



(ISSN: 2602-4047)

Afat, N. & Yürük, Z. (2023). Perceptions about special educational needs: is it believed that giftedness requires special education? *International Journal of Eurasian Education and Culture*, 8(22), 1649-1663.

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.35826/ijoecc.750>

Article Type: Research Article

PERCEPTIONS ABOUT SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS: IS IT BELIEVED THAT GIFTEDNESS REQUIRES SPECIAL EDUCATION?

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Received: 23.05.2023

Accepted: 20.08.2023

Published: 01.09.2023

ABSTRACT

It is believed that in order to improve the quality of special education, it is necessary to raise awareness at a societal level. Describing the current situation is an important starting point for improving this awareness. From this perspective, the aim of this study was to explore the perceptions of students in the 5th grade about people with special educational needs (SEN) and in this context, to understand whether gifted students are seen as individuals with SEN. Students' perceptions of SEN were explored through their drawings and metaphor analysis. The phenomenological model was used in this qualitative research. The research group consisted of 43 students from a secondary school in the province of Istanbul. While collecting the research data, the students were asked to draw a person with special educational needs and complete the sentence "A person with special educational needs is like because". The descriptive analysis method was used to analyze the data; the frequency (f) and percentage (%) were evaluated. As a result, the most frequent 5th-grade students perceive 37% of individuals with special needs as having an intellectual disability, 34% as having a physical disability, 5% as having a visual impairment and 5% as having a special ability. 23% of 5th-grade students have an "uncertain" perception of the type of special education need. Individuals with SEN are perceived as male, without material support, with an open posture and happy expression.

Keywords: Perception, special education needs (SEN), gifted children, student, giftedness

INTRODUCTION

According to the Regulation on Special Education Services (2018), special education is defined as education carried out by specially trained personnel in an appropriate environment in line with a programme prepared for the needs of the student in order to meet the educational and social needs of individuals with special educational needs (SEN). The concept of individual with SEN in the definition refers to individuals who differ significantly from their peers with normal development in terms of individual, developmental and educational competences. The education of students with special needs is carried out on the basis of an individualised education programme (IEP), which is prepared by taking into account the individual characteristics and needs of the student and includes long and short-term goals in line with the level of development. The success status of students is evaluated according to the level of achievement of the goals in their IEPs (MoNE, 2022).

Individuals with SEN have the opportunity to receive education in a special education school, special education class, in the same class with their peers within the scope of mainstreaming/integration practice, at home and in the hospital as a result of the evaluation by the guidance and research center (GRC). The most appropriate environment for their characteristics are determined, and orientation is made by GRC. It is one of the basic principles of special education to plan in a way that does not separate students from their social and physical environment as much as possible (Special Education Services Regulation, 2018). According to data from the Turkey Statistical Institute (TSI), individuals with at least one disability constitute 6.9% of the total population in Turkey (T.C. Ministry of Family and Social Services, 2022). This rate is approximately 15% worldwide (Association for Living Without Disabilities, 2023). When we focus on educational environments, it is seen that in 2020, while the number of all students in formal education in Turkey was over 18 million, the number of students who were diagnosed and referred to special education institutions (mainstreaming, special education classes and special education schools) was 425,774. When we look at these numbers, it is seen that a very limited number of students with special education needs (30 percent of SEN) can benefit from special education opportunities.

Ensuring that individuals with special needs live in harmony with the society and acquire skills for this is of great importance for both the individual with special needs and society. For this purpose, modules on social and community skills are included in the education plans of all levels starting from early childhood for students with special needs (Special Education Programmes, 2022). Students with developmental disabilities and gifted students are included in the scope of special education. Gifted students are also included in the group that needs diagnosis within the scope of special education and can be diagnosed and directed to special education options. According to the accepted normal distribution in the world and Turkey, 2% of the population consists of individuals with intellectual disabilities and 2% of the population consists of individuals with special talents. Although they have competencies that set them apart from their peers, such as learning quickly and easily, gifted students may not benefit from mainstream educational opportunities and need special education. Therefore the education offered to individuals with special education needs can be handled in two groups. The first group includes education such as "mainstreaming, special education classes, special education school, rehabilitation

support education" for individuals with developmental disabilities (mental, visual, hearing, physical, etc.) and the second group includes education such as "Science and Art Centre, mainstreaming" for gifted students.

