

The Needs of Inclusive Preschool Teachers about Inclusive Practices*

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Abstract

Problem Statement: Since the law related to the inclusion of children with special needs was passed, the number of children with special needs in preschool classrooms has increased each year. Preschool teachers face serious challenges when they teach children with diverse abilities in the same environment. Although most of them support the idea of preschool inclusion, preschool teachers usually do not want children with special needs in their classrooms because of their lack of knowledge and skills regarding inclusive practices. It has been established that teachers are the most important component of inclusion, and in order to increase the success of inclusive practices, they should be prepared to teach in heterogeneous classrooms that include children with and without disabilities.

Purpose of Study: To develop and implement an effective and functional training program for inclusive preschool classroom teachers, we aimed to

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thoroughly examine the needs of preschool teachers with regard to supporting the development of children with disabilities in their classes.

Method: In the first part of our study, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 40 teachers, and in the second part, in-depth interviews were held with four of the teachers from the first group. All of the teachers who participated in this study had one or more children with special needs in their classrooms. After completion of the interviews, the data from the two groups were analyzed separately.

Findings and Results: The analyses of both groups of data indicated that teachers mainly needed knowledge, skills, experience, and support when assessing the performance of children with special needs, working with their parents, preparing individualized education programs (IEPs), adapting and modifying their curriculum, and dealing with behavioral problems.

Conclusions and Recommendations: To make preschool inclusion successful and to have special needs children gain the expected benefits, teachers need to be provided with functional teacher training programs that foster positive attitudes and provide them with a meaningful experience. If preschool teachers in Turkey had access to these types of programs in both pre-service and in-service education, the quality of preschool inclusion would improve immensely.

Keywords: Preschool teachers, mainstreaming practices, needs, semi-structured interview

The quality of inclusion programs varies according to program philosophy, administrative support, teacher training, and attitudes of instructors (Buysse, Wesley, Bryant, & Gardner, 1999); however, the most fundamental element needed for successful inclusion is general education classroom teachers (Bruns & Mogharberrean, 2009; Burke & Sutherland, 2004; Frazeur-Cross, Traub, Hutter-Pishgahi, & Shelton, 2004; Odom, 2000). Teacher training, experience, attitudes, and knowledge are key indicators of the quality of inclusion, and teachers need to be knowledgeable about and experienced in inclusion practices as they work with children with special needs and attempt to meet the diverse needs of the all of the children in their classes (Crane-Mitchell & Hedge, 2007). In this sense, successful inclusion is closely related to the ability to adapt the instructional environment and methods to the needs of students, use effective instructional methods and strategies to teach children appropriate behaviors, and provide equal learning opportunities for all children (Bricker, 1995).

Preschool teachers generally believe that children with special needs should be educated in general education classrooms and that these students benefit from inclusion (Avramidis, Bayliss, & Burden, 2000; Crane-Mitchell & Hedge, 2007); however, these teachers report that they have insufficient knowledge about inclusion

practices and lack competency for educating children with special needs (Odom & Bailey, 2001). In addition, teachers indicate that they are in need of training, support from special education teachers, and additional materials and tools for inclusive classes (Eiserman, Shisler, & Healey, 1995; Coombs-Richardson & Mead, 2001). Moreover, they emphasize that their most fundamental need is learning how to adapt the preschool program to meet the requirements of inclusion and how to engage the children with special needs in daily routines (Hadadian & Hargrove, 2001). Furthermore, in their pre-service programs, only general information is given; hence, they desire workshops, seminars, and additional courses so that they can gain more knowledge as well as on-the-job (i.e., in-classroom) experience (Crane-Mitchell & Hedge, 2007). Preschool teachers in inclusion programs have indicated that their primary needs are related to the preparation of individualized education programs (IEPs), instructional adaptation, augmentative technology (Buell, Hallam, Gamel-McCormich, & Scher, 1999), behavioral and communication strategies, and appropriate positioning/transportation, especially for children with motor disabilities (Bruns & Mogharberran, 2009). In addition, they believe that inclusion would be more successful if they had appropriate on-the-job training. Providing teachers with one-time in-service training is not sufficient to equip them with the necessary skills to meet the needs of special needs children. In addition, a lack of monitoring to determine whether teachers are applying the knowledge they received from the in-service training, limited though it may be in our country, can inhibit the use of new techniques and strategies in classrooms (Bruns & Mogharberran, 2009; Crane-Mitchell & Hadge, 2007). The reality is that many teachers only gain knowledge and experience via trial and error after special needs children are placed in their classrooms (Clough & Nutbrown, 2004).

In Turkey, preschool inclusion started in 1997 with the passage of a decreed law (no. 573), and became more widespread in 2006 with the adoption of a special education services regulation (MEB, 2013) that included the following principles. First, it stated that the education needs of young children with special needs can be met in public and private preschools by providing the needed support services. This process should include providing training and consultancy, professional support, and the necessary equipment to children with special needs, their families, their teachers, and other school staff. Furthermore, children who are eligible for special education services but who do not have severe or multiple disabilities according to the Counseling and Research Centers (CRCs) where educational diagnoses and placement decisions are made should be placed in preschool classrooms. Additionally, teachers, psychologists, and administrators who are working in preschools should take the necessary measures to meet the needs of these children.

