

PhD Snezana Jovanova-Mitkovska¹
PhD Biljana Popeska²

PRESCHOOL TEACHERS AND INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Abstract

Quality of education largely depends of the quality of the work of one of the key subjects in education, teacher, preschool teacher, of his expert knowledge of teaching area, the subject and the methods of teaching, of its abilities of the teaching and learning; creativity in creating a stimulating learning environment; of its abilities of the establishing social and educational inclusion in class, school; of its communication and cooperation with the family and of his interest and opportunities for professional development and professional collaboration.

Inclusiveness as one of the dimensions of quality education, which implies the inclusion of all children in the educational system, equal participation of all children in the predicted activities, overcoming the stereotypes of curricula, materials, looking for better preparedness, training abilities of the teacher, preschool teacher for its establishes, strengthening in kindergarten, school.

In the article we talking for the willingness of preschool teacher to implement the inclusive education, his willingness to support the various needs of all children, its capacity for implementation of inclusive practice.

In this article we present the results of realized qualitative research whose objective was the acquisition of knowledge about the implementation of inclusive practice in kindergartens, abilities of the preschool teacher for the realization of inclusive practice, as well as proposals, suggestions for further action in this field. The survey is conducted in a preschool institutions in the municipality of Stip. Of techniques for data collection we used technique interview with her instrument protocol for the free interview. The results, suggestions and proposals from the preschool teacher indicate the need of future actions with preschool teachers to achieve successful results in the field of inclusive education, practices.

Key words: quality education, inclusive practice, inclusive development, inclusive society

Introduction

The last ten years more commonly used the slogan "knowledge society, society in which the cornerstone is education, society based on so-called knowledge for knowledge, knowledge that lead to

¹ Snezana Jovanova-Mitkovska, Faculty of educational sciences, University "Goce Delchev", Stip, R.Macedonia

² Biljana Popeska, Faculty of educational sciences, University "Goce Delchev", Stip, R.Macedonia

economic, cultural, educational progress ... The strategic commitment of all countries is the realization of the right to education for all, raising the education level of the population, especially of children, youth, the realization of so-called quality education as a factor that can ensure quality in all other activities.

Quality education is education that allows to meet the educational (development) needs of its users, or education that is tailored to the users, on which affect a multitude of factors such as the environment, tradition, conditions in which is implemented educational process expertise, competence of teachers (educators, teachers).

Quality in education largely depends from the quality of the work of one of the key subjects in education, teacher, (primary and preschool teacher), from his expert knowledge of curriculum area, subject and methods of teaching, his capacity for teaching and learning; creativity in creating a stimulating learning environment; his capacity for establishing social and educational inclusion in the class, the school; his communication and cooperation with the family and his interest and opportunities for professional development and professional collaboration.

In R. Macedonia, considering the socio-cultural context in which is carried out the education process, are identified several dimensions that are crucial for the realization of quality education like: effectiveness, inclusiveness, health, safety and productive school environment, gender equality, participation, active participation of all stakeholders in the life and work of the school, preschool institution and the environment, respect for children's rights and multiculturalism.

Of particular interest to us, is the dimension *inclusiveness* that implies inclusion of all children in the education system, equal participation of all children in the planned activities, overcoming the stereotypes from curricula, materials, which requires better preparedness, competence of the teacher for her establishment, strengthening at preschool institutions, schools.

Readiness of the preschool teacher to implement inclusive education, to support of the various needs of all children, his capacity to implementation of so-called inclusive practice, is the subject of interest of this paper.

Inclusion, inclusive education

Inclusiveness, inclusive education is a new concept that can apply in European, but also and in our Macedonian region, the concept according to which diversity is a richness of the human, "all children are the same, all have equal rights." The basis for the application of this new concept is social and critical theories of training, especially the theory of Bronfenbrenner and Vygotsky and numerous international documents, that highlights the importance of inclusive education as an integral component of the whole education system, which allows the education of all, allows respect and recognition of the different needs and abilities of each, of all.

