VYTAUTO DIDŽIOJO
UNIVERSITETO
ŠVIETIMO
AKADEMIJA

Challenges for Primary School Teachers in Ensuring Inclusive Education for Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders

Rita Raudeliūnaitė[1], Eglė Steponėnienė[2]

[1] Mykolas Romeris University, Institute of Educational Sciences and Social Work, Ateities g. 20, LT-08303 Vilnius, Lithuania, ritara@mruni.eu

[2] Mykolas Romeris University, Institute of Educational Sciences and Social Work, Ateities g. 20, LT-08303 Vilnius, Lithuania, stepegle@gmail.com

Abstract. The article presents the results of a qualitative study revealing the challenges faced by primary school teachers in ensuring inclusive education for children with autism spectrum disorders (hereinafter ASD) in mainstream classrooms. Teachers face the following challenges: problem behaviour of children with ASD, difficulty in engaging children with ASD in the classroom community and common activities, difficulties in collaborating with other teachers, education support professionals, and parents.

Keywords: *children with autism spectrum disorders, inclusive education, primary school, teachers, challenges.*

Introduction

In the World Education Forum of 2015 UNESCO declared that equal opportunities and inclusion were one of the key tasks for future education by 2030 (UNESCO, 2015). The main aim of inclusive education is to ensure a high quality education for all learners and a possibility to get educated based on every learner's individual abilities and needs, by avoiding any type of discrimination (Wild at al., 2015). Inclusive education encourages the formation of a pluralistic approach to children's education diversity, through the perception of their individual differences as a value of education (Juodaitytė, 2014).

Inclusive education creates a need to shift to individualised education of every child, by developing and implementing new teaching and learning methods, changing educational environments and diversifying the forms of learning (Rouse, 2008; Smith, Polloway, Patton, & Dowdy, 2013; etc.). The concept of inclusive education puts an obligation on educators to have a good knowledge of and ability to combine education technologies which meet the needs of all the learners participating in the education process.

When developing inclusive education, more attention must be granted to children with special educational needs, by providing them with appropriate conditions for safe and high quality education in mainstream schools. Noteworthy, the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006) sets a priority for inclusive education for persons with special educational needs and ensuring necessary support in the general education system when studying together with peers.

Scientific research (Persson, 2012; Blandford, & Knowles, 2016; etc.) proved the benefit of inclusive education for all the learners: inclusive education environment is efficient both for the child's cognitive and social as well as emotional development. On the other hand, studies revealed that each member state of the European Union was facing similar challenges at the school level when implementing provisions for inclusive education, i.e. improvement of training for teachers and other professionals to educate learners with special educational needs, improvement of physical and informational environment at schools, renewal of education content and education tools, and implementation of information technologies in education process (Inclusive education for learners with disabilities, 2017). Noteworthy, the greatest challenges for inclusive education in many countries, including Lithuania, are related to the education of children with behavioural and emotional disorders and with ASD (Ališauskas et al., 2011). According to the studies performed by Lithuanian scientists (Ališauskas et al. 2011; Diržytė, Mikulėnaitė, & Kalvaitis 2016; Buivydaitė, Newton, & Prasauskienė, 2017), only a very small share of educators are prepared to educate children of various ages, who have ASD. Moreover, according to Ališauskas et al. (2011), there is a lack of studies focusing on the analysis of issues concerning the evaluation of the needs of children with ASD and satisfaction of their special educational needs, and assessment of efficiency of applied forms of education, contributing to the search for the most efficient ways to support these children. Lithuania lacks studies concerning the analysis of inclusive education for children with ASD. In this context, it is urgent to analyse teacher experiences when ensuring inclusive education for children with ASD, by revealing the challenges they face and searching for measures to overcome such challenges, to improve the quality of inclusive education for children with ASD. According to Lindsay, Proulx, Thomson, and Scott (2013), "the first step in building a more inclusive environment where children are all considered an equally valued member of the class, it is critical to understand the challenges educators may encounter when creating inclusive classroom environments, particularly for children with ASD" (Lindsay et al., 2013, 348). Other researchers also highlight the need to

develop a better understanding of educators' challenges in working with children who have ASD (Majoko, 2016; Anglim, Prendeville, & Kinsella, 2018; etc.). Such information is relevant for implementing inclusive education and providing support to teachers and children with and without ASD in mainstream classrooms.

The following problematic issue was raised: what challenges were faced by primary school teachers in ensuring inclusive education for children with ASD in mainstream classrooms. The aim of the study was to reveal the challenges for primary school teachers in ensuring inclusive education for children with ASD in mainstream classrooms.

Research methodology

Research methods. A qualitative study was chosen to reveal primary school teachers' experience of the challenges they face in ensuring inclusive education for children with ASD in mainstream classrooms. The method of a written reflection was used in the study. Written reflection included question: what challenges were faced by primary school teachers in ensuring inclusive education for children with ASD. The obtained data were analysed by applying the content analysis method. Qualitative content analysis was carried out in accordance with inductive, data-based research, in which categories were logically assigned. The qualitative content analysis was reviewed for consistency, by performing multiple readings and analysis of data, data coding, grouping codes into subcategories, joining subcategories into categories, and integrating categories/subcateregories into the context of the phenomenon analysed and description of their analysis (Creswell, 2014).

