

Attitudes of the Macedonian Preschool Teachers toward Students with Disabilities

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Preschool teachers are seen as key persons to implement inclusive education. Positive attitudes are therefore argued as playing a considerable role in implementing this educational change successfully. The aim of this study was to examine what attitudes Macedonian preschool teachers hold towards early inclusive education; which variables are related to their attitudes. We examined the impact of the teaching experience, age of the teachers, and experience of work with children with special needs. The Opinions Relevant to Integration of Students with Disabilities (ORI) was administered to 94 preschool teachers at 2 preschool institutions. The results of this study showed, in general, that the preschool teachers' attitudes were more negative than positive towards the inclusion of students with disability (meaning of students with intellectual impairments, visual impairments, hearing impairments, autism spectrum disorder, physical impairments and ADHD). No significance was found in relation to the grade level of education of preschool teachers, occupational experience and previous teaching experience with students with disability.

Les enseignants du préscolaire sont considérés comme des personnes clés dans la mise en œuvre des politiques éducatives intégratrices. Les attitudes positives jouent donc un rôle considérable dans la réalisation des changements éducatifs. L'objectif de cette étude était d'examiner les attitudes qu'ont les enseignants du préscolaire de la Macédoine face à l'éducation préscolaire inclusive et de déterminer quelles variables influençaient leurs attitudes. Nous avons examiné l'impact de l'expérience en enseignement, l'âge des enseignants et l'expérience de travail avec des enfants ayant des besoins spéciaux. Quatre-vingt-quatorze enseignants de deux institutions préscolaires ont répondu à un questionnaire portant sur leurs avis quant à l'intégration d'élèves présentant des handicaps. Les résultats indiquent que, de façon générale, les attitudes des enseignants du préscolaire étaient plus négatives que positives face à l'inclusion des élèves avec des handicaps (c'est à dire, ayant une déficience intellectuelle, visuelle, auditive ou physique; souffrant de troubles du spectre autistique ou atteints de TDAH). Nous n'avons pas trouvé de liens significatifs entre les attitudes et la scolarité des enseignants du préscolaire, leur expérience professionnelle et leur expérience avec des élèves présentant des handicaps.

In the past 40 years, the field of special needs education has moved from a segregation paradigm through integration to a point where inclusion is central to contemporary discourse. Several countries have led in the effort to implement policies which foster the integration and, more recently, inclusion of these students into mainstream environments (Hegarty, 2001). Although the movement to inclusive education has gained momentum in recent years, a key

element in the successful implementation of the policy concerns the views of the personnel who have the major responsibility for implementing it: that is, teachers. It is argued that teachers' beliefs and attitudes are critical in ensuring the success of inclusive practices since teachers' acceptance of a policy of inclusion is likely to affect their commitment to implementing it (Norwich, 1994).

The broadened conceptualisation of inclusive education was articulated in the meeting at the forty-eighth session of the UNESCO International Conference on Education, held in Geneva in November 2008, where it was acknowledged that "inclusive education is an ongoing process aimed at offering quality education for all while respecting diversity and the different needs and abilities, characteristics and learning expectations of the students and communities, eliminating all forms of discrimination" (UNESCO, 2009, p. 126).

Booth and Ainscow (2002) identify three dimensions for the promotion of inclusion. In relation to the early years, these are: creating inclusive cultures in early years' settings; developing inclusive practice in the early years; and producing inclusive early years' policies. Early inclusion provides opportunities for the development of appropriate attitudes towards students with disabilities (Konza, 2008). Ajzen & Fishbein (2005) argued that attitude is the most significant factor which largely influences the behavior of an individual. Attitudes are a complex collection of beliefs, feelings, values and dispositions which characterize the way we think or feel about certain people or situations (Aiden & McCarthy, 2014).

The advantage of inclusion is that it introduces the child to the mainstream of life right from day one. The child is thrown into the "shallow end" of the stream where he or she learns the art of living at a friendly pace, recognizing and appreciating expectations, responsibilities, challenges, and the opportunities of life. The environment is friendly but competitive, the bar is constantly being raised and each person or child is continuously challenged to perform at higher levels. Teaching, training, and grooming in the school are directed at enhancing skills, abilities, and techniques to actualize this challenge. Inclusive education also challenges the prevailing systems in terms of physical structures, human resources, curriculum, teaching, and communication media and methodologies, teaching and learning material, attitudes etc. Inclusion provides an opportunity for planners, designers, policymakers, administrators, and implementers to work on and develop the concept of a universal design. This could well be the nursery of a civil society that provides for all its members without exception (Puri & Abraham, 2004).

