemir, 2009):

- Efforts to expand primary education,
- Low number of students,
- Insufficient number of teachers,
- Insufficient number of classrooms,
- Cost of assigning teachers to villages with low enrollment,
- Reopening of village schools that were closed in favor of transportation-based education,

- Distance of settlements and transportation difficulties.

In conclusion, it can be said that combined class applications are a system that aims to provide proper education only under difficult conditions. While the small number of students, geographical conditions, and sometimes teacher shortages make this application necessary, the system has gained continuity and is still maintained in many places in order to ensure equal opportunities between students in rural areas and those in city centers. Although classroom environments with individual differences such as age, developmental characteristics, and learning speed create certain difficulties, it can be said that positive reflections such as peer learning and collaborative learning occur from time to time. Furthermore, it can be observed that students socialize more quickly in combined classes. In Turkey, combined classes are sometimes implemented even in places with only one student in order to include every child in primary education and ensure that no student is deprived of education and teaching activities.

3. Reasons for the Emergence of Multi-Grade Classrooms

The combined class system emerged in the early years of the Republic due to reasons such as the shortage of teachers and the lack of sufficient classrooms in village schools. However, in later periods, migration from villages to cities increased, causing the population in rural areas to gradually decline, which in turn led to a significant drop in student numbers. Although the Ministry of National Education's various policies have largely addressed the teacher shortage and classroom inadequacy, the problem of low student numbers persists in many regions due to continued migration from villages to cities and declining birth rates. Today, in schools where combined classes are still practiced, multiple grade levels are taught by the same teacher. However, in many schools, some classrooms are not used due to low enrollment (Beklen, 2025).

Combined-grade education is practiced in many different countries. These schools, like those in our country, provide education to school-age children living in rural areas. In rural areas with combined-grade classes, an assessment was made in terms of population density, and combined-grade classes were preferred over

separate classes. In these areas with combined classes, livelihoods are generally based on agriculture, animal husbandry, forestry, and fishing. The combined class system emerged as a rural, village-specific practice to provide education and teaching services to children from low-income families who earn their money in these ways. Each country has developed a combined class model based on its geographical conditions, needs, and social characteristics (Kılıç & Abay, 2009).

When evaluated from the perspective of Turkey, teaching in combined classes differs significantly from teaching in independent classes in terms of the implementation of primary education programs and the structuring of the education and teaching process. The first difference is seen in the concept of class (Karakuş, 2019). In combined classes, there is no homogeneous class distinction as expressed in independent classes because multiple grade levels receive education and training services together. In addition, in combined classes, which differ in terms of teaching duration, service environment, teaching method, and lesson delivery, the teaching programs of core subjects are implemented in rotation according to the years. However, subjects such as Visual Arts, Music, and Physical Education are taught simultaneously by selecting the program most suitable for all students' levels. In subjects such as Turkish and Mathematics, where students' cognitive levels are taken into account, teaching is conducted according to their cognitive levels, regardless of the grade level they belong to (MEB, 2000).

In conclusion, the emergence of combined classes in Turkey cannot be explained solely by a shortage of classrooms or teachers. This situation has a background that encompasses societal transformation and demographic variables. Although it was adopted as a necessity in the early years of the Republic, the transformation that took place during the process ensured the continuation of this practice. It can be said that combined class practices are shaped according to the socio-cultural and economic indicators of each country. Looking at the countries where it is generally practiced, it can be said that it is aimed at children from low-income families living in rural areas and earning their living from agriculture and animal husbandry.

Combined class practices implemented in Turkey are very important in terms of ensuring equal opportunities in education. However, there are a number of difficulties due to physical conditions, the presence of students of different ages and developmental characteristics, and disruptions in the teaching process. In order to overcome these difficulties, policies specific to combined classes need to be implemented and developed. Below is a general outline of the difficulties experienced in combined classes.

4. Challenges Experienced in Multi-Grade Classrooms

Combined-grade elementary schools have certain unique characteristics and specific conditions related to their structure, function, program implementation, administrative structure, and operation. These characteristics and conditions also bring certain difficulties. Reasons such as the lack of teachers due to the difficulties teachers face in working in rural areas, students frequently changing teachers, teachers' undergraduate education being insufficient, the inadequacy of teaching materials in these classes, and families' poor economic conditions can be counted among the difficulties encountered in combined classes (Erden, 1996).

The lack of teaching aids other than textbooks, their inadequate use, and limited availability cause problems in combined-grade schools. The very limited financial resources of these schools, in particular, pose a separate problem (Özben, 1997). In addition, problems such as loss of motivation among students during class management and lesson delivery, distraction by other class activities, and the limited time the teacher can devote to the classes can be added to these limitations (Çınar, 2004).

