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THE CHALLENGES OF INTEGRATING STUDENTS WITH DOWN SYNDROME

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Abstract

This research focuses on the integration challenges of children with Down Syndrome, this topic addresses the issue of their integration into regular classes.

This research has used the quantitative and qualitative methods which has served in data collection and analysis.

The research was conducted in the parallel classes of the following primary schools in Gjakove: "Yll Morina" and "Zekeria Rexha", at the Resource Center "Përparimi" in Prishtina, as well as in some other primary public schools in Prishtina and in Gjakova (in ("Nazim Gafurri", "Hilmi Rakovica", "Mustafa Bakia", "Shaban Golaj"). The research was conducted based on various literary review and studies done regarding this field, along with the data results collected from the questionnaires.

From the given answers we get to conclude that the discriminative mentality, the lack of professionalism from the teachers side in order to work with children with Down Syndrome, the inadequate infrastructure, result to be challenging in integrating these children into regular (inclusive) classes. The majority of teachers agree that MASHT (MEST) should provide professional trainings to the teachers that work with children with Down Syndrome.

Key words: integration, teacher, student, Down syndrome

1. INTRODUCTION

Our country is making important strides towards inclusion, as many students from resource centers and attached classes are moving through regular classes. The statistics obtained by the "Down Syndrome Kosovo" Association show that in the municipality of Gjakova there are two attached classes, with a total of 35 students with Down Syndrome.

The study of the challenges faced by children with Down Syndrome is not a new and previously unexplored topic, but its actuality never remains lacking, so I thought it reasonable to elaborate further. So, the motive to address this topic, the challenges facing children with Down Syndrome, I find mainly in the internal motive. The second reason is that I have always been motivated to help these children, and above all to contribute to their education.

According to Reçica, based on the documents approved by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology of Kosovo, our country aims for a comprehensive education system where the right to education is the right of everyone regardless of their status physical, intellectual, social, emotional, sensory, linguistic or any other condition.

The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology of Kosovo, emphasizes that social inclusion is an issue of the whole society and not only of the education system. Inclusive education, as a first step towards social inclusion, benefits the whole society. The experience of the last century gave a valuable lesson to society, because the isolation of some students in separate schools has negative effects on their future lives and on that of society in general. In many educational systems of different countries, inclusiveness has already become a reality, but accompanied by many difficulties. Kosovo is also facing this challenge, which is making efforts towards the realization of the concept of comprehensive education. Inclusion, as an educational philosophy, is relatively new in Kosovo both as a concept and as a practice.

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In 2013, Save the Children published a handbook on school procedures to support the inclusion of students with disabilities on the topic "Inclusion of children with disabilities in school", where it is emphasized that: "an inclusive school is a school in which which differences between students and diversity are welcomed and the necessary measures are taken to realize this. When we emphasize the difference between students, we don't mean only students with disabilities, but all those who have changes or specifics in learning, such as students from the Roma community, students with low income or gender-related, etc. In essence, an inclusive school does not aim to erase the differences between individuals, but enforces the right to quality education. In this respect, inclusiveness is a much broader concept than the concept of integration. In an inclusive school, the burden of adaptation falls on the student, who thus learns that the planning and organization of the school for the inclusion of students with disabilities is developed differently than most".Teachers, peers and the school environment are important actors in educating children in school with common norms and values.

While Muka, emphasizes that Education is a set of conditions and activities that lead to the intellectual, social, moral and physical development of the child.

According to the Landesakademie with partner, "The school must also help the child to prepare for "responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of the sexes and friendship between all peoples, ethnic groups, national and religious groups and people of autochthonous origin.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research methods, techniques and instruments

Quantitative and qualitative methods were used to collect the results, this method was used for the purpose of data collection, analysis and processing, while the qualitative method was used for qualitative data analysis.

In order to collect data related to the integration challenges of children with Down Syndrome, two questionnaire surveys are used. The two separate surveys consist of:

• 10 statements that quantitatively assess the degree of representation of teachers' views regarding the issue of inclusion of the category of children with Down Syndrome.

• 10 statements which quantitatively assess the degree of representation of the parents' point of view regarding the issue of inclusion of the category of children with Down Syndrome.

• For the collection of qualitative data, 3 open questions were asked to the teachers of children with Down Syndrome

3. RESULTS

In the question asked of teachers: "Down syndrome does not affect the learning process of students", the results were as follows: 9 of the teachers disagreed with this position (45%), 4 of them agreed (20%), 3 others fully agreed (15%), 3 disagreed at all (15%), while 1 had no opinion on this issue (5%). From these results, we can say that of the 20 teachers surveyed, most of them expressed that the child with Down Syndrome actually prevents other students from having a successful (complete) learning.

