

ATTITUDES OF CROATIAN AND POLISH ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TEACHERS TOWARDS INCLUSIVE EDUCATION OF CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

¹KATARZYNA ĆWIRYNKAŁO, ²TAMARA KISOVAR-IVANDA, ³JESS L. GREGORY, ¹AGNIESZKA ŻYTA, ⁴ALEKSANDRA ARCISZEWSKA, ²SMILJANA ZRILIĆ

¹Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn, Poland. Contact: katarzyna2710@wp.pl

³Educational Leadership and Policy Studies, Southern Connecticut State University, New Haven, United States of America

²Department of Teacher and Preschool Teacher Education, University of Zadar, Croatia

¹Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn, Poland

⁴Department of Affective Disorders, Chair of Psychiatry, Jagiellonian University Medical College, Poland

²Department of Teacher and Preschool Teacher Education, University of Zadar, Croatia

Received: 30.5.2017.

Accepted: 13.9.2017.

Original scientific paper

UDK: 376.1-056.34 (497.5:438)

Abstract: *Inclusive education has been gaining increasing attention from governments throughout the world. Croatia and Poland, two European Union members that ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, have been working on issues related to improving the quality of education of children with special educational needs. The aim of this article was to explore the attitudes of Croatian and Polish elementary education teachers towards inclusion of these children in regular classes. The sample consisted of 98 elementary education teachers from Croatia (N=50) and Poland (N=48). A diagnostic survey based on the Teacher Attitudes Toward Inclusion Scale (TATIS) (Cullen, Gregory, & Noto, 2010) was used. The instrument allows measurement of three main components of attitudes: teacher perceptions of students with mild to moderate disabilities (POS), their beliefs about the efficacy of inclusion (BEI), perceptions of professional roles and functions (PRF), as well as their general attitudes towards inclusion. We found that Polish teachers received significantly higher scores on two subscales: POS and BEI. We also found that age and place of living influenced the attitudes of teachers in the two groups. Implications for practice are discussed.*

Key words: *inclusive education, children with disabilities, teachers' attitudes*

INTRODUCTION

The need to provide education for all children regardless of their abilities and disabilities is highlighted in policies, initiatives and legislation both nationally in Poland and Croatia and internationally (UNESCO, 1994, 2015a, 2015b; Dunne and O'Connor, 2012). As a consequence, over the last few decades education in mainstream schools has become the most popular form of education of children with disabilities in many European countries (Leyser and Kirk, 2004; Hausstätter and Jahnukainen, 2015; Vaz et al., 2015). Nonetheless, it is often noted that integration of typically developing students and students with disabilities is enacted at an institutional level, whereas their interpersonal and psychological integration is neglected

(Krause, 2000). The concept of inclusion, which is derived from integration, emphasises the issues of rights, equity and social justice; therefore, thinking about inclusion solely in terms of school placement would be misguided (Dunne and O'Connor, 2012). In practical terms, the term "inclusion" is used to describe a state in which every student in a class is regarded as an individual and in which everybody should benefit from the best possible learning opportunities with no need to segregate children with and without disabilities (Schwab et al. 2015). Thus, inclusion argues against discrimination (Avramidis et al., 2000) and dictates an acceptance of all students irrespective of their differences, difficulties experienced by them (Żółkowska, 2008) or the additional support that some may require (Scanlon, 2012).

Educational systems for students with developmental difficulties and disabilities in the Republic of Croatia and the Republic of Poland are in many ways similar, which is partially dictated by their political situations. Both countries are European Union members (Poland since 2004, Croatia since 2013) and have ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (Croatia – in 2007, Poland – in 2012), which recognises the inherent dignity as well as the equal rights of all people and according to which a disability is the result of the interaction between individuals with disabilities and barriers that exist in the environment and that prevents those individuals' full and effective participation in society (UNESCO, 2015a; UNESCO, 2015b).

Students with developmental difficulties and disabilities were institutionalised and marginalised in Polish and Croatian society for many years. In Croatia, the right of children with disabilities to learn in mainstream schools was legalized in 1980 and in Poland in 1991 (although students with disabilities other than intellectual have never been totally excluded from attending these schools). Since that time there has been a rapid development of integrative and inclusive forms of education for all students at every stage, from primary school to universities. Contemporary Croatian schools presume the integration of children with various developmental difficulties and disabilities, including visual impairments (blind and partially sighted); hearing impairments (deaf and hard of hearing); sound, speech and language disorders; specific learning difficulties; motor disorders and chronic diseases; reduced intellectual abilities; behaviour, hyperactivity and attention disorders; disorders on the autistic spectrum; and different types and levels of difficulty in psychophysical development (Croatian National Education Standard, 2008). In Poland schools are obliged to adjust the process of teaching to the needs of students with basic disabilities (hearing and visual impairments, physical disabilities, intellectual disabilities and autistic spectrum disorders) as well as to the needs of those who are gifted or who have specific learning difficulties, communication disorders, chronic disease, or needs caused by environmental neglect, difficult personal or family situations, particular ways of spending

leisure time, environmental contacts or adaptive difficulties connected with cultural differences or with changes in the educational environment, such as earlier education abroad (Rozporządzenie MEN, 2013). Prerequisites for the realisation of a contemporary approach to education imply changes in terminology, introduction of diverse contents and forms of working, acquisition of teacher competences and modification of legal provisions. It is important to focus attention on the ability and needs of the student, individualise upbringing and education work, provide additional support to students through rehabilitation programmes, and include special educators or trained assistants in schooling.

