



THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT SKILLS, SELF-EFFICACY, AND CURRICULUM LITERACY LEVELS OF TEACHERS WORKING IN SPECIAL EDUCATION SCHOOLS¹²

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Abstract

The significance of special education has been on the rise recently. Considering this trend, there has been a growing interest in studying the abilities and attributes of teachers working in special education institutions. This study explored the connection between classroom management skills, self-efficacy beliefs, and proficiency in curriculum among teachers in special education settings. Employing a correlational, quantitative research model, this study involved 421 teachers from special education schools. The classroom management skills scale, teacher self-efficacy belief scale, and curriculum literacy scale, conducted online in the spring of 2021, were used to collect data. Statistical analyses included Pearson correlation analysis. After calculating the correlation between the variables, multiple regression analyses were employed. The findings revealed a moderate positive correlation among the three variables. Furthermore, it was established that teachers' self-efficacy beliefs and curriculum literacy significantly predicted 38.6% of their classroom management skills. Enhancing teachers' self-efficacy beliefs and curriculum literacy is beneficial for improving their classroom management abilities.

Keywords: Classroom management skills, Program literacy, Special education teacher, Special education, Teacher self-efficacy.

Özel Eğitim Okullarında Çalışan Öğretmenlerin Sınıf Yönetim Becerileri, Öz-Yeterlilik ve Program Okuryazarlık Düzeyleri Arasındaki İlişki

Öz

Özel eğitimin önemi son yıllarda artmaktadır. Ortaya çıkan bu durum çerçevesinde, özel eğitim okullarında çalışan öğretmenlerin sahip oldukları beceriler ve özellikler de araştırma konusu olmaktadır. Bu araştırmada nicel araştırma modellerinden korelasyonel model kullanılmıştır. Çalışmaya, özel eğitim okullarında çalışan 421 öğretmen katılmıştır. Veriler Sınıf Yönetimi Becerileri Ölçeği, Öğretmen Özyeterlilik İnancı Ölçeği ve Eğitim Programı Okuryazarlığı Ölçeği ile toplanmıştır. Veriler 2021 yılı bahar döneminde online olarak toplanmıştır. Veri analizinde Pearson Korelasyon analizi ve Çoklu Regresyon Analizi kullanılmıştır. Üç değişken arasında pozitif orta düzeyde bir korelasyon olduğu belirlenmiştir. Öğretmen özyeterlilik inancı ve eğitim program okuryazarlığı değişkenlerinin özel eğitim öğretmenlerinin sınıf yönetim becerilerinin %38,6'sını yordadığı bulunmuştur. Öğretmenlerin öz-yeterlilik inançlarının ve program okuryazarlığının güçlendirilmesi, öğretmenlerin sınıf yönetimi becerilerine katkıda bulunacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Özel eğitim, Özel eğitim öğretmeni, Sınıf yönetimi becerileri, Öğretmen öz-yeterliliği, Program okur-yazarlığı.

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1. Introduction

Special education has been increasingly gaining importance within general education in recent years. It has become crucial for both gifted and disabled individuals to receive education in special education processes explicitly designed for them instead of general education. (Gierczyk, & Hornby, 2021). Due to the substantial differences in individual and developmental traits, as well as educational qualifications, individuals requiring special education diverge notably from their counterparts (Ministry of National Education [MoNE], 2018); for this reason, the education of students in need of special education is becoming increasingly important for the society. This scenario underscores the necessity for special education teachers to possess professional competence and appropriate resources. Educators in special education settings need to tailor learning environments to meet the unique needs of their students. The effectiveness of teachers in guiding the learning process within the classroom is directly linked to their proficiency in “Classroom Management Skills” (Akyol, 2021, pp.460-462; Kiliç & Mutlu Aydın, 2016, p.472). The qualifications of teachers in all branches working in special education schools are essential for special education students’ cognitive, physical, emotional, and social development. For example, when sufficient studies are not conducted, the education problem of gifted students can become an invisible bleeding wound (Kirkic, 2019). Additionally, when visually impaired individuals are not given orientation and independent movement training at an early age, it is seen that they suffer physical and emotional collapse. Students who need special education are among the groups with special needs and are most likely to be neglected (Kaya & Ataman, 2017).

