EXAMINING TEACHERS' VIEWS ON INCLUSION STUDENTS THROUGH METAPHORS[*]

Sevda KATITAŞ[**]

Başak COŞKUN[***]

Abstract

This study was conducted to determine teachers' perceptions of inclusion students through metaphors. Metaphor analysis, one of the qualitative research methods, was used in the study. The study group of the research composed of 100 teachers working in public schools in Ankara, Turkey. Multi-stage sampling method was used to determine the study group. Accordingly, criterion sampling, snowball sampling and maximum diversity sampling methods were used in the research, respectively. A form developed by the researchers was applied as a data collection tool. In this form, participants were asked to complete the "Inclusion student is like…. Because…" statement. The data in the study were subjected to content analysis. Categories were created both according to the metaphors used for "inclusion student" and the participants causal expressions using these metaphors. In this context, five categories emerged. The results of the research revealed that teachers thought that inclusion students were sensitive, and therefore they needed special attention and affection. According to the teachers' views, it was concluded that inclusion students should be given educational support appropriate to their individual needs and that their individual characteristics and differences should be accepted without judgment. Besides this, it was revealed by teachers' opinions that inclusion students might have undiscovered characteristics and that these characteristics could be revealed when appropriate conditions were met. Teachers' opinions about the fact that inclusion students faced many difficulties due to being left behind their peers in academic and social terms and that they struggled to exist in the learning environment they were in, were among the results of the study.

Keywords: Inclusion Student, Inclusive Education, Metaphor

ÖĞRETMENLERİN KAYNAŞTIRMA ÖĞRENCİLERİNE İLİŞKİN GÖRÜŞLERİNİN METAFORLAR ARACILIĞIYLA İNCELENMESİ

Özet

Bu araştırma kaynaştırma öğrencilerine yönelik öğretmen algılarının metaforlar aracılığıyla belirlenmesi amacıyla yapılmıştır. Araştırmada nitel araştırma yöntemlerinden biri olan metafor analizi kullanılmıştır. Araştırmanın çalışma grubu, 2019-2020 öğretim yılında Türkiye'nin Ankara ilindeki kamu okullarında görev yapan 100 öğretmenden oluşmuştur. Çalışma grubunun belirlenmesinde çok aşamalı örnekleme yöntemi kullanılmıştır. Buna göre araştırmada sırasıyla ölçüt örnekleme, kartopu örnekleme ve maksimum çeşitlilik örnekleme yöntemlerinden yararlanılmıştır. Veri toplama aracı olarak araştırmacılar tarafından geliştirilen bir form kullanılmıştır. Bu formda katılımcılardan "Kaynaştırma öğrencisi … 'ya benzer/gibidir. Çünkü … " ifadesini tamamlamaları istenmiştir. Çalışmada veriler içerik analizine tabi tutulmuştur. "Kaynaştırma öğrencisi" kavramına ilişkin üretilen metaforlar ve katılımcıların bu metaforları kullanma nedenlerine yönelik ifadeleri dikkate alınarak kategoriler oluşturulmuştur. Bu kapsamda beş kategori ortaya çıkmıştır. Araştırma sonucunda, öğretmenlerin kaynaştırma öğrencilerinin hassas olduklarını ve bundan dolayı özel ilgi ve sevgiye ihtiyaç duyduklarını düşündükleri ortaya çıkmıştır. Öğretmen görüşlerine göre

kaynaştırma öğrencilerine bireysel ihtiyaçlarına uygun eğitim desteğinin verilmesi gerektiği ve onların sahip oldukları bireysel özellik ve farklılıkların yargılanmadan olduğu gibi kabul edilmesinin önemli olduğu sonucuna ulaşılmıştır. Bununla birlikte kaynaştırma öğrencilerinin keşfedilmemiş özelliklerinin olabileceği ve bu özelliklerin uygun şartlar sağlandığında ortaya çıkarılabileceği öğretmen görüşleriyle ortaya konmuştur. Kaynaştırma öğrencilerinin akademik ve sosyal açıdan akranlarından geride olmalarından kaynaklı pek çok güçlükle karşılaştıkları ve bu kapsamda bulundukları öğrenme ortamlarında var olma mücadelesi verdiklerine yönelik öğretmen görüşleri de araştırmada ulaşılan sonuçlar arasında yer almıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kaynaştırma Öğrencisi, Kapsayıcı Eğitim, Metafor

