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**Прегледни рад**

# *English Language Teachers' Attitudes towards Inclusive Education*

**Abstract**: *The paper studies attitudes of teachers of English as a foreign language (EFL) towards inclusion of children with special educational needs (SEN) in Serbian mainstream schools. The participants were 96 primary teachers of English with diverse experience in teaching inclusive EFL classes. The results showed that most of the respondents (N=84. i.e. 87.5%) had negative attitudes towards inclusion, due to both the lack of competences and to the absence of adequate conditions for effective inclusive practice: only 29.16% of the respondents claimed they had been specially trained to teach SEN children; 69.79% reported the availability of SEN teams in school, but most of them claimed that the teams met irregularly; only 27.08% (N=26) reported having a classroom assistant in school; most of the respondents (N=89, i.e. 92.7%) expressed their concerns related to a number of challenges they faced in daily work. Considering the fact that teachers are the key to supporting the process of inclusion, and that positive attitude is a predictor of success in inclusive teaching, the change of Serbian EFL teachers' negative attitudes towards inclusion is of great importance. This can be achieved by providing adequate pre-service and in-service education of EFL teachers, and by improving the conditions in our schools.*

*Key words: Teaching English as a foreign language, inclusion in mainstream primary schools, teacher competences, professional development, teaching conditions.*

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**Introduction**

With the introduction of English as a compulsory subject in Serbian schools from primary Grade One (children aged 6-7) in 2003, teachers of English as a foreign language (EFL) faced a number of challenges, the greatest being related to children's diversity as learners (Savić, 2009a). When the new Law on the Foundations of the Education System was passed in 2009, children with special educational needs (SEN) were accepted to mainstream schools from Grade One and were taught both by class teachers and foreign language teachers. However, unlike class teachers, primary EFL teachers were not adequately prepared to teach inclusive classes. Although "[r]esponding to diversity and considering individual needs of learners is a requirement of contemporary education at any level" (Savić, 2009a: 19), teaching children with SEN made everyday practice rather challenging and caused a lot of frustration in a foreign language classroom. It is undisputable that children with SEN should be placed in mainstream schools, as prescribed by the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994), and by Article 3, Paragraph 1, of the Law on the Foundations of the Education System (NARS, 2009); Article 3 deals with equality and accessibility of education and pedagogy, and prescribes "[e]quality and accessibility of education and pedagogy without discrimination and segregation based on gender, social, cultural, ethnic, religious or other background, place of residence or domicile, financial or health status, developmental impairments and disabilities" (NARS, 2009: 1). Inclusion is seen as a guiding principle in education focusing on reducing barriers to learning and social participation and viewing differences as assets to learning (UNESCO, 2009; UNICEF, 2012). Given that all children in Serbia, regardless of their aptitudes and abilities, share the same fundamental right to quality education, it follows that an inclusive approach should be adopted to early learning of foreign languages.

Teachers are "key factors to developing inclusive culture and practices" and their "beliefs and understanding that children with SEN benefit from being educated within mainstream education both academically and non-academically" (Savić, 2009c: 347) are essential to creating inclusive environments. For making inclusive education (IE) functional, it is crucial that teachers acquire a positive attitude towards IE, develop competences for IE, exchange information about IE within school, and get acquainted with laws and regulations related to IE (Kovacs Cerović et al., 2014). Research suggests that "[p]ositive attitudes on the part of teachers facilitate more successful inclusion" (O'Gorman & Drudy, 2011: 10), but teachers' attitudes appear to be rather complex and dependent on a number of factors. Significantly, teachers should be adequately supported both in preparing for IE and in the process of implementing it. Teachers of English in Serbia were provided with professional development seminars in IE and TEFL in the period January-December 2013. The programme was titled *Teching English as a Foreign Language and Inclusion in Serbia*, and was supported by the British Council in Belgrade. We here present the results of a survey performed within the training in 2013. The study was conducted with the aim to determine the practising primary EFL teachers' attitudes towards inclusion. The study drew on a number of previous studies of teachers' attitudes towards IE in the country and abroad. Although few of these research studies focused on primary English language teachers' attitudes towards inclusion, they offered valuable and comparable data. The results of some of the previous studies are presented in the following section.

*Literature review*

*Serbian studies of primary teachers' attitudes.* Serbian studies of IE point to the teachers' attitudes ranging from moderately positive, through equally divided, to slightly negative attitudes (Djević, 2009; Kalyva, Gojkovic & Tsakiris, 2007; Kovatcs Cerović et al., 2014; Peurača et al., 2015; Savić, 2009a). The

development of IE in Serbia in the course of 10 years (2004-2014) was summarised in the document titled *Monitoring Framework for Inclusive Education in Serbia* (Kovacs Cerović et al., 2014). The report dealt with all areas of inclusive policy development and implementation, and also tackled the topic od teachers' attitudes and beliefs, expressed in the following research results: in general, teachers held "moderately positive" (Kovatcs Cerović et al., 2014: 127) attitudes towards IE; most of the teachers were nominally in favour of inlusion, but not really motivated to put an effort to meet the needs of pupils who needed additional support; the teachers who were willing to adjust and change lacked knowledge and skills, as well as information about the benefits of inclusive approach (Kovatcs Cerović et al., 2014).

