
ATTITUDES OF UNDER-YEAR SCHOOL TEACHERS TOWARDS INCLUDING STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES IN COMMON CLASSROOMS

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Abstract: In Kosovo, pupils with special needs are educated in various educational institutions. Their education takes place in resource centres, which in the past were called special schools, attached classes that are part of regular schools and regular classes. The purpose of the study is to identify teachers' attitudes about the inclusion of pupils with special needs in their classrooms. In this study, it is not possible to address all the factors, but we have selected to address a very important factor, the teacher. If teachers have a negative attitude towards the inclusion of pupils with special needs, then the technical conditions do not come into play. Regarding the attitude of teachers towards the inclusion of students in their classes, among primary and lower secondary school teachers, the value of $F=4.756$ and $p=0.001<0.05$. Based on the results of One Way ANOVA it can be concluded that the alternative hypothesis has been supported: There are statistically significant correlations between the age of teachers and their attitude to the inclusion of pupils with special needs in their classrooms. The results of this study showed that professional development had a moderate effect on teachers' attitudes and that there is a need to provide ongoing professional development strategies to address the needs of general education teachers, especially in relation to the integration of pupils with significant academic difficulties, or behaviour. This study is unique because few studies incorporate current teacher classroom practices into involving pupils in inclusive settings.

Keywords: teacher, pupil, special needs, attitudes, involvement.

1. INTRODUCTION

The education of children with special needs, in different periods, has been treated differently, both by teachers and by parents and education experts. It was generally believed that children with special educational needs were different from their peers and that their social and learning needs were so different to those of other children that they required separated education outside the mainstream school (Griffin&Shevlin, 2011).

The child with special needs having problems like personal, social and many times academics in the school and they feel isolated in their environment and society. Earlier there were only special schools which taken care of these children problems. But now the philosophy has been changed, special, integration and inclusive approaches have come (Singh, 2014). Inclusion in education is the first principle of the Kosovo curriculum which means providing opportunities for equal inclusion of all children and young people in quality education, eliminate discrimination against children with special needs, highlight the personal values of everyone without distinction, for which inclusive classes, through appropriate teaching, suit every pupil, regardless of the situation or skills they have (MASHT, 2016). Inclusive education, as a first step towards social inclusion, is to the benefit of the whole society. The experience of the last century taught a valuable lesson to the society that the separation of a part of the pupils in special schools has negative effects on their further life but also on the society in general (MASHT, 2014). Inclusive education in the Nordic countries (Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Iceland and Finland) is one of the most valuable areas of education and social policy (Andriichuk, 2017). Inclusive schools promote and provide education for all children regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional and linguistic conditions (MASHT, 2014). In inclusive schools, diversity among pupils is welcomed and the necessary measures are taken to achieve this) Successful inclusive education requires school transformation and systems change. However, much of this reform is design-focused, and not resource-intensive. It is important to emphasise that inclusive education means that all children are together in mainstream classrooms for the majority of their day (Schuelka, 2018).

It is the education system in its entirety that needs to be adapted to ensure the full inclusion of children with special needs in the education process. Therefore, even in the definition of UNESCO, inclusive education is defined as a process that addresses and responds to the different needs of all pupils, by increasing participation in learning and reducing exclusion in and through it. It is closely related to changes and adaptations in curriculum contents, pedagogical approaches, structures and strategies in order to meet the specific learning needs of children (Sandkull, 2005). Key factors in inclusive education implementation include school and classroom level implementation such as school reviews and plans; training and supporting all teachers in inclusive practices, not just 'specialised' ones; and supporting school leadership to enact an inclusive vision for their schools (Schuelka, 2018).

In order to achieve the inclusion of pupils in school, parents must work on the education of children, school facilities must be suitable for all children, teachers must be willing to work with children with special needs, respect and help them, pupils should be prepared to cooperate with pupils with special needs, application of different teaching

methods, etc. (Bujari, 2003). One of the most important factors in the inclusion of pupils with special needs are teachers, who with their professionalism, willingness and will, can influence pupils with special needs to achieve good results in the educational process.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The role of the teacher in the inclusion of pupils with special needs is indisputable and without a commitment of teachers, there can be no good results in the educational process. The attitude of teachers towards the inclusion of pupils with special needs in regular schools, affects their commitment to work with these pupils.

