Comparison of Primary School Branch Teachers' and Principals' Opinions Regarding the Integration of Students with Disabilities

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Abstract

The aim of this research is to compare the opinions of primary school principals with those of branch teachers on integration. 82 school principals and 155 subject teachers from 20 primary schools, in the province of Isparta constitute the study population. The data were collected through the "opinions relative to integration" scale", which was developed by Antonak and Larivee(1995) and adapted to Turkish by Kırcaali-İftar(1996). At the end of the study, that the branch teachers were uncertain about mainstreaming and that as their professional experience grew, they tended to be more positive about it were found out. However, it was found that school principals were also uncertain about integration but as opposed to teachers, as they gained professional experience, they tended to be more negative towards the issue.

Key Words: Branch teachers, school principals, integration

1. Introduction

The issue of meeting the needs of students with disabilities without separating them from their peers in normal education environments has found a large application area since 1980s. This practice called integration is usually considered to be a process that starts and ends by placing students with disabilities in normal clases. Integration, however, is quite a technical practice that requires several arrangements besides solely placing students with disabilities in normal classes (Kırcaali-İftar, 1998). The aim of integrated education is not normalizing the student with disabilities but optimizing the use of his/her interests and abilities and making it easy for the student to take part and have an active life within society. Supporters of integrated education argue that students with disabilities in seperated education environments are not only deprived of shared education opportunity but they are also isolated from their peers in terms of intellectual, lingual and emotional- social development (Lewis and Doorlag, 1987; akt. Batu, Kırcaali-İftar, Uzuner, 2004).

The assumptions that integrated education improves friendship between normally developed children and those with disabilities and enriches the environments of education and learning constitute the basis of integration practices. In addition, a well-arranged social environment is also seen as an advantage of integration (Hepler, 1994; akt: Sahbaz, 2004). On the other hand, isolation of children with disabilities from normally developed children may affect their emotional and social development adversely and may cause them to be deprived of significant opportunities concerning the improvement of lingual and intellectual capacity (Sahbaz, 1997).

In the path to success for integration practices, family, normally developed children, school principals and supervisors undertake very important roles, and among these, the most significant part is of school principals and teachers. School principals, being the leaders of the school, are the key persons in the integration of students with disabilities (Payne & Murray, 1974, Hipp & Huffman, 2000). That's why school principals shall well-know the laws and regulations on integration, be able to interpret them for practice, coordinate in-school activities, ensure a systemized cooperation between the school and families. Moreover, they should come together with the teachers and provide the families participation into education, help them understand integration through related activities. It should be noted that the academic development and social development of integrated student should be equally cared, the program in practice should be evaluated by observing the developments of the student and it should be discussed with related people by orginizing meetings when necessary (Paul, Turnbull and Cruickshank, 1977).

There is a strong relation between the success of integration practices and school principals' opinions about and attitudes towards integration practice (Bailey & du Plessis, 1998; Praisner, 2003). According to Bain and Dolbel (1991), the success of integration practices is directly related to the fact that school principals and teachers have a positive attitude towards integration practices. If school principals believe in the necessity of integration practices, they can substantially increase the chance of success for integration practices as they would provide necessary support in issues such as the preparation of suitable environments in schools, making necessary changes, allocation of resources and employing staff (Bain & Dolbel, 1991; Payne & Murray, 1974; Hasazi, Johnston, Liggett, & Schattman, 1994). On the other hand, unless school principals believe in the necessity of integration practices, they may prefer that students with disabilities have their education in separate schools (Hasazi, Johnston, Liggett, & Schattman, 1994), may therefore decrease the chance of success for the disabled by reducing or limiting the degree of services provided for the disabled. Therefore, before everything, for the success of integration practices, school principals must have a positive attitude and determination for participation (Barnett & Monda-Amaya, 1998; Payne & Murray, 1974, Bailey & du Plessis, 1998; Praisner, 2003).

