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What Do Turkish Prospective Primary Teachers Promise for Inclusion?

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine Turkish prospective primary teachers' self-efficacy beliefs and readiness for their future roles and responsibilities as inclusive classroom teachers. Therefore, this study aimed to investigate how these roles and responsibilities relate to future teaching practices. In addition, this study examined prospective teachers' problems, worries, and expectations about implementing inclusive strategies in their classrooms. It investigated whether they are confident in their existing skills and knowledge and explored how these factors could affect the success of inclusion in Turkey. Study participants included 159 fourth year primary education teacher trainees at Necmettin Erbakan University in central Turkey. A qualitative case study design was used to gain the perspectives of teacher candidates. The data were collected through an open-ended questionnaire and were analyzed using the content analysis technique. The findings of the study have revealed that Turkish prospective primary teachers believe that they have an important role and a significant responsibility as teachers, not only for all students but also for students with special needs in particular. The respondents expressed a number of concerns, however, and indicated that they expect to encounter a variety of problems when inclusion is put into practice in their future inclusive classrooms. The prospective teachers were also found to have expectations of the school administration, special education services, and experts who might assist them in more effectively implementing inclusive strategies. The respondents expressed confidence in their own basic knowledge and skills, but reported that they still need more experience with special needs students in real classrooms. The study concludes that the way in which prospective teachers perceive inclusion and how they see their teaching practice align with the general education system will play a significant role in the success of inclusion.

Keywords: inclusive education, teacher preparation, prospective primary teachers, qualitative case study, Turkey

1. Introduction

For more than three decades, parents and professionals have been working to provide free and appropriate education for all children in the least restrictive environment; the inclusion of children with special needs in regular classrooms instead of segregated settings has thus become more prevalent (Avramidis, Bayliss, & Burden, 2000). The first attempt at implementing this vision was called "mainstreaming". The term "integration" has also been used to describe the inclusion of children with disabilities in programs for typically developing children. Some educators argue that there are clear-cut differences between "integration" and "mainstreaming", whereas others use the terms interchangeably. Both terms refer to children with disabilities being placed in full- or part-time programs designed for typically developing children (Allen & Cowdery, 2005).

Over the last decade, however, the international debate has been more focused on "inclusion", a concept notably different from "integration" and/or "mainstreaming". "Inclusion" suggests a process of transformation such that schools are developed in response to the diversity of pupils (Ainscow, 2002; Erkilic & Durak, 2013). While some scholars define "inclusive education" as a process that evolves as changes in the educational context emerge, others view it as a basic human right whereby all children are accepted and taught in regular classrooms (Villa & Thousand, 2005; Mentis, Quinn, & Ryba, 2005). In broadest terms, "inclusive education" refers to education for all including children from impoverished families, ethnic minorities, rural communities, and other sources of disadvantage. The idea of inclusive education is based on the belief that the right to education is a basic human right, and all individuals, regardless of their personal characteristics and difficulties, should be served by schools in their communities. Therefore, full inclusion goes beyond "integration" and/or "mainstreaming" ensuring the full contribution and participation of all students with diverse abilities so that they can have equal access to learning.

Although the inclusive education movement has gained momentum in recent years, a key element in the successful

implementation of related policy is the perspective of those personnel who bear responsibility for policy implementation, i.e., teachers (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002). Teachers' beliefs and attitudes are critical in ensuring the success of inclusive practices because teachers' acceptance of the policy of inclusion is likely to affect their commitment to implementing it. Therefore, the widespread practice of including students with exceptionalities in general education has increased among classroom teachers and has led to structural changes in teacher preparation programs (Fisher, Frey, & Thousand, 2003). Through program restructuring, a serious step has been taken to better prepare classroom teachers for inclusive settings in schools, and this has in turn placed greater emphasis on the roles and responsibilities of teacher preparation programs (Laarhoven, Munk, Lynch, Bosma, & Rouse, 2007). The initial education of teachers significantly influences their future practice; therefore, it is important to highlight the notion that teachers have a significant role to play in the success of inclusive education (Angelides, Stylianou, & Gibbs, 2006). Because teachers are held responsible for implementing inclusion practices, it is extremely important to examine their opinions and perspectives in regard to inclusion. If teachers are able to voice their opinions, this much needed input and information could be used to improve inclusion practices, thereby improving the overall educational experience for both teachers and students (Costley, 2013).

In the recent literature, there are various studies examining attitudes and opinions of primary school teachers associated with inclusion and inclusive educational practices (Gurgur, Kis, & Akcamete, 2012; Kurniawati, Minnaert, Mangunsong, & Ahmed, 2012; Todorovic, Stojiljkovic, Ristanic, & Djigic, 2011; Unianu, 2011; Yildirim-Eriskin, Yazar-Kirac, & Ertugrul, 2012). These studies reveal that teachers in primary schools exhibit more positive attitudes towards inclusive education, as they are ultimately in favor of inclusion; further, their attitudes seem to be related to teaching experience, training in special education, teaching environment adequacy and the support given to them. Recent studies have also shown that the notion of inclusion has been poorly accepted in schools, especially by classroom teachers. Although most of these teachers favor inclusion, they believe that inclusion can be successful only through available specialized courses and special education support services (Jordan, Glenn, & McGhie-Richmond, 2010; Sucuoglu & Kargin, 2008). Teachers who approach their roles and responsibilities as inclusive teachers with a negative outlook do so because they think they must care more about teaching the subject matter and ensuring students' achievement in the existing school system.

