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Multidimensional assessment of quality in inclusive education: Stakeholder perspectives from Turkey

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to reveal the quality of inclusive education in Turkey from the perspectives of parents, teachers, and educational evaluators. Using the holistic multiple case study design from qualitative research methods, the study conducted semi-structured interviews with 10 teachers, 10 educational evaluators, and 19 parents to gather rich data that reflected diverse experiences and perspectives. The data were analyzed using a thematic analysis approach, which combined both deductive and inductive coding strategies. The reliability and validity of the research were supported by participant confirmation and inter-coder agreement calculated at 79%. The findings were summarized under six main themes that affect the quality of inclusive education: family involvement and cooperation, teacher competencies and attitudes, social inclusive and interaction, the Individualized Education Program (IEP) process and practices, support services and resources, and improving quality in inclusion. Issues such as stakeholders' differing expectations regarding quality, inadequate in-service training, material deficiencies, risk of exclusion, and the need for expert support have come to the fore. It emphasizes the need for structural arrangements, such as systemic improvements, qualified in-service training, and addressing personnel needs, in addition to individual efforts to improve quality. Consequently, an attempt was made to develop recommendations aimed at improving the quality of inclusion education and to present a data-driven perspective that would contribute to its implementation. The goal is to contribute to the development of quality standards for inclusive practices in Turkey and worldwide, and to compare cross-cultural differences. The findings were discussed in relation to the relevant literature, and recommendations were made for implementation and future studies.

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Introduction

The inclusion of students with special needs and individuals with diverse learning requirements has emerged as one of the most significant developments in global education systems over the past thirty years. Since the adoption of UNESCO's (1994) Salamanca Statement, inclusion has been recognized not only as a pedagogical innovation but also as a human rights issue. The principle that "schools should include all children, regardless of their physical, mental, social, emotional, linguistic, or other conditions" (UNESCO, 1994, p. 6) has guided the restructuring of education systems in many countries. This perspective is also supported by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD, 2006), which emphasizes equal access to education as a fundamental right. Accordingly, inclusive education is increasingly recognized as an international policy priority that promotes equality, social justice, and sustainable development (United Nations, 2015).

Inclusive education represents an approach that enables individuals with special needs to learn in the same environments as their peers, emphasizing sensitivity to individual differences and the principle of equal opportunity (Ainscow, 2005; Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). This type of approach aims not only to increase academic achievement but also to strengthen dimensions such as social participation, self-efficacy, and a sense of belonging (Black-Hawkins & Florian, 2012). However, the success of inclusion practices largely depends on the quality of the process.

The concept of inclusive education is relatively new. Therefore, apart from definitions of inclusive education, there are very few studies that theoretically define the quality of inclusiveness. The quality of inclusion can be broadly defined as the quality of program and classroom features necessary for access to the general education curriculum, interaction with peers and adults, and the provision of individualized services that support a sense of belonging (Florian & Linklater, 2010; Odom et al., 2011; Schwartz et al., 2002). At this point, quality should be addressed within a multidimensional framework based on social justice. Drawing on Fraser's (1998, 2008) model of justice, quality should be evaluated not only in terms of the fair

distribution of resources but also in terms of respect for differences and identities and the involvement of stakeholders in decision-making processes. Furthermore, the literature explains the “quality of inclusive education” through multidimensional indicators such as teacher competencies, the effectiveness of individualized education plans, family-teacher collaboration, the physical and social environment of the school, curriculum adaptations, the continuity of support services, and the applicability of inclusive policies (Florian & Camedda, 2020; Karaca et al., 2024; Yılmaz & Yeganeh, 2021). Any deficiency in these indicators weakens the quality of the process and directly affects students' learning experiences.

In an international context, the participation of individuals with special needs in education has become an increasingly prominent agenda item. According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2022), approximately 16% of the global population consists of individuals with special needs, highlighting the importance of inclusive education policies. However, the literature emphasizes that focusing solely on inclusion practices is insufficient, as some students are forced to attend separate special education schools, where quality factors play a crucial role (Love & Horn, 2021; Phillips & Meloy, 2012). Inclusive classrooms foster empathy, tolerance, and collaboration among all students, thereby contributing to social cohesion (Forlin & Chambers, 2011; Lindner & Schwab, 2022; Lindsay, 2007). Moreover, students with special needs in inclusion settings generally exhibit better communication and social interaction skills than their peers in segregated environments (Hehir et al., 2016).

Special education services in Turkey are provided through both inclusive schools and separate special education institutions under the Ministry of National Education (MEB, 2018). However, the existence of qualitative differences and implementation problems in both models highlights different stakeholder perceptions regarding the factors that determine quality (Sakız et al., 2021). At this point, Turkey embraces inclusive education as a legal and ethical goal on the one hand. On the other hand, it faces competitive pressures created by a system that prioritizes academic achievement, such as centralized exams. This situation creates a tension that can be explained by the concept of "paradoxical policies" defined by Engsig and Johnstone (2015) for Denmark, because the goals of inclusiveness often conflict with the academic performance expectations placed on schools and teachers. From this perspective, understanding inclusive education requires consideration not only of teaching processes but also of parent-teacher collaboration, the structural conditions of schools, and the practical implications of education policies (Çıkılı & Ünal, 2022; Yılmaz & Karasu, 2018). While quality is defined in terms of professional competence and classroom practices from the teachers' perspective, teachers' attitudes, the supportive nature of the school environment, and contributions to the child's development are prominent from the parents' perspective; from the educational evaluators' perspective, the feasibility of individualized plans and the functionality of support services are decisive (Bakkaloğlu et al., 2018; Young & Clerke, 2024). This research aims to examine in depth how this dilemma is experienced by stakeholders in Turkey (teachers, parents, and Guidance Research Center experts) and the effects of these contradictions on the quality of inclusion.

Simply placing students with special needs in regular classrooms does not guarantee successful inclusive education; instead, systemic reforms encompassing pedagogy, assessment, and school culture are required (Florian, 2014; Slee, 2019). Research shows that inclusive education is most effective when it is embedded within whole-school approaches that prioritize collaboration among teachers, specialists, families, and community stakeholders (Booth & Ainscow, 2011; Waitoller & Artiles, 2013).

Consequently, although inclusion has become a normative expectation in today's educational discourse, the question of quality remains at the forefront. Structural and process variables must be considered to ensure equity and effectiveness in both inclusive classrooms

and special education settings. In countries like Turkey, which are undergoing continuous reform in special education, examining how different stakeholders perceive and define quality is crucial for both policy and practice. This study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the multidimensional factors that shape the educational experiences of students with special needs, like the ongoing international debates on inclusion and quality.

METHOD

Recognizing that the concept of "quality" in inclusive education is socially constructed, context-specific, and multidimensional, this study adopts an interpretive epistemological stance and a social constructionist ontological understanding, aiming to present phenomena richly within their natural contexts and through the perspectives of participants. Accordingly, the research methodology is designed to address this complex phenomenon with a holistic approach.

Research Design and Purpose

In line with the purpose of the research, it was decided that qualitative research methods, which allow for an in-depth examination of a phenomenon by focusing on the “how” and “why” questions, were the most appropriate approach.

Within this scope, the holistic multiple-case study design was chosen to examine the quality phenomenon in inclusive education comparatively from the perspectives of different stakeholders. According to Yin (2003), this design enables the examination of multiple cases within their own contexts, allowing for a comparative analysis between these cases. In this study, each stakeholder group (teachers, parents, and CRC specialists) was treated as a separate "case." This approach enabled the understanding of each group's perceptions, experiences, and expectations regarding quality within their own context. Then it brought these three different perspectives together to create a rich and multi-layered picture of the phenomenon.

