

Advantages and Challenges of Inclusive Education: Analysis of Teachers' Subjective Experiences

Daiva Alifanovienė

Vilnius University Šiauliai Academy, Lithuania
daiva.alifanoviene@sa.vu.lt
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4534-462X>

Laima Tomėnienė

Vilnius University Šiauliai Academy, Lithuania
laima.tomeniene@sa.vu.lt
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6356-5832>

Abstract. *The article aims to reveal the context of the expression of advantages and challenges of inclusive education. The research was based on an interpretive approach to research methodology in order to find out the attitude of the research participants – teachers of general education schools – about the reality of the implementation of inclusive education in the context of general education. In order to achieve high-quality education for all, the teachers saw the positive benefits of inclusion for all participants in the process of education, the community of the institution, the positive process of socialization, and the emotional well-being of children. It is emphasized that the successful implementation of the principle of inclusion in the school is impossible without changing values, attitudes, and beliefs, constructive and effective cooperation, team work of teachers and educational support specialists both when planning activities and directly working in the classroom.*

Keywords: *inclusive education, challenges, teachers, experiences*

Introduction

National and international documents emphasize the importance of a safe, inclusive, dynamic, open, and functional educational environment for all with diverse educational needs due to language, religion, nationality, ethnic group, gender, disability, social

Received: 2023-12-06. **Accepted:** 2024-02-27

Copyright © 2023 Daiva Alifanovienė, Laima Tomėnienė. Published by Vilnius University Press. This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution Licence, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.

environment, etc. (Education 2030; Geros mokyklos koncepcija [Good School Concept], 2015). The focus is on the actualization of inclusion in education and the implementation of the principle of inclusion in the education system, when conditions are created for each person to receive education, develop their powers and abilities, receive the necessary help, experience success in learning, social, cultural and/or other activities and not to be discriminated against due to the diversity of educational needs and/or the need for educational assistance (LR Švietimo įstatymo 5 str. 5 d. [Paragraph 5 of Article 5 of the Law on Education of the Republic of Lithuania], 2011). It is noted that inclusion in education is not an end point, it is a process of systematic transformation, which includes changing and modifying the content of education, teaching/learning methods, attitudes, organization and strategies of education in order to remove barriers to provide an equal and active learning experience for all learners of an appropriate age and to ensure an accessible environment (General Comments of the Committee on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities No. 4, 2016). According to Tiernan (2022), the basis of inclusive education is the recognition that all children can learn together in the same school, which means that in educational institutions it is necessary to analyze the ongoing processes and foresee the most important directions, which must be constantly worked on and efforts must be made to find the most effective means and activities that will help all children to experience success of teaching/learning ([Traukties švietime plėtros gairės [Guidelines for the development of inclusion in education], 2022). It is important to seek to implement the requirement to remove barriers that may limit children's participation and achievement (Tiernan, 2022).

National and international education and training documents state the right of all learners to education, prevention of various types of discrimination, stereotypic evaluation or exclusion and the creation of opportunities for meaningful and high-quality education, active participation of the learners themselves (Global Education Monitoring Report, 2020; European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2022). The documents point out that education must be a "shared social responsibility" – one of the basic human rights, strengthening everyone's ability to care for others and to cooperate at all levels of society (International Commission on the Futures of Education, 2021).

The documents regulating the progress of society and the development of education (Lietuvos pažangos strategija „Lietuva 2030“ [Lithuania's Progress Strategy "Lithuania 2030"], Valstybės pažangos strategija „Lietuvos ateities vizija „Lietuva 2050“ [State Progress Strategy "Lithuania's Future Vision "Lithuania 2050"], Valstybinė švietimo strategija 2013-2022 [State strategy of education for 2013-2022], etc.) emphasize the usefulness of inclusive education for all participants in the process of education. In order to achieve sustainable development goals in an inclusive society, a holistic approach and social investment in quality learning for all members of society should be sought. All participants in the process of education must expand the boundaries

of their understanding of inclusive education. The latter should cover all learners, and personalized education should promote the activity of the individuals themselves (International Commission on the Futures of Education, 2021).