1. INTRODUCTION

The importance of inclusive education has long been recognized not only in the educational policies of countries but also in the field of research and practice. Accordingly, this concept has been the subject of various disciplines, including psychology, pedagogy, and education, and has been discussed from both conceptual and practical aspects. The research and practice literature of inclusive education has founded nearly 30 years of history after the Salamanca Declaration in 1994 (Supriyanto, 2019). Parallel to the research history, Salamanca Declaration which was regarded one of the most important international political initiative was signed in 1994 by 92 countries. With this declaration, it was emphasized that education was a need for every child and that all children should benefitted from equal educational opportunities (UNESCO, 1994). In the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the scope of inclusive education was set out more widely. In the 24th article of the convention, it was clearly stated that students with special needs should not be excluded from the general education system due to their disability and they should receive the necessary support to facilitate their education within the general education system (United Nations, 2006, art. 24). In Turkey, inclusive education was legally adopted and enforced by the Children with Special Education Needs Law in 1983. It was clearly emphasized with the law that children with special education needs should receive education in general education classes with their peers. Since then, inclusive education has been applied in all types and levels of schools from kindergarten to university education in Turkey.

Inclusive education, which is secured in line with both international conventions and national legal regulations of the countries, is also comprehensively discussed in the literature and contextualized with different approaches. For example, some researchers who explained inclusive education with a socio-ecological approach (Echeita et. al., 2017; Nilholm & Göransson, 2017) emphasized that the education system should reach all students, including those with special needs, and responded to their needs taking the interactions between student abilities and environmental demands into account. Muntaner Guasp, Rossello Ramon and de la Iglesia Mayol (2016), who pointed out the importance of harmony between inclusive policies, culture, and practices, stated that barriers to learning and participation should be removed. Florian (2015) supported the idea of inclusive pedagogy as a transformative approach to individual differences and emphasized that inclusive education had the potential to reduce educational inequalities and contribute to democracy by eliminating organizational differences. Waitoller and Kozleski (2013) having similar thoughts stated that the inclusive education approach was a tool to develop democracy because it preserved the concept of diversity and individual differences as ordinary aspects of human diversity.

It is seen that the explanations made for the definition of inclusive education in the literature focused on different points. Some definitions focus on the capacity of the school to meet and adapt to differences, while in others different elements such as rights, values and society come to the fore. Accordingly, Sebba and Sachdev (1997, 2) defined inclusive education as "a process that involves schools making changes in their curriculum and teaching strategies in order to respond to various needs and abilities among students". Similarly, Ainscow, Booth, and Dyson (2006) emphasized that

schools should aim to meet the learning needs of all students in inclusive practices and make significant changes in the content, presentation, and regulation of basic programs in line with this purpose. Schools which provide inclusive education are seen as problem-solving organizations with the mission of learning for all students (Rouse & Florian, 1996). Booth and Ainscow (2002) mentioned that inclusive education should be a process that reduces student exclusion from the school and curriculum and increases his/her participation in education.

Uditsky (1993) and Forest and Pearpoint (1992) evaluated inclusive education in terms of values and society. Accordingly, Uditsky (1993) explained all kinds of rules and regulations promoting the student with special needs to be perceived as a valuable and indispensable member of the school community in all respects as inclusive education. Forest and Pearpoint (1992) used arguments such as "being with each other", "dealing with difficulties" and "dealing with differences" when explaining inclusive education. Ainscow et al. (2006) discussing inclusive education from a broader perspective explained this concept in six main categories: 1) Inclusion regarding disability and special education needs, 2) Inclusion in response to exclusion, 3) Inclusion for all groups vulnerable to exclusion, 4) Inclusion with a 'School for All' approach, 5) Inclusion with the principle of 'Education for All' and 6) Inclusion in education and society by adopting a principled approach.

The differences in the definition and interpretation of inclusive education show that the concept can be contextual and can be explained in different ways depending on the situation. This situation may mean that the demands for inclusive education and the needs of individuals with special needs are perceived differently according to the perspective of the relevant individual or group. In other words, even though inclusive education is discussed based on human rights, each school's view, and assessment may differ in practice.

