

An Investigation Of Teachers' Views On School Administrators' Competencies For Special Education

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to examine teachers' views on school administrators' competencies on special education. The research was designed with the interview method, one of the qualitative research methods. The participants in the study were 20 teachers working in schools with students with special needs in Turkiye in the 2023-2024 academic year. The research data were obtained through a semi-structured interview form. The data obtained from the participants were analyzed using the content analysis technique. According to the teachers' evaluations, school administrators may inadequately provide and manage the necessary resources for special education programmes. Most teachers stated that administrators do not make extra efforts beyond the facilities and materials provided by the state institutions. Although it is clear in some cases that administrators exhibit caring and conscious approaches, it is highlighted that they may be slow and inadequate in determining special education processes and needs in general. Therefore, comprehensive training programmes on special education should be organized for school administrators and these programmes should be updated regularly. To improve the management skills of administrators concerning special education, feedback from teachers and parents should be taken into account.

Keywords: School administrators, special education, inclusion, teacher

Introduction

Education & training is one of the most fundamental rights of individual. However, this process should not be viewed only as a legal obligation since education and training, which should continue throughout an individual's life, is also considered important for an ideal life (Güleç et al., 2012). Since cognitive, social, and emotional potential and current performance should be taken into consideration while providing education and training services for individuals, "special education" emerges as a complementary category of the education process (Baykoç, 2010). It is known that special education is an important part of the education and training system. Special education services are provided to meet the needs of students with special needs, to maximise their competencies and to ensure their social adaptation. Special education services are services provided to prepare learning opportunities specifically designed to meet the individual needs of students with special needs. Special Education services provide students with special needs access to appropriate learning opportunities to enable them to achieve the goals of their Individualised Education Programmes. These opportunities include cognitive, social, emotional and behavioural learning areas (Villa & Thousand, 2021). Special education services include the education of individuals with special needs in general education classes with their typically developing peers. The education offered to all students in general education schools for individuals to study with their peers can also be a way to ensure the effective use of resource rooms or community-based programmes.

This view, which is in favor of inclusive education in the general education classroom, has a philosophy based on equality of opportunity and social justice in education, and at the same time, it is a practice that aims to participate in education and training based on the needs of the student in special education (Rombo, 2006). In this direction, the "Special Education Services Regulation" was published in Turkiye in 2006, which refers to

the educational environment of people with special needs affected by disability. This regulation mentions the legal arrangements for children with special needs to continue their education in a regular education environment as their peers without separating them from their social and physical environment as much as possible (Ministry of National Education, 2006).

All kinds of support should be available for students with special needs to maximize the participation of every student in the classroom environment with their peers (Karaca, 2018). Therefore, inclusion practices should be planned to support the needs of all students and include effective intervention strategies. In addition, there should be educational environments that could provide opportunities to identify and develop the needs and strengths of students with special needs. All these things require effective collaboration between school administrators, teachers, parents, and all stakeholders (North Vancouver School District, 2015).

The role of school administrators, regarded as a part of cooperation in special education services, is considered important (Gökçe, 2000; Özdemir, 2018). The fact that school administrators have knowledge, skills, and competencies related to special education is among the factors that will affect not only the success of students with special needs but also that of teachers in general education schools. The role of school administrators is emphasized especially in the process of creating and implementing special education policies. Administrators are responsible for properly and effectively implementing these legal regulations (Kocaman, 2015).

The opportunities provided by school administrators to continuously improve themselves and teachers in the field of special education contribute to the quality of special education services. Therefore, professional development opportunities offered by school administrators for teachers are considered important. Especially the most frequently encountered difficulties in special education and the support provided by school administrators to overcome these problems will make it easier for teachers to do their jobs more effectively (Akbaşlı & Diş, 2019).