This has been supported by the results of a number of empirical studies that have examined the impact of inclusion on learner outcomes in different curriculum areas and at different levels of education (Molina Roldán et al., 2021; Kefallinou et al., 2020; Szumski et al., 2017; Oh-Young & Filler, 2015, etc.). It is noted that academic and social progress is increasing when students with special educational needs are taught in well-designed and organized inclusive classrooms (Waldron & Mcleskey, 2010). In such classrooms, typically developing students learn to respect others, accept differences and recognize different abilities, thus creating opportunities to form new friendships; they learn about the skills involved in helping others, participate, learn, develop patience and thus gain satisfaction from helping others to learn and behave better; they get a chance to get to know themselves and their peers better (Molina Roldán et al., 2021) the extension and universalization of an inclusive approach will also be enhanced with more evidence on the benefits that inclusion has for all students, including those without SEN. Based on the existing knowledge that learning interactions among diverse students are a key component of educational inclusion, the aim of this study is to identify the impact on students without SEN of being educated with students with SEN in shared, inclusive, interactive learning environments. Data were collected in three schools using a qualitative approach with a communicative orientation. Semistructured interviews were held with teachers as well as community volunteers participating in the schools. Further, focus groups were conducted with students and teachers. The results show that students without SEN benefit from participating in interactive learning activities with peers with SEN in different ways: (1. It is emphasized that the successful implementation of the principle of inclusion in the school is completely impossible without changing attitudes so that the diversity of students is considered a value, without constructive and effective cooperation, team work of teachers and educational support specialists, both when planning activities and directly working in the classroom, because only interpersonal relations between all members of the school community, based on mutual respect and agreements, attention, and understanding can become a prerequisite for the successful implementation of inclusion (Auškėlis et al., 2022; Ališauskienė & Miltenienė, 2018; Miltenienė et al., 2020; Kaffemanienė et al., 2023). Change of attitudes is inextricably linked to professional development, development of competences and continuous support for the implementation of changes (Įtraukties švietime plėtros gairės [Guidelines for the development of inclusion in education], 2022). Recent research confirms that teachers' attitudes and behaviors have a significant impact on the quality of teacher–student interactions and students' achievement (Charitaki et al., 2022; Saloviita, 2020).

Regardless of the considerable work of scientists and practitioners analyzing the situation of inclusive education, unfortunately, the community of teachers and

parents still lacks knowledge and awareness of this process, the difficulties, the stress experienced by participants in the process of education.

A research problem can be characterized by the questions that require new research: *what advantages of inclusive education do teachers in educational institutions see, what challenges do the participants of the educational process face?*

Research aim – to reveal the context of the expression of advantages and challenges of inclusive education.

Research object – subjective experiences of teachers working in the situation of inclusive education.

Research methodology, sample, ethics. The informants were selected by means of targeted convenience sampling, i.e. teachers working in a general education school with students with special educational needs (SEN) were selected (N = 8). A qualitative data collection approach was chosen to reveal the experiences of the subjects. The researchers chose the focus group method, which allows asking open-ended questions that do not limit the possible answers according to the assessment areas provided by the researchers. The focus group method is designed to collect detailed descriptive data in small groups of subjects. The method chosen by the research group is based on the active interaction of the subjects, in which their views, attitudes, and considerations come to the fore. In this article, we will present several diagnostic areas that, from our point of view, characterize inclusive education. The latter were singled out after analyzing documents, scientific literature, the authors' research, revealing the positive opportunities, challenges, and methodological controversies of inclusive education (Ališauskienė & Miltenienė, 2018; Miltenienė et al., 2020; Ruškus & Mažeikis, 2007; Šapelytė et al., 2021).

Using this method of sample formation, by participating in a group discussion, participants better understand the inclusion processes taking place in the educational institution, are inclined to change, are in favor of changes, see advantages and disadvantages, problems, are open to new ideas. The group discussion promotes the activity and openness of the participants, the “brainstorming” of new solutions, a positive perception of the process of inclusion, and the researchers have the opportunity to learn their opinions and experiences about the object under study (Bitinas, Rupšienė, & Žydzūnaitė, 2008; Žydzūnaitė & Sabaliauskas, 2017).

The content of the answers, which formed the basis of the study, was categorized according to respective diagnostic areas, divided into categories (generalized semantic units), notional statements were selected. In the course of the research, the experiences and feelings of teachers who work in educational institutions where children with SEN study, which are encountered when working with them, were to be revealed. The study was based on an interpretive approach to research methodology in order to find out the views of the study participants about the educational reality of interest to us in the context of general education. This reality was reconstructed and revealed by interpreting the experiences and attitudes of teachers and analyzing the research of

other authors. The research data were organized applying the content analysis method, using an open coding procedure, presenting it from the teachers' perspective (Corbin & Strauss, 2014; Kvale & Binkmann, 2009). The expertise method was used for the validation of qualitative research data. The experts were presented with qualitative research tables with the intended diagnostic areas, the categories characterizing them and illustrating statements, after analyzing which, an opinion was expressed regarding the appropriateness and reliability of the data presented. The essential comments of the expert (naming and clarification of diagnostic areas, regrouping and highlighting of some illustrating statements) were taken into account when analyzing and interpreting the data. This made it possible to achieve a clearer and more detailed presentation of the study, a more accurate presentation and analysis of empirical qualitative research data, the quality of interpretation and presentation of the results.

The research participants were informed in advance about the aim of the research and the course of the research, the time and place were planned. The qualitative semistructured interview followed the principles of research ethics: respect for the individual and voluntariness. During the research, the privacy and anonymity of the research participants was respected, all information received is considered confidential (Bitinas, Rupšienė, & Žydžiūnaitė, 2008; Žydžiūnaitė & Sabaliauskas, 2017).

Analysis and discussion of the research results

In the course of the research, efforts were made to find out what advantages of inclusive education are perceived by teachers working in schools where children with SEN study. In the article, we present only the most informative and characteristic statements of the research participants (Table 1).

