

The Implementation of Inclusive Education after the 2016 Legislative Changes from Schools' Perspectives

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Abstract: This article aims at informing readers of the results of a qualitative analysis that was a complementary part of a quantitative investigation mapping the conditions of the implementation of inclusive education after the introduction of inclusive changes in the Czech Republic in 2016 from the perspective of school special educators and school managers. 992 respondents took part in the research. The article briefly presents its theoretical background and the selected methodology designed to determine the conditions in schools, to map proposals for changes in the system, and to provide space for free expression of opinions revealing more about the attitudes being examined in terms of inclusive education. A brief comparison with the results of the detailed qualitative part of the study reveals some major similarities – human and financial resources need to be ensured in inclusive education; the adverse factors include limitations in terms of staffing, high overall numbers of pupils in classes and of pupils with special educational needs (SEN), complex and burdensome paperwork, and the extensive rigidity of the system. Another key issue lies in the specific conditions in schools. The principles of inclusive education may only be applied if schools are provided with a certain degree of trust and powers. The respondents also mentioned the limitations of inclusion because of the specific type of disability – in particular, mental and behavioural disorders can hinder the management of inclusive education.

Key words: inclusive education, school special educators, school management

Introduction

Inclusive education has become a topical issue, especially in recent years since the governing legislation changed. Although the concept of *inclusive education* has

been known since the mid-1990s, when it was coined at the Conference on Special Needs Education in Salamanca (Right to Education (n.d.)), the implementation itself has taken place at different paces in different countries. As far as the Czech

Republic is concerned, there were several milestones defined with amendments to legislation enacting gradual inclusive changes, with the most significant change being the one from 2016, when Section 16 (9) of the Education Act was replaced to newly define a pupil with special educational needs as a pupil needing supportive measures, which were classified into five degrees of support. This change is also related to the existence of a new Decree No. 27/2016 Coll., as amended, on later regulations on pupils with special educational needs and gifted pupils, as well as the amended Decree No. 72/2005, as amended, on later regulations on counselling services.

This legislative amendment was the reason for the professional assessment of its impacts on educational practice in schools and became the topic of research examining this phenomenon from the perspective of school management and school special educators – the indispensable professional stakeholders in the process of the implementation of inclusive education. Research combining qualitative and quantitative methodologies was carried out in 2017–2019 and the resulting data was processed in 2020. The qualitative survey consisted of interviews with stakeholders. The data obtained from these interviews was analysed and used to generate a questionnaire aimed at quantitative verification of the data that had been obtained. The outputs of the research have already been publis-

hed in the publication which we refer to (Mrázková, 2020); nevertheless, the open questions in the questionnaire have not been processed yet as they need to be subjected to qualitative evaluation. This contribution aims at such processing.

Theoretical and Methodological Definition

Inclusive education is a term often used in its abbreviated form “*inclusion*” (include – to make someone a part of a whole), which is nevertheless a concept used in sociology and therefore possessing a broader meaning. It is widely used by both the pedagogical and lay public, though, so we will work with both the forms equally in this article. A fact worth mentioning is that inclusive education is not a steady state but a process that may never be completed in full. At the moment, most countries, including the Czech Republic, find themselves on the path between integration and inclusion – a shift from support provided to an individual to the benefit of the whole class, i.e. from adapting conditions to the needs of individuals to creating conditions for all children to work together (Booth & Ainscow, 2002; Mittler, 2012; Houška, 2017; Spilková, 2005). Inclusion can be perceived from the perspective of a mental health model or a psychosocial model (Soodak, 2006). The former somewhat

reduces the focus to pupils with special educational needs; the latter focuses on the benefits for all. The appropriate institution for applying this approach is an open school that perceives “otherness as an individual and normal characteristic” (Guidelines for inclusion, 2005).

The main qualitative part of the research was performed in 2017 and 2018, and the ensuing questionnaire was administered at the end of 2019. 992 answers with valid data were obtained, which in the case of the four qualitative questions of the questionnaire allowed evaluation of a total of 1017 statements.