Education models for students with disabilities applied in Croatia are: (1) an individualised approach, (2) adapted upbringing and educational programs, and (3) the model of partial integration. The individualised approach in education takes into consideration differences in the capacities, needs and goals of an individual and adapts to each pupil. An adapted upbringing and education programme is defined as the one appropriate for a student with developmental difficulties and disabilities, but it generally presumes the reduction of intensity and extensity through appropriate selection of teaching content enriched with specific methods, means and tools. This adapted approach implies content and methodological adjustment of teaching content, while an individualised approach implies only methodological adjustment. Attention is directed to the possibilities and needs of the student, individualisation of upbringing and education work, and provision of additional support for students through rehabilitation programmes and the inclusion of capable teaching assistants and others (Zrilić and Bedeković, 2012).

In Poland three main forms of education are available for children with developmental difficulties and disabilities: segregative (special schools), inclusive (or mainstream) and integrative. The last form, integrative, has been developed since 1991 and is a specific form of education for both students with and without disabilities. 'Integrative' school, however, is not exactly the same as a mainstream school. In integrative classes, which can be formed both in integrative and in mainstream schools –

although not as often in the latter - there are up to 20 students in general, including, usually, 3 to 5 students with special educational needs (based on professional assessment). Apart from a general education teacher, there is also a special educator working in such a class, whereas in mainstream (inclusive) classes there are usually up to 26 students (although there are no central regulations on the maximum number of students, so sometimes there are more), and special educators are involved in education far less frequently. Nonetheless, in each form of education, schools (and teachers) are obliged to adjust their teaching and requirements to students' special educational needs.

In Croatia, at the end of the school year 2013/2014, 16,318 students with disabilities (88.87% of all students with disabilities) were enrolled in mainstream primary schools, while 1,817 students with disabilities (11.13%) attended special primary schools. At the same time in Polish primary schools (in which there are six grades, not eight as in Croatia), there were 23,408 students with disabilities (39.06%) in special schools, 21,706 (36.22%) in integrative schools, 14,041 (23.43%) in mainstream schools and 774 (1.29%) in special classes of mainstream schools¹. The data show that the Croatian primary education system is more integrative than the Polish one, since only 11.13% of Croatian students with disabilities attend special schools compared to 39.06% in Poland.

Although legal regulations in Poland and Croatia guarantee the right of students with disabilities to receive education in regular classes, the process of providing all learners with equal educational opportunities is still considered a challenge in the two countries. The reasons can be found in the large number of students in classes, insufficient number of professional staff in schools, lack of professional education and rehabilitation support, (in)-competence, work overload and (negative) attitudes towards inclusion of children with developmental difficulties and disabilities expressed by teachers, and other reasons (Zrilić and Bedeković, 2012; Ćwirynkało, 2013). According to Zrilić and

Bedeković (2012) it is necessary to modernise and systematise existing programmes for education of students with developmental difficulties and disabilities, as well as establish systematic follow-up of students after they complete primary education.

Croatia does not yet have a fully structured national curriculum, but attitudes towards inclusion of children with disabilities can be observed in The Croatian National Curriculum Framework (2011). The Framework guarantees that all students have equal possibilities for participating in the upbringing and education system together with their peers through complete or partial integration, in line with their abilities. This creates a foundation for the elaboration of an individualised curriculum. Such a structured teaching curriculum assumes that students can develop their own potential in line with their own learning preferences (from cognitive, affective, motivational and social standpoints). Educational experts in Croatia currently respect the following legal provisions that determine possibilities of educating children with developmental difficulties and disabilities: Rules for Determining Children's and Students' Psychophysical State and for Creating Expert Commissions (Pravilnik o postupku utvrđivanja psihofizičkog stanja djeteta, učenika te sastavu stručnih povjerenstava), NN, 67/14), Regulations on Upbringing and Education of Students with Developmental Difficulties in Elementary and Secondary School (Pravilnik o osnovnoškolskom i srednjoškolskom odgoju i obrazovanju učenika s teškoćama u razvoju, NN 24/2015), Amendments and Addenda to Regulations on the Number of Students in Regular and Mixed Classes and Educational Groups in Primary School (Pravilnik o izmjenama i dopunama pravilnika o broju učenika u redovitom i kombiniranom razrednom odjelu i odgojno-obrazovnoj skupini u osnovnoj školi, NN 124/2010), and the Plan and Program for Primary Schools (Nastavni plan i program za osnovnu školu, lektorirani, MZOŠ, 2013).

Within the literature on inclusion, there is growing evidence that teachers play a key role in the development of high-quality education systems (Berry, 2010; European Agency for Special Needs

¹ More information on statistical data can be found on: Croatian Bureau of Statistics (2015) Statistical Reports; Retrieved 12 June, 2016 from: http://www.dzs.hr/Hrv_Eng/publication/2015/SI-1543.pdf; Oświata i wychowanie w roku szkolnym 2014/2015 (Education in 2014/2015 School Year) (2015) Central Statistical Office; Retrieved 14 June, 2016 from: file:///C:/Users/user/AppData/Local/Temp/oswiata_i_wychowanie_w_roku_szkolnym_2014-2015.pdf.

and Inclusive Education, 2015; Navarro et al., 2016). SharmilaVaz et al. (2015) identified several factors associated with teachers' attitudes towards inclusion of children with developmental difficulties and disabilities in mainstream school. They include age, gender, teaching efficacy and training. Other researchers suggest that attitudes are also correlated with the socioeconomic status of the school where teachers work (the lower the status, the more positive attitudes towards inclusion – Razer et al., 2015), previous personal contacts with people with disabilities (which predict more positive affective attitudes – Dias and Cadime, 2016), the type and severity of the student's disability (Haq and Mundia, 2012; Ćwirynkało and Żyta, 2015; Ćwirynkało and Myśliwczyk, 2016), previous experience teaching classes with both typically developing students and students with developmental difficulties and disabilities (which predicts less positive behavioural intentions – Dias and Cadime, 2016) as well as the process of planning for inclusion and the support that teachers feel (Boyle et al., 2012).

