

Attitudes of Teaching Staff in Kindergartens Towards Inclusion and Their Opinions on Inclusive Education

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Abstract. The research focuses on the attitudes of kindergarten teaching staff (teachers and pedagogical assistants) towards inclusion, their views on the problems they encounter in the education of children with special educational needs and their views on the importance of the measures introduced in the education of these children. Two questionnaires were used for data collection. Attitudes through a questionnaire by the researcher Marian Mahat (MATPIES) were measured. The second questionnaire of own construction consisted of six questions, two of which focused on the problems encountered by educators in the education of children with special educational needs and their views on the importance of the measures introduced for these children. The questionnaire was completed by 284 kindergarten teaching staff members. The correlation between the degree of problems reported by teaching staff in the education of children with special needs and the attitudes of teaching staff towards inclusion was not confirmed. The correlation between the assessment of the need for measures for successful inclusive education and the attitudes of teaching staff towards inclusion was not statistically significant.

Keywords: *inclusive education, pre-school education, preschool teacher, pedagogical assistant, attitudes towards inclusion, opinions on inclusion.*

Ikimokyklinio ugdymo pedagogų požiūris į įtrauktį ir įtraukijį ugdymą

Reikšminiai žodžiai: *įtraukusis ugdymas, ikimokyklinis ugdymas, ikimokyklinio ugdymo mokytojas, pedagogo padėjėjas, požiūris/nuomonė apie įtrauktį.*

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Introduction

Inclusion, the idea of inclusive education, is not entirely new in the world. The idea was mentioned for the first time at the conference in Salamanca in 1994. UNESCO (2009) defines inclusive education as a fundamental human right and the basis for a fairer and more equal society, which should be part of every education policy and practice. Loreman (2007) explains inclusive education as a vision where all students are educated together as one community in mainstream classrooms in a school. Another definition understands inclusion as “providing to all students, including those with severe disabilities, equitable opportunities to receive effective educational services, with supplementary aids and support services as needed, in age-appropriate general education classes in their neighbourhood schools, toward the outcome of preparing all students for productive lives as full members of society” (National centre on educational restructuring and inclusion, 1995, p. 1).

One of the many criteria for inclusive education is the readiness of school teaching staff for inclusive education, i.e., knowledge of special educational needs, mastery of assessment work or creation of individual plans. Baďuríková (2005) classifies the benefits of inclusive education into three groups: for teachers, for children and for parents. Through inclusive education, teachers can acquire skills for collaboration, acquire diagnostic competences, improve innovative practices, or increase their qualifications.

1. Theoretical Starting Point of the Studied Issue

Several studies have examined kindergarten teachers' attitudes and opinions towards inclusion. Study by Diken (2006) also focused on kindergarten teachers' attitudes and opinions towards inclusive education by using the Turkish version of Opinions Relative to Mainstreaming Scale (TORMS) (Diken, 2004). The results showed that the respondents had significantly positive attitudes towards inclusion of children with intellectual disabilities.

The research of Sucuoğlu et al. (2013) was aimed at exploring the knowledge and views of kindergarten teachers on inclusive practices as well as the relationship of teachers' knowledge and views on inclusion. Two research instruments were used: the Inclusion Knowledge Test and the Turkish form of Opinions Relative to Integration of Students with Disabilities. The results showed that teachers' views on inclusion were neither positive nor negative, and there was no statistically significant relationship between teachers' knowledge and their attitudes towards inclusive education. All the findings pointed towards further training of kindergarten teachers and several suggestions on how to train teachers to be able to work with children with special educational needs in mainstream classrooms.

The conditions of inclusive education in Slovakia have been researched in kindergartens mainly by Gumanová (2018), Janoško and Neslušánová (2014), Kušnírová (2019), Rusnáková and Rosinský (2018), and these authors agree that, except for schools involved in national projects funded by the EU, there are no interdisciplinary teams in other schools, and it is for this reason that individual staff members are often forced to act independently when solving problems. Research by Vorlíček (2019) in the Czech Republic and Rosinský et al. (2009) in Slovakia has identified the problems that arise in the education of Roma children. Among the biggest problems in this area are the absence of homework, bringing in supplies and problems related to classroom behaviour as well as the inability to adapt to environment (especially in classrooms with smaller numbers of Roma children), while in Roma-dominated classrooms, children's high levels of indiscipline also come to the fore. According to this research from 2009, the professional staff in the given context felt that there was a problem not in communicating with other children during lessons, but rather in the fact that most of them sought

out their Roma peers during breaks. The presence of Roma children negatively influences the learning style and teaching methods and determines the choice of methods to a large extent. In classrooms with fewer Roma children, it is noticeable that children show considerable aggression towards Roma, which also cannot be overlooked from the point of view of promoting inclusion in the school environment.

