

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN TURKEY

Definition

The concept of inclusive education is identified as follows in Ministry of Education (MONE) Special Education Regulations: "Inclusive education is a special education practice based on the principle that the education of individuals with special education needs (SEN) continue their education with their peers without disability in the official and private schools at pre-school, primary education, secondary education and adult education level by providing them educational support services" (MONE, 2006).

A. Policy, Legislation and Strategies

After the legislation and regulations made in 1983, 1997, 2004 and 2006 (MONE, 1983, 1997, 2004, 2006), education for children with SEN has been improved in Turkey.

The basic principles of special education in line with the general objectives and basic principles of Turkish National Education are; all individuals with SEN benefit from special education services in accordance with their needs, interests, abilities and competencies; individuals with SEN start their education at an early age; planning and execution of special education services of the individuals with SEN, as much as possible without altering their social and physical environment; giving preference to the education of individuals with SEN together with their peers, considering their educational performance and making adaptations in the purpose, content of teaching process and evaluation; collaboration with organizations and institutions who provide rehabilitation services to the individuals with SEN, to maintain their education at all levels and in all types; developing individualized education plans and implementing the education programs according to the needs of individual considering the competencies of them, the characteristics in all developmental areas and competencies in different academic areas (MONE, 2006)

Special education services in early childhood

Early childhood education covers the education of individuals aged between 0-36 months. Local education authorities may open early childhood education units in special education centers (schools) in order to provide educational services for the children with SEN in accordance with the recommendation of the Board of Special Education Services.

Early childhood education is planned taking into account the importance of early intervention in achieving the desired goals for the later stages of education. In early childhood education besides the education of the individual, his family is also informed and supported for their contribution of the education of the individual. Early childhood education services are

carried out in the schools and institutions and when needed at home. Planning and coordination of early childhood education services for special education are made by the Board Special Education Services. Measures are taken and necessary arrangements are done to provide education for individuals with SEN with their peers without SEN. It is also possible that education services may also be provided in independent educational units. Ministry of Education makes cooperation and collaboration with the associated organizations and institutions to identify and detect individuals with SEN and to carry out the education provided for these individuals. For example, with a program of Ministry of Health the mothers are monitored starting from their pregnancy period and this monitoring is continued after the baby is delivered until the age of 6. If a problem is detected in the child, necessary precautions are taken and the child is directed to the associated institutions such as hospitals, guidance and research centers.

Special education services in pre-school education

Pre-school education is compulsory for the individuals with SEN between 37-66 months. The preference is to have the individuals with SEN continue their education in inclusive classrooms with their peers in mainstream schools. However it is also possible to continue their education in special education pre-schools for 37-66 month-old children and open special education classes for 48-66 month-old children in mainstream schools. The pre-school education for individuals with SEN may be extended to 78 months with the report of Special Education Assessment Committee and the written consent of the parents (MONE, 2006).

Special education services in primary education

The main preference is to have the individuals with SEN continue their education in mainstream schools with their peers. However, the individuals who are not able to achieve the general goals in educational programs maintain their education in special need schools and institutions where educational plans are prepared considering the performance levels of individuals in developmental areas (MONE, 2006).

B. Implementation of the Policy

In the diagnostic process of individuals who need special education, developmental characteristics and educational qualifications of the individual for educational purposes are identified and the least restricted educational environment and the special education services that will be provided for the individual are decided. Educational assessment and diagnostics of individual is done in the Guidance and Research Center by the Board of Special Education Evaluation Committee with objective standardized tests and the individual characteristics measurement tools. In diagnostics; the health report taken from the hospital related with the disability of the individual; mental, physical, psychological, social development characteristics;

competency in the academic fields, educational performance and needs and individual development report are taken into consideration. National education authorities, formal and non-formal educational institutions, health care institutions, universities, units affiliated to Social Services and Child Protection Agencies and units of local government share the responsibility in diagnosis and evaluation of individuals with SEN under the steering of Guidance and Research Centers.

The main principle in special education is to provide education for individuals with SEN in inclusive classes in mainstream schools. The points considered in implementation of inclusion can be explained as follows (MONE, 2006):

Preference is to have individuals with SEN continue their education in the same institutions with their peers without disabilities. Individuals with SEN may be in mainstream schools for full-time or in special classes for part-time. Part-time inclusion can be carried out through participation of the individual with SEN in some classes or extracurricular activities together with their peers without disability. Pupils with SEN who continue their education through mainstreaming follow the teaching program implemented at the school. Additionally, individualized education program for the inclusion pupils is prepared based on the teaching program they follow, in line with the needs and educational performance of the pupils.

The schools with inclusive classes make physical, social, psychological environmental arrangements in line with the pupil disabilities. For these schools special educational materials are provided and supportive educational rooms are opened to implement effective and efficient educational services. In the support education rooms, teachers for education of different special needs (e.g. visual, hearing, mental retardiness), primary school teachers and subject teachers are appointed. In support education rooms, one-to-one education is provided considering the individualized education program to ensure the maximum benefit.

