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Organizational and Educational Problems at a Special Education Kindergarten in Turkey: Action Research

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Abstract. This study aimed to solve problems related to organizational aspects and educational planning and implementation at a public special education kindergarten in Turkey. Action research was carried out in the study, which focused on stakeholder involvement to solve problems, by a team composed of the school principal, teachers, two faculty members who are associate professors in the field of special education and a research assistant. Through this research process, actions were planned and practised to increase the quality of education, improve teachers' problem-solving skills, increase parents' involvement and participation at school and to realize the goals of effective special education practices. Data were collected via participant observations, field notes, meeting records and research logs. In addition, a focus group interview was held with teachers and a semi-structured interview was conducted with the school principal at the end of the process to determine their views. The obtained data were analysed by conducting content analysis. Based on findings, it was determined that action research can be used to solve problems experienced at schools, teachers can implement more effective teaching practices by taking advantage of the process and they can cope more effectively with students' behaviour problems.

Keywords. Special education, early childhood special education, action research.

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All children have different characteristics with their level of development, learning style, personality and family. The child discovers and develops the outside world as a result of experiences gained through interaction with his environment (Kartal, 2008). The term 0-6 / 8 years old, called early childhood, is a very important period for development. In this period, the development of children is very fast and children are ready to learn many skills (Birkan, 2001; Olçay-Gül & Diken, 2009). Heward (1996), Kroth and Edge (1997) emphasize that learning experiences in the first years of life are important for children with special needs as well as for children with normal development (Birkan, 2001). In Turkey, it is stated first in the "Law on Children in Need of Special Education" numbered 2916 enacted in 1983 that it is essential to start education of special needs children's early. However, this principle accepted in the law has not been understood and applied for a long time (Sazak-Pınar, 2006). Looking at the current Regulation Governing Special Education Services, pre-school education has become compulsory for children with special needs (Republic of Turkey Ministry of National Education, 2018). For this purpose, it is seen that public or private special education kindergartens can be opened for children who have completed 36 months and have not completed 66 months, as well as special education classrooms in the elementary schools. (Republic of Turkey Ministry of National Education, 2018).

In preschool period, some of the students with special needs attend preschool institutions, where inclusive practices are carried out, with their peers with normal development, while others receive education with their peers in a similar disability group in preschool special education institutions. (Bakkaloğlu, 2013; Republic of Turkey Ministry of National Education, 2018). When the Regulation Governing Special Education Services (Republic of Turkey Ministry of National Education, 2018) is examined, there is no detailed explanation regarding the functioning of special education kindergartens. The regulation includes a timeline, class size and a brief description of the activities that will be carried out by the general education teacher and preschool teacher. We can link this situation to the fact that the application is relatively new and has not become widespread yet. However, this uncertainty on paper will affect the quality of the applications of these institutions will perform.

Although special education kindergartens are a relatively new practice, preschool teachers have been working with children with special needs for many years. In the literature, it is seen that there are some studies on preschool teachers working with children with special needs. For example, Gök and Erbaş (2011) conducted semi-structured interviews with 10 pre-school teachers and determined their opinions and suggestions on inclusion practice. The researchers stated that the participant