The term inclusion (lat. inclusion), mean coverage, calculating. In wide sense is used to refer the process of society democratization, a process directed toward providing support to certain marginalized groups who live in it.

In pedagogical sense means the inclusion of persons with special needs in education. The process of inclusion of people with special needs in education is also marked with the term *integration*. Despite the similarities between these notions exists a certain kind of differences.

Namely, with *integration* (lat. Integration - addition of something with the other that is very important, recovery, transition from a disordered scattered situation in clutter condition), in pedagogical sense signifies connecting children from marginalized groups in the regular educational system, their including in the current environment. Differences between this two notions is evident. Namely, *inclusion* is directed not only to include the child in the social system, in the community at all levels, but also inclusion and acceptance of the individual in the family, a family in the community, involvement of children in the education system, but such involvement which means support of diversity and the realization of the right to education in one supportive and stimulating environment that will enable holistic development of each person, regardless of their differences.

The term *inclusion* is contrary to the notion of *segregation* (lat. Segregation), which in pedagogical sense means separation of the individual in separate, special schools and institutes for education of persons with special needs.

So, the inclusion is a process directed towards the identification and response to various needs of children through their increased participation in learning, cultural life and community life, in general. Inclusion can be understood in the narrow and broad sense. In a broader sense means includes an individual and group in the system, society as a whole, a process that ensures greater participation of the participants in the decision making that affect their lives. In the narrow sense refers to full participation in the educational system of all, regardless of gender, ethnic and religious affiliation, socio-economic background and health, implies active participation and involvement of all children, according to the right of all children to education, regardless of the differences that exist between them, in the teaching and cross curricula activities.

Inclusive education is a process that leads to relatively permanent and progressive changes at the individual and in terms of simedonian support and social inclusion in school, process through which the school is trying to meet to the needs of all students as individuals through review and restructuring of the organization of the curriculum and provision and distribution of resources to increase the fairness of opportunities

The interest for inclusive education, from the view of modern trends in the education development in the world and in our country, according to the commitments for quality education in recent decades, growing. Right there, increasing a number of studies related to the so-called inclusive practice, research aimed toward to finding obstacles, barriers encountered in the implementation of inclusive education, in order to overcome them, and search for the best solutions in the direction to advancement inclusive practice.

In the results from the performed research analysis, as the most common obstacles are the following: the willingness of class and subject teachers to work with children with special needs (Vujacic, 2009);

problems from technical nature: the number of children in the classroom, undefined role of the teacher; the existence of a real fear of teachers from the reaction of the parents of the other children, their prejudices and negative attitudes towards children with special needs, lack of professional support, lack of training and incompetence of teachers because of untimely and insufficient education of teachers (Muskinja, Lazic, Rista, 2010, Croatia, 2009); difficulties in terms of evaluation, burden of the teacher with paperwork; problems connected to the teachers attitude for the implementation of inclusive education, their competence for its realization (BiH, 2012) etc.

Among these obstacles, barriers for implementation of inclusive education is the teacher attitude towards inclusive education, his competence, his training.

The issue of teacher training, his readiness, attitudes and opinions for the implementation of inclusive education is the subject of interest of this paper. Why opinions views of preschool educators for inclusion in pre-school, child institution?

Taking into consideration the fact that the early development is a key prerequisite for further healthy and productive adult life, i.e. that "social relationships with peers have the greatest impact on the development and learning over the years of schooling ...i.e. early relationships with peers are key to long-term social conformity during the later years of life (Suzic, 2008: 36), so is an indisputable role of the preschool teacher in creating the conditions (cooperation with parents, children, professional associates, community) for inclusion of children with special needs in pre-school institution, their inclusion in the educational group.

