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The Early Literacy Ambassadors e-Mentoring Teacher Training Program and Teacher Competencies

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Abstract

Awareness of promoting early literacy skills has increased in Türkiye in recent years. This study examines the effect of e-mentoring Teacher Training Program support provided to pre-school teachers in the field of early literacy enriched with practice and feedback on their competencies. The research is patterned with a case study from qualitative research methods. The study group consisted of 12 pre-school teachers. The teachers participated in Early Literacy Ambassadors e-Mentoring Teacher Training Program through online meetings for two months. The research revealed that there were positive developments in the professional competencies of teachers who participated in the training program regarding the concept of early literacy and the development of early literacy skills in children. It was found that the difficulties experienced in developing early literacy skills among children stemmed from teachers' lack of knowledge and self-confidence. Accordingly, it is recommended that cooperation be established among preschool teachers, first-grade teachers, and families to support the

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development of children's early literacy skills. In addition, the Early Literacy e-Mentoring Teacher Education Program is suggested as an effective model to be utilized in the in-service training of early childhood educators.
Keywords: Early literacy; E-mentoring; Preschool teachers; Professional development; Teacher competencies.

Erken Okuryazarlık Elçileri e-Mentorluk Öğretmen Eğitim Programı ve Öğretmen Yeterlikleri

Öz

Türkiye'de son yıllarda erken okuryazarlık becerilerinin geliştirilmesine yönelik farkındalık artmıştır. Bu çalışma, okul öncesi öğretmenlerine erken okuryazarlık alanında destek ve geri bildirimlerle zenginleştirilmiş e-mentorluk öğretmen eğitim programının öğretmen yeterliliklerine etkisini incelemektedir. Araştırma nitel araştırma yöntemlerinden durum çalışması ile desenlenmektedir. Çalışma grubunu 12 okul öncesi öğretmeni oluşturmuştur. Öğretmenler, iki ay boyunca çevrimiçi düzenlenen Erken Okuryazarlık Elçileri e-Mentorluk Öğretmen Eğitim Programı'na katılmıştır. Araştırma, eğitim programına katılan öğretmenlerin erken okuryazarlık kavramına ve çocuklarda erken okuryazarlık becerilerinin geliştirilmesine yönelik mesleki yeterliklerinde olumlu gelişmeler olduğunu ortaya koymaktadır. Çocuklarda erken okuryazarlık becerilerinin geliştirilmesinde karşılaşılan güçlüklerin, öğretmenlerin bilgi yetersizliği ve özgüven eksikliğinden kaynaklandığı belirlenmiştir. Bu doğrultuda, çocuklarda erken okuryazarlık becerilerinin desteklenebilmesi için okul öncesi öğretmenleri ile ilkokul birinci sınıf öğretmenleri ve aileler arasında iş birliği yapılması; ayrıca Erken Okuryazarlık e-Mentorluk Öğretmen Eğitim Programı'nın, etkili bir uygulama örneği olarak erken çocukluk eğitimcilerinin hizmet içi eğitimlerinde kullanılmasının yararlı olacağı önerilmektedir.
Anahtar Kelimeler: Erken okuryazarlık; E-mentorluk; Okul öncesi öğretmenleri; Mesleki gelişim; Öğretmen yeterlikleri.

Introduction

Education is one of the fundamental human rights that enables individuals to realize their potential and contributes to the overall development of society. In today's world, where access to information, communication, and learning processes has become increasingly diverse, education is expected not only to transmit knowledge but also to foster lifelong learning skills. In this context, literacy stands as a core component of education, positioned at the

center of individuals' ability to access, interpret, and use information effectively.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) defines literacy as the ability to define, understand, interpret, assemble, communicate, and calculate using different types of written sources (UNESCO, 2004). As the needs of individuals have evolved, various types of literacy have emerged for different purposes. Technology, media, digital, and cultural literacy can be given as examples of these. The concept of early literacy emphasizes the experiences gained in early childhood related to literacy development. It can be argued that early literacy skills form the foundation of all literacy types. The concept of early literacy refers to the cognitive and linguistic basis required for the development of all forms of literacy.

Building upon this conceptual framework, it is crucial to examine how early literacy is addressed in educational contexts and teacher training practices, particularly within the preschool education system in Türkiye. In Türkiye, pre-service teacher education is under the jurisdiction of the Council of Higher Education, while in-service teacher education is under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of National Education. The preschool teaching undergraduate programs within the Departments of Primary Education introduced a course on school adaptation and early literacy education in the 2018–2019 academic year. This course is offered in the seventh semester as part of the Field Education Elective Courses (Council of Higher Education, 2022b). Similarly, within the framework of the National Core Curriculum for Undergraduate Child Development Education in the Faculties of Health Sciences, a course titled Early Literacy was included under the category of Suggested Elective Courses (Council of Higher Education, 2022a).

