

TEACHERS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS INTEGRATION

Agnes Nemeth Toth

Abstract

How the teachers' attitudes have changed towards integration in the last two decades in Hungary? How do they think of SEN? Are they ready for the integration of students with special educational needs (SEN) or not yet? We were trying to find answers for these questions by carrying out a regional research focusing on teachers' opinion in Western Hungary. Some of the results are surprising while others are the ones we were expecting for.

Introduction

In Hungary there has been an ongoing terminology debate relating to the denomination of students' (aged 6-14) learning problems. Nowadays we use three different categories to express various degrees of difficulties. The first term is 'Learning problem/temporary difficulty' refers to students who have problems with attention and/or understanding but only temporarily because of the state of their health or similar problems, but those kinds of problems can be solved by the class teacher thus students with learning difficulties are not diagnosed by a special education (SE) teachers' team.

The second term is 'Specific Learning difficulty/disorder' means that students have a long term problem with reading, spelling, counting due to dyslexia, dysgraphia and dyscalculia. Although these problems do not have anything to do with the person's intelligence but its solving requires both the class teacher and SE teacher's competences. It means these students need to have a diagnosis from a special teachers' team.

The third term is 'Learning disability' express that students have long term learning problems with some intelligence retardation. In Hungary this was previously called 'mild mentally retardation' and they were taught separated in special classes or schools by special education teachers. These students are diagnosed by a SE teachers' team. (NEMETH 2005)

The inclusion of students with a learning disability as a teaching strategy appeared only after the changing of the political system (1989) in Hungarian schools. We had some pilot schools in early 1980s but their results did not get wide publicity. The first laws after the changing of the political system were permissive and allowed integration but teachers did not have any experience and they were not able to introduce new ideas. By and large it was the main reason why many teachers disapproved of the idea to integrate these students into mainstream schools. Accordingly our segregated educational system existed for far too although inclusive education was wide spread over Europe. Laws adopted in the last few years provide for not only the opportunity of integration but stipulate obligations for integration.

Following diagnosis students with a learning disability after their diagnosis did not have to go to special schools or classes since 2003. Unless recommended otherwise by the SE teachers' team students with a learning disability are supposed to go to mainstream classes. "In this case schools play a double role. On the one hand they have to find the qualities in pupils which can be changed and have to do so in the most appropriate of time during their pupils' sensitive periods. On the other hand schools have to find ways of handling the qualities which can not be modified by the school." (GASPAR 2003)

Some schools have experience with team-teaching models while others provide extra-curricular classes for students with SEN given by SE teachers. A student with a learning disability must get a minimum of 15% extra time in compensation for his/her learning abilities, guided by a special education teacher. This means that if a school undertakes to educate students with SEN in a peer group, it must guarantee this service. Such schools with an inclusive approach towards students with SEN must maintain professional ties with a special education teacher and every mainstream teacher should have the opportunity to consult the SE teacher as often as he/she needs to.

Objectives of Research

We assumed that teachers' attitudes towards special needs had changed, during the past 18 years. They should have aimed to learn more about students with special educational needs (SEN). They are ready to teach students with

SEN together with others in their mainstream classes because they understand the significance of this new idea.

Have their inclusive attitudes changed or not? What do they think of inclusion nowadays? What is their opinion of their schools' inclusive practice? We wanted to find out what sort of attitudes teachers have. Are they positive or rather negatives towards integrating education in their schools and/or classes?

To get answer for these questions above 10 schools were chosen in three different regions in Western Hungary including elementary schools in towns and villages as well as secondary schools in towns. All of them identify themselves as inclusive institutions. 170 teachers were questioned at their schools in 2007. It was not a representative survey but the schools were selected randomly. All the teachers were requested to answer at their schools. 250 questionnaires were sent to the schools but only 170 were sent back fit for assessment.(see Figure 1).

