



INVESTIGATION OF OPINIONS OF TEACHERS OF
THE HEARING-IMPAIRED CHILDREN ABOUT SERVING
AS A SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHER

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Abstract:

The aim of this study was to investigate the opinions of teachers of the hearing-impaired children about serving as a special education teacher. The research was designed as a descriptive case study within the framework of qualitative research methods. Two criteria that the participants to be included in the study should have were determined as follows: graduating from universities' hearing-impaired teaching programs and serving as a special education classroom teacher in schools affiliated to the MNE. The participants consist of 51 teachers meeting the specified criteria. Semi-structured interviews were held with 5 of the participants, and data were collected from 46 of them through an open-ended questionnaire. Given the pandemic period conditions we currently experience, the e-interviews were conducted using Zoom, while open-ended questionnaires were collected via Google Forms. Descriptive analysis technique was used in the analysis of the research data. The descriptive analysis process consists of four stages: creating a thematic framework, processing of data according to the thematic framework,

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identification of findings, and interpretation of findings. Study findings revealed that the fact that teachers serve out-of-field they graduated from led them to feel insufficient in terms of professional knowledge and competency. Besides, it was observed that they failed to provide sufficient benefit to the students, they had difficulties communicating with families, they failed to cooperate with the school administrators or other colleagues and could not find the necessary support.

Keywords: special education, teaching the hearing impaired, undergraduate education, qualitative research

1. Introduction

The history of special education teaching program in Turkey goes back to the 1950s. The first special education branch was established within the body of the Gazi Institute of Education in 1952-1953, under the leadership of Dr. Mitat Enc, but it was closed down in 1955 due to problems with the Ministry of National Education (MNE) (Altunya, 2006). After 29 years of neglect with certificates given through short-term in-service training, the special education teaching program was reopened in 1984 within the Anadolu University, while this was followed by the Special Education Department, which was founded in 1986 within the Gazi University Faculty of Education (Özyürek, 2008). Today, special education teaching programs provide training for students within 47 universities in total, including 33 state universities, 8 foundation universities, and 6 universities of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) (CHD, 2021).

While it was aimed to train comprehensive special education teachers in the first years when special education programs were opened, changing objectives of the departments led to the structuring of the special education departments. Following the restructuring as the Mentally-Handicapped Teaching, Hearing-Impaired Teaching, and Visually-Impaired Teaching Programs, the first Hearing-Impaired Teaching Program was offered in Anadolu University in 1989 (Özyürek, 2008). Teacher training programmes have continued with the Hearing-Impaired Teaching Program in the Karadeniz Technical University (KTU) in 1998 and in the Ondokuz Mayıs University (OMU) in 2001 (KTU, 2021; OMU, 2021).

The characteristics of individuals with special needs differ in many aspects (Cavkaytar, 2014). As taking care of individuals from different types of disabilities requires different teacher competencies, this reconstructing becomes understandable. In fact, the diversity in profiles of students with special needs failed when teacher requirement in this field is met by teachers who received training for normally developing students (Nartgün, 2004; Nougaret et al, 2005).

The principles enforced in the appointment of teachers in Turkey are set by the Board of Education. Given the teacher appointment principles prevailed until 2013; it was stipulated that teachers who graduate from any branch would first apply for the staff in their field, and that teachers of the visually-impaired and hearing-impaired children

would be appointed to the staff of the mentally handicapped teaching program if the teachers graduated from the Mentally Handicapped Teaching Program fail to meet this need (MNE, 2009). Besides, same board decision specifies that the teachers who graduated from the special education department and the special education teacher education program can be appointed to these branches when they certify that they took 30% of their course credits during their undergraduate study from the courses in the mentally handicapped, hearing-impaired or visually-impaired teaching programs (2009 Board of Education; Board Decision No. 80; Item No. 29, 42, 85). Teacher appointment principles published in 2014 were amended and special education department, special education, mentally handicapped, visually-impaired, and hearing-impaired teaching programs were gathered in the special education appointment field (MNE, 2014). In 2015, the Council of Higher Education (CoHE) made a decision to unify all of the Mentally Handicapped, Visually-Impaired, Hearing-Impaired, and Gifted Children Teaching Programs under a single department for reasons such as this change made by the Board of Education, failure to meet the need for special education teachers in the field, and special education teaching programs in different countries. According to this regulation numbered 75850160-105.01.02.01-21249 and dated 11.04.2016, these programmes were unified under the name of "Special Education Teacher Education Program".

