



The Analysis of the Kindergarten Teachers' and Teaching Assistants' Attitudes to Their own Experiences in the Process of Inclusive Education

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Annotation. The aim of the research was to analyse the attitudes of teaching staff in light of their own experiences in the process of inclusive education. A self-designed questionnaire was used and completed by a total of 284 kindergarten teaching staff. It was confirmed that there was no statistically significant difference in attitudes between kindergarten teaching staff who participated in a project to support inclusion and those who did not participate in a project to support inclusion in their attitudes.

Keywords: *inclusive education, teaching staff, kindergarten teacher, teaching assistant, pre-school education.*

Introduction

In kindergartens, it is essential to develop, in a balanced way, all aspects of the child's personality; in order to not focus on the cognitive side at the expense of the socio-emotional and psychomotor sides. For this reason, the kindergarten environment and the organisation of education in terms of heterogeneity also play an important role in the development of the child's personality (Rochovská et al., 2019).

In terms of the inclusion of children into kindergartens, the trend is an inclusive education supporting the diversity and development of the child's personality without any comparison with other children. When creating the current curricular documents for preschool education, an interactionist approach (as opposed to the more extreme approaches of empiricism or nativism) is recommended, preferring a mutual respect, trust, and partnership communication. The adult is not the one who knows everything and the child is the one to learn everything from him, but he is in the role of facilitator and a partner of the child, they share common activities, they gain experiences, which are the basis for the acquisition of knowledge, skills, experience, attitudes, values, etc. (Huřová et al., 2018). According to Zelina (2012, p. 9), "the inclusive paradigm of education is about accepting the diversity of children. Diversity is understood as a matter of course".

Inclusion should rather be about all children, but as a political project, inclusion should maintain a focus on students with special educational needs. Specifically, to ensure that these groups are not rendered invisible within the conception of 'all students' (Magnússon, 2020). Inclusive education has now been broadened to address the needs of all children, including those from diverse cultures and ethnicities or those who are vulnerable and excluded for whatever reason and they lack access to mainstream school (Hajisoteriou, Sorkos, 2022).

The promotion of inclusion in education is "less about the introduction of particular techniques or new organisational arrangements, and much more about processes of social learning within particular contexts. As such, it involves a movement in a clear philosophical direction, requiring a culture of inclusion to permeate the education system" (Ainscow, 2021, p. 85).

Within the national context in Slovakia, the main curriculum document for preschool education states: „Every kindergarten should now be able to provide the conditions for inclusive education. Such education consistently fulfils the idea of equality of opportunity for all, equality of access to education, and ultimately to ensure consistent social inclusion“ (State Educational Programme for Preschool Education, 2016). In 2020, the Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic adopted the Zero Action Plan of the Strategy for Inclusive Approach in Education and Training of the Region, which was implemented during 2021. Important attention was paid to the following points: desegregation of the education system, inclusion in early childhood and preschool, inclusion of students in primary and secondary schools, support and personnel conditions for inclusion, or special-pedagogical support in education and counselling. In a national context, inclusive education is about providing all children with access to the highest quality education. Inclusive education creates an environment in schools and classrooms that welcomes and values difference and cares for every single child. The special educational needs of a child are a requirement for modification of the conditions in education and training for the children, i.e., modification of the content, forms, methods, environment, and approaches. Special educational needs are conditioned by a child's disability or talent

or development in a socially disadvantaged environment. Respect for these needs will enable equal access to education, appropriate development of abilities or personalities as well as the achievement of an appropriate level of education and appropriate integration into society.

Several projects have already been implemented in Slovakia, focusing on inclusion and education. In Slovakia, a national project called the *Inclusion Project in Kindergartens II*, known as *PRIM II*, has also been implemented since 2020. Its objectives are to create an inclusive environment in kindergartens. The specificity of the project is the creation of an inclusive team in the kindergarten, which consists of professional staff (school psychologist, social pedagogue, or speech therapist, etc.), teaching staff, including a teaching assistant, and a school special pedagogue (Šilonová, & Klein, 2019). The position of school special pedagogue, as a professional employee in a kindergarten environment, was introduced within the Slovakia for the first time in its history to a kindergarten within the national project PRIM – Project of Inclusion in the Kindergarten (2018).

But in real terms, inclusion in Slovakia is still at the beginning. Although the essence of inclusive education has been implemented in Slovak legislation and main curriculum documents, the conditions in schools do not correspond to inclusive education.

Several theoretical and empirical studies speak in favour of inclusive education (Mitchell, Sutherland, 2020; Dolinská, Zubal, 2019; Rosinský, Klein, Šramová, 2009; Kaleja, 2016) already from a pre-school education (Diken, 2006; Loreman et al., 2007; Kaleja, 2014; Švábová, 2017; 2018). According to L. Florian and D. Camedda (2019), the question remains how teachers can be better prepared to respond to the diverse needs of learners in today's schools.

Teachers are therefore essential for inclusive education, as they create behavioural role models for children, creating a good inclusive climate. Their behaviour towards children with special educational needs influences their attitudes towards them. Their practical views can be considered as valuable feedback on how inclusive education is working and what needs to be improved to the benefit of all involved. Therefore, any implementation of an inclusive education depends to a large extent on the views of the teachers.

A research problem has become the question of what are the kindergarten teachers' and teaching assistants' attitudes toward their own experiences in the process of inclusive education, and how these attitudes depend upon the participation of teachers in a project focused on supporting inclusion. The aim of the research was to analyse the above-mentioned attitudes. The research problem was formulated on the basis of the previously cited research, and especially a research study by Zelina (2018), who carried out research focused on finding out the attitudes of primary education teachers to their own experiences in inclusive education in primary school. Attitudes were examined through interviews in which the teachers' answered questions about the education of children with special educational needs. In particular, the questions concerned the most common problems in the education of children with special educational needs in general

groups; what helps them the most in their education, what most often worked for them during their education, what is most important in the creation of inclusive education, and what should be done to improve the education of children with special educational needs, especially for Romani children. In conclusion, the teachers' recommendations for improving inclusive education were presented. This research was the inspiration for the creation of our research tool.

The research problem and the main aim of the research led to the following research questions: Which problems do kindergarten teachers and assistants encounter most in the process of inclusive education? What are the opinions of kindergarten teachers and assistants with regards to the importance of introducing measures in inclusive education? What is the experience of the teachers and assistants when, thanks to inclusive education in a kindergarten, children with special educational needs were able to be included within a mainstream primary school education?

The Aims and Hypotheses of the Research

From the research problem, and the main aim of the research, the following objectives of the research also emerged:

1. To determine the degree of problems in the education of children with special educational needs in general groups, from the perspective of the kindergarten teaching staff.
2. To determine the opinions of the kindergarten teaching staff on the importance of introducing measures when working with children with special educational needs in general groups.
3. To determine the experience of the teaching staff, when thanks to an inclusive education in the kindergarten, children with special educational needs could be included within a mainstream primary school education.
4. To determine the difference between teachers who participated in a project to support inclusion and those who did not participate in a project to support inclusion, with regards to the reported level of problems in the education of children with special educational needs in general groups.
5. To determine the differences between teachers who participated in a project to support inclusion and those who did not participate in a project to support inclusion, with regards to their opinions on the importance of introducing measures for working with children with special educational needs in general groups.
6. To determine the connection between the reported positive experiences of teaching staff, when a child with special educational needs was included within a mainstream primary school education, and their participation in the project to support inclusion.

