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Religious Education for Students with Autism According to Their Families and RCMK Teachers

Ailelerine ve DKAB Öğretmenlerine Göre Otizmli Öğrencilere Yönelik Din Eğitimi

Teceli KARASU

ORCID: 0000-0002-1907-0100

E-Posta: t.karasu@alparslan.edu.tr

Doç. Dr., Muş Alparslan Üniversitesi, İslami İlimler Fakültesi, Felsefe ve Din Bilimleri Bölümü, Din Eğitimi Bilim Dalı
Assoc. Prof., Muş Alparslan University, Faculty of Islamic Sciences, Department of Philosophy and Religious Sciences, Department of Religious Education
Muş, Türkiye
ROR ID: [009axq942](https://orcid.org/009axq942)

İbrahim YILDIZ

ORCID: 0000-0003-3139-2169

E-posta: i.yildiz@alparslan.edu.tr

Dr. Öğr. Üyesi, Muş Alparslan Üniversitesi, İslami İlimler Fakültesi, Felsefe ve Din Bilimleri Bölümü, Din Felsefesi Bilim Dalı
Assist. Prof., Muş Alparslan University, Faculty of Islamic Sciences, Department of Philosophy and Religious Sciences, Department of Philosophy of Religion
Muş, Türkiye
ROR ID: [009axq942](https://orcid.org/009axq942)

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Abstract

The lives and experiences of individuals with autism differ in terms of social norms and differ not only from normal individuals but also among themselves. This situation necessitates making some special arrangements in education. A considerable amount of scientific work has been conducted on how to provide education for students with autism. However, it is difficult to say that the desired level has been reached at the point of religious education, which constitutes an important area of education. Religious education can play a crucial role in the entire development of students with autism, impacting not only their personal growth but also contributing to the formation of a healthy social structure and progress. For this reason, the effects of religious education on students with autism require further exploration through scientific studies. These studies can shed light on the specific benefits and challenges that religious education presents for individuals with autism. By examining the impact of religious education on cognitive, emotional, and social development in students with autism, researchers can identify strategies that promote inclusivity, engagement, and meaningful learning experiences. This knowledge can help educators, parents, and policymakers make informed decisions about implementing religious education programs for students with autism. Moreover, scientific studies provide an opportunity to develop evidence-based interventions and support systems that address the specific requirements and potential barriers faced by autistic students in religious education practices. This study aims to determine the religious education needs of students with autism and how these needs can be met. In the study, which was prepared in a qualitative design, data were collected through the interview technique. Considering the religious education needs of students with autism and the fact that their families and teachers are very experienced in meeting these needs, their opinions were consulted. The research study group consists of 6 parents and 5 teachers with different characteristics. The data of the research were generally analyzed using the descriptive analysis method. As a result of the research, it was seen that very few participants in the study group thought that religious education is not necessary for students with autism. In terms of which theories, methods and techniques should be used in religious education for students with autism, it has been presented that the most appropriate theory to be based on in the education of students with autism is behavioral learning theories with external control. Regarding what should be taken into consideration when using materials in religious education for students with autism, it has been stated that teaching materials should be prepared by considering the performance and development of students as well as the principles of material development to contribute to the student. It has been observed that classroom management is not difficult in cases where the students with autism are mild and their number is limited to one or two, but as the number of these students increases, difficulties are experienced in classroom management. It has been reported that in monitoring the development of students with autism, measurement and evaluation should be process-centered and all developmental areas of the student should be considered. Finally, it has been stated that teachers' negative attitudes towards students with autism and their inadequacy in designing instruction cause the most important problems in the religious education of students with autism. As a result of the study, it has been seen that it is essential to determine the appropriate teaching objectives for the students, to use methods and techniques, to prepare teaching materials, and to carry out assessment and evaluation by considering their characteristics and developments.

Keywords: Religious Education, Autism, RCMK Teachers, Families, RCMK program.

Özet

Otizmlı bireylerin yaşayışları, deneyimleri toplumsal normlar açısından farklılık gösterir ve sadece normal bireylere göre değil, aynı zamanda kendi aralarında da farklılıklar gösterirler. Bu durum eğitimde bazı özel düzenlemelerin yapılmasını gerekli kılmaktadır. Otizmlı öğrencilere nasıl eğitim verileceği konusunda önemli oranda bilimsel çalışma yapılmıştır. Ancak eğitimin önemli bir alanını oluşturan din eğitiminde istenilen düzeye gelindiğini söylemek güçtür. Din eğitimi, otizmlı öğrencilerin tüm gelişim alanlarında çok önemli bir rol oynar, sadece kişisel gelişimlerini etkilemekle kalmaz, aynı zamanda sağlıklı bir sosyal yapının oluşmasına da katkıda bulunur. Bu nedenle din eğitiminin otizmlı öğrenciler üzerindeki etkilerinin bilimsel çalışmalarla araştırılması gerekmektedir. Bu çalışmalar, din eğitiminin otizmlı bireyler için sunduğu belirli faydalara ve zorluklara ışık tutabilir. Araştırmacılar, otizmlı öğrencilerde din eğitiminin bilişsel, duygusal ve sosyal gelişim üzerindeki etkisini inceleyerek kapsayıcılığı, katılımı ve anlamlı öğrenme deneyimlerini destekleyen stratejiler belirleyebilirler. Böylece, eğitimcilerin, ebeveynlerin ve politikacıları otizmlı öğrenciler için din eğitimi programlarını uygulama konusunda bilinçli kararlar almalarına yardımcı olabilir. Ayrıca bilimsel çalışmalar, otistik öğrencilerin din eğitimi uygulamalarında karşılaştıkları belirli gereksinimleri ve potansiyel engelleri ele alan kanıta dayalı müdahaleler ve destek sistemleri geliştirme fırsatı sunar. Bu çalışma, otizmlı öğrencilerin din eğitimi ihtiyaçlarını ve bu ihtiyaçların nasıl karşılanabileceğini belirlemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Nitel desende hazırlanan çalışmada veriler görüşme tekniği ile toplanmıştır. Otizmlı öğrencilerin din eğitimi ihtiyaçlarını ve bu ihtiyaçları karşılamada ailelerin ve öğretmenlerin oldukça tecrübeli oldukları düşüncesiyle onların görüşlerine başvurulmuştur. Araştırmanın çalışma grubu, farklı özelliklere sahip 6 veli ve 5 öğretmenden oluşmaktadır. Araştırmanın verileri genel olarak betimsel analiz yöntemiyle analiz edilmiştir. Araştırma sonucunda çalışma grubundan çok az katılımcının otizmlı öğrenciler için din eğitiminin gerekli olmadığını düşündüğü görülmüştür. Bunun başlıca nedeni din eğitiminin inanç boyutunda soyut konuları içermesi ve otizmlı öğrencilerin ibadet mesuliyetlerinin olmamasıdır. Otizmlı öğrencilere yönelik din eğitiminde hangi teori, yöntem ve tekniklerin kullanılması gerektiği noktasında otizmlı öğrencilerin eğitiminde temel alınması gereken en uygun teorinin dıştan kontrollü davranışsal öğrenme teorileri olduğu dikkate sunulmuştur. Otizmlı öğrencilere yönelik din eğitiminde materyal kullanımında nelere dikkat edilmesi gerektiği konusunda öğretim materyalinin öğrenciye katkı sağlaması için materyal geliştirme ilkelerinin yanı sıra öğrencilerin performansı ve gelişimi de dikkate alınarak hazırlanması gerektiği belirtilmiştir. Sınıf yönetiminde otizmlı öğrencilerin hafif düzeyde olması ve sayıları bir veya iki ile sınırlı olması gibi durumlarda sınıf yönetiminin zor olmadığı, ancak bu öğrencilerin sayısı arttıkça sınıf yönetiminde zorluklar yaşandığı görülmüştür. Otizmlı öğrencilerin gelişimlerinin takibinde ölçme ve değerlendirmenin süreç merkezli olması ve öğrencinin tüm gelişim alanlarının dikkate alınması gerektiği bildirilmiştir. Son olarak ise öğretmenlerin otizmlı öğrencilere yönelik olumsuz tutumlarının ve öğretimi tasarlama konusundaki yetersizliklerinin otizmlı öğrencilerin din eğitimindeki en önemli sorunlara yol açtığı belirtilmiştir. Sonuç olarak öğrencilere uygun öğretim hedeflerinin belirlenmesi, yöntem ve tekniklerin kullanılması, öğretim materyallerinin hazırlanması, öğrencilerin özellikleri ve gelişimleri dikkate alınarak ölçme ve değerlendirme yapılmasının gerekli olduğu görülmüştür. Bu anlamda DKAB öğretmenleri, öğrencilerin eğitim ihtiyaçlarını karşılayabilecek şekilde öğretimi bireyselleştirmeli; bu bakımdan DKAB öğretmenlerini yetkin kılacak önlemler alınmalıdır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Din Eğitimi, Otizm, DKAB Öğretmenleri, Aileler, DKAB programı.

