



2024, 13 (5), 1899-1919 | Research Article

Experiences of Special Education Teachers: Difficulties They Face and Solution Suggestions

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Abstract

This paper explores special education teachers' opinions about the reasons for choosing their field, expectations, the problems they face, and their suggestions for these problems. This research was designed according to case study. 34 special education teachers, 13 female and 21 male, in Siirt during the 2022-2023 academic year, participated. The data were analyzed through content analysis. Results reveal that individual and economic factors are effective in choosing the field of special education teachers. The main expectations of teachers were environmental, individual and institutional expectations. Under the environmental expectations category, the highest demand for material support, appropriate educational environment, family education and the profession to be valued was expressed. Under the category of individual expectations, demands such as the need for in-service training, improvement of economic conditions and retirement age were specified. Under the institutional expectations category, the topics of intensive training in undergraduate education and the removal of field changes attracted attention. Environmental, institutional and individual issues categories emerged regarding the problems faced by special education teachers. Under the environmental issues category, the problems of low parent support, deficiencies in materials, lack of knowledge about the field by the society, and seeing teachers as caregivers came to the fore. Under the institutional issues category, problems encountered with school administrations and field changes occurred. In the category of individual issues, problems related to burnout and lacks of in-service training were mentioned.

Keywords: General Education, Special Education, Special Education Teaching.

Epeçcan, U., Bahçeci, F., & Üzüm, B. (2024). Experiences of Special Education Teachers: Difficulties They Face and Solution Suggestions. *Journal of the Human and Social Science Researches*, 13(5), 1899-1919. <https://doi.org/10.15869/itobiad.1264690>

Date of Submission	13.03.2023
Date of Acceptance	21.10.2024
Date of Publication	31.12.2024
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Özel Eğitim Öğretmenlerinin Deneyimleri: Yaşadıkları Zorluklar ve Çözüm Önerileri

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Öz

Bu araştırma özel eğitim öğretmenlerinin alanlarını tercih etme nedenleri, beklentileri, karşılaştıkları sorunlar ve sorunlara ilişkin çözüm önerilerini belirlemeye ilişkin görüşlerini incelemek amacıyla yapılmıştır. Araştırma nitel araştırma yöntemlerinden durum çalışması ile desenlenmiştir. Araştırmaya 2022-2023 eğitim öğretim döneminde Siirt ilinde görev yapan 13'ü kadın 21'i erkek olmak üzere toplam 34 özel eğitim öğretmeni katılmıştır. Araştırma sürecinde ulaşılan veriler içerik analizi ile çözümlenmiştir. Araştırmada özel eğitim öğretmenlerinin alanı seçme konusunda bireysel ve ekonomik faktörlerin etkili olduğu söylenebilir. Öğretmenlerin başlıca beklentileri, çevresel, bireysel ve kurumsal beklentiler şeklinde oluşmuştur. Çevresel beklentiler kategorisi altında en çok materyal desteği, uygun eğitim ortamı, aile eğitimi ve mesleğin değer görmesi talebi dile getirilmiştir. Bireysel beklentiler kategorisi altında hizmet içi eğitim ihtiyacı, ekonomik koşulların iyileştirilmesi ve emeklilik yaşı gibi talepler belirtilmiştir. Kurumsal beklentiler kategorisi altında ise lisans eğitiminde yoğun eğitimlerin verilmesi ve alan değişikliğinin kaldırılması başlıkları dikkat çekmiştir. Özel eğitim öğretmenlerinin alanda karşılaştıkları sorunlara ilişkin çevresel, kurumsal ve bireysel sorunlar kategorileri oluşmuştur. Çevresel sorunlar kategorisi altında veli desteğinin az olması, materyal konusunda eksiklikler yaşanması, toplum tarafından alanla ilgili bilgi eksikliğinin olması ve öğretmenlerin bakıcı olarak görülmesi sorunları ön plana çıkmıştır. Kurumsal sorunlar kategorisi altında okul yönetimleriyle karşılaşılan sorunlar ve alan değişikliği başlıkları oluşmuştur. Bireysel sorunlar kategorisinde ise yıpranma ve hizmet içi eğitim eksikliğine ilişkin sorunlar dile getirilmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Genel eğitim, Özel Eğitim, Özel Eğitim Öğretmenliği.

