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Parents' Perspectives on Physical Education and Sports Classes for Children Attending a Special Education Vocational School

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Abstract

This study was conducted to examine the perspectives of the families of children attending a special education vocational school regarding physical education and sports classes. In this study, a holistic case study design, a qualitative research method, was employed. The participants in the study were the families of students with special needs who are enrolled at the Special Education Vocational School in the city center of Muş. Content analysis was used to analyze the data obtained through a semi-structured interview form. The results identified three main themes: curriculum, developmental integrity, and sports as a profession, comprising a total of seven subthemes: demand for expansion, physical fitness, distributing classes across different days, individuality, being part of life, social acceptance, and a guarantee for the future. In line with this theme and its subthemes, some participants reported that physical education and sports classes in the curriculum are insufficient and should be distributed over the entire week. All participants noted that physical education and sports classes contribute to students' health, personal development, and socialization; that they want their children to choose sports as a career; that these classes help keep children away from bad habits; and that they have a unifying effect on society. It has been observed that parents hold differing views on whether the number of physical education and sports class hours in the curriculum is sufficient. In conclusion, parents expressed a shared view that physical education and sports classes provide numerous benefits to students with special needs and should be distributed throughout the entire week. It was found that some parents were willing for their children to pursue sports as a profession.

Keywords

Physical Education And Sports Class, Special Education Vocational School, Parent, Student With Special Needs, Opinion

INTRODUCTION

Education plays a significant role in the development of individuals. It is also effective in the process of acquiring and maintaining new skills. All individuals, including those with special needs, have the right to get an education (Rojo-Ramos et al., 2023). The ability of individuals with special needs to integrate into society and acquire independent living skills is largely dependent not only on the fulfillment of their needs but also on their ability to receive education tailored to their individual differences (Cavkaytar, 2017). Individuals with special needs should begin special

education at an early age to acquire knowledge and skills (Evans et al. 2010; Jameson & McDonnell 2007).

Special education is defined as “education conducted in appropriate settings by specially trained personnel using programs developed to meet the educational and social needs of individuals who differ significantly from their peers in terms of their individual and developmental characteristics and educational abilities” (MoE, 2018). As noted in this definition, the education of children with special needs is provided through programs tailored to their needs and characteristics and in appropriate settings (Sarı & Pürsün 2016; Kuzgun & Deryakulu 2017; Swanson et al. 2012). Curriculum

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frameworks designed in accordance with student characteristics and tailored to the type of school ensure that students with special needs receive an education that supports their holistic development and independence (Bayat, 2025). In Türkiye, education for these individuals is provided in general education classrooms, special education classes, special education schools, and special education vocational schools (MoE, 2018).

There are special education vocational schools designed to provide vocational and career guidance for individuals with mild intellectual disabilities and autism spectrum disorder who are unable to attend secondary schools, which are typically attended by students who have completed elementary school and are developing typically, as well as for individuals with visual or hearing impairments. These institutions offer both academic programs and vocational programs (MoE, 2018). Classes at the Special Education Vocational School are taught by special education teachers. Vocational courses, visual arts, music, and physical education and sports classes are taught by subject-specific teachers, but a special education teacher also assists in the class (MoE, 2018). Physical education and sports activities serve society on a large scale by contributing to the quality of life of individuals who differ developmentally from their peers, as well as by influencing all individuals in various ways and supporting their developmental aspects (Yavuz et al., 2025). Physical education and sports programs contribute to the development of the “adaptation” aimed for during special education (Vural & Kirath, 2025). And it enables the improvement of adverse conditions observed in individuals with disabilities (Kozak et al. 2019).

Physical education and sports, which are an integral part of educational programs, contribute to students’ development in many ways, help them incorporate sports into their daily lives, and encourage them to spend their free time engaging in cultural and sporting activities (MoE, 2018). According to Rosentswieg (1969), the primary objectives of physical education programs in special education schools should be socialization, perceptual-motor skills, the ability to form friendships, social acceptance, and self-concept (Ozer, 2001). According to Sherril (1988), the developmental characteristics of a well-planned physical education program necessitate that the prioritization of objectives differ between typically developing individuals and those with special

needs. In physical education for typically developing individuals, the primary goals should be “developing physical and motor skills,” whereas for individuals with special needs, the primary goals should be self-development, social competence, and sensory-motor development (Yavuz et al., 2025).

