

An Analysis on Education for Children with Disabilities: A Qualitative Study on Head-Teachers, Teachers and Conductor-Teachers Perception towards Inclusion in Hungary

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Abstract—The purpose of this study is to gain some insights into the challenges faced by the academic workforce in special/segregated and inclusive schools in Hungary and to investigate their perceptions regarding the barriers to inclusion. This paper has also examined in-depth the literature review on the barriers to successful implementation of inclusive education in any society. Fourteen semi-structured interviews (in English and Hungarian languages) were carried out in five schools in Budapest city, Hungary and the sample comprised of head-teachers, teachers and conductor-teachers. Two teachers with disabilities also participated in this study. The main results show, (a) the professional barriers faced by teachers at schools, and, (b) the different barriers to successful inclusive education. This study also provides an overview on gender occupation imbalances within teaching profession. The importance of “people first language” in context to people with disabilities is discussed. Acknowledging the limitations, the literature on successful implementation of inclusive education is more focused on Western European countries and qualitative research on teachers’ perception towards children with disabilities in Hungary is limited. This study concluded with recommendations for future studies.

Index Term—Children with disabilities, inclusive education, segregated schools, teachers

I. INTRODUCTION

Every child has a right to education and The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities established inclusive education as a legal right, but it has been pointed by many international studies that children with disabilities are vulnerable to exclusion [1]. Teachers are responsible for providing equal educational opportunities to students regardless of their race, age, gender, language, geographical location or disability, but they are confronted by many challenges on daily basis. Inclusive education is a multi-dimensional concept and no single terminology can describe this important revolutionary process. An international author Sue

Stubbs [1] in her book titled, “Inclusive Education: Where there are few resources” points out that “inclusive education is based on a rights and social model; the system should adapt to the child, not the child to the system” (p. 11). Certain studies raise concerns on the transition from “special” to “inclusive” education in regard to the participation of students with disabilities and to “dump” them in regular classrooms [2].

Article 24 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in the International Covenants on Human Rights, recognises the right of the people with disabilities to education. One of the preamble’s in the convention directs state parties to ensure that “persons with disabilities are not excluded from the general education system on the basis of disability, and that children with disabilities are not excluded from free and compulsory primary education, or from secondary education, on the basis of disability” [3].

Given the importance of education for children with disabilities in a classroom environment, this study investigates the following:

What are the barriers faced by head-teachers, teachers and conductor-teachers in segregated and inclusive schools in Hungary?

What are the perceived barriers and concerns of head-teachers, teachers and conductor-teachers regarding the inclusion of students with disabilities?

II. METHODOLOGY

Based on an in-depth analysis of literature and existing knowledge, a semi-structured questionnaire was prepared. Semi-structured interview was chosen as the methodological approach since they “provide reliable and comparable qualitative data and also allow informants the freedom to express their views in their own terms” [4]. With the help of semi-structured questionnaire, the experiences and perceptions of head-teachers, teachers and teacher conductors in special/segregated and inclusive schools were collected.

The selection of the participants was organised through

a local NGO office and official emails describing the study and requests for participation were sent to all the schools in the city of Budapest. Five schools indicated an interest in participating and were contacted again by phone calls to schedule interviews. Prior to the interviews, introduction emails and consent forms were sent to all the principals. The research participants were five head teachers, five teachers and four conductor-teachers. Interview sessions lasted for 20-50 minutes. The interviews were conducted in Hungarian and English languages in respective school premises to ensure comfort level. Verbal consent from all the participants was taken to record the interviews and also to take manual notes during each session. The entire interview session included an introduction of the authors to the participants, thanking the participants for agreeing to take part in the study and the purpose of the study, followed by a personal and professional exchange of experiences and finally, wrap up. Specifically, participants were asked, can you please (a) List the barriers/challenges you encounter at school? (b) List the barriers to successful inclusion?

The comments and perceptions from the respondents were combined and it was observed that there was hardly any difference in their viewpoints. The main barriers were listed after the data was transcribed manually and the themes were identified. The audio recordings and manual notes were reviewed multiple times to ensure the accuracy of the data being analysed. With the help of international databases, authors searched for studies on mainstream, integrated, segregated and inclusive education system in context to children with disabilities. The respondents' professional experiences enhanced the depth of study and the authors decided to use certain quotations from all the interviews to highlight relevant points for the betterment of this study.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Perceived Barriers and Challenges

The teachers selected to participate in this study revealed many challenges faced by them which impact their performance. The interviews revealed challenges such as, (a) physical and technological constraints (teaching aids, vocational training constraints, accessibility/physical structure of the building, rehabilitation tools, etc.), (b) financial constraints (salary and budgeting constraints), and (c) profession related constraints (lack of technical skills and competence, the attitude of teaching and non teaching colleagues, competent teaching staff).

