

Variables that influence teachers' attitude regarding the inclusion of special needs children in the mainstream school system

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Abstract

Keywords:

inclusive education, special needs in education, continuous training, mainstream school system

„Education for All” is the concept intended to lift all barriers found in educating all children, especially, those vulnerable to exclusion and marginalization. Therefore education for all represents the ideal of maximum flexibility and tolerance regarding diversity. The study conducted on 130 teachers, from 5 Romanian counties (Cluj, Mureș, Sălaj, Maramureș, Bistrița-Năsăud), had the purpose of identifying the attitudes of the teachers towards the educational inclusion of children with CES. We wanted to find out if there were significant differences in perception between counties but also related to the teachers' age/experience. The results didn't show any difference in perception between counties, as well as the way the teachers' attitudes were influenced by their age/experience.

Zusammenfassung

Schlüsselworte:

Schulische Inklusion, Kinder mit besonderem Förderungsbedarf, Fortbildung, Schule

„Erziehung für alle” ist das Prinzip, das den Zugang aller Kinder in der Schule unterstützen soll, durch die Entfernung der Erziehungsschranken, besonders für die Kinder, die von Exklusion und Randerscheinungen gefährdet sind. Schule für alle heißt also der Wunsch auf maximale Flexibilität und Toleranz was Diversität betrifft. Das Studium wurde durchgeführt mit 130 Lehrern in 5 Kreisen Rumäniens (Cluj, Mureș, Sălaj, Maramureș, Bistrița-Năsăud) und hat als Ziel, die Identifizierung der Einstellung dieser gegenüber der schulischen Inklusion der Kinder mit besonderem Förderungsbedarf. Wir wollten erfahren, ob es große Einstellungsunterschiede in den verschiedenen Kreisen und abhängig von Alter und Arbeitserfahrung im Lehramt. Die Resultate haben Unterschiede in den Einstellungen gegenüber Kindern mit besonderem Förderungsbedarf zwischen den Kreisen und auch inwieweit das Alter die Anschauung der Lehrer beeinflusst.

1. Introduction

Over time, the international community has systematically built the vision upon education. Today education is considered a human right and not a privilege. „Education for all” is the concept launched in Jomtien, Thailand (1990), a concept intended to lift all barriers found in educating all children, regardless of gender, religion, linguistic, psychological, physical and socio-cultural differences, especially regarding children that are vulnerable to exclusion and marginalization. Therefore education for all represents the ideal of maximum flexibility and tolerance regarding diversity, while also looking for solutions that will efficiently meet the learning needs of children, related to their learning rhythm and style, abilities, competences, interests, facilitating their development and expression according to their personality traits.

Conventions, declarations, and resolutions regarding inclusive education constitute the framework for the development and establishment of the politics and inclusive practices, supporting principles of equality and social participation of children and people with disabilities. Among these, we can mention The World Declaration on Education for All, Jomtien (1990); The Salamanca Statement (1994); The World Education Forum, Dakar (2000); The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006); The Oslo Summit on Education for Development (2015), etc.

In this context, the UNESCO political orientations related to inclusive education (2009) have highlighted the aspects that require the most consideration, specifically at the educational level. Inclusive school need to develop teaching methods that fit the individual differences of all children; from a social point of view: inclusive schools demand a change in the attitudes towards diversity,

forming the base for a nondiscriminatory society; at the economic level: inclusive schools keep all children together, eliminating the complex system of specialized schools for different groups of children (Furfurică Băiescu, 2013).

2. Theoretical foundation

Inclusive education seamlessly combines the universal principles of a child-centered pedagogy, and the individual differences are seen as natural. From this point of view, the role of the educational system is that of identifying ways of adapting to those differences and of answering to the educational needs of the students. Therefore when discussing the integration of special needs children in the mainstream school system, it is important to identify solutions that help the adapting and socializing process (Băiescu, 2013).

In order to develop a suitable framework for the successful integration of these students in the educational environment, Loreman (2007) presented seven main factors that are found at the basis of this process, which are: (1) a positive attitude; (2) inclusive politics and leadership; (3) school and class management; (4) flexible curriculum; (5) continuous training and resources; (6) community involvement; (7) reflection upon performance. Therefore, the success of the school inclusion, depends greatly on the positive attitude of those involved in this process, especially that of the teachers, students, parents, managers, community, etc. (Gelheiser, Meyers, 1996, Niemeyer, Proctor, 2002, Van Laarhoven, et. al., 2007 apud Cullen et al., 2010). It also depends on the existing of specialized personnel, resource specialists who are able to offer counseling, support and willingness to collaborate with the teachers from the mainstream school system (Wolery et al., 1994; Wesley, 1997), and nevertheless on the existing of the psycho-pedagogical assistance services (Hammond, Ingalls, 2003), on the necessary space and logistics in order to satisfy the educational needs of all children (Wolery et al., 1994), and on the continuous training of the teachers (Loreman, Deppeler, 2002).

