Regular Versus Special Streams within Teacher Education

Mojca Peček[1], Sunčica Macura-Milovanović[2] and Ivan Čuk[3]
[1]Faculty of Education, University of Ljubljana
[2]Faculty of Education in Jagodina, University of Kragujevac
[3]Faculty of Sport, University of Ljubljana

Abstract

Teacher educators need to have a clear picture of student teachers' attitudes towards diversity, disability, learning and teaching, because this knowledge can be helpful in designing teacher education programmes which can prepare future teachers better for work in inclusive settings. Therefore, the study presented in this paper was designed to explore the attitudes of student teachers enrolled in teacher education programmes in Slovenia (University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Education) and Serbia (University of Kragujevac, Faculty of Education in Jagodina) towards the factors which affect the learning difficulties of vulnerable pupils. The results of the study suggest that the majority of student teachers in the first and the fourth year from both countries rank a pupil's disability as the factor which has the greatest impact on his/her learning difficulties. The authors conclude that fragmentation between special teacher education and regular teacher education, that is, between special education and mainstream education may elicit student teacher attitudes which are not conducive to taking responsibility for vulnerable pupils, and might therefore hinder the process of inclusion. The implications of these findings for teacher education programmes are subsequently discussed.

Key words: *attitudes; inclusive education; pupils' disability; special education; student teachers.*

Introduction

The makeup of pupils in primary schools today is changing due to migration and increased awareness that all groups of vulnerable pupils should receive the best possible education in regular classes, as well as that regular education should be based on the principle of inclusive education. However, the meaning of inclusion has various

conceptualisations (Armstrong, Armstrong, & Spandagou, 2011). For the purpose of this article, we contrast the *narrow* understanding of inclusion as an attempt to educate persons with disabilities by integrating them into the regular structures of the educational system (Michailakis & Reich, 2000) with *broad* definitions of inclusive education as a process in which schools attempt to reduce all forms of exclusion and discrimination towards pupils based on disability, ethnicity or other factors which may make school life unnecessarily difficult. This is accomplished by reconsidering and restructuring the curriculum to allocate resources in a way that enhances the equality of opportunity (Booth & Ainscow, 1998; Ouane, 2008; UNESCO, 2008; Arnesen, Allen, & Simonsen, 2009; Florian & Rouse, 2009).

As Rouse (2008) explains, according to a 'classic' special education view, it is not possible to include pupils with learning difficulties in the mainstream classrooms; rather, it is desirable to group them according to the nature of their abilities, disabilities or difficulties. This author cites Kaufman et al. (2005 in Rouse, 2008, p. 6), according to whom successful teaching of pupils who are different requires their homogenous grouping so that special pedagogical approaches can be deployed by teachers who have been trained to use them. This perception might also be accepted by teachers teaching in inclusive settings (Jordan, 2009, 2010). It is deeply connected with medical discourse (Fulcher, 1989), the biggest danger of which is that the 'problem' is seen as involving solely the child (McConkey et al., 2001). If pupils with special educational needs (SEN) are mostly seen through their difference or through their disability, special teachers are considered to be the only professionals who have the knowledge to deal with them, either in special or inclusive settings. The 'classic' special education view is further confirmed by the two-track teacher education system, in which teachers are trained separately to work with 'ordinary' and with 'special' pupils, which is the case in many countries, or by the existence of 'special' subjects within regular teacher education programmes which deal with the teaching of vulnerable pupils. Both of these teacher education systems lead teachers to believe that it is necessary to work with vulnerable pupils in a completely different manner and with different knowledge than is necessary for 'ordinary' pupils. This belief makes vulnerable pupils in regular schools the responsibility of those who have undertaken specialised courses, and therefore diminishes the regular teacher's sense of responsibility for them (Florian & Rouse, 2009).

The analysis above leads us to the conclusion that when the education of vulnerable children in regular schools is conceptualised in the 'classic' special education manner, it is a barrier to the development of inclusion. The process of inclusion may be hindered by specialised teacher profiles, whose position is highly controversial: although they are needed, they also generate beliefs that vulnerable pupils require special approaches and that teachers who work in mainstream schools do not have the necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes to teach them.

According to research (Rouse, 2008) carried out in the classroom setting where teachers were encouraged to try out a range of teaching strategies to teach all children,

teachers reported that they knew more than they had thought, and for the most part, children learn in similar ways. Many teachers stated that they had not thought that they could teach children with SEN, but their confidence and repertoire of teaching strategies developed over time. According to Rouse (2008), this would suggest that by just doing it, teachers are capable of developing knowledge and positive attitudes towards inclusion. This also suggests that teaching approaches and strategies for vulnerable pupils are not significantly different from the approaches used to teach all pupils (Davis & Florian, 2004; Florian, 2007). Florian and Rouse (2001) argue that although some children might need extra support, teachers do not distinguish between 'types' of SEN when planning this support; moreover, as Lewis and Norwich (2005) state, when teachers receive high-quality oriented pre-service education and have experience in inclusive schools, they need considerably less subsequent in-service training or advice from specialists.

