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An Analysis of Graduate Theses Conducted in the Field of Special Education in Türkiye*

Türkiye’de Özel Eğitim Alanında Yürütülmüş Lisansüstü Tezlerin İncelenmesi

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ABSTRACT

Special education is a field that has been valued in Türkiye especially in recent years. The aim of this study is to examine the types of postgraduate theses conducted in the field of special education in Türkiye between 2000 and 2023, their intensity in the field of special education and their distribution according to years. The research is a literature review designed in qualitative research model. The keywords of special education, autism, down syndrome, learning disability, intellectual disability, mental deficiency, giftedness, superior intelligence and special talented were determined to serve the purpose of the research. The keywords were searched from the National Thesis Center database. The data were analyzed using descriptive analysis. Considering the titles of the theses, 2991 postgraduate theses including master's, doctorate, specialization in medicine and proficiency in art were reached. The types of postgraduate theses reached, the distribution of theses among keywords and the change of theses according to years are presented in graphs. As a result, it was observed that master's theses were predominant in postgraduate theses in the field of special education between 2000 and 2023, the most focused special education field was autism, and there was a general increase in theses by years, except for 2020.

Keywords: Special Education, Graduate Theses, Descriptive Analysis

ÖZ

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Özel eğitim, Türkiye'de özellikle son yıllarda değer verilen bir alandır. Bu çalışmanın amacı, 2000-2023 yılları arasında Türkiye'de özel eğitim alanında yapılan lisansüstü tezlerin türlerini, özel eğitim alanındaki yoğunluklarını ve yıllara göre dağılımlarını incelemektir. Araştırma nitel araştırma modelinde tasarlanmış bir literatür taramasıdır. Araştırmanın amacına hizmet edecek şekilde özel eğitim, otizm, down sendrom, öğrenme güçlüğü, zihinsel engel, zihinsel yetersizlik, üstün zekâ, üstün yetenekli ve özel yetenekli anahtar kelimeleri belirlenmiştir. Anahtar kelimeler Ulusal Tez Merkezi veri tabanından taranmıştır. Veriler betimsel analiz kullanılarak analiz edilmiştir. Tezlerin başlıkları dikkate alındığında yüksek lisans, doktora, tıpta uzmanlık ve sanatta yeterlilik olmak üzere 2991 lisansüstü teze ulaşıldı. Ulaşılan lisansüstü tezlerin türleri, tezlerin anahtar kelimeler arasındaki dağılımı ve tezlerin yıllara göre değişimi grafikler halinde sunulmuştur. Sonuç olarak, 2000-2023 yılları arasında özel eğitim alanında yapılan lisansüstü tezlerde yüksek lisans tezlerinin ağırlıkta olduğu, en çok odaklanılan özel eğitim alanının otizm olduğu ve 2020 yılı hariç yıllara göre tezlerde genel bir artış olduğu görülmüştür.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Özel Eğitim, Lisansüstü Tezler, Betimsel Analiz

INTRODUCTION

Special education is a comprehensive education and training service offered in cooperation with school-individual-families that will meet and develop individuals' interests, wishes, abilities, and skills at the highest level by centering the differences, developmental characteristics, and educational needs of individuals. It will support their development within a special program without separating individuals with individualized education plans (IEP) (Special Education Services Regulation, 2018). Special education aims to prepare individuals for higher levels of education and training and for working and social life by using their capacities and competencies at the highest level (Alkan, 2019; Çiçek, 2020).

It is ensured that all individuals who need special education services start special education early, based on their interests, wishes and abilities. Individuals receiving special education services benefit from all levels of education without interruption and without being kept away from their physical and social environment. It is essential that special education is provided through an individualized education plan developed in line with the competencies and skills of each individual (MEB, 2022). The Ministry of National Education is responsible for special education services in line with the general principles of Turkish National Education (Decree Law on Special Education, 1997). As

a matter of fact, the ministry shares responsibility for special education services through provincial/district national education directorates by establishing the necessary cooperation with formal and non-formal education institutions, rehabilitation centers, universities, Guidance and Research Centers and health institutions (Special Education Institutions Regulation, 2012). Special education services are provided from the least restrictive environment such as full-time mainstreaming, support education room and part-time mainstreaming (Çiçek, 2020) to the most restrictive environment such as special education class, day special education school and boarding special education school in line with an integrative perspective (Special Education Services Regulation, 2018).

Types of disabilities in the field of special education are evaluated within the framework of intellectual disability (mild, moderate, severe), physical disability (visual, hearing, orthopedic, chronic disease), autism, special learning difficulties, speech and language disorders, and special abilities (WHO, 2011). The Ministry of National Education, which provides special education services in Türkiye, categorizes the types of disabilities in the field of special education within the framework of visual impairment, hearing impairment, learning disability, attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder, intellectual disability, physical disability, language and speech disorders, autism spectrum disorder or autism and giftedness/special talent (Special Education Services Regulation, 2018). As a matter of fact, within the scope of this research, the focus was mostly on learning disability, intellectual disability, autism and giftedness special talent.

Although individuals do not experience intellectual deficiencies (Miller et al., 1998), learning disabilities are an area of disability expressed as difficulties in academic skills and logical reasoning (Yıldız, 2004). Due to deficiencies or inaccuracies in the diagnosis of inadequacies such as difficulty in acquiring academic skills, difficulty in reading and writing, language and speech disorders, and native language acquisition problems, the diagnosis that the individual has mental retardation instead of learning disabilities are factors that prevent individuals from using and developing their existing competencies at a high level (Torgesen, 2004; Fletcher et al., 2018). However, it is worth nothing that the fact that this disability causes failure in school delays the existing mental capacity of the

individual and pulls him back despite showing similar interventional characteristics with his peers (Silver, 2006). In addition to academic disability, individuals with learning disabilities may develop social failure and problem behaviors in parallel with this failure (Mishna, 2003).

Intellectual disability is a type of disability diagnosed before the age of 18 (AAMR, 2002) that limits an individual with an intelligence level below 70 IQ (Sattler, 2002) in cognitive, social, and practical skills and makes it difficult for the individual to adapt accordingly (Shree & Shukla, 2016). As a matter of fact, the first two years of life can be misleading in this rating of intelligence, because a child who does not perform well in the tests conducted in the first two years may be able to overcome this retardation by the age of four (Shevell & Swaiman, 1999). Although it is known that the average IQ is 70 in the grading of intelligence, 20 IQ and below refers to profound mental retardation, 20-35 IQ refers to severe mental retardation, 36-50 IQ refers to moderate mental retardation and 51-70 IQ refers to mild mental retardation (Kaufman et al., 2016; WHO, 1992).

Autism, another developmental disorder (Moore & Goodson, 2003; Volkmar & Klin, 2005), is a pervasive developmental disorder that is usually recognized in the first three years of life (Bailey & Rutter, 1991) and continues throughout life (Dawson et al, 2007), is a type of pervasive developmental disorder (Reichow & Volkmar, 2010) that affects an individual's motor skills, sensory processes, language and communication, social and academic development, leaving him/her developmentally behind his/her peers, observed in the form of repetitive cyclical behaviors (Dagdir et al. , 2022), and intensive experience of certain interests (APA, 2013).