Băiescu (2013) thinks that the teachers' attitude towards inclusive education is greatly determined by their personal experiences in dealing with children with disabilities, initial training, the existence of some form of support, the number of students in a class and the responsibilities that the teachers have at the institutional level. Hobbs și Westling (1998, apud Loreman, 2007)

have highlight that the success of school inclusion is sustained by the positive attitude, aspects that have also been reviewed by Shanma (2008 apud Cullen, 2010), who mentioned the fact that teachers that have a positive attitude towards inclusive education are also more open to the adaptation and change of ways of teaching, suited to the needs of the students.

On the opposite side, negative attitudes towards inclusive education have been correlated with low expectations regarding the academic success of children with disabilities, which, could also have a negative impact on others' performance (Wilczenski, 1993, Forlin et al., 1999). According to Murphy (1996), the teachers' negative attitudes regarding the inclusion of special needs children are difficult to modify because these have at their core negative experiences, fear of novelty and resistance to change. Therefore the teachers' initial and continuous training regarding the process of inclusion is very important because it is a context of developing positive attitudes towards the social and school inclusion as well as their benefits. This fact is also supported by Loreman (2001) who showed that the teachers' needs: the need for specialized support; the need for constructive partnership between teachers and specialists, and also the teachers' need for professional training and development.

Additionally, the same author pointed out that the lack of suited resources and logistics is a barrier against school inclusion (Loreman, 2001). Among other obstacles, scientific literature mentions also lack of knowledge, lack of competences regarding the best practice design solution for school inclusion and the fear of taking responsibility in educating this category of children (Worrell, 2008; Orr, 2009). The previously negative experiences often determine teachers to show a skeptical attitude (King-Sears, 2008) towards the benefits of school inclusion.

3. Research methodology

The *purpose of this research* was to investigate the perception of teachers regarding the inclusion of children with special needs

This *study's hypotheses* are the following:

- The opinions of teachers regarding the inclusion of children with special needs will be differ by age and seniority.

- The opinions of teachers regarding the inclusion of children with special needs will be differ by county.

3.1. Participants

The participants of this study were 130 female teachers from five counties (Cluj, Sălaj, Maramureş, Bistriţa-Năsăud and Mureş) having the age between 25-60 years old ($M_{age}=42$ years old and 5 months, $SD_{age}=10.3$).

Table 1. Distribution of participants included in the study by age and county

		County					Total
		Cluj	Bistriţa Năsăud	Maramureş	Sălaj	Mureş	
Age	25- 30 years old	4	0	2	10	1	17
	31-40 years old	6	8	5	1	11	31
	41-50 years old	15	6	11	6	22	60
	51-60 years old	5	6	2	3	6	22
	Total	30	20	20	20	40	130

3.2. Instruments

Scale of Teachers' Attitudes Toward Inclusive Classrooms (STATIC, Cochran, 1998)

The STATIC was developed by Cochran (1997) to measure the attitudes of teachers who teach students with special needs and to identify relationships between the attitudes of teachers toward inclusion and towards disabled or special need persons in general.

The instrument contains 20 questions which are divided in four subscales; these are (1) Advantages and Disadvantages of Inclusive Education, (2) Professional Issues, (3) Philosophical Issues, and (4) Logistical Concerns. Items are evaluated on a 1-5 point Likert scale where 1 represents „strongly disagree” and 5- „strongly agree”.

Following a factor analysis, Cochran (1999) found that for the overall scale, the reliability was to be around $\alpha = .89$. This coefficient is both for teachers in special and general education, but also for teachers in elementary and secondary school. Instead, the reliability coefficient for individual subscales were: Advantages and Disadvantages $\alpha = .87$, Professional Issues $\alpha = .83$, Philosophical Issues $\alpha = .57$, and Logistical Concerns $\alpha = .62$.

The STATIC has been used in numerous studies investigating teacher attitudes toward inclusion (Martin, 2010; Parker, 2009; Pierre, 2009; Ross-Hill, 2009; Royster, 2011; Smith, 2008; Walpole, 2008).

