## CHALLENGES OF INCLUSION FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF PARENTS AND EDUCATIONAL WORKERS

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### Abstract

The inclusion of children with developmental disabilities in the regular educational system is a process that is being developed and perfected. Accepting diversity and understanding the difference cannot be changed in a short time. It is an ongoing process, and it takes a lot of effort and time to achieve good results. When all actors of the inclusive process have similar views on inclusion, then we will be able to talk about acceptance, understanding and its successful implementation. Informing and educating students, teachers, and parents of children without disabilities is a good basis for developing inclusion and an inclusive society.

Within the project "Educational - rehabilitation support for children with disabilities in inclusion", members of the Association for Support of Children with Developmental Disabilities "LALA" carried out workshops and lectures for students, parents and teachers. The goal of the project was to provide support to children with developmental disabilities, parents of children with developmental disabilities, as well as teachers in order to make the educational process as successful as possible for all actors of the inclusive process. After the workshops and lectures, we examined the views of parents of children with developmental disabilities and educators about inclusion and the challenges they most often face.

The results of the research showed that both sides share the opinion that it is necessary to permanently work on information, education and communication between all actors of the inclusive process of upbringing and education with the aim of building an inclusive society.

Keywords: challenges of inclusion, parents, educators.

### INTRODUCTION

After more than twenty years since the introduction of inclusion in Bosnia and Herzegovina, we can state with certainty that we have made significant progress in its implementation. From sporadic cases of inclusion of children with developmental disabilities in regular schools, we have come to the point that every class has at least one student with developmental disabilities. When it comes to the Sarajevo Canton, the inclusive process of upbringing and education has been brought to an enviable level. Teaching assistants and mobile teams are provided for each school and preschool, which include children in appropriate treatments and help teachers to adapt Curricula and programs according to the needs and abilities of the children. We are constantly working on the professional development of the teaching staff, the provision of spatial capacities, didactic and material resources in order to provide quality conditions for work. By introducing inclusion and including children with developmental disabilities in regular schools, one of the basic rights of the child is fulfilled, namely the right to equality. However, inclusion in the true sense of the word did not meet all the prerequisites prescribed for it to be successful in every segment. Much more needs to be done both with children and with the parents of children with developmental disabilities. The way a parent accepts the difficulty his child is dealing with will reflect on the relationships he will build with other participants in the inclusive educational process. Therefore, inclusion does not only apply to a child with developmental difficulties, it does not apply only to the parents of that child, it applies to all people who directly or indirectly have any relationship with the child and who can in any way contribute to a better and more successful inclusion of the child into society. Here we mean parents of children with typical development, children with typical development, teachers, professional associates, family members (siblings), extended family and the social community in which the child lives. In order to lay the foundation for good inclusive practice, it is necessary to work with all actors of the inclusive process and thus ensure a good relationship, good cooperation, and therefore the least restrictive environment for the upbringing and education of children with developmental disabilities. Successful inclusion in education comes from a successful inclusion in society. At the same time, we should also think about other categories of children and young people who are part of the inclusion process. In addition to children with developmental disabilities, inclusive education implies an educational system that is open to all children who need additional help and support while thy grow up (Mujkanović, Mujkanović, 2018). This is supported by the results of the research related to teachers, parents of children with difficulties and parents of children with typical development.

The challenges that teachers and parents of children with developmental disabilities face on a daily basis are numerous. Educators point out that the biggest challenges for them are in adapting teaching content and the lack of professional supervision of children. Also, the lack of didactic resources and teaching aids as well as insufficient expertise of the teaching staff in working with students with various difficulties represent an additional challenge. The biggest challenge for parents is mastering the established plan and program that the child must adopt and socialisation with the children in the class. Of course, another challenge is the way the parents of children with typical development will accept the child into the class, as well as cooperation with the teaching staff, creating an adequate way of working in accordance with the child's abilities and providing professional support.

