

TEACHERS OPINIONS TOWARDS THE INTEGRATION OF STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS IN MASS EDUCATION

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Abstract: *The present article is a qualitative research which responds to the following question: 'What is teachers' opinion on integration of students with special needs in normal schools?' A group interview method was used to answer this question. Ten respondents, teachers in urban high school and middle school level attended the focus group. The results showed a positive attitude towards inclusion. The results represent a starting point for future research on the attitude of teachers towards integration.*

Key words: *Integration, attitude, students with special needs.*

1. Introduction

To understand the attitudes of teachers towards disabled students integrated in mass education, we consider it necessary to explain the concepts of "integration" and "attitude".

According to Verza (1998) integration represents a way of achieving normalization. Normalization means ensuring conditions for children with special needs similar to those for normal children. Gherguţ (2001) recalls about a functional normalization (ensuring specific conditions to persons with deficiencies), a social normalization (membership of a small group) and a societal reconstruction (widening social group towards public life). Verza (1995) defines the school integration as a process of adjustment of the child to the school's requirements he or she attends to. School integration according to Gherguţ (2001) involves the inclusion of student with special needs in learning activities and school participation, depending on the potential, alongside other children. An interesting approach of the concept of integration is provided by the same author, which recalls what is not integration (Gherguţ, 2006). Therefore, integration does not mean to isolate children with special needs in special classes of the school, or keeping them isolated from the rest of the class, without getting them involved in learning activities. Integration does not mean accepting children with special needs in mass schools just for benefits, without the necessary training and support.

In terms of attitude, Allport (1959) defines the attitude as the subject's stance toward another subject, object, or situation. Larousse (1998) explains that the concept of attitude covers various meanings. There are personal attitudes that put in question only the individual, and social attitudes that have an impact on the groups, both having in common a set of personal reactions toward a determined object: animal, person, idea, or thing.

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There are numerous studies in terms of teachers' attitude towards students with disabilities. Thus, Clough and Lindsay (1991) have presented a ranking of the teachers, who considered the needs of children with emotional and behavioral difficulties as the most difficult to fulfil, then the needs of children with impaired sight, and those with hearing impairments. Researchers have shown that the presence of children with special needs in the classroom is an issue for teachers focused only on teaching the material. Chalmers (1991) concluded that primary teachers are more open to the idea of integration when compared with their colleagues from secondary. Forlin (1995) showed that teachers in educational support centers and teachers from special schools accept children with disabilities easier than teachers from mass school, the latter supporting more children with physical disabilities than children with mental deficiencies. Jordan, Lindsay and Stanovich (1997) studied the relationship between teachers' beliefs and attitude, showing that teachers who believe in rehabilitation of children have a different teaching style than teachers who don't think students with special needs can recover. Croll and Mores (2000) as cited in Scutaru and Coceanu (2012) showed the relationship between the severity of the deficiency of the student and teacher attitude by revealing the fact that students with mild impairments are more easily accepted when compared to students with serious deficiencies. Etenesh (2000) as cited in Cramaruc (2012) studied the relationship between teachers' attitude and the severity of the disability, and showed that the attitude of rejection is stronger in the case of students with severe disabilities than in case of those with less severe impairments. Lie Yueh Cheng (2005) as cited in Cramaruc (2012) showed that 45% of the teachers polled in the Taiwanese area have reported that students with severe disabilities should be included in the special classes. Daunarummo (2010) measured the perception towards integration of directors, teachers from special schools, and teachers from normal schools from New Jersey. Data were collected through focus group interviews. With regard to support integration, participants responded that they would need support from the authorities, training and qualifications, teachers' collaboration with teachers from special schools will also be beneficial. The three groups have agreed that a positive influence on the integration process is a must. Sharma and Sokal (2016) investigated the relationship between Canadian teachers' classroom behavior and attitude, caring, and self-reported effectiveness towards inclusion. Through several scales and observations, researchers have come to the conclusion that teachers who had a positive behavior in the classroom towards the students with deficiencies have recorded lower scores in attitude measurement scales and concern towards inclusion. In Romania, Bolea (2007) investigated teachers' opinion towards the integration of education and special education in Cluj. The results were obtained through interviews taken directly from persons involved in integration: principals, teachers, speech therapists, special education teachers, support teachers. The analyzed dimensions were: difficulties encountered in integrating, teachers training, curriculum and assessment. The following difficulties were identified: lack of communication between specialists, stereotypes regarding the success of the integration of students with deficiencies, inadequacies in training teachers to work with students with special needs, lack of materials and conditions to facilitate activity, overloaded curriculum, overloaded classrooms.

