

Investigating the Attitudes of Elementary School Teachers, School Psychologists and Guidance Research Center Personnel on the Process of Preparing the Individualized Educational Program and Challenges Faced During the Related Process

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the attitudes of elementary school teachers, school psychologists and guidance research center personnel regarding developing an individualized educational program (IEP) process as well as challenges faced during the related process, according to several variables. The study included 201 participants who were working in several districts of Ankara province. The Attitudes towards IEP Development Process Scale and the Challenges during the IEP Development Process Scale were used in this study. The scales were developed and the validity and reliability of them have been investigated by the researchers. Results have shown that, with the exception of age variable, attitudes with respect to the IEP development process and challenges faced varied according to the post as an elementary school teacher, school psychologist or guidance research center personnel as well as to variables such as the institution the participants worked in, previous involvement in in-service training and previous participation in IEP development. While terms of in-service training sessions did not lead to a significant difference in attitudes, it proved to be a variable causing significant differences in terms of the challenges faced. Findings regarding attitude differences across the variables revealed that gender [$t(201) = .29$; $p > .07$] and participation in in-service training programs [$t(78) = 1.83$; $p > .07$] did not lead to a significant difference on attitudes whereas age [$F(2-198)$

=7.67; $p < .01$], occupational status [$F(2-198) = 8.72$; $p < .01$], type of institution [$t(199) = 3.43$; $p < .01$], participation in in-service training on IEP development [$t(199) = 4.05$; $p < .00$] and involvement in the IEP development process [$t(197) = 2.93$; $p < .01$] led to significant differences. Findings regarding challenges faced across the variables revealed that gender did not lead to a significant difference on attitudes [$t(201) = .07$; $p > .09$], whereas age [$F(2-198) = 3.78$; $p < .05$], occupational status [$F(2-198) = 19.78$; $p < .05$], type of institution [$t(199) = 4.98$; $p < .01$], participation in in-service training on IEP development [$t(199) = 6.32$; $p < .001$], term of in-service training programs [$t(78) = 2.26$; $p < .05$] and involvement in the IEP development process [$t(199) = 4.46$; $p < .01$] led to significant differences.

Key Words

Individualized Educational Program (IEP), IEP Team, IEP Developing Process, Attitudes towards the IEP, Guidance and Research Centers.

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Liability to develop individualized educational programs (IEP) to meet the educational requirements of children with special needs have been introduced in several legislations. This liability is provided under the USA Education for All Handicapped Children Act dated 1975, Canada School Act dated 1995 and UK Education Act dated 1996 (Fiscus, & Mandell, 1997; T.C. Başbakanlık Özürlüler İdaresi Başkanlığı, 2005).

Taking into consideration the studies regarding the IEP development and implementation in Turkey, it is observed that such studies are rather new and that IEP development and implementation for individuals with special needs were introduced through Decree Law no 573 enacted in 1997. Through this Decree Law, the right of education was provided to all individuals with special needs so that they could benefit from educational facilities (Millî Eğitim Bakanlığı [MEB], 1997; Sucuoğlu, & Kargin, 2006). In the aftermath of the Decree Law dated 1997, Regulation on Special Education Services dated 2000 defined IEP in its article no 62. According to this definition, IEP is “the special curricula developed for an individual in need of special education, which is approved by his/her parents; being developed in line with the needs of the individual as well as the teacher and parents, including also the supportive education services in accordance with the designed purposes.” Article 63 of the abovementioned regulation provides for the setting up of “IEP Development Teams.” These teams are stated to include parents, individual himself/herself -where necessary- elementary school teachers, school psychologists, and special education teachers (Millî Eğitim Bakanlığı [MEB], 2000).

The legal regulations in Turkey as well as those in various other countries provided for IEP development to enable each and every child with special needs to benefit from an education suitable for his/her needs and the fact that IEP development shall be undertaken by a team. To this end, experts to participate in this team should have knowledge of IEP development, individuals with special needs in addition to characteristics and education thereof. The literature on IEP includes some findings which reveal that IEP requires a lot of paper work, consequently taking up far too much time of the team members, which frequently led to some negative attitudes towards IEP (Küçük, Kargin, & Akçamete, 2002; Lytle, & Bordin, 2001; Menlove, Hudson, & Suter, 2001; Tod, Castle, & Blamires, 1996).

