



Attitudes of Parents of Children With Special Needs Towards Inclusive Education

Original scientific paper

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Abstract

Inclusive education is very important for all children especially for those with special needs. In the Republic of Kosovo, the inclusion it is an approach in progress. This study aimed to explore the attitudes of parents of children with special needs towards inclusive education. The current findings of inclusiveness, challenges, risks, benefits and achievements of inclusive education in the Kosovo education system were also analysed. Through a semi-structured interview, ten parents whose children attend regular classes in various schools in pre-university education in Kosovo were interviewed. The results of the research indicate that parents of children with special needs have similar attitudes towards inclusion. In their opinion, it should occur, but they are worried about the challenges that appear. Inclusion is seen as a good opportunity, capacity building, equality, socialization and part of the overall development of the child. Parents recommend improvements in infrastructure conditions and human resources for successful inclusion.

Keywords: *education, inclusion, parents, children, attitudes.*

When we read about the development or education of the child, it is inevitable not to come across the notion of “parents” or “family”, especially when it comes to the impact of influencing factors on the child's development. This shows the role and importance of parents or family in different stages of the child's development. Even

though nowadays, the modern family is busy and unavailable the involvement of parents in the child's education is important in every aspect and in this sense, it is important for their academic success (Jeynes, 2011). The birth of a baby is one of the most interesting moments in a person's life. Parents, in this case, are the ones who conceive their

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future, they are the ones who have their expectations, and these expectations can be “suffocated” (diminished) when the child is born with injuries of various natures, it causes a stressful experience (Gupta & Buwade, 2013), while expectations and hopes can fade (Kandel & Merrick, 2007).

Parents develop their own expectations for the child in every area of life (Devolli, Kryeziu, & Bujupi, 2023). Expectations, which are beliefs related to the child's future, are more oriented towards the child's education and are based on experience and information provided by the school, the media and informal networks for parents (Russell, 2003). This is where the conflicts of parents with the social system in general and with the educational system, namely the school, begin. In fact, as Lake and Billingsley (2000) suggest, one of the central causes of conflict between school staff and parents is the discrepancy between their views of the child and their needs, and this influence is most powerful when school staff describe the child from the deficit perspective, considering him more as a problem, than as an individual (Lake & Billingsley, 2000). In this study, the term "children with special needs" includes all children who have special educational needs, all those who in any way have difficult access to educational institutions, in the process of learning or in their education in general as a result of different diversities, but with special emphasis on children or students who are at different degrees of mental retardation, with vision impairment (completely or partially blind), hearing impairment (a partial or a total inability to hear), with communication difficulties (do not speak at all or have other communication problems), emotional and behavioural difficulties. Therefore, the focus in our study is on parents of children who are included within the phrase: “special needs” (Zabeli, 2022).

The inclusion of children with special needs in the inclusive education system is a permanent challenge in almost every society. Inclusive education means a radical change in the way we think about education” (Doménech & Moliner, 2014). Inclusion is considered by many researchers as a difficult concept to be defined, considering that it is a complex concept (Lindsay, 2007; Mitchell, 2014), a multidimensional concept (Sarrazin, 2016) and that, despite many

studies, there is a constant need for clearly defined research and new types of research are needed (Göransson & Nilholm, 2014). Inclusive education finds its philosophical education roots in ideas about human rights, social justice and equity (Zabeli, Perolli Shehu, & Gjelaj, 2020). Researchers Booth and Ainscow (2016) consider that “inclusion in education includes valuing all students and staff equally, increasing the participation of students in, and reducing their exclusion from, the cultures, curricula and communities of local schools, restructuring the cultures, policies and practices in schools so that they respond to the diversity of students in the locality, reducing barriers to learning and participation for all students, not only those with impairments or those who are categorized as having special educational needs, learning from attempts to overcome barriers to the access and participation of particular students to make changes for the benefit of students more widely, viewing the difference between students as resources to support learning, rather than as problems to be overcome, acknowledging the right of students to an education in their locality, improving schools for staff as well as for students, emphasizing the role of schools in building community and developing values, as well as in increasing achievement, fostering mutually sustaining relationships between schools and communities, recognizing that inclusion in education is one aspect of inclusion in society” (Booth & Ainscow, 2016, p. 3).

There is a lot of research on the attitudes of teachers towards inclusion, but there is less research on the attitudes of parents of children with special needs. The attitudes of all factors towards inclusion are important, but the attitudes of parents also play a significant role in the education of children with special needs (Malakar & Saikia, 2017) and that for the implementation of inclusive education, parents can be strong partners in the school, community and beyond (Paseka & Schwab, 2020).

