

Teachers' Expectations Regarding the Family's Contribution to the Education Process in Special Education

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Abstract: This study aims to examine teachers' expectations regarding the family's contribution to education process in special education. This study was conducted with a qualitative research design. Accordingly, the study group consisted of 23 teachers (15 females, 8 male) working in totally 7 schools in the Karamürsel district of Kocaeli province in Türkiye. A semi-structured interview form was used as a data collection tool in the study. Content analysis was used to analyze the qualitative data collected through semi-structured interviews. The findings of the study were gathered under 4 main themes within the framework of the research questions. These themes were defined as; (1) expectations regarding what needs to be done in special education courses, (2) expectations regarding what needs to be done in school, (3) expectations regarding what needs to be done outside school, (4) expectations regarding what needs to be done for students receiving special education in rehabilitation centers. When the findings are evaluated in general, it was seen that teachers had expectations especially in terms of parent-teacher cooperation, and parents supporting both their children and teachers inside and outside the school by considering the physical and mental conditions of the students..

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Introduction

TODAY, in some countries such as Türkiye, there is an education system that includes various levels of 12-year compulsory education (Şahin, 2023). In this system, family support and cooperation require the family and school to work in harmony with each other (Tschannen-Moran, 2001). Research shows that children spend approximately 11% of their time at school and 89% of their time with their families outside of school (Şahin, 2023; Ülker & Barış, 2019). It can be said that the family is one of the important factors affecting the quality of education given to students. In fact, some studies have shown that the family environment in which education is provided and supported makes significant contributions to student success (Wong, 2018). In general, studies approach the subject from two different perspectives. The first of these includes family-teacher communication as well as the participation of families in school communities and institutional activities at school. The second is aimed at investigating behaviours such as family helping with homework and child care (Rogers et al., 2009).

It is seen that the importance of family participation in the education process and school-family cooperation is understood in developed countries and is reflected in education policies. In the legal regulations made on this subject, certain responsibilities are assigned to both schools and educators and families (Erdoğan & Demirkasımoğlu, 2010). In order to create effective and successful school-family cooperation, the schools can organize various activities such as organizing home visits, planning activities such as trips, observations, and conferences for parents, teachers, and children, using parents as in-class resource persons, using parents for vocational guidance, scheduling and announcing meetings with parents, giving parents opportunities to use school resources, conducting surveys to obtain parents' opinions about the school, assigning tasks to parents in celebrating important days, having parents write for the school bulletin, organizing classroom demonstrations at certain intervals and ensuring that parents are informed about student performance in this way, and demonstrating a sample lesson to parents (Arslan & Nural, 2004; Erdoğan & Demirkasımoğlu, 2010). However, although the importance of the issue has been understood and reflected in education policies, there are some obstacles to the participation of families in the education process (Erdoğan & Demirkasımoğlu, 2010). On the other hand, Accardo et al. (2020), who stated that positive family-school relationships are associated with student success, also emphasized that establishing successful relationships with parents can be a difficult task for teachers. In some studies, teachers reported that they were not ready to involve parents in their children's education (Collier, 2015; Wagner et al., 2012). Moreover, many teachers report that they are afraid of

communicating with parents and see working with parents as an anxiety-provoking and stressful challenge (Gartmeier et al., 2017).

In contemporary societies, instead of schools or teachers that do not care about the family, an approach that shares the responsibilities of the family and the school should be adopted. In fact, the family is the most important stakeholder of the school (Şahin, 2023). In parallel, researchers have focused on the fact that the family's participation in education increases the academic and social success of children. However, the necessity of helping parents with the responsibility of educating their children has been adopted and cooperation between parents and schools has gained importance (Machen et al, 2005). This situation becomes even more important when children with special needs are considered. As known, individuals with special needs are individuals who differ significantly from their normal peers in terms of both their physical characteristics and learning abilities (İlgar, 2017). Due to these disadvantages, parents of children with special needs may face various difficulties throughout their lives, which can put stress on the family unit (Burke & Hodapp, 2014).

