

*Full Length Research Paper*

# Prospective special education teachers' metaphorical perceptions on the concept of special education teacher

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The aim of this research is to define the perceptions of prospective special education teachers regarding special education teacher through metaphors. Phenomenology design was used in this research. The study group comprised 116 third year prospective special education teachers studying at Marmara University, Ataturk Faculty of Education, Special Education (Mentally Disabled Teaching) Department. The prospective special education teachers were asked to fill a form featuring the phrases, "The special education teacher is like (similar to) .....; because ....." The data were analyzed through content analysis. The results showed that the metaphors created by prospective special education teachers on the concept of special education teacher were grouped under ten categories. These categories are: (1) Patience and devotion; (2) Difficulty of profession; (3) Source of love and affection; (4) Complementing; (5) Superiority of profession; (6) Life coaching/guidance; (7) Weariness of profession; (8) Skill teaching; (9) Social leadership/enlightening, and (10) Social prejudices. All these categories were discussed within the scope of previous researches and some concrete research proposals were suggested for further studies.

**Key words:** Special education, teacher, prospective teacher, metaphor.

## INTRODUCTION

There is not enough and accurate information about the number and proportion of disabled people in Turkey. "Turkey Disability Survey-2002" (State Institute of Statistics, 2009) presents some data about these proportions that "Total disability proportion in the overall population is 12.29%. The proportion of orthopedically, seeing, hearing, speaking and mentally disabled people is 2.58% and the proportion of people having chronic illnesses is 9.70% as well." (p.5). In Turkey, according to 2011 Population and Housing Census, the number of

population who has at least one type of disability (in seeing, hearing, speaking, walking, climbing stairs, holding or lifting something, learning, doing simple calculations, remembering and concentrating compared to peers) was 4 million 882 thousand and 841. In other words, 6.6% of the total population has at least one type of disability (Turkish Statistical Institute, 2015). In addition to these data, the National Education Statistics (2015-16) reveal that the number of students with special needs studying in different types of schools and levels within

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formal education was 288.489 (Ministry of National Education, 2016). As the total number of students in school at the aforementioned period is 17.588.958, the rate of students with special needs may be considered to be 1.64%. While there may be differences in methods and periods of calculation, and terms used (disabled, handicapped etc.); it is evident that there is a considerable amount of people with special needs, in school age or not.

Regardless the age group, education is one of the primary needs of individuals with special needs. The Regulation on Special Education Services (2006) defines individuals with special needs as "individuals with significant difference compared to their coevals on personal and developmental features as well as educational capabilities due to various reasons." The same regulation defines special education as "the education carried out by specially trained personnel and specially developed education programs and methods in line with all the developmental features and academic capabilities of individuals with the need of special education in suitable environments, in order to fulfill the educational and social needs of these individuals."

As it may be understood from the definition of special education, specially trained personnel is required for this education to be carried out. In special education processes, there may be a number of different professionals, from physiotherapists to guidance and psychological consultants. Among these professionals, special education teachers hold an important role. In 2009, the State Advisory Council of the President's Office (2009) released a report stating that schools did not have the sufficient number of special educators.

"Training teachers is an important issue in special education, just like in any other step of general education. The success of special education services depends on the quality of the personnel providing these services, therefore the teacher quality. Since 1981, personnel have been trained for special education in bachelor's degree level. The special education teachers, who can provide mentally, visually or hearing disabled individuals with direct education services, are trained by the Faculties of Education Special Education Teaching Departments. These teachers are specialists who are directly responsible for defining mentally, visually or hearing disabled children's educational needs, developing, applying and assessing personalized education programs (PEP)." (p. 182)

The same report released by the State Advisory Council of the President's Office (2009) emphasizes the need of qualified staff on special education field.

"The training of personnel needed for the special education field is the prerequisite of starting and sufficiently improving special education services. The qualified personnel need in special education is comparable to that of other fields. Special education

service is a bundle of interdisciplinary services that requires several personnel to work side by side. The personnel carrying out this work should be trained in fields like medicine, psychology, social services, sociology, child development and education, physiotherapy, home economics, audiology and speech disorders, arts and crafts teaching" (p. 182-183).