Much less attention has been paid in the Central European area to the issues of problems and recommendations for promoting inclusion in kindergartens. The views of pre-primary teachers in the Czech Republic on inclusive education were investigated through a questionnaire by Burkovičová (2016). She investigated whether there was a relationship between the degree of education of the kindergarten teacher and her familiarity with inclusion of children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds in theoretical and practical terms. She examined how they understand the concept of inclusion, what are the most common problems they encounter when implementing inclusion, what problems children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds have, etc. The hypothesis – the higher the kindergarten teacher's educational background, the more detailed their description of the theory and practice of inclusive education – was confirmed. In total, 18% of kindergarten teachers with secondary education have not encountered inclusive education. The implementation of inclusion was hampered by the problem of the high number of children in the classroom, insufficient equipment with didactic material for children from socially disadvantaged environment, problematic planning and implementation of educational activities, unthought-out legislation, and lack of experience with inclusion. They described a wide range of problems, also on their side, problems arising from cooperation with parents as well as problems caused to teachers by external factors.

2. The Research Problem, Aim and Hypotheses of the Research

The research problem was to find an answer to the question what the attitudes of kindergarten teaching staff towards inclusive education of children regarding problems with children with special educational needs are. The sub-objectives of the research are as follows:

1. To examine the relationship between the reported level of problems in the education of children with special educational needs and the attitudes of teaching staff towards inclusion.
2. To examine the relationship between the assessment of the need for measures for successful inclusive education and the attitudes of teaching staff towards inclusion.

Based on the theoretical knowledge, practical experience, research question and research objectives, the following hypotheses were identified:

- H₁: There is a statistically significant relationship between the level of scores of kindergarten teaching staff in the questionnaire of attitudes towards inclusion and the degree of reported problems in the education of children with special educational needs.
- H₂: There is a statistically significant relationship between the level of scores of kindergarten teaching staff in the questionnaire of attitudes towards inclusion and their views on the importance of introducing measures in working with children with special educational needs.

3 Research Methodology

3.1. Instruments and Procedures

To measure attitudes, researcher Marian Mahat's Multidimensional attitudes toward inclusive education scale (MATPIES) questionnaire, originally designed to measure the attitudes of elementary (or secondary) schoolteachers, was used (Mahat, 2008). The author Marian Mahat has adapted it for the conditions of kindergartens in the European area, especially for pre-school teaching staff in

Germany. The modification concerned the terminology, the nature of the statements was not changed. The questionnaire consists of a six-point Likert scale with 18 items, ranging from strongly disagree (6 points) to strongly agree (1 point). The questions hit three levels: cognitive, affective, and behavioural components, with 6 consecutive items for each of them. The cognitive component (items 1-6) focuses on respondents' general attitudes and perceptions of inclusion. The affective component (items 7 – 12) explores emotions towards inclusion, both positive ones such as openness, trust, and negative ones such as fear, frustration. The last dimension, the behavioural component (items 13 – 18), captures teachers' self-reflection on their behaviour in practice. The items of the original MATPIES questionnaire in the pilot testing (originally authored by Mahat 2008) met the criteria of reliability, construct and content validity and showed preliminary evidence of the suitability of this questionnaire for measuring teachers' attitudes. In the sample there was found internal consistency values, Cronbach's Alpha (Cronbach's Alpha) values consistent with the original version (cf. Mahat, 2008) and the MATPIES questionnaire implemented in Germany on a sample of 1,030 pre-primary school staff (Lohmann et al., 2016). Like the original research and the German use of MATPIES, the behavioural component had the highest value, although the differences are not as pronounced (Table 1).

Table 1

Cronbach's Alpha values of our sample and other studies

	α (our sample)	α MATIES (Valovič, 2015)	α MATPIES (Lohmann et al., 2016)	α MATIES (Mahat, 2008)
Cognitive component	0,82	0,79	0,74	0,77
Affective component	0,78	0,85	0,73	0,78
Behavioural component	0,87	0,85	0,83	0,91
Total score	0,96	0,90	-	-

The kindergarten teaching staff also responded to a questionnaire designed by the researchers, which consisted of six questions. Considering the research question, two questions are relevant to the research. In the first one, they were asked to indicate the extent of problems they have in educating children with special educational needs. Each respondent was asked to comment on each of the options given. Respondents indicated on a scale: very big problems (5 points), big problems (4 points), adequate problems (3 points), minor problems (2 points), no problems (1 point), and I do not work with these children (0 points). In the second question, respondents were asked to assess and indicate the level of importance of each measure for creating an inclusive kindergarten environment. This was a five-point scale ranging from very necessary (5 points) to absolutely not necessary (1).

