

## Opinions and suggestions of preservice special education teachers on ethical principles

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### Abstract

This study aims to explore the opinions and suggestions of preservice special education teachers about the ethical principles that should be followed in the field of special education. The study adopted qualitative methodology. The data were collected through semi-structured interview questions. The participants of the study are senior students who study at the special education department of a faculty education in a university in the Western Black Sea region. One of the prerequisites sought for students is that they have successfully passed all junior year courses and the other is that they have taken the Ethics and Ethics in Education course. The data collected in the study were analysed through content analysis. In addition, the Maxqda programme was used in the analysis of the data. Research findings were categorised under five themes. The themes are ethical principles, ethical characteristics that special education teachers should have, ethical and unethical behaviours, the impact of training and legal regulations on ethics and suggestions of the participants on ethics were collected under the sub-categories.

**Keywords:** Ethics, ethics in special education, professional ethics.

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## 1. Introduction

Almost all children differ from each other in terms of their physical and learning characteristics. When these differences are significant, special education programmes and arrangements are necessary. Individuals who differ significantly from their peers in terms of their characteristics and educational qualifications for various reasons are defined as individuals with special education needs (Kanun Hükmünde Kararname. 573 [KHK], 1997). The education provided for these individuals is called special education. Accordingly, special education is considered as the education that is carried out with specially trained staff, specially developed curricula and methods that are suitable for their disability condition and characteristics to meet the educational needs of individuals with special education needs (573 KHK, 1997). Specially trained staff and teachers are considered important in special education. In Article 3 of the teaching profession law, teaching and related management duties are described as a specialisation. It is stated that teachers are obliged to perform these duties in accordance with the aims and basic principles of Turkish National Education and the ethical principles of the teaching profession. Similarly, regarding the qualifications and selection of teachers in Article 4 of the same law 1) the qualifications to be sought in terms of world knowledge, field-specific knowledge and pedagogical/professional knowledge in preservice teachers are determined by the Ministry of National Education (MEB). 2) It is stated that teachers are selected among the graduates of tertiary teacher training institutions and of foreign higher education institutions whose equivalence is recognised (Resmi Gazete, 2022). Teachers who are employed by the Ministry of National Education in the field of special education, similar to general education teachers, are trained in 4-year undergraduate programmes of education faculties affiliated to higher education institutions. In the definition of special education profession, a special education teacher is described as a person who has successfully completed special education teaching undergraduate programmes of universities in order to educate students with various differences that may prevent their learning due to different characteristics, such as learning, vision, hearing and mental disabilities, behavioural and emotional problems or giftedness (Vuran, 2020). Preservice teachers are those who will be employed as a special education teacher when they graduate but are seniors at the faculty or have graduated but have not been employed. When preservice special education teachers become teachers, they are expected to follow the processes, such as curriculum development, teaching and evaluation, for children with special needs. Special education teachers are also expected to comply with ethical rules while carrying out their profession.

Ethics appears in our daily life, mostly within the scope of normative and applied ethics, in other words, in a position that defines what ideal behaviours should be. Ethics, according to a definition in the same vein, is described as the 'guiding values, principles and standards that help determine how things should be done at the individual and societal levels' (Uzun & Yolsal, 2008). Also, ethics is a field of study that tries to create ideals and norms by examining and questioning ethical and moral behaviours and aims to help individuals, institutions and experts make decisions by distinguishing between right and wrong. Social norms differ based on different disciplines. One of these disciplines is 'Professional Ethics' (Akcemete et al., 2016). Professional ethics both gives ideas and guides on what is right and wrong about the work carried out. Each profession has its own professional ethics due to the characteristics and the way it is practiced. Preservice teachers learn about the rules regarding the teaching profession in their undergraduate programmes. In the teacher training programme of the Higher Education Council, teaching profession ethics is taught in the Morality and Ethics in Education course. Contents of this course covers the basic concepts of morality and ethics; ethical principles, ethical rules, business and professional ethics/ethics; the teaching profession with its social, cultural, moral and ethical aspects; the right to education; ethical principles in teaching, learning and evaluation processes; ethical principles in relation with education stakeholders; education/school administrators, unethical behaviours in the professional life; ethical regulations regarding education and teachers; unethical behaviours in school and education, ethical dilemmas, problems and solutions; moral/ethics education and ethics committees in school; school principal and teacher as a moral/ethical leader (YOK, 2018). The conduct of educational activities is

affected by ethical and moral values that depend on certain basic values. In this respect, ethical behaviours are also included in the teaching profession, which play an important role in the conduct of educational activities (Bullough, 2011; Keser et al., 2013).