Table 1
Advantages of inclusive education in educational institutions

Category	Examples of statements
Positive socialization of learners	<i>A child with special educational needs socializes. [P1] It's good when you see how they "grow." [P2] I think it's a reality – inclusive education, we need to learn to work in a classroom with students of different abilities, it's useful for everyone. [P3]</i>
Emotional well-being	<i>Typically developing children learn empathy. [P1] Not only students but also parents learn tolerance. <...> It is good when other students in the class help them to get calm, to learn. [P2] I have a child who stutters in the classroom, when he has difficulty speaking, the children even advise "take your time". [P4]</i>
Benefits of organizing the inclusive education process	<i>Mutual benefit. And we learn, we look for new ways, methods... we create new tools. [P3] Every day is different, we improve ourselves, we learn. [P1-P8]</i>

	<p><i>It is necessary to individualize tasks for children and then they feel better and experience success. This is also everyone's success. [P6]</i></p> <p><i>This is how we try to ensure the best possible learning conditions for students with various educational needs. [P2]</i></p>
Cooperation of the participants in the process of education	<p><i>But this is where psychologists, social and special educators come to the rescue. Only together we can travel towards success in small steps. [P5, P6, P7]</i></p> <p><i>Closer cooperation with parents, it helps to get to know children better. [P7]</i></p> <p><i>The principal suggests strategies that would be more suitable for parents and other participants in the process of education. [P4]</i></p> <p><i>In inclusive education, everyone's cooperation is important – teachers together with students, their parents, educational support specialists analyze the causes of learning failures and other educational difficulties at the meetings of the Child Welfare Commission. Then, support focused on the student's needs is provided. [P1-P8]</i></p>
Positive attitude of teachers towards children with SEN	<p><i>Teachers' attitudes towards children with SEN are positive, they try to understand. [P1-P8]</i></p> <p><i>The administration forms appropriate attitudes towards children with SEN, communicates a lot with parents and children. [P2]</i></p> <p><i>Efforts are made to protect parents of children with SEN from attacks by other parents, etc. (especially those with behavioral and emotional disorders). [P4, P7]</i></p>

Reconstructing the multimeaning context of the inclusive education process in terms of the educational diversity of students, the analysis of the collected data allows us to see the **advantages** provided by such education. In the course of the research, the generalized semantic units that have been distinguished precisely reveal the diversity of the variables of the expression of inclusion (Bitinas, Rupšienė, & Žydžiūnaitė, 2008; Žydžiūnaitė & Sabaliauskas, 2017).

The analysis of the teachers' opinion revealed the **advantages of inclusive education**. The research participants believe that inclusive education promotes the **process of positive socialization** of students (Kvieskienė, 2005, Ruškus & Mažeikis, 2007). In their opinion, the presence of children with different needs together undoubtedly has a positive effect on the success of their socialization:

A child with special educational needs socializes <...> [P1] It's good when you see how they "grow" <...> [P2] I think it's a reality – inclusive education, we need to learn to work in a classroom with students of different abilities, it's useful for everyone <...> [P3] Those children can achieve a lot of good results, develop competences, and later they socialize properly in society <...> [P8]

The research data reveal that inclusive education creates suitable conditions for students' **emotional well-being**, empathy, favorable interpersonal relationships, which create prerequisites for personality growth (Geros mokyklos koncepcija [Good School Concept], 2015, Valstybinė švietimo strategija 2013-2022 [State strategy of education for 2013-2022]). The field of emotional well-being allows children to feel happy,

important, responsible, and self-confident. In such an environment, children feel safe and self-confident:

Typically developing children learn empathy <...> [P1] Children are quite friendly, bullying does not occur, they accept him as he is, they learn to help <...> [P8]

Other participants in the process of education are also important for the development of the emotional well-being of students. According to the teachers, not only children but also family members must learn tolerance:

Not only students but also parents learn tolerance. <...> It is good when other students in the class help them to get calm, to learn. [P2] Although we speak to communicate tolerantly, parents often advise their children to "hit back." Then you need to talk not only with the children, but also with the parents, discuss compliance with the rules of conduct, advice for the children <...> [P6].

The subjective experiences of the research participants reveal the **benefits of inclusive education** for all participants in the process of education. This is also reflected in important documents regulating the progress of society and the development of education (Lietuvos pažangos strategija „Lietuva 2030“ [Lithuania's Progress Strategy "Lithuania 2030"]; Valstybinė švietimo strategija 2013-2022 [State strategy of education for 2013-2022]; Ruškus, 2020). By increasing the inclusion and accessibility of education, favorable opportunities are created to reveal personal abilities and to meet special educational needs:

Mutual benefit. And we learn, we look for new ways, methods, we create new tools <...> [P3] We share our good experience of working with special students, their "success stories" with other teachers, it is useful <...> [P7] This is also everyone's success <...> [P6] The administration makes efforts, communicates with parents, and looks for professionals <...> [P1-P8].

