

## Problems faced by special education school principals : mixed methods research

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**Abstract.** The aim of this research was to examine the problems faced by special education school principals in Turkey. For this purpose, with the permission of the district directorate of national education, data were gathered by interviews with 9 principals who were working at special education schools in Kepez district of Antalya province and voluntarily participated in the research. In this study, in which the convergent mixed method research method was used, the research data collected through semi-structured interviews were analyzed using theme, descriptive and content analysis method in the qualitative phase, and using descriptive statistics based on the frequency of the themes in the quantitative phase. Research findings indicated that special education school principals faced problems in management, bureaucracy, and educational policies; accordingly, it was found that managers could cope with some of these problems, and they needed comprehensive support from the central administration to solve some of them. As a result, it was understood that the number and quality of personnel, the physical conditions and capacities of the schools, the materials specific to the special education field, the contents of the curriculum and resource books, and most importantly, the funds provided by the state were insufficient. In addition, it was revealed that the bureaucratic process did not work fast and effectively, and that families with children in need of special education could not provide adequate support for their children's education.

**Keywords:** Special education, schools, principals, teachers

### Introduction

Education is one of the most important factors that fulfill the function of transferring culture from generation to generation (Başgöz, 1995). At the same time, education is one of the most important tools of development and the most effective tool that increases the creative power and productivity of the society and provides the opportunity to improve the abilities of the individual by providing equality of opportunity (Adem, 1993). "No one can be deprived of the right to education and training", which is the 42nd article of the Constitution, and on this occasion, the education rights of citizens are protected in accordance with international conventions (TR Constitution, 1982). Individuals have the right to receive education in line with their potential abilities. (Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948). Thus, it has been accepted that each individual has the right to get education, taking into account their individual differences. States are responsible for educating their citizens as useful individuals both for themselves and for their society by providing the necessary education services. This obligation is also a basic criterion for civilizations to ensure the social and moral development and continuity (Baş, 2007).

Although education and training is the most fundamental right of people, this process should not be seen as just a legal obligation or a right. Because education, which should continue for a lifetime, should also be accepted as an ideal lifestyle (Güleç, Çelik, & Demirhan, 2012 and MEB, 1973). Considering the equality of opportunity in education, "special education" emerges as a complementary and integrating category of the education process, since the physical and emotional potential of the individual and his current abilities should be taken into account while providing education services (Baykoç, 2010 ; Diken & Batu , 2010). Beyond trying to bring these individuals together and train them, special education services should ensure that these individuals are healthy both emotionally and physically at an optimum level and that their interactions with society develop properly. Special education is the education of

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specially trained personnel, developed education programs for the education of children in need of special education, and activities carried out in an educational environment suitable for the disabilities and characteristics of these children (Özsoy, Özyürek, Eripek, 2002).

A significant part of the current problems found so far in the researches on the problems faced by special education school principals are those that the principals working in special education institutions and the inspectors who supervise the institutions are not special education graduates and they do not have enough knowledge in the field, part time teachers who do not have knowledge about the field and teachers who become special education teachers with field changes with a short-term certificate program do not know enough about the field and they cause conflict environment by putting the principals in a difficult situation in front of parents, and it is not possible to increase the quality of special education practices with principals who do not have experience in special education (Özyürek, 2008).

In this study, it is aimed to determine, understand and interpret the problems faced by the principals working in special education schools affiliated to the Ministry of National Education. It is thought that the results of the research will reveal the problems faced by special education school principals, and the recommendations to these problems will contribute to the field of management of special education schools and will shed light on both the top policy makers in the planning and programming processes and the school management in their implementation.

For this purpose answers to following questions for both qualitative and quantitative strands were sought:

1. Qual: What kind of management problems do special education school principals face?  
Quan: What is the frequency of the themes of the management problems faced by special education principals, and does the frequency of themes of these problems differ according to the duty, the branch, the seniority and the graduation of special education principals?
2. Qual: What kind of problems originated from education policies do special education school principals face?  
Quan: What is the frequency of the themes of the problems originated from education policies faced by special education principals, and does the frequency of themes of these problems differ according to the duty, the branch, the seniority and the graduation of special education principals?
3. Qual: What kind of economic problems do special education school principals face?  
Quan: What is the frequency of the themes of the economic problems faced by special education principals, and does the frequency of themes of these problems differ according to the duty, the branch, the seniority and the graduation of special education principals?

## **Method and paradigm of research**

This research was carried out as a mixed methods study. Mixed methods research design can be defined as a process which combines, analyzes, and mixes both quantitative and qualitative research and methods in a single study in order to understand a research problem comprehensively (Green, Caracelli, & Graham, 1989; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Morse & Niehaus, 2009; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009, Gunbayi, 2020a). While the paradigm of this research in qualitative strand is interpretive as it is subjective and intersubjective views of the individuals, the paradigm of this research in quantitative strand is functional as it is descriptive quantitative research (Gunbayi & Sorm, 2018, Gunbayi & Sorm, 2020; Gunbayi, 2020 a,b). Accordingly, in this research a convergent mixed methods design with the data-transformation variant was used.

In the qualitative strand of this research descriptive case study design with holistic multiple cases was used. Descriptive case studies have been among the most common case studies. They can offer rich and revealing insights into the social world of a particular case (Yin, 2017). In quantitative strand, descriptive statistics based on the frequency of the themes coded were used. Frequency distributions are descriptive

statistics that provide informative and summarized data sets in tables and graphical illustrations (Allen, 2017).

### *Sampling*

The population of the research consisted of principals working in Special Education Schools within the boundaries of Antalya province Kepez District in the 2021-2022 education year. The sample consisted of 3 principals and 6 vice-principals working in special education schools on a voluntary basis (Table 1).

**Table 1.**

*Distribution of demographic variables of the participants*

Participant	Status	Seniority	Graduation	Branch
A	Principal	15 and more years	Undergraduate	Theology
B	Vice-principal	6-10 years	Undergraduate	Physical education
C	Principal	15 and more years	Graduate	Physical education
D	Vice-principal	6-10 years	Undergraduate	Visual arts
E	Vice-principal	3-5 years	Undergraduate	Psychological Counselling and Guidance
F	Vice-principal	15 and more years	Undergraduate	Special education
G	Vice-principal	6-10 years	Graduate	Music
H	Vice-principal	15 and more years	Undergraduate	Psychological Counselling and Guidance
I	Principal	15 and more years	Undergraduate	Theology

### *Data collection*

In the research, data were collected through individual face to face interview with semi-structured form, which consisted of main and probe questions prepared by the researcher by taking expert opinion and within the scope of the conceptual framework created by the review of the relevant literature. First of all, the literature was searched, and interview questions were prepared, and expert opinion was sought. Afterwards, the form, which also included the demographic characteristics of the people, was given its final form and made ready for the research. The interview form consisted of 5 demographic questions, 3 basic questions and 9 probe questions.

### *Ethical procedures*

Scientific research ethics were followed at all stages of the research: (1) ethics committee approval of this research was obtained from Akdeniz University Social Sciences Ethics Committee at the meeting of 14 decision numbered 381 on November 4th, 2021, (2) permission was obtained from the Antalya Provincial Directorate of National Education for the implementation of the research and (3) an informed consent form was obtained from the participants before the interview.

### *Validity and reliability of the research*

In order to increase the internal and external validity and reliability based on the criteria of credibility, transferability, confirmability and dependability, (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) of the qualitative data, followings were carried out: (1) In order to increase the internal validity (credibility) of the research, an interview form was developed by taking expert opinion and within the scope of the conceptual framework created by the review of the relevant literature and qualitative data were combined, analysed and mixed with quantitative data to understand the research problem comprehensively. (2) In order to increase the external validity (transferability) of the research, the data obtained were generalized analytically by comparisons with the similar researches and a purposive sampling method was chosen based on voluntarism to get opinions and experiences (3) In order to increase the internal reliability



(confirmability) of the research data were coded by two independent researchers and Cohen's kappa coefficient was calculated to determine inter-rater reliability of themes. as 0.81, which indicated that there was a perfect level of agreement between the codings d) In order to increase the external reliability (dependability) of the research, all data collected were kept to prove on demand (Landis and Koach, 1977; Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Cohen, Mannion and Morrison, 2007, Gunbayi, 2018).

### Data analysis

In qualitative strand, after the interviews were completed, the recorded audio files were transcribed verbatim using the NVIVO 10 software and the obtained data were analyzed with thematic, descriptive and content analysis methods. In quantitative strand, themes of qualitative data the inter-coder reliability of which was confirmed and demographic data of principals merged into numbers so as to determine whether it differed according to opinions of the principals in terms of their duty, seniority, branch and graduation (Kelle, 1995; Cohen, Mannion & Morrison, 2007). Thus qualitative research "NVIVO 10" software for qualitative strand and excel for quantitative strand were used in the analysis of the data obtained in the study.

