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# INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN TIMES OF MIGRATION: PROBLEMS AND CHALLENGES

## EDUKACJA INKLUZYJNA W DOBIE MIGRACJI – PROBLEMY I WYZWANIA

**Streszczenie:** Edukacja inkluzyjna ma na celu włączenie uczniów ze specjalnymi potrzebami edukacyjnymi (SPE) do nurtu kształcenia ogólnodostępnego, stanowiąc w Polsce alternatywę dla edukacji integracyjnej i specjalnej. Obejmuje edukację uczniów zarówno z odchyleniami dodatnimi, jak i ujemnymi, z różnymi cechami, np. niepełnosprawnością czy trudnościami adaptacyjnymi, w tym uczniów-migrantów. W procesie edukacyjnym tej grupy uczniów istotną rolę odgrywają rodzice, dlatego nieodzowne jest współdziałanie szkoły z rodziną ucznia ze SPE. W artykule poruszono problemy i wyzwania edukacji inkluzyjnej w kontekście migracji, związane ze współdziałaniem szkoły podstawowej z rodziną ucznia ze SPE, szczególnie rodzicami uczniów z orzeczeniem o potrzebie kształcenia specjalnego. Przeprowadzone badania dotyczyły czynników determinujących proces współdziałania, takich jak zachowania rodziców uczniów ze SPE wobec nauczycieli. Wyniki badań wskazują na występowanie negatywnych zachowań wpływających na przebieg procesu współdziałania.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Edukacja włączająca, specjalne potrzeby edukacyjne, migracja i edukacja, edukacja integracyjna

**Abstract:** Inclusive education aims to include students with special educational needs (SEN) into the mainstream educational system, providing an alternative to integrated education and special education in Poland. It includes the education of students with both positive and negative deviations encompassing different characteristics such as disabilities or adaptation difficulties, for example among migrant students. Parents play a crucial role in the educational process of this group, making the interaction between the school and the families of students with SEN indispensable. This paper addresses the problems and challenges of inclusive education in the age of migration, focusing on the interaction of the primary school with the family

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of a student with SEN, particularly parents of students with a referral for special education. The research examined determinants of the interaction process, such as the behavior of parents of students with SEN towards teachers. The results of the study revealed the presence of negative behaviors that influence the course of the interaction process.

## Introduction

At its core, the idea of inclusion opposes the marginalization and exclusion of an individual for any reason, acknowledging the heterogeneous characteristics of each person. However, the mechanisms leading to inclusion should be identified, as ideological and philosophical reflection or good intentions alone, are not sufficient grounds for the realizing the idea of inclusion (Chrzanowska 2019). This principle also applies to the field of education, where the inclusion of students with special educational needs in mainstream education is being pursued. This is because inclusion is understood as full participation of this group of students in social and educational integration in the broadest sense.

In Poland, inclusive education is one of three forms of education available to students with special needs, alongside with integrated and special education. The special (segregated) form of education is carried out in special schools, kindergartens, divisions, and other facilities. This form of education takes place in homogeneous groups and is characterized by a complete separation of students with and without disabilities.

In Poland, integrated education is implemented in mainstream kindergartens with integrated divisions, integrated kindergartens, mainstream schools with integrated classes and integrated schools, or integrated divisions within mainstream schools. The education of both groups of students is facilitated using specialized interaction methods. Integrated education represents a transition between special education and inclusive education, with this third form of education being considered a path towards full inclusion.

Inclusive education is part of the broader mainstream of social inclusion, which assumes equal access to education (Nikula et al. 2021). It embodies the idea of full participation in education for all students regardless of their diverse characteristics, such as race, origin, social and economic status, health status or disability. Inclusive education implies the inclusion of students with different characteristics, e.g. disabilities, in all areas of social life, particularly in education. It is supported by anti-discrimination movements, with initiatives led by UNESCO centered around the school-for-all concept, and it is based on the educational policies of many countries, especially European countries, which are transitioning from integrated to inclusive education (Chambers & Forlin 2021).

