

## **UNPACKING EARLY MEMORIES: PRE-SCHOOL TEACHER CANDIDATES' ATTITUDES TOWARDS SPECIAL NEEDS**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The Individuals' experiences and memories about people with special needs affect their attitudes, behaviours and perceptions towards these individuals in the following years. This study aims to discover pre-school teacher candidates' early memories about people with special needs and understand the effect of these early memories on teacher candidates' attitudes towards people with special needs. The convergent parallel design of mixed-method research is used in this study. The researchers used extreme or deviant case sampling of purposeful sampling. 110 teacher candidates at pre-school teaching department of Akdeniz University answered the survey and open-response questions. The survey included the Multidimensional Attitudes Scale toward Persons with Disabilities (MAS) scale developed by Findler et al. (2007) and adopted into Turkish by Yelpaze and Türküm (2018). The quantitative data were imported into the SPSS program to calculate descriptive and inferential statistics. To analyse the attitudes of teacher candidates, mean and standard deviation were conducted. For the qualitative analysis, 10 teacher candidates in the highest and in the lowest (5 participants from each group) on Turkish version of MAS were selected. The data were coded by using NVIVO 10. According to the analysis of qualitative data, pre-school teacher candidates' memories included positive and negative aspects together; like sadness, fear, astonishment, and helplessness. On the other hand, according to the analysis of quantitative data, teacher candidates' attitude towards people with special needs were mostly close to negative in affection and behaviour. Therefore, it can be thought that the memories of teacher candidates towards individuals with special needs do not affect their attitudes.

**Keywords:** teacher education, special needs education, attitudes, memories, mixed method

### **INTRODUCTION**

Teacher education has always been an important issue of policy makers and governments for the education of teacher candidates because of the changing needs of the era. In the 21st century, lifelong learning, learning to learning, becoming knowledge society, and new trends in education are getting more and more attention in teacher education programs. Even though there are plenty of research on teaching and teacher education, there is a huge need in researches on education since the world is facing new changes in the digital era. Especially for

understanding teacher attitudes which affects teaching activities, more researches are needed. Therefore, teacher education programs can be revised according to these research findings. In particular, special needs education is a specific field which needs more researches to improve teacher education programs.

Turkish Council of Higher Education (Yükseköğretim Kurulu-YÖK), the responsible body for teacher education, revised the teacher education programs, and Special Education Course became a must course for all teacher education departments to improve all teachers' competences who will have students with special educational needs (SEN) in their classes (YÖK, 2018). All teacher candidates also have to take this course to complete the undergraduate program and become a teacher. During this course, they learn basic principles related to special needs education, mainstreaming, the characteristics and education of children with intellectual disabilities, hearing impairment, visual impairment, physical disability, language and communication disorder, chronic illness, learning difficulties, attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder, autism, multiple disabilities, and gifted children. The main reason of this need is the issues and challenges of teachers in teaching children with learning disabilities. Similarly, Allam and Martin (2021) revealed that the classrooms for children with learning disabilities have poor learning environment to support such as lack of budget, curriculum guide, instructional materials, and school facilities. Moreover, as stated by Hussein et al. (2020), the teaching activities practiced by special education preschool teachers to foster thinking skills among the students with learning disabilities should be improved. On the other hand, teachers' attitude is also an important determiner of the quality of education given by the pre-school teachers. There are plenty of literature which shows that teachers' attitudes affect SEN students' inclusion or exclusion in schools (Avramidis, et al., 2000; Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; Binti Ramli, 2017; Bunch & Valeo, 2004; Brodwin & Orange, 2002; Chen, et al., 2002; Dimitrova-Radojichikj, et al., 2016; Kwona, et al., 2017; Lawson, et al., 2006; Murdaca, et al., 2018; Ravenscroft, et al., 2019; Smart, 2002; Zainun, et al., 2019). As a result, teachers' attitudes are highly important for SEN students' active participation and getting equal opportunities in class. Moreover, it is revealed by researches that having contact with disabled people in the past affect's teachers' attitudes (Carroll, et al., 2003; Dessemontet, et al., 2014; Emmers, et al., 2020; Thaver & Lim, 2014) and children's acceptance of peers with disabilities (Kwona, et al., 2017). Therefore, more researches on the reasons of negative or positive teacher attitude towards individuals with special needs are precious for better and equal education opportunities for students with SEN.