teachers wanted to have more information about individuals with special needs and the application of inclusion. In addition, the participant teachers stated that they felt inadequate in the classroom due to lack of information. Bozarslan and Batu (2014), on the other hand, conducted a research to determine the opinions of preschool teachers working in private kindergartens on the application of inclusion. In this study, teachers stated that their knowledge about inclusive practices, effective teaching methods and students with special needs was insufficient. Participant teachers also suggested that information should be made not only to themselves but also to all employees working at the school. In their study, Batu et al. (2017) determined the views of 45 preschool teachers from eight kindergarteners who have inclusive students in their classrooms about inclusion practices in their schools. The findings of the study are that the participants did not have enough information about inclusion, although they had positive opinions about the inclusion practice. Participant teachers stated that information gaps were related to inclusion, special needs types and features, effective teaching methods, adaptation and so on. Considering the studies in general, it is seen that the most obvious need of preschool teachers who work with students with special needs is the knowledge equipment. It is obvious that they need serious support in subjects such as students with special needs and their characteristics, preparing individualized education programs, and providing effective teaching. In Turkey special education kindergarten is a new application, and both special education teachers and pre-school teachers work together in these institutions. However, the job descriptions are not explicitly stated in the legislation and there is confusion about how this operation will be maintained. It can be said that these two groups of teachers who have naturally different undergraduate education need support to work together and to structure the process. It is an inevitable requirement that pre-school teachers need systematic knowledge support about “special needs”, and that special education teachers share knowledge and to work with cooperation. This requirement is one of the pillars of the action research conducted within the scope of this research. In the following section, explanations about action research and its processes are included.

Action research conducted during the processes of problem identification and problem solving in educational environments by teachers’ and administrators’ effective participation is defined as a systematic inquiry and problem solving process carried out to improve the quality of education (Uzuner, 2005). Creswell (2017) believes that the most important factor in action research is the necessity to solve a problem in practice and emphasizes that educators develop training practices while solving the encountered problem. Action research (Ferrance, 2000), based on the assumptions that educators will work more effectively on the problems they identify and contribute to the

professional development of the research process (Ferrance, 2000), is regarded to be an effective method in solving various problems in educational environments (Goodnough, 2011; Jaipal & Figg, 2011). During the action research process, educators can collaborate to find solutions to the real problems that occur every day in schools, and they can improve both education and themselves (Ferrance, 2000).

In the action research process, participants of the research plan solutions to the problems that are faced and phases of evaluating the solutions that are put into practice, searching for new solutions and implementing them follow one another in succession. A simultaneous operation of problem identification and implementations for problem solving (Bruce & Pine, 2010) and repeating these phases until the desired outcome is achieved generates a cyclical process. This dynamic process, which involves repeating the activities that are performed, includes the cycles of problem identification, data collection, action planning and implementation cycles (Creswell, 2017).

Effective results are reported to have been obtained in action research conducted in educational environments. For instance, outcomes of studies focusing on different topics such as improving classroom practice by increasing student participation in learning activities (Morton, 2005), reducing students' aggressive behaviour (Leff et al., 2004) or absenteeism (Cox & Pant, 2008) and improving student achievement (Strambler & McKown, 2013) demonstrate that this research approach can be used for educational environments. It is seen that several action research has been conducted in Turkey as well to improve the quality of education. For instance, an action research conducted at pre-school level focused on practices that aimed to control the noise level in kindergarten (Bulunuz et al., 2017). Another action research examined the practices that focused on training social studies teacher candidates to be culturally sensitive individuals during higher education (Tuncel, 2017). Literature also includes action research which examined the formative assessment practices of teacher trainees (Karaman & Karaman, 2017) and the implementation of individual and social responsibility model in physical education courses (Keske-Aksoy & Gürsel, 2017).

Literature also includes action research conducted for students with various problems arising from differences in individual characteristics (Argyropoulos & Stamouli, 2006; Cheney, 1998; Schoen & Nolen, 2004; Sen & Goldbart, 2005; Welch & Chisholm, 1994). These studies focused on improving the positive behaviours of students with learning difficulties, training the families of disabled children and developing social awareness for the disabled, supporting the academic development of visually impaired students or preparing prospective teachers to work in inclusive

classes. Several different action research studies were conducted in Turkey in the field of special education as well (Akyol & Ketenoğlu-Kayabaşı, 2018; Çolak et al., 2013; Güleç-Aslan, 2013; Güner-Yıldız & Kurtova, 2017; Gürgür, 2017; Uzun et al., 2005). Recent action research studies include analysing the professional development process based on coaching (Gürgür, 2017), solving the problems caused by students with problem behaviours arising from their different individual characteristics in an elementary school classroom (Güner-Yıldız, & Kurtova, 2017) and development of reading skills in students experiencing reading difficulties (Akyol & Ketenoğlu-Kayabaşı, 2018). Although the studies in the field of special education in Turkey have increased in recent years, it can be said that action researches done in special education environments are not sufficient yet.