The extant research in the field generally supports that inclusive education is an effective approach for both groups of students with and without special needs. In a study conducted by Blackorby et. al. (2005) with 11,000 students in the United States, it was concluded that students with special needs in inclusive environments performed better than students with segregated learning environments. Both the reading skills and math performances of the included students were close to their grade level and significant differences were observed in their social participation levels compared to their peers in differentiated environments (Blackorby et al., 2005). Sharma and Mahapatra (2007) listed the benefits of inclusive education for students with special needs as follows: reduction in the inappropriate behavior levels; increase in success rates in individual learning goals; higher participation in inclusive environments and social enterprises in the future; advanced skill acquisition; increase in generalization and friendship relations. The researcher reported the benefits of inclusive education for the typically developing student as follows: Greater understanding, acceptance, and appreciation of diversity; respect for all people; meaningful friendships; preparation for a future of inclusive society and having the opportunity to master their skills by teaching others (Sharma & Mahapatra, 2007).

As it is clearly seen, there are numerous studies (Holahan & Costenbader; 2000; Waldron & McLeskey, 1998) demonstrating the benefits of inclusive education for students with or without special needs in terms of both academic and social acquisitions. From this point of view, teachers should see the value of inclusive education and be able to use efficient inclusive strategies in all educational processes. However, various challenges of inclusive education are mentioned in the literature. As reported by Sharma and Mahapatra (2007), the biggest obstacle to inclusive education is the negative attitude of the society towards this education. In addition, factors such as physical limitations in school buildings, curriculum which are poor in meeting the needs of all students and staff who lack adequate training in this field also prevent inclusive education from being successful.

Research (Darling-Hammond, 2016; De Laet et al., 2015; Franklin & Harrington, 2019; Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Reid & Feist, 2018; Rivkin, Hanushek, & Kain, 2005; Wang & Eccles,

2012) shows that teachers play an important role in student engagement, motivation, and academic success. The studies conducted with special needs students (Ainscow, 2007; Forlin, 2010; Specht et al., 2016) reveal that teachers play a key role in the social and academic attitudes and performances of these special groups. Accordingly, teacher education is critical for the success of inclusive education and for the students to benefit from this education at the highest level (Avramidis & Kalyva, 2007; Loreman & Earle, 2007; Sokal & Sharma, 2014).

It is argued that teacher education programs should try to increase teacher candidates' sense of self-efficacy. As the self-efficacy of teachers increases, their beliefs about the importance of inclusive education also change positively (Sharma & Sokal, 2016). Unfortunately, the opposite is also possible. The teacher who fails in the inclusive education practices might have a negative attitude towards inclusive education (Jordan, Schwartz, & McGhie-Richmond, 2009). In a study conducted by Stanovich and Jordan (1998), it was concluded that teachers' feelings about their own compentencies and their beliefs about disability affected their success in inclusive education practices. Jordan, Glenn, and McGhie-Richmond (2010) stated that the teacher's feelings about his/her own competences; the teacher's beliefs in students' learning abilities and the teacher's perception that he/she is responsible for student learning are effective in achieving positive results in inclusive education.

Although most teachers have a positive attitude towards the theoretical principles of inclusive education, many are hesitant and worried about implementation (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; Florian, 1998; Ring & Travers, 2005). De Boer, Pijl, and Minnaert (2011) stated in their study that most of the teachers had negative beliefs about the implementation of inclusive education and found themselves inadequate in educating students with special needs (De Boer et al., 2011). Teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education differ according to the type of disability of the students. It is observed that students with emotional and behavioral disorders or mental disabilities cause more anxiety for teachers than students with other types of disabilities (Avramidis, Bayliss, & Burden, 2000; Moberg & Savolainen, 2003). In addition to the type of disability, it is seen that different variables such as class size (Anderson, Klassen, & Georgiou, 2007; Smith & Smith, 2000) and teacher experience (Kalyva, Gojkovic & Tsakiris, 2007; Moberg, 2003) also influence teacher attitudes towards inclusive education. Teachers who are experienced in inclusive education have more positive attitudes than less experienced teachers (Kalyva et al., 2007). However, the quality of the experience is also important. Teachers with successful experiences in this area have a more positive attitude towards inclusive education than teachers with no or unsuccessful experiences (Moberg & Savolainen, 2003).