Research has shown that teachers' attitudes towards inclusion are often based on the implementation of inclusive education, and less on the specific ideology and understanding of the concept of inclusion (Vaz et al., 2015; according to Tomić, 2018). It should be pointed out that teachers' attitudes towards the inclusion implementation process are often examined with special attention. The reason lies in the assumption that the success of implementing inclusion largely depends on educators having a positive attitude towards it (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; according to Subotić, 2010). Monsen and Frederickson (2003; according to Tomić, 2018) point out that teachers' positive attitudes towards the inclusion and involvement of children with developmental disabilities affect children's satisfaction and reduce divisions between them. According to research by Kranjčec Mlinarić et al. (2016) teachers express approval of the inclusion process and have positive attitudes towards it. More negative views are expressed by Nikčević-Milković and Jurković (2017), according to which one of the most significant obstacles to inclusion is the unpreparedness and lack of education of teachers, as well as the small number of professional associates in schools, physical obstacles in teaching and the lack of assistants. The results of the research Borić and Tomić (2012) also indicate a positive attitude of teachers about inclusion, but also show the need to educate teachers about it.

Research carried out in Serbia shows that students of pedagogical faculties have more negative attitudes towards the inclusion of children with developmental disabilities, that is, they believe that these children should be educated in special classes (Macura-Milovanović and Vujisić-Živković, 2011). According to Galović, Brojčin and Glumbić (2014), it was found that teachers show a neutral stance towards inclusive education, but also more positive expectations regarding the outcomes of inclusion. Popov (2014) reached results that showed that classroom teachers have more positive attitudes towards inclusion than subject teachers and that they are more willing to educate themselves about children with developmental disabilities. In their research, Schmidt and Vrhovnik (2015) showed that secondary school teachers have more positive attitudes towards inclusion teachers.

Research on the attitudes of parents of children with developmental disabilities and parents of children with typical development has shown that their attitudes depend on gender, level of education, place of residence (urban, rural) and age of the child (preschool, school age). Mujkanović (2019) points out that parents of children with developmental disabilities who attend regular school express the views that inclusive education is the best option for children with developmental disabilities regardless of lack of preparation. Parents of children who attend a specialised institution expressed negative views in favour of the option for the child to be educated in a regular school at any cost. The stances of the parents of children involved in the process of inclusion in preschool institutions showed that the parents of children with normal development have quite positive stances towards inclusion, and the attitudes towards the impact of inclusion on socialisation were particularly positive. The negative stance of parents was determined in relation to the impact of inclusion on their child's education. No significant differences were observed between the attitudes of parents in relation to gender, age, socioeconomic status, the size of the city they live in and the number of children in the family. It was also determined that parents of children who do not have a child with disabilities in the group have a significantly more positive attitude about the impact of inclusion on their children's education than parents whose children reside in a

group with a child with disabilities (Budimlija et al., 2020). Parents of children with typical development express positive attitudes towards the inclusion of children with developmental disabilities. They express the most positive attitude towards the inclusion of children with sensory impairments (hearing, vision) and towards children with moderate or mild intellectual disability, while the less positive attitude is towards the inclusion of children with more expressed developmental disabilities (autism, severe intellectual disability) (Tomić, Nikolić, 2021).

The assessment of the number of children with developmental disabilities at the level of a country depends on the criteria for determining the type and degree of a child's disability. A rough estimate says that every tenth child has some form of cognitive, physical, communication and emotional difficulties (Killoran et al., 2007). According to the available data from the Ministry of Education from 2015, there were no clear statistical data on the number of students with developmental disabilities enrolled in regular educational institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina. While international statistical data show that around 10% of children with developmental disabilities are in primary education institutions. This would mean that there are about 20,000 students with developmental disabilities in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina who are in inclusion. The latest data from 2023 for the Canton of Sarajevo show that the number of children with developmental disabilities in inclusion is about 4,000, while no data is available for the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

### Subject of research

It is evident that the number of children with developmental disabilities is increasing day by day. With the progress of science and technology, discovering the disabilities and making a diagnosis is becoming easier. However, it is the first step on a long road of training that requires expertise, patience, understanding and love. An important segment in the implementation of inclusion is occupied by the non-governmental sector, which, through project activities, often works to improve the quality of life of people with disabilities and their families. Members of the Association for Support of Children with Developmental Disabilities "LALA" implemented workshops and lectures for students, parents and teachers as part of the project "Educational -Rehabilitation Support for Children with Developmental Disabilities in Inclusion". The goal of the project was to provide support to children with developmental disabilities, parents of children with developmental disabilities, as well as teachers in order to make the educational process as successful as possible for all actors of the inclusive process. The workshops in which students from grades 4-8 participated showed how important it is to talk to children and gain insight into their thoughts. The interaction with the students during the workshops was excellent. The students showed a high level of understanding, information, empathy and willingness to actively participate in the inclusive process. In this research, we tried to show how parents, as the most interested participants in this process, and educators, as the most responsible for the work, deal with the challenges of inclusion. The subject of the research is to examine the challenges of inclusion from the perspective of parents of children with developmental disabilities and the perspective of educators (teachers).