Research studies that have examined inclusion practices in Turkey and the factors that affect their success have shown that problems often occur when implementing inclusion practices and that administrators, parents, and teachers frequently bring up these problems, for example the higher numbers of children in classrooms, a lack of support services for the child and the teacher, insufficient knowledge on the part of

administrators and teachers regarding inclusion, and negative teacher attitudes (Aral, 2011; Batu, 2010; Gök & Erbaş, 2011). The report of the Education Reform Initiation (Eğitim Reformu Girişimi, 2011) on inclusion practices and problems in Turkey entitled “A Situational Analysis of Inclusion” demonstrated that even though teachers accept children with special needs into their classrooms, they lack the competence to deal with them and need appropriate training and knowledge to meet their needs. For instance, Varlier and Vuran (2006) conducted interviews with 30 preschool teachers and found that in order for teachers to gain knowledge and experience in working with special needs children, they needed seminars, courses, in-service training, and training during their undergraduate studies. Two other related studies showed that teachers lacked knowledge about inclusion and therefore were unable to meet the needs of the children with special needs in their classrooms (Altun & Gülben, 2011; Gök & Erbaş, 2011). Furthermore, the studies noted that the teachers had difficulties in differentiating preschool programs that are developed for typically developing children, adapting their instruction to different children’s characteristics, and utilizing effective classroom management strategies. Another issue that many of the teachers face is that they do not have access to professionals (i.e., psychologists, speech and language therapists, and physiotherapists), so they must try to resolve classroom problems on their own or with the help of the parents of children with special needs (Gök & Erbaş, 2011). Similarly, the majority of preschool teachers believe that they do not possess the skills to meet the needs of children with special needs (Kaya, 2005) and desire to gain the knowledge and support that they lack so that they can assist with the development of these children (Şen, 2003; Yavuz, 2005). In a study comprised of 183 preschool teachers, more than 60% reported that the most fundamental need to ensure the success of inclusion was gaining more knowledge and experience (Küçükler, Acarlar, & Kapçı, 2006).

Preschool teachers have only one compulsory special education course during their undergraduate programs, and some only offer inclusion as an elective course. Unfortunately, only general information related to inclusion is given in these courses, and pre-service teachers are not really expected to improve their knowledge and experience related to working with special needs children (YÖK, 2013). A similar situation occurs in in-service courses, seminars, and meetings, because teachers have no opportunity to apply the knowledge that is presented. For example, in the study by Özyayın and Çolak, (2011) researchers examined the opinions of preschool teachers concerning an in-service program they had attended. Even though instructors indicated that the program was useful because they acquired new information, they criticized the length of the training and the content because of the lack of visual examples and stated that they wished they had been provided with more knowledge about how to write IEPs.

Therefore, based on the findings of previous research studies, it is clear that if preschool inclusion practices are to be successful in Turkey, then providing more knowledge and experience regarding inclusion must be a priority. However, in order to achieve this goal and prepare appropriate programs, the needs should be

prioritized. Thus, as the first stage of a broader project in which we aimed to investigate the effects of a teacher training program to be developed based on teachers' needs and evaluate the outcomes, we examined the needs of preschool teachers who have children with disabilities in their classrooms regarding inclusive practices. For this purpose, our study was carried out in two stages. Semi-structured interviews were initially conducted with 40 teachers, and their primary needs and areas in which they considered themselves to lack competence were examined. In the second stage, in-depth interviews were conducted with four of the teachers from the first group who volunteered to provide more in-depth answers about what is necessary to effectively teach in heterogeneous classrooms.

Methods

Research Design

In Turkey, although the preschool teachers' opinions and their attitudes regarding inclusion have been investigated in several studies, their needs related to inclusive practices have not been well documented. Because our goal was to determine the needs of the preschool teachers who have young children with special needs in their classrooms, we used a case study approach, a type of qualitative research. The data were gathered via semi-structured interviews for both stages of the study and were analyzed using descriptive analysis in the first stage of the study and inductive analysis in the second stage of the study.

Study Group

Our study was made up of two groups of teachers. The first group included 40 female teachers who worked in Ankara in any one of the 14 public preschools affiliated with the Ministry of National Education. As previously mentioned, the second group consisted of four teachers from the first group. The characteristics of the teachers in both groups are given in Table 1. In the teachers' classrooms, there were 37 children who were officially diagnosed as having special needs, and three who consistently demonstrated different behavioral and developmental characteristics than their peers (children at risk). Although these three had similar characteristics to the children who had been diagnosed with special needs, they were not referred for diagnosis because their parents did not want them to be labeled.

Table 1.

Frequency and Percentage of the Participants' Characteristics

| | First Group | | Second Group |
|--|-------------|------|--------------|
| | f | % | f* |
| <i>Age</i> | | | |
| 20-30 | 23 | 57.5 | 2 |
| Older than 31 | 17 | 42.5 | 2 |
| <i>Education</i> | | | |
| Associate's degree | 3 | 7.5 | |
| Bachelor's degree | 37 | 92.5 | 4 |
| <i>Undergraduate department</i> | | | |
| Child development | 4 | 10.0 | |
| Early childhood teacher education | 32 | 80.0 | 4 |
| Early childhood training | 1 | 2.5 | |
| Preschool teacher education | 3 | 7.5 | |
| <i>Work experience</i> | | | |
| 1-10 years | 37 | 92.5 | 3 |
| More than 11 years | 3 | 7.5 | 1 |
| <i>Experience with children with special needs</i> | | | |
| Inexperienced | 15 | 38.0 | 1 |
| 1-5 years | 23 | 58.0 | 3 |
| More than 6 years | 2 | 4.0 | |
| <i>Classroom size</i> | | | |
| 10-15 students | 8 | 20.0 | |
| 16-21students | 21 | 52.5 | 2 |
| More than 22 students | 11 | 27.5 | 2 |
| <i>Types of disabilities</i> | | | |
| Intellectual disabilities | 14 | 35.0 | 1 |
| Autism | 13 | 32.5 | 3 |
| Multiple disabilities | 5 | 12.5 | |
| Speech and communication disorders | 3 | 7.5 | |
| Hearing impairment | 3 | 7.5 | |
| Physical impairment | 1 | 2.5 | |
| Emotional and behavioral disorders | 1 | 2.5 | |
| <i>Number of diagnosed or at-risk children</i> | | | |
| At-risk | 3 | 7.5 | |
| Diagnosed | 37 | 92.5 | 4 |
| <i>Special education support</i> | | | |
| No support (either for the teacher or the student) | 9 | 22.5 | 1 |
| Special education support (for the student) | 25 | 62.5 | 3 |
| Special education support + in-class support (for the student) | 5 | 12.5 | |
| Special education consultation (for the teacher) | 1 | 2.5 | |

*f= number of teachers. Since the second group consisted of only four teachers, percentages are not given.

