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 Murat Dogan<sup>1</sup>  
ORCID: 0000-0003-4942-3760

 Tezcan Cavusoglu<sup>2</sup>  
ORCID: 0000-0002-2225-6651

 Emrah Akkaya<sup>3</sup>  
ORCID: 0000-0003-2124-5085

# Understanding Early Childhood Special Education through a Journal: 11 Years of INT-JECSE\*

## Abstract

*Field specific scientific journals do not only serve as a source of information to guide the practice in that field but also as a transmitter to dispense information distilled from practice. This is how they can facilitate setting and directing the trends in the field. This study aimed to identify the trends in methods and research subjects across the field of early childhood special education (ECSE) by analyzing the articles published in International Journal of Early Childhood Special Education (INT-JECSE) within the last 11 years. Designed as a journal analysis, the study has converted demographic and methodological features, and subject areas of 133 articles published in INT-JECSE into a data set via Article Description Form. Data regarding demographic and methodological features of all the articles have been analyzed via quantitative descriptive analysis whereas their subjects have been examined through content analysis. As for demographic analysis, the distribution of articles varied across years. Despite the high number of international and co-authored articles, those with an interdisciplinary orientation were scarce. With respect to methodology, non-intervention articles and those designed in line with quantitative methods outnumbered the others. Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder constituted the majority of research samples in all the articles. Subject areas of the articles have been grouped under eight themes such as developmental areas/skills, parents, early intervention, teachers, ECSE systems, inclusion, assessment, and others. Based on the findings, it is deemed critical for the journal to include methodological approaches and research subjects in accordance with their size and density in theory and practice.*

*Keywords: Early childhood special education, early intervention, journal analysis, content analysis, INT-JECSE.*

## Introduction

The paradigm shift witnessed in 1960s as social model became definitive over how disabilities were perceived has increased the visibility of individuals with disabilities and their needs and also has paved the way for special education to become a

priority (Winzer, 1993). Similar to all scientific fields, special education also gave birth to its own sub-fields in time (McLeskey & Landers, 2006; Taylor, 2001). Initially, sub-fields of special education were determined through the axis of disability type. Yet, more recently, developmental milestones and needs based on these milestones have led to the emergence of

<sup>1</sup>Ph.D., Anadolu University, Faculty of Education, Special Education Department & ICEM, Eskisehir, TURKEY.  
e-mail: mudogan@anadolu.edu.tr

\*Corresponding author

<sup>2</sup>MA, Anadolu University, Faculty of Education, Special Education Department, Eskisehir, TURKEY.  
e-mail: tezcancavusoglu@anadolu.edu.tr

<sup>3</sup>MA, Anadolu University, Faculty of Education, Special Education Department, Eskisehir, TURKEY.  
e-mail: emrah\_akkaya@anadolu.edu.tr

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another sub-field (McLean, Sandall & Smith, 2016). Where this tendency overlapped with the international consensus over “early diagnosis-early intervention”, a relatively new sub-field of special education emerged: Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE). Following the multi-factorial nature of development in early childhood and based on interdisciplinary knowledge and practice, ECSE devises preventive and educational interventions for children between 0-to-6/8 years of age who have developmental disabilities or who are at risk due to conditions they have to struggle with (Odom, 2016; Reichrow, 2016).

ECSE can be noted to be a relatively new/young discipline considering the age group in focus and field of study (Pool, Macy, McManus & Noh, 2008). Nevertheless, ECSE has become an important sub-field of special education because of the target population, developmental milestones, and the body of literature compiled by researchers in time. Although its headquarter is located in the United States of America (USA), Council for Exceptional Children (CEC), which sets the trends and direction in special education throughout the world, has certified the significance of ECSE by establishing Division of Early Childhood (DEC). The Division has published advisory reports for this developing field of study and updated these reports along with changing needs through the course of time (DEC, 1993, 2006, 2007, 2014). Though the focus of priority varies (such as personnel training, developing curricula, scanning, assessment etc.) in time, these reports conclude that it is urgent to enhance the accumulation of knowledge in ECSE and to advance the field.

