

Examination of Social Science Teachers' Opinions on the Education of Students with Special Learning Deficiency

Hakan AKDAĞ

*Faculty of Education, Mersin University, Turkey
hakanakdag@mersin.edu.tr*

ABSTRACT

Considering the desire and effort of human beings, who are social beings, to live together, each individual forming the society needs a particular importance. It is also necessary to support the desire of harmonious and healthy individuals to live together in a society consisting of different people in terms of quantity and quality, with different instruments. Apart from the communication, economics, law, theology, psychology, politics, demography, etc. fields, education and training activities come to the fore when the necessity of systematic learning and assimilation of different variables by individuals within a multi-disciplinary understanding. When the subject is considered from the point of view of individuals with specific learning difficulties, systematic studies are carried out through public or private institutions for their education in Turkey. Inclusive education is one of the practices that schools do in this context. The teachers of the social studies course, being one of the useful courses for the students to adapt and socialize with the society they live in, have important duties in terms of adapting the students with special learning difficulties to the society. It is thought to be necessary to determine the status, scope and purpose of educational activities for them and the suggestions presented in this framework. In this context, this research, which was conducted to determine the views of social studies teachers on inclusive education practices, was shaped in a case study pattern and suggestions were presented in accordance with the results obtained.

Keywords: Learning Difficulty, Social Studies, Inclusive Education, Opinion, Case Study.

INTRODUCTION

Learning difficulty, which is thought to develop due to heredity or various environmental factors, is one of the educational barriers that can be overcome by employing the special education option.

Learning difficulty, a concept that can be defined as impairments in thinking, using language skills (listening/watching, speaking, reading, writing) or in one or more of mathematical calculations is a condition that should be identified as a result of teachers' evaluations through various activities. The process of determining this problem, which can cause disorders in affective, social and psycho-motor areas over time (Ministry of National Education, 2008; Polat, 2013), should be completed before students are directed to guidance and research centers (Doğan, 2012). It is ensured that students with specific learning difficulties continue their education with inclusive education in the same classrooms with their peers after receiving the necessary diagnosis.

Students with special learning difficulties receive education with the Individualized Education Program (IEP), which is based on the program for their peers in their classes, and their assessments are made accordingly. Each branch has a maximum of 2 inclusive students. If a suitable class cannot be found, arrangements are made to have a maximum of 5 inclusive students in a class. It is obligatory to establish an IEP Development Unit and a support training room in schools with these students. The courses to be taken by the students in need of special education in the support education room are determined at the beginning of the semester and can be arranged during the semester if deemed necessary. Social studies course is also among the courses that can be given in this room. In the whole assessment and evaluation process, arrangements are made in the educational elements (material, duration, environment, etc.) in line with their inadequacy and developmental characteristics. Necessary measures are taken for them in central system exams (Special Education Services Regulation, 2018).

With inclusive education, it is aimed to support the academic skills of students with learning difficulties as well as improve their social skills with their peers. Social studies course acts as a bridge in this context. Therefore, it is thought that it is necessary to determine the status, scope and purpose of educational activities for them and the suggestions presented in this framework. There are studies in the literature examining the views of teachers on students with special learning difficulties, but there are hardly any studies examining the views of social studies teachers on this subject. Yaylacı and Aksoy (2016) collected the opinions of social studies teachers about their competencies in inclusive education through a questionnaire. Accordingly, it has been determined that teachers consider themselves sufficient in planning and organizing the teaching process, but not in observing and evaluation and in enabling vocational development. In addition, it was determined that teachers supported inclusive education,

but found themselves inadequate in providing this education. Arslan (2019) conducted a study to determine the attitudes of social studies teacher candidates about inclusive education in terms of various variables, and the following results were obtained: Pre-service teachers' positive attitudes towards inclusive education are high. In addition, female pre-service teachers, pre-service teachers who take courses on disability types, pre-service teachers who are familiar with special needs individuals, and pre-service teachers who support the participation of individuals with special needs in inclusive practice have more positive attitudes. Based on the small number of studies and the reasons presented above, it is aimed to determine the views of social studies teachers, who are the course administrators, on inclusive education practices. Based on this main purpose, answers are sought for the following questions:

1. What are the opinions of social studies course teachers, who have students with learning difficulties, about their classroom activities?
2. What are the opinions of social studies course teachers on the suitability of the course topics for the structure of students with learning difficulties (inclusive education)?
3. What are the activities teachers have done for students who have learning difficulties in social studies sessions?
4. What do the teachers think about the advantages and disadvantages of social studies course subjects in the context of inclusive education?
5. What are the teachers' suggestions for inclusive education within the scope of social studies course?

