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Mustafa HAN¹, Merve Nur UYGUR²

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¹ Muş Alparslan University, Faculty of Sports Sciences, Muş/Türkiye, 44mstafahan44@gmail.com,

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6731-0746>

² Muş Alparslan University, Faculty of Sports Sciences, Muş/Türkiye, uyg.merve@gmail.com,

 <https://orcid.org/0009-0000-6522-1363>

Investigation of the Attitudes of Teachers Working in Special Education Schools Towards Games, Sports and Physical Activities Lessons

Mustafa Han¹, Merve Nur Uygur²

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ABSTRACT

The attitudes of teachers working in special education schools towards games, sports, and physical activities are crucial for the participation of students with special needs in these lessons and for promoting their physical activity levels. Participation in physical activity positively affects the physical, social, psychological, and spiritual development of students with special needs. This study aims to evaluate the attitudes of physical education and special education teachers towards games, sports, and physical activities lessons in terms of various variables.

The study involved 50 physical education teachers and 192 special education teachers working in special education schools. Data were collected using the "Attitude Scale Towards Games and Physical Activities Lesson," and ethical approval was obtained before the research. Descriptive statistics, normality tests, ANOVA, and independent samples t-tests were used for data analysis.

Results indicated that gender, age, total professional experience, and school level did not significantly affect teachers' attitudes ($p > .05$). However, physical education teachers had significantly higher attitude scores compared to special education teachers, and the service period in the current school also revealed a significant difference in attitudes ($p < .05$).

These findings suggest that attitudes vary by teaching branch and current school tenure but are independent of other factors. The more positive attitudes of physical education teachers are likely linked to their training background. Conversely, the decrease in attitude scores with longer tenure at the same school may reflect reduced motivation. In-service training programs are recommended to raise awareness among special education teachers and support active student participation.

Keywords: Disabled Students, Games-Sports and Physical Activities, Physical Education, Special Education, Teacher Attitude.



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INTRODUCTION

The main purpose of the modern education system is to provide all individuals with the services they need in the field of education, as well as to teach them to produce solutions to the problems they may encounter at all stages of their lives and to prepare them for life. Special education practices within this large and comprehensive system are to provide environments and educational services for students with special needs (SEN) who cannot benefit from normal education practices due to their disabilities (Opstoel et al., 2020; Gündoğan, 2002; Segrave & Holt, 2003). Education in special education schools, which are in place to provide appropriate conditions for students with special needs, is classified as tier Primary, Middle, and High School, separate education programs are offered for each tier (Han et al., 2024; Mengi & Öpengin, 2021; Can & Kuru, 2018). The aim of these schools is to educate the SEN in the best way possible in accordance with contemporary educational principles and to ensure that these individuals develop in all aspects in order to achieve the goals of education (Koçyiğit et al., 2007; Schreuer et al., 2014). For these reasons, education programs are structured with special lessons that provide services to cover all areas of development. Games, sports and physical activities (GSPA) lessons are among the most important special lessons that contribute to many developmental areas. The Games, Sports and Physical Activities lesson is included in the curriculum of levels Primary, Middle and the Sports and Physical Activities lesson is included in the curriculum of level High School (Alemdağ et al., 2014; Güven & Yıldız, 2014).

GSPA lessons are an important factor in terms of the developmental areas of SEN with their fun and mobility-enhancing qualities such as running, jumping and leaping, as well as their individual and group activities (Tarantino et al., 2022; Burns et al., 2017). Within the scope of the lessons, basic movement skills are taught to the SEN, thus paving the way for them to use their bodies more efficiently at a later age. At the same time, these movements are a preliminary preparation for the complex games and sports that SEN may encounter in their later lives (Smith & Sparkes, 2019). GSPA lessons curricula include all educational processes that can contribute to the participation of SEN in physical activities, playing games and developing their motor skills for their developmental areas during these practices (Boyras & Serin, 2016; Han, 2025). Thanks to the educational games and activities they include, GSPA lessons are of great importance in ensuring that SEN become more physically active, love and internalize sports, make sports a regular habit, and ultimately lay the foundation for a healthier life (Taşmektepligil et al., 2006; İlhan et al., 2013).

