

The Perception of the Teachers about the Children with Specific Learning Disability as a Special Education Need: Brayaty Primary School Case in Erbil

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Abstract: Students with special learning difficulties are categorized as people in need of special education. The field of special education is very wide, and it also covers specific learning disability. Specific learning disability is mistakenly perceived as a lack of intelligence because it is considered as the main reason behind students' failures to a large extent. These students have the potential to be integrated into society with special education. This study was conducted to reveal how this situation is perceived by the teachers.

Keywords: Special Education, Specific Learning Disability, Teacher Perceptions

1. Introduction

Children in need of special education have been considered as an issue in modern times and steps have been taken in this regard. The specific learning disability, which is a part of this, could not be noticed with its real content for a long time and the students suffering from this condition were perceived as students with intelligence problems. However, recent studies on these students have shown that these children will adapt to society with the appropriate education that can create a positive atmosphere in students' life. Students will be motivated to perform their curricular goals by spending time in extracurricular activities they receive (Yildiz, 2015). Teachers have great responsibilities to understand this problem and solve it with the necessary methods. According to Tosun and Yildiz (2015), 'Educators' job is sacrificing because all the great personalities made are their fruits. Therefore, they have to dedicate themselves to build a golden generation.' In this case, teachers' perceptions on this issue are important.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Special Education

Special education is the education given to students who differ from normal. This differentiation in students can occur both mentally and emotionally. For instance, 'the usual toughest problem when students

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study in a foreign country or in a foreign language education system is learners' getting difficulty to acquire the new language in learning process due to providing wrong learning strategies" (Yildiz, 2019, p. 589; Celik et.al., 2022).

Considering this reality, the education that will enable children to adapt to the society they live in and be specific to them is called special education (Mangal, 2007). Special education needs of children are determined by a specialist. It is not enough for the teacher or the family to decide for this. Children in need of special education are subject to a special education program, unlike normal students, after passing through expert control (Florian, 2008).

The content of the concept of special education is quite broad. On the one hand, gifted people fall into this group, on the other hand, mentally retarded people are also included inside the children who need special education (Kohli et al., 2018). However, when special education is mentioned, even though people with intelligence problems are understood in society, most of the children who need special education do not have intelligence problems. For example, problems such as speech disorders, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, reading difficulties (dyslexia), writing difficulties (dysgraphia), difficulties in mathematical operations (dyscalculia) and speech disorders (aphasia) are not usually problems related to intelligence deficiency (Caylak, 2010). In addition, severe cases such as autism are handled within this concept, as well as hearing, vision and orthopedic problems within the scope of special education.

The classification of children with special education needs according to the situation and why they need it is as follows. The situations that require special education arise due to the following situations:

1. Mental Disabilities
2. Learning Disabilities
3. Emotional and behavioral disorders
4. Language and speech disorders
5. Visual Impairments
6. Autism
7. Hearing Impairments
8. Physical Disorders
9. Health Problems
10. Brain Trauma
11. Multiple Disabilities
12. Gifted Children (Heward & Wood, 2013).

According to statistics collected during the 2009-2010 school year in the United States, some of the situations related to children in need of Special Education are as follows: On average, twelve percent of children aged 6 to 17 years have Special Education needs. In general, boys who need special education are twice as likely as girls (Heward & Wood, 2013).

The evaluation of children in need of special education and the determination of education programs according to their needs is a recent effort. During the Middle Ages, there was no positive step towards

children in this situation, and during these periods, problem children were treated very badly (Winzer, 1993).

Addressing these children in today's world requires consideration of a number of important issues. While it is an important issue to determine in which subject children are inadequate, it is also important not to distinguish them in such a way that they will distance themselves from the society. While scientific approaches are necessary in this regard, emotional, political and ethical issues should also be considered. In addition, the financial dimension of the issue requires special attention (Winzer, 1993).

