Attitudes of Students to their Inclusive School from the Point of View of their Teachers, School Psychologists and Parents

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Abstract

The study comes up with selected results of qualitative research, aimed at identifying pupils' attitudes (3 intact pupils and 3 pupils with SEN) towards school, class teacher and their classmates. The participants of the qualitative research were the parents of pupils, pedagogical (class teachers, teacher assistant) and professional staff (school psychologists) of the school, who work closely with these pupils. The processing of the data obtained by the semi-structured interview was done using thematic analysis [1].

Introduction

In Slovakia, after January 2012, the problem of inclusion in education began to be defined, when the Slovak government adopted the concept of inclusive education. Subsequently, in February 2012, it pointed out the need for a legislative definition of the concepts of segregation and inclusion in the Anti-Discrimination Act, the Education and Training Act and other relevant legislation. The education concept states that it is necessary to develop a specific model of school inclusion for different situations and target groups with the ambition to create a "general model of inclusive school" [2,3]. In 2014, Zelina [2] together with other authors, developed the first official model-the pedagogical model of inclusive education, in primary schools, within the framework of the National Project of Inclusive Education-Prined. The main aim of this project was to create a model of inclusive education that will ensure better preparedness of children from marginalized Roma communities and at the same time support their social inclusion. The main goal in developing an inclusive education model should be to promote social inclusion for all children in Slovakia, where the diversity and individuality of each pupil in the school is respected. Another goal in the field of inclusive education was set by the Private Primary School in Bratislava, whose management decided to introduce inclusive education into its educational process and together to instruct and educate integrated and intact children (1:1) by strengthening school staff with professional staff and individualization and differentiation of the educational process. The project became part of the projects of the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic after their approval (for 2016-2025) under the title "Impact of an inclusive primary school on mental health and personal development of pupils with special educational needs and intact pupils".

One of the partial aims of the research was to map the impact of elementary school with inclusive education on attitudes of 3 intact pupils and 3 pupils with SEN towards school, classmates, class teacher using qualitative method - semi-structured interview with pupils, with their parents and school staff. As we have already mentioned, the results of our qualitative research, which we are bringing, relate to pupils' attitudes towards their class teacher, classmates and school from the point of view of their parents, class teachers, teacher assistants and school psychologists. We processed data from interview transcripts using a thematic analysis [1,4-6] which led to many thought-provoking findings.

Method

Characteristic of inclusive elementary school

The inclusive elementary school in the capital of Slovakia - Bratislava in the educational process is based on the aspect of C. R. Rogers' concept of human-centered education and the concept of creative-humanistic education of M. Zelina. The concept of this school with inclusive education is built on five basic pillars:

i.   Pillar: Humanistic psychology and pedagogy in inclusive school

ii. Pillar: Positive psychology applied in inclusive school

iii. Pillar: Multidisciplinarity, multidisciplinary team of experts in cooperation in inclusive school

iv. Pillar: New role of school psychologist in inclusive school

v.   Pillar: New modern forms of cooperation between school and parents in the inclusive school.

The elementary school with an inclusive type of education proceeds according to the state educational program for the first stage of primary schools (ISCED 1) and the state educational program for the second stage of primary schools (ISCED 2). At school, classes are created with fewer pupils (8-15). Intact pupils are educated together with pupils with SEN. The pupils attended the school at the time of the research had any specific cultural issue to be considered.

Research sample

This type of the research has received the ethical permission of the Ethical commission of the Paneuropean University in Bratislava. Participants of our qualitative research, part of which we present in this study, were parents of 3 intact pupils and 3 pupils with SEN (autistic spectrum, mental disability, ADHD). These were first and second grade pupils who were 9-13 years old at the time of data collection. The participants were also pedagogic (class teachers, teacher's assistant) and