According to Gemici (Aktaran Özben, 1997), there are a number of shortcomings in textbooks from the perspective of combined classes. These are:

- First of all, textbooks are written for cities. They are far from meeting the real needs of village children.
- Textbooks do not encourage students to study and learn on their own.

- Textbooks are written with words and expressions that rural children find difficult to understand, making learning and self-study even more difficult.

Teachers who teach combined classes must be very familiar with the environment/village where they work in order to teach effectively and efficiently. They must be well acquainted with the socio-economic and cultural life of the community, the opportunities and conditions of the environment, customs, traditions, and values. The lack of teaching aids and equipment in combined-grade schools, their inadequacy in terms of use, and the limited opportunities for procurement can be counted among the reasons for inefficiency in village schools. In order for schools to be suitable for learning by doing and experiencing, as envisaged by the primary education program, combined primary schools should have application gardens and classrooms, and the necessary environment should be prepared. Managing several classes at the same time requires the teacher to prepare in advance for each day. This is because a combined class teacher has to deal with more than one class or group at the same time. This also requires good planning, a serious preparation process, and understanding and patience (Kılıç & Abay, 2009).

In combined-grade schools, students are generally gathered in one or a few classrooms, requiring the classroom to be used for multiple purposes. Classrooms are often used for experiments, physical education, and art classes, serving multiple purposes. Even the absence of one of these features can negatively affect education (Özben, 1997). Another issue is classroom management in combined classes. It involves more difficulties and complexity compared to other types of classes. The processes of planning, preparing, implementing, and evaluating instruction are also more complex than in independent classes. Furthermore, since this system is generally implemented in rural schools, the economic conditions, geographical structure, demographic, and cultural characteristics of the location must be carefully considered (Bereket Turan, 2025). One of the most important issues to consider is the quality of education in combined classes. This is because students educated in these classes will move on to the second stage of primary education, where they will be educated in independent classes. If the education

they receive in the first stage is insufficient, this will become apparent in the second stage and cause major problems (Palavan, 2012).

Not all classroom teachers have sufficient knowledge and experience regarding the combined class system. It becomes difficult to achieve all the objectives specified in the primary education curriculum in these classes. The time and energy teachers spend preparing for lessons increases. Preparing to guide students to work independently and to do so effectively takes a lot of time (Köksal, 2005).

Karakuş (2019) lists the disadvantages of the combined class application as follows:

- The scope of the teacher's duties, authority, and responsibilities increases.
- The planning and preparation required by the teacher to guide students to work independently and to make this effective increases.
- It is not possible to achieve all the gains of the teaching program.
- The teacher has less access to students.
- It requires more independence and personal motivation from the student.
- Distraction and inability to concentrate may occur more frequently.
- Interactive work is limited if the teacher's classroom management skills are insufficient.
- If teaching is not planned effectively, students may experience more distractions.
- Teachers' knowledge and skills regarding teaching in combined classes are insufficient.
- Teachers working in such schools are left alone in terms of professional guidance.

As a result, many researchers have pointed out that combined classes have numerous disadvantages. It has been observed that the problems experienced are not limited to the learning-teaching processes, but also encompass many issues such as environmental, pedagogical, economic, material, and human resources. In rural

areas where combined classes exist, there is often teacher mobility and staff shortages due to transfers. It is stated that this situation causes serious problems and leads to a shortage of teachers. In addition, it can be said that the textbooks and teaching materials prepared are based on urban centers and are not suitable for rural areas. Furthermore, there are deficiencies in many areas, such as classroom inadequacy, lack of internet access, lack of materials and resources, and financial shortcomings. This situation reduces the effectiveness of teaching processes and prevents the implementation of targeted processes such as learning by doing and active learning in combined classes. It can be said that all these difficulties and complex processes reduce teachers' motivation, complicate classroom and time management, and reduce their physical and psychological resilience. Ultimately, it can be said that the quality of education provided in combined classes has declined and causes students to experience serious difficulties when they move on to middle school.

5. Primary Challenges Faced by Teachers in Multi-Grade Classrooms

There are many different problems encountered by classroom teachers in combined classes. This is because combined class environments are full of differences and complex structures. Having students of different ages and developmental levels together makes classroom management difficult, causes frequent disruption of discipline, and leads to a rapid loss of student interest and motivation (Aday Korkmaz, 2024). This situation places additional responsibilities on teachers, causing them to lose more energy and strength.

