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# The Role of Prep Schools in the Middle to High School Transition of Students in Southeastern Turkey

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The Role of Prep Schools in the Middle to High School Transition  
of Students in Southeastern Turkey

by

Mucahit Kocak

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirement for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
in Curriculum and Instruction with an emphasis in  
Special Education  
Department of Teaching Learning  
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University of South Florida

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Student at Risk

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## **DEDICATIONS**

This dissertation is dedicated to my father who always wanted to see my success throughout my educational journey, to my mother who always encouraged me to get a higher degree, and to my wife who always believed and supported me. Thank you very much for everything that you made throughout my Journey.

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## **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the role that a small sample of prep-schools play in meeting the academic and behavioral needs of students who are at risk for poor academic and social outcomes as they transition from middle school to high school. The study examined the perspectives of teachers, students and families about their experiences with prep schools. A qualitative case research design was used in this research to gain a deeper understanding about the role of prep schools in the Southeastern region of Turkey. Teachers, students, mentors and parents were selected purposefully for the study as participants. Interviews, observations, and document analysis were used as a source of data. Based on the revealed qualitative data, the role of Reading Halls was represented under five themes and three sections. It is found that there are four main concerns about students including security, economic, academic, and behavioral concerns. These prep school type programs are non-profit organizations and aim to provide a safe environment for the students and teacher-family collaboration and play an important role. The program is supported with academic courses and social activities to address the concerns about the students.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **Introduction**

In the Southeastern region of Turkey, people have struggled with many problems for decades. People in that region struggle with economic and ethnic problems. In general, the socioeconomic status in the southeastern region is very low when compared to other regions in Turkey. Southeastern Turkey is the region where there has been high poverty for decades. In addition, after the East and Black sea region, southeastern Turkey has the third largest rural population (Benek, 2009). People in this region also struggle with terrorist activities. The region has a very heavy political atmosphere, and at times the tension increases. In the last two years there has been a huge conflict and 20 districts were under round-the-clock curfew. These problems show that students from this region are at risk for victimization. Students in this region experience limited access to school as well. A high number of children from the southeastern region are at risk of poor academic and social outcomes.

In this environment students need to deal with several problems and because of these circumstances, most of the students from this region are at risk. According to Beach (2014), students who face issues in schools, communities or families also experience limited access to school. Students who occupy low socioeconomic status are considered to be at risk and being in a minority group might also place the students at risk (Beach, 2014). Adolescents from the Southeastern region of Turkey are at risk of poor academic and social outcomes, and students in this region need a supportive transition program more than in any other region in Turkey.

However, many schools cannot provide appropriate education and students have limited access to school because of the difficult conditions.

In general, the transition from middle school to high school is a difficult period of time for many adolescents because they need to adapt to a new environment, make new friends, and deal with more difficult courses. Barber and Olsen (2004) mentioned that students need to deal with personal, behavioral, and physical changes because all these changes and adaptations occur during the adolescent years. Because of all these changes, many students face academic, behavioral and procedural challenges during the transition period (Akos & Galassi, 2004).

Adolescence is a very critical period of time for all students, but especially for students in Turkey because they have to deal with all the transitional problems, and they need to take an important exam to be able to attend a better high school. Moreover, students in the southeastern region have even more problems because there is high poverty in the region and there is a huge conflict which has taken place for more than a decade. Therefore, the transition from middle school to high school is very important in this environment. Jackson and Schulenberg (2013) stress the importance of transition from middle school to high school in their study mentioning that during the transition period, students experience a different and a complex social context. Therefore, students need to have programs that support positive transitions. However, students who are from the Southeastern region of Turkey may not have the opportunity to get enough support from their school. Students who have better economic situations spend most of their time in prep schools especially at the end of the eighth grade. However, because of the economic and political issues in Southeastern Turkey, most of the students do not have a chance to receive academic support from prep schools or private tutoring.

In the Turkish education system nationwide examinations are very important. To be able to make a successful transition into business life, get a job, and have a good career, students need to get good scores on the exams. Even though there have been some changes through the years, the main concept of the examination has not changed. Students need to take two nationwide examinations “which determine who will advance to the upper levels of schooling” in high school and universities (Tok, 2013). The entrance examination for high school, The Exam of Transferring to Secondary Education (TEOG), and the entrance exam for universities, The Exam of Transferring to higher Education (YGS), is a crucial part of the Turkish education systems. These examinations are significant for several reasons. These examinations result in a lower rate of enrollment in higher education in Turkey compared to some other countries (e.g., Canada, 88%, Belgium, 56%; France, 51%; Egypt, 20% and Turkey 12, 5%) (Baştürk, 2011). In this competitive environment graduating from a quality high school is very important and students need to have high enough scores to enter good high schools. However, the public schools are not in very good condition and teachers are inexperienced, especially in Southeastern Turkey. Therefore, students who are at the end of middle and high school need to get academic support, and this is one of the reasons why students need to attend prep school programs.

Before 2014 prep schools had an important role in the Turkish education system. According to the Sector Report of the Turkey Education Assembly (TUCCE) (2012), there were 4056 prep schools in Turkey, and more than one million (1.234.738) students went to prep schools in 2011. There are prep schools in middle school and in high school to prepare students for the nationwide exams for high schools and universities. These prep schools have an intense curriculum and students spend their weekends in prep schools. Students who are at eighth grade in middle school or 12<sup>th</sup> grade in high school also attend after school programs in the prep

schools. In 2014, the government decided to either shut down prep schools, which are the main transition programs that provide academic support and prepare students for the nationwide examinations, or convert them to private schools. With this decision the government aimed to direct students toward education in public schools. In 2016, many prep schools shut down or converted to private schools. However, there are still prep school type programs because after the prep school crackdown, public schools began to give supportive courses on the weekends. The fact that students still attend prep schools after the crackdown shows that students need these supportive programs.

Some educators believe that prep schools assist students in achieving educational success and play an important role in the students' self-development and moral values. Also, they provide a good opportunity to support students' transition from middle school to high school. Especially for students in the Southeastern region of Turkey, some supportive transitional programs are needed because of the difficult environment that they face. Therefore, the role of the prep schools and prep school type programs need to be investigated to be able to understand their role and effect on students' academic and behavioral development.

The focus of this study on prep school type Etude Centers, which are mostly known as Reading Halls, in the Southeastern region of Turkey is of importance because Reading Halls offer a different type of program during the students' transition. Transition-oriented prep schools might play an important and different role in the future of the Turkish education system because it is claimed that these type of prep schools not only promote students' success on the examination, but also help students to gain moral values and self-development (Yazar, 2013, October 12). Especially for students in Southeastern Turkey, the Reading Halls help to provide an equal education and keep their students away from maleficent behaviors and some of the

illegal groups who may lead students to some undesirable behaviors and crimes. Therefore, focusing on Reading Halls can provide a better and deeper understanding of the effects of prep schools on students' transition from middle school to high school. Furthermore, focusing on the Southeastern region of Turkey can provide exemplary life stories from the perspectives of students, teachers, and families that increase our understanding of the complex issues adolescents face in this context.

Transition programs need to meet the needs of the students they serve. This is one of the important features of any transition program. Transition programs should address the academic, procedural and social concerns of students to be effective. Therefore, a good transition program should prepare students academically, as well as for their new environment and social changes (Cauley & Jovanovich, 2006; Cohen & Smerdon, 2009). However, there is a gap in the literature about the role of prep schools and their effect on students' academic and behavioral development in Turkey. The initial studies of the role of prep schools were conducted starting in the early 2000's. Since that time, the political and social challenges facing Southeastern Turkey have become more complex. Therefore, more research is needed to identify the role of prep schools and whether or not the prep schools support students' academic and behavioral development and help students' transition from middle school to high school.

The effects of prep schools on educational aspects such as students' self-development and transition need to be questioned. Prep schools in Turkey have begun to be investigated and some research has been conducted in the last few years. Most of the studies focus on the educational aspect of prep schools; however, students spend most of their time in these institutions so there might be very different social and behavioral effects of these prep schools for students. Thus,

there are still many issues that warrant further research about the role and the effectiveness of prep schools and, in particular, the role of Reading Halls in Southeastern Turkey.

### **Conceptual Framework**

According to Akos and Galassi (2004), students have three main concerns during the transition from middle to high school. These concerns are procedural, social, and academic concerns. If these issues are not addressed in the schools, students may face negative outcomes. Concerns and difficulties during the transition period can result in both negative academic and behavioral outcomes for students (Benner & Wang, 2014). Therefore, providing a good transition program is important for students' social as well as academic development.

Transition programs should address students' concerns and needs. For students' academic, behavioral, and procedural concerns Ellerbrock, Denmon, Owens, and Lindstrom (2015) suggest developmentally responsive transition from middle to high school program. The program that they suggest includes several activities and transition courses at the eighth grade and ninth grade which address students' specific concerns. In this way, students may get developmentally responsive support during the middle to high school transition. Based on the findings of their study, Ellerbrock et al. (2015) suggest that transition programs should provide the social and academic activities and courses for 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> grade students as outlined in Table 1.

Ellerbrock, et al. (2015) point to the importance of certain activities and courses related to each concern that students have during the transition process. To be able to provide a developmentally responsive transition program, Ellerbrock et al. (2015) suggest some activities such as field trips, informational sessions, open house programs, team time capsules, and send-off activities to address students' procedural and social concerns. Providing tutoring for students



addresses academic aspects of a developmentally responsive transition program. Moreover, providing transition courses in the first year of high school addresses the procedural, academic and social concerns.

Table 1.

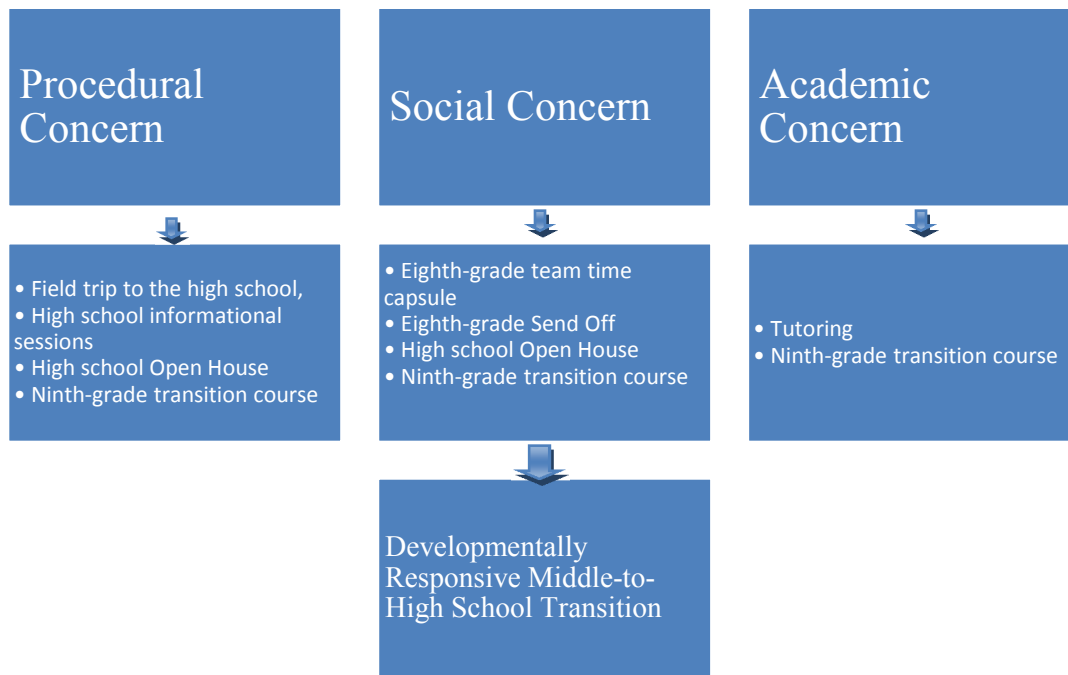
Ellerbrock et al. (2015)'s outline for Developmentally Responsive Transition to High School

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<b>Transitional Concerns</b>
<p><b>Procedural</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>– Transition programs with activities that address procedural aspects of the move are ways to foster a developmentally responsive transition<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Field trip to the high school</li><li>• High school informational sessions</li><li>• High school Open House</li></ul></li><li>– Transition courses that address procedural aspects of the move are ways to foster a responsive transition</li></ul>
<p><b>Social</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>– Transition programs with activities that address social aspects of the move are ways to foster a developmentally responsive transition<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Eighth-grade team time capsule</li><li>• Eighth-grade Send Off</li><li>• High school Open House</li></ul></li><li>– Transition courses that address social aspects of the move are ways to foster a responsive transition<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Ninth-grade transition course</li></ul></li></ul>
<p><b>Academic</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>– Transition programs with activities that address academic aspects of the move are ways to foster a developmentally responsive transition<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Tutoring</li></ul></li><li>– Transition courses that address academic aspects of the move are ways to foster a responsive transition<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Ninth-grade transition course</li></ul></li></ul>

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Ellerbrock's et al. (2015) findings about the developmentally responsive transition program during middle to high school were used as a conceptual framework for this study. Students' concerns and related activities are shown at Figure 1.



**Figure 1.** Conceptual Framework of the study

### **Research Questions**

The purpose of the study was to investigate the role that a small sample of prep schools play in meeting the academic and behavioral needs of students who are at risk for poor academic and social outcomes as they transition from middle school to high school. The study examines the perspectives of teachers, students and families who participated in the study about their experiences with prep schools. For the purpose of the study the research questions that guide this study are as follows:

1. In what ways do prep schools play a role in the Southeastern region of Turkey for students who are at risk for poor academic and social outcomes?
2. What is the teachers' perception of and role in the students' academic and behavioral development?

3. What type of programs are offered for students' academic and behavioral development?
4. In what ways do the prep schools serve economically disadvantaged and ethnically diverse students in Southeastern Turkey?

### **Summary of the Study**

For this study a qualitative case research design was used to gain a deeper understanding about how prep schools address the academic and behavioral needs of students who are at risk for poor academic and social outcomes as they transition from middle school to high school in the Southeastern region of Turkey. Six teachers, six students, six parents, and two mentors were selected purposefully for the study as participants. Interviews, observations, and document analysis were used as a source of data.

The interviews were designed as semi-structured interviews and the participants were interviewed by using a face- to-face interview method. Also, six field observations were conducted to observe the classroom settings and teacher-student relations. Document analyses were used as the third type of data and class schedules, the yearly education calendar, and a document that shows goals and missions of the institutions were used.

Based on the revealed qualitative data, the role of Reading Halls was represented under five themes. The findings are discussed under five themes and these five themes are represented under three sections. In the first section, concerns about students in the southeastern region of Turkey were discussed. In the next section, Reading Halls in Diyarbakir and the role of Reading Halls during transition were discussed. Finally, in the third section teacher and family collaboration and the role of Reading Halls on students' behavioral development are discussed.

## **Definition of Terms**

Based on the purpose of the study, some of the key terms such as prep schools in Turkey, transition, and Reading Halls need to be defined in order to understand how the terms are used and what the terms mean in the study. The key terms for the study are defined as follows:

*Preparatory Schools:* Preparatory schools (prep schools) are a type of private tutoring, profit oriented school in which teachers tutor students in a classroom setting. These types of prep schools, known as Dershane in Turkish, have an important role because these institutions are spread all over the country. Generally, the buildings of these prep schools are owned or rented close to downtown of the city. The average classroom size is around 15 to 20 students. When the average number of students in a classroom decreases, the cost of the school increases. Students who receive education from these schools attend a time period outside of formal education schedules, which are mainly weekends and after school time (Tansel & Bircan, 2006).

*Reading Halls:* Reading Hall is the specific name of etude centers in the Southeastern region of Turkey. Reading Halls are prep school type educational institutions which are widely open in suburban areas. Reading Halls serve students with low socioeconomic status and provide free education (Gurbuz, 2016). The buildings used for Reading Halls are owned or rented and modified to provide educational services for economically disadvantaged students. The typical Reading Hall is a separate building which includes classrooms, computer rooms, and activity rooms (Gurbuz, 2016). The classroom size is around 20 to 25 students and class hours are mainly on weekends and after school.

*Student at Risk:* Students who have experienced an important “mismatch between their circumstances and needs, and the capacity or willingness of the school to accept, accommodate and respond to them in a manner that supports and enables their social, emotional and intellectual

growth and development are considered at-risk” (Beach, 2014; p.16). Many students at-risk face some issues in schools, communities or families such as victimization, and experience limited access to school. Students who have low socioeconomic status, low academic achievement, are in a minority group, and have court involvement are considered to be at-risk (Beach, 2014).

*Transition:* “A process during which institutional and social factors influence which students' educational careers are positively or negatively affected by this movement between organizations” (Schiller, 1999, pp. 216-217). Nowadays students experience several types of transition from kindergarten to college. Students typically have four main transitions during the education life. These transitions are begun with ‘home-to-school’ transition. After that, students have ‘elementary school to middle/junior high school’ transition, then ‘middle/junior high school to high school’ transition, and finally, ‘high school to college/work’ transitions (Anderson, Jacobs, Schramm, & Splittgerber, 2000).

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The purpose of the study was to investigate the role that a small sample of prep-schools play in meeting the academic and behavioral needs of students who are at risk for poor academic and social outcomes as they transition from middle school to high school. The study examined the perspectives of teachers, students, and families who participated in the study about their experiences with prep schools.

In this review of literature, transition from middle to high school will be reviewed in terms of students concerns, transition programs, and transition programs for marginalized students. After that, a brief background will be given about the education system in Turkey and in the Southeastern region of Turkey. At the end of the literature review, prep schools and etude centers will be discussed as a type of transition program.

#### **Introduction**

Academic and behavioral support from transition programs for middle school to high school are very important for the students because of the various changes that occur during this time (e.g., personal, behavioral physical changes due to adolescence, adapting to a new environment, making new friends, taking more challenging courses). Without supports, these difficulties may result in additional challenges including behavioral problems, depression, increasing alcohol usage, and failure to complete school.

Through the years several studies have been done related to the transition from middle school to high school in different countries. They have focused on different issues such as the

causes of increased dropout rates in high school, the effect of parental involvement, students' concerns, and causes of academic failure (Benner & Graham, 2009). Cauley and Jovanovich (2006) argue that the transition from middle school to high school has more notable risks for academic failure because in the ninth grade students fail more than any other grade, minority students and students who struggle with poverty are more likely to be retained, and 14 and 15 year old students who have reading and math difficulties are at risk of dropping out of school in the United States (i.e., a dropout rate of 20%) (Cauley & Jovanovich, 2006).

Prep schools have been playing an important part in the Turkish education system. After 2014 prep schools decided to shut down, and transition programs became more prevalent in discussions throughout Turkey. All the transition programs, which give academic support, are affected with this regulation, especially for students in the Southeastern region of Turkey. In the Southeastern part of Turkey, the prep schools are playing a very important role because the region and its people have been struggling with many problems such as poverty, racism and stereotyping. The majority of the population in the Southeastern region of Turkey is Kurdish and those students are second language learners. Therefore, students in the Southeastern region of Turkey have more notable risks and are likely to be retained during the transition because they are ethnically diverse and for many places economically disadvantaged. In addition, most of the public schools in that region are not good enough to prepare students for high school and for the nationwide high school entrance examination. Therefore, supportive transition programs during middle to high school are critically important in the Southeastern region.

### **The Significant Factors in Transition**

During transition, students face some difficulties and problems. Akos and Galassi (2004) discuss three areas of concern for students about transitioning to high school. These include

academic, procedural and social concerns. Also, families have some concerns during the transition process; however, family concerns are different than those of the students. Families concerns are more about safety and acceptance in the high school, and they do not have as many academic concerns as the students have (Smith, Lim, Wiley, & Akos, 2008).

The first student concern is related to academic success. High schools are very different than middle schools, and when students move to high school they find themselves in a new environment. They need to study more than in middle school and they have more homework and assignments to do (Akos & Galassi, 2004). Furthermore, students report that they receive less academic support by teachers and principals compared to middle school (Barber & Olsen, 2004).

According to Akos and Galassi (2004), the second concern expressed by students is procedural in nature and it is about difficulties adapting to a new school environment. Those procedural concerns can be described as daily problems with managing multiple classes and block schedules, developing relationships with teachers, teachers' high expectations, time management and homework. In high school students should get acclimated to the new school environment, and they need to manage multiple classes. Moreover, they need to develop new relationships with the teachers in high school. All of these changes bring some concerns for the students.

The last concern mentioned in the study of Akos and Galassi (2004) was about social problems. Even though some studies show that students feel more freedom in high school, and enjoy having the opportunity to participate in extracurricular activities and to engage with different social groups (Latrell & Miles, 2003), for many students socialization is a very challenging process in the high school. For example, making friends, increased social expectations, and learning alongside new classmates increase the level of anxiety of students.



Therefore, many students have some social concerns at the beginning of high school, and students need to deal with all these concerns.

If these issues and concerns are not addressed in the schools, many students can face negative outcomes. Concerns and difficulties in these three areas can result in both negative academic and behavioral developmental outcomes for students. These negative outcomes can lead students to attendance problems (Benner & Wang, 2014), nonparticipation in extracurricular activities (Barber & Olsen, 2004), lower GPA, and academic failure. These academic and social problems are likely to trigger dropping outs and behavioral problems for students.

**Academic Difficulties.** Many studies about transition from middle to high school focus on academic outcomes and concern academic issues such as low attendance, decreasing academic achievement and GPA score, and dropping out of school. Academic issues have been discussed in several different perspectives in the literature because most of the time students' grades decline when they move to high school (Benner & Graham, 2009). There might be several reasons behind these academic difficulties. Students' connection with the school is one of the main reasons, and studies show that developing a good connection with the school increases academic success and positive social behaviors. However, when the academic performance and students' school connectedness are decreased, then students may demonstrate some undesirable attitudes such as increasing alcohol usage, low attendance to classes, and unaccepted sexual behaviors, (Uvaas & McKeiviti, 2013). The findings show that there is a relation between academic success in the schools and behavioral development, and academic success affects students' behavior in a positive way.

