

EDUCATION AND ASSESSMENT OF LEARNING OUTCOMES IN LITHUANIAN SPECIAL SCHOOLS

Irena Kaffemaniene

Rita Meliene

Lina Milteniene

Renata Geleziniene

Daiva Kairiene

Laima Tomeniene

Siauliai University, Lithuania

Abstract. *The strategic aims of Lithuanian education orientate towards the development of inclusive education. However, in addition to mainstream schools, special schools still exist as well. In this context, future perspectives of special schools and their role in the inclusive education system has become a particularly relevant problem; therefore, it is important to analyse experiences of education in special schools.*

The aim of the study presented in the article is to analyse teachers' opinion regarding special education and assessment of outcomes. The study was conducted in special schools of Lithuania, using a questionnaire method. Based on the data of the analysis of scientific literature sources, the ranking scale of variables (statements describing various dimensions of education and assessment of outcomes) was drawn up (respondents marked answers from 1 – strongly disagree to 5 – strongly agree).

The results of the study show that teachers of special schools understand priorities of contemporary education. This is demonstrated by strong approval of statements about fostering of self-esteem, development of communication and problem-solving abilities of special school students; search for non-traditional forms of education; involvement of school community in education. Nevertheless, in the opinion of a considerable share of special school teachers, individual teaching and a traditional lesson are more effective compared with the variety of learning methods. In the opinion of many special school teachers, the purpose of special education is to cope with students' disorders, and only specialized educational institutions can ensure quality individualised education. Respondents also noted certain shortcomings of education at special schools.

Keywords: *assessment, learning outcomes, special education, special schools.*

Introduction

Significance of the problem. Legal documents regulating Lithuanian system of education distinctly orientate towards striving for inclusive education

development, and this corresponds to the international educational policy. The system of meeting special educational needs and educational assistance in mainstream schools has been developed and is legally regulated in the country. Nevertheless, in the national education system, in addition to mainstream schools, special schools, which can accept children with considerable and very considerable special educational needs, still exist. Education of students with special educational needs in special schools does not cohere with the provision stipulated in international documents stating that only inclusive education can ensure the non-discriminatory right to learning. Education of children with special educational needs in special schools is incompatible with objectives of inclusive education. Therefore, in recent years, it is sought to restructure the country's educational system so that all students learn in mainstream schools and that the number of special schools and the number of learners in them are reduced. These objectives are reflected both in the strategic plans of Lithuanian education of recent years and in national research, the topics of the majority of which are related to the development of inclusive education and the analysis of its problems.

The main objective of the inclusive school is to meet the needs of all students and also those with special educational needs; education grounded on students' cognition, education based on interaction, partnership, assistance to the student; created possibilities for individualised and group learning, participation in various school activities; relevant education, developing various competencies necessary for contemporary life, preparing for solution of actual problems, etc. It is likely that interaction and coherence of these constituents of school activities should promote quality of the whole system of education.

Much scientific research of Lithuania and other countries seek to prove the advantages of inclusion. In recent decades, the number of studies on experience of education accumulated by teachers of Lithuanian special schools considerably reduced. Although there were solitary studies (Ališauskas & Vaičienė, 2005; Gevorgianienė & Zaikauskas, 2007) which compared learning outcomes of learners of mainstream and special schools, there were no systematic studies of Lithuanian special schools at all.

In this context, when inclusive education ideas are being developed and the best model of *the school for all* students is being sought for, it has become particularly relevant to outline future perspectives of special schools, their role in the inclusive education system, acknowledging good practice of education in special schools and considering problematic aspects of education of students with special educational needs. This research aimed to answer the problem questions: *What practice of education and assessment of learning outcomes is inherent to the special school? What experiences of education in special schools could be useful for application in mainstream schools? What are the strengths and weaknesses of education in special schools?*

The research subject is teachers' attitude towards education and assessment of learning outcomes in special schools.

The research aim is to analyse teachers' opinion on education and assessment of learning outcomes in special schools.

