

## Professional Problems of Visual Arts Teachers Experienced During Classroom Management and Learning – Teaching Process in Special Education Institutions\*

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**Abstract:** The aim of hereby study is to determine the problems that visual arts teachers encounter during class management and learning – teaching processes in special education institutions. In this respect, 18 visual arts teachers employed in Special Education Institutions (Schools for Visually and Orthopedically Handicapped, Hearing Impaired, Autistic, Trainable and Educable Mentally Retarded persons) in Ankara and central districts were interviewed during 2010 – 2011 Academic Year.

A phenomenology design was used in this research in which qualitative research method was used. Data of this research were collected with semi-structured interview technique chosen from data collection methods, and were also supported by techniques of observation and document analysis from other data collection techniques.

A semi-structured interview form developed by the researcher and the specialist was used to interview with the visual arts teachers involved in the research. NVivo 8 qualitative data analysis program was used in analysis of the data obtained from this research.

As a result of the research, the professional problems experienced by visual arts teacher during classroom management and learning-teaching process were divided in two themes: findings of the research demonstrate that visual arts teachers encounter various problems in subjects of (a) classroom management, (b) learning and teaching process. Suggestions towards the solution of these problems are developed.

### 1. Introduction

It is known that each individual has his / her own specific body structure, various learning skills and capabilities, perception rate and emotional characteristics Individuals have their own specific body structure, that children can benefit from general educational services when such differences are not too prominent and remain at a certain level between individuals and also that in cases where there

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are significant differences between individuals, general educational services would be insufficient thus special education would be needed [1].

According to World Health Organization (WHO) data it is estimated that more than a billion of world population lives with various handicaps which corresponds to approximately 15 percent of world population (according to 2010 population estimations) [2]. On the other hand, in Turkey there are approximately 8,5 million handicapped individuals [3]. Given the significant number of handicapped individuals in Turkey, the importance of the special education is self evident for our country. In order to provide an effective special education, not only the students and teachers but also the educational program must be in full harmony. In this regard, given the student oriented approach of artistic education and individual educational opportunities it presents, arts education becomes prominent in special education.

In Turkey, artistic education is provided under visual arts classes in a program where the creative potentials of the students are highlighted. The visual art class is a field of application of aesthetic education where the students can express themselves by using all kinds of tools and materials and where they can cooperate with other students. Acknowledging that each child is naturally creative, the creative potentials of students are highlighted and their development is facilitated in these classes while due consideration is given the difference between individuals [4]. Visual Arts is a different class than others; it is a field with a special training approach, methods and techniques. At the same time, visual arts education connects the verbal with non-verbal thus enabling the student to comprehend and understand the whole [5,6]. The visual arts lessons centers the child. What is important for this class is always relative to child. In this regard, the visual arts education classes given in the schools are considered highly beneficial for the students that need special education; and needed to improve their knowledge and capability (performance) of such children and thus it is necessary to solve the professional problems of teachers so as to continue education without any hindrance.

## **2. Objective of the Study**

The objective of this study is to determine the problems encountered during class management and learning – teaching processes by visual arts teachers assigned by the Ministry of National Education who work in special education institutions and to present solution proposals for these problems. In this scope, the following questions were examined:

- a) What is the opinion of visual arts teacher regarding problems related to classroom management?
- b) What are the opinions and suggestions of the visual arts teachers on the problems that they encounter during learning and teaching process?

In this regard, this study, it is aimed to define the teacher opinions and problems for each obstacle group and develop suggestions.

## **3. Method**

### *3.1. Research Model*

Qualitative study conducted by interviewing the visual arts teachers assigned by the Ministry of National Education who work in governmental special education institutions (Schools for Visually and Orthopedically Handicapped, Hearing Impaired, Autistic, Trainable and Educable Mentally Retarded persons) in Ankara and central districts in 2010-2011 academic year to determine the problems encountered during classroom management and learning – teaching processes. Qualitative research pattern, i.e. phenomenological research pattern was used. Also, a qualitative data collection method, i.e. semi-structured interview technique was employed to collect the research data. This technique was supported by observation and document analysis techniques.

