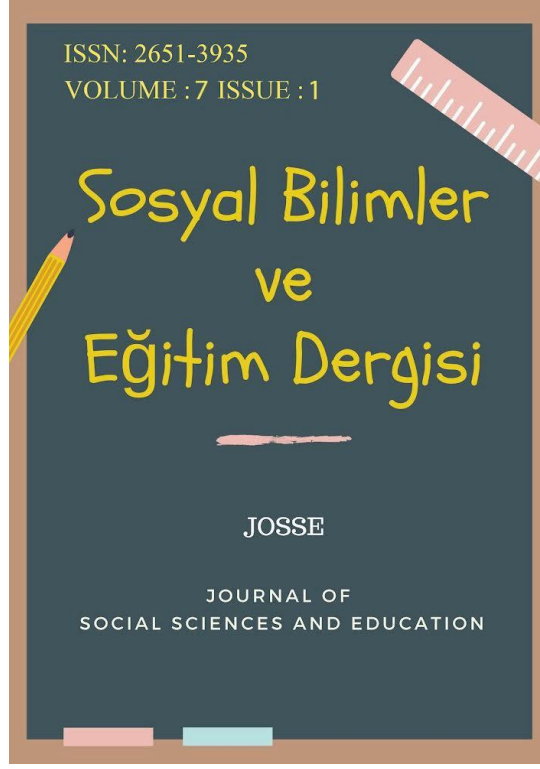


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**Teachers' Opinions on the Problems Encountered in Internship Practices in  
Special Education Vocational Schools**

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# Teachers' Opinions on the Problems Encountered in Internship Practices in Special Education Vocational Schools

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## Abstract

Special education vocational schools are educational institutions for children with special needs. Internship studies carried out in these schools include practices aimed at preparing students for the real work environment. The aim of this study is to reveal the difficulties encountered by students doing internship in special education vocational schools according to teachers' opinions and to make some suggestions on this issue. The research was handled with a descriptive design from case study methods. The study group of the research consists of teachers working in special education vocational schools. While collecting the research data, the opinions of teachers selected from different fields were utilized. The data were collected using a semi-structured interview form developed by the researchers. Content analysis is used to analyze the research data. The findings obtained from the research can be categorized under four headings. These are internal problems, problems related to the school, problems related to the practicum teachers and problems related to the practicum institution. The most important problems related to students are stated as adaptation and absenteeism. The most important problem arising from the school is the lack of workplaces where students will practice. Problems arising from the practicum teacher were stated as the application process and the follow-up of the students. The problems arising from the institution are concentrated in the options of excessive workload and the staff's approach to students. In order to eliminate these problems, it was suggested that students should be informed about internship, each student should be assigned to a workplace related to his/her field, students should not be made to do unnecessary work, and competent master trainers should be assigned. Some suggestions have been made to solve these problems.

## Research Article

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**Keywords:** Special education vocational school, internship, intern student, master teacher

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## **Introduction**

In today's education sector, it is of great importance to integrate individuals in need of special education into society and to teach them appropriate vocational skills. Ensuring that people in need of special education have a profession that will sustain their lives and ensure their participation in social life is seen as one of the main objectives of the social state. In special education vocational schools, in addition to providing students with theoretical skills, internship studies are included in order for students to better adapt to business life. Internship practices in these schools are seen as a process of applying the theoretical knowledge of students in practice and adapting to business life. The problems experienced in this process negatively affect students' professional life. Finding out why these problems arise and finding solutions to them will make a significant contribution to this process. Although some studies have been conducted on the problems experienced in special education schools in Turkey, it is seen that there is limited research on the problems they experience in their internship studies and their solutions. In this respect, this study is expected to make a contribution to special education vocational school administrators and the business sector.

Looking at the literature, in a study on the relationship between employers and the employment of individuals with intellectual disabilities, employers expect certain skills from them (Ünal, 2001). In a study evaluating students with special needs who graduated from business school according to their parents' views, it was found that social skills are important (Coşkun Başar, 2010). The importance of communication skills and teamwork in the employment of people with intellectual disabilities is emphasized (Baran and Cavkaytar (2007). In another study, the importance of establishing relationships with others for people with special education is discussed (Çubukçu & Gültekin, 2003). In another study, the importance of providing individuals with developmental retardation with job transition skills was discussed (Gürsel et al., 2007). In the research on the internship and professional skills of students in special education vocational training centers, the social skills that students should have were listed (Üstün & Çıkılı, 2019).