Giftedness is defined as an individual's ability to outperform his/her peers in cognitive skills, creativity, artistic skills, leadership capacity, and specific academic areas (Johnsen, 2021). This high level of performance is demonstrated by an intense interest in language, art, mathematics, social sciences, arts, hobbies, detailed knowledge, and the ability to analyze complex ideas (Tannebaum, 1983; Sterneberg & Davidson, 1986). In addition, according to the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children - 4th Edition (WISC-IV) and Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children - 5th Edition (WISC-V), 90-119 IQ is an

indicator of normal intelligence, while 110-119 IQ indicates bright intelligence, 120-129 IQ indicates superior intelligence and 130 IQ and above indicates very superior intelligence (WHO; 1992; Weiss, 2006; Kaufman et al., 2016). Societies provide gifted and talented or gifted individuals (Bilgiç et al., 2021), who are approximately 2-3% of their population, with the opportunity to develop their existing skills at a high level by providing a customized education and training service in the field in which they are gifted differently from their peers (Marland, 1972; Brown et al., 2005). However, it should not be forgotten that the fact that many gifted individuals cannot reveal their special talent and perform below their potential can cause the individual to be known as a failure and this situation can cause a great loss for both the individual and society (Davis et al., 2011).

The improvements made by the Ministry of National Education in special education student quotas, the number of special education teachers and the number of special education classes are important developments in terms of special education services (Güner et al., 2016). In fact, Türkiye ranks high among OECD countries in terms of prioritizing special education services (OECD, 2019).

The Ministry of National Education visits different countries to examine education and training services, workshops for developing special education lesson plans and materials, and developing innovative methods in education and training are studies that develop the field of special education (Baltalar, 2022). When the special education departments at the undergraduate level of higher education institutions in Türkiye are examined, it is seen that it is a common field. In 2023, there are 52 universities, including state and foundation universities, with special education departments (YÖK, 2023).

Special education services are very important in Türkiye. Publications and research on special education have been increasing in recent years. However, review studies are much less compared to other publications. Coşkun et al. (2014) examined postgraduate theses in the field of special education in Türkiye between 2008 and 2013 in terms of various variables and analyzed master's and doctoral theses in terms of types of special education disabilities, thesis topics, frequency by years, research methods used, universities where theses were conducted and scientific titles of thesis advisors. However, Coşkun et al.

(2014) examined only 61 master's and 11 doctoral theses written between 2008 and 2013. Similarly, Kıyak et al. (2019) examined studies aiming to teach skills to individuals with disabilities and analyzed the demographic characteristics of the studies, methodological characteristics of the studies and the results of the studies. However, Kıyak et al. (2019) analyzed only 33 studies published between 1990 and 2017. In addition, Yıldız et al. (2016) examined special education research in Türkiye and analyzed the number of articles published in the field of special education by years, the number of authors of the articles, the universities where the authors work, the keywords and research methods of the articles. However, Yıldız et al. (2016) analyzed only 113 articles. Çağlar & Özkan (2021) examined the articles published on autism between 2010 and 2020 and analyzed the studies in terms of their distribution in different journals, number of publications by years, research methods and data collection techniques. However, Çağlar & Özkan (2021) analyzed only 136 articles published on autism between 2010 and 2020. Görgün & Melekoğlu (2019) examined the studies conducted in the field of learning disabilities in Türkiye and analyzed the studies in terms of publication types, number of authors, publication year, database, publication language, research topics and fields, research methods, research samples and demographic characteristics, and tests and scales used in the studies. However, Görgün & Melekoğlu (2019) analyzed only 189 publications in the field of learning disabilities. Erol & İlhan-Ildız (2020) examined postgraduate theses on the language development processes of individuals with special needs and analyzed the theses in terms of publication years, thesis types, language they were written in, gender and titles of thesis advisors, gender of thesis authors, university, institute and main discipline, research models used in theses, thesis sample and characteristics and thesis topics. However, Erol & İlhan-Ildız (2020) analyzed only 69 postgraduate theses in the field of language development processes of individuals with special needs. It has been observed that the scope of these published review studies is quite specific and narrow in terms of year range, number of publications, code keyword diversity and types of graduate theses. Therefore, more comprehensive studies are needed in terms of publication year, scope of the field and publication type.

In this regard, this research is a review study that aims to reveal and analyze how the postgraduate theses in the field of special education in Türkiye between 2000 and 2023 are distributed according to their types, which types and categories of disabilities are clustered in special education, and how these postgraduate theses are spread over the years from the beginning of the 2000s to the end of 2023 with numerical and percentage expressions.

This study, which is a literature review, is also called bibliometric research. Bibliometric studies are researches that enable publications to be analysed by different methods and scientific studies to be evaluated (Coşkun et al., 2014). Bibliometric studies are studies that allow scientific research to be analyzed based on a number of statistical data such as publication year, number of publications, number of citations and percentage ratio (Osareh, 1996). Bibliometrics studies, which enable the numerical presentation of scientific research such as articles, journals and theses published in a certain period of time, are frequently used to reveal how these researches affect the researches that have been conducted after these researches (Broadus, 1987; Donthu et al., 2021). Bibliometric studies use a number of visual elements such as diagrams, tables and classifications to reveal the relationship between different fields of expertise and research topics (Wittig, 1978). Bibliometric studies allow to present the accumulated sources of information together in an organized manner (Zupic & Čarter, 2015). Considering all the above-mentioned developments in the field of special education both in the ministry and higher education institutions, this research utilizing bibliometric studies is necessary.

METHOD

Research Model

This research is a literature review study designed in the qualitative research model. The qualitative research model is a comprehensive research method in which the researcher draws its own boundaries with the intense effort of the researcher and allows the researcher to act very flexibly (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2008). Qualitative research is

subjective and interpretive research (Silverman, 2016) that enables data collection through research methods such as observation, interview and literature review (Seale, 1999) depending on the research purpose. Qualitative research aims to reveal the research topic best by going deeper and more detailed into the subject to be analyzed (Marshall & Rosman, 2014). The qualitative research model was chosen because it was aimed to examine the situation to be investigated in depth (Neuman, 2000) and to enable the researcher to act flexibly in accessing and analyzing postgraduate theses (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2008; Maxwell, 2012). Literature reviews are a detailed examination of both printed and non-printed documents in line with the research purpose and the creation of a new meaningful whole (Creswell, 2002). Literature review studies, frequently used in educational research (Patton, 2002), are valuable in revealing a specific situation and being the basis for many new studies (Creswell & Cheryl, 2018).

The Aim of the Study

This study aims to present the distribution of postgraduate theses in the field of special education in Türkiye between 2000 and 2023 according to their types, which types and categories of disabilities are focused on in postgraduate theses in special education, how postgraduate theses are distributed according to years from the beginning of 2000 to the end of 2023 quantitatively and collectively with percentage expressions and thematically analysed. For this purpose, 5 research questions were determined and answers to these questions were sought.

Research Questions

In this study, which was conducted to examine graduate theses written in the field of special education in Türkiye from various perspectives, a comprehensive perspective on the field of special education was provided by taking into account the variables within the scope of the research among all graduate theses published by YÖK national thesis center. In line with this purpose, answers to the following sub-objectives were sought:

1. In line with the key words, how many graduate theses, including master's, doctoral, medical specialty and proficiency in art theses, were written between 2000 and 2023?

2. How is the distribution of the obtained graduate theses among master's, doctoral, medical specialty and proficiency in art theses in terms of keywords?
3. From which keywords were the most number of postgraduate theses obtained?
4. How is the distribution of postgraduate theses written in the field of special education between 2000-2023 according to years?
5. How is the distribution of postgraduate theses according to years in terms of each keyword?

Validity and Reliability of Study

The measures taken to increase the validity and reliability of the study are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Measures Taken to Increase the Validity and Reliability of the Study

Validity	Internal Validity	Expert opinion was consulted when determining keywords.
		The data were double-checked by both researchers.
	External Validity	The data collection process was explained in detail.
		The data analysis process was explained in detail.
Reliability	Internal Reliability	The roles of researchers are described in detail.
		The research model is explained in detail.
	External Reliability	The findings are tabulated and graphed without interpretation.
		The consistency of the findings was checked by both researchers.
		The findings are discussed in the conclusion section.