Research Instruments and Procedure

Teacher Interview Form A: To begin, we generated the questions to be included in the interview form for the first stage of the studies by examining previous studies (Gök & Erbaş, 2011; Kapçı, Acarlar, & Küçükler, 2003; Orhan, 2010; Şen, 2003; Varlier & Vuran, 2006; Yavuz, 2005). These questions were then analyzed by two experts in the field, and changes were made according to their suggestions. The first part of Form A included questions regarding demographic information about the teacher and the children with special needs, and the second part consisted of four questions related to the opinions of the teachers about inclusive practices in Turkey. The third part of the form consisted of three lists, each containing 10 items, with questions related to the difficulties the teachers encountered in their inclusive environments. The teachers were asked to rank the items according to whether they felt competent or lacked competence regarding the topic and whether they believed they needed more knowledge about the subjects on the first, second, and third lists, respectively.

Teacher Interview Form B: This form was developed to conduct in-depth interviews with four teachers and to reveal their needs concerning inclusion. For this purpose, 10 questions regarding preschool inclusion were prepared that covered the following topics: (a) the difficulties teachers encounter while they work with children with special needs, (b) physical adaptations and accommodations they make, (c) instructional goals they choose for special needs children, (d) methods they use to assess the children's performance, (e) difficulties they have in inclusive classroom management, (f) strategies they implement for individualized instruction, (g) intervention methods they use to deal with problem behavior, (h) support they receive, (i) interaction with the families of their students, and (j) professional development. All interviews were conducted during suitable hours by a doctoral student with experience in qualitative research studies in a quiet room at the teacher's school, for example a meeting room, teachers' room, or school counselor's room. The interview sessions were recorded on audio and video tapes, with both stages lasting 30 minutes on average.

Data Analyses

For data analysis, QSR NVivo9 software (QSR International Pty, Ltd., Victoria, Australia) was used. The first researcher transcribed all of the interviews conducted with the 40 teachers who were coded as T1, T2, T3, etc. (descriptive information), and the third and the fourth authors confirmed the transcribed texts by comparing them with the audio recordings. Next, all of the written texts were separately transferred to electronic media and the teachers' answers were examined in detail. The answers were then divided into different categories by content. These categories were examined separately by the first and fifth researchers. In this process, 20% of the interview files were randomly compared in terms of the categories and statements (teacher codes/frequencies) and any disagreements were reviewed until the researchers reached an accord. Inter-coder agreement was calculated using the following point-by-point agreement formula (Tawney & Gast 1984): [(Agreement/

(Agreement + Disagreement) \times 100]. For qualitative studies, Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest that finding agreement in more than 70% of the points means the coding is reliable. In the first stage of this study, the agreement coefficient was found to be reliable at 77%.

In the second stage, the data collected from the four teachers were analyzed by the first and fifth researchers using the same method. Themes and subthemes were formed, and agreement was reached on all of the themes. After the comparisons, any disagreements were resolved by discussion and agreement on coding, and in the end, five themes were predominant (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Results

The Results of the First Stage

Qualitative results. Our analyses showed that the first stage of the study had five main themes with 18 subthemes, as shown in Table 2. According to Table 2, all of the teachers in the first group seemed to believe that inclusion was a necessary practice and that it benefited all children, whether they had special needs or not. One of the teachers (T10) explained the benefits of inclusion for typically developing children: “I think other students in my class are developing more than typical at the beginning of the year. I mean, when that student (with special needs) cannot take his bottle or bag, one of his classmates runs there and helps him, and when he cannot carry his chair, someone pulls the chair back. I mean, they have incredible cooperation.” Another teacher (T1) added her thoughts on the same topic: “She (special needs child) came out of her shell over time, and her friends are trying to help her all the time. She started to trust her friends, so she is more open now. I mean...I think she started to slowly overcome her problem. Her socialization...her relationship with her friends started to get much better.” Another teacher (T11) stated, “That setting is so important for the child...At least he is learning the rules, I think.” Five teachers indicated that inclusion was a legal obligation, with one explaining it in the following way (T22): “Now it is really their (children with special needs) right...They need to attend (preschools).” Another teacher (T33) stated, “There is an obligation to have one student with special needs in every classroom.”

Table 2.

Themes and Subthemes Obtained by Descriptive Analyses

| Area of Questioning (Semi-structured question) | Core Relevant Narrative Formed From Quotation (Key content summarized through relevant quotations and linked by formulated meaning statements) | Emergent Themes (Initial themes arising within quotation) | f* | % |
|---|---|--|----|-----|
| The need for inclusion | <i>Inclusion is effective for children with and without special needs. (T1, T10, T11)</i> | 1. The benefits of inclusion | 40 | 100 |
| | <i>Inclusion is a legal obligation in Turkey. (T22, T23)</i> | 2. The legal obligation of inclusion | 5 | 13 |
| | <i>Inclusion practices are not properly carried out. (T29, T30)</i> | 3. Inclusion is unsuccessful/insufficient | 28 | 70 |
| The success of inclusion | <i>Inclusion practices are implemented but practices are only partially sufficient/successful. (T3, T19, T21)</i> | 4. Inclusion is partly successful/partly sufficient | 9 | 23 |
| | <i>Inclusion practices are sufficient and effectively carried out. (T2, T20, T34)</i> | 5. Inclusion is successful/sufficient | 5 | 13 |
| Factors affecting inclusion | <i>Teachers' knowledge and skills, classroom size, number of students with special needs in one classroom. (T1, T2)</i> | 6. Factors related to school | 36 | 90 |
| | <i>Type and severity of the disability of the student with special needs and existence of multiple disabilities. (T1, T28, T32)</i> | 7. Factors related to children with special needs | 15 | 38 |
| | <i>Whether the family of the child with special needs accepts his/her condition and their cooperation with schools; positive/negative attitudes of other families towards children with special needs and their families. (T4, T11, T20, T22)</i> | 8. Factors related to families | 13 | 33 |
| | <i>Approach and awareness of the society towards individuals with special needs. (T2, T3, T6)</i> | 9. Other factors | 5 | 13 |
| | <i>No support, such as consulting or in-class special education support (teacher aide). (T5, T22, T28)</i> | 10. No support given to the teacher | 23 | 58 |
| Support given for inclusion | <i>Support from school administration, school counselor or teacher candidates. (T13, T17, T23)</i> | 11. Support of school | 35 | 88 |
| | <i>Family-teacher cooperation, families providing communication between classroom teacher and special education teacher. (T4, T12, T13, T14, T18, T20, T23, T38)</i> | 12. Support of family | 26 | 65 |
| | <i>Face-to-face communication with or calling special education teacher. (T13, T19, T37, T8, T38)</i> | 13. Support of special education experts | 15 | 38 |