In support of inclusive education system, all respondents agreed to have a common approach for the success in educating and providing better future for children with disabilities, but also expressed their concerns regarding the attitudes, knowledge and professional skills of the teachers, physical and technological accessibility issues in schools, financial

and other resources constraints, and above all, the degree and type of the disability possessed by a student.

According to Bradshaw and Mundia [5], there are basically three types of factors which influence the inclusion process, i.e. child related, teacher related and educational-environmental related factors. The key barriers to successful inclusive education that are consistent with previous international studies examining inclusivity in schools, are: overcrowded class rooms [6]-[10], resources constraints [7], [9]-[13], inadequate financial resources [7, 9, 14], the attitudes of teachers towards children with disabilities [9] [15]-[16], transition preparedness barriers [12] [17], children with disabilities not receiving education as defined in the legislation [18], the severity and type of disability possessed by a child [5] [7] [19]-[20], specialised and non consistent training support for teachers to address diversity in their classes [8-12], [15]-[16], [21]-[22], classroom management or discipline issues in context to students with disabilities [15], rigid class timetables [6], behavior of students with no disabilities towards their peers with disabilities [23]-[24], architectural or environmental barriers [7], parents resistance [1] [21], rigid teaching style [21], definite tension between the general and special educators [25] and teachers own perception about their academic skills and knowledge [26]. Few of the barriers are elaborated briefly which are consistent with the findings and supported by quotes of the participants to enhance the understanding.

Thenegative attitudes of the teachers and their beliefs are the major barrier to inclusion of children with disabilities in school. Factors that affect the teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education are: previous experience with children with disabilities, teachers' education, training and professional support, class strength and workload [27].

Many respondents cited that teachers in general classrooms lack basic information about the disability and also pointed out a lack of training support available for them. According to Symeonidou and Phtiaka [28], the teachers' perception about disability and children with disabilities is based on the medical and the charity model and the teachers, as facilitators of inclusion, need to be supported by the provision of ample training opportunities and material. The main focus of the teachers training program should be to provide adequate training in context to knowledge and skills to future teachers so that they are able to address and teach diverse population of students in an inclusive environment. One of the teachers from special school mentioned that, *"Teachers in mainstream schools have no exposure to disability and do not know anything about children with disabilities (not even basic information). I visit many mainstream schools to help children with disabilities to integrate into inclusive environment. There is a child with autism who does not look at me and never answers my questions when I try to speak with them. The classroom teacher asked me once, what is the problem? I told her*

that this child has autism and we have to find a different way to interact with them. This is a basic thing and she was not aware of it. It is a very hard situation. It is one of the biggest difference between Hungary and other countries. For example, teachers in Canada, England and Finland know how to communicate with children with disabilities, even though they don't have any special education degree". This finding was consistent with another study, Flem and Keller [29] citing Meijer et al., 1997, where education and training of a teacher is one of the first steps to handle differences in the classroom and to facilitate smooth inclusion of students with disabilities.

Classroom strength of children with disabilities in an inclusive environment could be a barrier in providing supportive and encouraging atmosphere for all children, especially children with disabilities. One of the teachers said, "If mainstream school has all the resources, then it is fine to teach students with disabilities in an inclusive environment. In Hungary, most of the schools don't have resources, equipments, conductors and special teachers. I feel one or two children with disabilities can be accommodated in general classrooms". The above mentioned finding is in line with other international studies emphasizing the benefits of having classes smaller in size in context to students with disabilities i.e. a teacher with fewer students with disabilities [7], [30], [31]. Therefore, strength of students with disabilities in a classroom should be carefully planned in order to provide quality education in a diverse environment.

Another complex dilemma is the issues related to resources. Schools, in majority of the cases, are obliged to modify their physical surroundings, upgrade their technological aids and provide other kinds of materials/support to students with disabilities to have better access to physical environment and curriculum [32].

Tension between the general and special educators play a marked role in the inclusion and exclusion of children with disabilities. There are certain issues in this context such as, constant struggle for power, unequal distribution of duties, ownership of students and access to the information [25].

Many teachers are positive about the ideology behind inclusion, mainly for children with no disabilities as they would be exposed to different aspects of disability. One teacher remarked on the benefits of inclusive environment, "Inclusive schools are better for both groups i.e. children with disabilities and children with no disabilities. Children with disabilities get an opportunity to interact with ordinary children and vice versa. Children in special schools interact only with children with disabilities but they are more exposed to a diverse environment in general classrooms". Like every coin has two sides, there are some disadvantages for students with disabilities attending general schools. Inclusive education provides an environment for everyone to get adapted to normal life and also helps in

removing social stigmas [29], but there are some concerns of teachers in context to children with disabilities being educated in general classrooms. A teacher shared her experience regarding a child with autism and she has reservations regarding this child being integrated to a general classroom. She stated, "Inclusive education is good. Children with severe disabilities are being admitted into general schools but, in my opinion, it is neither good for them nor for ordinary students. There are children with mild to severe autism in the classrooms. For instance, I have a student with autism in my class. He gets very aggressive when he hears a loud noise and he cannot deal with it. Special school is a better option for him". Fig. 1(a) and 1 (b), summarises the strengths and challenges of an inclusive education in context with children with and without disabilities.