The Regulation on Special Education Services defines a gifted students "an individual who performs at a high level compared to his/her peers in intelligence, creativity, arts, sports, leadership capacity or special academic fields." Like every student, the right to education also applies to gifted student. Education that is not differentiated according to the needs of gifted student may conflict with the principles of inclusion and justice in education. The study by Pak and Özden (2018), which examines whether the educational needs of gifted children in Turkey are met in the context of a rights-based approach, shows that the education offered to gifted students does not adequately meet the needs of these students and therefore does not meet the rights they need. It has been revealed that the necessary sensitivity is not shown socially. Gifted students that they face prejudice from their teachers, family members and friends that they can do everything themselves, that there are no special education needs and that they can meet their own needs (Özdiyar, Demirkaya, & Gürten, 2016). Wrong attitudes about gifted' potential and performance can be cause constrain educational opportunities (VanTassel-Baska, 2022). Students deserve that advance their learning, to find their own life themes in whatever creative area they can find or devise. If awareness of society could develop, children's opportunities to reach enrichment opportunities provided.

Differentiated and enriched educational opportunities that are sensitive to the developmental needs of gifted student should be offered (Levent, 2011). These rights that should be offered to gifted children should be considered as natural rights, not privileges. These rights should be perceived as a requirement of inclusion, equality and fundamental rights and freedoms in education. However, it can be seen that there is a serious problem of representation and that all students with special educational needs have difficulties in accessing educational opportunities. It is known that individuals with disabilities are not fully accepted by society and face negative attitudes and behaviours in social areas (Hüseyinli, Göçmen, & Nasibov, 2017). In studies conducted to evaluate the attitudes of various groups towards special education and students with special needs, it has been observed that one of the most important reason for the negative attitude of people towards individuals with SEN is the lack of information (Ünal & Saban, 2014; Bayrakdar, Batık, & Barut, 2016; Altunhan, Bayer, & Açak, 2021; Özdemir & Karadağ, 2021). At the same time, various studies have been conducted to improve attitudes towards special education and students with SEN, and it has been observed that information programmes are effective in helping participants develop positive attitudes towards special education (Alptekin & Batık, 2013; Yaşaran & Gürsel, 2006; Gözün & Yıkılmış, 2004).

The first principle of special education (MoNE, 2022) is to ensure that all individuals with special educational needs, regardless of the type of diagnosis, have access to special education opportunities. Increasing and diversifying the quality of the educational opportunities offered can be supported by increasing our social awareness, increasing referrals, and strengthening the search for rights. To achieve the general and specific goals

within the scope of special education at the universal and national levels, society, policymakers, families, and education specialists should cooperate and be aware of each other.

Drawing is an important means of expressing feelings and thoughts. According to Kehnemuyi (2004, 18), drawing is an important means of expression in children's lives as they go through developmental stages. In recent years, there has been an increasing interest in children's drawings (Başay & Güngör Aytar, 2019; Duran 2023). Children's drawings have been found to be more detailed, proportionate, and realistic with increasing age. The middle age group of the study group is evaluated as the 'realism' period (9-12 years) (Yavuzer, 2011). In the realism period, drawings, line, colour, spatial perception and perspective are differentiated according to other age periods. Line; between cognitive skills and fine motor skills, there can be an asynchrony with the ability of cognitive skills to be ahead of fine motor skills. As children in this age group are in the transition period from the cognitive concrete thinking stage to the abstract thinking stage (Yavuzer, 2011), they tend to reflect what they want to draw as much as possible in the appropriate proportion and perspective. From this perspective, it was tried to understand how students, current members of the future societies, perceive individuals with special educational needs and whether they perceive gifted individuals as having special educational needs with drawing and metamorphs.