Table 2 continue...

| Area of Questioning (Semi-structured question) | Core Relevant Narrative Formed From Quotation (Key content summarized through relevant quotations and linked by formulated meaning statements) | Emergent Themes (Initial themes arising within quotation) | f* | % |
|--|---|---|----|----|
| Suggestions for inclusion | Utilizing books or films about children with special needs. (T8, T21, T22, T30) | 14. Support of printed and visual media | 8 | 20 |
| | Teacher education, assistive personnel, physical construction of the school building, classroom size, materials/equipments in the classroom. (T10, T12, T13, T14, T20, T28, T30, T31) | 15. Suggestions for school | 34 | 85 |
| | Separate classrooms, duration of inclusion, transition programs. (T1, T14, T18, T25) | 16. Suggestions for children with special needs | 9 | 23 |
| | Raising awareness among families of children with and without special needs. (T20, T24, T34) | 17. Suggestions for families | 6 | 15 |
| | Raising awareness in the society, personnel designation, checking related institutions and organizations. (T19, T20, T27, T40) | 18. Other suggestions | 5 | 13 |

Note: T: Teacher, *f = number of teachers

The second theme was related to the opinions of the teachers regarding the success of inclusion and the difficulties they encountered in their classes. When asked whether inclusion was successful or not, the majority of the teachers (f=28) reported that it was not (see Table 2). Those who thought that inclusion was successful (f=5) or partially successful (f=9) mentioned several factors that they believed contributed to the success. One of the teachers (T29) described it by saying, "Why aren't they (these programs) successful? That's because the teacher isn't attending to them (children with special needs). You can't attend to them like you can in special education (centers). You have to attend and teach only to them." Another teacher (T30) indicated that "When I think about my methods, I don't think they are sufficient...because...I'm not knowledgeable about it (inclusion) at all."

According to the teachers, the success of inclusion was negatively influenced by teacher factors, such as negative attitudes and a lack of knowledge and skills about the issue. In addition, as can be seen in Table 2, almost all the teachers (f=36) said that school factors, such as large class size, the number of children with special needs in one classroom, and the lack of assistants, also played a role. More than half of the teachers (f=25) indicated that they lacked the knowledge and skills to work with special needs children and that they especially had difficulty preparing IEPs and having students follow routines in classrooms with large numbers of students. One of the teachers (T1) put this into words by remarking, "Teachers need training for this. I

think teachers have to attend seminars and in-service trainings." Another (T12) said, "I can't individualize the educational program. At least, I can't do this right now. That's because my classroom size is large. I have 28 students in my class."

Thirty-eight percent of the teachers indicated that the characteristics of children with special needs affected the success of inclusion (f=15). When addressing this topic, one teacher (T1) remarked, "The severity of the child's impairment must be taken into account. The child must have only one kind of impairment. I mean, a child with both a physical and a mental impairment would benefit less from the instruction. I think inclusion is appropriate for children with mild disabilities." Another (T28) had this to say: "The impairment level is important...I mean, other children hardly accept them (children with severe disabilities)." Moreover, the teachers reported that they did not have the skills to manage the behavioral problems of special needs children (f=23). T1 explained this with the following example: "She colors everywhere...the tables, the floor...after she finishes activities. I tell her that what she does is wrong. Other than that, I can't do anything else."

Thirteen teachers explained that another factor that affects the success of inclusion is the families of children with and without special needs. For example, T20 described the importance of the relationship between a child with special needs and his family when she said that "There is a big difference in him now than the day he started, and this pleases his family. This is really important because I always receive feedback from his parents. 'We have done this and that...and this or that happened.' When you hear that, you feel more self-confident, and once you feel that, you want to give more to the child." Teacher 11 also explained how the families of children without special needs can affect inclusion. "But the parents of my students are really great. They all accept the child, and I've never heard anything like 'Why do we have a child like this?' They are all good." However, not all of the parents of children without special needs had positive things to say about inclusion, as T22 recounted: "Some parents say, 'I don't want my child to see a child like that; she might be depressed (because of him/her).'"

The fourth theme concerned the support that the preschool teachers receive, and more than half (f=23) indicated that they had no support (see Table 2). For example, T28 explained that she did not receive any support even though her student had a severe intellectual disability. She also complained, "In addition, we don't have any aides in the school and we need them." However, some teachers reported that they did receive limited support from the school, families, and school counselor. Teacher 13 described the support of a pre-service teacher: "At least she is supporting...I mean, the teacher candidates...I mean, most generally we benefit from them..." Meanwhile, T17 commented on the support of the school counselor: "Thanks to her (school counselor), we arranged an IEP meeting and we talked with her (the child with special needs') teacher there (at the special education center)." Some teachers also reported that they talked with special education teachers (outside of the school) either face-to-face, by telephone, or via the family to receive information to help develop the child's IEP.

