

Brief Overview into Inclusive Settings in Higher Education in Turkey

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Abstract

Problems that individuals with disabilities meet can be listed as social exclusion, inequality in access to health services, education and personal development, and inhibition of their access to fundamental rights and freedoms such as participation in professional life. Among possible preventions against these problems, the significance of inclusive education arises. Inclusive education provides the individual with special needs with the opportunity of being educated with his peers and obtaining ideal educational facilities for his requirements. Statistical data related to the rates of individuals with disabilities benefiting from educational services in Turkey is considerably worrisome. In addition, attending primary and secondary education is viewed as satisfactory for people with disabilities. Therefore, current conditions are not able to meet the needs of university students with disabilities in Turkey. For making higher education system in accordance with inclusive education in Turkey, a framework which will be used for developing programs including phases and adaptation of these programs may be created. This framework may be a useful guideline for adaptation of any program to inclusive education. The phases in this framework may be structured as pre-system arrangement, recognition of inputs, participation to process and transformation to dynamics, evaluation, and monitoring life span development.

Keywords: disabilities; higher education; inclusive education

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Introduction

Criteria of expertise, prevalence and expediency in main service areas such as security, education and health have been largely noticed by individuals and society with the increase in expectations and awareness related to these areas. Expectations and demands of stakeholders especially in education related to implementations which are equitable, participating and respecting individual differences have been seen as a significant element of social pressure. One of the fields that these demands and expectations, focus on is inclusive education coming into question as a requirement related to principles of human rights and equality in education. As a matter of fact, also individuals with special needs have the right of reaching educational facilities meeting the requirements ideally just as typical individuals. Inclusive education emerging as an idea with the expression of these rights of the individuals with special needs, provides the individual with special needs with the opportunity of being together with their peers and reaching educational facilities meeting his requirements ideally.

In the literature, inclusion is widely defined as “educating students with special needs in normal classrooms which are the least restrictive educational setting for them, with the help of necessary supportive facilities for full time or part time (Batu et al., 2004). In another study, it is defined as “making individuals with special needs participate in education programs which are appropriate for their educational, personal and vocational development by providing supportive educational services together with other individuals”. In addition, researchers defined inclusion as “educating the student with special needs in regular educational settings providing the student or/and class teacher with supportive special education services whenever needed” (Kırcaali-İftar, 1992) Although inclusion has been defined differently by several researchers, requirement for providing supportive services that individuals with special needs need has been emphasized by all of these definitions. As a matter of fact, educating individuals with special needs is not merely sufficient for that implementation to be a part of inclusive education.

Individuals with special needs need different regulations in terms of types and levels of their needs through the process of being educated together with normally developing peers. According to ISCED accepted by Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 1997), there are three categories for the children who need special education (Peters, 2003) (see Table 1).

Table 1. The special education categories according to international standard classification of education-ISCED

<i>The Special Education Categories According to International Standard Classification of Education-ISCED</i>
Category A: Certain biologically impaired children
Category B: Children having Learning Disability with no concrete reason
Category C: Children facing difficulties as a result of disadvantages

Considering special needs of people with disabilities, the terms impairment, disability and handicap are proposed to be used by World Health Organization (1980). However, it is seen that health characteristics of individuals are focused on more in creating these terms. Although these terms are frequently used in field research, they are considered as not to be sufficient in expressing all characteristics of individuals with special needs when evaluated in terms of both social-cultural and educational sciences. Since disability is a part of human life and almost every person will lose abilities and strength after a while so may be disabled (World Report on Attitudes of Disability). For this reason, disability refers to negative states emerging from the interactions of the individual with personal and environmental factors affecting the individual and environment. As it is understood from this definition, it is possible that every individual will experience a specific disability in a period of his lifetime. When educational processes of individuals with special needs are considered, current and developing scope and significance of special education and inclusive education can be estimated.

Defining the Increasing Need for Inclusive Education

Number of people with disabilities has been increasing rapidly. The reasons for this increase can be listed as the increase in the incidence of disorders such as depression being caused by the stress emerging from current life conditions, several disorders (Autism, Asperger, etc.) whose causes are not determined yet, disabilities caused by increased mean age of the population and chronic diseases such as diabetes and coronary heart problems in all over the world. As a matter of fact, a research conducted by NPSAS (2008) in USA, shows that the number of students with disabilities have increased by 20% in schools with pre-university education, at schools in California and 40% at schools in New York from 1999-2007 (National Postsecondary Student Aid Study, 2008, cited in United States Government Accountability Office Report, 2009). These statistics demonstrate remarkable increases. According to another

