



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Every Camp Has a Story: Barrier Free Youth Camp with Teacher Narratives

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Abstract

This study was carried out to investigate the opinions of teachers who participated in the youth camp without disabilities organized for individuals with intellectual disabilities. The research was conducted in twelve teachers who participated in the barrier-free youth camp organized in Mersin province Silifke district and were selected through easily accessible situation sampling. Data were collected by means of personal information forms created by the researchers together with semi-structured interview questions, while the content analysis method was used for data analysis. Five main themes and ten sub-themes, dependent on the former, emerged from the findings. The expectations of the participating teachers before the camp started were determined to contribute to the socialization of the students, and their expectations regarding the camp environment were positive. Relating their experiences during the camp, the teachers stated that the activities prepared for the students were organized according to the latter's characteristics, with enriched and well-developed content. Although the camp was suitable for students with intellectual disabilities in terms of accessibility, they reported that there was no canteen in the camp to meet their daily needs. They found the camp to be beneficial for students to integrate, socialize and act independently. After the camp had finished, the teachers expressed their satisfaction with the experience, concluding that it had been productive both for their professional development and for the students. However, they suggested increasing the duration and number of the camps and simplifying the arrival and departure procedures.

Keywords

Barrier Free Youth Camp, Teacher, Opinion

INTRODUCTION

Social policies for disabled people in Turkey were first introduced in 1976 and gained momentum in the 1980s. The National Coordination Board for the Protection of the Disabled was established in 1981; that same year, the constitution of the Republic of Turkey guaranteed the rights of persons with disabilities. In 2005, the Law on the Disabled came into effect. With these steps, the principles of preventing discrimination against persons with disabilities

while allowing them equal opportunities and full participation in all stages of social life were adopted into law. These laws encouraged the inclusion of people with disabilities in all areas of social life, from programs to schools, sports, and entertainment services (Seyyar, 2015). In order to ensure the full participation of disabled people in society, ministries strive both within their own bodies and in cooperation with other ministries to work for people with disabilities. The duties and responsibilities of the Ministry of Youth and Sports (MYS), which carries out activities

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throughout Turkey, published in 2011 in its Decree on the Organization and Duties of the Ministry of Youth and Sports, are as follows: *“To create policies that support the personal and social development of young people and to enable them to realize their potential by taking into account the needs of different youth groups. To develop proposals to ensure effective participation in decision-making and implementation processes and all areas of social life, to carry out activities with this aim, and to ensure coordination and cooperation in the services of relevant institutions concerning youth.”* Thus, “Youth Camp” activities are organized under the auspices of the ministry in line with its principles.

The goal of these camps is to contribute to the holistic development of the individuals who attend them, to respond to their social, athletic, cultural, and personal needs, and to expand these activities throughout the country. Today, the camps stand out as facilities established for the purpose of making productive use of the free time of young people with various cultural, social, and sports activities. Youth camps are organized under the names of “Free Sea Camps” for youths aged 12 – 15 and “Free Nature Camps” for those aged 16 – 22, hence including all young people. The camps aim to provide a guiding program for young people to identify their skills and interests by making the most of their free time with themed activities. In addition, “Barrier Free Youth Camps” are also organized for disabled youth by the Ministry of Youth and Sports acting in collaboration with the Ministry of National Education (MNE). The aim is to enable students with special needs to take part in social life together with their peers through various social and cultural activities. Barrier Free Youth Camps are located in different provinces throughout Turkey, and participation is open to students with special needs and their teachers, who are involved in the education and training of these students while accompanying them at the camps. The ultimate objective is thus to provide the highest level of benefit from out-of-school learning environments (MYS, 2023).