Methodology of research

The aim of the research was to explore the opinions and attitudes of preschool teachers for their capacity for the realization of inclusive education, the purpose, and manner of realization of the inclusive education in preschool institutions, their attitudes towards inclusive education, to identify the factors of which depends successful inclusion of children with special needs in regular group in preschool institution, as well as their proposals and suggestions for its successful implementation in preschool institutions.

We apply descriptive method, and from the techniques for data collection were applied technique analysis of documentation and attendance list as an instrument - analyzed curricula of faculties in R. Macedonia which educate teachers for pre-school education, in particular: the study programs of the Institute of Pedagogy, Faculty of Philosophy, UKIM, study programs from the Faculty of Education Sciences, UGD in Stip, study programs from Pedagogical faculty in Bitola, study programs of Pedagogical faculty in Skopje; technique interview and instrument-protocol of interview. The sample was intentional, composed from two subsample-study programs, subsample preschool teachers-14 preschool teachers from preschool institution in Stip.

Interpretation of the results

The analysis of curricula gave the following results:

In study programs for initial teacher education are indicated pedagogical and methodological competencies that should be possessed by a preschool teacher after the first cycle of initial education. In these competencies are embedded and competences for inclusive education, i.e. they intertwine and build on the previously mentioned competencies.

Based on analyzed study programs at those universities we came to the following findings:

In the study programs of the Institute of pedagogy, content on inclusive education intertwines through the content of different subjects: Psychology, Pedagogy, Preschool pedagogy, Didactics. Greater range of the contents related to inclusive education exists at a number of proposed elective courses as: Teachers work with vulnerable children, Intercultural Education, Strategies for learning and teaching, Early Learning and Development, Pedagogical communication, Social pedagogy, Educational work with children without parents and parental care.

In the curriculum of Pedagogical Faculty in Skopje and Faculty in Bitola, we have a similar situation - there is no separate subject Inclusive education, but content related to inclusive education are evident in the curriculum of subjects: Psychology, Pedagogy, Preschool Hygiene, Developmental psychology, Preschool pedagogy, Family pedagogy.

In the curriculum of subjects: Multicultural Education, Ethics, Psychology of personality, Pedagogical communication, and Methodology of educational work, Methodology of work with gifted children, Methodology of work with children with disabilities, have specific instructional content, through which students take knowledge for inclusive education. The exercises of these courses allow students to the field to gain etc. inclusive practice.

At the Faculty of Educational Sciences, content of inclusive education are intertwined through mandatory courses: Fundamentals of pedagogy, Child development, Methodology of preschool education; elective subjects: Multicultural Education, Social Pedagogy, Mental health of children and adolescents, Developmental psychopathology, Strategies of learning and teaching, Methodology of work with gifted children, but there is as compulsory subject, teaching subject *Inclusive education*, that allows all students to acquire the appropriate theoretical knowledge for inclusive education and acquisition of inclusive practice in the field - through appropriate hospitalizations in preschool institution and primary schools.

Based on the analysis we can perform the conclusion that during initial education, preschool teachers have very little opportunities for inclusive practice. At the teaching faculties there aren't mandatory subjects that are aimed to the development of this competence, hence, there is a need for changes in the curricula, their restructuring. Have in mind the fact that the principles of inclusive education is embedded in the National Program for Education development and in the Standards for early child development, special attention is placed to the preparing and education of students, future preschool teachers, to act to change their sense, their metanoia for work in inclusive environment, their capacity to design IOP necessary for working with children with special needs.

According to this set of curricula is the opinion of preschool teachers for their competence to work in inclusive environments. Namely, preschool teachers are aware that during their initial education, they are not, or little trained to work with children with special needs. They lack theoretical knowledge and practical training.

They exchange literature with their colleagues, receive support and assistance from special educators, psychologists, they alone learn from this area. But, they haven't specific knowledge for methods, forms of work with children with special needs. Unknown for them is also the way on which shall be prepared IOP.

