

INVOLVEMENT OF PARENTS IN STUDENTS' INCLUSIVE EDUCATION TEAM IN THE POLLOG REGION”

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Abstract

Inclusive education relies on the effective formation and functioning of collaborative teams. These teams include teachers, professional associates, parents and other relevant stakeholders. Parental engagement represents a critical component in the quality and sustainability of inclusive practices, especially in the development and implementation of Individualized Education Plans (IEPs/MPs).

This research “Involvement of Parents in a Student’s Inclusive Team in the Polog Region” examines the attitudes, experiences and involvement of parents who have children with special educational needs. Using a descriptive research design, the study aims to provide insights into the extent and nature of parental participation in the inclusive learning process. The specific focus is on the parental contribution to the preparation of Individual Student Plans and participation in inclusive team meetings. The sample consisted of 84 parents. Datas were collected through a nine-item questionnaire developed in collaboration with professional associates from OURC “Zlatan Sremec” and administered during April and May 2025. Findings indicate that parents exhibit a basic level of awareness, while simultaneously exhibiting a moderate to high readiness level and overall positive attitudes toward inclusive education. However, their active and consistent participation remains limited. The results highlight the need for systematic and transparent mechanisms that aid in communication, strengthen collaboration and acknowledge parents’ perspectives. Enhancing these dimensions is essential for improving the quality and inclusiveness of educational practices within schools.

Keywords: individual education plan, inclusive education, consistent participation, school collaboration, parents' perspective.

Introduction

The modern education system aims to create an inclusive environment. This environment, regardless of individual differences, provides every child with equal opportunities to learn and develop. Inclusive education honors these differences by ensuring the necessary support for each student. Key factors in achieving this goal include the student’s inclusive team, with important tools such as the Individual Education Plan (IEP) and the Modified Program (MP). These programs enable support according to the student’s needs and potential. Equally essential is the role of the parents, whose participation not only enriches the planning of the IEP/MP but also ensures effective cooperation between the school and the family.

The purpose of this paper is to examine parents’ experiences and attitudes regarding their involvement in inclusive education. There is a particular emphasis on the IEP/PM participation process and participation in inclusive team meeting. These meetings aim to identify challenges and opportunities for improving school–family collaboration.

I. Theoretical framework

1.1. Inclusive Education: According to the Law on Primary Education, inclusive education is a process that guarantees equal opportunities for development and quality education through the adaptation of content, approaches, and teaching strategies, with the obligation of the state to provide education for all students (Bureau for the Development of Education, 2020). Inclusion is a process that does not exclude any student from society, school, or school curricula. It reduces barriers to learning by providing inclusion for all students, not only for those with disabilities or those classified as “with special needs.” Furthermore, differences among students are viewed as resources that support learning instead of being considered as problems to be solved (Booth & Ainscow, 2002).

1.2. The Student’s Inclusive Team: The student’s inclusive team is a professional team formed to support the educational process for a specific student. It consists of teachers, the parent/guardian, a pedagogue, a psychologist or social worker, a special educator, and, when necessary, an educational or personal assistant. The main task of this team is the development and implementation of the Individual Education Plan (IEP) or the Modified Program (MP), in accordance with the student’s needs and abilities (Bureau for the Development of Education, 2020).

1.3. Individual Education Plan (IEP) and Modified Program (MP): The Individual Education Plan (IEP) is a document that provides a detailed description of the learning plan designed according to a child’s learning needs (Ristova et al., 2021). According to Ristova et al (2021) these plans include the nature of the difficulty, the current level of functioning, activities undertaken by the school, learning objectives, parental support, medical and other needs. These plans also document the progress and evaluation of effectiveness, established time frames and note the people committed to its implementation (Ristova et al., 2021).

1.4. The Role of Parents in the Student’s Inclusive Team: According to UNICEF (2014), parents play an important role in the entire process of inclusive education. As members of the inclusive team, parents contribute to the development of the IEP or MP by providing important information about the child’s needs, abilities and daily functioning, while sharing responsibility with the school for achieving better educational outcomes (UNICEF, 2014).