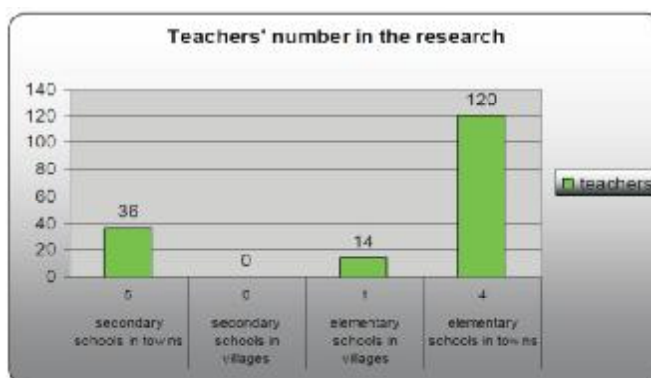


Figure 1

The teachers were given 30 questions from three different topics like to evaluate their teachers' group's knowledge and approach towards SEN; to administer their own professional information and attitudes toward the integration and to enumerate their daily activities and difficulties in the classroom towards of different students (Figure 2).

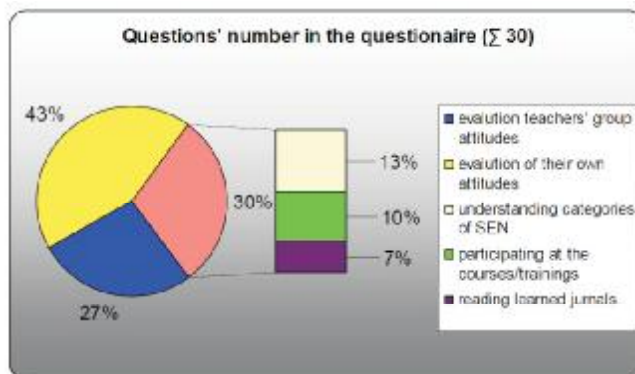


Figure 2

Our questionnaire was written out with the help of some part time university students because we thought that those which are posted are not sent back. School teachers have jobs outside of school like administration and research and can not have time to deal with any new research and questionnaire. Eventually, after data processing we started to get results surprising data. See them in order of analysis.

Teachers' knowledge about different groups of SEN

As we know from our earlier experiences teachers generally don't have enough theoretical knowledge about SEN because of their inadequate education. They didn't learn typology of handicapped people at universities as their knowledge must be completed by self-study. So it was not a big surprise that, 62% of them could define the categories correctly but the fact third of them doesn't recognise it as a very special deficiency. It should be noticed that coefficients of standard deviation was quite high ($sd= 22\%$) between teachers.

The main problem is that they are mixing the categories like learning difficulties, learning disadvantages and learning difficulties. Some of them define learning disabilities as mentally handicap and suggest that students with those syndromes have to learn in a different classroom with SE teachers.

Teachers were asked to express where their information came from. Almost three-quarters (69%) of the population referred that their knowledge came from their colleagues and not from courses and/or professional journals and/or books.

Half of the elementary school teachers' group declared they would undertake to be a participant of the special courses in these topic opposed to (87%) secondary school teachers who refused this chance. 52% of the teachers read professional journals and books about the SEN but their interest was only opportunely (See Figure 3)

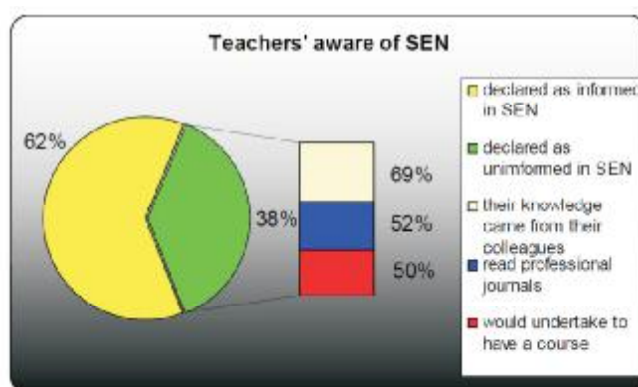


Figure 3

We were curious about is there any connection between teachers who have incorrect understanding in different categories of SEN and their colleagues who are refusing special courses and books or not. It is not a big surprise but yes, there is a connection but not only those teachers who have incorrect information about SEN thinking negatively about the training. We have found a low correlation coefficient ($cc = 0,192059$) between this two groups. Actually it means more teachers are refusing courses about integration, so more and more will be uninformed in this topic. So the quality of the courses must be higher in order to be more attractive for exercising teachers.¹

What ever is the connection between teachers who refuse courses and reading about inclusion? Negative correlation ($cc = - 0,62958$) was found between the groups this means that the more teachers refuse the training the more teachers will be out of information. In reality they do not read professional journals and books. It shows also that there is a remarkable problem with the system of teacher training. In Hungary there is a strict rule that each practising teacher must join courses for 120 credits for all 7 years. They have the possibility to choose it's topic from a union catalogue and their school sponsors 60-80% of the tuition, but the teachers' employment does not depend on it.