The profession of special education teaching appears to be a versatile professional field that also needs specialization. For instance, the methods and techniques used by the special education teacher will vary per type of disability. Furthermore, the area of responsibility for the special education teacher is not limited to children and youth of school age. Individuals with special needs outside school age will also be within the area of responsibility of the special education teacher. The possibility of working with individuals with more than one disability is also among the realities of this profession which would require different professional knowledge and skills. Additionally, the special education teacher will have to cooperate with other specialties in the education process of the individual with special needs.

Evidently, the special education teacher carries out a multi-dimensional and complex profession that requires expertise. For this reason, an in-depth analysis of the special education teacher regarding their profession will help better understanding of the different aspects of this profession. Within this scope, the aim of this research is to define the perceptions of prospective special education teachers regarding "special education teacher" through metaphors. It is expected that the research will provide hints on the profession of special education teaching and create new points of discussion.

## METHODOLOGY

### Research design

In this study conducted to define the prospective special education teachers' perceptions on the "special education teaching" concept, the phenomenology design among the qualitative research methods is used. Yıldırım and Şimşek (2013: 78) claim that the phenomenology design may be used in perceiving concepts that we are not completely unaware of but we do not have a thorough understanding on. In this study, the conception of special education teaching is attempted to be understood through metaphors based on the perceptions of students receiving education on this very field.

### Study group

The study group of the study is comprised 116 prospective teachers studying third year at the Marmara University Atatürk Faculty of Education Special Education (Mentally Disabled Teaching) Department in 2015-16 academic term.

### Data collection tool

The prospective special education teachers are given a form

**Table 1.** The metaphors created by prospective special education teachers on the concept of special education teacher.

Metaphors	f	%	Metaphors	f	%	Metaphors	f	%
A pitcher trying to fill a broken glass	1	0.86	Jewel designer	1	0.86	Rock	1	0.86
A rare fruit tree	1	0.86	Lapidary	1	0.86	Rock of patience	12	10.3
A robust building	1	0.86	Leavening the lake	1	0.86	Rower against the storm	1	0.86
Angel	4	3.44	Life coach	3	2.58	Sculptor	2	0.86
Ant	1	0.86	Light	1	1.72	Self-sacrificing person	1	0.86
Candle	4	3.44	Locksmith	1	0.86	Silk cloth	1	0.86
Cane	1	0.86	Marathon runner	1	0.86	Sisyphus	1	0.86
Carpet weaver	1	0.86	Mother	27	23.2	Snowdrop	1	0.86
Cook	1	0.86	Mother/father	6	5.17	Soil	1	0.86
Courageous person	1	0.86	Nanny	1	0.86	Sun	1	0.86
Craftsperson treating diamond	1	0.86	Pencil/Pen	2	0.86	Sword and shield	1	0.86
Diamond	1	0.86	Penny bank	1	0.86	Tailor	1	0.86
Engineer	1	0.86	Pirate	1	0.86	Type-o-negative blood	1	0.86
Eraser	1	0.86	Pottery master	1	0.86	Vaccination	2	1.72
Fish swimming against the flow	1	0.86	Precision scale	2	0.86	Velvet cloth	1	0.86
Gardener	3	2.58	Prophet	1	0.86	Volunteer	1	0.86
Guide	1	0.86	Puzzle maker	1	0.86	Warrior	1	0.86
Hero	1	0.86	Remedy	1	0.86	Water	2	1.72
Interpreter	1	0.86	Road companion	2	1.72			
Jellyfish	1	0.86	Robot technician	1	0.86			
						<b>Total</b>	<b>116</b>	

featuring the phrases, “The special education teacher is like (similar to) .....; because .....” The prospective special education teachers are asked to fill the first blank with a metaphor on the concept of special education teacher and provide justification for this metaphor filling the second blank. Participant prospective education teachers are asked to produce only one metaphor.