It is emphasized that increasing the competencies of school administrators in special education will improve the quality of services provided to students with special needs (Kocaman, 2015; Küçlü, 2021). Studies should be carried out to increase the competencies of teachers and administrators and necessary precautions should be taken in case of a possible risk. For example, the provision of appropriate resources for special education programmes can be mentioned as one of these improvements. Such contributions are considered among the most important responsibilities of school administrators. Both physical and material resources are also included in this category. Finally, the importance of school administrators' competencies in planning and implementing policies and practices related to students is emphasized in research (Çobanoğlu & Demir, 2021). There is limited research on the competencies of school administrators in schools with inclusive practices and how these competencies are assessed by teachers. Although there are studies on general competencies (Akbaş & Diş, 2019), leadership competencies (Aktay & Çakır, 2018; Özdemir et al., 2015), and humanistic competencies (Özdemir et al., 2015) of school administrators in Türkiye, there is no research conducted on the competencies of school administrators related to special education. The purpose of this study is to examine teachers' views on school administrators' competencies for special education.

The present study is assumed to contribute to the determination of deficiencies and positive aspects in this field by revealing the opinions of teachers about the competencies of school administrators concerning special education. The findings of the research emphasize the practices that school administrators are expected to direct education and training related to special education in a positive direction and the areas of competence required for the effective management of these processes. Therefore, this research aims to ensure that the educational rights of students with special needs in general education schools are met in the best possible way and to increase the quality of education. The scope of the research is limited to the views of teachers working in general education schools in Türkiye where students with special needs are enrolled. However, it should be kept in mind that the obtained findings may be valid in other countries with similar education systems and may provide important indications for the improvement of general education policies.

Methodology

Research Model

The research was designed by interview method, one of the qualitative research methods. The use of qualitative research methods is preferred in educational research, especially in studies that evaluate the opinions of students, teachers, and parents about a particular programme, method or technique. The interview method is an effective method that enables participants to provide in-depth and rich data on the subject (Hegarty, 1985).

Study Group

The participants of this research are teachers who work in general education schools and teach students with special needs in their classrooms under the purpose of the research. The main criterion for the selection of the study group was the fact that the teachers were working in inclusive practices. Interviews were conducted with 20 teachers by this criterion. The researcher formed the teacher group under the relevant criteria within the framework of the identified problem and subject (Mertens & McLaughlin, 2004). As Büyüköztürk (2011) stated, to obtain more in-depth information in such studies, the study group was determined by purposeful sampling method. Twelve (60%) of the participants were male and 8 (40%) were female. 13 of them were between the

ages of 24-33, while 7 of them were between the ages of 34-43. 4 of them were Preschool Teachers, 9 of them were Class Teachers, 3 of them were Counsellors, and 4 of them were Turkish Teachers.

Data Collection Tools

In the present study, a semi-structured interview form developed by the researcher and evaluated by 3 special education experts for content and face validity was used. Cohen et al. (2007) has stated that the interview process includes the skills of directing clearly, listening carefully, guiding effectively, and allowing the participants to express their feelings freely. Semi-structured interview technique was preferred by the researcher because it provided the opportunity to communicate directly with the interviewed teachers. The interview technique has many advantages. Thus, it provides the opportunity to collect detailed information, make observations, and ask questions to the participants (Karasar, 2005; Sağlam, 1975). Information about the process of developing the semi-structured interview form and using it in the research is given below. The following questions were included in the semi-structured interview form.

1. How do you see the role of administrators in creating and implementing special education policies in your school? Are the opinions of teachers sufficiently taken into account in these processes?
2. What are your views on the opportunities provided by administrators to continuously improve themselves and teachers in the field of special education?
3. What are the most common difficulties you encounter in special education and what are your views on the efforts of administrators to overcome these difficulties?
4. What kind of improvements would you suggest to increase the competencies of school administrators in the field of special education?
5. How would you evaluate the work of school administrators in providing and managing the necessary resources for special education programmes?
6. What are your opinions about the competencies of school administrators in planning and conducting practices related to students with special education needs?