The concept of early literacy first appeared in Turkish academic literature in 2013, and the inclusion of early literacy as an elective course in undergraduate programs in 2018 reflects a relatively delayed institutional recognition of its importance. This delay may be attributed to the late awareness of policymakers and educational authorities regarding the significance of early literacy education. Consequently, it can be inferred that the majority of current preschool teachers did not have the opportunity to take a compulsory or elective early literacy course during their undergraduate education. n addition, within the Türkiye Yüzyılı Maarif Model curriculum recently introduced by the Ministry of National Education (Ministry of National Education, 2024),

early literacy skills are explicitly included under the Turkish language field competencies, highlighting the growing national emphasis on the development of foundational literacy in early childhood.

Children's early literacy awareness has increased significantly over the past decade in Türkiye. However, various studies have shown that preschool teachers' knowledge levels, classroom practices, and both pre-service and in-service training in early literacy remain limited and insufficient (Altun and Tantekin Erden, 2016; Deretarla Gül and Bal, 2006; Ergül et al., 2014; Kerem and Cömert, 2005; Özdemir and Bayraktar, 2015; Sezgin Yalçıntaş et al., 2019; Tuğluk et al., 2008). Previous studies have emphasized that early literacy courses should be integrated into teacher education curricula and have underlined the importance of in-service training in this field (Bayraktar, 2018; Bolat, 2019; Ergül et al., 2014; Feyman Gök, 2013; Laçin, 2019; Öğretir Özçelik, 2018; Sezgin Yalçıntaş et al., 2018).

It is also known that the effectiveness of professional development programs for teachers in Türkiye remains limited due to challenges in the in-service training system (Karaevli and Levent, 2022; Özdemir, 2021), particularly the lack of individualized and practice-oriented designs. However, despite the growing awareness of early literacy in Türkiye, there is still a lack of sustainable, practice-based, and individualized professional development models that directly address preschool teachers' needs in this field. This gap indicates that teachers require ongoing support mechanisms integrating feedback, reflection, and mentoring to translate theoretical knowledge into effective classroom practice.

This study examines the effect of practice- and feedback-enriched e-mentoring support provided to preschool teachers in the field of early literacy on their professional competencies. The unique contribution of this research lies in the fact that it represents the first e-mentoring-based professional development program in early literacy education for preschool teachers in Türkiye. The study is guided by the following research questions:

- How does teacher training through e-mentoring shape teachers' experiences of supporting early literacy skills?
- What are the main challenges teachers encounter in early literacy practices?

Early Literacy

The knowledge and skills that facilitate children's transition to primary school, enable them to make a strong start to learning to read and positively affect their reading comprehension performance when they switch to reading are expressed in the literature as early literacy (Kargın et al., 2021). Considering that literacy includes not only the acts of reading and writing but also the acts of listening and speaking, one can say that literacy begins with birth (Makin and Whitehead, 2004). Early literacy has the potential to greatly impact the child's life by transforming into various types of literacy through lifelong learning. In addition to developmental factors, literacy skills are influenced by the environment in which children are raised. It is known that children who grow up in a rich literacy environment in early childhood make a successful transition from early literacy to traditional literacy (Ghoting and Martin-Diaz, 2006; Justice and Ezell, 2004; Lonigan and Shanahan, 2010; Roskos et al., 2003). Research suggests that there is a strong relationship between children's early literacy experiences and their academic success and literacy skills (Neuman and Dickinson, 2001; Whitehurst and Lonigan, 1998; Whitehurst and Lonigan, 2001). Early literacy skills are associated with motivation and success in reading and writing (Swick, 2009) and general academic success (Sukhram and Hsu, 2012). Supporting early literacy skills in early childhood has attracted the attention of academicians and practitioners in recent years. The theoretical framework of early literacy skills in early childhood, the pre-service and in-service training processes of teachers on this subject, the efforts to support these skills at school, assessment methods and techniques and the creation of home literacy environments are of great importance.

Mentoring and e-Mentoring

Mentoring is one of the most widely recognized approaches for supporting teachers' professional growth, particularly those responsible for developing children's skills in preschool education settings (Diamond et al., 2013). Mentoring can be defined as a professional development process in which an experienced individual (the mentor) guides, supports, and assists a less experienced individual (the mentee) in developing pedagogical knowledge, teaching practices, and professional confidence. The main purpose of mentoring is to improve teaching quality, promote reflective thinking, and strengthen teachers' self-efficacy through a relationship based on trust and collaboration.