A study of Serbian teachers' attitudes towards inclusion conducted by Kalyva, Gojkovic and Tsakiris (2007) with 72 class and subject teachers, found the teachers' slightly negative attitudes towards the inclusion of children with SEN. The study showed that teachers with experience in teaching children with SEN held more positive attitudes towards inclusion in comparison to teachers without such experience. No differences were observed in teachers' attitudes towards inclusion in relation to their years of teaching experience.

Djević (2009) studied Serbian primary teachers' (N=205) readiness to accept pupils with SEN and found that most participating teachers had already had experience in teaching children with SEN, and that a majority of them expressed readiness to accept children with SEN in their classes; half of them, however, believed that a type and degree of disability should also be taken into account before mainstreaming children with SEN. Moreover, teachers expressed doubts about academic achievement potential of children with SEN, considering mainly humanistic reasons of IE. More positive attitudes to inclusive teaching resulted from teachers' involvement in IE projects and from teachers' experience with children with SEN. The author conclud-

ed that it could be argued that negative attitude to IE might be attributed to the participants' realistic view of teaching conditions rather than to their beliefs. A significant implication of the study appeared to be the need to involve schools in IE projects and to provideteachers with immediate contact with SEN pupils so that more positive attitutes of teachers towards IE could be developed.

In a recent study of primary school teachers' (N=79) attitudes to inclusive education (Peurača et al., 2015), it was found that experience in teaching inclusive classes positively affected teachers' attitudes. Moreover, more positive attitudes were expressed by teachers who had participated in a greater number of professional development programmes related to inclusion. Teachers who had experience in teaching children with SEN were also aware of benefits of inclusive practice both for children with SEN and for their peers, and stressed the importance of cooperation and sharing good practice within school. It was concluded that class teachers should be supported in differentiating their teaching practice and in scaffolding individual learners in order to increasethe effectiveness of changes implemented in Serbia in respect to the educational rights and needs of children with SEN.

Attitudes of primary English language teachers towards inclusion were studied in Serbia at the very beginning of formal implementation of inclusive education. In an early research study conducted by Savić (2009a), primary EFL teachers (N=56) were surveyed in terms of their understanding of inclusive education, their attitude to mainstreaming children with SEN, their familiarity with and response to disorders, impairments and language learning difficulties of children with SEN, and their professional needs for making EFL classes more inclusive. A majority of the respondents (71%) expressed a narrow understanding of inclusive education, and were divided in their attitude to placing children with SEN in regular EFL classes. Those who opposed the inclusive process (50%) justified their stand with lack

of training and beliefs related to poor learning abilities of SEN children, while those who supported inclusive education (50%) mentioned not only linguistic, but also emotional and social benefits of mainstreaming learners with SEN. A great majority of the respondents stated they knew nothing or very little about impairments and disorders that inhibited children's language learning, though they had introduced some adaptations of the curriculum and "pedagogical and methodological changes" (Savić, 2009a: 23). Almost all respondents expressed a need for a structured training in teaching inclusive classes and formal "decision-making regarding ways of supporting the child with SEN" (Savić, 2009a: 26). It was concluded that EFL teachers needed some form of formal training for teaching English in inclusive settings, involving the development of teaching knowledge and skills, and strategies for successful cooperation with colleagues, experts and parents. Moreover, the study pointed out that EFL teachers needed more information about legislation stipulating the rights of all children to be educated together, provided by international (UNESCO, 1994; UNICEF, 2012) and national (NARS, 2009) documents on equal opportunity and diversity.

*International studies of primary teachers' attitudes.* Studies of teachers' attitudes towards IE conducted outside Serbia show more favourable attitudes towards IE in comparison to Serbian studies (Avramidis, Bayliss & Burden, 2000; Avramidis & Kalyva, 2007; Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; Barrios Espinosa & García Mata, 2007; O'Gorman & Drudy, 2011). Reviewing a vast body of research of teachers' attitudes towards inclusion, Avramidis and Norwich (2002) focused on factors that influenced teachers' acceptance of inclusion. Three groups of factors were found very influential: 1. child-related factors, such as the kind and severity of SEN; 2. teacher-related factors, such as experience and expertise in IE; and 3. educational environment-related factors, such as availability of support. Teachers seemed to express more positive attitudes towards inclusion of children with physical and sensory im-

pairments than to the learners with learning difficulties and emotional-behavioural difficulties. In respect of teacher characteristics, experience of contact with SEN children was a significant variable and teachers who had more experience teaching SEN children had more positive attitude towards IE; also, teacher training in IE was found to play an important role in shaping teachers' attitudes. Finally, both physical and human support was found significant in forming positive attitudes, like the provision of adequate materials and equipment and support by specialist teachers. The authors point to the interrelation of all variables found in the studies considered.

Avramidis, Bayliss and Burden (2000) reported the results of a large-scale study of attitudes of mainstream teachers towards the inclusion of children with special needs in the ordinary schools in Great Britain. The findings showed that participants appeared to be generally positive towards the overall concept of inclusion. Teachers with active experience of inclusion held significantly more positive attitudes towards inclusion than those from randomly selected schools. The factor that had the greatest influence on teachers' attitudes was the level and nature of support that they received. Half of the teachers believed that intensive and well-planned in-service training, or as an ongoing professional development process with specialists acting as consultants, was needed. About 40% thought that adequate curriculum materials and other classroom equipment appropriate to the needs of students with disabilities were needed with differentiation of the teaching tasks, because it generally caused most of the teacher workload. The authors concluded that provision of more resources and extensive opportunities for training at both pre-service and in-service levels, could make teachers' attitudes towards inclusion more favourable. Reflective practitioner training was seen as the most productive for developing the skills which would allow teachers to modify their everyday practice in ways which would ultimately be inclusive.

