Factors for the Success of Early Childhood Inclusion & Related Studies in Turkey

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Abstract

This paper was designed in two phases. The first phase determines the important aspects playing role in the successful early childhood inclusion. Based on related literature, teachers, school administrators, children with and without special needs, parents of children with and without special needs and physical environment were considered as the important aspects and discussed in the paper. In the second phase, some research studies conducted in Turkey about early childhood inclusion and opinions and attitudes of teachers and other people regarding inclusion were examined. The results of the research studies were also discussed.

Key words: Inclusion, factors influencing inclusion, early childhood, Turkey

The present study aims to give information in two subtitles. In the first part of the study, some important aspects playing essential roles in successful inclusion are being defined and discussed. In the second part, research studies related with early childhood inclusion conducted in Turkey in the last decade are being addressed and discussed.

Important aspects in early childhood inclusion
It is known that the first three years of children with developmental disabilities are very critical for starting to learn their environment. Since most of the information is known to be acquired in the early childhood years, environment plays an important role on

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children's learning (Barnett, 1995; Gomby, Larner, Stevenson, Lewit& Behrman, 1995; Odluyurt, 2008; Yoshikawa, 1995).

Reviewing the literature on early intervention practices for children with developmental disabilities, many results can be derived from the studies conducted (Barnett, 1995; Guralnick, 2001; Kemp, 2003; Smith & Strain, 1988; Yoshikawa, 1995). Odluyurt (2008) summarized these results in the following sequence:
  (a) Early intervention practices reduce the problem behaviors and accelerate social cognitive development of children with developmental disabilities.
  (b) When early intervention services are provided to children with developmental disabilities , they might more possibly acquire skills in physical, cognitive, self help, communication, and social developmental areas.
  (c) If children are provided with complex and intense services, behavioral and learning problems may decrease, and solutions of the possible problems may become easier.
  (d) In the early intervention programs, parents are seen as a part of the system. If the parents become a part of the education of their child from the beginning, they might become as the most important aspect of the education system of their children. Child-parent interaction develops and the stress level of the parents regarding their child's exceptionality reduces.

Depending on the results mentioned above, children with developmental disabilities should receive early intervention as soon as they are diagnosed. Although preschool education is compulsory for children with special needs in Turkey, professionals who diagnose the children usually do not have sufficient knowledge about the education opportunities for these children. Ertem (2005) examined the problems that children with developmental disabilities between 0-3 years and their parents live. The results of the study revealed that one of the most frequently mentioned problems that the parents live was the late referring to education. Even parents who learned that their child had developmental disabilities in the first days after birth, mentioned that they were referred for education when their child was 18 months. Hence, the medical professionals should be given information that "early education" means "as early as possible".

There are different early intervention programs for children with developmental disabilities and their parents either home-based or center-based. Portage, Small Steps, and other programs are being used both at home and at the kindergartens/preschools with children with developmental disabilities and their parents in Turkey. Although early education is a matter of the last 20 years in Turkey for children with special needs, it is getting a fast acceleration.

Inclusion in the early years of children provides access to regular education programs within regular education environments with peers without special needs. Inclusion is a rather challenging term in the education literature. In every country different implementations of inclusion have been carried out. No matter where and how it is

implemented, the success of inclusion depends on many different aspects. There are many factors which may be effective regarding inclusion's success. In order to conduct inclusion successfully, each factor should be working sufficiently. The factors affecting the success of inclusion have been defined as teachers, regular students, the students with special needs, school administration, parents of regular students and students with special needs, physical environment and support services (Batu & Kircaali-Iftar, 2008). In this study each of the aspects will be examined deeply.

The role of teachers in inclusion
Teachers are perhaps the most important agents affecting the success of inclusion. If the teachers are in a positive manner regarding inclusion, it is very possible that the inclusion process can be successful. But unfortunately, there are many research studies providing evidence about the unwillingness of teachers about inclusion practices and working with students with special needs (Avcı & Ersoy, 1999; Batu, 2000; Diken, 1998; Sargın & Sunbul, 2002; Sucuoğlu & Kargın, 2006; Uysal 1995). However, the studies also show that teachers become more willing to be a part of inclusion, when they are provided with enough information and support services before and during the inclusion process. Research also shows that the reason of the teachers' unwillingness is the lack of their knowledge about inclusion and students with special needs.

