



Exploring the Competencies and Challenges of English Language Teachers in Teaching Inclusive Education Programs: A Qualitative Research

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to reveal the inclusive educational competencies and experiences of English teachers. In this study, a qualitative research method was used. The research was carried out with semi-structured interviews conducted with eight teachers, four of whom are male and four of whom are female, in Bartın Province in the 2014-2015 academic year. After the interviews, the research data were analyzed by descriptive analysis techniques. As a result of the study, the most important problems faced by teachers in practice are lack of parental support, studying inclusive students in crowded classrooms without professional support, and difficulties in controlling an inclusion student. The findings of the research have provided some suggestions. It is thought that the practices of inclusion will be more successful by reducing the number of students, providing teachers to take in-service education, providing psychological support to families, and including them in the process.

Keywords: English Language Teachers, Inclusive Education, Challenges

Introduction

Education is the process of selected and planned activities to ensure the highest level of social development and personal abilities of individuals (Tezcan, 1984), and education is one of the basic rights that every human has. Education actually helps individuals to lead an independent life in society (Kot et al., 2015).

However, in every society, besides healthy individuals with normal development, there are individuals who differ significantly from their peers in terms of physical, mental, emotional and social characteristics that need special education. When these differences are within certain limits, students benefit from general education services. However, when differences are more prominent, general education services are insufficient and special education services are required (Cavkaytar, 2013). They cannot provide independent living skills without support.

It is known that about 10% of individuals are disabled in every society. In Turkey, about 13% of the population has a disability, of which 6% has no education at all, and

36.3% is illiterate. In this context, it can be said that disabled people cannot use the educational rights with their peers, which is one of the basic rights (Demirtaş, 2019).

Special education is the whole of the education services that are planned specifically for the individual with disabilities in cognitive, behavioral, social-emotional, physical and sensory areas and aim to maximize the individual's possibility of living independently (Diken, 2013; Eripek, 1998). Therefore, students who have intellectual disability, hearing impairment, visual impairment, learning difficulties, emotional and behavioral disorders, physical disabilities, speech and language problems, and gifted students benefit from special education services.

The student who needs special education should be placed in the least restrictive educational environment (Kırcaali-İftar, 1998; EARGED, 2010). The least restrictive educational environment is the educational environment where the educational needs of the student will be met at the highest level and where they will be together with their normal peers (DeMonte, 2010). Considering the characteristics of all special education students, the least restrictive education environment for most special education students is inclusive education (Kırcaali-İftar, 1998). The aim of inclusive education is to ensure that students with special needs integrate and adapt with their peers socially, psychologically and academically in general public schools (EARGED, 2010). In accordance with this purpose, legal studies on inclusive education programs started in 1997 in Turkey. However, inclusive education practices started in schools in 1997, there was no concrete development until 2006 in practice (Çankaya & Korkmaz, 2012).

When the literature is examined, research on inclusive education practices has increased in our country in recent years (EARGED, 2010; Çankaya & Korkmaz, 2012; Özen et al., 2013; Kot et al., 2015; Güteryüz & Özdemir, 2015). Sadioglu et al. (2013) indicated that support services provided to teachers for inclusive education schools are insufficient in school. Therefore, it causes the teachers to be the sole responsibility of inclusion practices (Sadioglu, Batu, & Bilgin, 2013). The fact that teachers are alone in the process of inclusive education causes them to have problems with students with special needs. Some teachers have difficulty overcoming these problems (Sucuoğlu & Kargın, 2008; Özmen-Güzel, 2009). Yılmaz (2015) sorted the problems faced by teachers as; a) the classroom environment is not suitable for inclusion students, b) there are problems in diagnosing special education students' assessments, c) families do not accept the situation of students, d) students with normal development do not accept students with special needs, and they display negative attitudes towards them.

Kot et al. (2015) have conducted a study with classroom teachers in Bolu city center. They reported that although teachers' pay attention to inclusive education practices, they do not have enough information about the special needs of them. Another finding of the study is that teachers do not cooperate with experts, professionals and institutions that should be involved in the inclusive education process.