Participants

The participants in the study were selected using the maximum variation sampling technique. This purposive sampling method aims to recruit individuals who will provide the richest and most in-depth data for the study's purpose. The primary reason for choosing this technique is our assumption that there is no single, homogeneous view on quality in inclusive education; somewhat, this concept is shaped by diverse experiences and contexts. In this regard, specific diversity criteria were considered within each stakeholder group to maximize different perspectives and richness of experience. The demographic information of the participants is presented in Table 1.

Table-1 Demographic Information About Participants

Participant		Variables	n
	Gender	Female	7
		Male	3
	Professional Seniority	1-9 Years	2
		10-19 Years	3
		20 Years and more	5
	Graduation Field	Primary School Teaching	5

		Preschool Teaching	5
	Gender	Female	3
		Male	7
	Professional Seniority	1-9 Years	3
		10-19 Years	4
		20 Years and more	3
	Graduation Field	Special Education	5
		Psychological counselor	5
Demographic Information of Parents (n=19)	Gender	Female	18
		Male	1
	Work Status	Working	2
		Not Working	16
		Retired	1
	Graduation Status	Primary School	2
		Secondary education	9
		University graduate	6
		Postgraduate	2

Preparation of Data Collection Tools

In line with the purpose of this study, semi-structured interview forms were developed separately for three stakeholder groups: teachers, parents, and educational evaluators (the Guidance and Research Center [RAM] specialists). To ensure the reliability and validity of the study, the development of the forms was carried out through a systematic and multi-stage process.

The interview forms consist of two sections. The first section contains questions designed to gather participants' demographic information. In contrast, the questions in the second section were prepared to thoroughly examine the key indicators highlighted in the literature regarding quality in inclusive education. In this regard, the theoretical framework for the questions was established by reviewing relevant national and international literature (e.g., Ainscow, 2005; Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011; Kargın, 2004). The questions were structured to examine fundamental quality indicators, including family participation and cooperation, teacher competencies and attitudes, the IEP process and practices, social inclusive and interaction, and support services and resources, which are also addressed in the findings section of the study.

The draft question pool was first discussed by the researchers and reviewed for content. Questions not directly related to the research scope or those that were repetitive were eliminated. As a result of this elimination, the final question lists were determined, consisting of eight questions for teachers, thirteen for parents, and eight for educational evaluators. To enhance the scientific quality of the forms, the drafts were submitted for evaluation to three field experts with doctoral degrees in special education. The experts were asked to review the questions in terms of content validity, alignment with research objectives, comprehensibility for each stakeholder group, and impartiality. Based on the feedback from the experts, the wording of some questions was made more transparent, and the forms were revised.

Finally, pilot interviews were conducted with one participant from each stakeholder group to test the functionality of the forms in the field. This pilot application evaluated practical elements, including how participants understood the questions, the flow of the interview, and the estimated duration of the interview. Based on the feedback obtained from the pilot interviews, final adjustments were made to the interview forms, such as simplifying some technical expressions in the parent form.

This multi-stage preparation process laid a solid foundation for collecting data in a manner that was rich, reliable, and appropriate for the research objectives. Data was collected via the interview forms between April and July 2025.

Data Analysis

In analyzing the data obtained from the interviews, a thematic analysis method was employed, which systematically analyzes qualitative data to derive codes, themes, and ultimately, a conceptual model. The analysis process was conducted using a multi-stage and systematic approach that combined both deductive and inductive strategies. This hybrid approach ensured alignment with the research questions and existing literature while also allowing for the emergence of original and in-depth insights from the data.

The analysis process was structured similarly to the multi-phase approach proposed by Bingham (2023) and, as emphasized by Naeem et al. (2023), focused on developing findings in a transparent and traceable manner:

During the research process, the first stage of data analysis involved the researchers becoming thoroughly familiar with the data by reading all transcripts multiple times. At this stage, following the fundamental research questions and the literature used in preparing the interview forms (e.g., family participation, teacher competencies), general topic codes for the data were created using a deductive (a priori) approach, as defined by Bingham (2023). These codes provided an initial framework for dividing the data into broad categories relevant to the research questions.

In the second stage of data analysis, the data within each topic code were analyzed using an inductive approach. In this process, open coding was applied to meaningful statements derived directly from the data, and new codes were created to name patterns and concepts in the data. As Naeem et al. (2023) stated, this coding process focused on capturing keywords and rich statements in the participants' statements. Using the constant comparative method, similar codes were grouped to form sub-themes, and the relationships between these sub-themes were examined to form main themes. This systematic process not only summarized the data but also revealed the underlying complex layers of meaning and relationships within the data.

In the final stage of data analysis, the emerging themes were analyzed to reveal the patterns and differences within each stakeholder group (situation). Subsequently, as required by the holistic multi-case design, a systematic cross-case analysis was conducted between these three groups. This comparative analysis enabled us to gain a deeper understanding of the commonalities, differences, and contradictions in the stakeholders' perceptions of quality. This systematic progression aimed to arrive at a conceptual framework that explains and relates the findings beyond the themes, as emphasized by Naeem et al. (2023).

Throughout the multi-stage and hybrid analysis process, analytical memos were kept, in which the researchers recorded their analytical decisions, code definitions, and theme development processes. This practice played a critical role in increasing the transparency of the analytical process and the reliability of the study, as noted by Bingham (2023).

Reliability and Validity

To ensure the methodological rigor of the study and the reliability of its findings, the reliability and validity (trustworthiness) criteria proposed by Guba (1981) for qualitative research were utilized. In this context, the following strategies were applied:

To ensure that the study's findings corresponded with the participants' experiences, the theme summaries created through the analysis were presented to some participants for confirmation. In addition, credibility was enhanced by researchers meeting regularly during the analysis process to discuss and interpret the findings.

An audit trail was created to ensure the research process was transparent and traceable. During the coding process, two of the researchers independently coded two randomly selected texts. Inter-coder agreement was examined to ensure the reliability of the data analysis. Using the formula of Miles and Huberman (1994), the inter-coder similarity rate was found to be 79%. Cohen's Kappa coefficient, which also considers the possibility of random agreement, was calculated as 0.68, which indicates “good agreement” according to the classification of Landis and Koch (1977). This result supports the reliability of the coding process and the methodological consistency of the study. Any inconsistencies that arose were discussed and resolved among the researchers. In addition, all coding and theme generation processes were reviewed by a specially trained expert outside the research team to ensure expert oversight (peer debriefing).

No qualitative data analysis software (e.g., NVivo, MAXQDA) was used in this study. The primary reason for this is that the study is based on data obtained from a relatively small sample, which is directly readable and manageable by the researchers. The dataset was manually coded systematically by the research team and then separated into themes. During this process, the researchers kept their own analytical notes (memoing), clearly recorded their coding decisions, and reached consensus through comparative discussions. Thus, beyond the technical convenience that a computer-assisted program would provide, the researchers were able to gain direct control over the data and capture contextual nuances. Furthermore, the hybrid approach (deductive + inductive) used in the coding process and the inter-coder agreement analysis (Miles & Huberman percentage and Cohen's Kappa) supported the reliability of the method. Consequently, it was possible to analyze the data comprehensively and reliably without the need for software.

Ethical Issues

The research was deemed ethically acceptable by the Inonu University Social and Human Sciences Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee in its 14th session dated 06/16/2025, with its 11th decision.