Introduction

Humans are created with different qualities from each other. This difference is greater in some people than in others. One group that differs significantly from ordinary people proportionally is individuals with autism (with autism spectrum disorder). These individuals are diverse in terms of social and emotional skills and verbal and nonverbal communication. People with autism have special interests and repetitive behaviors. They have features such as routinizing behaviors, deep commitment to issues/events, and avoiding symbolic expression. These characteristics of individuals with autism are accepted within the scope of neurodevelopmental disorders.¹ However, early intervention, environmental conditions, and a positive cultural perspective have an important place in the development of these people. In other words, family and school have an important place in terms of making these students self-sufficient, both in their education and in raising public awareness. At this point, in formal education religious education courses are an important educational area that can help. A religious education suitable for the needs of the time² can contribute to the well-being of individuals with autism and motivate them to attend to society.

A universally accepted definition of autism has not yet been established, for various reasons. One of the primary reasons for this is the incomplete understanding of the etiology (causality) of autism so far.³ In addition, the different results of autism intervention methods and the fact that all individuals with autism do not show the same characteristics make the definition of autism difficult. However, the IQ levels of approximately 75% of individuals with autism are below the IQ levels of ordinary individuals. It can be said that some of them have superior intelligence in areas such as

¹ *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders- DSM-5* (Arlington: American Psychiatric Association Publishing, 2013), 50.

² Mehmet Su, "Din Eğitiminde Çocuklar için Felsefe (P4C): İmkânlar ve Sınırlılıklar", *Din ve Bilim - Muş Alparslan Üniversitesi İslami İlimler Fakültesi Dergisi* 5/1 (2022), 80.

³ Elizabeth Baltus Hebert - Christina Koulouglioti, "Parental Beliefs About Cause and Course of their Child's Autism and Outcomes of Their Beliefs: A Review of the Literature", *Issues in Comprehensive Pediatric Nursing* 33 (2010), 149.

mathematics and music.⁴ However, the common feature of autistic children can be expressed as the difficulty they experience in perceiving the world.⁵ Mental retardation sometimes accompanies autism,⁶ which is said to appear in the first 30 months of infancy.⁷ This naturally affects the approaches, theories, strategies, and methods that can be followed in religious education that will be designed for students with autism.

It is the most basic right of individuals with autism to receive education. Organizing educational activities for this group, which is estimated to constitute 1/40-1/80 of society,⁸ is the duty of the state as well as essential for the rest of society. When the education for these students contributes to their being able to live without being dependent on someone and makes them self-sufficient, it will also prevent them from being a burden to society. Most importantly, the religious education that autistic students will receive can contribute to their psychological well-being, self-confidence, and self-esteem.

The identification and placement processes of individuals with autism are like the other disability groups. Depending on the degree of autism and whether there is any accompanying disability, these students can receive education in special education centers or special education classes of regular schools or regular schools with their peers through inclusive education. There is also a Religious Culture and Moral Knowledge (RCMK) course in the program prepared for the special education schools and classes that these students can attend. This course first started to take place in the program in 2010 and continued its existence by being renewed in 2013 and 2018. When the literature is examined, it will be seen that the discussions on the subject are mostly related to the

⁴ Champion Quinn, *100 Soruda Otizm Aileler ve Uzmanlar için El Kitabı*, çev. Ümit Şahbaz (Ankara: Anı Yayıncılık, 2017), 30-31.

⁵ Ahmet Güneş, *Otizim ve Otistik Çocukların Eğitimi* (İzmir: İzmir Yayınevi, 2005), 13.

⁶ Barış Korkmaz, *Ah Şu Otizm* (İstanbul: Aba Yayınları, 2017), 37.

⁷ Jed Baker, *The Social Skills Picture Book Teaching Play, Emotion and Communication to Children with Autism* (Arlington: Future Horizons, 2003), 9.

⁸ Sümeyra Birecik, "Otizmliler için İlköğretim Din Kültürü ve Ahlak Bilgisi Dersi Öğretim Programı: Otizmlilerde Din ve Din Eğitiminin İmkânı Tartışmaları Çerçevesinde Bir İnceleme", *Darulfunun İlahiyat Dergisi* 30/1 (30 Haziran 2019), 83.

legitimacy of the course and the necessity of religious education.⁹ However, what needs to be discussed is how the RCMK course can contribute to the religious and moral development of students with autism.

There are a limited number of studies on religious education for autistic students. In the study conducted by Karagöz, religious coping with the problems of parents with autistic children is discussed.¹⁰ In the study conducted by Usta, inferences are made about the religious education rights of autistic individuals from the verses and hadiths.¹¹ Two of the studies in the field of religious education belong to Bilecik.¹² She deals with the positive-negative discussions about the possibility of a Religious Culture and Moral Knowledge course for students with autism within the framework of teacher views. Additionally, she argues that the current RCMK program does not cater to the needs of all students with autism. However, it is imperative to engage in a comprehensive discussion about religious education for individuals with autism, as they form a significant part of society and impact others in various ways. Exploring the scientific approaches that can positively contribute to their lives is crucial for enhancing their religious education.