In the literature on school principals' opinions on and attitutudes towards integration practices, different research findings can be found. In some of these research, school principals' opinions and attitudes are positive (Bain and Dolbel, 1991; Dyal, Flynt and Bennett-Walker 1996, Center, Ward and Parmente, 1985; Praisner, 2003), in some hesitant (Barnett and Monda-Amaya, 1998), and still in some others, they are seen to be negative (Payne and Murray, 1974; Pupke, 1977). One of the significant factors affecting the success of integration practices is class and branch teachers. Teachers' opinions and attitutes regarding integration practices may as well affect the success of integration practices. If teachers have a positive opinion and attitude regarding integration practices, they can be enthusiastic about initiating required activities for the preparation of appropriate environments for the students with disabilities to be successful. Besides, teachers' opinions and attitudes concerning disabled student may as well affect positivly the opinions of normally developped students and families and lead social acceptibility levels of the disabled to go up. Otherwise, negative attitudes of the teacher towards students with disabilities may lead other students to show negative attitudes and may adversely affect the success of integration practices to succeed, teachers must show positive attitudes and determination for participation as well as school principals (Batu, Kırcaali-İftar, 2009).

In the literature on teachers' opinions and attitudes regarding integration practices, we come across different research findings. Scruggs and Mastropieri (1996) studied 28 research studies on teachers' opinions and attitudes regarding integration which were carried out between the years 1958 and 1995 and stated that in less than half the studies teachers showed positive opinions on and attitudes towards integration. Studies carried out after 1995 also have similar results. In some of these research studies, teacher opinions on integration are positive (Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996; Agran, Snow & Swaner, 1999; Van Reusen, Shosho & Barker, 2000; Mdikana, Ntshangase and Mayekiso, 2007), and in some they are negative (Vaughn, Schumm, Jallad, Slusher & Saumeel, 1996; Soodak, Podell and Lehman, 1998; Snyder, 1999; Avramidis, Bayliss, & Burden, 2000; Yuen and Westwood, 2001; Avramidis and Norwich 2002; Şahbaz, 2007; Şahbaz, 2008; Şahbaz & Peker 2008, Ertunç, 2008).

In the literature, there are a limted number of studies comparing the opinions of school principals and teachers on the integration of students with disabilities. In some of these studies, school principals' opinions appear to be more positive than teachers' (Savage, 1971; Overline, 1977), and in some the opinions of school principals and teachers on integration are negative (Shotel, Iano and McGettigan, 1972; Stoner, 1981; Uysal, 1995). In these studies which compare the opinions of school principals and teachers, the teachers expressing opinions are rather class and special education teachers; no studies comparing the opinions of school principals and branch teachers on the integration of disabled students can be found.

1.1. Problem

The aim of this study is to compare the opinions of school principals and branch teachers on the integration of the students with disabilities. For this purpose, answers for the following questions will be searched for;

1.1.2. Sub problems

1. Is there a meaningful difference between the opinions of branch teachers about the integration of the disabled students depending on the teachers' sex?

2. Is there a meaningful difference between the opinions of school principals about the integration of students with disabilities depending on their occupational experience?

3. Is there a meaningful difference between the opinions of branch teachers about the integration of students with disabilities depending on their occupational experience?

4. Is there a difference between the opinions of primary school principals and branch teachers about the integration of students with disabilities?

1.2. Limitations

This research is limited to 82 school principals and 155 branch teachers working at primary schools in the central towns of Isparta city who attended the in service training seminar titled as "Students with Special Needs and Special Education Strategies" in the academic year of 2007-2008.

2. Method

2.1. Research Model

In this research study, descriptive method has been employed with the aim of determining the opinions of primary school principals and branch teachers about the integration of students with disabilities.

2.2. Research Group

The participants of this research study consist of 155 branch teachers who attended the in service training seminar titled as "Students with Special Needs and Special Education Strategies" in the academic year of 2007-2008 from 20 primary schools located in the central town of Isparta and 82 school principals 38 of whom are managers and 44 deputy managers working at primary schools in the central towns of Isparta who attended the seminar. Data relating the research group are given in Table 1 and Table 2.

| Table 1: Frequency | Table of School | Principals a | depending on | n their Occupational | Experience |
|--------------------|-----------------|--------------|--------------|----------------------|------------|
| | | | | | |

| Occupational Experience | Frequency | Percentage | |
|-------------------------|-----------|------------|--|
| 6-10 years | 6 | 7,3 | |
| 11-15 years | 14 | 17,1 | |
| 16-20 years | 17 | 20,7 | |
| 21 years and over | 45 | 54,9 | |
| Total | 82 | 100,0 | |

In the analysis of Table 1 on the occupational experience of school principals, it can be observed that 7,3% of the 82 principals within the scope of the research have 6-10 year experience, 17,1% 11-15 years, 20,7% 16-20 years, 54-9% 21 years and over.