According to Albana Markja and the working group, successful teachers are those who know how to teach all pupils. According to them, teachers take responsibility to enable the learning of all pupils in the classroom, find alternative ways of participation of all pupils in school life (Markja, et al., 2015).

Therefore, the more we pay attention to inclusion, the more successful the education system will be.

2.1. The role and attitude of the teacher for the inclusion of pupils with special needs

For the inclusion of pupils with special needs in schools, the key role is played by the teacher, who should have a positive attitude towards the inclusion of that pupil with special needs in regular classes. The term inclusion is used to refer to the commitment to educate each child, to the maximum extent appropriate, the school and grade he/she would otherwise attend (Rogers, 1993). As involvement of pupil has continued, regular classroom teachers have begun to address the real problems of how they adapt group lessons, modify homework and standardize grades, and accommodate pupils with special needs (Smith, 1998). Regular education teachers can not correct all the academic difficulties of pupils with special needs and to redesign the entire curriculum for one pupil, many modifications can be made for these pupils. Teachers can appropriately plan programs, guides, modify existing curriculum materials, assess pupil progress and involve experts when necessary (Lipsky&Gartner, 1996; Smith, 1998). The success of the inclusion or organized placement of children with special needs in the general classroom flow largely depends on teachers' attitudes towards pupils and their knowledge of how to educate them properly (Dapudong, 2014).

Teachers' attitudes have been found to have a significant impact on integration/inclusion effectiveness. The results showed that the attitudes held by regular and special teachers towards pupils with disabilities determine the success or failure of pupil involvement (Wilczenski, 1992; Brown, 1997). The attitude of teachers towards working with pupils with special needs depends on various factors. Among the factors that play a role in teachers' attitudes is the training of teachers to work with those pupils with special needs. Well-trained teachers understand what to do and how to deal with each pupil depending on their disabilities and needs (Bujari, 2003).

Teachers should apply teaching forms and methods that make learning as attractive and close to pupils as possible, to encourage those pupils to interact with each other (MASHT, 2014). The successful teacher in the learning process will become an expert to help pupils learn, therefore, it is useful to create responsibility in teaching which reduces problems in education (Ross, Ford&Burse, 2007). In order for teachers to be prepared, there must be a high quality and meaningful professional development required continuous professional development to maintain a successful teaching and inclusive environment (McLeskey&Waldron, 2002). Teachers need to spend a certain amount of time and energy to pursue continuous professional development and practice adaptation (Weiner, 2003).

Teachers need to have good knowledge of working with pupils with special needs to be willing to work with them. After professional preparation, teachers should work with pupils in the classroom to accept those pupils with equal special needs and treat them well (Bujari, 2003). It is understood that pupils with special needs, as well as other pupils, will encounter difficulties while learning, so teachers, but also other pupils, must be willing to help and respect these pupils. Negative attitudes towards people with special needs in all aspects limit them opportunities to integrate into the regular classroom.

Trust on the part of teachers plays an important role in reaching pupils with special needs. Everyone in this world is a personality in itself. It has its drawbacks, but also its possibilities. Therefore the teacher must have confidence in those pupils for them to achieve good results. During teaching work, teachers should use different forms, methods and strategies. It also suggests that general teachers and primary level teachers feel inadequate to teach children with special needs. Some teachers feel that they are often unable or unwilling to adapt their lessons to meet the needs of pupil individually, although they are adapted, the guidelines are critical to the success of many pupils with special needs who are educated in the regular environment (Martinez, 2004; Smith&Smith, 2001).

As more and more pupils with special needs are being placed in regular classrooms, therefore, it is imperative that teachers be well prepared to accept the roles and responsibilities for inclusive programs to be successful.

3. METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

3.1. Research questions

1. What is the relationship between the age of teachers and the attitude of teachers to the inclusion of pupils with special needs in their classrooms?
2. What is the connection between the training of teachers for the education of children with special needs and their attitude, for the inclusion of these pupils in their classes?
3. Is there a correlation between the experience of teachers with pupils with special needs and their attitude towards the inclusion of these kinds of pupils in their classes?

