

## Preservice Teachers' Efficacy and Opinions Toward Inclusion of Students With Mental Retardation

*Öğretmen Adaylarının Yeterliği ve Zihin Engelli Öğrencilerin Kaynaştırılmasına İlişkin Görüşleri*

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### Abstract

*Background:* Teachers' sense of efficacy in working with students with special needs and their positive or negative opinions or attitudes toward inclusion appear to be powerful factors shaping their behaviors and their teaching practices in inclusive practices.

*Purpose:* The purpose of this study was to examine both preservice teachers' sense of efficacy to work with students with MR and their attitudes toward inclusion of students with MR. The following questions were addressed;

1. What is the level of sense of efficacy of preservice teachers?
2. How do preservice teachers think about inclusion of students with MR?
3. Is there a significant relationship between the scores of preservice teachers' sense of efficacy and the scores of preservice teachers' opinions on inclusion?

*Method:* This descriptive and relational study included a total of 145 preservice teachers of students with MR, regular education, and early childhood education. Turkish version of the Teacher Efficacy Scale (TTES-Diken, 2004) and Turkish version of Opinions Relative to Mainstreaming Scale (TORMS-Kırcaali-İftar, 1996) were used to gather data.

*Results:* Preservice teachers in general held significantly high level of sense of efficacy to work students with MR and had significantly positive attitudes toward inclusion of students with MR. A moderate positive correlation between preservice teachers' scores on their sense of efficacy and their scores on their opinions toward inclusion of students with MR was also found.

*Discussions and Suggestions:* Preservice teachers who have enough knowledge but not enough experience regarding students with disabilities and inclusion graduate with positive opinions. The challenges of inservice teachers in inclusive settings need to be investigated further.

*Keywords:* Inclusion, preservice teachers, teacher efficacy, students with mental retardation.

### Öz

*Problem Durumu:* Öğretmenlerin yeterlik algılamaları veya özgüven duyguları, öğretmenlerin öğretmenlik uygulamalarını ve öğretim sürecini doğrudan etkileyen önemli bir faktör olarak belirlenmiştir. Ülkemizde, kaynaştırma uygulamalarının başarısında etkili olabilecek bu iki faktöre ilişkin çalışmalara gereksinim bulunmaktadır.

*Araştırmanın Amacı ve Soruları:* Bu çalışmanın amacı, öğretmen adaylarının zihin engelli öğrencilerle çalışmalarına ilişkin yeterlik algılamalarını ve zihin engelli

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öğrencilerinin kaynaştırılmasına ilişkin görüşlerini belirlemektir. Bu amaçla, aşağıdaki sorular yanıtlanmaya çalışılmıştır:

1. Öğretmen adaylarının zihin engelli öğrencilerle çalışmaya ilişkin yeterlik algılamalarının düzeyi nedir?
2. Öğretmen adaylarının zihin engelli öğrencilerin kaynaştırılmasına ilişkin görüşleri ne yöndedir?
3. Öğretmen adaylarının yeterlik algılamaları ile kaynaştırmaya ilişkin görüşleri arasında anlamlı bir ilişki var mıdır?

*Yöntem:* Araştırma, betimsel ve bağıntısal bir çalışma niteliğinde olup, araştırmanın katılımcılarını bir üniversitenin eğitim fakültesinde üç değişik öğretmen yetiştirme programına (zihin engelliler öğretmenliği, sınıf öğretmenliği ve okulöncesi öğretmenliği) devam eden 145 gönüllü öğretmen adayı (son sınıf öğrencisi) oluşturmuştur. Araştırmanın verileri Öğretmen Yeterlik Ölçeği Türkçe Versiyonu (Diken, 2004) ve Kaynaştırmaya İlişkin Görüşler Ölçeği Türkçe Versiyonu (Kırcaali-İftar, 1996) kullanılarak toplanmıştır. Araştırmada ayrıca, demografik ve betimsel veriler toplamak amacıyla araştırmacı tarafından geliştirilen bilgi formu kullanılmıştır.

