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Examination of Physical Education Teachers' Feelings, Attitudes and Perceptions Towards Integration/Inclusion of Autistic Students*

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Abstract

Aim: The aim of this study was to examine the feelings, attitudes and perceptions of physical education teachers towards inclusion and integration of autistic students. Material and Methods: The research sample was composed of physical education teachers who taught at private and state schools affiliated to Edirne Provincial National Education Directorate. To obtain the research data, a "Personal Information Form" developed by the researcher, and the fourth part of the "Placement and Services Survey" (PASS) developed by Segall (2011) for inclusion and integration of students with Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and adapted to Turkish by Ahmetoğlu et al. (2017), namely, the "Scale of Attitudes, Feelings and Perceptions towards Inclusion/Integration of Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder", were used. In the study, the data obtained by means of the questionnaire were analyzed and evaluated using SPSS 17 software. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests were used to investigate the normal distribution of variables. 0.05 was used as the level of significance when interpreting the results. For examining differences between the participant groups in the study, the independent samples t-test was utilized when variables were normally distributed. In the test results, when p values obtained for the related variables were greater than 0.05, data were assumed to be normally distributed, whereas when p values were less than 0.05, data were assumed not to be normally distributed. Findings: A statistically significant difference was found in mean scale scores depending on whether or not the physical education teachers had worked with children requiring special education during their years of service ($p<0.05$). It was determined that the mean scale score (96.11) for physical education teachers who stated that they had worked with children requiring special education during their teaching careers was significantly lower than the mean scale score (103.52) for physical education teachers who stated that they had not worked with children requiring special education during their teaching careers. Conclusion: It can be said that physical education teachers' experience or lack of experience of working with children who require special education had a significant effect on their feelings, attitudes and opinions.

Keywords: Physical education teacher, autism, inclusion, integration, feelings, attitudes and perceptions.

INTRODUCTION

In Turkey, integration began to be applied in 1983 with the "Children With Special Education Needs Act" no. 2916, and continued with the "Legislative Decree Regarding Special Education" no. 573 of 1997, and the "Special Education Services Regulation" (SESR), which came into force in 2000. Inclusion/integration practices involve the implementation of the principle of normalization in education that began in Scandinavian countries in the 1970s and spread to the rest of Europe and to the USA, in the name of "providing equality of opportunity in education for everyone". These include the whole school population (14). Planning and evaluating academic and social education (Lewis and Doorlag 1999) (20), and establishing schools and social institutions where all students