professional staff (school psychologists) of the school, who work closely with these pupils. These were research participants, of which 10 parents (in one case it were parents of two siblings), 4 teaching staff (two class teachers commented on two pupils in their class), 2 professional staff (one of the school psychologists commented on several students), 1 teacher´s assistant. In order to maintain anonymity and observe the ethical code of the psychologist and researcher in one person, each quote in transcripts is denoted by the letter of the participant's code name. More precisely, the mother of the intact pupil and pupil with SEN (MIP, MP with SEN), the father of the intact pupil and pupil with SEN (FIP, FP with SEN), the class teacher of the intact pupil and pupil with SEN (CTIP, CTP with SEN), school psychologist of intact pupil and pupil with SEN (SPIP, SP of pupil with SEN), teacher´s assistant of the pupil with SEN (TAP with SEN). Each participant was assigned a number to differentiate. During the entire implementation of the research, as well as when writing the final thesis, we addressed the following basic ethical questions: Freedom of refusal, the need to obtain informed consent and the preservation of anonymity.

Methods of data collection and processing

In the framework of qualitative research we used semi-structured interview as a research method for data collection. All interviews were recorded, and in order to maintain the authenticity of the interviews, transcripts contain slang and expressive expressions, non-standard language as well as Americanisms. In order to maintain anonymity and observe the ethical code of the psychologist and researcher in one person, each quote in transcripts is denoted by the letter of the participant's code name. More precisely, the mother of the intact pupil and pupil with SEN (MIP, MP with SEN), the father of the intact pupil and pupil with SEN (FIP, FP with SEN), the class teacher of the intact pupil and pupil with SEN (CTIP, CTP with SEN), school psychologist of intact pupil and pupil with SEN (SPIP, SP of pupil with SEN), teacher´s assistant of the pupil with SEN (TAP with SEN). Each participant was assigned a number to differentiate. We used thematic analysis to process the data obtained from the transcripts [1]. Before analyzing the data, we first proceeded to a transcript of the interviews. After completing this step, we performed the first comprehensive reading without coding. The reading process and the thematic analysis were carried out by two team members, supervised by the research auditor (triangulation of investigators).

a) The first phase of the thematic analysis is focused on "familiarising yourself with your data" [1]. In this first phase, after re-reading the transcripts, we identified themes/patterns. Thus, this phase can be considered as the beginning of coding. The second phase represents "generating initial codes" [1].

b) In the second phase, we generated the initial codes based on the data obtained. We did the encoding manually. At this stage, we took notes on the analyzed data we obtained from the transcripts to help us identify the codes.

c) The third phase is known as "searching for themes" [1]. At this stage, we have gradually sorted all the codes that we have identified in the previous stages of the thematic analysis, and then we have searched for topics. In this phase "essentially, you are starting to analyse your codes, and consider how different codes may combine to form an overarching theme" [1]. "Some initial codes may go on to form main themes, whereas others may form sub-themes, and others still may be discarded" [1].

d) In the fourth phase "reviewing themes" we have realised two step verification and re-definition of themes [1]. In the first step, we reviewed all coded sections of the data. If such encoding had a coherent format, such data was moved to the second step. However, if these topics did not suit, or did not show elements of coherence, they were returned to the first step, where either the coding was reconsidered, i.e. the data was reworked to new topics, or excluded from the analysis. The result of this phase is a thematic map [1].

e) Fifth phase represents "defining and naming themes" [1]. After creating such a thematic map, we proceeded to define and name the topics.

f) Sixth phase consists of "producing the report" [1].

Organisation of research

This part of research was realised in the academic year 2018/2019, in months March-May upon receiving of the approval by all participants of the inclusive school in Bratislava, Slovakia. In this paper we presented partial results of the qualitative research. Its full results were used in the dissertation thesis [7].

Results

Based on the sixth phase of thematic analysis (after complete and thorough data processing), we would like to present the following results. "It is important that the analysis (the write-up of it, including data extracts) provides a concise, coherent, logical, non-repetitive, and interesting account of the story the data tell" [1].

In a semi-structured interview, we asked the following questions to parents, teachers and school staff who were also participants in our research:

O1: What attitude pupils have towards their class teacher?

O2: What attitude pupils have towards their classmates?

O3: What attitude pupils have towards the school?