Research on relationship-based professional development indicates that mentoring, coaching, and counselling practices are effective in enhancing teachers' pedagogical competencies and in fostering continuous professional learning (Bowman et al., 2001; Fukkink and Lont, 2007). Mentoring can take the form of one-to-one support, peer collaboration, or group/team mentoring, depending on the institutional context and goals. Its strengths include building trust between colleagues, reducing anxiety among novice teachers, providing emotional and professional support, promoting collegial cooperation, and preventing burnout (Bakioğlu and Göğüş, 2013; Bakioğlu et al., 2013). However, mentoring can also be time-consuming, and mentors may encounter challenges in maintaining reciprocity or designing mutual learning strategies.

With the integration of technology into education, e-mentoring has emerged as a flexible and complementary alternative to traditional face-to-face mentoring (de Janasz and Godshalk, 2013; Murphy, 2011; Shrestha et al., 2009). E-mentoring, also referred to as online or long-distance mentoring, takes place through digital communication platforms where mentors and mentees interact synchronously or asynchronously. The process involves sharing information, exchanging ideas, asking reflective questions, and collaboratively developing classroom practices. Studies show that e-mentoring supports trust building, reduces teachers' anxiety, encourages experimentation with new teaching methods, and provides continuous professional and emotional support. Moreover, teachers have reported that online mentoring opportunities, particularly during the pandemic, contributed significantly to their professional development and time management (Karaevli and Levent, 2022).

Method

This section details the methodology used in this study. Research method, population and sample, development process of the measurement tool, data collection and coding and analysis of data are presented in this section.

Research Method

This study is a qualitative research conducted as a case study to provide an understanding of the Early Literacy Ambassadors e-Mentoring Teacher Training Programme for pre-school teachers. This study employed a case study design, one of the qualitative research approaches, to gain an in-depth understanding of preschool teachers' experiences within the early literacy e-

mentoring teacher education program. The case study method allows the researcher to explore a particular phenomenon, individual, group, or program within its real-life context comprehensively (Yin, 2018). It provides rich, holistic data that help explain how and why certain processes occur (Creswell, 2013). In this research, the aim was to examine how the e-mentoring program contributed to teachers' professional competencies in the field of early literacy. Therefore, the case study design was deemed appropriate, as it enabled a detailed exploration of teachers' perceptions, experiences, and reflections throughout the program. This study adopts a qualitative case study design; any brief closed-ended checklists were reported descriptively only, not for inferential purposes, and served solely to contextualize the qualitative thematic analysis.

The Participant Group

Table 1. Teachers' Demographic Characteristic

Number	Participant code	Graduated University	Education Level	The Department	Length of service
1	T1	Ege	Bachelor's degrees	Preschool teaching	16 years
2	T2	Gazi	Bachelor's degrees	Child development	9 years
3	T3	Gazi	Bachelor's degrees	Preschool teaching	11 years
4	T4	Süleyman Demirel	Bachelor's degrees	Preschool teaching	18 years
5	T5	Dokuz Eylül	Bachelor's degrees	Preschool teaching	18 years
6	T6	Sakarya	Bachelor's degrees	Preschool teaching	9 years
7	T7	Abant İzzet Baysal	Master's degree	Preschool teaching	14 years
8	T8	Anadolu	Bachelor's degrees	Preschool teaching	7 years
9	T9	Çukurova	Master's degree	Preschool teaching	12 years
10	T10	Anadolu	Master's degree	Preschool teaching	10 years
11	T11	Pamukkale	Bachelor's degrees	Preschool teaching	13 years
12	T12	ODTÜ	Bachelor's degrees	Preschool teaching	12 years

Criterion sampling method was employed to determine the study group within the qualitative case study design. Twelve preschool teachers who met the criterion of (a) working in public kindergartens and (b) having graduated

from preschool teaching or child development undergraduate programs volunteered to participate in the study. The participants represented graduates from ten different universities. All teachers had a minimum of seven years of professional experience. According to Bakioğlu's (1996) classification of teachers' career phases, three teachers were in the stagnation stage, seven were in the experimentalism and activism stage, and two were in the expertise stage (Table 1).

Experimental Study : Early Literacy Ambassadors e-Mentoring Programme

The Early Literacy Ambassadors e-Mentoring Teacher Training Programme was implemented over eight weeks, with teachers participating in one online session per week lasting approximately 90 minutes. In addition to these sessions, participants completed weekly reflection tasks and shared classroom practices and visuals via online platforms. The programme was developed by the researchers based on the early literacy framework proposed by Ergül et al. (2014), Justice and Ezell (2004), and Whitehurst and Lonigan (1998). The content was structured around six core early literacy skills: (1) print motivation, (2) knowledge of letters and alphabets, (3) writing awareness, (4) vocabulary, (5) storytelling skills, and (6) phonological awareness. The theoretical foundation of the programme is grounded in relationship-based professional development (Bowman et al., 2001) and social constructivist learning theory (Vygotsky, 1978), which emphasize that teachers learn most effectively through interaction, reflection, and collaboration. Within this framework, the e-mentoring process aims to enhance teachers' knowledge and pedagogical practices through guided support, feedback, and reflective discussion.