3.2. Participants

The research included 209 teachers working in regular schools, where, 204 teachers were involved in quantitative research, while 5 teachers were involved in qualitative research. In quantitative research, 110 of them work in the villages, while 94 work in the city schools. Of these, 138 are female and 66 are male. In terms of age, 40 teachers are aged up to 30 years, 60 aged 31-40 years, 56 aged 41-50 years, 42 aged 51-60 years and 6 aged over 60 years. Regarding educational preparation, 22 with high school, 158 with faculty, 24 teachers have the title of master of sciences. Of these teachers, 128 of them, during their studies, had subjects for the education of children with special needs, while 76, did not have subjects for the education of children with special needs. About 154 teachers said that they have knowledge about the education of children with special needs, while 50 of them do not have knowledge about the education of children with special needs. After starting work as teachers, 90 of them have completed training for the education of children with special needs, while 114 have not completed any training for the education of children with special needs. During the work, 124 teachers expressed that they have worked with children with special needs, 80 of them that they have not previously had pupils with special needs in the classroom, 92, have stated that currently in their class, they have pupils with special needs, while 112, that currently, in their class, do not have pupils with special needs.

3.3. Research instruments

To conduct the research, we applied two measuring instruments. Quantitative data were provided through the questionnaire, while qualitative data were provided through the interview. The questionnaire is an instrument specially prepared for the needs of the study and consists of 3 parts. In the first part, the demographic data of teachers are presented. In the second part, some issues about the education of children with special needs are presented, e.g. if during the studies, they had any subject for the education of children with special needs, if they have completed trainings, etc. In the third part, 16 Likert scale questions were asked, with 5 scales, related to the willingness of teachers to include pupils with special needs in their classroom. After conducting the research, for the needs of the study, from 5 scales (1. Strongly agree, 2. Partially agree, 3. Neutral, 4. Agree, 5. Strongly agree), the recoding was done in 3 scales (1. Negative, 2. Neutral, 3. Positive).

The interview is a tool specially prepared for this research, and it asks 8 (eight) open-ended questions.

3.3.1. Questionnaire reliability

Cronbach's Overall meter reliability coefficient is 0.873, which is high value and indicates that the meter is reliable. The reliability score of the instrument based on parallel model is 0.873, the same as it is according to Cronbach's Alpha model, while the predicted value of the impartial reliability coefficient is 0.874. Based on the reliability score obtained from Cronbach's Alpha model, Parallel and Strict Parallel, it can be concluded that the reliability of the instrument is high.

3.4. Data collection procedure

The application of the research instruments took place during the months: February-March 2020. The questionnaires were distributed to the teachers, but before starting to fill in the questionnaires, the teachers were informed and received the necessary instructions on how to complete those instruments. Conducting field research has its difficulties, as in many cases, participants do not want to cooperate, are not honest in their answers, complete the instruments just to complete them, etc. In order to overcome this problem, we tried to ensure that the participants were instructed in writing (on instruments), but also orally on how to complete, to be asked orally to give the most honest answers and to be careful in giving answers. The questionnaires were completed sometime after the lesson in the presence of the problem researcher (except for those who requested that the questionnaires be returned the next day). During the completion of the questionnaires, the participants didn't need any clarification, without any problem researcher explained it to each of them. And, 320 questionnaires were submitted to teachers. During our stay at the school, the teachers completed 204 questionnaires and we have fulfilled 5 interviews. Teachers took 116 questionnaires and 7 samples of interviews with them. Due to the Covid 19 pandemic, the teaching process was ceased on, and it was not possible to complete all questionnaires and other interviews.

3.5. Methods of statistical data analysis

Quantitative research data were analysed through the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS), while qualitative research data were presented in a short form of participants' attitudes. To test the internal consistency of the instrument, Alpha Cronbach, Parallel and Strict Parallel were used, taking the value above 0.7 as a value that proves whether or not the questionnaire has internal consistency. The level of statistical significance 0.05 was set for the evaluation of the results of all statistical tests. The normal distribution of variables was tested through the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, while for the homogeneity of variance, Levene's test was used.

To compare the age averages of teachers and their attitude towards the inclusion of pupils with special needs in their classrooms, the ANOVA One Way Test was used. The T-test was used to test the link between training for the education of children with special needs and the attitude of teachers, for the inclusion of these pupils in the classroom.