Teachers are the most valuable and indispensable educational elements (Mavis et al., 2014). In this context, teaching is considered a profession that requires high-level qualifications in many fields. In a rapidly changing and transforming world, new educational approaches and students’ needs bring teachers new academic and professional responsibilities. Teaching, known as a profession, becomes more critical when it comes to the education of disabled children due to the characteristics of these special children (Karahan & Balat, 2011). Perceived self-efficacy belief is the person’s ability to cope with and manage adverse events (Benight & Bandura, 2004). Self-efficacy is the individual’s capacity to carry out the courses of action needed to achieve their goals (Kucuktepe, 2010). Teacher competencies are the key to success, and self-efficacy can change in response to positive and negative behaviors. There is a direct relationship between the student’s disability level and the teacher’s required competence level (Beard et al., 2010). Assigning teachers who lack training in special education to classrooms attended by students with disabilities is akin to assigning a medical intern to perform surgery in a hospital operating room (Ozyurek, 2008). Teachers who know their students well in every aspect, can highlight their abilities, know their strengths and weaknesses, and work in a planned manner in this direction are effective teachers in classroom management.

Effective teaching depends on how the teacher communicates with his students. Teachers working in special education can make education more effective by making the following arrangements in classroom management:

- Students showing problematic behavior can be replaced.
- The student can be seated with students who are good role models.
- An assistant teacher can be helpful in the classroom.
- Student control can be achieved through oral and written practices.
- Complex subjects can be simplified, and the student’s active participation in the lesson can be ensured.

- Appropriate learning styles can be decided for each student.
- A behavior change plan can be developed and implemented.
- Work can be done in cooperation with the family.
- Technology can be significantly beneficial.
- Motivation can be increased by giving extra working hours.
- The content of the curriculum can be applied according to the students.
- Reinforcement can be provided by focusing on positive behaviors (Pierangelo & Giuliani, 2007).

In special education, undesirable student behaviors should be evaluated from multiple perspectives. These behaviors can negatively affect students' academic and social lives, individually and in groups. Special education teachers need to know their students in every aspect, both for the positive development of their students in every aspect and for the teacher to figure out the correct management strategy in the classroom. Students exhibiting problematic behavior in classrooms may affect the academic success of students exhibiting positive behavior (Finn et al., 1995). Wheldall and Merrett (1988) draw attention to the relationship between the undesirable student behaviors teachers encounter and the environment in which students live. The unwanted behavior of students is one of the determining concepts of classroom management in special education. Therefore, students' misbehavior makes the need for discipline and management evident. A study examining the relationship between teachers' student success and classroom behavior showed that students who behaved negatively attracted more attention from teachers (Finn et al., 1995). Students who did not participate in the lesson were ignored. Lund (1996), on the other hand, states that it is difficult to continue teaching in the classroom with students who exhibit negative behavior. The study conducted by Wheldall and Merrett (1988) also confirms these findings.

Self-efficacy is one's belief in one's ability and capacity to produce, as well as one's belief in being able to do the job successfully in new situations (Bandura, 1997; Kurbanoglu, 2004; Pajares, 1996; Zimmerman, 1995). Teachers' ability to complete an academic task successfully and carry out plans to deal with possible situations also appears to be self-efficacy (Lunenburg, 2011). Self-efficacy belief, especially the success or lack of success individuals experience in their positions, significantly affects their performance and tasks (Appelbaum & Hare, 1996). Self-efficacy affects students' learning, motivation, and performance because people only try to learn and perform tasks in which they believe (Lunenburg, 2011; Schunk & Swartz, 1993). Perceived self-efficacy emerges as a critical factor that motivates the selection and effort of people facing obstacles and achieving students' goals (Bernadowski et al., 2013; Zimmerman, 2000). High and low self-efficacy observed in teachers is task-specific and may vary from person to person (Robinson, 2017). There is a correlation between self-efficacy and classroom management (Kirkic & Cetinkaya, 2020). Special education is a specific field, and the self-efficacy beliefs of teachers from all branches working in special education schools are essential. Self-efficacy belief, especially the success or lack of success a person experiences in their position, significantly affects their performance and tasks (Appelbaum & Hare, 1996). Teachers' self-efficacy significantly affects their performance, motivation, student achievement, and teaching practices (Duffin et al., 2012; Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998). Creating learning environments conducive to developing cognitive, emotional, and social skills depends largely on teachers' abilities and self-efficacy. Self-efficacy beliefs significantly influence human behavior because our beliefs primarily direct our behavior (Klassen & Usher, 2010).