Similar results were obtained in a study of Greek primary school teachers' (N=155) attitudes towards inclusion (Avramidis & Kalyva, 2007). The teachers expressed generally positive attitudes towards the concept of IE, but differed a lot in their attitude to accommodating children with a range of SEN in mainstream classes. The factors that contributed to more positve attitudes were experience in teaching inclusive classes and professional development in the area, while the barriers to implementing inclusion effectively were mostly in inadequate experience and insufficient training. The authors concluded that for achieving attitudinal change longterm training courses were needed by all practising teachers.

Irish teachers' (post-primary and primary) attitudes towards inclusion were surveyed by O'Gorman and Drudy (2011) within a large-scale study of teachers' professional development needs in IE. Since primary teachers' (N=417) were not surveyed separately from post-primary ones (N=399) in respect to attitudes, the findings apply both to post-primary and primary teacher groups. The authors argue that "despite articulating positive dispositions towards students with disabilities and special educational needs and displaying generally positive attitudes towards the inclusion of such students in their schools, only a very small minority would accord inclusion as an inalienable right without some aspect of conditionality, usually related to within-person variables, such as the nature of one's disability or special need and its possible impact on other students" (O'Gorman & Drudy, 2011: 10). Participants in the study mostly requested professional development in the areas of developing individual educaton plans (IEP), acquiring knowledge of specific disabilities, applying administrative skills, assessment, and teaching methodologies. The authors' recommendations for pomoting inclusion involve designing a school plan on PD in SEN, establishing SEN adviser role, working collaboratively, researching and reviewing professional development, and providing PD courses.

A more recent study conducted in Australia in 2015 aimed to determine the factors influencing primary school teachers' (N=74) attitudes towards inclusion of SEN students into the mainstream schools. The most influential factors appeared to be age, gender, teaching self-efficacy and training. The results showed that male teachers had a more negative attitude towards inclusion; also, teachers who were aged 55 years and over held more negative attitudes towards inclusion when compared to the 35–55 year old subgroup; teachers with low-levels of self-efficacy in their teaching skills were more likely to also hold negative attitude towards including students with disabilities; teachers who reported having training in teaching students with disability held positive attitudes towards inclusion. What is more, the kind and type of the disability appeared to be an important factor: the more severe the child's disability, the less positive the teachers' attitude was towards inclusion; teachers were generally more supportive of including children with physical and sensory disabilities than those with intellectual, learning and behavioural disabilities. Moreover, the study concluded that teachers who felt more competent were more comfortable in accepting some responsibility for students' difficulties.

International studies of primary foreign language teachers' attitudes towards inclusion are rather rare. A qualitative research conducted in Spain by Barrios Espinosa and García Mata (2007) with pre-service primary English language teachers (N=21) showed the EFL student teachers' generally favourable attitude towards inclusive philosophy. However, in the course of their practicum period and observation of English classes in schools, student teachers identified factors that severely affected the implementation of IE by EFL teachers acting as tutors/mentors: inadequate human and material resources, lack in appropriate training for dealing with SEN pupils, and ineffective methodological strategies, like physical isolation of children with SEN and lack of communication with other educators within the school. The study pointed to the three groups of fac-

tors that affected in-service EFL teachers' attitudes: 1. cognitive: the more teachers knew about IE, the more competent they felt, and the more positive their attitude became; 2. affective: experience and personal contact with SEN pupils resulted in more positive attitudes towards IE; and 3. performance: teachers who saw themselves as efficient practitioners developed more positive attitudes to IE. The authors concluded that comprehensive training was needed both as pre-service education and in-service professional development in SEN philosophy and implementation, involving exposure to effective samples of IE experiences in the English classrooms. Moreover, collaboration and horizontal learning within school was seen as a factor contributing to effective adaptation of the curriculum and more positive attitudes to SEN.

All these studies, conducted either in Serbia or abroad, indicate the importance of teachers' attitudes for developing effective SEN practice, and also point to a range of variables contributing to the development of positive attitudes. Both Serbian and international studies towards IE indicate that the type of SEN influences teachers' acceptance, and that the contact with children with SEN and adequate preparedness are contributing factors in developing positive attitudes. Attitudes are dynamic concepts and teachers continue to have mixed feelings towards IE, which calls for regular surveys in order to gain a deeper insight into the factors that contribute to more positive attitudes towards inclusion. This study is a step further in that direction.

### Aim of the study and research questions

The primary focus of the study was to determine the attitudes of primary English language teachers towards inclusive language teaching in mainstream schools in Serbia. More specifically, we aimed to identify the factors that could be recognised as obstacles to positive attitudes to inclusion. Four research questions (RQ) were devised:

RQ 1: What is EFL teachers' specific experience in IE?

RQ 2: What kind of institutional support do EFL teachers get?

RQ 3: What are EFL teachers' perceptions of their professional development needs in IE?

RQ 4: What are EFL teachers' attitudes to IE?

