



Ewa Domagała-Zyśk

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2227-7102>

John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin

e-mail: ewadom@kul.pl

Tomasz Knopik

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5253-7545>

Maria Curie-Skłodowska University, Lublin, Poland

e-mail: tomasz.knopik@umcs.eu

Attitudes Toward Inclusion Among Polish Primary School Teachers: A Strategic Factor in Implementing Inclusive Education

Abstract

The purpose of the article is to determine the dominant attitude toward inclusive education among primary school teachers in Poland and to explain the predictors of this attitude. Research conducted on a group of 71 teachers using the “Attitudes Toward Inclusive Education” questionnaire showed a moderately positive attitude toward inclusive education among teachers, with statistically significant differences between teachers of grades 1 to 3 and 4 to 8. The much more positive attitude among the teachers of lower grades is supported by their richer experience of working with students with special educational needs and their broader competences and qualifications in inclusive education. These results give an important perspective that should be considered when implementing the idea of inclusion in the Polish education system (mainly when preparing teachers for the profession) so as to ensure continuity in supporting the development of all students at every stage of their education – not only in grades 1 to 3.

Keywords: teacher education, attitude toward inclusion, special educational needs, Polish teachers, teacher training

Introduction

The Polish education system strives to create optimal conditions for learning at the school which is closest to each student's place of residence, including students with disabilities. The preamble to the Act of 14 December 2016, the Law on School Education, reads "the school should provide each student with the conditions necessary for their development and should prepare them to fulfill family and civic obligations based on the principles of solidarity, democracy, tolerance, justice, and freedom." Legislation that would fully implement the concept of inclusion in Polish kindergartens and schools is currently being consulted with stakeholders to create a comprehensive "high-quality education model for all students." This model, the result of more than two years of work from a team of experts appointed by the Ministry of National Education and supported by the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (2018–2020) analyzes in detail the conditions for the successful implementation of inclusion, referring to socio-cultural, economic, legal, and intrapersonal factors associated with individual beliefs about inclusive education held by teachers, parents, and other stakeholders. It is compatible with the worldwide trends of preparing teachers for inclusive education (Florian & Rouse, 2009; Florian & Camedda, 2020).

The quantitative characteristics of inclusive education must be supplemented with qualitative analyses and research into the effectiveness of such education for both students with special educational needs (SENs) and neurotypical students (Keffalinou & Donnelly, 2019). An important element of the developed *model of high-quality education for all students* is the preparation of systemic solutions that strengthen teachers' competences in working with students with diverse educational needs, since they are the ones who are key to the effectiveness of such support (see Avramidis et al., 2000; Balboni & Pedrabissi, 2000). The involvement of the teaching staff in strengthening their skills in the area of inclusion depends on their fundamental beliefs about inclusive education, among other things. "Inclusion largely depends on teachers' attitudes toward learners with SENs, their view of differences in classrooms and their willingness

to respond positively and effectively to those differences (EADSNE 2003, p. 15). At the same time, as numerous studies demonstrate, enriching experiences and expanding qualifications have a positive effect on teachers' attitude toward inclusive education (see Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; Boyle et al., 2013; Ahsan et al., 2012; Saloviita, 2020). The aim of this research is to examine the teaching staff's readiness (in terms of awareness and competence) to engage in the process of increasing the quality of education for all students. The analysis of the results and recommendations can be used to improve the quality of education not only in Poland, but also in other countries – especially those in the process of moving away from special education toward inclusive education.

Polish Path to Inclusion

The Polish education system consists of three main stages: pre-primary (kindergarten), primary (grades 1–8), and secondary (grades 9–12). Pre-primary education is available to – but not obligatory for – children from the age of 3 years. One year before entering school, a kindergarten education is obligatory and provided to every child by the state. Children start school at the age of 7 or – with their parents' consent – at the age of 6. There are three main types of schools: special, integrated, and mainstream (inclusive). Special schools in Poland are usually designed for three groups of children: 1) those with intellectual disabilities, 2) those with vision impairment, 3) and deaf and hard of hearing children. These are segregated schools, where the children have fewer opportunities for socializing with their non-disabled peers, but where qualified instructors and teachers very often make it a safe environment for the children to develop life skills and learn independence. The second category of schools is the integrated schools, where classes are smaller than in the mainstream schools. Usually, there is about 75% non-disabled students and 25% students with different disabilities in such schools. Lessons are conducted by two teachers: a lead teacher and a support teacher. Integration started in Poland only after the 1989 transformation and, admittedly, education

integration in many communities started the process of social integration on an unprecedented scale. The mainstream schools (lately often called inclusive) provide education for every child who lives in a given district. Parents still have the right to send their child to any other school, but the child will be admitted only if there are enough places. It is advised that children with SENs attend the school which is closest to their place of residence – where they would be admitted if they were neurotypical.

