

SOCIAL INCLUSION OF STUDENTS WITH VISUAL IMPAIRMENT: A REVIEW OF LITERATURE

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СОЦИАЛНО ВКЛЮЧВАНЕ НА УЧЕНИЦИ СЪС ЗРИТЕЛНИ НАРУШЕНИЯ: ПРЕГЛЕД НА ЛИТЕРАТУРАТА
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Abstract Social inclusion is a complex and often misunderstood concept. At the international level, social inclusion is considered a key issue in the inclusion debate. Today, most students with visual impairments (VI), meaning students who are blind or have low vision, in the Western world attend inclusive education settings (Foreman, 2011). And yet, relatively few studies have considered the academic outcomes of students with VI in the inclusive context, and even more limited is research reporting the views of those students on the social inclusion in the regular school. The aim of this paper was to synthesize previous research about the social inclusion of students with visually impaired in regular school. A literature review was conducted to explore the peer-reviewed evidence relating social inclusion of students with visual impairments. In total 8 papers were included in the review from the Finland, Israel, Poland, USA, and Holland. The literature of the school social inclusion of students with visual impairments is limited and this paper provides a basis for further exploration of this area.

Key words: inclusive education, social inclusion, students with visual impairment

Резюме Социалното приобщаване е сложна и често неразбрана концепция. На международно равнище то се счита за ключов въпрос в дебата за приобщаване. Днес повечето ученици със зрителни увреждания (VI), които означава, че са слепи или имат слабо зрение, в западния свят посещават приобщаващи образователни центрове (Foreman, 2011). И все пак, сравнително малко проучвания са взели предвид академичните резултати на учениците с такива увреждания в контекста на приобщаването и дори по-ограничено е изследването, съобщаващо мнението на тези ученици за социалното приобщаване в масовото училище. Целта на тази статия е да се синтезират предишни изследвания за социалното приобщаване на ученици с увредено зрение в масовите училища. Направен беше преглед на литературата, за да се проучат доказателствата, свързани със социалното приобщаване на учениците със зрителни увреждания. В прегледа бяха включени общо 8 статии от Финландия, Израел, Полша, САЩ и Холандия. Литературата за училищното социално приобщаване на ученици със зрителни увреждания е ограничена и този документ дава основа за по-нататъшно проучване на тази област.

Ключови думи: приобщаващо образование, социално приобщаване, студенти със зрителни увреждания

Introduction

In the literature, there is no definition that fully explains the true meaning of the concept of inclusive education. Therefore, inclusive education is the focus of debate and research in the last few decades. But there is still no consensus among researchers on the results of the implementation of inclusive education.

The most serious issue about the meaning of inclusion is that caused by confusion of social inclusion with inclusive education for students with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) (Anastasiou & Kauffman, 2012). Social inclusion is a complex and often misunderstood concept. At the international level, social inclusion is considered a key issue in the inclusion debate. Advocates of inclusive education argue that the social inclusion of students with SEND increases when they are educated with typically developing peers (De Leeuw, De Boer & Minnaert, 2018).

Social contact and relations with typical peers have been identified as parents' first motive for their children's placement in a regular school (Scheepstra, Naken & Pijl 1999). Namely, they believe that contacts with typical peers will have a positive effect on the social-emotional development of their children (Koster et al., 2009). However, researchers disagree about the extent to which children with SEND are actually socially participating in regular schools. In sum, although children with disabilities may be physically included nowadays, social inclusion is not guaranteed (Pijl, 2005).

Today, most students with visual impairments (VI), meaning students who are blind or have low vision, in the Western world attend inclusive education settings (Foreman, 2011). And yet, relatively few studies have considered the academic outcomes of students with VI in the inclusive context, and even more limited is research reporting the views of those students on the social inclusion in the regular school.

According to Whitburn (2014), there is a need for research that takes into account the voices of young people with disabilities, particularly in educational contexts such as schools. Moreover, it is essential to understand the perspectives of students with vision impairments, to ascertain where challenges lie (Grima-Farrell et al., 2011). The aim of this paper was to synthesise previous research about the social inclusion of students with visual impairments in regular school.

