

## Special education in Turkey\*

*Figen Eres*

*(Department of Educational Science, Faculty of Industrial Arts Education, Gazi University, Ankara 06830, Turkey)*

**Abstract:** The quality and the prevalence of education are the major indicators of the development of a society. It is a kind of human right to every person living in the society to be educated in a sufficient way. The education of the disabled people, a social reality in Turkey, is not sufficiently carried out. This paper aims at the education of the disabled people in Turkey. In order to mention about the education of the disabled people, this paper also mentions about the general characteristics of the disabled. The service of special education has not reached all the disabled, and the disabled and their families are not aware of the importance of the education. Only 90 thousand out of over one million disabled children receive the education. Disabled children continue their training in five groups: the sight impaired, the hearing impaired, the orthopedic impaired, the mentally impaired and children with long-term illness. Raising awareness is very important for all of the Turkish people. So a social education is necessary in order to deal with this problem.

**Key words:** Turkey; special education; disabled children; disabled people

### 1. Introduction

Values such as democracy, equivalence and human rights frequently mentioned during the globalization process determine the necessity of the participation of the disabled in the society like the other normal persons as a standard of judgment. The participation of the disabled in the society is observed in the examples of developed countries. However, when compared with Turkey, only the 4/10,000 of the national income is spent for the disabled, and despite the fact that of the total population of the country 12% belong to the disabled, it is interesting that the education rate is only 2.5% (KB, 2001). It is necessary to evaluate the presence and quality of the special education for the disabled in order for the disabled to make use of the education, a fundamental human right, like the other people.

Special education is the training that is implemented in an environment which is suitable for the disabled children through the help of qualified personnel and special development programmes (Ozsoy, 1985). According to another definition, special education is the type of education that is generally provided for unusual children with special needs, helps those with outstanding characteristics to increase their competence upto the highest level, prevents turning of inadequacy into disability, enables disabled individuals to be integrated with the society by helping them to be self-sufficient and equip individuals with skills so that they can become independent and productive (Ataman, 2003; I. Ozurluler Surasi, 1999). As is also understood from the descriptions, the special education in Turkey is not only aimed for the disabled but also for the highly gifted. On the other hand, in terms of the prevalence of the education given, the education for the disabled is superior. Therefore, it will be correct to

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Figen Eres, Ph.D., assistant professor, Department of Educational Science, Faculty of Industrial Arts Education, Gazi University; research fields: education and school management, educational leadership, education politics and planning.

consider the disabled as the target group when defining the special education.

## 2. General characteristics of disabled in Turkey

Individuals with disabilities in Turkey have equal rights with normal individuals and various provisions of law relating to the education of the disabled are available. There are decisions for the disabled in the Council of National Education and Development Plan in Turkey. Today, special education is continued by the Ministry of Education (Cikili, 1996). Population of Turkey is 70,586,256 according to the last census. There are 8,357,000 people are disabled. 12.29 percent of the population is disabled and most of them are at old age. The number of disabled men is much more than women and many of the disabled live in the Black Sea region. While the highest disability proportion is observed in orthopedically disabled people, the lowest disability proportion is observed in hearing disabled people (DIE, 2008). When the proportions are examined by sex, it is observed that while the proportion of orthopedically, seeing, hearing, speaking and mentally disabled people is higher in males, the proportion of people having chronic illnesses is higher in females. While the proportion of orthopedically, seeing, hearing, speaking and mentally disabled people is higher in rural, the proportion of people having chronic illnesses is higher in urban (OIB, 2002). The education level of the disabled in Turkey is shown in the following Table 1.

**Table 1 The proportion of disabled population by completed educational level (age≥25)**

	Illiterate	Literate	Literate but no school completed	Primary school	Junior high school and equivalent	High school and equivalent	Higher education
Turkey	36.37	63.62	7.69	40.97	5.64	6.90	2.42
Urban	27.40	72.58	6.85	42.75	8.00	10.62	4.36
Rural	45.36	54.64	8.54	39.17	3.31	3.16	0.47
Male	25.75	74.22	7.95	47.21	6.98	8.98	3.10
Female	51.26	48.74	7.32	32.22	3.78	3.97	1.45

Source: OIB (2002).

