



Parents' and Teachers' Roles in Parent Involvement in Special Education: Who is Responsible, to What Extent?

Research Article

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ABSTRACT

Parent involvement has been reported to have many benefits for the education of children with disabilities. Many children with disabilities in Turkey receive educational support services from institutions entitled "Special Education and Rehabilitation Center" (SERC). The general purpose of this research is to develop a better understanding of the opinions of teachers and parents of children with disabilities in regards to their roles in parent participation in SERC education programs. This qualitative study adopted a phenomenological approach and conducted face-to-face interviews as a data collection method. Content analysis method was utilized to analyze the data. Findings revealed that lack of communication is an important problem for both teachers and parents. Teachers reported lack of parent involvement and interest in children's education. While parents stated their expectations for more social activities and desire for increased numbers of class sessions for their children, teachers emphasized the great need for active parent involvement.

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Keywords:

Special education, educational support services, special education and rehabilitation services, parent involvement

Introduction

Every individual has their own unique characteristics and abilities. Regardless of their differences, everyone is equal before the law, has the right of education and learning, working, and social security. In the article 42 regarding The Constitution of the Republic of Turkey it is declared that "The State shall take necessary measures to rehabilitate those in need of special education so as to render such people useful to society" (Retrieved January 29, 2019, from https://global.tbmm.gov.tr/docs/constitution_en.pdf). In Turkey,

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1980s were important time period with regard to special education laws and regulations. The "Law on Social Services and Child Protection Agency No. 2828" adopted in 1983 is one of the important developments in the field of special education. In this law, a person with a disability is defined as an individual who is unable to comply with the typical life requirements due to a loss of his/her physical, mental, spiritual, emotional and social skills at birth or afterwards because of any illness or accident and needs protection, care, rehabilitation, counseling and support services (Şahin, 2003). In the same year, Law No. 2916 on Children in Need of Special Education enters into force. In this governing law, the sections on definitions, principles, institutions and duties related to special education, the identification of individuals with special needs, placement and monitoring were given and various regulations related to special education were designed in accordance.

These constitutional guidelines and laws summarized above have been a guide to the regulations needed for individuals with disabilities (Kargin, 2003). Within the framework of Decree Law No. 573 on Special Education (MEB, 1997), individuals who require special education differ significantly from the level expected from their peers in terms of their individual characteristics and educational qualifications for various reasons (Ersoy & Avcı, 2000). This law recognizes the importance of parent involvement for children with special needs and requires their participation during the processes of diagnosis and all educational activities. Additionally, to overcome the financial barriers preventing parents joining educational activities, Turkish Ministry of National Education covers the food and accommodation expenses of first degree relatives of children with special needs (Decree Law No. 573 on Special Education, 1997).

All individuals with exceptionalities, regardless of the reasons are entitled to receive special education services when typical educational settings do not meet their needs (Altan, 2008; Çuhadar, 2013; Ersoy & Avcı, 2000). Special Education and Rehabilitation Centers (SERC) has been one of the most common educational settings for the children with special needs in Turkey. These private SERCs operate under the control of Turkish Ministry of National Education or the Social Services and Child Protection Agency and their main goal is to equip individuals with disabilities with independent living skills and their integration in the mainstream society (MEB, 2005; Metin, 2012).

Turkish Ministry of National Education defines special education as a mode of education provided by specially trained professionals, through explicitly developed programs and special teaching techniques in appropriate settings for individuals who are significantly different from their peers in terms of their individual and academic competence, depending on the congenital or acquired causes (MEB, 2013). When the researchers' explanations of special education examined it can be seen that improving individuals' self-sufficiency, productivity, independence (Kırcaali-İftar, 1998), providing specifically planned instructional activities (Özsoy, Özyürek & Eripek 1998), and promoting social inclusion (Ataman, 2011) are at the central point.

To increase the quality of special education, ensuring active and informed parent participation is as important as the laws, institutions, teachers and educational programs. At this juncture, it is necessary to distinguish between the school-parent collaboration and the parent involvement or school-parent relationship concepts (Epstein, 1992). Epstein (2008) defines six different modes of parent involvement; parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community.

Although these terms are used interchangeably, collaboration extends across involvement. While parent involvement activities includes parents' assisting their children's homework or teachers' conducting parent conferences and meetings (Harry, 2008), family-school collaboration activities involves building reciprocally respectful relationships in which shared decisions making and problem solving occurs (Dettmer, Thurston & Dyck, 2005). Therefore, parent-school collaboration is very important for the learning and education of the child with a disability (Blue-Banning, Summers, Frankland, Nelson & Beegle, 2004). However, especially

when there are cultural differences between children's home and school, there may be many obstacles in front of families and school professionals (Cobb, 2013; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011).

