



Pre-Service Teachers' Attitudes toward School Inclusion in Romania

Anca Luștrea

Assoc. Prof., University Clinic for Therapies and Psycho-Pedagogic Counselling, West University of Timisoara, Romania, anca.lustrea@e-uvt.ro

The present study aims to determine the pre-service teachers' attitudes towards inclusion in Romania and understand them in relation with their specialization and prior relation with a person with special needs. Research on attitudes towards inclusion has a long tradition in the scientific field. However, most of studies focus on the teachers' and parents' attitudes. Fewer studies have focused on pre-service teachers' attitudes thus far and this study seeks to fill this research gap. The participants were 175 Educational Sciences pre-service teachers from the West University of Timisoara, Romania. A mixed-method approach was used to analyze the participants' written work (i.e., in which they explained their choice between special schools and inclusive schools). A content analysis of the made arguments was carried out; further, the frequencies of the main response themes were analyzed quantitatively. Overall, there is a predisposition to view the special schools as the better educational environment for children with SEN, but the choice of the profession and the prior relation to a person with SN do not influence pre-service teachers' attitudes. The arguments made are diverse, ranging from pro-special school as optimum environment to anti-inclusion school beliefs. To better understand inclusion, this study recommends that more special education disciplines should be included in the curriculum and that students should be offered opportunities for teaching students with SEN.

Keywords: school inclusion, attitudes, pre-service teachers, inclusive schools, special schools, Romania

INTRODUCTION

School inclusion has now moved beyond the stage of an educational policy imposed by international laws and has increasingly become a common and necessary practice, recognized at the level of existential principles. International legal bodies (UN, 2016; UNESCO, 1994) have been promoting school inclusion as a non-discriminatory educational policy for more than 30 years. Therefore, most states have integrated it into their laws. Romania, too, at the pre-accession stage to the EU, promulgated the first laws (Romanian Education Law, 1995) that ensured the right of children to inclusive education. Now, as a full EU member, a National Strategy is in place and the proportion of children included is as high as 50% (Tudose, 2017).

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Inclusive education (IE) is a multivalent concept, its connotations depending very much on the socio-cultural context specific to each country. Van Miegheem et al. (2018) recommend that each study should specify the operational definition of IE to which it relates, so as not to create conceptual confusions. In the Romanian legislation, IE is defined as 'an ongoing process of upgrading the school institution, with the aim of exploiting (valuing) the existing resources, particularly human resources, to support the participation in learning of all pupils from inside a community' (Vrasmaş & Vrasmaş, 2007, 3). The inclusive education should not seek to bring a simple improvement of the school or the classroom activity but a radical change of the entire educational institution, of the active teachers, of the curriculum, and of the society.

In the Romanian legislation, the term SEN is used inconsistently: handicap, incapacity, disability, deficiency, and SEN (Vrasmaş & Vrasmaş, 2007). In our study, the term children with SEN, most used by teachers, is understood as 'children whose learning difficulties hinder their ability to benefit from the general education system without support or accommodation to their needs' (European Commission, [EC], 2018, 3). In Romania, children with SEN can be educated in special or inclusive schools (National Education Law, 2011). A special school provides programs, learning activities and complex support for rehabilitation of children who fail to achieve an age-appropriate level of development; an inclusive school provides education for all children and is the most effective means of combating attitudes of discrimination and segregation (Ministerial Order, 2011).

Being a concept and a reality so present in education, it is important that IE is achieved at a high-quality level. At the heart of the success of the inclusion process is the social and educational attitude towards it. Our study focusses on investigating the attitudes of pre-service teachers. The research (Kraska & Boyle, 2014; Sharma & Nuttal, 2015) emphasize the importance of studying pre-service teachers' attitudes as an attitudinal diagnostic factor at the beginning of professional training, but also as a predictor of future teachers' attitudes. If we determine the attitudes towards inclusion at the beginning of the professional development, we can make curricular adjustments to foster inclusive attitudes.