learn to respect the differences between each other and which are based on meeting their needs (Salend 1998) (20), involve addressing the needs of all students (14,28). The concept of integration is much debated by experts (25). Guldberg (2010) (17) expresses inclusion for students with autism as "the process of identifying, understanding and breaking down barriers to participation and belonging, and therefore goes beyond education to cover the total experience of a child or young person on the autism spectrum, as well as his or her family" (19). According to İnce (2017) (7) , in the context of "Physical Education and Sport for the Disabled", the importance of physical education within the scope of special education cannot be ignored. Physical education can be defined as all the physical activities organized for contributing to an individual's physical, psychomotor, sensory, mental and social development. According to Akdenk et al. (1997) (2), physical education and sport are the easiest way for the disabled to communicate physiologically, sociologically and psychologically with society (6). Physical education for disabled individuals involves the implementation of education programmes organized according to their abilities, limitations and interests in order to accelerate and support their development, and to meet their mobility needs. In the USA, with the signing of the Education for all Handicapped Children Act (Public Law 94-142), a special education resolution passed by President Ford's government in 1975, physical education for all disabled children became compulsory (26). When special education programmes in Turkey are examined, with the inclusion of the statement in the SESR (2018) that "…religious culture and moral knowledge and other…lessons related to physical education and vocational lessons are to be taught by their branch teachers. A special education teacher is to provide support for the teaching of lessons given by branch teachers by participating in the lessons…", the fact that physical education lessons for all disabled children are among the lessons that have an active role in inclusion/integration programmes, which are an implementation of special education, can be understood. The statement that "every child has the right to mobility, games and sport" is a legal guarantee on an international level that asserts the right of students with special needs to participate at least as much as their peers with typical development in games, physical education and sports activities. The 31st Clause of the Convention on Children's Rights, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1989 and approved in later years by Turkey, determines that mobility, games and sport are the basic right of every child. In inclusion classes, all students should have the opportunity to take part in learning, play, and educational and social activities together. According to Morris and Schulz (1989) (13), activities that are organized for disabled individuals are intended to improve a number of developmental areas such as constructive self-concept, social competence, motor skills development, physical and motor fitness, free time skills, and stress relief (11).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study group consisted of a total of 86 (49 male and 37 female) physical education teachers employed in state and private schools affiliated to the Provincial National Education Directorate of Edirne in the 2018-2019 academic year. Data collection tools were a Personal Information Form used to gather demographic data about the physical education teachers, and a measurement tool, namely, the "Scale of Attitudes, Feelings and Perceptions towards Inclusion/Integration of Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder", which was developed by Segall (2011) (23) and adapted to Turkish by Ahmetoğlu et al (2016) (1) , and which can be evaluated with six different and original scenarios. However, since groups diagnosed with autism are represented in this study, a single scenario (Scenario E) was selected. The scale is made up of a total of 32 Likert-type items, each scored from 1 ("I completely disagree") to 6 ("I completely agree"). Analysis and evaluation were made with SPSS software. To determine whether or not variables showed normal distribution, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests were utilized. Results were interpreted by accepting a significance level of 0.05; it was determined that for $p<0.05$, variables were assumed not to be normally distributed, whereas for $p>0.05$, variables were assumed to be normally distributed. For examining differences between groups, the independent samples t-test was utilized when variables were normally distributed. When interpreting the results, a significance level of 0.05 was used; it was determined that for $p<0.05$, there was a significant difference, whereas for $p>0.05$, there was no significant difference. A statistically significant difference was found ($p<0.05$) between mean scale scores for participants answering "Yes" to the question in the Personal Information Form which asked them whether or not they had worked with

children requiring special education during their teaching careers. It was determined that the mean scale score (96.11) for participants who stated that they had worked with children requiring special education during their teaching careers was significantly lower than the mean scale score (103.52) for participants who stated that they had not worked with children requiring special education during their teaching careers. This study was conducted in accordance with the Principles of the Declaration of Helsinki. Moreover, approval for the study was obtained from the Ethics Committee: "Social and Human Science Research Ethics Committee no. E.27371531/10/2018".

FINDINGS

Table 1. Data related to participants' demographic characteristics

Teacher Variables		n	%
Gender	Male	49	57.0
	Female	37	43.0
Age group	Aged 18-25	6	7.0
	Aged 26-33	18	20.9
	Aged 34-41	34	39.5
	Aged 42 and over	28	32.6
Marital status	Married	75	87.2
	Single	11	12.8
Education level	Bachelor's	76	88.4
	Postgraduate	10	11.6
Years spent teaching	Less than 1 year	3	3.5
	1-5 years	13	15.1
	6-10 years	21	24.4
	11-20 years	30	34.9
	21 years or more	19	22.1

As can be seen in Table 1, 49 (57%) of the physical education teachers included in the study were male, while 37 (43%) of them were female. It was determined that the majority of the physical education teachers belonged to the 34-41 (39.5%, n=34) and 42 years-and-over (32.6%, n=28) age groups. Regarding marital status, 75 (87.2%) of the teachers were married, while 11 (12.8%) were single. In terms of the teachers' educational level, 76 (88.4%) had bachelor's degrees, while 10 (11.6%) had received postgraduate education. Finally, it was determined that the majority of the physical education teachers (59.5%, n=51) had between 6-20 years of experience in their current positions.

Table 2. Frequency and distribution of personal data of participants answering "Yes" to the question "Have you worked with children requiring special education during your teaching career?"