In the present article, a classical theory of 'attitude' by Fishbein and Ajzen (1972) has been applied. According to this theory, attitude has been conceptualised as an aggregate of cognitive, affective, and behavioural dimensions. Further, while the behaviours are observable in the field, Fishbein and Ajzen assert that the affective and cognitive domains of attitude drive the behavioural intentions. The classical concept of 'attitude' seems to be one of the most popular also in recent studies. For example, a quantitative study by Gregory et al. (2016) used the three dimensions of attitude as a diagnostic tool to determine what type of professional learning would most positively impact teachers' attitudes towards inclusion.

The problem of teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education is also dealt with in recent Croatian literature (Vuković, 2016; Kelava, 2016; Mlinarević and Zrilić, 2015; Bouillet and Bukvić, 2015) and Polish literature (Ćwirynkało and Żyta, 2015). Great attention is given to social support because not all persons with disabilities receive adequate support. Therefore, it is professional duty to encourage and educate families who could participate in support, and the authors also point out the importance of regular training of professional

staff. The results of their investigations show the need for further systematic evaluation of inclusion in schools and kindergartens with the aim of creating guidelines for development of inclusive culture and implementation of high-quality inclusive practice (Chrzanowska, 2015).

As far as inclusive education is concerned, one of the key messages is that it should be introduced as early as possible (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2014), since it benefits both typically and non-typically developing young students. Taking this into account, we believe that it is essential to investigate the attitudes of a specific group of teachers, i.e. teachers who work with the first three grades of primary school. We believe it is essential to understand their attitudes towards inclusive education of students with mild and moderate disabilities. These students – as opposed to the ones with more severe disabilities – are most likely to be included in regular classrooms of primary schools.

AIMS OF THE RESEARCH

This paper is the result of the research "Teachers' attitudes toward inclusion of children with special educational needs in Poland and Croatia" carried out by the University of Warmia and Mazury of the Republic of Poland and the University of Zadar in the Republic of Croatia (2014-2015) in collaboration with 19 primary schools in the two countries.

The study reports data obtained from a cross-sectional survey carried out in Croatia and Poland. Teachers from several regular primary schools from the region of *warmińsko-mazurskie* voivodeship in northeastern Poland and from Zadar in Croatia were recruited for the study.

The aim of the study was to explore the attitudes of Croatian and Polish elementary school teachers towards inclusion of children with special educational needs. The following research questions were investigated in order to achieve this aim:

Research Question 1: What are the attitudes of Polish and Croatian teachers towards inclusion of children with mild to moderate disabilities in regular classrooms (with respect to their perceptions of the students, beliefs about the efficacy of inclusion, perceptions of professional roles and functions and general attitudes)?

Research Question 2: Are there any statistically important differences between Polish and Croatian teachers' attitudes towards inclusion of children with mild to moderate disabilities in regular classrooms?

Research Question 3: Are there any statistically important correlations of Polish and Croatian teachers' age with their attitudes towards inclusion of children with mild to moderate disabilities in regular classrooms?

METHOD

Instruments

In this study, the Teacher Attitudes Toward Inclusion Scale (TATIS) (Cullen et al., 2010) was used. The instrument is one of the few that measures all three domains of attitude: cognitive, affective, and behavioural. Using the scale, respondents are asked to evaluate 14 statements through assessment scales (1 – agree very strongly, 2 – strongly agree, 3 – agree, 4 – neither agree nor disagree, 5 – disagree, 6 – strongly disagree, 7 – disagree very strongly).

The validity of the original English scale was confirmed through a principal component analysis and its reliability through Cronbach's alpha correlation (Cullen et al., 2010). The instrument measures three main components: teacher perceptions of students with mild to moderate disabilities (POS, cognitive – Alpha Reliability - .803), their beliefs about the efficacy of inclusion (BEI, affective – Alpha Reliability - .863) and perceptions of professional roles and functions (PRF, behavioural – Alpha Reliability - .680) as well as teachers' general attitudes towards inclusion (Alpha Reliability for the full scale - .821).

The scale was translated forward and backward into Polish and Croatian in order to avoid differences in meaning among the three versions of the scale (English, Polish, Croatian).

Since it has been demonstrated that small changes in wording have a significant impact on the reliability of a scale of this type (Gregory and Noto, 2013), in the process of analysis we excluded several items in order to increase the instrument's reliability. The Cronbach's alpha reliability statis-

tic was .815 for the whole English version of the scale, .722 for its Croatian version and .712 for the Polish version. We deleted item 3 ("Most or all separate classrooms that exclusively serve students with mild to moderate disabilities should be eliminated"), item 10 ("I find that general education teachers often do not succeed with students with mild to moderate disabilities, even if they try their best") and item 13 ("The responsibility for educating students with mild/moderate disabilities in regular classrooms should be shared between general and special education teachers"). This made the overall alpha increase to .842 for the English version, .741 for the Croatian version and .782 for the Polish version of the scale.