Behaviours that include teaching profession exhibited by teachers while carrying out their duties in schools cannot be considered different from ethical responsibilities. One of the basic requirements for teachers to assume this responsibility is the establishment and monitoring of professional ethical principles. Thanks to professional ethical principles, the boundaries of appropriate and inappropriate teacher behaviours are drawn and basic standards are established (Ozdemir, 2022).

The circular for 'Professional Ethical Principles for Educational Service Providers' issued by the MEB in Turkey in 2015 includes the ethical principles that teachers must comply with. These principles are listed under the title of 'ethical principles related to students' as follows: 1) love and respect; 2) setting a good example; 3) being understanding and tolerant; 4) behaving fairly and equally; 5) prioritising the student's development; 6) covering the student's information; 7) not reflecting negative psychological situations; and 8) avoiding ill-treatment. Ethical principles regarding the education profession are listed as follows: 1) professional competence; 2) providing a healthy and safe education environment; 3) compliance with working hours and lesson hours; 4) not accepting gifts; 5) not minding personal benefits; 6) not giving private lessons; and 7) not requesting for donations. In addition, ethical principles for relationships with educators, parents, school administration and society, as well as ethical principles regarding school administrators' relations with teachers, students and parents, are included (MEB, 2015). Although there is no legal regulation regarding the ethical rules that specifically special education teachers must comply with in Turkey, ethical standards for special educators have been put forward by a committee of academics, teachers and non-governmental organisations in the field of special education (Vuran, 2020). In developed countries, there are ethical principles for special education created by various organisations. For example, the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) determined the following ethical principles:

1) Respecting the characteristics of individuals with special needs, such as their reputation, culture, language and background, and maintaining expectations of achieving the highest possible level of learning outcomes and improving their quality of life;

2) Demonstrating a high level of professional competence and integrity, as well as making professional decisions that the individuals with special needs and their parents will benefit from;

3) Encouraging the inclusive participation of individuals with special needs in schools and in the community;

4) Collaborating with people who provide services to individuals with special needs;

5) Developing respectful relationships with families, including families and individuals with special needs in the educational decision-making processes;

6) Using evidence, education data, research and professional knowledge in practices involving individuals with special needs;

7) Protecting and supporting the physical and psychological safety of individuals with special needs;

8) Avoiding practices that may harm individuals with special needs and not condoning such a situation;

9) Practicing in line with professional ethics, standards and the policies of the Council for Children with Special Needs, protecting laws, regulations and policies that affect professional practice and advocating for the development and improvement of laws, regulations and policies;

10) Supporting professional conditions and resources that will improve the learning outcomes of individuals with special needs;

11) Contributing to the development of the profession with active participation in professional communities;

12) Contributing to the development and dissemination of professional knowledge and skills.

Professional ethics in the field of special education is as important as in other fields of education. When the literature in this field is reviewed, various studies can be found. These studies include a review study on ethics and ethical considerations in special education (Ozdemir, 2022); professional ethics knowledge and practice of administrators and teachers (Fiedler & Van Haren, 2009); a discussion on the importance of ethics teaching in education (Gulcan, 2015); a scale of professional ethics was developed for individuals working in the field of special education (Akcemete et al., 2017); an assessment of ethical levels of special education teachers (Rice & Stein, 2009); an investigation of professional ethics in ethics teaching and special education teaching in Turkey (Bolat et al., 2020); and systematic reviews (Decker et al., 2022).

In addition, when the opinions of other preservice teachers about professional ethics are examined, there is a study on the examination of environmental ethics awareness of preservice science and primary school teachers by different variables (Sozmez, 2019). In another study, the views of preservice teachers about professional unethical behaviours were discussed (Altinkurt & Yilmaz, 2011). Moreover, studies on the investigation of preservice science teachers' ethical approaches towards the environment and their attitudes towards sustainable environment (Alpak Tunc, 2015); determining the views of preservice science teachers on ethical principles and morality (Ceyhan, 2013); examination of preservice science teachers' ethical attitudes towards the environment (Karakaya et al., 2018); and opinions of preservice teachers participating in the pedagogical formation certificate programme on the 'Ethical Values of the Teaching Profession' (Zan & Zan, 2017) can be found.

