KURAM VE UYGULAMADA EĞİTİM BİLİMLERİ EDUCATIONAL SCIENCES: THEORY & PRACTICE

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Research Article

Procedures in Turkey for Guiding Students with Special Needs into Inclusive Settings*

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Abstract

Systematic and organized management of guidance and placement procedures is a definitive prerequisite for the quality and functionality of inclusive settings. This research aims to analyze the Guidance and Research Centers' (GRCs) procedures for guiding students with hearing loss into inclusive settings in Turkey. Being designed as a phenomenological study, it is composed of semi-structured interviews conducted over 14 experts and six parents. Research data have been subjected to inductive analysis, which has revealed five groups of themes regarding inclusive settings, such as how guidance procedures work in GRCs, the guidance criteria for inclusive settings, and suggestions for improving the quality of these procedures. Findings show that the participant experts and parents go through these guidance procedures starting with educational assessment and have faced problems with team work and parental participation. Aside from the experts' need for professional development, the lack of criteria for guiding into inclusive settings is a noteworthy problem. This study concludes that the organizational structure of GRCs should be revised to enhance the quality of the guidance procedures and suggests that future case studies are needed to understand these guidance procedures comprehensively.

Keywords

Inclusive settings • Guidance • Placement • Guidance and research centers • Students with special needs • Students with hearing loss • Parental participation

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The literature encompasses a great many research studies that underpin the vital role of early diagnosis and early education opportunities in the development of students with special needs (SSNs) (Rhoades, Warren, Domitrovich, & Greenberg, 2011; Yoshinaga-Itano, 2014). Moreover, other studies indicate that students with hearing loss (SHLs) in particular can suffer from academic failure because their language and communication skills can be adversely affected by a lack of early diagnosis and education opportunities (Lederberg, Schick, & Spencer, 2013; Schirmer, Bailey, & Lockman, 2004). Therefore, the most feasible way to minimize these potential difficulties is to diagnose hearing loss early, furnish students with hearing assistive technologies such as cochlear implants or hearing aids, and offer them early education and certain types of family interventions (Mahoney, 2009; Rhoades et al., 2011). When SSNs reach school age, guidance procedures should start according to what kind of options would be more appropriate as far as educational setting. These options include (a) either boarding or separate special education day schools, (b) special education classes within regular education, and (c) full-time inclusive settings within classes at regular education schools (Marschark & Knoors, 2012; Stinson & Antia, 1999). Among these, inclusive settings are the most frequently preferred option on both the national and international scale. The definition of inclusive settings regards environments where SSNs are educated in regular education schools and classes together with their peers where all kinds of support services are provided for both themselves and their teachers and other students (Cook & Friend, 2010; Salend, 2008). The current literature hosts a significant amount of research studies that have concluded inclusive settings to contribute to a SHL's language and communication skills, social adaptation processes, and academic success (Antia, Jones, Reed, & Kreimeyer, 2009; Kluwin & Stinson, 1993; Marschark & Knoors, 2012; Stinson & Antia, 1999). On the other hand, other studies have reported inclusive settings to bear potential risks for SHLs such as becoming socially non-adaptive, being/feeling excluded from both in-class and out-of class activities, and being unsuccessful academically (Qi & Mitchell, 2012; Salend, 2008).

Some prerequisites have been noted for minimizing the odds of SSNs encountering such risks and for benefitting the most from inclusion practices (Fuchs, 2010; Goodman & Burton, 2010). These include, but are not limited to, preparing the stakeholders for inclusion in the educational setting, carrying out physical and instructional modifications within the educational setting, and providing educational support services (Turnbull, Turnbull, & Wehmeyer, 2008). In addition, another prerequisite that influences the quality and functionality of inclusive settings has been noted as systematic, standardized, and organized management of guidance and placement procedures (Yell & Katsiyannis, 2004; Wood, 2002). Despite being two interwoven procedures, guidance for and placement in educational settings are regarded as a whole and defined as a systematic and cooperative process that consists

of family participation and educational assessment for identifying SSNs' available educational options based on their current educational performances, as well as diagnostic procedures to decide on their best educational setting (Blankenship, Boon, & Fore, 2007; Wood, 2002). As such, the questions regarding guidance and service as the rationales for this study are as follows:

- How are the procedures for guiding SSNs into educational settings completed?
- Which students are guided into inclusive settings?
- How do the procedures work for guiding into inclusive settings?

The literature review conducted for answering these questions yields the existence of certain legal regulations, solid guidelines, documents, and countless studies on guidance practices in certain countries for maintaining systematic and planned procedures (Ainscow & Cesar, 2006; Allen, 1992; Hornby, 2014).

Examining the international legal regulations and reports in accordance with efforts to find answers to these questions has indicated that certain steps have to be followed for a correct and qualified guidance process (Blankenship et al., 2007; Easterbrooks & Baker-Hawkins, 1995; Fiedler, 2001; Schick et al., 2012). The commonalities found in the literature related to the steps in the guidance process are (a) initial diagnosis; (b) pre-referral process; (c) guidance; (d) comprehensive assessment; (e) deciding about special education services; and (f) preparing the individualized educational program, monitoring, and evaluation (Department for Education [DfE], 1994; Wood, 2002). Additionally, a guidance team is also known to manage the entire process. The responsibilities of the guidance team are to review students' reasons for applying, to organize meetings concerning guidance into educational settings after educational assessment, and to decide on the educational-setting placement (Strickland & Turnbull, 1993).

