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(Review paper)

INCLUSION OF THE STUDENTS WITH DIFFERENT TYPES OF DISABILITIES IN PRIMARY SCHOOL

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Abstract: Over the last 50 years there has been a radical change in the education of children with disabilities. Inclusive education is a rationale concept which means wholeness and long transformation of institutional systems in society, especial in education.

The aim of this study was to examine the attitudes of Macedonian primary school teachers towards inclusive education; we analyzed the quality of the inclusive education of students with different types of disabilities in the mainstream schools in Skopje. 98 teachers from primary schools in the city of Skopje were inquired with the teacher inclusion attitudes questionnaire.

Data analysis indicates that in general, teachers have positive attitudes toward inclusion, but can be noticed that they have a divided opinion on the degree and type of disability.

We can conclude that there are still barriers facing students with disabilities and teaching staff, and at the same time, the teaching staff does not have enough resources for work.

Key words: inclusion, attitudes, primary school teachers, disabilities

Introduction

Under the new paradigm for primary education, schools are viewed as an integral part of a child's development. The school is not viewed as a separate entity to which children come and go, but rather as a vital partner in the continuum of planning and implementation of instruction and support services for all children. The inclusive education is an educational process that aims

at increasing the participation and reducing the exclusion in ordinary school or classical education by effectively responding to the different needs of all learners. The inclusion of pupils with special educational needs in mainstream schools is a focus of debate in education systems across the world (Artiles, Kozleski, Dorn, & Christensen, 2006; Göransson & Nilholm, 2014). In general the inclusion is an attitude - a value and belief system, not a set of actions. Once adopted by a school, it should drive all decisions (Puri, Abraham, 2004).

With the democratization of the education in the XX century, considering that the education is not privilege of the individuals, but the right of all, the inclusion was promoted as basis of the educational system, which aims to meet the needs of all children. A new attitude is being developed for a more equitable social respect towards people with special needs, as it gives each individual the opportunity to decide on their own lives and take responsibility. The globalization of the civilized world has left a strong mark in the field of education, educational institutions, the classroom and the teacher. From that perspective the education is moving on the road from segregation to integration and from exclusion to inclusion. The inclusivity as a new attribute implies a new model of organized teaching and learning which is identified and confirmed through creation of the inclusive culture, inclusive politics and developing inclusive practice in our schools, and the same is accepted in many countries around the world.

Over the last 50 years there has been a radical change in the education of children with disabilities. This shift has been accompanied by changes in language as new views are expressed on how best these children can be educated.

By the mid-1990s the term ‘inclusion’, as opposed to ‘integration’, was being used to describe the education of children with disabilities in mainstream schools. More recently, the term ‘full’ inclusion has been introduced (Giangreco 1997; Jarrett 1996).

The full inclusion model has a number of features:

- all children attend the school to which they would go if they had no disabilities;
- a natural proportion of children with disabilities occurs at any school;
- no child should be excluded on the basis of a disability;
- school and general educational placements are age-appropriate, with no self-contained special educational classes operating on the school site;
- cooperative learning and peer teaching methods receive significant use in general teaching practice at the school; and
- special educational support teachers and TAs are provided within the context of the general educational class and other inclusive environments.

Inclusion describes the process by which a school attempts to respond to all pupils as individuals by reconsidering its curricular organization and provision. Through this process, the school builds its capacity to accept all pupils from the local community who wish to attend and, in so doing, reduces the need to exclude pupils (Sebba & Ainscow, 1996). Changes in legislation and professional training help ensure that this objective is fulfilled.