research conducted by General Directorate of Family and Community Services in Turkey (2011), there is an individual with disabilities in need of care in 5.3% of all houses in Turkey. The percentage of the houses hosting an individual with disabilities who is in need of care is 4.5% in cities. This percentage rises to 7.5% in rural areas. (Research on Family Structure in Turkey Report, 2011). In light of all these striking statistical data, referral to the disadvantaged groups and people with disabilities by the constitutional change in Turkey (2010), demonstrates that the needs of people with special needs became more visible. People with disabilities are not able to take opportunities for living in harmony with society in Turkey due to the problems they meet, although their existence in society are generally accepted. These problems basically stem from external factors such as prejudice and indifference for people with disabilities in society, but not from the factors related to disability. “In order to find satisfying solutions to disability, we need firstly to create a sound footing theory. This is the best possible way to pass next step, implementations based on theory. The implementation step requires qualified staff. To meet qualified staff in the opening, new initiatives also in education and training should be done. To provide service network, challenges in regions and diversities in cultures should be regarded. To inform the families about the services will also be useful for effectiveness of initiatives” (Tübitak Research Report, 2006). According to the UNDP “The Human Development Report” (2010), although Turkey has the 83rd place among the 169 countries in terms of Human Development, it has a lower rank (109th out of 169) in terms of “Average Education Time” which is the subcomponent of the human development (Kavak, 2011). Statistical data related to the rates of individuals with disabilities benefiting from educational services is considerably worrisome. At the Education year 2011-2012 in Turkey, 238.917 students were provided with special care facilities. Except for the students in special care institutions, out of 169.711 students, 20.958 were educated in special care classes, 137,893 students at primary-schools and 10,860 students at secondary schools benefited from inclusive education. (ERG Report, 2011). Although development related to these numbers is gladsome when compared with previous years, it is considered that these numbers are not sufficient given the potential number of students who need inclusive education and that inclusion is one of the first priorities to be improved.

Problems that individuals with disabilities meet can be summarized as social exclusion, inequality in access to health services, education and personal development, and inhibition of their access to fundamental rights and freedoms such as participation in professional life. Among preventions against these problems, the significance of dissemination of special and inclusive education arises. Developed countries have completed legal regulations related to

providing people with disabilities with educational and social services and have taken precautions intended for implementation of these services. In last ten years, these countries have taken intensive effort for making higher education more accessible for individuals with disabilities (Barnes, 2007; cited in Claiborne et. al. p. 513).

Inclusive Education and Higher Education in Turkey

In Turkey, the right to education for all is assured by the second paragraph of article 42 of the Constitution of the Republic of Turkey. This article is related to the implementation of the principle of “*No one shall be deprived of education and learning*”.

Regulation for Special Education Services in Turkey (2006) defines inclusive education as “special education services which are based on the principle that individuals’ maintaining their education with normally developing peers in public and private preschool, primary, secondary and formal educational institutions with the help of supportive educational services”. The lack of referral to higher education in the definition may be due to a bureaucratic lack of coordination between Ministry of Education and Higher Education Board related to understanding that regulations related to higher education should be conducted by Higher Education Board. However, whatever the reason is, considering changes in the field of education in recent years, and demands emerging with educational approaches such as “education for all” and “lifelong learning”, the lack of step related to higher education in this definition draws the attention.

Higher education includes all of the educational institutions providing at least two year higher education based on secondary education. Purpose of the higher education in Turkey is defined as “training students according to their interest, competence and abilities in parallel to science policy and need for human resources of the country, conducting research in scientific fields, publishing studies that demonstrate research findings and improve science and technology, conducting studies requested by the government and expressing opinions about the results, emitting informative scientific data to the community both verbally and in written documents, and providing formal education services (TUBITAK, Vision 2023 Report <http://www.tubitak.gov.tr/tr/kurumsal/politikalar/icerik-vizyon-2023>). As understood from this definition, universities are institutions both in that knowledge is produced and reproduced, and the abilities needed by individuals for having a profession are provided. Considering this critical function of universities, providing all individuals with the opportunity to equally utilize from

this educational service come into prominence as a main function of the state (Kalyon, 2012). In Turkey, attending primary and secondary education is found to be sufficient for people with disabilities and implementations encouraging them to attend higher educational institutions are rarely conducted. The access to especially higher education is extremely difficult for individuals with disabilities. Although the number of people with disabilities having the opportunity for higher education is still not sufficient, this number has been increasing until 2000. When the number of students with disabilities being graduated from universities was 97, this number had increased to 410 in 2008 and to 1090 in 2009. As of 2011, the number of students with disabilities studying in universities was reported as 3584 (AÜ, 2011). Although possibility to study in universities for individuals with disabilities become closer with that for normally developing individuals, problems related to higher education of people with disabilities are not limited to this issue. The following process is considerably corrosive for students with disabilities obtaining the right for higher education by passing the university entrance exam. It is obvious that individuals with disabilities have serious problems related to access to higher education or obtaining qualified education during the following process. Even though there are several efforts such as special higher education institutions for individuals with disabilities (Anadolu University, Vocational High School etc.), current conditions are not sufficient to meet the needs of individuals with disabilities who want to be educated with normally developing peers on a field they prefer. In addition, these institutions are not exactly match the existing definition of inclusive education. However, considering all these needs, one of the most significant steps taken is the publication of “Regulation for Disabilities Consultation and Coordination in Higher Education Institutions” by Higher Education Board and that efforts for establishing Disability Support Units in universities have begun. The purpose of this regulation is explained as taking precautions and making arrangements to make higher education process for university students with disabilities easier. In accordance with the regulation, establishing of the units for students with disabilities has been accelerated. However, implementation of laws and regulations takes time. As of the year 2014, 118 universities have their own support units for students with disabilities in Turkey (<http://www.tiu.org.tr/turkce/content/view/34/65/>). Although universities have these support units, quality of services provided for university students with disabilities should be questioned. In this direction, expectations from higher education institutions were defined by the Platform for University Students with Disabilities as participating in decision making mechanisms, equality and struggle against isolation, accessibility and inclusive universities and respect for individual differences (Platform for University Students with Disabilities Report, no date).