Similar to the international researchers, parent involvement has been an interest to Turkish researchers from different educational fields such as educational psychology (Şanlı, 2012), elementary education and special education (Tekinarslan, Sivrikaya, Keskin, Özlü & Rasmussen, 2017). For example, Korucu (2005), investigated the difficulties faced by institutions (SERCs) providing special education and rehabilitation services in Turkey in terms of opinions of institution owners, administrators, teachers, and families of children with special needs. Kocaman (2015) and Altınkurt (2008) studied the problems faced by administrators in special education institutions in Turkey. Administrators reported that most problematic issues are related to finding well qualified staff (especially physiotherapists and special education teachers), increased numbers of SERCs and competition among these centers; unethical staff and student transfers among SERCs, financial difficulties (i.e. overdue payments of educational services), and lack of collaboration and communication between parents and SERCs. Parallel with SERCs' administrators, teachers also mentioned the challenge of inadequate school-family collaboration (Karasu & Mutlu, 2014).

Previous research demonstrates that teachers' thoughts on parent involvement may change based on grade level and their field (Dor, 2012) or the culture (Blackman & Mahon, 2016). To illustrate, elementary education teachers give more importance to parents' supports for their children's learning by assisting their homework and school projects in comparison to secondary education teachers (Dor, 2013). Although teachers in different countries agree on the value of parent involvement and accept their participation as a strengthening factor in education (Dor & Rucker-Naidu, 2012; Bæck, 2010; Koutrouba, Antonopoulou, Tsitsas & Zenakou, 2009), their attitudes may change from one country to another. Israeli teachers are found to be more ambivalent compared to their American colleagues when it comes to motivating parents for joining meetings and volunteering school activities (Dor & Rucker-Naidu, 2012). On the other hand, Norwegian teachers take great pride in their role as professionals and put emphasis on parents' role mostly as supporters of teachers' actions and school mandates (Bæck, 2010). A hierarchical relationship between families and schools was observed in special education settings where parents were only given supportive roles in Barbados (Blackman & Mahon, 2016).

Although the positive impact of family-school collaboration has been accepted for a long time, parents rarely find chances to express their expectations and understanding of parent involvement, and their thoughts on ways of building effective home-school partnerships as an equal partner in this relationship (Baker, 1997). Moreover, parents and teachers may have conflicting perceptions related to the definition of parent involvement about its content and the effective involvement practices (Miretzky, 2004). In this regard, the present study is conducted to give an equal voice to parents and teachers as partners in home-school collaboration in Turkish context. The objective of this study is to build on and contribute to the growing foundation for practical applications and research related to strengthening school-home collaborative partnerships in Turkey (e.g. Korucu, 2005; Şanlı 2012). In the lights of some previous studies, which were carried out in Turkey (Altınkurt, 2008) and in other countries (Dor, 2012; 2013), realizing the importance of mutual interaction between parents and teachers in parent involvement in education, the present study is designed to explore and compare the opinions and perceptions of special education teachers' and parents' about the responsibilities and challenges of parent participation in special education. In this context the problem sentence of the study can be expressed as "What are the roles of parents and teachers in parent participation in special education?"

Purpose of the Research

The general purpose of this research is to develop a better understanding of parents and teachers' opinions in regards to their roles in parent participation in SERC education programs. In response to this general objective, the following answers were sought:

- How often and for what reasons do parents visit SERCs?
- What do teachers expect from families in regards to the education of their children with special needs?
- What are the recommended activities for families to do at home as part of SERC education programs?
- What are the solution suggestions of the families about the problems they experience in regards to the teachers and SERCs?
- What are the other recommendations of the families in regards to the education of their children in the SERCs?
- What are the opinions of SERCs' teachers in regards to the organization of parent participation activities?
- What are the views of teachers working in SERCs on the adequacy of the parent participation in organized events?
- What are the views of teachers working in SERCs on the adequacy of communication with parents?
- What are the views of teachers working in SERCs on informing families about everyday activities?
- What are the suggestions of teachers working in SERCs to increase the parent participation in the education programs?

Method

This section provides information on the model, sample, data collection tools and analysis of the data.

