

## SPECIAL OR (ALL) INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

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*This paper deals with the issue of special and inclusive education within the current reform of the compulsory primary school in Bosnia and Herzegovina, with particular reference to Herzegovina-Neretva Canton. The paper is based on the survey research (carried out in the first half of 2010) on attitudes (towards primarily inclusive education) of 165 teachers and 145 parents from Herzegovina-Neretva Canton, respectively, through a five-point Likert scale referring to: teachers and parents' acquaintance with special and inclusive education requirements and their involvement in its designing, planning, organisation; teachers' professional training in the mentioned fields; school readiness for inclusive education; level of partnership with relevant subjects. Since the partnership of all the subjects involved in the education reform is a *conditio sine qua non* of its success, this paper reflects upon its position in various proclamations and in primary school teachers and parents' reality, i.e. legislative aspects vs. everyday situation of inclusive education in our schools. In both the samples of our research there has been so far the evident negative attitude towards the inclusive education, due to the lack of the most of the above mentioned points, including the reform political background ('top-down' model), as well. One of the conclusions to be drawn is that there is the urgent need for all the relevant subjects to work in synergy in order to provide decent and quality not only special but also inclusive education, taking into account the benefit of all the children in general. However, the following questions (put here in the form of puns) are still to be answered: is it all about special or inclusive; is it all or only inclusive education.*

**Keywords:** special education, inclusive education, education reform, primary school teachers, parents, partnership.

School should be viewed as a living organism consisted of people and their interaction within and outside it. The quality of their interaction determines to the great extent the efficiency and effectiveness of the school itself. However, the active participation of the teachers and parents in designing, developing and implementing the educational reform has been usually marginalized, as it is mostly the case with the current primary school reform – primary education in FBH consists of nine-year compulsory attendance – in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (in further text FBH). On the other hand, partnership between all the relevant factors has always been the cornerstone of the successful educational reform, and thus the inclusive education (being one of its crucial points in our country), as

well. Therefore, by examining the relevant subjects' attitude (in our case – teachers' and parents, their acquaintance with the inclusive education, their partnership, etc.) there could be revealed certain data as indicators of the current inclusive education implementation in Herzegovina-Neretva Canton (in further text HNC).

We took in consideration only Herzegovina-Neretva Canton where the education reform and inclusive education were introduced after many disputes. Furthermore, the *inclusive education* is an official term in the education legislation in our country although people delaying with this segment of education prefer the term integration in education (due to many prerequisites still not fulfilled for the inclusive education – as it could be seen from this paper, too).

### Inclusive education in Herzegovina-Neretva Canton

The concept of integration and inclusion are often used interchangeably without their clear understanding in the school and legislation. Although inclusive education has its *raison d'être* in the education reform in BiH, its *top-down* model will hardly gain the success.

We should pose a question whether those who had signed many declarations, contracts, etc., had taken this into consideration, especially when reflecting on inclusive education.

Different researchers (Lewis & Henderson, 1997; Monsen & Haug, 1998, Medeghini & Valtellina, 2006) show that many prerequisites are indispensable for the education reform and, thus, the inclusive education itself. If they are not created, they can be easily transformed into many obstacles to those processes at different (*educand*, teaching personnel, collaboration in a broader societal setting, organisational and legislative) levels. Péter Radó (2002) perceives the quality of education, among other parameters, also through meeting the needs and requirements of each single “user”, i.e. specific educational needs of each child (influencing his/her parents, teachers, peers, entire school, community, etc. – added by the author of this paper). Are our schools ready and prepared to accomplish this criterion?

Inclusive education requires joint vision, designing, planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, in the unique setting, i.e. of all the settings which – with more or less responsibility – through the interaction and co-operation, take an active part in the process of upbringing and education: family, school, relevant services, associations as well as non formal social groups like peers in the classroom, neighbourhood, acquaintances, etc., who interact in different ways with the person (in our case pupil) with special needs, that is developmental disabilities. This complex network, consisted of mutually dependant relations, is the core of the inclusion since the inclusive concept requires contemplation not only on so-called open institutional places, but also on all the others which are less formal, sometimes unexpected, but potentially strong and significant enabling the integration and developmental process concrete (Medeghini, Valtellina, 2006:111) and aiming to the inclusion itself, i.e. inclusive education in this concrete case.