All children benefit from inclusive education. It allows them to:

- Develop individual strengths and gifts, with high and appropriate expectations for each child.
- Work on individual goals while participating in the life of the classroom with other students their own age.
- Involve their parents in their education and in the activities of their local schools.
- Foster a school culture of respect and belonging.
- Be given opportunities to learn about and accept individual differences, lessening the impact of harassment and bullying.
- Develop friendships with a wide variety of other children, each with their own individual needs and abilities.

- Positively affect both their school and community to appreciate diversity and inclusion on a broader level. (British Columbia Association for Community Living & Canadian Association for Community Living, 2012)

Vignes, Coley, Grandjean, Godeau, and Arnaud (2008) have explained the idea of attitudes as follows: "Conceptually, attitudes are thought to be multidimensional and composed of affective, behavioral, and cognitive components" (p. 128). Feelings about the attitude object refer to the affective component. Regarding inclusive education, this may reflect teachers' feelings about educating students with disability, like "I'm afraid that the behavior of students with disabilities will set a bad example for students without disabilities". The behavioral component reflects someone's predisposition to act toward the attitude object in a particular way. This might include teachers' views on how to act with a student with disability in his/her classroom, e.g., "I have sufficient training to teach students with disabilities." The cognitive component consists of the individual's beliefs or knowledge about the attitude object. Teachers' beliefs or knowledge about educating students with disability in inclusive settings can represent this component, e.g., "I believe isolation in a special classroom has a beneficial effect on the social and emotional development of the student with a disability."

There have been numerous studies looking at teachers' attitudes toward inclusion. Most of these have taken place in the USA, Canada, and Australia. Some have taken place in Britain. One of the most interesting things about these studies is that there is no relationship between the year in which the research was carried out and teachers' attitudes. In other words, teachers' attitudes have not changed significantly over the last 30 years despite all the historical changes in policy that have taken place (Fox, 2003).

A review of 26 studies revealed that the majority of teachers hold neutral or negative attitudes towards the inclusion of pupils with special needs in regular primary education. No studies reported clear positive results. Several variables are found that relate to teachers' attitudes, such as training, experience with inclusive education and pupils' type(s) of disability. No conclusion could be drawn regarding the effects of teachers' attitudes on the social participation of pupils with special needs (Boer, Pijl, & Minnaert, 2011).

Although the topic of preschool teachers' attitudes towards inclusion is widely researched in many countries, evidence from Macedonia is very scarce. The overall political and social context to promote early childhood development in the Republic of Macedonia is based on the international framework provided by the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* and the present national legal and political framework. The national legislation (Law on Child Protection) in our country defines early childhood development as preschool education, which measures care given to the children, as well as activities that promote their health and intellectual, emotional, physical, and social development. The education system in the Republic of Macedonia is organized in four levels: *preschool education*, including children from 8 months until 5 years of age; *primary school education*, which is nine years of education, starting from the age of 5 years and 9 months and finishing at 14 years of age; four years of *secondary (high) school education* (14/15-18 years); and *high (university level) education*. The provision of care and upbringing services to preschool age children takes place in kindergarten, whereas for the children who are not included in these institutions, other extra-institutional organized opportunities are expended (Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia, 2000). The present state of preschool education shows a limited network and insufficient coverage of children: only around 15% of children aged zero to 6 years are covered by some form of preschool education (Damovska,

Shehu, Janeva, Palcevska, & Samardziska Panova, 2009, p. 7). We don't have official information about the number of included children with disabilities at regular preschools. Although parents have right to enroll children with a disability in a preschool institution, most of them stay at home. One of the reasons is that the conditions for inclusion of these students doesn't exist, e.g., there is lack of training for staff, an absence of inclusive culture, architectural barriers, and inclusive political.

