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SCHOLAR PERSPECTIVES ON INCLUSIVE EDUCATION AND TEACHER'S ROLE IN INCLUSIVE CLASSES WITH SPECIFIC FOCUS ON CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

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ABSTRACT

This paper provides various perspectives of scholars on inclusive education throughout its history and the role of an inclusive teacher in inclusive education schools with specific focus on children with disabilities that attend regular classes with their non-disabled peers.

The paper is based on the literature review of various research papers and studies that were published by prominent and specialized scholars, institutions and relevant organizations in the field of inclusive education, with a focus on disabled children and their rights to have equal chances for education in regular schools with their peers. The paper further reflects teachers experience and perception on the inclusive education process and the challenges they face in this regard.

Finally, the paper provides various views on what is expected by an inclusive teacher and what type of support and assistance they need to get from other educators and teachers specialized in education of children with disabilities in order to meet children's needs in the context. The paper also describes the importance of inclusive teacher's collaboration with the school management, children's parents and caregivers and other relevant specialists in order to understand the specific background of child's type of disability with the aim of adapting his

teaching methodology, tools and materials as per child's specific needs for an individualized education planning if needed.

Keywords: Inclusive education, Inclusive teacher, children with disabilities.

INTRODUCTION

According to the Convention on The Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2016) the term person with disability means a person who has a permanent physical, intellectual, mental, or sensory impairment which in contact with barriers hampers person's complete and effective participation in society on equal basis with others. This definition applies to all children with disabilities that are mentioned in this paper. Based on the Article 24 of this convention children with disability have right to inclusive education systems at all levels and lifelong learning towards their full human and potential development, their personality, talents, and creativity, including their dignity and self-worth, and development of their mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential.

The literature review shows that, since the ancient times, children with disabilities have undergone through very difficult times, denied from their basic human rights, neglected, discriminated, and almost completely abandoned and separated from the society till late nineteenth and mid of 20th century. Only in the recent decades, children with disabilities started to attain higher level of consideration and efforts have been made by many scholars, governments and non-government institutions and community to develop special covenants and mechanisms that will protect the rights of children with disabilities and integrate them in the education system and society on equal bases with other children. Naturally, throughout the time, the attitude, approach, and methodology towards education of children with disabilities have undergone lots of changes with the development of society and civilization in general.

In the ancient times, disabled children were treated with hostility and were neglected. Often, there was no empathy shown for them, and they were surrounded with lots of prejudices, as pitiful people, or misfortunate. Even at later stage, the society became fearful of people with disabilities, and they were considered evil. They were considered as curve of God and burden for the parents, thus were often abundant by their parents (Shreve,1982). In the later stage the disabled children were kept in institutional protection and wardship. Persons with disabilities were considered to be a burden and of no use for the society and their families, or as persons that need to take care of throughout whole their life.

Institutions worked more in hiding the disabled children and treating them in the conditions less than human. Thus, no attempt was made for their education, training, and rehabilitation. At the beginning of 19th century, disabled children were regarded as shame for most of families, thus they were either hidden or sent to institutions and left there during their entire live (Shreve, 1982).

In England, the introduction of mass education of children was regulated in early ninetieth century through the education acts of 1870, 1876 and 1880. However, there were many examples of earlier projects, as part of some specific teaching effort or any other education or training program for disabled and children that had difficulties in learning in the Workhouse and Asylum (Armytage, 1965; Armstrong, 2003).

Efforts were further made to educate children with disabilities, but children with disabilities were seen as different from their school mates, as unfit for education in mainstream schools. In this way, for the first time, special schools and institutions were created in various countries for education and training of disabled children. They were educated in special schools, separated from their parents and peers without disabilities. (SAIL on, 2018). In the second half of the 20th century, new thinking and new approach opened for the education of children with developmental disabilities. It was then understood that a child with a disability is not a different kind of person, but it is a child with special needs, and like all other members of society, people with disabilities should have the same rights to education, work and full participation in society.

Prior to 1975, in most of countries, children with developmental difficulties did not have to be educated and were mainly sent to institutions for their entire life. If those children were permitted to attend school, they were usually grouped into special classes of education. This type of special education was not designed to address children's potential, but more to meet their developmental demands (Brown, Nietupski, & Hamre-Nietupski, 1976).