## Findings

### Qualitative findings

#### 1. Management problems

In Table 2 the themes related to the management problems faced by special education school principals and the distribution of themes are given.

**Table 2.**

*Management problems faced by special education school principals*

Management problems faced by special education school principals	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I
Problems originated from families' conditions and approaches	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Bureaucratic problems	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	
Inter-organizations communication problems			✓	✓	✓			✓	✓
Problems caused by lack of personnel	✓	✓	✓					✓	

When interpreted the administrative problems faced by special education school principals in general, as in Table 1, it was seen that the problems originated from families' conditions and approaches took the first place. The opinions of the participants on this theme are given below;

*Families' belief in school and teachers ensures that the education given at school is reinforced voluntarily by the family at home. This leads to results in behavioral change in a short time (A 1, 1)*

*Since our school has the potential of parents with a low level of education, they interfere in our education system a lot. This is the problem that arises from their unconsciousness in education (B 1, 1)*

*While the attitudes of conscious and caring families increase the quality, the attitudes of the opposite type of families harm.(C 1,1)*

*The attitudes of some families towards school and their lack of interest towards the child at the desired level cause the student's lack of development at home. (D1, 1)*

*It affects too much. Families can sometimes evaluate the event financially. But sometimes more, really accepting their children and giving them their love, accelerate the development of their children.( E 1, 1)*

*Families are socio-economically inadequate and may cause behavioral problems in some of the students. Students whose expectations are not met may show aggressive behavior.( F 1, 1)*

*.... The family, who can understand their children, automatically develops a positive attitude towards school. As I said, it is very important to communicate with your child, the family that can ensure proper communication automatically develops a positive attitude towards school. In other words, if the family can say, let's go to our school, if they can say goodbye to their school happily, or if they can go out together, yes, the child's view of school changes. But if in the family there is an understanding that nothing will happen to this child, what will happen if he or she goes to school, then the child's attitude towards school is really troubled and we observe behavioral problems more.*

*Now, this situation is not only in special education, but also in other things, if the family is involved, the child's behavior changes, his education develops positively, that is, if he or she is in contact with the teacher, if he or she is in contact with the school, the child's behavior develops in a positive way. But if he or she is not interested, if he or she does not pay attention to the child's self-care, if he or she is not in contact with the school, if he or she is not in contact with the teacher, it happens in a negative way.....(H 1, 1)*

*Families are very tired and unhappy in this process. If family-school-child communication can be established well, the process can continue without any problems. (I 1, 1)*

Later, bureaucratic problems and Inter-organizations communication problems were effective in the management problems faced by special education principals. The opinions of the participants on this themes are given below:

*From the school institution level, the District Directorate of National Education, the Provincial Directorate of National Education and the Ministry of National Education, respectively, are faced with a number of problems. For example, the District Special Education Evaluation Board, which directs student enrollments, often directs students even though the quota is full in our school's e-school system.(A 1, 2)*

*... It is necessary for people who are knowledgeable and experienced in special education to take part in the bureaucracy, and I believe that in this way, the process will be accelerated and solution oriented. The arrival of trained and well-equipped people in the bureaucracy will ensure that the work to be carried out in the field will be carried out more efficiently and healthily.(B 1, 2)*

*Although we are in ICT age and we do most of the official work on the computer, but still the filing archiving system continues. We still deliver documents with wet signature to the district MEM.(D 1, 2)*

*It is a bureaucratic problem that authorized persons do not have knowledge about special education...(F 1, 2)*

*... Although the bureaucratic process has alleviated many things with the DYS program we have used, the bureaucratic processes are still cumbersome, unfortunately. In other words, you are sending an article from here, but the system asks you for national education from the province/district again by making the original copy of that article as the original, that is, it was processed with an electronic signature. This bureaucratic understanding interrupts the work.*



*...Our age is 21. We are in the 21st century, at this point, the internet age, the software age, the information age, but unfortunately we still have bureaucratic obstacles at this point. As I said, but I look at it in this sense in terms of the most important legal process management. In terms of management, the bureaucratic process of the special education process is predominantly in this direction, I can say that; (1.) Staff(2.) As managers, we do many things, we are like civil servants, in fact, most of the day is spent with constant correspondence. In fact, many of my executive friends do not know what we are. In other words, I don't think that we are able to fully perform our essential duty, our duty as a principal apart from the formal correspondence. (G1, 2)*

*Now there are managers responsible for us at the center, they must have worked in the field once. In other words, even the concepts we say, most of the foreigners, for example, you call support education, look at their face, they must be from the field, they must be experienced. Since we do not have such managers, we have a lot of problems.(H1, 2)*

*Communication should be solution oriented. Unsolved problems multiply even more. Therefore, it is necessary to increase the number of personnel who can empathize with solution oriented. (B1, 3)*

*It will be useful to establish communication between health institutions and MEB institutions. (G.M 3)*

*As a system, there is a certain integration with MEB institutions and district MEB institutions, DYS system, but there is a certain integration with other institutions of the state, such as health, municipality, population, etc. interaction is less...(D 1, 3)*

*Inter-organizations communication should be increased, disconnections should be resolved. Awareness will increase as the society accepts us as "WE EXIST" and the institutions accept us. (M1, 3)*

*Now there is the National Education, which we are in contact with, there are RAMs, there are hospitals. Hospitals can sometimes misdiagnose. Likewise, RAM can place students who are not suitable for us in our school. Or they place the student who needs to come to us in other schools. We have such problems with hospitals and RAMs...*

*There is a very frequent request for data with the National Education, the number of students, the class sizes, however, they cause disruption to our work by pressing a button.*

*Communication between institutions should be increased. (I 1, 3)*

The problem of the lack of personnel were also influential among the management problems faced by special education principals. The opinions of the participants on this theme are given below.

*We are experiencing problems because there is no nurse staff in our school and there is no appointment because there are individuals who use drugs. (A 1, 4)*

*We have to work with personnel who do not know the job and special training. This leads to the inability to provide the necessary education to students with special educational needs. This is then reflected from the students to the parents, and the parents complain about these issues. Since we do not work with the personnel with the necessary experience, the student inevitably cannot receive the necessary training. The parent isn't happy about it either. (B1, 4)*

*The absence of cleaning personnel, security personnel and physical therapists creates problems.(C 1, 4)*

...The biggest problem is that our teacher colleagues who pay additional tuition fees, do not embrace the work very much, saying that I will leave here in three months, five months or a year, because they can't see their future in life here, they don't feel like they belong here anyway (G 1, 4)

## 2. Problems originated from education policies

In Table 3 the themes related to problems originated from education policies faced by special education school principals and the distribution of themes are given.

**Table 3.**

*Problems originated from education policies faced by special education school principals*

Problems originated from education policies	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I
Curriculum related issues	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Having problems with students with ASD	✓	✓	✓				✓	✓	✓

As in Table 2, it was seen that the curriculum related issues ranked first among the problems originated from the Education Policies that special education school principals generally faced. The opinions of the participants on this theme are given below:

*It would be a right step to update the current curriculum according to the medium-heavy level of the students. Unfortunately, it is not possible to use some of the books of the Ministry of National Education. (A 2, 1)*

*It is not aimed at special education students (with moderate-severe intellectual disability) and does not match exactly with the students at my school. The curriculum should be prepared according to the incidents and events in the field.(B 2, 1)*

*The curriculum is not suitable for the level of students at the institution where I work. It is prepared for medium students.( C 2, 1)*

*In Turkish and mathematics textbooks, the curriculum that will respond to every student level is appropriate. However, other course materials and books are not available to be suitable for every student.( D 2, 1)*

*Frequent changes in the curriculum. (M 2, 1)*

*Lack of appropriate course programs for the type of disability (Mild autism-slight mental illness should be a separate program)... Short duration of courses other than field courses, such as music, physical education, visual arts, etc. (F 2, 1)*

*...Curriculum should be made available to teachers at the point of a diversified curriculum filled in by the ministry. I see the curriculum incomplete on this subject ... (G 2, 1)*

*Now our school medium-heavy practice school materials and curriculum are generally prepared for light students and there is no standard...(H 2, 1)*

*Even if it is in the same class, it should be applicable according to the level.(I 2, 1)*

Then, it came to the sub-theme of having problems with students with ASD -Autism Spectrum Disorder-, of the problems experienced in education policies. Below are the opinions of the participants on this theme.