Research Model

This qualitative research was conducted through interviews. Qualitative research can be defined as the research in which qualitative data collection methods such as observation, interview and document analysis are used to reveal perceptions and events in a natural and realistic way (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). The research was also conducted on the basis of phenomenological model. Phenomenological design is a research approach used to deeply understand how the people react to the events around them (Balci, 2005). Phenomenological approach is based on determining the core of a shared experience of a phenomenon. One of the methods providing the use of this approach is interview in a qualitative methodology (Patton, 2002). Since authors were interested in in-depth exploration of qualitative data related to parents' and teachers' subjective experiences and interpretations of parent involvement phenomenon, the phenomenological model was selected among the research approaches to inquiry (Creswell, 2013).

Sample

The sample consisted of 20 parents of the students attending various SERCs in Osmaniye and 20 teachers from different majors working in these centers. The data were collected from SERCs in which the colleagues of one of the authors were working. Thus convenient sampling method was used to collect data. Descriptive statistics related to the parents of children with disabilities attending these SERCs and to their teachers are shown in Table 1 and Table 2.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the parents

Variables	f	%
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Gender	Female	16	80
	Male	4	20
Job	Housewife	14	70
	Freelancer	4	20
	Government Employee	2	10
Disability of their children	Intellectual Disabilities	5	25
	Hearing Impairments	4	20
	Autism	4	20
	Physically Disabilities	3	15
	Down Syndrome	3	15
	Visual Impairments	1	5
Education period of their children	1-3 years	10	50
	4-6 years	5	25
	7-10 years	5	25

As shown in Table 1, the majority of the participating parents are women, housewives, have children with intellectual disabilities, and have children who have been receiving educational services for 1-3 years.

Table 2. Demographic characteristics of teachers

Variables		f	%
Gender	Female	12	60
	Male	8	40
Age	20-25	3	15
	26-30	4	20
	31-35	4	20
	36 and over	9	45
Educational background	Bachelor's degree	17	85
	Master's degree	3	15
Staff title in the institution	Teacher for individuals with mental retardation	11	55
	Special education teacher	4	20
	School counsellor	3	15
	Physiotherapist	2	10

It can be seen in Table 2 that the majority of the teachers who participated in the study are female, aged 36 and over, and have bachelor's degree in the education of individuals with mental retardation program.

Data Collection Tools

The data of the study were obtained by using semi-structured interview forms consisting of open-ended questions. Semi-structured interview is a type of interview in which the interviewer's response is received by asking interviews in a regular and consistent manner (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). The forms were developed based on the research questions. There were eight questions for parents and seven questions for teachers in the first versions of interview forms developed by the researchers separately for parents and teachers. The necessary modifications were made based on the feedbacks obtained from the pilot applications and the final versions of the forms were composed. Final versions of semi-structured interview forms consisting of seven open-ended questions for parents and six open-ended questions for teachers were used as data collection tools in the study. To provide construct validity, content validity, and language validity, the opinions of educational sciences experts were received. An additional demographic information section in the forms was implemented to collect personal information about the participants.

The Collection and Analysis of Data

The data collection process of this study has occurred between the dates of 01-27 August 2016. Parent participants were interviewed in a quiet room in the Guidance and Research Centers. Teacher participants preferred to be interviewed either at these centers or at a suitable out of school environment. Some of the interviews were done in SERCs in which the sample teachers had worked and the sample parents had attended. Each interview conducted at a convenient date, time and place for the participants and lasted 30-45 minutes. Participants' responses were recorded by the interviewer on the interview form during the time of the interview. In order to protect the privacy of the participants and to facilitate the analysis of the data, each interview form was given a code number and a letter. The letter "T" was selected for the teachers and "P" for the parents. While the codes starting from T1 to T8 represented the male teachers, the remaining 12 (T9 to T20) exemplified females. Similarly, codes starting from P1 to P4 referred to fathers, while the codes between P5 and P20 denotes mothers.

Content analysis was done on data collected in the research. In the analysis of the data, the answers given by the teachers and parents during the interview were read word by word and the codes and themes were reached. Direct citations to the responses obtained in the interviews were given place in order to clarify the findings.