Epçaçan, U., Bahçeci, F., & Üzüm, B. (2024). Özel Eğitim Öğretmenlerinin Deneyimleri: Yaşadıkları Zorluklar ve Çözüm Önerileri. *İnsan ve Toplum Bilimleri Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 13(5), 1899-1919. <https://doi.org/10.15869/itobiad.1264690>

Geliş Tarihi	13.03.2023
Kabul Tarihi	21.10.2024
Yayın Tarihi	31.12.2024
*Bu CC BY-NC lisansı altında açık erişimli bir makaledir.	

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Introduction

With our similarities and differences, we try to maintain our existence in the society we live in. As well as facilitating our adaptation to the society, having the characteristics of the majority also enables the society to embrace us. Very few of us, however, experience what it means to have different characteristics in a society where the majority has similar traits. In fact, we need to be defined and named by those who are normal if we look, think, feel, or act differently from the majority. The needs of individuals different in terms of their need for special education are emphasized and evaluated in a special category with the phrase “the state takes measures to make those in need of special education beneficial to the society” included in the 42nd article of the constitution of Turkish Republic.

Activities aimed at training teachers in the field of special education first started with Mithat Enç in the 1950s at the Gazi Education Institute for individuals with special needs, whose rights are guaranteed in the Constitution of the Republic of Turkey, to receive the education they need. However, due to some bureaucratic reasons and insufficient demand for teachers in this field, the program was closed after graduating for two terms (Altunya, 2006). Later, teacher training activities continued by opening special education at Ankara University in 1965 and at Anatolian University Faculty of Educational Sciences in 1983 (Akçamete, 2010). Due to the increase in the need for teachers in this field and the fact that the program implemented by the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) does not comply with the teacher appointment policy, the Council of Higher Education (CoHE) has combined the “Gifted/Special Talented”, “Visual, Hearing and Mentally Impaired Teaching” programs into a single undergraduate program under the name of “Special Education Teaching” starting from the 2016-2017 academic year and taking into account the programs implemented in various countries (Büyükalın Filiz et al. 2018). Each child is a different world. Therefore, their mental, social, emotional development, learning speed, and learning styles may differ. These differences may be greater in children with special needs. Thus, changes in school practices or special education services are needed to develop the unique potential of these children (Kirk et al., 2017). It can be said that with the expansion of the scope of the special education teacher program, student diversity has increased, thus increasing the responsibilities of teachers to meet these special education needs.

Teacher training is a situation that maintains its importance in the field of special education, together with the training of teacher candidates who will work at general education levels. Candidates who will work in special education should be equipped with the necessary equipment in the evaluation of individuals with special needs and in preparing their programs according to their performance. In addition to effective teaching methods, they are expected to have a good command of teaching skills (Özen et al. 2009).

The aim of the special education teaching program is to train teachers who enable people with special needs to be individuals who can act independently, participate actively in society and have a productive character. In addition, it is important to train teachers who can use different teaching methods and techniques, provide the necessary education and support services to the families of individuals with special needs, cooperate with different disciplines, are sensitive to the problems in the field, fulfill the ethical principles of the profession, and have the knowledge, skills and qualification

that meet the needs of the age (Afat & Çiçek, 2019). The special education teacher program is planned as a core program in Turkey like in the international literature, so that candidates who first take general common courses and then specialization-oriented field elective courses will have knowledge about students in different areas of need when they graduate (TEDMEM, 2016). The program includes professional knowledge, general culture and field education courses. Field education courses are in six areas: visual impairment, hearing impairment, mental impairment, learning disability, autism spectrum disorder and special talent. In order to graduate, a teacher candidate must take one course from these six areas in addition to the compulsory courses and seven elective courses in a chosen field of expertise (YÖK, 2018).

The intense need for special education teachers, both in public institutions and in the private sector, leads student candidates to prefer these departments (Yıldız & Melekoğlu, 2016). Being well-qualified in special education is important for special education teacher candidates in meeting the needs of students, in the problems they will encounter in the workplace and in the search for solutions to these problems. Qualified special education teachers are mainly expected to be competent in teaching methods, coping with behavioral problems, planning and evaluating instruction, preparing and implementing an individualized education program (IEP), cooperation with family and experts, materials and learning environment, laws, and personal and professional development (Özyürek, 2008; Manning et al. 2009; Gebbie et al. 2012). In addition, since the outputs of special education take place in small steps and in a longer term (Başaran, 2001; Major, 2012; Şahin & Şahin, 2012), unlike the learning speed of students who learn in normal times, teachers working in the field of special education should be as patient and self-sacrificing as the families of people in need (Girgin & Baysal, 2005). On the other hand, the fact that most of the teachers who work in the classes opened for mentally, visually, hearing impaired and autistic children are graduates from different fields means that expectations for students decrease. Without sufficient knowledge and experience, special education classes become backbreaking and tiring for teachers who work with students with different characteristics (Akçamete et al. 2001). Teachers who are incompetent in special education services also experience various problems in meeting the expectations of parents and feel themselves under pressure (Sucuoğlu & Kuloğlu, 1996). In addition, since the number of private education institutions is not sufficient and the materials and physical conditions in the institutions do not adequately meet the needs of the students (Gündüz & Akın, 2015). Environments suitable for students with special needs should be appropriate for the individuals' developmental areas and needs in cognitive, affective, social and physical terms. Fimian (1986), and Billingsley and Cross (1991) reveal that the quality of special education services decreases even if the teachers have the necessary academic qualifications in the field.

