

PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICE IN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

This paper deals with the school psychologist's role as a potential factor in assessing, advising and integrating special needs children in the inclusive education. It focuses on his/her efficiency and role in children's problematic behavior, reducing their stress level, anxiety, and depression.

This study aims to make people aware of spreading and supporting psychological service in the inclusive education as well as public opinion about collaborating with psychologists in order to support special needs children and to motivate school psychologists to improve their professional performance in assisting children with learning difficulties.

Methodology: Half-structured interviews, focus group and observation were used as instruments of this study, which was performed in three schools: "Osman Myderizi", "Dituria", and Edit Durham".

Results: 48 of the respondents stated that psychological service helps in facilitating the learning process. 20% of them admitted that counseling, psycho-educative assessment, psychological assistance, social help and individual counseling were successfully applied by school's psychological service. 35% of them said that psychological counseling was effective in reducing bullying. 38% accepted the psychologist's coordinating role with the other actors in education. 40% of the respondents highlighted the fact that psychological service is necessary for inclusive education.

As a conclusion, it is time psychological service was institutionalized as a permanent service and integrated into all schools of our country. The effectiveness of psychological assistance to special needs children in inclusive schools was increased by collaborating with the other actors of education.

KEYWORDS: Psychological Service, Psychological Counseling & Effectiveness.

INTRODUCTION

School psychology service generated by the end of the XIXth century and the beginning of the XXth century. Witmer opened his first psychology clinic for children in 1892. Firstly, psychological knowledge was tried on a practical application in order to treat school problems. Psychology of Education was represented by a group of authors, in the XXth century, among whom Lev Vygotsky, who published his masterpiece "Thinking and Speech" and was considered by his contemporaries as "Mozart of Psychology of Education". J. Bruner published "Process of Education" underlines the idea that "To learn, you have to conceptualize, to divide into categories," etc. (Rapti, 2005)

University of Tirana in Albania, in 1992, opened the Faculty of Social Sciences, by decision of the Ministry of Education And Science. In 1995, the Faculty opened the Department of Psychology. Since then until September 2017, about 2200 students have enrolled in this branch, - without including here the part-time system students and those of Master and Doctoral Studies/Ph.D. degrees programs. The students' number is even higher because the Psychology branch is being developed/established in other public faculties such as in : Shkodër, Durrës, Elbasan, etc. whereas in private

universities, like: “European University”, “Albanian University”, “Mediterranean University”, “Marin Barleti University”, etc. the psychology students have graduated for more than a decade now.

In “Wisdom” University College, the Department of Psychology was created in 2008 and it has been consolidated functioning with the Bachelor degree program which was reaccredited in 2017, and “Master” degree ones in “School Psychology” and “Education”. The later is in the process of being accredited. The curriculum of this programme included subjects like: “Learning disorders”, “Autism disorders”, “Applied Psychology”, “Counseling Psychology”, “School Psychology”, etc.

When graduating, Master students will have acquired the professional skills and abilities to manage the recent problems of inclusive education in Albania. Psychology students acquire knowledge about the interactive teaching process and doing research on treating children with difficulties in learning such as being dyslexic, dysgraphic, or having dyscalculia or attention-span disorders, ADHD and psycho – motoric disorders. Professional internship enables the students to consolidate the theoretical culture. There is qualified academic staff who have a long teaching experience. There has been an improvement in: curriculum, textbooks, lectures and the contemporary teaching/learning methods are being used Each year.

Psychologist’s Role in Inclusive Education

School itself as the temple of knowledge, is involved in a reforming process to be more complete and equal to inclusive teaching standards compared to the European education system of the knowledge society. Traditional teaching which is teacher-centered, is being replaced each day by the interactive teaching which is student-centered, regardless of psycho-social or psycho-physical difficulties by using methods and activities which help learning process and develop thinking, by activating the levels of cognitive processes.

A school psychologist offers support for the assistant teachers and a new vision in treating the autistic teenagers. He/she needs to collaborate with the subject’s teachers, the caretakers, and the parents in order to minimize conflicts during classes by professionally managing bad social climate due to the hyperactive or aggressive behavior of the pupils with psycho-social difficulties/problems. The school psychologist is a specialist whose aim is to bring a psychological perspective which is connected with educational services towards the problematic patient.

The psychologist in school or kindergarten (in inclusive education) provides information about the psycho-social situation of the child in the familiar context, the atmosphere in classes/schools, advices on compiling the objectives of PEI and how to apply them, looks after confidentiality, anonymity of every kind of information regarding the child and his/her family. He/she gives information from the child’s file only when/if the school or kindergarten directory or Regional Education Directory employees approve it in the written form based on the respective legislation about education.