Most of Romanian research on IE has focused on identifying obstacles and solutions for better IE. One of the proposed solutions was to conduct training programs in special education, on an individual basis or through continuous training, which would reflect school reality as adequately as possible (Ghergut, 2011; Grasu, 2012; Unianu, 2012; Frumos, 2018). However, few studies on Romanian IE attempts to determine the pre-service teachers' attitudes toward IE to support the curricular design on empirical data.

The purpose of this study is to identify pre-service teachers' attitudes toward inclusion in relation with their specialization and prior relation with a person with SN, and to propose theoretical and methodological solutions. We aim to determine pre-service teachers' attitudes toward inclusion, to identify broad themes and patterns in pre-service teachers' arguments for special or for inclusive school and to analyse the main types of arguments in relation to the prior relation with a person with SEN of pre-service teachers.

Theoretical framework

Attitude refers to a set of beliefs, behaviours, and emotions in relation with a person, reality or object. Van Mieghem et al. (2018, 4) compiled the definitions of attitudes found in reviews of IE attitudinal research and concluded that most define attitude as a 'compilation of cognitive (beliefs or knowledge), affective (feelings) and behavioural (predisposition to act in a particular way) components'. In this study, attitudes were analysed on two dimensions: first, the predisposition to act toward inclusion (by asking the pre-service teachers to choose between special or inclusive schools) and cognitive (the pre-service teachers had to argue their choice and we interpreted how they reflect their beliefs in this argumentation).

The research of pre-service teachers' attitudes towards IE has two main directions: determining the factors that influence it independent of vocational training programs; and factors that arise directly from training and that can influence the shaping of attitudes during studies. Among the mentioned factors that influence attitudes are the level of education and perceived level of confidentiality in teaching students with disabilities (Sharma & Nuttal, 2015), perceived self-efficacy (Lancaster & Bain, 2010), level of education and perceived level of trust in teaching students with disabilities (Sharma et al., 2009) and experience in a teaching role, specialisation, year of study or perceived experience with people with SEN (Kraska & Boyle, 2014; Orakci et al., 2016).

We aim to explore the pre-service teachers' attitudes in relation with specialisation and prior relation with a person with SEN, also. Specialization refers to the subject area the students major in. However few studies investigated this variable in relation with attitudes towards IE, with diverse results. Avramidis et al. (2000) assert that science study majors are less positive toward inclusion (due to the focus on academic performance) and the students in humanistic studies are more positive. Kraska and Boyle (2014) found no significant differences between preschool and primary pre-service teachers' attitudes. Other studies (Woodcock, 2011; Markova et al., 2016) report that elementary school majors have more positive attitudes than secondary school majors. Quandt and Kurniawati (2019) found that special education pre-service teachers have a more positive attitude than Early Childhood Education majors.

The prior relation with a person with SEN can be an important influential factor. Most of the studies (Sharma et al., 2009; Lyakurwa & Tugaraza, 2013) found a positive and significant relation between the attitude toward inclusion and the prior relation with a person with SEN.

This study focuses on exploring both direction of attitude towards IE, positive or negative, the predispositions and beliefs in relation to IE, as well as influencing factors – specialisation and prior relation with a person with SEN.

METHOD

Research questions and objectives

Research objectives

The current study investigated pre-service teachers' attitudes towards inclusion in Romania. The attitudes will be approached on two dimensions: first, in terms of choice for an educational option – pro-special (SS) or pro-inclusive school (IS); second, in terms of the rationale for this option. The attitudes will be analysed in relation to two factors: the college specialisation of the pre-service teachers' and their prior relation with a person with SEN.

The *research objectives* are:

- To determine pre-service teachers' attitudes toward inclusion.
- To determine if the pre-service teachers' approaches to inclusion differ in relation to specialisation and to their prior relation with a person with SEN
- To identify broad themes and patterns in pre-service teachers' arguments for special or for inclusive school.
- To analyse the main types of arguments in relation to the prior relation with a person with SEN of pre-service teachers.

