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Examining specialist teachers' conceptualisations of their roles in supporting learners with vision impairment: A comparative analysis of Turkey and England using Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory

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Examining specialist teachers' conceptualisations of their roles in supporting learners with vision impairment: A comparative analysis of Turkey and England using Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory

This paper investigates how specialist teachers of learners with vision impairment¹ in Turkey and England conceptualise their roles in supporting learners with vision impairment (VI) using Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory as a conceptual lens. Through comparative analysis of the findings of interviews with thirty specialist teachers of learners with VI in Turkey (n = 17) and England (n = 13), the paper identifies similar and different aspects of the teachers' conceptualisations of their roles *with* the learner and with other agents *around* the learner. The findings suggest that the concept of promoting/developing independence is commonly understood as concerning *teaching* 'independent living' skills to learners within mostly the school setting in Turkey. In contrast, that role was conceptualised in a broader context in England, such as *developing* 'independent living', 'independent learning' and 'self-advocacy' skills, involving other agents *around* the learner within and between home and school settings. Given the similarities and differences between the perspectives of specialist teachers on their multi-layered roles in two countries, the paper provides greater understanding of the specialist role of those teachers. It also offers a methodology to others who wish to explore and emphasise the distinctive roles of specialist teachers in their own settings.

Keywords: specialist teacher; vision impairment; ecological systems theory; Bronfenbrenner's theoretical model

Introduction

In spite of a variety of national policy and legislative contexts, a number of common responsibilities have been highlighted in the literature regarding the distinctive role of specialist teachers of learners with vision impairment. These include – but not limited to

¹ Teachers who have had specific and/or additional teacher training in the area of vision impairment education

– performing functional vision assessments, providing instruction in braille or instructing with large print and optical devices, finding appropriate ways of reducing potential barriers to access in educational settings, supporting additional/expanded core curriculum (ECC) skills, monitoring learning progress of the child and providing guidance to the child and their families (Spungin and Ferrell 2000; Sapp and Hatlen 2010; McLinden and Douglas 2013).

A number of studies have investigated the distinctive and multifaceted role of specialist teachers of learners with vision impairment in a range of country settings, including the United States, Australia and the United Kingdom (see, e.g., Wolffe et al. 2002; Griffin-Shirley et al. 2004; Brown and Beamish 2012; McLinden et al. 2016, 2017a, 2017b) as well as their roles alongside paraprofessionals' roles in schools (see, e.g., McKenzie and Lewis 2008, 2010). The role of specialist teachers of learners with vision impairment has been mostly described alongside terms such as 'confused', 'demanding' and 'complex' due to working with a population with a various age groups and educational support needs, in a variety of school and home settings, and collaborating with professionals from a range of disciplines (e.g. Griffin-Shirley et al. 2004; Spungin and Ferrell 2000; Brown and Beamish 2012). In particular, in the context of increased inclusive educational practice in recent years, the concept of the distinctive role of specialist teachers have expanded naturally into promoting inclusive educational practices for learners with vision impairment. For example, mandatory qualification outcomes for specialist teachers of learners with vision impairment in England emphasise the skills of specialist teachers in “developing, implementing and evaluating policies and practices that contribute to the achievement, inclusion and well-being of learners with vision impairment” (NCTL 2016, 25). Similarly, professional standards for specialist teachers of learners with vision impairment in Australia, New Zealand and

the South Pacific region highlight the key role of such teachers in “identifying strategies within the school context which promote academic and social inclusion of students who are blind or have low vision” (SPEVI 2015, 16).

Given the complex and changing roles of specialist teachers of learners with vision impairment, this paper seeks to explore *how* specialist teachers conceptualise their multifaceted and distinctive roles in supporting learners with vision impairment in Turkey and England from the perspective of teachers themselves as professionals who are actively engaged in their local and national contexts. Using a comparative approach, the paper aims to identify similarities and differences between specialist teachers’ conceptualisations of their roles, and therefore draw out greater understanding of the specialist role more generally as well as implications for the role at a national level. To gain greater insight into a variety of complex systems in which specialist teachers operate, and to have a consistent language and structure for data collection and comparison of the two different countries, Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory was used as a conceptual lens in this study (Bronfenbrenner 1976, 1977, 1979, 1992, 2005).