II. Research methodology

This research attempts to shed light on involvement of parents in the student’s inclusive team in the Pollog region. The purpose of this is to obtain a clearer picture of parental engagement and participation in the preparation of their children’s Individual Education Plans (IEPs).

This research has a quantitative and descriptive character, providing data on the current state of parental involvement in the inclusive education process. The sample consisted of 84 parents of children with special educational needs from the Pollog region. The use of the descriptive method was based on a 9- question survey, developed by a co-author of this study in cooperation with the professional services of OURC “Zlatan Sremec” in Skopje. Demographic characteristics included gender, age, residence and level of education. The survey was conducted via Google Forms during

the period of April 22nd, 2025 to May 2nd, 2025. After the primary schools were informed, educational assistants who provide support distributed the questionnaire to parents.

2.1. Analysis of Results Related to Demographic Characteristics: The study involved 84 parents, from which 88% were female and 12% male. Their average age was 42.2 years. Regarding residence, 42% of parents live in rural areas, while 58% live in urban areas.

The parents' level of education shows that the majority, 64% of parents have a university degree, 25% have received primary education and 11% have received secondary education.

2.2. Research Results: The study showed that the majority of parents, 91.6% were aware of what the Individual Education Plan (IEP) or Modified Program (MP) represents. Approximately 63% of parents had participated in inclusive team meetings, while 59.5% had contributed to the preparation of the IEP/MP. A larger part, 77.3%, had read the document, and 87.9% of parents agreed with its content. 72.6% of parents stated that they did not want to make any changes to the individual plan, while only 28.5% provided specific suggestions for changes, of which 20.2% were taken into account. Meanwhile, 51.1% of parents did not provide any suggestions at all. Concerning participation in inclusive meetings during a school year, 36.9% had never attended, 46.4% attended 1–2 times, and 16.6% attended three times or more. Regarding the question about future parental involvement, 95.2% of parents expressed their desire to be actively involved in the preparation of the IEP/MP.

Conclusion

Inclusive education represents an opportunity to create a society with equal rights. Collaboration among teachers, professional services, students and parents is crucial for achieving this vision. This study highlights that most parents have basic knowledge of the IEP/MP and are willing to participate in the planning process. The fact that a significant part of parents have not participated in inclusive team meetings, or in the preparation of the IEP/MP indicates a gap between willingness and active involvement. This is further reflected in the findings regarding parents' agreement with their children's IEP/MP. While most agree with the plans, some parents wish to make changes, yet only a small number of suggestions are taken into account by the school. This indicates a need for greater transparency and more effective mechanisms for valuing parental input. Moreover, the finding that 77.3% of parents have read the plan while 87.9% agree with it raises questions about whether those who have not read it, but still agree, are demonstrating indifference, misunderstanding, or extreme trust in the plan's form or goals. These findings suggest gaps in research, which are necessary to clarify the reasons behind such discrepancies.

In conclusion, parents possess knowledge and willingness to be involved in the inclusive process, but their practical involvement remains limited. To improve the inclusive education process, it is essential to strengthen communication and cooperation between the school and families, and to establish proper mechanisms for collaboration. Only through genuine partnership can quality education and meaningful support for every child be ensured.

Recommendations

Some of the recommendations that can be drawn from this study regarding parental involvement in the student's inclusive education team are: to establish appropriate mechanisms for informing

parents, to provide informative training for both parents and teachers, to offer opportunities for active involvement through concrete suggestions and taking in consideration those suggestions, to organize meetings with flexible schedules, to enable parents' involvement in the evaluation processes of the IEP or MP, and to promote a culture of collaboration based on respect, trust, and open communication, in order to reduce as much as possible the barriers that hinder the partnership between the school and the family.

Research Limitations

A limitation of this study can be considered the lack of specificity in some of the questions, meaning that providing more answer options could have offered greater clarity, reduced potential confusion, and created an even more comprehensive overview.

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