In another study on the subject, Yılmaz (2015) examined the opinions of teachers in a primary school located in the Tepebaşı district of Eskişehir province about inclusive education with structured interview technique. According to the results of the study, it was seen that although teachers have knowledge about inclusive education, they also need in-service training in order to update their information.

In a similar study, Aslan (2020) examined the opinions of science teachers and students regarding inclusion education. Because of the research, they stated that teachers had received in training to inclusion education only during their undergraduate studies, but they do not have sufficient knowledge about inclusion education. The teachers also stated that they needed help in preparing a teaching plan for inclusion students and that they could not use different methods and techniques because the classroom spaces were crowded. Some of the students with normal development expressed their opinion that inclusion students should be educated in a separate classroom and experts should provide inclusion education, while some said that it is not a problem for them to study together with inclusion education students.

Cengiz (2019) examined the self-evaluations of teachers towards inclusion education. According to the results of the study, there was no difference in the gender, age of the teachers, the presence of inclusion students in their classrooms, while there was a difference according to the year of seniority of the teachers. When the quantitative data were examined, it was stated that; a) teachers did not contact experts from outside of the school, b) they only received support from the guidance service within the school, c) teachers did not have enough information about inclusion, d) they needed in-service training on inclusion.

Kara (2016) determined the factors affecting teacher attitudes in inclusive education. When the results are examined, teachers can improve their attitudes according to the type of inadequacy that students have. In order to reduce the workload of teachers and increase their motivation, the classroom environment should be made appropriate, the number of students studying in the classroom should be reduced, and the school administration and parents should support teachers. It has also been noted that the attitudes of teachers who have more knowledge about inclusion are more positive.

Özen et al. (2013) conducted with 10 preschool teachers. The researchers reported that teachers should gain experience in order to apply the activities they practice with normal students to inclusion students. Güleriyüz and Özdemir (2015) deciphered the opinions of elementary school classroom teachers and preschool classroom teachers about inclusive education and revealed the differences between the opinions of the two groups on the subject. According to researcher, teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education vary according to their professional seniority and do not change according to their gender. Teachers have a more positive perception of inclusive education in the first decade of their profession.

When the literature was examined, it was seen that the studies carried out focused on revealing the knowledge and experiences of preschool and primary school teachers for inclusion education in general. The aim of this study is to reveal the inclusive educational competencies and experiences of English teachers. It is thought that the study will contribute to the literature.

Method

In this study, a qualitative research method was used. According to Patton (2002), qualitative research is a research process in which researchers try to understand the facts they are working on as they really are. Maxwell (1996) indicates that there are basically five ways to reach this goal: a) the individuals who participated in the research in which they live to ensure that they are understood depending on their own experience of the natural environment, b) the individuals that participated in the research, environment variables, understanding of the impact of their actions, c) the identification of unintended effects belonging to the research phenomenon, d) within the researched phenomenon where understanding the process or action carried on, and finally, e) the presentation and understanding of causal explanations and links for patients.

In this study, the Case Study pattern was adopted as the research pattern. The most basic feature of the qualitative case study is the in-depth study of one or more situations. That is, various variables related to a situation (environment, method, event, process, etc.) are examined with a holistic approach. It focuses on how these situations are affected by what. Case studies are one of the most frequently used patterns in qualitative research (Shuttleworth, 2008). The most commonly used method in qualitative research is the interview method (Yıldırım, 2005).

Sampling

Purposeful sampling is a technique used for the identification and selection of information-rich cases for the most effective use of limited resources (Patton, 2002). The research was carried out with short semi-structured interviews conducted with eight teachers, four of whom are male and four of whom are female, in Bartın Province in the 2014-2015 academic year.