Learning is the social structuring of knowledge in a collaborative, social interaction incorporating flexible and hands-on activities, both inside and outside the school environment (Güloğlu & Çetin, 2021). Camps represent important sports and recreational activity areas

outside of school for disabled youths to communicate, interact, and develop meaningful relationships, providing them with numerous positive experiences and new skills. The learning experiences that transpire during camp activities enable the participants to learn about themselves as well as to develop their capacity to work together and improve their problem-solving skills. Social communication and interaction occur within educational environments that help disabled youths to overcome their obstacles (D'Eloia & Price 2018). In camp environments, disabled youths have the opportunity to participate in various physical activities such as horse riding, cycling, archery, folk dances, street games, swimming, basketball, and volleyball (MYS, 2023). The camps also allow disabled youths to develop social interaction and communication skills with their peers (Schelbe et al., 2018, Anderson et al., 2018; Flynn et al., 2019), to participate in fun and developmentally appropriate physical activities (Clark & Nwokah, 2010, Bell, 2021), offer opportunities for them to develop self-esteem (Aggerholm & Moltke Martiny, 2017; Willis et al., 2017), and improve their health-related quality of life (Kapsal et al., 2019). In addition to all of these contributions, camp staff members foster an environment conducive to learning by implementing strategies and activities that incorporate their knowledge of disabilities and by encouraging the disabled youths to become active learners (Flynn et al., 2019). Furthermore, the participation of teachers in accessible youth camps, who are familiar with the students' knowledge and skill levels, helps both the camp personnel and the learning environments of the disabled students, as it is the duty of teachers to develop their students' knowledge and skills, enabling them to benefit from them (Singal & Swann, 2011). Thus far, studies in the literature have concentrated on disabled individuals, families, or camp officials participating in such camps (Michalski, et al., 2003; Wozencroft, et al., 2019; Goodwin, & Staples, 2005), whereas no study has been published on the presence of companion teachers in these camps. For this reason, we believe that it is necessary to examine the camp experiences of teachers accompanying students with special needs and to offer suggestions accordingly. Hence, the present study focused on the experiences of teachers who participated in an barrier free youth camp.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Model

The research was conducted following the case study design, a qualitative research approach, in order to determine the current situation of the teachers participating in The Barrier Free Youth Camp and to examine their views on this experience in detail. A case study is defined as the investigation of one or more particular situations or circumstances. In other words, the factors (events, environment, individuals) present in a given situation are investigated using a holistic approach, with a focus on how they affect and are affected by the relevant situation (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013).

Participants

A total of twelve teachers were interviewed by contacting participants in the Barrier Free Youth Camp held in the Silifke district of Mersin province through easily accessible case sampling. In the study, the code names PT1, PT2, etc. (PT: participating teacher) were used in order to conceal the names of the teachers. The data obtained from the teachers interviewed within the scope of the study are presented below.

PT1, 25 years old male, special education teacher. Second year in the profession. He has been working at the Special Education School for two years. There is no previous camping experience and there is no disabled person in his family.

PT2, a 33-year-old male psychological counseling and guidance teacher. Tenth year in the profession. He has been working at the Special Education School for ten years. There is no previous camping experience and there is no disabled person in his family.

PT3, 28 years old male special education teacher. Second year in the profession. He has been working at the Special Education School for two years. There is no previous camping experience and there is no disabled person in his family.

PT4, 34 years old male special education teacher. Tenth year in the profession. He has been working at the Special Education School for seven years. There is no previous camping experience and there is a disabled person in his family.

PT5, 52 years old male psychological counseling and guidance teacher. Twenty-seventh year in the profession. He has been working at the

Special Education School for seventeen years. He has had one camping experience before and there is no disabled person in his family.

PT6, 46 years old male special education teacher. Twenty-second year in the profession. He has been working at the Special Education School for five years. There is no previous camping experience and there is a disabled person in his family.

PT7, 26 years old male special education teacher. Fifth year in the profession. He has been working at the Special Education School for four years. He has had one camping experience before and there is no disabled person in his family.

PT8, 48 years old male physical education and sports teacher. Twenty-fourth year in the profession. He has been working at the Special Education School for nine years. There is a camping experience twice before and there is a disabled person in his family.

