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Collaboration for the promotion of inclusive education in primary school in the Czech Republic

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by

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Student statement

I hereby declare that this Master's thesis is my own work and that the bibliography contains all the literature that I have used in writing the thesis. I declare herewith that I have only used this Master's thesis to gain a master's degree in the universities of the consortium as part of the Erasmus Mundus Master program in "Special and Inclusive Education". I also give my consent that this Master's thesis can be accessed by public for the purpose of study in a relevant library of Charles University in Prague and via the electronic database of academic degree thesis of Charles University in accordance with the copyright law.

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Abstract

The study objective was to explore collaborative practice among professional for the promotion of inclusive education in primary school.

The qualitative study was conducted in the domain of inclusion of pupils with special educational needs (SEN) and pupils with diverse cultural background in primary schools in the Czech Republic. The semi-structured interviews were conveyed with five participants in two schools, in a village and a suburban area, in the Czech Republic. The study participants differed in terms of their profession and experience in education. The interviews were conducted in English.

The research sample was small to make generalisation. Nevertheless, the goal of the research was to understand particulars rather than making claims of the general.

The study revealed that collaborative approach among school professionals is considered as a way for the improvement of inclusive education in primary school. In addition, school leaders can influence the school culture, promotion of the professional development, as well the inclusive practices in their schools.

Joint planning and shared work can play a significant role in promotion of inclusion, not only in schools but in the society in general. All children, regardless to their needs, have right to be educated. The outcome depends on engagement in constructive and critical learning to meet the needs of diverse pupils in an inclusive school culture.

Further research in the area of the school leadership is needed, and it might be recommendable to have a larger sample and a questionnaire as research method.

Keywords: inclusive education, collaboration among professionals, primary school

Acknowledgment

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1 Introduction

Today's world is changing rapidly in every aspect of society such as cultural, religious, ethnic, family or school organisation, and as a result schools face new challenges. These changes are inescapable and should be taken into consideration, generally, including the education system of one country (Humphrey et al., 2006). Society was more homogenous once, however, it has evolved into diverse society, and has got a new dimension overall. Along with these changes, perceptions of human rights and the matter of responsibility is not same as it was in the past (Frederickson & Cline, 2009).

However, as Thomas and Loxley (2001) point out, inclusion is not only based on policy of one country. It goes beyond legislation framework and it is something that might be considered as a broader picture not only related to special needs but rather with children's rights.

Not that long ago, each child got the right to be educated, and international policies were transferred into the policy of governments. The United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations, 1994) declared education as a human right, and those two aspects have been linked ever since. Furthermore, the implementation of the concept of 'schools for all' promoted by the Salamaca World conference on Special Needs Education (UNESCO, 1994) has led to a more inclusive orientation, diversity, and quality education. These initiatives involve support for all children, as well as working together to overcome learning and barriers.

At the same time, in order to deliver appropriate provision for pupils with SEN in the mainstream schools and decrease exclusion, focus on progression of schools for all could have limited impact in practice. All these efforts and reforms of policy oriented worldwide aim to protect children. At the same time, they promote social inclusion and make a better quality of service. However, the question is how to process and develop the policy from the government documents to practice and school level. Implementation and adaptation of current inclusive models usually requires a greater effort from policy makers, local authorities, and communities to school teachers. One of the main issues is the negative attitude towards inclusion that still holds up in the mainstream schools, communities and the whole society in general (Rouse & McLaughlin, 2007).

1.1 Background of the study

Globally, inclusive education is often described as ' great idea ' in theory but difucult to achieve in the practice. Thus, inclusion implies that schools have to restructure their practice and accomodate all pupils regardless to their needs

Collaboration and inclusion are often perceived as two terms that overlap.

Inclusion takes into consderation the needs of the pupils while collaboration reffers to the needs of school professionals. Moreover, collaboration is considered as a style of ineractions that professionals use to share responsibilities. The question is how they interact to promote inclusion and provide effective education of all pupils.

The key element for the successful implementation is the view of the professionals who have the main responsibility in schools (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002). Therefore, it is neccessary to explore how they reflect their beliefs, as well as how they interact, and collaborate to improve the current practice towards inclusion of vulnerable pupils.

Developing beliefs, organisation, and school practices that support inclusive education involves several factors such as time, resources, energy and commitment (Peters, 2010).

Furthermore, we can only assert that there are limits of inclusion in practice, but not the way how they are constructed.

However, the current trends in inclusive education point out that:

''the newest challenge is to make inclusive practices available to everybody, everywhere and all the time'' (Ferguson, 2008, p.109)

While much effort has been done, the schools still struggle to provide equal opportunities especially for pupils that belong to minority or have different type of disabilities.

1.2 Gap in the knowledge

In general, earlier research was focused on teachers (Poulos et al., 2014).

Thus, the intention is to give voice to various school professionals, and to illuminate answers through the analysis of their discourses.

However, there is gap in the knowledge on the topic of collaboration within school in regard to inclusion of vulnerable pupils. Most researches have been concerned with the attitudes of school leaders and teachers towards inclusion. The focus of the study is the school

collaboration. Nonetheless, the research aims to raise some question involved in the whole process of inclusion in a primary school that could be implication for the further study.

1.3 Purpose of the study and Research questions

The aim of the study is to explore collaboration among professionals for the promotion of inclusive education in primary school. The focus of the study is the school collaboration with the aspect of inclusion of pupils with SEN and diverse cultural background.

According to Poulos et al. (2104) current conversations have neglected how professionals interact and work together to achieve successful outcomes. Research objective was to reveal experiences of the school professionals, as well as to explore collaborative approach and strategies of mutual collaboration within the school.

Inclusion as a process still raises many questions especially about what constitutes good practice nowadays. In majority of countries, education is provided by individual schools that are governed by local regional level to some extent.

Since 2003, in the Czech Republic, all schools have had the status of legal entities. Furthermore, school principals have full responsibility for the quality of the educational process, for appointing and dismissing teachers and for relations with the community, as well as the financial management of the school (Strakova et al., 2011).

According to the report of CSI in 2010 (as cited in Strakova et al., 2011), there was only 57% of the support provided for the children with SEN in compulsory education in the Czech Republic. All schools did not provide information, as well as the organised support for teachers who were not prepared for inclusion.

Evans (2007) claims that, still, it is a challenge to run an inclusive school, since the majority of schools across world are conventionally organised and perceptions of the staff major barrier. However, the previous research showed that schools used collaborative work as a tool, and a step further towards inclusion (Cesar & Santos, 2006).

In addition, every school has its own policy and inclusion can depend on attitude, motivation and the aims of the school. In a collaborative group, each person knows something and can contribute in a unique way. Creating a collaborative climate in schools means building trust, sharing fears and strengths, admitting mistakes, and commitment to carry our responsibilities to support each child with the coordination of human services (Brody & Davidson, 1998).

Furthermore, collaboration is the key element that connects everyone in that human chain and creates possibility for better understanding and improvements in education for all children.

However, there is a pressure on schools to improve teaching of vulnerable pupils nowadays. Majority of the countries are often concerned how to make schools more effective in raising standards. Moreover, pupils' attainment depends on schools' capacity and willingness to respond to their needs (Evans at al., 1999).

In addition, Evans (2007) argues that inclusion is about equal opportunities for all children regardless of their attainment or background. However, quality of opportunity is not only about giving the pupils same opportunities but enabling them to reach their full potential. It should involve different strategies by providing pupils appropriate educational provision. Moreover, at school level, flexibility and responsiveness to diversity of pupils' needs depends on several factors such as school organization, level of knowledge, as well as the skills and understanding of teachers (Evans, 1999). In addition, previous studies proved the critical and challenging role of the school leader. Furthermore, they need to be facilitators of collaborative vision for school to be successful and empower inclusion. Educators experience value conflicts in problem solving process, and they need support along with opportunities for professional development (Smith & Leonard, 2005; Kugelmass, 2010).

According to Leo & Barton (2006) developments educational system of one country can be placed in international and national dimensions even though some history, culture, and social and political factors play role.

Based on the school observations in England, Norway, and Czech Republic it was noticeable that collaboration among school professionals plays an important role in promotion of inclusion. Furthermore, it enables quality education for all pupils within school. Responsibility of school leaders and professionals is to organise human all other resources, make a successful planning, and share ideas for the best possible outcome.

There is a personal interest in the topic, as well as the interest in understanding the current practice in one of the member country of the European Union. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the entire national educational system is fragmented with the elements of segregation rather than inclusion. Actual government has many difficulties with the inclusion in general, considering the issues of children with special needs, and various national, ethnic, and religious groups (Dizdarevic et al., 2010).

Research hopes to investigate the contributions of collaboration to the promotion of inclusive education, and how strategies they might use could be replicated or modified to suit the context of inclusive school in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The main research question that is going to guide the study is:

How do professionals collaborate to promote inclusive education in primary school?

And related sub-questions are:

    I. **How do professionals experience collaborative process?**

    II. **What is the role of school leader in collaborative practice towards inclusion?**

1.4 Research approach

The study was designed as qualitative study with constructivist epistemology in its essence (understanding of the world around us through our own interpretations).

The method used in the study was the interview in order to gather qualitative data about collaborative practice among professionals in primary school. Furthermore, a semi structured interview guide was used as a data collection tool (Appendix 1).

The five interviews were conducted in two primary schools in the Czech Republic, in September, 2015. Before the interviews, a pilot interview was conducted to validate the interview guide as a tool. The sample was quite small to claim generalisations. Such a small sample was due to the constraints in terms of time and access to the participants.

Thematic approach was used to analyse data in the study as recommended by (Ryan, 2006; Anderson, 2007; Seale, 2012). In order to address the research questions, the interviews were analysed, and themes that emerged from data were identified.

The data revealed the importance of collaboration for the overall improvement of inclusive education. Moreover, themes that emerged from the data were related to the role of the school leader, the role of the teaching assistant, and the social participation of pupils with SEN.

1.5 Outline of the study

The study is organised in five chapters.

The first chapter presents the interest in the study, and the purpose of the research followed by the main research question and sub-questions.

The second chapter provides a review of the relevant literature and earlier research used as a background of the study.

The third chapter describes the methodology that was used in order to complete the research. The fourth chapter focuses on the presentation of data followed by discussions.

The fifth and the last chapter of the research conclude with the overview of the findings, further implications, and limitations of the study.

Appendix 1 contains the interview guide.

Appendix 2 contains consent form that was signed by all participants of the study.

2 Literature Review

This chapter will focus on the relevant literature and earlier research in regard to the topic of collaboration for inclusion. Firstly, it will present an overview of inclusion as a concept with the focus on pupils with SEN and diverse cultural background that is in domain of the study. The second part will define collaborative approach. The third part will evaluate the key factors, identified in the literature, that influence the school practice in order to achieve effective collaboration among professionals: i.) Leadership, ii.) Creating Inclusive School Culture, and iii.) Professional Development.

The role of theory is to give us assumptions and arguments about a particular issue, as well as the explanation of the certain phenomena in the social context (Basit, 2010). The intention is to gradually build explanations and understandings in order to gather all relevant knowledge before starting the data collection.

2.1 Inclusion as a concept

'Inclusion'- it is the word that has been increasingly used in this century and involves people and society that values diversity and overcoming barriers. 'Like learning, inclusion is a dynamic process, not a static condition-a journey, not a destination.' (Topping & Maloney, 2005, p.1)

According to Booth & Ainscow (2002, 2011) inclusion in education involves:

Putting inclusive values into action, supporting everyone to feel that they belong, reducing exclusion, discrimination, barriers to learning and participation; restructuring cultures, policies and practices to respond to diversity in ways that value everyone equally, linking education to local and global realities, viewing differences between children and between adults as resources for learning, acknowledging the right of children to an education of high quality in their locality, improving schools for staff and parents as well as children.

Furthermore, inclusion, seen as a never-ending process, involves reconstructing policies, practices, and cultures in schools so that they can respond to students' diversity with the presence, and participation of all pupils vulnerable to exclusion. Teaching pupils with SEN is only one aspect of inclusion, and nowadays, there is an increasing tendency for inclusion in education to be viewed more broadly with excluding and including pressures within the

society. In addition, the concept of school for all is about providing education responsive to diversity where schools should take into consideration different aspects such as pupil's needs, identity and family background within their community (Ainscow et al., 2006).