METHOD

Research Model

Within the scope of this research, the perceptions of 5th-grade students towards individuals with SEN, whom they are always encountering and being together in the social environment, were tried to be examined with the phenomenology design, one of the qualitative research methods. Qualitative researches lead the way to revealing perceptions realistically and holistically in a natural environment (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2011). In qualitative research, the phenomenological design provides a basis for making sense of phenomena that are not very unfamiliar and/or whose meaning is not fully grasped (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2011). Cases can be handled as events, experiences, perceptions, orientations, concepts and situations. In the phenomenological design, participants are selected among those who experience the phenomenon that is focussed on or who can reflect on this phenomenon. In this direction, the phenomenon analyzed in the research is individuals with SEN and gifted student.

Study Group

The study was conducted with 43 5th-grade students (24 boys and 19 girls) selected from Istanbul city center who had no diagnosis of any disability. Although sampling was not determined, the study group was determined by a convenient sample from non-random sampling methods. This sampling method provides speed and practicality with a close and easy-to-access study group. Therefore, it is among the most preferred sampling methods (Howitt & Cramer, 2014). Fifth grade corresponds to the first grade of secondary school in Turkey. After primary school, there are significant changes in children's environment with secondary school. Students in this

age group form new perspectives on life with the introduction of different teachers in the lessons, the change of classmates, the change of the school building, the prominence of friendships, and the beginning of the transition period from childhood to adolescence. The 5th-grade level, where the important first steps of the adult perspective are taken, was chosen because it is considered important for determining and developing the perceptions of future adults.

Data Collection Tools and Process

This study was conducted with the permission of the Ethics Committee of the Rectorate of Istanbul Sabahattin Zaim University based on the decision dated 29.03.2023 and numbered 2023/03. After the research's legal and ethical preliminary preparations were completed, the application was carried out in groups of 10 people in the places (classrooms) allocated by the school administrations. The study group was informed about the study's importance, purpose, scope, and duration. The afternoon students were given an A4-sized white record prepared back to front, and the instructions were explained. The sentence "draw an individual with special education needs" was written on one side of the paper. On the other side, at the beginning of the page, the sentence "an individual with special education needs is like..... Because....." sentence was given. Expressions that would direct the children about what to draw were avoided. While the children were drawing their drawings and completing the metaphor analysis sentence, there was no restriction on the duration and the choice of pencils used. It is stated that through the drawings made by children, it is possible to make sense of the information about the inner world of children in a visual structure, to understand their emotions and to determine their real thoughts, desires, and wishes (Özsoy & Ahi, 2014). In addition, considering the difference in learning styles, metaphor analysis requiring written expression was also included to obtain more detailed information. It was observed that the students finished the study within 10 minutes.

Analysing the Data

The data obtained from the study group were coded and transferred to the computer environment. The data of two students who left blank or erased their drawings instead of drawing a people with SEN on the worksheet and the data of sixteen students who wrote "I don't know" or "?" to the sentences expected to be completed in the metaphor analysis were included in the study as they were deemed meaningful. While analyzing the drawings, the age level was considered, and ideas, thoughts, and perceptions beyond the artistic perspective were taken as a basis. Considering the number of participants, a code consisting of letters and numbers was given instead of a code name to code student opinions. The students were randomly ordered, and the sequence number of the first-ranked student constituted the first data of the code, and the first letter of the gender constituted the second data of the code (such as 1E, 2K.....). The data obtained were analyzed by descriptive analysis. In a descriptive study, the data are placed under predetermined themes (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2011).

The questions that the research sought to answer and the themes that emerged from the literature review were used to define and interpret the findings. The visual units based on drawing in the analyzed data and the teams

in the metaphor analysis were coded by considering the themes presented in the research. Then the frequencies and percentages of the themes and codes were found. The frequencies and rates of the themes were calculated and given. Presenting the data by quantifying it supports comprehensibility and allows comparison (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2011). According to Sandelowski (2001), numbers are an integral part of qualitative research because meaning partly depends on numbers. In this study, which analyzed perceptions of the person with SEN, the following themes were reached by examining the principles of child development and special education literature:

- Type of needs of the individual with SENs
- Gender of the individual with SEN
- Tools and equipment that support the individual with SENs
- Physical posture of the individual with SENs
- Emotional expression of the individual with SENs
- Social environment of the individual with SENs

FINDINGS

In this section, the perceptions of 5th-grade students who have no diagnosis about SEN as a study group about "individuals with special needs" and "whether they see gifted individuals as individuals with SEN," were tried to be explained with the findings.

