



Mariana Cabanova

Faculty of Education at UMB
Banská Bystrica, Slovakia

TEACHER TRAINING AND SELECTED CHARACTERISTICS OF TEACHERS IN AN INCLUSIVE CLASS¹

Abstract: The trend of inclusive education and the education of pupils with special educational needs puts increased demands also on the teacher training. The researches have so far proved that appropriate acting and responses of teachers require far more than just plain knowledge. Some authors highlight the teachers' attitudes as a crucial component for a successful integration of pupils with special educational needs into the classes. In her theoretical study, the author focuses on a research aimed at the attitudes of teacher trainees towards inclusive education. She emphasizes the importance of developing pro-inclusive attitudes among teachers-to-be before they actually enter the profession.

Key Words: teacher, attitudes, inclusive education

PRZYGOTOWANIE ZAWODOWE I WYBRANE CECHY NAUCZYCIELA KLASY INTEGRACYJNEJ

Streszczenie: Specyfika edukacji włączającej i kształcenia uczniów ze specyficznymi potrzebami edukacyjnymi (dydaktyczno-wychowawczymi) stawia szczególne wymagania i na przygotowanie zawodowe nauczyciela. Wyniki przeprowadzonych badań ujawniają, że dla właściwych działań i reakcji nauczyciela ważna jest nie tylko wiedza. Niektórzy autorzy podkreślają postawy nauczycieli jako kluczowy element zapewniający skuteczne włączanie do zajęć szkolnych uczniów ze specyficznymi potrzebami edukacyjnymi. W studium teoretycznym autorka zwraca uwagę na badania mające na celu zdiagnozowanie postaw wobec edukacji włączającej studentów studiów nauczycielskich. Podkreśla znaczenie rozwijania proinkluzywnych postaw między studentami przed ich przystąpieniem do zawodu nauczyciela.

Słowa klucze: nauczyciel, postawy, edukacja włączająca

¹ This paper is the result of a research project within the VEGA project No. 1/0732/19 titled Teachers' Attitudes to Diversity in Relation to the Selected Characteristics of Teachers

Introduction

Contemporary school systems in democratic nations are slowly steering away from the selective categorization of pupils, sanctioning their failures, and from strictly dictating the scope of their knowledge, skills and the time these should be acquired by the pupils. It is a shift away from the receptive, verbal and memory-based orientation that reduces the possibilities of individualization and direction towards the development of pupils through individualization and differentiation.² Therefore, we think it is important not to focus solely on the knowledge area during teacher training. Teacher training should also focus on encouraging the positive attitudes towards the learners, which are reflected within classroom management, as well as in day-to-day communication. Universities should also apply this trend into their training processes. Bulk frontal instruction during lectures should slowly recede. Young people's attitudes are much easier to form in smaller groups³ through regular discussions and problem solving within case studies from the area of inclusive education,⁴ as well as through experience gained at inclusive classes visited during their professional training.

1. Theoretical Background And an Overview Of Completed Studies

As the basis for the work of all teachers in inclusive education, four core values related to teaching and learning have been identified. One of them is to respect the value of pupil diversity, where differences are seen as a resource and asset to education.⁵ Several authors emphasize teachers' attitudes as a crucial component in ensuring successful integration of pupils with special educational needs into mainstream schools. Teachers' attitudes can have a significant impact on the way of teaching and communicating with pupils.⁶ The impact of education and pre-graduate training in special education and inclusive education has been proved in several studies.⁷ One such study is the research conducted on a sample of 122 primary education teachers (1st-6th grade)⁸ and this research has shown that teachers who have received special education courses during their training have more positive attitudes towards implementing an inclusive approach into their teaching. However, most of these respondents claimed that undergraduate education did not equip them with the skills necessary to face the challenges and obstacles of teaching pupils with specific learning disabili-

² J. Duchovičová et al, *Diverzita v edukácii*, UKF, Nitra, 2012.

³ J. Mintz, J., *Attitudes of primary initial teacher training students to special educational needs and inclusion*, Support for Learning, 2007, vol 22, no 1, pp. 3 - 8.

⁴ E. Boling, *Yeah, but I still don't want to deal with it'. Changes in a Teacher Candidate's Conceptions of Inclusion*, Teaching Education, 2007, vol 18, no 3, pp.217- 231.

⁵ Vzdelávanie učiteľov k inklúzii, 2012

⁶ M. N. Wagithunu, *Teachers' Attitudes as a Factor in the Realization Inclusive Education Practice in Primary Schools in Nyeri Central District*, Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences, 2014, vol 5, no 5, pp. 117 – 134.

⁷ E. E. A. Hassanein, *Inclusion, disability and culture*, Rotterdam 2015.