So far we have mainly been relying on a special, parallel school system for children with disabilities, which we have called special education. The new law for primary education in the Republic of North Macedonia, enacted in 2019, advocates total inclusion of students with disabilities. Many schools feel constrained to offer full inclusion against the wishes of the parents and without appropriate support; it is still not uncommon to hear representatives of the general school system declare: “These are not our children; they belong to special education”. Teachers are seen as key persons to implement inclusive education. One of the main barriers in the practice of inclusive education is represented by the teachers’ attitudes towards inclusion and its principles. These attitudes are influenced by several factors such as: the degree of children’ difficulties, the nature of children’ disabilities, the teachers’ experience with children with special educational needs, the trust in their own capabilities to implement inclusive activities (the teachers’ preparedness for integrated classrooms) or the expectations towards the children no matter what are the differences between them, the curricula and so on (Unianu M., 2012). Positive attitudes are therefore argued as playing a considerable role in implementing this educational change successfully. Following the main goal, we aimed to determinate the quality of the inclusive education of students with disabilities in mainstream schools in the city of Skopje.

Experimental section

The quality of inclusion depends on the teachers’ will to work with children with SEN, and their will is directly link to their attitudes. This empirical study examined the attitudes of primary school teachers towards inclusion of students with different types of disabilities. The sample was consisted of 98 teachers from primary regular schools located in the city of Skopje (Table 1).

Table 1. Demographic data of the participants

	Demographic	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	24	24.5
	Female	74	75.5

Age	< 35 years	12	12.2
	35-45 years	33	33.7
	45-55 years	45	45.9
	>55 years	8	8.2
Working status in the school	Head teacher	55	56.1
	Subject teacher	43	43.9
Working experience	< 10 years	15	15.3
	from 10 - 20 years	48	49
	from 20 - 30 years	26	26.5
	> 30 years	9	9.2
Practical experience of work with children with SEN	Yes	83	83
	No	17	17
Acquired knowledge about the inclusion	University – (obligatory or elective courses, practical class)	8	8.2
	Professional training - (courses, seminars)	90	91.8
	Do not exist	/	/
Type of finished training	Intellectual disability	19	19.4
	Autism	13	13.3
	Hearing impairments	/	/
	Visual impairments	/	/
	Motor impairments	1	1
	Speech and language disorders	21	21.4
	Specific learning difficulties	44	44.9
	Emotional problems	/	/

For data collection we used specially prepared questionnaire for teachers, composed by 22 questions divided in 2 sections. The first section includes demographic data, including gender, age, work experience, working status in the school, experience of working with children with SEN, acquired knowledge about the inclusion. For the second part we used teacher inclusion attitudes questionnaire composed of 15 questions, adapted according our needs and findings in the pre-test checking (adapted from Sideridis and Chandler 1997 cited in Foks, 2003, Table 2). Teachers were asked to answer the questions using the five-point Likert scale (5 = strongly agree; 4 = agree; 3 = partially agree; 2 = disagree; 1 = strongly disagree). The sum of responses of the scale ranges from 1 to 5, with a higher score indicating a more favorable attitude.

Table 2: The Teacher Inclusion Attitudes Questionnaire

Number	Item	Intellectual disability	Autism	Hearing impairments	Visual impairments	Motor impairments
1	I feel that I have the knowledge to teach children with a...					
2	I support inclusion for children with...					
3	I feel that children with disabilities make better progress in mainstream than they would in special schools					
4	I feel that children with disabilities are socially accepted by their peers					
5	I feel that I am able to remediate the learning difficulties of children with a...					
6	I feel that children with disabilities benefit academically from inclusion in a mainstream classroom					
7	I feel that other pupils benefit from the inclusion of children with physical disabilities into mainstream classrooms					
8	I feel that I have adequate classroom support for planning and working with these children					
9	I believe that mainstream teachers should support inclusion as a positive education practice					
10	I feel that adequate support services (such as speech and language therapists, physiotherapists, occupational therapists and educational psychologists) are readily available to me					
11	I feel that children with physical disabilities get considerable support from their typical peers in the mainstream classroom					
12	I am willing to attend additional INSET to broaden my knowledge about the education of children with...					
13	I feel that adequate equipment and teaching material is available to me for teaching children with ...					
14	I feel that children with disabilities benefit socially from inclusion into a mainstream classroom					
15	I believe that children with disabilities have a right to be in mainstream schools					

Results and discussion

In this article we will present the analysis and interpretation of the teacher's answers from the inquiry regarding the different types of disabilities. Figures 1 and 2 outline the attitudes of the teachers from lower and higher (subject teaching) grades towards students with intellectual disabilities in relation to the total average points starting from the attitudes (questions) that are most positive and ending with the attitudes (questions) with which teachers least agree.