The research questions are:

RQ1: Which type of school do pre-service teachers see as most fitting for a student with SEN?

RQ2: How the pre-service teachers' approaches differ in relation to specialisation and to their prior relation with a person with SEN?

RQ3: Which are pre-service teachers' main arguments for special or for inclusive schools?

RQ4: How the pre-service teachers' arguments differ in relation to the pre-service teachers' prior relation with a person with SEN?

Participants

The data were collected from a convenience sample of 175 Romanian pre-service teachers from all three specialisations of Educational Sciences studies offered by WUT (Table 1).

Table 1
Descriptive summary of the participants

Category	Frequency	%
Gender		
Male	9	5.1
Female	166	94.9
Specialization		
Special Education	35	20
Pedagogy	39	22.28
Primary and Preschool Education	101	57.72
Prior relation with a person with SEN		
Family member (FM)	69	27.3
Classmate (CL)	66	26.1
Acquaintance (AC)	49	19.4
No relation (NR)	37	14.6

Participants were 166 (94.9%) women, with ages ranged from 18 to 51 years ($M=20.79$, $SD=5.47$). The participants were enrolled as follows: in Special Education (SE) - 35 (20%), Pedagogy (PE) - 39 (22.28%), and Primary and Preschool Education (PPE) – 101 (57.72%). There were 32 (18.28%) students that declared that have a family member (FM) with disabilities, 38 (21.71%) had a classmate (CL) with disabilities, 54 (30.85%) with at least one acquaintance (AC) with SEN, and 51 (29.14%) with no prior relation (NR) with a person with disabilities.

Study design

To gain better insight into pre-service teachers' attitude towards inclusion an embedded mixed methodology was used. Quantitative methods were used to determine the frequency and percentages of the participants' choice between special and inclusive schools and for the arguments of the respondents. The adequate number of participants ($N=175$) allowed us to classify the main arguments of the students by occurrence frequency. The content analysis, a qualitative method, was applied to identify the students' arguments for or against inclusion.

Procedure

The cohorts of two consecutive years, 2019-2020 and 2020-2021, i.e. 175 students, were included as participants in the study. The students are enrolled in all three specialisations offered by the Department of Educational Sciences of the West University of Timisoara. All students in the department take a mandatory course on the topic (i.e., Foundation of Special Education) in their first semester. In the third week of the semester, the students attending the weekly seminar for this subject were asked to participate in the study, based on an informed consent. Being at the beginning of their college studies, we can say that the following findings illustrate their attitudes toward inclusion developed prior to university enrolment.

Data Collection and analysis

A short demographic survey was conducted at the beginning, gathering data about the gender, age, specialisation, and the prior relation with a person with SEN. The prior relation with a person with SEN was presented in four pre-established categories, from which the students could choose: family member (FM), classmate (CL), acquaintance (AC) and no relation (NR). These categories were pre-determined based on different degrees of closeness to a person with SEN – the closest being FM and the furthest NR.

The students were asked to answer two questions in writing:

- (1) Which setting do you think is better for the education of children with SEN - special school or inclusive school?
- (2) Write the main argument on which you based that choice.

The data were analysed through a process of thematic content analysis. The responses were reviewed to identify recurring responses and main arguments. We analysed the arguments for special and for inclusive schools and in total three types of arguments were identified. Key quotations from the manuscripts were categorised along these thematic lines.

FINDINGS

The results highlight the pre-service teachers' attitudes towards inclusion in terms of choices and arguments pro-special or pro-inclusive school. A tendency to view the special schools as the better educational environment for children with SEN is evident and the participants with the specialisation closest to the special education mostly chose this option. The arguments brought are diverse, ranging from pro-special school beliefs as optimum environment in terms of individualization of intervention, academic progress, and socialization, to anti-inclusion school beliefs, viewed as not enough prepared in terms of specialists or present stigma. The following results are organized thematically, with direct quotations to illustrate the students' attitudes.