2.1.1 Advantages of Classifying the Students with Special Education Needs

The learning and behavior patterns of these students are different from the others. With this classification, these differences become more understandable. Afterwards, it is easier to produce the solutions required by this situation. In addition, in normal life, students do not have the chance to access the opportunities they will need. Furthermore, students will receive the education that suits them. Yildiz and Yucedal, (2020) argue that learners have to be responsible for their own learning and should be placed at the core of language learning process. Within this context of education, learner autonomy enables learners to take active role in their own learning process (Mart, 2021). These students are made to adapt to the society more quickly by making some positive discriminations in their education life. The situation of children in need of special education is more on the agenda and all relevant parties seek a solution to the issue. However, it is not possible to transfer financial resources to any problem within the political processes without the agenda. By this means, financial opportunities are also provided in this field. Parallel to this, the way for legal arrangements required in political processes is opened. With all these, the search for solutions is increasing (Brussino, 2020).

2.1.2 Disadvantages of Classifying the Students with Special Education Needs

The terminology used for children with special education needs is often based on negativity and inadequacy. In addition, this terminology deals with the low performance of students. Such negative concepts may cause a negative impact on students, as well as humiliation by their other friends. Along with problems such as labeling on children, it can also pave the way for many psychological problems. In addition, in the continuation of this, the expectations of the teachers from these students may decrease. As a result of this, teachers may believe that they will not be more successful as they develop different treatments for these students. When children in this situation realize that they are being discriminated against because of something they don't have, they can grow negative psychology (Brussino, 2020).

2.2 Principles of Special Education

Making the best use of special education for children in need depends on adopting a number of principles and acting within the framework of these principles. Identifying these principles means setting out the responsibilities of everyone, from policy makers to teachers and families, in meeting the needs of these children. Thus, more effective programs can be prepared for these children and these children can be brought into society to the extent of their skills. We can list some of the principles of special education as follows:

1. These children benefit from education according to their interests, wishes and competencies. They receive special training in whatever field they need and benefit from special services accordingly.
2. In order for this education to be successful, children should be diagnosed at an early age. Afterwards, the necessary training should be started for them. Education given at further ages reduces the success rate.
3. Children receiving special education should not be separated from their social circles. The success rate of children who are isolated from the social environment they live in due to the need for special education decreases, and the socialization effect, which is one of the most important goals of the education given, decreases considerably.
4. Where the institutions providing this training are insufficient, it is necessary to cooperate with other institutions.
5. Since each of these students is insufficient in different fields, it is necessary to develop a special curriculum for them.
6. It is an inevitable necessity to include families in the special education process.
7. Non-governmental organizations focusing on special education should be established and educational institutions should cooperate with these organizations.
8. The ultimate goal expected from this education is to prepare children for the future as members of the society (Winter, 2010).

2.3 Specific Learning Disability

It is when a student experiences problems in understanding and using written and spoken language and falls behind his peers (Murphy et al., 2007). These children, who progress more slowly than their peers in the process of acquiring knowledge, fall behind in listening, speaking, reading, writing, concentrating on a point and performing mathematical operations. As a result, the performance of these children decreases over time, and they experience social adaptation problems (Butterworth, 2005).

Children with specific learning difficulties also have a number of other problems. In these children, perception disorders occur, as well as delays in perception. In addition, these children's motor learning speeds are slower than their peers. Specific learning disabilities may develop spontaneously or may develop due to some brain damage. In this case, sometimes mental problems and emotional disorders also occur (Fletcher et al., 2018).

Specific learning disability may appear as a structural problem depending on conditions as well as a developmental problem. The root cause of this problem is unknown, but it is stated that psychological and neurological factors play a role (Torgesen, 2018). Most of the children in this situation do not have a physical or mental problem, but they can be understood in this way because they fall behind their peers academically. These children often have problems with understanding and using language. In addition, the emotional development of children in this situation is slower than their peers (Geary et al., 2008).

The emergence of specific learning difficulties can be caused by individual and environmental reasons. This problem may occur due to some physical damage to the child or genetic factors. In addition, some emotional problems can trigger this problem (Huume & Mackenzie, 2014). When we look at the environmental causes of the problem, the wrong behaviors of the parents towards the child, economic

problems in the family, inadequacies of the socio-cultural environment, post-traumatic stress disorders (Trickey et al., 2012) can be shown as the causes. Yildiz (2017) notes that “the education is a human right; and now that education is a system, then the implementers in this system of education have a very significant place” (pp.116). In addition, children's problems with school and teachers can also be a source of this problem. In fact, the fact that the education program is not suitable for the learning styles of children can also cause this problem (Felder & Brent, 2005).