When reconstructing the process of inclusive education in schools, the opinion of teachers about the importance of **cooperation of the participants in the process of education** becomes apparent. The teachers believe that the success of the process of inclusion is hard to imagine without teamwork between teachers and educational support specialists (Gaižiūnas, 2022, Galkienė, 2021, Miltenienė & Venclovaitė, 2012). Such cooperation must take place *within* the school community (internal cooperation of participants in the educational process), sharing important, sensitive information with colleagues, families, administration in order to maximally meet the needs of the child. The continuation of cooperation must also include activities outside the educational institution (extra-school, inter-institutional cooperation), involving the community, other schools and institutions:

While providing them with help, we cooperate constructively with educational support specialists, we try to include the students' parents and the children themselves <...> [P1-P8] Teachers' cooperation with specialists is encouraged <...> [P3] The principal suggests strategies that would be

more suitable for parents and other participants in the process of education <...> [P4] Joint events and meetings are organized <...> [P1, P5] Parents are included in their organization [of various activities, events] <...> [P7].

The research data also reveal another important matter, which includes not only functional (positive socialization, cooperation) aspects of the organization of inclusive education, but also a philosophical and methodological view, a **positive attitude** towards children with SEN, **values** that are likely to be the most important in educational practice (Council Recommendation on Common values, Inclusive Education and the European Dimension of Teaching, 2018; Įtraukties veiksmų planas 2021-2024 [Inclusion Action Plan 2021-2024], UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2006).

The teachers state: *The administration forms appropriate attitudes towards children with SEN, communicates a lot with parents and children <...> [P2] Teachers' attitudes towards children with SEN are positive, they try to understand <...> [P1-P8].*

Both international strategic education documents and the strategic education documents of the Republic of Lithuania state the prerogatives of establishing human rights and democratic values, for which, by the way, it is most difficult to yield change, transformation and practical implementation. This is also reflected in the attitude expressed by the teachers about the process of inclusive education.

During the research, we analyzed what challenges teachers working in the inclusion situation face, what causes stressful situations, what difficulties arise in organizing the process of education. The study analyzes the subjective context of the teachers' experiences and presents only the most informative statements (Table 2).

Table 2

Challenges of inclusion in educational institutions

Category	Examples of statements
Little differentiation of physical environments in the educational institution	<p><i>Not adapted physical environments of schools. [P4, P6]</i></p> <p><i>Lack of calming rooms, special measures for children of certain SEN groups. [P5]</i></p> <p><i>There must be different classes under one roof, where students study separately when necessary and together when necessary. [P4, P6]</i></p>
Poor adaptation of classroom learning spaces	<p><i>There is no way to separate a child if he/she needs a quiet environment, the classroom is small, there are many children. [P7]</i></p> <p><i>The quality of learning can suffer when there are aggressive children and there is no place to take them out or make them sit separately to get calm. [P3]</i></p>
A large number of students with SEN in the classroom	<p><i>It is difficult for one teacher to work when there are children of very different abilities in a large classroom. [P3]</i></p> <p><i>When there are many children with SEN in the classroom, it is difficult to organize the process of education. [P1]</i></p>

A long process of getting to know a child with SEN	<i>The disorder causes difficulties in other cases, it takes a long time to get to know the child. [P4] You have to wait a very long time before the specialists of the Development Centres accept for consultation. [P1-P8] You also have to wait for the consultation of the specialists of the Pedagogical Psychological Service. [P1]</i>
Difficulties in educating children with behavioral, emotional, and multiple developmental disorders	<i>It is more difficult with children with mental, behavioral, and emotional disorders. [P1-P8] Teachers often experience physical violence from them. [P4] Physical and verbal violence, bullying, inappropriate behavior that affects other children. [P6, P8]</i>
Lack of educational support professionals	<i>Schools do not have so many professionals. [P5] We need more qualified special educators who help teachers a lot. [P1, P4, P6]</i>
Teaching assistants are not competent enough to help children with SEN	<i>Teaching assistants are needed to help organize assistance for students properly. [P7] The competence of teaching assistants is insufficient – at least courses are needed. [P1, P4, P5, P7]</i>
Difficulties in cooperation with parents	<i>It happens that some parents do not admit their child's behavioral disorders, that he/she has a problem. [P2, P5] Parents of other children begin to ask how much they can tolerate the inappropriate behavior of the child with SEN. [P5, P6] "Super mums" lack tolerance, they often interfere with organizing the education process, they understand everything, how a teacher should work. [P5] Parents of misbehaving children are invited to attend classes to observe their child's behavior. [P5]</i>
Negative attitudes of teachers towards children with SEN	<i>Inadequate attitude of some teachers towards children with SEN in older classes. There is a lack of flexibility in some subject teachers. [P2] It is difficult for teachers to accept those "more difficult" children, then the teacher's motivation is emotionally destroyed. [P5, P6]</i>
Difficulties in adapting the content of education	<i>Many questions arise when it is necessary to adapt the content of education, to select appropriate methods for students with more severe SEN. [P1, P3] Subject teachers often have difficulties with the personalization of education. They are all different. [P2]</i>
Gaps in the appropriate legal framework	<i>No one protects teachers, there is a lack of documents. [P5] All rights for parents and children, but not for teachers and specialists. [P4] Politicians must coordinate the preparation of documents with practitioners. [P1, P3]</i>
Difficulties in disclosing personal data	<i>Having information also helps to form classes more appropriately. [P1, P4, P5, P7] More responsibility is needed for parents – the availability of information must be in order to create suitable conditions for the education of these children. [P1, P4, P5, P6]</i>

In order to achieve a successful process of inclusion, it is important for educational institutions to adhere to the principles of universal design, which provide opportunities for children with different needs to use accessible school and classroom spaces: halls, classrooms, libraries, canteens, toilets, individual recreation and other. Educational environments should be reviewed and transformed, mobile, changing according to the emerging needs of students. Teachers and students should be trained to use them in order to achieve their educational and social independence and success (Miltenienė et al., 2020).

