

Examination of teacher's opinions regarding normal development students and students with special needs education in the same class



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ABSTRACT

Article History

Received: 13 March 2023

Revised: 10 May 2023

Accepted: 19 May 2023

Published: 25 May 2023

Keywords

Inclusive education

Positive classroom

Productive teacher

Special education

Special-needs students

Training needs.

This study examines teacher opinions about the education needs of children with normal and special abilities in the same class at a Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) primary school. Therefore, in order to increase the success of the students studying in the same class, the opinions and suggestions of the teachers were examined and the things to be done were stated. As one of the qualitative research methods, the descriptive survey method was used in the study. According to purposive criterion sampling, 84 primary school teachers were sampled for this study. The semi-structured interview forms were used to collect the data related to teachers' opinions. The obtained data were analyzed by content analysis. As a result, it shows that this prepares students with special needs for socialization by introducing them to students at different developmental levels. However, when the teachers' opinions were examined, it was stated that the education applied in this way had negative aspects. Due to the deterioration of the classroom order, it was determined that sufficient time could not be allocated to special needs students. At this point, participants emphasized the importance of designing appropriate education programs for special-needs students in order to ensure their success.

Contribution/ Originality: In this study, it was aimed to determine the support needed to be able to take lessons in the same class with individuals with normal development, with the increase of individuals with special needs. It is important that teachers increase their awareness on this issue and have the necessary information.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Introduce the Problem

Individuals with special needs are defined as those who, for various reasons, differ significantly from their normally developing peers in terms of physical, mental, social and affective aspects (Baykoç, 2015). Continuity and productivity of individuals with special needs in society are based on their abilities to perform the skills in everyday life. In this respect, it is important for individuals with special needs to take on the skills and social roles in daily life and gain full independence in daily life. Gaining these roles is possible by determining the educational needs of these individuals, taking into account the needs and abilities of these individuals, and providing educational environments suitable for their needs. Individuals with special needs should be educated by taking into account their abilities, competencies and needs, both in accordance with the humanitarian view and the democratic view. In this context, special education programs should be used in which educational activities that are planned individually

and applied systematically are planned (Eripek, 2004). The stage of deciding whether individuals should participate in special education programs is primarily determined by the educational evaluation and diagnosis of the individual. In this context, individuals with special needs must first be identified by the relevant institutions in order to enable them to benefit from the special education they need.

At the end of the diagnosis process, individuals with special needs are classified according to the deficiencies they experience and the degree of these deficiencies. This classification is as follows; Visually impaired people, hearing impaired people, people with language and speech difficulties, people with mental retardation, people with emotional and behavioral disorders, people with special learning disabilities, people with multiple disabilities, people with physical disabilities, gifted and gifted people, people with chronic diseases, people with autism and emotional adjustment difficulties, people with attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder (MOE, 2013).

It is decided that individuals who have been diagnosed should participate in the least limited educational environment and/or special education service, where their educational needs are also taken into account, taking into account all development areas, characteristics and academic qualifications in the light of educational purposes (Special Education and Rehabilitation Services, 2006).

Inclusive education is the least restrictive educational environment that enables students with special needs to receive education together with their normally developing peers (Üzümçü, 2018). Therefore, mainstreaming programs carried out in normal classrooms are used as an education model that is being disseminated today (Sucuoglu, 1991). When the results that may arise or exist from inclusive education are evaluated, the benefits or limitations of this form of education for both students and teachers gain an important dimension (Kaya, 2005). Several studies in recent years have found that inclusive education produces beneficial outcomes not only for students with special needs, but also for students who are developing normally (Vaughn & Swanson, 2015).

According to Acar and Demir (2005) teachers, parents of students, guidance specialists at the school and school management play an important role in a successful inclusive education. Especially teachers who teach classes of students with special needs are expected to be more sensitive/sensitive to special students receiving formal education.