The cooperation of special education teachers and families is essential to support students with special needs (Accardo et al., 2020). In order for these students to benefit from the education provided in the educational institution at the highest level, parents must actively participate in the child's education and support this education at home (Taytak Küçük. & Taşkın, 2023). Families are the first teachers and advocates of their children with special education. They actively play a role in the special education process and are key to ensuring children's social and sensory development and their self-confidence. The family, which has an important place in the education process of all children, is gaining more importance in the education of individuals with special needs, namely children. The duty of the family is to take an active role by being included in the individual education program that determines the path of their children in need of special education. At the same time, it is seen that some legal regulations have been made regarding special education (Gul & Ozay Kose, 2024, Özkan, 2024). In Turkey, with the Special Education Services Regulation in 2006, the educational services to be provided directly or indirectly to those in need of special education were established in detail. The regulation took its final form in 2018 (Özkan, 2024). It also included regulations regarding the active role of families in every aspect throughout special education and the provision of education (Kartal et al., 2024). However, such regulations and partnerships are often inadequate in practice, and teachers state that they are not sufficiently prepared to work with families. In addition, it is reported that parents' beliefs that they can increase their children's adaptive functioning and behaviour are positively affected by strong parent-teacher relationships (Accardo et al., 2020). At this point, the importance of the

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of the Participants.

		f	%
Profession	Special education teacher	16	69.6
	Subject teacher	7	30.4
Gender	Female	15	65.2
	Male	8	34.8
Professional experience	0-5 years	7	30.4
	6-10 years	1	4.4
	11-15 years	4	17.4
	≥ 16 years	11	47.8
Professional experience in special education	0-5 years	12	52.2
	6-10 years	2	8.7
	11-15 years	4	17.4
	≥ 16 years	5	21.7

family's effects or contributions to the process in creating a positive teacher-family-school unity cannot be denied. In achieving this, determining teachers' expectations from families can contribute to the development of the mentioned cooperation.

Purpose of the Research

The purpose of this study is to determine teachers' expectations regarding the family's contribution to education process in special education. Considering the importance of the family in both the mental and physical development of children with special needs, determining the expectations of teachers from the family in schools where these children study can contribute to the detection and elimination of problems that may arise in this process. It is also thought that this study can serve as an example for similar studies to be conducted in the future.

Method

Research Design and Sample

In this study conducted with a qualitative research design, the study group was determined by the convenience sampling method. Convenience sampling is one of the purposive sampling methods. In this method, the researcher selects a case that is close and easy to access (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2011). Accordingly, the study group consists of 23 teachers (15 females, 8 male) working in totally 7 schools determined by convenience sampling in the Karamürsel district of Kocaeli province in Türkiye (**Table 1**).

When **Table 1** is examined, 7 of the teachers are branch teachers (religion, science, Turkish, etc.) while 16 of them are teachers working in the field of special education. While the majority of the teachers have 16 years or more of professional experience, it is seen that more than half of them (52.2%) have very little experience in the field of special education.

Data Collection Tool

A semi-structured interview form was used as a data collection tool in the study. The interview form was developed by the researchers and included 4 open-ended questions to investigate the teachers' expectations regarding the families' contributions of students with special needs to education: (1) What are your expectations from parents regarding the courses you teach in special education?, (2) What are your expectations from parents regarding what needs to be done for students receiving special education in school?, (3) What are your expectations from parents regarding what needs to be done for students receiving special education outside of school?, (4) What are your expectations from parents regarding what needs to be done for students receiving special education in rehabilitation centers outside of school?. The questions were examined by two teachers (field teacher, special education teacher) in terms of language, scope, comprehensibility, etc. and were found appropriate for the purpose of the study.

Before the interview, the participants were informed about the purpose of the interview, how it would be conducted, and how long it would take. The interviews were conducted face-to-face. Each interview lasted approximately half an hour. All analyses were conducted in Turkish, but only the necessary parts were translated into English in this study. For example, the direct quotations from teachers' opinions given in the section "Discussion and Conclusion" were translated from Turkish to English.

Analysis of Data

In the study, content analysis was used to analyze the qualitative data collected through semi-structured interviews. In this process, the researchers examined the data several times to ensure reliability and grouped the data according to the main themes. Then, categories were determined by grouping similar and different views in each theme and the content analysis was completed. In some theme, more than one category was specified by the same teacher. Therefore, the total may exceed 23.

Table 2. Teachers' Expectations About What Needs to be Done in Special Education Courses.

Teachers' opinions	f	%
Control or provision of course materials	6	26.1
Repeating classroom work and activities at home	11	47.8
Helping with and checking homework	10	43.5
Supporting students' reading and writing skills	2	8.7
Teaching that classroom rules and negative behavior rules are also valid at home	2	8.8
Ensuring attendance	6	26.1
Supporting the child by allocating special time	5	21.7

Table 3. Teachers' Expectations About What Needs to Be Done in School.