Although we have no exact information about teachers' experiences in the postgraduate training system, we may suppose that teachers usually join short time or quickly doable courses in order to fulfil their obligation and their choices are not up to their real claims and training usability. On the other hand we think there could be many problems with the high standards of trainings even though there is a special institute which has exclusive right to authorise training courses for practising teachers.

Teachers' attitudes towards the integration of students with SEN

The main topic of our research was to analyse attitudes of teachers towards integration. We expected a freshness in their attitudes toward teaching and at same time towards the SEN and integration as well, were resulted by the new claims of the parents, by the new educational politics, by the new law, by the ideas and teaching methods from the profession inside and outside of our country, by the new challenge which came from international measuring of students' competence in last eighteen years. We wait for positive attitudes and more open manifestations in teachers' opinions towards the integration.

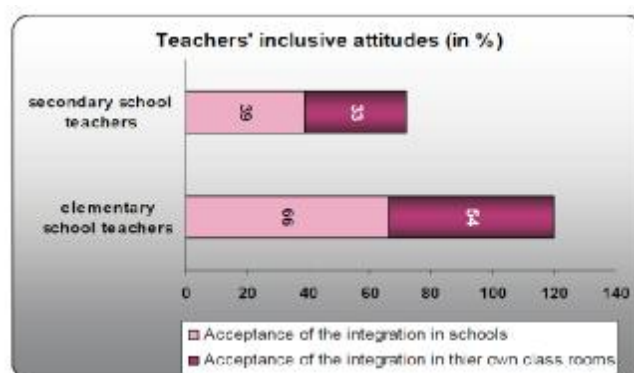


Figure 4

In the Figure 4th we can see how the teachers' affirm to integration at their schools and in the class rooms. Many of them accept students with SEN but only at their schools and not in their classrooms. It means they wouldn't like to get more difficult or newer kinds of tasks than they have currently without integrated students, however they have no reason to refuse if their schools accept students with SEN.

There is another aspect not a little interesting. Some mainstream teachers at elementary schools (20%) are ready to deal with students with SEN either at school or in their classroom while 28% of secondary school teachers are refusing integratvv pedagogy absolutely.

Hence the first groups of students with SEN being integrated have already appeared in the secondary schools we thought there was no difference between the attitudes of mainstream teachers from the two sorts of schools. That is why we have taken some comparisons in their opinions.

Teachers' aware at SEN and attitudes towards the integration are in a quite strong correlation ($cc = 0,876$) which means the more information they have about theory and practice of inclusion, the more tolerant they are. So we are standing at the modernisation of the teachers' postgraduate training again. If we remember the teachers' answers connecting to their habits in professional journal reading or joining training courses, we recognise that about half of them prefer those kinds of postgraduate education.

We asked mainstream teachers ($\Sigma 113$) who have experience in integration to enumerate their daily activities and difficulties in the classes because of the different groups of students.

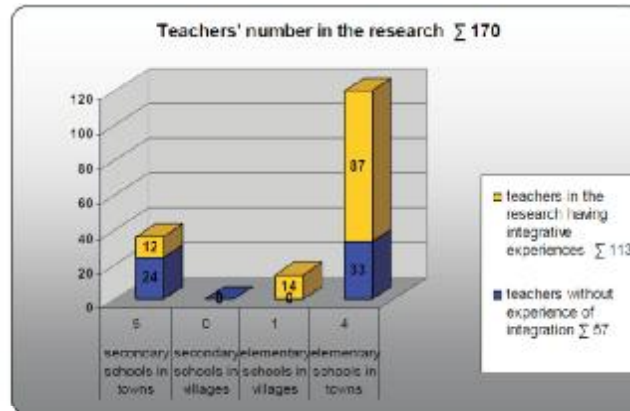


Figure 5

They had to evaluate ten various statements from 1 to 5 (never – always) in conformity with those contains. On the basis of their answers we made a group of the teachers' daily professional difficulties in their integrative classes.