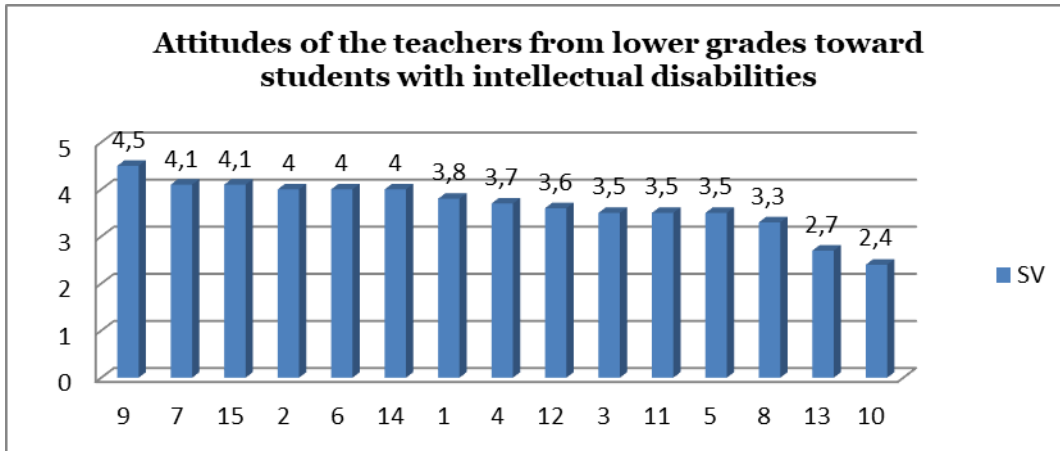


Figure 1. Attitudes of the teachers from lower grades toward students with intellectual disabilities

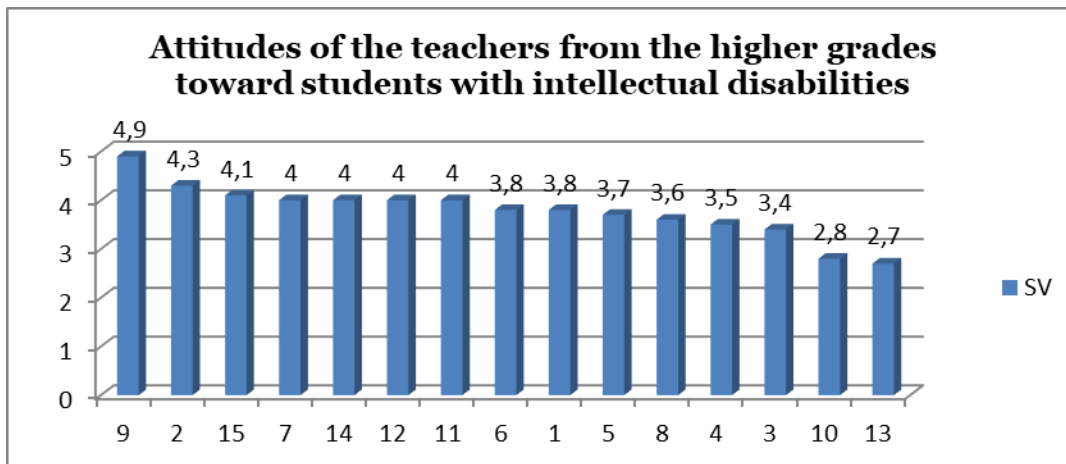


Figure 2. Attitudes of the teachers from the higher grades toward students with intellectual disabilities