If the teachers have some required qualifications, they may feel more competent not only about inclusion but also about what to do with the students with special needs in and out of the class. The qualifications needed for the teachers to be successful as inclusion implementers are as follows:
  (a) to be able to take place in the team of assessment and program development,
  (b) to be able to make suggestions and put these suggestions into action for the student with special needs' success in the regular class,
  (c) to be able to construct equal educational opportunities for all students including the student with special needs (Friend & Bursuck, 2006; Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2004).

If the teachers take place in the team of assessment and program development, they have to work collaboratively with special education teachers, parents of both children with special needs and the ones without special needs, and also with the other professionals working with the child with special needs. These professionals may include speech therapists, physiotherapists, and etc (Batu & Kircaali-Iftar, 2005; Friend & Bursuck, 2006; Lewis & Doorlag, 2003; Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2004).

An important point that plays an essential role in the success of inclusion in the preschools is that the preschool teachers should realize that social and individual development is as important as academic success for a student with special needs. Inclusion aims to provide appropriate education to the students with special needs in a least restrictive environment. Another very important aim of inclusion is to try to develop the social skills similar to these of the regular peers. When the literature is reviewed, it can be seen that students with special needs usually have difficulties in

showing appropriate social skills in appropriate environments. Therefore, they are frequently not accepted into the social groups in schools, classes, play grounds, and etc. For this reason, the regular education teacher should realize the importance of development of social skills and take it as important as the academic skills for the students with special needs. In order to do this, the teacher should integrate social skills teaching program into the Individualized Education Programs (IEP) of the students. For doing this, the teacher may evaluate the student's performance about the social skills of his/her age level, and then plan the skills to be taught in and out of the class (Friend & Bursuck, 2006; Lewis & Doorlag, 2003; Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2004).

In the social skills teaching process, generalization of the skills plays an important role for the children with special needs. If the determined social skills are taught only in the classroom, the student may not be able to generalize the skill into the real environments. Therefore, the teachers should keep in mind to generalize the skills across different materials, different people, different settings, and different times.

There are many aspects affecting the perspectives of teachers towards inclusion and children with special needs. Some of these factors are the age of the teacher, the background of the teacher, the type of disability of the child with special needs, the severity of the disability, the type, frequency and quality of the support services provided to the student with special needs, and also to the teacher, and the acceptance of the school administration regarding the student with special needs as well. Research shows that younger teachers are more willing to accept students with special needs into their classes. Especially with the preschool students, teachers should be energetic enough to be able to cope with the children all the day. Also that, teachers who took courses related with special education and children with special needs was more willing for inclusion. Type of disability is another factor playing an important role on the decision of accepting the students with special needs into the classes. Another research result is that, students with mental retardation are the least preferred disability group (Batu, & Uysal, 2006). Children with severe and profound disabilities are the least preferred group for inclusion, whereas mild to moderate disabilities of every disability group are more preferred groups of disability to be placed into the regular education classes. Another important factor affecting the opinions of teachers about inclusion is the support services. If the teachers are provided with sufficient support services both for themselves and to the student with special needs, then they are more likely to accept these students into their classes more willingly (Batu & Kircaali-Iftar, 2005; Friend & Bursuck, 2006; Lewis & Doorlag, 2003; Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2004).

Regarding the findings and information above, it can be said that teachers should be prepared for inclusion before the implementation starts in their classes. They should be provided with information about the students with special needs and inclusion implementations. They should also be provided with special education support services during the implementations.

