

SERD | Inclusive education in Turkey

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Received: 19. 11. 2018

Accepted: 30. 12. 2018

How to cite: Kutay, V. (2018). Inclusive education in Turkey. *Studies in Educational Research and Development*, 2(2), 144-162.

Abstract

This paper aims at discussing the concept of inclusion in Turkish education system. In order to do that, firstly, special and inclusive education practices in the world was presented because the term of inclusion as an education issue might be considered as a new concept in Turkey comparing with developed countries such as the USA and the UK. The educational developments in the developed countries are closely followed in Turkey and have a big impact in restructuring the education system Therefore, it may be useful to look at what the approaches and practices were for more inclusive school settings around the world before starting to discuss the place of inclusive education in Turkish education system. Secondly, the history of special and inclusive education in Turkey was demonstrated in the light of special education laws and regulations. Lastly, the current special and inclusive education practices in Turkey were presented.

Keywords: Special education, inclusive practices in Turkey, statistics

Introduction

Children with special education needs (SEN) must be educated in a different way responding to their physical, intellectual, behavioural and social needs. Education practices of children with SENs has changed with the changes in understanding of the concept of special education. For example, while the first education institutions of children with SENs were day and boarding special schools, today, inclusive education has been more accepted in all over the world including Turkey. However, there are still debates about how inclusive education must be understood in practice and whether it is having a positive or negative impact on pupils with and without SENs (Kalambouka et al., 2007).

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The meaning of inclusion (integration or mainstreaming) is to educate children with SENs in general education settings with their peers by providing extra education services to fulfill children's special education needs and to support both children with disabilities and the classroom teacher (Kircaali-Iftar, 1992).

According to OFSTED (The Office for Standards in Education), there are three important questions which need to be answered. These are; 'What is the purpose of inclusion?', 'When are children with SENs included in mainstream schools?' and 'How can the effectiveness of inclusion be measured?'. In order to understand the issue more precisely, the improvements in three areas should be evaluated: "educational attainment, gains in self-esteem and improved relationships between children with special education needs and their peers" (OFSTED, 2002, quoted in Frederickson et al. 2007, p.105).

According to United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2001, cited in Ainscow, 2007, p.3), inclusive education should mean something more comprehensive. It is claimed that inclusive education should mean education for all learners irrespective of their race, religion, ability, gender and social class. However, while this approach to inclusive education has been increasing (Ainscow, 2007), this comprehensive view about the issue has no advocates according to the literature which was reviewed for this paper. That is why I am taking the definition of Kircaali-Iftar in this paper to investigate inclusive education in Turkish education system. The definition of Kircaali-Iftar on inclusive education is simply about providing education to children with SENs in general education settings with nondisabled peers. So, this definition is more suitable with the objectives of the study.

In this paper, firstly, a brief history of special and inclusive education in the world will be presented.. The developments in education in the developed countries are followed closely in Turkey and have a big impact in restructuring the education system Therefore, it may be useful to look at what the approaches and practices were for more inclusive school settings around the world before starting to discuss the place of inclusive education in Turkish education system. Secondly, a brief history of special and inclusive education in Turkey will be given in the light of special education laws and regulations. Lastly, the current special and inclusive education practices in Turkey will be presented.

Research Methods

The study is focussing on the terms of special education and inclusive education in the context of Turkish education system. The aim will be accomplished by investigating the related literature. That is to say, the study is planned as a literature based study. Online search engines and databases such as Google Scholar, ERIC, Scopus, Wiley Digital Archives and Taylor&Francis Online were used to find the related literature such as research papers, reports by governmental and non-governmental organisations, official documents from the Ministry of National Education of Turkey. The issue will be investigated under the light of selected literature.