PT9, 36 years old male special education teacher. His fourteenth year in the profession. He has been working at the Special Education School for five years. He has had two camping experiences before and there is no disabled person in his family.

PT10, 40 years old male special education teacher. His seventeenth year in the profession. He has been working at the Special Education School for eleven years. There is no previous camping experience and there is no disabled person in his family.

PT11, 49 years old male fine arts teacher. Twenty-first year in the profession. He has been working at the Special Education School for eleven years. He had a camping experience once before and there is a disabled person in his family.

PT12, 34 years old male psychological counseling and guidance teacher. Tenth year in the profession. He has been working at the Special Education School for four years. There is no previous camping experience and there is no disabled person in his family.

Data Collection Tools

Data collection was conducted in the form of individual interviews employing a semi-structured interview technique. The interview questions were prepared by the researchers based on a review of the literature and in accordance with the objectives of the study. Additionally, the interview questions were approved by two academics, both experts in

the field, who gave the questions their final form by making the necessary revisions. The questions posed to the teachers for this study were as follows:

1. What were your expectations prior to the start of the camp?
2. What are your thoughts on the suitability of the camp activities organized for the children?
3. What are your thoughts on the suitability of the campsite in terms of accessibility for the children?
4. What were the effects of the camp on the social development of the children?
5. What were your experiences after the camp finished?

Data Collection

The Barrier Free Youth Camps within the scope of the research is a one-week sea camp program for individuals with intellectual disabilities. Program activities are organized as sea and land activities organized by MYS, program managers. The program manager and camp leaders took part in the implementation of the program. The activities were carried out in the company of camp leaders and accompanying teachers who accompanied the students.

The researchers collected the data by conducting individual interviews in person (face-to-face) with the teachers. Before being interviewed, the teachers were informed of the subject of the research and gave their consent. Interviews were held at the camp during the evening rest hours on the fifth day of the camp. Interviews with the twelve teachers lasted between 30 and 35 minutes each and were recorded using a voice recorder with the permission of the participants. Permission for the study was obtained from the Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee of Muş Alparslan University (document date and number: 04.07.2022-55505).

Data Analysis

The qualitative data obtained from the interviews were transferred from the voice recorder to a computer by transcription before undergoing content analysis. Content analysis involves the basic process of compiling similar data within the framework of certain concepts and themes, and arranging and interpreting the data in such a way as to be comprehensible (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). After being coded and themed separately by three different researchers, the data were then finalized by identifying common codes

and themes. The coherence of the codes and themes was confirmed by an independent academic with expertise in the field who performs qualitative studies. Finally, the analysis process was completed with the generation and interpretation of the findings.

Validity and Reliability

In qualitative research, validity refers to the ability of researchers to verify their findings (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). For the validity of the present study, a deep-focused data collection process was applied in the interviews with the teachers, a literature review was conducted prior to preparing the questions, expert opinions were consulted during the question preparation process, and the method section included a detailed description. Reliability involves taking detailed notes such that each and every step of the research process can be followed (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). To ensure the internal reliability of this research, separate codes and themes were determined by three different researchers, and the common codes and themes were then finalized. In addition, two independent academics, who are experts in the field and in qualitative research, applied content analysis and checked the suitability of the codes and themes obtained using a holistic approach. The agreement between the coders was determined to be 94%. Miles and Huberman (1994) reported that for a good study, intercoder agreement should be at least 80% according to the internal consistency formula (consensus / (consensus + disagreement)) (Miles and Huberman, 1994). In order to ensure the external reliability of the present study, data collection process and the overall method study were explained in detail. Articles prepared in accordance with the principles of writing and approved by the review board are published.

