

Full Length Research Paper

The effectiveness of in-service training for school counselors on the inclusion of students with disabilities

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The purpose of the research is to ascertain the effectiveness of in-service training for school counselors on the inclusion of students with disabilities. In this research, pre-experimental method in compliance with pretest- posttest model is employed in order to ascertain the effectiveness of in-service training for school counselors on the inclusion of students with disabilities provided by the Ministry of Education. The research group consists of all school counselors (14 teachers in total) who participated in the in-service training organized by the Ministry of Education Isparta Guidance and Research Centre in 2007 to 2008 school year. In the research, the “opinions relative to mainstreaming” scale developed by Antonak and Larviee (1995) and translated into Turkish by Kircaali-İftar (1996) was used as the data collection instrument. In-service training on the inclusion of students with disabilities was provided to school counselors by 4 persons in charge in Isparta Guidance and Research Centre for 5 days. Dependant samples t test was used in order to ascertain the effectiveness of the in-service training on the inclusion of students with disabilities provided to school counselors. It was found out that the in-service training on the inclusion of students with disabilities provided to school counselors is not effective in altering the views of teachers. In order to change the views of school counselors on the inclusion of students with disabilities, it is thought that there is a need for long term in-service education in which; different teaching methods and techniques are used, teachers voluntarily take part in it and they can put theoretical information into practice.

Key words: Inclusion, in-service training, school counselor, teacher training.

INTRODUCTION

In 1970s in the West, as the result of the protesting movements, families urged against their children's being labeled; these families' winning the cases they sued for a better education for their children (Stephens, Blackhurst, and Magliocca, 1982); the concepts', such as human rights, social justice and equality of opportunity, gaining importance (Yell, 1998), it has been decided that disabled children should not be kept out of the regular education, and the idea that disabled children should be educated in regular schools administrating inclusive education instead of isolating them in special schools or classrooms became prevalent in the field of education in many countries (Snyder,1999; Hughes, Schumm and Vaughn, 1996; Flem and Keller, 2000). This resulted in the initiation of the legal restructuring on the issue.

The crop of this legal action was the emergence of the

term “The least restrictive educational environment. “Along with this conclusion the concept of “least restrictive environment” came up (Kirk and Gallager, 1983). According to the disabled student's level of being together with his peers and family; least restrictive environment could range from a full time classroom education to educating the individual at home or keeping him in hospital in order to provide medical assistance and carrying on the education in these environments. Although many countries have legally guaranteed that the handicapped could be educated in least restrictive environment, these practices are carried out differently in different countries. For example; while countries like Australia, the USA and the UK adopt educational practices at different levels from separated education to integrated practices in special education schools some others such

as Denmark and Switzerland attach more importance to inclusive education and carry out full time inclusion practices (Stella, Forlin and Lann, 2007). In Turkey, these practices are conducted like those in Australia, USA and UK and in-service training is provided by the Ministry of Education to the personnel (manager, supervisor, teacher etc.) responsible for inclusion practices.

As a result of the policies carried out for inclusion practices, there has been an increase in the number of students with disabilities included in regular classes (Stella, Forlin and Lan, 2007). These increases in the numbers of students with disabilities included in regular education environments have brought along several other problems that have made it necessary to define the factors enabling or hindering inclusion practices. As a result of the research carried out, teachers' views and attitudes on inclusion have been stated as one of the most significant factors affecting the success of inclusion practices (Williams and Algozine, 1977; Chow and Winzer, 1992; Chalmers, Hoover and Olson, 1997). There is much research available in the literature on the views and attitudes of teachers about inclusion. One can see in the findings obtained from the conclusions of the related research that the findings vary from country to country and by gender. In their research by which they examined teachers' attitudes towards inclusion in Germany, USA, Israel, Guana, Taiwan and Phillipines; Leyser, Kapperman and Keller (1994) found out that attitudes of teachers vary from country to country and that the attitudes of teachers in USA and Germany towards inclusion are more positive than those in Israel, Guana, Taiwan and Phillipines. Research focusing on relation between teachers' views and attitudes show differences in their findings; while some findings state that female teachers have a more positive attitude (Higgs, 1975; Beh-Pajoo, 1992; Leyser, Kapperman and Keller, 1994) and some state males do so (Avramidis, Bayliss and Burden, 2000; Forlin, Jobling and Carroll, 2001; Carroll, Forlin and Jobling, 2003). Some others state that there is no such meaningful relation between teacher attitude and gender (Harasymiw and Horne, 1976; Ringlaben and Price, 1981; Graffi and Minnes, 1988; Polat, 1993; Sucuoğlu and Diken, 1999; Şahbaz and Peker, 2008). Scruggs and Mastropieri (1996) examined 28 pieces of research on teachers' views and attitudes about inclusion between 1958 and 1995 and ascertained that teachers' views and attitudes about inclusion were positive in less than half of their research. Similar conclusions have been reached by examining the findings of research carried out after 1995. In some of them teachers' views on inclusion are stated as positive (Scruggs and Mastropieri, 1996; Agran, Snow, Swaner, 1999; Van Reusen, Shosho and Barker, 2000; Mdikana, Ntshangase and Mayekiso, 2007) and in some Saumell, 1996; Soodak and Lehman, 1998; Snyder, 1999; Avramidis, Bayliss and Burden, 2000; Avramidis and Norwich, 2002; Şahbaz, 2007, 2008; Şahbaz and Peker, 2008).

