

## FULL INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: IDEALISTIC OR REALISTIC MACEDONIAN EDUCATIONAL AGENDA

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**Introduction:** *According to the Macedonian educational legislation, from the school year 2022/23, all children with disabilities must be included in regular schools.*

**Aim:** *The purpose of this paper is to explore the attitudes of teachers towards inclusive education of all students with disabilities, and also the factors they consider most important for the proper implementation of inclusive practices in regular schools.*

**Method:** *The questionnaire "Teachers' beliefs and attitudes towards Inclusive Education" was used to examine educators' attitudes and beliefs about full inclusion of students with disabilities. The sample for this study consisted of a total of 346 Macedonian regular school teachers. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences Software was used to analyze the data, organize the results, and provide descriptive statistics.*

**Results:** *Teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education for all students with disabilities were divided (45.4% of them agree/strongly agree, against 41.3% who disagree/strongly disagree with this issue). The findings show that regular teachers are not sure about the level of confidence in teaching students with disabilities ( $M=3.15+1.10$ ). According to teachers, the biggest barriers of inclusive education are large number of students in classrooms (68.8%), unqualified educational staff (63.6%), and the curriculum (62.1%).*

**Conclusion:** *Generally, the teachers in this study accept the inclusion of children with some types of disabilities in the regular classrooms, indicating at the same time the benefits of inclusion for them and for typically developing children.*

**Keywords:** *teachers' attitudes, pupils with disability, regular school, full inclusive education*

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## INTRODUCTION

In literature, the current debate is no longer about what inclusion is and why it is needed; the key question is how it is to be achieved (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2014). Moreover, in our country currently, the debate focuses on “full inclusive education”. Namely, according to the new Macedonian educational legislation, from the school year 2022/23, all children with disabilities must be included in regular schools. When the goal is full inclusion, it is essential for teachers to be competent and willing to work with children with disabilities (Pappas et al., 2018). Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to explore the attitudes of teachers towards inclusive education of all students with disabilities, and also the factors they consider most important to the proper implementation of inclusive practices in regular schools.

## METHOD

### Sample

The sample of this study consists of a total of 346 Macedonian teachers from regular schools during the academic year of 2020 and 2021. The majority of respondents are women (74.3%), mostly over 41 years of age, with experience in the teaching profession over 11 years, and almost 60% of them were secondary school teachers (Table 1). Also, 261 (75.4%) teachers have teaching experience with students with disabilities.

**Table 1**  
*Sociodemographic characteristic of teachers*

Variables	Category	n	%
Gender	Female	257	74.3
	Male	89	25.7
Age	25-30 years	32	9.2
	31-40 years	89	25.7
	41-50 years	126	36.4
	51-60 years	95	27.5
	>60 years	4	1.2
Year of teaching service	<10	94	27.2
	11-20	119	34.4
	21-30	105	30.3
	>31	28	8.1
Teaching level	Primary	139	40.2
	Secondary	207	59.8
Teaching experiences with students with disability	Yes	261	75.4
	No	85	24.6

## Instrument and data analyses

The questionnaire “Teachers’ beliefs and attitudes towards Inclusive Education” (Pappas et al., 2018) was used to examine educators’ attitudes and beliefs about the full inclusion of students with disabilities. The questionnaire consists of five parts. The first part contained demographic questions. The next four sections focused on teachers’ confidence regarding teaching students with disabilities, their attitudes toward inclusion in relation to the different kinds of disability, then learning outcomes and possible implications of inclusion for students with disabilities and for students without disabilities. The last part of the questionnaire was focused on possible barriers to inclusion in our educational system. Data obtained by those instruments were classified with Likert scale of 1 to 5 (“1”; strongly disagree, “5”; strongly agree).

In order to do a better analysis and comprehension of the data obtained from participants about full inclusive education, the five scale intervals are determined as Low: 1.00-2.33; Medium: 2.34-3.66; and High: 3.67-5.00.

The Statistical Package for Social Sciences Software (SPSS) was used to analyze the data, organize the results, and provide descriptive statistics.