Research Limitations

The research is limited to postgraduate theses in the field of special education written between 2000 and 2023 and made available in the YÖK national thesis centre database.

Research Process

Firstly, code keywords that would serve the purpose of the research were determined by both researchers. These keywords were chosen from the words that would comprehensively represent the field for the subfields of special education. Firstly, a keyword pool was created by both researchers. Then, words that could represent the field were selected from the word pool. While selecting the keywords, the opinions of 3 different experts from the field of special education were consulted. The experts were selected based on their scientific publications in different fields of special education such as intellectual disability, learning disability, autism and special ability. The experts were selected from different universities and their opinions were consulted unaware of each other. Finally, these keywords were determined as special education, autism, down syndrome, learning disability, intellectual disability, mental deficiency, giftedness, superior intelligence and special talented. The determined keywords were searched twice by both researchers between 02.10.2023-31.12.2023 in the YÖK national thesis centre database. Graduate theses were obtained by considering their titles. The obtained postgraduate theses were tabulated by both researchers according to years and types under keywords. Postgraduate theses were expressed numerically and in percentages according to their types by both researchers. Then, the distribution of postgraduate theses according to years in the context of keywords was visualised with graphs. The keywords were modelled by both researchers with descriptive statistical graphics from data visualisation tools in R Programming. The findings in the tables and graphs were analysed by both researchers using descriptive analysis. The findings are discussed together with the literature in the discussion section.

Data Analysis

This research is a literature review study. In literature reviews, titles, texts and chronological data in personal or institutional printed documents and non-printed archives and databases are examined (Yin, 2015). Literature reviews provide in-depth information about the subject to be researched from a large data pool. As a matter of fact, database searches have been frequently used in recent years (Berg & Lune, 2019). In this literature review study, descriptive analysis was used for data analysis. In general terms, descriptive analysis is the process of collecting, organising and summarising data about an event, phenomenon or situation (Büyüköztürk et al., 2017). In descriptive analysis, a large number or complex data are presented in a way that can be easily understood by readers. For this purpose, data are visualised with tables and graphs (Aslan, 2018).

R Programming was used for the analysis. R Programming was preferred because it can be integrated with the data set in Excel and has powerful visualization libraries. The R programming library set allows the analysis to be expressed richly with visually supportive histograms and graphs. The data obtained within the scope of the study were transferred to Microsoft Excel. Descriptive statistics of the data were visualized with R Programming.

As a matter of fact Table 2 types of graduate theses accessed from keywords, Table 3 statistical distribution of graduate theses accessed from keywords and Table 4 shows distribution of special education graduate theses accessed from all keywords between 2000-2023. Similarly Figure 1 types of graduate theses accessed from keywords, Figure 2 statistical distribution of graduate theses accessed from keywords, Figure 3 distribution of special education graduate theses accessed from all keywords between 2000-2023, Figure 4 distribution of graduate theses accessed from the keyword special education by years, Figure 5 distribution of graduate theses accessed from the keyword autism by years,

Figure 6 distribution of graduate theses accessed from the keyword down syndrome by years, Figure 7 distribution of graduate theses accessed from the keyword learning disability by years, Figure 8 distribution of graduate theses accessed with the keywords intellectual disability and mental deficiency by years and Figure 9 shows distribution of graduate theses accessed with the keywords giftedness, superior intelligence, superior talented by years. All descriptive tables and graphs created from the data obtained were interpreted and transcribed by both researchers.

FINDINGS

The keywords special education, autism, down syndrome, learning disability, intellectual disability, mental deficiency, giftedness, superior intelligence and special talented, which serve the purpose of the study, were searched in the database of the YÖK national thesis center and 2991 postgraduate theses related to the field of special education between 2000 and 2023 were identified by taking into account the titles of the theses.

Table 2. Types of Graduate Theses Accessed from Keywords

Types of Postgraduate Theses	n	f(%)
Master's	2269	75,86
PhD	476	15,91
Medicine Specialty	244	8,15
Proficiency in Art	2	0,06
Total	2991	100

Note: Yükseköğretim Kurumları (2023). *Ulusal tez merkezi [National thesis center]*.

<https://tez.yok.gov.tr/UlusalTezMerkezi>

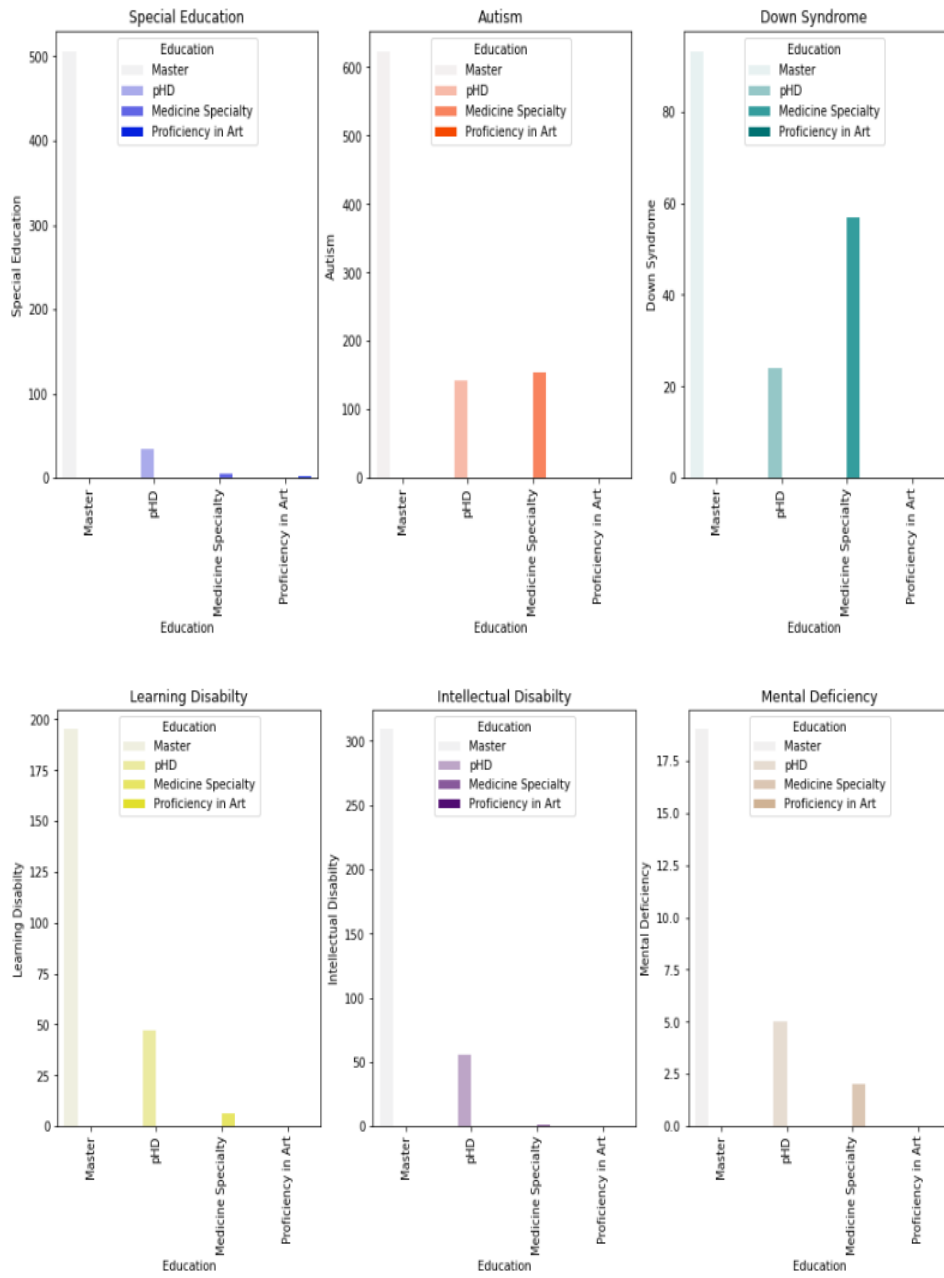
According to Table 2, a total of 2991 postgraduate theses were reached with 9 different keywords by considering the thesis titles between 2000 and 2023. The majority of the postgraduate theses are master's theses with 2269 theses. Master's theses are followed by doctoral theses with 476 theses, medical specialty theses with 244 theses and proficiency in art theses with 2 theses.

