



# Problems, Expectations, and Suggestions of Elementary Teachers Regarding Inclusion\*

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## Abstract

The purpose of the present study is to display a detailed investigation of the views of the elementary teachers in the specification of defections in the inclusive education applications and in the evaluation of success. In accordance with this aim, in 16 different cities of Turkey, 23 teachers who have been working in schools where inclusive education is applied in relation with Ministry of Education and who have willingly participated to the study are interviewed. In the study, where descriptive method from among the qualitative research methods is used, inductive analysis of the research data gathered with semi-structured interviews is conducted through Nvivo 8 qualitative data analysis program. The findings indicate that elementary teachers generally have a negative opinion regarding the inclusive education applications in our country, that they are inadequate in this subject and need a great deal of sustenance particularly expert support, that they find pre-service and in-service training insufficient and experience problems due to the physical conditions of the classrooms and schools they work at. For the improvement of inclusive education applications, elementary teachers suggest the presence of separate teaching environments and part-time inclusive education, the organization of qualified and effective pre-service and in-service training and providing them material support.

## Key Words

Inclusion, Teachers' Opinions, Students with Special Needs, Semi-Structured Interviews, Qualitative Study.

In recent years, inclusive education applications which prove educating individuals with special requirements together with their peers with normal development have taken on a new significance. Inclusive education is an implementation where students with special needs and regular development have their education together (Eripek, 2007, pp. 5-6) and described as “the receiving part time or full time education of the students with

special needs in regular classes which are the least restrictive educational environments for them by providing the necessary support services” by Kırcaali-İftar (1998). Least restrictive environment is a placement that provides the educational needs where most appropriate for the child (Batu & Kırcaali-İftar, 2007, p. 7; Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı [MEB], 2006; Sucuoğlu & Kargın, 2008, p. 29).

\* This study is derived from the PhD. thesis prepared at Uludağ University Educational Sciences Institute by Ömür SADIOĞLU under the supervision of Prof. Asude BİLGİN and Assoc. Prof. Sema BATU.

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### Related Studies

In the foreign literature there are a number of studies examining the opinions (Horne & Timmons, 2009; Opdal, Wormnaes, & Habayeb, 2001; Soodak, Podell, & Lehman, 1998), attitudes (Avramidis & Kalyva, 2010; Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; Jobe, Rust, & Brissie, 1996; Kwapy, 2004), both opinions and attitudes (Olson, Chalmers, & Hoover, 1997) and the school programs regarding inclusion (McLeskey & Waldron, 2002; McLeskey, Waldron, So, Swanson, & Loveland, 2001). On the other hand, in the literature in Turkey also the opinions and attitudes of teachers were examined by different researchers (Avcıoğlu, Eldeniz Çetin, & Özbey, 2004; Metin & Çakmak Güleç, 1998; Önder, 2007; Uysal, 2004). Besides, in some studies, an implementation program was applied and the opinions of teachers were collected after the implementation (Metin, Güleç, & Şahin, 2009; Türkoğlu, 2007; Yıkımsı, Şahbaz, & Peker, 1998b).

These studies in general reveal that, teachers have negative opinions and attitudes regarding inclusion (Avcıoğlu et al., 2004; Bilen, 2007; Önder, 2007; Rakap & Kaczmarek, 2010; Uysal, 2004). They think that they do not have sufficient knowledge about the implementation (Avcıoğlu et al., 2004; Babaoğlu, & Yılmaz, 2010; Nizamoğlu, 2006), meeting the needs of children with special needs (Avramidis & Kalyva, 2010; Horne & Timmons, 2009), managing time (Horne & Timmons, 2009) in inclusion implementation. They mentioned that they needed information about these issues (Avcıoğlu et al., 2004; Metin & Çakmak Güleç, 1998; Opdal et al., 2001; Rakap & Kaczmarek, 2010). They also pointed that they do not have any support (Bilen, 2007; Önder, 2007) and needed support during their implementations (Horne & Timmons, 2009; Kwapy, 2004; Opdal et al., 2001). Some studies reveal that opinions and attitudes were changed through informing programs, in-service trainings, and providing support in a positive way (Jobe et al., 1996; McLeskey et al., 2001; McLeskey & Waldron, 2002; Metin et al., 2009; Türkoğlu, 2007). Regarding the findings of the mentioned studies, the purpose of the present study was to display a detailed investigation of the opinions of the elementary teachers in the specification of deflections in the inclusive education applications and in the evaluation of success.