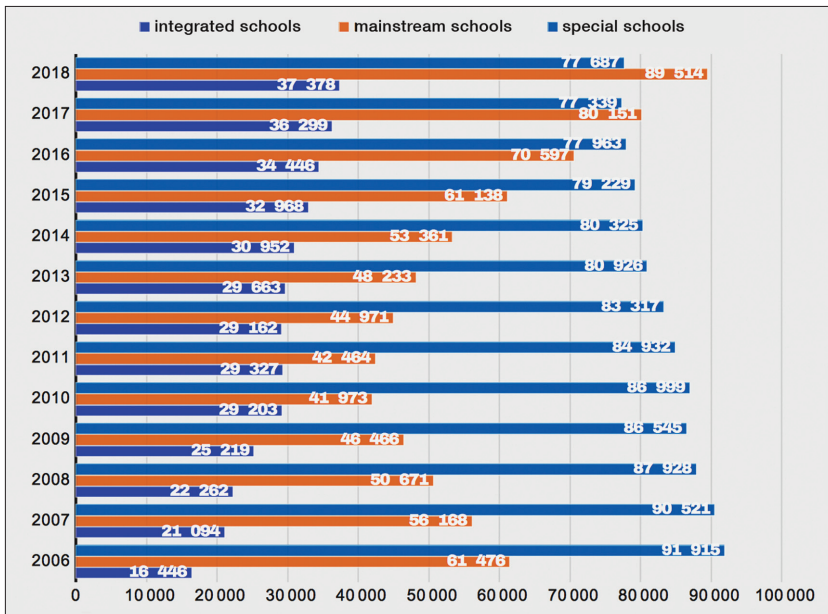
Statistical data show that in quantitative terms, inclusive education is already a fact in Poland. The following observations testify to this:

- a) For about a decade, the percentage of children receiving psychological and pedagogical support in kindergartens and public schools has been approx. 30%–35% of the population.
- b) In the 2018–2019 school year, 63% of the pupils with a statement of special educational needs (due to disability or social maladjustment) attended mainstream schools.
- c) Parents of children with a statement of special educational needs often decide to send their children to a mainstream school (instead of a special school), seeing it as an appropriate place for their child (detailed data for the period 2006–2018 are presented in Figure 1).

The research to date indicates that Polish teachers hold ambiguous attitudes toward the idea of children and adolescents with SENs learning alongside their peers. Out of 86 articles from 2013 to 2016 on the education of students with SENs from 11 Polish journals in the field of pedagogy (6 of which were in the field of special education), 10 articles were found on teacher attitudes (Domagała-Zyśk, 2018a). The results show that between 2000 and 2017, the level of acceptance of students with SENs in integrated and mainstream classes increased significantly in Poland. The highest level of acceptance (in various studies, it is usually above 60%) concerns children with mild motor and/or intellectual disabilities, visually impaired children, and children with hearing impairments. The least accepted are mentally ill children and children with moderate or profound intellectual disabilities. Skura (2019) also found that 68% of mainstream

Fig. 1. Participation of students with a statement of special educational needs in special schools, integrated schools, and mainstream schools.

Source: Ministry of Education, Educational Information System



school teachers and 65% of integrated school teachers ($N=225$) admitted that they would not like to work with students with moderate or severe intellectual disabilities. These results are consistent with the results of international research. Both the review of 28 studies conducted from 1958 to 1995 in the USA, Australia, and Canada by Scruggs and Mastropieri (1996) and the meta-analysis by de Boer et al. (2011) showed that an overall positive attitude toward inclusion was held by about 60%–70% of teachers, with a clearly higher indicator of teachers' acceptance of inclusion per se and a lower willingness to accept students with severe disabilities into their classes.

Recently, Chrzanowska (2018, 2019) conducted research on the attitudes of special kindergarten teachers toward inclusion, investigating the relationship between teachers' seniority and their attitudes toward

inclusion. Among a group of 127 special kindergarten teachers, those with fewer than 10 years of professional experience showed more positive attitudes toward inclusive education than the teachers with more seniority (Chrzanowska, 2019). Most teachers with less seniority (75%) indicated that inclusive education can be beneficial for students with SENs, especially for those with intellectual disabilities and hearing or vision impairments. According to Chrzanowska (2018), integrated kindergarten teachers, regardless of their seniority, were positive about integrated teaching of disabled students (64% of teachers with 10 years of professional experience or less and 60% of teachers with 24 or more years of teaching experience) and students with developmental difficulties (83% and 75%, respectively). These numbers indicate that teachers with less seniority were more supportive of inclusion.