Table 2: Frequency Table of Branch Teachers Depending on their Occupational Experience

| Occupational Experience | Frequency | Percentage | |
|-------------------------|-----------|------------|--|
| 0-5 years | 25 | 16,1 | |
| 6-10 years | 42 | 27,1 | |
| 11-15 years | 35 | 22,6 | |
| 16-20 years | 14 | 9,0 | |
| 21 years and over | 39 | 25,2 | |
| Total | 155 | 100,0 | |

In the analysis of Table 1 on the occupational experience of branch teachers, it can be observed that 16,1% of the 155 branch teachers within the scope of the research have 0-5 year experience, 27,1% 6-10 years, 22,6% 11-15 years, 25,2% 21 years and over.

2.3. Data Collecting Tools

The data of the research were collected via "The Scale of Opinions Regarding Integration" which was developed by Antonak and Larivee (1995) and adapted into Turkish by Kırcaali-İftar (1996). In the adaptation of the scale into Turkish, structural validity was inspected via factor analysis while inner-consistency was examined via item analysis. The inner consistency coefficient of the item was found to be .80.

The scale is in the form of a fivefold rating scale. The highest score that can be attained on the scale is 100 whereas the lowest score is 20. High scores reveal a negative attitude, low scores reveal a positive attitude.

2.4. Data Analysis

The scores of the answers given by school principals and branch teachers to "The Scale of Opinions Regarding Integration" were recorded into SPSS 16.0 package software. In adding the scores together, for negative questions inversion was used. The total scores of the opinions of school principals and branch teachers about integration were calculated and coefficient of skewness and Kolmogorov Smirov normality tests were checked in order to determine whether there is difference between the scores. The scores attained from the data collection tool showed a normal distribution, the opinions about integration of school principals and branch teachers participating in the study were decided to be compared by parametric tests and the results gained from parametric tests are given in Table 3, Table 4, Table 5 and Table 6.

3. Findings and Comments

The purpose of this study is to compare the opinions of primary school principals and branch teachers on the integration of students with disabilities. For this purpose, total score averages and t test results of the opinions of branch teachers about the integration of their disabled students depending on the teachers' sex are shown in Table 3, total score averages and variance analysis results of school principals' opinions about the integration of their disabled students depending on the integration of their disabled students depending on their occupational experience are given in Table 4, total score averages and one way variance analysis results of branch teachers opinions about the integration of their disabled students depending on their occupational experience are given in Table 5, and total score averages and t test results of primary school principals and branch teachers' opinions about the integration of disabled students are shown on Table 6.

Table 3: Total Score Averages and t test Results of the opinions About The Integration of Disabled Students of Branch Teachers Participating in The Study Depending on their Sex

| | Sex | N | $\overline{\mathbf{X}}$ | SS | Sd | t | р |
|-------|--------|----|-------------------------|------|-----|-------|-----|
| Total | Male | 81 | 55,43 | 7,11 | 153 | 1 22 | 10 |
| 10101 | Female | 74 | 56,82 | 5,71 | 155 | -1,55 | .18 |

When Table 3 is studied in connection with the first sub problem of the research; it can be seen that the average score of male teachers is $\overline{X} = 55,43$ and the average score of female teachers is $\overline{X} = 56,82$. When research data are evaluated in terms of averages, it appears that the opinions of male and female branch teachers are hesitative, and while there is a difference between the average scores of male teachers are lower than the average scores of female teachers. As for the fact that whether this difference between the opinions of male and female teachers in statistically meaningful, we can see that the is no meaningful difference between the opinions of male and female branch teachers about the students' integration depending on their sex [t₍₁₅₃₎= 1.33, p>.05].