RESULTS

This section contains the findings of the content analysis, according to which a total of five main themes and ten sub-themes emerged

The codes of the sub-themes are shown in the table. Under the main theme “What did I expect”, there are two sub-themes, “social interaction” and “venue conditions”. The sub-themes “suitability of activities” and “inadequacy of activities” comprise the main theme “Scope of Activities”. The next main theme, “Was it

accessible”, includes the sub-themes “accessible without problem” and “need for a canteen”. For the main theme “Social Development”, the sub-themes “two heads are better than one” and “becoming independent” were created. The final main theme, “What did I find”, consists of the sub-themes “invaluable” and “legislation barriers”. Certain views expressed by the participants with respect to the above sub-themes and codes are presented in the following paragraphs.

The main theme “What did I expect” concerns the teachers’ expectations prior to the start of the camp and includes two sub-themes, “social interaction” and “venue conditions”. Concerning the former, PT1 answered thusly: “I did not know what we would encounter in the camp. In general, my expectation was an environment where students from different schools could spend time together playing, engaging in aquatic activities, socializing, and talking with each other.” PT8 responded as follows: “My expectation was that the students who came here would come together and socialize, make new friends, realize their self-worth, and enjoy themselves with games and aquatic activities.” With respect to the “venue conditions” sub-theme, PT4 said: “Actually, when I heard about the camp, I expected that fun activities would be held in a pleasant environment, in a clean and well-kept space, within a program prepared beforehand.” Regarding the same topic, PT10 stated: “Actually, I didn’t have much in the way of expectations because I thought that everything would be done through a ready-made program. My sole expectation was that the first children would arrive safely and have their needs met in a safe environment, and I expected the program managers in other sections to act with all of these points in mind and organize the activities accordingly.”

The main theme “Scope of Activities” concerns the views of the teachers regarding the appropriateness of the activities organized in the camp for children. Under this main theme, the two sub-themes “suitability of activities” and “inadequacy of activities” were created. suitability and activity inadequacy. With respect to the first sub-theme, PT2 replied as follows: “There are aquatic activities. There is no sea where we and the children come from, so the children’s swimming skills are not developed, they have not encountered the sea much. From this point of view,

this is a very good thing, we endeavor to help the children acquire swimming skills. Apart from that, there are activities carried out by the camp administrators in order to develop the children’s social skills and ensure their integration. I think it is appropriate because these activities are organized in the form of structured games and activities, taking into account the situations of the children.” PT7 responded: “(There are) children with mild intellectual impairment and hearing impairment. It is debatable whether they are all different from each other or if they are affected to the same extent. But I can say that with the adaptations made, things have been brought to the same level for the children. For example, one student knows which is the right side, the other does not. For this reason, the teacher made it suitable for children by pointing to his right side, using verbal cues or including an example in the activity.” In response to the sub-theme “inadequacy of activities”, PT5 stated: “The activities within the scope of the camp program were aimed at children. But the variety of activities was minimal, and there were occasional problems with the aquatic activities. Because most of the children who come here have not seen the sea. Aquatic activities could have been incorporated more regularly, different game groups could have been established. Children get bored and want to do something in their free time. For this, some tools or activities could have been utilized. After all, these children need special developmental support. In this sense, their needs could have been met.” PT12 commented thus: “There are not enough activities in the camp, the level of activities is suitable for the children, but the activities needed to be developed. There were 3-4 activities and their duration was very short, they were not activities that would take much of the students’ time.”

The main theme “Was it accessible” pertains to the teachers’ views on the suitability of the camp for children. Within this theme, two sub-themes were created, “accessible without problem” and “need for a canteen”. In response to the issue of accessibility, PT9 answered: “It was suitable. Our students had mild intellectual disabilities anyway. Despite that, there were ramps, signs, signage. Access to the places within the camp was easy.” PT6 stated: “I did not see any shortcomings in accessibility. It was possible to roam easily. The width of the ramps, signage, signs, interior

corridors, and rooms were all appropriate. The circulation between the buildings and the access to the sea were convenient.” To the topic of “need for a canteen”, PT3 responded: “There is no problem in accessing the dining hall, dormitory, and the sea within the campground, but the campground itself is a closed area within certain limits, and the children cannot go out and sometimes they want things, so not being able to leave or have a place like a canteen that meets their needs created a problem.” PT10 expressed the opinion that “The facility was strong in terms of accessibility for children. There was simply no place for children to provide for their individual care needs and wishes. The children were told to bring their own supplies, but they cannot bring a washing machine themselves. Sometimes they may need something they don’t have. There should have been a washing machine in each room, or a laundry room, and a place where they could obtain what they wanted.”