Standard methods of data analysis were applied – encoding of open data and subsequent categorization. The research was based on the methodology of clusters, in which statements are classified and conceptualized into groups based on mutual overlapping or similarities between the identified units. This creates more general and inductively formed categories (Miovský, 2006). The analysis was performed using text colouring, keyword searches, and encoding. The respondents answered the following questions:

Question 1: Please list any other conditions of inclusive education that you consider important (under this question, the respondents only listed conditions in addition to those already presented – the questions formulated on the basis of the previous qualitative survey). N 21.

Question 2: Please indicate any other requirements that you consider important in terms of inclusive education (the respondents indicated requirements on the profession of a school principal/special education teacher in addition to those already presented). N 54

Question 3: Please describe briefly (using bullet points) how you would like to set up the system yourself (if you had the opportunity) so that pupils with SEN are well taken care of and, at the same time, you can enjoy your job at school. N 666

Question 4: Would you like to communicate anything else to us? N 276

The answers were partially overlapping, which is why we interlinked the conditions and the mutual requirements on the profession of a school principal/special educator. The evaluation of the question concerning the ideal structure of the system was interlinked with the final question asking for additional comments because of the same statements and categories appearing in both of them.

Conditions for Implementation of Inclusive Education in Schools

As far as the issue of ensuring conditions for the implementation of inclusive education is concerned, the qualitative

answers in the questionnaire can be classified as internal, external, and those reflecting both internal and external conditions. At the same time, the text reflects the professional demands required from the profession of the school special educator by the school principal and vice versa, which co-shape the conditions in the specific school.

The internal conditions for the successful implementation of inclusive education are, for example, dependent on the degree of support granted to the special educator by the school management. At the same time, the special educator contributes to the improvement of other teachers' working conditions. Speaking of the support provided by the school management, good mutual cooperation is appreciated, as well as support granted by the school management to the special educator's steps towards the teaching staff. Many answers do not formulate the conditions as such, but as evaluations of negative factors that allow the conditions to be inferred. We may therefore formulate the first condition here, which consists of the need for the school management to support the involvement of special educators as full members of the teaching staff. However, this may be complicated by the fact that special educators are usually funded from projects and not from school budgets. Another important condition is quality HR management implemented by the school managers; the shortcomings

in this area have been formulated as follows: *the special educators does not perceive sufficient motivation on the part of the school management to contribute to the common vision, the management is ignorant of the reasons why and how the special educator works at the school, the special educator is never given a personal bonus, no matter how hard he or she works.* One of the key conditions on the part of the school management is the ability to implement or provide support and training to teachers in terms of the implementation of innovations and flexibility into teaching. The general but fundamental internal condition concerning schools as well as individuals (see also the individual conditions) consists of the activeness and initiative of the teaching staff and their good relationships with the children.

Another category of conditions can be classified as the **internal-external conditions**. They occur in situations where the implementation of inclusion is affected by factors inside and outside the school alike. The ability of the school principal to identify and manage these conditions plays an important role here, as do the attitudes of the education authority, settings of the system, and legislation. The area of the construction and technical conditions was defined by the respondents as a sufficient physical size and quantity of classrooms with respect to the local population (*full classrooms without any free space for*

relaxation during breaks or simultaneous activities of the assistant and the main teacher during lessons do not suit me) and sufficient facilities for pedagogical staff (such as staffrooms and school counselling offices). The respondents' comments suggest that a separate office for school counsellors is not a matter of course at many schools or that the office is often located inappropriately (*we do have a counselling office, but it is neighbours with the gym hall and is therefore rather noisy at the beginnings and towards the ends of classes*). With an increasing incidence of interventions (special education subjects, pedagogical interventions), appropriate rooms are lacking too.

