



TEACHER'S ATTITUDES TO INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

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ARTICLE INFO

Article History:

Received 6th February, 2018

Received in revised form 20th

March, 2018 Accepted 8th April, 2018

Published online 28th May, 2018

Key words:

Inclusion, teacher attitudes, teachers' self-efficacy

ABSTRACT

Although the inclusive trend in the world has been present since the 1990s, Bosnia and Herzegovina continues to face various challenges in implementing inclusive education in elementary schools. The aim of the research was to examine the attitudes of teachers towards inclusive education in regular elementary schools of Bosnia and Herzegovina, to determine the differences in the attitudes of teachers in relation to the territory and to examine the importance of additional professional training of teachers in gaining positive attitudes towards inclusive education. When assessing the teachers, the Questionnaire for the Assessment of Teachers' Attitudes towards Inclusive Education is used, which was specifically designed for the purposes of this research. The sample of teachers included 298 respondents, both sexes, from the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Republic Srpska. The results of the survey show generally positive attitudes of teachers towards inclusive education, until significant differences are not found with respect to the teachers' entity. There is no significant link between the additional professional training of teachers with their attitudes.

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INTRODUCTION

An inclusive trend in the world has been present since the nineties of the past century. However, the key ideas related to this trend date back to the half of the last century within various social movements that indicate that all human beings should be regarded as individuals with their own rights.

International initiatives that strive for inclusive education concern the education of all children. These initiatives for the ultimate goal have not only quality education but also more inclusive societies. The term inclusion is characterized by restructuring culture, policies and practice in schools and reducing barriers to learning and participation for all students (Booth and Ainscow, 2002). Inclusive education is most often related to the education of children with disabilities in an elementary school, along with peers (Karna-Lin, 2003).

The concept of inclusive education can also be used when it comes to the education of children of superior abilities (gifted children), but as such it is rarely used in international literature. Some authors (Garguilo, 2006) seek to reconcile these two ideas and, through inclusion processes, seek an adequate place for both children with developmental disabilities and gifted children. Inclusion involves not only reform of education systems, but also a number of other measures at the social level. Inclusive education is not only an objective but also a medium of achieving an inclusive society. The key argument that supports inclusion is not exclusively educational, but also includes significant ethical and social factors (Sretenov, 2005).

In order to achieve inclusive education, teachers must transform their own way of educational work, stop with practice in which the most important thing is to implement the curriculum, move away from isolation in the classroom and get closer to working with other colleagues and families (Hollenweger, 2014).

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Boer, Pijl, and Minnaert (2011) found that most teachers show a neutral or negative attitude towards the inclusion of students with disabilities in regular classes, and that no study has found pure positive attitudes. Đević (2009) states that teachers considered that they needed co-operation with all participants in the educational process, as well as the help of special education teachers, as well as continuous professional development.

Another factor that is in the majority of previous studies related to attitudes towards inclusive education is the perception of teachers' self-efficacy, their confidence in their own skills that they have and their adequate application in working with children with disabilities. Some teachers believe that they do not have enough knowledge to work with sensitive groups of children involved in regular schools (Agbenyega, 2007). In a large number of surveys, the perception of self-efficacy, attitudes and concerns are brought into line with higher self-efficacy indicating more positive attitudes and less concern about the outcomes of inclusive education (Ahsan *et al.*, 2012; Savolainen, 2012; Sharma *et al.*, 2006).

Inclusive education has been the main topic of educational reform for the last 15 years in Bosnia and Herzegovina and it is often misunderstood by the stakeholders in this field. It is safe to say that the inclusive education in Bosnia and Herzegovina is still at its beginnings despite the fact that it is being legally supported since 2004 (Dizdarević, Mujezinović and Memišević, 2016).

All education reform strategies in Bosnia and Herzegovina, laws and various policies promote the principles of equal access, acceptance, official recognition, non-discrimination and lack of segregation in education (Sciencier and Centre for Education Policy, 2010). Although clearly stated, the quality and availability standards outlined in the strategy, reforms are not systematically applied. The analysis of legal documents in Bosnia and Herzegovina points to relatively poorly regulated provisions that define and regulate inclusive education.

It is indicative that, except in many cases, it is unclear and imprecise, in certain territorial units, legislation is almost non-existent. It cannot be understood that educational policies in Bosnia and Herzegovina fulfill the conditions that Bosnia and Herzegovina committed to by signing various international agreements and conventions related to the reduction of social exclusion and the realization of children's rights, nor to a significant extent contributing to the fulfillment of the goals defined in the Social Inclusion Strategy in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Sciencier and Center for Educational Policy, 2010).

