

Intercorrelation between Sociodemographic Characteristics of Pupils and Their Perception of Inclusive Education in Primary Schools in Croatia

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Abstract

The task of educational institutions in the process of implementing inclusion in schools is a constant securing the necessary support of all pupils, regardless of their differences, and which can be realized in school and / or beyond. The concept of inclusive education is an integral part of the national curriculums of Europe and the world, well as in Croatia. The aim of this paper is to present intercorrelation of socio demographic characteristics (gender, class, achievement in school, involvement in extracurricular activities) for pupils and their perception of inclusive education in primary schools in Croatia. Intercorrelation presented in this study showed no statistically significant association between the studied variables by pupils and their perceptions of inclusiveness of school, except that pupils who are involved in extracurricular activities are also involved into activities out of school. It is considered that pupils recognize the positive application of implementation of inclusion in their primary schools.

Keywords: inclusion, educational inclusion, pupils, schools, socio demographic characteristics, curriculum

1. Work Method

Since the effective implementation of inclusive education is based on immediate carriers of educational activities, this research is focused towards pupils as key participants in the implementation of inclusion in the classroom and school environment. It is considered that successful and quality implementation of inclusive and quality upbringing and education in school is connected with the perception of the implementation of the same, whereby the pupils' assessment related to studied sociodemographic marks. The aim of this paper is to show the intercorrelation of sociodemographic characteristics of pupils (gender, class attending, school achievement and their involvement in extracurricular activities) with their perception of inclusive education in schools. Application of inclusive education in Croatian educational system was included partial and unsystematic, which has resulted as implementation of various contents and ways of implementing inclusive education, and different organization of educational inclusion at the school practice. The research involved 953 pupils of 6th grade and 999 pupils 8th grade, from a total of 21 primary schools in the Republic of Croatia. For the purposes of this study a questionnaire was used, which was developed in the Centre for Inclusive Education (Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education, CSIE) in the UK. Index for inclusion (2002) is a methodological construct that serves schools and researchers who deal with the concept of educational inclusion to remove barriers for learning and participation and inclusion of all children and young people into regular schools. Index for inclusion is a tool to support the development of inclusive development of schools, which can help all participants in the educational process of inclusion that establish specific steps in promoting inclusion in schools in which they work. Please note that this paper presents intercorrelation of the examined variables which are presented in table 1 with pupils' perceptions of inclusive education in their schools. In order to clearly summarize and display data, basic mathematical statistical methods of descriptive statistics were used. To determine the relationship between the studied socio demographic variables and pupils' perceptions of inclusion in school, Pearson correlation coefficient was used.

For the used instrument, the coefficient of internal reliability Cronbach's alpha was calculated, which is for applied *Questionnaire for the perception of inclusiveness school by pupils* 0.90. This indicates the very high reliability of the applied instruments.

2. Socio Demographic Characteristics of Pupils

The research involved a total of 1952 pupils in the 6th and 8th grades. In the following text, one presents socio demographic characteristics of the pupils who participated in this study (gender, class, school achievement and involvement in extracurricular activities).

Gender: 1008 (51.63%) male pupils, and 944 female pupils (48.36%). It turned out that there was no statistically significant difference in the number of male and female pupils ($\chi^2 = 0.9849$, $df = 1$, $p < 0.01$).

Grade: 953 (51%) pupils attended the 6th grade, and 999 (49%) pupils the 8th grade. It turned out that there was no statistically significant difference in the number of students attending the 6th or 8th grade ($\chi^2 = 0.492$, $df = 1$, $p < 0.01$).

The achievement of pupils at the end of the last school year: the highest number of pupils have a very good achievement (4) at the end of the school year ($N = 790$). They are followed by pupils with excellent achievement ($N = 730$), then followed by pupils with fine achievement ($N = 375$) and pupils with sufficient achievement ($N = 42$). From the above mentioned descriptive indicators sample of pupils with considering their achievement, we can say that pupils who make up the sample in this study have an average very good achievement at the end of the school year.