Interview data was analysed by two researchers. A constant comparative approach of organising the data with continual adjustment and discussion between the researchers was used throughout the analysis. Prior to the data analysis, the researchers agreed concerning the principles for the analysis, i.e. the primary data analysis was performed by each researcher individually, by coding text extracts and joining them into primary subcategories and categories. The researchers hereafter compared the primary subcategories and categories and any mismatches between the first and the second researchers were addressed in discussions and solved through a mutual agreement between the researchers.

Research sample. Criteria-based sample was used in the study. The informants were selected according to the following criteria: primary school teachers, who worked in general education schools and had an experience of at least 5 years in working as primary school teachers, and who had recently been working with children with ASD and had at least one year experience in working with children with ASD in mainstream classrooms at general education schools. The study was conducted in May 2019. 16 educators participated in the study. The teachers reflected their experience in a written form. The reflection lasted up to one week.

Research ethics. Informants were asked to give their personal consent to take part in the research. Researchers assumed an obligation not to disclose any information related to the school and the informant. The principles of anonymity, volunteerism, and benevolence were followed. The teachers were acquainted with the aim of the research, the questions of written reflection, and the importance of argumentative reflection on their experience. In order to ensure confidentiality for research participants, their names were coded using a letter I and a number (I1, I2, etc.).

Research results

When analysing the study data the seven groups of challenges faced by primary school teachers in ensuring the inclusive education of children with ASD in mainstream classrooms were identified: lack of teachers' competence for work with children with ASD, problem behaviour of children with ASD, increased sensitivity of children with ASD to their environment, difficulty in engaging children with ASD in the classroom community and common classroom activities, teachers' difficulties in organizing teaching/learning in the classroom, and difficulties in collaborating with other teachers, education support professionals and parents (Table 1).

Table 1

Challenges Faced by Primary Classroom Teachers in Ensuring Inclusive Education for Children with ASD in Mainstream Classrooms

Category	Subcategory
Lack of teachers' competence for work with children with ASD	Lack of teachers' training in high schools for work with children with special educational needs, including children with ASD
	Lack of in-service training on how to educate children with ASD, by responding to their needs
	Lack of knowledge on ASD specifics and knowledge on how to work with children with ASD
Problem behaviour of children with ASD	Lack understanding the causes of problem behaviour
	Lack of knowledge of problem behavior management
	Spending a lot of class time on the solution of a child's problem behaviour
Increased sensitivity of children to their environment	Behavioural features and sensory defensiveness of children with ASD
	School's or classroom's unsuitable physical environment causes confusion, stress, fears, and insecurity of children with ASD

Category	Subcategory
Difficulties in engaging children with ASD in the classroom community and common classroom activities	Challenges with social interaction and communication barriers of children with ASD
	Repetitive and stereotypical behaviour, interests and activities
	Other children do not understand children with ASD, ignore and hurt them
	Teachers do not know how to provide information to other classmates on the specifics of ASD and special needs of children with such disorders
	Some school staff and parents do not know the specifics of ASD and do not understand the needs and behaviour of children with ASD
Teachers' difficulties in organizing teaching/ learning in the classroom	Difficulties in planning activities, assigning tasks and time
	Large number of learners in a classroom makes individualization of education process difficult
	Lack of human resources
	Lack of methodological publications and tools for the education of children with ASD
Difficulties in collaborating with other teachers and education support professionals	Medical approaches to disability by some teachers and specialists
	Lack of responsibility from the entire community when creating and ensuring an inclusive environment at schools
	Lack of regular meetings of teachers and specialist team, by including the child's family
Difficulties in collaborating with parents	High expectations of parents, denial, and covering-up of child's problems
	Parents inability to recognize the child's problems
	Problems of communication between parents and teachers
	Parents do not implement agreements and insufficient work with a child at home
	Negative attitude of some parents of children without disabilities and their unwillingness to accept children with disabilities

Lack of teachers' competence for work with children with ASD. The study results showed that teachers lacked competences for work with children with ASD. On the one hand, a lack of teachers' training in high schools for work with children with special educational needs, including children with ASD, was revealed. Informants mentioned: *"during our pedagogical studies we have not been trained for work with children with ASD"* (I2), *"basic knowledge alone is not enough. Among my colleagues, however, there are teachers who have not been taught anything about this disorder, let alone how to work with such children"* (I10), *"I had a student who had studied in such a programme.*

She faced a lot of difficulties, when she directly met children with ASD in an educational institution" (I5). On the other hand, teachers lack in-service training on how to educate children with ASD, by responding to their needs, when creating inclusive education environment. According to the study participants, *"we have studied something about it during studies, the information, however, has been forgotten and we do not succeed very much in applying it, yet in-service training is very necessary, particularly concerning the applied behaviour analysis"* (I16), *"training is very necessary on how to create inclusive educational environment for children with ASD in mainstream classrooms"* (I13). Thus, naturally, the study data indicates that teachers lack knowledge on the special educational needs of children with ASD. Teachers indicated that they lacked epistemic information (knowledge on ASD specifics) and notably instrumental information (knowledge on how to work with children with ASD and create inclusive environment).