Development of Programs in Accordance with Inclusion in Higher Education

Higher education in all over the world is in a dynamic process being shaped by needs, demands and expectations of students, society and academia. As in all levels of education, planning should be completed considering educational needs of individuals in also higher education. As Lingard mentioned (2007), educational programs should be planned by transferring from pedagogy of the same to pedagogy of the different. It is indispensable that needs should be defined and consistently evaluated when designing or developing higher education programs with an educational approach making differences and disabilities more visible.

Universities are structures having different patterns and every unit, person and function should be structured according to the nature and philosophy of inclusive education. Thus, whatever the reason is, understanding and meeting the needs will be easier. At this point, support units in universities should work in collaboration with other units and support them related to knowledge and skills they need. Therefore, individuals working in support units should know inclusion and adaptations needed well and provide required guidance. Since every individual with disabilities generally has different needs in different fields, he needs different planning for every course. Therefore, existence of specific standards related to staff working in support units will increase the quality of services. In addition, the student in inclusive program should be made a part of university dynamics. Energy for being more visible and creating new structures according to their interests and needs will ensure this dynamism. It would be good to have changes up to bottom in which the change would be in the system itself and not forcing the individual to make these changes happen. Policies on higher education include the principles of non-discrimination should set. Today, lifelong learning is one of the most valuable educational approaches. Universities have responsibilities especially on both professional development and social acceptance of the students. Monitoring and evaluation should be conducted about effectiveness and potential contributions to monitoring regulations of higher education programs.

Conclusion

Although people with disabilities are accepted in society with their general existence, they have difficulties in living in harmony with the society. These difficulties generally stem from external factors such as prejudice and indifference of society rather than factors related to impairment. Individuals with disabilities will be productive and have the opportunity for self-

realization when they participate in professional life. As a matter of fact, individuals with disabilities are able to have appropriate professions differing in terms of the type of disability. However, they have difficulties in participating professional life due to prejudice in society and the fact that laws are not implemented. According to the results of Disability Research in Turkey, the rates of participation to production for people with disabilities is extremely low. Low rates of placement to jobs is one of the significant discriminations that people with disabilities experience in society. Working in a job is important for people with disabilities in terms of their integration to society. Unemployment rates' being high among people with disabilities causes them to be excluded from society (ÖZİDA 2002, cited in Aslan & Şeker 2011). Turkey recognizes disabilities and the rights of people with disabilities with many national and international contracts, laws and decrees. Transforming this condition to a more concrete structure, social inequalities should be resolved and necessary regulations should be made.

The principle of continuity in education has a more critical importance for children with disabilities. Access to education for individuals with disabilities is limited because of difficulties in preventing, determining and evaluating disabilities, lack of physical equipment and insufficiency in implementation of special and inclusive education. It is extremely difficult for individuals with disabilities who completed their compulsory education even in difficult conditions, to reach higher education. Even though there are several higher education institutions for individuals with disabilities (Anadolu University, Vocational High School etc.), these institutions are not sufficient to meet the needs of individuals with disabilities to be educated with their normally developing peers. Inclusive education from preschool to higher education is a system that will make contributions for all students, their families and instructors. Therefore, laws and implementations should overlap for disabilities to gain a place in every field in society. For this reason, efforts towards configuring positive social perception related to disabilities should be planned and implemented as a social policy. When quality in education is defined as child centered and different elements of education is designed considering aspects and needs of the child, effective inclusive education will be implemented. Strengthening educational institutions and practitioners and providing them with necessary knowledge and skills should be seen as a natural extension of this approach (ERG, Inclusive Education in Turkey: Suggestions for Policies and Implementations Report, 2012). In the framework of lifelong learning philosophy, the model for inclusive education may be realized with an approach of creating equal and accessible educational opportunities. Although the process related to laws and contracts about social acceptance are about to be completed in Turkey, more

concrete and observable implementations should be accelerated. The point that research related to inclusive education focus on is generally the fact that supportive educational services should consistently be developed. The quality of supportive educational services will certainly increase with an effective planning and coordination. Increasing the quality of education, analyzing planning, implementations and evaluation programs in other countries which use integrated educational model, and creating a model specific to Turkey are the facts that come into prominence.

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