

## **Przygotowanie nauczycieli do edukacji włączającej w Polsce i na Litwie**

### **Preparing teachers for inclusive education in Poland and Lithuania**

**Key words:** teacher, inclusive education, school reform.

**Słowa kluczowe:** nauczyciel, edukacja włączająca, reforma szkoły.

**Streszczenie.** Celem artykułu jest dokonanie analizy porównawczej wypowiedzi nauczycieli polskich i litewskich odnośnie wdrażania w szkole ogólnodostępnej założeń edukacji włączającej. Z przeprowadzonej analizy wynika, że zarówno polscy, jak litewscy respondenci wskazują na niewystarczający zakres zmian wprowadzonych na poziomie szkoły, co utrudnia im realizację idei inkluzji. Nauczyciele rozumieją potrzebę dostosowania pracy na lekcji do indywidualnych możliwości i potrzeb uczniów ze specjalnymi potrzebami edukacyjnymi. Wskazują na propozycje rozwiązań. Najczęściej stosują strategie wspólnego programu nauczania i kooperacyjnych metod pracy. Mają trudności w konstruowaniu indywidualnego programu nauczania i zastosowania specjalistycznych metod pracy. Zauważalna jest potrzeba specjalistycznego wsparcia i współpracy, a także ciągłego doskonalenia zawodowego.

**Introduction.** The idea of inclusive education in recent years has become more and more significant in educational theory and practice, both Polish and Lithuanian. Its first premises appeared in international politics with the adoption in 1994 of the Declaration of Salamanca (UNESCO, 1994), which called for the implementation of the idea of ‘education for all’, for reducing the phenomenon of social exclusion and marginalization of students particularly exposed to it. According to the declaration, every child, regardless of his ability, but taking into account his individual characteristics, interests, abilities and learning needs should be provided with the opportunity of receiving education in the setting of school integration. Special educational needs of students should be satisfied in the so called regular schools, which requires the design of a new school model, one prepared to work with students with diverse needs and abilities. These assumptions are close to the idea of inclusive education, even though the authors of the declaration signed back in the 90s used the term: integrative education.

In Poland and Lithuania, regulations regarding the specific objectives of inclusive education emerged in the similar period. An Education System Act was published in Poland in 1991 year, which legalized a possibility for every pupil to not only learn at a general school but also to obtain necessary individual assistance. The Law on Education of the Republic of Lithuania, which stipulated the right for pupils with disabilities to learn at mainstream schools and obtain necessary assistance, was passed in the same year – 1991 in Lithuania.

The effectiveness of their implementation depends largely on the local environment and the school, and, in particular, the preparation of teachers as its chief implementers.

Adopting the debate on practical assumptions of inclusive education as the theoretical backdrop, this article presents the results of research conducted in both countries on the preparation of public schools and especially teachers, for its implementation. The research is limited to selected studies conducted after 2010, on a wider group of respondents and the common areas of research carried out in Poland and Lithuania.

### **Historical and legal outline of inclusive education in Poland and Lithuania.**

In Polish educational policy, public kindergartens and schools, as one of the forms of education for students holding a statement that qualifies them for special education, are listed in the *Regulations of the Minister of National Education of 2010* (Dz. U. [Journal of Laws] No. 228, item. 1490), and 2017 (Dz. U. [Journal of Laws] item. 1578). They postulated that students with disabilities, to ensure their integration with non-disabled peers, at every stage of their education attended their district school, i.,e. educational institution closest to their place of residence. According to the latest *Regulation of the Minister of Education of 9th August 2017*, para. 5. a mainstream school should generally provide the student with a disability “implementation of the recommendations contained in the a statement that qualifies them for special education; conditions for learning, specialized equipment and teaching aids, appropriate because of the individual and educational developmental needs and of psychophysical abilities of students; specializes classes (...); the integration of pupils with peer community including students without disabilities” (*Regulation of the Minister of National Education of 9 August 2017*, para. 5).