### Aim

The general aim of the present study is to determine the views, problems and suggestions of the elementary teachers who have been working in seven different regions of Turkey regarding the

inclusive education applications in the areas that they have been working at. In accordance with this general aim the following research questions have been investigated:

- What are the general views of the elementary teachers regarding the inclusive education applications in the country?
- What are the problems that elementary teachers intensively encounter during the inclusive education applications?
- What kind of support do elementary teachers receive during the inclusive education applications?
- What are the physical conditions of the classrooms and schools that elementary teachers work at?
- What are the suggestions of elementary teachers for the improvement of inclusive education applications in the country?

### Method

#### Research Model

Descriptive method, one of the qualitative research techniques, was used in the present study. Research data which were collected by semi-structured interviews were analyzed by inductive analysis. Briefly, qualitative research is inclusively collecting, analyzing and discussing the written and visual data in order to better comprehend a certain case or concept that the researcher is interested in (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2006, p. 399). In semi-structured interviews, the questions determined by the researcher in advance are addressed to the interviewee in the same order and the interviewee is given the opportunity to answer the questions however comprehensively they want (Gay et al., 2006, p. 419).

#### Qualifications of the Teachers Participating to the Study

A total of 23 teachers (8 males and 15 females) teaching at primary schools where inclusive education is given in relation with Ministry of Education in 16 different cities of Turkey in 2009-2010 school year willingly participated to the present study.

#### Development of Data Collection Material

Following a review of the related literature (Batu, 2000; Bozeman, 2005; Duman Sever, 2007;

Migyanka, 2006; Özdemir, 2008; Türkoğlu, 2007), open-ended questions which were used as data collection material were formed with the aim of determining the opinions, problems and suggestions of elementary teachers who have students with special requirements in their classrooms regarding inclusive education. Prepared questions were examined by two experts in this field and finalized in accordance with the opinions of these experts.

### Data Collection and Analysis

The data were collected through semi-structured interviews. During the interviews, each teacher who participated in the study was given a code name and requested to answer 20 previously prepared interview questions. The interviews lasted 14 to 64 minutes and their transcriptions provided 272 pages of data. The collected data were analyzed with "content analysis" by the help of NVivo 8 qualitative data analysis program.

### Validity and Reliability

In this study research process was extensively dealt, direct quotations were used and the results were explained based on these statements. In order to provide the internal validity of the research, a conceptual framework related with the subject was constructed as a result of the review of the related literature for the formation of an interview structure. Additionally, the themes were identified in a frame wide enough to include relevant concepts and narrow enough to exclude the irrelevant concepts in the conducted content analysis. Both the researcher and a professor with experience on qualitative research performed separate coding on the collected data and these two were compared for reliability. Still, raw data collected during the research, codings, diaries and researcher notes are kept by the researcher and are open to the investigation of other researchers. Upon request, these shall be sent to the interested parties.

## Results and Discussion

### The Views on Inclusive Education Applications

Almost all the teachers (21 participants) who were interviewed expressed negative opinion about inclusive education applications in our country. The participants who stated negative opinions about inclusive education applications thought that elementary teachers were inadequate on this subject

(9 participants), that there were some setbacks in inclusive education applications (7 participants), that classrooms were crowded (5 participants) and that special educations was more beneficial for students with special requirements (5 participants).

The findings of the present study show similarity with the findings of the study conducted by Uysal (2004), Babaoğlu and Yılmaz (2010), Avcioğlu, Demiray, and Eldeniz Çetin (2004), Akdemir Orta (2008), Bilen (2007) & Metin et al. (2009), Timuçin (1998) and Çelik (2006).

### Physical Conditions

In the light of the information obtained from the teachers, the fact that whether 17 schools were suitable for inclusive education or not was determined. Based on the information obtained from the teachers, it was seen that only six of the schools had access ramps at the entrance, four had toilet for the disabled and only one had a special education classroom. One teacher who worked at a school built almost exclusively for inclusive education indicated that due to the problems resulting from school administration resource room and disabled elevator were not used.

In the studies examined for literature review it is identified that physical conditions of the schools were not appropriate for inclusive education. All conducted research give rise to the thought that the required importance has not yet been placed to the organization of the physical conditions of the classrooms and schools in the inclusive education applications in our country.