The objectives of the research are to analyse special school teachers' opinions about 1) priorities of educational objectives; 2) organization of learning; 3) individualisation of learning; 4) assessment of learning outcomes; 5) quality factors of education in special school.

Research methods: theoretical analysis, questionnaire survey, quantitative (descriptive statistics) data analysis methods.

The Overview of Previous Research

In the 21st century, it is still discussed which form of education (mainstream education or the special school) is best for students with special educational needs. Today, in Lithuania, like in some European countries, part of students are still learning in special schools, although both the number of special schools and the number of learners in special schools reduced.

The overview of scientific literature shows that there are many supporters of inclusion but support for special schools is also evident.

Some scientific research of previous years shows that there is little difference even between learning outcomes of students with complicated disabilities in mainstream and in special schools. The study by Rea, McLaughlin and Walther-Thomas (2002) clearly demonstrated that disabled students in inclusive classes achieved better learning outcomes in language and mathematics than their peers in special schools, while academic outcomes in other subjects among students of both schools were similar. Similar findings were obtained in studies conducted in Lithuania. It has been identified that social intelligence of students with mild intellectual disabilities educated in mainstream schools is statistically significantly higher than the one of students who learn in special schools (Ališauskas & Vaičienė, 2005). Comparative analysis of students' abilities revealed that special school student's academic outcomes in the Lithuanian language significantly differed from the ones of their peers in ordinary schools, but there were practically no differences in mathematical skills (Gevorgianienė & Zaikauskas, 2007). However, Kauffman, Anastasiou, Badar, Travers and Wiley (2016) state that the fact that inclusive education for some or for many students allows to achieve similar outcomes is not convincing evidence proving that everyone achieves the same. In the authors' opinion, more scientific research is needed to find out which types of schools are more effective for students with special educational needs. According to Kauffman & Badar (2014), it is wrong to state that education for disabled students does not differ from education for

students who do not have disabilities or that special education does not require teachers' specific competencies.

Florian (2013), Blanton, Pugach and Florian (2011) and other authors note that many teachers feel unprepared to educate students with special educational needs and do not want these students in their classes.

According to Florian (2013), the teachers' attitude that the diversity of students' learning peculiarities requires specific knowledge of disabilities and disorders is still popular, although there is a lack of evidence proving this position. The study on mainstream schools teachers' competencies conducted in Lithuania (Milteniene & Daniute, 2014) demonstrates that having compared with previous studies, respondents highly assessed their professional readiness to educate students with special educational needs (on a 5 point rating scale - $M=4,84$) and their abilities to differentiate learning and assessment methods ($M=4,82$).

Florian (2013) notes that learning as a collaborative activity, where students with different experiences meet, encourages thinking about such education that would provide the majority of learners with rich learning possibilities, would be accessible for all so that all students could take part in classroom learning activities. In the author's opinion, combining students' collaborative and individualised learning, teachers need to better reflect on the ways in which they respond to individual differences while teaching the whole class, organizing work of the group and seeking everyone's meaningful involvement in learning.

Kauffman et al. (2016, p. 155) agree that more students than in the past could and should participate in social and academic life of the mainstream school, but only if such participation provides benefit that equals or is bigger than the one obtained in special schools. According to Kauffman, Anastasiou, Maag (2017), not the school but efficient education is most important; students should not be separated from their peers; the priority should be given not to the type of school but to the scientific evidence on efficient teaching practice.

The research results of Rea et al. (2002) demonstrate that adequate individualization of curricula according to students' abilities and support for disabled students provide them with opportunities to achieve academic and social success in mainstream classes.