Special education vocational schools are educational institutions that aim to support the educational and professional development of individuals in need of special education and bring them into society. These schools with specialized curricula also help students develop their social, emotional, physical and professional skills (Deveci, 2019; Özbey, 2018). By providing students with education in line with their individual abilities and skills, they contribute to their social, psychological and professional development. Thus, students can

adapt to society and become independent and self-confident individuals (Artan & Uyanık Balat, 2003). In short, these schools have an important function in helping individuals in need of special education to adapt to society and acquire professional skills to sustain their lives (Sarı & Gürbüz, 2021). In addition to enabling individuals with disabilities to live independently, it is also necessary to change people's negative perceptions of them (Othman et al., 2019). Two types of education, theoretical and practical, can be mentioned in these schools.

In the theoretical education given in special education vocational schools, students' individual differences, mental, emotional and physical characteristics, interests and abilities are taken into consideration. With the education carried out with Individualized Education Programs (IEP), students' unique needs are met (Makal Güner, 2013). Students with special needs cannot acquire social skills as easily as their peers (Maag, 2005) and may be rejected by their peers (Koster et al., 2010). Social activities organized in schools help students develop their social skills and make friends, while guidance and psychological counseling services help them cope with the difficulties they will experience and improve their problem-solving skills (Erim & Caferoğlu, 2012). In order to provide students with the importance of lifelong learning and the skills to manage and evaluate learning processes, elective courses and activities are offered according to their interests and abilities, allowing them to discover and develop their own potential (Şener & Tanrısever, 2021). In this process, family participation is important and families are more sensitive to student needs (Aydoğdu & Kılıç, 2016).

In special education vocational schools, students are prepared for business life with practical education. Schools fulfill this function through internship studies in enterprises. Thanks to the internship studies, students adapt to business life more easily and have the opportunity to be employed in appropriate professions. Therefore, internship studies have a special importance for vocational schools (Kiraz, 2002; Wong & Tsui, 2007). The special education vocational school, vocational course teachers and the practicing enterprises have important responsibilities in the effective execution of these studies. In addition, students are also expected to fulfill their duties in order to provide the expected benefit from the practice. The inclusion of individuals in need of special education in society and providing them with appropriate vocational skills is of great importance in terms of equality of opportunity in education. For this reason, thanks to internship studies, students adapt to business life more easily and have the opportunity to be employed in professions suitable for them (Demirtaş et al., 2016).

In internship studies conducted in special education vocational schools, the school administrator is responsible for school-related problems. In a study on administrators working in special education schools, it was stated that principals did not carry out some practices and that their training on this subject was incomplete (Karabulut et al., 2017). Teachers working in these schools should have sufficient professional knowledge and skills. Seminars, workshops and projects can make significant contributions to teachers' professional development (Akay & Gürgür, 2018). Master instructors should provide the necessary support to students who go to practice. In some studies, it is stated that students who go to internship in enterprises are ordered to do errands instead of gaining professional skills (Ergün, 2018; Tekdaş et al., 2016). Effective internship studies will also increase the employment chances of students (Wu, 2004).

Internship practices in these schools are of great importance in terms of preparing students for professional life. During the internship process, students have the opportunity to apply their theoretical knowledge in business life and gain professional practical experience. In internship studies, students have the opportunity to follow current developments while gaining knowledge about the requirements and expectations of business life. In short, they adapt to business life more easily and have the opportunity to be employed (Şener & Tanrısever, 2021). Internship studies are to help students with special education disabilities prepare to succeed in school, work and live independently. Many people with disabilities may have problems finding a productive job and earning a living after graduation (Şahan, 2018).

