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## SYSTEMATIC EXAMINATION OF POSTGRADUATE THESES CONDUCTED BETWEEN 2013-2023 ON SERVICES OFFERED TO FAMILIES IN THE FIELD OF SPECIAL EDUCATION

Review study

## **Corresponding author:**

Yusuf Ziya Tavil ORCID ID: 0000-0003-3487-6417 Biruni University, İstanbul, Turkey. <u>ytavil@biruni.edu.tr</u>

Hasan Pesen <u>ORCID ID: 0000-0001-9746-2751</u> Ministry of National Education, Siirt, Turkey. <u>hasanpesen1@gmail.com</u>

## **Biodatas:**

Yusuf Ziya Tavil is an Associate Proffesor Doctor of Special Education at Biruni University in İstanbul, Turkey.

Hasan Pesen is a School Principal at Ministry of National Education in Siirt, Turkey.

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Yusuf Ziya Tavil ytavil@biruni.edu.tr

Hasan Pesen hasanpesen1@gmail.com

#### Abstract

This study aims to examine postgraduate works conducted in Turkey between 2013 and 2023, focusing on services offered to families in the field of special education. The research is designed as a systematic review to deeply examine the studies conducted on services offered to families in special education. A search was conducted using the keywords "Family education program, family education, special education family, and family in special education" in the YÖK Thesis Center database to access the studies within the scope of the research. Thirty-four studies were included in the screening. The findings indicate that the majority of the studies were published in 2021, conducted at the master's level, and preferred quantitative research methods. Moreover, it was found that mothers were the primary study group, most of the studies were conducted with families having children diagnosed with ASD, there were more studies aimed at providing communication skills, and the most common study was participation in the family education program.

*Keywords:* Special education, family education, family education program, systematic review

#### 1. Introduction

The family, as the smallest unit of society, is defined as the social institution where individuals are born and spend most of their lives (Cavkaytar, 2012). The family environment has various impacts on a child's development and is considered the place where the foundations of children's attitudes, thoughts, beliefs, and behaviors are laid (Bayraktar, Güven, & Temel, 2016). While the development of typically developing children progresses in the usual course in the family environment, there are differences in the developmental processes of children with special needs. Various supports, including family education, must be provided to family members to normalize these differences.

Family education is defined as all activities organized to contribute to the education and development processes of parents' children with special needs (Y1lmaz Bolat, 2017). Another definition describes family education as education conducted to ensure the continuity of the family, the healthy development of individuals, and their harmonious and responsible integration with society (Cavkaytar & Özen, 2009). Kaner (2015) describes family education as training that helps family members understand the situation of the child with special needs, increases the competencies of parents, develops positive attitudes towards the child, and teaches various skills to children through parents.

Based on these definitions, it can be said that the aim of family education is to ensure the acceptance of individuals with special needs by their families, awareness of families' responsibilities and rights, and training of parents who can teach functional skills (Sarı, 2002; Walker-Hall & Sylva, 2001). Effective and direct communication with parents is essential to



achieve these goals. It is also important that the educator providing family education has the appropriate qualifications (Rimm, 1996; Varol, 2006).

Families with children with special needs may face difficulties accessing economic resources, participating in social and cultural activities, health problems, and educational services (Arslan, Ulaş, & Coşkun, 2020). Especially in contributing to their children's educational processes, families with children with special needs require more support (Yakın, 2009). Besides these needs, families need support on how to communicate with their children, how to cope with problem behaviors, and how to conduct activities to teach skills they lack (Öncül, 2012). It has been observed that education provided according to needs contributes to families adopting positive behaviors towards their children and helping them gain various independent skills (Cavkaytar, 1999). Research has shown that supporting families in this regard contributes to the development of individuals with special needs and that parents' participation in family education programs is important for their children (Özcan, 2004; Güzel, 2006; Diler Sönmez, 2008; Şeker, 2013; Koca, 2016).

