

# Exploring teachers' perspectives on home visit practices in early childhood special education: A qualitative study from Türkiye

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**Abstract:** This study explores preschool teachers' perspectives on home visit practices as a means of strengthening school–family collaboration in early childhood education. Home visits are increasingly recognized as an effective tool for building trust, supporting children's social–emotional development, and promoting continuity between home and school environments. Despite their potential benefits, the implementation and perceived impact of home visits vary widely across educational contexts. Using a descriptive qualitative design, this study examined the experiences, perceived benefits, and challenges reported by 10 special education teachers working in public early childhood institutions. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and field notes. These are analyzed using thematic content analysis. Findings indicated that teachers view home visits as a valuable practice that enhances communication with families, provides insights into children's home lives, and strengthens teacher–parent partnerships. Teachers reported that home visits support children's adaptation, classroom behavior, and academic readiness by fostering a sense of security and familiarity. However, they also identified several challenges, including time constraints, workload, safety concerns, and limited parental participation. Teachers emphasized the need for institutional support, structured guidelines, and professional development to implement home visits more effectively. Overall, the study highlights that while home visits contribute meaningfully to early childhood education, sustainable implementation requires systematic planning, administrative support, and clear standards. These findings may guide policymakers, school administrators, and practitioners in designing more comprehensive and effective home visit programs.

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## Introduction

Early childhood represents a critical developmental stage during which the foundations of lifelong learning, behavior, and adaptive functioning are established. Educational and support services provided during this period promote not only cognitive growth but also holistic development across social, emotional, and physical domains. For children with special needs, early childhood education plays a pivotal role in identifying developmental delays and implementing appropriate interventions, thus forming the cornerstone of early intervention processes (Duffee et al., 2017). Within this context, home visits in early childhood special education have become a widely adopted practice worldwide, aiming to support children's development in their natural environments, strengthen family engagement, and enhance collaboration between teachers and families (Brentani et al., 2021).

Research in the field consistently demonstrates that home visits yield multifaceted benefits for both children and families during the early childhood period. Empirical evidence indicates that home-visit practices contribute significantly to children's cognitive, linguistic, and social development and enhance parents' awareness, parenting competencies, and engagement in the educational process (Bilukha et al., 2005; Kotake et al., 2023). Within the scope of home visit programs, home-based interventions are

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structured, professionally designed activities implemented in the child's natural environment to address individual developmental needs (Tomris & Çelik, 2021).

Such interventions not only foster children's development but also empower families by enhancing their knowledge, skills, and self-efficacy. Through components such as parent education, psychosocial support, developmental assessment, home-environment structuring, and family counseling, these programs transform parents from passive recipients of services into active partners in their child's development (Erdemir, 2022; McBride & Petterson, 1997; Wasik & Bryant, 2000). Moreover, home-based interventions have been found to strengthen teacher–family communication, enhance family participation in educational decision-making, and promote children's motivation to learn. Consequently, home visits are increasingly recognized as an essential component of a family-centered, holistic approach in early childhood special education.

Home-based interventions are typically implemented by professionals in collaboration with families within the child's natural living environment. In this context, home visits are among the most common and effective modalities in early childhood special education practice. Home–visit–based programs constitute a multidisciplinary intervention approach in which professionals such as teachers, psychologists, special education specialists, social workers, and healthcare providers engage directly with families to support children's developmental progress (Bock et al., 2021; Toran & Özgen, 2019). During these visits, professionals not only deliver individualized, play-based educational activities tailored to the child's needs but also provide developmental guidance, informational support, observational feedback, and parent coaching (Bock et al., 2021; Peterson et al., 2007).

Through these interactions, parents are encouraged to recognize their children's strengths, understand their developmental needs, and create enriched learning opportunities integrated into daily routines. Furthermore, home visits enhance parents' ability to interact with their children in a more conscious and meaningful way, thereby supporting the integration of family participation into the educational process (Orum-Çattık et al., 2021; Sweet & Appelbaum, 2004). Ultimately, home visits function not only as a teaching strategy but also as a mechanism for family empowerment that strengthens collaborative partnerships between teachers and families within early childhood intervention systems. From an ecological perspective, home visits can be understood as practices that enhance the alignment and continuity between children's primary developmental contexts, particularly the home and educational environments. In Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, such practices strengthen the child's mesosystem by creating purposeful connections between daily family routines and educational goals (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007). Similarly, family-centered intervention frameworks emphasize that empowering caregivers through shared decision-making, sensitivity to family priorities, and the use of natural learning opportunities support more sustainable and contextually meaningful developmental outcomes (Dunst, 2002; Sheridan et al., 2010). When evaluated from an ecological and family-centered perspective, home visits provide a structured opportunity to translate contextual information into collaborative educational planning, rather than merely serving as relational encounters.

Research in the field indicates that home visits not only provide developmental support for children but also strengthen the parent–child relationship, enhance parental responsiveness, and yield long-term positive outcomes in children's academic, social, and emotional adjustment (Edwards et al., 2020; Grantham-McGregor et al., 2020). These findings suggest that home visits serve as an effective mechanism for implementing family-centered approaches within early intervention frameworks.

Particularly in special needs contexts such as autism spectrum disorder (ASD), home-based interventions have been shown to produce significant improvements in children's communication, joint attention, social engagement, and behavioral regulation skills (Bierman et al., 2017). The benefits of such interventions extend beyond observable symptom reductions; they also empower parents to feel more competent, supportive, and engaged in the instructional process. Thus, home visits emerge as a multidimensional and sustainable model for fostering collaborative partnerships among children, families,

and professionals in early childhood special education.

