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## NATIONAL RESEARCH: INCLUSION IN EDUCATION

**Abstract:** From April 6 to May 20 2024, the Croatian Shorthand Association conducted a national research study on inclusive education, focusing on the attitudes and perceptions of stakeholders within the educational process. The objective of the research was to identify key challenges faced by teachers, principals, and educational specialists and to provide recommendations for enhancing inclusive practices within the education system. A total of 268 actively employed individuals from various educational institutions in the Republic of Croatia participated, with data collected via a survey questionnaire.

The results revealed that the majority of respondents are familiar with the concept of inclusive education and believe that their institutions encourage inclusive practices. However, some participants expressed concerns about the lack of resources and support for students with developmental difficulties. Additionally, many respondents recognized efforts by their institutions to provide special attention to students with difficulties, indicating a positive trend toward integrating these students. The research highlights existing challenges in implementing inclusive education and underscores the need for additional training and resources. These findings contribute to a better understanding of inclusive education and provide a foundation for developing strategies to improve practices within Croatia's education system.

**Keywords:** inclusion; education; research; challenges; students with developmental difficulties

### 1. Introduction

Inclusive education represents an approach that ensures all students, regardless of their individual needs and abilities, have equal opportunities to participate in the educational process. In today's society, which faces numerous challenges concerning diversity, the importance of inclusion is becoming increasingly prominent. In this context, a national research study was conducted to analyze the attitudes and perceptions of educational stakeholders regarding inclusive education.

The research aimed to identify the key challenges encountered by teachers, principals, educational specialists, and other educational stakeholders in implementing inclusive practices. Its objective was to contribute to a better understanding of the needs and obstacles present in educational institutions and provide useful guidelines and recommendations for improving inclusion practices. The study analyzed respondents' perceptions and attitudes about the importance of inclusive education, the availability of resources and support, and the promotion of understanding and respect for diversity among students.

### 2. Theoretical framework for inclusion in education

Inclusive education is a key direction within the modern educational system, grounded in the idea of equal rights and opportunities for all students, regardless of their abilities, challenges, or social status. UNICEF (2024) emphasizes that inclusive education ensures equal rights and opportunities for all children, regardless of their difficulties, providing a foundation for social justice. This approach underscores the importance of adapting the system to the needs of students, thereby avoiding marginalization and enabling full participation by all.

According to UNESCO guidelines, inclusive education plays a vital role not only in ensuring equal rights for all students but also in promoting social justice and equality (UNESCO, 2024). The fundamental principles of inclusive education are reflected in international documents such as the Declaration on the Rights of the Child. At the national level, the legal framework includes laws and regulations such as the Act on Education in Secondary Schools (N.N. 87/08 and subsequent amendments).



The key distinction between inclusion and integration lies in the approach to students with difficulties. While integration involves adapting students to the existing system, inclusion requires the educational system to adapt to the individual needs of each student. This concept is based on the assumption that differences among students are an asset rather than a barrier to the educational process. Inclusion emphasizes actively acknowledging and leveraging differences as resources for learning and teaching.

However, the successful implementation of inclusive education often depends on the availability of resources. Challenges in inclusion can be interpreted through resource theory, which highlights the importance of providing material, organizational, and human capacities to implement inclusive practices. A lack of these resources frequently presents obstacles to the daily application of inclusive principles.

Additionally, fostering positive attitudes among teachers, students, and parents is essential because inclusive education requires broader societal support. Interactive teaching approaches, collaboration with parents, and the use of digital tools are key to the success of inclusive educational processes. The professional development of teachers and their continuous education are also priorities to ensure that all stakeholders have the necessary skills and knowledge for successful inclusion.

In Croatia's educational system, inclusion is increasingly recognized as a strategic goal. Nevertheless, practical challenges persist in adapting the system to the needs of students, such as limited resources and insufficient support for teachers. Despite these challenges, inclusive education remains a fundamental direction for the development of modern education and a tool for achieving equity and equality in education.

### **3. Empirical research on inclusion in education through national research „Inclusion in education“**

The empirical research on inclusion in education conducted through the national study “Inclusion in Education” focused on examining the attitudes and perceptions of key stakeholders in the educational process. The research provided a better understanding of existing obstacles and needs in implementing inclusive practices and contributed to the development of recommendations for future improvements to the educational system.

#### **3.1. Research subject and objective**

The research subject encompasses the analysis of inclusion within the educational system, specifically how students with developmental difficulties are integrated into regular school activities. The focus is on the perceptions and attitudes of various stakeholders in the educational process, such as teachers, principals, educational specialists, and teaching assistants. This research aimed to determine the extent to which inclusive practices are applied and the extent to which the needs of students with developmental difficulties are recognized. The objective was to provide guidelines for further improving inclusive education in the Republic of Croatia through the adaptation of teaching methods and enhanced resources. Additionally, the research sought to identify areas within the system requiring improvement to ensure equal educational opportunities for all students.

#### **3.2. Research hypothesis**

Based on the defined research subject and objective, the following hypothesis is established: To ensure the successful inclusion of students with developmental difficulties, it is desirable for educational institutions in the Republic of Croatia to improve resource availability, provide additional training for teachers, and promote collaboration with parents and educational specialists.

#### **3.3. Research questions**

During the research on inclusive education, the need arose to examine the attitudes of teachers, principals, and educational specialists regarding the implementation of inclusion. The following research questions were formulated:

1. What are the key challenges teachers, principals, and educational specialists face in implementing inclusive education in schools?
2. What is the perception of teachers, principals, and educational specialists regarding the availability of resources and support for students with developmental difficulties within the educational system?
3. How do teachers, principals, and educational specialists assess the success of inclusive practices and adaptations of teaching programs for students with developmental difficulties in their educational institutions?



### 3.4. Research instrument

The research was conducted through a survey questionnaire that included questions related to participants' attitudes and experiences regarding inclusive education. The questions focused on key aspects such as awareness of inclusion, support for students with developmental difficulties, and perceptions of the success of inclusive practices in their institutions. The survey covered various dimensions, including resource availability, collaboration with parents and educational specialists, and the adaptation of teaching programs.

The collected data provided a quantitative insight into the current situation and enabled analysis to identify the most significant challenges faced by educational professionals. The results were then presented in graphical form to facilitate interpretation and analysis.

### 3.5. Research methods

Various scientific research methods were employed for processing and presenting data relevant to the topic of this study. Using the analytical method, data were divided into key thematic categories, while synthesis was applied to derive overall conclusions regarding the main challenges of inclusion in the educational system. The comparative method was used to compare the attitudes of teachers and principals toward inclusion, and the classification method grouped 268 respondents' answers into several thematic categories. Inductive reasoning was used to draw conclusions based on specific data, while deductive reasoning tested existing theories on inclusive practices. The descriptive method was applied to describe key research results, and data compilation provided a comprehensive picture of the state of inclusion in education.

Both primary and secondary data sources were utilized for the preparation of this scientific work. Secondary data were gathered by reviewing literature (books, scientific articles, internet sources) and from available databases, which provided insights into the concept, significance, and challenges of inclusion in education. Primary data were collected and analyzed through empirical research, specifically via the survey method. The research focused on analyzing the attitudes of educational stakeholders, including teachers,

principals, and educational specialists, regarding the challenges and opportunities of inclusion in education.

Although the overall number of respondents was satisfactory, an uneven distribution among different participant groups was noted, which may have affected the ability to establish correlations based on educational level or region. This uneven distribution could limit the generalization of results across all groups, as the number of respondents in certain categories (e.g., primary school teachers, secondary school teachers, or various educational levels) was significantly smaller than others. Despite the inability to conduct correlation analysis due to this imbalance, the analysis of specific respondent groups provided valuable insights into the challenges and experiences related to inclusion in education.