Table 1: Demographic information of the teachers who teach to inclusion students

Code Name	Gender	Age	Educational Status	Vocational Seniority	Training on inclusion education.
Nuri	E	36	undergraduate	12	In-Service Training + Course
Yakup	E	38	undergraduate	15	In-Service Training + Course
Melek	K	45	undergraduate	24	No
Canan	K	53	undergraduate	30	No
Kezban	K	46	undergraduate	23	No
Ali	E	45	undergraduate	21	In-Service Training
Nisa	K	38	undergraduate	13	No
Hakan	E	42	undergraduate	17	No

* Teachers provide education to students with inclusion in more than one class.

A semi-structured interview form was completed to reveal the inclusive educational experiences and competencies of English teachers. Then, short-term face-to-face interviews were conducted to explain their answers. The semi-structured interview form consists of two parts. In the first part, there are questions about the personal information of the interviewed participants, whether they have received training for inclusive education. In the second part, there are questions that reveal the inclusive educational experiences of teachers. These questions were prepared after analysing the literature.

Analysis of the Data

After the interviews, the research data were analyzed by descriptive analysis technique. Descriptive analysis is used in the processing of data that does not require in-depth analysis. The data obtained in the descriptive analysis are summarized and interpreted according to previously determined themes (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2005). The data were digitized by calculating the frequencies of the codes and themes that appeared as a result of the interview transcripts.

Results

In this section, the questions related to the inclusion practices asked to the teachers and examples of the answers given by the teachers to the questions are presented.

1. Findings of Teachers' Competencies on Inclusion Education

The teachers were asked, whether they attended any course about special needs students? Five of the teachers stated that they did not have enough knowledge about special needs students and that they had learned something from their experiences (Table 1). Three teachers stated that they had taken courses related to the subject in their undergraduate education. Two teachers have been trained both in undergraduate education and in in-service education after becoming teachers. There are some opinions of teachers about it, as follows:

“We have the necessary information about our students who need special education both during their university years and later in the field of special education with in-service trainings after becoming a teacher.” (T2)

“I have not received any education. Honestly, I don't know much about this.” (T5)

“I have not received any education other than the courses seen at the university for children in need of special education (T6)",
I have never received any education.” (T7)

2. Disability Types of Inclusion Students Trained by Teachers

According to the findings of the study, teachers encounter students in 9 disability groups (given in Table 2). Percentages of students that teachers encounter are, 33,33% of the students have learning disabilities, 27.1% have mental disabilities, 7.4% have hearing disabilities, 7.4% have speech and language problems, 5.4% have emotion and behaviour disorders, 2% have physical disabilities, 2% are visually impaired, 1.5% are gifted and gifted, and 3.43% are in the other group.

Table 2: Disability types of inclusion students trained by teachers

Inclusion Students	Frequency	Percent (%)
Learning disabilities	12	33,33
Mental disabilities	9	25,00
Hearing disabilities	3	8,33
Emotion and behaviour disorders	3	8,33
Physical disabilities	4	11,11
Gifted and gifted	3	8,33
In the other group	2	5,56
Total	36	100

As it is seen from Table 2, the inclusive group that teachers often encounter is students with learning disabilities and mental disabilities.

3. The Competencies and Challenges of English Language Teachers

Teachers were asked if they encountered any problems in the education of special needs students? All of the teachers stated that there were problems in the education of special needs students. The teachers were asked what kind of problems they encountered during inclusive education. According to the analysis of the answers, the problems faced by teachers are given in Table 3 together with their percentage and frequency.

Table 3: Problems of teachers regarding inclusive education

The problems faced by teachers	Frequency	Percent (%)
Lack of parental support	4	13,33
Teaching children with disabilities in in crowded classrooms	5	16,67
Difficulties in controlling an inclusion student	4	13,33
Failure of the student to fulfil his responsibilities	3	10,00
antisocial behavior of the student	3	10,00
the reluctance of the student to study	2	6,67
Lack of acceptance by friends.	2	6,67
lack of sufficient support from the administration	3	10,00
inability to communicate with the student	2	6,67
Excessive expectations of students' parents	2	6,67
Total	30	100,00

According to the analysis of the answers, the most common problems faced by teachers were identified as lack of parental support, implementation of inclusive education in a crowded classroom, difficulties in controlling a student who requires special attention in a crowded classroom. The most common problem faced by teachers is the lack of support from inclusive students' parents. A teacher stated as follows:

"There are parents who cannot accept their child with disabilities, therefore do not cooperate with the school and come to see him only once during the year. Therefore, the student has no knowledge about the educational process (T1)."