The similarity rate between the coders indicates the reliability of data (Baltacı, 2017). Miles and Huberman's (1994) reliability analysis formula was used for calculating the reliability of data collected by interview form:

$$\text{Reliability} = \text{Number of agreement} \div (\text{Number of agreement} + \text{Number of disagreement}) \times 100$$

The researchers reached an agreement on 52 codes, and disagreed on only one code. The following value was determined after the numbers were put in the formula:

$$\text{Reliability} = 52 \div (52+1) \times 100$$

$$\text{Reliability} = .98.$$

This value indicates the internal reliability and it is expected to be at least .80 (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Patton, 2002). Accordingly, the data were accepted as reliable.

Findings

In this section, the findings from families and teachers about parent involvement in SERC support education programs are presented.

Findings Regarding Families

Table 3 demonstrates the findings on how often and for what purpose the families visit SERCs.

As shown in Table 3, according to the frequency of visits theme, many parents (8/20) stated that they visited the institution every time they bring their children to their session. According to the purpose of visiting SERCs theme, families mostly (8/20) stated that they visited the institution with the purpose of following the process of development of the stent as well as communicating with their children's teacher.

Table 3. Findings related to visits of families to the SERCs

Theme	Codes	f
The frequency of visits	Each session	8

	Once a week	6
	Once a month	4
	A few times a year	2
The purpose of the visits	To follow the process	8
	To communicate with the teacher	8
	To be with the child	4

Some of the interviewee families' opinions on the subject are as follows:

P-3: "I go to a SERC on each session of my child. I go there, because I get information about the process of my child's development."

P-6: "I go to the institution once a month to talk to the teacher face to face and sign the papers about us."

P-10: "There is no need to lie. I go a few times a year for the report works."

Parents' perspectives on teachers' expectations regarding the education of children in SERC education programs are given in Table 4.

Table 4. Teachers' expectations related to children's education in SERC education programs

Theme	Codes	f
Teachers' expectations of the families	Active participation	8
	To do works at home	8
	To support the child	2
	No expectations	2

As shown in Table 4, in the SERCs' education programs, due to the expectation of teachers' from the parents, parents often (8/20) stated that teachers expected them to take active participation from themselves and to work at home with regard to the education of the child. Some of the opinions of the parents on this issue are as follows:

P-1: "My child's teacher expects me to have an active participation in this process."

P-4: "The teacher wants us to do extra reinforcement work at home."

P-8: "The teacher knows that I do not know how to read and write, and he does not want anything from me. Even if he wants I cannot do anything. I have a small child, housework. I cannot keep up with it."

Findings related to parents' perception on the activities recommended for families to do at home in the context of SERCs' education programs are given in Table 5.

Table 5. Recommended activities for parents to do at home in the scope of SERCs' education programs

Theme	Codes	f
Teachers' suggestions for families	To review the subjects	12
	To support the child patiently	8
	To participate all parents in the process	6

As can be seen in Table 5, in the theme of "recommended activities for parents to do at home in the scope of SERCs' education programs", most of the families (12/20) stated that teachers wanted them to review the subjects which were taught at school. Some of the interviewed families expressed their views on this situation as follows:

P-2: "Teachers especially recommend reviewing the school work at home to ensure the retention and reinforcement of what was taught at school."

P-5: "They suggest us to involve in the process patiently as we have problems accepting our children's status."

P-17: "They suggest that all parents must participate, but it is not easy. Father works until late in the evening. One of my other two children is a senior high school student, he is in his own world, and the other is a baby. I try to be involved as much as I can, but unfortunately not enough."

Findings related to the parents' opinions about teacher related and institution related problems and their suggested solutions to these problems are presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Parents' opinions on teacher and institution related problems and suggestions for solutions

Theme	Codes	f
Teacher related problems	Lack of communication	13
	Unmet expectations	12
	Disinterest	8
Solutions for teacher related problems	Communication problem should be solved	13
	Teachers can develop themselves	11
	They can show more attention	10
Institution related problems	Late or early arrival of the service bus	15
	Disinterest	12
	Lack of communication	9
	Financial expectations	5
Solutions for institution related problems	Service routes can be re-arranged	15
	Communication problem can be solved	13
	Their interest level can be increased	10

As seen in Table 6, many parents (13/20) highlighted the lack of communication and unmet expectations (12/20) as important issues and provided some ideas to solve these problems related to teachers and SERCs. More than half of them (13/20) thought that solving the problems related to communication is a priority and expressed their views on this situation as follows:

P-12: "We have serious problems about the communication with the teachers. The teachers are constantly busy. As a solution to this situation, certain times can be set to communicate."

P-9: "Many of the teachers do not meet our expectations because they are new graduates or are not field experts. As a solution proposal, teachers should develop themselves and master the field."