### 3.6. Research results

The research utilized a survey questionnaire divided into two main sections. The first section focused on the respondents' profiles, collecting basic information about their workplaces, educational institutions, and roles within the educational system. The second section was aimed at gathering personal opinions and preferences regarding inclusive education. In this part, respondents shared their views on the implementation of inclusive practices, resource availability, and challenges they face in their daily work.

In addition to the questionnaire as the primary data source, the results were supplemented by secondary sources, including literature reviews and relevant studies on inclusive education. These secondary sources provided a broader insight into the theoretical aspects of inclusion and allowed for comparisons with practices in other educational systems.

Internal data sources refer to information collected directly from survey responses, offering a detailed overview of the current situation in educational institutions across the Republic of Croatia. External sources included literature, laws, and legal frameworks related to inclusive education, as well as guidelines from international organizations working in this field.

The research results were presented in graphical form as follows:

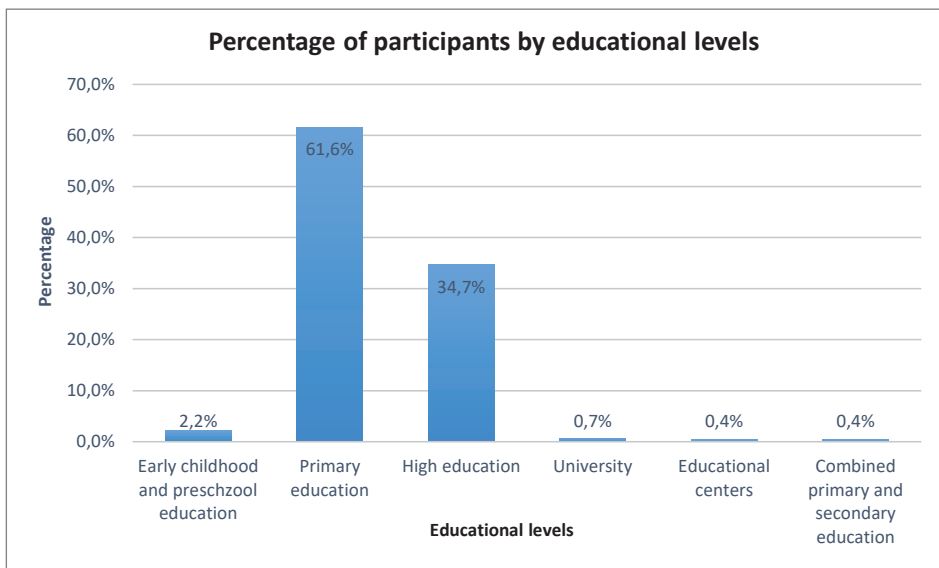
Data were collected through a survey involving respondents from various educational institutions. The results are presented as percentages to better visualize employment distribution.

- University: 0.7%
- Educational centers: 0.4%
- Combined primary and secondary education: 0.4%

**Current Employment of Respondents:**

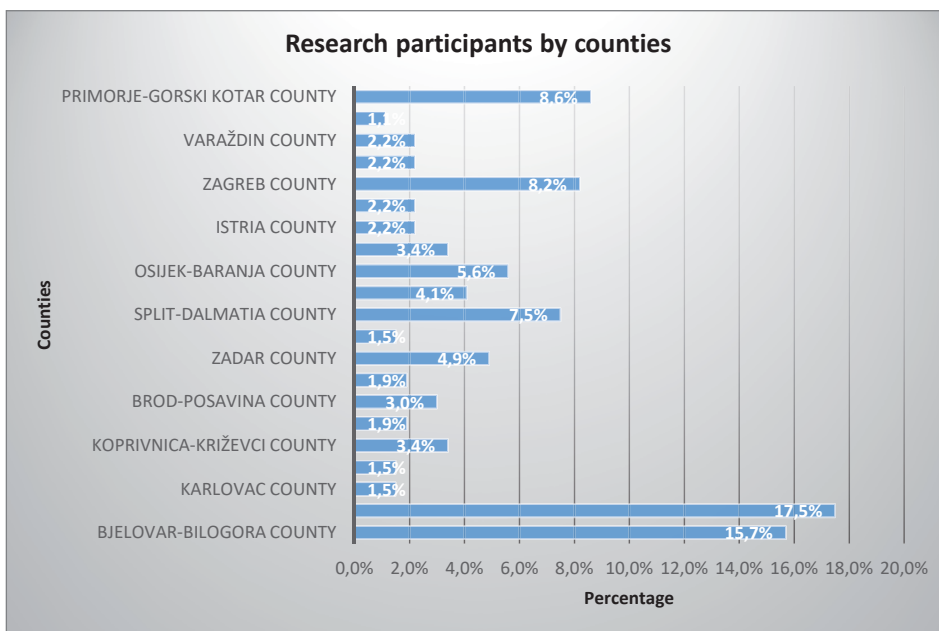
- Primary education: 61.6%
- High education: 34.7%
- Early childhood and preschool education: 2.2%

The majority of respondents are currently employed in primary education (61.6%), while a smaller percentage work in secondary education (34.7%). Other sectors, such as early childhood and preschool education, higher education, and educational and care centers, show significantly lower participation rates in the research.



Source: Own Research

Photo 1. Percentage of participants by educational levels



Source: Own Research

Photo 2. Research Participants by Counties



The largest number of respondents comes from the City of Zagreb, accounting for 17.5% of all research participants. The Bjelovar-Bilogora County ranks second with 15.7% of respondents. The smallest number of participants comes from the Lika-Senj County, with 1.1%.

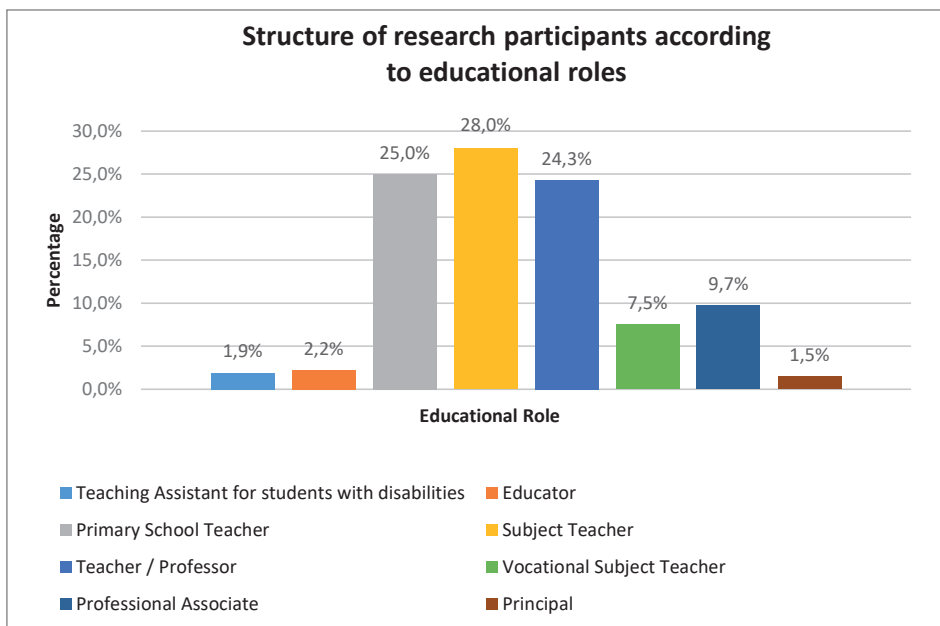
Following these are the Karlovac, Koprivnica-Križevci, and Zadar Counties.