Professional ethics in teacher education as a field of study has received little attention in the special education literature (Decker et al., 2022). Therefore, no study or research could be found on the views of preservice special education teachers on the application of professional ethical principles in special education. The inability to find studies in the aforementioned area and the curiosity of the researcher on the topic can be considered as the leading reason behind this study.

It is clear that professional ethics is critical in terms of the roles and responsibilities of special education teachers and there is a need for professional ethics teaching in teacher training and professional development. In the field of special education, it is necessary to scientifically examine how professional ethics is handled, especially in the fields of teacher training and professional development. The main purpose of this research is to reveal the opinions and suggestions of preservice special education teachers about professional ethics in the field of special education. In this respect, the following research questions guided this study:

1. What are the opinions of preservice special education teachers on the concept of ethics?
2. What are the opinions of preservice special education teachers about the ethical principles that special education teachers should have?
3. What are the opinions of preservice special education teachers about the ethical and unethical behaviours of special education teachers?
4. What are the opinions of preservice special education teachers about the legal regulations and training they receive?
5. What are the opinions of preservice special education teachers regarding professional ethics?

## 2. Method

In this section, the research design, participants, data collection tool, data analysis, validity and reliability discussions are included.

### 2.1. Research design

This study was conducted to determine the opinions and suggestions of preservice special education teachers on professional ethical principles. The study was carried out as a holistic single case study, which is one of the qualitative research designs. Qualitative study is defined as research study in which the qualitative process is followed in order to reveal perceptions and events in a realistic and holistic way in their natural environments with qualitative data collection techniques, such as observation, interview and document analysis (Yildirim & Simsek, 2018). Creswell (2017) stated that interviews can be conducted face-to-face and one-on-one, as well as on the phone or online. In this study, data were collected through face-to-face interviews and a reflective journal (Uzuner, 1999).

### 2.2. Participants of the study

The participants of this study consisted of 20 preservice special education teachers who attend special education teaching undergraduate programme. Criterion sampling, one of the purposive sampling methods, was adopted for the study. The criterion sampling method is based on the understanding of studying situations with groups that meet a set of predetermined criteria (Yildirim & Simsek, 2018). In this study, the criteria were determined as being a special education teaching senior spring semester student, taking the 'Morality and Ethics in Education' course and being successful in this course and volunteering to participate in the study. The research was carried out with 10 female and 10 male participants who met these criteria. The ages of the participants ranged from 21 to 38 years. In order to protect the identities of participants, pseudonyms, such as Participant 1, Participant 2...Participant 20, were used instead of their names.

### 2.3. Data collection tools and procedures

Data were collected through a semi-structured interview form and reflective research journal, which are qualitative data collection tools. In the development of the data collection tool, questions were prepared by examining the literature on 'ethics', 'professional ethics' and 'special education professional ethics'. The questions asked to the preservice teachers in the interviews are given as follows:

- 1) What does the concept of 'ethics' mean to you?
- 2) What are the professional ethical principles that special education teachers should have?
- 3) First of all, if we start with ethical behaviours, what kind of behaviours do you think a special education teacher exhibits will be ethical in a professional sense?
- 4) What kind of behaviour should be considered unethical in relation to our previous question?
- 5) What kind of effects can legal regulations have in complying with professional ethical principles? To what extent do you think the current legislation is sufficient to support professional ethical behaviour?
- 6) What can be done to make special education teachers behave more suitable for professional ethical principles?
  - a) Legal regulations?
  - b) Monitoring of practices?
  - c) Stakeholder roles?

7) What do you think about the reflection of 'Ethics and Ethics in Education' course on professional ethical principles?

8) Finally, is there anything you would like to add?

At the end of the literature review, interview questions were determined and an interview form was created by the researcher. As a result of the analysis, it was considered important to ensure that the questions serve the purpose of the assessment of the professional and ethical principles and behaviours that special education teachers should have. After the interview form was created, the interview final form of the interview form was reached after consulting s special education expert who has experience in qualitative research, a faculty member giving ethics courses, and an assessment and evaluation expert. In line with the feedback received from the experts, the third and fourth questions were added. In addition, the seventh question was revised.

