Attitudes of inclusive educators towards inclusion

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Abstract An educator who has completed an additional master's degree in inclusive education (hereafter referred to as an inclusive educator) can be employed at several positions in a regular primary school. The research presents the understanding of inclusion of five inclusive educators working at different positions in a regular primary school. For the purpose of our research, we used a semi-structured interview and focused on inclusive educators' attitudes towards inclusion, differences between their positions, their sense of competence in implementing inclusive practices, and the barriers they identified in the process of achieving inclusion. Based on the responses, we aimed to deepen the understanding of each of the inclusive educators and to highlight the conditions that hinder or enable the implementation of an inclusive environment. The study shows that the respondents have a favourable inclination to adopt inclusive practices and a positive attitude towards inclusion. All respondents have a sense of competence, but emphasise the importance of continuous improvement and training. There is considerable variability in the positions, tasks and groups of children with special needs that inclusive educators encounter. As a result, there are different barriers in different roles that hinder the integration of inclusive teaching methods.

Keywords: inclusive educator; inclusion; challenges; special needs

Stavovi inkluzivnog pedagoga prema uključivanju

Sažetak Učitelj inkluzivnog obrazovanja koji je završio dodatni magisterij iz inkluzivnog obrazovanja (u daljnjem tekstu inkluzivni edukator) može biti zaposlen na više radnih pozicija u redovnoj osnovnoj školi. Istraživanje predstavlja razumijevanje inkluzije pet inkluzivnih edukatora koji rade na različitim pozicijama u redovnoj osnovnoj školi. U svrhu našeg istraživanja koristili smo polustrukturirani intervju i usredotočili se na stavove inkluzivnih edukatora prema inkluziji, razlike među pozicijama, njihov osjećaj kompetencije u provođenju inkluzivnih praksi i prepreke koje su identificirali u procesu ostvarivanja inkluzije. Na temelju odgovora, cilj nam je bio produbiti razumijevanje svakog inkluzivnog edukatora i istaknuti uvjete koji ometaju ili omogućavaju provedbu inkluzivnog okruženja. Studija pokazuje da ispitanici imaju povoljnu naklonost prema usvajanju inkluzivnih praksi i pozitivan stav prema inkluziji. Svi ispitanici imaju osjećaj kompetencije, ali ističu važnost kontinuiranog usavršavanja i obrazovanja. Postoji značajna varijabilnost u pozicijama, zadacima i skupinama djece s posebnim potrebama s kojima se inkluzivni edukatori susreću. Kao rezultat toga, postoje različite prepreke u različitim radnim pozicijama koje ometaju integraciju inkluzivnih metoda poučavanja.

Ključne riječi: inkluzivni edukator; inkluzija; izazovi; posebne potrebe

1 Introduction

1.1 Inclusion

In recent years, the concept of inclusion has gained considerable attention in the field of education (Azorin and Ainscow, 2020). The introduction of inclusion in education has been one of the most significant changes in the field in recent decades. Inclusion involves adapting the environment to the needs of children and removing barriers that hinder their development, especially in the case of children with special needs (Navodila za izobraževalne programe s prilagojenim izvajanjem in dodatno strokovno pomočjo za devetletno osnovno šolo, 2003).

In education, inclusion refers to the practice of ensuring that all students, regardless of ability, gender, race or socio-economic status, have equal access to educational opportunities in a traditional classroom environment. It is about tolerating and accepting people who are different from us. The principles of inclusion include cooperation, interdependence, acceptance, friendship and more (Galeša, 1997).

The aim of inclusive education is not only to integrate children with special needs, but also to foster a sense of satisfaction in all children and to create an environment that facilitates the participation of all. This way of thinking positively influences the growth of a society that encourages openness and promotes respect, cooperation and peaceful coexistence among its members (Lesar, 2009).

For the quality establishment of an inclusive environment, it is important to recognise mutual differences and individual needs and problems, which enables us to exchange experiences in a mutual recognition of differences. It is also important to create a capacity for coexistence, where each individual learns to live with the differences of one another, without prejudice or stereotypes. Developing empathy is the first step towards creating an inclusive environment, as it is essential for understanding diversity. One of the important aspects of an inclusive environment is also to provide assistance and support to all involved (Marussig, 2013).