The involvement of pupils in extracurricular activities: the total number of pupils in this study who were involved in extracurricular activities is 1056, while the total number of pupils who are not involved in extracurricular activities 886. It turned out that there was a statistically significant difference among pupils involved in extracurricular activities than those who did not ($\chi^2 = 7.2801$, $df = 1$, $p < 0.01$). When it comes to extracurricular activities, the total number of pupils involved in extracurricular activities is 1181, and the total number of pupils who are not involved in extracurricular activities is 757. It turned out that there is a statistically significant difference in the number of pupils involved in extracurricular activities and those who are not. There are significantly more involved ($\chi^2 = 46.5018$ with $df = 1$, $p < 0.01$).

2. Results and Discussion

In the intercorrelation table the significant coefficients are indicated at $p < 0.05$. Although there are relatively lot of such coefficients, it should be noted that their absolute values are small. We can define them as small, ie negligible correlation, statistically significant because of the large number of respondents. Because of this it would not be reasonable to interpret these correlation coefficients.

Table 1: Relationship between Socio Demographic Characteristics of Pupils and Their Perceptions of School Inclusiveness

Variables	gender	grade	achievement	Extracurricular activities	Extracurricular (out of school) activities	The questionnaire for pupils perception of school inclusiveness
gender		0,01	0,16	0,01	0,14	-0,03
grade			-0,01	0,02	0,06	0,17
achievement				-0,14	-0,14	0,04
Extracurricular activities					0,38	0,06
Extracurricular (out of school) activities						0,02
The questionnaire for pupils perception of school inclusiveness						

Marked correlation coefficients are significant at $p < .05$

The only statistically significant, and also higher than the other, is the correlation between pupils' involvement in extracurricular activities ($r = +0.38$), which tells us that pupils involved in extracurricular activities are also involved in activities out of school, i.e. those who are not involved in extracurricular, are not included even in activities out of school. Extracurricular activities in school are a kind of an area where pupils have the chance to prove their needs and desires. It is presumed that if a pupil participates in extracurricular activities, he / she participates in outdoor activities. Extracurricular activities make space where there is no numerical evaluation, and student-teacher cooperation is at a high level. Due to the fact that the extra-curricular activities in school present an area where pupils spend their free time with the opportunity of showing their needs and desires are considered a very important segment of school practice, free time is the space and the opportunity to interact in the process of individuation, socialization and enculturation, therefore the space of self-actualization and realization of the personality of each individual (Previšić, 2000). In the framework of the educational system in Croatia is given great importance to extra-curricular activities through legal provisions that emphasize their importance in the context of the immediate school practice. This refers to the Law on Education in Primary and Secondary Schools and the curriculum for primary schools. Thus, Article 28 of the Law on Education explicates that "The school curriculum determines the curriculum elective courses and extracurricular activities," and The curriculum for elementary school explicates that the extracurricular activities are the most effective way of preventing antisocial behavior and are highly stimulating students to self-actualization and self-discovery learning.

Within the Curriculum for Primary Schools, areas are listed that include extracurricular activities, including: literary, dramatic, natural sciences, sports, health and recreational activities associated with the preservation of national and cultural heritage conservation, social - humanist projects, pupils' creativity and technical creativity (The curriculum of for Primary Schools, Ministry of Science, Education and Sports, 2006). Through extra-curricular activities it is possible to overcome those organizational forms of work in lessons that dominate as the frontal meeting between pupils and teachers, whereby the teachers are barely able to recognize their supernumerary pupils of one department. In this way pupil achieves much better results, is happier and more satisfied if he/she can work according to their own wishes and possibilities. Content and modes of operation in extracurricular activities should be based on the principles of freedom, of free will, individuality, spontaneity and diversity. The objective of inclusion in school's is the reversal of the traditional view towards the contents of special pedagogy to the application of new approaches to the inclusion of children with special educational needs in the regular education system. One can say that the use of inappropriate teaching methods and forms of teacher's work, and which are not in accordance with the curriculum changes greatly limit the implementation of inclusion at the level of the immediate school practice.

