

Hearing Impaired Children in Turkey and Their Education

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Hearing disability is one of the most common disabilities around the world. This disability appears as a multidimensional social problem affecting the individual directly, and the family and the environment both directly and indirectly due to the insufficiency it causes in the individual. It was stated in the report published by the World Health Organization (WHO) in 2011 that there are 360 million of hearing impaired individuals around the world and 32 million of these are children. As it is the case worldwide, individuals with hearing impairment constitute an important part of the society in Turkey. While generally, there are not parsed data related to the population of hearing impaired individuals/children in Turkey, it is possible to say that there are data in parallel with the findings of the WHO. In this study, a general assessment is presented in relation to the digital data and problems of hearing impaired children in Turkey.

Keywords: hearing impairment, hearing loss, hearing impairment children in Turkey

Introduction

Hearing disability is among the types of multidimensional and common disabilities affecting the individual and society. Hearing impaired children are deprived of the abilities to understand what is spoken and express what they think depending on the level of hearing loss to a certain extent. Hearing loss in children may occur at different times and cause hearing loss with different features. In general, hearing disability is defined by the fact that the results of an individual's hearing test are different from normal hearing thresholds at a certain level, it prevents the language acquisition of the individual and the individual cannot perform his/her duties in development, adaptation and communication in spite of the required corrections, and it is classified according to the level of hearing loss, and time and place it has occurred (Aral & Gürsoy, 2009; Belgin, 2011).

We see that there are different definitions of hearing impairment. Because wide ranging experiences related with the disability, it renders grading and definition of disability difficult. As most definitions of disability are based on interpretation of the concept of "normality," different interpretations make universal definition of disability difficult. Hearing impairment is defined as education performance and social adaptation of an individual being affected adversely from difficulty in acquisition of speech, use of language and communication resulting from partial or complete impairment of hearing sensitivity in the special education services regulations of the Ministry of National Education (MNE) in Turkey. Hearing impairment is defined as an impairment that is so severe that the child is impaired in processing linguistic information through hearing, with or without amplification in the Individuals With Disabilities Education (IDEA) Act in USA (Akçamete, 2003; Easterbrooks, 2004). Further to these definitions, hearing impairment may be defined as an inability of

the individual caused by the reduction in hearing sensitivity in the cogeneral meaning. Hearing impairment is a disability type, which affects the family and the environment of the individual both directly and indirectly and which has social aspects.

Hearing Impaired Population in Turkey

As it is the case worldwide, individuals with hearing impairment constitute an important part of the society. World Health Organization (WHO) reported that there are 360 million individuals with hearing impairment, of which 32 million are children, in the world in 2011. Absence of classified and updated data on the population with disability in general emerges as a problem in Turkey, which is confirmed as one of the general problems in the World Disability Report. Although they are limited, official figures related with individuals with hearing impairment in Turkey goes as follows: 12.3% of the population consists of individuals with hearing impairment in 2002 based on Turkey Disability Survey. Breakdown of individuals with hearing disability are as follows: 0.20% in the age group of zero to nine and 0.29% in the age group of 10 to 19. The percentage of individuals with hearing impairment by gender is 0.41% in men and 0.33% in women. While the percentage of 0.45% of individuals has hearing impairment in the rural areas, this figure drops to 0.32% in urban areas. Moreover, there are differences among the regions in demographical terms with Southeast Anatolia region having the highest percentage with 0.70% (Turkish Statistical Institute [TUIK], 2009; Oral et al., 2016).

TUIK study titled “Problems and Expectations of Individuals With Disability in 2010” was limited to the records of the national database of individuals with disability. However, the study presents a breakdown of different disability types by age. Based on the results of this study, 9.6% of the individuals with a health record, registered in the database are in the age group of zero to six, and 17.4% are in the age group of seven to 14. This study also provides data on the education status of the individuals with hearing impairment at the same time. Examination of information on education status reveals that 31.6% of individuals with hearing impairment are illiterate, 23% are literate but have not graduated from a school, while 17.9% have graduated from elementary school, 16.4% have graduated from primary/middle school, and 11.1% have graduated from high school and equivalent schools (TUIK, 2011; Sart, Barıs, Sarısık, & Düsün, 2016).

As a result of the study carried out in the scope of Turkish Population and Housing Survey in 2011, individuals aged three or above with minimum one disability constitute 6.9% of the population in year 2011. This rate is 2.3% in the age group of three to nine, 2.1% in the age group of 10 to 14, and 2.3% in the age group of 15. Again, based on the results of this study, 1.1% of the population has difficulty in hearing. Nineteen point seven percentage of those who are older than the age group of three to six with difficulty in hearing or who cannot hear at all are literate, from whom 32.8% are elementary school graduates, 10.3% are primary/middle school graduates, 5.7% are high school and equivalent graduates, and 2.4% are university graduates (TUIK, 2013).