Research question 1

Which type of school do pre-service teachers see as most fitting for a person with SEN?

Of the total respondents (see Table 2), nearly half (49.71%) would have children with SEN placed in SS, 40 % chose IS and 10.28% had a nuanced view – they opted for either SS or IS, depending on several factors.

Table 2

Frequency table – pre-service teachers' choices toward inclusion by specialisation

Type of school specialization*	Special school		Inclusive school		Both	
	γ	%	γ	%	γ	%
SE	21	60	14	40	-	-
PE	20	51.28	18	46.15	1	2.56
PPE	46	45.54	38	37.62	17	63.83
Total	87	49.71	70	40	18	10.28

* SE – Special Education, PE – Pedagogy, PPE – Primary and Preschool Education; γ - Frequency

Research question 2

Do pre-service teachers' approaches differ in relation to specialisation and to their prior relation with a person with SEN?

Table 3

Frequency table – pre-service teachers' choices toward inclusion by prior relation with a person with SEN

Prior relation with a person with SEN	Special School		Inclusive School		Both	
	γ^*	%	γ	%	γ	%
Family Member	13	40.62	15	46.87	4	12.5
No relation	27	52.94	23	45.09	1	1.96
Acquaintance	29	53.70	16	29.62	9	16.66
Classmate	18	47.36	16	42.10	4	10.52
Total	87		70		18	

• γ - Frequency

By specialisation (see Table 2), 60% of SE students, 51.28% of PE students and 45.54% of PPE students opted for special school. A chi-square Kruskal Wallis test of independence was performed to examine the relation between the preference of placement (SS, IS, and both) and specialization (SE, PE, PPE). The relation was non-significant $\chi^2(2, N=175) = .42, p=.80$. Nevertheless, in all specialisations, the first option was for SS and the SE students opted the most for SS. We can say that the closer the specialisation is to special education, the more the students consider SS better. Most students with a nuanced view are enrolled in PPE.

By prior relation with a person with SEN (Table 3), the hierarchy of the options for SS is: 53.70% of the students with a prior relation of AC, 52.94% of the students with NR, 47.63% of students who had a CL with SEN and 40.62% of students with a FM with SEN. The answers were statistically processed via JASP program (JASP, 2022). A chi-square Kruskal Wallis test of independence was performed to examine the relation between the preference of placement (SS, IS, and both) and prior relation with a person with SEN (FM, NR, AC, CL). The relation was non-significant $\chi^2(3, N=175) = 2.02, p=.56$. Even if no statistically significant difference was obtained, we can see that the closer the relation is, the lower the tendency to opt for SS. The students with NR with people with SEN or with AC with SEN do not have first-hand information and experiences with the educational system and tended to opt for SS. The students (42.10%) who lived and learned together with a CL with SEN or who had FM with SEN (46.87%) opted for IS. It can be observed that the closer the relation with a person with SEN is the more pro inclusion the attitude of the students is.

Table 4
Main types of arguments

	Family member		No relation		Acquaintance		Classmate		Total	
	γ^*	%	γ	%	γ	%	γ	%	γ	%
Arguments Pro special school										
Pro special school										
Student centred	7	21.87	15	29.41	9	16.66	6	15.78	37	21.14
School centred	4	12.5	9	17.64	14	25.92	7	18.42	34	19.42
Total	11	34.37	24	47.05	23	42.59	13	34.21	71	40.57
Opposite (counterexample) to inclusive school										
Student centred	1	3.12	1	1.96	4	7.40	3	7.89	9	5.14
School centred	1	3.12	2	3.92	2	3.70	2	5.26	7	4
Total	2	6.25	3	5.88	6	11.11	5	13.15	16	9.14
Arguments Pro inclusive school										
SEN student centred	10	31.25	13	25.49	10	18.51	14	36.84	47	26.85
Typical centred	4	12.5	2	3.92	1	1.85	1	2.63	8	4.57
Life values	1	3.12	8	15.68	5	9.25	1	2.63	15	8.57
Total	15	46.87	23	45.09	16	29.62	16	42.10	70	40
Arguments to both special and inclusive school										
Disability type					5	9.25	2	5.26	7	4
Disability degree	4	12.5	1	1.96	1	1.85			6	3.42
The best interest of the child					3	5.55	2	5.26	5	2.85
Total	4	12.5	1	1.96	9	16.66	4	10.52	18	10.28
Total	32	100	51	100	54	100	38	100	175	100

