

Multicultural Education in Turkey: Exploring Kindergarten Teachers' Problems while Working Students Coming from Different Cultural Background

Türkiye'de Çok Kültürlü Eğitim: Anasınıfı Öğretmenlerinin Farklı Kültürlere Sahip Öğrencilerle Çalışırken Karşılaştığı Sorunların İncelenmesi

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to examine the problems that teachers face while they are teaching the students coming from different cultural backgrounds. This study depicts 20 kindergarten teachers (17 females and three males) who were working in various parts of Turkey. Data was collected by questionnaire had five demographic questions and six explanation questions. These questions focused on teachers' academic background about multicultural education, problems that they currently have, and recommendations to solve these kinds of issues. Results indicate that in-service teachers in Turkey defined different cultures as having different languages, religions, and nations. Thus, they claimed that they do not face any problems because they are speaking a common language with their students and belong to the same religion. On the other hand, while the majority of in-service teachers recommended a seminar organized by the Ministry of Education about multicultural education minority of them suggested universities should include a class about multicultural education. For the problems related to parents, they recommended school districts to design meetings for integrating teachers and parents.

Keywords: Multicultural education, Early childhood, In-service teachers, Teachers' problems

ÖZET

Bu çalışmanın amacı, öğretmenlerin farklı kültürlere sahip öğrencileri öğretirken karşılaştıkları sorunları incelemektir. Türkiye'nin çeşitli bölgelerinde çalışan 20 anaokulu öğretmenini (17 kadın ve üç erkek) içermektedir. Veriler beş demografik soru ve altı açıklama sorusu olan soru listesi ile toplanmıştır. Bu sorular, öğretmenlerin çok kültürlü eğitim hakkındaki akademik geçmişine, şu anda sahip oldukları sorunlara ve bu tür sorunları çözme önerilerine odaklanmıştır. Sonuçlar, Türkiye'deki öğretmen adaylarının farklı kültürleri, farklı diller, dinler ve uluslar olarak tanımladıklarını göstermektedir. Öğrencileriyle ortak bir dil konuştukları ve aynı dine mensup oldukları için de herhangi bir sorunla karşılaşmadıklarını iddia etmişlerdir. Öte yandan, öğretmen adaylarının çoğunluğu Millî Eğitim Bakanlığı tarafından çok kültürlü eğitim hakkında düzenlenen bir seminer tavsiye ederken, azınlığı üniversitelerin çok-kültürlü eğitim hakkında bir ders içermesi gerektiğini öne sürmüştür. Ebeveynlerle ilgili karşılaştıkları sorunlar için okul müdürlüklerinin öğretmenler ve velileri kaynaştırmak adına toplantılar tasarlamalarını önermişlerdir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Çoklu kültürel eğitimi, Erken çocukluk eğitimi, Çalışan öğretmenler, Öğretmen problemleri

INTRODUCTION

The cultural characteristics of the individuals who make up the society consist of elements such as gender, language, religion/sect, social class, race, and sexual orientation (Banks & Banks, 2007). In this context, when culture is mentioned, it is necessary to talk about a whole that includes the differences brought by the geographical location and ecological environment in which the individual lives, the ethnic origin, and the characteristics of the nation in which he lives (Bektaş, 2006). In history, various reasons, especially the transition from an agricultural society to an industrial society, have caused international migrations (Peköz, Külcü & Gürşimşek, 2018). These increasing migrations around the world also increase multiculturalism (Aktın, Karakaya, Türk & Aslan, 2015). The concept of multiculturalism consists of individuals, families, and groups from different cultures and subcultures (Temel, 2008).

Multiculturalism is the coexistence of individuals' social class, age, language, ethnicity, religion/sect, and cultural differences (Sezer & Kahraman, 2017). The concept of multiculturalism includes not only people belonging to stereotypes such as different ethnic groups, social classes, and religions but also people of different genders, superior abilities, and intelligence (Banks & Banks, 1993; Cırık 2008; Herring & White, 1995; Kılıç, Gülenç & Genç, 2014; Polat, Ö., 2007; Slavin, 1994). The fact that students with these differences receive education under

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equal conditions and the structuring of the school environment accordingly is expressed as multicultural education (Cırık, 2008). At the present time, most of countries is seen as a multicultural.

Turkey is one of these countries and currently experiencing its largest influx of immigrants since it was established in 1923. TUIK (2020) stated the population of Turkey has increased to 83,154.997 and almost 20% of them belongs to different nations. According to KONDA (2011), Turkey hosts people from 36 different ethnic groups and is defined as a multicultural society either. While culture is conceptually defined as an iceberg, which is vast under water by Çiftçi and Aydın (2014) "multicultural education is defined as the school approach that guarantees education and teaching based on democratic values and equality in education" (s.197). Polat (2009) stated all students need to get education at the same level to have equal opportunities and social justice; however, researchers have proved that each person has different biological, physiological, and socio-cultural development, thus multicultural education started to have a significant role in education.