When Table 1 is examined, 36% of the disabled population is illiterate. In other words, approximately 3 million disabled people lack of literacy. This rate is higher in the rural areas. When the numeric data is evaluated according to the sex, an inevitable fact of Turkey is seen. Whereas the 27% of the female population in Turkey is illiterate (DIE, 2005), this condition is also valid for the disabled women. More than half of the disabled handicapped women are illiterate. Another issue is associated with the use of higher education by the disabled. According to the data in Table 1, it is observed that the disabled continue their higher education in the rate of 2.42%. When the data in Table 1 are generally evaluated, the disabled in Turkey are not able to make use of the education sufficiently. The surveys conducted for the disabled in Turkey are very limited. In the research conducted by the Prime Ministry, the expectations of the disabled from the government have been examined. The expectations of the disabled are shown in the following Table 2.

According to Table 2, it is observed that financial support is one of the greatest expectations of the disabled with the rate of 61%. The rate of the disabled who expect financial support is 68% in the rural areas while approximately 55% in the city. Approximately 59% of the disabled men, and approximately 64% of the disabled women expect financial support from the organizations and institutions. It can be said that the reason why the rate of disabled expecting financial support is more in the rural areas and why the women expect such support more result from the low incomes. It is very interesting that the expectation of the disabled to make use of the education

facilities is in the lowest level. It can be useful for the quality of the governmental services to look for the reason of this condition.

**Table 2 The proportion of disabled population by expectations from organizations**

	Financial support	Creation of educational opportunities	Helping to find job	Defense of legal rights	Having treatment and care services by health personnel at home	Others	Unknown
Turkey	61.22	3.31	9.55	3.51	4.12	13.53	4.76
Urban	55.28	4.23	10.20	4.60	4.71	15.37	5.60
Rural	68.03	2.25	8.80	2.26	3.45	11.41	3.80
Male	59.34	3.63	12.33	4.10	2.97	12.65	4.98
female	63.76	2.88	5.78	2.72	5.67	14.72	4.46

Source: OIB (2002).

### 3. Education of disabled in Turkey

Special education is continued by the Ministry of National Education in Turkey (Cikili, 1996). Special education covers children between the ages of 0-18 who show some differences from other children because of their physical, mental, psychological, emotional or social characteristics and cannot, therefore, benefit from the regular education services. Education of the disabled children is a subject of concern for the Ministry of National Education, according to the principle of "Equality of Opportunity and in Education" (MEB, 2007). In Turkey, educational services are provided in special education schools to children and young people in five groups: the sight impaired, the hearing impaired, the orthopedic impaired, the mentally impaired and children with long-term illness. Of the children in all groups, those in a suitable condition are included in integration education in normal schools and benefit from education services through special education classes and supportive education (MEB, 2008). Numeric values concerning the handicapped between 0-19 are shown in the following Table 3 (DIE, 2008):

**Table 3 Numbers of the handicapped between 0-19 age according to sex**

Age group	Total	Boy	Girl
0-4	263,055	157,186	105,869
05-09	319,276	183,599	135,677
10-14	278,468	157,323	121,145
15-19	297,837	155,941	141,896
Total sum	1,158,636	654,049	504,587

Source: DIE (2008).

When Table 3 is examined, it is understood that 1,158,636 handicapped children in total live in Turkey. The numbers of the disabled boys are superior to that of the disabled girls. When the disabled children are examined according to their handicap, 21.6% of the orthopedically handicapped, 22.2% of the visually disabled, 36.2% of the hearing disabled are between ages of 0-19 (DIE, 2008). There are no data available related to the mentally disabled.

The basic principle of special education which has adopted along with the new legislation is to plan and carry out the services without isolating individuals with special education needs from their social and physical environment (MEB, 2000). Also in all those impairment groups, the children who meet the criteria are taken to adaptation training in normal schools and make use of education services through special education classes and

supplementary education (Sari, 2002). Adaptation education refers to disabled individuals' sustaining education in regular or separate classes where peers that are not inadequate study (MEB, 2008). But there are some children who cannot benefit from education due to several reasons though they need special education.

