



A Comparative Study of the Attitude, Concern, and Interaction Levels of Elementary School Teachers and Teacher Candidates towards Inclusive Education

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Abstract

Inclusion is an educational approach providing students with special needs with education in normal classrooms, which is the least restrictive educational environment for them by offering the necessary services for full time or part time. Although the necessary laws and regulations appear to execute this inclusive practice properly in Turkey, there are some problems regarding its implementation. Aim of this study contributes to the implementation by determining and solving the problems encountered in the inclusive practices by developing an assessment instrument comparing the attitude, concern and interaction levels of pre-service and in-service elementary teachers towards inclusive education. The study sample consists of 68 in-service elementary teachers working at central elementary schools in Amasya and 112 pre-service elementary teachers in the elementary education program of Amasya University during the 2009-2010 academic year. For the study, an assessment consisting of four parts was developed and applied as a data collection instrument. The data gathered from the study was analyzed using the SPSS 18.00 package program. With the findings obtained, it has been determined that there are significant differences between the in-service and pre-service teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education and their interactions with individuals with special needs. It has been concluded that these differences are related to occupational experience and the preparation levels of the individuals with special needs. The findings of this study suggest that professional development workshops and seminars on special and inclusive education would improve the knowledge of in-service elementary teachers and enhance the qualification of the inclusive practices.

Key Words

Elementary School Teachers, Inclusive Education, Attitude, Concern, Interaction.

Approximately 12 % of a society consists of individuals with special needs (Güneş, 2001; Üre, 2002). Individuals with special needs have right to benefit from educational services which will meet their

needs in the best way, just like all other individuals. As a natural outcome of the fact that these individuals' needs are different, the environment where their individual needs are met also varies. The main environments are special education schools, special classrooms in the public schools and regular classrooms. Another practice which is offered in regular classes and becoming widespread day by day is "inclusive" education. Inclusion is defined as an educational approach providing the students with special needs education in the regular classrooms, which are the least restrictive educational environment for them. Inclusion provides the necessary

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support services in the same classroom with other students of the same age on a full time or part time (Gulliford & Upton, 1992; Idol, 2000; Kırcaali-İftar, 1998; Miles & Singal, 2010; Osborne & Dimattia, 1994). Based on from the definition, this means more than just placing the student in the normal classrooms; inclusion should be considered as an environment where the student may integrate with students of the same age, while their special needs are still being met.

The effect of teachers, families, guidance counselors, and school managements is very important determinant factor in successful implementation of inclusive education (Florian & Linklater, 2010; Kırcaali-İftar, 1998). It is certain that these four factors are quite significant in inclusion process. However, teachers, especially classroom teachers' attitudes towards the students participating in inclusive education, behaviors, and proficiency levels related with inclusive education are strongly significant (Hannu, Petra, Mima, & Olli-Pekka, 2012).

Classroom teacher should have a strong moderator role in terms of classroom climate and behaviors in any classroom condition, especially in the classrooms where the children with special needs and normally developing children are trained together (Hill, 2009; Van Kraayenoord, 2007; Walker & Lamon, 1987). Teacher has a survival role in meeting the needs of children in classroom, establishing and maintaining healthy interactions in classroom, and integrating the children with special needs into classroom, school, and social life (Avcı, 1998). The teachers participating in the inclusive program notify that inclusive programs improve their knowledge level besides their personal and professional experiences (Ataman, 2001; Avramidis, Erkekliss, & Burden, 2000; Diken & Batu, 2010; Giangreco, Dennis, Cloninger, Edelman, & Schattman, 1993; Kırcaali-İftar, 1998; Yıkımsı, 2006). The standpoints of teachers for inclusion are affected positively by their education levels, their trainings related to special education, and the qualification of supportive service (Gözün & Yıkımsı, 2004; İzci, 2005; Salend, 1998). The special education course, which was an elective course before, has been planned on the teacher training undergraduate programs as a must course since 2009. With this in mind, the difference in terms of knowledge level about special education between the teachers graduated before 2009 and the ones graduated after 2009 is expected. Depending on this difference, the difference between their attitudes towards the special education is expected in favor of the newly graduated stu-

dents. For this reason, the results of many researches released that one of the reasons why teachers develop negative attitude towards inclusive education is their low level of awareness related with special education (Barton, 1992; Batu, 2000; Bender, Vail, & Scott, 1995; Diken, 1998; Familia, 2001; Ferguson, 2008). In addition, in their study Orel, Töret, and Zerey (2004) determined that taking inclusion courses affected positively the attitudes of the classroom teacher candidates towards inclusion.