This study is important for parents and the community in general who cope with special needs children as well as researchers who deal with this field of study. The study is focused on the attitudes of parents of children with special needs towards inclusive education, obtained as a result of a qualitative research, carried out through semi-structured

interviews, supported by scientific literature and argued by researchers in this field.

The Context of the Study

The education system in Kosovo from the 50s to the last decade of the 20th century has been influenced by the education system of the former Yugoslavia, it is characterized by the socialist-communist system and as such a centralized education system has functioned - controlled by the state, as in other socialist countries in the region, a situation which has been followed for about 5 decades. Schools primarily served political regimes, and pedagogy – particularly objectives, content, and method – was unified and often externally controlled. Teaching also in the region focused on delivering selected and often ideologically flavoured knowledge, with little or no space for the learner's own interpretations, initiatives, or critical thinking (Sahlberg & Boce, 2010). After 1990 the Albanian population established an education system, known as the independent system and education of the Albanian population was delivered at private homes by Albanian teachers. The education system was also affected by the war in 1999, during which a majority of the population was displaced (Venäläinen & Gashi, 2015) whereas, after 2000, radical changes have been made in the education system in all segments of education in Kosovo.

Special education in Kosovo has gone through two basic phases. The first phase (1950-1999) is characterized by the education of children exclusively in special schools and in special classes and this period started after the Second World War in the 50s of the 20th century and continued until the end of the 20th century. This period is characterized by typical segregation, with isolated special schools, with teachers with regular teacher education qualification but without specific qualification to teach students with special needs. The second phase started in 2000 with changes in the entire education system and therefore with a different approach to special education. Under the auspices of international associations, a new phase of thinking about inclusive education begins. In fact, until this time, the notion "inclusive" has been a totally unknown term in Albanian terminology in Kosovo. Not only as a notion, but also as a practice, at first it seemed too

illusory, as something that could possibly happen in other countries but not in Kosovo (Zabeli, Perolli Shehu, & Gjellaj, 2020). International projects have also contributed to the development of the second phase and in cooperation with the Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation (MESTI) they have drafted laws, strategies and administrative instructions that regulate the issue of special respectively inclusive education. Parallel to the drafting of the laws, changes have also been made in school practice. Thus, special schools have been transformed into Resource Centers (former special schools), while special/ attached classes into resource classes. The resource centers, in addition to working with children with special needs (from preschool to 12th grade), have been established to provide assistance to educational institutions, families and individuals in need, its motto is: every student should be given opportunity for maximum utilization of learning potential (MEST, 2014). Resource Centres have three main functions: i. To provide support to other schools; ii. To create teaching/ learning materials for use by regular schools with special needs students; iii. To provide training for regular school teachers. Within these services, the Resource Centres offer pedagogical services such as: support for regular schools with traveling teachers, internal evaluation service, Braille printing machine, training for regular school teachers, early intervention services for blind children and sensory rooms (Zabeli, 2022). Meanwhile, attached classes are classes that function in a regular school and children with special needs learn there. These classrooms are expected to be transformed into resource rooms/classes in the future, and most of the children will be transferred to regular classes (Zabeli, 2022).

Currently, as in the resource centres as well as in the attached classes, the number of students has started to decrease because the process of inclusiveness in regular classes has begun. To implement this new approach, core groups have been formed from the staff of the center and their task is to build support services for students with special educational needs in regular schools and their teachers. Traveling teachers have also been hired. They are teacher assistants who support students with special educational needs and their teachers in regular schools. Evaluation

teams at municipal levels are also planned to be operationalized. They are composed of professionals who will make a professional evaluation of children with special educational needs, will make the decision for education with special needs, will propose where the child will be placed and provide recommendations for the educational support that the child should have (MESTI, 2016).

In our country, the assessment instruments for children with special needs have been developed, designed to respond to all types of children's disabilities (MEST, 2019). A series of activities have also been organized in the professional development of people who work with special needs children, thus qualifying Level 5 Special Needs Assistants and employing them according to the needs of schools (MEST, 2018). In addition to fifth-level studies, Kosovar teachers follow BA studies, Primary Education, as well as master studies in Inclusive Education Program offered in the Republic of Kosovo (University of Prishtina, 2019).

The assessment of children with special needs is done by the evaluation team, which is established by the municipality where this team operates. This team consists of permanent members: psychologist, pedagogue/special pedagogue, social worker, support teacher and other members as needed (MEST, 2017). On the other hand, in addition to legislation, pedagogical documents that support inclusive education and some good inclusive practices, there is a lack of research to prove the positive or negative sides of inclusion. Apart from some reports from state institutions or NGOs, there is not any real research about inclusion in general or any research that deals with aspects of parents' attitudes, beliefs or perceptions about inclusion.

