Inclusive Education and In-service Teachers' Attitudes

Liliana MĂȚĂ¹, Otilia CLIPA²

¹ PhD, Associate Prof., „Vasile Alecsandri”
University of Bacău, Bacău, Romania,
liliana.mata@ub.ro

² PhD, Associate Prof., „Ștefan cel Mare”
University of Suceava, Romania,
otiliac@usv.ro

Abstract: The aim of this research was to measure teachers' attitudes about inclusive education, teachers who are involve on in-service teacher training. When the teachers have a positive attitude towards inclusive school, they become more open to adjusting and changing the way they teach, in order to meet the numerous pupils' learning needs. Studying the teachers attitudes towards the integration of the “special educational requirements” children help identifying the most appropriate influence measures, in order to establish relations based on mutual valorisation and promotion of equal participation opportunities. The investigation of the attitudes of teachers upon the integration process of students with special educational needs helps identify the best means of influencing, with the purpose to form relations based on mutual evaluation and to promote equity of participation chances.

Keywords: *Inclusive education; pre-university education; questionnaire; special educational needs.*

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1. Introduction

The study of the attitudes towards the special educational requirements pupils was the centre of many researches in the last few years. Although the studies regarding the special requirements pupils show an evolution of its members' attitudes towards acceptance and tolerance, there still are persons who share wrong concepts regarding different types of deficiencies persons or behave discriminatory regarding the educational or professional opportunities which can be made available to them. This research, who underline attitude of the teachers toward children with special education needs, became a very important and actual topic for educational policies (Clipa, Măță & Lazăr, 2019; Sharma, Forlin & Loreman, 2008; Savolainen *et al.*, 2012; Tamayo, Rebolledo & Besoain-Saldana, 2017; Yada & Savolainen, 2017). The educational policies became real vectors for develop positive communities who creating an inclusive society (Batarello *et al.*, 2016; Clipa & Greciuc, 2018; Monsen *et al.*, 2014; Unianu, 2012, 2013). There are a series of studies which focused on studying the attitudes towards the integration or involvement of the “special educational needs” (SEN) children.

Hollowood *et al.*'s (1994:243) study is oriented on the studying of the time spent on learning in an inclusive class, as compared to a traditional one. The presence of children with “special educational requirements” influences negatively nor the time allocated to learning for typical children neither the academic objectives achievement. The factors determining the creation of positive or negative attitudes towards the children with special educational needs and reflects the extent to which the regular persons are prepared or not to relate to the handicapped persons, can be at least three categories: factors that relate to the person expressing the opinion, the type of the handicap or the socio-cultural context at a certain moment. On the other hand, many authors (Tervo *et al.*, 2004:910) reviewed a series of factors which can influence the attitudes shaping towards the handicapped persons, amongst whom we mention: age, gender, nationality, marital status, educational level, socio-economic level, residence in rural or urban areas, experience in working with people with deficiencies etc. Researches reveal that when the teachers have a positive attitude towards inclusive school, they become more open to adjusting and changing the way they teach, in order to meet the numerous pupils' learning needs (Cullen *et al.*, 2010). This educational policies and researches are different and specific for each country: India (Shah *et al.*, 2016: 37); Israel (Romi & Leyser, 2006: 87); Mexico (Forlin *et al.* 2010:725); Norway (Flem & Keller, 2000: 190). In this

researches is reveals that the interaction with people with special needs is a predictor of the teachers positive attitude.

In the Romanian educational system, the trend for the educational system is to include students with special needs in regular education and to promote specific educational policies for the inclusive approach (Gherguț, 2010: 714; Unianu, 2013: 1238). In this context, inclusive school is the name of the school institution in the public mass education where all the children of a community have access, regardless of the origin place, in which children with special needs are integrated in one form or another. According to the “Report regarding the situation of the inclusive education in Romania” (2007: 15), there are stipulations referring to teachers attitudes towards inclusive learning. „Some teachers were enthusiastic and involved, others still question themselves (some colleagues said from the beginning that the project was viable, acceptable and not too difficult, considering that children with problems were accepted before in the kindergarten; other colleagues considered that these children have to learn in special schools since they make their job more difficult and they do not have the necessary special training)”. „Some of them understood and got involved (most of them), the others considered that it diminishes the school’s prestige and accepted more verbally”. Predominantly the primary and pre-school teachers were involved, while the teachers opposed to the change of practices and attitudes.

