

A Study of the Process towards Inclusion Related to Slovenian Pupils with Hard of Hearing or Functional Deafness

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Introduction

The denial of one single truth is one of the basic postulates of the postmodern era. While modernists sought objective truth, the objective of the postmodernists was studying the shift from the explanatory towards pluralistic approaches to discourse, trying to identify the multitude of small things which influence the opportunities of individuals with special needs. The postmodern era has seen the rise of general moral standards, such as the ethics surrounding caregiving and justice. While we have so far been aiming at discovering the truth, postmodernists are striving to achieve best practice. Consequently, the paradigm of the educational system in general and schooling for children with special needs in particular has changed due to the raised awareness and respect for the rights of every human being.

In this connection education of the deaf and hearing impaired population has significantly changed. This is a particularly deprived group with special needs, one encountering many barriers related to acquisition of knowledge, obtaining a professional education as well as employment opportunities due to

their communication challenges. At the same time, this is a very heterogeneous group when it comes to differences in their degree of hearing remains, the age at which their hearing started to deteriorate and their primary and secondary social environments. These factors contribute to enhancing or inhibiting these individuals in their communicative development and, consequently, in public recognition of their civil rights.

Following international principles of human rights as stated in UN and UNESCO documents, the school system in Slovenia has been significantly changed, and we have started to incorporate with the so-called school for all or inclusive education. According to UNESCO (2008), inclusive education is an on-going process aiming at offering quality education for all while simultaneously respecting diversity and the different needs and abilities, characteristics and learning expectations of pupils and communities, eliminating all forms of discrimination.

Persons with special needs on different levels and with different types of impairments are currently integrated in the ordinary school system. Moreover, various programmes which have been introduced are expected to be adapted to these different needs, and further systemic professional assistance, the possibility of adapting teaching-learning organisation and internal differentiation during lessons are also assumed to be provided.

Studies related to pupils with hard of hearing and functional deafness in the uniform school

Schmidt & Čagran (1998) refer to research showing positive impact of the school environment related to empathy and loyalty. Although differences are observed between emotional and social integration of individual pupils who are deaf, the process of integrating of these pupils seems to be effective. Compensatory therapeutic programmes and programmes adapted to their individual disabilities contribute largely to these pupils' positive performance. Moreover, the integration into mainstream schools does not indicate negative impact on their hearing peers. However, research results are contradictory when it comes to the social situation of pupils who are deaf. Peršolja (1997) establishes that there are no differences between hearing and deaf pupils in their social inclusion in the classroom community. Further, no differences are observed between either genders or lower and higher primary school levels. However, on higher levels trends have been reported regarding the weaker social inclusion of pupils who are deaf compared with their hearing peers. On the other hand Kuhar (1996)

reports that the social status of deaf pupils in the classroom is close to average, as 17% of the pupils participating in the study are considered to be “very much liked”, whereas 43% of them are “isolated” from or “disliked” by peers.

Schmidt (1997) considers the attitudes of teachers toward the integration of children with special needs as an important element of their successful inclusion in the mainstream primary school. She identifies important factors contributing to successful inclusion:

- presence of special education teacher in school
- assistance of parents and special education teachers
- volume of knowledge
- forms of school work
- emotional and academic characteristics of children with special needs
- communication of children with special needs
- social status of children with special needs

Individual satisfaction with self-realisation, communication and social networks as well as professional possibilities may give indications of the efficiency of the social care system. These personality aspects are in development during adolescence, and the study therefore focuses on education on the secondary level.

Research questions and objectives

How does a pupil with hard of hearing or functional deafness feel? How does he or she actively participate in the classroom? What knowledge does he or she possess? Does he or she communicate verbally and/or non-verbally? To what extent is his nearest environment; family, peers, and teachers, ready to respond to the communication challenges with which the deaf pupil is confronted? Are there specific characteristics of the socialisation and self-concept of individuals with hard of hearing or functional deafness?

The objective of the research is to explore and analyse the guidelines for facilitation for social acceptance of for pupils with hard of hearing or functional deafness, and the practical implementation of the guidelines. This includes the status of the deaf individual in a regular school, communication and knowledge, readiness of the local environment to offer support as well as didactic and technological equipment applied at school. The research will cover and compare two educational arenas for pupils with hearing or functional deafness, namely the regular class and the special education class.

Hypotheses or research topics

- H1: Didactic and technical equipment in regular classes and in special classes for the deaf and hard of hearing are the same.
- H2: Verbal and non-verbal communication in regular classes and in special education classes are similar.
- H3: Socio-metric status of pupils with hard of hearing and functional deafness is equally distributed in regular classes and special education classes.
- H4: Parents are equally satisfied with work in regular classes and special education classes.
- H5: Pupils with hard of hearing and functional deafness are equally satisfied in regular classes and in special education classes.
- H6: Parents believe that pupils are equally satisfied in regular classes and in special education classes.
- H7: Teachers in regular classes and in special education classes are equally satisfied with their competence to work with pupils with hard of hearing and functional deafness.
- H8: The principles of bilingual teaching receive equal attention in both regular and special education classes.
- H9: Communication is equally adapted in regular classes and in special education classes.
- H10: Pupils with hard of hearing impairment and functional deafness have proportionally an equal number of hearing and deaf friends in regular classes and in special education classes.
- H11: A positive self-concept of the pupil with hearing and functional deafness is equally distributed in regular classes and in special education classes.
- H12: Risk factors for health and socialization are the same in regular classes and in special education classes.