Seghers et al. (2009) stated that schools and parents should work together to encourage students to be physically active. When schools and families prioritize physical education and sports classes, provide guidance to students in this area, and maintain communication with physical education and sports teachers, this can help foster exercise habits among students with special needs and contribute to more effective instruction. Parents have a significant and important influence on children’s participation in physical activities and on making physical activities appealing to children (Güven & Öncü, 2006). In their study, Yüksel (2019) concluded that factors such as parents’ attitudes toward sports, their own levels of physical activity, and their goals play a decisive role in determining the nature and objectives of their children’s participation in sports. According to the study by Çalışkan et al. (2008), titled “The Perspectives of Families with Children with Disabilities on Physical Education and Sports Activities,” 93.9% of parents believe that individuals with special needs will be successful when participating in physical activities, while 90% reported that their children are calmer and happier on days when they participate in sports activities. In their study, İlhan (2009) noted that the vast majority of families expressed their approval of and support for their children with intellectual disabilities participating in physical education and sports classes. Students with special needs tend to be more dependent on their family members than typically developing students. Therefore, families’ awareness of the effects of physical education and sports on their children, as well as their positive attitude toward these classes, can play a significant role in helping children achieve the goals set for these classes.

Accordingly, the aim is to determine the perspectives of the families of students with special needs (SN) enrolled at the Special Education Vocational School regarding physical education and sports classes and to identify their perceptions of the effects of these classes on the physical development, social adaptation, independent living

skills, and psychological well-being of students with special needs. Also, the study aimed to examine families' expectations and suggestions regarding the duration, content, and implementation of physical education and sports classes. To this end, our study focuses on investigating the views of individuals with special needs and their parents regarding physical education and sports classes at the Special Education Vocational School.

It appears that family perceptions regarding physical education and sports classes have not been sufficiently examined in the literature, and it has not been clearly established to what extent current practices align with family expectations. Since families are key stakeholders in children's development, understanding their views on physical education and sports classes is important for improving educational programs, organizing class schedules, and developing best practices. In this context, the following questions were addressed:

- 1) What are your thoughts on physical education and sports class time at school?
- 2) What do you think are the effects of physical education and sports classes on your child's development?
- 3) Would you like your child to pursue sports as a career? What benefits do you think this will provide?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Model

Since the study aimed to examine in depth the perspectives of parents of students attending a special education vocational school regarding physical education and sports classes, a holistic case study design, one of the qualitative research approaches, was employed. The research requires examining the experiences and perceptions of participants in a specific educational setting within their natural environment. In this regard, the holistic case study design was deemed an appropriate research design in order to evaluate the case as a whole without breaking it down into subsections and to preserve contextual factors. Furthermore, the fact that the study focuses on in-depth understanding rather than generalization also supports this pattern. In the holistic case study approach, there is a single unit of analysis; the case is examined within its natural setting; data collection is in-depth and detailed; it offers a

multifaceted perspective; and it has a flexible and exploratory structure. Our study is a one-off case because it focuses on a specific group, a specific type of school, and a specific subject. Therefore, in our study, families' perspectives were analyzed holistically, data were collected in a natural setting, in-depth data analysis was conducted using open-ended questions, and efforts were made to preserve the contextual relationships among these factors (disabilities, school resources, lesson structure, and societal perceptions). A case study is an investigation of one or more cases. In other words, it examines the factors associated with a given situation (events, environment, individuals) using a holistic approach, focusing on how they are affected by and influence that situation (Yıldırım & Şimşek 2013).

Participants

The study consists of parents of students with mild intellectual disabilities, aged 14 to 17, who are currently enrolled in grades 10 and 11 at a Special Education Vocational School in Muş Province; these parents are accessible to the researcher and will facilitate the data collection process. Due to the advantages it offers in terms of time and cost, convenience sampling (Yıldırım & Şimşek 2013) was chosen. Since participants in convenience sampling are not selected at random, this can limit the sample's ability to represent the population and make it difficult to generalize the findings to a broader audience. Comprehensive data regarding physical education and sports classes was obtained through interviews with 11 parents. The aim of qualitative research is not to make generalizations but to gain a deep understanding of the situation; therefore, the sample size does not need to be as large as it is in quantitative research. During the interviews, data saturation was reached with eleven parents due to factors such as the lack of new information from participants, likely stemming from the fact that the parents were from the same type of school and had similar experiences, as well as the repetition of the same information and the emergence of similar responses; consequently, the interviews were concluded.

To protect the anonymity of the parents, they have been assigned the codes P1, P2, etc. The demographics regarding the parents interviewed as part of the study are as follows.

