



## EXPLORING SOCIAL STUDIES TEACHERS' COMPETENCIES IN INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

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### **Abstract:**

For individuals with special needs to effectively benefit from social studies education, their inclusion in individualized education programs (IEPs) is of great importance. Considering the physical, mental, and emotional differences of these individuals, social studies teachers need to possess the competence to prepare IEPs. To acquire these competencies, special education courses are provided in teacher training programs and supported by in-service training. The aim of this research is to examine social studies teachers' perceptions of their competence in preparing IEPs. A descriptive survey design, a quantitative method, was used in the research. The study group consisted of 121 social studies teachers working in state and private schools affiliated with the Ministry of National Education in Niğde province during the 2024-2025 academic year. The "IEP Teacher Competence Scale" and a personal information form prepared by the researcher were used as data collection tools. According to the research results, it was determined that social studies teachers' perceptions of their competence in preparing IEPs were at a high level. Furthermore, a statistically significant difference was found between teachers with 11-15 years of professional experience and those with 20 years or more of experience.

**Keywords:** individualized education program, competency, social studies teacher

### **1. Introduction**

Education is a fundamental process that enables individuals to acquire knowledge, skills, values, and behaviors necessary for both personal development and social adaptation. As emphasized in the literature, education is not only a means of individual development

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but also a key mechanism for ensuring social cohesion and sustainability (Fidan, 1996; Gündüz & Zorluoğlu, 2023). In this context, the principle of equality of opportunity in education plays a critical role in ensuring that all individuals can access quality learning experiences regardless of their differences. This principle is particularly significant for individuals with special needs, who require appropriate educational support to develop essential life skills and participate actively in social life.

Individuals may exhibit differences in physical, cognitive, or psychomotor development, which may lead to various disabilities requiring specialized support. Special education, therefore, emerges as an individualized process designed to meet the diverse learning needs of these individuals through appropriate instructional strategies, materials, and environments (Ünlü, 2021). In Turkey, legal regulations have progressively aimed to ensure equal access to education for all individuals, including those with special needs. Although early regulations were limited in scope, subsequent developments have contributed to the expansion of both inclusive and specialized educational practices (Akyüz, 2018; Karal, 2021; Fidan, 2022).

Inclusive education, which allows individuals with special needs to learn alongside their peers, has become a widely adopted approach due to its positive effects on social integration, self-confidence, and skill development (Ateş, 2018). One of the most critical components of inclusive education is the Individualized Education Program (IEP), which is designed according to the individual characteristics, needs, and goals of learners. In many countries, including Turkey, the preparation of IEPs is a legal requirement (Ministry of National Education, 1997). An effective IEP includes the learner's current performance, targeted outcomes, support services, and participation conditions within the educational process (Yüksel, Oğur, & İşbilir, 2020; İlik & Günay, 2020).

From a global perspective, inclusive education has become a central priority in international education policies aimed at promoting equity and social justice (UNESCO, 2020). Within this framework, IEPs are recognized as essential tools for addressing individual differences in educational settings (Mitchell, 2014). However, the effectiveness of IEP implementation largely depends on teachers' knowledge, skills, and attitudes, making teacher competence a decisive factor in the success of inclusive education (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). Despite this, research indicates that many teachers do not feel adequately prepared to design and implement effective IEPs (DeLuca *et al.*, 2013). Although the number of studies focusing on teacher competencies in inclusive education has increased, research specifically addressing subject teachers, such as social studies teachers, remains limited.

Teacher competence plays a crucial role in ensuring the effective implementation of IEPs. Teachers who are capable of identifying students' needs, monitoring their progress, and adapting instructional strategies contribute significantly to the quality of educational outcomes. In this regard, competencies related to assessment and evaluation are particularly emphasized in the literature (Christle & Yell, 2010; Avcıoğlu, 2011). However, it is also reported that prospective teachers, especially those outside the field

of special education, often possess limited knowledge and skills regarding IEP processes (Koca, 2022). This limitation may lead to challenges in practice and reduce the effectiveness of inclusive education.

Social studies, as a subject area, aims to prepare individuals for social life, foster civic awareness, and develop essential life skills (Ministry of National Education [MoNE], 2018). Therefore, it plays a critical role in supporting the social integration of individuals with special needs (İlk & Açıkalın, 2018). Given the strong alignment between the objectives of social studies education and the goals of IEPs, the competencies of social studies teachers in preparing and implementing IEPs are of particular importance. However, existing studies indicate that teachers in this field experience various challenges and exhibit varying levels of competence in practice (İlk & Açıkalın, 2018).