As far as technical equipment is concerned, the respondents mentioned IT equipment or good acoustics of classrooms and offices. Another key factor is the way in which the mental health of teachers at schools is supported. Though the support was not further specified in the comments, we can consider support for professional skills in the teacher's work with a diverse team, support through counselling inside and outside the school, adjustment of the school climate, and targeted support for self-awareness and self-care.

When formulating **external conditions** (i.e. conditions given by the system and the state of society) for the successful implementation of inclusive education, the respondents were mostly mentioned the funding of the school

special educators and psychologists. Their answers as to whether the funding already has or has not been ensured differed significantly. One respondent in his comment expressed his satisfaction in his comment about the fact that the funding was provided through the European Structural Funds (so-called Templates), or from the system of supportive measures. However, other comments pointed to the unsystematic nature of such a method of funding and called for financing of the school counselling professionals from the state budget as employees for whom the school is reimbursable in the same way as regular teachers, and not from European funds and for limited periods of time.

The lack of certainty about the long-term financing of the school psychologist's and special educator's jobs because of the current project-based funding method may affect the willingness of candidates for the jobs to apply, which is a relevant observation if we consider the numerous comments related to the lack of school psychologists and special educators at schools (*a special educator is a scarce commodity at schools*). Better availability of special educators in towns compared to the countryside was mentioned too (*special educators are only in larger towns. That is irrelevant for municipal schools*). One respondent even believed that there were no funds available for the financing of special educators. The question

is whether the respondent believes that the system of supportive measures cannot include such funds or is ignorant of the option of drawing money from the Structural Funds.

Other comments concentrated on the potential consequences of the above situation in terms of a deterioration in the quality of education in mainstream primary schools and the subsequent tendency of some parents to address this issue by selecting six- or eight-year grammar schools for the education of their children. It is worth mentioning, though, that special educators (together with many other factors) enhance the quality of education.

The demand for psychologists and special educators in schools is reflected in the raised claim that was raised that these experts should be present in all medium-sized to large schools, while several smaller schools could share one such professional. Another option of for how to resolve the situation that the respondents mentioned, was to ensure the reimbursability of these professions by at least the minimum-time employment. However, that would not solve the issue of the lack of these professionals. The status quo within these professions was reflected in a commentary, which considered a 0.5 part-time employment insufficient, and yet there are many schools where these specialists have even shorter contractual part-time employment or no employments at

all. Another comment pointed to the fact that it was often difficult for schools to find a teacher, let alone a special educator. Another answer described a situation where the expert was present at the school but fulfilled the duties of regular teachers because of the lack of those.

Some schools addressed the lack of special educators by employing at least increasing numbers of regular teachers qualified in the field of special pedagogy. One of the respondents mentioned a notable number of such teachers at their school (*there is not a position of a special educator at our school, but 50% of the teaching staff have a qualification in special pedagogy*).

In addition to special educators and psychologists, the profession of a guidance counsellor is mentioned too. According to a respondent (school principal) it is necessary to reduce the counsellors' direct teaching obligations in order to ensure quality counselling (*so that my guidance counsellor could teach 15 instead of 20 hours*).

The need for additional funding was mentioned in connection with the provision of care for pupils requiring first-level supportive measures, i.e. for pupils with the mildest difficulties, but whose further development is at risk. It should be noted that the data was collected at a time when the funding of pedagogical interventions fell into the second level of supportive measures and thus depended on the assessment of the

school counselling facility. Currently, this kind of support is the responsibility of the school, which pays for it from its budget. Likewise, one of the respondents articulated the need to secure funding for aids outside the system of supportive measures. It was proposed that the budget of schools should include funds to provide aids that the school would decide about on its own.

Prior to the enactment of the amendment on inclusive education (in 2016), insufficient funding and the problematic reimbursability of teaching assistants were a frequent issue. This has significantly improved as a result of the change in the legislation (Mrázková, 2020). A current problem and a real condition for successful inclusion are represented by the availability of these professionals and their quality. According to one of the respondents, the growing need for teaching assistants is a reflection of the current composition of the pupil body in classes.