In his study, Diken (1998) used an attitude scale with the aim of comparing the attitudes of the teachers who have mentally deficient students in their classes and the ones who do not towards the inclusion of the mentally deficient students. The results of the study showed that very few teachers are willing to have inclusive students in their classes and the rest are not, but, they stated that school administration placed inclusion students in their classes without getting their ideas. While almost all teachers participating in the research stated that they need supportive services related with the inclusive students, the same teachers also notified that they did not take any supportive service during the practice. In addition, the results of this study indicated that whether the teachers have previous experiences with mentally deficient students do not affect their attitudes towards inclusive students. In his study Giangreco et al. (1993) determined that the teachers are against inclusion or are not positive at all, but their standpoints changed positively after the interaction with the mentally deficient students. Moreover, researchers stated that according to most of the teachers the students with mild mental deficiency are more suitable for inclusion.

In the study conducted by Janney, Snell, Beers, and Raynes (1995), the teachers stated that they will accept inclusive students with any kind of support service that can be provided them unless it increases their workload. In the same study, it is one of the suggestions for the local administrators that it is required that the activities should be planned by making decisions together instead of forcing the practitioners to implement the previously planned activities. In addition, in the study, it is suggested that everyone related to students with special needs should join the work in preparation and planning phases, and school administrator should also share the information and innovations that he or she learned from various sources with school staff. For special education teachers, it is recommended that classroom teacher should be informed about inclu-

sive students before practice and the quality of the support services that the special educators provides ordinary teachers. For the ordinary teachers, it is recommended that they should solve problems as a team and help inclusive students have the feeling of belonging to class.

Although there are some rules and regulations in order to properly manage the practice of inclusion in Turkey, the problems related with the practice of inclusion cannot be solved yet. Those problems are lack of sufficient support service staff, lack of appropriate physical environments in the schools and classrooms for practice of inclusion, insufficiency in teachers and school managements' knowledge about inclusion, and the negative attitudes of classroom teachers towards inclusive education (Ataman, 2001; Coşkun, Tosun, & Macaroğlu, 2009; Diken, 1998).

When the related literature was reviewed, in addition to the studies on classroom teachers related with inclusion (Akçamete & Kargin, 1994; Kilgor, 1982; Leyser & Abrams, 1983; Şahbaz, 1997; Yıkıms, Şahbaz, & Peker, 1997), the studies for physical education teachers (Meegan & MacPhail, 2006) were also found. In our country, the focus of the studies on classroom teachers about inclusion is usually on teacher competencies in inclusion (Battal, 2007; Bülbin, Ünsal, & Özokçu, 2004), the factors affecting success in inclusive education (Özokçu, 2002), teacher attitudes (Diken, 1998; Gözün & Yıkıms, 2004; Orel et al., 2004), and the views of teachers about inclusion (Uysal, 2004; Yıldırım Doğru, 2007).

The literature regarding elementary teachers and inclusive practices mostly focuses on attitude levels. In these studies, concepts of concern, readiness and interaction with people with disabilities have not been addressed. In addition, no literature was found comparing in-service elementary teachers teaching in inclusive classrooms to senior pre-service elementary teachers based on the concepts mentioned before. Carrying out such a study will make it possible to compare and evaluate the perspectives of elementary teachers and teacher candidates about inclusive education not only in terms of attitude but also interaction and concern. In addition, it is believed that such a study will contribute to determining the effects of the *Special Education* course, which was introduced into the elementary education program in 2009, on teacher candidates' attitudes, concern and interaction levels with regard to special education. Finally, the study will be able to reveal the source of the "problems in inclu-

sive education" mentioned by many researchers, whether these problems arise during pre-service education or in-service.

The goal of this study is to examine comparatively the attitudes, anxiety, and interaction levels of the teacher candidates and in-service teachers about inclusive education.

The sub goals of this study are to determine;

- How are the attitudes of the teacher candidates towards the inclusive education?
- How are the anxiety levels of the teacher candidates for the implementation of inclusive education?
- Is there a relationship between the interaction level and the students taking inclusive education?
- Is there a relationship between gender and the attitudes towards inclusive education?
- Is there a relationship between gender and anxiety levels for the practice of inclusive education?
- Is there a relationship between gender and the interaction with the students taking inclusive education?

Purpose

This study was conducted to compare the attitude, concern and interaction levels of in-service elementary teachers and teacher candidates towards inclusive education.

Method

Sample

The sample of the study carried out as a case study consisted of 68 elementary teachers working in Amasya central elementary schools and 112 teacher candidates in the elementary education program of Amasya University during the 2009-2010 academic years. The elementary teachers and teacher candidates were chosen with a basic random sampling technique among the probability sampling techniques (Çepni, 2010).

