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**INTERCONNECTIONS BETWEEN TEACHERS' ATTITUDE AND
INCLUSIVE EDUCATION**

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Abstract

The study focuses on teachers' attitudes as a key element in ensuring optimal teaching and learning process. The topicality of the study is justified by the shortcomings in the reforms of the national education system related to the implementation of inclusive education, where one of the most important factors is the insufficient competence of teachers. The purpose is to study the teachers' subjective self-assessment of attitudes towards the implementation of the inclusive education in the context of a three-dimensional model, which includes the affective, behavioural and cognitive indicators of attitude. The research questions are: (1) How do attitudinal components affect teachers' involvement in inclusive education? and (2) What components of attitudes need to be updated in teacher education? A quantitative research methodology, based on correlational research design, is used to address the topic and the survey Attitudes towards Teaching All Students (ATTAS-mm) was employed. For statistical analysis a method of descriptive statistics, Kruskal-Wallis test, and Mann-Whitney test was applied. The study involves teachers with different backgrounds, professional qualifications and involvement in inclusive education. The results confirm that the affective and behavioural dimensions of the attitudes reveal a prevailing positive attitude and the readiness to create an accepting learning environment, whereas the cognitive dimension confirms the negative attitude. Improvement of the content of teacher study programs is necessary to prevent the development of such negative attitudes.

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1. Introduction

Inclusive education is a humanitarian effort to achieve social justice by ensuring equal conditions and opportunities for all people to participate in obtaining education and, at the same time, in wider public life (Frühauf, 2010; Jacobs, 2013). Consequently, children's own readiness to be accepted into mainstream education is no longer considered as the primary issue. Demands to adapt are nowadays transferred to schools that are expected to become more welcoming towards children with differing abilities (Ainscow, 2005; Saloviita, 2018).

Since the late 1990s, inclusive education policies have been defined in statements and programmes of various international organizations such as UNESCO, the Council of Europe, and the United Nations. In this context, UNESCO conceptualises an ideal model of the education system, where inclusion and equality are the "cornerstones" of the educational programme and all forms of pushing out, exclusion and inequality are eliminated, thus allowing all people to participate in education process and achieve learning outcomes (UNESCO, 2015). In turn, according to the Council of Europe policies, the social value of inclusive education is also reflected in its capacity to develop the understanding of human diversity (Communication from the Commission Europe, 2010).

The principles of inclusive education have been incorporated into many countries' laws, which initiate long-term reform processes of education systems in many EU countries. The analysis of international studies confirms that the relevance of educational institutions to the specific needs of the individual is crucial for the implementation of inclusive education. In this context, education has to be organized in a way that every student gets adequate and well-timed support for her / his learning and growth (Hasan, Halder, & Debnath, 2018; Haug, 2017; Maykus et al., 2014; Saloviita, 2018).

Such educational strategy poses a challenge to the competence of teachers because teachers must believe in the fact that they are capable of teaching all children and continually developing new and creative ways of teaching (Florian 2014; Haug, 2017; Schmidt & Vrhovnik, 2015). For the present, there is currently a lack of conclusive evidence-based proof of the direct impact of teachers' beliefs and attitudes on the quality of the implementation of the learning process (Heinrich, Urban, & Werning, 2013; Saloviita, 2018). However, research reports certify that attitudes are a significant component in the structure of teachers' professional competence, which is an important factor of a person's professional activity and assists in being aware of personal beliefs and values (Bethere, Vecenane, & Usca, 2018).

The study presented in the publication focuses on the study of teachers' attitude towards the inclusion of children with special educational needs (SEN) in the general educational setting. The aim of the study is not only to highlight the influence of attitudinal components affecting teachers' involvement in inclusive education, but also to emphasize the potential impact of teacher education on the components of attitudes.

1.1. The structure of teachers' attitude

Attitude is a system of positive or negative evaluations, emotional feelings, and cation tendencies that is expressed in the evaluation of a particular social environment object or impression and determines the evaluative judgment of the usefulness and truthfulness of the information provided, as well as of the

involvement in activities and social processes, etc. (Delamater & Myers, 2001; Long, 2000; Matthewman, Rose, & Hetherington, 2009).