Unifying these fields that currently have intense content led the questioning of the qualifications of special education teacher education programs. Ulay (2018) discovered that special education teacher education programs did not meet the teaching qualifications for the mentally handicapped teaching program due to the reduction of courses for individuals with mental disabilities. Doğan and Güven (2021), on the other hand, stated that the courses in the special education teacher education program mostly coincide with the Mentally Handicapped Teaching Program and they suggested increasing the number of courses for different types of disabilities. Courses offered in the special education teacher education programs are directly related to the number of academicians in the relevant field of the university where the program takes place.

Unifying the fields denotes that teachers graduating from these branches at present will take care of individuals in the disability groups which they could not receive sufficient knowledge due to intensive course contents. As a matter of fact, until 2014, the appointment of teachers of the hearing-impaired children, who were employed in the primary and secondary schools of the hearing-impaired children, vocational high schools of the hearing-impaired children, and special education and rehabilitation centers, as special education teachers necessitated them to work with individuals with different types of disabilities. The examination of this working process, which will require the use of different knowledge from the hearing-impaired teaching undergraduate program and the determination of possible problems and solution suggestions are thought to serve a qualified education process. In this regard, the aim of this study was to examine the views of teachers of the hearing-impaired children on serving as a special education teacher. Accordingly, the following research questions were sought:

- 1) What are the opinions of teachers of the hearing-impaired children about the problems they experience while serving as a special education teacher?
- 2) What are the solution offers of teachers of the hearing-impaired children related to the problems they experience while serving as a special education teacher?
- 3) What are the expectations and suggestions of teachers of the hearing-impaired children who serve as a special education teacher?

2. Material and Methods

2.1 Research Model

Qualitative research enables to evaluate people's perceptions of events and phenomena with the eyes of them (Neuman, 2010). Yin (1984) defines the case study as a research method in which a researcher conducts in-depth investigate of an event or phenomenon with the questions of "how" and "why". Case studies are one of the research methods recommended for use in educational studies (Shulman, 1986). The aim of the study was to investigate the opinions of teachers of hearing-impaired children on serving as special education teachers. In this context, the research was designed as a descriptive case study within the framework of qualitative research methods.

2.2 Study Group

Criterion sampling, one of purposive sampling method, allows researchers to determine participants using the criteria they have designated in line with the research purpose (Glesne, 2014). Given the research objective, two criteria that the participants to be included in the study should have were determined as follows:

- 1) Graduating from universities' hearing-impaired teaching programs,
- 2) Serving as a special education classroom teacher in schools affiliated to the MNE.

Two of the researchers graduated from the hearing-impaired teaching programs in Anadolu University and Karadeniz Technical University. Therefore, the participants planned to take part in the research are people who can be reached by researchers under the determined criteria. The participants consist of 51 teachers meeting the specified criteria. Semi-structured interviews were held with 5 of the participants, and data were collected from 46 of them through an open-ended questionnaire.

2.3 Data Collection Tools

Case studies typically include several data collection tools such as observations, interviews and relevant documents (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2018). Interviews are one of the basic data collection techniques used in qualitative research (Aull Davies, 1999). In this regard, the research data were obtained through semi-structured interviews and open-ended questionnaires. The researchers created draft questions to cover all research questions. Later, the opinions of three experts in the field were consulted, necessary corrections were made, and the questions were finalized. The questions prepared were

applied to the participants through semi-structured interviews and open-ended questionnaires.

2.4 Data Collection Process

Interviews can be conducted face-to-face, but if participants are at great distances from each other or it is difficult to convene, e-interviews can be preferred as well (Linabarry and Hammel, 2017). Considering the conditions of the pandemic period we are in, it was decided to collect research data online. Data were collected through semi-structured e-interviews. The interviews were conducted using Zoom, according to the interview schedule created by determining the times when the participants are available for the interview. Open-ended questionnaires, on the other hand, were collected via Google Forms. The prepared questions were transferred to Google Forms; and the participants were asked to respond the questions after the link was shared with them.

