Exploring Primary School Teachers' Perspectives on Behavioral Problems and Speech and Language Difficulties of Their Students in Inclusive Classrooms: Experience-Based Insights and Technology-Based Resource Needs in Turkey *†

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SUMMARY

The aim of this study is to determine the opinions of primary school teachers about the problem behaviors and speech and language difficulties they encounter in their students based on their experiences and to reveal their needs for these issues. A basic qualitative research design, also known as basic interpretive qualitative research or interpretive qualitative research, was employed. The study's participants were 28 teachers employed at various primary schools and across different grade levels in a city within the Central Anatolia region of Turkey during the 2023-2024 academic year. Focus group interviews were utilized to explore the prior knowledge, opinions, and experiences of primary school teachers in enhancing the language skills of students with special needs and in managing their problem behaviors interactively. Teachers predominantly reported encountering externalized problem behaviors, including physical and verbal aggression, property damage, bullying, and classroom disruption. Teachers frequently encounter speech and language difficulties with their students in inclusive classrooms in their professional careers, with most reporting experiences with speech difficulties such as speech sound disorder, rapid slurred speech, and stuttering. The need for enhanced training and information is further

highlighted by the challenges teachers face in inclusive education settings, particularly in classroom management, addressing problem behaviors, and promoting positive behaviors and supporting speech and language skills of students. Recommendations for practice and further research were provided.

Keywords: Primary school teachers, inclusion, problem behaviors, speech and language difficulties, qualitative research, Turkey.

INTRODUCTION

The participation of individuals with special needs in society and educational life has changed over time. Today, both globally and in Turkey, the prevailing view regarding the education of children with special needs is the inclusive education system, where children are integrated with their typically developing peers (Barton & Smith, 2014; Bendová et al., 2014; Winton, 2016). In the literature, inclusive education/inclusiveness is defined as the access of all children, with or without special needs, to an equal and quality education system that adheres to universal design principles (Barton & Smith, 2014; Salvia et al., 2016; Winton, 2016). Although the benefits of inclusive education practices to society, the environment in which the child interacts, and the child's development have been demonstrated by scientific research (Dew et al., 2014; Sucuoğlu et al., 2020), various problems may be encountered in the functioning of this system. One of the most fundamental issues is the lack of knowledge and training among teachers (Bakkaloğlu et al., 2018; Barton & Smith, 2014; Buysse & Hollingsworth, 2009; Nilholm & Göransson, 2017). Studies have shown that although teachers believe in the necessity of inclusive education, their lack of practical knowledge and training may lead them to develop negative attitudes towards it (Bennett et al., 1997; Jury, et al., 2021; Recchia & Puig, 2011; Odom, 2016; Odom & Schwartz, 2002). It is stated that the primary areas requiring information and training are problem behaviors and practices for coping with speech and language difficulties (Can & Kara, 2017; Gürgür & Hasanoğlu-Yazçayır, 2019; Işıtan & Dayı, 2022; Koçak, 2020; Nungesser & Watkins, 2005)

Problem behaviors are one of the main challenges that disrupt teachers' classroom management. It is observed that there is an increase in problem behaviors exhibited by children in schools around the world, and prevention and intervention programs for these behaviors have gained importance (Gezer-Demirdağlı, 2020; Plueck et al., 2015; Sørlie, et al., 2015; Tobin & Sugai, 2005). In the context of inclusive education for children with special needs, problem behaviors become more diverse and are more challenging to manage (Didden et al., 2012). Research indicates that children with special needs can exhibit problem behaviors three to four times more frequently than their typically developing peers, showing these behaviors more frequently and intensely (Baker et al., 2022; Eratay, 2021; Güner-Yıldız & Melekoğlu, 2016; Sucuoğlu & Özokçu, 2005). Problem behaviors, characterized by their frequency, severity, duration, and versatility (Sprague & Walker, 2000), are categorized into internalized and externalized problem behaviors (Austin & Sciarra, 2009; Campbell, 1995; Kauffman & Landrum, 2008). Externalized problem behaviors are observable actions such as physical and verbal aggression, violence, and anger, while internalized problem behaviors include less visible issues like timidity, anxiety, and constant worry (Austin & Sciarra, 2009; Campbell, 1995; Eisenberg et al., 2010). Research findings suggest that teachers more frequently encounter externalized problem behaviors such as spitting, violence, wandering around the classroom, fighting, crying, and speaking without permission.

Another significant issue faced by teachers in inclusive education is speech and language difficulties, which are also recognized as a contributing factor to problem behaviors. Speech and language difficulties may manifest jointly or independently as isolated language or speech difficulties. Language difficulties involve challenges in one or more components of language, such as phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics (Bishop et al., 2016). Speech difficulties encompass difficulties with voice, speech sound, motor skills, and fluency (American Speech-Language-Hearing Association - ASHA, 2017). Common speech and language difficulties encountered in classrooms include developmental language disorder, speech sound difficulties, stuttering, and rapid, slurred speech. In inclusive education settings, it has been noted that a majority of children with special needs also present with speech and language difficulties, leading to complications in social communication and interaction, as well as problem behaviors (Kıyak & Diken, 2008; McClintock et al., 2003; Peck-Peterson et al., 2005).

When examining the methods teachers use to address problem behaviors and speech and language difficulties, it is evident that they employ a variety of strategies. According to national and international literature, teachers primarily use verbal warnings and assert authority to prevent and intervene in problem behaviors, often resorting to non-systematic practices such as talking to the student and offering advice (Ceylan & Yıkmış, 2017; Colvin et al., 1993; Çimen, 2022; Karabıyık & Işıkdoğan-Uğurlu, 2019; Owens et al., 2018; Sinoğlu-Günden, 2018). Particularly within national literature, it is highlighted that teachers do not feel adequately prepared to deal with problem behaviors and tend to tackle these issues individually without support. These unsystematic interventions are noted to have only short-term effects on problem behaviors and lead to classroom management difficulties (Akalın, 2015; Işıtan & Dayı, 2022; Koçak, 2020; Melek, 2022; Yıldırım & Kılıç, 2024; Yumuş & Metin, 2015). Unaddressed problem behaviors pose a lifelong risk (Chandler & Dahlquist, 2002), disrupt the learning process

and classroom management for the child and their peers, and create significant barriers to the success of inclusive education (Melek, 2022). This underscores the need for systematic and evidence-based interventions (Ceylan & Yıkmış, 2017; Oliver et al., 2011; Owens et al., 2018). In the case of speech and language difficulties, teachers are observed to conduct non-systematic activities such as having the child repeat difficult words, correcting mispronunciations, and encouraging the singing of poems and songs (Saman & Aydın-Uysal, 2022). This indicates a need for teachers to gain knowledge and training in systematic and evidence-based practices for both speech and language difficulties and problem behaviors (Nungesser & Watkins, 2005; Oliver et al., 2011; Owens et al., 2018).

