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## OKUL PSİKOLOJİK DANIŞMANLARININ KAYNAŞTIRMA EĞİTİMİNE YÖNELİK TUTUM VE GÖRÜŞLERİNİN İNCELENMESİ

### INVESTIGATION OF SCHOOL COUNSELORS ATTITUDES AND OPINIONS TOWARDS INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

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#### Abstract

This research is a qualitative study that aims to examine the perceptions, attitudes and opinions of school counselors towards inclusive education. In this research, which was carried out within the framework of the phenomenological design, semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight school counselors working in schools in 2023. The obtained data were analyzed by content analysis method and as a result of the analysis; Four themes were identified: perception and experiences, role and interaction, individualized education program and problems. The findings reveal that the undergraduate and in-service training processes of school counselors are not at the desired level in terms of inclusive practices and that the lack of practical knowledge limits effective inclusion practices. It is seen that the participants take on multidimensional roles both directly with the student and indirectly with the teachers and parents in the inclusion process. However, the inadequacy of the number of consultants, the limitation of physical conditions and the weakness of cooperation between stakeholders negatively affect the effectiveness of the process. The findings of the research show that teacher training programs and in-service trainings should be updated, the quality of their practices should be increased and the roles of school counselors should be strengthened in order to maintain inclusive education in a more functional way.

**Keywords:** Inclusive Education, School Counselor, Individualized Education Program (IEP)

#### Öz

Bu araştırma, okul psikolojik danışmanlarının kaynaştırma eğitimine yönelik algı, tutum ve görüşlerini incelemeyi amaçlayan nitel bir çalışmadır. Fenomenolojik desen çerçevesinde yürütülen bu çalışmada, 2023 yılında okullarda görev yapan sekiz okul psikolojik danışmanı ile yapılandırılmış görüşmeler gerçekleştirilmiştir. Elde edilen veriler içerik analizi yöntemiyle analiz edilmiş ve analiz sonucunda; algı ve deneyimler, rol ve etkileşim, bireyselleştirilmiş eğitim programı ve sorunlar olmak üzere dört tema belirlenmiştir. Bulgular, okul psikolojik danışmanlarının lisans ve hizmet içi eğitim süreçlerinin kaynaştırma uygulamaları açısından istenilen düzeyde olmadığını ve uygulamaya dönük bilgi eksikliğinin, etkili kaynaştırma uygulamalarını sınırladığını ortaya koymaktadır. Katılımcıların, kaynaştırma sürecinde hem doğrudan öğrenciyle hem de dolaylı olarak öğretmen ve velilerle çok boyutlu roller üstlendikleri görülmektedir. Bununla birlikte, danışman sayısındaki yetersizlik, fiziki koşulların sınırlılığı ve paydaşlar arası iş birliğinin zayıflığı sürecin etkililiğini olumsuz yönde etkilemektedir. Araştırma bulguları, kaynaştırma eğitiminin daha işlevsel bir şekilde sürdürülebilmesi için öğretmen yetiştirme programları ve hizmet içi eğitimlerin güncellenmesi, uygulamalarının niteliğinin artırılması ve okul psikolojik danışmanlarının rollerinin güçlendirilmesi gerektiğini göstermektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Kaynaştırma Eğitimi, Okul Psikolojik Danışmanı, Bireyselleştirilmiş Eğitim Programı (BEP)

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## **INVESTIGATION OF SCHOOL COUNSELORS ATTITUDES AND OPINIONS TOWARDS INCLUSIVE EDUCATION**

### **Introduction**

Inclusive education is defined as one of the inclusive education approaches adopted worldwide in order to ensure equal participation of individuals in social life and education by respecting their differences (Batu and Kırcaali İftar, 2016; Gause, 2011; Gürgür, 2008). According to Lindsay (2007), inclusive education is an important educational outline that improves the education and training opportunities of students with special needs. In Turkey, on the other hand, this practice has been carried out with various legal and structural regulations for more than 40 years (Yazıcıoğlu, 2018). Today, the increasing number of individuals with special needs and the expectations to increase the quality in the education system have given inclusive education an important place both nationally and internationally (Demirbilek et al., 2025). In this context, the Ministry of National Education (MNE), in the Special Education Services Regulation (SESR) published in 2018, defines individuals with special needs as "individuals who differ significantly from their peers in terms of individual and developmental characteristics and educational competencies" (MNE, 2018). In the same regulation, inclusive education is expressed as an education model enriched with support services that enables individuals with special needs to receive full-time or part-time education with their peers.

Kırcaali İftar (1992) defines inclusive education as a process that allows individuals with special needs to learn in interaction with their peers without being exposed to social isolation. This process aims to support the individual's collaborative learning, development as a self-sufficient individual, and participation in social life (Batu, 2000; Kış, 2013; Yazıcıoğlu, 2018). In Turkey, inclusive education is implemented in a wide range to cover individuals with different diagnosis groups such as intellectual disability, hearing and visual impairment, physical disability, language and speech disorders, special learning difficulties, autism spectrum disorder and attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder (MNE, 2010).

In practice, inclusive education is carried out in three basic ways in line with the individual needs and developmental characteristics of the students (Gürkan, 2010). The first of these is full-time inclusion. In this model, students with special needs attend general education classes full-time; While continuing their education with their peers, they benefit from support education services if they need it (MNE, 2010). In addition, they are supported by special tools, materials and teaching arrangements according to the type of individual disability. The second model, part-time inclusion, involves the participation of students with special needs in some classes and activities with their peers in general education classes, even though they are enrolled in a special education class. In this model, the student benefits from both special and general education environments simultaneously (Eripek, 2012; Yazıcıoğlu, 2018). The third model is reverse fusion. Students who do not have disabilities in this practice voluntarily attend institutions or classes where individuals with special needs are educated, especially in the preschool period (Gürkan, 2010; MNE, 2006). This method is applied to increase the social interactions of students with special needs, to support peer learning and to internalize inclusion at an early age.