If we take the particular case of the students who had a CL with SEN, more (47.36%) opted for SS than (42.10%) for IS, meaning that, for most, the experience of inclusion was not successful. However, the difference between the two options is not a significant one, meaning that there are negative (still in majority), but also positive experiences of inclusion.

Research question 3

Which are pre-service teachers' main arguments for special or for inclusive schools? Three types of arguments were identified in the respondents' texts: arguments pro special-schools, arguments pro-inclusive school, and arguments both pro-special and pro-inclusive schools.

Arguments pro-special schools

Most of the pre-service teachers' arguments were pro-special school (see Table 4), categorized in two sub-types: pro special school and opposite (counterexample) to inclusive school (see Table 5).

The pro special-school arguments point out the benefits of SS for the child. The opposite to inclusive school arguments relate negatively to inclusion, giving examples of negative situations, as an argument of option for SS. Both pro special school and opposite to inclusive school themes contained two sub-categories – student-centred and

school-centred. The student-centred arguments put the accent on the benefits or disadvantages for the child with SEN, while the school centred arguments highlight the positive or negative aspects of special or inclusive school on child's development.

The student-centred arguments were in majority (see Table 5) outpointing the benefits of SS in terms of learning, individualization of intervention or socialization or the negative aspects of the IS in terms of lack of interest, mockery, rejection or academic unfulfillment. The most frequent argument in terms of school characteristics was the qualification of the teachers in SS and the lack of qualification in the IS.

Arguments for inclusive school

The pro-inclusive school arguments represent 40% of the total arguments and were categorized in two main sub-types: SEN student-centred, highlighting the benefits for the student with SEN, and typical student centred, underlining the benefits for their typical peers (see Table 6).

Table 5
Arguments pro special schools

Type of argument codes	Sub-codes	Coding examples (translated from Romanian)
Pro special schools	In relation to learning	'in special schools the children gain a lot of useful knowledge for life, to write, read or do math and use them in everyday life' [61]
	student centred Individualization of intervention	'all children with SEN are different and they can be educated in an individual manner only in special schools' [12]
	In relation to socialization	'in special schools all children have SEN, it's easier for them to make friends and to be accepted' [19]
	school centred Special teachers	'in special schools all the teachers know how to work with students with SEN' [122]
	Support technologies	'students with SEN may need special equipment to help them in the therapies they need and only in the special school there is such equipment' [137]
	School environment	'the special school is the most suitable place for children with SEN, the classes are arranged differently, they spend more time at school' [171]
Opposite (counter example) to inclusive school	student centred Attitudinal - Lack of interest	'in the inclusive school the students with SEN are not taken into account, they are left to do what they want' [71]
	Mockery	'in the inclusive school the special students are mocked, bullied, insulted and nobody defends them' [53]
	Attitudinal - Rejection	'in the inclusive schools they can be rejected by everyone, classmates, teachers while in the special school they are the centre of attention' [103]
	Academic	'the students are limited to a low level of knowledge; they can't keep up with their typical peers' [115]
	Poor teacher training	'almost none of the teachers know how to work with students with SEN' [44]
	school centred School readiness for inclusion	'Romania does not have the resources necessary for a proper management of inclusion, and the mentality of the population is very deficient in the chapter 'inclusion' [3]
	Allows teachers to teach typical students	'its' better in a class with all typical students because a child with SEN can have a bad behaviour and disrupt the class' [21]
Negative influence on students	'the children with SEN can behave badly, be aggressive and the typical students are at risk or can copy their behaviour' [2]	

Most of the arguments refer to the benefits of inclusion for the child with SEN, in terms of learning from typical peers, having a socialization environment or having better opportunities for learning. The arguments that highlight the benefits for the typical peers invoke the opportunity to learn diversity or pro-social behaviours.