Hanson et al.'s (2001) study, which was designed to determine the opinions of parents whose children with hearing loss had been placed within inclusive preschool settings about the process of deciding which educational setting their child would take part in during their primary education years, is one of the studies focusing on guidance procedures in the international literature. They concluded parents, experts, non-governmental organizations, the physical structure of schools, the presence of support services, the attitudes of normally hearing peers, and teachers' professional background/capabilities to affect the placement decision. Another relevant study by Swart, Engelbrecht, Eloff, Pettipher, and Oswald (2006) aimed to depict the experiences that families of SSNs went through during the placement process into inclusive settings. They determined students to first be subjected to a trial process before placement and school principals' opinions to have a decisive influence over these students' placement process. On the other hand, Fuchs, Fuchs, and Stecker's

(2010) report is also noteworthy, as they indicate the existence of several problems in these practices, even though the literature bears precise legal regulations and positive research results regarding guidance procedures. In their report, the authors aimed to describe the guidance process and defined their conclusion as "blurry." Regarding their questions about the guidance process, one can answer that several tangible and certain standards exist, yet still some vagueness prevails in these practices (Oxfordshire County Council, 2015; Red, Osborne, & Waddington, 2010; The Teaching Council, 2013; Wokingham Borough Council, 2014).

The uncertainty concerning SSNs' guidance into inclusive settings within the international literature is also true for Turkey (Çerezci, 2015; Özak, Vural, & Avcıoğlu, 2008). In this sense, statistics depict the number of students within inclusive settings embodied in regular education to be 1,399 for pre-school, 81,380 for primary education, 92,032 for middle school, and 27,730 for high school, which points out how prevalent inclusive practices are in Turkey (Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı [MEB], 2016). After underlining how common inclusive settings are throughout the country, one should also note that Turkey has legal regulations regarding guidance procedures.

Therefore, the Regulations on Special Education Services clearly define the procedural steps for guidance, who is authorized to perform them, and how the process is to be completed (MEB, 2012). Figure 1 can be examined closely to see the steps of the procedures for guiding SSNs in Turkey.

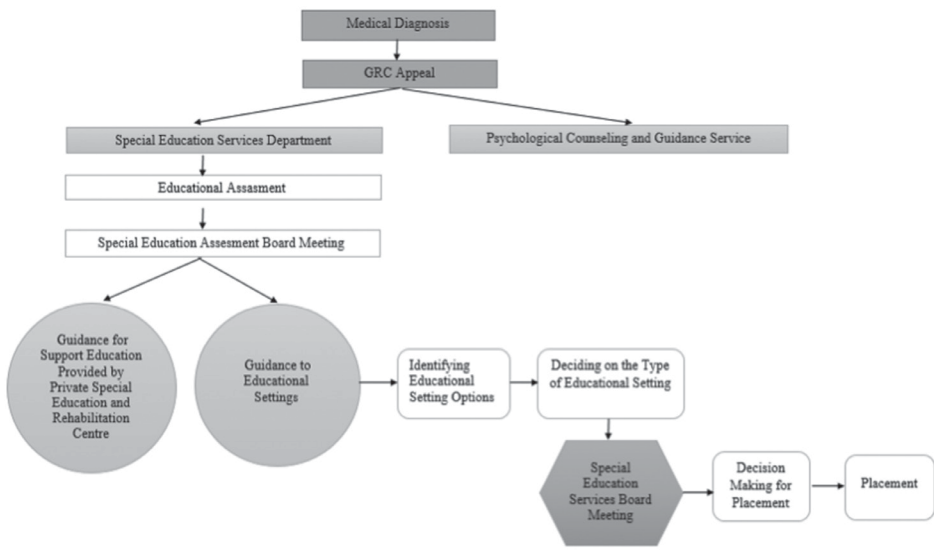

Figure 1. Procedures for guiding SSNs into educational settings (MEB, 2012).

As shown in Figure 1, the primary responsibility and role in guiding SSNs into educational settings belongs to Guidance and Research Centers (GRCs). The main function that GRCs fulfill is to guide SSNs into educational settings following educational assessment procedures and diagnoses (MEB, 2012). In addition, guidance procedures are monitored by both the GRC Special Education Assessment Board and the Provincial Board of Special Education Services, which has greater authority and affiliation with MEB. Furthermore, legal regulations mandate that guidance decisions be made in consideration of the closest school within the family's neighborhood, the student's features (type and severity of disability, academic performance, and level of development across all areas), and the properties of the school (availability of relevant personnel, characteristics of the educational setting, etc.; (MEB, 2012). Although the guidance system in Turkey appears functional and complete, the picture gets a little blurry as one starts digging to see how the system is applied in practice. Accordingly, Özak, Vural, and Avcıoğlu's (2008) study, which aimed to determine GRC personnel's opinions on the guidance procedures for SSNs, is evidently notable as their findings indicate that GRC personnel consider the diagnosis and placement criteria employed for guidance procedures to be insufficient and the personnel to have a limited number of options with respect to educational settings. Some important reports have concluded several problems to exist regarding both the guidance procedures for SSNs into educational settings and the follow-up processes, which should also have been added to the findings of Özak et al.'s study (Gök & Erba, 2011; Sadioğlu, Bilgin, Batu, & Oksal, 2013).

One can conclude that inclusion practices are quite common in Turkey, yet not without their problems. The source of some of these problems may be vagaries within the guidance procedures. Therefore, analyzing the functions of how SSNs are guided into inclusive settings is still meaningful, regardless of several solid legal regulations. Examining how SHLs in particular are guided into inclusive settings is of great significance because the quality of the entire process can be increased, and this should also be considered as a prerequisite for enhancing the quality of inclusion practices. Research like this will shed light onto the difficulties and problems within Turkey's guidance procedures, identify the strong and successful aspects of the procedures, and produce practical suggestions for upgrading the quality of these procedures. In this sense, this study aims to analyze how GRCs guide SHLs in primary education into inclusive settings in Turkey. Accordingly, answers have been sought for the following questions:

1. What is the goal and definition of the guidance procedures conducted by GRCs in Turkey?

2. How do GRCs handle the guidance procedures in Turkey?

3. What problems are experienced in GRCs during the guidance procedures?

4. What can be suggested for enhancing the quality of the guidance procedures in GRCs?

Method

Research Design

Aiming to analyze GRCs' procedures for guiding SHLs into inclusive settings within primary education, this research uses the phenomenological design from the qualitative approaches in order to reflect comprehensively and in detail the experiences that GRC experts who take part in the guidance procedures go through, as well as the parents of SHLs (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). The basic rationale for choosing this design is that the literature states phenomenological designs to be conducive for describing phenomena, cases, and experiences that people are aware of but have insufficient detailed knowledge of in their daily life (Creswell, 2007; Ersoy, 2016). Additionally, another reason why this research uses a phenomenological design can be attributed to the ease of effort in precisely determining the similarities and differences in the answers provided by GRC experts and parents to the interview questions based on their experiences because they are the main factors influencing the procedures for guiding SHLs into inclusive settings.