In the first and second levels of special education schools, namely primary and secondary schools, these lessons are taught by special education teachers, and in the third level, high school, these lessons are taught by physical education teachers (Demirci & Demirci, 2014; Temel & Kangalgil, 2021). Although teachers working in special education schools and conducting GSPA lessons believe in the importance of these lessons and consider these lessons very necessary, they face problems related to the applicability of the curriculum such as not having sufficient knowledge and skills in the field, having difficulty in what to teach in the lessons, not having enough materials and facilities in schools, insufficient class hours, etc. (Nemec et al., 2019; Şentürk et al., 2015). For this reason, GSPA lessons, which are extremely important for individuals in need of special education, come to the forefront with the attitudes of teachers. It can be stated that the contribution of teachers should be taken seriously and, in this respect, the attitudes and behaviors of the teachers conducting the lesson towards GSPA lessons are important (Kaya & Yıldız, 2023; Önal et al., 2023; Han et al., 2024).

The main purpose of this study is to examine the attitudes of teachers working in special education schools towards GSPA lessons and to reveal the factors affecting the applicability of this lesson. GSPA lessons make significant contributions to the development of motor skills of students with special needs, to increase their participation in physical activities and to support

their social adaptation. However, the effectiveness of this lesson largely depends on the knowledge, skills and attitudes of teachers. Therefore, determining the opinions of teachers conducting GSPA lessons will constitute an important data source in terms of planning, implementing and developing the lesson. In this study, social cognitive theory was used as a basis to understand the attitudes of teachers working in special education schools towards GSPA lessons (Bandura, 1986). The limited number of studies in this field in the literature, especially the inadequacy of studies that examine teachers' opinions in depth, make this study an important step towards eliminating the lack of information in the field. It is expected that the findings to be obtained will guide practitioners and educational administrators and contribute to the more qualified education of individuals with special needs.

METHOD

Research Model

This research was designed as a quantitative study based on the survey model. Using the descriptive survey method, the attitudes of physical education and special education teachers working in special education schools towards the GSPA lessons attended by their students were examined.

Universe and Sample

A total of 242 teachers, 50 physical education teachers and 192 special education teachers, working in special education schools in 10 provinces from different regions of Turkey, participated in the study voluntarily. Teachers working in Primary, Middle, and High School level special education schools in Adıyaman, Ordu, Samsun, Eskişehir, Denizli, Sakarya, Malatya, Erzurum, Muş and Van provinces were included in the study. Convenience sampling method was used to determine the study group. While collecting the data for the study, care was taken to ensure that the data was homogeneous by reaching teachers in at least one province from all regions of Türkiye.

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of the Teachers Included in the Study

Variable	Category	N	%
Age	25-30	136	56.2
	31-35	62	25.6
	36-40	26	10.7
	41-over	18	7.4
Gender	Male	122	50.04
	Female	120	49.6
Branch	Physical Education	50	20.7
	Special Education	192	79.3
Total tenure of teachers in the profession	1-5 years	152	62.8
	6 years - above	90	37.2
	1-3 years	150	62
The length of service of teachers in their current schools	4 years - above	92	38
	Level Primary and Middle	161	66.5
Level of the school where the duty is performed	Level High School	81	33.5

Data Collection Tool

In the study, the "Attitude Scale Towards Play and Physical Activity Lesson" (ASTPPAC) developed by Hazar and Demir (2018) was used as a data collection tool. This scale consists of a total of 17 items and 3 sub-dimensions. It also has a 5-point Likert-type structure and a Cronbach's Alpha internal consistency coefficient of 0.78. The scale was developed as a measurement tool that measures the attitudes of prospective classroom teachers towards the game and physical activities course in a valid and reliable manner. The scale was shared with teachers via WhatsApp, web and Google Forms, and a consent form was also obtained from the participants for voluntary participation. Before the research, ethical permission report dated 06.03.2025 and numbered 186253 was obtained from Muş Alparslan University, Scientific Research and Ethics Committee. All teachers participated in the study voluntarily and the necessary confidentiality rules were followed during the data collection.