In spite of taking Special Education Course during undergraduate program and learning about the basic principles related to special needs education and the characteristics and education of children with special needs, teacher candidates may not have positive attitude towards students with SEN since there are other factors that affects attitudes. One important thing about attitude is that attitudes occur at a younger age and what we heard in stories and read in books, etc. shapes our attitudes towards individuals with special needs. Moreover, the attitude of our families and close environment towards individuals with special needs also affect our attitude. As stated by Miller et al. (2011), studying early memories about students with disabilities is essential to generate approaches to the preparation of future teachers for the students with disabilities who will be included in their classrooms. Therefore, discovering these early memories and their effects will help educators, researchers, and policy makers to understand the reasons of negative attitude towards individuals with special needs and help them to take measures or find solutions to change these negative attitudes. Even though there are studies conducted by using the early memories (Aldemir & Sezer, 2019; Kakana, et al, 2015; Haught, et al., 2015; Logue, et al., 2011; Moriña Díez, 2010; Van Hook, 2002), there are

limited researches which investigates early memories and pre-school teacher attitudes towards students with SEN in the literature.

This study aims to discover pre-school teacher candidates' early memories about people with special needs and understand the effect of these early memories on teacher candidates' attitudes towards people with special needs. Mixed methods is employed in this study, so the quantitative and qualitative research questions were used. Quantitatively, what is the early memories of teacher candidates about individuals with special needs? Qualitatively, what is teacher candidates' attitude towards individuals with special needs?

## **METHODOLOGY**

The convergent parallel design of mixed-method research is used in this study. The researchers used the questionnaire variant (data-validation variant) to examine the attitudes of teacher candidates towards people with special needs and to explore the effect of their early memories on their attitudes. According to Creswell and Plano Clark (2018), qualitative and quantitative data are collected simultaneously, two sets of data were analysed separately and then the results of the data from two sources were interpreted/compared/combined in the convergent parallel design. As Günbayi (2020) stated that pragmatism is the umbrella philosophy of mixed-method studies. He identifies the mixed-method study as a procedure for collecting, analysing, and mixing both quantitative and qualitative research and methods in a single study to understand the research problem. The study used a mixed-method approach involving writing memories as narrative inquiry and a Likert-type scale. The examination of teacher candidates' attitudes towards people with special needs in Akdeniz University involved 110 participants comprised of pre-school teaching department.

### **Participants**

Participants in this study were 110 undergraduate students who were studying in Preschool Teaching Program of Education Faculty at Akdeniz University. They were attending Special Education Course, a must course for all teacher education departments to improve all teachers' competences who will have students with SEN in their classes. All teacher candidates also have to take this course to complete the undergraduate program and become a teacher. During this course, they learn basic principles related to special needs education, causes of disability, the importance of early diagnosis and treatment, mainstreaming, the characteristics and education of children with intellectual disabilities, hearing impairment, visual impairment, physical disability, language and communication disorder, chronic illness, learning difficulties, attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder, autism, multiple disabilities and gifted children. Therefore, the population of this study consists of all teacher candidates (110 teacher candidates) who attended this must course. All the 110 teacher candidates answered the survey and open-response questions. The survey included the Multidimensional Attitudes Scale toward Persons with Disabilities (MAS) scale developed by Findler et al. (2007) and adopted into Turkish by Yelpeze and Türküm (2018). For the qualitative analysis, 10 teacher candidates in the highest and in the lowest (5 participants from each group) on Turkish version of MAS were selected. The researchers used extreme or deviant case sampling of purposeful sampling.