Among the conditions that we can classify as external is the optimization or reducing of the number of pupils in classes. It is not only the absolute numbers of pupils that are often perceived as high, but also the insufficient operability concerning changes in the number of pupils in a class depending on changing or otherwise complex circumstances. One of the respondents drew attention to the changing situation in the class *upon the arrival of a new*

pupil in an already functioning large class, because of the presence of more students with behavioural disorders in one class and the high or increasing number of pupils with SEN in a large class. The possibilities of changing the number of pupils in classes are affected by the valid legislation, as well as by the current occupancy of classes and school buildings.

Legislation is an issue in itself. It is not commented on positively, but both general and specific reservations occur. One of the respondents mentions *completely insufficient legislative conditions*, without further specification or explanation, though. Other comments point to the large amount of paperwork associated with the new legislation, which places a significant burden on school counsellors, even though their number has increased (*colleagues still do not manage the rocketing inclusive legislation*). The paperwork is not always assigned to special educators; sometimes this task is fulfilled by another counsellor (guidance counsellor, psychologist, deputy principal, or principal of the school). This practice may be attributed to the fact that the funding of supportive measures is reflected in the school budget. The school principals therefore prefer to supervise correct reporting concerning this support personally. It is up to them whether they assume this responsibility themselves or assign it to another employee. One

of the options that presents itself here is to delegate part of the paperwork to newly-hired administrative staff, but the question is whether schools have funds available to pay such employees (*we have a new colleague who takes care of that; we would not manage without her at all*). Frequent changes in legislation, in particular Decree No. 27/2016 Coll., are perceived negatively too. The quantitative research did not confirm this criticism to a wider extent, though.

Individual conditions, i.e. those that the employees provide themselves in order to ensure a certain level of professional comfort, are based on seeking cooperation with other special educators aimed at the sharing of professional experience and joint professional growth.

The study has noticed certain risks resulting from insufficiently secured conditions or inappropriate perception of the principles of inclusion: *Because of inclusion, our small school has become a field office of a special school.*¹ Some respondents described the risk of endangering the quality of education because of the presence of pupils who significantly disrupt teaching or whose education in the current conditions is so demanding that teachers have limited opportunities to work systematically with the rest of the class. Furthermo-

re, there is pressure against excessive consideration being given to pupils with special educational needs, as it carries the risk of lowered motivation of other pupils (and their parents) to make use of the students' potential and perform in the best way possible. The problem may lie in the teachers' limited competence to explain to both students and their parents different approaches to the education and assessment of pupils with SEN.

Proposed Changes to the System and Critical Observations

Though this question was formulated positively, the respondents sometimes articulated their critical comments concerning the current system. Several categories of issues were identified – staff, pupils and their limitations, funding, paperwork, the authorities, the authority of parents, the authority of schools, and proposals concerning the tertiary training of teachers.

Staff

As far as the staff is concerned, the respondents mostly commented on the supporting professions at school. They

¹ According to the current terminology, the respondent meant the elementary practical school.

focused on training and further education of pedagogical staff and on the numbers of professionals within the education system and they proposed various changes to the system of staffing. There were critical comments dealing with the real qualifications of teaching assistants, which seem to be unsatisfactory in many cases, and the assistants therefore do not provide teachers with the necessary degree of help (*they can help with the notice board or filling in of diaries, but they have no training in working with children – a course is not enough*). On the issue of further education, the informants pointed to the lack of meetings of special educators aimed at discussing methodology. They nevertheless did not rule out that such encounters take place somewhere. Besides that, the respondents requested extension of the scope of employment of prevention methodology specialists. One of the comments addresses the issue of qualification limits for work within the subject of special educational care, which should not be performed by a psychologist who is not an expert in reeducation of specific learning disabilities (SLD), though it is worth mentioning that the content of this subject should include psychological work with students. However, if the subject content consists of SLD reeducation, it should be taught by special pedagogues.