Table 1. Fifth Grade Students' Perceptions of the Type of Needs of Individuals with Special Needs

Needs type	<i>f</i>	%
Mentally Retarded	16	% 37
Physical Disability	15	% 34
Visual Disability	2	% 5
Indeterminate	10	% 23
Gifted	2	% 5

The frequency and percentage values of the codes prepared for the theme "Requirement type of the individuals with SEN" are given in table 1. 37% of individuals with SEN are perceived as mentally retarded, 34% as physically disabled, 5% as visual impairment and only 5% as gifted. 23% of 5th grade students have an "ambiguous" perception of the type of SEN.



Figure1: Mental Retardation type; "it's like he doesn't know because he can't answer." (14E)



Figure2: Physical disability type; "cant walk because she has car accident " (25K)



Figure3: Gifted type; It's like he is full of wisdom. Because he is beautiful (12E)



Figure4: Visual disability type; "it's like a blind person because unlucky." (38E).

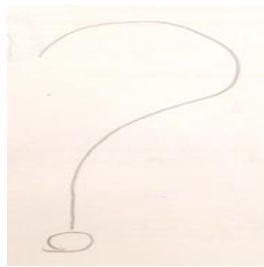


Figure5: Indeterminate type "I don't know (32E).

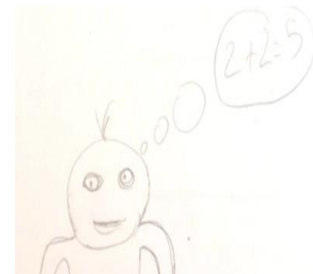


Figure6: Mental Retardation type "It's like something that's done wrong because it can't distinguish right from wrong. (2E).

Table 2. Fifth-Grade Students' Perceptions of the Gender of Individuals with SEN

Workgroup	Special Needs	f	%	f	%	f	%
		(Special Educational Needs)	(Working Group)	(Special Educational Needs)			
Female	Female	14	%73	19	% 32	15	%34
	Male	4	%10				
Male	Female	0		24	% 51	28	%65
	Male	24					

In this part of the research, the gender of the students in the study group and the gender of the individuals with SEN in their drawings were given. A total of 34% of the drawings about individuals with SEN were drawn as female and 65% as male. According to the findings presented in table 2; Female students, who constituted 32% of the study group, drew 73% of individuals with SEN as "female". Male students, who constituted 51% of the study group, drew individuals with sSEN as 100% male.



Figure7: Female drawn by a female (35K)



Figure8: Male drawn by a male (19E.)

Table 3. The Study Group's Perceptions of the Equipment That the Individual With SEN

Tools	f	%
Wheelchair-Chair	10	% 4
Glasses	2	% 5
Cane	3	% 7
No material	28	%65

According to the findings presented in table 3, 65% of the study group did not include any tools in their drawings. On the other hand 4% added wheelchairs, 5% glasses and 7% canes as tools used by individuals with SEN to their drawings.



Figure9: Wheelchair (39E)



Figure10: Glasses (7K)



Figure11: Cane (40E)



Figure12: No Materials (3K)

Table 4. The Study Group's Perceptions of the Physical Posture of the Individual With SEN

Physical Posture	f	%
Standing	33	% 76
Sitting	10	% 24

The study group's perceptions of the physical posture of the individual with SEN are presented in Table 4. 76% of students with SEN were drawn standing up, while 24% were drawn sitting or receiving support from a tool/equipment.



