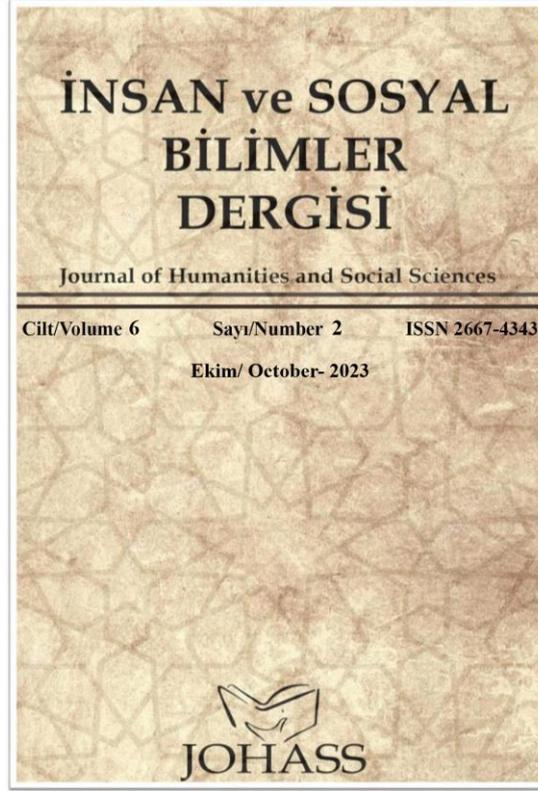# JOURNAL OF HUMAN AND SOCIAL SCIENCES (JOHASS)

Early Childhood Educators' Views, Sentiments, Attitudes, Concerns and Practices Related to Students with Special Needs

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Abstract	Research Article
This research aims to investigate early childhood educators' sentiments, attitudes, and concerns towards students with special needs, their efficacy related to inclusive education practices, and how they follow students with special needs in their classrooms. This study uses a convergent/parallel mixed methods research design, including quantitative and qualitative research designs. The sample size of the quantitative part of the study is 135 early childhood educators. The participants for the qualitative part are ten early childhood teachers working with special needs children. The quantitative part of the study uses the scales of sentiments, attitudes, and concerns related to inclusive education and teacher efficacy during inclusive education practices. For the qualitative part of the study, researchers developed interview questions to collect data related to inclusive practices in early childhood education. The quantitative data is analyzed using the Kruskal-Wallis, Mann-Whitney, and Spearman's rho correlation non-parametric tests. The qualitative data is analyzed with content analysis and open coding. Based on the findings, there is no relationship between sentiments, attitudes, and concerns related to inclusive education and teachers' efficacy during inclusive education practices. On the other hand, it is found that there is a weak correlation between the dimensions of sentiments attitudes and concerns and teachers' efficacy and its dimensions. In light of the findings derived from qualitative data, teachers feel less unsatisfied about firstly children with special needs and their parents, then themselves, and finally, typically developed children and their parents during the adaptation process.	*Received*: 19.09.2023 *Revision received:* 20.10.2023 *Accepted:* 24.10.2023 *Published online:* 27.10.2023

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Introduction

Providing equal educational opportunities for all members of society is one of the significant indicators of modernity and democracy in developed societies. When human rights, inclusive and quality education based on equity, and life-long learning opportunities offered for everybody are concerned, we can clearly understand how educating individuals with special needs is crucial for the well-being of societies (Metin, 2013). Most of the sustainable development goals (Goals 4, 8, 10, 11, and 17) put a great emphasis on the view that individuals with special needs are an indispensable part of societies and the actions that might be taken to reintegrate them into the society are specified in each goal. When we take a closer look at these goals, "Goal 4: Quality Education", for instance, stresses the importance of inclusive and equitable education involving the whole society (UNESCO, 2017).

Inclusive education allows individuals with special needs to equally benefit from the available educational opportunities by sharing the same learning environments with their typically developed peers, which considerably supports these individuals in their attempts to maximize their development in "the least restrictive environment" (Yükselen & Akar, 2021, p. 49).

The practical implementations of inclusive education in all levels of elementary education in Türkiye were initiated in 1983 according to the requirements specified in Article 4 of the Law on Children Who Need Special Education numbered 2916 (Resmi Gazete [Legal Gazette], 1983; Sargın and Sünbül, 2002). Having approximately 40 years of history in legislative terms, inclusive education has been practiced since the 1990s in early childhood education (Yılmaz, 2020). The Regulation on Special Education and Guidance Services published by the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) in 2006 and the regulations regarding early childhood education that were introduced in 2004 allowed special needs children to receive early childhood education (Sucuoğlu, Bakkaloğlu, İscen Karasu, Demir and Akalın, 2014). Revised in 2013, the Early Childhood Education Program emphasized the importance of educating special needs children together with their typically developed peers in the same learning environment. This program also focused on adaptations and individualized education program practices (IEPs) that teachers might develop and implement. In addition, the program was designed to introduce a roadmap for teachers. Appendix 11 of the program explains the characteristics of children with different types of disabilities and the issues to be considered while actively integrating them into the

educational processes (MoNE, 2013). Including special needs children in the same learning environment together with 36-66 months old typically developed children was legitimized within the Regulation on Early Education and Elementary Education Institutions (Resmi Gazete [Legal Gazette], 2014). The number of inclusive students in a classroom depended on the class size. There was a considerable increase in the number of inclusive children in early education institutions after the enactment of this regulation (Çakıroğlu and Melekoğlu, 2014). In the 2014-2015 academic year, the number of students[3] attending early childhood inclusive education programs was 304 (MoNE, 2014), which was reported to reach 1830 in the 2021-2022 academic year (MoNE, 2021).

Individuals with special needs benefit from inclusive education the most in early childhood since many positive changes take place in various dimensions of their development during this period (Batu, 2010; Buysse et al., 2002). Therefore, inclusive education is remarkably essential since it yields successful outcomes in the growth and development of children with different special needs. Despite the increase in the number of children benefitting from inclusive education, still few special needs children, unfortunately, receive inclusive education when the overall ratio is considered (Seçer, Çeliköz, Sarı, Çetin and Büyüktaşkapu, 2010). According to the data published by the Ministry of Family and Social Services in 2021, there were a total of 124.244 individuals with special needs in Türkiye, 33.185 of whom were in the 0-4 age range and 91.059 in the 5-9 age range (Ministry of Family and Social Services, 2021). In the 2021-2022 academic year, only 1830 of these individuals received inclusive education (MoNE, 2021), which clearly supports the findings of Seçer et. al (2014). In fact, inclusive education supports these children's cognitive and social-emotional development and minimizes problematic behaviors. Early inclusive education encourages productive education and promotes positive experiences not only for special needs children but also for teachers, typically developed children, as well as parents of typically developed children and special needs children (Aral, 2011; Batu and Kırcaali İftar, 2007).

Early Childhood Teachers in Inclusive Education

Teachers play a crucial role in the quality, effective, and successful implementation of inclusion practices in early childhood (Odom, 2000). Accordingly, teachers are expected to

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[3] *The numbers of special needs students are reported based on guidance and research center's educational assessment and diagnostics.*

assume the following roles and responsibilities when there are special needs children in their classes: (a) roles related to developing positive attitudes, (b) roles related to IEPs, (c) teaching roles, (d) roles related to behavior management, (e) roles related to assessment and (f) family-related roles (Gezer, 2017). Thus, teachers' attitudes and performances with regards to inclusive education are remarkably significant (Ataman, 2003; Kayhan, Şengül and Akmeşe, 2012; Seçer, Çeliköz, Sarı, Çetin and Büyüktaşkapu, 2010). Positive attitudes of early childhood teachers towards a special needs child in the class positively affect the attitudes of other students, their parents, and all other staff working in the school (Ekşi, 2010; Kaya, 2013; Kuz, 2001; Temel, 2000). Furthermore, teachers' positive attitudes help them accept special needs children and find effective solutions to the problems they encounter (Batu, 2000; Temel, 2000; Ekşi, 2010). In addition to teachers' attitudes, their efficacies regarding this specific teaching type should not be overlooked while taking necessary actions (Kuz, 2001). Among these efficacies are (a) knowledge about inclusion practices and the ability to implement these principles, (b) assessing performances and identifying areas of interest and needs of students with special needs by using appropriate measurement and evaluation tools, (c) developing learning materials, selecting and applying suitable teaching techniques and methods according to these measurements and evaluations, (d) ensuring the child's active participation in the learning process by consulting to special education teachers, developing an IEP and making necessary adaptations, and (e) collaborating with school administration, school staff and parents (Battal,2007; Batu and Kırcaali-İftar, 2011; Kargın, 2004; Özcan and Karaoğlu, 2021; Özdemir, 2010; Sucuoğlu, Bakkaloğlu, Karasu, Demir and Akalın, 2014; Vural and Yıkmış, 2008).

When the literature related to inclusive education in early childhood is examined in detail, we can notice the predomination of the studies conducted with teachers and children (Yılmaz, 2020), although there are some studies whose participants were school administrators and families (Gezer, 2017; Tuş and Çiftçi Tekinarslan, 2013). Bakkaloğlu, Yılmaz, Altun-Könez, and Yalçın (2018) examined a total of 58 studies conducted on early childhood inclusive education in the Turkish context. According to the findings of the study, 41 of these studies were descriptive (25 qualitative and 16 quantitative), 10 were experimental, and 7 were compilations. Mixed research design was not preferred in any of these studies.