Understaffing was mentioned with regard to the positions of special

educators, school psychologists, and assistants. Some respondents spoke about a general lack of staff who can be of benefit to pupils with special educational needs. The positions of regular teachers are often insufficiently staffed too (*if education is based on working pensioners (five out of 31) and unskilled staff members (four out of 31)..., the situation will not be better, even if the legislation created the best conditions for inclusive education*). The role of a school psychologist or special education teacher is frequently misconceived. Often an expert working for several schools simultaneously is designated as such (*there is only one school psychologist in the whole town with seven primary schools and a kindergarten*), even though it is recommended that a school psychologist should have at least 50% part-time employment at a school in order to fulfil their role properly. Some respondents suggested that certain professions should be eligible for reimbursement of the salaries paid to their practitioners – a teaching assistant in every class, a school psychologist/special educator at every school.

Pupils and their Limitations

This category was commented on extensively. Although it was meant as a platform for the articulation of proposals for changes, the respondents commented on the limits that they perceive in inclusive

education regarding pupils with special educational needs. In general they suggested a change in the area of the education of students identified as performing below the level of the educational mainstream. Limits on the education of pupils with mild mental retardation were mentioned the most frequently. The respondents described the consequences in the field of education itself (*students do not master the curriculum even with the support of teaching assistants*) and in the emotional area (*they do not experience success*). The consequences affect regular teachers and other students too (*for teachers it is a great burden to adjust the teaching and everything is to the detriment of other pupils, including gifted ones*). Within the context of the perceived limitations, the respondents also expressed the positives that inclusive education meant for the sector of special education – *smaller teams, a special educational approach*. In addition to pupils with a mild intellectual disability, pupils with a moderate intellectual disability were mentioned too. The inclusive education of such children is perceived as extremely complex. The respondents also mentioned pupils with borderline intellectual capacity who do not fulfil the diagnosis of a mild intellectual disability but have difficulties with mainstream education (*inclusion harms pupils with a borderline intellect – they cannot study at special schools and suffer at regular*

schools). The above arguments need to be discussed.

Other limitations of inclusive education are related to students with more serious behavioural issues (ADHD and other psychiatric diagnoses, including autism spectrum disorders), where the emotional instability of the student poses a significant complication for teaching (*the student is capable of disrupting a lesson to the extent that the teacher cannot teach the remaining pupils properly*), while the attendance of such pupils in other than regular primary schools is problematic. Pupils with more serious learning disorders were mentioned too in the study. The opinion that inclusive education is only unproblematic in the case of physically handicapped pupils could be noticed, but it seemed to be marginal. The importance of naming these limitations of the pupils and not perceiving them as failures was pronounced too (*if an included is highly disruptive, we should not feel ashamed of it and we should act*). The limitations can also be seen in terms of the total number of pupils with SEN present in a class. If there are too many, the education of the other students becomes significantly more difficult (if there is above a certain number of such pupils, it is almost impossible to teach in the class).

In addition to pupils with special educational needs, attention was also

paid to gifted pupils, though they were mentioned only by one respondent, who suggested that pupils with SEN were cared for, while gifted pupils were still receiving much less attention. That could be due both to the fact that it is difficult to identify these students and that it is complicated to find space for their systematic support.

All the respondents described inclusion as a way of supporting pupils with special needs and did not relate it to all students.

They also mentioned the consequences that going beyond the limits of inclusive education can lead to for parents, teachers, and students in the class (*whatever-it-takes inclusion does not make sense, teachers are exhausted and parents are upset; the climate in the class deteriorates*), and for students with SEN who do not necessarily benefit from it entirely (*there are children for whom attending our school is of no use or benefit, who do not experience the joy of learning*). The personality of the student may be a limitation in itself too. There are students who are not motivated to do schoolwork despite substantial support provided by teachers (*one tries to help in every possible way, but they do not care*).