Problem behaviour of children with ASD. The study revealed that primary school teachers faced challenges in ensuring inclusive education for children with ASD because of the problem behaviour of the children. As mentioned, teachers indicated that they lacked knowledge of ASD and work with children with ASD. Thus, it was not by chance that the study participants stressed that they found it difficult to identify and understand the causes of problem behaviour, manage the child's problem behaviour, select and apply appropriate measures to reduce problem behaviour and educational strategies and tools to develop positive behaviour of the children. The above was illustrated by informants' statements, such as: *"I would like to grant more attention on a child's behaviour correction, since it has an impact on the quality of teaching/learning, yet this is quite hard, I feel a lack of knowledge"* (I4), *"I find it hard to understand what type of behaviour is problem, whether he seeks attention or he rather suffers from some pain"* (I2), *"Seemingly, we try to eliminate any possible stimuli, yet sometimes it is still hard to understand where resistance and a wish to escape from the class come from"* (I3), *"It is not always possible to foresee what will become an enforcement in any particular case, i.e. very often the thing which was preferred by a child yesterday, today is rejected, not interesting and you have to look for other ways to increase the child's motivation"* (I6), *"a lack of knowledge how to handle the situations when a child starts behaving aggressively in the classroom, other children suffer from such a behaviour, and parents write complaints"* (I15). In addition, without understanding the causes of a child's problem behaviour and with a lack of knowledge on how to manage problem behaviour of children with ASD, educators spend a lot of time in the class for the solution of problems emerging due to problem behaviour of children with ASD and therefore they *"have less time for teaching and learning"* (I12).

Increased sensitivity of children to their environment. The study revealed that increased sensitivity of children with ASD to their environment causes significant challenges to teachers. Noteworthy, sensory defensiveness is characteristic of a considerable share of children with ASD. According to informants, *"some children are very sensitive to different stimuli, such as touching, sounds, smell, view, light, etc., whereas some children are very*

lively and agile, they cannot sit quietly, and, of course, vice versa situations occur, when children demonstrate lower sensitivity and activity. Therefore, I should say, continuous vigilance is needed for the creation of a safe and suitable environment, and, certainly, knowledge of strategies for developing such senses is required" (I16). Another considerable challenge for teachers was the non-adapted physical environment at the classrooms and school, which causes stress, fears, and a feeling of insecurity for children with ASD. The study participants put a particular stress on a lack of spaces or rooms intended for comfort and relaxation, where a child could calm down in case of any difficulties. According to the study participants, *"sometimes the sensory area is perceived too primitive, i.e. various lamps and lights are added, whereas those lights often cause even a higher irritation, a child gets anxious"* (I9).

Difficulties in engaging children with ASD in the classroom community and common classroom activities. The study data revealed that teachers found it difficult to engage children with ASD in the classroom community and common classroom activities. That was influenced by challenges with social interaction and communication barriers of children with ASD. According to informants, *"they prefer staying alone rather than communicating and working in a group with others"* (I14), *"a child gets stubborn and does whatever he likes, it is very difficult to offer something new and engage him into new activities"* (I11), *"they find it difficult to understand others, while others find it very difficult to understand them as well, particularly in case of any speech impairments, therefore other children are often reluctant to communicate with a child who has ASD"* (I5). Moreover, certain behaviour specifics are characteristic of these children: *"attachment to certain things, intensive interests of stereotypical and limited nature, following certain routines, demands for no changes, etc."* (I7), *"other children do not like that"* (I2). Therefore, children with ASD find it difficult to collaborate with others, they often face conflict situations, other children do not understand children with ASD, they reject and hurt them: *"not all the children are tolerant, some of them laugh and mock at children with ASD"* (I10), *"some children happen to encourage their peers not to be friends with a child since the child is silly"* (I7). The above indicates that teachers face challenges when creating favourable atmosphere in the classroom and maintaining mutual positive relations among children. On the other hand, children with ASD fail to engage into positive interpersonal relationships because of a lack of social skills. Noteworthy, the study participants indicated that they lacked knowledge on how to develop social skills of children with ASD.

The study participants acknowledge that the information about ASD specifics and special needs of such children is very important for the peers, they, however, do not know how to present this information. According to informants, they face a dilemma: *"there is a constant question as to whether to tell other children? And what to tell them?"* (I7), *"who should tell it to other children?"* (I3), *"should we tell it to parents of other children?"* (I2).

Analysis of the study results revealed that some school staff and parents were unaware of ASD specifics, and did not understand the needs and behaviour of children with ASD.