The analysis of the studies conducted with teachers revealed that the majority of these studies focused on determining their attitudes and views about inclusion practices as well as

levels of their knowledge and professional efficacies, identifying practices and adaptations implemented in classrooms, their needs, and problems they encounter in inclusive education (Bakkaloğlu, Yılmaz, Altun-Könez and Yalçın, 2018; Gezer, 2017; Yılmaz,2020). These studies often reported positive attitudes of teachers towards inclusive education (Artan, Uyanık-Balat, 2003; Küçük-Doğaroğlu and Bapoğlu-Dümenci, 2015; Dias and Cadime, 2016; Hsieh and Hsieh, 2012; Dikici-Sığırtmaç, Hoş and Abbak, 2011). Although teachers develop positive attitudes towards such students, they often feel anxious about the presence of an inclusive child in their classes and the implementation of inclusion practices since they lack self-confidence regarding how to support individuals with special needs (Akdağ and Haser, 2017). In addition, some studies reported that teachers develop negative attitudes towards the presence of inclusive children in their classrooms (Dimitrova-Radojichikj, Chichevska-Javanova and Rashikj-Canevska, 2016; Koçyiğit, 2015). Besides, the related studies concluded that teachers' attitudes change according to "age" and "professional experience" variables (Özdemir and Ahmetoğlu, 2012; Üstün and Bayar, 2017). The literature review also revealed that the studies on teachers' views about inclusive education often focused on the following problems encountered by teachers in inclusion practices: inadequate physical conditions (Dikici-Sığırtmaç, Hoş and Abbak, 2011), teachers' not being well-equipped about special needs children's education and the problems encountered during practices (Gök and Erbaş 2011; Kale, Dikici-Sığırtmaç, Nur and Abbak, 2016; Küçük-Doğaroğlu and Bapoğlu-Dümenci, 2015), designing IEPs inappropriately for these children (Koçyiğit, 2015), communication problems between the teacher and special needs children and their families (Dikici-Sığırtmaç, Hoş and Abbak, 2011), the problems related to classroom transitions and ineffective adaptations (Ergin and Bakkaloğlu, 2019; Özen, Ergenekon, Ülke Kürkçüoğlu and Genç, 2013).

In summary, the literature review emphasizes the significance of the following issues to ensure effective and successful implementation of inclusion practices: teachers' fulfilling the roles and responsibilities expected from them regarding inclusive education, being equipped with professional efficacies about inclusive education, and the ability to put these efficacies into practice. In addition, the studies focusing on this issue were often conducted by employing qualitative or quantitative research designs. However, mixed method research design allows researchers to test the identified situation and adopt a holistic perspective to understand it clearly (Greene, Caracelli, and Graham, 1989). Therefore, in the present study, it is possible to determine whether the quantitative data obtained using a mixed research design

supports the findings obtained from early childhood educators with previous and current experience with inclusive students in their classrooms. Besides, this study presents more detailed findings about in-class inclusion practices in early childhood education. At this point, the study aims to determine early childhood teachers' sentiments, attitudes, and efficacies regarding inclusive students and explore the actions taken in the class for inclusive students. To achieve this purpose, the study seeks answers to the following research questions:

Research Questions

1. Do early childhood educators' sentiments, attitudes and concerns about inclusive education differ according to the following variables: the province of the school where they work, the number of students in the class, duration of professional experience, duration of training received on special education, type of the special need, duration of experience with special needs children, the presence or absence of inclusive students in the class and having a relative with special needs or not?

2. Do early childhood educators' efficacies about inclusion practices differ according to the following variables: the province of the school where they work, the number of students in the class, duration of professional experience, duration of training received on special education, type of the special need, duration of experience with special needs children, the presence or absence of inclusive students in the class and having a relative with special needs or not?

3. Is there a significant correlation between early childhood educators' sentiments, attitudes and concerns about inclusive education and their efficacies about inclusion practices?

4. What are the opinions of early childhood educators who have inclusive student(s) in their classes about inclusion practices?

5. What actions do early childhood educators take regarding inclusion practices in the learning environments?

Method

Design

The study employed a mixed research design to determine early childhood teachers' sentiments, attitudes, concerns, and efficacies about inclusive students and how they

implement inclusion practices in early childhood education. This design uses both quantitative and qualitative data (Creswell and Plano-Clark, 2011; Johnson and Christensen, 2014), and both data types were collected concurrently in the present study. In other words, the study used a convergent/parallel mixed methods research design, which gives equal weight (Qual+Quan) to the information obtained from both data types. The quantitative part of the study was descriptive, while the qualitative part was conducted as a case study. By doing so, the study aims to present quantitative and qualitative information about teachers' sentiments, attitudes, concerns, and efficacies regarding inclusive education and how they implement inclusion practices in their classes and discuss the findings based on the data obtained.

Sample and Population

This study, which used a convenient sampling method (Büyüköztürk et al., 2019), was conducted in a city with approximately 1.400.000 population located in the Central Anatolia Region and a city with approximately 230.000 population in the Eastern Anatolia Region. This sampling method is chosen according to location and ease of access (Merriam, 2009). The cities are selected based on their population size. The population of the quantitative part of the study consists of early childhood education teachers (n=424) working at public and independent preschools and nursery classes in primary schools located in these two cities in the 2020-2021 academic year. Sampling should constitute at least 30% of the population in relational analyses (Büyüköztürk, 2012). Therefore, the data collected from 135 teachers (30% of the population) were used for the analyses after excluding inaccurately filled surveys. See Table 1 for detailed information.

Table 1

Demographic Information about the Participant Teachers

	f	%
City		
City A (population approx.1.400.000)	79	58.5
City B (population approx. 230.000)	56	41.5
Age		
20-25	22	16.3
26-30	21	15.6
31-35	39	28.9
36+	53	39.3
Professional experience		
0-4 years	26	19.3
5-9 years	26	19.3
10-14 years	51	37.8
15 years+	32	23.7

Classroom size		
5-15 children	101	74.8
16-20 children	27	20
21-25 children	5	3.7
26 children+	2	1.5
Educational experiences related to special education		
None	30	22.2
A little bit (1-19hours)	60	44.4
Medium (20-39 hours)	31	23
Top (40 hours+)	14	10.4
Special needs child in the classroom		
Presence	35	25.9
Absence	100	74.1
The type of disabilities		
None	97	71.9
Physical Disability	3	2.2
Intellectual disability	2	1.5
Autism Spectrum Disorder	9	6.7
Hard of Hearing	4	3
Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder	7	5.2
Learning Disability	3	2.2
Other	10	7.4
Professional Experience with Special Needs Children		
None	38	28.1
A little bit (1-29days)	56	41.5
Top (30days +)	41	30.4
Special needs relative		
Having	31	23
Not Having	104	77

As for the qualitative part of the study, the purposive sampling method was preferred to determine the participant teachers in order to collect more detailed information about inclusive education in early childhood (Merriam, 2009). First, 35[4] teachers in the sampling were found to have inclusive students in their classes. Later, 10 out of 35 early childhood education teachers in the sampling volunteered to participate in the qualitative part of the study. See Table 2 for detailed information.

Table 2

Demographic Information about the Interviewed Teachers

*Teachers	Age	Gender	Professional Experience	Children's Age Group	Duration of special education training (excluding undergraduate)
P1	32	F	8 years	5	-
P2	35	M	12 years	4-5	2-4 hours
P3	28	F	7 years	5	-
P4	33	F	9 years	4	8 hours
P5	44	F	12 years	5	+ (did not remember the duration
P6	48	F	15 years	3-4	+ (did not remember the duration
P7	22	F	2 years	3	5 months

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[4] *In 2020-2021 academic year, preschool education was held face-to-face except between April 29th and May 17th 2021, which were the times of the full lockdowns throughout the country due to the pandemic. However, it might be kept in mind that weak immune systems of students with special needs might have negatively affected their attendance in face-to-face education.*

P8	23	F	5-6 months	5-6	-
P9	36	F	3 years	5	+ (did not remember the duration)
P10	35	F	15 years	5	10-12 hours

* Pseudonyms were used to preserve teachers' anonymity.

Data Collection Tools

Quantitative Data Collection Instruments

The quantitative data about early childhood educators' efficacies, sentiments, attitudes, and concerns about inclusive education were collected through (a) Teacher Efficacy in Inclusive Practices Scale, and (b) Sentiments, Attitudes and Concerns about Inclusive Education Scale. Before using these scales, to collect demographic information about the participant teachers' personal information form was developed. The questions in the form were inspired from the questions prepared by Bayar (2015) and assumed to have effects on the research data. It consists of eight items aiming to collect data about "age", "duration of professional experience", "total number of students in the class", "presence/absence of inclusive student in the class", "inclusive student's special need type", "level of received training on special education", "teaching experience with special needs children" and "having a relative with special needs or not".

a) The Teacher Efficacy in Inclusive Practices Scale (TEIP): Developed by Sharma, Loreman and Forlin (2011) and adapted to Turkish by Bayar (2015), the Teacher Efficacy in Inclusive Practices Scale includes 18 items, which are rated according to 6-point Likert Scale. The results of the Exploratory Factor Analysis revealed three dimensions for the scale: (1) Teaching efficacy, (2) Collaboration Efficacy, and (3) Classroom Management Efficacy. The Turkish-adapted version's Cronbach Alpha, internal consistency coefficient, was 0.89. The coefficient calculated for the present study was 0.97.

b) The Sentiments, Attitudes and Concerns about Inclusive Education Scale: Developed by Forlin, Earle, Loreman and Sharma (2011), the scale was adapted to Turkish by Bayar, Özaşkın and Bardak (2015). This 4-point Likert-type scale consists of 15 items. The maximum score that can be obtained from the scale is 60, and the minimum score is 15. There are three dimensions in the scale: (1) sentiments, (2) attitudes and (3) concerns. The Cronbach Alpha value of the adapted version was calculated as .88 while the overall scale's value was .71. The Cronbach Alpha value in the present study was .74.

Qualitative Data Collection Instruments

The qualitative data on early childhood educators' views and attitudes related to inclusive education, their inclusive education experiences, challenges in inclusive practices, and parents' attitudes were collected using semi-structured interview techniques.

The interview protocol was developed by the researchers after a detailed literature review and finalized according to the feedback received from the early childhood education teachers and experts who have had experiences in early childhood education and special education. The first section of the protocol includes five questions to collect demographic data about the participant early education teachers such as age, gender, year of teaching experience, educational background, the age range of the students they teach, trainings/seminars/courses they attended to learn about special education and/or inclusive education. The nine questions in the second section aim to collect information about the following issues: advantages and disadvantages of early childhood inclusive education, previous experiences with special needs children, the most challenging special need(s), the types of special needs of the inclusive student(s) in their class, their experiences with special needs children, whether they implement the adapted version of the activities for inclusive students as one-on-one practice, whether they make special physical arrangements for inclusive children in the learning environments (in the classroom and the school garden), attitudes of typically developed children's parents towards the inclusive child(ren) and the actions they take when the inclusive child is not accepted by typically developed children in the class.

Data Collection and Analysis

Quantitative Data Collection and Analysis

The required ethical committee and implementation permissions were taken before administering the Personal Information Form and the scales. After the related institutions granted the permissions, the Personal Information Form and the scales were uploaded to the digital environment. The principals of public and independent preschools and nursery classes in primary schools in the city centers were informed about the study, and one copy of the Personal Information Form and the scales were shared with them. Later, the principals shared the form and the scales with teachers via the internet. The data collection procedure lasted approximately three months after the necessary permissions were taken.