The implementation of inclusive education requires educators to develop a positive attitude towards inclusion, which is crucial for the success of inclusive practices (Kavkler, 2008).

Social cognitive theory provides a theoretical framework for understanding attitudes towards inclusion. According to this theory, attitudes are formed through the interaction of cognitive processes and social experiences (Bandura, 1986). Inclusive educators' attitudes towards inclusion are shaped by their beliefs, values and experiences. The socialisation process, which includes training, professional development and experience of working with diverse students, also contributes to

the formation of attitudes (Scruggs and Mastropieri, 1996).

A review of the literature has identified several factors that influence teachers' attitudes towards inclusion (child-related variables, the teacher's gender, age and teaching experience, level of education, teacher training, etc.). One of the key factors are a teacher's beliefs about inclusion. The belief that all students have the right to be educated in a regular classroom creates a greater sense of responsibility for educating a wide variety of students; therefore, teachers are able to successfully implement an inclusive environment (Avramidis and Norwich, 2002). Educators who hold this belief are more likely to have positive attitudes towards inclusion. Another factor is the level of support provided to teachers. Teachers who receive adequate support from their colleagues, school leaders and the wider community are more likely to have positive attitudes towards inclusion (Burke and Sutherland, 2004).

Research has shown that teachers' attitudes towards inclusion are influenced by their previous experience of working with students with disabilities (Burke and Sutherland, 2004). Educators who have had positive experiences of working with students with disabilities are more likely to have positive attitudes towards inclusion. Conversely, negative experiences can lead to negative attitudes towards inclusion (Scruggs and Mastropieri, 1996).

1.2 Inclusive Educators

The issue of teacher education is of high political priority, as education plays a crucial role in the development of a more equitable society (Donnelly and Watkins, 2011).

Educational programmes for inclusive educators and additional training on inclusion pose significant challenges for education systems (Symeonidou, 2017).

Additional training on inclusion typically lasts an average of twenty hours, with some courses focusing solely on theoretical knowledge, while others include practical components. Such training is short-term and focuses primarily on attitudes, knowledge and skills. Researchers suggest that additional training should be more long-term to facilitate the gradual integration of inclusive practices into the field (Kurniaeati, De Boer, Minnaert, and Mangunsong, 2014).

Forlin notes that training for inclusive educators typically takes the form of a three- or four-year undergraduate programme or a one- or two-year graduate programme (Forlin, 2010).

Allday et al. note that universities worldwide devote an average of seven credit hours to inclusive education within each discipline. Specialised programmes exclusi-

vely for inclusive educators are not common (Allday, Neilsen-Gatti, Hudson, 2012).

The University of Columbia has been offering two programmes in inclusive education (for younger and older students) since 2004. Both undergraduate programmes total 44 and 56 credits. The programme qualifies graduates for employment as a teacher or special educator and is designed for those who do not yet have a background in education (Teachers College, 2023).

University College London - Institute of Education offers a postgraduate programme in special and inclusive education. The programme is divided into two content areas: students with autism and students with specific learning difficulties. The programme lasts one year, comprises 180 credits and aims to enhance knowledge in the field of education. Upon completion of the programme, graduates can find employment in adult education, regular primary schools, or other educational environments (UCL, 2023).

A teacher training university in the American Southwest has an undergraduate programme focused on inclusive teaching. It lasts three semesters and prepares students for special education practice and teaching in elementary schools. The programme consists of 83 credits (Kurth and Foley, 2014).

In Slovenia, the postgraduate study programme in inclusive pedagogy serves as an additional qualification for professionals in various educational fields (Inkluzivna pedagogika, 2023).

The study of inclusive pedagogy in Slovenia differs from the study of special education or defectology, as the latter is more specialised in the professional treatment of children with special needs and tends to lead to their rapid exclusion from the majority population (Jeznik, 2015).

In Slovenia, the two-year programme of inclusive pedagogy consists of 480 hours of lectures, 435 hours of seminars, 150 hours of exercises, 75 hours of practical training and 15 credits for the master's degree (Inkluzivna pedagogika, 2023).