### Methodology

*Participants.* The participants were 96 primary teachers of English with diverse experience in teaching inclusive EFL classes. Convenience sampling was applied and the participants were EFL teachers from 3 geographically distant regions in Serbia: western (Kruševac), central (Kragujevac) and southern Serbia (Niš), who attended the seminars titled *Teaching English as a Foreign Language and Inclusive Education in Serbia* in the period February-March 2013. A great majority of the participants was female (N=91, i.e. 94.75%), and a majority taught in city schools (N=67, i.e. 69.79%), while the others worked in village schools (N=29, i.e. 27.08%). All participants taught EFL in state primary schools, while 8 teachers (8.33%) also worked in private language schools. In respect of their overall teaching experience, the participants broadly fell into five groups, the smallest one being the least experienced (up to 4 years of teaching experience), while more than a half of the respondents (56.25%) had from 5 to 14 years of teaching experience, and about a third had teaching experience of at least 15 years (see *Table 1*). It can be concluded that two thirds of the participants were teachers in the first half of their careers, and had substantial teaching experience.

*Instruments.* Quantitative data were collected by means of a questionnaire with both close-ended and open-ended questions. The questionnaire was specially designed for the study and piloted with a group of primary EFL teachers and amended after that. It comprised five sections: 1. Demographic data; 2. Specific experience in IE; 3. Institution-

*Table 1: The participants' professional experience in TEFL.*

| Years of teaching experience | Frequency (N) | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|
| 0-4 | 6 | 6.25 |
| 5-9 | 29 | 30.21 |
| 10-14 | 25 | 26.04 |
| 15-19 | 15 | 15.63 |
| 20+ | 21 | 21.87 |

al support; 4. Professional development needs in IE; 5. Attitudes to IE. The questionnaire was in part an adapted version of the Questionnaire on Professional Development in Learning Support/Special Educational Needs,which was used in the study by O'Gorman and Drudy (2011). Open-ended questions allowed a deeper insight into the respondents' experience, attitudes and beliefs.

*Procedure.* Data were collected as part of the activities of the PD training sessions, and the questionnaire was distributed at the beginning of the seminar to elicit an unbiased response of the participants.

## Results and Discussion

Data were analysed using methods of descriptive statistics and will be presented in the sequence of research questions and dominant themes and example answers to open-ended questions.

### Research Question 1

The first research question sought to explore the specific experience of EFL teachers in IE. The data were collected as answers to closed and open ended questions related to different aspects of the respondents' IE experience. Only about a half (48%) of the respondents claimed having IE experience, of different length: 43% had up to 2 years, 43% from 3-5 years, and 14% had 6 or more years of SEN experience. It is obvious from these answers that teachers considered different definitions of IE, and that

those who claimed having at least 6 years of experience with SEN thought of inclusion as the practice of responding to all individual learner needs, not only to the special educational needs of learners identified to have specific impairments and/or disorders. However, although some of the respondents did not identify themselves as teachers with experience in teaching SEN learners, they still reported teaching pupils with specific needs (e.g. 53% reported teaching learners with social behavioural problems), which could be attributed to some of the respondents' flexible understanding of IE.

*Table 2* shaws the frequencies and percentages of the respondents' reports related to their SEN experience. Learners' needs were grouped into four categories in the questionnaire, as follows: 1. behavioural, emotional and social needs; 2. sensory and physical needs; 3. communication and interaction needs; and 4. cognition and learning needs.

According to the data obtained, the research sample reported social behavioural problems as the most frequently encountered needs (53.13%), while speech and language difficulty (46.88%), AD(H)D (44.79%), and gifted and talented (40.63%) were also identified among the most frequently met needs; high frequency was reported for emotionally disturbed (35.42%), specific learning difficulties (30.21%), physical impairement (28.13%), and dyslexia (26.04%), while visually impaired (20.83%), autism/Aspergers (19.79%), hearing impaired (17.71%) and psychological needs (15.67%) were less frequently reported by the respondents; the least frequent were dyscalculia (2.08%), dysprax-

*Table 2: The respondents' experience in teaching learners with specific needs (in order of frequency within four categories).*

| No. | Type of SEN | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | Behavioural, emotional and social needs | Frequency (N) | Percentage (%) |
| 1.1 | Social Behavioural Problems | 51 | 53.13 |
| 1.2. | AD(H)D | 43 | 44.79 |
| 1.3 | Gifted and Talented | 39 | 40.63 |
| 1.4. | Emotionally Disturbed | 34 | 35.42 |
| 1.5. | Psychological Needs | 15 | 15.67 |
| 2. | Sensory and physical needs | Frequency (N) | Percentage (%) |
| 2.1. | Physical Impairment | 27 | 28.13 |
| 2.2. | Visual Impairment | 20 | 20.83 |
| 2.3. | Hearing Impairment | 17 | 17.71 |
| 2.4. | Multi-sensory Impairment | 6 | 6.25 |
| 3. | Communication and interaction needs | Frequency (N) | Percentage (%) |
| 3.1. | Speech and Language Difficulty | 45 | 46.88 |
| 3.2. | Autism / Aspergers | 19 | 19.79 |
| 4. | Cognition and learning needs | Frequency (N) | Percentage (%) |
| 4.1. | Specific Learning Difficulties | 29 | 30.21 |
| 4.2. | Dyslexia | 25 | 26.04 |
| 4.3. | Down Syndrome | 7 | 7.29 |
| 4.4. | Dyspraxia | 5 | 5.21 |
| 4.5. | Dyscalculia | 2 | 2.08 |

ia (5.21%), multi-sensory impairment (6.25%) and Down syndrome (7.21%). Asked to add any need(s) not offered in the questionnaire, the respondents did not supply them, and the list provided in the questionnaire can be considered fully comprehensive.