Students are also at increased risk for dropping out of school as they transition from middle to high school. Students who do not have a good transition are more likely to drop out of

school. Low attendance triggers declining grades and lower GPA which causes more stressors for students. They may begin to experience more behavioral problems such as anxiety, loneliness, and struggles with academic success (Benner & Graham, 2009). Furthermore, students who have attendance problems have decreased participation and low academic performance, and these problems frequently increase the likelihood of dropping out at the high school level (McIntosh, Flannery, Sugai, Braun, & Cochrane, 2008).

**Procedural Difficulties.** The adaptation of the environment and environmental changes are important factors for students' success in high school because middle schools and high schools have different environment and structure. Ellerbrock and Kiefer (2013) point out structural differences in schools. Structural and unstructured aspects of schools might have negative and positive effects on middle to high school transition. Students' expectations and needs change during the transition from middle to high school. Therefore, school structures and schedules should be designed based on students' needs and expectations. Otherwise, this different scheduling may not provide a strong connection and sense of personalization. This situation causes confusion and mental mismatch. This mental mismatch brings some negative outcomes (Ellerbrock & Kiefer, 2013). In addition, Barber and Olsen (2004) stress that from the students' perspective the school environment is very important because the quality of the school environment and academic and social functioning are linked to each other. This means that creating a quality environment in the school has a positive effect on students and increases students' academic success and social interaction.

**Behavioral Developmental Difficulties.** McIntosh, Flannery, Sugai, Braun and Cochrane (2008) reported that there is a correlation between problem behaviors in eighth grade and academic skills in ninth grade. Students who have problems in eighth grade are more likely

to have later academic problems. Also, there is a link between eighth grade academic skills and ninth grade problem behaviors. Students who have good academic skills in eighth grade are less likely to demonstrate problem behaviors. Therefore, as stressed earlier, academic achievement and students' behavioral development process are parallel to each other, and academic difficulties and behavioral problems should be solved hand in hand.

Benner and Wang (2014) reported that students' attendance declines significantly when it is compared to their middle school attendance. Furthermore, students who have small size middle and high schools, students who are segregated, and students who are economically disadvantaged are more likely to have difficulties with attendance. Moreover, it is stressed that students with emotional behavioral disorders are more likely to drop out in high school than any other students among their peers who have another disorders (McIntosh, Flannery, Sugai, Braun & Cochrane, 2008).

According to Barber and Olsen (2004), the grade and school transition causes many changes for the students and most of them are negative changes. Studies have demonstrated that some of these undesired behaviors are likely to increase after starting high school. For instance, Aderman and Midgley (2004) stress the increasing percentage of cheating in high school. The result of the study shows that students in high school cheat more than middle schools. Moreover, Jackson and Schulendeberg (2013) show that the use of alcohol increases during the transition depending on the social context and environmental changes in high school.

### **Effective Transition**

Anderson, et al. (2000) stress two important elements for a successful transition - 'preparedness' and 'support'. Both of these elements are very significant for the student in every level of transition. Preparedness has more than one dimensional concept, including among the

key dimensions of ‘academic preparedness’, ‘independence and industriousness’, ‘conformity to adult standards’, and ‘coping mechanisms’. Students who have low GPA are likely to experience more problems after the transition period in order to make some adjustment about their study routines.

Academic preparedness is one of the key components of a successful transition. Students should be well prepared academically and ready for the academic content for high schools. Furthermore, it is expected that the students are able to work by themselves to be successful at the next school level. Therefore, independence and industriousness is the second component of a successful transition. Moreover, after high school they need to be ready for ‘conformity to adult standard’ because the expectations and responsibilities will change after transferring to high school.

The last component for a successful transition is ‘coping mechanisms’. Coping mechanisms help students to deal with problems and the students who are skilled at using coping mechanisms tend to be more successful in making systemic transitions. Another important component for an effective transition that Anderson, et al. (2000) mention is to offer student support. In this period of time students may need support academically or behaviorally. Support which may come from their families, peers and teachers are very helpful for the transition students. Moreover, Newman, Newman, Griffen, O'Connor, and Spas (2007) stressed that high school transition is a sensitive period, and if the students’ school belongingness decreases, then the depressive symptoms are increased. From this perspective, family, teacher, and peer support play a key role during transition.

According to Akos and Galassi (2004), students have mainly three concerns during the transition from middle to high school. These concerns are procedural, social, and academic

concerns and suggest that school personnel, school counselors, and psychologists should assist students during the transition based on these concerns. For these concerns, Ellerbrock, Denmon, Owens, and Lindstrom (2015) suggest transition support programs which include several activities and a ninth grade transition course. Each activities and courses address students' procedural, social, and academic problems. In this way, students may get a 'developmentally responsive transition' support during middle to high school.

Ellerbrock et al. (2015) suggest field trips to high school, informational sessions about high school, and high school open house activities for students' procedural concerns. For social concerns, team time capsule, send-off, and open house activities are offered at the end of the eighth grade and it is found that these activities assist students' social development. Providing tutoring for the students addresses academic aspects to cultivate a developmentally responsive transition program. As mentioned earlier, students can face difficulties in high school such as adopting a different environment and heavy coursework. Therefore, students can be supported with tutoring sessions. Furthermore, providing transition courses at the first year of the high school addresses the procedural, academic and social concerns.

Queen (2013) gives a well-tested guideline for local schools to provide a successful transition from middle to high school for their students. Queen (2013) suggests this guideline includes the following suggestions:

- Providing activities for students, families, and teachers from middle and high schools during the transition period.
- Establishing an annually updated protocol that can be replicable.
- Providing a timeline for the transition process.

- Scheduling meetings between the collaboration groups and between the schools to discuss the issues about the students.
- Arranging financial support for the transition process.
- Evaluating the process by asking teachers, counselors, and parents about their experiences during the transition.

### **Transition Programs**

Transition is a stressful period and students have some concerns, but there are some positive aspects of the transition that make students excited as well. According to Akos and Galassi (2004), one of the most attracted things for the students are more freedom, meeting new people, and extracurricular options. Therefore, an effective transition should respond the students' needs and expectations. Furthermore, depending on the goal, the transition program can be supported with some activities in order to make the program more attractive for the students.

To provide effective transition for students, well designed programs might be needed because as Anderson et al. (2000) mentioned, support is one of the main elements of a successful transition. Queen (2013) mentions some important components for an effective transition program. One of the key components is providing student centered orientations. Another important key component for a successful transition is providing the concept of an adult advocate who can be a teacher or an administrator. Furthermore, staff development takes an important part for effective transition, and student-to-student relationships are an equally important part of the transition.

Activities in a transition program should address students concerns and transition programs should meet students' needs. This is one of the important features for a program which

focus on middle to high school transition. The transition programs should address the academic, procedural and social concerns to become an effective program for the students. Therefore, a good transition program should prepare students academically. In addition, the students need to be prepared for the new environment and social changes (Cauley & Jovanovich, 2006; Cohen & Smerdon, 2009). During the transition, students may get support from their families, peers and teachers (Anderson et al., 2000). There is a general notion that parental involvement in high school might have negative effect on students' behaviors. However, from the students' perception, receiving encouragement by some positive reinforcement motivates students for the academic success and they think that family support is very helpful for them (Chen, Gregory, 2010; Barber & Olsen, 2004; Uvas & Mckeviti, 2013). Therefore, families need to take a place in the transition and some programs need to be designed for the families.

Uvaas and McKeviti (2013) have some recommendations about the transition programs. At first they argue that developing an individualized transition program is necessary for the students. The programs should address individual's problems and concerns. Also, they suggest promoting academic development in the programs in terms of preparing students for the high school and preventing them from dropping out of school. Another point that Uvaas and McKeviti (2013) stress is promoting school connectedness in the transition program by developing good relationship with teachers and students. Students who have good relations with their teachers develop a better connection with the school as well. The fourth important component of a transition program is to be able to be aware of the effects of the transition on students. Therefore, transition programs should be examined systematically in order to understand students' needs. During the transitions, students might have 'multiple stressors'. Therefore, the last recommendation is to identify students' experiences and whether or not these

experiences cause ‘multiple stressors’ which may have negative effects on students (Uvaas & McKeviti, 2013).

Nowadays there are several transition programs and interventions have been done for students, families, teachers, and administrators. High schools develop partnership programs with the local middle schools such as informal parent meetings, student shadowing programs, panel discussions and high school course advising sessions (Cohen & Smerdon, 2009). Some of the supportive programs are very beneficial for the students such as academic and social mentoring programs and group advisory periods (Uvaas & McKeviti, 2013).

After high school reform movements in the United States, districts and high schools began to develop and implemented some programs for a better transition. These programs mainly addressed bridging the gap from middle school to higher institutions, preventing students from dropping out of school, and reentering high school. For these purposes, the structure of the high school was changed and high schools began to provide mentoring, coaching, and some types of professional development activities for the teachers (Cohen & Smerdon, 2009).

### **Transition Programs for Marginalized Students**

Transition from middle to high school is a stressful process. All students might have difficulties during the transition because the changes that the students face during this period mostly have a negative effect on the students such as declining achievement, decreased motivation, lower self-esteem and increased psychological distress (Akos & Galassi, 2004). However, some students have difficulties and struggle more than other students because of some factors. According to Anderson et al. (2000), females, students with behavioral problems, students with academic difficulties, and students with low socio economic status who are mostly



minority students, have the most difficulties during the transition. Therefore, minority students face multiple risk factors.

During the transition period these marginalized students should handle environmental and social pressure. As I mentioned, students in these ages need to deal with the biological, physical, and social transformations during adolescence as well. These difficult and negative situations might cause some behaviors which are harmful to themselves or other people around them (Gutman & Bidgley, 2000). For all of the counted factors above, it is very clear that every student needs a good transition. However, marginalized students especially need an effective transition program.

To meet the needs of adolescent students during transition from middle to high school, different types of groups and organizations, such as schools, churches, community organizations and businesses are interested to provide transitional services (Queen, 2013). There are several programs that have been developed through the years. To be able to have an effective program for minority students, their needs should be addressed very well. Neild, Stoner-Eby, and Furstenberg (2008) stressed that students from the urban areas are likely to struggle in the ninth grade because they already have a weak academic background, and ninth grade classes include more intense content making this shift even more difficult for students. As a result of this situation, minority students have a high dropout rate. Neild et al. (2008) suggest that to provide an effective transition program for the students, the program needs to be continued at the ninth grade as well.

Gentle-Genitty (2009) made a study to investigate the best implementation of the transition program for low-income African American students. Two hundred and forty six programs have been investigated in the study and four of the best practices were chosen among

these programs. These programs are School Transitional Environmental Program (STEP); Skills, Opportunity, and Recognition (SOAR); Positive Action through Holistic Education (PATHE); and FastTrack. According to Gentle-Genitty (2009), STEP is the best practice among these four programs for low-income African American students' transition from middle school to high school. The main target of STEP is non-white low income students' transition from elementary and middle to high schools in urban areas. STEP uses the same curriculum and settings that the schools use throughout the year. Furthermore, the program is offered for the entire academic calendar. The program works collaboratively with the teachers, parents, and students. According to Gentle-Genitty (2009), the STEP program works effectively from the individual, peer, family, school, and community perspective.

### **Education in Turkey**

Turkey is a social government and free public education has to be offered by the government to all citizens in Turkey. Therefore, all students have a right to get free public education. Some of the articles are related to education in the Turkish constitution, but one of the important one is Article 42. Education rights are given by the constitution of Turkey. According to Article 42:

“No one shall be deprived of the right of education.

The scope of the right to education shall be defined and regulated by law.

Education shall be conducted along the lines of the principles and reforms of Atatürk, based on contemporary scientific and the phrase “and children’s rights” was added by the fourth Article of Act No. 5982 dated September 12, 2010. Twenty educational principles, under the supervision and control of the State. Educational institutions contravening these principles shall not be established.

The freedom of education does not relieve the individual from loyalty to the Constitution.

Primary education is compulsory for all citizens of both sexes and is free of charge in state schools.

The principles governing the functioning of private primary and secondary schools shall be regulated by law in keeping with the standards set for the state schools.

(Paragraph added on February 2, 2008; Act No. 5735, and annulled by the decision of the Constitutional Court dated June 5, 2008 numbered E. 2008/16, K. 2008/116)

The State shall provide scholarships and other means of assistance to enable students of merit lacking financial means to continue their education. The State shall take necessary measures to rehabilitate those in need of special education so as to render such people useful to society.

Training, education, research, and study are the only activities that shall be pursued at institutions of education. These activities shall not be obstructed in any way. No language other than Turkish shall be taught as a mother tongue to Turkish citizens at any institution of education. Foreign languages to be taught in institutions of education and the rules to be followed by schools conducting education in a foreign language shall be determined by law. The provisions of international treaties are reserve” (Republic of Turkey Const. art. XLII, § 3).

Moreover, the Fundamental Law on Turkish National Education guarantees the rights of education, access to the educational institutions and the equal education for all Turkish Citizens with the Article 4, 7 and 8. Based on these articles in the constitution, the government is not only responsible to provide free public education, but the government is also responsible for equal educational opportunities for every Turkish citizen.

The education system in Turkey has changed couple times in the last two decades. First, compulsory education became eight years, and elementary and middle schools were combined in 1997 (Karadeniz, 2013). Other major changes were made by the government in the 2005-2006 academic year to include curriculum and programs being re-designed for elementary school based on the eight year compulsory education (Celen, Celia & Seferoglu, 2011). In 2012, the years of compulsory education were changed one more time and were increased from eight years to 12 years. After these changes, elementary schools, middle schools, and high schools have been compulsory for all students. Furthermore, elementary schools and middle schools were separated. After this change, another major modification has been done to the system of education. Elementary schools became four years instead of five, and middle schools became four years instead of three (Karadeniz, 2013). Currently, there are 12 years of compulsory

education in Turkey, elementary school (4 years), middle school (4 years), and high schools (4 years) which are known as the 4+4+4 education model.

Nationwide examinations take a very important place in the Turkish education system. Students need to take a nationwide examination after middle school and high school and in the last ten years. High school entrance examinations were changed five times and university entrance examinations were changed three times until 2003 (Bedir, 2013, August, 26). Recently, in order to go to a better high school, students need to take two TEOG exams during their first and second semester of eighth grade from five main courses: Math, Science, Literature, Social Sciences, and English. Moreover, students need to take YGS, which is a SAT type exam, to enter a university.

Even though the system has been changed frequently, the quality of the education did not increase based on the PISA results. Celen, Celik and Seferoglu (2011) point out the PISA results among 65 countries indicating Turkey became 43rd in Math and Science, and 41st in Reading ability. Especially, students at the eastern and southeastern region decrease the ratio of the scores because based on the PISA results, students in the Southeastern region, Eastern region, and Black sea region received the lowest score in Turkey (Berberoglu & Kalender, 2005). These results show that the quality of education in the Southeastern, Eastern, and Black sea regions of Turkey is even worse, and there is a huge quality gap among the educational services in these regions and the western cities of Turkey. Students in the western cities demonstrate better success in the high school and entrance exams when compared to the students in the eastern cities because most of the successful schools are located in the western part of Turkey (Cinoglu, 2006). From this perspective, students in the Eastern, Southeastern, and Black sea region need to get academic support programs.

## **Southeastern Turkey**

Turkey is between Europe and Asia. The Asian part of Turkey is called Anatolia and the European part is in Balkans. Turkey is located among Bulgaria, Georgia, Greece, Azerbaijan, Iran, Armenia and Syria. Turkey is divided into seven regions based on the geographical structure and the Southeastern region is one of the smallest regions in terms of geographical and economical structure. There are nine cities in the Southeastern region and these cities are: Diyarbakır, Batman, Siirt, Şırnak, Mardin, Adıyaman, Gaziantep, Kilis, and Sanliurfa. The region borders Iraq and Syria on the south as illustrated in Figure 2. The map of Southeastern region of Turkey (Benek, 2009). Over five million people live in the Southeastern region of Turkey and this is less than 10% of the population of the country. This region has one of the largest migration levels in Turkey and after the East and Black sea regions; the Southeastern region of Turkey has the third largest rural population (Benek, 2009).



**Figure 2.** The Map of Southeastern region of Turkey (Source: Wikipedia)

There is no data collected based on ethnic differences because of the constitution. However, it is estimated that there are 12-16 million Kurdish in Turkey and the majority of them live at the Eastern and Southeastern part of Turkey (Aydin, 2012). According to 2000 data, the literacy rate in Southeastern Turkey is 73.3%, which is lower than the national literacy rate (Kaya, 2009). Based on regions in Turkey, the highest literacy rate is seen in the eastern and the southeastern. This is another piece of data that depicts the lack of educational services in the Southeastern region of Turkey.

Southeastern region of Turkey is ethnically diverse, and there are people who are ethnically different that live in the Southeastern Turkey as well. The people in that region identify themselves as Arabs, Kurds, and Zazas, but the major population in that region is Kurdish. Therefore, people in that region are bilingual and most of them learn Turkish in elementary schools (Şahin & Gümez, 2000). However, there is no ESL type program for these students because the constituent defines all the citizens as Turkish.

The third article in the constituent of Turkey protects the ‘indivisible integrity of the state with its territory and nation’ and Turkish defines as the ‘language of the state’. Therefore, other than Turkish is prohibited to teach as a mother language. The government of Turkey only recognizes Armenians, Rums and Jews as minorities and, accordingly, no other minorities except these groups have the right to open and run their own schools (Kaya, 2009).

In 1980 there was a military coup and many cities, which are mostly Kurdish population, were governed under martial law which is called Turkish *Olağanüstü Hal* (OHAL). This law was an emergency rule law and PKK, which is defined as a terrorist organization by Turkey and many countries, was raised as a reaction and the whole Southeastern and Eastern region including several cities as Diyarbakır, Batman, Siirt, Şırnak, Mardin, Hakkari, Bitlis, Bingöl,

Muş, Van, Elazığ, Adıyaman, and Tunceli were affected from the OHAL (Gurbuz. 2016). Therefore, these regions are separated and governed by Emergency Rule Law (OHAL). This law was applied with an extraordinary power ruled in the OHAL region and the situation has continued until 2002; therefore, ‘autocratic militarism’ affected the region for more than 20 years (Jacoby, 2005). After 2004, the government began to make some certain changes about the regulations related with minorities. Even though minorities are still not recognized by the constitution of Turkey, minorities were given some rights. First of all, government’s TV channel TRT began to broadcast Kurdish programs and other sub cultural programs specifically for Kurdish, Arabic, and Cerkez. Furthermore, at the same year, the government allowed to open Kurdish, Arabic and other spoken languages in the region by the government (Cinoglu, 2006). In 2013, it has been allowed to open private education in Kurdish by law and after that three private Kurdish-language schools opening in southeastern Turkey in 2014. However, those private schools were closed in the same year (Freedom House, 2015).

In 2012, peace process was started by the government and continued until 2015 (Ogur, 2015, August 11). The peace process had been finished after two terrorist attacks. In Suruc, 32 activists were killed with suicide bombs on July 20, 2015. Two days after this terrorist attack, two police officers were killed and according to official sources, PKK related organizations took the blame (Ogur, 2015, August 11). After these two terrorist attacks, a major operation started in Southeastern Turkey. Round the clock curfew was imposed at 20 districts in seven cities (Kazaz, 2015, December 14). These districts were the place where PKK rebels aimed to control the region. Three hundred and fifty-five security forces, 285 civilians, and more than 3500 PKK militants died in these operations (Anadolu Ajansi, 2016, March, 28).

The conflicts have some negative effects on politics, economics and education and education, schools and educational institutions play a critical role. Education in these districts in the Southeastern became more important. According to Davies (2003), education should be supported in the post-conflict years because it provides many opportunities to children. Education gives an opportunity to children for normalization, space for childhood, hope and site for development.

Going to school in this difficult situation provides an environment for students where they can be as children and they do activities as they need to do. Therefore, schools provide normalizations in this environment. Also, educational institutions provide space for childhood. Children need to be children during their childhood and schools provide places to play and improve kids' self-development. Furthermore, schools offer some hope about the future by unifying the community and security. Moreover, education protects students from destitute of schools and helps them to develop skills; and finally, education provides a 'window of opportunity' for the kids' improvement and educational development (Davies, 2003).

### **Transition Programs in Turkey**

Prep schools had a major role before the crackdown in 2014. Even though many prep schools converted to private schools or shut down, many of the prep schools are still functioning in Turkey. Moreover, public school began to provide weekend courses in order to support students' academic developments. There are different types of private tutoring methods in Turkey. Prep schools are most known, and common private tutoring types which are profit oriented school-like institutions in Turkey. Teachers teach in classroom settings. In addition to these types of programs, Reading Halls and Youth centers which are non-profit programs became more popular and opened especially in the south region of Turkey.



## **Prep Schools in Turkey**

Prep schools are a type of private tutoring. Private tutoring is defined by Tansel and Bircan (2006) as ‘the education outside the formal schooling system where the tutor teaches particular subject(s) in exchange for a financial gain’ (p. 1). They stress the three specific properties of private tutoring. First of all, private tutoring is not a part of the formal education system which means that it is completely separate from the regular education in the schools. Second, private tutoring is not a non-profit organization since students pay for that. Third, the students expect more things from the tutor than their formal school teachers. Students who demand private tutoring believe that their chances of successfully moving through the educational system will be increased by private tutoring (Tansel & Bircan, 2006).

This type of Prep school is known as *Dershane* in Turkish. In general, the prep schools are owned or rented buildings located close to down town of the city. In an average classroom 15 to 20 students can receive education. When the average number of students in a classroom is decreased, the expenditure of the school increases. Students who receive education from these schools attend outside of formal education classes, which are mainly weekends and after school (Tansel & Bircan 2006).

Nationwide examinations and prep schools are hot topics in Turkey. The year 1984 was a critical year for the prep schools in Turkey because legislation had been passed for these types of institutions and after that year the number of prep schools increased tremendously (OZDE-BIR, 2012). After 1984, the discussion about the prep schools and nationwide examination never ended. Furthermore, after that date the entrance examination for high school and universities played a crucial part in the Turkish education systems and in parallel to this reality, the role of prep schools in the education systems have grown because there is high competition

to enroll in higher education in Turkey (Baştürk, 2011). Therefore, prep schools began to fill a need for the students until early ages, and many families support their children to attend these institutions which is one of the main reasons the number of prep schools increased and took place in Turkish education system.

Table 2.