In Turkey studies delineating the participation and attitudes of teachers and experts involved in the IEP development process and probable challenges that may be faced during the related process are still scarce. The attitudes of IEP team members toward the IEP development process have been accepted to have a significant effect on the effectiveness of IEP, a legally defined term, which is one of the fundamental requirements in the planning and implementation of education for pupils with special needs. Identifying the attitudes of professional members involved in IEP development and implementation, with respect to IEP development process is as important as identifying the challenges that may be faced during the related process for designing successful programs (Akçamete, 2002). Studies are confined to only a few on the respective subject in Turkey. Therefore, challenges that may be faced by the related members of profession, factors affecting this process or factors according to which this process varies is needed to be discovered. Moving on from this requirement, the problem analyzed in this study is constituted by the research on attitudes, regards to IEP development, of elementary school teachers undertaking delivery and assessment of education, school psychologists providing support to individuals with special needs as well as parents thereof -where required- and guidance research center personnel who take an active role during the diagnosis and placement to appropriate programs, in addition to the challenges they may face throughout this process.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to identify the attitudes of elementary school teachers, school psychologists, and guidance research center personnel on IEP development as well as challenges that might be faced during the related process. To this end, answers to the following questions have been sought. Under the scope of this purpose, significant differences in the attitudes, regarding IEP development process, of elementary school teachers, school psychologists and guidance research center personnel and several challenges faced in IEP development process will be analyzed with regard to some variables namely, gender, age, occupational status, participation in in-service training on IEP development, term and previous involvement in IEP development process.

Method

Participants

Research group includes a total number of participants, who are elementary school teachers, school psychologists, and guidance research center personnel working in the Ankara province. Data are collected from 201 participants in this study. In Ankara province, there are 14 Research and Guidance Centers (i.e., Çankaya, Yenimahalle, Mamak, Altındağ, Keçiören, Sincan, Etimesgut, Polatlı, Gölbaşı, Ş. Koşhisar, Beypazarı, Nallıhan, Kızılcahamam ve Kalecik). Seven Research and Guidance Centers (i.e., Çankaya, Yenimahalle, Mamak, Altındağ, Keçiören, Sincan, Etimesgut) are selected for this study according to distance from the city center. Classroom teachers and school psychologists' are selected from these areas. The scales were administered to a total number of 201 participants and data were used for the reliability and validity analyses.

Among the participants in the research, 24.4% were males (51 participants), 75.6% were females (150 participants), 31.32% were in the age group 20-30 years old, 46.3% were in the age group 31-40 years old, and 22.4% were in the age group 41 years old or above, and 22.9% of the participants were single while 77.1% were married. Out of these participants, 42.3% were elementary school teachers, 53.7% were school psychologists and 4.0% were social workers (social services personnel) and special education teachers selecting the category of "other." While 79.1% of participants worked in schools, 20.9% worked in guidance research centers. Furthermore, 39.8% of the participants had participated in in-service training programs on IEP development organized by the Ministry of National Education (MoNE), whereas 60.2% had not. Among those who had previously participated in in-service training programs on IEP development, 29.9% attended training programs lasting for 1 to 5 days while 11.4% attended training programs lasting for 6 days or more. Finally, 29.4% of the participants had previously been involved in an IEP development process whereas 70.6% thereof had not been previously involved in such a process.