### The aim of the research

The goal of the research was to examine, analyse and determine the attitudes of parents and educators about inclusion and the challenges they most often face.

### **Research tasks**

In accordance with the set subject and goal of the research, the following research tasks were formulated:

1. To examine and analyse whether the views of parents of children with developmental disabilities on inclusion are positive.

2. Examine and analyse whether the views of educators (teachers) on inclusion are positive.

### **Research methods**

In the research, the method of theoretical analysis was used in the collection of sources used to define basic terms and to study written sources of theoretical importance related to the research of the topic. A descriptive method was used for data processing, in order to explain and interpret the obtained data from the conducted survey and statistical data processing, and the obtained values were presented in tabular form and explained.

### **Research instruments**

For the purposes of the research, a scale of attitudes for parents and a scale of attitudes for educators (teachers) were constructed with the aim of examining which challenges they most often encounter.

The Attitude Scale for Parents of Children with Developmental Disabilities examines parents (attached). The measuring instrument consists of 10 variables in the form of statements. The variables are qualitatively described, and the respondents' answers are quantified, according to a Likert type scale, in the range from 1 to 5. The answer *I do not agree at all* is marked with the number 1, the answer *I mostly disagree* with the number 2, the answer *I both agree and disagree* with the number 3, the answer *mostly agree* with number 4 and the answer *completely agree* is marked with number 5.

The second attitude scale is intended for educators (teachers), (attached). The measuring instrument consists of 10 variables in the form of statements, the variables are described qualitatively, and the respondents' answers are quantified, according to the Likert type scale, in the range from 1 to 5. The answer *I do not agree at all* is marked with the number 1, the answer *I mostly disagree* with the number 2, the answer *I both agree and disagree* is marked with the number 3, the answer *I mostly agree* with the number 4 and the answer *I completely agree* is marked with

the number 5. For a simpler presentation of the results, the answers *I do not agree at all* and *I mostly disagree* are combined, as well as the answers *I mostly agree* and *I completely agree*.

The measuring characteristics of the instruments have been determined and checked, and they meet the methodological criteria. Based on the obtained research results, we can determine that the measuring instrument has satisfactory reliability and that the measurement error is reduced to a minimum. To check the measuring instrument, the metric characteristics of the particles and parts of the scale were calculated using the standard Reliability test from the statistical package SPSS. The Cronbach alpha coefficient, as an indicator of internal homogeneity, which is 0.867, in the scale for parents of children, and 0.895, in the scale for educators, shows that the internal consistency of the scale is satisfactory, that is, it shows the appropriate level of validity.

### A sample of respondents

The research included parents of children with developmental disabilities (58), and teachers (83) of several elementary schools.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

# Attitudes of parents of children with developmental disabilities about the challenges of inclusion

The first research task was to examine and analyse whether the attitudes of parents of children with developmental disabilities about inclusion are positive. This task is presented through the analysis of attitudes obtained by the Scale of Attitudes of Parents, and the data are presented in tabular form. The scale of attitudes used in the research was constructed in such a way that the answers *I completely agree* and *I mostly agree* express the respondents' positive attitudes about the implementation of inclusion. The answers *I do not agree at all* and *I mostly disagree* express the views of respondents who express dissatisfaction with the implementation of inclusion, while the answers *I agree and disagree* express the parents' indecision about the stated claims.

R a			I do not agree at all		I agree and disagree		I completely agree	
n g	Statements	f	%	f	%	f	%	М
1	The teacher regularly consults with me about how to work with my child.	6	10,3	13	22,4	39	67,2	4,15

Table 1. Shows the frequencies and percentages of the attitudes of parents of children with<br/>developmental disabilities.