Inclusion in education is therefore the inclusion of students with special educational needs in mainstream education, which in Poland is implemented in mainstream schools, divisions, and institutions, also known as mass entities, mainstream entities, inclusion schools, or main current schools.

In Poland, the term ‚special educational needs' refers to a group of diverse needs that can be described as special needs, arising from individual positive and negative deviations. These deviations include behavioral or emotional disorders, special talents, specific learning difficulties, competence deficits and language disorders, chronic diseases, crises or traumatic situations, educational failures, environmental neglect related to the living situation of the student and their family, the way of spending free time and environmental contacts. They also include adaptation difficulties related to cultural differences or changes in the educational environment, including those associated with previous education abroad (Regulation of the Ministry of Education of 9 August 2017 on the principles of providing and organizing psychological and pedagogical assistance in public kindergartens, schools, and institutions (Journal of Laws 2017, item 1591, § 2, point 2).

Special educational needs also relate to individuals with various types of disabilities (mild, moderate, and severe intellectual disabilities; hearing impairments, visual impairments, motor disabilities, including aphasia; autism, including Asperger's syndrome, and multiple disabilities), as well as social maladjustment or threat of social maladjustment. These conditions can lead to issuing a referral for special education for a student (Regulation of the Ministry of Education of 9 August 2017 on the conditions for organization of education, upbringing, and care for children and youth with disabilities, social maladjustment and threat of social maladjustment, Journal of Laws 2017, item 1578).

In practice, inclusive education is fraught with various difficulties and challenges. One of the key problems is the interaction between the school and the families of students with SEN, which affects the effectiveness of the actions taken both by the school and the student's parents. Therefore, this paper focuses on the problems and challenges of inclusive education centered on the interaction between the school and the parents of a student with SEN and the factors that influence this process. This issue seems to be particularly relevant in the age of migration.

### Problems and challenges of inclusive education

Using a horizontal perspective, people are brought up in a variety of environments. Among these, the most important is the family as the primary natural educational environment shaped over the course of life, and the school as the environment of institutional education. The latter is an example of a formal organization, set up intentionally and performing predetermined tasks based on legal regulations, with its activities systematized, carefully planned, and carried out by professionals. In

contrast, the family usually performs its functions spontaneously and situationally in the course of everyday life (Szymański 2013).

Both the family and the school have their own distinctive characteristics and specific functions. While some of them are shared, their overarching goal, the best development of the child, requires interaction through pedagogical interventions. This is particularly important in difficult circumstances such as migration or when the subject of these interactions is a student with a disability.

The statement that "interacting with the family and aligning the behavior of parents and teachers is one of the best educational methods to learn about the child's needs and capabilities to ultimately creating conditions conducive to optimal development" seems to be particularly important (Plichta et al. 2017, 89). This is especially true as parents of students with SEN form a specific social group that performs not only traditional functions but also provides remedial and rehabilitative support for their child. (Apanel 2017).

The process of interaction between the school and the student's family in the context of school education burdened by current migration is a complex phenomenon, and its improvement poses a challenge for contemporary Polish education. While this process should involve all students, it requires special attention in the case of students with SEN. The success of inclusive education depends on the interaction between the school and the parents. Furthermore, although some research findings indicate that, in general, parents of students with SEN hold positive attitudes toward inclusive education (Paseka & Schwab 2019), it is important to emphasize the specific burdens of the cooperation process. When conducted properly, this interaction can aid wider inclusion of students with disabilities in the age of migration.

Although pedagogical literature has been increasingly constantly enriched in recent years with topics concerning inclusive education, it still addresses the interaction between the school and the family of a student with SEN in a rudimentary way, hence the need to explore this research area in more detail.