### Required Support

The present study displayed that elementary teachers were respectively in need of expert support (12 participants), being informed (9 participants) material support (6 participants), special education classroom (6 participants), family support (4 participants) and resource room support (3 participants). Conducted studies indicated that teachers were in need of detailed information regarding inclusive education applications (Yıkımsı, Şahbaz, & Peker, 1998a, p. 164; Metin et al., 2009, p. 7), and that the related training given increased the proficiency of the teachers (Mrsnik, 2003, pp. 218-220) and provided a positive change in the attitudes of the teachers (Batu, Kircaali İftar, & Uzuner, 1998, p. 104; Metin et al., 2009, p. 7; Yıkımsı et al., 1998b, p. 36).

### Conducted Adaptations

Majority of the participants (19 teachers) made different adaptations in the assessment for their students with special requirements. These adaptations were assessing the student with special requirement individually (11 teachers), making adaptations in the pass grade (7 teachers), assessing according to BEP (Individualized Education Program) (5 teachers) and making social assessment by way of observation (5 teachers). A part of the participants (5 teachers) indicated that they had difficulty in assessing their students with special requirements.

Adaptations conducted by the teachers were in the form of adaptations related with the lesson (22 participants) and adaptations related with the position of the student (9 participants). Nearly half of the teachers who made adaptations related with the lesson (10 participants) indicated that they had their students with special requirements make more/simple activities and/or examples, 9 participants stated that they made one-to-one activities and 7 participants expressed that they encouraged the students with special requirements to participate in the lesson. A few of the teachers (5 participants) explained that their students with special requirements did not want any different activities. A part of the teachers who made adaptations in the lessons specified that they exercised BEP (Individualized Educational Program). A few of the teachers (4 participants) made their students with special requirements sit among other students, 3 participants to the front row and 3 participants at the back of the classroom.

Conducted studies indicated that elementary teachers made adaptation in question and answer technique in the lessons and in the practice studies of the students with special requirements the most (Vural, 2008, p. 91) and that the adaptations they made for their students with special requirements were in the form of “giving the exam questions beforehand”, “encouraging the student to participate to the lesson”, “using teaching equipment”, “engaging one-to-one/personal education” (Batu, 2000, p. 134). It is seen that the adaptations made by the teachers showed similarities in both studies.

It is a remarkable finding that there were a few teachers who used BEP (Individualized Educational Program). Avcıoğlu (2009, p. 63), however, indicates that it is necessary to use individualized educational program for meeting the needs of the students with special requirements who are educated along with the students who show normal progress.

### Problems Experienced

A part of the elementary teachers who participated in the study (6 teachers) thought that students with special requirements were not identified in RAM (Counseling and Research Center) properly and a few (2 teachers) were of the opinion that observation process was not working. The teachers who expressed that they had experienced problems with the rehabilitation center indicated that these institutions did not work properly and that they were not able to receive support from these institutions. In the study conducted by Diker Coşkun, Tosun, and Macaroğlu (2009, p. 2762), the fact that elementary teachers were unable to receive sufficient support from RAM (Counseling and Research Center) was expressed as well. A similar finding appeared in the study by Timuçin (1998, p. 170). In fact, the people working at RAM should be informed about assessment, the physical conditions of the school in which the student who is decided to be included in the inclusive education is to receive education should be known and the student with special requirement should be placed in classroom with low class size and be regularly observed. Timuçin (1998, p. 170), and Horne and Timmons (2009, p. 283) has also revealed similar findings in their study.

### Suggestions of the Teachers

A part of the teachers who have students with special requirements (7 teachers) indicated that separate educational environments might be more effective for the education of students with special requirements; the other suggestions by the teachers were; (6 teachers) constructing qualified and effective in-service training sessions, (5 teachers) part-time inclusion, (4 teachers) making undergraduate education more qualified and (4 teachers) providing material support.

### Suggestions

Both the teachers and the students with special requirements should definitely be given support special education services such as resource room, in-class assistance and special education counseling in the schools where inclusive education is applied.

1. It is necessary to have a special education expert in every school where inclusive education is applied and for the schools without an expert mobile special education expert practice should be exercised in a more planned and effective manner.

2. More effective and productive in-service training seminars should be given to elementary teachers regarding inclusive education.
3. The opinions and competence of the elementary teachers may be determined by using both qualitative and quantitative research methods or by the help of research designs in which more than one data collection material is used.

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