The findings from the literature review show that most of disabled children and adults face many difficulties in attending regular schools. As a dominant problem of both children and adults in the field of disability has been identified the lack of access to education, and there is a vivid difference in many countries on the ways how educational opportunities are provided for disabled children and non-disabled children. (Peters, 2003).

Based on findings from the surveys conducted with families that have disabled children in fourteen countries with law income, disabled children appear to be amongst the most discriminated and marginalized children, first from their larger family, then from the society and the school. The isolation and exclusion of children with disabilities impact seriously their

wellbeing and confidence which then influence their overall health condition, performance and learning outcomes at school as well. Filmer (2008).

Based on Cameron & Valentine (2001), inclusive education should embrace broader aspects of its goals, by considering specific needs of children with disabilities for provision of additional services as per their health and social welfare needs while attending inclusive education. Therefore, there is a need for governments to design adequate policies that would enable good coordination and environment for provision of such services to the children as per their specific needs.

REFLECTIONS ON INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

The first fundamental roots of inclusive education were set in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted in 1945, in the Article 26 which calls for equal right and access to qualitative education for all without any discrimination. The declaration called for all independent countries to embed this right in their country constitutions and was further followed by several other conventions and declarations that served as a complementary binding legal instrument to build future institutional mechanisms and legal environment for implementation of inclusive education for all, including children with disabilities.

The early implementation practices of inclusive education are also found in 1969, in The Hamilton Wentworth Catholic District School in Canada, following the School Board policy endorsement of admission to school for all children able and disabled. The main contributors to this process were professors and life-long inclusion advocates, such as: Jim Hansen, Gary Bunch, Phil DiFrancesco and Gerv Leyden **(**Bunch, 2017**).** Jim Hansen developed his first inclusionary model of education, called "Each Belongs" which changed education for children with special needs (Nolan, 2017)."Each belongs not because he or she can do something or cannot do something. Each belongs because he or she is"(Hansen, 1969).

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006) is a mandatory legal instrument that invites governments to provide, among other persons with disabilities with equal opportunities and access to education without discrimination within an inclusive education system. In more specific, Article 9 of this convention obliges governments to develop appropriate access to the school premises, transport and access to communication and information systems within their inclusive education schools.

There were different concepts of understanding and interpretation of what inclusive education meant among various countries and scholars compared to special education and how should that right be mainstreamed into the so-called inclusive education schools for children

with disabilities as well. The literature review shows that this change could not take place immediately across the countries and the translation of these rights into appropriate practical inclusive education in most of countries was associated by many challenges and skepticism from the influential special education institutional approach in the next following decades. Children with disabilities, in most of countries, were excluded from formal education, because schools were not appropriately equipped to respond to their specific learning needs, styles and their respective disability backgrounds. Therefore, some children with disabilities were separated based on their type and category of disabilities and sent to special schools, which were separated and far from their school mates and peers. So, this is how the two education systems were developed, the regular and special education within countries (Kisanji, 1999).

The early model for inclusive education was found in special education for children with disabilities when children were classified based on a medical model. Based on their level of disability, then the children were separated and placed into special classes (Florian, 2014). Most children with disabilities that attended special schools, were excluded from public education, and were kept out of mainstream society. This was done under the assumption that such children are unable to reach satisfactory learning outcomes and would make no added value to the society and its economic development (Proffer, 2018).

In recent decades, the special education concept started to be questioned and the new concepts for inclusive education started to prevail in many countries. Thus, the struggle has changed from survival to equality which includes the rights of the disabled as approved by the United General Assembly in 1975.

Some schools in the 1970s tried a different approach than special schools, such as integrating children with developmental disabilities into regular school buildings but not yet in the same classes with other children without disabilities. This approach was much different from the inclusion concept because integration applies different methodologies within the regular educational systems. Integration system required only some adaptions in school facilities to accommodate children with disabilities within that school, but children were still kept in segregated, separate classrooms from their peers without disabilities that attended regular classes. Thus, integration system does not demand essential reforms and changes in school teaching methodologies, its administrative and cultural structures as inclusive education do. (Harman, 2016). The integration process expects the child either as individual or as a group to adapt to existing structures and arrangements in the school settings and then the pedagogical arrangements will be made, depending on child's need identified. While, inclusive education, requires school restructuring to address the learning needs of all children first and adapt

necessary arrangements so that children with disabilities attend same regular classes with their peers (Ainscow, 1995).

