Chapter 16
Attitudes of Teachers Towards Diversity and Social Inclusion in Italy, Poland, Romania, and Spain

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ABSTRACT

The present study uses an international survey composed of several scales to compare diversity and social inclusion among 164 teachers and 317 students from universities and 216 practitioners. Participants belong to four countries: Italy, Poland, Romania, and Spain (IPRS). The results illustrate the same or different perspectives of teachers, students, and practitioners about competencies for 21st-century teachers, efficient professionals in inclusive education, the program of the Master's Degree in Education for diversity and social inclusion, and the components for a curriculum adaptation in IPRS. IPRS showed a clear difference among their groups of teachers, students, and practitioners. Limitations and future directions are included.

INTRODUCTION

Most studies from Eastern European countries have examined the attitudes toward inclusive education and people with disabilities held by parents, schoolteachers or college instructors, school administrators and students. Concerning teachers, the studies paid attention to the type of training in the field of inclusion, and the practical experience teachers had working with different kinds of students with special needs (Stepaniuk, 2019).

The study of attitudes towards people with "special educational needs" (SEN) represented 25% of the studies dedicated to inclusion in the English and Spanish languages. "The primary focus of attitudinal studies was examining self-reported data from surveys of pre-service or in-service teachers' perceptions toward inclusion of students with SEN" (Amor et al., 2019, p. 1283).

There is a lack of research on the link between educational inclusion, teaching effective competencies and training programmes; nor is there much research on this topic in relation to teachers, students and practitioners. There is a need for specific comparative study on Italy, Poland, Romania and Spain in social diversity and educational inclusion, as teachers coming to university need to be more effective in designing and adapting inclusive education curricula for university students. Therefore, this study explored different teacher groups' perceptions about social diversity and inclusive education. It considered how notions of human diversity and inclusive education are understood by teachers, professionals and students in four countries: Italy, Poland, Romania,and Spain (hereafter IPRS).

Italian Inclusive Education

The trend in evaluation and monitoring of the inclusive school system has focused on structural and procedural aspects aided by descriptive studies. They have provided information on practices or skills. They have left aside research aspects such as teachers (differentiating between classroom or subject teachers and support teachers), students' social goals, the performance of students with or without disabilities or other SEN, and the effectiveness of classroom practices and intervention (Marsili et al., 2021). Regarding teachers, two main topics of discussion studied these issues at the national level: "(1) the competences of the teachers and consequently, their training; and (2) collaboration and integration of roles and competencies" (Ianes et al., 2020, p. 255). Although teachers take joint responsibility for individualised activities, remedial teachers are often the only educational agents who carry out the individualised planning of classroom activities. (Ianes et al., 2014). The closure of schools and the social distancing caused by Covid has meant a change in the practices of teachers of students with differences to ensure the rights of students with disabilities and the connection with the school, despite the scarcity of spaces and technological resources, the poor level of parent-family communication and the lack of cooperation among parents (Colombo & Santagati, 2022).

Inclusion Education in Poland

Some research results offer parallels between the Polish and English education systems. In Poland, as in the UK, inclusion is a term used at the level of political rhetoric. However, inclusion in Poland, as in the UK, is one of those buzzwords in education that says everything but says nothing. The concept of inclusion is not well known in Poland, and inclusive education continues to dominate educational thinking. The integrated education in Poland happened in 1993. Inclusion in Poland worked well in the early stages of education but found difficulties integrating older children into mainstream educational settings (Starczewska et al., 2012). Poland is one of the countries affected by various migration problems. Social inclusion becomes a tool enabling inclusion of social groups of different ethnicities, cultures and religions in society. As part of the social inclusion process, support from other entities such as day care/kindergarten/school is also necessary (Sowa-Behtane, 2016). Brągiel and Kaniok's (2016) describes satisfaction with integrated education reported by 92% of parents whose children had disabilities. The success of inclusive education is closely related to the attitude of the teachers involved in the process.

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