Participants contributing to this study (N = 110) were undergraduate students from a public university offering teacher education in Turkey. As it can be seen in Table 1, a majority

were identified as female (n = 79, 71.8%), while a minority identified as male (n = 31; 28.2%). Ages ranged from 17 to 29+ years. Majority of the participants (n = 91; 82.7%) were aged between 17 and 22 years. Others were between 23 and 28 (n = 13; 11.8%) and 29+ (n=6; 5.5%) years. Majority of the participants (n =65; 59.1%) does not have people with special needs in their neighbourhood.

Table 1  
*Teacher candidate demographics*

| Demographics   |        | Frequency | Percent |
|--|--------|-----------|---------|
| Gender   | Male   | 31        | 28.2    |
|  | Female | 79        | 71.8    |
| Age  | 17-22  | 91        | 82.7    |
|  | 23-28  | 13        | 11.8    |
|  | 29+    | 6         | 5.5     |
| Having people with special needs in their neighbourhood. | Yes    | 45        | 40.9    |
|  | No     | 65        | 59.1    |

Before starting the Special Education Course, 110 teacher candidates were asked to fill the online form voluntarily. They were informed about the ethical issues and privacy of the personal data with an online consent form before filling the survey. They were informed that the online form has two parts. First part has Likert-scale questions and they have to choose the best option according to their feelings. Teacher candidates first completed the Likert-scale questions. The 31 items on this scale were each responded to on a five-point "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree" scale. The survey took 10–15 minutes to complete. In the second part, teacher candidates were asked to write about their first memories of people with special needs. They were given directions such as this memory could be in a class, school or outside of it, with more than one people, and they could be a part of the case or an observer. They were asked to write maximum 100 words and give detailed information about the people who were present there, how they felt, what the surroundings were, what others might feel, and how old they were. Teacher candidates completed MAS and wrote the memories in the same class session. This was conducted in the first day of the course. Therefore, while teacher candidates were aware that the course subject was special needs education, basic principles of special needs education and the characteristics and education of children with special needs had not been introduced.

### **Instruments**

An online form created by researchers is used to collect data. There were Likert-type rating scale and open-response question in the online form. A 31-item Likert-type rating scale called the Multidimensional Attitudes Scale toward Persons with Disabilities (MAS), which was developed by Findler et al. (2007), was used to measure teacher candidates' attitudes towards persons with disabilities. The permission from Yelpeze and Türküm (2018), who adapted MAS into the Turkish context, was taken via email from the researchers. In the next step, the online form including 31-item, three dimensions (affection, cognition and behaviour) and five choices from strongly agree to strongly disagree was created by the researcher to collect answers. In the second part of the online form, there was an open response questions. In this part, teacher candidates were asked to write about their first memories of people with special needs. They were given directions such as this memory could be in a class, school or outside of it, with

more than one people, and they could be a part of the case or an observer. They were asked to write maximum 100 words and give detailed information about the people who were present there, how they felt, what the surroundings were, what others might feel, and how old they were. Teacher candidates wrote their memories rather than describe orally since according to Allers and Katrin (1997), having memories written is a useful equivalent.

## **Data Analysis**

First the online form was closed, then the data were downloaded. The quantitative data were imported into the SPSS program to calculate descriptive and inferential statistics. To analyse the attitudes of teacher candidates, mean and standard deviation were conducted.

A total of 10 responses were chosen by using MAS scores of teacher candidates. 5 participants in the highest and 5 participants in the lowest on the MAS scale were chosen and descriptive analysis was conducted for these data. In this step, firstly the qualitative data were read repeatedly to determine the essence of the phenomenon and structures of memories of teacher candidates. The data were coded by using NVIVO 10, a qualitative data analysis computer program. NVIVO 10 programs do not perform the analysis but supports the researcher who performs the analysis by organizing data and recodes (Cohen et al., 2007; Kelle, 1995).