The role of students with special needs in inclusion
Preparing the student with special needs for inclusion is another very important part of successful inclusion. In order to prepare the student with special needs for the regular education setting, the student has to be provided with education for the behavioral and academic skills which have to be used frequently in the regular education settings. In order to do this, regular trips might be arranged to the class for the student to get used to the new environment as easily as possible. The student with special needs should be taught to go to the class from the entrance of the school, and also from the class to the restrooms and back to the class, and also the locations of other essential places in the school. S/he should be taught also ask for permission to borrow others' materials, obey all of the regular class rules and routines. In order to be able to teach these to the student with special needs before the inclusion implementation starts, the student might be taken to the kindergarten or preschool out of the school hours, if possible, to the classroom which s/he will be placed during the school year. The routines, rules, and materials should be introduced to the student in the actual classroom and school.

Social skills teaching should take place in the program. Since social skills cause the students with special needs to be accepted by their peers, these skills should take a primary place in the educational programs of these children. More social skills mean more probability for the acceptance of the students with special needs by their peers in the regular education settings (Batu & Uysal, 2006). Taking turns, asking for permission to take other's materials, to say "thank you", greeting, and other social skills are the skills to be taught.

In order to teach the rules and routines, the rules and routines should be determined and be photographed. The photograph list should be stuck on the wall of the student's class where s/he can see easily. The rules and routines should be reviewed during the day, and every attempt to obey the rules and routines should be praised or reinforced by the teacher. Teachers should increase the variety of praises and reinforcers in order to keep the students' attention on the activities running in the class. If the students with special needs are prepared for the inclusion implementation properly, less problem behaviors may occur in the class which may mean easier acceptance of these children by their peers without special needs (Batu & Kircaali-Iftar, 2005; Friend & Bursuck, 2006; Lewis & Doorlag, 2003; Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2004). Just as the other aspects playing role in the success of inclusion, only preparing the students with special needs for inclusion is not enough. Providing special education support services during the implementations is also very important for the success of inclusion.

The role of students without special needs in inclusion
The best and perhaps the most unimagined result of inclusion is regular education students' acceptance of their peers with special needs both into their classes and their lives. One of the aims of inclusion is to give opportunities to children with special needs to interact with their normally developing peers and increase the social acceptance probability of children with special needs among their peers in and out of the schools.

Regular students are very important components for conducting a successful inclusion because students do not usually learn everything from the teacher in the school. They frequently learn from their peers during the activities in and out of the class (Batu, & Uysal, 2006). Therefore, regular class students should be prepared for their peers during the inclusion implementations.

Regular education students should be provided with information regarding the characteristics of their classmate with special needs and the ways of helping him/her in and out of the class. For the regular education students, learning the right way of providing appropriate help is very vital because the students with special needs have to learn independently. Therefore, providing help whenever s/he needs is not very beneficial for them. First, showing easier ways of practicing the skill by her/himself has to be done, and then if s/he cannot manage, the appropriate amount of help should be provided. If the regular education student knows these factors, they can be more useful helpers for their peers with special needs (Friend & Bursuck, 2006; Lewis & Doorlag, 2003; Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2004).

The role of school administration in inclusion
Another important factor for the inclusion process to be successful is the school administration. If the school administration has an accepting perspective for inclusion and students with special needs, the success of inclusion becomes easier for the school. If the school administration accepts inclusion, this means a lot of problems that need to be solved will be solved easily. The problems to be solved will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

(a) The number of regular education students in the classes can be distributed equally: For the inclusion process to be successful there should be a limited number of regular education students in the classes for the teacher to be able to control all the students in the class.
(b) There should not be more than two inclusion students in the class: In the regular classes where inclusion student is placed, there should be one or two inclusion students. If more than one inclusion students are placed into the classes, the type of the disability of the students should be the same (e.g. mental retardation).
(c) The place of the class can be determined depending on the type of the disability of the inclusion student: The location of the class is very important for the inclusion students. For example, if the student has a physical disability, the class may be on the ground floor for the student to be more independent in the class and school, or if the student has a visual disability, the location of the class can be close to the toilets for the student to be able to go to the toilets independently and easily.
(d) The materials needed could be provided depending on the needs of the inclusion student: For each type of disability, different materials can be needed in order to prepare a more comfortable environment for the student with special needs (e.g. a U type desk for a child with a wheel chair to enable him to be closer to his desk), and also to make the lessons more understandable for the student depending on his/her special needs (e.g.

for a student with hearing impairment, more visual materials should be provided in order for the student be more able to understand what he is being taught).

