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## ATTITUDES OF STUDENTS WITH TYPICAL DEVELOPMENT TOWARDS STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

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**Abstract:** Inclusion is a long process that needs to constantly evolve and upgrades. Personal attitudes, behavior, and professionalism of the teachers and the professional team are vital in the process of inclusion. But certainly very important factor are attitudes of students with typical development.

**Methodology:** The aim of the research is to examine how children with typical development are willing to accept (inclusion) of students with disabilities. Main tasks of the research are: to determine the opinions of students with typical development in terms of social interaction with children with disabilities, to determine whether children with typical development bias against students with disabilities because they are in their class and to identify the opinions of students with typical development in terms of whether students with disabilities can learn like them. To process the information comparative method and the method of descriptive analysis were used. The data were obtained using a questionnaire "Questionnaire to measure the attitudes of students with typical development to students with special needs" (Gash, 1993); this questionnaire was translated and adapted into Macedonian.

**Results:** The study included 333 students with typical development, from 4 regular schools in 4 municipalities in the territory of the Republic Macedonia who started the process of inclusion. The majority of respondents agreed that children with disabilities should be included in mainstream schools (55%) and that students with disabilities can learn mathematics (70.57%) and read the same books (61.56 %) like them.

**Conclusions:** According to the results, we can conclude that children with typical development have positive attitudes towards children with disabilities.

**Keywords:** attitudes, inclusion, children with typical development, children with disabilities

### Introduction

There is no official definition of the term inclusion. It is generally understood to be a process whereby children are educated in the general classroom, and supportive are brought to that classroom wherever possible. Inclusion aims to remove the barriers to learning so that children can participate in all aspects of school life (Birnbaum, R., 2010). The philosophy of inclusion is twofold: 1) children with disability will develop better socially if they can attend classes with non-disabled children; and 2) children who are non-disabled will become more knowledgeable and sensitive when working with children who have disabilities (Yanoff, 2007). There also appears to be an increase in self-esteem and a reduction in prejudice for many non-disabled children as a result of their relationships with disabled children (Peck et al., 1992).

Many of the early studies of the outcomes of inclusion focused on the attitudes of teachers, principals, parents and students to the mainstreaming of students with a disability. One of the reasons for this was a belief, at the time, that the main impediment to successful inclusion was the negative attitude of some teachers, principals, and peers. It was believed that if attitudes were positive, inclusion would be successful (Forman, 2009). The attitudes of all participants are undoubtedly significant variables when students with disability are enrolled in mainstream schools. It is likely that they are both dependent and independent variables. In other words, the attitudes of parents, students with disabilities, peers, and professionals will affect the outcomes of inclusive placements. Conversely, the outcomes of inclusive placements will affect the attitudes of all participants.

Conceptually, attitudes are thought to be multidimensional (Antonak & Livneh, 2000), and composed of affective, behavioral, and cognitive components. The affective component addresses feelings and emotional reactions, the behavioral component relates to actual or intended behavior, and the cognitive component reflects beliefs and knowledge (Rosenbaum et al., 1986; Nowicki et al., 2002; Eagly et al., 1993). Attitudes are also described as "learned predispositions reflecting how favorable or unfavorable people are towards other people, objects or events" (Triandis, 1971). Consequently, attitudes are assumed to be subject to change. The process of changing attitudes of children towards peers with disabilities can, according to Campbell (2006), be regarded as a process of persuasive communication, requiring consideration of "who says what, how, to whom, and with what effect" (Campbell, 2006).

The aim of this study was to explore how students with typical development are willing to accept (inclusion) of students with disabilities. According to the aim, our first goal was to assess the attitudes of Macedonian student

from a public school towards their disabled peers. Due to cultural differences, attitudes of the Macedonian student might differ from the Albanian student.

## Methodology

### Participants

Participants were 333 students from a public school from 4 municipalities in the Republic of Macedonia, from 6<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> grade; Gender distribution: 159 girls (47,7%) and 174 boys (52,3%); Nationality: Macedonian 213 students (64%) and Albanian 120 students (36%).

### Procedures

Students answered the questionnaires in their classrooms, during class time, in the presence of the teacher. Confidentiality was guaranteed. Informed consent and the authorization of the school administration were previously obtained. A basic condition for the choice of these classes was that at least one pupil with disabilities should be included.

### Instrument

For this research, the questionnaire "Questionnaire to measure the attitudes of students with typical development to students with special needs" was used (Gash, 1993); This questionnaire was translated and adapted into Macedonian. It contains 20 questions, and students are expected to answer with "yes", "no" or "don't know".