To ensure content validity, the programme was reviewed by three experts in the fields of early childhood education, language development, and teacher training. The process reliability was strengthened by documenting all mentoring sessions, keeping digital records of teacher reflections, and presenting direct quotations in the findings. Furthermore, inter-coder reliability for qualitative data analysis was established above 90% agreement among researchers.The programme was initially piloted in 2022 with four preschool teachers, and feedback from this pilot implementation was used to refine the structure and content before the main study. The finalized programme was delivered in four interactive stages:

Step 1 – Introduction and Early Literacy Awareness Training: In the first online meeting, teachers were introduced to the concept of early literacy through an awareness webinar focusing on the six basic skills. Examples of classroom arrangements and teacher-led activities were shared to illustrate how each skill could be supported.

Step 2 – Padlet Application Training: Teachers were encouraged to document their classroom practices digitally. Since most participants were unfamiliar with the Padlet tool, an additional short training was provided to support their use of the application.

Step 3 – Feedback-Based Sharing Meetings: Weekly mentoring meetings were structured around teachers' feedback and classroom experiences. Discussion topics included establishing literacy centers, fostering literacy motivation, supporting alphabet knowledge and writing awareness, enriching vocabulary, promoting storytelling, and engaging families in home literacy environments.

Step 4 – Visibility and Dissemination of the Programme: A social media awareness campaign was launched under the hashtag #earlyliteracyambassadors. Teachers voluntarily shared posts prepared by the research team to raise public awareness of the importance of early literacy.

Measurement Tools

In this study, two data collection tools were used: the Early Literacy Teacher Competencies Questionnaire Form and the Early Literacy Teacher Diaries. Additionally, a chat application that enabled online feedback meetings was employed to facilitate interaction and provide timely feedback on teachers' classroom practices during the implementation process.

The Early Literacy Teacher Competencies Questionnaire Form was developed by the researchers to assess teachers' knowledge, awareness, and competencies related to early literacy. During the development process, the Competencies of Early Childhood Educators document published by the Center for the Study of Child Care Employment (2008) and the Preschool Teacher Special Field Competencies document issued by the Ministry of National Education (2008) were utilized as foundational references. Based on these sources, a 23-item instrument was created and structured according to a three-point Likert scale, in which teachers indicated their level of agreement for each item as "agree," "undecided," or "disagree."

The form was administered twice—once before and once after the professional e-mentoring programme—with an eight-week interval between the two administrations. These administrations served to document the baseline and endline self-assessments of teachers' perceived competencies. The instrument was used solely for descriptive comparison to identify directional changes in teachers' perceptions and practices; it was not intended as a psychometric test, and no inferential statistics were conducted.

To ensure content validity, expert opinions were obtained from three field specialists, and necessary revisions were made based on their feedback. In addition, the Early Literacy Teacher Diaries were used to capture teachers' reflections, experiences, and classroom practices throughout the e-mentoring process. Teachers were asked to write concise diary entries after each mentoring session, documenting their thoughts, challenges, and learning experiences related to early literacy practices.

Analysis of Data

In order to reveal the changes in teachers' competencies regarding early literacy, the data obtained from the Early Literacy Teacher Competencies Form were analyzed in two stages. In the first administration (baseline), teachers indicated their level of agreement for each item by choosing one of the options "agree," "undecided," or "disagree." In the second administration (endline), the same items were answered again, and the researchers compared each teacher's responses across the two administrations.

The analysis focused on identifying directional changes in teachers' responses using a descriptive qualitative approach. A shift from "disagree" to "undecided" or "agree" was interpreted as an increase in awareness and competency, while stable or negative shifts indicated no progress in that particular competency area. This analytical process was not based on inferential statistics but aimed to reveal meaning-based and reflective changes in teachers' self-assessments and professional awareness throughout the e-mentoring process.

In the pre- and post-program questionnaire applications, the researchers compared and analyzed the responses given according to the three-point Likert-type scale for 23 items. The video recordings and teacher diaries were analyzed through content analysis, defined as the systematic coding of qualitative data based on specific themes and categories (Fraenkel et al., 2012). Data

derived from content analysis were supported with direct quotations from the participants to strengthen the validity of interpretation.

To ensure the reliability of the study, the qualitative data were independently coded by two researchers. The inter-rater agreement percentage was calculated using the formula suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994), where an agreement above 70% is considered reliable. In this study, the percentage of agreement between coders was 95%, indicating a high level of consistency and ensuring the reliability of data analysis.Furthermore, the credibility of the research was enhanced by the fact that both researchers are field experts who have been actively working in early childhood education for many years, conducting field-based studies with children, teachers, and families. This professional experience contributed to the interpretive depth and trustworthiness of the analysis.