*We experience more problems in the autism group...(M 2 2)*



*We have the most problems in the education of students with Autism Spectrum Disorder...(B 2, 2)*

*We have problems especially in the education of students with autism spectrum disorder. We face intense behavioral problems. (C2, 2)*

*...autism is very distressing, that is, the number of students with autism is increasing day by day and they are educated in the same school as middle-weight and mental. However, I think that autism schools should be separated. Because their fields should be very different and their approach to education should be very different. I think that it would be much more effective for teachers who are only interested in autism to be with the teachers who are specialized in autism...(G 2, 2)*

*We mostly have problems with students with moderate-severe autism in their education. Changing behavior and maintaining it is very difficult.(H 2, 2)*

*The education process of students with ASD is not efficient.(I 2, 2)*

### 3. Economic problems

In Table 4 the themes related to economic problems faced by special education school principals and the distribution of themes are given.

**Table 4.**

*Economic problems faced by special education school principals*

Economic problems	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I
School not physically designed suitable for special education	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓
The effects of low or high socio-economic status of families on children	✓	✓	✓			✓		✓	
The materials not developed according to the characteristics of the children.	✓	✓		✓					
Insufficient salaries allocated to staff									✓

As in Table 4, it was seen that the sub-theme of School not physically designed suitable for special education among the economic-based problems faced by special education school principals in general ranked first. The opinions of the participants on this theme are given below.

*Our school is physically unsuitable for meeting the educational needs of special education students. The building is old and made of masonry, workshop, playground, garden, etc. insufficient.(A 3, 1)A*

*Since our school was not designed as a special education school, it was not planned, it was later converted from another school, so it is not efficient compared to special education. We have these problems as the classrooms are small, the stairs to the floors are steep, there is no elevator, there are problems in the trip of the children in wheelchairs in the school and they go up to the floors, there is no ramp.(B 3, 1)*

*The architectural structure of my school is not suitable for a private education institution...(C 3, 1)*

*This is a special education school, we are missing an elevator here.(D 3, 1)*

*Buildings built vertically as special education schools create negativities for students. Environmental planning should be planned for these students. (M 3, 1)*



*For the school, for our own school, I would like to have a garden, sports facilities, for example, a pool. A special education child should not only enter the classroom and be educated, but there should also be activities in the garden, there should be activities in the gym, he or she needs to touch, hear she needs to do sports, for example, some students have physical disabilities, it would be very useful if there was a pool, for example, or a pool that he could go to. . But unfortunately, even the garden is very small and insufficient for us.(H 3, 1)*

*For physically handicapped individuals, there should be an elevator for the disabled and a ramp for the disabled. Technological devices should be fully equipped in special education classes.(I 3, 1)*

The effects of low or high socio-economic status of families on children was the second most important economic problem. The opinions of the participants on this theme are given below.

*...Those who are in high economic standing receive additional training from outside in addition to their education at school. (M 3, 2)*

*...If you say the socio-economic environment in which the family lives, I believe that it affects these children negatively because the limited and underprivileged environment in which the family lives. (F 3, 2)*

*The low socio-economic level creates problems on the socialization of children.(C 3 2)*

*Families are socio-economically inadequate and may cause behavioral problems in some of the students. Students whose expectations are not met may show aggressive behavior.(F 3 2)*

*If the student is in an environment with a high socio-economic status, children's behaviors change for the better, change in a positive way and become permanent. If the socio-economic status is low, it is the same for other students in other fields, and it is difficult to change behavior and make it permanent. If the socio-economic situation of the family and the environment is high, if it does not contribute positively, it falls behind a little. (H 3 2)*

Later, the problem arose that of the materials not developed according to the characteristics of the children. The opinions of the participants on this theme are given below.

*Teaching materials are not provided in accordance with the disability and age group.(A 3, 3)*

*As I said at the beginning of the materials, I said the same thing in the training plan, that is, since it is not determined which materials will work exactly on the field, the materials are not made according to the level of the children and their disability. Incoming materials become unusable, so they go down to the field, meet with children and schools one-on-one, plan according to the level of children's disability and remove them in this way, making it more useful for schools to use the materials. (B 3, 3)*

*We have difficulty in finding materials suitable for each learning area.(D 3, 3)*

Finally, as a sub-theme of the economic-based problem, Insufficient salaries allocated to staff was mentioned. The opinions of the participants on this theme are given below.

*...I think that it will be effective to direct staff members in special education schools and to encourage them financially, in other words, if our teacher friend works here, it will be effective to encourage him to improve his salary, otherwise this blood loss will continue... (G 3, 4)*

## Quantative findings

### 1. Problems according to Duty

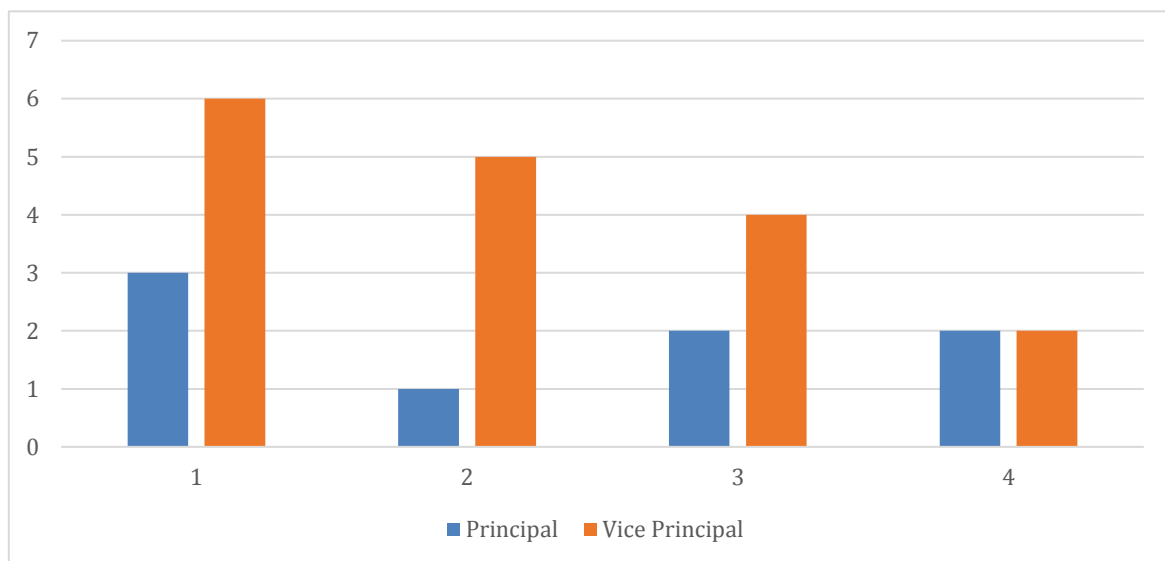
#### Management problems

The frequencies of the themes on the mangement problems faced by special education school principals according to duty are presented in Table 5 and Figure 1.

**Table 5.**

*The frequency of the themes of mangement problems faced by special education school principals according to duty*

Management problems	Principal (f)	Vice Principal (f)
1 Problems originated from families' conditions and approaches	3	6
2 Bureaucratic problems	1	5
3 Inter-organizations communication problems	2	4
4 Problems caused due to lack of personnel	2	2



**Figure 1.** *The graphic of the frequencies of the themes of mangement problems faced by special education school principals according to duty*

When we interpreted the views of special education school principals on management problems they faced according to the duty, it was understood that special education school vice-principals were more likely to encounter problems originated from the conditions and approaches of families, bureaucratic problems, Inter-organizations communication problems, and problems caused from the lack of personnel compared to the principals. From this point of view, it can be interpreted that vice principals were more active in the school management.