Table 1. Demographic information of parents

Participant	Age	Gender	Education level	Student Diagnosis	How many children do you have?	Number of Disabled Individuals in Your Family
V1	56	Male	High school	Mild Intellectual Disability	2	1
V2	55	Male	Primary school	Mild Intellectual Disability	6	1
V3	41	Male	High school	Mild Intellectual Disability	4	1
V4	40	Female	Primary school	Mild Intellectual Disability	4	1
V5	37	Male	University	Mild Intellectual Disability	1	1
V6	48	Male	Primary school	Mild Intellectual Disability	4	2
V7	47	Male	High school	Mild Intellectual Disability	4	1
V8	40	Male	Primary school	Mild Intellectual Disability	6	1
V9	65	Male	High school	Mild Intellectual Disability	6	1
V10	43	Male	High school	Mild Intellectual Disability	4	1
V11	44	Male	University	Mild Intellectual Disability	2	2

Data Collection Tools

Individual interviews were conducted with parents using a semi-structured interview technique. The semi-structured interview questions were developed by the researchers based on a review of the literature and in accordance with the study's objectives. Furthermore, three academics specializing in special education, physical education and sports, and assessment and evaluation were consulted to evaluate the scope, clarity, and appropriateness of the interview questions. In accordance with the opinions of expert academics, the wording of some questions has been simplified, and the necessary revisions have been made to finalize the text. These questions were aimed at gathering opinions and thoughts:

- 1) What are your thoughts on physical education and sports class time at school?
- 2) What do you think are the effects of physical education and sports classes on your child's development?
- 3) Would you like your child to pursue sports as a career?
- 4) What benefits do you think this will provide?

Before beginning the study, a pilot study was conducted to test the interview form in order to assess the clarity of the semi-structured interview

questions, measure the time required, and identify any potential issues. Also, after all the questions, people asked for further clarification and examples.

Collection of Data

Data collection was carried out between October 10, 2022 and November 18, 2022. The researchers conducted individual face-to-face interviews with the relevant parents. Parents were informed about the theme prior to the meetings, and their consent was obtained. The meetings were scheduled during a time when students were not in school to ensure a quiet environment and were held in a suitable classroom at the school so that parents could feel at ease. The individual interviews with the 11 parents lasted between 20 and 35 minutes. The interviews with the participants were recorded using a voice recorder with the participants' permission.

Limitations of the Study

The limited number of participants in the working group, the fact that the data were collected from a single institution, and the use of convenience sampling in the selection of the sample are the limitations of our study.

Analysis of Data

The qualitative data obtained from the interviews were transferred to a computer by transcribing them from the audio recorder. The qualitative data were analyzed using content analysis. The content analysis process in the study is based on an inductive approach. The codes and themes previously identified were not used in the analysis process; instead, the codes and themes were derived from the data obtained during interviews with the participants. The data, which had been coded and categorized separately by the researchers, was subsequently finalized through the identification of common codes and themes. An academic expert in the field, well-versed in qualitative research, also reviewed the code and themes for appropriateness. Finally, the analysis process was completed with the generation and interpretation of the findings.

Credibility

To ensure the validity and credibility of the study, all participants were asked to confirm the accuracy of the interview transcripts. Therefore, the findings include direct quotations from the participants' statements (Yıldırım & Şimşek 2021). Volunteer parents of the students participated in the study. The participants have been assigned code names. After obtaining the necessary consent from the participants, the students' parents were informed about the content of the meeting prior to the meeting.

Validity and Reliability:

In qualitative research, the non-measurability of variables and the inability to control potential sources of error may threaten the internal validity of a study (Mays & Pope, 1995; Sandelowski, 1986). In this context, to ensure the validity of the research, an in-depth data collection process was applied during interviews with parents, a literature review was conducted prior to question development, expert opinions were consulted during the preparation of the questions, and the methodology section was explained in detail. It is believed that it is important for researchers to have prior experience conducting studies involving individuals with special needs and their families, and for the researcher conducting the interview to have prior experience serving in administrative roles at special education schools.