Confidentiality and Ethical Issues

The participants of the study were informed about the research process, and their consent to participate in the study and explicit consent to the retention of video recordings were obtained. Verbal informed consent was obtained prior to the interview. In the study, two-digit codes such as T1, T2 consisting of letters and numbers were used instead of the participants' names for the purpose of protecting personal data. The letter T in the codes represents the first letter of the word teacher. The order of the codes was given according to the order in which the teachers filled in the form. For example, the teacher with the T1 code completed and submitted the form earlier than the teacher with the T2 code. Within the scope of the study, the ethics committee permission was obtained from Çankırı Karatekin University in the 20th meeting held on 31.05.2021.

Result / Findings

Findings Regarding Teachers' Early Literacy Competencies

In 10 of the 23 items in the early literacy teacher competencies questionnaire, there were differences between the responses given by the teachers in the pre-test and post-test. Five teachers (T3, T4, T7, T8 and T11) who disagreed in the pre-test, turned to be more positive as undecided or agree in the post-test. These teachers constitute approximately half of the participating teachers in the study. Three of the five teachers stated that they had not received any training on early literacy before (T4, T8, T11); the other two stated

that they had received training two or more times (T3 and T7). The 10 items that have changed positively in the proficiency questionnaire are as follows:

1. I read books to children (only as a large group activity).
2. I read books to children (as a small group or individually).
3. I use word labels to identify objects, learning centres, etc. in the classroom.
4. I do vocabulary and picture recognition activities.
5. I introduce common words and signs.
6. I organise book reading sessions targeted at learning goals (e.g. to develop vocabulary knowledge and storytelling skills).
7. I ensure that children have concrete experiences to enhance and sustain their development.
8. I adapt activities by adopting a 'continuous assessment approach.'
9. I evaluate the effectiveness of the pre-school education programme.
10. I assess children's early literacy skills with various assessment tools.

T3, a bachelor's degree graduate, stated that they had received training on early literacy two or more times before. T3 marked disagree in the pre-test for a total of five items: 2, 4, 6, 7 and 9, and marked agree in the post-test for the same items. T4, a bachelor's degree graduate, stated that they had not received any training on early literacy before. They marked the item 1 as disagree in the pre-test and changed it to undecided in the post-test. T7, a master's degree graduate, stated that they had received training on early literacy two or more times before. They marked the item 1 as disagree in the pre-test and changed it to agree in the post-test. T8, a bachelor's degree graduate, stated that they had not received any training on early literacy before. Although they stated that they disagreed with item 5, 'I introduce common words and signs' in the pre-test, they marked it as agree in the post-test. T11, a bachelor's degree graduate, stated that they had not received any training on early literacy before. For a total of 4 items among 23 items, they marked disagree in the pre-test and changed it to agree in the post-test. These items are 3, 5, 8 and 10. There was no difference between the pre- and post-test responses of teachers coded T1, T2, T5, T6, T9 and T10. In other words, in the following items, the teacher who marked agree in the pre-test marked agree in the post-test; the teacher who marked undecided in the pre-test marked undecided in the post-test; the teacher who marked disagree in the pre-test marked disagree in the

post-test. The 13 items with unchanged markings in the competency questionnaire are as follows:

1. I talk to and listen to children to encourage conversation.
2. I offer planned and unplanned reading experiences to encourage children to speak and listen.
3. I provide opportunities for children to see models of writing and begin to use their developing writing skills.
4. I encourage children to ask questions and actively listen to their answers.
5. I create opportunities for children to have free and independent access to the classroom book centre throughout the day.
6. I sing to the children.
7. I chat with children.
8. I do activities with rhymes and rhyming words.
9. I do activities that support sound awareness.
10. I ensure that children are exposed to a writing-rich environment and have meaningful interactions with the writing around them.
11. I consult current theory and research on early literacy.
12. I develop strategies to support the development of early literacy skills in children.
13. I partner with families to support children's early literacy skills.

The actions in these items can be considered as teachers' practices before programme in the classroom.

Findings Based on Teachers' Discourses on Early Literacy

Two main themes and sub-themes emerged regarding the opinions of the teachers as a result of the sharing meetings with 12 pre-school teachers. Accordingly, sub-themes of lack of knowledge and lack of self-confidence emerged under the theme of competencies and sub-themes with classroom teachers and families under the theme of cooperation (Figure 1).