Following the development of the interview form before the formal interviews were conducted, a pilot study was conducted with one of the volunteer participants. At the end of the pilot interview, it was seen that the questions were clear. No revisions were made on the questions after the pilot interview.

The data of the study were collected between 01.03.2022 and 30.03.2022. All of the interviews were conducted by the researcher as face-to-face interviews. Demographic information, consent form, information to participant form and semi-structured interview questions were included in the data collection tool. The questions were directed to the participants following their order and recorded with a voice recorder. The durations of the interviews were ranging between 9 minutes 23 seconds and 19 minutes 35 seconds.

#### *2.4. Data analysis*

Research data were analysed using content analysis. Maxqda 2022 package programme was used to organise and analyse the data. According to Yildirim and Simsek (2018), the main purpose in content analysis is to reach concepts and relationships that can explain the collected data. The process performed in content analysis is to gather similar data under the framework of certain concepts and themes and to organise and interpret them in a way that the reader can understand. After the data collection process, the data were read several times in order to check the accuracy of the obtained data. The obtained data were simplified and the codes were extracted. In the extraction of the codes, the researcher and an expert from the field of special education worked separately. The coding keys prepared by the researcher and the expert were compared and the reliability coefficient between the coders was calculated. In the calculation the formula developed by Miles and Huberman (1994) was used –  $\text{Reliability} = \frac{\text{Consensus}}{\text{Consensus} + \text{Disagreement}}$  – and the agreement level between coders was determined as 95%. As a result, it was concluded that the interview coding key prepared by the researcher can be used in the analysis of the data. After the coding was carried out, the codes were arranged according to the appropriate themes. Findings were presented with direct quotations.

#### *2.5. Validity and reliability*

Yildirim and Simsek (2018) highlighted that strategies such as long-term interaction, depth-oriented data collection, participant confirmation and expert review can be used to ensure validity and reliability. Expert review was used as an effort to ensure validity and reliability in this study. Expert review was carried out in two ways. First is conducting expert–researcher conferences. In these conferences, the researcher explains all the processes to the expert. He evaluates the validity of his approach and way of thinking with the expert by showing the data he has collected and the conclusions he has reached. The expert asks questions about the processes, reviews the raw data and the analysis. Then, the expert provides feedback on the soundness of processes. As a second method of expert review, the researcher sends all the documents related to the research design, data analysis and the results to an expert, adding all the raw data he has collected. The expert

examines the work and gives feedback (Yildirim & Simsek, 2018). The second method was adopted in this study. The researchers sent all documents to an expert who has studies in special education and qualitative research as an effort to ensure validity and reliability. After the expert completed the necessary examinations, it was confirmed by the expert that the research design, analyses and data collection techniques were appropriate.

### 3. Findings

The data obtained in this study, which was carried out to determine the opinions and suggestions of preservice special education teachers about professional ethical principles that special education teachers should follow, were gathered under five themes. The themes are the Concept of Ethics; the Ethical Principles Required for Special Education Teachers; Ethical and Unethical Behaviours; the Effect of Legal Regulations and Training; and Suggestions.

#### 3.1. The concept of ethics

Preservice special education teachers stated that the concept of ethics means behaviours in accordance with social norms, the effort to find the good and the beautiful, the rules, the results of the behaviours, honesty and benevolence. It was seen that preservice teachers' opinions on this theme mainly focused on behaviours that are accepted by the society. In addition, they defined the concept of ethics entirely through behaviours. Some opinions on this theme are as follows:

*'The concept of ethics is like the truth of a society, to me, if we do something right it will be appropriate when the society accepts. For example, if a person accepts stealing as right for himself, morality is right for that, but it is wrong for the society. This is also about ethical behaviours. It is society's approval of behaviours'.* (Participant 5)

*'The concept of ethics, based on the moral and ethics course in my education, brings to my mind concepts such as right, good, bad. Besides, it evokes things like being right, being beautiful, being good. Ethics, at the same time... it also comes to my mind as a discipline that affects the norms, rules and behaviours that establish the interaction between individuals and society'.* (Participant 7)