*Bulgular:* Araştırmanın bulguları, öğretmen adaylarının genel olarak zihin engelli öğrencilerle çalışmaya ilişkin olarak kendilerini yeterli hissettiklerini göstermiştir. Araştırma bulguları ayrıca, öğretmen adaylarının genel olarak zihin engelli öğrencilerin kaynaştırılmasına ilişkin olumlu görüşler içinde olduklarını göstermiştir. Araştırmada, öğretmen adaylarının yeterlik algılamaları ile kaynaştırmaya ilişkin görüşleri arasında orta derecede olumlu bir ilişki olduğu belirlenmiştir. Diğer bir deyişle, kendini zihin engelli öğrencilerle çalışmada yeterli hisseden öğretmen adayları aynı zamanda zihin engelli öğrencilerin kaynaştırılmasına ilişkin olumlu görüşler bildirmişlerdir.

*Öneriler:* Öğretmen adaylarının zihin engelli öğrencilerle çalışmaya ve bu öğrencilerin kaynaştırılmasına ilişkin görüşleri niteliksel araştırma desenleriyle araştırılabilir. Ayrıca, farklı grupların görüşleri (mezun olmamış öğretmen adayları, yeni mezun olmuş öğretmenler ve deneyimli öğretmenler) karşılaştırılabilir.

*Anahtar Sözcükler:* Kaynaştırma, Öğretmen adayları, Öğretmen yeterliği, Zihin Engelli Öğrenciler.

Inclusion has recently been one of the most preferred educational placement options in Turkey as the number of students with special needs served in regular classrooms in Turkey has been dramatically increasing in recent years (MEB, 2005). For example, there were 10,184 students with special needs in regular classrooms in 1996 (MEB, 1996); out of about 76,218 students with special needs receiving public education, there were approximately 42,225 students with special needs in regular classrooms in 2005 (MEB, 2005). These numbers mean the educational needs of more than half of students with special needs in Turkey were being met in regular classrooms in 2005. Recent legislations regarding individuals with special needs such as Regulations on Special Education Services of 2004 also strongly support inclusive practices in Turkey.

Providing appropriate and efficient education to students with special needs in inclusive placements requires taking several crucial factors. One of these factors influencing the success of inclusion is the attitudes of individuals involved in the process of inclusive practice. Regular classroom and special education teachers and their attitudes have been recognized as very crucial for the success of inclusion since

they have direct contact with students with special needs who are included (Burke & Shutterland, 2004; Cook, 2002; Garriott, Miller, & Snyder, 2003; Moberg, Zumberg, & Reinmaa, 1997).

The importance of the attitudes/opinions of teachers toward inclusion of students with special needs has been widely recognized and studied around the world and in Turkey as well. Results of several studies conducted on attitudes of administrators, preservice and practicing teachers (Barnett & Monda-Amaya, 1998; Bennet, DeLuca, & Bruns, 1997; D'Alonzo, Giordano, & VanLeeuwen, 1997; Waldron, McLeskey, & Pacchiano, 1999) revealed varying attitudes toward inclusion. Some pointed out including children with disabilities into regular classrooms was not favored especially by regular education teachers (Alghazo & Gaad, 2004; Bacon & Schultz, 1991; Larrivee & Cook, 1979). Regarding preservice teachers' perceptions toward including students with disabilities, different findings were also found. While some of these studies reported preservice teachers had positive attitudes following university coursework, others found no relationship between university coursework and either preservice teachers' positive attitudes or their willingness to work with students with disabilities (Campbell, Gilmore, & Cuskelly, 2003; Garriott, Miller, & Snyder, 2003; Goodlad & Field, 1993; Kirk, 1998; Rojewski & Pollard, 1993; Welch, 1996).

Several studies have been carried out in Turkey on attitudes or opinions of teachers or administrators (Atay, 1995; Batu, 1998; Baykoç-Dönmez, Avcı, & Aslan, 1999; Diken, 1998; Uysal, 1995; Varlier, 2004) toward inclusion of students with special needs. Results indicated regular classroom teachers in general had negative experiences and opinions or attitudes toward inclusion, although most teachers believed inclusion was beneficial for students with special needs. These studies also pointed out regular classroom teachers were not willing to be part of inclusive practices because of several factors such as lack of training or education on both inclusion and students with special needs, lack of support during inclusive practices, and the excessive number of students in their classrooms. Positive attitudes toward inclusion among preservice general educators appear to be one prerequisite of successful inclusion. However, research clarifying the beliefs of preservice teachers toward inclusive education appears to be limited. Although there have been several studies conducted with inservice teachers in Turkey, limited studies focused on the effectiveness of teacher preparation programs or an undergraduate level course on preservice teachers' opinions regarding inclusion of students with special needs were conducted with preservice teachers (Mağden & Avcı, 1999; Yıkımsı, Şahbaz, & Peker, 1998).