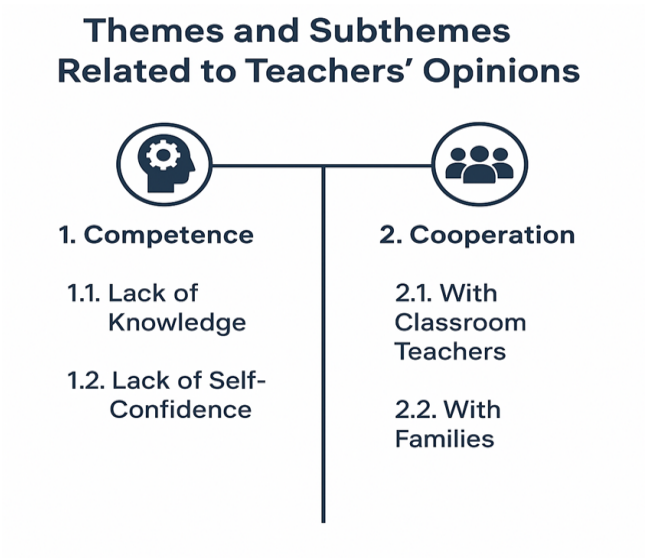


Figure 1. Themes and Subthemes Related to Teachers' Opinions

Competencies

While expressing their views on early literacy skills in the meetings, teachers mentioned some of their concerns and worries. The teachers' statements divided the situation they faced into two sub-themes. Accordingly, the teachers mentioned lack of knowledge and self-confidence as a result of their self-criticism.

Lack of Knowledge. During the meetings, teachers expressed that they needed to learn about the concept of early literacy and early literacy skills. Two teachers related this need to not having received early literacy education at university and said this as follows;

"*Is there a mentoring training course like the one you've given us currently available as part of the literacy preparation course in universities? We graduated in 2008 from a university in Ankara and we didn't receive such training. Although we attend field training to improve ourselves, we often discuss our profession with a group of friends who are also here listening. As teachers, we're proud to explain the importance of our profession and what we do in pre-school education to classroom teachers on every platform. However, we don't fully understand the subject of letters and phonology. While we received great training from teachers at the university, perhaps there have been innovations since our time, including courses on this topic.*" (T11).

"*Of course, our deficiency, the point that everyone is stuck on is the inability to correctly teach the sound of letters…The reason for this will be that we cannot explain that letter and that sound correctly because we do not have the training for this.*" (T5).

One teacher's statement about not knowing how to answer the questions asked by the families about the development of early literacy skills in children is given below.

"*The child somehow learned to read with the support of his family, with his own interest, but there is no writing, so he does not want to write. The family also said, "Teacher, he does not want to write, should we apply pressure? Shall we force him?" Of course, I suggested not to apply pressure. But I don't know what needs to be done.*" (T6).

Participant T11 similarly expressed the questions in his mind with the following statement;

"*We always told to the parents never say (bee, cee, dee) because when they start the first grade, they may have problems combining sounds. We only give sounds and you can find the correct sound more easily from the last letter of the word, for example, the sound of balık-kıh… At least that is what I was doing myself. Well, now, as the name of the letter, yes, the name of this letter is b, c, but are we going to say "bbb, ccc", is this the correct way?*"

Lack of Self-confidence. The main point emphasised under this theme was the negative reactions teachers might encounter in their social environment in terms of teaching early literacy skills. A teacher stated that she was afraid of the reaction she would get from her environment about giving letter and phonetic information and that she was afraid of making mistakes.

"*I would say a little shyness and uneasiness. probably due to the negative comments we have always received from these classroom teachers. Since I don't know how to express myself there, I don't even say "s" sound, I say "sss" sound. So, is the feedback we get from primary school teachers. Frankly, I contradicted myself. I also have a lack of knowledge on this subject or I do not know exactly how to do it at work. As you just said, we are heading towards vowels, yes, we are only heading towards it. We don't even mention consonants in our daily life, because there is a thought that if we do it wrong, it's like this. Personally, I am like that…*" (T12).

Cooperation

With Classroom Teachers. While the teachers expressed their views on the subject of early literacy at the meetings, they stated that they thought it would be a more developmental process for them if they cooperated with classroom teachers, and they stated this as follows:

"*Because of yesterday's social media post (Classroom teachers should stop pressurising pre-school teachers not to name and sound the letters. We invite classroom teachers to cooperate with us!), smiling appeared on the face of classroom teachers. Who are you? How did you start such a thing? Who decides this? I was really quite nervous. I pretty much resisted answering. How will we get through this process? How far can we reach unless we agree with them? Classroom teachers are very strict on this issue, they have a careful attitude not to leave the environment they are in.*" (T10).