Table 6
Arguments pro inclusive schools

Type of argument codes	Sub-codes/(frequencies)	Coding examples (translated from Romanian)
SEN Student centred	In relation to learning	'in the inclusive school they learn to have more patience, to listen, to participate' [175]
	In relation to social inclusion	'in the inclusive school the students with SEN harden and learn how to live in the normal world' [131].
	In relation to socialization	'in the inclusive school they can make friends for life' [99]
	Learn typical models from peers	'being around normal children is important for them, by imitation they will adapt better' [89]
Typical-Student centred	Typical students get used to diversity	'the classmates learn diversity, acceptance and how to behave around disabled people' [77] 'the other students from the class can learn how to be helpful, to care for the disadvantaged children' [117]
	Life values and principles	'we live in a society which is based on equality, integration, socialization' [129], 'every child deserves a chance in life' [22].

A special category is represented by life values and principles, where the pre-service teachers used as arguments for the IS moral and ethic arguments, of equality, respect for diversity or children rights.

Arguments for both special and inclusive schools

Table 7
Arguments for both special and inclusive schools

Type of argument codes	Coding examples (translated from Romanian)
Disability type	'it's not an easy choice, it depends on the type of disability, for example ASD is more difficult to include than another disability'[2]
Disability degree	'I cannot make a choice, the severe forms I think should learn in special schools, they can need a lot of thinks a normal school cannot provide, but the mild forms can learn in inclusive schools.'[11]
The best interest of the child	'I think that each case must be judged independently and the best solution for the child should be adopted' [75].

Although the respondents were only given two options – special or inclusive school – 10.28% found this unsatisfactory and proposed a more nuanced option – to individualize

the school orientation for each case (see Table 7), related to disability type, degree or the child's best interest.

Research question 4

In relation with research question number 4, how the arguments differ in relation prior experience with SEN, we analysed the responses and related them to the four categories of prior relations – FM, CL, AC and NR (see Table 4). For participants with FM, the pro-inclusive arguments prevailed (46.87%) while the pro-special school arguments were in majority for participants with AC, NR and CL. For all categories of prior relations, the same two arguments prevail – the individualization of intervention and special teachers. For the rest of the arguments there are no big differences either. The participants with CL made the most arguments favour of SS (including the anti-inclusive school arguments) but almost equal with the pro-inclusion school.

DISCUSSIONS

This research investigated the attitudes of pre-service teachers toward inclusion in Romania. The attitudes were studied on two levels – the choice between special and inclusive school and the underlying arguments for this option. This approach to examining teachers' beliefs is novel and is generalizable across contexts.

The college specialisation of the students as well as their prior relation with a person with SEN were taken into consideration.

In relation to research question 1, which investigated the preferences of pre-service teachers for SS or IS, despite compelling evidence of the positive effects of IE (Kalambouka et al., 2007; Ruijs & Peetsma, 2009), the results indicate that most of the participants choose SS, but with no significant difference in relation with the IS. Our findings are similar to the conclusions formulated by Gradea (2018), who stipulated that the Romanian educational system is still divided regarding SS and IS. Although the respondents could only choose between those two categories, there were some that felt the need for a more nuanced option, which would take into consideration the type and degree of disability or the better interest of the child.

The research question 2, analysed the pre-service teachers' preferences in relation to specialisation and to their prior relation with a person with SEN. The data suggest that the choice of profession do not influence pre-service students' attitude. The results are similar with the claims of Kraska and Boyle (2014) and AlMahdi and Bukamal (2019) who found no differences in pre-service teachers' attitudes in relation with their specialization. Our finding is also different from the results reported by Quandhi and Kurniawati (2019) that found that SE pre-service teachers have a more positive attitude than PPE majors. This difference in results may reside in the fact that in our study the pre-service teachers are at the beginning of their professional development and do not have specialised knowledge yet. The students in SE may believe that special education is practiced only in SS and not in IS, too. Of course, there is the need for more knowledge and abilities in the field to develop a correct understanding.