## Methodology

The aim of the study was to examine the determinants of the interaction between a primary school and the parents of a student with special educational needs in inclusive education in Czestochowa, Poland. Specific problems were also identified regarding the characteristics of communication and behavior between teachers and parents of students with SEN. The results presented in this paper address one of the identified research areas and answer the following question: What negative behaviors do teachers experience from parents of students with SEN?

Due to its scope, this paper presents an excerpt of the findings. The research was conducted in 2020 in 24 public primary schools in the city of Czestochowa, Poland, which provide inclusive education to students with SEN. The study was narrowed

down to the group of students with the referral for special education. The research was diagnostic in nature, utilizing a diagnostic survey and the questionnaire technique. Three research tools were used: survey questionnaires designed for parents or other family members caring for students with special education needs, form teachers, and support teachers for this group of students, and school counselors. These groups of teachers were found to be most frequently involved in interactions with the parents. Teachers completed the survey questionnaires multiple times, individualizing their experiences and the knowledge they gained about the parents of each student.

The purposive sampling was used in the study. The participants included 126 parents of students with SEN, form teachers of 127 students, school counselors working with 148 students with SEN, and 78 support teachers.

Quantitative analysis of the research material was preceded by coding using Excel and Statistica software. The resulting databases enabled statistical analyses, including measures of central tendency and dispersion.

## Analysis of the results

The research revealed opinions on the behavior of parents towards form teachers, support teachers, and school counselors. The table highlights the behaviors of parents of students with the referral for special education, as observed by the teachers. In the survey questionnaires addressed to teachers, a five-point scale was used to assess the opinions: 5 – I agree, 4 – I rather agree, 3 – I have no opinion, 2 – I rather disagree, 1 – I disagree. The use of a quantitative scale allowed for the calculation of measures of central tendency, such as the arithmetic mean and median and the standard deviation, which is a classic measure of variability. Form teachers, support teachers, and school counselors were asked to indicate the prevalence of negative behaviors.

**Table 1. Teachers' opinions of negative parental behavior (scale continuum: 5 – I agree, 1 – I disagree)**

| Behavior presented by parents | | Variable | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Form teacher | | Support teacher | | School counselor | |
| | | Arithmetic mean | Standard deviation | Arithmetic mean | Standard deviation | Arithmetic mean | Standard deviation |
| A | Providing inaccurate information by parents about students' skills and behavior at home | 1.9 | 1.234 | 2.34 | 1.456 | 2.03 | 1.32 |
| B | Parents being overly ambitious about current and future educational path | 2.13 | 1.282 | 2.48 | 1.42 | 2.03 | 1.363 |
| C | Parents trying to enforce strictly defined teacher behaviors toward the student | 2.07 | 1.248 | 2.42 | 1.407 | 2.12 | 1.437 |
| D | Lack of agreement between the teacher and parents about the actions taken | 2.1 | 1.283 | 2.18 | 1.325 | 2.21 | 1.324 |
| E | Criticism and questioning of the teacher's qualifications by parents | 1.31 | 0.817 | 1.5 | 1.03 | 1.37 | 0.881 |
| F | Parents asserting superiority due to a better financial situation or position compared to the teacher | 1.06 | 0.268 | 1.13 | 0.55 | 1.17 | 0.595 |
| G | Allegations of low school effectiveness by parents | 1.33 | 0.81 | 1.45 | 0.869 | 1.46 | 0.942 |
| H | Criticizing the educational methods used by teachers | 1.31 | 0.730 | 1.45 | 0.914 | 1.52 | 1.001 |