METHODS

In this research, which was carried out in accordance with the qualitative model, the case study pattern was taken as the basis. The case study is a research design that focuses on finding a holistic description and explanation (Merriam, 2013), and allows the researcher to examine a phenomenon or event that cannot be controlled by the researcher based on 'how' and 'why' questions (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2006).

'Typical case sampling', which is one of the purposive sampling methods and aiming to reveal the typical or normal (Glesne, 2013, 61), was applied in the research. In this context, 21 social studies teachers working in public schools affiliated to Mersin Provincial Directorate of National Education were reached in the 2020-2021 academic year. Information about the working group is given below.

Table 1. Information about the study group of the research

		n	%
Tenure	1 – 5 year	2	10
	6 – 10 year	5	24
	11 – 15 year	10	47
	16 – 20 year	4	19
	20 + year	0	0
	Total	21	100
Gender	Female	7	33
	Male	14	67
	Total	21	100
Age	25-30	3	14
	31-35	4	19
	36-40	9	43
	41-45	3	14
	46-...	2	10
	Total	21	100

When looking at the table, 14 (67%) of the participants are male and 7 (33%) are female. It is seen that teachers who work for 11-15 years are more than the others in terms of their tenure. In addition, when looking at the age range, the majority of teachers are 36-40 years old.

The data were collected through an open-ended question form, which enables unexpected or unplanned answers to be obtained if participants are asked to answer freely (Büyüköztürk et al., 2014). In this way, it is thought that more comprehensive and detailed data on the subject can be reached. With the form, it was asked what they thought about the in-class activities that social studies teachers do for their students with special learning difficulties, the suitability of the course topics to the structure of this type of students, the advantages and disadvantages of social studies course topics in the context of inclusive education, and what can be done for inclusive education within

the scope of social studies course. The open-ended question form was given its final form after taking the opinions of three field experts.

In the analysis of the data collected through focus group interviews, content analysis was used, in which similar data were brought together around certain concepts and phrases and presented in a way that readers could understand (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2006).

FINDINGS

In this section, the findings obtained in order to answer the sub-questions of the research are given.

Table 2. Having a student with a learning disability

Themes	n	%
Exist	15	71
Absent	6	29
Total	21	100

Table 3. Activity themes

Themes	n	%
Teaching with game	13	22
Concretization	12	20
Re-reading and writing	9	15
IEP Plan	9	15
Material preparation	8	13
Communication	5	8
Current events	4	7
Total	60	100

71% (15) of the participants stated that there were students with learning difficulties in their classes, and 29% (6) stated that they were not in their classes to the question which is one of the aims of the research: ‘Do you have students who have learning difficulties in Social Studies courses? Please write your opinions about your classroom activities, if any.’. It is seen that the activity themes of the teachers, especially those who attend the classes of the students with learning difficulties and according to their previous job experiences, are grouped under the headings of ‘teaching with games, concretization, re-reading and writing, IEP plan, material preparation, communication and current events’. In form 7, a teacher said, ‘Of course there is. I’m trying to embody more. I try to explain the games or the materials they use in daily life, with materials close to them’.

Table 4. Opinions on the suitability of social studies course topics for the structure of students with learning difficulties (inclusive education)

Themes	n	%
Not suitable	13	34
Discrete / Hard	12	32
One-to-one education	9	24
Suitable	4	10
Total	38	100

Thirteen of the participants (34%) stated that the subjects were not suitable within the framework of the second sub-problem of the research [‘What are your views on the suitability of social studies course topics for the structure of students with learning difficulties (inclusive education)?’]. On the other hand, they stated that the subjects were difficult and abstract and that they were solved with one-to-one training, and 4 (10%) teachers stated that the subjects were suitable. In form 5, a teacher said, “For students with learning problems, the topics are a bit heavy. For example, let’s leave the literacy problem aside, it is very difficult to explain the wars of the Ottoman Empire to a student who does not know the capital of Turkey.

Table 5. Activities carried out by teachers for students with learning difficulties in social studies sessions

Themes	n	%
One-to-one education	13	20
Teaching with game	12	19

Concretization	12	19
Material preparation	10	15
Reinforcement	8	12
Simplification	7	11
We do not conduct much	3	4
Total	65	100

Thirteen of the participants (20%) reported a theme in the direction of one-to-one training within the framework of the third sub-problem of the research [‘Please write down the activities you have done for students who have learning difficulties in social studies sessions (inclusive education)’]. Considering the other themes, 12 (19%) of the teachers were teaching with games, 12 (19%) were concretizing, 10 (15%) were preparing materials, 8 (12%) were reinforcement, 7 (11%) were facilitating, and 3 (4%) stated that they do not do much of this type of activity. In form number 4, a teacher said, ‘We play the game who am I so that he gets to know his friends, increases his communication with them, and understands the role of student at school. Topics stay in mind by singing. Also, matching is more effective in puzzle games and they have fun.’