Research Participants

This study has two kinds of voluntary participants: the GRC experts responsible for guiding SHLs into educational settings and the parents of SHLs who are continuing their primary education within inclusive settings. Detailed information follows about both the experts and the parents.

Features of participating GRC experts. The participant experts in the study are 14 experts responsible for guidance procedures in two different GRCs located within the province of Eskişehir. Of these experts, seven are female and seven are male. Table 1 displays the participating experts' demographic information.

Table 1
Demographic Features of GRC Experts

Pseudonym	Experience	Bachelor's Degree	Job Definition
Ali	1Y	Primary Education/Classroom Teacher	Spec.Ed.Teacher/SEAB Member
Umut	1Y	Primary Education/Classroom Teacher	Spec.Ed.Teacher/SEAB Member
Baha	.75Y	Psychological Services in Education	Spec.Ed.Teacher/SEAB Member
Asu	5Y	Special Ed./Teacher for Hearing-Impaired	Special Education Teacher
Berk	3Y	Psychological Services in Education	GuidanceTeach./SEAB Member
Naz	14Y	Psychological Services in Education	GuidanceTeach./SEAB Member
Jale	18Y	Psychological Services in Education	GuidanceTeach./SEAB Member
Ece	1Y	Special Ed./Teacher for Hearing-Impaired	Special Education Teacher
Can	1.5Y	Special Ed./Teacher for Mentally Handicapped	GuidanceTeach./SEAB Member
Gül	17Y	Psychological Services in Education	Spec.Ed.Teacher/SEAB Member
Nil	1Y	Primary Education/Classroom Teacher	Spec.Ed.Teacher/SEAB Member
Cem	16Y	Psychological Services in Education	Spec.Ed.Teacher/SEAB Member
Lale	1.75Y	Special Ed./Teacher for Mentally Handicapped	Spec.Ed.Teacher/SEAB Member
Mete	4Y	Special Ed./Teacher for Hearing-Impaired	Spec.Ed.Teacher/SEAB Member

A closer look at Table 1 yields the professional experience of GRC experts to range from 8 months to 18 years. As for their bachelor's degrees, two have a degree in teaching the hearing impaired, two in teaching the mentally handicapped, three in classroom teaching, four in psychological services in education, and two in psychological counseling and guidance. According to the experts' job definitions, ten work as special education teachers, three as guidance teachers, and one as a counselor.

Features of SHLs' participating parents. Within the scope of this research, six parents were interviewed who agreed to partake in the study voluntarily and who have a child with hearing loss attending an inclusive education setting in primary school. Of these six parents, four are mothers and two are fathers. Relevant demographic information about these parents is presented in Table 2.

Table 2
Participant Parents' Features

Pseudonym	Degree of Affinity	Occupation	Family Training
Nur	Mother	Housewife	Completed in the past
Taner	Father	Teacher	Completed in the past
Okan	Father	Civil Servant	Completed in the past
Mine	Mother	Teacher	On-going
Duru	Mother	Housewife	Completed in the past
Neşe	Mother	Housewife	Completed in the past

Table 2 shows that of the participant parents, three are housewives, two are teachers, and one is a civil servant. As for family training, one parent is still in training, while five have already been trained. Of these parents' children with hearing loss in inclusive settings, four are second graders and two are third graders.

Data Collection Technique

The semi-structured interview technique has been employed for collecting data in this phenomenological-design research study (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). The rationale behind using semi-structured interviews is the ease of effort in gathering comprehensive information about the procedures for guiding SHLs in primary education into inclusive settings.

The first step in the semi-structured interview technique is to prepare the interview questions that will be directed to both the experts and the parents. After the researchers formed the questions, they were sent to three experts in different fields (two experts in the Special Education Department and one expert in the Primary Education Department). Based on the experts' opinions, one question to be directed to the parents was excluded from the interview form. With respect to the other questions addressing the GRC experts, two questions were considered to be too similar, so one of them was excluded, as well. As a result, the interview form was finalized with 12

questions for the experts and 11 for the parents. Some of the questions for the experts are: How do the guidance procedures work following the assessments; how do you decide to refer/guide someone into inclusive settings, and what problems, if any, have you encountered during or after the procedures for guiding SHLs into inclusive settings? Likewise, some of the questions for the parents are: What was your role while your child was being referred into his/her future school; What problems did you experience during the guidance procedures; and What do you think can be done to better the decision-making process for referring yours or other children into the schools where they will be educated?

Data collection process. Research interviews were held at the same time with the parents and with the experts who work at GRCs in Tepebaşı and Odunpazarı. The experts' interviews were completed as one-on-one sessions and took place at their GRCs. The parents' interviews, on the other hand, were conducted at various places, such as their home, workplace, a cafe, or at Anadolu University. Detailed information about the interviews with GRC experts and parents are provided under the two following headings.

Interviews with the experts. Expert interviews were scheduled and conducted by the first author after having scheduled appointments with the experts. Table 3 displays the interview calendar for the experts.