Based on the theoretical background, field experience from the research problem, and research objectives, three hypotheses were formulated:

- H₁: There is a statistically significant difference between the kindergarten teaching staff who have participated in a project to support inclusion and among kindergarten teaching staff who have not participated in a project to support inclusion, with regards to the reported problems in the education of children with special educational needs in general groups.
- H₂: There is a statistically significant difference between the kindergarten teaching staff who have participated in a project to support inclusion and the kindergarten teaching staff who have not participated in a project to support inclusion, in the reported importance of measures to support the inclusion of children with special educational needs in general groups.
- H₃: There is a statistically significant difference between the kindergarten teaching staff who have participated in a project to support inclusion and among the kindergarten teaching staff who have not participated in a project to support inclusion, with regards to the number of aforementioned positive experiences, when a child with special educational needs was included into a mainstream primary school.

Research Methodology

Sample

The research sample consisted of 284 members of kindergarten teaching staff (140 teachers and 144 teaching assistants) who taught in general groups in kindergarten. In Slovakia, the roles of pedagogical and professional staff in a kindergarten are determined by law. The most frequent pedagogical employee in the kindergarten is a kindergarten teacher who has completed secondary or higher education of pedagogical orientation. The pedagogical assistant cooperates with the teacher and helps the child in education, creating equal opportunities for all. Mainly women work in kindergartens, within Slovakia. Men are represented only very rarely.

Looking at the age of the teaching staff, a large group are employees within the age range of 50 to 59. In terms of the length of teaching experience, most teaching staff have more than 30 years of experience. Looking at the career position, the largest number was in the option none, and the second largest number selected the career position of headmistress. Under the item education, the teaching staff had four options to choose from. The majority of them choose secondary pedagogical education and higher pedagogical education of the 2nd degree (Table 1).

Table 1*Characteristics of Respondents*

	N	%
Age		
less than 30	43	15.47
30–39 years	67	24.10
40–49 years	69	24.82
50–59 years	71	25.54
60 and more years	28	10.07
TOTAL	278	100
Number of years of teacher practice in a kindergarten		
Less than 2 years	35	12.59
2–5 years	56	20.14
6–10 years	30	10.79
11–20 years	36	12.95
21–30 years	37	13.31
more than 30 years	84	30.22
TOTAL	278	100
Career position		
headmaster	70	25.18
deputy headmaster	16	5.76
head of the methodological association	20	7.19
class teacher	6	2.16
none	166	59.71
TOTAL	278	100
Education		
higher pedagogical education of the 2 nd degree (Mgr.)	111	39.93
higher pedagogical education of the 1 st degree (Bc.)	42	15.11
secondary pedagogical education	113	40.65
I have no pedagogical education	12	4.32
TOTAL	278	100

It was also investigating whether the respondents were involved in a project (usually national projects) focused on inclusion and, thus, whether the school in which they work sought to create the preconditions for inclusion and an inclusive approach.

Table 2*Participation in a Project Focused on Promoting Inclusion in Kindergartens*

	N	%
no	133	47.84
yes	145	52.16
TOTAL	278	100

The questionnaire was sent to kindergartens in all regions of the Slovak Republic. The most completed questionnaires are from eastern Slovakia, they make up 60.9% of the total number, i.e., 173 teaching staff answered.

Instruments and Procedures

A self-structured questionnaire was used to examine the attitudes of kindergarten teaching staff based on their own experiences in the process of inclusive education of children in kindergartens. The questionnaire was constructed by the authors of the paper. The research problem, research questions, and experience of the authors from the field were the basis for the development of the questionnaire, regarded the national context of the issue. The questionnaire was reviewed by kindergarten teachers, who commented on whether it was clear and understandable. It consisted of six items, most of which were scaled.

In the first item, the respondents had to indicate the degree of problems which they have when educating individual groups of children: a) children with behavioural problems and children with ADHD; b) children with mental disabilities; c) children with autism; d) children with a combination of different disorders; e) children with physical and sensory disabilities; f) children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds; g) with other children. The respondents indicated on the scale: very significant problems (5 points); significant problems (4 points); moderate problems (3 points); minor problems (2 points); no problems (1 point); I do not work with these children (0 points).

In the second item, they were asked to indicate the degree of problems which they have when educating children with special educational needs: a) children do not know how to talk; b) children do not understand me; c) uncleanliness of the children; d) insufficient orientation of the children with regards to time and spatial awareness; e) indiscipline of the children; f) attendance of the children in the kindergarten; g) the children do not have basic hygiene habits; h) a lack of interest by the parents in the education of the child; i) other. The respondents were supposed to comment on each of these options. The scale of the degree of the problem was the same as in the first item.

In the third item, the respondents had to express what worked best for them when working with children with special educational needs in general groups: a) an individual approach to the child; b) my effort, perseverance, motivation; c) trust and love towards children with disabilities; d) the help of a teaching assistant; e) the help of teaching staff – a school special pedagogue; f) the help of professional staff – a social pedagogue, a school psychologist; g) the help of the parents of children with special educational needs; h) other answer. The respondents could mark more options.

In the fourth item, the respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they needed to be assisted when working with children with special educational needs by individual professionals and the specific aforementioned measures: a) teaching assistant; b) teaching staff – a school special pedagogue; c) professional staff – a social pedagogue,

a school psychologist; d) help from the child's parents; e) change of content and performance standards in the state education program; f) completion of courses within university studies with a focus on working with children with special educational needs; g) completion of continuous education with a focus on working with children with special educational needs; h) self-study of literature with a focus on working with children with special educational needs; i) other. It was a five-point scale from very necessary (5 points) to absolutely unnecessary (1 point).

In the fifth item, they had to assess and indicate the degree of importance of individual measures for creating an inclusive environment in the kindergarten: a) cooperation of the teacher with a teaching assistant; b) cooperation of the teacher with a school special pedagogue; c) cooperation of the teacher with professional staff, especially a school psychologist, a speech therapist, etc.; d) cooperation of the teacher with the parents; e) cooperation with school counselling facilities (Pedagogical-Psychological Counselling and Prevention Centre, Special Pedagogical Counselling Centre); f) creation of suitable conditions – material, didactic aids, methodical aids for children with disabilities, etc.; g) better, newer ICT equipment – interactive whiteboards, digital technologies, and more; h) assign more teaching assistants; i) creation of a suitable climate, atmosphere in the kindergarten classroom; j) diagnosis of children as a help for teachers; k) reduction of the number of children in the classes, l) teacher education in the area of inclusion and working with disadvantaged children, m) other. On the same scale as in the fourth item, they had to indicate the degree of importance for each of the options.