Researchers such as Shahbaz (1997); Batu (2002); Temir (2002) and Özmen (2004) also emphasized the importance of how ready the classroom teachers are to engage in mainstreaming education in order to achieve successful results in the implementation of mainstreaming education. They also mentioned that factors such as the suitability of the school and the classroom for inclusive education, the number of students with normal development, the attitude towards students with special needs, and the characteristics of students with special needs who will receive inclusive education should also be taken into account. In order for teachers to develop positive attitudes towards inclusive education, parental attention, school administration support, and adequate guidance services are crucial. In addition, it is stated that success can be supported by additional arrangements such as curriculum, materials and physical equipment that will be prepared by taking individual differences into account (Causton-Theoharis, Theoharis, Bull, Cosier, & Dempf-Aldrich, 2011).

In a study conducted by Deniz and Coban (2019) to determine the views of teachers on inclusive education, it was found that most classroom teachers were unaware, inexperienced, and incompetent about inclusive education, as well as their schools lacking the appropriate physical structure for inclusive education. Due to the fact that inclusive education's success is closely related to the views of teachers who contribute to this issue, it is necessary to determine those views to improve inclusive education, in other words, make it more efficient. With this research, we are examining teachers' opinions about inclusive education practices in TRNC primary schools. In this regard, answers were sought to the question below.

1-What is the opinion of branch teachers and classroom teachers about the sharing of classroom space between students with normal development and those with special needs in the TRNC's primary school?

All those who directly or indirectly contribute to the education of these students, particularly teachers, play an important role in determining whether co-education with students with special needs and with their peers with normal development is successful. For this reason, the teacher's attitude towards inclusive education should be positive (Atay, 1995; Sari, 2002).

Teacher attitudes positively affect the perspectives of individuals with special needs, both in society and in private institutions. In addition, it has a significant effect on changing the negative attitudes of individuals in the society towards individuals with special needs and increasing the sensitivity of the society (Gürsel & Sünbül, 2000; Kayaoglu, 1999). This situation also reveals that successful integration depends on the teacher's positive attitude towards integration studies in the classroom. It is necessary to examine teachers' opinions regarding teaching students with special needs and students with normal development together in this study, as it will improve the efficiency and effectiveness of guiding educational studies in this field.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Research Design

This article was conducted using the descriptive survey method, one of the qualitative research methods. This method involves seeking the opinions of participants in the study and modeling the phenomenon or event based on the opinions of the participants (Karakaya, 2012).

2.2. Sample Size

The universe of this study was formed on the sample representing the target audience. This study examined 84 teachers employed by the Department of Primary Education of the Ministry of National Education and Culture in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus between 2021 and 2022. While choosing the sample, purposive and criterion samples were used together. Care is taken to ensure that the units handled with these methods are composed of persons, events, facts or objects with certain qualifications, and that units meeting the criteria determined for the sample are included in the sample (Büyüköztürk, Kılıç, Akgün, Karadeniz, & Demirel, 2018).

Table 1. Demographic characteristics.

Variable	Subgroups	f	%
Task	Class teacher	51	60.7
	Branch teacher	33	39.3
Gender	Female	55	65.5
	Male	29	34.5
Seniority	1-5 Year	16	19
	6-10 Year	13	15.5
	11-15 Year	26	31
	16-20 Year	10	11.9
	21 Year and above	19	22.6

As indicated in Table 1 considering the demographic characteristics of the study group, it is observed that 55 of the 84 participants were male and 29 were female. It is observed that 51 of the 84 teachers participating in the research data are classroom teachers and 33 are branch teachers. According to the seniority variable, 16 teachers in the study had seniority of 1-5 years, 13 teachers had seniority of 6-10 years, 26 teachers had seniority of 11-15 years, 10 teachers had seniority of 16-20 years, and 19 teachers had seniority of 21 years or more observed to have.

2.3. Data Collection Tool

Data were collected using semi-structured interview forms prepared by the researchers depending on the research problem. Three different experts in the field reviewed and approved the prepared interview form. The form consists of two parts, in the first part of which there is demographic (personal) information, and in the second part

there are open-ended questions for the research. Participants were asked to answer open-ended questions on a voluntary basis for the interview form. While personal information is included in the first part of the form, there are 4 open-ended questions developed in line with the purpose of the study in the second part. The research questions prepared in the second part are as follows:

1. What are the main problems you see with students with normal development and students with disabilities being placed in the same class?
2. What benefits do you think students with normal development and students with special needs studying together have?
3. What are the negative aspects of having special needs students in the same class as students with normal development?
4. How do you propose to increase the success of the education received by students with normal development and students with special needs together?