In the light of the arguments in the literature, it is possible to say that teachers' beliefs and attitudes play a crucial role in the implementation and success of inclusive education. There are many studies (AlMahdi & Bukamal, 2019; Alnahdi, Saloviita, & Elhadi, 2019; Altun & Filiz, 2020; Anılan & Kayacan, 2015; Deniz & Çoban, 2019; Güleryüz & Özdemir, 2015; Katıtaş & Coşkun, 2020; Kurt & Tomul, 2020 ; Magumise & Sefotho, 2020; Moberg, Muta, Korenaga, Kuorelahti, & Savolainen, 2020; Özcan, 2020; Page, Boyle, McKay, & Mavropoulou, 2019; Saloviita, 2020; Sheehy, Budiyanto, Kaye, & Rofiah, 2019; Vanderpuye, Obosu, & Nishimuko, 2020; Woodcock & Woolfson, 2019; You, Kim, & Shin, 2019) in the literature that investigated teachers' attitudes, beliefs and competencies towards inclusive education. However, it was seen that there was a scant of studies (Kök, Balcı, & Bilgiz, 2017; Krischler & Pit-ten Cate, 2019) with the teachers who were actively provide inclusive education, that is having at least one special needs student in their class. In this context, it was believed that this study, which was conducted to determine the perceptions of teachers towards inclusion students through metaphors, would bring great contributions to the literature by exposing the perceptions of the teachers, actively practicing inclusive education. For this purpose, the research questions of this study were as follows:

(1)   What are the metaphors teachers use about inclusion students?
(2)   What are the main categories of the metaphors teachers use about inclusion students?

2. METHOD

2.1. Research Design

This study was conducted using metaphor analysis, which is one of the qualitative research methods. Metaphors are used as effective tools in understanding the feelings, thoughts, and understandings of individuals about a particular situation, concept or subject. For this reason, they are frequently used in research to understand and describe social realities (Collins & Green, 1990).

2.2. Study Group

The study group of the research was composed of 100 teachers working in public schools in Ankara province of Turkey. The research was carried out in 2019-2020 academic year. Multi-stage sampling method was used to determine the study group. While determining the sample for a research, different methods can be followed at each stage of multi-stage sampling, which is completed in two or more stages (Büyüköztürk, Çakmak, Akgün, Karadeniz, & Demirel, 2015). Accordingly, criterion sampling, snowball sampling and maximum diversity sampling methods were used in the research, respectively. Firstly, according to the criteria of the research, which was having at least one inclusion student in their current class, the researchers reached the teachers they knew that they met this criterion. And then using snowball technique more teachers who had inclusion students were reached. Later the researchers decided that the experiences and perceptions of teachers at different levels of education might vary that is why teachers working at different school grades (kindergarten, primary school, middle school, and high school) and differing in terms of gender, branch and professional seniority were included in the study to ensure maximum diversity. A relatively balanced number from different school grades, gender, branch, and professional seniority were tried to be ensured while including the teachers in the study group. Balance has been achieved between school grades, gender, branches, and professional seniority.

While deciding on the sample size, the theoretical sampling approach was used. After including 100 people in the study, the researchers agreed that they reached the saturation point (Shenton, 2004) and ended the phase of including the participants in the sample. The form of 20 participants was not evaluated because they did not use metaphors correctly or left the questions partially or completely blank. Data analysis was carried out of 80 participants. Accordingly, 15 kindergarten teachers, 25 primary school teachers, 24 middle school teachers, and 16 high school teachers made up the analysis group. 45 of the participants were women and 35 of them were men. 80 participants, 40 of whom were elementary school teachers (15 of whom were pre-school and 25 of whom were primary school teachers), and 40 of whom were teaching different subject branches, were working in public schools. Participants' professional seniority ranged from 1 year to 20 years. Accordingly, 14 of the participants have 0-2 years of experience, 15 of them have 3-5 years of experience, 20 of them have 6-9 years of experience, 20 of them have 10-15 years of experience, and 11 of them have 16 or more years of experience.

2.3. Data Collection

A form developed by the researchers was used as a data collection tool. Relevant literature was reviewed, and tests used to reveal metaphors were used to ensure credibility. The prepared questions were reviewed by two experts in the field of inclusive education, and then revised and finalized. A pilot study was conducted with three teachers before applying the data collection tool.