Albeit still growing, the field of ECSE hosts research studies conducted to determine the present trends. These trends include reviews of studies focusing on one topic (evidence-based practice, replication of intervention efforts) (Banerjee, Movahedazarouigh, Millen & Luckner, 2018; Odom & Wolery, 2003); studies spanning across a certain period of time (Smith et al., 2002); research endeavors analyzing articles (Öncül, 2014) and theses (Gül & Diken, 2009) exploring the field in a country; studies examining certain research methods (such as mixed methods

design) (Corr et al., 2019); those revisiting “ground breaking” articles (Pool et al., 2008); and opinion papers discussing the feasibility of research findings for a given culture (Carta, 2002), sharing ideas about research findings (Fixen, 2018; Shonkoff, 2002; Wolery & Bailey, 2002), and contemplating about primary research fields (Guralnick, 2002).

One of the effective ways to identify trends in a given research domain is to closely examine scientific journals in that field (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009). However, review of literature on ECSE has yielded that no studies have been conducted on the publication content of academic journals so far. On the contrary, there are several opinion essays concerning publishing policies (McWilliam, 2002) and future publication agendas of journals (Boyd & Reichow, 2020) within the field of ECSE. As a matter of fact, journal analysis is one effective tool to explore any field of study. This effectiveness best manifests in Norris's (2020) words:

*“Academic journals are not merely neutral reports, but carefully curated collections of research—subjected to rigorous peer review and reflecting key disciplinary disputes, directions, and quandaries that characterize a given field at a given moment of time.” (pp. 1)*

Along with establishing the body of literature for a field, academic journals also unfold the history, trends, research norms, and the interaction among researchers in any given scientific domain (Taylor, 2001). Especially the journals representing a sub-field facilitate decoding of field-related information and holistic perception of a field (Wellington & Nixon, 2005). Through journal analysis, primary research subjects in a domain can be identified (Buboltz, Miller, & Williams, 1999), and interrelated research subjects can be distilled to unravel the trends in that domain (Ongel & Smith, 1994). This could guide the formation of quality knowledge regarding the domain at hand and contribute to its expansion.

Being an interdisciplinary field, ECSE always strives to generate theoretical information and to reflect this line of information onto practice. Accordingly, field specific journals do not only spread information gathered from practice but also generate information to be put into practice. Thus, academic journals help both

form and direct trends in a domain of study. Know-how knowledge in a given field determines the disposition of know-how in the future.

International Journal of Early Childhood Special Education (INT-JECSE) has been serving for the above functions for the last 11 years. The aim of this research is to unearth the trends in ECSE by analyzing the articles published in INT-JECSE within the last 11 years in terms of demographic and methodological features, and subjects. Accordingly, answers have been sought for the following research questions:

1. What is the distribution of studies in terms of demographic features?
2. What is the distribution of studies in terms of methodological features?
  - a. study characteristics (type of study, method, design)
  - b. participant characteristics (participants, types of disability)
  - c. data collection
3. What are the subjects of these studies?

## Method

Designed as a journal analysis, this study has examined the features of articles published in INT-JECSE and analyzed them in accordance with content analysis, a descriptive technique. Content analysis entails sorting and categorizing of a large body of data, processing quantitative and/or qualitative data sets in line with the research aim, and analyzing the data set through use of specific techniques (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018; Elo & Kyngäs, 2008; Schwandt, 2007). The process of journal analysis consists of formation of data set and data analysis.

### *Formation of Data Set*

In this study, the articles published in INT-JECSE have been scrutinized in order to define the trends in the field of ECSE. INT-JECSE is an international peer-reviewed journal published twice a year and posted online free of charge. This journal is included in major international indexes such as Emerging Sciences Citation Index-ESCI, Educational Research Complete-

EBSCO, DOAJ, and SCOPUS. Research studies conducted on children with developmental disabilities or at risk during early childhood and their families are the main focus of the journal (INT-JECSE, 2020). This study has investigated a pile of 133 articles published in all the issues of the journal – including the last issue (year 2019, Vol. 11, issue 25) – within the last 11 years during when the journal has been published without any intervals. Since the aim was to scan all the issues of the journal, no exclusion criteria were determined.

Each and every article has been coded on the Article Description Form (ADF). This form was developed in accordance with research questions and another Article Description Form suggested in a different study (Akkaya, Çolaklıoğlu, Genç & Doğan, 2017). ADF is composed of 6 parts including a total of 19 items: a) demographic information about the article (publication date, number of authors, research context etc.); b) methodological features of the article (type of research, its method, design etc.); c) participants' characteristics (research sample, participants' disability types, sampling technique etc.); d) data collection (quantitative/qualitative data collection instruments); e) data analysis (quantitative/qualitative data analysis techniques); and f) research subject. One form was filled out for each article.