Bandura (1997) states that academic self-efficacy is the individuals' belief that they can be successful in an academic subject area. Teachers' development of their professional knowledge and skills in their field, their efforts, and the production of projects can be considered within the scope of academic self-efficacy (Colak et al., 2017). Therefore, academic self-efficacy refers to teachers' knowledge of their field, their confidence in their knowledge, and their beliefs about improving it. Professional self-efficacy refers to teachers' pedagogy field knowledge self-efficacy. For example, teachers' ability to organize the teaching environment, use time appropriately, manage the classroom in a quality and effective manner, and increase students' motivation can be considered within the scope of professional self-efficacy (Bedel, 2016; Berkant & Baysal, 2018; Colak et al., 2017). Intellectual self-efficacy can be considered as the teachers' ability to evaluate the education system, predict current developments in the education system, and evaluate events from a scientific perspective (Colak et al., 2017). Intellectual self-efficacy becomes high when "the subject is satisfied with his or her intellectual performance and the difficulty degree of tasks he or she can deal with" (Panc et al., 2012, p.881). Aybek and Aslan found that intellectual self-efficacy and teaching preparedness significantly correlate (Aybek & Aslan, 2019). Teachers are exemplary individuals who are knowledgeable and constantly want to learn, who, at the same time, never lose their curiosity about their field and strive to improve.

Education constitutes the main element of individual development and social progress. This development in individuals becomes possible when countries reconsider and restructure their education and training programs (Tuncer & Taspınar, 2008). For teachers to work successfully with individuals with special needs, they need to know the existing curriculum and correctly convey this to children with special needs (Ozyurek, 2008). In this context, curriculum literacy is needed in education. The concept of curriculum literacy combines the concepts of "curriculum" and "literacy." Curriculum literacy is a field of competence related to all work and actions in understanding, implementing, and evaluating an education or training program (Akyildiz, 2020). The curriculum guides teachers to help their students acquire knowledge, skills, and attitudes (MoNE, 2017). In addition, curriculum is the most crucial element that determines and directs the quality of education. This critical element reveals the road map of educational leaders and the desired behaviors of those who benefit from education (Bolat, 2014). Educational environments for students with special needs should be designed differently (Avcioglu, 2017). Designing the educational environments and educational materials of individuals with special needs according to individual differences also facilitates the adaptation of students to social environments. If every student is provided with the time and adequate learning opportunities they need, and if the criterion of "mastery learning" is determined for students with learning difficulties, most of the students can have the power to learn with high success (Bloom, 1979). There should be no time to waste in special education; therefore, teaching that does not result in learning is a "waste" of lives (Kirkic, 2020). Teachers working with individuals with special needs establish positive relationships with students in the classroom when they can effectively adapt the special education curriculum to their students. The teacher should ensure that the students in his/her class develop a healthy and balanced personality. It is essential to ensure expected behaviors in the classroom environment, to create a classroom atmosphere, to solve problems before they escalate, to comply with the rules, and to change undesirable behaviors (Celik, 2003). In special education settings, teachers' leadership practices are critical regarding classroom management and creating structured learning environments. Acquiring positive behaviors for individuals with learning disabilities requires the effective implementation of individualized teaching strategies. This is only possible with strong leadership skills. Teachers who successfully assume leadership roles contribute to their colleagues and school-wide improvement efforts. In this way, they can successfully provide

effective instruction appropriate to the special needs of students with disabilities (Ngang & Abdullah, 2015).

Classroom management varies according to the education level and the students' needs. Primary school teachers focus on providing essential skills and creating a stimulating learning environment. Secondary school teachers prioritize behavior management along with more complex knowledge and skills. In special education classes, different and specific classroom management skills are needed. Therefore, classroom management strategies should be planned to follow the educational environment level and the students' developmental stages (Chao et al., 2017).