Table 6. Opinions on the advantages and disadvantages of social studies course subjects in the context of inclusive education

Themes (Advantages)	n	%	Themes (Disadvantages)	n	%
Concretization	15	18	Discrete subjects	14	18
Visualization	14	17	Concepts	13	16
Simplification	12	15	Session duration	13	16
Communication	10	13	Crowded Classrooms	12	14
Flexibility of Subjects	10	13	Long texts	12	14
Supportive	10	13	Boring	10	12
Reinforcement	9	11	Environment	8	10
Total	80	100	Total	82	100

While the themes of concretization (15), visualization (14), simplification (12), communication (12), flexibility of subjects (10), supportive (10) and reinforcement (9) indicate the advantages of the subjects, the abstractness of the subjects (14), the concepts used (13), insufficient course time (13), crowded classrooms (12), long texts (12), boredom of students with learning difficulties in the course (10), and environmental impact (8) themes were also stated as disadvantages of social studies course subjects within the framework of the fourth sub-theme of the research (‘Please write your views on the advantages and disadvantages of social studies course subjects in the context of inclusive education.’). In form 12, a participant said, ‘Actually, it is a disadvantage that the subjects are abstract and have too many concepts, but if we make such subjects concrete, we can turn this situation into an advantage in a suitable way. It can be an advantage to be able to find examples from life.’ he said.

Table 7. Possible suggestions for inclusive education within the scope of social studies course

Themes	n	%
Separate curriculums	15	19
Simple activities	14	18
Game cards	13	16
Sightseeing	10	13
Family participation	9	12
Decreased acquisitions	9	12
Concrete outputs	8	10
Total	78	100

Looking at the answers given by the participants within the framework of the last sub-question of the research (‘Please write down your suggestions for inclusive education within the scope of social studies course.’), 15 teachers (19%) stated that there should be a separate curriculum in the context of social studies course especially for students with learning difficulties, 14 teachers (18%) stated that there should be simply activity examples, 13 teachers (16%) stated that there should be game cards. 10 of them (13%) stated that there should be a sightseeing, 9 (12%) of them stated that there should be family participation. According to 9 of them (12%) acquisitions should be decreased and 8 of them there should be concrete outputs. While in form 5, a teacher said, ‘Games, puzzles,

matching, etc., suitable for their level, related to the subject, should be increased further. In order for these students not to isolate themselves in the classroom environment, their course activities should be increased in the school environment.', in form 13, a teacher said, 'Special textbooks and materials should be developed for mainstreaming students, audio-visual video studies and interactive studies should be prepared. Educational studies should be carried out in separate classrooms or institutions.'

CONCLUSION

In this study, examining the views of social studies teachers about the education of students with special learning difficulties, it has been determined that the majority of teachers in the study group stated that they had students with learning difficulties. In the social studies classrooms in which these students were present, teachers stated the themes of 'teaching with games, concretization, re-reading and writing, IEP plan, material preparation, communication and current events.

A certain part of teachers in the study group stated that the subjects of social studies course are suitable for the structure of students with learning difficulties. On the other hand, it was concluded that the subjects are difficult and abstract and that they can be solved with one-on-one education.

Teachers stated that within the scope of inclusive education, they did activities on the themes of one-to-one education, teaching with games, concretization, material preparation, reinforcement and facilitation in the social studies lesson. It was determined that very few teachers could not do much activity. It can be said that this situation is parallel to the studies of Yaylacı and Aksoy (2016), who obtained the result that the participating social studies teachers considered themselves partially sufficient in the learning and teaching process.

The following results were also obtained in the research that concretization, visualization, simplification, communication, flexibility of subjects, supportive and reinforcement indicate the advantages of the subjects. The abstractness of the subjects (14), the concepts used (13), insufficient course time (13), crowded classrooms (12), long texts (12), boredom of students with learning difficulties in the course (10), and environmental impact (8) themes were also stated as disadvantages. Negative opinions about crowded classrooms are similar to the findings of Yaylacı and Aksoy (2016). One of the reasons of social studies teachers who do not support inclusive education in their study is that the classes are crowded.

Teachers in the study group offered suggestions for the preparation of a separate curriculum, simple activity examples, the use of game cards, organizing sightseeing, family participation, concrete outputs, decreasing acquisitions for inclusive education within the scope of the social studies course.

Based on the results, the following recommendations can be made:

1. Social studies course topics and activities might be prepared for students with learning difficulties.
2. Topics might be given with simple, understandable and concrete examples as much as possible.
3. Class hours might be reconsidered for students with learning difficulties.
4. Classrooms and the number of students might be determined according to the characteristics of students with learning difficulties.
5. Academic studies might be conducted in terms of multidisciplinary or interdisciplinary approaches for students with learning difficulties.

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