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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Parents' Views on Their Role in the Educational Process of Their Children With Special Needs

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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to examine parental views on their role in the education of children with special needs. The study group of the research consists of 10 parents whose children are studying in primary and secondary special education schools in Aksaray Province. In order to determine the views of parents on their role in special education, phenomenology—one of the qualitative research methods—was used as a research method. A semi-structured interview form was used within the scope of the research, and the interview form used consisted of open-ended questions about parents' personal perceptions of their role in special education. The obtained data were analyzed by content analysis method. According to the analysis of the data, it was determined that families perceived the role of parents in education as helping their children during the assignments given and expressed their opinions that they fulfilled their duties in this regard. However, it was concluded that there were no efforts to take additional measures to support the development of children and to allocate time for participation in in-school activities. In addition, it was concluded that families received external support for educational activities and pointed to rehabilitation centers as a source of support. As a result, it can be stated in the study that parents do not have enough information about the place and importance of the family in special education, academic development, and support of children. In the light of these results, it is proposed to organize seminars on the place and importance of the family in special education for parents and to include activities that make family participation mandatory in the curriculum.

Keywords: Developmental disability, parent, special education

Introduction

The family, which constitutes the smallest building block of society, is also defined as an interactive communication network environment in which each individual in it influences and is influenced by each other (Okeke, 2001). Children spend most of their developmental period together with their parents in this communication network (Çelenk, 2003). From the moment the child is born, he first communicates with his parents, obtains the experiences and information about life through them, and performs the first stage of socialization in the family. In addition, the character of the family members, their behavior, and perspective on life directly affect the development process of the child. In this respect, the importance of the family in child development is undeniably great (Kırık, 2014). Taking the behavior of their parents as an example, the child shapes their life according to the attitudes and behaviors they learn from them (Demiriz & Öğretir, 2007). In this sense, parents are not only responsible for the growth, development, and education of children until they start school but they also serve as the first teachers of their children. When children start school, parents share these responsibilities with teachers and their schools (Kirkwood, 2016). School culture is one of the determining factors of achieving success as a result of learning and is effective in shaping the personality of a child in social life. It functions as an incentive for individual learning and development efforts and as a supporter of educational activities (Balci, 2007). However, it is not an easy process for the school culture to achieve the desired behavioral changes in children on its own. If the behaviors, knowledge, and skills acquired by children are supported and reinforced by parents, they become settled and permanent. If there are discrepancies between the

school and the home environment, it becomes difficult for the child to become permanent and generalize their gains in the school environment (Hornby, 2000). During this process, parents accept their children's teachers as their other parent and wonder what the teachers are doing with their children at school and the methods and techniques they apply to develop appropriate behavior. Similarly, teachers also want to accept parents as teachers of children and know how they spend time with their children at home, what they do, the nature of the child's living environment, whether the educational activities implemented at school are maintained at home, and the expectations of families regarding discipline and problem behaviors (Maharaj-Sharma, 2015).

With the understanding of the place and importance of the family in educational activities, the role of the family in achieving success in educational activities has been increasingly addressed in recent years. In this sense, responsibilities such as family-teacher communication, participation of families in institutional activities, supporting homework for children's academic progress, and care of the children are emphasized (Rogers et al., 2009). In addition, school visits, being a teacher's assistant, assisting field trips, participating in classroom activities, providing the necessary tools for children, providing information about their professions, and repeating the activities carried out at school in the home environment can be stated as elements that help families to support their children's educational processes (Çamlıbel-Çakmak, 2014). However, families need various trainings in the stages of transferring the skills their children gained at school to daily life, transforming the skills they have acquired into behavior, helping them in need, guiding them, and preventing and solving possible problems. Family

trainings are at the forefront of this (Varol, 2016). The purpose of family education is to provide appropriate attitudes, behaviors, knowledge, and skills to family members (Ünal, 2015). In fact, the rule on special education services guarantees family education, and it is the responsibility of the school to include families in educational activities (MEB, 2006). Educational programs are those that are directed at children with disabilities or at risk, their families, or that are carried out in collaboration with both groups (Bruder, 2000). These training programs designed for the family are offered as home-centered, if the specialist carries out the training activities in the home environment of the family; based on both home and institution, if the educational activities are carried out simultaneously in the home and institution; or as institution-centered, if the family goes to the institution (Dunst, 1999). Home-centered education is not education offered directly to the child but is designed for family members who contribute to the development of the child (Aral et al., 2002). The most important goal of home-based special education services, which provide information and education opportunities to the family, to determine the needs of the family and the child in their own environment, to plan together with the family, is to increase family participation in child education (Birkan, 2002). Home programs (Hinojosa & Anderson, 1991), one of the strategies widely used to achieve desired development in children, will allow children to maximize their potential if implemented regularly by parents (Novak, 2011).