Hehir (2016) argues further that it is fundamental to understand the distinction between integration and inclusion approaches in order for the education system to be able to produce learning and social outcomes for every child. In an inclusive school, children have the right to go to their nearest community school where they belong, no matter their differences. Further, inclusive schools require both educational and other cultural reformations so that all children in the community can be equally appreciated and accepted at school. Based on scholars, such as Hehir, Grindal, Freeman, Lamoreau, Borquaye, & Burke (2016), inclusive education involves all children, including children with learning difficulties, children with disabilities and not only one group of children. Furthermore, an inclusive education system attempts to prevent all children from any kind of discrimination, intolerance and injustice towards them in no matter what forms it takes (Plaisance & Gardou, 2001). It is also expected that all the previous human resources, learners, educators and other resources from special education to be incorporated into the regular school system, in order to be available to respond to the children's specific needs (Skrtic, 1991).

According to Dikeledi (2013), inclusive education is not easy to define given its complex and multi-dimensional purpose and its unsolidified nature. Depending on the context of various countries, different concepts of inclusive education are being developed and applied. Pijl, Mijer & Hegarty (1997) also explain that inclusion has different meanings for different people and countries. This depends on the various stages that some countries are going through regarding inclusive definition within education system. Some are in the middle stage, some are in the beginning, while the rest countries are still sticking to the special school concept.

The children's right to inclusive education has been regulated and supported by international human rights law and many international conventions and instruments which were ratified by their member countries. These covenants provide a sound support for children with disabilities which call for their rights to access Inclusive Education and recognize their special education needs for their equal participation in school settings with other children. It is also acknowledged that people with disabilities, especially those with mild to moderate disabilities can be educated together with their peers without disabilities in regular schools with additional provisions. Moreover, the literature review shows that education of children with disabilities in mainstream schools, shared with children without disabilities, has been shown to be an economical system in terms of cost effectiveness. These realizations, acknowledgments

and actions by educators, planners and teachers led to the concept of integrated education for children with disabilities.

World Declaration on Education for All (1990) is the first agreement that calls for provision of basic education to all children, youth and adults, and the basic qualitative education services to be consistent in order to reduce educational disparities among children. This declaration also acknowledges the specific needs and measures that need to be undertaken to enable all categories of children with disabilities equal access to qualitative education as an essential part of the education for all approach. The declaration invites for creating the learning environment to enhance knowledge and skills development in integrated community learning programs for all children and will support the parents and caretakers' interaction so that the learning should not take place in isolation. The declaration also emphasizes the right of all children to benefit from the modern technology and scientific knowledge that should assist them at every level of their education.

Salamanca Declaration and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education (1994) represents a global compromise on future guidelines for the inclusive education for children with disabilities. That was a turning point for inclusive education around the world. The Declaration reaffirms the right of every person, irrespective of their differences, within the regular education system and the right of children with disabilities to receive all the specific support they need by chive their learning goals and outcomes. Governments and the international community are urged to adopt the principle of inclusive education among several other actions. It obliges schools to accommodate all children regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic, or other conditions, including disabled, gifted children, street and working children, children from remote or nomadic populations, children from linguistic, ethnic or cultural minorities and children from other marginalized areas or groups. International community and government institutions have been urged to implement the methodology of inclusive education throughout all the education system by also obliging schools to consider in all children irrespective of their level or category of disability (intellectual, physical, linguistic, social, emotional) or other conditions, including children from marginalized and vulnerable groups

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (UN General Assembly, 2015) calls for children rights to an equal and quality education without any discrimination including children with disabilities as well. Furthermore, inclusive education should apply equity measures for all children, and it should be provided in inclusive classrooms and other school settings.

A big number of research studies support the Salamanca Statement and its principles as the evidence support for inclusive education with the conclusions that are in favor of children with disabilities that have special education needs in the primary inclusive schools. These specific education needs of children can be more effectively and efficiently adopted withing the inclusive school settings than in separated or isolated learning environment without high expenses. Also, UNESCO (2003; 2009) support inclusive education and define it as contrary to the concept of special education, because it intends to expand and adapt schools that are accessible for all children on an equal basis. Likewise, inclusive education strives to improve the learning outcomes of all students in terms of their intellectual attainment, social abilities, and personal advancement by adapting schools to the children's background and their learning needs. Inclusive education also appears to be less costly than special education, because it keeps all students together within the same school settings and it doesn't require to establish complicated specialized systems only for children with disabilities and those with specific learning needs.