FINDINGS

In the study, data obtained from the views of teachers, parents, and CRC specialists, who serve as educational evaluators, regarding the quality of inclusive education in Turkey, were analyzed using thematic analysis. The data were analyzed holistically from a multi-stakeholder perspective. The participants' statements provided important clues in identifying the key components that affect the quality of inclusive education. The findings were structured in line with the quality indicators found in the literature and classified under six themes.

Family Involvement and Cooperation

The data obtained within the scope of the research revealed that teachers, parents, and specialists from the RAM view family involvement and cooperation as one of the key indicators determining the quality of inclusive education. Participants evaluated this theme under three subheadings: family information, active participation in the process, and school-family cooperation (Figure 1). While all stakeholders agreed on the importance of these elements, it was observed that the meanings attributed to the concepts of "active participation" and "cooperation," as well as the expectations from these processes, could differ, sometimes leading to ambiguities. For example, for teachers, active participation means increased family involvement in school planned activities, while for parents, this concept can mean having a greater say in decision making processes.

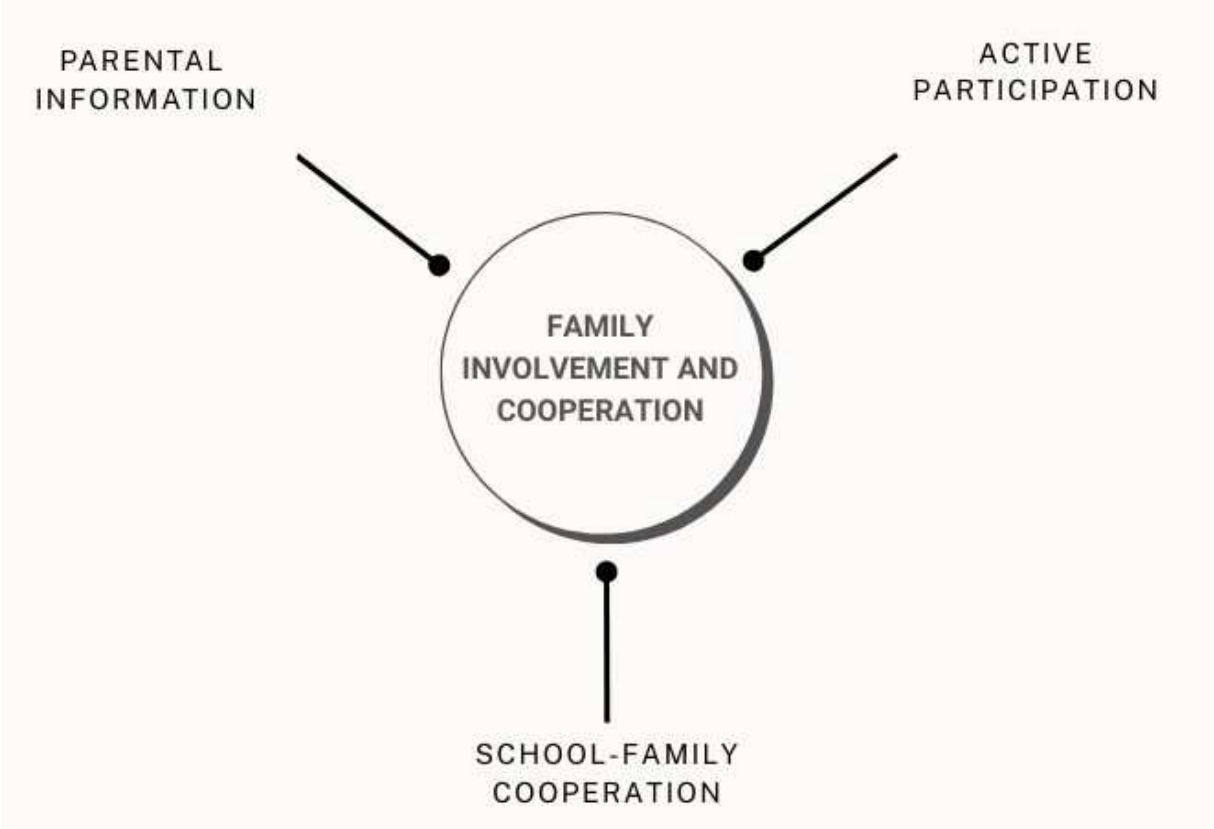


Figure 1. Family Participation Collaboration

In the sub-theme of family information sharing, teachers emphasized that students are also supported at home through regular information sharing. One teacher (T3) described this situation with the statement, "By regularly informing the family, I ensure that the student is also supported at home." CRC specialists also emphasized the importance of the information process, noting that it is a key element that enhances transparency, particularly in the diagnosis process. Indeed, one CRC specialist (SED2) emphasized this point by saying, "Informing the family during the diagnosis process is very important for us; it makes the process more transparent." Parents also stated that the regular information provided by teachers increased their participation in the process. One parent (P5) expressed this situation by saying, "Our teacher gives us information at every meeting, so we are more involved in the process."

In the sub-theme of active participation in the process, it was highlighted that families should not only be informed but also active partners in the process. One of the teachers (T1) concretized this contribution by saying, “If I involve the family in the lesson planning process, the student's success increases.” One of the CRC specialists (SED4) explained the importance of involving families in decision-making processes, stating, “We give families a say in the decision-making stages, which encourages them to participate more actively in the process.” Parents also supported this approach, emphasizing that being asked for their opinions increased their commitment to the process. One parent (P2) expressed this situation with the statement, “When we are asked for our opinions, we feel valued and support our child more.”

In the sub-theme of school-family cooperation, harmony and cooperation between school management, teachers, and families emerged as a factor directly affecting the quality of inclusion education. One teacher (T6) drew attention to the positive impact of this cooperation, stating, “When there is cooperation between the school and the family, there are noticeable

improvements in the student.” Similarly, the CRC specialist (SED1) emphasized the contribution of joint action to the diagnosis and guidance processes, stating, “Educational guidance is much healthier when the school administration and the family act together.” Parents also noted that the cooperation established with the school administration and teachers had a facilitating effect on the process. One parent (P3) expressed this view by saying, “Our principal and teachers work in collaboration with us, which makes the process easier.”

Teacher Competencies and Attitudes

In the study, teacher competencies and attitudes were identified as another key factor influencing the quality of inclusive education. Participants evaluated this theme under three subheadings: in-service training needs, professional development, and teacher attitudes (Figure 2). When considering the views of stakeholders on this issue, it is evident that parents primarily focus on the teacher's "loving and understanding approach," while CRC specialists highlight that "prejudiced attitudes" complicate the process. This situation highlights a discrepancy in quality expectations, with parents prioritizing the emotional and relational aspects, while specialists focus on a more professional and systemic issue.