After the inaccurately filled data collection instruments were excluded from the analysis, the remaining data were examined by performing descriptive and correlational analyses through the Kruskal-Wallis Test, Mann-Whitney Test, and Spearman's rho Correlation non-parametric tests since this data was not normally distributed. SPSS statistical package software was used for all the analyses.

Qualitative Data Collection and Analysis

The interview questions were piloted, revised, and finalized before the interviews. Also, the participant teachers were informed about the purpose of the study and asked whether they would like to volunteer to participate in the interviews. Those who volunteered were asked to sign the informed consent form. In addition, they were informed that the interviews would be audio recorded and they could leave the study anytime without or by giving an excuse. The interviews were conducted face-to-face in the schools where the participant teachers work and audio recorded. Each interview lasted approximately 25 minutes, and the total data collection time was nearly one month.

The data obtained from these interviews were analyzed through open coding (Strauss and Corbin, 1998) and content analysis (Baxter and Jack, 2008; Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2008), which requires the completion of some processes such as transcribing the data, generating codes for the transcribed data, determining themes involving these codes and categorizing the codes and themes. The collected data were used to determine categories and codes. This procedure was followed by determining themes and sub-themes. The researchers carried out all these procedures independently at different times and locations. After the coding procedure was completed, the researchers discussed the codes, themes, and sub-themes and determined the agreed and disagreed ones. The procedure was finalized following the negotiations over the disagreed ones.

The study's validity was confirmed by expert review (Creswell, 2008) and participant validation (Merriam, 2009). As for reliability, intercoder agreement was preferred. According to Miles, Huberman and Saldana (2014), agreement between coders should be above 85%. The agreement between the coders, who were experienced researchers in early childhood education, was calculated as 88% in the present study.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

The permissions required to conduct the present study were taken according to the rules specified in "The Directives for Higher Education Institutions Scientific Research and Publication Ethics". No actions specified under "the Actions Contradicting Scientific Research and Publication Ethics" were taken within the scope of this study.

Ethical Committee Permission Details

The Name of the Ethical Committee= Kirsehir Ahi Evran University Social Sciences and Humanities Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee

The Date of the Permission Granted: March 4th 2021

The Document Number of the Permission Granted: 2021/1/46

Findings

In this section, the findings of the study are presented based on the replies provided for the related research questions.

The Findings regarding the First and Second Research Questions

In this part, findings related to the research questions given below were shared. These are:

1. Do early childhood educators' sentiments, attitudes and concerns about inclusive education differ according to the following variables: the province of the school where they work, the number of students in the class, duration of professional experience, duration of training received on special education, type of the special need, duration of experience with special needs children, the presence or absence of inclusive students in the class and having a relative with special needs or not?

Do early childhood educators' efficacies about inclusion practices differ according to the following variables: the province of the school where they work, the number of students in the class, duration of professional experience, duration of training received on special education, type of the special need, duration of experience with special needs children, the presence or absence of inclusive students in the class and having a relative with special needs or not?

Only the data analysis results with significant differences were presented as tables in this section.

Of the variables for which the Mann-Whitney U Test was performed, not a significant difference was found for the following variables: the presence or absence of inclusive student(s) in the class; early childhood educators' sentiments, attitudes and concerns about inclusive education; and teacher efficacies in inclusion practices. The variables with significant differences are presented in the tables below.

Table 3

U-Test Results for Early Childhood Educators' Sentiments, Attitudes and Concerns about Inclusive Education and Teacher Efficacies in Inclusion Practices According to the "City Where the Teacher Works" Variable

	Cities	n	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	U	*P*
SACIE-sentiment	City A	79	70.84	5596.50		
	City B	56	63.99	3583.50	1987.5	.311
SACIE-attitude	City A	79	70.04	5533.00		
	City B	56	65.13	3647.00	2051	.467
SACIE-concern	City A	79	71.65	5660.00		
	City B	56	62.86	3520.00	1924	.194
TEIP-II	City A	79	64.73	5114.00		
	City B	56	72.61	4066.00	1954	.246
TEIP-C	City A	79	67.22	5310.50		
	City B	56	69.10	3869.50	2150.5	.783
TEIP-MB	City A	79	67.31	5317.50		
	City B	56	68.97	3862.50	2157.5	.807
totTEIP	City A	79	66.31	5238.50		
	City B	56	70.38	3941.50	2078.5	.551
totSACIE	City A	79	73.58	5812.50		
	City B	56	60.13	3367.50	1771.5	**.048**

*p< .05

According to Mann-Whitney U Test results presented in Table 3, the only significant difference at .05 degree of significance was found for the participant early childhood educators' total scores in their sentiments, attitudes and concerns about inclusive education *(U= 1771.5, z= -1.98, p=.048, r=.17)* according to "the city where they work" variable. In other words, the teachers working in City A (approx..1.400.000 population) scored higher than those working in City B (approx. 230.000 population) in their total scores on their sentiments, attitudes and concerns about inclusive education. However, no significant difference was found for the sentiments, attitudes and concerns dimensions, although the scores of teachers working in City A were higher than that of City B for these dimensions.

Table 4

U-Test Results for Early Childhood Educators' Sentiments, Attitudes and Concerns about Inclusive Education and Teacher Efficacies in Inclusion Practices According to "The Presence or Absence of a Special Needs Relative" Variable

	Special relative	needs n	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	U	*p*
SACIE- sentiment	Yes	31	81.18	2516.50		
	No	104	64.07	6663.50	1203.5	**.031**
SACIE-attitude	Yes	31	59.77	1853.00		
	No	104	70.45	7327.00	1357	.177
SACIE- concern	Yes	31	57.48	1782.00		
	No	104	71.13	7398.00	1286	.085
TEIP-II	Yes	31	79.82	2474.50		
	No	104	64.48	6705.50	1245.5	.054
TEIP-C	Yes	31	81.69	2532.50		
	No	104	63.92	6647.50	1187.5	**.026**
TEIP-MB	Yes	31	82.85	2568.50		
	No	104	63.57	6611.50	1151.5	**.016**
totTEIP	Yes	31	82.16	2547.00		
	No	104	63.78	6633.00	1173	**.021**
totSACIE	Yes	31	62.53	1938.50		
	No	104	69.63	7241.50	1442.5	.372

*p< .05

Table 4, which displays Mann-Whitney U Test results, shows that early childhood educators' scores in their sentiments about inclusive education (*U*= 1203.5, *z*= -2.16, *p*=.031, *r*=.18), teacher efficacies' "collaboration" dimension (*U*= 1187.5, *z*= -2.23, *p*=.026, *r*=.19) and "classroom management" dimension (*U*= 1151.5, *z*= -2.418, *p*=.016, *r*=.20), and total scores for "teacher efficacies in inclusion practices" (*U*= 1173, *z*= -2.299, *p*=.021, *r*=.19) significantly differ at .05 degree of significance according to "whether or not they have a relative with special needs". In other words, the scores of early education teachers with special needs relative were higher than those without a relative with special needs in their sentiments about inclusive education, teacher efficacies' collaboration and classroom management dimensions, and the total scores of "teacher efficacies in inclusion practices".

According to the results of Kruskal-Wallis tests, "teacher efficacies in early childhood education" and "early childhood educators' sentiments, attitudes and concerns about inclusive education" did not significantly differ according to "age", "professional experience", "the total number of children in the class" and "inclusive child's special need type" variables.

Table 5

Kruskal-Wallis Test Results for Early Childhood Educators' Sentiments, Attitudes and Concerns about Inclusive Education and Teacher Efficacies in Inclusion Practices According to the "Receiving Training on Special Education" Variable

	Educational experiences related to special education	n	Mean Rank	χ^2	df	p
SACIE-sentiment	Never	30	64.53			
	Low-level (1-19h)	60	66.66			
	Mid-level (20-39h)	31	71.26	.866	3	.834
	High-level (40h+)	14	73.96			
SACIE-attitude	Never	30	70.23			
	Low-level (0-19h)	60	70.11			
	Mid-level (20-39h)	31	74.53	8.653	3	**.034**
	High-level (40h+)	14	39.71			
SACIE-concern	Never	30	74.65			
	Low-level (0-19h)	60	68.63			
	Mid-level (20-39h)	31	69.76	5.010	3	.171
	High-level (40h+)	14	47.18			
TEIP-II	Never	30	66.67			
	Low-level (0-19h)	60	63.74			
	Mid-level (20-39h)	31	73.34	2.142	3	.543
	High-level (40h+)	14	77.29			
TEIP-C	Never	30	65.95			
	Low-level (0-19h)	60	63.93			
	Mid-level (20-39h)	31	74.34	2,119	3	.548
	High-level (39h+)	14	75.79			
TEIP-MB	Never	30	72.40			
	Low-level (0-19h)	60	64.31			
	Mid-level (20-39h)	31	71.03	1.110	3	.775
	High-level (40h+)	14	67.68			
totTEIP	Never	30	68.57			
	Low-level (1-19h)	60	64.16			
	Mid-level (20-39h)	31	72.39	1.258	3	.739
	High-level (40h+)	14	73.54			
totSACIE	Never	30	70.73			
	Low-level (1-19h)	60	67.59			
	Mid-level (20-39h)	31	78.52	9.380	3	**.025**
	High-level (40h+)	14	40.61			

*p< .05

As shown by Kruskal-Wallis Test results in Table 5, early childhood teachers' "level of received training on special education" and their attitudes towards inclusive education significantly differed at .05 degree of significance (never, n=30; low-level, n=60; mid-level, n=31; high-level, n=14), χ^2 (3, n=135)= 8.653, *p*=,034. Mann Whitney-U Test performed to examine the differences between the groups showed that the median value (*Md*=10.50) for high-level training received (more than 40 hours) was lower than median values (*Md*=12) calculated at all other levels. In other words, as the participant teachers' "level of received training on special education" increases, their "attitude" scores decrease.