In the first part of the form, there were personal information questions, and in the second part, there were statements that would reveal teachers' metaphorical perceptions for inclusion students. In this context, participants were asked to complete the "Inclusion student is like…

Because…" statement. In metaphor studies, the concept of "like" is used to explain the relationship between the subject of the metaphor and the source of the metaphor, and the concept "because" is used to justify the metaphor (Saban, 2009). Data collection forms were given to the participants by the researchers. The researchers made a short briefing to the participants about what a metaphor was and how they would complete the forms.

2.4. Data Analysis

The data obtained in the study were subjected to content analysis which consists of their steps as determining patterns, coding, and categorizing (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2008). Categories were created by considering the metaphors produced for the concept of "inclusion student" and the expressions of the participants explaining the reasons for using these metaphors. Frequency (f) values for the metaphors produced and the categories to which they were related were calculated.

To reach the trustworthiness and authenticity, data analysis process of the research, in other words, how to reach the categories from the data obtained was explained clearly. At the same time, while reporting the findings, direct quotations from the teachers' own expressions were included. The participants were numbered as T1, T2, T3, etc.

The categories were created by two researchers independently, and their results were compared to assure confirmability. It was noticed that similar findings were obtained as a result of the comparison. Besides, the opinions of two field experts were used to verify whether the metaphors under the produced categories represented the relevant category.

3. FINDINGS

In line with the research questions of the study, the metaphors used were categorized and presented in Figure 1, considering the metaphors the teachers made about the inclusion students and the reasons they wrote about these analogies.
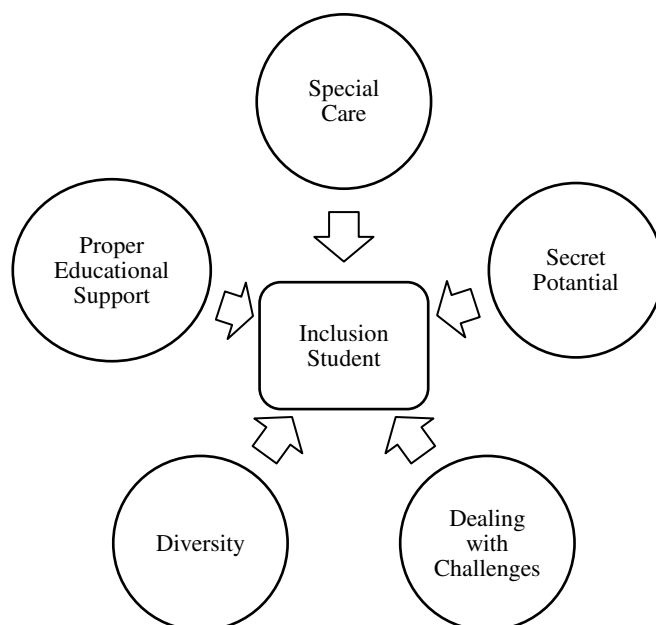

Figure 1. Categories Regarding Metaphors Used by Teachers for Inclusion Students

As shown in Figure 1, the metaphors that teachers used for the inclusion students were classified under five categories: "Special Care, Secret Potential, Dealing with Challenges, Diversity and Proper Educational Support". Accordingly, teachers used a total of 47 metaphors. These metaphors and related categories are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Metaphors Used by Teachers Regarding Inclusion Students

Categories	Metaphors	Opinions (f)
Special Care	Flower (10), Baby (9), Sapling (4), Orchid (3), Water (2), Potted Flower (2), Hazelnut (1), Mimosa (1), Ivy (1), Sportsman (1), Moon (1), Flower Seed (1), Eclosing Butterfly (1), Unprocessed Mine (1), Seed (1), Wounded Bird (1), Butterfly (1)	41
Dealing with Challenges	Snowdrop (4), Fish Out of Water (2), Unripe Fruit (2), Ugly Duckling (2), Small Fish in the Ocean (1), Passenger (1), Carnation in a Daisy Bouquet (1), Boat Drifting in the Current (1), Short-grain Rice in a Long-grain Rice Bowl (1)	15
Secret Potential	Surprise Box (2), Treasure (2), Ore (2), Four O'clock Flower (1), Jewelry (1), Equation (1), Hotchpotch (1), Endemic Plant (1), Undiscovered Planet (1), Pearl (1), Surprise Egg (1)	14
Diversity	Rainbow (3), Spice (1), DNA Codes (1), Seashells (1), Climate (1)	7
Proper Educational Support	Milk (1), Tree (1), Coal Among Diamonds (1), Ink (1)	4

According to Table 1, it is seen that the teachers mostly express their opinions about inclusion students by using the metaphors classified in "special care (f = 41)" category. This is followed by "dealing with challenges (f=15)", "secret potential (f=14)", "diversity (f=7)" and "proper educational support (f=4)" categories, respectively. Explanations for these categories are given below.