The main theme “Social Development”, which interrogates the teachers’ thoughts on the effects of the camp on the social development of the children, contains two sub-themes, “two heads are better than one” and “becoming independent”. Regarding the first sub-theme, PT5 was of the view that “The effects on the children’s social development are absolutely very positive. We see that our students, who did not speak at all when we first came, communicate with students from other provinces and chat with them. I think these camps will be more beneficial in integrating them by placing them together with their typically-developing peers.” PT8 responded thus: “We organize events with our students for their schools all year. Similar activities were held here as well. However, the difference was that here the child felt that he was cared for. They met students from different provinces, socialized, and felt that they were not alone. They made new friends and when we saw the happiness on their faces, we realized that they had a lovely camp experience as well.” With respect to the sub-theme “becoming independent”, PT4 commented: “There was very serious socialization between the students, there was mixing and socialization both among themselves and with students from outside, and they influenced each other. They could not meet their own needs on their own, their families helped, but seeing each other here, they started to

do their own work, for example, making their beds, arranging their closets, arranging their belongings, etc., they saw that they could do this.” PT5 replied: “During the one-week camp, I witnessed the positive aspects of this, socialization took place at a high level, there was commingling, I saw that the environment for establishing friendships with each other was very, very good, I think that their ability to act on their own developed in this direction. I saw my students, who previously could not go anywhere without permission, could get food on their own, go to the bathroom on their, go to the doctor on their own after getting a sunburn at the sea. I never saw any of my students ask if I could go together with them or take them to the doctor after getting sunburned, instead I witnessed them going on their own, and this made me very happy.”

The main theme “What did I find”, concerning teachers’ thoughts about their post-camp experience, consists of two sub-themes, “invaluable” and “legislation barriers”. Regarding the first, “invaluable”, PT9 remarked: “There was an unexpected situation when it came to this. I didn’t know what to expect at the camp. Now I know what the camp is. That would create different expectations, and there was a thought about how I could involve these children in such activities. We were aware of such things before, but I did not know that it could be so effective and productive for the children.” PT6 commented: “I wish that there were more such activities from the Ministry. I expect inter-provincial and inter-regional [activities]. I believe that will be more useful. Here, we met with teachers from other provinces, we shared our professional knowledge, and I think we will be more useful in our school by eliminating the shortcomings we see in ourselves.” In the sub-theme of “legislation barriers”, PT7 answered, “Actually, I have known the organization since the beginning. Getting to and from the camp could have been a little easier. Buying tickets, canceling them, and making payments to the company were tiring for the school administrators. Perhaps MYS or MNE vehicles could have been used to come here. Or, if the transportation contract were to include a clause that the contractor company shall provide free transportation for social events, I think the transportation problem would be eliminated. It is necessary to reduce bureaucracy.

When people are coming on holiday to relieve the year's exhaustion, they shouldn't have to be in a rush, I think we should be able to solve this very easily." PT11 expressed the following views: *"From now on, if such a camp is planned, we can proceed a little more professionally. For example, one-stop solutions can be produced for problems such as pre-camp correspondence and transport to the camp. We might want the camp to be in a different area, we might want it to be in a different region. When we participate in such activities, we can contribute to the work of enriching the very activities that will take place during the camp."*