Data Analysis

SPSS 25.0 program was used to analyze the data and firstly, the general distribution of the data was examined by using descriptive statistics. Skewness and Kurtosis tests were used to check whether the data were normally distributed so parametric tests were used since the data showed normal distribution. ANOVA test was used for multiple group comparisons and independent samples t-test was for pairwise comparisons.

Table 2

Normality Test Results Based on Skewness and Kurtosis

Variable	Skewness	Std. Error	Kurtosis	Std. Error
Teachers' GSPA scale scores	-0.005	0.156	0.052	0.312

In Table 2, it is seen that the Skewness and Kurtosis values of the data are between -1 and +1, and the skewness and kurtosis values between -1 and +1 indicate that the data show normal distribution (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). According to these results, it was accepted that the data showed normal distribution. ANOVA test was used for multiple group comparisons and independent samples t-test was for pairwise comparisons. The error level of the statistics was accepted as $p < 0.05$.

FINDINGS

This section presents the results of statistical analyses conducted to examine the differences and relationships among the study variables. Tables 3 through 8 summarize the findings based on variables across groups, gender, field of study, total length of service in the profession, length of service at the current school, and level of the current school.

Table 3

Comparison of ASTPPAC Scale Scores according to Teachers' Age Variable

	Sum of squares	SD	Mean of squares	F	p
Between groups	92.490	3	30.830	0.730	0.535
Within groups	10055.680	238	42.251		
Total	10148.169	241			

There was no statistically significant difference between age groups in terms of scale scores ($p > .05$). Based on this result, it can be interpreted that teachers' age is not a determining

factor in their attitudes towards the GSPA lessons attended by students with special needs.

Table 4

Comparison of ASTPPAC Scale Scores according To Teachers' Gender Variable

Gender	N	Average	SD.	t	p	d
Male	122	58.71	6.53	0.016	0.987	0.002
Female	120	58.70	6.47			

There was no statistically significant difference between the gender variable and the scale scores of the teachers ($p > .05$). This result shows that teachers' attitudes towards GSPA lessons attended by students with special needs are at similar levels regardless of their gender. No statistically significant difference was found between male and female teachers' attitude scores toward GSPA lessons. A Cohen's d value of 0.00 indicates that gender has no effect on attitudes, and the difference is statistically and practically insignificant ($d = 0.002$).

Table 5

Comparison of ASTPPAC scale scores according to the branch variable of teachers

Branch	N	M	SD.	t	p	d
Physical Education Teacher	50	62.72	4.98	5.165	0.000*	0.82*
Special Education Teacher	192	57.66	6.44			

*= $p < 0.05$

It was seen that the scale scores of physical education teachers were significantly higher than those of special education teachers and as a result of the t-test, a statistically significant difference was found in terms of the branches of the teachers ($p < .05$). This is thought to be due to the fact that physical education teachers have a more positive attitude towards the participation of students with special needs in GSPA lessons due to the branch they are working in. Physical education teachers' attitudes toward GSPA lessons were found to be significantly higher than those of special education teachers. Cohen's d was 0.82, indicating a large effect size. This result suggests that subject matter has a strong influence on teacher attitudes and that physical education subject matter knowledge may influence this positive attitude ($d = 0.82$).

Table 6

Comparison of ASTPPAC Scale Scores in terms of Teachers' Total Tenure in their Profession

Total tenure of teachers in their profession	n	M	SD	t	p	d
1-5 years	152	58.43	6.91	-0.848	0.397	0.11
5 years and above	90	59.16	5.69			

There was no statistically significant difference between teachers' total tenure in their professions and their attitudes towards the participation of students with special needs in GSPA lessons ($p > .05$). It is thought that teachers' total tenure in their professions does not have an effect on their attitudes towards the GSPA lessons attended by their students. No significant difference was found in attitudes toward GSPA courses between teachers with 1–5 years of experience and those with more than 6 years of experience. Cohen's d was 0.11, indicating that this difference was a small effect and of little practical significance. This may suggest that teachers' attitudes depend not only on experience but also on other factors, such as professional development and motivation ($d = 0.11$).