P-15: "Teachers show indifferent attitudes. I feel like it is an ordinary job for them. My solution in this topic is that teachers should show interest and relevance in the direction of every student's needs."

When it came to the problems with the SERC as an institution, while the school bus related problems placed on the top by majority of parents (15/20), instructions' lack of interest was identified as another disturbing problem by parents (12/20). Most of them suggested adjusting the service routes (15/20) and solving the communication problem (13/20). Some of the parents' opinions on this issue are as follows:

P-16: "The biggest problem we have experienced about the institution is the late arrival or early arrival of the service vehicle. The service route can be rearranged to resolve this situation."

P-3: "The problem we have in the institution is the indifferent attitudes of the authorities and the lack of communication. For the solution of the problem, the authorities can show interest and communicate with us."

P-20: "The problem for me is that the institution has a one-way communication with us on money issues. They contact with us about the money that they would receive from the government for my child's monthly education. If it is that time, they listen to us. As a solution, the institution should communicate with us not only about the material issues but on all issues. They can communicate about what we can do, what we need to do, interact with parents and inform us about our children's situation, and they can create opportunities and atmosphere for communication."

Findings of other families' recommendations for children's education in SERC education programs are given in Table 7.

As seen in Table 7, most families (17/20) asked for the increase of the number of class sessions/teaching hours in SERCs and parent interaction events (13/20).

Table 7. Other suggestions of parents towards children's education

Theme	Codes	f
Other suggestions related to childrens' education	The number of class sessions/teaching hours can be increased	17
	Parent interaction events can be arranged	13
	Allocating time for children to spend with peers at the same level	7

Some of the parents' opinions about these suggestions are as follows:

P-5: *"The number of class session provided for my child is not enough. So, institutional authorities can increase the number of lesson hours. It lasts two class sessions per week, a total of 8 hours a month. How much efficacy they can get is doubtful."*

P-8: *"In fact, events that might bring families together with other families can be organized. At these events, sharing experiences with each other would expand our horizons for the solutions of the problems that we are experiencing."*

P-11: *"When my child gets on the service bus, he goes to the institution with the children who have more severe or different disabilities. Though individually they are in different classrooms, I want my child to spend time with his peers and who are at the same level."*

Findings Regarding Teachers

Findings related to the opinions of the teachers about the conferences, information seminars or meetings organized for parents and what topics are included in the organized events are given in Table 8.

Table 8. Teachers' opinions regarding organized activities for families

Theme	Codes	f
Event topics	Developmental characteristics	8
	Types of disabilities	5
	Personal development	4
	The importance of parent participation	3
Reasons for not organizing the event	Disinterest of the families	9
	Heavy workload	7
	Transportation problems	4

As seen in Table 8, in the SERC education programs, teachers stated that they organize activities related to the developmental characteristics of many students (8/20) depending on the theme of the activities organized by the teachers for their families. Also teachers stated that disinterest of the families (9/20) and the heavy workload at the SERC (7/20) are the main reasons for being unable to arrange activities. Some of the teachers' opinions on this subject are as follows:

T-3: *"We organize informative seminars on a variety of topics for parents. We give informational seminars on mental, physical and psychomotor developmental characteristics especially depending on the age of children."*

T-7: *"In fact, we are trying to organize events on many topics. We mainly organize activities on the types and characteristics of children with disabilities so that parents have knowledge about the children they have."*

T-10: *"Activities are planned, but we cannot ensure the participation of the families. Our biggest worry in this regard is that the families are indifferent."*

Teachers' opinions on the adequacy of parent participation in organized events are given in Table 9.

Table 9. Teachers' opinions regarding adequacy of parent participation in organized events

Theme	Codes	f
Families' participation in activities	Adequate	12
	Inadequate	8

As seen in Table 9, about the families' participation in organized events in SERCs, the majority of the teachers (12/20) stated that the participation is adequate. Some of the views of teachers on this subject are as follows:

T-2: *"Participation of families for planned events is sufficient. Families want to take part in all kinds of activities related to their children."*

T-8: *"In one-on-one talks, the families talk about various problems. Therefore, they do not have the time for the events organized for them. In fact, they have indifferent attitudes about this topic."*

Teachers' opinions on the adequacy of parents' communication with teachers are given in Table 10.