Partnership produces benefits for both teachers and parents as well as for the pupils/students in terms of their better confidence in school and greater self confidence in their (teacher and parents') role, respectively.

Education reform as well as special and/or inclusive education – and not special vs. inclusive education – do not imply the revolution, but rather

the evolution of the education system. The essence of the special as well as of the inclusive education is a joint vision producing the necessary changes, transformations and new directions, guidelines as well as the outcomes representing the benefit for all the subjects involved and the entire society, as well. It is the process putting together the people, ideas, systems, communications, technologies... Is it a case with HNC school reality?

### Research methodology

The aim of the survey research, carried out in 2010, was to examine the attitudes of teachers and parents towards the implementation of the inclusive education in Herzegovina-Neretva Canton (HNC is specific for the delay of the primary education reform and inclusive education implementation launched in 2006. It is also interesting from the legislative point of view: dual education system; seat of federal and cantonal ministries of education, etc.), with particular attention to the partnership between them as a crucial point of the education reform in our country. The research was carried out through the five-point Likert scale (26 items) on the strata sample consisted of 165 primary school teachers and 145 parents from HNC whose children attend the primary school. (Teachers with different degree of education; in urban, suburban, rural schools. Parents in urban, suburban and rural places; parents whose children attending the first, second and third class of the nine-year primary education; degree of parents' education; etc. As it has already been said, the researcher could not present all the data obtained, but the interested reader can get an in-depth insight in all the research results directly by the author of this paper.)

Due to the length of this paper, the researcher presented here just the main points obtained by the teachers and parents. The results of the research, hereby presented in the simplest descriptive way, can serve as a kind of indicator for further, deeper research of this complex issue. (Attitudes of primary school teachers from HNC towards inclusive education, N=165.)

Table 1. *Teachers' education and preparedness for inclusive education*

	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Neither agree nor disagree		Agree		Strongly agree	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
I think the teachers have been prepared enough for the inclusive education implementation.	56	33.93	76	46.06	22	13.33	11	6.66	-	0.00
I am completely prepared for the inclusive education through seminars and workshops in the last five years.	39	23.63	65	39.39	38	23.03	21	12.72	2	0.00
I regard school is both materially and organisationally prepared for the inclusive education implementation.	59	35.75	77	46.66	20	12.12	9	5.45	-	0.00
I need additional education in order to work with pupils with special needs in regular school.	3	1.81	4	2.42	22	13.33	84	50.90	52	31.51

More than three fourths of primary teachers in HNC, who participated in our research, have been neither prepared nor educated enough for the implementation of the inclusion in their schools. This becomes even indicative when more than a half of them claim not to be prepared for the inclusive education through seminars and workshops, held in the last five years. Any further comment would be unnecessary.

It is also indicative that almost a half of primary school teachers in HNC strongly agree that schools have not been prepared for the inclusive education. Their opinion is strongly shared by more than one third teachers who took part in this research.

There is no wonder that more than 80% of teachers clearly say they need additional education and training to be able to work with pupils with special needs. Workshops and seminars destined to teachers apparently did not gain the success expected.

Table 2. *Partnership between teachers and relevant subjects within inclusive education*

	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Neither agree nor disagree		Agree		Strongly agree	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Partnership between school and parents is sufficient in the inclusive education implementation.	37	22.42	65	39.39	51	30.90	11	6.66	1	0.60
I have assistant in my work with pupils with special needs.	62	37.57	66	40.00	26	15.75	9	5.45	2	1.21
The appropriately qualified assistant helping the teacher is indispensable in the classes where there is a pupil with special need.	-	0.00	5	3.03	11	6.66	69	41.81	80	48.48
Teachers have always been consulted about the inclusive education implementation.	52	31.51	71	43.03	26	15.75	14	8.48	2	1.21
I regard that ministries and Institute for Education have imposed inclusive education onto us.	5	3.03	30	18.18	64	38.78	34	20.60	32	19.39
I think that inclusive education has been used for a purpose of personal interests of certain individuals thus neglecting crucial issues of pupils with special needs.	1	0.60	25	15.15	62	37.57	55	33.33	22	13.33
I am worried about what will happen with special needs pupils within our educational system.	2	1.21	10	6.06	39	23.63	72	43.63	42	25.45