The last theme of this study focused on suggestions from the teachers about inclusion. As Table 2 notes, 85% of the participants had suggestions for the schools (f=34), such as providing seminars, courses, in-service training, and real life experience regarding inclusive practices (f=18), having more assistive personnel, pre-

service teachers, etc. (f=14), and getting support from special education teachers, school counselors, or experts from CRCs. They also made other suggestions related to decreasing classroom size (f=6), organizing physical structure and architecture, and providing better resources (f=4). Teacher 31 suggested that *“Seminars must be organized. Something must be done in some way rather than leaving the child with special needs in the classroom with teachers who are unprepared.”* Nine teachers (25%) made suggestions related to the children with special needs themselves. For example, five of them believed that these children must be educated in separate classrooms; five thought that inclusion should not be full time, and one suggested that the children should participate in a transition program before they are enrolled in the regular classrooms. In addition, six teachers commented that the families of the children in the class, both children with and without special needs, must be informed about inclusion. Finally, five teachers also made recommendations that focused on informing society about inclusion (f=2), employing special education teachers in preschools (f=2), and reorganizing CRCs and special education centers (f=1).

Quantitative results. For the third part of Form A, the teachers were requested to rank the topics in which they felt competent or lacked competence, along with the primary topics that they deemed were areas in which they needed to increase their knowledge. Our findings are listed in Table 3. According to Table 3, 28-55% of the preschool teachers indicated that they felt competent when using different instructional methods, applying classroom and behavioral management strategies, and cooperating with families. However, half of the group reported that they lacked competence when it came to offering individualized instruction, assessing the performance of special needs children, and carrying out classroom and behavioral management. In addition, 50-58% of teachers stated that the main areas in which they needed to increase their knowledge were learning more about the characteristics of children with special needs, individualized instruction, and managing behavioral issues.

Table 3.

Topics in which the Teachers Felt Competent or Lacked Competence along with the Primary Topics for which They Needed to Increase Their Knowledge

| Topics | Competent | | Lacked competence | | Primary Topics | |
|--|-----------|----|-------------------|----|----------------|----|
| | f | % | f | % | f | % |
| Characteristics of young children with special needs | 5 | 13 | 11 | 28 | 23 | 58 |
| Assessment of performance | 5 | 13 | 17 | 43 | 8 | 20 |
| Individualized instruction | 8 | 20 | 24 | 60 | 21 | 53 |
| Use of different instructional methods | 20 | 50 | 9 | 23 | 5 | 13 |
| Supportive speech and language | 6 | 15 | 20 | 50 | 10 | 25 |
| Classroom management | 12 | 30 | 17 | 43 | 8 | 20 |
| Prevention and control of behavioral problems | 11 | 28 | 22 | 55 | 20 | 50 |
| Communication and cooperation with families | 22 | 55 | 6 | 15 | 3 | 8 |

The Results of the Second Stage

In the second part of our study, we analyzed data gathered from the in-depth interviews with four teachers, and found that their needs regarding inclusion were similar to what we found in the first stage of the study. These teachers reported that they did not know the characteristics of children with special needs, had difficulty teaching children with and without special needs in the same environment, and could not deal with behavioral problems in the classroom. Moreover, some particular needs related to inclusive practices emerged from these interviews. For example, due to the impairments of the children with special needs, the teachers could not involve them with table activities, art, music, or play activities. Teacher 3 explained, *"You can motivate them in social areas in one way or another or you can communicate with them by giving instructions...but in academic skills, when you put a worksheet in front of them (children with special needs) and give them instructions on how to fill it in, you can't get them do it like the other children."* Teacher 1 agreed, and added, *"He (a special needs child) finds it too difficult to hold the scissors in cutting exercises."*

The teachers also believed that teaching daily life, self-care, social, adaptive, and communication skills to special needs children in preschools was sufficient. Teacher 1 stated, *"The child must learn about daily life and his/her self-care first of all."* Teacher 2 said that *"social development is my priority goal. These types of kids are socially excluded."* On the same topic, T3 noted, *"Teachers must work on socially adaptive behaviors and communication rather than academic areas. I think communication must be the most important basis of inclusive education."*

The teachers also answered questions about the need for more knowledge regarding the developmental characteristics of children with special needs. They reported that they had difficulties in communicating and supporting the communication attempts of these children and explained that they needed to know what they should teach and how to instruct them. One teacher (T2) commented, *"In particular, how should we approach them (children with special needs)? What should we teach them? What are their characteristics?"* Another (T4) added, *"For example, physical organization – we aren't knowledgeable about it."* The teachers also indicated that they had attended in-service training but that they had had no opportunities to use the newly learned strategies in their classrooms. As T4 stated, *"I've attended training-sessions about inclusion before... I've participated in seminars about special education...even preparing IEPs...but when you don't have a child with special needs in your classroom, it makes no sense. I see now that I have little knowledge about inclusion. I understand it now."*

The other specific needs that were mentioned focused on developing IEPs and adapting the curriculum. One of the teachers reported that she was making the instructional goals simpler for her special needs children, and another indicated that she was trying to adapt the instruction by grouping the children according to their developmental levels. However, they both said that even though they wanted to modify the goals, they needed support to know how to choose appropriate goals and targets for the developmental level of the children, prepare IEPs, and integrate the IEP goals into the classroom program. One of the teachers (T2) discussed her difficulty in choosing goals, noting, *"We tried to write an IEP, but we weren't sure if it*

was right or wrong." Two teachers stated that they tried to modify the instructional setting and activities (e.g., changing the duration of activities), and three others said that they offered physical and verbal cues and reinforcement during classroom instruction. Regarding the use of cues, one teacher remarked that "...verbal (cues) are not so effective. I have to go right next to him and help." Another teacher (T4) indicated that she could not help the child as much as she needed. "For example, the child with special needs just sits during the activity, whether it is story-reading or art, and she just waits. She waits for me, and other children need help individually, too. I help every child one by one, and when it's her turn, I help her, too." One teacher responded, "His (child with special needs') work (worksheet) stays in front of him; I try to make him do that work individually for an hour." Another (T3) stated her ideas related to the problem of helping a special needs child in her classroom: "His family and others want him to do things in a group here (in the school). Indeed, sometimes, because he doesn't like group activities, we should do things one-on-one."

