

Early Childhood Special Education for Children Who Need Special Education in Turkey

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Abstract

The early years of the life of a child are very important. During infancy and early childhood years, children grow fast and are ready to learn quickly. Early childhood development is an important point for a productive and regular life of a child who has special needs. Because of that, studies on brain and brain development and process have revealed that it is compulsory to provide support services for pregnant women and women who have newborn babies up to three years old. In early childhood term, 80% of the brain develops and due to that students' in-school, and life success are affected by early education experiences. Early intervention programs - if utilized from early pregnancy programs - are decreased the number of antenatal and postnatal problems or possible risks damages of new-born babies and, in some cases, avoid developmental delays of the child. If a child who has special needs make use of special education programs, he or she might maintain his/her life on his/her own. Some children and their families confront specific difficulties and need more help. Early intervention programs offer early intervention services to children who have special needs and their families in early childhood term. This study presents the current status and development of early intervention programs in Turkey. The study aims to describe the structure of special education and early intervention system in Turkey.

Keywords: Early childhood, Early intervention, Intervention programs, Special education

1. Introduction

Individuals who need special education benefit from special education services depending on their needs, interests, abilities, and competencies (Allen & Cowdery, 2015; Cook, Klein & Chen, 2015). The educational needs of those individuals must be identified as earliest as possible, and it must be provided required social support to them for them to integrate the society successfully. Children who have special needs must be educated with their normal peers by providing them with special education supports and services (Moné & Bringen, 2006). Collaboration with organizations and institutions which provide rehabilitation services to the individuals with special education need is important for the continuity of education (Cook, Klein & Chen, 2015; Dönmez, 2000). Preparing individualized education plans for individuals who have special needs by considering their competencies and integrating them into education can affect those individuals' characteristics and skills in all developmental areas positively (Eres, 2010; MONE, 2008). The education programs must be planned with a suitable setting. The teaching methods selected for the special education curriculum is critical, and the teaching methods can be changed based on target skills. Additionally, the education program must be planned as early as possible for individuals with disabilities. Preschool education is an obligation for children with special needs in Turkey for 36-72 months old. It is essential to provide the equality of opportunity in education for all children including the ones with special needs (Melekoğlu, Çakıroğlu & Malmgren, 2009; MONE, 2008). Nonetheless, there isn't any program for children with disabilities 0-36 months in Turkey thus far. This article presents the current status and developments in early intervention education in Turkey. The purpose of this paper is to describe the structure of the special education and early intervention system in Turkey and current developments in the early intervention field.

2. Special Education Need in Early Childhood

The early years of a child are critical. It is important to understand how early intervention it is implemented and interpreted around the world. During the early childhood term, children grow fast and are ready to learn quickly. Brain research has demonstrated that it is compulsory to provide supportive services for pregnant women and young children from birth to age three (Cook, Klein & Chen, 2015). During this period, approximately 80% of the brain develops (Phillips & Shonkoff, 2000). Early intervention programs minimize the disability-based problem and in some cases prevent delays in the development of infants and toddlers with disabilities. Some studies about early intervention programs indicate that the early intervention programs are useful in the long term for individuals concerning developmental factors. The early intervention is critical for children with disabilities. The Early Intervention Program is a nationwide program that provides many different types of early intervention services to infants and toddlers with disabilities and their families. Some children and families might confront particular challenges and need extra help. In these cases, providing assistance makes a difference on disabled child's life (MONE, 2015; Yıldırım Doğru, 2015). The development of the child must be monitored, and the needs of that child must be identified at the early years of his/her life. The child is dependent on his/her family at the early childhood term. The child who has developmental delay needs more support than a healthy child. Early childhood education is an essential term for the child with disabilities to reach the level of the healthy child (Trivette, Dunst, Boyd & Hamby, 1995).