Thus, the development of inclusive education ideas raises many questions about the survival of special schools and their role in the modern education system. In the opinion of Cera (2015), special schools should be a support for the inclusive system rather than an alternative to it. According to Florian (2013), the transition from special education as a response to specificities of learning towards *learning for all*, recognizing differences, will have consequences for special education practice; this can change the role of special education, better tuning it to the values of equal opportunities and respect for human dignity. In the opinion of Hedegaard-Soerensen and Tetler (2016), promotion of special schools and their

empowerment to participate in the inclusive education system should be implemented not by closing special schools but, on the contrary, by increasing educational standards for special schools; besides, the new role of special schools will require teachers' professional development, the ability to cooperate with mainstream schools.

Currently, in Lithuania, like in other countries, studies on quality of meeting students' special educational needs in mainstream schools prevail. However, there is a lack of scientific data on the features of the shift of special schools and the current educational practice in special schools.

Research methodology. The methodological basis of the research is the modern conception of meeting students' special educational needs, recognizing students' differences and focusing on general indicators of quality of education: students' learning and participation in school activities; education that supports learning; personalized education considering students' powers and special educational needs; assessment and self-assessment of students' learning outcomes, dialogic environment of education, etc.

The study was conducted employing the quantitative research methodology and applying the questionnaire method. The main part of the questionnaire consisted of closed-ended questions with possible variants of answers on 11 topics¹. According to the data of the analysis of scientific literature sources (constructivist conception of education, meeting students' special educational needs considering the diversity of abilities, etc.), the rating scale of variables describing various educational dimensions was developed. Respondents had to indicate their approval or disapproval to each statement on the 5-point rating scale: 1 - strongly disagree, 2 - disagree, 3 - neutral, 4 - agree, 5 - strongly agree.

An electronic version of this questionnaire was published on the portal www.apklausa.lt; the invitation to answer the questionnaire questions was sent to all special schools, special education centres, multifunctional education centres of Lithuania². The questions had to be answered in two weeks.

Data analysis methods. Quantitative research (questionnaire survey) data were processed using descriptive statistics methods: the mean of answers M ,

¹ This study aimed to evaluate future perspectives of special schools in the context of educational policy developing inclusive education ideas. To this end, a complex study on quality of education in special schools was conducted, combining quantitative (questionnaire survey) and qualitative (case studies) research methods. The questionnaire consisted of the following topics: 1) education of students with special educational needs (SEN) in the modern system of education; 2) assistance and services provided for students in the special school; 3) adaptation of the curriculum and organization of education; 4) assessment of educational outcomes; 5) students' self-feeling and educational environment; 6) adjustment of the physical environment; etc. *The article presents only a small part of the results of this study: the analysis of answers to two scales (organization of education and assessment of learning outcomes)*

² There are 3 types of schools for students with special educational needs in Lithuania: special schools, special education centres and special schools-multifunctional centres. At present, most students of special schools have disabilities: almost half of them have intellectual disabilities, more than one-third of them have complex disabilities; a small share consists of students with learning disorders and learning difficulties.

standard deviation *SD* were calculated. Intergroup differences of the results of the research on school types were identified employing non-parametric criteria (Kruskal-Wallis test, calculating *H* (chi-square), mean rank *MR* and statistical significance *p* indicators); the article presents only statistically significant ($p < 0,05$) differences of answers given by teachers representing different schools.

Principles of research ethics. *The general principles of research ethics* related to reliability of presentation of theoretical and empirical data; respondents' informing about research aims, data collection methods, the strategy of publicising the research results and assurance of confidentiality of personal information are respected. Following the principle of anonymity, school names are not indicated in the article.

The research sample. Targeted selection of respondents' sample was applied. The quantitative study involved 317 teachers and educational assistance specialists working in special schools of various cities and regions of Lithuania for children with various disabilities. The total sample of respondents is sufficient for the statistical analysis of data and almost corresponds to the requirement of reliability of the sample (a representative sample would be 362 teachers). However, the proportion of teachers representing various schools who participated in the study is not equal; therefore, generalising the results of the sample, a systematic error slightly larger than 0,5 % is possible.