3.1. Special Care

The category of special interest included metaphors such as *baby, flower, sapling, orchid, ivy, eclosing butterfly, seed, unprocessed mine,* and *wounded bird*. In this category, the participants emphasize that students with special needs are disadvantaged socially and academically compared to their peers and therefore it is necessary to behave more sensitively and pay special attention to them. For example, a classroom teacher who compared the inclusion student to the butterfly coming out of the cocoon expressed his opinion as " As long as we encourage them to get out of their cocoons, give them enough time and show patience … (they can show their potential)" (T43). A social science teacher using the ivy metaphor explained the reason with these words "It is not possible for inclusion students to grow without support, such as an ivy, which cannot grow without holding on to a place. Therefore, these students need support and attention of their teachers." (T11). An English teacher with a similar view expressed her opinion as "Inclusion student is like an orchid. Because it is very sensitive. If you give it more water, it will rot, if you give less, it will fade" (T77).

3.2. Dealing with Challenges

In the category of dealing with challenges, participants emphasize that the inclusion students are left behind their peers academically and socially, they face many difficulties and struggle to exist in their learning environments. In this regard, a primary school teacher explained her opinion as; "Student with special needs is like an unripe fruit. Because he/she is not ready to enter society, to learn huge amount of academic knowledge and to make friends" (T31). Another teacher working in high school compared inclusion student to the snowdrops and expressed his view as "Snowdrop flower is a flower that wants to exist despite the snow and cold. The inclusion student tries to stand out and express himself/herself among his/her peers who are advantageous compared to him/her. He/she tries to socialize and find a place in his/her environment" (T67).

3.3. Secret Potential

The category of hidden potential includes the opinions of the participants that the inclusion students may have undiscovered features and these features can be revealed when appropriate conditions - including but not limited to positive attitudes and behaviors of teachers, educational materials and teaching methods that can meet individual needs, etc.- are provided. In this category metaphors such as *four o'clock flower, jewellery, surprise box, treasure, equation, hotchpotch, endemic plant, undiscovered planet, ore,* and *surprise egg* were used. A science teacher expressed her thoughts as " The inclusion student is like a surprise box. When we provide the necessary arrangements in the classroom in accordance with his/her abilities, there may be surprises that will surprise us through the box" (T10). A Turkish teacher using the treasure metaphor explained the reason for her analogy in this way; "Inclusion student is a special treasure waiting to be discovered. Because you have special situations that doesn't exist in everyone." (T12). A mathematics teacher expressed his opinion as "You can follow different ways in solving equations. Inclusion student also expects to be discovered different aspects of him/her such as an equation." (T13) by making an analogy of the equation.

3.4. Diversity

In the category of diversity, there are participants' opinions about the characteristics that make the inclusion student special and distinguish him/her from other students. In this category, it is emphasized that for the integration of the inclusion student and other students, it is vital to accept and welcome the special characteristics of the inclusion students as so. *Rainbow, spice, DNA codes, seashells* and *climate metaphors* were used under this category. A teacher of physical education lesson expressed his opinion related to this category as "The inclusion student is like a rainbow. It contains many beauties that we do not know or see." (T26). A music teacher who made a spice analogy expressed her opinion with the words: "The meal is flavored with spices. Inclusion student adds a different beauty to his/her environment with his/her features." (T33).

3.5. Proper Educational Support

In the category of proper educational support, it is seen that participants emphasize that positive results can be obtained when the students are integrated with the appropriate educational conditions by using the metaphors of *milk, tree, coal among diamonds* and *ink.* For example, a kindergarten teacher who used the milk metaphor expressed her reason with the following words: "If the milk is not processed correctly, it will be spoiled and wasted. But if the correct process is applied, yoghurt, cheese, and butter are produced. Good results can be obtained if the inclusion student is well trained" (T44). Another classroom teacher explaining the inclusion student with an ink metaphor stated her opinion with these words; "Inclusion student is like ink and the teacher is like a pen. If the teacher teaches the child with appropriate methods, a nice script appears, otherwise the ink will appear as a black mark on the paper" (T51).