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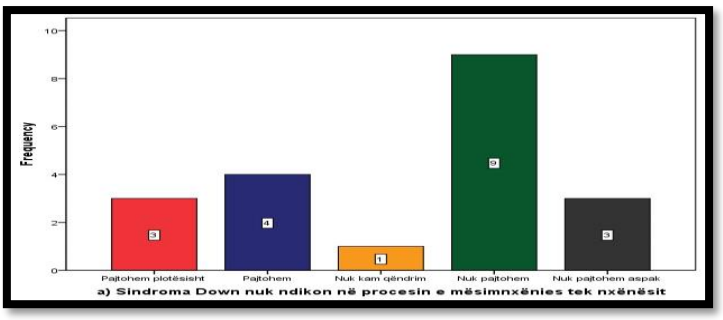


Figure 1. Down syndrome does not affect the learning process of students

If we make a correlation with the question addressed to parents: "Do other students provide support to my child during lessons?", we see that other children provide maximum support to these children. Out of 20 parents surveyed, 4 of them fully agreed (20%), 11 of them agreed (75%), while only 5 disagreed (25%). These percentages are presented below through graph number 2.

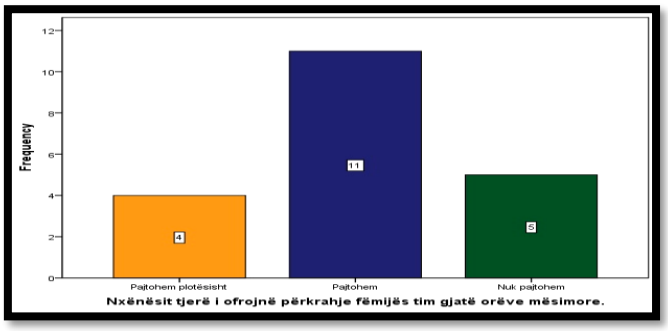


Figure 2. Other students provide support to my child during lessons

In the question addressed to the teachers: "Students with Down Syndrome find it challenging to integrate in different educational institutions", it turned out that for the majority it is very challenging to integrate these children in school institutions. In terms of percentage, it turns out that: 8 fully agreed (40%), 10 agreed (50%), 1 disagreed (5%) and 1 of them had no opinion at all. These data are presented below through graph number 3.

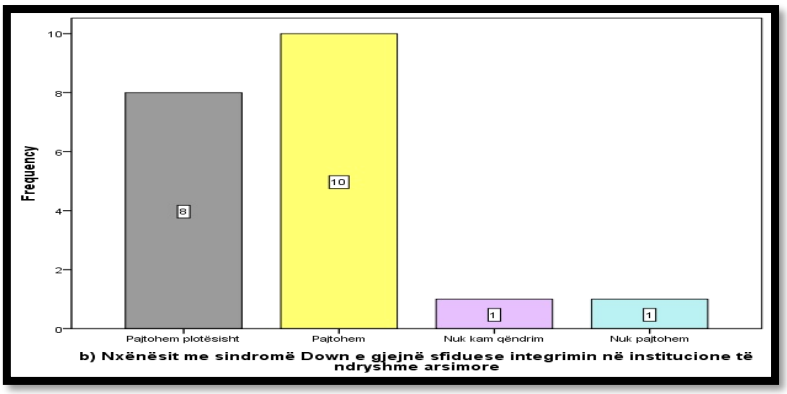


Figure 3. Students with Down syndrome find it challenging to integrate into different educational institutions

On the other hand, parents asked: "I think their child should be part of regular classes", 9 out of 20 parents surveyed answered that they agree with the integration of these children in regular classes (45%), 2 of of them fully agreed (10%), 7 disagreed with the integration of children with Down Syndrome in regular classes (35%), while 2 of the parents surveyed did not give any opinion on this question.