As a matter of fact, the most basic feature that distinguishes special education teachers from general education teachers is that they have a wide expertise due to working with different disability groups, and that they work at different education levels and all grade levels. At the same time, they are expected to have more knowledge and skills than general education teachers in terms of teaching programs and interventions, and to continue their education and training activities in cooperation with other professional groups and families (Brownell et al. 2004). It is stated that being a teacher in special

education can be a more difficult and tiring process in the professional sense compared to other teaching fields (Güleç Aslan, 2014).

To develop a comprehensive and collaborative approach regarding how a qualified special education teacher should be, to fully discuss teacher competencies in special education, and to implement large-scale reforms to address these deficiencies, relevant departments at universities and administrators responsible for education need to work together to increase teacher quality (Brownell et al., 2004; Ngang, 2012). Special education teachers are expected to have a broad range of expertise, serve in a variety of roles for students with special needs at all grade levels, have more knowledge than general education teachers about curriculum and interventions, and provide direct instruction in collaboration with other professionals and parents (Brownell et al., 2004).

Based on literature, it is clear that the studies on special education teachers are mostly about such topics as the difficulties that the special education teachers face (Çetin, 2004; Ergenekon, 2004; Altinkurt, 2008; Adıgüzel et al. 2017; Demir & Kale, 2019), occupational burnout (Girgin & Baysal, 2005; Karahan & Uyanık Balat, 2011; Dere Çiftçi, 2015), opinions on field of special educations (Dedeoğlu et al. 2004; Nartgün, 2007; Tortop et al. 2015), job satisfaction and professional competency (Bayrakdar et al. 2016; Akkaş, 2017). It is thought that there is a need for a study in which problems related to special education services- an area under the shadow of general education-and solutions to these problems are worth to be investigated through the expectations of special education teachers. Thus, the present study is expected to contribute to the literature.

While conducting a study, bearing in mind the views of the people in the field, who are the primary addressees of the study, will contribute to the emergence of a more qualified product. Therefore, in this study conducted on special education, it was thought that they could best express the situation that special education teachers are in. In this study, it was tried to determine the opinions of special education teachers about the field of special education. In line with this general purpose, answers to the following questions were sought.

1. Why did special education teachers prefer this field?
2. What are their expectations?
3. What kind of problems do they face?
4. What kind of solutions do they have for the problems they encounter?

Method

Research Model

This research which used qualitative research method was designed as a case study. Case study can be defined as the method in which educational curriculums, social groups, events and the related systems are analyzed in a detail manner (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013).

Participant

Whether the sample represents the target population adequately in a study can be understood by how the sample is selected. While choosing the sampling method, one of the probabilistic (non-purpose) sampling and non-probabilistic (purposeful) sampling

methods are selected according to whether there is a probability element or not and the research objectives and questions are clearly expressed (Liamputtong, 2013). Purposive sampling methods are preferred more frequently in qualitative studies (Grix, 2010). One of them is the stratified purposive sampling method. In stratified purposive sampling, the aim is to highlight major changes rather than develop common understanding. In stratified purposive sampling, each stratum is small and homogeneous so that the sample is at the level of generalization or statistical representation. In general, it is preferred in situations where it is desired to access universes with multiple and different characteristics from professional groups such as teachers, opera singers, army members and bankers (McNabb, 2015). Therefore, the stratified purposive sampling method, which was suitable for the purpose of this research, was used.

