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**STUDY-TEACHER' ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE INTEGRATION
OF CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS IN KINDERGARTEN**

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Abstract

The scope of this study is to identify which is the attitude teachers in Cluj County have in relation to the inclusion of children special educational needs in kindergarten, as well as their training level in the inclusive education field. For the realization of this study, 103 teachers from kindergartens in Cluj County agreed to participate, who face the challenges of the inclusion of children with special educational requirements in their classroom. The teachers who participated are specialized as educators and teachers for preschool education, and have didactic degree I, didactic degree II, definitive didactic degree, and a small part have no didactic degree. The subjects were voluntarily chosen, out of 110 requests to participate, 103 teachers responded positively. The survey method was used for this research, and as a working tool the questionnaire. To collect the data a questionnaire was used, which highlights the attitude teachers have, as well as the training they have in the inclusive education field. The questionnaire used aims to express opinions and options teachers in mass education have, based on specific criteria regarding the inclusion process. For this questionnaire teachers have to read the items and check the extent to which that answer suits them (from the 5 possible options: 1 – strongly disagree, 2 – disagree, 3 – neutral/I don't know, 4 – agree, 5 – strongly agree) (Likert Scale).

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1. Introduction

We hear more and more often people talking about diversity, accepting human diversity, valuing diversity, but also about the challenges and opportunities offered to education by the diversity of experiences and models that appeared in the last years (Gherguț & Frumos, 2019).

It is known that integrating and educating children with special educational needs never represented a priority for the educational system, and the education was neither ready nor open to answer to these requirements. Many of these children have been rejected by society, and then, step by step, an understanding of social and individual nature of each child has developed and laid the foundations of special education. (Albulescu & Catalano, 2019).

New regulations adopted by the Romanian government state that children with special educational requirements can be integrated in special education units, or in special classes in normal educational units, as well as individually in classes with children who have a normal development from kindergartens. (Neamțu & Gherguț, 2000)

Gherguț (2016), states that for an optimal success in the integration process of children with special educational requirements in kindergarten, it is necessary for several stages to be completed over time, which have as a purpose ensuring favorable conditions for the integration

Integrated education referred to children with disabilities, at the beginning. Once new integration models appeared, concepts of individualization, normalization, adaptation to mass school, became operational. Children with disabilities were guided more and more towards mass schools, getting additional support in this institution, or in another, outside the school program. Even though it manages to eliminate the isolation characteristic to previous periods, this manner of solving the special educational requirements did not turn out perfect either. Children are the ones who adapt in schools and are not completely integrated, precisely because they need additional support and are advised to follow, additionally, support structures in parallel to regular school, to meet the requirements. (Albulescu & Catalano, 2019, p. 550)

A child's education will be oriented towards the development of the respect for fundamental human rights and freedoms. A child's education will be oriented towards the development of respect for the parents, own cultural identity, language and own values. A child's education will be oriented towards the maximum development of their potential in regards to personality, talents, and physical and mental abilities. (Manea, 2020, p. 48)

2. Problem Statement

The realization of this study followed to identify the attitude teachers from mass kindergarten have, in relation to the inclusion of children with special educational needs in kindergarten. We also set out to investigate the impact the type of a child's disability has on the attitude teachers have towards the kindergarten inclusion process of this children.

3. Research Questions

The implementation of a training program for teachers, with formal and non-formal components, focused on the inclusion of children with special educational needs, determines the formation of attitudes and the adoption of positive practices for the integration of these children in kindergarten.

4. Purpose of the Study

The objectives of the study are:

- To determine the attitude teachers have towards the inclusion of children with special educational needs in kindergarten;
- To identify the necessity to attend special training actions and programs in the inclusive education field;
- To examine the differences in attitude teachers have towards children with special educational needs;
- To identify the relationship between teachers' attitude and the inclusion of children with special educational needs;
- To examine the effects teachers' attitude has on the performance of children with special educational needs;
- To identify the decisions of inclusion in mass kindergartens for children with special educational needs;
- To elaborate training programs for teachers, in the fields of inclusive education;

5. Research Methods

For the realization of this study, 103 teachers from mass kindergartens in Cluj County agreed to participate, who face the challenges of the inclusion, in their classroom, of children with special educational needs. The teachers who attended are specialized as educators and teachers for preschool education and have didactic degree I, didactic degree II, definitive didactic degree, and a small part have no didactic degree. The subjects were voluntarily chosen, out of 110 requests to participate, 103 teachers responded positively.

For this research the **survey method** was used, and as a tool the **questionnaire**. To collect the data, a questionnaire was used, which highlights the attitude teachers have towards the inclusion of children with special educational needs in kindergarten.

6. Findings

The research is carried out on a pool of 103 respondents, represented by teachers who carry out their activity in mass kindergartens in Cluj County. All the teachers who participated in this study are female, who are found in kindergartens in Cluj County. More than half of the respondents (51.5%) have the highest degree in pre-university education, degree I, less than a quarter (22.3%) of teachers have

didactic degree II, 17.5% have a definitive didactic degree and only a small percentage, 8.7% have no didactic degree for now, being at the beginning of their career in the teaching process.