## **Validity and Reliability**

For the reliability of the survey, Cronbach's Alpha is calculated by Yelpeze and Türküm (2018) and Cronbach's Alpha as for the Turkish version of the total scale of MAS, Affection, Cognition and Behavior subscale were 0.90, 0.88, 0.89 and 0.84, respectively. The reliability analysis for this study was also done by researchers. Cronbach's Alpha values are 0.84 for the total scale of MAS, 0.82 for affection, 0.94 for cognition, and 0.73 for behaviour.

The researchers collected data from various sources, such as written memories and survey to assure reliability and validity of the study. Moreover, they used a purposive sampling method based on voluntarism to get memories of teacher candidates and used direct quotations without making any comments on them. Besides these, the data were coded by two independent experts, and researchers calculated Cohen's kappa coefficient to determine the inter-rater reliability of themes coded—0.91 perfect agreement—for inner reliability (Landis & Koach, 1977).

## **Ethical Considerations**

Researchers applied to Social and Human Sciences Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Board at Akdeniz University to obtain the permissions for the research. The study was started just after getting the decision of Ethics Board (Decision Date: 06.05.2020, Decision Number: 113). Before starting the data collection procedure, teacher candidates were informed about the research aims. They were also kept informed in all stages, and anonymity was offered. Teacher candidates' opinions were the required ones. Therefore, researchers paid attention not to impose their beliefs.

## FINDINGS

The results of the study were reported separately by open response questions and survey. To investigate attitudes towards people with special needs, teacher candidates were asked the extent to which they agree with a series of statements (with 1 = Strongly Disagree and 5 = Strongly Agree). To investigate teacher candidates' attitudes towards people with special needs, they were asked to write about their first memories of people with special needs.

### Early Memories of Pre-School Teacher Candidates

The attitudes of the teacher candidates towards people with special needs were tried to be presented. The teacher candidates were asked to write about their first memories of people with special needs. All the 110 teacher candidates wrote about their first memories of people with special needs. For the qualitative analysis, 10 teacher candidates in the highest and lowest on MAS scale were selected. The researchers used extreme or deviant case sampling of purposeful sampling. During the research process, participants were offered anonymity. After several readings of the early memories, three themes aroused out of these written earliest memories about people with special needs. These themes are the initial feeling of teacher candidates when encountering someone with special needs, type of contact they had when they first met with someone with special needs, and the specific features of special needs.

### The Initial Feeling When Encountering Someone with Special Needs

Teacher candidates focused on their initial feelings when they first encounter someone with special needs when they were asked to write about their first memories of people with special needs. The data can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2  
*The initial feeling when encountering someone with special needs.*

|               | A | B | C | D | E | F | G | H | I | J | f | %   |
|---------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|-----|
| Sadness       |   |   | √ | √ | √ |   |   |   | √ |   | 4 | 40% |
| Fear          |   | √ |   |   |   | √ | √ |   |   |   | 3 | 30% |
| Astonishment  | √ |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   | √ | 2 | 20% |
| Anger         |   |   |   |   | √ |   |   | √ |   |   | 2 | 20% |
| Embarrassment |   |   |   | √ |   |   |   | √ |   |   | 2 | 20% |

As it can be understood from the frequency analysis of teacher candidates' initial feelings when they first encounter someone with special needs in Table 2, 40% of teacher candidates stated that they felt sad about people with special needs when they first encountered. The opinions of some participants are as follows:

*'There was a student with autism in the classroom. I did not know he was autistic at first. I tried to talk to the boy, but he did not answer at all and speak. The intern then told us that the child was autistic. The children in the classroom were playing on their own and nobody talked or played with the child ...' (C1, 1)*

*'It was an old lady in a wheelchair waiting at the bus stop, the bus driver did not want to help, I was sorry for her and I was so sad ...' (E1, 1).*

Another participant expresses his feeling of sadness as follows:

*'While waiting for a bus at the bus stop to go into the town from home, a 40-year-old man sitting in a wheelchair came to my side. After a while, the bus he was waiting for came, but the bus driver told the man that he could not take him to the bus because the bus was too crowded and he had to catch up with other stops. Nobody in the bus and at the bus stop ever reacted' (D1, 1).*

About 30% of teacher candidates stated that they felt fear when they first encountered with person with special needs. The opinions of the participants are as follows:

*'Our neighbour's son was mentally disabled. I was about 7-8 years old in those days. Of course, I heard that they were yelling continually because they were living in the flat opposite. I was very scared when we came face to face because he was continually shouting and he was big since he was older than me' (B1, 2)*

*'...I was a little scared' (F1, 2)*

*'There was a classroom with disabled people in the primary school. There were especially mentally disabled students. They caught my attention. I was afraid of them because I was young. Because I could not understand exactly what they were doing. Once, one of them was running after other children. The children were also making fun of him and running away' (G1, 2).*

About 20% of teacher candidates stated that they felt astonishment when they first encountered with people with special needs. The opinions of the participants are as follows:

*'I saw him while I was passing from their street with my motorcycle. I was surprised since it was the first time, I saw him. I thought how hard life was for him and his family' (A1, 3)*

*'The first individual with special needs I met was my cousin. I was about 7-8 years old when I first met him. I was a little surprised when I first saw him because I was young' (J1, 3).*

About 20% of teacher candidates stated that they felt anger when they first encountered with person with special needs. They stated that they felt anger to themselves because of not helping the person with special needs. The opinion of one of the participants is as follows:

*'It was an old lady in a wheelchair waiting at the bus stop, the bus driver did not want to help, I was sorry for her and I was so sad, I was angry with the driver, the people around, and even myself' (E1, 4).*

Another participant expresses his feeling of anger as follows:

*'Although I was not very close, I encountered an individual with speech impairment and mental disability. I did not know exactly how to behave at that moment, I got angry at myself because of a great lack of consciousness and because I did not know how to treat people with disabilities, I felt inadequate and embarrassed' (H1, 4).*

About 20% of teacher candidates stated that they felt embarrassment when they first encountered with person with special needs. The opinion of one of the participants is as follows:

*'... I did not know exactly how to behave at that moment, I got angry at myself because of a great lack of consciousness and because I did not know how to treat people with disabilities, I felt inadequate and embarrassed' (H1, 5).*

Another participant expresses his feeling of anger as follows:

*'I was 17 years old. While waiting for a bus at the bus stop to go into the town from home, a 40-year-old man sitting in a wheelchair came to my side. After a while, the bus he was waiting for came, but the bus driver told the man that he could not take him to the bus because the bus was too crowded and he had to catch up with other stops. Nobody in the bus and at the bus stop ever reacted. The bus went, and the man continued to waiting disappointedly. I was embarrassed both for myself and for the community because I did not react at that moment (D1, 5).*

When the early memories of teacher candidates on initial feelings when they first encounter someone with special needs were analyzed generally, they stated that they felt sadness. In spite of the feeling of sadness, they also stated that they felt fear. Accordingly, some participants stated that they felt astonishment when they first encounter someone with special needs. On the other hand, some other participants stated that they felt anger and embarrassment towards themselves because of not helping people with special needs. In fact, they felt astonishment and they could not decide what to do when they first encounter someone with special needs, so they cannot take action and help them in the first moment. Afterwards, they realized the situation and felt embarrassment and anger because of not taking action and helping that person.

### **The Type of Contact with People with Special Needs**

Teacher candidates wrote about the type of contact they had when they were asked to write about their first memories of people with special needs. The data can be seen in Table 3.



