

Chapter 1

OPINIONS ABOUT THE INSTRUCTIONAL ADAPTATIONS REGARDING THE VISUALLY IMPAIRED STUDENTS WHO CONTINUE HIGHER EDUCATION¹

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INTRODUCTION

Education is accepted as a fundamental human right and constitutes a base for many legal regulations (Grand National Assembly of Turkey-TBMM-Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948; UNESCO, 2020). Many international organizations such as United Nations (UN), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) state that education environments must strengthen individuals and support their participation in the society in which they live from early childhood. This process is affected by many factors, including both the educational policies of the countries and the characteristics of teachers and students (OECD, 2020). Education must also include equal opportunity and accessibility as a right, and it requires preparing programs based on the needs of the individual (OECD, 2014; UNESCO, 2020 United Nations, 2018;). While the existence of legal regulations is binding today, there is a need for some policies and sanctions that support these regulations in terms of equal opportunities. For example, the individuals' needs at the education levels they continue may differ, and the programs, materials, and physical environment adaptations specific to that age level may vary (Sucuoğlu, 2006). The education of students with disabilities is carried out in general education schools where they continue education with their peers and in separate environments where special education services are

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provided. The planning of education and support services in these schools follows the Regulation on Special Education Services published in the Official Gazette dated 07.07.2018 and numbered 30471 (Ministry of National Education-MEB, 2018). According to the regulation, education planning for individuals who need special education follows the general objectives and basic principles of Turkish National Education. In our country, academic, social, and cultural adaptations have been made, and measures to support full participation have been taken in higher education for students with disabilities (Council of Higher Education-YÖK, 2010).

Similarly, policies have supported participation in higher education for students with disabilities in international areas in recent years. For example, in the United Kingdom, supervisory units that try to enable equality within universities have been established with the Equality Act adopted in 2006. This act stipulates that higher education institutions provide equal opportunities to individuals regarding ethnic origin and disability (Baltaru, 2019). In France, it has been compulsory to establish guidance units that provide pre-graduation competencies, preparation for the business world, and mentoring before graduation for students who have continued higher education since 2008 (Kavka, 2017).

International studies on disabilities and higher education show that students with disabilities face significant challenges in higher education compared to students without disabilities (Richardson & Roy, 2002; Rioux & Pinto, 2010; Vickerman & Blundell, 2010). It is not enough for individuals with disabilities to be included in a higher education institution to be able to complete their education process. Studies have shown that the learning of students with disabilities may face significant limitations depending on learning-teaching practices (Rioux & Pinto, 2010; Vickerman & Blundell, 2010). Thus, it is necessary to determine the instructional adaptations resulting from the disability-specific needs of the students who enrolled in higher education, examine influential factors in adopting these adaptations, and develop solution suggestions. Students form the subject of education life. The research problem of this study is to examine instructional adaptations regarding the academic life of visually impaired students continuing higher education in line with the opinions of visually impaired students and faculty members/instructors who are experienced in teaching visually impaired students.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The general purpose of this study is to evaluate instructional adaptations regarding the academic processes of visually impaired university students in the context of instructional planning, implementation, assessment, and monitoring of individual success. For this general purpose, answers to the questions below have been sought;

What do the faculty members who work in the higher education institutions and students who receive education in higher education institutions;

1. Think about the importance of university life in higher education institutions?
2. Think about the services provided to them?
3. Think about the problems they face in the education service process and the reasons for these problems?
4. Suggest to increase the quality of provided services?

EDUCATION OF THE VISUALLY IMPAIRED STUDENTS AND INSTRUCTIONAL ADAPTATIONS

According to the legal definition, “after all necessary corrections, a person having a visual efficiency of 1/10 that is having a visual acuity of 20/200 or less or having a visual field of 20 degrees or narrower is called ‘blind’; a person having a visual acuity between 20/70 and 20/200 is called ‘low vision’. A person who sees an object that a person with normal vision sees from 6 meters from approximately 60 centimeters or less or cannot see at any distance is blind according to the legal definition (Tuncer, 2003). According to the educational definition, individuals who are severely affected by visual acuity loss and need to continue their education with the help of tactual and auditory materials (Braille alphabet, audiobook, etc.) are blind and cannot use their eyesight for learning purposes. Low-vision individuals are affected by visual loss to the extent that they can use their eyesight for learning purposes with the help of various tools such as magnifiers and eyeglasses (Gürsel, 2009; Tuncer, 2003).