Another important point that the four teachers emphasized was that they did not have sufficient instructional materials in the classrooms. Teacher 2 explained, "We can't find them (appropriate materials) for different disabilities. And that's hard. Because they (these materials) aren't available all the time in the classroom, and since the classrooms are crowded, we can't get everyone access to appropriate materials." Another of the teachers' needs was to know how to assess whether the child was learning. The teachers indicated that they usually did this by observing the children, assessing their work, and having the students do a self-assessment. However, they found it difficult to apply these same methods to the children with special needs. One of the teachers said that she assessed her special needs child's performance by asking questions.

Similar to the findings of in the first stage of our study, the four teachers highlighted that the behavioral problems of the children with special needs negatively affected the classroom setting, and that they did not know how to deal with them. They also stated that they could not employ the same strategies that they normally used with children without special needs. Teacher 4 indicated that she left her special needs child alone: "Sometimes this child (with special needs) affects it (my classroom management). He is hyperactive. He runs, runs, (and) runs in the classroom. Then he falls down and gets up again and starts to run again. I can't do much about him. I can't do anything but let him do the things he does. I mean, sometimes when there is a challenging situation, I tell him, (but) I don't know if he understands me." Teacher 1 indicated that she did not implement any special strategies for classroom and behavior management for her children with special needs. "For my classroom management...I mean, I do what I generally do." Teachers 2 and 3 attributed the behavioral problems to the children's impairments when they said, "The things I do are useless because these behaviors are his (child with disability) characteristics."

The teachers indicated that they tried to cooperate with the families, school counselors, and special education experts, and two said that they talk with the families of the special needs children to try and find common ways to deal with behavioral issues, especially if the child is exhibiting the same problems at home and at school." Teacher 3 stated that she was trying to cooperate with the special

education center regarding the special needs child in her class. *"Since we are in touch with her (child with special needs') teacher there, I inform her (special education teacher) about the methods I use. They (the parents) talk to me about what a special education teacher does."* One of the teachers stated that she identified the instructional goals for her special needs student with the help of the school counselor. However, another teacher emphasized that school counselors also have limited knowledge about inclusion. In addition, one teacher (T3) stated that there was a need to prepare the children without special needs for inclusion saying, *"What and how will I explain to the other children about the child with special needs?"*

Discussion and Conclusions

In this two-staged study, the needs of inclusive preschool teachers were determined by analyzing qualitative data. The participants in both stages of the study believed that children with special needs must be educated alongside their peers. In addition, even though they indicated that they have had issues related to the system and difficulties in their inclusive classrooms; they believed that inclusion was still successful. It was very clear that the teachers did not think that they had sufficient knowledge and skills to work in inclusive classrooms, and that they had conflicts and doubts, especially with regard to their ability to prevent and control behavioral problems. Furthermore, having good classroom management and identifying the learning priorities of the children were also problematic. On one hand, the teachers believed that they could prevent and control behavioral issues, but at the same time, they expressed that this was sometimes difficult, and expressed a desire to learn more effective strategies. This might mean that these teachers saw the behavioral problems as a general characteristic of the children with special needs. Therefore, even though T1, T3, and T4 said that they have issues with classroom management and problem behavior, they did not mention this as a need because they felt like there was nothing that could be done. Lastly, the teachers stated that they needed training regarding the characteristics of children with special needs, behavioral strategies, prevention of behavioral problems, and assessment of special needs children. In addition, they felt that they needed additional experience and support in developing IEPs. Our findings were consistent with the results of previous studies conducted with preschool teachers working in inclusive schools both in Turkey and throughout the world (Buell et al., 1999; Crane-Mitchell & Hedge, 2007; Gök & Erbaş, 2011; Kapçı et al., 2003; Özaydın & Çolak, 2011; Soodak, Erwin, Winton, Brotherson, Turnbull, & Hanson, 2002; Şen, 2003; Varlier & Vuran, 2006; Yavuz, 2005)

The teachers' needs with respect to all aspects of inclusion can be explained by two factors. First, in undergraduate education, there is only one introductory course on special education in Turkey, and many teachers graduate without having attended any courses or classes that focus on working with children with special needs. Moreover, pre-service teachers learn the methods and techniques needed to work with children with typical development in their undergraduate degrees, but they learn only that inclusion is an educational approach or service model. In

addition, applied courses or practicums in teacher training programs focus on working with children without special needs leads to the lack of experience that the teachers in our study expressed.

The second issue is that in-service teacher training programs on inclusion are provided in Turkey for preschool teachers. However, due to factors such as the teachers' heavy workload and financial issues, only a few teachers can attend these programs. In addition, the in-service courses only include general knowledge about the principles of inclusion along with methods and strategies that can be used in inclusive environments. Therefore, the teachers in our study reported that they have not been able to use these methods and strategies in their classrooms because they need more than just general knowledge (Batu, 2000; Özaydın & Çolak, 2011). Hence, preschool teachers in Turkey have limited knowledge and experience with working in heterogeneous classrooms and cannot meet the diverse needs of the children. Previous studies have shown that for inclusion to be successful, teachers need to be informed about this issue and have on-the-job training along with workshops. Furthermore, they need to be provided with additional special education courses during their undergraduate studies so that they can effectively work with children with special needs (Crane-Mitchell & Hedge, 2007). Besides access to informative courses, preschool teachers also need different types of training programs that include coaching and feedback (Hundert, 2007; Schepis, Reid, Ownbey, & Parsons, 2001; Yang & Rusli, 2012). Therefore, in order to increase the quality and redeem the promise of inclusion in Turkey, where these types of teacher training programs are rare, teachers must be offered a way to increase their knowledge and experience related to inclusive practices.

In Turkey, there is limited available special education support for the teachers in inclusive preschools. The results of the first stage of this study showed that 22% of teachers did not have any support, and 62% of the students with special needs received individualized support from special education centers (Table 1). Even though some teachers indicated that they had support from families and school counselors, the lack of systematic support services, assistive teachers, volunteers, and paraprofessionals in the classrooms makes inclusion difficult. Teachers are especially challenged in classrooms with large numbers of students that have children with severe disabilities.

