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ATTITUDES OF POLISH SCHOOLS' TEACHERS TOWARDS THE IDEA OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION FOR DISABLED PEOPLE

Anna Katarzyna Czyż

*Pedagogical University of Cracow, Faculty of Education, Institute of Special Needs
Education, Cracow, Poland*
annaczyz@up.krakow.pl

Abstract

The purpose of the presented research is to determine the direction of teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education in the context of selected variables. To propagate the idea of inclusion, we need a multi-faceted diagnosis including the diagnosis of teachers' attitudes, which are responsible for its implementation.

The appropriate study was conducted on a sample of 363 teachers. The diagnostic survey was used together with the tool constructed for this study – The Scale for Measuring Attitudes towards Inclusive Education. The tool was subjected to standardization procedures, high reliability (Cronbach's alpha = 0.85) and theoretical accuracy of the scale was obtained. The attitude analysis was based on the following variables: seniority (work experience in years) and the position (teachers of regular subjects or teacher-psychologist/pedagogue). Considering the tool's ability, sample size and normality of decomposition, parametric statistics were used to determine the relationships. The results of research show no significance relationship between direction of attitude and position of work and significance relation between direction of attitude and seniority.

The results provide a valuable source of information to identify the causes of slow development of inclusion education in countries with similar education models. They give you the opportunity to determine the direction of change and to introduce appropriate solutions.

Keywords

Teachers, Attitudes, Inclusive Education, Special Needs

1. Introduction

The idea of inclusion deriving from the notion of uniting people of different needs was started in the US in the early 19th century. In Europe it was widely propagated starting with the 1950s and 1960s in the context of migration problems (Osgood 2005; Leicester 2000). Its aim is to create an environment that is most favorable to the development of all people regardless of their health, age, race, religion, origin, etc (Lechta, Schmidtová, Leonhardt 2011; Norwich 2007; Florian 2008). In the context of education, in many countries inclusion has replaced the segregation model of teaching. In Poland, a country with a tradition of following the segregation trend and creating special schools for people with different types of disabilities, the idea of inclusion raises a lot of controversy and its development can be described as slow. However, it is observed that the citizens' awareness of equality of all people increases resulting in reducing the number of children undergoing the segregation model of education in favor of personalization of teaching processes in public schools. People with disability have a special role in the open education system. They suffer not only because of the incompetence of the organism but above all from the social lack of understanding of their situation, which resulted, among others, in separating children with and without disabilities in school reality. In 1991 the first act on education system in post-communist democratic Poland was established (Act of 7 September 1991 on the system of education, Journal of Laws no. 95, item 425). Legal framework brought about real changes in the mid 1990s. Segregation education was slowly substituted with integration. Still existing special facilities have undergone a makeover. They reached out to the society, begun to integrate students beyond the education plane allowing for mutual appreciation of citizens and understanding of needs. Due to that, for around 20 years now, people with developmental problems have been able to obtain mandatory education in any given school whose obligation it is to ensure appropriate conditions, adapt the education program, methods and didactic tools to suit the child. In the 1990s integration classes were formed in order to facilitate the implementation of afore-mentioned solutions and the realization of compulsory education by children with and without disabilities. However, it quickly turned out that the idea in many cases is an artificial notion that strengthens segregation and division (Czyż 2014; Grzyb 2013). Currently, the integration system that was in its prime in the late 1990s is becoming more and more comparable to a truly inclusive system raising above the divisions. Artificial incorporation of groups of disabled children in schools or classes is slowly being replaced by

creating school environments that are ready for a natural role in the education of children with different needs. It is a system in which the responsibility for the process of education is put in the environment in which each entity requires individualization. Moreover, this is the only complete and natural way of gaining knowledge and experience ensuring the full participation in society – now and in the future (Florian 2005, 2008, 2012). Undoubtedly one of the most important elements of an inclusive system is the teacher. Together with a team of professionals, he or she creates educational environment, at the same time being responsible for the upbringing of adolescents in the spirit of respect for the diversity of possibilities and needs (Burke & Shutlerland 2004). Further development and success of inclusion depends on their work and attitude towards the idea itself. Through their attitude they shape the future generation's open attitude which accepts that every person is different, yet equally valuable, and the diversification of needs is a motor for the development of the world.

2. Teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education

Present day generates a need for organizing environments for members of different socio-psychological profile. School environment as a common place for education and upbringing creates on the one hand an institutional system of education in which legal solutions of open education can be implemented, and on the other hand creates the environment of mutual appreciation through the possibility of maintaining relationships with the diversity of school community. This shapes the attitude of openness, mutual understanding and prepares the participants for cooperation with entities of different capabilities and needs. In order to encourage an open, positive attitude in students, the teacher should also exhibit one. In this context, the constitutional and ethical right for equal, just education and upbringing of each child should be considered. At the same time it needs to be noted that even though the legal regulations obligate to forming and complying with certain rules, they are not able to force a favorable attitude towards a given reality. They do not shape the attitudes of teachers, and it is their attitudes towards inclusion that appear to be crucial for its success (Rakap & Kaczmarek 2010; Ross-Hill 2009; Ringlaben & Griffith 2008). Studies show that there is more than just a disagreement as to the teachers' stand on inclusive education – it is a conflict towards implementing inclusion as alternative to special schools expressed by attitudes. As it turns out the concept of education for all is not fully approved in the teachers' environment. Studies show that inclusion often has limits, with disability being one of them (Hammond & Ingalls 2003; Ryan 2009). Contemporary research do not conclusively settle the issue of direction, as well as the variables determining the attitudes towards inclusive education of students with special educational needs. It is known, however,

that the direction and intensity of attitude is linked with multiple variables connected to personality and environment, as well as the teacher's attitude towards a person having difficulties (Brandy & Woolfson 2008). The perception of student in inclusive education system is determined by the type and severity of the disability; for example, worst perceived is joint education of people with severe intellectual disability, best – with physical disability (Ridarick & Ringlaben, date of access: 13 October 2017), people with autism are more likely to be accepted to classes than people with behavior disorder (Cassady 2011).

Attitudes of teachers towards an inclusive system can be dictated by gender, age, or experience (Brandy & Woolfson 2008). Dukmak & Ain (2013) claims that generally women tend to be more positive about inclusion, while the length of work experience negatively correlates with favorable attitudes. What is more interesting in his research is that positive attitudes towards social inclusion appear when students with difficulties are to pursue compulsory education outside public schools (which proves that disability is not fully accepted in school environment and the positive attitude towards inclusion may in fact be a masked negative one and/or be conditional). Barnes and Gaines (2015) research shows that in general attitudes towards inclusive education are more positive than negative and that there is a connection between the level of education and work experience and the intensity of attitude - the lower the level of education the less positive the attitude and the shorter the work experience the more positive the attitude. For attitudes towards inclusive education not only seniority, but also teachers' preparation for work in such a system is of significance. Observed is a not particularly favorable attitude towards inclusion exhibited by teachers of low level of knowledge, skills, and competence in working with a student with disabilities (Hamre 2004; Crane-Mitchel & Hedge 2007). At the same time, the level of support for inclusion of people with developmental problems increases with the acquisition of proper qualifications and skills (Leroy & Simpson 1996; Ahmmed, Sharma & Deppeler 2012).

Polish research on attitudes towards inclusion shows that it is neutral in direction and that there is no connection between the type of educational institution and the direction of the attitude (Czyż 2017). Quality research shows the reluctance in turning away from the segregation system. The argument used is that it is a more beneficial form of education for people with disabilities. Low level of knowledge and skills of working with people with different developmental problems is diagnosed in teachers in public schools. Additionally, public institutions exhibit rather poor level of preparation for accepting students with special educational needs (Czyż 2016; Czyż, Gałuszka 2017), which might explain the teachers' neutral attitude towards inclusive education. This is due to the fact that they do not adequate

knowledge and experience in working in such a system. At the same time they feel that they do not possess adequate resources to meet the demands of open doors education. They however show an understanding for every child's right to personalized education designed to suit individual needs. The neutral attitude of teachers of special schools can be explained in a different way. Being accustomed to the segregation model of teaching, fear of the restructuring of the education system and employment, at the same time possessing knowledge and experience in working with students with developmental problems implying awareness of the characteristics of work following the common well-being and appreciating the rights of the disabled may generate indecisiveness and neutral attitudes to inclusive education.