3.2. Sample Selection

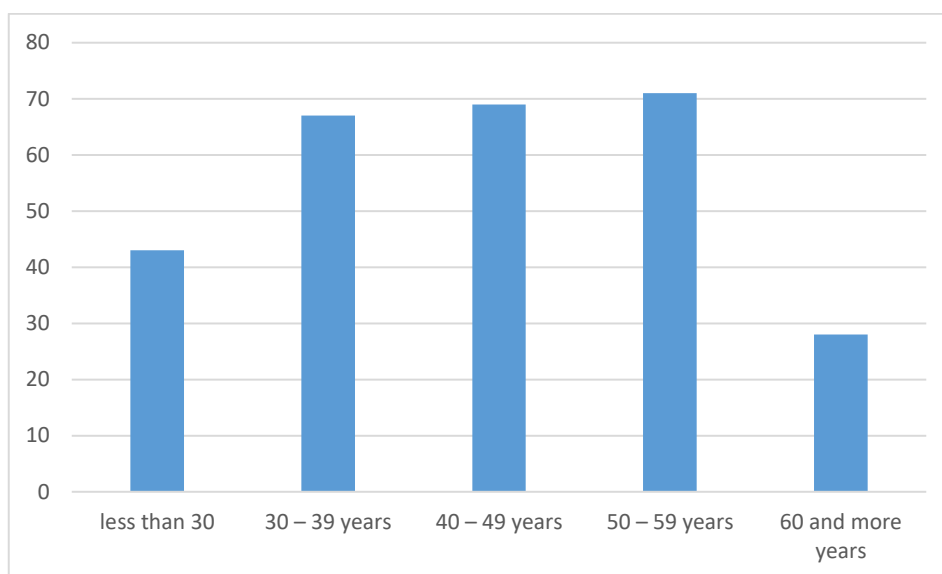
The research involved 284 teaching staff (teachers, teaching assistants) of kindergartens. The sample was compiled from the available selection. The questionnaire was addressed to kindergartens in all regions of Slovakia. Mainly women work in kindergartens, within Slovakia. Men are represented only very rarely. In terms of the age of teaching staff, the predominant age category is 50–59 (25.4%), followed by 40–49 (25%), 30–39 (23.6%), less than 30 (15.5%) and the smallest group is 60+ (10.5%). Looking at the length of teaching experience, the largest group is teaching staff with more than 30 years of experience (30.6%), followed by those with 2–5 years of experience (19.7%), 6–10 years of experience (10.6%), less than 2 years of experience (13%), 11–20 years of experience (12.7%), 21–30 years of experience (13%). One teaching staff member did not answer this question. Regarding the

classification of the teaching staff, 86.2% of the respondents are classified as a teacher, 13.4% work as a teaching assistant. One teaching staff member did not answer this question.

For the education item, teaching staff had four options to choose from. In total, 40.1% of the respondents have completed secondary pedagogical education, 40.9% of the respondents have completed pedagogical university second degree (M.Sc.), 14.8% of the respondents have completed pedagogical university first degree (B.Sc.), 4.2% of the respondents have not completed undergraduate teacher training.

Figure 1

Age of the respondents



3.3. Data Analysis

The research results were analyzed using Pearson's correlation coefficient. Mann-Whitney U test, Kruskal-Wallis test (for the first hypothesis) was used to confirm the hypothesis at the significance level of $p < .05000$.

4. Research Results

4.1. Attitudes of teaching staff in kindergartens towards inclusive education

Respondents were asked to identify one group of children they would talk about or to whom their responses would apply before they began to comment on each item. More than half of the respondents (56.47%) work with children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds. Working with children with intellectual disabilities was selected by 17.99% of respondents, other disability was selected by 17.63% of respondents, and the least number of respondents (7.91%) marked the physical disability option.

Almost half of the respondents (47.12%) strongly agreed with the statement *I think that an inclusive kindergarten is one that allows all children to develop, regardless of their abilities.*¹ A total

¹ The results presented in the study are the part of a larger research where the views of intact children and children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds were compared. Working with children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds has long been problematic in Slovakia and they represent large groups in some regions.

of 9% of respondents disagreed with this statement. It is the best positively evaluated statement. The second within this component is that *I think that inclusion of children with special educational needs in mainstream school helps the socially appropriate behaviour of all the children*, 38.13% of the respondents chose to agree, 30.94% of the respondents completely agree. Most of the respondents disagreed (22.30%) with the negative statement *I think that children with special educational needs should learn in designated (reserved for them) kindergartens*. In the item *I think that every child can handle the requirements of a standard kindergarten if the activities are tailored to his/her individual needs* 38.49% of the respondents chose agreement, 22.66% of the teachers completely agreed. To the information *I think children with special educational needs should be educated separately in other facilities, because inclusion is too costly for kindergarten*, 29.86% of the respondents answered that they disagree, 25.18% of the respondents disagree at all, and 15.47% of the respondents somewhat disagree. The last item of the questionnaire *I think that children with special educational needs should be placed in designated kindergartens so that they do not have the experience of rejection in mainstream school* was disagreed by 33.45% of the respondents and not at all agreed by 25.18% of the respondents. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2*Cognitive component in %*

	I totally agree	I agree	I somewhat agree	I somewhat disagree	I disagree	I don't agree at all
a)	47.12	35.97	7.91	3.24	3.60	2.16
b)	14.03	17.99	18.71	11.87	22.30	15.11
c)	30.94	38.13	18.35	5.04	2.88	4.68
d)	22.66	38.49	16.55	10.43	6.47	5.4
e)	7.91	10.43	15.11	15.47	29.86	21.22
f)	6.83	11.87	11.87	10.79	33.45	25.18

Legend:

- a) I think that an inclusive kindergarten is one that allows all children to develop, regardless their abilities.
- b) I think that children with special educational needs should learn in designated (reserved for them) kindergartens.
- c) I think that the inclusion of children with special educational needs in mainstream school helps the socially appropriate behaviour of all the children.
- d) I think that every child can handle the requirements of a standard kindergarten if the activities are tailored to his/her individual needs.
- e) I think that children with special educational needs should be educated separately in other facilities, because inclusion is too costly for the kindergarten.
- f) I think that children with special educational needs should be placed in designated kindergartens so that they do not have the experience of rejection in mainstream school.

