

# Teacher attitudes and challenges in inclusive classrooms

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## Abstract

After the 90s, inclusive classes are a new reality in Albanian schools, supported by law 69/2012<sup>1</sup>. But this new reality was accompanied by some challenges and difficulties.

This study focuses precisely on the attitudes of teachers in inclusive classrooms in the Albanian school, in order to determine the needs of teachers for an effective teaching. The study is a quantitative study regarding the research method. Data were collected from surveys conducted with teachers of Preschool and Primary Education were processed with the statistical program SPSS, version 20. The TSES<sup>2</sup> and STATIC<sup>3</sup> instruments were used to measure the influencing factors on teachers' attitudes.

The findings of the study show that factors such as: teaching experience, gender of teachers, their professional development play an important role in teachers' attitudes. The need for intervention in elements such as: creating a suitable environment, ways of cooperating with parents, ways of adapting the curriculum for these children also emerged.

This study provides a contemporary overview of the analysis of teachers' attitudes in inclusive classrooms. The findings of the study can serve as an incentive and orientation for the teachers of these classes as well as for the students.

**Keywords:** inclusive classrooms, teacher attitudes, students with special needs.

## 1. Introduction

It is accepted that inclusion is beneficial for students with special needs by helping them develop in many areas. This process as a novelty for the Albanian education system is also accompanied by some challenges, which take their time, so that inclusion is within all the criteria and standards that it requires.

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<sup>1</sup> LAW NO. 69/2012 "ON THE PRE-UNIVERSITY EDUCATION SYSTEM IN THE REPUBLIC OF ALBANIA", UPDATED, CHAPTER XI, pp. 4422-4423

<sup>2</sup> TSES - Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale, (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001).

<sup>3</sup> STATIC - the Scale of Teachers' Attitudes toward Inclusive Classrooms, Cochran, (1998, revised 2000).

In relation to teacher attitudes in inclusive classrooms (Buell, Hallam, Gamel-Mçornick, Scheer 1999), they show the connection between teaching efficiency and several factors such as: teacher training, successful practices and support with specialist teachers.

Various studies have been conducted regarding teaching in inclusive classrooms as well as teachers' attitudes towards students with special needs. Variables influence teachers' beliefs about student engagement, teaching strategies, and inclusive classroom management (Cheryl Tremble Smith 2008).

The orientation of general and special teachers who coordinate teaching in the same classroom, in order to better integrate students with special needs in inclusive classrooms, is very important (Chopra, 2008).

### **1.1 The purpose and objectives**

The purpose of this research is to analyze the factors that influence the attitudes of teachers in those classes where students with special needs are included, in the reality of the Albanian school.

The objectives in this research are:

- Analyze the demographic elements of teachers that affect teaching in inclusive classrooms;
- To determine the connection of demographic elements that influence teachers' attitudes;
- Evaluate the role of teachers (general and supportive / special) in relation to training in those classes where the presence of students with special needs makes it necessary.

These objectives also influenced the design of the study hypotheses.

Teachers' willingness to teach as closely as possible to the student's needs and abilities, which requires commitment, creative thinking and effective classroom strategies, is influential in effective teaching (Villa & Thousand, 2003).

Cochran (1998, revised 2000) with STATIC, in relation to teachers' attitudes in inclusive classrooms, analyzes: the advantages and disadvantages of inclusive education; professional issues related to it; philosophical issues related to inclusive education as well as teachers' concerns about these classrooms.

Teachers' confidence in their abilities to make students change, which means collaborating to work and being able to include students who present with difficulty as well as those who feel unmotivated (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001).

Teachers' attitudes towards the inclusion of students with special needs are multidimensional and complex (Beattie, Antonak & Anderson, 1997). Positive attitudes are considered to encourage the inclusion of students with special needs in regular classes, while non-positive attitudes support their low achievement as well as difficulty in achieving the usual parameters in these students.

Teachers' attitudes can play an important role in the success of student involvement with A.K, such as teachers' positive attitudes towards inclusion, can be the key to success in this teaching (Cochran, 1998). The patterns and factors that influence positive attitudes need to be made more apparent, but the manner of publication is a separate process.

The attitudes required to include students with special needs in general education (Kavale, 2002) still need to be discussed. The concept of inclusion has not only sparked a debate on the appropriate placement of students with special needs in general education, but has also called for caution in the examination, to make this inclusion as simple as possible.