The program prepared for students with autism is a framework. Also, Religious Culture and Moral Knowledge Course Book 1st Level and Teacher Guidebook have been prepared by the Ministry of National Education.¹³ The important thing is that the course can be designed following the level of the students, meeting their needs, and

⁹ Gökhan Töret vd., "Otizmlilerde Çocuğa Sahip Olan Ebeveynlerin Görüşleri: Otizm Tanımlamaları ve Otizmin Nedenleri", *Ankara Üniversitesi Eğitim Bilimleri Fakültesi Özel Eğitim Dergisi* 15/1 (2014), 2; Bilecik, "Otizmliler için İlköğretim Din Kültürü ve Ahlak Bilgisi Dersi Öğretim Programı", 85.

¹⁰ Sema Karagöz, *Otizmlilerde Çocuğın Anne Babalarında Anlamlandırma ve Dini Başaçıkma* (İstanbul: Marmara Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, 2010).

¹¹ Mustafa Usta, "Otizmlilerde Din Eğitimi", *Özel Eğitimde Din Eğitimi*, ed. Özdemir Özdemir - Mustafa Başkonak (Ankara: Grafiker Yayınları, 2018), 64-76.

¹² Bilecik, "Otizmliler için İlköğretim Din Kültürü ve Ahlak Bilgisi Dersi Öğretim Programı", 79-109; Sümevra Bilecik, "Özel Eğitim ve DKAB Öğretmenlerine Göre Otizmlilerde Din-Ahlak Eğitimi ve DKAB Dersleri", *Bilimname* 37/2 (31 Ekim 2019), 553-589.

¹³ Alpaslan Karabulut, Rıdvan Demir, Mesut Önder, Ayhan Baştürk, *Din Kültürü ve Ahlak Bilgisi Ders Kitabı I. Kademe* (4. Sınıf), ed. Alpaslan Karabulut, (Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Millî Eğitim Bakanlığı Yay.); Alpaslan Karabulut, Rıdvan Demir, Mesut Önder, Ayhan Baştürk, *Din Kültürü ve Ahlak Bilgisi Öğretmen Kılavuz Kitabı I. Kademe* (4. Sınıf), (Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Millî Eğitim Bakanlığı Yay.).

contributing to their development. At this point, it is their families and the RCMK teachers, who know the characteristics of autistic students and the issues to be considered in religious education for them. Therefore, it is important to scientifically address the views of the families of students with autism and the RCMK teachers involved in their religious education regarding religious education for students with autism. The data to be obtained scientifically can contribute to the training of teachers who will work in these institutions in the future and make a serious contribution to the coping of families who are likely to have children with autism.

This study aims to reveal the views of RCMK teachers who teach autism classes and the families of individuals with autism about religious education. Based on this main purpose, answers to the following questions were sought:

1. According to RCMK teachers and families, in which matters, do students with autism need religious education?
2. According to RCMK teachers and families, which theories, methods, and techniques should be used in religious education for students with autism? Why?
3. According to RCMK teachers and families, what should be considered in the use of materials in religious education for students with autism?
4. According to RCMK teachers and families, what should be considered in classroom management in religious education for students with autism?
5. According to RCMK teachers and families, how should the assessment and evaluation of students with autism be?
6. According to RCMK teachers and families, what are the main problems experienced in the religious education process?

1. Method

This section consists of some basic information about the research design, study group, data collection technique and tools, data collection, and analysis.

1.1. Research Design

In this work, the case study design was used in this study, which deals with the religious education of students with autism in line with the views of their families and RCMK teachers.

1.2. Study Group

In the research, a purposive sampling technique was used to obtain sufficient and valid data.¹⁴ The study group of this research comprised individuals who were considered to possess significant knowledge on the subject.¹⁵ Specifically, it consisted of 5 RCMK teachers who teach students with autism and 6 families with autistic children. In this context, teachers who work in different types of schools in Muş city center where autistic students attend and who are thought would contribute to the study were preferred. It is assumed that the parents who participated in the research were sincere in their opinions. Qualitative information about the study group is given in Table 1 and Table 2 below.

Table 1: Some Basic Information of the Study Group (Teachers)

Nickname	Gender	Vocational Seniority	Type of school attended	Working time	The disability level of the autistic	Undergraduate Graduation
1	Male	2	Primary School Special Education Subclass	1	Mild Level	RCMK teacher
2	Female	2	Secondary School Special Education Subclass	1	Mild Level	Paid Teacher with Sociology Graduate and Special Education Certificate
3	Female	8	Special Education Practice School III. Level	2	Medium and Heavy Level	RCMK teacher
4	Male	8	Special Education Practice School III. Level	8	Medium and Heavy Level	Special Education Teacher

¹⁴Ali Yıldırım - Hasan Şimşek, *Sosyal Bilimlerde Nitel Araştırma Yöntemleri* (Ankara: Seçkin Yayınları, 2008), 107.

¹⁵Burke Johnson - Larry Christensen, *Eğitim Araştırmaları Nicel, Nitel ve Karma Yaklaşımlar*, ed. Selçuk Beşir Demir, çev. İbrahim Budak - Ayfer Budak (Ankara: Eğiten Kitap, 2014), 231.

5	Female	6	Special Education Application Center I. and II. Level	8	Medium and Heavy Level	Special Education Teacher
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Table 2: Some Basic Information About the Study Group (Student’s Parents)

Nickname	Gender	Relationship Status to Student	Education level	Age of Student with Autism	Disability Level of the Autistic Student	Educational Institution of the Student	Student’s Attendance in Rehabilitation
1	Felame	Mother	High school	11	Mild Level	Special Education Subclass	Goes to the Special Education and Rehabilitation Center.
2	Felame	Aunt	Primary school	10	Mild Level	Special Education Subclass	Goes to the Special Education and Rehabilitation Center.
3	Male	Uncle	Middle school	10	Mild Level	Special Education Subclass	Goes to the Special Education and Rehabilitation Center.
4	Male	Father	Undergraduate	12	Mild Level	Special Education Subclass	Goes to the Special Education and Rehabilitation Center.
5	Felame	Mother	High school	17	Medium Level	Special Education Practice School III. Level	Goes to the Special Education and Rehabilitation Center.
6	Felame	Mother	Primary school	11	Medium Level	Special Education Practice School I. and II. Level	Goes to the Special Education and Rehabilitation Center.

1.3. Data Collection and Analysis

Within the scope of the study, firstly, a literature review was made. By making use of this review, forms with semi-structured interview questions were developed separately for teachers

and parents by the researcher to realize the purpose of the study. A pilot interview was conducted with 1 RCMK teacher and 1 parent with the forms prepared after the assessments of two field experts. After the feedback, necessary corrections were made, and the forms were given their final shape. After obtaining ethical and legal permissions for the study, face-to-face interviews were held with the study group. Voice recordings were taken in the interviews with the consent of the participants. It was later transcribed into the text.

The descriptive analysis method was preferred in the analysis of the data. The data obtained in the study were processed into predetermined themes and categories depending on the problem status and sub-problems.¹⁶ In this context, respectively, a descriptive framework was constituted, the data were processed according to the thematic framework, and the findings were defined and interpreted.¹⁷ Moreover, the descriptive findings and interpretations that will increase the quality of the report have been presented. In this context sometimes direct quotations were made from the participants. To understand whom, the comments belong to, RCMK teachers were coded with the letter "T" and the parents of the students with the letter "F".

2. Results

The results of the study are classified as follows, based on its sub-objectives.

