Determining Students’ Needs to Design Inclusion Course: Needs-based Course Design Preparation

Necdet Karasu¹

Summary

Recent changes in teacher education program which approved by the Higher Education Council of Turkey required students of education programs in higher education to take special education course. Also, the regulation about education of the students with special needs has been changed. All students with certain disabilities are considered as subjects to be involved in inclusive education settings. Therefore, early childhood department students are offered a course titled as inclusion. However, only limited number of education colleges can provide experts on inclusion even though there are considerable amount of early childhood education departments all over the country. Thus, a need to design a course for all education colleges appeared as necessity.

Since inclusion course is offered in the last semester of senior year, a course design to teach inclusion must have special features to work on. Ziegenfuss (2007) determined five major course design approaches. One of the highly preferred methods is named as needs-based course design. What makes that design is its focus on practical needs for professional future of the students. Therefore, lying on that approach to design a course seemed preferable to the researcher. In order to construct the course, the researcher started to learn about what the needs, knowledge, and expectations of the senior students of the early childhood education department.

Method

Participants were students at early childhood education program in a major teacher education college in Ankara. Twenty female participants volunteered to be in the study. The age varied from 21-25. The study continued for more than 2 years. The study was based on qualitative research methodology. As data gathering method, a set of structured interview questions were prepared. In the first year 10 questions were directed to teacher candidates. Two questions from original form were dropped due to the responses giving by first participant group. Those 2 questions failed in gathering targeted data.

All those students were provided a form consisted of 8 structured questions to determine the level of students’ knowledge level about special education and inclusion. Also, how they perceive their ability for working with students with disabilities. In addition to those questions, their expectations and requests from inclusion course was gathered.

Results

Based on the candidates’ responses, it appears that they lack in basic special education and inclusion knowledge. Even though they have some confidence in them on working with the students with disabilities, they also admit the difficulty of the work. The results also provided some evidence for the expectations of teacher candidates for their future professional life. They strongly believe that they will need practical info, even practice to able to work with their students with disabilities in future.

¹ Gazi University, Gazi Faculty of Education, Department of Special Education, necdetkarasu@gazi.edu.tr
Discussion

In order to design a course to teach about inclusion to early childhood education department students, it appears that needs-based course design approach would be the one that meet the needs of teacher candidates. A course with rather practical information is more likely expected by the candidates than only information based course. Provided insight can help to pin out the important features for teacher candidates.