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DISABILITY IN A FAMILY AS A FACTOR FOR DEVELOPING ATTITUDE TOWARDS DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING STUDENTS IN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION^a

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SUMMARY

Inclusion is the process of wider involvement of children with disability into mainstream education system and further on into various social aspects. Inclusion promoters claim that the acceptance of children with disability by their peers in mainstream schools is a corner stone of inclusion. Promoters believe that positive attitude of typically developing students is a crucial factor of successful implementation of inclusion process. Hearing impairment is the most frequent congenital sensory handicap. Hearing impairment affects speech and cognitive development and therefore presents significant health and social burden in the considerable part of population.

The goal of this study was to assess if the presence of a disabled person in a family could affect the attitude of older students (6th, 7th and 8th grade) towards deaf and hard of hearing students in mainstream school. The instrument in this study was the adapted questionnaire Attitudes toward Deafness a four-point 25-item rating scale (Cowen et al., 1967).

The study was conducted in five mainstream primary schools. The sample contained 255 typically developing students of both genders, attending 6th, 7th or 8th grade. They came for various social strata.

The results have shown that the students have mostly positive attitude regarding deaf and hard of hearing schoolmates. Students coming from families with disabled person usually have developed more sympathetic attitude.

Key words: inclusive education, attitude of mainstream students, deaf and hard of hearing

INTRODUCTION

The Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development in bylaws from 2009 has defined inclusive education as accessible, quality and justified for every child. The concept of inclusive education relies mainly on Education for all (EFA) concept and improvement in schools. Instead of being preoccupied with a certain group, inclusive education is focused on overcoming obstacles in learning and participating. UNESCO conference in Salamanca in 1994 have outlined that the inclusion process is directly related to overall improvement of education system.

Inclusion is a process of finding solutions and responding to various needs of all students in order to avoid exclusion of any student from the education process. It

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requires changes and adjustment of contents, approach, structures and strategies, according to the common vision, encompassing all the children of certain age group and belief that the mainstream education should respond to every child need. Inclusion refers to wider involvement of children with disability in mainstream education and afterwards in every segment of social and professional life (Jablan & Kovačević, 2008).

Attitudes are usually defined as an acquired and permanent system of positive or negative evaluation, influencing the tendency to act in favor or against certain object, situation, institution, term or person (Dulčić & Bakota, 2008; Fajgelj, 2007). It is important to keep in mind that attitudes are acquired or learned, not inherited. Attitudes are usually long lasting, although not final and could be changed over time (Krstić, 1988). The attitude is formed based on direct or indirect experience in contact with the subject over socialization process. It is very important in the context of inclusive education of deaf and hard of hearing children as well as other children with disability.

Impact of deafness or hearing impairment on education potentials

According to the World Health Organization (WHO) data 1-3 out of 1000 newborn babies have significant bilateral permanent sensorineural hearing loss (WHO, 2010). Additional 3 out of 1000 children acquire hearing loss during early childhood (Cunningham & Cox, 2003). There is no comprehensive data on overall number of children with permanent hearing loss in Serbia, but the results of numerous studies have confirmed the frequency (1-3 per 1000) congruent with WHO data (Babac, Petrović-Lazić, Tatović, Stojanović-Kamberović, & Ivanković, 2010; Mikić et al., 2011; Nikolić, 2016; Ostojić, 1999; Ostojić & Mikić, 2010).

Negative impact of hearing loss on speech and cognition development makes the deafness and hearing impairment an important issue of public health affecting considerable population (Barišić, Sansović, Knežević, & Pavelić, 2004). Education process for the deaf and hard of hearing children should be adjusted to their specific functioning.

In terms of education, auditory information is usually more present than the visual ones. Development of speech and language as a basic communication tool is highly integrative process requiring harmonized functioning of several aspects: anatomical, physiological, auditory, mental, emotional and social (Ostojić, 2004). Communication competence of deaf and hard of hearing children is frequently defined by seriously deteriorated speech and language. Advanced verbal communication capacity provides harmony of emotional, educational and social development of the deaf and hard of hearing person.

Impact of inclusive education on deaf and hard of hearing students

The school setting can considerably contribute to the self-confidence and acceptance when the child is successful and accepted by teachers and peers. When the child is not adequately accepted by the peers in the class he will probably search for peers outside his class, adhering to the group of individuals with similar problem.

Despite the continuous attempts, deaf children are generally less successful in interaction with peers as compared to hearing kids. Even when they succeed, their interactions are shorter and less complex. Deaf children spend less time than the hearing ones interacting with peers in organized games or free activities (Guralnick et al., 1996).