Besides, there was a significant difference at .05 degree of significance between early childhood teachers' "level of received training on special education" and their total score on their "sentiments, attitudes and concerns about inclusive education" (never, n=30; low-level, n=60; mid-level, n=31; high-level, n=14), χ^2 (3, n=135)= 8.653, *p*=,034. Mann Whitney-U Test performed to explore the differences between the groups indicated that the median value (*Md*=34.5) for high-level of received training on special education (more than 40 hours) was lower than median values calculated for all other levels (never (*Md*=38), low-level (*Md*=37), and mid-level (*Md*=38). In other words, as the participant teachers' "level of received training on special education" increases, their sentiments, attitudes and concerns about inclusive education scores decrease.

No significant differences were found between teachers' "levels of received training on special education" and the other remaining variables at a .05 degree of significance.

Table 6

Kruskal-Wallis Test Results for Early Childhood Educators' Sentiments, Attitudes and Concerns about Inclusive Education and Teacher Efficacies in Inclusion Practices According to "the Work Experience with Special Needs Children"Variable

	Professional Experience with Special Needs Children	n	Mean Rank	χ^2	df	*p*
SACIE-sentiment	Never	38	71.50			
	Low-level (1-29 days)	56	70.71	1.905	2	.386
	High-level (30 days+)	41	61.06			
SACIE-attitude	Never	38	64.89			
	Low-level (1-29 days)	56	72.19	1.123	2	.570
	High-level (30days+)	41	65.16			
SACIE-concern	Never	38	72.33			
	Low-level (1-29 days)	56	71.19	2.767	2	.251
	High-level (30 days+)	41	59.63			
TEIP-II	Never	38	59.74			
	Low-level (1-29 days)	56	66.51	4.357	2	.113
	High-level (30days+)	41	77.70			
TEIP-C	Never	38	59.72			
	Low-level (1-29 days)	56	64.62	6.228	2	**.044**
	High-level (30 days+)	41	80.29			
TEIP-MB	Never	38	64.41			
	Low-level (1-29 days)	56	65.74	1.622	2	.444
	High-level (30 days+)	41	74.41			
totTEIP	Never	38	61.09			
	Low-level (1-29 days)	56	65.30	4.187	2	.123
	High-level (30 days+)	41	78.09			
totSACIE	Never	38	69.55			
	Low-level (1-29 days)	56	75.14	5.355	2	.069
	High-level (30 days+)	41	56.80			

*p< .05

According to the results of the Kruskal-Wallis Test displayed in Table 6, there was a significant difference between early childhood teachers' "teaching experience with children with special needs" and "collaboration" dimension of "teacher efficacies in inclusion practices" at .05 degree of significance (never, n=38; low-level, n=56; high-level, n=41), χ2 (2, n=135) = 6.228, *p*=,044. Mann Whitney-U Test performed to examine the differences between the groups showed that the median value (*Md*=31) for high-level experience (more than 30 full days) was lower than the median values calculated for other levels (never (*Md*=30), low-level (*Md*=29). In other words, as the participant teachers' level of experience with special needs children increases, their scores on the "collaboration" dimension of teacher efficacies also increase.

The Findings Regarding the Third Research Question

The findings based on the third research question given below were presented in this part.

3. Is there a significant correlation between early childhood educators' sentiments, attitudes and concerns about inclusive education and their efficacies about inclusion practices?

Table 7

Pearson Correlation Analysis Results Between Early Childhood Educators' Sentiments, Attitudes and Concerns About Inclusive Education and Its Dimensions and Teacher Efficacies in Inclusion Practices and Its Dimensions

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1.SACIE- sentiment	-							
2. SACIE- attitude		-						
3.SACIE- concern			-					
4. TEIP-II	-.225**	.187*	.227**	-				
5. TEIP-C	-.204*	.181*	.196*		-			
6. TEIP-MB	-.218*	.180*	.198*			-		
7. totTEIP	-.220*	.186*	.211*				-	
8. totSACIE								-

**p< .01

According to Pearson Correlation Test results in Table 7, there was no significant difference between the total scores of early childhood education teachers for "sentiments, attitudes and concerns about inclusive education" and "teacher efficacies in inclusion

practices". However, a significant difference was found at .01 and .05 degrees of significance between the "sentiments", "attitudes", and "concerns" dimensions and "teacher efficacies in inclusion practices" and its dimensions. Since the items in the "sentiments" dimension are reverse coded, there is a positive weak correlation with total scores of "teacher efficacies" (r=.22, n= 135, p< .05), which explains 4% of the variances. In addition, the "sentiments" dimension has a positive and weak correlation with the "teacher competency" dimension (r=.22, n= 135, p< .01), which explains 4% of the variances. Similarly, the "sentiments" dimension positively and weakly correlates with the "teacher collaboration" dimension (r=.22, n= 135, p< .05), which explains 4% of the variances. Finally, the "sentiments" dimension has a positive and weak correlation with the "classroom management" dimension (r=.22, n= 135, p< .05), which explains 4% of the variances.

There is a positive and weak correlation between the "attitudes" dimension and total "teacher efficacies" scores (r=.18, n= 135, p< .05), which explains 3% of the variances. Similarly, the "attitude" dimension positively and weakly correlates with the "teacher competency" dimension (r=.18, n= 135, p< .05), which explains 3% of the variances. The "attitude" dimension also has a positive and weak correlation with the "collaboration" dimension (r=.18, n= 135, p< .05), which explains 3% of the variances. Finally, there is a positive and weak correlation between the "attitudes" dimension and "classroom management" dimension scores (r=.18, n= 135, p< .05), which explains 3% of the variances.

There is a positive and weak correlation between the "concerns" dimension and total "teacher efficacies" scores (r=.21, n= 135, p< .05), which explains 4% of the variances. Similarly, the "concerns" dimension positively and weakly correlates with the "teacher competency" dimension (r=.22, n= 135, p< .01), which explains 4% of the variances. The "concerns" dimension also has a positive and weak correlation with the "teacher collaboration" dimension (r=.19, n= 135, p< .05), which explains 3% of the variances. Finally, there is a positive and weak correlation between the "concerns" dimension and "classroom management" dimension scores (r=.19, n= 135, p< .05), which explains 3.6% of the variances.

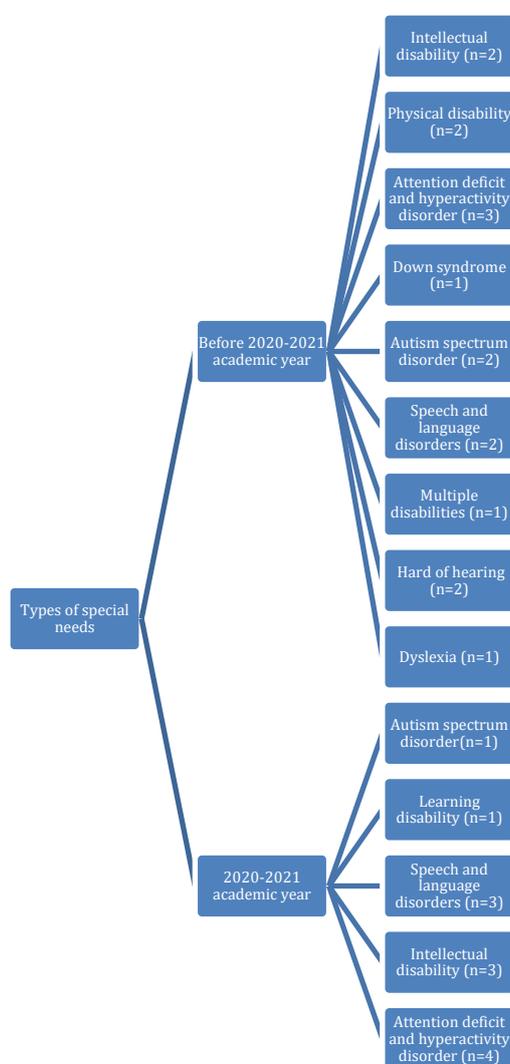**Findings regarding the Fourth Research Question**

In this part, findings related to the fourth research question given below were shared.

4. What are the opinions of early childhood educators who have inclusive student(s) in their classes about inclusion practices?

First, only one of the interviewed teachers did not have experience with special needs children before the 2020-2021 academic year. When we consider the time the study's qualitative data were collected, this teacher had been teaching an inclusive child for almost an academic year. All other nine teachers already had experiences with inclusive children in the 2020-2021 academic year and before. See Figure 1 for detailed information.

Figure 1

Special Need Types of Inclusive Children

The participant teachers listed the most challenging special needs and lack of skills in inclusion practices: (a) "lack of self-care skills" (n=2),(b) "concentration problems" (n=3), (c)

"intellectual disability" (n=2), (d) "attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder" (n=2), (e) "lacking more than one skill" (n=2) and (f) "lack of group work skills" (n=1). (See Figure 2)

Figure 2

Type of Special Needs and Lack of Ability that Early Childhood Teachers Find Challenging

The present study showed that early childhood teachers working with special needs children focused on the disadvantages and advantages of inclusion practices while expressing their opinions about inclusive education. According to the findings, six teachers who mentioned the disadvantages focused on typically developed children, four on children with special needs, and six on teachers.

The disadvantages regarding typically developed children were reported to be "negative point of view" (n=1), "negative attitude" (n=1), "failure to empathize" (n=1), "expectation of tolerance" (n=1), and "failure to accept differences" (n=2).

As for the disadvantages in terms of children with special needs, the participant teachers mentioned "disrupting the classroom atmosphere" (n=1), "failing to adapt" (n=2),

and "displaying problematic, maladaptive behavior" (n=1). P2 teacher explained the disadvantages regarding both children with special needs and typically developed children as follows:

> These children [those with special needs] disrupt the classroom atmosphere. How do they do that? I mean, they behave against the rules since they cannot adapt and perceive the class rules. Of course, other children do not know that these children are special children, children with special needs; if they knew, I mean, since they cannot empathize with them, they want to act freely just like they do or when we tolerate their behaviors, other children think that the teacher will tolerate them if they behave the same way and they want to behave similarly or they want this freedom, so there is an adaptation problem.

The disadvantages in terms of teachers were stated as "classroom management" (n=1), "workload" (n=3), "spending less time with typically developed children" (n=1), and "one-on-one care" (n=1). (See Figure 3)

P6 teacher explained the situation through the following sentences:

> … But I can mention some challenges. The size of preschool classes affiliated with MoNE is quite high, 20 on average. It is difficult for a teacher to do the same activity for both the inclusive child and other children while doing her activity with 20 students. Of course, it depends on the inclusive child's needs. The teacher has a lot to do here. She sacrifices a lot. But there is always a way for a person who enjoys doing her job.

