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ATTITUDES OF PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS TOWARD INCLUSION OF STUDENTS WITH DIFFERENT DISABILITIES

Abstract

Inclusive education can be defined as an education system that includes all students, and welcomes and supports them to learn, whoever they are and whatever their abilities or requirements. Inclusive education involves transforming the whole education system – legislation and policy, systems for financing, administration, design, delivery and monitoring of education, and the way schools are organized. Positive teacher attitudes are essential for success when children with special educational needs (SEN) are placed into mainstream classrooms.

According to the new law for full inclusion in the education system of the Republic of Macedonia, the main goal of our study was to determine the attitudes of teachers in regular primary school towards inclusion of children with different types of disabilities. 100 teachers in primary school from the city of Skopje were inquired with the teacher inclusion attitudes questionnaire.

Data analysis indicates that in general teachers have positive attitudes toward inclusion, but can be noticed that they have a divided opinion on the degree and type of disability.

Since inclusion requires constant amendment of practice and development of new teaching strategies and skills, it is essential to offer intensive, systematic, and ongoing staff development to future teachers and practicing teachers.

Key words: inclusion, attitudes, primary school teachers, disabilities

Introduction

The inclusive education is an educational process that aims at increasing the participation and reducing the exclusion in ordinary school or classical education by

effectively responding to the different needs of all learners. The inclusion of pupils with special educational needs in mainstream schools is a focus of debate in education systems across the world. Over the last two decades or so many national governments have introduced legislation intended to support more inclusive education systems. Yet, despite these policy changes, developments in inclusive classroom practices do not seem to have been so easily achieved (Artiles, Kozleski, Dorn, & Christensen, 2006; Göransson & Nilholm, 2014).

Booth and Ainscow (2002) identify three dimensions in the promotion of inclusion. These are: creating inclusive cultures; developing inclusive practice; and producing inclusive policies. They emphasize that inclusive culture is the most important for successful inclusion, because if there is no inclusive climate and culture then we cannot talk about successful inclusion regardless of good inclusive policy and practice. This is probably the reason why there is more research on attitudes toward inclusion than research on academic achievement resulting from inclusion (Dyson et al., 2004).

Teachers play a pivotal role for bringing about inclusion. On the assumption that the successful implementation of any inclusive policy is largely dependent on educators being positive about it, a great deal of research has sought to examine teachers' attitudes towards the integration and, more recently, the inclusion of children with special educational needs in the mainstream school. Because of their importance, teachers' attitudes towards integration or inclusion have been studied extensively for decades (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; de Boer, Pijl, & Minnaert, 2011). Most often, these studies have been performed in the United States, but it is notable that they have appeared all over the world, including in developing countries. In an international comparison, Bowman (1986) found that teachers in those countries where the law required inclusion felt most positively towards this practice. It is, thus, possible that teachers' opinions also reflect the official policy of each country.

Methodology

The quality of inclusion depends on the teachers' will to work with children with SEN, and their will is directly linked to their attitudes. This empirical study ex-

amined the attitudes of primary school teachers towards inclusion of students with different types of disabilities. The sample was consisted of 100 teachers from primary regular schools located in the city of Skopje (Table 1). For data collection we used specially prepared questionnaire for teachers, composed by 22 questions divided in 2 sections. The first section includes demographic data, including gender, age, work experience, working status in the school, experience of working with children with SEN, acquired knowledge about the inclusion. For the second part we used the teacher inclusion attitudes questionnaire composed of 15 questions (adapted from Sideridis and Chandler 1997 cited in Foks, 2003). Teachers were asked to answer the questions using the five-point Likert scale (5 = strongly agree; 4 = agree; 3 = partially agree; 2 = disagree; 1 = strongly disagree). The collected data is presented in tables and figures. Then, the scores for each question were recorded in a notebook. Afterwards, the scores were used with the SPSS software to calculate the mean and standard deviation for each variable as well as to perform independent sample t-test.

Table 1. Demographic data of the participants.

	Demographic	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	24	24
	Female	76	76
Age	< 35 years	12	12
	35-45 years	34	34
	45-55 years	46	46
	>55 years	8	8
Working status in the school	Head teacher	56	56
	Subject teacher	44	44
Working experience	< 10 years	16	16
	from 10 – 20 years	49	49
	from 20 – 30 years	26	26
	> 30 years	9	9
Practical experience of work with children with SEN	Yes	83	83
	No	17	17
Acquired knowledge about the inclusion	University – (obligatory or elective courses, practical class)	9	9
	Professional training – (courses, seminars)	91	91
	Do not exist	0	0

Type of finished training	Intellectual disability		
	Autism	19	19
	Hearing impairments	13	13
	Visual impairments	/	/
	Motor impairments	/	/
	Speech and language problems	45	45
	Specific learning difficulties	1	1
	Emotional problems	22	22
		/	/

Results

In this study, a factor analysis is made accord the total score of five attitudes areas. The sum of responses of the scale ranges from 1 to 5, with a higher score indicating a more favorable attitude. The questionnaire can be broken down into five attitudes areas: **Rights, Benefits, Skills, Acceptance, Resources** but here we will discuss only the first area including the 2, 9 and 15 questions.

