

TEACHERS' ATTITUDES TOWARD INCLUSIVE EDUCATION OF STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS IN ULCINJ

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ABSTRACT

The schools in Montenegro have opened the door for integration of children with special needs in regular education since in 2000, when it was launched a wide reform of the educational system. Children now more than ever are being placed into inclusive classrooms. The teachers and their schools are at the changing phase to inclusive setting and the integration of children with special needs in regular schools is an overly demanding work for regular teachers. The regular teachers should accept and understand the principles and demands of inclusion in order to use effective methods in education.

This study is to investigate the attitudes of 45 regular teachers of three elementary schools in Ulcinj toward inclusive education (IE), because teachers' attitudes toward children with special needs have an important impact on the success and effectiveness of their teachings. The main hypothesis of this study will be: regular teachers will not support inclusion as the best alternative for children with special needs; the majority of senior teachers will hold a negative attitude toward inclusion and they will not support the idea that all students will benefit from inclusion and regular teachers are not trained appropriately to work with students with special needs.

In order to investigate this topic, the authors made a review of literature concerning the regular education initiative on inclusion and a questionnaire, based on a number of pre-existing measures, was developed. The paper will investigate the relationship between the teachers' attitude and three groups of variables-child, teacher and educational environment. The paper will highlight the links between teachers' attitudes and their age, sex, year of teaching experience, contact experience and knowledge.

Keywords: *Children with special needs, inclusive education, attitudes, teaching.*

INTRODUCTION

Education systems throughout the world are looking for ways to create schools that promote justice and enhance learning and performance in all children. Schools are now becoming more inclusive valuing diversity and giving opportunity to various children to learn together. Building an inclusive school is still a very challenging task for many educational systems and teachers are key players in creating inclusive and supportive environment in classroom and school. Teachers have to be supported and equipped with skills and techniques to meet a wide range of learners needs.

This study investigates the attitudes of regular teachers in four elementary schools in Ulcinj toward the inclusion of students with special needs.

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN MONTENEGRO

The inclusive education in Montenegro was initially promoted by different organizations like Save the Children, UNICEF, OECD (Bogojevic, 2008). Their work was then supported by the Bureau of Education of Montenegro under the supervision of the Ministry of Education. A main point in this journey was a pilot project realized in partnership between Ministry of Education and Sports and Save the Children UK (Novovic, Dimitrijevic & Djurovic, 2008). This was a four year research project (1998 – 2002) and its main goal was the integration of children with special needs in kindergartens. This was the first time in Montenegro that children with special needs entered regular kindergartens. The positive outcomes of this pilot project, encouraged the application of inclusion in elementary schools. In 2002, it was organized the training of school staff and parents. Teachers and experts in schools have gained a qualitative training and extra education from foreign and local experts. From 2002 TO 2005, children with special needs have been integrated successfully in five elementary schools.

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN ULCINJ

In Ulcinj there are four elementary schools. The teachings in three elementary schools in Ulcinj are bilingually organized in Albanian and Montenegrin language, considering the multi-ethnicity and multicultural aspects of the local society. The school staffs are proud for nurturing good relationship between pupils even in most difficult times of armed conflicts in Balkan. THE inclusive education is not something new in these schools taking into account that they work respectfully with different children without prejudices, but inclusion still remains a challenge to confront.

Inclusive education in Montenegro is based on the principals of "equal opportunities" and "freedom of choice in accordance with individual abilities". This implies that Montenegro took responsibility for guaranteeing equal rights in education of every individual, irrespective of their physical or

psychological constitution, giving opportunity to each child to express their own possibilities (MPIN, 2005). Ulcinj, is the place where different children live, play, and learn, But until recently many children with disabilities were not included in schools. There are no comprehensive data regarding the number of children with special needs in Ulcinj.

LEGAL FRAME

Law on Education of Children with Special Needs for the first time came into force in 2004 and was reviewed and changed in 2010. We believe that this legal framework is a precondition for the successful implementation of inclusive education. Main changes include: involvement of children with special needs in regular schools, reform of Commissions for categorization in Commission for direction children in schools and new concept of teaching assistant.

The core principles of inclusive education in primary schools are integration of these children in regular classrooms with special adaption of curriculum and special care. The teaching plans and curricula will be applied on the basis of the pupil's capacities. In this way pupil's personality will develop in conformity to his capabilities.

Commissions formed for direction of children in schools have to set special norms and regulate the number of pupils in classroom, type and degree of impairment and scope of integration in regular school. Teachers, professionals in school will perform these duties in cooperation with parents.

The primary objective is to enable a pupil's personality to develop in conformity with his/her capabilities and laws of the development. In accordance with these principles, mainstream primary schools need to introduce additional professional services beside the existing ones (such as speech therapy, special pedagogue, oligophrenological, somatological, typhlological). Moreover, the school buildings need to be adjusted structurally to the children with developmental disorders.

STATEMENT OF THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

A large body of research on inclusive education shared the assumptions that teachers' attitudes may act to facilitate or constrain the implementation of inclusion (Avramidis, Bayliss, & Burden, 2000; Forlin, 2001). It is generally agreed that teachers are most responsible in the success of inclusive education. The main objective of this study is to investigate what are the teacher's beliefs toward inclusive education in order to provide a pattern of possible factors influencing their attitudes. The study will offer important information to policy makers on the role played by teacher's attitudes in the policy development and implementations.

PARTICIPANTS, METHODS AND PROCEDURE

Participants

The study carried out in four elementary schools in Ulcinj. 45 regular teachers of these schools answered the questionnaires; 52.2% of them had experience with children with disabilities. The authors decided to include both teachers with and without experiences of working with students with disabilities with the intent to find the differences in attitudes between the two groups. Theoretically, attitudes are acquired through experience (Antonak et al.2000). There were 24 female teachers and 23 male teachers who answered the questionnaire. 57% of participants were between 22-40 years of age while the other part was between 40-50 + years of age. 56.5 % of the participants had a Master degree and 37% of the participants had a Bachelor degree. 48% of the participants had participated in training programs related to inclusive education. 84.8 % of the participants would accept to work in an inclusive classroom.

Procedure

The research was carried out following quantitative approach based on a survey design. The research instrument was a self-administered questionnaire.

Statistical analysis of data were conducted through SPSS 17. The statistical procedures will be done by both descriptive statistics and inferential statistics.

Measures

The instrument used in this research is a questionnaire derived from the Attitude towards Mainstreaming Scale (ATMS) developed by Larrivee and Cook (1979). This was designed for to assess regular teacher's attitudes toward inclusion. The original language of the instrument was in English and was then translated into Albanian by the researchers.

RESULTS INTERPRETATION AND DISCUSSION

The results of participants in three subscales of the instrument (*Understanding general philosophy of inclusion, Perceived ability to teach students with disabilities, Classroom behaviours of students with disabilities*) will be analysed in details. Then the authors will analyse the teachers' attitudes by their gender, age and general teaching experience.

CONCLUSIONS

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