The risks ensuing from the limitations were described too. These are seen in the existence of some classes where the composition of the pupil

body is so difficult that the quality of teaching is endangered. The situation may be somewhat paradoxical: ensuring the quality of education for pupils with SEN is preferred to the detriment of other pupils. Because of the complexity of the process of applying supportive measures, including the processing of the relevant paperwork, some schools retreat from providing them (*many schools - I know that because of the students transferred - prefer not to send pupils to the school counselling facilities at all - the less, the better. It's a step backwards*). The proposed changes consist of a reduction of the number of pupils in the class (the measure proposed the most frequently) or a decrease in the number of pupils with SEN in a class.

Funding and Paperwork

The respondents either demanded a general increase in the funding of the system of education, or directed their demands to the area of the funding of counselling and administrative staff in charge of inclusive education at schools. In this context they mentioned these positions: special education educators, school psychologists, teaching assistants, school assistants, social workers, and administrative workers. They also proposed that in the case of teaching assistants, schools should be provided with funding according to the number of pupils with

SEN. The paperwork was described as excessive to overwhelming.

Authorities

The respondents most often commented on the functionality of cooperation between pedagogical-psychological counselling centres and demanded better communication, more flexible collaboration, and better support for schools in the area of intervention activities. A formal approach on the part of counselling centres (*their staff only deal with papers and are not interested in children at all*) or their unprofessional advice were criticized. Two respondents also mentioned their desire to transfer a certain amount of authority from school counselling facilities to schools. They even suggested transferring the whole authority to schools, as is the practice in the Scandinavian countries. Communication with, and the activity of, the Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sports were also criticized. As a result, schools try to set up an effective procedure on their own initiative (*it is sad that the Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sports is unable to explain, prepare, and mediate everything, to ensure the conditions; at the end of the day, we are putting everything together on our own at school*). As to the proposals, the respondents suggested setting up a contact counselling centre, which would mainly provide consulting to teachers with little experience with inclu-

sion, or to set up an office for a district special pedagogue who would regularly visit schools and support teachers.

Authority of Schools

According to several respondents, extending the powers of schools would contribute to the effective implementation of inclusion. However, this step could also lead to higher degrees of rejection where schools do not have suitable conditions, and that could prove controversial because of the risk of students being rejected by some schools in order to make their life easier. On the other hand, schools often have a very realistic idea of the potential barriers (*large numbers of children in classes, interconnected classes, absence of a special educator*) that may complicate inclusive education. Schools would also welcome more trust from the education authorities and the Ministry of Education, which would enable them to assume responsibility for their own actions. Amongst the options of how to increase the powers of schools we can name the suggestion of letting school principals decide about the proportion of direct and indirect work of a teaching assistant, as they know and may assess each specific case better than the decree or the school counselling facility.

Authority of Parents

The respondents were generally of the

opinion that parents had a lot of rights and that they would not oppose partial restriction of those. They describe situations where, according to the school, parents decide against the interests of the child or society. Following such a decision of the parents, the child is included in a programme that is beyond his or her capacities and the resulting knowledge and skills of the pupil are worse than would be the case if he or she were taught according to another programme or in another class or school. This baseline situation is associated with a more problematic application of the person in the labour market. The respondents thus question the right of parents to decide against the recommendations of a school counselling facility which is (for instance) suggesting the child be educated within the special education sector.

One of the respondents calls for greater responsibility on the part of parents for pupils' education with reference to the fact that inclusive education entails considerable financial costs (*expensive inclusion without the obligation of parents to participate in it somehow does not make sense*). We should nevertheless stress here the aspect of strengthening equal opportunities for pupils with insufficient support from their families. The need to set clear rules for communication between families and schools was another aspect that was mentioned. The rights and obligations

of both parties should be balanced. One respondent drew attention to the risk of transferring parental responsibilities to schools.

Proposals Concerning Tertiary Training of Teachers

The need to extend the university training of future teachers by education in the field of special pedagogy and by greater practical training was mentioned frequently. Furthermore, it would be advisable to consider providing support to smaller schools in order to enable them to hire a school psychologist and a special education teacher. Schools would also benefit from the opportunity to split pupils into smaller groups, which is nevertheless hampered by spatial, staffing, and financial factors. Threshold numbers of pupils with SEN per school should be set too.