#### *Problems originated from education policies*

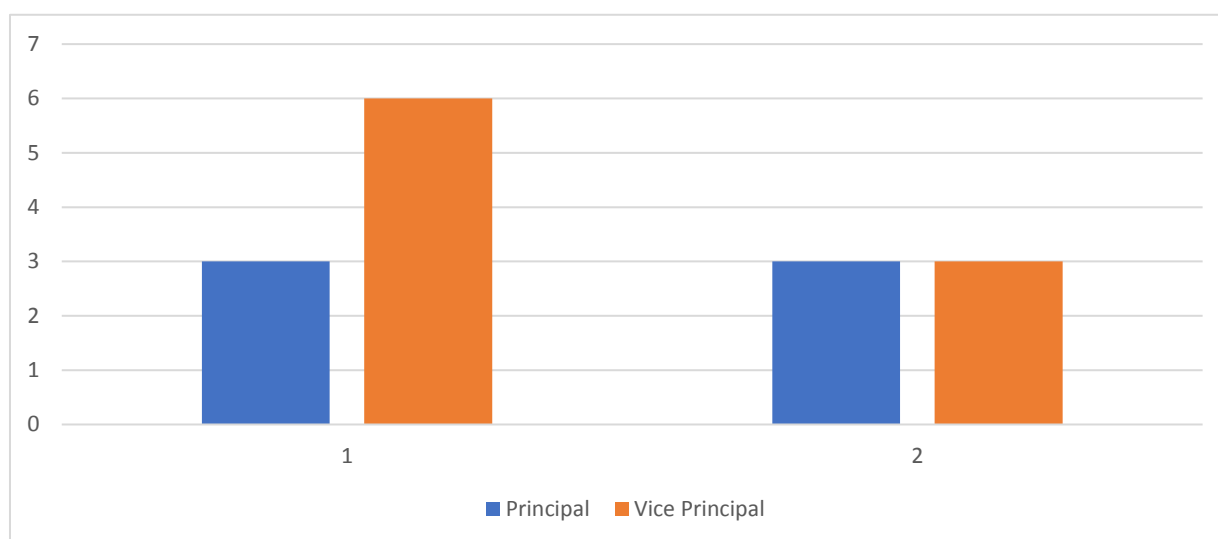


The frequencies of the themes on problems originated from education policies faced by special education school principals according to duty are presented in Table 6 and Figure 2.

**Table 6.**

*The frequency of the themes of problems originated from education policies faced by special education school principals according to status*

Problems originated from education policies	Principal (f)	Vice Principal (f)
1 Curriculum related issues	3	6
2 Having problems with students with ASD	3	3



**Figure 2.** *The graphic of the frequencies of the themes of problems originated from education policies faced by special education school principals according to duty*

When we interpreted the opinions of special education school principals regarding the problems originated from education policies they faced according to duty, they stated that the special education school principals had problems with the curriculum and with the students with ASD. As a result, it can be interpreted that vice principals were more closely related to the educational status of the school compared to the principals.

### *Economic problems*

The frequencies of the themes on economic problems faced by special education school principals according to duty are presented in Table 7 and Figure 3.

**Table 7.**

The frequency of the themes of economic problems faced by special education school principals according to duty

Economic problems	Principal (f)	Vice Principal (f)
1 School not physically designed suitable for special education	2	3
2 The effects of low or high socio-economic status of families on children	3	3
3 The materials not developed according to the characteristics	3	4



of the children

4 Insufficient salaries allocated to staff

0

1

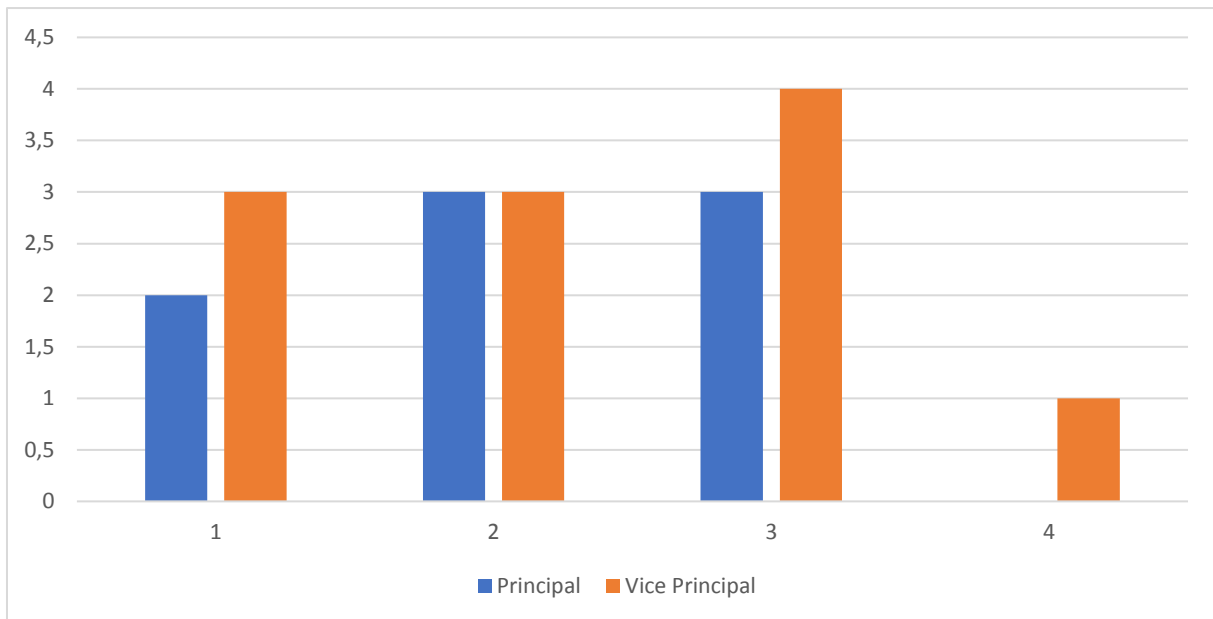


Figure 3. The graphic of the frequencies of the themes of economic problems faced by special education school principals according to duty

When we interpreted the views of special education school principals on economic-based problems according to duty, it was understood that special education school vice principals had more information about the economic situation of the school and families than the principals. Thus, it can be interpreted that vice principals were the first to know and be aware of the economic situation of the school, the needs of the staff, the characteristics and needs of the students.

## 2. Problems according to branches

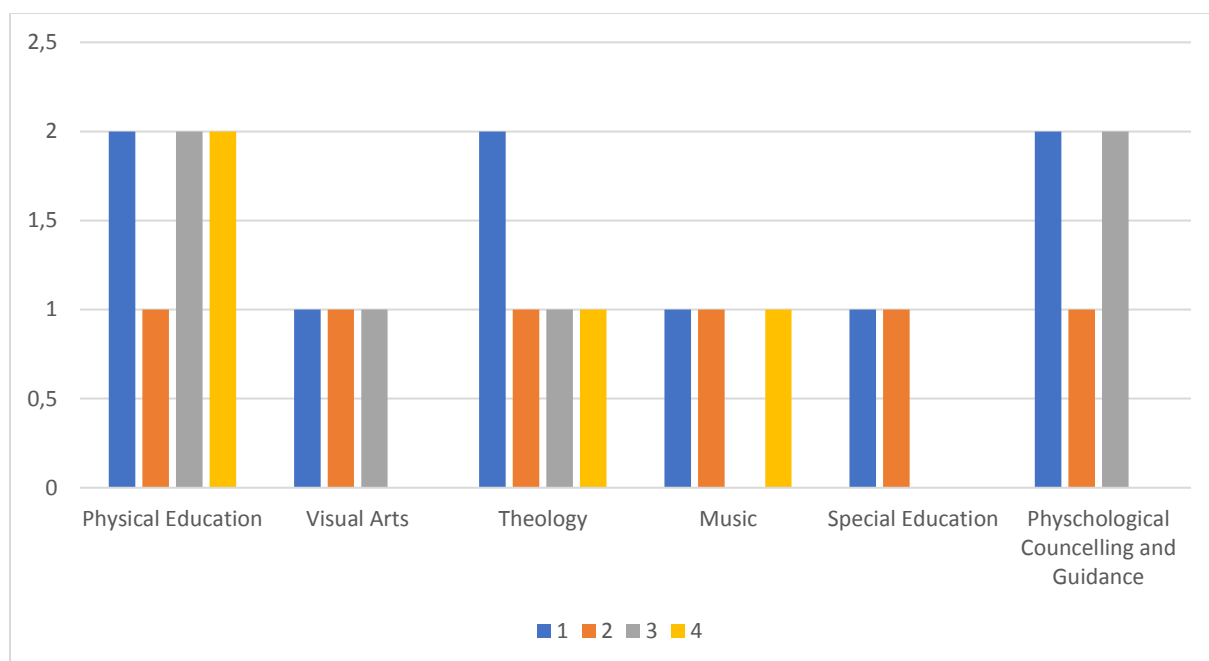
### Management problems

The frequencies of the themes on the mangement problems faced by special education school principals according to branches are presented in Table 8 and Figure 4.