In the sixth item, the respondents were asked to indicate if they had experienced that, thanks to an inclusive education in the kindergarten, children with disabilities could be placed in a mainstream primary school. They had to describe this experience.

Data Analysis

The research results were analysed using a quantitative approach and, in the sixth item, also a qualitative approach, where open coding, analysis, and interpretation of the responses were used. The answers were broken down by individual groups of children with special educational needs, who the respondents have taught. Subsequently, an experience (positive/negative/none) was determined and specified in what the problem was or how the respondents dealt with it.

When using quantitative approach, the relative number of respondents who marked particular options were presented in the tables. The numbers were also divided onto the group of teachers who participated in the project supporting inclusion and who did not. The data was analysed and presented regarded the social paradigm of inclusive education. Hypotheses H_1 and H_2 were tested using the Mann-Whitney U Test. Pearson's Chi-square test of independence was used to verify hypothesis H_3 .

Research Results

The Degree of Problems in the Education of Children With Special Educational Needs

The respondents commented on the degree of problems they have with individual groups of children. The statements of the respondents show that working with the aforementioned groups of children is problematic for them. It means they consider children with special educational needs in general groups problematic, that is not in line with positive attitudes toward inclusive education. The biggest problem for them is working with groups of children with autism problems, especially for respondents who have not participated in the project to support inclusion. In contrast, they consider working with children with physical and sensory disabilities and children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds to be less problematic. The results are shown in Table 3.

Table 3

The Degree of Problems with Individual Groups of Children (Relative Numbers)

	I Do Not Work with These Children	No Problems	Minor Problems	Moderate Problems	Significant Problems	Very Significant Problems
a) children with behavioural problems and children with ADHD	26.62	0.00	6.47	29.86	29.50	7.55
a) gr. 1	18.80	0.00	2.55	33.08	37.59	8.27
a) gr. 2	33.79	0.00	6.47	26.90	22.07	6.90
b) children with mental disabilities	39.57	2.16	8.27	21.22	20.50	8.27
b) gr. 1	33.08	2.26	8.27	21.80	23.31	11.28
b) gr. 2	45.52	2.07	8.27	20.69	17.93	5.52
c) children with autism	32.73	2.52	5.76	17.99	24.10	16.91
c) gr. 1	24.81	2.26	5.26	19.55	25.56	22.56
c) gr. 2	40.00	2.76	6.21	16.55	22.76	11.72
d) children with a combination of different disorders	38.13	2.52	5.04	15.11	21.22	17.99
d) gr. 1	32.33	3.01	4.51	16.54	22.56	21.05
d) gr. 2	43.45	2.07	5.52	13.79	20.00	15.17
e) children with physical and sensory disabilities	38.13	4.68	8.99	23.74	17.63	6.83

	I Do Not Work with These Children	No Problems	Minor Problems	Moderate Problems	Significant Problems	Very Significant Problems
e) gr. 1	32.33	4.51	9.77	27.07	16.54	9.77
e) gr. 2	43.45	4.83	8.28	20.69	18.62	4.14
f) children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds	14.39	13.67	24.10	34.53	9.71	3.60
f) gr. 1	21.80	10.53	24.06	33.08	7.52	3.01
f) gr. 2	7.59	16.55	24.14	35.86	11.72	4.14
g) with other children	61.15	8.99	11.15	13.67	3.96	1.08
g) gr. 1	59.40	8.27	12.03	15.04	3.76	1.5
g) gr. 2	62.76	9.66	10.34	12.41	4.14	0.69

Legend:

- gr. 1 (group 1) - not participating in the project to support inclusion
- gr. 2 (group 2) - participating in the project to support inclusion

Option g) with other children was marked by a total of 30 respondents (from this 9, i.e., 30%, were included in the project to support inclusion), from which two have stated that they don't have other children in the school, apart from the aforementioned categories. Some respondents gave more than one answer, which could be included in several of the created categories (e.g., “*Children with impaired communication skills and children with visual impairments.*”), thus, the total number of responses exceeds the total number of respondents. The answers were classified into categories (Table 4).

From the category “other answers”, it can be mentioned, for example:

- “*If a child is admitted as healthy at the discretion of a paediatrician, and problems occur during the school year, parents close their eyes to it, they do not go for an examination when prompted by the teacher and cannot be excluded from the kindergarten.*”
- “*Children with an immature nervous system, who manifest themselves in different ways, and it is very difficult to find a way to educate them, and most importantly, their parents see them as completely “normal”, and refuse help ... then it makes it very difficult for us to work with the children – the children disturb the class, hurt other children, run away, destroy things...*”

Table 4

Other Groups of Children With Whom the Teaching Staff Have Problems (Absolute Numbers)

Other Children (characteristics)	Project Focused on Inclusion	
	Yes	No
Children with impaired communication skills	3	4
Children with incorrect upbringing (the children of over motivated parents, maladapted, raised according to modern websites, without boundaries...)	1	3
Other nationality, ethnic group, marginalised Roma communities*	2	1
Visually impaired children*	1	2
Gifted/talented	0	2
Children with hearing impairment*	0	1
Children with problems in the emotional area	0	1
Children with diabetes	0	1
Hyperactive children*	0	1
Children with mild Asperger's syndrome*	0	1
Slower thinking	1	0
Children with a combination of different disorders*	0	1
Intact	1	0
They did not specify	0	3
Other answers	1	1

* Those marked with an asterisk can be classified into categories - into one of the options a) to f) in Table 1.

The respondents also commented on the degree of problems in the education of children with specific educational needs in general groups. For each of the aforementioned problems, the respondents indicated that it was a problem for them. In particular, the lack of discipline among children was a very significant problem, which was mentioned more by the respondents who had not participated in the project to support inclusion. Another big problem is that the children do not know how to talk or do not understand the teacher. The largest group of respondents (about a quarter to a fifth) did not consider the attendance of the children in the kindergarten, the absence of basic hygiene habits and a lack of interest by the parents in educating the child to be a problem.

The results are shown in Table 5.

