

Attitudes of parents of child with special educational needs towards inclusive education: a perspective from the Czech Republic

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Abstract: *The purpose of this study was to identify the attitudes of parents of child with special educational needs to inclusive education. Questionnaire was constructed to obtain needed data and was distributed to parents whose children with special educational needs were educated in regular classrooms in 16 public regular primary schools in Olomouc region of the Czech Republic. Analysis of collected data indicated four main characteristics: firstly, parent respondents admitted the advantages of inclusion; secondly, they expressed low expectation on their exceptional children's development; thirdly, about one third of them agreed disadvantages of inclusion; fourthly, parents expressed neutral attitudes toward special education schools. The study ended with research-based recommendations for future practice.*

Key words: *Parent of child with special educational needs, attitude, inclusive education, Czech Republic*

1 Introduction

The Czech Republic has a long history of providing special education support to children with disabilities and has made some progress in inclusive education since Velvet Revolution in 1989 (Cerna, 1999). According to the data of academic year of 2009/2010, there were 71,879 Czech students with special educational needs (SEN) learning in compulsory schools, including 30,092 in (segregated*) special schools, 7,026 in special classes in regular schools and 34,761 in fully inclusive settings (European Agency for Development in Special Needs, 2010). Specifically, "mainstream schools were opened for pupils with SEN; diverse forms of individualization of education were established to meet the needs of pupils with SEN; a counselling system has

been developed for pupils with SEN to support their integration and inclusion into mainstream schools and for pupils who are educated at home; the role of parents was stressed and special schools had developed into resource centers” and so on (ibid). At the same time, development of Czech inclusive education (IE) is experiencing some difficulties; one of them is the attitude of the parents to IE.

There are only few literature sources in English that show the attitude of the parents of child with SEN to IE in the Czech Republic. The role of parents of a child with SEN is very important in a way those parents realize IE. The success of IE will be dependent by the way they act. The birth of a child with impairment is typically considered as an burden and stress for the family as well as family life. The level of resilience and wide variety of all the resilience factors are significant for the effectivity of calming down the family with a child with impairment. These factors are important for the further “school” life and rate of success the particular child with special education needs in integrative education (Potmesilova, 2012). These factors were also a reason why to study current status quo of attitude of parents of child with SEN to IE. To find out more following research questions were considered:

- (1) What was the attitude of parents of child with SEN to IE in Czech Republic?
- (2) What support did those parents need most in order to help their children with education in regular classrooms?

This research is focused mainly on students with SEN in fully inclusive settings. According to the School Act (No. 561/2004), the statistical data only covered “students with impairment: physical, mental, sensory, speech and language impairment, specific learning and/or behavioral difficulties, autism and children with severe multiple needs” (European Commission, 2009).

2 Method

(1) Research instrument

After reviewing relevant Western and China’s literature (e. g., Niu, Liu & Tian, 2005) describing perception and attitude to IE of those involved (especially teachers, parents’ and principals’ and so on), three principal points were considered in order to find out the parents’ attitude to IE: the advantages of IE, the disadvantages of IE and advantages of special school and the parents’ expectations of their children with SEN. According to the research questions of this study, one draft of questionnaire was indentified, carefully worded and formatted in Czech for parents whose children with SEN were educated in regular primary classrooms.

Six special needs experts and ten front line practitioners with at least 10 years experiences of implementing IE in regular schools were invited to review the draft

and give suggestions. According to following professionals' critical reviews minor changes in the wording and format of items of the draft were made. The final questionnaire was field-tested on 30 parents whose children with SEN were educated in regular primary schools.

This questionnaire comprises 4 parts. An introductory statement is attached to explain the purpose and significance of this research and to assure of confidentiality in the first part. The second section consists of open questions to get respondents' background information. The third section uses a 5-point scale (strongly disagree, mildly disagree, not sure, mildly agree, strongly agree) format for items assessing respondents' attitude to IE. In the last section the respondents were asked to list three most difficult things that their children with disabilities have to face in her/his inclusive schooling. Totally, there are 22 items.

(2) Research sample

The Czech respondents were parents whose children with SEN were educated in urban and rural primary regular schools from grade 1 to grade 5 in the region of Olomouc. The towns of Olomouc, Litovel and Mohelnice were selected as sample sites for research. 42 out of 48 returned questionnaires were identified as valid.

A high percentage of the respondents (85.7%) were female. The majority (66.7%) of parents were 30–39 years old. Approximately 47.7% of them received education “under college level”, 16.7% of them received education “over college level”. The majority of parents (85.7%) have never received any training or course aimed at children with disability. The majority (92.9%) of respondents have never taken part in any associations for parents of children with SEN or kept in touch with these associations.