Table 3  
*The type of contact with people with special needs.*

|                   | A | B | C | D | E | F | G | H | I | J | f | %   |
|-------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|-----|
| 1. No contact     | √ |   |   | √ | √ | √ |   | √ |   |   | 5 | 50% |
| 2. Low contact    |   | √ |   |   |   |   |   |   | √ |   | 2 | 20% |
| 3. Medium contact |   |   | √ |   |   |   |   |   |   |   | 1 | 10% |
| 4. Close contact  |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   | √ | 1 | 10% |

As it can be understood from the frequency analysis of teacher candidates' contact type with people with special needs in Table 3, 50% of teacher candidates stated that they had no contact with them. These people with special needs were mostly people they saw in their neighbourhood, in the street, and mostly at the bus stop, so they had no relationship with them. The opinions of some participants are as follows:

*'I saw him while I was passing from their street with my motorcycle ...' (A2, 1)*

*'It was an old lady in a wheelchair waiting at the bus stop, the bus driver did not want to help ...' (E2, 1)*

*'Although I was not very close, I encountered an individual with speech impairment and mental disability. I did not know exactly how to behave at that moment ...' (H2, 1)*

Another participant wrote as follows:

*'I was 17 years old. While waiting for a bus at the bus stop to go into the town from home, a 40-year-old man sitting in a wheelchair came to my side. After a while, the bus he was waiting for came, but the bus driver told the man that he could not take him to the bus because the bus was too crowded and he had to catch up with other stops. Nobody in the bus and at the bus stop ever reacted. The bus went, and the man continued to waiting disappointedly. I was embarrassed both for myself and for the community because I did not react at that ... (D2, 1).*

About 20% of teacher candidates stated that they had low contact people with special needs. The opinions of the participants are as follows:

*'Our neighbour's son was mentally disabled. I was about 7-8 years old in those days. Of course, I heard that they were yelling continually because they were living in the flat opposite ...' (B2, 2)*

*'I helped an individual in a wheelchair get on the bus.' (I2, 2).*

About 10% of teacher candidates stated that she/he had medium contact with people with special needs. She/he mostly tried to help them. The opinion of the participant is as follows:

*'I met when I went to a school for teaching practice course in the first semester. Since our mentor teacher did not come, we had to do observation that day in the next classroom. There was a student with autism in the classroom. I did not know he was autistic at first. I tried to talk to the boy, but he did not answer at all and speak. The intern then told us that the child was autistic. The children in the classroom were playing on their own and nobody talked or played with the child. I tried to speak a few more times, but he never answered.'* (C2, 3).

About 10% of teacher candidates stated that she/he had close contact with person with special needs. In fact, the person with special needs was a relative and she/he had close contact with her/him. The opinion of the participant is as follows:

*'The first individual with special needs I met was my cousin. I was about 7-8 years old when I first met him. I was a little surprised when I first saw him because I was young. However, as I grew up, I realized that he was not different from us. Now I am getting along very well with him. Sometimes I take him outside'* (J2, 4).

When the type of contact with people with special needs in teacher candidates' early memories were analysed generally, most of the participants stated that they had no contact with people with special needs. In fact, these people with special needs were mostly people they saw at the bus stop or in the street, so they had no relationship with them. Some participants stated that they had low contact with people with special needs. Similarly, one participant said that she/he tried to help person with special needs when she/he needed. In other words, she/he had medium contact with her/him. On the other hand, one participant stated that she/he close contact with person with special needs since she/he was a relative. It can be concluded that if the person with special needs was a relative, the contact would be closer, but if the person with special needs was met in the street or at the bus stop, there would be no contact.

### The Specific Features of The Special Needs

Teacher candidates wrote about the specific characteristics and features of special needs when they were asked to write about their first memories of people with special needs. The data can be seen in Table 4.

Table 4  
*The specific features of the special needs.*

|                  | A | B | C | D | E | F | G | H | I | J | f | %   |
|------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|-----|
| 1. Not mentioned | √ |   |   | √ | √ | √ |   | √ | √ | √ | 7 | 70% |
| 2. Negative      |   | √ | √ |   |   |   | √ |   |   |   | 3 | 30% |

As it can be understood from the frequency analysis of teacher candidates' statements of the specific features of special needs in Table 4, 70% of teacher candidates did not write about positive or negative features of the special needs. They only wrote about their feelings, the experiences and the setting, but they did not write about the specific features of the people with special needs.