Reliability, on the other hand, refers to the accuracy of the measurement and the validity of the

approach. Mayring (2000). To ensure the internal validity of the study, two researchers independently reviewed the interview transcripts in accordance with the qualitative data analysis process, identified meaningful statements, and independently identified the codes and themes representing these statements. After the independent coding process, the researchers met to compare the codes they had identified. The differences among the researchers were addressed through discussion, and an agreement was reached. In cases where no agreement could be reached, the relevant codes were reviewed again to clarify the codes and themes. Also, an independent academic expert in the field and in qualitative research reviewed the codes and themes derived from the content analysis using a holistic approach. Out of 28 coding units, researchers reached agreement on 25, while there was disagreement on 3. Inter-coder compliance was found to be 90%. Miles and Huberman (1994) reported that, for a study to be considered robust, inter-coder compliance should reach at least 80% according to the internal consistency formula: $\text{agreement}/(\text{agreement} + \text{disagreement})$. However, after having all participants confirm the accuracy of the interview transcript, the parents' views were presented using a descriptive approach and direct quotations. To ensure the external validity of the study, the researchers' role in the data collection process and the overall methodology of the study have been described in detail.

Ethical standards

This study followed ethical standards and received approval from the Muş Alparslan University, Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee with reference number (Date and Number: 27.10.2021–27741). Participant provided informed consent, with the volunteer form covering research details, risks, benefits, confidentiality, and participant rights. The research strictly adhered to the ethical principles of the Declaration of Helsinki, prioritizing participant's rights and well-being in design, procedures, and confidentiality measures.

RESULTS

As indicated in Table 2, three main themes emerged from the interviews, along with a total of seven subthemes related to these main themes. The codes for the subthemes are also included in the

table. Under the main theme of the curriculum is the subtheme of the request for an increase and the distribution of the course across different days. Under the main theme of developmental integrity, the subthemes are vitality, uniqueness, and

engaging in life. Under the main theme of sports as a profession, the subthemes of social acceptance and a guarantee for the future have emerged. Here are some of the participants' views on the subthemes and codes:

Table 2. Codes and themes related to participants' responses

Theme	Subtheme	Code	Participant
Curriculum	Request for an Increase	Opinions on increasing class hours	V1, V3, V4, V5, V6, V7, V8, V9, V10, V11
Curriculum	Distributing the class over different days	Sufficient; class time should be divided	V2
Developmental Integrity	Vitality	Mobility, being dynamic, vigor, and healthy	V1, V2, V3, V6, V7, V8, V9, V10
Developmental Integrity	Unique	Self-confidence, personal development, outgoing, and talkative	V1, V3, V6, V7, V8, V11
Developmental Integrity	I am engaged in life	Independence, sense of responsibility, development of friendships, socialization, communication skills,	V3, V4, V5, V7, V8, V9, V10, V11
Sports as a profession	Social acceptance	I want, may benefit from utilizing available opportunities and resources, gain recognition and comfort within society, experience acceptance and a sense of belonging, avoid harmful habits, achieve personal success, integrate more fully into the community, enjoy an improved environment, acquire professional skills, become self-sufficient, and feel valued and accomplished within society	V1, V4, V3, V6, V7, V9, V10, V11, V8, V5
Sports As A Profession	A guarantee for the future	Continuity in the profession	V2

Under the main theme of the curriculum, when examining parents' views regarding the subtheme of Request for an Increase, it was found that they believe the number of physical education and sports class hours in special education vocational schools is insufficient and that the schedule should be planned to include these classes every day of the week. Participants V1, V2, V3, and V5 expressed their opinions by stating "insufficient", indicating that the three hours per week were too few and suggesting that an increase would be beneficial. V1 emphasized the importance of physical education and sports for students with special needs, stating, "In my opinion, physical education is important for children. They engage in sports, and educators and instructors can guide them toward the branch in which they are most capable, where they may even achieve great success." V3 expressed their opinion by stating, "I think it would be better if the classes

were distributed throughout the week. From our perspective, it is better for the child to engage in sports because it benefits their health, helps them stay away from harmful habits, and allows them to experience different environments," highlighting the importance of these classes for students' health. Similarly, V5 emphasized the significance of physical education for the physical development of students with special needs, stating, "For children under fifteen who are still developing, physical education classes should be increased. The activities aligned with the curriculum are highly beneficial as they support muscle development, eye-body coordination, and the necessary motor skills. Additionally, for children with special needs, these classes enhance physical development and help them gain better control over their movements." It appears that parents view physical

education and sports classes as beneficial for students in the SN program.

When examining parents' views regarding the subtheme of distributing classes across different days, V2 stated, "I think it is sufficient; if you distribute these hours over three days, with one hour per day, it would help children lose weight, be more active, and stay healthy. Also, physical education and sports classes can be increased according to the child's condition, but under the current circumstances, I believe the hours are sufficient", indicating that this supports distributing the classes across multiple days while emphasizing that any increase in class hours should consider the students' performance.