An important point to be underlined here is that students with learning difficulties often have normal and above-normal intelligence. However, they develop slower than their peers in terms of acquiring academic skills. Therefore, these students are sometimes perceived as students with intelligence problems. These students do not have a primary mental illness. In addition, there is no obvious brain pathology. Moreover, they do not have an emotional disability. However, these individuals experience social perception and interaction problems. As a result, they cannot respond to the standard education they receive and cannot show success in accordance with their intelligence level (Swanson, 2015).

In the relevant literature, the first person to identify specific learning disabilities was shown as Dr. Morgan. Dr Morgan, who identified this problem in the 19th century, observed a 14-year-old boy. He realized that this boy, whose name is Percy, could not read correctly. He also found many more errors in the boy's writing. This boy wrote his own name as "Precy" instead of "Percy". Dr. Morgan, who developed a hypothesis on this subject, suggested that there may be a problem due to the words not being placed in the memory correctly (Svensson, 2015). Students with specific learning difficulties exhibit the following behaviors, unlike their peers:

1. Inability to demonstrate the knowledge and skills required by their age and to experience inadequacy in this regard
2. Showing abnormal differences in reading and writing, such as writing the letter backwards, changing the places of the letters in the word and writing the numbers backwards.
3. Academically slower progress compared to other students who have gone through the same education process
4. Some speech disorders
5. Having difficulties in writing some letters, numbers and figures
6. Showing some social behavior disorders
7. Nail biting
8. Slow development of some psychomotor skills compared to their peers (Ehri, 2005).

It is necessary to pay attention to some points in order to support the development processes of these students. For example, it is important to discover the interests and competencies of these students and to enable them to focus on these areas. By this means, students see that they can achieve something, and their self-confidence increases. In addition, these students have difficulty in doing some activities unlike their peers. To overcome this problem, it is necessary to concentrate on these activities and make these activities attractive for students. It is very important to feed these students who have low self-confidence with positive feedback. In addition, it is necessary not to compare them with others and to explain more simply in order to facilitate their participation in the lesson (Gersten et al., 2001).

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Model

This research was designed to reveal the attitudes of teachers towards children with learning difficulties. For this, a questionnaire was given to the teachers about this, and the opinions of the teachers were evaluated in the questions asked. It has been tried to determine how valid misperceptions about specific learning difficulties are on teachers. In this respect, this is a qualitative study.

3.2 Sampling

This study was carried out on the teachers at Stirling Schools Brayaty Primary School operating in the province of Erbil in the Iraqi Kurdistan region. A total of 18 teachers took part in this study. Since the primary school period in which specific learning difficulties are clearly seen is important, the perceptions of the teachers of the students at this age were included in the study. 10 of them were females, and 8 of them were males.

3.3 Data Collection

Data collection was made through a questionnaire given to teachers. Evaluation was made according to the answers given by the teachers to the questionnaire.

4. Findings

In order to measure the perceptions of teachers about students in need of special education, the answers we received to the questions we asked them are listed below.

First, we asked the teachers if they had any students who needed special education. Thus, their sensitivity towards students in this situation will also emerge.

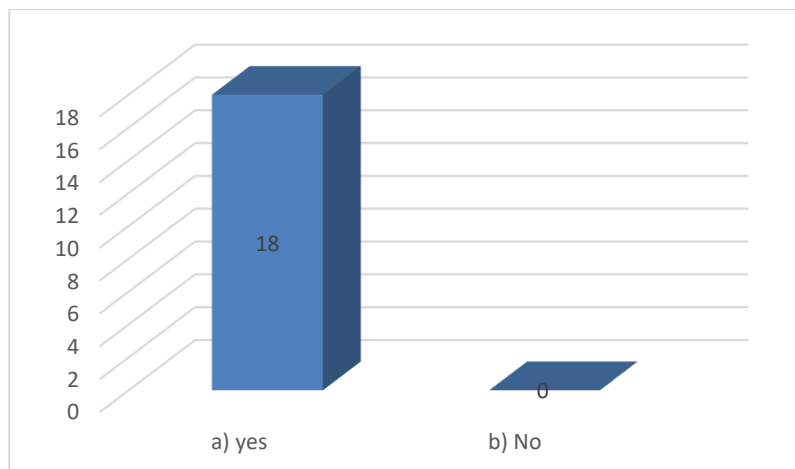


Figure 1: Do you think there are students with special needs in your class?