Distribution of respondents by schools and positions occupied. The survey was attended by 189 special school teachers (59,6 % of the research sample); 95 (30 % of the research sample) teachers of special education centres and 31 (9,8 %) teachers working in multifunctional education centres. The largest share of the respondents who participated in the survey consists of educational assistance specialists (91), teachers of special, educational and social skills classes (77), pre-primary, primary education and subject teachers (64); the survey was also attended by 50 administrative employees of special schools (directors, deputy directors) and 35 other employees of special schools (educators, teacher assistants).

Respondents' answers about students of special schools. According to the respondents, the schools they represent, are attended by students with various disabilities: with intellectual disabilities (77,6 % of answers), complex disabilities (73,8 %); speech and language disorders (53,3 %), behavioural and emotional disorders (48,6 %), speech, language and movement disorders (46,4 % of answers), hearing (25,2 %), visual (18 %) and other disorders. This means that although special schools in Lithuania are specialized by the disability, they still have students with different disabilities and different levels of special educational needs.

Research Results

Priorities of educational objectives in special school. Table 1 presents research data (M - mean, SD - standard deviation) on the priorities of education in special schools.

Table 1 **Priorities of Special Education**

Priorities of special education	M	SD
It is most important that students should learn to be with others, socialise, solve problems.	4,53	0,54
It is most important that students should feel needed, be able to work, not become recipients of benefits.	4,39	0,64
The most important thing is fostering of the student's self-confidence, self-esteem.	4,38	0,58
It is most important to gain at least elementary knowledge of each subject.	4,10	0,74
Educating SEN students, it is most important to cope with existing disorders.	3,91	0,95
Educating SEN children, it is most important to form basic literacy abilities.	3,53	0,93

According to Kauffman & Badar (2014), special needs teachers must focus on the efficient development of specific academic and social abilities.

According to the respondents, the main goals of education of disabled students are to prepare them for their self-sufficient life in the society, to help them acquire abilities *to be with others, socialize, solve problems* (M=4,53; SD=0,54); *so that students feel they are needed, could work, do not become recipients of benefits* (M=4,9; SD=0,64); *fostering of the student's self-confidence, self-esteem* (M=4,38; SD=0,58).

Nevertheless, in the opinion of a quite significant share of respondents, *it is essential to acquire at least elementary knowledge of each subject* (M=4,10; SD=0,74); *to develop basic literacy abilities* (M=3,53; SD=0,93) and *to cope with <...> disorders* (M=3,91; SD=0,95). The latter statements show not high expectations regarding students' learning outcomes, orientation to the disability as to the individual's problem.

Comparing the responses of respondents of special education centres (sec), multifunctional centres of special education (mc) and special schools (ssch) by the types of schools they represented (Kruskal-Wallis test), statistically significant were special school teachers' approaches to prepare students for self-sufficient life (*It is most important that students should feel that they are needed, be able to work, not become recipients of benefits*: H(2)=8,35, p=0,015; MR ssch=168,8; MRsec=142,6; MRmc=139,5). As to other parameters of priorities of education,

the opinions of teachers of all special education institutions are similar, no statistically significant differences were identified.

Organization of learning in special education institutions. Data of teachers' survey on the organization of learning in special schools are presented in Table 2.

Table 2 **Organization of Learning**

Organization of learning	M	SD
The teacher's duty is to involve all children in activities, considering everyone's needs.	4,50	0,53
The school is looking for more innovative forms of education than the traditional lesson or educational activity.	4,41	0,57
Our children often learn not only in the classroom or school but also in other settings.	4,31	0,66
Students in the classroom are so different that in the lesson you just have to work with each of them.	4,30	0,70
Teachers are well aware of the goals raised by other teachers and specialists working with their students and how they work.	4,29	0,65
Teachers often give integrated lessons, educational activities.	4,26	0,59
The most effective methods are the ones where students can do something practical individually (construct, draw, etc.).	4,22	0,68
The most effective methods are the ones where students can learn together with others and from each other.	4,15	0,66
Students need safe and familiar environment; therefore, it is best if the structure of the lesson changes little.	3,51	0,93
However, the traditional lesson is the best way to achieve the intended results.	3,07	0,84
During the lessons, students have to work individually on their own a lot because the teacher cannot "be torn".	2,81	1,07