An analysis of the pedagogical study programs and postgraduate study programs on offer currently or in the past three decades shows an evident increase in issues related to inclusive education. It can therefore be assumed that the new generations of teachers are better prepared for inclusion in terms of content and mentality, although the issue of the relationship between the age of teachers and their attitudes toward inclusion is not clear (Galaterou & Alexander-Stamatios, 2017). Research shows that individual factors can mediate teacher training and preparation: Woodcock and Jones (2020) reported that research attitudes toward classroom inclusion have been affected by individual factors, such as expressed affection and other relational factors. Whirter et al. discovered that teachers who believe an inclusive classroom is an effective way to teach all students reported higher levels of teacher self-efficacy than those who did not (Whirter et al., 2016).

More recent studies on attitudes toward students with SENs included students with autism (Nowakowska & Pisula, 2018). University students in teacher training programs ($N=70$) and teachers ($N=70$), despite the current 12 years' worth of knowledge about autism, thought that teaching children with autism or Asperger syndrome in special classes was more appropriate than teaching them in mainstream classes (53% of students and 64% of teachers). The respondents also expressed concern

that children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) would experience learning difficulties, distract other students from learning, and be discriminated against by non-disabled students (over 70% of the responses in each group).

An analysis of the methodology of research conducted in Poland revealed that it mainly relied on authors' own questionnaires, whose psychometric properties were not verified. Before beginning our research, we carefully examined the existing tools for measuring attitudes toward inclusion and checked their Polish version in a pilot study: "Attitudes Toward Inclusive Education Scale" (Wilczenski, 1995), "Differentiated Attitudes Toward Inclusion Scale" (Lübke et al., 2018), "The Sentiments, Attitudes, and Concerns about Inclusive Education Revised (Forlin et al., 2011)", "Teacher Self-Efficacy for Inclusive Practices Scale" (Sharma et al., 2012), and the "Scale of Teachers' Attitudes Toward Inclusive Classrooms" (Nishimura & Busse, 2015). Though they were designed relatively recently and the Polish education system is not very different from Western ones, the instruments did not answer the problems we wanted to pose in our research. Indeed, some of their questions can be regarded as promoting segregation: in some questions teachers are asked which group of students should be integrated in mainstream education – and which not so much. We think this way of asking as building unnecessary biases and space for comparing the assets and difficulties of one group of students with disabilities or special needs – against other groups. This revealed the need to construct a new measure with good psychometric properties that would measure teachers' attitudes toward inclusion in a contemporary context. An important aspect of the uniqueness of Polish education philosophy is the explicit consideration of the education process as consisting of both cognitive education and moral education – supporting the students to form attitudes towards other people and different elements of reality around : this dyad should also be captured in the measurement.

Method

Aims of the Study

In connection with the changes in Polish education connected with the implementation of the model of inclusive education, it was considered important to conduct a series of studies that would identify the most sensitive areas of risk. One such area is the teaching staff's readiness (in terms of their awareness and competence) to engage in the process of increasing the quality of education for all students.

The purpose of the present study was to answer the following research questions:

- Q1: What is the attitude of Polish primary school teachers toward inclusive education?
- Q2: Are there significant differences in attitudes toward inclusion between teachers in the first (grades 1–3) and second educational stages (grades 4–8)?
- Q3: What is the relationship between teachers' seniority, work experience with students with SENs, qualifications in inclusive education, and attitudes toward inclusion?
- Q4: Which variables best explain teachers' attitudes toward inclusion?

Participants

A total of 71 teachers (39 women and 32 men) employed in 14 public primary schools comprised the study group. The schools are located in three voivodeships¹: Lublin (6), Lesser Poland (4), and Mazovian (4). Eight of the schools were city schools, while the remaining six were rural schools. There were 33 early childhood education teachers (grades 1–3) and 38 teachers teaching specific subjects (Polish, English, Mathematics, Biology, History, Chemistry and Physics). The questionnaires were distributed and collected between September and December 2019 using paper and electronic versions of the research instruments.

¹ This is the highest-level administrative unit of Poland.

Instruments

Two measures were used in the research:

1. "Attitudes Toward Inclusive Education Scale" (AIE; Knopik, 2022) – the respondents are asked to rate 10 statements related to inclusion on a four-point scale. A validation study conducted among 98 primary school teachers showed high internal consistency of the measure (Cronbach's $\alpha=0.92$) and satisfactory test stability (Spearman's $\rho=0.81$; test-retest, measurements 10 weeks apart). Additionally, the test differentiated teachers who explicitly identified themselves as supporters ($M=32.12$) from opponents of inclusion ($M=20.24$) during the consultation meeting (differential validity). The version of the scale used in the study is the result of a two-stage reduction and modification of the statements by a group of five competent judges (experts in the field of education); only items with a content validity ratio of at least 0.99 were selected (Lawshe, 1975); the factor analysis confirmed the homogeneous structure of this construct, as no factors were distinguished.
2. The author's own questionnaire, containing questions about gender, level of teaching (first educational stage or second), seniority, qualifications in inclusive education (a description is presented in Table 1), and experience in working with students with SENs in the past three years (one point for each example cited). The respondents were also asked to indicate the type of SEN according to the classification in the "Regulation of the Polish Ministry of National Education on the principles of the organization of psychological and pedagogical assistance" from August 9, 2017. The proportions of various types of SENs of students, as indicated by the respondents, is presented in Table 2.