Studies conducted in different cultural contexts have found that teacher attitudes, teacher efficacy and perceived school support are considered to be important variables in understanding classroom teachers' intentions to include children with various special needs in regular classrooms (Ahmmed, Sharma, & Deppeler, 2014; Avramidis & Kalyva, 2007; Sharma, Loreman, & Forlin, 2012). These studies have shown that teacher efficacy is one of the strongest predictors of teachers' attitudes towards inclusion. Accordingly, teachers with a positive sense of self-efficacy in teaching students with special needs are more likely to have positive opinions and to believe that students with special needs can be taught effectively in regular classrooms. In many of the reviewed studies, perceived school support has also been identified as having a significant influence in the implementation of inclusive education. However, researchers argue that there is a need for more empirical research to examine how teachers' perceptions of school support influence teachers' attitudes, efficacy and intentions to include students with disabilities and implement inclusive practices in regular classrooms.

Research with teachers undergoing pre-service preparation and in-service development presents a complex picture of how teachers can be assisted in developing effective teaching skills. Very little is known about how skills for effective inclusion are developed or about how to influence teachers' epistemological beliefs so that they might be reflected in their teaching practices. Jordan, Schwartz, and McGhie-Richmond (2009) note that the difference between effective and ineffective inclusion may lay in teachers' beliefs about who have primary responsibility for students with special educational needs. The findings of their study suggest that teachers who believe that it is their responsibility to instruct students with special educational needs in their inclusive classes are more effective overall with all of their students and are also more effective in working individually with students with special educational needs. What may be needed in both teacher education and pre- and in-service preparation is to challenge teachers' beliefs about ability and disability in terms of learning potential, the resulting beliefs about their roles and responsibilities, and epistemological beliefs about the nature of knowing, knowledge and the process of acquiring knowledge. To summarize, a review of the current research literature highlights the essential future role of prospective classroom teachers in incorporating the principles of inclusive education in their teaching practices.

Inclusion practices in Turkey were first introduced with the passage of the *Children in Need of Special Education Law* by Turkey's Ministry of National Education (MEB), and since the 1980s, children with special needs have been placed in general education classrooms. The legal basis of inclusive education in Turkey was formed with the *573 Special Education Legislation*, which came into practice in 1997 (MEB, 1997). *The Disabilities Education Act*, which was introduced in June 1997 in the Turkish education system, stated that schools had a duty to educate children with special needs in general education classrooms. Thereafter, more pupils were expected to be educated in general education

classrooms for at least a portion of the day. The 2000, 2006 and 2012 regulations on special education services passed by the Turkish government also moved Turkish schools towards adopting inclusion for pupils with special needs (MEB, 2012). According to the Turkish Ministry of National Education, inclusive education is based on the principle that individuals with special educational needs (SEN) continue to be taught alongside their peers who do not have SEN in preschool, primary, secondary and non-formal education institutions where support services are offered (MEB, 2012).

Recently, like most countries, Turkey is seeking ways to apply the principles of the *Salamanca Framework* (UNESCO, 1994) with its focus on inclusive education, and the *Dakar Framework for Action* (UNESCO, 2000) with its commitment to education for all. Considerable efforts have been being made in the Turkish education system to improve special education services and disseminate inclusion in elementary and secondary schools (Melekoglu, Cakiroglu, & Malmgren, 2009; Sucuoglu & Kargin, 2010). Whereas there were approximately 20,000 students attending inclusive education in 2000, the number had increased to 161,295 in 2013 (MEB, 2015). The results of Cakiroglu and Melekoglu's (2014) study also show that the number of students with special needs, as well as students in inclusive education, has rapidly increased, and the percentage of students in inclusive education, of all students with special needs, is higher than many European countries.

Yet, inclusive education practices in Turkey are not at the desired level, and Turkey is still struggling to deal with the provision of inclusion practices (Gurgur et al., 2012). To practically improve these practices and teacher preparation in this field, two new courses, *Special Education* and *Inclusion in Primary Education*, have been being offered in the primary teacher education programs of education faculties in Turkey since 2005.

2. Purpose

Recently, the preparation of primary teachers for their roles in inclusive classroom settings has gained a greater importance in the implementation of inclusive education in Turkey. For this reason, it is essential to examine how prospective teachers perceive their roles and responsibilities as they prepare to teach in inclusive classroom settings. This approach could also be an effective way to identify prospective primary teachers' willingness to implement inclusive education and to understand the impact of teacher training programs in higher education institutions. Hence, the main purpose of this study was to examine prospective primary teachers' self-efficacy beliefs and readiness for future roles and responsibilities as inclusive classroom teachers. Specifically, the following four research questions guided this study:

1. What roles and actions could Turkish prospective primary teachers take in the implementation of the inclusive education in the future?

2. What are Turkish prospective primary teachers' attitudes towards inclusion students? What impact do these attitudes have on both other students in the classroom and the teachers themselves?

3. What potential strategies do Turkish prospective primary teachers adopt to overcome problems related to the presence of inclusion students in their future classrooms, and what are their recommendations?

4. What do Turkish prospective primary teachers think about the usefulness of college courses in helping them to implement an inclusive approach to education?

3. Method

3.1 Research Design

A qualitative case study design was used in this study. A qualitative case study is a detailed examination of one setting, subject, document depository, or event (Merriam, 1998). The case study approach focuses on understanding a bounded system, whether a single actor, classroom, institution, or enterprise, in its own natural conditions. Qualitative case studies are interested in insight, understanding and interpretation. Researchers who use this approach try to capture the ways in which different people make sense out of their lives. In other words, qualitative researchers are concerned with what are called *participant perspectives* because meaning is of essential concern to the qualitative approach (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). Given that the focus of this study was on understanding the existing perceptions of prospective primary teachers in regard to inclusion and their future inclusive practices, a qualitative case study design was considered to be the most appropriate methodological framework for this study.