Following the above-mentioned research, disabilities result not from impairments, as promoters of special education claim, but rather from a lack of opportunities, participation and education (McConkey, 2001). This means that there is a wide range of things teachers can do to reduce the disabilities, and the task of teacher education programmes is to let them know and experience that. To achieve this within teacher education programmes, particular attention needs to be paid to challenging the deterministic views of ability. According to Florian (2007, p. 17; see also Florian, 2008), "deeper consideration needs to be given to the power of the beliefs that teachers hold about human ability, teaching, learning and specialist knowledge. Rethinking the concept of normalcy requires consideration of how it is conveyed in teacher education and reinforced when working with pupils in schools". This is further confirmed by Jordan et al. (2010, p. 540), who suggest that:

> "There are significant relationships between what teachers believe about ability, disability and the nature of knowledge and how learning is accomplished, and their beliefs about their roles and responsibilities for instructing all their students. These beliefs in turn influence how they teach and how effective they are in reaching their students with and without SEN."

The Present Study

We strongly agree with Rouse (2008) that the crucial element in the development of inclusive practice is a better preparation and support for teachers. To achieve this, we need to have a clear picture of teacher students' (students') attitudes towards diversity, disability, learning and teaching. Therefore, the present study was designed to explore the students' attitudes concerning the factors that affect the learning difficulties of vulnerable pupils. In particular, we investigated whether students' attitudes point to the medical 'deficiency' discourse, where disability is seen as the main cause of learning difficulties, reflected in the question, '*What is wrong with this child?*' (Rouse, 2008, p. 7), or more to a pedagogical discourse based on teachers' support, interventions

and responsibility for learning of all pupils in the class, reflected in the question, *'What does the child need to support his/her learning?'* (Rouse, 2008, p. 7). Additionally, we wanted to find out whether attitudes of students from Slovenia (Ljubljana) and Serbia (Jagodina) moved towards pedagogic discourse (Fulcher, 1989) and in favour of inclusive education during their four-year studies. Therefore, the purpose of the study was to address the following research questions and hypotheses:

  a) What are the students' attitudes towards various factors that affect the learning difficulties of vulnerable pupils?
  b) Are there any differences between first-year and fourth-year students' attitudes and the hypothesis that there are no differences between first-year and fourth-year students?
  c) Are there any differences between the attitudes of students from Slovenia and Serbia and the hypothesis that there are no differences between students from Serbia and Slovenia?

Methods

Sample

In both Slovenia and Serbia, students preparing to be class teachers in primary mainstream schools undertake their initial education at a university which offers four years of basic studies followed by one year of postgraduate studies for a master's degree in the framework of Bologna programmes.

The survey took place at the beginning of their first year (the academic year 2009/2010) and at the end of their fourth year of study (the academic year 2012/2013). The sample consisted of students enrolled at the University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Education (FE Ljubljana) and at the University of Kragujevac, Faculty of Education in Jagodina (FE Jagodina) in a full-time class teacher education programme. The survey was longitudinal. At FE Ljubljana, the questionnaire was completed in the first and the fourth year by 79 students, representing 88.76% of the enrolled students in the fourth year. At FE Jagodina, 30 students completed the questionnaire in both years, representing 28.85% of the enrolled students in the fourth year. Since these programmes are strongly dominated by female students, gender differences in attitudes could not be analysed.

Settings

The teacher education programme at FE Ljubljana includes one compulsory course in the fourth year of study on teaching vulnerable pupils, entitled 'Inclusive Education'. Topics such as theories dealing with diversity, the current situation of educationally disadvantaged pupils in schools and teaching vulnerable pupils are also included in some other obligatory and optional courses. The content of the courses is based on the broad definition of inclusive education, although the focus on teaching children with SEN prevails. There is a paucity of content needed for teaching in ethnically varied

classes with immigrant children and Roma pupils. From the point of view of students, insufficient attention is paid to the field of handling heterogeneity, individualisation and differentiation in the classroom.

In terms of students' instruction, lectures and seminars are the most prevalent forms of instruction. There are fewer practical sessions and workshops where work is carried out in smaller groups, in which students could more easily face their own stereotypes, prejudice and any fears they might have regarding the teaching of vulnerable groups of pupils. Thus, during the course of study, the emphasis is placed on providing knowledge, while teacher educators work less on the development of students' positive attitudes, dealing with fears, prejudice and stereotypes linked to vulnerable groups of pupils.