Most respondents approved of statements about all students' involvement in educational activities (*The teacher's duty is to involve all children in activities considering everyone's needs*: M=4,50, SD=0,53), innovation of teaching (*The school is looking for more innovative forms of education than the traditional lesson or educational activity*: M=4,41, SD=0,57), the diversity of educational settings (*Our children often learn not only in the classroom or school but also in other settings*: M=4,31; SD=0,66; *Teachers often give integrated lessons, educational activities*: M=4,26, SD=0,59). These respondents' answers are in line with the ideas of education grounded on the constructivist paradigm, orienting modern schools to promotion of students' self-sufficiency, active learning,

collaborative teaching and learning, learning by exploring and problem solving (Akpan & Beard, 2016; Bada, 2015 et al.).

However, the respondents slightly more approve of individual teaching (*Students in the classroom are so different that in the lesson you just have to work with each of them*: M=4,30; SD=0,70; *The most effective methods are the ones where students can do something practical individually*: M=4,22; SD=0,68). There are slightly less approvals of statements about application of collaborative learning methods (*The most effective methods are the ones where students can learn together with others and from each other*: M=4,15; SD=0,66). In the opinion of quite a considerable share of respondents, *students need safe and familiar environment; therefore, it is best if the structure of the lesson changes little* (M=3,51; SD=0,93); *however, the traditional lesson is the best way to achieve the intended results* (M=3,07; SD=0,84). However, Akpan & Beard (2016) believe that it is important to combine students' individualized and collaborative learning. According to the authors, teachers should abandon the traditional teacher-centered model; they must accept the fact that knowledge is built through learning in action, combining individual experience and newly discovered knowledge, promoting students' interpersonal interaction, exploring, discovering and solving real-life problems (Akpan & Beard, 2016). The authors state that student-oriented learning is a useful for all learners, including students with special educational needs too.

It should be noted that opinions of teachers of various types of special schools about the learning is differed. Teachers of special schools and multifunctional centres mostly distinguish themselves by:

- student-oriented learning promotes students' activeness and collaborative learning (*The most effective methods are the ones where students can learn together with others and from each other*: H(2)=7,33; p=0,004; MRssch=167,9; MRmc=167,5; MRsec=135,2; *The teacher's duty is to involve all children in activities, considering everyone's needs*: H(2)=6,186; p=0,045; MRssch=167,1; MRmc=146,8; MRsec=143,7);
- the diversity of learning settings (*Our children often learn not only in the classroom or school but also in other settings*: H(2)=8,56; p=0,014; MRmc=169,4; MRssch=166,3; MRsec=137,8)
- and the objectives of innovative teaching (*Teachers often give integrated lessons, educational activities*: H(2)=7,836; p=0,020; MRmc=169,9; MRssch=165,2; MRsec=139,8).

The research data demonstrate the statistical significance of the attitude of special school teachers to the innovativeness of the lesson (*The school is looking for more innovative forms of education than the traditional lesson or educational activity*: H(2)=6,767; p=0,034; MRssch=167,3; MRsec=146,4; MRmc=136,9).

Teachers of special education centres differently from teachers of other types of special education institutions tend to:

- less care about support for the student (*During the lessons, students have to work individually on their own a lot because the teacher cannot “be torn”*: $H(2)=20,246$; $p=0,000$; $MR_{sec}=182,6$; $MR_{ssch}=154,8$; $MR_{mc}=102,2$)
- and organize teaching in traditional, unchanging ways (*Students need safe and familiar environment; therefore, it is best if the structure of the lesson changes little*: $H(2)=7,333$; $MR_{sec}=178,0$; $MR_{ssch}=149,6$; $MR_{mc}=148,1$).