On the 11th of March, 1990, when independence from the Soviet regime was reinstated in Lithuania, fundamental changes began in the education system. They were particularly significant in the education of people with disabilities. On the 20th of August, 1991, the Supreme Council of the Republic of Lithuania, the Reconstituent Seimas, adopted the Law on Education of the Republic of Lithuania No. I-1489 (1991). It established the fundamental National School idea and emphasized that education in Lithuania would be based on humanistic cultural values of the people and the world, principles of democracy as well as universally acknowledged human rights and freedoms. The first law governing the inclusive system of education in Lithuania was the Law on Education of the Republic of Lithuania of 1991 (Galkiene, 2017, p. 64).

The first document that standardized the education of pupils with special educational needs in general schools was the Decision by the College of the Lithuanian Ministry of Culture and Education, published in 1993. It states that students with special educational needs “in mainstream institutions may be educated in a mainstream group or class, following the mainstream curriculum, but with special methods applied or following a modified mainstream curriculum or an alternative curriculum or individual educational plan”. These provisions were legitimized by law in 1998 with the publication of the Law on Special Education of the Republic of Lithuania No. VIII-969 (1998).

Another measure adopted in 1998 pointed to the need of the student and his parents to be ensured adequate pedagogical, psychological and social support, and the resulting regulation indicated the need to equip the student environment with appropriate technical and teaching aids.

The Law on Special Education of the Republic of Lithuania, which, on the one hand, standardized the process of inclusive education in the country, on the other hand, created an inevitable legal collision. Education in Lithuania was regulated by two laws: general education was the subject of the Law on Education of the Republic of Lithuania, and special needs education was that of the Law on Special Education of the Republic of Lithuania. The legal problem was solved when in 2011 a Law Amending the Law on Education of the Republic of Lithuania No. XI 1281 was adopted, integrating, amending, or broadening the main principles of the education of persons with special needs as well as their implementing provisions set out in the Law on Special Education of the Republic of Lithuania (Galkiene, 2017, p. 71).

According to the newest *Republic of Lithuania Law on Education* (2011) special needs education is provided by all compulsory and comprehensive educational programmes. In order to meet the needs of all children, these programmes have to be changed or adapted, and if needed, new special educational programmes can be developed. Moreover, additional assistance has to be provided. The most recent Lithuanian government documents defining the strategies of educational activities indicate various forms of educational support. 17th *Government Programme 2017–2020* and *Government’s Implementation Plan 2017* provided measures for developing inclusive education until the year 2020. Key priority directions from the new Government’s Implementation Plan to ensure inclusive education aims at strengthening the system for providing educational assistance, developing the competence of teachers and other specialists participating in the education process to enable them to work with different groups of learners with special educational needs and to ensure inclusive education while providing education and education assistance services close to a learner’s area of residence (FPIES – Lithuania Country Report, 2018, pp. 47–49).

It can be stated that the educational policy regarding inclusive education in Poland and Lithuania contains the same key tasks, namely, the education of students with special needs in their living environment, and adapting the didactic and educational process to their individual abilities and needs by properly prepared teachers supported by a team of specialists. In the next subsection I will draw attention

to the extent to which these provisions are consistent with the idea of inclusive education.

**Preparing the school for accepting students with disabilities, as a condition for the implementation of inclusive education.** The practical dimension of inclusive education mainly concerns its understanding as a reform of the entire school system. G. Szumski (2010) states that the reform of the school can be analyzed in two dimensions – in the vertical and horizontal plane. The vertical plane is created through the functional integration of a special and public education system into a unified school system, thus leading to the development of a qualitatively new education system.

The other, horizontal, approach to this reform assumes that all organizational levels of the school system are taken into consideration, starting with the central level through the policy of local school authorities to individual educational institutions. As G. Szumski (2010, p. 32) explains, “what happens at the school level and at the higher organizational levels is of key importance for the implementation of the principles of inclusive education”. What is particularly important here is the regional level, where the placement of pupils from a given region in particular places is considered, in accordance with the provisions of education law and the activities of education politicians. In the concept of inclusive education, it is a school that is supported to provide all students with appropriate conditions for effective education, and not individual students who receive individual educational support. The management of resources necessary to support a student with special educational needs takes place, therefore, at the level of a school or school district, not through individual assistance granted to pupils with a statement that qualifies them for special education.