Primary school teachers usually teach large groups and transfer content to students by following the curriculum. Special education is done in smaller groups or individually for students with special learning needs. Therefore, in special education, teachers prepare individual education plans recommended by the ministries of education or relevant authorities. Individual education plans help students overcome obstacles that make it difficult for them to learn in the general classroom environment and provide them with a suitable learning environment (Gilberts & Lignugaris-Kraft, 1997, p. 607). The professional effectiveness of the teacher in education also depends on the teacher's success in classroom management. In this context, it has been observed that there is an effective link between special education teachers' self-efficacy, classroom management, and curriculum literacy skills.

Special education is a lifelong story, and this story is written by exceptional teachers who serve in the field of special education (Heward, 2012). The most critical element in special education is teaching. The qualifications of teachers serving in the field are essential for effective teaching (Heward, 2012). Unwanted student behaviors in the classroom (like leaving their desks without permission, speaking without permission, inattention, and hyperactivity) have always been chronic problems for teachers (Geiger, 2000). Teachers' knowing their students in every aspect, knowing their characteristics, and discovering their interests and abilities are the most critical factors that make the teacher's responsibility easier in behavior management. A teacher who knows how to treat a student will be able to predict what behavior will be appropriate for his/her student and develop strategies to deal with problem behaviors (Atici, 2002). Upon reviewing the literature, it was observed that there is a scarcity of studies addressing the challenges teachers face in Turkish special education schools. Consequently, there arose a necessity for such research to be conducted.

Therefore, this study explored the correlation between self-efficacy beliefs, classroom management skills, and curriculum literacy levels among teachers in special education schools. Additionally, the study sought to ascertain if there are notable differences in these aspects based on teachers' demographic characteristics. This study's primary research question was: "Is there a significant relationship between self-efficacy, classroom management skills, and curriculum literacy levels of teachers working in special education schools?". This investigation delved into the connection between classroom management skills, self-efficacy beliefs, and curriculum literacy levels among teachers in special education institutions. The following questions were posed in the research to address these objectives:

1. Does a notable correlation exist among the classroom management abilities, self-efficacy beliefs, and curriculum literacy levels of educators in special education institutions?
2. Can teachers' self-efficacy beliefs and curriculum literacy levels in special education schools be predictive of their classroom management skills?

2. Method

2.1. Model of the Research

The study utilized the correlational model, a quantitative research approach. While scrutinizing the connection between variables, this model aims to predict the unknown value of one variable based on the known value of another. Within this framework, the variable with the known value is termed the predictor variable. In contrast, the variable whose value is to be predicted is referred to as the criterion variable (Fraenkel et al., 2012). In this investigation, the correlational model was employed to examine the correlation between the self-efficacy beliefs and curriculum literacy levels of teachers working in special education schools.

2.2. Participants

There were 1944 teachers, 781 male and 1163 female, working in special education schools in Istanbul. Appropriate sampling, one of the sampling methods, was used in selecting the study group of this study. The study sample consisted of 421 teachers working in special education schools in Istanbul. 71.3 % of teachers were female, and 28.7 % were male. 54.9 % were married, and 45.1 % were single. Teachers with similar distributions from all age groups were reached. Teachers in all branches working in special education schools were reached, and it was seen that special education teachers participated the most. 61.3 % of teachers worked full-time, 27.1 % were paid, and 11.2 % were contracted. 87.6 % of the teachers had undergraduate education, and 12.4 % had postgraduate education. 43.7 % of the teachers participating in the research were high school teachers, 24.2 % were secondary school teachers, 23.5 % were primary school teachers, and 8.6 % were preschool teachers. The study population consisted of 1944 teachers working in special education schools in Istanbul. Four hundred twenty-one teachers who could be reached through appropriate sampling and participated voluntarily in the study constituted the study group of the research. The study groups were determined to be more than 321 teachers, with a 5% margin of error and a 95% reliability level for the population of 1944 people (Raosoft, 2021). Considering the response rate to be 50% due to the pandemic, the survey was sent to approximately 650 teachers, and the surveys of 421 teachers who responded were analyzed.