More than a half of the teachers claim that partnership between schools and parents is insufficient. A third of the participants in this research strongly agree with them. It will be interesting to see parents' opinion on this issue.

Although 90% of teachers need appropriately qualified assistants in their classrooms, more than three fourths of our teacher sample do not have such a support in their everyday work with pupils with special needs (among them, more than a half does not have it at all). The Institute of Education should provide teachers with the adequately qualified assistants! Any further comment seems unnecessary here.

More than three fourths of our teacher sample claim that they have been neglected in the planning and implementing the inclusive education in the schools. So, they mostly claim that inclusive education has been imposed by ministers and Institute for Education. More than a half of primary school teachers have got no support or help by educational advisors and Institute for Education in the implementation of inclusive education (as slightly more than one third, i.e. 35.23% strongly agreed).

Furthermore, almost a half of teachers from our research regard that some individuals use the concept of inclusion for the purpose of their own interests and profit. This should be considered in the light of a number of the inclusive education projects launched by many GOs and NGOs which did not gain any long-lasting success and where the chance to invest into human resources (teacher's assistants, f. ex., teachers' in-service training, etc.) was neglected. In the end, there is no wonder that teachers are worried about special needs pupils within our educational system where there is the evident lack of teachers and school preparedness for inclusive education as well as insufficient partnership between the relevant subjects.

Table 3. Teachers' evaluation of inclusive education implementation

	1		2		3		4		5	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
I would evaluate the inclusive education implementation in HNC:	13	7.87	39	23.63	81	49.09	26	15.75	6	3.63

Teachers evaluate the inclusive education implementation in „regular” schools (see Table 3) mostly as *good* (3) (almost a half of them). Then follow the grades *sufficient* (2) and *very good* (4). For some of them it deserves even the lowest and just for 3% the highest grade. Although the HNC teachers have neither been prepared and trained enough neither consulted about inclusive education, they still have been doing their best to implement it and so give it the grades presented here.

*Attitudes of parents from HNC towards inclusive education* (N = 145). Almost a half of the parents from our HNC sample claim not to be informed enough about inclusive education, while almost a third of them still does not have a clear opinion about this issue (see Table 4). This is indicative since our sample was consisted of the parents whose children attend the nine-year primary school. More than a half of the parents was informed about inclusive education through TV. There is a question to be posed: what about co-operation, i.e. partnership with schools and teachers as well as professional school services?!

Table 4. *Parents' acquaintance with the inclusive education*

	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Neither agree nor disagree		Agree		Strongly agree	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
I am informed enough about the inclusive education.	19	13.10	50	34.48	43	29.65	27	18.62	6	4.13
I am informed about inclusive education mostly by a means of TV.	4	2.75	19	13.10	35	24.13	57	39.31	30	20.68
I think the teachers should have informed us in details about the inclusive education.	5	3.44	10	6.89	39	26.89	53	36.55	38	26.20

On the other hand, more than 60% of the parents from the research sample expected the teachers to inform them about inclusive education. And how could the teachers have done it when they themselves have not been informed enough?!