Educational environments can differ by the needs of students with visual impairment. Education environments can be listed as special education schools, schools for the visually impaired, special education classes in general education schools, and full-or part-time inclusion practices (Castellano, 2004). The concept of “instructional adaptation,” first introduced by Glaser (1977), includes the changes/arrangements made in teaching processes by instructors for students with disabilities to benefit from educational activities at the highest level (Fuchs et al., 1993; Özmen, 2012). Not being able to provide equal opportunities in the

academic area is stated as one of the obstacles for visually impaired students to get a job. Therefore, it has been emphasized that this may cause them to be less represented in certain parts of society. This study reveals a holistic result about the practical adaptations currently in progress, what kind of adaptations visually impaired students need in their faculties, colleges, and classes, and what kind of preventive and reformatory solutions have been delivered to these needs. Listening to the students and academicians and considering their unique experiences is thought to help shape policies, practices, and research in higher education institutions. The study is limited to 9 visually impaired students and 10 faculty members/instructors who have taught visually impaired students at higher education institutions for at least one term or were teaching them in the 2018-2019 academic year.

STUDY DESIGN

The study's phenomenology design based on the data obtained from qualitative research methods was preferred. Thus, it was thought that it would be possible to focus on understanding the opinions of the participants and events (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016).

Data Collection Technique

Semi-structured interview technique was utilized as the data collection technique. The semi-structured interview is a technique in which interview questions are prepared in advance by the purpose of the study; the process is more flexible, and in-depth, rich, and natural data are obtained from the participants (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016).

Data Collection Instruments

Depending on the semi-structured interview technique, one of the qualitative research methods, the data collection instrument of the study is the semi-structured interview form revised by taking the opinions of 5 different field experts.

Participants

The participants were determined using the snowball sampling method. The information regarding visually impaired university students and faculty members/instructors who lecture them is given in Table 1 and Table 2.

Table 1. Information Regarding the Participants (Academicians)

No	Code Name	Age	Gender	Academic Title	Faculty-Department
01	Hüseyin	39	Male	Assoc. Prof. Dr.	Faculty of Education- Social Sciences Teaching
02	Ersoy	40	Male	Dr. Academic Member	Faculty of Education-PCG
03	Ömer	59	Male	Dr. Academic Member	Faculty of Education-Music
04	Özgür	34	Male	Dr. Academic Member	Faculty of Education- Special Education
05	Oğuz	34	Male	Dr. Academic Member	Faculty of Education- Special Education
06	Yaşar	40	Male	Dr. Academic Member	Faculty of Education- Educational Sciences
07	Feridun	30	Male	Res. Assistant Dr.	Faculty of Education- Special Education
08	Zeynep	46	Female	Dr. Academic Member	Foreign Languages
09	Pelin	42	Female	Dr. Academic Member	Faculty of Education- English Teaching
10	Eylül	28	Female	Academic Member	Justice Vocational High School-Justice

The information regarding the visually impaired students who accepted to participate in the study voluntarily is obtained using the participant information form and shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Information Regarding the Participants (Visually Impaired Students)

No	Code Name	Age	Gender	Faculty Department	Year	Age of Diagnosi Level	Aid to be Used
01	Buse	23	Female	Education-PCG	4	Congenital Total	Walking Stick-Screen reader

Table 2. Information Regarding the Participants (Visually Impaired Students)							
No	Code Name	Age	Gender	Faculty Department	Year	Age of Diagnosi Level	Aid to be Used
02	Beste	24	Female	Sports Master's-Coaching	2	Congenital-60%	-
03	Sevgi	25	Female	Faculty of Sports Sciences Physical Education and Sports Teaching	4	Congenital-40%	-
04	Aslı	19	Female	Education-Music Teaching	2	8 years-90%	Walking Stick, Phone, Computer Voice Record
05	Emir	27	Male	Engineering-Mechanical	4	11 years 90%	Lens
06	Hasan	29	Male	Educational Sciences-History	2	12 years-90%	Magnifier
07	Mehmet	19	Male	Faculty of Engineering	1	Congenital 59%	Glasses
08	Sefa	23	Male	Justice Vocational High School-Justice	2	2.5 years 90%	Glasses
09	Çağatay	33	Male	OEF-Sociology	1	Congenital Total	Walking Stick-Screen Reading

The data were collected via semi-structured interviews in this study (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016). Pilot interviews were conducted with Derya, a visually impaired university student, and Mr. Serhat, a faculty member at a state university, to give interview questions in their final form. The interview conducted with Derya lasted 54 minutes. Derya is 19 years old and is a Special Education Teaching student at the Faculty of Education of a foundation university.