Despite the fact that nowadays all educational professionals play an inclusive role, in our work we will use the term "inclusive educator" for individuals who have completed the second-level programme of inclusive pedagogy (an independent two-year master's programme in Slovenia). For other educational professionals who have not completed the programme of inclusive pedagogy, we will use the terms "pedagogist" or "teacher" (Inkluzivna pedagogika, 2023).

2   Methodology

2.1 Purpose

The purpose of our research was to explore the attitudes of inclusive educators towards inclusion according to their job position at a regular primary school.

In the empirical part of the study, we focused on the following objectives:
- To determine how the job positions of inclusive educators differed in terms of content and which disability they have the most contact with according to their position,
- To determine how inclusive educators understood inclusion and how they provided an inclusive environment depending on their job position,
- To identify inclusion competencies for inclusive educators,
- To determine where inclusive educators have identified potential barriers to implementing inclusive practices.
- The research questions were as follows:
- How do the job positions of inclusive educators differ in terms of content, and what disability do they encounter most depending on job position?
- How do inclusive educators understand the concept of inclusion and how do they provide an inclusive environment as a function of their position?
- Do inclusive educators feel adequately qualified to implement inclusion?
- Where do inclusive educators perceive barriers to implementing inclusive practices?

2.2 Research Methodology

For the purpose of the research, we chose a semi-structured interview designed with pre-established questions.

The interview questions were divided into three sections. In the first section, related to job positions, disabilities the educators most often faced and challenges, six questions were asked. In the second section, understanding of inclusion, five questions were asked. In the last section, competencies, three questions were asked.

The interviews were carried out in January and February 2023.

Each of the interviewees was informed about the purpose and the expected course of the interview. At the end of the interviews, the responses were transcribed and analysed.

The anonymity of all participants was guaranteed. It should be emphasised that the data obtained were related to specific cases, therefore it is not possible to generalise the results.

2.3 Sample

Five inclusive educators, all with a master's degree in inclusive education, were employed at different positions in a regular primary school: a hospital school[1], a provider of additional professional support[2], a counsellor[3], a teacher in the classroom[4], and a teacher of children with special needs[5].

All inclusive educators had at least one year of experience at their respective positions.

3 Results

3.1 Job Positions and Disabilities They Most Often Face

In the first set of questions, we compared the work of inclusive educators based on their job positions. We focused on the types of deficits that the students they work with have, compared the most frequently addressed content and issues, and discussed the most prominent effects on each job position and their impact on creating an inclusive environment.

A teacher of children with special needs[5] has the most contact with students with deficits in specific areas (dyslexia, dyspraxia, dyscalculia, attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder). There are slightly fewer students with mobility impairments, speech and language impairments, or autism spectrum disorders. All the children they work with in this position are referred to the regular primary school programme with an adapted curriculum.

In addition to the disabilities listed above, an inclusive educator in the classroom[4] also works with gifted students and students who have not been identified as having special needs or gifted.

An inclusive educator in the counselling role[3] has contact with all students, but works primarily with students with learning disabilities who have less supportive home environments or who have not yet been referred for additional services in a one-on-one role.An inclusive educator in the role of an assistant[2] has the most contact with the individual student they support. These are most often students with autism spectrum disorders or mobility impairments.

In a hospital school, an inclusive educator[1] works with students who are hospitalised due to illness or mental health issues. The most common of these are eating disorders, depression, emotional and behavioural disorders in younger students, and attention and concentration disorders.

Based on the content and issues addressed, the work of an inclusive educator

varies greatly depending on the position.

An inclusive educator of children with special needs[5] most often addresses content related to reading comprehension, learning strategies, auditory discrimination and attention, attention and concentration training, social and emotional content, and organisation and planning of activities.

In addition to academic content, an inclusive educator in the classroom[4] often emphasises creating a social climate, social relationships in the classroom, social games, and improving individual emotional competencies. There is also often an emphasis on developing reading comprehension and critical thinking skills.

The content of an inclusive educator's work in the advisory department[3] relates to academic content and the organisation and strategies of learning. The most common content in workshops is socialisation, acceptance, and compliance.

An interviewee who is employed as an additional professional support[2] mentioned that his work mainly consisted of recording the student's behaviour, monitoring behaviour, assisting in the organisation and preparation of school supplies, assisting in following lessons and understanding academic content.