*'Ethics is knowing about the right and wrong, good and bad, and also being able to apply it. Ethics is the effort to find them. It is not just about knowing, in fact, the important thing is that I know what is right and wrong, but I think, it is being able to see where to apply the right, being able to see the wrong and turn it into the right. We can say the concept of ethics, that is, to be on the side of the truth, to seek [them]'.* (Participant 15)

#### 3.2. Ethical principles that a special education teacher should have

Preservice special education teachers have expressed various opinions regarding the ethical principles that special education teachers should have. In terms of professionalism, preservice teachers stated professional competence, cooperation with families, being able to conduct effective teaching, avoidance of self-interest and fairness and equal treatment as ethical principles. They also stated that the behaviours of respect, patience, love of profession, sensitivity, confidentiality and empathy are ethical principles. When the answers given by the preservice teachers are examined, it can be said that these ethical principles can be considered not only for special education teachers but also all teachers. Some opinions on the theme are as follows:

*'The ethical principles that teachers should have can be fair... and can be fair and tolerant. Above all, I think [the teacher] should be someone who respects human dignity. He should treat all his students equally. There needs to be unconditional respect and acceptance'.* (Participant 12)

*'First of all, [teacher] needs to be much more patient, these children's.... normally people can be very angry about something, but they need to explain it more patiently. Sometimes they show aggressive behaviours. One has to prepare himself first, by knowing and predicting these encounters. He must have professional qualification. He has to be patient. He must have sufficient knowledge. What will a person turn to when he faces with a problem? Or how will he guide those families? The families we*

*deal with do not know about special education either, special education is a very new field. It is also necessary to guide them. The teacher should have these too. Which public institutions they can consult, how they can get support, these need to be known as well'*. (Participant 1)

*'I think that the most important ethical principle that special education teachers should have been commitment to the goal and mission. There should be love of the profession. And then, the teacher should provide information and be a participant in this process along with the family. He should not share his students' private information with others'*. (Participant 3)

### 3.3. Ethical and unethical behaviours

Preservice special education teachers have many opinions about ethical and unethical behaviours. While some of the opinions expressed by the participants directly refer to unethical behaviours, doing the opposite of some behaviours can be accepted as ethical or unethical. Labelling, punishing, discriminating, sexual abuse, insults and sharing photos of students on social media are behaviours that preservice teachers define as unethical behaviours. Behaviours that preservice teachers accept as ethical are paying attention to their appearance, attending their classes on time, getting to know the children and their families as well as the child's environment, treating all students equally and fairly, behaving honestly and completing their paperwork. In the Ethical Principles theme, preservice teachers drew attention to the behaviours that not only special education teachers but also other teachers should have. Several quotations of the opinions on the related theme are as follows:

*'When we think professionally, a special education student is a child who requires attention, so they should not be discriminated, and the child should be treated according to his level. There should be no discrimination, injustice, violence against students. First of all, I think that the teacher should not say any hurtful words in his class. I think, if all children are treated equally, it can be said that the teacher behaves in accordance with ethical principles. When he is tolerant, treats all his students equally without discriminating against anyone'*. (Participant 18)

*'I said responsibility from the duty; I said that the teacher has responsibilities to fulfill. First of all, he should know these things, he should know what is going on, he should not think that I nailed this job. Above all, one should think in general. For example, oh my lesson... so what, we have already informed his family. I faced such a situation; the teacher said that we informed RAM [Counselling and Research Centre], we informed his family, this child cannot be educated, he should not come here. I think, it shouldn't be thought that no matter what it is, it doesn't concern me from now on. Because they too are a soul. We should see them as our own children, but we shouldn't go too far, of course'*. (Participant 20)

*'First of all, I think that he should do this profession willingly. Not in exchange for anything specific... He may not be recruited [by the state], he may have livelihood concerns or working hours, even if he does not like it, he has to do it fairly. He shouldn't be thinking it as a way to spend the day. I think, he should do his job rightfully'*. (Participant 8)

*'Violence, this applies to all, secondly, I think it is unethical when the teacher does not cooperate with child's family, because in special education, family is a very important component, it can be a problem when it goes beyond it, and if the teacher does a sloppy work, it will be unethical too'*. (Participant 4)