Table 3
Contextual Information Regarding the Semi-Structured Expert Interviews

Pseudonym	Date	Interview Length	Location
Nil	2/24/2016	00:38:48	Odunpazarı GRC
Cem	2/24/2016	00:57:14	Odunpazarı GRC
Lale	2/26/2016	00:48:20	Odunpazarı GRC
Mete	2/26/2016	00:37:22	Odunpazarı GRC
Naz	2/29/2016	00:46:50	Tepebaşı GRC
Jale	2/29/2016	00:34:41	Tepebaşı GRC
Ali	3/1/2016	00:19:48	Tepebaşı GRC
Veli	3/1/2016	00:32:49	Tepebaşı GRC
Baha	3/1/2016	00:33:48	Tepebaşı GRC
Ayşe	3/3/2016	00:23:30	Tepebaşı GRC
Berk	3/3/2016	00:37:54	Tepebaşı GRC
Ece	3/4/2016	00:31:16	Odunpazarı GRC
Can	3/4/2016	00:44:38	Odunpazarı GRC
Gül	3/7/2016	00:51:26	Odunpazarı GRC

As can be seen in Table 3, data concerning the GRC experts were collected between February 24, 2016 and March 7, 2016. All interviews took place at either the Tepebaşı or the Odunpazarı GRC. The mean length of the experts' interviews was 40 minutes.

Interviews with the parents. Participant parents were first contacted by phone for scheduling the interviews. Table 4 shows their interview calendar.

Table 4
Contextual Information Regarding the Semi-Structured Family Interviews

Pseudonym	Date	Interview Length	Location
Duru	2/17/2016	00:33:49	Ms. Duru's house
Nese	2/22/2016	01:07:42	Anadolu University E Block
Nur	3/08/2016	00:32:54	Gaziantepli Hasanoğlu Baklavacısı (Patisserie)
Taner	3/14/2016	00:33:20	Şehit Murat Tuzsuz Vocational High School Cafeteria
Okan	3/15/2016	00:25:24	Çamlıca Ticaret Odası Religious Middle School Lobby
Mine	3/15/2016	00:51:21	Müze Café

As shown in Table 4, interviews with parents were conducted between February 17, 2016 and March 15, 2016. These interviews were held at different places and their mean length was 39 minutes.

Data Analysis

The research data collected using semi-structured interviews were subjected to inductive analysis. Inductive analysis is defined as classifying similar data in a way so that certain concepts and themes can be produced from the data cluster and readers can easily read and understand the research data (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Creswell, 2007). Accordingly, the following steps were followed in data analysis: (a) first, all interviews were decoded and transcribed into documents. Documented audio scripts were examined and verified by a field expert, (b) in the next step, all documents were transferred onto a detailed interview form containing five parts (contextual information, descriptive index, descriptive data, interviewer comments, and overall comments). As a result of the expert and parent interviews, 364 pages of data were documented for the experts and 420 pages for the parents. (c) After transferring data onto the detailed interview form, the expert and parent interview files were selected at random, and the contextual information, descriptive index, interviewer comments, and overall comments sections were separately completed by the first researcher/author and another field expert. Subsequently, data files completed by the author and the expert were compared for agreement. (d) In the last step, all data were coded, with 16 codes for the expert interviews and 12 codes for parent interviews, according to the descriptive index section. All coded data sections were separated, and data bearing the same codes were put in the same file in two copies. Each file was scrutinized by the expert and the researcher in order to formulate the themes and sub-themes. Finally, the themes were revised by the second author, with five themes at last being identified.

Validity, Reliability, and Ethics

Validity and reliability are noted as two significant conditions that any research data should meet in order to be considered scientific and credible (Creswell, 2007). In this context, the researcher was granted the pertinent permissions from the Governorship of Eskişehir Province before the study started. A range of data sources was

employed to achieve validity and reliability. The Participant Information Form and interview questions were prepared and finalized after consulting with field-experts. A pilot interview had been conducted to check the functionality of the interview questions before the actual interviews were held. Participants were informed that pseudonyms would be used during the interviews and that voice records would under no circumstances be shared with third parties. An expert listened and checked the data transcribed from the audio records while preparing for data analysis. As for the data analysis, the first author and field experts worked on assigning codes and themes independently, which was followed with an agreement session. Consequently, due attention was paid to preserve research ethics, provide researcher variety, and maintain data validity and reliability.

Findings

This part of the study contains information regarding the findings distilled from the interviews that had been conducted with the participating GRC experts and parents. The findings are grouped under five themes as shown in Table 5.

Table 5
Themes Concerning the Opinions of Experts and Families

1. Definition and Aim of the Procedures for Guiding into Educational Settings
2. How the Procedures Function in GRCs for Guiding into Educational Settings
3. The Criteria for Guiding into Inclusive Settings and for Terminating the Guidance Process
4. Problems Experienced during the Process of Guiding into Inclusive Settings
5. Suggestions for Improving the Quality of the Procedures for Guiding into Inclusive Settings

Definition and Aim of the Procedures for Guiding into Educational Settings

Of all the participating experts, nine (Berk, Can, Cem, Ece, Gul, Lale, Mete, Naz, and Umut) defined the procedures for guiding into educational settings and stated their opinions about the aim of this process. For instance, expert Mete defined the process as: "Guiding a child to an educational setting where s/he can experience the least amount of negativity regarding the disability." Likewise, expert Gül said the following about the process: "The goal is to reach the highest number of educational outcomes within the least restricted environment." Analysis revealed no parental opinions on this theme.

How the Procedures Function in GRCs for Guiding into Educational Settings

The participant experts and parents reported the guidance procedures into inclusive settings to include the following components: educational assessment instruments and documents, assessment domains, family participation in the educational assessment, and a guidance board meeting.