Similar to the educational process of children without special needs, parents have an important role in the education of children with special needs. In particular, it is imperative for parents to participate in their children's education in order for children with special needs to reach the determined goals and to generalize the knowledge and skills they have acquired in the school environment to different environments in their daily lives. The duties and responsibilities of parents are especially important in terms of ensuring that the knowledge and skills learned at school are used in daily life and to motivate children (Danielson, 2002). However, for many years, special education services have been based only on individuals with special needs and ignored families (Kaner, 2009). However, with the awareness of the place and importance of the family in special education, if collaborative interaction can be achieved, the targeted decisions aimed to be implemented in the school regarding students with special needs can also be implemented at home and the generalization and permanence of the acquired knowledge and skills can be increased by creating consistency between home and school (Jones & Passey, 2004). However, for parents with high levels of anxiety about meeting the important needs of their children such as care and education, this process can be challenging (Ersoy & Çürük, 2009). There are many factors that cause parents to have problems in this process. Excessive responsibilities due to special needs of their children, concerns regarding their children's future, inadequacy of treatment and education services, negative attitudes faced by parents (Küçükler, 2001), children's need for lifelong care and support, behavioral disorders (Kaner, 2002), low education levels of parents, negative attitudes about school or educational activities, extra responsibilities at home or work, and health problems (Köksal, 2008) may cause parents not to be sufficiently interested in their children's educational status. Determining how parents perceive their role in special education, how the home- and school-centered studies are supported by the parents, and what are the factors that prevent parents from fulfilling their roles in the educational process of their children will make positive contributions to the educational processes of individuals with special needs. In addition, even though research that examine the opinions of families in primary and preschool education age regarding the role of their children in the educational process (Argon & Kıyıcı, 2012; Doğrul et al., 2021; Gökçe, 2000; Köksal-Eğmez, 2008; Tümkaya & Yeşiloğlu-Uçar, 2021) and studies that examine family involvement through the perspectives of teachers and school administrators (Bayraktar et al., 2016; Bıçak &

Susar-Kırmızı, 2013; Erdoğan & Demirkasimoğlu, 2010; Kahraman, 2022; Tümkaya & Altunkaynak, 2020) exist, there have been no studies examining the personal opinions of parents regarding their role in the educational process of individuals with special needs. It is considered important to determine the opinions of the parents of individuals with special needs, who are the main supporters in the educational process, about their roles in the educational process of their children, and what problems they experience. For this reason, the research aimed to determine the views of parents on their role in the educational process of their children with special needs. In line with the determined purpose, answers to the following questions were sought:

1. What are the parents' views on their role in the educational process of their children?
2. What are parents' views on supporting their children's home-based educational activities?
3. What are the problems that parents face in their children's educational activities?
4. What are the support elements that parents apply for their children's educational activities?

Methods

Research Model

In the research, in order to determine the views of parents on their role in special education in detail, phenomenology was preferred among the qualitative research methods. This method focuses on assessing lived experiences (Miller, 2003).

Research Group

A purposeful sampling method was adopted in determining the participants of the study. In purposive sampling, people with certain criteria are included in the sampling in order to examine in detail the situations in which rich and important information may exist (Büyükoztürk et al., 2016). The participants of the study are the parents of 10 students studying at Aksaray Murat Keskin Special Education Primary and Secondary School in first grade (one student), second grade (one student), third grade (one student), fourth grade (two students), fifth grade (one student), sixth grade (one student), seventh grade (one student), and eighth grade (two students). One of the parents has a child with autism spectrum disorder, two with Down syndrome, and eight with a diagnosis of intellectual disability. Although there are no parents with children with multiple disabilities, all children diagnosed with intellectual disability are in the mild intellectual disability group. The criteria for participants to be included in the study were determined as having a child with special needs who is studying in Aksaray and consenting to participate in the semi-structured interviews that will be conducted within the scope of the research.

