



**ATTITUDES AND KNOWLEDGE OF SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS ON
LANGUAGE AND SPEECH DISORDERS IN CHILDREN**

**ÖZEL EĞİTİM ÖĞRETMENLERİNİN ÇOCUKLARDAKİ DİL VE KONUŞMA
BOZUKLUKLARINA İLİŞKİN TUTUMLARI VE BİLGİLERİ**

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Abstract

Special education teachers are important team members in the prevention and intervention of speech and language disorders. The knowledge and attitudes of special education teachers about language and speech disorders are important for the evaluation, development and progress of the child with special needs. The aim of this research is to determine the attitudes and knowledge of special education teachers towards language and speech disorders in children. 106 special education teachers participated in the study. In this research, which is a descriptive study, survey model was used. "Attitude and Knowledge Questionnaire towards Language and Speech Disorders" was used as a data collection tool in the study. The data obtained through the questionnaire were collected to reveal the knowledge of special education teachers on the subject. The data collected from the research were analyzed with the Statistical Package Program for Social Sciences (SPSS 23.0). The findings obtained from the research are presented together with the tables in the form of frequency and percentage values and descriptive findings. More research is needed on special education teachers regarding language and speech disorders that are common among disability groups.

Keywords: *Speech and language disorders, knowledge and attitude, special education, special education teacher*

Öz

Özel eğitim öğretmenleri, konuşma ve dil bozukluklarının önlenmesi ve müdahalesinde önemli ekip üyeleridir. Özel eğitim öğretmenlerinin dil ve konuşma bozukluklarına ilişkin bilgi ve tutumları, özel gereksinimli çocuğun değerlendirilmesi, gelişimi ve ilerlemesi için önemlidir. Bu araştırmanın amacı, özel eğitim öğretmenlerinin çocuklarda dil ve konuşma bozukluklarına yönelik tutum ve bilgilerini belirlemektir. Araştırmaya 106 özel eğitim öğretmeni katılmıştır. Betimsel bir çalışma olan bu araştırmada tarama modeli kullanılmıştır. Araştırmada veri toplama aracı olarak "Dil ve Konuşma Bozukluklarına Yönelik Tutum ve Bilgi Anketi" kullanılmıştır. Anket yoluyla elde edilen veriler özel eğitim öğretmenlerinin konu ile ilgili bilgilerini ortaya çıkarmak amacıyla toplanmıştır. Araştırmadan elde edilen veriler Sosyal Bilimler için İstatistik Paket Programı (SPSS 23.0) ile analiz edilmiştir. Araştırmadan elde edilen bulgular frekans ve yüzde değerleri ve betimsel bulgular şeklinde tablolarla

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birlikte sunulmuştur. Yetersizlik grupları arasında yaygın olarak görülen dil ve konuşma bozuklukları konusunda özel eğitim öğretmenleri üzerinde daha fazla araştırmaya ihtiyaç vardır.

Anahtar kelimeler: *Dil ve konuşma bozuklukları, bilgi ve tutum, özel eğitim, özel eğitim öğretmeni*

Introduction

Every child in the world is different and unique. Each child has unique social, physical, emotional and cognitive characteristics (Norwich, 2002). In some of the children, deficiencies may occur in terms of communication skills, cognitive skills and motor skills. In case of more than one of these deficiencies, the child may be adversely affected (Sharp and Hillenbrand, 2008; Konca, 2021). It is seen that general education services are insufficient and special education is needed for these children due to deficiencies in development areas. Special education is the education carried out with appropriate education programs and in appropriate environments to meet the social and educational needs of individuals whose developmental and individual characteristics differ from their peers. An individual in need of special education is one who differs significantly from his peers according to his individual and developmental characteristics (Billingsley and Bettini, 2019). The purpose of special education service is to prepare individuals who need special education for social life in line with their abilities and interests. Determining the needs of the child correctly and providing the most efficient and effective education in accordance with these needs has been the most important element aimed at from individuality in special education.