A teacher approached the process by empathising with the classroom teachers and expressed her thoughts as follows:

"*As educators, we work closely together to balance teaching children about transitioning and preparing for school. Regular meetings allow us to consult each other about our respective fields and share our experiences. We recognize the importance of not overstepping boundaries, which, unfortunately, some of our preschool colleagues do by teaching through dictation and keeping notebooks for this purpose. We understand that this approach can stifle children's self-expression and have observed a clear contrast in our own classrooms between those introduced to books from infancy and those encountering them later on. Our belief in the importance of collaboration among teacher friends motivates us to share our insights on this topic.*" (T7).

A teacher stated that a bridge based on mutual understanding should be established between pre-school teachers and classroom teachers and this process should be supported by the programme with the following words.

"*Now I think the main problem is this; there is something that has become a myth for years. As pre-schoolers, we feel like we're unable to teach sounds or letters, and often we're told that we can't do this or that. The main challenge we face is bridging the gap between pre-school and primary school teachers. It often seems like only primary school teachers can teach letters and sounds that pre-school teachers can't. Unfortunately, there's an attitude that puts pressure on pre-school teachers not to address this issue. We believe*

that primary school teachers need to recognize us as early literacy ambassadors and connect our teachings and theirs. It's time to change our curriculum and include early literacy training in the new pre-school education program." (T5).

A teacher stated that it would be beneficial to exchange ideas within the scope of a workshop to be held on cooperation with classroom teachers;

"*During our first meeting, we discussed a point that had been unaddressed before. There was consensus that there should be better communication and collaboration amongst us, and suggested organizing a workshop. A certain attitude among classroom teachers suggests that teaching sounds and letters is their sole domain, which creates a barrier for us pre-school teachers, who also play a vital role in a child's education. It often feels like we are not taken seriously or undervalued, but this should not be the case. Ultimately, working together will benefit everyone and make our jobs easier.*" (T5).

With Family. Teachers thought that additionally to classroom teachers, families should also be informed about early literacy activities and cooperation should be made with them. One of the teachers expressed the need to raise the families' awareness about early literacy as follows:

"*I have been a teacher for over 15 years and used to believe, like some of my colleagues, that children should not be taught reading and writing before school. However, the pandemic made me rethink my stance, as I witnessed children effortlessly picking up these skills while learning from home. Nonetheless, I do have concerns as I currently work in a school with families from low-income backgrounds. During a recent activity, a student copied letters from a box of crayons, and when the mother saw the work, she asked if we had taught the letters and if her child could read. I worry that some families may force their children to learn, labeling them if they cannot succeed, and wonder how we can prevent this.*" (T1)

A teacher emphasised the importance of cooperation with the family by giving an example from their experience with a parent during early literacy activities in the distance education process and expressed it in the following words:

"*Healthcare professionals whose mothers are at work and whose fathers are at home during the distance education process. It was a little difficult*

for fathers to do some activities. "Instead of preparing for the socio-dramatic play, I ask him a word and he gives the answer, what are you trying to do with us, teacher," he said. I said it wasn't like that. I said, "Children understand and learn better with the game, I don't want to memorise it". Then they did the activity with their mother. The cooperation of the family is important…" (T8).

Teachers emphasized that they lack of knowledge about developing children's early literacy skills. They don't self-confidence. Despite this, they think that they can overcome this with cooperation with classroom teachers and families. They are willing to fill in their knowledge gaps.

Discussion

The Early Literacy Ambassadors e-mentoring training programme was implemented to enhance the competencies of pre-school teachers in supporting children's early literacy skills. The findings indicated that the programme contributed positively to teachers' professional growth by increasing their awareness, confidence, and ability to apply early literacy practices in their classrooms. The guidance and continuous professional assistance provided through e-mentoring helped teachers overcome time and space barriers, offering a flexible and sustainable model of professional development.

These results demonstrate that e-mentoring can serve as an effective tool for promoting reflective practice and collaborative learning among pre-school teachers. This finding aligns with previous research emphasizing the role of mentoring and relationship-based professional development models in enhancing teacher competencies and classroom practices (Bowman et al., 2001; Fukkink and Lont, 2007; Gaible and Burns, 2005). In this sense, the programme's outcomes are consistent with theoretical perspectives that highlight the importance of practice-based and feedback-oriented support systems in early childhood education.

Hezlett and Gibson (2005) described e-mentoring as an expertise system that enables fast and real-time learning, while Quintana and Zambrano (2014) emphasised that the model's effectiveness depends on mentors' communication, empathy, and pedagogical competencies. Similarly, research conducted in different contexts has demonstrated that e-mentoring fosters professional collaboration, reflective practice, and peer learning among educators (Jayatilleke et al., 2017; Özdemir and Boydak Özan, 2013). In the Turkish

context, Oğuz Ünver et al. (2023) highlighted the importance of designing professional development programmes that integrate mentoring, coaching, and collaboration strategies aligned with teachers' needs and expectations.Taken together, these findings support the current study's results, showing that e-mentoring provides a flexible and interactive platform for teachers' professional development. The present study contributes to this growing body of evidence by demonstrating that the Early Literacy Ambassadors e-mentoring programme effectively enhanced pre-school teachers' early literacy competencies through ongoing feedback, practice, and mentor support.