In the affective component, the most inclusive attitudes were shown by the teaching staff when they said *I am frustrated when I have to tailor activities to the individual needs of all the children*. A total of 72.3% of respondents disagree with this item. Thus, the teaching staff claim that for most of them it is not a problem to tailor activities to the individual needs of the children. At the same, they are only slightly annoyed *when children with special educational needs cannot keep pace with daily activities*, which is also positive. A total of 31.65% of respondents disagree and 28.78% do not agree at all. *I am nervous when I cannot understand children with special educational needs* – 5.76% of the respondents agree with this statement, while 28.78% disagree and 26.62% disagree at all.

Pedagogical staff in Slovakia largely agree with inclusive education and the inclusion of children with special educational needs in regular schools, they are willing to adapt activities and aids to them. But they are not willing to accept all children. In general, the prevailing opinion among teachers is that children with severe disabilities should continue to be educated in special classes. This is also confirmed by our results, since 21.58% of the respondents expressed complete agreement with the statement *I am concerned when children with special educational needs are placed in a regular class, regardless of the severity of their problem*. Only a third of respondents disagree. Overall, teaching staff have the worst attitudes in the effective component. The results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Affective component in %

	I totally agree	I agree	I somewhat agree	I somewhat disagree	I disagree	I don't agree at all
a)	5.76	13.67	15.83	11.51	28.78	24.46
b)	7.91	10.43	12.23	8.99	31.65	28.78
c)	5.76	15.11	14.03	9.71	28.78	26.62
d)	14.03	15.47	12.59	11.87	28.78	17.27
e)	21.58	18.71	14.03	11.15	18.35	16.19
f)	6.47	8.63	12.59	9.71	32.37	30.22

Legend:

- a) I am frustrated when communication with children with special educational needs is difficult.
- b) I get angry when children with special educational needs in my class cannot keep pace with the daily activities.
- c) I am nervous when I cannot understand children with special educational needs.
- d) I am not comfortable with the inclusion of children with special educational needs in a regular class.
- e) I am concerned when children with special educational needs are placed in a regular classroom, regardless of the severity of their problem.
- f) I am frustrated when I have to tailor activities to the individual needs of all the children.

In total, 41.01% of respondents strongly agreed and 39.21% agreed with the item *I am willing to support children with special educational needs to participate in all the social activities of a regular kindergarten*. The statement *I am willing to adapt the activities to suit the individual needs of all the children, regardless of their abilities* is strongly agreed by 38.49%, agreed by 38.13% and not at all agreed by only 3.60% of the respondents. For the indicator *I am willing to physically integrate children with severe disabilities into a normal kindergarten with the necessary support* 29.14% of the respondents agree, 26.98% of the respondents completely agree and only 6.47% of the respondents disagree. The evaluation of this statement documents that in Slovakia, teaching staff are of the opinion that inclusive education in a regular school is for children with mild disabilities. The last two items focused on adaptation of communication techniques and assessment scored very high. In total, 77.7% of the respondents agree and totally agree with the item *I am willing to adapt my communication techniques to facilitate the inclusion of children with special educational needs*. Up to 79.14% of respondents agree and totally agree with the item *I am willing to adapt the assessment of individual children with special educational needs in order to include them in the educational process*. Teaching staff have had the most pro-inclusive attitudes in the behavioural component. The results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4*Behavioural component in %*

	I totally agree	I agree	I somewhat agree	I somewhat disagree	I disagree	I don't agree at all
a)	41.01	39.21	11.15	2.88	2.88	2.88
b)	28.49	38.13	12.59	3.24	3.96	3.60
c)	26.98	29.14	20.14	9.35	7.91	6.47
d)	33.09	39.21	13.31	5.04	5.76	3.60
e)	37.41	40.29	15.83	2.88	1.80	1.80
f)	38.85	40.29	13.67	3.60	2.88	0.72

Legend:

- a) I am willing to support children with special educational needs to participate in all the social activities of a regular kindergarten.
- b) I am willing to adapt the activities to suit the individual needs of all the children, regardless of their abilities.
- c) I am willing to physically integrate children with severe disabilities into a regular kindergarten with the necessary support.
- d) I am willing to adapt the classroom environment to include children with special educational needs.
- e) I am willing to adapt my communication techniques in order to facilitate the inclusion of children with special educational needs.
- f) I am willing to adapt the assessment of individual children with special educational needs in order to include them in the educational process.