The Number of Prep-Schools and the Number of Students, and Teacher per Year

<b>Academic year</b>	<b>prep schools</b>	<b>Students</b>	<b>Teachers</b>
1999-2000	1,808	500,464	17,073
2000-2001	1,864	523,244	18,178
2001-2002	2,002	588,637	20,112
2002-2003	2,122	606,522	19,881
2003-2004	2,568	669,673	23,730
2004-2005	2,984	784,565	30,537
2005-2006	3,507	925,299	41,031
2006-2007	3,986	1,071,827	47,621
2007-2008	4,031	1,122,861	48,855
2008-2009	4,262	1,178,943	51,916
2009-2010	4,193	1,174,860	50,432
2010-2011	4,099	1,234,738	50,209
2011-2012	3,961	1,219,472	50,163
2012-2013	3,858	1,280,297	51,522

*Source:* Ozel dershaneler Birliği [Private Prep schools Union] (OZDE-BIR)

From 2000 through 2011 the number of prep school increased year by year. In parallel to the number of prep schools, students' participation also increased. According to Sector Report of Turkey Education Assembly (TUCCE) (2012) there were 4056 Preparatory schools in Turkey and more than one million (1.234.738) students went to Prep schools in 2011. Then the speculation about shutting down the prep school began after 2011, and it has affected the sector. Some of the companies decided to close their prep schools or converted to private schools. However, even though after the speculation about the prep schools the number of active prep schools decreased to less than 4000, these institutions still played an important part in the Turkish education system (Rotahaber, 2013, November 20). When the government of Turkey

changed the regulation about the prep schools, 3,540 prep schools were still functioning and around 700 prep school shut down during this process (Aktas, 2015, September, 2). After the Supreme Court decisions in July 13, 2015, prep schools have been continuing their functions under the name of *Özel Eğitim Kursları* [Private Education Courses] (Aktas & Kasap, 2015, August 30). During this process, Ministry of Education decided to give free courses during the weekend and public schools began to give free courses until October, 11, 2015 (Kasap, 2015, July, 11).

As a result, prep schools for middle school and high school are still functioning and prepare students for nationwide exams and provide academic support for their schools. There are classrooms from the fifth grade elementary school through 12th grade high school. The prep schools have an intense curriculum and students spend their weekends in these prep schools. Moreover, students who are in eighth grade in middle school or 12th grade in high school even attend after school programs.

**Etude Centers.** Etude centers became more popular with the Social Support Project (SODES). SODES is a very broad project and education takes a part in this project. The aim of the project was to provide equal opportunities and better quality education for all students by providing vocational courses, reading and writing courses and etude centers (Akbulut & Beren, 2012). Especially, in the Southeastern region, many educational Etude Centers are opened for the students who prepare themselves for high school entrance exams and for the students who will take university entrance exams

With SODES project, equal educational opportunities are provided and many educational projects are supported by the government (T.C. Kalkınma Bakanlığı Sosyal Destek Projesi, 2011). Many local foundations were founded with the SODES project and some of these

organizations provide non-profit prep school type educational facilities which are called Reading Halls and Youth centers for the poor students in that region (Gurbuz, 2016). These institutions began to take more places in the Southeastern region of Turkey. According to Rethink Institute (2015) the reported number of reading Halls and Youth Center increased tremendously in last ten years. The number of students who received services between 2005 and 2015 increased from approximately 15,000 to around 100,000 in the last 10 years. Youth Centers and Reading Halls mainly provide supportive academic courses, reading camps, field trips, and social activities. These institutions are supported by non-profit organizations and their main goal is to prepare students with low socio economic status for the nationwide exams and high school.

Reading halls are prep school type educational institutions and mostly open in suburban areas in the Southeastern Turkey. Reading Halls serve students with low socioeconomic status and provide free education and academic courses (Gurbuz, 2016). The building of the institutions are owned or rented, and modified to provide educational services for the economically disadvantaged students. The buildings of the institutions are designed as a separate building which includes classrooms and computer and activity rooms (Gurbuz, 2016). The classroom size is around 20 to 25 and class hours are mainly weekend and after school.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHOD**

#### **Introduction**

A qualitative case research design was used in this research to gain a deeper understanding about the role prep schools play in meeting the academic and behavioral needs of students who are at risk for poor academic and social outcomes as they transition from middle school to high school in the Southeastern region of Turkey. Teachers, students, mentors and parents were selected purposefully for the study as participants. Interviews, observations, and document analysis were used as a source of data. In this chapter the design of the study is discussed. Also, participant selection procedures, data collection process and data collection instruments are explained. Finally, data analysis procedures, ethical issues and the trustworthiness of the study are described.

#### **Purpose**

The purpose of the study is to investigate the role that a small sample of prep-schools play in meeting the academic and behavioral needs of students who are at risk for poor academic and social outcomes as they transition from middle school to high school. The study will examine the perspectives of teachers, students and families who participate in the study about their experiences with prep schools. The research questions that guided this study were:

1. In what ways do prep schools play a role in the southeastern region of Turkey for students who are at risk for poor academic and social outcomes?
2. What is the teachers' perception and role in the students' academic and behavioral development?

3. What type of programs are offered for students' academic and behavioral development?
4. In what ways do the prep-schools serve economically disadvantaged and ethnically diverse students in Southeastern Turkey?

### **Interpretivism**

This study is grounded in an interpretivist theoretical perspective. Qualitative research most often aims to understand lived experiences from a subjective perspective through methods (e.g., observations, and interviews) designed to capture information about people's everyday lives. While there are different theoretical or philosophical traditions in qualitative research, Howson (2010) argues these philosophical traditions have similar goals in that they aim to gain deeper understanding about people and interpret their experiences in context.

The main focus of "interpretivism is to work with these subjective meanings already there in the social world; i.e. to acknowledge their existence, to reconstruct them, to understand them, to avoid distorting them, to use them as building blocks in theorizing" (Goldkuhl, 2012, p: 5). In other words, differing from a positivist approach, interpretivists focus on 'culturally derived and historically situated interpretation of the social life-world' (Crotty, 1998). The qualitative researchers who use interpretivist approaches try to understand the meaning of being a human and ask questions about what a social phenomena means to them, how things work, and how people's thoughts influence their lives (Howson, 2010).

Consistent with interpretivist aims, Huberman and Miles (2002) suggest that the researcher brings human experience into sharper focus while analyzing, capturing, bracketing, constructing, and contextualizing the phenomenon under exploration. The aim of the researcher during these interpretive activities is to be able to create the main materials which help to supply

the foundation for interpretation and understanding the phenomena. This interpretivist case study seeks to understand participants' (teachers, parents, and students) subjective experiences of the role prep schools play in Southeastern Turkey, and how participants make sense of those experiences.

### **Description of the Case**

In order to understand the role which prep-schools play in meeting the academic and behavioral needs of students who are at risk for poor academic and social outcomes as they transition from middle school to high school, teachers', students', and parents' experiences at the Reading Halls in Diyarbakir were chosen as a case. Diyarbakir was chosen because it is the biggest city in the southeastern region of Turkey and is ethnically diverse. The majority of the population is Kurdish but there is also a considerable number of Turkish, Arab and Zaza living in Diyarbakir. Furthermore, the city is the center of conflicts which have continued for decades, and parts of the city have major economic problems. Therefore, Diyarbakir is a place where ethnically diverse and economically disadvantaged students' receive education.

Students experience a very unique environment in Diyarbakir. During the high school transition, they need to contend with common transitional problems (e.g., academic preparation). Furthermore, they are required to prepare themselves for a nationwide exam which places extra stress on the students because it is a very critical exam that determines the future of their education. Moreover, the city has been struggling with political turmoil for decades and in particular, over the last two years the tension of the conflict between the government and PKK has increased in the city. Furthermore, when the research was conducted in the city, Sur district was under curfew and closed to civilians because there was a huge conflict. Sur is the biggest and economically the most disadvantaged district in Diyarbakir. The curfew took 103 days and

during the curfew 71 security forces and 271 PKK militant died (Oymez, 2016, March 9). Also, around 22,000 people moved out during the curfew (Basaran, 2015, December 21), and 22 % of the population migrated from the Sur district (Tümer, 2016, January 11). It took almost three months for this conflict to subside, and thousands of families who live in that region had to flee from their houses.



**Figure 3.** While curfew was partially removed in Diyarbakir Sur district

In this environment, receiving transitional support would protect students from many negative factors. However, even public schools have many problems in that region. Therefore, students need to have well prepared support programs in place during the transition from prep



schools. Because of these aforementioned factors, teachers, students, and families experiences are significant and important in understanding the role of prep schools in students' academic and behavioral needs. Therefore, this case study focuses on the teachers', students', and parents' experiences relating to the prep schools during the transition from middle to high school.

### **Research Design**

To be able to address the goals and related research questions of this study, a descriptive qualitative case study was conducted. Qualitative research allows the researchers to access reports of the inner experiences of the people who participate in the study. This study was interested in discovering and describing in depth the behavioral and academic development and transition from middle school to high school of students attending prep schools. To meet this purpose, a qualitative case study research design was used. A case study design is used to explore and understand real life experiences in abounded system.

Different types of case studies can be used to investigate a phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). According to Yin (2002), a case study approach allows investigation of multiple factors in naturally occurring events, and this study has been conducted utilizing case study method. Case study design was selected for this study because case studies are descriptive and provide more details about phenomena and their contexts. A case study allows for the use of different types of data sources. For in depth understanding of a case, multiple sources of data can be used such as interviews, observations, audiovisual material, and documents and reports (Creswell, 2013). Different forms of data can be analyzed to understand patterns. Also, this study design can provide an opportunity for the researcher to draw hypotheses in some cases (Stake, 2006). The theme of the case and their descriptions are used to report a case study (Creswell, 2013). The patterns and hypotheses yielded in case studies are particularly helpful in explaining situations

and phenomena. At the same time, case studies can contribute as a tool to evaluate and analyze new theoretical understandings (Duff, 2008).

### **Participant Selection**

Most of the time purposive sampling strategy is used in qualitative research (Cohen, Monion & Morrison, 2013). In qualitative studies, using purposive sampling usually builds variety and creates opportunities for the researcher to conduct an intensive study (Stake, 2006). Therefore, in this study a purposive sampling method was used in order to recruit the participants of the study.

Six teachers, six students, six parents, and two mentors who agreed to participate in the study and signed the Informed Consent were chosen as the participants. Prospective participants' were invited to participate based on the following criteria. The teachers should have at least three years of experience in prep schools at the middle school level. Six students and their parents (one or both parents) who attend the prep school program and are served by these teachers were also invited to participate to the study. In addition, two mentors (who are undergraduate students in a local university) of the students served by these teachers, were invited to participate. In total, 20 participants participated in the study.

The six teacher participants had three to seven years of experience and all of them worked full-time in the Reading Halls. The teachers had been teaching Turkish, social sciences, and math. The age of the teacher participants ranged from 26 to 31. Three teachers were female and three of them were male. Also, six students participated in the study. The six student participants were between 14 and 16 years old. Among the student participants, two of them were eighth graders. Two of them were in ninth grade (freshmen at the high school) and the rest of them were in 10<sup>th</sup> grade (sophomores in high school). Only one of the students was female,

and the rest of them were male. Furthermore, six parents participated in the study. Except in the case of one participants, the parents allowed more than one of their children to go to the Reading Halls. Among the parent participants, three of them were female and three of them were male. Moreover, two mentors who are undergraduate students, participated in the study. Both of the mentors were female, and both were Reading Hall students during middle school and had been awarded high school scholarships from the same institutions. All of the participants could speak Turkish even though some of the participants' native language is Kurdish. All of the participants are fluent in Turkish and all of the participants were speaking Turkish as their own language. Thus, interviews were conducted in Turkish.

To solicit participation I made personal visits to prep schools in the region during after-school hours or non-class time. During these visits I met with teachers who met the criteria for participation and described the study to each prospective participant. Prospective participants were informed about the purpose, procedures (as described below), and confidentiality of participation. Also, it was stressed that the participants would be informed about the findings for the study if they wished to know. After that, they were invited to participate in the study.

All teachers were asked to participate in interviews that took approximately one hour and were asked to submit examples of typical classroom materials such as lesson plans for review by the researcher. However, only class schedules, yearly plans, and a 10 page document that showed the reading halls aim and vision were given. Prospective participants were informed that their participation was completely voluntary and confidential and that, if they decided not to participate, there would be no adverse consequence. They were also informed that there was no anticipated risk associated with the study and that they were not going to be compensated or rewarded for participation, but that they might benefit from receiving a verbal and written report

of the results of the study which might be useful for instructional planning. They were also informed that, if they decided to participate, they were free to leave the study at any time. Those who decided to participate were asked to sign the Informed Consent statement.

For those teachers who elected to participate in the study, I asked the participating teacher to nominate one or more students and their parents who might be interested in participating, and to assist in scheduling times that I could meet with the students and their parent(s) to discuss the study. I met with the students and parents recommended by the teacher and explained the purpose and procedures of the study, the confidentiality of participation and confidentiality of the findings of the study. I asked the parents and students to each participate in a one-hour interview. I also sought permission from the parents to observe one parent-teacher conference.

I informed the students and their parents that participation is completely voluntary, that if the parent did wish to participate or grant permission to the student to participate, or if the student decided not to participate, there would be no adverse consequence for non-participation, and that, if they decided to join the study, they can elect to leave the study at any time. Parents and children were informed that there was no risk associated with participating in the study and that there would be no material rewards, but that they would receive a written and verbal summary of the findings of the study. Those parents who decided to participate and who agreed for their adolescent children to participate were asked to sign the Informed Consent statement for their own participation and for their adolescent child's participation. All adolescent children were asked to provide assent if they wished to participate.

Participating teachers were also asked to identify mentors for each participating student. Mentors were undergraduate students at a local university (Diyarbakir Dicle University) who

worked individually or in small groups with one or more adolescents. The mentors were provided with information about the purpose of the study; informed that their participation was completely voluntary and confidential; informed that the findings of the study were completely confidential; informed that there were no adverse consequence if they elected not to participate; and informed that they were free to leave the study at any time. If the mentor of a particular participating student elected not to participate, the mentor was not involved in the study.

### **Procedures**

The procedures of the study involved individual interviews of approximately one hour in length with each participating teacher, student, parent, and mentor. (The process for participant selection and ensuring Informed Consent is described above.). During the interview, the researcher asked approximately 13 questions provided in the interview protocol. Pending teacher consents, I also reviewed typical classroom materials such as lesson plans. Contingent on parental consent and student assent, the researcher observed a student during after-school hours. Also, contingent on parental consent, the researcher attended one parent/teacher conference.

All interviews were conducted on an individual basis at times and places that were mutually agreeable to the participants and researchers and that did not interfere with the school day. Interviews were tape recorded, and recordings were transcribed in two weeks and coded by the researcher. The researcher used Atlas t.i. 6.2 to code data and developed themes that served as the basis for case study. All research materials including interviews, sample documents, and observation notes were maintained on jump drives that were housed in a locked file. I will maintain the files for at least five years before disposing of them.

## **Pilot Study**

To be able to understand whether these reading halls focus on students' behavioral development, a pilot study was conducted. The pilot study was done as a qualitative case study and four teachers were interviewed by phone in order to collect the data about the reading halls. The purpose of the pilot study was to investigate the role that a small sample of prep schools play in meeting the academic and behavioral needs of students who are at risk for emotional behavioral disorders as they transition from middle school to high school. Also, the pilot study evaluated the effectiveness of conducting interviews by using Skype, telephone, and the extent to which the interview questions were appropriate for obtaining the data necessary for answering the preliminary research questions of the full study.

**Findings of the Pilot Study.** One year prior to this study, the pilot study was conducted in order to understand whether reading halls provide transition support programs for students' academic and behavioral development, and to examine the effectiveness of the interview questions and of distance interviewing. The findings were divided into two sections. In section one, the role of the prep schools was represented in terms of the teachers' perceptions of students' behavioral development in the Southeastern region.

In the second section, the effectiveness of interviewing by Skype and telephone, and the effectiveness of the interview questions and interview process were analyzed. One of the research questions was to evaluate the effectiveness of conducting distance interviews. Through the interviews I discovered some problems. First of all, I tried to do my interview through Skype, but I could not do it because some of the participants were not using Skype. Therefore, I used the telephone to interview and I had some problem with phone calls. The calls were sometimes cut off and the interview did not go fluently. I asked questions related to the

interview at the end of the phone interview. Only one participant gave positive feedback and said that he felt very comfortable while the rest of the participants said that talking face-to-face would be more effective. Also, the participants suggested that it would be much better to come and see their prep schools.

I found that most of the interview questions produced the type of foundation that I wanted. However, the sequence of the questions was changed and two questions were added to the interview protocol. These questions were about respondents' general perception of students' needs in Southeastern Turkey and about marginalized students. Since the teachers were the only participants for the study, the interview questions were modified for the student and parent participants. Based on findings from the pilot study the interview questions were developed with more detail and specificity in order to elicit more thorough responses.

### **Data Collection**

In terms of understanding transition to the high school in the Southeast region of Turkey for those students attending prep schools, data were collected for this study by using interviews with the people who have worked as teachers, parents, and students who have taken courses from prep schools. The participants were interviewed using questions developed by the researchers and refined based on findings from the pilot study. Also, class observations and prep school schedule documents were used as a source of data for this study. The study was approved by Institutional Review Board (IRB) on March 14, 2016, before collecting data for the study (See Appendix A). Also, the permission was taken from the institutions before the study was conducted.

**Interviews.** According to Creswell (2013), interviews are one of the significant tools to gather data, especially in qualitative studies. The protocol consists of questions to learn more

about the participants and their experiences in those prep schools during the transition from middle to high school, what types of programs and instructions are used to teach students good behaviors, how the methods in the prep schools affect students' behaviors, and how helpful for the students are the schools in terms of their transition from middle school to high school.

Interviewing has several steps and processes. Preparing questions is one of the most important parts of the process of an interview, because the interview questions should be prepared based on some criteria. The questions in the interview should be open-ended, general and related to the research (Creswell, 2013). Also, in order to get better data, different types of questions can be prepared for the interview such as big picture questions, follow-up questions, and comparison and contrast questions (Janesick, 2011, Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Quality of the interviews and interview questions are very important for qualitative studies. The quality of the interview consists of four main issues which are (1) using the gathered data from the interviews appropriately, (2) interviewers facilitate the interview to endure collection of quality data, (3) quality has been addressed in every step of the research, (4) the methods and strategies for the study reflect the quality of interpretations (Roulston, 2010)

While preparing the interview questions, different types of questions are prepared and asked to get more qualitative data from the interviews because of the factors mentioned above. For this study, based on the interview and the participants, some additional follow up questions were needed. The interviews were planned as semi-structured interviews. According to Rubin and Rubin (2012) different than probe questions, follow up questions can be asked during the interview but those are not added to the interview protocol. The interview questions were designed by the researcher. Also, the questions of the interview were prepared based on the research questions of the study. Every single question in the interview addresses one of the



research questions of the study. Relationships between the research questions and the interview questions can be seen in table 3.

Table 3

Relationships between Research Questions and Questions in Interview Protocol

<b>Research Questions</b>	<b>Interview Questions</b>
1. In what ways do prep-schools play a role in the Southeastern region of Turkey for students who are at risk for poor academic and social outcomes?	1, 1a,5, 8
2. What is the teachers' perception and role on the students' social and behavioral development during the transition period?	2, 4, 6b, 7
3. What type of programs are offered for students' academic and behavioral development?	1b, 3, 6a, 9
4. In what ways do the prep-schools serve economically disadvantaged and ethnically diverse students in Southeastern Turkey?	9b, 10, 11, 12

One-on-one interviews were conducted in the study. All of the participants were interviewed using a face-to-face interview method. Before the interview began, the goal of the interview and the purpose of the study were introduced to the participants. Verbal and written consents were requested before the interviews. All participants were interviewed using open ended, semi-structured interview methods. Depending on participants' responses, the interviews were around 45 minutes. However, interviews for six of the participants only took around 15 minutes, and one of these participants wanted to turn off the recorder after 10 minutes of the interview. After turning off the recorder, I reminded that her participation to the study is completely voluntary and if she wanted not to continue, she can freely withdraw her consent. These participants did not withdraw their consent and the data that they share were included in the study. During the interview, all other conversations were recorded with an electronic device. All recorded data were transcribed and read by the researcher several times. Also, to strengthen

the data, triangulation was done by peer reviews. Two peer reviewers who are Ph.D. students at University of South Florida checked relationships of the codes and the themes. I introduced the codes and explained the meaning of the codes with some quotes. After that, the peer checked the relationships with the codes and themes, and gave some feedbacks. After getting feedbacks from the peers themes were created.

**Field Observations.** In this study field observations were used as a source of data. Observation is an important tool for gathering the data in qualitative research (Creswell, 2013). Based on the purpose of the study, many things can be observed by the researcher such as physical setting, participant activities, dialogues, and conversation. There are different types of observation methods such as complete participant, participant as observer, observer as participant, and complete observer (Creswell, 2013). In this research, six observations were conducted and a complete observer method was used to make the observations.

There were mainly two types of observations in the study. First, observations where the student participates in the classroom settings and teacher-student relations were observed. The second one was a parent teacher conference, and in these observations teacher-family relations were observed. The observations were done in two different reading halls which are in Diclekent and Baglar. It was planned to make observation at the Reading halls in Sur district but, because of the conflict, all the schools, prep schools, and reading halls were closed. Therefore, observation notes from the Reading Halls in Sur district could not be conducted for research. A complete observer method was used for each observation. In order to maintain a natural environment for the classroom during the observation, I introduced myself and the reason for doing the observation before the class began, and sat at one of the desks at the back of the classroom. The same process was used during the parent-teacher conference. Two classroom

observations and two parent-teacher conference observations were conducted for the study. The classroom observations took around 45 minutes each and parent teacher conferences were 30 minutes long.

**Documents Analysis.** In case studies, using multiple methods of data collection is very important in order to make a distinction (Creswell, 2013). In addition, to interviews and observations, document analyses were used in the study as well. Document analyses were used as the third type of data pending teachers' consent, and I planned to review typical classroom materials, such as lesson plans, and prep school curriculum.

According to Merriam (2009), public records and personal documents are two main documents used as data. Also, visual data such as video, photography, and popular culture documents are considered as document data. Even though different types of documents can be used for analysis in qualitative studies, very few documents could be analyzed for the study. Because of the lack of opportunities and confidentiality, I was only allowed to use class schedules, the yearly education calendar, and a document that shows goals and missions of the institutions. Therefore, these are the only documents that were used for the analyses.

