

# A Source of Inspiration for Attaining the Quality Standards in Early Childhood Education: *QRIS (Quality Rating and Improvement System)*\*

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## Abstract

Awareness being experienced in the world while the fact that the early childhood education is significant is supported by the research, enabled focus on access to early education, equal opportunities, and the necessity of education quality. In this context, while raising the quality in early childhood education it is also essential to construct standards as a framework. It is possible to see the implementations through the quality standards in Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) in the United States. Although, QRIS has emerged in America, and has been a source of inspiration to many countries in the world, in different states of USA, it is seen that the frame of QRIS is approached in different ways. In this sense, the QRIS applications in North Carolina, which has made too much effort in QRIS for many years and still continue to its efforts, and which is one of the model states. This research aims to present QRIS in the state of North Carolina as an example of a systematic approach for attaining the quality in early childhood education. Research is handled as a literature review. This review is conducted through official web sites of the organizations which work for the quality of early childhood education in USA and in the state of North Carolina, policy reports of these organizations and the research articles about QRIS. Results of the reviews will provide a presentation of a specific implementation in the world.

**Key words:** Early childhood education, quality in education, Quality Rating and Improvement System, QRIS, United States, Turkey

## Öz

Dünyada erken çocukluk eğitiminin önemine yönelik olarak yaşanan farkındalık, erken eğitime erişim, fırsat eşitlikleri ve kaliteli erken eğitime yönelik araştırmalarla desteklenmesini sağlamıştır. Bu bağlamda, erken çocukluk eğitiminin kalitesini, kalite standartlarını da bir çerçeve olarak yapılandırmak önemlidir. Bu standart çerçevesi uygulamasını Amerika Birleşik Devletlerinde uygulanmakta olan Kalite Değerlendirme ve Geliştirme Sistemlerinde (QRIS) görmek mümkündür. QRIS, ABD’de doğmuş ve dünyada pek çok ülkeye ilham kaynağı olmuş bir yaklaşım olmakla beraber, ABD içerisindeki farklı eyaletlerde, uygulamaların farklılaştığı dikkat çekmektedir. Bu anlamda, Kuzey Karolina eyaletinde yürütülen QRIS uygulamaları uzun yıllardır devam etmekte ve pek çok eyalete örnek teşkil etmektedir. Bu araştırma, erken çocukluk eğitimi kalitesini geliştirmede sistematik bir yaklaşım olan QRIS’in Kuzey Karolina eyaletindeki uygulamalarını tanıtmayı amaçlamaktadır. Araştırma, bir alanyazın taramasıdır. Bu tarama ABD ve Kuzey Karolina’da erken çocukluk eğitiminde kaliteyi artırmak için çalışan kuruluşların resmi internet sayfaları, bu kuruluşların politika raporları ve alanyazındaki QRIS’i irdeleyen bilimsel makalelerden faydalanılarak yürütülmüştür. Bulgular, dünyadaki özgün uygulamalardan birinin tanıtılmasına yardımcı olacaktır.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** Erken çocukluk eğitimi, eğitimde kalite, Kalite Değerlendirme ve Geliştirme Sistemi, Amerika Birleşik Devletleri, Türkiye

## Introduction

### *The importance of early childhood education and attaining its quality*

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In terms of growing up, maturation, and developmental progress of the child, early childhood period is a critical period with short and long term effects. Therefore, if this period is efficient, there will be individual and social gains. Early childhood education enables individuals to start their life by laying foundations of their physical and psychological health, and as well by raising the quality of life in the long run. Life quality of the individual brings along quality in terms of society, because even if healthy and quality start to live looks as if only relating individuals, as a matter of fact, in the long term, it also means a healthy society of welfare, and high education level. It is the social dimension of the early childhood education. Therefore, what is desired is to raise awareness of the societies towards early childhood education, attaching significance to this critical period, and making effort for quality running of early childhood period. Quality education processes bring on the agenda the practices in terms of quality. Awareness being experienced in the world while the fact that the early childhood education is significant is supported by the researches, enabled focus on access to early education, equal opportunities, and the necessity of education quality. Developments triggered the efficient extension of education (Culkin, 2000; Dahlberg, Moss and Pence, 2007; Wesley and Buysse, 2010).

Every society is obliged to fulfill its development in economic, social, political, cultural, and in particular in educational terms in line with its own conditions, with the purpose of maintaining its presence, and to establish a strong structure for its future. However, among the aforementioned spheres of development, the most vital one is the education, because if a country builds up its education system wrongly, it has to face many unfavorable outcomes in the long run. This is one of the basic problems of undeveloped and developing countries. Like every system, education system is also a product of historical, political, cultural and economic infrastructure of the society it belongs to. As a result, it is possible to assess each education system based on its own community. However, it does not mean that every community has proper education practices. Education is the system yielding results in the longest term. Unsuitable practices lead to loss of time, money, energy and particularly loss of human in society in the long term (Ada and Baysal, 2009).