Action research which has the feature of developing problem solving skills by working cooperatively on the problems defined by the educators (Ferrance, 2000) can be used effectively in solving the problems experienced in special education environments. In this context, this study focused on improving the quality of education by addressing the problems experienced in a special education kindergarten related to organizational aspects and in planning / and implementation of education with the help of action research approach. The research aimed to contribute to solving the problems in the special education kindergarten and to increase the competencies of the educators employed in this school in order to improve and transfer problem solving skills to other educational problems that can arise in the future. It is also believed that this research will provide data for future studies that will be conducted in educational environments in general and special education environments in particular and will provide the basis for similar applied research in educational environments.

Method

This action research was conducted in collaboration with educators employed at a special education kindergarten and faculty members employed at the university. Action research in education is defined as a research process that transforms the role of teachers as “teacher-as -researcher” and this process ensures that teachers are not individuals who only use information but produce solutions to problems by using this information and continue their professional development (Büyüköztürk et al., 2014). Action research is a cyclical process that establishes a starting point by identifying a problem and then continues by defining the problem in detail, planning and implementing the necessary actions to solve the identified problem and planning new actions as a result of evaluating the results (Büyüköztürk et al., 2014). While traditional research examines the subject of the research

by objectifying it, action research removes the distinction between the researcher and the observed (Rubin & Babbie, 2011). In this manner, the researchers investigate the problems experienced in the group that they are also a part of and try to find solutions. This research was designed as an action research in which a team composed of researchers and preschool teachers who experienced various problems during the establishment of the institution worked in cooperation and attempted to improve the quality of education by suggesting solutions to the problems experienced at the school.

Stakeholders

The research was carried out in a public special education kindergarten in Eskisehir province center with the participation of the following stakeholders.

School Principal: The school principal, professionally a pre-school teacher, was assigned in a special education institution for the first time in her career. Therefore, he reported not being very familiar with the field of special education and that he needed support in the field of special education. The school principal carried out activities such as preparing physical conditions related to the activities to be carried out during the study, ensuring communication with parents and supporting communication among stakeholders.

Teachers: A total of 13 teachers were employed at the school: two of these teachers specialized in teaching the mentally disabled, two specialized in teaching the hearing impaired and nine teachers were pre-school teachers. Like the school principal, preschool teachers also stated that they needed to be better informed in the field of special education and had difficulties during implementation. Four teachers who graduated from special education departments reported that although they specialized in special education, they faced difficulties as well because both the school was newly established and the majority of the students were autistic children requiring intensive support. During the study period, special education teachers participated in trainings to update their knowledge and also assumed the responsibility of giving support to pre-school teachers when necessary for students with special needs. Pre-school teachers also took an active role in the study by keeping records about the situations they encountered in their classrooms, by presenting case studies during meetings, sharing their practices and results with other teachers, and thus contributing to solving problems in the classroom.

Faculty Members: One of the faculty members employed at the university as an associate professor has worked on teacher education, inclusive education and classroom and behaviour management with a prior action research carried out to solve the problems experienced in an

elementary school classroom. The other faculty member involved in this action research has worked mainly on autism, alternative communication, preschool inclusive practices in preschools and applied behavior analysis with experience in conducting both single-subject studies and qualitative research interviews.

Research Assistant: The research assistant works in the Department of Special Education as a research assistant and continues doctoral studies in the field of education of the hearing impaired.

The role of the faculty members and the research assistant in the research: Throughout the action research process, academicians working in the special education department of the university acted as volunteer members of the special education kindergarten who did not work full-time but provided support whenever necessary. The first researcher with 14 years of experience in both state and private institutions such as Guidance and Research Center, special education practice school and private rehabilitation center has background information and knowledge based on extensive practice about the conditions and difficulties faced by parents of students with special needs and educators who work with them. This fund of knowledge facilitated the role as a member of the school within the action research process.