4.2. Opinions of teaching staff on problems in the education of children with specific educational needs

Respondents in the questionnaire commented on the degree of problems they encounter in educational process of children with special educational needs. Based on the answers of the respondents, a significant problem is the children's indiscipline, but also that the children cannot talk or do not understand the teachers. On the contrary, some of the respondents do not consider the children's attendance at kindergarten, the lack of basic hygiene habits, or the parents' lack of interest in the child's education to be a problem at all. The results are presented in Table 5.

Table 5*Rate of problems in the education of children with special educational needs in %*

	I don't work with these children	No problems	Minor problems	Average problems	Big problems	Very big problems
a)	10.79	6.47	15.11	30.58	23.38	13.67
b)	12.95	12.23	14.03	28.78	20.50	11.51
c)	17.27	16.91	20.14	26.62	14.03	5.04
d)	6.83	13.31	24.10	34.17	14.39	7.19
e)	5.04	9.35	20.50	29.86	20.50	14.75
f)	8.99	25.90	12.59	23.38	17.27	11.87
g)	13.67	22.30	18.35	21.94	15.47	8.27
h)	10.79	19.78	13.67	23.74	19.78	12.23
i)	90.29	2.52	0.72	2.52	1.44	2.52

Legend:

- a) children cannot speak
- b) children do not understand me
- c) children's uncleanliness

- d) children's lack of orientation in time, space
- e) children's indiscipline
- f) children's attendance at kindergarten
- g) children not having basic hygiene habits
- h) lack of parental interest in the education of the child
- i) other

4.3. Opinions of teaching staff on the importance of individual measures for creating an inclusive kindergarten environment

In the questionnaire, the respondents indicated, in addition to the problems, the level of importance of individual measures to create an inclusive kindergarten environment. Most of the respondents indicated that the measures listed were very necessary for each option. A low percentage of respondents indicated that these measures were not necessary. Respondents consider very important the measures in the field of cooperation between the teacher and the pedagogical assistant, with the school special educator, with the professional staff, especially the school psychologist, speech therapist, with the parents and the creation of appropriate conditions (material, didactic aids, methodological aids for children with disabilities, etc.). The results are shown in Table 6.

Table 6

Degree of importance of individual measures for creating an inclusive kindergarten environment in %

	I can't judge	Absolutely unnecessary	Almost unnecessary	Neither necessary - nor unnecessary	Needed	Much needed
a)	4.68	2.16	0.72	1.80	20.50	70.14
b)	4.32	2.16	1.80	1.44	24.46	65.83
c)	5.04	3.60	1.44	4.32	33.09	52.52
d)	1.08	1.44	0.36	1.80	24.46	70.86
e)	3.60	3.60	1.08	5.76	37.41	48.56
f)	2.52	2.88	0.36	2.16	28.06	64.03
g)	1.44	6.47	2.88	16.55	34.89	37.77
h)	7.55	5.40	3.96	12.95	30.58	39.57
i)	0.72	2.88	2.52	5.76	33.81	54.32
j)	1.08	2.88	1.08	7.19	34.53	53.24
k)	1.80	3.24	1.80	8.27	26.98	57.91
l)	2.16	4.68	0.72	7.19	37.05	48.20
m)	95.32	0.00	0.72	1.08	0.72	2.16

Legend:

- a) teacher-teaching assistant cooperation
- b) teacher cooperation with a school special educator
- c) teacher's cooperation with professional staff, in particular school psychologist, speech therapist, etc.
- d) teacher cooperation with parents
- e) cooperation with school counselling facilities (Centre for Educational and Psychological Counselling and Prevention, Centre for Special Educational Counselling)
- f) creation of appropriate conditions: material, didactic aids, methodological aids for children with disabilities, etc.
- g) better, newer ICT equipment: interactive whiteboards, digital technologies, etc.
- h) assign more teaching assistants
- i) creating an appropriate climate, atmosphere in the kindergarten classroom
- j) diagnosis of children as an aid for the teacher
- k) reduce the number of children in classes
- l) training teachers in the field of inclusion and working with children with disabilities
- m) other

4.4. *The relationship between the level of problems in the education of children with disabilities and the attitudes of teaching staff towards inclusion*

The relationship between the level of problems in the educational process of children with special educational needs and teaching staff attitudes towards inclusion was confirmed in the affective domain for the response option of children's indiscipline, where we see that the perceived level of children's indiscipline problems decreases with decreasing values of the affective component (improving) ($p = .028$). As the value of the behavioural component (worsening) increases, the perceived rate of problems with parental disinterest in the child's education also increases ($p = .020$). Correlations are significant at the $p < .05000$ level. The testing of hypothesis H_1 is presented in Table 7.