However, there is still a prevailing assumption that inclusion is only about educating pupils SEN. Besides that, schools often follow a narrow concept regarding only pupils with SEN or use divided approaches to inclusion. SEN covers only one aspect of inclusion which is a term that actually includes all children who could be at risk of being put at disadvantage in schools (Evans, 2007).

In addition, it is not that straightforward to take into consideration cultural and ethnic differences in schools. However, 'it can be something on which to capitalise rather than to stigmatise' (Farrell, 2003, p. 117). In many areas, there is a fast-growing group of pupils that come from different cultures. Consequently, the importance of multicultural education should have be taken into consideration in every school, and considered as one of the crucial functions of schools in twenty-first century. If schools and the society in general, want to promote diversity and tolerance, they must to acknowledge and incorporate those values into the whole curriculum by celebrating differences. However, various issues could arise when educational professionals want to make a distinction among those with learning difficulties, emotional problems or problems with the additional language (Evans, 2007).

One of the solutions for the successful reforms towards more inclusive schools involves strategies to gather human resources, and agencies in order to improve quality of education for all pupils. The emphasis is on sharing information and working together within the schooling system and beyond. In fact, it is the whole organization that enables people to work together efficiently. Joint work can be imagined as a chain of people working for the same aim. Therefore, if one individual is missing or malfunctioning it cannot be productive enough (Clough, 1998; Rouse & McLaughlin, 2007).

Furthermore, Florian (2014) points out that even though there is richness in inclusive education literature, the problem is the lack of clear definition and conceptual difficulties. In addition, the idea of inclusion would take alternate forms in different places depending on the current policy and the environment.

The Czech society, including the educational system, has undergone big changes over the last two decades. In order to adapt new humanistic values and concept of education, inclusion

became a part of political agenda. However, the full legislative support of the inclusive education system has begun very recently where there is still a struggle to reach the coherent national policy towards inclusion.

In addition, inclusive education in The Czech Republic is hindered with several factors, such as the attitudes of society, insufficient staff, as well as the prevailing school practices. There is a lack of teacher training in formative assessment, methodological materials, and adjustment of teaching to the needs of individual students that would help to master this difficult task (Strakova et al., 2011).

Smyth et al., (2014) claim that, still, there is a lack of specific support for pupils with SEN in the policy framework that could lead to limitation of opportunities for the future education and their overall progress. Furthermore, the latest study of Bacakova & Closs (2015) showed that pro-inclusive education development in the Czech Republic is confronted to different range of barriers. The schools are facing new demands and trying to find answers and solutions how to facilitate all students regardless to their diverse needs. Moreover, teachers are supposed to work collaboratively as well as to continuously work on their professional development.

In March, 2010, the National Action Plan of Inclusive Education was approved by the Czech government.

In addition, according to the education policy of The Czech Republic the main principles and priorities are:

'Social cohesion, life skills, multicultural diversity, school for all, curricula adaptation and mainstream education of Roma pupils' (Government of The Czech Republic-Preamble, 2011)

Many people would accept the values of equity and participation, but the issues arise when they look into details and how they should put into practice. The policy context is usually contradictory, complex, and unfavourable to inclusion as well as the institutions, schools and classrooms where different relations and principles interact. Therefore, the key is to find the way to promote inclusive values where the circumstances are less than optimal (Ainscow et al., 2006).

2.2 Collaborative approach

Collaboration is an idea of high theoretical currency in the area of special and inclusive education, and it is considered to be s foundation of the effective school inclusion. It is a process that involves cooperation, effective communication, planning, and problem solving, and finding solutions among people. Furthermore, collaboration enables school professionals to accomplish goals, and improve practice for teaching in the inclusive setting. There is a great value of developing and sharing professional knowledge in order to improve provision Also, it encourages personal growth, independent thinking, and critical respect for individual differences (Smith & Leonard, 2006; Rayner, 2007; Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2014).

Furthermore, the main strategies that have been used for creating and maintaining collaboration among professionals in schools are:

Create a culture of expectancy, increase sharing of information, encourage sharing of expertise, enable sharing of ideas, allow sharing of concerns, promote sharing of knowledge, model sharing of consideration, humour, compassion, and other personality traits.

<div align="right">(Murawski & Spencer, 2011, p. 146)</div>

However, according to Pouloset et al. (2014), current conversations do not stress the importance of the interaction of school staff and how they work together in order to be successful. Still, the focus is more on the individual performance of teachers even though the recent research findings show that the overall outcome was better if teachers have had stronger ties with their colleagues. Additionally, this could be the way to improve one of the most challenging barriers of negative attitudes towards inclusion that still holds up in schools and societies in general (Gibson & Blandford, 2005).

Therefore, if school communities want to build a positive experience and attitudes of inclusive education they will allow teachers to share experiences, views and feelings. The working climate should be supportive and open with the special emphasis on the interaction of colleagues. Specifically, teachers should be given space and time to collaborate in order to develop collective attitudes towards all pupils. In addition, it involves reflective meetings in order to respond to all questions being asked of their professional knowledge as well as their personal understandings and views (Farrell, 2003; Gibson & Blandford, 2005).

Similarly, Carrington & Robinson (2006) maintain that in a collaborative environment teachers are provided with the wide range of opportunities in a process of developing and

understanding their own 'educational platform' and beliefs. In this way they link theory to practice on a daily basis and the process of collaboration can embrace changes to the assumptions and values in education system.

Furthermore, Ainscow et al., (2006) suggests that teachers should be exposed to various ways of teaching, and possibilities to reflect on differences in practice. Moreover, in this process, critical friendship among professionals with mutual examination help teachers to understand what they do and define their future goals. However, without development of common language with colleagues, it is more difficult for teachers to experiment with new possibilities in order to develop practice.

Freire & Cesar (2010) in their research findings showed that it is important for schools to empower educational professionals to overcome existing conflicts and tensions among them in order to be successful in the implementation of the inclusive ideals. The study presents that some urban schools found the way to transform their practice into collaborative work, set expectations and share responsibility which lead them to overcome many challenges.

In addition, Ainscow (1997) points out that school could be more effective through team work and coordinated support for all staff members. Accordingly, these joint plans and actions should be linked to an overall vision. Similarly, Evans et al., (1999) argue that collaboration is seen as important factor that can increase school effectiveness by promoting various training and increasing the capabilities of their staff.

However, in education, the irony of such practice involves the reflection of social and professional cultures, as well as the personal attitudes. Similarly, the school workforce is motivated by a desire to make a difference, and to help pupils to develop, succeed and learn. Therefore, collaborative approach could be used as way to create a new post-modern approach to diversity in the schools, and transformative change, under a good management that brings the growth of professional knowledge and shapes learning organisation (Rayner, 2007).

Surprisingly or not, the literature review identified mainly the strategies and benefits of collaborative approach. However, there was no information what could be the actual topic of collaboration in schools. Therefore, the research hopes to contribute to the better understanding of collaboration among school professionals in regard to inclusive education.

2.3 Key factors to effective collaboration for inclusive education

Three key factors were identified in the literature that influence schools practice in order to achieve effective collaboration among professionals in regard to inclusive education.

2.3.1 Leadership

Leadership is seen as a key aspect for the change and a step forward towards better access to education for all and learning that focuses on potential rather than limitation.

Smith & Leonard (2006), in their research on practitioners' perspectives on inclusion and collaboration, revealed findings about the critical role of school leaders in establishing collaborative culture for successful inclusion in schools. Therefore, inclusive leadership is seen as an opportunity to embrace developing concepts of personal differences and social diversity in education as well as to move beyond the special needs perspective. In addition, further step would be to challenge established fundaments of learning and teaching and perceptions of fixed intelligence and ability (Rayner, 2007).

However, inclusion in education requires more than just knowledge, skills and resources. The school must have positive attitudes towards vulnerable pupils, a better responsiveness to individual needs, and the most important, the willingness among all staff to play their part. Moreover, leadership is seen as the key factor, and the link in making these happen. The case study of Oluwole (2009) revealed that one the main concerns of school leaders was the fear of negative impact of inclusive education system on academic achievement and overall school performance. Principals usually face moral dilemmas regarding the placement of pupils with disabilities.

Poulos et al. (2014) point out the importance of the school leader in creating a school structures and collaborative norms that allow teachers to work together and share expertise for the whole-school improvement. Still, teachers usually cannot be critical enough of one another. Therefore, in order to overcome potential barriers for deeper collaboration, school leaders can introduce critical questions with constructive feedback. Nevertheless, school leadership needs to be placed within the context and management of governmental, local authority and school structures. Furthermore, the question of leadership, diversity and inclusion is closely related to the institutional structures that is the part of the wider system of responsibility. The research findings proved that leadership based on the moral values of

social inclusion was significant for inclusion to be effective (Gibson & Blandford, 2005; Leo & Barton, 2006).

Leadership models create inclusive culture where inclusion and diversity become a way of life of the school rather than initiative. Thus, educational leadership is one of the crucial components in establishing school culture, and creating changes for the promotion of inclusion. Moreover, it is not only seen as the view of principal but goes a step further by creating conditions for increased capacity among teachers (Cherkowski, 2010).

In addition, the review of the literature on leadership in education identified the models in educational leadership that are recognised as the important factor towards the development of collaborative process, and the overall promotion of inclusion for all pupils.

Those models are defined as follows:

i) Distributive Leadership- involves everyone associated to the particular community or school to take responsibility in areas in which they are skilled and competent. Moreover, it is seen as a shift from taking a decision as a single person to more collaborative and shared involvement. However, this does not abandon the model of formal leadership roles in organisational structures but considers that they could be more flexibly arranged. The aim is to move to more inclusive approach (Neuman & Simmons).

ii) Transformational Leadership- is considered to be the most comprehensive model of the school leadership and it deals with establishing and building a school vision, creating a productive school culture, promoting participation in school decisions, modelling organisational values, offering intellectual stimulation and individualised support. With this approach, the aim is to influence the outcome of the school where the transformation of the school involves the transformation of the teaching profession. Moreover, leaders seek the support of teachers in order to increase capacities for the common goal achievements (Leithwood, 1994; Gunter & Rayner, 2006). However, Rayner (2007) asserts that the lack of transformational management can be seen as a high dependency with subordinate workforce, that in this case, does not lead to sustainability if the person leaves school.

iii) Inclusive leadership- it is concerned with people, contexts, and systems that involves educational theory, professional knowledge as well as the growth of praxis. It is considered as a certain action that provides access to learning at any level of provision and deals with differences and diversity in school community (Rayner, 2007).

In order to be effective, a school leader requires an understanding of context and appropriate knowledge that could be applied.

Nevertheless, education system of one country is influenced to some extend by market and globalisation in terms of purpose, function as well as governing. Therefore, school leaders have to respond to the government's initiatives, workforce reforms, funding, competitions where some children will be more expensive to educate that others. These are the factors involved that make the role of the school leader even more complex, and the commitment to inclusion is difficult to sustain in the certain policy context (Leo & Barton, 2006).

However, change for better was meaningful for teachers, student, and parents if systematic issues were addressed effectively at the organisational level. Moreover, the study of Leo & Barton (2006) demonstrated that if the school leaders were engaged in professional learning and development, there would be a higher degree of organisational learning that is beneficial for inclusive practice at all levels.

Similarly, the recent studies (Hoppey & McLeskey 2013; Lindqvist & Nilholm, 2014) revealed that the school principal viewed his role as 'lubricating the human machinery' as well as he stressed the importance of providing the support for teachers and staff to do their best work. The researchers suggests that the key factor for successive leadership involves creation of school culture, support for collaborative professional learning. However, school leaders can face challenges when they want to move away from traditional ways of dealing with difficulties in schools. Also, the studies presented that even they support inclusive practices they would propose individual solutions in some cases.

2.3.2 Creating inclusive school culture

The social model of disability and inclusive values emphasise that the inclusion is the responsibility of all schools. Moreover, they should establish an inclusive school culture by changing its policy and environment in order to fit the pupils' needs and facilitate diversity. Therefore, inclusive education requires higher responsiveness from schools so they can close the 'gap' by taking a more flexible approach based on the acknowledgement of the diversity of pupils. However, at the same time, there is a paradox that schools are encouraged to be more inclusive while some patterns of organisational structure does not fully support those principles (Evans et al., 1999; Gibson & Blandford, 2005) .

Therefore, schools should be encouraged to review their current inclusive practice as well as the school culture and teaching approaches. In addition school leaders and teachers must be aware of the school community in their practice, value all members and provide safe learning environment. Consequently, this joint effort will enable everyone to express their beliefs, build awareness and capabilities together where they are more likely to be inclusive (Farrell, 2003; Gibson & Blandford, 2005; Carrington & Robinson, 2006).