Under the main theme of developmental integrity, a review of the subtheme of well-being revealed that physical education and sports classes help students with special educational needs improve their physical fitness and motor development. V7 emphasized the importance of physical education and sports classes for her child's physical development, stating, "My child is developing. It does them good. My child has been attending these schools for ten years; previously, they could not walk or stand. May God bless you and all the former instructors who brought our child to this level. My child can now meet all their own needs." V1 and V8 noted that the classes keep the children active, prevent weight gain, and help them lose weight, with V1 adding that "My child becomes lively and energetic." V7, V8, and V9 further expressed that "All kinds of sports are beneficial. It is good in every aspect, for health and physical fitness." These responses indicate that parents recognize the physical benefits of physical education and sports and consider them essential for their children. With these responses, they emphasize that physical education and sports classes contribute to physical fitness and are essential for children in every respect. V9 additionally highlighted the role of the classes in meeting her child's need for movement, stating, "When my child does not exercise at home, constantly gains weight and cannot walk properly. Due to practical limitations, it is impossible to take my child out regularly." V9 also emphasized the psychological benefits, noting, "I feel that my child is happy when he exercises."

When examining parents' views regarding the subtheme of unique, V6 stated, "They find themselves in a better environment; when they

return home, they talk about what they did in class, saying "We did this, we did that," which keeps their minds focused and is better for them," highlighting the environmental benefits of physical education and sports classes and noting the children's happiness. V6 and V11 described the situation as "Firstly, their self-confidence increases, and since we know that physical education benefits health, we believe that it also enhances the self-confidence of more children." V11 indicated that the classes are beneficial for the child in many ways, stating, "I believe they contribute to bodily and physical development, enhance social interaction with peers, and support both personality and physical growth," while emphasizing that the most significant development observed is in her child's self-confidence. V8 expressed the view on the matter, stating, "Sports provide benefits in every aspect. Sports are beneficial in all respects, including psychologically; they contribute to physical development and enhance communication with family," highlighting that physical education and sports have a positive impact on children in multiple dimensions.

When examining parents' views regarding the subtheme I am engaged in life, V10 emphasized the multifaceted importance of physical education and sports classes for children, stating, "At home, my child spends a lot of time on the phone. During physical education and sports classes, they are away from the phone, can engage in physical activities, focus better on the lessons, and think more quickly. Their posture and fitness improve, we observe benefits in communication, and they return home very happy. I believe these classes contribute to personality development and have a full impact on their health." Regarding this, V4 states, "My child feels a bit more comfortable and free, becoming stronger in movements independently; that's why I want physical education classes to be held regularly," highlighting the contribution of these classes to the child's independence. She continues, "My child says, 'Mom, today we had PE, it was great.' As my child tells me and shows joy, I feel even happier. I think our life is better with physical education. My child becomes freer and gains self-confidence; that's why I want PE classes. After the lesson, my child comes home very happy, excited, and cheerful, saying, 'Mom, today we had PE, it was great', telling as much as can be," emphasizing the positive impact of physical education and sports classes on confidence and happiness. Regarding

this, V5 expresses the thoughts as follows: “I believe my child can act with team spirit, develop friendships, and gain a sense of shared responsibility toward a common goal with peers. Also, by fulfilling their responsibilities within a team, they will contribute to the team’s success and feel happy with the achievements they attain,” emphasizing the impact of physical education and sports classes on socialization, friendships, experiencing success, and developing a sense of responsibility; continues: “Physical education is one of the most beneficial subjects, especially for children with special educational needs, because these children often have difficulties in coordinating and focusing their thoughts. I believe that the physical development gained through PE will also positively affect the child’s cognitive abilities,” highlighting the cognitive benefits of PE and sports classes for children with special needs. Further adds, “As the saying goes, a sound mind is in a healthy body; this applies to all children,” expressing the view that children with special educational needs, who often have developmental delays from early childhood, can overcome deficiencies or disadvantages through PE classes.