Table 7

Verification of hypothesis H_1

	Cognitive component	Affective component	Behavioural component	Maties Total
a)	.814	.947	.836	.914
b)	.276	.514	.539	.714
c)	.942	.170	.268	.783
d)	.513	.213	.089	.992
e)	.058	.028	.119	.209
f)	.440	.193	.138	.808
g)	.234	.062	.183	.360
h)	.465	.070	.020	.967

Legend:

- a) children cannot speak
- b) children do not understand me
- c) children's uncleanliness
- d) children's lack of orientation in time, space
- e) children's indiscipline
- f) children's attendance at kindergarten
- g) children not having basic hygiene habits
- h) lack of parental interest in the education of the child

4.5. *The relationship between the assessment of the need for measures for successful inclusive education and the attitudes of teaching staff towards inclusion*

A statistically significant relationship between the assessment of the need for measures and attitudes towards inclusion was confirmed in the cognitive domain for the response g) better, newer ICT equipment – interactive whiteboards, digital technology, etc, in the affective domain ($p = .000$) for k) reduce the number of children in the classroom and the behavioural component ($p = .005$). The dependency was also confirmed for the behavioural component for measures e) cooperation with school counselling facilities ($p = .006$) and l) teacher training in inclusion and working with disadvantaged children ($p = .005$), this is a positive dependency. The testing of hypothesis H_2 is presented in Table 8.

Table 8*Verification of hypothesis H₂*

	Cognitive component	Affective component	Behavioural component	Maties Total
a)	.651	.975	.137	.449
b)	.848	.270	.196	.117
c)	.502	.467	.248	.317
d)	.174	.397	.764	.168
e)	.885	.894	.006	.124
f)	.293	.723	.163	.870
g)	.038	.764	.379	.110
h)	.433	.342	.684	.196
i)	.108	.123	.177	.312
j)	.432	.372	.063	.888
k)	.151	.000	.005	.035
l)	.534	.592	.005	.295

Legend:

- a) teacher-teaching assistant cooperation
- b) cooperation between the teacher and the school special educator
- c) cooperation of the teacher with professional staff, in particular school psychologist, speech therapist, etc.
- d) teacher cooperation with parents
- e) cooperation with school counselling facilities (Centre for Educational and Psychological Counselling and Prevention, Centre for Special Educational Counselling)
- f) creation of appropriate conditions: material, didactic aids, methodological aids for children with disabilities, etc.
- g) better, newer ICT equipment: interactive whiteboards, digital technologies, etc.
- h) assign more teaching assistants
- i) creating an appropriate climate, atmosphere in the kindergarten classroom
- j) child diagnostics as an aid for the teacher
- k) reduce the number of children in classes
- l) training teachers in the field of inclusion and working with children with disabilities

5. Discussion

The main objective of conducted research was to examine the relationship between the reported level of problems in the education of children with disabilities and the attitudes of teaching staff towards inclusion. A subsequent aim was to examine the relationship between the assessment of the need for measures for successful inclusive education and the attitudes of teaching staff towards inclusion.

Educational staff has shown pro-inclusive attitudes tremendously. Teaching staff have had the most pro-inclusive attitudes in the behavioural component, while they had the worst attitudes in the affective component. They have agreed with the statement that an inclusive kindergarten is one that enables the development of all the children regardless of their abilities, as well as that the inclusion of children with special educational needs in mainstream school facilitates socially appropriate behaviour for all children strongly. At the same time, they were of the opinion that any child can cope with the demands of a standard kindergarten if the activities are adapted to his or her individual needs. The importance of adapting activities to implement inclusive education is supported by the research findings of Trump and Hange (1996).

Additionally, pedagogues expressed that they are not frustrated by the difficulty of communicating with children with special educational needs, even when they cannot understand them. For the

most part, they do not even show anger when these children cannot keep up with daily activities. Their comments indicated that they have no problem adapting activities to the individual needs of all children. However, most teachers are concerned when children with special educational needs are included in the mainstream classroom regardless the severity of their problem. In the original MATIES questionnaire (Mahat, 2008), the statement “I believe that children with disabilities should be taught in special schools” received the worst rating. It had the highest rating, indicating that it was the most difficult item to agree with. Moreover, the statement in question was identified by teaching staff as one they could not agree with.

In their responses, the majority of the teachers expressed their willingness to support children with special educational needs to participate in all activities of a regular kindergarten, to adapt activities, to meet the individual needs of all children, to physically include children with severe disabilities in a regular kindergarten, to adapt the classroom environment, to adapt their communication techniques and assessment of individual children with special educational needs in order to include them in the educational process.

Attitudes, together with knowledge and skills, belong to the competency areas of the inclusive teacher profile. The findings of several experts and researchers (Drudy & Kinsella, 2009; Avramidis & Kalyva, 2007; Cullen et al., 2010; Kožárová, 2018, among others) show that the success of inclusion depends on the positive attitudes of school staff, especially teachers. Jursová Zacharová et al. (2019) conducted a study on attitudes towards the placement of children with diverse needs in mainstream education using a sample of professional and teaching staff at all levels of regional education in Slovakia². The authors based one of their assumptions on the idea that professional and pedagogical staff in mainstream schools are more likely to support the placement of children in mainstream classes than staff in special schools. They found this assumption to be borne out in the case of kindergartens, while primary and secondary schools expressed a greater degree of agreement.