The research data allow us to state that **insufficient differentiation of physical environments and adaptation to education** is a concern **not only in schools, but also in classrooms:**

Not adapted physical environments of schools <...> [P4, P6]. Lack of calming rooms, special measures for children of certain SEN groups <...> [P5]. There is no way to separate a child if he/she needs a quiet environment, the classroom is small, there are many children <...> [P7].

According to the teachers, the success of the process of inclusion is also hindered by the **large number of children with SEN in the classrooms** and **difficulties in adapting the content of education:**

When there are many children with SEN in the classroom <...>, it is difficult to organize the process of education <...> [P1]. It is difficult for one teacher to work when there are children of very different abilities in a large classroom <...> [P3]. Many questions arise when it is necessary to adapt the content of education, to select appropriate methods for students with more severe SEN <...> [P1, P3]. Subject teachers often have difficulties with the personalization of education. They are all different <...> [P2].

The context of inclusive education opens spaces for all children to learn together, but also challenges the differentiation of the content of education, taking into account the different characteristics, needs, and opportunities of students. The personalization of the content of education poses significant challenges for teachers, their assistants, and parents. Smooth and thought-out personalization of the content of education opens up opportunities for revealing the child's activity, powers, self-worth, and pursuit of experience and personal progress.

Many challenges for teachers are caused by **children with behavioral, emotional, and multiple developmental disorders:**

Teachers are afraid of students with behavioral and emotional disorders who fight <...> [P5]. Physical and verbal violence, bullying, inappropriate behavior that affects other children <...> [P6, P8]. Misbehavior, autism, emotional disorders pose challenges for the entire school community and especially for the classroom community <...> [P5]. When there are many students with SEN in the classroom and they have behavioral problems, it is difficult <...> [P1].

According to the authors, children with this type of disorder learn together with everyone in the general education system and often pose many challenges. Although all these children share common behavioral and emotional disorders, each of them is very individual both in its content and scope. These children face difficulties in the process of education, they lack recognition and control of their emotions, concentration, confidence, responsibility, self-esteem, social skills, establishing relationships and properly maintaining them. Often, they can even injure themselves and others, thereby causing a feeling of insecurity and fear in those around them (Geležinienė, 2011; Civinskas, Levickaitė, & Tamutienė, 2006). According to the study participants, this group of students with unpredictable behavior causes concern and poses a serious challenge to the classroom and school community.

Then, according to the teachers, the **gaps in the legal framework** of education become apparent, when only students and parents have rights, but not teachers (*No one protects teachers, there is a lack of documents <...> [P5]. All rights for parents and children, but not for teachers and specialists <...> [P4]*). The research data also reveal the teachers' concerns about ignoring the opinions of teachers practitioners when creating documents on education (*Politicians must coordinate the preparation of documents with practitioners <...> [P1, P3]. It is necessary to take into account the reality of practice <...> [P7]*).

When reconstructing the space of features of inclusive education, referring to the subjective analysis of the teachers' opinions, several semantic units emerge: **difficulties in disclosing personal data** and **a long process of getting to know a child with SEN**. According to the teachers, this type of disturbance makes it difficult to achieve the educational success of children with SEN:

The Pedagogical Psychological Service does not provide the school with any information about the results of the child's test if the parents do not want it. But the problem exists, how should it be solved then? <...> [P4, P6, P8]. It is bad if the parents do not agree on the assessment of the child's abilities and the provision of educational assistance... and all the data are unavailable <...> [P3]. Having information also helps to form classes more appropriately <...> [P1, P4, P5, P7]. The disorder causes difficulties in other cases, it takes a long time to get to know the child <...> [P4]. You have to wait a very long time before the specialists of the Development Centres accept for consultation <...> [P1-P8]. You also have to wait for the consultation of the specialists of the Pedagogical Psychological Service <...> [P1].

The research participants are convinced that if information from the Child Development Centre and Pedagogical Psychological Services were more accessible, if parents willingly shared it and cooperated with teachers, the educational process would be much more successful. Now this information is not available, families often do not want to disclose such information. According to teachers, this prolongs the process of getting to know the child and the organization of proper education.

The process of organizing educational assistance in schools is an integral and important part of the development of the process of inclusion. This area includes special education, psychological and social services for students with different needs. A harmoniously functioning education support system, the activities of the child welfare commission help to remove obstacles to learning, which creates favorable conditions for the well-being and prosperity of students. The educational institution must assess the characteristics of the student population and anticipate the need for these professionals, so that educational support be available to all who need it (Valstybinė švietimo strategija 2013-2022 [State strategy of education for 2013-2022], LR Švietimo įstatymas [Law on Education of the Republic of Lithuania], 2011).