There are three evaluative components in the structure of attitude: (1) an affective component that includes feelings or emotions evoked by the object; (2) a behavioural component expressed by the tendency or disposition to act in a particular way towards an object; and (3) a cognitive component – containing our perceptions, thoughts, beliefs, and ideas about the object. The affective or the component of feelings is of utmost importance and have a significant impact on the other two components (Delamater, Myers, & Collett, 2015; Eagly & Chaiken, 1993; Petty & Cacioppo, 2018).

Scientific studies emphasize that among the factors that are able to strengthen the relationship between attitudes and behaviour are the following ones: (1) a solid foundation base of information and knowledge; (2) comprehension that facilitates identification and retrieving from the mind; (3) protective character of attitudes supported by the existing belief system (Matthewman, Rose, & Hetherington, 2009). In addition, the above-mentioned interaction between attitudes and behaviours depends on the individuality of each personality (Huskinson & Haddock, 2006). In this context, teachers' attitudes can be defined as pedagogically relevant subjective concepts that primarily affect perceptions of the environment, professional interactions with students, and determine, for example, a classroom climate (Gasterstädt & Urban, 2016; Madukwe, Onwuka, & Nyejirime, 2019).

1.2. The importance of teachers' attitudes and the factors of their formation in inclusive education

In the context of inclusive education, teachers are active participants in the education process. They should be motivated and interested in providing quality education for children with different educational needs. Numerous scientific studies confirm that positive teachers' attitudes towards inclusion are transferred into effective action during the implementation of the educational process. This means that teachers who are competent and accept responsibility for teaching a wide variety of students recognize that the way of teaching contributes to their students' educational outputs. They feel confident in their instructional and management skills, as well as engage in regular professional training and can successfully implement inclusive programmes (Gollwitzer & Schmitt, 2009; Kullmann et al., 2015; Maio & Haddock, 2015).

According to scientific knowledge, a positive attitude enhances teachers' professional curiosity, motivates them to critically evaluate new information and improve their pedagogical approach (Briñol & Petty, 2005). It enables them to overcome current professional challenges, such as creative organization of learning in the classroom, formation of competent and positively oriented relationships with the partners involved, that is, students, colleagues, and parents, adequate response to students' behavior, satisfaction with their professional responsibilities, and adequate assessment of the quality of work performance (Brooks & Goldstein, 2007; Ewing, Monsen, & Kielblock, 2017).

The development of teacher attitudes in inclusive settings is also influenced by the interaction of individual and social factors. In this context, research analysis reveals a diverse set of indicators, such as teachers' life and professional experience, competence, self-esteem, type of educational institution, where the teaching staff is employed, number of children with SEN in the classroom, support of the professional

environment, etc. (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; Boer, 2012; Hellmich, Görel, & Schwab, 2016; Urton, Wilbert & Hennemann, 2014).

Analysis of research findings reveals a relatively common view on the relevance between teachers' age and attitudes towards inclusive education, i.e., more positive attitudes are present among younger teachers (Schüle, Schriek, Besa, & Arnold, 2016; Schmidt & Vrhovnik, 2015). On the other hand, the impact of professional experience in the development of teacher attitudes is controversial. For example, Praisner (2003) points out that teachers who have more experience of daily professional practice in inclusive education demonstrate a more positive attitude. Avramidis & Norwich (2002), on the other hand, deny this relationship based on the results of numerous studies.

Research reports show that teachers' attitudes are also determined by confrontation with specific childhood SENs in their daily work, for example, Boer (2012), in this context, identifies the most common negative attitudes of teachers towards the inclusion of students with emotional and behavioural difficulties or moderate learning disabilities and emotional disturbances. Lack of knowledge and stereotypical perceptions of the nature of pupils' special educational needs are pointed out as the main factors causing the deficit of positive teachers' attitudes (Maykus et al., 2014; Werning, 2014).