It was ensured that the stakeholders in the academic field acted as the members of the school and were involved in decision making in the daily routine from time to time in regards to points such as the placement of personal belongings, educational materials to be purchased, arrangements to be made in the classrooms, activities to be organized during ceremonies. This approach facilitated their understanding of school personnel's outlook and sentiments.

The Cyclic Process in Research

Special education preschools in Turkey, not as common as desired, are highly important in providing early intervention and learning opportunities to preschool children with special needs. The kindergarten in Eskisehir province, where the study was conducted, is a state special education kindergarten which was established in September 2017. Various difficulties were experienced in the school arising from the recent establishment of the school based on preparation of physical conditions and completion of administrative procedures along with the problems arising from the adaptation process for the staff and students to get to know one another and the school. The school principal with limited knowledge about special education practices due to being a preschool teacher by profession sought support for her school at the time of its establishment. The fact that the school principal was seeking support for the problems experienced at the school was the fundamental ground for

conducting the present action research which was initiated after the interview with the school principal.

Making decisions on conducting an action research and initial planning: In December 2017, the principal of the special education kindergarten called the first researcher and stated that he was seeking help as a result of various problems experienced at school and invited the researcher to discuss and make observations. During the interview conducted at school, the school principal stated that since the school was recently established, the staff needed information and support; they lacked experience especially in behaviour management and effective teaching; most of the teachers did not know special education methods and techniques since they were specialized in preschool education, not in special education and therefore they were unable to solve related problems. A follow-up meeting was planned on 9 January 2018. On this date, the school principal, the special education teachers working in the school and the first and second researchers came together to talk about the problems at the school and the school principal reiterated her request for support. The first researcher proposed conducting an action research at the school to solve the problems experienced by the school principal and teachers in regards to behaviour modification, preparing individualized education plans (IEPs) and family education. When the proposed research approach was accepted by the school principal and teachers, a decision was made to ensure that the first phase would include teacher training on special education. For this reason, training was planned on assessment, writing objectives based on assessment results, preparing IEPs and applied behaviour analysis (ABA). In addition, family training was planned in regards to communication problems experienced between parents and school. Finally, a decision was made to guide ... University students to support kindergarten teachers and parents within the scope of their Community Service courses.

The interviews with the school principal conducted by first researcher focused on the issues and problems related to the establishment process of the school. When the research was initiated, the school was under renovation and education areas were still being organized. The school principal consulted the first researcher about these physical arrangements and the materials to be purchased for the school. A decision was taken for the school principal to visit other special education institutions in Eskisehir in order to obtain information about the administrative operations of these types of schools.

February 2018: Since the school was closed in January due to semester break, the first researcher and the school principal met at the beginning of February to determine the dates of the

proposed trainings and other details related to trainings. Trainings started in February. One of these trainings focused on Cooperation with Families. In this context, the teachers were informed about assessing family characteristics, important points in communication and how to increase cooperation between school and family. A similar training was provided to parents the following day and 20 parents, two of whom were fathers, attended the meeting where school-family cooperation was addressed. At the meeting, the parents reported that they did not receive information from teachers unless they sought it and requested more support and information.

The stakeholders included in action research came together after these two training sessions to discuss the results of the meeting and to plan new actions based on the results. Based on the analysis of data obtained during meetings, a new decision was made for teachers to plan parent interviews individually and as a group in order to inform them about the methods to use with their children at home for different skills. In line with this decision, teachers were informed of this decision in a separate meeting.