5.1. Fundamental Problems Experienced in Classroom Management

Classroom management is one of the most fundamental problems encountered by classroom teachers in combined class applications. Since combined classes are complex practices that bring together different ages, developmental characteristics,

interests, and needs, classroom management requires maintaining all these balances. Teachers must strive to create learning environments suitable for each student while also maintaining classroom discipline. This requires extra effort, energy, and time (Akin et al., 2024).

Having students with different characteristics in one place (a single classroom) causes difficulties in terms of both rewarding and maintaining discipline. This is because each student's needs, motivation, and learning speed are different. This situation requires the teacher to constantly observe the classroom and use different strategies to maintain a harmonious classroom environment. This situation increases the teacher's workload far beyond what is necessary.

In combined classes, it is crucial for teachers to develop inclusive management policies tailored to student differences to reduce the challenges of classroom management. Teachers must maintain constant, lively communication to ensure discipline and keep motivation high. They should establish common rules to be followed at school and in the classroom together with the students and apply these rules clearly (Akcan, 2022).

5.2. Difficulties Experienced in Teaching and Learning Processes

One of the most fundamental problems teachers face in combined classes is the teaching-learning process. Each student has a different type of intelligence, a different learning speed, and a different level of motivation. This situation requires teachers to take all these individual differences into account and prepare and plan accordingly. While a classroom teacher in a regular class may suffice with a daily plan, a classroom teacher in a combined class must make many different plans. When teachers fail to provide students with

appropriate pace, content, or materials, academic achievement may decline and motivation may be lost (Bucak & Akbaşlı, 2018).

Although it is important for teachers to prepare multiple teaching materials and engage in multiple planning and preparation to meet students' needs and increase academic achievement, this is a heavy burden and effort for them. It is important for teachers to prepare flexible plans taking into account individual differences and to be flexible in the classroom environment to make their work easier. Good planning and flexibility will greatly empower the teacher in terms of time management (Gelen & Yaşar, 2023).

5.3. Difficulties Experienced in Assessment and Evaluation Processes

Assessing and measuring students is another fundamental challenge faced by classroom teachers working in combined classes. Having different student profiles/levels together makes it difficult for students to demonstrate their true performance and also makes it difficult for teachers to measure this performance appropriately (Özdemir & Aydoğdu, 2023). It is quite difficult for teachers to provide detailed explanations and feedback to each student in crowded classrooms and environments where different classes are combined. This situation makes it difficult for them to see the progress of their students and monitor them.

What classroom teachers need to do here is to diversify the assessment criteria, as they do in the teaching-learning processes. Assessment techniques selected according to students' different learning speeds and styles will be very useful both in terms of accurately measuring their learning levels and making a fair assessment (Kara & Yavuz, 2025). In this context, it may be recommended that classroom teachers working in combined classes participate in various professional training programs to be able to make sound assessments and accurately monitor students' development levels.

5.4. Difficulties Experienced in Terms of Resources and Time

One of the most significant problems teachers face in combined classes is resource and time management. Conducting teaching and learning activities with students of different learning styles and speeds requires serious organization. If this organization is not well executed, teachers' time management becomes quite difficult, and a significant portion of this time is wasted (Arslan & Ergül, 2021). This is because while teachers are directly teaching one grade level, they assign tasks to other grade levels to ensure independent work (Little, 2006).

It is crucial for teachers to strike a balance between the time they allocate to lesson planning/preparation, classroom activities, and assessment processes in terms of time management. Preparing activities adapted to each grade level requires extra time, effort, and energy. Teachers need to make quick decisions and be flexible to carry out these processes effectively. Otherwise, classroom management will become difficult, and significant time loss will occur.

Teachers must both use the right resources at the right time and plan their time management effectively. To facilitate time management, teachers should plan and prepare teaching materials in advance and make effective use of digital environments (Küçük et al., 2024).

As summarized above, it can be said that the problems encountered by classroom teachers working in combined classes are concentrated in four different areas: classroom management, teaching and learning processes, resource and time management, and measurement and evaluation processes. Having students with different developmental characteristics and needs together makes effective classroom management and discipline difficult, increases the teacher's workload, and lowers student motivation. This diversity and differences require teachers to be highly prepared and plan, causing them to spend a lot of time. After a while, teachers' feelings of burnout increase, and they prefer to request transfers to city centers. For these reasons, it can be recommended that teachers working in combined classes be supported with both personal and

financial rights to improve their performance and maintain their motivation, and that the regions and schools where combined classes are implemented be made more attractive. Again, supporting teachers with appropriate resources and professional activities may be beneficial in helping them overcome the difficulties they face.