In relation to the question of the way in which it carried out and accomplished the inclusion in preschool institutions, all preschool teachers emphasized that increasingly concerned about integration rather than inclusion.

Namely, children with special needs (overactive, gifted, children with disabilities, children with learning difficulties, .) are integrated into the educational group. There are too many children in educational groups, number which should not be neglected, 20-30 children in educational groups, and on behalf of that one preschool teacher and a nurture, which allows them to devote special attention to child with special needs.

Really, preschool teachers receive help from special educators, psychologists, who distinguish the children with special needs during the day and work with them individually. Educators are trying as much as possible, and work on the basis of their modest experience (self-education), work with these children at strengthening cohesion in the educational group, work on the acceptance of these children in the group, work on their socialization and interaction. They missing cooperation with the parents, missing closer interaction and communication, together activities aimed to the successful child development. They lack detailed information about the way in which they should work with children with disabilities, they lack education of this area.

Educators successfully identified the factors that determine the successful inclusion of children with special needs in mainstream groups in preschool institution.

As factors they cited:

- Physical access;
- Provision of appropriate teaching materials - work with preschool children requires a multitude illustrative material that will stimulate curiosity, this child's have need for kinesthetic, visual support;
- The existence of prejudice and stereotypes about children with special educational needs (at children and staff who working in pre-school institution);
- Professional readiness of preschool teacher for working with children with special needs;
- Collaboration between parents, parents of children with special educational needs, educators, professional staff of the institution, local community;
- Teamwork;
- Willingness of children for living and working in an inclusive environment;

- Acceptance of children with special educational needs from their peers in the group;
- An excessive number of children in educational groups;

Analogous of the identified factors are the suggestions, recommendations of preschool teachers as:

- Engagement of community, support and help from parents in providing physical access to the preschool institution and help for ensure the appropriate didactic material (tactile boards, picture books, etc.).
- Continuous teachers education through various forms (workshops, seminars ..) that would include parents, representatives from the local community and they would be aimed to overcoming the negative attitudes and prejudices of the teaching staff, parents, people from society towards to persons with disabilities, self-confidence, overcoming the sense of distrust in the abilities to achieve inclusion, a sense of insecurity in their experience of working with children with special educational needs and the fear that cannot meet to the needs of inclusion, i.e. to contribute to the development of human, empathic attitude towards to all children;
- Respect and adherence to the principles of inclusive education appointed by the standards of early learning and development as: all children, regardless of gender, ethnicity and religious affiliation, socioeconomic and cultural differences, as well as various health and disabilities, should be allow entry into the education system; All children can learn. They deserve high expectations for their achievements in the process of learning, and in accordance with their age and socio-cultural characteristics; the child learning development is completely conditioned by quality educators who are interested for their own continuous professional improvement, development and cooperation with the children and their parents, Respect of personality and individual specifics, needs, interests and abilities of each child, including children with special needs, and children from all socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds; mutual action of the family and community in encouraging the development of early child learning; All children have the potential to reach most of the standards expected in a particular age, with appropriate support, instruction and stimulation of the development of early learning..
- Smaller educational groups and depending of that, if in the group have a child with special needs, the possibility of engagement an assistant who will helps in work with all child's, but especially with those children;
- Help from a professional team in preschool institution, teamwork which will include educators, professional associates, parents and children;
- Better collaboration with parents, gaining confidence and successful communication and interaction between them, which will enable them to the correct orientation of the pedagogical profile of each child, an introduction to his developmental and educational needs and based on that, to make plan for help and support;
- Implementation of new strategies, game activities aimed to strengthening the cohesiveness in the educational group;

-Organizing mutual events with people from the community in order to strengthen the capacity of educators, parents, people from the community, of the importance of mutuality.

Inclusive education is of great benefit to children with special needs, allows detection of children's potential, it is the basis for their adaptation, covered them for further education, for quality life.

Instead of conclusion

"Inclusion is not an obligation but a right of each individual to develop in accordance with its nature."

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