Analysis of Data

In this study, Content Analysis Technique was used to analyze the data obtained from the participants. Robert and Bouillaguet (1995) defined content analysis as a methodical, systematic, objective, and quantitative examination process to classify the basic elements of different texts that are not understood by direct reading and to interpret these elements in themselves. One of the basic techniques used to analyze the data obtained in qualitative research is the content analysis technique. In this study, the content analysis technique was used to focus on the contextual status of the data. Content analysis goes beyond words and requires an intensive language study. It offers the opportunity to classify the text through predetermined categories.

The content analysis technique used to better understand the thoughts of the participant teachers is defined as a subjective interpretation of a text. In addition, qualitative content analysis is a part of systematic classification as a research method that makes thematic coding of the obtained data (Kondracki et al., 2002).

FINDINGS

In this part of the study, the findings obtained from the teachers' opinions about the extent to which the opinions of teachers are taken into account by school administrators in formulating and implementing special education policies, the opportunities provided by administrators to continuously improve themselves and teachers in the field of special education, the efforts of administrators to overcome the difficulties faced by teachers related to special education, the efforts of school administrators in providing and managing the necessary resources for special education programmes, and the competencies of school administrators in planning and conducting practices related to students with special needs are presented.

Table 1. Taking the opinions of teachers into account while formulating and implementing special education policies

Category	Themes
Disregard of Opinions	Manager Indifference
	Disregarding Opinions
	Negative Attitudes
Partially Considered	Partial Co-operation
	Incompetence of Managers
	Demonstration Practices
Consideration of Opinions	Cooperation and Support
	Influence and Role of Managers

"I don't think they have enough information about special education, so I think they can't take the right steps regarding the education process. Our opinions are not taken into consideration enough. They do everything for a show" (Teacher 17).

"Most of the administrators in institutions with special education classes do not expect any problems. They are not interested in special education as long as there are no problems. If there is a problem, they hold the teacher responsible for the process. They try to help if they can within the school facilities, but they generally meet the demands reluctantly" (Teacher 6).

"Managers play a big role. Because they have the final say. For example, when we are going to implement an activity, we make all the plans and transfer them. However, the administrator has the final say. the work we have planned can be implemented up to a certain point. At the end of the day, the administrator's opinion is again put into the plan." (Teacher 1)

Table 2. Opinions about the opportunities that administrators offer to continuously improve themselves and teachers in the field of special education

Category.	Theme 1	Theme 2
No Opportunity Offered	Indifference	Inadequacy
Partially Providing Opportunity	Lack of information	Project Support
Providing Opportunity	Training and Seminars	Technology and In-Service Trainings

"No opportunity is provided. In general, the field of special education is neglected" (Teacher 13)

"They allow us to improve ourselves by inviting experts in their field to the school for seminars" (Teacher 9)

"I do not know what they do to improve themselves, I haven't seen that they offer any kind of opportunities for teachers" (Teacher 14).

Table 3. Suggested improvements to increase the competencies of school administrators in the field of special education

Category.	Theme 1	Theme 2
Lack of Resources	Lack of Material	Technology and Guidance Services
Staff and Management Support	Lack of Support Staff	Lack of Management Support
Parent and Student Relations	Communication Problems with Parents	Student Behaviour Problems
Other	Crowded Classrooms	Inclusion Problems

"Support may be needed for parental involvement. Our administrators are neutral towards this situation. We try to solve the situation ourselves" (Teacher 1).

"We have difficulties in cooperating with families and in helping families to form realistic expectations about their children. In addition, the increase in problem behaviors among pupils as a result of attitudes of their families is also a challenge for us. The administration is with us when we have problems with families" (Teacher 15).

"Creating and organizing a classroom and school environment suitable for students. Administrators cannot support us much, they expect teachers to make arrangements with their means" (Teacher 6).

"We generally need material support to provide quality education. Our administrators do not provide the necessary support in this regard" (Teacher 3).

"Establishing healthy communication with parents, meeting the material needs in the classroom, the administration leaving the teacher alone when there is a problem with the parent" (Teacher 9).