6. Aim of Study

This study aims to evaluate research on the problems encountered by classroom teachers in combined classes. A review of the relevant literature reveals that classroom teachers working in combined classes face difficulties and various problems in many areas (Dursun, 2006; Özben, 1997; Sidekli et al., 2015; Sağ & Sezer, 2012; Palavan & Göçer, 2017; Taşdemirci, 2005; Yıldırım & Amaç, 2020; Erdem et al., 2005; Karayel, 2017; Bilir, 2008; Eker & Sıcak, 2016; Kan et al., 2023; Tatar & Oflaz, 2024; Korkmaz, 2024; Göksoy et al., 2015; Bozpolat, 2020; İspir & Akan, 2023; Gözler & Çelik, 2013; Yılmaz & Demir, 2023; Yeşiltepe & Korucuk, 2020). It is believed that this study will serve as an example for other researchers and as a resource for future studies. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to evaluate the research conducted on the problems encountered by classroom teachers regarding combined classes. In line with this general purpose, answers to the following questions were sought:

- What are the purposes of the research conducted on the problems encountered by classroom teachers regarding combined classes?
- What are the important findings from the research on the problems encountered by classroom teachers in combined classes?
- What are the recommendations based on the results of studies on the problems encountered by classroom teachers regarding combined classes?

7. Importance of the Study

The combined class system is specific to small settlements. It meets the needs in regions where education and teaching conditions are unfavorable. For this reason, it has many negative aspects. Combined class schools have some unique characteristics in terms of their structure, function, program implementation, administrative structure, and mode of operation (Gözler, 2009) and have been a practice in our education system for many years. While they have certain advantages, they also have disadvantages. Consequently, the problems experienced by classroom teachers working in combined classes come to the fore. It is important to examine and evaluate these problems along with their causes and consequences. The research is considered important in terms of evaluating the problems encountered by classroom teachers in combined classes in line with the defined objective and finding solutions for future studies.

8. Limitations of the Study

- This study is limited to information obtained from studies conducted on the problems encountered by classroom teachers in combined classes.
- It covers studies conducted in Turkey and published in Google Scholar and EBSCO indexes between 2000 and 2019.

9. METHOD

This section describes the research model, data collection, data sources, and data analysis process.

9.1. Research Model

This study used the systematic review method from qualitative research designs. A systematic review is a systematic and

clear re-examination of a clearly defined question using systematic and clear methods to identify, select, and critically evaluate relevant studies and to collect and analyze data from the studies included in the review (Torgerson, 2003; Millar, 2004; Littell, Corcoran, & Pillai, 2008).

The main purpose of a systematic review is to synthesize and evaluate existing research findings in a specific field and to identify gaps in the relevant literature (Kitchenham, 2004). Systematic reviews are widely used in the fields of education, health, and social sciences. In this context, they provide researchers with evidence-based, robust conclusions and systematically reveal the effectiveness of various methods, techniques, and applications (Gough et al., 2017).

9.2. Data Collection and Data Sources

Within the framework of the defined research questions, studies conducted between 2000 and 2019 were examined during the systematic review process. Studies published between these specified dates were obtained from Google Scholar and EBSCO databases. When deciding which studies to evaluate, attention was paid to ensuring that the studies only related to problems encountered by classroom teachers regarding combined classes. As specified in the systematic review rules, the purpose and questions of the research were the main determinants in selecting the identified articles.

9.3. Data Analysis

The data obtained in the study were analyzed using a content analysis approach according to the criteria determined in line with the objectives of the study. The basic process in content analysis is to bring together similar data within the framework of specific concepts and themes and to organize and interpret them in a way that the reader can understand (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2006).

The main purpose of content analysis is to transform large amounts of collected data into more meaningful, understandable, and smaller units in order to find answers to the research questions

(Neuendorf, 2017). The articles included in the compilation were analyzed and presented in line with the answers sought in the research.

10. FINDINGS

The findings obtained from the content analysis conducted in this part of the study are presented separately for each research question.

10.1. Findings Related to the First Sub-Problem

Studies related to the topic were examined to answer the first sub-problem of the research, which was defined as “What are the objectives of studies conducted on the problems encountered by classroom teachers regarding combined classes?”