Theoretical frame

Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems model of human development is used in this study as a theoretical frame to gain richer insight into a variety of complex systems in which specialist teachers operate in both countries. Basically, Bronfenbrenner’s theoretical model accepts human development as the developing person’s evolving conception of their ecological environment and their relation to it (Bronfenbrenner 1976, 1977, 1979). Surrounding the developing person at the centre of the *ecological* system, Bronfenbrenner defines the *ecological* system as a ‘nested arrangement of structures, each contained within the next’ with the terms of *microsystem*, *mesosystem*, *exosystem*,

and *macrosystems* (Bronfenbrenner 1977, 514). In accordance to this, considering complex and multi-layered *ecological* system which is surrounded by the learner with vision impairment, the study was designed considering common roles of specialist teachers within and between the learner's immediate and remote systems (i.e. the learners' *microsystems*, *mesosystems*, *exosystems* and *macrosystems*) in Turkey and England, such as within and/or between home and school settings.

Specialist teachers of learners with vision impairment in Turkey and England

Educational policy in both Turkey and England legislates that the education of children and young people with vision impairment requires the involvement of a qualified teacher with specialist training in vision impairment education. In Turkey, this training is provided through 4-year undergraduate programme within special education teacher training programmes as a sub-area of special education. The key professional who provides specialist support for learners with vision impairment in Turkey is commonly a special education teacher (SET) [in Turkish: 'Özel Eğitim Öğretmeni']. In England, specialist teacher training in this area is provided through 2-year postgraduate level of training (masters level) as part of continuing professional development of already qualified teachers. This leads to the status of qualified teacher of children and young people with vision impairment (QTVI), who are able to provide and advise specialist support for learners with vision impairment. Although specialist support for learners with vision impairment is provided by a range of professionals besides QTVIs in England, including a registered qualified habilitation specialist or mobility teacher/habilitation worker, a teaching assistant or a health specialist who specialises in diagnosis and treatment of eye conditions (RNIB 2016), 'specialist advice and coordination of support' for learners with vision impairment in England is usually provided by QTVIs (Keil et al. 2017, 569).

Method

Research design

In order to identify similarities and differences between the conceptualisations of the roles of specialist teachers of learners with vision impairment in Turkey and England, a comparative inquiry was used to ‘see various practices and procedures in a very wide context that helps to throw light upon them’ (Phillips and Schweisfurth 2014, 17).

Thomas (2017) raises the methodological concern of ‘the equivalence of situations for the comparative inquiry’ (184); in this case the concern may be that differences between educational and legislative contexts in Turkey and England make the comparison futile. Nevertheless, it was assumed that specialist teachers of learners with vision impairment in Turkey and England (i.e. SETs and QTVIs) have quite similar roles in providing specialist support for learners with vision impairment in each country. Furthermore, this study is seeking a richer understanding of both settings through the process of comparison rather than concluding which is best. As Lauwerys (2014) states, “comparative education is not normative: it does not prescribe rules for the good conduct of schools and teaching. [...] It tries instead to understand what it is done and why.” (cited in Philips and Schweisfurth 2014, 15).

Interview schedule

Interview schedules were designed with Bronfenbrenner’s theoretical model of human development. Participants were asked about their current and previous roles *with* learners with vision impairment within school/home/centre settings (i.e. *microsystems*) and with other people *around* learners with vision impairment, including families, peers and other professionals within and between different settings/environments in each country (i.e. *mesosystems*, *exosystems*). They were also asked whether they have had

any role in relation to the country's forms of laws/regulations regarding learners with vision impairment (i.e. *macrosystems*) [Table 1].

Table 1. Design of semi-structured interview schedule

Headings	Content
Opening/Introduction	Background, previous experiences as a specialist teacher of learners with VI
<i>Microsystems</i> – The role of specialist teachers with the learner (e.g. within home, school)	<p>Teaching and learning activities (e.g. one-to-one teaching role– such as teaching braille)</p> <p><i>Question: How do you describe your roles in school/home/centre in terms of teaching and learning activities?</i></p> <p><i>Question: How do you describe your roles in facilitating curriculum access in school(s)?</i></p>
<i>Mesosystems</i> – The role of specialist teachers with families/other professionals (e.g. within/between home and school)	<p>Partnership working (e.g. advisory roles – such as advising next educational setting)</p> <p><i>Question: How do you describe your roles/responsibilities in terms of providing specialist advice and guidance for families/carers?</i></p> <p><i>Question: How do you express your roles/responsibilities in working with other staff who work with pupils with vision impairment in the school(s)?</i></p>
<i>Exosystems</i> – The role where the learner is not involved but which may have an influence on their development (e.g. peers' class in the school)	<i>Question: What do you think about your roles in relation to raising awareness of peers, teachers and other staff in the school(s) in relation to vision impairment?</i>
<i>Macrosystems</i> – The role related to the country's forms of laws/regulations, etc. concerning people with vision impairment	<i>Question: Did you have any role in providing advice for policy makers/decision makers in relation to pupils with vision impairment? (If yes, can you tell me more about your role?)</i>
Closure	Additional comments