Two of the most important factors are: teachers' attitudes towards inclusion as well as teachers' beliefs in their abilities for effective teaching in inclusive classrooms (Avramidis, Bayliss, and Burden 2000), (Forlin 2001), (Raj 2002), (Riemer & Loyola 2004); (Sharpe 1994), (Wolpert 2001)

One of the factors that can contribute to the positive attitudes of teachers is the support with additional staff in those classes where students need specialized support depending on the limitation they have. Different types of support can be, for example with assistant teachers, where the general teacher also operates in the same class, this improves attitudes towards inclusion (Avramidis & Kalyva, 2007).

Teachers' attitudes (Hastings & Oakford 2003) are crucial to the success of adaptation programs in involving students with special needs in learning activities. In this study, the influence of individual needs characteristics (intellectual versus emotional and behavioral problems) as well as teacher training, determine their attitudes towards inclusion.

Contradictory results have been observed on teachers' attitudes towards inclusion (Hwang 2010), while some researchers have reported negative attitudes and even expressed uncertainty towards inclusion. This reference is based on a study conducted with North Korean teachers. However, the "readiness" of teachers should vary according to the type and severity of the disability offered to us.

Teachers' influences and attitudes on inclusion, identify positive attitudes towards the general concept of inclusion as well as changing views on the difficulties offered by different types of disabilities in regular classes (Avramidis & Kalyva, 2007).

The analysis of the factors that are decisive in the teaching of inclusive classrooms, will influence specific orientations, as well as will acquaint teachers and especially new teachers or those practitioners with some necessary elements of teaching in these classrooms.

Intervention and improvement in these elements will bring a significant impact on the efficiency of teaching in these classrooms, as this is one of the priorities that puts inclusive education before new challenges in the reality of the Albanian school.

Hypothesis:

Albanian teaching, in relation to inclusion, presents several different problems. Hypotheses, their analysis, as well as their confirmation or not` regarding the attitudes of teachers and the factors that influence this teaching in the classrooms where students with special needs are involved will be addressed step by step in this search.

The establishment of different hypotheses compared to the hypotheses of studies of the same nature organized by different researchers in other countries, will highlight the commonalities and differences that have factors influencing effective teaching in inclusive classrooms.

H.1: In inclusive classrooms, the teaching efficiency of female teachers is higher than that of male teachers;

H.2: Teachers who have experience in teaching students with special needs have a higher efficiency than teachers who have no experience in teaching students with special needs;  
H.3: Teachers who provide ongoing training in teaching students with special needs are more efficient than teachers who are not trained.

## **2. Methodology**

The methodology used in this research is the quantitative method of data collection and processing. This kind of methodological approach makes the arguments that come to its conclusion more solid in relation to the factors influencing the attitudes of teachers in inclusive classrooms. The tool used in the search, are Surveys conducted on teachers.

The TSES and STATIC instruments were used to measure the influencing factors on teachers' attitudes in the content of the questionnaires, distributed for the survey of Preschool and Primary Education teachers.

### **2.1 Sample included in the study**

The population selected in this research are teachers of Preschool and Primary Education, in three districts: Durrës, Tirana and Berat. The district of Durrës is presented with 169 teachers in Preschool Education and in the Primary School with 561 teachers<sup>4</sup>. The district of Tirana has 582 teachers in Preschool Education and 1244 teachers in Primary Education<sup>5</sup> and the district of Berat with 160 teachers in Preschool Education and 355 teachers in Primary Education<sup>6</sup> (from grades 1-5), a total of 3071 teachers.

The districts from which the samples were selected were made at random.

The technique used to select the sample of the Questionnaires was randomly clustered, as in the completion of the questionnaires school teachers were selected: in the city center, away from the center as well as in the schools of rural areas, whose selection was made to represent them to be almost equal.

The sample of the questionnaires was aimed at collecting factual data of the teachers participating in the survey; teachers' attitudes regarding the inclusion of students with special needs; their opinions regarding efficiency in this teaching.