When we look at the answer given to this question, it is seen that all of the teachers have the opinion that there are students who need special education in their classrooms. Students who do not show improvement despite some efforts or students who constantly exhibit the same negative behaviors may have caused this idea to occur in teachers.

When the teachers were asked how many students need Special Education in the classes they teach, we got the following answers.

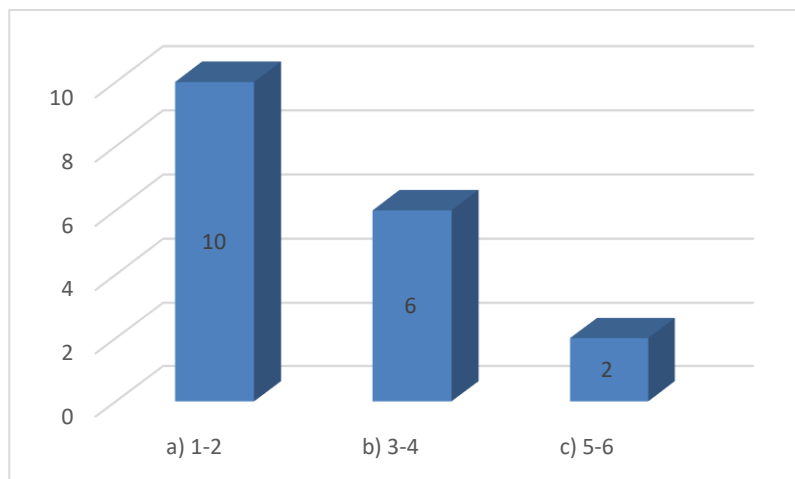


Figure 2: How many students with special needs do you think are in your class?

As can be seen, 10 of the teachers (56%) stated that one or two students in their class were in this situation. 6 of the teachers (33%) said that there are 3 or 4 students in their classroom who need Special Education. 2 teachers (11%) stated that 5 or 6 students in their classes are in need of special education. In this school, which has an average of 20 classrooms, it is well above the scientific data expressed in the literature review that 5 or 6 people in a class need special education. Therefore, we can conclude that the teachers may have counted all students with low academic achievement and other students who have problems in adapting to the classroom in this category.

As stated in the literature review, children with special education generally do not have intelligence problems. To measure how much teachers, know about this situation, in the next question we asked whether these children had an intelligence problem.

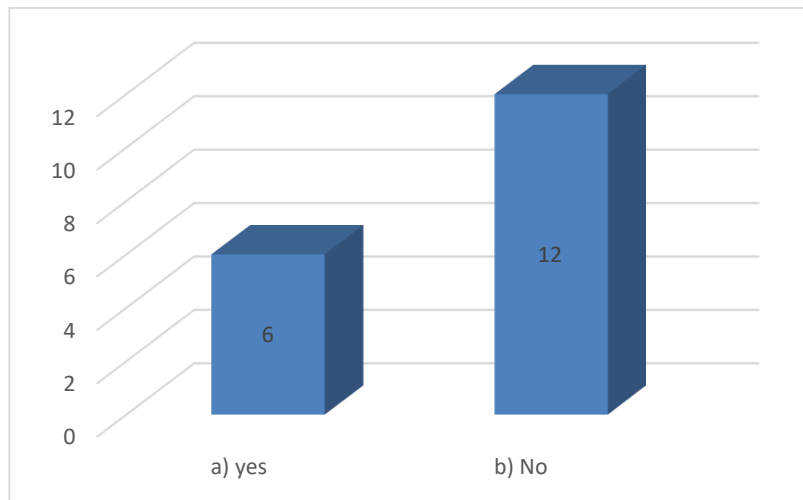


Figure 3: Do you think that these children have problems with their intelligence?