Educational assessment instruments and documents. Eleven experts (Ali, Asu, Baha, Berk, Can, Cem, Ece, Gul, Lale, Mete, and Veli) shared their opinions on the educational assessment process and the tools they employ during this process. For example, expert Ece stated they had used a Broad Assessment Form during educational assessment. In addition, the same expert noted that they had used some extra materials, but they were not standard, saying: "Everybody has their own materials." Furthermore, participating experts stated that they had also considered student's previous assessment results, school projections, and educational plans. Accordingly, expert Cem noted that he had made use of a student's previous GRC assessment results, saying: "I compare that with the previous assessment." Expert Ece stated, "We also review the student's individual development report."

Assessment domains. Eıght participating experts (Ali, Asu, Can, Cem, Gul, Lale, Mete, and Veli) also expressed their opinions on the assessment domains. For instance, expert Asu listed these domains to be "Hearing, language and speech, reading and writing comprehension, mathematics, and social communication." Similarly, expert Ali stated students' social competence to also be assessed, saying: "We examine their attitudes at school, in their environment, and towards their friends." All participant parents (Duru, Mine, Nese, Nur, Okan, and Taner) also shared their opinions about the areas where their children had been assessed. For example, Taner said, "An academic performance assessment was conducted." Moreover, Duru noted that one of the questions regarding her child's social competence during the assessment procedure at GRC was "Can your child do it when friends are around?"

Parental participation in educational assessment. Seven of the participating experts (Asu, Cem, Gul, Jale, Lale, Mete, and Naz) underlined that parents had also been consulted to support the assessment results with extra information about their children. Accordingly, expert Lale noted, "Sometimes, we collect information from the parents for things we can't observe during assessment." Meanwhile, five parents (Mine, Nese, Nur, Okan, and Taner) stated both positive and negative opinions about their involvement in the assessment procedures completed at the GRCs. For instance, Nese described her involvement in the assessment, saying: "They generally ask [us]." However, Mine exemplified how she had been left out, stating: "No, I waited outside."

Guidance board meeting. All the experts (Ali, Baha, Berk, Can, Cem, Ece, Gul, Jale, Lale, Mete, and Naz) gave information about how the results of educational assessment reports had been discussed in SEAB, as well as the roles and responsibilities of the board. Considering the number and expertise of the board members, expert Jale said, "There are six members: three counselors and three special education teachers." Another expert, Can, told how they had invited the parents to partake in the board meetings, noting: "We sent invitations to the parents to inform them about the date

and time of the meeting." Despite the experts' remarks, two of the interviewed parents (Duru, Nese) stated having never had attended any SEAB meeting. For example, Duru underpinned that she had never been invited to a meeting by the GRC, saying: "I wasn't involved in any kind of meeting."

Participant experts also explained the board's roles and responsibilities. Accordingly, expert Gül defined the role of the board as being "To conduct educational assessments for each child." Furthermore, expert Jale explained the board's role in changing the educational setting, stating: "A change in schools." Additionally, expert Lale underlined the board's role in deciding to when to terminate the educational stage, saying: "When primary school is finished, which is something we decide, the child needs to be guided through middle school."

The Criteria for Guiding into Inclusive Settings and for Terminating the Guidance Process

Regarding the criteria for guiding into inclusive settings, 11 experts (Asu, Berk, Can, Cem, Ece, Jale, Lale, Naz, Nil, Mete, and Veli) mentioned both being an SHL and other criteria. For instance, expert Mete said, "Guidance is completed after due consideration of the child's age, disability, and family's expectations." Expert Ece added, "Age matters, too," as well as "If the child has assistive instruments or not also counts." Expert Jale, on the other hand, noted that the type of hearing loss was also a significant criterion for guidance into inclusive settings and that children with total hearing loss were not eligible for inclusive settings, saying: "There is only one school for kids with total hearing loss, primary school for the hearing impaired." Lastly, expert Jale also noted that several other properties such as "Academic performance, social skills, psychomotor skills, and language development" were also important for guidance alongside the other criteria.

Additionally, four participant experts (Ali, Berk, Lale, and Veli) said that not only criteria in relation to the child but also in relation to others in the school, classroom, and class teacher should also be taken into account during the procedures for guiding into educational settings. For example, expert Ali stated, "These children are referred/guided to the closest school to their neighborhood."

Nonetheless, all the participating parents (Duru, Mine, Nese, Nur, Okan, and Taner) noted that they had considered the properties of the school, class, and teacher before selecting which school to attend. For instance, Mine explained her reason for choosing by saying, "It is close to my home." Similarly, Duru noted that not only was the school close to their home but the class size was also reasonable, stating: "Not more than 20." In addition, Taner underlined that the teacher factor had also been influential in their decision, noting: "The principal said we could choose a proper teacher."

Problems Experienced during the Process of Guiding into Inclusive Settings

The problems the participant experts and parents stated relate to the discrepancies between legal regulations and the practices, structure, and functions of the GRC's guidance criteria.

Problems emanating from discrepancies between regulations and practice. Two of the interviewed experts (Berk and Gul) mentioned the problems stemming from the differences between legal regulations and the practices about inclusion. In this regard, Gül stated legal regulations and instructions to exist on how inclusion should be implemented, yet some problems are still experienced during implementation: "These describe the ideal situation, but in practice we leave the inclusion students on their own." Another expert, Berk, talked about the details of the problem, noting: "The problem is that we continue this practice just because it is mandated by the regulations, but the stakeholders are not seriously trained and the infra-structure is not ready."

Problems regarding the structure and function of GRCs. Ten of the participating experts (Asu, Berk, Cem, Gul, Jale, Lale, Mete, Naz, Nil, and Veli) underscored the presence of some problems regarding GRCs' educational assessment processes and insufficient number of personnel. In this context, expert Nil complained about the quality of the work carried out in GRCs, even though they are responsible for many duties such as educational assessment and guidance, saying: "I don't believe the guidance procedure is healthy enough here." One expert (Lale) stated that they had had to assess all types of SSNs according to new legal regulations, noting: "We have to be knowledgeable about all types of disabilities now." Moreover, two experts (Berk and Cem) underpinned how the insufficient number of qualified personnel responsible for guidance procedures leads to various problems. In this context, Berk said, "There is barely any knowledgeable branch manager with proper training on special education. Even a music teacher can work as a special education branch manager." Cem additionally underlined that some problems can be overcome if experts from all fields were to be involved in GRC's guidance procedures. Cem also summarized the gist of the problem as: "GRCs can't pay cash, so no one wants to be involved."

