

**GORDANA STANKOVSKA, SLAGANA ANGELKOSKA & SVETLANA
PANDILOSKA GRNCAROSKA**

EDUCATION OF STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS AND THEIR INCLUSION IN THE COMMUNITY

Abstract

In education, inclusion is a process of mutual respect for differences of every student and his/her needs, in which the focus is placed on the student. The education system, on the other hand, should deal with the challenges that all students face, including the special educational needs students. The main purpose of this paper is to investigate the role of educational inclusion of students with special educational needs in mainstream school system and to offer strategies or more precisely guidelines for teachers working with them. Research and practice in special education and inclusion of students with disabilities in the mainstream school system and social life are one of the most important priorities of Policy of the Department of Education and Science in every country in the world. So in this paper we have presented attitudes and experiences about special education reforms strategies in educational system. Research methods are based on documents studies and cases studies about changes in social and educational policies for students with disabilities and special educational needs who are included in primary and secondary school. Conclusions are that students with disabilities and special needs should enjoy the same access as their non-disabled peers. There is growing evidence that students with disabilities learn better when they are allowed to go to a public school within their neighborhood. In this frame, school societies try to support full participation of students with disabilities in areas of their lives on equal terms, conditions, social justice and basic human rights.

Key words: disabilities, special educational needs, integration, inclusion, peers

Introduction

The last twenty years have been unprecedented time for parents and professionals who work with children with special needs. We have benefited from more effective special needs as well as from a trend towards more inclusive and normalized educational experiences for all children with disabilities (Roussos, 2003). As a society we have had more opportunities to learn from students with disabilities and from parents of children with disabilities. Researchers have learned more about effective interventions and children with special needs are being included in child care, recreational and educational programs more frequently.

But through the world, students with disabilities and many others who experience difficulties in learning are often marginalized within or, indeed, even sometimes excluded from school systems. Children and adolescents with disabilities face inequalities in health care, transport, education, employment and other aspect of human life. A great number of these children live in developing countries where they often suffer neglect, stigma and discrimination (Barbette, Guillemin & Chua,

2001). The situation began to change only when legislation started to require including children with special needs in educational system.

Ensuring that children with disabilities receive good quality education in an inclusive environment should be a priority of all countries. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities recognizes the right of all children with disabilities both to be included in general education system and to receive the individual support they require (Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2006).

For children with disabilities, as for all children, education is vital in itself, but also instrumented for participating in employment and other areas of social activity. In some cultures, attending school is part of becoming a complete person. Social relations can change the states of people with disabilities in society and affirm their rights (Nott, 2008). For children who are not disabled, contact with children with a disability in an inclusive setting, over the longer term, increase familiarity and reduce prejudice.

So the main purpose of this paper is to investigate the role of educational inclusion of students with special educational needs in mainstream school system and to offer strategies or more precisely guidelines for teachers working with them.

The means of the term disability

The World Health Organization has defined health as “a complete physical, mental and social well-being and merely the absence of disease or infirmity”. The concept has been more recently extended to include health related with quality in life. According to the international classification of impairments, disabilities and handicap, impairment is concerned with physical aspects of health, disability has to do with the loss of functional capacity resulting from impaired organ and handicap is a measure of the social and cultural consequences of an impairment of disability (World Health Organization, 2011). Disability affects physical health, social relationship of people, life in the context of family, friends and neighbors, psychological state and level of independence. The consequences of disability can have an impact at personal, interpersonal, family and social levels. Disability affects the different facets of life of a person and this life is often complicated by negative forces, such as ignorance, prejudice, negativism and insensitivity.

Many disabilities with a clear medical basis are recognized by the child's physician or parents soon after birth or during the preschool years. In contrast the majority of students with disabilities are initially referred for evaluation by their classroom teacher or parents, because of severe and chronic achievement or behavioral problems (Carroll & Florin, 2003).

These disability categories are based to varying degrees on eight dimensions of behavior ability: intelligence, achievement, adaptive behavior, social behavior and emotional adjustment communication, language, sensory status, motor skills and health status.

What are “special educational needs”?

Some children find it harder to learn than other children of the same age. Children who are finding learning difficult are supported by their teachers, or with

some extra help in school. A few children have more complicated learning difficulties and may need extra help or equipment in school to help them access an appropriate education.

Research and practice in special education show that students have special educational needs if they have a learning difficulty which calls for special educational provision to be made for them. About one in five children may have special educational needs of some kind. Some children may have special educational needs for relatively short time; others have special educational needs right through their education.

So special educational needs means, in relation to a person, a restriction in the capacity of the person to participate in and benefit from education on account of an enduring physical, sensory, mental health or learning disability, or any other condition which results in a person learning differently from a person without that condition (Smith, 2010).