*'If he is committed to his class, disciplined in his class, comes to his class on time, gives importance to his students, asks for their opinions, if he can answer the question of how my student will behave when I am not actually present, these behaviours are quite ethical'*. (Participant 13)

### 3.4. The effects of legal regulations and training

Teachers expressed their views on the effect of legal regulations and preservice training on teachers' ethical behaviours. Especially, they stated that the 'Morality and Ethics in Education' course they took during their undergraduate period raised awareness in teaching ethical and unethical



behaviours and in mastering ethical principles. However, they highlighted the limited reflection of this awareness in the field. Some preservice teachers have mentioned that the lessons have no effect on ethics. Similarly, they pointed out that the legal regulations are sufficient, but there are problems in supervision. In this vein, they mentioned that the practices in the legislation were not fully implemented and as a result, ethical problems occurred. Regarding the legal regulations, the participants stated that it would be more effective for legislators and supervisors to receive training on ethics, in terms of legal regulations' compliance with the ethical principles. Some preservice teachers' views on this theme are as follows:

*'I think, it's totally the responsibility of the school administrators and partly the teacher is responsible. That's to say, if the school administrators give importance to this, of course not in the form of pressure to use their positions on the teachers, there is a legislation for this. In fact, this and that need to be done, and this and that will be done in this way... But since not everyone knows about special education classes, that is school administrators also do not know how to treat special education students. For example, administrators should be informed about these issues. How should he behave? Regulations need to be made about how it should be carried out. For example, well... it can be done in classes... maybe a camera system can be installed for the family to watch'.* (Participant 9)

*'You know, the teacher should be supervised somehow. The teacher may face an inspection by the higher authorities. If he misbehaves, he should be inspected against students'.* (Participant 16)

*'Legal legislation sets the boundaries, determines the distance between us and let it be the child or the family, it is important in this respect, it also allows us to focus more on work, because some people do not want to do a job without legal obligations, they try to avoid it. I think the legal regulations are sufficient, but there are problems in implementation'.* (Participant 2)

*'The moral and ethics course in education, which has been added to undergraduate programmes in recent years, is an indication that difficulties in complying with ethical rules are experienced and that such a course should be taught in schools. Since this course has been taught, it will be easier to train teachers - including myself who adopt professional ethical principles by taking into account the legal regulations. Teachers who experience ethical contradictions between two situations will choose what they have to do ethically, not what is asked of them when deciding'.* (Participant 17)

*'I mean, I can't say that the lessons are completely... 100 percent, but I mean, it has definitely been beneficial. So, it did. Of course, it helped us to be informed about how we should behave or what the ethical principles are, but I think that we need to do research and read about these issues in order for us to be at the level we desire. I don't think that the desired level will be reached just at the course level. I'm already in that direction. In other words, I think, that I am not at the desired level on the course level'.* (Participant 6)

*'I don't think that the lessons have much of a reflection, sir, because the moral lesson in education should not only be in education, but also there should be ethics in education in special education. Let it be about privacy or cleanliness, how a student needs to be approached more morally and ethically should also be taught to the special education teacher'.* (Participant 16)

### 3.5. Participants' suggestions

Preservice special education teachers who participated in this study made some suggestions for special education teachers to behave more in line with ethical principles and to exhibit ethical behaviours more. The focus of preservice teachers' suggestions was mostly on inspections and trainings. Preservice teachers suggested increasing inspections and seminars, courses and in-service training activities. In this respect, they suggested that it would be beneficial for supervisors to conduct frequent and regular inspections, teachers' preservice training should be emphasised and criteria for ethical principles should be determined. They also stated that regarding inspections, administrators with ethical principles should conduct inspections. They also suggested that informing other stakeholders in special education about ethics would be effective, cooperation would

contribute to complying with ethical principles, families should take an active role and more scientific research should be done. The suggestions of some of the preservice teachers are as follows:

*'I think that the words of the great leader Mustafa Kemal ATATÜRK, "Teachers, new generation will be your legacy" should be posted as signboards at the entrances of education faculties and -based on these words, the ones who take morality and ethics in education course should think about the importance of it in the course... in the course or later on... in professional life. Because I think that even if we are good teachers with the right character and personality, this can affect students. In other words, obeying ethics is an internal situation rather than laws'.* (Participant 5)