As a result of the teachers’ attitude analysis towards the integration of children with special educational requirements in regular education, Cercel (2009: 21) distinguishes the following types: the attitude of indifference and disengagement; the exaggerate protection attitude; an objective and balanced attitude towards the school integration process manifested through professionalism; the reluctance of the teachers towards integration and teaching the class with special educational needs pupils; fear of accidents; the teachers are afraid that they will not succeed in ensuring all the necessary pedagogic support for a child with special educational requirements; another problem is related to the general situation of the class. Băiescu (2013: 43) analysed the nature of the students and teachers attitudes towards the reality of the inclusive education within mass kindergartens.

According to the analysis carried out, it was found that the differences between teachers' attitudes towards school inclusion are due to some factors related to the teachers or the special needs child particularities and school environment factors, according to the theoretical model revised by Avramidis and Norwich (2002: 130). As a result, teachers as educational actors who did educational - instructive activities with children with disabilities manifest significantly more favourable attitudes towards the

inclusion of children with disabilities in general, as opposed to those who did not carry out such activities. They also have a significantly greater tendency to recognize the benefits of school inclusion and the role teachers have in the teaching-learning process in inclusive groups.

The results of the study confirm that part of the data obtained by Avramidis *et al.* (2000: 196) which highlighted the fact that an essential factor in modelling the teachers opinions towards the school inclusion lies in the direct experience with the disabilities pupils. Although previous studies have made significant contributions to clarifying these issues, the results are contradictory and prove that the attitudes are very different and there is a slightly unfavourable or even unfavourable trend towards school inclusion, with emphasis on the disadvantages of school inclusion. In others article, Yada and Savolainen (2017: 225) underline the significant differences between theoretical part of these educational policies and the practices of them.

Also, in others article based on results of this research (Armstrong, 2006; Campbell, Gilmore & Cuskelly, 2003; Clipa, 2018; De Boer et al., 2012; Ferguson, 2008; Monsen et al., 2014: 115; Peček, Macura-Milovanović & Ćuk, 2015), there can construct the educational policy who suppose the reform of teacher education (with these elements of inclusive education integrated) and develop the inclusions competences of teaching in their practicum.

The aim of the study is identifying the pre-university education teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education depending on the environment of residence and the type of education.

Research hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: Is the attitude of the teachers from the urban areas different from the ones in rural?

Hypothesis 2: Is the attitude of the teachers from the mass education system different from the ones in special educational system?

2. Research methodology

2.1. Participants

The study was done on a plot of 264 teachers from the pre-university educations, which are divided by the independent variables into several categories (Table 1). By *gender*, 220 (83.3%) of the participants were female and 44 (16.7%) were male. In terms of *teacher age*, 86 were of ages comprised between 20 and 33 years (32.6%), 129 between 34 and 47 years (48.9%) and 49 between 48 and 61 years (18.6%). According to the *school*

type, 236 (89.4%) of the participants were teaching in mainstream schools and 28 (10.6%) in special education schools. By reference to the *grade level*, 54 teach in preschool education (20.5%), 81 in primary school (30.7%), 94 in middle school (35.6%) and 35 in high school (13.3%). Regarding the *experience in teaching students with special needs*, 34 have teaching experience (12.9%) and 230 do not have any teaching experience (87.1%). Regarding the *teaching degree*, 231 have a bachelor's degree (87.5%) and 75 have a master's degree (28.4%). In relation to *inclusive education training*, 123 (46.6%) teachers had participated in courses and 141 (53.5%) had not.

Table 1. The distribution of the research plot by independent variables

Independent variables	Distribution
Gender	220 women and 44 men
Residency	156 from urban areas and 108 from rural areas
Education level	54 from pre-school education; 81 from primary education; 94 from gymnasium and 35 from high school education
Type of school	236 from mass education and 28 from special education system
Field training	123 trained in this field and 141 with no training in this field
Master studies	75 master graduates and 189 with no master studies

The participants were selected according to the stratified sampling procedures (Etikan & Bala, 2017). The study participants were selected mainly according to the type of education and by residence environment.

2.2. The operationalization of the concepts and the description of the variables

The main concept of attitudes towards the inclusive education was operationalized into twenty-one characteristic elements which are found in the current literature and which express the teachers' attitude towards (Clipa et al., 2019):

- confidence in the ability to teach children with special needs (I1);
- the ability to interact with the SEN pupils (I2);
- the way to relate with the parents that have pupils with SEN (I3) ;