DISCUSSION

Leisure time activities, which include physical exercise and artistic/cultural activities, contribute to the development of social behaviors while satisfying the individual's spiritual needs and improving their mood (Doster et al., 2006). Youth camps, organized with the goal of putting the leisure time of young people to good use, enable young people to gain new life experiences, spend time together and share spaces with their peers, realize their shortcomings during group work, and recognize their abilities (Fort et al., 2017). In line with this, our study was conducted to investigate the views of the teachers who participated in an barrier free youth camp as regards their experiences prior to, during, and after the camp. On the subject of "social interaction", a sub-theme of the main theme "What did I expect", the teachers commented that they had expected a camp environment full of aquatic activities, programs suited to the development level of the students, sports activities, and educational games. In addition, they expected the camp to provide an environment for communication, in which students from different provinces and different schools would socialize, and new friendships would be established among the children. They expressed a general optimism regarding the future of the accessible camp, that it would continue with various activities, with positive effects on the social development of the children. Outdoor activities performed with teams have been found to foster the development of self-confidence in children and young people, reciprocally enhancing their communication (Marchant et al., 2019; Slingerland et al., 2020; Anderson vd., 2018; Flynn vd., 2019). Esentaş et al. (2016) concluded

in their study that nature camps offer positive cultural, social, and spiritual contributions to students. These results support the expectations of the teachers elicited in the present study as regards the "social interaction" sub-theme.

The sub-theme "venue conditions", also under the main theme "What did I expect", investigated the teachers' views on such matters as ensuring the security of the location where the camp would be held, providing a beautiful, clean and well-kept area, and preparing the camp environment for activities and to satisfy basic needs. In this vein, meeting the security needs of the participants and providing a clean and well-maintained environment in which they can feel comfortable can create a satisfactory experience for them. The sense of peace associated with an individual's security, privacy, and comfort (Schlesinger, Cervera, & Cabanero, 2014) should include people's need for security and privacy in a single place (Amoah, Radder, & Eyk 2016). Aksoz et al. (2012) reported that the primary concern of the participants who had experiences with camps prior to joining the camp in their study was how to meet their daily needs (showers, meals, etc.). These findings are consistent with the expectations of the teachers in our study pertaining to venue conditions.

With respect to "suitability of activities", a sub-theme of the main theme "Scope of Activities", the teachers considered the camp activities to be appropriate for the level of the students, having been adapted according to their levels the both during the camp activities of the teachers and with the support of the camp leaders, and thought that students easily performed the activities, which were implemented in a certain order. In contrast, examining the sub-theme "inadequacy of activities", some teachers stated that the number and variety of the programs are insufficient, that activities involving coordinative skills in some sea and land activities are difficult for students, preliminary preparations cannot be made before the activities, and they are unaware of most of the activities. In addition, the importance of enriching the programs, increasing the number of activities, diversifying and developing the activities, choosing team leaders, creating different game groups and getting the opinions of the participating teachers before the camp has emerged. There was no consensus concerning the implementation of the activities in

accordance with the stated objectives camp and for the development of the students. Activities in which people participate in their leisure time create important opportunities in terms of personal development such as expressing themselves, recognizing their abilities, evaluating their creativity, and improving their language, consciousness, social, emotional, and motor skills (Aytaç, 2003). Certain adaptations to athletic programs are necessary in order for individuals with special needs to participate in sports activities and benefit from them (Schultheis, Boswell & Decker, 2000; Clark ve Nwokah, 2010, Bell, 2021). Avan et al. (2019) reported that activities associated with daily life and carried out in a practical manner enhance learning, supporting the views of the teachers in our study on the sub-theme of “suitability of activities”. However, in order for the camp program to achieve its purpose, it is essential to plan the camp activities so that they meet the needs of the students, secure the close participation of expert teachers familiar with the students’ strengths and deficiencies during the planning stage. Outside the classroom environment, educational activities that activate all the sense organs and enable students to grasp elements of the environment should be carried out (Gruno & Gibbons, 2020). In general, camp programs for people with disabilities are carried out in an environment where materials are specially identified, staff assistance is available, and appropriate activities are available (Knapp et al., 2015). Yükseltürk et al. (2016) reported an increase in students’ perception levels related to problem-solving skills in their summer camp study, but the significance of the findings could not be determined; they emphasized that the number of activities should be increased and similar activities disseminated. These results align with the opinions of the teachers with regard to the sub-theme “inadequacy of activities”.

