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Families Beliefs About Inclusive Education Model

Ana Doménech ^{a*}, Odet Moliner ^b^aUniversitat Jaume I, Av. de Vicent Sos Baynat, s/n, Castellón de la Plana 12071, Spain^bUniversitat Jaume I, Av. de Vicent Sos Baynat, s/n, Castellón de la Plana 12071, Spain

Abstract

In this paper, we present the results of a study conducted in the province of Castellón (Spain). It arises from the idea that for moving towards an inclusive education models is necessary, first of all, that educators and families understand the meaning of inclusion and, secondly, to know the benefits generated by inclusive education. We analyze the conceptions and beliefs that families of our context have over inclusive education model. This is a quantitative cross sectional study in which over-scale questionnaire, 33 parents expressed their views over this topic. It also aims to see whether there are differences in beliefs of families who have children with disabilities and families without it. After obtaining the results, they are analyzed and discussed at the end of work.

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1. Introduction: Inclusive education and the importance of enquire in families' beliefs

Inclusive education means a radical change in the way we think about education, but not just in relation to students with any difficulties or special educational need, but it's for everyone. This educational model is, undoubtedly, one of the foundations for a democratic society and one of the values that, with multiculturalism, contributes to the creation of a new school and a better society which promote fair, equitable and humane politics (Moliner, 2008). The way to an inclusive school is complex, and the changes and transformations involved multiple settings and actors: parents, teachers, students and members of community.

So, we cannot ignore the role of families in this process, because as Carrillo (2008) said, the family is the first area of intervention in dealing with diversity. Therefore support them is one of the first tasks of an inclusive school. From this educational model, it attached great value to families, to the information they possess, their participation and involvement in education, and their opinions and beliefs over this education model. In fact, the beliefs of families become very important in the process of educational change. Attitudes are built on these beliefs, also subjective norms, intentions and a inclusive or exclusive conduct. (Domenech & Moliner, 2011a).

If we take in account what literature says, we observe that in the studies of the opinions and beliefs of families, it's possible to distinguish two types of studies depending on the focus: families of children with disabilities and families of children without disabilities (the first one is the most common).

*Corresponding Author: Ana Doménech Vidal. Tel.: +34-964-729-714

E-mail address: adomenec@uji.es

1.1 *Studies on the beliefs of families of children without disabilities.*

Families of children without learning difficulties or disabilities don't agree when their sons and daughters share classes with students with special educational needs, as they believe, these needs could affect the other children's learning (Cardona, 2006). However, when parents know the real meaning of inclusive education, they have information about it and they are sensitized to this issue, his opinion changed, becoming advocates for inclusion (Miller et al, 1992; Phillips, Sapona & Lubic , 1995; Kalyva, Georgiadi & Tsakiris, 2010) and even when parents have had any inclusive experience, they confirm that inclusion has improved their children's live and has had a positive effect on their personal and social development (Logan et al, 1995).

1.2 *Studies on the beliefs of the families of children with disabilities.*

Likewise, parents of students with disabilities take two positions on this issue. On one hand, and in a less numerous, there are families who do not support the inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream schools (Green & Shinn, 1994). On the other hand, most of the studies and researches show that families of children with SEN or disability support and are pleased with the inclusive education model for many reasons (Jensen, 1970, Miller et al, 1992; Bennett, DeLuca & Bruns, 1997; Lowenbraun, Madge & Affleck, 1990; Seery, et al. 2000, Simpson & Myles, 1989; Turnbull et al, 2002; Leyser & Kirck, 2004; Lutfi, 2009). In fact, the work of Leyser & Kirck (2004) concluded that parents recognize social and emotional outcomes as one of the main benefits of inclusive education. They indicate the greater acceptance and sensitivity to individual differences of the schoolmates as positive effects of inclusion.

2. **Descriptive study**

This paper presents a study that aims to investigate the conception that families of our context have (Castellón, Spain) over the inclusive model. We want to find out what kind of beliefs and preconceptions they have about the inclusion in mainstream classrooms and their opinion on the current educational response. In this sense, this research innovates in the approach of the problem. It doesn't try to make visible the views and opinions of families who have children with some kind of need or disabilities. This study aims to show also the perceptions of families in general (without children disabled) to extract the general vision of families from our context and since then to generate and develop new proposals to advance to a quality and just education for all.