Research was conducted to 34 special education teachers who were working in Siirt province during 2022-2023 academic year. The reason for the participants remaining at this number is that there are a limited number of special education teachers in the province where the study was conducted. The study was carried out in Siirt because there was a demand for an academic publication where special education teachers could express their opinions on this subject. The information related to gender, age, educational status and years of experience of the participating teachers is presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Demographic Information of the Participants

	Variables	f	%
Gender	Female	13	38.2
	Male	21	61.8
Age	20-25	1	3.4
	26-30	21	61.7
	31-35	10	29.4
	36 +	2	5.8
Education Status	Bachelor	33	97
	Master	1	3.4
Years of Experience	1-5	18	52.9
	6-10	12	35.2
	11-15	2	5.8
	16+	2	5.8
Total		34	100

Table 1 shows that of the participating teachers, 13 teachers are female and 21 of the teachers are male. According to the age variable, there is just 1 person between 20-25, 21 people between 26-30, 10 people between 31-35 and 2 people aged 36 and over. As for the education level variable, there are 33 people with a bachelor's degree and 1 person with a master's degree. Years of teaching experience variable reveals that there are 18 people with 1-5 years of experience, 12 people with 6-10 years, 2 people with 11-15 years, and 2 people with 16 years of experience or more.

Instruments

A semi-structured interview form developed by researchers was used in the present study. In the first part of the interview form-consisted of two parts- questions aiming to gather information about teachers were included. In the second part, there were open-ended questions, whose answers were sought in line with the purpose of the research. The questions in the first part are about the gender, age, education level and professional experience of the participants. In the second part, in line with the purpose

of the research, the following questions were included: What are the reasons for special education teachers to prefer the field of special education? What are their expectations? What problems do they have? What are the solutions for the problems they encounter? Before the study, special education teachers were interviewed regarding the general framework of the study and their opinions were sought during the preparation of the interview questions. Then, the questions were finalized in line with the suggestions of three academics who are experts in educational sciences. Ethics committee approval numbered 30.06.2022-2955 was obtained from Siirt University Ethics Committee to conduct the study.

Data Analysis

The data obtained during the process of the study was analyzed by using content analysis. The purpose in the content analysis is to find out the concepts and relationships that can reveal the data obtained. Therefore, the obtained data should be conceptualized first, and then organized according to these concepts, and finally the themes that explain the data should be determined (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013).

Trustworthiness of Study

The opinions of experts in the field of special education and training programs were taken in data analysis in order to ensure internal validity. After the collected data were analyzed, they were compared with the analysis of another researcher. As a result of the comparison, it was determined that there was sufficient consistency between the codings. The method of the research to ensure external validity is clearly stated.

The categories which were generated for the reliability of the study were examined by each researcher separately. At the end of the examination, the categories that had "consensus" and "disagreement" were identified. Following the necessary adjustment related to the categories, the reliability formula [Reliability = Consensus/Consensus + Disagreement] proposed by Miles and Huberman (2016) was used. In qualitative studies, a reliability percentage of at least 70% is expected to be reached between the data analysis of the researcher and the expert.

In order to ensure the reliability of the research, the results of the content analysis of the qualitative data were shared with two expert academicians in the field of education programs and teaching, and feedback was received. It has been determined that there is consistency between the shared results of the research and the feedback of the academicians in the field. According to Yıldırım (2010) quoted from Glesne and Peshkin (1992), sharing the data obtained in qualitative research with experts in the field of qualitative research and receiving feedback will increase the reliability of the study.

Based on the opinions of the teachers, the reliability coefficient of all themes was 1.0: A reliability coefficient of 1.0 was reached in the theme of "Preferences", 1.0 in the theme of "Expectations", 1.0 in the theme of "Problems" and 1.0 in the theme of "Solution Suggestions". Since the obtained values are above 0.70, it shows that there is agreement among the researchers.

Findings

The findings obtained in this part of the study were presented in tables and supported by direct quotations.

Findings Regarding the Reasons of Special Education Teachers to Prefer this Field

The findings regarding the reasons why special education teachers prefer this field are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Opinions of special education teachers on the reasons for preferring the field

Theme	Category	Code	Participants
Reasons for Preference	Individual Factors	Helpfulness	P10-P16-P20-P25-P28-P32
		Interest	P17-P18-P21-P24-P30-P31
		Self-improvement	P2-P11
		A Different Profession	P19-P33
		Appropriateness	P8
		Being Patient	P4
		Feeling Close to	P7
		Sense of Wonder	P15
		Affection	P17
		Economic Factors	Employment
	Opportunity		

Scrutinizing the opinions of special education teachers on the reasons for choosing the special education field were examined, the categories of "Individual Factors" and "Economic Factors" were created under the theme of "Reasons for Preference" and the findings were analyzed. In addition, it is seen that job opportunities are the most important factor in special education teachers' choice of department.