Individualised education. Individualized education is one of the peculiarities of special education. The results of the survey of special school teachers disclose their opinions about individualisation of education, considering students’ special educational needs (see Table 3)

Table 3 **Individualisation of Education**

Individualisation of education	M	SD
Teachers prepare individualised adapted curricula for each child, considering the student’s abilities.	4,66	0,59
Individualising education, it is most important to know students’ strengths.	4,55	0,55
Seeking quality individualisation, education must be organized in more diverse ways (projects, didactical games, etc.).	4,39	0,58
All teachers and specialists educating the child are involved in the preparation of the individualised curriculum.	4,38	0,78
Individualising learning, it is most important to prepare an appropriate curriculum.	4,38	0,61
Only specialized educational institutions can ensure high-quality individualised education.	4,33	0,78
At school, the curriculum is revised according to the student’s needs: students learn more such subjects that are necessary for them.	4,27	0,81
If we want to ensure individualisation of education, we need more teacher assistants in the classroom.	3,81	0,90
It is difficult to ensure individualized education, as there is a significant shortage of teaching aids adapted for SEN students (textbooks, workbooks).	3,61	1,00

Teachers quite unanimously stated that *they prepared individualised adapted curricula for each child, considering every student’s abilities* ($M=4,66$; $SD=0,59$). One of the most important things of individualising education is *knowledge of the student’s strengths* ($M=4,55$; $SD=0,55$). Other important aspects in order to individualized education in a quality manner are the diversity of ways

of organizing education (...education must be organized in more diverse ways: M=4,39; SD=0,58); involvement of all participants of education (*All teachers and specialists educating the child are involved in the preparation of the individualised curriculum*: M=4,38; SD=0,78); preparation of the curriculum corresponding to students' competencies (*Individualising learning, it is most important to prepare an appropriate curriculum*: M=4,38; SD=0,68).

In the opinion of quite a large share of respondents, *only specialized educational institutions can ensure high-quality individualised education* (M=4,33; SD=0,78), but *more teacher assistants are needed in the classroom* (M=3,81; SD=0,90) and there is a significant shortage of teaching aids for SEN students (M=3,61; SD=1,00).

Similar results were also demonstrated in studies earlier conducted in Lithuania. For example, according to the data Ališauskas et al. (2011), teachers of the majority of mainstream and special schools believe that the special school meets students' individual special educational needs best and is best suited for students with severe and profound special educational needs.

According to our research data, the statement that only specialized institutions can ensure high-quality individualised education was more approved by teachers of special schools and special multifunctional centres ($H(2)=16,362$; $p=0,000$; $MR_{ssch}=172,6$; $MR_{mc}=153,6$; $MR_{sec}=130,5$).

Assessment of learning outcomes. An important part of education is the assessment of students' learning outcomes. Table 4 illustrates data on practice of assessing outcomes at special schools.

In the opinion of the majority of respondents, it is best to assess outcomes by *thank-you letters and awards* (M=4,44; SD=0,54), sometimes to encourage by *small gifts: a sweet, sticker, etc.* (M=4,26; SD=0,70). A large proportion of teachers stated that *assessment criteria for students' outcomes were individual* (M=4,30; SD=0,67).

Although respondents stated that one of the priorities of education was the development of students' social competencies and self-esteem (*It is most important that students should learn to socialise, solve problems, that their self-esteem should be fostered*, see Table 1), however, a quite significant proportion of teachers oriented to students' academic outcomes: *outcomes are assessed after completion of the topic, part of the course* (M=3,85; SD=0,94); *outcomes are assessed every lesson* (M=3,75; SD=0,99).

The following statements are less approved of: *the most effective assessment system is the one that is based on the description of progress* (M=3,70; SD=0,76); in the opinion of certain teachers, *for senior children the mark is more important than verbal assessment* (M=3,50; SD=1,00).