3.2 Participants

Study participants included 159 fourth year pre-service teachers (55 males and 104 females) enrolled in the primary education program at Necmettin Erbakan University in central Turkey in the spring term of the 2014-2015 academic year and registered in the *Inclusion in Primary Teaching* course. Participants had previously taken a *Special Education* course in the fall term of the same academic year. When the study was carried out, the students were about to complete the *Inclusion in Primary Teaching* course. Data were intentionally collected around this time as it was the researcher's

wish to ascertain in-depth views of participants related to the subject under study. By the time the participants shared their opinions on the open-ended questionnaire, they had completed the requisite teaching practice at schools and had received some experience and knowledge through coursework related to inclusion. Both courses were 2 credits each and theoretical. Prospective primary teachers were not required to work with a student or students with SEN in any of these courses. Although the courses were theoretical and did not embed any practicum, teacher trainees were asked to conduct observations and projects on the inclusion of students in public schools where they did their teaching practice as a part of their coursework.

3.3 Data Collection

Data were collected using an open-ended questionnaire (see Appendix A) that was based on the four research questions presented in the introductory section of this paper. The questionnaire format was the preferred method of data collection as the researcher was interested in reflecting as many participants' views as possible to gain a broader perspective on the research topic. The participants were asked to reflect and express their own ideas freely when answering the open-ended questions. The researcher requested that participants hand in their responses within a week. The participants were also reminded that they could use extra paper as needed so as not to feel restricted when writing.

It must be noted that the researcher was the instructor of the two courses mentioned above. Because the researcher was also one of the program's tutors, the data collection process was carried out as an "out of class activity" and the participants were asked not to include any names or personal information in the questionnaire to avoid ethical problems. Participants were also given the opportunity to opt out and were told that they had the freedom to decline to take part in the study. For this reason, before the data collection process began, participants were informed of the purpose of the study and told that participation in the gathering of data would be voluntary. In addition, they were assured that their participation in the study would not affect their grades and that they should therefore write their responses freely. Participants were also informed that the data obtained from their contribution might be published in the literature. All of the participants willingly completed the questionnaire anonymously.

3.4 Data Analysis

The content analysis technique was used to analyze participants' written responses. First, a thorough reading of the collected data was undertaken. At this stage, a detailed examination became necessary to determine and develop the conceptual themes that emerged from the data. To do so, the researcher searched the data for regularities and patterns as well as possible topics of interest. Key words and phrases were then written down in Turkish to represent these topics and patterns because the participants' responses were in Turkish. After developing a list of codes, key words and phrases were sorted into certain categories and translated into English. Hereafter, all coding and data analysis processes were carried out in English.

During the data analysis process, themes and sub-themes were categorized according to each question in the open-ended questionnaire used during the data gathering process. Participants' perspectives were captured in particular phrases they used. Because statements captured shared understandings, they also became codes with which to sort the data. Although participants' ways of thinking and opinions were different from each other, they shared similar experiences and norms as well as some general points of view. As such, what participants shared in common were reflected and voiced by the researcher in this study.

Themes were identified in a broad framework to include relevant sub-themes. In this way, the themes' relationship to the focus of this study was constructed and verified. Finally, all conceptual themes and sub-themes, as well as the interpretations made by the researcher, were reinforced with participants' quotations and opinions. The results were further explained and interpreted based on these statements and opinions.

To maintain the reliability and validity of the study findings, two colleagues (one from Turkey and the other from the United States) provided their reviews and feedback in regard to the coding process as well as their ideas on the other aspects of the paper. These colleagues ultimately compared their codes with those of the researcher and arrived at a consensus.

4. Findings

Table 1 shows the main themes and sub-themes that were formed from the study data.

Table 1. Main themes and sub-themes formed through the research questions

Main Themes	Sub-Themes
Perceived roles and actions for inclusive education	Preparation for teaching to inclusion students; Promoting socialization and social acceptance; Accepting and encouraging the inclusion student; Effective classroom management; Cooperation with stakeholders
Attitudes about having inclusion students in the classroom	Positive attitudes/effects; Negative attitudes/effects; Conditional effects; Educational impact of inclusion students in the classroom; Worries about overcoming problems
Suggested solutions to problems	Seeking help from students/classmates; Inviting exceptional people for classroom visits; Getting help from colleagues; Asking for help and cooperation between parents and school staff; Self-reflection on teaching philosophy and abilities
Use of college courses in the implementation of inclusive education	Knowledge and self-esteem; Seeking opportunities for professional development; Teaching attitudes towards inclusion students; Awareness about the value of inclusion; Contribution to personal life experiences

4.1 Perceived Roles and Actions for Inclusive Education

All primary teacher trainees in the present study indicated that they have important roles and responsibilities as future classroom teachers to carry out inclusive education in Turkish schools because the number of special education teachers in Turkey is not yet adequate and most Turkish schools still lack qualified special education support and services. As one participant stated: "*I know that I will take all the responsibility if I work in a place where I cannot get any help, have to work in poor conditions or am deprived of special education services.*" The main roles and responsibilities of primary teachers can be grouped into the following five sub-categories.