YES		n	%
Gender	Male	30	52.6
	Female		47.4
Age group	Aged 18-25	6	10.5
	Aged 26-33	9	15.8
	Aged 34-41	26	45.6
	Aged 42 and over	16	28.1
Marital status	Married	47	82.5
	Single	10	17.5
Education level	Bachelor's	49	86.0
	Postgraduate	8	14.0
Years spent teaching	Less than 1 year	0	.0
	1-5 years	10	17.5
	6-10 years	13	22.8
	11-20 years	22	38.6
	21 years or more	12	21.1

When examining Table 2, which shows data related to participants who answered "Yes" to the question "Have you worked with children requiring special education during your teaching career?" it can be seen that 52.6% of physical education teachers stating that they had worked with children requiring special education were male, while 47.4% of them were female. 10.% of participants belonged to the 18-25 age group, 15.8% to the 26-33 age group, 45.6% to the 34-41 age group, and 28.1% to the 42-and-over age group. 82.5% of the teachers were married, while 17.5% of them were single. 86% of teachers had bachelor's degrees, while 14% of them had postgraduate degrees. In terms of length of career, it was determined that 17.5% of teachers had worked for 1-5 years, 22.8% of them for 6-10 years, 38.6% of them for 11-20 years, and 21.1% of them for 21 years or more.

Table 3. Frequency and distribution data related to responses given to questions 10-22 by participants answering "Yes" to the question "Have you worked with children requiring special education during your teaching career?"

Teacher Variables		n	%
How long did you work with them?	4 months or less	11	19.3
	5-8 months	8	14.0
	9-12 months	9	15.8
	13-24 months	7	12.3
	Over 24 months	22	38.6
(Which special education/disabled groups have you worked with?) Those with attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder	No	28	49.1
	Yes	29	50.9
(Which special education/disabled groups have you worked with?) Those with physical disabilities	No	35	61.4
	Yes	22	38.6
(Which special education/disabled groups have you worked with?) Those with hearing impairment	No	45	78.9
	Yes	12	21.1
(Which special education/disabled groups have you worked with?) Those with visual impairment	No	53	93.0
	Yes	4	7.0
(Which special education/disabled groups have you worked with?) Those with mental handicaps	No	35	61.4
	Yes	22	38.6
(Which special education/disabled groups have you worked with?) Other	No	48	84.2
	Yes	9	15.8
Do you have knowledge about physical education and sports activities for the disabled?	Yes	50	87.7
	No	7	12.3
(How did you acquire knowledge about physical education and sports activities for the disabled?) Undergraduate study	No	18	31.6
	Yes	39	68.4
(How did you acquire knowledge about physical education and sports activities for the disabled?) In-service training	No	43	75.4
	Yes	14	24.6
(How did you acquire knowledge about physical education and sports activities for the disabled?) Course	No	50	87.7
	Yes	7	12.3
(How did you acquire knowledge about physical education and sports activities for the disabled?) Seminar	No	50	87.7
	Yes	7	12.3
(How did you acquire knowledge about physical education and sports activities for the disabled?) Postgraduate study	No	56	98.2
	Yes	1	1.8
(How did you acquire knowledge about physical education and sports activities for the disabled?) Other	No	53	93.0
	Yes	4	7.0
Do you have inclusion experience?	Yes	43	75.4
	No	14	24.6
Have you received training related to inclusion?	Yes	30	52.6
	No	27	47.4
(What kind of training related to inclusion have you received?) Undergraduate study	No	40	70.2
	Yes	17	29.8
(What kind of training related to inclusion have you received?) In-service training	No	36	63.2
	Yes	21	36.8
(What kind of training related to inclusion have you received?) Course	No	51	89.5
	Yes	6	10.5
(What kind of training related to inclusion have you received?) Seminar	No	48	84.2
	Yes	9	15.8
(What kind of training related to inclusion have you received?) Other	No	55	96.5
	Yes	2	3.5
Is there a child in need of special education in your class this term?	Yes	32	56.1
	No	25	43.9
Is your school's physical education and sports hall suitable for the use and inclusion of special needs children?	Yes	18	31.6
	No	39	68.4
Would you like to receive information about physical education and sport for the disabled?	Yes	41	71.9
	No	16	28.1
Would you like to receive information about inclusion?	Yes	43	75.4
	No	14	24.6
Do you wish for a child requiring special education to be included in your class?	Yes	39	68.4
	No	18	31.6
Do you wish for your school's physical education and sports hall to be reorganized to facilitate inclusion of special needs children?	Yes	49	86.0
	No	8	14.0