However, the social interaction of the deaf students with typically developing schoolmates in inclusive settlement is not always positive, especially due to communication issues (Stinson, Kluwin, 2003). Deaf adolescents in mainstream schools have higher self-esteem and consider themselves more responsible, talented and successful than their deaf peers in the schools for the deaf. Self-perception of the deaf students in the mainstream schools is dominantly positive even if they are not fully accepted by typically developing peers (Stinson & Kluwin, 2003).

Review of the studies regarding deaf and hard of hearing students in mainstream education imply that interaction with typically developing peers could positively affect their self-esteem and socio-emotional self-confidence (Stinson & Kluwin, 2003; Hsin-Ling Hung, 2005; Radić-Šestić, Milanović Dobrota, Kaljača, & Dučić, 2012). The results of one study have shown high acceptance of the deaf students aged 10 to 20 years by their hearing peers, especially girls and younger students. Deaf girls were generally better accepted than the deaf boys, emphasizing the gender influence (Cambra, 2002).

The results of the study done by Radić-Šestić et al., (Radić-Šestić, Milanović Dobrota, Kaljača, & Dučić, 2012) also imply that the deaf adolescents from mainstream schools have better chance to be accepted by the hearing peers and to develop pro-social skills, than deaf and hard of hearing students from the schools for the deaf. Deaf subjects who socialize with their deaf and normally hearing peers equally, manifest higher self-esteem than their deaf peers confined to the deaf community. They are more satisfied with their looks, more self-confident, consider themselves appreciated by their parents, teachers and peers as well as more successful and less lonely than their deaf peers from the school for the deaf.

Mainstreaming helps the deaf and hard of hearing students identify with their hearing peers. Numerous studies on inclusive education have provided additional proofs that inclusion is not only education, but socialization as well. Children are learning a great deal from each other. Communication between disabled and typically developing children improves and enhance speech development, social skills and personality features. Behavior of typically developing children represents a positive role model, which is easily accepted and imitated by children with disability. Children with disability have positive influence on their peers as well. Compassion and understanding of their problems inspire the typically development students to develop altruism and curiosity about human body and its functioning (Cerić, 2006).

Successful inclusion could have overall positive impact on the deaf and hard of hearing students. Numerous subjective and objective factors could affect the inclusion success as has been discussed before. According to the advocates of the inclusive education, attitude of the typically developing students have been considered essential for successful implementation of inclusion (S. Stainback, W. Stainback, Strathe, & Dedrick, 1983).

Objective of the study

This is the part of the extensive study regarding different factors (gender, age, social environment, parents education, disabled person in a family, quality of communication) that could affect the attitude of older students towards deaf and hard of hearing students in inclusive school settings (reference). The authors will analyze the impact of a disabled person in a family on older students' attitude towards the deaf and hard of hearing children in inclusive education.

Having a family member with disability makes the family and wider social circle more sensitive to the specific disability related issues. It has been widely known and proved by numerous studies (Burke & Cigno, 1996; Burke & Montgomery, 2001; Glendenning, 1986; McCormack, 1978) that children with disability require more support from parents and entire family. About 80% of children with disability have typically developing siblings (Atkinson & Crawford, 1995), so that the topic of the distribution of parental care and support has been widely investigated. This study did not take the type of disability in the family into consideration. The topic was the attitude of the students who had family member with disability towards the deaf and hard of hearing students in the inclusive education system.

Theoretical foundation of this study is based on the fact that the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development in bylaws from 2009 has defined inclusive education as accessible, quality and justified for every child. The concept of inclusive education relies mainly on EFA (education for all) concept and improvement in schools. Instead of being preoccupied with a certain group, inclusive education is focused on overcoming obstacles in learning and participating. UNESCO conference in Salamanca in 1994 have outlined that inclusion process is directly bound with overall improvement of education system.

Inclusion is a process of finding solutions and responding to various needs of all students in order to avoid exclusion of any student from the education process. It requires changes and adjustment of contents, approach, structures and strategies, according to the common vision encompassing all the children of the certain age group and belief that the mainstream education should respond to every child need. Inclusion refers to wider involvement of children with disability in mainstream education and afterwards in every segment of social and professional life (Jablan & Kovačević, 2008).

The goal of the study

The basic goal of the study was to discover if the existence of a family member with disability could affect the attitude of students in 6th, 7th and 8th grade of primary school towards their deaf and hard of hearing mates in inclusive school setting.

Based on this goal, the following hypothesis has been defined. The presence of family member with disability could positively impact students' attitude towards the deaf and hard of hearing students in inclusive education setting.

METHOD

The study has been conducted in five mainstream schools: one metropolitan, two suburban and two country schools in Serbia.

The data were summoned in accordance with school calendar following previous consultation with school authorities and employees.

The methodology of survey has been explained to participants beforehand. They were assured that their participation is anonymous and voluntary, as well as that they will be allowed to drop out of the process anytime. The researcher had explained the protocol and the task to the students. They were participating individually in a survey in their classroom. The time appointed for a survey has been 30 minutes.

