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COMPARATIVE ANALYSES OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN LATVIA, RUSSIA, AND KAZAKHSTAN

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Abstract

The educational system of each country has its focus on a global discourse towards implementing inclusivity politics. The educational systems become more open and inclusive worldwide. A number of problems that arise as a result of implementing inclusive politics in Latvia, Russia and Kazakhstan have much in common and well as different. The design of a strategy of inclusive education has to do with the identification of priorities and their solutions. Those issues are related to a lack of legislative bases in regard to inclusive education, a lack of interrelatedness among all the actors of the educational process, low level of inclusive culture in schools and in the society in general, and a lack of necessary infrastructure. These are a few problems to be considered while designing inclusive education.

The empirical part of the research contains data gained as a result of questionnaire carried out among teachers of comprehensive schools in three countries. For the purpose of this study, the authors have designed a questionnaire that allowed to evaluate a degree of the solution of implementing inclusive politics. Such an approach allows identifying problems and a level of significance of those problems as viewed by the teachers. Only a cooperation among all the stakeholders allows designing more inclusive educational reforms and practice.

Keywords: inclusive education, problems, and solutions, multiple stakeholders.

1 INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education is a topical question of discussion by scientists and has gained high priority in the EU political agenda in recent decades (UNESCO, 1994). The discourse of inclusive education has developed internationally as the most debated issue. UNESCO (2009) defines inclusion as an ongoing process aimed at offering quality education for all while respecting diversity, different needs and abilities, characteristics and learning expectations of the students. Inclusion has been conceptualized as a political imperative that aims at re-ordering current practice. It requires inclusive pedagogy for all students and teachers who are invited to re-examine their approaches for including pupils of diverse social, cultural and ethnic background (Cochran-Smith, 2004). Zoiniou-Sideri and Vlachou (2006) defines inclusive education as 'the quest for equity, social justice, participation, and the removal of all forms of exclusionary assumptions and practices' (p.234). Such kind of education respects the needs of all students and values all students.

1.1 Defining Inclusion

There are inconsistencies in the research on teachers' attitudes towards implementing inclusion and in defining obstacles that prevent the implementation of inclusive education (Kraska, Boyle, 2014), therefore this study focuses on obstacles that hinder implementing the idea of inclusive education. Inclusion needs to take into account a geographical location, ideology and infrastructure since it is a context bound concept that has a link with socio, economic and political and religious context. The 'borrowing' and application of the model from one country's context to another does work quite well. Intensive debate indicates that each country needs to adapt approaches that are flexible, dynamic and responsive to individuals in particular cultural locality. The model of inclusive education should be built in the context of reforms of national educational systems. There is an evident shift from special education to inclusive education. As the analyses of situation in the global context indicates that inclusive education occupies a stable position in a comparative context (Daniels & Garner, 2005).

Inclusion is seen in a wider perspective as education for all pupils (Aincow, et al, 2006). Amenson et al. (2010) identify core values that reveal the essence of inclusive education, such as quality, equity, social justice, participation and a balance between unity and diversity. Discourse around inclusivity centres around such themes as acceptance of all, not leaving anyone behind, emphasizing equal opportunities and inclusion of all (Norwich, 2013). Disability is discussed as only one of the assets along with the ethnicity, gender, and socio-economic indicators. Inclusion involves the use of a wide range of institutional strategies which recognize students' differences in learning styles, strength and limitations. Inclusive practice involves homogeneous groupings, flexible scheduling, positive attitude of staff members towards inclusion, parents as partners' involvement in designing environment for children with disabilities and fostering a positive attitude towards those children.

Inclusive education is a contested issue and is viewed as an alternative to special education. The idea of inclusive education was broadened by including all learners who are excluded and marginalized. Inclusive pedagogy considers every child's capacity to learn when teachers remove barriers and limits for growth. According to a Vygotskian (1978) socio-cultural theory, culture plays a significant role in teaching. Teachers need to work together in supporting children without stigmatizing them. The inclusive pedagogical approach holds an open ended view on each child's potential to learn and 'disrupt deterministic expectations put on them' (Spratt, & Florian, 2015, p.91). Teachers need to adopt a variety of strategies in their work, including support, encouragement, flexibility and interest in students' lives (Mu, Hu, Wang, 2017).