In the internship studies of special education vocational high school students, the attitude of the business towards the students also affects the success (Wehmeyer & Palmer, 2003). According to research, the biggest obstacle for special education students to participate in society is prejudiced attitudes (Carter & Huges, 2006), and this should be taken into consideration when selecting organizations. The success of internship activities depends on active communication with employers (Hollenbeck, 1996). Student participation is also effective in the success of internship activities. Students should attend these activities regularly, avoid dangerous behaviors and adapt to the workplace. Betz & Redclay (2002) state that reasons such as lack of career goals, not being directed to appropriate enterprises, lack of self-confidence, lack of follow-up negatively affect internship practices.

Considering the research findings summarized so far and the findings in the literature, the aim of this study is to reveal the problems encountered by students in special education vocational schools during their internship studies according to teachers' views and to make some suggestions about them.

## Method

### Model

This study was conducted with qualitative research method. According to Creswell (2019), qualitative research enables the collection of information through qualitative methods and the presentation of the collected information in accordance with the perceptions and natural environment of individuals. The research was handled with a descriptive design from case study methods. According to Gerring (2007), a case study is an in-depth study of a single situation in order to explain more situations. Case studies are classified as descriptive, interpretive or evaluative according to their purposes.

### Study Group of the Research

The study group of this study consists of 15 branch teachers working in special education vocational schools in Atakum and İlkadım districts of Samsun province in the 2022-2023 academic year, selected by maximum diversity sampling method. In qualitative research, in addition to the characteristics of the research problem, the resources of the researcher also determine the size of the study group, in other words, the participants (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2011). Personal information about the study group is given in Table 1.

**Table 1**

*Participating Teachers' Personal Information*

Code	Gender	Age	License	Marital Status	Occupational Seniority
P1	Woman	43	Family Economics and Nutrition	Single	20
P2	Woman	46	GardenPlants	Married	10
P3	Woman	48	Handicrafts	Single	24
P4	Male	53	Accommodation and Travel Services	Married	27
P5	Woman	45	Handicrafts	Married	21
P6	Male	41	Furniture and Decoration	Married	8
P7	Male	48	Furniture and Decoration	Married	25
P8	Woman	49	Handicrafts	Married	26
P9	Woman	37	Nutrition and Dietetics	Married	15
P10	Male	38	Family Economics and Nutrition	Married	15
P11	Woman	45	Clothing, Production Technologies	Married	21
P12	Woman	41	Handicrafts	Married	17
P13	Woman	40	Clothing, Production Technologies	Married	17

P14	Woman	42	Handicrafts	Married	19
P15	Woman	37	Nutrition, Dietetics	Single	14

When the personal information about the teachers participating in the study is analyzed, it is seen that the majority of them are female, married and aged above 35 years. Teachers from different branches with a seniority of 8-27 years participated in the study.

### **Data Collection Tool**

In this study, a semi-structured interview form developed by the researchers was used. The form includes personal information such as gender, age, branch, marital status, seniority and research questions. While preparing the interview form, a preliminary examination of the deficiencies seen in practice in these schools was made and questions were formed. These questions were organized by taking the opinions of two field experts. These questions were applied to some teachers working in special education schools and it was concluded that everyone understood the same thing from the questions. Thus, the research questions were finalized. The following questions were asked to the teachers in the research: 1) What are the intern-related problems in practice? 2) What are the problems caused by the school? 3) What are the problems caused by the practicum teacher? 4) What are the problems caused by the institution?

### **Validity and Reliability of Data Collection Tools**

In case studies, the word credibility is suggested instead of validity and reliability. To ensure credibility, internship activities were observed by a researcher. The answers received during the interview were checked with the participant and participant confirmation was obtained. The answers were analytically evaluated by extracting the frequency of the statements. The findings of the study were checked by a different person who was not involved in the research. The findings obtained in the study were interpreted with direct quotations from the opinions of the teachers participating in the study. Research findings were supported by the literature (Bassey, 1999).

### **Collection of Data and Analysis**

Data were collected through face-to-face interviews. An appointment was made with the teachers and an interview lasting approximately 40 minutes was conducted with each teacher and what the teachers said was recorded in writing. These records were read to the

participant and participant confirmation was obtained. In order to ensure that the teachers gave detailed answers on the subject, in-depth questions were asked to obtain detailed information on the subject.