In Conclusion, providing volunteers or paraprofessionals who can support the teachers as well as the special needs children might increase the expected benefits of inclusion. In order for preschool inclusion to be successful, teachers need to be provided with support systems and appropriate classrooms as well as functional teacher training programs, which would create positive attitudes and provide teachers with the appropriate knowledge, skills, and experience that they need. While we believe our results are pertinent to the current status of inclusive classrooms in Turkey, further research is needed regarding the measures necessary to assess the quality of inclusion programs to ensure their success; the evaluation of pre-service and in-service teacher training programs, along with their effects on teacher and child outcomes; and efforts needed to improve the inclusion system and increase its benefits.

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Okul Öncesi Öğretmenlerin Kaynaştırma Uygulamaları Konusundaki Gereksinimleri

Atıf:

Akalın, S., Demir, Ş., Sucuoğlu, B., Bakkaloğlu, H., & İşcen, F. (2014). The needs of inclusive preschool teachers about inclusive practices. *Eurasian Journal of Educational Research*, 54, 39-60.

Özet

Problem Durumu: Kaynaştırma uygulamalarının kalitesi, programın felsefesi, idarecilerin desteği ile öğretmen eğitimi ve açık fikirli öğretmenlere bağlı olarak değişmekte; ancak başarılı kaynaştırmayı sağlayan en temel *elemanın* sınıf öğretmenleri olduğu ifade edilmektedir. Öğretmenlerin eğitimi, deneyimi, tutumları ile bilgileri kaynaştırma kalitesinin göstergesi olarak kabul edilmektedir. Öğretmenlerin sınıflarındaki farklı beceri ve yetenekleri olan çocukların gereksinimlerini karşılamak için hem özel gereksinimli çocuklar hem de kaynaştırma uygulamaları hakkında bilgi ve deneyime sahip olmaları gerektiği vurgulanmaktadır.

Türkiye'deki kaynaştırma uygulamalarını inceleyen araştırmalarda, kaynaştırmaya ilişkin çeşitli sorunlar yaşandığı ortaya çıkmıştır. İdareciler, anne babalar ve öğretmenler sıklıkla uygulama sürecindeki sorunları gündeme getirmiş ve bu sorunlar nedeniyle okul öncesi sınıflarına devam eden özel gereksinimli çocuklar için beklenen yararların sağlanamadığını vurgulamışlardır. Okul öncesinde kaynaştırma uygulamalarında karşılaşılan temel sorunların sınıflardaki çocuk sayısının fazla olması, çocuk ve öğretmen için destek hizmetlerinin yetersiz olması, idareci ve öğretmenlerin kaynaştırma konusundaki bilgilerinin yetersiz olması ile olumsuz öğretmen tutumları olduğu belirlenmiştir.

Özel gereksinimli çocukların kaynaştırılmasına ilişkin yasal düzenlemelerin yapılmasından sonra her yıl okul öncesi sınıflardaki özel gereksinimli çocukların sayısı artmaktadır. Öğretmenlerin çoğu okul öncesi kaynaştırma fikrini desteklemesine karşın, kaynaştırma uygulamalarına ilişkin bilgi ve beceri yetersizlikleri nedeniyle genellikle özel gereksinimli çocukları kendi sınıflarında istememektedir. Kaynaştırmanın en önemli bileşeni öğretmenlerdir ve kaynaştırma uygulamalarının başarısını artırmak amacıyla, öğretmenlerin özel gereksinimli olan ve olmayan çocukları kapsayan heterojen sınıflarda öğretim yapabilmek için hazırlanmaları gerekmektedir.

Araştırmanın Amacı: Türkiye'de okul öncesi dönemde kaynaştırma uygulamalarının başarısını artırmak için öğretmenlerin kaynaştırma konusunda bilgi ve deneyim kazanmalarının öncelikli bir konu olarak ele alınması gerektiği düşünülmektedir. Ancak, okulöncesi öğretmenlerinin bilgi ve beceri kazanmalarını sağlayabilmek ve gereksinimlerini karşılayacak işlevsel programlar hazırlayabilmek için öğretmenlerin öncelikli gereksinimlerinin belirlenmesi gerekmektedir. Bu nedenle okul öncesi öğretmenler için hazırlanan bir eğitim programının öğretmen çıktıları üzerindeki

etkilerini arařtırmak amacıyla yrtlen bir projenin ilk ařaması olarak planlanan bu alıřmada, sınıfta zel gereksinimli ocuk olan okul ncesi ğretmenlerinin kaynařtırmaya iliřkin gereksinimlerinin belirlenmesi amalanmıřtır. Bu amala iki ařamalı bir alıřma planlanmıř, ilk ařamada 40 ğretmenle yarı-yapılandırılmıř grřmeler yapılarak ğretmenlerin kaynařtırma konusundaki gereksinimleri ile kendilerini yeterli ve yetersiz grdkleri konular belirlenmeye alıřılmıř, ikinci ařamada ise bu ğretmenlerden drd ile derinlemesine grřmeler yapılarak ğretmenlerin gereksinimlerinin ayrıntılı olarak ortaya konulmasına alıřılmıřtır.

*Arařtırmanın Yntemi:*Nitel arařtırma ynteminin kullanıldıđı bu alıřmanın ilk ařamasına MEB'e bađlı 14 okul ncesi kurumunda alıřan 40 ğretmen ile ğretmen Grřme Formu A kullanılarak yarı-yapılandırılmıř grřmeler yapılmıřtır. Formun ilk blmnde ğretmen ve zel gereksinimli ocukların demografik bilgilerine iliřkin sorulara, ikinci blmnde kaynařtırma uygulamalarına iliřkin 4 aık ulu soruya ve son blmnde ise ğretmenlerin kaynařtırma uygulamalarında karřılařtıkları konuları ieren 10 maddelik  listeye yer verilmiřtir. ğretmenlerden birinci listeyi kullanarak kendilerini yeterli grdkleri konuları, ikinci listeyi kullanarak glk ektikleri konuları ve nc listeyi kullanarak ise ncelikli olarak bilgiye gereksinim duydıkları konuları nem sırasına gre sıralamaları istenmiřtir. alıřmanın ikinci ařamasında ise, 40 ğretmen arasından gnll olan 4 ğretmen ile ğretmen Grřme Formu B kullanılarak derinlemesine grřmeler gerekleřtirilmiřtir. Grřlen ğretmenlerin sınıflarında bir ya da birden fazla zel gereksinimli ocuk bulunmaktadır. İki grup ğretmeninden toplanan veriler, QSR NVivo-9 yazılımı kullanılarak ayrı ayrı tmevarım yntemi kullanılarak analiz edilmiřtir.