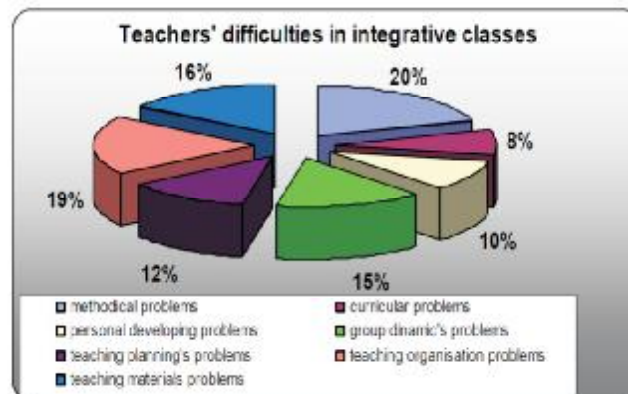


Figure 6

As we can see in the Figure 6th teachers' main professional problems in integration come from instructions, methodology, teaching organisation, group dynamic and also from the teaching materials' deficiency for different groups of students.

They expressed they had not enough methodical knowledge to teach students with SEN like to graduate their learning motivation, like to use new methods to differentiate students' groups in teaching, like to evaluate students' with SEN in their learning effectiveness.

Teachers formulated they have less time to teach their regular students than they had earlier because of students with SEN in the lesson.

Mainstream teachers complained about that they must solve different conflicts between peer group and students with SEN. Some students in the classes can't accept their classmate's learning pace and also refuse to help them. This situation often drives to conflicts between students. We assume this come from preferring of, "racing-pedagogy". If they exercised co operative teaching they wouldn't have any trouble in peer group because of students learning pace.

Teachers also have difficulties because of limited tools for teaching students with SEN. Some students need to

learn the same but others must learn different curriculum with their classmates. That is required for their diagnoses. It means teachers should have different tools for teaching but those tools are missing from the classrooms and are not easy to purchase for example mock-ups, pictures for application, different hand books, big size models etc.

Summary

We planned to confirm that teachers' attitudes were changing towards the integration of students with SEN since integration is spreading in regular schools, because of their rights to learn together with others which were declared by the laws in past two decades in Hungary.

Although our research was not a country wide representation, namely it was just focused on the region of our University, but its results are quite illuminating.

1. No more than half of teachers at the mainstream schools said that they were informed in terminology of SEN or methodology of integrative education. It is not feasible to make stretch inclusion nationwide.

2. New educational challenges couldn't really affect teachers' with inclusive attitudes at the analysed ten schools. It means for the researcher and also for decision makers it's not enough to prescribe something for schools like integration without any promotion and/or particular orientation. We can see many teachers are still negative to students'

integration probably because of their classical "result orientated" or "competition orientated" teaching practice. We guess they don't or hardly use any modern methods of competence based teaching like co-operative and/or individual and/or project learning programmes.

3. One in every five of secondary school teachers do not accept students with SEN neither in schools nor in classes oppose to elementary school teachers whom have a remarkable part and would undertake and deal with students with SEN, either in school or in their classes. We think secondary school teachers' approach should be changed as soon as possible before a large number of students with SEN appear at secondary schools in the next five years.

4. Mainstream teachers who have experience in integrative pedagogy are objecting to their limited teaching methodology, limited teaching tools, and limited knowledge in learning organisation and also in term of SEN. It is clear, namely they couldn't learn this kind of information earlier in their professional education at high school or universities. The situation of limited teaching tools is up to school management or its maintainer.

5. Teachers generally think negatively of postgraduate courses. It may be for many different reasons like the training is too long it contains too theoretical, maybe the lecturer is not the adequate person to guide teachers and the courses. Experience show that there should be developed and new postgraduate training courses for practising teachers by our department but we must attend better to teachers' claims. So trainings must be short, practice orientated and lecturers must be selected by their performance abilities and by their teaching experiences. On the base of the research results we recognised that distance and/or digital learning must be offered to teachers training.

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