



"HENRI COANDA"
AIR FORCE ACADEMY
ROMANIA



"GENERAL M.R. STEFANIK"
ARMED FORCES ACADEMY
SLOVAK REPUBLIC

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE of SCIENTIFIC PAPER
AFASES 2012
Brasov, 24-26 May 2012

ATTITUDES TOWARDS INCLUSIVE EDUCATION – A QUALITATIVE META-ANALYSIS OF RECENT STUDIES

Ecaterina Maria UNIANU*

*Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, Transilvania University of Brasov, Romania

Abstract: *Inclusive education represents an issue focused on different problems such as conceptual delimitations, attitudes towards children with special needs or children from different social and economical areas. It is very important that we understand the need for inclusive education in a society based on human and, especially, children rights, on values such as equality, responsibility and implication. At the international level, the attitudes towards inclusive education represents an issue that has been developed in so many studies concerning attitudes towards children with special needs, children with Down syndrome, children with epilepsy and so on. The teachers' attitude towards inclusive education in its all aspects also represents a very important issue because the social and economical context (national and international) is not a favourable one for this type of education. The studies analyzed in this qualitative meta-analysis present some interesting points of view concerning teachers' attitudes towards this domain. This little research tried to show that many countries have encouraged the idea of inclusive education but, at practical level, the implementation of inclusive policies is a very slow process and takes time and lots of effort in order to apply the principles of inclusive education. It is a very hard work but it can be done starting from changing teachers' attitudes towards those principles.*

Keywords: *inclusive education, teaching, attitude, meta-analysis*

1. INTRODUCTION

Since the end of the 20th century priority has been given to building an educational context, in which all children could learn, all children or adolescents could be integrated in the mainstream educational system, all children have potential that should be valorised – an inclusive educational context. This is the aim of the majority of educational systems, international or European, in order to respect and valorise the possibilities of every child no matter what is his ethnic group, his religion, his family background, his level of development and so on. The concept of inclusive education has been and still is a controversial one because of the lack of

correct comprehension of the term. For a great period of time, *inclusion* was a concept related with the *special educational needs* one. This relationship was developed in the individual gaze paradigm (Fulcher, 1989), which stipulated that it is important to know those characteristics of the child with disabilities which are an obstacle to children' adaptation to the mainstream education. Therefore it is necessary to develop a special education system in order to elaborate a special curriculum for those children and to remediate their deficiencies.

The interactive or organizational paradigm has in the centre of its preoccupation the need to recognise the differences between children but it is also underlying the incapacity of

educational system to adapt itself to those differences. Therefore, it is necessary to build an educational context which can satisfy the individual needs of the children and to raise their learning performances. Nowadays educational inclusion is seen as an appropriate context for all children development no matter their family background or level of development.

European educational systems see this concept more related with educational integration but there are major differences between these two. Integration represents the challenge to adapt children with special educational needs to the standards of mainstream education an inclusion represents the challenge to adapt the educational standards and context to the children's needs and characteristics.

The teachers' attitude towards inclusive education in its all aspects also represents a very important issue because the social and economical context (national and international) is not a favourable one for this type of education.

This analysis is meant to identify the main and relevant studies which approached the teachers' attitude towards inclusive education and to determine the main factors which can contribute in a valuable way to the appropriate implementation of its principles.

It is also meant to investigate the following research questions:

* How is defined inclusive education in different educational systems?

* Which are the factors which have an important role in the development of inclusive systems?

* Why it is necessary and worthwhile to implement the principles of inclusive education?

* How it can be develop a teacher's positive attitude towards inclusion in order to improve learning performances of the children?

These questions and their answers could have an important impact on how the Romanian educational system is seen now and on how it could be build in order to apply the principles of inclusive education.

2. METHODS

2.1 Literature search. The literature search was started with the analysis of nine online data bases (Science Direct; ProQuest; SpringerLink; Oxford Journals; Cambridge Journals; Wiley Online Library; Ebsco; Thomson Reuters. Web of Knowledge; Ulrichsweb. Global Serials Directory). The first step was a simple search of the terms (*inclusive education* and *attitudes towards inclusive education*) in order to identify the number of publication which approached them. The results are presented in table 1.