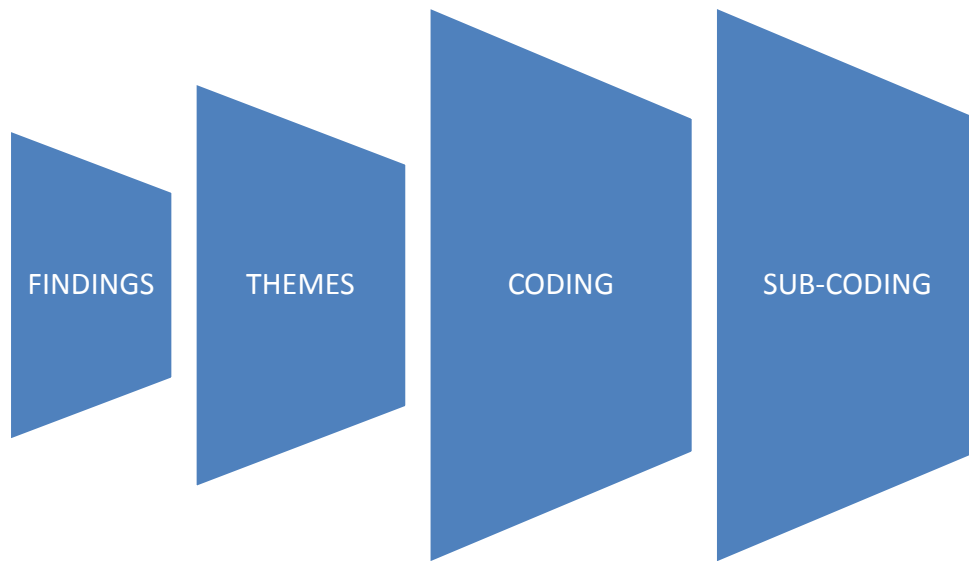
### **Data Analysis**

Data that were collected for the study from interviews, observations and documents were analyzed. The collected data were analyzed by using case study methods to understand the role that prep schools play in meeting the academic and behavioral needs of students who are at risk for poor academic and social outcomes as they transition from middle school to high school. Teachers', students', and parents' experiences at the Reading Halls in Diyarbakir were described as a case.

According to Duff (2008), data analysis in a qualitative study is already taking place from the beginning of the data collection and transcription processes. Every step of the data collection is important in terms of data analysis. Therefore, in this study the data analyses process took place from the very beginning of the data collection because every single interview and observation allowed the researcher to understand the case, and every single step of the data collection process helped the researcher to analyze the collected data.

The data can be represented in different ways. Researchers may provide some summaries of observations and interview data. During the documentation the most salient points and themes are highlighted and these data can be significant subsequent data collection (Duff, 2008). During the data collection process some of the notes were taken while the transcripts were read, and some parts in the transcript and in the observation notes were highlighted (Duff, 2008). According to Meriam (2009), one of the first stages of data analysis in case studies should be bringing all the data together and all the data should be retrievable. Therefore, at the beginning of the analysis process, the transcript of the interviews, observations and documents were brought together. These collected data were coded together. The common codes were represented under the themes and the themes were represented in the finding section.

During the analysis process ATLAS.ti.6.2 was used. Therefore, the data of the interview transcript, observation notes, and documents were sorted, retrieved, and reviewed. After revision of the transcript, sub-codes were identified. After bringing related sub-codes, the codes were created. The common codes were brought together, themes were created, and findings were described based on the themes. Related quotes were coded and cut from the transcripts and rearranged according to open coding methods.



**Figure 4.** Case Analysis Process

### **Ethical Issues**

In this study there were three main ethical issues that need to be addressed. One is my position of reflexivity about the topic that I focus on in this study. The other issue is data collection boundaries. The third ethical issue in this study is confidentiality. These ethical issues are described in the paragraph to follow.

When I was in Diyarbakir to collect data about the study, there was an unclear situation about the prep schools because the government decided to shut down prep schools. The supreme courts found the regulation against the constitutions, and the government tried to use different ways to shut down prep schools. I believe that prep schools have an important role and functions specifically in the Southeastern region of Turkey. In this regard, even though I do not have any connection with the prep schools and reading halls, I appreciate most of their effort in education, and philosophically, I agree with their teachers about the government's position on prep schools. Therefore, my personal reflection about these issues might play a role in my interpretations.

Furthermore, because of the heavy atmosphere in the region, teachers and the activists (who are mentors in this study) perceive the people who are interested in their organization differently and consider that they are either one of the supporters of their ideology or a potential opponent who try to find the weak side of the prep schools. During the interviews and observations, I found it difficult to behave as a researcher because I worried that they will think that I am one of the supporters of the prep schools. Sometimes people were very skeptical and they had some concerns about my position. Therefore, managing these situations was not easy and became another ethical issue as all of these factors affected my position and reflexivity.

The second issue is data collection boundaries. The issue that I am interested in the study is related to students' academic and behavioral development as described by students, teachers and families. The experiences that they shared with me included some specific details which were very sensitive for the participants. Therefore, it was a very important issue for me to be aware of the boundaries while doing the data collection and analysis.

Diyarbakir is a very unique city in Turkey and in the Southeastern region. There is a heavy atmosphere in the southeastern region over decades. Because of the conflict, people who participated in the study wanted to be sure that all the information that they shared will be confidential. They had concerns and fears about some issues. Since PKK has attacked the reading halls with Molotov cocktails, they are already under a threat for their association with the reading halls. Also, I think the participants have concerns about profiling by the government. Therefore, participants avoid criticizing about both sides. All of the participants took part in the study voluntarily, and I mentioned verbally and in the written form that all the information will be confidential. They asked me several times and wanted to be sure that their comments were confidential. The collected data included lots of personal experiences and the topic of the study

included some sensitive issues. Therefore, as a researcher and a person, confidentiality is very important in order not to harm any of the participants to the study.

### **Trustworthiness**

In qualitative studies, trustworthiness takes the place of validity in quantitative studies. Credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability are used to explain the validity of the research (Merriam, 2009).

**Credibility.** One of the well-known strategies to increase the credibility of the study is triangulation. Triangulation basically means using different sources to verify the authenticity of each source (O’Leary, 2012). There are four types of triangulation methods in qualitative studies. These are: (1) the use of multiple method, (2) multiple sources of data, (3) multiple investigators, and (4) multiple theories (Merriam, 2009). Therefore, some of the triangulation methods were used in order to increase the credibility of this study. Thus, to increase the credibility of the study three types of data sources were used in the research. In this way multiple sources of data were provided. Furthermore, after coding process, the codes were shared with the peers who are graduate students at University of South Florida. The codes were explained with some quotes to the peers and their feedbacks are received. After peer reviews, themes were created. In this way, peer reviewed process was completed. As a result, two types of triangulation was done to increase the credibility.

Moreover, 12 out of 20 participants read and signed the transcript of their own interview and agreed that all the words which were written on the transcript are their own words. Eight of them did not sign based on two reasons. In one case, the transcript was not finished when I was in the field. The second reason was that we could not meet after finishing the transcript.

**Transferability.** From the transferability perspective, there are several ways for transferring the findings in qualitative studies. The most common way is using rich and thick description in the study. Also, choosing the study sampling and giving careful attention to the participants is very important for transferability. Maximum variation, purposeful sampling, and model sampling are other strategies to enhance the transferability (Marriam, 2009). Therefore, in this study participants were chosen with the purposeful sampling strategies. Also, a rich and a thick description were used to increase the transferability.



## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **RESULTS**

The purpose of the study was to investigate the role that a small sample of prep-schools in the Southeastern Turkey play in meeting the academic and behavioral needs of students who are at risk for poor academic and social outcomes as they transition from middle school to high school. The study examined the perspectives of teachers, students and families about their experiences with prep schools. The research questions that guided this study include as follows:

1. In what ways do prep-schools play a role in the southeastern region of Turkey for students who are at risk for poor academic and social outcomes?
2. What are the teachers' perceptions of and role in the students' academic and behavioral development?
3. What type of programs is offered for students' academic and behavioral development?
4. In what ways do the prep-schools serve economically disadvantaged and ethnically diverse students in Southeastern Turkey?

In this chapter of the study the findings are divided into five particular categories. The first of these themes addresses students' concerns in the Southeastern region of Turkey. Students who live in this region have mainly four pertinent issues which affect their education: security concerns, economic hardship, academic challenges, and behavioral concerns. These challenges will be addressed from the participants' perspective. The second subject of interest will address how Reading Halls in Diyarbakir affect the students' programs, curriculum, schedule, and environments. Furthermore, the third theme looks into how the role of prep schools are effective

in helping support students who are transitioning into high school transition. The fourth category focuses on teacher-family collaboration by looking at teacher and family relationships, parent-teacher conferences, and teacher home visits. Finally, the role of Reading Halls influence students' behavioral development. For example, the Reading Hall provides programs such as book readings, role modeling, creating a safe environment, and social activities. These themes will be discussed under three sections.

Table 4.

Relationships between Themes and codes

<b>Sections</b>	<b>Themes</b>	<b>Codes</b>	<b>Interviews</b>	<b>Observations</b>	<b>Documents</b>	
Section One	Concerns about Students in the Southeastern region	Security Concerns	53	13	1	
		Economic Concerns	42	1	9	
		Academic Concerns	23	5	3	
		Behavioral Concerns	10	5	2	
Section Two	Reading Halls in Diyarbakir	Environment of Ins	6	11	0	
		Academic Sup.	33	30	12	
		Study Programs	18	2	1	
		Cur. & Schedule	21	4	4	
		Charity Org.	4	0	7	
		Conference & Sem.	4	0	7	
	The Role of Prep School during Transition	Guidance	16	3	6	
		West Imp.	10	0	0	
		Youth Center	5	0	3	
Section Three	Teacher Family Collaboration	Teach. Fam. Rel.	27	15	0	
		F. Meeting	7	19	0	
		Family Visits	20	0	0	
		Ethnicity issues	17	2	2	
	The Role of Reading Halls on Students' Behavioral Development	Behavior Develop.	27	3	0	
		Role Modeling	21	0	0	
		Teacher Stud. Rel.	49	10	0	
		Book Readings	15	0	4	
		Social Activities	41	7	5	
		Religious Values	20	1	9	
		Ethnicity Issues	17	2	2	

## **Section One: Concerns about Students in the Southeastern Region of Turkey**

In this section students' concerns are represented based on the participants' perspective. The qualitative data demonstrated that the major concern was for student security and safety. After that, the next concern was students' socioeconomic status and how this factor affects student education. Academic concerns were considered important but not as stressed as the first two concerns. Finally, behavioral concerns are represented. It is important to note that the findings differed from the literature about the transition from middle to high school, procedural concerns are not stressed.

In order to better the understanding of how the preparatory schools help support students during the transition from middle to high school in the Southeastern part of Turkey, several factors need to be taken into consideration. First of all students' concerns need to take into account holistically each student's challenges and needs. In this section of concerns about students in Diyarbakir will be represented. Qualitative findings from the interviews, observations and the document analysis revealed that teachers, students, and families in these prep schools describe some of the concerns that the students have in this region. These concerns can be listed as: Security concerns, economic concerns, behavioral concerns and academic concerns.

**Security Concerns.** Diyarbakir is the biggest city in the Southeastern region of Turkey. More than 1,000,000 people live in that city. Also, the city is ethnically diverse but the majority of the population is Kurdish. Most of the time the city has been the center of the conflict related to Kurdish issues. Therefore, Diyarbakir has a very heavy political history that includes decades of civil unrest.

For instance, the Kurdish Workers' Party, commonly referred to by its Kurdish acronym, PKK (Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan) is recognized as a terrorist organization by Turkey, the United States, and many other countries. Also, it should be noted that the PKK organization heavily influences political activities in Diyarbakir. In addition, there is a considerably high crime rate in Diyarbakir. Therefore, people in the region have an important security concern for their families. Based on the qualitative findings from the revealed data, there are mainly three issues that cause these security concerns. These security concerns are: (1) the risk of attending illegal organizations, and (2) the risk of using drugs, and remaining in between violent protests.

First of all I think it is very important to understand people's position against the PKK because without current opinions of general population of Diyarbakir, the security concerns cannot be clearly understood. There is a bias about Kurdish people's ideology, and the bias is that people think that most of the Kurdish people share the similar ideology as PKK. However, many Kurdish are against the PKK's ideology. Moreover, they try to protect themselves against PKK. As a result, existing PKK is a major threat for many parents. All teacher and parent participants have mentioned this point. Therefore, the data represents PKK oppositions' perspective. One of the teacher participants said that:

“Bu da çok önemli çünkü buranın halkı çok... işte tek bir zihniyete bağlı kalmış gibi görülüyor. İşte kürtsün kürt kalacaksın kürdü destekleyeceksin diye birşey yok. PKK'yı destekleyeceksin. Bunu mesela ailelerin birçok ailede bundan şikayetçi. Tamam Diyarbakır'lıyım. Tamam kürdüz ama biz bunları istemiyoruz diyen birçok aile.”

“This is also very important because people in here... I mean it seems they stuck to only ideology, I mean there is no such a thing like, you are Kurdish, you will stay Kurdish, you will support Kurdish, and you only support PKK. This is for example, many families complain about this. There are many families say: Ok I am from Diyarbakir, ok we are Kurdish but we don't want them.”

Also, one parent participant stressed the similar perspective:

“Bu fankسیونlar tabiki devletin aleyhine çalıştığı gibi, toplumun da aleyhine, milletinde aleyhine, Kürtlerin de aleyhine çalışan fraksiyonlar. Aslında kürt fraksiyonları adı altında

geçse bile.... Kürtlere faydadan çok zarar getiren, devletine karşıduran, devletine zarar vermeye çalışan fraksiyonlar bunlar”

“As these fractions are against the government, they are also against to the society. They are working against Kurdish people as well. Even though they are named under Kurdish fractions....These fractions are given damage more than benefits to the Kurdish, they stand against to the government, and damage to the government.

The Southeastern region of Turkey has been struggling with terrorist problems. These problems affect the people and students from many different aspects in the region. One of the biggest concerns for the teachers and the families is attending illegal actions. Mainly, two types of concern occur in this situation. First, they are afraid that the kids may be kidnapped for letting them be part of PKK. One of the parent participants stated that “we heard that they are kidnapping children, and we afraid and did not send them to school”. Also, from the participants’ perspective, academic problems or the lack of academic development encourage students some illegal actions or organizations. One of the parent participants mentioned that:

“Çocuk ne olacak okumazsa ne olacak? Taş atacak polislere arabalara taş atacak. Şu olacak ya böyledir. Ya dağa gidecek illa ki birşey yapacak çocuk ama okusa bunu yapmaz çocuk. Çünkü ben şimdi çocuğumu okutmasam çocuk ne olacak ya hırsız olacak? Ya esrar çekecek ya balıcı olacak ya illa ki birşey olacak ama okusa hiçbir şey olmaz. Kendi ayağı üzerinde duracak. Kendi hedefi olacak. Çoğu çocuklar surda çoğu çocuklar ya hırsızdı ya esrarcıydı ya balıcıydı ya dağa gidiyordu.”

“What is a child going to be if he does not go to school? He will stone the police cars!!! That is what is going to happen. Or he will go to the mountains –referring to the pkk camps- but surely something –bad- will happen. But if he goes to school he won’t do any of those. What is going to happen if I do not send my child to the school? He will either become a thief or do drugs but if he goes to school he will not do any of these. He will stand on his own feet and he will have his own goals. Many of the children here were either thief, doing drugs or going to the mountains.”

Another important problem from the participants’ perspective is the risk of using drugs and smoking. Especially some of the regions in Diyarbakir, which are known as high crime rate ratio, are very risky for the students because according to the participants it is very easy exposed to illegal drugs. Especially in the Sur district, selling and using drugs is a big concern for the

families and teachers. Here is what a teacher participant said about the drug use problem specifically mentioning Sur district:

“Ya mesela bizim o çalışmış olduğumuz kesimde daha çok böyle varoş kesim var. İşte ee burda sigaranın uyuşturucunun hırsızlığın kol gezdiği yerler. Burası, bu çocuklar okuldan önce tamamen boşlar. Ya bir işte çalışacak ya aile onlara sahip çıkamıyor orda”

“For instance many –people- in the area where we work, are ghettos types. There are the places where smoking, stealing and drugs are awfully common. Kids, there, are totally idle before the school. They should either work or their parents are not taking care of them there.”

One of the parent participants also point out about the risk of drug use by saying:

“Şimdi ben bakıyorum... Görüyorum bizim girişte esrar sarıp içiyorlar. Sigara içer gibi içiyorlar. Bide onun kokusu da ayırdır bellidir ki sigara değil. Yani benim çocuklarım yaşlarındaki çocuklar gençler. Ben görüyorum. Çok yani ben görüyorum. Ama bende birşey söyleyemiyorum kadın başıma. Üzülüyorum dua ediyorum.”

“I usually see them at the entrance of our apartment, smoking marijuana as if they are smoking cigarette. But I know it is not a cigarette, because it has a different smell. I see many of them. They are children and young adults almost at the same age of my own children. But I cannot say anything as being a woman myself. I feel sad and pray for them.”

In Diyarbakir there is a very heavy political atmosphere and the protest sometimes became violent. In this environment most of the families do not allow their children to go to school or even outside of their houses. For example, when I was in Diyarbakir, Kurdish party (HDP) leader called for a protest and when the protest day came, prep school changed their schedule and finished the program earlier because families worry about their children having problem in these protests. Two types of problems occur in these protests. Protesters may use the children and let them “throw stones to police.” This is a big problem for their future because these students face illegality in early ages. In addition to this situation, protestors may use the children as human shields and based on the participants, children may be exposed to tear gas or the children might be physical damaged or even worse during the chaos. One of the teacher participants shares a tragedy about her student:

“O olaylarda çocukların yüzünü bağlayıp olayların içine attılar ne olacak.... Ama biz çok korkuyoruz ya bir öğrencimiz de o olayların içine girerse...bir tanesi oranın öğrencisiydi. Oldu. İşte okuma salonundaydım ben geçen yıl oradaoraya sürekli gelen giden bir öğrencim vardı. Hani bu yıl orada değilim. Burdayım. Haberleri bir açtım o öğrencinin fotoğrafını gördüm. Yani vurulmuş. ... Sizce bir 12 yaşındaki bir çocuğun bir kız çocuğunun. Ne suçu olacak ki? Çok üzüldüm ya orada baya bir şey oldum hani... yıkıldım ya...”

“That clutter, they tied the children’s face up and throw them into the clutter. But we afraid a lot if something happens to our students and in between of a conflict... one of my student there. It happened. When I was there last year at the Reading Halls, I have student that comes all the time. I was not here this year I am here. I turn on the news and I saw her picture. I mean, she was shot.... What can a 12 year girl do to be guilty? I feel very and I was like... collapse”

Therefore, based on the participants’ perspective, education and academic success is not just educating the children and giving them a better academic career, but also protecting students against some security concerns.

**Economic Concerns.** Poverty is one of the biggest problems for the people in Diyarbakir. Especially, people in the Sur district have large families and it is not uncommon to have more than five children. Based on the participants’ response, the unemployment rate is high and Sur is the poorest region in Diyarbakir. Therefore, families do not have economical means or privilege to provide private courses, or have the chance for their children to attend preparatory schools. One of the teacher participants addressed the economic problems in families as follows:

“Evdeki baba zaten babanın durumu belli baba 3 ay yaz boyunca çalışır. Serbest olduğu için ...Kışında evde oturuyor. Yani kalkıp da sekiz tane çocuğunun 8 ini de dershaneye gönderecek durumu belki de yoktu çünkü dershane fiyatlarında kolej fiyatları da malum. Hepsini gönderemeyeceğinden dolayı okuma salonları bir fırsat çünkü dershane ayağına kadar gitmiş orada. Çünkü okuma salonları açıldığı yerler genelde böyle fakir işte böyle ailenin olmuş olduğu yerlerde açılıyor.”

“The father’s condition is obvious. He only works for three months during the summer and stays at home during the winter season. I mean it is impossible for him to send his all eight children to the prep schools because private schools and prep schools cost a lot of money. Due to he cannot afford to send his children to the prep schools, reading halls are

good opportunity for him. Because these reading halls have been opening the place where generally poor families live.”

Especially in the poor regions such as Sur and Baglar, life standards are not as high as any other region in Diyarbakir. Sometimes very crowded families have to live in a small house which means that students did not have a least restrictive environment to study when they are at their houses and students’ academic development is affected negatively due to the lack of opportunities. One of the teacher participants shared her observation in a family visits:

“Herzaman şartları uygun olmuyor malesef hani ders çalışma ortamı bile olmuyor diyebilirim yani çocukların. Tek odalı evler veya işte aynı evde birkaç aile yaşayabiliyor. Babanesi, halası falan da aynı evde yaşayan çocuklarda oluyor. Mesela, tek kendine ait odası yok bu çocukların ee oturup dersini dinleyeceği vakti yok. Çok kardeşler çoğu işte kardeşi engel olabiliyor mesela ders çalışınca. İşte kitabına karışabiliyor, notuna karışabiliyor. Tek oda da olunca çocuğu ayrı bir yere de götüremiyorsun mesela. Sobalı evlerde yaşadıkları için hani kışın özellikle bu çok problem oluyor.”

“Every times, conditions are not appropriate for students to study. There is only one room. In some cases, you can see more than one family live in a house, sometimes aunt, uncle or grandma, grandpa live in that house. I mean very crowded house population. Students do not have their own room; therefore, there is no quiet time to work on assignments. Sisters and brothers sometimes disrupt and bother them while students are studying. Since, they are living in a house heated by stove, everyone needs to be in the room stove is there. In that time, it is very hard to study, and big problem for them.”

