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Research Article

EXAMİNATİON OF SPECİAL EDUCATİON TEACHERS' OPİNİONS ON CURRİCULUM CHANGES

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ABSTRACT

EXAMİNATİON OF SPECİAL EDUCATİON TEACHERS' OPİNİONS ON CURRİCULUM CHANGES

The aim of this research is to examine the views of special education teachers regarding changes made to educational programs. To this end, the perceptions and experiences of teachers regarding the content, structure, applicability, and effectiveness of program changes were investigated. The research is important because it reveals how changes in special education programs are perceived and evaluated by practitioners. The opinions and experiences of teachers implementing the program are crucial for the success of the educational programs. This research is limited to 10 special education teachers working in the Çağlayancerit district of Kahramanmaraş during the 2024-2025 academic year. A descriptive phenomenological design, a qualitative research method, was used in the study. A semi-structured interview form developed by the researcher was used as the data collection tool. The study concluded that the effective use of technological tools and modern materials in special education supports learning processes and increases student motivation, and that student-centered and individualized programs in special education optimize the learning process by supporting various developmental areas of the individual, etc.

Key Words: Special education, education program, program change.

ÖZEL EĞİTİM ÖĞRETMENLERİNİN EĞİTİM PROGRAMLARI DEĞİŞİKLİĞİNE YÖNELİK GÖRÜŞLERİNİN İNCELENMESİ

ÖZET

Bu araştırmanın amacı, özel eğitim öğretmenlerinin eğitim programlarında yapılan değişikliklere yönelik görüşlerini incelemektir. Bu amaçla, öğretmenlerin program değişikliklerinin içeriği, yapısı, uygulanabilirliği ve etkiliğine ilişkin algıları ve deneyimleri belirlenmeye çalışılmıştır. Araştırma, özel eğitim programlarında yapılan değişikliklerin uygulayıcılar tarafından nasıl algılandığını ve değerlendirildiğini ortaya koyması bakımından önem taşımaktadır. Eğitim programlarının başarıya ulaşmasında, programı uygulayan öğretmenlerin görüşleri ve deneyimleri büyük önem taşımaktadır. Bu araştırma, 2024-2025 eğitim-öğretim yılında Kahramanmaraş/ Çağlayancerit merkezde görev yapan 10 özel eğitim öğretmeniyle sınırlıdır. Araştırmada nitel araştırma yöntemlerinden betimsel fenomenoloji deseni kullanılmıştır. Araştırmada veri toplama aracı olarak araştırmacı tarafından geliştirilen yarı yapılandırılmış görüşme formu kullanılmıştır. Özel eğitimde teknolojik araçlar ve modern materyallerin etkin kullanımı, öğrenme süreçlerini destekleyerek öğrencilerin motivasyonunu artırdığı, özel eğitimde öğrenci merkezli ve bireyselleştirilmiş programlar, bireyin çeşitli gelişim alanlarını destekleyerek öğrenme sürecini optimize ettiği vb. sonuçlara ulaşılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelime: Özel eğitim, eğitim programı, program değişikliği.

ENTRANCE

Special education is a dynamic field encompassing the planning, implementation, and evaluation processes of educational services for students with individual differences and needs. Special education programs are designed to support the cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development of individuals with special needs, to improve their independent living skills, and to facilitate their integration into social life. The success of changes made to special education programs is closely related to the opinions, attitudes, and competencies of the teachers who implement these programs. Special education includes organizing the necessary educational environments to enable individuals with special needs to utilize their potential to the fullest, using appropriate teaching methods and techniques, and preparing individualized education programs (Cavkaytar, 2019).

Unlike general education programs, special education programs have an adaptable structure based on the individual characteristics and performance levels of students. The fundamental feature of these programs is that they offer the most suitable educational content and teaching methods to meet the needs of students, taking into account their strengths and weaknesses (Erbaş and Yücesoy, 2019). In recent years, various changes have been made to special education programs in Türkiye. These changes have been implemented to better meet the educational needs of individuals with special needs, to improve the quality of educational services, and to comply with international standards. The special education programs updated by the Ministry of National Education in 2018 have been given a more flexible and adaptable structure that takes into account the individual differences and needs of individuals with special needs. These programs emphasize the development of students' daily living skills, support their adaptation to social life, and the acquisition of independent living skills, while also giving importance to the development of social and emotional skills in addition to academic skills (Yıldız and Özaydın, 2022).

It is crucial for teachers to develop teaching strategies appropriate to the individual characteristics and needs of each student, to effectively utilize different teaching methods and techniques, and to adapt learning environments to the needs of students. Teachers who lack sufficient subject matter knowledge and teaching skills cannot effectively implement special education programs, and this can negatively impact the development of students with special needs (Kargın, 2022).