- the possibility of achieving school progress by children with special needs (I4);
- the state of frustration during teaching to students with special needs (I5);
- the integration of pupils with SEN into mainstream education (I6);
- the state of comfort when teaching a child with moderate physical disability (I7);
- the need to train teachers to teach pupils with special needs (I8);
- the negative effects of the SEN pupils' integration on the parents with children with no special needs (I9);
- accepting teaching a pupil with cognitive deficiencies (I10);
- the children SEN have high results when they are included in regular school (I11);
- the fact that the children with special needs self-esteem is increased when they are included in the ordinary education system (I12);
- the efficient collaboration and interaction between children, although they differ intellectually, physically and psychologically (I13);
- making different physical arrangements in my classroom to meet the needs of pupils with special needs (I14);
- easy purchase of materials and equipment adjusted to meet the needs of special needs students (I15);
- taking into account the students with SEN in decisions on techno-material endowment (I16);
- the low level of anxiety when a teacher learns that he/ she will have a pupil with special needs in class (I17);
- the teachers collaborate with other colleagues to found methods for teaching and learning SEN students (I18);
- the negative effects to include the SEN pupils on class performances (I19);
- the ability to adequately work with the pupils with easy to moderate behavioural problems (I20);
- adequate training to meet the needs of the children with disabilities (I21).

The dependent variable is the attitude towards inclusive education. The independent variables are the following: gender (female/ male); residential environment (urban/ rural); education level (pre-school; primary school; gymnasium; high-school); school type (mainstream education/ special education); training in the field (yes/ no); masters' degree (yes/ no).

2.3. Research methods

In the present study it was applied the questionnaire validated by Clipa et al. (2019). Likert Scale was used, with 5 intervals, where 1 = Strong disagreement, 2 = Disagreement, 3 = Weak agreement, 4 = Agreement and 5 = Strong disagreement. The value of Cronbach α had an acceptable range (> 0.7) who means the internal consistency is appropriate for this instrument.

Questionnaires were applied on undergraduate education teachers. The application of the questionnaires supposed to fill in a Likert scale for each dimension. The subjects were provided the necessary time to fill in the questionnaires, as a result of the detailed analysis which this involves. Before to the start of application, all the participants were informed about the objectives of the study, ensured about anonymity, voluntary participation, and guaranteed the possible feedback of research findings.

2.4. Research procedure

The research was approved by the ethics committee of „Ștefan cel Mare” University of Suceava, Romania. Also, the confidentiality of the subjects' answers to the questionnaire items was ensured.

3. Results

By applying the One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test, it was determined that the distribution is not normal, as the Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) = 0.000. In order to verify general hypothesis 1, the nonparametric test Mann-Whitney-U was applied, to find whether there are differences in the teachers attitude in urban and rural environment or not. According to the results obtained (Table 2), it is noticeable that in case of item 14, Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) = 0.045.

Table 2. Values of Mann-Whitney-U test regarding the attitude of teachers regarding inclusive education, in relation to the residential environment

	Mann-Whitney U	Wilcoxon W	Z	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)
I14	7218,000	19464,000	-2,023	,043

By analysing the average values (Table 3), it was determined that the attitude of teachers from the rural environment ($M2=143.67$) is more

favourable to making different special physical arrangements in the classroom to accommodate children with special needs than the teachers from than urban environment teachers ($M2=143.67$). Depending on the residential environment, the hypothesis is partially confirmed, as there are significant differences only at the level of a single item referring to making different special physical arrangements in the classroom to accommodate children with special needs.

Table 3. Statistical indicators of teachers' attitude towards inclusive education, in relation to the residential environment

Residential environment		N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
I14	Urban	156	124,77	19464,00
	Rural	108	143,67	15516,00

To verify the general hypothesis 2, the nonparametric Mann-Whitney-U was applied, to verify whether there are differences in the attitude of teachers from the general education system and from the special institutions. According to the results obtained (Table 4), we can notice that in the case of items 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 10, 11, 12, 13, 16, 17, 20, 21, as Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) < 0.005. Depending on the type of type of education system, the hypothesis is confirmed, as there are significant differences only at the level of 14 items.

Table 4. Values of Mann-Whitney-U test regarding the attitude of teachers in respect to inclusive education, in relation to the type of education system

	Mann-Whitney U	Wilcoxon W	Z	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)
I1	1542,000	29508,000	-4,907	,000
I2	1310,000	29276,000	-5,470	,000
I4	2526,000	30492,000	-2,161	,031
I5	1976,500	29942,500	-3,707	,000
I6	2423,000	2829,000	-2,378	,017
I7	2488,000	30454,000	-2,235	,025
I10	1493,500	29459,500	-4,953	,000
I11	2324,000	2730,000	-2,653	,008
I12	2079,000	2485,000	-3,363	,001

I13	2592,000	30558,000	-1,980	,048
I16	1888,000	29854,000	-3,828	,000
I17	2025,500	29991,500	-3,501	,000
I20	1857,000	29823,000	-4,086	,000
I21	1388,000	29354,000	-5,125	,000

By analysing the statistical averages, the following differences were noted, depending on the type of education system:

- The attitude of teachers in special teaching system ($M_2=195.43$) is more favourable towards the trust in the capacity to teach to children with special needs than the attitude of teachers in the general education system ($M_1=125.03$);

- The attitude of teachers in special teaching system ($M_2=203.71$) is more favourable regarding the ability to interact with CES students than teachers in the general education system ($M_1=124.05$).