Literature Review

Children's education is essential and a preoccupation for every society around the world, while the education of children with special needs, in addition to being essential and a preoccupation, also represents a challenge for the education system in all countries of the world, whether they are underdeveloped, developing or developed countries. The debates are still current today regarding the question: should the child

with special needs be educated in special institutions or in regular institutions. In this sense, research shows and gives positive answers (although not all) for the education of children in inclusive environments because exclusion and isolation are no longer considered justifiable solutions. Therefore, the reconstruction of the educational system is going in the direction of systematization, accommodation of all students without distinction, even though this is not considered an easy mission (Boyle & Topping, 2012) and that barriers to the inclusion of students with special needs are often mentioned as a result of inadequate training and teachers' attitudes, classes with a large number of students, equipment and unsatisfactory staff support, etc. (Gupta & Buwade, 2013).

Families can face crises if they are not clear about the issue of the child's impairment and needs. In their research, Graungaard and Skov (2006) report the great need and importance of diagnosing children because it affects their better coping with life, and the researchers report that in this regard, parents had a lot of dissatisfaction and criticism towards health experts (Graungaard & Skov, 2006). Researchers, Kandel and Merrick (2007) report that for the balance between recognition of disabilities and efforts to compensate for these disabilities, four characteristics of the acceptance process are necessary (Kandel & Merrick, 2007), such as: "A realistic view of the child, with appreciation of the complications created in the family; the parent is not overwhelmed by feelings of self-pity and guilt; The parent engages in a logical search for possible services and does not seek a "magical solution" (Graungaard & Skov, 2006, p. 1083).

In the implementation of inclusive education and its success for all children without distinction, a considerable number of factors are important: administrators teachers, students, curricula, (Stainback, Stainback, & Stefanich, 1996), teaching materials, assessment methods (Buli-Holmberg & Jeyaprabhan, 2016), but the research shows that families also played an important role. Parents as a social group can act in favour of inclusion or support segregated educational environments (Vlachou, Karadimou, & Koutsogeorgou, 2016). The success of inclusion is mainly depends upon the attitude of parents towards it (Bhuyan & Joshi, 2022).

Earlier studies on attitudes of parents (of children with mild disabilities and children with severe disabilities) show that where supportive the inclusion practices is satisfied with the benefits for their child (Myles & Simpson, 1989; Hanline & Halvorsen, 1989). Studies of later years also show positive attitudes towards inclusion and support the concept of mainstreaming, support their children's chance to participate in typical classes (Leyser & Kirk, 2004; Kokaridas, Vlachaki, Zournatzi, & Patsiaouras, 2008; Gupta & Buwade, 2013; Algood, Harris, & Hong, 2013). The researchers therefore report positive attitudes of parents towards inclusion. Children/students with special needs benefit and are satisfied with these achievements when inclusion is supported by all relevant factors and additional resources are used.

On the other hand, some researchers report that parents do not have enough information about inclusion and do not understand it properly. Ceylan and Aral (2016) report that mothers of children with special needs are not able to explain the meaning of inclusion, similarly as the research of Kargin et al. (2003) indicating that parents' knowledge and skills regarding inclusion are limited (Ceylan & Aral, 2016; Kargin, Acarlar, & Sucuoğlu, 2003). The findings of the research of Kokaridas et al. (2008) show that parents are concerned about the social acceptance of their children by children without special needs. It is also reported that the level of education of the parents and the type of disability of the child do not influence the attitudes of the parents towards inclusion (Kokaridas, Vlachaki, Zournatzi, & Patsiaouras, 2008). Regarding parents' attitudes towards inclusive education, researchers Boer, Pijl and Minnaert (2011) report the following:

- Five studies turned out to be positive and five other studies – neutral
- Parents of children with special needs hold more neutral attitudes than parents of children without special needs
- Parents of children with special needs express concerns about the emotional development of their children, about individual teaching and adequate services in regular schools
- Parents of children without special needs/without disabilities showed more positive attitudes towards inclusive education

- Parents claimed that inclusive education has risks for both groups of children
- Parents' attitudes are related to several variables such as: economic situation, type of impairment/disability, educational level and experience with inclusion
- Parents were less positive about the inclusion of children with behavioural and cognitive problems
- No study showed what influences parental attitudes about the social participation of students with special needs (Boer, Pijl, & Minnaert, 2011).