Another important factor which most likely has a direct impact on the success of inclusion is teachers' sense of efficacy or self-confidence about teaching students with special needs. Teachers' sense of efficacy or their confidence in their teaching ability is perceived as "teachers' belief or conviction that they can influence who well students learn, even those who may be considered difficult or unmotivated" (Guskey & Passaro, 1994, p. 628). Teachers with higher sense of efficacy were found in several studies being more optimistic about teaching using positive teaching strategies, searching for new ideas in order to meet educational needs of their students, spending more time with challenging students, and focusing on providing a higher quality of instruction (Allinder, 1994; Ashton & Webb, 1986; Deemer & Minke, 1999; Gibson & Dembo, 1984; Guskey & Passaro, 1994; Ross, Cousins, & Gaddalla, 1996;

Soodak & Poddell, 1996; Woolfolk, Rosoff, & Hoy, 1990). Studies regarding teacher efficacy in Turkey are too limited and have been mostly focused on preservice and inservice science teachers' sense of efficacy (Cakiroglu, Capa, & Sarikaya, 2004; Savran, Cakiroglu, & Cakiroglu, 2004; Tekkaya, Cakiroglu, & Ozkan, 2002). Regarding special education teachers' sense of efficacy, Diken and Ozokcu (2004) conducted a study on both regular and special education teachers' sense of efficacy in working with students with Mental Retardation (MR). The results revealed special education teachers had in general higher sense of efficacy than regular education teachers in working with students with MR. Moreover, special education teachers who had more years of experience with students with MR showed higher level sense of efficacy.

Teachers' sense of efficacy in working with students with special needs and their positive or negative opinions or attitudes toward inclusion appear to be powerful factors shaping their behaviors and their teaching practices in inclusive practices. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine both preservice teachers' sense of efficacy to work with students with MR and their attitudes toward inclusion of students with MR. The following questions were addressed;

1. What is the level of sense of efficacy of preservice teachers?
2. How do preservice teachers think about inclusion of students with MR?
3. Is there a significant relationship between the scores of preservice teachers' sense of efficacy and the scores of preservice teachers' opinions on inclusion?

## Method

### *Participants*

Preservice teachers, senior students, in three teacher preparation programs of college of education at a university in Turkey were participants of the study. The study included a total of 145 preservice teachers of students with MR (23 female, 9 male), regular education teachers (58 female, 17 male), and early childhood education (35 female, 3 male). Age ranged for preservice teachers of students with MR from 19 to 33, with a mean of 23, for preservice regular education teachers from 20 to 26, with a mean of 22.6 and for preservice teachers of early childhood education from 21 to 33, with a mean of 23.

### *Measures*

*Turkish version of the Teacher Efficacy Scale (TTES-Diken, 2004)*. The TTES was used to examine preservice teachers' sense of efficacy related to working with students with MR. The Teacher Efficacy Scale was developed by Gibson and Dembo (1984) and revised by Guskey and Passaro (1994). It was adapted and validated in Turkish by Diken (2004). The TTES is a five-point Likert-type scale. A total of 16 items included in the scale are rated as "1: Strongly disagree", "2: Disagree", "3: No opinion", "4: Agree", and "5: Strongly Agree". Its internal consistency is .71. In order to use the scale in this study, the reliability of the scale was reexamined by checking the Cronbach Alpha. Out of 16 items, the reliability coefficient of 15 items was found to be .74. Therefore, reliable 15-item scale was used in the current study. The lowest score on the scale could be obtained was 15 while the highest score was 75. The higher the total score was, the higher sense of efficacy teachers had.