**Table 8.**

*The frequency of the themes of mangement problems faced by special education school principals according to braches*

Management problems	Physical education	Visual arts	Theology	Music	Special education	Psychological Counselling and Guidance
1 Problems originated from families' conditions and approaches	2	1	2	1	1	2
2 Bureaucratic problems	1	1	1	1	1	1
3 Inter-organizations communication problems	2	1	1	0	0	2
4 Problems caused due to lack of personnel	2	0	1	1	0	0



**Figure 4.** The graphic of the frequencies of the themes of mangement problems faced by special education school principals according to branches

When we interpreted the views of special education school principals on management problems they faced according to the branch, they stated that the principals in the branches of physical education, visual arts, theology, music, special education and guidance and psychological counseling experienced problems originated from the conditions and approaches of their families and bureaucracy. While principals in the branches of physical education, visual arts, theology and music, and guidance and psychological counseling stated that they had problems originated from inter-institutional communication, the managers in the physical education, theology and music branches stated that they had problems due to the lack of personnel. Thus, the fact that opinions on management problems can be interpreted by demographics of participation should be taken into account in order not to be mistaken.

#### *Problems originated from education policies*

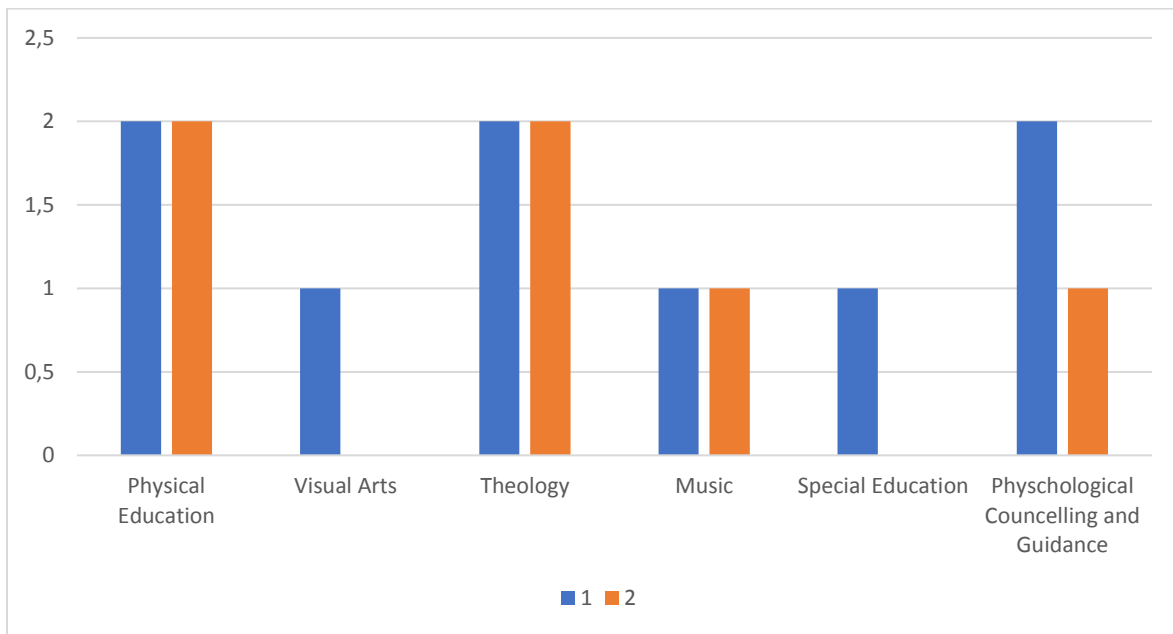
The frequencies of the themes on problems originated from education policies faced by special education school principals according to branches are presented in Table 9 and Figure 5.

**Table 9.**

*The frequency of the themes of problems originated from education policies faced by special education school principals according to branches*

Problems originated from education policies	Physical education	Visual arts	Theology	Music	Special education	Psychological Counselling and Guidance
1 Curriculum related issues	2	1	2	1	1	2
2 Having problems with students with ASD	2	0	2	1	0	1





**Figure 5.** The graphic of the frequencies of the themes of problems originated from education policies faced by special education school principals according to branches

When we interpreted the opinions of the special education school principals on the problems originated from the education policies they faced according to the branches, it was understood that the principals in the physical education, visual arts, theology, music, special education and guidance and psychological counseling branches had problems with the curriculum, and that the principals in the special education and visual arts branches did not have problems with students with ASD. Thus, it can be interpreted that the findings of the problems originated from education policies differed according to the branches.

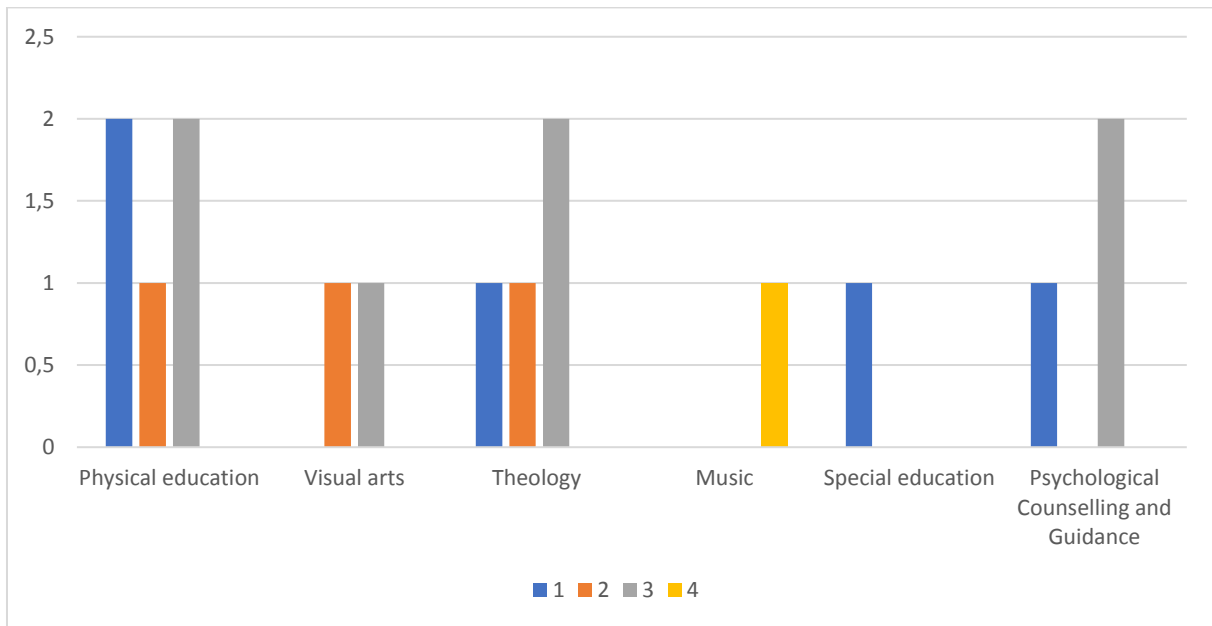
### *Economic problems*

The frequencies of the themes on economic problems faced by special education school principals according to branches are presented in Table 10 and Figure 6.

**Table 10.**

The frequency of the themes of economic problems faced by special education school principals according to branches

Economic problems	Physical education	Visual arts	Theology	Music	Special education	Psychological Counselling and Guidance
1 The effects of low or high socio-economic status of families on children	2	0	1	0	1	1
2 The materials not developed according to the characteristics of the children	1	1	1	0	0	0
3 School not physically designed suitable for special education	2	1	2	0	0	2
4 Insufficient salaries allocated to staff	0	0	0	1	0	0



**Figure 6.** The graphic of the frequencies of the themes of economic problems faced by special education school principals according to branches

When we interpreted the views of the special education school principals on the economic-based problems they faced according to the branches, it was seen that the principals in the visual arts and music branch did not see any problem on the effects of the low or high socio-economic status of the families on the child, the principals in the branches of music, special education, guidance and psychological counseling did not comment on the theme of the materials not developed according to the characteristics of the children and the music and special education branches did not comment on the theme of physically designing schools for special education. On the sub-theme of insufficient salary allocated to the personnel, only the managers in the music branch commented. Thus, it can be interpreted that the findings of economic-based problems differed according to the branches, and the principals in the special education and music branches did not see many situations as a problem as perhaps they focused more on education.