Figure 3

The Disadvantages of Inclusive Education According to Early Childhood Teachers

```
Disadvantages
├── For children with typical development
│   ├── Negative point of view (n=1)
│   ├── Negative attitude(n=1)
│   ├── Lack of empathy (n=1)
│   ├── Expectation of tolerance (n=1)
│   └── Failure to accept differences (n=2)
├── For children with special needs
│   ├── Disrupting the learning environment (n=1)
│   ├── Failure to adapt (n=2)
│   └── Displaying problematic, maladaptive behavior (n=1)
└── For early childhood educators
    ├── Classroom managment (n=1)
    ├── Work load (n=3)
    ├── Spending less time for children with typical development (n=1)
    └── One-on-one care (n=1)
```

The findings showed that teachers who reported the advantages primarily focused on typically developed children and children with special needs. However, no advantages were mentioned with regard to teachers. The participants listed the advantages in terms of typically developed children as "social adaptation to the environment (socialization)" (n=2), "respect for individual differences" (n=2), "helpfulness" (n=2), "preventing social exclusion of special

needs child" (n=1), "normalization of special needs children" (n=1), "peer teaching" (n=1). The advantages with regard to children with special needs were listed as "sense of belonging" (n=1), "self-confidence" (n=1), "sense of accomplishment" (n=1), "acquisition of social skills" (n=5), "peer interaction" (n=1), "benefits for child development" (n=2). (See Figure 4)

P5 teacher explained the advantages of inclusion practices in the following quote: "*I believe that adaptation of children [special needs children] to the society and displaying behaviors that are appropriate for the society are useful for his integration and also for the acceptance of the disabled individuals by the society*". P9 teacher also added the following sentence as the explanation of the advantages: "*The child [the special needs child] is able to socialize more easily and learn from their friends; I mean; peer teaching might take place*".

Figure 4

The Advantages of Inclusive Education According to Early Childhood Teachers

The Findings Regarding the Fifth Research Question

In this part, findings related to the fifth research question given below were shared.

5. What actions do early childhood educators take regarding inclusion practices in the learning environments?

The actions taken by the teachers were examined in terms of the following cases: *whether they make adaptations in their activity plans and make any arrangements in the learning environments regarding inclusive education in general; the actions they take when they encounter problems during inclusive education practices; and what they do in case of problems related to typically developed children and their parents.*

Findings About Adaptations Made on Activity Plans

According to the data regarding whether and why the participant teachers make any adaptations in their activity plans, six teachers reported that they make while one teacher stated that she does not make any adaptations and other three teachers stated that they make partial adaptations in their activity plans. See Figure 5 for detailed information.

As for the reasons for teachers' actions, those reporting that they make adaptations in the activity plans listed their reasons as "short attention span" (n=2), "the child's need" (n=5), "supporting active involvement" (n=2), "modifying the activity for the child's level" (n=2). P6 teacher explained her opinions about the issue as follows:

> Yes, I do. I have a plan to implement in the class. However, if I have an inclusive child in the class and I need to prepare a special material for him/her, I do; or If I need to revise the activity, I do because there is not another way to get this child to participate. If I need to extend the activity duration specifically for this child after other children finish the activity, I do so, as well. And this does not have to be a very long time.
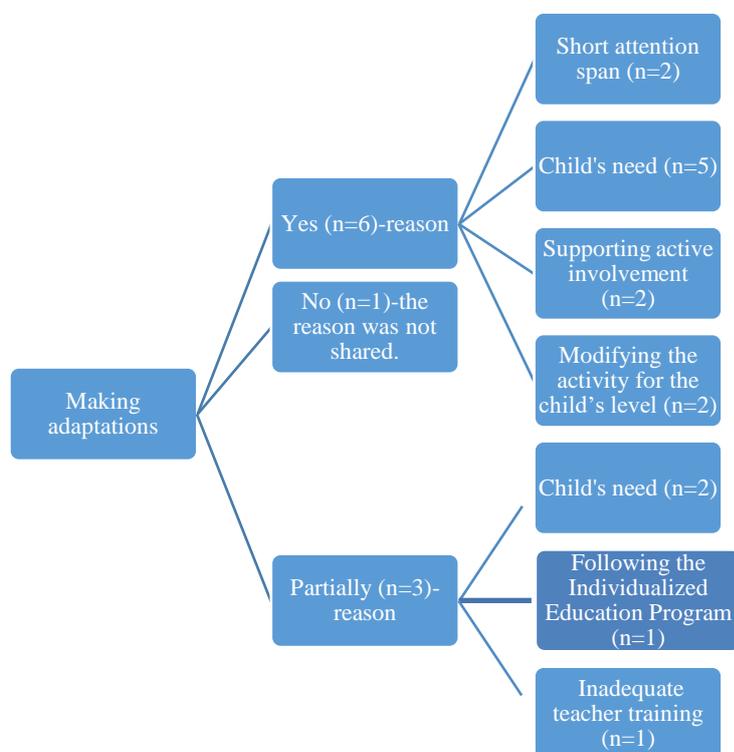
The teacher who does not make any adaptations for the inclusive child(ren) in her classes did not want to give any reasons for her preference.

Finally, the teachers making partial adaptations in their class activities listed their reasons as follows: "the child's needs" (n=2), "following the IEP" (n=1), and "inadequate teacher training" (n=1). The quote below explains P10 teacher's reasons for the partial adaptation of class activities:

> I do not make very often. Yes, sometimes I do, but we did not get an outstanding education about that issue. I think that is the reason. There is no one we can get quality support and consultation. For instance, I learned better about adaptation from the seminars I attended as a part of the project. My previous adaptations were not adequate but I think they are more effective now, especially after the seminars in the project.

Figure 5

Findings about Adaptations in the Activity Plans

Findings about the Arrangements in the Learning Environments

The findings showed that five participant teachers made some arrangements in the learning environments according to the needs and abilities of the inclusive child(ren), while the other five teachers did not report any specific arrangements in the learning environments. See Figure 6 for detailed information.

The teachers make the following arrangements in the learning environments: "having the child sit close to the teacher, material and screen" (n=2), "removing unsafe materials" (n=1), "preparing visual teaching aids" (n=1) and "creating interest areas" (n=1). P6 teacher explained her opinions about this issue as follows:

> Yes, I do. For instance, one of my students had albinism. He had poor vision. If there is a problem with vision, I prepare visual materials; if there is a problem with hearing, I get him to sit next to me. Because these children try hard to produce these sounds, I should be able to perceive them. Unfortunately, there is not a unique garden for the preschool children. I take my students out when the garden is desolate and when the garden is not very crowded. After briefing my students about the rules before going to the garden, I join the garden activity by keeping the inclusive student very close to me.

As for the reasons for not making any special arrangements, the teachers stated: "not needed according to disability type" (n=4) and "the teacher's lack of knowledge" (n=1). P8 teacher explains this as follows:

> No, I do not. In fact, I do not know what to do. Do I need to do something? When I cannot communicate with a child with an attention deficit due to many stimuli, I take her to a place with fewer stimuli. I try to talk to her there.

Figure 6

The Arrangements in the Learning Environments for Special Needs Children

Findings about the Actions Taken When Challenges are Encountered during Inclusion Practices

All the participant teachers reported that they encounter various problems with special needs children, parents of special needs children, typically developed children and parents of typically developed children. See Figure 7 for detailed information.

The problems related to special needs child(ren) were reported as "adaptation problems" (n=2), "difficulty in self-expression" (n=1), "social exclusion problem" (n=2),

"physical violence" (n=1) and "need for personal guidance" (n=2). P9 teacher states the followings about the issue:

> Some problems might occur with special needs children. They might find difficulties in expressing themselves. They might find adapting to the class and obeying the rules challenging.

As for the problems related to parents of special needs children, the teachers mentioned: "socio-cultural characteristics" (n=1), "school-parent collaboration" (n=2), and "denial about their child having a disability" (n=4). P1 teacher expresses her feelings about these problems as follows:

> For instance, if parents do not know that their children need special education and are unaware of this, we might have difficulties getting the family to accept it. I mean, parents develop "not accepting" behavior due to the location of the school and the social-cultural characteristics of this location. We cannot diagnose the problem when we notice some inadequate abilities in the child. We should send him/her to the GRC (Guidance and Research Center) and collaborate with the parents throughout this process. It takes time for the parents to accept this and take the child to the necessary institutions for the diagnosis; it is a waste of time; we are getting late for his/her education…

The problems with regard to typically developed children were listed as "lack of empathy" (n=1) and "failure to communicate" (n=1). The following quote by P2 teacher provides a good summary of such problems:

> While working with special needs children, first of all, we face problems and difficulties with having the parents of special needs children and other children [typically developed] in the class, and their parents accept that these children have special problems and different needs and empathize with these children. I mean, first, they need to accept the presence of this child in the classroom. After s/he is accepted, we should reinforce this acceptance during the activities while playing with his friends, sharing something, or giving responsibility to other children in the group plays. I mean, other children need to realize that this child has a special need and they are not like them, and every child is different.