## RESULTS

In Table 2, it can be seen that teachers moderately agree with the statement that all students with disabilities should be educated in inclusive schools ( $M=3.054$ ). Also, teachers have a moderate level of confidence in teaching students with disabilities ( $M=3.118$ ). A statistically no significant difference has been identified with the teachers’ acceptance and confidence in teaching students with disabilities ( $t=-0.684$ ;  $p<.05$ ).

**Table 2**

*Teachers’ views on full inclusive education*

Items	M	SD
Teachers’ acceptance to teaching all students with disabilities	3.05	1.29
Teachers’ confidence regarding teaching students with disabilities	3.12	1.15

The original questionnaire consists of 12 types of disabilities, in this research two were excluded (Comprehension problems and Syndromes) and one type was added (Multiple impairments) (Table 3). Teachers highly agree with the inclusion of students with specific learning disabilities ( $M=3.81$ ), then with mobility problems ( $M=3.78$ ) and speech impairments ( $M=3.73$ ), but they seem more cautious with the inclusion of students with aggressive behavior ( $M=2.64$ ).

**Table 3***Inclusion of students with different types of disabilities*

Kind of disability	M	SD
Mobility problems	3.78	1.19
Visual impairments	3.39	1.23
Hearing impairments	3.26	1.24
Speech impairments	3.73	1.09
Behavioural problems	3.26	1.24
Aggressive behaviour	2.64	1.22
Intellectual disability	3.24	1.24
Autism spectrum disorder	3.04	1.28
Emotional disorder	3.66	1.16
Specific learning disabilities	3.81	1.10
Multiple impairments	3.29	1.16

From Table 4, it can be seen that the teachers estimate higher that students with disabilities will benefit from inclusion in terms of their social rather than their academic development. Upon analyzing teachers' beliefs in terms of outcomes of inclusion, a significant difference has been noted across the academic and social development of students with disabilities ( $t=-5.732$ ;  $p<.05$ ). Also, they statistically significantly higher estimate social compared to academic benefits of inclusive education for students without disabilities ( $t=-6.271$ ;  $p<.05$ ).

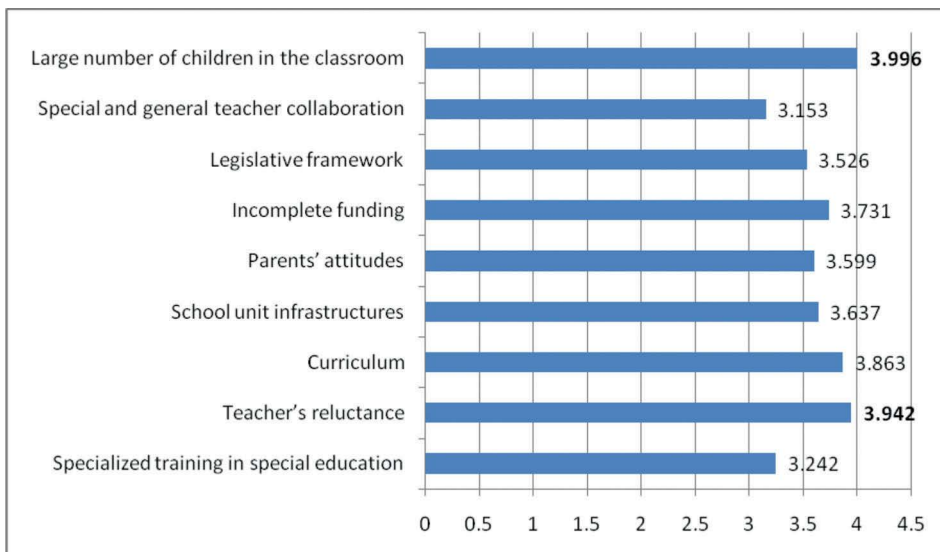
**Table 4***Expected outcomes of inclusion*

Benefits	Students with disabilities		Students without disabilities	
	M	SD	M	SD
Academic	3.32	1.07	3.30	1.16
Social	3.82	1.05	3.88	1.10