Table 1. The results of the search of the concepts in online data bases

Online data bases	Inclusive education (no. of results)	Attitudes towards inclusive education (no. of results)
Science Direct	24439	4665
ProQuest	161149	18669
SpringerLink	17865	4933
Oxford Journals	197619	415597
Cambridge Journals	35312	18998
Wiley Online Library	36500	10321
Ebsco	3671	30
Thomson Reuters	1991	54
Ulrichsweb	9071	9167

The search was restricted to studies published in English, regarding teachers' attitude towards inclusive practices, programmes or principles. Studies were conducted at primary, secondary and high school level. Finally, the search was restricted to the publication years 1994 to 2012.

2.2 Eligibility criteria. A number of 27 studies have been included in this research, all regarding teachers' attitude towards inclusive education. These studies were made by specialists from all over the world with the help of different research methods and instruments such as: case study, statistical



"HENRI COANDA"
AIR FORCE ACADEMY
ROMANIA



"GENERAL M.R. STEFANIK"
ARMED FORCES ACADEMY
SLOVAK REPUBLIC

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE of SCIENTIFIC PAPER
AFASES 2012
Brasov, 24-26 May 2012

analysis, experiments, and questionnaire. The selection of the studies was based on the following eligibility criteria:

Purpose of the study: the keywords regarding the objectives of the studies used for the first step of the selection were: evaluation of teachers' attitude towards inclusive education, instruments used to this evaluation, identification of the implications of teachers' attitude towards inclusive education on teaching strategies, assessment of knowledge and practice of teachers regarding inclusion.

Research design: the selected studies were both quantitative research (experimental, correlational or descriptive) and qualitative research.

Teachers' training: the studies presented different aspects of teachers' initial or continuous training.

Participants' characteristics: in order to identify the most relevant studies for good practice examples, regarding the development of positive attitudes towards inclusive education, this analysis was focused on those which involved students who were preparing to become teachers and/or teachers with more or less experience in the educational system.

Educational context: due to the vast area of inclusive education concept, this research was focused on the studies that were implemented in specific educational context (situations when teachers work with children with SEN or different ethnical background).

3. RESULTS

The majority of the studies from this selection were based on the idea that teachers should have a positive attitude towards inclusive education but unfortunately they didn't. There are several educational conditions which can influence this attitude

both in a positive way and in a negative way. The subject is still a controversial and a challenging one because of the various implications on different levels: individual (teacher or/and child, parents), organisational (the necessary resources for the implementation of inclusive education principles), community (the relationship between school and community regarding an appropriate development of an inclusive educational system) and social (further social inclusion based on educational inclusion).

As shown in the table no.1, a simple search of these terms could mean thousand of results. This underlies the importance of this subject not only in the field of research but also in the educational practices area.

How is defined inclusive education in different educational systems? The research revealed that there is much confusion regarding the meaning and significance of this concept. Kalya, Gojkovic and Tsakiris think that inclusion is „*the organised placement of children with disabilities in mainstream classrooms*” [15]. There were also a number of 12 studies in which the definition of inclusion was likely the same and it was reflecting the confusion between inclusion and integration. Panerai, Zingale, Trubia, Finocchiaro, Zuccarello, Ferri and Elia defined inclusive education as a context in which „*all students in a school, regardless of their strengths or weaknesses in any area, became a part of the school community*” [19]. There were another 13 studies with likely the same definition of this concept but with variations from *equal opportunities for all to educational setting*.

Which are the factors which have an important role in the development of inclusive systems? Regarding teachers' preparedness for inclusive classrooms the studies revealed that there are many difficulties in applying the

principles of inclusive education as follows: lack of teachers' training (24 studies), learners with special educational needs need more attention but not enough time is available (12 studies), the lack of appropriate resources (16 studies), insufficient time for preparing the activities in order to valorise the characteristics and potential of every child (17 studies), the number of children in a class (15 studies), the experience with children with special educational needs (5 studies), parents attitudes towards school and their own children (2 studies), teachers' attitudes towards inclusive practices and their own work (27 studies) and the lack of support from the specialists in special educational needs field (15 studies).

Why it is necessary and worthwhile to implement the principles of inclusive education? The benefits of an inclusive policy and practice could be organized on the following levels: teachers' beliefs about their work and abilities to teach all children, the increase of children' learning performances, organisational changes in schools.

How it can be develop a teacher's positive attitude towards inclusion in order to improve learning performances of the children? Around the world there are many educational or research programmes aimed to develop a positive attitude towards inclusive education.