The first attitudes area concerns the teachers' attitudes towards **Rights** of children with disabilities to be included in mainstream schools. The mean scores of the first Sub-scale are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Teachers' beliefs about the right of children with disabilities to be included in mainstream schools

Rights							
(teachers' beliefs about the right of children with disabilities to be included in mainstream schools)							
teachers		strongly agree	agree	partially agree	disagree	strongly disagree	S V
		(5)	(4)	(3)	(2)	(1)	
		N	N	N	N	N	
Intellectual disability	Question 2	47	38	8	4	3	4, 2
	Question 9	86	5	9	0	0	4, 8
	Question 15	50	34	9	4	3	4, 2
	Total	61	26	8	3	2	4, 4
Autism	Question 2	24	28	22	17	9	3, 4
	Question 9	61	35	4	0	0	4, 5
	Question 15	31	42	17	4	6	3, 8
	Total	39	35	14	7	5	3, 9
Hearing impairments	Question 2	13	17	41	20	9	3
	Question 9	7	31	57	3	2	3, 3
	Question 15	23	28	32	12	5	3, 5
	Total	14	25	43	12	6	3, 3
	Question 2	9	12	40	27	12	2, 8

Visual impairments	Question 9	12	38	42	8	0	3,5
	Question 15	22	23	33	18	4	3,4
	Total	14	24	39	18	5	3,2
Motor impairments	Question 2	40	44	10	3	3	4,1
	Question 9	60	35	4	1	0	4,5
	Question 15	33	43	15	5	4	3,9
	Total	44	41	9	3	3	4,2
Specific learning difficulties	Question 2	31	40	15	10	4	3,8
	Question 9	35	38	25	2	0	4
	Question 15	26	49	18	4	3	3,9
	Total	31	42	20	5	2	3,9
Speech problems	Question 2	55	31	7	4	3	4,3
	Question 9	40	37	18	5	0	4,1
	Question 15	17	56	22	3	2	3,8
	Total	37	41	16	4	2	4,1
Emotional problems	Question 2	48	30	17	3	2	4,2
	Question 9	29	29	29	10	3	3,7
	Question 15	33	40	20	5	2	3,9
	Total	37	33	22	6	2	3,9

Namely, of the total mean values of the statements –I support the inclusion of the students with...‖ –I believe that teachers should support inclusion as one of the ways of positive education practice...‖ and „I believe that students with SEN have rights to be included in mainstream school classes‖ we can conclude that the teachers have most positive attitudes towards inclusion of students with intellectual disabilities (SV 4,4), motor impairments (SV 4,2) and speech problems (SV 4,1), and least positive for students with visual impairments (SV 3,2) and students with hearing impairments (SV 3,3). There are no significant differences in teachers' attitudes regarding the gender, 79.16% of males have positive attitudes, and half of the females. There is insignificant difference among head and subject teachers, the first group has more positive attitudes, 66.7% answered positive and in the second group 45.5% support inclusion.

Discussion

Salovita (2018) surveyed teachers' attitudes towards inclusion by using a large national sample and Teachers' Attitudes towards Inclusion Scale (TAIS). About 20% of teachers were strong opponents of inclusion, and 8% were strong advocates. Opposite of our finding female teachers felt slightly more positively towards inclusion than male teachers. Schmidt and Vrhovnik (2015) found that teachers in secondary schools have more positive attitudes than those in primary schools. Djordjevic et al. (2018) analyzed opinions and attitudes of teachers and professional associates towards inclusive education and towards students with special needs in the Republic of Serbia and Norway and concluded that there is a generally positive attitude of teachers and professional associates in the Republic of Serbia towards inclusive education of children with special needs. Also the research did not show statistically significant differences in the attitudes of male and female respondents. Florin (1995) found that acceptance of inclusion was lower for children with an intellectual disability than children with a physical disability, which is one more time opposite to our findings, where the teachers have more negative attitudes toward inclusion of student with hearing and visual impairments.

Conclusion

Due to the sampling procedure of the study and limitations of the instrument, the result must be interpreted with caution. Teachers' beliefs and acceptance of the policy and philosophy of inclusive education are significant predictors of the degree to which they carry out inclusive practices. The research synthesis presented above reveals that teachers, although positive towards the general philosophy of inclusive education, do not share a 'full inclusion' approach to special educational provision. Instead, they hold differing attitudes about school placements, based largely upon the nature of the students' disabilities.

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