To obtain more specific data, we asked the respondents to report on the number of SEN pupils taught, their ages/grades and types of special needs. Only one fifth of the sample provided data in response to this question, some of the replies being rather vague, like: "I teach several SEN children in each grade, ages 7-13"; "I teach a child with Down syndrome in a combined class (primary grades 1-4 in one class), along with many other types of social and behavioural problems"; "I have taught 10 SEN pupils, aged 6-10"; or, "I teach individual classes to 7-12 year-olds with a variety of disabilities". Some of the respondents provided more specific data, such as: "I teach one student aged 13 with ADHD and one student aged 14 with specific learning difficulties (low IQ)"; "I have taught 9 SEN pupils, 7-15 year-old, with ADHD and autism."; "I teach an autistic child."; "I teach two Grade 3 and Grade 4 pupils, one with speech problems, the other with low

intelligence"; "I have taught 5 children aged 8-13 with visual impairment and ADHD"; "Autism – one child, visual impairment – one child, physical impairment – one child."; or, "I teach 10 year-old children, two girls with social behaviour problems; we have special programmes for them." The IE experience of the respondents who provided the above data ranged from teaching/having taught from one to ten SEN children, aged 6-15, with needs within each of the four SEN categories listed in *Table 2*.

### Research Question 2

The second research question aimed to study the kind of institutional support for IE the participating EFL teachers got in their respective teaching settings. It referred to availability of support through SEN teams, special teachers and classroom assistants, especially for devising Individual Education Plans (IEP) for SEN children. The results were obtained by the respondents' identification of specific forms of institutional support (see *Table 3*), by their evaluation of supportiveness of their teaching environments, and by content analysis of the answers to an open question asking the respondents to suggest all forms of support they found crucial for being more effective in their respective inclusive settings (see *Table 4*).

A majority of the respondents (N=67, i.e. 69.79%) claimed that SEN support teams were available in schools where they taught. To gain an insight into collaboration within the teams, the participants were asked about the frequency of regular SEN team meetings. The results showed that only 3.12% of the respondents claimed the teams met weekly, almost a half (44.79%) reported that they met monthly, and 18.75% claimed the

meetings were either once in three months, once a semester, or once a year. It can be concluded that institutional support in providing SEN teams was widespread in mainstream primary schools, but the teams did not meet regularly or often enough to help the respondents feel truly supported and confident in their daily teaching practice in inclusive classes. Moreover, only 27.08% of the respondents reported having a classroom assistant available in school. Since a classroom assistant is considered a much needed support in the inclusive foreign language classroom, inability of a majority of schools to provide a teaching assistant is rather problematic. As for institutional support in devising IEP, more than a half (N=49, i.e. 51.04%) of the respondents reported that their schools devised IEP for learners with SEN.

Asked to evaluate the supportiveness of their respective teaching environments, the respondents mainly mentioned the level of support provided by the staff in the schools they worked in. They rated the staff within a full spectrum of supportiveness, from "not supportive at all", "not very supportive", "not enough", "not particularly", through "They are supportive, but I feel that they are not competent enough for work with SEN children.", "They are supportive as much as they can be, but they don't know much, so they can't help.", to "very supportive", "The staff are supportive. They like to cooperate, but somehow we don't have enough time to deal with them.", "They sympathise, do what they can relying on their personal experience and conscience", "They are all ready to help in whatever way they can", "They are trying a lot", "quite supportive", "They are very supportive". Basically, three groups of ratings were given: 1. Absence of any support; 2. Support that is

*Table 3: The respondents' reports on institutional support provided in mainstream schools in which they taught.*

| No. | Type of institutional support | Frequency (N) | Percentage (%) |
|-----|-------------------------------|---------------|----------------|
| 1. | SEN support team | 67 | 69.79 |
| 2. | Classroom assistant | 26 | 27.08 |
| 3. | Support in devising IEP | 49 | 51.04 |

*Table 4: Institutional support requested by the participants.*

| No. | Type of institutional support requested |
|---|---|
|  | Classroom assistant |
|  | Community support |
|  | Parents' support |
|  | Professional support of a psychologist ("The Ministry of Education does not provide finances for employing a psychologist in our school.") |
|  | Professional support of a special teacher |
|  | More time to prepare lessons |
|  | More funds for extra resources (a computer with the internet connection, a printer,  school lifts for physically disabled students, additional teaching materials) |

not of value, as it is not helpful; 3. Support that is valuable and useful. Importantly, the respondents' answers pointed to the significance they attached to peer support in immidiate surroundings. *Table 4* gives seven different types of institutional support the respondents requested to be able to make their inclusive practice more effective.

The support requested by the participants indicated that a classroom assistant was considered as a significant factor for making IE effective, but also that cooperation with a psychologist, special teacher and parents was prioritised by the participants. Moreover, institutional support was needed in providing technology and assistive aids, as well as physical conditions for SEN children.