Speech and language disorders are common in early childhood. Approximately 10-15% of school-age children have speech, language or hearing impairments (Topbaş, Konrot and Ege, 2002). These disorders affect the academic performance of the individual negatively and reduce the psychosocial adjustment of the individuals. Special education teachers have an important role in the diagnosis, treatment and follow-up of children with this disorder (Aydın Uysal and Tura, 2018). Communication is the exchange of information, feelings and thoughts that takes place between two or more people, the receiver and the sender. Individuals can live illiterately; but they cannot live without acquiring the language and learning to speak. Children also need communication to express their feelings, thoughts, interests and desires (Reder and Duncan, 2008).

According to Feldman (2019), language, speech and communication have an important place in our daily life and the main purpose of communication is the exchange of feelings and thoughts that are desired to be shared. Language is the system that people use to share their thoughts and feelings with each other. Speech is a verbal communication tool. Speech is the production of sounds in the language by the movement of speech organs (lip, palate, tongue, vocal cords, chin, etc.). Although they have the accumulation of language standards and can understand what they hear and read, they may have problems in speaking due to structural deficiencies. Speech is the ability to express one's feelings and thoughts by speaking. It is to initiate logical communication with the other person through verbal and written methods using language, thought, voice or hand and arm movements. The child's learning to use language is one of the most important indicators of child development. Considering that this development starts before birth, it is accepted that the child has learned language skills as of this time (Sunderajan and Kanhere, 2019).

Education and environment have a great influence on language development. Although the history regarding the evaluation of hearing, visually and mentally handicapped children who require special education is old, meeting the special education needs of children with language and speech problems is quite new. In the 19th century, experts from disciplines related to normal speech processes in some clinics and hospitals, university professors were interested in speech defects. The American Speech and Hearing Association (ASHA), which was established in

1920 as the “American Speech Academy” and took its current name in 1979 with the effect of the change, stated that the main goal of this discipline was the diagnosis, education and treatment of communication problems (Brown, 2011).

Meeting the educational, emotional and social needs of children with speech and language disorders constitutes an important area of special education services. The social and educational needs of children with speech and language disorders are supported by education programs and methods, specially trained staff (especially speech and language therapists and special education teachers), and education and therapy carried out in environments suitable for their developmental characteristics, based on the personal competencies of people who need special education (Powell, 2018; Büyükköse, 2020). The main purpose of special education is to help children with speech and language disorders meet their social and educational needs, increase their vital skills, increase their independence by decreasing their dependence in daily life, prepare for life, develop healthy relationships with others, and improve their abilities. Special education is carried out in environments suitable for developmental characteristics, based on educational programs developed in accordance with individual characteristics and needs of children with speech and language disorders (Çağlar and Çiyiltepe, 2019).

The number of people with speech and language disorders is increasing day by day in the world and in our country (McLeod and McKinnon, 2007). These disorders affect the academic performance of the individual negatively and reduce the psychosocial adaptation of the individuals. Special education teachers have a critical role in the diagnosis, treatment and follow-up processes of children with this disorder. The aim of this research is to determine the attitudes and knowledge of special education teachers towards language and speech disorders in children.

Method

Research Model

The survey model, which is among the quantitative research methods, was used in the research. Survey research is based on the opinions of the participants about an event or subject, or their interests, attitudes, skills, etc. These are studies in which the characteristics of the research are determined and on larger samples compared to other studies (Büyüköztürk, Kılıç Çakmak, Akgün, Karadeniz and Demirel, 2014).

Participants

106 special education teachers participated in the study. The participants of the study were determined by convenient sampling method. Convenient sampling is used when the researcher includes the most accessible respondents in his sample until he reaches the number of samples he needs (Etikan, Musa and Alkassim, 2016). Demographic characteristics of the participants are given in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of the Participants

Demographic Characteristics	f	%
Gender		
Female	70	66.7
Male	36	33.3
Age		
21-30	66	62.6
31-40	33	30.8

41-50	5	4.7
51 and above	2	1.9
Education status		
Graduate	63	58.3
Postgraduate	43	41.7
Professional experience		
1-5 years	64	59.8
6-10 years	26	24.3
11-15 years	9	8.4
16-20 years	3	2.8
21 years and above	4	4.7
Whether or not worked with a student with a language and speech disorder before		
Yes	97	89.8
No	10	10.2
Participation in any certificate program or in-service training related to language and speech disorder before		
Yes	77	72.2
No	30	27.8
Total	106	100