Table 4 **Assessment of Learning Outcomes**

Assessment of learning outcomes	M	SD
Thank-you letters, awards during events are excellent assessment of children's work.	4,44	0,54
Assessment criteria of outcomes are individual.	4,30	0,67
It is sometimes worth encouraging by a small gift (for example, a sweet, a sticker or the like) for a well-done job.	4,26	0,70
The school operates an effective system for discussing with parents the progress of the child's learning.	4,20	0,75
Students perceive learning outcomes according to their abilities and get involved in the assessment of outcomes.	3,99	0,76
It is very difficult for students to self-evaluate their progress.	3,93	0,79
Outcomes are assessed after completion of the topic, part of the course.	3,85	0,94
Outcomes are assessed every lesson.	3,75	0,99
The most effective assessment system is the one that is based on the description of progress.	3,70	0,76
It is important to evaluate as often as possible.	3,64	0,85
For senior children the mark is more important than verbal assessment.	3,50	1,00
Most often parents are interested in the child's outcomes.	3,49	0,95
Parents' expectations regarding children's progress are realistic.	3,05	0,89

According to teachers, *their schools operated an effective system for discussing the child's progress with parents* (M=4,20; SD=0,75), but research data show less approval of statements: *parents are interested in the child's achievements* (M=3,49; SD=0,89) and *their expectations regarding children's progress are realistic* (M=3,05; SD=0,89). In the teachers' opinion, *students perceive learning outcomes according to their abilities and get involved in the assessment of outcomes* (M=3,99; SD=0,7), but *it is very difficult for them to self-evaluate their progress* (M=3,93; SD=0,79).

The study disclosed differences in the opinions on assessment among teachers working in different type schools. Special school teachers more approved of formal assessment by marks (*For senior children the mark is more important than verbal assessment*: $H(2)=17,161$; $p=0,000$; $MR_{ssch}=174,51$; $MR_{mc}=137,82$; $MR_{sec}=131,73$).

Teachers of special education centres and special schools tend to assess students' outcomes as often as possible (*Outcomes are assessed every lesson*: $H(2)=13,355$; $p=0,001$; $MR_{sec}=176,5$; $MR_{ssch}=160,4$; $MR_{mc}=113,9$; *It is important to assess as often as possible*: $H(2)=7,768$; $p=0,021$; $MR_{sec}=174,8$; $MR_{ssch}=154,4$; $MR_{mc}=128,7$).

Teachers of special education and multifunctional centres more than special school teachers agreed that *parents were interested in the child's outcomes*: (H(2)=10,586; p=0,005; MRsec=179,1; MRmc=170,8; MRssch=145,3). At educational centres teachers tend to use non-formal assessment, grounded on the description of progress (*The most effective system of assessment is the one that is based on the description of progress*: H(2)=9,428; p=0,009; MRmc=175,5; MRsec=175,2; MRssch=146,5).

Factors of quality of education in special education institutions. Teachers' opinions on the quality of education in special schools is shown in Table 5.

Table 5 **Factors of Quality of Education**

Quality of education	M	SD
Seeking quality education, it is important to arrange appropriate provision with teaching aids.	4,59	0,57
The competent teacher is most important for quality of education.	4,57	0,51
The quality of education can only be ensured by involvement and participation of the whole community.	4,51	0,61
It is most important for quality of education to ensure specialists' (speech therapist's, psychologist's, etc.) help.	4,34	0,64
It is most important that the teacher should be a good, sincere and ordinary person.	4,33	0,73
Learning outcomes are mostly determined by responsibility assumed by the family.	3,76	0,92
At school, too much attention is paid to "paper" curricula, which nevertheless do not reflect reality.	3,38	1,13

According to respondents, teaching aids (M=4,59; SD=0,57) are an important factor of quality of education; teachers' competencies (M=4,57; SD=0,51) as well as their personal qualities (*It is most important that the teacher should be a good, sincere and ordinary person*: M=4,33; SD=0,73), activeness of school community, involvement and participation of the whole community (*Quality of education can only be ensured by involvement and participation of the whole community*: M=4,51; SD=0,61) and specialists'(speech therapist's, psychologist's, etc.) help: M=4,34; SD=0,64) are important. There was less approval of statements about the importance of family participation in the child's education (*Learning outcomes are mostly determined by responsibility assumed by the family*: M=3,76; SD=0,92).