During data coding, 133 articles were shared by the researchers and relevant information about each article was transferred onto ADF. Subsequently, the researchers exchanged their forms and checked them again for consistency, which in turn pointed an agreement about 125 articles and a disagreement about 8 articles. In the meantime, inter-coder reliability was assessed to be 94% (Gwet, 2014). The researchers reached a consensus about the articles they had disagreed, and all data was electronically uploaded to be analyzed.

### *Data Analysis*

As for quantitative analysis, descriptive techniques on SPSS were run for demographic (first 5 items on ADF) and methodological (items between 6-18 on ADF) features of the articles. Yet, study subjects in all the articles were examined via content analysis. Accordingly, information coded for the 19<sup>th</sup> item on ADF was transferred to

excel program. In this step, codes were formed separately by two researchers as regards the subjects of the articles. Then, inter-coder reliability was calculated to be 92% for all the articles. Next, themes and sub-themes were formed through joint work of the researchers.

## Results

The findings concerning demographic and methodological features and subjects of the articles are presented in this section. Presentation is in line with the order of research questions.

### Demographic Features

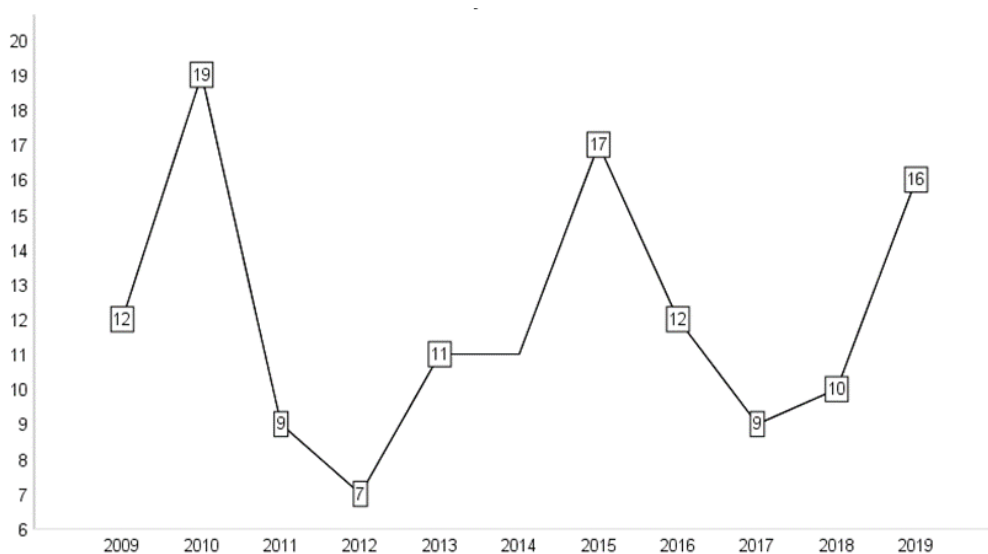
As regards demographic features, the distribution of articles across years, number and specialty of authors, and continent (countries) have been studied. Figure 1 depicts the distribution of articles across years.

Figure 1 indicates that there is no special pattern for the distribution of articles across years and that the annual number of the articles published each year varies. Accordingly, 2012 is the year with the lowest number of articles (7), and 2010 is the one with the highest number (19).

Table 1 presents the distribution of articles in terms of the number of authors, their fields of specialty, and across continents. As for the values in Table 1, the

number of authors is considered as an indicator for the degree of collaboration (Subramanyam, 1983). Likewise, field of specialty for the authors points to the degree of interdisciplinary orientation, and number of articles from different continents (countries) determines the degree of international efforts.

As displayed in Table 1, 28.6% of articles were written by only one author, and 71.4% by more than one (multiple authors or co-authors). The rate of articles authored by more than one researcher is the largest for 2 researchers (39.8%) and least for 5  $\geq$  researchers (5.3%). A significant part (61.7%) of all the articles were written by authors with a specialty in special education, and 17.8% were authored by researchers from 8 other fields outside special education. Besides, an interdisciplinary approach was adopted in 26 articles (19.5%) authored by researchers from various fields of specialty. Special education is the field with the highest number of studies ( $n = 22$ ) conducted with an interdisciplinary approach, a majority of which were completed through collaboration with the field of psychology ( $n = 6$ ). For all 26 articles with an interdisciplinary orientation, the distribution of study domains collaborated is as follows: 4 articles through collaboration with medicine, 1 with theology, 2 with assessment and evaluation, 2 with physiotherapy, and 2 with physical education and sports.