Attitudes Towards Teaching All Students Instrument (ATTAS-mm, Noto & Gregory, 2011)

The ATTAS-mm contains 9 statements and requires educators to rate their level of agreement with each statement on a seven point Likert scale, ranging from “agree very strongly” (1) to “disagree very strongly” (7).

Each statement in the ATTAS-mm instrument corresponds to one of three scoring subscales for the instrument to address the three theoretical components of attitude: cognitive, behavioral, and affective (Lewin & Grabbe, 1945; Ajzen, 1985). The first three statements are designed to measure the cognitive dimension of attitude, which is defined as “believing all students can succeed in general education classrooms”. The next three statements measure the affective dimension of attitude and is titled “developing personal and professional relationships”. The final three statements assess the behavioral aspect of attitude; this subscale is referred to as “creating an accepting environment for all students to learn” (Gregory & Noto, 2012).

To test the validity of the revised version of the instrument, in 2012, the authors of the ATTAS-mm selected 27 items for a pilot test of the instrument. An initial factor analysis was conducted to identify and retain only those items with initial correlations of .7 or greater on a rotated component matrix; that is, those items that were closely related to other items in this attitude measurement instrument. A principal components analysis

(PCA) was conducted by the authors of the instrument on the remaining 12 items to identify those that related to or loaded most strongly on one of the three components or factors. Nine of the twelve items were retained, and an additional factor analysis was run on these items. The unstandardized Cronbach's alpha reliability statistic for the remaining nine-item ATTAS-mm scale was calculated by the instrument's authors to be .833 (Gregory & Noto, 2012); a value of at least .8 is considered to be acceptable (Cardinet, Johnson & Pini, 2010, p. 5).

3.3. Procedure

The current study had a correlational and quasi-experimental design, thus the principal purpose was to investigate the perception of teachers regarding the inclusion of children with special needs.

4. Results

For testing the first hypothesis we calculate the Pearson's correlation coefficient to investigate whether there is an association between teachers' perception of inclusion by age and age.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
age	2,66	,90	130
seniority	3,44	,98	130
Advantage and disadvantage of Inclusion Education	23,6	2,43	130
Professional Issues	14,6	2,32	130
Philosophical Issues	15,07	2,53	130
Logistical concern	13,51	2,48	130
Cognitive dimension	12,10	2,89	130
Affective dimension	15,47	5,43	130
Behavioral aspect of attitude	14,80	2,53	130

Table 3. Pearson's correlation coefficients for the measured variables

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. age	-								
2. seniority	.54*	-							
3. Advantage and disadvantage of Inclusion Education	-.13	-.10	-						
4. Professional Issues	.016	-.15	.18**	-					
5. Philosophical Issues	-.14	-.19**	.43*	-.040	-				
6. Logistical concern	.38	-.10	-.36*	-.10	.56*	-			
7. Cognitive dimension	.03	-.05	.23*	-.09	.28*	.32*	-		
8. Affective dimension	-.24*	-.28*	.17**	-.06	.34*	.11	.23*	-	
9. Behavioral aspect of attitude	-.15	-.20**	.28*	-.08	.51*	.31*	.54*	.35*	-

*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

**Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

To verify if there are significant differences regarding teachers' perception of inclusion according to the county, we applied the one-way analysis of variance (One-Way ANOVA).

Table 4. Descriptive indicators for measuring variables

Variables	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Advantage Cluj	30	22,6	2,25	,411	21,75	23,44	19,00	27,00