The data from the survey questionnaires were statistically processed in the SPSS program.

Participants

Classroom teachers in charge of students attending elementary classes (first three grades of primary school) in the academic year 2014/2015 were eligible to participate in the research. Data were collected from 98 teachers – 50 from Croatia and 48 from Poland. In the first step of the process of recruitment of the participants of the study, regular primary schools located in the warminko-mazurskie voivodeship region of Poland and the Zadar region of Croatia were chosen using the 'lottery bowl' method. After that, the researchers asked the principals of the schools for consent to participate in the study and – after such approval – teachers signed consent forms and were asked to complete the survey questionnaires in paper and pencil format. Participation in the study was voluntary.

The majority (96%, $N = 94$) of our sample was female, whereas 4% ($N = 4$; 1 in Poland and 3 in Croatia) was male. This distribution can be considered as an adequate gender balance due to the presence of a significant proportion of women teachers (particularly in early childhood and primary levels) both in Poland and Croatia (chi-squared test with Yates' correction: 0.22, $p=0.63$).

The age and work experience of the participants are presented in Table 1. It shows that the average age of all teachers was 44.48 years, and it was similar in the two countries (Poland – 44.81;

Table 1. Age and work experience of the participants of the study

All teachers (N=98)					
Variable (years)	Average	Median	Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Std. dev.
Age	44.48	45	25	63	8.96
Work experience	19.31	20.5	1	38.4	10.72
Polish teachers (N=48)					
Variable (years)	Average	Median	Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Std. dev.
Age	44.81	47	25	57	7.83
Work experience	21.57	25	1	34	9.94
Croatian teachers (N=50)					
Variable (years)	Average	Median	Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Std. dev.
Age	44.18	43	29	63	9.98
Work experience	17.14	14	2.5	38.4	11.09

Table 2. Teachers' attitudes toward inclusion of children with mild to moderate disabilities in regular classrooms

All teachers (N=98)					
Variable	Average	Median	Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Std. dev.
POS (cog)	20.84	20	10	37	5.89
BEI (aff)	15.93	16	5	25	4.63
PRF (beh)	10.28	11	4	18	3.62
Full Scale	45.78	47	29	65	7.99

Croatia – 44.18; $t=0.34$, $p=0.73$). The average number of years of work experience was 19.31, and this differed significantly between Poland, where the average was 21.57, and Croatia, where the average was 17.14 ($t=2.06$, $p=0.04$).

Geographically, most of the teachers (68.4%) work in urban areas, and the proportions are similar in both countries.

RESULTS

Regarding the first research question, our interest was focused on the attitudes of all teachers in the sample towards inclusion of children with mild to moderate disabilities in regular classrooms. The main attitude components taken into account were:

- POS – teacher perceptions of students with mild to moderate disabilities
- BEI – beliefs about the efficacy of inclusion
- PRF – perceptions of professional roles and functions
- General attitudes

Results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2 provides an overview of average scores² of the participants. The average score of the sample in the Full Scale was 45.78 ± 7.99 (where the lowest possible score was 11 and the highest was 77). As far as the components of the attitudes towards inclusion of children with disabilities are concerned, we found that the average score was 20.84 ± 5.89 (min.=5, max=55) for POS (perceptions of students with mild to moderate disabilities – cognitive component), 15.93 ± 4.63 (min.=3, max=33) for BEI (beliefs about the efficacy of inclusion – affective component) and 10.28 ± 3.62 (min.=3, max=33) for PRF (perceptions of professional roles and functions – behavioural component).

In the second research question, our interest was focused on checking whether there are any statistically important differences between Polish and Croatian teachers in their attitudes towards inclusion of children with mild to moderate disabilities in regular classrooms.

The results are given in Table 3.

Student's t test was used to compare the groups of participants from the two countries. As indicated

2 Higher scores indicate more positive attitudes.

Table 3. Polish vs Croatian teachers' attitudes toward inclusion of children with mild to moderate disabilities in regular classrooms

ATTITUDE COMPONENT – Raw data	POLAND (Av. ± SD)	CROATIA (Av. ± SD)	T	P
POS	19.4 ± 5.4	16.0 ± 3.2	3.70*	<0.001
BEI	20.4 ± 4.0	17.8 ± 4.4	2.97	<0.01
PRF	7.1 ± 2.5	8.1 ± 2.7	-1.94	0.06
General result	44.6 ± 6.3	42.1 ± 6.7	1.85	0.07

*test with independent estimates of variance

Table 4. Age and attitudes of Polish and Croatian teachers towards inclusion of children with mild to moderate disabilities in regular classrooms

Variable	AGE – All teachers	AGE – Poland	AGE – Croatia
POS	-0.08	0.11	-0.11
	p=0.43	p=0.44	p=0.44
BEI	0.17	-0.07	0.33
	p=0.09	p=0.63	p=0.02
PRF	0.10	0.13	0.09
	p=0.35	p=0.39	p=0.54
General result	0.10	-0.07	0.21
	p=0.36	p=0.65	p=0.15

in Table 3, Polish teachers have significantly higher scores on two components: perceptions of students with mild to moderate disabilities (POS, $p < 0.001$) and beliefs about the efficacy of inclusion (BEI, $p < 0.01$). Of note is that the country of teachers' origin did not significantly influence the last scale (PRF – perceptions of professional roles and functions, $p = 0.06$) or the general result ($p = 0.07$), with Polish teachers tending to score lower on PRF and higher on the general result.