**Roles of Participants in Education:**

- Teaching Assistant for students with disabilities (teaching assistant) 1.9%

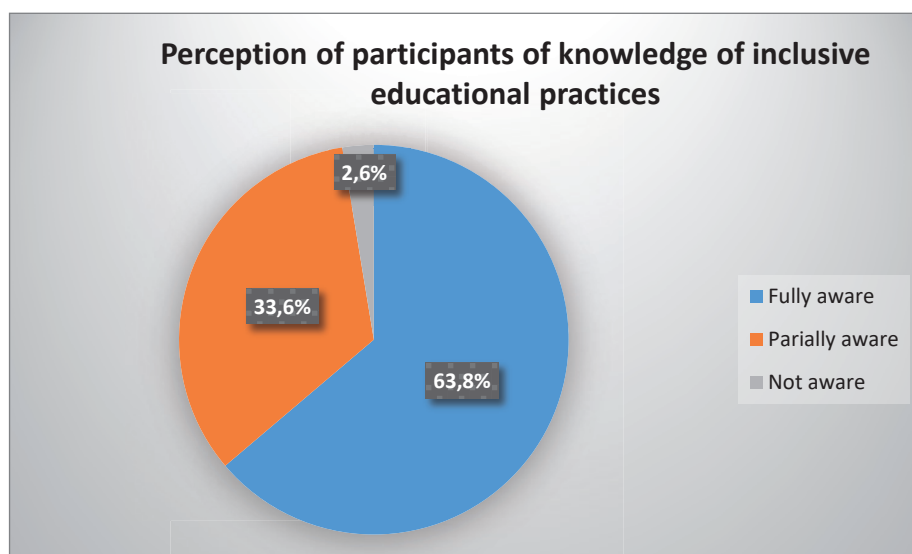
- Educator 2.2%
- Primary School Teacher 25%
- Subject Teacher 28%
- Teacher/Professor 24.3%
- Vocational Subject Teacher 7.5%
- Professional Associate 9.7%
- Principal 1.5%

The distribution of roles in the educational system shows that the largest number of respondents are employed as subject teachers (28%) and primary school teachers (25%). A smaller percentage of respondents work as teaching assistants for stu-



Source: Own Research

Photo 3. Structure of research participants according to educational roles



Source: Own Research

Photo 4. Perception of participants on knowledge of inclusive educational practices

dents with disabilities (1.9%) and principals (1.5%). The survey results regarding participants' knowledge of the concept of inclusive education are presented in the following percentages:

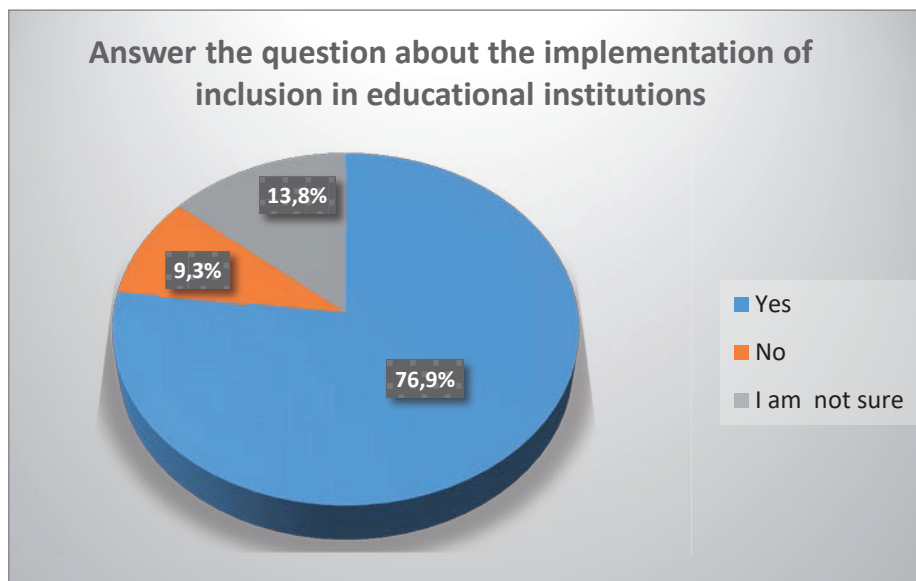
- Fully aware: 63.8%
- Partially aware: 33.6%
- Not aware: 2.6%

The data shows that the majority of respondents (63.8%) are fully aware of the concept of inclusive education. This suggests a high level of awareness and understanding of this concept among the participants. On the other hand, a significant portion

of respondents (33.6%) are partially aware, indicating the need for further education and information to enhance understanding and implementation of inclusive practices. A smaller percentage of respondents (2.6%) are not aware of the concept, which is relatively low, but still important for targeting additional educational efforts.

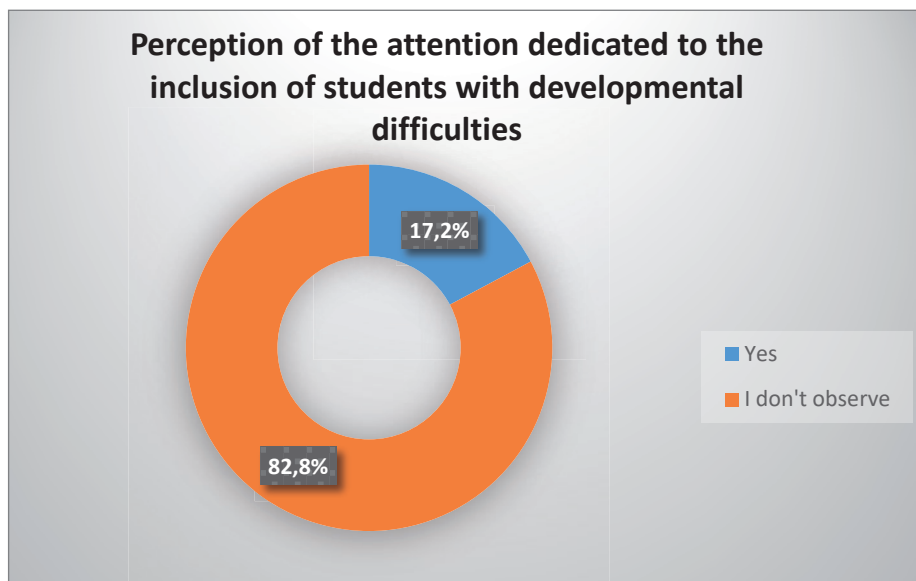
The survey results on respondents' attitudes towards the implementation of inclusive education in their institutions are as follows:

- Yes: 76.9%
- No: 9.3%
- Unsure: 13.8%



Source: Own Research

Photo 5. Answer the question about the implementation of inclusion in educational institutions



Source: Own Research

Photo 6. Perception of the attention dedicated to the inclusion of students with developmental difficulties

The data indicates that the majority of respondents (76.9%) believe that their educational institutions encourage and implement inclusive education. This suggests a positive trend in the acceptance and implementation of inclusive practices. However, 9.3% of respondents do not believe that their institutions promote inclusive education, and 13.8% are unsure about this.

These results suggest that, although significant progress has been made, challenges remain in the full implementation of inclusive education across all institutions.

The results of the survey on the perception of special attention in the inclusion of students with developmental disabilities are as follows:

- Yes 82,8%
- I don't observe 17,2%

Data shows that the majority of respondents (82.8%) observe that special attention is given to the inclusion of students with developmental difficulties in their institutions. This indicates a positive trend in integrating these students and recognizing their needs.