2.3. Data Collection Tools

The study employed a survey comprising the classroom management skills scale, teacher self-efficacy belief scale, and curriculum literacy scale. The classroom management skills scale was initially developed by Delson and adapted into Turkish by Yalcinkaya and Tonbul (2002). It consists of 25 items out of 6 sub-dimensions. All items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale. The scale demonstrated high reliability with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .88, indicating that higher scores reflect enhanced classroom management skills. This study calculated the Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the total scale as .95, indicating high reliability.

The teacher self-efficacy belief scale developed by Colak et al. (2017) was used. It includes 27 items. The Cronbach alpha value of the scale was calculated as .93. Increasing scores from the entire scale indicate that teachers' self-efficacy beliefs have increased. In this study, the total Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient of the teacher self-efficacy belief scale was determined to be .94, which is highly reliable.

The curriculum literacy scale developed by Bolat (2017) was implemented. The scale consists of 29 items divided into two sub-dimensions. The type of the scale is a 5-point Likert. The reliability coefficient of the scale is .940. A high score on the scale indicates that teachers' literacy levels in the

education curriculum have increased. This study calculated the Cronbach alpha value as .98 for the scale, which is highly reliable.

2.4. Data Collection and Data Analysis

Research data was collected online with Google Forms in the spring semester of the 2020-2021 academic year. Before applying the forms, the participants were contacted by phone, and an invitation was sent via e-mail. The purpose of the research was stated, and it was emphasized that participation was entirely voluntary.

Table 1

Kurtosis and Skewness Values of the Scales

Dimensions	N	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Teacher self-efficacy belief scale	414	4.34	.47	-.777	.538
Classroom management skills scale	414	4.37	.46	-.515	-.105
Curriculum literacy scale	414	4.34	.52	-.270	-.865

The skewness and kurtosis values of the scales are between +1 and - 1. Therefore, distribution can be considered normal (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2018). For this reason, the distribution of the findings was considered normal.

2.5. Ethical Considerations

This study was approved by the Istanbul Sabahattin Zaim University Ethics Committee with its decision dated 11/02/2021-E.2025. Another permission was obtained from the Istanbul Provincial Directorate of National Education for the data collection process from teachers with a consent letter dated 09/12/2020-E.3687. All steps of the study were done by paying attention to ethical rules.

3. Results

The first problem in the research, “Is there a significant relationship between teachers’ classroom management skills working in special education schools and their self-efficacy beliefs and curriculum literacy levels?” was determined. The data obtained from the teachers’ responses were examined through Pearson correlation analysis and given in Table 2.

Table 2

Results of Pearson Correlation Analysis were Conducted to Determine the Relationship between Teachers’ Self-Efficacy Beliefs and Classroom Management Skills

Dimensions	N	Mean	SD	1	2	3
1. Teacher self-efficacy belief	414	4.34	.47	-	.521*	.590*
2. Classroom management skills	414	4.37	.46	.521*	-	.584*
3. Curriculum literacy	414	4.34	.52	.590*	.584*	-

A moderate positive relationship was found between the classroom management skills scale, teacher self-efficacy belief total scale, and the curriculum literacy scale ($p < .05$).

The second problem in the research is “Do the self-efficacy beliefs and curriculum literacy levels of teachers working in special education schools predict their classroom management skills?”

Table 3*Multiple Regression Analysis Results in Predicting Teachers' Classroom Management Skills*

<i>Variable</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>(β)</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>Correlation bivariate</i>	<i>Partial Correlation</i>
<i>Constant</i>	1,578	1,578	-	8,848	.000		
<i>Curriculum literacy (CL)</i>	.374	.042	.424	8,887	.000	.584	.401
<i>Teacher self-efficacy belief (TSEB)</i>	.269	.048	.271	5,670	.000	.521	.269

R=. 624, R²=.386, F_(1,411)=32.150, p<.001

Special education teachers' curriculum literacy and self-efficacy beliefs can explain %38.6 of their classroom management skills.

$$\text{Classroom management skills} = 1.578 + (.374 * \text{CL}) + (.269 * \text{TSEB})$$

4. Discussion, Conclusion, Recommendations

Analysis of the research findings revealed a moderately positive and statistically significant correlation between self-efficacy beliefs and curriculum literacy levels. A comparable study by Karakus (2006) in multigrade classes also identified a moderately significant correlation between teachers' self-efficacy beliefs and curriculum literacy levels.