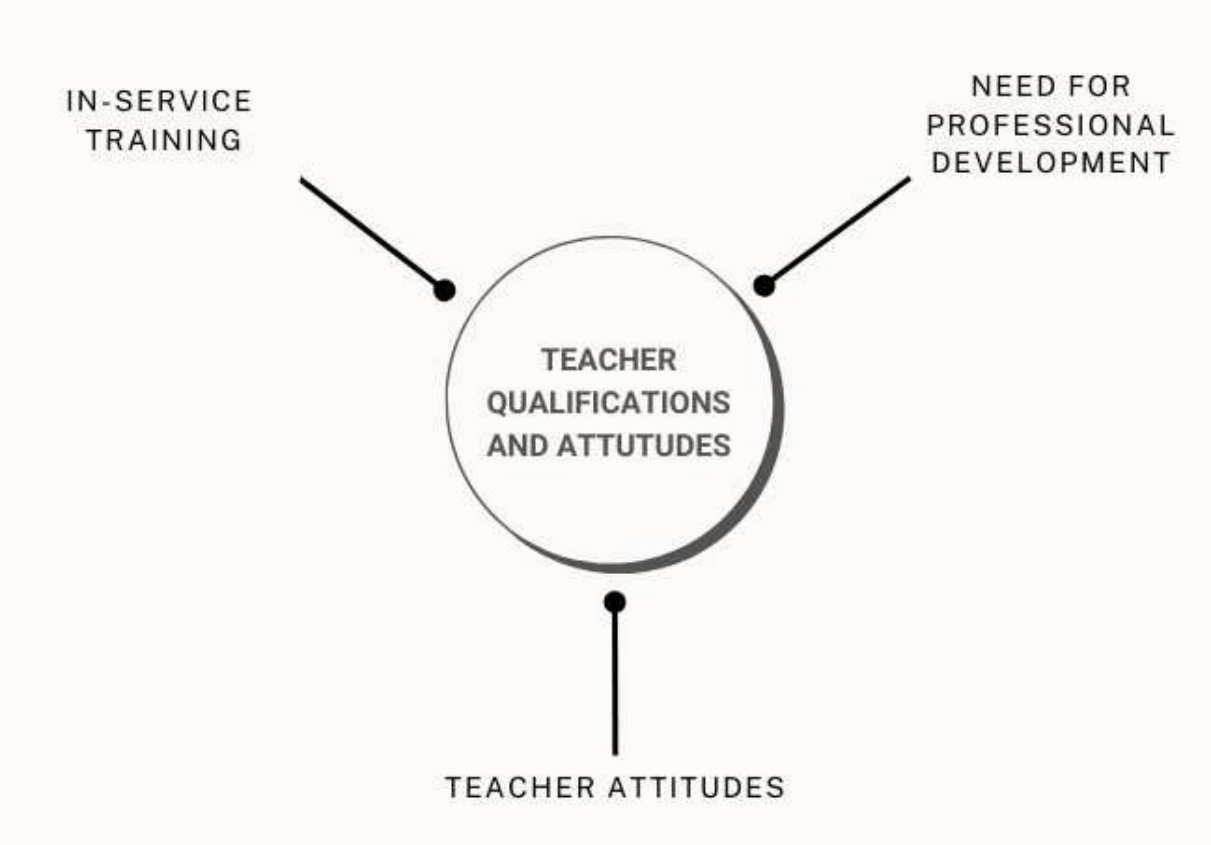


Figure 2. Teacher Competencies and Attitudes

Within the sub-theme of in-service training needs, teachers stated that current in-service training is insufficient and that they do not consider themselves adequately prepared for their roles. One teacher (T4) expressed this situation by saying, "I only received in-service training on this subject. I do not consider myself very well prepared." CRC specialists also similarly stated that staff are not supported by adequate in-service training. Indeed, one expert (SED2) drew attention to this deficiency by stating, "RAM personnel need to be made more competent through in-service training." Parents also emphasized the direct impact of teachers' training on children's development. One parent (P1) expressed this need by saying, "If teachers receive more training, our children's development will also be better."

In the sub-theme of professional development, participants emphasized that it is essential for teachers and specialists to improve themselves continually. A teacher (T6) clearly stated this situation by saying, "Continuous development is necessary in special education, otherwise we fall short." One of the CRC specialists (SED4) mentioned the need for increased knowledge about current tests and methods, stating, "It is essential for experts to improve their knowledge of current methods and tests." Parents also pointed out that teachers' professional development has a direct impact on students' success. For example, one parent (P3) said, "Our teacher's self-improvement directly reflects on my child."

In the sub-theme of teacher attitudes, teachers' approaches to students were seen as critical to the success of inclusion practices. One teacher (T2) emphasized the importance of a positive attitude, stating, "Approaching children with love increases success." However, CRC specialists stated that teachers can be prejudiced in some situations, which negatively affects the process. One expert (SED1) highlighted this problem by stating, "Teachers' prejudices towards inclusion students complicate the process." Parents stated that the teacher's loving and understanding approach is the most significant source of confidence. One parent (P7) expressed this view, stating, "The class teacher is definitely the only factor that gives my child confidence, and that is because the teacher is understanding and loving."

Social İnclusive and Interaction

Another theme that participants emphasized was the importance of social inclusive and interaction. This theme was seen as a key quality indicator in terms of the contribution of inclusive education to students' social development. Sub-themes were classified as peer relationships, social acceptance, and exclusion (Figure 3).

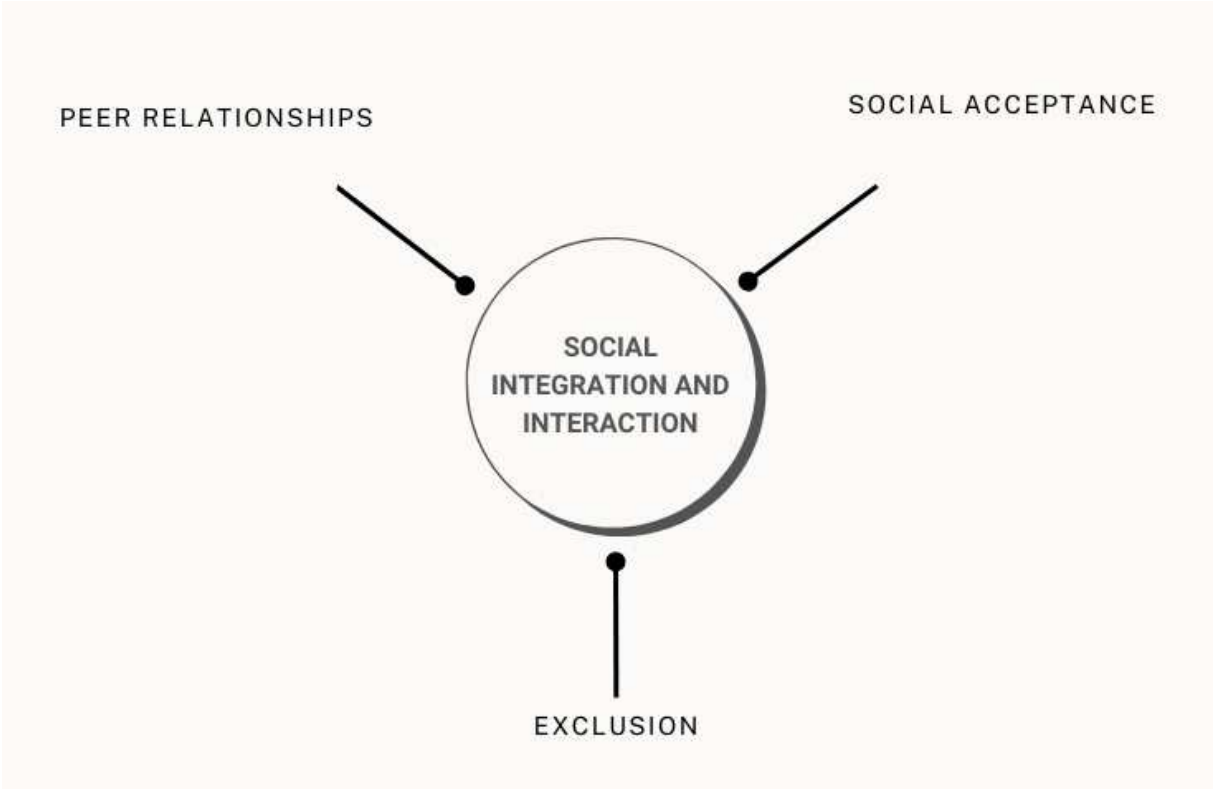


Figure 3. Social İntegration and Interaction

Within the sub-theme of peer relationships, teachers emphasized the importance of peer education and group activities in supporting students' social development. One teacher (T3) expressed this approach by saying, "I place great importance on peer education and large and small group games." CRC specialists also noted that peer relationships are observed and taken into account in guidance. One expert (SED5) explained this process by saying, “We make guidance by observing peer relationships.” Parents, on the other hand, emphasized the positive effects of peer relationships on students' self-confidence. For example, one parent (P4) highlighted this contribution by saying, “His self-confidence increased when he started getting along well with his friends.”