On the other hand, 17.2% of respondents do not observe special attention to the inclusion of these students. This percentage points to possible shortcomings or insufficient visibility of inclusive practices in certain institutions.

It can be concluded that most respondents recognize the efforts of their institutions in including students with developmental difficulties, which is a positive sign of progress towards inclusive education.

Survey results on the availability of resources and support for students with developmental disabilities are as follows:

- Excellent 8,6%
- Good 38,4%
- Average 34%
- Poor 19%

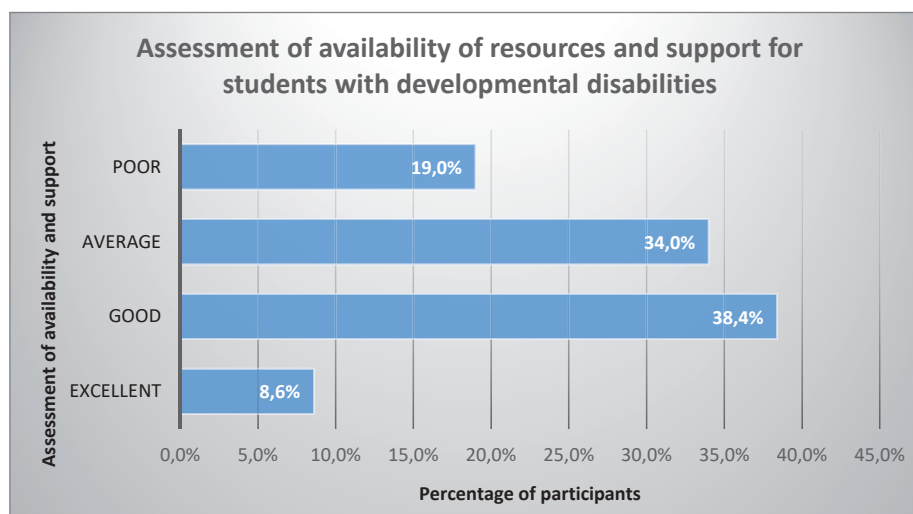
The data shows that most respondents rate the availability of resources and support as "good" (38.4%) or "average" (34%). A smaller percentage rate it as "excellent" (8.6%), while 19% consider it "poor."

These results suggest that, although there is a certain level of support and resources for students with developmental disabilities, there is still significant room for improvement. Particularly concerning is the high percentage of respondents who consider the availability of resources to be poor, which may indicate a lack of resources, insufficient training, or support for teachers and specialists.

Survey Results on Promoting Understanding and Respect for Diversity Among Students:

- Yes, the institution actively promotes understanding and respect for diversity: 63.4%
- I do not notice enough effort to encourage understanding: 23.1%
- I am not sure: 13.4%

The data show that the majority of respondents (63.4%) believe their institution actively promotes understanding and respect for diversity. This indicates a positive trend in educational institutions



Source: Own Research

Photo 7. Assessment of the availability of resources and support for students with developmental disabilities

toward inclusive education and fostering tolerance among students.

However, a significant percentage of respondents (23.1%) do not notice enough effort in this area, and 13.4% are unsure. These results suggest that, although considerable efforts are being made, there is still room for improvement in promoting understanding and respect for diversity.

Most respondents recognize the efforts of their institutions to promote understanding and respect for diversity, but there is a need for continued work to ensure consistent application of these values across all institutions.

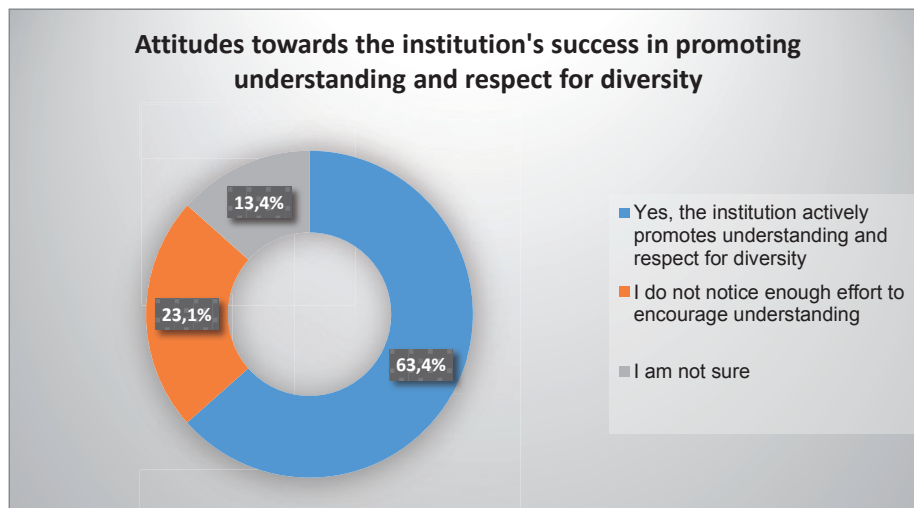
Survey results on the perception of bias towards certain groups are as follows:

- Yes, I observe bias: 20.1%
- No, I do not observe bias: 79.9%

The data indicates that the majority of respondents (79.9%) do not observe bias towards certain groups in their educational institutions, which is a positive sign and reflects the efforts of these institutions to promote equality and inclusivity.

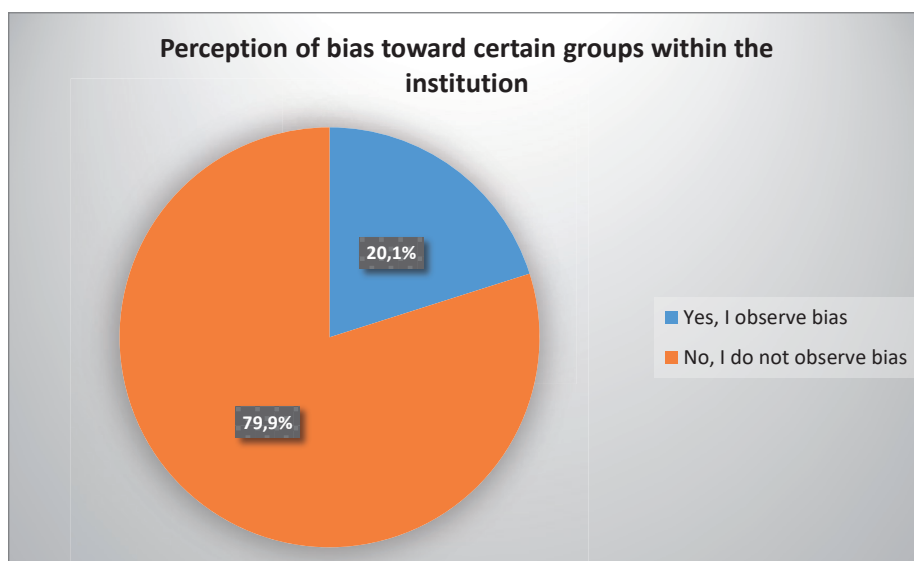
However, 20.1% of respondents observe bias, which is not a negligible percentage. This result suggests that, despite efforts, there are areas where bias may manifest and require additional attention and intervention.

Overall, most respondents do not observe bias in their institutions, indicating success in promoting inclusivity.