Materials and Methods

The goal of this paper was to conduct a survey of attitudes of Macedonian preschool teachers toward students with disabilities in regular preschool institutions. In order to achieve this goal we developed several research questions:

- Do teachers consider that inclusion has positive effects for children with disabilities?
- Do teachers consider that they will be successful in the management of the preschool classroom, without cost effects for both groups of children?
- Are teachers able to teach students with disabilities in their regular classrooms?
- What do teachers consider are the positive and negative sides of the special school education versus general school education?
- Is there a relationship between the age of teachers, teaching experience, level of teacher's education and experience of teaching children with disabilities and the teacher's attitude and beliefs towards inclusive education?

Participants

The sample for this study consisted of 94 pre-school teachers from two main preschool institutions with their separate sections (3 sections in both institutions) from the cities of Veles and Kumanovo, Republic of Macedonia. All participants were females. Their mean age was 47.51 years ($SD = 10.05$), with a range of 28–62 years. Participants' preschool teaching experience ranged from 1 to 39 years. The mean years of experience were 20.59 ($SD = 11.8$). Only 8.5% of the respondents ($n = 14$) reported that they didn't have previous experience teaching a child with disabilities. At the time of data collection 34% ($n = 32$) of the preschool teachers had a child with disability in their preschool groups.

Instruments

The Opinion Relative to Integration of students with Disabilities (ORI) was originally developed by Larrivee and Cook (1979), and was then revised by Antonak and Larrivee (1995). The updated ORI consists of 25 items, 12 of which are negatively worded; e.g., "integration of students with disabilities will require significant changes in general classroom procedures.". The other 13 are positively worded, e.g., "Integration offers mixed group interaction that will foster understanding and acceptance of differences among students.". The ORI comprises four Sub-scales: 1) Benefits of Inclusion, 2) Integrated Classroom Management, (3) Perceived ability to teach students with disabilities, and (4) Factors affecting Special Education versus General Education.

According to Antonak and Larivee (1988), scores on the ORI range from 0-150 and the closer teachers' scores are to 150 the stronger the support is for students with special needs to be included in regular education settings. However Antonak and Larivee do not report what scoring ranges constitute either weak or moderate support for inclusive education. According to our needs and standards in order to avoid misunderstandings of statements by the examinees and also to facilitate data calculation and interpretation, we made some changes of the ORI. Instead of negative scoring of the negative attitudes with -3 for the most negative attitude and -1 for the least negative attitude, we used scoring from 1 to 6, where 1 reflected the most negative attitude and 6 was the most positive. The respondents therefore rated each statement on a 6-point Likert rating scale from disagreeing very much (1) to agreeing very much (6). Indirect transformation of the negative scores into the positive ones also changes the total score; in our research the ORI ranged from 25-150. Another change we made was assessing the opinion toward inclusion instead of integration.

The results for each attitude are presented separately as scores which are the average values of rating figures. If the score is below 2, it means that most respondents disagree with the statement. If the score is between 2.1 to 4, it means that most of the respondents have no clear attitude for the statement. If the score is above 4.1, it means that a majority of respondents agree with the statement. In presenting the results, mostly respondents' views of disagreement (i.e. "strongly disagree" and "disagree") are compiled to reveal their dissatisfaction towards inclusive education. Respondents' views of agreement (i.e. "strongly agree" and "agree") are compiled to indicate their understanding, expectation or satisfaction towards inclusive education

Procedures

Before the initiation of the research after the preparation of the survey, preliminary research was conducted to ensure the validity of the instrument. When the written consent from each participant was obtained, survey questions were distributed to 123 preschool teachers directly in preschool institutions during the staff meetings, of which 94 were completed and returned to us. The questionnaire required about 10 minutes to complete. All responses were anonymous. The survey packet had three sections. It began with a cover letter describing the purpose of the study. The second section addressed general background information about preschool teachers. The last section included the ORI.

Statistical Analysis

The data is presented in tables and figures. SPSS software was used to calculate the mean and standard deviation for each variable. For the statistically significant difference, the difference of level of $p < 0.05$ was applied. One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was then used to examine whether the demographic variables had a significant correlation with the attitudes of preschool teachers towards ORI.

Results

In this study, a factor analysis was conducted according to the total score of four factors proposed by the developers of the ORI. The sum of responses of the scale ranges from 1 to 6, with a higher score indicating a more favorable attitude.