However, there are a number of students that are still marked by their differences and easily trapped in stigma and separation, access and support for learning. Hence, a better provision and well-established working culture should be imperative for better inclusive practice. In addition, the role of the schools in social interaction where they can influence the minds of the people should not be forgotten (Gibson & Blandford, 2005).

The research findings of Leo & Barton (2006) showed that inclusion, or the lack of it, was related to the school culture, as well as to the systems and structures that should be adaptive and responsive to the learning and learners.

Similarly, Tjernberg & Heimdahl Mattson (2014) study presented that successful schools used different methods and approaches, and teachers were prepared to work in different ways suitable for the overall pupil variation with the reflexion on their own teaching.

However, Ainscow et al. (2006) argues that school improvement is more than just a technical process of raising the school capacity to achieve particular outcome. Furthermore, it involves building relationships and dialogue within and beyond the school. In addition, Ebersold (2003) asserts that holistic approach engages various professionals from diverse backgrounds with the unity on common focus.

2.3.3 Professional development

In the process of learning of every human being it is natural to experience challenges and difficulties. In addition, new identities are imposed to educational professionals at all levels. However, this process should be framed in way to understand that every fail is not an error but a necessary aspect in the carrier-long journey and a personal growth related to the professional development (Rayner, 2007).

The culture of teaching profession is changing and it is cause by the changes in the society that reflects values, cultures, and beliefs. In addition, effective teaching and learning is based on sharing those notions. Consequently, in the world that faces increasing change of educational policy, teachers are confronted with more challenges and struggle for effective inclusive practice (Leo & Barton, 2006).

However, some studies (Gibson & Blandford, 2005) proved that the teaching and learning strategies emerged from a long process of the whole staff involvement to promote understanding and commitment of those standards.

In addition, the concept of organisational learning led to a collective response for the new knowledge where successful solutions were applied across the school. If the school was incapable to adapt new organisation strategies, future learning would depend on the individual teachers' efforts. Therefore, if teachers do not have the opportunity for their professional development they will not be successful enough in the classroom.

According to Carrington & Robinson (2006), the school staff is operating from the existing structure which can be the major barrier to think about alternative practices in the curriculum, as well as the new ideas of school organisation. That is one of the reasons why school teachers should be encouraged to question, challenge and move forward towards better practice with critical reflection and engagement in school. Furthermore, if schools develop their staff, and accept holistic approach, they will certainly grow as a learning organisation.

In their recent study, Freire & Cesar (2010) argue that mostly teachers do not have sufficient training and they lack adequate preparation in regard to inclusion of children with SEN.

Therefore, the teachers should have been given an opportunity to learn, and grow as professionals in order to adopt a problem-solving approach and respond effectively to diverse pupil needs. This involves a great understanding of pupil's needs, as well as the whole cycle of actions from planning to evaluation.

However, professional development is often determined by the school leader itself. Also, current practice shows that such responsiveness requires considerable efforts from teachers which can be another barrier (Evans et al., 1999).

The major factors for inclusive school culture where all pupils are valued, competent and never excluded are the teachers' positive attitude towards their pupils and their commitment to pedagogical process. Moreover, the successful results come from mentorship, co-operation with colleagues and constant pedagogical reflexion and discussion.

Overall, teachers value constant collective reflection on the pedagogical system, thoughtful discussion with colleagues, and professional reflexion on pupils, subject and context which increases positive working climate (Tjernberg & Heimdahl Mattson, 2014).

Inclusive discourse can advance the practice and the acceptance of pupils' individual differences. Also, teachers' attitudes can be influenced by the dominant school discourse which consequently can affect pupils' learning process. The way how teachers respond to those differences can be learned through flexible social interactions. In addition, the

importance of the teacher development in the inclusive practice has been recognised, as well as the established school-based strategies for supporting that development. Furthermore, such strategies are focused on the partnership among teachers in order to encourage dialogue, and workshops on active learning approaches (Skidmore, 2004).

Some school leaders adopt values and planning based on the teamwork, shared decision, and supporting positive school culture trough developing relationships among staff. However, many schools do not engage enthusiastically with these processes, and the problem might exist in a traditional school planning. Moreover, the teachers consider these processes to be unacceptable and irrelevant (Carrington & Robinson, 2006).

According to Florian (2014) inclusive pedagogy as an approach supports teaching and learning. Furthermore, it enables teachers to respond to individual differences between pupils but avoids the marginalisation of those who are treated differently. Therefore, the training of staff is crucial to the development of school's approach to inclusion. Professional development should be evaluated according to context, purpose and the pupil's outcome (Gibson & Blandford, 2005). Teachers by themselves should try to find new ways and develop opportunities with the personal reflection and experimentation in order to respond to diverse learning needs of all pupils (Farrell, 2003).

Schools should think critically and stay constantly engaged in activities of self-inquiry in order to sustain fundamental principles of inclusion. In addition, action and intervention in any situation depends upon relevant skills and knowledge. Therefore, school leaders, teachers, teaching assistants and all other school staff must know how to apply that knowledge and move in a more inclusive direction (Ainscow et al., 2006).

2.4 Conclusion

In summary, more inclusive schools, and societies, require major developments in how schools perceive and respond to pupil's diverse needs.

Furthermore, it demands a culture shift in expectations and attitudes where school should adapt to meet pupils' needs rather than pupils to fit into the school, and to promote collective responsibility for more inclusive education system. The first step in establishing inclusive practice starts from the strong leadership and it is a key for developing awareness, understanding among colleagues, and school self evaluation. In addition, collaboration, in the process of change, enables schools to be more effective in achieving those aims (Ritchie & Crick, 2007; Evans, 2007).

3 Research Methodology

In this chapter, the study will be described in terms of research approach, research method, selection of research sample, data collection technique, the process of data collection, the process of data analysis, considerations for validity and reliability, generalisation and limitations of the study. The final part will conclude by mentioning ethical consideration of the study.

3.1 Qualitative research approach

The social and educational world is a place full of richness, complexity, and contradictions. In any research, it is important to be familiar with the 'logic of discourse'. If we consider educational research, it involves investigation of educational phenomena and improvement of policy and practice with new findings. In addition, it is mainly concerned with teaching and learning process, but it can include broad range of issues (Pring, 2004; Basit, 2010; Cohen et al., 2011). The focus of this study is on the process of collaboration among the school professionals for the promotion of inclusive education in primary school.

I used a qualitative research approach as the most appropriate approach to investigate how professionals practice and experience collaborative process within the school. According to Gay et al., (2011), qualitative research seeks to go into the research setting in-depth, as well as to obtain deep understanding about the way things are, and how do participants perceive it. Moreover, it gives voices to participants, and investigates issues that lie beneath the surface of presenting actions and behaviours (Cohen et al., 2011). Therefore, qualitative approach provided the possibility to explore inter-relationships among school professionals, and to use patterns for better understanding of the whole collaborative process in regard to inclusive education in primary school.

However, there is no 'single blueprint' for any approach, including qualitative research. There are rather many ways of investigating the worlds around us. In addition ''one of the features of qualitative research is its emergent nature '' (Cohen et al., 2011, p.231).

Any paradigm and methodology that we choose and apply have to serve the purpose of our research. The interpretive paradigm, in contrast to normative paradigm, ''is to understand the subjective world of human experience '' (Cohen et al., 2011, p.17). Furthermore, it is not interested in generalising, but focuses on smaller number of in-depth analyses of human perceptions and behaviours (Basit, 2010). From an interpretive perspective, the focus is on

'action'. The researcher starts with individuals and sets out to understand their interpretations of the world around them (Cohen et al., 2011). Therefore, the research objective was to study the conditions of a common place, and be informative about experiences of an average institution and people.

The study was designed by using a constructivist approach. Lincoln & Guba (1985) state that people construct their own meanings of situation, behaviors are context-related and socially situated. Therefore, the research interviews investigated how school context influenced school professionals in the process of school collaboration for inclusion of pupils with SEN and diverse cultural background. Moreover, it was important to be open for professionals' awareness-perspectives and practical experiences in order to find out new scientific issues. Nonetheless, Cohen at al.(2011) point out that qualitative approaches can also be criticized for their nature of narrowly micro-sociological perspectives, as well as for the risk of becoming 'hermetically sealed' from the outside world of the participants.

When discussing a qualitative inquiry, a several lists of characteristics could be used. Creswell (2009, p.175) presented a combined list of traditional and newer, self-reflexive perspectives. Furthermore, here are the characteristics of qualitative research that this research relates to:

I) Natural setting- qualitative researchers gather information in the field at the place where participants actually experience the issues that study aims to explore. Moreover, one of the main characteristics is that data can be collected talking directly to people within their own context. Therefore, the study involved face to face interviews with school professionals in the school setting which was helpful to gather relevant information about the school context. However, some of the participants were interviewed in a different setting according to their preferences.

ii) Researcher as a key instrument-qualitative researchers are the ones who gather data through observations, documents, or interviews, and do not rely on instruments developed by other researches. However, due to the time constraint and the language barrier, the qualitative interview was the only method for data collection

iii) Participant's meanings-Throughout the whole research process, the focus should be kept on learning the actual meaning about the issue from the participants. Hence, the focus of the

study was on the school professionals, their practice, and experiences in the process of collaboration for inclusion.

iv) Inductive data analysis- The data is organised into patterns, categories, and themes that are built from the bottom up. Thus, thematic coding was used in the process of data analysis in order to identify themes and build up the knowledge.

v) Emergent design- It means that all phases of the research process may change, and that the initial plan cannot be strictly prescribed. Thus, it was important to be flexible, and try to minimize potential errors.

Accordingly, the research was based on personal views of the school professionals, as Basit (2010) states, those social realities are created by peoples' experiences. However, it is important to acknowledge the meaning that participants hold about those experiences.

3.2 Research sample

3.2.1 Sampling

Robson (2011) points out that sampling is particularly important aspect of a social research because we make judgements about others based on fragmented evidence.

The purpose of the study was to explore collaborative process among education professionals for promotion of inclusive education. In addition, the study domain focused on children with SEN and diverse cultural background. Therefore, I used non-probability (or purposive) sample strategy based on the school context. As a result, the main criterion for school samples was that children with SEN and diverse cultural background are educated in the same classroom as their peers. According to Cohen at al. (2011), the small-scale research often use purposive sample only to represent itself in a similar population, and it does not represent wider population.

Nonetheless, it must be acknowledged that the research sample was also a convenience sample because of the fact that providing the participants for the study was a very challenging task.

3.2.2 Selecting participants

Cohen et al. (2011) states that the researcher is faced with the broad range of issues, and decisions are important on the sampling of people, issues, context, and time frame. Within that in mind, and in order to establish contacts, one of the teachers was approached in June before the school holiday. Unfortunately, there was no respond to an e-mail that included the research information letter.

At the beginning of the school year, I continued to make contacts via e-mail by sending the invitations to one of the school principals, and two teachers that I have met during the school visits. Again, it was unsuccessful as they stayed silent.

In the mid-September, the supervisor of the study programme assisted in finding the suitable schools and research participants. However, there was no guarantee that the criteria would be fulfilled. During the first interview it was revealed that the school have had only one pupil from different cultural background from this school year. Hence, participants from that school could not discuss about that experience since it was relatively new to them.

I could have visited schools before the interview process to ensure that the sample criterion was fulfilled. Nevertheless, due to the time constraint, and the cultural barrier the research sample relied on the supervisor's contacts.

3.2.3 Settings

The research was conducted in two schools in The Czech Republic, located in the village, and the suburban area of Prague. All participants described their schools as a small, family type of school with the friendly atmosphere.

Interviews were conducted with five school professionals who varied in terms of educational background, profession, and experience.

In the first school, the interviews were conducted with the school principal (who was also teaching one class) and a teacher. The intention was to interview a teaching assistant as well. However, after a personal contact and few e-mails, the teaching assistant did not respond so it was not possible to arrange the interview.

In the second school, the interviews were conducted with two teachers and a teaching assistant. Also, the school principal was invited to participate in the study but he refused to be interviewed.

It would have been better if other professionals such as pedagogist, psychologist, or special educators were interviewed. However, the study findings revealed that these professionals were not permanent school staff, and that their professional role was in a domain of the external support services.

All interviews were conducted in English. It is important to acknowledge the fact that it was not their mother tongue. Therefore, the language barrier influenced the data to some extent.