### Data analysis

The data analysis is carried out in four stages. These are; (1) sorting, (2) screening, (3) sense-making (categories) and categorization, (4) explaining the categories and exemplification. In the first stage, the metaphors produced by prospective special education teachers, without being separated from their justifications, are sorted alphabetically. In the second stage; nine prospective special education teachers that did not produce metaphors or provide a meaningful justification are taken out of the study. For example, the responses without meaningful justification such as “special education teachers are like artists because they work hard for students to learn” are discarded. In this stage, a variety of metaphors is observed and the distribution of this variety (frequency and percentage) is given in Table 1. In the third stage, the justifying statements of prospective special education teachers are examined and categories are created according to their content. The categories created and the distributions of metaphors under these categories are given in Table 2. And in the fourth stage the distribution of metaphors under defined categories is given separately as tables with exemplary justifications.

In order to ensure the validity of the research, the prospective special education teachers' statements are quoted directly. The statements are also coded with an abbreviation showing the linkage

with the owner of the statement like PSET1, PSET2 (prospective special education teacher 1)... Also, in order to ensure intra rater reliability, the categorization is redone by the researcher after three weeks. The intra rater reliability of the research is measured as 0.94. The metaphors categorized differently in two assessments are revised by the researcher and the final decision is made.

### FINDINGS

The frequency and percentage analysis of metaphors created by prospective special education teachers on the concept of special education teacher is given in Table 1.

In Table 1, it has been understood that 116 prospective special education teachers whose metaphors are taken into account produced 60 different metaphors. Among 116 metaphors created, the most frequent are “mother” composed by 27 (23.2%) prospective special education teachers and “rock of patience” composed by 12 (10.3%) prospective special education teachers. These are followed by the “mother/father” metaphor composed by 6 (5.17%). When “mother” and “mother/father” metaphors are classified together, it is used by one third of the prospective special education teachers. Below given are examples of these three most frequent metaphors, one each with their justifications.

PSET4: “The special education teacher is like a mother

**Table 2.** The conceptual categories of metaphors created by prospective special education teachers on the concept of special education teacher.

Metaphor category	f	%	Metaphor category	f	%
Patience and devotion	27	23.28	Life coaching/guidance	10	8.62
Difficulty of profession	24	20.69	Weariness of profession	7	6.03
Source of love and affection	16	13.79	Skill teaching	4	3.45
Complementing	11	9.48	Social leadership/enlightening	3	2.59
Superiority of profession	11	9.48	Social prejudices	3	2.59

**Table 3.** Metaphors under patience and devotion category.

Metaphors	f	%
Rock of patience	12	44.44
Mother	6	22.22
Angel	3	11.11
Self-sacrificing person	1	3.70
Carpet weaver	1	3.70
Robot technician	1	3.70
Jewel designer	1	3.70
Tailor	1	3.70
Prophet	1	3.70
Total	27	100

because the special educator is as patient and affectionate as a mother. They give their love to the student, first and foremost.”

PSET97: “The special education teacher is like the rock of patience because they need to be patient to fulfill the needs of their profession and also to be able to face the social pressure on their profession.”

PSET34: “The special education teacher is like a mother/father because the special education teachers have students/children that they have to take care of every need, like a mother/father.”

The metaphors created by prospective special education teachers on the concept of “special education teacher” as classified under several categories. Accordingly, ten categories are created. In Table 2, the names of categories, and the frequency and percentages of metaphors under these categories are given. It is observed also that the two categories where the most number of metaphors produced by prospective special education teachers are grouped under are “patience and devotion” category by 23.28% and “difficulty of profession” by 20.69%.

The metaphors produced by prospective special education teachers on the concept of “special education teacher” and the categories comprised of these metaphors are given in Tables 3 to 12.

As observed in Table 3, 27 metaphors exist under patience and devotion category and these metaphors constitute 23.28% of the total. Nine different metaphors are listed under patience and devotion category. The most frequent metaphor among them is the “rock of patience” by 44.44%. This is followed by “mother” (22.22%) and “angel” (11.11%). Some of the justifications provided by prospective special education teachers under patience and devotion category are given as follows:

PSET93: “The special education teacher is like a rock of patience because it is possible to meet expected results in a student under if you are patient. If there is no patience, most of the things that need to be given with enthusiasm go away.”