In Türkiye, both research findings and the Special Education Services Regulation (Ministry of National Education [MoNE], 2018) indicate that although home visits are formally recognized within the national special education framework, their implementation remains limited and inconsistent. Existing studies reveal that teachers generally hold positive attitudes toward home visits, viewing them as an effective means of fostering collaboration with families. However, they also report a range of practical challenges, including difficulties related to program management, transportation, time constraints, continuity of family participation, and insufficient institutional support (Mengi & Alpdoğan, 2020; Yıldırım-Parlak, 2024).

These findings highlight that while home visits hold considerable potential for integration into early childhood special education in Türkiye, their sustainability is hindered by structural and logistical barriers. Therefore, understanding teachers' experiences and perceptions regarding home visits may provide valuable insights for improving both policy and practice in the field. Accordingly, the present study aims to explore the content, implementation practices, and teacher perspectives on home visits conducted with children with special needs during early childhood.

To achieve this aim, the study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the functions of home visits for children with special needs during early childhood, and how are these functions reflected in the educational process?
2. How do teachers who conduct home visits with children with special needs in early childhood perceive the effectiveness, strengths, and limitations of these practices?

### **Method**

The present study aims to explore in depth the content, implementation practices, and teachers' perspectives on home visits conducted with children with special needs during early childhood. In line with this purpose, a qualitative case study design was employed. The case study approach seeks to examine a specific phenomenon, program, or process within its real-life context, providing a holistic and multidimensional understanding of the situation under investigation (Tardi, 2019; Yin, 2003). This design was deemed appropriate because it enables in-depth exploration of teachers' lived experiences and perceptions of home-visit practices in natural educational settings.

Case studies have been categorized in various ways within the literature (Baron & McNeil, 2019; Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2003). Drawing on the typology proposed by Baron and McNeil (2019), the current research was conducted as an instrumental case study. An instrumental case study focuses on an in-depth analysis of a single case in order to gain a broader understanding of a specific phenomenon, rather than to achieve generalization (Wellner & Pierce-Friedman, 2019). Accordingly, the selected case in this study served as a means to deepen the understanding of teachers' experiences with home visits and to contribute to the theoretical knowledge base of early childhood special education.

This methodological choice was particularly well-suited to the aims of the current research for several reasons. First, home visit practices in early childhood special education are complex, context-dependent, and shaped by multiple ecological factors such as family dynamics, teacher–parent interactions, and children's individual needs. An instrumental case study provides the flexibility and depth needed to capture these multilayered dynamics in their natural context, rather than reducing them to isolated variables. Second, teachers' perceptions and decision-making processes during home visits often involve tacit knowledge, professional judgment, and situational adaptations that cannot be meaningfully understood through standardized or large-scale quantitative approaches. The case study design allows these nuanced, experience-based insights to emerge organically through rich descriptions and thick data. Third, because home visits are implemented differently across educational settings, cultures, and service delivery models, an in-depth inquiry into a single bounded system offers the opportunity to illuminate how broader principles of early childhood special education manifest in practice. Finally, this approach

aligns with the study's aim of contributing to theoretical understanding rather than generalizing to larger populations. By closely examining a single case in detail, the research can reveal patterns, tensions, and contextual factors that inform both practice and future research on home-visit implementation in early childhood special education.

## **Data Collection Instruments**

### *A Semi-Structured Interview Form*

It was employed as the primary data collection tool in this study. The form was developed to conduct in-depth interviews with teachers in early childhood special education who actively participated in home-visit practices. The development of the interview form was guided by the research's overall purpose and specific research questions. Initially, the researchers drafted a pool of potential interview questions, which were reviewed and refined based on theoretical considerations and relevant literature to ensure conceptual clarity and content relevance.

Following the revision process, the final version of the interview form comprised five main questions and six probing (follow-up) questions, totaling eleven items. The draft interview form was evaluated by an associate professor specializing in special education and a qualitative research expert, who assessed the instrument for scope, linguistic clarity, and appropriateness. Revisions were made in line with the experts' feedback. Subsequently, pilot interviews were conducted with two teachers to examine the clarity, flow, and consistency of the questions. The insights gained from these pilot interviews were used to finalize the form before data collection. Throughout the development and pilot phases, ethical principles—including participant confidentiality, voluntary participation, and informed consent—were strictly observed.

The semi-structured interview format was chosen because it enables the collection of rich, nuanced, and experiential data, which aligns with the exploratory nature of this study. Home visit practices involve teachers' personal judgments, emotional experiences, professional decision-making processes, and interactions with families—elements that cannot be adequately captured through structured or closed-ended tools. The flexibility of semi-structured interviews allows researchers to follow participants' narratives, probe more deeply when needed, and uncover meanings that may not emerge from predetermined questions alone. Moreover, because the study aims to understand teachers' lived experiences in real-life contexts, this tool enables the elicitation of detailed examples, reflections, and context-specific insights. Ultimately, the semi-structured format supports a balance between systematic inquiry and participant-driven responses, making it particularly well-suited to investigating complex educational practices, such as home visits.