See limitations of the study for more detailed discussion

3.3 Qualitative interview as data collection method

3.3.1 Interview structure

The qualitative interview was used as a tool for data collection. Interview is considered to be 'powerful implement for researcher ' which provides answers for deep and complex issues. It is the flexible tool for data collection where different channels of verbal and non-verbal communication are used. Moreover, it enables participants to discuss their interpretation of the world, and express themselves about the situations from their own perspective (Cohen at al., 2011). Therefore, interviewing will be appropriate tool for data collection since the study aims to investigate collaborative practice and personal experiences of the education professionals involved in the process of inclusion of children with SEN and diverse cultural background.

The study was guided by the main question, and two sub-questions with the aim to get response to them. Hence, the form of the interview was semi-structured because of the possibility to provide more focus on the research question. Furthermore, the interview questions should reflect what the researcher needs to find out where defined objectives provide the right kind of data. The order of the interview can be controlled, but at the same time it gives space for spontaneity. In addition, semi-structured interviews are most appropriate when the interviewer is closely involved in the research process (Cohen et al., 2011; Robson, 2011).

Nevertheless, the researchers have to be aware of their limitations as they can be time consuming, open to bias of the interviewer, possibility of the interview fatigue, and they may be inconvenient for the respondents (Cicourel in Cohen at al., 2011). The impression was that some of the respondents felt uncomfortable when they could not express themselves in English.

In addition, interview is specifically planned, constructed event, and it is different than everyday conversation. Therefore, there is an obligation by the researcher to follow ' rules of the game ' of the interview (Cohen et al., 2011).

See ethical considerations for more detailed discussion.

3.3.2 Interview Guide and Pilot Study

The first interview guide generated fifteen interview questions from the main research question and two sub-questions. All questions were embedded in the primary school context, drawing on experiences of education professionals rather than specific theory. Some questions were added, and adjusted as suggested by the supervisor.

According to Basit (2010, p. 71) '' researcher must conduct the pilot study in order to increase the validity and reliability of the study''. Hence, a pilot interview was conducted on September 15th in order to validate the interview guide (Appendix 1).

Furthermore, the sample should be representative, and not part of the main study. At first, the teacher from The Czech Republic was approached to participate in the pilot study. Unfortunately, she was not available so the pilot interview was conducted with the teacher from another cultural setting. The pilot interview was conducted in English, and even though the respondent was a colleague of mine, she approached it in a professional manner. Eventually, it was very productive and it helped to get valuable insights and gain more confidence.

Basit (2010) asserts that the purpose of data collection in the pilot study is to give more information about the main study. Therefore, a pilot study that occurred in a natural setting enabled the interview questions to be refined. It helps us designing a realistic project, and wording questions in order to minimize nonresponsive rates. Furthermore, researcher should be allowed to make mistakes and learn from it (Basit, 2010; Creswell, 2012).

After the pilot interview, the questions were reviewed and rephrased according to the informant's responses. Moreover, it was noted that two of the questions were too long which created confusion during the interview.

However, the pilot study was conducted only a day before the first interview. It could have been done at least few days earlier in order to provide enough time for thorough planning.

Overall, the process highlighted the importance of conducting the pilot study in research.

3.3.3 Interview process

The study was carried out in two schools with relatively small number of pupils and staff. Three out of five face-to-face interviews were conducted at schools. The other two interviews occurred at places that participants designated (e.g. coffee shops). The interviews ranged in length from 35 to 50 minutes.

The interview questions were focused on experiences of education professionals in the collaborative process in regard to inclusion of pupils with SEN and diverse cultural background. However, in the interview process, there is a possibility for bias since it is a subjective experience. In order to minimize the risk, the best way would be keeping a mind open about what data will be generated in the interview itself (Basit, 2010). Hence, during the interviews with the education professionals, some of the questions probed for further elaboration, clarification, or information where seemed to be appropriate. In addition, notes and memos were kept during the interview.

The research topic and the interview questions were explained to the participants, both before and during the interview process. Furthermore, three respondents were not familiar with one of the words in English (confident) so that we had to stop the interview in order to clarify the meaning. Also, in some instances, they used the words in Czech.

Before the interviews started, an informal conversation with the participants took place if I had noticed that they were not ready to answer the interview questions in English. However, the interview guide could have been sent to the participants earlier so they could go through the question and be more prepared in terms of vocabulary and terminology of the study.

3.3.4 Recording and Transcribing

All interviews were audio-taped and verbatim transcribed in order to provide subsequent data analysis. There is considerable advantage in audio-taping because it enables researcher a permanent record and concentrate on a conduct of the interview. Furthermore, transcribing is a crucial step in interviewing because of the potential for huge data loss. The problem might occur when transcription becomes only a record of data different than a social encounter with important visual and non-verbal elements. The transcripts cannot be fully correct, but it rather becomes a matter to what extend it can be useful for the research (Cohen et al., 2011; Robson, 2011). Hence, as the interviews were the only tool for data collection of the study, the special attention was given to the whole interview process, from the structure to recording, transcribing, and data analysis. All interviews were listened 'for a sense of the whole'. Furthermore, tapes were listened several times taking into consideration notes with the means of non-verbal communication. Also, transcripts were read a number of times in order to understand the context for the units of meaning, and themes that emerged from the data. However, during the transcription of the interviews, it was noticeable that mistakes were made in the interview process. As a first time researcher, I tried to follow the natural conversation and not to be bias, and it resulted that one of the questions in the first interview was omitted. General impression is that the good rapport was established with all of the participants.

3.4. Data analysis process

3.4.1 Storing of raw data

According to Helen Simons, "whatever process you use to make a sense, all involve sorting, refining, refocusing, interpreting, making analytic notes and finding themes in the data" (2009, p.119).

As recommended by Robson (2011), the memos were kept during and after interviewing, as well as during the transcription of the interviews. Overall, the memos were very valuable and helped throughout the whole process of the data analysis. The original transcripts were stored safely, and a copy was used as the working document for the analysis.

3.4.2 Coding process

After the process of data collection, the following procedure in research is the task of data analysis. The qualitative research aims to identify themes and patterns that will emerge during analysis of the collected data (Gay et al., 2011). Therefore, the transcripts were read several times in order to develop understanding of what and why was said, and to ensure the valid interpretation of the data.

3.4.3 Thematic analysis

Thematic analysis was used in the process of data analysis of the study as recommended by Ryan (2006), Anderson (2007), and Seale (2012). The aim was to identify themes that emerged from the data, and address it to the research questions.

After transforming the data from the transcripts of the interviews conducted in the research, data was coded and categorised. In addition, Gay et al. (2011) suggest that one of the first stages in the process of data analysis should be identifying themes. Therefore, the list of themes was noted during the first reading.

As suggested by Braun & Clark (2012) different colours were used to mark different preliminary themes. Some of the themes that emerged from the data were socialisation in the classroom as the main issue, active involvement of the school leader, and high demand for teaching assistants.

The following step in the data analysis was to code the text units. Codes can be either analytical or descriptive, and it is systematic data analysis method that gradually builds explanations or understandings. However, one of potential danger is that it can become mechanical and stay at a descriptive level, remaining with fixed codes as more data is examined (Simons, 2009).

3.5 Validity and Reliability

According to Basit (2010, p.63) '' Validity signifies that the research actually measures or describes the phenomena it set out to measure or describe ''.

Furthermore, it is a requirement and an important key of any research. In qualitative research, validity might be addressed to depth and richness of the data that is achieved, honesty, the

participants that were approached, objectivity and triangulation (Winter, 2000 as cited in Cohen et al., 2011). Therefore, the research dealt with several types of validity:

3.5.1 Content validity

To enhance the research validity and to minimize this risk of interview biases, according to Basit (2010), the best way would be keeping a mind open about what data will be generated in the interview. Moreover, Bell (2010) suggests being constantly aware and being able to reflect oneself in a critical way. In addition, reducing bias includes careful and clear formulation of the questions. Therefore, I used the pilot interview feedback in order to rephrase the interview questions so they can address the research topic more effectively. Also, the attention was to avoid leading questions and avoid influence on the participants' answers.

Nevertheless, the interview is a dynamic social moment, and there are many factors that affect each interview such as interviewer's control, mutual trust, misunderstanding on the part of the interviewer, and misperceptions on the part of the respondent. No matter how interviewer attempts to be objective and systematic, it is impossible, as in everyday life, to bring every aspect of communication within rational control (Cohen, et al., 2011).

Thus, during the interview process, I tried to be aware of all the potential risks, and to minimise such errors.

3.5.2 Descriptive validity

As recommended by Maxwell (2012), during the analysis and discussion of the findings, the interview recordings and transcripts were replayed, and re-read several times to ensure that interview accounts were accurate, as well as to ensure descriptive validity. Hence, descriptive validity provided the validation of the data interpretation.

3.5.3 Interpretative validity

Maxwell (2012) points out that interpretative validity is grounded on the interpretation of language of the people that are being studied. Therefore, their own concepts and words were used during the analysis of the research findings.

Furthermore, it should be taken into consideration that the research threats can only be minimised since no research is completely valid (Basit, 2010).

In addition, ''Reliability denotes that the research can be repeated at another time on similar participants in a similar context with the same results'' (Basit, 2010, p.64). However, in the qualitative research there is a small possibility to do that. Therefore, the intention is to present the entire procedure of the study precisely, and ensures that the research questions were addressed appropriately.

3.6 Generalisation

Creswell (2012) points out that there is no intention to generalise to a population in qualitative inquiry, but develop deeper understanding of the central phenomenon. Therefore, the focus of the research was on the phenomenon of collaboration with its aspect of inclusion of pupils with SEN and diverse cultural background. Moreover, the aim was to reveal experiences and relationships of the school professionals in the collaborative process.

In addition, Yin (2011) states that the problem of generalisation can be minimised by replicating the study in the similar setting which was the approach that was adopted in this research.

3.7 Ethical considerations

Ethics is about how we behave with the people we interact in the research, and one of the main ethical principles in any methodology is to do no harm. However there are some dilemmas that confront the researcher in the field, and ethical issues that researcher must consider when conducting a qualitative research. Furthermore, in educational research, it is very important to ensure that the research is conducted in ethical manner. This must be kept in mind throughout the study at all stages of the research process (Simons, 2009; Basit, 2010).

In addition, regarding educational research, it is important for every researcher to have consciousness about anonymity, confidentiality, and validity including informant consent (Basit, 2010, Cohen et al. 2011). Therefore, the special attention during the whole research process was to ensure the subject's rights to freedom and self-determination.

3.8.1 Informed consent

According to Cohen et al. (2011), researcher who seeks informed consent must make sure that the participants really understand the risks and benefits of the research. Hence, at the first stage of data collection, the information letter was sent to all participants in order to explain

the aims of the research, interview procedure and guidelines, confidentiality and anonymity issues, as well as their risk and benefits.

Again, before the interview process, all procedures were shortly explained to the study participants, and they were assured that they would stay anonymous. They were also asked for the permission to audiotape the interview.

As the cornerstone of ethical behaviour, the informed consent (Appendix 2) was obtained by all participants in the study. They were required to read the form, and keep their own copy.

In addition, participants were informed that they can withdraw for any reason, and at any time during the research.

3.8.2 Confidentiality and Anonymity

Unlike quantitative research, in qualitative approach, specific care should be taken considering identification of person and places (Bryman, 2008). Thus, all participants were given pseudonyms so they can stay anonymous. The school context was carefully described so they were not easily identified.

Recorded interviews and transcripts were safely stored, protected and available only to researcher and supervisor of the study.

Any private data identifying schools or subjects will not be reported. In addition, all data will be destroyed after the completion of the research.

4 Data analysis and Discussion

This chapter will present the findings that are based on the thematic analysis (Anderson, 2007). I used the combination of the codes, and as Patton (cited in Basit, 2010) asserts, qualitative inquiry demands both creative and critical thinking. Furthermore, some of the codes were theoretically developed, and some originated within the data itself (Seale, 2012).

The themes and categories were derived as follows:

The central themes that were identified from the literature:

- Collaboration among school professionals
- The role of the school leader
- Creating inclusive school culture
- Promotion of professional development

The themes that were data driven in the process of the data analysis:

- Understanding of inclusive education among professionals
- Socialisation in the classroom as the main issue
- High demand for the teaching assistants

The subthemes will be introduced under the main themes.