Table 10. Findings on the adequacy of communication of teachers with their families

Theme	Codes	f
Adequate	Development monitoring	5
	Collaboration	4
	Active participation into the process	2
Inadequate	Limited collaboration	5
	Limited participation into the process	4

As seen in Table 10, due to the theme that the communication with parents is adequate for the teachers working in the SERC, teachers indicated the most (5/20) that communication is adequate as families come into contact due to monitor their children's development, and also stated that the communication is adequate in regard to the families' cooperation (4/20) and their active participation to the rehabilitation process (2/20). In addition, in the context of inadequate communication of teachers with their parents, teachers (5/20) talked about the inadequacy of communication because their families did not cooperate in their work with their children, and because of their limited participation in the process (4/20). Some of the teachers' views on these topics are as follows:

T-1: *"Families' communication with us is sufficient. They are constantly in contact with us to track their children's development."*

T-17: *"It is not sufficient. They do not want to cooperate on any issue."*

Teachers' opinions on informing parents about daily activities are given in Table 11.

Table 11. Teachers' opinions on informing families about daily events

Theme	Codes	f
Ways of informing	Face to face	7
	By phone	6
	By multi-media	3
	With note cards	2
	Via school bus personnel	2

As can be seen in Table 11, teachers working in the SERCs stated that they mostly informed about daily activities by face to face (7/20) and by phone (6/20) depending on the way of information they use. Some of the views of teachers on this subject are as follows:

T-5: *"Yes, I inform them. Firstly, I prefer to see them face to face. When it is not possible, I am informing the families by calling them on the phone or by writing notes on the students' notebooks."*

T-8: *"Yes, I inform the families about the situations of the children on multi-media groups."*

T-11: "Yes, I inform many families. I generally prefer face-to-face interviews, but when the families don't come to school, I inform them via service personnel."

Teachers' views on increasing parent participation in education programs are given in Table 12.

Table 12. Teachers' opinions on increasing parent participation

Theme	Codes	f
Suggestions for increasing parent involvement	Raising awareness of parents	10
	Providing school-parent collaboration	6
	Increasing of social events	3
	Active participation to the process must be provided	1

As can be seen in Table 12, in order to increase parent involvement in the SERC education programs, half of the teachers (10/20) stated that families should be made aware, while some (6/20) stated that school-parent collaboration should be provided. Some of the teachers' views on this issue are:

T-4: "Families are made aware of their children's cognitive, social, academic and physical developmental characteristics etc. They should also be made aware of the importance of parent involvement."

T-16: "Seminars and meetings should be held on the necessity of school-parent cooperation and the process should be continued as a collaborator."

T-19: "Parent involvement can be improved by organizing social activities for the parents."

Results, Discussion and Recommendations

In this study, it is aimed at understanding the barriers hindering the foundation of strong family-school collaboration and identifying the solution recommendations from the perspectives of study participants.

The results of this study, in which the problems and solution suggestions of parent participation in the SERC education programs are examined in terms of the opinions of the teachers and their families, are as follows:

- Families often visit the institution where their children get education and follow the process and be in contact with the teacher.
- Teachers expect the parents to actively participate in the education process and to do works at home.
- Teachers encourage families to repeat their work and be patient in the process.
- There is a lack of communication between parents and teachers, and teachers cannot meet the expectations of parents.
- Families have problems with the time schedule of school buses.
- Families are encouraged to increase the number of class hours and parent interaction organizations.
- Teachers often give seminars on the developmental characteristics of the children to their families.
- Teachers regard the indifference of families and the intensity of institutions as the main reasons in the course of their activities.
- Teachers think that parents' participation in activities is sufficient.
- Teachers often think that families mostly communicate to track their children's development to make cooperation.
- Teachers often provide information to their parents via face-to-face or by phone.
- Teachers advise parents to become conscious of special education and cooperate with the school.

Parent participants of this study stated that they visit SERCs at least once a week. The purpose of these visits was generally keeping track of their children's education and being in communication with the teachers. Communication is identified as not only an important component but also as a problematic area of parent involvement by both parents and teachers. Although some parents like P-10 accepted their responsibility,

majority of parents perceive teachers' heavy workload and lack of interest and dismissive attitudes as the source of communication problems. Teachers, on the other hand, pointed to the parents' lack of interest. Parallel with Lawson's (2003) findings, when teacher participants in the present study talk about the necessity of teacher-parent communication, they impose this duty on parents. Yet, research demonstrates that it must be the other way around. According to Epstein's (2001) findings, parent involvement increases as the teachers actively stimulates parents. Moreover, it is a vital component of successful special education (Blue-Banning et al., 2004). Thus lack of parent and school communication should be considered as a major problem to be resolved.