Purpose and Importance of the Research

The main objective of this research is to examine the views of special education teachers regarding changes made to educational programs. Understanding the experiences, perceptions, and expectations of the teachers implementing these programs is crucial for the effective implementation of program changes in special education. This research aims to conduct an in-depth examination of special education teachers' views on the content, structure, applicability, and effectiveness of program changes. The opinions and experiences of the teachers implementing these changes play a decisive role in the success of educational reforms and program changes. As direct observers of how educational programs are implemented in the classroom and their effects on students, teachers are the most competent individuals to evaluate the effectiveness of

program changes. Therefore, the opinions and experiences of the teachers implementing the programs are of great importance in achieving success.

Sub-Problems

In line with the problem statement of this research, answers were sought to the following sub-problems:

1. How do special education teachers evaluate the recent changes?
2. What do teachers think about the feasibility of the program change?
3. What are their opinions about the impact of the program changes on the education process of students with special needs?
4. What difficulties did teachers encounter in the process of adapting to the program changes?

METHOD

This research employs a descriptive phenomenological design, a qualitative research method, to deeply examine the views of special education teachers regarding curriculum changes. The descriptive phenomenological design allowed for an examination of how special education teachers interpreted the curriculum changes, how these changes were reflected in their practices, and the problems they encountered during the change process, all through their subjective experiences.

Working Group

The sample for this study consists of 10 special education teachers working in public institutions in the Çağlayancerit district of Kahramanmaraş. Diversity in sample selection was ensured by considering the teachers' professional experience (1-5 years, 6-10 years, 11 years and over), department/faculty of graduation, age, and gender.

Data Collection Tool

In this study, a semi-structured interview form developed by the researcher was used as a data collection tool. The interview form consists of two sections. The first section includes questions aimed at determining the demographic characteristics of the participants (gender, age, professional experience, educational status). The second section contains four open-ended questions aimed at determining the teachers' opinions on the program change, the problems they experienced during the change process, and their proposed solutions.

Data Analysis

Content analysis was used to analyze the data obtained within the scope of the research. This analysis method involves grouping similar data within the framework of

specific concepts and themes, and interpreting them by organizing them in a way that the reader can understand. The data analysis process was carried out in four stages. Each interview transcript was read several times in an attempt to gain a holistic perspective on the data.

FINDINGS

This stage of the research presents the findings obtained from the data collection instrument. The demographic characteristics of the participants in the study are given in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the participants.

Variable	Category	f
Gender	Female	4
	Male	6
Age	25 - 34	10
Education level	Licence	9
Years of experience / Seniority	1 – 10	8
	11 - 20	2
Faculty of graduation	Faculty of Education	10

The study included 4 women and 6 men. Participants ranged in age from 25 to 34. All participants held a bachelor's degree, with 8 participants having between 1 and 10 years of experience and 2 participants having between 11 and 20 years of experience. Furthermore, all participants graduated from faculties of education.

Participants were asked, "*How do you evaluate the recent changes to the special education curriculum?*" and some of the responses are given below:

"(K3): Special education differs from general education in many ways. While in general education the content is determined by central programs for children around the average, in special education the content of the program is determined by the child's needs… (K4): Frequent changes in special education programs do not necessarily mean that education will change positively… (K5): Programs designed to suit the individual needs and learning styles of students enable them to learn more effectively and efficiently…"

Table 2. Findings regarding participants' opinions on recent changes to special education programs.

Theme	Sub-theme
Student-centered education	Needs-based programs
	Learning style approaches
	Inclusive strengths
Modern educational materials and technology	Technology integration
	Game-based learning
	Enriched materials
Implementation competence and improvement	Impact of program changes
	Functionality of support rooms
	Impact of professional development

According to Table 2, these themes, which emphasize the importance of individualized and inclusive approaches in special education, aim to shape education by centering on the unique needs of each student. Student-centered programs, tailored to individuals' learning styles and strengths, increase equity and effectiveness in education.

Participants were asked, "**What are your thoughts on the feasibility of the program changes?**" and some of the responses are given below:

"(K1): A play-based approach in special education, modern educational materials, and making technological tools more effective would be feasible and effective. (K5): Yes, it is feasible, but only in a limited number of our schools. As with previous educational programs, it doesn't seem very feasible due to insufficient staff, materials, and facilities. (K10): It depends on how much the state invests in resource allocation, teacher training policies, and the initiative of local governments."

Table 3. Findings regarding participants' opinions on the feasibility of program changes.

Theme	Sub-theme
Modern approaches and technology	Game-based motivation
	Technology integration
	Support room improvement
Applicability and resources	Infrastructure deficiencies
	Local conditions
	Lack of resources
Collaboration and improvement	Lack of collaboration
	Resource allocation

According to Table 3, the effective use of modern educational materials and technological tools in special education has the potential to increase student motivation and make learning processes more efficient.