In the sub-theme of social acceptance, teachers stated that they attempted to ensure that all students accepted one another through classroom activities. A teacher (T7) exemplified this by saying, "We do activities in the classroom so that all students accept each other." CRC specialists emphasized that directing the student to the least restrictive environment is critical in ensuring social acceptance. One expert (SED2) stated, "We direct the student to the least restrictive environment, which is important for social acceptance." Parents also mentioned that their children were accepted with the support of some of their friends. One parent (P6) expressed this by saying, "Some of his friends accept him very well and support him."

In the sub-theme of exclusion, teachers and parents in particular drew attention to the risk of students being excluded by their peers. One teacher (T5) addressed this issue, stating, “Some students do not want to include the integrated student in their games.” One of the CRC specialists (SED3) also noted that social prejudices are reflected in the classroom environment, stating, "Prejudices in society are reflected in classrooms, which leads to exclusion." Parents also expressed that their children experience problems in social interaction. One parent (P2) explained this situation by saying, "He has many problems with social interaction; his peers do not really include him."

IEP Process and Implementation

One of the key findings of the study was the Individualized Education Program (IEP) process and its implementation. Participants evaluated this theme under three subheadings: IEP preparation, individualization, and insufficient class time (figure 4). Under this theme, it was observed that teachers and CRC specialists approached the IEP process more from a technical and procedural framework, such as "objective forms" and "checklists." At the same time, parents emphasized that the process needed to be "more carefully implemented," focusing on the qualitative and emotional dimensions of the application. This divergence suggests a difference in expectations among stakeholders regarding the definition of IEP quality.

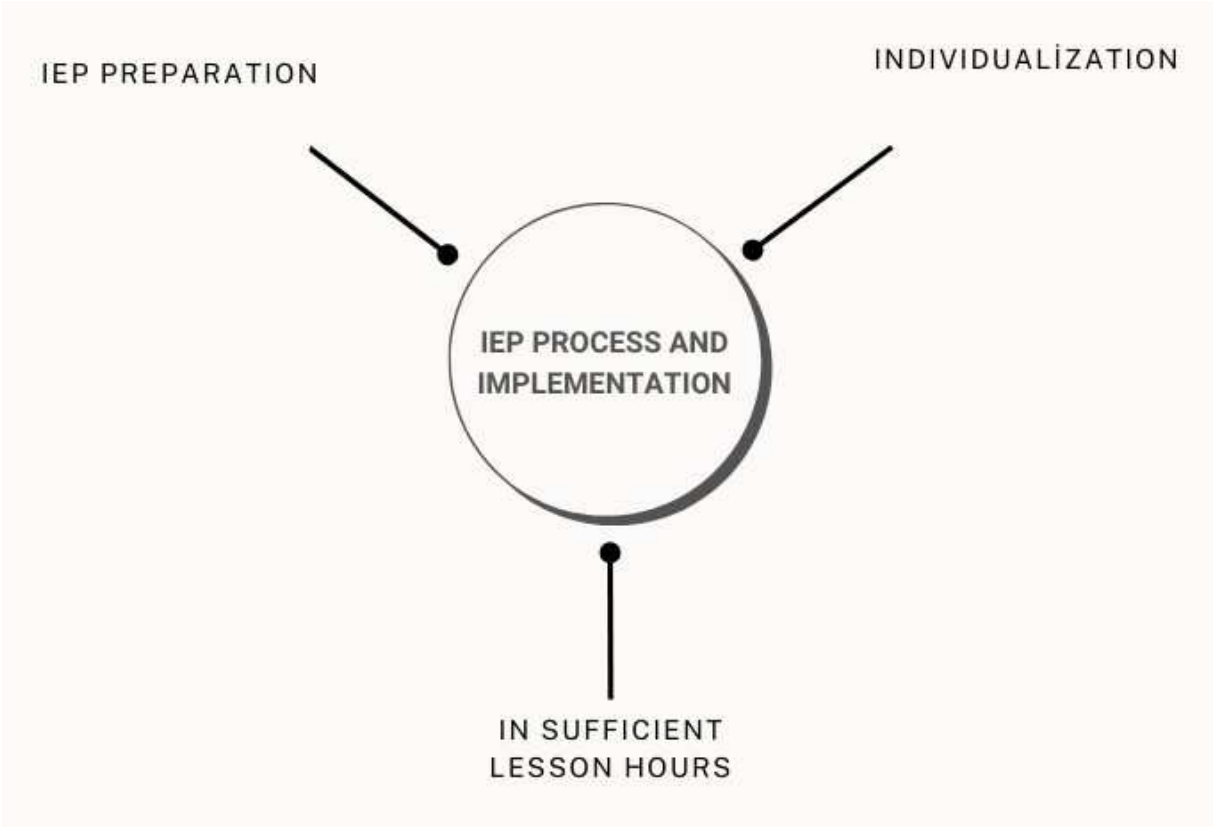


Figure 4. IEP Process and Implementation

In the sub-theme of IEP preparation, teachers stated that they prepared special forms and lists to track students' progress. One teacher (T5) explained this situation by saying, “I record their progress by creating checklists and detailed evaluation forms specific to my students.” CRC specialists emphasized the importance of using objective and detailed forms in the IEP process. One expert (SED1) expressed this view by stating, “Objective and detailed forms should be used when preparing the IEP.” Parents also stated that the preparation of the IEP was positive but needed to be carried out with care. One parent (P3) conveyed their expectation on this subject by saying, “An IEP is being prepared for my child, but it should be done more carefully.”

Under the sub-theme of individualization, the importance of developing content and methods appropriate to students' individual differences was emphasized. One of the teachers (T2) explained their practices by stating, “I prepare activities appropriate to the individual differences of each student.” CRC specialists also emphasized the need to determine individual needs based on performance. One expert (SED4) said, “Individual needs are determined according to the child's performance.” Parents also stated that methods tailored to the child have a positive effect on learning. One parent (P1) expressed this contribution by saying, “My child learns more when methods tailored to him/her are applied.”

In the sub-theme of insufficient class time, teachers pointed out that the time allocated to inclusion students is limited. One teacher (T7) highlighted this problem by saying, "The time allocated for inclusion students is minimal." CRC specialists also similarly indicated that weekly class hours are insufficient. One expert (SED2) expressed this deficiency by saying, "The weekly class hours do not meet the students' needs." Parents also stated that the short duration negatively affected the students' development. One parent (P2) explained this situation by saying, "The hours and training periods are short; they should be longer."

Support Services and Resources

Another theme that participants strongly emphasized was the need for support services and resources. The existence and quality of support mechanisms are considered critical to the success of inclusion education. This theme was addressed under three subheadings: support room, material deficiencies, and expert support (Figure 5).