Within the scope of the "Individual Factors", the opinions of the students are expressed below through direct quotations.

"To promote the lives of individuals with special needs and to reintroduce them into society." (P25)

"I knew that it was a profession that I could do with passion and will. The second reason is that it is easy and convenient to be assigned." (P21)

"I chose it because each student has different characteristics and I like to push my limits." (P19)

The opinions of the students related to "Economic Factors" category are presented below through direct quotations.

"I chose it because it is the branch with the highest rate of appointment in the field of profession (teaching) I want to do." (P1)

"The reasons for my preference are that it is a field of my interest, that my score is enough, and that it puts less anxiety about future on me is than the other branches." (P24)

"I chose it because I thought I wouldn't have any assignment problems." (P27)

Findings Related to Teachers Expectations

Findings related to teachers' expectations are identified in the Table 3 below.

Table 3. Opinions of special education teachers on their expectations

Theme	Category	Code	Participants
Expectations	Environmental Expectations	Material Supply/Variety/Support	P1-P5-P6-P9-P10-P13-P14-P15-P16-P24-P25-P30-P31-P33
		Appropriate Educational Environments	P3-P4-P5-P10-P11-P12-P23-P25-P34
		Parenting Education	P1-P6-P13-P30
		Being Appreciated	P7-P19
		Parent-Administrative Cooperation	P9
		Being Supported	P22
		Assistant Personnel	P25
	Individual Expectations	In-service Training	P2-P3-P6-P11-P12-P15-P16-P17-P18-P32
		Economic Conditions	P4-P5-P10-P11-P26-P31
		Retirement Age	P26-P27-P28-P29-P31-P32
		Increasing Job Opportunity	P9-P20
		Professional Depreciation Allowance	P26-P27
		Internship Applications	P2-P8
		Class Durations	P23-P27
Institutional Expectations	Intensive Training	P8	
	Measuring Professional Competence	P21	
	Being Supported	P22	
	Changing Field	P24	

Based on the opinions of special education teachers on their expectations, the categories of "Environmental Expectations", "Individual Expectations" and "Institutional Expectations" were created under the theme of "Expectations" and the necessary analysis was done accordingly. It has been determined that environmental expectations and individual expectations are close to each other and are seriously prominent.

The opinions of the students related to "Environmental Expectations" category are presented below through direct quotations.

"Various materials that appeal to more senses can be developed for special education teachers." (P31)

"Making school and classroom environments suitable for special education." (P3)

"To ensure that the development expectation between the teacher and the parent is brought together on a common ground by providing realistic information about the level of the students with the parent education programs." (P1)

"It is necessary to be aware of the fact that we are raising human beings not only as special education teachers, but also as all teachers and that we should be appreciated." (P19)

The opinions of the students related to "Individual Expectations" category are presented below through direct quotations.

"Increasing the quality of teachers with in-service training." (P15)

"Being granted professional depreciation allowance." (P5)

"Lowering the retirement age compared to other teachers." (P32)

The opinions of the students related to “*Institutional Expectations*” category are presented below through direct quotations.

“*More intensive university education.*” (P8)

“*...I wish there was a reliable study that evaluates and measures our professional competence from time to time. Therefore, we can be more dynamic. We constantly renew ourselves and those who do their job well remain.*” (P21)

“*I would like and expect non-field teachers to be added to special education teachers’ field.*” (P24)

Findings Related to Problems of Special Education Teachers

Findings related problems of special education teachers are tabulated in the Table 4 below.

Table 4. Opinions regarding problems of special education teachers

Theme	Category	Code	Participants
Problems	Environmental Issues	Parent Support	P1-P2-P3-P6-P9-P10-P13-P15-P19-P20-P23-P25-P27-P31
		Material Shortage	P7-P8-P13-P23-P25-P28-P29-P33
		Field Knowledge Deficiency	P2-P5-P10-P14
		Expectation	P5-P9-P29-P30
		Unappreciated	P20-P21-P22
		Physical Conditions	P15-P16
		Being Regarded as a Babysitter	P30-P33
		Relevancy to the Real World	P16
		Institutional Issues	School Administrations
	Field Changing		P16-P20-P24
	Practical Application		P12
	Shortage		
	Individual Issues	Inadequacy of Teachers	P16
		Deduction of Additional Course Fee	P21
		Number of Teacher Appointments	P24
		Burnout	P4
		In-service Training Shortage	P11

Reviewing special education teachers’ opinions about the problems they face, the categories “*Environmental Issues*”, “*Institutional Issues*” and “*Individual Issues*” were generated under the theme “*Problems*” and the data was analyzed. Although individual problems seem to be less prominent, the fact that institutional problems are mentioned but environmental problems are very common has drawn attention.