The use of self-assessment tools can help teachers gain knowledge and awareness of early literacy skills and contribute to their beliefs about children's learning abilities. Teachers who believe they can help children learn through their actions feel more confident about their future teaching performance, and this affects their goal setting and effort. The study revealed that self-evaluation tools for teachers are a powerful technique that helps increase teacher success and bring about change in the teacher. Furthermore, the study showed that the early literacy teacher competencies questionnaire administered to the teachers by the researchers supported teachers' knowledge and awareness of early literacy skills through self-assessment. Self-evaluations predict that teachers can overcome obstacles by making them willing to try new learning ideas with high expectation of success (Ross, 1992). Teachers with high expectations of their own teaching skills also produce high achievement in children (Goddard et al., 2000; Muijs and Reynolds, 2001).

However, the use of self-assessment tools can be criticized for being subjective. Still, teacher self-assessment forms are one of the documents recommended for inclusion in a comprehensive professional development system (Buldu, 2014). This study also highlighted the importance of designing professional development programmes with various strategies, such as mentoring, coaching, peer learning and collaboration, that prioritize teachers' ideas and expectations.

Although some universities have taken quick action and managed to include early literacy skills in their undergraduate education programmes, the number of these universities is limited. Therefore, there is a need for both new scientific studies on early literacy and reaching more students in undergraduate and graduate programmes. Research with teachers and pre-service teachers supports the finding that teachers lack knowledge about the concept of early

literacy (Özdemir and Bayraktar, 2015; Altun and Tantekin Erden, 2016; Ergül et al., 2014; Laçin and Güldenoğlu, 2022). Seabrooks et al. (2000) found in their research that trainee teachers' knowledge and self-confidence increased with the e-mentoring method.

Pre-school teachers care about collaborating with classroom teachers to support early literacy skills in children. Families are another stakeholder group under the theme of cooperation. In supporting early literacy skills, researchers emphasised the importance of establishing cooperation with families, ensuring qualified home-school cooperation and creating literacy environments at home (Işıtan et al., 2020; Çalış and Feyman Gök, 2022). The absence of clear cut-off points in early literacy and traditional literacy development, according to the literature, makes it difficult to set timings in literacy development stages (Justice, 2006). In Ergül et al.'s (2014) study, it was emphasised that the early literacy competencies of pre-school teachers should be supported by a practice-based mentoring programme that will be imparted continuously, not once, by field experts. Bayraktar (2018), however, revealed that pre-school teachers should receive in-service training to support the skills of writing awareness, which is examined within the scope of early literacy, and to apply methods such as interactive reading. In her study, Laçin (2019) drew attention to the relationship between teachers' knowledge levels and classroom practices related to early literacy and stated that teachers' knowledge levels should be increased and qualified and numerous in-service training programmes should be organised. The İstanbul Ataşehir Early Literacy Workshop was held on 11 June 2022. Academicians, pre-school teachers, classroom teachers, school/institution principals, counsellors, special education teachers attended the workshop. The workshop report included the answers and suggestions given to the questions and sample plays for implementation (Karaevli, 2022). In the United States, academicians, teachers and families take part in these meetings (Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development-NIH-DHHS, 2010).

Conclusion / Suggestions

The study concluded that the Early Literacy Ambassadors e-mentoring training programme effectively enhanced pre-school teachers' competencies in supporting children's early literacy skills. The programme fostered teachers' reflective practices, strengthened their professional self-confidence, and

contributed to their ongoing professional development. The findings also indicate that e-mentoring provides a sustainable and practice-oriented model for teacher training in early childhood education. Furthermore, the results highlight the importance of continuous professional development opportunities for teachers to maintain and improve their competencies in promoting children's early literacy.

The lack of knowledge and self-confidence observed among many Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

- Early literacy mentoring and e-mentoring programmes should be expanded to reach a wider group of pre-school teachers in order to strengthen their knowledge and confidence in supporting children's early literacy skills.
- Continuous professional development activities should focus on practice-based learning and reflective feedback processes to promote the sustainable improvement of teachers' competencies.
- Self-assessment tools should be integrated into teacher education programmes to help teachers monitor and evaluate their progress in early literacy practices.
- Collaboration and communication between pre-school and primary school teachers should be enhanced to ensure continuity in children's literacy development.
- Systematic collaboration between teachers and families should be established regarding early literacy activities, and awareness-raising efforts should be organised to inform families about their role in supporting early literacy.
- Further studies should investigate the long-term effects of e-mentoring programmes on teachers' professional competencies and classroom practices.

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