Special Education	537	17,95	36	1,20	5	0,16	1	0,03
Autism	663	22,16	162	5,41	170	5,68	1	0,03
Down Syndrome	97	3,24	24	0,80	56	1,87	-	-
Learning Disability	208	6,95	51	1,70	7	0,23	-	-
Intellectual Disability	317	10,59	58	1,93	-	-	-	-
Mental Deficiency	19	0,63	5	0,16	3	0,10	-	-
Giftedness	208	6,95	69	2,30	1	0,03	-	-
Superior Intelligence	45	1,50	18	0,60	1	0,03	-	-
Special Talented	175	5,85	53	1,77	1	0,03	-	-
Total	2269	75,86	476	15,91	244	8,15	2	0,06

Note: Yükseköğretim Kurumları (2023). *Ulusal tez merkezi [National thesis center]*.

<https://tez.yok.gov.tr/UlusalTezMerkezi>

According to Table 3, a total of 2991 postgraduate theses were identified with nine different keywords by considering the titles of the theses between 2000 and 2023. Master's theses constitute 75,86% of the postgraduate theses. 15,91% of the theses were doctoral theses, 8,15% were medical specialization theses and 0,06% were proficiency in art theses. Among these postgraduate theses, 996 theses with the keyword “autism” are the most accessed keyword. Of these 996 theses with the keyword autism, 623 are master's theses, 162 are doctoral theses, 170 are medical specialization theses and 1 is a qualification in art thesis. Subsequently, of the 579 theses accessed with the keyword “special education”, 537 are master's theses, 36 are doctoral theses, 5 are specialization in medicine and 1 is proficiency in art. The keyword special education was followed by the keyword intellectual disability. With the keyword "intellectual disability", 375 theses were reached, 317 of which were master's theses and 58 were doctoral theses. With the keyword “giftedness”, 278 theses were reached, 208 of which were master's degrees, 69 were doctorates and 1 was a medical specialty. With the keyword "learning disability", 266 theses were reached, 208 of which were master's, 51 were doctoral and 7 were medical specialties. With the keyword "special talented", 229 theses were reached, 175 of which were master's, 53 were doctoral and 1 was a medical specialty. With the keyword “down syndrome”, 177 theses were reached, of which 97 were master's, 24 were doctoral and 56 were medical specialties. With the keyword “superior intelligence”, 64 theses were found, 45 of which were master's, 18 were doctoral and 1 was a medical specialty. Finally, with the keyword "mental deficiency", 27 theses were found, 19 of which were master's, 5 were doctoral and 3 were medical specialties.



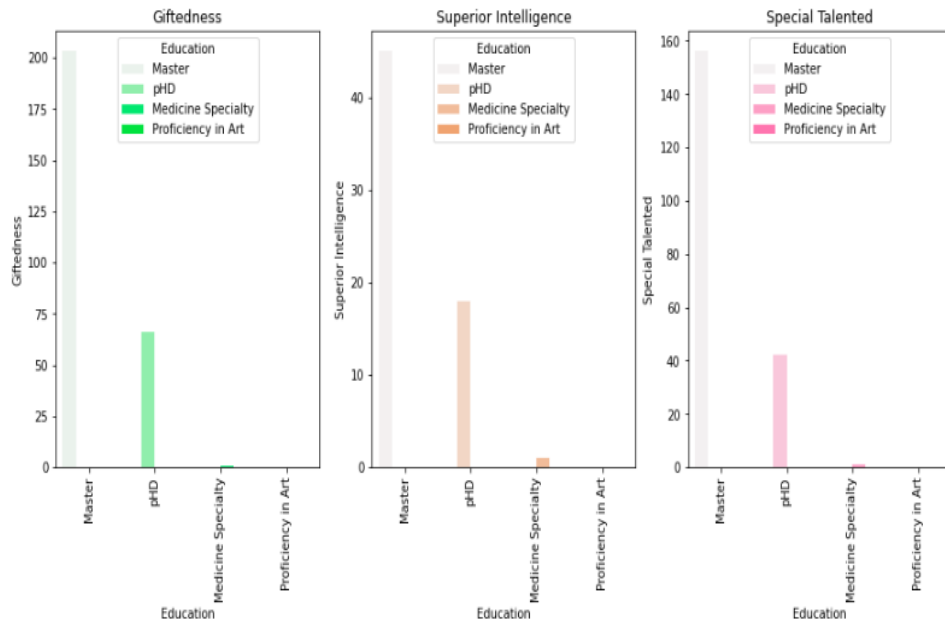


Figure 2. Statistical Distribution of Graduate Theses Accessed from Keywords

Note: Yükseköğretim Kurumları (2023). *Ulusal tez merkezi [National thesis center]*.

<https://tez.yok.gov.tr/UlusalTezMerkezi>

Figure 2 was prepared to visualise the data in Table 3. According to Figure 2, it was seen that most of the postgraduate theses obtained from each keyword were master's theses. Doctoral theses were obtained from other keywords representing the subfields of special education rather than the keyword special education. Medical specialisation theses were mostly obtained from the keywords autism and down syndrome. It was observed that there were very few art proficiency theses.

Table 4. Distribution of Special Education Graduate Theses Accessed from All Keywords Between 2000-2023

Graduate Thesis Types by Year								
Years	Master's		PhD		Medicine Specialty		Proficiency in Art	
	n	f(%)	n	f(%)	n	f(%)	n	f(%)
2000	9	0,30	1	0,03	-	-	-	-
2001	16	0,53	3	0,10	4	0,13	-	-
2002	13	0,43	4	0,13	7	0,23	-	-
2003	15	0,50	1	0,03	3	0,10	-	-
2004	12	0,40	6	0,20	4	0,13	-	-
2005	16	0,53	1	0,03	2	0,06	-	-
2006	30	1,00	5	0,16	3	0,10	-	-
2007	30	1,00	8	0,26	2	0,06	-	-
2008	46	1,53	4	0,13	2	0,06	-	-
2009	44	1,47	4	0,13	1	0,03	-	-
2010	63	2,10	7	0,23	4	0,13	-	-
2011	50	1,67	6	0,20	6	0,20	-	-

2012	40	1,33	12	0,40	5	0,16	-	-
2013	47	1,57	16	0,53	10	0,33	-	-
2014	61	2,03	22	0,73	8	0,26	-	-
2015	98	3,27	32	1,06	10	0,33	-	-
2016	114	3,81	26	0,86	8	0,26	-	-
2017	127	4,24	28	0,93	16	0,53	-	-
2018	156	5,21	31	1,03	19	0,63	-	-
2019	308	10,29	41	1,37	23	0,76	-	-
2020	140	4,68	36	1,20	20	0,66	-	-
2021	243	8,12	38	1,27	18	0,60	-	-
2022	302	10,09	67	2,24	36	1,20	1	0,03
2023	289	9,66	77	2,57	33	1,10	1	0,03
Total	2269	75,86	476	15,91	244	8,15	2	0,06

Note: Yükseköğretim Kurumları (2023). *Ulusal tez merkezi* [National thesis center].