Education received in the school environment alone is not sufficient for individuals with special needs to lead an independent life. Education programs to be offered to families within a certain system need to be included in the process. With these educations, children's developmental processes will be supported at home, and they will have the opportunity to lead an independent life (Cavkaytar, 2007; Batu, 2008).

The participation of families in the education process contributes to the empowerment of families, increases their self-confidence, reduces their anxiety and stress levels, and helps them set the right goals for themselves and their children (Arslan, Ulaş, & Coşkun, 2020). Family participation, one of the basic principles of special education, is mandated by the phrase "Ensuring that families actively participate in every stage of the special education process" (MEB, 2018). Due to the low level of special education services provided to children in our country and the inability to meet the needs of children in educational environments at the desired level, family education becomes essential (Özdemir, 2013). However, it has been observed that not every family participates in their children's educational processes (Keçeli-Kaysılı, 2008; Cavkaytar & Özen, 2009).

One of the main reasons for the family education process is that environmental arrangements outside the family do not have as much impact on the child's learning motivation as the education provided by the parents (Mcfarlane, Bellissimo & Norman, 1995). Children respond more to their parents, who have reinforcing properties for them. The reason for this is stated to be the duration and intensity of communication between parents and children being more effective than with other individuals (Rimm, 1996).

Family education provides contributions in many aspects not only to individuals with special needs but also to families with special needs individuals, educators, and other individuals in the environment. The presence of scientific studies proven to be effective in family education programs guides educators, who are the instructors and managers of the process. When the literature is reviewed, review studies related to family quality of life in the field of special education (Gülsün & Cavkaytar, 2021), individuals with hearing loss and Down syndrome (Marul, 2023), individuals with multiple disabilities (Eldeniz-Çetin, Çay & Bozak, 2020), teaching with behavioral examples in individuals with ASD (Vuran & Olçay, 2021), executive functions (Ertürk-Mustul & Doğan, 2022), the use of Errorless teaching methods (Denizli-Gülboy & Melekoğlu, 2022), support classroom application (Öpengin, 2021; Yılmaz, Yılmaz & Savaş, 2021; Talas, Türkoğlu & Seçil-Karamuklu, 2022), designbased research methods (Kurt & Melekoğlu, 2022), augmented and virtual reality technologies (Demirtaş & Yalçın, 2022), teaching reading skills (Gülboy & Rakap, 2023) and



the remote education process (Kurt & Kurtoğlu Erdem, 2022) can be found. No research examining postgraduate theses conducted between 2013-2023 on family education within the field of special education has been encountered. In this context, it is thought that the research will contribute to the literature in various ways.

The purpose of this study is to examine postgraduate studies conducted in Turkey between 2013-2023 on services offered to families in the field of special education. Within the framework of this general objective, answers to the following questions have been sought:

- 1. What is the distribution of postgraduate theses on services offered to families by years?
- 2. What is the distribution of postgraduate theses on services offered to families by types?
- 3. What is the distribution of methods used in postgraduate theses on services offered to families?
- 4. What is the distribution of study groups in postgraduate theses on services offered to families?
- 5. What is the distribution of student characteristics in postgraduate theses on services offered to families?
- 6. What is the distribution of topics in postgraduate theses on services offered to families?
- 7. What is the distribution of studies conducted in postgraduate theses on services offered to families?

# 2. Method

#### 2.1. Research design

In this study, a systematic review was conducted to determine postgraduate studies carried out in Turkey between 2013-2023 on services offered to families in the field of special education. The research was carried out using the screening model from qualitative research methods. Qualitative research methods include processes of data collection, analysis of documents, and expression with tables and numbers (Creswell, 2014). The screening model is a research approach that aims to describe an existing situation in its current form. In the screening model, the research subject is tried to be described within its own conditions without any interpretation added (Karasar, 2012). A systematic review is defined as the identification of studies using various inclusion and exclusion criteria by comprehensively scanning research conducted in that field in response to questions sought within the scope of the research, and the synthesis of findings in the research (Burns & Grove, 2007; Karaçam, 2013; Uysal, Koç & Gürgür, 2018). Systematic review studies are considered important in terms of being unbiased, repeatable, and comprehensive, and being able to clearly state the methods used for literature review and the criteria used for research selection (Moula & Goodman, 2009). For these reasons, a systematic review was used in this research.