There are several factors affecting teachers' views and attitudes towards inclusion. Some of them are as follows: crowded classroom environments, lack of resources (Vaughn, Schumm, Jallad, Slusher and Saumell, 1996), features and characters of the school and students with disabilities (Soodak and Lehman, 1998) and the fact that teachers do not possess sufficient experience and knowledge on inclusion (Bradshaw and Mundia, 2006). Although each of these factors have important effects on teachers' views about inclusion, maybe the most significant one is that the teachers do not possess sufficient experience and knowledge on inclusion. A majority of the behavioral problems of students with disabilities in integrated classes are caused by teachers who do not have information about these children and by their expectations from students (Campell, Judith and Bost, 1985). Therefore it is often highlighted that the teachers should be informed about students with disabilities. Among the means of informing, one of the most suggested is providing teachers with in-service training (Carlson and Potter, 1972; Guerin and Szatlocky, 1974; Harasymiw and Horne, 1976; Johnson and Johnson, 1980; Powers, 1983; Hastings and Oakford, 1996). The findings and methods of the research carried out on changing the views and attitudes of teachers about disabled- inclusion differ from each other. According to some research findings, in-service training programs provided for inclusion serve for the development of a positive view and attitude in teachers (Higgs, 1975; Harasymiv and Horne, 1976; Mandell and Starin, 1978; Larrivee and Cook, 1979; Mc Coy, Prehm and Lambert, 1980, Sanche, Haines and Hestere, 1982; Hoover and Cessna, 1984; Wilczenski, 1993; Yıkmiş, Şahbaz and Peker, 1997; Avramidis, Bayliss and Burden, 2000; Lambe and Bones, 2007) and to some others it does not do so (Bradfield, Brown, Kaplan, Rickert and Stannard, 1973; Johnson and Cartwright, 1979; Johnson, 1980; Hudson, Reisner and Wolf, 1983, Lambe and Bones, 2007).

When the research on changing teachers' views and attitudes towards inclusion in and out of Turkey is examined, it is observed that much of the research is concentrated on classroom teachers and branch teachers while only a little amount of research has been carried out on the effectiveness of in-service training for school counselors who assume very important responsibilities on preparing psychological counseling and guidance programs for educational, vocational and personal developments of students with disabilities. Şahbaz (2007) research, in which he compared the views of classroom teachers and school counselors about the inclusion of students with disabilities, has stated that both teacher groups have negative opinions about inclusion. In Şahbaz (2008) research which compares the views of classroom teachers, branch teachers and school counselors about the inclusion of students with disabilities has stated that all three groups of teachers have negative

opinions about inclusion, while school counselors' views about inclusion are more positive than those of classroom teachers and branch teachers. The results of Şahbaz and Peker (2008) research comparing the views of school counselors about the inclusion in several different cities have stated that school counselors have negative opinions about inclusion and no research has been found pertaining to the effectiveness of the training provided to school counselors about the inclusion of students with disabilities. This research also aimed at obtaining some clues on the effectiveness of the in-service training provided by the Ministry of Education and making suggestions accordingly.

The purpose of the research is to identify whether;

1. the guidance counselors receiving the in-service training experience a variation of personal opinions about the integration of the students with disabilities compared to the pre-training time, and
2. the opinions of the counselors about the integration of the students with disabilities differ upon their gender.

METHODS

Research design

In this research, pretest- posttest pre-experimental method was used with the aim of ascertaining the effectiveness of the in-service training provided to school counselors on changing their views about the inclusion of students with disabilities.

Research group

The participants of the research consist of 14 school counselors working at primary schools in the centrum of Isparta in 2007 to 2008 school year. As in-service training is aimed to be provided to all primary school counselors in this city, sample and control groups were not formed.

The limitations of the research contains 14 guidance counselors who served in the provincial center of Isparta in 2007-2008 academic year and attended the in-service training. Also, a control group could not be built for the guidance counselors to attend the in-service training were designated by the provincial directorate for national education in Isparta and attendance within the specified dates was compulsory.