Once more, it might be necessary to emphasis that the major issue during the data collection process was the language of the data collection since English was not the native language of informants and the researcher. The informants used 'broken English' which was taken into consideration during the data analysis.

4.1 Understanding of the inclusive education among school professionals

This theme presents how the school professionals perceive inclusive education, and subthemes will present how their beliefs were reflected to i) inclusion of pupils with SEN ii) inclusion of pupils with diverse cultural background

The data shows that that majority of school professionals expressed the positive attitude towards inclusive education in their schools. Furthermore, they had a good understanding of the core values of inclusive education which is evident from the extracts below:

Ms. Eva, the school principal, asserted: *''Equal chances for all the kids''* while Mr. Martin, the teacher, commented: *'' All children have special individuality''*.

It seems they were aware that all children have different needs, and that inclusive education should bring equal rights.

Furthermore, one of the teachers, Ms. Barbara pointed out that teachers should focus on the needs of all pupils as one of the main tasks:

'' We have different children, and every children need something else, and for me inclusion is to give all pupils what they want, what they need actually.''

In addition, Ms. Marta, another teacher, stressed the importance of social aspect of inclusive education that goes beyond special education:

'' (.) work with children with special need, but the children are (.) in the class or in the group with children which haven't any special needs.''

However, despite of the good understanding of inclusive education, the excerpt from Mr. Martin's interview show that some of the school professionals see inclusive education differently in practice:

''Integration and inclusion (.) I can read it different but I don't feel it different.''

It seems that integration and inclusion could be identified as the same term due to the lack of efficiency in the inclusive school practice.

Moreover, some of the school professionals relate the current obstacles to the educational system of the country as one of teachers, Ms. Barbara, commented:

''Here in Czech Republic, we are trying also (.) to have all these students, but still we have the special schools that are open for those pupils.''

Similarly, Ms. Petra, teaching assistant, described the current situation in The Czech Republic indicating the problem more implicitly:

'' Inclusive education is a good idea, but it doesn't work in real word. Because we have students, but they are not included at all (.) Principals and teachers are not ready for them (.) Education system in the Czech Republic is not ready.''

Therefore, findings imply that some of the school professionals related certain issues, such as the concept of special schools and the knowledge of general teachers, to the broader context. Moreover, they described the education system of the country as not ready to fully support and embrace inclusion of all pupils.

4.1.1 Inclusion of pupils with SEN

During the interviews, the school professionals generally described their schools as open to all children.

On the contrary, they had their own limits regarding pupils with SEN, and were not ready to accept every child as Mr. Martin commented:

''(.) inclusion is not for (.) so good with all children with special needs. (.) But in general, the school is open.''

In addition, the school principal, Ms. Eva expressed the doubt regarding the inclusion of all children, and explained that in some situation it could cause a negative impact if they are not able to provide adequate support:

''But on the other hand, it's not so easy (.)So, if the kids are very specific, they've got very specific needs, it's influencing the whole classroom in negative way (.) I'm for inclusion, but some kids they need very special need which we are not able to (.) provide.''

Similarly, Ms. Barbara explained her point of view:

''I think they should be involved into the normal classes, but (.) depends how deeply they can, they are damaged kind of (.)''

Hence, the data shows that the school professional were not ready and confident enough to accommodate every pupil in their school. In practice, they tend to label pupils and put boundaries according to their needs.

In addition, it seems that some of the school professionals still use the terms that are in line with the medical model as shown in the excerpt of Ms. Petra's interview:

'' We have some other included students, but they are not so (.) so badly handicap.''

Also, through the interviews, some of the teachers described pupils as '*'children with special problems'',* or *''children with some difference, some problem''.*

Therefore, the findings imply that, some of the school professionals still perceive pupils with SEN as children who have 'problems'.

4.1.2 Inclusion of pupils with diverse cultural background

The focus of the subtheme is on the inclusion of pupils with diverse cultural background. Some of the teachers have had the experience of working with these children, and the excerpt from Ms. Barbara's interview show that teachers initially deal with the issue of the second language. She described one of the pupils that just came to her class:

'' (.) she cannot speak correct in Czech language so it will be kind of my task (.)''

Similarly, another teacher, Ms. Marta provided an example of a bilingual pupil in her class:

'' (.) one girl is from bilingual family (.) her mother is Czech, but her father is Portuguese, and she came to our school in second grade. And until now, she has sometimes problem, for example, with length of vowels (.) So, I help her (.) we have some listening activities''.

It seems that the teachers were aware, and willing to support these pupils to overcome the language difficulties.

In addition, Mr. Martin noted that apart from the second language issue, pupils with diverse cultural background had no difficulties to be included into the mainstream classrooms:

'' I have a boy from Ukraina, from Russia, now from Vietnam (.), from China (.) But we don't feel (.) the problem (.) because there is no problem(.) from another culture. It's maybe problem with language''

Finally, it is interesting to note that only one of the informants, Ms. Barbara, perceived inclusion broadly as she explained:

'' There are poor pupils from poor background, so they need more than, for example, the pupils they have the background OK, and the one that they have excellent background. (.) Or the kids that they are talented (.) it's necessary to work with them. (.) Inclusion is not only about the children with SEN.''

Nevertheless, a lot of enthusiasm was captured in the interviews with the school professionals. Even though they tend to put their own boundaries, overall impression is that they are willing to give chance to all pupils if they have the adequate support.

4.2 Creating inclusive school culture as an important factor

The focus of the theme is creating of inclusive school culture.

As identified in the literature, creating inclusive school culture is an important factor when promoting inclusive education. The data showed that the school professionals tried to promote positive and inclusive working atmosphere in their schools, and follow a *''constant philosophy''* as Mr. Martin, one of the teachers explained.

In addition, it is important to note that the main interest in inclusion come from parents of children with SEN.

However, it can be a long and challenging process especially for the new schools that need to demonstrate effective inclusion in practice.

The school principal, Ms. Eva, described her experience:

'' (.) people around us didn't believe us that we can manage to build up the school (.) not really good atmosphere. But we managed, mainly because there were clients, like parents looking for very small, like family school, as because their kids had, well they've got still …very special needs.''

In addition, the excerpt from the principal's interview:

'' There were many kids, I mean parents, from this…village, they sent their kids somewhere, you know, somewhere else because they didn't trust we can manage''

shows that some parents are still skeptical about the inclusive education, and concerned to what extent it can have an impact on the education of their own children.

It seems that creating inclusive school culture is a part of reconstructing traditional schools, as well as raising awareness of school professionals and parents. Moreover, if well established it can be transferred into the classrooms for the benefit of all pupils.

Ms. Barbara commented: *'' And we feel well…at our school so that the atmosphere to the children is also nice (.) And I think that atmosphere is sucking to the children as well so they are helping each other as well.''*

Similarly, Ms. Petra suggested: *''It's important to create…good atmosphere for work…when a children feel…safety.''*

Therefore, the data shows that creating inclusive school culture involves promotion of inclusive values, as well as the positive attitudes in order to achieve an optimal learning environment and successful schools for all.

4.3 Socialisation in the classroom as the main issue

The theme has emerged from the data, and presents socialisation in the classroom. It is considered as one of the main issues in regard to inclusive education in two schools.

As revealed during the data collection, all school professionals were aware of the importance of the social aspect of inclusion as Ms. Barbara captured it in one phrase ''*Socialisation is above all!''*

Thus, they explained that socialisation of children in the classroom was one of the main issues that was discussed in their schools. In addition, equally important for them was to develop relationship among peer and overall acceptance of children with SEN.

Mr. Eva, the school principal, explained the issue and pointed out that pupils with SEN have to be accepted by their peers:

''Just to move these kids more to the…some interactions with other kids (.) So, socialisation, just to get kids involved in the classroom, just to teach another kids that it's normal, that we..., that everyone is specific, there is no the same personality, and it's totally normal that everyone has got some things…. specific.''

Similarly other teachers, such as Ms. Barbara, raised the questions of the social participation:

'' (.) how to involve the child into the environment of the classroom, how to do it for the cooperation, socialization, organization (.) and how to accept, to not to let them push the child out of the group. '' ,

And another teacher, Mr. Martin indicated the problem more implicitly:

'' The problem with inclusion…can be...when the child is included by me, but it's not included by other children. They tolerate him, they him, but they don't accept…fully accept.''

From the interview extracts, it is evident that the school professionals consider it as their part of the job. Moreover, they take responsibility in terms of the social participation in the classroom and not merely focusing on teaching and learning.

Furthermore, Mr. Marta described her role in the classroom:

'' But my job is to teach children to help to each other, not only to think about herself or himself, and about his or her problems. Helping each other, not only teacher, but everybody.''

Whereas Ms. Petra, teaching assistant, provided an example of her student who overcame communication difficulties with her support:

'' (.) there was the problem with him; he didn't want to speak with teachers, and with other students (.) And after this, we started to… join him more and more and made him speak; I made him cry (.) I made him to be with his friends in the class. And it's helping him, he is getting better.''

It seems that they tried to find solutions, and improve the current situation in their schools in regard to the social participation of pupils with SEN.

However, the experience with children from diverse cultural background was different. It is evident from excerpt of Mr. Martin's interview:

''I don't saw any problems. It was very, very clear, very nice, no xenophoby, no regression (.) Absolutely accept, yes.''

Those pupils did not have any difficulties in terms of acceptance among their peer, and overall socialisation in the classroom.

4.4 The active involvement of the school leader

This section will present the findings that reflect how the two school leaders support their staff, as well as the collaborative practice in the process of inclusion.

As identified in the literature, the school leaders have responsibility to provide education for all children. Furthermore, they should support their staff in the process of inclusion in order to reduce potential barriers.

Most of the school professionals revealed that they had the support of the school leader as one of the teachers simply put *''I feel his support''*.

In addition, they stressed the advantage of working in small school.

In regard to the collaborative practice, data showed that the two school leaders tend to support informal collaboration among their staff.

Ms. Eva, school principal, explained the practice in her school:

'' I'm not saying you and you have to meet and discuss this and this because if I see that it's working like that, that they are working informally, and just doing these things informally there is no point just to, you know, you have to meet every Wednesday this time to sort this out because we are small.''

Similarly, one of the teachers, Ms. Barbara, commented:

''It's really small school so if we have trouble or problem with something we just go and ask. It's not we are waiting for consultation. It's really open.''

And Ms. Marta, the teaching assistant, noted:

''So we have rather small school, and we can speak about children informally. (.) It's more often.''

However, even though the school leaders provide support for their staff, it is equally important to be actively involved in the whole process. The differences were found in two schools.

The principal of Kvetna School, Ms. Eva, was aware of difficulties that teachers could face in teaching and learning process of children with SEN as she explained through her narrative:

''Because sometimes it's just very difficult to have these kids, and, and in the classroom. So if the teacher feels, so like, that he knows, or she knows, her limits, that say alright…this is enough for me. I need help, or I need some other to, to sort it out with me. (.) I say, OK, you are doing the best you can, and if you know how to do it, just ask people, just call someone, call, and just to me, to other staff.''

Furthermore, the excerpt from, Ms. Barbara's interview shows that her school principal was engaged into the inclusive process in their school:

''Yes, she is really into, into inclusion because she is, I think, or, I can see it (.) …all pupils need something else, and we need to do maximum for them. That's what she is trying…to do maximum for them.''

In Soncek Primary School, Ms. Petra, the teaching assistant, described her school principal as *''opened to receive students with disabilities ''*.

However, she noted that he was not actively involved, and she indicated the problem more implicitly:

'' He has his papers, and…he has us, some assistants who should be responsible for the education of disabled students (.) he doesn't want to work more…he doesn't come to the class to see how we work with disabled students. He only knows what he hears from us or other teachers…He is not in the process.''

The interviews revealed that if the school leader is 'out of the process' it is more difficult to identify 'mistakes', and hence, to make some improvements in regard to inclusive education in their school.

In addition, the data shows that one of the main issues of the school leaders is lack of the finances as one teacher noted:

''She is trying to find finance for those kind of kids that they need''.

Furthermore, they are mainly concerned with the problem of funding of the teaching assistants as Ms. Martin noted: *'' I think there isn't money for these things, for them.''*

Similarly, Ms. Marta, the teacher, commented:

''But the problem is more financial…more than other because we need assistants (.) and school hasn't enough, enough money for the assistants.''

From the excerpt of Ms. Eva's interview, it is evident that in some situations parents have to pay for the teaching assistant because of the insufficient state funds:

'' (.) there are no really… ideal financial (.) It's not like let's say, legal in Czech Republic because she is staying two hours paid by state, by Ministry of Education. And the rest are the parents paying because she is taking care of…boy with autism, and he needs hundred percent of help.''

