

## **Opinions of the Parents and the Principals on the Attitudes of Principals towards Mainstream Education (Sample of a County in West Black Sea Region in Turkey)**

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### **Abstract**

In this study the opinions of the principals of 31 primary schools in a county of West Black Sea Region and of 55 parents whose mainstreamed children are attending to these schools are asked to determine the attitudes of the principals towards mainstream education. Surveys prepared by the researchers to be used in this paper were conducted both to the parents and to the principals. While the survey for the principals consists of 50 questions 6 of which are two-point-Likert and 44 of which are five-point-Likert, the one for the parents consists of 32 questions 4 of which are two-point-Likert and 28 of which are five-point-Likert. The descriptive survey model was used for this study. The data were analyzed with SPSS package program on significance level of 5%. As a result of this study it was found out that mostly mentally retarded children are educated in these schools, the facilities of the schools for disabled students aren't sufficient and there is a significant difference between the perceptions of parents and principals on attendance of the students and between the communication of the principals and the parents. Besides, the principals who have participated in-service training on mainstream education are more likely to support and more enthusiastic and more positive about mainstream education than the ones who have not. Furthermore, the principals, who have a handicapped relative or acquaintance, seemed to behave more sympathetic towards mainstreamed students and towards their parents than the principals who do not have.

**Keywords:** Mainstream education, principal, parent

In order to create a healthy learning environment for all children, educators have to be sensitive about the needs of their students (Blecker & Boakes 2010). Likewise, students who need special education should benefit from educational opportunities to improve themselves preeminently in accordance with their specific necessities. For these students being in the same classroom environment with their peers where their requirements are met at the highest level with the least restrictive atmosphere is proposed and this kind of environment indicates mainstream education (Battal, 2007; Kargin, 2004; Kırcaali-İftar, 1998).

The idea of mainstream education was first emerged in The Salamanca World Conference which was about “The Special Needs in Education” (UNESCO 1994, cited in Ainscow & Sandill, 2010). Since the main topics of the mainstream education can be listed as “human rights”, “equality of opportunity” and “social justice” (Armstrong, Armstrong, & Barton, 2000; cited in Moran & Abbott, 2002; Keogh, 2008; Halpin, 1999), the significance of mainstream education has been gradually increasing.

The main objective of mainstream education is to increase the learning opportunities and social benefits for all children (UNESCO, 1994). Social benefit is an opportunity for the interaction between a mainstreamed child and a normal child as well as an opportunity of learning from each other. Success of the mainstream education is depends on different adults such as parents, therapists, early childhood education teacher and special education teacher (Allan & Sproul, 1985; Diler, 1998; Gözün & Yıkımsı, 2004; Huang & Diamond 2009; Kırcaali-İftar, 1998; Mortier, Van Hove, & De Schauwer 2010). Mainstream education can be accomplished with some distinctive circumstances like schools which are open to new ideas, teaching staff who believe in whatever they are doing, reliable and influential guidance and counseling service as well as ever ready support systems in schools, flexible educational applications such as outcome-based education, constructivist approach in education, interdisciplinary curriculum, a distinctive assessment style, comprehension and interpretation of the educational needs of mainstreaming by the parents, the members of non-governmental organizations and social groups employers and the rest of the community and finally reaching a mutual agreement in order to meet these needs.

To educate students with special needs in mainstream classrooms is one of the targets taking place in the educational policy of many countries. According to Ferguson (2008) not only the number of the parents who want regular education for their child with special needs but also the number of students with special needs attending school regularly have increased substantially in recent years. Parents often call the continuous attendance of their children as

the transition of academic advantage into personal benefit (Frederickson, Dunsmuir, Lang, & Monsen, 2004, cited in Koster, Pijl, Nakken & Van Houten 2010). However, the real motivations of the parents in sending their children with special needs to school regularly can be interpreted as more social opportunities for their children (Scheepstra, 1998, cited in Koster, Pijl, Nakken & Van Houten 2010). Unfortunately they also hope that their children can be able to develop normal relationships just as their normal peers (Koster, Pijl, Nakken, & Van Houten 2010).