Based on a thematic analysis [1] of the transcripts of the parents' answers to the above questions, we have come to create the following themes and their sub-themes:

i. Self-image of a class teacher according to class teacher,

ii. Image of a class teacher according to other school staff (professional staff and teacher´s assistant),

iii. Pupils attitude to class teacher according to pupils' parents,

iv. Pupils' attitude towards classmates according to the pedagogical and professional staff of the school

v. Pupils' attitude to classmates according to their parents

vi. Pupils' attitude to school according to the school's pedagogical and professional staff

vii. Pupils attitude to school according to pupils' parents

Self-image of a class teacher according to class teacher and image of a class teacher according to other school staff and parents

The self-image of the teacher as well as their image according to their pupils or pupils' parents influences not only the learning process, but also the emotional and social aspects of each pupil's personality. Negative or positive attitude of pupils towards the class teacher is largely reflected in the educational process. In our research, almost all classroom teachers say their pupils have a positive attitude towards them as classroom teachers. "Hm, I think that positively" (CTIP1). A teacher who represents a school with their personality represents the authority of the school as an institution. It is the classroom teachers who within their responses frequently state that pupils have respect for them and thus represent for them the authority of the school that the role of the teacher entails. "...respects me..." (CTIP3). In one case, the teacher even perceives that in addition to the respect that he thinks the pupil has for him, he also likes him. However, some class teachers, in addition to the authority of the school, are according to them also a social support for their pupils. "...he really takes me as a person he can count on to, to whom he can come to" (CTIP2). According to teachers, some pupils are tied to them. Even one of the classroom teachers realizes that in addition to authority, it is important to build the pupil's trust towards them as a class teacher, which is then reflected in the teacher-student relationship.

Teacher´s assistant of pupil with SEN2 states that, according to her, the pupil has a positive attitude towards her class teacher; she likes her and thus also trusts her. "She has confidence in her, full. I think the relationship is absolutely perfect. She likes her and always asks her when she needs to" (teacher´s assistant of pupil with SEN2). So, it can be said that, according to the teacher´s assistant, the class teacher is a social support for the pupil. In most cases, school psychologists, as school staff, also evaluate pupils' attitude towards their class teacher positively. "...Very positive..." (SP of pupil with SEN1). At the same time, the class teacher represents a social support for most pupils. "...The teacher treats him empathically, understands him, knows when to be relaxed, but at the same time insists on certain boundaries which give him a sense of security and safety" (SP of pupil with SEN1), "...he has great support in her…" (SPIP2). Thus, in some cases, professional staff states that classroom teachers are a person who can provide emotional support to them and have confidence in them, which gives them a feeling of security. According to the school psychologist, the fact that a teacher as a class teacher solves or even tries to prevent certain unpleasant situations that occur in the school environment is very important for pupils and that has a positive impact

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on their attitude towards class teachers. Half of the mothers report that their children have a positive attitude towards their class teacher. Some parents, much like half of the class teachers, consider the class teachers to be an authority for pupils. "...accepts her, that means, there is a natural authority..." (FP with SEN3).

According to their parents, pupils accept their class teachers and respect them. In some cases, however, pupils' parents were not able to comment on their child's attitude to the class teacher. "I cannot objectively evaluate this at all" (FIP3). So, we are talking about an ambivalent attitude. As states one of the mothers, even if she asks about school, her child does not want to talk about school. She also mentions that if her child has a problem, she will share it with her. Some parents, especially fathers, say that according to them their children like their class teacher. "He likes CTP with SEN3, I would even say that he likes her most of all the teachers so far, he likes her" (FP with SEN3). Every person likes to spend time where good and especially healthy interpersonal relationships prevail; where they can find emotional support, understanding and respect of their individuality. Thanks to these relationships we can feel even where we do not like it, better, more pleasant.