Table 4: Total Score Averages and Variance Analysis Results of School Principals' Opinions about theIntegration of their Disabled Students Depending on their Occupational Experience

| Occupational Experience | ce N | $\overline{\mathbf{X}}$ | SS | Sd | F | Р | Meaninful Difference |
|-------------------------|------|-------------------------|------|------|------|------|-------------------------|
| 6-10 years | 6 | 52,33 | 5,53 | | | | · |
| 11-15 years | 14 | 56,64 | 4,03 | 2 70 | ,932 | .429 | |
| 16-20 years | 17 | 56,29 | 7,18 | 3,78 | | | - |
| 21 years and over | 45 | 57,26 | 7,47 | | | | |
| Total | 82 | 56,59 | 6,83 | | | | |

When Table 4 is studied in connection with the second sub problem of the research; it can be seen that the average score of school principals with 6-10 years of experience are $\overline{X} = 52.33$, of those with 11-15 years of experience are $\overline{X} = 56.64$, those with 16-20 years of experience are $\overline{X} = 56.29$ and the average score of the principals with 21 years of experience and more are $\overline{X} = 56.29$.

155 56,09

6,50

When the average scores of school principals depending on their occupational experience are compared with each other, it appears that school principals who have 6-10 years experience have the most positive attitude towards the integration of students with disabilities; while principals who have 21 years of experience and more have the most negative attitude. According to the data acquired we can claim that the more occupational experience school principals have, the more negative their attitudes towards integration of the disabled get. When we consider whether This difference in the opinions of school principals about the integration of students with disabilities is statistically meaningful it can be observed that there is no statistically meaningful difference between the occupational experience of school principals and their attitudes towards the integration on students with disabilities $[F_{(3,78)}=.932, p>.05]$.

| Occupational Experience | Ν | $\overline{\mathbf{X}}$ | SS | Sd | F | Р | Meaningful differece |
|----------------------------|----|-------------------------|------|-------|----------|----------|-------------------------|
| 0-5 years | 25 | 57,84 | 5,78 | | <u> </u> | <u>.</u> | |
| 6-10 years | 42 | 56,00 | 6,25 | | | | |
| 11-15 years | 35 | 56,08 | 5,54 | 4,150 | .826 | .511 | - |
| 16-20 years | 14 | 56,71 | 4,79 | | | | |
| 21 years and over | 39 | 54.87 | 8.29 | | | | |

Table 5. Total Score Averages and Variance Analysis Results of Branch Teachers' Opinions About the Integration of their Disabled Students Depending on their Occupational Experience

When Table 5 is studied in connection with the third sub problem of the research; it can be seen that the average scores of branch teachers who have 0-5 years of occupational experience are $\overline{X} = 57.84$, of teachers who have 6-10 years of occupational experience are $\overline{X} = 56.08$, of those who have 16-21 years of occupational experience are $\overline{X} = 56.71$ and of those who have 21 years of occupational experience and more are $\overline{X} = 54.87$. When the average scores of branch teachers depending on their occupational experience are compared with each other, it appears that branch teachers who have 21 years of experience and more have the most positive attitude towards the integration of students with disabilities; while branch teachers who have 0-5 years of experience branch teachers have, the more positive their attitudes towards integration of the disabled get. When we consider whether this difference in the opinions of branch teachers about the integration of students with disabilities is statistically meaningful difference between the occupational experience of branch teachers and their attitudes towards the integration on students with disabilities [$F_{(4,150)}=.826$, p>.05].

Table 6.Total Score Averages and t test Results of Participating Primary School Principals and Branch Teachers' Opinions about the Integration of Disabled Students

| Occupation | Ν | $\overline{\mathbf{X}}$ | SS | Sd | t | р |
|------------------|-----|-------------------------|------|-----|-----|-----|
| School Principal | 82 | 56,59 | 6,83 | 225 | 55 | 50 |
| Branch Teacher | 155 | 56,09 | 6,50 | 235 | .55 | .58 |

When Table 6 is studied in connection with the forth sub problem of the research; it can be seen that the average score of the opinions of participating school principals about the integration of students with disabilities is $\overline{X} = 56.59$ and the average of branch teachers is $\overline{X} = 56.09$. According to the data acquired, it can be asserted that the opinions of school principals and branch teachers about the integration of disabled students are hesitant, that there is a small difference between the averages and the average scores of school principals are higher than those of branch teachers. When we consider whether this difference in the opinions of branch teachers and school principals about the integration of students with disabilities is statistically meaningful, it can be observed that there is no statistically meaningful difference between the opinions of branch teachers and school principals about the integration of students with disabilities [$t_{(235)}=.55$, p>.05].