Participants were asked, "**What are your opinions on the impact of program changes on the educational processes of students with special needs?**" and some of the responses received are given below:

> *"(K3): The resources include examples for the planned objectives, but they are insufficient for lasting learning. (K7): I see the program being updated and made more practical for the student as a positive development. (K10): It has the potential to improve the educational processes of students with special needs, especially in terms of individuality and accessibility, and presents a correct vision."*

Table 4. Findings regarding participants' opinions on the impact of program changes on the educational processes of students with special needs.

Theme	Sub-theme
Student-centered education	Interest-focused change
	Individual program contribution
	Success-oriented design
Flexibility and adaptability	Lack of flexibility
	IEP adaptability
	Up-to-date program suitability
Implementation challenges and solutions	Adaptation process
	Lack of resources
	Local conditions
Continuous development and potential	Contribution of individual differences
	Creating the right vision

According to Table 4, student-centered and individualized programs in special education make the learning process more efficient by supporting the individual's cognitive, social, and emotional development.

Participants were asked, "**What challenges did you encounter during the process of adapting to program changes?**" and some of the responses are given below:

> *"(K2): Teachers who have not received adequate training in the field of special education may experience difficulties in implementing program changes. (K5): Parents should be informed about the changes, teachers should be provided with information about the program content through seminars, etc., and necessary material support should be ensured. (K10): Most of these difficulties stem from insufficient planning of the transition process and inadequate preparation of stakeholders for the process."*

Table 5. Findings regarding the challenges participants faced in adapting to program changes.

Theme	Sub-theme
Implementation challenges and monitoring	Adaptation difficulties Lack of monitoring Resource issues
Equal opportunity and regional challenges	Rural school problems Impact of economic inequality
Teacher competency issues	Lack of adaptation Lack of materials and information
Collaboration and transition processes	Lack of communication Lack of planning

According to Table 5, equal opportunities in education cannot be fully achieved due to implementation difficulties in rural areas and economic inequalities. Teacher deficiencies and insufficient materials hinder the successful implementation of programs.

RESULTS, DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Individualized and inclusive approaches in special education enhance educational equity and accessibility by meeting the diverse needs of students. The use of modern educational materials and technology makes the learning process more effective and engaging, while play-based methods strengthen student motivation.

The effective use of technological tools and modern materials in special education supports learning processes and increases student motivation. However, the success of these programs is affected by factors such as resource deficiencies, teacher qualifications, and infrastructure problems.

In special education, student-centered and individualized programs optimize the learning process by supporting various developmental areas of the individual. Flexibility and adaptability enhance the effectiveness of programs by offering educational solutions tailored to the changing needs of students with special needs.

Ensuring equal opportunities in education requires addressing implementation challenges in rural areas and overcoming economic inequalities. The successful implementation of programs depends on improving teacher qualifications and resolving resource deficiencies.

Argument

In the study by Kizir and Memişoğlu (2017), questions were posed to administrators to evaluate issues such as the language of the special education

legislation, its clarity, scope, level of meeting needs, and difficulties in its implementation. As a result of the research, it was determined that, according to the opinions of the administrators, the language of the legislation was not clear and understandable, its scope was narrow, it did not adequately respond to needs, and various difficulties were encountered during its implementation.

Research by Ari and Kat (2024) reveals that half of the participants are undergraduate graduates and that their reasons for choosing the program are largely related to the ease of appointment. Teachers stated that they might encounter problems stemming from administration, parents, and inexperience before starting their professional duties, and that they plan to overcome such difficulties by consulting with experienced colleagues.

In the study by Mengi and Özçelik Hataş (2024), it was stated that special education teachers take into account the individual needs, characteristics, disabilities, developmental levels, and environmental conditions of children when preparing educational plans and creating learning environments in accordance with the curriculum.

In the study by Aydın and Şentürk (2021), the quality of the old undergraduate programs was examined and it was determined that the practical courses were inefficient, the curriculum was inadequate, the academic staff lacked quality, and the program failed to meet professional skills requirements.

Suggestions

Priority should be given to developing individualized and inclusive programs in special education. Innovative approaches that enhance attention and motivation should be encouraged by increasing the integration of technology into educational materials.

To improve the effectiveness of special education programs, professional development activities for teachers should be increased, and government policies should be strengthened to address infrastructure deficiencies. Considering geographical differences, special support and resource allocation should be provided to schools in rural areas.

To ensure equal opportunities in education, infrastructure and resource deficiencies in rural areas must be addressed, and economic inequalities minimized. Continuous training programs and material support should be provided to enhance teachers' professional competencies. Better planning mechanisms should be developed to facilitate the transition of changing programs, ensuring effective collaboration among stakeholders. Furthermore, evaluation and monitoring mechanisms should be strengthened to regularly check the effectiveness of the programs.

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