Data Collection Tool

A scale was used as a data collection tool consisting of four parts. The first part of the scale was designed to determine the demographic features of participants.. The second part consisted of the

Attitudes toward Inclusive Education Scale (ATIES) (Wilczenski, 1992, 1995). The third part consisted of the *Interactions with Disabled Person's Scale* (IDP) developed by Gething (1991; 1994). The fourth part of the scale used in the study consisted of the *Concerns about Inclusive Education Scale* (CIES) developed by Sharma and Desai (2002). Adaptation of the instrument into Turkish was carried out by the researcher.

Findings

The elementary teachers included in the sample consist of 38 females and 30 males, while the teacher candidates consist of 43 men, 69 women. Twenty seven of the classroom teachers, 49 of the classroom teacher candidates have a medium confidence level.

The independent samples post 't-test' comparing the participants' concern and knowledge levels showed a significant difference between those with a medium or above level of knowledge (Average=38.60 SS=7.36) and those with a low level of knowledge (Average=41.69 SS=8.58) as [$t=-2.427, p < .05$].

A significant difference was found in the ANOVA test performed between the confidence and concern levels of the participants [$F(3-176) = 5.840, p < .05$]. In the multiple comparisons performed between the confidence levels, it was found that this difference was between the level of 'very Low' and other levels. However, no significant difference between the participants' attitudes and confidence levels towards inclusive education [$F = 1.543, p > .05$] and interests [$F = 1.280, p > .05$], and concern levels and interests [$F = 2.719, p > .05$], was found.

Based on the independent sample 't-test' on the item between the interactions with disabled people and gender, it was found that there was a significant difference in the C2 [$t=-3.595, p < .05$], C7 [$t=-2.223, p < .05$], C13 [$t=-2.258, p < .05$], C15 [$t=-2.106, p < .05$], C17 [$t=-2.740, p < .05$] and C20 [$t=-2.052, p < .05$] items. Similarly, the independent sample 't-test' on the item between the interactions with disabled people and receiving education analysis results suggest that, there was a significant difference in the C16 [$t=2.886, p < .05$] and C17 [$t=-2.205, p < .05$] items.

The independent sample 't-test' based on the item between the interactions with disabled people and age analysis results show that, a significant difference was observed in the C18 [$t=2.057, p < .05$] item. In addition, a significant difference was found

in terms of teacher candidates regarding interactions with disabled people in the C6 [$t=2.069, p < .05$] and C18 [$t=2.320, p < .05$] items.

The ANOVA test performed between the participants' confidence levels and interactions with disabled people showed a significant difference in the C11 [$F=3.104, p < .05$], C12 [$F=3.510, p < .05$] and C19 [$F=6.306, p < .05$] items. The multiple comparison made between the confidence levels showed that this difference was between High and Medium levels for C11 item, between High-Medium and High-Low levels for C12 item, between High and Low levels for C13 item. Also, a significant difference was found in the C10 [$F=4.632, p < .05$] and C12 [$F=4.024, p < .05$] items of the ANOVA test performed between the participants' interests and interactions with the disabled people. In the multiple comparisons performed for the interests, this difference was observed between 'I have no acquaintances' - Other for the C10 item while it was observed between 'I have no acquaintances' Family member or close acquaintances for C12 item.

Discussion

Considering the demographic features of the sample group, as expected, the average age of the teachers is higher than that of teacher candidates. In addition, 65% of the elementary teacher group is below the age of 29. The number of teachers with high occupational experience (over 40 years of age) corresponds to approximately 10% of the teacher sampling. Approximately 60% of both teachers and teacher candidates are in direct interaction with the disabled people in their lives. 10% of the classroom teachers and 5% of the classroom teacher candidates have received education regarding special education before. The fact that the teachers and teacher candidates have a low level of confidence about educating individuals with special needs is an important situation that should be focused on. Considering the effect of classroom teachers on students' education, the importance of these teachers' and teacher candidates' interest and knowledge levels regarding special education increases more (Ataman, 2001; Carroll, Forlin, & Jobling, 2003; Forlin, 2001; Forlin, Douglas, & Hattie, 1996; Forlin, Jobling, & Carroll, 2001).

In the independent samples 't-test' performed between the participants' concern and knowledge levels regarding special education, a significant difference was found between the ones with a medium or above level of knowledge (Average=38.60 SS=7.36) and

ones with a low level of knowledge (Average=41.69 SS=8.58) as [$t = -2.427, p < .05$]. Considering this information, it can be stated that the concern levels of the individuals with a low level of knowledge is higher than the others. Based on the studies in the literature, we see that a low level of knowledge comes with low self-confidence (Anderson, Greene, & Loewen, 1988). Considering the findings of these studies and this study, it can be stated that the confidence problem arising from a low level of knowledge increases the level of concern.