The limited application of the principle of the best interests of the child is evident in the application of inclusive education in elementary and secondary schools by the lack of sufficient number of professional mobile teams (special education teachers, speech therapist, psychologist, social worker, psychiatrist), training and professional assistance to teachers working with children with special needs, where most of the schools are not adapted to provide all conditions for children with disabilities (Situational analysis of the state of the rights of the child in Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2012).

In general, the structure for implementing the adjustment of the existing school system to the requirements of inclusion exists, but still does not meet the basic requirements explicitly

insisting on education for all children, in their closest, least restrictive environment, and in the conditions in which they will meet their needs.

The aim of the research was to examine the attitudes of teachers towards inclusive education in Bosnia and Herzegovina in regular elementary schools, to determine the differences in the attitudes of teachers towards inclusive education in relation to the territory and to examine the importance of additional professional training of teachers in gaining positive attitudes.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Sample

A simple random sample included a total of 298 teachers in elementary schools: 100 teachers from the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and 198 teachers from the Republic of Srpska.

Out of a total of 298 subjects, 82 (27.5%) were male, while 216 (72.5%) female respondents. 87 (29.2%) of respondents are 36 years of age and less, 108 (36.2%) are between 36 and 45 years old, while 103 respondents (34.6%) are over 45 years of age.

The vast majority of the respondents, 235 (78.9%) has a university degree, while 63 respondents (21.1%) have a higher education qualification.

In the sample there were fewer teachers of subject teaching (128 or 43%) compared to the number of class teachers (170 or 57%).

The average length of service in the school of the examined teachers is 16 years, 3.61 is the average number of attendance at the workshops/seminars related to working with children with developmental difficulties, while the average score for the years spent in classes is 8.86.

Instrumentation

The Data Collection Questionnaire was used to assess the attitudes of teachers towards inclusive education, which was specifically designed for the purpose of this research. The first part of the questionnaire is used to obtain general information about the respondent, while in the second part of the questionnaire the teacher's attitudes towards inclusive education are examined. It consists of 16 statements that the respondents responded using the 4-fold Likert type scale, where 1 means "I completely disagree", 2 means "I do not agree", 3 means "I agree" and 4 means "I completely agree". A higher score means a more positive attitude (before processing individual items are recoded so that the direction of the attitude would be the same).

Data collection

The research was conducted in the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina (both Entities) during the school year 2016/2017. During the course of the year, teachers of elementary schools in the Republic Srpska and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina examined the methodology of an anonymous questionnaire for examining the attitudes of teachers towards inclusive education. The idea of the research was presented to the directors or pedagogues of these schools in order to obtain consent for interviewing teachers of class and subject teaching. Survey questionnaires are distributed to every third teacher by

random selection. Before filling in the questionnaires, teachers are briefly acquainted with the purpose of the research and how to fill in the questionnaire. Each teacher filled in the questionnaire independently. After the data collection has been completed, the data are arranged, grouped and analyzed in relation to the set goals, sub-goals and work hypotheses.

Data Analysis

The collected data was processed using the SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) 21.0 for Windows.

The measures of descriptive statistics (arithmetic mean, standard deviation, frequencies and percentages, minimum and maximum) were used to determine the degree of presence of measured properties and distribution by category of categorical variables on the tested sample. Using the t test for all independent samples, the difference in teacher attitudes towards inclusive education was examined, depending on the entity. The data is shown in the table.

RESULTS

The basic descriptive values of the questionnaire particulars are shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Basic descriptive values of questionnaires for measuring teacher attitudes towards inclusive education