This study contributes to the literature in several ways. First, while research on IEP competencies has mostly focused on special education or classroom teachers, this study focuses on social studies teachers, a relatively less studied group. Second, the research presents empirical findings on how teachers' perceptions of IEP competencies differ according to both demographic and professional variables. Finally, by highlighting the decisive role of in-service training and professional experience, it offers important practical recommendations for improving teacher competencies and strengthening inclusive education practices.

In this context, the main objective of this research is to reveal the competencies of social studies teachers in preparing individualized education programs (IEPs). The research aims to examine the teachers' knowledge levels regarding IEPs, their application competencies, and whether these competencies differ according to various variables. Accordingly, the research question has been determined as follows: "What is the level of social studies teachers' perceived IEP competence, and does it differ across selected variables? (gender, seniority, educational attainment, school type, whether they have taken a "Special Education" course in their undergraduate education and their status of receiving in-service training in "Special Education").

## **2. Methodology**

This section includes information on the research model, research group, demographic data of the participants, data analysis and the collection process.

### **2.1 Research Design**

This study examined the opinions of social studies teachers regarding the individualized education program implemented in public and private middle schools. This research aims to describe the IEP competencies of social studies teachers and reveal the current situation. Therefore, a descriptive survey design, one of the quantitative research approaches, was chosen for this study. A descriptive analysis was conducted using the survey model during the data collection phase of the study. In the survey model, the subject to be researched is expressed as is. No changes are made to the subject or object

being researched. The goal of the survey model is to identify the research topic through careful observation (uhadar, 2006). The survey model aims to collect data to determine certain characteristics of the group (Büyüköztürk *et al.*, 2019). Descriptive research, on the other hand, is conducted to reveal the characteristics of the phenomenon under study (Borg, Gall, & Gall, 1993). Descriptive research is an approach that aims to describe the current situation or characteristics within a specific time period. In the survey model, the topic to be researched is presented as is. This study uses a descriptive method to explore the level of social studies teachers' perceptions of IEP competencies and whether these perceptions differ based on various variables.

## 2.2 Research Group

The study group consisted of 121 social studies teachers working in public and private schools affiliated with the Ministry of National Education in Niğde province during the 2024-2025 academic year. Because all social studies teachers working in Niğde province were reached, this group also represents the study's sample.

## 2.3 Data Collection Tools

In order to determine the competencies of social studies teachers working in public and private schools in preparing IEP, data were obtained from the Individualized Education Program Competency Scale (Ilik & Sarı, 2018). The first sub-scale of the scale is named "Pre-Preparation for Individualized Education Program (PPIEP)". The second sub-scale is titled "Individualized Education Program Development (IEPD)", and this section covers the basic requirements regarding the IEP preparation process. The third sub-scale is defined as "Family Involvement in Individualized Education Program (FIIEP)" because family support and information are of great importance in the process. The fourth sub-scale is titled "Individualized Education Program Implementation and Evaluation (IEPIE)". Thus, comprehensive information was obtained about the competencies of teachers at all stages of the process. The general Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient of the scale was reported as .98 in the literature; In this study, the Cronbach alpha value for the entire scale was calculated as .98.

## 2.4 Data Analysis

This study aimed to reveal the level of social studies teachers' perceived competence and whether these perceptions differed based on various variables. Data collected through scales during the research process were processed by the researcher in the SPSS 26.0 package program and analyzed using appropriate analysis techniques. First, a Kolmogorov-Smirnov analysis was applied to determine whether the data exhibited a normal distribution. The resulting data are shown in Table 1 below.

**Table 1:** Kolmogorov-Smirnov Analysis Results

IEP Scale	Variable	Variable Type	Statistics	df	p
	Gender		Female	.083	71
Male			.059	50	.200
Seniority		1-5	.197	3	.000
		6-10	.127	15	.200
		11-15	.175	28	.028
Educational Status		16-20	.162	23	.120
		20 years and above	.067	52	.200
		BA	.071	101	.200
		MA	.126	19	.200
School Type		State	.056	116	.200
		Private	.235	5	.200
Special Education Classes Status		Available	.100	26	.200
		None	.058	95	.200
In-Service Training Receiving Status		Available	.112	41	.200
		None	.093	80	.85

As seen in Table 1, the results of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov analysis show that the data met the normal distribution condition ( $p > .05$ ). In this context, the parametric analyses listed below were applied in the analysis of the obtained data.