According to Figures 1 and 2, it can be concluded that both groups of respondents agree that the most necessary for teachers is to support inclusion as one of the ways for positive educational practice (SV-4.5 for lower grades teachers and SV-4.9 for subject teachers). Also, both groups of respondents agree that teachers do not have adequate equipment and teaching materials to teach students with intellectual disabilities (SV-2.4 for lower grade teachers and SV-2.7 for subject teachers), and that adequate services (such as speech and language therapists, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, and special educators) are not readily available (SV-2.4

for lower grade teachers and SV-2.8 for subject teachers). Comparing the average values, we can conclude that in general, the teachers from the higher grades have more positive attitudes than the teachers from the lower grades when it comes to people with intellectual disabilities. Currently, only students with mild intellectual disabilities are included in regular schools. Similar to our finding were the results of the Al-Zyoudi (2006) in Jordan primary schools, where twenty-three of 90 teachers mentioned that students with specific disabilities should be included in mainstream schools. The most frequently mentioned were students with physical disabilities, mentioned by 21 of the 90 participants. Students with sensory disabilities were rarely mentioned; students with visual impairments were mentioned by 12 of the participants. The students considered least includable were the students with intellectual disability and behavior problems that may affect reading, writing and arithmetic. Seven teachers specifically mentioned that students with intellectual disabilities should not be included in public schools. The same results obtained Kern in 2006 in Pennsylvania, where 49.4% of the respondents strongly agree and 23.4% agree with the statement “Students who are diagnosed with intellectual disability should be in special education classrooms”.

The Figures 3 and 4 presents the attitudes of the teachers toward inclusion of students with autistic spectrum disorder, one more time starting from the most positive attitudes and ending with most negative ones.