*'In fact, many people do not know the legal regulations. The parents of the students don't know either. Conferences and seminars can be given to families, teachers, and administrators of individuals with disabilities. These can be about legal regulations, what are their sanctions can be mentioned'.* (Participant 8)

*'These ethics and morals should be in every field, not just in the form of teaching. Ethics and morals of teachers should be developed, teachers are constantly given seminars at the end of the semester. I think that one of the most important points of these seminars, even the first seminar courses, is about ethics and morality. Experts can be brought in, invited. At this point, I think that teachers should be given serious training. First of all, we need to know the child well so that we can display our ethical behaviours accordingly'.* (Participant 19)

*'Families need to be properly enlightened so that teachers can comply with ethical principles. Also, families should be monitoring. Administrators should supervise. In other words, administrators need to conduct regular inspections'.* (Participant 10)

*'We are already taking professional morality classes. I mean, here, in universities... a little... what's a teacher? We are learning what the teacher needs to do. But, here, the important thing is to be able to apply it. For practice, teachers should be given sufficient training while studying at the university'.* (Participant 20)

*'People don't do their what is necessary, in any institution I've observed, people do not do what they need to do, nor they are supervised properly. Let me give an example from a hospital, when the workers, all nurses, doctors are told not to go out before five, the chief physician mustn't go out before five. Because if the chief physician goes out before two the other one goes out at three. To me, the highest authorities will comply first so that the others will also comply'.* (Participant 7)

*'There is already a cooperation in special education. Definitely it is not possible without collaborative. For example, the child may be going to physiotherapy at the hospital. Or there may be other additional things. In other words, school administrators, in the application of the ethical behaviours, maybe because they are administrators, they have a little more to say and they can assist in special educators who are in a position to apply this'.* (Participant 4)

#### **4. Discussion, conclusion and implications**

The data obtained as a result of this study which aimed to determine the opinions and suggestions of preservice special education teachers on professional ethical principles were categorised under five themes. These themes can be listed as the concept of ethics; the ethical principles that special education teachers should have; ethical and unethical behaviours; the effect of legal regulations and training; and suggestions. Regarding the first theme, the concept of ethics, the preservice teachers considered the concept of ethics with reference to behaviours and results of behaviours in accordance with social norms. In this respect, the behaviours such as good, bad behaviour and honesty are about the value attributed by the society. Kucuradi (2003) stated that the word ethics has three main meanings used in today's discussions. The word ethics is used with reference to morality, i.e., the evaluation and behaviour systems that are expected to determine the evaluations and actions of people in a certain group at a certain time. These norms are unwritten norm systems. These norms are norm systems about what is good and bad in a given culture at a

given time. They are different and variable norm systems that express what people should and should not do in general terms. Kucuradi calls these 'moral norms' (2003). In this respect, the ethical understanding of preservice teachers can be considered as 'moral norms'. However, Cevizci (2002) defines the concept of ethics as '*moral principles as a theory of principles, as a discipline of philosophy that fight to realise a certain ideal of living, that criticise and even condemn the age and the life of the society in which he is a member, that replace the current range of values with alternative values, that clearly define the rules of life, in short, that add meaning to life*'. It can be said that preservice teachers have difficulties in distinguishing the concepts of ethics and morality.

Regarding the ethical principles special education teachers should have, which is another theme obtained in the analysis of the research data, are the preservice teachers mentioned professional qualification; cooperation with families; effective teaching; avoidance of self-interest; and fairness and equality as ethical principles. They also stated that the behaviours such as respect, patience, love of the profession, sensitivity, confidentiality and empathy are also ethical principles. Vuran (2020) listed a set of ethical principles for special education teachers. These principles are honesty, objectivity, sensitivity and respect, confidentiality, protection and defence of rights and privileges, prevention of neglect and abuse, avoidance of self-interest, professional qualification, effective teaching, researcher responsibility, cooperation and interaction and social responsibility. The findings obtained in the present study confirm the ethical principles stated by Vuran (2020). It is seen that preservice special education teachers have sufficient knowledge regarding ethical principles.