4. DISCUSSION

How is defined inclusive education in different educational systems? The selected studies revealed a demand of all educational systems which are preparing teachers for tomorrow: the initial or continuous training should make a bigger investment in knowledge of the right meanings of inclusion and integration. The teachers should know the differences between these two concepts and also they should know how to apply the principles of inclusive education in order to increase children' performances. All university study programmes should have a domain dedicated to this concept and practice in order to contribute in a valuable way to the development of an educational system which can be inclusive.

Which are the factors which have an important role in the development of inclusive systems? This research has identified a number of factors which can contribute to the development of the teacher's attitude towards inclusive education. These factors are not acting in a separate way, they are connected and each of them has its main role in facilitating the inclusive practices. We talked about the importance of knowing the right meaning of inclusion but it is also important to know how to apply the principles, how to make inclusion in school or in the classroom. The inclusive practice depends on how well is the teacher prepared to do this, on which resources are available, on how much time it is invested by the teacher in the preparation of the educational activities, on their experience with children with special educational needs and so on. This all means that inclusive practices will be efficient when all these conditions will be met. There is a need for changing in education practice but it has to be a revolutionary one in order to apply all the principles of inclusive education (individualized curriculum, the valorisation of the characteristics and potential of every child, equal opportunities for learning).

Why it is necessary and worthwhile to implement the principles of inclusive education? Regarding teachers' beliefs about their work and abilities to teach all children, there are studies focused on how one could reduce the expectations that can negatively affect the children' learning performances, how could be developed an attitude of acceptance of difference, how teachers could become more tolerant. There are also studies focused on teachers' ability to critically analyse their educational practice in order to detect and eliminate or reduce those factors which can act as barriers to inclusive education. One of the main conclusions of these studies is that the confidence of teachers in their teaching efficacy is very important in development of a positive attitude towards inclusive education.

An increase of children' learning performance is not an easy task but the first step in this process is represented by the acceptance of difference. There were studies



"HENRI COANDA"
AIR FORCE ACADEMY
ROMANIA



"GENERAL M.R. STEFANIK"
ARMED FORCES ACADEMY
SLOVAK REPUBLIC

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE of SCIENTIFIC PAPER
AFASES 2012
Brasov, 24-26 May 2012

which demonstrated that teachers who worked in the spirit of inclusion felt that they could make a difference. Finally, the implications of inclusive education are seen to an organisational level: school culture, values and beliefs which have a major impact on teachers' values, beliefs, expectations, and relationships with the children and their parents. There is a need to have an organisational change in schools, a change that could enhance children's performances and their social inclusion.

How it can be develop a teacher's positive attitude towards inclusion in order to improve learning performances of the children? The studies revealed two main contexts in which teachers could develop a positive attitude towards inclusion in order to improve learning performances of the children. Firstly, even is not educationally prepared to make inclusion, the teacher is facing this need due to the diversity of the children. Secondly, the teacher could participate to educational programs of initial or continuous training in order to know what inclusion is, to know how to make inclusion and how to promote further the principles of inclusive education. There are universities which have study programs at bachelor level which promote those principles and teach the students to apply them. There are also programs of continuous training designated to the teachers who could chose to participate in order to understand and know good practice examples in inclusive education. The programs are aimed to develop those competences which are necessary to implement the principles of inclusive education: knowledge, abilities and attitudes towards this educational domain.

5. IMPLICATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

This research was aimed to identify the main and relevant studies which approached the teachers' attitude towards inclusive education. The conclusions of the analysed studies are underling the importance of several factors which could contribute to the development of positive attitudes towards inclusive education such as: knowing the right meaning of the concept, initial or continuous training in order to increase the confidence in their own competences, resources, time and tolerance to diversity.

In order to valorise the conclusions of this research it is important to recognise its limitations. Firstly, due to the large period of publication time it would be necessary to increase the number of studies included in this research. Secondly, the selected studies didn't use the same instruments of research and they didn't have the same training program in order to develop a positive attitude. Thirdly, the generalisation is not possible due to the fact that there are many factors to be considered: the age of the teachers, their experience in this field, their motivation or work satisfaction and so on.