<https://tez.yok.gov.tr/UlusalTezMerkezi>

According to Table 4, the most written postgraduate theses between 2000 and 2023 are master's theses. Master's theses are followed by doctorate, specialization in medicine and proficiency in art theses. It is seen that the number of graduate theses written between 2000 and 2023 has roughly increased over the years. According to Table 4, most master's theses were written in 2019. Doctoral theses were mostly written in 2023. Medical

specialization theses were mostly written in 2022. Proficiency in art theses were written only one each in 2022 and 2023.

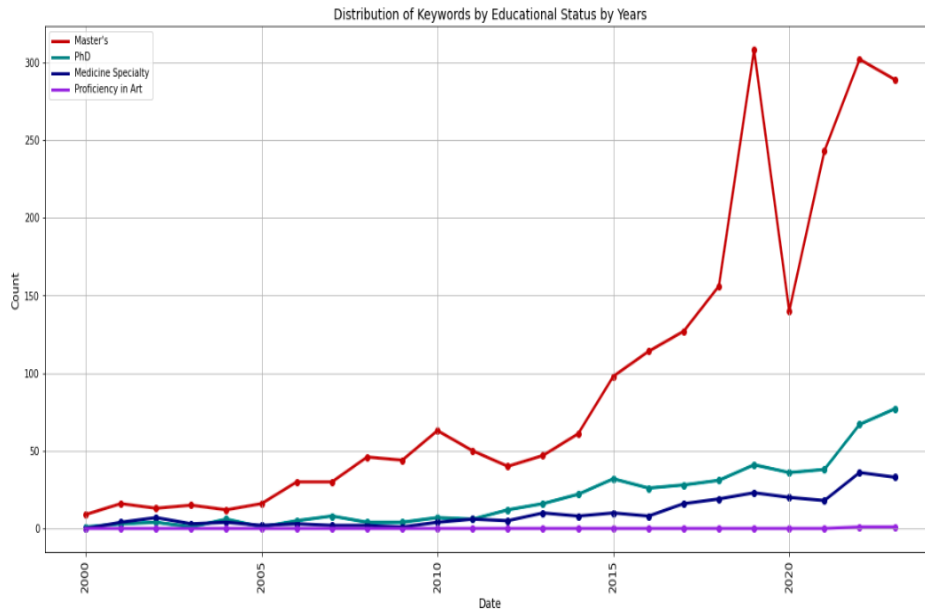


Figure 3. Distribution of Special Education Graduate Theses Accessed from All Keywords Between 2000-2023

Note: Yükseköğretim Kurumları (2023). *Ulusal tez merkezi [National thesis center]*.

<https://tez.yok.gov.tr/UlusalTezMerkezi>

According to Figure 3 the distribution of master's, doctoral, medical specialty and proficiency in art theses between 2000 and 2023. The majority of the theses are master's theses. Master's theses increased roughly until 2017 and increased sharply in 2019. In 2020, master's theses showed a sharp decline curve and continued to increase sharply in 2021 and 2022. In 2023, the number of doctoral theses continued to increase, master's and medical specialisation theses decreased, and no proficiency in arts theses were written.

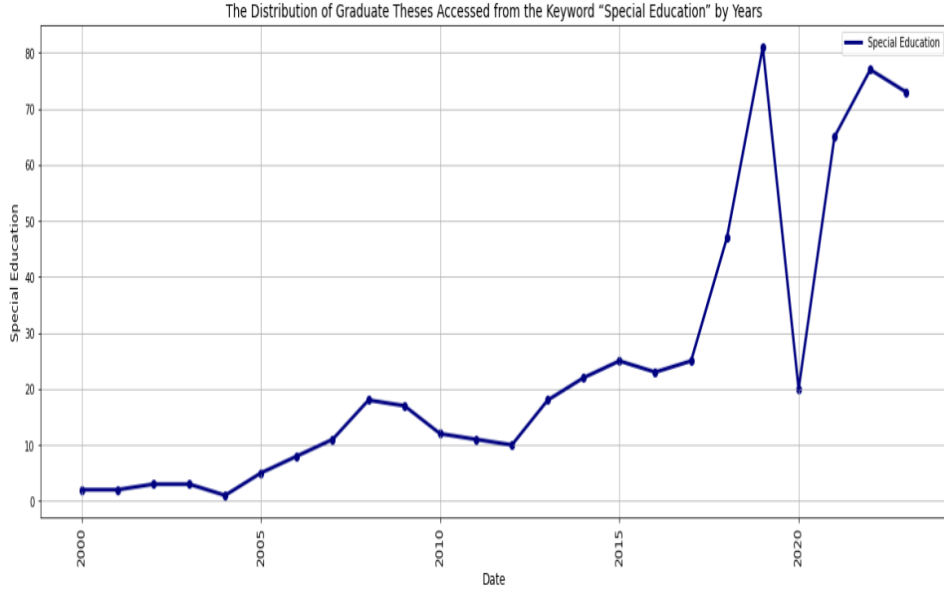


Figure 4. The Distribution of Graduate Theses Accessed from the Keyword “Special Education” by Years

Note: Yükseköğretim Kurumları (2023). *Ulusal tez merkezi* [National thesis center].
<https://tez.yok.gov.tr/UlusalTezMerkezi>

According to Figure 4, it can be said that the number of postgraduate theses accessed with the keyword “special education” increased roughly from the early 2000s to 2019. In 2020, it is seen that there is a sharp decrease in theses and in 2021 and 2022, it almost catches up with the curve in 2019. In 2023, a slight decrease in theses was observed.

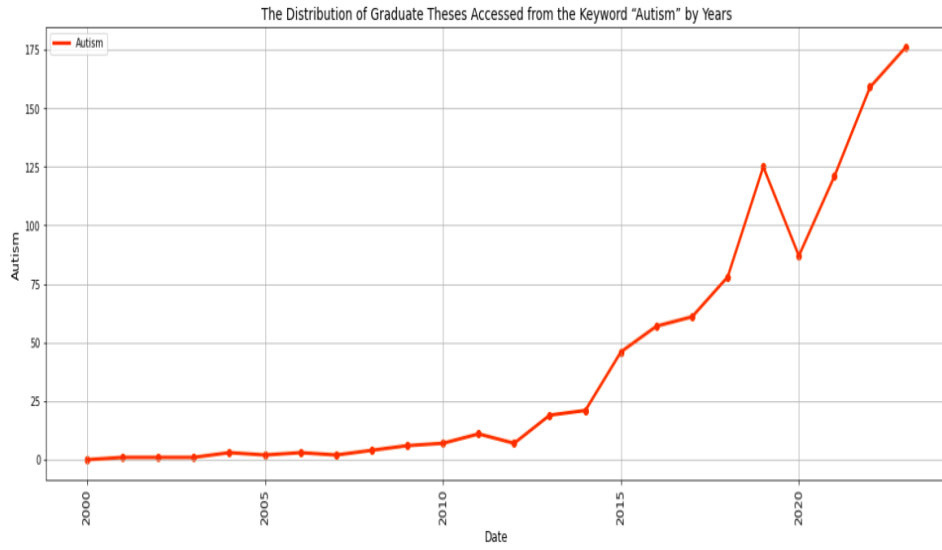


Figure 5. The Distribution of Graduate Theses Accessed from the Keyword “Autism” by Years

Note: Yükseköğretim Kurumları (2023). *Ulusal tez merkezi [National thesis center]*.
<https://tez.yok.gov.tr/UlusalTezMerkezi>

According to Figure 5, it can be said that the number of postgraduate tests accessed with the keyword “autism” increased significantly from the early 2000s to 2019. In 2020, there was a decrease in theses, and in 2021 and especially in 2022, there was a large increase. In 2023, the increase in theses continued.