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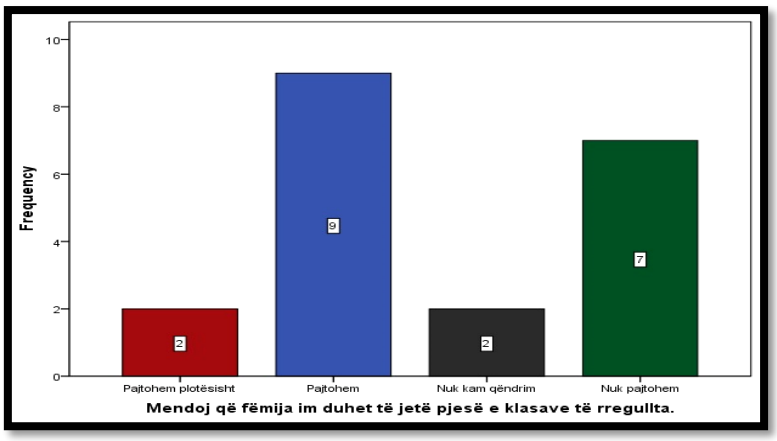


Figure 4. I think their child should be part of regular classes

The teachers asked: "Students with Down syndrome are integrated in regular classes" most of them, or say 12 of them, disagreed with this attitude (60%), which lets you understand that children with Down syndrome do not are partially integrated in regular classes, 4 agreed (35%), 3 fully agreed (15%), 1 did not give a specific opinion (5%). Below, through table number 1, the statistics about this question are presented.

Table 1. Students with Down Syndrome are integrated in regular classes

	Frequency	**Percent**	**Valid precent**	**Cumulative Precent**
I completely agree	3	15.0	15.0	15.0
I agree	4	20.0	20.0	35.0
I have no attitude	1	5.0	5.0	40.0
I do not agree	12	60.0	60.0	100.0
Total	**20**	**100.0**	**100.0**	

To relate to the question above, parents were asked about the acceptance of children with Down Syndrome by other children. In the question: ". My child is easily accepted by others" they present the following results: 8 out of 20 surveyed parents agreed (40%), 3 fully agreed (15%), 6 disagreed (30%), while 3 others did not express an opinion (15 %). From these results, we see that children with Down Syndrome are moderately accepted by others. Table 2 shows the results about this question.

Table 2. My child is easily accepted by others

	Frequency	**Percent**	**Valid precent**	**Cumulative Precent**
I completely agree	3	15.0	15.0	15.0
Concur	8	40.0	40.0	55.0
I have no attitude	3	15.0	15.0	70.0
I do not agree	6	30.0	30.0	100.0
Total	**20**	**100.0**	**100.0**	

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Qualitative data analysis

Based on the results obtained through the questionnaires, a qualitative analysis of the data, namely of the answers to the open questions addressed to the teachers, was also done:

1. How is the integration of students with Down syndrome in regular classes?

2. How is the professional preparation of teachers done?

3. How is the cooperation with parents of children with Down Syndrome?

In the questions addressed to the respondents, the following answers were obtained:

1. How is the integration of students with Down syndrome in regular classes?

Students with Down Syndrome find it very challenging to integrate into regular classes, because there are many factors that influence them not to have full integration into regular classes. Among the key factors turned out to be the discriminatory mentality of our society, a factor that is directly affecting them, since the community is very little informed about this category of society.

A child with Down syndrome does not feel good in a class where others are prejudiced and do not allow him to be part of the inclusive society.

Another factor is the lack of suitable teaching materials. In a place where the work tools are not provided, such as the appropriate didactic-teaching tools that are more than necessary for working with children with Down Syndrome, of course the work is difficult, therefore the students do not feel comfortable and do not find themselves part of that class.

The transportation of students, respectively the round-trip transport from their home to the institution, is deficient and non-functional in most municipalities of Kosovo, which is making it impossible to send children to the relevant institution, knowing that not everyone has the opportunity to sending children to the educational institution on their own.

All the above-mentioned factors were an essential factor in not having the full integration of children with Down Syndrome in the relevant educational institutions.

How is the professional preparation of teachers done?

A very important role in the integration of children with Down Syndrome is played by the staff of teachers who work with them, since teachers who work with children with Down Syndrome must have adequate professional training.

From the collected results, we have seen that in our country there is a lack of professional training for teachers who work with children with Down Syndrome. This is certainly a consequence of the lack of information and preparation of teachers with these children.

The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology should ensure that there are adequate trainings, scientific conferences, various workshops on inclusiveness so that teachers are trained to work with children with Down Syndrome.

The support from MEST in this direction should be great and not only enable you to train, but also offer practical work to young students where they will see from an expert how it works and what are the methods and techniques of working with this category of children.

DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The work on the Challenges of the integration of children with Down Syndrome is focused on extracting the results of what are the challenges for the integration of children with Down Syndrome. Part of the research were 20 teachers, 10 teachers who work in attached classes ("Yll Morina", "Zekeria Rexha" schools and the Progress resource center), as well as 10 teachers of inclusive classes but who have children with Down Syndrome ("Nazim" schools Gafurri", "Hilmi Rakovica", "Mustafa Bakija", "Shaban Golaj") these schools are located in the municipalities of Pristina and Gjakova. 20 parents of children with Down Syndrome also participated in the research.