In the third research question, we focused on looking for statistically important correlations between teachers' age and their attitudes towards inclusion of children with mild to moderate disabilities in regular classrooms.

In order to answer this research question, the Pearson correlation test was used. As seen in Table 4, a significant correlation was observed only on one scale (BEI – beliefs about the efficacy of inclusion; $r = .17$, $p = .09$): the older the teachers, the higher the results on the scale. This result is supported mainly by significant moderate and positive correlation among Croatian teachers ($r = .33$, $p = .02$). As far as other components and general results are concerned, the attitudes of older and younger teachers did not differ significantly.

DISCUSSION

Although the study was set in the regional context of two countries, the results have some implications that can be shared internationally.

The attitudes of elementary school teachers towards inclusion of children with disabilities that we investigated are differentiated but generally positive, which is in accordance with other research on the subject (Ćwirynkało and Żyta, 2015). It is also worth noting that the results obtained in the current study indicate that the overall attitude for the full sample compares with the 69th percentile of the U.S. sample used to develop the instrument (Cullen et al., 2010). As the results are greater than the 50th percentile, the attitudes of the respondents in this sample are more positive than those used to generate the standard scores for the instrument. In this context, the cognitive domain scores were much lower (50th percentile) than the affective domain (84th percentile) or behavioural domain scores (62nd percentile).

The present study shows that Polish teachers received higher scores on two components of attitudes toward inclusion of children with disabilities: cognitive (perceptions of students with mild to moderate disabilities, POS) and affective (beliefs

about the efficacy of inclusion, BEI). We suppose that the reason for such results can be found in the greater societal push on inclusion in Poland than in Croatia. The development of inclusive forms of education has been very dynamic, and research shows that teachers' attitudes towards inclusion have become more and more positive in the last several years (Ćwirynkało and Żyta, 2015). However, what is also worth noting, Croatian teachers have higher scores (although not significantly higher) on the behavioural component (perceptions of professional roles and functions), which suggests that they might be aware more often of their roles in inclusive settings. Perhaps this situation is caused by the fact that inclusive education has a longer history in Croatia and many teachers have worked in such a system, so it is the norm. These results suggest that elementary school teachers in Poland know about inclusion and value it, but may not yet have implemented it, while the higher scores in behavioural domain of attitude among Croatian respondents indicate their lived experiences of inclusion.

We also found that age was an important determinant of teachers' attitudes towards inclusion in the affective scale of beliefs about the efficacy of inclusion, in which the results indicate a significant correlation. However, the results were somewhat surprising as it turned out that the older the teachers were, the higher their scores were. The explanation of these results may lie in teachers' experience working with students with disabilities. Taking into account the fact that educational systems both in Poland and Croatia are inclusion-oriented nowadays, it is getting more common for children with disabilities to attend regular classrooms, and, consequently, for teachers to have in-service inclusion experience. Older teachers are more likely to have more such experience, and other research (Jobb et al., 1996) suggests that teachers with more in-service inclusion experience are slightly more likely than others to feel positively about inclusion. The obtained results are – in a way – contrary to some other research. For example, Vaz et al. (2015) showed that teachers aged 55 and over held more negative attitudes to inclusion than the subgroup of teachers aged 35-55. Also, the results of Polish research by Chodkowska and Kazanowski (2007)

as well as Kossewska (2000) suggest that teachers with less work experience are more open toward inclusion and see more benefits in it. However, it needs to be emphasised that the differences we obtained in the current data refer only to beliefs about the efficacy of inclusion. Generally, the differences in attitudes toward inclusion between different age groups turned out to be insignificant.

CONCLUSION

In this study we investigated the attitudes of Polish and Croatian elementary school teachers towards inclusion of students with mild to moderate disabilities in regular classrooms. We found that these attitudes are differentiated in their components (cognitive – perceptions of students with mild to moderate disabilities; affective – beliefs about the efficacy of inclusion; and behavioural – perceptions of professional roles and functions), but generally positive. It was also observed that there are significant differences between Polish and Croatian teachers in their attitudes towards inclusion. Polish elementary educators received higher scores on cognitive and affective components, but there were also statistically insignificant differences in the behavioural component, which turned out to be more positive among Croatian teachers. Furthermore, teacher age was significantly related to the affective component of attitudes towards inclusion: older teachers were more likely to achieve higher scores on this component.

Taking into account that teachers' beliefs about inclusion are one of the main factors associated with the effectiveness of inclusive practices (Olson et al., 1997), it should be considered what needs to be done to make beliefs more positive. One of the answers to this question is given by Schwab et al. (2015), who suggest that in order to achieve changes in teachers' beliefs and behaviour, appropriate school policy, new curricula and sufficient teacher training must be provided. The need to shape teachers' attitudes and beliefs that are favourable to inclusion is definitely crucial at every stage of professional development of a teacher, starting with teacher preparation coursework through initial employment to continuing education (Cullen et al., 2010). Efforts to achieve this aim can be observed in Poland and Croatia.

As for the first stage at the university level, it has been found that a special education course paired with field experience working with students with special educational needs can significantly influence preservice teachers' attitudes towards inclusion and, consequently, their way of teaching in inclusive settings (Swain et al., 2012). During university education of primary school teachers in the Republic of Croatia, there are certain compulsory courses connected with teaching children with special education needs. These courses, depending on the university, are: Education of Children with Special Needs, Inclusive Education, and Inclusive Pedagogy. There are also some optional courses, such as about specific learning difficulties, behaviour disorders in children and others. During these courses only elementary knowledge is acquired with the aim of making preservice teachers aware of the need for additional education, as there is no unique teaching method for children with special needs.