In addition to the research of Boer, Pijl and Minnaert (2011), other later researches also report positive attitudes towards the benefits of inclusion. The importance of attitudes about other factor's reported the other research (Saloviita, 2020). Attitudes comprise a cognitive, an affective, and a behavioural dimension. Furthermore, sociologists emphasize that the development and enactment of attitudes should be understood in terms of the interrelatedness of the individual and its social environment (Kielblock & Woodcock, 2023). Research on parents' positive attitudes towards inclusive education show the benefits and advantages of children with special needs in inclusive environments. Researchers Sharma and Trory (2019) report 3 benefits of inclusion: "1. Inclusion is socially advantageous for their children; 2. Inclusion helps prepare their children for the real world; 3. Inclusion helps their children develop self-help skills. Furthermore, the majority of the parents (90%) agreed that their children will develop increased self-esteem in an inclusive setting and that they will have good role models to follow in an inclusive classroom. 70% of the parents agreed that their child would develop academic skills more rapidly in an inclusive setting and that their children have the right to be educated in the same classroom as typically developed children" (Sharma & Trory, 2019, p. 883). The study of Bhuyan and Joshi (2022) reported that the parents have a positive attitude towards inclusion of children with disability in general is slight positive attitude, just above average. Therefore, there is a need to spread the awareness regarding inclusive education. Awareness programmed, media, posters, conferences, meetings, training etc. should conduct on it (Bhuyan & Joshi, 2022). Research of Campos et al. (2020)

showed that the inclusion can be useful, in the first place, to increase the awareness and sensitization of the parents of children with typical development, as these parents have an essential role in the messages they transmit to their children and that knowingly or not, transmit to other members of the school community (Campos, et al., 2020). Also, the study of Sharafudeen et al. (2022) showed a positive attitude towards the aspects of inclusion namely academic improvement, social adaptation and cooperation between teachers (Sharafudeen, Bollapalli, Thalathoti, & Bollikonda, 2022).

In Kosovo, there is some research about teachers' attitudes about the inclusion of children with special needs for preschool level, primary and lower secondary school level and university level (Zabeli, Perolli Shehu, & Gjelaj, 2020; Zabeli, Perolli-Shehu, & Anderssen, 2021) but there is no research about parents' attitude. This increases the importance of this research and gives us the opportunity to compare similar research in other countries.

Methodology

The Aim of the Study

The aim of this research is to identify the attitudes of parents of children with special needs towards inclusion as well as indicate the risks, barriers, expectations and benefits of inclusive education.

Research Questions

To achieve the aim of the research, three research questions are posed:

1. What are the attitudes of parents of special needs children towards inclusive education?
2. What do parents think about the risks, barriers and difficulties of implementing inclusive education?
3. What are the expectations on inclusive education and its benefits?

Study Design, Sample, and Data Analysis

In this study, the qualitative research design was used because it is thought that the phenomenon is better researched (Merriam, 2009). The study is focused on the essence and structure of the experience (phenomenon), on the description of the experience from the perspective of people with experience in that matter and at the same time researching the ways in which the interviewees (in this case the parents) have experience and the attitudes about the phenomena are expressed in different ways (Mertens & McLaughlin, 2004). Through the qualitative design, contextual factors and the uniqueness of the problem are taken into account (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2006). For this reason, this study focuses more on the knowledge of deeper meanings and the development of theory and not on hypothesis testing (Devetak, Glazar, & Vogrinc, 2010). This study is based on the experiences of 10 parents of children with special needs who are involved in inclusive classrooms/schools. Parents involved in the research were selected through purposive sampling. All parents have children with special needs included in regular classes. The semi-structured interview was used to obtain the results of this research. The power of purposive sampling lies in the selection of a sample rich in information that will help us in the case study. Information-rich samples about the study are those from which more in-depth and concrete information is learned that gives us deeper knowledge and understanding rather than empirical generalizations (Staller, 2021). In this case, the interviewed parents are parents of children with special needs and have experience in inclusive education based on the inclusion or non-inclusion of their children in regular schools. Table 1 shows in more detail the qualifications, gender, children's needs, children's inclusion etc.