The first sub-scale A, Benefits of Inclusion, comprised four positively-worded items (3, 7, 17, and 21) and four negatively worded items (11, 14, 20, and 24). The mean scores of the first sub-scale are presented in Table 1. The results of this study suggest that the highest mean scores are on the third item *“Inclusion: offer mixed group interaction that will foster understanding and acceptance of differences among students”* (4.59+1.09). Two items had the same lowest mean scores, the 11th *“The presence of students with disabilities will not promote acceptance of differences on the part of students without disabilities”* (2.75+1.20) and the 17th item *“The Inclusion of students with disabilities can be beneficial for students without disabilities”* (2.75+1.25). Considering all statements in the subscale 1, we notice that there is no disagreement about any statement. In five of the statements, the teachers have suggested unspecified attitudes, neither negative nor positive, and for three statements they have agreed.

The second sub-scale, Inclusive Classroom Management, comprised five positively worded statements (1, 15, 16, 22, and 25) and five negatively worded statements (4, 6, 9, 12, and 18) (Table 2). The results suggested that the highest mean scores are on item twenty-five: *“The student with a disability will not be socially isolated in the general preschool group”* (4.36+1.15). The lowest mean score of 1.91 can be seen in two items, the 15th item, *“It is not more difficult to maintain order in a general preschool group that contains a student with a disability than in one that does not contain a student with a disability”* (SD=1.14) and the 22nd item, *“The preschool group behavior of the student with a disability generally does not require more patience from the preschool teacher than does the classroom behavior of the student without a disability”* (SD=1.49). Summarizing the results of all 10 statements on the second subscale, we suggest that the teachers disagreed about two items (15 & 22), on 7 items they have

Table 1

First sub-scale

Item	<i>Benefits of Inclusion</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Min</i>	<i>Max</i>
3.	Inclusion offers mixed group interaction that will foster understanding and acceptance of differences among students	4.59	1.09	1	6
7.	The challenge of being in a general preschool group will promote the academic growth of the student with a disability	4.40	1.22	1	6
11.	The presence of students with disabilities will not promote acceptance of differences on the part of students without disabilities	2.75	1.20	1	6
14.	Inclusion of the student with a disability will not promote his or her social independence	2.97	1.59	1	6
17.	The inclusion of students with disabilities can be beneficial for students without disabilities	2.75	1.25	1	5
20.	Inclusion will likely to have a negative effect on the emotional development of the student with a disability	3.82	1.32	1	6
21.	Students with disabilities should be given every opportunity to function in the general preschool group where possible	4.25	1.26	1	6
24.	Isolation in a special preschool group has beneficial effect on the social and emotional development of the student with a disability	3.5	1.62	1	6

Table 2

Second sub-scale

Item	<i>Inclusive Classroom Management</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Min</i>	<i>Max</i>
1.	Most students with disabilities will make an adequate attempt to complete their assignments	3.44	1.50	1	6
4.	It is likely that the student with a disability will exhibit behavior problems in a general preschool group	2.29	1.45	1	6
6.	The extra attention students with disabilities require will be to the detriment of the other students	2.02	1.21	1	6
9.	Increased freedom in the general preschool group creates too much confusion for the students with a disability	2.43	1.16	1	6
12.	The behavior of students with disabilities will set a bad example for students without disabilities	2.95	1.48	1	6
15.	It is not more difficult to maintain order in a general preschool group that contains a student with a disability than in one that does not contain a student with a disability	1.91	1.14	1	5
16.	Students with disabilities will not monopolize the general preschool group teacher's time	2.57	1.46	1	6
18.	Students with disabilities are likely to create confusion in the general preschool group	3	1.45	1	6
22.	The preschool group behavior of the student with a disability generally does not require more patience from the preschool teacher than does the classroom behavior of the student without a disability	1.91	1.49	1	6
25.	The student with a disability will not be socially isolated in the general preschool group	4.36	1.15	2	6

neutral attitude, and they only agree about 1 item. Most of the preschool teachers declared that it is much more difficult to maintain order in a general preschool group that contains a student with a disability than in one that does not. Moreover the preschool group behavior of the student with a disability generally requires more patience from the preschool teacher than does the classroom behavior of the student without a disability. We propose that the reason for this is that they do not want to have children with disabilities in their class at all, which was confirmed in our previous study where 40% of teachers support inclusive education, but only 19% want to accept disabled child in their own classroom (Dimitrova-Radojichikj & Chichevska-Jovanova, 2013). In the discussion on implementing inclusive education, several authors suggest aspects which are seen to be important in this process like training, resources, legislation, and teachers.