4.1.1 Preparation for Teaching to Inclusion Students

Participants noted that being equipped with skills and methods, understanding students' needs and potential, and being open to and volunteering for professional development would help teachers better prepare to teach students with special educational needs (SEN). The participants believed that they should be "… *well equipped with teaching skills and methods in order to effectively implement the inclusive program*." For example, they highlighted the use of cooperative teaching and learning strategies in the inclusive classroom so that students with special needs can work on teams with other students and thereby be fully included in the classroom. They also emphasized that accepting inclusion students in their classrooms and continuously working to help them to fulfill their greatest potential is a must. Participants believed they are responsible for "… *teaching them the necessary and most useful skills related to real life, even if they cannot learn everything related to academic skills*." In addition, they believed that they should always be in search of useful information to help students with SEN through additional seminars and in-service training sessions offered to them.

4.1.2 Promoting Socialization and Social Acceptance

Education has an interactive relationship with society; educators play a major role in providing equal opportunities for all children to become socialized within a community. Participants believed that one of teachers' most important tasks while implementing inclusion in their classrooms is promoting the socialization of students with special needs. According to them, teachers should focus more on helping people to understand and accept that students with special needs require appropriate education in our society. As one of them stated: "*If only we could make inclusion students and the people around them understand that they are like the other students with only some differences, we could secure the success of inclusive education.*"

According to the participants, the positive support of school administrators, classroom teachers and other school staff has an important effect on the successful implementation of inclusive education. As one participant stated, "*The school administration and staff as well as the classroom and special education teachers should do their best to promote the social acceptance of an exceptional child by all members of the school and carry out their responsibilities in this matter.*" Participants said that teachers should also help other students to understand that "… *the differences of the exceptional child are similar to those personal differences all people have*." To do so, the child's peers must be informed about the special needs of their included classmates and understand how to help them. This kind of interaction supports social acceptance among all students, fostering a better understanding of the differences and promoting the development of positive attitudes towards classmates with special needs.

4.1.3 Accepting and Encouraging the Inclusion Student

The acceptance of exceptional children in general classrooms still remains one of the most widely observed problems of inclusion. Participants stated that the patience, self-sacrifice and determination of classroom teachers could precipitate

the success of inclusive education. As one respondent stated, "*Teachers should not be afraid of teaching in an inclusive classroom, and they should believe that they can help their included students and also make other students believe in that.*" They also believed that the ways in which students with special needs are treated in the classroom can be the key to the success of inclusion. One respondent, for example, noted that inclusive teaching involves "… *rewarding the students with special needs for their success and good behavior to help them develop self-confidence and feel valued, treating them equally with the other students in the classroom and asking for their participation to help them feel they are not different or less skilled than the other students.*" These strategies would be good means of encouragement for SEN children that could help them to feel they have a place in the classroom and can achieve their best.

4.1.4 Effective Classroom Management

Participants mentioned that using effective classroom management techniques could be among their most crucial roles when implementing inclusion in regular classrooms. Because they consider all students' involvement, "… *students' attention and motivation should be well kept in an inclusive classroom.*" Therefore, participants recommended preparing both students and the classroom environment to meet the needs of SEN students, thereby maintaining management of the class. They stated that "… *creating and providing a comfortable and peaceful classroom environment and atmosphere and making all students (including the student with special needs) feel secure in it*" would lead to better teaching in classrooms with inclusion students.

4.1.5 Cooperation with Stakeholders

Participants described many ways of cooperating with other people outside the classroom, namely, interacting and communicating with the families of children with and without special needs, helping and informing colleagues who have SEN students and do not have much practice with inclusive education, and providing assistance and sound practical advice from experts in the field of special education. As one of them stated, "*My roles and responsibilities should not only be limited to the classroom environment, but should also include working with parents and special education services on behalf of the included student. The common purpose of all my roles as an inclusive teacher should be to help them to fulfill their greatest potential.*"

Participants also cited a need for both special education teachers and classroom teachers to take responsibility for exceptional children and play active roles in successfully implementing inclusion at schools. Doing whatever is necessary to teach SEN children and working for the success of the inclusion program by enlisting the support of parents and school administration would be indispensable. As one participant stated, "*Inclusive education is cooperative work. For this, there is a need for an appropriate environment, conscious and educated parents, and the preparation of school staff. Special education experts, school administrators, classroom teachers, parents and the child should all work together like a team. The heart of the team is the classroom teacher!*"

Participants also believe that involving parents in the education of their SEN children and informing them as to how to best assist in their children's education would also greatly contribute to teaching inclusive students. According to the participants, teachers should be in contact with parents, communicating with them continuously and ensuring that they follow the development of their children.

4.2 Attitudes about Having Inclusion Students in the Classroom

Although some of the prospective primary teachers had negative and conditional attitudes towards having inclusion students in the classroom, most participants expressed positive attitudes. Examples of these three perspectives are discussed below.