Data Collection Tool

The research was conducted using a semi-structured interview form and the interviews were conducted face-to-face. The form used was developed by the researcher after the necessary literature review was carried out. The interview form consisted of open-ended questions aimed at examining the purpose of the study and parents' personal perceptions of the role of parents in special education. In order to prevent data loss in the research and to increase the validity and reliability of the study, expert opinion was taken during the creation of the data collection tool. For this purpose, the interview form was examined by three special education experts and three faculty members, and the form was given its final shape as a result of expert opinions. The parents who agreed to participate in the research process were asked about the days and times they were available for interviews and appointments were made. Before starting the interviews, the parents were informed about the purpose of the research, it was explained that personal information belonging to the parents would not be included, and code names would

be used instead of personal names. The interviews were conducted in the school meeting room by the researcher. In the meantime, in order to prevent data loss, the interviews were recorded with a voice recorder and reminder notes were taken where necessary.

Analysis of the Data

The data obtained as a result of the interviews were analyzed by descriptive and content analysis. As stated by Creswell (2017), categories were created during the analysis, data encoding process was performed, and themes were created from the encoded data. The code list of the data was created by the researcher and the codes were collected together according to their common characteristics and categories. Data coding processes were supported by expert opinion; the codes representing the relevant categories were explained in relation to each other and comments were obtained. During the data analysis, in order to increase the reliability, the answers of the parents to the questions were examined by the researcher and the expert in the field and the items with consensus and the items with disagreement were determined. Miles and Huberman’s (1994) formula, $reliability = \frac{consensus}{(consensus + disagreement)} \times 100$, was used and the reliability was calculated as 94%. Code names were used instead of the real names of the parents participating in the study and the parents were coded as E1, E2, ..., E10. In order to increase the reliability within the scope of the study, direct quotations from the opinions of the participants were also included.

Ethical Issues

The approval of the ethics committee dated August 26, 2021, and protocol number 2021/06-16 was obtained from the Human Research Ethics Committee of Aksaray University for this research. In addition, the participants of the research were informed about the purpose of the research, the study plan, final goals, and a consent form was taken that they were voluntary participants.

Results

The findings obtained under this heading are presented in accordance with the subproblems.

Results on Parents’ Views on Their Role in Their Child’s Educational Process

The findings of parents’ personal opinions on their role in the educational process of their children are given in Table 1.

Table 1.
Parents’ Views on Their Role in Their Children’s Education

Theme	Categories	Participants	f
Parental role in child education	Ready for any kind of help	E1, E4, E6, E8, E9, E10	6
	Not being able to help due to time issue	E3, E7	2
	Helping if the child requests it	E2, E5	2

When Table 1 is examined, parents stated that they are ready to help their children in the education process ($f=6$), they cannot help due to time problems ($f=2$), and they help if their children request it ($f=2$). The following are direct quotations from the statements of the parents in the categories of being ready for any kind of help (E1, E6), not being able to help due to time problems (E3), helping if the child requests it (E5):

E1: “Always, when he can’t read, when he can’t write, when he doesn’t know... my only child, as long as he studies, I will support him

as much as I can. My wife and I want him to study it too. Of course, my wife would like him to study, but she is not interested in her lessons.”

E6: “He is everything to me, of course I will help. As long as he reads, learns, doesn’t get deprived... It would be a lie if I say our situation is good, but we will do anything to get him to read.”

E3: “Actually, I’m not very useful. Of course, if I had the opportunity, I would like to support, but I can’t keep up. When I catch up with everything, there’s no time left for him, to tell the truth.”

E5: “If my child wants help, I will help. As far as I know, I try to help with her lessons. I’ll go to school if she says the teacher is calling me. I was actually more interested when she just started school, but as she got older, she can do it on her own. If she says I don’t know, I’m helping her.”

Findings on Parents’ Strategies to Support Their Children’s Home-Based Education

The findings about the strategies of parents to support their children’s home-based education are given in Table 2.

Table 2.
Strategies of Parents to Support Their Children’s Home-Based Education

Theme	Categories	Participants	f
Home-based training support	Helping with homework	E1, E3, E4, E5, E7, E8, E9, E10	8
	Attend parent meetings	E6, E8, E9, E10	4
	Reading and helping to read books	E4	1
	Dealing with school lessons	E4	1
	Preparing for school	E2	1

When Table 2 is examined, a significant part of the parents stated that they support their children’s home-based education process by helping them with their homework ($f=8$). In addition, they expressed their support in the form of attending parent meetings ($f=4$), reading and helping to read books ($f=1$), dealing with school lessons ($f=1$), and preparing for school ($f=1$). The following are direct quotes from parents’ statements in the categories of helping with homework (E4, E9), preparing for school (E2), and attending parent meetings (E10):

E4: “I’m helping him with his homework. We’re trying to do his homework together. Every day when he comes home from school, I ask what classes he had that day. I’m getting her to read books and sometimes I read. I help him read.”