On the other hand, internships do not deal thoroughly enough with the question of how to organise work in heterogeneous classes and how to effectively use knowledge on individualisation and differentiation in teaching. It often happens that students who have had practical work, especially those who have doubts as to the feasibility of inclusion, are even more convinced of its impracticality.

The teacher education programme at FE Jagodina includes one compulsory course in the third year of study entitled 'Inclusion in Education', which is intended to prepare students for work with pupils who need additional support for learning and social participation. The content of the course is based on broad definitions of inclusive education. It aims at preparing students to teach all pupils in classes and accepting pupils' diversity as a challenge that contributes to the development and richness of instruction. The course has a strong orientation towards pedagogical discourse, covering topics dealing with socially and culturally underprivileged pupils, Roma pupils and gifted pupils as well. It also includes practical assignments, such as providing support for pupils with difficulties in learning and social participation, visits to and interviews with families from marginalised groups and so on.

The programme at FE Jagodina also includes one optional course in the first year of study entitled 'Intercultural Education', which is intended to provide competencies for instruction in multicultural classrooms. This course covers the topics of prejudice, stereotypes, discrimination, respect for cultural differences and so on. Some parts of the content related to inclusive education are covered in other courses, such as English Language (dictionary of inclusion), 'English Language Teaching Methodology for Younger Children' and 'Methods of Working with Children Gifted in Mathematics'. Courses in didactics do not provide content related to inclusive education.

In terms of internships, unfortunately, it is not certain that all students will have a chance to observe quality inclusive practice in schools. There is a huge gap between lectures intended to shape positive attitudes towards inclusion and diversity and school practice where teachers with negative attitudes towards inclusive education and vulnerable pupils might be encountered. This situation further intensifies students' prejudice and results in adverse attitudes to inclusion. Students absorb the prejudice of the teachers whose classes they observe (Macura-Milovanović, Gera, & Kovačević, 2010).

Data Collection

We prepared a pilot version of the questionnaire and tested it on a sample of students from both universities. Based on their responses and comments, we prepared the finalised version of the questionnaire, which was filled out by students at the beginning of the first year of study and at the end of the fourth year of study. The questionnaire was filled out for the first time before students had been formally introduced to issues related to inclusion. Therefore, their responses reflected a stage not influenced by discussion, knowledge or experience gained in the teacher education programme or school-based internship. The purpose of the study was described to students. When they filled out the questionnaire for the first time, they were also informed that they would be asked to fill out the same questionnaire at the end of their fourth year with the aim of determining possible changes over the period of initial education in relation to their attitudes; therefore, the information was not anonymous.

The data was collected during class sessions in both instances. Students were provided with verbal and written assurance that the collected data would not be used for any purposes other than scientific research, in accordance with the research ethics and to ensure confidentiality. The questionnaires were then distributed to the students who agreed to participate. All participants completed and returned the questionnaire.

Instrument

The questionnaire included a working definition of vulnerable pupils: "In this questionnaire, we will use the term 'vulnerable pupils' to describe pupils who, due to their specific needs, require additional support in learning and social participation". Vulnerable pupils were specifically defined as including children with SEN, children of immigrants, children belonging to various minority groups, children from disadvantaged families, refugees and internally displaced children. These children represent the most vulnerable groups in the educational systems of both countries.

The part of the questionnaire presented below asked students to specify the following: "In your opinion, which factors affect the learning difficulties of vulnerable pupils to the greatest extent?" Students provided their responses to the question using a ranking scale (where rank 1 was ascribed to the most influential factor, rank 2 to the second most influential factor and so on). The list of factors (Wang, Haertel, & Geneva, 1993; Hegedűs & Forrai, 1999; Peček & Lesar, 2006) which may directly affect pupil's academic achievements comprised the factors related to the individual pupils, to the school environment, to teaching practices and to the pupil's social environment.

Data Processing

Statistical analysis was conducted using SPSS 22.0. The frequencies of each response were calculated for each group (Ljubljana, Jagodina). Differences between groups in the first and fourth year were analysed with the χ^2 test. The pairwise t-test was used to determine the differences which emerged in the period from the first to the fourth

year, within each group. Differences with p<0.05 were considered to be statistically significant.

Results
Students' Attitudes towards Factors that Affect Learning Difficulties

As shown in Table 1, more than two-thirds of all first-year students ranked the *pupil's disability* as the factor with the greatest impact on his/her learning difficulties. Beyond this result, there was little consensus. Most students ranked family or scope and complexity of the curriculum in the second place; relations with peers between the third and fifth place; relationships with teachers between the fourth and sixth place; teaching methods and techniques in the seventh place; and wider social environment in the eighth place. The question also gave the respondents the option to specify other factors. Only six students in Ljubljana opted to do so. These other factors included friends, depression and the pupil's personality.