Teacher training focused on ABA in early February addressed the basic principles and the use of reinforcers in behaviour modification. The second training on ABA provided the second week of February, one week after the first training, included the techniques used to reduce problem behaviours. During the training, teachers reported that they needed more detailed information on intervention for autistic students' behavioural problems. Based on this need, the stakeholders re-evaluated the process and it was decided to modify the content of the planned training activities. Accordingly, it was decided to focus on behavioural problems and behaviour modification in autistic children in line with teachers' needs. The third researcher, an associate professor with studies on autism and behaviour modification, joined the research team to provide more detailed information about the subject and to meet teachers' needs.

In February, teachers were trained on IEP, informal assessments and preparation and use of criterion-referenced tests. In addition, in line with the decision taken at the first meeting, four students who took a Community Service course in ... University Special Education Department started to support the school. These students provided support to teachers in terms of both knowledge and practice by visiting the school on separate days for one and a half hours daily.

March 2018: The third researcher who joined the research team conducted training on diagnostic criteria and communicative characteristics of autistic children with the participation of all teachers in early March. During this training, the teachers also gave feedback on the behavioural

problems they experienced in their classrooms by making assessments individually. Teachers were also asked to keep records of the observed problem behaviours in their classrooms and information was given about how to keep these records.

During the second training meeting held in March, the first and third researchers examined the records kept by teachers followed by information on how to evaluate student behaviours based on examples. Teachers were informed about the necessity to identify the causes of problem behaviours in order to modify undesired behaviours and hence they were urged to use undertaking functional analysis, but it was observed that this subject should be studied in more detail at a later date. For this reason, the research team prepared a new action plan and training was planned on behaviour functions.

In the same month, the first researcher conducted two separate studies in relation to action research. In the first study, the researcher organized individual interviews with teachers based on classroom observations and made notes about student behaviours to be evaluated in future meetings. Second study included a process assessment with the school principal regarding the administrative procedures and physical arrangements necessitated by the recent establishment of the school.

April 2018: Based on the needs that emerged during the process, the third researcher organized training on the function of planned behaviours and the fact that behaviours can be controlled by discovering the underlying causes was discussed at length. During the training, teachers' questions were answered about serious behavioural problems of students such as harming themselves and damaging the environment and teachers were informed about behaviour modification techniques that can be used to solve these problems. During this meeting, teachers reported progress in controlling behaviours, stated that they discovered what bothered students since they got to know them better and that problem behaviours decreased when they took precautions. These views were regarded as positive effects of the work undertaken so far.

Topics such as learning, teaching, stimulus control and differential reinforcement were discussed during the last training organized in April where examples from classrooms were discussed and the problems related to learning and behaviour experienced at the school were assessed and solutions were discussed.

May 2018: The month of May included activities such as evaluating the results of the actions taken during the process and identifying whether new requirements emerged. During this month, researchers visited the school from time to time and met with teachers to discuss the case studies in

their classrooms related to the topics covered in the trainings and answered their questions. In addition, Special Education undergraduate students continued to support teachers in their classes. In May, interviews were conducted with the school principal and it was concluded that the chaos experienced at the beginning of the semester started to be replaced by routine work and the establishment process of the school was about to be completed.

On the last day of May, a focus group interview was organized with the participation of all teachers and the opinions of teachers about the action research process were obtained in a free discussion environment. The school principal did not attend this interview due to her administrative position over teachers and thus participants were given an opportunity to freely express their opinions during the focus group meeting.

June 2018: A semi-structured interview was conducted with the school principal to evaluate the work undertaken so far.

Data Analysis

The data obtained at the end of the study were examined and analysed. Focus group interview with the teachers and the semi-structured interview with the school principal were transcribed and entered into the Nvivo program for content analysis. In addition, other data such as research diary, observations and meeting minutes were interpreted and evaluated.

Results

In this section, the data obtained from observations, interviews, meeting minutes and data obtained from the research diary during the action research process and the data obtained from the interview records at the end of the process were grouped according to the themes and sub-themes acquired from the content analysis.