Inclusive Education in Some Other Countries and Turkey

Inclusive Education in Some Other Countries

In the world, first systematic efforts for children with SENs started in 16th century and in 18th century and separate schools started to be built for those children (Gearheart et al., 1996). In the first half of 19th century, special schools for children with different types of disabilities increased rapidly (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 1995). In that period of time, people commonly thought that children with SENs could not be educated in regular classrooms. It was asserted that whole day special schools with specialised teachers and convenient environment were better for children with SENs. It was also thought that children who are physically, intellectually, emotionally and socially different than others could harm their peers when they were included. That is why children with SENs were sent to special schools. An example for that belief is that a 13 year old child with physical disability in the USA was removed from his school and sent to a special school although he was intellectually normal. The reason was teacher's and nondisabled pupils' possibility of being sad and harmed because of the child's physical condition (Lewis and Doorlag, 1999).

Actually, in the USA, many students with SENs were put into regular classrooms before 1900s because there were not sufficient number of special schools for all students with SENs (Lewis and Doorlag, 1999). However, many disabled students had to leave the school a result of placement of them without any additional support (Lewis and Doorlag, 1999). In those days, debates focussed on the concepts of

'education' or 'care' rather than inclusion or exclusion. Until the half of 20th century, besides the belief of betterness of special schools for disabled children, some efforts and opinions for inclusive education appeared. For example, in the United Kingdom in 1928, the Wood Committee highlighted the unity of general and special education. After that, suitable children with SENs started to be educated in regular classrooms with the 1944 Education Act (Lindsay, 2003).

In the world, the most significant developments for more inclusive classroom settings have started to occur in 1960s and have carried on until today. The first reason for these developments was the problems in practices in special education classes. The main purpose of special education classes is to manage to educate children with SENs with their peers in the same school, but in a separate class with children who have similar disabilities. It is likely that with this practice, partial inclusion of children with SENs are ensured by being together with their healthy peers in break times, other outside classroom activities and non-academic courses like painting and music. Furthermore, it is expected that special classes within general schools may be more helpful for children with SENs because they are prepared to meet children's individual needs. In other words, a class with a special education teacher, appropriate equipments in it and a convenient environment can be more likely to meet children's special education needs. The idea of special education classes might be assumed to be beneficial in theory, but it did not work in practice. Moreover, it caused lots of problems. Firstly, it was seen that partial inclusion did not succeed. On the contrary, it caused dividing children as disabled and abled. Additionally, in some schools, children were separated even in outside classroom activities by arranging different break and lunch times in order to prevent affecting each other negatively (Lewis and Doorlag, 1999). Furthermore, it was observed that lack of academically successful models in the classroom had a negative effect on children with SENs' academic performances. Similarly, it was observed that the teachers who worked in these classrooms gave children's disabilities as underlying cause of children's academic failure instead of techniques and strategies they used (Gearheart et al., 1996).

As a consequence of increased critiques about the education for children with SENs in special schools and classes, inclusive practices in education have taken place in many countries' constitutions by starting with 1970s. In 1971 in Italy, in 1976 in Norway, in 1974 in England, in 1975 in the USA and France, legislations about inclusive education for disabled children were enacted (OECD, 1995).

In the USA, the civil right movements and a series of court cases such as the Brown case, the Mills case and the PARC case had a big impact on EAHCA (The Education for All Handicapped Children Act, 1975). The act gave the right to students with disabilities to be educated in least restrictive environment (LRE) with non-disabled peers. Another regulation in the USA was IDEA (the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) in 1990 which ensured that children with disabilities were educated in regular classes and their parents had more voice in the education decisions affecting their children (Dray, 2008).

Inclusive Education in Turkey

This chapter will deal with the history of special education in Turkey. Developments in special education in Turkey can be divided into three categories which are those till 1950, those between 1950 and 1980 and those from 1980 to today.

First education services for gifted and talented pupils started in the era of the Ottoman Empire. The school called Enderun School opened in 1455 in Istanbul (Senel, 1998). Later, a school was founded for deaf and blind students in 1889 which was called Istanbul Trade School. It continued providing education for 30 years until it was closed in 1919 (Ozsoy et al. 1998). In 1921, the Private Izmir Deaf and Blind School was opened and provided education under the Ministry of Health and Social Aid until 1950 (Ozsoy et al., 1998).