Regarding accessibility, the first sub-theme “accessible without problem” reflects the teachers’ statements that they had no difficulties in reaching the camp nor finding their way around the camp, where they were guided by the camp managers after their arrival. A camp should be planned in such a way as to be accessible to all participants, so they arrive smoothly and comfortably, thus generating positive feelings about the camp. In order for integration to be successful, the participant needs to be socially integrated into the

program. In addition, the program should ensure the participation of all individuals collectively while being accessible to all participants; at a minimum, these two criteria must be fulfilled (Brookman, 2003; D’Eloia & Price, 2018). Experiences with other aspects, including accommodation, outdoor activities, and transportation, also affect the satisfaction level of camp visitors (Öztürk & Başarangil, 2019). In a qualitative study conducted by Hırça (2012), the teachers expressed the opinion that “the location of the camp was ideal for transportation, security, and providing all kinds of facilities”, thus supporting the importance of this sub-theme as indicated by the views of the participants in our study.

On the topic of the sub-theme “need for a canteen”, the consensus emerged that due to the lack of a canteen, the students were not always able to meet their alimentary and other individual needs and that the location of the camp afforded limited opportunities to reach places such as canteens and buffets. The habit of snacking is central to the modern diet and therefore may be considered within the framework of basic needs. Studies in the literature have reported that the regular eating habits of adolescent students are quite insufficient and they thus have adopted the habit of eating snacks between meals (Büyük and Özdemir, 2018; Özmen et al., 2007). Glasser (2005) stated that the level at which one’s daily needs are met contributes to the individual’s well-being and happiness. In this vein, the fact that the students who attended the camp expressed the desire to meet their daily needs for snacks and other personal needs supports the findings of that study.

Regarding the sub-theme “two heads are better than one”, under the main theme “Social Development”, the teachers observed that the camp provided students a chance to get to know each other and form friendships, mingle with students from different provinces, improve communication skills, meet social needs, and develop play skills. The teachers also noted that the students felt that they were cared for and that they were not alone. Furthermore, the teachers stated that mixed camps should be planned and implemented, given that there is no place other than school and family life for these students to socialize. Well-planned barrier free youth camps are important for students with disabilities in terms of communicating with their peers, acquiring

friendships, and developing socialization skills. Camps represent a great opportunity for students both with and without disabilities to become better acquainted with and accept their peers (Stewart, 2017) while guiding students toward healthy social development (Knapp et al., 2015). Leisure activities are important for all individuals, but leisure activities are even more so for people with disabilities by allowing them to fully integrate with their social environment (Pagán-Rodríguez, 2014; Melbøe & Ytterhus, 2017). These results support the views of the teachers revealed in our study pertaining to the sub-theme “two heads are better than one”.

On the topic of the sub-theme “becoming independent”, the teachers expressed the view that the students acquired experience in meeting their personal needs, could act without assistance, and would be able to lead their lives without being dependent on others. Participation in an accessible youth camp contributes to the acquisition of basic life skills for students with disabilities, allowing them to gain experience in meeting their needs. Experience is formed by directly observing individual or actual participation in activities (Sathish & Venkatesakumar, 2011). In this vein, students participating in camp activities contribute to their ability to act independently. Therapeutic Recreation has been defined as a holistic process that deliberately employs recreational and experiential interventions to achieve social, emotional, intellectual, physical, and/or spiritual change in order to maintain and improve health status, functional capacities, and quality of life (Carter & Van Andel, 2019). This concept confirms the idea that individuals contribute to the development of independent living skills in a camp environment. Studies have shown that disabled students participating in a camp improve their independent decision-making skills while also learning teamwork through camp activities (Henderson, 2007; Daughrity et al., 2020). Cobanoglu et al. (2020) found that the students who participated in their study enjoyed the activities carried out in the camp and felt more independent and free in the camp environment, results which are aligned with the views of the teachers in the present study.