### *Field Notes*

The second data collection tool utilized in the study was field notes. During each interview session, the second and third researchers documented detailed observations regarding participants' non-verbal reactions, emotional expressions, and contextual features of the interview environment, as well as their own reflections as observers. These notes served as supplementary and corroborative data sources alongside the semi-structured interview form. The primary purpose of maintaining field notes was to ensure data triangulation, thereby enhancing the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings. In addition, recording contextual and behavioral cues—such as participants' tone, gestures, facial expressions, and situational dynamics—contributed to a richer interpretation of the qualitative data. Thus, field notes served as a reflective tool that supported the objectivity of the research process and facilitated a more nuanced understanding of teachers' experiences.

Field notes were included in the study because interviews alone cannot fully capture the subtleties and contextual dynamics of participants' experiences. Teachers' accounts of home visits may be complemented—or at times contradicted—by their emotional expressions, hesitation, excitement, or discomfort during the interview process. Such non-verbal indicators provide valuable interpretive depth that strengthens the accuracy and authenticity of qualitative findings. Furthermore, home-visit practices are inherently relational and sensitive, involving interactions with families, children, and home

environments; thus, understanding teachers' perspectives requires attention not only to their verbal statements but also to the affective and situational cues that accompany those statements. Field notes also enhance methodological rigor by contributing to data triangulation, providing an audit trail, and reducing potential researcher bias through reflexive documentation. For these reasons, field notes constitute an essential complement to achieving a holistic and credible understanding of teachers' experiences with home visits.

### Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected through face-to-face and online semi-structured interviews, conducted at mutually agreed-upon times. Prior to each interview, the purpose of the study was explained, informed consent was obtained, and only participants who agreed to audio recording were interviewed. All interviews were conducted in accordance with ethical guidelines, ensuring participant confidentiality. Following the interviews, a member checking procedure was implemented. Summaries of individual interviews were sent to consenting participants, who were asked to confirm their accuracy. To ensure transcription reliability, an independent expert who was not part of the research team listened to a randomly selected audio recording and compared it with the written transcript, completing a verification form. In total, 150 minutes of audio data were transcribed in Times New Roman, 12-point font, with 1.5 line spacing, yielding 54 pages of qualitative data for analysis.

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis, a systematic method for identifying, organizing, and interpreting patterns of meaning (themes) within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Initially, all transcripts were uploaded to MAXQDA 2024 for coding and thematic categorization. Two researchers independently coded three randomly selected transcripts and then collaborated to ensure inter-coder reliability through regular calibration meetings. Codes with conceptual similarities were grouped to form subthemes and overarching themes. At the end of the analysis, 80 codes, 8 subthemes, and 4 main themes were identified. This analytic process enabled the extraction of meaningful patterns from the data and provided a comprehensive understanding of teachers' experiences with home visits in early childhood special education.

### Participants

A total of 10 teachers participated in the study, comprising 5 females and 5 males. Regarding their professional backgrounds, three were preschool teachers, while seven were special education teachers. In terms of institutional settings, six teachers were employed in special education preschools, two in special education application schools, and two in Guidance and Research Centers (GRCs). Participants were recruited through direct contact with schools and institutions, following preliminary meetings with teachers in early childhood special education settings. Following these initial meetings, teachers who expressed voluntary interest were provided with detailed information about the study, and only those who gave informed consent were included in the participant group. To increase the contextual breadth of the study and better reflect the diversity of home-visit practices within Türkiye, the sample was drawn from four geographic regions. In addition, particular attention was paid to selecting participants with prior experience working in special education preschools and conducting home visits as part of early childhood special education services. Participants were selected using purposive sampling, which enables the inclusion of individuals with specific characteristics relevant to the research purpose. The diversity of participants' institutional backgrounds and geographic representation enabled a comparative understanding of teachers' experiences with home visits across different educational contexts in Türkiye, while also strengthening the transparency of the sampling process and its ethical grounding.

**Table 1**  
*Participant Information*

Gender	Field	Institution
Female	Special Education Teacher	Special Education Preschool
Female	Special Education Teacher	Special Education Preschool
Female	Special Education Teacher	Special Education Preschool

Female	Special Education Teacher	Special Education Implementation School
Female	Special Education Teacher	Guidance Research Center
Male	Special Education Teacher	Special Education Preschool
Male	Special Education Teacher	Special Education Preschool
Male	Special Education Teacher	Special Education Preschool
Male	Special Education Teacher	Guidance Research Center
Male	Special Education Teacher	Special Education Implementation School

### **Credibility, Dependability, and Reflexivity**

Qualitative research inherently seeks to capture the meanings individuals assign to their experiences within specific contexts. Accordingly, validity and reliability are established through the broader framework of trustworthiness, which comprises the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Guba, 1981). To ensure credibility, several strategies were implemented. Throughout the interviews, field notes were taken and used as complementary data to support the interview transcripts. The research team conducted peer debriefing sessions to discuss data interpretations and verify the internal coherence of the findings. Moreover, member checking was conducted by sending participants summarized transcripts for confirmation of accuracy.

To enhance dependability, two researchers independently coded three randomly selected transcripts. Regular meetings were held to discuss discrepancies and reach consensus, ensuring a high level of inter-coder agreement (Miles & Huberman, 1994). To strengthen confirmability, multiple data sources—including interview recordings, field notes, and document analyses—were utilized to achieve data triangulation. Additionally, an external expert reviewed the alignment between codes, themes, and interpretations, and the findings were compared with existing literature (Mauthner & Doucet, 2003). Throughout the study, the researchers maintained a reflexive stance, acknowledging and minimizing the potential influence of their assumptions on the research process. A standardized interview protocol was employed across all sessions to ensure procedural consistency. After the interviews, participants were provided with summaries of their transcripts for verification of accuracy. Collectively, these measures enhanced the study's credibility, methodological rigor, and overall trustworthiness.