## 2.2. Data Collection Process

The YÖK Thesis Center database was used to access the studies included in the review. The inclusion criteria for the studies to be included in the review were that they must be nationally published theses conducted within the framework of family education in the field of special education and that the full text of the study could be accessed. The screening process was conducted between November 1 and November 30, 2023. The criterion of having been conducted between the years 2013 and 2023 was determined for the studies. The



keywords "family education program", "family education", "special education family", and "family in special education" were used to identify studies on family education in the field of special education. During the screening process, the abstracts of the studies reached by the researchers were read, and studies thought to be relevant within the scope of the review's objectives were recorded in computer environment under key term titles using the snowball sampling technique. Studies related to family education identified during the screening were included in the research. The systematic review process related to the screening process is shown in Figure 1 (Karaçam, 2013).

## 2.3. Reliability

To ensure the reliability of this research, an education sciences expert was asked to conduct a search using the same keywords in the YÖK Thesis Center. The coding reliability resulting from the search was 100%, and to ensure reliability in the data analysis process, the same person was asked to follow the steps in the research and conduct the analysis.

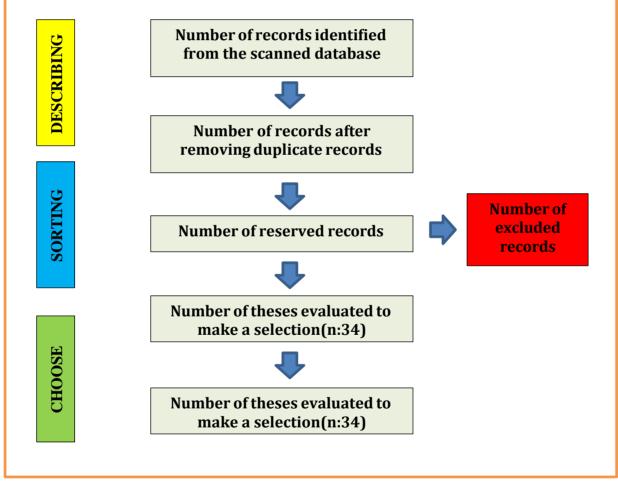


Figure 1. Systematic Compilation Process (Karaçam, 2013)



## 3. Findings

The distribution of the studies reached within the scope of the review by publication years is shown in Figure 2.

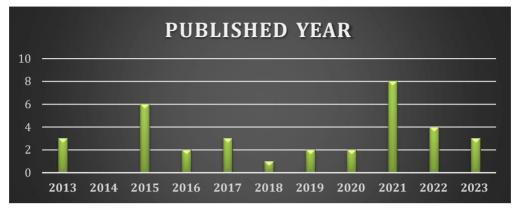


Figure 2. Years of Publication of Research

Figure 2 shows that the highest number of studies on family education was published in 2021 (n=8), and the least was in 2014 (n=0).

The distribution of the studies reached within the scope of the review by types is shown in Figure 3.



Figure 3. Research Type

Figure 3 shows that most of the studies were master's theses (n=21), and the least were doctoral theses (n=21).

The distribution of the studies reached within the scope of the review by methods is shown in Figure 4.



Figure 4. Methods of the Studies



Figure 4 shows that the methods of the studies were quantitative research (n=17), qualitative research (n=12), and mixed methods (n=5).

The distribution of the studies reached within the scope of the review by study groups is shown in Figure 5.