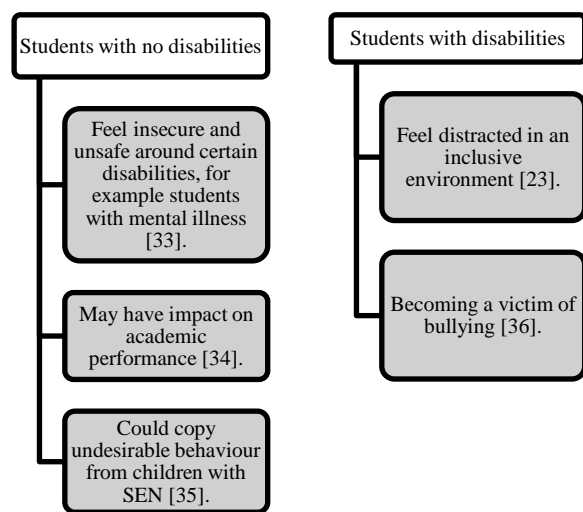


Figure 1. (A): Challenges to inclusive education.

B. Gender Imbalances: Female vs. Male Teachers

During the interviews, the first author observed that a gender imbalance in context to academic personnel in all five schools, as highlighted in table 1. Therefore, this important finding was later included in the study to highlight the under-representation of male teachers in schools. The schools in Hungary, like other countries, reports gender imbalances within teaching profession. Schools, in general, are described as a 'feminised' environment [39] and many studies have highlighted the worldwide under-representation of male teachers in schools. It is clearly evident from the table 1 that female participation is more as compared to male teachers in all five schools. This finding is consistent with the rest of the schools in Hungary where male participation is less than females in the teaching profession. At present in Hungary, there are 154,369 teachers who are employed in various schools and out of which 127,406 are women teachers [40].

All respondents were asked to describe the reasons behind the underrepresentation of men in teaching profession. During the interview, some of the reasons given by respondents in support of gender imbalances

were, (a) salary, (b) prestige issues and (c) social stereotypes attached to teaching jobs. Table 1, provides an overview of themen and women teachers in participating schools.

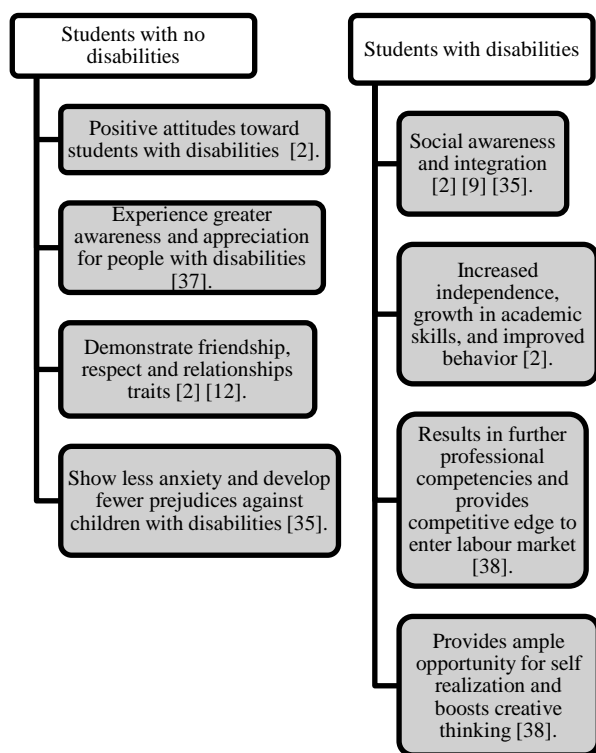


Figure 2. (B): Strengths of Inclusive Education.

TABLE I. MALE AND FEMALE TEACHERS STRENGTH IN PARTICIPATING SCHOOLS.