**Figure 1.**  
*Distribution of articles by years*

**Table 1.***Distribution of articles by number and field of authors, and continents (n = 133)*

Variation Indicators	<i>n</i>	%
<b>Number of authors</b>		
1	38	28.6
2	53	39.8
3	20	15.0
4	15	11.3
5 ≥	7	5.3
<b>Field of authors <sup>a</sup></b>		
Special education	82	61.7
Psychology	6	4.5
Preschool education	4	3.0
Child development	4	3.0
Guidance and psychological counseling	4	3.0
Social work	3	2.3
Speech and language therapy	2	1.5
Other <sup>b</sup>	2	1.5
Inter-disciplinary	26	19.5
<b>Continent</b>		
Asia	71	53.4
America	34	25.5
Europe	22	16.5
Africa	3	2.3
Inter-continental	3	2.3

Note. <sup>a</sup> Field of the author depends on doctoral or bachelor's degree. <sup>b</sup> Other includes distance education and primary education.

Regarding the distribution of articles across countries and continents, Table 1 indicates that articles from 28 countries located in 4 continents have been published in the journal: 53.4% Asia (Turkey, Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, China, India, Iran, Israel, Malaysia, Singapore, Jordan, Philippines, and Taiwan), 25.5% America (USA and Canada), 16.5% Europe (Spain, Lithuania, Sweden, England, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Belgium, Austria, Germany, Finland, Ireland, Italy, and Hungary), and 2.3% Africa (Botswana, Ethiopia, and Ghana). Furthermore, 3 articles were written through collaboration among authors from different continents. Almost half the studies (46.62%) were conducted in Turkey and the other half (53.38%) in various other countries.