4. DISCUSSION

In the research, the metaphors used by teachers for inclusion students were collected in five categories. Accordingly, special care, dealing with challenges, secret potential, diversity, and proper educational support categories emerged. Among these, the category of special care was the category in which teachers used the most metaphor when explaining the inclusion student. With this category, it was emphasized that inclusion students were disadvantaged socially and academically than their peers and therefore it was necessary to treat them more sensitively and pay special attention.

Based on this finding, it can be said that it is very important that the teacher recognizes the student with special needs in his class, interacts with him correctly and communicates with him in a positive way. However, in many studies (Al-Yagon & Mikulincer, 2004; Barbosa, Campos, & Valentim, 2011; Freire, Pipa, Aguiar, Vaz da Silva, & Moreira, 2020) conducted on this subject, teachers stated that they had fewer positive relationships with students with special needs. Besides, some studies (Gresham, Elliott, Vance, & Cook, 2011; Schwab, Gebhardt, Krammer, & Gasteiger-Klicpera, 2015) revealed that students with special needs who display emotional, social, and learning difficulties did not have as much closeness with their teachers as students without special needs regardless of their social, behavioral, and academic characteristics. This may be due to teachers' beliefs about inclusive education or their role in inclusive education. Waddington (2014) argued that teachers could help children create positive experiences by establishing effective communication. Forlin (2001) having similar arguments asserted that the positive teacher-student relationship was effective in increasing the number of students with special needs within the general education system.

Dealing with challenges and secret potential categories were also among the categories in which teachers used metaphors frequently to explain the inclusion student. In the category of dealing with challenges, it was concluded that inclusion students were left behind their peers academically and socially and they faced many difficulties accordingly. There are many studies on the challenges experienced in the literature. For example, Akbulut, Özgül, Ak and Uslu (2015) expressed that some school principals were not willing to enroll students with special needs, some teachers, and some parents with typically developing children did not want these students in their class. The authors also stressed that these students were also exposed to physical abuse in their schools. Aside from this, other studies revealed the difficulties experienced by students with special needs in terms of both academic (Azatyan & Alaverdyan, 2020; Gündüz, 2015; Lane, Barton-Arwood, Nelson, & Wehby, 2008; Sanır, 2009) and social acceptance (Chamberlain, Kasari, & Rotheram-Fuller, 2007; Frostad & Pijl, 2007; Guralnick, Neville, Hammond, & Connor, 2007; Güleryüz, 2009; Katıtaş, 2019; Koster, Pijl, Nakken, & Van Houten, 2010; Schoop-Kasteler & Müller, 2020).

Many children with special needs have been subjected to discriminatory behaviors since their preschool years and cannot deal with it. This leads to a decrease in the number of children with special needs in the later stages of education (Menda, Karabeyoğlu, & Berktay, 2013). In other words, children with special needs are struggling to exist due to their differences, cognitive or social inadequacies since they entered the educational environment. Unfortunately, the number of these students in the formal education are decreasing with the later stages of education.

The secret potential category in the study disclosed the participants' views that inclusion students may have undiscovered characteristics and that these characteristics can be revealed when appropriate conditions (e.g., teachers' positive attitudes and behaviors, educational materials and teaching methods that can meet individual needs) are met. Peters (2004) stated that one of the challenges faced by teachers working in schools with inclusive education was student diversity. Here, the fact that all students have common aspects is considered as the characteristic feature of diversity. While power is hidden in diversity, it emphasizes that all students can have strengths. It is the responsibility of teachers and all those who support the educational rights of these children to reveal these strengths and believe that all students can learn. In this context, while encouraging the

achievement of students with special needs and helping them reveal their potential, the progress of these students in the process should be considered (Ilyin, 2002). According to Rieser and Peasley (2002), a teacher should ensure that all students, including those with special needs, have the opportunity to succeed and ensure that each student gains knowledge and skills in line with their abilities.