Although Turkey's mainstream education practices were legally adopted with Children in Need of Special Education Law (Law no. 2916) in 1983, this kind of legal support has not been sufficient for the existing practices (Öncül, 2003). The prior responsibility of the school principal should be to be aware of the laws on education and legislation for special education and of the applicable law and regulations (Diler, 1998). Organizational conditions, effective leadership, maximum attendance of staff and students and joint planning refer to agreement and collaboration of the staff which also indicates more effective mainstream education instead of discrimination (Ainscow & Sandill, 2010; Stainback & Stefanich, 1996).

Unfortunately in Turkey necessary and sufficient requirements for mainstream education, especially in terms of support services, haven't been met yet. All that has been done in the name of mainstream education is distributing mentally retarded children into regular classrooms which makes the already negative attitude and behaviors towards mainstream education even worse, thus does more harm than good (Eripek, 2004).

The concept of students meeting their own living conditions and learning opportunities and the social responsibility of meeting the needs of individuals exposed to discrimination can be in compliance with each other as long as the principal of the school manage to dominate the fact that each individual has a different capacity and can act differently in his/her school (Rayner & Gunter 2005; Blackmore 2006, cited in Ainscow & Sandill, 2010).

The research of Barnett and Monda-Amaya (1998) on the knowledge levels and attitudes of the principals towards mainstream education states that most of the principals act ambivalently, the program has a lot of drawbacks in terms of mainstream, tools and devices used in schools are inappropriate for mainstreamed students, they have no or little legal information on mainstream education and there isn't any supervision or counseling on the very subject. Besides, it is observed that some of the principals and particularly the parents of normal students do not want to see mainstreamed students in schools. Sometimes physical arrangements for the handicapped students can be inadequate in schools and students who

have enrolled just because of legal obligations might be ignored in terms of educational activities and school attendance. Furthermore, it is also visible that principals who have a disabled acquaintance and/or have in-service training on mainstream education are likely to adopt more positive attitudes towards mainstream education and to take a closer interest in students' education and training than the ones who don't have an acquaintance or training.

### *Problem Statement*

What is the situation of primary schools in terms of mainstreamed students and how is the attitude of the principal towards these mainstreamed students?

### *Sub Problem Statements*

1. What kinds of disabilities are seen among the mainstreamed students in primary schools?
2. What kind of physical arrangements are made by schools in favor of mainstreamed students?
3. What can be inferred about the concerns of the principles on the attendance and educational activities of mainstreamed students and about the relationship between the principals and parents? Is there a significant difference between the views of parents and principals?
4. Do the attitudes of the principals differ significantly depending on the facts that he/she has a disabled acquaintance, he/she has in-service training on mainstream education and the parents of the mainstream student(s) has a better socioeconomic status, or not?

### Method

This study has descriptive research model. An assessment tool was prepared by researchers to determine the adequateness of the physical arrangements in schools with mainstreamed students as well as the concern and attitude of the principals towards these students. In accordance with this purpose all of the primary schools (31) in a county of West Black Sea Region in Turkey and parents of 55 mainstreamed students were contacted and with their answers not only the concerns of the principals were identified but also the opinions of the parents and the principals were compared. The results were tested at a significance level of 5% with SPSS package program.

## Results

*Table 1.*  
Distribution of Children with Disabilities

	N	%
Mentally retarded	37	67,3
Physically handicapped	5	9,1
Hearing impaired	1	1,8
Visually impaired	2	3,6
Other	10	18,2
Total	55	100,0

According to Table 1, most of the mainstreamed students (67.3%) are mentally retarded, the rest (33.7%) are physically handicapped, visually impaired, hearing impaired or children with other disabilities. This can be explained with the facts that there is a school for the visually impaired students which provides better opportunities for them and children with more severe disabilities are educated in special schools.