*Turkish version of Opinions Relative to Mainstreaming Scale (TORMS-Kırcaali-İftar, 1997).* The TORMS was used to examine attitudes of preservice teachers regarding inclusion of students with MR. It was developed by Antonak and Larrivee (1995) and adapted and validated in Turkish by Kırcaali-İftar (1996) to assess teacher opinions and attitudes related to mainstreaming students with special needs in regular education classrooms. The TORMS is a five point likert-type scale, including 20 items. The items are rated as "1: Strongly agree", "2: Agree", "3: No opinion", "4: Disagree", and "5: Strongly disagree". As total scores of the scale increase, negative attitudes toward inclusion increase respectively. The TORMS has an internal consistency of .80. In order to use the scale in the current study, reliability of the scale for the current study was reexamined by inspecting the Cronbach Alpha. Out of 20 items, 13 items showed an internal consistency of .72, which was a reliability coefficient for the scale to be used in the study. Therefore, 13 items were used in this study. The lowest score could be gathered from the scale was 13, and the highest score was 65. The higher the total score was, the more negative attitudes toward inclusion teachers had.

*Information Form.* In order to understand some factors influencing preservice teachers' sense of efficacy and their opinions, the researcher developed a demographic and descriptive information form included questions regarding preservice teachers' opinions on the preparation in their departments to work efficiently with students with MR, or in the inclusive classrooms, their preference and intentions of choosing their fields, their feelings on being ready to work students with MR, and their likings to work students with MR.

### **Data Collection**

Data were collected from senior preservice teachers of three different teacher preparation programs of the College of Education in May of 2005. The reason why these preservice teachers were chosen was that they have the highest probability of working with students with MR who comprise the largest and most frequently included group of students with disabilities.

In order to identify participants of the study, all senior students in the Departments of Regular Education, Early Childhood Education, and Special Education with a major of MR were contacted and verbally asked to voluntarily participate in the study. Volunteered participants were given a booklet including the scales and information form to fill it out. It took approximately 15-20 minutes to fill out the booklet. Table 1 shows the results regarding demographic and descriptive data of participants.

**Table 1**  
*Demographic and descriptive data of participants*

Variables	Participant Preservice Teachers (N=145)							
	Total		Early Childhood Education		Mental Retardation		Regular Education	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	F	%
Gender								
Male	29	20	3	8	9	28	17	77
Female	116	80	35	92	23	72	58	23
Preference of this field in the university exam								
1 <sup>st</sup> , 2 <sup>nd</sup> , 3 <sup>rd</sup>	69	48	18	47	18	56	33	44
4 <sup>th</sup> & above	76	52	20	53	14	44	42	56
Intentionally choosing this field								
Yes	132	91	34	90	31	97	67	89
No	13	9	4	10	1	3	8	11
Feeling ready to work students with MR								
Yes	43	30	4	11	27	84	12	16
No	46	32	19	50	1	3	26	35
Somewhat	56	38	15	39	4	13	37	49

## Results

### *Preservice teachers' sense of efficacy*

Result of one-sample t-test revealed that preservice teachers in general held significantly high level of sense of efficacy to work students with MR ( $X=52.25$ ,  $SD=7.15$ ,  $t(144)=37.1$ ,  $p<.05$ ). When each group individually was examined, even though there was not a significant difference, preservice teachers of students with MR held higher level of sense of efficacy to work students with MR ( $X=54.69$ ,  $SD=7.22$ ), than regular education preservice teachers ( $X=51.85$ ,  $SD=7.36$ ) and early childhood education preservice teachers ( $X=51.00$ ,  $SD=6.31$ ).

### *Preservice teachers' opinions toward inclusion*

Result of one-sample t-test conducted first for the whole group and then for each group indicated that preservice teachers had significantly positive attitudes toward inclusion of students with MR ( $X=31.62$ ,  $SD=6.55$ ,  $t(144)=10.3$ ,  $p<.05$ ). When each group individually was examined, although there was not a significant difference, preservice teachers of students with MR held more positive opinions toward inclusion of students with MR ( $X=30.97$ ,  $SD=7.07$ ), than early childhood education preservice teachers ( $X=31.57$ ,  $SD=5.30$ ) and regular education preservice teachers ( $X=31.92$ ,  $SD=6.94$ ).