Theme 1 - From Chaos to Change

Three sub-themes emerged under this theme. The first sub-theme was related to the chaos and the negative emotions experienced at the beginning of the academic year. At the beginning of the process, observations and interviews conducted in the special education kindergarten demonstrated the existence of chaos at the school. School principal and teachers seemed to feel helpless and inadequate in the face of the problems stemmed from planning and implementation of educational aspects as well as organizational procedures. During the focus group interview, teachers often used similar words to describe the initial situation such as difficult, tiring, helpless, inadequate, guilty, remorseful, distress and fear. One of the participants expressed this as follows:

“That everyone experienced the same things, I mean, the desperation felt at first, the feelings of inadequacy ...”

During the semi-structured interview, the school principal talked about teachers' initial experiences:

“The pre-school teachers at our school were a bit uneasy, a bit timid, a bit scared for working at such a school for the first time in their lives. This unease does not exist anymore”

The second sub-theme was related to difficulties teachers experienced in managing student behaviour. Examination of the records for observations, interviews and the meeting minutes demonstrated that teachers especially had problems in behaviour managing and did not know what to do. For instance, students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) had difficulty in adapting to the physical characteristics of the new school as well as getting used to the people they met there and these difficulties often manifested themselves in tantrums but teachers were unable to cope with this problem. Two of the participants expressed their thoughts with the following words:

“I was not quite capable of differentiating whether the child's reactions were stemmed from behavioural problems or from autism, but after the meetings we had here, I was able to tell the difference”

“How much, how far we can change (things). Should we change them? We received great support from you on this issue”

The third sub-theme was about the transformation experienced after initiating the action research. The chaos and anxiety experienced at the school were gradually replaced by relief (as expressed by teachers) along with the activities initiated in February by the action research. One teacher stated the following, *“I felt more relaxed as I learned more. I mean, what really scared me was not knowing”*. Another participant reported the positive effects of the process on them and on parents by stating *“overcoming emotions... we overcame the feelings of helplessness as we became more knowledgeable. When we realized the impact of this transformation, the feedback from the parents was positive indeed. I mean, it is a continuum, the training we received positively affected us, the children and their parents”*.

Observations and the records also supported the statements related to the positive changes and feelings of relief experienced at the school. Researchers also observed that teachers experienced more positive emotions as the action research progressed. In time, teachers were increasingly effective in their practices and seemed less anxious. During training sessions, teachers started to share their solutions for the problems in their classrooms and the positive results that they obtained. This positive atmosphere had a positive impact on all stakeholders, including the researchers.

The pressure felt by the school principal about the establishment process was gradually gave way to relief as well. The school principal visited other special education institutions and found out sample solutions related to administrative affairs. In addition, fewer problems were brought to the attention of the school principal since physical arrangements at the school structure were nearly completed and demands and complaints from parents had already decreased as a result of the trainings.

Theme 2 - Effects of Action Research on Teacher Development

Two sub-themes related to the professional teacher development and developments in teacher-parent relationships were identified under this theme. In the context of the first sub-theme, observations confirmed that teachers extensively developed themselves during the action research process in terms of assessment and management of student behaviours. For instance, it was observed that the frequency of behaviours such as lying in front of the classroom door and punching the door and yelling due to a temper tantrum gradually decreased and the teachers who were at first content to wait with the child at the beginning process when temper tantrums occurred learned to control the

environmental factors that triggered such behaviour. In one of the meetings organized during the process, one of the teachers expressed her thoughts as follows: *“We began to discover how we can prevent and control problem behaviours. We can now recognize and regulate environmental factors (sound, light, temperature, etc.) that disturb children”*.