Special needs education started in the 60’s in Albania. For the first time were created special classes for children with impaired speech and hearing (today they have the status of national institutions). Later, in the 70’s-80’s a result of the identified needs, but even in applying the compulsory elementary system for children with mild mental retardment, were created special schools of special education in some cities, such as Tirana, Durrës, Shkodër, Elbasan, Vlora and Korça (Ballhysa, 2011).

OBJECTIVES

- To influence in increasing citizens' culture to a European level in order to support the psychologist in training children with different abilities in inclusive education.
- To affect in increasing the professional performance through qualifying for training children with different abilities.
- To encourage lobbying with all the actors in order to increase the efficacy of psychological service in schools.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Psychology is the science which is evolving rapidly. Psychology studies include active analysis, raising questions and problem solving. Thematic urge the reader to have a critical attitude of questioning the methods that are used in collecting the data, considering alternative explanations on the given facts and statements thus supposing to carry on studies and analysis which can enlighten more the discussion (Charles G. Morris, Albert. A. Maisto, 2008.)

Educational Psychology is closely connected with the teaching. The aim of this type of psychology is to understand and improve the teaching and learning processes. Educational psychologists create ideas and methodologies. They study what happens when somebody (the teacher, parents) teach something (mathematics, dancing) to someone else (pupils, collaborators or other team members) in a certain environment (i.e. Class, theater or gym) (Musai, B., 1999).

The psychological service offers a new vision to teacher assistants about how to treat the autistic teenagers. He/she has to collaborate with the subject teachers, the caretaker and parents in order to minimize conflicts during classes by professionally managing social climate when/if there is hyperactive or aggressive behavior from pupils with psychosocial difficulties. A school psychologist is a specialist of general psychology whose purpose is to bring a psychological perspective in school, which is connected to educational service for the problematic client (Orhani, Z., 2005.)

In inclusive education, it is the psychologist's duty to help teenagers with difficult behavior to express his/her negative emotions during their counseling sessions by thus relieving him/her from the stressful emotions/situation. Cooperation with parents is the school psychologist's dimension in his/her job. Therefore, it is his/her duty to contribute in increasing the parents and other actors' role in supporting the school community. Another aspect of the psychologist's role is to collaborate with the pupils' senate in order to defend their rights.

School Psychologists help the pupils at schools. These psychologists are responsible for their adaptation at school and interpreting the intelligence tests or learning habits. They consult with teachers and pupils about learning and emotional difficulties. Other psychologists who work in schools are called education psychologists. The later, study and test the efficacy of tests, lesson planning, learning methods and test compilation. Some education psychologists, along with teaching in universities or colleges, lead research on learning and education methods (Pettijohn, F. Terry, 1996).

Inclusive education is an educational system which accepts all the children as equal and supplies them with the best possible education quality. In order to have an inclusive education, communities, teachers, schools, and systems need to change so that they can adapt the pupils needs diversity in learning, as well as to enable them to be involved in all school and life's aspects (Osmanaga, F., 2016).

METHODS

Aims

- Awareness of decision-making opinion about the spread and support of psychological service in inclusive education.
- Awareness of public opinion to collaborate with the psychologist for supporting children with different abilities.
- Motivating school psychologists to improve their professional performance in training children with learning difficulties.

The study's sample is composed of 100 people, i.e. 30 parents, 25 teachers, 15 children, 15 teenagers, and 15 psychologists. Study's Limitations: the limited sample does not favor generalization of this study's results.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

There are many actors who collaborate with the psychological service in schools for supporting the education of the autistic teenagers such as school psychologists, families, school directories, subject teachers, caretakers and teenagers' peers.

The role of those factors brought by the school psychologist in inclusive education will strengthen their relationships and will increase the efficacy of the learning process for everyone in schools. The school psychologist will help the children and youngsters with different abilities to achieve success in school, in society, and in resolving their emotional and behavioral problems

This process is done pursuant the pupil's cognitive level starting from their pre-school level until their highest level of education. The western experiences show that it is necessary to work for the psychologist's team in a school with about 2000 pupils (i.e. The social psychologist, counseling psychologist, and the school psychologist). The school psychological service in the inclusive education is necessary, not only to manage many of the psycho-social problems of special needs children, but also to create a collaborative social climate among the pupils, their academic staff, and the supportive community of the inclusive schools.