REFERENCES USED TO THE META-ANALYSIS (SELECTION)

1. Ainscow, M., Booth, T., Dyson, A. *Understanding and developing inclusive practices in schools*. Available: <http://www.bipsolutions.com/docstore/pdf/8215.pdf> (November 2010).
2. Angelides, P., Stylainou, T., Gibbs, P. *Preparing teachers for inclusive education in Cyprus*. in *Teaching and Teacher Education* 23, p. 513-522 (2006).

3. Avramidis, E., Bayliss, P., Burden, R. A *survey into mainstream teachers' attitudes towards the inclusion of children with special educational needs in the ordinary school in one local education authority.* in *Educational Psychology*, vol. 20, no. 2, p. 191-212 (2000).
4. Bishop, M., Slevin, B. *Teachers' attitudes toward students with epilepsy: results of a survey of elementary and middle school teachers.* in *Epilepsy and Behavior* 5, p. 308-315 (2004).
5. Campbell, J., Gilmore, L. *Changing student teachers' attitudes towards disability and inclusion.* in *Journal of Intellectual & Developmental Disability*, vol. 28, no. 4, p. 369-379 (2003).
6. Chhabra, S., Srivastava, R., Srivastava, I. *Inclusive education in Botswana: the perception of school teachers.* in *Journal of Disability Policy Studies*, 20 (4), p. 219-228 (2010).
7. Cochran, H.K. *Differences in teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education as measured by Scale of Teachers' Attitudes Towards Inclusive classrooms (STATIC).* Available: <http://www.eric.ed.gov/PDFS/ED426548.pdf> (September, 2010).
8. Forlin, C., Tait, K., Carroll, A., Jobling, A. *Teacher education for diversity.* Available: <http://www.iier.org.au/qjer/qjer15/forlin.html> (November 2010).
9. Ghanizadeh, A., Bahredar, M.J., Moeini, S.R. *Knowledge and attitudes towards attention deficit hyperactivity disorder among elementary school teachers.* in *Patient Education and Counselling*, 63, p. 84-88 (2006).
10. Ghergut, A. *analysis of inclusive education in Romania. Results from a survey conducted among teachers.* in *Procedia Social and Behavioral Sciences* 5, p. 711-715 (2010).
11. Hay, J.F., Smit, J., Paulsen, M. *Teacher preparedness for inclusive education.* in *South African Journal of Education*, 21 (4) (2001).
12. Kalya, E., Gojkovic, D., Tsakiris, V. *Serbian teachers' attitudes towards inclusion.* in *International Journal of Special Education* vol. 22, no. 3, p. 30-35 (2007).
13. Lee, H. *Collaboration: a must for teachers in inclusive educational settings.* Available: <http://successde.org/pdfs/088collaborationmustforteachers.pdf> (September 2010).
14. Lee, S.A., Yim, S.B., Rho, Y.I., Chu, M., Park, G., Park, S.P., Jung, D.S. *Factors contributing to Korean teachers' attitudes toward students with epilepsy.* in *Epilepsy and Behavior* 20, p. 378-381 (2011).
15. Loiacono, V., Valenti, V. *General education teachers need to be prepared to co-teach the increasing number of children with autism in inclusive settings.* in *International Journal of Special Education*, vol. 25, no. 3, p. 24-32 (2010).
16. Panerai, S., Zingale, M., Trubia, G., Finocchiaro, M., Zuccarello, R., Ferri, R., Elia, M. *Special education versus inclusive education: the role of the TEACCH program.* in *J Autism Dev Disord*, 39, p. 874-882 (2009).
17. Pijl, Y.J., Pijl, S.J., Van des Bos, P. *Teachers' motives for referring students to special education.* in *Keith Ballard Inclusive education: international voices on disability and justice*, London, Falmer Press, p. 10-27
18. Shehata, G.A., Mahran, D.G. *Knowledge, attitude and practice with respect to epilepsy among school teachers in Assiut city, Egypt.* in *Epilepsy Research*, 92, p. 191-200 (2010).
19. Symeonidou, S., Phtiaka, H. *Using teachers' prior knowledge, attitudes and beliefs to develop in-service teacher education courses for inclusion.* in *Teaching and Teacher Education* 2, p. 543-550 (2009).
20. Vrasmas, E., Vrasmas, T. *Inclusive education in Romania (1995-2007).* Available: http://www.ibe.unesco.org/file_admin/user_upload/Inclusive_Education/Reports/sinaia_07/romania_inclusion_07.pdf (December 2010).