Source: Own Research

Photo 8. Attitudes towards the institution's success in promoting understanding and respect for diversity



Source: Own Research

Photo 9. Perception of bias toward certain groups within the institution

Survey Results on the Assessment of Collaboration in Supporting Students with Developmental Disabilities:

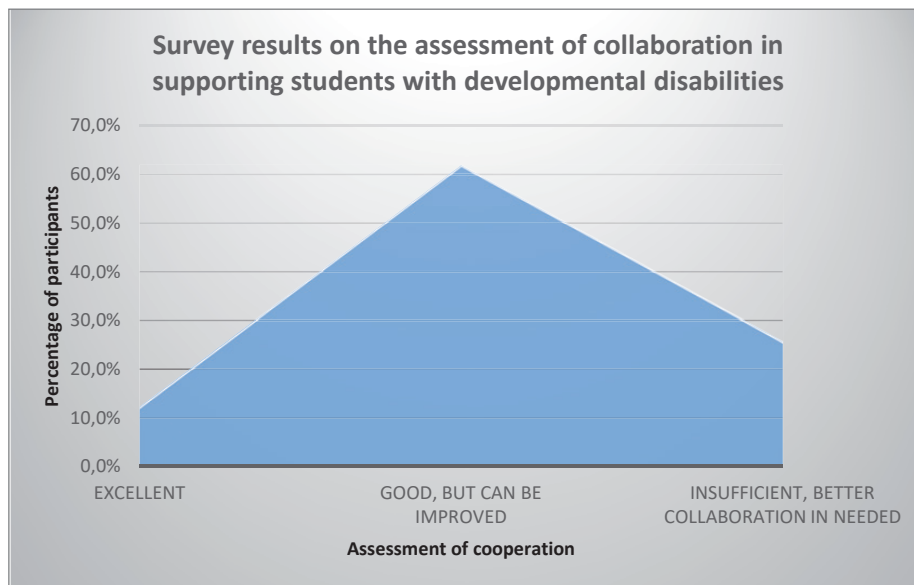
- Excellent: 12.3%
- Good, but can be improved: 61.9%
- Insufficient, better collaboration is needed: 25.7%

The data shows that 12.3% of respondents rate the collaboration as excellent, indicating a very high level of effectiveness and coordination in supporting students with developmental disabilities in certain institutions. This suggests that there

are examples of good practices that can serve as a model for others.

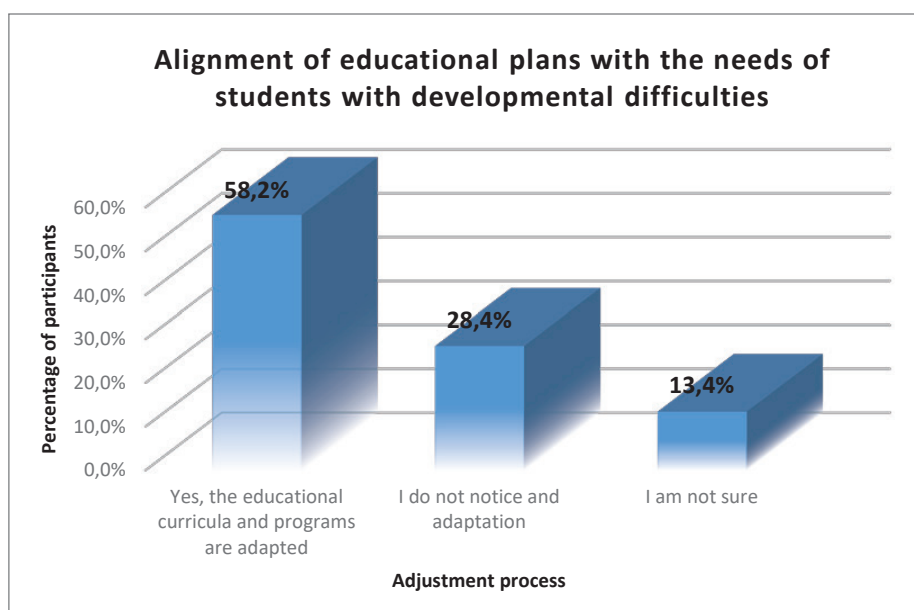
The majority of respondents (61.9%) consider the collaboration to be good but with room for improvement. This indicates a solid foundation for collaboration but also points to the need for additional efforts to improve coordination and the effectiveness of support.

A significant percentage of respondents (25.7%) rate the collaboration as insufficient, which points to serious challenges in communication and coordination among the involved parties. These results



Source: Own Research

Photo 10. Collaboration between parents, teachers and specialists in supporting students with disabilities



Source: Own Research

Photo 11. Alignment of educational plans with the needs of students with developmental difficulties

highlight the need for intervention to ensure adequate support for students with developmental disabilities.

It can be concluded that the majority of respondents recognize that there is a good level of collaboration among teachers, parents, specialists, and experts, but they also acknowledge the need for further improvement. A significant portion of respondents feels that collaboration is insufficient, which indicates an urgent need to improve communication and coordination

The survey results regarding the adaptation of educational plans and programs are as follows:

- Yes, educational plans and programs are adapted: 58.2%
- I do not notice any adaptation: 28.4%
- I am not sure: 13.4%

The data shows that the majority of respondents (58.2%) believe that educational plans and programs are adapted to support students with developmental disabilities. This is a positive indicator, suggesting efforts in providing inclusive education and adapting the curriculum to meet the needs of students.

However, a significant percentage of respondents (28.4%) do not notice any adaptation in the educational plans and programs, which may indicate a lack of visible changes or inadequate implementation of adaptations in some institutions. Additionally, 13.4% of respondents are unsure about the adaptations, suggesting a need for better communication and information about existing adjustments.

It can be concluded that the majority of participants recognize the adaptation of educational plans and programs for students with disabilities, which is a positive sign of progress toward inclusive education.

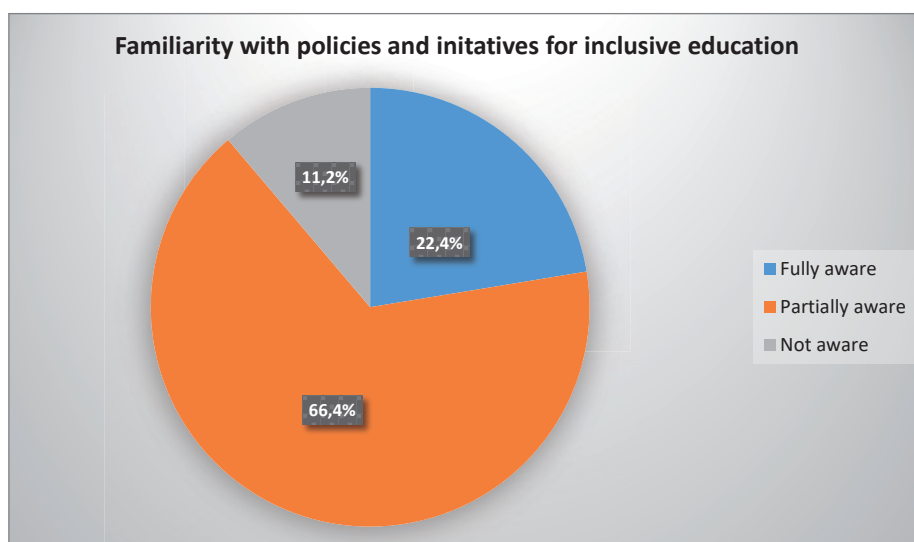
According to the collected data, the level of awareness of existing policies and initiatives promoting inclusive education among the survey respondents is as follows:

- Fully aware 22.4%
- Partially aware 66.4%
- Not aware 11.2%

The group of participants who are fully aware (22.4%) has a high level of awareness and knowledge about policies and initiatives promoting inclusive education. This may indicate that they are actively involved in the educational system, regularly follow updates and changes in educational policies, and participate in relevant training and seminars.

