

PARENTS ATTITUDE: INCLUSIVE EDUCATION OF CHILDREN WITH DISABILITY

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Received: March, 25.2014.

Accepted: April, 28.2014.

Original Article

UDK 316.644-055.52:376.1-056.26/.36(497.7)

Abstract. This article reports the findings of a study designed to explore the attitudes of parents of “normal” developing children toward the inclusion of children with disabilities into mainstream education in Macedonia. Specifically, the study was designed to explore the similarities and differences in the attitudes of two groups of parents: a group of parents of preschool children and a group of parents of school age children. Participants included 88 parents. Generally, many of the parents accept inclusive education, but most of them still think the special school is better place for education of children with disability.

Keywords: Attitude of parents, Children with a disability, Children without disability, Inclusive education.

1. INTRODUCTION

Recent international and national legislation has cast increasing spotlight on the inclusive education. For example, the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with a Disability (2006)* states the right of every person with a disability to participate fully in an inclusive, quality education on an equal basis with people who are not labeled as disabled. Inclusive education involves “all children, families and adults’ rights to participate in environments where diversity is assumed, welcomed and viewed as a rich resource rather than as a “problem” (Purdue, 2009; p.807). Inclusion values the active participation of every child as a full member of his or her family, community, and society (Diamond and Hong, 2010). “Children’s knowledge and skills are developed through their interactions with each other.” (Frankel et al, 2010; p.3).

Negative attitudes cycle is limiting opportunities for children with disabilities (Cologon, 2013). Attitudes to children with disabilities can be one of the keys facilitator or a serious barrier to their inclusion and participation in mainstream education. Inclusive education provides an opportunity for the development of appropriate attitudes towards people with disabilities. Exposure to students of all types on a daily basis allows typical students to observe that, just like themselves, students with disabilities have strengths and weakness (Westwood and Graham, 2000). Research has long established that changing attitudes towards people with disabilities requires, both, information about these disabilities and experience with people with disabilities (Bandy and Boyer 1994; Carroll et al., 2003; Cook et al., 2000; Lombard et al., 1998; Westwood and Graham 2003; Wishart and Manning, 1996). Inclusion facilitates both of these requirements (Konza, 2008).

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The aim of this study was to investigate the attitudes of parents of “normal” improving children toward the inclusion of children with disabilities into regular education in Macedonia. Specifically, the study was aimed to explore the similarities and differences in the attitudes of two groups of parents of children without disability: A group of parents of preschool children and a group of parents of school age children (primary school).

For the research’s needs, a specially prepared questionnaire with 6 questions and one list with ten opinions on a variety of statements about the education of children with disabilities in a regular classroom were intended for use. The first section included four personal questions (e.g. Gender, age, education and employment of parents) and two questions

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that parents needed to answer: do they have opportunity to meet and make contact with some person with the disability and what is their general attitude towards people with disabilities (positive or negative). The second section included opinions about the education of children with disabilities in a regular classroom, parents were supposed to rate the agree level by using the four level Likert Scale (1 – strongly disagree; 2 – disagree; 3 – agree, 4 – strongly agree). After parents confirmed their participation in the research, they were based on the questionnaires with a previous explanation of the aim and the methods of the research.

2.1. Participants

The survey included 88 parents, 50 (56,9%) of them have preschool child (from 3 to 5 years old) and 38 (43,1%) have a school age child (from 6 to 10 years old). 44 (76%) of the respondents were females. The mean age of the respondents was 35.6 years, with a range of 20–45 years. 41 of them or 46.6% have high school degrees, 42 (47.7%) BA and 5 (5.7%) junior college degrees. Most of the parents (73.9%) worked.

3. RESULTS

We used SPSS 13.0 for quantitative data analysis, which included computation of percentages, mean scores, standard deviations, Pearson χ^2 test and t test. The significance was determined according to level $p < 0.05$.

Table 1. Contact with persons with disabilities

Parents of child	Yes	No
Preschool age	32 (64%)	18 (36%)
School age	32 (84,2%)	6 (15,8%)
Total	64 (72,7%)	24 (27,3%)

$$\chi^2=4.446 \text{ df}=1 \text{ p}= .034$$

The obtained results show that sixty-four (72.7%) of all parents indicated that they have opportunities to make contact with a person with disability.

Table 2. General attitude towards persons with disabilities

Parents of child	Positive	Negative
Preschool age	38 (76%)	12 (24%)
School age	35 (92,1%)	3 (7,9%)
Total	73 (82,9%)	24 (17,1%)

$$\chi^2=3.961 \text{ df}=1 \text{ p}= .046$$

On the second question: *What is your general attitude towards people with disabilities*, 82.9% of all parents have a positive attitude towards people with disabilities. A two-way contingency table analysis was performed to evaluate which group of parents was more positive towards people with disabilities. The two variables were parents of preschool age child and school age child and their attitudes toward people with disabilities (positive and negative). Parents of children of school age were found to be significantly related, Pearson $\chi^2 = 3.961$, $p = .046$. Parents of children who attend primary school (school age) were more positive towards people with disabilities as related to the other group of parents.

The frequency (percentage) of parents in different child age groups showing their willingness for inclusion of a child with disability in the group/class of their child is presented in table 3.

Half of the parents (58%) of children of preschool age agree and 28.9% parents of children of school age disagree a child with a disability to be included in the group/class of their child.