Furthermore, because of the high unemployment rate children sometimes began to work in early ages. According to another teacher their students “sell seeds at the parks, they paint shoes, and sell water at the bus stop” in order to support their families financially. Sometimes, in order to support their parents, students have to change their future desires to become professionals with advanced degrees, and give up their dream jobs. A teacher in Sur district stressed how the students need to change their direction to be able support their family:

8. Sınıfta Sağlık Meslek Lisesine yerleşecek kadar bir puan aldığı andan itibaren hayaliyle ister istemez çelismeye başlar. Neden? Çünkü karşısına...işte lisede okuduğu anda hemen meslek sahibi olabileceği bir fırsat çıkıyor karşısına. Çocuk onu çok rahatlıkla yazabiliyor. Yazdıktan sonra çok rahat bir şekilde hemşire olup atanabiliyor. Normalde onun hayaliyle tamamen zıt. Çocuk hemşire olmak istemiyor...ama bir an önce, 4 yıl sonra atanıp ailesini geçindirmek adına böyle bir karar alıyor.



When the eighth grade students get a score which is enough to enter Health Profession High School, they began to contradict with themselves. Why? Because...she comes up with an opportunity which she may get a job as soon as she graduates from the high school. Kid can decide to go easily. After she decide she can be a nurse easily and appointed (get a job). Normally it is just opposite from her dream. She does not want to be a nurse... but in the name of support their family as soon as possible, appointed four years later, she gives a decision like this.

To help address some of these concerns, Reading Halls target these populations.

Therefore, most of the participants of the study point out the families' low socio-economic status. Until 2014, the reading halls were mostly founded by the Social Support Project, (SODES). In last two years, the foundation keeps doing their services with donations and supports. Therefore, they provide free education for students. The only requirement hey ask from their students is document fees for books and tests. Some of the economically disadvantaged families who cannot afford the requested fees receive a free financial wavier. For these reasons, Reading Halls provide an alternative opportunity for the people who are from low economic status. A parent participant share her experiences as follows:

“Ben mesela param yoktur dediğim zaman benden birşey almadılar. Şimdi 7'ye giden oğlum inanki ben beş kuruş vermedim. Bütün ihtiyaçlarını görüyorlar. Hatta bütün kitap test ne desen veriyorlar. Ben onların hakkını nasıl öderim bilmiyorum. Eee baştan diyorlar biz kitap parasını alıyoruz ee durumu olanlar verirler olmayanlarda vermezler. İşte ne bileyim ben vermişim vermemişim hatırlamıyorum ama babası burda olduğu zaman belki vermişizdir de babaları gittiğinden beri ben vermemişim. Babaları iki yıldır içeride.”

“For instance, when I said I did not have money, they did not ask for money. I have a son, he is in 7th grade, and I have not pay even five penny. They take care of everything what my son need. They gave books, quiz material, whatever we ask from them. I do not know how to pay for their service. At the beginning, they say we take money for books, however, only people who have money pay, others do not. I do not know whether I gave or not, but we maybe gave money when their father here, we have not pay since their father went. Their father is in jail for two years.”

**Academic Concerns.** In eight grade students need to take the nationwide exam which is called TEOG and the teachers, families and students focus on this nationwide exam. It is very critical because based on the result of the exams it will be decided which high schools students go. Participants have worried about the quality of the education at schools. One of the teacher participant shares his taught about the public schools:

“Şimdi çocuklar okulda eğitim fazla iyi görmüyorlar yani burda biraz daha güneydoğu olduğu için öğretmenler biraz daha sallaya biliyor yani biraz daha batıda ki okullar gibi değildir yani.Sadece dakikasını geçirir dakikasını geçirdikten sonra evine gider yani”

“Now, the kids do not receive a good education in public schools. I mean, because here is more Southeastern, teachers may ignore. I mean, schools are not like more at the west. I mean, they only pass their minutes, and after he/she finishes his/her minutes the go home.”

Moreover, the heavy political atmosphere affects education in a negative ways. First of all, because of the protests interfering with education in the schools and as mentioned earlier, families do not allow their children to go to school because of the conflict. Also, sometimes teachers actively attend the protests and do not go to schools. Therefore, students might not be able to attend classes at schools and the schools cannot catch the curriculum which is followed all over the country. A teacher stressed these problems in public schools.

“Şimdi şey oluyor. Şimdi eylem var hadi okullar kapatılsın. Okulları kapatıyorlar haliyle bu sefer çocuklar eğitim den geri kalıyor. Soruyorsun işte nerdesiniz konu olarak. İşte hocam surdayız. Ama baktığın zaman o kadar gerideler ki hani bunlar çocukları çok etkiliyor... Sırf bu olaylar yüzünden gidemediler...Mesela bu yıl o sur içi yani yıkıldı orada kaç tane okul vardı bizim orada kaçtane öğrencimiz vardı. Çocuklar gidemediler. Buraya bakalım hani Diclekent tarafı buralar biraz daha sakin yerler oralara gore.E işte bazen öğrenciler geliyor okul vaktinde. Niye gitmediniz kızım oğlum? Hocam bugün öğretmenler eylem yapıyor...Öğretmenler niye eylem yapıyor.”

“Now things happen. Now they there is protests, schools should be closed. They closed the schools. Then, students fall behind of the education. Asking the student where you are in terms of the subject. They say teacher we are here. But when you look at it they are way behind... I mean it is affecting students a lot. Just because of this clutter they couldn't go... For instance, this year Sur is destroyed we have many schools (Reading Halls) and many students there. Children couldn't go. When we look at here, I mean, here, Diclekent side is quieter when it is compared to Sur. Sometimes, students are

coming here during the school time. Why didn't you go my daughter, my son? Teacher today teachers have protests. Why are the teachers attending the protest?"

Academic success is not just a need for students, but also for the society as well. Most of the participants, including teachers and families, mentioned that the lack of quality education causes other problems related with security. However, one of the teachers mentioned that families do not have enough knowledge about the importance of the nationwide exam, and while explaining the importance of the Reading Halls he said that, "if these institutions were opened 30 years ago, we would have a very clean county." He said, "very clean" to mean "no crime" which means that from the teacher's perspective, academic success and low crime are related to each other. Another teacher participants connected poverty and academic success.

"Ben o çocukları gördükten sonra işte asıl onların eğitime ihtiyacı olduğunu anlayabildim. Daha önce hep güzel semplerde kalmıştım. Böyle evim daha böyle lüks yerlerdeyim orada kaldım. Ama daha sonra o fakir ortamı görünce, böyle oradaki gece konduları görünce, hayatın sadece bir yüzünü değil öteki yüzünü de görmüş oldum orada."

"After I saw these kids, then I understood that they really need education. Before that I have lived in beautiful neighborhoods. I mean my house was in a luxury places. I stayed there. But then I saw the poor environment, when I saw such slums, I saw not the one side but also other side of the life"

As a result, the lack of quality academic development is seen as a cause of most of the problem in the region. Therefore, the participants' academic concerns may trigger other problems and difficulties for the students.

**Behavioral Concerns.** Another problem that the participants mentioned are behavioral concerns. Students during adolescent may demonstrate some inappropriate behaviors. Some participants mention that students may demonstrate aggression and use "inappropriate language" to their friends. A teacher participant talked about the effect of the environment on students' behaviors.

“Tabi yani mesela kimi çocuklarımız daha şiddet meyillisidir. Ergenliğin vermiş olduğu şeyde var. Biz bu öğrencilerimizden yakından ilgileniyoruz daha yakından ilgileniyoruz. Böyle ailesiyle birlikte takip ediyoruz.”

“Certainly, we have some students who are slantwise to violence, at the same time adolescent brings something. We take care of these students very closely, take care of them very closely. We take eye on these students with their families.”

Some of the traditions take an important part in southeastern culture. To be respectful to older people, and specifically father and mother, is very significant for the people in that region. Therefore, they expect respectful behaviors from their children and when children did not behave respectfully, it becomes a big behavioral concern. One of the teacher participants shared his thought about this issue.

“Hani şimdi sizde biliyorsunuz ergenlik döneminin verdiği bir şeyle hani bir asilikle... Bazı öğrenciler ailelerine karşı hani böyle tepkililer. Bağırıp çağırmalar istezarlamalar evden çıkmalar falan hani biz burada konuşuyoruz.İlgileniyoruz. Çocuk şimdi bu sefer anne babanın hakkını öğrenince onlara karşı daha bir yumuşak daha bir hani bir saygılı ve sevgili olmaya başlıyorlar.”

“I mean as you know with the adolescent rebelliousness... some students are more aggressive reaction... they may shout, and get angry and leave home... like this. We, here, talk with them and take care of them. Then when the kid learn about the rights of mother and father they become more sensitive, I mean, they become to demonstrate more respect and love”

## **Section Two: Reading Halls in Diyarbakir and Transition**

In this section two main issues will be discussed. In the first part, the Reading Halls' environment, schedule and curriculum will be explained briefly based on the gathered data. Furthermore, programs at the Reading Halls such as academic coursework's and social activates will be represented. In the second part, the role of prep school during transition from middle to high school will be discussed.

### **Reading Halls in Diyarbakir**

Reading Halls are prep school type institutions and are run by non-profit organizations and there are a couple of foundations to support these prep schools. All the data are gathered in

Education and Developing Public Relation Foundation (EHIDER) facilities. These Reading Hall projects were supported by a government with the Social Support (SODES) project funds. Even though the SODES project continues, the funds are directed in different areas and the funds have been cancelled for Reading Halls. After the SODES support was canceled in 2014, the number of the reading halls decreased. In 2016 there are around 15 reading halls still functioning in Diyarbakir.

The programs start for fifth grade students and continue until the students graduate from high school. The programs for the middle grade students are named Reading Halls (Okuma Salonlari) and the program for high school students are named Youth Center (Genclik Merkezi). These prep-schools provide additional courses for preparing students for the nationwide examination in middle schools and in high schools. Also, tutoring services are given to prepare the students for their exams.

**Environment of the Reading Halls.** Reading Halls are small buildings renovated from houses or plazas. Each Reading Hall includes three to five classrooms, an activity room, library or computer room, and kitchen. Also, each Reading Hall can service on average of 100 to 300 students. The number of students can vary during any given semester. According to the teacher participants, Reading Halls at the Sur district have more student capacity, but when the data was collected they were closed temporarily because of the curfew which has lasted almost three months.

Different than most of the educational institutions, students are expected to take off their shoes before they enter some rooms or the entrance of the building. Some of the Reading Halls are separated based on gender, and there are prep schools just for boys and girls. If it is a gender mixed school, for each Reading Hall a male and a female teacher are working full time and a

male teacher is assigned to male students, and female teachers are assigned to female students. The teachers who are assigned to the students are responsible for all the programs in the Reading Halls.

Other teachers are recruited part-time and work only on the weekends and study hours after school. Some of the teachers teach voluntarily, and some of them are paid based on the hours they teach. Since it is a voluntary job for some of the teachers, they may not come to teach, and these teachers are replaced with other teachers who are available at that time in the Reading Hall. The number of teachers in a Reading Hall may change depending on the number of students and their academic situations.

One of the main reasons to provide course work and social activities is to protect the kids from the negative environment and to engage their students with some programs because, as mentioned earlier, there are major security concerns regarding the students. Sometimes the kids are kidnapped. Families are fearful about their children being kidnapped, or instead of attending school will attend illegal activities or PKK camps. Therefore, families and teachers want students to spend as much time as possible at the Reading Halls because Reading Halls are some of the secure places from the participants' perspective. In this regard, Reading Halls have a role from the teachers' and parents' perspective to create a safe environment for the students. A teacher participant stressed the difficulties of the families about creating safe environment.

“Kiminin abisi, kiminin ablası, kiminin amcası, kiminin dayısı dağa çıkmış. Aileler görmüşler yaşamışlar. Yani en azından çocuğumuz zayı olmasın diye bize getiriyorlardı. Hocam bari çocuk burada ders görmese dahi bari gelsin sizin bu yerde oyun oynasın yani. Çünkü internet –café-, başka bir oyun sahasına gönderemiyorlardı.... Çünkü dışarı çıktı mı dediğim gibi başkaları kapıyor aile istediği kadar peşine düşsün geri dönüşü olmuyor”

“Some of them's brother, some of them's sister, and some of them's uncle went to the mountain -referring to participate PKK camps-. Families saw, and experienced. They were bringing their kids in order to not to lose their children. Hodja Even he/she do not participate to the classes let him/her come and play games in your place. Because they were not able to send their children to internet -café- or other game place.... Because

when he/she go out, somebody else keep him/her and there is no way back even the family follows him/her.

Therefore, students and families consider Reading Hall as a place where they can feel safe for their children. Reading Halls are aimed at keeping students connected with the teachers while providing a safe environment for students. As mentioned in the first section, there are several issues that might bring huge problems to the students. These types of places protect students from negative behaviors, and provide a place where families are comfortable allowing their children to go. A parent participant explains what she feels when their kids are at Reading Halls.

“Yani mesela çocuğumu onların yanına gönderirken ben çok huzur duyuyorum mesela... nebileyim mesela içim rahat. Şimdi baba başlarında olmadığın... ben hep titriyordum başka yerlerde olduğu zaman çok tedirgin oluyordum. Nerdeler? Ne yapıyorlar? İşte çevreyi bilmiyorsunuz birde binbir türlü insanlar var. Buraya geldiği zaman, Okuma Salonuna geldiği zaman içim rahat ediyordu. Güveniyordum yani ben bunlara çok güveniyorum.”

“I mean, for example, when I send my child to Reading Halls, I was feeling peace, for instance. Because their father is not here, I was always trembling. When they are other places, I was getting nervous. Where are they? What are they doing? I mean you don't know the environment and there are thousand types of people. When they came here (Reading halls), I am feeling comfort. Trust them I mean I trust them a lot.”

**Academic Support.** Before prep school regulation in 2014, prep schools were dominating the education field. However, economically disadvantaged students were not able to go to prep schools. In this regard, Reading Halls are an alternative for the students with low economic status. The main objectives of Prep schools in Turkey focus on academic development and prepare students for the nationwide exam. Therefore, to be able to provide an alternative to the students, Reading Halls provide similar academic support and courses to those that the prep schools offer. This is with some differences. First of all, the quality of the teachers in reading halls are not as good as the prep schools because these Reading Halls offer very low salaries and teachers are inexperienced compared to teachers in prep schools. Because of the economic issues, they can hire teachers with the minimum salary. Teachers are mostly very young and

inexperienced. Therefore, some students are not satisfied with the quality of teachers. A

students shared his idea about the teachers as follows:

“Bana göre yani benim bazı derslerden bir sorunum yok da, inkılap mesela türkçe fende bir sorunum yok ama matematik hocası burda biraz... anladığım bir şey yok yani anlatımını hiç sevmiyorum. Ben bunu zaten dönem başında XXX [önceki müdürün ismi] hocayla da konuştum. İşte XXX [önceki müdürün ismi] hoca dedi yapacak bir şey yok.... İşte ne yapsa anlamıyorum yani bu hocanın anlatım şeklinden anlamıyorum.”

“For me, I mean I don't have problem with some courses like history, Turkish, Science. I don't have problem with these but math is a little... I don't understand anything. I mean I don't like him/her teaching style. I already told this to XXX [the name of the previous principle] at the beginning of the semester. I mean XXX said there is nothing we can do.... I mean whatever she/he does, I don't understand. I don't understand with this teacher's teaching style.”

However, it is not always the thought of every student. Even though some students are not satisfied about the quality of the courses, there are some students who are very pleased about the courses and quality of the teachers. As a result, with all the negative and positive sides, the academic courses are the main component of the academic support.

Study hours is another aspect which is as an important part of the academic courses. Reading Halls give students an opportunity to study with their teachers. Providing a study environment is very important feature of the Reading Halls because some students do not have an opportunity to study at home due to their economically disadvantaged family backgrounds and their houses which are too small or too crowded. A mentor participant who was a student at reading halls shared her experiences about this issue:

“Evde ortam bulamadığımda okuma salonlarına gidiyordum derslerimiz felan vardı etütlerimiz falan vardı. Bana çok yardımcı oldu. Yani ailem gönderemediği için ben oraya ücretsiz gidiyordum. Ben oraya. Çok bana katkısı oldu hocalarımın. Daha sonra oradaki ortamın çok büyük bir katkısı oldu.”

“I was going to the Reading Halls to attend courses designed to help students when there is no appropriate atmosphere to study at home. It's been so helpful to me. I mean my family had financial difficulties and these courses were free. The teachers have incredibly been beneficial. The atmosphere was remarkably helpful as well.”



After the 8th grade, home staying programs are offered. If the parents gives permission to this program, students can stay home (mentor's houses who are undergraduate students and volunteer of the EHIDER) once a week or once every two weeks. At the home staying programs, students spend the whole day with their group. They have a schedule and their mentors tutor the students. Students begin to stay more through the years. The students are divided into groups of five or six, and every group has a mentor (abi which means older brother) who are students at the undergraduate level. Also, prep-schools organize camps for studying and reading. Their teachers stay with the students during these camps.

**Curriculum and Schedule.** Reading Halls are open eleven months of the year and they have three semesters. During the summer there is a two month semester. Teachers follow the public schools curriculum. Mainly, the subjects of Science, Social Science, math, and Turkish are taught to the students. Reading halls struggle to find English teachers and therefor English is not taught. English is one of the main subjects in the nationwide examination and it is the only course which is not covered in the Reading halls.

Reading halls are opened six days a week. Monday is the only day off for the teacher and Reading Halls are closed on Monday's. In general, weekends are the busiest days because all students take courses from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Therefore, all students spend at least a half a day on Saturday's and Sunday's at the Reading Halls. On Tuesday through Friday, students have *etude hours* (study hours) and social activities. Two student participants explain a typical week as follows:

“Geçen sene Pazartesi bir gün hariç her gün gidiyordum. . . . ders çalışıyordum ondan sonra hocalarla hani konuşuyorduk. Oyun moyun oynuyorduk. Bazı konular vardı onları anlatıyorlardı. Bazenleri de işte maç yapıyorduk. Yani tenis menis oynuyorduk.”

“Except Mondays, I was coming everyday last year. . . . I was studying. Then, we chat with teachers. We were playing games. There are some topics, and they were teaching. Sometimes we have games. I mean we play table tennis.”

Burada hafta sonları sabahleyin ders görüyoruz ondan sonra öğlenleyin etüt yapıyoruz. Hafta içi de okuldan çıkıyoruz - 1.30 gibi buraya geliyoruz.Ders çalışıyoruz işte etüt yapıyoruz. Aktiviteler yapıyoruz.Bilgisayar oynuyoruz falan.... Ben buraya haftanın 4 günü geliyorum..... Salı, çarşamba, Cumartesi, Pazar.

At the weekend morning we have classes and then at noon we have etude hours (study hours). At the week days we leave school like 1.30 pm. We come here. We do study. I mean we do etude. We have activities. We play PC games etc.... I come here four days.... Tuesday, Wednesday, Saturday and Sunday.

At the Reading Halls, students study for the examination and do their homework during etude hours (study hours). If they have a question, the teachers stay with the students during the etude hours. Students are expected to come at least three days to the Reading Halls. Two days for courses and one day for ethic lecture. In this ethic lecture, teachers talk about some ethical issues by using religious literature. For eighth graders, a more intense program is used and some students come to the reading halls six days because eighth grade students need to take the nationwide exam and sample tests are offered at Reading Halls. However, they do not have a strict schedule and depending upon the students' available time, teachers might make arrangements on their schedule. One of the teacher participants explains how he revised the schedule for a student.

“Öğrenciler burada mezarlığa sulamaya giderler. Hani mezar suladıklarında para almak için. Şimdi o gün ders programını kaydurdum o öğrencinin için. Perşembe günü öğrencinin dersi yok. Salı çarşamba buraya geliyor. Perşembe de mezara gidip çalışıyor kendi ya. Yani kaybetmemek uğruna biz elimizden gelen herşeyi yapıyoruz abi. Tek öğrenciyi bile kaybetmeyelim. Yani ben ders programını... bir öğrenci yüzünden ders programı değişti.”

“Students go to memorial parks to irrigate cemeteries in this place. I mean to make money... That day, I rescheduled students' program just for helping “him”. He did not have courses on Thursdays anymore (in the new schedule). He was coming here on every Tuesday and Wednesdays. And, he was going to memorial parks to work on Thursdays. I mean we did our best not to lose him. For every student we had... The whole program was rescheduled just for a single student.”

**Social Activities.** Other main focuses of the program is organizing social activities.

According to teachers social activities are very important in order to reach out to students and

protect them from the negative environment. Since their families have some security concerns, families do not allow them to go outside. In this regard, these activities provide a safe environment for the students and give them an opportunity to socialize with their friends and increase their social abilities. A teacher participant explained their goal for the social activities.

Çocuklar içeri kapanmış.içerden dışarı çıkmadığı için... çocukların biraz daha böyle sosyalleşmesine yani, kimseden zarar görmeden nasıl aktivite yapılabilir, nasıl geziler yapılabilir. Bu türlü şekilde, arkadaşlarımıza, öğrencilerimize yardımcı olmaya çalışıyoruz.

Children are stuck at home. Since they do not go outside... we assist them to more socialize, I mean how to do activities, how to do trips, by not getting harm from anybody. In this way we try to assist our friends, our students in this way.

Based on this purpose, prep schools have a social activity room in which the student can play some games such as table tennis, table football, chess, and video games, and they organize some activities as picnics, trips, and camps. They schedule one big event monthly such as a picnic or a trip, and small events weekly such as soccer games or movie time. These social activities are mostly scheduled on Tuesday to Friday. They watch a movie with their teachers or play soccer. They decide what to do for social activities together. At this point, activities with female students and male students are distinguished from each other depending on their choices. For example, female students could bake a cake with their teachers during their social activity time, but this social activity is not done for male students.

“Mesela bizim burda haftalık olarak etkinliğimiz oluyor. Nedir? Bir hafta çocuklarla beraber hep birlikte bir pasta yapıyoruz. Nedir? Bunu sınıf sınıf ayırıyoruz ama altıncısınıflar 7. Sınıflar 8. Sınıfı hep ayırıyoruz. Ondan sonra işte onların çok hoşuna gidiyor bu tür şeyler hani birde böyle bir yerde çok mutlu oluyorlar.”

“For example, we have weekly activities here. What are those? One week we make a cake altogether with all the kids. What are those? While we did this we serape it grade by grade but with sixth grade, with seventh grade, with eight grade we all separate. Then, they like these activities; I mean these type activities in this place. They are being happy.”

