



## A Study of instructors' educational background who are instructing special education teachers in teaching practice course

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**Abstract.** The aim of this study is to examine instructors' education on special education area who is responsible for teacher practice courses in special education departments. In this study, the description of situation was made by using the document analysis method which is among the qualitative research methods. The data collection process of the research was carried out in 2018. the web pages of these universities chairperson of special education departments have been reached. Research questions are shared with chairpersons of the departments via e-mail or phone. Chairpersons who give consent and willing to participate in this research answer the questions. According to their answers, results were analyzed as numbers and percentages. It was seen that 1669 students graduated from special education teacher and 224 group is opened for teaching practice course. According to this, in most of the special education departments, it is seen that the instructors who did not take this course carry out the course. Looking at the overall results of the study, many of the special education teachers trained in Turkey seems to get their education from universities which established without sufficient staff trained in area.

**Keywords:** Teacher training, teaching practice, special education

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### INTRODUCTION

In education, children's learning and development is closely linked to their teachers. Learning and development of children is only possible if the teachers are more qualified. Teacher efficacy is very important. Teacher education is one of the key points in order to train more qualified teachers. In National Education Legislation 1739, being a teacher defined as a specified job which is responsible with education and related administration duties (Ministry of Education, 2016). Hence, being a teacher is seen as a job which contains multiple applied courses and cannot learned by trial and error after starting the job (Bulunuz & Bulunuz, 2015). There are many approaches in teacher training such as mentorship, having on job training and building a teacher identity for teacher candidates (Beijaard, Ping & Schellings, 2018). There are applied courses in undergraduate programs in order to develop teaching skills before they graduate from faculty of education (Bulunuz & Bulunuz, 2015). Teaching practice course is crucial for teacher candidates in order to transfer their theoretical knowledge to real world (Kavanagh, Kazemi & Mcdonald, 2013; Ulubey, 2018). Moreover, teacher candidates have opportunity to learn in one-on-one environment and if this course is meets the standards, their job satisfaction can increase (Batu, Ergenekon & Özen, 2008).

Professors who is working at the universities as instructors, have great influence and importance on teacher training. (Ping et al. 2018). The characteristics and qualifications of the instructors play a vital role in the development of the teacher candidates they teach (Erişen & Şen, 2002). This situation is valid for teaching practice course. Academicians should meet the standards while they instruct the course (Kelchtermans & Vanassche, 2014). At the same time, they carry the responsibility of being a role model in teacher training (Timmerman, 2009).

Academicians have great responsibility in their area of instruct. Yet, it is determined that many academicians, even if they are qualified for instructing this course, fail to inform teacher candidates, having communication problems and management problems in the teaching practice

course (Alkan, 2017; Grge, okalıřkan & Korkut). In addition to that, instructors of this course can be inefficient in terms of giving feedback and helping to develop new skills for their students (Alkan, 2017). Especially for an applied course, inefficient instructors can be seen as one the main problem (Akyıldız, 2018; Yılmaz, 2011). In order to instruct to an applied course in an area, the instructor should have adequate education in this area to meet the needs of their students. Teacher candidates can only achieve high skills which they need to teach if the instructor is qualified and knowledgeable in the area. The biggest problem of the applied courses is instructors from different areas who are assigned for this course (Alkan, 2017).

The area of special education is working with students who have special needs, thus teacher training should be approached with sensitivity. The training of special education teachers may differ from the training of other teachers in various aspects (Brownell, Coln, McCallum & Ross, 2005; Darling, Dukes, Floyd & Vernon-Dotson, 2014). Special education teachers need to have the expertise and skills to meet the needs of students with special needs and at the same time they should demonstrate commitment to this field and to the education of these students (Brownell, Danielson, Kiely & Sindelar, 2010). Special education teachers should have a positive attitude towards students with special needs, they should also know their characteristics and needs. Moreover, they should be able to master the special interventions they need. The field of special education is one of the areas where teaching practice and applied courses maintain great importance. This course can be considered as the most important course of special education programs. (Ergenekon et.al. 2008). It is very important that special education teachers should be competent in practice because of the children with special needs that they are assigned to teach.

In other words, the special education teachers should be able to meet the needs of individuals with special needs in social, cognitive, communication and academic fields. It is stated that this can only be reached with the teachers trained by adequately equipped teacher instructors (Grgr, 2012). When we look at the studies carried out, there are opinions about the problems of implementation of special education teachers about teacher training, especially in the teaching training courses should be developed in the teacher training programs of universities (Dedeođlu, Durali & Tanrıverdi Kıř, 2004; Baydık, Demir & Ergl, 2013).