Our study demonstrates that the existence of a prior relation with a person with SEN has no statistically significant influence on the pre-service teachers' attitudes toward inclusion. Nevertheless, the closer the relation is, the more they prefer inclusive education. Most of the respondents with close relationships, FM or CL, chose IS. These findings are similar to those of Kraska and Boyle (2014).

The research question 3 was referring to the pre-service teachers' main arguments for special or for inclusive schools. In terms of arguments, the pro-special school arguments prevail. The SS is viewed as an educational environment conducive to individualized intervention and progress where there are specialised teachers and support technologies. Counterexamples relating to inclusive schools were given as arguments for special schools: the lack of teacher specialisation in special education and lack of school accessibility. In the line with this data are the conclusions drawn in other research (Ahrbeck & Felder, 2020; Efendi et al., 2022) that ascertain the need for more robust inclusion practices, including better support services. The main arguments pro-inclusive school were SEN student-centred – in terms of socialization or learning from typical peers.

In relation to research question 4 (how the arguments differ in relation prior experience with SEN), there are no statistically significant differences in the types of arguments brought depending on the prior relation with a person with SEN. The only exception to this is that FM made mostly pro-inclusive arguments unlike the other categories. As such, the closer the relation is, the more pro-inclusion the attitudes are. These findings are similar to those of Kraska and Boyle (2014).

We can analyse a special category of respondents, the ones with CL as a prior relation, because they are the ones that experienced inclusion first-hand. With no significant difference from the other categories (results in line with those of Schwab (2017), they mostly chose SS, which shows that they have negative (still in the majority), but also positive experiences of inclusion. Let's hope that for the future generations of pre-service teachers the proportion will reverse, thus indicating a qualitative change in inclusion.

The generalizability of results is limited by the fact that the participants were only from one Romanian university. Further research is needed to establish if those findings are similar in other Romanian or European universities.

It is beyond the scope of this study to establish how the inclusive attitudes change during the study years. It may be interesting for future studies to analyse this longitudinal transformation.

CONCLUSIONS

By analysing the pre-service teachers' attitudes toward inclusion at the beginning of their studies this study establishes that the percentage of students who see SS as the better alternative for students with SEN is only slightly higher than the percentage of students who chose inclusive schools. The data suggest that the choice of profession do not influence pre-service teachers' attitude.

The main argument for special schools was the individualization of intervention, the child's socialization, and learning taking centre stage. The main pro-inclusion argument was socialization. To increase pro-inclusive attitudes, we need to focus more on the academic progress and learning as the school is not just a social environment. Another strong pro-special school argument was the existence of specialised teachers and support technologies, given as a counterexample in inclusive school (lack of specialists and technologies). To foster better inclusion, we should invest in teacher training in special education and support technologies.

For the pre-service teachers, for a better understanding of inclusion, there is a need for specialised knowledge and abilities, not only for SE students but also for PE and PPE students, because they will be teaching students with SEN in inclusive classrooms. We should have more special education disciplines in the curriculum and, in the didactic courses, how to teach special students should be a frequent topic.

Finally, we determined that is a tendency (but not statistically significant) that the closer the relation to a person with SEN is, the more inclusive attitudes they have. We should create opportunities for the pre-service teachers to have first-hand experiences in teaching the students with SEN, by increasing the hours of professional practice, introducing practice in inclusive and special education (not only in the general education schools) for PPE students or encourage volunteering in IS. We have the chance to make school inclusion an agent of change at the societal level. If the school inclusion is experienced positively by typical classmates, their parents and teachers, we can train a generation of people with pro-social attitudes that can raise awareness about inclusive education for all.

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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