In Poland there are no obligatory courses at universities, but the Ministry of Science and Higher Education introduced certain standards of education that need to be followed to prepare students to become teachers. In the document, five modules of teaching were distinguished: 1) academic preparation to teach the first school subject, 2) psycho-pedagogical preparation, 3) didactic preparation, 4) academic preparation to teach the second subject, and 5) special education preparation. The last module consists of 140 hours of special psycho-pedagogical preparation, 90 hours of special didactics and 120 hours of pedagogical practice training in institutions with students with disabilities. Unfortunately, only the first three modules are obligatory, while the latter two are optional, and some universities do not offer the last one (Chrzanowska, 2015).

It is also essential to support in-service teachers for whom working with children with disabilities might be a challenge. Preparedness of teachers – which can be achieved by attending training programs and providing psychological support for participants of the inclusive process – is believed to be the main factor of success of inclusive education (Alekhina et al., 2011). Lee et al. (2015) showed that teachers in Hong Kong with training in special

education were stronger advocates of inclusion, irrespective of their professional roles (administrator or class teacher), for children with intellectual disability, visual, hearing, and speech and language impairments. In literature one can find numerous examples showing the positive effects of various forms of training in special education on teachers' attitudes towards inclusion (e.g. Sari, 2007; Sharma et al., 2008; Swain et al., 2012; Clench and King, 2015). It is not always easy, however, to improve teachers' competences for designing inclusive learning experiences. With various resources available through the Internet, books, workshops and courses (e.g. UNESCO, 2012; Conole, 2013; Meyer et al., 2014; Zeryas et al., 2014; Baldiris et al., 2016), teachers are expected to select and adequately transform the information to fit their students' needs, which requires gaining new competences (Navarro et al., 2016). Empowering teachers to address the diversity of learners through training and support is a key issue in effective inclusion.

The possibility of implementing the above-mentioned as well as other teaching programmes, content and methods depends on the teacher's competence. It has been shown that children with special needs create a problem in the upbringing and educational practice due to the teacher's feeling of incompetence, and thus every child with special needs is a challenge. The specific quality of the field emphasises the need to know the aetiology of the impairment, the methods for working in school settings, the use of numerous special teaching aids as well as expert and social competence in order to prevent possible social difficulties of children with disabilities.

As with all social research, there are several limitations of our study. The most important one is the relatively small number of participants. Further research would benefit from exploring a national probability sample. Unfortunately, we were not able to capture a large enough sub-sample of male teachers or teachers from urban, suburban, and rural settings in the two countries. Factors such as special needs training, educational attainment, and access to professional support could also be investigated as possible determinants of teachers' attitudes towards inclusion of students with disabilities.

REFERENCES

- Alekhina, S.V., Alekseeva, M.A., Agafonova, E.L. (2011): Preparedness of Teachers as the Main Factor of Success of the Inclusive Process in Education, *Psychological Science & Education*, 1, 83-92.
- Avramidis, A., Bayliss, P., Burden, R. (2000): A survey into mainstream teachers' attitudes towards the inclusion of children with special educational needs in the ordinary school in one local education authority, *Educational Psychology*, 20, 190-211.
- Baldiris, N.S., Zervas P. Fenregat, G.R., Sampson, D. (2016): Developing Teachers' Competences for Designing Inclusive Learning Experiences, *Journal of Education, Technology & Society*, 19, 1, 17-27.
- Berry, R.A.W. (2010): Preservice and early career teachers' attitudes towards inclusion, instructional accommodations and fairness: Three profiles, *Teacher Education*, 45, 75-95.
- Boyle, C., Topping, K., Jindal-Snape, D., Norwich, B. (2012): The importance of peer-support for teaching staff when including children with special educational needs, *School Psychology International*, 33, 2, 167-182.
- Chodkowska, M., Kazanowski, Z. (2007): *Socjopedagogiczne konteksty postaw nauczycieli wobec edukacji integracyjnej*. Lublin: Wydawnictwo UMCS.
- Chrzanowska, I. (2015): *Pedagogika specjalna. Od tradycji do współczesności*. Kraków: Oficyna Wydawnicza "Impuls".
- Clench, H.K., King, B.S. (2015): Online training to promote inclusion: A systems level intervention., *Educational & Child Psychology*, 32, 1, 62-70.
- Conole, G. (2013): Open Educational Resources. In: *Designing for Learning in an Open World* (pp. 225-243). New York, NY: Springer.
- Croatian Bureau of Statistics. (2015): *Statistical Reports*; Retrieved on 12 June, 2016 from http://www.dzs.hr/Hrv_Eng/publication/2015/SI-1543.pdf.
- Croatian National Education Standard (2008) Zagreb: Ministry of Science, Education and Sports.
- Cullen, J.P., Gregory, J.L., Noto L.A. (2010): The Teacher Attitudes toward Inclusion Scale (TATIS). In: *Eastern Educational Research Association* (pp. 1-20); Retrieved on 31 July, 2017 from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED509930>.
- Ćwirynkało, K. (2013): Nauczyciele wobec zmian warunków kształcenia uczniów ze specjalnymi potrzebami edukacyjnymi (SPE). In: Chrzanowska, I., Jachimczak, B., Pawelczak, K. (Ed.), *Miejsce innego we współczesnych naukach o wychowaniu. W poszukiwaniu pozytywów* (pp. 391-402). Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu im. Adama Mickiewicza.
- Ćwirynkało, K., Myśliwcyk, I. (2016): Mainstream School Teachers' Attitudes toward Inclusion of Children with Special Educational Needs in Poland. In: Titrek, O, Mikelson, I., Pavitola, L., Sezen Gültekin, G. (Ed.), *ICLEL 2016 Conference Proceeding Book. 2nd International Conference on Lifelong Education and Leadership for All* (pp. 680-687). Sakarya: Sakarya University.
- Ćwirynkało, K., Żyta, A. (2015): Przekonania nauczycieli na temat edukacji włączającej uczniów ze specjalnymi potrzebami. *Raport z badań, Szkoła Specjalna*, 4, 245-259.
- Dias, P.C., Cadime, I. (2016): Effects of personal and professional factors on teachers' attitudes towards inclusion in preschool, *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, 31, 1, 111-123.
- Dunne, L., O'Connor, L. (2012): Inclusion and SEN. In: Walton, A., Goddard, G. (Ed.) *Supporting every child. A Course Book Foundation Degrees in Teaching and Supporting Learning*. 2nd ed. (pp. 51-63). Los Angeles, London, New Delhi, Singapore, Washington DC: Sage.
- Elementary school teaching plan and programme (2006) Zagreb: Ministry of Science, Education and Sports.
- European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (2014): *Five Key Messages for Inclusive Education. Putting Theory into Practice*. Odense, Denmark: European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education.