Content analysis technique was used to analyze the data obtained from the interviews. In content analysis, direct quotations are often used to reflect the views of the interviewed or observed individuals in a striking way (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2011). Before analyzing the data, each researcher was given a code and teachers were coded as K1, K2, K3...K15. Then, in line with the purpose of the research, the findings obtained within the framework of the questions asked in the research were shown in figures and direct participant opinions were included while making the necessary comments under them. The frequency of the opinions that the participants agreed with the most were extracted and discussed in order of importance.

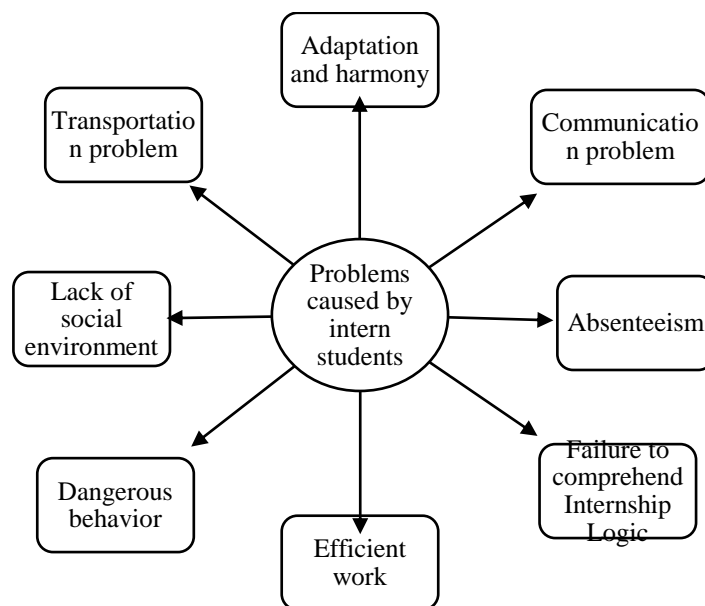
### **Ethical Committee Approval**

Ondokuz Mayıs University, Social and Human Sciences Ethics Committee (dated 29.12.2023 and numbered 2023-1073).

## **Findings**

### **Findings Regarding the Problems Arising from Intern Students in Internship Practices**

Under this heading, student-related problems encountered during internship practices in special education vocational schools were focused on. Findings regarding student-related problems during internship practices are presented in Figure 1.



**Figure 1.** *Problems caused by Student Interns*



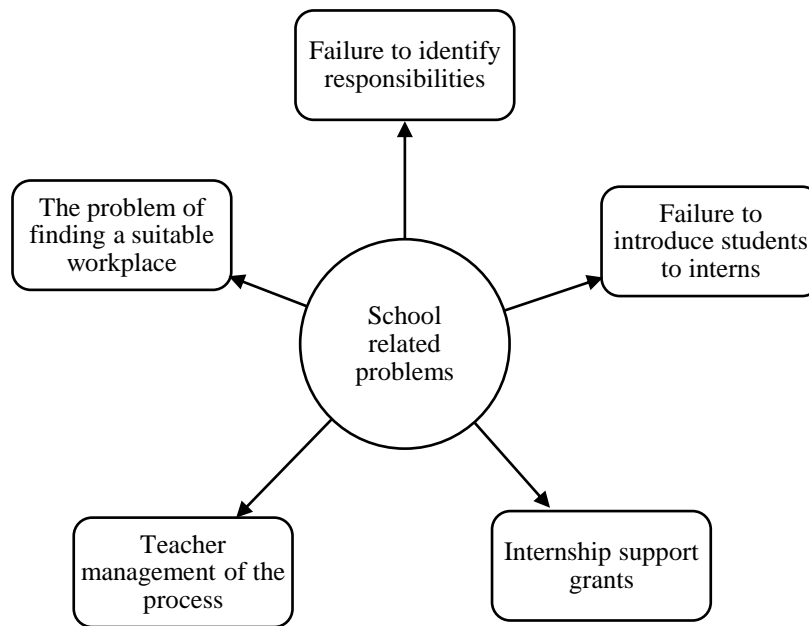
When Figure 1 is examined, the answers given by the teachers regarding these problems are listed as adaptation and harmony (n=8), absenteeism (n=8), inability to work efficiently (n=5), inability to comprehend the logic of internship (n=5), transportation problem (n=4), communication problem (n=2), lack of social environment (n=2), dangerous behavior (n=2). In other words, it is understood that the primary problem of the students is adaptation. When it comes to the problems caused by intern students in internship practices, it is seen that many participants mentioned adaptation and harmony problems. It is difficult and requires patience for interns who need special education to adapt to a new working environment. Some of the participant views from the answers given by the teachers to the problems caused by student interns are given below:

- For intern students, the adaptation process takes a long time due to the special conditions of the students. (P1)
- After a while, after starting to work, there is a desire not to continue working (P4).
- The problem is that the performance of many students is not suitable for the working order of the enterprise (P5).
- Although the student is not suitable for the occupational field due to his/her disability, the family insists on this field (P14).
- They see the internship not as education, but as a job that should be done with pleasure and to earn money (P10).
- They experience difficulties in traveling to and from the workplace. They engage in behaviors that endanger themselves and the environment at work (P6).
- After a while after they start working, they miss the friendship environment at school because they cannot make friends at work (P4)
- Since our students are individuals with special needs, I think this is a challenging process for the intern students if the transportation to the place of internship will be with their own means (P3).
- Difficulties in traveling to and from the workplace (P6).

### **School-based Problems in Internship Practices**

Under this heading, findings related to school-related problems encountered during internship practices in special education vocational schools are presented. School-based problems constitute another problem seen in internship practices. These problems originate

from the school itself. Teacher opinions about school-related problems during internship practices are given in 2.



**Figure 2.** *School-based Problems*

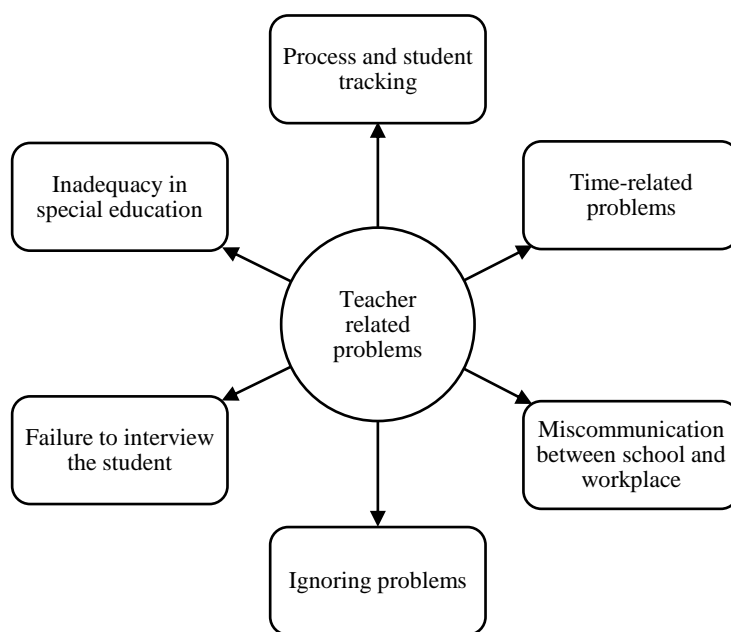
When Figure 2 is analyzed, teachers expressed school resource problems with words such as not finding a suitable workplace (n=10), not determining responsibilities (n=2), leaving the process only to the teacher (n=2), not introducing students to interns (n=1), and internship support payment (n=1). While teachers mentioned the lack of suitable workplaces as the most important problem, they also complained about the school's lack of interest in students. They expressed this indifference with different words. Teachers stated that students should do internships in workplaces according to their fields, but the lack of suitable internship places forces students to do internships in different fields and makes it difficult for them to adapt to the system. Some of the participants' responses to school-related problems are given below:

- In our school, we cannot place students according to our regulations except for certain areas. There are suitable enterprises, but there cannot be suitable students for suitable enterprises due to the field situation (P2).
- There are not enough enterprises according to the fields (P5).
- The fact that the intern student's areas of responsibility are not clearly defined with a clear line creates a problem (P14).
- The responsibilities of the student are not clearly stated (P12).