Some aspects of the school psychologist's work include: consulting, psycho-educative assessment, psychological assistance, social assistance, individual counseling. All the informative resource's state the positive message that: the psychological service (in the selected schools) is being integrated, each year, in the school community as one of the factors that motivate the teenagers for a positive attitude towards the learning process. One of the important jobs for the school psychologist is to design tests that assess the learning load, the student's relationships with their teachers, with each- other, and with their parents. Not less important, is designing tests that assess the matura's orientation towards choosing their future profession according to their psycho-social abilities/skills.

How necessary is the Psychological Service is in Inclusive Education? 20% of the interviewees stated that psychological service in inclusive education applies to all the above rubrics.

The School Psychologist is an essential part of the team that designs PEI-s. He/she also monitors its application; helps in preparing the PEI-s; assesses the progress of special needs children; administers the assessments; gives recommendations; prepares written reports for assessments; helps in applying certain elements of this plan; ensures the

intercession of specialized services pursuant the problems that these children have, and coordinates work with the other specialists.

However, the pupils are a critic, even on some prejudicing attitudes of some of their teachers regarding the psychological service in schools. Their parents had different thoughts in their interviews. Some of them were pro and some against the psychologist's role in supporting the teenagers to create their identity and minimizing problematic behaviors. Teachers' interviews state, even doses of nihilism and skepticism regarding the school psychologist's role as an adviser for the teenagers and the staff, for specific professional techniques in relationships with the teenagers.

Representatives of school directories in a united way admitted the positive effect/influence of psychological service in minimizing the teenagers problematic behavior, and encouraging and motivating them to achieve higher results in their lessons. However, their interviews showed a tendency to limit the psychologist's role in the school, i.e. collaborating only with the teenagers. They skipped their reports on their collaboration with the psychologists, thus aiming only full dependency of the psychologists on the school directories and not a partnership among them.

Does a Psychologist have a Coordinative Role among the Actors of Education in Inclusive Education? 38 % of the interviewees think that the psychologist completely has a coordinative role between the education actors.

Does the Psychological Service Facilitate the Learning Process in Inclusive Education for Children with Dyslexia, Dysgraphia, Dyscalculia ? 48% of the interviewees stated that the psychological service facilitates the learning process, and improves parameters of pupils with dyslexia, dysgraphia, dyscalculia.

Bullying is the new problem in schools these days. Bullying, which affects in a security sense of the pupils, is widely spread and perhaps it is the less reported problem in schools. Against popular belief, bullying happens most often in school premises compared to the streets, or out of schools. Bullying was thought as a harmless behavior which affects the youth's character, but now we see its long term effects for the victim as well as for the bully pupils. It is often misunderstood as a close chain of a silent antisocial behavior which has spread in the elementary schools' yards. Bullying can happen in every class, i.e. starting from class I up to class IX. It is a fact that the police has taken more responsibility for pupils safety by helping even school directors, but this does not happen in all schools in Albania.

A normal functioning of psychological service in schools and strengthening of collaboration with supporting actors of pupils and teenagers minimizes the bullying cases. Bullism phenomena are manifested more towards children with different abilities because of their difficulties in the communicative sphere, interactive, psycho-social, and psycho-physical ones, they often are the object of psychological, physical, and emotional violence. It is the school psychologist's duty and the teacher assistant's to support and make aware the pupils and parent's community to support and not to violate the children with different abilities who integrate into inclusive education.

Does Psychological Service effect in Decreasing Bullying Cases towards Children with Different Abilities in Inclusive Education? 35% of the interviewees said that psychological service is highly effective in inclusive education; 5% of them admitted that it influences a little, and 5% of the interviewees shared the thought that the psychological service does not have any effect at all.

Psychology experts argue that it is necessary to treat the children with different abilities at a very early age or as early as possible. There are some alternative ways about treating/training children with different abilities such as it is done by inclusive schools, by community centers, special schools, hospitals and families of those children with psycho-social

problems.

50% of the interviewed parents admitted that their children are treated in inclusive schools, 35% of these parents stated that special schools would be the best environment for treating their children.

CONCLUSIONS

- The effectiveness of psychological assistance is reflected even by psychologist's collaboration with the academic staff, parents' community, school directory, pupils' senate, the business community, and Asperger teenagers themselves.
- Psychological service can work in all the education system and be spread, not only in the urban areas, or just to manage the problematic behavior of the autistic pupils.
- In order to develop the mental health of an individual, it is necessary to function the multidisciplinary team, i.e. the psychologist, psychiatrist, social worker, and nurse.
- Designing tests to assess the learning workload is an important duty of the school psychologist so as to develop the learning process of the autistic pupils.
- Normal functioning of psychological service in schools and strengthening collaboration with the supporting actors of pupils and teenagers minimizes the bullying cases against autistic children.
- The psychological service is a must in all the social, educative and health institutions.

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