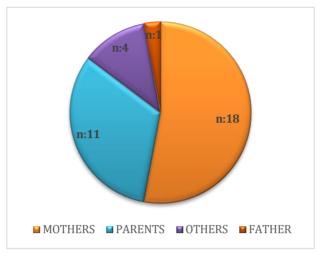
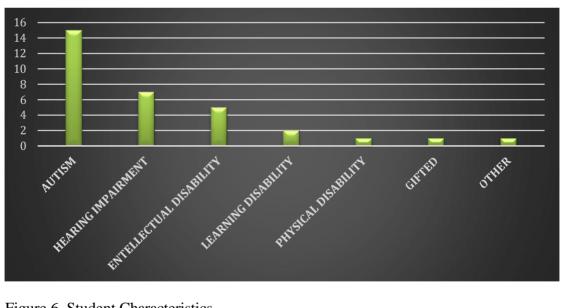


Figure 5. Study Groups

Figure 5 shows that the study groups were mostly mothers (n=18), followed by parents (n=11), others (n=4) and fathers (n=1).

The distribution of the student characteristics in the studies reached within the scope of the review is shown in Figure 6.



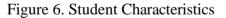


Figure 6 shows that the student characteristics in the studies were autism (n=15), hearing impairment (n=7), intellectual disability (n=5), learning disability (n=2), physical disability (n=1), gifted (n=1), and others (n=1).

The distribution of the topics in the studies reached within the scope of the review is shown in Table 1.



Table 1. Research Topics

SUBJECT TITLE	Ν	%
Developing Communication Skills	4	11,76
Determination of Teacher Views	2	5,88
Rule Acquisition Skill	1	2,94
Color Teaching	1	2,94
Social Skills Instruction	1	2,94
Impact on Family Life Cycle	1	2,94
Developing Imitation Skills	1	2,94
Impact on Family Functions, Resilience and Levels of Hopelessness	1	2,94
Increasing Families' Coping Ability Level	1	2,94
Increasing Awareness and Knowledge Level of Neglect and Abuse	1	2,94
Preparing an Activity Schedule	1	2,94
Increasing Positive Behaviors	1	2,94
Reducing Problematic Behavior	1	2,94
Teaching Fluent Reading Strategies	1	2,94
The Impact of Family Involvement on Children's Education	1	2,94
Developing Play Skills	1	2,94
The Impact of Parents' Coping with Stress, Quality of Life, and Social Support	1	2,94
Levels		
The Impact of Family Education Program on Parents	1	2,94
Impact on Families' Knowledge and Attitudes	1	2,94
Joint Attention and Gesture Use	1	2,94
The Impact of Parents' Stress and Depression Levels on Social Support and Family	1	2,94
Functioning Levels		
Developing Parental Awareness	1	2,94
Impact on Mothers' Interaction Behaviors	1	2,94
The Impact on Mothers' Development of Positive Behaviors	1	2,94
Perceptions Regarding Paternal Experiences	1	2,94
Accessing Family Education Services	1	2,94
Teaching Safety Skills	1	2,94
Information on Special Education	1	2,94
Teacher, Parent, and School Administrator Views	1	2,94
The Problems Faced by Teachers and Families	1	2,94
TOTAL	34	100

Table 1 shows that the research topics varied widely. The most common topic was improving communication skills (n=4), followed by determining teacher opinions (n=2). Other research topics (n=1) focused on different subjects.

The information on the studies conducted within the family education process is shown in Table 2.



#### Table 2. Research Topics

STUDIES CONDUCTED	Ν	%
Participation in Family Education Program	17	50
Differential Reinforcement Utilization	1	2,94
Utilization of Concept Teaching Process	1	2,94
Utilization of Social Story and Video Modeling Teaching Process	1	2,94
Utilization of Requesting-Modeling Technique	1	2,94
Utilization of Discrete Trial Teaching Process	1	2,94
Adapted Physical Activity Program	1	2,94
Effective Reinforcement Utilization	1	2,94
Mother-Child Development Program	1	2,94
Parent Education Program	1	2,94
Utilization of Milieu Teaching Techniques	1	2,94
Naturalistic Teaching-Based Family Education Program	1	2,94
Psycho-Educational Group Program	1	2,94
Utilization of Auditory-Verbal Therapy Techniques	1	2,94
Family Education Process	1	2,94
Parental Views	1	2,94
Sexual Education Acquisition Process	1	2,94
Preparation and Implementation of Family Education Program	1	2,94
TOTAL	34	100

Table 2 shows that the studies within the family education process varied widely. The most common study was participation in the family education program (n=17). Other studies (n=1) focused on different implementations.