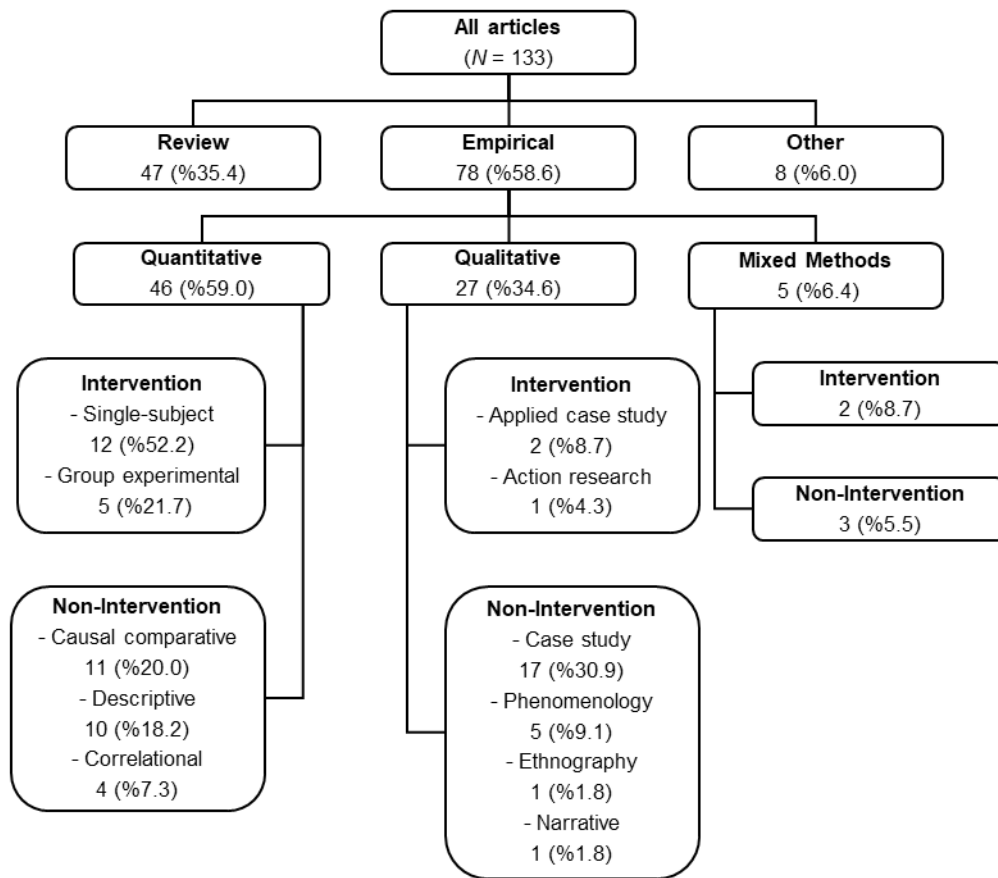
#### *Methodological Features*

With respect to methodological features, findings about research methods, participant characteristics, and data collection techniques/tools were investigated with scrutiny. Figure 2 presents the findings concerning methodological features of the articles.

Figure 2 shows that research methods in the articles were sorted in terms of research types, inclusion of intervention, and research designs. Empirical articles are the most frequent (58.6%) among the research sample. Within this group of

articles, quantitative studies are the most common (59.0%), followed by qualitative (34.6%) and mixed methods (6.4%) research respectively. Of all 78 empirical research endeavors, 28.2% are intervention and 71.8% are non-intervention studies. A closer look at Figure 2 reveals that studies designed in accordance with quantitative method are the highest in number ( $n = 17$ ). Single-subject design is preferred more ( $n = 12$ ) than group experimental design ( $n = 5$ ) among quantitative intervention research efforts. Another cluster of findings about the methodological features of articles regards characteristics of participants from whom research data is collected. Participant type was identified as the first difference concerning participant characteristics. All information regarding participant types are provided in Table 2.

According to Table 2, different types of participants were included independently in 50 studies and 26 studies were completed with a combination of participant types. As for the highest number of research studies with independent participants, teachers and children with disabilities participated in 17 different studies each. Concerning those with a combined group of participants, on the other hand, children with disabilities are mostly combined with their typically developing peers, teachers, and parents.



**Figure 2.**  
*Distribution of articles by article type and research methods*

**Table 2.**  
*Distribution of articles by participants*

Participants	n	%
<b>Independent (n = 50)</b>		
Child*	17	22.4
Teacher	17	22.4
Parent	8	10.5
Mother	4	5.3
Father	1	1.3
At risk child	1	1.3
Early intervention staff	1	1.3
Typically developing peer	1	1.3
<b>Combined (n = 26)</b>		
Child + Typically developing peer	6	7.9
Child + Teacher	5	6.6
Child + Mother	5	6.6
Child + Parent	1	1.3
Other combinations	9	11.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Another feature of participants taken into consideration was participants' disability types and additional/multiple disabilities. Table 3 depicts the distribution of articles by disability types.

Table 3 displays that the participant groups for 40 research studies were

children with disabilities. Virtually half of these studies included children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Yet, there are 10 studies involving participants from different disabilities such as intellectual disability, hearing loss, visual loss, and syndromes.

**Table 3.***Distribution of articles by disability type*

<b>Disability Type</b>	<b><i>n</i></b>	<b>%</b>
Not reported	1	2.5
Autism Spectrum Disorder	19	47.5
Intellectual disability	3	7.5
Hearing loss	3	7.5
Visual loss	2	5.0
Syndromes	2	5.0
Combination	10	25.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Of all 40 research studies in which individuals with disabilities participated, 32 provided no information as to the existence of additional/multiple disabilities. In 6 of these, the participants had no accompanying disability. There are only 2 articles reporting findings concerning participants with additional/multiple disabilities: one article focused on visual impairment together with neurological problems and another investigated intellectual disability accompanied with syndromes.

The last bit of analysis for the methodological features of the articles in question was data collection tools/techniques. Accordingly, these findings are presented in Table 4 in terms of quantitative and qualitative research methods.

The numbers and percentages in Table 4 indicate that the most and least frequently employed data collection tools in quantitative studies are forms ( $n = 19$ ) and tasks ( $n = 1$ ) respectively. Besides, a combination of quantitative data collection tools were utilized in 10 of the articles. A closer look at qualitative data collection techniques yields that interview is the technique most often employed on its own ( $n = 17$ ) without combination, and document analysis and focus group interviews are scarcely used by researchers. On the other hand, details about the use of these

techniques in combination revealed a different distribution, with observation and interviews being combined with other techniques in 11 and 7 articles, respectively. Whereas both field notes and document analysis were combined with other techniques in 2 articles each, there is only one research employing artifacts. Unlike other data collection techniques, focus group interview was not combined with any other techniques in any of the articles.