1.2 Obstacles of Pursuing/Implementing Inclusive Education

The situation in regards to inclusive education in all three countries is promising and one can trace positive tendencies towards inclusive education. But the goal of inclusive education has not been achieved yet. Still much remains to be improved. It requires dismantling barriers to access and participation of all students. It requires taking all the factors that influence building inclusive education, such as economic, social, political and environmental factors. Among the social factors no be named are the following: negative societal attitude, rigid school environment, lack of community's involvement and a collaboration of a team of professionals.

Among the economic factors are: inadequate funding for inclusive education, inadequate number of support personnel, inadequate resources that are available, and a lack of training of personnel in dealing with the diversity. Among the emotional factors there are as the following factors: lack of teachers' awareness about the diversity in the classroom, marginalization of children in school, and a lack of a sense of belonging.

Among the most common reasons for preventing inclusion are the following: unavailability of infrastructure (lifts, equipment's, specialists), lack of a multidisciplinary team's support, negative societal attitude, lack of teacher training to work with children with special needs, and a peer pressure). The students are struggling with an inadequate support for their academic learning and encouragement. A rigid curriculum that does not allow experimentation with flexible timing arrangement is also a significant barrier to an inclusive education. All those factors hinder effective implementation of inclusive education.

2 METHODOLOGY

The empirical part of this study comprises the results gained as a result of a questionnaire that was carried out in Latvia (n =155), in Russia (n = 251), and in Kazakhstan (n = 102). Teachers were asked to evaluate the level of relative significance of implementing inclusive education in 10-point scale. Teachers were asked to evaluate the level of relative significance of obstacles related to implementing inclusive education.

Table 1 Problems encountered while implementing inclusive education

	Problems
P1.	Lack of necessary infrastructure (equipment that is necessary for students with special needs (lifts, special equipment for pupils with visual impairments).
P2.	Lack of infrastructure in schools that is necessary for rehabilitation process of pupils (pedagogical, psychological, medical)
P3.	Lack of normative regulations for organizing inclusive education
P4.	Lack of teachers' competencies to use pedagogical strategies in dealing with pupils with special needs, lack of psychological knowledge and correctional pedagogy.
P5.	Lack of financing in implementing inclusive education
P6.	Low availability of methodological and organizational support for teachers for implementing inclusive education. Lack of specialized educational programs and requirements for educating children with special needs. .
P7.	Low level of inclusive culture in comprehensive schools and in the society. Dominant cultural stereotypes in relation to pupils with special needs, intolerance towards them.
P8.	Strict regulations in educational establishments, normative regulations and rules that restrict flexibility in designing inclusive education
P9.	Choice made by parents for their children with special needs (their opinion about the need of a hyper care for their child and the need for creating special circumstances that can be provided only in separate school for pupils with special needs
P10.	Low organizational support for efficient interaction among all stakeholders for organizing efficient educational process of inclusive education among administration, teachers, pupils, and their parents