Table 5

*Degree of Problems in the Education of Children with Specific Educational Needs
(Relative Numbers)*

	I Do Not Work with These Children	No Problems	Minor Problems	Moderate Problems	Significant Problems	Very Significant Problems
a) children do not know how to talk	10.79	6.47	15.11	30.58	23.38	13.67
a) gr. 1	15.79	5.26	18.05	25.56	20.30	15.04
a) gr. 2	6.21	7.59	12.41	35.17	26.21	12.41
b) children do not understand me	12.95	12.23	14.03	28.78	20.50	11.51
b) gr. 1	20.30	14.29	12.03	24.06	22.56	6.77
b) gr. 2	6.21	10.34	15.86	33.10	18.62	15.86
c) uncleanliness of the children	17.27	16.91	20.14	26.62	14.03	5.04
c) gr. 1	27.07	15.04	20.30	24.06	11.28	2.26
c) gr. 2	8.28	18.62	20.00	28.97	16.55	7.29
d) insufficient orientation of the children with regards to time and spatial awareness	6.83	13.31	24.10	34.17	14.39	7.19
d) gr. 1	11.28	12.78	23.31	36.84	11.28	4.51
d) gr. 2	2.76	13.79	24.83	31.72	17.24	9.66
e) indiscipline of the children	5.04	9.35	20.50	29.86	20.50	14.75
e) gr. 1	9.02	4.51	20.30	27.07	21.05	18.05
e) gr. 2	1.38	13.79	20.69	32.41	20.00	11.72
f) attendance of the children in the kindergarten	8.99	25.90	12.59	23.38	17.27	11.87
f) gr. 1	15.04	33.83	12.78	18.05	13.53	6.77
f) gr. 2	3.45	18.62	12.41	28.28	20.69	16.55
g) the children do not have basic hygiene habits	13.67	22.30	18.35	21.94	15.47	8.27
g) gr. 1	24.81	23.31	15.04	21.80	7.52	7.52
g) gr. 2	3.45	21.38	21.40	22.07	22.76	8.97
h) a lack of interest by the parents in the education of the child	10.79	19.78	13.67	23.74	19.78	12.23
h) gr. 1	18.80	22.56	13.53	20.30	15.04	9.77
h) gr. 2	3.45	17.24	13.79	26.90	24.14	14.48
i) other	90.29	2.52	0.72	2.52	1.44	2.52

Legend

gr. 1 (group 1) – not participating in the project to support inclusion

gr. 2 (group 2) – participating in the project to support inclusion

The option i) other was marked by a total of 25 respondents, from which 11, i.e., 44%, participated in the project to support inclusion. One answer was ruled out, it didn't make sense, and one answer was that the respondent had no other problems.

Some respondents gave more than one answer, which could be included in several of the created categories (e.g., “*We do not have the conditions – we do not have assistants, a large number of children in the class, small spaces, there is a lack of suitable teaching aids.*”), thus, the total number of responses exceeds the total number of respondents. The answers have been classified into categories (Table 6).

Table 6

Other Problems Which the Respondents Have With Regards to the Education of Children With Specific Educational Needs (Absolute Numbers)

Other Problems	Project Focused on Inclusion	
	Yes	No
Lack of teaching assistants	5	3
Problems with the parents (they do not cooperate, they are aggressive, etc.)*	1	5
A high number of children in the class	3	2
Unsuitable working conditions (premises, teaching aids, finances, etc.)	2	2
Insufficient material provisions for children (inappropriate clothing, footwear, hygiene*, non-payment of food fees, trips, etc.)	2	1
Physical disability	1	1
Insufficient education of the teachers	1	0
Other answers	1	4

* Those marked with an asterisk can be classified into categories - into one of the options a) to h) in Table 3

From the category “other answers”, it can be mentioned, for example:

- *Uncertainty, lack of self-confidence.*
- *I have usually encountered a problem when participating in a group activity.*
- *Children do not have an individual education plan, as they have not been diagnosed with a disability which is visible.*
- *Escaping from the kindergarten.*
- *The biggest problem for me is working with a child with mild autism in a group of children, so that, on the one hand, he concentrates and does not disturb the other children, and on the other hand that the teacher does not perceive it to be a disturbance.*
- *The lack of a school special & social pedagogue and school psychologist.*

Within the individual categories, it is also possible to state the degree of problems in the education of children with special educational needs in general groups from the point of view of the respondents. The respondents considered the lack of a teaching assistant

and the high numbers of children in the classroom to be significant to very significant problems. Insufficient hygiene for children, clothes, and footwear is also a big problem for teachers if the child does not have an individual education plan or if he or she has a physical disability.

The Importance of Introducing Measures When Working With Children With Special Educational Needs

The importance of introducing measures when working with children with special educational needs in general groups. The answers show that the most effective individual approach for teachers when educating children with special educational needs has proven to be trust and love for children with disabilities, their effort, perseverance and motivation, and the help of a teaching assistant. They commented positively on each of the proposed approaches. The results are shown in Table 7.

Table 7

Best Practices for Working with Children With Special Educational Needs in General Groups (Relative Numbers)

Best Practices	Yes	No
a) an individual approach to the child	84.53	15.47
a) gr. 1	89.47	10.53
a) gr. 2	80.00	20.00
b) my effort, perseverance, motivation	60.43	39.57
b) gr. 1	57.14	42.86
b) gr. 2	65.52	34.48
c) trust and love towards children with disabilities	61.51	38.49
c) gr. 1	42.86	57.14
c) gr. 2	69.66	30.34
d) the help of a teaching assistant	56.83	43.17
d) gr. 1	42.86	57.14
d) gr. 2	69.66	30.34
e) the help of teaching staff - a school special pedagogue	40.65	59.35
e) gr. 1	28.57	71.43
e) gr. 2	51.72	48.28
f) the help of professional staff - social pedagogue, school psychologist	23.02	76.98
f) gr. 1	18.80	81.20
f) gr. 2	26.90	73.10
g) the help of the parents of children with SEN	33.09	66.91
g) gr. 1	36.09	63.91
g) gr. 2	30.34	69.66
(h) other answer	1.44	98.56

Legend

gr. 1 (group 1) – not participating in the project to support inclusion

gr. 2 (group 2) – participating in the project to support inclusion

Furthermore, the respondents expressed who or what would help them in working with children with special educational needs. The teachers especially praised the necessary help from a teaching assistant, a school special pedagogue and the child's parents. The results are shown in Table 8.

Table 8

*Help Working with Children With Special Educational Needs in General Groups
(Relative Numbers)*

	I Can't Judge	Absolutely Unnecessary	Almost Unnecessary	Neither Necessary nor Unnecessary	Necessary	Very Necessary
a) teaching assistant	10.79	0.72	1.08	3.60	19.42	64.39
a) gr. 1	13.53	0.00	0.75	3.76	14.29	67.70
a) gr. 2	8.28	1.40	1.38	3.45	24.14	61.38
b) teaching staff - school special pedagogue	12.59	0.36	2.88	3.60	24.82	55.76
b) gr. 1	17.29	0.00	2.26	3.76	27.82	48.87
b) gr. 2	8.28	0.69	3.45	3.45	22.07	62.07
c) professional staff - social pedagogue, school psychologist	19.78	2.52	2.88	13.31	27.34	34.17
c) gr. 1	24.06	0.75	2.26	13.53	28.57	30.83
c) g r. 2	15.86	4.14	3.41	13.10	26.21	37.24
d) help from the child's parents	7.55	0.72	0.72	3.60	33.09	54.32
d) gr. 1	6.77	0.00	0.75	2.56	33.08	57.14
d) gr. 2	8.26	1.38	0.69	4.83	33.10	51.72
e) change of content and performance standards in the state education program	16.55	4.68	8.99	21.94	28.42	19.42
e) gr. 1	19.55	4.51	8.27	19.55	26.32	21.80
e) gr. 2	13.79	4.83	9.66	24.14	30.34	17.24

f) completion of courses within university studies with a focus on working with children with special educational needs	17.27	3.96	3.24	15.47	35.25	24.82
f) gr. 1	13.53	3.76	3.01	12.03	36.84	30.83
f) gr. 2	20.69	4.13	3.41	18.62	33.79	19.31
g) completion of continuous education with a focus on working with children with special educational needs	5.76	5.40	3.60	15.11	41.37	28.78
g) gr. 1	5.26	7.52	5.26	8.27	40.60	33.08
g) gr. 2	6.21	3.45	2.01	21.38	42.07	24.83
h) self-study of literature with a focus on working with children with special educational needs	8.27	7.19	2.88	11.87	44.24	25.54
h) gr. 1	7.52	9.77	3.76	6.77	40.60	31.58
h) gr. 2	8.97	4.83	2.07	16.55	47.59	20.00
i) other	93.88	0.36	0.36	0.72	1.44	3.24