Based on Ainscow (2005), inclusive education is a process that implies systematic improvements in order to respond to the needs and challenges that are associated with disability. This is a means for detecting and eliminating obstacles to increase attendance of all students, improving access to school and help achieving learning outcomes for all marginalized students and not only for children with disabilities (Artiles and Kozleski, 2007). Furthermore, Floria (2005) describes inclusive education not only as an education practice and process but also as a philosophy. In addition to this, as per Vislie (2003), it attempts to respond to all students as individuals and not treat them collectively.

In parallel, inclusive schools require systematic capacity building and practice of teachers to adapt to the new education model and methodology (McLeskey, et.al. 2014). Inclusive education is not just about respecting children with disabilities, but it also requires new curricula, policy reforms and practice, restructuring of school's staff and their cultures, eliminating access to school and learning barriers, reducing exclusion of children from various activities, and support their active participation as per their potential (Booth & Ainscow, 2002). Establishment of good relationship between schools and communities in inclusive education is of particular importance as it will help the smooth transition towards an inclusive society (Zabeli, Anderson & P. Shehu, 2020).

There are several main reasons and essential arguments in support of the inclusive education, including the fact that children with disability benefit more in the academic and social aspect, they have the same right to education as all other children, and it is more cost

effective than the special education system. It is easy to accommodate children in general education settings than to opera special schools Mitchell (2014) in the (Zabeli, A. Anderson & P. Shehu, 2020).

Inclusive education embraces multi-dimensional aspects under its umbrella, including the differences and diversities of all children, their human rights, social justice, as well as equal opportunities (Schmid and Vrhovnik, 2015). As such, inclusive education implementation in practice is very complex and it is perceived in different concepts, forms and formats (Lindsay, 2003). It is essential in inclusive education and education systems to understand and accept the fact that inclusion is not a privilege only for some children, but it is a right for all. Thus, the level or severity of a disability should not prevent a child from being included in inclusive schools. (Oberti, 1993).

The literature review also describes benefits that inclusive education provides for children without disabilities as well. First, it increases social acceptance and tolerance and reduces fear of children that look or behave differently from others. It increases the feeling of belonging, for caring for each other and good friendship, boosts self-esteem and stimulates more empathy and responsiveness among peers without prejudice. It provides the opportunity for more active and effective communication among all children and peers with less prejudice for each other. (Staub & Peck, 1995).

Inclusive school settings and classrooms require structural changes to school organization, curriculum, teaching and learning strategies that will consider specific needs of children with disabilities as well. The authors, Waldron and McLeskey (2010) worked on widespread guidelines on how to reform schools to become suitable for delivering inclusive education in the regular school settings. Based on them, inclusive education should be adapted as per multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) in a way that should comply with the specific students' needs and based on the category and level of severity of disabilities along with the type of specialized services they need. In this context, inclusive education does not only depend on good school system, legislation, curricula and regulations but also on the availability of sufficient financial resources and the way how teachers utilize them within their inclusive classes (Pijil et. al.,1997).

THE ROLE -MODEL TEACHER IN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

The literature review shows that in addition to creative development of policies and strategies for inclusive education, the success of inclusive education scheme primarily depends on the cooperation of all parts of society, i.e., school management, especially school principals,

teachers, parents, members of state and non-governmental organizations. While principals are the administrative leaders of schools, teachers are the real executors of the plans. Without their cooperation, no government policies, projects or actions can achieve success in inclusive education. The role of teachers and parents of children with disabilities is crucial for their effective implementation in the inclusive classes.

The authors Alasuutari, Savolainen and Engelbreichit (2019) argue that the core pillar of creative inclusive education strategies is based on good pedagogical practices and support that includes teacher's positive, effective and professional education attitudes towards all children, including children with disabilities and their specific education needs in the classroom. The authors suggest that it is important to provide trainings to some teachers to become more specialized in individualized approaches so that they can train and support other teachers and learners within general education classrooms. In this way children with special education needs should not be referred elsewhere to get the adequate support they need within the positive and social learning environments they know and feel comfortable among their peers.