### 3. Problems according to seniority

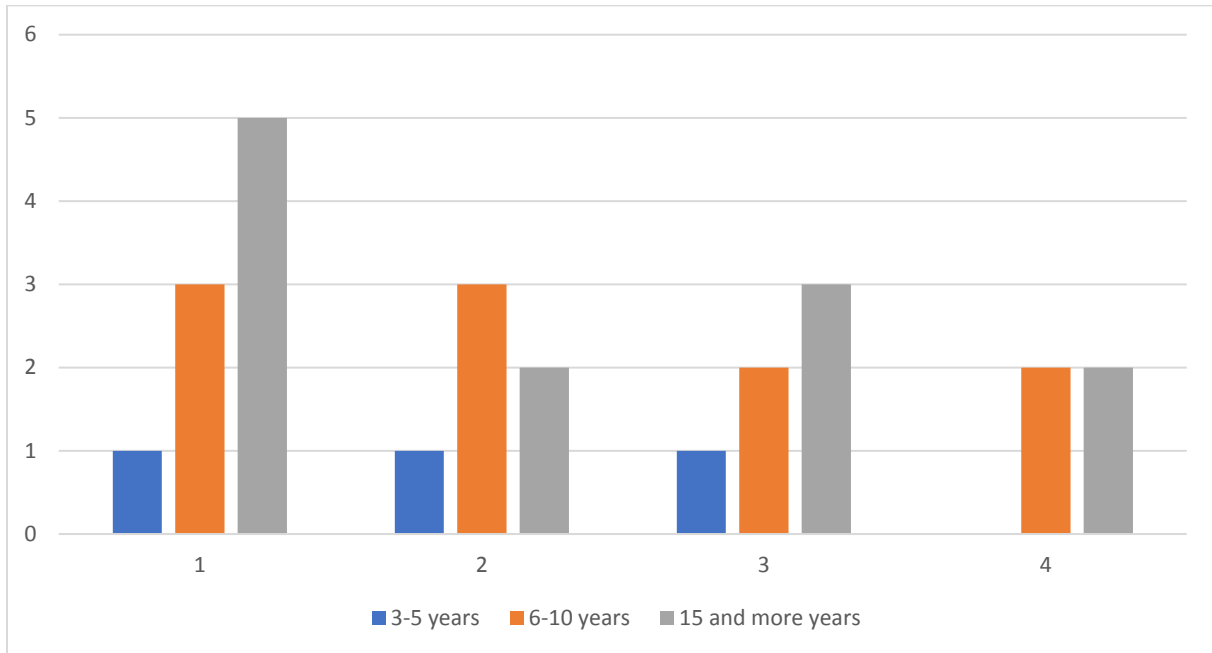
#### Management problems

The frequencies of the themes on management problems faced by special education school principals according to seniority are presented in Table 11 and Figure 7.

**Table 11.**

The frequency of the themes of management problems faced by special education school principals according to seniority

Management problems	3-5 years	6-10 years	15 years and more
1 Problems originated from families' conditions and approaches	1	1	3
2 Bureaucratic problems	0	2	1
3 Inter-organizations communication problems	1	2	4
4 Problems caused by lack of personnel	0	1	0



**Figure 7.** *The graphic of the frequencies of the themes of economic problems faced by special education school principals according to seniority*

When we interpreted the views of special education school principals on the management problems according to seniority in general, it was understood that the problems originated from the conditions and approaches of the families, bureaucratic problems, problems caused by lack of personnel were experienced by principals with 6-10 years the most. This result can be interpreted that as the seniority increases, the managers adapt to the system and experience fewer problems.

*Problems originated from education policies*

The frequencies of the themes on problems originated from education policies faced by special education school principals according to seniority are presented in Table 12 and Figure 8.

**Table 12.**

*The frequency of the themes of problems originated from education policies faced by special education school principals according to seniority*

Problems originated from education policies	3-5 years	6-10 years	15 years and more
1 Curriculum related issues	1	3	5
2 Having problems with students with ASD	1	2	3

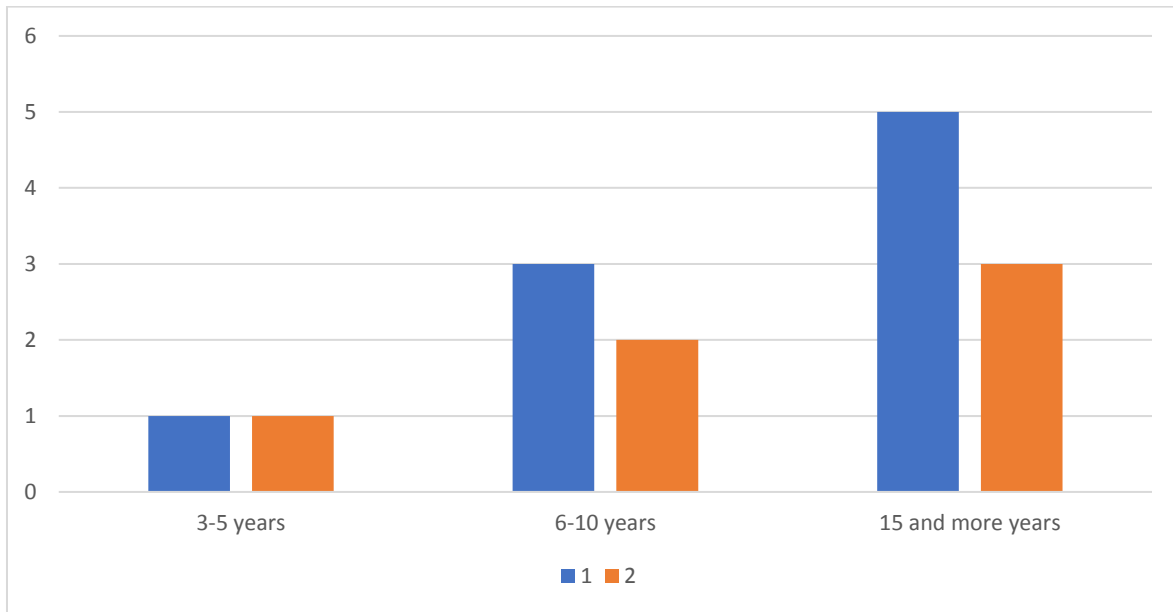


Figure 8. *The graphic of the frequencies of the themes of problems originated from education policies faced by special education school principals according to seniority*

When we interpreted the views of special education school principals on the problems originated from the education policies they faced according to seniority, the themes of curriculum-related issues and having problems with students with ASD differed according to seniority. It was seen that the problems increased more as the seniority increased. On the other hand, the reason why junior administrators had low rates of problems originated from the curriculum and students with ASD can be interpreted as they needed a little more experience to get to know the school.

### *Economic problems*

The frequencies of the themes on problems originated from economic problems faced by special education school principals according to seniority are presented in Table 13 and Figure 9.

**Table 12.**

*The frequency of the themes of economic problems faced by special education school principals according to seniority*

Economic Problems	3-5 years	6-10 years	15 years and more
1 The effects of low or high socio-economic status of families on children	1	1	3
2 The materials not developed according to the characteristics of the children	0	2	1
3 School not physically designed suitable for special education	1	2	4
4 Insufficient salaries allocated to staff	0	1	0

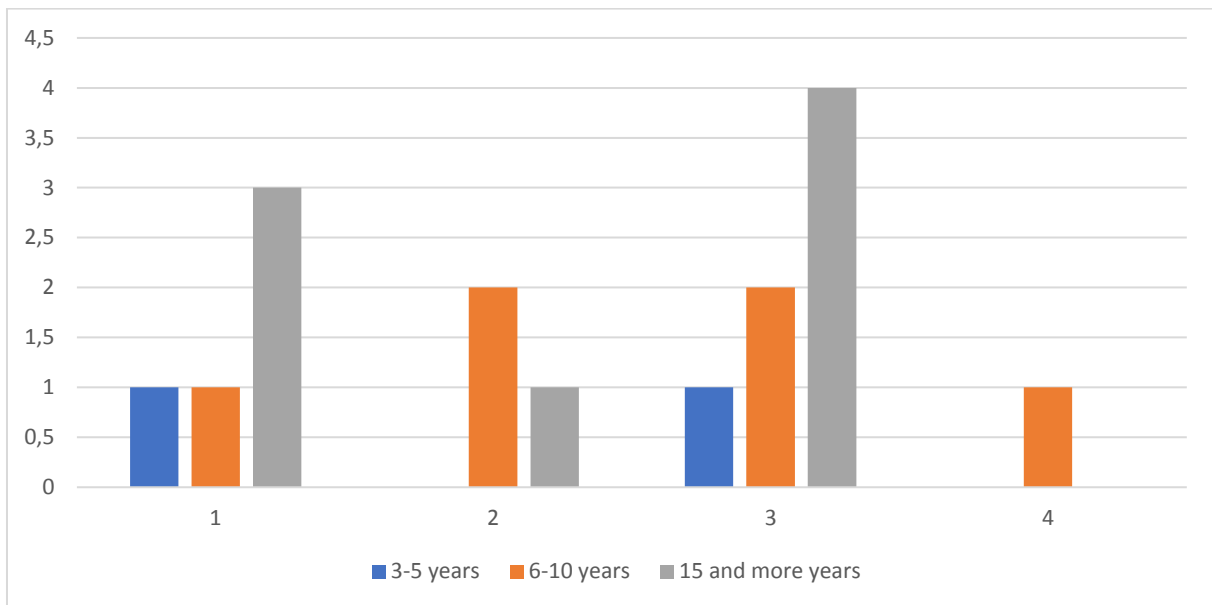


Figure 9. The graphic of the frequencies of the themes of economic problems faced by special education school principals according to seniority

When we interpreted the views of special education school principals on the economic-based problems they faced, according to seniority in general, while the principals between 3-5 years seniority stated that there was only a problem related to the effects of low or high socio-economic status of families on children and the school not physically designed for special education, In addition to the problems experienced by principals with 3-5 seniority, principals with 6-10 years seniority reported problems related to the materials not developed according to the characteristics of the children and the insufficient salaries allocated to the personnel. From this point of view, it can be interpreted that as the duration of seniority increased, economic-based problems became more evident.