Legend:

gr. 1 (group 1) – not participating in the project to support inclusion

gr. 2 (group 2) – participating in the project to support inclusion

The respondents stated the degree of importance of individual measures for creating an inclusive environment within the kindergarten. For each option, the largest group of respondents said that these measures were very much needed, and only a small percentage said they would be unnecessary. It means that inclusive education without some measures the teaching staff consider very difficult. Most often mentioned were measures such as the teacher's cooperation with a teaching assistant, with a school special pedagogue, with professional staff, especially a school psychologist and a speech therapist, and with the parents, and the creation of suitable conditions - material, didactic aids, methodical aids for children with disabilities, etc. The results are shown in Table 9.

Table 9

Degree of Importance of Individual Measures for Creating an Inclusive Environment Within the Kindergarten (Relative Frequency)

	I Can't Judge	Absolutely Unnecessary	Almost Unnecessary	Neither Necessary nor Unnecessary	Necessary	Very Necessary
a) cooperation of the teacher with a teaching assistant	4.68	2.16	0.72	1.80	20.50	70.14
a) gr. 1	5.26	0.75	0.75	0.75	22.56	69.92
a) gr. 2	4.14	3.45	0.69	2.76	18.62	70.34
b) cooperation of the teacher with a school special pedagogue	4.32	2.16	1.80	1.44	24.46	65.83
b) gr. 1	4.51	1.50	1.50	2.26	22.56	67.67
b) gr. 2	4.14	2.76	2.07	0.69	24.46	64.14
c) cooperation of the teacher with professional staff – especially a school psychologist, a speech therapist, etc.	5.04	3.60	1.44	4.32	33.09	52.52
c) gr. 1	3.76	3.76	1.50	3.76	33.83	53.38
c) gr. 2	6.21	3.45	1.34	4.83	32.41	51.72
d) cooperation of the teacher with the parents	1.08	1.44	0.36	1.80	24.46	70.86
d) gr. 1	1.50	0.75	0.75	3.01	17.29	76.69
d) gr. 2	0.69	2.07	0.00	0.69	31.03	65.52
e) cooperation with school counselling facilities (Pedagogical-Psychological Counselling and Prevention Centre, Special Pedagogical Counselling Centre)	3.60	3.60	1.08	5.76	37.41	48.56
e) gr. 1	3.76	3.01	1.50	4.51	33.08	54.14
e) gr. 2	3.45	4.14	0.69	6.90	41.38	43.45
f) creation of suitable conditions – material, didactic aids, methodical aids for children with disabilities, etc.	2.52	2.88	0.36	2.16	28.06	64.03

f) gr. 1	2.26	2.26	0.75	1.50	24.81	68.42
f) gr. 2	2.76	3.45	0.00	2.76	31.03	60.00
g) better, newer ICT equipment – interactive whiteboards, digital technologies and more	1.44	6.47	2.88	16.55	34.89	37.77
g) gr. 1	2.26	5.26	3.76	19.55	34.59	34.59
g) gr. 2	0.69	7.58	2.07	13.79	35.17	40.69
h) assign more teaching assistants	7.55	5.40	3.96	12.95	30.58	39.57
h) gr. 1	9.77	4.51	3.76	13.53	28.57	39.85
h) gr. 2	5.52	6.21	4.14	12.41	32.41	39.31
i) creation of a suitable climate, atmosphere in the kindergarten classroom	0.72	2.88	2.52	5.76	33.81	54.32
i) gr. 1	1.50	2.26	3.76	6.77	27.07	58.65
i) gr. 2	0.00	3.45	1.34	4.83	40.00	50.35
j) diagnosis of children as a help for teachers	1.08	2.88	1.08	7.19	34.53	53.24
j) gr. 1	1.50	3.01	1.50	10.53	30.08	53.38
j) gr. 2	0.69	2.76	0.69	4.14	38.62	53.10
k) reduce the number of children in the classes	1.80	3.24	1.80	8.27	26.98	57.91
k) gr. 1	2.26	2.26	0.76	6.02	23.31	65.41
k) gr. 2	1.38	4.14	2.76	10.34	30.34	51.03
l) teacher education in the area of inclusion and working with disadvantaged children	2.16	4.68	0.72	7.19	37.05	48.20
l) gr. 1	3.01	4.51	0.00	5.26	37.59	49.62
l) gr. 2	1.38	4.83	1.38	8.97	36.55	46.90
m) other	95.32	0.00	0.72	1.08	0.72	2.16

Legend:

gr. 1 (group 1) – not participating in the project to support inclusion

gr. 2 (group 2) – participating in the project to support inclusion

A total of 19 respondents (from which 11, i.e., 58%, participated in projects to support inclusion) gave the answer “other” for option m). Two answers within this were “no” and one was “I don’t know”. Some respondents gave more than one answer, which could be included in more than one of the created categories (e.g., “*cooperation with teaching assistants, professional staff, individual education plans, fewer children in the classrooms*”), therefore, the total number of responses exceeds the total number of respondents. The answers were classified into categories (Table 10).

Table 10

Other Measures for Creating an Inclusive Environment Within Kindergartens (Absolute Numbers)

	Project Focused on Inclusion	
	Yes	No
Cooperation with the parents, the community	2	2
Cooperation with professionals	2	2
Reducing the number of children in the class	1	2
To cooperate with a teaching assistant	1	2
To improve material provisions (premises, compensatory aids, etc.)	0	2
Individual education plans	2	0
Cooperation with the founder, with the school management	2	0
Segregation of children with special educational needs (independent kindergartens)	1	0
Respect for the needs of other children in the class	0	1
Other answers	2	1

From the category “other answers” it can be mentioned, for example:

- The coordinator of inclusive education should have a separate job description (not a headmaster, who has enough to do), who has enough time to manage the inclusive team.
- Frequent application of prosocial education into the process.
- The biggest problem is that the child comes to the kindergarten at the age of between two and three years. The parent does not know and also does not want to admit that his child is not okay. By the time we have a paper from some kind of expert that the child is disabled, or that he/she is autistic, or ADHD, he/she is already 5–6 years old. Most parents admit it only when they cannot put their child in a normal primary school. So, we have such children in the kindergarten, we don’t even have a reduced number of children in the class, we don’t know how to work with these children and it is not even possible with such a large number of children.