- Lack of adequate communication with institutions, leaving the work and procedures entirely to the teacher and not supervising them (P11).
- Internship support payments are made late (P6).
- The likelihood of school-based problems is generally low (P13).

### Problems Arising from Practice Teachers in Internship Practices

Under this heading, findings related to teacher-related problems encountered during internship practices in special education vocational schools are presented. Teacher opinions on teacher-related problems during internship practices are presented in Figure 3.



**Figure 3.** *Problems Caused by The Mentor Teacher*

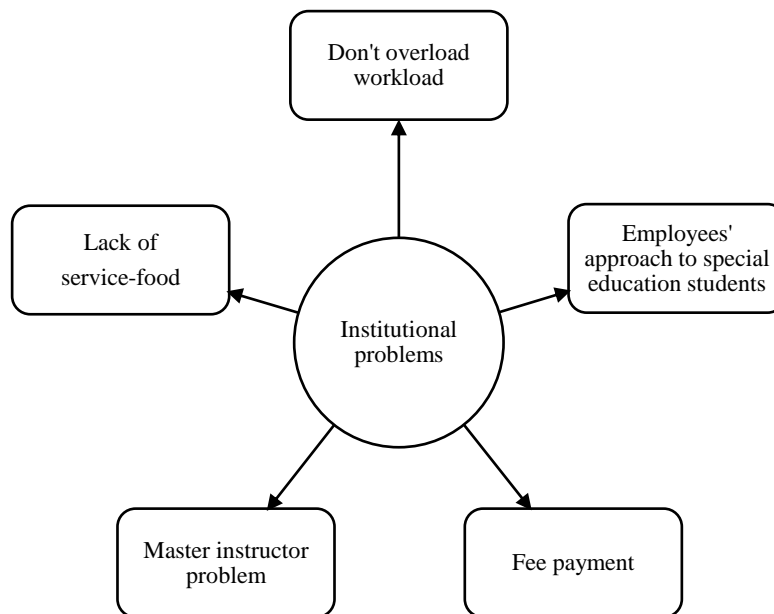
When Figure 3 is analyzed, the teachers expressed the problems caused by the mentor teacher with sentences such as process and student follow-up (n=8), time-related problems (n=5), miscommunication between school and workplace (n=4), ignoring problems (n=3), not interviewing students (n=2), and insufficiency in special education (n=2). Teachers stated that the first of the problems caused by the mentor teacher was the lack of follow-up of the students and the process. One teacher stated that there was no such problem regarding the problem caused by the mentor teacher. Some of the participant views from the answers given by the teachers to the problems caused by the mentor teacher are given below:

- Disruptions in weekly controls (P9).
- Time-related problems are experienced. In addition to the professional mastery of teachers, they are insufficient in special education (P1).

- Communication between the school and the workplace is not fully fulfilled (P6).
- Student follow-up is seen only as absenteeism (P10).
- Since there are not many businesses to place special education students, some minor problems are ignored in order not to lose the business (P4).

### **Problems arising from the Internship Institution in Internship Practices**

Under this heading, findings related to institutional problems encountered during internship practices in special education vocational schools are presented. Institutional problems during internship practices are presented in Figure 4.



**Figure 4.** *Institutional Problems*

When Figure 4 is analyzed, it can be seen that teachers expressed institutional problems in terms of overloading students with too much work (n=10), staff's attitude towards special education students (n=8), payment of wages (n=6), lack of master trainers (n=4), service and food facilities (n=1). The most important of these problems is overloading students with too much work. This is followed by the institution's approach to students. Some of the participant views from the answers given by the teachers to the problems caused by the institution, that is, the organization, are given below:

- Students are made to do tasks that are not their duties (P6).
- Students are assigned more work than their area of responsibility (P12).

- The fact that the institution has not worked with individuals with special needs before, communication with them, reconciliation, and sensitivity to any situation are insufficient (P3).
- Student wages are not paid on time and sufficiently (P7).
- There are not enough master trainers at the workplace (P11)
- Service and the lack of lunch in some enterprises is an important problem (P5).