During the focus group interview, teachers’ answers in regards to process’ impact on their professional development also supported the data obtained from the results of observation that pointed to professional improvement:

“I mean, I found out it wasn't easy for me to cope with this with the training I received as a preschool teacher. You do not need to reinvent the wheel, before the trainings, we were trying to reinvent the wheel, but the information you provided here made it much easier”

“It was efficient that the information we received was immediately applicable at the classroom, the method was better in terms of efficiency and productivity. The undergraduate courses at the university did not include much practice, only information. But the fact that the information that was transferred was implemented right away made it more productive for me”

In addition, the interview with the school principal supported the data obtained from both the observations and the focus group interview that demonstrated professional development of teachers:

“We have solved many, if not all, of our teachers’ educational needs ... Now when I see my teachers or ask them something, they respond more confidently”

“Everything that was planned was implemented, and I perceive that we are getting results by seeing the trust in the eyes of our teachers”

“Of course it contributed ... I mean, I realized it when I saw the IEPs, I saw the difference between the IEPs prepared in the first and second semesters. That is, it contributed in a professional sense ... both to my teachers and to my parents”

The second sub-theme was related to the transformation in the problems experienced in the relationships between teachers and parents at the beginning of the action research. The teachers stated during the interviews that there were positive changes in their communication with parents. For instance, three teachers express the following opinions:

“When we implemented what we’ve learned from you, families were aware of it (the development of communication)”

“Family interaction was important. I think we talked about very important issues, each of which was important on its own”

“As we got positive feedback from families, we were happy and started to work more enthusiastically. Of course, when they realized how we worked, they contributed harder at home”

Theme 3 - Dissemination of the Action Research

This theme focused on the views on the action research process and the dissemination of action research to other schools. During the focus group interview and the semi-structured interview, teachers and the school principal were asked about their views on conducting similar studies in other schools and all participants replied that they believed such studies should be undertaken in other schools and they would be useful. For instance, the school principal stated her feelings in the following way:

“I think similar studies should be undertaken. ... In my opinion, we should be able to cooperate with our universities at all aspects we need support ... because it is much different to learn from experts, from people who are specialists. ... So, I think that every school should undertake such studies, maybe different kind of studies, maybe with different activities”

Teacher views on action research were as follows:

“... We experienced and observed positive results, and we are still experiencing them. There should be a follow up, the process should be repeated ... I think its contribution to teacher training is significant and it will be reflected on children’s education. I believe that all teachers, teachers at every level should receive this training but classroom teachers must definitely do that”

“When I worked here I realized some things. I think it would be useful to go to regular kindergartens and give information to teachers there as well”

“I believe it will definitely be helpful because we highly benefited from it. I think it was a good practice. I think it would be equally beneficial for other schools”

Discussion, Conclusion, and Recommendations

This research addressed the problems of establishment and education in a special education kindergarten with the help of action research process and solutions were generated.

It is emphasized in the literature that action research conducted in educational environments is effective both in generating solutions to the experienced problems and in improving the qualifications

of educational practices that the educators perform with their improved skills in problem solving (Ferrance, 2000; Goodnough, 2011; Jaipal & Figg, 2011; Uzuner, 2005). The benefits of action research are also supported by the findings obtained in this study. The teachers and the school principal stated during and after the process that action research contributed to their development. Observations confirm the statements of the educators as well. For instance, the school principal talked about action research during a meeting held during the process: “I started to implement the process carried out to find solutions in the action research to other problems at the school. Therefore, I started to feel stronger. Now I know which path to follow in problem solving and how to solve problems.”

Active participation of all stakeholders in the research process is considered to be important in the success of action research. During this research, the teachers participated in all meetings, enriched the meetings by asking questions or providing comments and prepared for trainings by undertaking given tasks such as collecting data through observations in their classrooms or meeting with parents. Similarly, the school principal provided extensive support and contribution necessary for conducting the action research; stakeholders from the academia fulfilled their tasks in all activities planned to support the school. In his action research, Morton (2005) emphasizes the necessity of mutual responsibility, trust and respect when talking about the importance of the relationship established with the teachers as researchers. The fact that the stakeholders of this research experienced the support, respect and trust mentioned by Morton (2005) ensured the successful implementation of the action research process. In the semi-structured interview, the school principal expressed her view on this topic in the following statement: “I always feel distant towards universities..... I always thought that our academicians were aloof and that was my previous experience. However, I felt differently in this action research”. The school principal expressed the following about the first researcher; “She always approached us warmly, she tried to explain things clearly and tried to help us out at times when we panicked”.