Although in the past, people believed teachers have to teach based on what they planned already, they were responsible only for students' academic achievements, and however, this belief has changed over time. Now, both teachers and educators have become more aware of multicultural education and support the idea that the first duty of teachers is to teach students who they are, because when students know their identity, they could be aware of their potential and success each part of their lives (Özel, 2021). As each child has different funds of knowledge including culture, beliefs, values teachers should be able to teach different students at the same classroom (Gollnick & Chinn, 2002).

However, Ray, Bowman and Robbins (2006) claimed majority of teacher education faculty are ill prepared to train teachers for the diversity challenges. Today, most of education faculty do not offer any class to prepare pre-service teachers for teaching culturally diverse students even though Turkey hosts students from different culture. In fact, some students do not speak Turkish while the official and educational language is only Turkish. Unfortunately, these kinds of problems may decrease teachers' expectations of students from particular backgrounds (Nieto & Bode, 2008). This inevitably affects students' achievement in time.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the problems that teachers face while they are teaching the students coming from different cultural background. This study will focus on the following question: What kinds of problems do teachers face while they are teaching the students coming from different cultural background?

METHOD

The most effective way, according to Denzin and Lincoln (2005), is the qualitative research method, which is utilized in many academic fields, particularly in the social sciences, to bring an in-depth understanding of human behavior, attitudes, and their causes. The "inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem" is how the qualitative approach is defined. The study is carried out in a natural setting as the researcher "builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants" (Creswell, 1998, p. 15). In other words, a qualitative study is when a researcher may examine and analyze a social issue using words. In this study, the qualitative method is appropriate for exploring the problems that teachers face while they are teaching the students coming from different cultural background.

Participants

For the purpose of the study a convenience sample of 20 preschool teachers (17 female and 3 male) who are teaching 6 ages and have 4 years teaching experience in the different parts of Turkey were selected. All 20 participants have bachelor's degree in preschool teaching and were conducted in questionnaire with 5 questions for demographic information, and 6 questions for the problems that they faced with students and parents who have different culture and suggestions for solving these problems.

DePaulo (2000) stated that a key point when conducting qualitative research is that the sample must only be big enough to assure that collected data mentions most or all of the perceptions that might be important. According to results, the sample was enough to gather data for this study because significant information was repeated by participants.

Procedure

The questionnaire for this study was designed with open-ended questions, and the questionnaire administration mode is computerized questionnaire, where the items are presented on the computer because participants are in Turkey. While questions were designed, the researcher sought to answer the question of the study. After questions

were designed, they were translated into Turkish, and send participants via mail. Participants had unlimited time to answer questions and could choose to opt out of answering questions. After they finished, they sent back.

Data Analysis

After data collected through questionnaire, demographics of participants were categorized based on their teaching experience. The first step was reduction of the large amounts of narrative data such as the information about teachers' needs that need to be met by Ministry of Education. Then, data was collected and eliminated from narrative information, and then data was coded based on coding scheme. In the coding scheme, TPWS (teachers' problems with students), TPWP (teacher problems with parents), TMSP (teachers' methods to overcome the problems), TRFP (teachers' recommendations for solving problems) were used. Finally, data was interpreted by examining the representation within the coded categories into a word document.

Limitations

This study has some limitations. First, all data was collected only by interview. This created a limitation since findings were based on participants' responses. Another limitation is including 20 participants, which cannot be generalized through the country. Finally, since each participant has different number of students who have variety funds of knowledge their perceptions and responses may vary. Therefore, this should be considered as a limitation of this study.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Teachers' Problems

The participants' answers showed that they do not know what diversity is unfortunately. However, they should be aware of individual differences while they are teaching and prepare their methods based on these differences (Coban, Karaman & Dogan, 2010). They defined "diversity" as students who came from different countries, speak different language, and believe different religion. Thus, majority participants said that they do not have any problems while they are teaching due to different cultures although all of participants stated that they did not take any course when they were at universities. Although Kaya and Aydin (2014) stated that teachers have to take classes related to multicultural education to be able to design their classroom environment based on individual needs; most of teachers do not take any classes related to multicultural education at the universities (Damgaci & Aydin, 2014). Their answers about the problems are almost same. For instance, participant# 11 said that "I have any problem with neither students nor parents because all of them are Turkish", while participant# 6 claimed that "even though I am working in the east of Turkey which has crowded Kurdish population because I am teaching at an urban school all of my students and parents can speak in Turkish, thus I do not have any problem".