Differences in the responses were observed between students from Ljubljana and Jagodina. For students from Ljubljana, *school culture*, *family* and *relations with peers* seemed to be more important factors than for students from Jagodina.

Table 1

First-year students' attitudes towards factors which affect the learning difficulties of vulnerable pupils

	Group of students	1 (%)	2 (%)	3 (%)	4 (%)	5 (%)	6 (%)	7 (%)	8 (%)	9 (%)	χ^2	Sig.
						Rank						
School culture	FE Jag.	0.0	16.7	13.3	10.0	10.0	6.7	30.0	13.3	0.0		
	FE Lj.	5.1	19.0	20.3	19.0	15.2	7.6	5.1	8.9	0.0		
	Total	3.7	18.3	18.3	16.5	13.8	7.3	11.9	10.1	0.0	15.432	.031
Pupil's disability	FE Jag.	63.3	3.3	3.3	0.0	3.3	23.3	3.3	0.0	0.0		
	FE Lj.	72.2	6.3	3.8	3.8	2.5	7.6	1.3	2.5	0.0		
	Total	69.7	5.5	3.7	2.8	2.8	11.9	1.8	1.8	0.0	7.582	.371
Family	FE Jag.	16.7	10.0	0.0	6.7	16.7	13.3	10.0	26.7	0.0		
	FE Lj.	8.9	30.4	12.7	11.4	13.9	3.8	7.6	11.4	0.0		
	Total	11.0	24.8	9.2	10.1	14.7	6.4	8.3	15.6	0.0	15.723	.028
Wider social environment	FE Jag.	0.0	3.3	10.0	10.0	3.3	26.7	20.0	26.7	0.0		
	FE Lj.	7.6	2.5	11.4	15.2	2.5	13.9	11.4	35.4	0.0		
	Total	5.5	2.8	11.0	13.8	2.8	17.4	13.8	33.0	0.0	6.547	.478
Relations with peers	FE Jag.	0.0	6.7	20.0	20.0	46.7	0.0	6.7	0.0	0.0		
	FE Lj.	5.1	13.9	22.8	19.0	13.9	7.6	13.9	3.8	0.0		
	Total	3.7	11.9	22.0	19.3	22.9	5.5	11.9	2.8	0.0	17.109	.017
Relations with teachers	FE Jag.	6.7	6.7	30.0	23.3	10.0	16.7	3.3	3.3	0.0		
	FE Lj.	3.8	2.5	10.1	17.7	25.3	19.0	16.5	5.1	0.0		
	Total	4.6	3.7	15.6	19.3	21.1	18.3	12.8	4.6	0.0	12.803	.077
Scope and complexity of the curriculum	FE Jag.	6.7	30.0	6.7	20.0	3.3	10.0	13.3	10.0	0.0		
	FE Lj.	3.8	24.1	12.7	5.1	16.5	15.2	13.9	8.9	0.0		
	Total	4.6	25.7	11.0	9.2	12.8	13.8	13.8	9.2	0.0	10.063	.185
Teaching methods and techniques	FE Jag.	6.7	23.3	16.7	10.0	6.7	3.3	13.3	20.0	0.0		
	FE LJ.	5.1	5.1	12.7	7.6	5.1	20.3	25.3	19.0	0.0		
	Total	5.5	10.1	13.8	8.3	5.5	15.6	22.0	19.3	0.0	13.222	.067
Something else. Please specify:	FE Jag.	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0		
	FE Lj.	0.0	16.7	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	83.3	36.000	.000
	Total	0.0	2.8	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	13.9		

As shown in Table 2, fourth-year students' responses were still skewed towards the pupil's *disability* as the factor with the greatest impact. Again, beyond this result, there was little consensus. Most students ranked *family* in the second place, *relations with peers* between the third and seventh place, school culture in the fourth place, relations with teachers between the second and sixth place, and the wider social environment in the eighth place. Nine students, eight from Jagodina and one from Ljubljana, opted for other factors. Only one student from Ljubljana specified motivation.

Differences in the responses between two groups of students were observed. Students from Ljubljana considered *pupil's disability* to be more important than was the case with students from Jagodina. They also viewed *relations with peers* and *with teachers* as less important than students from Jagodina did.