The preservice teachers who participated in this study regarding the ethical and unethical behaviours of special education teachers as labelling, punishment, discrimination, sexual abuse, insult and sharing the photos of students on social media as unethical behaviours. Ethical behaviour is paying attention to one's appearance, attending classes on time, knowing the families and the environment where the child lives, treating all students equally and fairly, being honest and completing students' paperwork. Preservice teachers who participated in the study of Zhunusbekova et al. (2022) defined discrimination, professional abuse, bribery, indiscipline and irresponsibility as unethical behaviours. Moreover, teachers' honesty, professionalism, responsibility and justice are among the ethical behaviours. In this respect, the opinions of preservice special education teachers and preservice teachers working in the field are similar (Smith, 2013; Zhunusbekova et al., 2022). According to a study conducted with preservice teachers, preservice who participated in the study teachers think that teachers do not exhibit unethical behaviours. According to preservice teachers, the most frequent unethical behaviour that a teacher exhibits is not paying enough attention to students with low success levels and the least unethical behaviour is to apply pressure on students on religious issues (Altinkurt & Yilmaz, 2011). In this respect, the views of preservice special education teachers and preservice teachers from different fields do not overlap. The reason behind this is thought to be because of the programme they followed during the education process.

Preservice teachers, regarding legal regulations, pointed out that they are sufficient, but there are problems in implementation and inspection. In this respect, the preparation of legal regulations is not sufficient on its own terms and the implementation and inspection procedures should be strictly controlled (Ince & Yikmis, 2021). In addition, preservice teachers stated that the practices in the legislation were not fully implemented and this caused ethical problems. They stated that in order to prevent these problems, legislators and inspectors should receive training on ethics, which would be more effective in making legal regulations suitable with the ethical principles.

Altinkurt and Yilmaz (2011) suggested that more importance should be given to informing prospective teachers about ethical principles in Turkey. They stated that the reason behind this was the lack of courses related to ethics in the existing teacher training programmes. They stated that as of the year their study was conducted, there was no course on ethics in teacher training programmes. However, the updated undergraduate programme includes a two-credit 'Morality and Ethics in Education' course. Preservice teachers stated that the 'Morality and Ethics in Education'

course they took during their undergraduate education raised awareness in teaching ethical and unethical behaviours and in mastering ethical principles. However, they highlighted the limited reflection of this awareness to the field. Several preservice teachers have mentioned that the lessons had no effect on ethics. Sisman and Acat (2003) stated that novice teachers' perceptions of ethical values were more negative compared to those of experienced teachers. High quality education provided during the undergraduate period can contribute to a positive change in perceptions.

Finally, preservice special education teachers made suggestions to various stakeholders in order for special education teachers to behave more in line with ethical principles. They suggested increasing the frequency of inspections, seminars and courses in service training activities. They suggested that criteria for ethical principles should be determined. In terms of inspection, they also stated that administrators with ethical principles should conduct inspections. Although administrators have inspection authority, conducting research studies on ethical principles in order to determine how they use their authority is important. Another suggestion is informing stakeholders on ethical issues. Considering that special education should be carried out with a collaborative team approach (Friend & Cook, 2014), all stakeholders should also be informed about ethics. They suggested that families should play a more active role and that more scientific research studies should be conducted. There exist various studies conducted on ethics in the national and international literature (Akcamete et al., 2017; Altinkurt & Yilmaz, 2011; Alpak Tunc, 2015; Fiedler & Van Haren, 2009; Decker et al., 2022; Gulcan, 2015; Ozdemir, 2022; Rice & Stein, 2009; Sozmez, 2019; Zan & Zan, 2017). The reason behind this suggestion may be because preservice teachers did not have sufficient knowledge of the studies in the literature, but it should be stated that ethics is an area that needs more research (Kucuradi, 2003).

Based on the findings of this study, some suggestions for practice and for future research were developed. For practice, professional ethical principles can be added to the contents of the courses that preservice special education teachers take in their education. Training programmes such as seminars, courses and in-service training can be organised for the in-service teachers. By determining criteria for ethical principles, teachers who comply with ethical principles more can be rewarded. For future research, a similar study can be carried out using quantitative research methods. Preservice teachers can be trained on ethical principles and their effectiveness can be analysed. Opinions and suggestions of special education teachers on ethical principles can be determined. The same study can be carried out with the participation of students from more than one special education department in different universities.

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