According to the study findings, one of the most important needs of the parents was increased frequency and length of time for their children's educational sessions. In addition, they suggest activities that not only focused on academics but also activities that promote communication and interaction among families. In a study by Sarı (2002), results revealed that in order for special education to be effective, personnel in the SERCs should communicate with parents openly and sincerely, take their ideas and suggestions seriously, work on developing Individualized Education Programs (IEP) collaboratively as equal partners, and support them to participate in school activities. However, neither teacher nor parent participants mentioned taking part in IEP meetings, communicating in related to in-class activities, behavioral management issues, and shared decision making, and creating common goals for the development of the child with a disability.

Many parents in this study raised the poor professional qualifications of the teachers as an issue, and suggested that they should improve and equipped themselves with necessary skills and knowledge to work as successful special education professionals. Although teacher participants explained the activities conducted to improve parents' knowledge about child development and disability issues, their own needs for professional improvement were largely missing. Among the problems identified by Kocaman's (2015) study by school administrators in special education institutions are the inadequacy of the number and quality of staff and the indifference of the parents of individuals who need special education to the educational process and organized activities. Ege, Altıntaş, Acarlar, Cavkaytar and Baydık's (2004) findings confirmed the present study's results. Not only teachers were ill qualified to work with children with disabilities, but also support services were not accessible for many families. Thus, the researchers suggested that the necessary precautions should be taken in order to meet these immediate demands by providing effective in-service trainings in line with needs for teachers and special education support services staff. Altinkurt (2008) investigated 20 administrator's perceptions of problems experienced in SERCs. SERC administrators expanded on the concerns about teacher qualifications, and mentioned the frequent teacher transfers from one SERC to another due to the destructive competition leaving no time for creating a trusting atmosphere that will allow professionals and parents to realize their commitments to develop each child's potential.

Teachers working in the SERCs, talked mostly on what types of involvement they want from the parents and from their students' parents. In general, Turkish teachers, comparable to teacher participants in Baker's (1997) study, ask parents to support their work by assisting their children's homework and reviewing the materials covered in the classroom. This hierarchical and traditional approach to parent involvement adopted by the teacher participants were also seen in both Dor's (2013) and Blackman and Mahon's (2016) studies. As Blackman and Mahon (2016) explained that this attitude (keeping the parents in their place and away from teachers' domains) especially challenging in special education settings, since parents have the crucial information on their children and the children's school success reliant on the strong democratic relationship between families and schools.

Similarly, in the study conducted by Korucu (2005) on the analysis of the difficulties faced by institutions providing special education and rehabilitation services in terms of institution owners, principals, teachers and families, it is stated that although it is known that the participation of the parents is important in activities

related to special education, parent participation is not at the desired level, the education given to individuals who need special education should be spread to all day, the necessary education was not carried out regarding parent education aimed at families in institutions and although it is revealed that the in-service training is important for teachers' training and self-improvement, there are problems with time due to various concentrations.

Research results demonstrated that teachers' perceive providing parent education sessions such an important part of parent involvement that they conducted home visits to invite families. However, they reported a lack of interest and low levels of parent attendance to school activities that are mainly educational sessions on different types of disabilities, characteristics of students with various special needs and child development. It is observed during the interviews that workload density at SERCs and parent lack of interest decrease teachers' motivations related to preparing better activities. Although, this study's parent participants showed low attendance, Şanlı (2012) found that, "information" is the primary need for parents of children with intellectual disabilities. Comparable with the teacher participants' beliefs, majority of Şanlı's (2012) parent participants were unconcerned with their children's education and did not show enough interest in their children. They see SERC as day care facilities and communicate with school very rarely or not at all.

However, there may be many other realities under this appearance of families. Considering the fact that all parent interviewees have a child with a disability, these findings may be resulted from the parental belief that their children's problems with learning are resistant to change and hence, their active involvement is not as necessary. Alternatively, parents may feel lack of confidence in their own intelligence or abilities. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) explain that parents who feel low-efficacy may avoid drawing attention to themselves, stay away from school and refrain from asking questions or questioning the decisions made by school professionals in order to prevent negative judgments about their parental competence. P-8 provides a good example for this phenomenon as she was telling that she cannot read or write, consequently the teacher cannot ask anything from her and even if he asks she cannot do anything.