Table 2

Fourth-year students' attitudes towards factors that affect the learning difficulties of vulnerable pupils

	Group of students	1 (%)	2 (%)	3 (%)	4 (%)	5 (%)	6 (%)	7 (%)	8 (%)	9 (%)	χ²	Sig.
School culture	FE Jag.	16.7	13.3	3.3	26.7	20.0	3.3	13.3	3.3	0.0		
	FE Lj.	2.5	7.6	10.1	21.5	16.5	17.7	17.7	6.3	0.0		
	Total	6.4	9.2	8.3	22.9	17.4	13.8	16.5	5.5	0.0	13.047	.071
Pupil's disability	FE Jag.	36.7	3.3	10.0	10.0	6.7	13.3	6.7	13.3	0.0		
	FE Lj.	65.8	15.2	3.8	1.3	6.3	6.3	1.3	0.0	0.0		
	Total	57.8	11.9	5.5	3.7	6.4	8.3	2.8	3.7	0.0	25.934	.001
Family	FE Jag.	16.7	16.7	10.0	3.3	16.7	3.3	10.0	23.3	0.0		
	FE Lj.	12.7	27.8	12.7	15.2	11.4	5.1	11.4	3.8	0.0		
	Total	13.8	24.8	11.9	11.9	12.8	4.6	11.0	9.2	0.0	13.739	.056
Wider social environment	FE Jag.	3.3	6.7	16.7	3.3	6.7	13.3	20.0	26.7	3.3		
	FE Lj.	1.3	2.5	6.3	6.3	5.1	6.3	12.7	58.2	1.3		
	Total	1.8	3.7	9.2	5.5	5.5	8.3	14.7	49.5	1.8	11.477	.176
Relations with peers	FE Jag.	16.7	13.3	13.3	16.7	10.0	20.0	10.0	0.0	0.0		
	FE Lj.	1.3	3.8	20.3	17.7	21.5	16.5	17.7	1.3	0.0		
	Total	5.5	6.4	18.3	17.4	18.3	17.4	15.6	0.9	0.0	15.969	.025
Relations with teachers	FE Jag.	20.0	23.3	20.0	13.3	10.0	6.7	6.7	0.0	0.0		
	FE Lj.	3.8	10.1	15.2	16.5	15.2	24.1	12.7	2.5	0.0		
	Total	8.3	13.8	16.5	15.6	13.8	19.3	11.0	1.8	0.0	15.414	.031
Scope and complexity of teaching methods and techniques	FE Jag.	0.0	20.0	20.0	10.0	10.0	16.7	13.3	10.0	0.0		
	FE Lj.	0.0	16.5	13.9	17.7	13.9	11.4	11.4	15.2	0.0		
	Total	0.0	17.4	15.6	15.6	12.8	12.8	11.9	13.8	0.0	2.728	.842
	FE Jag.	3.3	3.3	10.0	16.7	20.0	16.7	13.3	16.7	0.0		
Something else.	FE LJ.	11.4	16.5	17.7	3.8	10.1	12.7	15.2	12.7	0.0		
	Total	9.2	12.8	15.6	7.3	12.8	13.8	14.7	13.8	0.0	12.401	.088
	FE Jag.	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	12.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	87.5		
Please specify:	FE Lj.	100	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0		
	Total	11.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	11.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	77.8	9.000	.011

Differences between First-Year and Fourth-Year Students' Responses

Differences between students' responses in the first and the fourth year of study from Ljubljana were evident within four factors (Table 3). While *school culture, wider social environment* and *relations with peers* seemed to be less important factors in the opinion of the fourth-year students, *teaching methods and techniques* seemed

to be more important. In summing up those results, we may suggest that students from Ljubljana in both years of study included in this research viewed the pupil's *disability* as the most important factor. It can be also observed that during the study, the significance of social factors diminished, while the factor of teaching methods and techniques gained in importance.

Differences between the students' responses in the first and the fourth year of study from Jagodina were exhibited only in one factor, *school culture*, which was more important in the opinion of fourth-year students than in the opinion of first-year students. If we look at the mean difference for the factor of pupils' *disability*, we can also observe a difference, since fourth-year students (36.7% put it in the first place) attached less importance to this factor than first-year students (63.3% put it in the first place). However, since the standard error mean is huge, the difference is not statistically significant. In comparison to first-year students, fourth-year students also gave more importance to *relations with teachers*. However, this difference was not statistically significant either. In summing up the results, we may suggest that there was a tendency among fourth-year students from Jagodina to place greater emphasis on teachers, while disability started to lose its importance.

