

Current changes in the education of pupils with mild intellectual disability from the point of view of primary school teachers of the Czech Republic

(scientific paper)

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„The paper is dedicated to the following project: ‘Teaching staff as a key factor in inclusive education’ (IGA_PdF_2016_026)“.

Abstract: *Inclusive education is currently (2016) one of the main priorities of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (hereinafter referred to as MŠMT). Consequently, we were interested in the views of teachers on inclusive education and related legislative changes. We carried out a questionnaire survey with the main objective to ascertain the teachers' views on the amendment to the Education Act (Act No. 82/2015 Coll., amending the Act No. 561/2004 Coll., on pre-school, primary, secondary, higher professional and other education /Education Act/ as amended, and certain other legislation) and the current Regulation (Regulation No. 27/2016 Coll., on educating pupils with special education needs and gifted pupils). We approached 3746 mainstream schools in total, of which 485 participated. The survey results show that to a certain degree teachers have negative attitude to the legislative changes in the education of pupils with mild intellectual disability and specific difference of opinion with the amendment to the Education Act and the associated Regulation. However, their views differ on different legislative points. The vast majority of teaching staff highlights the concern of educating pupils with mild intellectual disability jointly with mainstream pupils and seem to think that if so, pupils with mild intellectual disabilities should be taught some subjects outside the class collective. The survey results raise many concerns and problem areas requiring further attention.*

Keywords: *Inclusive education, amendment to the Education Act (Act No. 82/2015 Coll.), Regulation No. 27/2016 Coll., teaching staff, views, MŠMT, RVP ZVLPM*

1 Introduction

Amendment to Education Act No. 82/2015 Coll. came into force on 01 September 2016, amending Act No. 561/2004 Coll., on pre-school, primary, secondary, higher professional and other education (Education Act) as amended, and certain other legislation (hereinafter referred to as Act No. 82/2015 Coll.) and the associated Regulation No. 27/2016 Coll., Regulation on educating pupils with special education needs and gifted pupils (hereinafter referred to as Regulation No. 27/2016 Coll.), which provides education for pupils with special education needs including pupils with mild intellectual disability (hereinafter referred to as MID).

2 Theoretical background and definition of terminology

From the amendment to the Education Act it follows (MŠMT – Act No. 82/2015 Coll., §16, Para 1, [online]) that *“children, pupils and students with special education needs, including pupils with MID, have the right to receive free assistance provided by schools and school facilities, whereas the assistance is classified into five assistance levels according to the organisational, educational and financial requirements.”*

In our research, we focused on pupils with mild intellectual disability. In accordance with the tenth revision of the International Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems we understand intellectual disability (mental retardation) as the *“condition where intellectual development ceased or is incomplete, which is particularly characterised by violation of skills manifested during the developmental period, affecting all forms of intelligence, namely cognitive, language, motor and social skills”* (ICD10, 1992, Page 219). A pupil with MID has intelligence within the range of 50 to 69 (ICD10, 1992).

Difficulties in teaching manifest themselves not only in reading, writing and arithmetics, but also in other areas. Persons with MID usually achieve full independence in adulthood, whether in caring for themselves or looking after a household (Kozáková, Krejčířová, Müller, 2013). Children and pupils whose performance in the school-relevant skills and competences, knowledge, cognizance or habits corresponds to mild intellectual disability (MID) or upper zone of moderate intellectual disability are classified into the third assistance level.

In our research we were interested in the views of teachers on educating pupils with MID whilst receiving assistance, on individual and group integration, on repealing the RVP ZV Appendix amending education of pupils with MID (hereinafter referred as the RVP ZVLPM), and on the use of teacher's assistant and personal assistant in educating pupils with MID (MŠMT – Regulation No. 27/2016 Coll., Regulation on educating pupils with special educational needs and gifted pupils [online]). We were also interested how teachers view the potential presence of up to

four teachers at the same time in one class and the preparation of the education assistance plan (hereinafter the PLPP) for pupils who by the early September will not be assessed by the school counselling facility.

3 Methodological background of the research

Objectives

The **main** research **objective** was to ascertain teachers' views on the amendment to the Education Act (Act No. 82/2015 Coll.) and Regulation No. 27/2016 Coll.