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The largest number of teachers as well as parents agree with the fact that we have challenges towards the integration of children with Down Syndrome. Graph number 3 shows the results of the teachers, considering how challenging they find the integration of children with Down Syndrome.

Table 11 shows the teachers' responses on how challenging they see the discriminatory mentality, and from those responses we saw that this issue is quite worrying because most of them think that the discriminatory mentality of others towards children with Down Syndrome is one of the main challenges.

When teachers and parents were asked about the professional preparation of teachers who work with Down Syndrome, the answers turned out to be such as to indicate that teachers lack professional preparation to work with children with Down Syndrome; for non-professional preparation, both teachers and parents agreed, these results are presented in figures 8 and 9, as long as we have these results we can consider it as one of the challenges for the integration of these children. Cërmjani cites that in Kosovo there is still no staff professionally prepared enough to work with children with Down Syndrome. (Cermjani, 2007).

As for the suitable conditions for schooling students (children with Down Syndrome), in the survey conducted, the parents asked about this issue express agreement and disagreement between them. Half of the parents agree that there are suitable conditions for integration, while the other half disagree with this position, asserting that there are no suitable conditions for integration.

While, regarding the conditions offered by our schools, how much they offer suitable conditions, we see that even in schools we do not have suitable infrastructure for the integration of children with Down Syndrome. Figure number 6 shows the responses of parents, where it can be seen that they think that our schools do not offer suitable conditions for the integration of children with Down Syndrome. We can ascertain this even if we make even a simple visit to the schools around us. Adequate conditions are missing not only for this category of students, but also for other students in our schools.

For the same issue, the teachers were also asked about what they think about the conditions offered for the education of these children. Figure number 5 shows their answers, where it can be seen that they affirmed that our schools do not have sufficient conditions.

Duranovic and collaborators emphasize that "the teacher plays the most important role in the integration of children with Down Syndrome in the classroom. He/she is tasked with preparing the students in the classroom to accept a child with Down Syndrome in a classroom community. The right conversations make students accept the fact that there are students who are different from them. Timely announcements can direct students to the acceptance of students with disabilities, but the actual value is achieved through those who live and work together." (Duranovic, M., Klasnic, I., & Opic, V., 2017).

When parents were asked about the support of children with Down Syndrome during the lessons and the support they receive from their teachers, they answered that their child should be supported more by the relevant teachers and this is still very important for these children. . These results are presented in table number 12. As for how much support they have from other children, their answers were that other children give maximum support to children with Down Syndrome. The results are presented in figure number 2.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

During the process of this study, the results of the data were examined, analyzed and discussed in detail. These results speak about the challenges of integrating children with Down Syndrome, about the point of view of teachers and parents in this regard. Based on these results, the following conclusions were drawn:

• According to quantitative data, Down syndrome affects the teaching process of other students.

• Students with Down Syndrome find it challenging to integrate in different educational institutions, because they need greater support from both teachers and state bodies, such as MEST - i.

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• The discriminatory mentality negatively affects the integration of children with Down Syndrome, therefore society (community), according to them, lacks information and is not yet sufficiently aware of this issue.

• Schools do not have sufficient and necessary conditions for integration, therefore our country must focus on this point as well; most parents and teachers agreed with the fact that our schools lack the proper infrastructure for children with Down Syndrome to integrate.

• Teachers are not professionally prepared and also do not have adequate training for children with Down Syndrome; lack of qualification and lack of adequate training leads us to a problem in itself; the majority of teachers and parents declared that there is a lack of teachers professionally prepared for work with children with Down Syndrome.

• The surveyed teachers expressed that they need greater support from the Ministry of Education and Technology.

Based on the results of the studies as well as the conclusions drawn, we must consider some recommendations in order to be more careful and help the comprehensive process.

Teachers of children with Down syndrome must have professional training for working with these children.

The community should be informed that children with Down Syndrome should be part of regular classes and they should receive this information from state bodies.

Holding trainings for parents to raise awareness of how to accept children with Down Syndrome.

Raising children's awareness to accept and treat children with Down Syndrome as they are.

MEST - must hold adequate training for teachers who work with children with Down Syndrome.

MEST - must provide the necessary conditions for the integration of children with Down Syndrome, such as: schools with better infrastructure, necessary didactic-learning tools.

MEST must take care to advance the children with Down Syndrome in the areas they have operational skills.

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