- Descriptive analyses were conducted to reveal the level of social studies teachers' perceptions of IEP competence.
- An independent samples t-test was conducted to determine whether social studies teachers' perceptions of IEP competence differed based on gender.
- A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to determine whether social studies teachers' perceptions of IEP competence differed based on their seniority. A Tukey test was also used to determine which seniority group the participants' scores on IEP competence perceptions differed significantly based on their seniority.
- A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) test was applied to reveal whether social studies teachers' perceptions of IEP competence differ according to their educational status.
- An independent groups t-test was applied to determine whether social studies teachers' perceptions of IEP competence differed according to the type of school they worked in.
- An independent groups t-test was applied to determine whether social studies teachers' perceptions of IEP competence differed according to whether they took special education courses during their undergraduate education.
- An independent groups t-test was applied to determine whether social studies teachers' perceptions of IEP competence differed according to their status of receiving in-service training on special education.

### 3. Findings

This section presents the findings and their evaluations of the results obtained from the study. Social studies teachers' perceptions of their competencies in preparing individualized education programs and their views on the implementation process are presented along with findings and related data obtained from the "Individualized Education Program Competency Scale."

#### 3.1 Findings on Participants' Perceptions of IEP Competence

The first sub-research question of the study aimed to obtain results related to the question "What is the level of the perceptions of social studies teachers regarding IEP competence?" A descriptive analysis was conducted to address this sub-research question. The results of this analysis are presented below in Table 2.

**Table 2:** Descriptive Statistics of Participants' Perceptions of IEP Competence Scores on the Scale and Subscales

	N	Min.	Max.	X	Ss
IEP SCALE	121	44.00	190.00	128.52	33.63
PPIEP	121	8.00	40.00	28.38	7.36
IEPD	121	9.00	45.00	28.85	8.31
FIIEP	121	5.00	25.00	18.02	4.75
IEPIE	121	16.00	80.00	53.25	15.33

When Table 2 is examined, the arithmetic mean of the scores obtained by 121 participants from the scale is 128.52 and the standard deviation is 33.63. In this case, the arithmetic mean obtained is higher than the scale mid-score (114), which shows that the social studies teachers who participated in the study have a high perception of competence regarding the individualized education program.

#### 3.2 Findings Regarding the Participants' Perceptions of IEP by Gender

The second sub-research question of the study aimed to obtain results related to the question "Do social studies teachers' perceptions of IEP competency differ by their gender?". An independent samples t-test was conducted to address this sub-research question. The results of this analysis are shown below in Table 3.

**Table 3:** Independent Groups t-test Results of Participants' Perceptions of IEP Competence by Gender

	Gender	N	X	S	SD	t	p
Total Scale	Female	71	124.88	34.34	119	1.422	.158
	Male	50	133.68	32.23			
PPIEP	Female	71	27.32	7.53	119	1.915	.058
	Male	50	29.90	6.91			
IEPD	Female	71	27.78	8.50	119	1.687	.094
	Male	50	30.36	7.88			

FIIIEP	Female	71	17.64	4.61	119	1.040	.300
	Male	50	18.56	4.93			
IEPIE	Female	71	52.12	15.74	119	.965	.337
	Male	50	54.86	14.74			

When Table 3 is examined, a t-test revealed no significant difference between the total scale scores of male and female social studies teachers based on gender ( $t=1.422$ ,  $p=.158$ ;  $p>.05$ ). No significant difference was found for the entire scale and its sub-scales. Social studies teachers' perceptions of IEP competence did not differ by gender.

### 3.3 Findings Regarding the Participants' Perceptions of IEP by Seniority

The third sub-research question of the study aimed to obtain results related to the question "Do social studies teachers' perceptions of IEP competence differ by their seniority?" An ANOVA test was applied to examine the sub-scales of the Individualized Education Program Competence Scale and the total scale scores of the participating social studies teachers according to their years of professional seniority. Table 4 shows the arithmetic means and standard deviations of the social studies teachers' IEP competence perception scores by their seniority.