Figure13: Standing (1E)

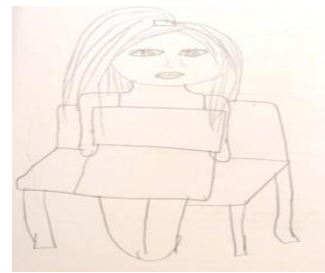


Figure14: Sitting (31K)

Table 5. The Study Group's Perceptions of the Emotional Expressions of the Individual with SEN

Emotion Expression	F	%
Happy	28	% 65
Sad	5	% 11
Angry	1	% 2
Neutral Vague	9	%20

As seen in table 5, the study group's perceptions of the emotion expressions of the individual with SEN are presented in table 5. Mouth and eye drawings on the facial expressions of students with SEN were drawn as 65% happy, 11% as sad, 2% as angry. 20% of the study group did not include the expression of emotion to be detected in the drawings of individuals with SEN.



Figure15: Happy (3K)



Figure16: Sad (23E)



Figure17: Angry (30E)



Figure18: Neutral (12E)

Table 6. The Study Group's Perceptions of the Social Environment of the Individual with SEN

5th Grade Student	f	%	Social Interaction	f	%	Social Circle	f	%
Drawn Alone	26	%60	-	26	%60	School	1	%3
						At home	0	0
						Outdoors	7	%27
						Ambiguous	18	%70
Drawn together with one or more persons	17	%40	With an adult	7	%16	School	4	%23
			With peers	10	%23	At home	0	0
						Outdoor	5	%29
						Ambiguous	8	%47

In table 6, perception of working group about SEN people's social environment are included. 60% of the students in the study group drew the SEN alone, and 40% with one or more people. While 3% of the individuals with SEN drawn alone were drawn at school, 27% outdoors, the space code could not be determined in the drawings representing 70%. 16% of individuals with SEN drawn together with one or more people are perceived with adult

support and 23% with peer support. Of the students who were not drawn alone, 23% were drawn at school, 29% outdoors, while the location code of 47% could not be determined.



Figure19: Drawn together with one or more persons
(24E)



Figure20: Drawn alone (32E)

CONCLUSION and DISCUSSION

As a result, this research attempts to explain how people with SEN are perceived by fifth graders who do not have SEN and whether gifted students are perceived as having SEN. It can be said that people with SEN is mostly thought of as having mental and physical disabilities so other types of needs are not recognized. A limited number of participants identified gifted students as having special educational needs. These findings highlight the problem of representation of people with special educational needs. The data can be summarised as most individuals with special education needs were perceived as male, not needing any tools, standing and standing with arms outstretched, with happy facial expressions, and lonely in a social environment. Children in this age group are in the transition period from the cognitive concrete thinking stage to the abstract thinking stage (Yavuzer, 2011). For this reason, drawings and metaphors were used as data collection tools. Despite that the lack of detail in the drawings may be due to the characteristics of the developmental period and the fact that a significant part of the primary school years took place during the pandemic period.

In order to disseminate a qualified inclusive education, social structures (classrooms, schools, communities) and socio-educational actions should be designed by taking into account students with special needs from the very beginning (Rodriguez & Garro-Gil, 2015). While mainstreaming education focuses on the student with special educational needs, inclusive education focuses on the whole environment (classroom, diagnosed student, undiagnosed student, community, etc.). From this point of view, it is necessary to understand how students without needs in the current environment perceive students with needs in order to improve the process.

The first theme explored in the research examines fifth graders' perceptions of the types of needs of people with special needs. At this point, mental and physical disabilities were identified as the most commonly perceived needs. Individuals with special abilities are not perceived as having special educational needs. The study results are parallel to the statistics of Turkey in terms of the distribution of types of special needs. According to the Ministry of Family and Social Policy's 2022 statistics, the most common types of diagnosed students in Turkey were mental retardation (N: 385,313; 17%) and orthopedic/physical disability (N=311,131; 13%). The lack of data

on other types of diagnosis can be interpreted as a lack of awareness of special educational needs and types. However, using "with special educational needs" instead of "disabled" in the expressions used may also have had an effect. In the study by Eren, Avşar & Işıtan (2019), it was understood that preschool children could not fully grasp the concept of 'special education needs.'