These studies aim to determine the views and proposed solutions of teachers in combined classes regarding the problems encountered in combined classes and their proposed solutions (e.g., Summak, Gören Summak, and Gelebek, 2011; Dursun, 2006), to examine the teaching and teacher reality in village primary schools with combined classes (e.g., Bilir, 2008), examining the views of teachers working in combined classes and prospective classroom teachers regarding combined classes (e.g., İzci, Duran, and Taşar, 2010; Kazu and Aslan, 2016), examining the problems encountered by classroom teachers teaching combined classes (e.g., Erdem, Kamacı, & Aydemir, 2005; Sağ, Savaş, & Sezer, 2009), identifying teachers' views on the problems they encounter in the learning-teaching process in combined class applications (e.g., Kılıç & Abay, 2009), determining the professional needs of combined class teachers (e.g., Sağ and Sezer, 2012; İnce and Şahin, 2016), and presenting the management problems of combined-class elementary schools and proposed solutions to these problems (e.g., Döş and Sağır, 2013).

When these systematically reviewed articles are examined in general, it is seen that most of the research conducted is related to the problems experienced in combined class applications and proposed solutions.

10.2. Findings Related to the Second Sub-Problem

To answer the second sub-question of the study, “What are the important findings from studies on the problems encountered by classroom teachers in combined classes?”, studies related to the subject were examined. The studies generally cover classroom teachers. According to (Summak et al., 2011), the problems faced by teachers teaching in combined classes stem from the education program; reasons such as the program in separate classes also being applied in combined classes, lack of time, and low student level were put forward. Again, according to (Summak et al., 2011), the lack of interest from families and the ineffectiveness of school-family associations stand out as the most prominent problems in the research.

According to Kazu and Aslan (2016), teacher candidates do not consider themselves adequate for combined classes, their knowledge is not sufficient, and they do not view the practice positively. In studies conducted by Sağ (2009) and Bayar (2009), teachers also stated that the teaching course they took during their undergraduate studies on teaching in combined classes was insufficient. According to İzci et al. (2010), considering that combined classes are generally held in rural areas and that these schools are inadequate in terms of both physical environment and equipment, the views of teacher candidates that these environments are suitable for education and teaching indicate that their knowledge about this practice is quite insufficient.

According to Kılıç and Abay (2009), male teachers were found to evaluate their own competence more positively than female teachers. Similar findings were obtained in the research conducted by Yerlikaya (2000) and Şahin (2003). According to Aybek and Aslan (2014), teachers encountered problems such as students' inability to understand what they read, form syllables, words, and sentences, and the inadequacy of teacher-led lessons in the sound-based sentence method; and students' inability to write legibly and the lack of aesthetics in their writing in the teaching of cursive writing.

According to İnce and Şahin (2016), teachers working in independent classes feel less burnout than teachers working in combined classes in terms of personal achievement. Furthermore, according to the study conducted by İnce and Şahin (2016), it was found that teachers working in independent classes had a moderate level of job satisfaction, while teachers working in combined classes perceived themselves as close to the threshold of dissatisfaction. Again, according to the study conducted by İnce and Şahin (2016), the reasons why the job satisfaction level of teachers working in independent classes is higher than that of teachers working in combined classes can be listed as: insufficient coverage of combined classes in teacher training programs, lack of development of appropriate programs, lack of practical in-service training, and insufficient administrative and financial support from central and local administrations.

According to Dursun (2006), teachers working in combined classes face challenges such as the same lesson time being divided among multiple classes, locations with combined classes generally lacking equipment (TV, photocopier, etc.), insufficient class hours, incomplete coverage of topics, different grade levels being taught together, the same program being taught in the same time period in both independent and combined classrooms, not being able to devote sufficient time to individual students, not having enough time for guidance and social activities, inability to maintain control in the classroom and disorder in the classroom, and difficulty in ensuring that children from families with different and weak social and cultural backgrounds benefit from the program.

According to Sağ et al. (2009), a significant proportion of teachers (73.6%) in the field of management work in schools with inadequate technology (in terms of internet-connected computers), a significant proportion (65.2%) have difficulty covering school expenses, and more than half (57.8%) conducting teaching in conjunction with school management, a portion (36.8%) have problems accessing teaching materials, another portion (31.5%) have problems with insufficient salaries, and a portion (21%) have problems accessing career guidance services.

10.3. Findings Related to the Third Sub-Problem

To answer the third sub-problem of the study, “What are the recommendations derived from the results of studies on the problems encountered by classroom teachers regarding combined classes?”, studies related to the subject were examined. According to (Summak et al., 2011), there are many difficulties in the implementation of the education program, and as a solution to this situation, it is recommended that a program suitable for the functioning of combined classes and textbooks and teacher guidebooks appropriate for this program be prepared.