(e) In-service trainings of teachers should be provided by the school administration: If the school administration has an accepting manner towards inclusion, then the in-service trainings can be arranged for the teachers by the school administration during appropriate periods of the school year.

(f) Factors related with special education support services can be provided by the school administration: If there are inclusion students in a school, and if the inclusion process is to be successful, then some special education support services should be provided. A resource room, a special education teacher and materials necessary for the support of the students with special needs can be the factors affecting the success of inclusion process, but especially the student with special needs (Friend & Bursuck, 2006; Lewis & Doorlag, 2003; Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2004).

Besides the points mentioned above, if the school administration has an accepting attitude regarding inclusion and students with special needs, it can be said that, this will probably affect the attitudes of regular education teachers, regular education students, and the regular education students' parents positively (Lewis & Doorlag, 2003; Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2004).

The role of physical environment in inclusion
Physical environment has a very important role on the success of inclusion process. The physical environment includes the classroom and the materials in the class. It does not matter if it is a regular education class or a special education class, one to one teaching class or a group teaching class, each class has to be an attractive place to motivate students' learning. The attractiveness of the class affects the students' behavioral responses, as well as their success during the activities.

Another important point to be mentioned is the number of the students in the class. There should be appropriate number of students in the class regarding the size of the class. If the class is a small one, the number of students in the class should be appropriate for the size of the class, but if the class is a big one, then the number of students can be more compared to a small class.

The safety of all students is another very important aspect in the classroom. Especially the students with special needs and the type of the disability they have should be considered while preparing the physical environment. If the inclusion student has a visual disability, then there should not be any materials on the floor, between the desks, and in the corridors. For the students who have balance problems, again the materials on the floor will be a serious problem. A slippery surface will be a problem for the student with balance problem as well.

The desks should be appropriate for the students' physical conditions. If the students feel comfortable in their desks, they will remain in their seats for a longer period of time. The activities done by the students can be placed on the walls of the class in order to

enable students to see their products and also to make them willing to produce more activities to see them on the walls. But the activities should be replaced with new ones to make the class tidy enough for the students to recognize their own activities. Especially students with special needs (e.g. mental retardation) might need this to find their own products among all the activities on the wall.

If the physical environment of the class is prepared appropriately for the students with special needs, many problems may be solved before they occur; such as behavior problems, attention disorders, etc. The physical environment should be prepared appropriately for the students before they arrive to the class. After a while, when the teacher gets used to the students, s/he can make arrangements depending on the characteristics, needs, and strengths of the students (Batu & Kircaali-Iftar, 2005; Friend & Bursuck, 2006; Lewis & Doorlag, 2003; Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2004).

If the school administration has an accepting attitude towards inclusion and inclusion students, the arrangement of the physical environment could be easier for the teacher because the administration could support the teacher's efforts for the preparation of a better physical environment.

The role of parents of students with and without special needs in inclusion
Both groups of parents play a very important role in the success of the inclusion implementations. Therefore, both groups should be informed about the benefits of inclusion of their children and other children as well. Professionals can be invited to the school to give information about inclusion, special education, children with special needs, and other issues needed to be covered for parents.

For parents of the students with special needs, the informing sessions should contain their rights and responsibilities, as well as the benefits of inclusion for their children. Most of the parents usually do not know their rights and responsibilities; and therefore, they think that if any component of the inclusion process does not want their child to be in the regular school, they should take the child from the school. Inclusion is a right to all of the students with special needs given by the regulations, and the parents should be informed about this and many other rights they have.