According to the study participants, *"generally, I still come across people who have never seen children with ASD and have not heard anything about this disorder"* (I14) and *"the school's medic has supposed that the child with ASD has been always trying to avoid people. Whereas a vice versa situation is often observed, i.e. they are very keen on communicating, yet they cannot and do not know how to do it"* (I9).

Teachers' difficulties in organizing teaching/ learning in the classroom. The study identified that teachers found organizing of teaching / learning process in the classroom difficult. The study participants stressed that they faced challenges in planning activities, assigning tasks and time, and a large number of learners in a classroom made individualization of education process difficult. According to informants, *"sometimes the challenges caused by problem behaviour of children with ASD occupy the whole time of the class"* (I12), *"what am I supposed to do, when I fall short of time to teach, because a child with ASD gets angry and starts shouting loud?"* (I4), *"if the class is big, then it is difficult to grant necessary attention to everyone and to have enough time to think of everyone, sometimes a teacher even has no assistant"* (I11).

The study participants considered versatile and complex support to learners, parents and teachers provided by education support specialists, based on collaboration, one of the greatest advantages of the school when creating an inclusive education environment. The study participants, however, indicated that *"schools get insufficient funds and they are unable to hire new professionals"* (I1), therefore *"the support offered by specialists at school is insufficient"* (I8).

The educators who participated in the study claimed that *"due to a lack of funds, schools are unable to acquire new or necessary equipment"* (I2). Moreover, informants indicated that they lacked methodological publications and tools for the education of children with ASD, and found it difficult to adapt teaching materials in electronic format. The above is illustrated by several statements by informants: *"they are very fond of technologies, we, however, have no possibilities to provide electronic learning material adapted for children with special needs"* (I15), *"there is a big lack of methodological publications in Lithuanian, those who read in other languages are in a more favourable position, they can find some information and share it"* (I6).

Difficulties in collaborating with other teachers and education support professionals. The study revealed that one of the challenges of this nature is medical approaches to disability by some teachers and specialists: *"there is still a desire to correct and modify behaviour and even the very child"* (I1), *"a desire to manage the child is very often observed"* (I9). Another challenge of this nature is a lack of responsibility from the entire community when creating and ensuring inclusive environment at schools. Therefore, according to informants, *"attitude and disposition of some people working in the institution needs to be changed since the formation of an inclusive environment is based on everybody's efforts"* (I1), *"effort from individual educators is not enough, collective efforts from everyone are needed"* (I11), *"collective implementation of inclusive education by putting common efforts*

will reduce a contradiction between the declaration of an inclusive education and its actual implementation in schools" (I5). Informants indicated that *"administration plays an important role in formation of the school's policy, including the policy of inclusive education"* (I4), *"when administration considers inclusive education a priority, the school's community is enabled to create inclusive education environment"* (I13). The third challenge of this nature is related to a lack of regular meetings of teachers and specialist team, by including the child's family. The study participants specified that they lacked more frequent meetings with education support professionals, by including the child's family, where the stakeholders could coordinate their activities, share good practice, discuss the challenges faced and search for their solutions collectively. A lack of coordination is a significant obstacle in this sphere.

Difficulties in collaborating with parents. The study revealed difficulties in collaboration between teachers and parents. First, these difficulties are related to high expectations of parents, and denial and covering-up of problems. According to informants, *"some parents find it hard to acknowledge that their child has some learning and behaviour problems"* (I7), *"parents delay addressing the specialists for determining ASD"* (I1), *"some parents do not tell that their child has been diagnosed with ASD"* (I16). Second, parents are unable to recognize the problems faced by their child: *"parents lack knowledge on ASD"* (I2), *"some parents do not collaborate and put a blame on teachers"* (I3), *"they do not even attend meetings to discuss the problems faced by the child"* (I9), *"they listen to us, give the nod, but we see that they do not go deeper into problems"* (I11), *"they criticise the conclusions made by Pedagogical Psychological Service and Child Development Centre, they claim the evaluations are incorrect"* (I16). Third, the study participants stressed challenges in communication with parents, which manifest in *"finding no common language with parents, indifference of parents, and a lack of mutual dialogue and trust"* (I15). According to informant, *"the result of finding no common language is information deficit for both parties and thus education of children gets more complicated"* (I14). Fourth, parents fail to implement agreements and their work with children with ASD at home is insufficient. The study participants stressed that *"involvement of parents into the educational process is very important to encourage them to work with the child at home, because working at school alone is insufficient and a failure to work at home cannot bring good results"* (I3). The study participants regretted that some parents did not follow agreements: *"you discuss the issues concerning activity continuation at home and they know how to do it, yet they do it episodically and inconsistently"* (I8). Fifth, the study participants indicated that they faced a negative attitude of some parents of children without disabilities and their unwillingness to accept children with disabilities: *"parents of other children have fears for the unknown"* (I6), *"the biggest problems occur when a child with ASD is also hyperactive or aggressive. Parents rebel and address the school's heads with complaints"* (I10), *"sometimes they publicly claim that they do not want to have a child with ASD in their child's classroom"* (I7). Parental and community involvement are necessary

components of educational success and inclusion for ASD children (Lindsay et al., 2013). No one teacher alone can create an inclusive system (Smith, 2012).