2.5 Data Analysis

Descriptive analysis technique was used in the analysis of the research data. The descriptive analysis process consists of four stages: creating a thematic framework, processing of data according to the thematic framework, identification of findings, and interpretation of findings (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2018). First, data was itemized and then accuracy of inventory was checked. Later, the descriptive framework was created by the researchers considering the research data and theoretical framework. The data were transferred to the framework created and the identification of findings process was started.

2.6 Validity and Reliability

There are many different methods of ensuring validity and reliability in case studies. Getting expert opinion on research data is one these methods as well (Merriam, 1998). During the preparation of the interview questions of the research, opinions of three experts in the field were asked for. Besides, expert opinion was asked for again, while creating the thematic framework for research data. It is thought that the reliability of the research was enhanced through detailed descriptions for the research and data analysis process.

3. Results

When the data obtained are analyzed, the opinions of hearing-impaired children's teachers serving in a different field were collected under the titles of: experiences, source of support, and solution offers.

3.1 Experiences

a. Education

While sharing their experiences, the teachers stated that they had difficulty coping with the problem behaviors. Teachers of children with autism and severe intellectual disabilities, in particular, stated that they had difficulty coping with the problem behavior. One of the teachers mentioned that he/she had difficulty learning the Braille Alphabet in the education of visually-impaired students. They underlined that they had difficulties because they did not learn about problem behavior while graduating as a teacher of the hearing-impaired children. It was observed that teachers had difficulties especially in the first years and in the education of children with severe intellectual disabilities. It was seen that teachers of students with mild mental disabilities did not have difficulties.

b. Students

Teachers expressed that they were not efficient enough for students, especially in the first years when they started working with students with different types of disabilities. The opinion of a teacher on the subject was as follows: *"We experience a setback especially in terms of the student. The teacher of hearing-impaired children remains incapable to benefit the mentally handicapped students."*

c. Families

When teachers' opinions about families are analyzed, it was seen that high expectations of families come to the forefront. However, contrary to the high expectations of families, it was seen that families regard teachers as caregivers. A teacher, who stated that families are biased because they regard him/her out-of-field, expressed his/her opinions on the subject as follows: *"At first, parents may act with prejudice towards the out-of-field teacher, but as the education process continues successfully, this prejudice is overcome."* Stating that he/she felt inadequate towards the families as he/she is a graduate of hearing-impaired teaching program, the teacher uttered that *"You always wonder whether there is a more accurate solution, while directing the family."*

d. Experts

When the opinions of teachers about school management and their colleagues are examined, cooperation was observed to be the prominent issue. Teachers stated that the level of cooperation was not sufficient. Teachers mentioned that although they were satisfied with the attitudes of school principals to themselves and to special education, they were not supported by school principals sufficiently.

e. Job satisfaction

The teachers pointed out that they felt professionally incompetent in the first years in particular. A teacher who stated his/her opinions on the subject said the following: *"I received an intensive education and internship training for the hearing-impaired people in subjects such as instruments, language courses, auditory training for four years. At the moment, I cannot find a field where I can use this knowledge of mine. I feel incompetent in my professional life and in the education of children with autism, in particular. I have the problem of internalization not only in terms of information but also psychologically."* Another teacher stated that he/she was

not satisfied professionally, expressing the situation he/she is in like 'flogging a dead horse'.

f. Positive experiences

Participants stated that serving in the education of children with different types of disabilities as a teacher of the hearing-impaired children provided experience to them, that they got the chance to know different children and had the opportunity to improve themselves. One teacher's opinion about the subject were as follows: *"Special education is a very wide range...you have the chance to recognize, learn and touch all colors."* Another positive experience that stands out was that as the participants were teachers of the hearing-impaired children, they contribute to children's language development. *"This was very beneficial for mentally handicapped and autistic students, who suffer from speech defect. I got very good results in language education."* Another teacher mentioned that, *"Since the language-speech disorders can be observed in all disability groups, I felt more competent and developed myself in this regard."* Another teacher explained that working with mentally handicapped students is easier and more enjoyable for him/her and added, *"I am the teacher of children with mild intellectual disability, but our courses are easier and more fun compared to the courses of hearing-impaired children, so I am happy with that."*

3.2 Source of support

a. Experience

It is seen that the teachers' experiences gained over time are an important source of support in overcoming their difficulties. Teachers stated that they overcame difficulties by experiencing over time.