About 30% of teacher candidates wrote about negative features of the special needs. The opinions of the participants are as follows:

*'...I tried to talk to the boy, but he did not answer at all and speak. The intern then told us that the child was autistic. The children in the classroom were playing on their own and nobody talked or played with the child. I tried to speak a few more times, but he never answered' (C3, 2)*

*'... I was afraid of them because I was young. Because I could not understand exactly what they were doing. Once, one of them was running after other children ...' (G3, 2)*

*'Our neighbour's son was mentally disabled. I was about 7-8 years old in those days. Of course, I heard that they were yelling continuously because they were living in the flat opposite. I was very scared when we came face to face because he was continuously shouting and he was big since he was older than me. He could talk and walk very slowly. I had a hard time understanding him and spit always came out of his mouth when he was speaking. Frankly, this made me a little bit disgusted. He could not eat alone and go to toilet alone' (B3, 2).*

When the specific features of people with special needs in teacher candidates' early memories were analysed generally, it is found that most of the participants did not state any features of the people with special needs. These people with special needs were mostly people they saw in the street, at the bus stop, or at school. They do not have long contact or close relation, so they did not mention their features. On the other hand, some other participants stated negative features of the people with special needs.

### **Pre-School Teacher Candidates' Attitudes towards Individuals with Special Needs**

The data collected by a survey of the study were reported according to the last four research questions: What are the attitudes of teacher candidates towards individuals with special needs?

#### ***Attitude Scores of Teacher Candidates***

Teacher candidates' attitude scores can be seen in Table 5. It is found that teacher candidates' attitude scores in cognition at average level. However, their attitude scores in affection and behavior are low.

Table 5  
*The attitude scores of teacher candidates.*

|              | X    | S.s  |
|--------------|------|------|
| 1. Affection | 2.33 | 8.95 |
| 2. Cognition | 3.73 | 8.09 |
| 3. Behaviour | 2.29 | 4.42 |

## **DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS**

The aim of the current research is to provide a better insight into the teacher candidates' attitudes towards people with special needs and analyse whether their early memories affect their attitudes positively or negatively. The interviews revealed out that although teacher candidates felt sadness, fear and astonishment when they first encounter someone with special needs, they did not help people with special needs. Therefore, they felt anger and embarrassment because of not helping people with special needs. In other words, their memories included positive and negative aspects together; like sadness, fear, astonishment, and helplessness. The survey results reaffirmed this dilemma. In other words, teacher candidates' attitude towards people with special needs were mostly close to negative in affection and behaviour. Only in cognition they have an average attitude score. Miller et al. (2011) conducted a research on preservice general education classroom teachers in an inclusion course and asked them to describe their own earliest memories of students with disabilities in school. Their research revealed that preservice teacher education classroom teachers who scored lower on the attitude scale described characteristics in a negative way. Even though there are limited researches which investigates early memories and pre-school teacher attitudes towards students with SEN in the literature, there are a plenty of literature review which reveal negative preschool teacher attitudes towards students with SEN. In other words, the findings of the current study are also consistent with previous researches that reveal preschool teachers' mostly negative attitudes towards students with SEN. For example, Dimitrova-Radojichikj et al., (2016) found that the preschool teachers' attitudes were more negative than positive towards the inclusion of students with disability. Furthermore, Sucuoğlu et al. (2013) conducted a study and applied Turkish form of Opinions Relative to Integration of Students with Disabilities to assess the attitudes of preschool teachers regarding inclusive practices. They also reported that teacher attitudes towards inclusion were neither positive nor negative. Moreover, Tamakloe (2018) analysed preschool teachers' pedagogical behaviours and attitudes toward children with disabilities in three rural kindergartens in the Kpando district of Ghana. In this study, Tamakloe revealed that although the teachers claimed that they value children with disabilities, their verbal and non-verbal behaviours enacted through their pedagogical practices were inconsistent with their claim of valuing children with disabilities.