Most of the children with special educational needs will have appropriate provision made for them by their school, working with parents. Sometimes the special educational needs (SEN) team may become involved in helping the school to provide the support needed (Farwell, et al., 2007). All professionals and parents realize that students with disabilities are human beings with a wide range of assets and limitations. Students with disabilities are different from the normal in one or two personal dimensions such as intelligence or achievement. The evaluation typically includes observation in the regular classroom, review of the child's educational history including past test scores, assessment with standardized tests of achievement if there are discrepancies between achievement and intellectual ability, and elimination of other possible causes of the learning problem (for example, sensory or visual deficits).

Educating students with special needs

Special Education is a specialized area of education which uses unique instructional methods, materials, learning aids and equipment to meet the educational needs of students with disabilities. Special services designed instruction that meets the unique needs of a child who has a disability. These services are provided by the public school system and include instruction in the classroom, at home, in hospitals and institutions.

Special education instructors work with youth and students with a wide range of disabilities. A small percentage of these special education teachers work with students with mental retardation or autism and primarily teach them life skills or basic competency. The majority of special education teachers work with students with mild to moderate learning disabilities. They use the general education curriculum and modify it to meet each child's individual needs. Most special education instruction teaches students at the elementary, middle, secondary and high levels (Hustler & Levi, 2008). Special education programs provide instruction for specific learning difficulties and disabilities, such as speech and language impairments, emotional disturbances, hearing and visual impairments. Students are tested and listed under one of the categories and paired with teachers are prepared to work. One of the most critical steps in aiding students with disabilities is early

detection and intervention and most of the special education teachers are well qualified to aid the students in overcoming their disabilities.

Special education teachers use various techniques to promote learning. Depending on the disability, teaching methods can include individual instruction, problem-solving assignments and small group work.

Special education makes for student to achieve academic success in the least restrictive environment despite their disability. So special education teachers help to develop an Individual Education Program (IEP) for each special education student. The IEP sets personalized goals for each student and is tailored to the student's individual needs and ability. Teachers work closely with parents to inform them of their student's behavioral, social and academic development, helping the students develop emotionally, feel comfortable in social situation and be aware of socially acceptable behavior (Coleman, 2005). Special education teachers communicate and work together with parents, social workers, school psychologists, speech therapists, occupational and physical therapists (Oyez, Hall & Haas, 1987).

Benefits of inclusive education

Over the past years inclusion has become increasingly the focus of many national and international policies of education. Many children with disabilities have become victim to an educational system which is not able to meet their individuals' needs. Inclusive education is a human rights issue. Inclusive education means that all children, regardless of their strength or weaknesses are accommodated in a school and become part of the school community. Inclusive education encourages bringing all students together in one classroom and following the same curriculum regardless of their diversities. The literature suggests that special needs students who have been educated in regular classes do better academically and socially than comparable students in non-inclusive settings (Karen, 2009). Also students with disabilities who were educated in inclusive settings made significantly greater progress in math than their non-disabled peers (Martin, 1995). Students without disabilities can serve as positive speech and behavior role models and offer acceptance, tolerances, patience and friendships.

The benefits of inclusive education are numerous for students with special educational needs. For example some of them are:

- Warm and caring friendships
- Increased social initiations, relationships and networks
- Greater access to general curriculum
- Increased inclusion in future environments
- Improvements in self-concept
- Development of personal principles
- Greater opportunities for interactions.

The inclusive education should play a key role to ensure individual development and social inclusion, enabling children and youth with disabilities to attain the highest possible degree of autonomy and independence. In this frame, school societies try to support full participation of students with disabilities in all areas of their lives on equal terms and conditions (Bowers, 2004).

Organization of education for SEN students in the Republic of Macedonia

The tendency in most European Union countries is to develop policies that promote inclusion as an important process in democratic societies, which gives equal opportunities to everyone and maximum flexibility in meeting the specific and social need of the individuals. Having in mind that inclusion is a developing and dynamic process, the developmental level of inclusion in the member states varies. Following the global tendencies and practices, the South-East Balkan countries, including the Republic of Macedonia, face a challenge to steer the national policies towards creating societies that are structurally based on the principle of equal rights to all, according to which person has equal right and opportunities, individual differences and respects and they lead towards building an inclusive society. The general intentions of the Macedonian institutions are to build an inclusive society in terms of abilities, ethnicity and socio-economic inclusion. Progress has been made, although inclusion is a multi-causal conditional process which requires the involvement of resources and time for full institutionalization and strengthening inclusive culture, policies and practices.

Inclusiveness in the education system in the Republic of Macedonia, as well as in the South-East European countries is a relatively new concept. In 2001, the Government of the Republic of Macedonia adopted the National Strategy on Equalization on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in the Republic of Macedonia, which is based on a thorough comprehension and analysis of the need the Government to adopt adequate decisions for protection, education, rehabilitation, training and employment of disabled persons. The National Strategy on standardization of the rights of persons with special educational needs was revised 2010-2018. It represents a plan for numerous activities of their disabilities in all areas of life (National Council of Disability Organizations of Macedonia, 2011). The right to education for the persons with disabilities is covered by Article 24 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which our country ratified in 2011.