Table 7

Comparison of ASTPPAC Scale Scores in terms of Teachers' Length of Service in Their Current Schools

The length of service of teachers in their current schools	n	M	SD	t	p	d
Up to 3 years	150	59.46	6.91	2.348	0.020*	0.31*
4 years and above	92	57.46	5.69			

*= $p < 0,05$

There was a statistically significant difference between the length of service of the teachers in their current schools and their attitudes towards the participation of students with special needs in GSPA lessons ($p < .05$). It is understood from the table that this significant difference is in favor of the teachers with 3 or less years of service in the current school. It can be concluded that teachers with less years of service in the current school have better attitudes towards the participation of students with special needs in GSPA lessons and that this positive attitude gradually decreases with the increase in the length of service in the same school. Teachers who have worked at the same school for three years or less have significantly higher attitude scores than those who have worked at the same school for four years or more. Cohen's d was 0.31, indicating a small-to-medium effect size. This result suggests that teachers working at the same school for extended periods may lead to a loss of motivation or a habituation effect on their attitudes ($d = 0.31$).

Table 8

Comparison of ASTPPAC Scale Scores according to the Level of the Schools Where Teachers Work

Level	N	M	SD	t	p	d
Level Primary and Middle	161	59.14	6.15	1.457	0.146	0.20
Level High School	81	57.85	7.08			

In the table, the independent samples t-test analysis of the attitudes of the teachers towards the participation of their students with special needs in the GSPA lessons and the levels at which they work is given and no significant difference was found as a result of the test ($p > .05$). It can be said that the level at which teachers work does not have any effect on their attitudes towards the participation of students with special needs in GSPA lessons. No significant difference was found between primary/middle school and high school teachers in terms of attitudes toward GSPA courses. A Cohen's d value of 0.20 indicates a small effect size. This suggests that grade level is not a determining factor in teacher attitudes, and that other variables (field of study, institutional culture, student profile, etc.) may be more influential ($d = 0.20$).

DISCUSSION

In this study, it was aimed to examine the attitudes of physical education teachers and special education teachers working in special education schools towards games, sports and physical activities (GSPA) lessons in terms of various variables. The results of the research showed that there was no significant difference in the attitudes of the teachers according to the variables of gender, age, total length of service in the profession and the level of the school, but a significant difference was found according to the variables of branch and length of service in the current school. In this part of the study, the findings and results obtained were evaluated and discussed with the related studies in the literature. In addition, the study was based on social cognitive theory to understand the attitudes of teachers working in special education schools

towards GSPA lessons (Bandura, 1986).

In the study, no significant difference was found between teachers' gender and their attitudes towards GSPA lessons. Research on the subject states that gender is not a fundamental factor that directly affects teachers' attitudes towards sports and physical activities lessons, and instead professional competence and experience are more important (Han & Yılmaz, 2023, Yılmaz et al., 2023). However, some studies (Yenmiş & Gül, 2021) stated that male teachers are more confident in sports and physical activities, while female teachers focus more on students' social and emotional development (Bertills et al., 2018; Demirel et al., 2022 Demiralp et al., 2025).

No significant difference was found between teachers' ages and their attitudes towards GSPA lessons. In a study conducted by Demirci and Demirci (2014) on the subject, it was stated that the age factor of teachers did not directly affect their attitudes towards their students' participation in physical activities. While Tarantino et al. (2022) argued that teachers' attitudes towards their students' participation in physical activities decreased as they got older, Temel and Kangalgil (2021) stated that experienced teachers manage their lessons more effectively and provide students' participation in physical activities better. It can be concluded that age is not a determining factor on attitude, but teachers' professional motivation and individual attitudes have a more determining effect than age.

One of the variables in which a significant difference was found was the branch variable. The attitude scores of physical education teachers towards GSPA lessons were found to be significantly higher than those of special education teachers. The results obtained from the studies conducted by Smith and Sparkes (2019), Han and Yılmaz (2023) overlap with our research findings. It is thought that the main reason why physical education teachers exhibit more positive attitudes towards GSPA lessons attended by SEN is that they receive more pedagogical and practical training in the field of physical education (Nemec et al., 2019). Among the reasons for the lower level of special education teachers' attitudes towards the participation of SEN in GSPA lessons; difficulties encountered during physical activity practices (Şentürk et al., 2015; Hadi et al., 2023;), lack of infrastructure and materials in schools (Alemdağ et al., 2014), professional wear and tear as a result of working with SEN for a long time (Pocock & Miyahara, 2018; Tercan & Ekinici, 2025).