Significant developments related to special education field began to occur in 1950. In this year, the management of special education services passed from the Ministry of Health and Social Aid to the Ministry of National Education (MEB). It is crucial that the issue began to be considered as an education issue rather than a health issue with this regulation (Ozyurek, 2004). At the same year, the first blind union was founded to encourage people with visual impairments to take roles in Turkish Society.

Special education should be provided by trained teachers to obtain more effective results. To do that, the first Special Education Department in Gazi University in Ankara was opened in 1952 to educate teachers. However it was closed after three years education in 1955 (Senel, 1998). A new institution named Research and Guidance Centre was founded in Ankara in 1955. This institution was responsible for making research on disabled children and diagnosing their difficulties to provide education which meet their individual needs. Furthermore, the first two special

education classes were opened in Kazıkıçı Bostanları Elementary School, Ankara within the same year. These were the first examples of special education classes which are being currently implemented across Turkey (Sahin, 2005).

Second systematic effort to train teachers in special education was the opening of Special Education Department in Ankara University in 1965. This department also began to arrange Special Education Teaching Certificate Program in 1978 to meet the need of special education teachers (Akcamete and Kaner, 1999).

In 1983, the Department of Special Education, Guidance and Counselling services was established under the management of the Ministry of National Education to provide special education services under the same roof (Senel, 1998). Later, Special Education Departments were founded in 1983 in Anadolu University and in 1986 in Gazi University to train teachers for blind and intellectually disabled children (Caglar, 1990).

To conclude this chapter, it is important to know that the number of special schools in Turkey was 75 until 1992, interestingly it became 150 in 1995 (National Education Congress Report, 1999).

Special Education Laws and Regulations in Turkey

The first regulation about special education was enacted in 1957. It was called 'The law about children need to be protected'. The article 22 of this law states that the Ministry of National Education arranges the necessary provisions for children with SENs (National Education Congress Report, 1999). Second regulation was the Primary Instruction and Education Law (No.222), which was enacted in 1961. Article 12 of this law expresses that provision of special education services must be ensured for students with mental, physical, psychological, emotional and social disabilities (Senel, 1998).

Inclusive education was firstly mentioned in Children with Special Education Needs Law (No. 2916) which was published in 1983. The article 4 of this law states that children with SENs who have suitable qualities should be educated in regular schools with their normal peers. In addition, the article states that it is essential to begin special education in early ages (MEB, 2000).

The developments for a more inclusive education increased rapidly in 1990s. For example, First Special Education Committee was gathered in 1991 and significant decisions about inclusive education were taken. One of the most important decisions was to prepare individual education plan (IEP) for every disabled child. In addition, it was decided to employ special education teachers for children with SENs (National Education Congress Report, 1999). The most important development was Special Education Regulation (No. 573) which was published in 1997. The principles determined in this law are as following;

“(1) special education is considered an indispensable branch of general public education; (2) all children with special education needs should be provided with special education services irrespective of the severity of their disabilities; (3) early intervention is a crucial step for special education provision; (4) children with special needs should receive individualized educational programmes addressing to their unique needs; (5) children with special needs should be educated in the least restrictive environment with their non-disabled peers; (6) vocational education and rehabilitation services should be provided without interruption for children with special needs; and (7) for all levels, education services for children with special needs should be planned by relevant institutions (Donmez, 2000 quoted in Melekoglu et al. 2008, p.5).”

More recent regulation about special education was published in July, 2018. This official paper which is 46 pages long has regulations on many issues about special education such as the aims of special education services, educational evaluation and diagnosis procedures, early childhood education, education of children who have more than one disability, education at home and hospitals, parenting education, individualised education programs, mainstreaming and integration practices and so on. This is a very comprehensive regulation and so it might be seen a very positive development on special education in Turkey (MEB, 2018).

Important Issues Related to Inclusive Education

As stated above, inclusion of children with SENs does not only mean to put children into regular classrooms, but also necessary arrangements are needed to meet those children's individual needs in the classrooms.