PSET12: “The special education teacher is like a mother because a mother bears with everything her children do and pay an effort to show the right way with patience. The special education teacher is just like that. They try to show the right way to the students tirelessly, with patience.”

Ö78: “The special education teacher is like an angel because they are devoted to children with special needs. They pay an extraordinary effort to help the child, already born with a challenge, overcome their challenges and be raised as an independent individual, by taking them under their wings.”

**Table 4.** Metaphors under difficulty of profession category.

Metaphors	f	%
Mother	2	8.33
Precision scale	2	8.33
Sculptor	2	8.33
Pencil/Pen	2	8.33
Candle	2	8.33
Fish swimming against the flow	1	4.17
Cook	1	4.17
Gardener	1	4.17
Leavening the lake	1	4.17
Ant	1	4.17
A pitcher trying to fill a broken glass	1	4.17
Pirate	1	4.17
Penny bank	1	4.17
Marathon runner	1	4.17
Lapidary	1	4.17
Engineer	1	4.17
Warrior	1	4.17
Eraser	1	4.17
Sisyphus*	1	4.17
Total	24	100

**Table 5.** Metaphors under affection and source of love category.

Metaphors	f	%
Mother	12	75
Mother/father	4	25
Total	16	100

Ö90: "The special education teacher is like a robot technician, because the robot technician tries to make robots think, act and decide like human. The special education teachers devote themselves trying to eliminate situations that make individuals robots and make them more normal."

As observed in Table 4, 24 metaphors are classified under difficulty of profession category and these metaphors constitute 20.69% of the total. Under difficulty of profession category, there are 19 different metaphors. Some of the statements constituting the difficulty of profession category are given as follow:

PSET10: "The special education teacher is like a mother because just like a mother taking care of her child's everything, the special education teacher takes care of their student's eating when hungry, relieving their pain when they fall down, not just their education."

PSET59: "The special education teacher is like a precision scale because their profession has so many delicacies and sensibilities that they need to balance them all."

PSET60: "The special education teacher is like a sculptor because they try to turn the material they have from almost nothing to the most perfect possible."

PSET69: "The special education teacher is like an ant because like the ant overcoming challenges bigger its size, the special education teacher tries to overcome challenges in their field. They are robust. They know they always have to work hard for students' benefit."

PSET74: "The special education teacher is like a marathon runner because they are in a long run to reach their goals and see the results. They always have to work harder."

PSET106: "The special education teacher is like Sisyphus, like he knows it will not stand up when he carries the rock to the top, we [special education

**Table 6.** Metaphors under complementing category.

Metaphors	f	%
Gardener	2	18.18
Mother	1	9.09
Cane	1	9.09
Sun	1	9.09
Remedy	1	9.09
Angel	1	9.09
Candle	1	9.09
Interpreter	1	9.09
Soil	1	9.09
Puzzle maker	1	9.09
Total	11	100

**Table 7.** Metaphors under superiority of profession category.

Metaphors	f	%
Vaccination	2	18.18
Water	2	18.18
Locksmith	1	9.09
Pottery master	1	9.09
Diamond	1	9.09
Craftsperson treating diamond	1	9.09
Silk cloth	1	9.09
Snowdrop	1	9.09
A rare fruit tree	1	9.09
Total	11	100

teachers] know that the results might not be permanent but still continue to try.”

PSET114: “The special education teacher is like a pen, it is hard to correct when they make a mistake. When you make a mistake and scratch, it leaves a mark. A mistake a special education teacher makes also leaves such a mark in the student.”

As observed in Table 5, there are 16 metaphors under affection and source of love category and these metaphors constitute 13.79% of the total. Under this category, two different metaphors, albeit similar, exist. The most repeated metaphor is the “mother” by 70.59%. This is followed by “mother/father” metaphor by 25%. Some of the statements by prospective special education teachers under affection and source of love category are given as follow:

PSET21: “The special education teacher is like a mother because, in order to reach their special students, they approach them with motherly love and affection.”