The largest percentage of respondents falls into the partially aware category (66.4%). This suggests that most respondents have basic or intermediate knowledge about inclusive education, but are not fully aware of all the details, policies, and initiatives. This may be due to limited access to information, a lack of time for continuous education, or insufficient communication about these topics within educational institutions.

A smaller percentage of respondents are not aware of inclusive education (11.2%), which may be concerning, as it shows that there is a portion of the population lacking basic information about important educational policies. This points to



Source: Own Research

Photo 12. Familiarity with policies and initiatives for inclusive education



the need for better awareness and education on inclusive education.

Regarding the issue of student assessment (64.9%), it is evident that this problem is the most pronounced. The issue of assessment can include challenges in objectively evaluating the progress of students with disabilities, both in terms of academic results and social skills and behavior. It is possible that teachers are concerned about how to apply the right assessment methods that will reflect the true abilities of students without creating additional stress.

The issue of unrealistically high expectations from their parents (66%) is almost as prevalent as the previous one. Parents often have high expectations that may not align with the abilities of the students, which can create additional pressure on both students and teachers. It is important to provide parents with realistic expectations and information about the possibilities and needs of their children.

The issue of lack of resources and support (57.8%) refers to limited resources such as specialized materials, various technologies, or additional assistance. The lack of resources can significantly hinder working with students with disabilities and make the application of individualized approaches more difficult.

Regarding the lack of knowledge and skills (46.3%), it can be concluded that teachers may not have enough adequate knowledge and skills to work with students with disabilities. This may

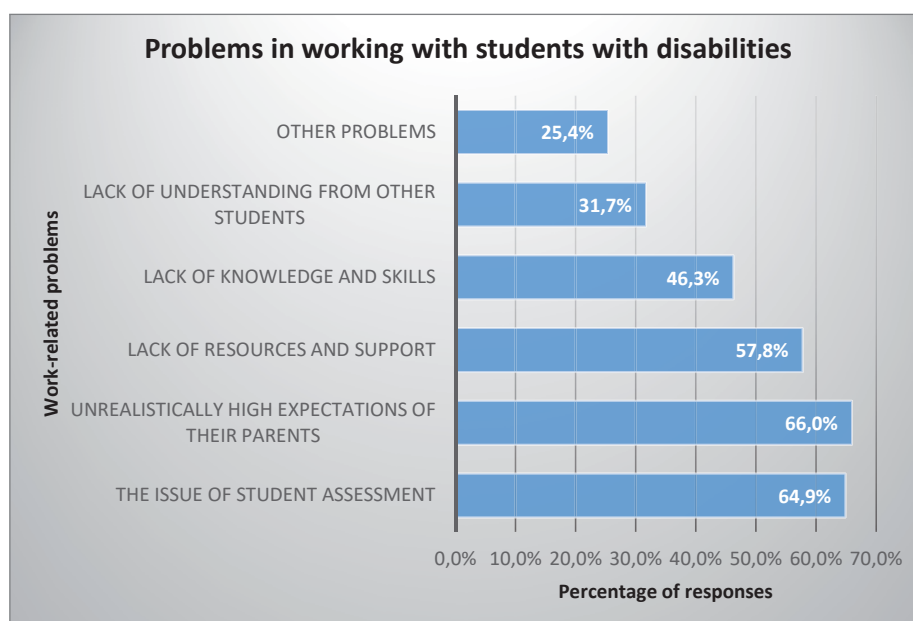
include a lack of training in specific methods and techniques needed for effective work with these students.

The problem related to the lack of understanding among other students (31.7%) suggests that students without disabilities may show a lack of understanding or tolerance toward their peers with disabilities. This can affect the social dynamics in the classroom and create additional challenges in inclusive education.

Regarding other problems (25.4%), it can be concluded that these include other challenges not covered by the previous factors, which may involve specific situations or unforeseen obstacles that arise in different educational contexts.

Analysis of the results clearly shows that teachers face various challenges when working with students with disabilities. The most prominent issues include unrealistic parental expectations and difficulties in assessing students, while the lack of resources and professional knowledge also significantly affects the quality of education. It is necessary to work on strengthening support for teachers, ensuring adequate resources and training, as well as improving communication with parents to create an optimal environment for students with disabilities.

According to the collected data, the most prominent priorities for improving work with students with disabilities are increased support and resources (70.1%) and improved professional training and practical experience for teachers



Source: Own Research

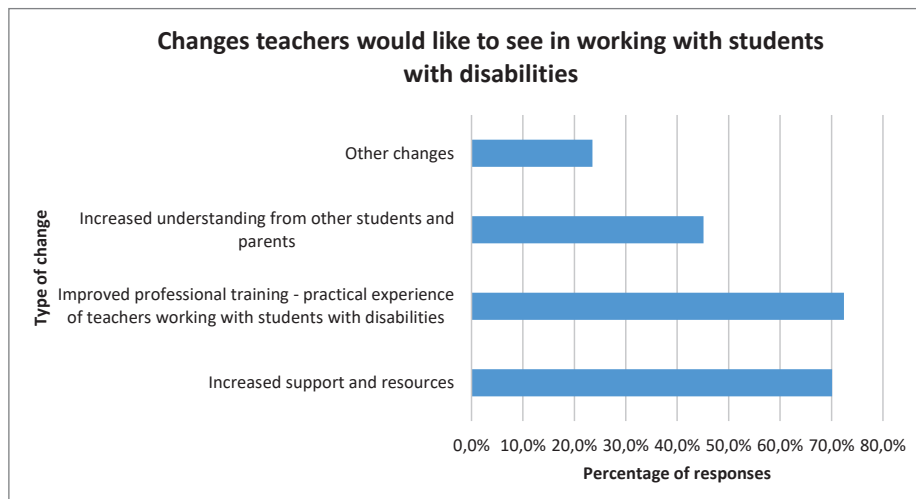
Photo 13. Problems in working with students with disabilities

(72.4%). These results suggest that the need for additional materials and training is crucial for improving the quality of teaching and support. Increased understanding among other students and parents has also been recognized as an important factor (45.1%), while specific changes not covered by the general categories appear at a lower percentage (23.5%). These results emphasize the need for stronger resources, training, and greater understanding to create a more inclusive educational environment.

According to the collected data, the level of usage of digital tools in teaching and communication with students with developmental disabilities among the survey participants is as follows:

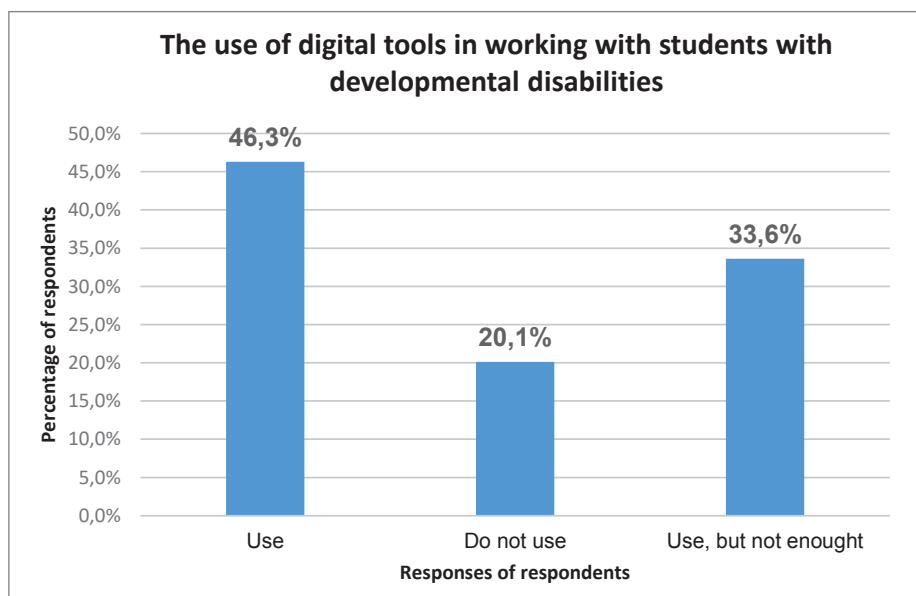
- I use them 46.3%
- I do not use them 20.1%
- I use them, but insufficiently 33.6%