On the other hand, there are also a plenty of literature review which reveal positive preschool teacher attitudes towards students with SEN. For instance, Zakirova Engstrand and Roll-Pettersson (2014) stated that preschool teachers held positive attitudes towards children with autism, and they relate it with the number of credits in special education taken during pre-service education. Moreover, parallel to what Zakirova Engstrand and Roll-Pettersson found in their study on the attitudes of preschool teachers towards children with autism, Paulo and Cadime (2016) reported positive preschool teacher attitudes towards inclusive education and found that having previous personal contact with a person with SEN predicted more positive affective attitudes, whereas having previous experience teaching classes that included students with and without SEN predicted less positive behavioural intentions. Similarly, Rakap et al. (2016) conducted a study to investigate and compare Turkish and American preschool teacher candidates' attitudes towards inclusion of young children with disabilities. Their study results showed that pre-service teachers across two countries had similar attitudes towards inclusion and their attitudes were positive.

When the early memories of teacher candidates on type of contact with people with special needs were analysed generally, most of them stated that they had no contact or low contact with them. When the attitude scores were analysed, it is seen that participants who has

no or low contact with people with special needs has the highest scores from MAS. These people stated that they felt angry to themselves since they could not take action and help people with special needs when they saw them in the street or at the bus stop. They also stated that they were ashamed of themselves because of not helping the people with special needs. One participant (6-7 years old) who has a relative with special needs and close contact with her/him, has the lowest score from MAS. These can be interpreted that having close contact in the early ages may affect attitude negatively.

When the specific features of people with special needs in teacher candidates' early memories were analysed generally, it is found that most of the participants did not state any features of the people with special needs. On the other hand, some participants who has the highest attitude score from MAS stated negative features of the people with special needs. Although these participants stated negative features, they had the highest attitudes scores. This can be interpreted that these participants felt sad and pitied people with special needs, even though they stated negative features, they had higher attitude scores from MAS. The result of the current study also overlaps with those of Paulo and Cadime (2016)'s study, which was carried out with teachers of preschool education in Portugal. According to Paulo and Cadime (2016)'s study findings, having previous personal contact with a person with SEN predicted more positive affective attitudes.

Yıldırım Hacıbrahimoğlu and Ustaoglu (2019) carried out a study on preservice preschool teachers' knowledge and attitudes toward children with autism spectrum disorders and found that preservice teachers' attitudes towards children with autism spectrum disorders differed based on their background of taking education on autism. Furthermore, Seçer (2010) explored the effect of in-service teacher training on the attitudes of preschool teachers towards students with SEN and he highlighted the importance of in-service teacher training to change the negative attitudes of preschool teachers towards students with SEN. Especially the studies in the literature (Seçer, 2010; Yıldırım Hacıbrahimoğlu & Ustaoglu, 2019; Zakirova Engstrand & Roll-Pettersson, 2014) pointed out the importance of any course at undergraduate level or any in-service training to change teachers' negative attitude towards students with SEN. This current study was conducted before the Special Education Course to assess the attitudes of preschool teacher candidates, so another study should be done to find out whether there is a change in preschool teacher candidates' attitudes towards students with SEN.

## **CONCLUSION**

The researches revealed that there are issues and challenges of teachers in teaching children with different disabilities. Since teachers' attitude is an important determiner of the quality of education given by the teachers, researchers tried to get a better insight into the teacher candidates' attitudes towards people with special needs and analyse whether their early memories affect their attitudes positively or negatively. This research showed that the memories of teacher candidates towards individuals with special needs do not affect their attitudes. However, more researches should be done on this topic to understand the attitudes and factors affecting the attitudes to provide inclusive education for students with different disabilities. Therefore, more researches on the reasons of negative or positive teacher attitude towards individuals with special needs are precious for better and equal education opportunities for students with different disabilities.

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