The research data reveal a lack of **educational support** and **teaching assistants** in educational institutions:

Schools would need physiotherapists and other specialists, especially psychologists <...> [P1, P2]. We need more qualified special educators who help teachers a lot <...> [P1, P4, P6]. Teaching assistants are needed to help organize assistance for students properly <...> [P7]. The work is impossible without helpers who know special education, when there is a large number of children with SEN in the classroom and their special educational needs are high <...> [P4, P7].

In the opinion of the research participants, there is an obvious lack of specialists and knowledgeable teaching assistants in educational institutions, and this constitutes an obstacle to the organization of the process of quality education. In addition to the mentioned difficulties, the participants of the study note the still existing **negative attitude of teachers towards students with SEN**:

Inadequate attitude of some teachers towards children with SEN in older classes. There is a lack of flexibility in some subject teachers <...> [P2].

The lack of a culture of tolerance, nondiscrimination and respect for otherness hinders the creation of a safe environment, where everyone feels equal and accepted, in educational institutions.

The research data highlight another area of generalized semantic units – **difficulties in cooperation with parents**. On the one hand, parents of children with SEN tend to hide or ignore the disorders and do not provide information to teachers (*Parents do not provide information to teachers, they hide diagnoses from teachers <...> [P1, P4, P6, P7]. Parents of children who have come to the first grade are especially hiding <...> [P1, P3, P4, P6, P7]. Parents of misbehaving children are invited to attend classes to observe their child's behavior <...> [P5]*), on the other hand, parents of neurotypical children are not tolerant of children with SEN (*Parents of other children begin to ask how much they can tolerate the inappropriate behavior of the child with SEN <...> [P5, P6]. "Super mums" lack tolerance, they often interfere with organizing the education process, they understand everything, how a teacher should work <...> [P5] We try to "trick" mothers, involve them in the organization of lessons, the organization of various activities <...> [P1, P2, P6].*

Such attitude of parents hinders constructive cooperation and successful development of the process of inclusion. Trust between parents and teachers, sharing of experience, recognition of competence can ensure the maximum success of education. Thus, parents and teachers need to talk, enriching each other with knowledge about the child's personality traits, learning and behavior characteristics, family resources and limitations, expectations, priorities, continuity of school education at home, possible help from professionals. The constructive cooperation of the participants in the educational process allows for an adequate assessment of the child's needs and opportunities, as well as the construction of education that meets the abilities and creates conditions for the unfolding of the personality (Gevorgianienė, 2003; Klizaitė, Varneckienė, & Valaitienė, 2021).

In this article, we presented the most controversial areas of the conducted research in the context of the upcoming organization of universal inclusive education. This ambiguous process creates many concerns and unknowns for the community of education and training policy makers, teachers, and parents, which we will analyze in the future.

Generalization

The analysis of scientific literature and the latest national strategic education documents allows us to state that the education policy of Lithuania is based on the implementation of the principles of inclusive education and a system that provides better quality education for all children and helps to change discriminatory attitudes towards students of different abilities or different cultures. It is emphasized that in order to achieve the success of the education of each child, complex educational support is necessary, which includes the efforts of the entire community, various professionals, and social partners.

The changed philosophical value direction of education, the tradition of education and training, according to the teachers' practitioners, brought to educational institutions a number of positive changes in the implementation of the school for all and inclusive education. In order to achieve quality education for all, the teachers see the positive benefits of inclusive education for all participants in the process of education, the community of the institution, the positive socialization process, and the emotional well-being of children.

The implementation of universal inclusive education in our country causes a lot of apprehensions in the community of teachers. The analysis of the subjective experience of the practicing teachers allows us to look at the difficulties of inclusion **from a systemic point of view**, highlighting the *philosophical value* aspects and the aspects of *education policy and educational practice*. While creating an inclusive society and high-quality education for all children, the negative *attitude* of the participants in the process of education towards disability still persists. Gaps in *education policy*, the creation of a suitable legal base, and legal regulation, where the dimension of the school for all

would become apparent, are also becoming evident. The inclusive *education practice* and the daily life of an educational institution probably cause the most unknowns for teachers, including the reorganization of educational spaces, shortages of professionals and teaching assistants, difficulties in the reorganization of the content of education and cooperation.