***Research Question 3***

The participants were asked to identify all areas of their own professional development needs and to prioritise the five areas by ranking their importance in respect to their own specific SEN contexts. The analysis of the professional development requests of the participants indicated that the choices partly corresponded to SEN experiences of the participants: social behavioural problems were chosen by 68.75% of the participants, and were  given a priority by a half of the group of the respondents who had identified them, while AD(H)D was chosen by 47.92% of the participants, but was given a priority by two thirds of the respondents who had

identified it as their professional development need. *Table 5* shows 15 SEN areas requested by EFL teachers for professional development.

*Table 5: SEN areas requested for professional development (in order of frequency).*

| No. | SEN area | Frequency (N) | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|---|
|  | Social behavioural problms | 66 | 68.75 |
|  | Emotionally Disturbed | 47 | 48.96 |
|  | AD(H)D | 46 | 47.92 |
|  | Speech and Language Difficulty | 37 | 38.54 |
|  | Psychological Needs | 37 | 38.54 |
|  | Gifted and Talented | 33 | 34.38 |
|  | Specific Learning Difficulties | 30 | 31.25 |
|  | Autism / Aspergers | 25 | 26.04 |
|  | Dyslexia | 21 | 21.88 |
|  | Multi-sensory Impairment | 13 | 13.54 |
|  | Physical Impairment | 11 | 11.46 |
|  | Visual Impairment | 8 | 8.33 |
|  | Hearing Impairment | 8 | 8.33 |
|  | Down Syndrome | 7 | 7.29 |
|  | Dyscalculia | 2 | 2.08 |

The participants were also asked to report on their previous professional development in SEN. Only 29% of respondents reported having had some

professional development in the area of SEN. A small number od these respondents provided more information about the PD programmes attended, and some of them evaluated the programmes with grade 1 (least useful) to grade 5 (most useful): *Inclusion in Serbia* (40 hours of PD, provided by the Ministry of Education; grade 5); *Training in Inclusive Education* (provided by the School for Special Educational Needs, Belgrade; grade 5); *Inclusive Classroom* (training provided by Ljiljana Tošić, 2012); *A Lesson Meeting a Child's Needs* (8 hours of PD; grade 5); *School Meeting A Child's Needs* (grade 1); *Inclusion – the initial programme* (2 days of PD; grade 4). Most of the PD programmes attended by the participants were graded rather high by the respondents. However, it is problematic that more than two thirds of the participants did not have any training in IE after inclusion had been officially introduced into Serbian mainstream primary schools.

Apart from identifying SEN areas for their PD, the participants were asked in an open question to suggest other forms of PD they needed for creating more inclusive EFL environments. The requests included "PD for using assistive aids", "PD providing more medical knowledge on specific problems", "more PD programmes", and "better PD programmes with real-life examples and direct specific solutions".

### *Research Question 4*

To determine the respondents' attitudes to IE, the participants were asked to describe their feelings towards inclusion, and to support their attitude by listing the challenges they met in their daily SEN teaching practice, and/or by providing evidence of success cases in teaching English to childen with SEN.

The results showed that majority of the respondents (N=84, i.e. 87.5%) had negative attitudes towards inclusion, specifying that they felt "confused, helpless, insecure, not trained enough", "frustrated, because I do not devote enough time either

to SEN pupils or to their peers", "not competent enough, need expert support", "puzzled", "not comfortable because I haven't been trained", or "sad". Some respondents clarified their negative feelings by adding explanations like "It's too demanding for the teachers, without much help by the Ministry, if any", "I feel puzzled how to teach children with SEN without any technical help or human support", "Don't like it, don't understand it, don't support it.", "There are educated people for IE and they should teach SEN children.", "It's a difficult task, and I am not trained for it.", "I'm still not sure it can work in our society.", "I think that children with SEN, especially those with severe disorders, should not be included in mainstream schools", "I think that both regular and SEN students are not given enough attention in the classroom – we are not trained enough and competent enough for this kind of work, and we are underpaid.", or "I see no benefits, only problems". There were slightly positive views, such as: "I felt enthusiastic in the beginning, but feel a bit worried now.", "I support it, it's a good idea, but not with all types of disabilities.", "I am willing to help, but angry because of lack of equipment.", "I agree that SEN children should be accepted by their classmates, but there are too many in the classroom for it to work.", "It depends on what kind of disability pupils have", or "I know inclusion is the best for SEN children, but we are not trained to cope with all the problems, and 2 classes a week is just not enough for success.". Asked to list the biggest challenges, concerns and fears related to teaching in inclusive settings, a great majority of the respondents (N=89, i.e. 92.7%) specified a number of problems encountered or predicted, ranging from the lack of adequate training to inappropriate conditions (see *Table 6*).