Table 1: Demographic information of Czech parent sample (C . R)

Item	Variable	Frequency (n = 42)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	6	14.3
	Female	36	85.7
Age	20–29 years	2	4.8
	30–39 years	28	66.7
	40–49 years	12	28.6
Education	Basic education	2	4.8
Background	Secondary education	18	42.9
	College programs	15	35.7
	Bachelor programs	7	16.7
Training types	None	36	85.7
	Nonperiodic	4	9.5
	Periodic	2	4.8

Item	Variable	Frequency (n = 42)	Percentage (%)
Training time	Within one week	2	4.8
	1 week to 1 month	1	2.4
	6 months to 1 year	1	2.4
	1 year above	2	4.8
	Missing	36	85.7
Membership of associations for parents of children with SEN	Yes	3	7.1
	No	39	92.9

(3) Methodology of research

Firstly, mainstream schools in the towns of Olomouc, Litovel and Mohelnice were contacted and a permission to distribute questionnaires in these schools was obtained. After that a formal survey was conducted by the author personally.

(4) Data analysis

The data were coded and entered into the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) for Windows (15.0) for statistical analysis. An analysis of the data was carried out by using descriptive statistics and one-way ANOVA.

3 Results

(1) Results from closed questions

Table 2 shows that 95.3% of parents agreed that all children had the right to study in regular schools as same as their intact peers, and there seem to be no disputes on this point ($SD = 0.582$). 66.6% of them agreed that there were sufficient resources as well as professionals to support inclusive education. Half (50%) of them agreed that their children with SEN could achieve better results faster in regular school than in specialised settings. 81% of them agreed that inclusive education was likely to have a positive effect on children's with SEN social and emotional development. 73.8% of them agreed that ordinary teachers are able to give appropriate attention to their children and to take care of them in regular classes. 78.2% of them agreed that inclusive education could facilitate understanding, acceptance and social interaction among children with and without SEN. 88% of them agreed that inclusive education made intact students more likely to accept other individual's differentness, recognize themselves more easily and be ready to help others. And 88.2% of them preferred their children with SEN to study in regular school.

At the same time, 71.4% of respondents had low expectations of their children's development in the future to certain extent ($SD = 0.846$). There were still 35.8% of them agreed children with SEN were easily discriminated by their intact peers and felt isolated in regular classroom. 31% of them agreed that the impairments of chil-

dren with SEN affected their interaction with intact children. 28.5% of them agreed that children with SEN are less competitive and lack ambition comparing with their healthy peers.

26.1% of respondents stated that children with SEN were able to get more effective and systematic support in special settings but responses on this point have to a certain extent been centered around “not sure” ($M = 2.98$, $SD = 0.897$).

On the whole, average mean of the attitude is 3.51 with a very low standard deviation of 0.352, which indicates that all responses of this section have to a large extent been centered on “mildly agree”.

In addition, by utilizing one-way ANOVA in terms of respondents’ attitude to inclusive education as whole, parents with different gender, age, education background, training types and time did not demonstrate significant differences.

Table 2: Parents’ attitudes toward inclusive education (C . R)

Items	Sd	Md	Ns	Ma	Sa	M/SD
Children with SEN have the right to study in regular school as same as their intact peers.			4.8%	52.4%	42.9%	4.38/0.582
There are sufficient resources and professionals to support IE in regular schools.	2.4%		31.0%	59.5%	7.1%	3.69/0.715
Academic achievement of children with SEN can be promoted faster in regular classroom than in special class or special school.	2.4%	11.9%	35.7%	40.5%	9.5%	3.43/0.914
IE is likely to have a positive effect on the social and emotional development of students with SEN.			19.0%	64.3%	16.7%	3.97/0.604
For children with SEN we only expect that they will be more self-sufficient in the future, we can not expect they will do well as same as their intact peers. ☆	4.8%	2.4%	21.4%	64.3%	7.1%	2.33/0.846
Children with SEN can get regular education teachers’ appropriate attentions and cares in regular class.	2.4%	4.8%	19.0%	54.8%	19.0%	3.83/0.881
Children with SEN are easily discriminated and isolated by their intact peers in regular classroom. ☆	9.5%	26.2%	28.6%	31.0%	4.8%	3.05/1.081
Children with SEN can get more effective and systematic resources in special, separate settings. ☆		31.0%	42.9%	19.0%	7.1%	2.98/0.897