Coordination of Special Education

The General Directorate of Special Education, Guidance and Counselling Services under the Ministry of National Education is the main responsive unit in special education in Turkey. Today, it supervises 228 regional Guidance and Research Centres across Turkey which are charged with the diagnosis and placement of students with SENs. These centres are located in all cities and big towns of Turkey and include qualified teachers and experts (MEB, 2015b).

In the process of preparing statements for children with disabilities, these steps are followed; firstly, parents go to a hospital to get the reports that show their children's disabilities. Then, they apply to the nearest Guidance and Research Centre with the reports. Afterwards, children are examined with some tests by special education experts and the statements showing children's individual needs are prepared within one or two weeks. A counselling expert working in a Guidance and Research Centre pointed out that the time was not enough to prepare statements of disabled children. Because, there was lack of staff in these centres but there were large number of children who waited to have their statements. At the end of this process, children are sent to regular schools or sent to special schools related to their disabilities. Children who are sent to regular schools are followed closely and regularly by counselling experts in regional Guidance and Research Centres in coordination with guidance and counselling teachers within schools.

In order to diagnose disabilities and special education eligibility of children, only one intelligence test named WISC-R has been used by Guidance and Research Centre experts since 1979. However, the Ministry of National Education bought three other test batteries named Wechsler, Kaufman ve Woodcock-Johnson III in 2014. Using more than one intelligence test can be seen a positive development for more valid and reliable diagnosis of disabilities (Tedmem, 2014). Turkey's first national intelligence scale ASİS (Anadolu-Sak Intelligence Scale) was developed in 2016 (Anadolu Agency, 2016). Development of an intelligence test which is more convenient for Turkish context was a great step for efficient and impeccable diagnosis of disabilities which is a prerequisite for successful special education practices (Tedmem, 2015).

Training of Professionals

One of the most important issues in the continued development of special education is the training of professionals. As stated earlier, even though the first institution to train teachers was established in 1950s, the number of these institutions started to increase in 1980s. Today, there are forty undergraduate programs in special education in the universities in Turkey (Council of Higher Education, 2018). However, the number of specialised teachers graduated from special education departments is not still enough to cover the needs of Ministry of National Education. Another problem is that many newly graduated special education teachers choose to work in the private institutions because of the good working conditions and salaries (Cakiroglu&Cakiroglu, 2003 cited in Melekoglu et al. 2008, p.9). Therefore, the Ministry of National Education gives in-service courses for untrained teachers for special education to meet the need of demanded qualified teachers in special education field (Cavkaytar, 2006). Furthermore, some universities which have special education departments like Anadolu University give conversion courses (approximately 120 hours) for general education teachers to qualify them as special education teachers. It is also possible in Turkey to become a special education teacher by getting a masters degree in special education field (Arion Report, 2005).

In addition to train general education teachers in special education field, regional Guidance and Research Centres provide one week courses for all elementary school teachers who will have students with SENs in their classrooms.

There were four undergraduate programs for special education teacher candidates in Turkish universities till 2016. These were Teacher Education for Hearing Impaired, Mentally Handicapped Teacher Education, Visually Handicapped Teacher Education and Gifted and Talented Teacher Education. Beginning from 2016-2017 academic year, Higher Education Council in Turkey (YÖK) made a decision to unify all four programs of teaching children with special education needs under a single department named "Special Education Teacher Education Program" (Tedmem, 2016).

Current Situation of Inclusive Education in Turkey

Special education services and inclusive education practices have increased rapidly in the last decade, especially after the publishing of Special Education Regulation in 1997. In the last decade, the Ministry of National Education has emphasized the

importance of inclusive education and the implementations of inclusion have been wide spread. At the same time, the number of special schools has been increasing rapidly to educate every disabled child who has the right of getting education like other children with no disabilities (Melekoglu et al., 2008).

According to Cavkaytar (2006), in Turkey, there are three opportunities for children with SENs:

- Special education schools,
- Children with SENs in regular schools and special classes,
- Support services in rehabilitation centres.