- European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (2015): Empowering Teachers to Promote Inclusive Education. A case study of approaches to training and support for inclusive teacher practice. Odense: Denmark: European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education.
- Fishbein, M., Ajzen, I. (1972): Attitudes and Opinions, *Annual Review of Psychology*, 23, 1, 487–544.
- Gregory, J.L., McCoy, T.A., Baker, M.F., Fedigan, A.L. (2016): Using Educator Characteristics on Attitudes Toward Inclusion to Drive Professional Development, *Journal of Advances in Education Research*, 1, 1, 20-31.
- Gregory, J.L., Noto, L.A. (2013, July): Does language matter? Comparing instrumentation measuring teachers' attitudes towards teaching all students. Paper presented at the International Association of Special Education Annual Conference, Vancouver, Canada.
- Haq, F.S., Mundia, L. (2012): Comparison of Brunei Preservice Student Teachers' Attitudes to Inclusive Education and Specific Disabilities: Implications for Teacher Education, *The Journal of Educational Research*, 105, 366-374.
- Hausstätter, R.S., Jahnukainen, M. (2015): From Integration to Inclusion and the Role of Special Education: Examples from Norway and Finland. In: Żółkowska, T., Buława-Halasz, J., Kaliszewska, K. (Ed.) *Disability: Premises and Conclusions* (pp. 49-66). Szczecin: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Wydziału Humanistycznego Uniwersytetu Szczecińskiego MINERWA.
- Jobb, D., Rust, J.O., Brissie, J. (1996): Teacher Attitudes Toward Inclusion of Students with Disabilities into Regular Classrooms, *Education*, 117, 1, 148-153.
- Kossewska, J. (2000): Uwarunkowania postaw. Nauczyciele i inne grupy zawodowe wobec integracji szkolnej dzieci niepełnosprawnych. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Akademii Pedagogicznej.
- Krause, A. (2000): Integracyjne złudzenia ponowoczesności. Kraków: Oficyna Wydawnicza "Impuls".
- Lee, F.L.M., Yeung, A.S., Tracey, D., Baker, K. (2015): Inclusion of Children with Special Needs in Early Childhood Education: What Teacher Characteristics Matter, *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education*, 35, 2, 79-88.
- Leyser, Y., Kirk, R. (2004): Evaluating Inclusion: an examination of parent views and factors influencing their perspectives, *International Journal of Disability, Development and Education*, 51, 3, 271–85.
- Meyer, A., Rose, D. H., Gordon, D. (2014): *Universal design for learning: Theory and practice*. Wakefield, MA: CAST Professional Publishing.
- Moen, T. (2008): Inclusive educational practice: Results of an empirical study, *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, 52, 59-75.
- Navarro, S.B., Zervas P., FabregatGesa R.F., Sampson D.G. (2016): Developing Teachers' Competences for Designing Inclusive Learning Experiences, *Educational Technology & Society*, 19, 1, 17–27.
- Olson, M.R., Chalmers, L., Hoover, J.H. (1997): Attitudes and attributes of general education teachers identified as effective inclusionists, *Remedial and Special Education*, 18, 28-35.
- Oświata i wychowanie w roku szkolnym 2014/2015 (Education in 2014/2015 School Year) (2015) Central Statistical Office. Retrieved on 14 June, 2016 from: file:///C:/Users/user/AppData/Local/Temp/oswiata_i_wychowanie_w_roku_szkolnym_2014-2015.pdf.
- Plan and Program for Primary Schools (2013), Zagreb: Ministry of Science, Education and Sports.
- Razer, M., Mittelberg, D., Motola, M., Bar-Gosen, N. (2015): Israeli high school teachers' perceptions and attitudes towards a pedagogy of inclusion, *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 19, 9, 944-964.
- Regulations on elementary school upbringing and education of pupils with developmental difficulties (2015), Zagreb: Narodne novine, 24/15.
- Regulation on Amending Ordinance on the Number of Students in Regular and Multi-classes and Educational Groups in Primary School (2010), Zagreb: Narodne novine, 124/10.