#### *Subjects of Articles*

The last research question of the current study aims to sort the subjects of articles. In this regard, themes and sub-themes of the articles are displayed in Table 5.

Table 5 shows that subjects of the articles published in the journal can be grouped under 8 themes and 18 sub-themes. Accordingly, developmental areas and skills ( $n = 30$ ) are the most common subjects dealt in the journal. On the contrary, the theme explored the least in the journal is assessment ( $n = 7$ ). The category 'other' hosts one or two articles from interdisciplinary studies and those investigating educational needs, ethics, instructional technologies, guiding processes, and theses analysis.

**Table 4.***Distribution of data collection tools and techniques by research methods*

<b>Data Collection</b>	<b><i>n</i></b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Quantitative tools (<math>n = 51</math>)</b>		
Form	19	37.3
Scale	13	25.5
Questionnaire/Survey	8	15.7
Task	1	2.0
Combinations	10	19.5
<b>Qualitative techniques (<math>n = 34</math>)</b>		
Interview	17	50.0
Observation	2	5.9
Focus group interview	2	5.9
Document analysis	2	5.9
Combinations	11	32.4

**Table 5.**  
*Subjects of the articles*

Themes	Sub-themes	<i>n</i>
Developmental areas and skills ( <i>n</i> = 30)	Social-emotional development	11
	Language-speech-communication	7
	Academic	5
	Self-care	3
	Cognitive	2
	Play	2
Family/Parent ( <i>n</i> = 24)	Parent training	9
	Family experiences	7
	Parent participation	4
	Parent-child interaction	4
Intervention in ECSE ( <i>n</i> = 22)	Early intervention programs	19
	Early intervention centers	3
Teacher ( <i>n</i> = 15)	Teacher competence	9
	Teacher education	6
National ECSE systems ( <i>n</i> = 14)	ECSE systems by countries	14
Inclusion ( <i>n</i> = 11)	Inclusive education	7
	Teacher in inclusion	4
Assessment ( <i>n</i> = 7)	Assessment processes	4
	Measurement tools	3
Other ( <i>n</i> = 10)		10
<b>Total</b>		<b>133</b>

*Note.* ECSE = Early Childhood Special Education

## Discussion

Despite a dense and comprehensive literature on early intervention and ECSE throughout the world, the number of scientific journals is relatively small. Scientific journals publishing unbiased research reports reviewed by referees reflect the debatable issues, trends, and dilemmas within the field of their specialty (Norris, 2020). Therefore, decoding a field-relevant scientific journal may tremendously contribute to the understanding of the overall picture in that field. Centered in Turkey and published without any interval for the last 11 years, INT-JECSE is one of the few scientific journals within the field of ECSE. The current research aims to analyze all the articles published in INT-JECSE and determine the trends in ECSE through such analysis. The journal analysis conducted in this sense involves investigation of published articles in terms of demographic features, methods, and research subjects.

### *Demographic Trends*

The journal has published 133 articles in 25 issues and 11 volumes within the last 11 years spanning from 2009 to 2019. Though the publication of the journal has never been paused throughout this

process, the distribution of articles by number across years varies significantly. This finding can be interpreted both as a sign of determination to continue its publications and as a warning with respect to a more balanced distribution of articles by number across years.

Demographic features of articles included identifying the number of authors, their fields of specialization, and their continents (countries). Each of these variables can be deemed as an indicator for an important feature of the journal. A journal's *variation indicators*, these variables signify the degree of collaboration, interdisciplinary orientation, and international efforts. One can interpret the number of authors in an article as the degree of *collaboration* (Sunramanyam, 1983), similarly the authors' fields of specialization as the degree of *interdisciplinary orientation*, and continents (countries) where the articles were completed as the degree of *international efforts*. Of all 133 articles, 71.4% were authored by more than one researcher while 28.6% were conducted by only one author. Howbeit this finding can be interpreted as an indicator of high degree of collaboration among authors, it does not necessarily mean that the collaboration is interdisciplinary in nature. As a matter of fact, 61.7% of the articles were written by special education researchers in the field of special



education, and researchers specializing in a different field authored 17.8% of articles within their own fields of specialty. This can be noted as a dominance of special education in the journal and as a sign of relatively low degree of interdisciplinary orientation in terms of research studies and researchers. Authors from various fields of specialization produced a total of 19.5% of all the articles. The fact that special education cooperated most with the fields of psychology, preschool education, and child development is highly compatible with the historical development of special education and with the nature of ECSE (Odom, 2016; Reichrow, 2016; Winzer, 1993).