For the third sub-scale: Perceived Ability to Teach Students with Disabilities, there are two positively (10 and 19) worded statements and one negatively worded statement (2). Results from that Sub-scale are presented in Table 3. The lowest score indicates that preschool teachers do have not sufficient training to teach students with disabilities. In this subscale our respondents have interesting attitudes. They claim that they do not have training for teaching students with disabilities and also that they are not prepared for work with these children. What is also interesting is that they do not declare that they need retraining.

Table 3

Third sub-scale

Item	<i>Perceived Ability to Teach Students with Disabilities</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Min</i>	<i>Max</i>
2.	Inclusion of students with disabilities will necessitate extensive retraining of general preschool teachers	2.63	1.64	1	6
10.	General-preschool teachers have the ability necessary to work with students with disabilities	3.06	1.28	1	6
19.	General-preschool teachers have sufficient training to teach students with disabilities	2.36	1.39	1	6

Table 4

Fourth sub-scale

Item	<i>Special Education versus General Education</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Min.</i>	<i>Max.</i>
5.	Students with disabilities can be best served in general classrooms	4	1.49	1	6
8.	Inclusion of students with disabilities will require significant changes in general classroom procedures	2.12	1.33	1	6
13.	The student with a disability will probably develop academic skills more rapidly in a general classroom than in a special classroom	3.82	1.24	1	6
23.	Teaching students with disabilities are better done by special rather than general classroom teachers	1.40	0.93	1	6

The fourth and final sub-scale: Special Education versus General Education comprises two relatively positive statements (5 and 13) and two negatively worded statements (8 and 23). The highest score, which indicates the general attitude of the preschool teachers is that “*Students with disabilities can be best served in general classrooms*” (5th Item, 4.0+1.49), which correlates to the lowest score in the 23rd item (1.40+0.93) “*Teaching students with disabilities is better done by special rather than general classroom teachers*”. Results obtained with the 4th sub-scale are opposite to the previous attitudes of our respondents. On the 23rd item, they disagree with the statement that “*Teaching students with disabilities is better done by special rather than general classroom teachers*,” which is opposite to their reported position that they do not want to have disabled children in their classroom. Results are presented in Table 4.

Table 5 demonstrates variations of responses among different sub-scales of ORI. Participants showed maximum agreement on the first sub-scale “*Benefits of Inclusion*” (3.64+1.50). Generally, the total mean score of all four sub-scales was 3+1.54 and showed that teachers’ attitudes were neutral but might be considered more negative than positive. The results suggested that there was a significant effect on teachers’ information about *Benefits of Inclusion* (1st scale) related to their attitude about the inclusion of children with disabilities at the $p < .05$ level [$F(3, 372) = 8.33, p = .00$].

The average mean suggests no major differences in the teachers’ responses based on their ages (Table 6). The age of the teachers was taken as an independent variable because we consider that with age come changes the teachers’ attitudes and beliefs. It is also important because older teachers may not have had additional training or courses about teaching children with disabilities, and this can impact their attitudes. Training and courses for teaching children

Table 5.

Total Score Averages and t-test results of the ORI accord four sub-scales

ORI	M	SD	SS	df	MS	F	P
1 st sub-scale	3.64	1.50					
2 nd sub-scale	2.68	1.54					
3 rd sub-scale	2.68	1.47					
4 th sub-scale	2.82	1.68					
Total	3	1.54					
ANOVA Summary							
Between Groups			60.038	3	20.013	8.334	.000
Within Groups			893.256	372	2.401		
Total			953.294	375			

Table 6

Total Score Averages of the ORI depending on their years of age

Age	N	M	SD	SS	df	MS	F	P
<39	20	74.8	8.89					
>40	74	73.4	15.4					
ANOVA Summary								
Between Groups				30.860	1	30.860	.151	.699
Within Groups				18,814.290	92	204.503		
Total				18,845.149	93			

with disabilities in our country started as a pilot program in 2002, and at the beginning were in only a few institutions. In 2016 almost every primary school has teachers that have taken additional courses for teaching children with disabilities, but this is not case with preschool teachers. Inclusion in the preschool institutions (8 months-5 years) is still very poor.