The analysis of the respondents' statements indicates a mixture of reasons for negative attitudes of EFL teachers towards inclusion: the lack of professional competences and the absence of adequate

*Table 6: Challenges of IE, identified by the respondents*

| Challenges | Statements |
|---|---|
| Competences | "Lack of PD in teaching SEN students, not knowing their psychological needs."<br>"How to manage discipline during classes without any support from the outside since classes are too large (more than 30 pupils)."<br>"I am completely baffled as to what to do to give appropriate attention to other students as the SEN students take up a lot of my time, as the students with individualised programmes do."<br>"Lack of support, training, teaching mixed-ability classes"<br>"Combined classes with SEN children, children with different impairments in the same classroom, having to cope with other children who also want to learn."<br>"ADHD"<br>"Problems with preparing for the class, creating teaching materials, not having enough time and opportunity to work with all pupils equally and be equally dedicated to all types of students. Problems with working collaboratively with parents and problems with teachers having to follow the curriculum, which we often can't do because we have a wide range of students to work with, and to pay attention to their specific needs, where time flies and we can't manage all the things we should."<br>"Inadequete knowledge about specific needs"<br>"How to work with an autistc child"<br>"Learners' severe intellectual and behaviour problems"<br>"How to foster interaction between a SEN/ADHD child and peers"<br>"How to make activity plans for SEN students and how to assess them"<br>"How to differentiate activities"<br>"How to control SEN pupils' behaviour"<br>"How to make EFL lessons successful" |
| Conditions | "Old school buildings, no equipment, no PD, our society being against inclusion; before we build the roof, we need to build the foundations, not only metaphorically, but also literally – meaning, to build new schools, educate people (not only teachers, but parents as well), and then we can introduce inclusion into our education system."<br>"Technical problems (lack of equipment)"<br>"No adequate support"<br>"Lack of help and time to prepare lessons"<br>"Not having a teaching assistant while teaching an autistic child"<br>"Lack of parents' support"<br>"Lack of teaching aids and additional teaching materials" |

conditions for successful inclusive practice. However, it can be argued that the negative attitude is more the result of the teachers' realistic view on teaching conditions than of their beliefs (Djević, 2009).

A great minority (N=12, i.e. 12.5%) of the respondents expressed positive attitudes and understanding of the benefits of IE, saying "It is important to recognise the issue and help chidren.", "It's about making education more available to everyone.", "It's beneficial as SEN children are accepted by their peers.", "SEN children develop social skills and communication.", "We should all give children with SEN a lot of help", or "We should all help them.". Asked to share success cases in their respective inclusive EFL

settings, the respondents provided the following details about specific achievements of SEN children:

- – An autistic boy who used to run around the class, screaming, has made great improvements with the help of music and can endure the whole lesson without disturbing others;
- – A physically impaired boy has developed great interest in English and is among the most competent in the class;
- – A girl (aged 10) with speech difficulty developed a range of strategies to express herself through body language (gestures) and enjoys language games;
- – A 7-year old child with Down syndrome participates in pair work and hands-on activities;
- – A 10-year old autistic boy participates in group and whole class activities, where he is supported by all learners;
- – An 11-year old autistic boy has become more independent in school, can circle the right answer in tasks or write numbers as answers;
- – A child with speech impairment has learned to name the means of transport in English with the help of the teacher and the fleshcards she used.

One of the respondents also provided the factors behind the success cases: "Yes, more than one case, and they all needed support from me first and then from parents (who had to be educated too); the strategies were to engage other teachers and make them aware of the problems, so that we worked on the development of the strenghts of each pupil using a creative approach." This response illustrates how much the effectiveness of inclusive EFL teaching depends on teachers and their commitment to respond to SEN children's needs.

## Conclusion

It can be concluded that the respondents, i.e. primary EFL teachers in Serbia, generally held a negative attitude towards IE, which is consistent with some research studies conducted in Serbia so far (Kalyva, Gojkovic & Tsakiris, 2007; Kovacs Cerović et al., 2014), and in contrast to international research studies (Avramidis, Bayliss & Burden, 2000; Avramidis & Kalyva, 2007; Barrios Espinosa & García Mata, 2007; O'Gorman & Drudy, 2011). The respondents' experience with IE was rather varied, as were the conditions in which they taught. The factors that influenced teachers' attitudes were mainly related to teacher competences and conditions, and not to the severity of children's disabilities. As much as teachers expressed requests for professional development in IE and improvement of their knowledge and skills, they also requested much more support and better conditions for implementing inclusion. Meeting these requests may be a key to the development of more positive attitudes to inclusion (Avramidis, Bayliss & Burden, 2000). The success cases that some of the respondents shared, indicate the significance of positive attitude for meeting the needs of SEN children.

### *Limitations of the study*

There are limitations of the study that must be mentioned. First, the sample was not representative of the whole population of EFL teachers in Serbia, as teachers from large cities and from the north of the country were not surveyed. Then, there was no differentiation of teachers' attitudes towards the inclusion of different types of SEN, nor any correlational analysis of data (e.g. attitudes and teaching experience/professional development). However, these limitations could be addressed in future research to further evaluate the nature of teachers' attitudes towards inclusion after three more years of experience in IE and EFL.

### *Pedagogical implications*

Taking into account teachers' role in developing children's positive attitude towards children with special educational needs and disabled people (Beckett, 2013), the results of our study stress the need to raise the Serbian EFL teachers' awareness of the SEN children's rights to education within mainstream schools. Involving EFL teachers in training activities "organised by schools and carried out by experts in the field" (Savić, 2009a: 21) is one of the possibilities. Savić (2009b: 11) maintains that "[h]umanistic teaching principles can be used as guidelines for respecting diversity and creating an inclusive environment", and suggests applying the principle of individualisation through differentiation of tasks and activities, and challenging the learners both by making the tasks easier or more difficult, depending on individual learning needs; moreover, the author argues that creating a friendly, anxiety-free and safe environment can foster language creativity, while cooperative learning can facilitate "cognitive and affective areas of pupils' learning and development" (Savić, 2009b: 18) through interaction and cooperation with peers, having beneficial effect for all learners. Horizontal learning can be fostered at PD events, like conferences, seminars and workshops, specially designed for EFL teachers. Some of these activities in the area of IE have already been provided by the British Council in Belgrade: in June 2013 the first conferences on Special Educational Needs and Inclusive Education was organised, and the second one a year later, in 2014. The aim of both conferences was to stress the importance of inclusive education as well as the adequate teacher training. Also, the organisers wanted to share the UK experiences and offer some practical advice and solutions to teachers in Serbia. The debates were held with the participation of the representatives of all stakeholders, leading to increased knowledge and understanding that only through collaborative engagement could IE in Serbia be developed and properly implemented.

