INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS' AND PRE-SERVICE EDUCATORS' ATTITUDES

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Abstract

According to Huber (2009), determination of factors that influence on pre-service teachers' attitudes may provide information for making curriculum aimed at promoting desirable attitudes toward inclusion. In this context, a great number of researchers had studied variables related to pre-service teachers' attitudes toward inclusion. While the results of some of these studies indicate that pre-service teacher have positive attitudes about the benefits of inclusion, others reveal concerns about the inclusive education of students with disability.

This survey was conducted with students from Institute of Special Education and Rehabilitation and Institute of Pedagogy, examining their attitudes toward inclusion of students with disabilities in regular schools. The Attitudes Toward Inclusion in Africa Scale (ATIAS) (Agbenyega, Deppeler & Harvey, 2005) was used to assess the pre-service teachers' and pre-service special educators' attitudes towards inclusive education.

Results show that, in general, majority of pre-service teachers and pre-service special educators support the concept of inclusion

Keywords: *attitudes, inclusive education, students with disability, pre-service teachers, pre-service special educators.*

1. Introduction

The inclusion of students with special educational needs (SEN) is now a worldwide practice (Leyser & Romi, 2008), but is far from being fully accepted by the educational community (Yellin et al., 2003). Teacher's attitudes towards inclusion of students with SEN are a critical component to the inclusion of students with SEN. A *lot of research* has investigated *teachers*' *attitude. However, the findings from this research have been mixed.* According to Scruggs and Mastropieri's (1996) analysis of 28 studies (from 1958 to 1995), about two-thirds of the teachers supported the concept of inclusion. Some researchers have found that teachers were not in favor of inclusion (Coates, 1989; Giangreco et al., 1993; Reiter, Schanin & Tirosh, 1998; Semmel et al., 1991). Also, few researchers reported that teachers had uncertain or neutral attitudes (Bennett, Deluca & Bruns, 1997; Leyser & Tappendorf, 2001).

Hobbs and Westling (1998) cited that "positive attitudes can be and need to be fostered through both training and positive experiences with students with disabilities." Murphy (1996)

stated that if teachers graduate with negative attitudes toward the inclusive education of students with SEN, these attitudes are very difficult to change.
The purpose of this research is to *explore* pre-service *teachers*' and pre-service special educators' *attitudes towards inclusion* of *students* with SEN.

2.Methodology

Sample

A total of 200 undergraduate students participated in this research (124 students of the Institute of special education and rehabilitation and 76 students of Institute of pedagogy, Faculty of Philosophy in Skopje, Republic of Macedonia). Of the total number of students, 66 (33%) were the first year in college, 47 (23.5%) were the second year, 55 (27.5%) were the third year, and 32 (16%) were the fourth year.

Instrument

Participants' attitudes toward inclusion were measured using the Attitudes toward Inclusion in Africa Scale – ATIAS, (Agbenyega, Deppeler & Harvey, 2005). It was administrated to the participants during the academic year 2015/2016. The instrument consists of two sections: the first asks for demographic information such as gender, contact with a person with disability, previous training; the second invites the rating of pre-service teachers and pre-service special educators to 17 statements using a 6-point Likert-type classification ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 6 (strongly disagree). The statements were divided according to the 4 factors identified by Agbenyega (2007) through factor analysis: behavioral issues, student needs, resource issues, and professional competency. In this survey, the items from factor *professional competences* were not used (14, 15 and 17 items).

Statistic

The data were statistic analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 14.0. An independent samples t-test was used to compare the mean scores of the participants' responses regarding the inclusion of a student with SEN. This test was used to determine whether there is a statistically significant difference in the mean scores between the two groups of undergraduate students.

3.Results and Discussion

Participants were predominately female (91.9%), and all were between 18 and 24 years. 71.9% respondents reported that they had a contact with a person with disability (e.g. family member, friend, neighbors). Half of them (54.5%) had not received any training focusing on the inclusive education of students with SEN (e.g. courses, workshop, and seminar) (Table 1).

Behavioral issues include characteristics that may be associated with students with disabilities which teachers might find difficult to work within an inclusive classroom setting. A low score indicates a more positive attitude toward inclusive education. However, it must be noted that a mean score above 4 could be conclusively described as a negative attitude. As seen in table 2, the responses to items, which were from the behavioral domains, were similar among pre-service teachers' and pre-service special educators'. The pre-service teachers' were

more likely (p=.026) than pre-service special educators' to believe that "students with difficulty following school rules should be in regular school."