Participants

Participants were specialist teachers of learners with vision impairment working and/or had previously worked with learners with vision impairment in various educational setting(s) in Turkey or England (n = 30). Using purposive participation selection strategy (Robson 2011), specialist teachers were approached and recruited to ensure a wide range of experience in relation to: characteristics of the students taught (age groups, additional disabilities) and educational setting(s) [Table 2].

Table 2. Work settings of participants in Turkey (T) and England (E)

	T	E
Special education school designated for learners with vision impairment	9	6
Mainstream school (including mainstream school with a resource base)	2	2
Guidance and Research Centre ²	3	--
Vocational Training Centre (affiliated to a special education school designated for learners with vision impairment in Turkey)	2	--
Visiting Teacher Service	--	5
Special Education and Rehabilitation Centre ³	1	--
Total	17	13

Procedure

Interviews were conducted face-to-face by the first author in 2017 (only one interview

² “An educational centre where individuals ‘requiring’ special education are guided to programmes (or schools) with suitable conditions by doing their educational evaluation and identification” (MoNE 2019, xxi)

³ “Private educational institution of which function is to improve abilities of individuals who have mental, physical, auditory, social and emotional difficulties for their adaptation into society” (MoNE 2019, xxii)

in each country were conducted via phone and internet). All participants were informed about the study and their consents were taken prior to interviews. Ethical approval for this study was granted by the Turkish Ministry of National Education (MoNE) and the University of Birmingham ethics committees.

Data Analysis

The transcribed interview data were analysed using a thematic framework analysis method (Ritchie, Spencer, and O'Connor 2003) with pre-determined framework of codes. As illustrated in Box 1, this framework was developed from the relevant literature (McLinden et al. 2016, 2017a, 2017b; Bronfenbrenner 1977, 1979, 1992) and was centred around the *ecosystem* around the learner with vision impairment. Therefore, the data extracts were then 'indexed' in relation to *micro-*, *meso-*, *exo-* and *macrosystems* in accordance with Bronfenbrenner's theoretical model. Following this, the data extracts of the analysis were sorted by similar themes/concepts. A number of data extracts are presented in this paper in order to illustrate their relevance to themes/concepts.

Box 1 The initial conceptual framework of the analysis which raised from the relevant literature and theoretical model of the study (adapted from Ritchie, Spencer and O'Connor 2003).

1. Microsystem

1.1. Teaching and learning activities

1.1.1. Teaching braille

1.1.2. Teaching independent living skills

1.1.3. Other

2. Mesosystem

2.1. Working with families

2.1.1. Providing advice/support/guidance for families

2.1.2. Giving information about the support needs of the learner

2.1.3. Other

2.2. Working with other professionals

2.2.1. Providing advice to classroom teacher about accessibility/safety

2.2.2. Other

3. Exosystem

3.1. Raising awareness of VI among peers and/or other staff in the school

3.1.1. Organising activities to raise awareness among peers/staff

3.1.2. Other

4. Macrosystem

4.1. Providing advice for policy makers/decision makers

Findings and Analysis

Microsystem

Considering the *microsystem* of the learner with vision impairment in Turkey and England, the roles of specialist teachers (i.e. SETs and QTVIs) within close learning

environments in which they interact with learners with vision impairment, including home, school and centre, were analysed and compared. The comparative analysis suggested that the main roles of specialist teachers within the school setting in both countries were described mostly as facilitating curriculum access in accordance with the support needs of learners with vision impairment. The following statements illustrate this:

We do the same things with [general] classroom teachers here – teaching what they teach students from year-1 to year-4, by only using braille and some different equipment [for example] in maths, such as a cubarithm board and cubes so that children [with VI] follow the general national education curriculum. (P7, Turkey)

I think the thing that I find most is that whatever you plan you have got to have the right resources that all the pupils can access whatever you are trying to get across so it is adapting material all the time whether it putting into braille, into large print, simplifying it for children who have got additional learning difficulties. So, it is trying to get plenty of differentiated materials so that everybody can access what you...teach them. (P1, England)

Although the main roles of specialist teachers within the school setting were described as quite similar by most of the participants in the two countries, the interpersonal relations that were assumed specialist teachers developed *with* learners with vision impairment emerged from the analysis mainly in relation to the following two key concepts: (1) additional/expanded core curriculum (ECC) *teaching* focus and (2) ‘dual view of access’ *teaching* strategies (see, e.g., Douglas et al. 2011; McLinden and Douglas 2013 for detailed information regarding ‘dual view of access’).