3. Own research

In order to facilitate the popularization of inclusion, there is a need for a multidimensional diagnosis, including one on the teachers' attitudes towards the idea of inclusive education. The aim of the presented study is to determine the direction of teachers' attitude towards inclusive education of people with disabilities in the context of selected variables. The study proper was conducted among teachers as a diagnostic survey with the use of a tool designed for research on teachers' and educators' attitudes towards inclusive education of people with developmental problems and disabilities – The Scale for Measuring Attitudes Towards Inclusive Education. The tool has undergone standardization procedures, obtained high reliability (Cronbach's alpha = 0.85), sten score norms were established on the basis of a sample of 224 educators (Czyż 2017) and applied in the analysis of the results. Studies and standardization tests were carried out in March and April, and the research proper between May and October 2017 in Polish schools.

The attitude analysis was conducted based on the following variables: seniority (work experience in years) and position. After taking into account the capabilities of the tools, the size of sample and achieving normal distribution, to determine the relationships parametric statistics were used. The analysis uses descriptive statistics as well. No decision was made as to reduce the sample in determining the relationship between the attitude and seniority, and between the attitude and position. Results of the sample of teachers with the shortest experience (less than 5 years) and those employed as pre-school teachers and teachers of first years of elementary school were not used in determining the relationships.

3.1 Description of the tested sample

The study was conducted on a sample of 363 teachers. Those were men and women of age groups of under 30, 31–35 years old, 36–40 years old, 41–45 years old, and above 46

years old, with work experience of less than 2 years (the period of internship), between 3 and 10 years, 11–19 years, and more than 20 years, representing institutions on various levels of education starting with pre-school ending with secondary school, and occupying the following positions: teacher of school subjects, teacher-psychologist/pedagogue, pre-school and elementary school teacher (Table 1).

Table 1: *Characteristics of the tested sample*

<u>Characteristics</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>
Overall	363	100
Gender		
Man	74	20.39
Woman	289	79.61
Age		
≤30	51	14.05
31–35	64	17.63
36–40	87	23.97
41–45	65	17.91
≥46	96	26.45
Seniority in years		
≤2	59	16.25
3–10	104	28.65
11–19	106	26.45
≥20	94	25.89
Type of institution		
Mainstream	236	65.01
Special	127	34.99
The level of education		
Preschool	52	14.33
Elementary school	175	48.21
Secondary school	92	25.34
More than one level of education	44	12,12
Position		
Teacher of school subjects	148	40.77
Teacher-Psychologist/Pedagogue	144	39.67
Teacher of preschool and elementary school education	71	19.56

3.2 Results of own research

Results on the attitude in relation to seniority show that a significant majority of teachers, regardless of their teaching experience, are neutral towards inclusive education of children with developmental problems. The highest proportion of results indicating a negative attitude is in the sample of short work experience (3–10 years), while the highest proportion of results indicating a positive attitude is noted in the sample of longest work experience, i.e. more than 20 years. In the sample of teacher interns, who due to their number were not taken

into account in further analysis, noted was a balance between negative and positive attitudes and a relatively low percentage of neutral attitudes (Table 2).

Table 2: Summary of the results of the research on the attitudes towards inclusive education in the context of seniority

<u>Seniority in years</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>25%</u>	<u>75%</u>	<u>Sten</u>	<u>Low results</u>		<u>Average results</u>		<u>High results</u>	
							<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>
Intern ≤2	59	11.21	1.56	10.35	12.32	6	9	15.25	41	69.49	9	15.25
Short 3–10	104	10.69	1.39	9.73	11.72	5	31	29.81	64	61.54	9	8.65
Aver. 10–19	106	10.96	1.54	9.88	11.88	5	28	26.41	65	61.32	13	12.26
Long ≥20	94	11.31	1.43	10.49	12.05	6	16	17.02	65	69.15	13	13.83

Taking into account the results of ANOVA test, it was observed that seniority is of statistical significance ($p = 0.01$) to the attitude – years of experience differentiate the attitude. Post-hoc analyses using t-student test (Table 6, Figure 1) and analyses of descriptive statistics (Table 2) prove that teachers from the sample of work experience of more than 20 years are more favorable towards inclusive education of disabled children than their colleagues with work experience between 3 and 10 years ($p=0.00$). Differences between samples are also illustrated in Figure 1. A tendency towards positive attitude is observed as the work experience grows.