Table 1. ***Demographic characteristics***

Parameters	Pre-service special educators N=124 (62%)	Pre-service teachers N=76 (38%)	Total n=199
Gender			
Female	114 (91.9)	72 (94.7)	186 (93)
Male	10 (8.1)	4 (5.3)	14 (7)
Year in college			
I year	44 (35.5)	22 (28.9)	66 (33)
II year	30 (24.2)	17 (22.4)	17 (23.5)
III year	30 (24.2)	25 (32.9)	55 (27.5)
IV year	20 (16.1)	12 (15.8)	32 (16)
Contact with a person with disability			143 (71.9)
Yes	109 (87.9)	34 (44.7)	57 (28.1)
No	15 (12.1)	42 (55.3)	
Training for inclusive education			
Yes	70 (56.5)	21 (27.6)	91 (45.5)
No	54 (43.5)	55 (72.4)	109 (54.5)

Table 2. B*ehavioral issues*

Items	Pre-service special educators	Pre-service teachers'	t	p
	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)		
Difficulty following school rules	3.20 (1.54)	2.73 (1.38)	2.236	.026
Physically aggressive	4.02 (1.53)	4.11 (1.57)	-0.397	.691
Need help to move	2.45 (1.64)	2.44 (1.43)	0.045	.963
Verbally aggressive	3.41 (1.56)	3.56 (1.66)	-0.635	.526
Difficulty in expressing their thoughts	2.58 (1.34)	2.84 (1.54)	-1.216	.225
Difficulty in controlling behaviour	3.47 (1.53)	3.52 (1.44)	-0.233	.816
Often absent from school	3.19 (1.66)	3.18 (1.52)	0.043	.965
Difficulty in sustaining attention	3.08 (1.47)	2.75 (1.21)	1.722	.086

The second factor (*Student needs*) relates to challenges believed to be characteristics of students with sensory disabilities, which teachers believe require extra needs and support that cannot be provided in inclusive based regular classrooms. Based on the information in Table 3, pre-service teacher' were more likely (p=.006) than pre-service special educators to believe that "students who lack daily living skills and need training in managing themselves should be in regular school."

The third factor (*Resources issues*) relates to organizational and structural supports needed to assist teachers in the practice of inclusive education. An analysis of the data in Table 4 shows that both groups of participants indicated high levels of concerns and negative attitude regarding adequate resources, special materials, and inappropriate infrastructure. But, pre-service special educators' showed significantly more concerns about "class sizes" than pre-service teachers' (p = .048). Obviously, access to resources and support affects participants' confidence and attitudes toward inclusive education. Namely, negative attitudes about the inclusive

education of students with SEN are likely to interfere with the teachers' support for and effective participation in inclusive settings (Brantlinger, 1996).

Tabel 3. ***Student needs***

Items	Pre-service special educators	Pre-service teachers	t	p
	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)		
Speech is difficult to understand	3.08 (1.60)	3.13 (1.67)	-0.208	.834
Braille	3.98 (1.88)	3.93 (1.69)	0.194	.846
Need training for daily living skills	3.49 (1.70)	2.86 (1.46)	2.780	.006
Speech problems	2.81 (1.53)	2.64 (1.47)	0.781	.435
Sign language	3.86 (1.81)	3.60 (1.62)	1.053	.293

Tabel 4. ***Resources issues***

Items	Pre-service special educators	Pre-service teachers	t	p
	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)		
Inclusion will lead to stress and anxiety	3.79 (1.53)	3.47 (1.43)	1.495	.136
Lack of adequate resources and special materials will make inclusion difficult	2.16 (1.54)	2.38 (1.60)	-0.957	.339
Inappropriate infrastructure will make inclusion impossible	2.39 (1.44)	2.57 (1.26)	-0.928	.354
Class sizes will make inclusion difficult to operate	2.14 (1.38)	2.57 (1.54)	-1.992	.048

Table 5 depicts that the factor *Behavioural issues* have a mean (standard deviation) of 3.16 (1.53), corresponding most closely to a Likert value of "I agree a little more than I disagree" on the 6-point scale. Also, the factor *Student Needs* has a similar mean of 3.33 (1.67). The ATIAS factor *Resources* with a mean of 2.18 (1.46), corresponding to a Likert value of "Agree."

Tabel 5. ***Comparison means scores on the three ATIAS factors***

Factors	Pre-service special educators	Pre-service teachers	Total Mean (SD)
	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	
Behavioural issues	3.18 (1.60)	3.14 (1.46)	3.16 (1.53)
Student Needs	3.44 (1.76)	3.23 (1.58)	3.33 (1.67)
Resources	2.12 (1.47)	2.24 (1.45)	2.18 (1.46)

4. Conclusion

Understanding the attitudes of pre-service teachers and pre-service special educators are crucial in order to improve their teaching practices and professional preparation. Therefore, many researchers have investigated the attitudes of pre-service teachers toward inclusion. These investigations suggest that the majority of pre-service teachers support the concept of inclusion and believe in the benefits of inclusion for all students (Lambe & Bones, 2006; Martinez, 2003; Romi & Leyser, 2006). Our results also show that majority of pre-service teachers and pre-service special educators support the concept of inclusion.

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