Name of the school	Total number of teachers (Male)	Total number of teachers (Female)
SchoolA	4	42
SchoolB	1	55
SchoolC	12	96
SchoolD	-	104
SchoolE	10	32

Salary along with other non financial rewards attracts serving teachers and potential entrants in the teaching profession. Remuneration is one of the professional instruments which attracts young talent and helps in motivating the teachers to provide high quality education to children [41]. Teachers in Hungary irrespective of mainstream or special schools comparatively earn low salaries. Salary is one of the reasons why there is shortage of teachers in Hungary as compared to other countries. The salaries of the teachers in Hungary were among the lowest of all OECD countries in 2013, and much lower than the salaries of other tertiary educated professions. Primary teachers earned 62%, and upper secondary teachers 48%, of the average actual salary of a 25-64 year-old similarly educated graduate in 2013

(compared to the OECD average of 78% for primary teachers and 82% for upper secondary teachers) ([42], p.11). In another report published by OECD [43], "Hungarian teachers with 10 years of experience earned USD 17 858, compared to USD 36 491 that their counterparts earned in average across the OECD; and, those teachers with 15 years of experience earned USD 19 181 compared to an OECD average of USD 39 245" (p.7). One of the teachers commented, "The Majority of teachers in Hungary are women, especially in primary schools. Less money and prestige issues are associated with teaching job, therefore, men stay away from teaching jobs. Countries like Finland and Austria, teachers have respect in society but it is not the same in Hungary".

Our society has a crucial role in defining the stand of men and women in the job market, i.e. defining labour tasks as, either 'men's work' or 'women's work' [44]. Across the globe, women are considered to be competent and suitable for jobs in education and health services than men as it is easy for them to satisfy to cultural expectations of being 'female' and a member of 'caring occupation' [45]. Teaching occupation, in our sexist social system, is considered to be a low paid occupation, having low regard among other professions and the society holding low esteem attitude towards teachers [46]. Simpson [44] citing works of Bradley (1993) and Williams (1993), "As Bradley (1993) suggests, it may be easier for women to push into male jobs than vice versa. 'Compromised femininity' is still a possible female identity, involving as it does status enhancement and potential increases in pay. By contrast, the man who moves into women's work upsets the gender assumptions embedded in that work so that he is not seen as a 'real' man" (Williams, 1993) (p.6).

Then again, there is a different picture in certain countries for example, Finland and Singapore, where teachers are highly regarded in their societies [47]. As one of the principal put it, "more male teachers are needed to provide children with role models. It was a decision to hire male teachers than female teachers to set an example for children. Children with disabilities should also have exposure to male teachers".

To support and motivate teachers, both the male and female, several policies and practices were introduced in the last few years in Hungary, for example, Decree on the Teacher Training System (2012), The Klebelsberg Institution Maintenance Centre (2013), the National Public Education Act (2011), the new teacher career model (2015) and the career management system (2013). One important aim of Act CXCV of 2011 on Public Education is to restructure wages of teachers and also provide career growth opportunities for teachers [48].

C. People First Language.

Another important finding observed by authors during the interview process was that many of the respondents were not aware of "people first language". Many authors

and organisations (governmental and non-governmental) worldwide encourage the usage of people's first language to address people with disabilities [49]. Blaska [50], in her article, *The Power of Language: Speak and Write Using "Person First"*, emphasises the use of person-first language, "*The philosophy of using person first language demonstrates respects for people with disabilities by referring to them first as individuals, and then referring to their disability when it is needed. This philosophy demonstrates respect by emphasizing what people can do by focusing on their ability rather than their disability and by distinguishing the person from the disability*" (p. 27).

Majority of the respondents in their discussion were found practicing "identity first language", for example, disabled children (children/students with disabilities), autistic children (children/students with autism), etc regardless the type and degree of disability. Numerous studies have been advocating the use of appropriate language to address people with disabilities not only to show respect towards world's largest minority, i.e. individuals with disabilities but also to enhance how others perceive the concept of disability [51]. Authors preferred to use "persons with disabilities" instead "disabled people" as to follow the language of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities [1].

IV. CONCLUSION

The objective of this study was to provide an overview on the challenges faced by teachers in performing their duties in segregated and inclusive schools and also, in their experiences, to list the barriers to an inclusive education. Therefore, the present study examined the professional challenges and barriers to inclusion within five different school settings based on responses from head-teachers, teachers and conductor-teachers. The findings highlight the teachers' professional barriers (physical and technological, financial and profession related constraints) and teachers' perceptions on the barrier towards successful inclusion (child, teacher and educational-environmental related variables), and are found to be supported by international literature to have a better understanding on this important issue pertaining to educational rights of children with disabilities.

The authors faced many limitations in context to accessing the studies conducted in Hungary on inclusive education and especially studies (mainly qualitative) where teachers were asked about their opinions/challenges faced by them on inclusion of students with disabilities. In Hungary, there is lack of empirical based literature examining the barriers to inclusion and full participation of children with disabilities in general school environment.

A study (qualitative and empirical) on overall performance of children with no disabilities in an inclusive environment is being considered for future research. Teachers in an inclusive environment are to be

fully committed towards children with disabilities as well as other regular class children. There are many concerns in context to children with no disabilities in a general classroom as it has been acknowledged that inclusion "was unfair to other children" and would lead to "teaching to mediocrity" [34].

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