As can be seen in Picture 1, large number of students in classrooms ( $M=3.99$ ,  $SD=1.10$ ), teachers' reluctance ( $M=3.94$ ,  $SD=1.05$ ), curriculum ( $M=3.86$ ;  $SD=1.08$ ) and incomplete funding ( $M=3.73$ ;  $SD=1.06$ ), teachers consider as the main four possible barriers to inclusion. Additional barriers to successful inclusion are school unit infrastructures ( $M=3.64$ ;  $SD=1.19$ ), parents' attitudes to inclusion ( $M=3.60$ ;  $SD=1.14$ ), and educational legislation ( $M=3.53$ ;  $SD=1.06$ ). It is interesting to underline that the second important barrier is the teachers' reluctance, but at the same time, teachers do not note as a so important barrier the lack of specialized training in special education ( $M=3.15$ ;  $SD=1.28$ ).

**Picture 1**

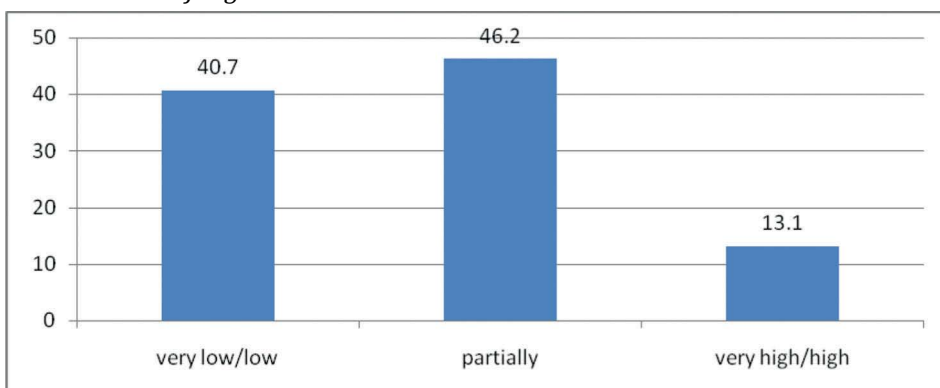
*Barriers to inclusion*



Finally, teachers were asked to *assess* the inclusive level of their school. Namely, according to teachers' answers, regular schools are partially (46.2%) or poorly/very poorly prepared for the included students with disabilities (40.7%) (Picture 2).

**Picture 2**

*Inclusive level of regular schools*



**DISCUSSION**

According to a large systematic review of the literature on inclusion in low- and middle-income countries, there is no definitive evidence to underpin the idea of better educational outcomes of children with disabilities in inclusive classrooms (Wapling, 2016). Consequently, many teachers are skeptical about the practical

implementation of inclusion at the classroom level (Avramidis & Norwich 2002; de Boer et al., 2011; Ring, 2005). Also, teachers that participated in this study, moderately agree that all students with disabilities should be educated in inclusive schools. Generally, they seem to support the inclusion of children with specific learning difficulties and disabilities in inclusive classrooms. However, they seem more cautious for some types of disabilities, such as aggressive behavior, autism spectrum disorder, and hearing impairments. Also, in this study teachers agree with the inclusion of students with specific learning disabilities, then with mobility problems and speech impairments, but they seem more cautious with the inclusion of students with aggressive behavior.

Inclusive education is still a controversial concept, as researchers and educators have still concerns about the effects of inclusion (Sharma et al., 2008). However, the literature suggests mostly positive or neutral effects of inclusion on students' academic achievement in the preschool or elementary school phases (Kart & Kart, 2021). In this research, teachers also have a neutral belief about the academic achievements of students with and without disabilities in inclusive schools. Statistically more of them believe that all students will have more social than academic benefits. Finally, the results show that a large number of students in classrooms, teachers' reluctance, and curriculum are the main barriers to the implementation of inclusive education in our educational system.

## CONCLUSION

The implementation of full inclusive education is a complex and very ambitious process that requires, besides the proper legislation, serious educational reforms. Article 24 promotes inclusion as being a basic human right of children with disabilities (UNCRPD, 2016) but this standpoint appears to be somewhat idealistic, with opponents arguing that inclusive education may not be the most appropriate option for all students with disabilities (Hornby, 2015). Namely, some of them would benefit from inclusive education and others may only be able to have their needs met in a special school, therefore they should be allowed the opportunity to attend a special school.

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