2.1. Religious Education Needs of Students with Autism

The autism level can be low in all developmental areas, as well as moderate and high. It may be high in some areas of development and low in others. Since this is related to the cognitive and religious development of students, it may affect their religious learning. Especially the religious knowledge needs of students who have deficiencies in several different fields vary considerably. According to the participants in the study group, the religious learning needs of the students differ depending on their disability level. For example, for a "severe level" student, T6 said: "Since students with autism have no cognitive ability, they have no religious responsibility. That's why we teach the rules of social harmony, etiquette, and courtesy in the lesson instead of how to worship." Despite that F1 stated that "As the child develops and gets older, the need for religious education changes".

¹⁶ Yıldırım - Şimşek, *Sosyal Bilimlerde Nitel Araştırma Yöntemleri*, 224.

¹⁷ Remzi Altunışık vd., *Sosyal Bilimlerde Araştırma Yöntemleri SPSS Uygulamalı* (Sakarya: Sakarya Yayıncılık, 2010), 322.

Some of the participants believe that students with autism do not need religious education. T1 expressed this as; “There are students who are both autistic and mentally handicapped at the same time, I do not think that religious education is necessary for them.” Similarly, T4 expressed his thoughts about how the religious education of these students is difficult as: “It is difficult to educate some of the students with autism. Because they avoid eye contact, they cannot identify, they cannot ask questions to learn, and they have trouble using language.” Some studies conducted in the West, supporting the above claims, state that since students with autism do not feel the need for religious education, religious education should not be given to them.¹⁸ According to these studies, students with autism are either atheists or agnostics. However, it is stated that these studies are mostly studies that collect data with the survey technique.¹⁹ It does not provide sufficient data to decide whether students with autism need religious education. Some claim that even students with a heavy level of autism can improve with religious education and therefore they should be allowed to experience the holy places. According to these, students can even think about God.²⁰ Their religious development is slower than the others.²¹ However, religious education is a source of prosperity and strength for these students as well as meeting their spiritual needs.²²

According to most of the participants, students with mild autism can be taught religious knowledge, short surahs, etiquette, and social relations that they can benefit from in daily life. For example, T3 said: “The subject of religious expressions in daily conversations can be explained in accordance with the level of these students.” Similarly, T2 expressed the following “One of my students memorized the Al-Fatihah, Al-Ikhlâs, and Al-Kauthar surahs.” F1 stated that her child constantly asks questions about creation, the universe, death, pain, and God, and sometimes she has the inability to answer them. This shows that these students feel the need for religious education and that these needs can be met with appropriate methods. Because religious education has an important role for students with autism to know themselves, develop

¹⁸ Mary Walsh, “Autism, Culture, Church: From Disruption to Hope”, *Journal of Disability & Religion* 20/4 (2016), 350.

¹⁹ Bilecik, “Otizmli Çocuklar için İlköğretim Din Kültürü ve Ahlak Bilgisi Dersi Öğretim Programı”, 105.

²⁰ Liz O'brien, “Connecting with Re: An Approach to Religious Education for Children with Autism and/or Severe and Complex Learning Disabilities”, *NASEN* 19/3 (2004), 134-135.

²¹ Leif Ekblad - Lluís Oviedo, “Religious Cognition Among Subjects with Autism Spectrum Disorder (asd): Defective or Different?”, *Clinical Neuropsychiatry* 14/4 (2017), 288,294.

²² Hakiman Hakiman vd., “Religious Instruction for Students with Autism in an Inclusive Primary School” 20/12 (2021), 140.

a worldview, and be included in religious communities.²³ Similarly, in a study conducted within the scope of the TÜBİTAK project, it was revealed that students with autism need religious education and that these needs could be met with the right methods.²⁴

Since most of these students have limited capacity, they have trouble keeping the information that is not used constantly in memory. Therefore, considering these characteristics of students, priority should be given to information that can be useful in normal life in religious education. In this regard, F3 said: "I would like religion lessons to contribute to my child's ability to meet the basic needs when my child is alone." And F6 expressed the following "The most basic need of these children is self-care, and the religion lesson can contribute to the cleanliness of the student." The learning outcome of the student in the religion lesson can also positively affect other areas of development. It can even help the student gain self-confidence. F1 said that: "As my child learns about religion, both the child and we rejoice." F1 also stated that her child wanted to fast, and the child spent a certain time of the day fasting, and the child warned the family every day to get up for suhoor. There are similar scientific study results in the West indicating that religious education can contribute to autistic students.²⁵ This reveals the necessity of designing religious education considering the level of students in question and their daily needs.

It was seen that most of the participants who thought "There is no need for religious education for the development of these students" evaluated religious education in the context of including abstract subjects in the context of belief and that students with autism are not responsible to perform worship. In this regard, F5 said: "These children do not understand subjects such as angels, destiny, and the hereafter." However, issues such as morality, cleanliness, etiquette, communication, daily concepts, and socialization can certainly be thought of in the context of religious education. Some parents stated that they wanted the children to go to the mosque to socialize, but they were worried about the attitudes of the congregation. F4 said: "My child very much wants to go to the mosque with other children." Activities such as going to the mosque can be interpreted that religious education can contribute to the

²³ O'brien, "Connecting with Re: An Approach to Religious Education for Children with Autism and/or Severe and Complex Learning Disabilities", 133.

²⁴ "Otizm Bir Hastalık Değil, Farklılıktır!", *Genç Dergi* (Erişim 26 Nisan 2022).

²⁵ Diane McGee, "Widening the Door of Inclusion for Children with Autism through Faith Communities", *Journal of Religion, Disability & Health* 14/3 (2010), 281-284.

socialization of the students. Similarly, in some studies conducted in the West, Christian parents stated that their children enjoyed going to Sunday school.²⁶ It is possible to interpret these results as religious education will improve students' social relations. However, going to the mosque is not enough for this. It is also important to organize the activities inside the mosque in a way that meets the child's interests and needs.

2.2. Strategies, Methods, and Techniques That Can Be Used in Religious Education for Students with Autism

It is important to specifically determine the strategies, methods, and techniques convenient for students with autism.

According to the study group, the theories that should be based on the education of students with autism are behavioral learning theories. Because externally supervised education with elements such as hints, reinforcement, reward, and punishment are more effective in the success of education for these students. On the other hand, education based on a constructivist learning approach is the least functional theory. T1 expressed this as "While internal activities such as Socratic discussion, finding and guiding in the teaching process are the right method for ordinary students, they are not very functional in the education of students with autism. Students cannot make sense of an item on their own." However, the active involvement of students in the educational process and their involvement in practice facilitate their learning.²⁷ T1 stated this as: "For example, you must give physical support to teach them how to greet. In other words, you need to hold their hands and show the greeting position and repeat it a few times." At this point, it is possible to say that error-free teaching methods and direct teaching methods can be used in the education of these students.²⁸ Because it is difficult to correct these students' wrong attitudes and knowledge. Therefore, care should be taken to ensure that the initial learning is correct. T3 expressed her sensitivity to this as: "Sometimes I follow up on my students during break time so that they don't learn anything wrong." Similarly, it is difficult for students with short attention spans to learn an event that requires several steps at once. Therefore, step-by-step instruction may be preferred. T5 stated as "These students quickly get

²⁶ Erica J. Howell - Melinda R. Pierson, "Parents' Perspectives on the Participation of Their Children with Autism in Sunday School" 14/2 (2010), 161.