In recent years, professional development programs tailored to the knowledge and training needs of teachers in inclusive education have gained momentum. Such programs are crucial for all educators, yet they are especially vital for primary school teachers, who are at the foundational stage of education and often embark on the inclusive education process with limited field-specific knowledge (Wolery & Odom, 2000). Qualitative studies in the national literature report that primary school teachers conclude their undergraduate education lacking adequate knowledge about special education and inclusive education, experience a deficit of practical experience, and endeavor to continue their professional lives while grappling with knowledge deficiencies in many areas (Bozarslan & Batu, 2014; Bruder, 2016; Dikici-Sığırtmaç et al., 2011; Küçük-Dağaroğlu & Bapoğlu-Dümenci, 2015). These studies also highlight that the burgeoning information needs, compounded by initial problems such as inadequate physical conditions and a lack of materials, cannot be met through books, the internet, etc., and that these solitary efforts by teachers lead to considerable time wastage. Hence, professional development programs designed to align with the informational and training needs of teachers in inclusive education are becoming increasingly critical. Over time, the presentation style, content, learning-teaching processes, and quality of professional development programs have evolved and are frequently discussed and examined in the literature (Christensen-Sandford & Whinnery, 2013; Gianoumis et al., 2012; Han, 2012; Hemmeter et al., 2011; Harjusola-Webb & Robbins, 2012; McBride & Schwartz, 2003; Smith & Camarata, 1999; Tate et al., 2005).

In line with the above-mentioned needs, the aim of this study is to determine the opinions of primary school teachers about the problem behaviors and speech and language difficulties they encounter in their students based on their experiences and to reveal their needs for these issues. In line with this purpose, answers to the following research questions were sought:

1. How are problem behaviors defined by primary school teachers?
2. What are the problem behaviors they encounter and how they deal with them?
3. What are the speech and language difficulties they encounter and how they cope with them?
4. What kind of professional development program do they need?

The data to be obtained in this first phase of a comprehensive project prepared for the preparation and testing of the effectiveness of an online professional development program (DilDa Professional Development Program) for primary school teachers in supporting the language skills and coping with the problem behaviors of students with special needs will be the basis for the preparation of a professional development online platform for primary school teachers in supporting the language skills and coping with the problem behaviors of students with special needs in primary school general education classes.

METHOD

Research Design

In this study, which aims to identify the problem behaviors and speech and language difficulties encountered by primary school teachers in their students from the teachers' own experiences and to ascertain their needs in these areas, a basic qualitative research design was employed. The objective of basic qualitative research, also known as basic interpretive qualitative research or interpretive qualitative research, is to understand how individuals interpret their lives and experiences from their personal viewpoints. Distinguished from other qualitative research designs, the basic qualitative research design is particularly suited for the in-depth comprehension of applied educational processes (Merriam, 2009). This design was chosen for its capacity to elucidate the needs of teachers, thereby laying the groundwork for the development of a professional development program tailored for effective interventions in managing problem behaviors and addressing speech and language difficulties in their professional practice.

Setting and Participants

The study's participants were 28 teachers employed at various primary schools and across different grade levels in a city within the Central Anatolia region of Turkey during the 2023-2024 academic year (See Table 1). The criteria for participation in the focus group interviews included: the teachers being volunteers, having students with special needs in their classrooms, and having experience working with students who have diagnosed special needs or are at risk.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of the Teachers Participating in the Focus Group Discussions

Participant	Gender	Length of service in the profession	Grade level taught	Class Size	Receiving PD-oriented training	Status of Receipt of IWB-oriented training
K1	Female	27 years	4th grade	30	No.	No.
K2	Female	17 years	1st grade	21	No.	No.
K3	Female	26 years	3rd grade	40	No.	No.
K4	Female	23 years	2nd grade	26	No.	No.
K5	Female	19 years	1st grade	24	No.	No.
K6	Female	17 years	-	4	No.	No.
K7	Male	24 years	1st grade	35	No.	No.
K8	Female	23 years	4th grade	23	Yes	No.
K9	Female	18 years	1st grade	33	No.	No.
K10	Female	10 years	1st grade	14	No.	No.
K11	Female	24 years	4th grade	33	No.	No.
K12	Female	21 years	1st grade	19	No.	No.
K13	Female	14 years	4th grade	18	No.	No.
K14	Male	24 years	1st grade	15	No.	No.
K15	Female	15 years	1st grade	27	No.	No.
K16	Female	23 years	3rd grade	31	No.	No.
K17	Female	21 years	1st grade	30	No.	No.
K18	Female	22 years	1st grade	28	No.	No.
K19	Female	25 years	3rd grade	33	No.	No.
K20	Female	19 years	2nd grade	38	No.	No.
K21	Female	13 years	3rd grade	30	No.	No.
K22	Male	28 years	4th grade	32	No.	No.
K23	Female	16 years	3rd grade	27	No.	No.
K24	Female	16 years	4th grade	27	No.	No.
K25	Female	20 years	4th grade	33	No.	No.
K26	Male	30 years	3rd grade	29	Yes	No.
K27	Female	15 years	3rd grade	37	No.	No.
K28	Female	20 years	4th grade	40	No.	No.