For data processing and analysis statistical program IBM SPSS Statistics, Version 20.0, was used. The trust level used in statistical analyzes is 95% Validation of the instrument after deleting items with values less than 0.2 shows the value of the Cronbach Alpha coefficient of 0.894, including 14 items. Following the Principal Component Analysis (ACP) three constructs are formed: **Professional skills and philosophies** (composed of questions 1,2,5,6,10,11,12), **Physical evidence** (composed of questions 14,18,19,20) and **Logistical aspects** (composed of questions 8,16,17).

The most appreciated items are: professional formation in the field of inclusive education should be a priority for all teachers in mass education (89.32%), children with special educational needs from inclusive classrooms cause a school progress slowdown of the children with normal development (88.35%), I face difficulties when I teach a child with intellectual disability (86.41%), I can handle children integrated in mass kindergarten, who have mild or moderate behavior problems (83.50%) and I believe that even if children differ intellectually, physically and mentally, all children can learn in most of the learning environments (76.70%).

A percentage of 45.63% of teachers state that they are bothered when they have to make changes to the space in their classroom, to meet the needs children with special educational requirements have, 29.13% don't have the proper professional training to meet the requirements children with disabilities have, 15.53% of the teachers who participated in the study think that children with special educational needs should be integrated in the educational program together with their colleagues with normal development and state that the director/supervisor does not give any support in making necessary adaptations in the inclusive classroom, while 11.65% mention that those special children are not different from an intellectual, physical and mental point of view, and that all children can learn in most of the learning environments.

The average score of the professional skills and philosophy of the teachers is 26.07, therefore teachers have the professional abilities and philosophies regarding the inclusion of children with special educational needs in mass kindergartens.

The average score of the physical evidence subscale is 13.98, not all pre-university institutions are ready to receive children with special educational needs, from the point of view of the arrangement of the space, of the didactic materials as well as the support offered by the unit management in the attempt to include children with special educational needs in mass education.

The average score recorded by the logistical aspects (12.48) confirms that teachers agree with the integration of children with special educational needs in special kindergartens, their presence in mass kindergarten having negative effects on the progress children with normal development have in school and agree that there is a need for teachers to attend training programs in the field of inclusive education, in order to improve their teaching process.

There is an association between the didactic degree and the professional skills and philosophies (Sig.=0.000<0.05), the higher the didactic degree held, the more attentive and normal the way of approaching and perceiving children with disabilities is.

There is a link between the didactic degree and the logistical aspects ($\text{Sig.}=0.005<0.05$), the experience teachers with higher didactic degree have, makes them state that those children with disabilities should be integrated in special schools and kindergartens, because they cause a slowdown of the learning process of the other children, and consider that it is necessary for teachers to attend training courses in the field of inclusion of children with special educational needs in mass education.

There are statistically significant associations, positive, of medium intensity and at a trust level of 99%, between the professional skills and philosophies and physical evidence ($p\text{-value}=0.644$) and between the professional skills and philosophies and logistical aspects ($p\text{-value}=0.567$). There is a statistically significant association, positive, of weak intensity and at a trust level of 99% between the physical evidence and logistical aspects.

If the perception teachers have regarding the inclusion of children with special educational needs in mass kindergarten is improving, becoming more open and receptive, or if their developing the teaching methods for this category of children, there will be a progress regarding the school progress and adaption of children and the educational units could be more receptive to changing and adapting their space and didactic materials needed for a more efficient teaching process (1).

The improvement of the perception teachers have regarding the inclusion of children with special educational needs in mass kindergartens has a positive impact on the integration of these children in kindergarten and on the professional formation of teachers in the field of inclusive education (2).

The integration of children with special educational needs in special schools and kindergartens, the slowdown of school progress of the children without disabilities, as well as the formation of teachers in the fields of inclusive education, leads to an increase in school progress of children with disabilities, to an increase in the desire to change the space and didactic materials and to the growing support of teachers by school management staff (3).

7. Conclusion

- Starting with the average score (26.07) and the interval in which the answers are found (12-35) recorded by the subscale of professional skills and philosophies of teachers, it is confirmed that there are differences between the attitudes teachers have towards students with special needs. Thus, most of the teachers who participated in this study have an open and proactive attitude towards children with special educational needs and are willing to make efforts to integrate them into mass education.
- Because of the open and proactive attitude towards children with special educational needs, more than 70% of teachers are making and are willing to make efforts to include these children in mass education.
- More than 80% of teachers are skeptical regarding the performance and school progress of children with disabilities if they are integrated in mass education.
- Even though most of the teachers don't have a problem regarding the inclusion of children with special educational needs in mass education, more than 70% think that these children would make the best progress if they were integrated in special kindergartens.

- More than 90% of the teachers who answered the questionnaire consider that the professional training in the field of inclusive education should be a priority for all teachers in mass education. On the other hand, teachers who frequently interact with children with special educational needs are requesting courses and training programs to help them cope with the changing needs of children.

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