

Analysis of the Current Situation of Inclusive Education from the Perspective of Subject Teachers' Experiences and Competencies: Sample of Bartın Province

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Doi: 10.23918/ijsses.v8i4p137

Abstract: The goal of inclusive education is to educate students with special needs in regular schools in a social, psychological and academic sense, and to ensure integration with peers. The objective of this study aims to determine the current situation of inclusive education from the perspective of subject teachers' experiences and competencies. In this research, a descriptive research model has been applied. Research is easily accessible from the sampling method used for sampling. Semi-structured interviews were carried out with 84 subject teachers in the academic year 2014-2015. The content analysis method was used to analyze the data obtained in the study. The findings of the study revealed that without adequate support from experts, subject teachers with inadequate experiences and qualifications are trying to provide education to inclusive students with their own efforts.

Keywords: Special Education, Teachers, Experience, Inclusive Education

1. Introduction

Education also enables individuals to lead an independent life in society (Kot et al. 2015). However, in every society, besides healthy individuals with normal development, there are several individuals who differ significantly from their peers in terms of physical, mental, emotional and social characteristics that need special education. They cannot provide independent living skills without support (Saraç & Hırça, 2017). When these differences are within certain limits, students benefit from general education services. However, when differences are more prominent, general education services are insufficient and special education services are required (Cavkaytar, 2013).

Education, which is one of the basic rights that every human has, is the process of selected and planned activities to ensure the highest level of social development and personal abilities of individuals (Tezcan, 1984). In addition, special education is the whole of the education services that are planned specifically for the individual with disabilities in cognitive, behavioral, social-emotional, physical and sensory areas

Received: October 19, 2021

Accepted: December 13, 2021

Çelik, B. (2021). Analysis of the Current Situation of Inclusive Education from the Perspective of Subject Teachers' Experiences and Competencies: Sample of Bartın Province. *International Journal of Social Sciences and Educational Studies*, 8(4), 137-145.

and aim to maximize the inclusive individual's possibility of living independently (Diken, 2013; Eripek, 1998). Students who have intellectual disability, hearing impairment, visual impairment, learning difficulties, emotional and behavioral disorders, physical disabilities, speech and language problems, and gifted students benefit from special education services

The student who needs special education should be placed in the least restrictive educational environment. The least restrictive educational environment is the educational environment where the educational needs of the student will be met at the highest level and where they will be together with their normal peers the most (DeMonte, 2010). Considering the characteristics of all special education students, the least restrictive education environment for most special education students is inclusive education (Kırcaali-İftar, 1998). The aim of inclusive education is to ensure that students with special needs integrate and adapt with their peers socially, psychologically and academically in general public schools (EARGED, 2010). In fact, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD, 2011) Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) report showed that many education systems that performed well achieved good results when incorporating marginalized student groups into inclusive education.

Although legal studies on inclusive education practices started in 1997 in Turkey, the desired results could not be achieved for a long time. The Ministry of National Education Special Education Services Regulation has started to focus on inclusive education practices since 2006 (Cankaya & Korkmaz, 2012). Then MEB laid the legal foundations for the integrated education model for the transition from a strictly segregated system to an education system open to all students equally. The aim was to combine general and special education in a common educational space. There has also been an intense movement of school-age children from families and special education centers to general schools.

Inclusive education practices and Special education services have increased rapidly in the last years, especially after the Special Education Regulation was published in 1997. In the last ten years, the Ministry of National Education has focused on the importance of inclusive education and studies on inclusion applications have spread over a wide area. The number of private schools to educate every disabled child is increasing rapidly (Melekoğlu et al., 2008).

In schools with inclusive classrooms, physical, social and psychological environmental arrangements are made in line with the disabilities of the students. Special education materials are provided to these schools and supportive training rooms are opened for the effective and efficient implementation of inclusive education. In support training rooms, one-on-one training is provided, taking into account the individualized training program, in order to ensure maximum benefit. A maximum of two inclusive students can be placed in inclusive classes.