As indicated in Table 1, of the 28 participants, four were male, and 24 were female. The participants' average tenure was 20.3 years, and the average class size was 27.7 students. Regarding grade levels, ten of the teachers instructed 1st grade, two taught 2nd grade, seven taught 3rd grade, and nine taught 4th grade. It is noted that two participants had received in-service training for Professional Development (PD), whereas none had received in-service training for Collaborative Learning Techniques (CLT). The participants were grouped into five focus groups, and one interview was conducted with each group. The groups were assembled to ensure a heterogeneous mix in terms of teaching experience.

Procedures

In this study, focus group interviews were utilized to explore the prior knowledge, opinions, and experiences of primary school teachers in enhancing the language skills of students with special needs and in managing their problem behaviors interactively. Focus group interviews are a prevalent method for data collection in qualitative research. A focus group interview can be described as a structured data collection session where participants share their perspectives and experiences on a topic in a carefully planned setting (Patton, 2002). Participants may have similar or diverse backgrounds, depending on the research objective. This technique is facilitated by a moderator who guides the group through pre-established questions (Morgan, 1998a). Focus groups enable the exchange of ideas, the discovery of perceptions, and the observation of variations in understanding through dialogue and interaction. As Patton (2002) asserts, the focus group approach is a form of interviewing. However, it differs from a one-on-one interview in that participants respond to each other's comments and may offer additional insights as they are influenced by the discourse of the group. Preparations for conducting focus group interviews involve a series of sequential and iterative steps (Patton, 2002; Krueger & Casey, 2000). The steps taken in this study are illustrated in Figure 1.
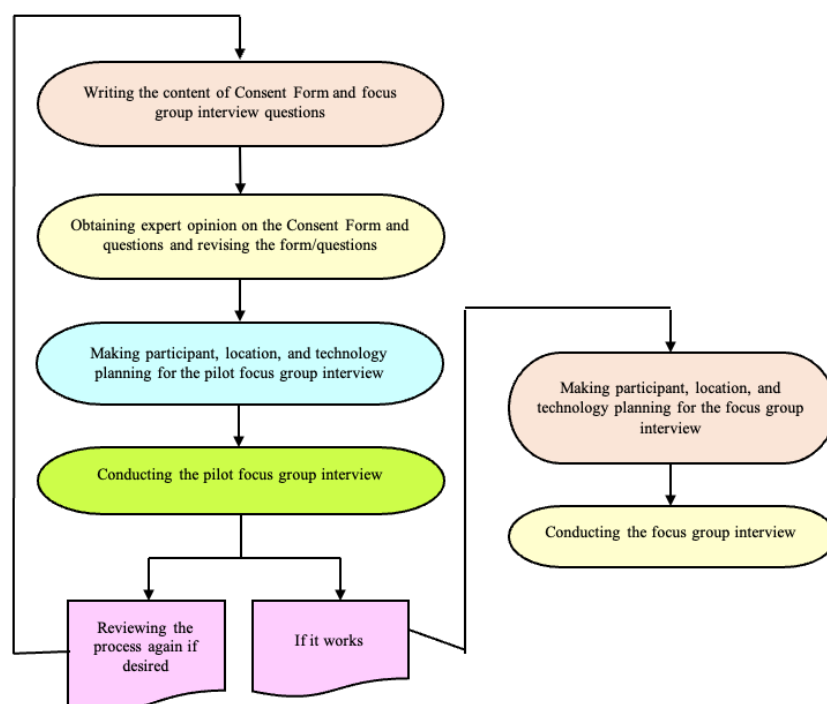

Figure 1. Preparation process for focus group interviews

Subsequent to the questionnaire's formulation, a protocol for conducting the focus group interviews was established. In addition, a consent form and a personal information form were prepared for participant use. Given that each focus group interview would be moderated by a researcher, the protocol delineated specific guidelines to ensure consistency. This included assigning a moderator and an assistant to each group, systematically posing questions to all participants, addressing each by name, moderators generating a checklist to track the discussion, taking notes on emergent themes during the interview, refraining from influencing responses or questions, and securing verbal consent at the beginning of each session.

To maximize efficiency during focus group interviews, a personal information form was created to gather details about the participants beforehand. This form solicited information regarding their professional experience, involvement with students who have special needs, encounters with problem behaviors, and any training they had received related to speech and language difficulties of their students. The forms, accompanied by consent

documents, were emailed to participants prior to the interviews, and they were instructed to return them completed to the researchers.

Before commencing the main interviews, a preliminary pilot interview was arranged with eight teachers. This session was attended by all researchers and was utilized to evaluate the clarity of the questions, the effectiveness of the interview procedure, and the time allocation for the interview. Insights gained from the pilot were used to refine the questions, leading to their finalization.

Focus Group Interview Process

As part of the research, five focus group interviews with distinct participants were carried out. To accommodate the teachers' schedules and working conditions, the interviews were conducted in the evening via video conferencing. The total duration of the five focus group interviews was approximately 461 minutes. During the interview sessions, the researchers took notes and later transcribed the audio recordings.

Data Analysis

Inductive analysis was employed to examine the data collected from the focus group interviews in this study. Inductive analysis is a process where patterns, themes, and categories are identified within the data (Patton, 2015). Its primary aim is to derive concepts and relationships that elucidate the gathered data (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2021). Within this research, efforts were made to comprehend the problem behaviors and speech and language difficulties reported by teachers. This was achieved by framing these issues in terms of their definitions, what constitutes problem behavior, the underlying reasons for such behaviors, and coping strategies. Consequently, the data were thematically organized and interpreted within this context.

Multiple researchers participated in the analysis phase. Therefore, the leading researcher for each group independently coded the data from their respective sessions (Patton, 2015). Subsequently, the researchers compared their codes to identify similarities and differences, from which themes and sub-themes were derived through discussion. The findings were substantiated with direct quotes from the participants.

Credibility and Ethical Measures

To enhance the credibility of the study during the data collection and analysis phases, a collaborative approach was adopted for all decisions made by the research team. This collaboration extended through the development of data collection tools, data gathering, organization, and analysis.