Based on these figures, we see that hearing impairment is one of the most common types of disabilities in Turkey. These figures may not seem very high compared with that of European Union countries and other developed countries. However, when sociocultural and economic differences among the countries are taken into consideration, we can say that individuals with hearing impairment in Turkey are affected more severely from this disability.

The Education of Children With Hearing Impairment

Education of all children with disability is considered in the scope of special education in Turkey. The objective of special education is to ensure that individuals with disabilities, who have different characteristic and requirements, are raised as productive and happy citizens, to be capable of realizing their roles in the society, establishing sound relationships, working in collaboration, and adapting to their environments; to ensure that they can develop basic life skills aiming at independent and self-sufficient life in the society; and to ensure that they are prepared for higher education, professional and vocational areas, and life through the use of special methods, personnel, and aid tools/equipment with suitable education programs. In legislation and practices, children with disability is defined with the term “individuals with special education needs,” which is a more comprehensive term in the context of Turkish education system. Individuals with hearing impairment have naturally taken their place in this scope. Turkey has banned discrimination against individuals with disability and secured the education rights of children with disability in the scope of numerous international conventions. Education in their integrated environment has been adopted as a principle in ensuring that children with hearing impairment enjoy the right of education, and it has been stated that education in isolated environments can only be resorted with due consideration of the child’s benefit. International legislation holds the party states responsible for ensuring that the education given in both integrated and isolated environments are formulated with an inclusive approach that covers the needs of children with disability. In this context, there are important regulations related with the education right of the individuals with hearing impairment in the national legislation of Turkey, which are open to development under the light of international instruments (MNE, 2006).

The responsibility of education of hearing impaired children, regulation, and supervision is undertaken by the MNE in Turkey. Special education services are provided to individuals with hearing impairment through official or special education institutions. Placement of the individuals with special education need in the education programs starts with the diagnosis process. First, the medical diagnosis of the individual with hearing impairment takes place followed by their educational evaluation. Early diagnosis is essential in both diagnoses. In the educational diagnosis process, individuals, of whom all characteristics in the development fields, efficiencies in the academic discipline field, and the educational needs are determined for educational purposes, are guided to suitable education institutions.

Preschool education is compulsory for children aged 37-72 months with hearing impairment in the preschool period in Turkey, and it is essential that they continue their preschool education in the scope of inclusive education applications at preschool institutions. With due consideration of their competences, children with hearing impairment are prepared for elementary education by acquisition of basic behaviors necessary in daily life. During elementary education, the individuals with hearing impairment can continue their education with their peers with inclusive education applications with priority or at elementary schools for those with hearing impairment. Similarly, education can be provided with their peers in general, or at vocational secondary education institutions with inclusive education applications, or at secondary education institutions for those with hearing impairment. At secondary education, children with hearing impairment are encouraged to be with their hearing peers in normal secondary education institutions. Thus, sharing social and emotional life together with their hearing peers is assured (MNE, 2006).

Individuals, who are qualified to continue their higher education after graduating from special inclusive

programs and schools for the hearing impaired, are placed at higher education institutions without exams based on their fields of interest in Turkey. There is a possibility of studying at the school for the handicapped for the students with hearing impairment, who have graduated from high school. Students study in associate degree programs in architectural drafting, computer operator training and undergraduate programs in ceramic arts, graphic arts and architecture at this school. Placement at these schools is through pre-registration based on the results of a nationwide exam and special talent exams. Furthermore, there are students who are studying in higher education with normal students after placement with the nationwide university exam. Ensuring this continuity in education is very important. However, there are difficulties during transition to higher education for hearing impaired individuals who have completed their compulsory education in our country. Absence of well-equipped and trained people for individuals with hearing impairment and lack of infrastructure in higher education institutions render continuity of education nearly impossible for these individuals. Turkey is not at the desired level in terms of continuity and accessibility in education.

Boarding and daytime education is possible for students with hearing impairment at every level excluding preschool and university. MNE has presented a report on school, student, and teacher numbers in special education institutions for the hearing impaired for the academic year of 2015/2016. Based on this report, there are 44 schools at elementary school level with a total of 863 students (513 boys and 350 girls) in these schools. There are 268 teachers, consisting of 96 men and 172 women. There are 44 schools at middle school level with a total of 1,771 students, consisting of 1,058 boys and 713 girls. A total of 632 teachers, consisting of 355 men and 277 women, are serving at middle school level. Moreover, 2,088 hearing impaired students, consisting of 1,221 boys and 867 girls, received education at 21 special education vocational high school. There are 453 teachers (258 men and 195 women) at this level. When the figures are compared with the population of Turkey, we see that there is a great distance to be covered on this issue (MNE, 2006; TUIK & Ministry of National Education Strategy Development Presidency, 2016).