Table 3

Differences between first-year and fourth-year students' responses

		Ljubljana				Jagodina			
Study year		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Sig	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Sig.
School culture	4	4.97	1.790	.201	.003	4.00	2.068	.378	.045
	1	4.08	1.947	.219		5.20	2.172	.397	
Pupil's disability	1	1.99	1.905	.214	.777	2.60	2.313	.422	.094
	4	1.91	1.634	.184		3.80	2.657	.485	
Family	4	3.65	2.063	.232	.444	4.53	2.675	.488	.337
	1	3.90	2.234	.251		5.10	2.604	.475	
Wider social environment	1	5.67	2.335	.263	.000	6.07	1.799	.328	.604
	4	6.80	1.890	.213		5.77	2.300	.420	
Relations with peers	4	4.81	1.586	.178	.016	3.90	2.023	.369	.311
	1	4.20	1.884	.212		4.33	1.213	.221	
Relations with teachers	1	5.06	1.659	.187	.113	4.03	1.691	.309	.062
	4	4.65	1.783	.201		3.17	1.821	.332	
Scope and complexity of the curriculum	4	4.85	2.045	.230	.320	4.63	2.076	.379	.307
	1	4.52	2.159	.243		4.17	2.291	.418	
Teaching methods and techniques	1	5.59	2.115	.238	.003	4.50	2.502	.457	.132
	4	4.47	2.390	.269		5.33	1.900	.347	
Something else. Please specify:	4	.	.	.	.000	8.50	1.414	.500	.000
	1	.	.	.		.00		.000	

Discussion

Students' Attitudes towards Pupils' Disability

Students' attitudes in the first year compared to the fourth year of study changed within four factors amongst students in Ljubljana and one factor amongst students

in Jagodina. It is appreciated that during the study, both groups of students chose to place greater emphasis on teachers. However, the most intriguing question is why most students in their first and in the fourth year from both countries believe that pupils' disabilities have the greatest influence on their learning difficulties.

First of all, both countries have special schools for pupils with SEN. Some confusion arises from this, including an underlying assumption that special school teachers have specific expertise, and that special schools have smaller class sizes and a high level of individualisation (Macura-Milovanović, Pantić, & Closs, 2012), through which pupils' disabilities can be easily addressed. Accordingly, many regular school teachers genuinely believe that they cannot undertake any work with pupils with SEN, and that special schools are the best option for them (Peček & Lesar, 2006).

Secondly, in both countries, special and regular teachers receive their professional education in separate study programmes. A result of the two-track teacher education system is that students and teachers frequently perceive that they do not have sufficient knowledge on vulnerable pupils' specificities and particularities, as well as that they are not familiar enough with their deficiencies and diagnoses, in order to teach them. As a result, they are not willing to accept the mandated responsibility for inclusion, as illustrated by the following teacher's statement: "Inclusion must be based on the voluntary principle. It is not right that someone simply 'gives you' a child with SEN and expects you to work with him. If it were so simple, study programmes at the Faculty of Defectology would not last four years" (Macura-Milovanović, Gera, & Kovačević, 2010, p. 39). These opinions are widely held, and it is highly unlikely that students would have opinions significantly different from the opinions of their older colleagues. This may support the students' tendency to look at pupils with difficulties in learning primarily through the lens of disability, and not through the role of the pupil, thereby implicitly following the medical discourse.

The important question is why, although teacher education programmes in both faculties make a special effort to educate students to work in inclusive settings, we cannot discern statistically significant differences in attitudes to pupils' disability when we compare students' answers from the first with the answers from the fourth year of study. We assume that one explanation could have to do with the paucity of courses and internships related to inclusive education understood broadly, as well as a lack of cross-curricular coverage of the content related to inclusive education. Such content is not sufficiently contained in didactic courses in the programmes of both faculties. Furthermore, less classic teaching approaches and more interactive approaches and methods, as well as more practical experience of students during internship in inclusive settings might also contribute to lessen the importance of pupil's disability. As Rouse (2008, p. 12) suggested, "developing effective inclusive practice is not only about extending teachers' knowledge, but it is also about encouraging them to do things differently and getting them to reconsider their attitudes and beliefs. In other words, it should be about 'knowing', 'doing' and 'believing'".

Another factor could be related to the negative attitudes which some teacher educators and teachers with whom students carry out their internships have towards inclusive education, specifically their understanding of disability as more or less an internal, fixed or pathological condition that is not amenable to instruction. Negative attitudes of teacher educators have been identified as one of the obstacles to the development of inclusive education in Serbia, as the following quotation from a teacher educator illustrates: "Teachers who educate future teachers are not themselves educated in this respect, except for some individuals. Future teachers have not had an opportunity to be trained for instruction in inclusive classes" (Macura-Milovanović, Gera, & Kovačević, 2010, p. 49).

Cross-country Differences Related to Students' Attitudes

According to the results of the study, in the first study year, *school culture, family* and *relations with peers* seemed to be more important factors for students from Ljubljana than for those from Jagodina. In the fourth year, students from Ljubljana viewed *pupil's disability* as more important than students from Jagodina did. They also viewed *relations with peers* and *with teachers* as less important than students from Jagodina did. In our view, the differences between the two groups of students can be explained not only according to differences in the teacher education programmes in the two faculties, but also in relation to the general educational context and education policy, for example, the ways in which education of children with SEN is regulated in the two countries.