2.4. Data Analysis

The analysis process of the research data was created using the Nvivo 12 package program (coding, category creation and theming processes). The obtained data were analyzed using content analysis. Content analysis is interpreted by examining the collected data, grouping them according to similar characteristics, and bringing them together in the light of themes and determined concepts (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2008). While conducting content analysis, first of all, codes and themes were created according to their basic meaning and consistency, and associations were made by grouping them. Afterwards, codes were created by examining the data obtained depending on the opinions of the teachers.

Ensuring the reliability of content analysis is related to the similar arrangement of codes handled by different researchers and researchers (Tavsancil & Aslan, 2001). In this context, two researchers who are experts in their fields were consulted while transforming the data obtained into themes and categories. The compliance percentages of the codings made by the researchers from each other were examined. To determine the percentage of agreement, Miles and Huberman (1994) used the formula $[\text{Reliability} = \text{Consensus} / (\text{Agreement} + \text{Disagreement}) \times 100]$. An agreement of 0.88 was calculated between the two encoders. The questions directed to the participants were divided into categories, and the themes and participation levels were determined based on the answers received. The data of the research are indicated in the tables using category, theme, frequency and percentage values.

3. FINDINGS

In this section, the findings obtained from the study are interpreted under a total of 4 dimensions: problems experienced in line with the purpose of the research, positive aspects, negative aspects and suggestions.

The results of Table 2 are based on the positive and negative opinions of the teachers participating in the research regarding the education of special needs and normal-developed students in the same class, along with the main problems encountered and the themes related to their suggestions.

The theme of "disruption of classroom order" has been determined as the theme with the most opinions, with a rate of 39.28 percent, in the study of problems teachers experience regarding students with special needs and those with normal development in the same class. Following this, opinions on the theme of "The incompatibility between special students and their classmates" were reported with a rate of 22.62%. Deniz and Coban (2019) reached similar results in their study and it was determined that there were problems in this application due to the unsuitability of the existing physical infrastructures of the schools.

When the opinions of the participants regarding the positive aspects category are examined, it is seen that 36.90% of the students with special needs and normally developing students have an opinion on the socialization of special students and 35.71% on the awareness of the students with normal development. In their study, Doğaroğlu

and Dumenci (2015) also found that teachers positively view the education of individuals with special needs and students with normal development in the same class. At this point, Maine (2013) study states that with the implementation of inclusive education, students' empathy skills increase and awareness for individuals with special needs is gained in classes where interaction and cooperation take place.

Table 2. Findings of the views of the TRNC primary school teachers regarding the education of students with normal development and special needs students in the same class.

Category	Theme	f	%
Problems experienced	Disruption of classroom order	33	39.28
	Inability to allocate enough time for students with special needs	16	19.06
	Academic level differences	12	14.28
	Lack of guidance services for teachers	4	4.76
	Incompatibility between students with special needs and classmates	19	22.62
	Total	84	100
Positive aspects	Bringing students with special needs into the society	10	11.91
	Socialization of students with special needs	31	36.90
	Awareness of normally developing students	30	35.71
	Normally developing students gain positive emotion	13	15.48
	TOPLAM	84	100
Negative aspects	Disruption of classroom order	38	45.24
	Inability to allocate enough time for students with special needs	18	21.43
	Separate lesson preparation for students with special needs	6	7.14
	Incompatibility between students with special needs and classmates	22	26.19
Suggestions	Total	84	100
	Preparation of educational programs suitable for students with special needs	23	27.38
	Teachers' guidance services	14	16.67
	Having shadow teachers alongside private students	20	23.80
	Students going to special education schools on certain days	13	15.48
	Assignment of special education teachers in schools.	14	16.67
	Total	84	100

On the other hand, when the views of the entrepreneurs regarding the negative aspects category are taken into consideration, it is seen that 45.24% of the students with special needs and normally developing students have an opinion that the classroom order is disrupted. Similarly, when the studies conducted in Turkey are examined, it is seen that there are some positive attitudes and thoughts towards people with special needs, and on the contrary, there are negative attitudes and perceptions towards pity, not preferring people with special needs in certain social environments, and receiving education in separate institutions with the thought that it will cause certain obstacles in educational environments.