However, when the studies are examined, these studies are mostly focused on classroom teachers' experiences (EARGED, 2010; Mart, 2011; Cankaya & Korkmaz, 2012; Kot et al., 2015), classroom teachers' experiences and preservice classroom teachers' knowledge levels (Güleryüz & Özdemir, 2015) and preschool teachers' experiences (Özen et al., 2013). Among these studies, Kot et al. (2015) conducted a study with five 4th grade teachers who have inclusive students in their class in the city center of Bolu. At the end of the study, it was reported that the teachers gave importance to inclusive education practices. However, it has been found that teachers do not have sufficient knowledge of the special needs of students.

The other finding of the study is that persons, professionals and institutions who should be involved in the inclusion process do not cooperate in this process.

EARGED (2010) conducted research with teachers, school administrators and parents in 400 primary schools in 26 provinces of Turkey. As a result of the study, it was stated that the school administrators and teachers of the primary school did not have sufficient knowledge about inclusive education and the experiences of the implementing inclusion process and that the teachers did not make enough preparations for inclusion education. In addition, the findings of the study showed that there are not enough special education teachers in primary schools where inclusive education is practiced, and that inclusive students were not able to receive sufficient support/help. At the end of the study, it was revealed that the most common problem that teachers experienced in the inclusion process was "insufficient time problem in practice of inclusive education due to crowded classes", inadequate educational materials. An interesting finding of the study was that although school administrators found the inclusion practices "partially" sufficient, the inclusion practices did not adequately meet the expectations of the parents.

Cankaya and Korkmaz (2012) conducted a study with 200 classroom teachers working in primary schools in Konya province and its districts. As a result of the study, although nearly half of the teachers did not receive any in-service training course about inclusive education, they had sufficient theoretical and practical knowledge. Besides, the most important problems faced by teachers in practice is studying inclusive students in crowded classrooms, studying with more than one inclusive students in the same classrooms, and the inadequacy of educational materials. Teachers also stated that implementing inclusive teaching with normal teaching brings additional responsibilities to teachers. Therefore, they have difficulties in classroom management.

Ozen et al. (2013) conducted a study with 10 preschool teachers. As a result of the study, it was revealed that teachers need to gain experience in order to apply the activities they do with normal students to inclusive students with special needs. Güteryüz and Ozdemir (2015) conducted research to determine the views of primary school classroom teachers and preschool classroom teachers about inclusive education. As a result of the research, no difference was found between the views of the two groups. In addition, they reported that the attitudes of classroom teachers about inclusive education vary according to their professional seniority. In addition, it was determined that the teachers in the first ten years of the profession had a more positive perception about inclusive education than the teachers' profession over ten years. It was also concluded that the perception of classroom teachers about inclusive education did not change according to their gender.

As can be seen, studies generally focus on preschool and primary school teachers. In Turkey, it is necessary to reveal the current state of inclusive education in order to achieve its purpose and to provide the expected benefits. The aim of this study is to determine the inclusive education competencies of subject teachers and their ability to apply inclusive education in the province of Bartın.

2. Method

The research design of the study was a descriptive survey method which is used to determine a person or an object of the study in its own conditions as it is. This kind of research has a pioneering role in

quantitative research designs (Shuttleworth, 2008). Purposeful sampling technique used for the identification and selection of information-rich cases for the most effective use of limited resources (Patton, 2002).

3. Sampling

The research was carried out with short-term semi-structured interviews with 84 teachers in the province of Bartın in the 2014-2015 academic year.

Table 1: Frequency and percentage of teachers

Subject of teachers	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Science	16	19,05
Classroom	27	32,14
Religious and culture	6	7,14
Social studies	20	23,81
Mathematics	15	17,86
	84	100

Of the teachers participating in the study, 19,5% were science teachers, 17,86% were mathematics teachers, 32,14% were classroom teachers, 7,14% were culture and religious teachers, 23,81% were social studies teachers.