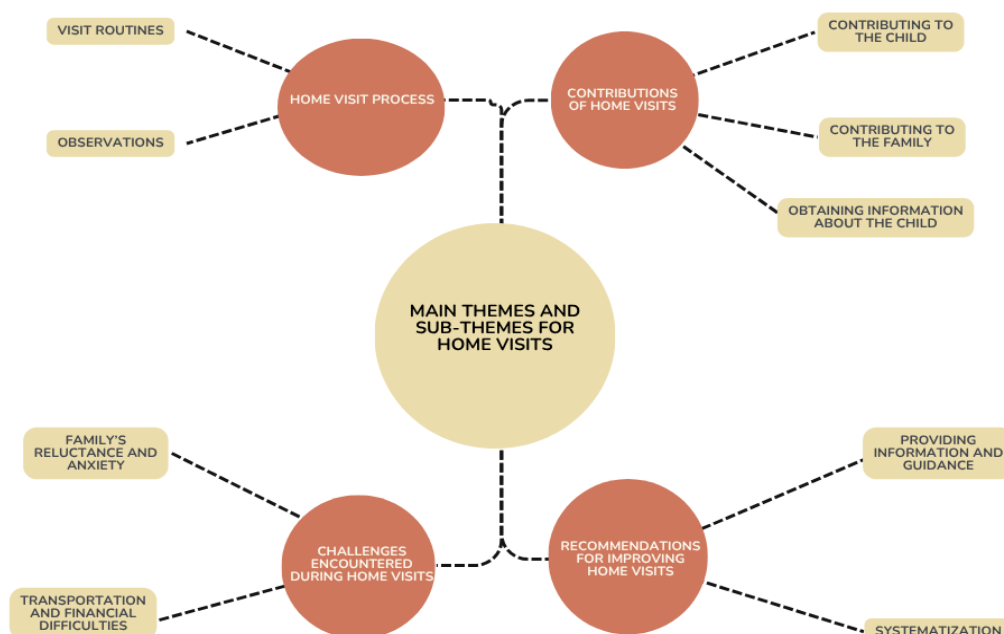
Expanding on these procedures, the adoption of these trustworthiness strategies was particularly critical given the complex, context-dependent nature of home-visit practices in early childhood special education. Ensuring credibility required not only verifying participants' accounts but also accurately representing their lived experiences as they unfold within intimate family environments and highly individualized educational contexts. Peer debriefing and member checks allowed the research team to validate emerging interpretations, reduce researcher bias, and ensure that findings authentically reflected teachers' perspectives. Dependability practices—such as independent coding and consensus meetings—were essential for maintaining consistency in the derivation of meaning units, codes, and themes, particularly given the exploratory nature of the study. Confirmability was further reinforced by systematic triangulation across interviews, field notes, and relevant documents, ensuring that interpretations were anchored in the data rather than in subjective assumptions. Reflexivity played a central role throughout the process, as researchers continuously monitored how their professional backgrounds, expectations, and prior experiences could shape their interpretation of home-visit practices. These methodological strategies were employed to enhance the study's trustworthiness and to establish credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability in the analysis of early childhood special education data.

### **Findings**

In this study, nine subthemes and four main themes related to home visits in early childhood special education were identified. As a result of the analysis, the subthemes were grouped under the corresponding main themes. In general, it was determined that the four main themes included: "Activities Conducted During Home-visits," which encompasses the practices carried out during home visits; "Functional Contributions of Home Visits," which focuses on the benefits of home visits for both children and families; "Challenges Encountered During Home Visits," which reveals the difficulties experienced

during the visits; and “Recommendations for Improving Home Visits,” which includes suggestions for making home visits more systematic and effective. Detailed findings for these main themes and subthemes are presented in Figure 1.

**Figure 1**  
Theme Sub-Theme



### Theme 1. Home Visit Process

Within this theme, two subthemes reflecting the functioning of teachers' home-visit processes emerged: “visit routines” and “observations.” When the subthemes and main theme were examined, it was observed that teachers conducted home visits according to a set routine. Teachers communicated with families prior to home visits, conducted visits at least twice a year, and stated that this practice was also mandated by law. Teachers indicated that home visits were typically scheduled during meetings held at the beginning of the school year. During the visit process, teachers communicated directly with families and noted that they scheduled appointments by informing families of the topic in advance. One teacher expressed this situation as follows:

...We talk according to the parents' availability. We discuss in advance which topics and situations we will address (T3).

However, teachers stated that they did not implement any intervention program or systematic teaching plan during home visits; instead, the process was generally carried out through observation and question-and-answer in a spontaneous manner. One teacher's opinion on this matter was as follows:

...You know, we go there and proceed like that. It develops as a mutual conversation, in the form of questions and answers, spontaneously... We take additional notes on the important points we observe and add our own opinions using the family interview form (T4).

Overall, these findings suggest that home visits in early childhood special education largely function as informal, flexible practices centered on communication and observation rather than on structured instructional planning, reflecting a need for more systematic guidance and pedagogical framing in implementation.