Within the main objective the following **partial objectives** were set:

- To ascertain teachers' views on educating pupils with MID whilst receiving assistance
- To ascertain teachers' views on repealing the RVP ZVLMP
- To ascertain teachers' views on individual and group integration
- To ascertain teachers' views on educating pupils with MID in some subjects outside the class collective
- To ascertain teachers' views on the use of teacher's assistant and personal assistant in educating pupils with MID and potential presence of up to four teachers at the same time in one class
- To ascertain teachers' views on the preparation of the PLPP for pupils who by the early September will not be assessed by the school counselling facility

Questionnaire and methodology

A non-standardised anonymous questionnaire was prepared to reflect the set objectives. According to Chráska (2007), it is the most widely used data acquisition method in general. The questionnaire included open, closed and scaled items. The compiled questionnaire was distributed to mainstream schools. A list of all primary schools in the Czech Republic was acquired through the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports website (MŠMT ČR, 2016, online). Subsequently, mainstream schools were selected from the said list. Information on each school was attained through the Registry of Inspection Reports available on the Czech School Inspectorate website (Czech School Inspectorate, 2016, online) and from websites relating to schools and their founding deeds. 3746 mainstream schools were selected in total.

The survey was carried out between March and November 2016. One questionnaire was sent to every mainstream primary school whilst ensuring that the respondent had unique IP address, namely that we had taken into account first completed

questionnaire from one proxy server. This ensured the informative value of the survey as only one completed questionnaire could be sent from each school.

As reported by Chráska (2007), the return of questionnaires sent electronically is significantly lower than personal handover. 485 questionnaires were returned in total, with one completed questionnaire excluded owing to erroneous completion; thus the total of returned questionnaires represents 12.9%.

4 Results

The results were statistically assessed and processed, and are presented in table format for clarity.

The **first item** related to examining the degree of agreement/disagreement by the teaching staff on repealing RVP ZVLMP. The questionnaire item was as follows: ***Give the scale of your agreement/disagreement on repealing RVP ZVLMP.*** Responses are given in Table 1:

Table 1: Views of teachers on repealing RVP ZVLMP.

Response	Absolute frequency	Frequency in %
Agree	52	10.74
More likely agree	57	11.78
More likely disagree	126	26.03
Disagree	249	51.49
Total	484	100.00

As it can be seen from Table 1, teachers more likely disagree with repealing RVP ZVLMP. Of the 484 respondents, 249 respondents (51.49%) disagree, 126 respondents (26.03%) more likely disagree, 57 respondents (11.78%) more likely agree and 52 respondents (10.74%) agree.

The **second item** related to examining the degree of agreement/disagreement by the teaching staff on educating pupils with MID whilst receiving assistance. The questionnaire item was as follows: ***Give the scale of your agreement/disagreement on educating pupils with MID whilst receiving assistance.*** Responses are given in Table 2:

Table 2: Views of teachers on educating pupils with MID whilst receiving assistance.

Response	Absolute frequency	Frequency in %
Agree	86	17.77
More likely agree	120	24.79
More likely disagree	157	32.44
Disagree	121	25.00
Total	484	100.00

As it can be seen from Table 2, teachers mostly tend to disagree on educating pupils with MID whilst receiving assistance. Of the total number 157 respondents (32.44%) more likely disagree, 121 respondents (25%) disagree, 120 respondents (24.79%) more likely agree and 86 respondents (17.77%) agree.

The **third item** related to examining the degree of agreement/disagreement by the teaching staff on educating pupils with MID in mainstream classes. The questionnaire item was as follows: ***Give the scale of your agreement/disagreement on individual integration of pupils with MID into mainstream primary school classes.*** Responses are given in Table 3:

Table 3: Views of teachers on educating pupils with MID in mainstream classes.

Response	Absolute frequency	Frequency in %
Agree	44	9.09
More likely agree	91	18.80
More likely disagree	162	33.47
Disagree	187	38.64
Total	484	100.00

The **fourth item** related to examining the degree of agreement/disagreement by the teaching staff on group integration of pupils with MID into special classes. The questionnaire item was as follows: ***Give the scale of your agreement/disagreement on group integration of pupils with MID into special primary school classes.*** Responses are given in Table 4:

Table 4: Views of teachers on integration of pupils with MID into special classes.