and disadvantage of Inclusion Education	Bistriţa- Năsăud	20	24,7	2,73	,61	23,4	25,98	19,00	29,00
	Maramureş	20	23,7 5	2,12	,475	22,75	24,74	21,00	29,00
	Sălaj	20	24,5	1,67	,37	23,71	25,28	22,00	28,00
	Mureş	40	23,2 7	2,59	,40	22,44	24,10	18,00	28,00
	Total	13 0	23,6 0	2,43	,21	23,17	24,02	18,00	29,00
Professional Issues	Cluj	30	14,1 6	2,49	,45	13,23	15,09	9,00	20,00
	Bistriţa- Năsăud	20	14,9	2,93	,65	13,52	16,27	6,00	20,00
	Maramureş	20	14,4 5	2,06	,46	13,48	15,41	11,00	19,00
	Sălaj	20	14,7 0	1,68	,37	13,90	15,49	12,00	18,00
	Mureş	40	15	2,27	,35	14,27	15,72	11,00	19,00
Philosophic al Issues	Total	13 0	14,6 6	2,32	,20	14,25	15,06	6,00	20,00
	Cluj	30	14,8	1,62	,29	14,22	15,43	10,00	18,00
	Bistriţa- Năsăud	20	14,9 0	1,83	,40	14,04	15,75	9,00	17,00
	Maramureş	20	14,1 5	3,82	,85	12,35	15,94	9,00	20,00
	Sălaj	20	16,9 0	1,44	,32	16,22	17,57	14,00	19,00
Logistical concern	Mureş	40	14,9	2,68	,42	14,04	15,75	9,00	19,00
	Total	13 0	15,0 7	2,53	,22	14,63	15,51	9,00	20,00
	Cluj	30	13,3	2,60	,47	12,32	14,27	8,00	18,00
	Bistriţa- Năsăud	20	14,8 0	1,60	,35	14,04	15,55	11,00	17,00
	Maramureş	20	12,1 0	3,62	,81	10,40	13,79	5,00	18,00
Cognitive dimension	Sălaj	20	13,7 0	1,30	,29	13,09	14,30	11,00	15,00
	Mureş	40	13,6 5	2,23	,35	12,93	14,36	9,00	19,00
	Total	13 0	13,5 1	2,48	,21	13,08	13,94	5,00	19,00
	Cluj	30	12,2 3	2,16	,39	11,42	13,04	7,00	15,00
	Bistriţa- Năsăud	20	12,6 5	2,36	,52	11,54	13,75	9,00	16,00
Affective dimension	Maramureş	20	11,2 0	4,60	1,03	9,04	13,35	3,00	19,00
	Sălaj	20	11,7 0	2,27	,50	10,63	12,76	8,00	14,00
	Mureş	40	12,4 0	2,82	,44	11,49	13,3	7,00	17,00
	Total	13 0	12,1 0	2,89	,25	11,60	12,61	3,00	19,00
	Cluj	30	14,5 6	3,01	,55	13,44	15,69	9,00	21,00
	Bistriţa- Năsăud	20	15,4 5	2,01	,45	14,50	16,39	13,00	21,00
	Maramureş	20	15,0 0	5,04	1,12	12,63	17,36	7,00	21,00
	Sălaj	20	18,7 0	11,45	2,56	13,33	24,06	11,00	66,00

Behavioral aspect of attitude	Mureș	40	14,8	2,45	,38	14,01	15,58	9,00	20,00
	Total	130	15,47	5,43	,47	14,53	16,41	7,00	66,00
	Cluj	30	14,60	3,06	,56	13,45	15,74	7,00	20,00
	Bistrița-Năsăud	20	14,70	1,75	,39	13,88	15,51	12,00	19,00
	Maramureș	20	15,10	3,41	,76	13,50	16,7	10,00	21,00
	Sălaj	20	15	2,27	,50	13,93	16,06	12,00	19,00
	Mureș	40	14,77	2,13	,33	14,09	15,45	9,00	19,00
	Total	130	14,80	2,53	,22	14,36	15,24	7,00	21,00

Table 5. One-Way Analysis of Variance of Teachers Perceptions by county

		SS	df	MS	F	Sig.
Advantage and disadvantage of Inclusion Education	Between Groups	75,07	4	18,76	3,40	,011
	Within Groups	690,12	125	5,52		
	Total	765,20	129			
Professional Issues	Between Groups	13,991	4	3,498	,64	,634
	Within Groups	681,117	125	5,449		
	Total	695,108	129			
Philosophical Issues	Between Groups	87,31	4	21,82	3,68	,007
	Within Groups	739,91	125	5,91		
	Total	827,23	129			
Logistical concern	Between Groups	75,86	4	18,96	3,28	,014
	Within Groups	722,60	125	5,78		
	Total	798,46	129			
Cognitive dimension	Between Groups	29,57	4	7,39	,87	,480
	Within Groups	1054,91	125	8,43		
	Total	1084,49	129			
Affective dimension	Between Groups	255,51	4	63,87	2,2	,068
	Within Groups	3550,91	125	28,40		
	Total	3806,43	129			
Behavioral aspect of attitude	Between Groups	4,01	4	1,0	,15	,962
	Within Groups	828,17	125	6,62		
	Total	832,19	129			

5. Discussions

Analyzing the means from table 2, a neutral, slightly positive attitude of teachers regarding the inclusion of special needs children into the mainstream school system can be observed. Therefore teachers don't feel they are

sufficiently prepared in taking the responsibility of teaching special needs children, but they show a high openness towards developing personal and professional relationships which can facilitate the process of inclusion.