Problems regarding the guidance procedures and criteria. Participating experts and parents noted having had encountered several problems emanating from the GRCs' own guidance procedures. While parents stated being concerned about the quality of the guidance procedures, the experts listed some of these problems as: some of the required documents for assessment are either incorrect or missing; insufficient/inappropriate assessment tools; insufficient time allocated for assessment; lack of qualified personnel; and lack of a suitable educational setting for guidance.

A total of nine participating experts (Asu, Baha, Berk, Cem, Gul, Jale, Lale, Mete, and Veli) reported having had problems with the GRCs' guidance procedures. For

instance, expert Gül had the following to say about applying to the GRC for guidance: "The educational assessment form is never correct. It never has detailed information about the child's characteristics." Moreover, this same expert added that some other problems also exist in getting information from the child's family about how good or bad their child has been in school, noting: "Families sometimes provide incomplete or incorrect information." Another expert, Ali, underscored that some issues stem from using the same assessment tools for children of all ages, saying: "The same assessment form is used for both kindergarteners and high-school students." Gül, saying: "If the child is having a bad day, we can incorrectly assess. As such, we occasionally make mistakes," noted that sometimes it may not be the right time to assess the child. This indicates another problem related to assessment tools, along with the others. Regarding the short time allotted for assessment, expert Nil noted, "We come up with some goals for a student after a 5- to 15-minute assessment. I don't think it's healthy." In support of this, expert Baha added, "Assessments should be repeated at schools."

In addition, four participant parents (Nese, Mine, Nur, and Taner) endorsed what the experts had underlined by drawing attention to the differences in performance that students display in the assessment from in their homes as part of their daily life. The parent Mine expressed her relevant concerns, saying: "It is a new place for children, so they can look worse than normal." Likewise, Nese blamed the time restriction on assessment process, noting: "No one can show their real performance in 10 minutes."

Furthermore, one participant expert, Mete, stated that certain problems experienced during the guidance procedure relate to an insufficient number of schools that are compatible with the students' characteristics and inclusion criteria, saying: "Is there a suitable school for the child? Is it compatible with the class-size criterion? Is the school located somewhere far away or nearby?" Regarding the experts' suggestions for the schools and teachers, expert Umut said, "It is beyond us. We complete the guidance process while ignoring whether or not the teacher is capable, will accept the student, and can prepare the class for inclusion."

Suggestions for Improving the Quality of Procedures for Guiding into Inclusive Settings

The suggestions both experts and parents made for enhancing the quality of the procedures for guiding into inclusive settings can be classified as follows: inter-disciplinary cooperation, informing parents about inclusion practices, and how GRCs should work.

Suggestions for inter-disciplinary cooperation. One expert (Cem) shared his opinions about how valuable it is for GRCs to cooperate with experts from various

fields, saying: "I wish we could bring a hearing specialist onto the board; we could learn their ideas about students."

One interviewed parent (Mine) underpinned that schools should deliver relevant information about inclusion students to the GRCs before the academic year starts, noting: "Teachers should send students' educational performances to the GRCs in June."

Suggestions for informing parents about inclusive education. Two parents (Nese and Nur) said that they needed to be informed about their children's characteristics and suitable educational settings before the guidance process. Nur said, "Families should be contacted and informed before the academic year starts." Likewise, Nese underlined that GRCs should consider teachers' qualities during the process of guiding to schools, noting: "GRCs should be able to tell us which schools have better teacher options for us and which teachers have more knowledge and experience with SHLs."

Suggestions about how GRCs should work. Of all the participating experts, 10 (Ali, Asu, Baha, Can, Ece, Gul, Lale, Mete, Naz, and Veli) made suggestions regarding how the assessment process should be managed in the GRCs. For instance, expert Gül said, "I believe field teacher should conduct the assessment process." Similarly, Lale explained that experts from different fields should work in the GRCs, noting: "We should accommodate teachers who specialize in different disability groups." Expert Ali, on the other hand, focused on the features of the assessment place, saying: "There should be special, sound-proof assessment rooms."

Experts made several other suggestions concerning the assessment tools as opposed to being about those who do the assessment. For instance, Baha underscored that assessment forms should be revised, saying: "We use the same assessment form for everyone with a hearing impairment, ranging from little children to adults between 25 and 30." Moreover, expert Mete stated that supplementary materials used alongside the standardized forms were numerous and inconsistent, saying: "We don't use one standard."

Discussion

This study aims to determine what experts working at the Guidance and Research Centers (GRCs) affiliated with the Ministry of Education, as well as parents of students with hearing loss (SHLs), think about the procedures for guiding SHLs into inclusive settings. In accordance with the participants' opinions, the following themes have been identified: the definition and aim of the guidance process, how the guidance procedures work in GRCs, and the guidance criteria for inclusive settings. Furthermore, three other themes were formulated: parental participation in the guidance process, the problems experienced during the process, and suggestions

for improving the quality of the process. This section of the article discusses the research themes by comparing them with those in the literature, making inferences, and drawing conclusions.