Great issue and a challenge from the point of view of the kindergarten teaching staff was the indiscipline of the children, furthermore, that the children do not know how to talk or do not understand the teachers. Respondents in our research found the individual approach to the child with the support of a professional employee (social pedagogue, school psychologist), trust and love for children with special educational needs, perseverance, and motivation to be the most effective in educating children with special educational needs. They commented positively on each of the proposed practices. They highlighted the help of the pedagogical assistant and the school special educator. Moreover, according to the authors Causton and Tracy-Bronson (2015), one of the important conditions regarding the successful implementation of inclusion in schools is the presence of professional staff (especially school special educators) in schools and their collaboration with teachers. Ideally, they have a set time together each week to plan and design curriculum content and lessons (Causton & Tracy-Bronson, 2015). Similarly, kindergarten staff consider teacher-parent collaboration to be an important measure. Less necessary measures to promote inclusion in the classroom, according to our results, are diagnostics of children as an aid for the teacher, reduction of the number of children in the classroom, training of teachers in the field of inclusion and working with children with disadvantages. The last measure can be seen more as a reluctance on the part of teachers to undertake further training and a reluctance to admit that changes are needed on their part as well. It is teacher education that is seen as a very important measure to support inclusion, e.g., according to Chang et al. (2005), there is a need for extended professional development alongside employment to bridge the gap between research and practice, which would contribute

² The authors of this study relied on data collected by the It Makes Sense project (<https://analyza.todarozum.sk>).

to more effective teachers in inclusive classrooms. Two key goals of professional development are improving teachers' positive attitudes about inclusion (Mitchell & Hegde, 2007; Muccio et al., 2014) and increasing their ability to use targeted strategies in the daily routines of children with disabilities in an inclusive classroom (Muccio et al., 2014).

Despite the fact that the hypotheses have not been verified, the areas under investigation need to be given increased attention. Inclusive culture, one of the three dimensions of an inclusive school, is reflected in the expectations, values, and attitudes of teaching staff.

The limitations of the research lie in the willingness of the teaching staff to participate in the research, which affected the representativeness of the research sample and thus the possibility to generalise the research results. Another limitation may be the fact that educators in the research tried to mark a socially desirable answer, i.e., to express themselves in favour of inclusive education only because it is a phenomenon preferred by the professional public in education.

6. Conclusions and Implications

Research has shown that there is no relationship between the level of problems in the education of children with disabilities and the attitudes of teaching staff towards inclusion. Regardless of the degree of problems that teachers and teaching assistants have with children (e.g., children are undisciplined, children cannot talk, children do not understand teachers), their attitudes are pro-inclusive, especially in the behavioural component. The research did not confirm the relationship between the assessment of the necessity of measures for successful inclusive education (e.g., teacher's cooperation with pedagogical assistant, with school special educator, with professional staff, with parents, and the creation of appropriate conditions: material, didactic aids, methodological aids for children) and the attitudes of pedagogical staff towards inclusion. The attitudes of teaching staff do not change even with the impact of individual measures. We recommend reflecting the views of teaching staff on inclusion, as they are the implementers of inclusive education in practice.

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Attitudes of Teaching Staff in Kindergartens Towards Inclusion and Their Opinions on Inclusive Education

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Summary

One of the many criteria for inclusive education is the readiness of school teaching staff for inclusive education, i.e., knowledge of special educational needs, mastery of assessment work or creation of individual plans. The research problem was to find an answer to the question what the attitudes of kindergarten teaching staff towards inclusive education of children regarding problems with children with special educational needs are.

- H_1 : There is a statistically significant relationship between the level of scores of kindergarten teaching staff in the questionnaire of attitudes towards inclusion and the degree of reported problems in the education of children with special educational needs.
- H_2 : There is a statistically significant relationship between the level of scores of kindergarten teaching staff in the questionnaire of attitudes towards inclusion and their views on the importance of introducing measures in working with children with special educational needs.

Attitudes through a questionnaire by the researcher Marian Mahat (MATPIES) were measured. The second questionnaire of own construction consisted of six questions, two of which focused on the problems encountered by educators in the education of children with special educational needs and their views on the importance of the measures introduced for these children. The research results were analyzed using Pearson's correlation coefficient. Mann-Whitney U test, Kruskal-Wallis test (for the first hypothesis) was used to confirm the hypothesis at the significance level of $p < .05000$.

The questionnaire was completed by 284 kindergarten teaching staff (teachers, teaching assistants) in Slovakia. The sample was compiled from the available selection.

Overall, teaching staff have the worst attitudes in the effective component and they have the most pro-inclusive attitudes in the behavioural component. They have agreed with the statement that an inclusive kindergarten is one that enables the development of all children regardless of their abilities, as well as that the inclusion of children with special educational needs in mainstream school facilitates socially appropriate behaviour for all children strongly. Teaching staff are of the opinion that inclusive education in a regular school is for children with mild disabilities.