In inclusive classrooms, maximum 2 pupils with SEN may be placed. The maximum number of pupils in inclusive classrooms are arranged as; 10 if there are 2 inclusive pupils and 20 if there is 1 inclusive pupil in pre-schools; and 25 if there are 2 inclusive pupils and 35 if there is 1 inclusive pupil in primary school classes.

Required arrangements are done through taking necessary measures related with teaching materials, teaching methods and evaluation and assessment in accordance with the type of disability and educational performance and need of the individual.

Reverse inclusive education, which is the education of individual without SEN in the same class with the pupils with SEN, may also be implemented. This could be possible in the same classes or in the classes opened in the special education schools. The class size may be maximum 14 in the pre-school classrooms and 20 in primary school classes, when there are 5 pupils with SEN in the class.

Teacher education

Some universities have departments for teaching of different types of special needs; namely visual impairment, hearing impairment, giftedness, mentally retardation and a general teacher education department on special needs education. In pre-school and primary teacher education departments have a course on special needs as a must course, while secondary teaching departments simply offer the course as an optional elective.

In our university, although it is one of the largest education faculties in Turkey, the pupil teachers at pre-school and primary teacher education departments have only one special education lesson and they learn about the concept of inclusion theoretically. In the courses for special needs, it is seen that the main focus is on inclusive education when the syllabus of these lessons examined. The content of the courses include the following components: Fundamentals of inclusive education (definition of inclusive education, key concepts, and the history of the inclusive education movement); Overview of children with SEN; How to create an Individual Education Plan; How to design and adapt activities for children with SEN; How to assess learning outcomes of children with SEN.

C. Needs and Challenges

Many research studies, articles, master's and doctoral theses that examined inclusive practices have been prepared since the beginning of inclusion practices in Turkey. In these studies, concept and principles of inclusion, attitudes towards the inclusive education and individuals with SEN, information and opinions about inclusive education and individuals with SEN, and characteristics of inclusive pupils were generally examined (Eğitim Reformu Girişimi [ERG] & [Tohum Otizm Vakfı] TOHUM, 2011). In the studies about concept and practice of inclusion in Turkey, the necessity of inclusive education was defended, the principles of inclusive education and support services necessary for a successful inclusive education were described (Batu, 2000; Baydık, 1997; Eripek, 1984, 1986; Tüfekçioğlu, 1997; Kırcaali-İftar, 1997, 1998). The class size, providing the requirements for pupils with SEN, the implementations of the Individualized Education Programmes, the cooperation between teachers and families for inclusive education in Special Education Services Regulation were not performed enough in the real implementation (Sucuoğlu, 2004). The importance of having sufficient knowledge and skills in this area and having a positive attitude toward the inclusion pupils by teachers were emphasized in many studies in Turkey (Kırcaali-İftar, 1992). According to the studies, the teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education and pupils with SEN, varied according to whether they feel themselves enough about the inclusive education model or not (Sucuoğlu, 2004). Teachers feeling themselves inadequate in this regard might be reluctant to apply the model of inclusion (Sucuoğlu, 2004). In the field research studies, it was emerged as a result that teachers supported the inclusive education provided that the

support for special education was given to them (Sucuođlu, 2004). In a research conducted by Özyaydın & Çolak (2011), most of the teachers stated that they did not have any support from the families and the school management for their inclusive classrooms, and they have very crowded classes. Sucuođlu & Kargın (2008) stated that no special training support for teachers and pupils were provided and the teachers facing the problems were helpless in the classroom implementing inclusive education.

Teacher education is an important point for improvement of inclusive education. Since the courses teachers take during their undergraduate years do not prepare them for working with children with disabilities, teachers, who are the most important factor of inclusion (Batu, 2010), often graduate without gaining knowledge or experience working in inclusive classrooms. Hence, teachers generally face serious difficulties regarding inclusion, and inclusion practices may not yield the desired outcomes (Batu, 2010), Indeed their need for knowledge about inclusion and children with SEN is frequently emphasized in the literature (Akalin, Demir, Sucuođlu, Bakkalođlu, & İşcen, 2014; Batu, 2010; Sucuođlu, Bakkalođlu, Karasu, Demir, Akalin, 2014).

In conclusion, at the governmental level, the regulations and legislations are well organized but studies show that there are some barriers to the inclusion: majority of the individuals with SEN are oriented to the special education schools, since physical conditions of other schools are not suitable for the disabled individuals; negative attitudes of the school staff, pupils and parents; inadequate information and furnishings in special education; lack of appropriate tools and materials for the individuals with SEN; lack of a standard school model where each pupil whether he/she is disabled or not benefits from the educational opportunities equally; inadequacy of developing inclusion policy in special education about raising awareness related with inclusion of the disabled in the society; inadequacy in increasing the vocational competences of teachers for special education.