### Data Analysis

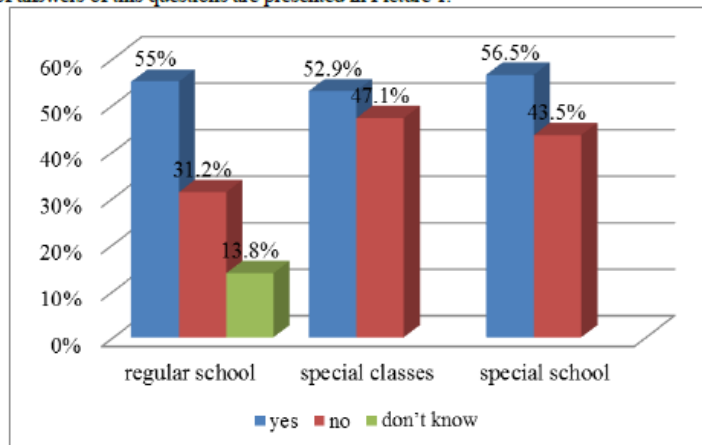
Data gained were presented in table and figures. Descriptive analysis, percentages, and frequencies were used to examine participants' attitudes of students with typical development towards students with special needs.

## Results and Discussion

For easier analysis of responses to the questions in the questionnaire, we tried to group the questions into several groups: issues concerning the place of learning, socializing with peers, ability to learn, play and hobby etc.

At the beginning of our study we wanted to see what are the peers' minds about the place where the children with disabilities should be educated, through the following questions: Should children with disabilities study in the same class with you?; Should children with disabilities study in a special class in your school?; and Should children with disabilities study in a special school?

Our research suggests that students do not have determined attitude regarding the location for the education of children with disability. Students wouldn't mind studying in the same classroom with children with disability (55%), but they wouldn't be against if they study in special classes (52.9%) or special schools (56.5%). The percentages of answers of this questions are presented in Picture 1.

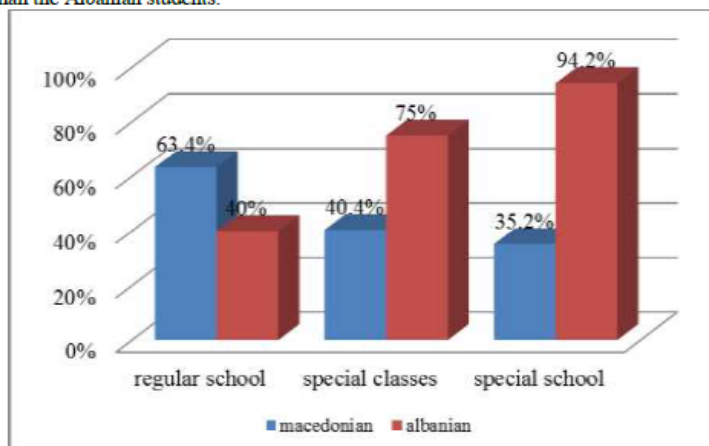


Picture 1. Placement of education of students with disability

While many of the attitudinal studies examined the attitudes of "others" to the enrollment of students with a disability, it is also important to know what the students with disabilities think themselves. A research with students with disabilities suggests that they have mixed views, and tend to report the location they are in as their preferred option, whether it is segregation or inclusion (Curtin & Clarke, 2005).

Also, on this issue, we wanted to see whether there are differences in terms of ethnicity in which the students belong. The answers of the students from Macedonian and Albanian nationality are shown on Picture 2. Our

research suggests that Macedonian students have more positive attitudes about the inclusion of children with disabilities, than the Albanian students.



Picture 2. Placement of education of students with disability according to nationality

The following 12 questions relate to the socialization of children with and without disabilities.

Table 1. Socialization of students

Question	Yes		No		Don't know	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
1. Would you smile to the child with a disability the first day?	182	54,6	143	42,9	8	2,5
2. Would you allow a student with a disability to sit next to you?	277	<b>83.2</b>	56	16.8	0	0
3. Would you spend the school break with a student with a disability?	241	72.4	63	18.9	29	8,7
4. Would you tell your secret to a student with a disability?	172	51,7	161	48,3	0	0
5. Would you like a student with a disability to be your best friend?	243	73	40	12	50	15
6. Would you invite a student with a disability to your home?	225	<b>67.6</b>	58	17.4	50	15
8. Would you like to invite a student with a disability to your birthday party?	283	<b>85</b>	30	9	20	6
10. Would you ask the student with disability some personal questions?	196	58.9	137	41.1	0	0
11. Would you care for a pupil with disability when other children would sneers?	309	92.8	24	7.2	0	0