Data Collection Tools

In the research, a questionnaire developed by Toğram and Maviş (2009) to determine the attitudes and knowledge of special education teachers towards language and speech disorders in children was used. In the questionnaire, there are a total of 20 attitude items, the first 10 of which are about the academic and social success of children with speech and language disorders, and 10 about their therapy needs. Evaluation of attitude items was made using a three-point Likert-type rating. Items rated as "disagree", "undecided" and "agree" were scored as 1, 2 and 3 respectively. In the second part of the questionnaire, there are 12 ranking items that aim to reveal the knowledge of the participant groups about the causes of speech and language disorders and lack of therapy. The first 6 of the ranking items are grouped as information about the causes of speech and language disorders, and the next 6 items are grouped as information about therapy deficiencies in speech and language disorders. Participants were asked to rank 6 items in each group according to their priorities by scoring between 1 and 6.

Data Collection

The data of the research were collected online due to the Covid-19 pandemi process. For this, the survey form was transferred to the online environment with the help of Google Forms and then the link (URL) required to access the survey was sent to the people who met the criteria determined for the participants. Both at the beginning of the survey and together with the survey link, instructions regarding the application process were presented and it was stated that they could contact the researcher for questions or problems they might encounter during the application.

Data Analysis

The data collected from the research were analyzed with the statistical package program for social sciences (SPSS 23.0). Percentage and frequency values were calculated for each item in the questionnaire. The values obtained in this direction were first graphed and then interpreted.

Results

In this section, the data obtained as a result of the analysis of the data collected electronically with the data collection tools are presented.

Table 2. Findings on the attitudes and knowledge levels of special education teachers towards language and speech disorders

Items		Agree	Disagree	Undecided
Attitudes towards academic/social success				
1. The child with speech problems goes to school when they reach the appropriate age.	f	71	29	6
	%	(%65.7)	(%27.8)	(%6.5)
2. Since the child cannot speak, he/she cannot learn to read and write.	f	28	67	11
	%	(%26.2)	(%63.6)	(%10.2)
3. The child's inability to speak turns into a learning disability in the future.	f	49	31	26
	%	(%45.8)	(%29.9)	(%24.3)
4. Children with speech problems become hyperactive and maladaptive.	f	27	58	21
	%	(%25.0)	(%55.6)	(%19.4)
5. The child's speech problem negatively affects his/her school life/courses.	f	83	16	7
	%	(%77.6)	(%15.9)	(%6.5)
6. The child realizes that his/her speech is distorted at school.	f	37	54	15
	%	(%34.3)	(%51.9)	(%13.8)
7. The child with speech problems is mocked by his/her friends at school.	f	55	17	34
	%	(%50.9)	(%16.7)	(%32.4)
8. Children with speech problems exhibit maladaptive behaviors in lessons.	f	41	44	21
	%	(%38.3)	(%41.1)	(%20.6)
9. Children with speech problems cannot participate in social activities at school.	f	23	67	16
	%	(%21.5)	(%63.6)	(%14.9)

10. The reason for the failure of the child in his/her lessons is the speech problem.	f	41	34	31
	%	(%38.0)	(%33.3)	(%28.7)
Attitudes towards speech and language therapy needs				
11. The child with speech problems can overcome the problem on their own.	f	8	67	31
	%	(%7.4)	(63.9%)	(%28.7)
12. Therapies should take place in a school setting rather than a clinical setting.	f	53	26	27
	%	(%50.9)	(%24.1)	(%25.0)
13. Teachers should observe therapy sessions.	f	98	1	7
	%	(%92.6)	(%0.9)	(%6.5)
14. The therapist should inform the teacher about the child's therapies.	f	104	1	1
	%	(%98.2)	(%0.9)	(%0.9)
15. Speech therapy also positively affects the child's (if any) retardation in other areas.	f	83	10	13
	%	(%78.7)	(%9.3)	(%12.0)
16. It is not appropriate for the child to leave the class to participate in speech therapy.	f	56	27	23
	%	(%53.7)	(%25.0)	(%21.3)
17. Children with speech problems can easily use what they have learned in therapy in their daily life.	f	87	6	13
	%	(%82.1)	(%5.7)	(%12.2)
18. Individual therapies (compared to group training) are more beneficial for the child with speech problems.	f	74	14	18
	%	(%69.2)	(%13.1)	(%17.7)
19. Therapies enable the child to develop a positive attitude towards the problem.	f	80	10	16
	%	(%74.8)	(%9.3)	(%15.9)
20. The child needs to take medicine for the speech disorder to go away.	f	6	68	32
	%	(%5.6)	(%63.6)	(%30.8)