When examining Table 3, which shows data related to responses of participants who answered "Yes" to the question "Have you worked with children requiring special education during your

teaching career?" it is seen that in terms of the length of time that participants had spent working with children needing special education, 19.3% had worked with them for 4 months or less, 14% had worked for 5-8 months, 15.8% had worked for 9-12 months, 12.3% had worked for 13-24 months, and 38.6% had worked for over 24 months. Regarding the responses to the question "Which special education/disabled groups have you worked with?" 50.9% of participants had worked with groups who had attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder, 38.6% had worked with groups who had physical disabilities, 21.1% had worked with the hearing impaired, 7% had worked with the visually impaired, 38.6% had worked with the mentally handicapped, and 15.8% had worked with other groups. In response to the question asking participants whether or not they had knowledge about physical education and sports activities for the disabled, 87.7% said that they did, whereas 12.3% stated that they did not. Examining responses to the question that asked participants how they had acquired knowledge about physical education and sports activities for the disabled, 68.4% of participants stated that they had acquired knowledge via undergraduate study, 24.6% had acquired it with in-service training, 12.3% had obtained it on a course, 12.3% had acquired it at a seminar, and 1.8% had obtained it through postgraduate study. 7% of participants stated that they had acquired this knowledge by other means. In response to the question asking participants whether or not they had experience of inclusion, 75.4% said that they did, while 24.6% stated that they did not. Regarding the question asking them whether or not they had received training related to inclusion, 52.6% said that they had, while 47.4% stated that they had not. Of those who had received training related to inclusion, 29.8% had received training through undergraduate study, 36.8% had received it via in-service training, 10.5% had been given training on a course, and 15.8% had received it at a seminar. 3.5% of participants stated that they had received this training by other means. When asked if there was a child requiring special education in their class during the current term, 56.1% of participants said that there was, while 43.9% stated that there was not. When participants were asked if the physical education and sports hall at their school was suitable for the use and inclusion of special needs children, 31.6% answered that it was, whereas 68.4% reported that it was not. In response to the question asking them if they would like to receive information about physical education and sport for the disabled, 71.9% said that they would, while 28.1% stated that they would not. When asked if they would like to receive information about inclusion, 75.4% of participants said that they would, while 24.6% stated that they would not. When participants were asked whether they wished for a child requiring special education to be included in their class, 68.4% stated that they did, whereas 31.6% declared that they did not. In response to the question asking participants whether they wished for their school's physical education and sports hall to be reorganized to facilitate inclusion of children with special needs, 86% of them answered that they did, while 14% of them replied that they did not.

Table 4. Normality test

		Kolmogorov-Smirnov			Shapiro-Wilk		
		statistic	sd.	p	statistic	sd.	p
Have you worked with children requiring special education during your teaching career?	Yes	.083	57	**.200***	.989	57	.866
	No	.150	29	**.095**	.829	29	.000

Prior to analysis of the data set, the related variables were tested for normal distribution in order to determine the statistical method that would be used. At this stage, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests were used. p=0.05 was taken as the critical value. As a result of the tests, it was determined that when the p values obtained for the related variables were greater than 0.05, the data were assumed to conform to normal distribution, whereas values less than 0.05 were considered not to conform to normal distribution. Since the data set showed normal distribution, the independent samples t-test parametric method was used to compare differences between the groups.