Another reason may be the outreach or invitation methods used by teachers for these meetings (Coutts, Sheridan, Kwon & Semke, 2012). Through these invitations, parents feel that they are welcomed and wanted and their ideas are valued at their children's schools (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). For example, participant P-15 stated that teachers were uninterested in her and she felt like as if she was an ordinary everyday work for the teachers.

Some of the teachers stated that the parent communication was inadequate in terms of content and frequency of the conversation. They criticized parents for not being involved in the educational process and they did not show enough support for cooperation. In this study, special education teachers exemplified supporting the child in the learning process as a way of parent involvement through completing tasks assigned by teachers, such as helping with homework and reviewing and practicing what is taught at school. Dor and Rucker-Naidu (2012), who received similar responses from elementary education teachers, draw attention to the fact that this type of an interaction occurs between parent and the child at home, not between parents and teachers.

While parent participants recommended improving teacher qualifications, teacher participants suggested raising awareness among families about the positive outcomes of parent involvement for children and ensuring school-parent cooperation. Karasu and Mutlu (2014) stated that when parents have unrealistically low or high expectations from their children, communication problems start to arise between parents and teachers. Hoover-Dempsey, Whitaker and Ice (2010) suggested that families should ask these questions themselves: "Is my active involvement in my child's education expected? They say that if I take part in the process, will I contribute to my child's learning and the school success?" However, in order to receive positive answer from parents to these questions, the level of education, knowledge, and awareness they

possess must be adequate. Altinkurt (2008) revealed a different kind of conflict damaging the relationships between home and school when some parents ignored their children's education and exploit the special education system for gaining pecuniary advantage due to lack of education.

Previous research demonstrates that parents become more involved in school, once they believe their efforts can make difference in their children's education and learning (Georgiou & Tourva, 2007). Therefore it is very important to empower families of children with disabilities. One way to empower them would be increasing their level of knowledge related to child development and individuals with disabilities, and their skills on how they can support their children's education. Similar to study participants (i.e. A-5), Barbadian teachers also felt that parents lack of coping skills with their children's special needs may be a hindering effect on parent involvement (Blackman & Mahon, 2016). In order to increase the life and educational success of children with disabilities, Al-Shammari and Yawkey (2008) recommends schools to integrate parent education programs informing them about their children's disability. Teachers can use differentiated methods of content delivery in order to make the subject interesting for parents from different social and educational backgrounds. To meet the needs of parents to communicate and to interact with other families and professionals other types of activities can be implemented such as parent support groups and a mixture of social activities. In addition, parent support services and psychological support services can be provided to improve co-operation. Depending on the characteristics of the parent or on the sensitivity of the subject to be discussed, group meetings (for delivering training on a specific issue requested by several parents) and one-on-one parent-teacher conferences (for resolving economic issues between SERC and a family) can be organized.

The present study has many implications for school administrators, teachers, teacher educators, and the researchers. Research revealed characteristics, perceptions and expectations of parents and teachers, school structures and systemic problems may have an impact on parent involvement. For example, teacher participants of the study conceptualized parent involvement as parents' attendance to educational meetings and assistance to their children on academic issues such as homework. However, parents needed to feel valued by the school personnel. Teachers mentioned the heavy workloads at SERCs as one of the factors preventing them from building stronger relationships with parents. This finding suggested that administrators and teachers perceive their responsibility in parent involvement as subsidiary to their other duties. However, the quality of the relationship between families and school professionals is a critical factor for children's academic, social and emotional well-being. Therefore; administrators in SERCs should direct their attention and efforts to create time and atmosphere in SERCs that is fostering positive teacher-parent interactions. It is important to remember that economic, social, cultural, psychological and educational factors may prevent parents to take an initiative in their children's education. Thus professionals at SERCs should take the first step in empowering families and develop creative ways to involve parents in SERCs. Moreover, teacher education programs should focus on the relational aspects of teaching in special education and revising their course contents in order to increase pre-service teachers' understanding of the importance of mutual respect and decision making with families.

The present study has some limitations. One of them is about the sample including the teachers who work in SERCs and the families who have children attending to these institutions. In another study, the opinions of the managers of the institutions about parent participation can be taken into account. Another limitation is based on the model of the study. The study was realized by using qualitative method, so quantitative studies may be conducted to determine the mutual attitudes of special education teachers and their families towards each other. As another limitation, the problem of the study consists of the parents' involvements in SERC education programs. In future studies, the other problems faced in SERCs may be determined and proposals for solutions may be put forward.

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