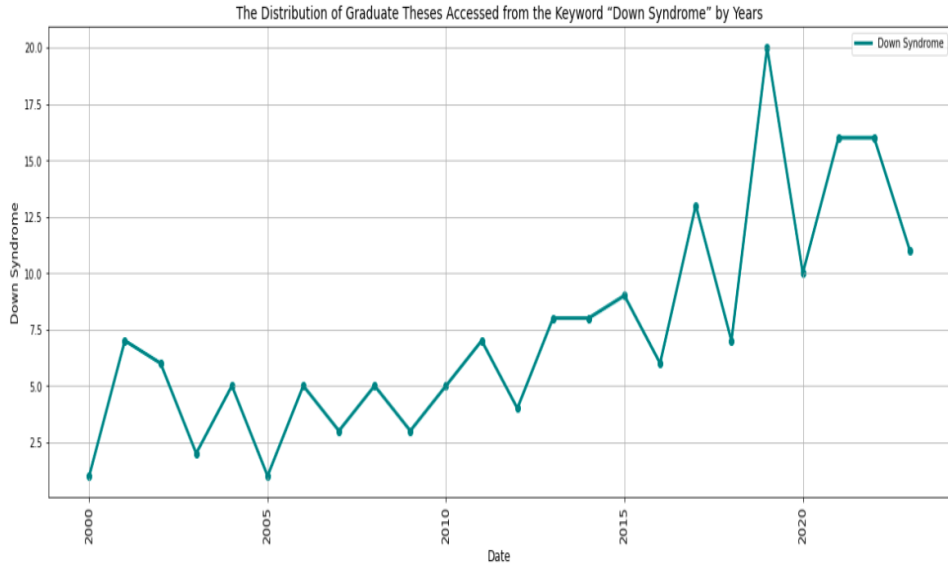


Figure 6. The Distribution of Graduate Theses Accessed from the Keyword “Down Syndrome” by Years

Note: Yükseköğretim Kurumları (2023). *Ulusal tez merkezi [National thesis center]*.

<https://tez.yok.gov.tr/UlusalTezMerkezi>

According to Figure 6, it is seen that the number of graduate theses accessed with the keyword “down syndrome” has been fluctuating since the early 2000s, and as with other keywords, there was a sharp increase in 2019. In 2020, as in other keywords, there was a decrease in theses, while an increase was observed in 2021. In 2022, there was no increase or decrease in theses, while in 2023 there was a decrease in theses.

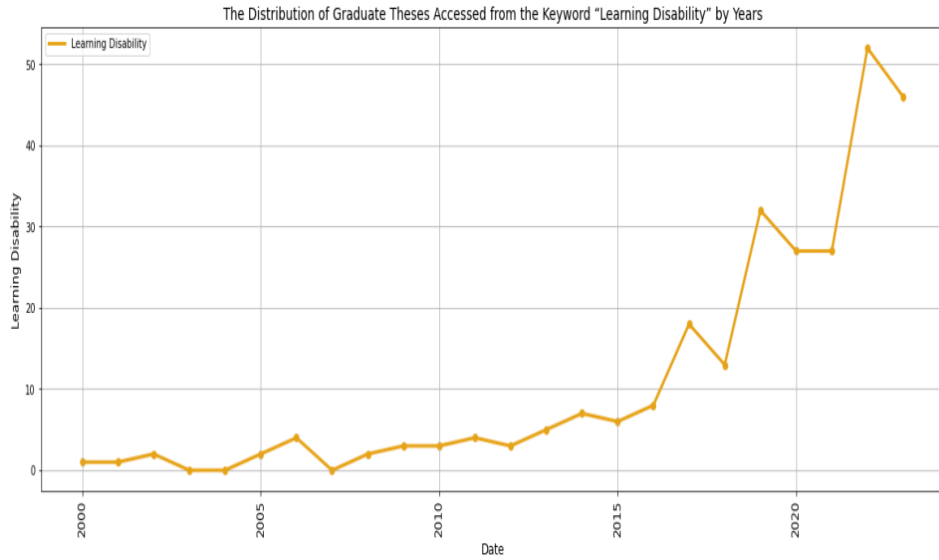


Figure 7. The Distribution of Graduate Theses Accessed from the Keyword “Learning Disability” by Years

Note: Yükseköğretim Kurumları (2023). *Ulusal tez merkezi* [National thesis center].

<https://tez.yok.gov.tr/UlusalTezMerkezi>

According to Figure 7, the number of postgraduate theses accessed with the keyword "learning disability" increased first in 2017 and then in 2019. In 2020 and 2021, the curve remained constant and showed a sharp increase in 2022. In 2023, it was observed that there was a slight decrease in theses.

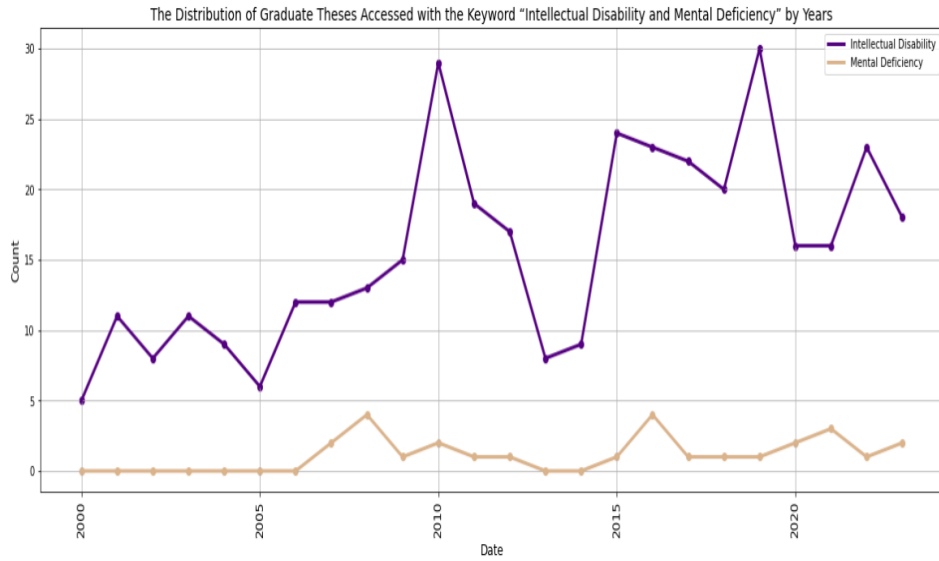


Figure 8. The Distribution of Graduate Theses Accessed with the Keywords "Intellectual Disability" and "Mental Deficiency" by Years

Note: Yükseköğretim Kurumları (2023). *Ulusal tez merkezi [National thesis center]*.

<https://tez.yok.gov.tr/UlusalTezMerkezi>

According to Figure 8, the keywords "intellectual disability" and "mental deficiency" were examined together due to their use in the literature and it was seen that intellectual disability was used more in the field of special education instead of mental deficiency based on the number of theses. According to the years, there is a scattered spread rather than a linear increase in graduate theses accessed with the keyword mental disability. There were sharp increases in theses in 2010, 2015, 2019 and 2022. In 2023, it was observed that there was a slight decrease in theses.