PSET33: “The special education teacher is like a mother/father because they establish a bond with the individuals that they will educate and show them the affection and attention they need. This is important for their development.”

As observed in Table 6, there are 11 metaphors under complementing category and these metaphors constitute 9.48% of the total. Under this category, ten different metaphors are present. The “gardener” metaphor is created twice while other ten metaphors are mentioned once. Some of the statements by prospective special education teachers under complementing category are given as follows:

PSET39: “The special education teacher is like a gardener because just a gardener trying to make a plant flourish by completing its missing water and soil, the special education teacher sees the missing parts in individuals with needs of education and helps to make them cling to life.”

**Table 8.** Metaphors under life coaching/guidance metaphor.

<b>Metaphors</b>	<b>f</b>	<b>%</b>
Life coach	3	30
Mother	2	20
Road companion	2	20
Nanny	1	10
Hero	1	10
Guide	1	10
Total	10	100

**Table 9.** Metaphors under weariness of profession category.

<b>Metaphors</b>	<b>f</b>	<b>%</b>
Mother	1	14.28
Mother /father	1	14.28
Jellyfish	1	14.28
Velvet cloth	1	14.28
Rock	1	14.28
Candle	1	14.28
Type-o-negative blood	1	14.28
Total	7	100

PSET42: "The special education teacher is like a cane because they support the individuals requiring special education and make them stand."

PSET111: "The special education teacher is like an interpreter because they speak the language of those requiring special education. They understand their emotions and needs from motions. As the person understanding them, they provide communication with the family and the society."

PSET115: "The special education teacher is like a puzzle because they complete the missing parts of their students."

As observed in Table 7, there are 11 metaphors under superiority of profession category and these metaphors constitute 9.48% of the total. Nine different metaphors exist under superiority of profession category. "Vaccine" and "water" metaphors are used twice. Some of the statements that constitute the superiority of profession category are given as follows:

PSET38: "The special education teacher is like a vaccine applied to the tree because the vaccine fixes the defects in the tree's fruits and the fruits become high quality and tastier. The special education teacher is a vaccine that increases the disabled students' life quality and improves them, meeting expectations."

PSET50: "The special education teacher is like a diamond because they are rare [like a diamond]. They [special

education teacher] are also made out of coal with great effort. They know every child will become a diamond with effort."

PSET64: "The special education teacher is like a silk cloth because among many types of cloth the silk is one of the most valuables. There are a lot of teachers but because of the nature of their job, the special education teachers are superior to other teachers."

PSET86: "The special education teacher is like a rare fruit tree because it requires a great effort of themselves and others to raise them. When they are raised, their fruits become very valuable. These valuable fruits heal every individual that require special education."

As observed in Table 8, there are ten metaphors under life coaching/guidance category and these metaphors constitute 8.62% of the total. Six different metaphors exist under this category. The most frequent metaphor among them is the "life coach" metaphor that the category is named after. Some of the statements by prospective special education teachers that constitute the life coaching/guidance category are given as follows:

PSET118: "The special education teacher is like a life coach because they not only give knowledge to the students with special needs; they also teach them adaptation to social life."

PSET120: "The special education teacher is like a trip companion because when they walk with the student

**Table 10.** Metaphors under skill teaching category.

Metaphors	f	%
Mother	3	75
Mother /Father	1	25
Total	4	100

**Table 11.** Metaphors under social leadership/enlightening category.

Metaphors	f	%
Courageous person	1	33.33
Light	1	33.33
Sword and shield	1	33.33
Total	3	100

requiring special education, the student's trouble and happiness becomes their own trouble and happiness. Whenever they fall, they stand back up together."

PSET46: "The special education teacher is like a nanny because not only they give knowledge; they prepare children requiring special education to life. In need, they become a brother, sister for them."

As observed in Table 9, there are seven metaphors under weariness of profession category and these metaphors constitute 6.03% of the total. All metaphors under this category are used only by prospective special education teachers. Some of the statements by prospective special education teachers that constitute the weariness of profession category are given as follows:

PSET47: "The special education teacher is like a jellyfish because the profession [of special education] wears them down and pulls off pieces but they know how to renew themselves."