The results indicate a positive trend in the use of digital tools when working with students with disabilities, but also highlight areas for improvement. Nearly half of the participants use digital tools, while a significant portion either does not use them or uses them insufficiently. To ensure the full integration of technology in the education of students with disabilities, additional training, resources, and support for teachers are necessary. Furthermore, efforts should be made to eliminate barriers that prevent more effective use of digital tools in education.



Source: Own Research

Photo 14. Changes teachers would like to see in working with students with disabilities



Source: Own Research

Photo 15. The use of digital tools in working with students with developmental disabilities



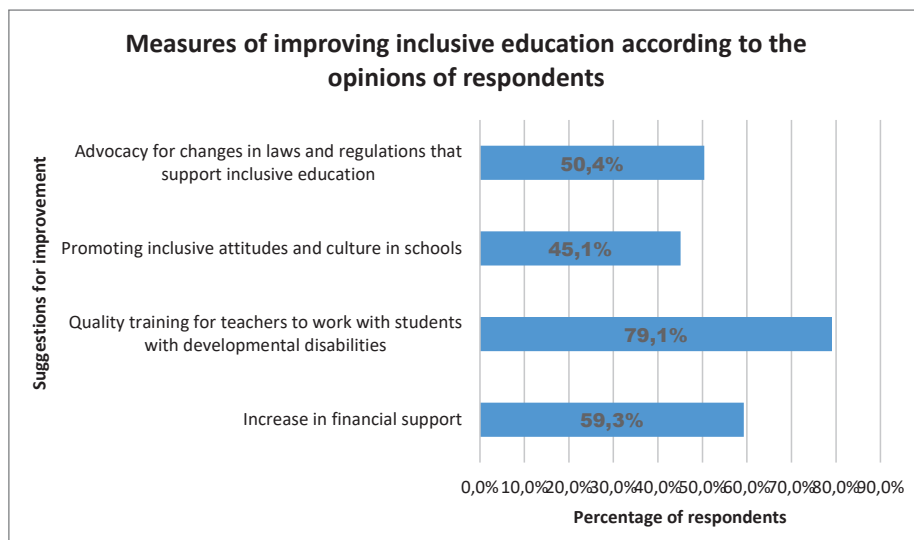
According to the collected data, survey participants identified several key areas for improving inclusive education:

- Increased financial support 59.3%
- Quality teacher training for working with students with developmental disabilities 79.1%
- Promoting inclusive attitudes and culture in schools 45.1%
- Advocacy for changes in laws and regulations supporting inclusive education 50.4%

Respondents clearly highlight key priorities for improving inclusive education. Quality teacher training, increased financial support, promoting

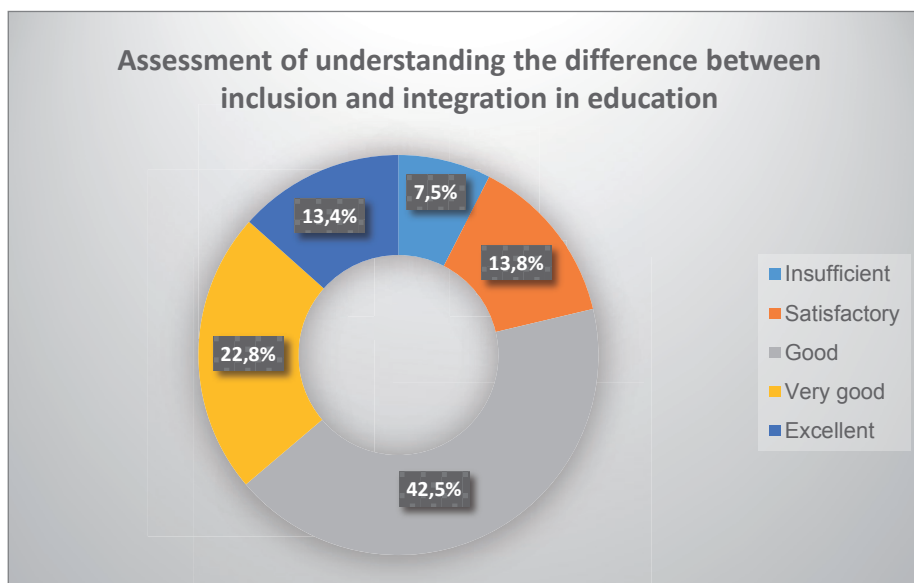
inclusive attitudes and culture, and changes in laws and regulations are recognized as the most important steps. The implementation of these measures can significantly improve the education system and ensure better educational outcomes for students with disabilities. As a society, we need to advocate for these changes to create a more inclusive and equitable educational environment for all students.

According to the collected data, respondents assessed their understanding of the difference between inclusion and integration in education as follows:



Source: Own Research

Photo 16. Measures of improving inclusive education according to the opinions of respondents



Source: Own Research

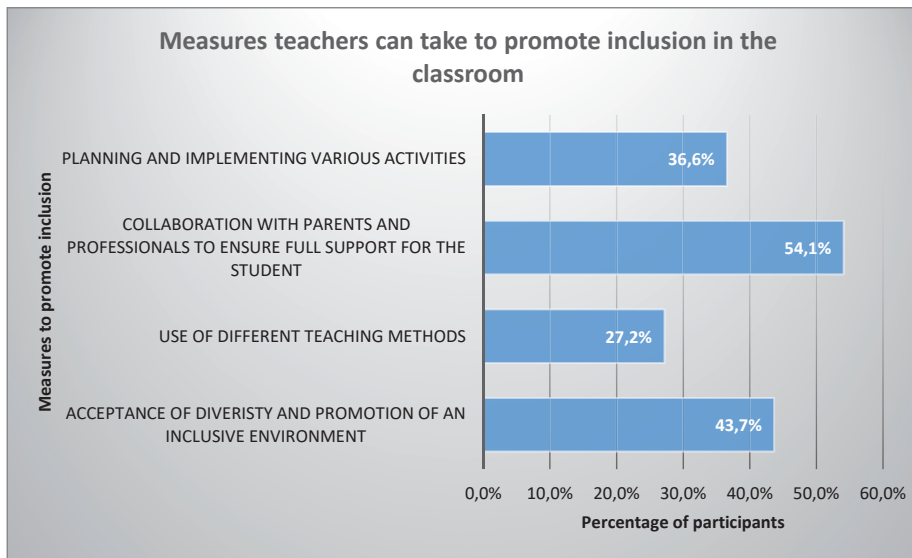
Photo 17. Assessment of understanding the difference between inclusion and integration in education

- Grade insufficient 7.5%
- Grade sufficient 13.8%
- Grade good 42.5%
- Grade very good 22.8%
- Grade excellent 13.4%