2	My child is well accepted in the class both by the teacher and by his peers.	3	5,2	12	20,7	43	74,1	4,12
3	It is difficult to accept that you have a child with developmental difficulties, the teacher provides us with support and understanding so that we can cope with the challenges more easily.		5,2	5	8,6	50	86,2	4,10
4	Through continuous conversations with students and parents of children with typical development, the teacher tries to ensure that my child with developmental disabilities is adequately accepted in the class.		6,9	6	10,3	48	82,8	4,07
5	The school my child attends is an example of good inclusion.		10,3	0	0	52	89,7	3,95
6	We have invested so much energy, effort, time and money in the child, and at the beginning they are asking us for an assistant without observation, without personal contact with the child!		43,1	11	19	22	37,9	3,88
7	We always listen to criticism, for the sake of the child, for our efforts, we have no motivation to cooperate.	8	13,8	22	37,9	28	48,3	3,71
8	The teacher is afraid of my child and has put up a wall in communication, I can't get close to her!	2	3,4	30	51,7	26	44,8	3,55
9	I was invited to talk with the school's pedagogue, teacher, social worker and assistant about my child's future. I felt attacked, helpless, humiliated, insulted, as if I was doing nothing for the welfare of my child.	39	67,2	9	15,5	10	17,2	3,43
10	I tried to explain to the teacher how I work with my child and how I motivate him, but he didn't have time to listen to me.	29	50	11	19	18	31	3,42

The research results show that the highest value of the arithmetic mean of parents' attitudes is 4.15 for the statement "The teacher regularly consults with me about how to work with my child". In general, the results show that parents are satisfied with communication with the teacher and that they achieve good cooperation (67.2%). Similar results show that parents find it difficult to accept their child's condition (86.2%), but that the most important thing for them is that the child is accepted in the class both by the teacher and by peers (74.1%), while the majority ( 89.7%) believe that the school the child attends is an example of good practice and inclusion.

When it comes to the claims "We invested so much energy, effort, time and money in the child, and at the start they ask us for an assistant without observation, without personal contact with the child!" and "We always listen to criticism, for the sake of the child, for our efforts, we have no motivation to we cooperate", the results show that 37.9% of parents fully agree with the above statements, 43.1% of parents disagree with the above statements, while 19% of parents did not express their opinion on these statements. The lowest percentage of negative responses (3.4%)

related to the statement "The teacher is afraid of my child and has put up a wall in communication, I can't get close to her!" The highest number of negative responses (67.2%) related to the statement "Invited myself to talk with the school pedagogue, teacher, social worker and assistant about my child's future. I felt attacked, helpless, humiliated, insulted, as if I was doing nothing for the welfare of my child". Often parents of children who are in the first grade of primary school perceive every well-intentioned advice and information negatively because they are still dealing with accepting the child's difficulties. Meetings with the school's professional team are an obligation and parents should be prepared in advance who will attend, what the topic of the meeting is and why the meeting is beneficial for the child in order to avoid negative situations. Based on all of the above, we can conclude that the attitudes of parents of children with developmental disabilities about inclusion are positive.

### Educators' views on the challenges of inclusion

The second research task was to examine and analyse whether the views of educators (teachers) on inclusion are positive. Like the previous one, this task was also realised through the analysis of attitudes obtained by the Scale of Attitudes of Educational Workers (teachers), and the data were tabulated and explained. Table 2 presents the frequencies and percentages of educators' attitudes. Analysing the results, it is noticeable that the values of the arithmetic means of individual statements are ranked in the same order as the parents' attitudes, but with slightly lower values.