Teachers of special education institutions in general quite adversely assess, in their opinion, too much focus on preparation of individualized curricula

(At school, too much attention is paid to “paper” curricula, which nevertheless do not reflect reality: $M=3,38$; $SD=1,13$).

Special school teachers slightly more than teachers of other types of schools approved that *assurance of specialists’ (speech therapist’s, psychologist’s, etc.) help is most important for quality of education*: $H(2)=7,899$; $p=0,019$; $MR_{ssch}=168,4$; $MR_{mc}=145,3$; $MR_{sec}=141,4$.

Conclusions

The results of the study disclosed teachers’ opinion about the priorities of special school students’ educational goals, peculiarities of organization and individualisation of teaching, factors of quality of education.

1. Teachers of special education institutions who took part in the survey understand the priorities of contemporary education and support the ideas of education grounded on the constructivist paradigm: this demonstrates strong approval of statements about fostering of self-esteem, communication and problem-solving abilities of the child with special educational needs.
However, the majority of teachers who participated in the survey, irrespective of the type of the school, maintain that one of the most important goals of special education is coping with disorders. Teachers of special education and multifunctional centres approve of education of disabled students in special education institutions and distinguish themselves by the focus on the disability as the individual’s problem.
2. Teachers of special schools and multifunctional centres more often apply student-oriented learning, promoting students’ activeness and collaborative learning; teachers of these schools seek the diversity of teaching settings and innovativeness of teaching more. Teachers of special education centres, unlike teachers of other types of special education institutions, tend to care about student support less and distinguish themselves by supporting the traditional teacher-centred teaching paradigm; they support the diversity of learning methods and educational settings less. According to the teachers of these schools, it is better for students when the structure of the lesson changes less; in their opinion, students in the classroom are too different to effectively provide support to each student. Quite a large number of teachers believe that the most important thing educating disabled children is at least elementary knowledge of the subject.
3. The majority of respondents state that individualized curricula are prepared for students, considering the student’s strengths and needs. The individualised curriculum is prepared by all teachers and

specialists. According to special school teachers, only specialized educational institutions can ensure quality individualized education but special schools lack teacher assistants and teaching aids (textbooks, etc.) adapted for students with considerable special educational needs.

4. Most respondents state that assessment of students' outcomes in their schools is individualized, most often non-formal assessment is applied. A significant proportion of special school teachers apply object-based stimuli of students' learning (encouragement by a sweet, sticker). The learning progress is discussed with students' parents. Special school teachers give lower ratings to students' possibilities to self-evaluate their learning outcomes.

Comparing by the types of schools, it was noticed that special school teachers approved of formal assessment by marks more. Teachers of special education centres and special schools tend to assess students' outcomes as often as possible and apply non-formal assessment grounded on progress description.

5. According to teachers, seeking quality education, provision of schools with teaching aids, teachers' competencies and their cooperation are important. Specialists' (special educator's, speech therapist's, etc.) assistance to the student as one of the most important factors of quality of education is slightly more supported by special school teachers. Evaluating communality of the school and cooperation between the participants of education, teachers stated that parents of students learning at special education and multifunctional centres were more interested in the child's outcomes than parents of special school learners.

Summarizing the research results, it can be stated that there is more positive practice orientated to the paradigm of contemporary education in special schools; however, certain negative aspects of the attitude to the disability and disabled persons as well as difficulties of cooperation with parents show up. Positive changes ensuring the rights of the disabled to quality education are hindered by special school teachers' approach to the disability as the individual's problem (striving to eliminate disorders), low expectations regarding disabled students' learning outcomes, poor involvement of parents, striving to keep SEN students in segregated educational institutions without discussing possible contribution of special schools to the development of inclusive education.

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