Legal regulations have brought along various structural obligations in order to increase the quality of inclusion practices (Sucuoğlu and Kargin, 2010). Article 22 of the 2018 SESR mandated the establishment of an Individualized Education Program (IEP) development unit in every school where inclusive education is provided. IEP is an official document that is prepared in accordance with the individual characteristics of the student with special needs, comes into force with the approval of the family and includes supportive education services. Article 47 of the same regulation obliges the school counselor to be included in the IEP development unit. This situation points to the critical role of school counselors in inclusive education.

The duties of school counselors are not limited to the preparation of IEPs; It covers a multidimensional process starting from the diagnosis of the individual with special needs to their active participation in the education process (Batu and Kırcaali İftar, 2016). As Aksoy and Diken (2009) emphasize, guidance counselors undertake active responsibilities from the educational diagnosis process of inclusive students to the adaptation and monitoring of their attendance in educational environments. The Guidebook on Inclusive Education Practices (2015) published by the Ministry of National Education, General Directorate of Special Education and Guidance Services clearly defines the roles of school counselors in inclusive education. These roles include strengthening cooperation between stakeholders, preparing process evaluation reports and providing necessary guidance.

Özgüven (2001) states that the difficulties experienced by individuals with special needs in adapting to social environments make psychological counseling services important for them. These individuals need support in essential aspects of life, such as self-awareness, social acceptance, and communication skills. In line with these requirements, the main service areas of psychological counselors include; recognizing the interests and abilities of the individual, developing a positive self-perception, interacting effectively with families and teachers, contributing to the IEP process and providing professional guidance.

Considering the acceptance process and emotional difficulties experienced by the families of children with special needs, it is clear that psychological counselors should carry out an effective communication and counseling process not only with the student but also with the family. Küçüker (1999) emphasizes that families who receive the

diagnosis of a child with special education needs need professional support in the process of accepting this situation. In this context, the guidance and psychological counseling services offered to the family play a decisive role in the development of the child (Kış, 2013).

As a result, the increase in the number of individuals with special needs has significantly increased the likelihood of school counselors providing services for these students. In this context, it is important to determine the attitudes and opinions of the consultants regarding inclusive education in order to increase the quality of the services. It is thought that the evaluation of the attitudes and opinions of psychological counselors working in schools regarding inclusive practices supported by laws and integrated into the education system will contribute to shaping the roadmap of both practitioners and policy makers. For this reason, answers to the following questions were sought within the scope of the research:

1. What are the views of school counselors on the adequacy of the knowledge and skills they have acquired regarding inclusive education through undergraduate and in-service trainings?
2. How do school counselors evaluate the effect of inclusive education on the academic, social and emotional development of students with special needs?
3. What are the views of school counselors on classroom dynamics and teaching process in classrooms with inclusive students?
4. What are the roles of school counselors in communication with parents in the inclusion process and their experiences in this process?

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## Method

### Design of the Study

In this study, phenomenology design, which is one of the qualitative research methods, will be used in order to examine the experiences and opinions of school counselors on inclusive education in depth. The phenomenological pattern provides detailed and descriptive data on the phenomenon being investigated, providing guiding results on how theoretical knowledge can find a place in practice (Creswell, 2016; Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2005).

According to the definition of Yıldırım and Şimşek (2018), qualitative research aims to examine perceptions and events in a natural and holistic way through methods such as interviews, observations and document analysis. In this context, interviewing is the most frequently used data collection technique in qualitative research, allowing for a deep understanding of participants' perceptions and semantic attributions of events (Armstrong et al., 2011; Chadwick et al., 1984; Jensen, 2006). Semi-structured interview method was preferred in the study. The reason for choosing this method is the need for a format that offers flexibility to examine in detail the experiences of school counselors on all processes of inclusive education.

### Participants

The participants of this research consist of school psychological counselors who work in schools affiliated to the Ministry of National Education in 2023 and have inclusive students in their schools. The participants of the study were determined by purposive sampling method. Purposive sampling method is useful in the examination and explanation of events and phenomena (Patton, 2018). The researchers explained the aims of the research to the psychological counselors and stated that they wanted to get their opinions in line with the stated objectives. In line with the principle of volunteering, the demographic characteristics of the school counselors participating in the research are explained in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Demographic characteristics of the participants

| Demographic variables                |                     | Number |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------|--------|
| <b>Gender</b>                        | Woman               | 5      |
|                                      | Male                | 3      |
| <b>Age</b>                           | 25- 35              | 4      |
|                                      | 36- 47              | 4      |
| <b>Years of experience</b>           | 4- 9                | 3      |
|                                      | 10- 21              | 5      |
| <b>Years of inclusion experience</b> | 2- 10               | 4      |
|                                      | 11- 18              | 4      |
| <b>Institution of employment</b>     | Kindergarten        | 2      |
|                                      | Primary             | 3      |
|                                      | Secondary Education | 3      |

5 of the participants were female and 3 were male, and the average age was 34.3 years. The average of the years of professional experience is 12 and the average of the years of inclusive experience is 7. The distribution of the participants according to the institutions they currently work in is 3 primary education, 3 secondary education and 2 kindergarten.

### Data Collection

In this study, which is a phenomenological study in which qualitative data were collected, the data obtained were collected with a 7-question semi-structured interview form developed by the researchers. The interview form consists of questions that will deal with the subject in its entirety and are suitable for the purpose of the research after the literature review made by the researchers. The prepared interview questions were presented to the opinion of an expert and a school counselor. The questions were revised by taking into account the feedback received about the prepared questions. In the preparation process of the questions, criteria that will facilitate the research, such as ease of understanding and getting clear answers, were taken into consideration.