**Table 4:** Arithmetic Means and Standard Deviations Regarding Participants' Perceptions of IEP Competence by Seniority

Seniority	N	X	Ss
Entire Scale	121	128.52	33.63
1-5 years	3	115.66	21.54
6-10 years	15	121.73	32.31
11-15 years	28	111.46	31.80
16-20 years	23	132.39	36.80
20 years and above	56	138.69	30.69

When Table 4 is examined, the arithmetic mean of the scores for the entire scale of competency in preparing an Individual Education Program and the seniority of social studies teachers is found to be ( $X=128.52$ ). The results of one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) comparing the average scores of social studies teachers regarding their perception of IEP competency according to their seniority are shown in Table 5.

**Table 5:** Results of Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) Showing the Comparison of the Mean Scores of Participants' Perceptions of IEP Competence by Seniority

	Sums of Squares	Sd	Mean Squares	F	p
Between Groups	15057.079	4	3764.270	3.617	.008
Within Groups	120719.119	116	1040.682		
<b>Total</b>	<b>135776.198</b>	<b>120</b>			

Table 5 shows a significant difference between the seniority of the social studies teachers and their IEP competency perception scores ( $p=0.008$ ;  $p<0.05$ ). The seniority of the

participating social studies teachers created differences in their IEP competency perceptions. Therefore, a Tukey test was conducted to reveal the differences between the seniority levels. The Tukey test results for the relevant dimensions are shown in Table 6.

**Table 6:** Tukey Test Results on the Difference between Social Studies Teachers' Seniority and Their IEP Competency Perception Scores

(I) Seniority	(J) Seniority	Average Differences	St Error	p
	6-10 years	-6.06667	20.40277	.998
1-5 years	11-15years	4.20238	19.59748	1.00
	16-20 years	-16.72464	19.80255	.916
	20 years and above	-23.02564	19.15482	.750
	1-5 years	6.06667	20.40277	.998
6-10 years	11-15 years	10.26905	10.32211	.857
	16-20 years	-10.65797	10.70635	.857
	20 years and above	-16.95897	9.45473	.382
	1-5 years	-4.20238	19.59748	1.00
11-15 years	6-10 years	-10.26905	10,32211	.857
	16-20 years	-20.92702	9.07823	.151
	20 years and above	-27.22802	7.56177	*.004
	1-5 years	16.72464	19.80255	.916
16-20 years	6-10 years	10.65797	10.70635	.857
	11-15 years	20.92702	9.07823	.151
	20 years and above	-6.30100	8.07838	.936
	1-5 years	23.02564	19.15482	.750
≥ 20 years	6-10 years	16.95897	9.45473	.382
	11-15 years	27.22802	7.56177	*.004
	16-20 years	6.30100	8.07838	.936

According to the results of the Tukey test conducted to determine the years between which the differences in scores related to IEP competence perceptions of social studies teachers occur according to their seniority, there are differences between the mean scores of "social studies teachers who have served for 11-15 years" ( $X=111.46$ ) and "social studies teachers who have served for 20 years and above" ( $X=138.69$ ). It is observed that the IEP competence perceptions of social studies teachers who have served for 11-15 years are behind those of social studies teachers who have served for 20 years and above.

### 3.4 Findings Regarding the Participants' Perceptions of IEP by Different Educational Attainment

The fourth sub-research question of the study aimed to obtain results related to the question, "Do social studies teachers' perceptions of IEP competence vary by educational attainment?" An ANOVA test was applied to examine the sub-scales of the Individualized Education Program Competence Scale and the total scale scores of the participating social studies teachers by educational background. Table 13 shows the arithmetic means and standard deviations of the social studies teachers' IEP competence perception scores by educational attainment.

**Table 7:** Arithmetic Means and Standard Deviations Regarding Social Studies Teachers' IEP Competency Perceptions by Educational Attainment

Educational Attainment	N	X	Ss
BA	101	127.93	33.85
MA	19	131.63	34.13
Doctorate	1	129.00	
<b>Total</b>	<b>121</b>	<b>128.52</b>	<b>33.63</b>

When Table 7 is examined, the arithmetic mean of the scores for the entire scale of social studies teachers' educational attainment and their competency in preparing an Individual Education Program was found to be ( $X=128.52$ ). The results of one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) comparing the average scores of social studies teachers' IEP competency perceptions according to their educational attainment are shown in Table 8.