Discussion

The study revealed that primary school teachers lacked competences for work with children with ASD when ensuring inclusive education. The above is determined by a lack of teachers' training in high schools for work with children with special educational needs, including children with ASD. Moreover, teachers also lack in-service training on how to educate children with ASD, by responding to their needs, when creating an inclusive educational environment. Thus, unsurprisingly the study participants indicated that they faced considerable challenges in ensuring an inclusive education for children with ASD. Similar tendencies were revealed in Lindsay et al. (2013) study which noted that "with more students with ASD in mainstream classrooms, educators are expected to create an inclusive educational environment, often with few or no guidelines on how to do so" (Lindsay et al., 2013, 347). Many teachers feel unprepared to meet the multiple needs of children with ASD in inclusive environment (Majoko, 2016). Anglim, Prendeville, and Kinsella (2018) study reveals that teachers experience fear, despair and restfulness when they receive information that they will have students with ASD in their classroom. Because of gaps in teachers training, teachers can feel disappointed and "students with ASD may miss opportunities to reach their full potential" (Lindsay et al., 2013, 348). Corkum et al. (2014) noted that teachers need professional development in order to be knowledgeable about ASD and individualisation strategies for children with ASD and techniques for improving the social, behavioural and academic outcomes of students with ASD in mainstream classrooms. Inclusive education includes systemic changes implementation of which requires a transformation of training and professional development for educators and other educational support professionals *(Five* Key Messages for *Inclusive Education, 2014).* According to Florian (2014) an inclusive educational approach "is based on teachers' beliefs that they are capable of teaching a diverse range of children through creatively adapting practice to support the learning of all" (as cited in Anglim et al., 2018, 83). Any successful education highly depends on the competences of teachers and on providing them with adequate resources (McAllister & Hadjri, 2013). The European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education in its report Key principles for Promoting Quality for Inclusive Education – Recommendation for Practice stresses that all teachers should develop the skills necessary for effective education of all learners by considering each learner's needs. "In their initial and continuing education, teachers should be equipped with the skills, knowledge and understanding that will give them the confidence to deal effectively with a range of learner needs" (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2011, 15).

The teachers who participated in the research indicated that one of the significant challenges they face is the problem behaviour of children with ASD. The teachers have difficulties to identify and understand the reasons of the problem behaviour and manage that problem behaviour. In relation to that, they have to dedicate a major time of the lesson to solve the issues in regards to the problem behaviour of children with ASD. In addition, the teachers stressed their lack of knowledge how to establish positive behaviours in children with ASD. Similar tendencies had been revealed by other studies which indicated that teachers lacked information about ASD, especially about "specific ways to work with a child in the classroom and how to appropriately manage a child when a behavioural outburst occurs" (Lindsay et al., 2013, 354).

The research revealed, that the sensory defensiveness of children with ASD is also a significant challenge for their teachers. The teachers stressed that they lack the knowledge of how to organise the environment in order to meet the sensory needs of these children. The participants of this research specified that inappropriate physical school, classroom environment evokes anxiety, feeling insecure, fear, resistance in children with ASD. The teachers pointed out the need for sensory rooms, recreation areas, where the child could calm down, relax. Similar tendencies had been revealed by other studies which indicated that the mainstream school environment contains many stresses for children with ASD. McAllister and Hadjri (2013) noted that "being sensory sensitive and unable to integrate fully and communicate with others means that the child with ASD can find the world a disorientating and even frightening place" (McAllister and Hadjri, 2013, 58). Khare (2010) stated that "just as a well-designed environment can be supportive and ill-conceived environment can be harmful to a child's education" (as cited in McAllister & Hadjri, 2013, 58).

The participants of this research pointed out, that they have a difficult time while including children with ASD into group format activities and into the school community. On the one hand, it is related to social communication barriers, problem behaviour of children with ASD making it difficult for these children to establish and maintain relationships with other children. On the other hand, other children do not understand children with ASD, reject them, abuse them. Teachers noted that the peculiarities of the behavior and social interaction of children with ASD, as well as their social exclusion and bullying, made it difficult to include these children in the mainstream classroom, to create favorable classroom environment. Similar tendencies had been revealed in other studies (Lindsay et al., 2013) that showed that teachers faced challenges in developing an ethos of understanding and peer acceptance. Most of the teachers, even those with extensive teaching experience, maintained that they face significant challenges in promoting "peer interaction for children with social, communication and behavioural impairments" (Lindsay et al., 2013, 358). Majoko study reveals that other children reject children with ASD "because of their anti-social behaviour, lack of communication, exhibition of aberrant behaviours, overly possessiveness and obsessive behaviour, routines and rituals" (Majoko, 2016, 1437). Symes and Humphreys (2012) reported, that bullying is three times more

experienced by ASD children than other groups of children. Soulis, Georgiou, Dimoula, and Rapti (2016) research shows that children in the classroom have a negative attitude towards peers with special educational needs, when they are unsure what these learners are capable of, what they are incapable of and why.