Sample

The sample included students of 6th, 7th and 8th grade of mainstream primary schools. All of them had average intelligence and was typically developed. The study has encompassed 255 students, 134 (52.5%) males and 121 (47.5%) females. Seventy-eight students were in the 6th grade, ninety-five in the 7th grade and eighty-two in the 8th grade. Majority of the students, 114 attended metropolitan school, 71 country school and 70 suburban school.

Table 1. *Distribution of respondents who have disabled person in family*

Disability in family	Frequency (f)	Percentage %
Yes	46	18.0
No	209	82.0
Summary	255	100.0

Instrument

Adapted questionnaire Attitudes toward Deafness Scale A four-point 25-item rating scale (Cowen, Rockway, & Bobrove, 1967) presenting a single dimensional scale for assessment of attitudes towards deaf and hard of hearing persons, has been used in this study. The Serbian translation of a scale consists of 25 items. Four-point Likert-type rating scale has been used, ranging from 1 - totally disagree to 4 - totally agree. Cronbach alpha coefficient was 0.83.

Statistical analysis

Following statistical methods have been applied for evaluation of statistical significance: t-test for independent samples, One-way ANOVA, Pearson bivariate correlation. Statistical package SPSS 20.0 has been used for data analysis.

RESULTS

Descriptive characteristics of results obtained by the adapted questionnaire Attitudes to Deafness Scale, are shown in Table 2. In descending order, so that the items with most positive and most negative answers could be easily seen.

Table 2. *Descriptive analysis of Attitudes toward Deafness a four-point rating scale (Cowen et al., 1967).*

Attitude	Min	Max	M	SD
The deaf have as many interests as the hearing have.	3	4	3.55	0.498
A person who is deaf is as apt to be born a leader as anyone else.	3	4	3.41	0.493
Deaf people seem to be overly polite and to lack spontaneity.	3	4	3.33	0.472
A deaf person is not afraid to express his feelings.	3	4	3.31	0.465
The deaf are prone to have many more fears about the world than the hearing.	3	4	3.24	0.430
Because of his need to be pitied, it is particularly important that the deaf person has someone very tolerant to whom he can talk.	1	4	2.77	1.10
It is difficult to understand the deaf because they keep so much to themselves.	1	4	2.67	0.870
The deaf are prone to have many more fears about the world than the hearing.	1	4	2.65	0.927
A deaf person is constantly worried about what might happen to him.	1	3	2.65	2.07
Deaf people are more easily upset than people who can hear.	1	4	2.49	0.879
The deaf are usually on their guard with people.	1	4	2.49	0.918
I feel that deafness is as hard to bear as complete paralysis.	1	4	2.43	0.923
Deaf people somehow seem sadder and more wrapped up in themselves than hearing people.	1	4	2.40	0.925

Attitude	Min	Max	M	SD
Most deaf people are dissatisfied with themselves.	1	4	2.37	0.926
Most deaf people feel that they are worthless.	1	4	2.36	0.854
A deaf person cannot afford to talk back to people.	1	4	2.23	1.010
It must be bitterly degrading for a deaf person to depend so much on others.	1	4	2.21	0.844
Deaf people also seem to have more than the usual number of other physical complaints.	1	4	2.19	0.807
Deaf people show personality characteristics which frequently make them seem odd.	1	4	2.04	0.804
You should not expect too much from a deaf person.	1	4	2.01	0.930
In general, deaf people are more neurotic than those who hear.	1	4	1.91	0.676
The deaf adult is not quite as mature or "grown up" as the hearing adult.	1	4	1.81	0.870
The deaf generally have a less mature personality than the hearing.	1	4	1.76	0.720
Overall, deaf children seem to be less intelligent than hearing children.	1	4	1.70	0.857
It is impossible to really get "close" to a deaf person.	1	4	1.68	0.791

The difference in attitudes between students with and without family member with disability tested by t-test for independent samples has been showed in Table 3.

Table 3. *Attitudes of students with and without family member with disability toward deaf and hard of hearing students*

Attitudes toward deaf and hard of hearing students	Disability in family	N	M	SD	Std. Err. Diff.
	Yes	46	62.46	7.78	1.16098
	No	209	59.60	9.06	0.62887

Results of inferential statistics are shown in Table 4. Results are showing the significance of difference between attitudes of students with vs without family member with disability, toward hearing impaired peers.

Table 4. *Attitudes toward deaf and hard of hearing students*

		Levene's test for equality of variances				t-test		
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean diff.	Std. Err. diff.
Attitudes toward deaf and hard of hearing students	Assumption of equal variances	2.027	0.156	-1.965	251	0.051	-2.86154	1.45640
	Assumption of unequal variances			-2.167	72.285	0.034	-2.86154	1.32036

The results for statistical significance obtained in this study represent borderline significance ($p = 0.05$). Since the sample was not homogenous, we assumed the variance inequality since insignificant Leven test of variance equality. The Table 4 has shown $p = 0.03$ which correspond the level of significance $p < 0.05$.