References

- Ališauskienė, S., & Miltenienė, L. (2018). Inkluzinis ar įtraukusis ugdymas: socialinių konstruktu interpretacijos švietimo kaitos kontekste [Inclusive or Engaging ('Absorbing') Education: Interpretations of Social Constructs in the Context of Change in Education]. *Specialusis ugdymas [Special Education]*, 1(38), 11–32. <https://doi.org/10.21277/se.v1i38.430>
- Auškelis, R. et al. (Ed.) (2022). Įtraukties link. Ką turi žinoti mokykla? *Atmintinė mokykloms* [Towards inclusion. What does the school need to know? Memo for schools]. Vilnius: Nacionalinė švietimo agentūra [National Agency for Education]. <https://www.nsa.smm.lt/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Itraukties-link.-Ka-turi-zinoti-mokykla.Atmintine-mokykloms.pdf>
- Bitinas, B., Rupšienė, L., & Žydžiūnaitė, V. (2008). *Kokybinių tyrimų metodologija [Qualitative research methodology]*. Klaipėda: S. Jokužio leidykla-spaustuvė.
- Charitaki, G., Kourti, I., Gregory, J. L., Ozturk, M., Ismail, Z., Alevriadou, A., ... & Demirel, C. (2022). Teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education: a cross-national exploration. *Trends in Psychology*. <https://doi.org/10.1007%2Fs43076-022-00240-0>
- Civinskas, R., Levickaitė, V., & Tamutienė, I. (2006). *Vengiančių lankyti mokyklą vaikų problemas ir poreikiai [Problems and needs of children who avoid attending school]*. Vilnius: „Garnelis“.
- Corbin, J., & Strauss, A. (2014). *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory*. Sage Publications.
- ED-2016/WS/28 (2016). *Education 2030: Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all*. Paris: UNESCO. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000245656.locale=en>
- Europos specialiojo ir inkluzinio ugdymo plėtros agentūra [European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education] (2022). *Agentūros pozicija dėl įtraukiojo ugdymo sistemų [The Agency's position on inclusive education systems]*. <https://www.european-agency.org/sites/default/files/Position-Paper-LT.pdf>
- Europos Tarybos rekomendacija dėl bendrų vertybių, įtraukaus švietimo ir europinio mokymo aspekto propagavimo* (2018/C 195/01) [Council Recommendation on Common values, Inclusive Education and the European Dimension of Teaching]. Europos Sąjungos oficialusis leidinys [Official Publication of the European Union]. [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/LT/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32018H0607\(01\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/LT/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32018H0607(01))
- Gaižiūnas, I. (2022). Įtraukusis ugdymas – mokykloms ir vertybė, ir iššūkis [Inclusive education – both a value and a challenge for schools]. <https://www.lrt.lt/naujienos/pozicija/679/1741469/ignas-gaiziunas-itraukusis-ugdymas-mokykloms-ir-vertybe-ir-issukis>
- Galkienė, A. (2021). Kokybinė įtraukiojo ugdymo slinktis visuomenės raidos kontekste: dialektinis modeliavimas [Qualitative advancement in inclusive education in the context of societal development: dialectical modelling]. *Pedagogika / Pedagogy*, 141,1, 190–213. <https://doi.org/10.15823/p.2020.141.11>
- Geležinienė, R. (2011). Reflective activities of pupils with special educational needs and teach-

ers in the self-educational process. *Social Welfare: Interdisciplinary Approach*, 1(1), 60-69. <https://doi.org/10.15388/SW.2011.28316>

Geros mokyklos koncepcija [Good School Concept] (2015). *TAR*, 2015-12-21, Nr. 20048.

Gevorgianienė, V. (2003). Komandinis darbas mokykloje [Teamwork at school]. In J. Ambruskaitis, J. (Ed.). *Specialiojo ugdymo pagrindai [Basics of special education]* (pp. 211-221). Šiauliai: Šiaulių universiteto leidykla [Šiauliai University Press].

Global Education Monitoring (GEM) Report (2020). <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/global-education-monitoring-gem-report-2020>

International Commission on the Futures of Education (2021). *Reimagining our futures together: a new social contract for education. Report from the International Commission on the Futures of Education*. UNESCO. <https://doi.org/10.54675/ASRB4722>

Įtraukties švietime plėtros gairės [Guidelines for the development of inclusion in education] (2022). Vilnius: LR Švietimo, mokslo ir sporto ministerija [Ministry of Education, Science and Sports of the Republic of Lithuania]. <https://smsm.lrv.lt/uploads/smsm/documents/files/aalaini/Įtraukties%20švietime%20plėtros%20gaires%201.pdf>

Įtraukties veiksmų planas [Inclusion Action Plan 2021-2024] (2021). Action plan for the year 2021-2024 for the preparation for the implementation of the provisions of the amendment of Articles 5, 14, 21, 29, 30, 34 and 36 of Education Law No. I-1489 and the addition of Article 451 to the law]. No. 21515.

JT neįgalųjų teisių konvencija [UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities]. (2006). <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAD/TAIS.335882>

Jungtinių Tautų Neįgalųjų teisių konvencijos komiteto Bendrosios pastabos Nr. 4 [General Comments of the Committee on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities No. 4] (2016). *CRPD/C/GC/4. General comment No. 4, article 24: Right to inclusive education. UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities – CRPD*. <http://www.refworld.org/docid/57c977e34.html>

Kaffemanienė, I., Kantanavičiūtė-Petružė, R., Musteikienė, G., Jurevičienė, M., Giedraitienė, L., Žymantienė, A., Tomėnienė, L., Bilbokaitė-Skiauaterienė, I., & Bilbokaitė, R. (2023). *Specialioji pedagoginė pagalba tvariam švietimui personalizuoto ugdymo kontekste [Special pedagogical support for sustainable education in the context of personalized education]*. Vilnius: Vilniaus universiteto leidykla [Vilnius University Press].