Variety in the data sources was prioritized to strengthen the study. In striving for a diverse range of data sources, efforts were made to include teachers with varying levels of experience from different regions within the central area where the research was conducted. For the transferability of the research findings, meticulous attention was given to presenting the data comprehensively. Accordingly, the findings were articulated with detailed descriptions and direct quotes from the participants' feedback.

An ethics committee approval was secured for the research, and official permission was sought from the concerned authorities with the accompanying documentation. Participation by the teachers was on a voluntary basis, and confidentiality of the participants' personal information was strictly upheld.

RESULTS

The initial question this study sought to address pertained to how primary school teachers define problem behaviors, as part of determining their needs concerning the problem behaviors experienced with students and the speech and language difficulties they encounter. Upon analyzing the data from five focus group interviews, the definition of problem behavior was categorized into four main themes (See Table 2).

In contrast, some teachers defined problem behavior as actions that are inappropriate for the child's developmental stage in an environment where the child behaves differently from their peers of the same developmental level. According to these teachers, problem behavior is characterized by behaviors exhibited by the child that deviate from the expected behavior of their peers. In this perspective, behaviors that set the child apart from their peers in the environment are perceived as problem behaviors. However, it's worth noting that only one out of the 28 teachers who participated in the study, in contrast to the majority, emphasized that behaviors commonly labeled as problem behaviors might actually be part of the child's development. This teacher expressed her opinion on the subject as follows: *"The child does not necessarily do it to be a problem behavior. When the child does that behavior, sometimes he/she does it for learning purposes. They do it to learn at that moment, out of curiosity. At this point, it is important to observe and listen to the child..."* and suggested that children might engage in such behaviors for the purpose of learning and out of curiosity. In her view, these behaviors should be observed and understood in the context of the child's learning and exploration. This diverse range of perspectives among teachers highlights the complexity of defining and understanding problem behavior in the context of child development and learning. It underscores the importance of considering individual differences and developmental stages when assessing and addressing such behaviors in educational settings. From these definitions, based on the classroom teachers' experiences, it is understood that although they consider problem behavior from different perspectives, they

predominantly view problem behavior as undesirable and negative. They tend to perceive any behavior that deviates from the norm as problematic. Indeed, the examples related to problem behaviors provided in response to the subsequent research question support this view.

Table 2. Definition of Problem Behavior

Theme	Sub Theme
Behaviors affecting the learning environment	Behaviors that prevent individual learning
	Behaviors that inhibit others from learning
	Actions disrupting classroom routine
	Behaviors interfering with the lesson
	Behaviors distracting the teacher and peers
	Behaviors that adversely affect self, peers, and classroom order
	Behaviors not conforming to school rules
Behaviors impeding social interaction and communication	Behaviors disrupting the social atmosphere and hindering communication
	Actions negatively influencing the child's self-expression and social communication
	Negative behaviors obstructing communication with peers and teachers
	Behaviors impairing social relationships
Societally unacceptable behaviors	Actions unsettling the child's immediate environment
	Any conduct disturbing societal order
	Behaviors infringing on others' freedoms
	Undesirable behaviors by societal standards
	Actions that society, beyond what is normally accepted, finds disturbing
	Behaviors disapproved by parents and peers
	Actions disregarding the rights of others
Developmentally inappropriate behavior	Absence of expected age-appropriate behavior
	Behaviors deviating from peer norms in their surroundings
	Actions that set the child apart from their peers

The second question this research aimed to address is which problem behaviors teachers encounter and how they deal with them. To this end, teachers were initially asked to define the problem behaviors they encountered and then to describe their methods for handling these behaviors. Considering the years of experience of the participating teachers, it is noted that their service ranges from a minimum of 10 years to a maximum of 30 years. This range is significant because it indicates that they have likely encountered a wide variety of behaviors. As illustrated in Table 3, the problem behaviors identified by the teachers fall into two categories: externalized and internalized.

Table 3. Problem Behaviors Encountered

Theme	Sub Theme
Externalized Behaviors	Physical Aggression
	Destruction of Property
	Disruption of Lesson Flow
	Infringement of Others' Rights
	Non-compliance with Rules
	Verbal Aggression
	Dishonesty
	Inappropriate Physical Boundaries
	Dependency on External Control
	Excessive Complaining
	Invasion of Privacy
	Bullying
Internalized Behaviors	Withdrawal
	Non-participation

Externalized problem behavior refers to destructive and aggressive actions that harm others. It appears that the majority of behaviors identified by the teachers fall into the externalized category. The most frequently cited issue within this group is physical violence. Teachers have observed students engaging in acts such as hitting, pushing, pinching, pulling hair, throwing stones, tripping, spitting on themselves or others, and struggling with anger control.

Destruction of property is another significant concern. According to the teachers, students have damaged school property, their peers' belongings, and their own items. Examples include leaving school toilets dirty, throwing

trash into toilet bowls, obstructing toilets with mop sticks, smearing soap on bathroom mirrors, urinating in trash cans, writing on desks, and persistently littering.

Disruptions to lesson flow are also highlighted as problematic. Such behaviors include asking off-topic questions, engaging in non-class-related activities, standing up without permission, wandering around the classroom, talking incessantly, crying without apparent reason, making distracting noises, lying on the floor, not paying attention, frequently approaching the teacher, and requesting the classroom door be kept open. Violations of others' rights were also reported, such as treating common areas as personal property, taking and then discarding food in the cafeteria, or rejoining the line for more. For instance, the inability to secure benches in the garden area due to students dismantling them underscores the issues with communal spaces. Non-compliance with rules was another concern. This includes behaviors like cutting in line, nose-picking in public, littering, and covering ears to ignore the teacher's call. Verbal aggression is another significant issue. Teachers noted frequent instances of swearing, using derogatory language, and insulting behavior. Some students were described as displaying dependency behaviors, such as constantly asking for their mothers, needing constant oversight, and showing impatience—characterized as a need for external control. Additionally, teachers have faced problems with students who frequently complain, assign blame to others, violate personal space by entering restrooms in pairs, and engage in bullying, particularly by older students towards younger ones. On the spectrum of internalized problem behaviors, tendencies towards withdrawal and avoidance were also discussed.