| Behavior presented by parents | | Variable | | | | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| | | Form teacher | | Support teacher | | School counselor | |
| | | Arithmetic mean | Standard deviation | Arithmetic mean | Standard deviation | Arithmetic mean | Standard deviation |
| I | Criticizing educational adjustments made for the student (too little or too much) | 1.33 | 0.767 | 1.69 | 1.058 | 1.59 | 1.089 |
| J | Verbally insulting the teacher | 1.03 | 0.221 | 1.11 | 0.475 | 1.15 | 0.595 |
| K | Ignoring and disregarding the teacher's statements | 1.13 | 0.618 | 1.24 | 0.723 | 1.23 | 0.75 |
| L | Aggressive behavior toward the teacher | 1.02 | 0.182 | 1.04 | 0.342 | 1.13 | 0.569 |
| M | Anxiety felt by the teacher when dealing with the student's parents | 1.02 | 0.182 | 1.18 | 0.704 | 1.15 | 0.607 |
| N | Disrespecting the teacher in the presence of the student | 1.01 | 0.091 | 1.09 | 0.518 | 1.11 | 0.507 |
| O | Attributing the child's difficulties to school incompetence | 1.18 | 0.645 | 1.29 | 0.762 | 1.4 | 0.89 |
| P | Underestimating of the teacher's commitment to the child's problems | 1.27 | 0.771 | 1.39 | 0.933 | 1.48 | 1.003 |
| R | Excessive use of telephone contact | 1.21 | 0.604 | 1.49 | 1.002 | 1.23 | 0.698 |

Source: author's own elaboration.

As indicated by the results of the exploratory research, the highest arithmetic means of responses concerning negative parental behaviors were found for school counselors (behaviors: D, F, G, H, J, L, N, O, P) and support teachers (behaviors: A, B, C, E, K, M, R). These groups of teachers rated the behavior of parents of students with SEN the lowest. Form teachers most frequently provided responses confirming
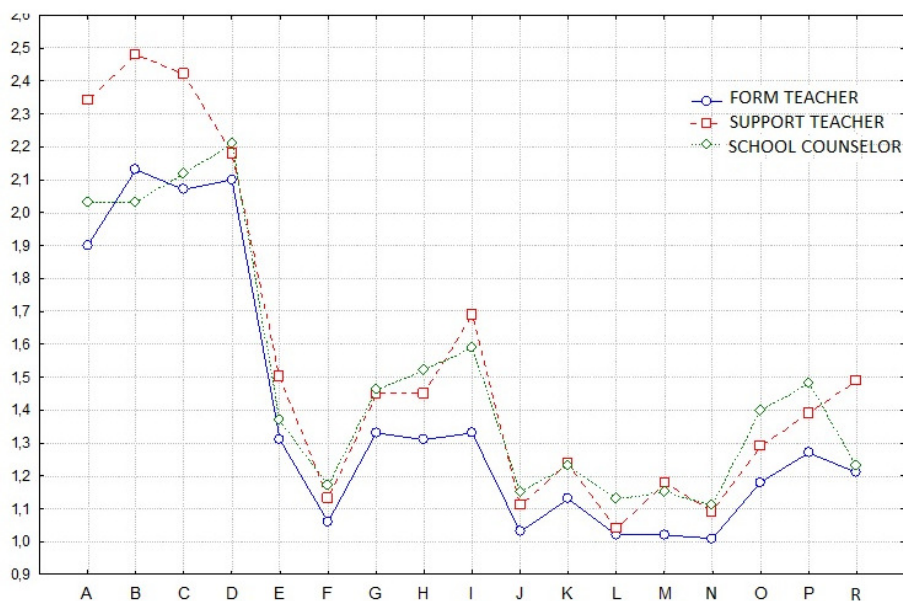
**Diagram 1. Teachers' opinions of negative parental behavior (scale continuum: 5-I agree, 1- I disagree)**

Source: author's own elaboration.

negative behavior of parents in category I, which involved criticism of educational adjustments for students (too little or too much). The lowest arithmetic means in almost all categories (except behavior B) were associated with the responses given by form teachers. This suggests that form teachers are the least likely of the surveyed teachers to observe negative behavior from parents of students with SEN.

The results of the standard deviation indicate a high concentration of responses. However, several categories of behavior among the support teachers deviated from the results of other teachers. This deviation concerns behaviors A to D: providing inaccurate information by parents about the student's skills and behavior at home, parents being overly ambitious about the current and future educational path, parents trying to enforce strictly defined teacher's behaviors toward the student, and lack of agreement between the teacher and parents regarding actions taken. These behaviors scored highest in the responses from support teachers and were most frequently reported by this group.