**Charity Organizations.** Reading Halls’ target mostly economically disadvantaged students. Therefore, charity organizations take an important part in funding the Reading Halls. According to the participants, students, families, and teachers organize some charity events in order to reach out to economically disadvantaged students. Students and families in a better neighborhood are donating money, books, and clothes. Then, those donations are sent to the places where people struggle with poverty. A teacher participant explains how they organized a charity organization for the people at Sur district.

“Sur’un çok ciddi sıkıntılar yaşadığını... bunların mesela öğrencilerimizin maddi durumunun iyi olması sebebiyle hani kıyafetlerinin çok olduğunu, ama ordakilerin olmadığını anlattık ve şöylebir çalışma yaptık. Yardım çalışması... surdaki öğrencilere... kitaptır, kıyafettir, ayakkabıdır... mesela ertesi gün olduğu bir sürü ayakkabı geldi. Bir sürü kıyafet geldi. Oradakilere yardım için gönderiyor. Aileler de çok memnun oldu bir baktım aileler de getirdi böyle kıyafet falan yani bizim aracılığımızla biz onlara ulaştırmış olduk.”

“We told them people have to face serious difficulties. For instance, because of our students are economically better situation, we told them they have many clothes, but people in Sur don’t have them and made an organization like this. Charity organization... to the kids in Sur... might be books, clothes, shoes... for instance, the next day lots of shoes, many clothes have been arrived. The families were happy too and I saw families brought clothes like that. I mean through our organization we conveyed those stuff.

Students take an active role in these charity organizations. Since they know the neighborhood better than the teachers, they are asked to be the guide for the teachers and students assist their teachers to reach out to the families who have need for donations. In this way, teachers aim to develop students’ understanding of social responsibility and the notion of helping one another. The role of the students in the charity organizations are explained by another teacher who work at the Sur.

Şimdi bu sokakları gezebilmek içinde rehber ihtiyaçları var.Bizde o dönemde şöyle bir proje yaptık.her öğrencimizi bir grubun sorumlusu yapalım.Çocuklar hem yardımlaşma verme duygusunu kapsınlar.bunu açıklayalım aynı zamanda rehberlik yapsınlar yol gösterebilirler. XXXX [öğrencinin adı] iki yıl boyunca bu yardım faaliyetlerinin içerisinde bulundu.... Çok böyle heyecanla da gelip söylüyordu “Hocam bizim mahallede 10 tane aile tespit ettim.... yardım götürebilirmiyiz” diye.

Now, to be able take trip in these streets they need a guidance. We made a project at that time like this. Let's assign each student to a group, and the children get the notion of helping one another. We explain this at the same time they make guidance, show the street. XXXX [the name of the student] has involved these charity activities for two years.... He/she was very excited and was saying "teacher in our neighborhood I found out 10 families. They are in a serious situation.... We need to help them"

**Conferences and Seminars.** Reading Halls organize conferences and seminars for the families. These programs are related to students' problems and address behavioral and academic issues. They aim to inform families about how the students should study for the nationwide exam and the importance of making decisions about high schools. Also, they try to increase awareness about the problems that the students may face during adolescence such as using drug or addictions. One of the parent participant talk about conferences and explains what the conferences are about.

"Yani konferans gibi birşey anlatıyorlardı... Konular hep bu hani çocukların eğitimi geleceği arkadaş çevresi takip edin. Onların haberi olmadan çantasını kontrol edin. Ne yapıyor kimle arkadaşlık ediyor. Arkdaşını çağırın eve, tanıyın felan filan"

"They were told like conferences... the topics are like child education, future of the children, friend environment. Take eye on them. Check their backpacks without they knew. What he/she is doing, whose his/her friends are. Invite their friends to your house, get meet with them. Something like that.

### **The Role of Prep Schools during Transition.**

The role of prep schools during transition from middle to high school can be collected under three main titles. These are guidance, west implementations (a scholarship that covers all academic tuitions and fees during the high school), and youth centers. In this part, these issues will be discussed.

**Guidance.** Transition from middle school to high school is a challenging process not just because of all the difficulties during the transition, but also the system of the entrance exam has changed three times in the last ten years. Students and families do not have enough information about what to do, and how to make high school selections. Also, teachers and prep schools need

to adopt the changes. Furthermore, since, “most of the parents are uneducated, they do not have knowledge” about the importance of choosing a good high school for their children, especially in the Southeastern region of Turkey. Therefore, teachers in the Reading Halls inform students and families about the high schools because there are very different types of high schools such as science high schools, health profession high schools, and Anatolian high schools. Also, they help them to make decisions about where to go to high school. During the decision process, if there is a need they visit the issue and try to convince the families to keep the students’ education on track and, if it is needed, teachers take a part and responsibility to register the students for high school. One unique experience is told about the school selection and registration process from a teacher participant.

“Meğer kızlardan biri şeyde çalışıyormuş pazarcılık yapıyormuş işte... Babaları yatalak rahatsız. Pazardaki işlerle artı böyle evin geçimini sağlayacak böyle bir şey... Buna rağmen de çok güzel bir puan. İşte bunların tercihlerini yaptık. Çocuklar gitti aradan böyle belli bir dönem geçti... kayıt dönemi... Son gün yarım saat var kayıtların kapanmasına. Kızımız geldi yanıma şöyle oturdu... Hocam babam vefat etti bir hafta önce dedi. Öyle mi dedim. Peki okulu ne yaptınız dedim. Böyle hani ilk sordum. Hani acıyla düşünmemişlerdir diye. Ben... Çermik ilçesine yerleştim. Ne yaptın kaydını m yaptın m yok hocam yapmadım. Neden? İşte taziye ilgilendiler. Kimse benimle ilgilenmedi. ne yapacaksın okumayacam. Tabi bu böyle deyince... Kazandığı okulun müdürüyle daha önce tanışmıştık... Hemen aradım. Rica ettim... mümün değil yetişemem. Kaydını yapın söz ben çocuğu getiriyorum evraklarla birlikte. Yarım saat o arada çocuk annesini arıyor. Annesi bana şunu demiyor... sen kimsin, kızımı niye götürüyorsun nerde kalacaksınız demiyor. Kızının kimliğini götürüyor. Hocam al kızım hayatını değiştir kurtar. Kızı aldım götürdüm. Orada kaydını yaptık sonra, yine bizim yurtlarımız vardı. Yurda ücretsiz yerleştirdik. Akşamda işte ablamlarda kaldık sonra döndük. Çocuk 4 yıl boyunca himayemizde okudu.”

“I found that the girl was working at the bazaar... their father is bedded and have serious disease... with the business at the bazaar she support financially to their home. However, with all these things she get a good score and we made their choices. Then kids went and a period of time pass... Registration time. Last half hour of the last day to closed the registration to high school. Then the kid came, sat near me... she said teacher my father passed away. I said really, and I asked what they do about the high school. I asked like this because I thought maybe they may not focus because of the sadness. She said I awarded to go to Cermik region. What did you do did you the registration? She said no. why? Everyone busy with condolence and nobody take care of me. What are you going to do? I will not go to school. We met the principle that she will go before and I called

him and request him... because it is impossible I cannot be on time. I said make the registration and I promise I will bring the documents. At that half hour she called her mom and her mom didn't say this. Who are you? Where you taking my daughter? I take her daughter ID. She said take this and save my daughter future. We went with the kid. We made the registration. We registered her to one of our dorms free. That night we stayed to my sister house and returned tomorrow. We take care of the kid four years during the high school. “

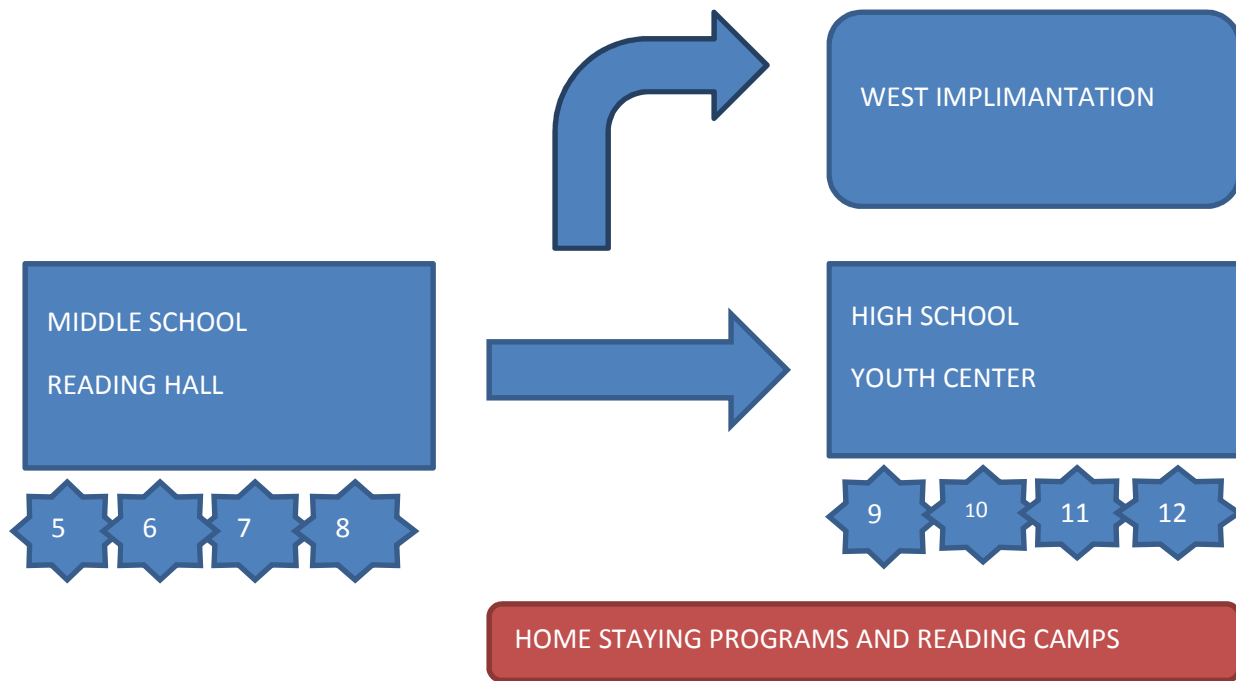
**West Implementation.** Another important program that the Reading Halls offer to their students is *Bati uygulaması* (West implementation). This program aims to protect students from the negative attitudes and environment. The main goal of the program is to help students to get a better education and take them out from the negative atmosphere and provide a better education opportunities to the students.

After middle school is completed, and based on the nationwide exam results, successful students are offered a scholarship. The students who prefer to attend schools outside of their hometown, will be offered a scholarship which covers students' education expenses, transportation and shelter during their entire high school years. If the families and students accept these programs, students choose high schools in the western cities. Sister foundations of EHIDER take care of the listed issues above after the students arrive to the chosen city in the west. These students receive a similar program that they had at Diyarbakir in western cities. A teacher explains how the process works as follows:

“8. Sınıf öğrencimiz sınava girdikten sonra aldıkları puanla eğer ailenin de izni varsa çocukta okumak isterse başka bir şehirde imkanların daha bol olduğu bir şehirde okumak isterse, biz oraya göndeririz o çocuğu. Ordaki imkanla yurtlarımızda veya başka mekanlarımızda kalıyorlar ücretsiz ve bütün masraflarını oradaki kurumlarımız ödüyor. Yine lise sona gelince ek dershaneye ücretsiz gönderiliyor. Üniversite kazanılırsa yine üniversite de takip ediliyor. Yani çocuk okumak isterse biz her türlü imkanı sağlıyoruz.”

“After taking the exam at the eighth grade with the score they got, if the family has permission, and if the child want to keep going to school in different city which has more opportunity, if he/she want to go to school in different city, we send the kid there. With the opportunity we have, they live at the dorms, or other places and all the expenses are paid by the institutions of the city where he/she went. Also, in addition, during the end of

high school, they go to Prep schools free. If he/she wants to go to University he/she is taken care of. I mean if the kids want to get education we provide every opportunity.”



**Figure 5.** Reading Halls System in the Southeast Region of Turkey

**Youth centers.** Students who attended Reading Halls receive similar programs at the high school as well. The institutions that focus on high school students are called Youth Center (in Turkish *Gençlik Merkezi*). The centers provide similar activities and courses with additional home staying programs. If the option is for the student to participate in home staying programs, students begin to stay with a group of friends some days of a week. A mentor who is a university student and a volunteer of EHIDER, assigns for this group and every group is made of three to six students. Students come to the mentor’s house and the mentors assist students with their coursework and tutoring needed by the student. Also, mentors assist the teachers and perform a follow-up regarding their students’ study hours and book readings.



During the first two years of high school, the courses are designed to support high school coursework which is an important concern of students because qualitative data revealed that one of the concerns of the students is “more difficult courses, especially Math”. Therefore, the programs which are applied at the Youth Centers addresses some of the concerns that the students face during transition. Also, these centers students are encouraged to be connected with the same environment. A teacher participant explains the transition process from Reading Halls to Youth Centers:

“Liseye geiş dneminde aynen bizim okuma salonlarının byle liseye ynelik olan farklı bir versiyonu var genlik merkezleri diye geiyor bunlarda. ocuklar mezun olur olmaz,eęer imkanımız oluyorsa yerimiz oluyorsa Byle kendi ğrencilerimizle devam ediyoruz... Orada da tamamen,byle lise dersleri iřte fizik kimya biyoloji trke matematik gibi dersler orada okuma salonun versiyonu devam ediyor orada”

“During the transition to high school, we have high school version of Reading Halls for high schoolers. They are called Youth Centers. As soon as the children graduate from here, if we have an opportunity, enough place, we keep continue with our students. At the youth Centers there are all high school level courses -let’s say- as physic, chemistry, biology, Turkish, math keep continue there in a different version of reading halls.”

### **Section Three: Teacher Family Collaboration and Behavioral Development**

In this section, teacher-family and teacher-student relationships will be explained. The teachers approach on families and students, and the importance of teacher-family collaboration will be represented. Furthermore, the role of prep schools on student’s behavioral development and the role of teachers in the behavioral development process are discussed based on the revealed findings.

#### **Teacher Family Collaboration**

People in Diyarbakir face many problems. Students need to be protected from some negative environment and attitudes. Also, they need to be successful in their education life. The need to overcome those problems and achieve success in education go hand-in-hand and collaboration with families is a significant feature of the Reading Halls. With this purpose,

teachers organize family meetings and visits to develop collaboration with the families, and teachers and families should have a good dialogue and relationship with each other.

**Teacher Family Relations.** Developing a strong relationship with the families is an important part of the collaboration. Teachers visit the families at their houses at least once in a year. Also, if there is problem about students' behavior, or teachers need to speak about some issues with the families, teachers may visit the families more often. Family visits are very important from the family perspective as well because they are not familiar these type of visits. One of the parent participants said that "in these days, my relative do not want to come to my house, but the teachers came." Therefore, visiting a family is a way of showing respect to the people. Also, family visits offers an opportunity to develop relationships between teachers and families. Furthermore, teachers get a better idea about the family. Moreover, teachers have a chance to observe the students' study environment. During the family visits teachers give information about what they did and how their children are doing in the courses and how he/she should study to the exam. A teacher said that:

"Aile ziyaretlerinde yani çocuğun önce bir ortamını yaşadığı ortamı görüyoruz. Aile kaç nüfus var nasıl bir imkanları var. Onları görüyoruz. Yine orada çocuğu nasıl takip edecekler evin içinde nasıl ders çalışması gerektiğini o şekilde biz velilerimize bilgiyi veriyoruz. Ve bu şekilde veli de şaşırıyor yani. Bir öğretmen evine gelmiş çocuğun durumunu anlatıyor. Nasıl ders çalışması gerektiğini veya bir öğretmen gelmiş bizde çay içiyor mesela onlar için çok farklı bir duygu yani çünkü şimdiye kadar okuldaki öğretmenler hep batıdan geldi batıdan gelince hep öğrenciyi derste görüp dersin dışında çocuğu görmüyor veya aileyi tanımıyor."

"At the family visits, first of all we see the child's environment, the place he/she live, and how many people in that family. We see these. Also, we inform families about how he/she should study in the house, and how they are going to follow up their students. In this way, we inform the families. And I mean families get surprise. A teacher came to their house and talk about student. How he/she should study or a teacher came and drink tea with us, for instance, it is very different feeling for them because teachers at the public school all came from west, when they came from west they only saw student at the school. They don't see it outside of school or they don't know families.

Ethnic differences play an important role to develop a relationships with the families because most of the families especially at the Sur district cannot speak Turkish, and Kurdish is the only language to have dialogue with their teachers. The three out of six teacher participants are from Diyarbakir region and Kurdish is their native language. The other three of them do not know Kurdish and when they visit the families at their houses the students they need to translate so that teachers can communicate with families. On the other hand, teachers who know Kurdish can interact with the families better than others. A teacher participants shared her experiences related to Kurdish language:

Yani bir kere aralarında kürtçe konuşmak onlar için etkili evet. Hani çünkü bilmiyor mesela bazıları hiç türkçe konuşmamış bazı veliler. Sadece kürtçe konuşmuş ama kürtçe konuşuyorsun ama şöyle şunu görüyor veli sadece hani kürtçeyi konuşmak için konuşmuyorsun gerçekten onlarla muhabbet etmek için konuşuyorsun işte sıkıntısını dinlemek için konuşuyorsun. İşte yani ben kürdüm kürtçe konuşuyorum değil. İşte abla şöyle hani çocuğun problem şu şöyle olması lazım... Mesela velinin hastalığını bile dinlemek onlar için çok etkili... Bir hoca beni arıyor ve benim hastalığım için dua ediyor... Bu onlar için çok etkili mesela hani hiç eşinden bile bu ilgiyi görmeyen abla bizden ilgiyi görünce çok etkili oluyor.

First of all, speaking Kurdish with them is affected, yes. I mean, for instance, some of the parents don't know, they have never spoken Turkish. They have only spoken Kudish. You speak Kurdish but like this. I mean not just speak Kurdish because you are able to but speak Kurdish because you want to talk with them. I mean to listen their problems. I mean, not for to mention I am Kurd and I speak Kurdish. I mean, to say sister the kid has this problem and it should be like this.... For example, even listening to the parents' illness is very effective.... A teacher call me and ask my illness and pray for me.... This is very effective for them. I mean, when a sister, who has never seen such a care from their husband, it is very effective.

**Meetings and Family Visits.** Teachers meet with the families very frequently in the Reading Halls. By developing strong relationships, teachers, families and students trust each other. When the trust builds between families and teachers, many problems can be solved easier and teachers and families can work collaboratively about the student's academic or behavioral problems. For example, a mother of a student can share their problems about their children with a teacher, and the teacher can take an important role to solve the problems. A teacher participant

shares her experiences about how she approaches the students when they demonstrate aggressive behaviors to their parents.

“Hocam dedi müsaitseniz bir gelin kahve içelim dedi kendi davet etti. Bende olur dedim. İşte gittim. Kadın ağlamaya başladı o kadar ağlıyor ki... işte kızım bana çok asi davranıyor bağılıyor çağırıyor iste... Ağladı ağladı sonra tamam abla dedim ben bir konuşayım bir ana baba hakkından bahsedeyim. Kızı çağırdım yanıma. Dedim hadi senle birlikte kitap okuyalım dedim. İşte bir kahve yaptık oturuyoruz... Anlattım anlattım anlattım sonra çocuk ağlamaya başladı... Niye ağlıyorsun dedim hiç dedi. Ondan sonra işte dedi hocam dedi annemle iki haftadır baya bir tartışmalıyız dedi. Ben dedi çok mu günaha girdim? Dedi. Ben de dedim yani tamam şey olabilirsin özür dile annenden helallik iste insallah dedim gecer. Artık annesine gitti biraz konuşmuşlar araları düzelmiş. Annesi akşam tekrar aradı. Hocam dedi Allah razı olsun kızım iyi düzeldi hani gelip özür diledi.”

“She invited me and said my hodja if you are available let’s come and drink a coffee. I said ok. Then, I went. Women began to cry. She is crying a lot... and said my daughter is being very rebellious to me, she screamed all the time... she cried a lot and I said ok sister let me talk to you daughter about the rights of mother and father. Then, I called the girl. I said let’s read some books. We made a coffee... I tell him. We talk, talk and talk then she began to cry... I asked why you are crying. She said nothing. Then, she said I argue with my mother a lot like two weeks. She said did I make a sin? I said ok it may happen sometimes. You can go apologize and inshallah I said it will pass. Then, she went home and they talked each other and they make it up. That night, her mother called me again. She said May God bless you Hodja my daughter is fine now she came and apologize.”

Teachers have more impact on students’ academic and behavioral development when they have collaboration with the families because teachers at the Reading Halls also follow up students’ reading and studying as well. Family meetings and family visits make progress much easier because teachers develop a close relationship with the families and students. Teachers gathered weekly reports from the students about how many sample questions that they solve and how many pages that they read through the week. Also, they called families if the student did not come to the Reading Halls and after the class hours to be sure that students do not go to some places that they can get some wrong attitudes. After they call the families, sometimes the families call their students and find out that they went to an internet café or somewhere else

instead of the Reading Halls. A teacher talked about how they follow up students with their families:

“Diyelimki çocuk bize geldi. Saat 1.30 derse girmesi gerekiyor. 10 dakika geç kaldıymıydı bizde bütün öğrencilerin ailesinin numaraları mevcut... hemen ailesine haberveriliyor. Öğrenciniz bugün geç kaldı haberiniz olsun diye. Aynı zamanda her bir çocuğa haftalık günlük ve aylık bir şekilde bir çizelge çıkarılıyor. Konu dağılımıdır ne kadar soru çözmesi gerekiyor, ne kadar ders çalışması gerekiyor, ne kadar kitap okuması gerekiyor, ne tür etkinlikler yapması gerekiyor. Bunları çizelge halinde bir tanesi bizde kalıyor. Bir tanesini de biz veliye verip o şekilde birlikte hareket ediyoruz. Çocuğun bu şekilde takibini yapabiliyoruz.”

“Let’s say a kid came to us. He should attend the class at 1.30 pm and when he was 10 minutes late, -we have all families numbers-... we inform the families immediately. We just want to let you know that you child was late. At the same time, we have daily, weekly, and monthly charts for every single student. Subject distributions, how much questions should be solved, how much should be studied, how many pages should be read, what type of activities should be done we keep these in a chart and by giving one copy to the families, we work together. In this way, we can follow up the child.”