Table 1.*The structure of the interviewees*

No.	Gender	Qualification	Parent of child with special needs (type of impairment)	The child with special needs included in regular classroom/school)	Code
1	F	Middle School	Down Syndrome	Included	P1
2	M	BA degree	Hearing impairment	Included	P2
3	F	Middle School	Intellectual impairment	Included	P3
4	M	BA degree	Multiple impairments	Included	P4
5	F	MA degree	Intellectual impairment	Included	P5
6	F	Phd Cand	Vision impairment	Included	P6
7	F	BA degree	Physical disability	Included	P7
8	F	BA degree	Down Syndrome	Included	P8
9	M	BA degree	Multiple impairments	Included	P9
10	M	Ma degree	Physical impairment	Included	P10
Total	10				

The semi-structured interview was used as the main instrument in this research. A semi-structured interview is an instrument for collecting data that emerges from the interaction of two individuals. Interaction occurs from questions and answers received during research that are focused on a certain topic, in this case a social interaction related to the stated research topic (Dolczewski, 2022). We are determined to use semi-structured interviews in order to have direct communication with parents and to receive information in an interactive dialogue. Through semi-structured interviews, we are interested in learning about the attitudes of parents of children with special needs about inclusion. For more, the participants included in the research were selected with experiences that are directly related to the topic of the research, that is, participants who have something to say about the issue or the same topic. Also, we wanted to generate ideas to avoid standardized questionnaires which often do not provide accurate answers as can be obtained from semi-structured interviews (Matthews & Ross, 2010).

The questions for the semi-structured interview were designed to synthesize the attitudes of the participants related to the

situation and context of the educational system. The interviews were in depth and semi-structured: developing questions, setting up the interview, taking place one-to-one and lasting 45 minutes to one hour (Glesne, 2011). All the interviews were audio recorded and transcribed word for word (Springer, 2010).

The interviewees were free in expressing their attitudes and ideas, their data from the interview were extracted as new information (Belina, 2022). They participated of their own free will, we informed them about all the procedures that will be followed to carry out the semi-structured interview. During the exploration of the research, a variety of attitudes were obtained from the interviewees which are not focused only on one issue. The semi-structured interview consists of 10 questions. The data obtained from the interview were transcribed, coding them as T-1; T-2; (Teacher 1-10). Interviewees for ethical issues were assured of being kept anonymous (Ruslin, Mashuri, Rasak, Alhabsyi, & Syam, 2022). The text from the open-ended items on the questionnaire was thematically coded manually (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

Validity and Reliability

The validity and reliability in qualitative studies has been explained very well in the study on research by Vogrinc and Saqipi (2020), if the results are consistent with the results of other researchers, the study is considered reliable. To ensure reliability in this research, the questions, themes and sub-themes were prepared by reviewing the literature and relying on the opinions of experts in this field (Vogrinc & Saqipi, 2020). The research process was planned and explained in detail, the data collection process, the research instrument, information about the validity and reliability of the research, and the analysis of the results were well-planned. The interviews were transcribed to preserve the content and data obtained. Parents' attitudes were presented in the results section of this research. The results of the research present the consistency of the researched literature with the results found by this research. The participants in the research were encouraged and allowed for long and detailed answers to highlight their credibility. To make sure about the reliability, we have taken care in the logical understanding of what the participants express. During the research, member checking was done. This approach has enabled the participants to have their say in the research process and their comments have been considered valuable to confirm the accuracy of the research findings. This was accomplished by sharing with them transcripts, summaries and the entire research report. Participants reviewed the information to verify any inconsistencies, inaccuracies or missing data. This process has helped to create credibility and build mutual trust (Matthews & Ross, 2010).

Ethics

In order to maintain the ethics of the research, the parents participating in the research were given an official invitation, in this invitation the reason for their participation in this research was described in detail. The invited parents agreed to participate in this research. They were free to choose to participate without any pressure or coercion. Participants were guaranteed of confidentiality as well as assured that during the publication part their data will be

coded to maintain participants' privacy. The researchers and parents signed the agreement to voluntarily and with full confidentiality participate in the research, and to publish the data from the research.

Data Analysis

The data collected through semi-structured interviews were analysed according to content analysis, comparing the basic issues from the literature with the attitudes of parents to ascertain similarities or differences between them as well as coding the relevant data so that they can be found again for further studies; all have been considered important, each one has been read carefully and evidenced accurately. From the content analysis, the themes were coded and analyzed according to the basic issues found. Content analysis was applied with the aim of focusing on the presence of words or concepts extracted by the participants with the aim of extracting the meanings and relationships they have with one another. We have considered it as a flexible approach to accurately analyse reflective data related to attitudes about a certain issue, in our case, about attitudes of inclusion (Matthews & Ross, 2010).

The research data were grouped into 4 themes and 4 subthemes, determined by the research questions and literature review (see Table 2). The information of this study is strictly confidential and ensures full anonymity of the participants in this study. This study also includes our experience in the inclusion of children with special needs, as compilers of many documents, scientific articles, and organizers of various trainings with parents and teachers. These experiences, together with the preliminary research of various researchers and the data collected from the interviews correlate the reliability of the data from this research.