The special education area that works with students with special needs is an area that needs to be approached with great sensitivity in teacher training. The training of special education teachers may differ from the other teachers in various aspects (Brownell, Coln, McCallum & Ross, 2005; Darling, Dukes, Floyd & Vernon-Dotson, 2014). For special education teachers, a general knowledge in an area is not enough. The area of special education is one of the areas where teaching practice is extremely important.

One of the biggest problems experienced during the training of special education teachers is to have special education departments which are opened without sufficient number and quality of teaching staff, and to assign the lecturers coming from other fields who do not have sufficient knowledge and education about special education (zyrek, 2008). In Turkey, the number of academics who are trained in special education is very limited. For this reason, there is the opinion that the teaching staff carrying out the teaching practice course is assigned by ignoring the consultancy and application experiences. (Ergenekon et al. 2008). During the training special education teachers, the instructor should understand the work of special education teachers. They should also master the specific strategies which are used for people with special needs and they should carry out the course to support special education teacher candidates' skills which they would use in their job (zyrek, 2008; Vernon-Dotson et.al. 2014). In addition, it is stated that the instructors who teach the teaching practice course should also be sufficient in classroom teaching in order to give practical suggestions and feedback to their students (Grgr, 2012). It is thought that it is not possible for the instructor to meet these requirements in an area without any formal education and they cannot train qualified special education teachers.

There are many studies related to the teaching practice of teacher candidates (For detailed review: Alkan, 2017). In previous research, although instructor competence valued, there are quite few published studies in this subject in Turkey (Akpınar, olak & Yiđit, 2012; Yılmaz,

2011). When these published studies are examined, it is seen that there are studies covering the opinions of prospective teachers, not the professional characteristics and competencies of the instructors. In addition, when the studies related to teaching practice in the field of special education are examined, it is seen that the studies are very few. Although most of the existing studies cover the way of teaching practice course and student views on the subject and only one study examined the process of teacher training (Aksoy et al. 2018; Dedeoğlu et al. 2004; Ergenekon, Özen & Batu, 2008; Gürgür, 2012). In all these studies, the importance of the instructors and their feedback is emphasized. The content of the courses in special education department conducted teaching practice is the same by definition in Turkey (Ergenekon et al. 2008). On the other hand, the instructor who conducts the course is in a very determining position for the teaching practice course in the field of special education. In order to carry out this course, special education instructors who are actually educated in the area are required. In many universities in Turkey, it is thought that instructors who do not have sufficient training in special education are assigned to conduct teaching practice course in special education undergraduate programs due to lack of the number of the academician who are educated in special education. Also some universities' different attitude to the subject, they establish the department of special education without sufficient staff.

However, there is no study on the current education of the teaching practice course instructors in the literature. The aim of this study is to examine instructors' education on special education area who is responsible for teacher practice courses in special education departments. In response to this general objective, the following questions were asked:

1. How many students have graduated from your special education teacher license program this year?
2. How many groups do you have for the teaching practice course?
3. How many of your lecturers who are teaching teacher practice course have taken the teaching practice course in special education department at undergraduate level?
4. How many of your faculty members conducting teaching practice have a doctorate degree in special education?

## METHODS

In this study, the description of situation was made by using the document analysis method which is among the qualitative research methods. Document review examines documents containing information about facts and phenomena that are aimed to be investigated, and includes finding, reading and evaluating resources for a specific purpose (Creswell, 2007, Durgun & Gümüş, 2000, Şimşek & Yıldırım, 2016). In this research, in order to answer questions universities, entitled to Higher Education Council of Turkey, which have special education departments and graduate candidates in 2017-2018 academic year participated.

### Data Collection and Analysis

The data collection process of the research was carried out in 2018. In the data collection process, firstly, universities with special education departments were reached in 2014, and the guidelines and special education departments of universities were determined due to Student Selection and Placement System (ÖSYS) Guide to Higher Education Programs and Quotas. The reason for the 2014 guide is that the teaching practice is the 7 and 8th semester of 4th year program of the undergraduate program. Secondly, through the web pages of these universities chairperson of special education departments have been reached. Research questions are shared with chairpersons of the departments via e-mail or phone. Chairpersons who give consent and willing to participate in this research answer the questions. According to their answers, results were analyzed as numbers and percentages.

The process of collecting the research data via e-mail started on 09.07.2018 and some of the department heads reached and answered the questions immediately. In order to collect data, researchers continued to send e-mails from time to time until 1.10.2018. During this period, the changes in the department headings were checked on the web pages of the universities that did

not return and research questions were forwarded to the new department heads of the universities where the changes took place. During this time, documents obtained from the universities that returned by e-mail or telephone were analyzed. 3 universities could not be included in the research because they did not provide or refused to provide information.