The opinions of the students related to “*Environmental Issues*” category are presented below through direct quotations.

“*Families’ lack of awareness about the education of special students.*” (P10)

“*Sufficient resources and materials should be provided.*” (P7)

“*The inadequacy of the administrators in the normal school in the field of special education.*” (P5)

The opinions of the students related to “Institutional Issues” category are presented below through direct quotations.

“Trying to compromise with the administration that does not have knowledge about special education.” (P1)

“In order to eliminate the shortage of teachers, training of qualified teachers through courses should be avoided.” (P16)

“Lack of practical application in the field.” (P12)

The opinions of the students related to “Individual Issues” category are presented below through direct quotations.

“Early onset of professional disinformation. (P4)

“Providing continuous in-service training especially on different types of disability” (P11)

Findings Regarding Solution Suggestions for the Problems Special Education Teachers Face

The findings regarding the solution suggestions for the problems faced by special education teachers are given in Table 5.

Table 5. Opinions of special education teachers on suggestions for solutions to the problems they encounter

Theme	Category	Code	Participants
Solution Suggestions	Institutional Recommends	Material Supply	P9-P15-P24
		School Administrations	P1
		Book Contents	P8
		Speech and Language Therapy	P16
		Appointing Special Education Teacher	P21
		Field Changing	P24
		Working Hours	P13
	Environmental Suggestions	Parenting Education	P1-P2-P3-P5-P9-P10 P16-P20-P23-P30
		Raise the Awareness of Public Collaboration	P25-P28-P31
		Importance of Special Education	P14-P34
		Appreciation	P20-P22
		Enviromental Support	P31-P32
	Teacher Centered Suggestions	Economic Conditions	P18
		Inservice Training	P8-P13
		Continuing Education	P10-P11
		Early Retirement	P4
Motivation		P13	
Student Centered Suggestions	Educational Environment	P34	
	Absence	P6-P15	
			P30

Considering the opinions of special education teachers regarding the solution suggestions for the problems they encounter, the categories of "Institutional Suggestions", "Environmental Suggestions", "Teacher-Centered Suggestions" and "Student-Centered Suggestions" were created under the theme of "Solution Suggestions" and necessary analyzes were made. Although all of the suggestions made are noteworthy, it has been determined that environmental suggestions are particularly dominant.

The opinions of the students related to “*Institutional Suggestions*” category are presented below through direct quotations.

“Sending resources and materials to schools regularly every year.” (P15)

“Every school should have a special education teacher, just as counselors. Because private education is everywhere in our lives. The special education teacher should regularly inform each class about ‘special education’, other branch teachers and especially their parents. This can be presented as various activities.” (P21)

“Speech and language therapists need to be more and involved in the process.” (P16)

The opinions of the students related to “*Environmental Suggestions*” category are presented below through direct quotations.

“Seminars can be given by counselors to parents to have realistic expectations.” (P5)

“Establishment of a systematic order. Community, parent, etc. awareness studies. Trainings, etc., where the employees of the institution will be informed about the special education point.” (P25)

“Cooperation between the administrator-teacher-parent-student should be ensured.” (P34)

The opinions of the students related to “*Teacher-centered Suggestions*” category are presented below through direct quotations.

“Teachers’ material needs should be asked regularly, and teachers should be paid extra for this.”(P8)

“If deemed necessary, academic in-service training of teachers should be expanded and conducted.”(P10)

“Early retirement due to burnout” (P13)

The opinions of the students related to “*Student-centered Suggestions*” category are presented below through direct quotations.

“Material materials should be provided and educational environments should be designed in accordance with the level of the student.” (P6)

“Investigating the reasons for absenteeism from school” (P30)

Results and Discussion

As a result of the research, it can be said that individual and economic factors are effective on special education teachers' department preferences. Helpfulness and interest in the category of individual factors, and employment opportunity codes in the category of economic factors were predominantly specified. It can be said that the teachers participating in the research tend to prefer the department primarily in terms of obtaining a source of income for their lives. In addition, it can be said that the participants in the research prefer the field of special education because conscientious feelings predominate in their choice of profession and it is different from other teaching fields. It was concluded by Afat and Çiçek (2019) that there are helpfulness and employment opportunities factors among the opinions of special education undergraduate students regarding their tendency to choose the department. In the studies conducted by Nartgün (2007), Tortop et al. (2014), and Güner Yıldız and

Melekoğlu (2015), it was concluded that the availability of employment opportunities was effective in the preference of the special education department. These results are in line with the results obtained from the present research. The fact that the reason for choosing the special education department is that it has high job opportunities or employment opportunities is a subject worth thinking about in this sense. Because acting with such concerns will likely make teacher efficiency and quality open to discussion.