Regarding the sub-theme of social acceptance under the main theme of sport as a profession, V1 expresses their view as follows: “There are many examples, so why shouldn’t they be athletes? If they receive training, I would want them to become athletes,” explaining further: “There is nothing they cannot achieve; many people without arms or legs achieve success in Türkiye, so our children can do it too. If the state provides support, why shouldn’t our children become athletes? We always trust and respect our government. Being an athlete would benefit my child in terms of self-confidence. For example, there is a clip in your ‘Sing for Muş’ project; after learning to sing through that clip, my child started memorizing all the songs. When my child sees themselves on screen, feels very happy and cheerful. Therefore, I believe that sports activities will be beneficial for children with special educational needs. If we had a sports hall, they could engage in other disciplines as well; basketball, volleyball, handball, table tennis, and I believe they would succeed in whichever discipline they choose,” highlighting the importance of gaining self-confidence and a sense of achievement. V4 expresses the view on this matter as follows: “Of course, I would want my child to be an athlete. The child becomes more social, feels more comfortable

and confident, and gets to introduce themselves to society. It would be good for them to move in and out of society more easily. I would love for them to be a football player, athlete, or basketball player; the specific sport does not matter to us. They would gain more recognition in society,” emphasizing that being involved in sports would help the child feel more at ease in society, gain recognition, and build self-confidence. V10 states, “When they become an athlete, they would have a profession, their health would improve, they would stay away from bad influences, and their body would develop,” highlighting that sports can be pursued as a profession while positively affecting health and keeping the child away from harmful habits. V11 shares their opinion as follows: “Life is primarily about a person being self-sufficient, successful, enjoying life, and being happy.

Therefore, more than the profession or the work the child does, their happiness is what matters. Since we believe our child would be happy in football, various branches, or other sports, we want them to become an athlete,” emphasizing the importance of self-sufficiency and the sense of achievement. V5 responds with “Of course,” and continues, “As they practice sports, they will get to know their bodies, and as they understand their bodies, their self-confidence will develop. They will become members of society, and the achievements they gain through sports will further enhance their self-confidence, making their adaptation to society much easier,” highlighting the contributions of sports to social integration and self-confidence; and adds, “Rather than individual sports, having children in special education participate in team sports will help them both develop healthy friendships and adapt to social life. Therefore, if it were my choice, I would prefer team sports,” emphasizing that team sports facilitate easier socialization. V3 states, “I would want my child to be an athlete. As we said, sports are one of the main reasons young people stay away from bad habits. An athlete does not smoke or get involved in harmful behaviors; they become more energetic, dynamic, and healthy. My child already enjoys sports, and the successes they achieve in sports help them integrate more easily into society, increase their self-confidence, and gain recognition from others,” emphasizing the role of sports in keeping children away from negative behaviors, its positive impact on health, and its importance for social integration.

Regarding the sub-theme of guarantee for the future, V2 states, “At the moment, I don’t have such a thought, but I would recommend sports for physical health. I don’t think there is a chance for my child to become an athlete because of their abilities, but I know sports are beneficial. However, with today’s technology, any child with special educational needs can become an athlete, as long as their abilities allow. In that case, I would want them to become an athlete. They would learn a profession and be in a better environment,” highlighting that the parent views sports as a potential profession and a way for the child to gain a positive social environment.

DISCUSSION

Parents are one of the key factors playing an active role in the education process. In particular, the active involvement of parents of children with special needs in school-family collaboration not only contributes to the school’s success but is also crucial for ensuring that physical education and sports classes, which are an integral part of the school’s curriculum, are conducted more effectively. It is important for parents to share with educators their children’s strengths and weaknesses, behavioral characteristics and tendencies, and learning styles, and to provide support within or outside the institution (An & Goodwin, 2007), as this directly contributes to enhancing the children’s academic success at school. To this end, this study focuses on examining the views of the families of children attending a Special Education Vocational School regarding physical education and sports classes.

When we examine the results of the interviews conducted with parents regarding the sub-theme of the request to increase the curriculum’s main theme, they expressed the view that the number of physical education and sports class hours in special education vocational schools is insufficient and that these hours should be increased and distributed evenly across each day. It can be argued that factors such as students with special needs having fewer opportunities to participate in regular physical activity compared to typically developing students, families struggling to take their children to physical activity settings on a regular basis, and their awareness of the benefits of physical education and sports have fostered a positive attitude toward the call for increased

opportunities. A review of scientific studies on physical education and sports practices indicates that in the qualitative study conducted by Kalkan (2023), it was concluded that sports and physical activity courses play a significant role in supporting the developmental processes of individuals with special educational needs. However, the findings also indicated that the allocated weekly duration of these courses is insufficient to adequately meet their developmental requirements. The strategies proposed in the study by Bandeira et al. (2022) were found to result in more frequent and longer physical education classes, as well as mandatory daily classes. According to the results of the study by Yilmaz and Cihan (2018), it was concluded that the lack of adequate facilities and class time at the school plays a significant role in the implementation of specialized physical education classes. According to the study results of Yilmaz (2007), issues such as insufficient class hours and student attitudes were among the factors that hindered teachers from effectively implementing assessment and evaluation practices. In a study conducted by Ozer and Süngü (2016), three themes were identified (engagement, transformation through engagement, and barriers to transformation), and the study concluded that various improvements should be made to physical education and sports classes for individuals with special needs.

