TEACHERS AND PARENTS ATTITUDES TOWARD STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES¹

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Abstract

Attitudes towards people with disability for centuries have been segregating, learned through prejudice and lack of information. The inclusion of students with disability in regular classes is a basic prerequisite for school and social integration, as well as changes in attitudes towards students with disabilities. Inclusiveness is a complex commitment that stems from the essence of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, each child has equal chances in development and the opportunity to be an equal member of the community.

This paper presents the attitudes of elementary teachers and parents towards inclusive education, especially their views about the acceptance of students with disability.

For the purpose of the research it was applied descriptive – analytical method and questionnaire as research technique. The sample of the research was consisted of 60 teachers and 250 parents (100 parents of children with disabilities and 150 parents of children with a typical development) from 10 primary schools in Republic of Macedonia. The result showed that most of the parents and teachers accept attitudes towards inclusion in accordance with the human principle, agree that inclusion develop empathy, altruism, respect for differences and acceptance of every child; socialization of children and development of humanity; overcoming the stereotypes, prejudices and discrimination. On the other hand, for the parents of children with typical development the most important thing is that the children with disability will not be aggressive towards the other children in the class, and will not decrease the quality of the teacher’s work with their children.

Key word: inclusive education, students with disability, attitudes, teachers, parents.

INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education is a process of increased participation of all students in the school, including those with developmental difficulties. It is about reconstructing the culture, politics and practice in the school so that they would respond to different students and their needs. Inclusive education has the following characteristics:

- Accepts that all children can learn;

¹ Revisional scientific paper
Accepts and respects children's differences in age, gender, nationality, language, developmental difficulties, social status, etc.;

- Provides the educational structure, the methodology to suit the needs of all children;
- It is part of the wider variety for promoting an inclusive society;
- Dynamic process that constantly evolves.

One of the priorities in the reform of the education system is the creation of an inclusive education that will be in function of the student and his developmental and educational needs. Inclusive education means quality education for all and fits into policies for absolute inclusion in schools. This also involves adapting the teaching of the educational needs of children, including those children who have difficulty fitting into the existing education system.

The right to education for children with disability is covered in a large number of international documents (directly or indirectly, as part of the human rights and fundamental freedoms body), and is specifically addressed in the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Inclusiveness is a complex commitment that stems from the essence of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, each child has equal chances in development and the opportunity to be an equal member of the community. In the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the right to education is precisely defined and related both to the creation of conditions for the equal exercise of the rights of persons with disabilities, as well as the understanding of education in its continuity and duration throughout the life.

The Republic of Macedonia is a signatory country of several significant international documents that serve as basis for the principles of infusive education:

- National Program for the Development of Education in the Republic of Macedonia 2005-2015 (Primary and secondary education is open and provides access for all children regardless of language, sex, religion or physical and mental disability).

Regular schools that are inclusively oriented are the most effective means of preventing discriminatory attitudes because they create a commonplace in which they are all accepted, build an inclusive society and achieve the goal of education for all (Salamanca, 1994). The establishment of a positive legal framework in line with the human rights concept is a good basis for further development and the establishment of measures and systems for support in the realization of the rights of children and adults with disabilities. Without quality involvement in the educational system, children with disabilities will not be able to fulfill their life roles as all other people and take an active role in their lives and in the society. Inclusive education is part of a wider strategy of a society that promotes inclusive development, satisfaction of the basic rights and needs of every citizen. Inclusive education is the responsibility of anyone who is directly or indirectly involved in it.
Research shows that teachers consider that they do not possess sufficient knowledge and skills necessary for working with students with disabilities and that such knowledge and skills are exclusively owned by special educators. Such attitudes show that teachers make a "logical division", labeling among staff trained to work with students with disabilities and staff trained to work with "typical" students.

In order educational system to recognize and respond to the needs of all children, a major change is necessary first of all in attitudes and beliefs, and then in the knowledge and skills. Schools and educational staff should be committed to recognizing and responding to the needs of every child including children with disabilities. The development of inclusive education is not an easy process, so it's needed cooperation and inclusion of all human resources involved in the process in particular building quality communication between parents and teachers for which it is necessary to re-examine their own attitudes, supplement and develop their own capacities and developing new skills that will facilitate the process of collaboration and improve the inclusion of students with disabilities.