While 6 of these teachers (33%) think that children have intelligence problems, 12 (67%) think differently. In fact, we can state that most of the teachers think right, and some of them may have been informed in wrong way. Since one of the main problems of these children is to adapt to the social environment of the classroom, we asked the teachers for their opinions on this subject.

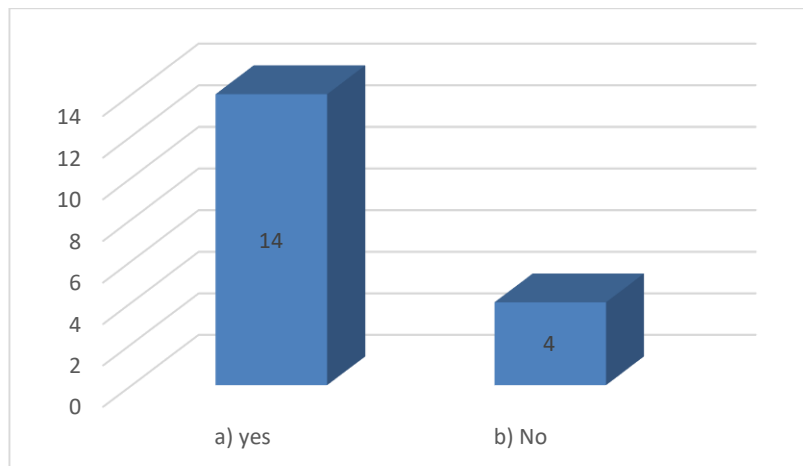


Figure 4: Do they have problems with adaptation to the class?

14 of the teachers (78%) stated that students have adaptation problems to the classroom. 4 teachers (22%) stated that these students do not have such a problem. Therefore, we see here that students with special learning difficulties have adaptation problems to the classroom, as it appears to most of the teachers.

The fact that these students fall behind academically and have adaptation problems to the classroom is a burden on teachers. To find out how valid this was among these teachers, we asked the next question.

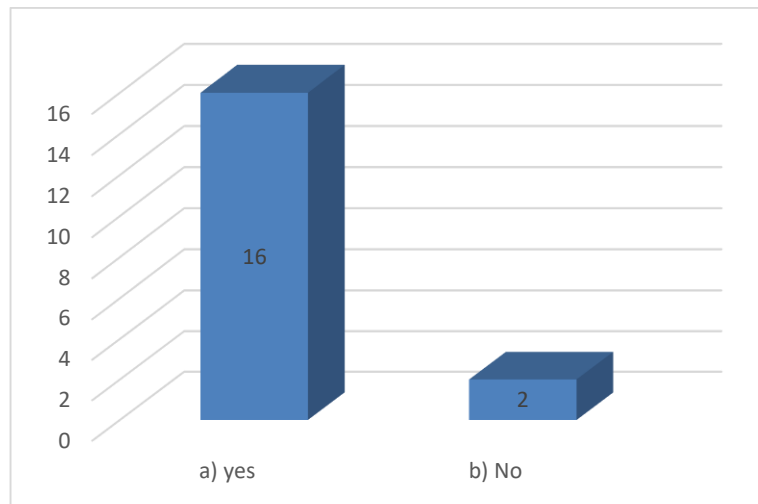


Figure 5: Do they cause extra burden on you?

According to the answers we received, 16 of the teachers (89%) stated that these students were a burden on them in the classroom. Only 2 of the teachers said that the students were not a burden. In this case, it shows that these students are mostly perceived as a problem for teachers as well. In the next question, we asked the teachers if these students would do better with the extra help.

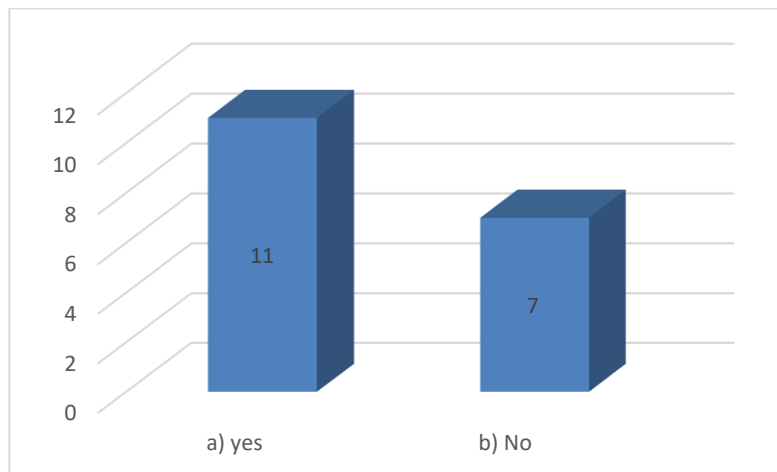


Figure 6: Do you think they can be better with extra help?