In order to collect data within the scope of the research, interviews with school counselors were conducted in the schools where the psychological counselors worked, on previously determined days and times. All of the interviews were conducted individually by the second researcher and recorded with a voice recorder with the permission of the participants. Before starting the interviews, the purpose of the study, the purpose of using the information obtained, the principles of confidentiality and rights were explained in detail to the participating school counselors; Then, the Voluntary Participation Form prepared by the researchers was signed. During the interview, the questions were asked in the specified order, and more detailed information was obtained by making additional explanations when necessary.

### Analysis of Data

In this study, the obtained data were analyzed using the content (induction) analysis technique. In this process, the stages of transcription, coding, determining and organizing the themes were carried out (Baxter and Jack, 2008; Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2000). After the semi-structured interviews were conducted, the audio recordings were transcribed and recorded in their original form without any corrections. The data were transferred to the computer and transcribed.

Interview recordings and transcripts were examined by an expert to ensure the reliability of the data. The specialist checked the accuracy of the casting and completed the shortcomings. After these preliminary preparations, categories and codes were created from the data, and then themes and sub-themes were determined. The coding process was carried out by two researchers working independently, after which the researchers came together to reach a consensus on the codes and themes.

For the validity and reliability of the study, the triangulation method (Data triangulation) was applied and written answers to the questions in the interview form were also obtained from the participants (Brantlinger et al., 2005). These written opinions served as supporting data in parallel with the themes. After all the processes were completed,

the field expert reviewed the created themes and sub-themes, and the necessary arrangements were made by the researchers. In the Findings section, the opinions of school counselors are presented in the form of direct quotes. In accordance with ethical principles, the names of each consultant were kept confidential and anonymity was ensured by using codings such as "Participant 1" (K1) or "Participant 4" (K4) according to the order of the interview.

### Limitations

In this study, the attitudes and opinions of school counselors towards inclusive education were examined. The research is limited to 8 school counselors working in two different cities in Turkey. At the same time, the results and findings of the research are limited to the scope of the analyses and semi-structured interview questions carried out by the researchers.

### Validity (Plausibility)

Credibility is an important criterion in qualitative studies and it is necessary to evaluate the research subject as a whole (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2016). The aforementioned validity criterion was taken into account in the conduct and design of the research. In the process of preparing the interview questions, the opinions of an academician who is an expert in the field were taken, and a pilot study was conducted with a school counselor and arrangements were made in the questions. Confirmation of the answers to the questions has been provided. The confirmations received contributed to increasing credibility. The school counselors who participated in the study were informed about the purpose and scope of the research and their questions were answered sincerely. At the same time, researchers took an active role in the data collection process. After the breakdown of the data, their consistency was taken into account.

### Findings

In this section, the themes that emerged by analyzing the qualitative data obtained through semi-structured interviews with school counselors who participated in the research are presented.

**Table 2.** Themes

| No | Themes                           |
|----|----------------------------------|
| 01 | Perception and Experiences       |
| 02 | Role and Interaction             |
| 03 | Individualized Education Program |
| 04 | Problems                         |

### Perception and Experiences

Most of the participants state that the trainings offered both at the undergraduate level and in the in-service processes regarding inclusive education mainly focus on theoretical content and are insufficient in terms of practice. This situation shows that pre-service teachers have difficulty in responding effectively to the various student profiles they encounter in their professional lives. However, some participants emphasized the importance of the theoretical basis offered by undergraduate education and stated that updating this basic knowledge by reinforcing it with in-service trainings contributed to the field to a certain extent. For example, K1 emphasized the necessity of theoretical knowledge and the role of in-service training in keeping this knowledge up-to-date.

*"The information received for inclusive education at the undergraduate level is an opportunity for students to prepare a solid ground for the theoretical part... With the in-service trainings received during the process, this knowledge and experience can remain up-to-date."*

However, the majority of the participants stated that both undergraduate and in-service trainings were insufficient in terms of content and scope, and that these trainings did not coincide with the realities in the classroom. K2 stated that the theoretical content does not reflect the diversity of students encountered in the field.

*"... I do not think that the undergraduate and in-service trainings I have received are sufficient for inclusive education. We didn't see almost any of the students we met in classes."*

Similarly, K8's statements point to the lack of implementation, as well as the lack of experience in the field of the people providing the trainings.

*"In the undergraduate and in-service trainings we receive, completely theoretical-oriented trainings are given. We are having a hard time because of this situation and because of the fact that the trainers are people who have not worked in the field."*

Some participants stated that the issue of inclusive education was not given enough importance in undergraduate programs. K5's statement points to the disconnect between theoretical knowledge and practical applications.

*"I don't think undergraduate education is very beneficial for inclusive education. In practice, we come across very different things. I think inclusion needs to be given a little more importance in undergraduate education."*

Moreover, it is seen that some teachers do not take any courses related to inclusive education during the undergraduate education process. K3 conveyed this situation in his words and stated that he continued his professional development largely through individual efforts.

*"I did not take a course on inclusive education in undergraduate education. When I started my profession, I gained knowledge through the education I received and my own efforts."*

Some of the participants state that inclusive education makes important contributions to students' social development and self-confidence. According to this view, students with special needs in the inclusive environment have the opportunity to develop their social skills by interacting with their peers with typical development and their self-efficacy perceptions are strengthened. K1 expresses this situation with the following words:

*"Inclusion students are individuals with different characteristics and needs. Together with their peers who show typical behavior, they develop self-confidence and social cohesion by observing, imitating and supporting them in the same classroom environment, in the same school environment."*

Similarly, it is stated that inclusive education in K4 contributes to the development of self-confidence and socialization.

*"... I think it contributes to inclusion students. At least I saw that their self-confidence was supported and that it was an environment where they socialized."*

It is emphasized that inclusive education is developing not only for individuals with special needs, but also for students with typical development. According to K1's statement, there is a two-way interaction in this process.