Inclusive education requires from inclusive teachers to have good knowledge and experience about various specific needs of their students that attend their inclusive classrooms. Therefore, there is a need for a close cooperation between regular and inclusive teacher to provide the best teaching and learning experience to the students. This relationship allows for educators in inclusive learning environment, settings and communities to share and exchange their expertise, ideas in teaching methodologies and lessons learnt from their practices and build on them to reach the best learning effects (Sparkal, 2022)

The literature indicates that the biggest barrier for inclusion are people's negative attitudes, assumptions and expectations that they make for children with disabilities. Thus, the primary role of teachers among others is to create the warm environment of acceptance of everyone in their classrooms, and that all children should be respected and valued for what represent as individuals. When teachers have good knowledge and understanding on his students' diverse backgrounds and their special needs for education, the level of learning outcomes will also increase for all students in the classroom, including children without disabilities. Therefore, combined support of both regular and more specialized teachers in diverse classes show best practical experiences in inclusive education systems. This type of teaching methodology and approach should be part of both pre-service and in-service teacher training programs for inclusive education (Mitchell, 2010).

Teachers are the role models for their students on how to perceive the world and how to behave within it. Therefore, it is necessary for the teachers to prepare children to value and accept the diversity and develop their concern for equity and recognition of diversity in the inclusive education classrooms and schools (McKay, 2002).

Researchers consider that to understand the reality of implementation of inclusive education in general, more comparative research is needed to inform decision-making on inclusive education efficacy (Kozleski, Artiles, Fletcher, & Engelbrecht, 2007). So far, reflections from various quantitative and qualitative surveys with teachers in different countries show that there are controversial teachers' opinions and attitudes regarding effectiveness of inclusive education that included disadvantaged children in their classes. A qualitative phenomenological study conducted by Zelina (2020) in Slovakia with 218 female teachers with a minimum of 20% of disadvantaged students in their classroom show positive attitudes and opinions towards inclusive education. They also appreciated their cooperation with specialists in schools for advancing inclusive education process in their classes and call for more favorable conditions to ensure by the state to attract higher attendance of disadvantaged children in inclusive education. While findings from a quantitative survey conducted by the scholars Moberg, Muta, Korenaga, Kuorelahti and Svolainen (2019) with inclusive education teachers in two culturally different countries, such as Finland (with 362 teachers) and Japan (with 1518 teachers) show varied attitudes and rather critical towards inclusive education. The Finnish teachers showed their concerns about teachers' effectiveness when implementing inclusive education, particularly when teaching children with intellectual disabilities or emotional and behavioral problems. While the Japanese teachers showed more positive attitudes on the benefits of inclusive education for children with and without disabilities (Corey, 2019)

Overall, it is the opinion of some researchers that the teachers who already had pre-service trainings and preparations on inclusive education have more positive attitudes and understanding towards inclusive education for children with disabilities rather than those who had to struggle with all the complex demands and challenges that come with teacher's roles and responsibilities in inclusive education, without having a previous or sufficient exposure to the relevant trainings and understanding of the specific needs of children with disabilities within. (Horne & Timmons, 2009, Loreman, 2010, Sosu, Mtika, & Colucci-Gray, 2010). Educational institutions should invest in developing the capacity of general education teachers and other educational professionals to work and help adopt an inclusive education process. All teachers should be adequately trained in child development and child-centered pedagogy and

individualized learning that can support them in teaching all students in a regular class. If teachers provide the necessary support and opportunities for children with disabilities in their inclusive education process, there are good chances for them to develop their abilities and competences to become productive and valuable part of society. Students with disabilities need to feel teacher's love and care for them, so as his/her kindness and empathy (Berry, 2011). Teachers and educators should be trained to identify opportunities when they need the support of specialized professionals or other teachers and must be forced to use mechanisms for co-operation and co-operation among professionals (Hunt, P. Belegu - Caka, V. 2018).

CONCLUSION

A literature review shows that inclusive education is still a challenging process today and that there is still a lot of work to be done before those involved in education devote themselves to the acceptance and value the diversity of every child in the classroom. Teachers are role models for the children they teach, so they must be ready to become an example of acceptance along with the appreciation of each member of the class. Today's inclusive education classes should be models of the wider community and the world for the future. Teachers must accept and appreciate the diversity of each child in their class, and the attitude of the teacher has a greater impact on how each child is valued. Furthermore, they need first to assess their own values and attitudes before understanding the inclusive perceptions and challenges they have to face while supporting each child with a special need. All teacher training programs should include inclusive education as their essential part of teaching career and it is fundamental for those who design such education programs for teachers to recognize the complexity of children's individual differences and their specific needs when delivering their teaching programs in inclusive schools and classrooms.

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