

What do postgraduate students think about special education?

Deniz Ozcan^{*}, Faculty of Education, Near East University, North Cyprus, Mersin 10, Turkey.

Pelin Gur, Department of Special Education, Faculty of Education, Near East University, North Cyprus, Mersin 10 Turkey.

Suggested Citation:

Ozcan, D. & Gur, P. (2016). What do postgraduate students think about special education?. *Cypriot Journal of Educational Science*. 11(2), 102-108.

Received April 08, 2016; revised May 16, 2016; accepted June 19, 2016.

Selection and peer review under responsibility of Prof Dr. Huseyin Uzunboylu & Assoc. Prof. Dr. Cigdem Hursen, Near East University.

©2016 SciencePark Research, Organization & Counseling. All rights reserved.

Abstract

The aim of this study was to determine the opinions of students receiving postgraduate education in special education area about special education. 35 students receiving postgraduate education at Near East University participated in this research. 8 of these students were doctorate student, and 27 of them were master student. This research was conducted in 2014-2015 spring semester. Interview questions used in this research were developed by the researchers. Qualitative research method was used in the research.

Keywords: competence in special education area, special education certificate programs, special education in TRNC, special education in Turkey

* ADDRESS FOR CORRESPONDENCE: **Deniz Ozcan**, Faculty of Education, Near East University, North Cyprus, Mersin 10, Turkey.. E-mail address: deniz.ozcan@neu.edu.tr / Tel.:+392-223-64-64

1. Introduction

Special education is a form of education towards individuals who cannot display normal development because of many reasons and it includes individualized education programs provided by specially trained personnel in class environments prepared for special individuals (MEB, Special Education Services Introduction Handbook). Individualized education plans are prepared for every individual in special education. In formal sources, individualized education programs are defined as “a special education program developed for the individual with special needs; approved by the individual’s family; prepared based on the requirements of the individual, family and teacher; includes support education services provided based on targetted aims” (MEB, 2000). Teachers who prepare these programs must have sufficient knowledge about special education area.

Teachers working at special education institutions are expected to have sufficient education, improved themselves in special education area and be individuals open to development. As Girgin & Baysal (2005) mentioned, “teaching profession has a strategic importance in terms of raising the students who are the adults of the future; their developments and education. Teaching is a profession which requires characteristics such as devotion, indulgence, continuous self-renewal and fulfillment of the profession fondly as well as occupational knowledge about the field. Since giving education to individuals who display slower development than normal individuals requires more patience and effort; special education teachers need to be more patient, indulgent and psychologically strong when compared to other class teachers. Teachers working at institutions are expected to obtain more beneficial results through working cooperatively. When occupational competences of special education teachers graduated from four-year undergraduate degree program are being discussed; trying to close the special education teacher gap with short-term certificate programs would increase the problems in training qualified teachers. Class teachers from different fields who are settled in special education with certificate programs lack the teaching skills such as removing self-harming behaviors, establishing eye contact, acquiring imitation response skills, self-care, daily life, social life and academic skills in a systematic way (Ozyurek, 2008). In this context, receiving sufficient education in order to be a special education teacher comes into prominence. Short-term education programs would not be sufficient for a teacher to work in special education field. In addition to this, class teachers assigned through short-term education who work as a special education teacher stated that they are unhappy and incompetent in this area (Nartgun, 2010).

1.1. Education of the Individuals with Disabilities in Turkey

Special education began to take place in Turkish education system in the 1950s. Although special education system appeared in the second half of the 18th century in Turkey, necessary importance and attention has not been provided and therefore it’s development has proceeded slowly. When the developments in the world are considered, our country is still far behind in special education area. First legal regulation related with special education was “ law of individuals who are in need of special education” with law no 2916 in 1983. This law formed the basis of next work. Widespread use of special education services has been achieved with “decree law about special education” with law no 573 in 6th June 1997. Individual plans based on educational performances of the individuals with special needs were generated and the opportunity to receive education with other individuals was provided with this decree law. The issues about raising the families’ consciousness and early start of the education of the individuals with special needs were studied. First personnel special to the area of special education in Turkey was begun to be raised in special education department at Gazi Education Institute in the academic year of 1952-1953 (Akcamete, 1998). Recently, there have been major improvements in special education in Turkey with the increasing consciousness among individuals. The value given to special education has been increased and many individuals benefit from the right to education with government support. However; in spite of these developments; when the developments in the world are considered, it can be said that our country needs to be developed more in this area.