Education systems in the world that are operating effectively, most of the time serve an example to other countries. These examples can be a source of inspiration sometimes to adaptations, and sometimes to development of new education systems. In case the societies know their structure well, and research well the systems that they are taking as an example, there is no obstacle for conducting successful applications. In this sense, Quality Rating and Improvement System - QRIS is introduced in general in this study, which is a quality improvement system in an early childhood education to serve as an example, and which has emerged in USA.

### **Aim of the Study**

In this study, it was aimed to transmit the “QRIS – Quality Rating and Improvement System”, which is being applied throughout the United States of America, and which is a system aiming at attaining and improving quality in early childhood education.

QRIS has emerged in America, and has been a source of inspiration to many countries in the world. But even in the borders of USA, it is seen that the frame of QRIS is approached in different ways. In USA, which is in a federal structure, which has a multi – national population, which accommodates different ethnic roots and cultures in itself, it is possible to see different applications in different states. In this sense, QRIS applications in North Carolina are presented. NC has made too much effort in QRIS for many years and still continue to its efforts, and which is one of the model states.

## **Method**

This study is based on a literature review.

## **Data Collecting Process**

As it is also specified above, the study is a literature review, and within the scope of this research,

- Web sites of the organizations both national and in the North Carolina state, which make efforts aimed at improving the quality in early childhood education, and which work QRIS – focused;
- Research reports of the above – mentioned organizations;
- And articles scrutinizing QRIS in the body of literature have been utilized.

## **Findings**

A general frame has been presented about QRIS and its operation has been presented, by systematizing the information obtained from the resources. This frame has been discussed by collecting under the following titles:

- Improvement of the quality in early childhood education in United States of America;
- QRIS – Quality Rating and Improvement System;
- Organizations in the North Carolina state, aiming at improving quality in early childhood education, and their goals and objectives;
  - The North Carolina Division of Child Development and Early Education - DCDEE
  - Health and Human Services
  - Race to the Top - Early Learning Challenge
  - Child Care Services Association
    - TEACH
    - Child Care Wages Project
  - Child Care Resource and Referral Council
- Details of QRIS, which is being conducted in North Carolina: steps of obtaining Star Rated License (License System based on Star Rating).

### **1. Improvement of the Quality in United States of America**

In United States of America, importance of access to high – quality care and education services has become one of the most fundamental focus points of early childhood education policy in the country, together with the increase in the demand for quality education from the families. Throughout the country, research, especially in the last thirty years, and the growing awareness of the importance of early childhood experiences, have brought greater attention to the need for policies to improve the quality of care and education for children. Even if early education settings are called different names such as “child care”, “early childhood education” or “pre–school”, it is now widely recognized that children benefit from being subject to high quality care and education. Longitudinal research by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development has also revealed the society – oriented benefits of a high – quality early childhood education. Some of these are increased education level, increase in the rate of employment, and positive outcomes in areas such as mental health. In light of all this research, the need for increasing availability of high quality early education services has been realized, and there is an increasing call to make early education available to all children

(Buettner and Andrews, 2009; Heckman and Masterow, 2007; National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies, 2007; National Institute of Child Health and Human Development Early Child Care Research Network, 2000, 2003).

Despite all this awareness, early education has been one of the most informal and irregular education levels. Within time, together with recognition of the need for a systematic approach, multiple quality improvement efforts have arisen. The Head Start program, which was implemented in the year 1965, is the first official and widespread early childhood program in USA. Head Start, which targets disadvantaged children, has aimed to be against to deficiencies in children's lives. In addition, despite all the efforts of Head Start, inequalities of opportunity aimed at the disadvantaged children has continued in the country (Buettner and Andrews, 2009, pg. 44; Hatfield, Lower, Cassidy and Faldowski, 2014).

Together with these improvements, the need for high quality care and education experiences, has been perceived in the national policy of the country. State level license systems and national accreditation are the most widespread strategies aimed at increasing the quality in early childhood education. NAEYC (National Association for the Education of Young Children) and NACCRA (National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies) are among the leading institutions promoting accreditation studies as a mechanism to improve quality of early education programs (Buettner and Andrews, 2009). But accreditation takes too much time, aims at very high standards, and hence, costs more for programs. Therefore, it is very difficult for a family to send their children to an accredited institution to experience higher quality care because it costs more. Hence, involving in the accreditation systems and ensuring its continuity can be a difficult process.