Findings

The study aims to investigate the attitudes of parents of children with special needs for inclusive education in the education system in Kosovo, which is in transition and has ongoing challenges especially in inclusive education. The research aims to highlight the attitudes of parents of children with special needs about inclusive education, how

much they know, how they know and how much they believe this, the barriers they overcome, expectations and benefits from inclusive education. Research data from interviews provide a narrative description of parents' attitudes. The themes in this research were determined by research questions and

literature review as well as the responses from parents i.e., the frequency of issues raised by them. Citations in this study are adapted from the most relevant information. Table 2 shows the coding, themes and content analysis.

Table 2.
Themes and content analysis

<i>Category</i>	<i>Themes</i>	<i>Description</i>
Parents' beliefs about the inclusion of children with special needs in regular classrooms/schools	Inclusion – its meaning according to parents	<i>The Principle of Inclusion</i> <i>Curricular framework</i> <i>Core curriculum</i> <i>Legislation in force</i> <i>With the new curriculum, the student is at the center.</i> <i>Inclusion is the inclusion of children with special needs in regular schools</i> <i>Parents lack information about inclusive education.</i>
Risks and barriers to the inclusion of children with special needs	Risks and barriers	<i>Rural areas face more challenges.</i> <i>The major problem is children who have not been diagnosed.</i> <i>Parents deny their children's disability.</i> <i>Lack of training for parents</i> <i>There are many challenges, school infrastructure.</i> <i>Teaching assistants</i> <i>Teachers' attitudes towards inclusion</i> <i>Inappropriate curricula for inclusion</i> <i>Improper communication</i> <i>Transparency</i> <i>Accountability</i>
Expectations of parents of children with special needs for academic and social achievements	Expectations - Attitudes	<i>Increasing schools' capacity in relation to inclusive education</i> <i>Students should all be included, without distinction based on the difficulties they have.</i> <i>Change is visible in inclusive schools.</i> <i>The child with special needs feels accepted and learns with others.</i> <i>Socialization among children</i> <i>Satisfactory academic achievement</i>
The benefits of inclusion for children with special needs	Expectations and benefits	<i>Socialization of children, the feeling that they are equal to others.</i> <i>They get positive things from other children.</i> <i>More opportunities for students with special need to appear in common environments with their peers.</i> <i>Raising awareness of inclusive practices</i> <i>Building inclusive societies and reaching education for all without distinction</i> <i>Collaboration of all stakeholders in the education system and beyond</i> <i>Inclusion meets all the needs of all students</i>

Inclusion - how do parents understand it?

The attitudes and knowledge of parents of children with special needs about inclusion, the participants involved in the research focused on the rights of children to be included in regular schools, participating in all activities without distinction. Parents claimed that their children should be included

since they have knowledge of inclusiveness and the rights guaranteed by law to all children without distinction. In the study of Paseka and Schwab (2020) parents also affirmed that inclusion should happen and parents are a strong partner of inclusiveness. The interviewed parents stated that:

- *“Their children have the right to be included in the learning process and all*

activities that take place in a regular classroom and they are equal to all other children” – P-6

- *“Inclusion ... means inclusion of children with special needs with other children in a common classroom” – P-3*
- *“Inclusion of children with special needs in activities, physical exercises, courses, etc.” – P-1*
- *“All students must go to school together and stay together in class” – P-7*
- *“It means that all children with special needs should be valued alike so that they don't feel bad” P-4*
- *“Every student must feel that he/she is always equal within the school” – P-9*

“For” or “Against” Attitudes?

In the study of Zondi and Gwala (2023) parents claim that every child deserves to attend any form of education and that in all schools there should be inclusiveness. In this research, parents' attitudes are generally in favor of inclusion of children with special needs in regular schools for many reasons:

- *“...I am for it because here good manners are learned. In special school, he shouted, whistled, rebelled, while in the inclusive classroom he has reduced these behaviors”. – P-2*
- *“... in favor of it for the reason that in the special school he imitated bad behavior; while in the inclusive classroom he acquires good manners from other students and feels equal to others” – P-3*
- *“Develops interactivity with others and positive behaviors” – P-1*
- *“In grades 1 to 5, it was better. Now in lower secondary school (grade 6), I don't think it is good (there are too many teachers) and I think maybe special school is better” – P-5*
- *“When children are included, there is no separation between them” – P-9*
- *“for’ regarding primary school but my concern is how will inclusive education work after the fifth grade” – P-7*
- *“As a parent who has had such an experience, I have full faith in this process” – P-8*
- *... “my child has felt the friendly and supportive environment both from the teachers and from the other children, I am for inclusion” – P-10*