Teachers' opinions	f	%
Requesting that playgrounds be built within the school	1	4.4
Supporting the teacher in the child's integration or communication with other students	3	13.0
Assisting the teacher in the development of the child's self-regulation and creativity skills	1	4.4
Cooperating with the teacher in every matter	8	34.8
Assisting the teacher in meeting the child's individual needs (such as the toilet)	3	13.0
Informing the school about changes in the child's mental or physical condition	2	8.7
Regularly attending parent meetings	2	8.7
Trying to get to know the child's friends or their families	1	4.4
Not comparing students with each other, accepting the child's situation	3	13.0
Showing more interest in the child	3	13.0
Correcting the child's misbehavior	1	4.4

Findings

The findings of the study were gathered under 4 main themes within the framework of the research questions. These themes were defined as; (1) expectations regarding what needs to be done in special education courses, (2) expectations regarding what needs to be done in school, (3) expectations regarding what needs to be done outside school, (4) expectations regarding what needs to be done for students receiving special education in rehabilitation centers. The teacher opinions gathered under four themes and the analysis results of the categories belonging to each theme are presented respectively. Accordingly, the findings regarding the teachers' expectations from parents regarding what needs to be done in special education courses are shown in **Table 2**.

When **Table 2** is examined, teachers' opinions on expectations from parents regarding what needs to be done in special education courses are grouped under seven categories. According to the findings, most teachers stated that parents should make more efforts in the areas of repeating the

Table 4. Teachers' Expectations about What to Do Outside of School.

Teachers' opinions	f	%
Making trips to nearby areas	1	4.4
Following the education process outside of school	7	30.4
Setting rules at home	1	4.4
Raising awareness of the negative attitude of society	1	4.4
Collaborating with the teacher outside of school	3	13.0
Accepting the child, not being ashamed	5	21.7
Sending the child to a rehabilitation center or other centers	4	17.4
Meeting the child's basic needs such as nutrition and cleaning	1	4.4
Spending quality time with the child during the day	4	17.4
Including the child in activities that will help them adapt to society (shopping, park, swimming, volleyball etc.)	4	17.4
Giving the child the opportunity to use the information they learn in class in their daily lives	3	13.0
Participating in courses or seminars that will contribute to the child's development and increase their awareness of their child	3	13.0

classroom work and activities at home (47.3%), helping and checking homework (43.5%), checking or providing course materials (26.1%), ensuring attendance in the course (26.1%) and supporting the child by allocating special time for them (21.7%). The findings regarding teachers' expectations from parents regarding what should be done in the school are shown in **Table 3**.

When **Table 3** is examined, teachers' opinions on expectations from parents about what to do for students receiving special education in school are grouped under eleven categories. According to the findings, the majority of teachers stated that parents should be in constant cooperation and communication with the teacher on every issue (34.8%). However, 13% of teachers stated that they expect more effort from parents in issues such as supporting the teacher in the integration or communication of the child with other students, helping the teacher in meeting the child's individual needs (such as the toilet), accepting their child's situation and not comparing students with each other, and showing more interest in the child. The findings of the study regarding teachers' expectations from parents about what to do outside of school are shown in **Table 4**.

When **Table 4** is examined, teachers' opinions on expectations from parents about what to do outside of school are grouped under twelve categories. According to the findings, the majority of teachers stated that parents should follow the education process outside of school (30.4%). On the other hand, most teachers stated that they should accept their children's situation outside of school as well as inside (**Table 3**) and should not be ashamed (21.7%). On the other hand, 17.4% of teachers stated that they expect more effort from parents in matters such as sending the child to a rehabilitation centre or different centers, spending quality time with the child during the day, and including the child in activities that will ensure their

Table 5. Teachers' Expectations Regarding What Should Be Done for Students Receiving Special Education in Rehabilitation Centers.

Teachers' opinions	f	%
Coordinating between the rehabilitation center and the school	14	60.9
Sharing the actions taken in the rehabilitation center with the teacher and the school	9	39.1
Making sure that the rehabilitation center is qualified	2	8.7

adaptation to society (shopping, park, swimming, etc.). The findings of the study regarding the teachers' expectations from parents regarding what should be done for students receiving special education in rehabilitation centres outside of school are shown in **Table 5**.