4.2.1 Positive Attitudes/Effects

According to the participants, inclusion will positively affect students in terms of having different experiences interacting with their special needs peers in the classroom and helping them to look at life from different perspectives. A majority of them indicated that they would do their best to learn new ways to create effective inclusive environments for students with special needs in their future classrooms and accept them like their other students. As one respondent stated, *"I would do my best for the other children to get used to the situation of having inclusion students in the classroom. I would start thinking about what I could do for them or how I could behave around them. I could help other students to be more sensitive and caring towards people who are different from them in their environment. I believe this practice would also help my other students have a good experience with exceptional individuals, manage their behaviors as they work with them and benefit from them."*

Inclusive education is not only one-sided or for students with special needs but is also for other students, their families, and teachers. Therefore, inclusion has many benefits and helps speed the development of everyone in the classroom. Through education, teachers and other students learn to respect differences and help each other, exhibit tolerance, and develop an understanding of democracy and moral values. They also learn to act as role models for others, take

responsibility for their actions, and learn to live with different people. As one respondent stated, "*Having more than one inclusion student in the classroom promotes the acceptance of exceptional students and the development of good social relationships between all students.*"

Participants thought that inclusive practices also contribute to teachers' professional development. For example, in having students with special needs, teachers may become more experienced and skilled in classroom management and the use of a variety of teaching methodologies. Moreover, participants assumed that teachers' being role model and encouragement of understanding among other students in the classroom would lead to the success of inclusion. As one respondent commented, "*At the beginning other students may try to exclude exceptional children, but we as teachers are the ones who will prevent this and help them develop positive attitudes towards their classmates with SEN.*"

4.2.2 Negative Attitudes/Effects

Although a majority of the participants thought that they would have positive attitudes if they had one or more inclusion students in their future classrooms, some believed that inclusion would affect the classroom environment and other students negatively. They assumed that teaching inclusion students required a different methodology that must be carefully developed. Therefore, inclusion would increase their responsibilities to the extent that some respondents worried that they would not be able to effectively implement inclusive policies. In addition, classroom activities might not reach their goals with several special needs students in the classroom.

Furthermore, participants mentioned that both exceptional students and other students would have difficulties adapting to each other, thereby causing disturbances or loss of attention. They indicated that the other students might make fun of the exceptional students and look down on them because of their unusual behavior or differences. As one respondent stated, "*Having one or more inclusion students in the classroom may affect the other students and their attention in a bad way; they may not want special needs children in the class and find their behavior strange. They may not even be friends with these children or be afraid of them (such as ignoring them, getting angry with them, treating them badly, pushing them or not sitting beside them.).*"

4.2.3 Conditional Effects

A number of participants pointed out that they would be worried, but not negatively affected, if they had only one inclusion student in the classroom. However, they thought that having two or more inclusion students in the classroom would make everything difficult for them as teachers because different students would require different educational needs, and in this situation, teachers would be apprehensive about being successful in helping their SEN students in a regular classroom environment. As one participant stated, "*Inclusion would affect the other students in the classroom badly at the beginning. But I don't take it badly; rather, it is natural to be aware of the importance and necessity of inclusive education. I would just come to realize that my job could be difficult.*" Participants also indicated that they would have worried if they lacked knowledge or experience to teach children with special needs, and they would surely need more assistance and guidance with their teaching. As one participant expressed, "*I would be worried only to a certain extent, and this would come up if I did not have a complete knowledge or had thought of having difficulties or not knowing what to do.*"

4.2.4 Educational Impact of Inclusion Students in the Classroom

A number of participants thought that they would encounter some problems if they have any students with special needs. However, they believed this would not prevent them from trying to find solutions to the problems they might encounter when teaching these students. As one participant stated, "*I would not have any difficulty having inclusion students in the classroom. The most important thing is to believe that you will succeed and love all your students.*" Although participants were aware that they may have some difficulties, they believe that problems could be solved through teachers' consciousness, knowledge, and understanding—and believe that it is their responsibility to do so. As one respondent stated, "*I do not have high expectations for implementing inclusive education. If our teachers are conscious enough of this matter, all problems could be solved and we could get good results even with the things available for us right now.*" According to the participants, teachers should serve as good role models and always be in search of information, seeking out help from others to solve these problems.

4.2.5 Worries about Overcoming Problems

Participants identified a number of problems and worries about having inclusion students and implementing inclusion in a regular classroom. They noted that teachers could experience problems related to the adaptation/socialization of inclusion children and other students, parents, and peers. A number of them were seriously concerned about inclusion students' ability to adapt to the classroom and wondered whether they could help inclusion students to develop a good relationship with their peers. As one respondent remarked, "*I would be worried if I could not help them to get socialized and if they could not be a part of the society and were left all alone and had to go on their life aloof from society later*

on." Participants also had worries about "… *not helping inclusion students enough, meeting their expectations, reaching their goals, or upsetting them.*"

Another concern of the participants was teaching- and learning- related difficulties in an inclusive classroom. Some participants were worried about using appropriate teaching methods or techniques with inclusion students. As one participant stated, "*They may not respond to my approach to teaching them.*"

Participants also had time- and environment- related worries related to teaching and learning in an inclusive classroom. They indicated that working in a place with poor conditions would prevent them from being able to overcome problems related to inclusion students and meeting their special needs easily. As one respondent remarked, "*The physical environment of the classroom may not be arranged according to the needs of the exceptional children or it may not be functional/adequate.*"

Participants reported that they were also worried that they might not get the help they need from school staff or special education support providers. As one respondent stated, "*They may not volunteer to help me or work with me cooperatively.*" Another pointed out, "*I may not get any special education services/support or benefit from them (i.e. there may not be a special education teacher or counselor at school).*"

Negative attitudes or reactions from parents and peers was another common worry expressed by the participants. As one of them stated, "*Parents may have negative thoughts related to their children with special needs or they may be ignorant or indifferent about them.*" Participants also thought that if negative attitudes and prejudices of other people got in the way of practicing inclusion, problems could arise. As one participant noted, "*Even today, many people still have prejudices about exceptional people, and they think that all exceptional students should get special education in special schools or institutions and should be taught by special education teachers. So inclusive teaching may be very difficult and we would have difficulty getting help from people in society.*"

4.3 Suggested Solutions to Problems

The participants suggested numerous ways to overcome problems related to inclusion.