In relation to *teaching* additional/expanded core curriculum (ECC) areas, while the roles were mostly reported in Turkey regarding developing ‘independent living’ skills (with a particular focus on mobility) and ‘braille’ skills of learners, the roles were

expressed concerning developing ‘independent daily living’, ‘braille’, ‘ICT/assistive technology’ and ‘self-advocacy’ skills of learners in England [Table 3].

Table 3. Summary of participants’ conceptualisations of their roles within the *microsystem* of the learner with vision impairment in Turkey (T) and England (E).

	Additional/ECC <i>teaching focus</i>	Dual view of access <i>teaching strategies</i>
(T)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Independent living skills (ILS) – with a particular focus on developing mobility skills • Braille 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus greatly upon teaching strategies to give the learner access to learning (e.g. using oral teaching strategies to teach national curriculum)
(E)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Independent living skills (ILS) • Braille • ICT/assistive technology • Self-advocacy skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Both access to learning and learning to access teaching strategies (e.g. teaching keyboarding skills)

Another difference between teaching roles of specialist teachers in Turkey and England appeared to be related to the dual view of access teaching strategies. Most of the participants in Turkey reported their teaching roles generally in relation to providing learners with access to information (i.e. ‘access to learning’) rather than teaching access skills (i.e. ‘learning to access’). This access to learning included facilitating curriculum access through using oral teaching strategies and using differentiated materials in learning and teaching process. In contrast, although the participants in England also appeared to conceptualise their roles mostly in relation to ‘access to learning’ strategies, the importance of ‘learning to access’ strategies for developing and promoting the independence of the learner was also recognised. For example:

Because communication is so important for the blind and visually impaired child, we don’t just teach the national curriculum. We don’t just teach what it is needed for an ICT and computing qualification. We also teach them access to ICT and the ICT they would meet when they go into the world. So, it is like keyboarding skills.
(P6, England)

Although the potential interpersonal relations experienced by the learner *with* the specialist teacher in given face-to-face settings in Turkey and England seemed to present a number of differences, the understanding of the role of specialist teachers *with* the learner seemed to be quite similar in the two countries. For example, the distinctive roles of specialist teachers were viewed commonly as related to ensuring ‘access’ in accordance with support needs of learners with vision impairment. Nevertheless, the key distinction between the conceptualisations of the roles at the *microsystem* level appeared to be related to the concept of ‘independence’. The comparative analysis suggested that while the concept of independence was constructed in Turkey only related to developing independent living skills of learners, this notion was constructed more widely in England which included developing independent living skills, independent learning skills and self-advocacy skills of learners with vision impairment. For example, a participant in England highlighted the importance of developing self-advocacy skills:

Because what we want to encourage them to do is to feel comfortable and talking about their own eye conditions and their own needs and understanding their own needs so that they can have those conversations if they need to in their new setting. Because they are always going to be meeting new people [who] don’t actually quite understand what is helpful for them. So it is becoming your own good advocate [that] is the way to go. (P7, England)

Mesosystem

Bronfenbrenner (1977) identifies the following four types of interconnections at the *mesosystem* level: *multi-setting participation*, *intermediate links*, *inter-setting communications* and *inter-setting knowledge*. The role of specialist teachers *within* and *between* close settings of the learner with vision impairment have been analysed and compared against these interconnections (e.g. home and school, school and centre).

The analysis suggested that specialist teachers of learners with vision impairment in England might establish more ‘complex’ connections and relationships within and between major environments of the learner, which involve more direct connections with other people *around* the learner (e.g. teaching assistants, other teachers in the school) in comparison with specialist teachers in Turkey [see Table 4].

Table 4 Summary of participants’ conceptualisations of their roles within the *mesosystem* of the learner with vision impairment in Turkey (T) and England (E).