The work of an inclusive educator in a hospital school[1] also includes other content related to learning strategies, overcoming mental disorders, finding strengths and building positive self-esteem.

3.2 Understanding Inclusion and How Inclusive Educators Provide an Inclusive Environment

We were interested in the participants' attitudes towards inclusion and where they saw the advantages and disadvantages of inclusion. We also wanted to know what forms of teaching and methods they use to create an inclusive environment and how they work with other professionals to implement inclusion.

All interviewees agreed that inclusion was an important part of education. They understand inclusion as equality, fairness, and acceptance of all students so that they can be as equal as possible and have many opportunities to learn together regardless of their differences. They mentioned that they understand the concept of inclusion as adapting the environment to children with special needs and expressing compassion and empathy when working with sick or special needs children.

We asked inclusive educators how they could help create a more inclusive environment in their workplace. Depending on their job position, respondents answered differently about how they could create an inclusive environment. Collaboration with other school professionals also varies by job position.

An inclusive classroom educator[4] and inclusive educator for children with special needs[5] suggested that they were able to foster an inclusive environment by modelling behaviours, providing opportunities for collaboration and cooperation, and creating a safe and supportive atmosphere for all students. They mentioned that they create an inclusive environment by making accommodations for students with special needs, using multisensory teaching methods, and treating all students equally. The inclusive educators often integrate special pedagogical content into academic subjects and creates assignments that incorporate both learning objectives and special pedagogical areas. To ensure quality work, the inclusive teachers collaborate with other professionals who address the special needs of individual children (e.g., creating individualised programmes, adapting academic materials and teaching methods, etc.).

Another inclusive educator in the counselling department[3] suggested that they could contribute to inclusivity by supporting teachers in adapting curriculum and learning strategies, providing individualised support, and promoting a positive school culture. It was also mentioned that, through their guidance, they were able to create an inclusive environment with the help of projects that develop cooperation and solidarity, as well as with preventive and thematic workshops. Collaboration with classroom teachers is the most important aspect of this position.

An inclusive teacher in the role of an additional professional support[2] suggested that they could contribute to inclusivity by building relationships with the students he supports, providing individualised support, having a positive attitude, and being responsive to children's needs. The inclusive educator in the role of additional professional support works primarily with a specific child with special needs, but also collaborates with all teachers who teach the student. It is crucial to work well with the teacher who teaches a particular subject. The extent to which a teacher can participate in the teaching process without violating their professional autonomy depends on each teacher, so creating an inclusive environment in his workplace has some limitations.

Finally, an inclusive educator in a hospital school[1] suggested that they could contribute to inclusivity by supporting students' emotional and mental health needs, helping them to stay connected to their regular school community, and advocating for their educational rights. In the hospital school, the work of the inclusive teacher is not limited to students with special needs, but focuses on all students who are hospitalised. The inclusive teacher influences the implementation of inclusion by leading group and relaxation workshops where students, regardless of age and health status, can socialise and partially integrate into the environment from

which they have been temporarily excluded due to hospitalisation. This position requires collaboration with home school teachers, hospital school teachers, and health care staff.

3.3 Competences of Inclusive Educators

We asked inclusive educators to assess their competencies in creating an inclusive environment, to summarise any gaps in their acquired competencies, and to indicate additional training in inclusive education that they received beyond their master's degree in order to feel confident in performing their job duties.

All respondents believed that their competencies were good enough to perform their job effectively. They mentioned that theoretical knowledge was a prerequisite for high quality job performance. In addition, all respondents emphasised the need for continuous education and improvement, as well as ongoing professional development, in order to perform their jobs successfully. They all believed that it was essential to constantly seek ideas and knowledge related to the current issues of the group or school, because the school is a living system and continuous education is inevitable.

An inclusive educator who works as a teacher in the classroom[4] emphasised that the teacher's attitude towards inclusion, adaptability to situations and students, as well as their relationship with students are crucial for successfully creating an inclusive environment. They emphasised that training alone does not provide all the competencies needed to manage an inclusive classroom.

All interviewees stated that a significant amount of training was needed at the beginning, as the positions are very different. Much practical knowledge is gained through independent research and initiative in finding literature and working guidelines. Theoretical knowledge is mostly gained through additional training, which the teacher has to show interest in.