Table 4. Regulations suggested by teachers to increase the competencies of school administrators in the field of special education

Category.	Theme
Education and Training	Courses and Seminars
	Continuous Professional Development
Administrator Selection and Qualification	Special Education Graduates Becoming Administrators Branch Information
Resources and Support	Adequate Resources and Budget
	Physical Structure and Co-operation
Certification and Expertise	Certification and Expertise Trainings

"Appointing graduates in the field of special education as administrators would enable them to better understand the deficiencies and difficulties in this field" (Teacher 5).

"To enable special education programmes to be carried out effectively, sufficient resources and budget should be provided and they should be supported with expert support" (Teacher 2).

"Making the physical structures of schools suitable for special education needs and more professional co-operation between teachers, families, and guidance services" (Teacher 7).

"Certificate programmes and specialized training should be offered in the field of special education so that administrators can become more competent in this field" (Teacher 16).

Table 5. Teachers' opinions on school administrators' efforts to provide and manage the necessary resources for special education programmes

Category	Theme	Details
Performance Evaluation	Overall Performance	Mostly, the performance of the administrators was found to be weak. It was stated that they could not perform adequately in special education. Thus, it was difficult to access the necessary resources and materials. In addition, they did not have sufficient knowledge and experience.
	Institution and Location Differences	It was stated that performance varied according to the institution and location and that some separate special education schools had more opportunities.
Resource Management	Resource and Material Access	It was emphasized that administrators were insufficient in providing the necessary resources and materials for special education and that they had difficulty in accessing resources.
	State and Institutional Resources	It was stated that the facilities provided by the state and the resources provided by the Ministry of National Education are sufficient, however administrators do not make extra efforts in addition to these resources.
Education System and Structure	Physical Structure of the Education System	It was stated that the physical structure of the education system is inadequate and this situation creates problems in meeting special education needs.
	Communication with Teachers	It was noted that the dialogue between administrators and teachers on special education issues was weak and this lack of communication negatively affected performance.

"Since they do not have much knowledge about the field of Special Education, they do not have enough performance in providing the necessary resources. In general, they say that you know better and leave it to us." (Teacher 3).

"I find them insufficient. I don't think they know what needs to be done and their dialogue with teachers on special education issues is very weak" (Teacher 18).

"It may vary according to the institution and its location; in separate special education schools, it is better because there are more opportunities, but in institutions with general education classes, it is insufficient and there is no provision of resources" (Teacher 3).

Table 6. Opinions of school administrators about their competencies in planning and implementing policies and practices related to students with special needs

Category	Theme	Details
Competence Level	General Competence	Most commonly, It was noted that the administrators were incompetent, slow, and inadequate in identifying the processes and needs.
	Education and Experience	It was stated that administrators were not educated in the field of special education and they lacked experience in this field.
	Special Education Policy	It was emphasized that administrators were inadequate in interpreting and implementing special education policies and they also had deficiencies in legislation.
Responsibility and Caring	Attitude	It was stated that there are administrators who display a caring and conscientious attitude, but this situation is rare.
	Reluctance and Anxiety	It was stated that administrators were reluctant to include students with special needs within their school and teachers were worried that it could disrupt the classroom dynamics.
Co-operation and Communication	Teamwork	It was stated that administrators tried to manage the process in cooperation with the guidance service and related teachers, but this process was generally challenging.
	Communication with Parents	Evaluations were made about the administrators' communication with parents and their activities in this process.

"Since our administrator is not a special educator, he may have difficulties in planning and implementing. He tries to manage the process together with the guidance service and branch teachers" (Teacher 3).

If the administrators I have met in special education practice schools are from a field outside special education and working in special education for the first time, it takes a long time for them to identify and solve the needs and it takes many years for them to be competent" (Teacher 1).

"I think they are competent, but they do not want to include the student in their school setting. The reason for this is that the teacher does not want them in the classroom. Teachers are most likely to experience symptoms of anxiety that the order in their classroom will be disrupted. It is more difficult if the child also has a disability" (Teacher 8).

