

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION AS AN INSTRUMENT FOR PREVENTING SOCIAL EXCLUSION

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Abstract: The main aim of the paper is to present a view of inclusive education as a tool for preventing social exclusion. Our findings were obtained through qualitative research conducted in an environment at risk of social exclusion. The results confirm the important role of education in preventing social problems. In the discussion of the results, we will point out the need for intensive involvement of special education and emphasize the need for quality training of the actors of inclusive education.

Keywords: Inclusive Education, Social Exclusion, Special Educational Needs, Resocialization

1 Introduction

Social exclusion is a major issue that modern society is attempting to address. It has negative impacts not only on a local level but also on a national, European, and even global scale. In today's interconnected society, it is important to recognize that social exclusion issues in other countries or on other continents will have an impact on us. Therefore, it is crucial to strive for the elimination, prevention, and combat of social exclusion through all possible means. Inclusive education is a fundamental tool for achieving the goal of reducing social exclusion. This paper presents the findings of a long-term study that explores the impact of education on individuals at risk of social exclusion. The paper is divided into two sections, each with a distinct focus. The first section introduces the research methodology and presents the theoretical background of the investigation. The paper will then focus on the research setting and the research process. The findings will then be presented, highlighting the significant potential of education as a social prevention tool. It is important to note that the principles of inclusive education must be applied to ensure that the target group can attain appropriate academic results. In the conclusion of the paper, we provide recommendations for modifying the training of future educators to enhance their preparation for the current inclusive paradigm. This will improve the quality of our education system and have a positive impact on addressing social exclusion.

2 Methodology

We conduct research using a qualitative approach which has been highlighted in academic literature as having a significant impact on the modern inclusive paradigm (Lindsay 2003; Willing 2017). Qualitative research finds application in numerous disciplines such as sociology, anthropology, psychology, and educational sciences. The goal of qualitative research is to offer an extensive, profound, and meticulous comprehension of the investigation's research issue. Qualitative research yields the benefit of a comprehensive and thorough scrutiny of cases, empowering us to scrutinize their evolution and make specific comparisons. This implies that we do not simply observe superficially, but rather take into account the influence of context, nuances and conditions, enabling us to scrutinise individual processes and their impact on the entire research framework (Hendl 2016). Consequently, qualitative research is a method that aims to interpret and understand human behaviour and experience, utilising techniques such as observation, interviews and document analysis. Qualitative research is typically carried out on a limited scale involving a small group of participants and necessitates a comprehensive examination of the data collected. This type of research facilitates the capture of subjective views from individuals who are directly involved with the topic under investigation. Afterwards, these subjective experiences, perspectives, and opinions are transformed into scientific knowledge, through the aid of a qualitative design (Given 2008; Leavy 2014). One of the benefits of qualitative research is its ability to refine the subject

of inquiry and uncover new avenues, viewpoints, and research goals over time (Gulova and Šíp 2013).

Our research design consists of two stages. The first stage involves conducting interviews, observations, and analyzing pedagogical documentation for initial data collection. Subsequently, the information obtained goes through grounded theory methods and phenomenological interpretive analysis. The research methodology is regularly reviewed and tailored to fulfill the current research objectives. Research methodology involves a variety of instruments and techniques that allow for flexible responses to the research context and targeted population. Continuous refinement and incorporation of new research tools and methods contribute to ongoing enhancement. Research is viewed as a living and evolving process that requires appropriate tools and methods.

For this research, we have a unique opportunity to use several in-depth case studies. Case studies are a very effective research tool. Case study research, frequently linked with qualitative inquiry, has emerged as a valuable methodology for probing intricate issues in real-world scenarios. Employing case research becomes particularly relevant when examining a contemporary phenomenon (Patnaik and Pandey 2019; Hyett et al. 2014). The regular utilization of case studies as a research approach has presented certain challenges, which can be alleviated through the employment of highly precise language and careful research design (Eisenhardt 2007). However, because we are present in the researched environment as part of it for a long time, we are able to operate in the linguistic code of the target group. This advantage provides our qualitative research with the possibility of deep insight into the issues under study.