Teachers also pointed out that dissemination of information on ASD could foster positive attitudes in other children towards their peers with ASD, however, they do not know how to present this information. According to Majoko "infusion of disability studies in the primary school curriculum would assist typically developing children understanding and appreciating human diversity and ultimately accepting the inclusion of their peers with ASD in mainstream classrooms" (Majoko, 2016, 1436).

The study participants indicated that children with ASD lack of social skills, however, teachers lacked knowledge on how to develop social skills of these children. In addition, other studies (Mandell et al., 2013) also note that even though teachers acknowledge that development of social skills of children with ASD is important for their independence, they feel incompetent to develop these skills.

This research revealed, that the teachers face challenges while organizing the teaching / learning process in the classroom. On the one hand, teachers face considerable challenges in individualizing the educational process in large classrooms and they lack time to provide additional help to children with ASD. Teachers who participated in the study also acknowledge that they lack not only tools and methodological publications for education of children with ASD, but they also lack the help of specialists to ensure the inclusive education of children with ASD. As Anglim, Prendeville and Kinsella (2018) noted, that "teachers' sense of efficacy in meeting the needs of pupils with ASD was related to the amount and type of support that they perceived themselves to be receiving at the time" (Anglim, Prendeville, and Kinsella, 2018, 85).

The research revealed that teachers have difficulties in cooperating with other educators and educational support specialists. This might be influenced by the medical attitude of some educators and specialists towards disability, the affixing of negative labels. The participants of this research stated that there are many cases when teachers, educational support professionals focus their attention on individual problems of a learner, without seeing and trying to overcome any barriers existing in school, classroom environment. According to Kielblock (2018), "if teachers have positive attitudes towards inclusive education for all, they are likely to understand that inclusive education for all is a never-ending process not only on the policy and school levels, but also for them as teachers who are engaged in ongoing cycles of reflection, critical thinking, and problem solving" (Kielblock, 2018, 29). Teachers also lack regular team meetings, sharing experiences. J. Anglim et al. (2018) suggest that a lack of collaboration and sharing of information, reflection on practical experience between professionals are barriers to inclusion. Wider collaboration and reflective practice can provide more "opportunities for teachers to

share examples of good practice and build confidence in their ability to differentiate the curriculum to meet the needs of all students with ASD" (Anglim et al., 2018, 86).

Teachers also face difficulties in collaboration with parents. On the one hand, the study revealed that there was a lack of understanding of or familiarity with the disorder among other parents, which inhibited the inclusion of children with ASD. The participants of this research stated, that they are greatly challenged by the negative attitude and reluctance of parents of children without disabilities to accept children with disabilities, especially those with problem behaviour. On the other hand, the teachers also face challenges in collaboration with families of children with ASD. It might be influenced by inappropriate parental expectations, by denial or hiding of the problem behaviour and other related problems with the child. The obstacles to cooperation with parents of children with ASD are also related to the lack of reciprocal dialogue between them, non-compliance with mutual agreements, lack of work with children at home. According toAlišauskas et al. (2011), parents should be encouraged to be more actively engaged in the child's educational environment, and have more communication not only with teachers and other specialists, but also with the child's peers, their parents. Parents' closer communication with the child's teachers, peers, and their parents could probably help the child to feel better in the mainstream class.

Conclusions

Teachers lack competences for work with children who have ASD. That is determined by a lack of teachers' training in high schools for work with children with special educational needs, including children with ASD, and a lack of in-service training on how to educate children with ASD, by responding to their needs, when creating inclusive education environment. Therefore, teachers lack both epistemic and instrumental knowledge related to inclusive education for children with ASD.

The study revealed that primary school teachers faced challenges of various natures when ensuring inclusive education for children with ASD. The problem behaviour of children with ASD causes considerable challenges for teachers. When lacking knowledge concerning ASD and how to work with children with ASD, teachers find it difficult to understand the causes of problem behaviour and manage the child's problem behaviour, as well as select and apply appropriate measures to reduce problem behaviour, and develop positive behaviour of the children.

Children with ASD are more sensitive to their environment. Therefore, teachers face challenges when creating a safe and suitable environment. The non-adjusted physical environment at the classrooms and school causes a feeling of insecurity, fears, and resistance in children with ASD. There is a particular lack of spaces or rooms intended

for comfort and relaxation, where a child could calm down in case of any difficulties. Moreover, teachers lack competences for developing sensory senses in children with ASD.