Attitudes of pupils towards classmates according to pedagogic, professional staff of school and pupil´s parents

In general, pedagogical and professional staff assesses the pupils' relationship with their classmates as positive. In some cases, they say that pupils like their classmates. "...I think he also likes them..." (CTIP1). "I think he likes them..." (SP of pupil with SEN1). What relationships pupils have with each other is then reflected in the classroom climate. We are aware that their relationships with classmates are conditioned by a number of factors such as emotional experience within their emotional maturation, sympathy and even antipathy towards each other, mutual trust, common interests, or the social competences they possess and the like. School staff states that pupils have good relationships with their classmates. They have several classmates among classmates. Even in one case, the school psychologist mentions that "...so now she has a kind of soulmate there..." (SPIP2). However, misunderstandings or conflicts, which are subsequently reflected in their emotional experience in the form of fears, disappointments, or negative emotions such as fear, also play a role here, as our school staff point out. "...he has also been disappointed in his classmates relatively recently..." (CTIP3), "...that it has also been turned into some antipathy and kind of concern and fear..." (SP of pupil with SEN3). Thus, pupils in the classroom enjoy friendships and, on the other hand, are exposed to stressful situations by their classmates that take place in the classroom. School staff also point out that pupils spend time with their classmates having fun with them. "...they just go crazy..." (SP pupil with SEN3), "...so when I see them here, in the hallway, they are always together, they are always merry and thinking something up" (SP of pupil with SEN2).

Pupils' parents, similarly to school staff, in some cases report that their children like their classmates. While one parent says that their child likes all of their classmates, "...he likes them all in my opinion" (MIP1), in other cases, parents report that their children like those of their classmates who are in the classroom already for a long time. Both school staff and some parents report that their children have friends among their classmates. "...has friends in the classroom" (FP with SEN1). Pupils thus have a close circle of friends among their classmates, with whom they spend most of their time at school. They are usually 1-3 classmates closest to the pupil. In one case, even the pupil's mother states that because of his friends he likes to go to school, and if they are not in school, her child is sad. So they have a friendship with some classmates.

On the other hand, in our research some fathers of pupils point out that because their children live in a city other than the school itself, which parents are fully aware of, there is not always space, time to deepen relationships with classmates into deeper friendships. "Because that's what we were talking about, that there isn't actually a continuation of that relationship" (FIP3). Pupils are often accompanied by parents or other adults moving from one island, school, to another island, home, or some kind of hobby group. The phenomenon of so-called "island childhood" is examined by Helus [8]. In this case, pupils have even smaller space, options like other children of their age who attend school in the city of their residence to spend enough time together with their classmates outside the school after classes. To move freely and experience together adventures outside the school. While at the first stage pupils still have this space in the afternoon group, most of the students in the second level, despite the possibility of attending the afternoon group, leave home to the second island accompanied by the parents.

Attitudes of pupils towards school according to pedagogic, professional staff of school and pupil´s parents

In most cases, the school staff, as well as the school psychologist, assess pupils' attitude to school as positive. In one case, the class teacher even states that the interest in the new curriculum, to learn something new has a positive impact on pupils' attitude to school. In other cases, school staff also reports that pupils like to learn. "... she likes to learn..." (CTP with SEN 2). Thus, within the educational process through the acquisition of new information, knowledge, which is the source of their internal motivation, their cognitive functions develop which is one of the aims of the school as an institution. According to some school staff, for some pupils the school is a place they like to go. "I think he likes to come here too" (CTIP1). Thus, the school is a place for pupils where, in addition to their responsibilities, they can have fun, experience enjoyable situations, whether from the side of teachers or classmates, and where they receive an individual approach within the educational process. "...where he got that individual approach..." (SP of pupil with SEN2). So, we can say that it is the school that represents for them an oasis of popularity and individual approach. In their responses, school staff also stated that school is a place of well-being for some pupils, and despite some conflicts, misunderstandings associated with negative emotions in their emotional experience it is a relatively safe place.

Like some school staff, in half of the cases also parents consider their children's attitude to inclusive primary school positive. Some pupils, according to their parents, take school as something that has to be a necessity. They do not always want to learn, devote time to home preparation for the next day at school or exam. So they take it as a duty. "...He knows it is a necessity..." (FT with SEN1). In one case, the mother mentions that her child has a positive attitude towards her school, but considers the school as an institution useless. In another case, the pupil's mother remembers that her child would sometimes want to cancel school when she has to learn at home. Despite our findings that for some pupils school is a duty, some pupils like to go to school according to their parents. "...she has always liked going to school..." (MIP2). So we can talk about positive motivation for school. Parents say that the source of this motivation is often the classmates they are looking forward to, especially after the holidays when even those do not want to go to school who according to their parents like to go there.