## 4. Discussion and Conclusion

In this research, 34 studies conducted between 2013-2023 on services offered to families in the field of special education were examined. The findings regarding the publication years of the studies, types of studies, methods of studies, study groups, student characteristics, and studies conducted within the family education process were discussed in light of the results obtained.

The findings suggest that the studies conducted between 2013 and 2023 did not follow a regular trend, with the most studies being carried out in 2021. This could be attributed to the global Covid-19 pandemic, which resulted in families spending more time at home with their children, providing them with more opportunities to engage with them. The most notable finding regarding the years of the studies is the absence of any studies in 2014. Considering the importance of services offered to families for individuals with special needs, it can be said that studies in this area are insufficient. Demirel (2005) concluded that including families in special education services makes the education provided more effective and efficient. In this context, it would be important to increase the number of family education programs. When looking at the distribution of the types of publications, it is evident that studies conducted at the master's level outnumber those done at the doctoral level. This could be due to the longer time required to prepare and implement services offered to families, making doctoral studies less common in this area. Additionally, the limited number of universities offering postgraduate education in special education may contribute to this trend. Coşkun, Dündar, and Parlak (2014) found that postgraduate studies in the field of special education are predominantly master's theses, which supports the findings of this research.



In terms of research methods, quantitative studies were the most preferred. This preference might be due to the suitability of quantitative methods for measuring the effectiveness of implemented programs. Considering the difficulty in finding families willing to participate in research, quantitative methods could offer convenience by requiring fewer participants. Literature review shows that quantitative research methods are most commonly used in studies on family education (Gül & Diken, 2009; Alpay Çelik & Erdem, 2023), which is consistent with the findings of this study.

Looking at the study groups included in the research, mothers were the most involved. Given that mothers are often the primary caregivers for individuals with special needs, this result is expected. Studies involving both parents were also not uncommon, highlighting the importance of joint parental involvement in the developmental processes of individuals with special needs. The low number of studies focusing on fathers could be attributed to their work commitments limiting their availability for educational programs. However, with more mothers entering the workforce, it would be beneficial for both parents to participate in their child's developmental process.

Regarding student characteristics, education programs for families of students diagnosed with autism were most common. Vosough Matin (2022) noted that families of children with autism require more educational support resources during their developmental processes, supporting this study's findings. Considering the increasing number of individuals diagnosed with autism, this trend is understandable. The number of services offered to families of children with hearing impairments was also significant, possibly due to the critical development periods for communication skills and hearing in the 0-6 age range.

In terms of research topics, the most common focus was on improving communication skills. This aligns with the needs of individuals with autism and hearing impairments, who often require significant support in this area. The wide variety of research topics could be due to the diverse needs of individuals and families in special education.

The final aspect examined was the type of studies conducted within the family education process, with participation in family education programs being the most common. This aligns with the goal of enabling parents to acquire various skills and apply them to their children. Similar to research topics, the variety in the types of studies conducted within the family education process might reflect researchers' attempts to test the effectiveness of different methods and techniques.

In conclusion, this research shows that studies on services offered to families in the field of special education over the last ten years have been scattered, predominantly conducted as master's theses, with mothers being the most frequent participants, and quantitative research methods being the preferred approach. The majority of research focused on families of children with autism and aimed at developing various skills.

#### 5. Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

- Conduct research that covers broader time spans on services offered to families.
- Increase the number of doctoral-level studies.
- Enhance the number of studies involving fathers in family education.
- Increase research on family education in special education.
- Encourage more universities to offer postgraduate education in this field.
- Include research that reflects the perspectives of different disciplines (such as health, sociology, etc.) on family education.



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#### **APPENDIX 1. List of Postgraduate Theses Studied Within the Scope of the Research**

- Acar, Ç. (2015). Comparing the effects of mother developed and delivered social stories and video modeling intervention on teaching children with Autism spectrum disorders.
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