The primary objectives of this study are:

- a) To investigate families' beliefs about the effects of inclusive education model and their satisfaction with the educational response to diversity.
- b) To check if these beliefs vary according to the independent variable: to have children with disabilities.

This is a descriptive study which is especially focused on the dimension "Beliefs families" of a Likert questionnaire (5-point) called Scale-questionnaire for Families on Inclusive Education (Cuestionario-escala para Familias sobre Educación Inclusiva -CEFEI) created by Domenech & Moliner (2011b). For the implementation of this questionnaire, there has been a non-probability and incidental sampling, taking as a members of the sample individuals who were available. The objective of this work is not to seek the representativeness of the sample or the generalizability of the results. In this research we count on teachers and management teams' collaboration who facilitated the delivery of the questionnaire to the voluntary families. Thus, the sample participating in this study (n = 33) is composed of parents of school-age children, and it's possible to distinguish two subgroups: parents who have children with disabilities and parents without it.

Below we can see the questionnaire items relating to the dimension "Beliefs of families" and the results which have been analyzed in this paper.

Table 1. Scale-questionnaire for Families on Inclusive Education (CEFEI: Cuestionario-escala para familias sobre educación inclusiva)

Regarding to inclusive education, I think that...					
... students with disabilities are discriminated by their peers.	1	2	3	4	5
... students with disabilities causes low level in other classmates.	1	2	3	4	5
... the students more benefit are those from special education.	1	2	3	4	5
...students without disabilities are benefit.	1	2	3	4	5
... special education classroom in a mainstream school is a segregator response.	1	2	3	4	5
... schools have resource to include all students.	1	2	3	4	5
... students with disabilities in mainstream schools don't have the attention they need.	1	2	3	4	5
... students with disabilities feel valued by their classmates.	1	2	3	4	5
... students with disabilities learn much more in regular classrooms than in special schools.	1	2	3	4	5
... benefits students with disabilities more on social themes than on academic ones.	1	2	3	4	5
... provides academic benefits to all types of students.	1	2	3	4	5
... to join together students with and without disabilities in the same classroom creates conflicts between them.	1	2	3	4	5

3. Study results:

To analyze the results of this study, it is necessary to consider first of all, how the dimension "Beliefs of families structured. Although the items of the dimension appear in the questionnaire without any distinction between them, these can be grouped into two broad categories:

- Effects (positive and negative) of the inclusive education model: items 1 to 4 and 8 to 12.
- Current response educational to the diversity: items 5 through 7.

To obtain rigorous results, this internal structure cannot be overlooked. In that case we would be analyzing different categories (beliefs about the effects of inclusive education model and satisfaction with the educational response to diversity) as a one. To analyze the results obtained about the families beliefs we keep those mentioned categories to examine the differences between the two groups of the sample.

Positive effects of inclusive education

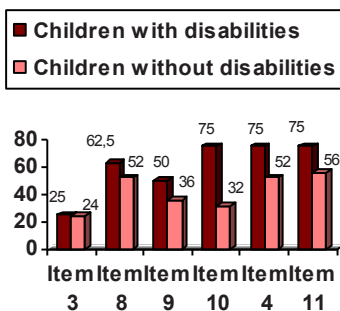


Figure 1. Beliefs about the positive effects of inclusive education in terms of the variable "to have children / as disabled." Percentage of agreement.

Negative effects of inclusive education

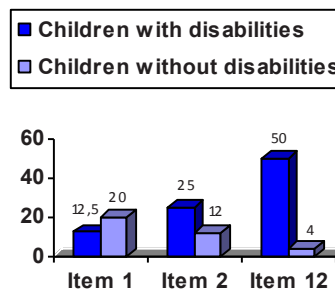


Figure 2. Beliefs about the negative effects of inclusive education in terms of the variable "to have children / as disabled." Percentage of agreement.

In relation to the families' beliefs over the effects of inclusive education model we can see at Figure 1, that parents of children disabled are generally more agree with the positive effects of inclusive education . It is noted that although both groups of parents draw the same response profile or trend support or defend these further beliefs about the positive effects of inclusion. Among these items, it stands out the percentages of both groups with respect to item 10. As can be seen, while parents of children with disabilities are strongly agreed with the belief *that inclusive*

education for students with disabilities benefit more in the social than in academics (75% agree), the family who do not have children with disabilities do not think in that way, being this only an affirmation in the 32% of the cases.