Discussion

The qualitative type of research implies certain limits that we are fully aware of and that we have encountered during the research. Qualitative research, unlike quantitative research, is characterized by examining fewer individuals. Thus we cannot generalize our findings to the whole population. Similarly, the semi-structured interview which allows us to reach only the findings which are enabled by the research participants. That is, where they let us in the conversation and to what extent they are willing to answer our questions honestly. Limitation also includes the time-consuming data collection as well as transcripts of interviews. In conclusion, however, we consider it important to mention the excellent cooperation with pupils' parents and the school staff, who, through their answers, helped us to gather information on pupils' attitudes to selected aspects of inclusive primary school, according to them as parents and school staff. However, based on our previous findings, we would like to answer our previously formulated research questions that were asked by the participants (parents, school staff) in a semi-structured interview.

O1: What is the attitude of pupils towards their class teacher?

The teacher influences the teaching process with his whole personality. The teacher should have not only excellent professional competences but also personal skills. Empathy, acceptance, congruence. These are the three principles pointed out by Rogers, a representative of humanistic psychology, who is known for his approach in the school system as PCE (Person centered education). Rather, with this type of teacher, pupils can be authentic, creative, accepted as they are and experience a sense of safety, security, acceptance in a school environment where they often spend more than half of the day. It is proven that positive relations between teacher and pupil are reflected in the whole pedagogical process and affects motivation, activation and evaluation" [9]. Pupils need to have emotional support within their family as well as at school. It is important that the pupil feels appreciated, understood, encouraged and so on by the teacher. Relationship of the pupil with the teacher changes during the course of the school attendance. The teacher plays an important role in the pupil's life, especially in

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the younger school age [10]. The results of our research point to the following findings. In most cases, the class teacher evaluates pupils' attitude towards themselves as a class teacher positively. According to some, their pupils perceive them as authority. By setting boundaries in the educational process, the teacher insists on adhering to certain rules, and this also gives the pupils a sense of security and safety. Some pupils, according to class teachers, in particular according to school psychologists, have social support in the class teacher, which provides them with a sense of security, safety or trust, which is also pointed out by the teacher´s assistant of the pupil with SEN. The school psychologist states that it is important for pupils that teachers deal with several crisis situations that take place in the classroom.

Evaluation of children's attitude to the class teacher by pupils' parents is greatly impacted by the teacher-parent, teacher-pupil relationship. Their assessment of pupils' attitude to the teacher is then largely reflected on the parents' cooperation with the school. Attitudes are not inherited. We learn or assume them from parents, peers, and friends. They are also often conditioned by our experience, which we gain through education in a given environment, in a given culture. If a parent has a negative attitude towards school, there is a high probability that the child will assume that attitude. "A person can have attitudes only to those things that exist in his world, in their field of vision. If they have a limited world and do not have enough impulses and experience, some attitudes are not developed or they simply have no attitude" [11]. We know that during our life our attitudes evolve, change. Half of the pupils' mothers also evaluate their children's attitude towards the class teacher positively. Some parents of pupils, similarly as half of the class teachers, evaluate their class teachers as an authority for pupils. In some cases, however, parents have an ambivalent attitude to the issue, as they were unable to comment on it. According to some parents, especially fathers, pupils like their class teacher. They say they like him because of the personal, or even friendly attitude that the class teacher has towards the pupil [12-20].

O2: What is the attitude of pupils towards their classmates?

During school attendance not only the pupil's teacher (s) but also their classmates play an important role in the pupil's life. They often acquire more importance for pupils in the middle school age than the teacher himself [10]. A pupil and their classmates have the opportunity to share the positives and negatives that the pupil's role brings. However, they also experience similar experiences outside of school life, which may or may not have a positive impact on deepening their relationship to friendship. One needs to gradually identify with the group of which they are a part. In the pupil's life, this reference group is the class that the pupil attends during school. According to the school staff, our research students have a mostly positive attitude towards their classmates. In some cases, classroom teachers evaluate the pupils' relationship with their classmates as good. In most cases, school psychologists report that pupils have friends in the classroom. Some pupils, especially according to the pedagogical staff of the school, have some classmates in favour. However, as the school psychologist states in one case, the relationship of a given pupil to classmates cannot be generalized, and it is always about a particular person in a given class [21]. Thus, pupils within their class usually have a circle of close friends with whom they spend more time compared to other classmates, whether during breaks or during the lessons themselves. This is also pointed out by some other school staff.