#### 4. Problems according to graduation

##### Management problems

The frequencies of the themes on management problems faced by special education school principals according to graduation are presented in Table 14 and Figure 10.

**Table 14.**

The frequency of the themes of management problems faced by special education school principals according to graduation

Management problems	Under-Graduate	Graduate
1 Problems originated from families' conditions and approaches	7	2
2 Bureaucratic problems	5	1
3 Inter-organizations communication problems	5	1
4 Problems caused by lack of personnel	2	2



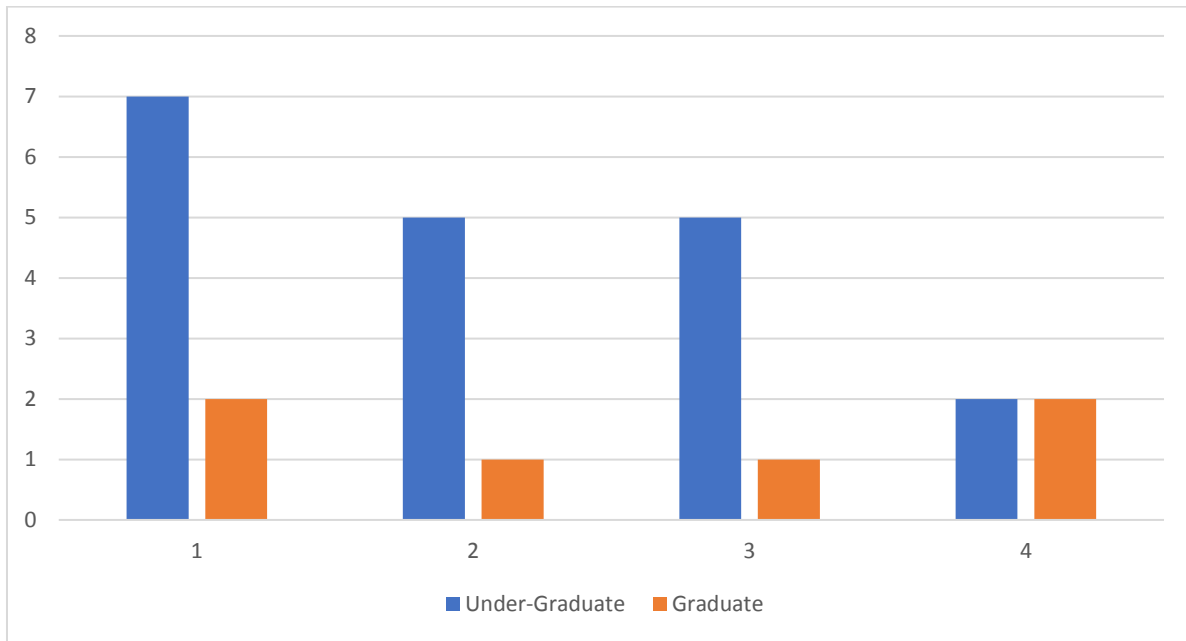


Figure 10. The graphic of the frequencies of the themes of management problems faced by special education school principals according to graduation

When we generally interpreted the views of special education school principals on management problems they faced according to graduation, while principals with under-graduate degree stated that they mostly experienced problems originated from conditions and approaches of their families, then problems due to bureaucratic, inter-organizations communication and finally the lack of personnel, principals with graduate degree stated that they experienced problems originated from the conditions and approaches of the families, lack of personnel, bureaucratic and inter-organizational communication problems relatively lower. Accordingly, it can be interpreted that there were differences between principals with a bachelor's degree and the managers with a master's degree in terms of the rate of experiencing problems originated from management, and that there were fewer problems as the level of education increased.

### *Problems originated from education policies*

The frequencies of the themes on problems originated from education policies faced by special education school principals according to graduation are presented in Table 15 and Figure 11.

**Table 15.**

*The frequency of the themes of problems originated from education policies faced by special education school principals according to seniority*

Problems originated from education poicies	Under-Graduate	Graduate
1 Curriculum related issues	7	4
2 Having problems with students with ASD	2	2

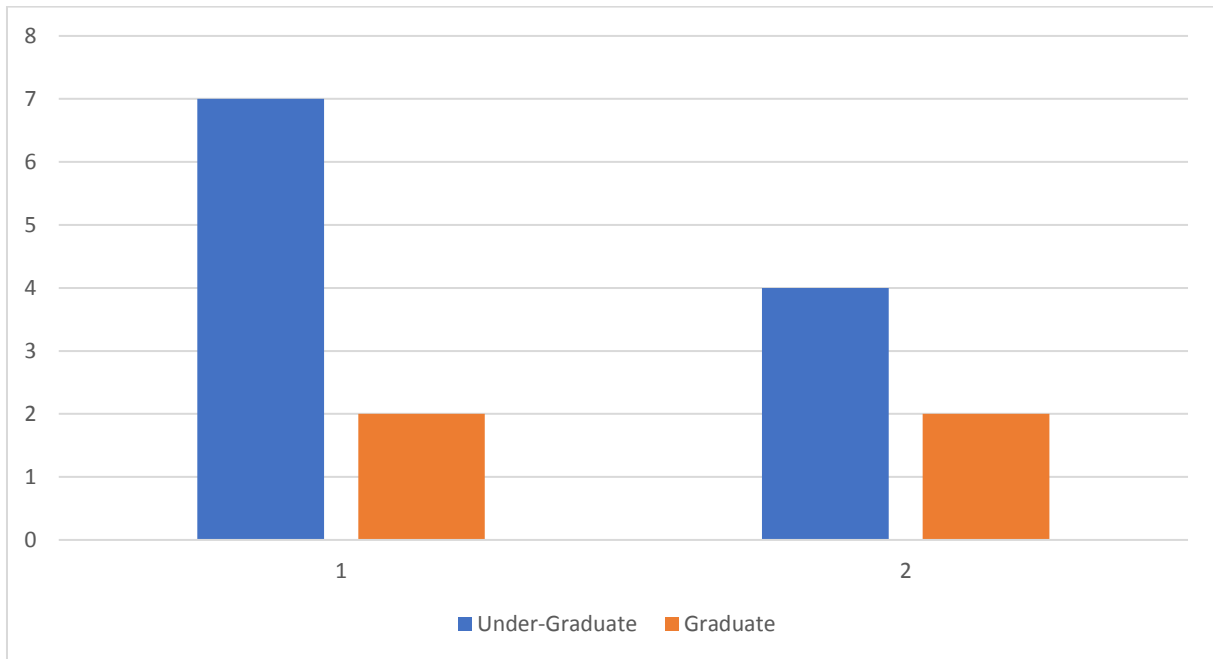


Figure 11. *The graphic of the frequencies of the themes of problems originated from education policies faced by special education school principals according to graduation*

When we interpreted the views of special education school principals on problems originated from education policies they faced according to graduation, while principals with under-graduate degree had problems related to curriculum and students with ASD, principals with graduate degree experienced these problems originated from education policies at a lower rate compared to undergraduate principals. Thus, it can be interpreted that there were differences between the managers with a bachelor's degree and the managers with a master's degree in terms of the rate of experiencing problems originated from education policies, and that there were fewer problems as the level of education increased.

### *Economic problems*

The frequencies of the themes on problems originated from economic problems faced by special education school principals according to seniority are presented in Table 16 and Figure 12.