Risks and Barriers

Impairment and special needs, in general, are viewed as a permanent condition, and there is a difficulty in believing in rehabilitation and change (Fuchs, 2021). The process of implementing inclusion is not an easy task. It is accompanied by various difficulties and barriers. All the parents think that there is support from teachers as well as from students in this process:

- *“Based on personal experience, I do not think that inclusion has risks, on the contrary, it has benefits for children for many reasons, firstly socialization, secondly when the child imitates the behavior of other children and receives positive things” – P-6*
- *... “the teacher knows all the children, she/he knows in which activities the child can be involved, in cooperation with the parent's barriers are overcome” – P-8*
- *“I think that the only barrier is that children with special needs in a classroom with others always fall behind or need help” – P-7*
- *“The lack of a teaching assistant is the main risk and barrier” – P-9*
- *“I live in a rural area, we have no information about children with special needs, my child has not been diagnosed yet” – P-10*

Difficulties

The participants included in the research present a series of difficulties related to the work of the teacher. They state that teachers do not have much information about inclusive education and that they do not allocate enough time to deal with children with special needs. The role of the teacher is great and the greater the satisfaction with the teacher, the more positive are the parents' attitudes towards involvement (Simón, Martínez-Rico, Mc William, & Cañadas, 2023).

Lack of support:

- *“Teachers do not devote much time to students with special needs. Difficulty in engaging in activities outside the classroom because the child needs care and the school does not offer such support” – P-1*
- *“Teachers do not have much information about the individual education plan*

(IEP)” – P-3 and P-4

- “There are less difficulties since the presence of the teaching assistant in the classroom” – P-2
- ... “lack of training for parents in order to be able to work with children after school” – P-5
- “If there was a teaching assistant, the work would be much easier” – P-6
- “Inadequate teaching materials” – P-7
- “The teacher is ready to guide me, but during the lesson there are many students in one class, this makes it difficult for the teacher to deal with my child” – P-8
- “We do not have proper communication with teachers” – P-10

Expectations and Benefits

Many of the research presented in the literature review report on expectations and benefits of inclusion. The attitudes of the parents in this research are also similar:

Expectations

- “Development of communication, development of independent skills, development of social skills; participate in class groups, to be treated equally by all” – P- 1
- “At least to be able to read, write, learn numbers, not to be bullied by other students even when he/she misbehaves, to learn good manners” – P-2
- “Acquire basic knowledge (reading - writing), social skills” – P 3
- “To be supported by other students, to be involved in additional activities, to become independent for her own needs” – P-6
- “Increasing schools’ capacity in relation to inclusive education” – P-5
- “My child has created an appropriate social circle, plays and has many friends” – P-7
- “Change is visible in inclusive schools; progress has been made since my child started attending this school 7 years ago” – P-8
- ... “Satisfactory academic achievement” – P-9
- ... “Children do not judge their special needs peers” – P-10

Benefits

- “He has developed a richer vocabulary, he has developed good manners, he respects the rules of the classroom and does not bully others, he has developed life skills, independent orientation, he can distinguish elementary things and there is also progress in the academic aspect” – P-1
- “My child has progressed emotionally and socially, feels equal to others, has a richer vocabulary and has gained some knowledge” – P-3
- “He has learned to take care of himself and has acquired new knowledge, and more importantly, he now takes his own initiative” – P-4
- “There is some progress” – P-2
- ... “the feeling that they are equal” – P-6
- ... “equal opportunities with their peers” – P-8
- “My child learns by interacting with others” – P-7
- “Raising awareness of inclusive practices” – P-9
- “Building inclusive societies and reaching education for all without distinction” – P-5
- “Inclusion meets all the needs of all students” – P-10

Discussion

This paper investigated parents’ attitudes towards inclusive education, it is worth noting that parents accept the inclusion of children with special needs in regular schools. This is similar to other research, parents assume that inclusive education promotes successful learning of students with special needs and brings greater results (Paseka & Schwab, 2020).

In this present study, parents had positive attitudes towards inclusive education claiming that it should happen because it brings numerous benefits in various social, educational and developmental aspects. Positive attitudes towards inclusive education can also be found in the study of Doménech and Moliner (2014) which shows that parents wanted their children to attend regular classes for a social closeness of children. In this study some of the parents preferred special classes (Doménech & Moliner, 2014). The defining characteristic of inclusiveness

is meeting the needs of children, and the challenge is how to do this in a way that does not present negative effects in this process (Aas, 2022). One of the main attitudes of parents in our research is that the school should meet the conditions of children with special needs, there must be teaching assistants for children with special needs; the infrastructural conditions in schools should also be improved in the future for inclusiveness to have positive effects.