The interview conducted with Mr. Serhat lasted 20 minutes. In-depth interviews are one of qualitative studies' most used data collection types. To make the interview process more efficient and effective, the researcher must pay attention to the interview principles, which are (a) making changes according to the flow of the interview when asking questions, (b) avoiding being directive, (c) being encouraging, not interrupting the conversation, and providing feedback, and (d) being empathetic and objective (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). It was stated that the interviews would be recorded with a voice recorder to avoid data loss during the interview, and these recordings would only be listened to/read by a second expert for reliability studies. Besides, it was reminded that the information regarding the participants would be kept confidential, each participant would be given a code name, and these code names would be included in the study. In contrast, the study was written down. 10 questions in the interview form were asked to the academicians, and 11 questions in the interview form were asked to the visually impaired university students in order.

Data Analysis

Data analysis means systematically examining and organizing interview transcripts, field notes, and other data collected to reach the study's findings (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). The six-step content analysis technique emphasized by Creswell & Creswell (2018) was taken as a reference when analyzing the study's data.

Analysis of the Data with Content Analysis Technique

This study was analyzed with content analysis. Content analysis is conducted with an inductive approach by reading and coding all the data and reaching sub-themes and themes from the codes (Seidman, 2006). Creswell & Creswell (2018) considered it necessary to read all the data as the first step to make a general inference and record the first thoughts. Taking the fact that the study group consists of 19 participants and the practical aspects of qualitative analysis programs into account, the researcher used MAXQDA 12 qualitative data analysis program to analyze the study. For coding reliability, support was received from the thesis advisor, an expert in special education and experienced in qualitative research. Miles & Huberman (1994) stated that the reliability coefficient could be calculated for the codes in each interview question using the formula "Agreement / (Agreement + Disagreement) x 100". The agreement rate between the two coders was calculated as 92% due to the reliability study. The number of codes, which was 65 before the intercoder reliability study, was reduced to 47 by combining some codes because they overlapped with each other.

FINDINGS

The study's findings are presented descriptively within the scope of the themes and sub-themes obtained in this study.

Themes and Sub-themes
1-Pre-Higher Education and Transition Process
Transition Between Stages Negative Experiences and Their Effects Readiness
2-Legal Regulations
Legal Legislation, Policies, and Supervision Right to Education and Foundation Equal Opportunities in Education Universal Design
3-Problems/Obstacles/Challenges
Dealing with Discrimination in Learning Process Negative Attitudes Sources of Problems Prejudices Causing Problems
4-Disabled Student Units
Disabled Student Units and Adaptations Problems Experienced with Disabled Student Unit
5-Instructional Adaptations
Need Recognition Need for Information and Preparation Access to Course Materials Technology Use in Education Teaching Process and Implementation Assessment Process and Adaptations
6-Accessibility in Higher Education
Academic Accessibility Physical Accessibility Social and Cultural Accessibility Career Planning Process
7-Cooperation and Support
Cooperation and Roles Support Types and Determining Factors
8-Holistic View and Suggestions
Suggestions Regarding Instructional Adaptations R&D Studies

When examining **the sub-themes of the first theme**, it is seen that five academicians and one student stated opinions about the transition between stages, and three academicians and three students stated opinions about negative experiences and their effects. Five of the academicians who participated in the study (Feridun, Ömer, Özgür, Zeynep, and Ersoy) emphasized the importance of pre-university education for visually impaired students to access academic adaptations and to have more qualified university education experience. However, contrary to this, only one of the students (Çağatay) stated that his background and educational experiences would be compelling while mentioning his university experiences. Three of the academicians (Ömer, Feridun, and Yaşar) and three of the students (Beste, Sefa, and Sevgi) stated that the physical and emotional results of the disability cause some negative experiences and they reported that these negative experiences negatively affect the transition to university process and the quality of education they receive. Regarding this, Mr. Ömer said “... *For example, we face them in instrument courses. Because holding an instrument, especially playing the violin, is very difficult for them. The flute has definite things, it’s easier. Singing is easier. Playing the piano is easier than playing the violin. I mean, at least it has a keyboard. If they play the violin pressing back and forth, the sound would be bad. They should control the bow. But the piano is not like that, also the guitar is not like that; it would be a more appropriate instrument. But a fretless instrument is a little bit more difficult for them...*” (Interview with Mr. Ömer, August 2019).