PSET65: "The special education teacher is like a velvet cloth because the velvet cloth keeps its softness even when it is worn down. The special education teacher is also worn down but keeps the softness that the profession requires."

PSET70: "The special education teacher is like a rock because as each year passes it takes something out of them. After all those year, that giant rock becomes a small piece of stone."

PSET87: "The special education teacher is like the type-o-negative blood because they always give. They give their patience, labor and life, but never take. This is because; it is very hard to get feedback from kids."

As observed in Table 10, there are four metaphors under skill teaching category and these metaphors constitute 3.44% of the total. Only "mother" and "mother/father" metaphors are created under this category. Some of the

statements by prospective special education teachers that constitute the skill teaching category are given as follows:

PSET7: "The special education teacher is like a mother because they prepare students to life. They teach all the skills such as using the toilet, holding forks and spoons that a mother teaches."

PSET31: "The special education teacher is like a mother/father because just like parents teaching all the skills to prepare the child to life, the special education teacher teaches the children with needs all the skills."

As observed in Table 11, there are three metaphors under social leadership/enlightening category and these metaphors constitute 2.58% of the total. "Light", "sword and shield", and "courageous person" metaphors are used once. The statements by prospective special education teachers that constitute the social leadership/enlightening category are given as follows:

PSET43: "The special education teacher is like a courageous person because they undertake a profession that they do not know at first and lead bringing in outcast individuals back to society."

PSET62: "The special education teacher is like a light because just like a light enlightening its surroundings, they enlighten their environment by bringing in individuals with special needs to society and making them accepted by the society."

PSET71: "The special education teacher is like the sword and shield because the children with special needs are in battle with the ignorant society. What will end this battle for good are the warrior [special education teacher] and their weapons [knowledge of special education]."

As observed in Table 12, there are three metaphors under social prejudices category and these metaphors

**Table 12.** Metaphors under social prejudices category.

Metaphors	f	%
Rower against the storm	1	33.3
Volunteer	1	33.3
A robust building	1	33.3
Total	3	100

constitute 2.58% of the total. “Rower rowing against the wind”, “robust building”, and “volunteer” metaphors are used once. The statements by prospective special education teachers that constitute the social prejudices category are given as follows:

PSET53: “The special education teacher is like the rower rowing against the storm because the society is so sure that you cannot teach them [individuals with special need of education] anything. They never give up pitying you. You profess under these conditions:

PSET56: “The special education teacher is like a volunteer because they give their greatest effort for these children even when their families do not want them.”

PSET103: “The special education teacher is like a robust building because just like a [robust] building standing tall against quakes, the special education teacher tries to stand tall while educating a socially outcast group.”

## CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

The metaphors created by prospective special education teachers on the concept of special education teacher are grouped under ten categories. These categories are: (1) Patience and devotion; (2) Difficulty of profession; (3) Source of love and affection; (4) Complementing; (5) Superiority of profession; (6) Life coaching/guidance; (7) Weariness of profession; (8) Skill teaching; (9) Social leadership/enlightening, and (10) Social prejudices. Among these categories, patience and devotion (23.28%), difficulty of profession (20.69%), and source of love and devotion (13.79%) are ranked in the first three regarding the number of metaphors under.

Patience and devotion category features the importance of patience and devotion for the special education teachers working with children with special needs in order to achieve the intended goals. Girgin and Baysal (2015) also mention the importance of patience and self-sacrifice in special education teaching:

*“Concerning the education of disabled children, it is obvious that the teachers working in this field should be as patient and self-sacrificing as the families. It is also known that the education and care of disabled children,*

*compared to those of their normal coevals, require more patience and self-sacrifice.” (p.173)*