- Rozporządzenie Ministra Edukacji Narodowej z dnia 30 kwietnia 2013 r. w sprawie zasad udzielania i organizacji pomocy psychologiczno-pedagogicznej w publicznych przedszkolach, szkołach i placówkach (2013) (Dz.U. Nr 228 z 7 maja 2013r. poz. 532).
- Rules of Determining Psychophysical State of the Child, Students and the Structure of the Commissions (2014), Zagreb: Narodne novine, 67/14.
- Sari, H. (2007): The Influence of an in-service Teacher Training (INSET) programme on attitudes towards inclusion by regular classroom teachers who teach deaf students in primary schools in Turkey, *Deafness and Education International*, 9, 3, 131–146.
- Scanlon, G. (2012): The context and challenges of special education in mainstream education. In: Nikolaeva, S., Mulcahy, C., Scanlon, G. (Ed.), *Towards transformative education. A multidisciplinary perspective on research and practice in Bulgaria and Ireland* (pp. 61-69). Gabrovo: "EX-PRESS" Ltd.
- Schwab, S., Holzinger, A., Krammer, M. (2015): Teaching practices and beliefs about inclusion of general and special needs teachers in Austria, *Learning Disabilities – A Contemporary Journal*, 13, 2, 237-254.
- Sharma, U., Forlin, C., Loreman, T. (2008): Impact of training on pre-service teachers' attitudes and concerns about inclusive education and sentiments about persons with disabilities, *Disability & Society*, 23, 7, 773–785.
- Swain, K.D., Nordness, P.D., Leader-Janssen, E.M. (2012): Changes in Preservice Teacher Attitudes Toward Inclusion, *Preventing School Failure*, 56, 2, 75-81.
- The Croatian National Curriculum Framework (2011) Zagreb: Ministry of Science, Education and Sports.
- The Croatian Parliament (2007) Law on ratification of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities; Retrieved 12 June, 2016 from: http://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/medunarodni/2007_06_6_80.html.
- UNESCO (1994) The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education. World Conference on Special Needs Education, Access and Quality; Retrieved 25 February, 2016 from: <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0009/000984/098427eo.pdf>.
- UNESCO (2012) 2012 World Open Educational Resources(OER) Congress UNESCO. Paris, June 20-22, 2012; Retrieved 31 March, 2016 from: http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CI/CI/pdf/Events/Paris%20OER%20Declaration_01.pdf.
- UNESCO (2015a): Education 2030: Towards inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong. April, 1-4.
- UNESCO (2015b): Education for All 2000-2015: Achievements and Challenges. Paris.
- Vaz, S., Wilson, N., Falkmer, M., Sim, A., Scott, M., Cordier, R., Falkmer, T. (2015): Factors Associated with Primary School Teachers' Attitudes Towards the Inclusion of Students with Disabilities, *PLoS ONE*, 10, 8, 1-12.
- Zervas, P., Alifragkis, C., Sampson, D. G. (2014): A Quantitative analysis of learning object repositories as knowledge management systems, *Knowledge Management & E-Learning: An International Journal (KM&EL)*, 6, 2, 156-170.
- Zrilić, S., Bedeković, V. (2012): Integrated Upbringing and Education Assumptions in Contemporary Schools: Curriculum, Legislation, Model Implementation, Competences, 8th International Conference on Education, Samos Island Greece, 979-983.
- Żółkowska, T. (2008): Reflections on moderate and severe intellectually disabled. Szczecin: ZAPOL.

STAVOVI HRVATSKIH I POLJSKIH UČITELJA PRIMARNOG OBRAZOVANJA PREMA INKLUZIVNOM OBRAZOVANJU DJECE S TEŠKOĆAMA

Sažetak: *Inkluzivno obrazovanje privlači sve više pozornosti vlada diljem svijeta. Hrvatska i Poljska, kao članice Europske unije i zemlje koje su ratificirale Konvenciju o ljudskim pravima osoba s invaliditetom, posvećuju pozornost pitanjima povezanim s poboljšanjem kvalitete obrazovanja djece s posebnim odgojno-obrazovnim potrebama. Cilj je ovoga rada bio ispitati stavove hrvatskih i poljskih učitelja primarnog obrazovanja prema inkluzivnom obrazovanju spomenute skupine djece u redovitim osnovnoškolskim razredima. Uzorak se sastojao od 98 učitelja primarnog obrazovanja iz Hrvatske (N=50) i Poljske (N=48). U istraživanju je korišten dijagnostički upitnik sa skalom učiteljskih stavova prema inkluziji (TATIS) (Cullen, Gregory i Noto, 2010). Instrumentom su mjerene tri glavne sastavnice stavova: učiteljska percepcija učenika s blažim do umjerenim teškoćama (POS), njihova uvjerenja povezana s učinkovitošću inkluzije (BEI) i percepcija profesionalne uloge i funkcije (PRF) kao i opći učiteljski stavovi o inkluziji. Uočeno je da su poljski učitelji iskazali značajno više vrijednosti na dvjema subskalama: POS i BEI. Nadalje je uočena povezanost dobi i mjesta življenja učitelja s njihovim stavovima u objema promatranim skupinama. U radu se raspravlja o implikacijama navedenoga za obrazovnu praksu.*

Ključne riječi: *inkluzivno obrazovanje, djeca s teškoćama, stavovi učitelja*