Table 1. Point values for variable qualifications related to inclusive education

Form of acquiring qualifications in inclusive education	Score (points)
Training on the topic, min. 5 hours	1
Training on the topic, over 5 hours	2
Training course	5
Postgraduate or Bachelor's degree program on the topic	10
Conference or seminar on the topic	2
Other forms	1

Table 2. Experience working with students with SENs

SEN category	Percentage of the students with the SEN, as reported by the respondents
Disabled students with – ASD or AS – intellectual disability – motor disability – sensory disability	Total: 35.2% – 16.2% – 8.2% – 5.4% – 5.4%
Students with language impairments	16.8%
Students with specific learning difficulties	16.2%
Talented students	12.2%
Students at risk of social maladjustment or socially maladjusted	8.4%
Students with chronic illnesses	6.2%
Bilingual students	5.0%

Results

The average attitude toward inclusive education in the study group had a value of 26.44, which indicates a moderately positive attitude (sten

score of 6, according to the temporary norms developed for the AIE scale). The attitude of women and men were at similar levels, as confirmed by the test of significance ($t=1.55$, $df=69$, $p=0.127$). However, significant differences were found when comparing the attitude toward inclusive education of teachers teaching grades 1–3 and grades 4–8. The former showed an above-average positive attitude toward inclusion ($M=30.9$, which indicates a sten score of 8 or 9), while the latter had a moderately negative attitude ($M = 22.55$, indicating a sten score of 4). The differences between the groups also concerned qualifications and experience: the early childhood education teachers had both higher qualifications and richer experience in the field of inclusive education. There were no differences in terms of seniority in the teaching profession between the two groups.

The analysis of correlation coefficients (Table 3) revealed that the strongest positive relationship was between experience and attitudes toward inclusive education (Pearson's $r=0.54$); there was a slightly weaker correlation between qualifications and such attitudes (Pearson's $r=0.45$). No significant relationship was found between seniority and attitudes toward inclusion as measured by the AIE, although the negative Pearson's r value suggests that teachers with more seniority may have slightly less positive attitudes toward inclusive education.

Table 3. Correlations between the variables of seniority, qualifications, experience, and attitude toward inclusive education

		AIE
Seniority	Pearson's r	-0.189
	Significance (two-tailed)	0.114
Qualifications	Pearson's r	0.451
	Significance (two-tailed)	<0.001
Experience	Pearson's r	0.542
	Significance (two-tailed)	<0.001

After five variables were introduced as potential predictors of teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education, the regression analysis showed that three variables explained 51.4% of the intensity of the dependent variable: the level of teaching, experience and the respondents' seniority (Table 4). Interestingly, qualifications were not included in the model, while experience was a stronger predictor, shaping attitudes to a greater extent (in the behavioral aspect of attitude).

Table 4. Stepwise regression analysis

Model	R	R ²	R ² change	Standard error of the estimate
1	0.627 ^a	0.393	0.384	5.253
2	0.682 ^b	0.465	0.449	4.968
3	0.731 ^c	0.535	0.514	4.667
a. Predictors: (Constant), stage				
b. Predictors: (Constant), stage, experience				
c. Predictors: (Constant), stage, experience, seniority				

Discussion

The study shows that teachers' general attitude toward inclusive education is moderately positive. About one third (30.9%) of the respondents showed a negative attitude toward inclusion, which is consistent with the results of international research (e.g., Saloviita, 2020), indicating a consistent percentage of teachers opposed to inclusive education for over three decades (de Boer et al., 2011). Presumably, this regularity is conditioned by some teachers' fundamental beliefs about the essence of education, which are not susceptible to any changes, despite various forms of promoting the idea of inclusion. This is evidenced by the assessment of the first item on the AIE scale, "The education system should strive to create conditions that enable all students to study in the mainstream

school.” In the group of teachers with a negative attitude toward inclusion, this statement obtained the lowest score ($M=1.68$), while among the remaining respondents – proponents of inclusion – the average score was 3.12. This indicates a basic conflict between teachers’ views of the function of education and the gradation of its axiological sources, for example, the place that equality and equity have in the subjective hierarchy of values (see Kwieciński, 2009). It seems that inclusion training and awareness-raising activities aiming at changing teachers’ attitudes toward inclusion (which have been widespread in our country in recent years) have not been as effective as they were thought to be. These results call for future research on the correlations between attitudes toward inclusion and deeper awareness-raising work that would rethink the basics of inclusive education for diverse groups.