Portage Early Education Program, Small Steps Early Intervention Program, and Tohum Autism Foundation Early Education Programs are early education programs which are ongoing in Turkey [13]. The fundamental principle of special education which has adopted along with the new legislation is to plan and carry out the services without isolating individuals with special education needs from their social and physical environment. Also, special education services are twofold: education and intervention services. The policies and applications set for the disabled are in fact related to not only the disabled but also the whole society. Bringing social and adaptation abilities to the children with disabilities are associated with the quality of special education as well as conscious awareness of the society about disability. Living standards of disabled population and quality of services related to this population are indicators of economic and educational development level of the countries.

3. Special Education Need in Early Childhood

Early intervention services are specialized services to help young children who have developmental delays or specific health conditions. Different types of specialists work with these kids in these services. Providing such services in the early years of the life of children who have special needs catch up with normal levels and increases their chances for success in school and through life (Eres, 2010). Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) provides early intervention services in the U.S.A. Through grants to each state from the federal government, children who are qualified may receive services free of charge or with low cost in the U.S.A. Every U.S. state and territory provides these services through their own comprehensive, coordinated programs. Also, some services support the families receiving early intervention services. Pre-school education is compulsory for the individuals who are between 37-66 months with special education need (Phillips & Shonkoff, 2000). According to the preference of families, the children may continue their education in inclusive classrooms with their peers in mainstream schools (Trivette, Dunst, Boyd & Hamby, 1995). It is also possible for 37-66 month-old children to continue their education in special education pre-schools or open special education classes for 48-66 month-old children in mainstream schools (Kayılı, Koçyiğit, Yıldırım Doğru & Çiftçi, 2010). The pre-school education for individuals who need special education should be extended up to 78 months by taking into consideration the report of Special Education Assessment Committee and the written consent of the parents (Moné & Bringen, 2006).

Early childhood education is planned by considering the importance of early intervention for achieving the desired goals for the later stages of learning. In early childhood education, families of individuals who need special education are informed about the education process (Moné & Bringen, 2006). Early childhood education services in Turkey are carried out in the schools and institutions and when needed at home. The Board of Special Education Services makes planning and coordination of early childhood education services for special education. Ministry of National Education makes cooperation and collaboration with the associated organizations and institutions to identify individuals who need special education and to provide the education for these individuals. For example, with a program of the Ministry of Health, the mothers are monitored starting from their pregnancy period until after the baby is born. If a problem is identified in the child, necessary precautions are taken, and the child and his/her family are directed to the associated institutions such as hospitals, guidance, and research centers. Table I shows the

number of pre-school special education institutions available in Turkey.

Table 1. Number of pre-special education schools/class and total student

Type of School	School/Class	Number of students
Kindergartens within Special Education School	143	1010
Inclusive Education (Kindergarten)	-	1399

3.1 Quality special education classroom in Turkey

Special education classrooms are set up for the individuals who cannot benefit from the mainstream education. The committee decides the need of child before setting up a special education classroom. Ministry of National Education provides materials and specially designed classes according to the needs of every type of children [6].

3.2 The Mainstreaming Education At Special Education Class

The student enrolls in a special education classroom, and if the unit of individualized education program decides the mainstreaming education for some of the lessons and social activity, the child with special needs can take lessons with his/her non-disabled peers. Half-mainstreaming education contains peer education and peer education provides opportunities to the child with special needs about founding friendship with non-disabled children. The extra advantage of mainstreaming education for non-disabled children are meeting different individuals and understanding individual differences (MONE, 2015).

4. Documents to Be Arranged For the Preschool Child with Special Needs

Twice a year, at the end of the term, the development reports of the child with special needs, who is going to continue special education class, are arranged.

4.1 The Process of Providing Material for Special Education Classrooms

School's General Management, School and Family Association and National Education Management with cooperation provide for the needs of Special Education Classrooms (MONE, 2015).