## Theme 2. Main Theme: The Contributions of Home Visits

Teachers reported that home visits provided benefits for themselves, families, and children. Upon examination of these views, three subthemes emerged: “obtaining information about the child,” “contributing to the child,” and “contributing to the family.” According to teachers, home visits offer significant advantages: they allow teachers to become familiar with the child’s living environment and help them obtain clearer, more objective information about the student’s actual performance. One teacher expressed this as follows:

Teacher, for example, we observe behaviors such as... Do the behaviors that the child develops at school continue at home as well? Or are the coercive interaction patterns with parents, for instance? (T7).

Teachers stated that they could observe their students’ real performance more effectively during home visits and, based on these observations, made adjustments to individualized education plans. They also mentioned that they gained more concrete insights into behaviors that challenge in specific contexts and reshaped the educational process accordingly. One teacher described this process as follows:

...Teacher, spiritually and educationally... when you see the child’s home environment, you can make a better plan. For example, you realize that the child doesn’t have a room of their own...(T3).

Teachers also emphasized that the contributions of home visits extended beyond educational benefits to psychological support and communication with families. It was emphasized that home visits strengthened communication and collaboration with families and that families reported greater psychological comfort as a result. One teacher expressed this view as follows:

...Regarding the family, sometimes there are problems they experience through the child, or between spouses, or even in a broader sense. When these are discussed, I have observed that they feel relieved. Talking to someone about these issues can make them feel better (T10).

Taken together, these reflections indicate that home visits function as a multidimensional support mechanism that not only enriches teachers’ instructional planning but also enhances child outcomes and strengthens family–school partnerships, underscoring their critical role in holistic early childhood special education practices.

## Theme 3. Challenges Encountered During Home Visits

The difficulties teachers encountered during home visits were examined under two subthemes: “reluctance and anxiety” and “transportation and economic challenges.” Teachers reported that families were reluctant throughout the home-visit process, which led to difficulties scheduling appointments and conducting visits. It was noted that some teachers and specialists exhibited prejudiced attitudes and criticism, which were cited as the primary reasons for this reluctance. In addition, according to the teachers, external factors such as families’ anxieties about having their home environment observed and the child’s actual circumstances, as well as worries such as “I may be criticized,” could lead to resistance to home visits. Furthermore, it was mentioned that gender differences might also influence family attitudes. A teacher expressed this situation as follows:

...As if making them appear guilty, and sometimes when we go for a home visit, there is this perception as if we are going to observe their faults...(T9).

Teachers also noted difficulties reaching families due to economic conditions and transportation barriers. It was stated that reaching some homes was particularly challenging under harsh weather conditions. One teacher expressed this situation as follows:

...For example, I work in the eastern region, and sometimes reaching a family’s home during winter conditions can be very difficult...(T2).

From a broader analytical perspective, these findings suggest that home visits are implemented within a framework of structural and relational constraints: while they hold substantial potential to support children and families, their effectiveness is undermined by families’ fears of being judged, power imbalances between professionals and parents, and socioeconomic and geographical barriers. The interplay of stigma, perceived surveillance, and logistical difficulties indicates that sustainable and

equitable home visit practices in early childhood special education require not only pedagogical planning but also sensitivity to family vulnerabilities, attention to contextual inequities, and institutional support mechanisms that mitigate these sources of resistance and burden.

#### **Theme 4. Improving Home Visits**

Teachers expressed diverse opinions on improving home visits and making them more effective. When these views were examined, two subthemes emerged: "providing information" and "systematization." Teachers emphasized that families should be informed about home visits. In this context, they emphasized the importance of meeting with families before visiting them and providing information about the purpose and scope of home visits. They also mentioned that informative brochures could be prepared to raise families' awareness about home visits. A teacher expressed this view as follows:

Teacher, for example... something could be prepared, like an informative brochure, for instance... (T8).

In addition, teachers stated that the home visit process should be more systematic. According to them, conducting home visits within a specific plan and program would improve the process's functionality. Teachers emphasized that not only the planning stages but also the implementation processes should become more structured. A teacher expressed this opinion as follows:

...To be carried out more efficiently, it needs to become a system, teacher. I think this should happen every year. Just as we hold parent meetings, I think parent visits should also be conducted in the same way (T7).

Overall, these suggestions indicate that teachers envision home visits as a formalized and collaborative component of early childhood special education, rather than as ad hoc or purely voluntary practices. By prioritizing clear, proactive communication with families and embedding home visits within a structured plan and policy framework, they highlight the need to transform home visits into a predictable, transparent, and pedagogically guided process. Such systematization, supported by preparatory information and ongoing family engagement, has the potential to reduce misunderstandings and resistance, enhance family participation, and more fully realize the developmental and educational benefits that home visits can provide for children with special needs.

### **Conclusion and Discussion**

The aim of this study was to explore the content, implementation practices, and teachers' perspectives regarding home visits conducted with children with special needs during early childhood. Based on the findings, four main themes were identified: the home-visit process, its contributions, the challenges encountered, and recommendations for improvement.