It is to be noted that teachers' attitudes towards the integration of the student with deficiencies are different, standing at two opposite poles, acceptance of children with special needs or rejection, between those two poles are included attitudinal changes

depending on certain factors. The severity of the deficiency also adversely influences the attitude of teachers. A more serious deficiency brings out rejection. Also, the situation of students with special needs regarding integration in schools is different in Romania from the situation in other countries from Europe or America, where most of the studies have been supported as previously mentioned. In this context, investigating the attitude towards integration remains a topic of actuality.

2. Objectives

The objective of the study is to investigate the attitudes of a small group of teachers from Braşov County towards integration in the mass education of students with special needs. Teachers' attitudes influence the process of integration, knowledge of this attitude allows the elaboration of programs aimed to change the attitudes and, hence, to facilitate integration.

3. Methods and Materials

The present study is a qualitative research. A group interview was used for data collection. The interview theme was the integration of pupils with special needs in mass education: it contained 22 questions (opening questions, key questions, final questions). The interview took place in a public school with the agreement of the director. The interview guide is given in Appendix 1.

Interpretation of the data is done by analyzing the frequency of answers. The answers given by teachers during the interview were classified and encoded on a scale from 1 to 5 in order to be analyzed, where 1 implied total disagreement, 2-partial disagreement, 3-neutral, 4 - partially agreement, and 5- totally agreement.

Participants in the interview were 10 teachers in tertiary education, in Braşov County, urban high school and middle school level, participants between ages of 24 and 60 years old and with experience in service between 1 and 42 years. Eight teachers have worked with students with moderate mental deficiency and have participated in at least one course intended for integration.

4. Results

Teachers' answers to the questions in the interview were classified from total disagreement to total agreement.

To questions regarding the integration of persons with disabilities in general (Persons with special needs have the right to health services and recovery? /Persons with special needs have the right to education? / Persons with the special needs have the right to training for employment?), all teachers expressed their total agreement to the rights of this category.

To the question 'Is the place of students with special needs in Special School?', six teachers expressed total and partial disagreement, which indicates a positive attitude toward the integration (fig.1).

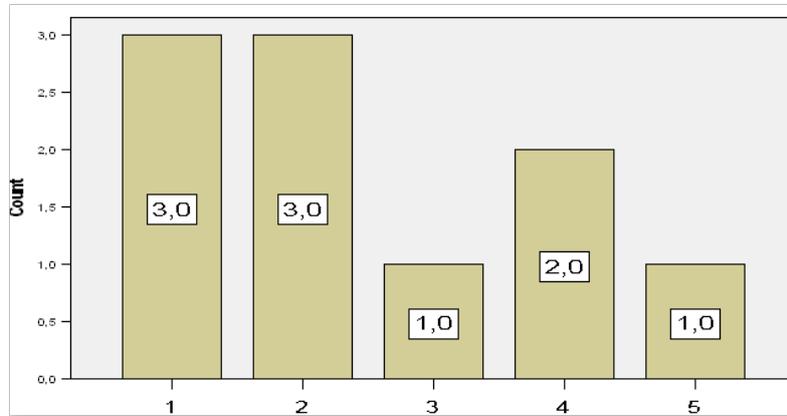


Fig. 1. Frequency responses to the question 'Is the place of students with special needs in Special School?'