### *The relationship between preservice teachers' sense of efficacy and opinions*

Results of Pearson product-moment correlation indicated that there was a moderate positive correlation between preservice teachers' scores on their sense of efficacy and their scores on their opinions toward inclusion of students with MR ( $r=-.46$ ,  $n=145$ ,  $p<.05$ ). In other words, preservice teachers who had high level of sense of efficacy held positive opinions toward inclusion of students with MR.

When each group individually was examined, there was a moderate positive correlation between the scores on the sense of efficacy and the opinions toward inclusion of early childhood education preservice teachers ( $r = -.44$ ,  $n = 38$ ,  $p < .01$ ), regular education preservice teachers ( $r = -.48$ ,  $n = 75$ ,  $p < .01$ ), and preservice teachers of students with MR ( $r = -.43$ ,  $n = 32$ ,  $p < .05$ ). In another word, preservice teachers of each group who had high levels of sense of efficacy also held positive opinions toward inclusion of students with MR.

### Discussion and Suggestions

When we discuss all these results as a whole, descriptive data provides us a broad picture of participant teachers' current characteristics. For example, descriptive data indicates 99 participants (68 %) of all participants feel themselves ready to work students with MR. More specifically, 43 of them think they are fully ready and 56 think they are somewhat ready. Fifty-nine (41 %) participants like to work students with MR and 68 (47 %) can't decide. In terms of choosing intentionally to be a teacher, 90 % of preservice teachers of early childhood, 97 % of preservice teachers of MR, and 89 % of preservice teachers of regular education intentionally chose to be a teacher. This descriptive data supports participant preservice teachers have a strong motivation to be a teacher. Regarding the results of preservice teachers' efficacy in the current study, they are consistent with the results of the study conducted by Diken and Ozokcu (2004). As it was found in this study, their study revealed in general both special and general education teachers had significantly higher sense of efficacy. Moreover, special education teachers had higher sense of efficacy than regular education teachers to work students with MR.

What is interesting in the current study is that preservice teachers have a high sense of efficacy and positive opinions toward inclusion in contrast to the results of previous studies conducted with inservice teachers (e.g., Atay, 1995; Batu, 1998; Diken, 1998; Uysal, 1995). The results of previous studies with inservice teachers show inservice teachers who have had difficulties and negative experiences with inclusive practices hold negative opinions or attitudes toward inclusion. However, when the results of this study are interpreted, it should be kept in mind, as Burke and Shuthlerland (2004) discuss, preservice teachers' perceptions or beliefs rely mostly on their current knowledge (what they are currently learning in their teacher preparation programs) rather than their experiences with teaching students regardless of disabilities. Therefore, based on their knowledge, not experiences, they might feel they have self-confidence of teaching students with MR and have positive attitudes toward inclusion of these students. The results of studies conducted by Campbell et al. (2003) and Garriott et al. (2003) support preservice teachers' attitudes toward including students with disabilities are more positive following university coursework. Jobe, Rust, and Brissie, (1996) also discuss teachers who have received the most intense training for working with students with disabilities usually have the most positive attitudes toward inclusion. Although in the current study preservice teachers of early childhood education and regular education did not have extensive courses in regard to teaching students with disabilities or MR, they were provided one compulsory and selective courses related to teaching students with disabilities and inclusion. However, the selective courses about special education or inclusion taken by participant preservice teachers were not identified in the current study. Compulsory and selective courses might have had positive influences on these

preservice teachers' beliefs or opinions regarding their confidence of teaching and inclusion of students with MR. Since preservice teachers of MR have had more courses on teaching students with MR in their teacher preparation program, they might feel more efficacious and hold more positive attitudes toward inclusion.

The current study shows preservice teachers who have not faced the challenges of inclusive practices hold positive attitudes or opinions toward inclusion. However, these positive opinions turn to negative attitudes because of negative experiences in practice. Therefore, the challenges of inservice teachers in inclusive settings need to be investigated further. Further research, especially qualitative, is needed to find out which courses provided during inservice training have had the most influence on preservice teachers' opinions. Moreover, further comparative studies between preservice and inservice teachers' sense of efficacy to work students with disabilities and their opinions toward inclusion might provide greater insights on both preservice and inservice teacher training programs. The results should be interpreted by considering the methodological limitation of the study. This study was conducted at a single university, and subject to the biases a single setting might impose. Therefore, further research including more participants from various settings is needed to see broad picture of opinions of preservice teachers.

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