In Table 2, the level of participation and the frequency and percentage values met by the special education teachers in the questionnaire about the knowledge and attitudes towards language and speech disorders in children are determined. The positive and negative attitudes of the participants for children with speech and language disorders were determined in terms of the values they used for the items they agreed with, were undecided about, and disagreed with in the survey, and these attitudes were described in the sections for the participants. According to the results, it was revealed that special education teachers agreed with the items 1, 3, 5, 7, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18 and 19 and disagreed with the items 2, 4, 6, 8, 9, 11 and 20.

Discussion and Conclusion

With this study, it was aimed to determine the attitudes and knowledge levels of special education teachers towards language and speech disorders in children. Language is fundamental to the development of literacy throughout children's educational years. It is essential for all children, especially oral language, communicative academic, social and emotional development, and supports the development of reading and writing skills. There is a risk that children who have a disorder/insufficiency in language and speech skills in pre-school and/or have started school without having their problems diagnosed before due to varying reasons may have difficulties in reading and writing.

According to the results, special education teachers revealed that therapies enable the child to develop a positive attitude towards the problem. Toğram and Maviş (2009) found that special education teachers believe in the need for language and speech therapies and give importance to them. The reason why the teachers in both studies expressed similar views on their needs for educational intervention may be that teachers in both countries had similar training. Considering all these results together, it is thought that pre-service teachers and teachers should be made aware of the increasing prevalence of language and speech disorders. Although the knowledge level of teacher candidates about these disorders is not sufficient, education processes on this subject need to be carefully planned. The communication of the teacher with the child with speech and language disorders is extremely important in terms of diagnosing this group. The results of this study are similar to the results of the study of Toğram and Bora (2018).

Results showed that 65% of special education teachers agree with the statement that children with speech problems go to school when they reach the appropriate age, 27% disagree, and 6% stated that they are undecided. In the study of Prakash (2012), it was concluded that teachers have positive attitudes in order to achieve the implementation of inclusion education in the school, according to the results of the research on the inclusion of hearing-impaired children in schools and teacher attitudes.

Speech disorders encountered during speech education and ways of correction In the study of Erdem (2013), classroom and Turkish language teachers, who are responsible for the development of language skills, also have to deal with the detection and treatment processes of students' speech disorders, sometimes trying to treat them and sometimes guiding them. Since special education teachers have similar responsibilities regarding the educational intervention process and therapy needs, it is important to increase teachers' awareness of language and speech disorders. According to the findings, special education teachers stated that 50% agreed, 24% disagreed, and 25% were undecided with the statement that therapies should take place in a school setting rather than a clinical setting. The findings are in line with the findings of Toğram and Maviş's (2009) study.

Attitudes and knowledge of special education teachers towards language and speech disorders in children were examined in this study. This study could be carried out with preservice special education teachers. Qualitative research can be conducted to draw more in-depth results in order to examine the views of special education teachers on language and speech disorders. It should be ensured that special education teachers participate in in-service trainings and seminars on language and speech disorders in order to recognize, understand, provide education and correctly guide students with language and speech disorders, and they should be informed about collaborating with speech and language therapists. Families with children with speech and language disorders struggle with many difficulties throughout the process (Friehe, Bloedow and Hesse, 2003). Since the role of the family is very important in this process, it is

thought that it would be beneficial to establish counseling units or a hotline that they can benefit from in case of difficulties.

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