3 RESULTS

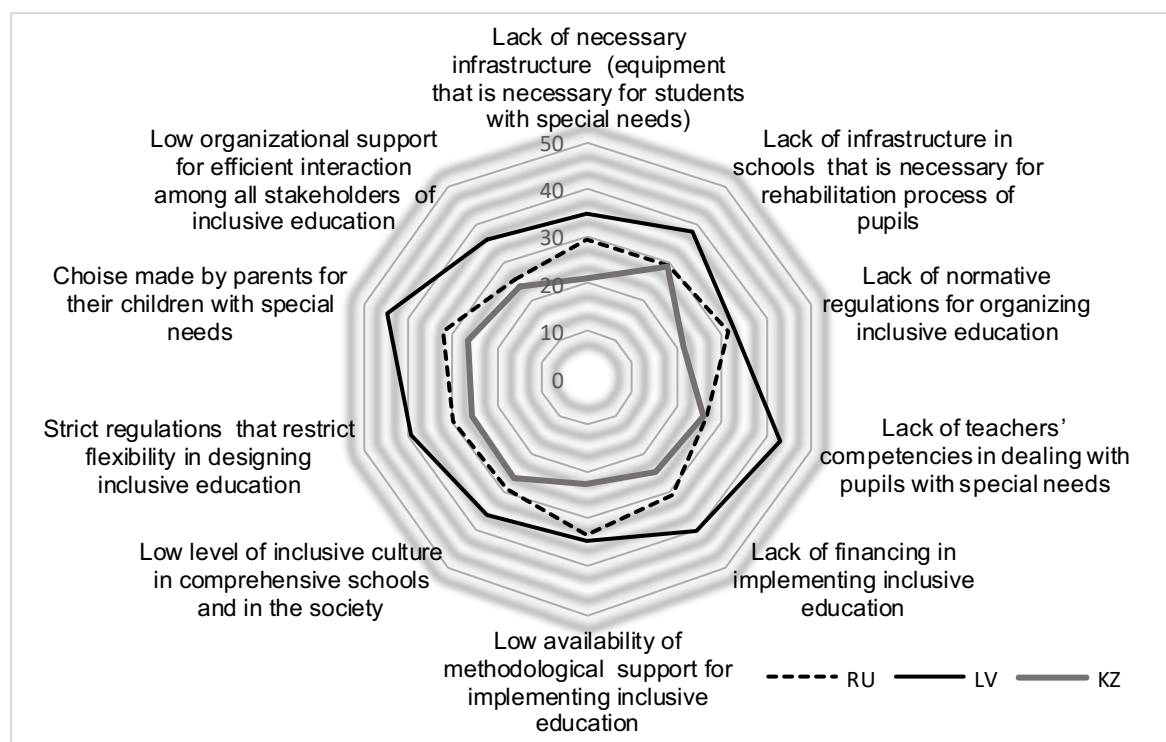


Figure 1. Means of problem solution related to implementing inclusive education in three countries.

In line with the one factor analysis of variance, the levels of solution of the problems related to inclusive education in three different countries, indicate to statistically significant differences.

The highest value of solution in regards to implementing inclusive education is in Latvia since this issue has already been discussed since 1991, and much has been done in practice as well, but the lowest level of solution is in Kazakhstan since this issue is relative new for Kazakhstan.