The Difference in the Reported Level of Problems in the Education of Children With Special Educational Needs Among Teachers who Have Participated, and Those who Have not Participated, in a Project Focused on Supporting Inclusion

The statistical testing of hypothesis H_1 is shown in Table 11. Hypothesis H_1 was not confirmed. There is no statistically significant difference between the teaching staff of kindergartens, who have participated in the project on supporting inclusion and the teaching staff of kindergartens who have not participated in the project on supporting inclusion, with regards to the problems in the education of children with special educational needs. Differences were identified between these groups of respondents only with

regards to the reported problems with children with behavioural problems and children with ADHD ($U = 4326.5, p = .042$). With regard to the problems in the education of children with special educational needs, the only differences between the groups of respondents that were identified were with regards to the reported problems related to the indiscipline of children ($U = 7302, p = .029$). In two other identified differences between the groups, even the respondents who participated in the project named a higher rate of problems related to the children's attendance at kindergarten ($U = 5761.5, p = .000$) and the parents' lack of interest in educating the child ($U = 6460, p = .05$).

Table 11

Verification of Hypothesis H_1

	Sum of the Order		U	Z	p
	Group 1	Group 2			
1 a) children with behavioural problems and children with ADHD	11927.5	8982.5	4326.5	2.036	.042
1 b) children with mental disabilities	7901.5	6294.5	3134.5	1.209	.227
1 c) children with autism	9939.5	7638.5	3810.5	1.460	.144
1 d) children with a combination of different disorders	7958	6920	3517	0.529	.597
1 e) children with physical and sensory disabilities	7911	6967	3564	0.385	.700
1 f) children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds	12415	16026	6955	-0.024	.981
1 g) with other children	3023	2863	1378	0.488	.625
2 a) children do not know how to talk	13912.5	16963.5	7584.5	-0.055	.956
2 b) children do not understand me	12327	17076	6656	-1.021	.307
2 c) uncleanliness of children	10640	15925	5887	-1.130	.259
2 d) insufficient orientation of the children with regards to time and spatial awareness	14761.5	18908.5	7740.5	-0.963	.336
2 e) indiscipline of the children	17382	17598	7302	2.182	.029
2 f) attendance of the children in the kindergarten	12202.5	19928.5	5761.5	-3.712	.000
2 g) the children do not have basic hygiene habits	11162.5	17757.5	6112.5	-1.673	.094
2 h) a lack of interest by the parents in the education of the child	12346	18530	6460	-1.963	.050

Legend:

U – value of the Mann-Whitney U test

Z – Z score

p – statistical significance

group 1 – not participating in a project to support inclusion

group 2 – participating in a project to support inclusion

Difference in the Opinions of Kindergarten Teachers on the Importance of Introducing Measures for Working With Children With Special Educational Needs Among Teachers Participating and not Participating in the Project Focused on Supporting Inclusion

The statistical testing of hypothesis H_2 is shown in Table 12. Hypothesis H_2 was not confirmed. There is no statistically significant difference between the kindergarten teaching staff participating in the project to support inclusion and the kindergarten teaching staff who were not participating in the project to support inclusion, with regards to the reported importance of measures to support the inclusion of children with special educational needs. The reported importance was statistically significantly higher only for the measure, teacher education in the area of inclusion and work with children with disadvantages ($U = 9274.5$, $p = .029$), for teachers not participating in the project to support inclusion.

Table 12
Verification of Hypothesis H_2

	Sum of the order		<i>U</i>	<i>Z</i>	<i>p</i>
	group 1	group 2			
a) cooperation of the teacher with a teaching assistant	18593	20188	9603	0.058	.953
b) cooperation of the teacher with a school special pedagogue	18863.5	19917.5	9332.5	0.46221	.643
c) cooperation of the teacher with professional staff – especially a school psychologist, a speech therapist, etc.	18843.5	19937.5	9352.5	0.432	.665
d) cooperation of the teacher with the parents	19514	19267	8682	1.433	.151
e) cooperation with school counselling facilities (Pedagogical-Psychological Counselling and Prevention Centre, Special Pedagogical Counselling Centre)	19540.5	19240.5	8655.5	1.473	.140
f) creation of suitable conditions – material, didactic aids, methodical aids for children with disabilities, etc.	19375.5	19405.5	8820.5	1.226	.219
g) better, newer ICT equipment – interactive whiteboards, digital technologies and more	17771.5	21009.5	8860.5	-1.1671	.243
h) assign more teaching assistants	18339.5	20441.5	9428.5	-0.318	.749
i) creation of a suitable climate, atmosphere in the kindergarten classroom	19054	19727	9142	0.746	.455

	Sum of the order		<i>U</i>	<i>Z</i>	<i>p</i>
	group 1	group 2			
j) diagnosis of children as a help for teachers	18222.5	20558.5	9311.5	-0.493	.621
k) reduce the number of children in the classes	20010	18771	8186	2.174	.029
l) teacher education in the area of inclusion and working with disadvantaged children	18921.5	19859.5	9274.5	0.548	.583

Legend:

U – value of the Mann-Whitney U test

Z – Z score

p – statistical significance

group 1 – not participating in a project to support inclusion

group 2 – participating in a project to support inclusion

Experiences of Teachers and Assistants With Inclusive Education in the Kindergarten

The respondents described their specific experiences where, thanks to inclusive education in the kindergarten, children with disadvantages could be placed within a mainstream primary school education. A total of 60 respondents answered the question (34 of them, i.e., 57%, were participating in the project to support inclusion). Some respondents mentioned several experiences, e.g., they described one positive and one negative experience within one response. Therefore, we worked with the number of responses, not the number of respondents who commented on the question (Table 13).

Table 13

Experiences of Teachers and Assistants With Inclusive Education in the Kindergarten

Group of Children	Experience with Inclusion into a Mainstream Primary School		Project Focused on Inclusion	
	Po/Ne/No	More Detailed Specification	Yes	No
With a physical disability	Ne	Lacking a teaching assistant	0	1
	Po	Cooperation with a teaching assistant	1	0
With a visual impairment	Po	Cooperation of the parents, cooperation with a professional assistant	0	1
	Ne	Lacking a teaching assistant at the primary school	0	1
With a hearing impairment	Po	Extreme workload of teachers, no interest by the founder	0	1