Table 3: ANOVA test results for the variable of seniority in the context of attitude

<u>Effect</u>	<u>SS</u>	<u>df</u>	<u>MS</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>p</u>
Variable Seniority in years	19.11	2	9.55	4.49	0.01*
<u>Variable Seniority in years</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>Attitudes -95.00%</u>	<u>Attitudes +95.00%</u>	<u>N</u>
short	10.69	0.14	10.41	10.97	104
average	10.96	0.14	10.68	11.24	106
long	11.31	0.15	11.02	11.61	94

*statistical significance ($p \leq 0.05$)

Table 4: Results of post-hoc analysis using t-student test for the variable of seniority in the context of attitude

<u>Variable Seniority</u>	<u>T</u>	<u>df</u>	<u>p</u>
short- long	-3.09	196	0.00*
short - average	-1.32	208	0.19
average - long	-1.67	198	0.10

*statistical significance ($p \leq 0.05$)

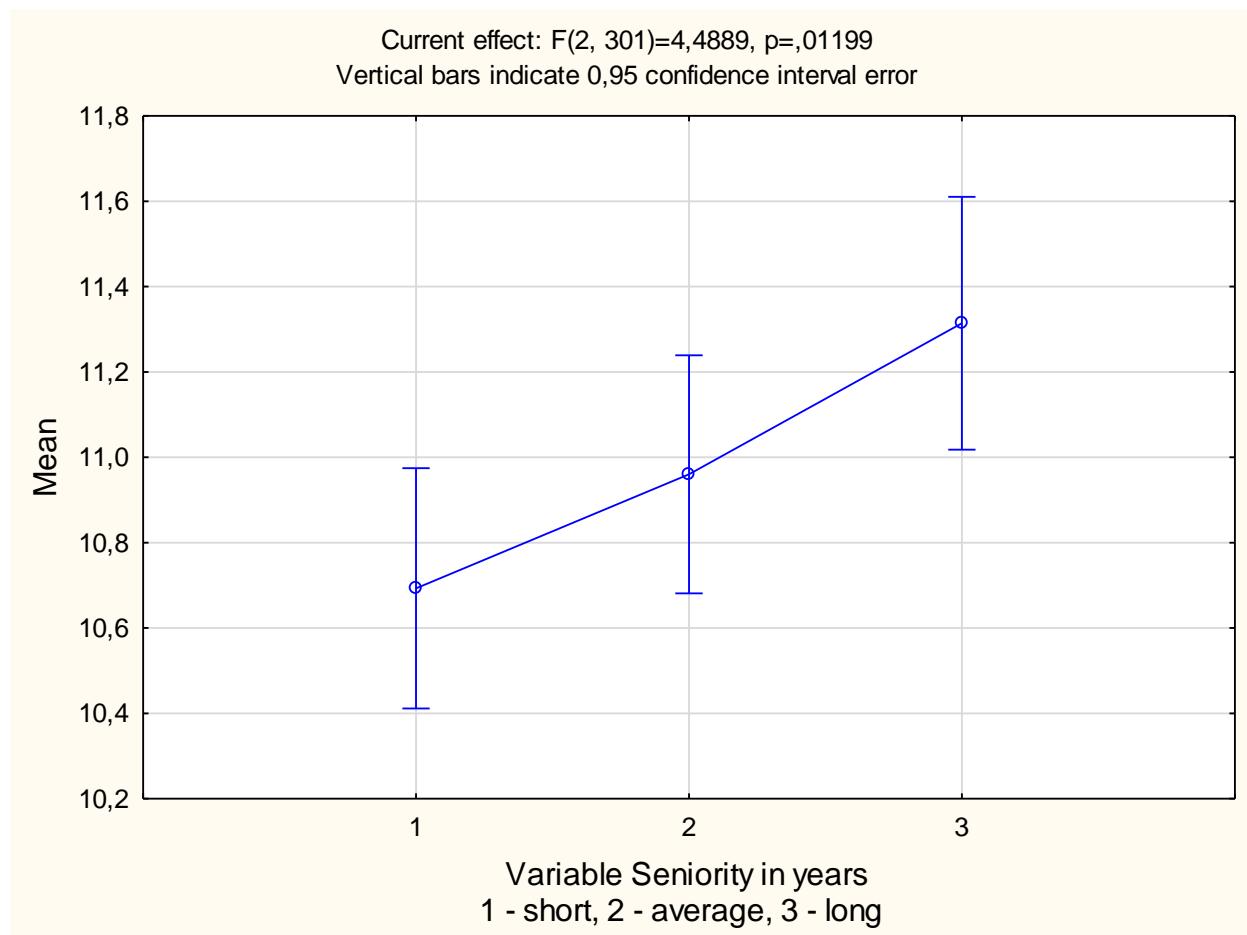


Figure 1: Graphical representation of results of research on the relationship between variables of seniority and attitude – comparison of mean values

It was observed that in samples taking into account the position occupied among teachers and teachers-pedagogues/psychologists, neutral attitude towards the idea of inclusive education of disabled children prevails. There is a dominance of low over high results in both samples (Table 5). Among pre-school and elementary school teachers, whose results were not taken into account in further analyses due to the population of sample, observed is a dominance of results suggesting neutral attitude and a comparable number of results indicating negative and positive attitude.