E9: “I make sure he does his homework. We finish his homework together. I also meet with his teacher. I call and ask whenever I can and I go to the school.”

E2: “I’ll get him ready for school. I wake him up early in the morning and make him have breakfast. I check his bag to see if there’s anything missing. I help him get dressed and take him to the bus service.”

E10: “I take care of her homework and lessons so that we can progress as much as possible. I always go to every parent meeting. I check her notebooks daily to see what they have done in their books.”

Results of Parents Regarding the Problems Experienced by their Children in Relation to Their Educational Activities

The findings of parents on the problems experienced by their children regarding their educational activities are given in Table 3.

Table 3.
Problems Experienced by Parents Regarding Their Children's Educational Activities

Theme	Categories	Participants	f
Issues encountered	Negative experiences	E3, E5, E6, E7, E8, E10	6
	Parent-related issues (education level, age, job, number of children)	E1, E2, E5, E8, E10	5
	Child-related problems (age, gender, education level)	E1, E7, E8, E9	4
	Environmental factors (teacher, school administration)	E2, E3, E7	3
	Financial problems	E6, E7	2
	Sociocultural characteristics	E2	1

Table 3 shows that the problems experienced by parents regarding their children's educational activities are negative experiences ($f=6$), parent-related problems ($f=5$), child-related problems ($f=4$), environmental factors ($f=3$), financial problems ($f=2$), and sociocultural characteristics ($f=1$). The following are direct quotations from parents' statements in the categories of negative experiences (E5), parent-related problems (E8), child-related problems (E1), environmental factors (E2):

E5: "I am helping him to study but he can't do it. Whether he can't do it or he forgets, the same thing every time. He can't proceed. Since he can't do it, I am not dealing with him anymore. He has a sister and she is very good. I am helping her instead of her brother. Because I don't have time to deal with both. So I only help her. I wish I had time."

E8: "I was helping him and still helping him but sometimes I don't know and ask her brother to help."

E1: "She does not want to study, read, or write. She doesn't say I should write while other children are writing. I don't know whether she doesn't want to do it or doesn't understand."

E2: "I don't speak Turkish. I didn't like the teacher either, I don't go to school when there is a meeting."

Results on the Support Elements That Parents Apply for Their Children's Educational Activities

The findings of the support elements that parents apply to regarding their children's educational activities are included in Table 4.

Table 4.
Support Elements That Parents Apply for Their Children's Educational Activities

Theme	Categories	Participants	f
Support elements in education	Rehabilitation centers	E1, E3, E4, E6, E7, E8, E10	7
	Supplementary lessons	E3	1
	I'm not getting support	E2, E5, E9	3

When Table 4 is examined, a significant part of the parents ($f=7$) stated that rehabilitation centers are the support element they apply to in the education process of their children. Additionally, it is seen that there are parents who state that they take supplementary lessons ($f=1$) and that their children do not receive any support in the education process ($f=3$). The following are direct quotes from parents' statements in the categories of rehabilitation center (E7, E10), tutoring (E3), and no support (E2):

E7: "We get support from the rehabilitation center. There too, they study and do homework. It's kind of a repetition. We don't have any other kind of support"

E10: "The rehabilitation center calls us and they come with a shuttle and take the child. There are other teachers there too, he studies with them. I'm sending him in case he learns something."

E3: "He also goes to the special education center. I mean, the rehabilitation center. We also get support from there. They are progressing one-on-one with school lessons. He also takes private lessons. He has no free time, I want him to do it again a lot and learn thoroughly."

E2: "There is no support, in fact, whatever he does at school is as much as we can do at home."