The sub-theme “invaluable”, under the main theme “What did I find”, concerns the teachers’ views on the positive outcomes afforded by the camp. The feedback obtained from the teachers

was that the students were happy to participate in the camp, that the latter was productive and contributed to the students’ acquisition of independent living skills, but that the camps should be further developed and duplicated in different regions of the country. Additionally, they stated that they had earned camp experience for themselves, learned about the camp, recognized their deficiencies, had the chance to meet their colleagues, shared information, and acquired different experiences. When barrier free youth camps are completed, students with disabilities may demonstrate progress in numerous ways, gaining positive experiences while having fun. Learning environments outside of school enable students to acquire fun, varied, and natural experiences thanks to the different activities they offer, while providing rich learning opportunities by eschewing books and the classroom environment (Saraç, 2017). A camp environment, as a learning environment, can also affect the personality and social development of individuals, affording opportunities to make new friends, take part in group activities and become acquainted with group members, as well as acclimate them to social life (Povilaitis & Tamminen, 2018). A review of the literature reveals that various camp programs implemented for groups with different characteristics engender positive outcomes, especially therapeutic recreation, and camps operating within this scope positively affect the health, social, and psychological development of individuals (Wozencroft et al., 2019; Neville et al., 2019). Outdoor learning activities in nature provide multifaceted benefits, especially for the cognitive, sensory, social, and health development of individuals, as our results for this sub-theme indicate.

Regarding “legislation barriers”, the second sub-theme of the main theme “What did I find”, the teachers commented that the duration of the camp was insufficient, the bureaucratic processes involved in camp participation should be reduced, the content requires enrichment, the planning should be more professional, and a greater number of more diverse youth camps should be organized in different regions. Well-designed, efficient preparation, implementation, and termination processes for barrier free youth camps are critical for fostering a more successful camp experience (Esentaş et al., 2017). Concerning the disadvantages of field trips, Kubat (2018) reported

that many of the pre-service teachers stated that legal proceedings progressed slowly and that potential security problems may arise. These results are consistent with the views of the teachers participating in the current study on this topic.

Based on the themes obtained as a result of our research, the participating teachers were found to have positive expectations regarding the camp environment, and these pre-camp expectations would contribute to the socialization of the students. As for their experiences during the camp, the teachers stated that although the activities prepared for the students were arranged with a view to the students' characteristics, the content should be further enriched and developed. Regarding the issue of accessibility in the camp, they commented that it was suitable for students with intellectual disabilities, but expressed concern over the lack of a canteen for the students to meet their daily needs. They also remarked that the camp was beneficial for students to integrate, socialize, and act independently. At the conclusion of the camp, the teachers confirmed that the time spent in the camp was productive both for their professional development and for the students and that they were satisfied, but specified that the duration and number of camps should be increased while the arrival and departure procedures require simplification. In line with these results, we offer the following suggestions:

- Eliminate the deficiencies of barrier free youth camps and include field experts in planning.
- Provide camp leaders with training within the scope of in-service adapted physical activity, oriented toward their program responsibilities.
- Organize the camps more than once a year in different regions, in such a way that students with different types of disability can coexist.
- Organize mixed and inclusive youth camps where students will be together with their typically developing peers.
- The procedures employed at the point of participation and transportation to the camp should be simplified.

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Conflict of interest

The authors do not have a statement of conflict regarding the research.

Ethics Statement

The study protocol was approved by Muş Alpaslan University Ethics Committee (04.07.2022-55505).

Author Contributions

Both authors contributed equally at all stages of the research

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