In a study conducted by Uzun and Kılınç (2020), five themes were identified (decision-making, planning, learning, motivation, and leisure activities); the study concluded that the duration of recreational activities conducted in special education schools is limited. These results support the findings derived from parents’ views regarding the subtheme of the demand for expansion in the study. When we examine the results of the interviews conducted with parents regarding the subtheme of distributing the course across different days, which is the main theme of the curriculum, we found that while parents believe the physical education and sports classes in the curriculum are sufficient, they also feel that these classes should be distributed across the days of the week. In this regard, it can be said that while parents are satisfied with the class schedules, they share the view that their children’s need for physical activity should be met at school throughout the week. In their study, İlhan (2009) found that the vast majority of parents wanted physical activity to be incorporated on a

regular basis into the special education process. This result supports the results of the interviews conducted with parents regarding the subtheme of distributing the course across different days within the curriculum's main theme.

When examining parents' views regarding the subtheme of vitality within the main theme of developmental integrity, they expressed the opinion that physical education and sports classes enhance their children's physical activity and enable them to lead lives as strong, dynamic, and healthy individuals. It can be said that the fact that parents view the behavior of students with special needs in a home setting as positive, following physical education class, contributes to the development of positive attitudes among parents regarding the subtheme of vitality. A review of the scientific literature reveals that a qualitative study conducted by [Uzun and Kılınç \(2020\)](#) concluded that recreational activities have a positive impact on the health and cognitive abilities of children with Down syndrome. Also, according to the teachers who participated in this study, they observed that students with Down syndrome demonstrated the ability to maintain high levels of attention following the activities. In a composition assignment conducted by [Yaylacı \(2012\)](#), students stated that physical education classes promote overall well-being, foster physical, mental, and emotional health, and serve as a means of improving physical fitness and living a healthy lifestyle. In their study, [Clapham et al. \(2020\)](#) found significant improvements in flexibility, body strength, cardiorespiratory endurance, and bone mineral density among children in the surfing group; these findings support parents' views regarding the subtheme of physical fitness.

When examining parents' views on the subtheme of developmental integrity, they stated that physical education and sports classes contribute to their children's personality development, boost their self-confidence, and help them grow into outgoing and talkative individuals. Sports foster social connections, bridge social divides, and cultivate the ability to empathize. It helps individuals express themselves more effectively and accurately ([Kaplan & Çetinkaya; 2014](#)). Environmental factors influence personality development; specifically, according to Bandura's Cognitive-Social Learning Theory, individuals can acquire the behaviors that shape their personality through environmental influences ([Pehlivan et al.](#)

[2011](#)). A review of the scientific literature reveals that, according to the results of a survey administered before and after a basketball training program conducted by [Togo \(2016\)](#), which involved thirty students aged 11-14 and consisted of three training sessions per week over a two-month period, significant differences were observed in the participants' self-concept. In their qualitative study, [Uzun and Kılınç \(2020\)](#) reported that they observed communication with students reaching a higher level following recreational activities, that more effective communication was established, and that students developed stronger friendships with their peers. According to the findings of [Vural and Kırath \(2025\)](#), it has been determined that, in individuals with physical disabilities, sports not only help maintain physical health but also strengthen communication skills, self-confidence, and social interaction; furthermore, by accelerating the process of social integration, it improves quality of life. These results support parents' views regarding the subtheme unique of developmental integrity.

When examining parents' views regarding the subtheme "I am engaged in life" within the main theme of developmental integrity, they stated that physical education and sports classes help their children develop communication skills, strengthen friendships, facilitate socialization, and foster independent behavior. A review of the scientific literature reveals that, according to the study conducted by [Kumcağız and Avcı Çayır \(2018\)](#), individuals with special needs derive greater enjoyment from life throughout their lives by strengthening themselves physically and psychologically through sports activities, and it was concluded that this also improves their quality of life. In their study, [Yavuz et al. \(2025\)](#) identified two themes (the contributions of physical education and sports to the holistic development of students with special needs, and the needs for physical education materials and teachers in special education); the study found that the participating special education teachers most frequently associated physical education and sports with the social development dimension. Numerous studies have shown that individuals with special needs who participate in physical activities in a structured manner experience positive effects in areas such as psychological adjustment, motivation to participate in group activities, socialization, and communication ([Tekkurşun Demir et al. 2017](#); [Kozak et al. 2019](#); [Tekkurşun Demir & İlhan 2020](#);

Namlı & Suveren, 2019; Güngör et al. 2019). These results support parents' views regarding the subtheme I am engaged in life of developmental integrity. In this regard, it is believed that physical education and sports programs in special education vocational schools will contribute to the development of students with special needs in many ways and to their integration into society.