Total

4. Conclusion and Suggestions

The aim of this study is to compare the opinions of school principals and branch teachers working at primary schools on the integration of the students with disabilities. When research findings are examined concerning the first sub problem, it can be seen that depending on sex, there is no statistically meaningful difference among branch teachers' opinions about the integration of students with disabilities and that male and female branch teachers are hesitant about the issue. When they are compared in terms of averages, the opinions of male and female branch teachers about the integration of students with disabilities it can be asserted that the average scores of male branch teachers are smaller than those of female branch teachers. Considering the fact that low scores on the scale show positive attitudes while high scores show negative attitudes; it can be said that female teachers have a slightly more negative attitude towards the integration of disabled students than male teachers. The findings acquired from the study are consistent with research results (Avramidis, Bayliss, & Burden 2000; Forlin, Jobling, & Caroll, 2001; Caroll, Forlin, & Jobling, 2003).

When the findings concerning the second sub problem of the study are examined, it can be seen that depending on their occupational experience, school principals' opinions on the integration of students with disabilities are hesitant and that there are differences between the average scores, but the difference is not statistically meaningful. The findings from the study are consistent with the research results of Barnett and Monda-Amaya (1998). When the opinions of school principals about the integration of disabled students depending on their occupational experience, the most positive attitude is of school principals who have 6-10 years of occupational experience and the most negative attitude belongs to those who have 21 years of occupational experience and more. According to these data acquired, it can be claimed that the more occupational experience school principals have, the more negative their attitudes towards the integration of the disabled get.

When the findings concerning the second sub problem of the study are examined, it can be seen that depending on their occupational experience, branch teachers' opinions on the integration of students with disabilities are hesitant and that there are differences between the average scores, but the difference is not statistically meaningful. The findings of the study differ from the findings of the research of which the findings are positive (Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996; Agran, Snow & Swaner, 1999; Van Reusen, Shosho & Barker, 2000; Mdikana, Ntshangase and Mayekiso, 2007) and from those in which the teacher attitudes are negative (Vaughn, Schumm, Jallad, Slusher & Saumeel, 1996; Soodak, Podell and Lehman, 1998; Snyder, 1999; Avramidis, Bayliss, & Burden, 2000; Yuen and Westwood, 2001; Avramidis and Norwich 2002; Şahbaz, 2007; Şahbaz, 2008; Şahbaz & Peker 2008, Ertunç, 2008). When the opinions of branch teachers about the integration of disabled students depending on their occupational experience, it can be claimed that the most positive attitude is of school principals who have 21 years of occupational experience and more and the most negative attitude belongs to those who have 0-5 years of occupational experience. According to these data acquired, it can be said that the more occupational experience branch teachers have, the more positive their attitudes towards the integration of the disabled get.

When the findings concerning the third sub problem of the study are examined, it can be seen that the opinions of school principals and branch teachers on the integration of students with disabilities are hesitant, and that there is a small difference between the averages but the difference is not statistically meaningful. Research findings differ from the research in which the opinions of school principals on the integration of disabled students are more positive than those of teachers (Savage, 1971; Overline, 1977) and from the research in which the opinions of school principals and teachers are negative (Shotel, Iano and McGettigan, 1972; Stoner, 1981; Uysal, 1995).

In conclusion, it is seen that the opinions of school principals and branch teachers on the integration of students with disabilities are hesitant and that there is no statistically meaningful difference between the opinions of school principals and branch teachers on the integration of students with disabilities. It is considered that the hesitant opinion of both school principals and branch teachers on the integration of disabled students is due to the fact that school principals and branch teachers do not have adequate knowledge and experience about students with disabilities. Research findings support the idea that if branch teachers have adequate knowledge and experience about students with disabilities and the integration practices, their opinions on the integration of disabled students will change positively.

Depending on the findings of this research study, we can suggest that

- 1. The opinions on integration of school principals and branch teachers working in different cities should be compared,
- 2. In service training activities should be arranged in order to change the opinions of school principals and branch teachers on the integrated education positively.

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