Group of Children	Experience with Inclusion into a Mainstream Primary School		Project Focused on Inclusion	
	Po/Ne/No	More Detailed Specification	Yes	No
With a mental disability	Ne	Cooperation with Pedagogical and Psychological Counselling and Prevention Centre, after entering the primary school he/she has no assistant	0	1
With multiple disabilities	Po	Cooperation with a teaching assistant	1	0
With diabetes mellitus	Ne	They did not have an assistant, the child had problems at the primary school	0	2
With multiple sclerosis	Po	The child managed a regular primary school	0	1
With impaired communication ability	Po	The child managed a regular primary school	1	2
With autistic spectrum disorder	Po	The child managed a regular primary school	1	1
	Ne	A lack of finances, there were no assistants, they had high numbers of children in the classrooms	1	0
With ADHD	Ne	A lack of finances, there were no assistants, they had high numbers of children in the classrooms	1	0
	Ne	Challenging work, missing an assistant, missing cooperation with an expert (the child was just waiting for the opinion of experts)	0	1
With Cerebral Palsy	Po	Cooperation with a school psychologist and a school special pedagogue	1	0
With social disadvantage	Po	Cooperation with speech therapist, school psychologist, teaching assistant; cooperation with the parents, Romani children mastered the Slovak language, they socialised better	5	0
	No	Not yet enrolled in primary school, communication problems in the kindergarten	0	1

Group of Children	Experience with Inclusion into a Mainstream Primary School		Project Focused on Inclusion	
	Po/Ne/No	More Detailed Specification	Yes	No
Not specified	Ne	Insufficient inclusion, the children in mainstream primary school lagged behind; disagreement with the inclusion of “all types of disabilities” in mainstream kindergartens, a lack of cooperation by the parents	5	3
	Po	The need for regular attendance at kindergartens, cooperation with the parents, with experts (psychologist, school special pedagogue), with a teaching assistant; The children were prepared for primary school; self-care, hygienic habits, communication, spatial orientation, graphomotor skills, and social and communication skills have improved	15	6
	No	In the kindergarten the child progressed, improved in several areas; opinion on the need for compulsory pre-primary education; opinion on the need to assign a teaching assistant	5	9

Legend:

Po = Positive, Ne = Negative, No = No experience, K = kindergarten, PS = primary school, PPCPC = Pedagogical and Psychological Counselling and Prevention Centre

68 responses were analysed. The overall positive experience was expressed in their answers by 37 respondents (54%), of whom 25 participated in the project to support inclusion and 12 did not. A total of 16 respondents (24%) expressed a negative experience, of whom 7 participated in the project to support inclusion and 9 did not. 15 respondents (22%) did not report any specific experience, of whom 5 participated in the project to support inclusion and 9 did not (Table 14).

Table 14

Impact of the Project to Support Inclusion on the Experience of Placing Children With Special Educational Needs in Mainstream Primary School Education

	Experience		
	Positive (n = 37)	Negative (n = 16)	None (n = 15)
Project to support inclusion – Yes	25	7	5
Project to support inclusion – No	12	9	9

Pearson's Chi-square test of independence was used to verify hypothesis H_3 . There was no statistically significant difference ($\chi^2(2) = 4.257, p = .119$) found between the respondents, who were participating in the project to support inclusion and those who were not participating in the project. Hypothesis H_3 was not confirmed. The kindergarten teaching staff participating in the project to support inclusion did not report statistically significantly more positive experiences, when a child with special educational needs became included in a mainstream primary school education, than kindergarten teaching staff who were not participating in this project.

In some responses, opinion was expressed rather than experience, e.g., *"In my opinion, not all types of disability are suitable for attending a regular kindergarten."*, *"My 30 years of experience in education. I am clearly in favour of not including children in mainstream classes. Healthy and ill children suffer as a result"*. However, it can be assumed that this is coming from the respondents' experience with the education of children with special educational needs and their subsequent enrolment in a primary school.

The largest group of respondents, numbering 43, commented on children with special educational needs in general and did not mention a specific group of children. Of these, 21 (49%) reported a positive experience (with 15 respondents participating in the project to support inclusion), 8 negative (19%) and 14 none (33%).

The second largest group, numbering 6, commented mainly on children with social disadvantages, while 5 of them, participating in the project to support inclusion, stated a positive experience with the inclusion of children in mainstream primary schools.

From all the answers where some positive experience was described, it can be stated that the respondents were positive about the cooperation with teaching assistants or professional staff (school special pedagogue, school psychologist, speech therapist, etc.), and parents, especially in terms of supporting the regular attendance of children into kindergartens. Answers containing negative experiences usually also included an explanation that in the kindergarten they did not have the opportunity to cooperate with a teaching assistant or professional staff, or, if this happened, then after entrance into the primary school the child did not have such opportunities, which was also reflected in his/her success and inclusion into a regular primary school. Also mentioned were the high numbers of children in the classrooms, and the lack of funds.

Discussion

As stated by Droščák and Danek (2014), education is not only important for acquiring knowledge, but also offers opportunities to improve the quality of life and the process of shaping the dignity of every human life. Education is the most important factor in the development of children, especially among those with special educational needs.

It is the kindergarten that is a place for a child with special educational needs, where his knowledge and skills can develop optimally and harmoniously under the professional guidance and educational work of a teacher. For this reason, the professional public is clearly in favour of inclusive education.

The main aim of the research was to analyse the attitudes of teaching staff toward their own experiences in the process of inclusive education, and to describe how these attitudes depend upon their participation in a project focused on supporting inclusion. The first research question asked which problems kindergarten teachers and assistants encountered most in the process of inclusive education. The statements of the respondents show that working with children with special educational needs is problematic for them. The biggest problems for them were working with groups of children with autism. On the other hand, they consider working with children with physical and sensory disabilities and with children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds to be less problematic. A lack of discipline by the children was a very big problem, as well as the fact that the children do not know how to talk or do not understand the teacher.

The Diken research (2006) also focused on the views of kindergarten teachers with regards to inclusive education, through the Turkish version of the Opinions Relative to Mainstreaming Scale (TORMS) (Diken, 2004). The results showed that the researched teachers had significantly positive attitudes towards the inclusion of children with mental disabilities. Kindergarten teachers, who had enough knowledge but a lack of experience working with children with mental disabilities, had positive attitudes towards inclusive education.

The second research question asked what the opinions of kindergarten teachers and assistants were with regard to the importance of introducing measures in inclusive education were. In the education of children with special educational needs, an individual approach to the child proved to be the most effective for the teacher, also thanks to the presence of a teaching assistant, a school special pedagogue, or a professional employee.

The respondents in the research further proved the worth of the help of a professional employee, i.e., a social pedagogue or a school psychologist, as well as the trust and love for children with disabilities, and their effort, perseverance, and motivation. They also commented positively on each of the proposed approaches. In particular, they praised the necessary help of a teaching assistant, a school special pedagogue, and the child's parents.

Nonetheless, based on the results of the survey by Földešová et al. (2013), in Slovakia 71.42% of kindergarten teachers did not have teaching assistants, only 17.85% of kindergarten teachers had teaching assistants. It can be stated that thanks to the projects to support inclusion, the situation has now improved.

“According to kindergarten teachers, the supporting of inclusion means a necessary cooperation with counselling facilities of educational counselling and prevention, such as the Pedagogical-Psychological Counselling and Prevention Centre and the Special Pedagogical Counselling Centre, reducing the number of children

in the classroom, assigning more teaching assistants, the presence of professional staff and cooperation with them and other teachers. Also, in the open item, they confirmed the need for the secondment of teaching assistants, and some of them would also welcome Romani assistants, who would help children to overcome the language barrier” (Kušnířová et al., 2018, p. 65).