Another question posed to teachers regarding this issue was the frequency of encountering problem behaviors. Teachers commonly reported encountering problem behaviors nearly every day. Subsequently, the causes of problem behaviors were examined. Teachers largely believe that these behaviors are linked to incorrect family attitudes. According to them, families often do not acknowledge the problem or the developmental disability. Additionally, failing to communicate effectively with the child, not being good role models, and not setting boundaries were among the cited reasons. A particularly notable finding is that, as per the teachers, parents perceive their children as "princes and princesses." One teacher who shared this observation remarked, "*There are many such princes and princesses in my class, but no children, because they don't understand the meaning of 'no.' Everything they want is granted. They are indulged with the rationale, 'If I can't have it, let them have it.'*" Another observation about families is that problem behaviors tend to be more prevalent among children from divorced, fragmented, and violent households. Teachers also noted screen addiction and the Covid-19 pandemic as contributing factors to problem behaviors. They believe that during the pandemic, increased screen time due to remote learning has led to behaviors such as quick boredom, disengagement in games, inability to sustain play, poor impulse control, and frequent school absenteeism.

According to teachers, systemic issues are another cause of problem behaviors. In this context, they identified crowded classrooms and the hasty placement of refugee students without adequate preparation as contributing factors. In terms of students, challenges with self-regulation skills (such as dependency on instructions, an inability to devise solutions to problems), seeking attention, and limitations in communication due to language and speech difficulties were among the identified causes of problem behaviors.

Lastly, teachers pointed to their colleagues as one of the contributors to problem behaviors. Those who subscribe to this opinion believe that the misguided attitudes and practical deficiencies of their students' former teachers foster problem behaviors. Reflecting on this, one teacher stated, "*The influence of previous teachers cannot be overlooked. One teacher requested a transfer, departed, and exhibited inconsistency during their tenure, which solidified these behaviors. Now, I strive for consistency in my rules and actions...*"

It has become evident that teachers encounter a broad spectrum of problem behaviors throughout the educational process and often attribute the root causes to the family environment. Consequently, they were queried about their strategies for managing these behaviors and the approaches they employed. Upon analyzing the responses to this question, the coping methods were categorized into five themes (See Table 4).

The first theme that emerged regarding the ways of dealing with problem behaviors was the use of practices based on the behaviorist approach. These practices include positive interventions such as examining the antecedents and consequences of the behavior, reinforcing positive behaviors, rewarding, using positive language, observing, organizing activities appropriate to the developmental level, and trying to direct the student's attention to a different activity/object. On the contrary, it was determined that practices such as depriving the student of a favorite activity, the price of the reaction, and ignoring the student were also used continuously. Another striking finding was that the teachers resorted to ways that they themselves expressed as punishment, such as assigning the student to be on duty in the classroom for a week and having the student clean the classroom. These are among the practices that are not preferred in the literature.

The second theme that emerged for problem behaviors was warning. The practices under this theme were listed as warning, threatening, making them apologize, keeping a report and informing the parents. Some teachers stated that they verbally warned their students verbally in the face of problem behaviors, made them apologize, sometimes wrote an official report called a report, and sometimes informed the parents. The teacher who expressed

the threatening behavior in the sub-theme stated that she would inform other parents about the problem behavior of her children if no measures were taken via instant messaging application and described this behavior as a passive threat.

Table 4. Ways of Coping with Problem Behaviors

Theme	Sub Theme
Utilizing practices based on behavioral approach	Examining the antecedents and consequences of behavior
	Deprivation methods
	Positive reinforcement
	Reward systems
	Response cost techniques
	Punishment
	Employing positive language
	Observation and analysis
	Ignoring
Warning strategies	Verbal warning
	Threats of consequences
	Mandating apologies
	Record-Keeping of Incidents
	Communication with Families
Benefiting from self-expression activities	Encouraging expression through drawing
	Drama or Animation Activities
	Engaging in Dialogue with the Child
	Active Listening to the Child
Receiving support	Support from family
	Collaboration with Other Teachers
	Assistance from School Administration
	Peer support
	Engagement in Social Activities
Providing emotional support	Physical Reassurance (e.g., Holding Hands)
	Showing Affection and Care
	Demonstrating Respect for the Student

Utilizing self-expression activities is another theme that emerged from the data. Under this theme, teachers stated that they used ways such as asking the child to express himself/herself by drawing a picture, doing drama/animation activities, talking to the child and listening to the child. One of the teachers said, *"When we encounter many events or many situations, when we encounter unwanted behavior, we act out the event/situation through what we call drama or animation. Then we ask questions to the child who exhibits problem behavior, such as how would you feel if it were done to you, and we try to solve it with a plot."*

Another theme that emerged in the context of addressing problem behaviors was the pursuit of support from various sources. Teachers reported seeking assistance from families, other teachers, school administrators, and peers, as well as steering their students toward diverse social activities during this process.

Emotional support was identified as the final theme among the methods for managing problem behaviors. Teachers shared that they sometimes provided comfort to students with problem behaviors through physical reassurance and verbal affirmations. They spoke of using tender words to provide emotional solace, gently stroking the child's head, holding their hand, making eye contact, keeping the student physically close, and treating the student with individual respect. One teacher, with 23 years of experience, reflected, *"Of course, we've made mistakes when dealing with problem behaviors, but the approach I've found most successful is love. When we offer them unconditional love and respect, I can somehow make a connection."* These remarks underscore the importance of emotional support. Just as the range of problem behaviors encountered is diverse, the strategies teachers employ in response to these behaviors are varied, demonstrating their commitment to resolving issues.

The third question the research aimed to answer was regarding the speech and language difficulties observed in their students and the methods employed to address them. As detailed in Table 5, the speech and language difficulties encountered were categorized under two themes: language difficulties and speech difficulties.