In Table 7, we present results on the ORI ranging from 25-150. If the teachers' scores are closer to 150, then they are more likely to support students with disability to be included in regular education settings. Results indicated that on average, preschool teachers with university degrees have more positive attitudes toward inclusion (75.13+14.29) than teachers with higher education (two years of post-secondary education) (72.44+14.21), [$F(1, 92) = .834, p = .363$]. However, the difference is not significant. This finding might reflect to a minor extent the curricula that they have followed during their education, i.e., those with university level of education may have completed subjects like inclusive education and children with disabilities in their study program.

Analyzing the teaching experience of preschool teachers in Table 8, it can be observed that 29.8% of the 94 participants have 1-10 years working experience, 10.6% have 11-20 years, 59.6% have 21 years or more. From the data we observe that preschool teachers with less than 10 years of teaching experience and preschool teachers with more than 21 years of experience have more positive attitudes towards inclusive education of students with disability than the preschool

teachers in the middle group. As we mentioned before, we consider that this observation might effect a crisis of middle-age work.

Table 9 suggests no major differences in the preschool teachers' responses based on previous teaching experience with students with a disability. However, preschool teachers with no experience had a slightly higher mean (74.71+19.38) compared to the teachers with experience (73.52+13.28).

Table 7

Total Score Averages of the ORI depending on their grade level of education

<i>Education</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>P</i>
Higher	50	72.44	14.21					
University	44	75.13	14.29					
ANOVA Summary								
Between Groups				169.356	1	169.356	.834	.363
Within Groups				18,675.057	92	202.990		
Total				18,844.413	93			

Table 8

Total Score Averages of the ORI depending on their teaching experience

<i>Experience years</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>P</i>
<10	28	76.21	13.20					
11-20	10	69.6	5.87					
>21	56	73.17	15.65					
ANOVA Summary								
Between Groups				376.9813	2	188.4907	.94	.394347
Error				18491.3286	92	200.9927		

Table 9

Total Score Averages of the ORI depending on previous teaching experience with students with disability

<i>Experience</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>P</i>
Yes	80	73.52	13.28					
No	14	74.71	19.38					
ANOVA Summary								
Between Groups				16.873	1	204.510	.083	.775
Within Groups				18,814.911	92	275.971		
Total				18,831.783	93			

Discussion

This research suggests that preschool teachers generally hold negative or “undecided” beliefs and feelings towards inclusive education. It is likely that the reforms that have taken place in 2000 with the implementation of laws supportive of inclusion in the former Yugoslavian countries resulted in similar findings in research into the attitudes towards inclusion of students with disabilities. For example, teachers in Serbia also have generally slightly negative attitudes towards the inclusion of children with disabilities (Gagic, 1998; Hrnjica, 1997; Pejovic, 1989) in contrast with research from other countries like Australia, United States and the UK, that indicated overall positive attitudes towards inclusion (Gilmore, Campbell, & Cuskelly, 2003; Wishart, 2001).

Delgado (2013) found that teachers’ beliefs in their ability to practice inclusion could affect their success in doing so. The results of this study indicated no significant difference in teachers’ attitudes towards inclusion based on a classroom setting characterized by a high ratio of children with exceptional educational needs to typically developing peers. In addition, this study revealed no substantial relationship between the attitudes of teachers regarding inclusion and teachers’ level of education or years of teaching experience. Idol (2006) found that overall, educators were positive about educating students with disabilities in general education settings.

Emam and Mohamed (2011) in their study conducted in Egypt, also using the ORI instrument, found that teachers with more experience had more positive attitudes than teachers with less experience, whereas experience had no effect on teachers’ sense of self efficacy in teaching pupils with disabilities. No differences were found between preschool and primary school teachers’ attitudes, whereas primary school teachers showed a higher sense of self-efficacy than did preschool teachers regarding the management and teaching of pupils with disabilities.

Hobbs and Westling (1998) state that positive attitudes can, and need to be, fostered through training and positive experiences with students with disabilities. There is considerable debate around whether teachers need specialist skills for teaching children with disabilities. Teachers must be highly skilled practitioners (Florian, 2012). When teachers are adequately trained, have access to appropriate resources and support, and have a positive attitude towards including students with disabilities within their classrooms, there are many good practices which become evident (Boyle, Scriven, Durning, & Downes, 2011; Smith & Tyler, 2011).