In his study, Bayar (2009) also stated that it is not an appropriate approach to include combined classes, where teacher responsibility has increased, in the same program as independent classes. He supported this view by saying that a teaching program for combined classes could also be a solution to the time management problems that arise in these classes. Again, according to Summak et al. (2011), combined classes are a reality in our country, and in this case, the Ministry of National Education should focus on this issue; the Council of Education can prepare a separate curriculum for these classes, different from the curriculum applied in independent classes.

According to the research conducted by Döş and Sağır (2013), the following recommendations were made: authorizing teachers with managerial experience to be trained in management; providing professional development for authorized teachers during the summer and at appropriate times under the guidance of experienced principals; increasing local and central training for combined-grade teachers; requiring school administrators of combined classes to reside in the settlement where the school is located and even supporting them with additional lessons, etc., if necessary, and assigning the administrator of the nearest independent elementary school as a coach to assist salaried teachers working in combined elementary schools in school management.

Bilir (2008)'s research suggests that instead of closing village schools to end teaching in combined classes, ways to make these schools more effective should be sought, teachers working in these

schools should be trained before service, those already working should be supported with in-service training, and necessary guidance should be provided by education supervisors. Furthermore, Bilir (2008) believes that it would be beneficial to train teachers working in combined-grade schools in a manner appropriate to the rural environment and conditions, to encourage them to love their profession, and to provide incentives for them to willingly work in combined-grade classrooms.

According to Kazu and Aslan (2016), in order to increase the knowledge and skills of prospective classroom teachers in combined classes, school experience and teaching practice courses should also be offered in these schools, the teaching hours for combined classes in the classroom teaching program should be increased, and, to avoid administrative problems, a course should be included in the program that provides teacher candidates with information on official correspondence, personal rights, and administrative matters. Furthermore, new methods, techniques, and activities, as well as complementary measurement and evaluation tools, should be prepared, taking into account the conditions of combined classes. According to (İzci et al., 2010), the “Community Service Applications” course in the new program of Education Faculties can be considered an opportunity for prospective classroom teachers to observe the practices in schools that teach in combined classes.

According to research conducted by Kılıç and Abay (2009), combined-grade schools need to be re-evaluated in terms of “teacher competence,” “school facilities,” “school-family cooperation,” “student-related issues,” and “program structure.” it is important not to assign newly graduated teacher candidates to combined-grade schools due to their lack of professional experience; parents should be informed about the importance of Turkish; mother tongue education should be encouraged by paying attention to the use of Turkish both in and out of school; In order for everyone to benefit equally from eight years of compulsory and uninterrupted education, the Transported Primary Education Application should be expanded, or the number and effectiveness of Boarding Primary Education Regional Schools (YİBO) should be increased. Some practical recommendations have been made, such as initiating a “sister school

program” between schools, preparing materials that will contribute to lesson objectives and sending them to these schools, addressing the education and teaching conditions of combined classes by the ministry, and developing a flexible program suitable for these settlements.

Saraçoğlu, Büyük, and Tanık (2012) in their research, it was suggested that teachers should include more activities in their lessons that enable students to use or develop their scientific process skills. Considering that students in combined classes perform less successfully in scientific process skills than those in independent classes, it was recommended that activities be planned and implemented to eliminate this difference and increase the success rate in combined classes.

In the research conducted by Sağ and Sezer (2012), it was recommended that the courses in the subject area teaching dimension of the classroom teaching program should include “Teaching practices in combined classes as a teaching application.” Developing the effectiveness levels of the Teaching in Combined Classes course, and addressing the topic of “school management processes and fundamental problems and solutions in schools with combined classes” in the Turkish Education System and School Management course program. According to the findings of the research conducted by İnce and Şahin (2016) research concluded that regulating career and income levels in the teaching profession, creating additional income sources such as service opportunities, lunch allowances, and shift pay, and implementing a functional form of supervision that regularly contributes to professional development and respects teachers would increase teachers' external satisfaction levels.

According to the research by İnce and Şahin (2016), in applications with multiple grade levels, developing teaching practices that will make classroom functioning effective and organizing in-service training programs in accordance with principles important for teaching in combined classes, such as individualized teaching and level groups, may increase teachers' job satisfaction levels. The results of the research by Özpınar and Sarpkaya (2010) indicate that it was recommended that emphasis be placed on training programs for village teachers to ensure that

classroom teachers undergo an educational process appropriate for village life, that classroom teacher candidates complete more of their internships in villages, that necessary arrangements be made regarding in-service training, guidance, and combined classroom practices, taking village education into account, and that only graduates of the Department of Classroom Teaching in the Faculty of Education be appointed as classroom teachers.