The results show visible differences in attitudes toward inclusive education between teachers of early childhood education (grades 1–3) and subject-based education (grades 4–8). The much more positive attitude of the first group toward inclusive education is probably due to the slightly different nature of the tasks performed by teachers at the two educational stages in primary schools. While the lower grades are usually taught by one teacher in the same classroom following a similar daily rhythm, higher grades have lessons that take place in different classrooms, are taught by different teachers using different teaching styles, and much more often have unannounced changes in the timetable. This can cause great discomfort for SEN students (especially those with ASD); hence the teachers’ fear of the effectiveness of inclusion and its positive impact on them and the whole group of students. Students in higher grades are more often bullied by their peers and enjoy less support from their teachers, who assume greater independence and self-reliance among their students, though in the case of students with SENs this is not always true (see Symes & Humphrey, 2010; Ross-Hill, 2009). The Polish curriculum emphasizes concern for students’ sustainable development in grades 1–3 (teachers should help students develop cognitively, emotionally, socially, and in personality), whereas in the higher grades the main focus should be directly related to knowledge. This directs the teachers’ work: maintaining a clear

focus on psychological and pedagogical assistance in early childhood education and teaching specific subjects at the second stage. This social mechanism is well reflected in the script of a teacher in grades 1–3 being a “motherly” figure, preparing pupils for professional education by learning subjects (Czaja-Chudyba, 2010), while a teacher in grades 4–8 is seen as an expert in “real” teaching within scientific disciplines, where there is limited space for therapeutic or developmental support. This is also confirmed by data presented by the Polish Ministry of National Education (2019), which show that about 82% of the activities related to psychological and pedagogical support in primary schools are done in grades 1–3.

On the one hand, this can be considered a natural consequence of linking support activities with students’ developmental challenges (i.e., learning to read is a challenge, and difficulty in meeting this challenge requires support), which are especially difficult at the beginning of school education. On the other hand, subsequent stages of students’ development also imply specific problems that are probably neglected in the course of an education that is reduced to subject teaching. Moreover, disabled students developing neuroatypically do not suddenly lose their diverse needs; these needs simply cease to be noticed at school, which has serious consequences for these students’ further education (Domagała-Zyśk et al., 2017). Therefore, the key is that in Polish schools the therapeutic and supportive role of subject teachers is not emphasized enough (either in the core curriculum or during initial teacher education). These results indicate an area for further research and awareness inclusion training, since it seems that teachers limit the notion of the child’s belonging and inclusion to younger children. They seem not to follow the recommendation in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (Article 24) that inclusive education should be offered to students at every stage of education, not only to the youngest ones. This may also reflect teachers’ anxiety over the education reform in Poland (in 2018), which extended primary education from 6 to 8 years and closed the junior high schools, which had offered segregated education. This has led to more children with SENs attending regular primary schools for 8 years instead of 6, a fact which may be greatly concerning to subject teachers.

The results also show significant positive relationships between a teacher's qualifications, experience, and attitudes toward inclusive education, which confirms research from other countries (Burke & Sutherland, 2004; Emam & Mohamed, 2011; Avramidis & Kalyva, 2007) and indicates that direct contact with students with SENs helps educators to better understand their needs and capabilities and to develop a positive attitude toward their inclusion. In the literature on the subject, however, contrasting results can also be found: Dias and Cadime (2016) reported that previous teaching experience with students with SENs was a predictor of a less positive attitude toward inclusion in a group of Portuguese teachers ($N = 68$). Likewise, in the present research these variables clearly differentiated the teachers in grades 1–3 from those in grades 4–8. The former showed both better preparation for inclusive education and more experience working with students with SENs. It can therefore be concluded that competences strengthen teachers' agency and equip them with practical tools to create an inclusive classroom on a daily basis. The scope of professional interaction with students with SENs provides further examples that confirm the legitimacy and feasibility of implementing inclusive education. It would be interesting to explore whether the teachers in grades 4–8 actually have such limited experience working with students with SENs, or whether it is related to the fact that such students are not identified in the class. For example, a detailed analysis of the results showed that only 12 teachers of grades 4–8 had worked with talented students in the last three years. Since the population contains 16%–20% talented people, these results should be considered evidence of teachers' lack of competence and commitment to the process of identifying students' individual resources (see Dyrda, 2000). Research also shows that in forming positive attitudes toward disability, it is not only the scope of experience that counts, but the nature of it (Enns et al., 2010). This means that even when subject teachers have extensive experience teaching students with SENs, if it is marked by protracted difficulties and a lack of support, they may be discouraged rather than encouraged to become further involved in inclusive education. The results may reflect a vicious circle of negative teachers' experience with the inclusion of SEN students leading to the decision to segregate classes

at the subject teaching stage (grades 4–8). This further results in less extensive exposure to teaching SEN students, which in turn leads to less experience and more negative attitudes toward inclusion.