Response	Absolute frequency	Frequency in %
Agree	155	32.03
More likely agree	191	39.46
More likely disagree	76	15.70
Disagree	62	12.81
Total	484	100.00

As it is shown in Tables 3 and 4, the teaching staff is more favourably inclined to accept the group integration of pupils with MID into primary schools special classes than individual integration of these pupils. With group integration agree 155 respondents (32.03%), 191 respondents (39.46%) more likely agree, 76 respondents (15.7%) more likely disagree and 62 respondents (12.81%) disagree. With individual integration agree 44 respondents (9.09%), 91 respondents (18.8%) more likely agree, 162 respondents (33.47%) more likely disagree and 187 respondents (38.64%) disagree.

The **fifth item** related to examining the degree of agreement/disagreement by the teaching staff on the use of personal assistant. The questionnaire item was as follows: *Give the scale of your agreement/disagreement on the use of personal assistant for pupils with MID.* Responses are given in Table 5:

Table 5: Views of teachers on the use of personal assistant for pupils with MID.

Response	Absolute frequency	Frequency in %
Agree	235	48.55
More likely agree	133	27.48
More likely disagree	64	13.22
Disagree	52	10.74
Total	484	100.00

The **sixth item** related to examining the degree of agreement/disagreement by the teaching staff on the use of teacher's assistant. The questionnaire item was as follows: *Give the scale of your agreement/disagreement on the use of teacher's assistant in a class where pupils with MID are taught.* Responses are given in Table 6:

Table 6: Views of teachers on the use of teacher's assistant for pupils with MID.

Response	Absolute frequency	Frequency in %
Agree	324	66.94
More likely agree	94	19.42
More likely disagree	24	4.96
Disagree	42	8.68
Total	484	100.00

In contrast to third and fourth items where the teaching staff favoured group integration of pupils with MID in special classes rather than the individual form of integration in the mainstream classes, it shows from the responses to the fifth and sixth items that the teaching staff do not perceive much difference between using personal assistant or teacher's assistant for pupils with MID. With using the services of personal assistant agree a total of 235 respondents (48.55%), 133 respondents (27.48%) more likely agree, 64 respondents (13.22%) more likely disagree and 52 respondents (10.74%) disagree. With using teacher's assistant agree a total of 324 respondents (66.94%), 94 respondents (19.42%) more likely agree, 24 respondents (4.96%) more likely disagree and a total of 42 respondents (8.68%) disagree.

The **seventh item** related to examining the degree of agreement/disagreement by the teaching staff on the preparation of PLPP for pupils who by the early September will not be assessed by the school counselling facility. The questionnaire item was as follows: *Give the scale of your agreement/disagreement on the preparation of PLPP for pupils who by the early September will not be assessed by the school counselling facility.* Responses are given in Table 7:

Table 7: Views of teachers on the preparation of PLPP for pupils who by the early September will not be assessed by the school counselling facility.

Response	Absolute frequency	Frequency in %
Agree	70	14.46
More likely agree	105	21.70
More likely disagree	132	27.27
Disagree	177	36.57
Total	484	100.00

It is clear from the results presented in Table 7 that 63.84% of the respondents disagree with the preparation of PLPP for pupils who by the early September will not be assessed by the school counselling facility. In contrast, 36.16% of the respondents agree. A possible cause for the discrepancy may be the large onus on teachers who will be preparing additional new documents and will be literally „paper“ overloaded.

The **eighth item** related to examining the degree of agreement/disagreement by the teaching staff on the potential presence of up to four teaching staff at the same time in one class. The questionnaire item was as follows: ***Give the scale of your agreement/disagreement on the potential presence of up to four teaching staff at the same time in one class.*** Responses are given in Table 8:

Table 8: Views of teachers on the potential presence of up to four teaching staff at the same time in one class.

Response	Absolute frequency	Frequency in %
Agree	36	7.44
More likely agree	37	7.64
More likely disagree	107	22.11
Disagree	304	62.81
Total	484	100.00

As it follows from the results presented in Table 8, teachers predominantly disagree with the presence of up to four teaching staff at the same time in one class. Overall, 84.92% of the respondents disagree. A possible cause of the principal opposition may be anxiety related to the louder classroom environment and the associated fragmented attention by pupils.

The **ninth item** related to examining the degree of agreement/disagreement by the teaching staff on the amendment to Education Act No. 82/2015 Coll. and Regulation No. 27/2016 Coll. The questionnaire item was as follows: ***Give the scale of your agreement/disagreement on the amendment to the Education Act and the associated Regulation relating to pupils with MID.*** Responses are given in Table 9:

Table 9: Views of teachers on the amendment to Education Act No. 82/2015 Coll. and Regulation No. 27/2016 Coll.