The findings show the participant experts to have stated their opinions on the aim and definition of the guidance procedures conducted at GRCs. According to them, this definition and aim include offering educational opportunities to SSNs in the least-restrictive environment compatible with their individual characteristics and making sure they get the most out of the process. Consistent with this finding, a review of the literature yields guidance procedures to be a major prerequisite for applying various interventions and strategies so as to determine the best educational environment according to individuals' strengths and weaknesses (Hornby, 2014; Rozalski, Stewart, & Miler, 2010). In this sense, one can conclude the present research's participants to be well-informed about the definition and aim of the guidance procedures. On the other hand, one should also note that the participant parents did not know much about the aim of the guidance procedures. This particular finding is also consistent with Özak et al.'s (2008) conclusion that families are not provided with enough clear information about their children and that GRCs' guidance process does not function properly. This could be the right point for emphasizing the literature's reminder of the significance of parental participation from the very beginning of a SSN's guidance process (Blankenship et al., 2007; Kasari, Freeman, Bauminger, & Alkin, 1999). As such, these conclusions raise some questions about how full parental participation is in the guidance procedures conducted at GRCs; families can reasonably be set forth on being informed about the aim of this process in order to enhance the quality of the entire process. The basis of this conclusion lies in the "Regulation on Special Education Services" (MEB, 2012), which is still valid in Turkey.

One of the themes formulated within the scope of this research is about how guidance procedures operate at GRCs. Participating experts stated having conducted the procedures as mandated by the current laws and regulations. Therefore they first do an educational assessment before referring students to any kind of educational setting. Similarly, the results of other studies in the literature also indicate that guidance procedures should be based on both formal and informal assessment tools related to the curriculum, should target various skills, and should also rely on documents showing students' previous performance (Galloway, Armstrong, & Tomlinson, 2013; Strickland & Turnbull, 1993). Likewise, the participant experts reported having conducted educational assessments using both formal and informal assessment tools during the guidance procedure. Meanwhile, this conclusion regarding educational assessments should be handled carefully for two reasons. First, the participant experts complained that the assessment tools they employ are not age or level appropriate. Thus, one can assume that experts have problems when judging

a student's real educational performance. The relevant literature concludes that only age- and level-appropriate assessment and measurement tools can completely reveal a student's educational performance, and such assessments matter significantly in terms of monitoring whether a student has attended educational programs at school, identifying the reasons for a student's current academic performance, and drawing realistic conclusions (Özak et al., 2008; Qi & Mitchelli, 2012). A second reason for this conclusion on educational assessment being treated carefully is that experts have defined their most significant problem experienced during the guidance procedure to be their inadequacy in conducting educational diagnoses and assessments. According to the experts, they are inadequate because they are expected to assess all disability groups (hearing disability, mental disability, visual disability, etc.) without regard to their undergraduate degree or their lack of university training on assessing different disability groups. Therefore, educational assessments should be carried out by experienced specialists, and cooperation should be established with experts from different fields (hearing specialists, speech and language therapists, psychologists, etc.; (Galloway et al., 2013; Isaacson, 1996; McLoughlin & Lewis, 2005; Wyatt-Smith & Cumming, 2009). Because participating experts have conducted multi-dimensional assessments and the problems they have encountered don't add up, one wonders whether or not the quality of educational assessment procedures are high enough to determine students' needs. Moreover, both parents and experts think that the time allocated for assessment is rather short, which aggravates views that regarding assessment procedures negatively. As for possible solutions to these issues, assessments should last longer, the immediate environment of students should be incorporated into the process, assessments should be based on interviews and observations, and students' developmental records should be systematically kept (Wood, 2002; Wyatt-Smith & Cumming, 2009).

Remarkably, however, the participant experts did not mention cooperating with experts from other fields during the educational assessment process. Although the experts are open to cooperating with colleagues from both the same institution and others, systematic cooperation is unable to be established because of insufficient personnel at the GRCs, a lack of time, and financial problems. Similarly, Özak et al. (2008) reported no interdisciplinary team to be present for GRCs' educational diagnoses and assessments, which urges the revision of the quality of educational assessment procedures at GRCs. Also supporting this conclusion, moreover, the participant parents' and experts' opinions indicate parents to be generally excluded from the educational assessment procedures at GRCs. According to the experts, parents are not involved in the educational assessment process at GRCs because they run the risk of providing missing or erroneous information about their children for emotional reasons. The relevant literature hosts a body of research that has concluded parents to have a tendency to regard their children as normal individuals

by denying their disabilities and that sometimes families do deny their children's incompetence thinking that accepting the condition may negatively affect their children (Kushalnagar et al., 2007). All these results clarify a set of problems to exist regarding teamwork and cooperation, both of which are definitive prerequisites that determine the quality of guidance procedures. To put more bluntly, the findings have revealed that teamwork and cooperation are not overwhelmingly present during the guidance procedures. However, many studies in the literature have indicated inter-disciplinary teamwork to be a must, and that cooperating with parents, who are the primary source of information and have a key role during both the selection of educational setting and the entire educational process, should never be neglected (Gürgür, 2010; Swart et al., 2006; Yılmaz, 2016).

According to the participants' opinions, the second step in the assessment process is to hold guidance board meeting together with members of the SEAB. This step is to identify students' strengths and weaknesses after reviewing the results of the educational assessment process, and decisions are made with respect to the most suitable educational setting for the students. This finding is consistent with that of Bozkurt (2009), indicating that SEAB often organizes meetings at GRCs, and this happens cooperatively. Yet the lack of parental participation, which starts from the beginning of the process, still prevails during SEAB meetings, as indicated by the findings. At this point, one can state that teamwork and cooperation cannot be established as a result of excluding parents from guidance board meetings as from the assessment procedures. Although parental participation is not conclusive on its own, it does increase the rate of making proper decisions alongside expert opinions by revealing students' characteristics, strengths, and weaknesses in detail (Blankenship et al., 2007; Swart et al., 2014).