Table 5. *Preparedness of primary school and teachers for the inclusive education (parents' point of view)*

	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Neither agree nor disagree		Agree		Strongly agree	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
I think the teachers have been prepared enough for the inclusive education implementation.	26	17.93	54	37.24	43	29.65	16	11.03	6	4.13
I regard school is both materially and organisationally prepared for the inclusive education implementation.	34	23.44	51	35.17	45	31.03	12	8.27	3	2.06
Teacher is responsible for the success of the inclusive education.	15	10.34	42	28.96	50	34.48	20	13.79	18	12.41

Parents of primary school pupils in HNC regard that schools have not been prepared for the inclusive education – almost 60% of them think so, of which almost one fifth strongly agree there has not been necessary

prerequisites to implement it. Furthermore, they do not think that teachers have been prepared for inclusion in school, either. The current situation in HNC schools reflects directly onto them through their children with and without special needs. Therefore, almost 40% of parents do not consider teachers responsible for this segment of education. However, slightly more than one fifth of parents puts the success of the inclusive education onto teachers' shoulders being its main performer.

Table 6. *Partnership between parents and school.*

	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Neither agree nor disagree		Agree		Strongly agree	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Partnership between school and parents is sufficient in the inclusive education implementation.	23	15.86	67	46.20	35	24.13	18	12.42	2	1.37
Parents have been always consulted about the inclusive education implementation.	40	27.58	76	52.41	21	14.48	7	4.82	1	0.68
I think that inclusive education has been imposed onto us by politicians.	6	4.13	21	14.48	30	20.68	53	36.55	35	24.13
I think that inclusive education has been used for a purpose of personal interests of certain individuals thus neglecting crucial issues of pupils with special needs.	1	0.68	10	7.0	25	17.24	56	38.62	53	36.55

For more than a half of the HNC parents partnership between them and school is not sufficient. However, one fifth of our sample still has not clear attitude towards partnership with school. Here it should be worthy searching who initiates partnership (schools, parents, or someone else from the school setting!), which forms of partnership exist in primary schools, etc.

Furthermore, more than a half of the HNC parents perceives inclusive education as being imposed by politicians. Their opinion is not shared by less than one fifth of our respondents. This is supported by further three fourths of our parents' sample who claim that inclusive education has been used for the purpose of personal interests of certain individuals while the real everyday problems of schools and pupils (with or without special needs) have been neglected.

When we add to the above mentioned the opinion of more than three fourths (more precisely, 79.99%) of the parents that they have not been asked about the inclusive education at all (and previously they claimed not to be informed) about that process, their attitude towards this segment of primary education becomes more clear and there is no need to comment it.

Obviously, HNC parents, who participated in this research and whose children attend the primary school, have showed so far the negative attitude about inclusive education.

## Discussion

Compulsory education does not imply selectivity (or ...?!). The real purpose of compulsory primary education is to enable as many positive influences and experiences as possible, for each child, in order to favour his/her full, entire development. Therefore, inclusive education has its *raison d'être*, but inclusion is a gradual, systematic, long-lasting, complex and at the same time creative process deriving from the real life and not from the ministers' armchairs. It is based on scientific analyses and facts, professional descriptions, concepts, in co-operation of all the relevant subjects. However, some crucial points had been overviewed in inclusive education concept in HNC.

The experiences of other countries should have been profoundly, objectively and critically analyzed. The point is not what approach, i.e. model of inclusive education is the best, but what combination of the approaches, i.e. various models is the most efficient and gives the long-term positive results, with particular regard to the benefit of children.

Primary schools in HNC were not prepared for the inclusive education (in the terms of their internal organisation, personnel, material resources, partnership with the relevant subjects). The barriers to its implementation are: lack of qualified staff / assistants at school level; lack of pre- and in-service training of teachers to work in inclusive setting, including creation and realisation of IEP; lack of co-operation and team work; fragmentation in laws; inadequate facilities; overcrowded classes, and last but not the least, lack of team work of all the relevant subjects. Education remains under the cantonal authorities. Each canton in FBH has its own Ministry of Education and the differences in governance, laws, education standards can be noted between each (Ministry..., 2004).

On the other hand, many children with special needs still remain isolated and marginalised in our country despite different projects implemented in this field. (For example, in the HNC there still has not been any methodology, modalities or criteria fixed to detect children with learning disabilities, gifted children, autistic children.) Therefore, prompt and synergic performance at micro-, mezzo- and macro-level, i.e. at the level of *education* (including his/her family), teaching staff, school, local community, entire society is *conditio sine qua non* for the inclusive education improvement.