Instruments

Scales were developed by the researchers since scales to identify the attitudes of elementary school teachers, school psychologists, and guidance research center personnel with respect to individualized educational

program development as well as challenges faced during the related process did not exist in Turkey. These scales are the Attitudes towards IEP Development Process Scale (Appendix-1) and the Challenges during the IEP Development Process Scale. Both scales were developed in accordance with Likert type 5 point scale and factor analysis performed on both scales (Tavşancıl 2002). The attitudes scale includes 15 items while the challenge scale includes 20 items. Responses to items in both scales were recorded as “Fully Agree”, “Agree”, “Indecisive”, “Disagree,” and “Fully Disagree”. In attaching points to the scales, items expressing positive attitudes or challenges have been sequenced from “Fully Agree” to “Fully Disagree” having 5 to 1 points each whereas items expressing negative attitudes or challenges had the same sequence with 1 to 5 points each. The highest score in the attitudes scale was 75 while the lowest was 15. The higher scores in the scale express positive attitudes and lower scores express negative attitudes. While the highest score in the challenges scale was 100, the lowest was 20. The higher scores in the scale express high number of challenges faced whereas lower scores express lower number of challenges faced. Both scales can be administered either individually or to a group.

Findings

I. Findings on Attitudes towards to IEP Development Process

It is noteworthy that participants in the age group 41 years old or above scored the highest on the attitudes scale among all groups ($X = 51.57$), across many of the variables. For gender, the arithmetic means of the male and female participants were observed to be close to each other, and findings have revealed that elementary school teachers scored higher than ($X = 50.78$) teachers of other branches (48.11-45.75), those working in schools scored higher ($X = 49.77$) than guidance research center personnel (46.76), those who had not participated in any in-service training programs scored higher ($X = 50.31$) than those having participated in such programs (47.38), among those having participated in such programs, participants who had had an in-service training program lasting 1 to 5 days scored higher ($X = 47.93$) than those having had an in-service training program lasting longer (44.86) and those who had not been involved in IEP development process scored higher ($X = 49.87$) than those having involved in the related process (47.52).

Findings regarding attitude differences across the variables revealed that gender [$t(201) = .29$; $p > .07$] and participation in in-service training programs [$t(78) = 1.83$; $p > .07$] did not lead to a significant difference on attitudes whereas age [$F(2-198) = 7.67$; $p < .01$], occupational status [$F(2-198) = 8.72$; $p < .01$], type of institution [$t(199) = 3.43$; $p < .01$], participation in in-service training on IEP development [$t(199) = 4.05$; $p < .001$] and involvement in the IEP development process [$t(197) = 2.93$; $p < .01$] led to significant differences.

II. Findings on the identification of Challenges faced during IEP Development Process

Taking into consideration the average scores by the participants with respect to various variables, in the challenge scale\ just as in the previous scale, it is noteworthy that participants in the age group 41 years old or above scored the highest among all groups ($X = 69.06$). Findings revealed that elementary school teachers ($X = 72.02$), those working in schools ($X = 68.30$), those who had not participated in in-service training programs ($X = 70.65$), those who had an in-service training program of 1 to 5 days ($X = 60.32$) and who had not been involved in IEP development process ($X = 68.69$) scored higher than other the participants. Findings regarding challenges faced across the variables revealed that gender did not lead to a significant difference on attitudes [$t(201) = .07$; $p > .09$], whereas age [$F(2-198) = 3.78$; $p < .05$], occupational status [$F(2-198) = 19.78$; $p < .05$], type of institution [$t(199) = 4.98$; $p < .01$], participation in in-service training on IEP development [$t(199) = 6.32$; $p < .00$], term of in-service training programs [$t(78) = 2.26$; $p < .05$] and involvement in the IEP development process [$t(199) = 4.46$; $p < .01$] led to significant differences.

Discussion

The initial findings of the research have suggested that on the attitudes toward IEP development process, there has not been any significant difference with respect to male and female participants. In a study by Rees, Spreen and Harnadek (1991), gender was stated to cause no difference in attitudes. On the other hand, another study suggested that attitudes were in favor of female participants (Akçamete & Kargin, 1994). Having regard to research on teacher attitudes towards individuals with special needs, attitudes have been observed to be affected by a wide variety

of factors. In general, findings obtained with respect to variables such as teacher age and gender, support services provided and participation in in-service training programs have been consistent with the findings of this study (Altman, 1981; Glass, & Meckler, 1972; Griffin, Minke, Bear, & Deemer, 1996). Such contradictory findings suggest that gender is not by itself sufficient to describe attitudes and should be analyzed together with other variables.