There was no significant difference between the total length of service of the teachers in their profession and their attitudes towards the GSPA lessons attended by SEN. This finding is similar to the result obtained from the study conducted by Taran and Kangalgil (2024). However, in a study conducted by Smith and Green (2004) on teachers' attitudes towards GSPA, they stated that teachers who have been working in their profession for many years can manage these lessons more effectively and therefore have more positive attitudes. The fact that professional experience was not a determinant of attitudes towards GSPA lessons in our current study suggests that the individual motivation and professional development opportunities of the participants may be a more effective factor than the duration of professional experience (Han, 2025; Opstoel et al., 2020).

Another variable in which a significant difference was found was the total length of service of the teachers in their current school. In the study, it was observed that the attitude scores of teachers with 3 years or less of service in the current school were better than the scores of teachers with 4 years or more of service. In the literature, it has been reported that the motivation of teachers working in the same school for a long time decreases over time and their interest in physical activities in which students participate decreases (Dağdelen & Kösterelioğlu, 2015). The main reason for this situation is thought to be the monotonization of lesson content and the routinization of physical activity lessons as a result of teachers working in the same school for a long time (Wang et al., 2015; Han et al., 2024). For this reason, it can

be argued that teachers should not work in the same school for more than 3 years and necessary regulations should be made on the subject (Altun, 2016; Kara et al., 2024).

No significant difference was found between teachers' attitudes towards the GSPA lessons attended by students with special needs and the levels of the schools where the teachers work. In this respect, the results obtained from the study conducted by Tindall et al. (2015) are in parallel with the results of the current study. However, some studies in the literature (İlhan et al., 2013; Alemdağ et al., 2014) stated that teachers' approaches to GSPA lessons can change depending on the age of the students and therefore the level of education. In particular, it is stated that teachers working at the high school level, which is the third level, have more problems in including their SEN in physical activities in GSPA lessons (Lamata et al., 2024). For this reason, it is thought that the curriculum should be prepared in accordance with the age and education level of the SEN in order for teachers working at different levels to teach the GSPA lessons more effectively and efficiently.

Conclusion

This study examined the attitudes of physical education and special education teachers working in special education schools towards GSPA lessons in terms of various variables. While no significant difference was found between the attitudes of teachers towards GSPA lessons in terms of gender, age, level of the school they work at and total service period in the profession, it was concluded that the branch of the teachers and the service period in their current school had a significant effect on their attitudes towards GSPA lessons. While physical education teachers have a more positive attitude towards GSPA lessons due to the nature of their fields, the relatively low attitudes of special education teachers can be related to the fact that GSPA lessons contain more physical education practices and that special education teachers do not receive sufficient training in this field. In addition, it has been concluded that teachers working in the same school for a long time may cause a loss in their motivation.

Recommendations

In this context, it is recommended that in-service trainings be organized for special education teachers and that they be better equipped in physical activities, and that appropriate rotations be made to increase the decreasing motivation of teachers who have been working in the same school for a long time. In-service trainings for special education teachers should be provided on how to teach GSPA lessons more effectively. During the entire education process, special education teachers and teachers trained in the field of physical education for the disabled should be in active interaction and share their knowledge in practice.

Ultimately, understanding and improving teachers' attitudes towards GSPA lessons is of critical importance in increasing SEN's participation in physical activities and in ensuring that they benefit from these lessons at the highest level. Future research can contribute to the development of education-training policies by focusing on the difficulties teachers encounter during the practices in the lessons, student perspectives and innovative teaching approaches.

Limitations

This study was limited to physical education teachers and special education teachers working in special education schools at primary, secondary and high school levels in 10 provinces from different regions of Türkiye, namely Adıyaman, Ordu, Samsun, Eskişehir, Denizli, Sakarya, Malatya, Erzurum, Muş and Van.

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