Special education schools and institutions consist of primary education schools, vocational and technical schools, multi-program schools, application schools, autistic children education center and science and art centers for talented and gifted children in Turkey (MEB, 2006). Disabled children are educated in boarding or day schools except autistic children education centers and science and art centers. Special education schools are summarized below (MEB, 2008).

### **3.1 The education of the mentally disabled people**

A mentally disabled person is defined as the person who is with two standard deviation differences under the average in terms of mental functions and in parallel with this condition a person with deficiencies or limitations of cognitive, social and practical adaptation skills, and the person who are with these characteristics under 18 which is the development period. These people can make use of four different education institutions according to level of deficiency, age, competence and also their education performances. These are:

#### (1) Primary education schools for mentally disabled

It provides education services for children of 6-14 years with mental deficiency with low level. Graduates of this school are awarded elementary school diploma and they are entitled to attend labor schools, high schools or adult education institutions.

#### (2) Job schools for mentally disabled

Individuals with slight mental deficiency younger than 21 years old and graduated from elementary school attend these schools. Academic information, vocational education is run in such schools. Education duration is four years. Individuals awarded diploma in these schools are not entitled to attend higher education upon graduation from these schools.

#### (3) Education and application schools

These schools are education institutions where children of 6-14 years with moderate and severe mental deficiency attend. Diploma awarded in graduation is not equivalent to the elementary school diploma, and graduates cannot attend high school. Those individuals can attend job training centers.

#### (4) Job training centers

Such schools are education institutions where individuals with moderate and severe mental deficiency remaining outside of compulsory education period attend. Aim of these schools is to equip members with skills relevant to a specific profession. Different curricula with varying contents and durations are applied in schools in this category. Those graduating from this course are awarded the "certificate".

### **3.2 The education of the people with physical disabled**

It includes the education of the people who are visually, hearing and orthopedically disabled.

#### (1) Special education for the hearing impaired

It is essential for hearing-impaired students to primarily benefit from integration education together with their normal peers. Special education is provided for hearing-aided children in both boarding and day schools in elementary education level. There are at most ten students in such schools. Graduates of these schools can attend vocational high schools for the hearing-aided. There are maximum 15 students in every workshop in those schools. General knowledge and professional courses are run in vocational high schools.

#### (2) Special education for the orthopedic impaired

Orthopedically disabled students can receive pre-school education, elementary and secondary education. Students can attend either boarding or day school. Vocational and technical education is provided after elementary education in vocational high schools.

(3) Special education for the visually impaired

Pre-school and elementary education are provided for visually disabled students in these schools. All of the elementary schools are boarding. Students may attend day school at their option. Graduates can attend regular high-schools in free boarding status.

**3.3 The education of the people with social and emotional handicap**

It includes the education of the autistic children.

(1) Autistic children education centers

Autistic children in compulsory education age attend these schools. In these schools, students are equipped with skills regarding daily life and self-care as well as receive education on adaptation to the society. Maximum four students are placed in each class, and one teacher is appointed for every two students. Autistic children can go to job training centers for acquiring professional skills after graduating from these schools.

(2) Job training centers for autistic children

These centers have been established in order to improve the basic life skills of the children who are not in the age of compulsory education and who are not able to make use of the general education program, and to make them adapted into the society, and to provide them with the skills for job and profession.

**3.4 The education of the people with permanent disease**

Includes the education of the people who have to stay in the hospital or at home due to their permanent disease requiring for the continuous or long-term care and treatment.

(1) Hospital primary education for patient children

There are elementary schools in hospitals where children who are supposed to receive therapy on a constant basis. These schools are opened for preventing loss of school year of children in compulsory education period. Besides, domestic education is provided for children who cannot attend regular schools. Teachers run domestic education in houses where students live. Once circumstances requiring domestic education expire, such as service finishes.

(2) Education at home

The education is for the persons who are preschool age and in the age of primary school and also need special education. This finishes when the conditions that require the home education are over.

**3.5 The education of the people with special skills**

The Ministry of National Education has established the centers of education on the grounds that intelligent students also need special education. These centers are also called as “Centers of Science and Arts”. Guidance and research centers were opened in order to undertake guidance and psychological counseling works at training and education institutions effectively as well as to analyze the individuals necessitating special education, to determine the most suitable education environment for these individuals and to provide guidance and psychological counseling to such individuals.