**Table 8:** Results of Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) Showing the Comparison of the Mean Scores of Social Studies Teachers' IEP Competency Perceptions by Educational Attainment

	Sum of Squares	Sd	Mean Squares	F	p
Between Groups	219.262	2	109.631	.095	.909
Within Groups	135556.936	118	1148.788		
<b>Total</b>	<b>135776.198</b>	<b>120</b>			

When Table 8 is examined, no significant difference is observed between the scores of social studies teachers regarding their IEP competence perceptions and their educational attainments ( $p=0.909$ ;  $p>0.05$ ). The educational attainments of the social studies teachers participating in the study did not create a difference in terms of their IEP competence perceptions.

### 3.5 Findings Regarding the Participants' Perceptions of IEP by School Sector

The fifth sub-research question of the study aimed to obtain results related to the question, "Do social studies teachers' perceptions of IEP competency differ by school type?" An independent samples t-test was conducted to address this sub-research question. The results of this analysis are shown below in Table 9.

**Table 9:** Examining Social Studies Teachers' IEP Competency Perceptions by School Type (t-test)

	School Type	N	X	S	SD	T	p
Entire Scale	State	116	128.88	33.61	119	.577	.840
	Private	5	120.00	36.78			
PPIEP	State	116	28.46	7.44	119	.553	.374
	Private	5	26.60	5.68			
IEPD	State	116	28.90	8.39	119	.342	.419
	Private	5	27.60	6.91			
FIIEP	State	116	18.09	4.75	119	.780	.796
	Private	5	16.40	4.87			

IEPIE	State	116	53.42	15.19	119	.573	.759
	Private	5	49.40	20.08			

When Table 9 is examined, the t-test found that there was no significant difference between the total scale scores of social studies teachers based on the school type ( $t=0.577$ ,  $p=.840$ ;  $p>0.05$ ). No significant difference was found for the entire scale and its sub-scales. Social studies teachers' perceptions of IEP competence did not differ based on the school type.

### 3.6 Findings Regarding the Participants' Perceptions of IEP with Respect to Their Special Education Training Status

The sixth sub-research question of the study aimed to obtain results related to the question, "Do social studies teachers' perceptions of IEP competency differ depending on whether they have taken a "Special Education" course in their undergraduate education?" An independent samples t-test was conducted to address this sub-research question. The results of this analysis are shown below in Table 10.

**Table 10:** Examination of Social Studies Teachers' IEP Competency Perceptions Based on the Special Education Course-taking Status (t-test results)

Special Education		N	X	S	SD	T	p
Entire Scale	Available	26	135.38	32.89	119	1.176	.242
	None	95	126.64	33.76			
PPIEP	Available	26	29.34	7.57	119	.747	.457
	None	95	28.12	7.32			
IEPD	Available	26	29.42	8.32	119	.394	.694
	None	95	28.69	8.35			
FIIIEP	Available	26	18.96	4.27	119	1.136	.258
	None	95	17.76	4.86			
IEPIE	Available	26	57.65	14.96	119	1.662	.099
	None	95	52.05	15.29			

When Table 10 is examined, a t-test revealed no significant difference between the total scale scores of social studies teachers based on whether they had taken special education courses during their undergraduate education ( $t=1.176$ ,  $p=.242$ ;  $p>0.05$ ). No significant difference was found for the entire scale and its sub-scales. Social studies teachers' perceptions of IEP competence did not differ based on whether they had taken special education courses during their undergraduate education.

### 3.7 Findings Regarding the Participants' Perceptions of IEP with Respect to Their Professional Development in Special Education

The seventh sub-research question of the study aimed to obtain results related to the question, "Do social studies teachers' perceptions of IEP competency differ depending on their status of receiving in-service training in "Special Education?" An independent

samples t-test was conducted to address this sub-research question. The results of this analysis are shown below in Table 11.

**Table 11:** Examination of Social Studies Teachers' IEP Competency Perceptions Based on the Variable of Receiving In-service Training on "Special Education" (t-test Results)

In-Service Training		N	X	S	SD	T	p
Entire Scale	Available	41	139.21	34.18	119	2.562	.012
	None	50	123.03	32.20			
PPIEP	Available	41	30.70	7.59	119	2.534	.013
	None	50	27.20	7.00			
IEPD	Available	41	31.56	8.41	119	2.672	.010
	None	50	27.46	7.97			
FIIIEP	Available	41	19.14	5.00	119	1.878	.063
	None	50	17.45	4.43			
IEPIE	Available	41	57.80	15.36	119	2.380	.019
	None	50	50.92	14.88			