The implementation of inclusive education is challenging since it is a complex process and it is necessary to hire teaching assistants and specialized educational personnel; stereotypes for children with special needs and a shortage of funding for infrastructure represent ongoing risks in inclusiveness (Pappas, Papoutsis, & Drigas, 2018). Similar attitudes were also held by the parents in this research.

The answers to the research questions were found in this study. The main concerns of the parents of special needs students were the following: they can be distinguished from other students; teachers can make class distinctions; children can copy others. Researchers Sharma et al. (2022), reported the attitudes of parents stating that special needs children in inclusive classes expressed poor social skills and low engagement in the educational process (Sharma, Woodcock, May, & Subban, 2022).

The difficulties regarding inclusiveness in our country are as follows: teachers do not devote much time to children with special needs due to the large number of children in the classroom, teachers do not have much knowledge about the Individual Education Plan, lack of training for parents, inappropriate teaching materials, inappropriate communication, etc. The results of other studies show the opposite such as: teacher-tailored instruction in the learning process, child-friendly materials, flexible classrooms, variety, and assistive technology for children with special needs (Buli-Holmberg & Jeyaprabhan, 2016). The results of our study show the following benefits of inclusive education: socialization, improved academic skills, cooperation with peers, feeling equal, development of independent skills, etc. These findings are similar to other research that lists the benefits of inclusion in many positive ways for all children (Sharma & Trory, 2019).

Practices have shown that the inclusiveness of children with special needs in regular schools provides motivation for the development of society under equal conditions for all children. Parents of children with special needs always hold the same attitude, similar results were also found in previous researches (Jigyel, Millera, Mavropouloub, & Berman, 2020).

Conclusion

Many factors affect the implementation of inclusive education and different stakeholders participate in this process. Our research has focused on the attitudes of parents of children with special needs towards inclusive education. The results of this research show us that inclusive education is a challenge in itself seeing the attitudes of parents of children with special needs, the benefits, challenges, difficulties, risks, advantages, etc., which schools must face in implementing inclusiveness.

The attitudes of parents of children with special needs for inclusive education are based on the right of each child to education without distinction, laws, equality, the need and desire for inclusiveness, regardless of the challenges and barriers that appear in this process.

Parents do not have proper knowledge about inclusive education, but they see it as a right for their children which no one can deny. Parents are the main partners in the implementation of inclusiveness. Relying on the partnership with parents, the school should be more active in involving parents in school practices, this can influence changes in the attitudes of parents of children with special needs for inclusive education and influence parents to help this process.

The findings of the present research have shown that parents are in favour of inclusiveness, but they think that in this process there are many shortcomings and difficulties starting from the curriculum, legislation in force, diagnosis of children, school infrastructure, teaching assistants, transparency, accountability, socialization, fulfilment of children's needs, etc. this shows that there is a clear need for continuous improvement in inclusive education.

Various studies show that the implementation of inclusive education requires the willingness of all stakeholders to get

involved in this process (Paseka & Schwab, 2020). The involvement of parents is essential for effective practice of inclusive education as well as for educating special needs children. Moreover, being part of the process, parents of children with special needs gain knowledge about good and bad practices for the school, as a result their attitudes towards inclusion will change gradually but not in a short time. The research showed the importance of parents' attitudes in general, but also the importance of their involvement in the process of inclusive education, in particular. This finding is evident in all the researches reviewed (Campos et al., 2020; Kielblock & Woodcock, 2023).

Recommendations

The attitudes of parents about inclusion are as important as the attitudes of other factors (teachers, school principals, leaders, policy makers, etc.). Therefore, this research will serve to raise the awareness of all factors about the benefits of inclusive education. Also, in the national context, no research has been found about the attitudes of parents about inclusive education, therefore this research will serve as the initiation of other research about the involvement of parents in this process and for more; it will be valid as a basis for comparisons in research others in the local and international context.

Limitations and Future Research

The study is based on the attitudes of parents of children with special needs towards inclusive education. It should be emphasized that inclusive education in Kosovo is a new approach and parents do not have much knowledge about inclusiveness. In the future, it is intended to conduct more in-depth studies on this issue by including more parents of children with special needs in a quantitative study, comparing the results and testing the hypotheses. If other research instruments were used, other research results could be obtained. Future studies will aim to contribute to the achievement of the goals set by all Member States of the United Nations in 2015. Considering the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which are a call to action by

all developed and developing countries in a global partnership, (1) good health and well-being, (2) quality education, and (3) reducing inequalities will be the main SDGs on which the study will focus.

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