According to the University Entrance Exam Guide-2014 in Turkey, there are special education department of education services in 20 universities and there are several different programs in some of these universities. It was determined that 20 of these 20 universities had education of intellectual disability teacher program, three had education of hearing disability teacher program and three had a gifted education teacher program and one visually impaired teacher program.

The lack of access to the data of a private university that does not want to participate in the study for ethical reasons and a non-repatriating state and a private is the limitation of this research. In spite of these limitations, the available data were examined carefully, and the data collected for the reliability of the research findings were examined separately by the researchers and their results were compared.

## RESULTS

### Findings Related to The First and Second Sub-Problems of The Research

When the undergraduate programs of the graduating special education departments, which are the first sub-question of the study, are examined, it is seen that 1669 students have graduated from special education teaching. In the second sub-question of the study, 224 groups were opened for the teaching practice course.

### Findings Related to The Third Sub-Problem of The Research

Findings related to the third sub-problem of the research are given in Tables 1 and 2.

**Table 1.** Number of lecturers who took / did not take teaching practice course at undergraduate level special education department and carried out teaching practice course (2017-2018)

Universities	Number of faculty members receiving teaching practice in undergraduate special education department in their own education	Number of teaching staff who do not take teaching practice in the special education department at undergraduate level in their own education
1	9	8
2	0	4
3	13	13
4	15	5
5	1	5
6	0	7
7	0	16
8	1	5
9	3	4
10	3	21
11	2	6
12	8	11
13	2	12
14	2	41
15	6	8
16	3	3
17	7	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>171</b>

**Table 2.** Number of groups with and without teaching practice course from the instructor who took teaching practice in the special education department at undergraduate level (2017-2018)

Universities	With teaching practice/ the number of groups	Without teaching practice/the number of groups
1	9	8
2	0	4
3	13	0
4	5	10
5	1	5
6	0	7
7	0	16
8	1	4
9	3	1
10	3	21
11	2	6
12	8	11
13	2	12
14	2	41
15	6	8
16	3	3
17	7	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>159</b>

When Table 1 is examined, it is seen that there are 246 instructors in the special education department at the undergraduate level in 2017-2018 academic year. When the distribution of the instructors is examined, the number of the instructors who take teaching practice at the undergraduate level is 75 (30,5%), and the number of instructors without the course is 171 (69,5%).

When Table 2 is examined, it is seen that the number of groups who took teaching practice course from the instructor who took the same course in the undergraduate level in special education department was 65 (29%) and the number of groups who took teaching practice course from the instructor who did not take the course in the undergraduate special education department was 159 (71%). In addition, it is seen that 22,25 students who graduated from the special education department in the 2017-2018 academic year received a teaching staff in the special education department at the undergraduate level.

### Findings Related to The Fourth Sub-Problem of The Research

Findings related to the fourth sub-problem of the research are given in Tables 3 and 4.

**Table 3.** Number of faculty members with / without PhD degree in special education department and conducting teaching practice courses (2017-2018)

Universities	With PhD. Or PhD. Student in Special Education	No PhD. in Special Education
1	10	7
2	1	3
3	10	3
4	3	12
5	6	0
6	3	4
7	2	14
8	5	0
9	2	2
10	1	23
11	4	4
12	2	17
13	4	10
14	8	35
15	2	12
16	5	1
17	3	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>153</b>

**Table 4.** Number of groups taking teaching practice courses from faculty members with / without doctorate degree from special education department

Universities	Number of groups which took course from an instructor with a doctorate degree from special education department or PhD. student	Number of groups with an instructor without doctorate degree in special education
1	10	7
2	1	3
3	10	3
4	3	12
5	6	0
6	3	4
7	2	14
8	5	0
9	2	2
10	1	23
11	4	4
12	2	17
13	4	10
14	8	35
15	2	12
16	5	1
17	3	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>153</b>

Lastly, when table 4 is examined there are a total of 224 faculty members with or without a PhD. degree in special education. When the distribution of the lecturers is examined, it is seen that the number of faculty members with a PhD. degree in the special education department is 71 (31.6%) whereas the number of faculty members who do not have a PhD. degree in the special education and who carry out the teaching practice course is 153 (68.4%). In addition, considering that a total of 1669 students graduated from special education teaching in the 2017-2018 academic year, it is seen that during the implementation courses, a faculty member with a doctorate degree to student ratio is 23.5 students.

## DISCUSSION and CONCLUSIONS

Recently it is on the agenda of increasing the quality of special education in Turkey in many institutions. In this study, which has performed in Turkey related to the special education teacher training, special education teachers at the undergraduate level of training related to special education is to examine the conduct of teaching practice lessons in conducting instructor training program.