In integrative education, the responsibility for adapting to school conditions and requirements rests with the assimilating individual who, as a result of the adaptation process, should “fit” into the school environment (N. Frederickson, T. Cline, 2002, p. 105). It is the students who are expected to adapt to more or less immutable school structures (C. Nilholm, 2006, p. 436). Integration is therefore about making only a limited number of additional adjustments at school for the needs of individual pupils with special educational needs. School as a system changes only to a small extent (N. Frederickson, T. Cline, 2002, p. 65).

From the assumptions of inclusive education, it is clear that it is the role of the school to assess each child’s ability and adapt to the diverse needs and abilities of individual students (C. Nilholm, 2006, p. 436), forming a network of educational support (A. Zamkowska, 2016). Supporters of educational inclusion assume that the obligation of change rests with the school, and the entire school community is involved in the process of adjustment, an important part of which is the teachers who have daily, direct contact with the student. These changes concern the adaptation of programs, methods, teaching aids and procedures to better suit the needs of individual students. The educational offer structured in this way is rich and diverse, which is why implementing the inclusive education philosophy can stimulate the creation of an

environment conducive to the acquisition of rich educational experiences by all students (N. Frederickson, T. Cline, 2002, p. 65).

**Preparing the school for inclusive education in the opinion of Polish teachers.** From a number of studies<sup>1</sup> regarding the conditions for the effectiveness of inclusive education in Poland, conducted among teachers, I selected only those that meet the publication criterion after 2010, and were carried out on a larger research group and concern teachers' preparation for working in an inclusive class.

The first research project called "Education Involving Education in Dialogue" was carried out by Danuta Al-Khamisy (2013) in 2010. Its purpose was to determine to what extent the current level of inclusive education, at the pre-school and primary education level, is going towards an inclusive dialogical education considered from the point of view of the dialogue-based model of education, i.e. TO GET TO KNOW EACH OTHER – TO UNDERSTAND – TO BE TOGETHER. Quantitative and qualitative research covered 394 kindergarten and primary school teachers. Particular attention has been paid to their practical preparation for working with students with special needs as part of inclusive education involving the adaptation of education to the individual abilities, needs and interests of these students.

The survey shows that the majority of teachers (62.7%) declared lack of competence in the construction of individual educational programs for the student. Only 33.4% of the respondents are of the opinion that they possess such competences. Perhaps it was for this reason that only 42.73% of respondents chose to construct an individual program as a strategy for working with a student. Most of the respondents were in favor of implementing a joint program in the classroom for all students, and as far as working with a child with disability is concerned, for additional work consisting in alleviating its deficiencies. In addition, the research results clearly indicate that the respondents prefer to implement common goals and a cooperative strategy (50.7%), which guarantees interaction between students. The least-chosen (5.5%) was the co-existential strategy, in which each student concentrates on his or her tasks. Teachers' declarations, therefore, indicate that they prefer the assumptions of education that includes the pupil with special educational needs to the inclusive class, through the implementation of common goals, a common curriculum and the use of cooperation strategies.

The second project was carried out by **Krystyna Barłóg** (2013) in 2012 using the interview method, and it was conducted among 90 teachers of the Podkarpackie Province working with students with special educational needs. Its purpose was to define forms of support provided by teachers for effective education and development of students with disabilities at the first stage of education in a mainstream school setting. Although the respondents, surveyed by K. Barłóg (2013, p. 206), adapt

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<sup>1</sup> A broader review of Polish research on determinants of the effectiveness of inclusive education has been made by B. Cytowska (2016, pp. 189–213); see also A., Zamkowska (2009) as well as Z. Gajdzica (2012, pp. 155–163).

teachers' curricula and teaching aids to the individual needs and abilities of students with disabilities, they admit that the scope of these activities is often insufficient.