1.2. Education of the Individuals with Disabilities in TRNC

There are many educational institutions opened with government support in TRNC with the aim of educating individuals with disabilities. In addition to the fact that absence of a special education law is the most important deficiency in this area; absence of qualified teachers for individuals with disability is also another problem in TRNC (Polili, 2012). Recently, it is planned to increase the number of personnel in this area with the opening of the special education departments at universities. Draft law was introduced for legal developments in TRNC which is far behind about the education of individuals with disability. Developments of individuals with disability who are receiving education cannot be followed and necessary government support is not provided. Although, there are many problems in TRNC such as absence of appropriate environment for education, absence of teacher support and deficiencies in education plans; there are continuous efforts to solve these problems as well. According to the information obtained from ministry of education, a commission has been constituted to prepare necessary legal regulations about special education and necessary work has begun to close the special

2. Aim of the Research

In this study, it was aimed to determine the opinions of special education students receiving education at master and doctorate level on their competences about this field, special education certificate program, teacher candidates from different departments and special education practices in Turkey and TRNC.

In line with this aim, the answers to following questions were sought:

1. What are the reasons of teacher candidates for selecting special education?
2. Is it necessary to be graduated from special education department to be a special education teacher?
3. Is special education certificate program towards people graduated from different departments adequate to perform as a special education teacher?
4. What are the characteristics in which special education teachers should have?
5. What are the opinions about special education practices in Turkey and TRNC?

2.1 Model of the Research

This research was constituted and conducted based on qualitative design. Model of the research is induction analysis model based on interview method which is one of the qualitative research methods.

2.2 Study Group

35 voluntary students receiving postgraduate education at Near East University participated in this research. 8 of these students were doctorate student, and 27 of them were master student.

2.3 Development of the Data Collection Tools

Interview form prepared by the researcher was used. Expert opinions were received in order to ensure the validity of the data collection tool and last version was developed based on the expert opinions.

2.4 Data Analysis

Answers given by the students to the interview questions developed by the researcher were examined based on expert opinions and obtained results were interpreted with using induction technique. In order to increase the reliability of the obtained results, expert opinion was received during the study.

3. Findings and Interpretations

1. In this section, departments of the master and doctorate students that they are graduated from and their reasons for selecting special education were evaluated.

According to the opinions of 35 students, aims of these students for selecting this field are provided in demonstrated in Table 1. It can be said that most of the participants selected this field in order to help individuals with special needs and integrate them into society. In addition to this, students stated that they selected this field fondly and they also emphasized that small number of qualified teacher was an important factor for them

Table 1. Special education teacher candidates' reasons for selecting this field

Reason for selecting special education	f
To be assigned	3
To help individuals with special needs	10
To integrate individuals with special needs into the society	3
Since they love this profession	9
Because of the small number of teachers in the area	5
Since there is an individual with special needs in their environment	4
To proceed academically	1
Total	35

2. In this section, occupational competence in special education was evaluated based on the results.

According to the results, opinions of master and doctorate students about the necessity of being graduated from special education field in terms of occupational competence are provided in Table 2.

Table 2. Opinions of special education teacher candidates about the necessity of being graduated from special education field

Necessity of being graduated from special education field	f
Yes	27
No	8
Total	35

There was a common opinion about the reasons for 27 participants to answer yes. They indicated that that being graduated from special education field is necessary for occupational competence, four-year education is important in terms of occupational competence and job experience and voluntariness are also very important.

8 participants who answered no to this question emphasized that sufficient knowledge about the field could be received with scientific preparatory courses during master and doctorate education and it is important to select this profession fondly in order to be successful in this profession.

3. In this section, opinions of participants about special education certificate program were evaluated.

According to the interview results, there was a common opinion of the participants about teachers assigned to special education centers with special education certificate program. 31 participants stated that in addition to the fact that four-year undergraduate education remains insufficient for this field; special education teachers cannot be raised with hourly certificate programs. The other 4 participants revealed that these certificate programs are sufficient since they are given by experts and individuals can develop themselves in this field. In addition to insufficiency, while people who are graduated from this field have difficulties in finding job; it is injustice for these people to be assigned based on hourly certificate programs. Participants also revealed that teachers performing this job who received this hourly certificate program since they could not be assigned would not be beneficial for individuals with disability.

4. In this section, opinions of the participants about the characteristics in which special education teachers should have were evaluated.

According to the results based on the master and doctorate students' opinions, characteristics in which special education teachers should have are demonstrated in Table 3.

Table 3. Opinions of special education teacher candidates about the characteristics in which special education teachers should have

Characteristics in which special education teachers should have	f
Patient	35
Indulgent	18
Have knowledge about the field	30
Voluntary	32
Energetic	10
Emphatetic	25
Sensitive	30
Open to development and learning	30
Conscientious	20
Devoted	15
Determined	30
Have occupational competence	35
Self-confident	30
Like to make research	20

According to the common opinions of the participants; teacher candidates should be patient at first. Special education teachers should have strong skills. Special education teachers should be an expert of the field, energetic, open to development, indulgent and more importantly, they are also expected to perform this job fondly. Individualized education is necessary for every domain since the learning of individuals with special needs are slower than individuals with normal development.