Discussion, Conclusion and Recommendations

The family institution, which consists of the people who spend the most time with the child and know him/her best, has a very important place in the child's life (Smith et al., 2006). The place of the family in the lives of individuals with special needs is much more important compared to children without special needs. For families, having a child with special needs is undoubtedly a difficult experience (Dikici-Sığırtaç & Deretarla-Gül, 2014). The intense anxiety and stress they experience can adversely affect the quality of life of all members of the family and make it difficult to realize the developmental goals of their children (Piştav-Akmeşe et al., 2011). Since parents do not know exactly what to do, they may exhibit inaccurate attitudes and behaviors and may not make the expected contribution to the development of their children (Can-Toprakçı, 2006). In the studies conducted with families of children with visual impairment, it was determined that families need academic skills, sexual education, self-care, information, independent movement, behavior control, psychological support, social skills, exclusion, and guidance (Küçüközyiğit et al., 2021). Similarly, in the study conducted by Orum-Çattık et al. (2020) with families of children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder, it was emphasized that even if the diagnosis is made in the early stages, families do not know how and in what way to participate in the education process of their children and they need systematic teaching processes in order to gain skills and behaviors. As a matter of fact, within the scope of the study, it is seen that the perception of the families being involved in the educational process is concentrated only in the form of helping to do homework and meeting with the teacher when necessary. In another study (Tutuk & Melekoğlu, 2019), it is seen that the involvement of the families of individuals with hearing impairment in the education process gains weight in terms of supporting their children's reading, correcting their mistakes, and being supportive in reading comprehension questions. Moreover, as a result of the study, it was determined that in order to ensure daily repetition and permanence, extra studies other than homework were not given enough importance by the parents; there was no desired frequency in the parent and teacher meetings; and that the student follow-up was carried out by the parent only if needed. This result coincides with the results of the study conducted by Erdoğan and Demirkasımoğlu (2010) that the frequency of parent meetings is not at an adequate level and attendance at parent meetings decreases significantly, especially with the progress in grade levels.

According to the personal perceptions of families, there are many obstacles that prevent parents of students with special needs from actively participating in the educational process of their children. It was concluded that these obstacles focused on parent-related factors. Parents expressed these factors as work life and professional intensity, preference to help the educational activities of their other children without special needs, the desire of the child with special needs to get

away from their past negative experiences, and financial impossibilities. In their studies, Bıçak and Susar-Kırmızı (2013), Crites (2008), and Gülay-Ogelman (2014) found that parents have experienced similar problems in having time to support their children's educational process. However, it can be said that the education status of the parents, which is one of the parent-related factors, is effective in experiencing these negativities. When the literature is examined, similar studies are found in which parental educational status is stated as an obstacle for parents to be involved in the educational process of their children (Harris & Goodall, 2008; Kay et al., 1994; Salıcı-Ahioglu, 2006; Welsch & Zimmer, 2008; Yavuz et al., 2016). It is seen that another factor mentioned among the parent-related factors is financial impossibilities. As a matter of fact, it can be stated in the literature that educational inequalities is a factor that is emphasized in the literature of educational sciences and that income inequality poses a problem for many societies (Atmaca, 2021). In addition, according to the findings obtained within the scope of the study, it can be stated that mothers are primarily responsible for the educational activities of the children and there is no cooperation between the spouses in supporting home and school activities. As a matter of fact, in the literature, similar findings in a study carried out by Mutlu et al. (2007) were found. However, it was determined that the number of children in the family, the education level of the other children, the presence of a second person with special needs in the house, and the negative thoughts they had about teachers and school were among the other factors that prevented families from being involved in the process. Similarly, there are studies showing that the number of children in the family (Case-Smith & Nastro, 1993), the age of the child, and the grade level (Green et al., 2007; Piştav-Akçamete & Kayhan, 2014) affect the participation of families in their children's educational process. When child-related factors are examined, it can be stated that factors such as the child's gender, age, education level, and invitation to participate are important. Similarly, Green et al. (2007) came to the conclusion that the educational level and age of the child are decisive in the involvement of families in the educational process. When environmental factors are evaluated, teachers and school administration are the leading predictors of whether families are involved in the education process or not. This finding obtained within the scope of the study coincides with the findings of the study conducted by Castro et al. (2004). In addition, it was found that parents prefer to stay in the background, especially in school-based participations due to different cultural values and languages used. There are similar studies that have come to the conclusion that the sociocultural environment is one of the obstacles for parents to take an active role in the educational process (Aslanargun, 2007; Keçeli-Kayı, 2008).

It was concluded that families indicated rehabilitation centers as a support element in the education process of their children and that the rate of parents receiving reinforcement support was low. This situation can be interpreted as families with children with special needs leave their educational responsibilities to schools and teachers from the beginning of their child's educational life and think that the primary responsibility for the educational process belongs to the school culture.

There are some limitations of the research in terms of its generalization. The fact that it has been studied with a small number of participants as well as the fact that all types of obstacles are not included among the participants can be considered a limitation. In this direction, it may be suggested to conduct qualitative and quantitative research on the importance of the family in the special education process using different methods with more participants in different disability groups. In the light of the results obtained from the research, parents can be given seminars on the place and importance of the family in the education of children with special needs. Skills can be gained to provide effective parental support. Activities that will ensure family participation (I am reading with my parents, presentation of cultural aspects in class,

taking an active role in official ceremonies, parent class visits, assignments to ensure parent participation) can be added to the curriculum to increase family participation.

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