Other than family meetings and visits, families are also informed with conferences and seminars. Reading Halls organize conferences and seminars for the families. The conferences can be directly related with the students, or it can be related to some social issues. For example, a teacher participant mentioned a conference about women and the rights of women from the Islamic perspective. She said that this conference was done on the March 8<sup>th</sup>, which is world women’s day.

### **The Role of Reading Halls on Behavioral Development**

All activities are planned to protect students from negative attitudes and to support their behavioral development. To protect the kids from negative environments and to foster positive behavioral development, prep-schools focus on three main issues. These are: (1) creating positive environment, (2) engaging students with social activities, and (3) teaching the students moral and religious values. Based on the participants’ responses, students work to improve the following behaviors: Reading, studying regularly, self-cleaning, and self-confidence.

At the Reading Halls teacher try to improve students' reading routines. They follow up on how many books they read, and they organize reading contests in order to let the students learn reading habits. Mostly, they suggest religious books mainly about the Prophet's life and attitudes. By doing this teachers teach some ethic and religious values and also student's learn good routines.

“Kaç kitap okuduğunu sayıca bilmem ama her zaman sorar mesela ne okudun ne yaptın. Mesela okutmaya çalıştıkları kitap. Haftada birdir yani. Haftada en az bir kitap bitirme sayısı ayda 4 kitap olur. Bizim yaptığımız belki ayda 1'di yani... haftalık işte çetele gibi birşey olurdu okudun mu yaptın mı ettin mi diye... kitapların içeriğini bize de bırakırlardı bazen olmadı onlar bize verirlerdi genelde... Ama mesela ordan okuttukları kitaplar biraz daha dinen hani birşeyler bilelim diye okuttukları kitaplardı.”

“I don't know how many books I read but all the time she asks, for instance, what I read, and what I did. The books that they want us to read were maybe once a week. At east, they want us to read one book in a week. It makes four books in a month. But what we did was maybe one book in a month. They left us the content of the book. If it is not, they mostly gave us a book. For instance, the book that they want us to read more about let us learn more about our religion.”

Students in the Reading Halls give a report every week about how many sample questions they solve and how many hours they studied. Then teachers show these reports to their families regularly and families have a chance to see how well their student studies. This circle has been done in four years and after the four years, students understand how to study and begin to study more efficiently and regularly. Also, because of the collaboration with the teachers, families become more aware of their children's academic issues and they can follow up with their students. A student participant shares his thought about the changes in his study behavior.

“Ben ilk buraya geldiğimde dersi hiç çalışmıyordum. Sıfırdı. Öğretmenleri hiç dinlemiyordum. Ama nedense artık derslerim biraz iyiydi. Buraya geldim. Öğretmenlerimi daha iyi dinlemeye başladım. Ders çalıştım.”

“When I first came here, I have never studied. It was zero. I was not listening to teachers but somehow my grades were good. Then, I came here and began to listen to my teachers and I studied.”

Another student explains his family's increasing awareness about his school work as follows:

“Bu ziyaretlerin... Mesela ailem eskiden benim derslerimi pek sormazlardı hani okula gelip sormazlardı. Şimdi ise her hafta geliyorlar. Buraya geliyorlar. Okula gidiyorlar hani beni sormaya başladılar”

“These visits... for example my family did not ask about my grades. I mean they did not come to school to ask. But now they came every week. They are coming here and going to school to ask about me”

According to participants responses, social activities and trips improve self-confidence.

One of the teacher said that they give small responsibilities to the students during social activities for increasing students' self-confidence. Also, one of the mentor participants who was a student of a Reading Halls when she was in middle school, mentioned that a trip was done to Istanbul and was very helpful for her to increase self-confidence because with the trips and social activities, students get a chance to do something which is not done in that neighborhood and made them feel special. A student explains how their self-confidence increased with the social activities and trips.

“Çocukları özel hissettiriyorlar. Mesela gidip bir uçağa binip istanbula gitmek imkansız birşeydi. Hani hayallerimiz var. Mesela çoğu çocuk malesef burda ilk defa burda pasta yediler. Hani böyle hep hayallerinde olan şeyi gerçekleştirdince çocuk kendini mutlu zannediyor. Yani kendine olan özgüveni de artıyor. Kendisine değer verildiğini hissedince bu mutlu oluyor”

“They make students feel special. For example, going to Istanbul with a plane was an impossible thing. I mean we have dreams. For instance, unfortunately, most of the kids ate a cake here first time. I mean it improves yourself confidence. When you feel that people take care of you, it makes you happy”

**Role Modeling.** Teachers in the Reading Halls have very intense schedules. They have only one day off (Mondays). Other than Mondays they work at the Reading Halls, and most nights they visit families. Furthermore, during the weekend they work around 10 hours from 8:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. The teachers try to be good models and they spend as much time as they can with their students. In Diyarbakir, many negative issues surround the children. In this environment, having a role model might be very helpful for the students. Therefore, teachers in

the Reading Halls try to be good role models and one of the teachers mentioned their role on the students.

“Biz yapmadığımız birşeyi anlatmıyoruz yani. Biz yapmadığımız bir şeyi anlattığımızda zaten öğrenciye de fayda vermiyor yani. Biz önce kendi hal ve hareketlerimize tavır ve davranışlarımıza çünkü en evrensel dil beden dilidir.”

“We do not tell something that we do not apply I mean. If we told something that we do not apply, it does not mean anything to the student. We first look at our attitude, behavior, and action because the most universal language is the body language.”

The part of being a good role model is having strong relations with the students. Family participants described teachers' relationships with their child as a friendship, or brotherhood/sisterhood. Also, most of the students gave similar responses and mentioned their teacher as either “an older sister” or “a friend”. One of the reasons that the students feel closer relations to their teachers is because of the love and caring they express toward the students. A student talks about her teacher and explains how she behaves to them.

“O sırf bize biraz daha şeyler verebilmek için çocuğun üstü açık uyumasına rağmen gelir bize birşey anlatabilmenin derdindeydi. İlk önce biz buna inanamıyorduk çünkü yani fedakarlığın ne olduğunu ilk... Yani tanımadığın birine nasıl bu kadar fedakarlık ya... biz hiç böyle birşey görmemiştik. Hani tamam ailen olsa kardeşin olsa annen baban olsa yaparsın ama tanımadığın bir insana için bunu yapmak bize çok hoş geliyordu. Çok değişikti. Yani en çok öğretmenler benim için fedakarlığı ifade ediyor. Her biri çok vakitlerinden ailelerinden fedakarlık yapıyorlardı. Sonra ücretten bahsetmiyorum bile yani. Onu fedakarlık olarak görmüyorlardı.”

“Even her child was fell asleep and not covered, she was thinking to give something more to us. First we did not believe this because...I mean first we...what the selfness less... I mean how you can.... Selfness less someone you don't know. We never see such a thing. I mean ok if it is your family, siblings, if it is your mother, father you do it. But doing these things some you don't know it seemed very nice to us. It was very different. I mean teachers mean selfness less to me the most. All of them were sacrifice from their time and family. I do not even talk about money. They did not see it as sacrifice”

However, students who are at better places did not describe their relationship with the teacher as the other participants had responded. They said they like their teacher, but it is just a teacher-student relation. Also, one family participant talked about a teacher and he stressed that even



though most of the teachers are good, that does not mean that there are some teachers who do not work as much as other teachers.

**Ethnic Issues in Teacher Student Relations.** Teachers always try to develop a good relationship with students, but it is more difficult in Southeastern cities because there is a very heavy atmosphere and students, teachers, or families might get offended by words or actions which might seem very appropriate in other regions. Since Diyarbakir is an ethnically diverse city, sometimes ethnic problems come to the table. In this type of situation, teachers do not touch on the ethnic issues and try to avoid discussions related to ethnic problems. Teachers would like to be inclusive for all ethnicities by using a conscientious language in the classes or daily talk.

“Mesela, bazen her iki tarafında milliyetçilik damarı kabarırsa, bu sefer nasıl yapacağız? En iyisi böyle güzel bir üslup kullanmaya çalışıyoruz. Kimseyi kırmadan incitmeden bazı düşüncelerinin yanlış olduğunu bunların hem kendilerine, hem topluma zarar verdiğini. Olabildiğince hassas bir dille anlatmaya çalışıyoruz.”

“For example, sometimes both sides may be sensitive about the sense of nation –refers to ethnicity-, what will you do this time? The best way, I mean we try to use a nice wording. We try to explain with a polite language that some approaches are wrong and these approaches are harming the society as well as themselves.”

Diyarbakir has been struggling with ethnic conflicts over decades. Because of the ethnic problems, sometimes students may take an opposite position to the state. In general, they try to avoid this type of discussion. However, for the students who have sensitivity and anger about these ethnic problems, teachers attempt to re-direct these students to education. One of the teacher participants from Diyarbakir said that:

“Ama biz neyi tercih ettik kalemle mücadeleyi tercih ettik. Şimdi kalemle mücadele de şu çocuklar çok kez söylüyor. Hocam işkenceye şahit olduk. Hocam işte ee babamın haksız yere tutuklanmasına şahit oldum....Hocam günler oldu yemek bulamadık, günler oldu işte farklı şeylere maruz kaldık sesimiz çıkmadı. Bunların karşısında nasıl sessiz kalayım diyen çocuklara şunu söylemeye çalışıyorduk.... Güvenlik güçlerinden kolluk güçlerinden çektiyse işte siz güvenlik olun, asker olun, gardiyan olun hapishane

müdürü olun. Savcı olun hakim olun, öğretmen olun. Bunu gaddarca değilde hani insanice yapın. Halkımıza ne yapın hizmeti götürün bu şekilde.”

“But we try to fight with pen. Fighting with pen is this. Most of the time kids are asking. Teacher we have witnessed torture, I mean we have witnessed injustice arrestment to my father.... Teacher we sometimes couldn't find anything to eat. Someday we faced different things and we were silent. To the kids who say “how can I be silent”, we were trying to say this. If you are harmed from security forces, law enforcement officers, then you become a security forces, you become a soldier, you become guardian, and prison warden. Become a prosecutor, become a judge, become a teacher and do this not tyrannical but humanistic.”

### **Summary of the Findings**

Based on the revealed qualitative data, the role of Reading Halls was represented under five themes. Diyarbakir is the biggest city in the southeastern side of Turkey and the city that is at the center of all the conflicts. Therefore, students have to deal with some major problems and concerns. Students in the region mainly have four concerns, and because of the conflicts, security concerns is the biggest issue. Also, economic hardship is a big concern for many families in the city. After these two concerns, teachers, parents, and families have academic and behavioral concerns. All these concerns were discussed under a theme which was named, Students' Concerns in Diyarbakir.

This study was done at the EHIDER, which is a non-profit organization known as Reading Halls. One of the main goals of Reading Halls in this region is to reach out to the economically disadvantaged student and provide academic support and social activities. Based on the gathered data, Reading Halls' curriculum and schedule, their environment, and academic and social activities are discussed. Furthermore the charity organizations that the teachers and families organize to support economically disadvantaged students are represented under the theme named the Reading Halls in Diyarbakir.

Reading Halls are a transition oriented program and after the eighth grade, they keep in touch with students and give them guidance in order to make high school selections for each

student. Furthermore, they assist the students in high school with Youth Center programs, which are similar to the programs offered by Reading Halls. West implementation is a program which is done with EHIDER's sister organizations in the western cities. Students who are eligible to get to high school in the western cities are offered a scholarship that covers all education fees. All of these issues related to transition were discussed under the 'Role of Reading Halls within the Transition' theme.

Teacher and family collaboration is a very important component of the program and it is also another theme of the study. Teachers try to develop strong relationships with the parents and solve some of students' academic and behavioral problems by working collaboratively with the families. Family visits and meetings have a significant role in developing strong relationships with parents. Families are also informed about students' academic and behavioral development. In order to inform the parents, family visits, weekly meetings with the parents, and conferences are arranged by the teachers.

All the programs that teachers used in the Reading Halls are aimed to improve students' behavioral development such as book readings programs and social activities. Teachers play a pivotal role and it is significant for them that they have a strong relationship with students as well. Their role on students' behavioral development is discussed under the fifth theme, Role of Reading Halls on Students' Behavioral Development.

Table 5.

Relationships between Research Questions and Themes

Research Questions	Themes
1. In what ways do prep-schools play a role in the southeastern region of Turkey for students who are at risk for poor academic and social outcomes?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Concerns about students in the Southeastern Region of Turkey</li> <li>• Reading Halls in Diyarbakir</li> </ul>
1a. What is the teachers' perception and role on the students' social and behavioral development during the transition period?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reading Halls in Diyarbakir</li> <li>• Teacher Family Collaboration</li> <li>• The Role of Reading Halls on Behavioral Development</li> </ul>
1b. What type of programs is offered for students' academic and behavioral development?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reading Halls in Diyarbakir</li> <li>• The Role of Prep Schools during Transition</li> </ul>
2. In what ways do the prep-schools serve economically disadvantaged and ethnically diverse students in Southeastern Turkey?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reading Halls in Diyarbakir</li> <li>• The Role of Prep Schools during Transition</li> <li>• Teacher Family Collaboration</li> </ul>

The role of Prep schools during the transition from middle to high school in the Southeastern region of Turkey was expected to be understood with all these themes. Also, the two main and two subordinate research questions are answered based on these themes. The first research question is about the role of prep schools in the Southeastern region of Turkey for students who are at risk for poor academic and social outcomes, and the first theme and second theme will relate to the first research question. One of the subordinate questions is about the teachers' perception of and role in the students' academic and behavioral development. The second, fourth, and fifth themes are related to this research question. The other subordinate question is aimed at understanding the prep schools' programs and instructions for students' academic and behavioral development. The second and third themes responded to this question. The second question was regarding the prep-schools function with economically disadvantaged and ethnically diverse students in Southeastern Turkey. The third, fourth and partially second

themes are related to this research question. The relation between the research questions and the themes are represented in the Table 5. Chapter Five provides a discussion of all of the responses to the research questions.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **DISCUSSION**

In this chapter the responses to the research questions will be discussed. Furthermore, recommendations for the Reading Halls and the prep schools based on Ellerbrock's et al. (2015) findings about developmentally responsive transition from middle to High School in the United States, which is used as a conceptual framework for the study, will be represented. Recommendations on how to provide a better transition focused prep school in the Southeastern region of Turkey will be discussed. Finally, limitations of the study and future directions for research are presented.

The purpose of the study was to investigate the role that a small sample of prep-schools play in meeting the academic and behavioral needs of students who are at risk for poor academic and social outcomes as they transition from middle school to high school. The study examined the perspectives of teachers, students and families about their experiences with prep schools. Ellerbrock's et al. (2015) study is used as a conceptual framework for this study.

Ellerbrock et al. (2015) suggest certain activities based on the revealed qualitative data in order to provide developmentally responsive middle to high schools transition. The activities that they suggest addressed students' procedural, social, and academic concerns. For procedural concerns Ellerbrock et al. (2015) recommends field trips to high schools, informational sessions for high schools, and open house for high schools. Also, Ellerbrock et al. (2015) also described a practice as team time capsule and send-off for eighth graders in order to address students' social concerns. Moreover, they recommended tutoring for academic concerns and transition course at

ninth grade for academic and social concerns. I have used Ellerbrock's (2015) findings about transition programs as a conceptual framework and believe that with some modifications this framework can be used to develop more effective programs for students in Diyarbakir. To examine my assumptions about applicability of this framework, the following research questions are investigated.

### **Responses of the Research Questions**

**1. In what ways do prep schools play a role in the Southeastern region of Turkey for students who are at risk for poor academic and social outcomes?** With the heavy political atmosphere and conflict in the Southeastern region of Turkey, students need to face very unique and difficult problems at an early age. The conflict affects students in different ways. First of all, the political problems in the region increase the risk of illegalization and the risk of negative attitudes. Also, the lack of quality education is affected in a negative way because sometimes schools are forced to close. Experienced teachers do not want to stay in the region, and when they find a better option, they go to western cities. In spite of these problems, education is one of the biggest needs for the people in the Southeastern region. Most people in society believe that education is the only way to rescue their students' lives because there is a widely held assumption that uneducated people are likely to join PKK and engage in illegal action. Most of the participants mentioned this point.

“Bir polis amirinin sözü vardı. Bir okuma salonu iki karakola bedeldir diye çünkü biz aslında o bizim kötü dediğimiz alışkanlıkların önünü kesmiş oluyoruz. Yani musluğunu kapatmış oluyoruz çünkü çocuklar bize gelince, o çocuklar bizde zaman harcaşınca, bizi görünce, o tür alışkanlıklara meyil göstermeyince, onların alışkanlıklarını kesmiş oluyorduk.”

“A police commander has a quote that a Reading Hall is equal to two police stations because we actually cut out the attitudes that we say are bad. I mean we turn off the water fountain because when the students come to us, when these kids spend time with

us, when they see us, when they do not learn those types of attitudes, we changed their attitudes.”

Another point about the education in the Southeastern region is about the nationwide exam at the end of the eighth grade. Students need to take a nationwide exam and the result of the exam will affect their future. The problem is that the competition among the students is not equal because sometimes schools cannot be opened regularly in Diyarbakir due to the conflict. However, at the end of the day they take the same exam. Consequently, education has a very significant role. It is not just important for increasing students' knowledge, but also their future. Even so, most families do not see a good future for their children.

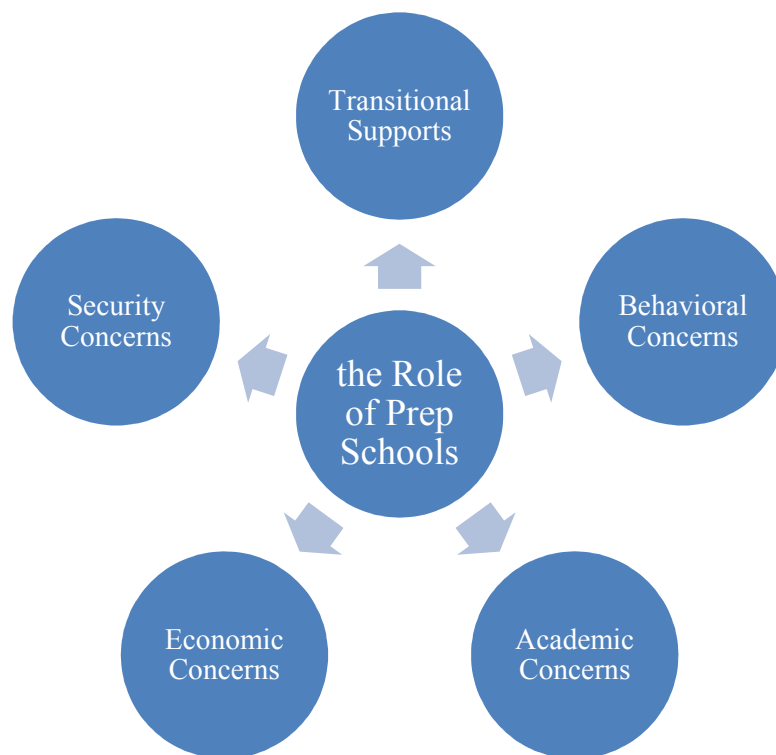
In this environment not all prep schools, but prep school type non-profit Reading Halls have a significant role. I do not say this for prep schools because the fees of the prep schools are very expensive for many families in Diyarbakir. However, the Reading Halls are non-profit and the only fees that they ask from their students are for the books and documents. Therefore, Reading Hall type transition programs are very important for the people in Diyarbakir.

Reading Halls organize activities to address five main concerns. These concerns are security concerns, economic concerns, behavioral concerns, academic concerns, and procedural concerns. Reading halls try to create a safe with environment. They develop a strong relationship and work collaboratively with families. Also, teachers engage students with academic work and social activities in order to keep them in a safe environment.

Reading Halls are non-profit organizations and their main focuses are economically disadvantaged students. In addition, teachers, students, and families sometimes organize charity events at the Reading Halls to help students who are economically disadvantaged. For behavioral concerns, three factors have an important role. One factor is role modeling; that is teachers try to be a good model for students and create a safe environment in which students are



protected from negative behaviors and attitudes. Social activities are aimed to increase students' social and behavioral developments. Moreover, with conferences families are informed about the risk of drug use and negative attitudes. Students take courses and tutoring for academic support. Also, Reading Halls have etude programs and study camps in order to provide study environments in which students can study. In terms of procedural concerns, teachers help students to select and register for high schools.



**Figure 6.** The Role of Prep Schools on the Southeastern Region of Turkey

**1a. What is the teachers' perception and role in the students' academic and behavioral development?** Teachers at Reading Hall have two main focuses which are the students' academic and behavioral development. For academic development, they have courses, tutoring, study sessions, study camps, social activities, and book reading programs which are designed in order to develop students' behavior. In this environment, teachers' are to be good role models for the students.

From the teacher's perspective, being a good role model is very important because students learn from teacher's behavior. Teachers spend as much time as possible with the students. During this time, they study, play, and eat together. Therefore, they can observe their teacher and find a chance to learn about some behaviors as sharing, helping, and respecting to each other. Also, teachers sometimes need to teach and remind students about personal hygiene such as brushing their teeth and washing their hands.

Teachers meet with their students weekly and they give lectures about some moral values and religious knowledge. Also, teachers ask their students to read books which are mostly related to religion and moral values of the religion. Teachers follow up the students' readings and let students get used to reading books regularly. Reading is very important for the teachers because most of the attitudes and values are transmitted through books. Sometimes they organize an exam, and sometimes they give gifts to the student who has read the most in order to keep students focused on reading.

From an academic perspective, teachers believe in study and practice with sample questions. Because of this, the first thing they ask their students is how many questions they have solved for a certain topic. This is a very important practice for the nationwide exam because the question types are similar. Especially for the eighth grade student, solving questions

is the best way to prepare them for the exam from the teachers' perspective. Other than in eighth grade, they follow the public school curriculum and help students to understand topic better.