By the establishment of the so-called "Organizational paradigm" of inclusive education (Dyson and Millward, 2000), there is a growing need for education systems in Europe and the world. This refers to the need for a clear operationalization of inclusion at the classroom environment, where the term 'inclusion in the regular education system implies the active participation of all pupils in the teaching process. The role and importance of extra-curricular and activities out of school in the context of the discourse of inclusive education is an important parameter to overcome a series of educational restrictions in the educational process in classroom context insofar as it allows the expression of acceptance of individual and specific needs each individual pupil outside the classroom environment. In this sense, teachers receive a new role focused on open communication among all pupils, and pupils themselves with awareness of the acceptance of diversity among them. One can say that teachers through extracurricular leadership and extracurricular activities can promote the development of inclusion to the level of entire school practice. Through the involvement of all pupils to participate in a series of educational activities outside the classroom context, a space is being created which appears a more open contact between pupils and pupils, pupils and teachers. It results with a realization of a school culture where every pupil can realize their maximum capability.

This study showed no statistically significant association between pupil's perceptions of school inclusiveness, especially taking into consideration the fact that the pupils participate in extracurricular activities. There is a possibility that pupils with special educational needs are not involved in extracurricular activities because of the lack of a number of conditions. In doing so, it is primarily considered content of extracurricular activities that may not always be appropriate for all students or a lack of the necessary material and human conditions that limit their implementation.

In modern school change, teachers are the key factors in creating an enjoyable atmosphere in which all pupils feel good, and in which will be recognized the elements of mutual positive cooperation of all participants in the educational process of inclusion in school practice. In this way, the school becomes an inclusive community in which children learn and play, mutually accept and cooperate. Efficient implementation of inclusion in elementary schools is a requirement of education policies of all countries, and their place is in the same national curriculum.

3. Inclusive Education as an Integral Part of the Curriculum

National Curriculum is one of the key documents of educational policy which explicates clear educational goals and competencies needed to work in different educational areas. National Curriculum of Europe and the world emphasizes the importance of inclusion in educational context as the target and / or principle. Within the National Curriculum for preschool upbringing and education and general obligatory and high school education of the Republic of Croatia, educational inclusion is considered as a basic principle in designing the educational programs. The concept of inclusive education is an integral part of national curriculum Europe, world and in Croatia. The curriculum in education is a very complex philosophy of the entire process of school activities and as such it provides guidance for practical educational activities (Previšić, 2007). Actual changes in society demand the changes in goals and tasks of the educational system as a whole. One can therefore say that the curriculum is based on the demands of modern society, and contemporary educational policy. More recent approach to the foundation of the curriculum in the educational context did Benjamin S. Bloom (1956) by publishing books on the classification and taxonomy of cognitive development and learning objectives (Taxonomy of Educational Objectives). The basic definition of taxonomy was the focus on three areas of the child's personality in the process of cognitive development and learning outcomes, and this is the focus on cognitive, affective and psychomotoric part of personality. The main goal of Bloom's taxonomy is to develop a holistic approach in creating educational requirements (Bloom, 1984). The ratio of the curriculum and inclusive education is important because the systems of the countries of Europe and the world through their national curricula implicitly or explicitly emphasize the importance of educational inclusion within the school process.

Inclusion in education as well as curriculum have a common focus on the entire process of education in schools, the overall organization of educational activities of the school. In the pedagogical literature and in practice we encounter many different definitions of the term curriculum. Inclusion of as request of modern educational policies of Europe and the world is a continuous process of school practice that is closely connected with components of national and school curriculum. The curriculum in schools refers to the entire practice of education, and to all the participants who implement it. So Marsh (1994) lists five basic categories that are directly or indirectly relevant to each approach of curriculum construction, and this is pupil's view, teachers' point of view, the strategy of curriculum planning and development and management curriculum. According to Bogner and Matijević (2005) curriculum is a technical plan for achieving planned, programmed and measurable effects of set goals. Certain changes i.e. higher requirements in the creation of high quality approach to teaching and learning requires new competencies of teachers, and pupils. Focus lies in the application of new methods and forms of work in order to improve the overall school practice.