Most of them (69.3%) developed a program tailored to the individual needs and abilities of a student with special educational needs, and only one – Individual educational and therapeutic program for a student with disability. Just over half (56.1%) used the same didactic aids as for the able-bodied students, and the rest prepared individually tailored didactic aids for students. Similarly to the previously analysed research, teachers preferred the approach of jointly teaching students with and without special educational needs based on a common, adapted program and the same didactic aids. However, they considered that the scope of these adjustments was insufficient. They also emphasized that the conditions of the school are insufficient to satisfy the special needs of students (K. Barłóg, 2013, p. 206). Most of the schools did not run specialist classes for students with autism or cerebral palsy. The majority (91.7%) of respondents confirmed the presence of architectural barriers in schools (no driveways, lifts, specialist equipment). The lack of appropriate adjustments may therefore result both from the lack of teachers' competence and the appropriate support of teachers from the side of the school as an institution.

The third, the latest project implemented by **Marta Uberman and Aleksandra Mach** (2016, pp. 173–174) presents an optimistic picture of the state of teachers' preparation for inclusive education. The authors examined the competences of 103 teachers employed in 19 Polish schools. Just over half of them (56%) worked in rural schools, while every third respondent was employed in cities of up to 20,000 residents. The global result of the sense of professional competence obtained by teachers of early school education indicates that 75% of respondents assess their preparation as average. It can therefore be concluded that the surveyed teachers are fully aware of the fact that their knowledge and skills are insufficient to undertake effective work with a disabled student. A low level of competence, a sense of lack of knowledge and skills allowing pedagogical work with a student with disabilities is acknowledged by 10% of teachers. Only 15% of respondents rated their competences as sufficient to undertake effective didactic and educational work and rehabilitation with a student with a disability attending a public school.

A detailed analysis of the results obtained showed that the praxeological competences were rated the highest – 44% of the surveyed teachers described them as high, and 42% as average. The teachers found that they had no difficulty in interpreting a specialist diagnosis included, for example, in statements or opinions issued by psychological and pedagogical counseling centers or identifying developmental and educational difficulties of a child with disability or adherence to the principles of rehabilitation work. They are good at analyzing the strengths and weaknesses of students with disabilities. The respondents adjust the curriculum to the needs and abilities of students with disabilities who require it. They do not declare problems in creating or adapting teaching aids. They define special educational needs and prepare the environment to satisfy them. As a rule, they predict the effects of didactic and educational activities implemented by them, they monitor the achievements of a student with disability and give an opinion on the effectiveness of

the support provided to him. On the other hand, they assess as inadequate their preparation for the use of specialist methods used in work with a student with disabilities (eg sign language, Braille, alternative communication methods) and the ability to design creative integral thematic units using the solutions of special needs didactics. Most teachers present, however, their readiness to work with a student with a disability.

**Preparing the school for inclusive education in the opinion of Lithuanian teachers.** The research of Lithuanian teachers was conducted by Alvyra Galkienė (2017) among teachers of general schools from various regions of Lithuania, including town and village schools (N = 355). All of respondents educate students with special educational needs in general classrooms. More than half of participating teachers are from schools in small towns and villages (N = 202 = 57%), the remaining 153 (43%) come from towns and cities. The research aimed to answer the following question: Which aspects of inclusive education do Lithuanian teachers apply in their teaching practice? The research has been conducted as a qualitative study. The answers of research participants have been analysed through the method of content analysis (White, March, 2006).

Teachers from Lithuania show that they are positive about the assumptions of inclusive education. The analysis of responses of the surveyed teachers shows they are in favour of inclusive education. The majority of sampled teachers (60%) believe in the efficiency of this education model and point out its successful application in Lithuanian schools. Teachers identify values and organisation of inclusive education as one of the most important factors leading to a democratic community. In their opinion, if education is based on the ideas of inclusive education, it ensures every family's right to educate their children in a local community school, encourages equal participation of all students in school activities; and improves pedagogical interaction which leads to the successful education of all students. Another share of teachers (23%) are also positive about the system of inclusive education and its global implementation provided that certain conditions are met to guarantee its higher efficiency. The least number of surveyed teachers (17%) have considerable doubts regarding the success of inclusive education and are in favour of sending students with special educational needs to separate specialised schools.