The Mann Whitney U test was used to test the correlation between teachers' experience with pupils with special needs and their attitude towards the inclusion of these pupils in regular classes (Kalayci, Ş., 2017).

4. RESULTS

4.1. Descriptive results

From the results of each variable, the overall results are derived. The overall results showed that 65.6% of teachers have a positive attitude in the inclusion of pupils with special needs in their classes, 19.1% of them, have a neutral attitude, while 15.3% of them, have a negative attitude, $M=3.829$.

4.2. Qualitative results

Based on the qualitative study, in general, there is a pro-inclusion attitude towards children with special needs in regular classes, with some reservations of teachers. In some cases, despite the positive attitude, the same is expressed for the lack of conditions for admission of these pupils. Teachers' attitudes have been found to have a serious impact on the effectiveness of inclusion.

4.3. Results related to the hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: There is a statistically significant correlation between teachers' age and their attitude towards the inclusion of pupils with special needs in their classrooms.

Testing of this hypothesis was done through the parametric One Way ANOVA test.

Empirical results showed that the highest average has teachers aged up to 30 years, $M=66.55$, while the standard deviation, $DS=7.2$, the average score for teachers aged over 60 years, $M=62.67$, while the standard deviation, $DS=1.86$, the average score for teachers aged 3-40, $M=61.2$, while $DS=8.5$, the average score for teachers aged 51-60, $M=59.1$, $DS=10$, the average score for teachers aged 41-50, $M=59$, $DS=10.7$. The results of the One Way ANOVA fundamental hypothesis test, related to the homogeneity of variance (Test of Homogeneity of Variances), showed that $p = 0.000 < 0.05$, so we can say that the variances are not homogeneous.

Regarding the attitude of teachers towards the inclusion of pupils in their classes, based on their age, the value of $F=4.756$ and $p=0.001 < 0.05$.

Based on the results of One Way ANOVA it can be concluded that the alternative hypothesis is supported: There are statistically significant correlations between the age of teachers and their attitude to the inclusion of pupils with special needs in their classrooms.

Hypothesis 2: Teachers who have completed training for the education of children with special needs have a more positive attitude towards the inclusion of these pupils in the classroom than teachers who have not completed training. Hypothesis testing was done through parametric t-test.

Empirical results showed that the average score for teachers who have completed training for the education of children with special needs, $M=63.91$, while the standard deviation, $DS=7.643$, the average score for teachers who have not completed training for the education of children with disabilities specific, $M=59.18$, while the standard deviation, $DS=10.338$. The results of the basic test of the T test, Levene's test for homogeneity of variance, showed that $F=12.210$, while $p=0.01 < 0.05$, where they indicate a heterogeneity of variance, and when we look at the values for both assumed equal variances, even for equal variances not assumed, $p=0.000 < 0.05$. Both sig values, for both equal variances assumed and equal variance not assumed, are less than 0.05, within the 95% confidence interval. This result shows that there is a significant difference between the averages of teachers who have completed training and those who have not completed training for the education of children with special needs.

Empirical results showed that the alternative hypothesis was supported; teachers who have conducted training for the education of children with special needs, have a more positive attitude to work with pupils with special needs.

Hypothesis 3: There are statistically significant correlations between teachers' experience with pupils with special needs and their attitude towards the inclusion of these pupils in regular classes.

The data on the study variables which are related to the attitude of teachers to work with pupils with special needs, were tested for their normal distribution through the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, while the hypothesis was tested through the non-parametric Mann-Whitney U test. Normality tests for these variables give the value $p=0.000<0.05$, which explains the abnormal distribution as the values of this test for normal distribution should be in the value of $p>0.05$. Average score for teachers who are currently working, or who have previously worked with pupils with special needs, $M=116.59$, while the average score for teachers who have not previously worked and are not currently working with pupils with disabilities specific, $M=90.93$, $U=3856$, $Z=-3.092$, $p=0.002<0.05$.

The results showed that there are statistically significant differences in the attitude to work with pupils with special needs, between teachers who have experience with pupils with special needs and teachers who have no experience with pupils with special needs. Teachers who have worked or are working with pupils with special needs have a more positive attitude than teachers who lack this experience.

From these results, it can be concluded that the alternative hypothesis is supported.

5. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

5.1. Discussions regarding teachers' assertions

The overall results showed that 65.6% of teachers have a positive attitude in the inclusion of children with special needs in their classrooms, 19.1% of them have a neutral attitude, while 15.3% of them have a negative attitude. From these results, it is noticed that over half of the teachers have a positive attitude in the inclusion of children with special needs, including the willingness of their colleagues and other school pupils, while 15.3% of them have a negative attitude, but there is also a considerable number of them, about 19.1%, who have a neutral attitude. Based on the qualitative study, in general, there is a pro-inclusion attitude towards children with special needs in regular classes, with some reservations of teachers. Teacher attitudes are the single most important factor in determining the success or failure of pupil involvement (Brown, 1997). Teachers give their reasons why pupils with special needs are better educated in special institutions, but also present the advantages of education in regular classes.

5.2. Discussions regarding research hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: There are statistically significant correlations between teachers' age and their attitude towards the inclusion of pupils with special needs in their classrooms.

The age of teachers is an important factor for teachers' attitudes towards various issues.

Based on the measurement tests, the results showed that the alternative hypothesis was supported, as it was found that there is a statistically significant correlation between the age of teachers and their attitude to the inclusion of pupils with special needs in their classrooms. Teachers up to 30 years old have the highest average. In some studies, it has been found that the age of teachers has not even had any relation to their attitudes towards the inclusion of children with special needs in the regular system (Chhabra et al., 2010; Gyimah, Sugden&Pearson, 2009; Kalyva, Gojkovic&Tsakiris, 2007), while there are other studies that show that younger teachers have felt slightly more positively about the inclusion of children with special needs than older teachers (Ahmed, Sharma&Deppeler, 2014; Bornman&Donohue, 2013; Cornoldi, Terreni, Scruggs&Mastropieri, 1999).

Hypothesis 2: Teachers who have completed training for the education of children with special needs have a more positive attitude towards the inclusion of these pupils in the classroom than teachers who have not completed training.

Empirical results showed that the average score for teachers who have completed training for the education of children with special needs is higher than the average score for teachers who have not completed training for the education of children with special needs, while $p<0.005$. This result shows that there is a significant difference between the averages of teachers who have knowledge and those who do not have knowledge about the education of children with special needs.

Empirical results showed that the alternative hypothesis was supported, teachers who have conducted training for the education of children with special needs, have a more positive attitude to work with pupils with special needs. Trainings related to the education of pupils with special needs are considered an important factor in improving teachers' attitudes towards the implementation of a comprehensive policy (Avramidis&Norwich, 2002; Shimman, 1990). In a study, conducted by Avramidis, E&B. Norwich, providing training, by policy makers should be seen as a top priority. The assumption here is that if teachers get help in mastering the skills required to implement an innovation such as involving children with special needs, they will become more committed to change as their effort and ability increases. (Avramidis&Norwich, 2002). Also in some other studies it has been found that conducting different courses and trainings in the education of children with special needs were associated with less resistance to inclusion (Avramidis et al., 2000; Buell et al., 1999; Van- Reusen, Shoho& Barker, 2000). So the effect of training is consistently positively correlated with inclusive attitudes (Ahsan, Sharma&Deppeler, 2012).

Hypothesis 3: There are statistically significant correlations between the experiences of teachers with children's with special needs their attitude to the inclusion of these pupils in their classrooms.

The average score for teachers who have experience with pupils with special needs is higher than those who have no experience with pupils with special needs, while $p < 0.05$.

The results showed that there are statistically significant differences between teachers who have experience with children's with special needs and those who have no experience. From these results, it can be concluded that teachers who have experience, have a more positive attitude than teachers who do not have experience with pupils with special needs. One study suggests that the experience of contact with children with special needs influences the formation of teachers' attitudes towards integration. Thus, teachers who implement inclusive programs are closer to pupils with special needs, so their attitudes can become more positive (Yuker, 1988). In another study, it was found that, in general, teachers with more experience with pupils with disabilities had significantly more favorable attitudes toward integration than those with little or no experience (Leyser et al., 1994). Findings from several other studies have highlighted the importance of teachers' experience with pupils with special needs and their attitudes (Harvey, 1985; Leyser and Lessen, 1985; McDonald, Birnbrauer and Swerissen, 1987; Stainback, Stainback and Detric, 1984; Shimman, 1990).

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