P5 teacher defined "refusing to accept the special needs child" (n=1) as a problem with the parents of typically developed children by saying, "*… Even there are parents who do not want inclusive children in the class. This is the most serious problem I face…*"

The teacher listed the challenges from her own perspective as "lack of time" (n=3), "increased workload" (n=2), "difficulty in classroom management" (n=2) and "full inclusion" (n=1). P3 teacher explained the difficulties she experienced as follows:
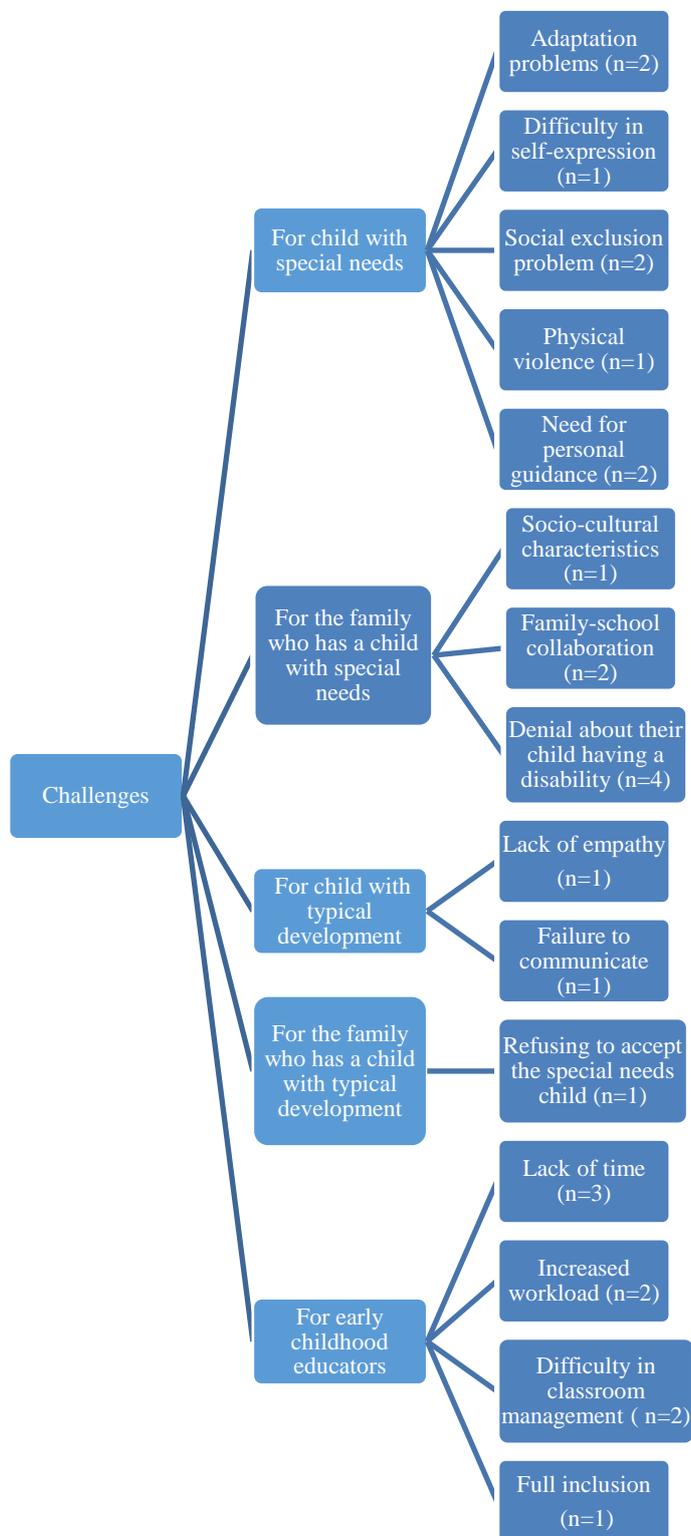
> Not having enough time to support the child [with special needs], insufficient support by the parents, and not being able to spend time on my responsibilities or other children while caring about my inclusive child. For instance, [my inclusive student] needs personal guidance in each activity.

P8 teacher made the following explanations about the issue:

> I am experiencing difficulties with classroom management because when I pay attention to such children, I deviate my attention from others. It is challenging to manage both sides at the same time.
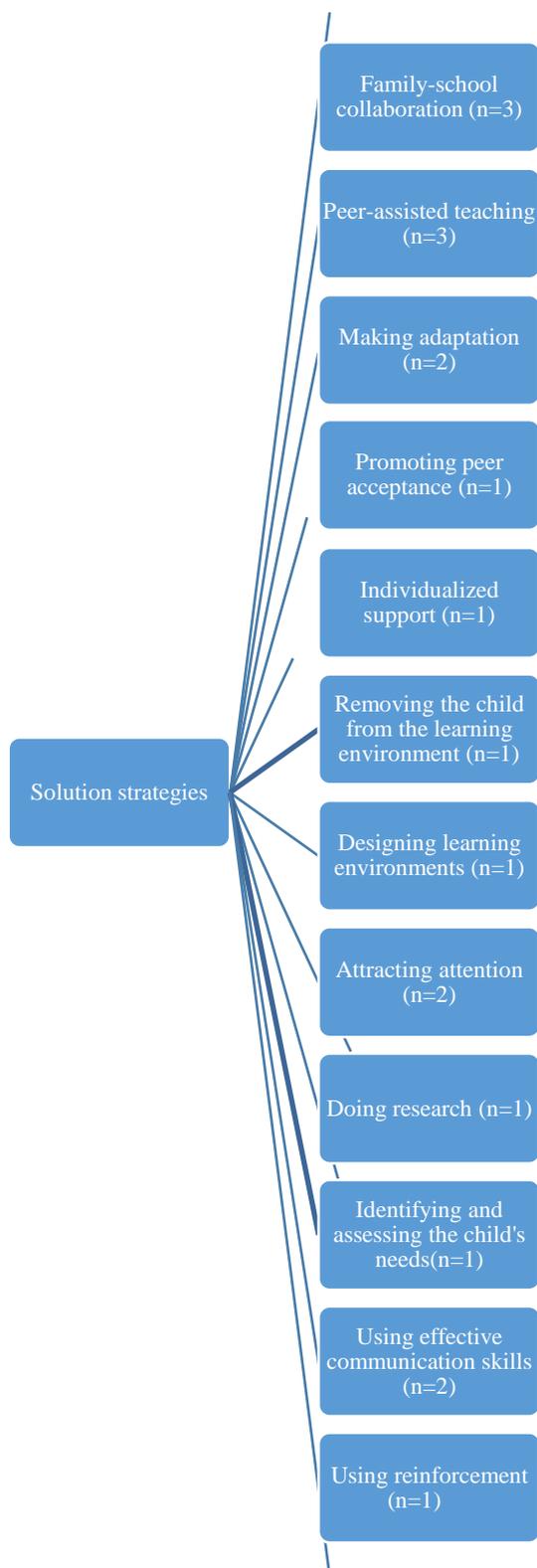
Figure 7

The Challenges Encountered

The participant teachers reported 19 different actions they took in order to cope with the challenges they encountered: (a) "family-school collaboration" (n=3), (b) "peer-assisted

teaching" (n=3), (c) "making adaptation" (n=2), (d) "promoting peer acceptance" (n=1), (e) "individualized support" (n=1), (f) "removing the child from the learning environment" (n=1), (g) "designing learning environments" (n=1), (h) "attracting attention" (n=2), (i) "doing research" (n=1), (k) "identifying and assessing the child's needs" (n=l) (l) "using effective communication skills" (n=2), and (m) "using reinforcement" (n=1). See Figure 8 for detailed information. P6, a participant teacher, talked about the solution methods as follows:

> When I am informed that there will be an inclusive child in my class, first, I examine his/her report, if there is one, of course. I learn about his/her special needs, and type of inclusion and search about it. I learn about his/her level in the report, and later, I talk to the child face-to-face. Later, I search for what I should do. To begin with, such children need to be loved the most; they rarely see other people than their mother, father, and close relatives. First, I approach him/her without adopting any techniques. Naturally, an emotional bond develops between me and him/her. So, all those techniques start to work after this emotional bond. Later, I search for which materials I can use to attract the child's attention and which techniques I should employ to make him/her participate in the activity with other students because these techniques are unique for each child. Afterward, I prepare an IEP and share it with the guidance teacher. I continue with my plan like that.
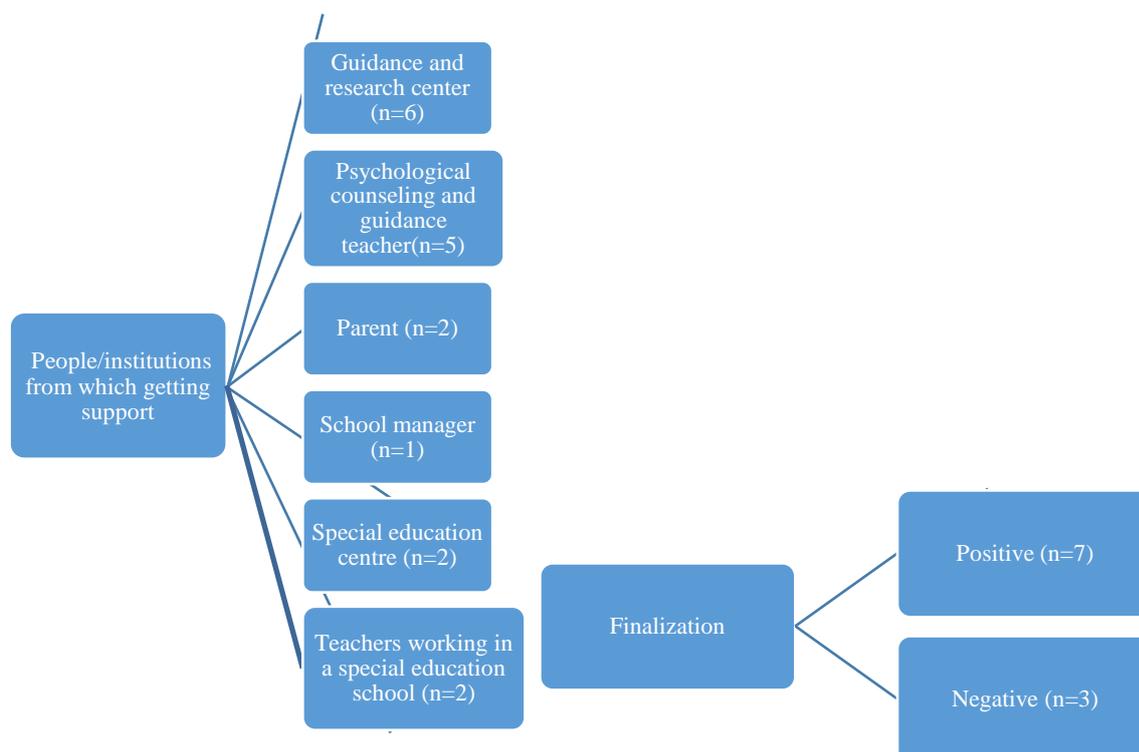
Figure 8

Solutions

As for people and / or institutions that the teachers asked for help while adopting the solutions mentioned above, GRC (Guidance and Research Center) was the most popular (n=6), which was followed by psychological counseling and guidance teacher working at the

school (n=5), parents (n=2), special education center (n=2), teachers working in a special education school (n=1), and school manager (n=1). Of these 10 cases, seven attempts to get help brought positive consequences and three negative ones. See Figure 9.