### ***1.1. Quality Rating And Improvement System - QRIS***

Among the strategies of capturing and improving the quality, the most current one is the Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS), which is actual subject of this study. The QRIS movement, which started in early 1990s, is the mechanism aimed at ensuring and maintaining high – quality services in the field of early childhood education in the states. Mitchell (2005, pg. 4) provides the definition of QRIS as “a method which rates, improves and informs about the quality of early childhood education care and education applications”. Especially in the last ten years, monitoring of the early childhood education programs by means of this system is an important improvement. Although there are different rating systems in the states, generally QRIS rates the education environments of early education programs to create a productive system, aiming at professional improvement to result in improved child outcomes (Goffin and Barnett, 2014; Hestenes, Kintner-Duffy, Wang, La Paro, Mims, Crosby, Scott-Little, Cassidy, 2014; <https://qrisguide.acf.hhs.gov/index.cfm?do=qrisabout>). Boller and Maxwell (2014) on the other hand, have expressed that QRIS, which is a “change agent”, is a complicated rating tool which rates the quality of programs.

In a QRIS which operates efficiently, there are the following components (Source: <http://qrisnetwork.org/glossary>);

- Quality standards for programs and practitioners,
- Supports and an infrastructure to meet such standards,
- Monitoring and accountability systems to ensure compliance with quality standards,
- Ongoing financial assistance that is linked to meeting quality standards, and
- Engagement and outreach strategies.

Although still in the beginning phase in some states, QRIS applications continuing in many states are gradually improving, and gaining popularity. While there were just 14 in the year 2006, in the end of the year 2008, 36 states has a QRIS (Zellman, Perlman, Le and Setodji, 2008, pg. 31). At the moment, QRIS initiatives are ongoing in almost all states in USA. If we examine more current data, in 37 states QRIS is being applied at the state level; in 2 states, QRIS is being applied at the local level, in 7 states plans are being made in order to initiate QRIS applications; in 3 states a QRIS is being piloted; and in 1 state, a law to improve QRIS has been submitted (Hestenes et al., 2014).

When we look at the system as a whole, it can be said to be an integrated version of both certification and accreditation systems. Because, there are both the standards desired to be reached and there is certificate / license as an award in case of reaching to the aimed standards. But one of the most important problems is to conduct systematic studies aimed at this quality system, and increase its potential by developing strategies aimed at increasing productivity (Buettner and Andrews, 2009 ).

Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS), is a system which aims at improving the quality in early childhood education in favor of the children and their families, by means of activities and financial supports, which are supported with findings from program assessments. The word “System” is the most fundamental word of this formation. This system, which regards the quality as the outcome of a multi – directional structure and process, is not a one – time intervention or application. It has a structure which is spread over a long time, which aims at many outcomes, and which continues consistently. With this aspect, the system not only produces a result rating; but also gives information to the institution in relation to its current situation with formative rating method, and brings forward suggestions aimed at increasing the quality of the program.

Within the frame of QRIS, ratings of the programs based on empiric data are being made by means of “Environment Rating Scales” in many states. The Infant / Toddler Environment Rating Scale - Revised (ITERS – R), Early Childhood Environments Rating Scale - Revised (ECERS – R), The Family Child Care Environment Rating Scale - Revised (FCCERS – R), The School-Age Care Environment Rating Scale (SACERS) are among the leading and most frequently used rating scales (<http://ers.fpg.unc.edu/> ; Hestenes et al., 2014). As the names imply, they are environment rating scales with similar operation, developed for different age groups and programs. These scales aim at evaluating the “structure” aspect of the education environments. They provide concrete data regarding structural aspects of early education in determining the quality of the program.

The most frequently used one of these, is the Early Childhood Environments Rating Scale - Revised (ECERS – R). ECERS – R has been developed in USA, with the aim of ensuring that the schools can continuously improve their quality by providing their own ratings, and by seeing their strong and weak program aspects (Harms, Clifford and Cryer, 2005). This scale, which was revised in the year 2005, has been used in studies over the course of time as a rating of quality, and has become a loadstar to the institutions in making their policy and application decisions (La Paro, Thomason, Lower, Kintner-Duffy, Cassidy, 2012). But it is also a reality that there are few studies researching the relationship between the rating scores obtained from these scales and outcomes of the children (Buettner and Andrews, 2009).

Every state adopting QRIS has formed its own rating systems within this system. Ratings, most of which are made with the number of “stars”, differ from state to state (Boller, Paulsell, Del Grosso, Blair, Lundquist, Kassow, Kim and Raikes, 2014)

; Efforts about quality early childhood education have brought together the research and rating studies of QRIS systems. Determination of all the outcomes, the productivity of the system in improving program quality and especially child outcomes obtained from the system, is important from the viewpoint of improving the system. These studies which have started in the end of 1990s have brought together more full-scale efforts together with 2000s. With the support program named Race to the Top - Early Learning Challenge (RTT – ELC), scientific research will support the states in evaluating their QRIS systems and measuring their validity have begun to be reported. This formation is the result of a cooperation between USA Department of Education and USA Department of Health and Humanitarian Services. The formation which aims at equal opportunity, is a reward /incentive system aiming at all children benefitting from qualified education. The formation which especially aims at the children who have difficulty in reaching qualified education, and whose needs are at the top level, aims that the children in early childhood can fill in the blanks with their peers. In accordance with these aims, the following fields are focused on and rewards are given:

- Successful state systems
- High – quality and evaluable programs
- Increasing the early learning and improvement outcomes Increasing the manpower in early childhood education
- Conducting evaluations of process and outcomes

In accordance with 2011 data of USA Department of Education, 20 states are making use of this support program. With RTT-ELC, the states (US Department of Education, 2011) are:

“1- Validating, using research based measures, whether the tiers in the State’s Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System accurately reflect differential levels of program quality,

2- Assessing, using appropriate research designs and measures of program progress, the extent to which changes in quality ratings are related to children’s learning, development and school readiness”

States that did not receive RTT - ELC support are also focused on conducting QRIS research. Policy makers, appliers and researchers aim to scientifically analyze the system outcomes.

In all these efforts, one of the most fundamental questions of debate is whether QRIS is a framework, or an intervention tool, or a quality measurement tool (Boller and Maxwell, 2014). The most fundamental question on which all the alternatives have focused is the importance for of these efforts aimed at the quality result in observable effects on child outcomes.

It is foreseen that RTT - ELC studies will reveal the productivity of the system in the upcoming years. However, different applications across the states still make it difficult to make inter – states comparisons, or to present a national profile (Boller and Maxwell, 2014).

### ***1.2.Organizations in the state of North Carolina, Aiming at Improving the Quality in QRIS and Early Childhood Education***

North Carolina established the QRIS system in the year 1999, and It is one of the earliest states to implement QRIS (DCDEE, 2012; Hestenes et al., 2014). In this state, there are a number of initiatives with the aim of improving the quality in early childhood education. Some short information is presented below regarding these institutions and their aims.

**1.2.1. *The North Carolina Division of Child Development and Early Education – DCDEE*** (Source: <http://ncchildcare.nc.gov/> )

With the increase in the number of working mothers, and the increase in the importance given to early childhood education in North Carolina, the Division, which was established in the year 1993, is operating in order that families and children could attain qualified care and education services. Its mission is to protect the health and security of the North Carolinians and provide the necessary humanitarian services in cooperation with the partner corporations. For this purpose, it started the QRIS. If we take a glance at the history of efforts to improve the quality of programs in the Division, we see:

- In the year 1971, license (certificate) law for child care was passed for the first time in NC. As a result of this, NC Management has established the Daily Child Care License Office.
- In the year 1985, NC General Council brought new legal practices with the purpose of reinforcing the Daily Child Care License. Together with this new law, Child Care Department was established under the roof of NC Division of Health Regulation.
- In the year 1993, some sub divisions of Daily Child Care Unit and Human Resources Department were integrated under the Child Development (current DCDEE) unit.
- In the year 1999, the unit developed a five level star license system. A system was developed in which meeting the minimum standards is compulsory, and meeting the higher standards is voluntary.
- In the year 2005, this “Star Rated License” was reviewed again. For the purpose of giving the most qualified education to families and children, new arrangements were implemented, which made it a requirement to meet the higher employee education and program standards.

Within the frame of these regulations, the NC Child Care Commission made regulations in the laws in child care, and adopted and legalized new practices. Practices adopted by this Commission are given below:

- Arranges the procedures necessary for licensed conduct of the family or institution based care services,
- Takes the health and security precautions (health measures for interior – outer space, children and employees, determination of treatment and medicine needs of children, precautions aimed at ill children)
- Employee qualification and education
- Consulting services aimed at the children
- Regulation of employee – child ratio in the schools
- Planning of the proper events from the developmental point of view
- Nutrition standards necessary to be complied with in houses and institutions
- Discipline policies
- Requirements in providing the transportation of the children
- Information necessary to be recorded in houses and institutions
- Guidance to voluntary schools in having 2 - 5 star licenses
- Management practices within the unit

**1.2.2. *Health and Human Services*** (Source: <http://www.ncdhhs.gov/about/overview> )



The institution is conducting collaborative works with state level institutions aiming at providing the quality in early childhood education. It makes effort in order that the families in need of protection and their children can make use of the health and humanitarian services.