In the journal that publishes articles from four continents and 28 countries, the percentages of articles originating from Turkey and other countries are 46.62% and 53.38%, respectively. One can conclude that the degree of international efforts published in the journal is quite high considering the number of continents and countries represented by the articles and the number of studies originating outside Turkey. Yet, a more balanced distribution of articles across countries can be noted as one of the ideal goals for the future of the journal. Briefly, variation indicators point that the degree of collaboration among authors and international efforts within the articles published in INT-JECSE is high, but the degree of interdisciplinary orientation is relatively low. Hosting different disciplines both independently and in combination with others can also be conceived as another future goal for the journal.

#### *Methodological Trends*

Research types, research methods, participant characteristics, and data collection tools/techniques were examined to determine the methodological trends. Higher percentage of empirical studies (%58.6) as opposed to other types (%41.4) can be taken as an indicator for the journal's capacity to generate authentic and new information. However, the amount of quantitative studies (59%) within empirical research endeavors is larger than the total of both qualitative (34.6%) and mixed method (%6.4) studies. To some extent, this finding is compatible with that of Smith et al. (2002) who examined 835 empirical research articles (quantitative 90%,

qualitative 9%, and mixed 1%). The current research concludes that qualitative and mixed method research studies are on the increase in accordance with the shift in methodological paradigm. Yet, this increase is hardly sufficient given the fact that it has been 18 years since Smith et al. (2002) was published.

Of all 78 empirical research studies, 28.2% are intervention and 71.8% are non-intervention studies. This should be a concern for an applied field such as ECSE, albeit consistent with the overall picture. Among the intervention studies, experimental methods prevail obviously, which can be noted as a consequence of efforts to bridge the gap persisting between theory and practice for years (Buysse et al., 2006). Yet, qualitative designs and mixed methods such as applied case study and action research that include intervention are also quite fruitful options in closing this gap (Corr, Snodgrass, Greene, Meadan, & Santos, 2019).

A closer look at the distribution of articles by participants reveals that the percentages of studies with teachers (22.4%) and disabled individuals (22.4%) as participants are exactly the same. However, one would expect families to weigh heavier among different types of participants in research endeavors within ECSE given the significance of families in terms of early intervention. The finding that individuals with ASD is the largest group of participants (47.5%) in terms of disability type should be interpreted as an indicator that there is a tendency in the field of ECSE to work with a particular group of participants. The results of Gül and Diken's (2009) review of master's and doctoral thesis and field review study by Öncül (2004) also point to a similar finding across Turkey. Annual steady increase of ASD diagnosis (Center for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2020) can account for this trend in the field. Nevertheless, one can caution that ECSE should consider a new set of criteria different from statistical values for both services and research studies within the field.

Another noteworthy finding for the field of ECSE yields that additional/multiple disabilities that participants have, if any, are not reported or stated in a vast majority of articles (80%). It is well-known that detailed description of participant characteristics in ECSE research studies

matter significantly with respect to practicality and replicability (Smith et al., 2002). As for the last component of methodological trends, the tendency concerning data collection tools/techniques is in favor of forms & scales and interview & observation among other quantitative and qualitative data collection tools, respectively. An unexpected finding worthy of noting is that more than one data collection technique has been used in a small number of qualitative studies. Considering the fact that qualitative research endeavors should resort to more than one data collection technique as part of data triangulation process in order to advance in trustworthiness (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2013), one can conclude that the articles cannot meet expectations in this sense.

#### *Trends in Subjects of the Articles*

8 themes and 18 sub-themes have been formulated as a result of analyzing the articles in terms of their subjects. Developmental areas and skills have been determined as the most frequently visited subject among the articles ( $n = 30$ ). One of the foundational aims of ECSE is to support children in their developmental and academic growth (Guralnick, 2011; Shonkoff & Meisels, 1990). Thus, the weight of developmental areas and skills across the articles published in the journal is highly consistent with the nature of ECSE. Social-emotional skills and language-speech-communication skills prevail among the developmental areas and skills scrutinized in these articles. This particular finding makes more sense when combined with the finding that ASD is the most frequently examined disability. On the other hand, several others such as academic, self-care, play, and cognitive skills that are vital during early childhood have generally been neglected within the field of ECSE. Various system theories underpin that cognitive, play, academic, and self-care skills should be supported as much as social-emotional and language-speech-communication skills (Guralnick, 2019; Gottlieb, Wahlstein, & Lickliter, 2007). This finding, when considered through such a theoretical framework, necessitates that the journal of ECSE include articles evenly distributed across all developmental areas and skills.