*"There is mutual inclusion, not only is the special child mingling with other peers, but other children with typical behavior are mingling with each other in the same environment in the same environment as special children, each individual is different and special. With this understanding, which can see differences as richness, it will be the healthiest thing to ensure integration through the mediation of the teacher who creates a climate in his classroom."*

However, many participants stated that inclusive education was not implemented under ideal conditions and therefore could not have the expected effect. It is thought that reasons such as the lack of sufficient knowledge of teachers, crowded class sizes, limited support for individual needs and insufficient physical conditions reduce the effectiveness of inclusive practices. For example, K2 states that the shortage of teachers has negative effects on students.

*"... I do not think that inclusive education contributes to the development of inclusive students. Namely, many teachers do not have enough knowledge about how to treat inclusive students. This negatively affects teachers' perceptions of inclusive students, and unfortunately, they do not want these students in their classrooms."*

Similarly, K8 highlighted the difficulty of individually dealing with inclusive students in crowded classrooms.

*"It is very difficult to take care of inclusive students in the classroom, especially in crowded classrooms. I think inclusive education has done very little for this reason."*

K5's observations, on the other hand, reveal that inclusive students are neglected because teachers have to focus on the overall classroom layout.

*"... Unfortunately, inclusion students in the classrooms are not in focus. The teacher usually teaches the lessons by addressing the whole class, only the inclusive students are given privileges in the exams, and their classes are somehow passed by holding separate exams. Unfortunately, inclusion students get lost in the classroom."*

Some of the participants stated that environmental factors such as physical infrastructure and classroom layout also negatively affected the inclusion process. K3 describes this situation as follows:

*"... We have classroom problems in inclusive classes. We had 7 teachers and 15 students, and due to the lack of classes, collective lessons are given. This distracts the student and the teacher."*

In addition, it is emphasized that the difference in cognitive and academic levels among students complicates the course and makes it difficult for the teacher to address all students. K2 expressed this situation with the following words:

*"In inclusive classes where inclusive students are present, the lessons are taught compared to children at a normal level, which results in inclusion students not getting the necessary efficiency. In addition, the focus of the class is disrupted in inclusive students who are accompanied by behavioral problems, which makes it difficult to teach the lesson."*

Although there were some differences among the interviewees, some respondents stated that teachers offered support to inclusive students in the course process. For example, K4 expresses this situation as follows:

*"... I think that inclusion students are given privileges and helped in the course and in the classroom environment..."*

In general, the opinions of the participants reveal that the current undergraduate and in-service trainings are limited in providing the skills and competencies required by inclusive practices. It is observed that there is a common opinion that the training content should be made more practice-based, structured based on in-class observations and case studies, and that these trainings should be given directly by experts with experience in the field. These findings show that there is a need to restructure inclusive education in terms of both content and method in teacher training programs and professional development processes.

### **Role and Interaction**

The findings obtained from the participants' opinions reveal that school counselors provide various supports to inclusive students both directly and indirectly. These supports include multidimensional practices to support the individual, social and academic development of the student.

In the context of direct supports, it is understood that school counselors carry out studies for inclusive students to get to know themselves, to realize their individual differences and to develop their problem-solving skills. K2, one of the participants, explains this process as follows:

*"School counselors support inclusive students in terms of getting to know themselves, helping them understand their individual differences, and problem solving skills."*

Indirect support, on the other hand, is mostly offered through one-on-one interviews with parents and teachers. In these interviews, goals such as obtaining information about the student's situation, understanding their needs and expectations, and developing family-school cooperation come to the fore. Participant K1 described in detail the operation of this process as follows:

*"As school counselors and guidance teachers, we provide direct and indirect support to inclusive students. One of the most indirect supports is one-on-one meetings with parents. In these meetings, information is exchanged both for the purpose of collecting information about the student from the parents and for the student's special situation, expectations, needs, and how to support the school at home; At the same time, parent interviews are very important in guiding parents. Likewise, teacher interviews are important. In the classroom environment, the student is guided to provide the healthiest environment. With such consultancy, parents and teachers are informed and indirectly support is provided to the inclusion student."*

Some participants stated that school counselors are directly related not only to the individual student but also to the social structure of the classroom environment and contribute to the provision of order in the classroom. The effects of advisors on regulating peer relationships and shaping the attitudes of other students towards the inclusion student are emphasized. Regarding this role, K4 said:

*"I think that school counselors have a lot of influence, that the classroom setup is adjusted at this point, and that they help the inclusion student in terms of how other students should behave. Apart from that, I think it has a lot of impact on providing psychological support to inclusive students."*

Participants state that school counselors play a central role in the inclusion process through parent interviews. The mediators of these meetings are usually consultants and are defined as important actors who coordinate the process. K5 describes this situation in the following words:

*"Parents of inclusive students and school counselors are in constant communication. They generally carry out business and transactions through us. They are also in contact with classroom teachers, but predominantly school counselors are in the first place in communication with parents."*

Similarly, K3 emphasizes the importance of parent collaboration in student success and states that academic support at home supports student learning that lasts:

*"We usually provide parent cooperation. In order for the acquired knowledge to be permanent, it is necessary to communicate with the parents and motivate them frequently. In short, it is important for them to support them at home regarding the continuity of lessons in the home environment..."*

However, some participants stated that this communication with parents was not always at the desired level. In particular, the education level of the parents can adversely affect the guidance and counseling process of school counselors. K8 drew attention to this situation with the following statements:

*"It can be difficult to communicate with parents of inclusion students when there are differences between the topics discussed and the education level of the parents."*

Another main challenge faced by advisors is the insufficient number of advisors compared to the number of students. Participants state that this situation increases the workload and reduces the quality of the support offered. In this context, K8 said:

*"... Considering the number of students and school counselors, this is very challenging."*

On the other hand, some participants stated that school counselors only provide support in general processes and that they cannot adequately respond to special needs specific to the field of special education. In this regard, the opinion of the K5 is noteworthy:

*"Inclusion students usually go to private educational institutions; They can receive more special, unique training from the outside. Unfortunately, school counselors cannot help the student's special branch as adults, but school counselors help in cases such as following the school situation and following the exams for general functioning."*

All these findings reveal the multifaceted roles of school counselors in inclusive practices and how critical the support they provide is at both individual and systemic levels. However, the structural and functional barriers faced by consultants can limit the effectiveness of support processes.