Moreover, two of participants who are working cosmopolitan cities said that they have some problems because they have a few students from different countries. Participant # 19 said that "I did not have any student coming from different culture except one who came from Germany, I had problem with him because of his limited Turkish, but we solved this problem after a short time", and participant # 17 said that "I have three students from different countries, although they develop their skills slower than Turkish students because of their language barrier, I observed that they looked happier than Turkish students as they are not exposed their parents' pressure". This proves that teachers are not prepared to teach students from different backgrounds and not well-trained (Damgaci & Aydin, 2014).

Only a few participants said that they face some problems due to different socio-economic status, and both these participants live in metropolitan cities. The other participants who live in smaller cities stated that there is not any differentiation even their socio-economic statuses are at the same level. Even though multicultural education is defined as "the ability to create a democratic learning environment by respecting the cultural differences of students" by Banks (2015:23) participant #7 said that "the problem I faced while I was teaching these students is that they do not respect each other and accept their differences".

On the other hand, Participant #3 brought a different perspective for these kinds of problem. She said that "even though I do not face any problem due to diversity, if I had chance to work with diverse students, it would be a chance to have better learning opportunities". However, she claimed that she did not have chance to teach diverse students. However, as Aslan (2018) mentioned that diverse students mean not only have different nations but also have different gender, socio-economic status, beliefs, traditions etc.

The results introduce that majority teachers do not know what the "diversity" is. Thus, they stated that they do not face any problems with children coming from different cultures. To not be aware of diversity causes unresentful behaviors between students because teachers do not give chance to explain themselves and express their feelings, in

fact, they cannot learn their identity, unfortunately, although teachers should ensure all students have their voice in the classrooms (Damgaci & Aydin, 2014).

Teachers' Methods to Overcome their Problem due to Different Culture

Unfortunately, most of participants answer the question about the method that they use to overcome their problems with students and parent coming from different cultural background in the same way: "I do not have any problem". Only a few participants answer this problem. Participant # 7 said that "I use drama method to help students for explaining their cultures, once they showed their own cultures, and then, they switch the roles, this encourages them to understand and respect others". Participant # 20 said that "if I had a problem due to diversity, it probably would be language barrier and I could ask help parents who can speak in both language".

Teachers' Recommendations

Even though they claimed that they do not have any problem because of different cultural background they recommend that universities should include a class about multicultural education as Damgaci and Aydin (2014) stated. The problem with this perspective is teachers think that they do not have diversity if their classrooms do not include students coming from different cultures; however, Turkey hosts people from different cultures even though it does not have a big immigrant population. In addition, as it was mentioned above, multicultural education is not hosting students from different nations, they could have different gender, language, beliefs etc. (Aslan, 2018).

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

First, most of teachers define multicultural education as coming from different nations even though it is defined having different funds of knowledge. This also decrease their awareness of creating classroom settings, where are appropriate for diverse children. Therefore, teachers should be aware of what the multicultural education exactly means because the results showed that teachers do not know what diversity is. They should have meeting with parents, get information about their cultural background such as religion, thoughts, beliefs, socio-economic status at the beginning of the semester. This will help teachers to understand students better.

Early childhood teachers do not take any classes related to multicultural education, and this causes several issues. Therefore, universities should include a class about multicultural education for preservice teachers because participants' answers prove that in-service teachers do not have information about diversity, and how they can integrate cultural differences in their curriculum. In Turkey, government tries to include and integrate different cultures; however, because people do not have a chance to learn others' beliefs, thoughts, and values, they are not able to respect each other. According to the findings, one of the most significant problems in Turkey is to not respect others.

The results showed that majority teachers do not know what diversity is, and how they can integrate diversity in their curriculum. Thus, Ministry of Education should have seminar or a booklet to explain how in-service teachers can improve their abilities about multicultural education. The seminar or booklet should include how teachers are aware of differentiation in their classroom, and then explain teachers how they can solve their problems about different culture, and the way that teachers can realize the diversity, and integrate in their curriculum.

Having different culture brings prosperities into the classrooms and countries. To benefit from differences, as both educators and teachers, we have to start to realize the differences. However, the results of the study show that teachers do not realize students' differences. To know, accept and respect people's identities, differences, cultures, values, and beliefs compose the fundamental rule in a country, and because schools are the places where people learn the rules, teachers are responsible to give chance students to know and show their own identities, at the same time, accept and respect others' beliefs, values, and cultures.

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