Insufficiently trained teachers of grades 4-8 for inclusive education also results from an ineffective system of acquiring teaching qualifications by university students (or graduates) of non-pedagogical specialties (e.g., mathematics or geography). The issues of working with a class with diverse educational needs and identifying individual resources and developmental difficulties constitute only a small part of the degree programs' curricula (app. 10% of the content is devoted to psychology and pedagogy). The ineffective teacher preparation system, both initial teacher education and continual professional development, is further worsened by the typical model of the courses and training programs, in which the goal is to provide teachers with knowledge about a specific disorders only (e.g., only about students with ASD or about students with visual impairment). This limited scope often deters teachers, who think they must know an impairment in depth to be able to work with a student who has it. Teachers comment that embracing inclusion would amount to them changing their profession from a subject teacher to a special education pedagogue. This kind of approach seems to be more divisive than supportive in preparing teachers for inclusive education (Cochran-Smith & Dudley-Marling, 2012). It seems that a more effective model would be to prepare the teacher to work with diverse students within the context of regular classes, taking the perspective of reconciling the tension between excellence and equity (Florian & Rouse, 2009) and using the universal design model. This model prepares the learning process so that it can be used by the largest group of students without the need for specialized adjustments or modifications (e.g., videos with subtitles help students with various special needs: hearing loss, autism, dyslexia, language difficulties, etc.; see Domagała-Zyśk, 2018b). Such a change in the teaching paradigm could give subject teachers a greater sense of professional agency and confidence.

The regression equation identified three predictors of teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education in the study group. In addition to the ed-

educational stage and experience, the model included seniority. Interestingly, the results point to a certain paradox, as the relationship between seniority and positive attitudes toward inclusion, although not statistically significant, was negative. At the same time, experience is naturally related to seniority and subsequent years of work should – as a rule – expand this experience. A detailed data analysis, however, shows that the nine teachers with the most seniority (over 25 years) had an extremely negative attitude toward inclusive education ($M=19.25$) and had less experience working with students with SENs ($M=18.75$) than teachers with less seniority ($M=22.40$). This is probably the result of these people's attachment to the segregated education model that dominated during most of their professional life.

Implications

The results can be used to formulate recommendations for strengthening the conditions conducive to implementing inclusion, not only in the context of Polish education, but also probably in any other education system with the principle of putting equal opportunity into social practice:

1. Supplement pedagogical preparation programs in non-teaching university specialties (such as biology, geography and foreign language departments) with an extensive module on inclusive education in different classes following the model of universal design.
2. Strengthen the involvement of universities (as part of the “third mission,” for example) in developing the competences of pedagogical staff in kindergartens and schools in the field of inclusion: transfer between science, current research, and educational practitioners, based on cross-disciplinary and interdisciplinary collaboration of many kinds (see Cochran-Smith & Dudley-Marling, 2012) or intentionally linking coursework with field experience (Walton & Rusznyak, 2020).
3. Create training schools where pedagogy students can gain experience and knowledge in the field of inclusive education by working with

students with diverse developmental needs and being mentored by experienced, instructionally effective teachers (see Richmond, 2019).

4. Activate teachers' networks of cooperation and self-education in the fields of special education (see Spear et al., 2018) and inclusive education in order to share good practices and cooperate on emerging difficulties on an ongoing basis.
5. Cooperate more with special schools (Blanton et al., 2018) and organizations that work with children and young people with SENs, which would allow pre-service teachers and teachers to learn about people with disabilities, better understand their needs and capabilities, and start cooperating with these children's parents.

Limitations

The study was conducted on a non-representative group of teachers with appropriate care to ensure the sociodemographic representativeness of the sample. This is an important argument in the discussion on the standards of teacher education which is currently taking place in Poland. This study should be treated as an introduction to further, extended research that could constitute a permanent component of the monitoring system for inclusive education in Poland.

Ethics

The Institute of Pedagogy KUL Research Ethics Committee approved the study. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, who were free to withdraw from the study at any time; all data was rendered anonymous.

Data

The full data set is available on request from the first author.