The second theme is “Legal Regulations” and consists of four sub-themes. One of the study’s most striking findings is the need for supervision in current legal regulations. Participants mentioned different practices due to the lack of supervision, although higher education policies and appropriate regulations exist. Eight of the academicians (Hüseyin, Ersoy, Ömer, Özgür, Yaşar, Feridun, Pelin, and Zeynep) and four of the students (Emir, Sefa, Çağatay, and Sevgi) stated that university regulations should be arranged in a way that supports inclusive and full participation, studies have been conducted on this, and positive results have been obtained. Mr. Ersoy stated that disabled student unit practices, which differ in quantity and quality according to institutions, make education complex, and inclusive regulations that will reduce this difference are necessary; “... *actually, every university should make proper regulations about disabled student units. We haven’t made it yet. To bind certain things by rules...*” (Interview with Mr. Ersoy, July 2019). Six of the academicians shared that education is a constitutional right and none of the students can be deprived of this right. However, only one of the students reported that adaptations and some educational rights are needed.

Sevgi, one of the students, said “...regarding this, students have some, I didn’t know I had rights in the first and second years of university. I would try to raise awareness among students...” (Interview with Sevgi, August 2019). The third theme obtained from the data analysis is “**Problems-Obstacles-Challenges**”. This main theme consists of four main themes which are “Dealing with discrimination in the learning process”, “Negative Attitudes”, Sources of Problems”, and “Prejudices causing problems”. Six academicians and five students reported that visually impaired university students experience various discriminative practices in the learning process. The participants stated that some strategies and personal characteristics of the students may effectively deal with discrimination. The fourth theme from the data analysis is “**Disabled Student Units**”. The opinions of the academicians about the effectiveness of disabled student units in terms of adaptations form the majority. In terms of problems experienced, the opinions of both the academicians and students show a similar distribution. One of the most repeated concepts related to instructional adaptations in the study’s findings was disabled students units. All academicians and four of the students stated that disabled student units supported them in terms of instructional adaptations. The fifth theme obtained from the data analysis is “**Instructional Adaptations**”. This main theme consists of six sub-themes which are “Need recognition”, “Need for information and preparation”, “Access to course materials”, “Technology use in education”, “Teaching process and implementation”, and Assessment process and adaptations”. Eight of the academicians (Eylül, Ersoy, Feridun, Hüseyin, Ömer, Zeynep, Yaşar, and Oğuz) considered it as an essential element to communicate with and listen to disabled students while determining the needs. All visually impaired students who participated in the study reported difficulty reaching course materials and sources. The sixth theme is “**Accessibility in Higher Education**”. This main theme consists of four sub-themes. In this theme, six of the academicians (Ersoy, Hüseyin, Özgür, Ömer, Yaşar, and Zeynep) and five of the visually impaired students (Aslı, Çağatay, Emir, Hasan, Sefa) stated that higher education institutions are not accessible enough. **The seventh theme is “Cooperation and Support**”. In this main theme, two sub-themes, “cooperation and roles” and “support types and determining factors” were determined. Seven of the academicians (Ersoy, Feridun, Hüseyin, Oğuz, Özgür, Pelin, and Zeynep) reported that the units in the university must work in cooperation for the instructional adaptations which are inclusive and support full participation to be applied. The concepts of coordination and cooperation have an important place in the findings of the study. **The eighth main theme is “Holistic View**

and Suggestions". This main theme consists of two sub-themes: "Suggestions regarding instructional adaptations" and "R&D studies". Five of the academicians (Eylül, Hüseyin, Oğuz, Özgür, and Yaşar) and four of the students (Emir, Hasan, Sefa, and Sevgi) made suggestions regarding providing more qualified services to visually impaired students in higher education institutions. In conclusion, the prominent findings in 8 main themes and 27 sub-themes of this study show that both academicians and visually impaired students think that continuing to higher education is an important stage.

Discussion and Suggestions

When examining the experiences of both academicians and visually impaired students at higher education institutions regarding the instructional adaptations for visually impaired students, the study's findings show that good practices should be provided for visually impaired students, and problems should be determined. Most of the participants emphasized that pre-higher education experiences are directly related to the university orientation process and adaptations. They stated that examining and supporting pre-university and university life is important for inclusion and transition to higher education. There have been studies that have similar findings to this study. It has been emphasized that schools have an important role for students with special needs in making the transition process easier (McGuckin et al., 2013; National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 2009). Academicians think that low expectations regarding visually impaired students cause negative experiences. However, they also stated that these negativities will disappear if the teachers who teach these students make necessary adaptations. Crow (2003) states that negative academic performance does not result from physical results of disability or lack of ability. However, it results from "impeding social, environmental, and attitudinal factors" called the social model of disability. A study with similar findings stated that negative attitudes in academic environments generally exhaust students with disabilities, and students can fail due to disability-specific obstacles, lack of sources, and appropriate approaches (Strnadová et al., 2015). However, when adaptations regarding the needs of each individual are made with appropriate regulations, it is seen that students who experience academic problems overcome the negativities (Strnadová et. al., 2015). The study results show that differences in practice constitute an obstacle to equal opportunities. Hence, in the literature, Robeyns (2006) drew attention to the fact that all current practices should be revised in a way that includes individuals with disabilities, otherwise, even the practices