In the study, it was also found that positive results could be attained when appropriate educational support was provided for inclusion students. The study of Kern, Delaney, Clarke, Dunlap, and Childs (2001) supports this finding. In their studies, the authors discovered that the positive behavior and academic achievement of students with special needs increased with changes in the educational programs. Similarly, another study (Lee, Wehmeyer, Soukup and Palmer, 2010) found that with appropriate changes to educational programs, students with special needs increased their participation in academic studies, problematic behaviors decreased so teachers implemented fewer classroom management activities.

Although the number of students with special needs in general education classes has increased when evaluated at the international level, the type and quality of education provided to these students is still being discussed (Morningstar, Shogren, Lee, & Born, 2015). Some researchers (Kurth & Keegan, 2014; Lee et al., 2010), argued that it was important to make the necessary changes to improve the quality of education provided to students with special needs through differentiated teaching. It is known that there are some problems with this issue in the implementation of inclusive education. In many studies (Strogilos & Stefanidis, 2015; Strogilos, Tragoulia, & Kaila, 2015) on the use of differentiated teaching in the education of students with special needs, it was found that no changes were made to the teaching programs for these students. Furthermore, the review by Scruggs, Mastropieri and McDuffie (2007) detected that inclusion students in general education classes were deprived of educational opportunities such as the use of appropriate teaching materials, differentiation in activities and individualization of the curriculum. It might be true to say that the attitudes and behaviors of teachers towards inclusion students and their inadequacy in the implementation of inclusive education had important roles in the rise of this situation. Teachers should have positive attitudes and behaviors for the success of inclusive education and for the students to benefit from this education at the highest level. In addition, teachers should improve themselves in terms of knowledge and skills to provide appropriate educational support according to the individual differences of the student.

Finally, it was concluded that the diversity of the inclusion student should be considered as an advantage. Participants emphasized that accepting the individual characteristics of inclusion students as so was important in the integration of inclusion students and other students. In studies that revealed similar findings (Hunt, Soto, Maier, & Doering, 2003; Ryndak & Fisher, 2003), the participation of students with special needs in inclusive education was associated with increased social interaction and social competence. These students gain social, communicative, and adaptive skills by observing their typically developing peers in their environment (Wolery & Schuster, 1997). On the other hand, students without disabilities in inclusive classrooms show positive social and behavioral developments such as acquiring improved self-esteem within the scope of integrative practices, developing personal principles such as morality and ethics, decreasing fears and prejudices against differences and disabled people (Fisher, Roach, & Frey, 2002). Briefly, it can be said that inclusive education is an integrative practice in terms of social acceptance, interaction, and peer education. So that, in this education when the individual characteristics of the inclusion students are accepted as they are, useful results are obtained for both these students and the other students with typical development.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study with which teacher perceptions for inclusion students were examined through metaphors, reveals that teachers think inclusion students are sensitive and therefore they need special attention and affection. Besides, inclusion students should be given educational support in accordance with their individual needs and that their individual characteristics and differences should be accepted without judgment. There might be characteristics of inclusion students waiting to be discovered and that these characteristics could be revealed when appropriate conditions (such as positive attitudes and behaviors of teachers, the use of teaching methods that meet individual needs) are provided. Teachers are aware that inclusion students face many difficulties due to being left behind their peers academically and socially and try hard to exist in the learning environments.

To sum up, according to the results of the research, it can be said that teachers know the general characteristics of inclusion students and what the conditions are to be met to satisfy their academic and social needs. However, it is known that there are still basic problems in the education of these students. Inclusion students face many challenges in terms of both academic development and social acceptance in their learning environments, and teachers may be inadequate in practice even if they have theoretically sufficient knowledge of this issue. In this context, all teacher candidates from different branches can be given comprehensive training on the characteristics and needs of children with special needs, and the preparation and implementation of individualized education plans for these students during their university education. To increase the social acceptance of inclusion students in schools, activities aimed at raising the awareness of school administrators, other students, and parents for children with special needs can be organized.

Although being the unique study revealing teacher perceptions for students with special needs by means of metaphors, the study has limitations. One of the limitations is the study group which was made up by the teachers working in public schools in one of the biggest cities in the central Anatolia. The study group reflects the perceptions of the teachers mostly working in crowded schools which can be accounted as a strong drawback in inclusive education and this might frame their perceptions. Furthers studies are needed to include teachers working in different school sizes and the studies should also investigate private school teachers' opinions. Quantitative studies which can address a bigger study group can be applied to shed more light on teacher perceptions for inclusion students.

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