4.3.1 Seeking Help from Students/Classmates

The participants emphasized that getting the support and help of students without special needs would be necessary to implement inclusion successfully in a regular classroom. They pointed out that teachers would need other students' help both in and outside of the classroom. They described some ways to engage other students in helping their exceptional classmates, such as "… *preparing and informing the students about the exceptional classmates' arrival at the classroom; designing and doing activities that will help them empathize with their peers with special needs; informing them about the inclusion students and their specialties or needs; and creating/providing a classroom environment that will help other students fully accept their included peers.*"

4.3.2 Inviting Exceptional People for Classroom Visits

Participants believed that inviting exceptional visitors to share their experiences with students in the classroom would be an effective way of preparing students to better help, accept and understand their included peers.

4.3.3 Getting Help from Colleagues

Participants suggested that soliciting the help of special education experts and teachers (e.g., university professors and colleagues) would be essential for the practice of inclusion (such as "… *getting the advice of teachers who have taught inclusion students before, observing their teaching and asking for their support.*" Participants also stressed that the existence of a special education teacher at their school could help teachers in developing individualized inclusion strategies. One respondent stated, "*First of all, I would get professional help and support from an expert. The first person I might get help from would be the special education teacher at school. I would like to be informed by this teacher.*"

4.3.4 Asking for Help and Cooperation between Parents and School Staff

Participants contended that inclusion programs could be improved with more cooperation between teachers, parents, and school staff. Participants pointed out that it should be the teachers' responsibility to inform and guide parents in assisting with their child's development outside of the classroom/school. As one participant stated, "*I hope to change the negative attitudes of parents who approach their children's disabilities negatively by setting up examples of families who work continuously for the development and education of their disabled children.*" Participants also emphasized cooperating with other students' parents to facilitate the success of inclusive education in schools. As one of them commented, "*I would inform the other students' parents about the inclusion student and the benefits of inclusive education and persuade them to cooperate through empathy, tolerance and love.*"

4.3.5 Self-reflection on Teaching Philosophy and Abilities

The significance of teachers' pedagogical philosophies and abilities was also discussed to overcome problems with inclusion in their classrooms and cope with their worries better. Participants proposed that teachers' continuous questioning and self-evaluation would be helpful in the process of putting inclusion into practice in their classrooms. As one of them stated, "*I believe we will learn a lot through reflecting on our experiences. Therefore, I cannot say I am knowledgeable enough right now.*"

4.4 Use of College Courses in the Implementation of Inclusive Education

Prospective primary teachers thought that the two college courses they took in the teacher preparation program (i.e., *Special Education* and *Inclusion in the Primary Education*) were quite useful in providing them with strategies for their future practice of inclusion.

4.4.1 Knowledge and Self-esteem

Participants commented that the courses they took on inclusive and special education in college helped them to develop the necessary skills to teach in an inclusive classroom and that taking these courses made them feel more self-confident and knowledgeable. As one of them stated, "*I think that I am well equipped in the implementation of inclusive education, and I believe that I will do my best for it and succeed. I am confident and do not have any worries.*" They emphasized that these courses helped them to better understand and handle their job as inclusive classroom teachers and that teaching in this way would make a difference for them. As one of them noted, "*We are one step ahead when compared with teachers who did not get this training, but we should never forget that we could be on the frontiers and be successful if only we have the skills to put it into practice when we come across real situations.*" Many participants also thought that the courses they took helped them to understand that inclusion students should be well cared for and embraced by their teachers. As one respondent expressed, "*I would take the success of my inclusion students as my own success. Seeing progress in their development would motivate me and make me happy.*"

4.4.2 Seeking Opportunities for Professional Development

Participants indicated that their college courses encouraged them to learn and seek out new strategies with which to approach inclusive and special education, thereby advancing their professional development. They also remarked that professional development within the field of inclusive education might be difficult because it was such a broad one; therefore, they would have to be proactive and motivated to improve their teaching abilities. One respondent noted, "*I think I will be more interested in this subject when necessary. I will not limit my knowledge on the subject to the knowledge I learned in class; rather, I will do more to search for new learning opportunities.*"

4.4.3 Teaching Attitudes towards Inclusion Students

Participants suggested that the courses they took in college helped them to overcome prejudices and develop more positive attitudes towards the inclusion students. Participants added that they would approach inclusion students anxiously and might not help them or have a negative attitude due to their ignorance of how to behave or what to do. One respondent stated, "*I would not want any inclusion students in the classroom if I did not take these courses. I would be against this type of education and prejudiced against inclusion students.*"

4.4.4 Awareness about the Value of Inclusion

Participants reported that special education and inclusive education courses were among the strongest ones to be taught to prospective primary teachers in the teacher training program. They mentioned that the courses helped them to prepare for inclusion students and learn the necessary things related to their specialties and psychology. The coursework also promoted the idea that inclusive teaching would require their best work and effort. One of the participants stated, "*Through this education, I learned I am not alone and how I can overcome negative attitudes. I learned not to be worried and deal with the difficulties when I come across them, and most important of all, I understood the only real handicap is the prejudice we create in our minds, which cannot be easily overcome.*"

Participants also emphasized that they became more aware of the importance and necessity of inclusion. They stated if they had not gained the knowledge from these classes, they would have been unable to empathize with their inclusion students and would potentially harbor negative attitudes towards them. According to some participants, there is always something that can be done, regardless of the situation or level at which the inclusion student learns. One participant argued, "*My biggest sadness is that teachers do not understand inclusion. If I were given the opportunity, I would travel all around the country, visit all schools and tell the teachers the importance of this subject.*"