The second issue examined in the research is the working group's perception of the gender of people with special needs. If we look at the proportion of disabled people by disability group in the general population in our country, the ratio of men is 5.9%, and the proportion of women is 7.9% (ASHB, 2022). In contrast to these data, the study group perceives people with SEN as more male. When the data were compared with the gender of the participants, it was found that the participants made drawings parallel to their own gender. The male participants drew boys, and the female participants drew girls. Since males were concentrated among the participants, it was found that individuals with SEN were perceived as males. Buyurgan and Buyurgan (2012) state that in the pre-adolescent stage, between the ages of 9 and 11, the distinction between boys and girls begins to be observed in children's drawings. However, considering their cognitive development (Ülger, 2023), flexibility in thinking, and the fact that abstract thinking skills have not yet been fully acquired may explain this parallel in the drawings.

In the third theme, where the perceptions of the tools supported by the individual with SEN were tried to be examined, the working group's awareness level was quite low. While most of the participants do not include tools in their drawings, the use of wheelchairs, canes, and glasses is perceived at a very limited rate. Using tools and materials is an indispensable element of special education. Many tools and materials are used to increase the permanence and impact of education, facilitate the individual's life, and support its accessibility (Johnston et al., 2009). Teachers working in the field of special education stated that they did not feel sufficient in the use of assistive technologies and tools, that they were not supported in this regard, that costs were difficult, and that they had problems in terms of updating and ensuring their sustainability (Kutlu, Schreglmann & Cinisli, 2018). The fact that the use of tools in the lives of individuals with special educational needs has not been given enough space may have been reflected in the perception of the study group.

The physical posture of the individual with SEN is perceived as standing and arms open. This statement can be interpreted as being perceived as individuals who are available to communicate and able to stand on their own feet. When the perceptions of the SEN individual towards the emotional expressions are examined in support of this interpretation, it is seen that the students with special needs are mostly perceived as happy and smiling. However, when the perception of their social development is examined, it is seen that individuals with SEN are perceived alone to a large extent. In the study of Tunalı et al. (2021), children with special needs were most often described as lonely.

SUGGESTIONS

Individuals with special educational needs face some problems in their individual and social lives and career lives. These; education, poverty, rehabilitation, transportation, environment, housing, accessibility, employment,

social security, etc. To eliminate these problems or reduce their effects, there is a need first to create awareness/common consciousness (Bezmez and Yardim, 2010: 165). It has been observed that the perceptions of families and teachers are often consulted in determining the perception of special education in national and international scientific studies. However, the views of the children that adults of the future are not consulted. For this reason, it may be recommended that more research be carried out on people without a diagnosis. The awareness that needs to be developed at the social level can contribute to both individual and social development with the increased quality of education. The research to achieve these large-scale goals has some limitations.

The age and size of the study group, the province and year in which the study was conducted, and the research method may be reviewed in future research. In this context, long-term observations can be made in analyzing the perception of individuals with SEN. The perceptions of family teachers, education administrators, and policy makers can be examined with students at different school levels. The data obtained from these studies can be discussed comparatively.

It is not certain who and when will encounter an individual with SEN or who may have special needs in the future. For the qualitative special education it is necessary to raise awareness of the need for special education. At this point, increasing parents' awareness can be an important first step in shaping future generations' perceptions. For this reason, training activities for parents about special education needs can be continued.

Given the findings obtained, social responsibility projects can be designed to support social awareness about individuals with special needs. Some of the lectures given in universities on the subject can be opened to the participation of volunteer listeners. Interventions to increase equal opportunities in education can be improved.

ETHICAL TEXT

This study was conducted with the permission of the Ethics Committee of the Rectorate of Istanbul Sabahattin Zaim University based on the decision dated 29.03.2023 and numbered 2023/03.

In this article, the journal writing rules, publication principles, research and publication ethics, and journal ethical rules were followed. The responsibility belongs to the authors for any violations that may arise regarding the article.

Author(s) Contribution Rate: The authors have not declared any conflict of interest. The contribution rate of the researchers in this study is as follows: 1. Author (60 %) and 2. Author (40 %).

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