Arařtırmanın Bulguları:alıřmanın birinci ařamasında yapılan analizler sonucunda, ilk olarak kaynařtırma uygulamalarının gerekliliđi, bařarısı, etkili faktrler, alınan destekler ve nerilerden oluřan beř ana tema ve bunlara bađlı onsekiz alt tema belirlenmiřtir. İkinici olarak, ğretmenlerin %28 ile %55'inin farklı ğretim yntemleri kullanma, sınıf ynetimi, problem davranıřların kontrol ve ailelerle iřbirliđi konularında kendilerini yeterli grdkleri, buna karřın grubun yaklařık yarısının (%43-60) ğretimi bireyselleřtirme, uygun ğretim materyali seme, zel gereksinimli ocukların performanslarını deđerlendirme, sınıf ynetimi ve problem davranıřlarla bař etme konularında ise kendilerini yetersiz grdkleri belirlenmiřtir. nc olarak, zel gereksinimli ocukların zellikleri, ğretimi bireyselleřtirme ile problem davranıřların kontrol konularının ğretmenlerin yarısından fazlasının ncelikli olarak bilgi edinmek istedikleri konular olduđu grlmřtir.

Arařtırmanın ikinci ařamasında yapılan analizler sonucunda, drt ğretmeninde birinci ařamadaki ğretmenlere benzer Őekilde kaynařtırmaya iliřkin bilgi ve deneyim gereksinimlerini vurguladıđı grlmřtir. Bu ğretmenler zellikle zel gereksinimli ocukları tanımadıklarını, ğretim srecinde glkler yařadıklarını ve davranıř problemleri ile bař edemediklerini aıklayarak bu konularda eđitim almaları gerektiđini belirtmiřlerdir. Bu ařamada ayrıca, ğretmenlerin kaynařtırma uygulamalarına iliřkin bazı zel gereksinimleri de ortaya ıkmıřtır. rneđin, ğretmenler zel gereksinimli ocukların dil ve konuřma, biliřsel, motor ve sosyal

becerilere ilişkin yetersizlikleri nedeniyle masa başı etkinlikleri ile sanat, müzik ve oyun etkinliklerine katılımını sağlamada zorlanmaktadırlar. Öğretmenler yine özel gereksinimli çocuklarla iletişim kurma ve onların iletişimlerini destekleme konusunda güçlük çektiklerini belirtmişler ve çocuklara hem ne öğreteceklerini hem de nasıl öğretim yapacaklarını bilmek istediklerini dile getirmişlerdir. Öğretmenlerin önemle vurguladıkları bir diğer nokta, öğretim yöntemlerinde ve materyallerde uyarlamalar yapamamaları ve sınıflarında yeterince öğretim materyali bulunmaması ile ilgilidir. Bir başka gereksinim ise, özel gereksinimli çocukların performansını, bir başka deyişle öğrenip öğrenmediklerini değerlendirmek konusundadır. Öğretmenler ayrıca kaynaştırma konusunda kısa süreli hizmetiçi eğitim programlarına katılmalarına karşın bu programların özel gereksinimli çocuklarla çalışmak için yeterli olmadığını da belirtmişlerdir.

Araştırmanın Sonuçları ve Önerileri: Çalışmanın her iki aşamasında yer alan katılımcıların uygulamada karşılaştıkları güçlükler karşın kaynaştırmanın tüm çocuklar için uygun olduğuna ve özel gereksinimli çocukların akranları ile birlikte eğitim almaları gerektiğine inandıkları görülmektedir. Bazı öğretmenler sistemdeki sorunlara ve karşılaştıkları güçlükler karşın, kaynaştırma uygulamalarını başarılı bulmaktadır. Ancak öğretmenler kaynaştırma konusunda kendilerini rahat hissetmediklerini, özel gereksinimli çocukların bulunduğu sınıflarda çalışmak için kendilerini yeterli görmediklerini ifade etmişlerdir. Öğretmenler çocukların özellikleri, öğretimi bireyselleştirme, davranışsal stratejiler, problem davranışlarla baş etme, özel gereksinimli çocukların performansını değerlendirme gibi neredeyse kaynaştırmanın tüm boyutlarında eğitime, deneye ve desteğe gereksinimleri olduğunu belirtmişlerdir.

Sonuç olarak, okul öncesinde kaynaştırmanın başarılı olmasını sağlayacak faktörlerin iyi eğitim almış personel, uygun destek hizmetleri, uygun fiziksel koşullar ve özel gereksinimli çocukların gereksinimlerini karşılayacak araç-gereçler ile olumlu öğretmen tutumları olduğu açıktır. Bir başka deyişle, okul öncesi kaynaştırmanın başarılı olması için, öğretmenlere destek hizmetleri ile uygun fiziksel koşulların sağlanmasının yanı sıra, bilgi beceri ve deneyimlerini artıracak ve olumlu tutumlarını geliştirecek işlevsel öğretmen eğitimi programlarının uygulanması gereklidir. İleri araştırmalarda kaynaştırma uygulamalarının kalitesinin sorgulanarak başarıyı artıracak önlemlerin belirlenmesi, hizmet öncesi ve hizmet-içi öğretmen eğitimi programları hazırlanarak bu programların öğretmen ve çocuk çıktıları üzerindeki etkilerinin araştırılması ile elde edilen bulgular temel alınarak sistemin iyileştirilmesi için gerekli çalışmaların yapılabileceği düşünülmektedir.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Okul öncesi öğretmenler, kaynaştırma uygulamaları, gereksinimler, yarı-yapılandırılmış görüşme