In order to understand the experiences and the competencies of teachers' inclusive education, a semi-structured interview form and short-term face-to-face interviews with the teachers was administered. The semi-structured interview form consists of two parts. In the first part, there are questions about the personal information of the interviewed participants and whether they have received training for inclusive education. In the second part, there are questions to determine their experiences in inclusive education. During the preparation of these questions, preliminary interviews were made with the teachers.

Content analysis method was used in the analysis of the data obtained in the research. In the research, the data obtained from the teachers' opinions are coded around certain concepts according to their similarities and themes are formed. Codes and themes are organized. The results are presented in a descriptive way and the findings are explained descriptively by including quotations (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2008). The data were then digitized with the Excel program.

4. Results

- Findings on Disability Types of Inclusion Students Trained by Teachers

According to the findings of the study, the students who the teachers trained in inclusive education were classified into 9 groups according to their disability groups.

Table 2: Frequency and percentage of inclusive students in terms

Obstacle Groups of Students	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Learning Disability	59	46,80
Mentally Retarded	36	29,10
Hearing Impaired	7	5,40
Emotion and Behavior Disorder	6	4,40
Speech and Language Disturbances	6	4,40
Physically Handicapped	4	3,00
Visually Impaired	3	2,00
Talented and Gifted	2	1,50
Other	4	3,40
Total	125	100,00

Of the students, 46.8% had learning difficulties, 29.1% had mental disabilities, 5.4% had hearing impairments, 4.4% had emotional and behavioral disorders, 4.4% had speech and language problems, and 3% had physical disabilities. 2% are visually impaired, 1.5% are gifted and talented, and 3.4% are in the other group.

- Findings on Teachers' Experience and Competencies in Inclusive Education

Although 58,1% of the teachers who educate inclusive students have taken seminars on inclusion/special education before, 41,9% of the teachers have not received any in-service training or seminar about inclusive education. 41,9% of the teachers stated that they have given inclusive education to the same student for more than two years, 34% of them have given inclusive education to the same student for one year, and 24,1% of them have given inclusive education to the same student for two years. Although 77,3% of the teachers stated that they had given training to an inclusive student before this student, 22,7% of them started to provide inclusive education with this student for the first time.

The teachers were asked about the sources of information regarding the special needs of the inclusive student. As the source of information about the special needs of the inclusion student (some teachers showed more than one source of information), 48,3% of the teachers used the guidance and psychological counseling centers (RAM), 23,9% of them asked the students' families, and 23,3% of them reached students' reports, 20,6% of them asked students' counselors, 17,8% of the teachers held seminars on the subject, 13,9% of the teachers use their own experiences, 8,3% of the teachers did their own research, 2,8% of the teachers took special education courses in their undergraduate education.

- Findings about Teachers' Receiving Expert Support During Inclusive Education

Teachers' answers to the question of how often they receive support from experts and/or institutions while organizing their activities for students with special needs are as follows. (40,5%) of the teachers answered this question. 54.7% of the teachers stated that they were mostly in contact with the school guidance services and the classroom guidance teacher. One of these teachers said, "We send information about the student to the RAM with the help of the school counselor. According to their replies, we provide implementation to the students" When another teacher said, "We evaluate reports together with the classroom guidance teacher, and we make necessary adjustments in learning outcomes". Another teacher summarized her situation as "Cooperation with RAM is established by special education class teachers in our school".

21.9% of the teachers stated that they received support from RAMs only at the beginning of the year and that they organize annual activities according to the RAMs' reports. One of these teachers stated, "At the beginning of the term, information about the student's disability is reported to the RAMs, and a sample lesson application is sent back from RAMs. Then there is no additional help coming from RAM". The same teacher also said, "However, RAM should support us during the education process. The assistance should not be limited to the report submitted at the beginning of the year."

25.2% of the teachers stated that they did not receive support from anywhere, neither RAM nor other guidance centers. A teacher explained as; "assistance and support remains a formality on paper. In practice, no support is given about the education that should be given to the student after the report is sent". One teacher said "There is no support in this regard, I was trying to do something with my own efforts. With the arrival of the guidance teacher at our school, we started to progress in a planned way". Another teacher said, "I can't get much support because of the lack of experts in the RAM where we are located. I also get help from other RAMs thanks to my friends. RAMs inform me how and in what way I can teach by preparing a special plan according to my situation." He pointed out the lack of experts to train.