Most of the respondents indicated that the measures listed were very necessary for each option. A low percentage of respondents indicated that these measures were not necessary. Respondents consider very important the measures in the field of cooperation between the teacher and the pedagogical assistant, with the school special educator, with the professional staff, especially the school psychologist, speech therapist, with the parents and the creation of appropriate conditions (material, didactic aids, methodological aids for children with disabilities, etc.).

The correlation between the degree of problems reported by teaching staff in the education of children with special needs and the attitudes of teaching staff towards inclusion was not confirmed. The correlation between the assessment of the need for measures for successful inclusive education and the attitudes of teaching staff towards inclusion was not statistically significant. Research has shown that there is no relationship between the level of problems in the education of children with disabilities and the attitudes of teaching staff towards inclusion. The attitudes of teaching staff do not change even with the impact of individual measures.

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Ikimokyklinio ugdymo pedagogų požiūris į įtrauktį ir įtraukujį ugdymą

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Santrauka

Vienas iš daugelio įtraukiojo ugdymo kriterijų yra pedagogų pasirengimas įtraukiamam ugdymui, t.y. specialiųjų ugdymosi poreikių išmanymas, vertinimo įvaldymas ar individualių planų kūrimas. Tyrimu siekta atsakyti į probleminį klausimą, koks yra ikimokyklinio ugdymo pedagogų požiūris į įtraukujį ugdymą ir kylančius iššūkius, ugdant vaikus, turinčius specialiuosius ugdymosi poreikius.

Keliamos hipotezės: H1: Yra statistiškai reikšmingas ryšys tarp ikimokyklinio ugdymo pedagogų požiūrio į įtrauktį ir identifikuojamų/pranešamų problemų, susijusių su vaikų, turinčių specialiuosius ugdymosi poreikius, ugdymo mastu. H2: Yra statistiškai reikšmingas ryšys tarp ikimokyklinio ugdymo pedagogų balų lygio požiūrio į **įtrauktį** ir jų požiūrio į priemonių diegimo svarbą dirbant su vaikais, turinčiais specialiuosius ugdymosi poreikius.

Pedagogų požiūriui atskleisti naudotas Marian Mahat (MATPIES) klausimynas. Antroji - pačių kurta anketa buvo sudaryta iš šešių klausimų, iš kurių du buvo skirti problemoms identifikuoti, su kuriomis susiduria pedagogai ugdydami vaikus, turinčius specialiuosius ugdymosi poreikius, bei jų požiūriui apie pristatomų priemonių svrąbą šiems vaikams atskleisti.

284 Slovākijos ikimokyklinio ugdymo pedagogai (mokytojai, mokytojų padėjėjai) užpildė pateiktą anketą.

Tyrimo rezultatų analizei naudojamas Pearsono koreliacijos koeficientą; hipotezės patvirtinimui - Mann-Whitney U, Kruskal-Wallis testi (pirmai hipotezei), kai reikšmingumo lygis $p < 0,05000$.

Apskritai, pedagoginio personalo požiūris į veiksmingumo komponentą yra mažiausiai teigiamas, o labiausiai įtraukus požiūris siejamas su elgsenos komponentu. Jie sutiko su teiginiu, kad įtrauki ikimokyklinio ugdymo įstaiga yra tokia, kuri įgalina ugdytis visus vaikus, nepaisant jų gebėjimų, taip pat, kad vaikų, turinčių specialiuosius ugdymosi poreikiu, įtraukimas į bendrojo lavinimo mokyklą stipriai prisideda prie socialiai tinkamo visų vaikų elgesio ugdymo. Pedagogai laikosi nuomonės, kad įtraukus ugdymas įprastoje mokykloje yra skirtas vaikams, turintiems nedidelę negalią.

Dauguma respondentų nurodė, kad išvardytos priemonės yra labai reikalingos kiekvienam pasirinkimui. Mažas procentas respondentų nurodė, kad šios priemonės nėra būtinos. Respondentai pažymi tokias labai svarbias priemones kaip: bendradarbiavimą tarp mokytojo ir pedagogo padėjėjo su mokyklos specialiuoju pedagogu, su kitais švietimo pagalbos specialistais, ypač mokyklos psichologu, logopedu, su tėvais; taip pat atitinkamų sąlygų sudarymą (mokymo medžiaga, didaktinės priemonės, metodinės priemonės vaikams su negalia ir kt.).

Ryšys tarp pedagogų keliamų problemų, ugdant vaikus, turinčius specialiuosius ugdymosi poreikius, masto ir pedagogų požiūrio į įtrauktį nepasitvirtino. Koreliacija tarp ugdymo priemonių poreikio sėkmingam įtraukiam ugdymui vertinimo ir pedagogų požiūrio į įtrauktį nebuvo statistiškai reikšminga.

Tyrimai parodė, kad nėra statistiškai reikšmingo ryšio tarp vaikų, turinčių negalią, ugdymo problemų masto/lygio ir pedagogų požiūrio į įtrauktį. Mokytojų požiūris nesikeičia net ir naudojamų pavienių priemonių aspektu.

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