When examining parents' views regarding the subtheme of social acceptance under the main theme of sports as a profession, they expressed a positive attitude toward their children pursuing sports professionally. They indicated that if their children with special needs became athletes, their opportunities and resources would increase, they would have a better environment, avoid harmful habits, experience a sense of achievement, be accepted and valued within society, and integrate more fully into the community. The emotions associated with sports, such as competition, losing, winning, sharing, and team spirit, can contribute to a person's character and personal development and create an environment that fosters integration into society. As a tool for socialization within society, sports play an effective role in fostering relationships between individuals and society (Ramazanoğulları et al. 2005). In addition to the physical and psychological benefits it provides, sports help individuals develop a sense of discipline, the ability to compete, and a sense of camaraderie, thereby helping them assume their social roles (Ergun, 2003).

When examining the literature, Chiang (2003) implemented an intervention for children with intellectual disabilities that included fun games and music-based dance activities. According to the qualitative measures obtained, the study reported a reduction in feelings of loneliness among the children, along with significant improvements in socialization and interaction skills. In the study by Kaya and Yıldırım (2024), it was concluded that recreational activities are an important method for fostering the development of social skills in individuals with special needs and for facilitating their social integration. In the study by Uzun and Kılınç (2020), tendencies toward collective movement and socialization were observed in individuals with Down syndrome following recreational activities. In their study, Yılmaz and Çetin (2025) concluded that sports make a positive contribution to social interaction, the ability to build a social network, communication skills, social

adaptation, social acceptance, empathy, and the ability to take responsibility. These studies support parents' views regarding the subtheme of social acceptance within the main theme of sports as a profession. In this regard, encouraging individuals with special needs to participate in sports and adopt it as a career is important for their social acceptance and integration into society.

When we examine parents' views regarding the sub-theme of guarantee for the future within the main theme of sports as a profession, we find that some parents express a desire for their child to view sports as a career while also wanting that career to be sustainable. In addition to engaging in physical activity, it is important for individuals with special needs to participate in competitive sports and view sports as an integral part of their lives. Sports teach people how to cope with their disabilities, boost their self-confidence, and enhance their personal development and motivation in life (Taşkın, 2014). Sports and physical activities are effective in the rehabilitation of individuals with special needs, in their social lives, in their ability to communicate with others, and in enhancing their quality of life (Ergun, 2008). In their qualitative study, Kumcağız and Avcı Çayır (2018) noted that 75% of the participants reported that sports had helped them develop their perspectives on setting personal goals for the future. In this context, it is considered important to adapt practices aimed not only at enabling individuals with special needs to actively participate in sports but also at supporting their identity as athletes in their future lives in the social environment.

Conclusions and Recommendations

As a result of the study, parents of students with special needs perceive physical education and sports classes as important in terms of health, independence, self-confidence, active lifestyle, and socialization, and they suggest that class hours should be increased and distributed more evenly throughout the week. Furthermore, families note that having their children participate in sports contributes to social integration, but they also emphasize that professional continuity is necessary for this process to be sustainable.

In line with these findings;

The class schedules and structure of physical education and sports classes in special education vocational schools must be reviewed in light of the individual differences, developmental characteristics, and special needs of students with

special needs. Children with special needs who are athletes or aspire to become athletes must be provided with appropriate physical, social, and educational environments where they can participate in sports in accordance with their individual differences, developmental levels, and needs. It is believed that conducting studies with the parents of students with special needs and various diagnoses regarding the importance, content, and contributions of physical education and sports classes to student development would be beneficial. It is recommended that support mechanisms be established to provide lifelong support for children with special needs who are athletes, and that programs be developed to include education, training, counseling, and social integration processes in this regard.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

Ethics Statement

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Authors' Contributions

Study Design: SK and AY; Data Collection: SK; Statistical Analysis: AY and ZÖ; Data Interpretation: SK and ZÖ; Manuscript Preparation: SK, AY and ZÖ; Literature Review: SK, AY and ZÖ. All authors have read and approved the published version of the manuscript.

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