Items	Sd	Md	Ns	Ma	Sa	M/SD
IE can facilitate understanding, acceptance and social interaction between children with and without SEN.	2.4%		19.0%	73.8%	4.8%	3.79/0.645
The impairments of children with SEN affect their interaction with common children. ☆	4.8%	28.6%	35.7%	28.6%	2.4%	3.05/0.936
Children with SEN are less competitive and lack ambition comparing with their healthy peers. ☆		21.4%	50.0%	21.4%	7.1%	2.86/0.843
IE makes intact students more likely to accept other individual's differentness, recognize themselves more easily and be ready to help others.			16.7%	61.9%	21.4%	4.05/0.623
As parents, I prefer my child to study at regular school.		2.4%	9.5%	52.4%	35.7%	4.21/0.716
Total						3.51/0.352

Note: Sd = Strong disagree, Md = Mildly disagree, Ns = Not sure, Ma = Mildly agree, Sa = Strong agree; Weights of "1", "2", "3", "4", "5" are correspondent to the categories "strong disagree", "mildly disagree", "not sure", "mildly agree" and "strongly agree"; adverse weights of "5", "4", "3", "2", "1" are correspondent to the categories "strong disagree", "mildly disagree", "not sure", "mildly agree" and "strong agree" to all the items attached "☆"; IE = Inclusive Education, SEN = Special Educational Needs

(2) Results from open question

In the last part of the questionnaire parents were asked to write down three current difficulties their children with SEN had to face during learning in regular class. About half of the respondents expressed their opinions. On the whole, they mentioned the following difficulties:

Children's concrete learning difficulties

Most parents who responded the open question mentioned problems about their children's learning. To be specific, these problems focused two aspects: first, their children lacked academic motivations and interest in learning, e. g. "child has no interest to study" and "my child wouldn't like to go to school because he/she cannot concentrate on studying"; second, children with SEN had concrete learning difficulties such as concentration on studying, with making notes, with handwriting and with doing homework and so on.

Children's relationship with intact classmates

Some parents stated that their children had problems regarding relationship with classmates. For example, several parents reported that "my child was laughed at by

his classmates”, “my child lacks skills of communicating with his/her classmates and friends”, “my child often quarrels or fights with classmates” and “he/she was always abused by his/her classmates”, few parents reported “my child was bullied at school”.

Concrete school supports

Parents also reported their children with SEN need more support from the school. For example, “school has too high demand on my child”, “my child’s needs are not respected by school” and “some students will stay at school after schooling, but there are fewer teachers staying at school to look after them, my child cannot get enough individual care” and so on.

More government and community supports

More than 70% parents agreed that they could get aid from government when they needed and 26.2% of them agreed they could get aid from specific professionals in their communities when they needed. But they said they needed more supports from government

4 Discussion

In the Czech Republic the attitude of parents of children with SEN to inclusive education seems to be positive and also negative and reflects following characteristics: firstly, they admit the advantages of inclusion; secondly, they express low expectations of their children’s development; thirdly, about one third of them agreed on disadvantages of inclusion such as children with SEN were easily discriminated by their intact classmates and isolated in regular classes and so on.

It is difficult to find out the reasons causing Czech parents’ attitude to inclusive education. In the author’s opinion the reasons are:

Firstly, because the lack of training or courses aimed at children with impairment, parents lack appropriate and deep understanding of inclusive education. Though 95.3% of parents who took part in the research admitted that children with SEN had right to go to regular school, only 14.3% of them received some courses for children with impairment, 26.2% of them were acquainted with relevant laws, regulations related the rights and social welfare of children with SEN;

Secondly and most importantly, traditional concept for people with disabilities and the stereotyped attitude to people with disabilities seem to be still deep-rooted in the Czech society (Černá 1999).

Thirdly, the support for children with SEN and their families was still poor. Only 21.4% of surveyed parents agreed that they could get aid from government when they needed and 26.2% of them agreed they could get aid from specific professionals in

their communities when they needed. 92.7% of them reported they had never participated in any parent association for handicapped children, half of them did not have any opportunities to exchange experiences with other parents of children with SEN.

5 Conclusion and recommendations

It seems the traditional stereotype concept of persons with disabilities and concrete support from government, community and inclusive school are still potential and crucial obstacles influencing the attitude of parents of child with SEN and it will hamper the development of inclusive education.

More attention should be given to the following vital issues:

- supporting a family with children with SEN through providing more financial support and courses of specific special education to parents,
- promoting parents' involvement in inclusive education,
- strengthening parents' communication and cooperation among themselves and with all kinds of professionals who provide various services to the children with SEN etc.

6 Limitation of this research

Our parent sample was limited in 16 regular primary schools in the region of Olomouc. It is a question whether the opinions of the respondents from this region would be the same as in other regions of the Czech Republic.

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8 Literature

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