4.4.5 Contribution to Personal Life Experiences

According to the participants, the special and inclusive education courses they took taught them to understand that anything might happen in life and to accept these differences with an open mind. One of the participants reported that

the coursework could teach teachers to approach inclusion from the perspective that anyone could someday develop a disability. This thought could help teachers approach such matters more consciously. Participants also reported that the courses contributed to experiences in their personal life, i.e., "… *getting informed as the parents of the future.*"

5. Discussion

The main concern of this study was to understand how prepared prospective primary teachers were to work in inclusive education. To this end, their self-efficacy beliefs about their future roles and responsibilities as inclusive classroom teachers were examined from their own perspectives. As seen in this study's results, participating prospective primary teachers shared a strong belief in the fundamental value of inclusion and perceived their roles and responsibilities as very important. Similar results were also reported by Emam and Mohamed (2011) who investigated the relationship between teachers' sense of self-efficacy and attitudes towards the inclusion of pupils with special educational needs in pre-school and primary settings. The results of their study showed that teachers with more experience had more positive attitudes than teachers with less experience.

All teacher trainees in the present study emphasized their responsibility to carry out inclusive education in their future classrooms. They identified a variety of actions they could take in their future inclusive classrooms related to their future roles and responsibilities. However, it is possible that what teacher candidates perceive to be their roles might not be the same as what their roles would be in the future. They may also face significant challenges, such as negative attitudes both at the personal and institutional level, the failure of schools to adapt appropriate inclusion education policies, and inadequate resources and training. The findings of Ciyer's (2010) study revealed that there are a variety of priorities, barriers, expectations, and contradictions involved in trying to extend inclusive practices in Turkey. Clearly constructed inclusive educational policies and procedures are needed immediately for a successful attitudinal and systemic change in inclusive education in Turkey.

The attitudes and beliefs of classroom teachers towards inclusive education are significant for the progress of inclusive education in Turkey because the failure or success of the program largely depends on them. However, a great deal of prior research indicates that the successful implementation of inclusion requires a restructuring of the physical environment as well as organizational and instructional adaptations. In Turkey, most schools lack basic educational materials and equipment to provide a sufficient education for students with special needs. Class size also appears to be another barrier. According to regulations in Turkey, teachers can have up to two students with special needs per class. Only one inclusive education student can be placed in a class of 35; primary education classes are typically overcrowded, with about or more than 40-50 students. The findings of some Turkish researchers have shown that this is not the ideal number of students with which to successfully implement inclusive education in general education classrooms (Batu, 2000; Ciyer, 2010).

When asked to evaluate their inclusive classroom environments, a majority of Turkish teachers (69 percent) who were participants in the study of Yildirim-Eriskin et al. (2012) reported that the school settings and distribution of inclusive students according to different classes were inconvenient. Although the majority of prospective primary teachers in the present study responded that they would have positive attitudes when asked to reflect on the impacts of having one or more inclusion students in their future classrooms, a number expressed worries that inclusion would negatively affect the classroom environment and other students. They thought that having two or more inclusion students in the classroom would make everything difficult for them as teachers because different students would have different educational needs; in this situation, they would be apprehensive about successfully helping their inclusion students in a regular classroom environment. From the perspective of teacher candidates, it is apparent that inclusive practices at schools should be systematically improved in order to be effective. Only in this situation would teacher attitudes become more positive and compliant.

The findings of a study by Sadioglu, Bilgin, Batu, and Oksal (2013) constitute a detailed investigation of the views of elementary teachers in regard to the specifications of inclusive education practice and the evaluation of success. The results indicated that elementary teachers generally have a negative opinion regarding inclusive education practice in Turkey. The results of their study also show that elementary teachers are inadequate in terms of inclusive education practice and therefore require a great deal of assistance, particularly in regard to expert support, pre-service and in-service training, remedies for insufficient experience, and improved physical classroom conditions. Teaching students with special needs requires specialists and additional staff to support the needs of inclusive education students. Because so many children need assistance, most schools in Turkey cannot finance the coordination of services and individual support for children with special needs in general education.

Similarly, in the present study, prospective primary teachers identified a number of problems and worries related to the adaptation and socialization of special needs children and other students, including parents' and peers' attitudes, teachers' adjustment, teaching and learning difficulties, time management, the physical environment, and the support

given to teachers and inclusion students by special education service providers and administrative staff members at schools. Nevertheless, these shortcomings do not cause hopelessness or negativity for most of the prospective primary teachers, perhaps because they have not yet started teaching; however, they have had the opportunity to observe classroom teachers and practice their teaching with in real classroom settings. Interestingly, they present enthusiasm and are hopeful about putting inclusion into practice, trusting in their own abilities to overcome problems. From their perspective, it can be understood that prospective primary teachers are aware that they may encounter difficulties or problems, yet they do not give up on the thought of putting inclusion into practice. Although the majority of the participants expect to encounter problems if they have students with special needs, they believe that this will not prevent them from trying to find solutions. Prospective primary teachers' reflections on the barriers to inclusive education and their ways of dealing with these barriers can be seen as two sides of the same coin: in every challenge lies a potential solution. As Mills (2000: 4) stated, "It is largely a question of attitude whether people decide to focus on what they are able to do, rather than on what they do not have. The greater the barrier, the more creative and imaginative the solution tends to be."