One of the most difficult problems for teachers in the process of inclusive education is that they teach an inclusive student and other students in the same

environment. Teachers have difficulty applying two different applications to two groups at the same time. Although teachers make efforts to demonstrate two trainings at the same time, they have difficulty balancing between the two groups. Teachers explained it more clearly:

“When I am trying to tell something to a special needs student, on the other hand, I am having trouble with crowded normal students. Similarly, when I am trying to tell something to the crowded normal students, I am having trouble controlling special needs students. It is too hard to balance between them. (T4)”

"When teaching a subject, it is necessary to think about all the students in the class separately. Of course, it is also necessary to take into account the student with special needs. Such a situation is not always easy. (T5)"

“Due to the student's learning difficulties, it is necessary to devote more time to a special education student than to other students. Due to the fact that the student forgets what he has learned, it is necessary to ensure that the student does more repetitions. These are problems that force the teacher. (T6)"

“Due to the student's learning disabilities, it is necessary to devote more time to him/her compared to others. Due to the fact that the student forgets what he has learned, it is necessary to make the student do more repetitions. These are the problems that forced us. (T8)"

"We cannot devote enough time to students with disabilities in the classroom during the lesson. We need to make special needs students do homework prepared for them. You definitely need special attention and time to get special needs students to do their homework. But I can't do that. It is better for us to ignore that the student with special needs is present in the classroom. Sometimes I'm content to briefly outline the topics for them. (T1)”

Controlling the inclusion student in the classroom is another problem that teachers have difficulty with in the process of inclusion education. Teachers about this problem said that:

“He asks a lot of different questions that have nothing to do with the lesson, and he constantly wants to talk about asking something. He's always waiting for you to take care of him. (T3) "

“While I am teaching the lesson, the student is constantly on the move, speaks out loud in the lesson, speaks to himself. And this disrupts the functioning of the lesson. The student also distracts other students by making noise. (T2)”

Some teachers explain that they are unable to teach lessons to inclusion students as follows.

“... Sometimes the problems can also be caused by the student. The students don't do the given instructions. He's being naughty during class. He doesn't care about our warnings. (T8)”

Another teacher expressed the difficulty he/she is experiencing as follows: “The student needs more time to complete the instructions while the course is being processed and the evaluation is being done at the end of the course. However, the limited time makes it difficult for us to get a yield from the student. (T6)”

Another teacher has expressed many common problems:

“I summarize the difficulties I have encountered as follows; the need of more time to prepare individual exam papers, and the lack of our experience necessary for the implementation of the individualized education plan, the difficulty of being able to develop a joint work program with the child's parents, and the lack of support of the guidance counselor in the school. (T4)”

They stated that the teachers had difficulty in education due to the student's antisocial behavior. A teacher's statement is as follows:

“The reluctance of the child is pushing us because of his family problems. We can't get any feedback from the student. He does not enter the same environment as his peers, his unwillingness to participate in educational activities leaves us in a difficult situation. (T7)”

Teachers admit that they cannot contact the student adequately due to the fact that they do not receive special educational support:

“I am experiencing difficulties such as the fact that it is difficult to implement both the main curriculum and the individual education plan at the same time in the classroom, and there is no guidance counsellor at the school, there is a lack of resources where we can get information at any time. (T6)”

Discussion and Conclusion

A group of English teachers were interviewed about inclusion educational practices in Bartın in order to reveal their experience, experience and problems they face. The findings of the research are compared with the literature and discussed below.