Special Education Schools

There are 1254 private and state special education schools and institutions in Turkey including science and art centres for talented and gifted children, kindergartens, elementary and lower secondary schools for visually, physically, hearing impaired, educable mentally retarded and autistic children, vocational high schools for visually and physically impaired children, hospital schools, vocational practice centres and special education application centres. In these schools, 43796 students in total are educated by 10596 special education teachers in total (MEB, 2015a). The number of private special education schools is small compared to state schools. There were only 46 private special education schools in Turkey in 2014-2015 education year (MEB, 2015a).

As can be understood from the type of special education schools in Turkey, these schools and institutions aim to train children with SENs in different vocational fields for possible jobs they might work in future besides academic education.

Children with SENs in Regular Schools and Special Classes

As stated earlier, the practice of special education class began in Turkey in 1955. In 2015-2016 education year, 32265 children with SENs are educated by special education teachers in special education classes within elementary and lower secondary schools (MEB, 2015a). The good things for children in special education classes are that they can have the opportunities to socialise with and make friends

with their normal peers. They can have qualified teachers who trained in special education field.

Inclusion of children with SENs in mainstream schools was mentioned firstly in Special Education Law in 1983. However, the implementations of inclusion have increased after 1990s (Sari, 2000). Inclusion of students with SENs in regular schools is the most common way of special education practices with 70% (TEDMEM, 2016). In 2015-2016 education year, 183221 students were integrated in regular schools in Turkey from kindergarten level to upper secondary school level (MEB, 2015a). These students are the ones who diagnosed and had their official diagnostic statements. In addition to this number, there are more disabled students in regular schools without any diagnosis (Kargin, 2004).

Children with SENs in regular schools are included as full day and half day students according to their individual needs. The ones who are included as half day students take educational support in private rehabilitation centre.

Private Rehabilitation Centres

Rehabilitation centres are charged with educational support for children with SENs in mainstream schools. They are all private funded institutions. However, children go to these centres do not pay any money for services they take. Because, Turkish government gives 545 TL (Turkish Liras) (about \$103 according to December, 2018 currency rates) per month per child for private sessions in rehabilitation centres and 153 TL (Turkish Liras) (about \$29 according to December, 2018 currency rates) for group sessions in 2018. According to Arion Report (2005), the payment for private sessions per month per child which the government made was 406 TL (Turkish Liras) (about \$77 according to December, 2018 currency rates). It can be seen that little increase in payment occurred within a decade.

Today, there is a huge number of private rehabilitation centres in almost every city of Turkey. According to The General Directorate of Special Education, Guidance and Counselling Services' statistics in October 2014 (information was given by an authorized person in the Ministry), there were 1881 rehabilitation centres run by private sector and 288,389 people with SENs were educated and rehabilitated in those centres. There may be two main reasons for this; strong attention and support from the Ministry of National Education for special education and the guarantee

payment provided by the Turkish government. Education and rehabilitation services in these centres are provided by special education teachers, preschool teachers, general education teachers with special education certificate, nurses, physical and speech therapist, etc.

Research Studies About Inclusive Education in Turkey

Research and studies in inclusive education field began to appear after 1980 and first thesis were written in 1989 (Bahceli, master's thesis and Baysal, doctorate thesis). The number of studies and papers has increased in 1990s. According to Sucuoglu (2004), the studies about inclusive education in Turkey can be grouped in three categories;

- The concept of inclusion, its principles, the results of inclusion and general information about inclusion.
- The perceptions and approaches about inclusive education and children with SENs.
- The characteristics of children who are included.

In the first group of studies, Kircaali-Iftar (1997) explained the principles of inclusion and the components of successful inclusion. In another study of Kircaali-Iftar (1998) and the study of Batu (2000), additional support services were highlighted as the most important component of inclusive education and they were investigated by explaining different types of them.