Major settings (<i>within</i> and/or <i>between</i>)	Some of reported examples	
Home – School School – Other setting(s) (<i>multi-setting participation</i>)	(T)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visiting home to promote the independence of the learner
	(E)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advising families about the support needs of the learner through home visits • Arranging visits for the learner to next potential educational settings • Using a video-based guidance for families to develop/promote independence of the learner
Home – Other setting(s) (<i>intermediate</i> links)	(T)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing information regarding the progress of the learner (mostly through official reports) • Referring families to a low vision clinic
	(E)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Signposting families to external sources to get them additional support
Home – School School – Other settings (<i>inter-setting communications</i>)	(T)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing advice for families to change their attitudes towards disabilities • Providing advice for the family regarding needs of the learner and/or next educational setting
	(E)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advising families for developing/promoting the independence of the learner at home • Providing information/advice/guidance for other professionals (e.g. teaching assistants, other teachers) to inform about educational support needs • Advising other professionals to reduce barriers to participation
School – Other setting(s) (<i>inter-setting knowledge</i>)	(T)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sharing experiences with the learner based on own experiences as a person with vision impairment
	(E)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Giving information to the learner about the next educational setting

The comparative analysis also found that while the advisory roles to families were reported to mainly have the purpose of changing overarching family attitudes towards disabilities in Turkey. In contrast, in England such roles were described as providing family advice/guidance/support in order for families to promote and develop the independence of the learner at home. The following data extracts illustrate an example of this:

They [families] don't know exactly their children's potential. They don't know – what they can do in the future, do they have to look after their children throughout their whole life? [...] I took the parents to a centre for people with disabilities and I introduced visually impaired people in the centre. One of them had climbed Mount Kilimanjaro. [...] I showed them to the parents in order for them to understand their children can be independent too. (P10, Turkey)

I have a role in helping them [families] engage with the students' learning [...] getting them to do lots of independence work which students can do at home. Because I can really tell those parents to do lots of great things in weekends and holidays... [For example] let them work in kitchen. (P12, England)

Similarly, the advisory role of specialist teachers with other professionals in Turkey were expressed with the purpose of changing the attitudes of other teachers/administrative staff towards disabilities, as the following statements illustrate:

[While I was working in the mainstream school], M. [the child's name] came to near me and asked a question in maths. One of the teachers [in the school] got very surprised and asked me – 'Can she really do this?' Because these children are in the special education class, there might be different [lower] expectations. (P10, Turkey)

The head teacher [in the mainstream school] said to me – 'No problem, you don't have to attend the flag raising ceremony [together with all students at school garden]' [...] they don't value either you or your students. [...] While I was working in the special education class, I used to request that other teachers and

administrative staff gave the same task to my students just like other students in the school. (P9, Turkey)

In line with this, the comparative analysis mainly found that while the roles of specialist teachers in England were reported as developing communications with families and other professionals particularly in order for them to promote and develop the independence of learners, such roles were commonly expressed as developing communications with families and other professionals particularly in order for them to change their attitudes towards disabilities in Turkey.

Exosystem

To consider specialist teachers' understanding of their roles within the *exosystem* of the learner, the analysis focused upon the role where the learner with vision impairment is not involved but which may have an influence on the learner's development (i.e. the roles in raising awareness of vision impairment among peers, teacher/staff). The comparative analysis suggested that there might be certain differences between practices of specialist teachers in carrying out the roles in raising awareness of vision impairment Turkey and England. While in Turkey such roles were generally expressed as speaking informally with other peers in the school in order to strengthen their interaction with learners with vision impairment, in England this role appeared more formalised. For example, a range of activities were reported, such as providing information about vision impairment and explaining the role of specialist teachers who have peripatetic roles. Contrasting examples illustrate this:

In order to raise awareness, [while working in a mainstream school] I used to take my students into their classrooms and tell them [peers] how they should communicate with students with vision impairment. (P6, Turkey)

With the permission and collaboration of the young person [who] you are supporting in the class...it is an opportunity to go and talk to their classmates about the visual needs of the young person with vision impairment. And to talk about and put on simulated spectacles perhaps take away some vision and saying – ‘what do you think would be helpful?’ And [saying] ‘that’s why I come in and help whoever it might be just to make sure they can see everything as well as you can’. (P7, England)

The comparative analysis, therefore, implied that specialist teachers of learners with vision impairment in England have a richer and more comprehensive understanding of awareness-raising practices in relation to vision impairment than specialist teachers in Turkey [see Table 5].

Table 5 Summary of participants’ conceptualisations of their roles within the *exosystem* of the learner in Turkey (T) and England (E).