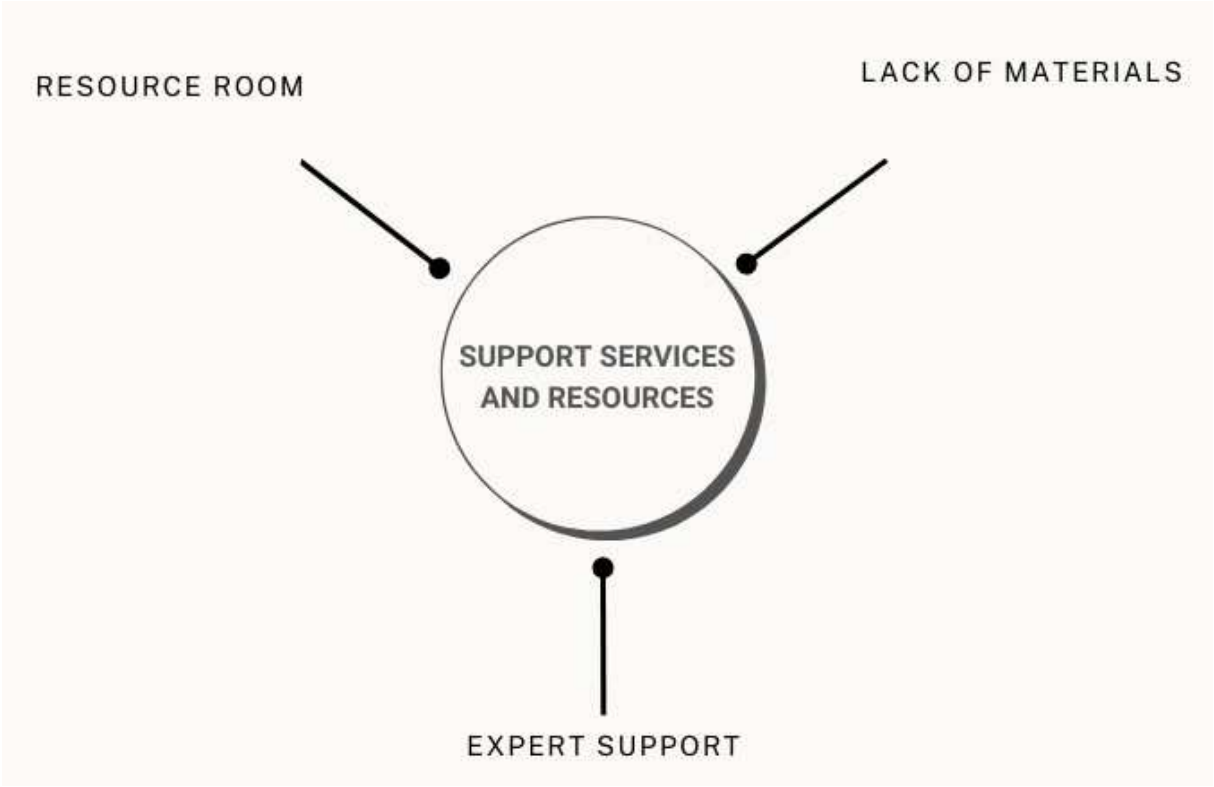


Figure 5. Support Services and Resources

In the support room sub-theme, teachers emphasized the effectiveness of one-on-one work. One teacher (T3) stated, “I get more effective results when I teach one-on-one in the support room,” highlighting this contribution. CRC specialists also stated that the effective use of support rooms accelerates student development. One expert (SED5) expressed this by saying, "The effective use of support rooms accelerates student development." Parents also stated that support rooms made significant contributions to their children's development. One parent (P4) said, "We saw much benefit from the support room; they made progress in reading and writing."

Under the sub-theme of material shortages, teachers reported having to try different methods due to a lack of available materials. One teacher (T6) conveyed this situation by saying, "We have to try different methods due to a lack of materials." CRC specialists also stated that material shortages were particularly evident in certain special needs groups. One expert (SED7) highlighted this issue by stating, "We have no materials for students with total vision impairment." Parents also stated that material shortages disrupted the education process. One parent (P1) said, "Materials are insufficient at school, so we provide support with our own resources."

Under the sub-theme of expert support, teachers emphasized that support such as speech and language therapy would be very beneficial for students. One teacher (T2) said, "Speech and language therapist support would be very beneficial for students." CRC specialists also indicated that occupational therapy and sensory inclusive support constitute a significant need.

One expert (SED4) highlighted this deficiency by stating, "Occupational therapy and sensory inclusive support are a great need." Parents also stated that their children would develop much faster if such therapies were provided. One parent (P3) expressed the situation by saying, "If my child had received speech therapy, he would have developed much faster."

Improving Inclusion Quality

Participants also highlighted the reforms needed to improve the quality of inclusive training. This theme was examined in three subheadings: systemic improvements, in-service training, and staffing needs (Figure 6).