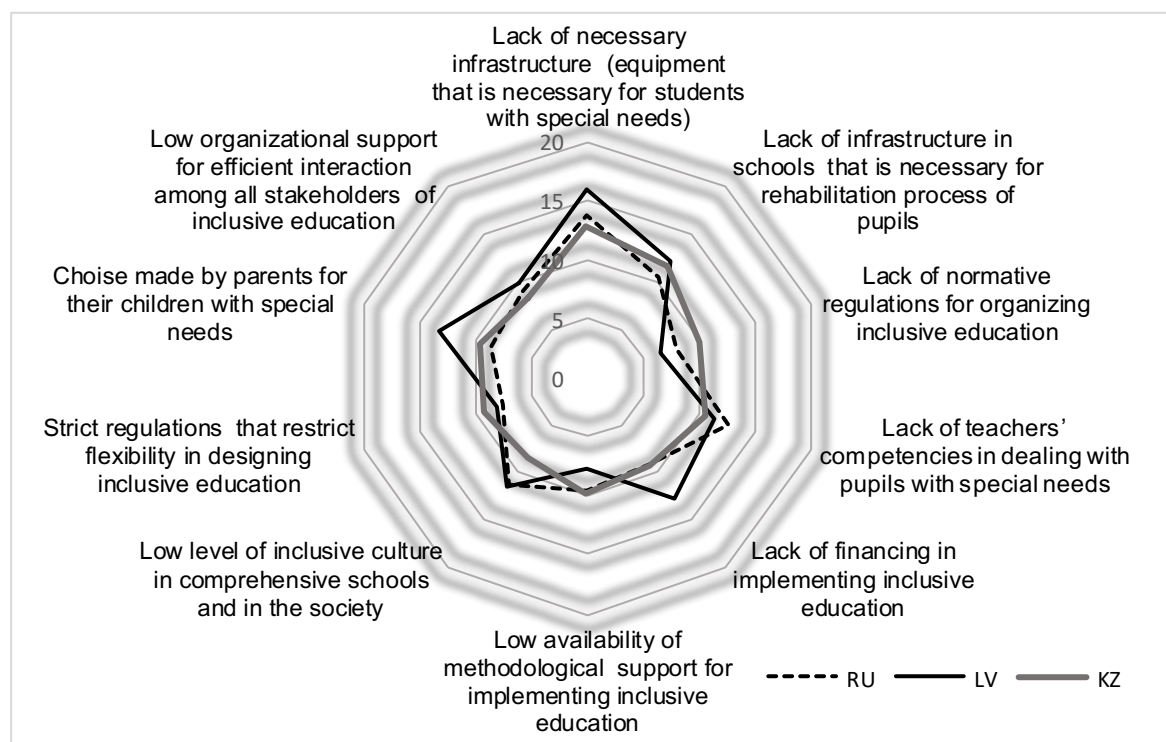


Figure 2. Means of relative significance of problems related to inclusive education in three different countries

The level of a relative significance of such as problem as “a *lack of necessary infrastructure (equipment that is necessary for students with special needs)*” was evaluated by the respondents of three countries higher than other problems in relation to implementing inclusive education. There are no significant differences in evaluating this issue by the research participants from three different countries.

With the regards to a significance of such problems as: *a lack of infrastructure in schools that is necessary for rehabilitation process of pupils, low availability of methodological support for implementing inclusive education and a low organizational support for efficient interaction among all stakeholders of inclusive education*, the research participants from all three countries evaluated in a similar way, and placed them on an average significant level. There were no statistically significant differences in the evaluation of those problems.

The problem related to a *lack of normative regulations for organizing inclusive education* in Kazakhstan was evaluated in medium level of significance, in Russia lower than average, and in Latvia teachers' evaluation is the lowest, and those differences are statistically significant.

Problems related to a lack of competency of teachers to dealing with the diversity in the classroom, in Russia has been evaluated as significant, but in Latvia participants have evaluated this issue higher than average, but in Kazakhstan in an average level of significance. Those differences as statistically significant.

The significance of such problems as: *a lack of financing in implementing inclusive education and a choise made by parents for their children with special needs* in Latvia is evaluated higher than average and higher than in other two countries, and those differences are statistically significant.

Significance of such statement as a “*Low level of inclusive culture in comprehensive schools and in the society*” both, in Latvia and in Russia are being evaluated higher than in Kazakhstan. The significance of the problem for teachers “*Strict regulations that restrict flexibility in designing inclusive*

education” is higher for the teachers in Kazakhstan than in other two countries. Those differences are statistically significant (Table 2).

Table 2. The results of one factor analysis of variance (ANOVA) with the aim to compare MEANS of significance of problems related to inclusive education in three countries

	F	Sig.
Lack of necessary infrastructure (equipment that is necessary for students with special needs)	2,073	,127
Lack of infrastructure in schools that is necessary for rehabilitation process of pupils	2,131	,120
Lack of normative regulations for organizing inclusive education	8,728	,000
Lack of teachers' competencies in dealing with pupils with special needs	3,244	,040
Lack of financing in implementing inclusive education	4,783	,009
Low availability of methodological support for implementing inclusive education	1,555	,213
Low level of inclusive culture in comprehensive schools and in the society	5,024	,007
Strict regulations that restrict flexibility in designing inclusive education	3,752	,024
Choise is made by parents for their children with special needs	8,724	,000
Low organizational support for efficient interaction among all stakeholders of inclusive education	1,060	,347