450 questionnaires were distributed, but 348 were collected, as some rural and suburban teachers hesitated to fill them out. Out of 348 questionnaires collected, 35 of them were male teachers and 313 were female teachers, expressed in percentage:

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<sup>4</sup> Data were obtained from the Local Education Office - Durrës <sup>5</sup> Data were obtained from the Local Education Office - Tirana <sup>6</sup> Data were obtained from the Local Education Office - Berat.

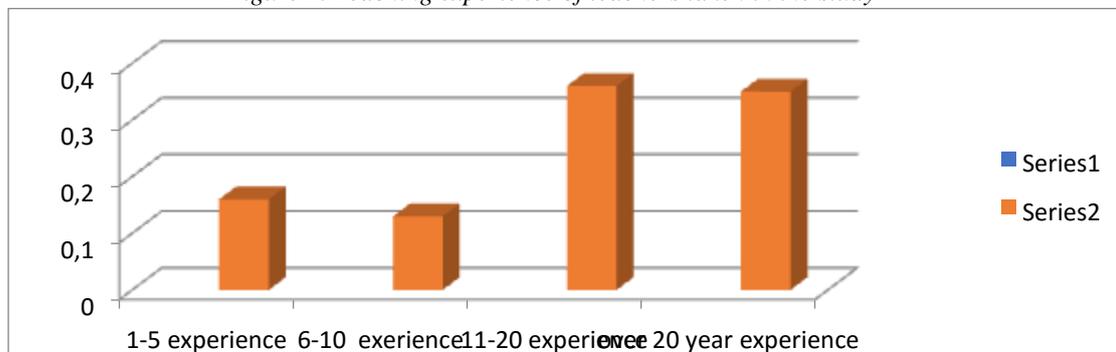
Table 1. Gender of survey participants, presented in percentage

Female Teacher	Male Teacher
90%	10%

Source: From the analysis of surveys with teachers

Commented on the teaching experience of the survey participants, we have this overview presented in the following graph:

Figure 1. Teaching experience of teachers taken in the study



## 2.2 Data analysis method

Analysis, as a working process, which is done with quantitative data to summarize, describe and explain the data stands next to the validation of hypotheses (Matthews. B, & Ross. L, (2010). Specifically, in this research, for the analysis of quantitative data, the database was initially created using the statistical program SPSS, version 20. The variables were coded and recoded according to the instructions of the researchers who developed these instruments. Before performing all statistical tests, the fulfillment of mandatory assumptions for these tests (Pallant, 2010), such as: normal distribution of variables, assumption of homogeneity of variables, assumption of homogeneity of variance, etc. were taken into account.

## 3. Results

### 3.1 Descriptive data results

Based on the data of the new variables in the table below will be presented an overview regarding the means, standard deviations, minimum and maximum values for the new variables, divided by type of school.

*Table 2. Descriptive data of the sample regarding the new variables of efficiency and attitudes towards students with special needs*

	<b>Location of school</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Average</b>	<b>Deviation Standard</b>	<b>Value Minimum</b>	<b>Value Maximum</b>
<b>TSES</b>	Urban area	151	97.6	13.4	41	118
	Suburb area	87	95.7	14.4	23	112
	Rural area	109	97.3	10.8	58	120
	TOTAL	342	97.0	12.9	5	95
<b>STATIC</b>	Urban area	151	58.4	14.4	10	95
	Suburb area	87	57.7	14.9	5	86
	Rural area	109	57.8	11.9	25	92
	TOTAL	342	58.0	13.8	5	95

### 3.2 Result from cross tabulations

One of the parts of the questionnaire was the demographic questions which aimed to create a profile of teachers to be able to identify what are the most important factors to have a high efficiency in inclusive teaching. The table below shows the relationship between self-reported teacher effectiveness and the training teachers have received in relation to inclusive teaching. The table shows that teachers who have received training are self-reported as highly efficient teachers (87.7%) in these classes. In the whole sample (N = 348) only two teachers self-report with low efficiency (0.6%) and medium efficiency (6.9%). These teachers claim to have received training, but for various reasons see themselves as incapable of being effective in inclusive classrooms.