Table 5. Independent t-test results for comparison of participants' total scale scores related to experience/lack of experience of working with children requiring special education

Have you worked with children requiring special education during your teaching career?		n	Mean	sd.	Min	Max	t	p
Total Scale	Yes	57	96.11	13.26	61	124	-2.516	0.014*
	No	29	103.52	12.20	85	151		

A statistically significant difference was found in mean scale scores according to whether or not participants had worked with children requiring special education during their teaching careers ($p<0.05$). The mean scale score (96.11) for participants who stated that they had worked with children requiring special education during their teaching careers was significantly lower than the mean scale score (103.52) for participants who stated that they had not worked with children requiring special education during their teaching careers. Finally, in the study, following the test results shown in Table 5, when the p values obtained for the related variables were greater than 0.05, the data were assumed to conform to normal distribution, whereas values less than 0.05 were considered not to conform to normal distribution. When Table 4 is examined, it is seen that there was a statistically significant difference in mean scale scores depending on whether or not the physical education teachers had worked with children requiring special education during their teaching careers ($p<0.05$). The mean scale score (96.11) for participants who stated that they had worked with children requiring special education during their teaching careers, was found to be significantly lower than the mean scale score (103.52) for participants who stated that they had not worked with children requiring special education during their teaching career.

DISCUSSION

With regard to the gender variable related to the physical education teachers who made up the study group of this research into their feelings, attitudes and perceptions towards integration/inclusion of children with autism, it was determined that in general, 57% of them were male and 43% were female, and that in line with this, of those who answered "Yes" to the question asking them whether or not they had worked with children requiring special education during their teaching careers, 52.6% of them were male and 47.4% of them were female, whereas the majority of those replying "No" to the same question consisted of female teachers. In studies conducted on the subject of inclusion education, with regard to teachers' gender, it was determined from the obtained data that teachers' gender had no effect on their attitudes towards inclusion (5,3). On the other hand, it was also determined in other studies that attitudes towards inclusion education differed according to gender, that female teachers were in the majority and that gender groups participating in the studies and attitudes towards inclusion varied (29, 30). With regard to the participants' age group, it was seen that 34-41 was the largest age group with 39.5%, while 18-25 was the smallest with 7%. Among those who stated that they had worked with children requiring special education during their teaching careers, 34-41 was the largest age group with 45.6%, while 18-25 was the smallest with 10.5%. On the other hand, among those who stated that they had not worked with children requiring special education during their teaching careers, 42 and over was the largest age group with 41.4%, while 18-25 was the smallest with 0%. Of the physical education teachers participating in the study, it was determined that teachers in the 34-41 age group had a more positive attitude towards inclusion than teachers in the 42 and over age group. Çolak and Çetin (2014) (3) , in a study entitled "A research on teachers' attitudes towards disability", concluded that the largest age range belonged to the 26-42 age group, while the age range of physical education teachers found by Özer et al. (2006) (16) in a preliminary study aimed at examining physical education teachers' attitudes towards mentally handicapped children also supports our study (29, 31). In Ertunç (2008) (6) study, it was determined that teachers' marital status had an effect on their viewpoints towards students and that generally, married physical education teachers had more positive attitudes towards inclusion implementations than unmarried physical education teachers did (15,10,5). In terms of the physical education teachers' professional experience, it was found out that for participants as a whole, the largest age group was 11-20 years with 34.9%, while the smallest age group was less than one year with 3.5%; that for those stating that they had worked with children requiring special education, the largest age group was 11-20 years with 38.6%, while the smallest age group was 11-20 years with 0%; and that for those stating that they had not worked with children requiring special education, the largest age