*Table 2.*  
Physical Designs of Schools in Studying Area for Children with Disabilities

Occasion	Yes		No		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Having a special education classroom in the school	9	29,0	22	71	31	100
Locating the special education classroom on the ground floor	7	22,6	24	77,4	31	100
Providing individualized education program (IEP)*	26	83,9	5	16,1	31	100
Having a restroom suitable for disabled students	7	22,6	24	77,4	31	100
Having a wheel chair access	14	45,2	17	54,8	31	100

According to Table 2, although 83.9% of the 31 schools in the population of the research have a special education program for disabled students, only 9 of them own a special education classroom (22.6%); furthermore 7 out of 9 classrooms are on the ground floor. Unfortunately, only 7 schools have special restrooms for disabled students and less than half have a wheel chair access. These responses might indicate the low level of significance on the physical needs of handicapped students in schools, the deficiency in the legal regulations regarding the problem and the limited budget allocated to schools for the handicapped students.

\* Individualized education program (IEP) is the program which is developed for individuals in need of special education and which is approved by the parents

Table 3.

Opinions of the Principals and the Parents on the Attitudes of the Principals towards the Education of the Mainstreamed students (in terms of educational activities, attendance and communication)

The principal of the school	Participant	N	X	sd	s.e.m.	F	t	df	P																																																																																																																																																																																																																												
Knows the development of the mainstreamed student	Principal	31	4,29	0,90	0,16	14,16	2,62	84	<b>0,01</b>																																																																																																																																																																																																																												
	Parent	55	3,51	1,51	0,20					Motivates the mainstreamed student about attending school regularly	Principal	31	4,13	0,92	0,17	6,13	0,08	84	0,94	Parent	55	4,11	1,27	0,17	Arranges meetings for the educational needs of the mainstreamed students	Principal	31	3,58	1,06	0,19	15,45	3,25	84	<b>0,00</b>	Parent	55	2,55	1,58	0,21	Plans training programs for the parents	Principal	31	3,81	1,19	0,21	0,23	6,89	84	<b>0,00</b>	Parent	55	1,95	1,21	0,16	Provides evaluation based on the level of the mainstreamed student	Principal	31	4,68	0,65	0,12	57,22	4,95	84	<b>0,00</b>	Parent	55	3,09	1,71	0,23	Tries hard to employ a special education teacher at school	Principal	31	4,71	0,64	0,12	24,57	2,49	84	<b>0,02</b>	Parent	55	4,05	1,38	0,19	Intervenes in whenever the teacher doesn't pay attention	Principal	31	4,23	0,84	0,15	10,57	1,12	84	0,27	Parent	55	3,93	1,35	0,18	Believes in the necessity of the mainstream education	Principal	31	4,03	1,30	0,23	0,11	0,35	84	0,73	Parent	55	3,93	1,35	0,18	Ignores the absence of the mainstreamed student	Principal	31	4,42	0,85	0,15	27,54	6,39	84	<b>0,00</b>	Parent	55	2,55	1,50	0,20	Behaves friendly in school	Principal	31	4,00	1,18	0,21	0,53	-0,26	84	0,80	Parent	55	4,07	1,29	0,17	Informs the parents in case of a problem about the teachers	Principal	31	4,29	0,86	0,16	3,83	1,53	84	0,13	Parent	55	3,91	1,22	0,16	Interferes when a normal student misbehaves with a mainstreamed student	Principal	31	4,32	0,83	0,15	8,08	1,18	84	0,24	Parent	55	4,02	1,30	0,18	Listens to and pays attention to the problems	Principal	31	4,45	0,89	0,16	4,99	1,62	84	0,11	Parent	55	4,04	1,26	0,17	Finds solutions for the problems of the mainstreamed students	Principal	31	4,55	0,81	0,15	10,24	2,99	84	<b>0,00</b>	Parent	55	3,80	1,25	0,17	Is friendly towards the mainstreamed students	Principal	31	4,35	1,17	0,21	10,69	2,28	84	<b>0,03</b>	Parent	55	3,62	1,57	0,21	Shares his cell phone number with the parents	Principal	31	4,10	1,11	0,20	13,81	2,46	84	<b>0,02</b>