Respondents showed competence in understanding the needs of students with special educational needs and how to adjust the school-class environment to them. Teachers understood the need of adjusting the curriculum to the diverse needs of students, but expected to provide appropriate methodological materials for students and for teachers in the form of, for example, textbooks tailored to the diverse needs of students. They were aware of the need of creating a proper space in the classroom that would allow the use of diverse forms of education, including working in small groups, or individual work. However, it is difficult to deal with, having to manage the class of not fewer than 30 students.

Teachers had a knowledge of necessary adjustments but experienced difficulties in their implementation, resulting mainly from the lack of systemic solutions: lack of

additional funds, e.g. additional staff, oversized classes (not fewer than 30 students) and lack of diversity of available educational solutions, especially those offered to pupils with challenging behavior and significant disability, which adversely affects the well-being of other students. Teachers also pointed to the lack of architectural adjustments in school buildings that would allow access to all students, such as ramps, entrances from the building, stairs. They also pointed to the need to reformulate the criteria for assessing teacher performance based on the number of high grades acquired by students in order to include the number of students with special educational needs reaching their maximum ability level.

Lithuanian teachers suggested abandoning a rigid class-lesson system in favor of flexible adjustment of working time to the pupils' abilities, so that students learning faster could deepen their knowledge, and slower learners had more time to achieve success. It also requires changes in the assessment system so that it is more adapted to the individual students' abilities and gives them the possibility of school success.

Referring to the direct work with the pupil, the teachers especially emphasize the need for support from specialists, in particular the need to employ special educators and psychologists in the school. The help of an additional person in the classroom, in the form of even a teacher assistant, would, in their opinion, be an appropriate help in class work. Research shows that it is the most clearly articulated need of teachers, especially when working with a student with emotional and behavioral disorders.

**Conclusion.** The comparative analysis of the statements of Polish and Lithuanian teachers on the practical preparation of the school and teachers for the implementation of inclusive education presented in this article indicated some similarities. The similarities are clearly visible in the assumptions of inclusive education, based on international legal documents. They point to the need of providing education to pupils with special educational needs, in the nearest district school, that would be adjusted to their abilities, needs and teaching abilities. The main burden of these adjustments lies with the school, but the respondents say that the state of these changes, both in Poland and Lithuania, is not satisfactory, as evidenced by the lack of elimination of architectural barriers, too many classes, lack of specialist support. These limitations make it difficult to implement some adjustments the competent teachers would like to apply.

Teachers make the adaptations therefore mainly on the class level. They adapt the teaching process using mainly common elements such as a common curriculum, the same didactic aids, and co-founding strategies based on student cooperation. Most of them have difficulties in constructing an Individual Education and Therapeutic Plan or the use of specialized working methods. Hence the postulate of support from the special pedagogue seems to be strongly justified.

Other postulates of Lithuanian teachers, also worth analyzing, concern, for example, the arrangement of the classroom space so as to ensure both group work and individual student support; providing specialist help in working with a student with emotional and/or behavioral disorders or teacher assessment not based on the achievements of talented students, but optimal performance of students with special



educational needs. The effectiveness of inclusive education requires, therefore, further changes, not only those related to school reform, but also, as postulated by Zenon Gajdzica (2011), continuous improvement of teachers, their appropriate preparation during studies and continuous professional improvement. It would be important to create a forum for exchanging experiences on the school premises, and on this basis to develop methodological solutions, which is well illustrated by the statement of one of the Lithuanian teachers: "... examples of successfully implemented inclusive education should be used for the purpose of methodologies." The surveyed teachers also indicate the necessity of ongoing support for a teacher working with a disabled student by specialists employed at school and external institutions. The theoretical assumptions of inclusion in the collision with the realities of Polish and Lithuanian schools indicate the need for a flexible arrangement of school reality, including the bottom-up voices of teachers. The implementation of an inclusive education is, in fact, a continuous process which calls for not only a change in school, but also the further preparation of teachers responsible for it.

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