Diagram 2 illustrates the clustering of responses given by school staff based on the arithmetic mean and standard deviation. The box plot, used in statistics to compare data sets, was employed in this case. A significant dispersion can be observed in the block of questions identifying the opinions of school staff regarding negative parental behavior, indicating substantial consensus among the opinions about the categories studied. However, it should be noted that the responses of support teachers showed a wider range, with higher arithmetic means. This suggests slight deviations in the results obtained by support teachers to the other teachers surveyed.
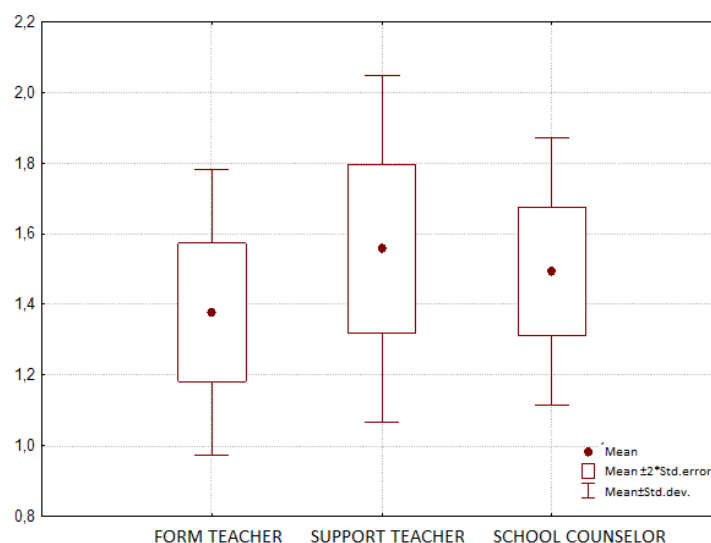
**Diagram 2. Clustering of school staff opinion data on parents' negative behavior (scale continuum: 5-I agree, 1- I disagree)**

Source: author's own elaboration.

## Conclusion

The research procedure aimed to verify the formulated problems. The collected material allowed for cautious generalizations, as it can be assumed that the issue studied is influenced by more factors than just those analyzed in the study.

Communication and interpersonal contacts between individuals influence the interaction process. The survey results indicate that parents of students with SEN exhibit negative behavior towards their children's teachers. The most commonly reported behaviors by all groups of teachers (form teachers, school counselors, support teachers) include providing inaccurate information by parents about student's skills and behavior at home, parents being overly ambitious about the current and future educational path, parents trying to enforce strictly defined teacher's behaviors toward the student, lack of agreement between the teacher and parents regarding actions taken, and criticizing educational adjustments made for the student (too little or too much).

It was also noted that support teachers and school counselors experience the most frequent negative behaviors of parents in inclusive education. It is important to observe that, unlike form teachers, these groups are more likely to have qualifications in special education and are more frequently in communication with students' parents.

The results of the study appear to be particularly relevant in the context of migration. Communication, which is the foundation of interaction, should be a primary concern for both schools and parents during times of difficult changes, such as family relocations. Parents' negative behavior can further hinder and disrupt interaction process with the school.

Implementing inclusive education in the age of migration is fraught with factors that lead to problems and new challenges. One of these challenges is the interaction between the school and the families of students with SEN. This process is subject to many determinants, with its overriding objective being the best possible development of the student with SEN.

It was concluded that research should continue on the determinants of parent-teacher interactions in inclusive education.

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*Rozporządzenie MEN z dnia 9 sierpnia 2017 r. w sprawie zasad udzielania i organizacji pomocy psychologiczno-pedagogicznej w publicznych przedszkolach, szkołach, placówkach* (Dz.U. z 2017 r., poz. 1591, § 2, pkt 2).

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