When Table 11 is examined, as a result of the t-test, a significant difference was found between the total scale scores of social studies teachers according to the variable of having received in-service training on "special education" ( $t=2.562$ ,  $p=.012$ ;  $p>.05$ ). A significant difference was found for the entire scale and its sub-scales. Social studies teachers' perceptions of IEP competence differ according to the variable of having received in-service training on "special education." This shows that teachers who have received in-service training have higher perceptions of IEP competency. In terms of sub-scale 3 (Family Involvement), although the mean score of those who have received in-service training is higher ( $\bar{X} = 19.14 > \bar{X} = 17.45$ ), this difference was not found to be statistically significant ( $p = .063$ ).

## 4. Discussion, Conclusion & Recommendations

### 4.1 Discussion

This study aimed to examine social studies teachers' perceptions of their competencies regarding individualized education programs (IEPs) and to explore whether these perceptions differ according to various variables. The findings were interpreted in relation to the existing literature.

The results indicated that teachers' perceptions of IEP competence were generally above the scale midpoint, suggesting a high level of perceived competence. Among the sub-dimensions, the highest scores were observed in the implementation and evaluation of IEPs, whereas the lowest scores were found in family involvement. These findings are consistent with previous studies reporting high levels of perceived competence or positive attitudes toward IEPs (Timuralp-Akbayır, 2023; Duman & Kozikoğlu, 2024; Yüçetürk, 2022). However, some studies have reported moderate or insufficient competence levels (Koca, 2022; Çıkılı *et al.*, 2020; Yüksel *et al.*, 2020; Fidan, 2022). These inconsistencies may stem from differences in professional experience, training

opportunities, and institutional support. While high perceived competence reflects positive professional awareness, it should be noted that perception alone may not directly translate into effective practice, highlighting the importance of continuous professional development.

Regarding gender, no significant difference was found in teachers' perceptions of IEP competence. This finding is consistent with previous studies (Fidan, 2022; Karakurt, 2020; Adalıoğlu, 2023; Şengün, 2022) and suggests that gender is not a determining factor in IEP-related competencies. This may be attributed to the standardized nature of teacher education and in-service training processes.

In contrast, professional seniority emerged as a significant variable affecting competence perceptions. Teachers with 20 or more years of experience reported higher competence compared to those with 11–15 years of experience. This finding supports the view that professional experience enhances practical knowledge and self-efficacy in IEP processes. Similar results have been reported by Şahbaz and Güder (2022). However, some studies have found no significant effect of seniority (Evyapan, 2020; Yüçetürk, 2022), which may indicate that recent graduates benefit from updated training, whereas experienced teachers may rely more on accumulated practice. Therefore, the relationship between experience and competence appears to be influenced by both formal training and experiential learning.

The findings also showed that educational attainment did not significantly affect teachers' perceptions of IEP competence. This result is in line with previous research (Koca, 2022; Ekşi, 2010) and suggests that postgraduate education alone may not be sufficient to enhance practical competencies related to IEP preparation. Instead, applied training and professional learning opportunities seem to play a more critical role.

Similarly, no significant difference was found based on school type. This finding is consistent with the literature (Kanmaz, 2024; Koca, 2022) and indicates that institutional context may have a limited effect on perceived competence. Rather, individual-level factors such as professional development and experience may be more influential.

Another notable finding is that taking a special education course during undergraduate education did not significantly affect competence perceptions. This suggests that the effectiveness of such courses may depend on their content, duration, and emphasis on practice. While some studies report similar findings, others (e.g., Fidan, 2022) indicate a partial effect, implying that the quality and practical orientation of training are critical factors.

In contrast, in-service training was found to have a significant positive effect on teachers' perceptions of IEP competence. Teachers who received in-service training reported higher competence levels across most dimensions. This finding is supported by previous research (Bingöl, 2024; Camadan, 2012), which emphasizes the role of continuous professional development in enhancing teachers' skills and reducing difficulties in IEP preparation. Although no significant difference was observed in the family involvement dimension, the overall findings highlight the importance of practice-based in-service training programs.

Overall, the results suggest that teachers' perceptions of IEP competence are more strongly associated with professional experience and in-service training than with demographic variables or formal education. This underscores the need to prioritize continuous, practice-oriented professional development to enhance the effectiveness of IEP implementation.