The category of suggestions related to the education of students with special needs and those with normal development in the same class was examined by the teachers participating in the research. With a rate of 27.38%, the highest theme is preparing education programs appropriate for special students, followed by a rate of 23.80% for shadow teacher opinions.

This result is also similar to the result of Kurt and Tomul (2020) research. According to Kurt and Tomul (2020) it has been concluded that in order for inclusive education to be successful, it is necessary to create education programs suitable for special students with expert support and guidance services.

Table 3. Findings of the views of classroom and branch teachers in TRNC primary school about students with normal development and students with special needs receiving education in the same class.

Category	Theme	Class teacher		Branch teacher	
		f	%	f	%
Problems experienced	Disruption of classroom order	21	41.18	12	36.36
	Inability to allocate enough time for students with special needs	9	17.64	7	21.21
	Academic level differences	3	5.88	9	27.27
	Lack of guidance services for teachers	3	5.88	1	3.04
	Incompatibility between students with special needs and classmates	15	29.42	4	12.12
	Total	51	100	33	100
Positive aspects	Bringing students with special needs into the society	3	5.88	7	21.22
	Socialization of students with special needs	21	41.18	10	30.30
	Awareness of normally developing students	19	37.25	11	33.33
	Normally developing students gain positive emotion	8	15.69	5	15.15
	Total	51	100	33	100
Negative aspects	Disruption of classroom order	20	39.22	18	54.54
	Inability to allocate enough time for students with special needs	12	23.52	6	18.18
	Separate lesson preparation for students with special needs	4	7.84	2	6.06
	Incompatibility between students with special needs and classmates	15	29.42	7	21.22
Suggestions	Total	51	100	33	100
	Preparation of educational programs Suitable for students with special needs	16	31.37	7	21.22
	Teachers' guidance services	8	15.68	6	18.18
	Having shadow teachers alongside private students	10	19.60	10	30.30
	Students going to special education schools on certain days.	9	17.66	4	12.12
	Assignment of special education teachers in schools.	8	15.69	6	18.18
	Total	51	100	33	100

When [Table 3](#) is examined, the themes related to the opinions and suggestions of classroom and branch teachers regarding the education of students with normal development and students with special needs in the same class were determined.

Considering the opinions of the classroom teachers about the students with normal development and students with special needs being educated in the same class, the classroom teachers stated that the classroom order was disrupted with a participation rate of 41.18% in the category of problems. A similar conclusion was reached in the research conducted by [Anılan and Kayacan \(2015\)](#).

In this study, it was concluded that it was difficult for the teacher to control some behaviors of students with special needs in the classroom, and this situation disrupted the classroom order. With a rate of 41.18% in favor of socialization of students with special needs, classroom teachers expressed their opinions about the benefits of teaching special needs students in the same class. For this reason, attention is drawn to the necessity of addressing an educational approach that focuses on the development of abilities of students with special needs, not the areas in which they are inadequate, by mingling with their peers ([Ergin, 2022](#)).

In the study conducted by [Duran Düşünür \(2018\)](#) it was concluded that students with special needs made progress in the direction of socialization, and students with normal development gained positive behaviors such as awareness, cooperation, and sharing. When asked about the negative aspects of this education that students with normal development and students with special needs will receive together, it was determined that the classroom teachers expressed an opinion that the classroom order would be disrupted with a participation rate of 39.22%. This situation revealed that, as in [Metin \(2018\)](#) study that classroom or branch teachers experienced various educational problems due to the fact that they did not receive any guidance in inclusion practices. Among the suggestions made

by classroom teachers to increase the success of the education that students with special needs and students with normal development will receive together, the theme of preparing education programs suitable for students with special needs was determined with the highest participation rate of 31.37%. Among the suggestions made by classroom teachers to increase the success of the education that students with special needs and students with normal development will receive together, the theme of preparing education programs suitable for students with special needs was determined with the highest participation rate of 31.37%. In support of this, [Smith, Polloway, Patton, and Dowdy \(2006\)](#) stated in their study that programs for students with special needs should be prepared in order for students with special needs to achieve effective success in education. In this context, considering the differences and characteristics of students with special needs, individualized education programs that will be developed so that the student can benefit from the inclusive practice at the highest level will guide the educators ([MOE, 2013; Smith & Brownell, 1995](#)).