5. In this section, opinions about special education practices in Turkey and TRNC were evaluated.

According to the interview results, there was a common opinion about the special education practices in Turkey and TRNC among the participants. Participants emphasized that Turkey is far behind when compared to European countries about special education practices, there is not even a special education law and government support in TRNC and there is an inadequate number of qualified teachers in both Turkey and TRNC. An important problem for special education graduates in TRNC is that positions are not opened in this field and teachers are assigned from Turkey. According to the explanation of Cyprus Turkish Teachers Union (KTOS); it was stated that "Special Education Draft Law and Special Education Department Establishment Draft prepared by KTOS should be put into practice; early diagnosis should be provided by the

government based on coordination and collaboration with Ministry of Health, Ministry of Labor and Ministry of Education; and education which individuals with special needs would require throughout their lives should be planned. Infrastructure work which would meet the requirements of individuals with special needs in every school should be completed.”

4. Conclusion

In this study, opinions of special education students receiving postgraduate education at master and doctorate level on their competences about this field, special education certificate program, teacher candidates from different departments and special education practices in Turkey and TRNC were received. According to the results of this study, students stated that helping individuals with special needs and integrating them into society were the most important factors for them to select this field. Regular and scheduled work is required to integrate these individuals into society and acquire them to display appropriate behaviour. Teachers who are experts in their field and perform this job fondly and intentionally are required. A special education teacher should always be patient, strong, devoted, open to development and innovation, self-confident, ambitious and more importantly, have occupational competence. This can also be seen from the results of the study. It is important to receive sufficient education in the area of special education for occupational competence. It is not possible to provide occupational competence with certificate programs. Recently, there were important developments in Turkey with the increasing awareness. However, it can be seen that Turkey is far behind in terms of special education practices when compared to European countries. When Turkey and TRNC are compared, it can be said that special education practices in Turkey are in a better position than in TRNC. Absence of a special education law in TRNC, lateness for law studies, small number of studies in special education and not providing support for people working in this field are important shortcomings for TRNC about special education. Recently, studies in special education has gained speed through increase in the number of special education graduates and awareness in the public. According to the explanation by Ministry of Education; a commission has been constituted and it was announced that there are teachers from the departments of the universities, Special Education Center Director and authorized people, teachers of mainstreaming class, class teachers, Elementary Department and General Secondary Education Department special education experts and representatives of non-governmental organizations in this commission. Additionally, according to the information obtained from Ministry of Education; the gap of special education teacher has been detected and necessary work is being done to assign special education graduates for this gap. This study constitutes a small part of the existing studies in special education. This study is limited to the used scale, number of individuals participated in this study and the location of the study which is applied.

4.1 Recommendations

1. Opinions of the students receiving postgraduate education in special education at Turkey could also be received.
2. Individuals with special needs should receive education by teachers graduated from special education department.
3. Certificate programs for being special education teacher should be removed.
4. Special education law should be prepared in TRNC.
5. Assignments of special education should be done in TRNC.

References

- Akcamete, G. (1998). Special education in Turkey. *Special education, Anadolu University Publications*, 1018, 197-207.
- Girgin, G. & Baysal, A. (2005). Occupational Burn-Out Level Among Teachers Of Mentally Retarded Students And Some Variables (Sample Of Izmir). *Pamukkale University Education Faculty Journal*, 18(18), 1-10.
- Ministry of Education, (2000). *Decree law about special education and special education services legislation*. Ankara: National Education Press.
- Ministry of Education, (2006). T.R. Ministry of Education General Management of Special Education Guidance and Counselling Services, Special Education Services Introduction Handbook. Retrieved 22 June 2015, from http://mebk12.meb.gov.tr/meb_iys_dosyalar/06/14/747031/dosyalar/2013_01/11100900_zeleiti_melkitab.pdf
- Nartgun, S. S. (2010). Perceptions of special education academic staff: Who should be employed as special education teachers? *International Journal of Human Sciences*, 7(1), 1082-1112.
- Ozyurek, M. (2008). Problems in Raising Qualified Teachers and Solutions. Example of Special Education. *Journal of Turkish Educational Sciences*, 2, 189-226.
- Polili, O. (2012). Rights of Individuals with Disability in North Cyprus (2012). *Turkish Cypriot Human Rights Foundation Publications*, 2(1).