Just as with problem behaviors, teachers frequently confront speech and language difficulties with their students in their professional lives. All participants in the study shared observations about these difficulties their students encounter in their inclusive classroom practices. The most commonly cited issues fell under the category of speech difficulties. Predominant among these are stuttering, rapid speech, articulation difficulties, a robotic tone of voice, and infantilized speech. In literature, stuttering and rapid speech are typically classified as fluency difficulties. Teachers noted that students who speak quickly often struggle with sentence clarity and tend to omit word endings.

Similarly, students with a stutter were reported to have disruptions at the onset of speech, leading to a reluctance to speak. Articulation difficulties were commonly characterized by difficulties in pronouncing the "r" sound and in enunciating certain consonants, resulting in reduced speech intelligibility. In addressing these challenges, teachers have adopted various approaches (See Table 6). Their strategies for managing speech and language difficulties have been organized into three main themes.

Table 5. Speech and Language Difficulties Encountered

Theme	Sub Theme
Speech difficulties	Stuttering
	Rapid speech
	Articulation problems
	Monotone (robotic) speech
	Infantilized speech (baby talk)
Language difficulties	Delayed speech and language
	Selective speech
	Developmental language disorder

Table 6. Ways of Coping with Speech and Language Difficulties

Theme	Sub Theme
Strategies to support speech and language	Engaging in Speaking Activities
	Modeling
	Encouraging Slower Speech Rate
	Applying Positive Reinforcement
	Informing other students about speech and language difficulties
	Allowing Additional Time for Speaking
	Emphasizing Problematic Sounds
	Avoiding Excessive Repetition
	Creating Targeted Activities
	Avoiding Forcing the Production of Sound
Receiving support	Seeking Professional Help
	Involving family
Unprofessional practices	Verbal warning
	Ignoring
	Providing emotional support

Among the strategies for supporting speech and language development, teachers frequently resort to a variety of approaches. They mentioned conducting speaking activities, providing correct pronunciation models, encouraging students to speak more slowly, using positive reinforcement, educating peers about students with speech challenges, allotting extra time for the affected students to express themselves, emphasizing problematic phonemes, having the students repeat sounds or words, and designing activities aimed at sound production. One teacher described the modeling technique: *"When I notice a pronunciation mistake, I don't let it slide. Instead, I repeat the mispronounced word correctly."*

Similar to dealing with problem behaviors, teachers seek external support when addressing speech and language difficulties. They reported obtaining assistance from speech and language therapists, child psychiatrists, and guidance counselors, as well as from families. One teacher noted, *"For significant issues like stuttering or major speech impediments, professional help is essential. However, for simpler problems like articulating a single letter, teacher and family support can be effective."* Furthermore, some teachers admitted to using what are considered unprofessional practices, such as giving verbal reprimands like, *"Why do you speak like that? You're not a baby, you're grown up,"* ignoring speech and language issues altogether, or providing empty reassurances like, "*You can speak, you can make this sound."* These methods were identified as unsuitable for treating speech and language difficulties.

The findings regarding problem behaviors, speech and language difficulties, and coping mechanisms underscore the necessity for in-service teacher training. The final research question explores the types of in-service training teachers require, with their needs expressed across four categories: content, setting, duration, and pedagogical processes (See Table 7).

Teachers have indicated a significant need for in-service training across various subjects. Predominantly, they highlighted the necessity for comprehensive understanding and strategies related to managing problem behaviors and addressing speech and language difficulties. Consequently, these areas could be prioritized in the development of in-service training programs for primary school teachers in our country. Moreover, training is also sought on

referral processes to specialists, diagnostic practices, family education, understanding different developmental disabilities, and effectively communicating these concerns with other school staff.

Table 7. Expectations from In-Service Training

Theme	Sub Theme
Content of the training	Diagnostic techniques
	Understanding Speech and Language Difficulties
	Strategies for Effective Guidance
	Managing problem behaviors
	Family education strategies
	Overview of Developmental Disabilities
	Educating other school staff
Education environment	Interactive sessions
	Online platforms
	Face-to-face (In- person) workshops
Duration of training	Short-term programs
Learning-teaching processes	Open-ended, classroom-applicable educational materials
	Case studies
	Video demonstrations
	Recommendations for Additional Resources
	Lectures by Experts
	International Approaches and Methods
	Successful ıntervention examples
	Foundational theories
	Use of Interactive Tools
	Sharing of Personal Teaching Experiences
	Hands-on training sessions
	Implementation of a Mentoring System

Regarding the preferred educational environment for these training sessions, teachers have expressed a preference for web-based (online), face-to-face, and interactive platforms. The ability to revisit information flexibly, without constraints on time or physical location, underscores the value seen in web-based (online) educational programs. This format is appreciated for its accessibility and lack of time restrictions, offering continuous opportunities for learning and application. Additionally, the duration of these training sessions is favored to be short-term, aligning with the practical constraints and schedules of teachers.

In terms of learning and teaching processes within these training programs, teachers have suggested the incorporation of versatile, practical, and interactive educational materials suitable for classroom use. They recommend the inclusion of case studies, video content, resource lists, expert lectures, international practices, proven intervention strategies, foundational theories, and hands-on training. One teacher's comment sheds light on the current challenges: *"We're facing a scarcity of resources. Finding suitable materials is difficult; many of us resort to searching on YouTube for articulation exercises and similar content. Although we receive assistance from specialists within our schools and attempt to implement their advice, it often feels like a stopgap solution."*

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study aimed to identify the needs of primary school teachers concerning the problem behaviors and speech and language difficulties they encounter in their students, drawing on their firsthand experiences. A key outcome from the interviews is the varied ways in which teachers describe problem behaviors. Despite the diverse definitions in existing literature, a consensus on certain critical aspects of problem behaviors emerges, aligning with established criteria. These include behaviors that adversely affect a child's ability to communicate and interact socially, are not suitable for the child's developmental stage or societal norms, pose safety risks, inflict harm, and obstruct the learning and development of the child and their peers, especially when these behaviors recur across different settings and times (Carr & Durand, 1985; Emerson, 2001; O'Neill et al., 2015; Yücesoy-Özkan, 2018). Consequently, problem behaviors are characterized as deviations from accepted social norms that negatively impact the child's communication, social interaction, development, and learning processes (Achenbach et al., 1987).