Forlin (1995) has reported findings similar to ours. She found that acceptance of a child with a physical disability was highest among teachers with less than six years of teaching and declined for those with 6-10 years of teaching. The most experienced educators (greater than 11 years of teaching) were the least accepting. Forlin also obtained a similar result for the integration of children with intellectual disabilities. Her study seemed to indicate that as educators gained experience in teaching, they became less accepting of integration. Similarly, Center and Ward (1987) found in their Australian study that teachers with the least amount of teaching experience (0-2 years) were consistently more tolerant to integration than were their more experienced colleagues.

In this study, an ANOVA was conducted to determine if significant differences existed between novice and more experienced teacher’s attitudes towards inclusion. Results suggest no significant differences in teacher attitudes between teachers with 1-10 years of experience, 11-20 years of experience, and those with over 20 years of experience. Others have also reported that experience is not related to attitudes. For example, Zambelli and Bonni (2004) found that there

were no significant differences among teachers towards inclusion according to the direct experience with inclusion as teachers both with and without experience had mixed attitudes (positive and negative) towards inclusion. Sretenov (2000) found that Serbian preschool teachers with more experience in teaching children with disabilities held more positive beliefs about inclusion than teachers with less relevant experience.

Meijer, Soriano, and Watkins (2006) noted the need for positive teacher attitudes and for teachers to create a “sense of belonging” to support effective inclusive practice. Likewise, Cook (2002) and Silverman (2007) point out that teachers’ attitudes and beliefs directly affect their behaviour with students and so have a great influence on classroom climate and student outcomes.

Despite the usefulness of this study—which was the first one differentiating between preschool teachers with and without experience in teaching children with disabilities in the Republic of Macedonia—it should be stressed that it has the following limitations: a) the sample is not representative of the whole population of preschool teachers in Macedonia, since only teachers from inner-city kindergartens in Kumanovo and Veles were surveyed; b) the design is not longitudinal and therefore it is not possible to detect trends in attitudes towards inclusion using the same measure; c) there was no differentiation as to preschool teachers’ attitudes towards the inclusion of different types of disabilities, which are thought to constitute an important parameter; d) the data was collected through self-reports, so it was not possible to establish whether preschool teachers’ attitudes were reflected also in the teaching practice; and e) there was no data linking attitudinal scores to either teaching effectiveness or to student outcomes. These limitations could be addressed in future research in an attempt to further evaluate the nature of preschool teachers’ attitudes towards inclusion in light of the contextual changes that have recently taken place regarding inclusion in the Republic of Macedonia. Given the fact that the implemented changes in Macedonia have not reinforced positive attitudes towards inclusion, it might be advisable to revise the content of the new training programs.

Conclusion

Generalizing the results of all four sub-scales we can conclude that most of the teachers’ statements are in the middle range - unspecified, neither positive neither negative, but with a tendency towards the positive. Most negative attitudes are directed toward teachers’ ability to manage the classroom with disabled children. Preschool teachers without the experience of teaching children with disabilities have slightly higher mean scores than the others. It is interesting that our middle group respondents have a most negative attitude toward inclusion of children with disabilities, whereas those with the least experience have more positive attitudes.

We can conclude that our research indicates that preschool teacher-related factors such as age, grade level of education, teaching experience and teaching experience with students with disability do not always significantly influence attitudes. A review of the literature indicated eleven factors that contribute to attitude development and change among preschool teachers: special education knowledge, experience and teaching practice, self-efficacy, confidence, personal and professional experience with disabilities, administrative support and resources, planning time, characteristics and severity of the disabilities, level of qualification, and class size. Therefore, it is necessary that all relevant institutions and individuals contribute to inclusive education so that it becomes a permanent practice in the educational system of the Republic of Macedonia. Although we are still far from this goal, it is encouraging that in the last

few years, inclusion is a current topic in the Republic of Macedonia.

We want to emphasize that whatever happens in the future, changes in the educational system are already present and these changes reshape the way the educational system responds to diversity. We suppose that this process of change can lead us far from what we now mean by the term “inclusion”.

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