groups were 6-10 years and 11-20 years with 27.6%, while the smallest age group was less than one year with 10.3%. Sources which support our study (Özer et al., 2006; Özdemir, 2010) (16, 15) report that the highest percentage of teachers had 11 years' experience or more, while there are studies in which it is stated that professional seniority had no effect on attitudes towards inclusion (5,21,19,29,27,28). Regarding responses given to the question asking participants whether or not they knew anyone or had a relative requiring special education, 31.4% of all participants replied that they did, while 68.6% of them stated that they did not; of those stating that they had worked with children in need of special education, 64.9% answered "No" to this question, while 75.9% of those stating that they had not worked with children in need of special education answered "No" to this question. In sources in the literature that support our study, no significant difference was found among groups consisting of individuals who had a disabled relative or acquaintance (9), while it was determined that for preservice physical education teachers who had a disabled acquaintance, there was no significant difference in relationships among competencies for inclusion training (20,24). With regard to receiving training in the field of special education, 58.1% of all participants stated that they had received training in special education, while 41.9% of them said that they had not; of those stating that they had worked with children in need of special education, 66.7% said that they had received training, while 41.4% of those stating that they had not worked with children in need of special education reported that they had received training. In the related literature, the rates of participants receiving training in the field of special education show a parallel with our study (24,23,31,4). Regarding types of training received by the physical education teachers, among participants in general, 54.7% had received training during undergraduate study, 29.1% had been given in-service training, while the rate for training received on courses and at seminars was the same, with 9.3% for each. Regarding rates for participants stating that they had worked with children in need of special education, these rates were 66.7% for undergraduate study, 35.1% for in-service training, 12.3% for courses and 12.3% for seminars, respectively; while for participants stating that they had not worked with children in need of special education, the rates were 31% for undergraduate study, 17.2% for in-service training, 3.4% for courses and 3.4% for seminars, respectively. In terms of length of time spent by the physical education teachers in working with individuals needing special education, most participants (38.6%) had worked for more than 24 months, while the fewest (19.3%) had worked for less than 4 months. The disabled group that the PE teachers most often worked with was the attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder group (50.9%), followed by the physically disabled (38.6%), the mentally disabled (38.6%), the hearing impaired (21.1%), and other groups (autistic, Downs syndrome and cerebral palsy) (15.8%), respectively. The group least often worked with was the visually impaired (7%). In a study conducted by Kırımlıoğlu et al. (2016) (10) on teachers in special education and rehabilitation centres together with preservice physical education and sports teachers, their levels of awareness of the effects of participation by mentally handicapped individuals in physical exercise were examined. In the study, with regard to participants who answered "Yes" or "No" to the question asking them whether or not they had received training related to the disabled, it was stated that levels of awareness were higher in favour of the group answering "Yes" according to different statistical results obtained from the research scale (12,27). 87.7% of the participants stated that they possessed knowledge about physical education and sport practices for the disabled. It was determined that this knowledge had been acquired by 68% of the teachers during undergraduate study, by 24.6% during in-service training, by 12.3% on courses, by 12.3% at seminars, by 1.8% during postgraduate study and by 7% by other means (journals, the internet or professional experience). Of the 11.6% of participants who had received postgraduate education, 86% of teachers who had worked with children requiring special education and 93.1% of teachers who had not worked with children requiring special education stated that they had acquired their knowledge during undergraduate study. Özkuloğlu (2015) (18) considered that the source of knowledge of teachers who had received training during undergraduate study originated from taking the Physical Education and Sport for the Disabled course as a compulsory lesson in physical education and sports colleges from the year 2006 onwards (8,11).

CONCLUSION

As a result, it is observed that physical education teachers do not have a negative attitude

towards inclusion, lack of school gymnasiums or not suitable for the use of individuals with special needs, and it is stated that there is a need to make arrangements for education. In addition, it was observed that there was a statistically significant difference ($p < 0.05$) in terms of average scale scores according to the working status of physical education teachers with children who require special education during the service year. It was found that the mean scale score (96.11) of the participants who stated that they worked with children requiring special education during their teaching was significantly lower than the average scale score (103.52) of the physical education teachers who stated that they did not work with children requiring special education. According to these results, within the framework of the positive attitudes of the teachers, it is envisaged that the necessary arrangements will be made periodically by applying to the teachers' experiences for the education of children with special needs.

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Summarized from master thesis.

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