### **Individualized Education Program**

The vast majority of respondents agree that IEPs should be prepared taking into account the individual characteristics of each student. In this direction, it is emphasized that IEPs should be planned annually in accordance with the student's development level and learning speed, updated when necessary, and the goals should be determined realistically, clearly and concisely. Participants state that the basic condition of a functional IEP is a special planning process that puts the needs of the student at the center. K1's view on this situation is as follows:

*"IEPs should be prepared for students and should be adjusted annually. It should be updated when deemed necessary and should progress at the student's pace. In other words, it will be healthier and more functional when it is prepared by setting realistic, clear and concise goals, without skipping the achievements that the student has not earned. So the most important thing to pay attention to is that the most important thing that is necessary for the functionality to be in place is that it is specific to the student."*

However, many participants stated that the IEP files prepared in the application were not sufficient and were mostly prepared superficially, by rote. In particular, there are criticisms that the files created with automatic IEP preparation programs are not compatible with the individual developmental characteristics and special needs of the student. Respondents point out that the quality of IEPs largely depends on the knowledge, skills and awareness of the preparer teacher. In this regard, K2's view is as follows:

*"I don't think the IEP files that have been prepared are sufficient. In particular, I think that IEPs prepared in automated IEP preparation programs are not suitable for the developmental characteristics and needs of students."*

Similarly, K6 stated that IEP files were prepared without taking into account individual differences, which led to inadequacy in practice:

*"I am of the opinion that IEP files are inadequate in practice. I am of the opinion that these files, which are not prepared by addressing individual differences, should be prepared more for their needs."*

Another common opinion of the participants is that IEPs remain only on paper and can be applied to a limited extent. In particular, the crowded class sizes, the concern of teachers about curriculum training and the inadequacy of the physical conditions of the schools prevent the effective implementation of IEPs. The views of K3 and K8, respectively, on this situation are noteworthy:

*"IEPs are sufficient, but there are problems in implementation. The crowded classrooms and the teacher's curriculum anxiety prevent them from implementing an IEP plan." (K3)*

*"The IEP files that are prepared remain entirely on paper and only a small part of them can be implemented. The expectations of the IEP board and the instructor from the inclusion students differ and there is a gap between the goals." (K8)*

In parallel with these findings, some teachers state that IEP files are not prepared and put into practice as they should be in the schools where they work. K5's statement clearly reveals the structural problems in practice and the challenges faced by teachers:

*"Unfortunately, IEP files have never been done as they should have been in any of the schools I have worked in, and their applicability is already problematic. Unfortunately, due to the physical conditions of the schools, the crowding of the classrooms, and the student structure of the class, teachers cannot show enough interest in inclusive students. Unfortunately, IEP files are not prepared as desired in this context. Unfortunately."*

Finally, one participant emphasized that IEPs exist only nominally, but they are not suitable for the student and that this process is a team effort. In this context, it was stated that school administration, teachers and other stakeholders should act in cooperation:

*"The IEP exists in name, it exists on paper; It has no suitability for the student. It's a team effort, including school management. Everyone, including us, is trying to fit it into their sleeve, just to make it work."*

These findings indicate that the IEP process should be carried out effectively not only formally but also functionally, and reveal the structural, administrative and pedagogical problems encountered in practice.

### **Problems**

In line with the opinions of the participants, it is understood that there are various structural, institutional and professional obstacles to the effective implementation of inclusive education. At the beginning of these obstacles are the lack of physical infrastructure, the lack of knowledge of teachers, the ambiguities in job descriptions and insufficient cooperation between stakeholders.

The lack of support education rooms in many schools, the inadequacy of the supply of equipment and crowded classrooms make it significantly difficult to carry out inclusive education efficiently. In particular, the excess of class sizes limits the applicability of individualized instruction and reduces the individual interest of the teacher towards the student. K3, one of the participants, expressed this situation with the following words:

*"If there are no more than two inclusive students in a class, the number of classes should be reduced, not three. Working models should be created according to disability groups. Due to the physical structures in all schools, there is no support education room and equipment cannot be provided."*

Participants state that a significant part of the teachers do not have enough information about how to approach inclusive students and this situation negatively affects teacher attitudes. Lack of knowledge can cause teachers to be reluctant to engage in inclusive practices and not want these students in the classroom. K2 draws attention to this problem with the following statements:

*"... Namely, many teachers do not have enough knowledge about how to treat inclusive students. This negatively affects teachers' perceptions of inclusive students, and unfortunately, they do not want these students in their classrooms."*

Similarly, it is stated that teachers cannot pay enough attention to inclusive students due to intense curriculum pressure, as well as lack of special educational knowledge. K5, one of the participants, explains this situation as follows:

*"There are many reasons, but first and foremost is the fear of catching up with the curriculum. I think that teachers do not show enough interest in catching up with the curriculum. It's the same for us... We don't have as much of the work to be done as we should be with the inclusion students."*

The fact that the duties and responsibilities are not clearly defined in inclusive practices causes role confusion among teachers and makes it difficult to make an effective planning in the process. In particular, the lack of clear boundaries of teachers' roles can lead to lack of planning and inadequacy in practice. It is understood that this situation negatively affects the quality of education and the fulfillment of the individual needs of the student. Participant K7 made a very critical assessment of this:

*"Teachers who are confused about what to do are generally apathetic and irrelevant. They are ignorant of such issues and special education. There is confusion of concepts in all schools. Although our job description is known, these studies, all processes and all details are requested from us. By necessity, it is in violation of the regulation... In primary and secondary schools, this situation is a complete wreck and a complete disaster in large schools, and worse there. All the students, all the apps, are going through the classroom without giving anything."*

In order to maintain inclusive education effectively, there is a need for continuous and qualified cooperation between teachers, school administration, psychological counselors and special education teachers. However, respondents stated that this cooperation was often superficial and that consultancy services were provided only at the seminar level. K6 summarizes the current situation as follows:

*"Every school needs special education subclasses and special education teachers to deal with these issues. We give dry seminars, we cannot go beyond consultancy."*

## Discussion and Conclusion

This research aims to examine in depth the perceptions of school counselors towards inclusive education and their experiences in this field. In this direction, the opinions of a total of eight psychological counselors were consulted. This study, which is based on a qualitative research design, provides comprehensive data to understand the attitudes of counselors towards the inclusion process, the difficulties they face and the roles they play in this process. In this part of the research, the findings are discussed in the light of the existing literature and discussed comparatively with the relevant literature. In this way, it is aimed to make a holistic evaluation of the contributions of school counselors to inclusive education.

The findings of the research reveal that undergraduate and in-service training programs for inclusive education have significant deficiencies in improving the professional competencies of teachers and psychological counselors. Studies in the literature also support that the level of knowledge of experts is insufficient and training is incomplete. Yıldırım Doğru (2007), states that teachers have a lack of knowledge in the field of special education; He emphasized that they have serious needs in terms of recognizing disability groups, theoretical knowledge and practical skills. The majority of the participants think that the theoretical and practical dimension of the training programs is weak, making it difficult for teachers to work effectively with students with different needs. This situation reveals the necessity of structuring theoretical knowledge and practice in a balanced and complementary way in inclusive education. Similarly, in the literature, it is stated that increasing field experience and applied education is critical in improving teachers' competencies for students with special needs (Altun and Gülben, 2009; Gök, 2009; Özbaba, 2000; Varlier, 2004).

Among the positive evaluations of the participants towards inclusive education, the findings that this practice makes significant contributions to the social development, self-confidence and social acceptance processes of students with special needs stand out (Aral, 2011; Odluyurt, 2012). The literature shows that inclusion practices support the socialization of students with special needs by enabling them to be in the same educational environment with their peers (Duran Düşünür, 2018; Şahin, 2010;). However, it is seen that the application cannot reach the expected effectiveness due to the inability to provide ideal conditions, the lack of equipment of teachers and the difficulties in the classroom (Kargın, 2004). This situation points to the existence of systemic and structural problems in education; Crowded classrooms, inadequacy of individualized supports, and lack of physical infrastructure are identified as the main obstacles faced by inclusion practices. Previous studies also emphasize that the inappropriate physical environment conditions are an important problem in the implementation of inclusive education in Turkey (Batu et al., 2004; Kargın et al., 2003; Kaya, 2005; Gok, 2013). The literature reveals that crowded class sizes, lack of materials, and inadequate physical equipment are among the main challenges faced by teachers (Berkant and Atılğan, 2017; Demir and Açar, 2011; Güteryüz and Özdemir, 2015; Zeybek, 2015). In this context, it is necessary to strengthen not only the teachers but also the general resource and support mechanisms of the school in inclusive education.

One of the important findings of the study was the multidimensional roles of school counselors in the inclusion process. The interactions of counselors with students, teachers and parents are among the important factors affecting the success of inclusive practices (Sucuoğlu, 2006). However, the inadequacy of the number of counselors and the difficulties experienced in communication with parents limit the effectiveness of these support processes (Yılmaz and Batu, 2016). Kayıkçı and Turan (2020) stated that guidance and psychological counseling services in primary and secondary schools are limited due to the high number of students per counselor, lack of staff, excessive workload and lack of physical facilities. This situation reveals the importance of quantitative and qualitative strengthening of guidance services and the training of counselors specialized in the field of inclusion (Akar, 2010; Hatunoğlu and Hatunoğlu, 2016; Logan and Wimer, 2013; Van Reusen et al., 2000).

In the field of Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), the mismatch between theory and practice continues. Studies by Öztürk (2009) and Scruggs and Mastropieri (1996) show that teachers' self-efficacy in preparing IEPs is low. This situation indicates that teachers' knowledge and skills regarding the IEP preparation process should be supported. Although there is a common understanding that IEPs should be prepared in accordance with the individual needs of students, in practice it is seen that these programs are prepared for superficial and formality purposes. In addition, in line with the research findings, it has been determined that internet resources are frequently used while preparing IEPs (Aras, 2023; Karakış, 2023; Toprak, 2018; Yıldız, 2024). The fact that IEPs mostly remain documents and cannot be adequately implemented due to class sizes and curriculum load also limits the effectiveness of the application. For this reason, providing the support needed by teachers in the preparation and implementation processes of IEP is a critical requirement in terms of increasing the functionality of the applications (Dikici-Sığırtmaç et al., 2011; Varlier, 2004).

Overall, the findings of the study point to the need for comprehensive updates in inclusive education, both in teacher training programs and in implementation processes. Reinforcing theoretical knowledge with practice, including experienced experts in training processes, strengthening the roles of psychological counselors and increasing the functionality of IEPs can be considered as basic steps for sustainable success in inclusive education. Taking these factors

into account in education policies and curriculum development processes will make significant contributions to ensuring permanent and positive developments in inclusive education.

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### **Suggestions**

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In order to increase the effectiveness of inclusive education in Turkey, it is necessary to make the content of special education and inclusion in teacher training programs more comprehensive, systematic and practice-oriented. In this context, the renewal of the education provided in universities to meet current needs can increase the competencies of teachers in the field. In addition, disseminating and ensuring the continuity of in-service trainings can support the professional development of both teachers and school counselors and ensure that they are effective in solving the difficulties they face.