²⁷ Teceli Karasu, *Din Eğitiminde İşlevsel Akıl* (Araştırma Yayınları, 2021), 102.

²⁸ Rıdvan Demir, "Zihinsel Engelli Bireylerde Din Eğitimi", *Özel Eğitimde Din Eğitimi*, ed. Mustafa Başkonak-Saadettin Özdemir (Ankara: Grafiker Yayınları, 2018), 162-163.

bored with the lesson. When it is explained at length in one go, the student breaks away from the lesson.” T4, also, said: “After doing lessons for about 15-20 minutes, we take an in-class break, and we also do daily, weekly and monthly repetitions.” Students with autism need coherent structured life and ideas, concrete designs, and activities to make sense of abstract ideas.²⁹ T3 expressed this situation as: “It is possible to give abstract ideas to students with materials and consistent repetition.” Therefore, it is necessary to try to provide education with a concrete, consistent and visual understanding.

The number of students in the class is one of the factors affecting the strategy and method to be used. There can be a maximum of 4 students in classes with autism. Sometimes the 4 students in the class may be at different grades and levels. However, sometimes one-on-one education can be done. This naturally affects the determination of the method to be used in the class.³⁰ Participants stated that one-on-one education was the most efficient option. F2, expressed this as “When new students came to the class, the teacher had to spend less time with our child and the student’s progress decreased.”

According to the participants, another factor that is as effective as the method is that the teacher is patient, compassionate, and tolerant. Because students with autism may be less tolerant, anxious, and nervous.³¹ F2 expressed her opinion on this subject as “The most important method in the education of people with autism; is patience and mercy.” Many repetitions and keeping the tone low are also important. F3 expressed his opinion as: “It is necessary to repeat patiently and not to get angry with the student. Because getting angry has more negative consequences.” Participants expressed that elements such as awards, appreciation, and thanks are very important in the education of these students. In this regard, F1 expressed her observation as: “... When giving water to her grandmother, she scolds her to thank him for her act”. Autism limits students’ capacities and reduces their learning speed.³² In this sense, the learning level for ordinary individuals may be quite low for these students. However, acting in coordination with all BEP-centered stakeholders can contribute significantly

²⁹ Ella Rain, “Religious Education for Autistic Children”, *Love to Know* (Erişim 01 Ağustos 2022).

³⁰ Ebru Güveli, “Öğretim Yöntemleri”, *Öğretim İlke ve Yöntemleri*, ed. Mehmet Küçük - Selami Yangın (Ankara: Nobel Akademik Yayıncılık, 2018), 109.

³¹ O’Brien, “Connecting with Re: An Approach to Religious Education for Children with Autism and/or Severe and Complex Learning Disabilities”, 133.

³² Mine Kizir, “Otizm Spektrum Bozukluğu Olan Bireylere İletişim Becerilerinin Öğretiminde Uzaktan Aile Eğitim Uygulamaları”, *Ankara Üniversitesi Eğitim Bilimleri Fakültesi Özel Eğitim Dergisi*, (15 Mayıs 2020), 254.

to their development.³³ T4 expressed his thoughts as: “I share the activities that are done every day in the classroom with the parents. Likewise, they share with me what is done in the family. Thus, we aim to make the behavior permanent.”

Another point that the study group drew attention to was coping with repetitive behaviors and obsessions. T1 expressed this as “When the student is asked, “What is the name of our Prophet?” the student responds as “What is the name of our Prophet?””. It is very difficult to gain social and academic skills for people who have such comprehension and interpretation problems. In this sense, it is possible to experience difficulties in religious education, which includes mostly abstract subjects. T5 stated this as: “It takes a special effort and time to give religious education to students with autism who cannot use language and have low communication skills.” In addition, teaching religious concepts and their meanings, which are widely used in daily life in religious education classes, can also contribute to the language development and social interaction of the student.

There are also strengths of students with autism. F1 stated this as: “The student learned to read by herself from television, we still do not know how she learned reading.” This shows that the student has areas of competence that can be improved. Education should be based on these strengths of the student and should be supported.³⁴ T4 stated this as: “The student is much better than her peers in music and painting what she sees.” Some students with autism try to apply the social skills they have learned in their daily lives. F1 explained this situation as “While her older brothers and sisters are not sensitive about turning off the lights and water, the student turns them off immediately she learned these in class.” All in all, having a common understanding between family and school facilitates learning. At the point where there is a different application, the realization of learning may become difficult.

One of the issues emphasized by the participants was that the students experience a sense of achievement. According to them, students are happy when they succeed and feel the need to share their joy. F1 on this matter said, “When the student memorized Al-Fatihah, she was reciting the surah publicly to show us what she had learned.” A sense of achievement can also bring self-confidence and self-respect. For this reason, special attention can be given to

³³ Teceli Karasu, “Din Eğitiminde Bireyselleştirilmiş Eğitim Programının Hazırlanması ve Öğretim”, *Özel Eğitimde Din Eğitimi*. ed. Saadettin Özdemir - Mustafa Başkonak. (Ankara: Grafiker Yayınları, 2018), 66-67.

³⁴ Hakiman vd., “Religious Instruction for Students with Autism in an Inclusive Primary School”, 151.

determining the [acquirements](#) appropriate for the level of the student and designing the classroom culture in a way that the student can taste success. Teaching can be designed by considering that students with autism sometimes see the world as strange, chaotic, and astonishing.³⁵

2.3. Instructional Materials That Can Be Used in Religious Education for Students with Autism

In the most general sense, teaching materials make the education process effective; It is all kinds of materials are used to achieve teaching objectives, from the simplest tools such as books, blackboards, etc. to the most complex equipment such as computers, the internet, and web technologies.³⁶ Teaching materials designed and used in education may vary depending on factors such as teaching objectives, teaching method, student characteristics, teaching environment (physical environment), teacher attitudes and skills, cost, and time.³⁷ Since individuals with autism differ significantly from their ordinary peers, the teaching materials to be prepared for them may also be different. Only with appropriate materials they can benefit from their learning potential.³⁸ In this sense, the Religious Culture and Moral Knowledge 1st Level Course Book (4th grade) and the Religious Culture and Moral Knowledge 1st Level Teacher's Guidebook prepared by the Ministry of National Education can make serious contributions to students.³⁹

Students with autism differ from their peers in points such as memory, attention, generalization of what they have learned, motivation, language, and social, behavioral, and emotional characteristics. Moreover, they can show different characteristics within themselves. In this regard, the participants stated that for the teaching material to contribute to the student, it should be prepared by considering the principles of material development, especially the

³⁵ O'brien, "Connecting with Re: An Approach to Religious Education for Children with Autism and/or Severe and Complex Learning Disabilities", 133.

³⁶ Tuğba Yanpar Şahin - Soner Yıldırım, *Öğretim Teknolojileri ve Materyal Geliştirme* (Ankara: Anı Yayıncılık, 1999), 21-22.