Teachers face challenges in engaging children with ASD in the classroom community and common classroom activities. That is determined by difficulties in social interaction and communication barriers of children with ASD, their repetitive and stereotypical behaviour, interests, activities, the fact that other children do not understand children with ASD, ignore and hurt them, some school staff and parents do not know the specifics of ASD, do not understand the needs and behaviour of children with ASD, and by a lack of knowledge on how to develop social skills of children with ASD. Therefore, teachers face challenges when creating a favourable, collaboration-based atmosphere in the classroom.

Teachers face challenges when organizing teaching / learning process in the classroom: they find difficulties in planning activities, assigning tasks and time, a large number of learners in a classroom makes individualization of education process difficult and there is a lack of tools, methodical publications, and support by specialists when ensuring inclusive education for children with ASD.

Teachers face difficulties in collaboration with other educators and education support professionals due to medical-corrective approaches to disability by some educators and specialists, a lack of responsibility from the entire community for the creation of inclusive environment by employing everybody's efforts, a lack of regular meetings of the specialist team, by including the family, and a lack of coordination in this sphere. Moreover, teachers face challenges in collaboration with parents of children with ASD and with parents of other children in the classroom. Difficulties with parents of children with ASD are related to high expectations of parents, denial, and covering-up of problems, parents' inability to recognize the problems faced by their children, finding no common language with parents, parents' indifference, a lack of mutual dialogue and trust, a failure of parents to implement agreements and insufficient work of parents with children at home. What is more, negative attitude of parents of children without disabilities and their avoidance to accept children with disabilities also pose considerable challenges for teachers.

The study reveals that development of the support system in educational institutions, an increase of the support efficiency, appropriate training of teachers for work with children with different educational needs, ensuring of in-service training and improvement of competences, adaptation of educational process organization and environment, appropriate financing, an increase of a number of professionals and development of services remain the tasks to be solved.

References

Ališauskas, A., Ališauskienė, S., Gerulaitis, D., Kaffemanienė, I., Melienė, R., Miltenienė, L. (2011). *Specialiųjų ugdymo(si) poreikių tenkinimas: Lietuvos patirtis užsienio šalių kontekste*. Mokslo studija. Šiauliai: VšĮ Šiaulių universiteto leidykla.

Anglim, J., Prendeville, P., & Kinsella, W. (2018). The self-efficacy of primary teachers in supporting the inclusion of children with autism spectrum disorder. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, *34* (1), 73–88.

Blandford, S., Knowles, C. (2016). *Developing professional practice 0–7*. London, N. Y.: Routledge.

Buivydaitė, R., Newton, Ch. R., Prasauskienė, A. (2017). Scoping review: Austism research in Baltic states – what is known and what Is Still to Be studied. *Review Journal of Autism and Development Disorders*, *4* (4), 294–306.

Case-Smith, J., Weaver, L. L., Fristad, M. A. (2015). A systematic review of sensory processing interventions for children with autism spectrum disorders. *Autism, 19* (2), 133–148.

United Nations. (2006). *Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities*. Retrieved from: https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities-2.html

Corkum, P., Bryson, S. E., Smith, I. M., Giffin, C., Hume, K., & Power, A. (2014). Professional development needs for educators working with children with autism spectrum disorders in inclusive school environments. *Exceptionality Education International*, *24*, 33–47.

Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods approaches*. London: Sage.

Diržytė, A., Mikulėnaitė, L., Kalvaitis, A. (2016). *Autizmo sutrikimų turinčių vaikų situacija ir įtraukties į švietimo sistemą galimybės*. Vilnius: VšĮ „Pažangos projektai".

European agency for special needs and inclusive education. (2011). *Key principles for promoting quality for inclusive education – recommendation for practice.* Retrieved from: https://www.european-agency.org/sites/default/files/key-principles-for-promoting-quality-in-inclusive-education-recommendations-for-practice_keyprinciples-rec-LT.pdf

European agency for special needs and inclusive education. (2014). *Five key messages for inclusive education*. Retrieved from: https://www.european-agency.org/English/publications

Inclusive education for learners with disabilities. (2017). European Parliament: Policy Department C: Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs. Retrieved from: http://www.europarl.europa.eu /RegData/etudesSTUD /2017/596807/IPOL_STU (2017)596807_EN.pdf

Juodaitytė, A. (2014). Vaikų individualizuoto ugdymo pedagoginės rekonstrukcijos: diskursai ir metakontekstai. *Tiltai*, *66* (1), 237–248.

Kielblock, S. (2018). Inclusive education for all: Development of an instrument to measure the teachers' attitudes. *PhD Thesis*. Germany: Justus Liebig University, Giessen; Australia: Macquarie University, Sydney.

Lindsay, S., Edwards, A. (2013). A systematic review of disability awareness interventions for children and youth. *Disability and Rehabilitation*, *35*, 623–646.

Lindsay, S., Proulx, M., Thomson, N., Scott, H. (2013). Educators' challenges of including children with autism spectrum disorder in mainstream classrooms. *International Journal of Disability, Development and Education*, *60* (4), 347–362.

Majoko, T. (2016). Inclusion of children with autism spectrum disorders: listening and hearing to voices from the grassroots. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 46*, 1429–1440.