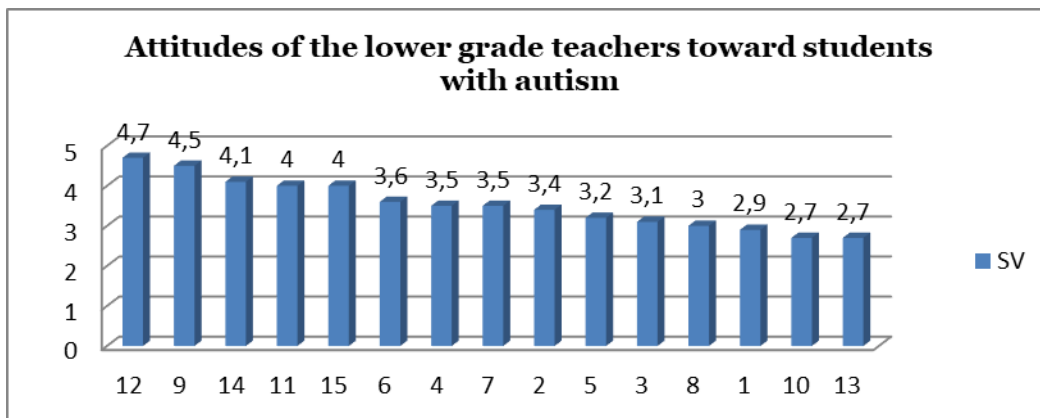


Figure 3. Attitudes of the lower grade teachers toward students with autism

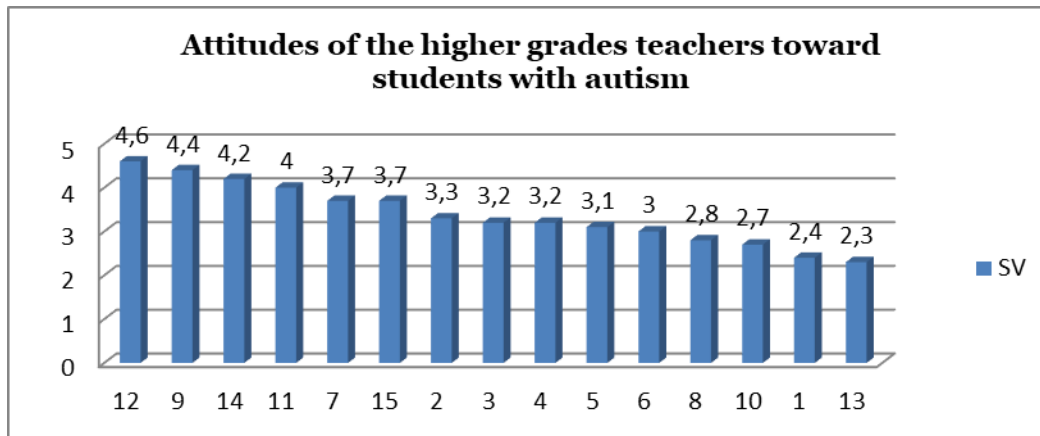


Figure 4. Attitudes of the higher grades teachers toward students with autism

According to Figures 3 and 4, it can be concluded that both groups of teachers agree that teachers should support the inclusion as one of the basic ways for positive education practice (SV- 4,7 for the lower grades teachers and SV- 4,6 for the higher grades teachers). Also, both groups agree that teachers are prepared to participate in different types of additional courses in order to increase their knowledge, considering that students with autism benefit in their socialization if they are included in mainstream classes (SV-4,5 for the lower grades teachers and SV- 4,4 for the higher grades teachers). They do not agree that they have adequate equipment and teaching materials for working with students with autism (SV-2,7 for the lower grades teachers and SV – 2,3 for the higher grades teachers), adequate services like speech and language therapists, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, and special educators and rehabilitators (SV - 2,7 for both groups of teachers). Lower grades teachers as well as those in the higher grades declare that they do not have enough knowledge to provide education for students with autism (SV 2,9 for the lower grades teachers and SV- 2,4 for the higher grades teachers). Regarding autism, Kern (2006) found that most of the examinees consider that students with autism should be included in mainstream classes, but they also face the problem of insufficient teaching materials. 37.7% of respondents strongly disagree with the statement that they are provided with sufficient material in order to be able to make appropriate accommodations for students with special needs and 41.6% disagree with this statement.

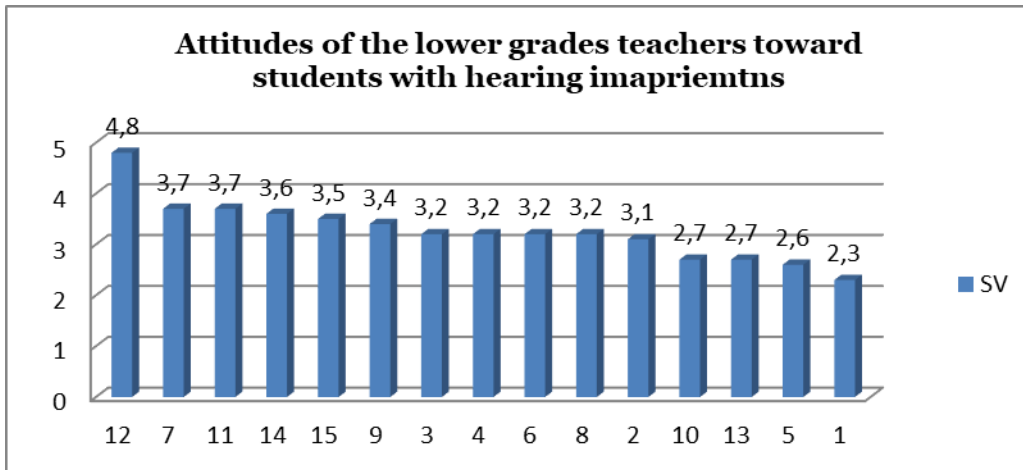


Figure 5. Attitudes of the lower grades teachers toward students with hearing impairments