### *1.2.3. Race to the Top - Early Learning Challenge*

(Source: <http://earlylearningchallenge.nc.gov/> )

RTT-ELC is a nationwide program and its aims are explained in the previous section. At this point, it is needed to mention about the RTT-ELC efforts in North Carolina. With the Race to the Top- Early Learning Challenge fund, North Carolina was awarded 69,9 million dollars for the years 2012 - 2015. NC established 10 targets which are important and supported with the award:

1. Providing high – quality education to more children
2. To establish higher education standards
3. To support the teachers in obtaining in – service education certificates
4. To increase the number of developmental observations between 0 - 3 ages
5. To increase the number of children who are applied developmental observation and direct them to other necessary services
6. To provide more access and contribution to the children, along with treatments that are ongoing and completed
7. To develop Kindergarten Entrance Assessment tool, apply it to 3 grades, and provide that these information are entered into long term data base
8. To provide services to children, families and teachers in the transformation zones
9. To prepare long term strategic plans aimed at improving the program quality, services and child outcomes
10. To make efforts beyond receiving the Early Learning Challenge award to sustain the Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge projects

### *1.2.4. Child Care Services Association*

(Source: <http://www.childcareservices.org/ps/teach-nc/> )

CCSA, which is a national, non – profit association, aims at promoting high – quality, accessible, and economical child care services, conducting research and offering services to all families. CCSA, which offers national, local and state- wide services, is supporting quality improvements by defending child rights, trying to offer families best possible conditions, providing education aimed at field experts, and offering occupational development scholarships. TEACH Early Childhood and Child Care Wages Projects, are examples of the support programs offered by the association. Early educators in North Carolina are actively benefitting from this.

*TEACH Early Childhood – North Carolina:* Is an education project, started by the Child Care Services Association in the year 1990. Aimed at strengthening the early childhood education workforce, the project has focused on the problems of low wage and overtime. In this sense, by giving scholarships to teachers who enroll in higher education, and by offering certificates related to the early childhood education, TEACH helps early educators improve their credentials.

*Child Care Wages Project:* One of the important problems in US is the low wages of early education providers. This project is a local solution to the low wages and it aims to offer wages with desirable levels. Wages are based on education level of the teachers who teach



for the children from birth to five in North Carolina. The funding is ensured with collaboration between local Smart Start Partnership and DCDEE.

**1.2.5. Child Care Resource and Referral Council**

(Source: <http://childcarerrnc.org/s.php?subpage=Mission> )

This council provides management and services in related to qualified education and care services offered state wide. While doing this, the organization reaches to families, those who provide child care and education, employers and other service providers:

- To offer families access to early care and education, and school age child care choices
- To improve these care and education opportunities
- To offer objective information in planning and policy development in the state and private sector areas

As being well – known nationally and based on research findings and data, the council aims to improve family and child focused early care and education and school age care services, providing information to families, employees of the sector, and institutions, supporting access to high – quality education.

**1.3. Development of QRIS Practices in North Carolina and “Star Rated License” System** (Source: [http://ncchildcare.nc.gov/parents/pr\\_sn2\\_ov\\_sr.asp](http://ncchildcare.nc.gov/parents/pr_sn2_ov_sr.asp) )

Contrary to other states, in North Carolina participation in the QRS is required for all the licensed early childhood education programs (Hestenes et al., 2014). The program evaluation process, that includes the basic child care license, is called the “Star Rated License”.

**1.3.1. What is “Star Rated License”? How is it gained and how is it graded?**

In the year 1999, Child Development Division (DCD) has started to give licenses to qualified child care centers and houses based on the star rating. The star-based rating system has certain components. These components of the system are:

**A. Program Standards** ( [http://ncchildcare.nc.gov/parents/pr\\_sn2\\_ps.asp](http://ncchildcare.nc.gov/parents/pr_sn2_ps.asp) )

Program standards are based on rating of the daily environment that the institution offers to the child. There are certain components rated, including:

1. Institution environment
  - 1.1.Sufficient space for events
  - 1.2.Diversity in materials
  - 1.3.Clean and comfortable play area
2. Number of employees per child
3. Interactions between adult – child / children and their peers / children and events and materials

These components are rated with the help of nationally valid environment rating scales. In this sense, quality rating scales developed in Frank Porter Graham Child Improvement Institute, which is affiliated to University of North Carolina Chapel Hill, are very useful.

**B. Education Standards** ( [http://ncchildcare.nc.gov/parents/pr\\_sn2\\_es.asp](http://ncchildcare.nc.gov/parents/pr_sn2_es.asp) )






Research has shown that, a manager of an institution has a great influence on the improvement of the institution, with his / her education level and experience. The more the employees are trained in the field of early childhood education, the more their teaching is effective. Therefore the star – based rating license specifically addresses the education level of employees in the programs. The components handled in employee education are:

- Education and experience level of the manager
- Number of head teachers having child care certificate
- Number of head teachers having more early childhood education and experience
- Number of teachers having formal education and experience

While former license systems could mislead families looking for high quality programs, this star – based rating license has minimized confusions, and the level of understanding of the system has increased.


In the star – based rating system, the necessary score to obtain a license certificate based on the two components (program standards and education), and corresponding number of stars is explained in the following Table – 1.

**Table - 1:** How is the number of stars decided?  
(Source: [http://ncchildcare.nc.gov/parents/pr\\_sn2\\_ov\\_sr.asp](http://ncchildcare.nc.gov/parents/pr_sn2_ov_sr.asp) )

Number Received	of Stars	Total Points Earned on a Two Component License
		1 - 3 Points
		4 - 6 Points
		7 - 9 Points
		10 - 12 Points
		13 - 15 Points

Using information from Table – 1, it is useful to review the specific point breakdown of a program entitled to three stars, which is shown in Table -2.