	N	Range	Min	Max	AM	Mo d	SD	Skewness (distribution asymmetry)		Kurtosis (distribution flattening)	
								SD	SG	SD	SG
Si5 - I support joint cooperation with a special educators in a class with a student with special needs.	298	4	1	4	3,47	4	,625	-1,161	,141	-,875	,281
Si6 - Students who lag behind for more than two years in intellectual development to their peers should be in special classes.	298	2	1	4	2	2	,857	,323	,141	,875	,281
Si7 - Students with autism should be in special classes.	298	2	1	4	1,81	1	,853	,705	,141	-,448	,281
Si8 - Students with mental retardation should be in special classes.	298	2	1	4	2,05	2	,819	,135	,141	-1,008	,281
Si9 - Students who are verbally aggressive towards other students may be in the regular class.	298	3	1	4	2,50	3	,809	-,296	,141	-0,483	,281
Si10 - Education of students with special needs may be less effective if in the same class there is a pupil with disabilities of another type.	298	2	1	4	2,18	2	,796	,268	,141	-,364	,281
Si11 - Special educators should teach students with special needs.	298	2	1	4	1,84	2	,733	,514	,141	-,167	,281
Si17 - Teachers in regular classes should not teach students with special needs.	298	2	1	4	2,49	2	,850	,032	,141	-,601	,281
Si18 - I like to be the only teacher in the classroom (without the presence of a special educator).	298	2	1	4	2,96	3	,784	-,610	,141	,248	,281
Si19 - Students who are physically aggressive towards other students may be in the regular class.	298	3	1	4	2,20	2	,792	,027	,141	,692	,281
Si20 - Students who have speech impairments or any other language problems should go to special classes.	298	2	1	4	2,88	3	,759	-,686	,141	,574	,281
Si21 - As a teacher in a regular school I should not work with students with special needs.	298	3	1	4	2,66	3	,838	-,547	,141	-,226	,281
Si22 - Teacher and special educator should teach students with special needs jointly.	298	3	1	4	2,96	3	,780	-,622	,141	,302	,281
Si27 - Students who are identified as depressed but don't show disturbing behavior should attend regular classes.	298	3	1	4	3,01	3	,651	-,816	,141	1,929	,281
Si28 - Special educators could be out of work if teachers continue to work with children with special needs.	298	2	1	4	2,49	2	,958	,139	,141	-,928	,281
Si29 - Additional teacher education can influence the more efficient creation of customized programs and a positive attitude towards students with special needs.	298	3	1	4	3,19	3	,728	-1,043	,141	1,754	,281

From the data in Table 1 it is visible that the highest value of the arithmetic mean for the particle Si1 = 3.47 SD = 0.625, and the lowest for the particle Si7 = 1.81 SD = 0.853 and that the arithmetic values of most items (except the items Si 7 and Si 11) ≥ 2 indicating the positive attitude of teachers towards inclusive education (the maximum score is 4). The range of values by individual particles is maximal for all particles, which implies that they cover the spectrum of the response well.

Given the asymmetry, the particle distribution ranges from moderately left asymmetric to moderately right asymmetric distributions and according to the heights of arithmetic means. If we observe the mode as the positional measure of the central tendency, then it is visible that the majority of the particles have high medium high modes (2 and 3), which is in accordance with higher arithmetic environments, or higher values of empathy in the group.

Table 2 shows the correlation of teacher attitude towards inclusion in relation to their additional education. Pearsons coefficient of correlation (r) was used.

Analyzing Table 2, we note that the correlation coefficients range from the minimum Si9 = -0.008 to the maximum Si20 = -0.209. Statistically significant differences among teacher groups in relation to additional education exist on variables Si10, Si18, Si20, Si21, Si27 and Si28. Variables that show the connection of additional teacher education with their attitudes towards inclusion relate to the presence of students with other disorders in the class (Si10), teacher unwillingness to collaborate with special educators (Si18) and their attitudes related to professional competencies and employment (Si28),

then the attitudes of teachers towards students with speech-language disorders (Si20) and depressive disorders (Si27), and generally the obligation and competence of teachers to teach students with special needs (Si27).

Table 3 shows the descriptive values and values of the t-test of teachers' attitude to inclusive education separately by entities, Republic Srpska (N = 198, group I) and FBiH (Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina) (N = 100, group II).

Table 2 Pearson correlation coefficient between the attitude towards inclusion and additional education

	N	r	Sig.
Si5 - I support joint cooperation with a special educators in a class with a student with special needs.	298	,014	,812
Si6 - Students who lag behind for more than two years in intellectual development to their peers should be in special classes.	298	,053	,358
Si7 - Students with autism should be in special classes.	298	-,16	,787
Si8 - Students with mental retardation should be in special classes.	298	,10	,857
Si9 - Students who are verbally aggressive towards other students may be in a regular class.	298	-,008	,891
Si10 - Education of a student with special needs may be less effective if in the same class there is a pupil with disabilities of another type.	298	,184	,001
Si11 - Special educators should teach students with special needs.	298	,039	,507
Si17 - Teachers in regular classes should not teach students with special needs.	298	,056	,334
Si18 - I like to be the only teacher in the classroom (without the presence of a special educators).	298	,179	,002
Si19 - Students who are physically aggressive towards other students may be in the regular class.	298	-,033	,570
Si20 - Students who have speech impairments or any other language problems should go to special classes.	298	-,209	,000
Si21 - As a teacher in a regular school I should not work with students with special needs.	298	,178	,002
Si22 - Teacher and special educators should teach students with special needs jointly.	298	,016	,782
Si27 - Students who are identified as depressed but don't show disturbing behavior should attend regular classes.	298	,1222	,038
Si28 - Special educators could be out of work if teachers continue to work with children with special needs.	298	,120	,038
Si29 - Additional teacher education can influence the more efficient creation of customized programs and a positive attitude towards students with special needs.	298	-,073	,209