³⁷ Eyüp Şimşek - Teceli Karasu, "Din Eğitiminde Engellilere Yönelik Öğretim Materyalleri (Öğretmen Görüşlerine Dayalı)", *Sosyal Politika Çalışmaları Dergisi* 37 (2016), 12.

³⁸ O'brien, "Connecting with Re: An Approach to Religious Education for Children with Autism and/or Severe and Complex Learning Disabilities", 134.

³⁹ Alpaslan Karabulut, Rıdvan Demir, Mesut Önder, Ayhan Baştürk, *Din Kültürü ve Ahlak Bilgisi Ders Kitabı I. Kademe (4. Sınıf)*, ed. Alpaslan Karabulut, (Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Millî Eğitim Bakanlığı Yay.); Alpaslan Karabulut, Rıdvan Demir, Mesut Önder, Ayhan Baştürk, *Din Kültürü ve Ahlak Bilgisi Öğretmen Kılavuz Kitabı I. Kademe (4. Sınıf)*, (Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Millî Eğitim Bakanlığı Yay.).

performance and development of the student. According to them, course materials prepared for ordinary students are not appropriate for students with autism. About the textbook, which is the most used material, T2 said, “We do not use the book because it is above the student level.” This reveals the necessity of preparing teaching materials exclusive to students with autism. Because the teaching material to be prepared for students with autism can contribute to attracting students’ interest, providing adaptation to the lesson, facilitating learning by embodying abstract topics, and realizing permanent learning.⁴⁰ In this sense, stories about the Prophet’s communication with children can be prepared. Despite that, during the study, it was observed that there were not enough teaching materials in some classes. On this subject, T4 said, “Student-specific materials were requested from the Ministry of Education. But it hasn’t arrived yet. We are also trying to benefit from the material prepared for ordinary students.” It is also important that the teacher knows how to use the material. Because some teachers have difficulties adapting the teaching materials to the students. On this subject, T2 said, “We were not trained for the education of these students. We get to know the students and learn to use materials in the process.” Most of the participant teachers stated that they used the prepared materials but did not reach the competence to design student-specific materials.

According to the study group, students with autism may feel uncomfortable with the presence of too much equipment in their surroundings. For this reason, it is necessary to comply with simplicity as much as possible in the design of educational spaces and to avoid tools that can harm or distract students with autism. T3 declared that the design of the class was not appropriate for the student, saying, “Unfortunately, the class in which we teach is an ordinary student class and was not prepared by considering students with autism”. In addition, benefiting from the material that provides a learning experience depending on the outcome can contribute to the easier learning of the students and the permanence of the learned information.⁴¹ T5 stated her thoughts on the subject as “For example, if the etiquette of drinking water is to be taught, it would be more useful when the glass and water were brought to the classroom and the subject was explained in practice”. Similarly, F3 also said, “To teach how to greet a visually prepared greeting can be much more effective than an oral presentation”. In this

⁴⁰ Yusuf Aydın, “Din Öğretiminde Teknoloji ve Materyal Geliştirme”, *Din Öğretiminde Hazırlanabilecek Öğretim Materyalleri ve Kullanımına Örnekler*, ed. Tuğrul Yürük-Rıdvan Demir (Ankara: Nobel Akademik Yayıncılık, 2021), 119.

⁴¹ Mehmet Korkmaz, *Din Öğretimi Teknolojisi ve Materyal Geliştirme* (Kayseri: Kimlik Yayınları, 2017), 85.

sense, the material can contribute to the concretization and therefore the understanding of abstract complex subjects.⁴² Some experimental studies show that appropriate materials prepared for students with autism minimize learning difficulties.⁴³

2.4. Classroom Management in the Process of Religious Education for Students with Autism

Classes opened for students with autism can have a maximum of 4 students. However, for these students, a combined classroom application can be made at the 1st-4th and 5th-8th grade levels.⁴⁴ In this case, it is necessary to provide education for students whose grades are very different from each other at the same time. Some difficulties may appear in the management of combined classes with students from different grades and levels.

Educational environments for students with autism should be cultural spaces that reduce anxiety, increase motivation, maintain attention, and allow working together.⁴⁵ Culture has an important function in both society and education.⁴⁶ According to the study group, if the students with autism are mild level and their class number is limited to one or two, it is not difficult to prepare the teaching environment. However, if the number is higher and students' undesirable behaviors are high, classroom management can be difficult. T1 expressed his thoughts on classroom management as "I did not have any problems in applying the lesson plan since I had one-on-one lessons with a student" Since students with autism have problems focusing, their attention span is short. These people have unique life experiences. The strengths and needs of each may differ from the other.⁴⁷ This requires the teacher to look after them individually. A student who is not cared for in a classroom with more than one student can sometimes cause problems. F2 stated that "If possible if only one teacher is to be in these classes, the number of students in the class should be at most two". In addition, in classes with autistic students, the

⁴² Aydın, "Din Öğretiminde Teknoloji ve Materyal Geliştirme", 120.

⁴³ Özge Eliçin vd., "Otizm Spektrum Bozukluğu Olan Çocuklara İşlevsel Okuma Becerilerinin Kazandırılmasında Tablet Bilgisayar Aracılığı ile Sunulan Programın Etkililiği", *Sosyal Bilgiler Dergisi*, 5/13 (2015), 272.

⁴⁴ Resmi Gazete, Özel Eğitim Hizmetleri Yönetmeliği (Resmi Gazete, Özel Eğitim Hizmetleri Yönetmeliği), 30471 (07 Temmuz 2018).

⁴⁵ O'brien, "Connecting with Re: An Approach to Religious Education for Children with Autism and/or Severe and Complex Learning Disabilities", 134.

⁴⁶ Yakup Uzunpolat - Eyüp Şimşek, "İlköğretim Din Kültürü ve Ahlak Bilgisi Dersi Öğretim Programında Kültür", *Din ve Bilim - Muş Alparslan Üniversitesi İslami İlimler Fakültesi Dergisi* 5/2 (2022), 264-269.

⁴⁷ Oxford RE Team, "Teaching Religious Studies to Those with Autism Spectrum Condition", *Oxford Education Blog* (19 Eylül 2018).

rules and the boundaries should be clear, and there must be consistency in applying the rules. Thus, the student can be helped to acquire skills.

According to the regulation⁴⁸, the lessons for students with autism are conducted by special education teachers. In addition, the field courses in the weekly course schedules are required to be taught by the relevant field teachers. Special education teachers, also, participate in these courses to support the teaching of the course. Therefore, support can be obtained from a special education teacher while giving religious education. In this case, teachers need to work with different models of cooperative learning in harmony.⁴⁹ Participants also drew attention to the awareness of ordinary students for social cohesion. Because socialization does not occur only at the request of the autistic student. F1 expressed this situation as “One of the things my child wants most is for other children to play with him”. This situation requires ordinary students in the school where the autistic student is present to develop a positive attitude towards the autistic student⁵⁰ and to plan activities that can involve the student in question.

2.5. Assessment and Evaluation in Religious Education for Students with Autism

Assessment and evaluation are a formative and integrated part of the multi-step and systematic learning process that includes the collection and interpretation of the data on teaching.⁵¹ In this sense, assessment, and evaluation can be considered an important element in the follow-up of the development of students with autism.