An examination of the findings revealed that teachers generally plan and implement home visits within a specific routine. This finding aligns with the Special Education Services Regulation (MoNE, 2018) in Türkiye, which mandates that home visits be carried out in a planned and organized manner. Teachers reported that they include home visits in their annual activity plans and implement them accordingly. However, the majority of teachers indicated that home visits are often conducted spontaneously and observationally rather than as structured interventions. They stated that there is no systematic instructional program or formalized plan guiding these visits. Similarly, studies by Peterson et al. (2007) and Tomris & Çelik (2021) emphasized that home visits should be implemented within a structured plan and supported by individualized educational approaches. The findings of the present study suggest that current practices deviate from the theoretical and programmatic framework recommended in the literature. Taken together, these findings illustrate a significant gap between policy-level expectations and actual implementation practices in the field. Although teachers formally integrate home visits into their annual plans, the lack of structured instructional content reflects a broader systemic challenge in operationalizing home-visit guidelines. Consistent with international research, the findings indicate that home visits are primarily used as relational and observational tools rather than as vehicles for targeted intervention, thereby limiting their potential impact on children's developmental and educational outcomes. Furthermore, the spontaneous nature of current practices suggests that teachers may require clearer procedural guidelines, professional

development opportunities, and institutional support to translate policy mandates into pedagogically meaningful actions.

This conclusion was derived from the discrepancy between teachers' reports of formally planning home visits and their simultaneous description of these visits as largely spontaneous, observation-based, and lacking structured instructional content. Within early childhood special education, the purpose of home visits extends beyond relationship-building to include translating ecological observations into individualized goals, family-guided teaching strategies, and continuity between home routines and educational objectives. When visits remain informal and non-systematic, this intended function is not fully realized, which explains the identified need for more systematic guidance and pedagogical framing in the implementation process. From an ecological perspective, this discrepancy limits the potential of home visits to function as intentional mechanisms that connect home and school contexts in meaningful and sustainable ways.

Within a theoretical framework, the divergence between recommended and actual practices underscores the need to enhance implementation fidelity of home-visit models in early childhood special education. Developing standardized yet flexible frameworks—supported by training, materials, and monitoring mechanisms—may help align practice with evidence-based approaches and enhance the overall effectiveness of home visits as an integral component of early intervention services.

At the same time, it is important to avoid overly rigid procedures that may constrain teachers' ability to capture incidental ecological information and build authentic relational connections with families. In this respect, the relational and observational nature of home visits should be recognized as a legitimate and often necessary foundation for later intervention planning, since such contextual insights may not be obtainable through school-based assessments alone

From a theoretical standpoint, the present findings gain greater explanatory power when interpreted through established ecological and family-centered frameworks (Dunst, 2002). Within Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, home visits can be conceptualized as a mechanism that strengthens the child's mesosystem by intentionally linking the primary developmental contexts of home and school, thereby promoting greater coherence and continuity across everyday routines and educational practices (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Within the ecological systems framework, children's development is shaped by ongoing, reciprocal interactions between the child and the multiple environments in which they participate. The microsystem refers to the immediate settings in which the child is directly involved, such as the home and the early childhood education environment, where daily routines, caregiving practices, and instructional interactions take place. The mesosystem, in turn, encompasses the dynamic relationships between these microsystems, highlighting the importance of coordination and consistency across contexts (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007). From this perspective, home visits serve as a critical mesosystem-level practice by intentionally linking the family and school environments and facilitating reciprocal information exchange between teachers and caregivers. Rather than functioning as isolated encounters, home visits enable educators to observe children within their natural routines, align educational goals with family practices, and support continuity between home-based experiences and school-based learning. Such alignment is particularly important in early childhood special education, where fragmented services and weak home-school connections may limit the effectiveness of individualized intervention efforts. The importance of these reciprocal connections can be further understood through a transactional systems perspective, which conceptualizes child development as the

From a theoretical standpoint, the present findings gain greater explanatory power when interpreted through established ecological and family-centered frameworks (Dunst, 2002). Within Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, home visits can be conceptualized as a mechanism that strengthens the child's mesosystem by intentionally linking the primary developmental contexts of home and school, thereby promoting greater coherence and continuity across everyday routines and educational practices (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Within the ecological systems framework, children's development is shaped by ongoing, reciprocal interactions between the child and the multiple environments in which they

participate. The microsystem refers to the immediate settings in which the child is directly involved, such as the home and the early childhood education environment, where daily routines, caregiving practices, and instructional interactions take place. The mesosystem, in turn, encompasses the dynamic relationships between these microsystems, highlighting the importance of coordination and consistency across contexts (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007). From this perspective, home visits serve as a critical mesosystem-level practice by intentionally linking the family and school environments and facilitating reciprocal information exchange between teachers and caregivers. Rather than functioning as isolated encounters, home visits enable educators to observe children within their natural routines, align educational goals with family practices, and support continuity between home-based experiences and school-based learning. Such alignment is particularly important in early childhood special education, where fragmented services and weak home-school connections may limit the effectiveness of individualized intervention efforts. The importance of these reciprocal connections can be further understood through a transactional systems perspective, which conceptualizes child development as the product of continuous, bidirectional interactions among the child, caregivers, and broader environmental systems (Sameroff, 2009). Within this model, changes in one component of the system—such as caregiver practices or educational expectations—can influence other components over time. Home visits, when grounded in ecological and family-centered principles, create structured opportunities for such transactional processes by supporting shared understanding, mutual adaptation, and coordinated action between families and educational professionals. In this sense, the effectiveness of home visits depends not solely on individual teacher practices but on their capacity to function as integrative mechanisms within a broader home-school system that jointly supports children's development.