The second finding of the study has shown that the attitudes of participants with respect to IEP development process vary depending on their age groups. This finding can be interpreted that more experience in teaching may result in more positive attitudes towards including pupils with individual differences one's class.

The third finding revealed that elementary school teachers have more positive attitudes towards the IEP development process. This finding hints us that the possession of more knowledge on IEP development shall not develop the related attitudes in a positive way. The fact that guidance research center personnel believe that teachers lack sufficient knowledge on IEP development and that as a consequence qualified individualized educational programs cannot be developed, have been assumed as a possible factor affecting guidance research center personnel's attitudes in a negative way. Research findings have also suggested that participants working in schools had more positive attitudes than guidance research center personnel. This finding indicates that the greater amount of time spent with children and elementary school teachers' being the first and foremost agents responsible for children's education affect attitudes towards IEP development in a positive way.

Another finding revealed by the research suggests that teachers having participated in in-service training programs have more negative attitudes. Teachers do not find in-service training programs on IEP development organized by the MoNe fully functional in terms of content and application format, which can be thought to affect attitudes towards in-service training programs in a negative way. This finding is in support of the view that the content and application format of in-service training programs are important. Bailey (1989) stated that the purpose of in-service training programs was to improve the professional practices of personnel working in the related field and they should therefore aim to provide knowledge and experience with a view to expand it to the general service provision (cited in Olson, 1998; Yates, 1973).

Another finding is that like the attitudes of teachers having participated in in-service training programs, attitudes of teachers having participated in the IEP development process are also negative. Many teachers expressed that hard working conditions, dense curricula applied at schools as well as crowded classrooms made IEP development more difficult. Teachers have to fill in and apply a lot of documents during IEP development, which brings about extra work load for them. Such requirements of IEP development process have also been considered to negatively affect the participants' attitudes. The respective attitudes may be affected in a positive way provided that teachers developing and implementing IEP are supported and encouraged, and the required tools-equipment and documents are provided by the MoNe.

According to findings concerning the challenges faced by the research group during IEP development process, gender did not lead to a significant difference with respect to the challenges that may be faced by teachers. Taking into consideration the studies conducted under the related literature, a similar finding has been observed in the study by Menlove et al. (2001), which stated that there were no significant differences in terms of gender for the challenges faced during the IEP development process.

The second finding suggested that teachers in the 41 years old or above age group face more challenges during IEP the development process. Teachers in the age group 41 years old or above who are assumed to possess great knowledge and experience in the application of traditional curricula have been considered to possess less knowledge on the new curricula.

Another finding revealed that although elementary school teachers have positive attitudes with respect to IEP development during IEP development process, they face more challenges compared to guidance teachers and guidance research center personnel. Elementary school teachers do not consider themselves in full command of adapting the developed IEP to practice, and they are held accountable for IEP development and implementation; however, they are not provided with the support they need, which all in all have been considered to increase the challenges faced. Research results showed that teachers who are not getting enough support reported more challenges to the IEP process (Lytle, & Bordin, 2001; Mccomas, & LaFlamme, 1996; Scruggs, & Mastropieri, 1996).

The fourth finding of the research has shown that those working in guidance research centers face fewer challenges than those working in schools. Guidance research center personnel do not spend much time with pupils after the diagnostic process, and they are not involved in implementation, which are considered to reduce the number of challenges faced.

One other finding of this study has shown that participants having participated in in-service training programs face fewer challenges. This finding may be interpreted as knowledge obtained through in-service training programs helps reduce challenges which may be faced. Finding also revealed that the longer term in-service trainings last, the fewer the challenges faced during the IEP development process. This finding sets forth the need to carefully plan the terms of in-service training programs for teachers.

Finally results showed that teachers having participated in the IEP development process face fewer challenges than those who had not participated in such a process. This finding indicates that as teachers participating in IEP development process live through the process and learn how to implement the program, challenges faced may be reduced.