All interviewees had attended additional seminars and training courses in the past, mainly on topics they frequently encounter in their work. They expressed the importance of following changes in legislation and exchanging practical experience with other professionals. In the past, they attended additional training courses mainly in the fields of sociology and psychology.

The respondents expressed the desire to continue their education in the future, although they felt competent in performing their duties. They would like to receive additional training mainly in the field of different methodological approaches, with strategies and practical solutions on how to develop students' competencies in

auditory discrimination, attention and motivation. They would also like to gain additional knowledge in successful communication with parents and more knowledge in psychology or social pedagogy. The inclusive educator employed at a hospital school[1] also expressed a desire for training related to mental health.

3.4 Potential Barriers to Implementing Inclusive Practices

We were interested in the opinion of inclusive educators on whether they faced any challenges in implementing inclusive practices. We also wanted to know their opinion on whether the Slovenian education system was mature enough to fully implement inclusion.

The interviewees expressed some benefits of inclusion, such as promoting empathy, mutual understanding, self-esteem and acceptance of diversity through the inclusion of students with special needs. Inclusion can have a significant impact on the acceptance of diversity and on the quality of the individual's integration into the social environment. The positive aspects of inclusion include the development of solidarity through an inclusive society and the facilitation of overcoming deficits. In the hospital school, the advantage of inclusion is emphasised in terms of a more confident reintegration into the home school and primary social environment.

The research participants also highlighted some of the challenges they face in creating an inclusive environment. They stated that identifying the individual problems and needs of each student was a challenge, especially for introverted students who may not be able to express what learning strategies work best for them. Building relationships with withdrawn or emotionally absent students is also difficult and progress can be slow. In the classroom[4], it is a challenge to provide various accommodations for all students and to create an environment that is equitable for all. It is also a challenge to deliver the curriculum in a variety of ways to meet the individual needs of all students.

The respondents also mentioned that student passivity and lack of motivation can be a challenge in creating an inclusive environment. They also identified some shortcomings, such as less successful students being vulnerable to peer criticism, and parents' expectations often being higher than students' abilities. Unrealistic expectations and demands from parents, who often do not understand the specific needs of their child in the classroom, can also be a challenge.

One of the interviewees[5] mentioned that a major shortcoming was the lack of time for teachers to work directly with students with special needs because they were overloaded with bureaucracy.

An inclusive educator working in a counselling service[3] mentioned that working with other professionals and keeping everyone up to date was one of the biggest challenges, as professionals' expectations and opinions may differ. Other respondents also highlighted the challenge of working with colleagues who have not embraced the concept of inclusion. It was mentioned that an inclusive environment cannot be achieved without changing the mindsets of all involved, which is a long and ongoing process. All interviewees mentioned that they perceived resistance from some professionals to creating an inclusive environment, as well as an unwillingness or lack of knowledge to understand the disabilities and barriers of individual students, as well as inflexibility in implementing different forms and teaching methods. Open and honest communication with all teachers is essential.

The interviewees noted that teachers often felt incompetent or lacked knowledge about children with special needs who were now included in every class. They observed that younger educators were generally more open, flexible and positive about inclusion. In the hospital school[1] they observed that inclusion was very important, but this is an environment where the child is already excluded from the home environment, so it is difficult to talk about inclusion.

The respondents also identified some challenges they faced in relation to the school system, which limited their ability to implement full inclusion. An inclusive educator who teaches children with special needs[5] mentioned the challenge of combining academic material and special education content, which often needs to be taught simultaneously in class. They noted that the root of this problem lay in the structure of the system. The respondents also highlighted the challenge of high standards in very heterogeneous classes, as working in such environments may be less effective.

All interviewees believe that the concept of inclusion in Slovenia is good, but that there is still a lot to be done to fully implement it. They mentioned that things had started to improve in the last few years. The full implementation of inclusion within the school depends mainly on the willingness of the management and staff to create an inclusive environment, therefore it is difficult to generalise.

The inclusive educators mentioned that in reality we were still far from inclusion at a systemic level, as children with special needs are excluded from the classroom during lesson hours with an inclusive educator who works with children with special needs[5] and children attending the hospital school[1] are also temporarily excluded for health reasons.