**Table - 2:** Threestar program rating sample  
(Source: [http://ncchildcare.nc.gov/parents/pr\\_sn2\\_ov\\_sr.asp](http://ncchildcare.nc.gov/parents/pr_sn2_ov_sr.asp) )

Three Star Example	
<b>Program Standards</b>	4 Points
<b>Education Standards</b>	4 Points
<b>Quality Point</b>	1 Points
<b>Total Score</b>	9 Points
<b>Star Score</b>	

In Table – 2, an institution has 4 points from program standards, 4 points from education standards, and 1 point from quality point. This institution has been entitled to 3 stars by

obtaining totally  $4 + 4 + 1 = 9$  points. Here at this point, it is useful to explain what the program standards and education standards mean.

Programs having the above explained standards at certain levels are entitled to obtain the certificate, an example of which is shown below (See Figure - 1).

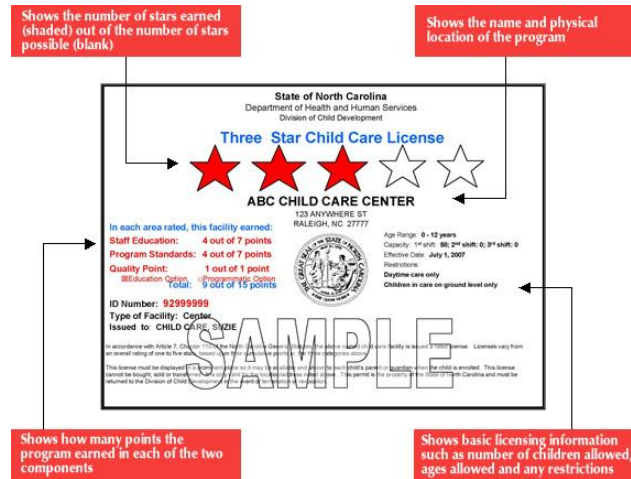


Figure - 1: Example License Certificate  
(Source: [http://ncchildcare.nc.gov/parents/pr\\_sn2\\_sl.asp](http://ncchildcare.nc.gov/parents/pr_sn2_sl.asp))

After the programs obtain this license, they can participate in the current quality rating and improvement system by inviting the evaluators to their institutions voluntarily.

## Conclusion and Discussion

This study has aimed at making a general introduction of QRIS, which is a system developed in America, and transmit the system on an example with the North Carolina example.

QRIS is a system of rating and improving the quality in early childhood education that has been started to be implemented in America starting from 1990s. Over the years, it has been started to be implemented at states level all around the country. Aimed at improving the system and researching its outcomes, there are many institutions and organizations in nationwide and at states level. Quality is an effort of improvement maintained regularly. It follows the reasoning of always grasping the better. QRIS studies have also triggered the regular improvement and change effort development of the early childhood education institutions in America. By means of environment rating scales, “structure” aspect of the programs is regularly rated, and deficiencies can be determined. Physical environment and materials that the child is subjected are the critical stimulants for completing the improvement phases productively. However, in rating of the process quality, opportunities aimed at bringing up experts in the area and providing professional improvement opportunities are being presented. Thus, qualified education staff, and provision of qualified education properly arranged education environments are aimed. QRIS has been a source of inspiration also to other countries, adaptations have been made and started to be implemented.

Together with all these efforts, there are some critics aimed at examination of the outputs of the system. The fact that applications show difference from state to state, also affect the multi – cultural structure in the country, socio – economic differences, practices and practice outcomes. There are some critics about that, especially when trying to improve the structure and process quality, child outcomes obtained from the whole of these are being dismissed. For

this reason, in order to draw a national productivity profile, still time and compared studies are needed. This is a gap which has been mentioned in many studies. In the year 2014, a special edition has been published by journal of Early Childhood Research aiming at only QRIS studies. Among the suggestions of the studies in this edition, fewness of the studies to observe the outcomes of QRIS in children, and to rate the productivity of QRIS is highlighted (Boller and Maxwell, 2014; Goffin and Barnett, 2014).

It is important to remember that early childhood education is the most basic step in development and progress of the societies. It will return with positive communal outcomes such as offering qualified education in this age group, high living standards of the society in the long term, high education and welfare level, low unemployment rates, low crime rates, and a developed society.

In Turkey, quality studies at the pre – school education level still have not come into the desired level. Although standard developing works are ongoing, and although new legal arrangements have been brought, application – oriented aspect of these arrangements is necessary to be researched. While current physical structure and material source in many schools have difficulty in meeting the “structure” leg of the quality, in order to review the process quality, very detailed and longitudinal studies are necessary.