The empirical research presented in this article examines the attitudes of teachers and students of the teacher education study programmes towards the inclusion of children with SEN, respecting their gender, age, the level of education, type of school, and teachers' age including their professional experience and ambition.

2. Problem Statement

Scientific evidence supporting the relevance of the study confirms that teachers' attitudes are a key variable in ensuring inclusive education process. The link between the belief of the individual in the values of inclusion and the tendencies to improve the educational process is crucial in this regard. This aspect is important for the implementation of reforms in the Latvian education system with the orientation towards social inclusion. The mentioned reforms began at the end of the 20th century and therefore, inclusive education has been made a priority in the planning documents of education system development. In its turn, national research in the context of inclusive education commissioned by the government, particularly emphasizes the lack of teacher competence and effective support for pedagogical activities in inclusive settings (Study on International Practice in Disability Support Systems, 2017; Study on the Cost Model for Support Services for Children with Special Needs, 2018).

Thus, the research focusing on teachers' attitudes can be considered as a contribution to the development of an inclusive education system. At the same time, the evaluation of such orientations helps to raise the social status of teachers, affects the ongoing need for personal growth and promotes their professional self-confidence, as well as ensure meeting their needs for self-realization (Stranovská & Lalinská, 2017).

The study addresses the attitude of teachers as one of the basic elements in forming personal competence and creating inclusive, equitable, and democratic learning communities.

3. Research Questions

The research questions are defined as follows:

- How do attitudinal components affect teachers' involvement in inclusive education?
- What components of attitudes need to be updated in teacher education?

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the research is to study teachers' subjective self-assessment of attitudes towards the implementation of inclusive education in the context of a three-dimensional model that incorporates both the affective perception assertions of the inclusion process and the reactive, behavioural, and cognitive indicators of attitude.

5. Research Methods

5.1. Research sample

227 questionnaires were used to obtain research data. The dominant participants of the research sample are subject teachers - 48.9%. The respondents also include primary education teachers (27.3%), support staff of educational settings (8.4%), teacher education students (4.4%) and other representatives of the groups delivering learning activities and content (11.0%) - special education teachers, preschool teachers, education policy planners, etc. The majority of respondents are women - 89.4%.

Concerning the location and type of the educational establishment, 55.1% of the respondents stated that they work in urban areas, 31.7% in rural areas and 11.9% in both urban and rural areas. Correspondingly, 45.4% work in elementary school, 41.0% in high school, and 13.7% indicate another type of educational institution, such as pre-school, special school or non-formal education setting.

Dominantly - 53.7% of respondents consider that educational facilities available at their educational institutions are insufficient for successful implementation of inclusive education. However, 37.4% consider them to be sufficient and 4.0% - as very good especially at schools, but 4.8% have not answered this question.

Regarding vocational and academic degree, 47.6% have a bachelor's degree, 44.1% a master's degree, 3.1% a doctor's degree, and 4.4% are undergraduate students.

In terms of pedagogical experience, most respondents are with 20+ years of experience (49.8%). Correspondingly, 14.5% of respondents have 15-19 years of work experience, 13.7% of respondents – 10 to 14 years, but 10.6% - 5 to 9 years and 11.0% up to 4 years.

The research sample includes groups of respondents who have acquired their education and/ or professional experience in different ways: in higher education programmes - 22.9%, only in practical pedagogical work - 16.7%, as well as there are participants who have obtained the professional qualification for pedagogical work with children with SEN only in continuing professional development courses - 42.3%. On the other hand, 15.9% obtained the qualification in all the above-mentioned ways.

Regarding the working hours that respondents spend with children with SEN, the research data reveal the following results: 29.1% of respondents work 11-80 hours a month, 18.1% - from 2 to 10 hours

a month, 15.9% - more than 80 hours a month, 7.9% - up to 1 hour per month, but 3.1% of respondents currently do not provide education for children with SEN.