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	Parent	55	3,93	1,35	0,18					Believes in the necessity of the mainstream education	Principal	31	4,03	1,30	0,23	0,11	0,35	84	0,73	Parent	55	3,93	1,35	0,18	Ignores the absence of the mainstreamed student	Principal	31	4,42	0,85	0,15	27,54	6,39	84	<b>0,00</b>	Parent	55	2,55	1,50	0,20	Behaves friendly in school	Principal	31	4,00	1,18	0,21	0,53	-0,26	84	0,80	Parent	55	4,07	1,29	0,17	Informs the parents in case of a problem about the teachers	Principal	31	4,29	0,86	0,16	3,83	1,53	84	0,13	Parent	55	3,91	1,22	0,16	Interferes when a normal student misbehaves with a mainstreamed student	Principal	31	4,32	0,83	0,15	8,08	1,18	84	0,24	Parent	55	4,02	1,30	0,18	Listens to and pays attention to the problems	Principal	31	4,45	0,89	0,16	4,99	1,62	84	0,11	Parent	55	4,04	1,26	0,17	Finds solutions for the problems of the mainstreamed students	Principal	31	4,55	0,81	0,15	10,24	2,99	84	<b>0,00</b>	Parent	55	3,80	1,25	0,17	Is friendly towards the mainstreamed students	Principal	31	4,35	1,17	0,21	10,69	2,28	84	<b>0,03</b>	Parent	55	3,62	1,57	0,21	Shares his cell phone number with the parents	Principal	31	4,10	1,11	0,20	13,81	2,46	84	<b>0,02</b>	Parent	55	3,31	1,57	0,21																																																																																					
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	Parent	55	3,93	1,35	0,18					Ignores the absence of the mainstreamed student	Principal	31	4,42	0,85	0,15	27,54	6,39	84	<b>0,00</b>	Parent	55	2,55	1,50	0,20	Behaves friendly in school	Principal	31	4,00	1,18	0,21	0,53	-0,26	84	0,80	Parent	55	4,07	1,29	0,17	Informs the parents in case of a problem about the teachers	Principal	31	4,29	0,86	0,16	3,83	1,53	84	0,13	Parent	55	3,91	1,22	0,16	Interferes when a normal student misbehaves with a mainstreamed student	Principal	31	4,32	0,83	0,15	8,08	1,18	84	0,24	Parent	55	4,02	1,30	0,18	Listens to and pays attention to the problems	Principal	31	4,45	0,89	0,16	4,99	1,62	84	0,11	Parent	55	4,04	1,26	0,17	Finds solutions for the problems of the mainstreamed students	Principal	31	4,55	0,81	0,15	10,24	2,99	84	<b>0,00</b>	Parent	55	3,80	1,25	0,17	Is friendly towards the mainstreamed students	Principal	31	4,35	1,17	0,21	10,69	2,28	84	<b>0,03</b>	Parent	55	3,62	1,57	0,21	Shares his cell phone number with the parents	Principal	31	4,10	1,11	0,20	13,81	2,46	84	<b>0,02</b>	Parent	55	3,31	1,57	0,21																																																																																																				
Ignores the absence of the mainstreamed student	Principal	31	4,42	0,85	0,15	27,54	6,39	84	<b>0,00</b>																																																																																																																																																																																																																												
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	Parent	55	4,07	1,29	0,17					Informs the parents in case of a problem about the teachers	Principal	31	4,29	0,86	0,16	3,83	1,53	84	0,13	Parent	55	3,91	1,22	0,16	Interferes when a normal student misbehaves with a mainstreamed student	Principal	31	4,32	0,83	0,15	8,08	1,18	84	0,24	Parent	55	4,02	1,30	0,18	Listens to and pays attention to the problems	Principal	31	4,45	0,89	0,16	4,99	1,62	84	0,11	Parent	55	4,04	1,26	0,17	Finds solutions for the problems of the mainstreamed students	Principal	31	4,55	0,81	0,15	10,24	2,99	84	<b>0,00</b>	Parent	55	3,80	1,25	0,17	Is friendly towards the mainstreamed students	Principal	31	4,35	1,17	0,21	10,69	2,28	84	<b>0,03</b>	Parent	55	3,62	1,57	0,21	Shares his cell phone number with the parents	Principal	31	4,10	1,11	0,20	13,81	2,46	84	<b>0,02</b>	Parent	55	3,31	1,57	0,21																																																																																																																																		
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Table 3 indicates that there is a significant difference between the opinions of the principals and the parents in the following occasions: arranging meetings for the educational needs of mainstreamed students (principal X= 3,58; parent X=2,55), planning training programs for the parents (principal X= 3,81; parent X=1,95), providing evaluation based on the level of the mainstreamed student (principal X= 4,68; parent X=3,09), trying hard to employ a special education teacher at school (principal X= 4,71; parent X=4,05), ignoring the absence of the mainstreamed student (principal X= 4,42; parent X=2,55), finding solutions for the problems of mainstreamed students (principal X= 4,55; parent X=3,80), being friendly towards the mainstreamed students (principal X= 4,35; parent X=3,62), sharing cell phone number with the parents (principal X= 4,10; parent X=3,31).