According to Dursun (2006)'s research findings, the following recommendations emerged: teaching staff who will teach courses related to this field in the program for training classroom teachers should receive training in this field; teacher candidates should receive training in this field and complete practical training (internship); and classroom teacher candidates should complete part of their teaching practice (internship) in villages. According to the research by Erdem et al. (2005), the following should be ensured: the necessary importance should be given to solving communication problems between teachers teaching combined classes and their superiors; the attendance of students should be ensured throughout the school year; the interaction of teachers teaching combined classes with their colleagues should be ensured at a higher level; Physical inadequacies in village schools where combined classes are taught should be addressed. rural schools with combined classes should be enriched in terms of teaching materials, teachers teaching combined classes should be supported and encouraged to improve themselves in order to provide higher quality education and teaching, and teachers teaching combined classes should be made more competent in “combined class management.” In rural schools where teaching will be conducted in combined classes, it is important to ensure that prospective classroom teachers gain the necessary competencies related to the subject during their pre-service training. The practice of teaching in combined classes should be taken into account during supervision, and the budget allocated for rural schools where teaching in combined classes is conducted should be increased.

According to Sağ et al. (2009), research can be conducted on the extent to which the classroom teacher training program, particularly the Teaching in Combined Classes course included in

the pre-service classroom teacher training program, is sensitive to the professional problems and areas of development of combined class teachers. Furthermore, according to Sağ et al. (2009), conducting research on the problems and professional needs of combined class teachers and the characteristics of their schools, including recent graduates, could provide valuable information on the effectiveness of pre-service classroom teacher training programs.

11. Discussion and Conclusion

It can be stated that the right to education, which is one of the most fundamental rights of the individual, should be enjoyed equally by every individual throughout the country. However, it is observed that individuals receiving education in multigrade classrooms do not have the same conditions as those educated in single-grade classrooms. Students studying in multigrade classrooms are at a disadvantage compared to students studying in city centers in terms of ease of access to information. Moreover, it is understood that when new curricula are prepared, the situation, environment, conditions, and instructional techniques of multigrade classrooms are not fully taken into consideration. It is evident that curricula prepared for single-grade classrooms in urban areas do not take into account the capacities of multigrade village primary schools, cannot/could not respond to the interests and needs of teachers who try to carry out educational activities under rural conditions, and that many problems are encountered in practice (Gelebek, 2011).

In settlements with small populations, reasons such as the low number of students and the impossibility of assigning more than one teacher to classes with small enrollments have made it compulsory to combine more than one grade into a single group and teach them under the supervision of one teacher. In addition, people living in rural areas/villages wish their children to be educated alongside their families and in the places where they live. They prefer multigrade schools instead of boarding and residential schools. In order to meet the educational needs of children of compulsory school age living in rural areas, multigrade schools have been established (Gözler, 2009). In the past, multigrade classrooms were formed especially in cases of teacher and classroom shortages,

whereas today factors such as industrialization and migration from villages to cities have led to a decrease in student numbers in some regions, resulting in the formation of multigrade classrooms. These situations have led to the preference for multigrade classrooms in order to ensure the effective use of educational resources (Dursun, 2006).

In this study, which aims to evaluate the research conducted on the problems faced by classroom teachers regarding multigrade classrooms, in addition to the general purpose, answers to emerging questions have been sought. To answer the first sub-problem of the research, “What are the objectives of studies conducted on the problems faced by classroom teachers regarding multigrade classrooms?”, the necessary searches were conducted, and the objectives of the studies were examined. The objectives were generally determined within the context of “problems encountered in multigrade classrooms and proposed solutions to these problems.” In addition, in some studies, prospective classroom teachers who have not yet started their service were taken as the sample group. Although the sample group varied, it was observed that most of the studies conducted on this topic progressed in the form of “problems and proposed solutions.”

To answer the second sub-problem of the research, “What are the significant findings obtained from the studies conducted on the problems faced by classroom teachers regarding multigrade classrooms?”, the necessary studies were examined. As a result of examining these studies, some findings were obtained. One of the problems identified in general in the studies was that the curriculum for teaching in multigrade classrooms is the same as that in single-grade classrooms. Researchers stated that this application is not appropriate and that the curriculum in multigrade classrooms should be different from that in single-grade classrooms, suggesting that better results could be obtained in this way. Another finding revealed the issue of insufficient time. It was concluded that classroom teachers working in multigrade classrooms face difficulties in time management compared to classroom teachers working in single-grade classrooms. The reason for this is that they have to teach more than one grade simultaneously in the same environment. According