Methodology

This is a cross-sectional study using qualitative and quantitative research methods.

Sample. Part of the responses will be obtained by examining legislation and analysing information in existing studies of the population of children with hearing impairment and functional deafness. Concrete questions will be posed to a selected group of 15–25 deaf pupils attending secondary school in classes together with hearing peers, and to a group of 15–25 pupils attending classes of only pupils with hard of hearing and functional deafness. The respondents

constituting the sample will be pupils, their parents, teachers and peers of different age groups on the secondary school level.

Variables

1. Organised and self-organised social concern.
 - School system:
 - Relevant legislation regulating the education of children with hard of hearing and functional deafness from the point of view of achieving the changed doctrine goals
 - Organising pupils with hard of hearing and functional deafness in different kinds of programmes
 - Level of competences of teachers and other education experts instructing persons with hard of hearing and functional deafness
 - Support system providing assistance to persons with hearing impairment and functional deafness
 - Knowledge of the deaf person compared to prescribed curriculum in the field of maths and Slovene oral language
 - Didactic and technical school equipment
2. Communication
 - Verbal and non-verbal communication of the person with hard of hearing or functional deafness and their environment
 - Verbal and non-verbal communication of the deaf person with another deaf person
3. Socialization
 - Satisfaction of the person with hard of hearing or functional deafness
 - Satisfaction and assessment of the environment regarding the inclusion of the person with hard of hearing or functional deafness
 - Self-concept of the person with hard of hearing or functional deafness
 - Status of the hearing-impaired person in the classroom
 - Basic risk factors for health and socialization

Research methods and tools. Individual variables will be assessed by qualitative text analysis of existing records and legislation, by administering questionnaires and checklists as well as testing and analysing video shots. For this purpose existing scales and questionnaires which have been used in similar studies will be applied, or new ones will be compiled solely for the purpose of this study.

The school system:

- Data will be acquired through analysis of current legislation, determining the right to education for children with hard of hearing and functional deafness in light of general principles of children's rights
- Assessment of inclusion of pupils with hard of hearing and functional deafness in different types of programmes will be made from social records
- Assessment of level of competence of special educators and other relevant experts educating persons with hard of hearing impairment and functional deafness will be made through analysis of regulations and the current situation.

The support system for the deaf:

- Description will be acquired through analysis of regulations and current situation.
- Knowledge status of pupils with hard of hearing and functional deafness in mathematics and Slovene language compared to expected status in curriculum:
- Description will be obtained on the basis of testing learning results and compare them with learning tasks prescribed in the curriculum

Didactic and technical school equipment:

- Assessment will be made on the basis of questionnaires

Communication:

- Verbal and non-verbal communication of pupils with hard of hearing or functional deafness and their surrounding environment:
 - Analysis of verbal and non-verbal communication in the classroom will be made by analysing video shots and checklists
 - Analysis of verbal and non-verbal communication in everyday life will be made by conducting interviews and circulating questionnaires
- Verbal and non-verbal communication between persons who are functionally deaf:
 - Analysis of verbal and non-verbal communication in everyday life will be made by conducting interviews and circulating questionnaires
 - Analysis of verbal and non-verbal communication in the classroom will be made by analysing video shots and checklists

Socialisation:

- A questionnaire will be constructed in order to explore experiences of pupils with hard of hearing or functional deafness concerning self-concept, general satisfaction and satisfaction with inclusion efforts in regular classrooms
- A socio-metric questionnaire will be applied to explore the status of hearing impaired pupils in the classroom as well as basic risk factors concerning health and socialisation for these pupils

Timetable of the Project

2006: Formulation of research plan

2007: Training for implementation of qualitative analyses in the school environment

Examination of the systemic framework for education of persons with hard of hearing or functional deafness

Preparation of tools for communication analysis, knowledge status and socialisation along with self-concept

Pilot study

2008: Revision of research instruments

Data collection, testing and conducting surveys

Data processing and preparation of final report

Phase reports

2009: Final report

Connection with the WB 04/06 project

Since this research project is part of the larger WB 04/06 project (Johnsen, 2013), it will overlap with this project and provide answers to questions common to participating universities, mainly as regards the communication of individuals with hard of hearing or functional deafness. Our focus is on the communication taking place in the surrounding environment. Focus is also on educational objectives and content related to this same group of pupils.

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Changes in the research plan during implementation

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No major changes were made to the research plan. However, due to periods with personal health problems, the researchers took turns assuming the responsibility for the project.