In Slovenia, according to educational laws, pupils with SEN may be included in mainstream schools if they are capable of achieving the educational standards established by regular school curricula (Ministry of Education, Science, and Sport, 2011). Thus, pupils who do not succeed in reaching educational standards despite additional support (individual educational programmes, additional work with teachers and experts, adaptations of curriculum, etc.) may be referred to special schools. This is why we can say that SEN education is based on the medical discourse: the concept of educational system does not support the inclusion of vulnerable groups of pupils in a broad sense. It also contributes to the diminishing teachers' sense of responsibility for teaching those children. The task of the teacher is mainly to identify whether a child needs additional help and to assist him/her if the help is needed within the framework of what is 'manageable' for the teacher; otherwise, the teacher refers the pupil to the school counselling service or begins the process whereby the child could be referred to a special school. This context is reflected in the teacher education process, which is related to the current situation of educationally disadvantaged pupils in school. Although educational law has been criticised within some courses, this does not seem to contribute sufficiently to the development of students' attitudes towards supporting the inclusion of vulnerable groups of pupils in a broad sense, diminishing students' initial prejudice concerning the importance of pupils' disability when it comes to learning difficulties of vulnerable pupils or raising their awareness of the importance of the teacher.

In Serbia, according to the Law on the Foundations of the Education System (LoF, 2009), every child has the right to be enrolled in the first grade of regular primary school. LoF defines inclusion as *a principle*, introducing the right to all levels of education in the regular system without discrimination or segregation of pupils from marginalised and vulnerable social groups or those with 'developmental difficulties and disabilities' (LoF, 2009, Article 6). Therefore, teaching vulnerable pupils is primarily the responsibility of teachers. The task of the teacher is to identify whether a child needs additional help, make any necessary adaptations and individualise the teaching process and finally, if previous measures have not shown results, create individual education plans (IEPs) in cooperation with pupils' parents. These may be generated for pupils with exceptional abilities, social vulnerability, mental or physical disabilities or those who, for other significant reasons, require additional support in education. A pupil with difficulties will be assessed in regard to the aims set out in his/her IEP, and not through comparison with other pupils. It is possible to alter educational standards for a particular pupil, and to create an IEP according to the altered (individualised) content in the school curriculum.

The described changes in the socio-political context of education policy in Serbia might be related to students' attitudes, as they are gradually becoming aware that they will be responsible for the teaching and learning of all pupils in their classes, not only the typical ones. This shift in students' attitudes is partly due to broad definitions of inclusion and social/pedagogical discourse present in the both education laws and courses within initial teacher education.

Conclusions

The results analysed above suggest that a distinction between vulnerable children and other children still remains in students' minds. We presume that fragmentation between special teacher education and regular teacher education, as well as fragmentation between special education and regular (mainstream) education, has contributed to these students' attitudes. Moreover, we consider that as a result of this fragmentation, students are not persuaded to take responsibility for vulnerable pupils, and this has hindered the process of inclusion. Therefore, the key question and challenge related to future teacher education is how to educate regular teacher students to become more open and accept differences and to be willing to embrace diversity in the classroom.

In order to facilitate the students' ability to manage inclusive education, teacher education institutions should first of all ensure that the content related to teaching vulnerable pupils becomes part of all of the courses in which the teachers are trained for their profession, including the didactic subjects. To achieve this, it might be necessary to confront teacher educators' attitudes towards inclusion.

Secondly, teacher education programmes should be based on research demonstrating that teaching approaches and strategies for vulnerable pupils are not significantly

different from the approaches used to teach all pupils (Davis & Florian, 2004; Florian, 2008).

Thirdly, in teacher education programmes there should be clear awareness that every child can learn (Florian, 2007), and that the main obstacle in some pupils' learning is not their disability, perceived as the pupil's problem, but rather a lack of opportunities, participation and education (McConkey, 2001).

Fourthly, effective teacher education has to include knowledge, practice and management of students' attitudes and beliefs. According to Rouse (2008), the analysis of content knowledge is important, but ultimately insufficient when it comes to improving practice in schools because many teachers do not act upon this knowledge when they return to the classroom. Thus, teacher educators need to be aware there might be a large gap between what teachers know as a result of their teacher education programme and what they actually do in their classrooms. This is why it is important for teachers to know how to transfer knowledge to practice.