**RELEVANT RESEARCH**

Positive attitudes of teachers for the inclusion of students with disabilities are an important prerequisite for successful inclusive practice in the school. The results of the studies show generally positive attitudes of teachers about inclusive education. Some of the results show that teachers' attitudes are positive in Western countries (Malinen & Savolainen, 2008), but in most studies their attitudes depend of the type and degree of disability of the student and the experience of working with students with disabilities (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002). Teachers generally have a negative attitude towards the inclusion of children with sensory disabilities in teaching, intellectual disability, and the resistance is particularly pronounced towards students with aggressive and hyperactive behavior. (Avramidis, 2000; Hrnjica & Sretenov, 2003; Alghazo & Gaad, 2004; Gamaz, 2004; Lifshitz, 2005; Cuk, 2006). Teachers are prepared to accept students with physical and chronic disabilities. Such attitudes show a lack of self-esteem for teachers, which is related to the competencies of teachers for working with students with disabilities. Teachers express positive attitudes towards the involvement of students in teaching that do not require additional skills and knowledge. (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002). According to the study by Malinen & Savolainen, 2008 conducted in Chinese schools, teachers showed positive attitudes towards students with sensory disabilities. Such results are due to an effective inclusive program in Chinese schools, which was primarily aimed at students with sensory disability. Intensive contact with pupils with disabilities, experience in working with them and greater awareness of their specificities affect the positive attitudes of the students (Vujačić, 2003). Well-prepared curricula, better school facilities and appropriate teacher training contribute to the attitude of teachers to develop in a more positive direction (Buell, 1999, as cited in Lambe & Bones, 2007). The results of the UNESCO study, which included teachers from fourteen countries around the world, show that in countries where the inclusion is introduced by law have more positive attitudes towards students with disabilities than teachers from countries with a pronounced segregation policy.

Even when the law enforces inclusiveness, the implementation in practice brings many challenges. In the study of Ombudsman of the Republic of Macedonia (2016), the obtained results showed that the legal and part of the relevant secondary legislation in the Republic of Macedonia concerning the education of children with disabilities is not in accordance with international standards given in the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. There is no educational system that is subordinate to the diversity and needs of each child (reasonable adjustment), so children are
categorized and enrolled in educational institutions according to those categorizations. The placement of children with disability in separate (special) classes in regular schools from a large number of teachers is treated as inclusion, although the practice shows that these children do not have or have minimal contact with the other children at all. The schools are not adequately staffed and technically equipped for implementation of the inclusion of children with special needs in the regular primary education.

**METHODOLOGU OF THE RESEARCH**

The general aim of the research is to examine, critically analyze and interpret attitudes and opinions of elementary teachers and parents about inclusive education, especially their views on the acceptance of students with a disability, whether their attitudes towards inclusion correspond to values such as equality, humanity and fairness.

**Methods and techniques of research**

The research was conducted with a descriptive - analytical method that is adequate and in accordance with the nature and character of the set goals of the research. The analytical method analyzed the views and opinions of the respondents covered in the sample of the research. The research was carried out using a questionnaire for both teachers and parents.

**Sample of research**

The sample of the research consists of: teachers, parents of children with disabilities and parents of children with typical development from 10 primary schools in the Republic of Macedonia. The sample was chosen randomly in each of the 10 primary inclusive schools from three geographical regions: South-West, Central and South-East region.

The sample of the research was consisted of 60 teachers and 250 parents (100 parents of children with disabilities and 150 parents of children with a typical development) from 10 primary schools.

**Data processing**

The data were processed quantitatively and qualitatively using the EXCEL and STATISTICS computer programs. The data were grouped according to the number of matching in certain categories and then placed in tables. The data were calculated with frequencies for which a percentage was calculated. In order to popularize certain statistics, they are represented by graphs. The following statistical procedures were used in the processing of data:

1. Xi - square test ($\chi^2$) to determine whether the differences observed statistically are significant at a certain level of significance
2. Coefficient of contingency (C) to determine the degree of connection between the variables.

**RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

Respondents were asked what they understood under the term inclusion and whether they considered it significant and beneficial to their environment (local community, school or family).

According to the results, most of the parents and teachers agree that the inclusion of children with disabilities is very important and their attitudes are positive, but lots of them identify the inclusion with inclusive education.
Some of the respondents under the term inclusion include:

"Involvement of persons with disabilities in every segment of everyday life"

"Full inclusion of people with disabilities in society"

"Education for All"

"Inclusion and development"

"Inclusion of children and people with special needs in the educational process, in every segment of life, by adjusting their needs."

"Involvement of students in the school with different opportunities, different potentials, pupils from vulnerable categories, equal chances and opportunities, inclusion in all spheres of life."

Figure 1. Inclusion is useful both, for the individual and for the society

According to Figure 1 most of the teachers (60%), parents of children with disabilities (73%) and parents of children with typical development (78.8%) agree that inclusion is useful both for the individual and for the society.

Figure 2. Inclusion enables people with disabilities to contribute to social welfare
According to Figure 2, most of the teachers (60%), the parents of children with disabilities (73%) and the parents of children with typical development (78.7%) agree that the inclusion enables persons with disabilities to contribute to the social welfare.

![What is inclusive education?](image)

Figure 3. What is inclusive education?

Most of the respondents, including 81% of the teachers, 77.3% of the parents of children with typical development and 87% of the parents of children with disabilities under inclusive education, understand educate in the regular schools for all children. The estimates show that inclusive education, as a term, has already been adopted and properly understood and as such is a good starting point for its development and further proper application.

![Inclusion reduces fears and prejudices](image)

Figure 4. Inclusion reduces fears and prejudices

63.1% of teachers, 74% of parents of children with typical development and 77% of parents of children with disabilities agree that inclusion affects the reduction of fears and prejudices.
The most of the respondents, 64.9% of the teachers, 67% of the parents of children with disabilities and 72% of the parents of children with typical development agree that by interacting with the children with disabilities, the children with a typical development will become more sensitive.

The analysis of Figure 4 and Figure 5 related to the impact of inclusion on reducing fears and prejudices, or developing empathy towards children with disabilities through joint interaction, show that while 77% of parents of children with disabilities consider that inclusion reduces prejudice and fear, and 67% think that children with a typical development will become more sensitive to other people's problems. It is important that these 36.9% and 35.7% of teachers who answered I do not agree, unspecified and I don't know unfortunately are still high.

According to Salamanca's statement Inclusive schools are the most effective way of developing solidarity among children with disabilities and their peers, but given the fact that these claims and opinions stem from the personal experience of teachers who have been working with children with disabilities that percentage is seriously high and requires serious work with teachers who are a key factor in the daily implementation of inclusive education.
The most of the respondents, 65.1% of the teachers, 74% of the parents of children with disabilities and 78% of the parents of children with typical development believe that inclusive education reduces discrimination and violence in the society.

Inclusive education creates a basis for the mutual positive impact of students with disabilities and their peers and is a basic argument for the advocates of inclusion. Students with disabilities achieve the best results (educational and social) in those schools where there are more opportunities for interaction with the regular population and their peers have significantly higher levels of tolerance tests and more patience in communicating with others (Colin, 2005). Positive outcomes of joint education will only develop under the condition of well-organized psychosocial support in the class. In cases of incompetence of inclusive programs, negative consequences (social and educational) for both groups of pupils have been identified (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1994).

![Figure 7. I don't want a child with disabilities in the class](image)

The parents of children with disabilities (68%), parents of children with typical development (53.3%) and teachers (33.2%) do not mind having children with disabilities in the class (Figure 7), but according to the results shown in Figure 8, more than half of the parents of children with typical development 54.3% fear that the child with disabilities can be aggressive towards other children in the class.

The calculated $\chi^2 = 8.51$ (df=6, $P_{0.05}=12.59$, $P_{0.01}=16.81$, $C=0.08$) shows that there aren’t statistically significant differences in the attitudes of the parents of children with disabilities, the parents of children with typical development and teachers.
Figure 8. I'm afraid of the possibility that child with disabilities can be aggressive to my child

If we make a comparative analysis of the attitudes of the parents of children with a typical development shown in Figures 6 and 7, we see contradictory attitudes that confirm on one side that inclusive education reduces discrimination and violence, and on the other side parents of children with a typical development fear that children with disabilities can be aggressive towards other students.