⁸ P. Subban, U. Sharma, *Primary School Teachers' Perceptions of Inclusive Education in Victoria, Australia*, The International Journal of Special Education, 2006, vol 21, no 1, pp. 42-52.

ties.⁹ Research by Ellins and Porter¹⁰ has proven the positive impact of special education training for secondary education teachers when building their pro-inclusive attitudes. Shaddock, Giorcelli, Smith¹¹ claim, that primary teachers (at primary schools) have a more positive attitude towards teaching learners with learning disabilities compared to their colleagues in secondary education (at secondary schools). They observed that this may also be due to the fact that the integration / inclusion of these pupils is mostly applied at primary schools than at secondary schools. Primary teachers also express more positive attitudes towards differentiating the content of education than their colleagues at secondary schools. Campbell et al¹² conducted a research on a sample of 274 student teachers, finding that training in the area of special education bears positive impact on building pro-inclusive attitudes. Lambe¹³ found that successful teaching practice in a (linguistically) non-selective environment had the most positive impact on general attitudes towards inclusion. Trainee teachers thus have a greater opportunity to work with pupils with different socio-cultural background, including those who may have different special educational needs, and their attitudes have been influenced by the fact that they could see and experience the inclusive teaching practice firsthand. The above researches clearly prove that if future teachers enter the profession with a positive attitude towards teaching in inclusive classes, it is likely this will result in applying successful inclusive practices and following these practices throughout their professional career.¹⁴

Research Objectives And Methodology

The project focuses mainly on respecting the value of diversity. We consider it important not only to educate teachers to work with pupils in an inclusive environment, but also to adopt positive attitudes towards the education of children and pupils with special educational needs in mainstream schools.¹⁵ Lambe & Bones¹⁶ stated that the undergraduate stage

⁹ P. Subban, U. Sharma, *Primary School Teachers' Perceptions of Inclusive Education in Victoria*, ...

¹⁰ J. Ellins, J. Porter, *Departmental Differences in Attitudes to Special Educational Needs in the Secondary School*, British Journal of Special Education, 2005, vol 32 no 4, pp. 188-195. Available at <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1467-8578.2005.00396.x/epdf>

¹¹ A. Shaddock, L. Giorcelli, S. Smith, *Students with disabilities in mainstream classrooms: a resource for teachers*. Commonwealth of Australia, 2007 podľa S. Woodcock, *Trainee Teachers' Attitudes Towards Students With Specific Learning Disabilities*, Australian Journal of Teacher Education, 2013, vol 38, no 8, pp. 16 -29.

¹² J. Campbell, L. Gilmore, M. Cuskelly, *Changing student teachers' attitudes towards disability and inclusion*, Journal of Intellectual and Developmental Disability, 2003, vol 28, no 4, pp. 369-379.

¹³ J. Lambe, *Student teachers, special educational needs and inclusion education: reviewing the potential for problem-based, e-learning pedagogy to support practice*, Journal of Education for Teaching, 2007, vol 33 no 3, pp. 359-377.

¹⁴ P. Haugh, *Qualifying teachers for the school for all*, [w:] T. Booth., K. Nes., M. Stromstad (red), *Developing inclusive education*, Routledge. London, pp. 97-115.

¹⁵ J. Komora, *Poňatie diverzity v školskom prostredí a aspekty pedagogickej diagnostiky v kontexte žiackej diverzity*. In Duchovičová, (red) *Diverzita v školskej populácii ako objekt pedagogickej vedy*. UKF, Nitra, 2013, pp. 20-92.

of teacher training could be the most effective period to foster positive attitudes and build self-confidence by providing high-quality education. Carroll et al.¹⁷ claim that participation in compulsory subjects dealing with inclusive education has a positive impact on shaping pro-inclusive attitudes. As part of conducting a quantitative research, we plan to use foreign research tools customized for our cultural conditions. In the initial phase, we verify the selected research tools imported from abroad corresponding with our research aim. Within the empirical part we will look for connections between teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education and their undergraduate training. Based on the analysis and statistical processing of the acquired data we will be able to present the attitudes of trainee teachers throughout the different stages of their studies, towards the education of children with special educational needs in the mainstream schools.

Expected Valuable Input Of The Conducted Research

We expect the research to play a valuable role mainly during the undergraduate training of teachers. Based on the data obtained, we will be able to identify the variables that influence the positive attitude of student teachers towards the education of persons with special needs in mainstream schools, and to modify the curricula for further accreditation. We can identify the variables affecting the pro-inclusive attitudes of future teachers and formulate recommendations for the development of curriculum and for teacher training.

Conclusion

Based on the available resources and the resources mentioned herein, we believe that education and training of future teachers should definitely include the subjects of special pedagogy, as well as the subjects focused on inclusive education. However, during their training and further professional career teachers must also become closely familiar with legal basis for the education of learners with special educational needs. We believe that participating in special education courses, as well as courses focused on legislative basis for inclusive education will also be reflected within our research. It is this theoretical knowledge that forms the basis for applying adequate didactic competences and for differentiation of the teaching process in relation to the target of learners. We should be inspired by the researches carried out abroad and the findings of the planned research and set up the processes in teacher training to develop not only the knowledge about learners with special educational needs and the methods of differentiating the teaching tasks, but also to encourage positive attitudes towards learners, that influence the classroom management, as well as day-to-day communication between teachers and pupils.

¹⁶ J. Lambe, J., R. Bones, *Student teachers' perceptions about inclusive classroom teaching in Northern Ireland prior to teaching practice experience*, European Journal of Special Needs Education, 2006, vol 22, no 2, pp.167–186.

¹⁷ A. Carroll, C. Forlin, A. Jobling, *The impact of teacher training in special education on the attitudes of Australian pre-service general educators towards people with disabilities*, Teacher Education Quarterly, 2003, vol 30, no 3, pp. 65-79.

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Dane kontaktowe

mariana.cabanova@umb.sk