In the present research the expectations of special education teachers were gathered under the categories of environmental, individual and institutional expectations. Under the environmental expectations category, mostly material support, appropriate educational environment, parenting education and the appreciation of the profession were identified. Under the category of individual expectations, the need for in-service training, improvement of economic conditions and retirement age appeared. Intensive training in undergraduate education and field change under the category of institutional expectations are remarkable. In line with the findings, it has been determined that special education teachers expect support in terms of classroom environment and equipment in order to provide a higher quality education, and they want to be appreciated by families and society. In addition, it can be said that teachers want to increase their personal development through in-service trainings and subsequently to benefit students. However, they stated that economic conditions need to be improved in order for them to lead a more comfortable life and considering the difficulty of the profession, they had the expectation for an early retirement. The removal of the field change, which can be defined as the "bleeding wound" of special education teaching, is also expected by field teachers. It is necessary to keep in mind the fact that integrating the members of a truly special field such as special education, namely the students and their families into society, is possible by listening to the expectations of the teachers in this field.

Going over the literature, it has been concluded that special education teachers do not get the appreciation they deserve in the society and this situation leads to professional burnout (Girgin & Baysal, 2005; Işıkhan, 2017; Yavuz & Yıkımsı, 2021). In addition, special education teachers pointed out the importance of in-service training in catching up with the developments in the field (Yıldırım et al. 2014). Dedeoğlu, Durali, and Tanrıverdi Kış (2004) concluded in their research that more emphasis should be placed on practice in order to increase the experience of special education undergraduate students in working in the field of special education. In the research by Nartgün (2007) with special education students, the conclusion was that making field changes through in-service training was met with reaction from field graduate students. Similarly, it has been determined that teachers from different fields working in the field of special education have difficulties in the field of special education (Çetin, 2004). These results support the results obtained from the present research. These results indicate that initiatives need to be taken to give special education teachers the value they deserve, to prevent professional burnout, and to provide more practice opportunities.

As a result of the research, the problems faced by special education teachers in the field consisted of three categories as environmental, institutional and individual issues. Such problems in the category of environmental issues as low parent support, material shortage, lack of knowledge about the field by the society, and seeing teachers as

babysitters were remarkable. The problems encountered with school administrations and field changes formed the category of institutional problems. Burnout and shortage of in-service training constituted the category of individual problems. The support of families, one of the most important elements of the special education process, to teachers and their children throughout the education process is important to smoothly carry out this process. On the other hand, material shortage in the classroom environment complicates the learning process. The lack of knowledge about special education by the society and the fact that special education teachers are regarded as babysitters rather than educators reduce the motivation of teachers to work. Likewise, it can be said that the negative attitudes of school administrators towards the field of special education wear out special education teachers. In order to follow the developments in the field, it can be stated that special education teachers have problems with in-service training. Regardless of the problem area, it should not be forgotten that in order to find a solution, it is necessary to get to the root of the problem. In addition, ignoring the problem or postponing the solution are issues that should be avoided. Since special education is a sensitive field, paying attention to these issues will be an important gain. This approach will also affect the professional attitudes of special education teachers. In addition, Johnson and Howell (2005) argue that the positive attitudes of teachers towards the profession are related to being able to fulfill the requirements of the profession more effectively and to be able to overcome problems. Because the attitude developed towards the profession can be an important determinant of the individual's success in that profession.

Based on literature, it has been determined that the most important problem related to special education is related to the setting of the environment (Gündüz & Akın, 2015). The completeness of the materials, indispensable for the arrangement of the environment, will ensure sound special education services to be carried out. In the study by Altınkurt (2008) it is concluded that there is a lack of knowledge and formation of the personnel working in private education institutions. On the other hand, in the study by Ergenekon (2004), it was demonstrated that special education teachers had various problems with school administrations, especially in the first years of their profession. In the study conducted by Griffin et al. (2009) with special education teachers, such remarkable ideas as providing material support, increasing practice-based training, improving physical conditions and increasing professional collaboration were proposed to eliminate some of the instructional and administrative problems experienced by teachers. All these results support the results obtained from the present research. In addition, Karasu et al. (2014) stated in their research that determining the various in-service training needs of teachers working in the field of special education will benefit teachers working in the field. This view is in line with the results obtained from the present research. Efforts to improve environmental conditions for special education and to increase the educational quality of special education teachers will be a separate added value for this field.