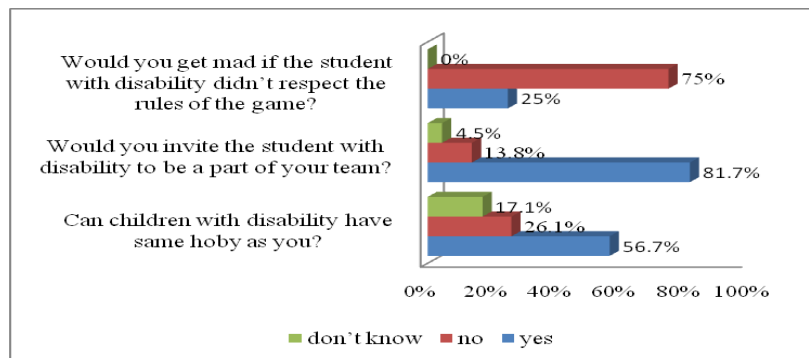
**KNOWLEDGE WITHOUT BORDERS**  
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15. Are you afraid of your classmate with disability?	41	12.3	264	79.3	28	8.4
19. Do children with disabilities prefer to socialize more with other children with disabilities?	172	51.7	144	43.2	17	5.1
20. Can you make a conclusion that the child has a disability only if you judge the child by its appearance?	177	53.2	141	42.3	15	4.5

The percentages of answers to these questions are presented in Table 1. It's important to notice that the peers showed more positive attitudes regarding socialization with children with disabilities in the presence of other peers or group (ex. Birthday party; 85%), then socializing with them alone (home visit; 67.6%). The children with typical development do not mind the physical presence of the children with disabilities (sitting together in class 83.2%). The question *Do the children with disabilities prefer to socialize more with other children with disabilities?* the children with typical development do not have a clear attitude.

Many studies suggest that attitudes are amenable to change. Rillotta & Nettlebeck (2007) found that training programs for secondary school students could lead to improved attitudes to students with an intellectual disability and that these improvements may be sustained over time. Longer training produced more positive attitudes.

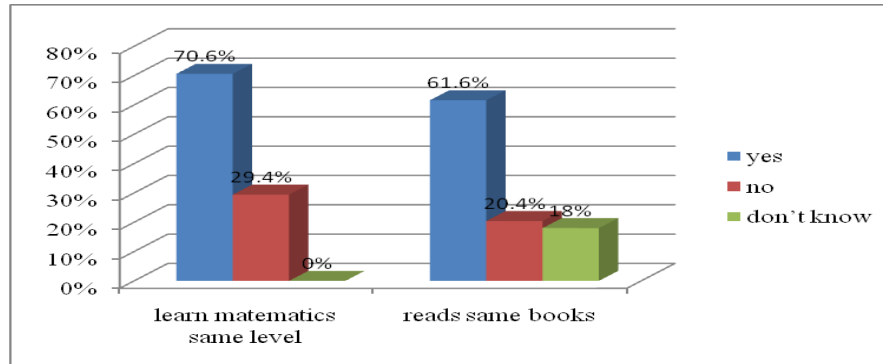
The findings of the same study also suggest that interventions to promote positive attitudes and positive interactions among students with and without disabilities should incorporate inclusive experiences, information provision, and support to friendship building. These findings support the benefits of inclusive settings in promoting tolerance to diversity, social acceptance and positive social interactions.



Picture 3. Hobby and game

On our questions related to hobby and game: Can children with disability have same hobby as you? Would you invite the student with disability to be a part of your team? Would you get mad if the student with disability didn't respect the rules of the game? the peers answered that they would invite the student with disability to be in their team (81.7%) and they would not get mad if they don't follow the rules of the game (75%).





Picture 4. Ability to learn

On the questions about the ability to learn: Do you think the child with disability could do the same maths as you? Do you think that he/she could read the same books as you? we got surprising results: most of the peers answered that they think students with disabilities can learn mathematics same as they can (70.6%) and can read the same books as they (61.6%).

#### Conclusion

In the beginning of the study, we specified two main goals. The first goal was to assess the attitudes of students in Macedonia towards their disabled peers. Results of this study revealed that students in Macedonia have fairly tolerant attitudes towards peers with disabilities.

Our research suggests that Macedonian students have more positive attitudes about the inclusion of children with disabilities, than the Albanian students.

Studies have shown that compared to female, male tend to have more negative attitudes towards people with disability (McConkey et al, 1983). Also, in our research result off all questions from the questioner indicated the females have more positive results (72.63%) than male's students (67.36%). Generally, females seemed to adopt more positive attitudes than males, confirming findings from other researchers (Rosenbaum et al., 1986; Vignes et al., 2009; Gonçalves & Lemos, 2013). The empathic and caring nature of females could be the reason for this difference.

#### Limitations

However, there were some limitations to this study. The sample was not balanced by gender or nationality. Therefore, the results may be skewed in favor of male and Macedonian attitudes. Another limitation of this study is the lack of knowledge about the students' understanding of the term disability. Additionally, the participants were all school age students, so the findings cannot be generalized to all age groups of children. Also, due to the broad range of disabilities and the possibility of variation of attitudes, we suggest future research to include an examination of attitudes towards different kinds of disabilities, such as cognitive or physical disabilities.

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