In conclusion, while the findings of this research reveal that social studies teachers perceive themselves as competent in IEP processes, this perception alone does not guarantee effectiveness in practice. At this point, the continuity and quality of practice-based in-service training play a critical role in bridging the gap between perception and practice. Therefore, increasing systematic and practice-oriented professional development opportunities focused on improving teachers' knowledge and skills regarding IEP processes is of great importance in strengthening the effectiveness of inclusive education practices and ensuring equal learning opportunities for all students.

## 4.2 Results

The research findings indicate that social studies teachers generally perceive their competencies regarding individualized education programs (IEPs) at a high level. This result reveals that teachers perceive themselves as competent in the educational processes for individuals with special needs and possess the basic competencies related to the preparation, implementation, and evaluation of IEPs. However, it is observed that these perceptions of competence do not differ according to some demographic variables, while they change significantly with respect to others.

When the findings were examined, it was determined that social studies teachers' perceptions of IEP competence did not show a significant difference according to gender, educational status, school type, and whether they took a "Special Education" course during their undergraduate education. This indicates that perceptions of IEP competence may be more closely related to professional experience and in-service learning processes rather than individual characteristics. Indeed, a significant difference was observed in competence perceptions according to the seniority variable; teachers with 11-15 years of experience were found to have a lower competence perception compared to teachers with 20 years or more of experience. This finding suggests that increasing professional experience strengthens self-efficacy perceptions towards IEP processes and that experience is a determining factor in this area.

On the other hand, it was determined that teachers' participation in "in-service training on special education" had a significant effect on their perceptions of IEP competence. Teachers who received in-service training were found to have higher perceived competence across the scale as a whole and its sub-scales. However, although the average scores of teachers who received in-service training were higher in the factor involving family involvement in the IEP process, this difference was not statistically significant. This indicates that while in-service training is effective in improving overall IEP competence, additional support and application-oriented training may be needed,

especially in more complex and multi-dimensional processes such as family participation.

Overall, the findings indicate that teachers' perceptions of IEP competence are significantly related to their professional experience and in-service training processes; however, demographic characteristics and formal education background have a limited impact on these perceptions. These results suggest that policies and practices aimed at improving teachers' competence in IEP processes should focus particularly on in-service training and practice-based professional development activities.

### **4.3 Recommendations**

This research reveals that in-service training and professional experience play a decisive role in strengthening social studies teachers' perceptions of their competence in IEPs. Accordingly, it is necessary to systematically plan and disseminate practice-based in-service training programs aimed at improving teachers' knowledge and skills regarding IEPs. Furthermore, it is important to include more content in teacher training programs that develops practical skills related to inclusive education and IEP implementation. Encouraging school-based collaboration models and creating structures that support the active participation of families in the educational process are considered important elements that can increase the effectiveness of IEP implementation.

From a research perspective, there is a need for more studies examining social studies teachers' perceptions of IEP competence in the context of different variables. The use of mixed methods approaches in future research will contribute to a deeper understanding of teachers' experiences. Furthermore, comparative studies conducted with different data collection tools can enable the validation and generalization of current findings. In particular, conducting experimental studies examining the effectiveness of in-service training will make significant contributions to policies and practices aimed at improving the quality of IEP implementation.

### **5. Limitations**

This study has some limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the study was conducted only with social studies teachers working in Niğde province during the 2024–2025 academic year; therefore, the findings cannot be generalized to all social studies teachers in Türkiye. Second, the data were collected using a self-report scale, which reflects teachers' perceived competencies rather than their actual classroom practices or observed performance. Finally, the study employed a quantitative descriptive survey design. Future research could adopt mixed-methods or qualitative approaches and include participants from different regions to provide a more comprehensive understanding of teachers' competencies in individualized education program (IEP) development and implementation.

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### **Ethics Statement**

The study was approved by the Ethics Committee of Niğde Ömer Halisdemir University (Approval No: 2024/01-32, Date: 31/01/2024). Participation was voluntary, informed consent was obtained from all participants.

### **Authors' Contributions**

Dilara aylak contributed to the conception of the study, data collection, and the preparation of the master's thesis on which this article is based. Buket Ündemir supervised the research process, contributed to the study design, data analysis and interpretation, substantially revised and developed the manuscript, and prepared the final version for publication. Both authors reviewed and approved the final manuscript.

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### **Conflict of Interest Statement**

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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