4.5 Promotion of the professional development

The focus of the theme is promotion of professional development as one of the key factors for successful collaboration.

As indentified in the literature, it is important element in the process of inclusion as it helps professionals to meet the needs of all pupils, and hence to facilitate inclusive education in their schools.

The data shows that there are no teacher trainings, seminars or any programmes for inclusion organised within the school. However, external services provide seminars, and conferences to promote professional development regarding various types of disabilities and inclusive education in general.

The school principal noted *'' now, people are talking about inclusion''*, and it is evident from the interview extracts that different organisations are trying to provide more information in order to support school professionals in this process.

Ms. Eva asserted: *'' (.) we don't provide like, any, any here in the school, but there are many seminars and conferences provided by like, external organisations.''*

Similarly, Ms. Petra commented: *'' Now, at present, we can, we can study at outside courses.''*

In addition, data shows that the two school leaders encourage their staff to attend seminars provided by external organisations. However, it is not obligatory, and it depends on their personal interest as Ms. Eva, the school principal, explained:

'' I always recommend, and it's up to teachers if they choose it or not, But I'm not pushing colleagues to do it (.) ''

Most of the teachers had similar comments in regard to their professional development as shown in the interview extracts below:

Ms. Marta: *''(.)Each teacher can, also, subscribe for some courses which she or he…consider as interesting, and headmaster can provide us some special.''*

Ms. Barbara: *'' (.) It's really up to us (.) So, the principal send us the link, and if you want to participate on, then you are welcome of course.''*

And Ms. Petra: *''There are some offers but it's individual.''*

Therefore, they mainly expand their knowledge individually as the school principal noted:

'' They are like trying, they are studying by themselves.''

In addition, one of the teachers commented about the new pupil from different cultural background in her class:

'' (.) It will be kind of my task, and I need to read and study about it to do it properly.''

It is important to point out that the data shows there is a gap in education of general teachers. One of the reasons is that they do not have enough subjects at university level that would prepare them to work with children with SEN in the mainstream schools as Ms. Petra, commented:

''I think… teacher should know more of all disabilities (.) When we educate teachers to teach, we should include some special education subjects…yes, for all teachers, for all schools.''

Ms. Barbara, one of the teachers, explained the situation indicating the problem more implicitly:

'' (.) I wasn't prepared by University. That's kind of sad to say (laugh). But we didn't have so many…things or seminars about this, and that's a shame because I think that's missing in the University.''

4.6 High demand for teaching assistants

The theme that has emerged from the data presents high demand for teaching assistants.

It is necessary to note that during the interviews all participants stressed the importance of having the teaching assistant in the classroom. Actually, they defined it as one the main issues in regard to inclusive education in their schools as Ms. Marta points out *''I think the main obstacle…when we need for some child assistant''*.

In addition, they were more interested to get a teaching assistant as a support instead of any inclusion programmes or seminars in the future as Ms. Barbara, one of the teachers, commented *'' More than programmes, I would like to have an assistant actually.''*

Furthermore, she provided an example: *'' (.) when the teacher is alone at the class, for example with twenty four students, pupils, that's quite difficult to…approach the inclusion in the maximum way. So, if the number of the pupils is in the class quite high, then it's necessary for me, or I think for other teacher, that there is assistant.''*

Similarly, another teacher, Ms. Marta, related the high demand for the teaching assistants to the fact that number of children with SEN in the school is increasing when she observed:

'' I think that the number of children which have problems…is increased, is raised. So some children have rather…rather serious problem and some children needs to have assistant.''

However, interviews revealed that most of the school professionals are not familiar with the role of the teaching assistant. It seems that, in the practice of two schools, teaching assistants have the main responsibility in the classroom. Moreover, the school principals and teachers rely on their help as they are required to do most of the planning, and paper work for the pupils with SEN.

This is evident from the excerpt of Ms. Eva's interview when she talks about the preparation for the lessons:

'' I just ask my two assistants to do that work for me, just they are…mainly helping me with those kids (.) I'm able to prepare something for them because I bought some books, and some worksheets for kids, and I know from which materials they are working from. But the work, like concretely, the individual work is up to assistants.''

Furthermore, she commented: *'' (.) sometimes, assistant is taking some part of educational process that she is talking about something to kids. In general, they are helping everybody.''*

It seems that most teachers consider that their work will be 'less difficult' with the teaching assistant in the classroom as one teacher noted *''It's quite big help for the teacher''*. And without having one their work seems to be more difficult in a way, as Mr. Martin concluded in short: *''It's harder for me.''*

Similarly, Ms. Marta asserted: *'' The teacher can work without assistant, but for him or for her is more difficult''*.

Teaching assistants are suggested to attend more courses and seminars for inclusion. Also, it is important to note that the data shows that they regularly meet with their colleagues for consultations.

In addition, teaching assistants are one of the most involved school professionals in collaborative process towards inclusion as evident from the interview extracts below:

Ms. Eva explained through her narrative:

''I just want my assistants to be specialists in specific needs. So that's why I'm working mostly with them about this topic, like, you know, supporting them to be, to go deeper to this problem and just help us…and it's helping the whole class, whole school because they are talking to my other colleagues.''

Similarly, Ms. Petra, the teaching assistant, commented:

'' I actually work with …psychologist and the special teacher who is writing an documents for him (.) I'm working with them, then I'm working with teachers in our school, and I'm planning with them some necessary subjects.''

Finally, Ms. Barbara noted:

''So, I go for her, to her, and ask her what do you think about this case, what you recommend.''

4.7 Collaboration among school professionals

This theme is the central theme of the research. The two subthemes i) open communication and collaboration ii) collaboration for the improvement of the inclusive education present the findings that revealed challenges and advantages of collaborative practice in two schools. Data shows that the school professionals meet on regular basis, formally and informally, to discuss all the problems in regard to inclusion of children with SEN and diverse cultural background. Furthermore, some official meetings also include parents and pupils.

This is evident from the interview extracts below:

The school principal, Ms. Eva, pointed out the good collaboration with her staff as well as the parents:

'' (.) I am closely working with them, very closely, nearly every day. Sending some reports, we had some meetings with parents as well together. We are trying to build up some routine for these kids, all the the time discussing which, what is the best for these kids''

Ms. Barbara explained through her narrative that collaboration in her school is related to planning and evaluation at official meetings:

'' When making the plans, and also, when plan is done, we are kind of going back as well (.) because there is a recommendation how to work. And then…and then after while we are, we look there if it worked or not. So, we have like quarters consultations with parents, and with child, and it's like three parted consultation: parents, child, and teacher where we discuss approach, and we are making…kind of goals for the future.''

Or, informally when sharing ideas with her colleagues:

'' So, we are sharing the materials or the ideas (.) we have some kind of private, our room where we can meet.''

Similarly, another teacher, Ms. Marta described collaboration in her school and noted how often it occurs:

'' During the school year we have approximately once a month official meeting (.) It's the working with individual plans…we are…talk about this plans, also with parents in the beginning of the school year. During the school year, we also have some consultations with parents if it's necessary.''

She also made a comment about informal collaboration in her school:

'' (.) Informally often…maybe I can say each day because we have dining room, and during the lunch we talk a lot of, or we discuss a lot of situations.''

Ms. Petra, teaching assistant noted:

'' We are, we are making some working sheets for student, and we are talking about them.''
Furthermore, she commented:

'' And informal is between me and my colleagues, and we are talking about that after, after school and after class.''

Interviews revealed that their overall experience was quite positive. It seems that they were aware of the advantages of collaboration towards inclusion. Furthermore, they pointed out different elements of collaboration that is evident from the interview extracts below:

Ms. Eva noted:

'' Cooperation is very, very good. Like very, very nice and it's helping me a lot (.)'We can just build up some ideas…all of the voices are counted (.)''

Ms. Barbara, one of the teachers, emphasised sharing among colleagues:

'' I think that in our school, the collaboration is working actually, collaboration among us, yeah (.) It's sharing materials, it's open atmosphere…when teacher wants to, want advice then everyone is open to answer and help in maximum way.''

And, Ms. Petra, teaching assistant, commented:

'' We are trying to work together to go the same way in our educational…training or practicing. And that's how it works.''

Also, Ms. Martin, teacher, explained the advantages:

'' It's very harmonic (.) You can see another ways to do something (.) you can learn something new from others.''

Ms. Marta pointed out the importance of time consuming in collaborative practice:

''(.) when you create some good plan or something which help you, so if you provided to other colleague, it can economise their time and vice versa.''

However, the data shows that the school professionals depend on support of the external services. Furthermore, it involves the support of psychologists and special educators. Currently, these education professionals are helping the school in making individual educational plans (IEP) as well as consulting and supervising them regarding the children with SEN as evident from the interview extracts below:

Ms. Eva, the school principal noted:

'' We haven't got like specialist.''

In addition, she provided an example of the situation when it is necessary to collaborate with the external specialist in order to resolve some issues:

'' And we've got just fresh experience with the girl in… my classroom. And she is very, very, very demanding, very hard to work with. You know, everything is just a problem with her. So, at the moment, we are…we are collaborating with all the specialists around the…you know, the school (.) As I said before, it's very hard for us. I mean, you need really specific help from other specialist from outside.''

Similarly, Ms. Barbara, one of the teachers, commented:

'' (.) Our supervisor for this kind of special educated children, and it's external, it's not in our school but, we are consulting, we are consulting her when it's a kind of tough task.''

Another teacher, Ms. Marta, explained that she also consults with psychologist who comes to school as an external support:

'' We meet with psychologist…and we talk about children, about their problems (.) twice a month or maybe when we need so...''

4.7.1 Open communication for effective collaboration

It is important to point out that besides the lack of time, the biggest challenge for school collaboration, as Ms. Petra noted, is *''to speak open-minded''.*

This sub-theme presents the data that revealed the importance of open communication among professionals within school based on '' friendly environment'' as they described.

Moreover, the excerpt from Ms. Barbara's interview shows that school professionals relate open communication to successful collaboration and perceive it as an important factor in the collaborative practice:

'' It's about your colleagues, if they are open to you, if they want to share with you. It's about that.''

Similarly, the principal of Kvetna School, Ms. Eva, described that managed to establish open and friendly atmosphere. In addition, she considered crucial to work as a team in order to have effective collaboration among school staff:

'' I think we are team now because for me we've got very friendly, open environment here, and for me it's basic, just for me it's elementary (.) because without that would be totally impossible to do something.''

Furthermore, she pointed out that it is important to speak open-minded even if they have different opinions:

'' (.) We can discuss, we can be open, we can say even if we don't agree, and we can find some arguments, and then ...to have friendly, still friendly atmosphere.''

However, the differences were found in Soncek School.

Ms. Petra, teaching assistant, was more critical when she explained the biggest challenge regarding collaborative practice towards inclusion:

'' To speak open minded. Because I think some teachers actually…don't say what they really mean.''

Furthermore, she suggested what could be done for more effective collaboration and overall school improvement in regard to inclusive education:

'' We should fix it, we should speak more open-mined…to get it better.''

It is important to note that she pointed out the lack of communication between teachers and students when she described the situation indicating the problem more implicitly:

''I was trying to tell them that we need to speak to the students more (.) they think it's important to teach them, and teach them, and teach them, and not communicate with them.''

She observed that some teachers are still traditional, and not fully ready to accept pupils with SEN:

'' And when there is a student with some disability or he is not too smarter to have some good marks, and they are…closing to him.''

In addition, some teachers are also 'closed' for the new ideas as she pointed out:

'' Because I'm talking about something and they are watching in me like: ''You are mad. You get crazy because it's not, it's not working in the class'' and I'm saying: Yes, it's good for the students, and I know it can work.'' ''.

Overall, data shows that the best results are achieved if school collaboration is based on friendly and open communication not only among the school staff but also between pupils and teachers.

4.7.2 Collaboration for the improvement of inclusive education

As revealed during the data collection, all school professionals stressed the importance of collaboration in the process of inclusion in their school.

Moreover, they consider it as a step forward that enables them to identify the problems, discuss the issues, and thus overcome barriers in the process of inclusion as one of the teachers, Mr. Martin noted:

'' Discuss problem and… finding the best way to do something''.

In addition, the excerpt from Ms. Eva's interview shows similarities in perception of collaboration as a way to find the best possible solutions:

'' Why is this good, why is not good, and then find the best way for all of us''.