Figure 9

People / Institutions Asked for Help and Consequences

Findings about the Actions Taken When a Problem is Encountered with Typically Developed Children

Nine participant teachers stated that typically developed children's "not accepting the special needs child" during inclusion practices as an essential problem. They also reported 17 actions they took when they faced such a problem: (a) "normalizing the disability" (n=1), (b) "making him aware of his different needs" (n=1), (c) "peer support" (n=2), (d) "being a role model" (n=3), (e) "talking to typically developed children" (n=1), (f) "love language" (n=1), (g) "empathizing" (n=4), (h) "parental support" (n=1), (i) "disability awareness activities" (n=2) and (k) "warning children with typical development" (n=1). (See Figure 10)

Figure 10

The Actions Taken When the Inclusive Child is not Accepted by His/ Her Classmates
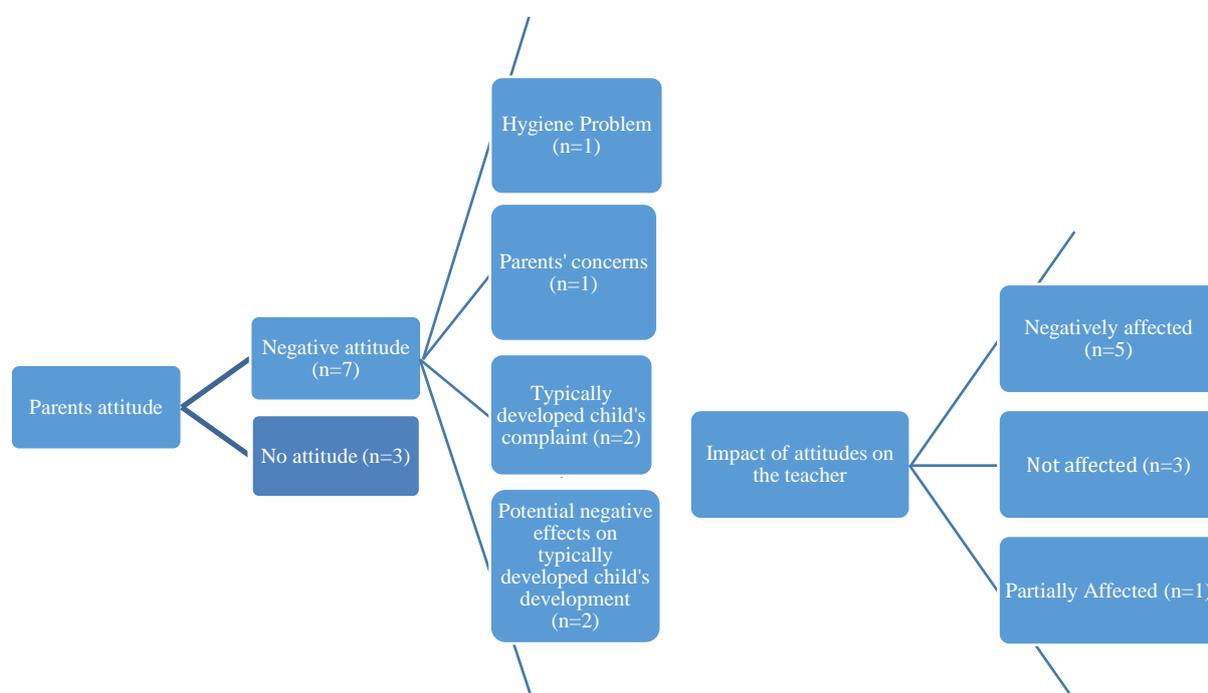

Findings about the Actions Taken When a Problem is Encountered with the Parents of Typically Developed Children

Three of the participant teachers stated that the parents had no attitudes, while the remaining seven reported parents' negative attitudes. The reasons given for such a negative attitude were "hygiene problem" (n=1), "the parents' concerns" (n=1), "typically developed

child's complaints" (n=2), and "potential negative effects on typically developed child's development" (n=2). Five teachers said that they were negatively affected by the parents' negative attitudes, three of them did not report any effects of these negative attitudes, and one of them stated that s/he was partially affected by them. (See Figure 11)
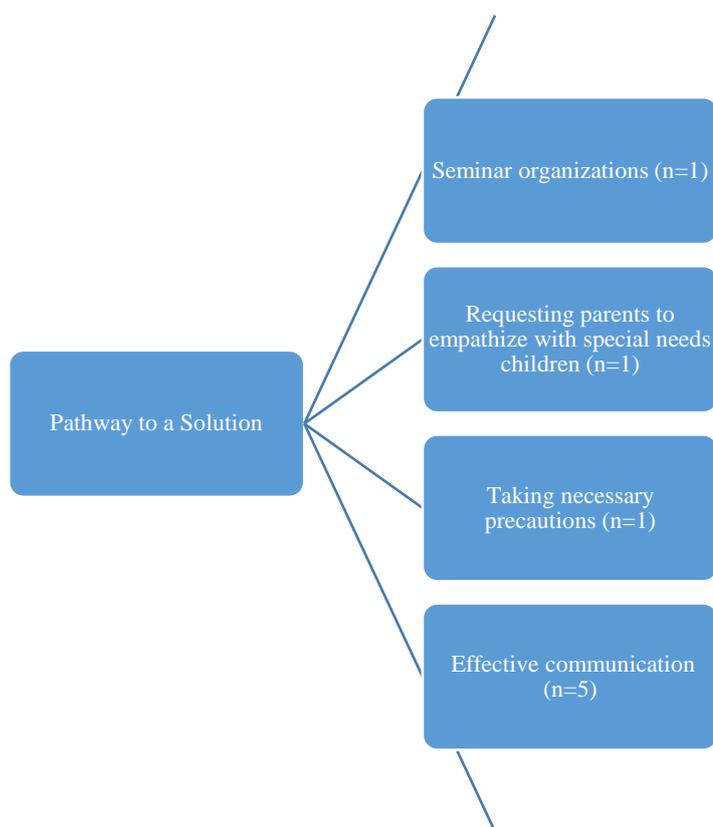
Figure 11

Typically Developed Children's Parents' Attitudes Towards Inclusive Students and Their Effects on Teachers

When a parent develops a negative attitude, teachers take some actions including (a) "seminar organizations" (n=1), (b) "requesting parents to empathize with special needs children" (n=1), "taking necessary precautions" (n=1) and (d) "effective communication" (n=5). (See Figure 12)

Figure 12

Teachers' Solutions for Typically Developed Children's Parents' Attitudes towards Inclusive Students

As a summary, the findings of the qualitative data indicated there was no significant difference between early childhood educators' sentiments, attitudes and concerns about inclusive education and the following variables: "presence or absence of an inclusive child in the class", "teachers' age", "duration of professional experience", "the number of students in the classes" and "duration of experience with special needs children". However, a significant difference was identified between early childhood educators' sentiments, attitudes and concerns about inclusive education and the following variables: "the province of the school where they work", "having a relative with special needs or not," and "levels of received training on special education."

On the other hand, no significant difference was found between early childhood educators' teacher efficacies in inclusion practices and the following variables: "presence or absence of an inclusive child in the class", "the province of the school where they work", "teachers' age", "duration of professional experience", "the number of students in the classes" and "levels of received training on special education". Nonetheless, a significant difference was specified between early childhood educators' teacher efficacies in inclusion practices and "having a relative with special needs or not". The duration of experience with special needs children only changed the "collaboration" dimension of "teacher efficacies in inclusion practices" positively.

Although no correlation was found between total scores of teachers' "sentiments, attitudes and concerns about inclusive education" with "teacher efficacies in inclusion practices, there were weak positive correlations among the dimensions of the scales.

When it comes to qualitative data analysis, the findings demonstrated that teachers had more positive attitudes towards inclusive education when they had more experience with different special needs. Even though teachers encountered challenges with special needs and typically developed children during inclusion practices, they had positive attitudes and awareness about making adaptations based on special needs children's characteristics and interests. The most stated challenges for special needs children are adaptation-based problems. Teachers mentioned increased workload and the presence of full-time inclusive student in the class as challenges. They also emphasized effective collaboration between families, regular and special schools, and GRCs. Social behavior acquisition of children with special needs was their most declared advantage. In addition, teachers mostly make adaptations based on the children's special needs for in-class practices.

Discussion and Results

According to the present study's findings, 35 out of 135 teachers who participated in the quantitative part of the study had an inclusive child(ren) in their classes. However, no significant difference was found between the "presence or absence of an inclusive child in the class" and early childhood teachers' "sentiments, attitudes and concerns about inclusive education" and "teacher efficacies in inclusion practices". Özcan and Karaoğlu (2021) also did not find a significant difference between the "presence or absence of an inclusive child in the class" and "teacher efficacies in inclusion practices" and "sentiments" and "concerns" about inclusive education dimensions. However, the "attitude" dimension had a significant negative difference. Based on these results, the qualitative part of the study was planned, and the teachers having inclusive child(ren) in their classes were interviewed.

The findings related to "the city where the teacher works" showed that the scores of the teachers working in a city with approximately 1.400.000 population in the Central Anatolia Region on their "sentiments, attitudes and concerns about inclusive education" were higher than those working in the city with approximately 230.000 population in the Eastern Anatolia region. However, no significant difference was found between "city" variable and "teacher efficacies in inclusion practices". The similar studies in the literature were either

conducted only in one city (Gezer, 2017; Yıkmış, Aktaş, Karabulut and Terzioğlu, 2018) or no data were presented about "city" variable in the studies carried out in more than one city (Bayar, 2015; Kale, Dikici Sığırtmaç Nur & Abbak, 2016). This finding might be because teachers might be affected by the socio-cultural characteristics of the schools where they work.

The study also concluded that the scores obtained by the participant teachers who have a relative with special needs in "sentiments about inclusive education", teacher efficacies' "collaboration" and "classroom management" dimensions, and the overall score they received from "teacher efficacies in inclusion practices" were higher than those achieved by the teachers with no relatives with special needs. This finding is consistent with the study conducted by Özcan and Karaoğlu (2021); however, they also found that only "sentiments" were positively affected. Indeed, studies report a lack of significance regarding the "presence or absence of a relative with special needs" (Özdemir, 2010; Temel, 2000). In the present study, it was concluded that teachers with a relative with special needs might develop empathy for inclusive child(ren), which, in turn, might positively affect their sentiments about inclusive education and their teacher efficacies.