Table 3. Cross-tabulation between TSES and inclusive teaching training

		Have you attended courses either training during your work on inclusive teaching?			Total	
		Yes	No	I can't answer		
<b>TSES cat.</b>	<b>FREQUENCIES</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>	
	% TSES categories	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	
	Low effectiveness	% Have you taken courses or training during your work on inclusive teaching?	1.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.6%
		<b>% e Total</b>	0.6%	0.0%	0.0%	0.6%
		<b>FREQUENCIES</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>48</b>
		% TSES categories	47.9%	47.9%	4.2%	100.0%
	Medium efficiency	% Have you taken courses or training during your work on inclusive teaching?	11.3%	21.3%	9.1%	14.4%
		<b>% e Total</b>	6.9%	6.9%	0.6%	14.4%
		<b>FREQUENCIES</b>	<b>179</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>284</b>
		% TSES categories	63.0%	29.9%	7.0%	100.0%
	High efficiency	% Have you taken courses or training during your work on inclusive teaching?	87.7%	78.7%	90.9%	85.0%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>% e Total</b>	53.6%	25.4%	6.0%	85.0%
		<b>FREQUENCIES</b>	<b>204</b>	<b>108</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>334</b>
		% TSES categories	61.1%	32.3%	6.6%	100.0%
		% Have you taken courses or training during your work on inclusive teaching?	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
	<b>% e Total</b>	61.1%	32.3%	6.6%	100.0%	

The next cross-tabulation was done with the STATIC instrument to see if the training provided by teachers would affect the way teachers would view the integration of students with special needs, in a positive or negative perspective. Detailed values are found in the table below. From an overview of the data in this table, we can see that they are not very effective in changing teachers' attitudes. 24.1% of teachers who have received training have negative attitudes towards inclusive teaching. While 75.9% of teachers who have received training have positive attitudes.

Table 4. Cross-tabulation between STATIC and training in inclusive teaching

		Have you taken courses or training during your work on inclusive teaching?			Total	
		YES	NO	I can't answer		
		<b>FREQUENCIES</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>84</b>
		% STATIC categories	57.1%	34.5%	8.3%	100.0%
Negative attitude towards students with special needs		% Have you taken courses or training during your work on inclusive teaching?	24.1%	26.9%	31.8%	25.5%
	<b>STATIC.Cat.</b>	% e Totalit	14.6%	8.8%	2.1%	25.5%
		<b>FREQUENCIES</b>	<b>151</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>245</b>
		% STATIC Categori	61.6%	32.2%	6.1%	100.0%
positive attitude towards students with special needs		% Have you taken courses or training during your work on inclusive teaching?	75.9%	73.1%	68.2%	74.5%
		% e Total	45.9%	24.0%	4.6%	74.5%
		<b>FREQUENCIES</b>	<b>199</b>	<b>108</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>329</b>
		% STATIC Categori	60.5%	32.8%	6.7%	100.0%
<b>Total</b>		% Have you taken courses or training during your work on inclusive teaching?	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
		% e Total	60.5%	32.8%	6.7%	100.0%

### 3.3 Results from ANOVA

To see if there was a difference between male and female teachers in the way they viewed and treated A.K. took place ANOVA. The ANOVA table below shows that there is no difference between males and females. This can be seen in the descriptive data table where the male and female averages for TSES are very close to each other. However, even when ANOVA was developed as a specific analysis, it is noticed that the statistical significance is very close to 1's. In other words: there is no difference between male and female teachers in terms of their perceived effectiveness for inclusive teaching.

*Table 5. Descriptive data table for gender & TSES*

	<b>N</b>	<b>Average Arithmetical</b>	<b>Deviation standard</b>	<b>Minimum value</b>	<b>Maximum value</b>
<b>Male</b>	35	96.51	12.02	63	120
<b>Female</b>	312	97.08	13.03	23	119
<b>Total</b>	347	97.02	12.91	23	120

*Table 6. ANOVA table for TSES and gender*

	<b>Sum of squares</b>	<b>Degrees of freedom</b>	<b>The average of the squares</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>Statistical significance</b>
<b>Between groups</b>	9.96	1	9.96	0.06	0.81
<b>Within groups</b>	57702.90	345	167.26		
<b>Total</b>	57712.86	356			

Another analysis was done to see if years of work influenced or not, in the way teachers perceived A.K, who treats H. 2, ANOVA showed that it did not matter if you had a few years of work as a teacher or many years. The way the teacher sees and treats the student with special needs. does not depend on the work experience of teachers. In the table below, it is noted that the averages obtained by teachers with different years of work are very close to each other. ANOVA proves that there is no connection between these two variables. Specific values for each of the working years are presented:

*Table 7. Descriptive data table for working years & TSES*

	<b>N</b>	<b>Average Arithmetical</b>	<b>Deviation standard</b>	<b>Minimum value</b>	<b>Maximum value</b>
<b>Up to 5 years</b>	66	96.80	12.53	48	115
<b>6-10 years</b>	54	98.94	12.01	58	119
<b>11-20 years</b>	99	94.97	15.23	23	114
<b>Over 20 years</b>	128	97.91	11.36	59	120
<b>Total</b>	347	97.02	12.92	23	120

## **4. Conclusions and Recommendations**

### **4.1 Conclusions regarding the (non) validation of hypotheses**

The study aimed to examine the hypotheses in an attempt to reach a conclusion on teachers and their teaching in relation to the inclusion of students with special needs. The following is the (non) confirmation of the hypotheses raised at the beginning of the research regarding the attitudes of teachers:

H.1: In inclusive classrooms, the teaching efficiency of female teachers is higher than that of male teachers;

This hypothesis was not substantiated. It turned out that the reported efficiency of teachers was the same regardless of the gender of the teachers. Failure to substantiate this hypothesis may be due to the fact that every person tends to see themselves in a positive light by valuing effort rather than actual performance. Consequently when teachers were asked to rate themselves, they had a similar tendency to offer the same answers regardless of their gender. Specific data are presented in ANOVA "Table 5" and "Table 6".

Another reason why this hypothesis was not substantiated is the very large difference of male teachers from female ones. From the beginning of the data analysis it was noted that the number of male participants was only 10%, while 90% were female. Although ANOVA does not take into account changes in sample size, the comparison between the groups may have faltered at this point.

H.2: Teachers who have experience in teaching students with special needs have a higher efficiency than teachers who do not have experience in teaching students with special needs; It was hypothesized that experience in the profession would be a factor related to efficiency, as presented in the third hypothesis. ANOVA showed that it did not matter if the teacher had less than five years of teaching experience, which belongs to Group I: up to 5 years, (according to the grouping of teaching experience), in relation to the other Groups. "Table 7" shows that the mean between these groups was very close to each other. Comparison of these means argues that this hypothesis was not substantiated.

H.3: Teachers who provide ongoing training in teaching students with special needs are more efficient than teachers who are not trained.

From the analysis of Cross Table "Table 3" and "Table 4", we can say that training influences teachers' attitudes. Certified H.3.

We can say that: although with few limitations in the study, the research results show a relationship between teaching efficiency and teachers' attitudes in inclusive cash registers. The variables that affect are related to professional attitudes as well as teachers' experiences with these students as well as the training received.

The number of students in the class (which in the Albanian school is greater than the average of the considerable number), as well as the number of students with special needs in the same class (cases when there are more than two students with disabilities in the class special and without special teachers), affects and puts teaching in these classes in difficulty - can be addressed in later studies.

#### **4.2 Recommendations**

Success in the comprehensive program is influenced by various factors, which, individually or together, play a progressive or minimizing role in the effect that effective teaching has in these classes. The findings of the study indicate problems that need to be improved in the work of schools in order to improve the quality of education of children with special needs.

The following recommendations, based on the findings of the study, are addressed to both teachers and school management staff.

The school management staff should show a support to the teachers of the inclusive classrooms, this support should be in many directions, through which the teachers meet all the difficulties, as they have to successfully face the problems that arise in these classrooms. Support should be both moral and material, where teachers should be provided with a didactic material base tailored to specific cases;

- The professional development that should accompany the teacher towards the experiences of inclusive teaching, increases to some extent the responsibilities towards the inclusion of the student with special needs in the classroom. Participate in trainings, workshops, conferences or research work centered on teaching children with A.K. in inclusive classrooms, they will alleviate as little as possible the need our teachers show for the differentiated teaching required of these students;
- Cooperation between the caretaker teacher and the specialist teacher, for a combination and harmonization of the roles of each, in the design and implementation of the PEI, adapting as well as possible the development and skills that the student with special needs has to the actions with the adaptive curriculum, for realization of PEI;
- The "access" that teachers of inclusive classrooms should have, in order to adapt the curriculum both in time and in the possible reduction of unnecessary burdens that the standard curriculum offers.

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