For parents of regular education students, the simulation activities and other empathy exercises can be conducted to put themselves into other parents' shoes. It is very important to tell parents of regular education students that the teacher will not spend most of his time with the student with special needs if a good program is prepared for the inclusion student.

For both groups of parents, the importance of their participation to their children's educational program should be emphasized. Especially, the parents of students with special needs should realize their importance in their children's education because they will be the partners of the teacher at home to continue the acquired knowledge and skills

in the real life (Batu & Kircaali-Iftar, 2005; Friend & Bursuck, 2006; Lewis & Doorlag, 2003; Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2004).

Each of the above mentioned aspect play an essential role on the succes of inclusion process. Preparation of every aspect before the inclusion implementations start and providing effective and efficient support services during the implementations are the milestones of successful inclusion. There are many research studies conducted in the area of early childhood inclusion in Turkey. In the following parts of the present study, the summaries and results of these research studies will be shared.

Studies related with early childhood inclusion
One of the studies examined the information needs of parents of children with mental retardation who are in the transition process into a public kindergarten. Participants of the study were 50 parents of children with mental retardation with ages ranging from 3 to 5. "The Scale of Parental Information Needs in Transition to Kindergarten" was used for collecting the data. Authors also examined the effects of different variables such as the age at which the children started to get education, and also the age and educational level of the participant parents. The results of the study revealed that most of the parents mentioned that they need information. The topics of the needed information were "where to get help and advice when my child has a problem in the school", "the titles of the information that will be provided for my child at school", "how to tell about my child's situation to the other parents", and also "where to get support services during the inclusion process of my child" (Cifci-Tekinarslan & Bircan, 2009).

Another study was related with development of children with Down syndrome who were aged from 4 to 6. Baysal-Metin (1989) conducted a study with 12 children with Down syndrome who were enrolled in the experiment and control groups of the study. The author compared the development of children who were in the control group with the children who were in the experiment group within intellectual, communication, motor, social and self-help areas. The results of the study showed that children who were in the experiment group, which means who were placed in inclusion classes, had higher scores from Denver Development Test and Seattle Performance Development Scale in the areas of intellectual, social, self-help and motor development.

There are also a group of studies examined the opinions and attitudes about inclusion. Ozbaba (2000), Sargin and Sunbul (2002), Artan and Uyanik-Balat (2003), Varlier and Vuran (2006) and Bozarslan-Malkoc (2010) examined the opinions and attitudes of different groups regarding the inclusion process in the early childhood years of children with special needs.

Ozbaba (2000) conducted a study for examining the attitudes of parents who have children with and without special needs and also the teachers who were working in preschools about the inclusion implementations being conducted in their schools. In order to collect the data, besides the personal information, "Preschool Years Inclusion Attitude Scale" was used both with parents and teachers. The participants of the study

were 40 parents of children with special needs, 260 parents of children without special needs, and 32 teachers working in five preschools. The results of the study revealed that there was a significant difference in the attitudes of parents of children with and without special needs. Also it was found that, variables such as age, experience, gender, and major were not effective on the attitudes of the teachers towards inclusion. The attitudes of teachers toward inclusion were positive.

In the other two studies, Sargin and Sunbul (2002) and Artan and Uyanik-Balat (2003) examined the attitudes and opinions of teachers who were working in preschools in different cities in Turkey. Sargin and Sunbul (2002) used a attitude scale whereas Artan and Uyanik-Balat (2003) used a survey in order to collect their data. Both studies showed that teaches had positive attitude and opinions regarding inclusion implementations in general. But Sargin and Sunbul (2002) found that the severity of the disability of the children with special needs was an important variable on the attitudes of teachers as well. The more severe the students' disability meant, the more negative the teachers' attitudes towards inclusion of those children. On the other hand, Artan and Uyanik-Balat (2003) concluded that although teachers' opinions were positive about inclusion implementations, they mentioned that they needed more information about children with special needs and inclusion implementations.