Following the completion of correlation analysis between the considered nine variables, according to table 3, it can be observed that there is a negative correlation between the following: aspects regarding philosophical issues of the inclusion of special needs children in the mainstream school system and seniority ($r(128)=-.19$, $p<0.05$), affective dimension and age ($r(128)=-.24$, $p<0.01$) and seniority ($r(128)=-.28$, $p<0.01$) and between attitudes towards creating an accepting environment for all children in the mainstream school system (behaviour) and seniority ($r(128)=-.20$, $p<0.05$). According to these results, we can state that educators with higher seniority don't manifest a positive attitude towards the philosophy of special needs children inclusion in the mainstream school system, age having a negative correlation to affective dimension and the behavioral aspect of attitudes regarding the inclusion, data that partially confirm the working hypothesis.

According to the descriptive data from table 4 a skeptical attitude of educators regarding the advantages/disadvantages of the inclusion with a 23,60 total score of mean can be observed; the philosophy regarding inclusion (Mean=15,07); the necessary logistics (Mean=13,51); beliefs regarding the success of special needs children inclusion in the mainstream school system (Mean=12,10). Regarding beliefs, a difference in perception among counties can be observed, in Maramures and Salaj counties it can be observed beliefs against inclusion. Also concerning the philosophy of inclusion, it can be observed that the educators from Salaj county have a more optimistic attitude, with a 16,90 mean, when compared with the rest of the educators, from example those from Maramures who have a 14,15 mean.

The positive attitude of educators was observed in the segment of the development of personal and professional relationships which can facilitate the inclusion of special needs children (Mean=15,47), the highest scores are in Salaj (Mean=18,70) and the lowest in Cluj (Mean=14,56). The positive attitude of educators was also observed regarding the wish of creating an inclusive learning environment for all children (Mean=14,80), with the highest scores in Maramures County (Mean=15,10) and the lowest in Cluj County (Mean=14,60).

It is also observed that the educators are not feeling sufficiently prepared for accepting the special needs children into the mainstream school system

(Mean=14,66), which led to beliefs against the inclusion (Mean=12,10).

According to the obtained results (Table 5), it is concluded that significant statistical differences are depending on the variable county regarding the educators' perception towards the inclusion of the special needs children – subscale: advantages and disadvantages of the inclusion ($F(4,125)=3,40$, $p<0.05$), philosophical issues ($F(4,125)=3,68$, $p<0.01$) and logistical concern ($F(4,125)=3,28$, $p<0.05$). In order to verify among which counties there are significant differences, we calculated the post-hoc t Tukey test. The results showed the existence of significant differences between the Cluj-Bistrița-Năsăud counties (Tukey $t=2.21$, $p<0.05$) and Cluj-Sălaj counties (Tukey $t=2.20$, $p<0.05$), for Advantage and disadvantage of Inclusion Education scale, for Philosophical Issues scale between Cluj-Sălaj, Maramureș-Sălaj (Tukey $t=3$, $p<0.01$) and Sălaj-Mureș (Tukey $t=3.74$, $p<0.01$) and for Logistical concern scale between Bistrița-Năsăud and Maramureș (Tukey $t=2.28$, $p<0.05$). Therefore the second hypothesis is only partially confirmed.

6. Conclusion

The results obtained in the study confirm international results. Therefore older people, despite their experience, show reluctance towards special needs children inclusion into the mainstream school system. This is due to the reluctance towards change, to difficulties in understanding the philosophy of this paradigm and to old professional training paradigms they were educated in. As Worrell (2008) and Orr (2009) stated, the lack of knowledge regarding the inclusion and the fear of accountability appears frequently in the cases of older educators, where the change of attitude and the modification of cognitions is hard to achieve. More than that, the educators, regardless of county, are feeling totally unprepared from their professional training point of view, considering that there is the need for practical training courses and examples of good practice, which can help them build self-professional confidence that they are able to assume the responsibility of teaching these children. We believe that the offer of continuous training courses that emphasize the practical component adapted to the class needs will easily eliminate the reluctant beliefs against inclusion and will facilitate a greater openness of educators towards this category of students.

The fact that most of the results show a neutral approach of teachers regarding inclusion indicates the lack of trust in the success of teaching as a result of the few positive experiences in dealing with this category of children and of course the lack of professional training courses and the lack of necessary resources and logistics in designing activities adapted to the learning needs of this category of children.

We consider more than necessary to carry out continuous training courses focused predominantly on examples of good practice, to facilitate cooperation/partnership between teachers and specialists in various areas of special education and to provide support in carrying out curriculum adaptation by providing methods and techniques appropriate to the needs of training of special needs children, providing educational institutions with the necessary equipment and promoting the benefits of educational inclusion for both special needs students and other students, teachers, parents, and the community.

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