The difficulty of profession category features the difficulties that the special education teacher faces while professing, along with the delicacies and sensibility required while working with individuals with special needs. Working with individuals with special needs necessitate using different methods and techniques. While it is not possible to mention all these techniques, a few examples may be given. For instance, knowing and applying prompting-related techniques such as simultaneous prompting (Arı et al., 2010; Karşıyakalı et al., 2014; Swain et al., 2015), constant time delay prompting (Saygın, 2009), most-to-least prompting (Davenport and Johnston, 2015; Eren et al., 2013) during skill teaching are just a few of the skills that a special education teacher needs to possess. Meanwhile, special teaching techniques in different fields may also be applied to the field of special education, like the use of the Orff approach in teaching concepts to individuals with special needs (Eren et al., 2013; Sağırkaya, 2014). Adapting and using technological developments in special education (Acungil, 2014; Eliçin, 2015; Özbek, 2014; Xin and Leonard, 2015) can increase the difficulty of the profession, as it shows the variety of skills that a teacher has to acquire. Additionally, existence of different disabilities and an individual possibly having multiple disabilities appear as factors that increase the difficulty of profession. The special education teachers are also in an intense cooperation with the parents while professing. The special education teacher educating the family or making use of the family in the development of children with special needs (Elmalı Alptekin, 2011; Çakmak, 2011; Meadan et al., 2015) is among the distinctive and important features of this profession which also renders it more difficult. Also, the fact that the expected results from individuals with special needs taking a huge amount of time is another professional difficulty. Arı and Sipal (2009) said that printed and audiovisual materials, the lack of professional development opportunities, students’ attitudes and inadequate salaries as the factors affecting job satisfaction among professionals working in special education field. The difficulties that a special education teacher may face can be categorized in a simple and limited manner, within the scopes of examples given. The

difficulties are grouped as; (1) difficulties related to methods and techniques while working with individuals with special needs; (2) difficulties related to including parents of individuals with special needs in the process, and guidance; (3) difficulties related to the probability of expected results in individuals with special needs appearing late; and (4) difficulties related to working environment and facilities.

The source of love and affection category features the importance and requirement of love and affection for the individuals with special needs shown by the special education teacher while teaching. It is generally accepted that, concerning teacher-student relationship, the profession of teaching contains more emotions than other professions (Celep, 2009; Çelik, 2011). Regarding special education teaching, it should not be surprising that this emotional relationship is even more intense compared to other fields of teaching. Especially, the education processes dominated by face-to-face and one-to-one relationships and the fact that individuals with special needs may be more sensitive and vulnerable render the emotional dimension of education more important.

Complementing category emphasizes the special education teacher being complementary on inadequacies of individuals with special needs. In this dimension, like in life coaching/guidance, preparing the individual with special needs to life is featured. Meanwhile in this category, it is important that the special education teachers consider themselves to be the person complementing the inadequacies of the individual with special needs. In this regard, a limited, non-pathological, normal narcissism may be at stake. In metaphors and justifying statements under this category, the prospective special education teachers underline that they are essential and indispensable while comparing themselves to a puzzle piece or a cane helping them to stand. This emphasis is similar to the features of "holding a sense of self-importance," "believing to be a special and unparalleled person" (APA, 2013) found in narcissistic tendencies. Meanwhile, the same metaphors point to an empathetic approach by statements such as "understanding the emotions of individuals with special needs." Pincus and Lukowitsky (2010) state that the narcissistic patterns may have negative consequences such as ignoring other people, while it may also have positive consequences such as establishing empathetic bonds with people, therefore there may be a normal/healthy narcissism. Additionally, Pincus and Lukowitsky (2010) also claim that every individual may have normal narcissistic needs. Therefore, it is important to underline that, the complementing category does not refer to a pathological narcissism, a personality disorder. It is a healthy narcissism with normal limits. The statements under the superiority of profession category also support this discussion and give hints on a normal/healthy narcissism.

The superiority of profession category features the superiority of special education teaching profession over other professions, notably over other fields of teaching. The special education teachers, due to the nature of their profession, directly intervene in the lives of individuals with special needs, as it may be also seen in facilitating, life coaching/guidance categories. This intervention is important as it enables the individual with special needs cling to life, their dependency on others become reduced, and they become productive. In other words, the special education teacher helps social, emotional and even professional development of individuals with special needs. Regardless of how slow the development may be, the results acquired are extremely valuable for the individual with special needs, their family and also the special education teacher. On the other hand, the special education teacher being professional sources of hope for many helpless families constitutes another important aspect of the profession. For these reasons, the special education teaching is deemed to be superior over other professions.