Also, six teachers considered that the image of the school is not going to be affected by the presence of students with special needs and totally agreed with the statement 'The image of the school is not affected by the presence of students with special needs' (fig. 2).

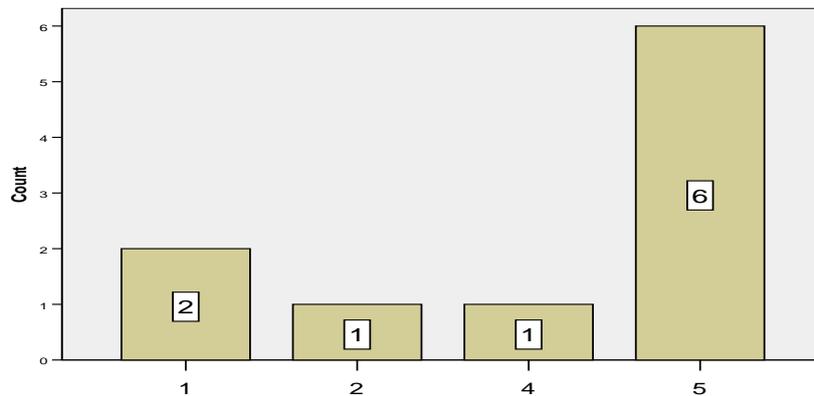


Fig. 2. Frequency responses to the statement 'The image of the school is not affected by the presence of students with special needs'

Regarding the statement 'Students with moderate disabilities can make progresses in the classroom', the participating teachers' answers were partially and totally agreement (fig. 3), which shows a positive attitude towards the integration of pupils with moderate deficiencies. The same attitude is expressed regarding the integration of students with serious deficiencies.

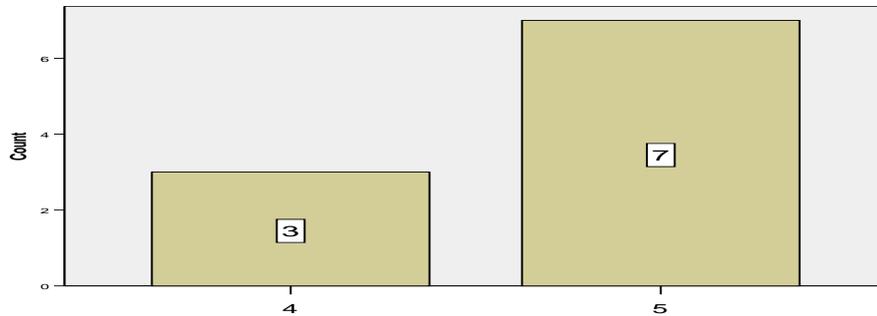


Fig. 3. Frequency responses to the statement 'Students with moderate deficiencies can make progress in classroom'

To the statement 'Students with special needs represent extra work for the teacher', eight teachers have been in total or partially disagreement (fig. 4).

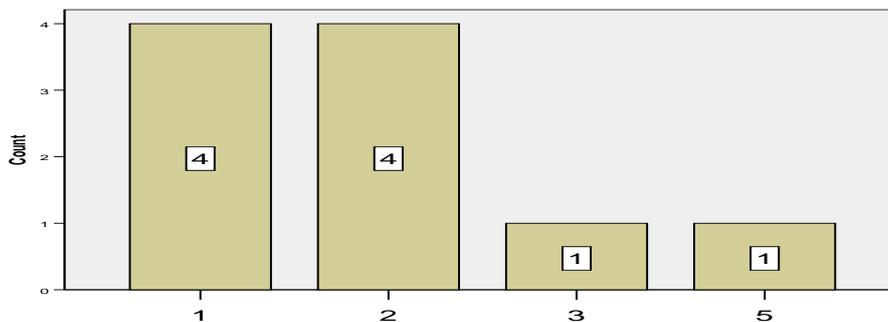


Fig. 7. Frequency responses to the statement 'Students with special needs represent extra work for the teacher'

The analysis of the questions regarding the integration of pupils depending on the type of disability the following ranking can be noted (fig. 8). At the top of the pyramid is the type of disability considered difficult to be integrated, and at the foundation of the pyramid is the type of disability easy to integrate in the public school (fig. 8).