Teachers should certainly be encouraged to reflect on their attitude to learners with SEN, identify their main characteristics (especially those that affect classroom learning), raise their own awareness of the emotional, social, behavioural and learning needs of these learners in their classroom, consider how the English curriculum can help these learners develop the required social and learning skills, and gain teaching strategies for supporting the learners within the classroom and the school.

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# СТАВОВИ НАСТАВНИКА ЕНГЛЕСКОГ ЈЕЗИКА
# ПРЕМА ИНКЛУЗИВНОМ ОБРАЗОВАЊУ

*Резиме*: *У раду се истражују ставови наставника енглеског језика као страног према укључивању деце са посебним образовним потребама у редовну наставу у основној школи у Србији. Примарни фокус истраживања био је да се утврди какав је став наставника према инклузивном образовању, као и да се идентификују фактори који на њих утичу. Учесници су били наставници енглеског језика (N = 96) који раде у основним школама у трима географски удаљеним крајевима Србије. Учесници су имали разноврсно искуство у инклузивној пракси, а две трећине испитаника биле су у првој половини наставничке каријере, са значним наставним искуством. Подаци су прикупљени путем упитника (адаптираним према: O'Gorman & Dradi, 2011), са питањима затвореног и отвореног типа у вези са специфичним искуством учесника у области инклузивне наставе, врстом и обимом институционалне подршке коју добијају у школи, личним потребама у вези са стручним усавршавањем у области инклузивне наставе, и личним ставовима према инклузивној настави. Резултати су показали да је највећи број испитаника имао искуства у пружању додатне подршке ученицима са поремећајима понашања (53,13%), затим са потешкоћама у развоју говора и језика (46,88%) и надареним и талентованим ученицима (40,63; високу фреквентност су имали и емоционални поремећаји (35,42%), специфичне тешкоће у учењу (30,21%), физички поремећаји (28,13%), и дислексија (26,04%), док су испитаници ређе пријављивали слабовидост (20,83%), аутизам / Аспергеров синдром (19,79%), оштећење слуха (17,71%) и психолошке потребе (15,67%); најређи су били поремећаји као што су дискалкулија (2,08%), диспраксија (5,21%), мултисензорна оштећења (6,25%) и Даунов синдром (7,21%).*

*Према резултатима истраживања, велика већина испитаника (N = 84, односно 87,50%) изразила је негативне ставове према инклузији, за шта су испитаници навели два основна разлога: 1) недостатак професионалних компетенција и 2) непостојање адекватних услова за успешну инклузивну праксу. Само 29,16% испитаника је изјавило да су имали стручну обуку за наставу у инклузивним одељењима, а велика већина (N = 89, односно 92,7%) изразила је забринутост у вези са бројним изазовима са којима се суочавају у свакодневном раду. Учесници су исказали потребу за стручним усавршавањем у области инклузивне наставе и за унапређивањем својих знања и вештина, као и за много већом подршком и бољим условима за спровођење инклузије. У вези са подршком која им је доступна у школи, 69,79% (N = 67) испитаника је изјавило да у школама у којима раде постоје тимови за инклузију, али већина њих је тврдила да се тимови нередовно састају и да не пружају корисну подршку за успешну инклузивну праксу. Значајна је чињеница да су учесници који су изјавили да им је подршка у школи била корисна и драгоцена истакли и важну улогу подршке коју*

су им пружале колеге. Само 27,08% испитаника је пријавило да има асистента у настави, и на то указало као на један од великих проблема везаних за инклузивну наставу.

Резултати који се односе на потребе за побољшањем услова за инклузивну наставу показали су да испитаници сматрају да је присуство асистента у настави значајан фактор за успешну инклузију, али и да је сарадња са психологом, дефектологом и родитељима такође од великог значаја. Осим тога, учесници су изјавили да је институционална подршка неопходна и за обезбеђивање технолошких и помоћних средстава, као и за елиминисање физичких баријера у школи. Имајући у виду чињеницу да је улога наставника кључна за успешно спровођење процеса инклузије, као и да је позитиван став предиктор успеха у инклузивној настави, постоје значајне импликације резултата истраживања за спровођење инклузије у Србији. Прво, иницијално образовање и стручно усавршавање наставника енглеског језика треба да пруже адекватну обуку за инклузивну наставу; друго, треба побољшати услове у нашим школама да би се задовољиле потребе све деце, и да би се на адекватан начин одговорило на потребе испитаника. Ове свеобухватне промене могу даље допринети промени негативних ставова које су исказали учесници истраживања према инклузивној пракси у нашим основним школама.

**Кључне речи**: настава енглеског као страног језика, инклузија у основном образовању, компетенције наставника, стручно усавршавање, услови наставе.