Discussion and Conclusions

When the research findings are examined, it is noted that school administrators should be more cautious in developing and implementing special education policies. Some of the teachers state that administrators lack interest and ignore the opinions of teachers. These views emphasize that administrators act with the expectation that no problems will arise in any way and that they generally have a partial lack of interest in special education. Some teachers stated that their opinions were partially taken into consideration, but decisions were generally not taken jointly. In this context, it is emphasized that administrators do not have enough knowledge and cannot evaluate teachers' opinions sufficiently. Similar findings were observed in the study conducted by Tantay (2010). In his study, he noted that administrators do not have sufficient knowledge about special and gifted students and therefore they should receive training.

On the other hand, some of the teachers who participated in the study stated that administrators were able to establish cooperation and provide support to them. This situation is especially evident in the provision of materials, technological tools, and other needs. Another issue is that administrators cannot fully put teachers' suggestions into practice because they have the authority to have the final say in planning processes. Finally, some teachers stated that administrators have negative attitudes and that the processes are often conducted only for show. These views emphasize that administrators should assume a more active and initiative-taking role. However, the situation is different in a study conducted with pre-service teachers. For example, in a study conducted by Çobanoğlu and Gökcalp (2015), it was observed that 90% of the pre-service teachers have positive perceptions of principals.

The results of this study showed that the opportunities provided by school administrators to develop themselves and teachers in the field of special education are partially insufficient. Most of the teachers stated that the administrators were indifferent and the opportunities were not sufficient. Some teachers stated that administrators did not offer opportunities and the opportunities offered were generally limited. In the category of partial provision of opportunities, some teachers stated that administrators provided partial support, but this support was insufficient. However, although the administrators were supportive in terms of project support, there was an emphasis on the inadequacy of the environment in which teachers could do self-improvement. In the category of providing opportunities, there is a significant amount of positive feedback on training and seminars, technology, and in-service training. For example, it was stated that administrators invited experts in their field to seminars and allowed teachers to improve themselves. In the other category, lack of information and special situations were mentioned.

Teachers' views reveal that the challenges they face in special education are daunting and the support provided by administrators to overcome these difficulties is insufficient. Opinions could be grouped into four main categories: Lack of Materials and Resources, Staff and Administrative Support, Parent and Student Relations, and Others. In the category of Lack of Materials and Resources, teachers reported serious problems in terms of lack of materials, technology, and counseling services. In particular, the inability to provide the necessary materials in the classroom, the inadequacy of the educational environment, and the lack of guidance services were frequently mentioned. In the category of Staff and Management Support, lack of support staff and lack of management support are the prominent themes. Teachers highlighted the difficulties they experienced with classroom management and large numbers of pupils and emphasized that administrators did not provide sufficient support in these matters. In the category of Parent and Student Relations, communication problems with parents and student behavior problems were mentioned as the main problems. The difficulty of cooperating with parents and unrealistic expectations of parents about their children are among the major problems faced by teachers. The importance of cooperation between school and family is emphasized in research conducted by (Gökçe, 2000; Özdemir, 2018). In addition, Tantay (2010) emphasizes the importance of family education. He states that some families can see their children's abilities at a high level and that they are putting unnecessary pressure on educators to exhibit these high-level skills. It is emphasized that families should be made aware of this issue. In the other category in the present study, overcrowded classes and the problem of inclusion come to the fore. Teachers stated that overcrowded classrooms and not giving enough importance to special education negatively affected the education process. Yaman (2010) states that crowded classrooms can cause serious problems in the dimensions of the educational environment, teacher's classroom management and social communication in the classroom, and teacher's guidance roles. These findings show that the diversity of the difficulties experienced by teachers in special education and the management support in dealing with these difficulties may be insufficient.