In the research, solution suggestions for the problems faced by special education teachers consisted of categories such as institutional suggestions, environmental suggestions, teacher and student-centered suggestions. Institutional suggestions category composed of material supply and school administrations. Parenting education and public awareness were the leading in the environmental suggestions category. Teacher-centered suggestions consisted of improving economic conditions, while

student-centered suggestions consisted of improving educational environments. It can be stated that special education teachers have developed suggestions for the provision of special education materials in the classrooms where they primarily work and for school administrations to have the necessary awareness. Dikici Sığırmaç et al. (2011) concluded in their research that school administrations should play an active role in increasing the quality of education that students in need of special education will receive. This result supports the present research results. In addition, a suggestion was made to raise awareness of families and society through various trainings. It can be argued that the realization of this situation will strengthen the motivation of special education teachers. It has been stated that the special education field is a more difficult field than other teaching fields, and accordingly, it is suggested that the economic conditions should be improved. It can be thought that special education teachers have developed this proposal to make their economic conditions attractive so that they can work in the field for many years. Finally, it can be revealed that students expected their learning environments to be promoted. It would be beneficial to take into consideration the solution suggestions offered for the problems if they come from individuals in the relevant field. Because they are the ones who deal with the problems in that field. Therefore, it should be taken into account that the suggestions to be offered will be the product of a solution-oriented understanding.

Recommendations

In line with the results of this study, the following recommendations have been developed.

1. Special education teachers' views on their working status at different levels and according to different disability groups can be examined.
2. Research can be conducted to examine the competencies of teachers who are graduates or not.
3. Physical infrastructure of special education classes can be strengthened.
4. Action plans that include all the elements of special education can be implemented.
5. Studies can be carried out to improve the social and economic conditions of special education teachers.

Peer-Review	Double anonymized - Two External
Ethical Statement	It is declared that scientific and ethical principles have been followed while carrying out and writing this study and that all the sources used have been properly cited. *(Siirt University Rectorate Ethics Committee Decision was taken with the decision dated 30.06.2022, numbered 2955 of the Presidency of the Publication Ethics Committee.)
Plagiarism Checks	Yes - Ithenticate
Conflicts of Interest	The author(s) has no conflict of interest to declare.
Complaints	itobiad@itobiad.com
Grant Support	The author(s) acknowledge that they received no external funding in support of this research.
Author Contributions (If the article is written by two or three authors)	Design of Study: UE (%35), FB (%35), BÜ (%30) Data Acquisition: UE (%35), FB (%30), BÜ (%35) Data Analysis: UE (%35), FB (%35), BÜ (%30) Writing up: UE (%35), FB (%35), BÜ (%30) Submission and Revision: UE (%35), FB (%35), BÜ (%30)
Değerlendirme	İki Dış Hakem / Çift Taraflı Körleme
Etik Beyan	Bu çalışmanın hazırlanma sürecinde bilimsel ve etik ilkelere uyulduğu ve yararlanılan tüm çalışmaların kaynakçada belirtildiği beyan olunur. *(Siirt Üniversitesi Rektörlüğü Yayın Etiği Kurulu Başkanlığının 30.06.2022 Tarih, 2955 Nolu kararı ile Etik Kurul Kararı alınmıştır.)
Benzerlik Taraması	Yapıldı - Ithenticate
Etik Bildirim	itobiad@itobiad.com
Çıkar Çatışması	Çıkar çatışması beyan edilmemiştir.
Finansman	Bu araştırmayı desteklemek için dış fon kullanılmamıştır.
Yazar Katkıları (Makale Çift veya Üç Yazarlı olduğu takdirde)	Çalışmanın Tasarlanması: UE (%35), FB (%35), BÜ (%30) Veri Toplanması: UE (%35), FB (%30), BÜ (%35) Veri Analizi: UE (%35), FB (%35), BÜ (%30) Makalenin Yazımı: UE (%35), FB (%35), BÜ (%30) Makale Gönderimi ve Revizyonu: UE (%35), FB (%35), BÜ (%30)

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