The calculated $\chi^2=15.13$ (df=3, $P_{0.05}=7.82$, $P_{0.01}=11.34$, $C=0.07$) shows that there are statistically significant differences in the attitudes of the parents of children with disabilities and the parents of children with typical development.

According to one UNICEF research in Macedonian school (2016), 26.5% of respondents oppose students with disabilities and students with typical development to study together, in this research, as many as 53% of parents of children with typical development fear the possible aggression of students with disabilities to other children.

All this mentioned above points to the need for education for the parents of children with typical development about better acquaint with the situation and needs of children with disabilities, their acceptance and overcoming stereotypes and prejudices.

On the question *how to be motivated for work with children with disabilities*, the teachers gave the following answers: "motivation can be stimulated by creating better working conditions (a smaller number students in the classroom, equipped with didactic materials), a quality system of professional education and advancement. All this will contribute to better progress for students, who are also motivating for the teachers themselves ".

CONCLUSION AND RECOMENDATIONS

The main goal of the research is to examine the attitudes of elementary teachers and parents about inclusive education, especially their views on the acceptance of students with a disability.

Most of the parents of children with typical development agree that inclusive education reduces prejudice and discrimination, making children more vulnerable and more tolerant.
From the analysis of the results there are statistically significant differences in the attitudes of the parents of children with disabilities and the parents of children with typical development about the claim. “I’m afraid of the possibility that child with disabilities can be aggressive towards my child”. The impression is that for the parents of children with typical development the most important thing is that the children with disability will not be aggressive towards the other children in the class, and not to decrease the quality of the teacher’s work with their children. This situation requires additional engagement of teachers and professional services aimed at counseling and finding appropriate strategies and solutions for all involved subjects: parents of children with disabilities, parents of children with typical development, pupils with and without disabilities. This arguments point to the need for additional educations for the parents of children with typical development that would help them better acquaint with the situation and the needs of children with special needs and their acceptance.

Teachers have positive attitudes towards the joint education of students with disabilities and their peers, but most of them think that this process requires a selective approach to the type and severity of developmental difficulties. Motivation of teachers can be stimulated by creating better working conditions a quality system of professional working conditions (a smaller number students in the classroom, equipped with didactic materials for their education and advancement.)

Children with disability are more likely than their peers to deviate from the generally accepted social rules, so they need help in the development of social skills. The acquisition of social skills helps students with disability become more involved and find themselves in school and in general in everyday life. When we talk about inclusion, the development of social skills should be done through activities with and for all students, whereby everyone will learn how to accept and help each other, how to respect diversity, how to communicate and nonviolently solve them conflicts. In this way, through interpersonal cooperation, all students will be able to acquire the basic moral and ethical values, in addition to social skills, so that no one will feel rejected or excluded, regardless of their diversity. Of course, the teacher should be a model by which students will develop social skills, as well as moral and ethical values. The way in which the student will accept the student with disabilities and give support to him will depend on how other students will behave towards him.

The final conclusion is that for most teachers and parents, inclusion has humane basis, they recognize the relationship with the development of tolerance, non-discrimination, reduction of fears and prejudices. On the other hand, they consider that for the realization of quality inclusion the most important are system solutions such as creation of appropriate personnel and technical conditions, reduced number of students in the class, equipment of the school with appropriate didactic materials, personal assistants for the children with disabilities.

The study recommends that an effective teacher must have high expectations on all students without discriminating students with disabilities or discriminating other students on gender, social class and culture. Teachers should strive to raise the bar for every student through effective classroom interaction in order for each learner to reach his or her best potential. Teachers should work on an attitude that all students can achieve to the teacher’s level of expectations thereby giving the sense of confidence too. Positive teacher attitude is a great asset in teaching and learning life and this will help teachers cope with both fast and slow learners and influence their academic performance. With the right attitude and framework, teachers can start the learning process on an equal footing for all students including those with disabilities and help them to take responsibility for their learning and exploration.
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