The means, which are above average, show that principals can be considered as successful about mainstream education. On the other hand, parents assume that principals are inefficient about the regulations regarding the educational activities. Even though the principals mentioned that they do not ignore absence, parents disagree with them; even some of the parents claim that the principles ignore absence as they aren't pleased with the presence of the mainstreamed student at school.

Table 4.

The concern of the principals due to the fact that they have a disabled acquaintance

Do you have a disabled acquaintance?	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	U	P
Yes	12	24,25	291,00	15	,00
No	19	10,79	205,00		

Table 4 illustrates that principles with a disabled acquaintance concern more positively towards mainstreamed student compared to the principals who do not have ( $p < .05$ ). The results point that these principals understand the condition of the disabled students and their parents better as a result of empathy and try harder to help them.

Table 5.

The effect of in-service training in terms of the concern of the principals towards mainstream education

Have you participated in an in-service training?	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	U	P
Yes	17	20,59	350,00	41	,00
No	14	10,43	146,00		

The table refers that principals who have participated in an in-service training on mainstream education are more likely to be concerned about the process of the mainstreamed students than the principals who have not ( $p < .05$ ). Thus, in-service training on mainstream education might contribute to the perceptions of the principals.

*Table 6.*

Relationship between the concerns of the principals towards the education of the mainstreamed students (enrollment, attendance, communication) and the income levels of their parents

Interest Towards Mainstreamed students' Education	
Income	$r = .60^{**}$
N=55, $**p = .00$	

Table 6 clearly displays the significant and positive relationship between the concern of the principals and the income levels of the parents ( $p < .05$ ). The reasons for this implication can be listed as donations by the parents and possibility of finding effective and practical solutions to the problems of the school.

## Discussion

This study presents that that mentally retarded children generate the majority of the mainstreamed students and the observations suggest that these students are generally educable. Moreover, in the process of mainstreaming children with less severe disabilities or children who are not accustomed to learning with their peers such as children with poor communication skills or with Down syndrome are more likely to be preferred by the teachers compared with the children with severe disabilities or children who needs more special attention such as autistic children and children experiencing emotional and behavioral problems (Avramidis et al., 2000a, 2000b; Buysse, Wesley, Keyes, & Bailey, 1996; Dinnebeil, McInerney, Fox, & Juchartz-Pendry, 1998; Dupoux et al., 2005; Eiserman et al., 1995; Engelbrecht et al., 2003, cited in, Huang & Diamond 2009).

A school principal who participated in Forlin's (2010) research declared that the number of the mainstreamed students in his school had increased, the main problem was to balance the needs of the normal students and mainstreamed students and when they enrolled all the mainstreamed students who applied, no room was left for others. The same study also emphasizes that the students generally behave nicely to the mainstreamed students and accept

their presence in the school. Besides, the principal pointed out that whenever the students see an mainstreamed student in the corridors, they slow down or even stop; although they joke with one another they behave more carefully when they are in the same place with mainstreamed students and they help them during the activities and with their homework.