Overall analysis has shown that students with disabled person in family generally have more positive attitude towards their deaf and hard of hearing schoolmates.

Hypothesis regarding positive influence of having a person with disability in a family on student attitude towards the deaf and hard of hearing peers has been confirmed.

DISCUSSION

The objective of this study has been to evaluate if the presence of a disabled person in a family of the students of 6th, 7th and 8th grades could affect the attitude towards the deaf and hard of hearing students in inclusive education.

Model based learning is well known technique in psychology, especially significant for children and adolescents. The way that significant adults are conveying messages and attitudes to the young ones in the family is essential. Their influence is crucial for successful social integration of individuals with disability. According to numerous authors, there are three levels of influence of significant others that could affect self-concept definition and social integration of disabled individuals. The first level consists of peers, family members and close friends. The second level consists of professionals, such as doctors, social workers, teachers, advisors. The third level is the community reaction to the public engagement of individuals with disability, which conveys important message to them (Altman, 1981).

Regarding that aspect, the authors have concluded that studying the attitude of hearing students towards deaf and hard of hearing school mates should be considered as priority, since it is directly related to their successful inclusion at very early age.

According to the analysis of descriptive results regarding attitude scale, the best congruence has been achieved regarding the following statement: "Deaf persons have

various interests as much as the hearing ones". Other statements with similar results ($M > 3$) have been as follows: "Deaf person is capable of leadership as any other", "Deaf persons seem very kind", "Deaf person is not afraid to show his feelings", "It does not seem that deaf persons worry more about usual life issues than hearing ones". All that implies that participants in this study mostly or completely have agreed that the deaf persons have certain interests, desires and needs as anybody, such as sharing feelings, leadership or dealing with everyday life issues.

On the other hand, the biggest discrepancy has been observed for the statement: "It is impossible to approach the deaf person". Similar disagreement is obvious ($M < 2$) at following items: "Deaf persons are generally more neurotic than hearing ones", "Deaf persons are not as mature as hearing ones", "Basically, deaf kid seem to be less intelligent than hearing ones". That implies that majority of the participants in this study think that deaf and hard of hearing persons are as intelligent and mature as the hearing ones.

Analysis of the answers has shown that positive statements are grouped between marks 3 and 4, which implies high degree of approval. On the contrary, most negative statements obtained disapproval (marks 1 and 2), which means that the attitude of older students has mainly positive attitude regarding the deaf and hard of hearing individuals.

That is true for one half of the statements from the scale. Response to the other half is variable tending to be either positive or negative. The greatest variation has been observed for following statement: "Deaf persons are usually cautious in contact with hearing ones" ($M = 2.49$), "Deaf persons get annoyed more easily than the hearing ones" ($M = 2.49$), "I consider the deafness as hard to stand as complete paralysis" ($M = 2.43$). Those attitudes could be considered neutral.

Numerous studies about attitudes towards deaf and hard of hearing persons have shown congruent results about majority of neutral or mostly positive attitudes regarding this population (Cambra, 2002; Dimoski, 2011; Emerton & Rothman, 1977; Furnham & Lane, 1984; Nikolarazi & De Reybekiel, 2001; Radoman, 1995).

However, not all studies about the attitudes towards the deaf have shown consistent results. Uzelac (1989) has found a lot of neutral statements in her study about attitude towards the deaf and hard of hearing students. Cowen et al., (Cowen, Rockway, & Bobrove, 1967) in their report have found dominantly negative attitude towards the deaf and hard of hearing persons, relating that to other socio-psychological statements and values, negative perception of minority groups and pro-authoritarian policies.

This study has investigated the influence of a person with disability in the family. Hypothesis about the influence of the disability in a family on attitudes towards the deaf and hard of hearing has been confirmed. Participants in the study who had a disabled person in the family have shown more positive attitude towards the deaf and hard of hearing students (Table 3). This result confirms the fact that previous contact with disabled person within family could affect future attitude considerably. Quality and frequency of such contacts within family is extremely important.

CONCLUSION

Results obtained in this study have shown that the participants from older school group who had a disabled person in a family have developed more positive attitude towards the deaf and hard of hearing students in inclusive educational setting.

Attitude of students towards the deaf and hard of hearing is dominantly positive. Majority of students has considered that the deaf and hard of hearing persons have mostly interests, desires and needs as anybody else, such as the need to share feelings, leadership or dealing with everyday issues. The positive attitude regarding intelligence or maturity of the deaf and hard of hearing persons was common finding in this study.

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