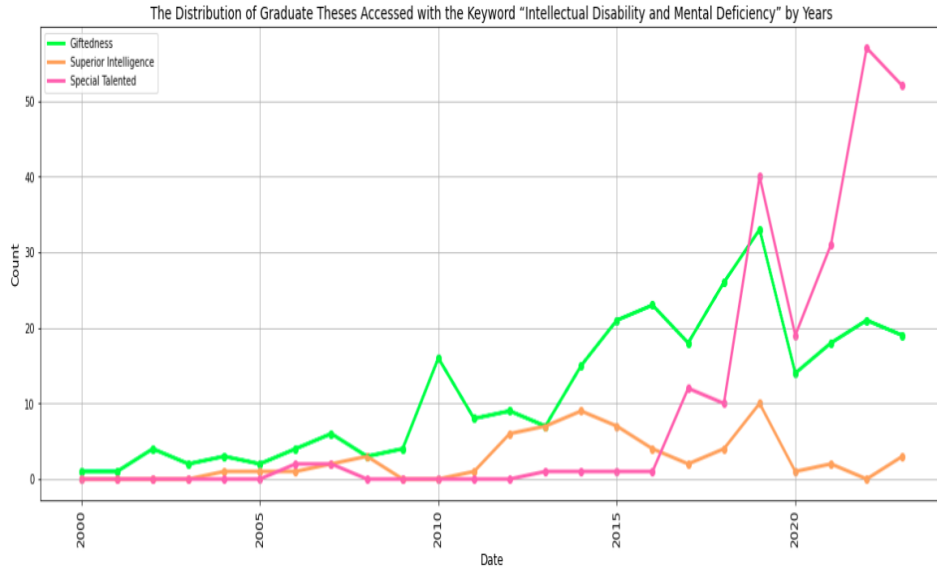


Figure 9. The Distribution of Graduate Theses Accessed with the Keywords "Giftedness", "Superior Intelligence" and "Superior Talented" by Years

Note: Yükseköğretim Kurumları (2023). *Ulusal tez merkezi* [National thesis center].

<https://tez.yok.gov.tr/UlusalTezMerkezi>

According to Figure 9, the keywords "giftedness", "superior intelligence" and "special talented" were examined together due to their usage in the literature and based on the number of theses, it was seen that the term superior intelligence was used less in the field of special education than the other two keywords. Special talent, on the other hand, has become more popular especially after 2018 and is used much more frequently than giftedness and superior intelligence. The term special talented showed a sharp increase especially after 2018 and continued this increase in 2021 and 2022. As with other keywords, both giftedness and special talent showed sharp decreases in 2019. In 2023, there was a decrease in theses obtained from both giftedness and special talented keywords and an increase in superior intelligence.

DISCUSSION

It has been observed that database search studies in the field of special education are less than other research articles. As a matter of fact, the existing review studies are narrow in terms of year range, few in terms of number of publications and very specific and limited in terms of the scope of the field of special education (Coşkun et al., 2014; Yıldız et al., 2016; Görgün & Melekoğlu, 2019; Kıyak et al., 2019; Erol & İlhan-Ildız, 2020; Çağlar & Özkan, 2021). Therefore, more comprehensive studies are needed.

This study reveals how the postgraduate theses written in the field of special education in Türkiye from the beginning of the 2000s to the end of 2023 have changed according to years. According to Table 1, 2269 (75,86%) of the 2991 graduate theses are master's theses, 476 (15,91%) are doctoral theses, 244 (8,15%) are medical specialization theses and 2 (0,06%) are proficiency in art theses. Considering that approximately 24% of the postgraduate theses consist of theses other than master's theses, it is seen that the scientific qualifications of the majority of the postgraduate theses conducted in the field of special education between 2000 and 2023 are limited.

While special education is a field of educational sciences, it requires a multidisciplinary structure due to the requirements of the field (Pieragelo & Giuliani, 2002). As a matter of fact, when the postgraduate theses reached are examined, it is seen that medical specialty theses constitute approximately 8,15% of all theses. This percentage in medical specialty theses is a significant rate in the context of postgraduate theses. The postgraduate theses accessed with the keywords autism and down syndrome constitute approximately 39% of all postgraduate theses. This is close to almost all of the medical specialty theses. The fact that autism is a neurological disorder (APA, 2013) and down syndrome has a genetic factor caused by a chromosomal disorder (Korlimarla et al., 2020) has positively affected the density of medical specialty theses in these special education fields.

The fact that doctors are in an important position especially in the diagnosis of autism and in the follow-up processes of the child has enabled doctors to directly access data for their specialization theses. This situation is also reflected in medical specialization theses. As

a matter of fact, Kamyş (2023) used antibody and biochemical parameters to evaluate the symptoms of autism in children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and compared children with autism and children with normal development with experimental methods. He suggested that autism should be diagnosed at an early age and special education services should be utilized at an early age. In his thesis, Fadiloğlu (2019) evaluated children diagnosed with ASD in terms of executive functions with their siblings with normal development. She observed that ASD is a hereditary and neurodevelopmental disorder and that certain characteristics of siblings are clustered in common parameters. Similarly, the important position of physicians in the medical evaluation, treatment, improvement of the quality of life and follow-up of children with Down syndrome throughout their developmental process has led to the writing of many medical specialty theses. As a matter of fact, Erzan-Tosun (2023) evaluated endocrine problems seen in children diagnosed with Down syndrome in her thesis. She emphasized the importance of treatment, follow-up and improving the quality of life and education of children. Durğun (2018) evaluated children with Down syndrome immunologically in his thesis. She suggested that allergy and immunity, which have an important place in the health of children with Down syndrome, should be monitored and their quality of life and education should be improved by increasing awareness.

As a matter of fact, postgraduate theses accessed only with the keyword autism constitute approximately 33% of all theses. In 2023, there are special education departments in 52 universities, including state and foundation universities. These universities have a total of 605 academic staff in the field of special education. Among these academic staff, the number of academic staff working in the field of special education and autism is 372 (61.48%) (YÖK, 2023). This is an indication of autism awareness and the importance given to autism in special education compared to other fields (Çağlar & Özkan, 2021). The fact that there are more master's theses (22,1%) and doctoral theses (5,4%) and medical specialization theses (5,6%) that are reached from the keyword autism than all postgraduate theses (19,3%) that are identified from the keyword special education, which

is the general name of the whole field, is an indication that autism is a research field in itself.

Another striking point is the keywords giftedness, superior intelligence and special talented in Figure 7. It is clearly seen that the term special talented is more commonly used in special education than superior intelligence. However, it is clear from Figure 7 that in recent years, the term "giftedness" has been more commonly used instead of "special talented". The fact that the term giftedness was first used by the Ministry of National Education in 2012 (MNE, 2012) and has been preferred in recent years (Bilgiç et al., 2021) shows that the concept of giftedness is generally accepted (Şahin, 2020), as in Graph 7.

Another point to be drawn attention to is the distribution of postgraduate theses conducted in the field of special education between 2000 and 2023 according to years. According to Figure 1, it is understood that the field of special education is an academically important field, especially in recent years, as postgraduate theses have increased over the years. However, as seen in all graphs, there is a sharp decrease in the number of postgraduate tests in 2020, apart from the general increase. It is understood that this decrease in 2020 is similar to the negative effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on academic studies (Alparslan, Polatçı & Yastioğlu, 2021; Parlar & Kart, 2022).

As a result of the research, it was seen that the number of postgraduate theses in the field of special education in Türkiye between 2000 and 2023 increased from the beginning of the 2000s to 2023, except for the pandemic process in 2020. It was also observed that the majority of the postgraduate theses were master's theses. It was observed that most of the master's theses were in the field of autism. Doctoral theses were mostly in the fields of autism and giftedness. Medical specialization theses were mostly in the fields of autism and down syndrome. It was determined that the most focused disability category in postgraduate theses in the field of special education was autism.