In connection with future career development plans, 44.5% of respondents intend to continue working in an educational institution for 5-10 years. Similarly, there are 23.8% of respondents who plan to do so for 11 to 20 years or less than 5 years. Only 7.9% of respondents would like to become the head of an educational institution.

5.2. Method

The survey of the Attitudes towards Teaching All Students (ATTAS-mm) was employed to obtain the empirical data for this study (Gregory & Noto, 2012). The survey contains nine questions grouped in three subscales to study the components of the attitude of teachers regarding the three-dimensional model. The Likert-type 7-point scale was offered to reveal the attitude towards the statements included in the survey: “agree very strongly”, “strongly agree”, “agree”, “neither agree nor disagree”, “disagree”, “strongly disagree”, and “disagree very strongly”. To get as objective responses as possible from the respondents and answer the research questions put forward for this study, the questionnaires were translated into Latvian, at the same time, respecting the authenticity of the semantics of questions.

For statistical analysis of the research data, the SPSS 25.0 program was employed: a method of descriptive statistics, Kruskal-Wallis test, Mann-Whitney test. According to the data encoding system, the lower average value of the indicators indicates a higher number of positive answers.

6. Findings

The statistical analysis of ATTAS-mm questionnaire data confirms that the total Full-Scale Cronbach's Alpha value is $\alpha = .738$, which indicates the relevance of the particular research instrument. Table 1 shows the mean values for the subscales.

Table 01. The components of attitude and mean values

Component	Subscale	Mean
Cognitive	1.Believing all students can succeed in general education classrooms	5.30
Affective	2.Developing personal and professional relationships	2.80
Behavioral	3.Creating an accepting environment for all students to learn	3.04

Analyzing the dominant trends for comparing the three attitude components, the mean values of the subscales for profiling statements are featured (see Table 2).

Table 02. Mean values of the statements

No. of the subscale	Statement	Mean
1.	1.Most or all separate classrooms that exclusively serve students with mild to moderate disabilities should be eliminated.	6.26
	2.Students with mild to moderate disabilities should be taught in regular classes with nondisabled students because they will not require too much of the teacher’s time.	5.10

	3. Students with mild to moderate disabilities can be more effectively educated in regular classrooms as opposed to special education classrooms.	4.54
2.	4. I would like to be mentored by a teacher who models effective differentiated instruction.	2.05
	5. I want to emulate teachers who know how to design appropriate academic interventions.	3.09
	6. I believe including students with mild/moderate disabilities in the regular education classrooms is effective because they can learn the social skills necessary for success.	3.25
3.	7. I would like people to think that I can create a welcoming classroom environment for students with mild to moderate disabilities.	2.81
	8. Students with mild to moderate disabilities can be trusted with responsibilities in the classroom.	2.28
	9. All students with mild to moderate disabilities should be educated in regular classrooms with non-handicapped peers to the fullest extent possible.	4.04

When analyzing the indicators of statements that confirm the respondents' agreement (see Table 2), the Kruskal –Wallis test found statistically significant differences for Statement 4 (Subscale 2): (a) dependence on respondents' place of work ($p = .018$) - teachers from rural educational institutions would be more likely to seek mentorship (Mean Rank 96.38), while teachers from city schools more seldom (Mean Rank 120.22); (b) dependence on the material resources of the educational institution ($p = .001$) - support is more likely to be received in the cases when teachers declare the material resources of their school as insufficient (Mean Rank 96.15), less often the respondents agree with this statement if they indicate material resources as sufficient (Mean Rank 126.70).

Resulting from the findings of the study quite significant differences were found for Statement 5 (Subscale 2): (a) in connection with the location of the respondents' workplace ($p = .001$) - the desire to emulate teachers who know how to design appropriate academic interventions is more often expressed by the teachers who work in rural areas (Mean Rank 84.37), but less often by those working in urban educational institutions (Mean Rank 125.76); (b) dependence on the amount of the respondents' workload with SEN ($p = .017$) - respondents with a workload of 11-80 hours per month (Mean Rank 92.86) are more likely to agree, whereas less frequently agree with the respondents with a workload of 2-10 hours per month (Mean Rank 135.37); (c) in connection with the plans to continue working at an educational institution ($p = .000$): respondents who intend to continue their employment for more than 20 years (Mean Rank 51.62) are more likely to agree, but less often those who intend to continue working for less than 5 years (Mean Rank 124.81).