Curriculum literacy, an integral aspect of teacher competency, is crucial in teacher education (Bolat, 2014). Educators need to comprehend, interpret, and adeptly apply curriculum materials to be effectively prepared for their roles as successful future teachers. There is a pressing need for high-quality and well-trained teachers. Consequently, the curriculum should emphasize educational practices that enhance literacy skills. Teachers should not merely be passive recipients of curricular content developed by experts (Demirel, 2004); instead, they should actively engage in curriculum development endeavors. Strengthening the dialogue between teacher education programs and national accreditation bodies is essential. This process should focus on classroom management, teaching knowledge, and practices supporting teachers' professional development (Gilberts & Lignugaris-Kraft, 1997, p. 607).

While existing literature discusses self-efficacy and classroom management (Brouwers & Tomic, 2000; Dicke et al., 2014; Emmer & Hickman, 1991; Lazarides et al., 2020) as well as teachers' curriculum literacy (Cetinkaya & Tabak, 2019; Egmir & Erdem, 2018), no study with the specific variables of our research was found. Teachers, parents, and students work together as a learning team. Teachers are responsible for supporting students' success in and outside of school. This collaboration is essential for developing effective solutions for students with learning difficulties (Gilberts & Lignugaris-Kraft, 1997, p. 607). Teachers' self-efficacy beliefs in classroom management are strongly related to classroom organization and instructional and emotional support levels. Teachers confident in classroom management create a more orderly classroom environment and provide students with instructional and emotional support (Ryan et al., 2015, p. 154). Strengthening teachers' self-efficacy beliefs and developing their curriculum literacy through in-service training contributes to the effective use of classroom management skills. In this context, in-service training to be organized by the Ministry of National Education, programs aimed at increasing curriculum literacy, strengthening self-efficacy beliefs, and classroom management skills should be provided to teachers working in special education schools. Such training can make teaching processes more effective.

Given the focus on enhancing teachers' classroom management skills in special education through in-service training, it is advisable to incorporate training programs that support teachers' self-efficacy beliefs and curriculum literacy. Strengthening these aspects contributes significantly to

teachers' effectiveness in managing classrooms. Elementary school teachers are equipped to manage large groups of students and are typically responsible for teaching grade-level content as determined by state education departments. Special education is designed for individuals or small groups with atypical learning and behavioral needs. As federal law requires, special education teachers implement individualized education plans to address deficiencies that prevent students from benefiting from mainstream classroom education (Gilberts & Lignugaris-Kraft, 1997, p. 607).

Differentiating leadership skills teachers apply in general classes is critical in special education settings. Especially when the methods and techniques of individualized teaching strategies prepared for individuals with learning disabilities are used effectively, individuals with learning disabilities can receive a quality education. In this way, teachers who lead can contribute to their environment to improve students' learning (Ngang & Abdullah, 2015). Therefore, students with disabilities contribute to different learning environments. Classroom management and teaching approaches vary according to the field of education of teachers. Elementary and mixed education teachers are required to implement group-oriented classroom management strategies. However, there is limited emphasis on evaluating the impact of these strategies. In contrast, special education teachers are expected to formulate, implement, and evaluate the impact of standards on individual students. Teaching competencies also reflect this difference. Elementary and mixed education teachers focus on general presentation and various teaching methods. This approach is essential when it comes to focusing on grade-level content. On the other hand, special education teachers' competencies emphasize specific teaching skills and applications for individual students. This is especially critical when working with students with learning disabilities (Gilberts & Lignugaris-Kraft, 1997, p. 607).

In the future, in-service programs can be prepared to test special education teachers' effectiveness in improving their curriculum literacy, self-efficacy beliefs, and classroom management skills. In addition, the lack of a scale for special education teachers regarding classroom management, which is also affected by student characteristics, is one of the study's limitations. In the future, scale development studies can be conducted to determine special education teachers' classroom management skills levels.

5. Limitations

Since the teachers from whom the research data was collected were determined by appropriate sampling, the limitations of this sampling method are insufficient in generalizing the results to special education teachers. Classroom management is not only related to teacher characteristics but also to student characteristics and is multidimensional. Since the study sample consists of only teachers working in special education, there may have been a limitation in analyzing the classroom management scale data.

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