In the second group of studies, the perceptions of teachers, head teachers, inspectors, parents and children without SENs were investigated and they were informed about inclusive education (Sucuoglu, 2004). In one of them, Batu (2004) found out that teachers believed in usefulness of inclusive education, but some teachers did not want children with SENs to be included for whole day. In contrast, in the study of Uysal (2003), it was seen that over half of teachers stated that the practice of inclusive education was not useful and the conditions to implement it were not ready yet. In another study (Pinar-Sazak and Yikmis, 2004), it was stated that some head teachers did not know what the inclusion was and most of them were reluctant on having disabled children in their schools. Rakap and Kaczmarek's study (2010) demonstrated that only %35 of general education teachers accepted children with

SENs in their classrooms although most teachers were open to in-service courses to increase their knowledge on special education and special education practices. These studies show that the practices of inclusive education have many problems: Children with SENs are not accepted by their peers, teachers, head teachers and parents who have lack of knowledge about inclusion, choosing of children with SENs in regular classrooms is not appropriate (Uysal, 1995, cited in Sucuoglu, 2004). In addition, it was found out that %70 of teachers did not take additional support, %80 of them did not prepare Individualised Education Plan (IEP) and they only gave extra home works and repeated what they told to help children with SENs (Kargin et al., 2005). A recent study investigated the attitudes of teachers of 500 primary school teachers towards inclusive education (Palavan, Çiçek and Yıldırım, 2018). They found that female teachers, the married teachers and the teachers who have worked more than 5 years had more positive attitudes to inclusive education compared to male, single and unexperienced teachers. Cansız and Cansız (2018) conducted a similar study with Palavan, Çiçek and Yıldırım's study but they investigated the preservice teachers' attitudes towards students with SENs and inclusive education. They found that grade level and training for inclusive education of preservice teachers did not have a significant on their sentiments attitudes to inclusive education. They concluded that teacher candidates should be prepared to teach students with different special education needs by providing more opportunities of practice.

In the third group of studies, the characteristics of children with SENs in regular schools were investigated. According to the results of these studies, educable mentally retarded children in regular classrooms knew more words than their peers in special classrooms, hearing impaired children were better at the skills of writing and reading compared to mentally retarded children and children with learning difficulties (Sucuoglu, 2004).

The studies about inclusive education in Turkey show that even though the practices of inclusion has been implemented since 1983, there are still huge problems to be solved for more successful inclusive practices. These problems are: teachers, head teachers, all parents, children without SENs have lack of information about inclusion, schools and classrooms are not suitable and ready for disabled children, curriculum is not adapted for disabled children and so on.

Conclusion

In this paper, I tried to investigate the place of special and inclusive education in Turkish education system within its historical development. In this brief history, the most important event is the publishing of Special Education Regulation (No. 573) in 1997. That is because it was the most comprehensive regulation about including children with SENs in mainstream schools (Melekoglu et al., 2008). This regulation has many similarities with Education of All Handicapped Children Act published in the USA in 1975 (Kargin, 2004). It can be important to show how educational developments in the developed countries affect Turkish education system.

As understood from the results of the studies about the issue, there is a consensus in Turkey that teachers have students with SENs in their classrooms believe in usefulness of inclusive education, but they need to be supported by additional services such as resource room, counselling, teaching assistants, etc. (Kargin, 2004). Unfortunately, the additional support services are being omitted and teachers in inclusive classrooms are alone with themselves without any additional support. Actually, as stated earlier, the Ministry of National Education has highlighted the importance of inclusion and explained the components and principles of inclusion in official papers, but they do not match with realities in Turkish education system. In addition, the principles of inclusion are not clear regarding the duties of teachers and administrators in Turkey.

Even though the number of students with SENs in regular school settings has began to increase, there are still many of them who are not included (Sari, 2003, cited in Melekoglu et al., 2008). However, future is full of hope regarding to the advancements in inclusive education in Turkey. Last thing to say is that it is an important changing in people's minds that in the past, disabled children did not even go outside and being disabled used to be considered something have to be ashamed of, but today, we argue the alternative places where they are educated.

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