Statistically significant differences can be discerned for Statement 6 (Subscale 2): (a) the relevance of the respondents' qualifications ($p = .012$): the statement was more often agreed by the support staff (Mean Rank 105.84) and less frequently by the students (Mean Rank 179.95); (b) dependence on respondents' work experience in the education system ($p = .009$): respondents with work experience of 5 to 9 years more often agree (Mean Rank 83.77), but less often the respondents with work experience of 10 to 14 years (Mean Rank 133.67) and 15 - 19 (Mean Rank 130.19); (c) interdependence with the way in which respondents obtained professional qualification to work with children with SEN ($p = .000$) - this statement is more likely to be shared by respondents who obtained qualifications only in continuing professional development courses (Mean Rank 82.70), however, less often by the graduates from higher education

(Mean Rank 120.85); (d) the relevance of the amount of respondents' workload with children with SEN ($p = .001$): the respondents with a work load of 2-10 hours per month (Mean Rank 90.84) are more likely to agree, whereas less tend to agree those who work more than 80 hours per month (Mean Rank 138.68); (e) in connection with the status of the school in which respondents work ($p = .016$) - secondary school teachers (Mean Rank 99.40) are more likely to agree than basic education teachers (Mean Rank 124.66).

Statistically significant differences are found for Statement 7 (Subscale 3): (a) connection with the respondents' academic background ($p = .033$) - respondents with a Ph.D degree (Mean Rank 86.64) are more likely to agree, whereas the students share opposite opinion (Mean Rank 174.42); (b) relevance to the type of obtaining professional qualification for pedagogical work with children with SEN ($p = .008$) - graduates from higher education studies (Mean Rank 75.45) are more likely to agree than those having only practical work experience (Mean Rank 106.61).

There are significant differences ($p = .023$) for Statement 8 (Subscale 3) in connection with future work plans in an educational institution: respondents who plan to continue working for more than 20 years agree more often (Mean Rank 64.38) than respondents planning to work for less than 5 years (Mean Rank 118.64).

7. Conclusion

The study presented in the publication involves teachers with different levels of an individual professional career. Regarding the question of attitudinal components that affect teachers' involvement in inclusive education, there is an identifiable disharmony in the interaction of attitude components. In this context, the analysis of the findings points to the dominance of affective and behavioural components concerning a cognitive component deficiency (see table 1).

It should be emphasized that the study confirms the belief that all learners can succeed in general education classrooms (Mean Rank 317.97). More positive answers were given by the respondents with work experience up to 4 years (Mean Rank 315.93) and those who do not currently provide education for children with special needs (Mean Rank 287.23), as well as those who have been employed in inclusive education for 2-10 hours per month (Mean Rank 308.14). Since these above-mentioned groups of respondents are in numerical minority, majority of cases produced the respondents' dominant negative attitude to the statements that most or all separate classrooms should be closed, as a student with SEN can be effectively educated in regular classrooms and would not require too much of the teacher's time (see table 2).

At the same time, it confirms the real situation in the inclusive education system, that is, the more teachers' professional experience and engagement in inclusive education increases, the more confidence in opportunities for success in this area is diminished. Possibly such attitudinal development is rooted in social factors, such as insufficient financial resources of the educational institution for the implementation of inclusive education. The lack of systemic education of mainstream teachers in inclusive education might also be a contributing factor in this context.

The discussion of the attitude development process provides some answers to the issue of the components of attitudes needed to be updated and addressed urgently in teacher education. Teacher study programs should include both theoretical courses and opportunities for practical action in an inclusive

education environment. As a result, providing the future teachers with a sense of personal ability and influence that would preventively serve the competent use of personal physical, mental and social resources would help to overcome the challenges of inclusive education in a professional career.

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