b. Intern

Participants stated that they received support from prospective teachers who came to their classes. Teachers receive support from trainee teachers who come to their classes, especially in terms of learning methods and techniques in practicing. One teacher stated that, *"We have trainees, these students were very well educated, because they were practicing in the classroom, I researched when I saw them, and I read about these subjects. These have definitely helped me a lot."*

c. Partner

Expressing that they receive support from the teachers they work with in the classroom, the teachers stated that they received support from their colleagues who are more experienced than them or who are teachers of mentally handicapped people.

d. Internet and books

It was observed that other sources of support of teachers were the Internet and books. Teachers use the internet and books to get the information they need. One of the teachers, who follows the distance education provided by academicians during the pandemic period, stated that these sources were beneficial for him/her.

3.3 Solution offers

a. Separation of the fields

The unification of special education in a single field stands out as the reason for the problems teachers experience. Teachers underlined that separation of their fields would be more beneficial for students and themselves. *"I think it would be more beneficial for them to be trained by educators qualified and specialized on handicap."*

b. In-service training

The teachers stated that the current in-service training was insufficient for them. Teachers, who expressed their opinions on the content of the education provided, mentioned that there should be a more comprehensive education that meets their needs and focuses on practice. They emphasized that an education that will be provided to them in the first years of the transition period would be beneficial.

c. Undergraduate education

Participants state that their undergraduate education is insufficient for serving for those other than hearing-impaired children. One of the teachers pointed out that the fields should be re-separated on the basis of subject, and his/her opinion about undergraduate education was as follow: *"If the curriculum had included courses on the other disability field other than hearing, we would have had the opportunity to work in the field as more qualified teachers in the field of special education."*

d. Postgraduate education

Another solution suggested by the participants was postgraduate education. They stated that taking a postgraduate education would be an important opportunity for them to improve themselves.

e. Placement

It was observed that especially situations experienced in the placement of students in classrooms affect teachers negatively. A teacher who stated that having students with different types of disabilities in the same classroom exerted him/her underlined that, *"The classroom got messed up when visually-impaired and severe mentally handicapped student was sent."*

f. Principals

Teachers uttered that school administration, in particular, should be more knowledgeable about special education, and that administrators should be chosen among special education teachers. They said that although school administrators have positive attitudes towards them, their lack of knowledge is a disadvantage for special education.

g. Family education

Teachers proposed family education and informing of families as a solution offer. They uttered that families had false expectations or could not cooperate adequately as they did not have enough knowledge. They stated that these goal-directed trainings to be provided for the families would be beneficial.

4. Discussion

It was seen that the data obtained from the teachers, who graduated from the Hearing-Impaired Teaching Programs and served in different fields of special education, were collected under the main themes of experience, source of support, and solution offers. It was observed that teachers stated positive and negative opinions about job satisfaction under the theme of experience. In his study carried out with the participation of teachers of hearing-impaired, mentally handicapped, visually-impaired children and preschool teachers, Çiftçi (2015) examined the relationship between teachers' professional competence and burnout levels. In the mentioned study, no statistically significant difference was found in terms of professional competence. However, in line with the findings of this study, it was observed that the participants generally did not have a good knowledge of teaching methods and techniques related to other special education fields, that the participants had difficulty coping with behavioral problems in mentally handicapped students, and that the participants expressed their lack of knowledge about other special education fields. It was found that participants received support from trainees studying in the mentally handicapped teaching program who attend the teaching practice course in their classrooms, their partners they worked in the same classroom, or from the internet and special education books.

In their study conducted with special education teachers, Sarıçam and Sakız (2014) found a negative relationship between teacher efficacy and burnout. Teachers' professional competence affects their burnout levels. Karahan and Balat (2011) concluded that as teachers' self-efficacy increases, their burnout levels decrease. Johnson (2010) examined job satisfaction in a study involving special education teachers and concluded that this factor is an important variable in continuing the profession. Similar findings were found in this study, too. While it was stated that teachers could not achieve job satisfaction and that working with hearing-impaired students is more satisfying than other fields, it was observed that they described the working process in different special education fields other than hearing-impaired classrooms using metaphors such as 'flogging a dead horse'. However, this opinion does not cover all the participants. It was seen that some participants reported serving in different fields as positive experiences such as recognizing and touching all colors.