It is thought that the coordination units to be specially established for the purpose of monitoring, evaluating and directing inclusive practices in schools will allow the process to operate more regularly and transparently. These units will support continuity in inclusive education by ensuring effective communication and cooperation between teachers, guidance services and administrators. Strengthening the guidance and supervision mechanisms of the Ministry of National Education is critical in terms of raising and disseminating the standards of inclusive education. Standards and monitoring systems to be established at the ministry level can contribute to the reduction of differences in practices and the increase in the quality of education.

In addition, increasing resources and disseminating support services (e.g. special education specialists, therapists, allied education staff) will play an important role in creating educational environments suitable for the individual needs of students. In particular, increasing material and human resources to a sufficient level is important for the sustainability of inclusive education.

Finally, increasing parental participation and supporting efforts to improve inclusive awareness in the society will strengthen the social dimension of the education process. Raising awareness of the society about inclusive education is of great importance in terms of ensuring the right to education and social participation of individuals with special needs.

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## Geniřletilmiř Trke zet

Bu arařtırma, okul psikolojik danıřmanlarının kaynařtırma eđitimine ynelik tutum ve grřlerini kapsamlı biimde incelemeyi amalayan nitel bir alıřmadır. Kaynařtırma eđitimi, bireylerin farklılıklarına saygı gstererek sosyal yařama ve eđitim sistemine eřit katılımlarını sađlamayı amalayan kapsayıcı bir yaklařım olarak dnya genelinde uygulanmaktadır. Trkiye’de yaklařık 40 yılı ařkın sredir yrtlen bu eđitim modeli, yasal ve yapısal dzenlemelerle desteklenmektedir. Artan zel gereksinimli birey sayısı ve eđitimin niteliđini arttırmaya ynelik beklentiler dođrultusunda kaynařtırma eđitimi gerek ulusal gerekse uluslararası dzeyde ncelikli bir konu haline gelmiřtir.

Milli Eđitim Bakanlıđı tarafından yayımlanan 2018 tarihli zel Eđitim Hizmetleri Ynetmeliđi’nde (EHY), kaynařtırma eđitimi; zel gereksinimli bireylerin akrabalarıyla birlikte tam zamanlı ya da yarı zamanlı olarak eđitim almalarını sađlayan ve destek hizmetlerle zenginleřtirilmiř bir model olarak tanımlanmaktadır. Ynetmelik, bu srecin planlı ve sistematik bir řekilde yrtlmesini sađlamak amaıyla her okulda Bireyselleřtirilmiř Eđitim Programı (BEP) geliřtirme birimi kurulmasını zorunlu kılmıř; bu birimlerde okul psikolojik danıřmanlarının yer almasını řart kořmuřtur. Bu srete okul psikolojik danıřmanları yalnızca BEP srecinde deđil, aynı zamanda đrencilerin tanınmasından sosyal ve duygusal geliřimlerine, veli iř birliđinden sınıf ii dzenlemelere kadar ok ynl grevler stlenmektedir.

Arařtırma, okul psikolojik danıřmanlarının bu srece ynelik algılarını, deneyimlerini, karřılařtıkları sorunları ve rol tanımlarını anlamaya odaklanmıřtır. Bu dođrultuda nitel arařtırma desenlerinden fenomenoloji (olgubilim) kullanılmıřtır. Katılımcılar, 2023 yılında Milli Eđitim Bakanlıđı’na bađlı okullarda grev yapan ve okullarında kaynařtırma đrencisi bulunan sekiz okul psikolojik danıřmandan oluřmaktadır. Katılımcılar amalı rneklemeye yntemiyle seilmiř, veri toplama aracı olarak arařtırmacılar tarafından geliřtirilen ve uzman grřleriyle yapılandırılmıř yedi soruluk yarı yapılandırılmıř grřme formu kullanılmıřtır. Grřmeler ses kayıt cihazları ile kaydedilmiř, gnll katılım ve etik kurallar gzetilerek gerekleřtirilmiřtir.

Veriler ierik (tmevarım) analizi yntemiyle zmlenmiř ve kodlama sreci iki bađımsız arařtırmacı tarafından yrtlerek temalar zerinde uzlařı sađlanmıřtır. Arařtırmanın bulguları drt tema altında sunulmuřtur: (1) Algı ve Deneyimler, (2) Rol ve Etkileřim, (3) Bireyselleřtirilmiř Eđitim Programı, (4) Sorunlar.

Algı ve Deneyimler temasında katılımcıların byk blmnn, lisans ve hizmet ii eđitimlerin ađrılıklı olarak teorik ierikler barındırdıđını ve uygulamada yetersiz kaldıđını ifade ettiđi grlmřtr. Alınan eđitimlerde alan uzmanlarının sahadaki deneyim eksikliklerinin de sreci olumsuz etkilediđi

belirtilmiřtir. Bazı danıřmanlar, lisans dneminde kaynařtırma eđitimine ynelik hibir ders almadıklarını, bilgi ve becerilerini bireysel abalarla geliřtirdiklerini aktarmıřtır. Katılımcılar, kaynařtırma eđitiminin đrencilerin sosyal uyum, zgven ve toplumsal kabul srelerine olumlu etkileri olduđunu vurgularken, sınıf mevcutlarının kalabalıklıđı, bireysel desteđin sınırlılıđı ve đretmenlerin kaynařtırma konusundaki yetersizliklerinin bu olumlu etkileri glgelediđini ifade etmiřtir.