Table 3 Basic descriptive values of the questionnaire in relation to the entity

	Entity	N	Arithmetic mean	Standard Deviation	Standard deviation error	t-test
Si5 - I support joint cooperation with a special educators in a class with a student with special needs.	Republic Srpska	198	3,42	,553	,039	-1,843
	FBiH	100	3,56	,743	,074	
Si6 - Students who lag behind for more than two years in intellectual development to their peers should be in special classes.	Republic Srpska	198	1,84	,796	,057	-4,745*
	FBiH	100	2,32	,886	,089	
Si7 - Students with autism should be in special classes.	Republic Srpska	198	1,77	,829	,059	-1,170
	FBiH	100	1,89	,898	,090	
Si8 - Students with mental retardation should be in special classes.	Republic Srpska	198	2,02	,803	,057	-,944
	FBiH	100	2,11	,852	,085	
Si9 - Students who are verbally aggressive towards other students may be in a regular class.	Republic Srpska	198	2,51	,792	,056	,403
	FBiH	100	2,47	,846	,085	
Si10 - Education of a student with special needs may be less effective if in the same class there is a pupil with disabilities of another type.	Republic Srpska	198	2,12	,790	,056	-1,838
	FBiH	100	2,30	,798	,080	
Si11 - Special educators should teach students with special needs.	Republic Srpska	198	1,78	,720	,051	-2,15*
	FBiH	100	1,97	,745	,074	
Si17 - Teachers in regular classes should not teach students with special needs.	Republic Srpska	198	2,38	,857	,061	-3,22*
	FBiH	100	2,71	,795	,080	
Si18 - I like to be the only teacher in the classroom (without the presence of a special educators).	Republic Srpska	198	2,82	,811	,058	-4,64*
	FBiH	100	3,25	,642	,064	
Si19 - Students who are physically aggressive towards other students may be in the regular class.	Republic Srpska	198	2,22	,800	,057	,537
	FBiH	100	2,17	,779	,078	
Si20 - Students who have speech impairments or any other language problems should go to special classes.	Republic Srpska	198	2,81	,741	,053	-2,23*
	FBiH	100	3,02	,778	,078	
Si21 - As a teacher in a regular school I should not work with students with special needs.	Republic Srpska	198	2,59	,849	,060	-2,14*
	FBiH	100	2,81	,800	,080	
Si22 - Teacher and special educators should teach students with special needs jointly.	Republic Srpska	198	2,85	,783	,056	-3,47*
	FBiH	100	3,18	,730	,073	
Si27 - Students who are identified as depressed but don't show disturbing behavior should attend regular classes.	Republic Srpska	198	2,93	,649	,046	-2,92*
	FBiH	100	3,16	,631	,063	
Si28 - Special educators could be out of work if teachers continue to work with children with special needs.	Republic Srpska	198	2,52	,916	,065	,554
	FBiH	100	2,45	1,038	,104	
Si29 - Additional teacher education can influence the more efficient creation of customized programs and a positive attitude towards students with special needs.	Republic Srpska	198	3,19	,720	,051	-,035
	FBiH	100	3,19	,748	,075	

*p<0,005

As it can be seen from Table 3, the highest arithmetic mean has a particle Si5 = 3.56 SD = 0.743 from Group II, and the lowest arithmetic mean has the particle Si7 = 1.77 SD = 0.829 from Group II.

To test the significance of differences in teacher attitudes towards inclusive education in regular elementary schools with regard to the entity, a t-test for independent samples was used, and the results are shown in the table. Interpretations of the statistical significance of t values were interpreted depending on the homogeneity values of the variants to be compared (Levene test).

From the obtained results in the table it is visible that there is a significant statistical difference on 8 of the total of 16 variables. Variables that confirm the statistical difference in the attitudes of teaching staff in relation to entities relate to teachers' attitudes towards students with intellectual disabilities (Si5), depressive disorders (Si27) and speech-language disorders (Si20), and teacher unwillingness for collaborative work with special educators (Si18) and their attitudes related to professional competencies (Si11) and the general obligation and competence of teachers to teach students with special needs (Si27).