Most of the teachers stated that they have little knowledge about the education of students with special needs. Considering the professional seniority of teachers, it is seen that they encounter students with special needs in some way in their professional lives, and they have the opportunity to observe and learn about the education of these students in their educational settings, even if they are not in their classrooms. It is seen that most of the teachers have information about the education of special needs students at the undergraduate level and/or through in-service courses organized by the Ministry of Education. Teachers in general are trying to fulfill their responsibilities. Teachers generally have a positive view of inclusion education.

According to the findings of this study, the perceptions of teachers about inclusive education do not change as their gender and age. This finding is similar to the conclusion of Özdemir (2015) and Cengiz (2019). However, Kara (2016), Cengiz (2019) and, Güleriyüz and Özdemir (2015) determined that teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education vary according to their seniority years and disability type of students. Teachers have a more positive perception of inclusive education in the first decade of their profession. According to Cengiz (2019), the attitudes of teachers who have more knowledge about inclusion are more positive according to those who do not know.

Findings of the study showed that the most disturbing problem that teachers are sad to face in inclusive education is the lack of support from parents. This result is in parallel with the finding of Yılmaz (2015) who stated, "Parents cannot accept their children with disabilities". The inability of parents to accept their children with disabilities has a negative impact on the students' success.

Teachers have difficulty ensuring that students, who do not receive support and acceptance from their family, to follow the guidelines. They do not do his homework, and do not fulfill his responsibilities. Therefore, support from the school administration and students 'parents are important for teachers and students (Cengiz, 2019).

Education in the least restrictive environment has become even more important in the world and in our country. However, one of the problems faced by teachers has to educate an inclusive student with other students. Findings showed teachers have difficulties in displaying different implementations' types to two heterogeneous groups at the same time. They cannot balance the teaching time. Therefore, it is difficult to educate an inclusive student in a crowded classroom. Educating the inclusive students alone without any assistance causes teachers to have problems during the learning process (Sucuoğlu & Kargın, 2008; Özmen-Güzel, 2009).

According to the findings of this study and the results of other studies, it is necessary to reduce the number of students in order to make the classroom environment more comfortable and ensure that the inclusion education is successful (Kara, 2016). Thus, the teacher's workload is also reduced. In addition, reducing the workload of teachers also leads to an increase in their motivation. Therefore, Yılmaz (2015) draws attention to the

teachers who state that the classroom environment is not suitable for inclusion students. Teachers cannot use different methods and techniques in overcrowded classrooms, neither for students with disabilities, nor for regular students (Aslan, 2020).

Özen et al. (2013) stated that not only crowded classrooms, but also the inexperience of the teachers' affects the success of inclusive education in the class. Kot et al. (2015) and Cengiz (2019) stated that teachers attach importance to inclusive educational practices. Teachers receive training in inclusion practices only during their undergraduate education (Aslan, 2020). Hence, many studies have emphasized that teachers do not have sufficient knowledge about inclusion education and that they need in-service training on inclusion (Kot et al., 2015; Cengiz, 2019; Aslan, 2020). Yılmaz (2015), on the other hand, stated that teachers have knowledge about special education and that they also need in-service training to update their knowledge.

According to the findings of the study, it has been revealed that the following measures should be taken in order to carry out the mainstreaming education processes more successfully:

- Carrying out studies aimed at reducing physical regulations, especially classroom ones,
- Making educational arrangements for inclusive education,
- Conducting studies on behavior control and positive behavior development of special needs students in inclusion education,
- Informing all stakeholders about the legal regulations issued regarding the education of individuals with special needs,
- Conducting work in communication and cooperation with the school administration, parents, classroom teacher, special education classroom teacher and guidance counselor,
- Conducting studies related to the Dec of students with normal development and students with special needs to study together,
- Providing on-the-job and practical in-service trainings so that teachers are informed about all aspects of inclusion training and have the equipment,
- It is thought that the problems will be largely solved by preventing clutter in the existing schools by activating the address-based registration system.

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