The theme of family/parents is the second common subject of research explored by the articles published in the journal, which is compatible with the true nature of the field of ECSE since families and parents are the recipients and partners of early intervention and interventions provided as part of ECSE (DiPipi-Hoy & Jitendra, 2004). Within this theme, parent training and family experiences are visited often whereas parent participation and parent-child interaction need to be tended more. Pool et al. (2008) uses the term “ground breaking” for the articles focusing on parent-child interaction and parent participation during early intervention. Family studies are essential in terms of the success of interventions (Fiedler, Clark & Simpson, 2004), revision of interventions, and developing new interventions (Bruder, 2000; Frost, Abbott & Race, 2015).

When viewed together, the themes of intervention and national ECSE systems mostly gather around promoting early intervention methods and national ECSE systems as practiced by different countries. Within field-related debates, introducing intervention examples and systems across the world is deemed as a key mission in spreading effective early intervention practice and devising new intervention systems (DEC, 1993, 2014; Wolery & Bailey, 2002). The findings indicate that the journal has been serving towards this mission.

Teachers bear a role as crucial as that of parents and family with respect to early intervention and the field of ECSE. Teacher competencies and teacher training are two subjects explored under the theme of teachers ( $n = 15$ ) in the articles. Distilling and reflecting teachers' opinions, all of these studies belong to the group of non-intervention research. Yet, it is often underscored that early childhood teachers should receive a high-quality training either in the form of pre-service or in-service training (DEC, 2006, 2014).

Inclusion theme is a relatively less studied subject within the journal ( $n = 11$ ). This may be related to the fact that children between 0 and 3 years of age are not placed in inclusion settings. Of course, educating children (3-8 years of age) with disabilities or at risk in the same environment together with their peers is critical for academic and developmental skills to flourish

(DEC/NAEYC, 2009; Frauzer-Cross, Traub, Hutter-Pishgahi & Shelton, 2004).

Assessment is the least frequently visited theme in this journal ( $n = 7$ ). Assessment before, during, and after interventions fulfil several crucial roles such as supervising the appropriateness/feasibility of intervention programs, planning of the programs, and examining the effects of intervention (DEC, 2007; McConnell & Rahn, 2016). A steady increase in the number of articles focusing on assessment seems fit for the journal.

### Limitations, Conclusion, and Suggestions

There is no single journal analysis focusing on three components such as demographic features, methodological trends, and research subject within the field of early intervention and ECSE. Though this lack is not a relevant limitation of the current research, it still impedes in-depth understanding of the findings through comparison. Thus, the findings should not be considered as a complete reflection of the entire field of ECSE. It is better to examine the trends in other journals and publications in the field before reaching conclusions. Under the supervision of this warning, it is possible to state that the findings of the current research bear significant results and suggestions for the journal and the field in question. In conclusion, it is plausible to state that INT-JECSE is taking action to publish research studies representing the field of ECSE and it is attempting to increase the variety of these studies in terms of methods and subjects. Based on the findings, following can be suggested for the publication policy of the journal in the future:

- The distribution of the number of articles across years should be balanced.
- It should host more studies with an interdisciplinary orientation.
- The distribution of research methods in empirical studies should be balanced.
- The rate of intervention studies should be increased; intervention studies employing qualitative methods (such as applied case study),

action research and mixed methods should be encouraged.

- Developmental disabilities other than ASD should be granted the interest they deserve.
- Research on children at risk should be increased.
- Research on individuals with additional/multiple disabilities should be encouraged, and researchers should be asked for the rationale when employing this group of participants as exclusion criteria.
- Studies on family and parents, virtually the most significant partner within the field of ECSE, should be increased.
- A fair attitude should be adopted towards all developmental areas and skills.

In sum, the most urgent issue is to settle a fair distribution of methods and subjects. In line with the nature of ECSE, it is critical for the future course of the journal to represent methodological approaches and research subjects in accordance with their weight in theory and practice.

### Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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