When **Table 5** is examined, teachers' opinions about expectations from parents regarding what should be done for students receiving special education in rehabilitation centers are grouped under three categories. According to the findings, the majority of teachers stated that parents should provide coordination between the rehabilitation centre and the school (60.9%). On the other hand, most teachers stated that parents should share the actions taken at the rehabilitation centre with the teacher and the school, while two teachers (8.7%) stated that parents should pay attention to the quality of the rehabilitation centre they send their children to.

Discussion and Conclusion

This study was conducted to determine teachers' expectations regarding the contribution of families with children with special needs to the education process. Individuals with special educational needs encounter various difficulties in their education life due to the difficulties created by their differences and are forced to change schools or leave the education system because of these problems (Küçük & Taşkın, 2023). It is important for schools and families to cooperate in overcoming the difficulties encountered by individuals with special needs. In these cooperation processes, teachers may need guidance and support to educate students, and also students and families may have similar needs (Taytak Küçük. & Taşkın, 2023; Wakeman et al., 2006). Teachers play an important role in providing them with the support they need. In this context, this study examined teachers' expectations regarding the contribution of families to the education process in special education.

The results of the study reveal that teachers who teach students with special needs have expectations from parents on various issues. These issues are grouped under four main themes. When the findings are examined in

detail, it is determined that teachers have certain expectations from parents regarding what needs to be done in special education courses. Most teachers emphasized the necessity of repeating classroom work and activities at home, helping with homework and checking. They also stated that parents should help with checking or providing course materials, allocating special time for their children and ensuring that the child attends class. When these findings are considered, it is clear that teachers want families to actively participate in the education process. Teachers may have thought that family participation in the education process will both reduce the teacher's burden and positively affect the child's cognitive development. The findings are parallel to the results of many studies in the literature (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; Fishman & Nickerson, 2015; Forlin & Hopewell, 2006; Sheldon & Epstein, 2002). Erdoğan and Demirkasımoğlu (2010) also emphasized the importance of family involvement in the education process and stated that both educators and families should be made aware of this issue. Studies in the literature have also found that family involvement in the education process leads to a decrease in absenteeism (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002) and an increase in academic success (Erdoğan & Demirkasımoğlu, 2010; Jeynes, 2007; Sheldon, 2003). On the other hand, some teachers in the study expect parents to teach the child that the classroom rules and negative behaviour rules are also valid at home. In the study conducted by Sheldon and Epstein (2002), it was determined that there was a decrease in disciplinary incidents when families were included in the process. During the interviews, some teachers told that;

TM1 (Teacher Male-1): "...On days when we have classes, it would be beneficial for parents to check that the course materials are prepared before the students arrive at school..."

TM3: "I am teaching a 'Technology and Design' course for special education students. This course is more focused on creativity and skill-based work. We need various tools and equipment to do these activities. We may need help and support from parents in this regard."

TF7 (Teacher Female-7): "It is very easy to forget the information learned in special education. For this reason, reviewing homework and repeating the subjects taught to children at home by parents will be useful in reinforcing and making the information acquired permanent."

In the study, teachers had expectations from parents not only what needs to be done in special education courses but also in some subjects that

should be done in school in general. The vast majority of teachers stated that parents should be in constant cooperation and communication with teachers in every subject regarding the school. In addition, teachers want parental support regarding some individual needs of the students. However, when the findings are examined in general, teachers argue that parents should be involved in the education-teaching process both in terms of the course and the school. This result shows that although the parent-teacher relationship is relatively weak in the course and school, teachers want this relationship to be developed. On the other hand, when the opinions of the teachers are examined, especially regarding the things that should be done in the school, it is seen that they mostly want support from parents regarding the individual needs of the students. However, some teachers stated that parents cannot accept the special situations of their children. This situation necessitates that families receive support in terms of raising awareness. When the findings obtained regarding the things that should be done in the school are evaluated in general, it is concluded that teachers support the participation of parents in the process. These results are supported by many studies in the literature (Accardo et al., 2020; Arnold et al., 2008; Fishman & Nickerson, 2015; Forlin & Hopewell, 2006; Johnsen & Bele, 2013). However, different research results that contradict the findings of this study have also been encountered (Christenson, 2004; Erdoğan & Demirkasımoğlu, 2010; Shannon, 1996; Walker & Dotger, 2012). For example, Shannon (1996) and Christenson (2004) stated in their studies that educators had negative attitudes towards families and did not believe in the importance of family involvement. According to the results of the study conducted by Erdoğan and Demirkasımoğlu (2010), teachers and administrators complained about families' unconscious behaviour regarding their participation in the education process. Teachers and administrators are uncomfortable with some parents intervening in their areas of expertise and pressuring them on what to do and how to do it, and therefore they tend to be lukewarm about the participation of families in the education process. According to Erdoğan and Demirkasımoğlu (2010), schools do not provide sufficient space for practices that will raise awareness of families on this issue and ensure their effective participation. For this reason, they recommended that seminars be organized for families on their responsibilities regarding participation in the education process. In fact, in a study conducted by Acardo et al. (2020), a Family Collaboration Project was included in a special education teacher education program course taken simultaneously with clinical practice in the field in order to prepare teachers who are capable of working with families. The results showed that candidates who participated in the experimental group understood teacher-parent collaboration better and learned communication skills better compared to candidates who did not complete the Family Collaboration Project. During the interviews, some teachers told that;