21.9% of the teachers stated that they only get help from RAM or guidance services when they deem necessary. A teacher said, "Authorities are coming from RAM to inform us in line with our demands. They provide information on the subjects and certain topics we request, other than that we do not receive any support from them". Another teacher said, "I got the implementation of the course from RAM. I also got help with an individual inclusive training plan. They stated that they would always provide support when needed. After that they provided inclusive education material". On the other hand, 5.4% of the teachers stated that they are in constant dialogue with the RAMs as "I consult the RAM about what it can do to provide a better education and be more useful and what kind of training should be given, and I also do research on the internet".

5. Discussion and Conclusion

With this study, the current situation of inclusive education from the Perspective of Subject Teachers was revealed in Bartın province. The findings of the study revealed some deficiencies in inclusive education in Bartın province in particular and in our country in general. The results reveal that pedagogical situations in heterogeneous classrooms are extremely multifaceted and include a variety of pedagogical choices to

be made by teachers. The most important of these deficiencies is undoubtedly that very few of the branch teachers have received inclusive education.

Subject teachers especially try to implement inclusive education with their own experience and priorities. It is an important issue that should be emphasized that “teachers provide inclusive education according to their own experiences”. This finding of the study has not been found in the literature. Although subject teachers state that they do not have sufficient knowledge in some applications for inclusive students, they still state that they pay attention to provide education to inclusive students in accordance with the principles of inclusive education. Similar findings have been reported by EARGED (2010), Cankaya and Korkmaz (2012), and Kot et al. (2015).

Unfortunately, teachers who accept that their knowledge about inclusive education is insufficient are obliged to provide inclusive education to students with learning difficulties and intellectual disabilities. Therefore, they request help from RAMs in this regard. However, as teachers stated, there are insufficient number of experts in RAMs and they also state that they cannot benefit from these institutions sufficiently. According to the findings obtained from the research, teachers try to find support in different ways according to the place they work (province center, district and village school) in order to organize their activities for students with special needs. While the teachers in the central schools mostly contact the school guidance services and the classroom guidance teacher. The teachers working in the village schools try to continue the inclusive education with their own efforts, such as asking a friend about their problems and utilizing search engines to answer their problems. This finding has been reported by EARGED (2010), Cankaya and Korkmaz (2012), and Kot et al. (2015)'s conclusion that teachers do not cooperate with RAMs or experts who should be involved in the inclusion process.

This research helps to better understand the experiences and challenges faced by primary and branch teachers when teaching in heterogeneous classrooms. It also helps to envision the role of teachers as decision makers at the national and school community level and ways to enhance professional development for the successful implementation of inclusive education. This research is valuable as it expands the theoretical views of previous researchers about the application of inclusive education in different sociocultural settings and in conjunction with general education. Additionally, research data can help provide support for teachers to help implement inclusive education.

Batu and Kırcaali-İftar (2009) conclude that meeting the needs of inclusion students in the classroom, keeping in touch with each other, being socially accepted at school and even in the society largely depends on the attitudes of the teachers. The role of teachers makes huge differences on the education of students (Mart, 2013a; 2013b). While making education reform, in-service training of teachers gains importance as well as initial teacher education. Moreover, the quality and systematic nature of teachers' in-service training will still be crucial when trying to overcome the challenges identified by teachers. Successful teaching experiences in heterogeneous classrooms are likely to improve teachers' attitudes towards inclusive students and towards diverse students in general (Avramidis & Kalyva, 2007).

In the light of the findings obtained from this research;

- It is recommended that all subject teachers attend in-service training, seminars and courses for special education or inclusive education.
- The institution that subject teachers consider to receive first aid in special education is RAMs. For this reason, the number of experts working in RAMs should be increased.
- Teachers state that they could not get support from students' parents in this process. It can be investigated why parents do not support teachers, and studies should be carried out to increase teacher-parent cooperation in line with the results.

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