The participant experts listed the major topics discussed during guidance board meetings as: the results of educational assessment, the student's characteristics, and guidance into inclusive settings. Therefore the experts noted the results of educational assessment (academic performance, social skills) and the student's characteristics (age, disability type, family expectations) to be two criteria that are considered during guidance into inclusive settings. However, the findings show that one cannot yet discuss tangible criteria (e.g. existence and severity of hearing loss, levels of academic and social competence) at this point for guidance into inclusive settings. On the other hand, the scarcity of research studies in the literature that have concluded with universal, common, and standard criteria to employ during guidance procedures should be noted (Eaves & Ho, 1997; Guardino, 2008; Hanson et al., 2001). The results from these rare studies have produced the following criteria: appropriate student profile for inclusive settings, the age when started using hearing aid technologies (when did they receive the cochlear implant), no accompanying

disability, and only a moderate level of hearing loss (Archbold et al., 1998; Çerezci, 2015; Eaves & Ho, 1997). Accordingly, one can plausibly conclude that tangible and solid criteria should be employed while guiding students into inclusive settings, and studies should be designed to determine how much students have benefitted from inclusion, as proposed by Hornby (2014) and Warnock (2005).

According to participant experts' opinions, they described the next step after completing the guidance procedures to be "choosing the school (placement)." The findings show the most effective criterion for the experts to be "proximity," and for the parents to be "class size" and "teacher's characteristics and experience." Unlike the parents' opinions, those of the experts have yielded ignorance of factors such as class size and teacher qualities while focusing on the least restrictive environment for a student. However, some studies have pointed out that inclusion practices can trigger several problems in crowded classes and that teachers cannot handle SSNs in such classes and complain about the workload (Akkoyun, 2007; Lindsay, 2007). Additionally, some studies have reported the class teacher's experience and characteristics, which was ignored by the experts but brought up by the parents as a component of the placement process, as a significant predictor for the success of inclusion practices (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002). To sum up, the experts' and parents' opinions yielded almost no tangible criteria within the guidance procedure to have been taken into account while deciding the setting where SSNs will continue their education. The reason for this is that experts are not informed much about the schools, classrooms, and the teachers who work there; they are, however, aware of these criteria.

Considering the participant experts' opinions about the criteria followed during guidance procedures, one can easily see that they had moved the focus of the problem away from themselves and onto the system. They generally underlined problems such as lack of infra-structure for inclusion practices, stakeholders being uninformed and untrained about the practices, and the lack of schools that can meet these students' needs (class size, proximity). Relevant research studies have concluded that students cannot benefit from the process when: stakeholders have not been informed about inclusion, physical and instructional arrangements have not been carried out at schools, individual education plans have not been developed, and support education services have not been provided (Cook & Friend, 2010; Gibb & Dyches, 2015). Although these conclusions show the experts to be right in terms of the problems they stated, they still underpinned several issues emanating from the stakeholders apart from the GRCs, rather than GRCs' lack of guidance criteria. In other words, participating experts did not mention a lack of guidance criteria as a procedural problem.

Along with all these findings, both families and experts made suggestions for improving the quality of guidance procedures. Compatible with the conclusions

drawn by Özak et al. (2008) and Yılmaz (2016), the experts' suggestions regarding the environments where educational assessments are done include making several physical arrangements at GRCs, such as sound-proof rooms, heating, and lighting. The relevant literature has dictated that educational assessments be completed in places where students are the most comfortable physically, socially, and psychologically (Isaacson, 1996). On the other hand, participating families stated that schools should regularly send information about the students to GRCs to improve the quality of the process. Furthermore, families have also noted their willingness to be trained on both inclusion and how to behave toward their children. Again, one can see that the suggestions the experts and parents made do not directly regard GRCs and the guidance procedure. Rather, they are on the inclusive settings where the students are placed.

Conclusion

This research, by examining experts' and parents' opinions about GRCs' procedures for guiding into inclusive settings, has distilled several details that can shed some light onto the process. At this point, it would be better to remember the argument made in the beginning that inclusion practices are quite common in Turkey but have some problems that may emanate from the guidance process. Therefore, one can say this argument has been verified through the judgments made in the findings. To put more precisely, although Turkey has clear laws and regulations about the guidance procedures conducted at GRCs, the entire process, starting with the educational assessment, denies any kind of cooperation and excludes parents. Guidance decisions are neither based on nor supported by standard criteria, and the assessment process suffers from several problems. All these problems raise eyebrows about the quality of the procedures and indicate that inclusion practices based on such procedures will be bound to fail right off the bat. In other words, one is unable to talk about the procedures for systematic and proper guidance, which are a prerequisite for the success of inclusion practices. In accordance with the conclusions regarding guidance procedures, the questions that form the rationale behind this research should be revisited. These are: How are the procedures for guiding SSNs into educational settings completed, Which students are guided into inclusive settings, and How do the procedures work for guiding into inclusive settings? The answers to these questions are similar to those given by Fuchs et al. (2010), who used the word "blurry" to describe the guidance procedures. Maybe taking things one step further and claiming that GRCs' procedures for guiding into inclusive settings to be just a pile of formalities would not be wrong. This is described in Figure 1 for Turkey, which shows no criteria of any kind.

Several suggestions can be made at this point in order to enhance the quality of GRCs' procedures for guiding SSNs into inclusive settings. The first suggestion

regards restructuring GRCs so that these procedures can be completed as required by the laws and regulations. In this sense, the organizational structure of GRCs should be redesigned in a way that allows full parental participation and interdisciplinary cooperation from the very moment that an SSN applies to the institutions. Within this new structure, all stakeholders should be supported with resources (temporal, spatial, and financial), especially while making decisions about inclusive settings and cooperating with regular education schools. In addition, the professional development of experts should be endorsed and sustained, and the assessment tools employed during educational assessment should be standardized to enhance the quality of the process. When interpreting the results of this study, on the other hand, one should not forget that it has been completed with 14 experts and six parents of children with hearing loss in the province of Eskişehir. Thus, the feasibility exists to make suggestions for future research endeavors. One way to confirm the results obtained by the descriptive efforts and to analyze the real reasons for the problems is to spend more time in the field doing observations and documenting analyses and case studies. In future case studies, not only the parents of SHLs but also those from other disability groups should be the focus of study. Last but not least, action research based on practice and focusing on development should be conducted at GRCs.

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