In other two studies Varlier and Vuran (2006) and Bozarslan-Malkoc (2010) conducted similar studies regarding the opinions of preschool teachers about inclusion. Varlier and Vuran (2006) conducted their study with public preschools teachers whereas Bozarslan-Malkoc (2010) conducted hers in private preschools in Eskisehir. In the study of Varlier and Vuran (2006) there were 30 preschool teachers as the participants of the study, Bozarslan-Malkoc (2010) realized her study with 26 preschool teachers and school administrators of eight public preschools. The results of both studies showed that no matter if they were working in public or private preschools nearly all teachers thought that children with special needs should be placed in inclusion environments. Also, both groups mentioned that they needed more information to be more useful for their students with special needs. In the study of Varlier and Vuran (2006) most of the teachers mentioned that their school environment was not good enough to provide sufficient education for their students with special needs whereas some of the participants of Bozarslan-Malkoc's (2010) study pointed that private schools are better placements for children with special needs because there usually are less number of students in the classes and teachers would be more involved with their students with special needs' education in those schools.

In a different study, Odluyurt and Batu (2009) conducted a study to determine the preparatory skills for preschool inclusion based on the opinions of preschool teachers and literature review. In the same study the authors also examined the effectiveness of simultaneous prompting embedded in activities for teaching the predetermined skills to children with developmental disabilities and generalization of these skills into inclusion environments by the participant student with developmental disabilities. The study was conducted in two phases. In the first phase, preparatory skills were determined regarding

the opinion of 48 preschool teachers and literature review. In the second phase, depending on the performance level and characteristics of the participants, three skills were determined to be taught to three children with developmental disabilities. The determined behaviors were; (a) understanding and following directions, (b) attending group activities without any problems, and (c) Answering the question "Do you want …?". Target behaviors were taught to the students in a multiple probe design across behaviors format, and simultaneous prompting embedded in activities was found to be effective on teaching the targeted skills. At the end of the study, target students managed to generalize and use the target behaviors in their inclusive environments as well.

Discussion

There are important aspects playing essential roles in the success of inclusion in the early childhood of children with special needs. Teachers, children with and without special needs, parents of children with and without special needs, school administrators are some of these aspects mentioned in the study. The characteristics of each aspect were discussed in the present study.

Reviewing the literature, it can be said that there are limited number of studies related with early childhood inclusion in Turkey. Most of these studies are related with the opinions and attitudes of preschool teachers working with children with special needs in their classes. The results of these studies revealed that, teachers usually have positive attitudes and opinions regarding early childhood inclusion. But some of the participants had negative opinions about the inclusion of children with severe disabilities, and especially mental retardation. Most of the teachers mentioned that they needed more information about children with special needs, their characteristics, needs, and strengths, and also about inclusion process. In the studies it was also found that teachers did not have any support services during the inclusion implementations in their classes. Only a few teachers mentioned that they were provided with support services during the inclusion of their students with special needs.

In some of the studies, some of the participants had negative opinions about inclusion of children with special needs into their classes. Turhan and Diken (2009) summarized the reasons of these opinions as follows: (a) lack of support services (Ozbaba, 2000; Varlier & Vuran, 2006), (b) high number of students in the classes (Ozbaba, 2000), (c) the difference of the type of disability of the students with special needs in the classes (Sargin & Sunbul, 2002), (d) lack of experience with children with special needs (Ozbaba, 2000), and (e) lack of information about managing the behaviors of children with special needs, preparing appropriate individualized programs and implementing the programs with these children (Artan & Uyanik-Balat, 2003).

Moving from these results, some suggestions can be derived in the present study. First, information packages can be prepared for the teachers, school administrator, school personnel, and parents of children with and without special needs. Second, support services staff can be trained in order to provide in-class support both to the students with

special needs and also to the teachers in the class. Third, the number of students with special needs should be limited with one student for each class while placing these children into the classes.

As a result, changing the negative attitudes of teachers, school administrators and parents into positive opinions and attitudes is essential in inclusion. Otherwise success cannot be possible in the classes. For changing the negative attitudes and opinions into positive manner, every aspect mentioned in the study should play their roles successfully.

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