Mandell, D. S., Stahmer, A. C., Shin, S., Xie, M., Reisinger, E., Marcus, S. C. (2013). The role of treatment fidelity on outcomes during a randomized field trial of an autism intervention. *Autism, 17*, 281–295.

McAllister, K., Hadjri, K. (2013). Inclusion and the special educational needs (SEN) resource base in mainstream schools: physical factors to maximise effectiveness. *Support for Learning*, *28* (2), 58–65.

McMillan, J. H., Schumacher, S. (2006). *Research in education: Evidence-based inquiry.* New York: Pearson Education.

Persson, E. (2013). Raising achievement through inclusion. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, *17* (11), 1205–1220.

Analysis of a student task to create an autism friendly living environment. *Good Autism Practice*, *5* (2), 35–41.

Rouse, M. (2008). Developing inclusive practice: a role for teachers and teacher education. *Education in North*, *16* (1), 6–13.

Smith, T. (2012). *Making inclusion work for students with autism spectrum disorders.* New York: Guilford Press.

Smith, E., Polloway, A., Patton, R., Patton, R., Dowdy, C. A. (2013). *Teaching Students with Special Needs in Inclusive Settings.* NJ: Pearson.

Soulis, S.G., Georgiou, A., Dimoula, K., Rapti, D. (2016). Surveying inclusion in Greece: empirical research in 2683 primary school students. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, *20* (7), 770–783.

Symes, W., & Humphrey, N. (2010). Peer-group indicators of social inclusion among pupils with autistic spectrum disorders (ASD) in mainstream secondary schools. *School Psychology*, *31*, 478–494.

Wild, E., Schwinger, M., Lütje-Klose, B., Yotyodying, S., Gorges, J., Stranghöner, D., Neumann, P., Sekre, B. and Kurnitzki, S. (2015). Schülerinnen und Schüler mit dem Förderschwerpunkt. *Unterrichtswissenschaft*, *43* (7), 1–27.

World Education Forum. (2015). Education 2030. Incheon declaration and framework for action towards inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning for all. UNESCO: UNESCO Institute. Retrieved from: https://iite.unesco.org/publications/education-2030-incheon-declaration-framework-action-towards-inclusive-equitable-quality-education-lifelong-learning/

Iššūkiai, kylantys pradinių klasių mokytojams, užtikrinant autizmo spektro sutrikimų turinčių vaikų įtraukųjį ugdymą

Rita Raudeliūnaitė[1], **Eglė Steponėnienė** [2]

[1] Mykolo Romerio universitetas, Edukologijos ir socialinio darbo institutas, Ateities g. 20, 08303 Vilnius, Lietuva, ritara@mruni.eu

[2] Mykolo Romerio universitetas, Edukologijos ir socialinio darbo institutas, Ateities g. 20, 08303 Vilnius, Lietuva, stepegle@gmail.com

Santrauka

Šiame straipsnyje pateikiami kokybinio tyrimo duomenys, atskleidžiantys iššūkius, kylančius pradinių klasių mokytojams, užtikrinant ASS turinčių vaikų įtraukųjį ugdymą. Tyrimas atskleidė, kad mokytojams stinga kompetencijų dirbti su ASS turinčiais vaikais. Nemenkus iššūkius mokytojams kelia probleminis ASS turinčių vaikų elgesys: sunku supranti šių vaikų probleminio elgesio priežastis, valdyti probleminį bei ugdyti pozityvų elgesį.

Mokytojams kyla sunkumų įtraukiant ASS turinčius vaikus į klasės bendruomenę, bendrą veiklą. Tam turi įtakos ASS turinčių vaikų bendravimo sunkumai, pasikartojantis, stereotipinis elgesys, interesai, veikla; kiti vaikai nesupranta ASS turinčių vaikų, juos atstumia, skriaudžia; mokytojams stinga žinių, kaip ugdyti ASS turinčių vaikų socialinius įgūdžius.

Mokytojai patiria iššūkius organizuodami mokymo(si) procesą klasėje: sunku planuoti veiklą, didelėse klasėse sunku individualizuoti ugdymo procesą, stinga priemonių, metodinių leidinių, specialistų pagalbos siekiant užtikrinti įtraukųjį ASS turinčių vaikų ugdymą.

Mokytojams kyla bendradarbiavimo su kitais pedagogais, specialistais sunkumų dėl kai kurių pedagogų ir specialistų medicininio požiūrio į negalią, stinga komandos periodinių susitikimų. Mokytojai turi bendradarbiavimo su ASS turinčių vaikų tėvais sunkumų dėl nepamatuotų tėvų lūkesčių, problemų neigimo ar slėpimo, jų negebėjimo atpažinti vaikui kylančių problemų, tėvų neįgyvendinamų susitarimų.

Esminiai žodžiai: *autizmo spektro sutrikimus turintys vaikai, įtraukusis ugdymas, pradinė mokykla, mokytojai, iššūkiai.*