Recommendations

In line with this research, recommendations are as follows:

- It was seen that there were predominantly master's theses in the postgraduate theses reached within the scope of this research and doctoral theses were quite limited compared to master's theses. Doctoral thesis studies in the field of special education should be emphasized.
- It has been observed that medical specialty theses are concentrated in specific areas of special education such as autism and Down syndrome. In this context, it is necessary to include more medical specialty theses in learning disability, intellectual deficiency, special talent and other types and categories of disabilities in special education.
- In postgraduate theses in the field of special education, it was seen that postgraduate theses were mostly in the autism disability category. In this context, the intensity in postgraduate theses conducted in the autism category of special education should also be seen in learning disability, intellectual deficiency, special talent and other disability types and categories of special education.
- Within the scope of this research, 9 different keywords were identified for accessing postgraduate theses. In order for future studies to be more diverse and inclusive in terms of postgraduate theses, more keywords can be determined.
- In future studies, the range of years to be scanned can be kept shorter and therefore the number of theses to be reached can be less, so that the scientific content and quality standards of the graduate theses reached can be evaluated in terms of scientific content and quality standards.
- Within the scope of this study, only the national thesis center database was searched. In future studies, the research can be enriched by comparing graduate theses in the field of special education in other countries of the world with graduate theses in Türkiye.

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GENİŞ ÖZET

Özel eğitim Türkiye'de özellikle son yıllarda değer verilen çok boyutlu bir alandır. Özel eğitim bireylerin farklılıklarını, gelişimsel özelliklerini ve eğitsel ihtiyaçlarını merkeze alarak bireylerin ilgi, istek, kabiliyet ve becerilerini en üst düzeyde karşılayacak ve geliştirecek, bireyselleştirilmiş eğitim planları ile bireyleri ayırıştırmadan gelişimlerini özel bir program dahilinde destekleyecek, okul-birey-aile iş birliği ile sunulan bütünsel bir eğitim ve öğretim hizmetidir. Özel eğitimde bireylerin kapasite ve yeterliliklerini en üst düzeyde kullanarak üst eğitim ve öğretim kademelerine ve çalışma ve toplumsal hayata hazırlanmaları amaçlanır. Özel eğitim hizmeti alması gereken bütün bireylerin ilgi, istek ve yetenekleri temel alınmak suretiyle özel eğitime erken başlanması sağlanır. Özel eğitim hizmeti alan bireyler kendi fiziki ve sosyal çevrelerinden alıkoyulmaksızın ve kesintisiz bir şekilde eğitimin bütün kademelerinden faydalandırılır. Özel eğitimin her bireyin yeterlilik ve becerileri doğrultusunda geliştirilen bireyselleştirilmiş eğitim planı (BEP) ile sağlanması esastır. Özel eğitim alanı eğitim bilimlerinin bir alanı olmakla beraber alanın gereksinimleri neticesinde multidisipliner yapıda olmayı gerektirmektedir. Bu araştırmanın amacı 2000-2023 yılları arasında Türkiye'de özel eğitim alanında yürütülmüş olan lisansüstü tezlerin türlerine göre nasıl dağılım gösterdiğini, lisansüstü tezlerde özel eğitimin hangi engel tür ve kategorisine yoğunlaştığını, lisansüstü tezlerin 2000'lerin başından 2023'e kadar yıllara göre nasıl dağılım gösterdiğini niceliksel olarak yüzdelerle ifade edilerek toplu bir şekilde ortaya koymak ve betimsel olarak analiz etmektir.

Araştırma nitel araştırma modelinde tasarlanan bir literatür taramasıdır. Nitel araştırma modeli araştırmacının yoğun çabası ile sınırlarını kendi çizdiği ve araştırmacıya son derece esnek hareket edebilme imkanı tanıyan bütüncül bir araştırma yöntemidir. Nitel araştırmalar araştırma amacına bağlı olarak gözlem, görüşme ve literatür taraması gibi araştırma yöntemleri ile veri toplanmasını sağlayan öznel ve yoruma dayalı araştırmalardır. Nitel araştırmalarda amaç araştırılmak istenen konunun derinlerine ve detaylarına inerek araştırma konusunun en iyi şekilde ortaya konulmasıdır. Araştırılmak istenen durumun derinlemesine incelenmesi ve araştırmacının lisansüstü tezlerle ulaşma ve tezleri analiz etmede esnek hareket edebilmesi amaçlandığı için nitel araştırma modeli seçilmiştir. Araştırmanın amacı doğrultusunda literatür taramaları basılı ve dijital belgelerin detaylı bir biçimde incelenmesini içermekte ve bu sayede yeni ve anlamlı bir bütün oluşturulmasına katkıda bulunmaktadır. Eğitim araştırmalarında sıklıkla kullanılan literatür taraması çalışmaları belirli bir durumun ortaya konulması ve birçok yeni araştırmaya temel olması bakımından kıymetli çalışmalardır.

Veri toplamak için ilk olarak araştırma amacına hizmet edecek kod anahtar kelimeler belirlenmiştir. Bu anahtar kelimeler; özel eğitim, otizm, down sendrom, öğrenme güçlüğü, zihinsel yetersizlik, zihinsel engel, üstün yetenek, üstün zeka ve özel yetenek şeklinde belirlenmiştir. Anahtar kelimeler özel eğitim alanı içerisindeki engel tür ve kategorilerine yönelik olarak özel eğitim alanında yazılmış tezlere ulaşmak amacıyla seçilmiştir. Anahtar kelimeler seçilirken 3 ayrı alan uzmanının görüşüne başvurulmuştur. Belirlenen anahtar kelimeler Yükseköğretim Kurulu ulusal tez merkezi veri tabanında tez başlıkları dikkate alınmak suretiyle aratılmıştır. Anahtar kelimeler özel eğitim engel tür ve kategorilerini temsil ettiği düşünülen temalar altında toplanmıştır. Tezler özel eğitim alanı içerisindeki engel tür ve kategorileri, tezlerin türleri ve tezlerin yıllar arasındaki dağılımı dikkate alınarak tablolaştırılmış, sayısal ve yüzdelerle ifade edilmiştir. Lisansüstü tezler bu çoklu durumlar doğrultusunda karşılaştırmalı olarak betimsel analiz yoluyla analiz edilmiştir.

Tez başlıkları dikkate alınarak yüksek lisans, doktora, tıpta uzmanlık ve sanatta yeterlik olmak üzere 2991 lisansüstü teze ulaşılmıştır. Ulaşılan lisansüstü tezlerin türleri, tezlerin anahtar kelimeler arasındaki dağılımı ve tezlerin yıllara göre değişimi grafikler ile ortaya konulmuştur. Ulaşılan bu 2991 lisansüstü tezin 2269 adetini (%75,86) yüksek lisans tezleri, 476 adetini (%15,91) doktora tezleri, 244 adetini (%8,15) tıpta uzmanlık tezleri ve 2 adetini (%0,06) sanatta yeterlik tezleri oluşturmaktadır. Lisansüstü tezlerin yaklaşık %24'ünün yüksek lisans tezleri dışındaki tezlerden oluştuğu görülmektedir.

Sonuç olarak özel eğitim alanında 2000-2023 yılları arasındaki lisansüstü tezlerde yüksek lisans tezlerinin ağırlıklı olduğu, en çok yoğunlaşılan özel eğitim alanının otizm olduğu ve 2020 yılı hariç tezlerde yıllara göre genel olarak artış olduğu görülmüştür.

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Conflict of Interest

The researchers do not have any personal or financial conflicts of interest with other individuals or institutions related to the research.

Ethics Committee Declaration

Since this research is a document review based study, it does not require ethics committee permission.