Regarding the negative effects of the inclusion (Figure 2) it's observed that the trends of families are very similar in both cases, percentages are very close (less than 12%) except for one item. This is item number 12, and it refers to the belief that to join students with and without disabilities in the same classroom creates conflicts between them. Surprisingly, the results indicate that this belief is more supported by parents who have children with disabilities (50%) than by without children with these characteristics (4%). This may be due to the fear generated by the thought that their children be in a unequal situation because of their needs, and probably they think that in special education classrooms they could be more "protected".

Educational responses to diversity

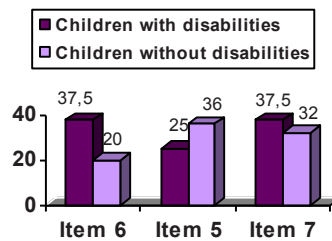


Figure 3. Percentage of families satisfaction about educational responses to diversity

Regarding satisfaction with the educational response to diversity, as seen in Figure 3, the percentages of satisfaction doesn't differ too much between the two sample groups. The degree of agreement is between 20 and 38%, slightly more prominent in item 6 (I think that schools have the resources to include all students) than the rest.

After exploring the results shown in the previous figures (1, 2 and 3) has been carried out to test whether these differences are statistically significant or not, depending on the variable "to have children with or without disabilities". To do this, we used a non-parametric test (Mann Whitney U) and the result indicates that these differences are not statistically significant.

4. Discussion of results:

From these beliefs, families detected a number of positive and negative effects of inclusion model. As a negative effect, they indicates the conflicts and aggression that it could arise among student with disabilities. This is one of the major concerns for parents, especially parents of students with disabilities, and also the lack of knowledge about disability, their characteristics, ... because it can lead to misunderstandings and confusions which become a conflict. This type of negative beliefs were also found in a research made by Leyser & Kirk (2004) who found that families of students with disabilities were concerned about a possible physical and verbal abuse of their children. They assume that disability doesn't imply conflict itself. We estimate that this feeling of vulnerability of the students could create fears and insecurities on families about the real benefits of inclusive education that result in the consideration of special education as the safe answer. In fact, Elkins et. al (2003), studying the attitudes of families on inclusive education, found that some families of children with disabilities preferred special education to regular classrooms, despite that inclusion model is better for the students' social and emotional development.

Moreover, families emphasize that inclusive education has great educational benefits. The students' academic performance is usually the first item to be considered for these families as assessment of inclusion value. In fact, in other studies, the vast majority of families says that it does not cause any drop in level in the other students

(Giangreco, Edelman, Cloninger and Dennis, 1993) and it favors them and enriches all students, generating great benefits to social and personal development (Logan et al, 1995). Also, this was reflected in the work of Leyser and Kirk (2004), who found that the parents recognized as one of the great benefits of inclusive education the social and affective outcomes on their.

In fact, families of our study detected that an inclusive classroom facilitates the emergence of certain human values such as tolerance and respect to the difference and this enables solidarity attitudes among peers. These same evaluations have been identified by authors as Frederickson, Dunsmuir, Lang & Monsen (2004) and Duhaney & Salend (2000). As we see, this is one of the major effects of the inclusion, and this is the way to create more critical and fair societies.

As it's known, at the basis of the beliefs of the people (in this case of families) is the information they held about a topic. For this reason, we believe that the information families have is essential to their opinion, attitude and positioning in front of the inclusive education model. We believe that in order to create educational change and engage in it, you must first be aware and sensitive about it. For this reason, we propose to develop sensibilization plans for families in schools, associations, neighborhoods, ... to present this educational model, from which knowledge, families can decide if they consider an educational change or not. But this plan is not consider from an "expert-trainer" perspective, it's though from families and for families. The main idea is to identify families more aware and more willing on educational transformation. The proposal is that it must be these families who do get the meaning and scope of the inclusive model to other families, in the first person. It is proposed to raise sessions, not training, just to exchange experiences and ideas about different educational models, the value of inclusion, its features and advantages, the deconstruction of myths and misconceptions associated with inclusion, laws and regulations supporting to inclusion and critical analysis aid, resources and dilemmas that generates an optimal distribution of that, teaching methods that promote inclusion, etc.. In this way, families could decide what and how to transform their children's schools in fairer and quality schools for everyone.

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