The life coaching/guidance category features emphasis on special education teachers' close and warm (empathetic) and constant relationship with the individual with special needs, preparing them for life and facilitating their life. The prospective special education teachers justifying the metaphors they used underline the guidance for preparing the individual with special needs for life, and not any guidance towards families or other teachers. It is noteworthy that the life coaching/guidance is limited for individuals with special needs. The Regulation on Special Education Services (2006) mentions the necessity of preparing individuals with special needs for life by improving their social, professional and basic life skills among the objectives of special education. Accordingly, guidance is prioritized in every step of special education services. Furthermore, within the scope of "Field Proficiencies for Special Education Teachers" defined by the Ministry of National Education (2008), special education teachers guiding students in different disability groups, their families and other teachers is required within different performance indicators.

The weariness of profession category features the negative effects of the profession over the special education teachers. In the justification of metaphors under this category, while the weariness of profession is underlined, the belief on special education teachers mending/repairing themselves is equally emphasized. Professional exhaustions may also be considered to be a consequence of weariness of special education teaching. There have been a number of studies that state the special education teachers face professional exhaustion of different levels (Brunsting et al., 2014; Karacan, 2012; Karahan and Uyanık Balat, 2011; Kaya and Uskun, 2012; Şahin and Şahin, 2012; Williams and Dikes, 2015).

Skill teaching category features that the special

education teachers not only give knowledge for preparing the individual with special needs for life but are also responsible for teaching/improving all kinds of skills. Skill teaching may be considered to be important in the education of individuals with special needs. In the studies on the field of special education, skill teaching is emphasized more than scholar skills such as reading and writing (Eliçin, 2015; Şengül, 2008), solving math problems (Karabulut, 2015; Kasap, 2015; Yakubova et al., 2015), overlapping professional (Bennett, 2013; Kwon and Lee, 2016; Özbey, 2015) and daily life skills (Kalaycı, 2014; Kaya, 2015; Kurtoğlu, 2015; Stanton-Chapman and Brown, 2015).

Social leadership/enlightening category features the role of special education teachers in bringing individuals with special needs in society, eliminating conflicts between the society and these individuals, and promoting the profession within the society. In a society where social prejudices over individuals with special needs persist, many shortcomings from environmental planning to education and care services exist; it is clear that the special education teacher will continue to have an increasing role of social leadership.

Social prejudices feature the biases the special education teacher faces while teaching, caused by the society and even the family of the individual with special needs. Among the studies examining the attitudes towards individuals with special needs, there are studies pointing at the existence of some positive attitudes (Bek et al., 2009; Yaralı, 2015). A number of works have been done by the state and NGOs to increase society's awareness on individuals with special needs, their adaptation to society and productivity. However, despite all these efforts, it is not possible to say prejudices over individuals with special needs do not exist. Tezcan (2013) claims that disabled people working in public service face prejudices such as "disabled people cannot be productive", "disabled people cannot manage that", "disabled people are uneducated," emphasizing most disabled people continue to receive education while working, in order to break the prejudice. Yavuz (2016) also emphasizes that mentally challenged individuals are underestimated, mocked and disregarded in society and this excluding approach emerges in many different ways; for instance a family with a mentally challenged child may face difficulties even when renting an apartment. The article also states that the acquaintances of a mother with a mentally challenged child once complained "will this child become a professor by going to school" (p.58).

The research findings generally suggest that the professional functions, responsibilities and difficulties of special education teachers are widely spread. Examining the categories revealed by this study more thoroughly in other studies will provide a more qualified and evidence-based approach towards the profession of special education teaching. In this regard, research topics such

as (1) professional proficiencies of special education teachers and prospective special education teachers, (2) the social prejudices they face, (3) the effects of the profession on their own sense of self, (4) their perceptions on their social leadership role may be suggested.

## Conflicts of Interests

The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

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