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## OFFICIAL WEBSITES

Child Care Resource and Referral Council official website

<http://childcarerrnc.org/s.php?subpage=Mission>

Child Care Services Association official website

<http://www.childcareservices.org/ps/teach-nc/>

QRIS National Learning Network official website

<http://qrisnetwork.org/our-framework>

Race to the Top - Early Learning Challenge official website

<http://earlylearningchallenge.nc.gov/>

The North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services official website

<http://www.ncdhhs.gov/>

The North Carolina Division of Child Development and Early Education (DCDEE) official website

<http://ncchildcare.nc.gov/>

## **Erken çocukluk eğitiminde kalitede standardı yakalamaya yönelik bir ilham kaynağı: *QRIS (Kalite Değerlendirme ve Geliştirme Sistemi)***

### **Giriş**

Erken çocukluk dönemi, çocuğun büyüme, olgunlaşma ve gelişimsel ilerlemeleri kat etmesi açısından oldukça kritik; kısa ve uzun vadede etkileri olan bir dönemdir. Dolayısıyla, bu dönemi en etkin ve verimli şekilde geçirmek, hem bireysel hem de toplumsal getiriler sağlamaktadır. Erken çocukluk eğitimi, bireysel açıdan kişinin fiziksel ve ruhsal sağlığının temellerini atarak hayata başlamasını sağlarken, ileriye dönük olarak hayat kalitesini de yükseltmektedir. Bireyin hayat kalitesi aslında topluma dönük bir kaliteyi beraberinde getirmektedir. Çünkü, sağlıklı ve kaliteli başlangıçlar bireysel görünse de uzun vadede toplumun sağlıklı, refah içinde, eğitim seviyesi yüksek bireylere sahip olması anlamına gelmektedir. Bu durum, erken çocukluk eğitiminin topluma dönük boyutunu oluşturmaktadır. Dolayısıyla arzu edilen durum, toplumların erken çocukluk eğitimine yönelik farkındalıklarının artması, bu kritik döneme değer verilmesi ve erken çocukluk döneminin nitelikli yürümesi için çaba sarf edilmesidir. Dünyada erken çocukluk döneminin önemi

araştırmalarla desteklendikçe yaşanan farkındalık, erken eğitime erişim sağlama, fırsat eşitlikleri ve eğitimin kalitesinin gerekliliği üzerinde daha çok durulmasını sağlamıştır. Gelişmeler, okul öncesi eğitimin nitelikli bir şekilde yaygınlaştırılması yönünde tetikleyici olmuştur. Nitelikli eğitim süreçleri ise kalite standartları çerçevesindeki uygulamaları gündeme getirmektedir.

Dünyadaki uygulamalar incelendiğinde gerek kaliteyi değerlendirme araçlarına, gerek yapılan çalışmalara bakıldığında, kaliteye yönelik öznel görüş ve uygulamaların aslında küresel anlamda geçerli belirli üst kalite standartlarına dayalı olduğu görülmektedir. Ancak önemli olan bu uygulamaların başarıyla yürütülüp yürütülmediğidir. Türkiye açısından düşünüldüğünde pek çok hedef, politika belgelerine yazılmakla kalmakta; uygulamaya geçememektedir. Bir diğer sık yaşanan durum ise, uygulamalarda niteliği artırmaya yönelik yapılan dönemsel projelerin, uzun vadeye yayılmaması ve projenin tamamlanmasıyla uygulamaların rafa kalkması sorunudur. Bu anlamda, eğitim işleyişini standartlara kavuşturmak, erken çocukluk eğitiminde niteliği artırma noktasında bir çerçeve oluşturmak açısından önemlidir.

Henüz Türkiye’de uygulamaya geçememiş olan okul öncesi eğitimde kalite standartlarına dönük uygulamaların sistematik halini, Amerika’daki QRIS uygulamalarında görmek mümkündür. Açılımı Quality Rating and Improvement System (Kalite Değerlendirme ve Geliştirme Sistemi) olan QRIS, erken çocukluk bakım ve eğitim ortamlarını değerlendirme, geliştirme ve haberleşme sağlamaya yönelik bir sistemdir. QRIS, gelişimden uygulamaya geniş bir yelpazede ele alınır ve eyaletin genelinde ya da daha bölgesel uygulamalarla yürütülebilmektedir. Verimli olarak işleyen bir QRIS’de,

- Program ve uygulayıcıları için kalite standartları,
- Standartları karşılayabilmek için bir altyapı oluşturma ve destekleme,
- Sistemin kalite standartlarını karşıladığından emin olmaya yönelik bir görüntüleme ve hesaplama sistemi meydana getirme,
- Devam eden bir finansal destek sunarak kalite standartlarını karşılamaya destekleme,
- Eğitime erişim ve topluma hizmet stratejileri unsurları bulunmaktadır.