During the research process, the positive atmosphere that was generated between the principal/teachers at the school and the researchers employed at the university is important as well since it demonstrates that teachers’ negative perspectives towards research and researchers in Turkey (Yellow, 2006) may change with the action research process.

This research was conducted in a special education kindergarten, a type of educational institution that has not been studied much since these schools are not very common in Turkey yet. Therefore, it is believed that important data were obtained regarding special education kindergartens

during this research process. For instance, assignment of preschool teachers or teachers from other branches to special education kindergartens results in teacher anxiety and these teachers feel inadequate due to their unfamiliarity with the special education field even though they are familiar with early childhood period. Since children with special needs in these schools are very young and therefore not schooled previously, they may display more behavioural problems and therefore the process becomes more difficult. The importance of preschool education for children with special needs (Varlier & Vuran, 2006) and the necessity to increase the number of special education kindergartens are clear. However, the data obtained from this research show that there are some important considerations in the process of establishing new special education kindergartens. For instance, issues such as assignment of at least one special education teacher to each classroom, selection of school principals from the field of special education and the provision of systematic trainings for all employees with the establishment of the school are regarded to be very important for the success of these schools.

As stated by Feldman (2007), one of the determinants of the quality of action research lies with the researcher and questioning of the self, considering different perspectives and not claiming the accuracy of own perspectives are necessary attributes of researchers. The trainings planned at the beginning of this research process mostly included the general principles of applied behaviour analysis and the application of behaviour modification techniques in the classroom. However, during meetings, teachers stated that their educational needs would be better met if they could go over case studies of children with ASD. Teachers' perspectives were taken into consideration and education planning was revised and modified. As a result of this change, case studies in classrooms were studied and actions to be taken in order to analyse and solve behaviour problems correctly were addressed. West (2011) states that teachers seek answers to confusing questions and try to increase their practical knowledge and generalize them into practice during the action research process. In this sense, the stakeholders' perspectives were addressed in order to meet their practical needs in the research process and thus the study was conducted more effectively. In addition, during the research process, academicians noticed differences of opinion between teachers and the school principal and the fact that stakeholders have different opinions and needs were regarded as natural. The goal was meeting the needs of all stakeholders and generating a common ground for different opinions. Postholm and Skrovset (2013) argue that the researcher should be able to continue the research despite opposing views and should know that not all events can be controlled. In this study, despite the negative atmosphere experienced from time to time as a result of the disagreement between teachers and the

principal, researchers continued the research by focusing on goals and positive results. The experiences during the process reveal that cooperation, communication and approaching events calmly are skills that are necessary for conducting action research.

Another issue that emerged during the process was the significance of multidimensional data collection in action research. At the beginning of this research, it was important to understand the situation at the school accurately so that the right actions could be planned. If data had been collected with fewer methods, the goings-on at the school, people's experiences and their emotional processes might not have been understood correctly. At the end of the process, focus group interview was used as one of the data collection methods. The use of focus group interview was very important for understanding people's feelings and thoughts accurately since focus group interviews (Şahsuvaroğlu & Ekşi, 2008), defined as planned discussions conducted in permissive and non-frightening environments, allow participants to express their perceptions and mutual interactions.

The results of this study reveal once again that action research has positive effects on educators' development and can be effectively used for problem solving at schools. The participants of the research emphasized the positive impact of the action research process and stated that its use should be expanded and disseminated. Therefore, it is recommended that action research be used in special education and general education. In addition, it is thought that new data on how action processes can be implemented more effectively can be revealed by disseminating action research. For this reason, action research is recommended for solving problems experienced during implementation at schools.

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Ethical Standards

Indicate if there is ethics committee approval. Otherwise, by stating that you have carried out the research within the framework of the Helsinki Declaration; the participants are volunteers, informed consent is obtained, etc. Indicate whatever measures are taken regarding ethics.

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