3 Course of the research

We're researching the children's home environment. Children's home is an educational institution for the provision of institutional care. The examined children's home is located in Prague, Czech Republic. This children's home consists of seven family groups with a total capacity of 54 children. It is a standard children's home intended primarily for children without serious behavioural problems. It is necessary to mention that the public, both lay and professional, is often unclear about the different types of educational institutions. Sometimes the generic term "institution" is used, which does not distinguish children's homes from other institutions, such as social service institutions, educational institutions or institutions for the social and legal protection of children. This is a serious mistake, as each institution has its own specific purpose and is intended for a clearly defined target group. The vast majority of children come from families that can be described as pathological. In recent years, there has been a slight change in the age distribution of new arrivals, with an increase in older children. There has also been a marked increase in the number of new arrivals requiring psychiatric care. Changes in the national composition of the home cannot be overlooked, with an increase in the number of children of different nationalities. After leaving the children's home, most children are at risk of social exclusion.

One of the main tasks of a children's home is to prepare children for successful reintegration into society. This task was the impetus for defining the primary research question framing the research presented in this paper. To what extent is the level of educational attainment linked to successful reintegration into society after leaving the children's home? The applicability of the definition of a child with special educational needs to the children's home target group has prompted the research question. It is crucial to consider that the children coming into the children's home from the pathological environment of their original families have been exposed to the negative influence of this pathological environment for a considerable period of time, and that this devastating influence cannot be expected not to be reflected in the level of special educational needs (Daněk 2022).

3.1 Case study

In this case study, we will present two children from the children's home under study, with whom we have worked for a long time in the past. Thus, we are familiar with their family history in detail, we know their health status, and we have reports from school counselling facilities. In order to preserve anonymity, we will follow the privacy policy, we will talk about Child A and Child B. Both children came to the children's home from dysfunctional family backgrounds at the same time. We were in intensive contact with both children throughout their stay in the children's home. We have also been in contact with them after they left the institution.

Child A's family was a family of severe substance abusers. Child A was born with withdrawal symptoms because mother abused methamphetamine. Very quickly, Child A developed behavioural problems. Child A came to the children's home at the age of 10 and started attending a mainstream primary school. Although Child A had a recommendation from the counselling centre for the assignment of a teaching assistant, the manifestations of behavioural disorders escalated. The school tried to accommodate the children's home as much as possible, but within two years the situation became unbearable. First, the children's home tried to find a specialised school for children with behavioural problems. Here, too, Child A was unable to manage her behavioural difficulties. This was followed by an attempt at home education where the children's home arranged for a qualified specialist. Again, this did not have the expected effect. The situation continued to deteriorate. However, the original family did not support Child A's transfer to a more appropriate institutional setting. However, after a further year, Child A was transferred to a children's home with a school. Today, Child A is still unable to manage the challenges associated with Child A's behavioural problems and is now placed in an educational institution. According to the information available, Child A is also facing significant educational challenges in this specialised educational institution.

Child B also came to the children's home from a disruptive environment. However, the original family did not have a history of substance abuse and it was a case of poor parenting skills. Child B also came to the children's home at the age of 10. As with Child A, behavioural problems began to manifest themselves in the children's home. However, the family cooperated closely and was willing to agree to Child B's transfer to a children's home with a school. The transfer took place very quickly. The scheme of the children's home and school proved to be an ideal educational space for Child B. After completing Child B's primary schooling, which was implemented in the children's home with a school, Child B returned to original family. Child B entered secondary school, from which Child B graduated. According to the information available to us, Child B is currently working, planning to start own family.

If we look at both cases, we can see some major differences. These differences were the cooperation of the family and their willingness to accept the child's special educational needs, but above all the provision of an adequate educational environment that met the child's needs. This significantly reduced the time that Child B was present in an educational reality that was not suitable for Child B. Whereas Child A remained for a long period of time in an environment that was not prepared to meet the requirements arising from special educational needs. Without adequate special education intervention, negative behavioural patterns were reinforced, which subsequently negatively affected the entire future life trajectory. Whereas Child B was very quickly given the opportunity for specialised intervention which led to the acquisition of behavioural models.