4 Discussion

The aim of the study was to explore the attitudes of inclusive educators towards inclusion in relation to their work positions. To collect data, we used a semi-structured interview format, interviewing five inclusive educators who have completed a two-year postgraduate programme in inclusive pedagogy within the Slovenian educational system. In this discussion, we shall aim to summarise the results of our research and compare them with some other findings.

In our research, we found that the job position of an inclusive educator significantly influences their tasks. In addition, the job position determines which type of deficit in children the teacher will have the most contact with. However, their common goal is to create a more inclusive environment. In regular primary schools, inclusive educators have the most contact with students with specific learning difficulties, except for the position in a hospital school where inclusive educators have the most contact with mental disorders. The content of inclusive educators' work is also highly dependent on their position. In summary, while the training of an inclusive educator is uniform, the requirements, knowledge and skills demanded of them vary greatly depending on the specific job position.

Kelhar states that inclusive educators in Slovenia can be employed as kindergarten teachers, teachers for additional professional support, counselling professionals, educators in educational programmes or programs with lower educational standards. Therefore, the diversity of competencies they require is already significant within the Slovenian environment (Kelhar, 2017).

Other sources outside of the Slovenian context mention additional professional positions (e.g., classroom teachers, etc.) atwhich inclusive educators can be employed. In addition, individuals with no prior pedagogical knowledge can enrol in these programmes. Due to the differences between the educational system in Slovenia and those in other countries, it is difficult to compare the impact of job positions on the tasks of inclusive educators (Teachers College, 2023; UCL, 2023; and Kurth and Foley, 2014).

We also investigated how the respondents perceived the concept of inclusion and how they ensured the establishment of an inclusive environment in their workplace. Based on the study of the understanding of inclusion from the perspective of inclusive educators, we found that all respondents emphasised that the quality establishment of an inclusive environment depended on the teacher's attitude and positive orientation. The responses regarding the understanding of inclusive principles revealed a discourse of justice or the principle of difference, which emphasises the need for differentiation and individualisation of the learning process.

The respondents demonstrated a positive attitude towards inclusive practices. Contrary to our study, Pijl found that teachers in the Netherlands generally do not have a positive attitude towards inclusion (Pijl, 2010).

The inclusive educators mentioned that they used different methods and ways of working, as well as collaboration with other teachers, to create a quality inclusive environment. All participants emphasised the importance of collaboration with other teachers, mutual support and assistance in creating an inclusive environment. The inclusive educators identified a range of adapted strategies and working methods, whether working with an individual student with special needs, integrating students with special needs into the classroom, or addressing the class or group as a whole.

Španinger points to the importance of social games in creating an inclusive environment (Španinger, 2021). This finding is consistent with strategies often used by inclusive educators employed as classroom teachers. On the other hand, Bagon emphasises that the use of information and communication technologies can also contribute to creating an inclusive learning environment, although none of the interviewees mentioned this (Bagon, 2015).

A good inclusive practice in Poland additionally includes the implementation of mentorship within the school for more vulnerable students, the implementation of programmes to improve social and emotional competencies, and simultaneous teaching by two educators (Peras and Štremfel, 2021). This practice from Poland partially overlaps with the strategies used by inclusive educators mainly in the role of counsellors.

In our research, we found that all interviewees had a sense of competence in carrying out their work. They emphasised that, in addition to formal education (a master's degree in inclusive education), a lot of additional education and self-initiated research was necessary to internalise this sense of competence. Among the important contents of education, they emphasised a deep understanding of the students' deficiencies, exchange of pedagogical practices, and an in-depth knowledge of psychology. In addition, they mentioned several other areas and the importance of lifelong learning.

Research from the Netherlands also emphasises the importance of training in the area of inclusion, but also points out that change takes several years. The researchers note that not only theoretical training is important, but also training in teacher confidence. It is not necessarily the case that training specifically on inclusion will automatically prepare teachers for inclusive teaching (Pijl, 2010).

Durdukoca notes that teachers generally feel competent in implementing inclusion, and attributes this to graduate programmes in special education (Durdukoca,

2021).

Despite the above comparisons, it is important to emphasise that the studies compared did not include only inclusive educators or teachers who had completed at least a two-year programme in inclusive education in addition to general education.