Table 3. Agree to include child with disability in the group/class of my child

Parents of child	Agree	Unsure	Disagree
Preschool age	29 (58%)	13 (26%)	8 (16%)
School age	11 (28.9%)	19 (50%)	8 (21.1%)
Total	40 (45.4%)	32 (36.4%)	16 (18.2%)

$$\chi^2=7.732 \text{ df}=2 \text{ p}= .02$$

Table 4. Parents' views about inclusive education

Statements'	Preschool age		School age		T test	p
	M	SD	M	SD		
All children with disabilities should be included in regular pre-schools/schools	2.84	0.96	2.65	0.62	0.4	.34
Children with disabilities included in regular pre-schools/schools are more independent	2.86	0.83	2.63	0.75	1.38	.08
Children with disabilities benefit from regular pre-schools/ schools	2,95	0,68	2,81	0,65	0.99	.16
In regular pre-schools/schools there are better educational opportunities for children with disabilities	2,83	0,79	2,57	0,68	1.51	.06
Children with disabilities will gain more friends in pre-schools/schools	3	0,69	2,73	0,64	1.71	.04
Regular pre-schools/schools strengthen confidence in children with disabilities	3,11	0,70	2,76	0,63	2.22	.01
Children with disabilities is better to include in special pre-schools/schools	2,89	0,78	2,71	0,61	1.16	.12
Children with disabilities in regular pre-schools/schools will be lonely	2,41	0,80	2,44	0,64	1.17	.12
Regular pre-school/school will lead children with disabilities have lower self-esteem	2,66	0,78	2,44	0,68	1.32	.09
It is necessary to have trained staff in regular pre-schools and schools so they can help children with disabilities	3,56	0,64	3,36	0,91	1.09	.13

Parents' perspectives about the aspects of inclusive education are displayed in Table 4. Most of the parents of children at pre-school age (M=3.56) and parents of children of school age children (M=3.36) "strongly agree" that it is necessary to have trained staff in pre-schools and schools so they can help children with disabilities. Only on two statements, there were evidently significant differences between opinions of parents of children at school and preschool age. Parents of children at preschool age have significant positive attitude about the statements "Children with disabilities will build greater friends in pre-schools/schools" (p=.04) and "Regular pre-schools/schools strengthen confidence in children with disabilities (p=.01).

4. DISCUSSION

Children with disabilities who are included in regular schools are given

opportunities to engage at higher academic levels and to achieve outcomes that may not otherwise be possible (Finke et al., 2009). Parents of children who attend preschool were more acceptable to inclusion of children with disabilities as compared to the group of parents of children at school age ($\chi^2=7.732$, $p=.02$).

Despite the parents' agreement on the statement "All children with disabilities should be included in regular pre-schools/schools" (58% of them "agree" and "strongly agree"), on the statement "Children with disabilities is better to be included in special pre-schools/schools", 71.8% of them answered that they "agree" and "strongly agree" with that. Part of the cause of this contradictory opinion may be that almost 93% of them think it is necessary to have trained staff in regular pre-schools and schools that will help to children with disabilities.

Inclusive settings encourage higher levels of interaction than segregated settings

(Antia et al., 2011; Baker-Ericzén et al., 2009; Odom et al., 2011; Theodoru and Nind, 2010). Research evidence suggests that genuinely inclusive education allows children to build and develop friendships that they might not have considered or encountered otherwise (Finke et al., 2009). In our research, 70.6% of parents indicated that children with disabilities will gain more friends in regular preschool/school.

Children who participate in inclusive education have been found to be more independent (Baker-Ericzén et al., 2009; Stahmer et al., 2011). There was moderate agreement for this statement (Children with disabilities included in regular pre-schools/schools are more autonomous) in our research, 59.2% of parents agree or strongly agree with this.

Numerous researches for inclusive education of social development has also found that inclusion results in a more positive sense of self and self-worth for children who do and do not experience disability (Diamond and Huang, 2005; Fitch, 2003). Almost 73% of the parents “agree” and “strongly agree” that children with disabilities contained in regular group/school will strengthen their confidence. But on the statement “Regular pre-school/school will lead children with disabilities to have lower self-esteem”, 46.2% of them “agree” and “strongly agree” with that. This is another example of inconsistent attitudes of parents about inclusive education of children with disabilities. Numerous people have negative beliefs about individuals with disabilities which may often be based on fear, misconceptions, and lack of knowledge (Hammond, Jentzch and Menlove, 1994).

5. CONCLUSIONS

A successful process of inclusion requires that the community believes in the competence of the education system to respond to the needs of all students. Parents especially need to get confidence in the capacity of the schools to understand and effectively educate their children with or without disabilities (Favazza and Odom, 1997).

Parents of children without disabilities worry that their child will not be challenged in an inclusive classroom, fearing that the teacher will have modified the curriculum for the entire class. Parents also worry that their non-disabled child will receive less one-on-one attention, as the teacher devotes all extra

time to the child with a disability. There does not seem that typical-developing children in inclusive classrooms achieve lower outcomes than their peers in non-inclusive settings. In addition, a number of studies have demonstrated that non-disabled children from inclusive pre-schools scored higher in tests on positive attitudes towards people with disabilities, and on social acceptance of people with disabilities.

For a successful inclusive education, parents of children with and without disabilities should be informed about this process. Attitudes have enormous influence on inclusion of children with disabilities in regular school. Numerous authors identified the attitudes as a major barrier to non-discrimination in education for people with disabilities.

Conflict of interests

Authors declare no conflict of interest.

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