When we look at the answers we received, we see that 11 of the teachers (61%) think that these students can do better with extra help. On the other hand, 7 teachers (39%) think that any help will not contribute to the betterment of students.

It was stated above that these students exhibited some behavioral disorders and had some social adaptation problems. We asked the next question to see how this situation was perceived by the teachers we surveyed.

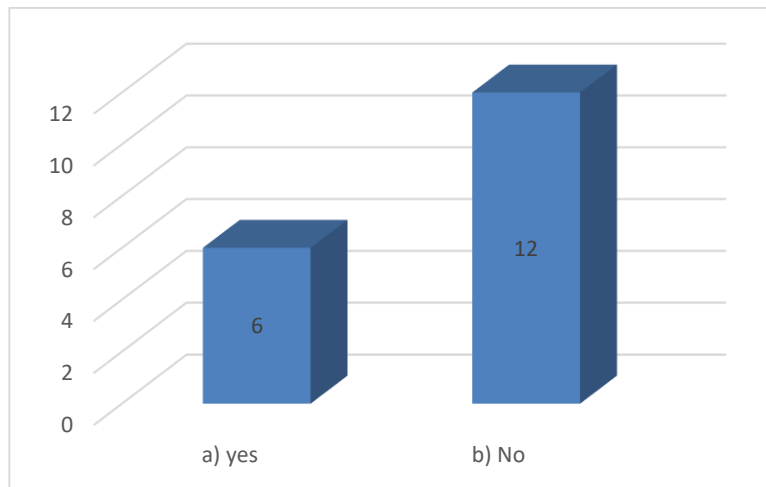


Figure 7: Do you think they are nastier than the others?

When we look at the answers we received, 6 of the teachers (33%) stated that these students are nastier in the classroom than the others. On the other hand, 12 teachers (67%) think differently on this issue. According to them, these students are no nastier than others.

When we asked their teachers if these children spoiled the classroom environment, we got the following answers.

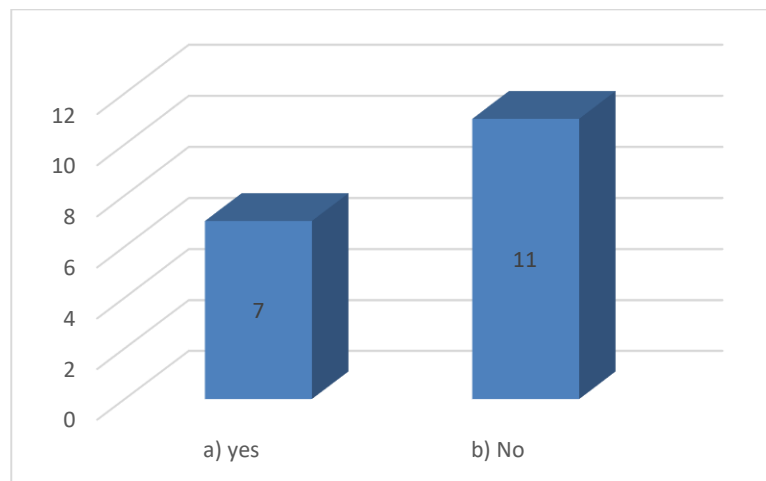


Figure 8: Do you think they spoil the class environment?

While 7 of the teachers (39%) stated that these students spoiled the classroom environment, 11 (61%) stated that they did not spoil the classroom environment.

We asked the next question to measure how hopeful the teachers were about this situation of the children.