to the findings of the studies, parental disinterest is also considered a problem. Among the reasons for this is that schools with multigrade classrooms are generally located in villages or similar settlements, and parents continue their lives by engaging in village activities. Therefore, along with the indifference of parents, problems are also experienced in school-family cooperation. Classroom teachers working in multigrade classrooms face problems due to parents' lack of interest in school. According to the study, the lack of knowledge and skills of prospective classroom teachers during their undergraduate studies regarding multigrade classroom practice may cause problems in their future professional lives. In addition, according to some findings, it was emphasized that classroom teachers should have the necessary competence while still being prospective teachers and even receive training on this issue during the early years of their professional life, and collaborate with experienced teachers and administrators in multigrade classrooms. When the studies were examined, it was revealed that teachers working in single-grade classrooms experience less burnout compared to teachers working in multigrade classrooms. Furthermore, it was found that job satisfaction of teachers working in single-grade classrooms is at a moderate level, while teachers working in multigrade classrooms perceive themselves as being close to the threshold of dissatisfaction. In general, the studies found that classroom teachers face problems such as lack of teaching materials, insufficient lesson hours, incomplete coverage of topics, and having different grade levels together in places where multigrade classrooms are implemented.

To answer the third sub-problem of the research, "What are the recommendations derived from the findings of studies on the problems faced by classroom teachers regarding multigrade classrooms?", the relevant studies were examined. As a result of these studies, some recommendations were made on the topic. The most emphasized of these recommendations is the development of a program specific to multigrade classrooms. According to the researchers, the curriculum applied in single-grade classrooms and the curriculum applied in multigrade classrooms should be different. It is thought that having a different curriculum in multigrade

classrooms compared to single-grade classrooms would also provide advantages in terms of time management. Another recommendation is to provide prospective classroom teachers with the necessary knowledge and skills regarding multigrade classroom practice during their undergraduate studies to reduce potential problems they may encounter when working in a multigrade classroom in the future. In addition, it has been suggested that the practicum of multigrade classroom applications should be carried out in village schools, which would also be beneficial. Another recommendation argues that providing classroom teachers working in multigrade classrooms with services such as transportation, duty allowances, and meal services would increase their job satisfaction. It has also been recommended that the physical environment of village schools be improved, the lack of equipment and materials be addressed, and a separate budget be allocated for village schools. Furthermore, it has been suggested that pre-service training should cover this topic to ensure that classroom teachers starting to work in multigrade classrooms are not inadequately prepared. Accordingly, recommendations have also emerged suggesting that teachers in multigrade classrooms should be supported to develop themselves to provide better education and that they should be made more competent in “multigrade classroom management.” To ensure equal access to eight years of compulsory and continuous education, it has also been recommended to expand the Transported Primary Education Application and increase the number and effectiveness of Regional Boarding Primary Schools (YİBO).

When the relevant studies are examined, it is observed that studies on the problems encountered in multigrade classrooms have increased in recent years. In general, the problems identified in the studies can be considered similar. In-service training for teachers working in multigrade classrooms should be practice-based, as this will help teachers overcome the difficulties they experience and contribute to their professional development (Beklen, 2025). In conclusion, it can be stated that classroom teachers working in multigrade classrooms face certain problems and that the recommendations made to address these problems should be taken into account. However, to implement these recommendations, it is

more appropriate to first determine their feasibility and then make progress accordingly.

12. Recommendations

In this section of the study, various recommendations have been made based on the findings obtained from the analyses. The recommendations are listed with respect to the research results and for future studies.

12.1. Recommendations Based on Research Results

- The vision and objectives in the curriculum for teaching in multigrade classrooms should be developed in accordance with the scope of the course and clearly stated.
- Studies can be conducted to enhance the competencies of classroom teachers who will start working in multigrade classrooms regarding teaching in multigrade classrooms and village life before they begin their duties.
- Additional services such as meal service and transportation can be provided to increase the professional satisfaction level of classroom teachers working in multigrade classrooms.
- The educational plan and curriculum applied in multigrade classrooms can be prepared differently from the curriculum of single-grade schools, according to needs and as directed by the Ministry.
- The Transported Primary Education Application can be made more widespread.
- The number and effectiveness of Regional Boarding Primary Schools (YİBO) can be increased.

- Cooperation between classroom teachers working in multigrade classrooms and parents can be facilitated.

12.2. Recommendations for Future Studies

- Evaluation studies can be conducted on the Teaching in Multigrade Classrooms course curriculum.
- Interviews can be conducted with classroom teachers working in multigrade classrooms who implement the curriculum to identify problems encountered in practice, and the curriculum can be revised according to identified needs.
- Seminars on “Teaching in Multigrade Classrooms” can be provided to classroom teachers working in multigrade classrooms.

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