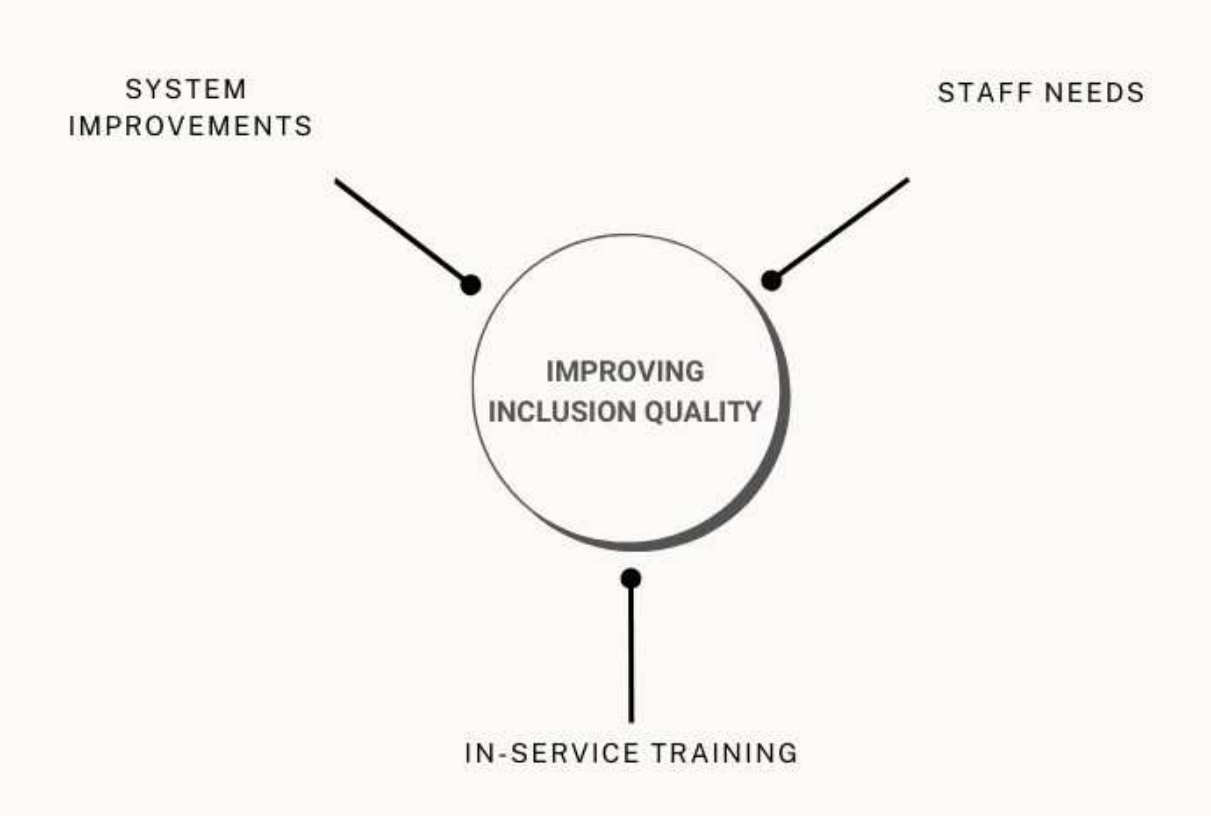


Figure 6. Improving Inclusion Quality

Under the sub-theme of systemic improvements, teachers emphasized the need for more structural arrangements to ensure inclusion is successful. One teacher (T8) pointed out this necessity by stating, "Teachers should receive additional training to be successful in inclusion." CRC specialists also stated that systemic deficiencies created difficulties in the process, particularly the need for technological inclusive and infrastructure development. One CRC specialist (SED3) expressed this need by saying, "Systemic steps such as MEBBIS inclusive should be taken." Parents, on the other hand, emphasized the need to organize processes in schools. One parent (P5) highlighted this need, stating, "The processes at school need to be organized; there is a lack of system."

In the in-service training sub-theme, teachers stated that they need to receive more in-service training to improve their professional competence. A teacher (T4) expressed this need by saying, “If more in-service training is provided, teachers will be better equipped.” CRC specialists also emphasized that in-service training is critical for staff to become competent. One expert (SED2) addressed this deficiency by stating, “RAM personnel need to be made more competent through in-service training.” Parents also emphasized the importance of teachers undergoing continuous training. One parent (P7) supported this view by stating, “I think teachers should undergo continuous training.”

Under the sub-theme of staffing needs, teachers emphasized the need to increase the number of special education teachers to improve the quality of inclusion education. One teacher (T1) expressed this need by saying, “The number of special education teachers in schools should be increased.” CRC specialists also stated that the lack of specialized staff prevents students from being properly guided. One expert (SED5) highlighted this problem, stating, “Due to the lack of specialized personnel, students cannot be guided as they should be.” Parents similarly emphasized that the lack of teachers has negative consequences for students' education. One parent (P6) drew attention to this problem, stating, “There are not enough teachers at school, so my child is falling behind.”

Discussion, Results, and Implications

The study evaluated the quality of inclusion education in Turkey based on the opinions of parents, teachers, and educational evaluators.

The research findings show that involving families in the process by informing them and ensuring their active participation is a fundamental element that enhances the quality of inclusive education. It is stated that regularly informing families can ensure that students receive support in their home environment as well. Along with all this, participants emphasize that not only informing families but also involving them in decision-making processes can improve quality. These findings coincide with the "inclusive pedagogy" approach put forward by Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011). Inclusive education requires not only classroom arrangements but also strong cooperation between stakeholders.

Furthermore, these findings are consistent with Epstein's family-school collaboration model (Epstein & Associates, 2019) and Ainscow's (2005) principles of inclusivity. Positioning families as active information seekers and providers in the education process, rather than mere observers, is considered important for students' holistic development. Coordinated work between school management and families is considered crucial for the effective functioning of the diagnosis and implementation processes (Love & Horn, 2021).

The study's findings indicate that one of the key variables determining the quality of inclusion education is teacher competencies and attitudes toward students. Participants' statements particularly highlight the inadequacy of in-service training, the importance of professional development opportunities, and the fact that teachers may exhibit biased approaches in certain situations. The findings indicate that not only individual teacher behaviors need to be addressed, but also that professional support elements at the system level require development. According to Love and Horn (2021), teacher education and professional support opportunities are not solely a matter related to the institutional context. When it comes to teacher education, it is emphasized that teachers need to receive very different training regarding inclusive practices and the education of children with special needs. Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011) focus on teachers' inclusive pedagogical approaches. Such an approach views learning difficulties not as deficiencies in students but as professional challenges for teachers.

Furthermore, both positive and prejudiced approaches were observed in the sub-theme of teacher attitudes in this study. Teachers' loving approaches increase students' self-confidence and success levels, while prejudiced attitudes complicate the process. The findings are consistent with Hornby's (2014) emphasis on the "necessity of changing attitudes in the transition to inclusive special education." According to the research findings, social inclusive is closely related not only to individual support but also to the socio-emotional climate of the classroom environment.

The research findings indicate that social inclusive and peer interaction are key components in determining the quality of inclusive education. It is emphasized that the ability of students with special needs to establish social relationships within the classroom, to be accepted by their peers without experiencing exclusion, and to feel part of the classroom community can directly affect the success level of inclusive education. In the peer relationship's sub-theme, teachers stated that they attach importance to peer education and group activities to support students' social development. Research indicates that developing empathy, cooperation, and conflict resolution skills through social-emotional learning (SEL) programs fosters the establishment of positive relationships among students (Fu et al., 2022; Lawson et al., 2019). Furthermore, researchers argue that social development is a crucial factor in determining the quality of inclusive environments (Fu et al., 2022). Parents' statements that their children are excluded from social interactions suggest that social prejudices in educational settings can be carried into the classroom environment. Support elements, such as cultural sensitivity training, are crucial in preventing this (Tanduyan, 2025).

Researchers have conducted various studies on which characteristics practitioners and families prioritize as affecting the quality of inclusive education (Barton & Smith, 2015; Hurley & Horn, 2010). Among the priorities were individualized arrangements and adaptations, as well as collaboration between families, teachers, and other professionals. More importantly, one of the most valued features of high-quality inclusive education emerged as the inclusion of children in a high-quality program. While the themes of individualized education processes and practices, family participation and collaboration, support services and resources, and teacher competencies show significant similarities with previous research, the themes of improving quality in inclusion, social inclusive, and interaction have emerged as distinct areas of focus. This indicates that the findings of the current study largely align with those of previous studies (Barton & Smith, 2015a; Hurley & Horn, 2010), while also highlighting less emphasized themes, such as social inclusive and interaction, and systemic strategies for improving the quality of inclusion, thereby contributing new insights to the literature.

Our research indicates that, while all stakeholders view the Individualized Education Program (IEP) process as a fundamental component of inclusive education, significant challenges are encountered during its implementation. Teachers, CRC specialists, and parents acknowledge the value of the IEP in terms of individualization and monitoring student development. However, they agree that the implementation needs to be more careful, based on objective data, and, most importantly, that the number of class hours allocated for IEP implementation is insufficient. The findings are consistent with international research, which shows that individualized arrangements and adaptations are central to the quality of inclusive education. Hurley and Horn's (2010) study also indicates that families and professionals view individualized arrangements as one of the most important priorities for high-quality inclusive education. This aligns with the emphasis placed on the "individualization" sub-theme by the stakeholders in our research.

However, implementation issues in the IEP process are universal. Norwich and Koutsouris (2017) note that although Education, Health, and Care Plans (EHC Plans) in the UK provide legal assurance, the process can be bureaucratic, slow, and conflictual between parents and service providers. Similarly, the parents' expectation in our study that the BEP should be "more carefully implemented" indicates that the process should not remain merely on paper but should be transformed into a qualified implementation. Norwich (2017) also emphasizes that these plans often focus on resources, such as teaching assistant time, rather than specific teaching approaches, and are written within the constraints of existing resources, which are insufficient to bring about the necessary organizational changes (e.g., establishing a new specialized unit). The lack of teaching hours, mentioned by all stakeholders in our research, is

one of the most concrete reflections of this systemic resource limitation in Turkey. In Denmark, despite the increase in inclusion targets, the decrease in cost per student reveals a similar resource-target contradiction (Keles et al., 2024).