In discussions, teachers primarily identified problem behaviors as those disrupting the learning environment, hindering social communication and interaction, and failing to conform to societal expectations. A minority of teachers pointed out that some behaviors deemed problematic might be age-inappropriate or distinct from peer behavior, suggesting a nuanced understanding that aligns with literature-based criteria. Notably, one teacher argued against labeling all negative behaviors as problematic, suggesting that certain actions stem from a child's innate curiosity and desire to learn. This perspective led to a deeper exploration of problem behavior criteria,

emphasizing the significance of behaviors manifesting in multiple environments and on repeated occasions. This approach mirrors the literature's emphasis on observable and measurable aspects of problem behavior. Additionally, the study observed that the terminology teachers use to describe problem behaviors-ranging from inappropriate or challenging to aggressive, antisocial, and maladaptive-closely matches the descriptors found in existing literature (Chandler & Dahlquist, 2005; McClintock, et al., 2003).

This alignment between teachers' definitions and scholarly criteria underscores the importance of a shared understanding of problem behaviors. It highlights the need for targeted in-service training that addresses both the identification of such behaviors and effective intervention strategies, thereby supporting teachers in managing these challenges more effectively within the educational setting.

The findings on problem behaviors identified by teachers underscore the prevalence of various behavioral challenges within educational settings. Teachers predominantly reported encountering externalized problem behaviors, including physical and verbal aggression, property damage, bullying, and classroom disruption. In contrast, a smaller proportion of educators highlighted internalized problem behaviors, such as introversion and social withdrawal. This distinction mirrors the literature's categorization of problem behaviors into externalized and internalized types. Externalized behaviors are outwardly visible and include aggression, hyperactivity, and defiance, whereas internalized behaviors encompass internal struggles like anxiety, depression, and withdrawal (Burt et al., 2008).

The tendency for teachers to concentrate on externalized behaviors can be attributed to their overt nature and direct impact on classroom dynamics and safety. These behaviors are not only more visible but also more readily identifiable and, therefore, easier to address in a classroom context. In contrast, internalized behaviors, which might require more nuanced detection methods and a deeper understanding of student psychology, tend to be less disruptive on the surface to the classroom environment, making them less likely to be prioritized for immediate intervention. This focus on externalized behaviors is consistent with studies suggesting that teachers are more likely to address behaviors that directly affect classroom management and require immediate intervention (Austin & Sciarra, 2009; Campell, 2002; Sazak-Pınar & Güner-Yıldız, 2017).

Given these insights, it becomes evident that while externalized problem behaviors are more conspicuous and impactful in the educational environment, internalized behaviors also necessitate recognition and understanding. The findings suggest a need for in-service training programs that equip teachers with the skills to identify and address both types of problem behaviors. Such training should encompass strategies for recognizing the subtler signs of internalized behaviors, alongside effective interventions for the more visible externalized behaviors, ensuring a holistic approach to student well-being and classroom management. This nuanced understanding of problem behaviors and the differentiated focus on externalized versus internalized types underscore the complexity of classroom management and the importance of comprehensive teacher training and support systems.

The insights drawn from teacher experiences with problem behaviors in the classroom reveal a significant discrepancy between theoretical knowledge and practical application. While many educators resort to informal strategies such as verbal warnings and discussions to address problem behaviors, there's a notable reliance on behaviorist approaches including rewards, ignoring, and deprivation. Yet, the consistency and effectiveness of these methods appear compromised, as teachers often struggle to implement these strategies systematically or with high fidelity. This discrepancy underscores a broader issue: the gap between what teachers know in theory and how they apply this knowledge in practice. The literature supports this observation, indicating that although teachers employ various reinforcement strategies to manage problem behaviors, there's a lack of systematic, evidence-based practices in their approach (Ceylan & Yıkmış, 2017; Colvin et al., 1993; Çimen, 2022; Karabıyık & Işıkdoğan-Uğurlu, 2019; Owens et al., 2018; Sinoğlu-Günden, 2018).

The need for enhanced training and information is further highlighted by the challenges teachers face in inclusive education settings, particularly in classroom management, addressing problem behaviors, and promoting positive behaviors. Research both nationally and internationally points to educators' difficulties in these areas, emphasizing their reliance on individual efforts and feelings of inadequacy (Akalın, 2015; Işıtan & Dayı, 2022; Koçak, 2020; Saraç & Çolak, 2012; Yumuş & Metin, 2015). Moreover, there's a recognized demand for knowledge regarding the behavioral characteristics of students with special needs, the underlying causes of problem behaviors, and effective prevention and intervention strategies (Güner, 2011; Işıkgöz et al., 2018; Kargın et al., 2003).

These findings suggest an imperative need for targeted professional development programs that bridge the gap between theoretical understanding and practical implementation. Such programs should focus on providing teachers with systematic, evidence-based strategies for managing problem behaviors, alongside fostering a deeper understanding of the behavioral dynamics of students with special needs. By equipping educators with the requisite skills and knowledge, these training initiatives can empower teachers to manage classroom dynamics more effectively, thereby enhancing the educational experience for all students.

In discussing coping strategies for problem behaviors, teachers also emphasized understanding their underlying causes. Predominantly, family-related factors were identified as significant contributors to these behaviors,

including poor role modeling, negative attitudes, permissive parenting ("my child can do anything"), divorce/separation, child abuse, and denial of the child's limitations. Additionally, systemic issues such as large class sizes, inadequate integration of refugee students, and previous educators' ineffective approaches were noted, alongside child-specific issues like attention-seeking behaviors and language or speech difficulties. Societal challenges, including the Covid-19 pandemic and natural disasters like earthquakes, were also mentioned as contributing factors.

The literature supports the notion that various elements can influence problem behaviors, particularly emphasizing the role of family dynamics in children's social adjustment. Studies have explored the impact of the immediate environment, parental stress, caregiver mental health, maternal depression, and parental confidence on such behaviors, situating these discussions within the frameworks of Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory and Family Systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). These theories propose that the family and other close relationships exert a mutual influence on a child's development, underlining the importance of the family in all developmental domains. Yet, the study's findings indicate that teachers tend to attribute problem behaviors to external factors rather than their own influence or responsibility.