### **Results and Discussion**

When the teachers' views on the problems encountered in internship practices are analyzed as a whole, it is seen that these problems are grouped under four headings. These are problems caused by the intern student, problems caused by the practicum school, problems caused by the practicum teacher and problems caused by the institution. The research was discussed under these headings and the following conclusions were reached.

One of the main problems arising from intern students is the problem of adaptation. The expected benefit of the practice depends on the students' adaptation to the workplace. It will not be possible for students who do not adapt to the internship place to adapt to real business life. Another important problem is that students cannot comprehend the logic of internship. In other words, children in need of special education are not aware of why they come to internship. The remoteness of the practice schools brings along transportation problems. Most of the time, even normal people may have transportation problems in crowded cities. Teachers state that students have communication problems. These children in special education have difficulty expressing themselves. Inadequate social environment and the risk of encountering dangerous behaviors are ranked last. In the selection of workplaces for students, places close to the school should be preferred. It is important that people in the workplace establish sincere relationships with these children and understand them. Students should be warned about dangers and workplaces where students can develop themselves socially should be preferred. Looking at the literature, there are studies on the difficulties in finding suitable workplaces for students (Kayakuş et al., 2019; Demir, 2015). In these studies, there are findings such as the difficulty of finding an internship place, busy work in the business, and interns being seen as a burden. Polatçı and Sobacı (2014) draw attention to the importance of person-job fit. It is emphasized that individual-environment fit has a significant impact on the mental and physical health and performance of the individual (Edwards &

Shipp, 2007). Establishing effective communication with employees at workplaces will increase success and help to create a peaceful working environment (Yılmaz & Esen, 2014). The findings that working disabled individuals have a more social and organized life in addition to their financial gains, and that they had a more disorganized life before they started working (Arslan, 2013) show how important special education vocational schools are in the employment of individuals with special needs. Betz & Redclay (2002) attribute the problems arising from students in internship studies to reasons such as lack of career goals, not being directed to appropriate enterprises, lack of self-confidence, and lack of follow-up.

The first school-related problem is the problem of not finding a suitable workplace. The inability to find a suitable internship place for students' fields causes them to do internships in different fields, thus causing difficulties in adapting to real business life. Another problem arising from the school is that the areas of responsibility of intern students are not clearly and explicitly defined. The responsibilities of a student with special needs should be explained in detail. Moreover, even normal people can sometimes forget their responsibilities. Another important problem is that teachers leave the internship process to the teacher. However, internship activities require teamwork between parents, workplace and coordinator. Communication problems between these people will make the problem worse. Introducing interns to students at school is another problem. One teacher stated that internship support payments are made late. The literature suggests that there should be open communication between interns and teachers (D'Abate et al., 2009). In a study on accounting profession candidates, finding an internship place and wage problems were among the problems faced by interns (Uzay, 2005). The fact that the environment of the place where vocational internship is carried out is appropriate and that the officials here attach importance to professional values will make a significant contribution to the effectiveness of these studies (Pekdemir, 2000). In a study on administrators working in special education vocational schools, it was stated that principals did not carry out some practices and their training on this subject was incomplete (Karabulut et al., 2017). These problems seen in internships may also stem from the ineffective implementation of the school's education programs. Students with special needs cannot acquire social skills as easily as their peers (Maag, 2005) and may be rejected by their peers (Koster et al., 2010). In these schools, students need to develop skills to cope with difficulties and problem solving skills (Erim & Caferoğlu, 2012). Considering that internship studies require teamwork, family participation is important and families are more sensitive to student needs (Aydoğdu & Kılıç, 2016). In the workplace evaluation form, which is among the internship documents in special education vocational schools, "sense of

responsibility of the student" is among the criteria to be evaluated by the school (IDF, 2022). Two of the 9 easy ways to attract attention as an intern are teamwork and interpersonal communication (Compass 360, 2023).