### 3.2. Study Group

The study group includes special education schools run by the Ministry of National Education in Ankara Province and Central Districts during 2010 – 2011 academic year. In this regard, a total of 18 schools (Primary School for Visually Impaired (2), Primary School for Orthopedically Disabled (1), School for Hearing Impaired (2), School for Trainable Mentally Retarded (3), School for Educable Mentally Retarded (6), Education Center for Autistic Children (3) and Early Childhood Kindergarten and Preliminary School (CP) (1), located in Ankara Province and Central Districts, were visited and a total of 18 visual arts teachers were interviewed.

### 3.3. Development of Data Collection Tools

As the data collection tool, a semi-structured interview form developed by the researcher and two field experts (Special Education – Art Education) based on comprehensive literature research was used. The interview form consist two section. The first part of the form is entitled “Personal information form” includes 9 questions like sex, age, educational background, working experience in field of special education of the teachers to determine the demographical characteristics of subjects. The second part of the interview form consists a semi-structured interview form with 17 items, including sub-questions, under two general theme. The interview form contains a total number of 26 questions, including personal information section. The interviews were held by the researcher. Teachers were visited at the schools in a convenient working date and time determined by the teachers. All of the interviews were recorded by means of a voice recorder.

### 3.4. Data Analysis

For analyzing the data, each interviewed teacher was assigned with a numeric code from 1 to 18. Instead of the actual names of teachers, the codes like “Teacher 1/T.1, Teacher 2/T.2” were used. For analyzing the data obtained in this study, NVivo 8 qualitative data analysis software was used.

## 4. Findings and Conclusion

In this part, 2 themes and 17 sub-themes that form the findings of the study that were obtained upon analysis of the content are presented. Since the interviewed teachers worked in different special education schools, the themes were separately described for the schools at each obstacle group.

At the conclusion of the study, the problems that teachers encounter in classroom management and learning – teaching processes were collected under two themes. Findings of the research show that the visual arts teachers encounter various problems on the subjects of (a) classroom management and (b) learning and teaching process. A number of solutions were developed to solve these problems.

### 4.1. Findings and Conclusion Regarding Personal Information Form

Table1. Distribution of Demographic Characteristics of the Teachers Included in this Study 1

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
Interview Duration	17	42	25,17	5.670
Age	24	46	38.61	6.021
Term of Service	1	21	13.78	5. 837
Time of Teaching	1	21	8.25	6.064
Working Experience in Special Education	1	21	8.50	6.176

Table 2. Distribution of Demographic Characteristics of the Teachers Included in this Study 2

Gender	Number of Individuals	Percentage
Female	17	94.4
Male	1	5.6
Total	18	100
School	Number of Individuals	Percentage
Education Faculty	16	88.9
Occupational Education Faculty	2	11.1
Total	18	100
In Service Trainings Received	Number of Individuals	Percentage
Yes	10	55.6
No	8	44.4
Total	18	100
Voluntary Assignment to the Position?	Number of Individuals	Percentage
Yes	9	50.0
No	9	50.0
Total	18	100

When Table 1 is examined, it is seen that the average interview time value is 25.17, while the standard deviation is 5.67. The shortest interview with teachers continued for 17 minutes while the longest took 42 minutes. The average age of the teachers was 38.61, with a standard deviation value of 6.021. The youngest of the teachers interviewed was 24 years old while the oldest was 46 years old of age. The average value of the term of service of the teachers was 13.78 with a standard deviation of 5.837. The newest of the teachers interviewed had been teaching for 1 years while the most experienced had completed 21 years in teaching.

The average value of the service time of the teachers in their respective schools was 8.25 with a standard deviation value of 6.064.

When the distribution in the Table 2 is assessed, it is seen that % 94.4 of the teachers interviewed was female while %5.6 of them were male individuals. %88.9 was graduated from Faculty of Education while remaining %11.1 was graduated from Occupational Education Faculty. A total of %55.6 of the teachers received in-service training after starting their service while %44.4 did not receive any. It is further seen that half of the teachers were voluntarily assigned the schools that they were working in while the rest were assigned involuntarily.

#### 4.2. Conclusions Related to Classroom Management

- All of the teachers use the award method as a reinforce to encourage positive attitudes in the classroom and to ensure continuity.
- Nearly all of the teachers stated that they encounter problems regarding the physical conditions of the classroom / workshop and adequateness of the materials and that the materials, sources, tools and instruments for visual arts class are insufficient. They strongly underlined that the time spared for visual arts classes in the weekly program is definitely insufficient.
- A large majority of the teachers stated that they do not understand and see the medical or

educational guidance reports of the students or that they tried to receive them on their own.