<u>Some of reported examples</u>		
Role	(T)	(E)
Raising awareness among other peers, teachers/staff in the school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Speaking with peers on behalf of the learner with VI (mostly in order to develop their interaction with peers) • Speaking with other teachers/staff 	Arranging activities for peers, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing information about VI • Organising peer workshops • Using VI simulations in the class • Explaining the role of peripatetic/itinerary teachers • Arranging training sessions for teachers/staff about VI • Providing information about VI to improve educational support of the learner at the school

Macrosystem

Perhaps unsurprisingly, no participant in either country reported any engagement role at the *macrosystem* level of the learner with vision impairment, such as developing educational policy in relation to learners with vision impairment. Nevertheless, this analysis identified a number of country differences between the roles of specialist teachers with families considering the *macrosystems* of learners with vision impairment. For example, the analysis suggested that specialist teachers in Turkey and England had different understandings regarding their advisory roles with families due to differences in the implicit/formal forms of the *macrosystems* (e.g. legislations, regulations) in these countries. For example, in England, in accordance with the Children and Families Act 2014, the SEND Code of Practice highlights that while education services are carrying out their duties in relation to children and young people with special educational needs (SEN), they must have regard to:

the views, wishes and feelings of the child or young person, and the child's parents [and] the importance of the child or young person, and the child's parents, *participating as fully as possible in decisions*, and being provided with the information and support necessary to enable participation in those decisions. (DfE 2015, 19, *italics added*)

On the other hand, the Special Education Service Regulation in Turkey stresses 'the active participation of families within all special education process' (ORGM 2018, 3), stating that "the opinion of the individual or the family should be sought regarding the educational assessment process" (ORGM 2018, 3). However, families are defined only as committee members within the decision-making process in Turkey (ORGM 2018). Considering these differences, it appeared that the importance of the participation of the learner with vision impairment and families in decision-making processes was not stressed within the *macrosystem* of the learner with vision

impairment in Turkey as much as in England. Therefore, it may well be argued that the differences between the remote systems of the learner with vision impairment (i.e. *macrosystem*) might affect the understandings of the roles of specialist teachers within close systems of learners with vision impairment (i.e. *microsystem*, *mesosystem*).

Conclusion

Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory of human development helped to gain a holistic understanding the complexity of the role of specialist teachers within the *ecosystem* in which they operate in two different countries. Through the comparative analysis, the distinctive role of specialist teachers within and between different layers of *ecosystem* of learners with vision impairment in Turkey and England were compared and contrasted, and the paper has identified similarities and differences regarding how the concept of developing and promoting independence of learners with vision impairment is constructed in the two settings. Accordingly, the analysis particularly suggests that the concept of promoting independence of learners with vision impairment is more narrowly understood by participating specialist teachers who participated in the study in Turkey as concerning commonly teaching 'independent daily living' skills (particularly relating to mobility) within mostly school settings in which the learner participates as a student. In contrast, the role of promoting independence of learners with vision impairment in England was generally expressed in a broader context, such as developing 'independent living', 'independent learning' and 'self-advocacy' skills of learners, involving other agents around the learner (e.g. other professionals, families) within and between home and school settings. The analysis also illustrates that despite similarities in the expressions of the roles of specialist teachers, there are a number of differences in operating those roles in Turkey and England (e.g. raising awareness of vision impairment). In this way, the analysis provides an insight into specialist teachers'

conceptualisations of their roles with learners with vision impairment and other agents around learners with vision impairment in Turkey and England. Given the perspectives of specialist teachers on their multi-layered roles in supporting learners with vision impairment in two different country settings (or ‘ecosystems’), this paper provides greater understanding of the specialist role of specialist teachers in reducing potential structural, environmental and cultural barriers that learners with vision impairment might face while participating in education and society. Furthermore, the comparative analysis using Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory as a conceptual lens offers a methodology for others who wish to explore the different strengths, weaknesses, and emphasis of these important specialist teacher roles in their own settings.

Limitations

By using Bronfenbrenner’s theoretical model, this paper assumed that specialist teachers *always* have an importance on the development of learners with vision impairment. However, as McLinden et al. (2017b) stated, Bronfenbrenner’s model “may not be effective in situations in which the learner [with vision impairment] does not accept the specialist teacher’s involvement” (581). Therefore, this study provided limited insights into potential interconnections which were assumed to be developed by specialist teachers in both countries. The study also did not demonstrate that what the specialist teachers *say they do* is necessarily *what they do* in practice. Therefore, their statements may not be reflected in the way they actually carry out their work. It is also worth noting that the views/opinions of specialist teachers who participated in this study may not represent views/opinions of all specialist teachers of learners with vision impairment in Turkey and England since this study was carried out in a limited time frame involving a limited number of participants in each country.

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