According to the study group, assessment and evaluation should be process-centered and continuous to monitor the learning of students with autism. For these people, more direct and error-free teaching methods should be preferred, feedback should be received immediately after the subject is covered and corrections should be made if necessary. This feedback can be considered a kind of assessment and evaluation. This type of assessment is referred to as “formative and nurturing assessment” in the literature.⁵² In addition, since these students are special, the performance of each of them is taken into account and an Individualized Education

⁴⁸ Resmi Gazete, Özel Eğitim Hizmetleri Yönetmeliği.

⁴⁹ Muzaffer Üzümcü, “Özel Eğitimde Din Eğitimi: El Kitabı”, *Din Eğitiminde Kaynaştırma Uygulamaları ve Destek Özel Eğitim Hizmetleri* (Ankara: Grafiker Yayınları, 2018), 97-98.

⁵⁰ Üzümcü, “Din Eğitiminde Kaynaştırma Uygulamaları ve Destek Özel Eğitim Hizmetleri”, 95.

⁵¹ Derya Çobanoğlu Aktan - Zafer Çepni, “Ölçme ve Değerlendirme Dersi Kapsamı ve Gereklilikleri Hakkındaki Uzman ve Öğretmen Görüşleri: Pilot Çalışma”, *Eğitimde ve Psikolojide Ölçme ve Değerlendirme Dergisi* 1/2 (2010), 86.

⁵² Neşe Güler, *Eğitimde Ölçme ve Değerlendirme* (Ankara: Pegem Akademi Yayınları, 2019), 14.

Program (BEP) is made accordingly.⁵³ This shows that the evaluation of the development of students with autism is made both by the teacher of the course and the BEP Board for shaping and training in the process, and by the Guidance Research Center (RAM) when necessary, for recognition and placement.

According to the study group, assessment and evaluation are important in terms of determining the usefulness of the activities for the student. In addition, including the family in the BEP at the point of evaluation is also beneficial in terms of supervision. An important point to note here is that the student's different developmental areas should also be evaluated, and the assessment should be done continuously.⁵⁴ Regarding the subject, T1 expressed his thoughts as "Evaluation should be made by considering emotional, social and psychomotor development as well as the cognitive development of the student". In addition, the development of these students is evaluated through BEP-centered assessments prepared for them. In this regard, T6 said, "We do not evaluate these students by considering the achievement written in the course curriculum. We are making a special evaluation dependent on the BEP". It is recommended to make a student-centered evaluation of the program.⁵⁵ In addition, according to the study group, alternative assessment and evaluation methods are more appropriate for students with autism than traditional assessment and evaluation methods. T5 expressed this as "We prefer to make observations and interviews rather than a written exam". The demands and practices of those in the study group are compatible with the assessment and evaluation approach in the support education program for individuals with an autism spectrum disorder. It is stated in this program that student progress should be evaluated with alternative assessment tools such as interview forms, observation forms, criterion-dependent tests, checklists, rubric registration forms, and portfolios.⁵⁶ Nevertheless, it may be useful to assess and evaluate depending on the

⁵³ Karasu, "Din Eğitiminde Bireyselleştirilmiş Eğitim Programının Hazırlanması ve Öğretim", 75.

⁵⁴ Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, *Orta-Ağır Zihinsel Engeli ve Otizm Spektrum Bozukluğu Olan Öğrenciler İçin Din Kültürü ve Ahlak Bilgisi Dersi Öğretim Programı II. Kademe (5, 6, 7 ve 8. Sınıf)* (Ankara: Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı Yayınları, 2018), 7.

⁵⁵ Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, *Orta-Ağır Zihinsel Engeli ve Otizm Spektrum Bozukluğu Olan Öğrenciler için Din Kültürü ve Ahlak Bilgisi Dersi Öğretim Programı II. Kademe (5, 6, 7 ve 8. Sınıf)*, 8.

⁵⁶ Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, *Orta-Ağır Zihinsel Engeli ve Otizm Spektrum Bozukluğu Olan Öğrenciler için Din Kültürü ve Ahlak Bilgisi Dersi Öğretim Programı I. Kademe (4. Sınıf)* (Ankara: Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı Yayınları, 2018), 35.

single opportunity and multiple opportunity techniques before starting the education, during the education process, and at the end.⁵⁷

2.6. Main Problems Experienced in Religious Education for Students with Autism

As in the religious education of ordinary students, it is possible to experience some difficulties in the religious education of students with autism. Because students with autism are unique in socialization, communication, imagination, thought, and perception. They resort to different ways and methods for different reasons at the points of obtaining, changing, classifying, organizing, and inferring information.⁵⁸

According to the participants, the most important problem in the religious education of students with autism is the lack of teachers or their unwillingness to take part. The number of RCMK teachers working in special education subclasses and special education application centers where students with autism are present is very small. Therefore, religious education classes are run by special education teachers. Moreover, some teachers who are appointed on a paid basis can also undertake this task. T4, a paid employee who is a sociology graduate, said, “We teach these courses because there is no RCMK teacher.” It can be said that this has some drawbacks.⁵⁹ Because, either special education teachers refrain from teaching this course or they are not capable of teaching the course. For example, F3 said, “I did not see the teacher teaching religious education”. Another important problem is the attitudes of teachers. In particular, the attitudes of administrators and teachers working in ordinary schools are one of the most disturbing issues for families. F1 explained this situation, “The teachers and administrators at the regular schools do not accept my child. When the teachers enter the classroom, they can tag my child. The only thing that the administrators know is to take an opening photo with balloons and make advertisements”.⁶⁰ F4 said, “My child was receiving inclusive education in the first semester. Ordinary students were mindful of my child and even advised him to hit other

⁵⁷ Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, *Orta-Ağır Zihinsel Engeli ve Otizm Spektrum Bozukluğu Olan Öğrenciler için Din Kültürü ve Ahlak Bilgisi Dersi Öğretim Programı II. Kademe (5, 6, 7 ve 8. Sınıf)*, 11-12.

⁵⁸ O'brien, “Connecting with Re: An Approach to Religious Education for Children with Autism and/or Severe and Complex Learning Disabilities”, 133.

⁵⁹ Özge Ünlü vd., “Alan Dışı Özel Eğitim Öğretmenlerinin Yeterliliklerine İlişkin Çalışmaların İncelenmesi”, *İlköğretim Online*, (15 Aralık 2019), 1637.

⁶⁰ F1 primarily demanded that her child receive inclusive education. During the two-day trial period, she had to transfer her child to a special education subclass of a different school due to the negative attitudes of the teachers and administrators.

students. My child was also deceived by ordinary students and teased some other students, and the school administration used this as an excuse and kicked my child out of school.” This situation shows that including the students in an inclusive education without any regulation can do more harm than good to the autistic student.⁶¹ The incompetence of RCMK teachers to provide teaching has been one of the problems mentioned. For example, T2 said: “We did not receive training to teach to these students in undergraduate education. We learn in the process.” As a matter of fact, this situation has been clearly emphasized in studies conducted in the field.⁶² Teachers who are open to innovation and well-intentioned can become competent in the process. However, another problem arises here. Teachers who have become competent in the process leave to go to schools in other provinces by requesting to appoint. In a place where teacher circulation is high, this vicious circle is constantly renewing itself. Unfortunately, it is also difficult for teachers who do not know the developmental characteristics of the student and therefore are not competent in designing the teaching specifically for the student, to be effective. Moreover, the incompetent teacher is more likely to wear out in the education of students with autism. T1 expressed this situation as “It is more difficult to give education to these children than to give education in ordinary classrooms”. However, in the regulation, it is mentioned that the teachers who give education are competent with the phrase “... education carried out in a suitable environment with specially trained personnel”.⁶³ Unfortunately, this is not always possible to see in practice.