General Attitude to Inclusive Education

Although the qualitative part of the questionnaire did not include any direct questions on the attitude to inclusive education in general, the respondents frequently expressed themselves regarding the issue when answering the open question about changes to the system.

A wide range of attitudes was presented – from positive ones, through attitudes requesting the fulfilment of

further conditions in order to achieve the successful functioning of inclusion, to negative ones. The concept of inclusive education was largely accepted by small schools, one-room schools, or alternative schools (mostly Montessori schools), which explain their acceptance of inclusion as a result of working in an environment that is naturally inclusive in itself (*in Montessori schools, everyone is unique and everyone deserves a different approach; we are a small school, we have always done our best for every child*). These respondents also drew attention to the fact that they had already adopted the concept of inclusive education before 2016 (though they had not been using the expression itself) and now felt too burdened with the excessive paperwork and formal procedures required by the MEYS apparatus. One of the respondents highlighted the need for personal positive input if her students' needs are to be met (*our principal has to deal with the inclusion herself, with her heart and sometimes regardless of the legislation*). Another respondent pointed out the paradox of emphasizing compliance with formal procedures over the effectiveness of real help granted to students. The costs of inclusion are regarded as something unquestionable and necessary to accept. Financial security is a condition for inclusion to be implemented.

Negative comments about inclusive education were either statements con-

cerning possible negative consequences of inclusion or statements perceiving inclusion as such negatively. The negative consequences were associated with all the stakeholders: pupils with SEN, "regular" pupils, and teachers who may feel demotivated or overwhelmed (*inclusion harms everyone; it harms ordinary students the most; our whole teaching staff is demotivated*). These negative consequences were further specified as a reduced level of education, a significant increase in paperwork, a collapse of counselling facilities, and increased bullying. The risk of lowering the level of education of "ordinary" pupils was mentioned repeatedly.

The other category of comments assessed inclusion in its entirety negatively, without any specific arguments. Some of these comments were strongly emotional (*inclusion is a crime against children; the whole infamous inclusion is just a big hype; inclusion was the biggest blow to our education system in the last 30 years; it is a mess and no one wants to do anything about it*). Several comments pointed to the low level of effectiveness of the current concept of inclusive education (*poorly presented and managed inclusion; the financial demands of inclusion are huge, while the benefits are minimal; it only presents excessive work to me, while there is no effect at all*).

It is also worth mentioning the oft-repeated statements that emphasize the importance of special needs education.

Some of these comments praise its existence and effectiveness (*special schools still exist and there are people who can tackle the issue*), call for preservation of special schools, appeal for the strengthening of this sector, criticize the abolition of this type of school, or call for their reestablishment, though it is common knowledge that the government has not given its assent to their abolition. Some of the statements go along the lines of the anti-inclusive concept in general. These respondents do not see any benefit in inclusive education. Other comments assess the existence of special education in the context of so-called *responsible inclusion* (Vaughn & Schumm, 1995), which supports inclusive education where possible, but acknowledges that it has certain limits, beyond which it is advisable to consider the education of a particular pupil with more severe disabilities outside the mainstream.

Discussion about Findings

The respondents' direct answers sometimes do not specify explicitly the conditions; these have to be deduced from the criticism expressed in the answers. The respondents paid significant attention to students for whom - in their opinion - inclusive education may not be the most effective option. The argument that

pupils with a mild intellectual disability (MID) do not master the curriculum even with the support of a teaching assistant is based on the assumption that all pupils should achieve the same level of knowledge. However, the MID pupils (but not only these pupils) should not be subjected to the same requirements; individual and achievable goals should be set for them. This is also tightly linked to experiencing success and achievement, which are more likely to occur in the case of individually set goals. It should also be noted that the education of pupils with MID is usually carried out on the basis of the set minimum outputs of the FEP PE, which are incorporated into the SEP of the school and IEP of the specific pupil. Teachers should know and apply those if the educational counselling facility (ECF) so recommends.