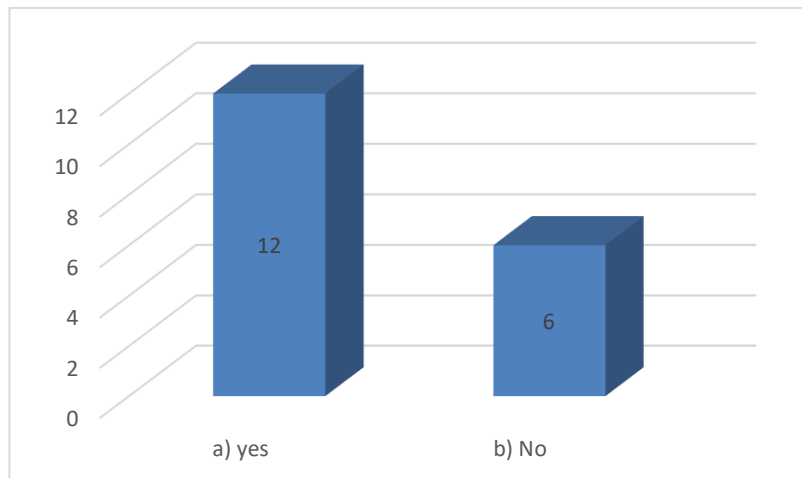


Figure 9: Do you think their problems can be fixed so that they can adapt to the social environment?

12 of the teachers (67%) stated that the problems of these children can be solved and that the children can adapt to the social environment. On the other hand, 6 teachers (33%) are not very hopeful in this regard.

5. Discussion and Evaluation

In this study, in which teachers' perceptions of the situation of children in need of special education in the classroom were investigated, first of all, teachers were asked whether there were children in need of special education in their classrooms. All of the teachers here stated that there are children in this situation. Therefore, we can say that this problem is quite visible. When asked about the proportion of children in need of special education in their classes, they mostly answered as 1 or 2 students. We can say that teachers who show this number as 5 or 6 in classes with an average of 20 people put all children with problems in this category.

The perception of these children among people is that they have intelligence problems. However, when we ask the teachers about this situation, it is seen that most of the teachers do not agree with this judgment. Few of the teachers stated that these students have intelligence problems. One of the most important problems of these students is adapting to the class they are in. When we ask the same question to the teachers, it is seen that the majority of them think in this way.

These children are often a burden on teachers as they are different from the average student and need a different education model. Here, too, we see that it is a burden for teachers. However, the majority of these teachers think that they would do better with the extra help to be provided to the students. Also, where we asked whether these students were nastier than the others, it was seen that the majority of the teachers did not agree with this idea. To the question of whether these students disrupted the classroom environment, most of the teachers answered that they did not disrupt the classroom environment. On the other hand, there are teachers who think differently. Finally, we asked the teachers whether there is a solution to this problem so that they can adapt to the social environment of the students. Most of the teachers have an optimistic point of view on this issue. According to them, these problems can be solved, and these students can adapt to the social environment.

6. Conclusion

Assuming that teachers' perspectives can change a lot for students, the correct perception of the teachers about the students with learning disabilities and the application of the right diagnosis and treatment for them will change a lot for these students. As we see in this study, most of the teachers think positively about the re-adaptation of children to the society, even though they state that they have problems with these children in the classroom. This can be considered as a huge step towards a solution. The fact that teachers first diagnose the problem and then take the right steps has the potential to change a lot for children. In fact, the positive approaches shown by the teachers here will prompt both families and policy makers to act in the right direction.

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Appendix- Questionnaire Applied to the Teachers

1. Do you think there are students with special needs in your class?

- a) yes
- b) No

2. How many students with special needs do you think are in your class?

- a) 1-2
- b) 3-4
- c) 5-6

3. Do you think that these children have problems with their intelligence?

- a) yes
- b) no

4. Do they have problems with adaptation to the class?

- a) yes
- b) no

5. Do they cause extra burden on you?

- a) yes
- b) no

6. Do you think they can be better with extra help?

- a) yes
- b) no

7. Do you think they are nastier than the others?

- a) yes
- b) no

8. Do you think they spoil the class environment?

- a) yes
- b) no
- c) partially

9. Do you think their problems can be fixed so that they can adapt to the social environment?

- a) yes
- b) no