In addition, we shall summarise some of the most common challenges that respondents face in creating an inclusive environment. They mentioned that providing all accommodations in numerous and heterogeneous classrooms was a major challenge for them. They also highlighted the lack of motivation, introversion or passivity of the students, which hindered the identification of needs and effective individualisation and differentiation. Among the more common challenges, they highlighted collaboration with other professionals who were not supportive of inclusive pedagogical practices. In relation to the school system, they highlighted the challenges of implementing additional professional support to ensure that students were not deprived of educational or special pedagogical content, as subject areas often overlap with additional support hours.

Despite the changes that have already been implemented in the field of inclusive education, challenges remain. One of these is how to make inclusive education accessible to everyone, everywhere, all the time. In addition, a significant challenge is the collaboration between teachers and special educators, as each of them has to take on a new role introduced with the implementation of inclusivity and learn to work together. It is important to also mention the challenge of organisational development in schools. At the stage of systemic change and improvement, schools should transform themselves in order to adapt to new scientific knowledge (Ferguson, 2008).

Our research has several limitations, so it is important to be very cautious when interpreting the results. The first limitation is that only five inclusive educators were included in the study, making it questionable to generalize to the larger population. The profile of an inclusive educator is a very specialised one that often overlaps with the profile of a special education teacher, while these two profiles are clearly separated in the Slovenian educational system. Due to the educational programmes differing internationally, comparing the with the whole population becomes difficult and may limit the generalisation of the results.

The second finding is that, regardless of the results of our research, the effectiveness of training programmes at the practice level remains unknown. We did not measure the concept of effectiveness in our study, so it is not possible to make conclusive statements about the effectiveness of different training programmes or to compare teachers who use inclusive practices and have received different forms of training internationally.

The third limitation is the potential influence of subjective error in conducting the interviews and analysing the responses, which could affect the objectivity of the results. Respondents may have adjusted their answers during the interview (socially desirable answers).

It is important to note that the topic we chose for our research is difficult to generalise to the entire population. In the future, it would be interesting to conduct a similar study with a larger sample of inclusive educators and compare the results based on different profiles of educational professionals working with children with special needs. Alternatively, a study could be conducted to thoroughly examine the differences in training programmes for inclusive educators around the world and draw new conclusions based on these findings.

The research we conducted is limited to those who participated in the study, and the representativeness of the sample was limited.

However, by analysing the responses of the respondents, we aimed to improve the understanding of inclusion and the profession of inclusive educators, which can contribute to the reflection and improvement of inclusive pedagogical practices, as well as to the development of further education and training programmes on this topic.

5   Conclusions

In the theoretical part, we wanted to present the training of inclusive educators in Slovenia and compare it with training programmes or additional training in other parts of the world. We also wanted to introduce the concept of inclusion and emphasise the importance of positive attitudes towards inclusive practices.

The attitudes of inclusive educators towards inclusion are crucial for the success of inclusive practices in schools. Educators' attitudes are shaped by their beliefs, values, and experiences, as well as the level of support they receive. Positive experiences in working with diverse students can lead to positive attitudes towards inclusion. Therefore, it is important to provide adequate support and professional development opportunities for educators to develop positive attitudes toward inclusion.

In the empirical part of the study, we found that the job positions of inclusive educators in regular primary schools varied significantly, as do their job responsibilities and the type and level of special needs of the children they work with. Inclusive educators have positive perceptions of inclusion and use a variety of pedagogical practices to create an inclusive environment. The methods and approaches they use are highly dependent on their position and the tasks involved. In addition, we

found that teachers with postgraduate training in inclusive education generally felt competent in carrying out their professional tasks and implementing inclusive practices. However, they emphasised the continuing importance of training and expressed a desire for additional knowledge related to the content areas of their work, despite having a master's degree in inclusive education. The interviewees also identified a number of challenges they face in practice that hinder the implementation of inclusive practices. These challenges include personal, school, and even national levels.

In conclusion, creating an inclusive environment still poses a systemic, personal, and social challenge that can, in most cases, be overcome in through additional education on the topic of including all children, developing a sense of understanding and acceptance, and consistently implementing inclusive pedagogical practices in the school setting.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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