The success of learning depends significantly on the appropriate adjustments to teaching strategies so that by their application special needs of pupils can be satisfied. It is important by which ways we present the content to pupils, transfer and present the content, give instructions, set tasks and what means and forms of work we use. This includes the selection of appropriate channels of information admission, adjustment of linguistic expression, enabling successful reading, the facilitation of written expression, the use of an effective demonstration, involving pupils in practical work, take care of the adequacy of facilities and equipment (Ivančić, 2010).

Teacher's selection of appropriate didactic and methodical procedures in working with students with special needs can largely affect the educational success and acceptance of students with special needs in the classroom environment. The didactic and methodological procedures of work refer to the selection of appropriate strategies and working methods of adjusting the content of teaching students with special needs, in accordance with the abilities and skills of each student (Ivančić, Stančić, 2003). In this way, it can provide a fruitful realization of the right to a quality education. According to a study from 2009 g (BatarelloKokić, Vukelić and Ljubić) showed that teachers are aware that during their university education they did not acquire the necessary skills to work in inclusive environment and study programs do not pay enough attention to the development of competencies required for inclusive education.

Teachers who participated in on this research said they were prepared for their educational work with regular pupil population and the problems encountered in the immediate educational practices require knowledge of specific forms and methods of work. Researchers still believe that the need to develop teachers' competences for inclusive education somewhat is satisfied and that teachers have the basic knowledge and skills needed for individual approaches to teaching. According to the above mentioned resulted research we can refer to the tendency that pupils in the Republic of Croatia recognize school inclusion, good interpersonal relationships in schools as a place where everyone feels good, regardless of gender, class, school achievement and involvement in extracurricular activities. According to curricular guidelines in Croatia, the main goal of inclusion of children in the formal education system is to enable all children to acquire the highest level of knowledge, abilities skills in accordance with their capabilities for independent successful life, onthat the level of preschool, primary secondary education (National Curriculum Framework for preschool upbringing and education, General Compulsory high school education, 2011).

4. Conclusion

Inclusion in education is a process that is continual, and which is directed to the use of new methods and forms of work aimed at taking into account the capabilities of each pupil. Teachers at the same time identify the competences of individual pupils, or just meet with a wide range of student skills, habits, achievements, behavior, experiences, knowledge and a range of other factors (Krampač-Grljusic and Marinić, 2007). As inclusive education is based on securing the conditions that the regular school system allows children and pupils with disabilities to acquire the expected achievements, school as educational institution becomes interactive learning community where teaches provides the acquisition of the necessary competencies to pupils to prepare them for the world of work and life in adulthood. The need for professional development of active participants in the educational process of inclusion at the level of school practice and constant acquisition of the competencies required for work with children with special needs is a requirement for effective implementation of the process of inclusion in school (Mittler, 2006).

The organization of school work in the implementation of the process of inclusion should be focused on ensuring the factors that will provide quality school practice. The purpose of teachers' creativity is emphasized in the process of teaching, as well as organizing various training - educational activities where the goal is to help pupils in achieving desired results. Since the basic principle of educational inclusion is to enable each child a regular school education respecting the individual differences among pupils, it is assumed that for quality implementation of inclusion in schools is necessary quality professional development for teachers whom organize a series of training - learning activities that encourage the implementation of inclusion in school. Organization of implementation of inclusion in schools requires various forms of cooperation between schools and the local community and the way of conducting inclusion in the context of the classroom environment requires appropriate education of teachers and assistants. The task of the school is to become a place where every pupil feels good and is equally accepted by the other pupils, as well as the entire teaching staff. Extracurricular activities can be a space for development of pupils' social competencies necessary for further education, life and work. Diversities among pupils through extracurricular activities become an incentive in the educational process within the classroom environment and beyond.

5. Literature

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