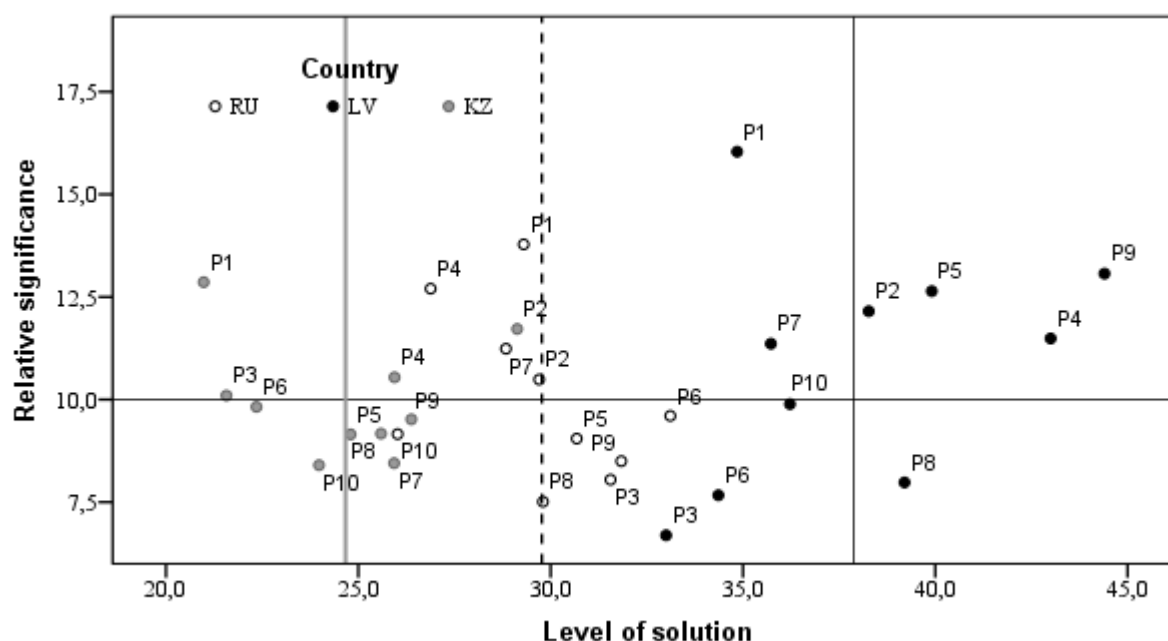


Figure 3. Boxplot diagram depicting problems in relation to implementing inclusive education (Level of solution & Relative significance)

There are a number of problems that teachers encounter in every country, the level of their significance is being evaluated higher than average but the level of their solution is related with lack of necessary infrastructure and is being acknowledged as a problem, the level of significance of which is higher than the level of its solution. Among such problems one can mention a low level of inclusive culture in schools and in the society at large in Latvia. In Russia and Kazakhstan, the main significance is paid by the teachers to such problems as a lack of teachers' competency to organize inclusive education.