Research instrument

In this research, the "Opinions Relative to Mainstreaming Scale" which was developed by Antonak and Larivee (1995) and translated into Turkish by Kırcaali-Iftar (1996) and whose internal consistency coefficient is 0.80 was used as the data collection instrument. The scale is 5 Likert-scales from 1= "strongly agree" to 5= "strongly disagree". There are 10 negative items in the scale (2, 4, 5, 7, 8, 10, 11, 14, 18 and 19), these items are graded reversely. The lowest point of the scale can be 20, while the highest point is 100.

Procedure

In the research teachers were provided with "in-service training" as the experimental activity. Before the training, all school counselors participating in the research were given the "opinions relative to mainstreaming" scale as the pretest. Following administrating the instrument before training, in-service training was initiated. This in-service training was given for 5 days and 6 hours a day (a total of 30 hours) by 4 persons in charge in Isparta Guidance and Research Centre. During this training, counselor teachers were informed about subjects such as students with disabilities and their characteristics, special education services and inclusion, benefits of inclusion, how to teach skills and notions in inclusion environments, educational adaptations, treating problem behaviors, class management and teachers' questions were answered. Computers, projection devices were used for assistance during the process. Upon concluding in-service training school counselors were given the "opinions relative to mainstreaming" scale again as the posttest.

Data analyses

The data distribution of pretests and posttests were examined by Kolmogorov Smirov test and by calculating the multiplied coefficients in order to determine the effectiveness of the in-service training given to school counselors on the inclusion of students with disabilities; it was observed that the data was normally distributed and concluded that analysis could be carried out with parametric statistics methods. Then, the dependent samples t test was used for comparing the scores of pretest and posttest of the research data and the t test for independent samples was used for comparing the average scores based on gender.

RESULTS

At the end of the in-service training given to school counselors on the inclusion of students with disabilities, the data on the effectiveness of the in-service training is given in Table 1; the data on whether teacher opinions differ according to gender is given in Table 2. Table 1 is about the effectiveness of the in-service training given to school counselors on the inclusion of students with disabilities is examined, it can be observed that there are differences between the pretest and posttest scores of the research, but also that the difference is not a significant one ($t_{(13)} = 0.194, p > 0.05$). When the research data is examined in terms of averages, it comes out that the posttest average ($\bar{x} = 51$ and 71) of counselors' opinions about inclusion practices is smaller than the pretest average ($\bar{x} = 52$ and 14). When Table 2 is examined in order to determine whether teacher opinions differ by gender at the end of the in-service training given to school counselors on the inclusion of students with disabilities, it has been ascertained that the total pretest scores ($t = 0.706; p > 0.05$) and the total posttest scores ($t = 1.321; p > 0.05$) of the in the research do not differ. When the research data is examined in terms of averages, it can be observed that a total of 14 teachers that is 6 female and 8 male participated in the in-service training; the pretest average of female counselors is ($\bar{x} = 58.00$), the posttest average is ($\bar{x} = 61.83$), while the pretest average of male counselors is ($\bar{x} = 60.00$),

Table 1. The results of the t-Test for the effectiveness of the in-service training given to school counselors on the inclusion of students with disabilities.

	N	\bar{x}	Ss	sd	t	p
Pretest	14	52.14	9.43	13	0.194	0.010
Posttest	14	51.71	10.56			

Table 2. The results of the t-Test for total average scores of pretest and posttest based on the gender of school counselors.

	Gender	n	\bar{x}	Ss	df	t	p
Pretest	Female	6	58.00	6.72	12	0.706	0.494
	Male	8	60.00	3.85			
Posttest	Female	6	61.83	4.70	12	1.321	0.211
	Male	8	57.37	7.15			

and the posttest average is ($\bar{x} = 57.37$).

Research data shows that, at the end of the in-service training there was an increase in the scores of female counselors while there was a decrease in those of males.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In this research, firstly the effectiveness of the in-service training given to school counselors on the inclusion of students with disabilities; and secondly, the fact whether a gender based difference occurred in the opinions of school counselors at the end of the in-service training for school counselors on the inclusion of students with disabilities were examined. When Table 1 about the effectiveness of the in-service training given to school counselors on the inclusion of students with disabilities is examined, it can be observed that the posttest scores of the research are smaller than the pretest scores, but this difference is not a significant one. Considering the findings obtained, it can be expressed that the in-service training given to school counselors on the inclusion of students with disabilities has not made a change in the opinions of the school counselors about inclusion. When the findings are examined in this aspect they can be observed to be consistent with the 2007 research results of Bradfield, Brown, Kaplan, Rickert and Stannard (1973), Johnson and Cartwright (1979), Johnson (1980), Hudson, Reisberg and Wolf (1983) and Lambe and Bones (2007). When research data groups are examined in terms of average scores it can be observed that the posttest score averages of the counselors are smaller than their pretest score averages. Considering the fact that high scores reflect negative opinion and low scores reflect positive opinion on the scale, at the end of the in-service training the opinions of counselors appear to have changed in a positive way; while they can be seen to be between indecisive and disagreeing and closer to the negative

opinion based on the scores on the scale.