In the field of special education, various improvements have been suggested to increase the level of knowledge and management competencies of school administrators. These suggestions include offering courses and

seminars on special education to administrators and organizing intensive in-service training programs in the summer months. These trainings were reported to increase the knowledge and awareness of administrators about special education. In addition, assigning special education graduate teachers as administrators is among the proposals. In this way, administrators can better understand the difficulties in the field and work diligently on these issues. Besides, it is emphasized in the research findings that the necessary resources and budget should be provided for implementing special education programs effectively. It is also suggested that the physical environment of schools should be adapted to meet special education needs and more professional cooperation should be established between teachers, families, and guidance services. In Tantay's (2010) study, it was noted that teachers working in schools should communicate with each other at an adequate level and work as a team and that the communication between teachers and students should be at an adequate level. Furthermore, in this study, it was stated that administrators should be encouraged to participate in certificate programmes and specialized training related to the field and that they should constantly monitor and follow up-to-date information and be open to innovations. The general aim of these proposals is to develop more competent and skilled administrators in the field of special education and thus improve the quality of special education in general education institutions.

According to the teachers' evaluations, the efforts of school administrators in providing and managing the necessary resources for special education programmes are considered as insufficient. Most of the teachers stated that administrators did not make any additional efforts beyond the facilities and materials provided by the state. Türker & Yıldırım et al. (2023) stated that teachers in Türkiye use their budgets when providing materials for individuals with special needs, prepare the materials themselves, but in certain cases, the materials are provided by the school administration. In addition, in this study, it was stated that it was difficult to access the necessary resources and that administrators were not successful in this regard because they did not have sufficient knowledge and experience. Although some teachers consider the efforts of the administrators to be positive, these positive views are in the minority. In general, it was emphasized that administrators lacked knowledge in the field of special education, did not make sufficient efforts to provide the necessary resources, did not have a good dialogue with teachers on issues related to special education and the physical environment of the education system was not adequate.

Based on the teachers' evaluations, it can be found that school administrators' competencies in providing support to teachers in planning and implementing practices related to students with special educational needs are generally inadequate. The lack of training and experience of administrators in this field is frequently emphasized. In particular, it is stated that there are serious shortcomings in the knowledge and implementation of legal provisions related to special education. Although it is seen that administrators can exhibit positive attitudes, they can be slow and inadequate in determining special education processes and needs in general. However, it is thought that this situation may be related to administrative situations. Kocaman (2015) states in his study that special education school administrators in Türkiye face problems in the fields of administrative, bureaucratic, and educational policies; administrators can cope with some of these problems and need comprehensive support from the central administration to solve some of them. The same study shows that the bureaucratic process does not work quickly and effectively and that families with children in need of special education may be indifferent to their children's education. In the study conducted by Çobanoğlu and Demir (2021), the change tendencies and personal initiative levels of managers in educational organizations were found to be "generally high" and it is recommended that the obstacles preventing the managers from taking initiative, which is necessary for the emergence of change, should be removed. In this context, it may be necessary to remove the obstacles for school administrators to take initiative in determining special education processes and needs. In addition, the reluctance of administrators to admit students to school and teachers' concerns about the disruption of classroom dynamics increase the problems in management. In the context of co-operation and communication, it is seen that some administrators try to manage the process by co-operating with the guidance service and teachers from different branches, but there are problems in the way this process is being managed. The performance of the administrators in terms of communication with parents was also evaluated, and it was concluded that the administrators generally needed more support and training on special education issues.

Recommendations

1. Comprehensive training programs on special education should be provided for school administrators.
2. Newly appointed or inexperienced administrators should be supported by experienced administrators.
3. Cooperation between the state (public sector/institutions) and the private sector should be encouraged and alternative solutions should be developed to provide more resources to schools.
4. Feedback from teachers and parents should be taken into account to improve the management skills of administrators in special education.

Limitations

The number of participants included in the present study is limited to 20 teachers. Therefore, the generalizability of the research findings on the competencies of school administrators in Türkiye towards

special education may be limited. In addition, it was not entirely possible in the current study to address competencies and experiences that vary among administrators in general education schools located in different provinces and at various levels in Türkiye.

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