As the teachers are important role models in the classrooms for facilitating and implementing any kind of innovation, the support of the teachers is crucial for the success of the mainstream education (Soodak, Podell, & Lehman, 1998). Therefore, teachers with adequate knowledge and skill are a must in mainstream education (Ferguson & Ralph, 1996; Garner, 1996; Kırcaali-İftar, 1998; Yıkmiş, 2006). Despite the above mentioned fact, researches indicate that teachers know very little about the significance of their role in mainstream education (İzci, 2005; Temel, 2000). Consequently, it was determined that lack of information on mainstream education affects the attitudes of the teachers (Gözün & Yıkmiş, 2004) and they have to take special education classes during their university education (İzci, 2005). Most of the teachers set out some conditions to accept a student with special needs in their classroom since they think they haven't been ready yet (DeLuke, 2000, cited in Stella, Forlin & Lan 2007). Various researches on the attitudes of the teachers who are against mainstream education revealed that positive approach of the teachers and success of the mainstream education are closely related to each other (Avramidis & Norwick, 2002). The attitudes of the teachers have been found to be strongly influenced by factors such as the nature and severity of the disabilities, educational background of the teacher and availability of both physical and human resources (Bradshaw & Mundia, 2006, cited in Stella, Forlin & Lan 2007).

Another factor required for successful inclusion is development of cooperation and communication between special education teachers, classroom teachers, parents and specialists (Broderick, Mehta-Parekh, & Reid, 2000; Hudson & Glomb 1997, cited in Blecker, & Boakes 2010).

The results of this study suggest that principals who have participated in an in-service training on mainstream education exhibit a more positive attitude and try harder than the ones who have not. Similarly, principals with a disabled relative behave nicer and better as they can empathize not only with the mainstreamed students but also with their parents.

While some of the studies suggested that the more a teacher spends time with a mainstreamed student the more experienced and in turn more confident he/she will be, studies conducted both with teachers who have mainstreamed students in their classes and who do not

suggested that the educational backgrounds of the teachers affect their attitude; i.e. teachers who were trained to educate the students with learning disability seemed to be more positive towards inclusion compared to their colleagues who weren't (Avramidis et al., 2000; Leyser et al., 1994; LeRoy & Simpson, 1996; Wilczenski, 1993; Shimman, 1990; Beh-Pajooah, 1992; cited in Lambe & Bones 2007). In fact, since making any change in one's attitudes is extremely challenging, the preliminary education of the prospective teachers on mainstream education ought to be very affective; thus teacher candidates who are likely to exhibit prejudice towards mainstreaming should be encouraged to take place in mainstream-based applications more often (Lambe & Bones 2007). Considering the fact that today's teachers are going to be future's principals, more attention should be paid on classes taught in Faculties of Education on this subject, numbers of the practices about special education and mainstreaming should be increased and awareness of the current teachers and principals about the significance and sensitivity of the issue should be raised. Another finding of this research is related with the socioeconomic levels of the parents of the mainstreamed students; in a sense higher income level means more attention towards mainstreamed student which implies that lower income level of the family is another obstacle for disabled students.

The main problem of the society can be briefly described like this: disability is perceived as a personal problem and disabled individual is perceived as the problematic; in other words they are marginalize or otherized. Nevertheless, equal opportunity and respect for human beings and civil rights can only be possible with acceptance of the disabled individuals at administrative levels (Zoniou et al., 2006). Noting that in Turkey until recently parents who have a disabled child used to keep them at home and didn't let other people see him/her (even it might be encountered nowadays), it is really pleasing to see mainstreamed students at schools with their peers. Gradually increasing education level of the society, recent legal regulations on the treatment, education, employment opportunities and financial aids provided for the families of disabled individuals and finally consciousness of the parents with disabled child/children promote the prevalence of the disabled individuals in daily life.

However, as a result of some phenomenon such as lack of resources in education, lack of interest on administrative level, some of the disabled individuals might be ignored by the authorities. Not having enough physical arrangements for mainstreamed students in some schools can be a good example for the above mentioned argument. One of the major indicators defining the level of development of a country is the significance attached to its handicapped citizens.

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