- The attitude of teachers in special teaching system ($M_2=260.29$) is more favourable referring to the possibility of achieving school progress by children with special needs than teachers in the general education system ($M_1=129.20$).

- The attitude of teachers in special teaching system ($M_2=179.91$) is more favourable related to the state of frustration during teaching to students with special needs than teachers in the general education system ($M_1=126.88$).

- The attitude of teachers in the general education system ($M_1=136.23$) is more favourable regarding the integration of pupils with SEN into mainstream education than teachers in special teaching system ($M_2=126.88$).

- The attitude of teachers in special teaching system ($M_2=161.64$) is more favourable related to the state of comfort when teaching a child with moderate physical disability than teachers in the general education system ($M_1=129.04$).

- The attitude of teachers in special teaching system ($M_2=197.16$) is more favourable referring to accepting teaching a pupil with cognitive deficiencies than teachers in the general education system ($M_1=124.83$).

- The attitude of teachers in the general education system ($M_1=136.65$) is more favourable regarding the idea that students with special needs have higher academic achievements when they are included in mainstream schools than teachers in special teaching system ($M_2=97.50$).

- The attitude of teachers in the general education system ($M_1=137.69$) is more favourable referring to the fact that the children with special needs self-esteem is increased when they are included in the ordinary education system than teachers in special teaching system ($M_2=88.75$).

- The attitude of teachers in special teaching system ($M_2=157.93$) is more favourable related to the efficient collaboration and interaction between children, although they differ intellectually, physically and psychologically than teachers in the general education system ($M_1=129.48$).

- The attitude of teachers in special teaching system ($M_2=183.07$) is more favourable referring to taking into account the students with SEN in decisions on techno-material endowment than teachers in the general education system ($M_1=126.50$).

- The attitude of teachers in special teaching system ($M_2=178.16$) is more favourable regarding the lack of anxiety when a teacher learns that he/she will have a pupil with special needs in class than teachers in the general education system ($M_1=127.08$).

- The attitude of teachers in special teaching system ($M_2=184.18$) is more favourable related to the ability to adequately work with the pupils with easy to moderate behavioural problems than teachers in the general education system ($M_1=126.37$).

- The attitude of teachers in special teaching system ($M_2=200.93$) is more favourable referring to the adequate training to meet the needs of the children with disabilities than teachers in the general education system ($M_1=124.38$).

4. Discussions

This study is relevant for educational process because it shows how the educational policies about inclusive education are possible to correlate with practicum in this area. The principles of inclusive education are detailed in specific documents and its must to be applied. The results of this article underline the possibilities of prediction of teacher's inclusive competences. In a few studies about attitude of the teachers, the authors demonstrate the predictability of this in relation with positive attitude to students with SEN. For Van de Veen et al. (2010) and Martan, Mihić and Matošević (2017) the attitudes was a good predictors for integration of children with special needs in classroom. In others studies these results are confirmed (Glasman & Albaracin, 2006) and the attitude predict the behaviour of the teachers and the success of integration depends of this.

Yada and Savolainen (2017) analysing the differences between the theoretical documents and applying these in educational process. After this study, many others authors found the specific ways who are very well analysed in educational policies. These documents show the multiple possibilities to improve teacher education and to develop the competences for teachers in inclusive education (Baldiris Navarro et al., 2016; Clipa & Greciuc, 2018; De Boer et al., 2012; Ferguson, 2008; Kovacevic & Macesic-Petrovic, 2012; Kudek Mirošević, 2016; Massé, 2010; Monsen *et al.*, 2014). The results of this study described the teachers' attitudes towards inclusion.

5. Conclusions

The investigation of the attitudes of teachers towards the integration of students with special educational needs helps identify the best means of influencing, with the purpose to form relations based on mutual evaluation and to promote equity of participation chances. Studying the teachers attitudes towards the integration of the “special educational requirements” children help identifying the most appropriate influence measures, in order to establish relations based on mutual valorisation and promotion of equal participation opportunities.

There are a number of limitations of the research, of which we mention the representativeness of the research group, which implies the need to extend the application of the questionnaire to a more representative research group. Another limit is given by the small number of variables analyzed, such as residential environment and type of education. In the future research directions, it is necessary to analyze the influence of new variables, such as gender, professional experience, specialization.

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