Another teacher, Ms. Barbara explained in what way collaboration helps school professionals to find the best possible solutions and solve the current issues:

'' (.) we can kind of find the better point of view, and one is looking at that way and it's stuck for example, and it cannot move, and the other will come with other idea that we can share (.) ''

Similarly, Ms. Petra, teaching assistant believes that collaboration is the way for improvement for pupils in regard to inclusive education:

'' We are discussing how to, how to make it better for included students, or how to change something what's wrong.''

Data shows that with joint efforts of education professionals, schools could be more prepared and effective to provide quality education for all pupils as the school principal concluded:

'' the school is more successful.''

In addition, the excerpt from Ms. Barbara's interview shows that collaboration for inclusion is necessary for schools if they want to be successful in the inclusive practice nowadays:

'' I think...the collaboration, when we want to do inclusion is very important. If we don't collaborate, I think it's impossible to do inclusion in the right.''

4.8 Conclusion

The analysis of the themes showed that the professionals demonstrated willingness to include all pupils as well to create positive working environment for everyone. However, still there is a gap in knowledge of general teachers and better support within the school system and beyond. It is interesting to note that there is a high demand for the teaching assistants as it seems that the teachers depend on their help to some extent.

The data shows that the main issues are concerned with the social interaction in the classroom and overall acceptance of pupils with SEN. In addition, apart from the language, there are no major issues in regard to inclusion of children from diverse cultural background.

However, it is presented that the active involvement of the school leader plays an important role in regard to support of their staff within school. Moreover, the professionals are encouraged to continue with professional development, and share information, more informally, on a daily basis.

In the end, professionals perceived collaboration as an important factor for the improvement of inclusive practice of pupils with SEN and diverse cultural background in their schools. Nonetheless, an open communication among school staff, as well as the pupils has an influence on overall collaborative process within the school.

4.9 Discussion

The research objective was to reveal the experiences of school professionals in the process of collaboration towards inclusion of pupils with SEN and diverse cultural background in primary school. Furthermore, the outcome of the research show that the participants perceived collaboration in inclusive education as beneficial. The outcome of the research also indicates possible areas for further development in terms of better support within school, as well as the active involvement of the school leader.

4.9.1 Inclusion seen by the school professionals

Inclusion is considered as a relatively new idea in the education system in the Czech Republic, and still is considered as a current topic under a continuous discussion. However,

there has been a higher interest in inclusive approaches expressed by the mainstream schools recently (Strnadova & Hajkova, 2012). According to the study findings, overall impression is that education professionals are willing to embrace inclusion in their schools as long as they have adequate support.

Nemec et al. (2015) assert that in the current process of inclusive education in the Czech Republic, the specific attention is paid to pupils with SEN. This was evident from the general understanding of inclusive education of the school professionals. Even though the attitude was positive, only one of the teachers perceived inclusion as a broader term, and exactly defined all group of vulnerable pupils (Evans, 2007).

Also, the findings revealed that the country itself is not fully ready to support inclusion in the mainstream schools. This might be due to the fact that Czech Republic has the long tradition in differentiated education system.

In addition, the school professionals seem to still struggle with the inclusive practice in their schools as they tend to put boundaries according to their needs. It seems that, still, there is the lack of understanding that all children have right for the equal opportunities in education regardless to their needs. Cherkowski (2010) points out that it is not enough to have rules and policies for the schools to be truly open for all the students.

The participants had some experience with inclusion of children with diverse cultural background, and they were aware of the language problems they might have. However, as found in the literature, the focus of inclusive education is on pupils with SEN and it seems that the school professionals were occupied with the inclusion of these children. Consequently, they might have overlooked some issues in regard to the multicultural education in their schools. Evans (2007) points out that overlapping need of these pupils can be difficult to identify and it requires planned actions, time, and patience.

4.9.2 Creating inclusive school culture

Some of the previous studies (Evans et al., 1999; Gibson & Blandford, 2005) also highlighted the positive effects of creating inclusive school culture. The participants of the study emphasised the importance of the positive working atmosphere within the whole school. Furthermore, the overall atmosphere values all individuals equally, and includes school staff as well as the pupils.

Rayner (2007) asserts that if the school is organised as a learning community and striving for the same goal, it will accept a life-long commitment and share values of social identity, human dignity and positive sense of self.

However, one of the school leaders described her 'challenging' experience in managing inclusive school at the very beginning. Strnadova & Hajkova (2012) claim that mistakenly presented view on the inclusive education in the Czech Republic has resulted in parent's anxiety as they perceived it as the possible threat to the development of their own children. Moreover, inclusive practice can be hindered by the prejudice of the local communities a as one of the previous studies imply (Strakova et al., 2011).

Findings revealed that the parents of children with children did not trust the school in terms of organization of the teaching and learning process in regard to inclusion of pupils with SEN. Therefore, schools had to prove that they could be successful in educational provision for all pupils regardless to their individual needs. It seems that if they manage to establish inclusive school culture from the beginning, it will be easier to follow the same path with support of all staff and parents.

In addition, school leaders and teachers must be aware of the school community in their practice, value all members and provide safe learning environment as identified in the literature (Farrell, 2003; Gibson & Blandford, 2005; Carrington & Robinson, 2006).

4.9.3 Social aspect of inclusion in primary school

The participants revealed that they were not concerned with academic achievement of pupils with SEN but rather with the socialisation in the classroom.

It is consistent with the findings that the social participation is one of the main motives of inclusive education. Moreover, relationship with peers, interactions, acceptance by the classmates plays a significant role during the school time, and it has been the focus of the research in the past decade. The social factors are crucial in psychological and learning outcomes. Therefore, maximising the social participation among peers in the classroom is generally considered as the important aspect of inclusion (Koster at al., 2009).

However, the social participation of pupils with SEN is quite challenging. The study findings of Schwab (2015) showed that pupils with SEN were less socially accepted that their peers without SEN.

Similarly, the study findings showed that the professional of two schools had issues with socialisation of pupils with SEN in their schools. Therefore, it was important for them to transfer the inclusive school culture into the classrooms and develop friendships among peers, and overall acceptance in the classroom.

Nevertheless, the study revealed that the pupils from diverse cultural background did not have any problems in regard to acceptance and interaction with their peers.

Nevertheless, the social aspect of inclusion is an important factor in overall development and should be taken into consideration regardless of the pupils' needs or backgrounds.

4.9.4 The role of the school leader in the collaborative practice

The most of the participants emphasised the need for the strong support of their school leader. Evans (2011) states that the first step starts from the strong leadership, and it is a key for developing awareness, understanding among colleagues, and school self evaluation.

Nonetheless, it is necessary to point out that the study findings revealed the importance of actively involved school leaders in the process of inclusion in their school which is consistent with the previous study of Leo & Barton (2006).

The differences found in two schools imply that the school leaders should be directly involved in the process of inclusion. Moreover, inclusive practice of two schools showed that the school leaders should be constantly involved in order to collaboratively identify problems as well as to resolve the current issues.

Ritchie & Crick (2007) assert that these changes demand for more inter-professional collaboration and take much broader view of the needs of all pupils.

In addition, the study findings imply that school leaders tend to support informal collaboration among their staff. However, it seems there was a lack of reflective meetings that could provide more effective practice.

Poulos et al. (2014) research implies that teachers usually cannot be critical enough of one another. Therefore, the school leaders should support teachers to work together by establishing school schedule for team meetings and study groups where they can reflect the current instructional practice.

Also, the study revealed that, with the increasing number of children of children with SEN in the mainstream schools in the Czech Republic, the school leaders struggle to find funding to support their staff and pupils.

Leo & Barton (2006) state that the struggle of school leadership committed to the values of inclusion comes from the social and political context. Moreover, as identified in the literature, some children are considered to be more expensive to educate than others.

4.9.5 Promotion of the professional development

As identified in the literature (Freire & Cesar, 2010) teachers mainly lack in training and preparation for the inclusion of pupils with SEN in the mainstream schools. Therefore, they should be given the opportunity to develop professionally.

Bacakova & Closs (2013) point out that the teachers have the key role in regard to the quality of inclusive education in the Czech Republic. However, the study revealed that, still; there is a gap in the knowledge of general teachers in regard to pupils with SEN.

Moreover, it is consistent with the findings of Strakova et al. (2011) that education programmes at Universities in the Czech Republic do not provide systematic, and equal preparation for the general teacher. Therefore, participants suggested better preparation at Universities as they were not provided with enough subjects on special needs education.

According to Brody & Davidson (1998) school staff needs a constant development and training in order to use them to the best effect. Moreover, their continuing professional development is considered as an important factor in promotion of pro-inclusive changes in the education system.

In inclusive school, which accepts all pupils regardless to their needs, same rules should apply for the staff diversity as well. School professionals might have different learning styles, strengths and weaknesses, and school has to recognise those differences (Evans, 2007).The findings revealed that the school leaders support their staff in their professional development and recommend ongoing trainings and seminars regarding inclusive education as a current trend.

However, participants of the study mentioned that all support programmes were organised by the external services. The study findings revealed that the school professionals were regularly

informed about the support programmes for inclusion but there is a lack in terms of school organisation in regard to this matter.

It is important to note that professionals of two schools were not obliged to attend any support programmes, and it was only determined by their personal interest. It was rather common that schools only provide lists of available courses according to their preferences instead of proper planning which is consistent with the findings of Strakova et al. (2011).

Therefore, the findings imply that care of vulnerable pupils in mainstream classes depends on the practices and believes of individual teachers.

4.9.6 High demand for teaching assistants

The study revealed that there is a high demand for the teaching assistants required by teachers in the mainstream schools. Furthermore, the findings imply that the school professionals considered the teaching assistants as a significant help in terms of support, and planning in the classroom, as well as towards collaborative practice in the school.

Inclusive schools in the Czech Republic can ask for regional authorities to provide funding for the teaching assistants, and their role is to help with pupils with SEN and culturally disadvantaged (Strakova et al., 2011).

However, the study revealed that the school leaders in practice still struggle to provide the support of the teaching assistant in the classroom due to the funding limits.

In addition, the study findings are consistent with the recent research conducted on the role of the teaching assistants in the Czech Republic (Nemec et al., 2015). Their study revealed that teaching assistants were those who were mainly involved in the process of inclusion in the mainstream schools.

Nevertheless, the school professionals revealed that they tend to rely on the help of the teaching assistant and they might misunderstand their role at some instances.

Generally, there is a high demand for the teaching assistants in many countries as they can be valuable assets in the classroom. However, they tend to be used as the 'key provision' for pupils with SEN. In addition, teaching assistants should not be put in any inappropriate role such as making pedagogical decisions (Giangreco, 2013).

Hence, it implies that they should be not considered as a replacement for teachers, and their role in the education of pupil with SEN should not be primary.

4.9.7 Collaboration for inclusion: Practice and experiences of the school professionals

The participants revealed that the collaborative practice regarding inclusion in two schools was mainly focused on informal meetings and sharing materials in staff rooms on a daily basis. It involved planning, organisation of teaching and learning process, as well as discussions of all issues related to inclusion of all pupils. In addition, they regularly had official meetings, and they perceived collaboration as a valuable opportunity to share both, knowledge and experience.

As identified in the literature, cooperation can be considered as a planning, delivering, and sustaining educational institutions. Furthermore, cooperation among humans is one of the oldest concepts that we relate to systematic survival. It is grounded on a human moral, and also requires in way we think feel and view others (Broady & Davidson, 1998).

According to the study findings, open communication was considered as one of the main issues in regard to the successful collaboration. The participants revealed that without open communication within school, it was more difficult to identify, discuss, and resolve the current issues. Hence, it implies that open communication is a foundation of successful collaboration.

Similarly, the previous studies showed (Gibson & Blandford, 2005) that it is important that voices from every part of the school can be heard and acted on. Moreover, communication is essential to effective decision-making. In schools, a supportive communication climate leads to cooperation as well as the more effective information gathering. Therefore, the dialogue needs to be valued among all practitioners in order to resolve any existing contradictions and issues.

4.9.7.1 Collaboration for improvement

Florian & Linklater (2010) state that teachers are faced with the challenge of teaching pupils who differ across various dimensions. Therefore, they strongly value the opportunity to work collaboratively with their colleagues. Altogether, they need to develop mutual support, share experience, and ideas in order to create collaborative problem solving.