Rol ve Etkileřim temasında okul psikolojik danıřmanlarının ok boyutlu destek rolleri n plana ıkmaktadır. Okul psikolojik danıřmanları kaynařtırma đrencilerinin bireysel farklılıklarını anlamalarına yardımcı olmakta, sosyal beceri geliřimlerini desteklemekte ve problem zme yeteneklerini gclendirmektedir. Ayrıca velilerle birebir grřmeler yoluyla đrenci hakkında bilgi edinmekte, beklentilerini anlamakta ve evde okulun nasıl desteklenebileceđi konusunda ynlendirmeler sunmaktadırlar. đretmenlerle gerekleřtirilen mřavirlik hizmetleri aracılıđıyla sınıf ii dzenin sađlanmasına katkıda bulunmakta ve đrenciye uygun đrenme ortamı oluřturulmasına destek olmaktadırlar. Ancak bazı katılımcılar, danıřman bařına dřen đrenci sayısının fazlalıđı nedeniyle bu hizmetlerin niteliđinin zaman zaman aksadıđını dile getirmiřtir. Velilerin eđitim dzeylerinin dřklđ de etkili bir iletiřim kurmayı zorlařtıran bir diđer faktr olarak ne ıkmaktadır. Ayrıca danıřmanlar, yalnızca genel rehberlik hizmetleri sunduklarını ancak gereksinime ynelik desteklerin ise sınırlı kaldıđını belirtmektedir.

Bireyselleřtirilmiř Eđitim Programı temasında katılımcılar, BEP’lerin đrencinin bireysel geliřim zelliklerine uygun olarak hazırlanması gerektiđini vurgulamaktadır. Ancak uygulamada BEP dosyalarının ođunlukla yzeysel biimde, ezberci yaklařımlarla hazırlandıđı, internet tabanlı sistemlerin kullanıldıđı ve ođu zaman yalnızca belge dzeyinde kaldıđı ifade edilmektedir. Katılımcılar, sınıfların kalabalık olması, đretmenlerin mfredat yetiřtirme baskısı ve okulların fiziki kořullarının yetersizliđi nedeniyle BEP’lerin byk lde iřlevsiz kaldıđını belirtmektedir. Ayrıca đretmenlerin BEP hazırlama konusunda bilgi ve beceri eksiklikleri, bu srecin etkili yrtlmesini engelleyen bařlıca nedenlerden biri olarak ne ıkmaktadır.

Sorunlar temasında ise kaynařtırma eđitiminin nndeki yapısal, idari ve mesleki engeller arařtırma kapsamında ortaya konmuřtur. En sık dile getirilen sorunlar arasında, fiziksel altyapı yetersizlikleri (rneđin destek eđitim odalarının eksikliđi), ara-gere temininde yařanan sıkıntılar, đretmenlerin zel eđitim konusunda bilgi eksikliđi, grev tanımlarının net olmaması ve paydařlar arası yetersiz iř birliđi yer almaktadır. Katılımcılar, đretmenlerin kaynařtırma đrencilerine ynelik yeterli bilgiye sahip olmamalarının, bu đrencilere karřı olumsuz tutum geliřtirmelerine ve onları sınıf ortamında istememelerine yol atıđını belirtmektedir.

Öğretmenlerin müfredata yetişme kaygısı nedeniyle kaynaştırma öğrencilerine yeterince ilgi gösteremedikleri, bu durumun öğrencilerin gelişimini ve sınıf içi öğrenme ortamlarını olumsuz etkilediği vurgulanmıştır. Görev tanımlarındaki belirsizliklerin ise öğretmenler arasında rol karmaşasına yol açtığı ve sürecin etkin yönetimini zorlaştırdığı ifade edilmiştir. Müşavirlik hizmetlerinin çoğunlukla seminer düzeyinde kaldığı ve iş birliği uygulamalarının yüzeysel olduğu da belirtilmiştir.

Tartışma ve sonuç bölümünde elde edilen bulgular, alanyazın ile karşılaştırmalı olarak ele alınmıştır. Çalışma, okul psikolojik danışmanlarının kaynaştırma sürecinde çok yönlü roller üstlendiğini ancak bu rolleri yerine getirirken önemli engellerle karşılaştıklarını ortaya koymaktadır. Danışman sayısının yetersizliği, fiziki olanakların sınırlılığı, iletişim eksiklikleri ve görev dağılımındaki belirsizlikler, danışmanların etkili hizmet sunmasını zorlaştırmaktadır. Araştırma bulguları, alınan eğitimlerin yetersizlikleri nedeniyle öğretmen ve danışmanların kaynaştırma eğitime ilişkin yeterliklerini olumsuz etkilediğini göstermektedir. Alanyazın da benzer şekilde, öğretmenlerin ve danışmanların kaynaştırma eğitimi konusunda yetersiz kaldığını ve daha fazla uygulama temelli eğitime ihtiyaç duyulduğunu ortaya koymaktadır. Ayrıca BEP süreçlerinin işlevselliğinin artırılması, sadece hazırlık değil uygulama açısından da desteklenmesi gerektiği vurgulanmıştır.

Öneriler arasında ise, öğretmen yetiştirme programlarında kaynaştırma eğitiminin uygulama temelli biçimde yeniden yapılandırılması, hizmet içi eğitimlerin sürekliliğinin sağlanması, okul içi iş birliği ve koordinasyon mekanizmalarının güçlendirilmesi, danışmanların rol tanımlarının netleştirilmesi ve BEP sürecine dair öğretmen yeterliklerinin artırılması yer almaktadır. Ayrıca destek eğitim odalarının yaygınlaştırılması, özel eğitim uzmanları ve yardımcı personel sayısının artırılması, velilere yönelik bilgilendirme çalışmaları yapılması ve toplumda kaynaştırma bilincinin geliştirilmesine yönelik programların düzenlenmesi önerilmektedir.

Bu çalışma, okul psikolojik danışmanlarının kaynaştırma eğitime yönelik görüş ve deneyimlerini çok boyutlu bir biçimde ele alarak, Türk Eğitim Sistemi'nde sürdürülebilir kapsayıcılığın sağlanabilmesi için somut veriler sunmakta, uygulayıcılar ve politika yapıcılara yol gösterici bir kaynak niteliği taşımaktadır.