There was not a significant difference between early childhood teachers' "age" and their "sentiments, attitudes and concerns about inclusive education" and "teacher efficacies in inclusion practices". Similar findings were reported in the studies by Nacaroğlu (2014), Üstün and Bayar (2017), Özcan and Karaoğlu (2021); however, some studies concluded that as teachers get older, they start to develop negative attitudes towards inclusive education (Gal, Schreur and Engel-Yeger, 2010; Özdemir, 2010). The data obtained in the qualitative part of the present study revealed that some teachers might have positive attitudes when they are younger and have fewer experiences with special needs children or when they get older and gain more experience with special needs children, which might explain the lack of significance in terms of "age" variable.

The study also concluded that early childhood teachers' "sentiments, attitudes and concerns about inclusive education" and "teacher efficacies in inclusion practices" did not differ according to their "professional experience", which is consistent with the findings of the studies conducted by Özcan and Karaoğlu (2021) and Emam and Mohamed (2011). However, the data from the qualitative part of the present study showed that more experienced teachers gave more detailed explanations about inclusion practices. On the other hand, Gülsün et al., (2023) found that "professional experience" negatively predicted primary

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teachers' sentiments, attitudes and concerns about inclusive education; it positively predicted their "teacher efficacies in inclusion practices".

The results of the study indicated that early childhood teachers' "sentiments, attitudes and concerns about inclusive education" and "teacher efficacies in inclusion practices" did not differ according to "the number of students in the classes". Despite the presence of some similar findings, Özcan and Karaoğlu (2021) found negative effects of total number of students in the class only on the "attitude" dimension. Furthermore, two teachers in the qualitative part of the study mentioned crowded classrooms, the presence of the inclusive child(ren), and challanges of inclusion practices. The teachers participating in the study conducted by Gezer (2017) also reported that full-time inclusion and crowded classrooms impede effective implementations of classroom activities.

The findings demonstrated that early childhood teachers' "sentiments, attitudes and concerns about inclusive education" and "teacher efficacies in inclusion practices" did not differ according to "inclusive child's special need type". However, the study's qualitative data showed that some special needs and lack of abilities (e.g., lack of self-care skills and mental retardation) were more challenging for teachers. Tuş and Çifci Tekinarslan (2013), in the interviews conducted with the parents of special needs children, found that parents highlighted the difficulties encountered in self-care skills. Similarly, Sargın and Sünbül (2002) and Gök (2009) argued that the type and degree of disability might cause difficulties for teachers in inclusion practices.

As teachers' levels of received training on special education increase, their scores on the "attitude" dimension and total scores for "sentiments, attitudes and concerns about inclusive education" decrease. However, not a significant difference was found between levels of "received training on special education" and "teacher efficacies in inclusion practices". It is thought that early childhood teachers' sentiments, attitudes and concerns change negatively when they realize the multi-dimensional nature of special education as their levels of special education increase. In contrast, Özcan (2020) did not find any significant differences between "levels of received training" and "sentiments, attitudes and concerns about inclusive education".

As teachers' experiences with special needs children increase, only the "collaboration" dimension of "teacher efficacies in inclusion practices" changes positively. There was not a significant difference between "professional experience" and "sentiments, attitudes and concerns about inclusive education". It is projected that as teachers' experience with special

needs children increases, their experience about how to collaborate also increases, which is also supported by the study's qualitative data. Similarly, Özcan and Karaoğlu (2021) did not report any significant differences in their study. However, Üstün and Bayar (2017) concluded that teachers develop positive attitudes as their experience with children with special needs increases.

According to the results of the correlation analyses performed within the scope of the present study, early childhood teachers' "sentiments, attitudes and concerns about inclusive education" did not correlate with "teacher efficacies in inclusion practices". However, there was a weak positive correlation between "sentiments" "attitudes" and "concerns" dimensions and total scores of "teacher efficacies in inclusion practices" and its dimensions. In other words, as teachers' sentiments and attitudes change positively, "teacher efficacies", "teacher competency", "collaboration," and "classroom management" also change positively. Therefore, developing positive sentiments and attitudes allows teachers to feel competent regarding inclusion practices and design and implement effective inclusion practices. Özcan and Karaoğlu (2021) and Emam and Mohammed (2011) also reported similar findings about "attitudes".

Besides, as teachers' levels of concern increase, teachers' efficacies and "teacher competence", "collaboration," and "classroom management" also change positively, which implies that the changes in levels of concern positively affect their practices for special needs children. On the other hand, Özcan and Karaoğlu (2021) found a negative correlation between the level of concern and teacher efficacy.

The study's qualitative data showed that the teachers interviewed have previously worked with children with different special needs. The analyses revealed that the teachers developed more positive attitudes towards inclusive education when they had experiences with different types of disabilities. Çulhaoğlu-İmrak (2009) also suggested that teachers' experiences with special needs children are significant factors in inclusive education.

The participant teachers highlighted the advantages and disadvantages while expressing their opinions about inclusion practices. The disadvantages were mainly about individuals with special needs, typically developed individuals and teachers, while the advantages focused only on individuals with special needs and typically developed individuals. In fact, teachers' positive sentiments and attitudes and their awareness about the need to make necessary adaptations according to the specific needs and interest areas of special needs children can be listed as some of these advantages. The most common

disadvantage mentioned regarding individuals with special needs is "adaptation problems". As for typically developed individuals, "not accepting the differences" and "failure to empathize" were the most common disadvantages, and "workload" was the most significant disadvantage for teachers. Akalın (2015), Sadioğlu, Bilgin, Batu and Oksal (2013) and Demir and Açar (2011) also concluded that inclusion practices increased the workloads of teachers.

Social behavior acquisitions of individuals with special needs were one of the most frequent advantages stated in the interviews. Similarly, Küçük Doğaroğlu and Bapoğlu Değirmenci (2015), in the interviews conducted with teachers, also found that it is possible to foster the adaptation of individuals with special needs through the implementation of inclusion practices and help them acquire skills to sustain their lives as well as cognitive, social and emotional ones. The advantage for typically developed individuals was "learning to live together with individuals with special needs and not to exclude them".

Teachers often have to make specific adaptations in activities to ensure the active participation of individuals with special needs in the learning process. When examples of such adaptations were examined, it was found that half of the teachers generally made adaptations for in-class practices, and during the interviews, they did not mention any adaptation attempts for out-of-class practices. In addition, it might be concluded that the teachers are not knowledgeable enough about inclusion practices. Dikici Sığıtmaç, Hoş and Abbak (2011) found that teachers fail to implement effective adaptations since they do not have enough knowledge about inclusion practices. Similarly, the study conducted by Temiz and Parlak-Rakap (2018) examined the adaptation section of teaching practice plans prepared by pre-service teachers. The results showed that pre-service teachers often focused on a specific type of need. The authors argued that the reason behind this finding is teacher education programs' inadequacy in presenting practical information and real experiences regarding how to make effective adaptations in activities for individuals with different types of special needs.

According to the present study's findings, the difficulties experienced in inclusion practices are mostly about individuals with special needs and their parents, followed by teachers and typically developed children and their parents. The most common challenges for individuals with special needs are adaptation-related problems, while failing to accept reality is the first problem for their parents. Increased workload and the presence of full-time inclusive student in the class are the main problems for teachers. As for parents of typically developed children, the biggest problem is "not accepting child(ren) with special needs". The solutions proposed to solve such problems are promoting quality collaboration between

family and school, implementing peer-supported teaching, making necessary adaptations, and using effective communication skills. Also, GRCs and guidance teachers at school are preferred the most by the participants to receive the necessary support; however, they do not find this support sufficient. Akalın (2014) and Dikici Sığıtmaç, Hoş and Abbak (2011) suggested that teachers need assistance with inclusion practices at various levels.

The participant teachers become role models and do activities allowing typically developed children to empathize with the inclusive child in the class so that they can accept his/her presence in the classroom. Gezer (2017) also found that the teachers interviewed used stories, fairytales, and cartoons to help typically developed children feel empathy for the inclusive child(ren) in their classes. The studies also reported that parents of typically developed children generally have negative attitudes towards the presence of an inclusive student in the class, assuming that this student might have negative effects on their children's development, which often negatively affects class teachers. However, teachers do their best to convince such parents to develop positive attitudes by establishing effective communication with them. Similarly, the study by Tuş and Çifçi Tekinarslan (2013) also showed that typically developed children and their parents have negative attitudes towards the inclusive child(ren) in the classes.

Recommendations

The results of the present study revealed that most of the participant teachers experience difficulties in implementing effective adaptations and often have to cope with this difficulty by themselves. Moreover, the increase in teachers' training related to special education positively impacted their attitudes, views, and practices related to inclusive education. Some teachers highlighted that they did not graduate from university with sufficient knowledge and practice about special and inclusive education. Although there is a compulsory course on special education and inclusive education in the undergraduate program, this course provides only theoretical knowledge (Higher Education Council, 2018). Therefore, pre-service early childhood teachers should take compulsory courses on special education and inclusive education that provide theoretical knowledge and opportunities to practice this knowledge during their undergraduate education. During this practicum, they should have experience with children with different special needs and typically developed children in inclusion classrooms. In addition, Akdağ and Haser (2017) emphasized that pre-

service early education teachers' taking this practical education by observing special education implementation conducted by special education teachers in special education schools and inclusive practices carried out by early childhood educators in regular education preschools would be significantly beneficial in implementing more effective adaptations in their future classes. Accordingly, the contents of early childhood education courses in associate degree and undergraduate degree programs of education faculties could be revised. Also, the knowledge teachers acquired during their undergraduate education should be extended and put into practice through in-service training sessions.

Furthermore, inclusive education is not a process that early childhood teachers can manage alone. Psychological counseling and guidance teachers at the preschools, special education teachers, school managers, and vice-managers should also be well-equipped with this type of education and giving support to special need and typically developed children's parents, be aware of their responsibilities, and provide constructive assistance whenever necessary. To achieve this purpose, shareholders should be encouraged and motivated to fulfill their duties and responsibilities more effectively and more consciously by providing in-service training opportunities, seminars, and similar practices and implementations. Existing control mechanisms can also be extended and improved for more productive and efficient inclusive education.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

The permissions required to conduct the present study were taken according to the rules specified in "The Directives for Higher Education Institutions Scientific Research and Publication Ethics". No actions specified under "the Actions Contradicting Scientific Research and Publication Ethics" were taken within the scope of this study.

Ethical Committee Permission Details

The Name of the Ethical Committee= Kirsehir Ahi Evran University Social Sciences and Humanities Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee

The Date of the Permission Granted: March 4th 2021

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