The participants revealed that with successful collaboration in their school, they would be able to identify problems, and resolve the current issues in regard to inclusion of all pupils. Furthermore, they perceived it as the key for an overall improvement.

It is consistent with the findings of the previous studies (Farrell, 2003; Gibson & Blandford, 2005) that showed that collaborative problem solving approach, with the strong commitment, will help to find solutions to every day challenges in regard to diverse group of pupils.

Finally, as identified in the literature, key factors to successful collaboration towards inclusion had an impact on an overall practice of two schools.

5 Concluding Remarks

5.1 Key findings

The qualitative study was designed to explore the opinions of the professionals in primary school and their experience regarding collaborative practice towards inclusion of pupils with SEN and diverse cultural background. In order to achieve the aim of the study three main research questions were posed:

- How do professionals collaborate to promote inclusive education in primary school?
- How do professionals experience collaborative process?
- What is the role of school leader in collaborative practice towards inclusion?

As previous studies were mainly concerned with experiences of the teachers (Poulos et al., 2014) the intention was to bring all the voices together and explore the collaboration within school. The quotations of the participants were analysed, and what emerged from them was addressed to the research questions.

The study findings showed that collaboration among professionals is considered as an important factor in promotion of development of inclusive education in the Czech Republic. School professionals perceived collaboration as beneficial in order to remove barriers and resolve problems.

However, the education system of the country faces challenges in terms of funding, and insufficient staff. Furthermore, the schools mainly depend on the external services in terms of professional support.

The study revealed that the active involvement of the school leader is crucial in the process of inclusion in primary school in the Czech Republic. Nevertheless, establishing school culture, collaborative environment, and open communication among school professionals, as well as the pupils is a foundation of successful inclusion.

Even though the school professionals have the positive attitudes towards inclusion of all pupils, still, pupils with SEN are limited by the nature of their needs to some extent.

Nonetheless, one of the emerging themes was social participation of pupils with SEN in the classroom. Participants revealed that it was important to include children, and not to be left out because they are 'different'.

Ultimately, findings imply that the multicultural approach in primary schools in Czech Republic is yet to be developed.

5.2 Implications for practice

It seems that policy is still ahead of the practice in the schooling system of the Czech Republic towards inclusion of all pupils. Moreover, running an inclusive school can be a confrontational and challenging task.

Hence, schools have to try to improve their current practice so that they can respond to pupils diverse needs. Moreover, the working climate should be based on open communication among school professionals as well as the pupils.

In order to support development of inclusive education, schools should continue with the efforts to restructure their conventional organisation. It is necessary to conceive the school in a new way, and transform school cultures into collaborative work for the benefit of all pupils.

Even though the research was done on a small sample of five participants, collaboration is clearly considered as a valuable approach in the inclusive practice in primary school. Moreover, it is considered to be a 'tool for improvement'. However, the study findings imply that collaborative approach should be taken into consideration not only for organisation and planning purposes but for the personal and school reflection.

The experiences of the school professionals indicate that they require better support within the school. The current level of professional support is not sufficient to provide accommodation of every child in the classroom, as well as to provide the sustainable development of inclusive education.

In addition, the role of the school leader is crucial in terms of staff support, professional development, and collaborative practice within the school. They should take responsibility as well as to engage in finding the solutions for an overall improvement. The findings imply that the leadership is modeling the inclusive practice. It determines if inclusion is only initiative or it will continue further development with active participation.

Thus, it is recommended for the school leaders to take part in trainings, as well as to expand knowledge on inclusive leadership models. Furthermore, they should improve the whole school organisation at all levels.

The study findings imply that it would be recommended to review education programmes for general teachers at Universities in the context of educational system of Czech Republic. Still,

there is the gap in the knowledge of the general teachers as they do not feel confident to embrace diversity, and accept all pupils regardless to their needs. In addition, the area of the professional development could be improved.

Also, there is a high demand for the teaching assistants as they can be valuable assets in the classroom. However, their role should be revised. Teachers have to take the main responsibility in the classroom, and support all pupils.

In addition, the study findings imply that multicultural approach should be taken in consideration, and more thorough planning in order to identify potential barriers for pupils with diverse cultural background.

There is a potential for every pupil to be 'left out', therefore school have to recognise vulnerable children and acknowledge potential 'differences'. Moreover, the school mission should be to accept and celebrate diversity by any means.

Finally, the schools should take into consideration that inclusive education is not only providing the equal opportunities. There is potential in everyone, and support should be provided for all pupils regardless to their needs. Therefore, the schools must try to find the best possible solutions, and enable them to reach their maximum in both academic and social activities.

5.3 Implications for practice in Bosnia and Herzegovina

The future of inclusive education in all the countries faces many challenges.

Currently, Bosnia and Herzegovina is under the influence of European and international agencies that promote inclusive education in the Balkan region. However, schools still struggle to transform inclusive policy into practice.

Furthermore, the entire educational system is fragmented with the elements of segregation rather than inclusion. Hence, at first, changes should start within the educational system.

One of the solutions for further improvement of inclusive education could be found in cooperation between professionals in mainstream schools. In addition, it is required to collaborate with various organisation and individuals for better planning and additional support.

In addition, teachers think they are not well prepared and trained to work in classrooms with the pupils with SEN. There is a need for constant development, and better organisation of professional programmes at all levels.

The effort should be focused on more training, and joint planning because of the lack of knowledge and skills. The opportunity could be in making regulations and standards, organising team of professionals at all levels, and adopting collaborative approach.

Although the context of two schools in the Czech Republic is different comparing to schools in Bosnia and Herzegovina, still there is something that school professionals can learn from.

Inclusive school culture should become a way of life of the whole school, and promoted by all staff. Furthermore, if it is well established, it could be transferred to the classrooms in order to create optimal learning environment for all pupils.

In addition, collaborative practice for inclusion can embrace changes in the mainstream schools. It could enable to identify the problems more easily, as well as to work on the best possible solutions with joint efforts. Moreover, the school professionals will be able to develop, and reflect on their own beliefs towards inclusion of all pupils. Hence, they should establish collaborative environment in order to have more effective schools.

In summary, organisation and support matters, and it is vital for the general understanding, implementation and promotion of inclusion. Collaboration among school professionals could be one of starting points and the key opportunities for Bosnian education system.

5.4 Limitations of the research

5.4.1 Methodological limitations

The research was constructed as qualitative constructivist study. However, the inter-reliability was not established due to the time constraint. Also, it has lead to the limitation of the research methods, and the only tool for data collection in the study was qualitative interview. Triangulation of data could have provided better perceptions from different angles in order to obtain richer data. Hence, no external reliability was established.

5.4.2 The sample size and the scope of the study

The study was conducted in two schools with five participants. Therefore, such a small sample cannot be used for external generalisation as it can only speak about itself.

Furthermore, the study was influenced by practical realities. Consequently, the quality of data was influenced to some extent caused by several factors.

First, the study was conducted as a master's thesis with a limited period of time.

Second, there was insufficient knowledge about The Czech Republic context due to the limited resources and information in English print.

Third, finding the study participants was harder than expected. In addition, the language barrier, and the use of English as the only mode of communication might have influenced the data obtained, and the overall interaction during the interviews.

Finally, the findings are bound to the certain context at a given time. However, it will be up to readers if any of these strategies used by school professionals could be applicable to their own setting.

5.5 Recommendations for future study

Inclusion is something that became the current topic worldwide. Therefore, the field of special and inclusive education is waiting to be explored.

The study has explored the school professionals' experiences on the collaborative practice towards inclusion of children with SEN and diverse cultural background. However, it could have been useful if a questionnaire study has been done on a larger sample before the interviews. In addition, document analysis of the school policy could have provided a better insight in regard to collaboration towards inclusive education.

Future research should include different method approaches.

One of the themes that emerged was the active involvement of the school leader in the process of inclusive education. It would be interesting to conduct the future study on the role of the school leader in the inclusive practice in schools in the Czech Republic.

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7 Appendices

7.1 Appendix 1
Interview guide

Background information and introduction

-Can you please introduce yourself and describe your school?

-How long have you been working in this school?

-Have you worked with children before you started to teach in this school? Where? How long?

 -Do you have any qualification to work with children with SEN?

How do professionals collaborate to promote inclusive education in primary school?

1. How do you understand inclusive education?

2. How confident do you feel working with children with special educational needs and diverse cultural background in your school?

3. How closely do you work with other professionals to accommodate all pupils, including children with SEN and diverse cultural background, in your school?

4. What are the main issues regarding inclusion in your school?

5. How do you collaborate with your colleagues regarding those issues?

6. How often do you meet, formally and informally, to discuss those issues?

7. How thoroughly are you prepared so that you are able to meet the needs of all pupils effectively?

8. What kind of training and professional development programmes for inclusion does the school provide for staff?

9. What kind of support programmes for inclusion would you like to have in the future?

How do school professionals experience collaborative process?

10. How do you define collaboration?

11. How do you feel during the collaboration with other professionals in your school?

12. In your view, what are the advantages of collaboration?

13. What are the main challenges you have experienced regarding the collaboration in your school?

What is the role of school leader in collaborative practice towards inclusion?

14. What is the vision of the school leader towards inclusion?

15. How often does the school leader exchange ideas with the staff in your school?

16. How does the school leader promote and encourage collaboration in your school?

17. Do you have something to add related to the topic of collaboration for inclusion?

7.2 Appendix 2

Consent to Participate in Research

Introduction

My name is Natasa Jorgic, and I am student of Erasmus Mundus Master in Special and Inclusive Education programme, Cohort 2014-2015.

This joint degree programme, funded by European Commission, is conducted by University of Roehampton- UK, University of Oslo-Norway and Charles University- the Czech Republic with the focus on policy and practice in each country, and the aim to share experience among people.

I would like to invite you to take part in the research project for my master's thesis at Charles University in Prague that will be supervised by Ph.D. Jana Stara, professor at the Faculty of Pedagogy. The title of the research project is Collaboration that promotes inclusive education in primary school in the Czech Republic.

Background and purpose of the study

The interest in the topic has been motivated by the current focus on the inclusion in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Nevertheless, the country is facing many difficulties with the implementation of inclusive education, as well as the school organisation in order to meet the needs of all pupils.

Research hopes to investigate what are the contributions of collaboration for the promotion of inclusion. The aim is to explore the current practice in Czech Republic, as one of the member country of the European Union, with the possibility to replicate or modify strategies that would suit the context of inclusive school in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Therefore, the research questions are related to explore school collaboration among professionals, as well as to reveal their experiences in that process.

Procedures

If you decide to take part in the study, I will conduct the interview at time and place that is convenient for you. The interview will involve questions about your views about inclusive education, experience about collaboration within your school, and opinions about the role of the school leader in the process of collaboration for inclusion of all pupils.

Duration of the semi-structured interview is designed to be approximately 45 minutes, in English if possible. If not, the assistance of the Czech language interpreter will be provided. With the permission of the participants, interviews will be audio recorded for the transcription purposes. Also, notes will be taken during the interview.

I expect to conduct only one interview. However, if there is need for the follow-up interview, I will contact you by mail to request this. The follow-up interview might occur if additional questions arise after the interpretation of the first interview.

Confidentiality issues

All data collected during the interview will be treated confidentially, and will be kept in a secure place. Only the researcher and the supervisor will have access to data, and the list of the names of the participants will be stored separately from the data collected. The audio recordings and transcriptions will be destroyed upon the completition of the research project. Participant's names will be coded so that you remain anonymous. Also, the school context will be carefully decribed and will not be rocognisable. The research project has ethics approval of Charles University in Prague.

Participation rights

Participation in this project is voluntarily, and participants may withdraw at any time, and for whatever reason. Please feel free to talk about the topic and any related ideas during the interview. However, if there are any questions that you do not feel comfortable answering, or you do not want to answer, please say so. In that case, we will stop the interview or move on to the next question, whichever you prefer.

Benefits

One of the benefits to participate in this study is that you will have the opportunity to present your personal experience about the topic of collaboration for inclusion. Also, it will be beneficial for better understanding, and an overall improvement of the inclusive school practice.

If you have any questions concerning the research project or require further information please contact me or my supervisor.

Student Researcher: Natasa Jorgic, e-mail: natasha0707@yahoo.com, phone: 776122329

Supervisor: Ph.D. Jana Stara, phone: e-mail: jana.stara@pedf.cuni.cz, phone: 221900187

Consent

You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep for your own records.

I have received the information about the research project and I am willing to participate in the interview

Participant's name:

_____

Participant's signature: Date:

_____   _____