In the study carried out by Aydemir, Diken, Yıkılmış, Aksoy and Özokçu (2015), the burnout levels of special education teachers by the school variable were found as Autistic Children Education Center (OÇEM), Job Training Centers, Business Schools, and Special Elementary Schools, respectively. In this study, it was found that teachers with CRC experience have less problems while serving in CRC compared to schools. It was reported that although they graduated from the hearing-impaired teaching programs, serving in other fields of special education in the CRCs, being mentally handicapped classrooms in the first place, is more problem-free compared to serving in schools. The main reason for this is described with the fact that standard inventory is used in processes

such as diagnosis and evaluation in the CRCs, while it is necessary to have methods, techniques and knowledge specific to special education fields in in-class practices.

Studies revealed that families did not have sufficient knowledge, they have very high or low expectations from teachers, they have communication problems with teachers, and they did not fulfill their duties (Karasu and Mutlu, 2014; Altinkurt, 2008). Although there were contradictory findings to the literature among the results obtained from this study, data coinciding with the literature was reached as well. The majority of participants underlined that they had difficulties in communicating with families, they are of the opinion that families tend to take part in classroom practices and that families do not have sufficient knowledge about special education. When compared to the education of the hearing-impaired children, in particular, it was observed that the expectations of families with mentally handicapped children are very different from the expectations of families of hearing-impaired children, it was found that they can communicate better and more clearly with the parents of hearing-impaired children. It was determined that some of the participants did not have any communication problems with the families and carried out an ideal process.

School principals need to be informed about special education, to provide convenience in meeting the needs of special education teachers and students, and to be open to cooperation (Sivrikaya and Yıkımsı, 2016; Kocaman, 2015). Similarly, in light with the statements of teachers serving in inclusive classrooms or special sub-classes, in particular, it was concluded that school administrators have lack of knowledge on special education, they did not know the special education, and that negative discrimination was encountered against teachers and students in inclusive classrooms. Participants stated that their colleagues other than the special education branch also have lack of knowledge, as in school administrators; besides, it was determined that there were problems in the cooperation process.

5. Conclusion

Within the scope of the study, opinions of teachers, who graduated from the hearing-impaired teaching program, were taken about their career which they continue in other fields of special education such as mentally handicapped, visually-impaired and autistic children's classrooms. It was concluded that the fact that teachers serve out-of-field they graduated from led them to feel insufficient in terms of professional knowledge and competency. Besides, it was observed that they failed to provide sufficient benefit to the students, they had difficulties communicating with families, they failed to cooperate with the school administrators or other colleagues and could not find the necessary support. In addition to the small number of participants expressing positive opinions, it was determined that participants experience negativities in the first years of their profession, while they overcome these problems in time and adapted to the field where they serve in. It should be noted that the disability levels of the students in the classrooms of teachers are effective in the opinions of teachers. It was observed that teachers who work with

students with mild disabilities have a more positive perspective compared to teachers who work with students with moderate and severe disabilities.

The sources that the participants regard as a support to overcome the problems they experience differ. It was determined that experience was the main support element in general. It was observed that as teachers gain experience in their field, they solve problems and have a more positive perspective. Other sources of support include trainees who take teaching practice courses in their classrooms, their partners they work with, internet resources and special education books. It was concluded that they used these sources to learn the methods and techniques they need in their field of study, in particular.

Finally, the participants made suggestions on solving the problems they experienced. The most striking suggestion among them was the proposal to re-separate special education fields. It was stated that the system, as before, should continue on specialization at a single disability field, in the form of the teacher of mentally handicapped, hearing-impaired, and visually-impaired children. On the other hand, there were solution offers, such as providing in-service training for all special education fields, offering postgraduate opportunities to teachers serving in a field other than their graduation, popularizing family trainings, and choosing school principals from special education teachers in schools that have special education students.

6. Recommendations

In order to eliminate lack of theoretical knowledge of teachers of hearing-impaired children serving in different special education fields, informative seminars, courses or in-service trainings can be organized on other special education branches, especially in the mentally handicapped and autism branches. The content of these trainings should predominantly include teaching methods and techniques in which ideal examples can be presented. Awareness-raising activities about special education for teachers and administrators who graduated from general education branches should be increased. Similar academic studies can be carried out with teachers who work with hearing-impaired students but graduate from other special education fields such as mentally handicapped and visually-impaired teaching programs.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interests.

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