References

- Ahsan, M. T., Sharma, U., & Deppeler, J. M. (2012). Exploring pre-service teachers' perceived teaching efficacy, attitudes and concerns about inclusive education in Bangladesh. *International Journal of Whole Schooling*, 8(2), 1–20.
- Avramidis, E., Bayliss, P., & Burden, R. (2000). Student teachers' attitudes toward the inclusion of children with special educational needs in the ordinary school. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 16(3), 277–293.
- Avramidis, E., & Kalyva, E. (2007). The influence of teaching experience and professional development on Greek teachers' attitudes toward inclusion. *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, 22(4), 367–389.
- Avramidis, E., & Norwich, B. (2002). Teachers' attitudes toward integration/inclusion: A review of the literature. *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, 17(2), 129–147.
- Balboni, G., & Pedrabissi, L. (2000). Attitudes of Italian teachers and parents toward school inclusion of students with mental retardation: The role of experience. *Education and Training in Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities*, 35(2), 148–159.
- Blanton, L. P., Pugach, M. C., & Boveda, M. (2018). Interrogating the intersections between general and special education in the history of teacher education reform. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 69(4), 354–366.
- Boyle, C., Topping, K., & Jindal-Snape, D. (2013). Teachers' attitudes toward inclusion in high schools. *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice*, 19(5), 527–542.
- Burke, K., & Sutherland, C. (2004). Attitudes toward inclusion: Knowledge vs. experience. *Education*, 125, 163–172.
- Chrzanowska, I. (2018). Opinions of teachers from integrated preschools, regarding the chances of success for inclusive action regarding particular groups of students and the professional experience. *Interdisciplinary Contexts of Special Pedagogy*, 20, 91–114.
- Chrzanowska I. (2019). Inclusive education in the opinion of the teachers from special pre-schools, regarding the chances of success of the inclusive actions toward particular groups of students, education participants, and teachers' seniority. *Interdisciplinary Contexts of Special Pedagogy*, 25, 127–149.

-
- Cochran-Smith, M., & Dudley-Marling, C. (2012). Diversity in teacher education and special education: The issues that divide. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 63(4), 237–244.
- Czaja-Chudyba, I. (2010). O kompetencjach kreatywno-krytycznych nauczyciela edukacji wczesnoszkolnej. [On the creative-critical competence of the early childhood education teacher]. In M. Klaczak (Ed.), *Integracja edukacyjna. Oczekiwania i rzeczywistość* (pp. 93–114). Wydawnictwo Naukowe UP.
- de Boer, A., Pijl, S., & Minnaert, A. (2011). Regular classroom schoolteachers' attitudes toward inclusive education: A review of the literature. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 15(3), 331–353. doi: 10.1080/13603110903030089
- Dias, P. C., & Cadime, I. (2016). Effects of personal and professional factors on teachers' attitudes toward inclusion in preschool. *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, 31(1), 111–123.
- Domagała-Zyśk, E., Knopik T., Oszwa U. (2017). *Diagnoza funkcjonalna rozwoju społeczno-emocjonalnego uczniów w wieku 9–13 lat*. [A functional diagnosis of the socio-emotional development of pupils aged 9–13 years]. Ośrodek Rozwoju Edukacji.
- Domagała-Zyśk, E. (2018a). *Uczniowie z niepełnosprawnościami w szkołach ogólnodostępnych i integracyjnych w polskich badaniach naukowych. Część I – artykuły z polskich czasopism naukowych 2013–2017*. [Pupils with disabilities in mainstream and integrated schools in Polish scientific research. Part I – articles from Polish scientific journals 2013–2017]. MEN.
- Domagała-Zyśk, E. (2018b). Integral development of students with special educational needs in inclusive education from a personalistic perspective. *Paedagogia Christiana*, 2(42), 181–194.
- Dyrda, B. (2000). *Syndrom Nieadekwatnych Osiągnięć jako niepowodzenie szkolne uczniów zdolnych. Diagnoza i terapia*. [Inadequate Achievement Syndrome as school failure in gifted students. Diagnosis and therapy]. Oficyna Wydawnicza „Impuls”.
- Emam, M. M., & Mohamed, A. H. (2011). Preschool and primary school teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education in Egypt: The role of experience and self-efficacy. *Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 29(1), 976–985.