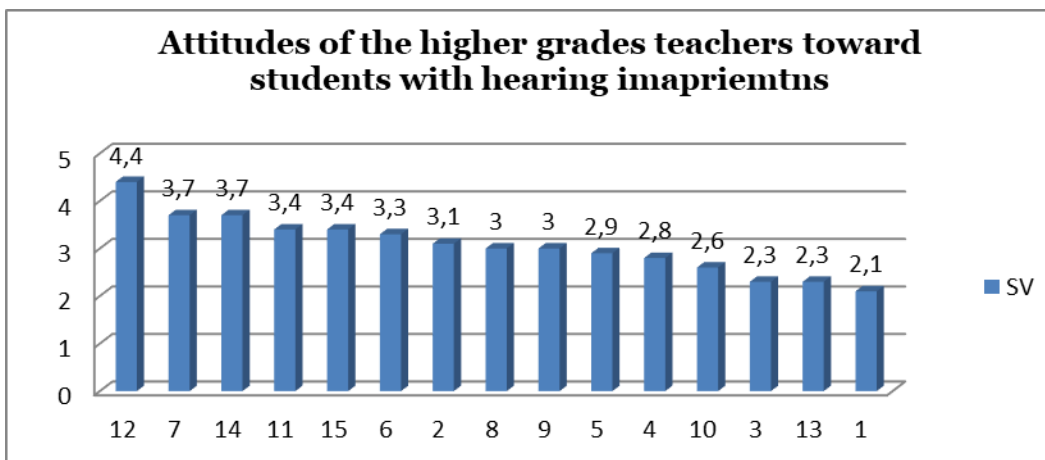


Figure 6. Attitudes of the higher grades teachers toward students with hearing impairments

The results presented in the Figures 5 and 6 also indicate that both group of examinees support the inclusion (SV – 4,8 for lower grades teachers and SV – 4,4 for higher grades teachers). They believe that other students benefit from the inclusion of hearing impaired students in the class (SV – 3,7 for lower grades teachers and SV – 3,7 for higher grades teachers). Lower grades teachers consider that students with hearing impairments get significant support by their peers, (SV – 3,6), and the higher grades teachers believe that these students have benefits in their socialization (SV – 3,7). Both groups do not agree that an appropriate

equipment, materials and services are easily available for the students with hearing impairments (SV 2,3 for lower grades teachers and SV-2,1 for higher grades teachers) and they think that they do not have enough knowledge to work with such students (SV – 2,6 for lower grades teachers and SV - 2,3 for higher grades teachers). Prakash (2012) in his study regarding the inclusion of students with hearing impairments found that most teachers agreed that there is a need for curriculum and classroom modifications to include children with disabilities, and that inclusion benefits all children, whether with or without disability. A few of them stated that the school management provided opportunities and support to improve their skills.

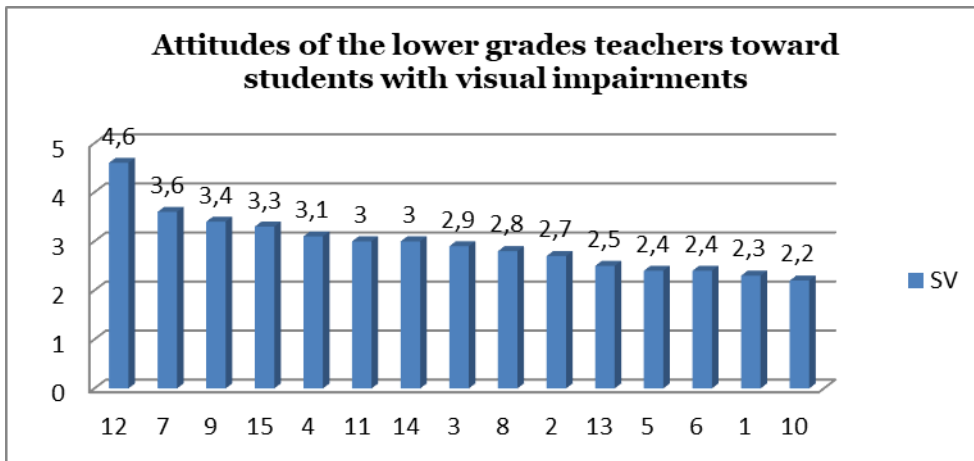


Figure 7. Attitudes of the lower grades teachers toward students with visual impairments