## **Yöntem**

Bu bağlamda, araştırma erken çocukluk eğitiminde kaliteyi yakalama yönünde yapılabilecek uygulamaları, mevcut işleyen bir sistem olan QRIS üzerinden ele almayı amaçlamaktadır. Araştırma, bir doküman analizi olarak tasarlanmıştır. Bu kapsamda, alanyazın taramalarında ulaşılan kaynaklardan, politika belgelerinden, web sayfalarından yapılan derlemeler sunulmuştur.

## **Sonuç ve Tartışma**

Bu çalışma, Amerika’da geliştirilmiş bir sistem olan QRIS’in genel bir tanıtımını yapmayı ve North Carolina eyaleti örneği ile bir örnek üzerinden sistemi aktarmayı amaçlamıştır.

QRIS, 1990lı yıllardan itibaren Amerika’da uygulanmaya başlanmış bir erken çocukluk eğitiminde kaliteyi değerlendirme ve geliştirme sistemidir. Yıllar içerisinde, bütün ülkede eyaletler düzeyinde uygulanmaya başlanmıştır. Sistemi geliştirme ve çıktılarını araştırmaya yönelik olarak ise ulusal çapta ve eyaletler düzeyinde pek kurum ve kuruluş mevcuttur. Kalite, düzenli olarak sürdürülen bir gelişim çabasıdır. Daima daha iyisini yakalama mantığını güder. QRIS çalışmaları da Amerika’da erken çocukluk eğitimi kurumlarının düzenli olarak gelişim ve değişim çabası geliştirmesini tetiklemiştir. Ortam değerlendirme

ölçekleri aracılığıyla, programların “yapı” boyutu düzenli olarak değerlendirilmekte ve eksikler tespit edilebilmektedir. Çocuğun maruz kaldığı fiziksel ortam ve materyallerin, gelişim evrelerini verimli tamamlayabilmek için kritik uyarandır. Bununla beraber, süreç kalitesinin değerlendirilmesi hususunda da alanda uzman yetiştirmeye ve mesleki gelişim olanakları sağlamaya yönelik fırsatlar sunulmaktadır. Böylece kalifiye eğitim kadrosu ve uygun düzenlenmiş eğitim ortamlarında, kaliteli eğitimin sağlanması amaçlanmaktadır. QRIS, başka ülkelere de ilham kaynağı olmuş, uyarlamalar yapılarak uygulanmaya başlanmıştır.

Bütün bu çabalarla beraber, sistemin çıktılarının incelenmesine yönelik eleştiriler mevcuttur. Uygulamaların eyaletten eyalete değişiklikler göstermesi, ülkedeki çok kültürlü yapı, sosyo-ekonomik farklılıklar, uygulamaları ve uygulama çıktılarını da etkilemektedir. Özellikle, yapı ve süreç kalitesi geliştirilmeye çalışılırken, bunların bütününden elde edilen çocuk çıktılarının göz ardı edildiği yönünde eleştiriler mevcuttur. Dolayısıyla, ulusal bir verimlilik profile çizmek için hala zamana ve karşılaştırmalı çalışmalara ihtiyaç vardır. Bu, pek çok çalışmada da dile getirilen bir boşluktur. 2014 yılında, Early Childhood Research Quarterly dergisi tarafından sadece QRIS çalışmalarını ele almayı amaçlayan özel bir basım yayınlanmıştır. Bu basımdaki, çalışmaların önerileri arasında da QRIS’in çocuklardaki çıktılarını gözlemleyecek, QRIS’in verimliliğini değerlendirecek çalışmaların azlığının altı çizilmektedir (Boller ve Maxwell, 2014; Goffin ve Barnett, 2014).

Türkiye’de ise okul öncesi eğitim düzeyinde kalite çalışmaları hala istenen düzeye gelememiştir. Standart geliştirme çalışmaları devam etmekte ve hatta yeni yasal düzenlemeler getirilmiş olsa da, bu düzenlemelerin uygulamaya dönük boyutunun araştırılması gerekmektedir. Pek çok okulda mevcut fiziksel yapı ve materyal kaynağı, kalitenin “yapı” ayağını bile karşılamakta güçlük çekerken; süreç kalitesini incelemek oldukça detaylı ve boylamsal çalışmaları gerektirmektedir.

Erken Çocukluk Eğitimi, toplumların gelişmesi ve kalkınmasındaki en temel basamaktır. Bu yaş grubunda kaliteli eğitim sunmak, uzun vadede toplumun yüksek yaşam standartları, yüksek eğitim ve refah düzeyi, düşük işsizlik oranları, düşük suç oranları, kalkınmış bir toplum gibi olumlu toplumsal çıktılarla dönüş yapacaktır. **Anahtar kelimeler:** Erken çocukluk eğitimi, eğitimde kalite, QRIS, Amerika Birleşik Devletleri (ABD), Türkiye