The main findings related to the problems caused by the mentor teacher are process and student follow-up. This is followed by time-related problems, ignoring problems and inadequacy in special education due to the quality of the school. According to the literature, the mentor teacher is considered as a kind of mentor in internship studies. For student success, the mentor should have clear expectations and provide regular feedback and support (Knemeyer & Murphy, 2002). Among the problems encountered in vocational schools, it is stated that working hours start early and continue until late hours, that is, problems related to time are encountered (Kaysi & Aydemir, 2018). It is necessary to be careful about the selection of special education vocational schools. Teachers emphasize that the quality of the school is also an important problem. In the literature, there are some studies that draw attention to the negative effects of the negative situations seen in the internship workplace on the interns (Güzel, 2010; Tektaş et al., 2016). In a study on educational-administrative inadequacies in special education institutions, it was found that teachers and administrators had deficiencies in pedagogical and field knowledge and classroom management, and that there were communication problems among employees and with students (Aydın, 2017). In special education vocational schools, it is possible to encounter different expectations when the workshop teacher does not fully comprehend the capacities and characteristics of students with special needs. In addition to having professional skills and professional dominance, the teacher's inadequacy in special education reduces the effectiveness of internship studies. Seminars, workshops and projects can make a significant contribution to the professional development of teachers (Akay & Gürgür, 2018).

When we look at the findings from the institution, that is, from the workplace, the most prominent problem is the excessive workload, followed by the employees' approach to special education students, deficiencies in wage payment and lack of master instructors. Internship studies allow students to develop a deeper understanding of the duties and responsibilities related to their profession (Üstün & Çıkılı, 2019). Exposure of special education students to excessive workload may negatively affect their performance and delay their entry into real work life. In a study conducted in the tourism sector, it was found that students are burdened with workloads beyond their physical and knowledge and experience (Olcaç, Yıldırım, & Sürme, 2015). In internship studies, the attitude of the company towards students affects success (Wehmeyer & Palmer, 2003). Considering that the biggest obstacle

for special education students to participate in society is prejudiced attitudes (Carter & Huges, 2006), care should be taken in choosing the workplace (Carter & Huges, 2006). Internship students are sometimes seen as cheap labor (Aymankuy & Aymankuy, 2013). Master trainers carry a significant burden of the work in internships. In one study, 44% of vocational training in enterprises is carried out by master teachers (Türkseven, 2012). However, the lack of master instructors will negatively affect internship studies. In some studies, it is stated that in enterprises, students who go on internship are ordered to do errands instead of gaining professional skills (Ergün, 2018; Tekdaş et al., 2016). Deficiencies in wages in internships may cause students' motivation towards work to decrease. There are studies in the literature that internship participants may be exposed to low wages or even unpaid work (Özdemir, 2019). In another study, it was found that the fields in special education vocational schools are not compatible with the lines of work in the real sector (Balta, 2017). The success of internship activities also depends on active communication with employers (Hollenbeck, 1996).

When the findings are evaluated together, according to teacher opinions, the problems related to internship studies in special education vocational schools are grouped under four themes. These are student, school, practicum teacher and institutional problems. It can be thought that student-related problems stem from the school and family. School-related problems may originate from the school administration. The reasons for the problems stemming from the practicum teachers can be listed as teachers' lack of self-training, insensitivity, high workload, and time problems. The problems originating from the institution, i.e. the organization, can be attributed to the inadequacy of the legal regulations made on this subject.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings obtained as a result of teacher opinions, solution suggestions are listed below:

- Each student should be informed about the importance and necessity of internship. Master teachers have a great role in this regard. Master teachers should encourage students.
- In order for the intern student to gain experience in terms of profession, it should be ensured that each intern student is employed in enterprises and institutions related to his/her field.



- During the internship process, students in special education vocational schools should not be made to do unnecessary work that will not contribute to their professional development.
- When institutions provide internship opportunities, they will have the chance to observe the students during the internship and these institutions will have a great advantage in terms of hiring the appropriate staff.
- In order to reduce the internship problems of students with special education needs, it should be ensured that they receive training from master trainers who are competent in special education.

### **Ethical Committee Approval**

Ondokuz Mayıs University, Social and Human Sciences Ethics Committee (dated 29.12.2023 and numbered 2023-1073).

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