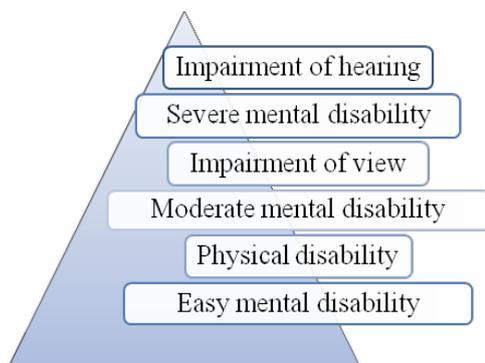


Fig. 8. The rank of deficiencies according to the difficulty to integrate

5. Conclusions and Discussion

The aim of this study was to investigate the attitude of a small group of teachers regarding the integration of pupils with special needs in public school, by focus-group method. The results indicate a positive attitude toward the inclusion. Teachers do not consider a disability student to be in any way harmful to the school reputation, they agreed that this category of students have also the right to education, health and professional training. Furthermore, the participating teachers share the opinion that the students with moderate and severe disabilities can progress in public school, the presence of a student with special needs in the class was not considered to be additional work for the teacher. Regarding the difficulty of the disabilities, teachers considered that students with impaired hearing are difficult to integrate in the public school, followed by those with severe mental deficiency, and by those with visual impairment. Easier to integrate are students with physical deficiencies and students with easy mental deficiency.

An important aspect that influenced the response of the participants is the lack of anonymity. Teachers have expressed a positive attitude because they were afraid of social judgment. Among the disadvantages of the focus group interview are: the volume of the information is low and the operation time is higher.

Starting from these results it is desirable to develop an instrument that would allow the investigation of teachers' attitude in a greater number, in a shorter time and under the principle of anonymity.

The obtained results have practical value, institution-wide, providing useful information in terms of teachers' attitude towards integration.

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Appendix 1

Interview Guide

Interview type: focus group

Theme: Integration of students with special needs in mass schools

Location: Brasov

Date of Interview: 15/02/2017

Interview time: 12:00

Interview duration: 30-40 min

Number interviewed: 10

Socio-demographic data of the respondents: Gender: F \ Age: 24-60 years / teachers, secondary level / high school / urban environment.

Opening questions:

1. Tell me who you are and what is your profession?
2. When did you start your activity in education?
3. What does 'student with special education needs' means?
4. What is the integration of a student with special needs?
5. Have you worked with students with special education needs?
6. What type of disabilities had students which you have worked with?
7. What degree of disabilities had students which you have worked with?

Key questions:

8. Are special needs persons entitled to health services and recovery
9. Persons with special needs are entitled to education?
10. Persons with special needs are entitled to training for employment?
11. What do you think about the statement “Is the place of students with special needs is in Special School”?
12. Do you think that the image of the school is affected by the presence of students with special needs?
13. Students with moderate deficiencies can make progress in class?
14. What do you think about the statement “Students with serious deficiencies do not make progress in the usual class.”
15. Can a student with special needs be considered extra work for the teacher?
16. What do you think about the integration of pupils with hearing impaired?
17. What do you think about the integration of pupils with deficiencies of view?
18. What do you think about the integration of pupils with physical deficiencies?
19. What do you think about the integration of pupils with slight mental deficiencies?
20. What do you think about the integration of pupils with moderate mental deficiencies?
21. What do you think about the integration of pupils with severe mental deficiencies?

Final questions

22. What is your general opinion about what we discussed today?