In the ANOVA test performed between the participants' confidence levels and concerns, a significant difference was observed [$F(3-176) = 5.840, p < .05$]. It was detected that this difference was between the 'very low' level and other levels in the multiple comparison made between the confidence levels. Another example for the high concern level encountered was the knowledge level between the confidence level and concern level. These findings suggest that the more the confidence levels of the individuals increase the more their concern levels decrease.

The comparison between the interactions with disabled people and gender shows a significant difference between the C2, C7, C13, C15, C17 and C20 items. In all items in which a significant item was seen, the difference was in favor of women. It is thought that this significant difference arises from the fact that women are more sensitive than men. Women are more sensitive and emotionally sensible in many subjects (Sanchez-Nunez, Fernandez-Berrocal, Montanes, & Latorre, 2008). It might be said that women are seen in the interaction process with individuals with special needs.

The comparison between the interactions with disabled people and receiving education showed a significant difference between the C16 and C17 items. People who received special education before were less likely to feel bothered when seeing a disabled person (item C16 "It often bothers me to come across disabled people as I am not disabled") compared to people who have not received special education before. This result suggests that, educated individuals are more aware of the importance of their attitude and behaviors towards disabled people. This high level of awareness might be a reflection of feeling more responsible and anxious when the individuals come across disabled people.

When participants responses were compared on the items between the interactions with disabled people and age' a significant difference was found on item C18 in favor of participants whose age average was between 19-29. With respect to the young individuals, this difference on item C18

"When I come across disabled people I finish what I am doing as soon as possible" might be evaluated as a consequence of the personal experience and age factors of the individuals. When the significant difference which was found in the C11, C12 and C19 items of the ANOVA test, performed between the participants' confidence levels and interactions with disabled people was emphasized, there was a significant difference with respect to the individuals' high confidence level on item C11 "I can't restrain myself from staring at the disabled people". This difference might be evaluated as a situation in which the individuals with high levels of confidence consider the disabled individuals as an integral part of the society and have above-average sensitivity. On the other hand, the fact that a significant difference arose in the C12 item "I feel anxious as I do not know how to behave" between the individuals with a high level of confidence and those with a medium and low level of confidence was expected among situation, as anxiety was not an expected among individuals with a high level of confidence. This difference might be evaluated as a special quality the sampling. The fact that there was a significant difference on item C19 "After I talked with a disabled person about his/her disability I feel more comfortable with him/her" was an expected situation in respect to the individuals with a high level of confidence. There is a link between a high level of confidence and the feature hidden in this item, a significant difference was expected in item C19 between participants who have a good confidence level and the ones who do not.

Results

- It was concluded that the significant difference with respect to the teacher candidates between the teachers' and teacher candidates' attitudes towards inclusive education arises from the fact that inclusive education causes extra work and intra-class problems for the teacher on duty; the significant difference was in favor of the teacher candidates; the special education course in the undergraduate programs may have a positive effect.
- Although a considerable part of the elementary teachers and teacher candidates in the sample were in a direct interaction with disabled individuals, most of these individuals' self-confidence and knowledge levels about special education were low. Although the relationship levels of the teachers' and teacher candidates' in the sample with the disabled individuals were high, and due to the fact that their levels of confidence

and knowledge were low, it might be concluded that the awareness levels of the teachers and teacher candidates about special education and its importance was low.

- The individuals who received education regarding special education were aware of the importance of their attitude and behaviors in the special education; and for this reason, as a reflection of feeling more responsible and anxious when they come across disabled individuals, they have more positive attitudes and behaviors towards disabled people compared to having less knowledge about the special education.
- The significant difference on the item “*I avoid directly looking at a disabled person’s face*” was in favor of the individuals who did not receive any education regarding the special education; the individuals whose preparation (for special education) level was insufficient feel mercy for the disabled people more intensively. As a natural consequence of this, it might be concluded display such a behavior as a consequence of perceiving the deficiency of these individuals as an obstacle or handicap.
- The individuals with a high level of confidence about special education considered disabled individuals as an integral part of society and their sensibility was above average. High level of confidence increases sharing with disabled people and displaying the behavior of talking with him/her about his/her deficiency.
- As the individuals with a low interest in disabled people were not sharing with disabled individuals, their awareness level of the disabled people’s problems is lower than the other individuals. Correspondingly, they display anxious behaviors when they come across disabled individuals.
- Compared to the teachers, the teacher candidates` ignoring the handicaps of an individual in the interaction process and emphasizing with them might be evaluated as a positive situation for the future of special education in our country. However, the fact that the teacher candidates do not like to come across disabled people often is a negative situation in terms of inclusive education.
- In this study the attitudes, interactions and concerns of the elementary teachers and teacher candidates towards inclusive education were analyzed. With respect to the data obtained from this study, carrying out studies which determine teachers’ levels of competence will make better contributions to furthering the goal of inclusive education in achieving this goal.

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