*In both the samples – teachers and parents from HNC – there has been so far the evident negative attitude towards the inclusive education, to somewhat greater extent in the parents in HNC, due to the lack of the appropriate information, partnership between the relevant factors, its political background ('top-down' model), etc. Crossing the relevant variables and teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education, through chi-square test ( $\chi^2$ ), showed that statistically significant difference ( $p < 0.05$ ) appears in negative attitude, i.e.: teachers from smaller towns as well as those with over ten-year professional practice in school, have more negative attitude towards this issue. On the other hand, teachers' gender, degree of education and identification with school they work in, did not show any statistically significant difference. Furthermore, parents' education and residence did not show any statistically significant difference, either.*

Both parents and teachers had been excluded from planning of inclusive education, they were neither informed in time nor involved into its preparing, and they still have been neglected in its implementation. Partnership between teachers/schools and parents as well as other relevant subjects still represents the Gordian knot of the inclusive education in



Herzegovina-Neretva Canton (not only at the level of nine-year primary school, but also at the other educational levels, but there are still deeper researches to be done within high and higher education settings). Is the inclusive education possible without partnership of the relevant subjects? Is it possible if we tend to marginalize special education that will always be necessary for certain special needs categories? – Strange, but true: special education is mentioned in the educational legislation just once in terms of special schools being the official schools in FBH education system. Furthermore, there is the evident lack of useful research on special education reality and issues in HNC although it seems they have been needed more than ever.

There is the urgent need to work on developing positive attitudes of teachers and parents towards inclusive education, through appropriately designed measures (increase their involvement in the inclusive education itself; improve and favour partnership; increase the information and make them better, more regular and available to the public, etc.).

The parents' involvement in the school everyday life and in the inclusion in education – in terms of making decisions, discussing the vision and improvement of the school in general – has been the crucial factor of the successful inclusive education. Instead of exclusion, the educational reforms – and thus the inclusive education - imply the involvement of the parents as active and important partners not only in the process of its designing and developing, but also in their implementation, monitoring and continuous evaluation of its outcomes.

A synergic action of all the relevant subjects, interdisciplinary and holistic approach, dialogue and meeting, understanding and partnership, mutual acceptance and respect, towards the joint path to and into inclusive education ... are *conditio sine qua non* of its efficiency, effectiveness and its benefit and successful outcomes for all, especially children.

Therefore, should we move, gradually, from special through integration towards inclusive education?! The message is rather clear – the more attention should be paid to children and their needs as well to those working directly with them – teachers. Furthermore, the point is not to evaluate the children, teachers, parents only, but the curricula and education policy makers, community itself, as well. The time will show whether it is possible to achieve it successfully. There are many questions yet to be posed regarding the uttered in a number of legislative and other documents and done in school / educational reality. We still have been implementing *top-down* instead of *down-top* model of inclusive education.

It is clear that inclusive education without appropriately trained teaching staff, without support, without schools and teachers' prior preparation (and parents', too), without the commitment of all the involved subjects, without staff (in-service) development, without clear vision and free division of the ideas, opinions, experiences, i.e. without partnership, cannot work. As this research has showed, the crucial issues of the implementation of the inclusive education within the regular schools in HNC result from the lack of many of the mentioned previously in this paper. However, the extent and the success of its implementation will be critically uttered in the years still to come, through the benefit for the schools, teachers, parents and, most of all, children with and without special education needs.

## Instead of conclusion

Whitman's (1983) words remind us to the ignoring attitude of those who have been responsible for the education policy and hence for the educational quotidianity of the pupils/students with special needs in Herzegovina-Neretva Canton.

The current situation of integration education, in particularly when it comes to its tendency towards inclusive education seems to reflect a kind of Orwellian 'approach' paraphrased – *we are all equal, but some are more equal than others*. Is it all about special or inclusive; is it *all* or *only* inclusive education?!

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