In parallel, family-centered intervention frameworks position home visits as a relational and participatory practice grounded in collaborative partnerships, shared decision-making, and responsiveness to family priorities and cultural values (Dunst & Trivette, 2009). Viewed through these perspectives, the findings suggest that when home visits are enacted predominantly as informal, observation-oriented encounters, their capacity to operate as theoretically grounded vehicles for ecological intervention and family empowerment may remain underutilized (Sheridan et al., 2010). Conversely, systematically structured home visits—supported by clear procedural guidance and professional preparation—may enhance teachers' ability to translate contextual insights into individualized goals, strengthen bidirectional collaboration, and support families as active agents within early intervention. In this way, anchoring home visit practices within ecological and family-centered theoretical traditions not only clarifies the conceptual contribution of the study but also highlights the conditions under which home visits can more effectively contribute to sustainable, contextually responsive, and developmentally meaningful outcomes for young children with special needs (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007; Meyer & Man, 2006; Turnbull et al., 2015).

Product of continuous, bidirectional interactions among the child, caregivers, and broader environmental systems (Sameroff, 2009). Within this model, changes in one component of the system—such as caregiver practices or educational expectations—can influence other components over time. Home visits, when grounded in ecological and family-centered principles, create structured opportunities for such transactional processes by supporting shared understanding, mutual adaptation, and coordinated action between families and educational professionals. In this sense, the effectiveness of home visits depends not solely on individual teacher practices but on their capacity to function as integrative mechanisms within a broader home-school system that jointly supports children's development.

Teachers' views revealed that home visits contribute to a deeper understanding of children's developmental characteristics and enable more effective structuring of individualized educational plans. This result is consistent with the findings of Bilukha et al. (2005), Wasik & Bryant (2000), and Edwards et al. (2020), who highlighted the value of home-based interventions in assessing children within their natural environments. Moreover, teachers reported that home visits strengthen communication and collaboration with families, fostering more supportive and cooperative relationships. Similarly, Sweet and Appelbaum (2004) found that home visits enhance communication and partnership between families and professionals. Together, these converging findings suggest that home visits function as a unique bridge between

educational settings and children's natural routines, providing teachers with ecological insights that cannot be captured through school-based observations alone. The alignment between the present study and previous literature underscores the potential of home visits to inform more responsive and contextually grounded intervention plans. Additionally, the emphasis on improved family–teacher communication highlights the relational dimension of home visits, which is central to effective early childhood special education. Strengthening trust, enhancing family engagement, and supporting shared decision-making all contribute to more holistic and sustainable educational outcomes. However, these benefits also point to the need for structured frameworks and professional training that can help teachers maximize the developmental and relational advantages of home visits. In this sense, the findings reinforce the argument that home visits, when systematically integrated into early intervention practices, hold substantial promise for promoting both child-centered learning and family empowerment. However, it is also important to acknowledge that home visits may not be uniformly beneficial across all contexts and families. Even when teachers report positive outcomes, home visits can inadvertently create pressure on families, raise privacy concerns, or intensify feelings of being evaluated—particularly in vulnerable households or when mutual trust has not yet been established (Mengi & Alpdoğan, 2020; Yıldırım-Parlak, 2024). In addition, inconsistencies in implementation, time constraints, and limited institutional resources may reduce the sustainability and effectiveness of home visits, suggesting that their impact is highly dependent on contextual readiness and system-level support.

Despite these positive contributions, several challenges were identified in implementing home visits. Factors such as families' reluctance, concerns about privacy, and lack of trust toward teachers were found to hinder the planning and execution of visits. These challenges are consistent with findings reported by Mengi & Alpdoğan (2020) and Yıldırım-Parlak (2024) in the Turkish context. Additionally, transportation difficulties and financial constraints were also identified as significant barriers that negatively affect the sustainability of home visit practices. These challenges collectively indicate that home visits, while pedagogically valuable, operate within a complex ecosystem shaped by sociocultural dynamics, institutional limitations, and socioeconomic disparities. Families' hesitation and privacy concerns point to underlying issues of stigma, perceived power imbalances, and fears of being judged—factors that diminish their readiness to collaborate with educators. Such relational barriers underscore the need for culturally responsive communication strategies and trust-building practices that can reduce anxiety and promote more open engagement. Likewise, the practical difficulties related to transportation and financial limitations reveal the structural inequities that particularly affect rural and economically disadvantaged regions, making consistent implementation difficult even for highly motivated teachers. These findings highlight the importance of developing policy-level supports—such as transportation allowances, flexible scheduling mechanisms, and institutional guidance—to enhance the feasibility and sustainability of home visits. Ultimately, addressing both relational and structural barriers is critical to ensuring that home visits can fully achieve their intended role as equitable, family-centered, and contextually meaningful components of early childhood special education.

Findings further indicated that teachers need systematic planning frameworks and informative materials for families to conduct home visits more effectively. This aligns with the systematic intervention models proposed by Wasik & Bryant (2000) and McBride & Petterson (1997). In this regard, teachers suggested that home visits should be institutionalized as a school policy, supported by guidelines and manuals for teachers, and complemented by informational resources for families. Taken together, these findings suggest that the effectiveness of home visits depends not only on teachers' individual efforts but also on the existence of institutional infrastructures that guide, regulate, and sustain the process. The alignment with established models in the literature highlights the importance of structured, evidence-based frameworks that delineate clear roles, expectations, and procedural steps for both educators and families. When supported by institutional policies, standardized manuals, and accessible informational materials, home visits can move beyond fragmented and ad hoc practices to become coherent components of early intervention systems. Such systematization also facilitates consistency across teachers and schools, enhances fidelity to recommended practices, and strengthens the capacity of families to engage

meaningfully in the process. From a policy and practice standpoint, the findings underscore the need for multi-level support—ranging from administrative leadership to resource development—to ensure that home visits are implemented in ways that reflect their pedagogical value and maximize their potential impact on children's development and family-school collaboration.