In relation to the presented variables, teachers in the Republic Srpska showed more negative attitudes towards students with intellectual disabilities and depressive disorders compared to FBiH teachers, but they show that they are more willing to cooperate with special educators and to include him in a class routine. Teachers from the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina show readiness for collaborative work and joint teaching with a special educator in relation to teachers of the Republic Srpska.

DISCUSSION

On the basis of the obtained results, it has been determined that teachers generally show positive attitudes towards inclusive education, which is in line with previous research carried out in the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which confirmed that little more than 50% of teachers support the concept of inclusion (Memišević and Hodžić, 2009). They support inclusion from the humanistic aspect, but most of them have doubts that they are not adequately prepared for work with children with disabilities. Similar results on teachers' positive attitudes are shown by research by Mukhopadhyay (2012) on a sample of 295 teachers in 165 regular schools, indicating that although most of the teachers were positive towards the concept of inclusive education, they did not have a favorable attitude toward the inclusion of students with special educational needs (SENs) in their classrooms due to lack of essential knowledge and skills in inclusive education.

The study did not establish a link between all the variables of the assessment between additional teacher education and their attitudes towards inclusion, which is in contrast to a similar study by Schmidt and Vrhovnik (2015) that showed that teachers who do not have additional education to work with students with special needs compared to their colleagues who do this, show a lower level of agreement and negative attitudes towards providing adequate support and assistance in the education of children with special needs. Similar research cited Vaz *et al* (2016) which shows that teachers who reported having training and teaching students with disability upheld positive attitudes towards inclusion. The significance of the level of teachers' knowledge of their attitudes towards inclusion is also emphasized in the research by Facolade, Adeniyi and Tella (2009) that reveal that a professionally qualified teacher has a more favorable attitude towards the inclusion of special needs students than their non-professional qualified teachers.

On the other hand, by comparing teacher attitudes with the entities, it was found that there was no statistically significant difference in the attitudes of teachers of FBiH and Republic Srpska. It is not possible to compare this and similar research results. Namely, most of the previous studies on the attitudes of teaching staff towards inclusion in Bosnia and Herzegovina have been done partially and include individual territorial units. If there are previous studies at the national level, then within these researches there was no comparison of the attitudes of the teaching staff with respect to the entities.

CONCLUSION

In this research, teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education in regular elementary schools in Bosnia and Herzegovina were examined. The results of the research have shown that teachers have generally expressed positive attitudes towards the joint education of students with disabilities and their peers in

regular elementary schools, with more than half of them considering that additional professional training of teaching staff is needed in this process.

There is no statistically significant statistical difference on all variables of assessment in attitudes towards inclusion between teachers in Republic Srpska and FBiH. It seems that both entities, without entering the quality of inclusion, implement politics equally. It is important to emphasize that teachers in Republic Srpska and FBiH have an equally positive attitude towards inclusion. Differences exist in attitudes related to the perception of the competences of teachers and associates (special educators) and teaching students with a particular type of difficulty (intellectual difficulties, depressive disorder, etc.). The data indicate that there is no statistically significant difference in all assessment variables in the teacher's attitudes depending on teacher involvement/non-participation in additional educational seminars. In this way, the assumption that teachers involved in several educational workshops will have more positive attitudes towards inclusion of children with disabilities in regular schools from teachers who were not included in any of such education was not confirmed. This could be explained in three ways. The first reason could be that the content and quality of the educators in the workshops is not enough to make a difference in quality between teachers who attended additional education and those who did not. The second reason would be that there is no ongoing training that would make a difference between them. And the third reason would be that the young cadre who comes to work in schools comes with far greater knowledge and experience than it was before. But research carried out previously shows different results than is the case with us. The research (Avramidis & Norwick, according to Studen, 2008) suggests that adequate teacher information is a good quality, continuous training for working with children with disabilities in a way that their attitudes change and be positive. Teachers who had more than 3 educations and teachers who knew better the needs of students with disabilities had more positive attitudes towards inclusive education in general (Carter, Hughes, 2005; Cook, Cameron, Tankersley, 2007).

It is very important that our respondents have a generally positive attitude to inclusion, which starts to have the motivation for finding the best way to solve problems in teaching, especially in terms of achieving educational goals, i.e. they are independent, trained and daily; regardless of additional education provide their maximum in implementing inclusion.

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How to cite this article:

Amila Mujezinović *et al* (2018) 'Teacher's Attitudes to Inclusive Education in Elementary Schools in Bosnia and Herzegovina', *International Journal of Current Advanced Research*, 07(5), pp. 12344-12349.
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.24327/ijcar.2018.12349.2167>