Teacher training is an important issue in special education also, as it is the case in every level of general education. Special education teachers are trained at undergraduate level in Turkey. Special needs teachers, who are capable of providing education services to the individuals with hearing impairment, are trained at the special education departments of faculties of education. These teachers are specialist teachers who are directly responsible for identification of educational needs of children with hearing impairment, and the development, application, and evaluation of individualized education programs.

Special Education for Children With Hearing Impaired in Turkey

As special education is an inseparable part of general education, special education is an issue that must not be considered separately from general education in training of special education teachers. Although there are no significant differences in terms of planning and application of the education program between general and special education teachers, there are significant differences in terms of the individual receiving the education being “special” and identification of needs unique to them. This requires sufficient knowledge and equipment in the field of disability and special education for the teachers working, especially in inclusive classes. MNE is applying certificate programs in collaboration with universities to fulfill the teacher demand in this field, and directors and teachers responsible for education of special needs individuals are subjected to in-service training annually. Moreover, the ministry is assigning substitute teachers to fill the teacher demand in the field of special education. Moreover, teacher training education programs at university level have been updated to be

applied to first year students at universities as of the 2006-2007 academic year, and the fact that special education course is given as a compulsory course in all teaching programs along with programs for special education teaching is an important development. Despite all these advancements, there are inefficiencies in terms of both quality and quantity of education personnel for the children with hearing impairment and individuals in other disability groups in Turkey.

Hearing impairment affects the relationships between the individual and the environment in nearly all aspects. For this reason, correct information and raising awareness of families, application of effective family training programs, and ensuring active participation of individuals with hearing impairment in education are of great significance at the same extent to the individual benefitting from education and support services for integration of the individual with disability with the society. Families learn the development, strengths, and weaknesses of their children with family training and start to see what they can do as a part of the education of their children. Understanding the present and future resources of children and supporting of the children in collaboration with family-specialists through inclusion of children with hearing impairment in education provide psychological relief for the families. For this reason, training of families with children with hearing impairment and other stakeholders is given great importance in Turkey and training services and psychological support services are provided for the families. Moreover, there are efforts to inform persons without any disability or handicap on the disability culture to change the point of view of the society.

Despite the positive developments observed in education services of individuals with disabilities in Turkey, the low rate of schooling in special education, special education being significantly behind the general education, special education services not reaching the desired level in qualitative and quantitative terms, and continuation of numerous problems unique to this field indicate the need to consider this issue comprehensively.

In addition to early education and support services for full participation of the individual with hearing impairment in the society, family training must be started early as possible also. There are very few institutions and establishments aiming at early education of especially the individuals with hearing impairment. Problems are encountered related with enrolment of children with hearing impairment in kindergartens and preschools, and benefiting of efficient number of children from these institutions providing early childhood and preschool education services cannot be ensured. Insufficiency of number of preschool education classes in special education schools, failure in ensuring systematic transition between education levels in special education, absence of sufficient number of education institutions after elementary education for students attending inclusive education, and guidance towards the present institutions are among other problems.

Parents, undertaking the role of natural educators in the education and development of children, play the role of obtaining information rather than application in education. Today, information is provided to parents as family training in institutions that provide for family training in their programs, and it is not controlled whether the information is transformed into behavior. For this reason, educators working with children with hearing impairment must be incited and supported in terms of parents training and participation of the family in education.

The need of the special education field for qualified personnel is beyond comparison with the personnel demand in any other field. Because special education services constitute a whole of services that require joint interdisciplinary work by many personnel. The people who will conduct this work must be trained as human resources with education in the fields of medicine, education, psychology, social services, sociology, child

development and education, physiotherapy, home economy, audiology and speech disorders, and arts and crafts. First of all, teachers, audiologists, physiotherapists, psychologists, etc. personnel, who are not required to be employed in special education in the legislation must be increased to a sufficient level.

Conclusion

In conclusion, targets aiming at fulfilling education and other needs of children with hearing impairment are found in the documents that guide the policies of responsible public policies in issues related with children with disabilities in Turkey. These targets include improvement of the diagnosis process, ensuring both physical access and access to information, giving priority to inclusive education, improvement of teachers in qualitative and quantitative terms, raising awareness in the society etc.. However, solid steps have not been identified at sufficient level for these targets in numerous fields and the rate of implementation of these plans must be monitored.

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