Response	Absolute frequency	Frequency in %
Agree	98	20.25
Disagree	386	79.75
Total	484	100.00

As it follows from the results presented in Table 9, a total of 386 respondents (79.75%) disagree with the amendment to the Education Act and the associated Regulation dealing with education of pupils with special educational needs, namely pupils with MID, and gifted pupils. A total of 98 respondents (20.25%) agree.

The **tenth item** related to examining the degree of agreement/disagreement by the teaching staff on educating pupils with MID in some subjects outside the class collective. The questionnaire item was as follows: ***Give the scale of your agreement/disagreement on educating pupils with MID in some subjects outside the class collective.*** Responses are given in Table 10:

Table 10: Views of teachers on educating pupils with MID in some subjects outside the class collective.

Response	Absolute frequency	Frequency in %
Agree	356	73.55
Disagree	128	26.45
Total	484	100.00

As it can be seen from the Table 10, the absolute majority of respondents agrees with educating pupils with MID in some subjects outside the class collective (356; 73.55%). With education outside the class collective, a total of 128 respondents (26.45%) disagree. One possible reason for more frequent agreement may be the anxiety felt by teachers in educating pupils with MID within the mainstream collective of healthy pupils.

5 Discussion

The research was carried out in 2015 within the “Systemic support for inclusive education in the Czech Republic” project, which investigated ‘attitudes and needs

of educational public in relation to the implementation of assistance in accordance with the new school legislation.' This research was aimed at special school teachers and also at the mainstream school teachers. As part of this research, one of the issues was whether the teachers consider the amendment to the Education Act as the appropriate step towards improving the education of pupils with special education needs. A total of 3566 mainstream primary school respondents replied. The results showed that 46.4% of the respondents considered the amendment to the Education Act the correct step and 32.7% of respondents did not consider the said amendment as the right step. The answers of the respondents were fairly evenly matched; nevertheless, more teachers considered the amendment to the Education Act as the right step (Systemic support for inclusive education, 2015, online). When comparing the specific results of both studies, we find that the teachers' views differ in comparison to 2015. Our research has shown that the teaching staff more likely disagrees with the amendment to the Education Act and the associated Regulation (79.75%). This outcome may be due to the research sample and also to other aspects.

6 Ethical aspects and limits of the study

The research results show that teachers adopt a rather negative attitude to the legislative changes in educating pupils with mild intellectual disability and some disagreement with the amendment to the Education Act itself and the associated Regulation. As the research was carried out at the very beginning of the introduced changes, these negative results may indicate a certain anxiety on the part of the teaching staff and scepticism of the unknown and new. Consequently, it may relate to the attitudes affected by the challenging bridging period where only time will tell whether the said concerns are justified.

7 Conclusion

The presented research results indicate rather negative attitudes of the teaching staff towards the amendment to the Education Act and the associated Regulation. Teachers have mostly negative views on repealing RVP ZVLMP, which amends education of pupils with mild intellectual disability, where a total of 77.52% respondents disagree with the repealing. Repealing RVP ZVLMP Appendix means that the primary school pupils practical (particularly for the first grade pupils, but later also for second grade pupils) education is carried out under the newly revised Education Program for the primary education framework. The majority of teachers expressed concern that students with mild intellectual disability will not be able to achieve even the minimum output as given in this newly modified RVP ZV and consequently, will not be able to meet the demands of the mainstream primary school.

More than half of survey respondents (57.44%) disagrees with educating pupils whilst receiving assistance. It may be possible to think whether it relates to the disagreement with assistance as such, or the placement of students with mild intellectual disability in inclusive education. Thus, it would certainly be worth investigating the reasons for disagreement more closely.

If we examine the opinions of teachers on the individual and group integration of pupils with MID, we find that a total of 346 respondents (71.49%) agree with group integration of pupils into the primary schools' special classes and a total of 135 respondents (27.89%) agree with individual integration of pupils into the primary schools' mainstream classes. Thus, the results show a clear preference for group integration. It would certainly be interesting to examine the reasons for this preference in detail.

We are aware that the research results may be affected by the fact that the amendment to the Education Act came into force only recently. Thus, it would be interesting to find out whether the opinions of the teaching staff will somehow change with lapse of time. It would also be useful to focus in detail on the reasons and causes of individual attitudes and opinions and based on that, subsequently look for ways in which the education could work to the satisfaction of all parties.

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