5. Early Intervention Programs and Applications in Turkey

Special Education Regulation (No. 573) published in 1997, defines the basic principles of special education and emphasizes the importance of including students with special needs in general education classrooms. According to these principles:

- Special education is considered an indispensable branch of general public education;
- All children with special education needs should be provided with special education services irrespective of the severity of their disabilities;
- Early intervention is a crucial step for effective special education provision;
- For children with special needs, individualized educational programs addressing to their uniqueness;
- Children with special needs should be educated in the least restrictive settings with their non-disabled peers;
- Vocational education and rehabilitation services should be provided without interruption for children with special needs; and for all levels, educational services for children with special needs should be planned by the relevant institutions (Dönmez, 2000; Melekoğlu, Çakıroğlu & Malmgren, 2009).

The early educational services in Turkey for 0-36 month-old children provide them with services such as diagnosing, informing and parent education. The educational needs of a disabled child are identified based on his substantial and educational performance, and the individualized educational programs are prepared accordingly (MONE, 2015).

5.1 Legal obligations about early interventions in Turkey

Educational services for children with special needs is a legal requirement in Turkey (Dönmez, 2000).

The new Special Education Act, enacted in 1997, contains the following provisions on early childhood and pre-school education:

Article 6: Early childhood special education services are maintained in homes and institutions by informing and supporting the family.

Article 7: Pre-school education is compulsory for children who require special education. This training is provided in private schools and other pre-school education institutions. Depending on the developmental and individual characteristics of children who need special education, pre-school education periods can be extended (Allen & Cowdery, 2015).

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 an individual are done with objective, standardized tests and the individual subjective measurement tools in the Guidance and Research Center by the Board of Special Education Evaluation Committee. In diagnostics; the health report is obtained from the hospital related with the disability of the individual; mental, physical, psychological, social development characteristics; their performance in the academic fields, and needs and individual development report are taken into consideration (Melekoğlu, Çakıroğlu & Malmgren, 2009). 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 work with Guidance and Research Centers for diagnosing and evaluating of individuals with special education needs (MONE, 2015).

Concerning special education applications; early childhood education covers the periods between 0-36 months. The following aspects are taken into account in the application of these training services:

- a) Early childhood education services are planned by considering the importance of achieving the desired goals for further education at this critical time.
- b) Early childhood education takes place by informing and supporting the parents to contribute to the knowledge of the individual.
- c) Early childhood education services are carried out at schools and institutions or home when necessary.
- d) The planning and coordination of early childhood education services are carried out by a special education services board. Measures are taken to ensure that early childhood individuals can be educated together with their non-disabled peers, or training services can be provided in independent units.
- e) For the process of planning and implementation of early childhood education services, first, the educational needs of the individual and the family are determined.
- f) Ministry of National Education cooperate with the relevant institutions and organizations during the process of diagnosis of the individuals in early childhood and detecting the offered services which will be provided for those individuals.

Capitalize only the first word in a paper title, except for proper nouns and element symbols. For papers published in translation journals, please give the English citation first, followed by the original foreign-language citation (MONE, 2015).

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

During the early childhood, children grow fast and are ready to learn quickly. Brain research has demonstrated that it is compulsory to provide supportive services for pregnant women and young children from birth to age three. During the early childhood period, approximately 80% of the brain is developed (Phillips & Shonkoff, 2000). Effective early prevention and treatment programs are necessary to reduce the burden of behavioral problems in disabled children. High-quality early intervention services can change a child's developmental trajectory and improve outcomes for children, families, and communities (Yıldırım Dođru, 2015).

There are some challenges before the disabled people taking their education which they need in Turkey. On the other hand, the services for the people needing special education have great importance in the context of the development of such people. However, when examining the data of Turkey, it is clear that the expectation of education of the disabled people is low but also the number of the children receiving the special education between 0-18 is rather small when compared with the total. Only ninety thousand out of one million children can receive such special education services, which is a topic. As much as the deficiency of the special education services in Turkey, the quality of the special education provided by the government is also required. Presentation of early intervention models in the school environment must be examined in depth for future research. The learning outcomes of early intervention programs in Turkey must be examined through longitudinal studies.

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