The biggest expectations of the participating families were that their children be accepted into regular classes and received inclusive education. In this regard, F2 said, “My only wish is that my child be taken to the ordinary class”. When parents, teachers, and ordinary students have a positive attitude and necessary arrangements are made, inclusive education can contribute to students with special needs in terms of moral, self-care, cognitive, and social aspects.⁶⁴

⁶¹ Mustafa Başkonak, “Görme Engelli Bireylerde Din Eğitimi”, *Özel Eğitimde Din Eğitimi*, ed. Mustafa Başkonak - Saadettin Özdemir (Ankara: Grafiker Yayınları, 2018), 176.

⁶² Rıdvan Demir, “Özel Gereksinimli Öğrencilerin Din Eğitiminde Karşılaşılan Problemler ve Çözüm Önerileri”, *II. Uluslararası Multidisipliner Çalışmalar Kongresi*, ed. Munir Yıldırım, (Ankara: Akademisyen Kitapevi, 2018), 14-32.

⁶³ Resmi Gazete, Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı Özel Eğitim Hizmetleri Yönetmeliği.

⁶⁴ Teceli Karasu, “Kaynaştırma Eğitiminin Dayandığı Teoriler ve İslam’ın Kaynaştırma Din Eğitimine Bakışı”, *Cumhuriyet İlahiyat Dergisi / Cumhuriyet Theology Journal* 23/3 (15 Aralık 2019), 1385.

Another important point emphasized by the participants is the lack of materials prepared for students with autism. In this regard, T1 stated that “The absence of appropriate material makes it difficult for us to teach abstract concepts in particular”. The fact that students with autism have serious differences among themselves makes it difficult to prepare materials for them. However, the flexible structure of the program based on BEP leaves a wide area for the teacher to prepare appropriate materials. At this point, the teacher needs to have the attitude and knowledge to prepare student-specific materials. However, when we look at the faculty programs, it is seen that while there is no special education and a course for the autistic in the theology programs/Islamic sciences, there is no course for religious education practices in the special education programs. In this sense, both programs must restructure their undergraduate education by considering religious education for autistic students.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study focuses on religious education for autistic students. The study, aimed to explore the perspectives of teachers responsible for teaching religious education to students with autism, as well as the viewpoints of families with autistic children, regarding religious education. The conclusions reached depending on the sub-objectives of the study can be summarized as follows.

All students hold the right to receive high-quality religious education. In any curriculum to be prepared nationally or internationally, students who differ should be considered. Depending on the type and level of disability, the religious education needs of students with autism differ. Few participants did not consider religious education necessary for students with autism. The main reasons for them are that religious education contains abstract topics in the dimension of belief and that autistic students are not obligated to worship. In contrast, participants who consider religious education necessary; think that subjects such as short surahs, etiquette, social relations, cleanliness, morality, language, and communication can contribute to students with autism. In this sense, by meeting the needs of religious education, contributions can be made to students with autism. Their short attention span, difficulties in motivation and generalization, and quick forgetting require consideration of their characteristics and prioritizing subjects/information that can contribute to their independent living in daily life.

In this sense, the religious education provided to students with autism differs from those provided to ordinary students in terms of materials, methods, assessment, and evaluation.

According to the study group, the theory that should be based on the education of students with autism is behavioral learning theories with external control. In this sense, the methods known as error-free teaching methods and direct teaching methods in the literature can be taken as a basis. By adopting these approaches, the prevention of acquiring incorrect attitudes and misinformation is ensured, and learning becomes more manageable through gradual progress. Moreover, the employed teaching methods should incorporate cues, reinforcement, appreciation, rewards, consequences, repetition, and physical assistance. It is also beneficial to tailor the instruction based on the individual strengths of the student. For instance, religious education can incorporate surahs (chapters) and fundamental religious knowledge, catering to students with exceptional verbal and visual memory skills. In addition, the determined target outcomes should be of a quality that will enable students with autism to experience a sense of achievement. Moreover, due to the high number of repetitive behaviors and obsessions, the whole educational process should be structured with patience, compassion, and tolerance.

For the teaching material to contribute to the student, it must be prepared by considering the principles of material development as well as students' performance and development. However, it is important to note that the available teaching materials designed for students with autism may not be fully adequate. Also, some of the teachers who attend religion classes have difficulties in preparing materials for students with autism and customizing existing materials.

Classroom management is not difficult if students with autism are mild level, and their number is limited to one or two. Nevertheless, when the number of these students increases, along with their challenging behaviors, it can pose difficulties in classroom management. In this sense, in classes with autistic students, the boundaries and the rules should be clear, and they should show consistency in applying the rules. Although there are different models in classroom management where there is more than one teacher, the collaboration of teachers is important. In addition, negativities outside the classroom should be avoided. In this sense, it is necessary to observe the autistic student (especially autistic students studying in inclusive

classrooms) during recess and, if necessary, to take measures to ensure that other students acquire a positive attitude and awareness.

In the follow-up of the development of autistic students; assessment and evaluation should be process-centered and have consideration for all developmental areas of the student. In addition, at the point of evaluation of the student, alternative assessment and evaluation methods can be applied rather than traditional assessment and evaluation methods. Another important point is that the assessment and evaluation must be based on BEP.

The most important problem in the religious education of students with autism is that teachers have a negative attitude and are incompetent in designing the teaching. While special education teachers are inclined to be against religious education, RCMK teachers may experience incompetence in adapting education to students. In this sense, while religious education courses are not included in the programs of institutions that train special education teachers, special education is passed superficially in theology/Islamic sciences undergraduate programs. Moreover, in some regions, religious education is given by graduates of different departments, who are not competent in both religious education and special education. Furthermore, the slow progress in advancing education for students with autism can be attributed to the prevailing negative attitudes of parents, administrators, teachers, and their peers in general.

Based on the conclusion of the study, the following recommendations can be proposed:

- Special education undergraduate programs can include courses related to religious education, and special education courses that include the education of autistic students can be included in theology / Islamic sciences programs.
- Teachers, families, and other stakeholders involved in the education of students with autism need to act in coordination.
- It can be ensured that RCMK teachers take part in the conduct of the courses related to religious education in the curriculum of autistic students and in-service training can be given to these teachers on the issues they experience incompetence.
- More comprehensive studies can be carried out in different regions and with distinct methods to determine and meet the religious education needs of autistic students.

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Veri Analizi	Data Analysis	%50	%50	%
Makalenin Yazımı	Writingup	%60	%40	%
Makale Gönderimi ve Revizyonu	Submission and Revision	%40	%60	%

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