The survey results show that the majority of participants have a solid to very good understanding of the difference between inclusion and integration in education. However, there is a significant number of respondents who could benefit from further education and training to achieve a deeper understanding of these key concepts. 13.4% of

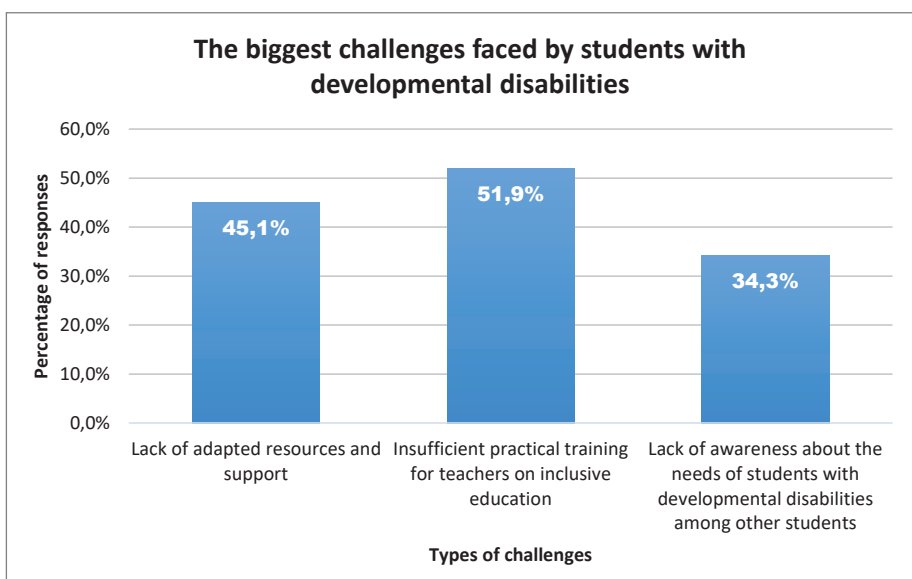
respondents rated their understanding as excellent, and they have a comprehensive understanding of the concepts of inclusion and integration, being able to distinguish and apply these concepts in an educational context. Improving knowledge of the differences between inclusion and integration can contribute to better implementation of inclusive practices in educational institutions, ensuring a higher quality educational experience for all students.

According to the collected data, respondents listed the following measures that teachers can take to promote inclusion in the classroom:



Source: Own Research

Photo 18. Measures teachers can take to promote inclusion in the classroom



Source: Own Research

Photo 19. The biggest challenges faced by students with developmental disabilities



- Acceptance of diversity and promotion of an inclusive environment 43.7%
- Use of different teaching methods 27.2%
- Collaboration with parents and professionals to ensure full support for the student 54.1%
- Planning and implementing various activities 36.6%

The survey results indicate that teachers can promote inclusion in the classroom through various measures, with collaboration with parents and professionals being recognized as the most important. Additionally, acceptance of diversity and creating an inclusive environment, using different teaching methods, and planning and implementing various activities also play a key role. These measures together contribute to creating a stimulating and supportive educational environment where every student has the opportunity to succeed.

According to the collected data, the biggest challenges faced by students with developmental disabilities in the educational environment are as follows:

- Lack of adapted resources and support 45.1%
- Insufficient practical training for teachers on inclusive education 51.9%
- Lack of awareness about the needs of students with developmental disabilities among other students 34.3%

The highest percentage of respondents recognizes the need for better practical teacher training. This includes training programs that would enable teachers to acquire the skills and knowledge necessary to work with students with disabilities. Practical training helps teachers better cope with various challenges. It can be concluded that the survey results highlight three main challenges faced by students with developmental disabilities in the educational environment: the lack of adapted resources and support, insufficient practical teacher training, and the lack of awareness about their needs among other students. Addressing these challenges requires a joint effort from educational institutions, parents, professionals, and the community to ensure an inclusive and supportive educational environment for all students.

#### 4. Discussion

The research results indicate a high level of awareness of inclusive education among respondents, consistent with findings from previous studies

conducted in the Republic of Croatia and abroad (Bouillet & Bukvić, 2015). However, it is concerning that a significant percentage of respondents highlighted a lack of resources and support for students with developmental difficulties. This contradicts the principles of inclusive education, which require the adaptation of the system to meet the needs of every student, thereby addressing the first research question regarding key challenges in implementing inclusive education (Bouillet & Bukvić, 2015).

Particular emphasis was placed on the challenges of assessing students with difficulties, confirming the theoretical premise that traditional assessment systems are often unsuitable for inclusive frameworks (Cindrić, 2021). These challenges correspond to the second research question regarding the perceptions of teachers, principals, and educational specialists about the availability of resources and support for students with difficulties within the educational system. There is a need to develop more flexible assessment models that consider individual abilities and student progress to support inclusion in education (Cindrić, 2021).

The identified need for additional teacher training aligns with literature emphasizing the importance of continuous professional development for the successful implementation of inclusive practices (Wade, 2019). This addresses the third research question concerning the evaluation of current inclusive practices and the adaptation of teaching programs for students with difficulties. In this context, proposed measures such as mentorship, workshops, and training for the use of digital tools represent significant steps toward enhancing inclusion (Wade, 2019). Implementing strategies recommended by the Inclusive Schools Network (2024) enables teachers to tailor instruction to the individual needs of students, thereby increasing the success of inclusion.

The hypothesis that successful inclusion of students with developmental difficulties can be ensured through improved resources, additional teacher training, and collaboration with parents and educational specialists was partially confirmed through the survey findings.

Positive trends, such as the application of inclusive methods in a majority of surveyed schools, demonstrate that Croatia's educational system is laying a strong foundation for inclusion. However, additional efforts are required to strengthen institutional support and ensure the necessary resources.

In comparison with international practices, the results indicate that the Republic of Croatia still



lags in certain aspects of inclusive education, such as the full adaptation of teaching programs and better collaboration with parents. These findings highlight the need for alignment with international guidelines and further improvements in legal frameworks to achieve full inclusiveness within the education system (Bouillet & Bukvić, 2015; Wade, 2019).

## 5. Conclusion

The research on inclusion in education provided valuable insights into the professional and personal needs, habits, and attitudes of actively employed pedagogical and educational professionals in the Republic of Croatia. The analysis of collected data highlights the importance of continuous personal and professional development, as well as ongoing learning and self-improvement. The results clearly demonstrate a significant need for additional resources, support, and training to enable educational professionals to successfully address the challenges of inclusive education.

Key obstacles identified include the lack of specific training for working with students with special needs, limited access to modern educational materials and technology, and the need for greater institutional support. Furthermore, the importance of collaboration and experience-sharing among pedagogical workers was emphasized,

as it can significantly contribute to improving inclusive practices in education.

The research results point to the need to enhance existing professional development programs to better meet the specific demands and challenges faced by educational professionals. Additionally, the development of new programs and initiatives that support teachers and educators in their work is recommended, including mentoring, workshops, and seminars focused on inclusion.

To ensure a broader understanding and application of the research findings, the results will be presented to the wider public at professional gatherings of educational professionals. These presentations will facilitate direct dialogue with practitioners and experts, encouraging the exchange of ideas and experiences. Furthermore, the results will be published in media outlets and professional journals to inform a wider audience involved in creating and designing educational strategies, professional guidelines, and development initiatives for educational professionals.

Ultimately, this research represents an important step toward better understanding and improving inclusion in education. By providing concrete data and recommendations, we hope to contribute to the development of an educational system that is fairer, more accessible, and supportive for all students, regardless of their individual needs and circumstances.

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