According to school employees, pupils have friendships with some classmates, but on the other hand, they experience various stressful situations in the classroom through multiple misunderstandings, conflicts that occur between them. School staff report in case of several pupils that pupils have fun with their classmates, for example, through a social game they invented in one classroom. Interpersonal relationships of pupils as well as their interdependencies between them have their dynamics and variability. Relations between classmates are undergoing a number of changes that determine various factors such as the arrival of a new classmate or teacher, mutual misunderstandings, conflicts, etc. What the school staff also point out is that some misunderstandings, disappointment in classmates led to the pupil's loss of trust in some classmates and even the end of friendship. Almost every pupil within their class has classmates who are more likely to spend time with them than other classmates. This is for several reasons, such as mutual sympathy, common interests and so on; to put it simply because they like them.

Pupils' parents, similarly as the school staff, declare that their children like their classmates. They also point out that their children have friends with some classmates in the classroom. However, in some cases, it is the pupils' fathers who state that their children perceive classmates as classmates, not friends. In our case, these findings are related to the fact that the fathers themselves point out - because their children live in a different city from the location of the school itself, there is not many opportunities

to deepen child's relationship with their classmates outside the school. It means the pupils do not spend time with their classmates after school, or experience common adventures that might bring them closer together. Pupils are transported by car from one "island", the residence to the other "island", which is the school, at a specified time. "The child is always on a kind of island where what is functional on that island takes place so that it can then be transferred to another island with a different functional definition of their", it is so called island childhood phenomenon [8].

O3: What is the attitude of pupils towards the school?

The pupil's relation to school is gradually changing, especially in the middle school age. Gradually, there is also a change in attitude to school, based on the experience acquired by the pupil. The pupil's attitude to school also affects the development of their cognitive abilities [10]. The majority of employees, as well as half of parents, assess pupils' attitude to school as positive. In addition to their school responsibilities, pupils also can have fun; enjoy various pleasant situations whether with teachers or classmates. The aim of schools with an inclusive type of education is that the teachers approach each pupil individually in the educational process, which is also confirmed by the words of the school psychologist, who realizes that thanks to this approach pupils can feel more confident at school by respecting the pace of the pupil, their needs and so on. Similarly, the staff recall in their responses that despite some unpleasant situations that pupils are sometimes exposed to at school, the school is a relatively safe place for them. This is due to the fact that the school staff not only deal with crisis situations that are taking place in the school environment but also take preventive measures to avoid multiple misunderstandings or conflicts in the school environment. Thus, the school is often a place where pupils have the opportunity to experience various challenges, multiple opportunities for self-development and self-validation. On the other hand, the school can also be a source of danger because the pupil's role brings with it several stressful situations that pupils are confronted with Vágnerová [10]. It is these experiences that affect their social development as well as their emotional experience.

We know that in today's generation of children, which is officially referred to as generation Z, part of which are students of our qualitative research, based on the results of the national report HBSC, which we cite, we can speak of a crisis of attitude to school but not to education. Although most 15-year-old pupils care about education, only one in five pupils aged 13-15 enjoy school. Children naturally like to learn from early childhood. They acquire new knowledge, skills that they gradually develop. This fact is also pointed out in the responses by the teaching staff of the inclusive primary school and, in one case, by the pupil's mother. We are aware that our sample is too small to be able to generalize our findings based on the results. Even in one case the class teacher states that it is the interest in the new curriculum, the acquisition of new knowledge which has a positive impact on the pupil's attitude towards school. Our findings to date on attitudes of both intact pupils and pupils with SEN on selected aspects according to their parents and school staff show that a school with an inclusive type of education can have a positive impact on pupils' mental health and their social and emotional development [22,23].

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