This perspective suggests a need for a more holistic approach in addressing problem behaviors, one that encompasses not only family and systemic factors but also the roles of educators and school environments. Professional development programs that foster an understanding of these diverse influences and equip teachers with strategies to engage effectively with students, families, and other educators could help mitigate problem behaviors. Moreover, such programs should encourage self-reflection among teachers regarding their potential impact on student behaviors and promote collaborative efforts between families and schools to support children's well-being and development comprehensively.

Teachers frequently encounter speech and language difficulties with their students in inclusive classrooms in their professional careers, with most reporting experiences with speech difficulties such as speech sound disorder, rapid slurred speech, and stuttering. Language-related issues, like developmental language disorder, were less frequently mentioned, likely because speech difficulties are more observable in classroom settings and thus easier for teachers to identify. Research indicates that teachers often have limited knowledge regarding speech and language difficulties, which can adversely affect their perceptions and attitudes towards these conditions (Can & Kara, 2017; Erim & Aydın, 2021; Saman & Aydın-Uysal, 2022; Nungesser & Watkins, 2005). Despite this, teachers are pivotal in recognizing speech and language difficulties in students, referring them to appropriate therapy services, and providing support within the educational environment (Erdem, 2013; Hearne et al., 2020; Tollerfield, 2003).

To address speech and language difficulties, teachers sometimes resort to unprofessional practices such as verbal warnings, ignoring the disorder, or making well-intentioned but uninformed encouraging comments. They also attempt supportive strategies like modeling, engaging students in speaking activities, encouraging slower speech, and allotting additional time for speaking. However, the inconsistent application of these practices often stems from a lack of knowledge. The literature highlights a global trend of inadequate teacher awareness regarding effective classroom strategies for managing speech and language difficulties, coupled with a general unfamiliarity with contemporary approaches (Erim & Aydın, 2021; Saman & Aydın-Uysal, 2022; Nungesser & Watkins, 2005). In Turkey, studies have emphasized the urgent need for both pre-service and in-service training programs tailored to address this gap in knowledge (Erim & Aydın, 2021; Saman & Aydın-Uysal, 2022).

Given these findings, it is imperative that there is a great need to develop and implement comprehensive training programs focused on speech and language difficulties. Such programs should aim to enhance teachers' understanding and skills, enabling them to better support students with these challenges. By improving teachers' knowledge and competencies in this area, we can foster more inclusive and supportive educational environments that cater to the needs of all students, including those with speech and language difficulties.

The enhancement of teachers' professional development is crucial for elevating the quality of education within inclusive educational settings. Globally, there's a growing emphasis on evolving professional development programs for teachers, marked by advancements in program content, delivery methods, and learning-teaching methodologies. Notably, the rise of web-based programs, the integration of diverse written and oral resources, and the prioritization of needs analysis to tailor content to teacher requirements represent significant progress in this domain.

Teachers have offered valuable insights into the development of professional training programs, particularly highlighting the need for programs addressing problem behaviors and speech and language difficulties. They suggest that such programs should cover diagnostics, effective guidance strategies, family education, understanding developmental disabilities, and methods for informing other staff members. The preferred formats for these programs include interactive, online, and face-to-face sessions, emphasizing short-term, practical applications. Moreover, teachers advocate for the inclusion of video demonstrations, theoretical foundations, hands-on training, accessible resources, and exemplars of successful interventions within the learning-teaching

processes of these programs. The addition of feedback mechanisms, such as coaching and advisory services, especially through online platforms, is seen as a way to enhance classroom practice effectiveness.

Empirical research supports the notion that effective professional development programs significantly boost teachers' knowledge and their application of evidence-based practices (Morrier et al., 2011; Paynter et al., 2017). This underscores the potential for teachers to apply newly acquired skills and knowledge directly to their teaching environments. In our context, the prevalent model of one-off informational seminars has been deemed inadequate for improving classroom practices within inclusive education, pointing to a pressing need for comprehensive, needs-based professional development initiatives (Ergül et al., 2013; Karasu et al., 2014; Odom, 2016).

To bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application, it is recommended that future professional development programs incorporate a variety of materials and be accessible across multiple platforms, incorporating robust support and feedback systems. Such an approach promises to facilitate the rapid and sustainable convergence of theory and practice, ensuring that all educators can access and benefit from these resources.

In conclusion, the impact of problem behaviors and speech and language difficulties on a child's social development and learning is well documented, with evidence showing that without early and effective intervention, these issues may persist into adulthood, resembling chronic conditions (Luo et al., 2021; Burt et al., 2008). Unaddressed, chronic problem behaviors can escalate into academic underachievement, school dropout, substance misuse, employment challenges, and social integration difficulties (Timmermans et al., 2008; Walker et al., 1995). Despite the insights derived from 28 primary school teachers in a provincial center, the convergence of their experiences with established literature underscores the necessity for advancements in teachers' understanding and management of problem behaviors, as well as speech and language difficulties.

Based on the results of this study, the following recommendations can be made for practice and further research:

- Incorporate specific courses on problem behaviors and speech and language difficulties into teacher education programs to better prepare future educators for these challenges.
- Organize training sessions led by specialists to enhance primary school teachers' competencies in addressing problem behaviors and supporting students with speech and language difficulties.
- Provide teachers with accessible resources, such as instructional videos and guidance booklets, on classroom strategies for supporting speech and language development.
- Develop and evaluate the impact of face-to-face or web-based professional development programs tailored to the specific needs of teachers regarding problem behaviors and speech and language difficulties.
- Explore the experiences and perspectives of educators from various disciplines concerning problem behaviors and speech and language difficulties to broaden the scope of understanding and intervention strategies.

This study, albeit with its limitations, highlights a critical area for development in teacher education and professional development. Addressing these gaps through targeted training and resources can empower teachers to more effectively support students facing these challenges, ultimately contributing to improved educational outcomes and social integration.

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