In Macedonia, the current concept of education and training for special educational needs students is regulated and integrated in the Law on Primary Education, the Law on Secondary Education and the Law on Educational Inspection as well as other strategic documents and is based on the highest legal act, the Constitution of the Republic of Macedonia.

In the Constitution of the Republic of Macedonia, the part on economic, social and cultural rights also regulates the right of education, which states:

“Everyone has the right to education. Education is accessible to everyone under equal conditions”.

The education and training of SEN students in the Republic of Macedonia is organized in special institution and schools, in special classes within regular schools and in “regular classes” together with their peers.

The Law on Primary Education gives the opportunity to SEN students to attend regular classes. SEN students who attend regular primary classes enroll in regular secondary schools after completing their primary education. Thus, the number of special educational needs students in the regular secondary schools grows every day (Ministry of Education and Science, 2014).

Identifying the special needs of every child, the additional educational and health and social support should be considered part of the process of ensuring that children and young adults are part of the education system and are able to realize their full potential. So it is fact that inclusive education produces students who will be the future citizens of the country and who will be the overall social developments, changes and values.

Conclusion

Students with disabilities are less likely than students without disabilities to start school and have lower rates of staying and being promoted in school. These students should have equal access to quality education, because this is real way to human capital formation and their participation in social and economic life.

While students with disabilities have historically been educated in separate special schools, inclusive mainstream schools provide a cost-effective way toward. Inclusive education is better able to reach the majority and avoids isolating students with disabilities from their families and communities (Ogot, McKenzie & Dube, 2008).

A range of barriers within education policies, systems and services limit disabled children's mainstream educational opportunities. Systemic and school-level change to remove physical and attitudinal barriers and provide reasonable accommodation and support services are requires to ensuring that students with special needs have equal access to education.

Every child has a fundamental right to education and must be given the opportunity to achieve and maintain an acceptable level of learning. Every child has unique characteristics, interests, abilities and learning needs, so educational system should be designed and educational programmers implemented to take into account the wide diversity of these characteristics and needs.

References

- Barbette, E., Guillemin, F. & Chua, N. (2001): Prevalence of impairments, disabilities, handicaps and quality of life in the general population: a review of recent literature. *Bull World Health Organ*, 79, 1047-55.
- Bowers, E. M. (2004): *Practical strategies for middle school inclusion*. Verona, WI: IEP Resources.
- Carroll, A. & Florin, P. (2003): The impact of teacher training in special education with students with disabilities. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 30, 65-73.
- Coleman, J. M. (2005): Self-concept and the mildly handicapped: The role of social comparisons. *Journal of Special Education*, 17, 37-45.
- Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006): New York, United Nations. <https://www.un.org?disabilities/default.asp?id=150>.
- Farwell, P. et al. (2007): SEN inclusion and pupil achievement in English schools. *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs*, 7, 172-178.
- Hustler, Y. & Levi, I. (2008): Including children with disability in education: general and specific attitudes of high-school students. *European Journal of Adapted Physical Activity*, 1, 21-30.

- Karen, T. I. (2009): *Inclusive strategies that work for adolescent learners*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.
- Martin, E. (1995): Case studies on inclusion: Worst fears realized. *Journal of Special Education*, 29, 192-199.
- Ministry of Education and Science, Bureau of Education Development (2014): Basic of program for educational work in preparatory year for children with developmental disabilities. Skopje.
- National Council of Disability Organizations of Macedonia (2011): Findings and conclusions of the held roundtable for education. Skopje.
- Nott, J. (2008): *Impaired identities? Disability and personhood in children with special educational needs*. Oslo: SINTEF.
- Ogot, O., McKenzie, J. & Dube, S. (2008): Inclusive Education and community-based rehabilitation. In: Hartley, S. & Okune, J. (Eds.) *CBR: inclusive policy development and implementation*. Norwich: University of East Anglia.
- Oyez, H. J., Hall, B. J. & Haas, W. H. (1987): *Speech, language and hearing disorders: A guide for the teacher*. Boston: Elyn and Bacon.
- Roussos, H. (2003): *Education for all: A gender and disability*. New York: UNESCO.
- Smith, P. (2010): *Whatever happened to inclusion: The place of students with special education needs*. New York: Peter Lang.
- World Health Organization (2011): *World report on disability*. Geneva: World Health Organization.

Prof. Dr. Gordana Stankovska
State University of Tetovo
Tetovo
Republic of Macedonia
gorstankovska@gmail.com

Slagana Angelkoska, MA
Center for Social Work
Gostivar
Republic of Macedonia

Assist. Prof. Dr. Svetlana Pandilovska Grncarovska
State University of Tetovo
Tetovo
Republic of Macedonia