With a participation rate of 36.36 % of branch teachers expressing opinions on the theme of disruption of classroom order, it was determined that they expressed their opinions about the education of students with normal development and those with special needs in the same class. They stated that the positive aspects of the education of the students with normal development and the students with special development in the same class of the branch teachers were in the direction of the socialization of special students with a participation rate of 30.30%. Collaboration between class teachers and branch teachers who express their opinions in a similar way in producing permanent solutions contributes to the development of positive attitudes towards mainstreaming students. Accordingly, it is known that inclusive students with special needs play an important role in both their academic success and their social development ([Deniz & Şen, 2021](#)).

In the category of negative aspects of this education, the branch teacher stated that the classroom order was disrupted with a participation rate of 54.54%. In the suggestions of the branch teachers, it was stated that there should be a shadow teacher next to the special students with a participation rate of 30.30%. Despite the problems experienced in the education of normally developing students and students with special needs, positive developments in both special students and students with normal development are proof that this practice is very important by teachers. When the literature is examined ([Avramidis & Kalyva, 2007; Monsen, Ewing, & Kwoka, 2014](#)) it is seen that this practice is a necessary one.

4. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

4.1. Conclusion

When the findings of this research were examined, it was concluded that the views of class teachers and branch teachers were similar. This situation reveals that the attitudes and behaviors adopted in classroom management or classroom climate do not have sufficient effect on students. In addition, this situation has revealed how important the source classes are once again.

The results of the research were interpreted under 4 dimensions, which are the problems experienced in line with the research purpose, positive aspects, negative aspects and suggestions. The results obtained regarding the problems experienced and the negative aspects dimension revealed that the students with special needs studying in the same class with the students with normal development play an active role in the disruption of the classroom order. Another result of the research is the result obtained regarding the positive aspects dimension. In this dimension, special students' socialization and education with normally developing students helped to raise awareness about the needs of these students. Finally, when the suggestions dimension is taken into consideration, it has been concluded that education programs suitable for special students should be prepared and these students should receive education together with shadow teachers. However, considering the answers given to all dimensions, it was determined that the necessary inclusion practices were not included in the schools, that the teachers could not reach sufficient support at this point and that permanent solutions could not be produced for the problems

experienced. However, despite all these, it has been concluded that individuals with special needs can socialize with their peers with a certain level of awareness in the classroom.

4.2. Suggestions

In line with the results of the research, the following suggestions can be made in order to eliminate the problems and negativities encountered with inclusive education and to increase the success:

- The subject can be reconsidered with a quantitative study by expanding the sample. As an alternative to the curricula followed by students with normal development, curricula suitable for the needs and levels of students with special needs should be developed and implemented.
- The number of students in these classes can be less than regular classes in order to avoid disrupting class order as well as to allow the classroom teacher to devote more time to students with special needs.
- The necessary financial resources can be provided by the Ministry of National Education and Culture in order to provide the necessary teaching materials, course equipment and resource classes for students with special needs.
- Students with special needs can be accompanied by shadow teachers so that their different behaviors are not disrupting the classroom order, and to provide guidance during classroom.
- It is necessary that the number of students be less in the classes with special students, so that the teacher can allocate more time to the special student.
- Students with special needs should also receive education in special education institutions or special education classes in line with their needs.
- Guiding and informative guidance services and in-service training courses on special education for teachers should be organized.
- Classroom teachers working in these classrooms with special students should establish a support unit under the Ministry of National Education, where experts will be assigned to solve the problems they will encounter during this training.

Funding: This study received no specific financial support.

Competing Interests: The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

Authors' Contributions: All authors contributed equally to the conception and design of the study.

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