R a	Statements		I do not agree at all		I agree and disagree		I completely agree	
n g			%	f	%	f	%	М
1	I regularly consult with parents about how to work with the child.		7,2	27	32,5	50	60,2	4,27
2	Students with developmental disabilities are an integral part of my class and participate equally in all activities.		19,3	9	10,8	58	69,9	4,22
3	It is difficult to accept that you have a child with developmental disabilities, I try to provide parents with support and understanding so that they can cope with the challenges more easily.		21,7	1	1,2	64	77,1	4,12
4	Through continuous conversations with students and parents of children with typical development, I try to ensure that a child with developmental disabilities is adequately accepted in the class.	16	19,3	11	13,3	56	67,5	4,05

Table 2. Attitudes of educators about the challenges of inclusion

5	The school where I work is an example of good inclusion.	7	8,4	8	9,6	68	81,9	4,01
6	I am not a special educator rehabilitator!	15	18,1	38		30	36,1	3,98
7	I am not competent to work with children with developmental disabilities!	13	15,7	50	60,2	20	24,1	3,72
8	I am afraid that the child's parents will be unhappy because I will not give the child as much knowledge as he needs to progress and learn!	17	20,5	47	56,6	19	22,9	3,51
9	A child with developmental disabilities is the concern of the mobile team and assistants!	38	45,8	15	18,1	30	39,7	3,33
10	The child must adopt all the contents provided for in the plan and program at any cost, otherwise he should not be educated in a regular school!	38	45,8	37	44,6	8	9,6	3,12

The results of the research showed that the percentage of educators agreeing with the statement "I regularly consult with parents about how to work with the child" is (60.2%). 69.9% of educators responded positively to the statement "Students with developmental disabilities are an integral part of my class and participate equally in all activities." A total of 77.1% of educators responded positively to the statement "It is difficult to accept that you have a child with developmental disabilities, I try to provide support and understanding to parents so that they can cope with the challenges more easily", which means that educators make an extra effort to help parents of children with developmental difficulties facilitated the process of raising and educating their child. When it comes to the acceptance of a child with developmental disabilities in the class, educators expressed positive views in 67.5% of cases where "Through continuous discussions with students and parents of children with typical development, they strive to ensure that a child with developmental disabilities is adequately accepted in the class." 81.9% of them agree with the statement that "The school where they work is an example of good inclusion".

On the following five statements, educators expressed the following views: On the statement "I am not a special educator and rehabilitator!", we received data that 36.1% of educators agree with the stated statement. There is agreement in 24.1% of cases on the following statement, which read "I am not competent/competent to work with children with developmental disabilities!". Therefore, there is a certain number of educators who believe that they are not sufficiently educated in order to provide the maximum in their work to children with developmental disabilities. It is logical that the following statement, which read "I am afraid that the child's parents will be dissatisfied because I will not give the child as much knowledge as he needs to progress and learn!", is the same percentage (22.9%) of educators. declared positively. The surprising fact is that as many as 39.7% of educators agreed with the statement that "A child with developmental disabilities is the concern of the mobile team and assistants!", while 9.6% of them agreed with the statement that "The child must adopt all the contents provided for in the plan and program at all costs, otherwise he should not be educated in a regular school!".

The attitudes of educators showed that in certain segments, when it comes to cooperation with parents and acceptance of a child with difficulties in class, they are positive. These attitudes are more appropriate for educators who work in classrooms, because during the first four years of

a child's education, efforts are made to establish the best possible climate in the classroom in order to be accepted and progress. However, we could connect the more negative attitudes with the attitudes of educators of the subject classes. When a student with developmental difficulties moves to subject classes, teachers should get to know the child in a short time, learn how the child functions in the class, what his capacities and abilities are, and adapt the teaching contents accordingly. Considering that the child has some of the subjects once a week, it is quite logical that the views of educators are often expressed, implying that the mobile team and the assistant should deal with the child, as well as that if the child does not adopt the regular plan and program, there is no point in education in regular school.

## Attitudes of parents and educators about the implementation of inclusion and the perception of creating an inclusive community

The first five statements of the Scale of Attitudes about the Implementation of Inclusion are common to both subsamples of respondents, both the subsample of parents and the subsample of educators. We wanted to examine whether there is a statistically significant difference in the attitudes of parents and educators when it comes to the implementation of inclusion and the perception of creating an inclusive community whose main source is the educational institution attended by a child with developmental disabilities. In order to determine the existence of a difference and its significance, we used a t-test for two independent samples.

Sample	Ν	М	t	р
Parents	58	4,17	6 015	0.036
Educators	83	3,68	- 6,915	0,036

Table 3. Testing the differences in the attitudes of parents and educators about the implementationof inclusion

Looking at the table showing the difference in arithmetic means between the attitudes of parents and educators regarding the implementation of inclusion, it can be seen that a statistically significant difference in interpretation has been established. The value by testing the arithmetic means of these two independent samples is t = 6.915 at the level of significance p = 0.036.