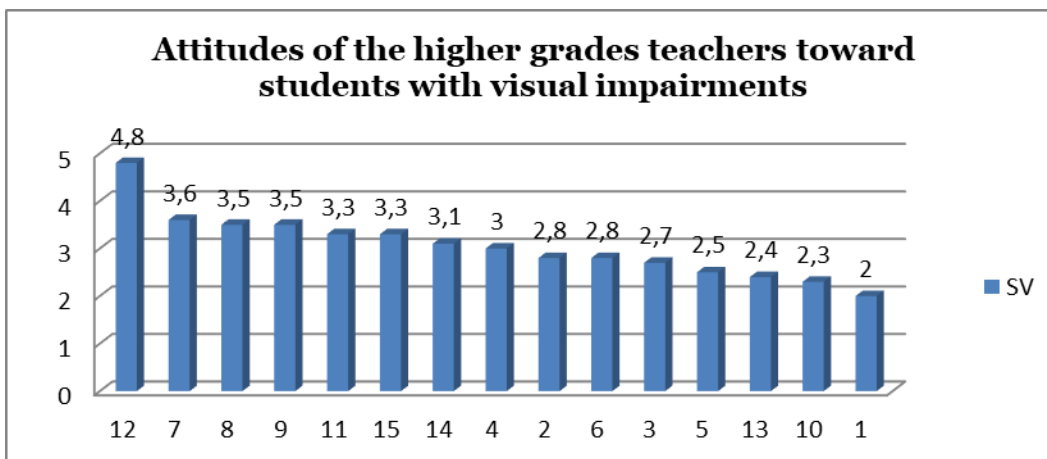


Figure 8. Attitudes of the higher grades teachers toward students with visual impairments

Same as previous the Figures 7 and 8 indicate that teacher support inclusion of students with visual impairments (SV- 4,6 for the lower grades teachers and SV – 4,8 for the higher grades teachers). Respondents believe that other students have benefits from the inclusion of the students with visual impairments (SV – 3,6 for the lower grades teachers and SV – 3,6 for the higher grades teachers). Both groups teachers pointed that there are not easy accessible equipment, materials and services (SV – 2,2 for the lower grades teachers and SV – 2 for the higher grades teachers), and they also declare that do not have sufficient knowledge to teach students with visual impairments (SV– 2,3 for the lower grades teachers and SV – 2,3 for the higher grades teachers). In Alghazo and Gaad (2004) study in the UAE, it was found that teachers were more accepting students with physical disability for inclusion than students with other disabilities such as specific learning difficulties, visual impairments, hearing impairment, behavioral difficulties and intellectual disability, on descending order.

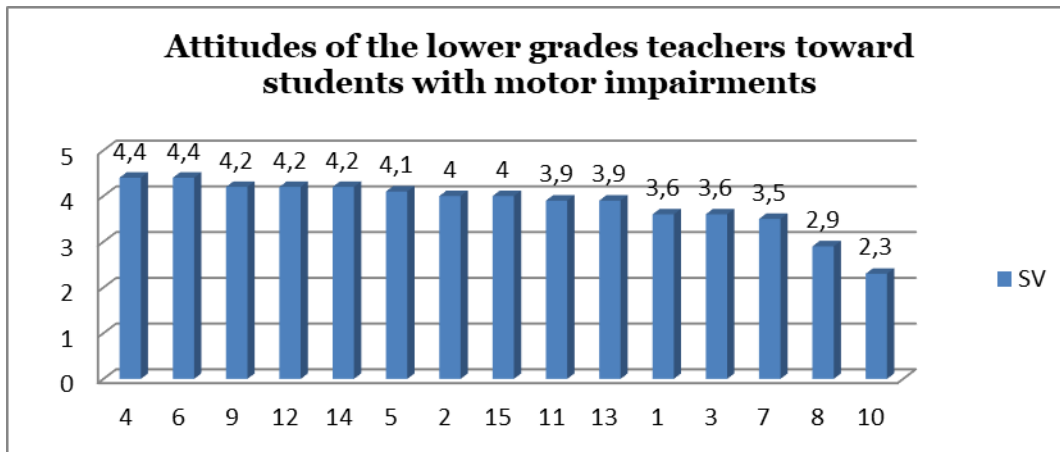


Figure 9. Attitudes of the lower grades teachers toward students with motor impairments