- Enns E. E., Boudreault, P., & Palmer, C. (2010). Examining the relationship between genetic counselors' attitudes toward deaf people and the genetic counseling session. *Journal of Genetic Counseling, 19*(2), 61–173.
- EADSNE (European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education). (2003). *Key principles for special needs education. Recommendations for policy makers.*
- Florian, L., Camedda, D. (2020). Enhancing teacher education for inclusion. *European Journal of Teacher Education, 43*(1), 4–8.
- Florian, L., & Rouse, M. (2009). The inclusive practice project in Scotland. *Teacher Education for Inclusive Education, 25*(4), 594–601.
- Forlin, C., Earle, C., Loreman, T., & Sharma, U. (2011). The sentiments, attitudes and concerns about inclusive education revised (SACIE-R) scale for measuring pre-service teachers' perceptions about inclusion. *Exceptionality Education International, 21*(2–3), 50–65.
- Galaterou, J., Alexander-Stamatios, A. (2017). Teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education: The role of job stressors and demographic parameters. *International Journal of Special Education, 32*(4), 643–658.
- Keffalinou, A., & Donnelly, V. (2019). Rozwój edukacji włączającej w Europie: strategie mające na celu podnoszenie osiągnięć wszystkich uczących się. [Developing inclusive education in Europe: strategies to raise the achievement of all learners]. In I. Chrzanowska & G. Szumski (Eds.), *Edukacja włączająca w przedszkolu i szkole* (pp. 26–41). Fundacja Rozwoju Systemu Edukacji.
- Knopik, T. (2022). *Kapitał różnorodności. Doradztwo zawodowe dla uczniów ze zróżnicowanymi potrzebami edukacyjnymi.* [The capital of diversity. Vocational guidance for students with diverse educational needs]. ORE.
- Kwieciński, Z. (2009). Wolność czy równość w edukacji?. [Freedom or equality in education?]. In A. Męczkowska-Christiansen & P. Mikiewicz (Eds.), *Idee – diagnozy – nadzieje: szkoła polska a idee równości*, (pp. 19–24). Wydawnictwo Naukowe Dolnośląskiej Szkoły Wyższej.
- Lawshe, C. H. (1975). A quantitative approach to content validity. *Personnel psychology, 28*, 563–575.
- Lübke, L., Pinquart, M., & Schwinger, M. (2018). How to measure teachers' attitudes toward inclusion: Evaluation and validation of the "Differentiated

-
- Attitudes Toward Inclusion Scale" (DATIS). *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, 34(3), 297–311.
- Nishimura, T. S., & Busse, R. (2015). A factor analytic validation study of teachers' attitudes toward inclusive classrooms (STATIC). *International Journal of Special Education*, 30(3), 1–8.
- Nowakowska, I., Pisula, E. (2018). Wiedza na temat zaburzeń ze spektrum autyzmu i opinie dotyczące edukacji włączającej dzieci z tymi zaburzeniami u nauczycieli szkół podstawowych oraz studentów kierunków nauczycielskich. [Knowledge about autism spectrum disorders (ASD) and opinions on inclusive education of children with ASD among primary school teachers and pedagogical faculties' students]. *Człowiek – Niepełnosprawność – Społeczeństwo*, 2(40), 29–48.
- Richmond, G., Bartell, T. G., Floden, R. E., & Jones, N. D. (2019). How research sheds light on the pivotal role of mentors in teacher preparation. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 71(1), 6–8.
- Ross-Hill, R. (2009). Teachers' attitudes toward inclusion practices and special needs students. *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs*, 9(3), 131–146.
- Saloviita, T. (2020). Attitudes of teachers toward inclusive education in Finland. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, 64(2), 270–282.
- Scruggs, T. E., & Mastropieri, M. A. (1996). Teacher perceptions of mainstreaming inclusion, 1958–1995: A research synthesis. *Exceptional Children*, 63(1), 59–74.
- Sharma, U., Loreman, T., & Forlin, C. (2012). Measuring teacher efficacy to implement inclusive practices. *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs*, 12(1), 12–21. doi: 10.1111/j.1471-3802.2011.01200.x
- Skura, M. (2019). Kompetencje osobiste i społeczne nauczycieli szkół integracyjnych, ogólnodostępnych i specjalnych a ich chęć pracy z uczniami z niepełnosprawnością intelektualną. [Personal and social competences of integration, public and special school teachers and their willingness to work with students with intellectual disabilities]. *Niepełnosprawność. Dyskursy Pedagogiki Specjalnej*, 36, 43–62.
- Spear, C. F., Piasta, S. B., Yeoman-Maldonado, G., Ottley, J. R., Justice, L. M., & O'Connell, A. A. (2018). Early childhood general and special educators: An examination of similarities and differences in beliefs, knowledge, and practice. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 69(3), 263–277.

-
- Symes, W., & Humphrey, N. (2010). Peer-group indicators of social inclusion among pupils with autistic spectrum disorders (ASD) in mainstream secondary schools: A comparative study. *School Psychology International, 31*(5), 478–494. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0143034310382496>
- Walton, E., Rusznyak, L. (2020). Cumulative knowledge-building for inclusive education in initial teacher education. *European Journal of Teacher Education, 43*(1), 18–37.
- Whirter, P. T., Brandes, J. A., Williams-Diehm, K. L., & Hackett, S. (2016). Interpersonal and relational orientation among pre-service educators: Differential effects on attitudes toward inclusion of students with disabilities. *Teacher Development, 20*(1), 1–17, DOI: 10.1080/13664530.2015.1111930
- Wilczenski, F. L. (1995). Development of a scale to measure attitudes toward inclusive education. *Educational and Psychological Measurement, 55*, 291–299.
- Woodcock, S., & Jones, G. (2020). Examining the interrelationship between teachers' self-efficacy and their beliefs toward inclusive education for all. *Teacher Development, 24*(4), 583–602. DOI: 10.1080/13664530.2020.1803957