known as the best should accept their deficiencies when they are not intended for every individual. Sparrow (2005) emphasized the importance of providing Braille to support the literacy skills of visually impaired students and stated that it is inevitable for a student to fail if the appropriate regulations are not made. However, Sparrow (2005) drew attention to the fact that instead of giving Braille in a separate environment and assuming that full participation in education is provided, it is necessary to carry out instructional adaptations without separating the student from participation in social life, cultural, and sports fields. The study found that the academicians and students emphasize that the regulations should be organized in accordance with the principle of universal design while organizing the regulations on disability. Regulations made in accordance with the principle of universal design should be carried out not only in the scope of physical accessibility but also in the scope of inclusion in terms of education content and programs. Kayhan et al. (2015) drew attention that the continuity of distinctive regulations of the institution that take universal design into account should be supported, and the units should evaluate national dynamics, especially the internal dynamics of the higher education institutions (physical capacity, number of academic staff) in local with cooperation. The Disabled Student Units Theme consists of two sub-themes: “disabled student units and adaptations” and “problems experienced with disabled student unit.” Most participants (10 academicians and 5 students) clearly stated the support of disabled student units about instructional adaptations. The participants emphasized that the units could be more inclusive with alternative names such as “accessibility unit”. The Instructional Adaptations theme has six sub-themes: need recognition, need for information and preparation, access to course materials, technology use in education, teaching process and implementation, and assessment process and adaptations. It is among the prominent findings that all academicians participating in the study stated that they certainly need to be informed about students, adaptations, and supports before they plan the instructional adaptation process. They also stated that the students should be informed about the process and supported with orientation education. This result supports Piştav Akmeşe’s (2018) finding that stated that satisfaction levels of students with disabilities related to higher education increase when in-service training and information meetings are held more frequently. One of the instructional adaptations theme’s most prominent findings is the difficulty in accessing sources and course materials. Almost all participants stated that visually impaired students have difficulty in accessing course materials and sources. This is a finding frequently stated in the literature (Hopkins, 2011; Kendall, 2016;

Moriña Díez et al., 2015). Participants stated that visually impaired students could not access the sources due to the reasons such as copyright, lack of embossed materials, and non-compliance with the content with visual impairment (sources containing too many shapes and graphics). One of the remarkable aspects of instructional adaptations regarding visually impaired students is technology-supported adaptations. Almost all academicians stated that they benefit from technology while providing adaptations. It is difficult to say that education institutions provide the desired level of access for the visually impaired students participating in the study. However, there is a legal unit in higher education, and participation is supported. In the report published by the Association of Visually Impaired in Education (EGED) in 2016, it was stated that universities in Turkey have taken important steps in terms of accessibility in recent years; however, it is emphasized that the existence of prejudices, difficulties in access to information and physical areas impose problems in front of accessible university life (EGED, 2016). According to the results of this study, universities are physically slightly more accessible than academic accessibility. This result can be interpreted that adaptations related to physical accessibility are less affected by individual variables such as attitudes and prejudices. One of the important results of the study is that higher education institutions provide many social and cultural opportunities for visually impaired students. The participants stated that these opportunities have results that support the participation of visually impaired students in society. NEADS (2012) similarly emphasized the importance of the quality of communication and interaction for visually impaired individuals to participate in society and stated that a healthy social life is important for everybody and higher education institutions provide opportunities for interaction, participation in clubs, making new friends, and participation in social activities. However, it is a prerequisite for visually impaired students to have gained independent life skills for a healthy and social higher education life. This finding matches Altunay Arslantekin's (2015) finding that states individuals must have independent life skills for full and active participation and meeting social needs and responsibilities. It is also similar to Kirchner & Smith's (2005) finding that the inequality between the employment rates of those with and without visual impairment decreases as the duration of education increases.

In conclusion, higher education institutions are the dream of each young person, and they provide students with academic knowledge and skills and critical social achievements such as social participation, employment, and a career in business life. Results of the study and findings in the literature show that academicians

need more knowledge to provide effective teaching in terms of instructional adaptations for the education of visually impaired students. Accordingly, informative in-service training activities on awareness and adaptations can be planned for academicians, printed materials can be shared, and seminars can be organized. Considering the inclusion and job definition of disabled student units, their names can be examined regarding accessibility and providing an inclusive higher education life.

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