According to the respondents, several measures are very important when educating children with special educational needs. Most often mentioned were measures such as the teacher’s cooperation with a teaching assistant, with a school special pedagogue, with professional staff, especially a school psychologist and a speech therapist, and with the parents, and the creation of suitable conditions – material, teaching aids, methodical aids for children with disabilities, etc.

The research of Sucuođlu et al. (2013) focused on examining the knowledge and views of kindergarten teachers on inclusive practices. Two research tools were used: The Inclusion Knowledge Test and the Turkish form of Opinions Relative to Integration of Students with Disabilities. The results of the research showed that teachers’ views on inclusion were neither positive nor negative, and a statistically significant relationship between the teachers’ knowledge and their attitudes towards inclusive education was not confirmed. All the conclusions pointed to the in-service training of kindergarten teachers and to several suggestions on how to train teachers to be able to work with children with special educational needs in mainstream classes.

Batu et al. (2017) examined the views of kindergarten teachers on inclusive education. They conducted semi-structured interviews with 45 kindergarten teachers who had experience working with children with special educational needs. The research showed that although the teachers had positive views on inclusive education, they still did not have enough knowledge about it, especially in the area of the types and characteristics of individual disabilities or disadvantages, inclusion, effective educational methods, etc.

In the Miřnová survey (2018), only 50% of teachers thought that their kindergarten was inclusive, 35% answered no and 15% of the teachers did not answer this question.

Our research confirmed that there is no statistically significant difference between the teaching staff of kindergartens who participated in the project to support inclusion and between the teaching staff of kindergartens who did not participate in the project to support inclusion, with regard to the aforementioned problems in the education of children with special educational needs. However, the level of reported problems among the kindergarten teaching staff who participated in the project focusing on the support of inclusion was lower among certain groups of children, namely among children with behavioural problems and children with ADHD, and in specific problems, namely the indiscipline of the children. Even the respondents who participated in the project had more problems with the attendance of children in the kindergarten and the parents’ lack of interest in educating the child.

Furthermore, it was confirmed that there is no statistically significant difference between the kindergarten teaching staff participating in the project to support inclusion and the kindergarten teaching staff who were not participating in the project to support inclusion, with regards to the reported importance of measures to support the inclusion of children with special educational needs in general groups. The reported importance was higher only for measures to train teachers in the area of inclusion and the work with disadvantaged children.

The third research question asked what the experience of the teachers and assistants when, thanks to inclusive education in a kindergarten, children with special educational needs were able to be included within a mainstream primary school education, was. The teachers and assistants mentioned 37 (54.41%) positive experiences, 16 (23.25%) negative experiences, and 15 (22.06%) none experiences. There was also no statistically significant difference found between the respondents who participated in the project to support inclusion and among those who had not participated in the project, in presenting positive experiences when a child with special educational needs is included in a mainstream primary school education.

A research study published by Opdal et al. (2010) found that 60% of the respondents supported the possibility of students with special needs attending to mainstream schools. 90% of the respondents commented on the possibility of changes in mainstream schools, with regards to the creation of conditions for students with disabilities and special needs. The respondents also expressed an interest in further education within the area of acquisition of knowledge and skills, which would help them in inclusive classrooms.

Our research results (non-confirmed hypotheses) certainly cannot be interpreted in such a way that a project to support inclusive education would not serve its purpose, but there are simply other important factors which affect the effectiveness of inclusive education. These certainly include the teacher's personality and certain characteristics which would need to be further explored.

The study (Forlin et al., 2007) emphasises that teacher training institutions should consider assigning inclusion into their curricula and provide students with hands-on experience of inclusive education, in a positive and supportive environment, which allows them to experience success. Seçer (2010) stated that many kindergarten teachers, who work with children with special educational needs and have not received in-service teacher training, have negative attitudes and views on inclusive education. Therefore, the study focused on comparing the views of teachers before and after such an education, using the Opinions Relative Mainstreaming scale. The results of the research showed that after the completion of education, the opinions and attitudes of the teachers were more positive.

Conclusions and Implications

The results of the research clearly indicate that it is necessary to take into account the views of teaching staff on inclusive education which results from their direct experience. They are the implementers of inclusive education in practice, and their opinions are good feedback for experts dealing with the given problem. Nevertheless, the research has shown that these opinions and experiences do not depend on whether or not the teaching staff have participated in a project to support inclusion.

The limits of the research lie in the willingness of the teaching staff to participate in the research, which has affected the representativeness of the research sample and thus the possibility to generalise the research results. The implication for further research is a qualitative study of the course of inclusive education in kindergarten praxis and the initial years of primary schools, which would further complement and develop the results of the quantitative research.

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Vaikų darželio auklėtojų ir auklėtojų padėjėjų nuostatų į savo patirtį inkluzinio ugdymo procese analizė

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Santrauka

Kalbant apie vaikų inkluzinį ugdymą vaikų darželiuose, pastebima tendencija, kad inkluzinis ugdymas formuoja vaiko asmenybės įvairovę ir vystymąsi. Tyrimo problema tapo klausimai, kokios yra vaikų darželio auklėtojų ir auklėtojų padėjėjų nuostatos į jų pačių patirtį inkluzinio ugdymo procese ir kaip šios nuostatos priklauso nuo auklėtojų dalyvavimo projekte, skirtame inkluzijai remti. Tyrimo imtį sudarė 284 vaikų darželių pedagoginio personalo nariai (140 auklėtojų ir 144 auklėtojų padėjėjai).

Šis tyrimas patvirtina, kad nėra statistiškai reikšmingo skirtumo tarp vaikų darželių auklėtojų ir auklėtojų padėjėjų, dalyvavusių inkluzijos rėmimo projekte ir nedalyvavusių inkluzijos rėmimo projekte, nei dėl specialiųjų ugdymosi poreikių turinčių vaikų ugdymo problemų, nei dėl specialiųjų ugdymosi poreikių turinčių vaikų inkluzijos rėmimo priemonių svarbos. Be to, nenustatyta statistiškai reikšmingų skirtumų tarp respondentų, dalyvavusių inkluzijos rėmimo projekte, ir respondentų, nedalyvavusių šiame projekte, kalbant apie teigiamą patirtį, kai specialiųjų ugdymosi poreikių turintis vaikas pradėjo lankyti ikimokyklinio ugdymo įstaigą. Šių rezultatų negalima interpretuoti taip, kad inkluzinio ugdymo rėmimo projektas nepasiekė savo tikslo, tiesiog yra kitų svarbių veiksnių, kurie daro įtaką inkluziniam ugdymui tapti veiksmingam.

Esminiai žodžiai: *inkluzinis ugdymas, pedagoginis personalas, vaikų darželio auklėtojas, vaikų darželio auklėtojo padėjėjas, ikimokyklinis ugdymas.*

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