In this respect it can be observed that teachers' opinions on inclusion practices are rather negative (Şahbaz, 2007, 2008; Şahbaz and Peker, 2008) and accordingly the findings are in consistence with the research findings stating that teachers have a negative attitude towards the inclusion of students with disabilities (Richardson, Hasford, Goodman and Dornbusha 1961; Shotel, Iano and McGettigan, 1972; Higgs, 1975; Lortie, 1976; Larivee and Cook, 1979; Larivee, 1981; Childs, 1981; Reisberg and Wolf, 1986; Myles and Simpson, 1989; Soodak and Lehman, 1998; Snyder, 1999; Avramidis and Norwich, 2002). Considering Table 2 related to the gender based distribution of teachers participating in the in-service training given on the inclusion of students with disabilities; it is stated that pretest and posttest total scores of the school counselors participating in the research does not differ by gender. In other words, in-service training given on the inclusion of students with disabilities did not make a difference between the opinions of male and female counselors. The findings obtained at the end of the research are consistent with research results (Harasymiw and Horne, 1976; Ringlaben and Price, 1981; Graffi and Minnes, 1988; Polat, 1993; Sucuoğlu and Diken, 1999; Şahbaz and Peker, 2008). In conclusion, although it was stated that there was a change in the opinions of school counselors on the inclusion of students with disabilities at the end of the research and this change did not differ by gender groups; the fewness of individuals in the research restricts the generalizability of research results. The generalizability levels of the findings obtained could be raised by carrying out future research with bigger groups of samples. It is stated in literature that several factors affect teachers' views and attitudes towards inclusion and some of them are listed as; crowded classroom environments, lack of resources, features and characteristics of the school and students with disabilities and the fact

that teachers do not possess sufficient experience and knowledge on inclusion (Vaughn, Schumm, Jallad, Slusher, Saumell, 1996; Soodak and Lehman, 1998; Bradshaw and Mundia, 2006). These factors affecting teachers' opinions and attitudes towards inclusion are considered to affect teachers in Turkey negatively as well and make it harder to change their opinions.

Cüceloğlu (1995) expresses that it is easy for an individual to change his opinions and attitudes in voluntary activities; while it is more difficult to do so in compulsory ones. Teachers participating in the in-service training practices organized by the Ministry of Education are often called by written order. In such practices in which teachers take part compulsorily, it is not easy to change their opinions and attitudes. The in-service training given to school counselors about the inclusion of students with disabilities whose effectiveness was studied in this research is a formal and theoretical activity which used the expository method of teaching and was a short term practice of 5 days (30 h in total). It is considered that the formal, theory based and short term in-service training given to the school counselors failed to make changes in the opinions and attitudes of teachers. Research findings are in consistence with those stating in literature that formal and theoretical informing is not sufficient alone in changing teachers' attitudes (Şahbaz, 1997), there may occur some changes as long as teachers are informed by long term practices (Larivee, 1981; Hoover and Cessna, 1984) and they can put the theoretical information into practice (Leyser, Abrams and Lipscomb, 1982). In conclusion, in order to be able to change school counselors' opinions about the inclusion of students with disabilities, it is considered that there is a need for long term activities transformed into "psychoeducation" groups in which teachers participate voluntarily, they can put theoretical information into practice, different activities like dramas and role plays that enable teachers to take part in actively/ interactively are practiced instead of "lecturing" and which are conducted by people trained in this field.

RECOMMENDATION

The research group of this study was composed of a limited number of guidance counselors serving in the province of Isparta whose attendances to the in-service training were designated by the provincial directorate for national education in Isparta. The study can be redone in bigger cities with the attendance of more guidance counselors, therefore with the opportunity to form a control group.

The content and period of the in-service trainings of Ministry of National Education are set by the ministry.

Hereat, trainings organized turn out to be short-term, theoretical and formal. Short-term, theoretical and formal trainings are not comprehensive enough to create a change in the opinions and professional attitudes

of teachers. Thus, practice oriented and long-term in-service trainings can be organized to lift the effectiveness of the trainings received by the guidance counselors so as to integrate the students with disabilities.

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