In order that the talented or gifted children at the age of primary and secondary education can be aware of their individual talents and develop and use their maximum capacity, science and art centers were opened as autonomous special education institutions. Science and art centers aim to provide individual or group education to talented or gifted children at the age of primary or secondary education according to their capacities, interests and

inclinations in their spare time left over formal education.

#### 4. An overview of special education schools

The Table 4 regarding the schools and teachers of the students who take special education service in Turkey is as follows:

**Table 4** Number of schools, students and teachers at special education in 2007-2008 academic year in Turkey

Type of school	Number of school-institution	Number of students	Number of teachers
Primary Education School for Hearing Impaired	48	4,967	1,023
Vocational High School for Hearing Impaired	15	1,301	211
Primary Education School for Visual Impaired	16	1,349	385
Primary Education School for Orthopedic Impaired	3	442	73
Vocational High School for Orthopedic Impaired	2	96	23
Primary Education Schools for Mentally Disabled	50	2,889	1,149
Job schools for Mentally Disabled	67	2,736	
Education and Application Schools	121	5,328	1,526
Job Training Centers	126	2,578	
Science and Art Centers	43	5,756	552
Hospital Primary Education School	47(in hospital)	Variable (5,996)	94
Autistic Children Education Centers	23	692	230
Education at Home	-	200	
Guidance Research Centers	192	-	926
Adaptation training in normal schools	-	56,521	-
Total	753	90,851	6,192

Source: MEB, 2008.

When Table 4 is generally evaluated, there are about 3-6 students per teacher in the education of the students who need special education. Because of the fact that the treatment period is over, there is no exact number for the students who are receiving education in the hospital or at home. Therefore, it is observed that there are more students for the teachers who are giving education in the hospital and at home.

#### 5. Result and discussion

Meeting the needs of the disabled has been always observed during the history. Indeed, meeting the needs of the disabled is associated with meeting the needs of the disabled families (Wade & Moore, 1987). The policies and applications set for the disabled are in fact related to not only the disabled but also the whole society (Varol, 2000). In order for the disabled to be socialized and for the normal people to be adapted to the disabled, all other factors are related with the special education of the disabled and the education of the society. Living standards of disabled population and quality of services offered to them take place an important role in health, education and economic development indicators of countries.

The limited studies conducted in Turkey have shown that poverty has direct impact on the disability becoming widespread. Poverty is the factor and reason that result of the disability. The handicaps resulted from poverty lead to the discrimination against the disabled and the negative behaviors and applications strength to strength. There is a discrimination against the disabled in work life in particular (DIE, 2008). The approximate

rate of disability, 12%, the disadvantages encountered by the disabled in health, education, making a business, and social life show another great matter to be dealt with. This is the prevention and early diagnosis of the disability. According to the result of the Turkey Disabled People Research, among the disability reasons, congenital disability rate was reported as approximately 34%. When considering the widespread kin marriage in the unique conditions of Turkey, disability due to prenatal reasons is a significant problem.

Another issue to be discussed is that the education of the disabled people after their unavoidable births. There are some challenges before the disabled people taking their education they need in Turkey. On the other hand, the service for the people needing the special education is of great importance in the context of the development of such people. However, when examining the data of Turkey, it is clear that the expectation of education of the disabled people is low but also the number of the children receiving the special education between 0-18 is rather low compared to the grand total. Only 90 thousand out of one million children can receive education and this is a condition required to be discussed. As much as the deficiency of the special education services in Turkey, the quality of the special education given by the government is also required to be discussed. The research on the issue why only 90 thousand out of over one million disabled children receive the education should be the first problem to be discussed.

Researches carried out so far suggest that legal regulations regarding special education need to be improved in Turkey. Several challenges are met in bringing up teachers (Cikili, 1996) and there is only a limited number of teachers in this area. Therefore, teachers from other branches (such as classroom teachers) are appointed for special education. On the other hand, necessary education support is not provided for families of children who are in need of special education (Korucu, 2005). Putting the laws into effect by the law makers is not enough for Turkey. The laws and the other legal texts should be made functional by the leaders. The special education managers should make a decision towards the efficient application of this function. Furthermore, raising awareness among the disabled and their families about the special education can increase the attention paid to the special education.

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