- Half of the teachers that has students with “Sensory Neural Type Hearing Loss” who can only communicate via sign language stated that they experience problems in the education process and they needed help of counselor or form teacher.
- The teachers that have students with visual acuity of 20/200 and autistic behavior as well as oversensitivity to touch stated that they could manage the problems that they encounter through the arrangements they made in the classes while the teachers that have visually handicapped (total blindness) students stated that they had not done any arrangement.
- The teachers that have students whose arms and hands are affected by Cerebral Palsy (CP) stated that they prepared special studies according to the condition of the student while some teachers stated that they do not know what CP was.
- A vast majority of the teachers that teach mentally retarded students whose attentive capacity is limited to 1 minute stated that they encounter many problems with such students and they also listed their suggestions to solve such problems.
- A vast majority of the teachers stated that they encounter problems especially in their communication with the students. Nearly all of the teachers stated that they used ignoring, not paying attention, warning and intervening the students to amend or correct any inappropriate or undesirable behavior. They also stated that they employ such other approaches like attracting the students’ attention to other directions; reward and punishment methods or addressing to general population of class instead of naming any specific student, pointing a desirable behavior as an example or changing the seat of the child and most of all showing compassion.

#### *4.3. Conclusions Related to Learning and Teaching Process*

- Majority of the teachers did not mention whether they prepare an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) to determine long term objectives for students; they provided irrelevant answers to this question or claimed to prepare annual plans. Nearly all of the teachers stated that they do not prepare Individualized Teaching Plan (ITP).
- All of the teachers stated that they prepared annual plans. More than half of the teachers stated that they prepare unit plans as well while the remaining part stated that they do not prepare unit plans.
- Nearly all of the teachers stated that the current curricula of visual arts class is not appropriate for special education institutions.
- Most of the teachers stated that they created a conversation-encouraging environment before starting classes and employed not only verbal method (direct talking) but also physical aid and showing – having the same done approaches as teaching methods. The teachers said that they could not employ drama methods due to students’ conditions.
- Nearly all of the teachers said that they use observation to assess the performance of the student and secondly they had the students practice.
- Half of the teachers stated that they used check lists, observation forms and assessment criteria for assessing the student while the remaining half stated that filling these forms for each student was a time-consuming practice which they do not follow.
- Most of the teachers stated that they evaluated the teaching practices in relation with the attention and effort of the student based on in-class observations.

## **5. Suggestions**

The suggestions were classified based on the themes defined within the scope of the study.

### 5.1. Suggestions for Decision Makers from the Ministry of National Education and Practitioners

- Finding of the study suggest that the visual arts teachers need in-class support. For this reason all concerning authorities were invited to make necessary arrangements to allow an assisting teacher (form teacher or counselor) and to attend classes in special education institutions.
- The physical structure of any given special education institution shall be considered in pursuance with the types of handicaps of the children.
- It was seen that materials, tools and instruments in class were not suitable in line with the needs of special education students. This situation must be handled by the General Directorate of Supporting Services of the Ministry of National Education.
- The teachers must receive in-service trainings on the subject of preparation, implementation, monitoring and assessment of IEP and ITP.

### 5.2. Suggestions for School Administrations

- The school administrations shall ensure that necessary arrangements (like special benches, seats and washbasins, rounded edge tables, sound insulation, etc) are provided in classes and workshops to suit the special conditions of students.
- Several places where children can conduct group works and have rest must be assigned and duly designed within schools.

### 5.3. Suggestions for Teachers

- The teachers must consider the individual capacities and limitations of children especially in special education and must employ such methods and techniques that address multiple senses (visual, audio, drama, etc) to ensure continuity of the knowledge acquired in class.
- Form teachers and counselors of the schools must support and aid teachers regarding special characteristics of the students.

### 5.4. Suggestions for Families

- Families must cooperate with school, teacher and all other relevant agencies and institutions.
- The families must exchange information related to the status of their children with teachers and school administrations and must closely follow the development of their children.
- They also should participate in any informative seminars or meetings organized in school or relevant institution.
- Furthermore, the families should also show proper respect and care for the teachers with whom they trust their children.

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