Method

Literature search procedures

A search of the literature was done using six electronic databases: ERIC, EBSCO-Host, Science-Direct, PROQUEST, SCOPUS and Google Scholar, from June to July 2018. Bibliographies of articles were searched manually for additional studies. The terms mapped were visual conditions such as „visual impairment“, „inclusive education“, „social inclusion“, and „social participation“. All types of study

design were included except case reports. A total of 59 articles were found using the database search. This number was reduced to 8 after reading the abstracts or complete articles.

Results

A literature review was conducted to explore the peer-reviewed evidence relating social inclusion of students with visual impairment. In total 8 articles were included in the review from the Finland (n=2), Israel (n=2), Poland (n=1), USA (n=2) and Holland (n=1). Studies included students of both sexes, and the sample sizes ranged from 10 to 766 students. A description of these articles can be found in Table 1.

Table 1. *Social inclusion*

| reference | country | sample/age | main results |
|------------------------------|---------|--|---|
| Huure & Aro, 1998 | Finland | 54 with VI, 385 without VI/mean 14 years | Adolescents with VI less often had many friends and dates with other young people than those without visual impairment. They also reported more often feelings of loneliness and difficulties in making friends. |
| Huure & Aro, 2000 | Finland | 115 with VI; 607 without VI; 44 with chronic conditions/ mean 14 years | The adolescents with VI, especially those who were blind, had more difficulties in their relationships with friends than did the other two groups, but had fewer problems with psychological well-being than did the adolescents with chronic conditions. |
| Rosenblum, 2000 | USA | 10 with VI and their friends / ages 13 to 17 | The adolescent with VI were often outsiders in the hierarchy on the school culture and did not view themselves as being part of the popular group. |
| Kef & Dekovic, 2004 | Holland | 178 with VI, 338 without / ages 14 to 18 | Adolescents with a VI experience less support (especially support from peers) than adolescents without impairment. |
| Griffin-Shirley & Nes, 2005 | USA | 71 with VI, 88 without VI/ mean 11 years | Children with VI in this study have the same social inclusion as children without VI. |
| Lifshitz, Hen & Weisse, 2007 | Israel | 40 with VI, 41 without VI/ ages 13 to 18 | Student with VI in regular school have a bigger opportunity to make social interaction with sighted peer, thus their score in behavioral category higher than students in special school. |
| Hess, 2010 | Israel | 63 with VI/ ages 12 to 19 | Pupils attending schools characterized by a positive school environment (climate and attitudes) reported that they were not stigmatized by others. |

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|-----------------------|--------|--|---|
| Papuda-Dolińska, 2017 | Poland | 90 with VI/ ages 8 to 12 (30 in each type of educational setting: regular, integrated and special schools) | The results of the social integration measurement showed the highest mean in the group of children in special schools. Students attending inclusive schools seem to be less socially integrated, but the lowest mean was observed in the results of children in integrated schools. |
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Discussion

According to Hatlen (2004), most learners who are visually impaired in inclusive education settings are socially isolated. Earlier research has shown that students with VI in inclusive education in fact often do not feel very socially included, but instead often feel isolated and lack friends in school (Huure & Aro, 1998; Huure & Aro, 2000). One more recent study presented a slightly different perspective, where the participating students reported an overall satisfactory social situation (Hess, 2010; Lifshitz, Hen & Weisse, 2007). However, several researchers have pointed out that children with VI generally have fewer peer relations than sighted children, both in and outside the school, thus fewer opportunities to practice their social skills (Rosenblum, 2000; Huure & Aro, 2000).

For children with VI, social competence must be trained from a very early age, since they are unable to learn through imitation and need more time to master skills that rely much on visual input. Opportunities to engage in interaction with sighted peers must be planned and embedded in the everyday class activities, but also be taken when they occur spontaneously (Roe, 2008).

In sum, social interactions are one area in which students with VI encounter difficulties that may impinge on their education. For example, an inability to recognize faces is seen as a major factor hindering social interaction between students with VI and their fully sighted peers (Khadka et al., 2012). Providing opportunities for greater peer interaction in the classroom- and school-wide activities is a most effective type of intervention for raising the social status of adolescents with disabilities among their peers without disabilities (Whitburn, 2014). Schools need to make changes rather than changing children to fit in (Lalvani, 2012).

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