While the stakeholders in our study noted that support education rooms make important contributions to student development, they emphasized that material shortages and the lack of therapy services (such as speech and language therapy, occupational therapy, etc.) seriously undermine the quality of inclusive education. The findings show that the success of inclusive education is directly related not only to philosophical acceptance but also to the availability of concrete resources and support mechanisms. Singal (2019) notes that efforts in India have primarily focused on the redistribution of resources, such as scholarships, assistive devices, and physical infrastructure; however, the quality of these facilities is often poor (e.g., broken ramps). This situation bears a strong resemblance to the findings of material deficiency in our research, showing that providing resources alone is insufficient; resources must be both qualified and functional.

The quality and structure of support services are also critical issues. In our research, the positive assessment of support rooms by all stakeholders confirms the importance of individualized support. Similarly, parents in the UK have been found to prefer specialized units within inclusive schools. However, Norwich (2017) states that there is a gap in national policies regarding the function and planning of such units, which weakens their inclusive into the system. This situation indicates that, despite the widespread adoption of support rooms in Turkey, there is a risk that the operating standards and quality of these rooms may vary across the country. Taneja-Johansson and Singal (2025) propose a "dual-track approach" at this point: This approach ensures that inclusive programs are accessible to all students while also developing targeted supports to meet the specific needs of students with special needs. The stakeholders in our research expressed a need for both an inclusive environment and specialized services such as therapy, confirming the necessity of this dual-track approach.

One of the most striking findings of our research is that stakeholders' suggestions for improving quality focus on structural arrangements such as systemic improvements, qualified in-service training, and addressing staffing needs, rather than individual efforts. This shows that the quality of inclusive education can only be achieved through a holistic transformation of the system. Ainscow (2020) defines inclusion as a never-ending process of identifying and removing barriers in specific contexts. This perspective reveals that the systemic deficiencies, educational inadequacies, and staff shortages expressed by stakeholders in our research are fundamental barriers that must be addressed and eliminated.

The need for in-service training is a theme frequently emphasized in the international literature. Teachers in India note that current training focuses on diagnosing disability but does not provide practical knowledge on inclusive pedagogy. This aligns with the teachers in our study, who find their in-service training inadequate. Aiello and colleagues (2021) propose a "simplicity" approach in teacher education in Italy, aiming to equip teachers with tools to cope with complexity. It shows that teacher education should focus not only on knowledge transfer but also on developing teachers' ability to act strategically and flexibly in complex classroom environments.

Systemic problems are seen as the biggest obstacle to improving quality. Engsig and Johnstone (2015) draw attention to the "paradoxical policies" created by the fact that Danish schools are required to meet an 80% success standard in national exams while striving to achieve a 96% inclusion target. This creates conflicting goals for teachers. Similarly, Singal and Jeffery (2011) argue that the fundamental problem in India is the effort to "include" children in a inclusive education system that is already riddled with systemic problems. This critical

perspective highlights the importance of the theme of "systemic improvements" in our research. Improving quality is possible not only by adding resources to the existing system, but also by questioning the system's fundamental philosophy, goals, and functioning. The view expressed by some German teachers in Görel and colleagues' (2024) study that "there is no difference between good inclusive education and good normal teaching" offers a transformative perspective at this point. This view argues that the goal is not to create a separate "inclusive pedagogy," but to develop general pedagogy in a way that can respond to the differences of all students. This approach is consistent with Ainscow's (2007) concept of "inclusive transformation," where the focus shifts from integrating students into the existing system to developing schools that can accommodate and serve diverse needs.

The research indicates that the quality of inclusive education in Turkey necessitates a holistic and systemic transformation that encompasses all stakeholders, extending beyond individual practices. The research findings align with a global trend of "paradoxical policies" that set inclusion goals on one hand while creating pressure for academic achievement on the other, as seen in Denmark, or focusing on the quantitative distribution of resources while neglecting quality, as in India. This situation reveals that the success of inclusion practices requires transforming the inclusive education system itself, which harbors systemic problems, as emphasized in the Indian example, rather than merely including students in the existing system. At this point, the fundamental recommendation for policy and practice is to move from discussing “why” inclusion is necessary, as noted in the international literature, to the question of “how” it can be effectively implemented. In teacher education, it is critically important to adopt innovative approaches, such as the “simplexity” model in Italy, which equips teachers with the skills to act strategically and flexibly in complex classroom environments, rather than approaches that are inadequate and detached from practice, such as those in India, which only introduce specific types of special needs. The goal, as some German teachers have pointed out, is not to create a separate "inclusive pedagogy," but to standardize "good teaching" by developing general pedagogy to respond to the differences of all students. This transformation, as Ainscow (2020) also points out, should be viewed as an ongoing process of identifying and removing barriers, with the entire education system being restructured to ensure the presence, participation, and success of every student.

Limitations

As this study is limited to a qualitative case study conducted on a purposeful sample, the findings are not statistically generalizable. Since the data collection process was primarily based on semi-structured interviews, it carries the risks of self-reporting bias, social desirability bias, and recall bias. Consistency between stated and actual practices could not be independently tested, as multiple data sources and triangulation (classroom observation, BEP document analysis, quantitative output indicators) were not used. When gathering opinions on inclusive quality, other stakeholders such as school administrators, peers, and policymakers were omitted, thus limiting a comprehensive picture at the ecosystem level. Although a hybrid approach was used in the analysis, the determination of initial codes based on the literature may have reduced the visibility of unexpected themes. The time dimension is cross-sectional; process changes and the effects of interventions could not be tracked longitudinally. Since quality indicators were not supported by quantitative measures, the possibility of establishing causal relationships remained limited.

Data availability

The datasets generated during and/or analyzed during the current study are not publicly available to protect the anonymity of participants but are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

Author contributions

All authors contributed to this research and manuscript. NC; was responsible for the analysis and writing of the findings, SDT responsible for the discussion and introduction sections, MAK responsible for the discussion section, AIY responsible for the introduction section, and OYH responsible for the methods and analysis of the findings. All authors participated in the data collection process.

Competing interests

The authors declare no competing interests.

Ethical approval

The authors confirm that all research was conducted in accordance with ethical guidelines and complies with the legal requirements of the country in which the study was conducted. All research procedures involving human participants were reviewed and approved by the Inonu University Ethics Committee (Reference No: E.604010-14/11). The date of ethical approval is June 16, 2025. This study was conducted in accordance with the ethical principles outlined in the Declaration of Helsinki and relevant institutional guidelines. We also strictly adhere to the ethical rules for surveys and interviews outlined in the Inonu University ethical guidelines.

Informed consent

In July and August 2025, we obtained informed consent from all participants. Data for this study was collected through an online interview form using Google Forms. All participants participate voluntarily and can withdraw at any time without affecting their rights. Participants agree to participate in the interview and consent to the use of their data for academic research. The researchers provided participants with a written statement confirming that their data will be used only for academic research. Before completing the interview form, participants were informed about the purpose, process, and data use of the study, and that this study was anonymous and did not include any personal information. Participants were also informed that they were free to answer any questions they wished and could terminate the interview at any time. In the consent form, participants were informed that all interview data would be subject to academic analysis and analysis, and that no personal information would be included. No personal information, privacy, or rights of the participants were violated during the research process.

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