For the improvement of inclusive education practice, Turkish elementary teachers in the study of Sadioglu et al. (2013) suggested the presence of separate teaching environments and part-time inclusive education, the organization of qualified and effective pre-service and in-service training, and the provision of material support. In some instances, teachers, principals, and special education teachers know very little about the philosophy/goals of inclusion and how to implement and maintain this practice. Teachers may be more eager to work with special educational needs students in their regular classrooms with more collaborative work and the proper training and support. Correspondingly, the participants of this study suggested that inclusion programs could be improved by more cooperation between teachers, parents, and school staff as well as students without special needs. Furthermore, they suggested that enlisting the help of special education experts and teachers would be indispensable in the practice of inclusion. Participants did not fail to recognize the significance of individual teaching philosophies and abilities to overcome problems related to inclusion in their classrooms.

The restructuring and reform of teacher education must be seen as integral to the preparation of teachers so that they can feel confident, qualified and prepared to teach all students, safe in the knowledge of what to do and how to get support when they have students with special needs. Teaching students with special needs in an inclusive classroom may be regarded as a challenge for teachers accustomed to teaching in the regular classroom (Coskun, Tosun, & Macaroglu 2009). Therefore, teachers should exhibit the basic characteristics of effective teaching. To be a successful teacher in inclusive classrooms is not easy because in such cases, the teacher must deal with different abilities; this requires teacher candidates to feel confident about inclusion. In fact, most general education classroom teachers in Turkey lack a specific body of knowledge and skillset for working with special needs children and have not had sufficient training to cover these matters. As such, these teachers do not have the necessary knowledge, skills, and attitude to carry out this work in inclusive schools. For this reason, supporting the professional development of teachers and providing adequate pre- and in-service training to encourage regular classroom teachers to take responsibility for educating all students in their classrooms is necessary to successfully implement inclusive education in Turkish schools.

Teacher development must be at the heart of initiatives for developing inclusive practices in schools (Ainscow, 2003). It is also important that teachers are able to critically analyze their practice to find and examine factors that act as barriers to inclusive education. Angelides (2005) argues that a significant reason why teachers fail to provide inclusive education is because they are not able to identify and pay attention to details. The implication of this conclusion for teacher education programs is that if teachers pay attention to and consider those particular details, it may help them to provide a more inclusive practice. If teachers develop the ability to identify and pay attention to seemingly insignificant details, they will then be able to translate them into a more inclusive practice. It is the duty of both schools and teachers to adjust their perceptions to respond to the new demands of inclusive settings.

This study suggests that awareness of the importance and necessity of inclusion is vital to prospective primary teachers. As the participants noted, awareness was one of the benefits of their coursework on special and inclusive education. They also mentioned that college-level courses contributed to their personal and professional development and shifted their attitudes towards students with special needs. In fact, the insufficiency of training for inclusive classroom teachers is one of the most common problems voiced today by many people who work in this profession. Classroom teachers therefore need adequate knowledge and experience to become skilled in this subject. Ideally, all university-based teacher education programs should develop curricula that prepare teacher candidates for diversity and inclusion in regular classrooms, as all teachers must be prepared to teach students with special needs. Additionally, more courses and training related to inclusion and its practice should be offered to prospective teachers in higher education institutions as well as teachers who are expected to work with inclusive education students in their classrooms.

6. Conclusion

The findings of this study reveal that primary teacher trainees believe that they have an important role and responsibility in the implementation of inclusive education mainly because of the inadequacy of extant special education services in Turkey. They also consider their roles to have serious professional and ethical obligations, such as preparing the most effective classroom environment for inclusion students, assisting in their socialization and social acceptance processes, and fostering cooperation among parents, peers, school staff, and special education service providers. Prospective primary teachers believe that inclusive education can be successful in school systems only if the necessary actions are taken, i.e., preparing qualified teachers, or supporting the education of inclusive education students inside and outside of the classroom. However, the presence of inclusion students in the classroom may also be met with negative attitudes among primary teachers (e.g., rejection of inclusion students due to lack of experience). Nevertheless, a number of solutions to deal with emerging problems and worries were offered by prospective primary teachers, such as seeking help from parents and students without special needs, inviting people with disabilities or special needs to visit the classroom, and enlisting the help of special education teachers and colleagues. Most of all, this study demonstrates that equipping prospective teachers with the necessary knowledge and skills through teacher training programs that include inclusive education is crucial in helping them develop the strong self-efficacy and self-trust needed to successfully teach in inclusive classrooms.

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Appendix A. Questionnaire

Dear Teacher Candidate:

The main purpose of this questionnaire is to obtain your perspectives on inclusive education. Thank you for contributing to this research by answering this questionnaire and sharing your opinions. I appreciate your participation and hope that the research will be helpful for you in your future inclusive teaching practices with all your students. Your participation in the study will not have an effect on your grades, and therefore, you should write your responses freely. You can use extra paper if needed. The data obtained from your contribution might be published and shared in the literature. Please hand in your responses within one week.

Questions:

1. What roles, responsibilities or actions you could take in the implementation of inclusive education in the future?

2. What do you think could help the success of inclusive education practices in our country?

3. How would you feel about having a student with special educational needs in your classroom and how could this situation affect you and other students in the classroom?

4. Do you think you would come across some problems if you had students with special educational needs and what would be your worries in that situation?

5. What do you recommend overcoming problems/worries related to having special needs students in your future classrooms?

6. What do you think about the usefulness of college courses on special education and inclusion to help you in the implementation of inclusion? What could be the benefits of them?