Table 5: Summary of the results of the research on the attitudes towards inclusive education in the context of position

<u>Position</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>25%</u>	<u>75%</u>	<u>Sten</u>	<u>Low results</u>		<u>Average results</u>		<u>High results</u>	
							<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>
Teacher of school subjects	14	10.9	1.5	9.96	12.03	5	3	24.3	9	62.8	1	12.8
Teacher-Psychologist	14	10.8	1.5	9.89	11.83	5	3	25.6	9	62.5	1	11.8
	8	8	8				6	2	3	4	9	4
	4	9	0				7	9	0		7	1

/ Pedagogue												
Teacher of preschool and elementary school education	71	11.34	1.26	10.69	12.16	6	11	15.49	52	73.24	8	11.27

In order to discover the relationship between the attitude and the position occupied by the teacher, a parametric t-student test was used for two independent variables (Table 6).

Table 6: Results of t-student test for the variable of position in the context of attitude

<u>Variable:</u> Positions	<u>t</u>	<u>df</u>	<u>p</u>
Teacher of school subjects and Teacher - Psychologist/Pedagogue	0.53	290	0.60

Taking into account both descriptive statistics and the result of t-student test revealing a lack of statistical significance, it is assumed that the teacher’s position does not differentiate the attitude towards inclusive education of students with developmental difficulties.

3.3 Discussion of the results

The results of the author’s research on the attitudes of teachers towards inclusive education suggest that there is a relationship between seniority and manifesting a more and more favorable attitude towards including children with special need in education environment. Experience in working with children fosters attitudes of openness and help, not change. Taking into account the results of the youngest group – teacher interns – it is observed that in the first stage of work they seek to explore the environment which is manifested in neutral attitude and a balance between negative and positive attitudes. Short work experience of 3 to 10 years moves the results in the direction of negative attitudes, which may suggest that the teacher is focused more on achieving educational aims and less on the children themselves. The increasing work experience of teacher’s causes at the same time moving away from schematic approach and focus on educational aims and tasks in favor of paying attention to the child and their needs. Professional stability and a richer work experience with proper skills and tools can also cause in teachers a higher sense of control, greater resourcefulness and ability to solve problems creatively which promotes not only the implementation and propagation of the idea of inclusive education, but more importantly the development of all aspects of education. It fosters tolerance, discovering oneself and others, shaping openness. Optimism itself and positive attitude facilitate the achievement of goals,

aids relieving tensions and solving conflicts. At the same time, research results do not reveal the significance of a relationship between the attitude and position occupied.

The research was based on the representativeness of the research sample, a research tool taking into account the context of introducing inclusive education in Poland, what was the strength of the study. Research limitations were the specificity of the research group and its availability, research issues, including polish and globality contexts of inclusive education.

4. Conclusions

The results of the study constitute a valuable source of information which is the basis for determining the reasons for the slow development of inclusive education in countries of similar models of education and similar experiences as those of Poland. They provide possibility for establishing a change in direction and implementing adequate solutions. Extensively designed and put into practice corrective programs should follow. On the one hand, attitude as a relatively constant and stable component, on the other hand, one that is undergoing slow changes under the influence of information and, as research results show, experiences. Due to the diagnosed positive tendency as work experience progresses, it is worth to stimulate, encourage and enrich the personality of teachers not only not to disturb the development, but to accelerate and strengthen it. It should be remembered that the direction of attitude is to be constantly monitored, and in the case of negative changes corrective measures are to be taken. In addition, understanding the importance of components of attitude (cognitive, emotional, and performative), comprehensive actions should be implemented, the knowledge and skills of using them enhanced and the awareness of the needs of others raised. The acceleration of inclusion calls for the consultation and cooperation of specialists from experienced countries, as it is a stimulating factor which at the same time helps prevent errors and/or to effectively eliminate them.

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