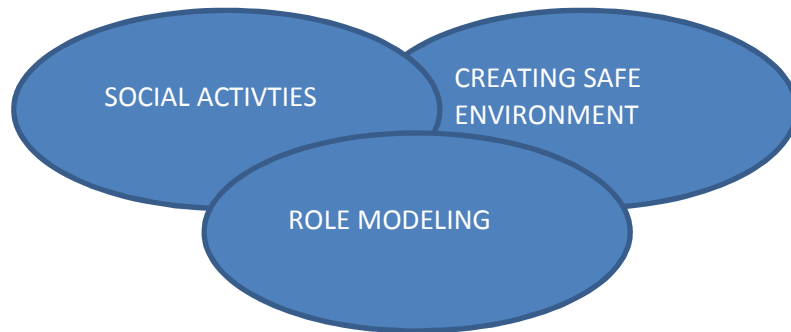
**1b. What type of programs is offered for students' academic and behavioral development?** Every activity in the prep-school is planned for protecting students against negative attitudes and for behavioral development. To protect the kids from the negative environment and to promote behavioral development, Reading Halls focus on three main issues. These are, (1) creating a positive environment around the students, (2) engaging students with extracurricular activities, and (3) teaching the students moral and religious values.

Reading Halls have an activity room and in that room students have the opportunity to play video-games, table tennis, chess, air hockey etc. They also provide internet which is not easy to access in that region for those who live in poverty. The program is designed to keep students connected with the teachers and the mentors because mainly they want to provide a safe environment.

Another important program to protect students from the negative attitudes and the environment is Bati uygulaması (West implementation). After middle school, the students who can handle living away from their hometown will be offered a scholarship which covers their education expenses, transportation and shelter needs. Students receive similar programs in western cities to these they had in Diyarbakir. The main goal of the program is to help students to get a better education and take them out of the negative atmosphere.

Even good coursework is aimed to protect the students from the negative environment and to engage them with some positive activities such as social activities and home staying programs. All the activities in the prep-school are done to achieve these goals in terms of a behavioral perspective. However, activities are sometimes designed to reach more than one

target as well. For example, social activities are mainly done to engage students with good friends and teachers, but at the same time the activities provide a safe environment for the student.



**Figure 7.** Main components of students' behavior development

**2. In what ways do the prep-schools function with economically disadvantaged and ethnically diverse students in Southeastern Turkey?** Economic problems and ethnic problems are related to each other. Sur district in Diyarbakir has the lowest economic status when it is compared to other regions in the city. At the same time, the Kurdish language is more actively spoken in the Sur than other places. Therefore, there is a connection between the economic and ethnic problems. Reading Halls mainly focus on economic problems.

Obviously, the major economic support is free education in these institutions. The Reading Halls have very critical functions in the poor region of Diyarbakir and the Southeastern side of Turkey because public education is not as good as in other regions in Turkey. Therefore, students need academic support, and it is not possible to provide academic support without paying a big amount of money. Since the prep school crackdown, public schools offer a weekend program which is mainly focused on the nationwide exam. However, the public

schools weekend programs for the nationwide exam are not good enough in the southeastern region because, as mentioned earlier, the quality of schools are not very good. Also, because of the conflict, teachers do not stay a long time and mostly inexperienced teachers work at the public schools. Therefore, as one of the parent participants mentioned, the public schools weekend courses are not helpful for the students.

“Sen götürüyorsun bu okullara, bu Cumartesi Pazar ek ders veriyorlar ya, ekders nerde veriyor? Vallahi vermiyor ben gitmişim. Bizim çocukları götürüyüm kaydettireyim ek ders versin. Yav nerde ek ders veriyor? Hocalar gidiyor bahçede sigara içiyor. Oradan bilmem ne yapıyor. Bilgisayarın başında şey yapıyor. Ya vereceği bir çocuğa diyor al bu çöz ya bu yaprağı oku.Okadardır. Başka birşey yok.”

“You take your child to schools, they have additional course at Saturday and Sunday. Where do they give it? I swear to God they don't give anything. I went there. I wanted to register my kids to receive courses. I mean where do they give it? Teachers go and smoke cigarette at the garden. They are doing something. They are on computer. I mean he/she says solve this sample questions, read this sheet. That is it. There is nothing more.”

Different non-profit organizations try to offer these types of prep school programs, and in this environment providing courses for students from low economic backgrounds is very important because Reading Halls provide an opportunity for these students to receive supportive courses.

Students and their families are economically supported with the charity organizations and scholarships (west implementation). As mentioned earlier, there are very poor neighborhoods and most of the families do not have a chance to provide for their students' basic needs for education such as books, documents, and backpacks. These charity organizations are very effective in reaching out to these families. However, after the prep school crackdown and finishing the Social Support (SODES) project, these types of organizations are less active than they were a few years ago. All these programs and organizations are very important because from many participants' perspectives, education is the way of solving problems including ethnic problems. One of the teacher participants gave a description about the students in the region and explained the Reading Halls' role as follows:

“Buradaki neslin şöyle bir sıkıntısı var. unutulmuş ve itilmiş bir nesil var. ama kim tarafından? Eğitimli kesim tarafından unutulmuş bir nesil var. Unutulmuş bir nesilde ne oluyor? Bir süre sonra ya canavarlaşıyor, ya duyarsızlaşıyor.... Rol modelle karşılaşmadıkları için ve onları uygun yönlendiren herhangi bir öğretmenle ablayla abiyle karşılaşmadığı için tamamen yanlış kararlar alan çocuklar. Bu onların işte yanlış kararlarının neticesinde ortaya çıkan kaos var....Dediğim gibi o dönemde unutilan terk edilen işte yanlış yönlendirilen nesillere sahip çıkıyoruz.”

“This generation has a problem like this. There is a forgotten and out casted generation. But from who? There is a forgotten generation by the educated people. What happens to the forgotten generation? After a while they are alienated and becoming desensitized. There are children who made wrong decision since they didn't meet with a role model, they didn't meet with a teacher, a sister, or brother who can guide them appropriately. As a result of these wrong decisions this chaos occurs.... As I said, we are taking care of these children who are forgotten and manipulated in to the wrong directions.”

Therefore, even though the Reading Halls do not have a specific program for ethnically diverse students, it can be understood from the quote that from the teachers' perspective education is one of the ways to solve some of the ethnic issues in the long run. In addition, teachers try to use an accurate language which would not hurt students from different ethnicities.

### **Recommendation for Prep Schools**

Prep schools played a major part in the Turkish education system. Students take courses from prep schools until the end of elementary school. The nationwide examinations were changed three times in the last 10 years but the prep schools were able to keep pace with this system. In 2013, the government decided to change the system one more time. However, this time the government decided to shut down all the prep schools and asked them to either close the prep school or convert them to a private school. After this regulation, some prep schools directed their investment to the private schools. Some of them shut down, and some of them took it to the court. In 2015 the Supreme Court decided that the regulation is unconstitutional (Aktas & Kasap, 2015, August 30).

During these three years from 2013 to 2016, there was an unclear situation about the status of the prep schools because no one could say anything about the future. On the one hand,

the Ministry of Education plans their future based on the changes that they make and they open weekend courses in public schools (Kasap, 2015, July, 11). Some prep schools continue to enroll students as if they will not be closed. While these discussions and changes were happening, prep schools were economically damaged.

In the Southeastern Region of Turkey, prep school type etude centers known as Reading Halls and youth centers, were becoming popular before the prep school crackdown. These programs were support by Social Support Project (SODES), and after the regulation about the prep schools the government cancelled the project related to prep schools and prep school type programs. At the end of the day, a big gap exists because of prep schools.

According to Akos and Galassi (2004), students have three main concerns during the transitions: academic, procedural and social concerns. In addition to these three concerns, people in Diyarbakir have economic and security concerns regarding their students. Economic issues are a big factor for transitional problems. As Anderson et. al. (2000) mentioned, students who have a low socio economic background are more likely to have transitional problems and economically disadvantaged students have more risk to dropout at high schools (Benner & Wang, 2014). Moreover, families and teachers have security concerns about students and because of the security concerns, students do not have enough opportunity to have academic and social activities. Prep schools may transform into programs that support students' transition from middle to high school. In this way, the gap that occurred after the prep school crackdown will be filled with a better version of prep schools. Also, more supportive programs which address students' concerns during the transition, can be developed.

Students in Southeastern region of Turkey grow up in a very unique environment. Students have to deal with all the transitional problems. At the same time they need to take a

nationwide exam in which everything about their education depends upon. Moreover, there is a big conflict going on the Southeastern region, and specifically in Diyarbakir, so students in face the problem that the conflict brought. In this environment, education is critically important because there is a high risk of marginalization and illegalization for the students. Because of this, education has a critical role as educational institutions provide an opportunity for educational development and improvement for the region (Davies, 2003). Therefore, education is not just important for the individuals, but also for the community as well because education stays at the center of most of the problem, and most of the families believe that if the children get education their future will be saved. However, public schools have many problems in that region. Students need to have well prepared support programs during the transition years, but public schools cannot provide this program. To meet the needs of students during transition from middle to high school, different types of groups and organizations can provide transitional services (Queen, 2013). Therefore, non-profit organizations in the Southeastern region of Turkey can offer transition programs instead of the public schools.

According to Anderson et al. (2000), transition programs need to have two major elements during the transition - preparedness and support. Prep schools and organizations can provide some activities that address students' preparedness and support. The transition program that Ellerbrock et al. (2015) recommends can be applied to Southeastern region of Turkey with some modifications. Because of the cultural and environmental differences, students in the Southeastern region of Turkey have some priorities. The programs which are developed for these students should further emphasize these priorities to provide a better transition program in the Southeastern of Turkey. These priorities are security, economic, behavioral and academic concerns. Since there are some major problems in the region, some of the concerns take place



more than others. Therefore, very few procedural concerns are mentioned by the participants in the study, and those procedural concerns are about the high school selections after the nationwide exam and registration. These issues are related to the nationwide exam and are different than the procedural concerns that the literature suggests.

According to Smith, et. al. (2008), parents concerns are more about safety and social issues than about academics. This study supported these findings. Families and teachers have security concerns. Therefore, creating safe environments for the students is very important because when people do not feel safe in a region, then security concerns become the major issue for the students. Safe environments can be educational intuitions. Davies (2003) stressed that supporting education in a conflict zone is very important because schools and educational institutions provide normalization and space for childhood. When families and children feel secure in a place, then children can do activities and play games as all children need to at their ages, and they find a place which provides a normalization effect and decreases the stress. The findings of this study supports Davies' (2003) point about supporting education in a conflict zone.

The southeastern region have major problems that come from the past, and educational problems are one of them. Increasing the quality of education might not solve the entire problem in the short term. However, in the long run, quality education will make a positive impact on many issues in that region. Security problems cannot be solved with a transition program, but a safe environment can be created with the prep schools and family collaboration. Since collaboration develops strong relations with the teachers and families, and teacher/family collaborations develop reliance among the teacher, family and students, families begin to have a more supportive role with their children which is very important for students' transition. From

the students' perspective, receiving encouragement by positive reinforcement motivates them for academic success (Anderson et. al., 2000; Newman et. al., 2007, Chen & Gregory, 2010; Barber & Olsen, 2004; Uvas & Mckeviti, 2013). Thus, when the family allows their students to attend prep schools they feel more confidence, and children can spend more time because they know that their families trust the teachers and prep schools. In addition, students have a better middle school to high school transition because their family plays an important and supportive role. Therefore, addressing activities for increasing the teacher/family collaboration will be significantly important for the region in meeting students' needs related to security concerns.

Economically, southeastern cities are one of least favorable regions in Turkey. Therefore, economic problems and difficulties should be taken into consideration by the prep schools that provide transitional support from middle to high school. These types of programs can be supported by the government as SODES or nonprofit organizations can make an investment. In this way, economically disadvantaged students get a chance to have a fluid transition from middle to high school.

The last modification is related to academic concerns. In Turkey, schools have an intense curriculum and at the end of the middle school students need to complete two nationwide exams. Competition is huge in these exams and students feel the pressure. That is the main reason why the prep schools became very popular. Therefore, transition programs should address academic support specifically in Diyarbakir more than any other place. Students in Diyarbakir are ethnically Kurdish and their native language is different than Turkish. They learn Turkish during elementary school, but because there are no special program for Turkish language learners, these students already have disadvantages when compared to students in the western cities. Also, the quality of the education is not as good as in western cities. Moreover, ninth graders have more

instance coursework. These findings are parallel to the arguments of Neild, Stoner-Eby, and Furstenberg (2008). They point out that students who are from urban areas are more likely to have academic difficulties in the ninth grade because of the weak academic background in elementary school and more intense courses at the ninth grade level. In addition to all of these problems, education is seen as a way of rescue from the economic problems and the risk of illegalization in the region from the teachers and families perspective. Therefore, academic activities such as supportive courses and study sessions can serve as part of the transition programs in the Southeastern region of Turkey.

Because of the educational and historical background, it is very unlikely to make transition programs part of the public schools in the Southeastern region of Turkey because teachers have limited experience and do not stay for a long time. In this school environment it is very difficult to manage a program that takes several years to implement. Therefore, the following recommendations can be considered for Reading Halls (etude centers in general) and prep schools which support students' transition from middle to high schools.

- **Environment and Facilities:** Students need to spend as much time as possible in transition oriented prep schools especially in the Southeastern region of Turkey because the families and students feel themselves comfortable and secure in these places. Therefore, the environment of the prep schools should allow students to spend time without getting bored and wasting their time. These places should meet the students' needs and should have enough facilities to provide an academic and social environment.
- **Conferences and Seminars:** Increasing awareness about education is very important for students and teachers in the Southeastern region of Turkey. Prep schools need to inform families about the nationwide exam, how students should study, and the important factors

about choosing high schools. Also, they need to inform families about some of the risks that their children may face at the schools, or outside, such as the risk of using drugs and the risk of illegalization. Conferences and seminars can be organized to inform families and students about these issues.

- **Information Sessions about High Schools:** The nationwide exams have a heavy role in students' educational life. The decision that they will make about their high school will affect the students' entire educational career because high schools are divided into disciplines such as science, health profession, or social science. When making a decision, middle school students should be aware of the differences of these schools so information sessions should be organized by the prep schools.
- **High School Trips:** The environment of the high school is different than that at middle school. To be able to adapt to the high school culture and not to have difficulty at the beginning of high school, high school trips should be done at the end of middle school. This program can be organized by the schools as well and prep schools can work collaboratively with the schools to make these engagements.
- **Ninth Grade Academic Support:** Students in Turkey have intense study time during middle school because of the nationwide exam. When they begin high school, they would like to have more relaxation time. However, at ninth grade the curriculum is more intense and heavy than in middle school. Most of the students have academic problems in the first year of the high school. Therefore, transition programs need to support students academically at the ninth grade with tutoring and courses.

## **Limitations**

While this study makes a contribution on the role that prep-schools play in meeting the academic and behavioral needs of students who are at risk for poor academic and social outcomes as they transition from middle school to high school, it has some limitations.

First of all, when this study was done in Diyarbakir, there was a huge conflict going on at the Sur district. Most of the people had concerns about their future. Therefore, participants did not want to sign anything and they do not want to share their thoughts. Some of the potential participants agreed to participate, but when I asked them to sign the consent forms they decided not to take part in this study. I think there was fear that to say something against the PKK or the government could give them trouble. Related to this issue, the participants of the study sometimes did not share everything that they experienced. For this reason, some interviews ended too quickly. In this study, 20 participants agreed to respond to the interview questions. However, six participants' interviews took around 15 minutes. Even though these participants did not withdraw their consents and the data that they shared were included in the study, I could not collect a richer data. Therefore, the environment during data collection limits the quality of the findings and the responses to the interview.

When I was in Diyarbakir to collect data for the study, Sur district had been under curfew for approximately three months. Public schools and prep schools were closed during that time as well. Sur district was struggling with poverty and PKK was very influential. For this study, Sur district was one of the important places. However, because of the conflict, all the prep schools were temporarily closed. Thus, I did not have a chance to observe in that region. Even though I have teacher, mentor and family participants from that region, I could not interview with the students. Therefore, this is another limitation for the study.

After 2013, the future of the prep schools and Reading Halls are unclear. The government made a change about the regulation and the Turkish Supreme Court decided that the regulation is against the constitution (Aktas & Kasap, 2015, August 30). When I began the study, people did not have any idea about what happen in regards to prep schools. The unclear future of the prep schools and Reading Halls affected the programs. Some families did not send their students to the prep schools and public schools began weekend programs. Therefore, the number of the students in the Reading Halls decreased and this situation limited the study in order to better observe application of Reading Halls.

Because of the conflict at the Sur, thousands of families moved out from that region and they either live in one of their relative's houses or live in hotel type places. Also, prep school teachers needed to move to another Reading Hall, so even though they have great experiences about Reading Hall and transition, they were in a new environment. Therefore, getting a deeper understanding about the role of the teachers and their relationship with the families and students was not possible. Thus, this was another limitation for the study.

The final limitation of the study is about the time frame for collecting data in the field. When I was in there, Diyarbakir was announced to be one of the unsafe cities by the US Embassy. For that reason, I had to leave the city. I spent almost one month in Diyarbakir. Also, some of the activities that the participants mentioned could not be observed because of the arranged schedule such as family visits. Teachers mentioned that they either finished their family visit, or they will visit next semester. Therefore, spending more time would be better in terms of gathering better observations and data.

As a result, this study has some limitations. In a more normal environment and time frame, the role of the prep school from middle to high school in the Southeastern Turkey could be understood with much richer data.

### **Future Directions for the Research**

This study investigated the role that a small sample of prep-schools play in meeting the academic and behavioral needs of students who are at risk for poor academic and social outcomes as they transition from middle school to high school. The study examined the perspectives of teachers, students and families about their experiences with prep schools.

In the future more research can be done about the transition specifically from middle to high school. First of all, after the prep school crackdown, it is important to research how these changes effect students. Is the students' academic success increased? Or do the programs which are used in public schools fill the gaps that occur because of the prep school shut down? These questions should be answered through academic research in Turkey.

The ultimate goal of the transition is to integrate students into society. Middle school to high school transition is very important, but it is the first step of this ultimate goal. Therefore, when we focus on the Southeastern region of Turkey, it is important to investigate the effectiveness of the prep schools from middle school to high school, and need to understand how effective these programs are in terms of integrating students into society. Also, the role of transition programs from high school to university is as important as middle to high school transition. Therefore, another study topic would be to explore the role of prep schools which are focused on high school students in the Southeastern region of Turkey.

## **Conclusion**

Because of the nature of human beings, adolescence is the time when big physical and psychological changes occur. This time is a very critical period for all students because the situation brings some difficulties. Also, students need to deal with the difficulties related to transition to high school. Many students decrease their academic achievement and have some difficulties in adapting to the new environment. Because of all the risk factors and stressors, students sometimes develop undesirable behaviors (Barber & Olsen, 2004). In addition to all of these factors, in the Southeastern part of Turkey students need to deal with heavy political environment and conflict. Therefore, it is a very critical period for the students in terms of their academic and behavioral development, and it is essential to prepare them for higher education.

Prep schools in the Turkish education system have been a hot topic of discussion since November 2013. In 2014, the government decided to shut down all prep schools which are private and an important part the Turkish education system. Most of the students go to prep schools from middle schools through high school. Even though the Supreme Court found the changes against the constitution, the future of the prep schools and Reading Halls are still unclear. However, with these unclear situations all the prep schools and Reading Halls are affected negatively.

In the Southeastern part of Turkey the Etude Centers (mostly known as Reading Halls, and Youth Centers in that region) are playing a very important role because the region and its people have been struggling with many difficulties, and students have security concerns because of the conflict in the region. Also, due to social and historical challenges, southeastern Turkey has high poverty. In these difficult conditions, students might need supportive programs for their social and academic development because, as the literature and this qualitative study suggest,



academic and behavioral development are related to each other and academic problems increase the risk of behavioral problems. However, the government of Turkey's decision about prep schools make the situation more difficult, not just for prep schools, but for all of the transition programs. There are a very limited number of studies about prep schools and transition programs in Turkey. More qualitative and quantitative studies are needed to get a better understanding about the role and effects of the prep-schools.

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## Appendix A: IRB Approval



RESEARCH INTEGRITY AND COMPLIANCE  
Institutional Review Boards, FWA No. 00001669  
12901 Bruce B. Downs Blvd., MDC035 • Tampa, FL 33612-4795  
(813) 974-5638 • FAX (813) 974-7091

March 14, 2016

Mucahit Kocak  
Teaching and Learning  
Tampa, FL 33612

RE: **Expedited Approval for Initial Review**

IRB#: Pro00025184

Title: The Role of Prep Schools in the Middle to High School Transition of Students in Southeastern Turkey

**Study Approval Period: 3/12/2016 to 3/12/2017**

Dear Mr. Kocak:

On 3/12/2016, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed and **APPROVED** the above application and all documents contained within, including those outlined below.

**Approved Item(s):**

**Protocol Document(s):**

[PROTOCOL.docx](#)

**Consent/Assent Document(s)\*:**

[Assent of Children to Participate in Research.docx.pdf](#)

[Consent to Parent and Parental Permission.pdf](#)

[Informed Consent for Mentors.docx.pdf](#)

[Informed Consent for Teachers.docx.pdf](#)

[Turkish assent of children form.pdf](#)

[Turkish consent form for mentors.pdf](#)

[Turkish consent form for teachers.pdf](#)

[turkish consent to participate in research parental.pdf](#)

\*Please use only the official IRB stamped informed consent/assent document(s) found under the

"Attachments" tab. Please note, these consent/assent document(s) are only valid during the approval period indicated at the top of the form(s).

It was the determination of the IRB that your study qualified for expedited review which includes activities that (1) present no more than minimal risk to human subjects, and (2) involve only procedures listed in one or more of the categories outlined below. The IRB may review research through the expedited review procedure authorized by 45CFR46.110. The research proposed in this study is categorized under the following expedited review category:

(6) Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes.

(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

Study involves children and falls under 45 CFR 46.404: Research not involving more than minimal risk.

As the principal investigator of this study, it is your responsibility to conduct this study in accordance with IRB policies and procedures and as approved by the IRB. Any changes to the approved research must be submitted to the IRB for review and approval via an amendment. Additionally, all unanticipated problems must be reported to the USF IRB within five (5) calendar days.

We appreciate your dedication to the ethical conduct of human subject research at the University of South Florida and your continued commitment to human research protections. If you have any questions regarding this matter, please call 813-974-5638.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "John A. Schinka, Ph.D.".

John Schinka, Ph.D., Chairperson  
USF Institutional Review Board