In line with this general objective, the number of students graduated from undergraduate programs, the number of teaching practice groups in universities, the teaching staff who carry out the teaching practice course, whether they have received teaching practice in the field of special education in their education processes and whether they have a PhD. degree in the field of special education have been examined. Within the scope of the aim of the study, the education of the instructors in the field of special education was examined. According to this, 75 (30.5%) of the teaching staff were conducting the course and took teaching practice course from the department of special education in their own education, while the number of teaching staff who did not take the teaching practice course from special education department was 171 (69.5%).

Accordingly, it is seen that most of the prospective teachers who will graduate from special education departments take the teaching practice course from the courses carried out by the instructors who have not taken this course at undergraduate level. Accordingly, it is seen that most of the prospective teachers who will graduate from special education departments take the teaching practice course from the courses carried out by the instructors who have not taken this course at undergraduate level. In the special education departments, an instructor who has not taken the teaching practice course from the special education department may have

taken the teaching practice which is very important in special education at the master or doctoral level. Nevertheless, this ratio is so high should be taken in consideration. In the previous studies, it was found out that the prospective teachers were not satisfied with the teaching practice course and that they could not get enough counseling from the instructors (Görgeç et al. 2012). Akyıldız (2018), evaluates that this may be the source of the fact that the instructors are from fields other than the field of application they carry out.

Within the scope of the other objectives of the study, it was examined whether the instructors who conduct the course received doctorate education in the field of special education. Accordingly, when the distribution of teaching staff is examined, 71 (31.6%) of the faculty members who have doctorate degree from special education department and carry out teaching practice course, 153 (68.4%) of the teaching staff who do not have doctorate degree from special education department.

It is seen that the majority of the candidates who will graduate from special education departments take teaching practice courses conducted by instructors who have not received doctorate education in special education field.

In addition to this, although it is seen that the teaching practice course is officially conducted by a faculty member with a doctorate degree from the special education department, the practice courses are carried out by research assistants in some universities. Whether the instructors responsible for the course give feedback to students on a weekly basis or the lack of data collection in the study about the frequency of observing the students can be considered as the limitation of this research. According to the researches, teacher training should be examined first to improve the quality of special education and it is important for the teacher candidates to have instructors who are educated in special education (Brownell et al. 2005; Nartgün, 2010). Yet when we look at the results in Turkey it appears to be significant problems in this regard. This situation may cause difficulties even in general education departments (Alkan, 2018; Akyıldız, 2018), it is thought that this situation may cause even greater problems in the special education department, which has different students, the methods, materials, course processing.

It is thought that faculty members who have not been educated in special education may experience many problems such as adaptation to the profession, difficulty in understanding individual education, difficulties in approaching children with special needs or transfer their knowledge directly to their students (Nartgün, 2010).

When the trial of the overall results of fact, the trained special education teachers, many of adequate staff received training in the department established the presence and the students teaching practice course with instructors qualified to do their counseling in Turkey it is unable to meet even. Considering that it is stated in the literature that the instructor who conducts the course during the teaching practice should be sufficient in classroom teaching in order to give practical examples and feedback, the research findings are thought-provoking in this respect. Özyürek (2008), mentions that special education teacher training is one of the biggest dangers in training in Turkey, because of the inadequate teaching staff and inadequate teaching practice lessons they carry these instructors. This situation directly affects prospective teachers of special education. However, it indirectly affects the students with special needs and their families to be educated by these teachers.

As a result of this research, it is seen that the number of academicians who have received special education training is quite insufficient in the existing special education departments. Special education is an applied area. Teaching practice is considered as one of the most important courses of this department (Ergenekon et al. 2008). Based on the previous research and the findings of this research, it is recommended to increase the number of academicians who have been educated in the field of special education and to prevent academicians who have not been educated in the special education field from conducting courses in an area where they are not trained. Also, increasing the quotas of existing graduate programs in special education departments in order to increase the number of academics have been trained to, working on establishing graduate programs re recommended. Also more academics should be send to abroad to get special education higher education while Turkey is waiting for more academics.

According to this, in most of the special education departments, it is seen that the instructors who did not take this course carry out the course. Looking at the overall results of the study, many of the special education teachers trained in Turkey seems to get their education from universities which established without sufficient staff trained in area. They do not even have a teaching staff who can mentor them in their teaching practice course. In future research, it should be investigated how teaching practice courses are conducted in different universities in terms of efficacy. It is thought that the realization of research on these questions in the future is important to determine the current situation.

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