Kefallinou, A., Symeonidou, S., & Meijer, C. J. W. (2020). Understanding the value of inclusive education and its implementation: A review of the literature. *PROSPECTS*, 49(3), 135–152. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11125-020-09500-2>

Klizaitė, J., Varneckienė, A., & Valaitienė, A. (2021). Tėvų, auginančių ikimokyklinio amžiaus specialiųjų ugdymosi poreikių vaikus, pedagoginis švietimas siekiant partnerystės su mokytojais [Pedagogical education for parents with preschool children with special educational needs aiming at working in partnership with educators]. *Studijos – verslas – visuomenė: dabartis ir ateities išvalgos [Studies – Business – Society: present and future insights]*, 4, 48–57. <https://doi.org/10.52320/svv.viVI.193>

Kvale, S. & Brinkmann, S. (2009). *Interviews: Learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing* (2nd ed.). Los Angeles, CA: Sage. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14687941100100030608>

Kvieskienė, G. (2005). *Pozityvioji socializacija [Positive socialization]: mokslinė monografija [scientific monograph]*. Vilnius.

Lietuvos pažangos strategija „Lietuva 2030“ [Lithuania's Progress Strategy “Lithuania 2030”] (2011). *Valstybės žinios [State News]*, 144-6763.

LR Švietimo įstatymas [Law on Education of the Republic of Lithuania] (2011). *Valstybės žinios [State News]*, 38-1804. <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAD/TAIS.1480/asr>

Miltenienė, L., Kaffemanienė, I., Melienė, R., Kairienė, D., Geležinienė, R., & Tomėnienė, L. (2020). *Specialusis ugdymas ir jo transformacijos įtraukiojo švietimo kontekste [Special education and its transformations in the context of inclusive education]*: monografija [monograph]. Šiauliai: Šiaulių universitetas [Šiauliai University].

Miltenienė, L., & Venclovaitytė, I. (2012). Pedagogų bendradarbiavimas inkluzinio ugdymo kontekste [Teacher collaboration in the context of inclusive education]. *Specialusis ugdymas [Special Education]*, 2 (27), 99-123.

Molina Roldán, S., Marauri, J., Aubert, A., & Flecha, R. (2021). How Inclusive Interactive Learning Environments Benefit Students Without Special Needs. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.661427>

Oh-Young, C., & Filler, J. (2015). A meta-analysis of the effects of placement on academic and social skill outcome measures of students with disabilities. *Research in Developmental Disabilities*, 47, 80–92. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ridd.2015.08.014>

Ruškus, J., & Mažeikis, G. (2007). *Neigalumas ir socialinis dalyvavimas: kritinė patirties ir galimybių Lietuvoje refleksija [Disability and social participation: a critical reflection of experiences and opportunities in Lithuania]*: monografija. Šiauliai: Šiaulių universiteto leidykla [Šiauliai University Press].

Ruškus, J. (2020). Inclusive education as the turning point for the dignified life course of children with disabilities. In M. A. Brown (Ed.), *International Perspectives on Inclusion within Society and Education* (117-130). London: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003016090-13>

Saloviita, T. (2020). Teacher attitudes towards the inclusion of students with support needs. *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs*, 20(1), 64–73. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1471-3802.12466>

Szumski, G., Smogorzewska, J., & Karwowski, M. (2017). Academic achievement of students without special educational needs in inclusive classrooms: A meta-analysis. *Educational Research Review*, 21, 33–54. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2017.02.004>

Šapelytė, O., Ališauskas, A., Ališauskienė, S., Melienė, R., Miltenienė, L., & Ruplienė, D. (2021). *Lietuvos pedagoginės psichologinės pagalbos teikimo modelio ekspertinis vertinimas [Expert assessment of the model of providing pedagogical psychological assistance in Lithuania]*. https://www.nsa.smm.lt/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/PPP_modelio_ekspertinis_vertinimas_2021m.pdf

Tiernan, B. (2022). Inclusion versus full inclusion: implications for progressing inclusive education. *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, 37(5), 882–890. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08856257.2021.1961197>

Valstybės pažangos strategija „Lietuvos ateities vizija „Lietuva 2050“ [State Progress Strategy “Lithuania’s Future Vision “Lithuania 2050”] (2023). <https://atvirasseimas.lrs.lt/processes/iniciatyvos-vizija-LT2050?locale=lt>

Valstybinė švietimo 2013–2022 metų strategija [State strategy of education for 2013-2022] (2014). Vilnius. https://www.nsa.smm.lt/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Valstybine-svietimo-strategija-2013-2020_svietstrat.pdf

Waldron, N., & Mcleskey, J. (2010). Inclusive school placements and surplus/deficit in performance for students with intellectual disabilities: Is there a connection? *Life Span and Disability*, 13, 29–42.

Žydyūnaitė, V., & Sabaliauskas, S. (2017). *Kokybiniai tyrimai: Principai ir metodai [Qualitative Research: Principles and Methods]*: vadovėlis socialinių mokslų studijų programų studentams [text-book for students of social science study programmes]. Vilnius: Vaga.