In conclusion, this research has found that the member of the IEP team need to increase their knowledge and skills through benefiting more from in-service training programs which are to be functionally designed to teach the IEP development processes. Accordingly, providing all the members of the IEP team with the knowledge required and developing their skills to co-operate, have been considered essential for the effective development and implementation of individualized program.

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EK 1.

BEP HAZIRLAMA SÜRECİNE YÖNELİKTUTUMLARI BELİRLEME ÖLÇEĞİ

	Tamamen Katılıyorum	Katılıyorum	Kararsızım	Katılmıyorum	Kesinlikle Katılmıyorum
1- BEP, engelli öğrenciye uygun eğitim hizmeti sunar.					
2- Engelli öğrenciler BEP'ten fazla yararlanamazlar.					
3- BEP eğitime nereden ve nasıl başlanılacağını gösterir.					
4- BEP ekibi karşılaşılan sorunları çözmede yetersiz kalır.					
5- BEP ekibinin oluşturulması, ekip üyelerinin öğrencinin eğitimine daha etkin bir biçimde katılmasını sağlar.					
6-BEP ekibi farklı çözüm önerilerinin sunulmasını sağlar.					
7- BEP ekibinde katkımın olabileceğini düşünüyorum.					
8- BEP ekibinde görev almak istemem.					
9- BEP hazırlama sürecinde görev almanın benim işim olmadığını düşünüyorum.					
10- Öğrencinin zorlandığı her bir alan için yıllık amacın oluşturulması eğitimi kolaylaştırır.					
11- BEP hazırlama sürecine katılmamın iş yükümü artıracığını düşünüyorum.					
12- BEP konusunda yapacağım çalışmaların bana daha fazla sorumluluk yüklemesini istemiyorum.					
13- BEP hazırlama sürecine katılmakla öğrenciye faydalı olacağını düşünürüm.					
14- BEP'i hazırlamak ve uygulamak pratik değildir.					
15- BEP'in sürekliliğinin sağlanacağını düşünüyorum.					

EK 2.

**BEP HAZIRLAMA SÜRECİNE İLİŞKİN KARŞILAŞILABİLEN
GÜÇLÜKLERİ BELİRLEME ÖLÇEĞİ**

	Tamamen Katılıyorum	Katılıyorum	Kararsızım	Katılmıyorum	Kesinlikle Katılmıyorum
1- BEP konusunda yeterli bilgiye sahip değilim.					
2- BEP'i öğrenmeye yönelik, materyal desteğim yok.					
3- BEP'i öğrenmek için nereden destek alacağımı bilmiyorum.					
4- BEP ile ilgili sorumluluklarımın ne olduğunu bilmiyorum.					
5- BEP ekip toplantılarını yapacak uygun oda okulda yok.					
6- Ekip üyeleri BEP hazırlama konusunda isteksiz davranırlar.					
7- BEP ekip üyeleri toplantılara düzenli katılmazlar.					
8- Öğrencinin eğitsel performansını belirleyecek bilgim yok.					
9- BEP hazırlama sürecinde yıllık amaçları belirlemeyi bilmiyorum.					
10- BEP'in hangi etkinlik ve araçlarla zenginleştirileceğini bilmiyorum.					
11- BEP uygulanan öğrencinin, hangi ölçütlerle değerlendirileceği konusunda bilgim yok.					
12- BEP hazırlanması çok uzun sürer.					
13- BEP uygulanırsa, sınıftaki diğer öğrencilerin müfredatını yetiştirmek zorlaşır.					

14- Sınıf koşullarının yetersizliği BEP'in uygulanmasını güçleştirir.

15- BEP konusunda okul idaresi yeterince yardım etmez.

16- Engelli öğrencilerin eğitimi ve BEP söz konusu olduğunda hep ben sorumlu tutuluyorum.

17- Her engelli öğrenci için ayrı ayrı BEP hazırlamak çok zor olur.

18- Sınıfların kalabalık olması BEP hazırlanmasını güçleştirir.

19- Hazırlanan BEP'in sınıftaki diğer öğrenci velilerine açıklanması konusunda sıkıntı yaşanır.

20- Aileler engelli öğrencinin eğitimi konusunda öğretmenden çok şey beklerler.