4 Inclusive education within the target group

Inclusive education is a teaching and learning approach designed to empower educators in addressing the unique needs of individual learners. It aims to prevent the marginalization that may arise when certain students are treated differently, fostering

an environment where every student can thrive (Florian and Spratt 2013; Zilcher 2019).

It is necessary to realize that the target area of the research, i.e. the institutional environment, is in a very specific position in the context of inclusive education. Children's homes in the Czech Republic are part of the school system, as it follows from their official name, educational institutions for the performance of institutional care. Education is not only limited to the time-space of the school, but also extends to the individual's home environment, in our case the children's home. The main role in education, i.e. in the process of upbringing and education (Průcha 2015), is played by pedagogical staff, in our case educators. As Lee (2015) rightly points out, the readiness of the educator for the specifics of working with children with special educational needs is quite necessary. It depends significantly on the educational worker's attitude towards the ideas of inclusive education and also on the willingness to apply these ideas to pedagogical practice (Cook et al. 2007). Although the economic cost of inclusive education is often cited, the gains for the student with special needs resulting from their participation in education are far greater than the costs of that education (Hibel et al. 2010).

Inclusive education requires close collaboration between schools and students' families (Baria 2023), which is a major concern in the case of our research. As we have repeatedly demonstrated in previous research activities, original families are largely uncooperative (Daněk 2023). Our findings suggest that the lack of importance indigenous families place on education makes them even less interested in the issue of inclusive education. Thus, if we add the fact that even in the intact population, we can still observe barriers to the full adoption of inclusive ideas (Pivik et al. 2002), we can identify our target group as at risk of exclusion from the inclusive paradigm.

Therefore, if the individual does not have the opportunity to fully fulfill his/her educational potential, there is a danger that undesirable behaviour patterns may emerge. Research indicates that experiencing stress and academic setbacks in school can trigger emotions of inadequacy and powerlessness, consequently leading to certain manifestations of self-destructive behaviour (Macanovič et al. 2023). According to recent reviews, education is a significant preventive factor when it comes to criminal activity leading to incarceration (Drahy et al. 2018).

5 Conclusion

Social exclusion can manifest in diverse ways, underscoring the importance of acknowledging the versatility and extensive impact of this concept (Sen 2001). Moreover, it is important to realise that in order to fully understand the issue of poverty, it is necessary to adopt the perspective of the poverty-stricken individual, otherwise biased conclusions may be reached (Halleröd 2006). In the Central European cultural environment, the awareness of the class stratification of society is not yet fully anchored. This can be attributed to the four decades when an officially class society did not exist. However, a middle class has gradually emerged, whose support has significantly activated the potential of their children (Lareau 2002). At the same time, it has also created population groups that have become socially excluded, without access to the opportunities for said activation. This implies a further deepening of social inequalities and stratification of society.

Without inclusive support for all students with special educational needs, today's education system is at considerable risk (Basit and Tomlinson 2012). Not only the education system, but also society itself. Without a sound education, it is very difficult to get a good job. Without good jobs, the risk of falling into poverty is evident. And poverty is one of the significant factors reducing access to quality education (Main and Bradshaw 2012; Ferguson et al. 2007). So, we see here a vicious circle of hopelessness that does not allow an individual to be realized in today's society. Nevertheless, we are optimistic. We live in a democratic society. We can argue that the process of inclusion is

possible especially in a society that is democratic at its core (Nilholm, 2006). Inclusion should be understood not only as an important value of the educational system (Norwich, 2005), but as a fundamental pillar of the social system. Inclusive ideals cannot be achieved without the methods of special education; therefore, special education can be described as a tool for social change (Stárek, 2023a). Ideals and goals are realized by people. Therefore, in order to fulfill inclusive goals, the training of special educators needs to be significantly improved (Stárek 2023b). In addition to special educators, it is critical that inclusive ideas be passed on to educators at all levels of education, from kindergarten through college. Most importantly, inclusive ideas must be presented outside of the school setting and must become an integral component of society. Only then will inclusive education be able to fulfil its potential and be an effective tool for preventing social exclusion.

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