TM1: "Playgrounds can be built for students with special needs within the school. Parents can request this from the school administration."

TF2: "..... At the same time, if the child has needs, parents can help the teacher to meet only their basic needs without interfering with the child's education and training at school."

According to the results of the study, teachers stated that they have some expectations from parents not only in school but also outside the school. According to the findings, the majority of teachers stated that parents should follow the education process outside the school. Teachers stated that parents should make more efforts, especially in matters such as spending quality time with the child during the day and including the child in activities that will ensure their adaptation to society (shopping, park, swimming, etc.). Ensuring their children's participation in social life, providing opportunities and preparing the necessary environment are among the most important benefits that families can provide to their children in this regard. At this point, it is necessary to ensure that children with special needs participate in environments and activities where they can integrate with their peers (Özkan, 2024). In this way, children with special needs can develop as a whole, not only cognitively, but also emotionally and physically. During the interviews, some teachers told that;

TF11: "Parents should not limit students' education only to school. In addition, they should direct the student to activities that will improve their development (such as swimming, volleyball, physical therapy, etc.)"

TF12: "Providing the child with environments that are open to various sports activities or social events will contribute to the child's development. The more stimulating, the easier and more effective it will be to explore the child's interests."

TM4: "If the child is receiving education outside the school, parents should inform the school about the developments there."

Considering the above situations, the importance and contribution of rehabilitation centers cannot be denied. Indeed, teachers emphasized the importance of rehabilitation centers and stated that parents should play a role in ensuring coordination between the rehabilitation centre and the school. In addition, the quality of the rehabilitation centre has been identified as an

important issue that teachers emphasize. In fact, the results of the study conducted by Mengi and Enginoğuz (2024) revealed that parents of students with special needs face some difficulties in special education and rehabilitation centres. At this point, it is considered important to inspect such institutions. During the interviews, some teachers told that;

TF8: "Rehabilitation centres and schools need to progress in a synchronized manner, and parents need to take an active role in this process, ensuring continuity and helping the process to be completed efficiently."

TF12: "Parents should follow the activities carried out in rehabilitation centres...."

When the findings of the study are evaluated in general, it is seen that teachers have expectations especially in terms of parent-teacher cooperation, and parents supporting both their children and teachers inside and outside the school by considering the physical and mental conditions of the students. On the other hand, it has been determined that some teachers have deficiencies in terms of parents' negative attitudes, their inability to accept their children's situation, comparing them with other children and communication with the teacher. Based on these results, it can be said that cooperation and coordination between parents-school-teacher-rehabilitation centres should be increased. In order to achieve this, families should be made aware that education is a process that should not be left only to schools; that families are also responsible in this process and that quality education can only be provided with family participation (Erdoğan & Demirkasımoğlu, 2010). In this direction, the following suggestions are offered for future research:

- Parent-teacher communication should be improved and, if necessary, teachers should be given seminars for this.
- Families who cannot accept the inadequacy of their children should be directed to receive support.
- Family participation should be increased in supporting the child's physical needs, especially in the school.
- It has been determined in the study that family participation in the education process is low in some areas. In future studies, factors affecting family participation in the education process can be examined.
- Only teacher opinions were included in the study. In future studies, parent and administrator opinions can also be used.
- Inspections aimed at improving the quality of rehabilitation centers can be increased.

- More coordination should be provided between the rehabilitation centre and the school, and parent support should be obtained in this regard.

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