**Table 16.**

*The frequency of the themes of economic problems faced by special education school principals according to graduation*

Problems originated from education policies	Under-Graduate	Graduate
1 The effects of low or high socio-economic status of families on children		
2 The materials not developed according to the characteristics of the children		
3 School not physically designed suitable for special education		
4 Insufficient salaries allocated to staff		

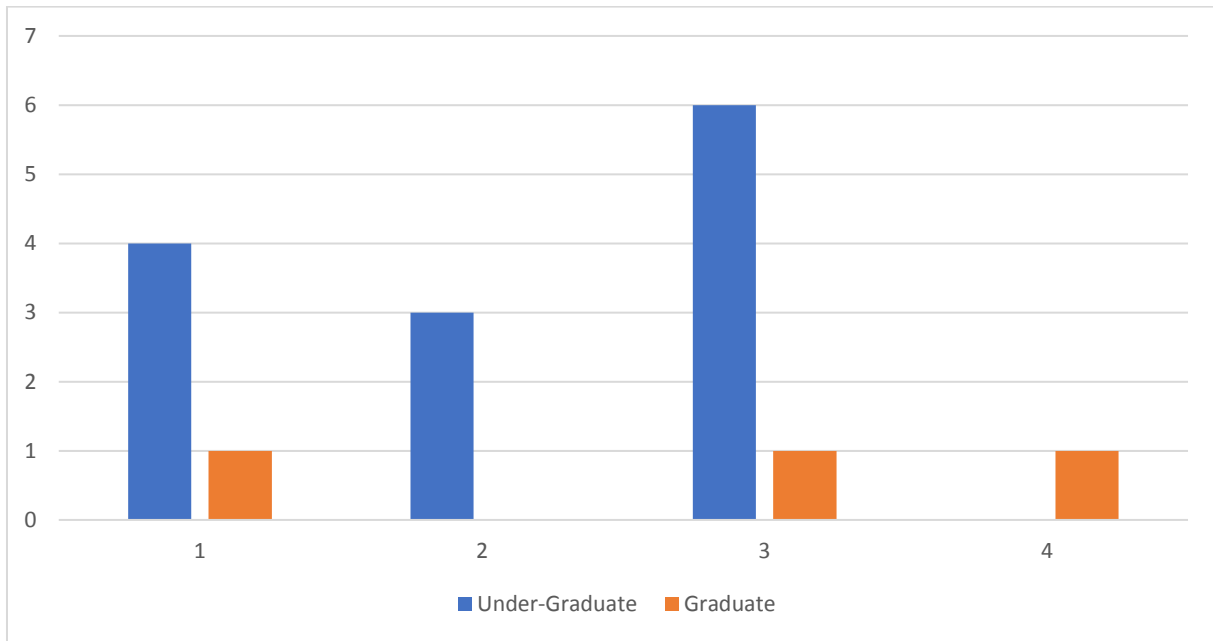


Figure 12. *The graphic of the frequencies of the themes of problems originated from education policies faced by special education school principals according to graduation*

When we interpreted the opinions of the special education school principals on the economic-based problems they faced according to graduation, the principals who had undergraduate degree expressed their views on the themes of the materials not developed according to the characteristics of the children, the effects of the low or high socio-economic level of the families on the child, and the school not physically designed for special education. On the other hand, managers with a master's degree stated that they experienced problems such as insufficient salaries allocated to the personnel, the effects of low or high socio-economic level of the families on the child, and the school not physically designed for special education. These results can be interpreted that the managers with a bachelor's degree experienced economic problems more intensely.

### Discussion and conclusion

In this study, the views of special education school principals on the problems they faced were tried to be revealed by using frequency analysis and thematic, descriptive and content analysis methods, based on management problems, problems originated from education policies and economic-based problems.

Management problems faced by special education school principals consisted of problems related to problems originated from families' conditions and approaches, bureaucratic problems, inter-organizations communication problems and problems caused by lack of personnel.

When we evaluated the managerial problems of special education school principals in general, the problems were the interventions of families in school management and teachers and indifference of bureaucrats working in the higher units bureaucratically. It was also stated in the interviews that the authorities did not show sufficient attention to the existing problems. Within the scope of the findings obtained in the research, it was also found that there were various problems related to the personnel issue, and that the top unit managers (staff working in the Provincial and District National Education Directorates) of the special education schools did not have sufficient knowledge about the field of special education. Employment of out-of-field teachers in the field of special education were also other

problems. the employment of out-of-field teachers in special education reduced the quality of education. Accordingly, Özyürek (2008) stated in the study titled “Problems and solutions in training qualified teachers that as a result of the pressures, the need for teachers was tried to be met quantitatively with inadequate teachers..

In the study, it was understood that a significant part of the families did not show enough interest in their children and they were insensitive about the education of their children. Additionally, some families did not care about education for their development, considering their children only as an economic return.

The problems caused by education policies faced by special education school principals were curriculum related issues and having problems with students with ASD.

In the study, it was found that the curriculum was not suitable for children, and that a curriculum was prepared for students with moderate-severe and mild intellectual disability, but it did not include students with ASD. In the study, it was also stated that there was a problem in the student group diagnosed with ASD and the reason for this was due to the lack of special education teachers. There are studies in the literature supporting this finding. Firat & Koçak (2018) stated that the teachers working in special education schools having sufficient knowledge and skills in special education schools positively affected the professional competence of these teachers, while the lack of sufficient knowledge and skills of non-field teachers negatively affected their professional competence levels.

When the problems identified within the scope of the research were evaluated in general, it was understood that almost all of them were economic based. The majority of families with children with special educational needs were low-income families. This also affected the child's success. In order to solve this problem, increasing social assistance and providing the necessary support, especially family education, was necessary to reduce the anxiety levels of families.

In the study, it was also found that the personnel were insufficient, and the salaries and social opportunities allocated to the personnel in the special education practice schools were insufficient. It has been stated that special education teachers preferred the special education classes in the normal school as the economic return was higher and they were less worn out than of classes in special education schools. Similarly, Kocaman (2015) in the study on the problems faced by special education school managers found that special education teachers did not want to work with autistic or severe students, and schools with such students were insufficient than others in terms of the staff.

The physical design of schools in accordance with special education schools was another issue. Many factors were identified such as the absence of ramps, the absence of elevators, the lack of landscaping, and the narrowness of the school's areas. There are studies in the literature that support this issue, as an example Akbaba, & Turhan (2016). (2016) emphasized the current physical condition of the school and identified deficiencies.

Another issue identified in the research was the lack of material. Materials, which are indispensable elements of education, are support tools that facilitate learning for special education and increase skills. Learning will be faster if materials suitable for its function are developed. It would be more appropriate to develop materials suitable for children's characteristics. However, it was found in the study that that the developed materials were not suitable for students.

### ***Recommendations***

In consistent with the results obtained, following suggestions can be put forward:

The Ministry of Education should ensure that special education programs and regulations be created according to each type of school and institution, with teams including special education school administrators and teachers of all types and levels.

It is necessary to ensure that the bureaucrats for special education working within the Ministry be selected from those who taught and managed in special education schools, and who mastered the problems of the field, and their authority should be increased.

An official database open to access by every institution related to special education should be established.

It should be ensured that all personnel in the field of special education, especially teachers, be constantly included in in-service training.

Care should be taken in the selection of students who want to work as a special education teacher, their personality traits should be taken into account during the process of entering the university, and it should be ensured that they see the environment in which they will work before starting their university education.

Teachers with experience in special education can be assigned to severely disabled, autistic or multi-disabled groups; On the other hand, an arrangement should be made to assign newly graduated teachers to mildly disabled groups, whose working conditions are easier, in order to enable them to gain experience.

Since the insufficient physical environments, educational materials and source books worsen the working conditions of teachers, necessary measures should be taken to solve these deficiencies as soon as possible.

It is necessary to ensure that the personnel working in the provincial and district national education directorates be selected from those who have worked as teachers and administrators in special education schools and who have a good grasp of the problems of the field, and their authority should be increased.

Family education in schools should be increased and be compulsory.

In countries that are pioneers in special education, school projects that set an example in terms of architecture should be adapted to the conditions of the country and implemented.

Salary and social opportunities allocated to the personnel need to be improved. Special education teachers should be given the right to depreciation and early retirement.

It is necessary to increase the economic opportunities offered by the state, to abandon the old and unsuitable schools and to build exemplary schools.

In order for the development of material for special education schools student characteristics should be considered.

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## **Ethical approval**

In the writing process of the study titled “**Problems faced by special education school principals : mixed methods research**”, the rules of scientific, ethical and citation were followed; it was undertaken by the authors of this study that no falsification was made on the collected data. “Journal Action Qualitative & Mixed Methods Research [JAQMER] and Editor” had no responsibility for all ethical violations to be encountered, and all responsibility belongs to the authors and that the study was not submitted for evaluation to any other academic publishing environment.

## **Ethics committee approval**

Ethics Committee Approval of this research was obtained from Akdeniz University Social Sciences Ethics Committee at the meeting of 14 decision numbered 381 on November 4<sup>th</sup>, 2021.