This means that both parents and educators agree that children with developmental disabilities have a place in a regular school, but their answers differ primarily in perspective. After enrolling their child in a regular school, parents believe that their child can meet the requirements

of a regular school and that there are no reasons to dispute their opinion. On the other hand, educators are faced with a series of challenges every day that need to be answered in order for a child with developmental disabilities to receive the necessary knowledge in an appropriate manner. Some of the challenges that educators face are insufficient professional skills to work with these children, insufficient professional support, a large number of students in the class that prevents individual access to the child, numerous administrative duties that take a lot of time, and a lack of didactic and teaching resources that would made their work easier. Parents are not familiar with all the challenges that accompany educators, which is why there is a statistically significant difference in their attitudes.

### CONCLUSION

Since the inclusive process in education came to life, various researches have been conducted and the attitudes of both educators and parents, as well as students, have been examined. The results of these surveys are used to improve the inclusion process. In this way, we find out what can be improved in terms of the organisation of the teaching process, cooperation between parents and the school, and what is missing in order to have a better atmosphere in the class between students. When it comes to the challenges of inclusion, a lot can be written about them, depending on whose perspective we look at. If we look at it from the perspective of parents of children with typical development, more teaching assistants should be provided so that children with developmental difficulties do not disrupt the lesson and so that children with typical development can study undisturbed. From the perspective of parents of children with disabilities, there should be more understanding, empathy and love for children with disabilities. From the perspective of educators, the challenges relate to the adjustment of teaching content, the need for teaching assistants, the need for educational-rehabilitation treatments, the need for more didactic material and professional staff. The results of this research show the attitudes of parents of children with developmental disabilities and the attitudes of educational workers (teachers).

Parents and educators agree that children with developmental disabilities have a place in regular school, but their answers differ in perspective. Parents are satisfied with the relationship with the teacher and the school their child attends. Most of the surveyed parents believe that the child received the necessary help in order to be successfully educated and that he was accepted by his peers, which is a prerequisite for a good inclusive approach. However, it often happens that parents experience a situation when they enrol their child in school and bring the necessary documentation, that an assistant is initially sought for the child without first seeing the child's condition and abilities. Parents have a particularly hard time experiencing meetings with the professional team, because they perceive it as an attack on themselves and the child. Overall, based on the obtained data, we can conclude that parents who achieve good communication with the teacher have positive attitudes about inclusion. Therefore, the empathic and friendly approach of the teacher dictates the future relations between parents and educators, as well as the success in the process of their child's education.

When it comes to educators (teachers), the most common challenge they point out in the process of inclusive education is insufficient expertise to work with these children. Given that children with more severe, severe and combined difficulties come to regular school, it is quite

logical that educators have a hard time dealing with the challenges of educating such a child. In addition to the help of the professional team in creating customised programs and the teaching assistant who helps in the implementation of the lesson, there remains the fear that the child will not get everything he needs. If you add to that all the students from the class who have different needs, then such a reaction is expected. Educators often complain that they have become "scribes", the numerous administrative duties that are imposed on them day by day, take away the time they could use for preparation and provision of work materials. Some of the challenges faced by educators are insufficient professional support, as well as a lack of didactic and teaching resources that would facilitate their work. It is for this reason that we received data in which educators point out that they are not educators-rehabilitators and that a child with difficulties should be the concern of a mobile professional team and assistants. However, we must analyse these attitudes more deeply, because they are the result of fear of failure. Educators are afraid that they will not help the child sufficiently and that they will harm him.

Regardless of the views of both, inclusion and inclusive education is our reality. How it will unfold and in what way the participants of inclusive education will adapt depends on themselves. There is still a need for the professional development of educators, for the engagement of assistants in classes and departments, as well as professional associates from speech therapists, special educators, psychologists to medical staff who would take care of the therapy and condition of children with developmental disabilities. Ideal conditions for implementing inclusion do not exist, both in Bosnia and Herzegovina and in the region and the world. However, it is important that there is a desire of all actors of inclusive education to learn and that there is love for the profession and for the education of all students without exception.

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