Further on, it is necessary to challenge students' beliefs that disability means immunity to learning, and to challenge their resulting beliefs about their roles and responsibilities, as well as their epistemological beliefs about the nature of knowing, knowledge and the process of acquiring knowledge. Teacher education programmes should focus on students' tacit beliefs related to inclusion. Tacit beliefs can become explicit when students have the opportunity to reflect on and discuss them, and to be challenged by feedback from colleagues and peers (Jordan, Schwartz, & McGhie-Richmond, 2009). These issues can be addressed through courses that provide students with opportunities to analyse their attitudes through peer discussion and to be exposed to positive attitudes toward inclusion. Thus, teacher educators will be able to rely not only on methods, such as persuasion, teaching and informing; rather, during the study process, more interactive approaches and methods should be used, such as role play, simulation and group work, all of which 'place' students in situations where they experience and see first-hand what it means to be different, marginalised, stigmatised and discriminated against, as well as what it means to discriminate against others. Student teachers' active role is therefore essential, as it is evident from previous research that the most convincing arguments are those presented by students themselves (Samaluk & Turnšek, 2011). For students to be more competent in facing their implicit theories, it would be sensible to discern their beliefs and attitudes as soon as possible at the beginning of their studies. In this way, the study process can be better planned based on these implicit theories.

Finally, teacher education programmes need to examine the current models of internship. Studies show that work and interaction with pupils from various vulnerable groups increase self-confidence and trust in students' own teaching competencies. Thus, it is important for students to have opportunities to observe high-quality teaching in diverse classrooms and to gain personal experience in working with vulnerable pupils (Loreman, Forlin, & Sharma, 2007; Sharma, Forlin, & Loreman,

2008). It is also important for students to have high-quality mentoring in schools which have strong inclusion policies and practices.

This study shows there is an urgent need for teacher education institutions and teacher educators to build partnerships with schools and to focus on how they can respond together to ongoing changes in teachers' roles and responsibilities, to move away from the medical 'deficit model' and to enable students to gain experience of teaching vulnerable pupils on a regular basis. In a partnership model of initial education, education for inclusive teaching should permeate various elements of the theoretical part of the programme (educational issues and subject teaching courses) and internships (Nash & Norwich, 2010). We think that the creation of a partnership model would help students understand the message that inclusive education is a part of the mission and vision of the teacher education institution at which they are undertaking their initial professional education, not just an interest of some teacher educators.

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Mojca Peček
Faculty of Education, University of Ljubljana
Kardeljeva ploščad 16, 1000 Ljubljana, Slovenia
mojca.pecek@guest.arnes.si

Sunčica Macura-Milovanović
Faculty of Education in Jagodina, University of Kragujevac,
M. Mijalkovića 14, 35000 Jagodina, Serbia
suncicamacura@gmail.com

Ivan Čuk
Faculty of sport, University of Ljubljana
Gortanova 22, 1000 Ljubljana, Slovenia
ivan.cuk@fsp.uni-lj.si

Redovni i specijalni pristup u procesu obrazovanja učitelja

Sažetak

Nastavnici koji obrazuju buduće učitelje trebali bi imati jasnu predodžbu o tome koje stavove njihovi studenti imaju prema raznolikosti, učenicima s teškoćama u učenju i poučavanju, jer bi im te predodžbe mogle uvelike biti od koristi pri izradi studijskih programa za obrazovanje budućih učitelja, a zahvaljujući kojima bi budući učitelji mogli biti bolje pripremljeni za rad u inkluzivnom okruženju. Stoga je istraživanje prikazano u ovom radu provedeno da bi se ispitali stavovi studenata pedagoških fakulteta upisanih na učiteljske studijske programe u Sloveniji (Sveučilište u Ljubljani, Pedagoški fakultet) i Srbiji (Sveučilište u Kragujevcu, Fakultet pedagoških nauka u Jagodini) prema čimbenicima koji mogu utjecati na poteškoće u učenju učenika s posebnim potrebama. Rezultati istraživanja upućuju na to da većina studenata, budućih učitelja, na prvoj i četvrtoj godini studija u obje države smatra da je učenikova teškoća čimbenik koji ima najveći utjecaj na njegove/njezine poteškoće u učenju. Autori ovog rada smatraju da podjela na obrazovanje učitelja za rad u specijalnim školama i na obrazovanje učitelja za rad u ostalim školama, tj. na specijalno i uobičajeno obrazovanje, može kod studenata stvoriti stavove koji nisu pogodni za stvaranje osjećaja odgovornosti za učenike s posebnim potrebama i tako mogu usporavati proces inkluzije. U ostatku rada raspravlja se o važnosti navedenih rezultata za učiteljske studijske programe.

Ključne riječi: *inkluzivno obrazovanje; specijalno obrazovanje; stavovi; studenti učiteljskih fakulteta; učenici s teškoćama.*