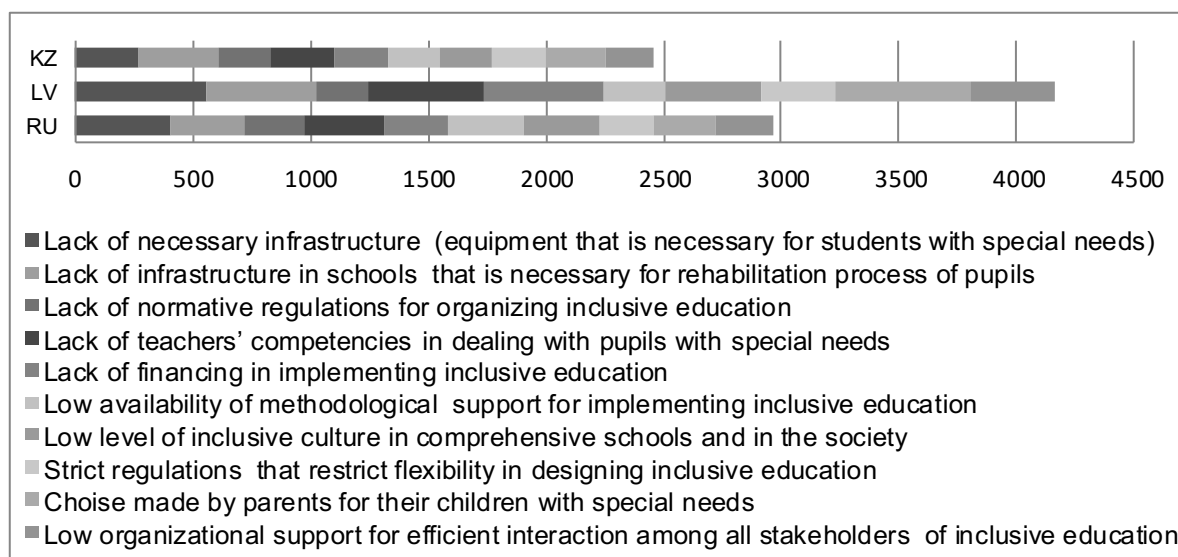


Figure 4. The level of readiness of teachers to implement inclusive education in Kazakhstan, Latvia, and Russia as based on the level of solution of problems and considering a weight of coefficients of problems.

The level of readiness of teachers from three countries to implement inclusive education can be evaluated as a sum of solution of all problems related to an implementation of inclusive education, multiplied to a level of significance of those issues which have significant weights. The highest readiness for implementing inclusive education is among Latvian teachers, the lowest is among the teachers from Kazakhstan.

4 CONCLUSIONS

The paper offers a holistic approach how inclusion can be implemented on individual, classroom, institutional and national levels in perceiving the difference as a value instead of stigmatizing it. This puts a moral imperative on every teacher to acknowledge and welcome the Otherness in seeking ways to build a more inclusive practice in daily encounters. This requires *phronesis*, teaching with a moral purpose in supporting all learners in their diversity and ensuring equal concern and respect to all children.

In order to implement inclusive education, there is a need for a systemic educational change and responsive practice towards a diversity of pupils' needs. Students need to be supported and socially integrated without any stigmatization for being different.

In order to build a more inclusive education, we need to recognize the limits of our understanding and constraints of our perspectives. Genuine inclusion means adapting to changing needs of all students, as well as celebrating and valuing differences. Inclusive education requires changes in the whole school policy. It requires re-examining the ways in which structural and organizational changes allow schools to be inclusive to all children not just those with the diverse abilities.

Inclusion should involve restructuring the whole system of school by ensuring that all children have access to educational opportunities. Inclusive classroom arrangement involves a frank dialogue about differences and well as acceptance of diverse background, beliefs and cultural backgrounds where teachers are the key to implementing change. This requires adapting a long term commitment to a professional development for implementing inclusive education.

Implementing inclusive education requires a shared vision, clear communication of this vision to all stakeholders, building trust among all actors involved and empowering the team to implement this vision. Only a dialogue among all the stakeholders - teachers, parents and students- can help to reduce barriers for participation of all students in the learning process.

Inclusive teaching practice should involve creating environment for learning for all, to differentiate learning activities, to use inclusive language, to involve children in co-constructing knowledge, questioning deterministic beliefs about fixed ability, believing in progress of each child, and supporting

each pupil's learning. Inclusive education fights all kinds of stigmatization, like bullying, lower expectations and exclusion.

Teachers need to be involved in action research projects in order to improve inclusive practices. Schools need to foster the cooperation among the team of professionals, families and students, thus aligning between perspectives in creating inclusive practice.

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