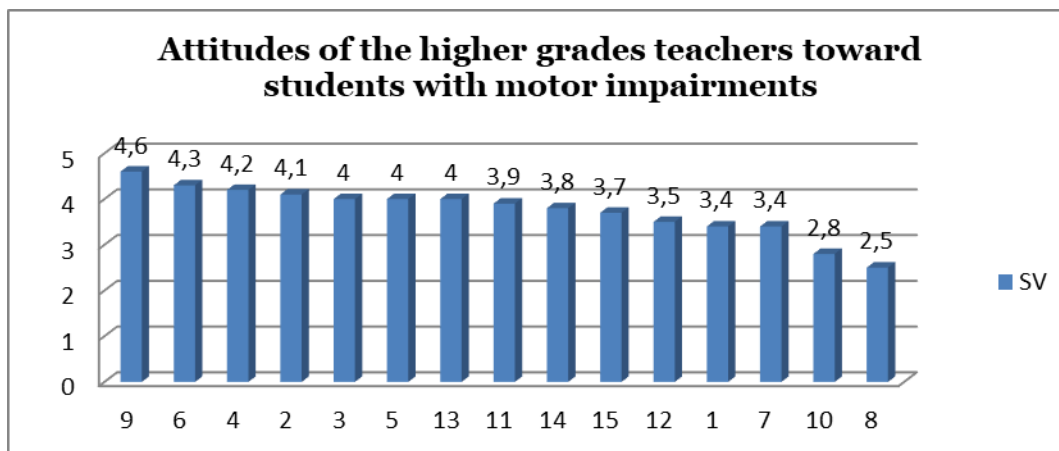


Figure 10. Attitudes of the higher grades teachers toward students with motor impairments

The inclusion of students with motor impairments was also supported by the teachers from both groups (SV – 4,4). The higher grades teachers have most positive answers toward inclusion support (SV – 4,6) and these students benefit from the inclusion in the regular classes (SV – 4,2). Both groups do not agree that they have needed support to work with students with motor impairments and other disabilities, (SV – 2,3 for lower grades teachers SV – 2,8 for higher grades teachers), adequate services (special educators and rehabilitators, occupational therapists etc.) are not accessible (SV – 2,9 for lower grades teachers SV – 2,5 for higher grades teachers), students with other types of disabilities have bigger support than students with motor impairment in the mainstream classroom (SV – 3,5 for lower grades teachers SV – 3,4 for higher grades teachers).

Conclusion

This article focuses on developing a shared framework for the inclusion of children with disabilities. This framework is made up of the beliefs, attitudes and values of teachers and other staff in schools. These attitudes or beliefs about inclusion are important as they underpin teachers’ professional practice. If practice is to change so that more children with disabilities are included then attitudes and beliefs also have to change. Beliefs are based on teachers’ own personal experiences, but also on how others, particularly significant others, talk about inclusion.

Data analysis indicates that in general teachers have positive attitudes toward inclusion, but can be noticed that they have a divided opinion on the degree and type of disability.

Although all teachers had some knowledge of inclusion acquired through professional development (trainings, seminars - 90 teachers or 91.8%), or university education (compulsory or electives 8 teachers or 8.2%), still a small number of teachers believe that they have the ability to work successfully and to conduct the educational process with visual impaired students, students with hearing impairment as well as severe or moderate intellectual disability, and have a

similar attitude towards autism. In order to overcome this and be able to work with all students, teachers believe that they should have additional training and education as well as constant cooperation with appropriate professionals. Regarding the availability of adequate services to professionals, speech and language therapists, special educators, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, etc., teachers have different views, but most of them believe that they are not available and should be raised to a higher level, level not in terms of quality but in terms of quantity.

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