The respondents abundantly mention the consequences of inclusion for other pupils in the class, who may be disturbed by pupils with SEN or suffer from a lack of space left to work with them. As for the findings of the quantitative part of the research about the growing parental activity perceived as burdensome by schools, we should admit that this may pose another complicating factor. Teachers need to concentrate not only on the effectiveness of the teaching process in the classroom, but also on the relationships with parents who are opposed to the presence of pupils with SEN, thus placing a heavy burden on the teacher.

This issue may be partly addressed through a greater focus on the effective education of other students in the class, provided, of course, that the internal and external conditions are met.

The respondents perceive inclusive education as inclusion of pupils with SEN among other pupils quite commonly. This perception of inclusive education is represented in the quantitative outputs to the same extent as the concept of inclusive education relating to all pupils. The qualitative survey nevertheless predominantly includes answers testifying to the concept focusing on the education of pupils with SEN.

Counselling facilities, criticized for their formal approach to the suggestions of supportive measures, need not be the greatest culprit', though. They are also burdened with the above-described lower flexibility of the system and long waiting times. All of that leads to a formalistic approach on the part of the ECF employees, even if they would prefer to work quite differently. Yielding greater powers to schools could leave the counselling facilities with more room for systematic work. The reproaches concerning unprofessional advice from ECFs could be avoided if greater opportunities were given to the ECF staff to get better acquainted with the specific school environment, the pupil and his/her needs, and the view of the school teachers. The supportive measures would thus be easier to set.

Enhanced mutual cooperation between the school management and the special educator is proving a key factor in greater support for inclusive education at schools. The survey revealed that the special educator is a profession much sought after by schools and a highly praised one, naturally hand in hand with other consulting and supporting professions. School principals need this position to be reimbursable and independent of partial projects. Considering the fact that the position of a special educator has been a standard part of Decree No. 72/2016 Coll., as amended, since 2005, we can assume that it already constitutes a stable position, at least in some schools, the existence of which is duly justified.

Let us return to the above-mentioned requirement of better training in the field of special education. It is completely justified. Teachers, regardless of their specialization, will be facing a diverse range of pupils, including those requiring specific support, more and more, and not all the issues that emerge can be solved by a special educator. The core teachers must be equipped with at least partial competencies in this field - especially the ability to identify difficulties, to determine subsequent steps, and to adapt their teaching appropriately.

In both parts of the survey the respondents complain that inclusive education was not sufficiently prepared by the Ministry of Education, specifically, that

it was not appropriately discussed with and communicated to educators. It is true that school associations provided the MEYS with their materials addressing the planned legislative change, but the discussion amongst institutions and authorities was probably not sufficient. Another question is whether and to what extent the authorities discussed the issue with their members who really live the reality of inclusion in schools and counselling facilities.

Another topic for discussion lies in the fact that the analysis showed rather negative answers and comments in response to the open-ended questions, which may give the impression that our respondents have adopted a rather anti-inclusive attitude. We should not forget, though, that the open-ended questions

were a mere add-on to the items dealing with individually defined areas and therefore quite logically provoked statements along the lines of the deficiencies or limitations of inclusive education. To get an overall picture of how school special education teachers and school principals perceive inclusive education, please refer to the comprehensive data of the qualitative-quantitative research (Mrázková, 2020).

Inclusive education is a topical task associated with quite a number of issues. It is important to monitor the feedback of practising professionals who can specify useful requirements, as well as the limitations of inclusive education. Their advice can help in the implementation of inclusive education at schools.

Abbreviations and acronyms: ILP – individual learning plan; MID – mild intellectual disability; MEYS – Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sport; ECF – educational counselling facility; SEN – special educational needs; SEP – school educational programme; FEP PS – framework educational programme for primary schools

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