In conclusion, home visits conducted with children with special needs during early childhood represent a critical practice for assessing children's developmental needs in their natural environments, strengthening family-teacher collaboration, and enhancing individualized education planning. However, to make this process more functional and sustainable, it is essential to establish systematic implementation procedures, ensure comprehensive family orientation, and provide supportive resources for teachers.

Given that home visits are formally embedded within Türkiye's national special education framework, the findings also provide a direct takeaway for policy and system-level decision-makers. In particular, the gap observed between planned implementation requirements and the largely informal, observation-based practices reported by teachers highlights the need to translate regulatory expectations into clearer operational standards and implementation supports. Strengthening procedural guidance, institutional accountability, and resource mechanisms may therefore increase the feasibility, consistency, and sustainability of home visits in early childhood special education settings in Türkiye (MoNE, 2018).

These steps would improve both the quality and the effectiveness of home-visit practices in early childhood special education. Overall, the findings of this study highlight the dual nature of home visits as both an opportunity and a challenge within early childhood special education. While the practice holds substantial potential to enhance ecological assessment, deepen pedagogical insight, and foster strong family partnerships, its impact is constrained when implementation relies solely on individual teacher initiative rather than structured institutional support. Therefore, strengthening policy frameworks, enhancing professional development, and equipping families with clear, accessible information are essential to improving the effectiveness of home-visit practices. Addressing these areas can ensure that home visits evolve into consistent, equitable, and evidence-based practices that meaningfully contribute to children's developmental progress and to the broader goal of inclusive, family-centered early education systems.

### **Limitation and Further Research Implications**

Although this study was designed as a qualitative inquiry and therefore does not aim for statistical generalization, certain limitations should be acknowledged. Although data were collected from participants working in four regions of Türkiye, all participants were employed in special education kindergartens throughout their professional lives. This common professional context, while enabling an in-depth, multifaceted examination of home-visit practices from an early childhood special education perspective, may have constrained the diversity of institutional viewpoints represented.

In addition, the study relied on teachers' self-reported experiences, which may reflect subjective interpretations of practice. In addition, although field notes supported the documentation of contextual details during data collection, they may also entail interpretive limitations. Field notes are inherently shaped by the researcher's observational focus and analytic lens, which may influence what is recorded and how events are represented. Therefore, while they enrich qualitative depth, they may not fully capture all interactional nuances and may reflect selective emphasis based on the researcher's perspective. Future studies may enhance trustworthiness by including participants from a wider range of institutional settings and by incorporating multiple data sources, such as family perspectives or direct observations, to further enrich the understanding of home-visit practices.

Overall, the present study makes an original contribution by foregrounding home visit practices within early childhood special education in Türkiye—a context that remains comparatively underrepresented in the international literature—and by capturing teachers' firsthand perspectives through an in-depth qualitative lens. Beyond documenting common benefits and challenges, the study uniquely highlights the persistent gap between policy-level expectations and the realities of

implementation, thereby offering a contextually grounded understanding of why home visits often remain informal and observation-based rather than intervention-oriented. In addition, by theoretically positioning home visits within ecological and family-centered perspectives, the findings extend existing discussions by illustrating how home visits can function not only as relational tools but also as mechanisms for strengthening home–school continuity and supporting family participation in early intervention. In practice, the study provides actionable guidance by identifying the need for standardized yet flexible planning frameworks, institutional resources, and family-oriented materials to improve both feasibility and fidelity. Taken together, these contributions advance the field by integrating theoretical interpretation, contextual specificity, and practice-focused recommendations, offering a more comprehensive understanding of how home visits can be strengthened as equitable and evidence-informed components of early childhood special education.

Moreover, the implications of this study can be more explicitly situated within both national and international early childhood special education policy orientations that emphasize inclusion, coordinated service delivery, and family participation. At the national level, the planned nature of home visits reported by teachers is consistent with Türkiye’s Special Education Services Regulation, which frames educational support services as processes that should be organized and systematically implemented (MoNE, 2018). At the international level, the teachers’ calls for systematizing home visits, strengthening family communication, and ensuring institutional support align closely with established early intervention principles that prioritize family-centered practices, collaborative partnerships, and coordinated planning. In line with this perspective, UNICEF’s multi-sectoral approach to early childhood intervention underscores that family-centered systems require coherent policies, implementation guidelines, qualified personnel standards, and sustainable infrastructures (UNICEF, 2022). Such policy components closely parallel the recommendations emerging from the present study regarding structured manuals, institutional frameworks, and resource provision, which are also emphasized as key system-building elements in broader guidance on strengthening early childhood intervention systems (Tolan et al., 2023). Accordingly, these findings offer practical value by identifying concrete leverage points for guideline development, teacher training, and school-level implementation supports, thereby strengthening the alignment between everyday home-visit practices and broader policy aims to build inclusive, equitable, and family-responsive early childhood special education services.

## Declarations

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