

Altogether, there was sufficient evidence to conclude that there is a positive relationship between teachers' attitudes and their professional training in inclusive education through course-based programmes [40].

In addition, findings from a correlational study of stereotypes and general beliefs about inclusion and classroom practices suggest that educators with strong teaching experience with students with SEN often express a low level of stereotyping [27].

Moreover, a meta-analysis on cognitive and psychological outcomes among students with SEN and their colleagues without general learning difficulties indicates that parents of students without GLD have no reason to believe their children will suffer from detrimental effects [16].

4.2. Teachers' demographic profile

One of the characteristics of Romanian teachers' profiles is the predominance of female teaching staff in pre-primary, primary, and secondary schools. According to the reports published by the Ministry of Education [31], most female educators work in preschool (99.7%) and primary school (91.8%).

The results of the inquiry-based questionnaire (N = 107) match the national statistics and emphasise the representativeness of the sample, with 94.4% of female teachers among the respondents.

In terms of job title and position held, one third of the respondents were teachers/ tutors/ professors for primary education; another third of them were teachers for secondary education; 15% were educators/ teachers for preschool; and only 3% were high school teachers (see Figure 1).

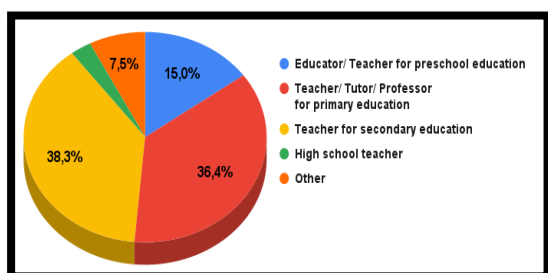


Figure 1. Educational staff distribution in terms of job title

The residence environment is a criterion with a strong impact on the distribution of teaching staff at the national level since only 36% of the teachers come from rural areas [31]. Considering the prevalent issue of limited internet access and digital skills in rural schools, the distribution of teaching staff by demographic areas in the data analysis is representative but slightly below national statistics, with 22.4% of respondents from rural areas.

Data analysis from the National Institute of Statistics of the evolution of the number of teachers during 2020-2021 showed that in the urban environment, staff increases were larger in secondary, high school, and preschool education, while in rural areas, the numbers of teachers in secondary and preschool education slightly improved.

The length of service in teaching plays an important role in educators' ability to create and implement inclusive methods for students with GLD. One third of the teachers questioned state they have an experience of 15-25 years, almost 20% have an experience between 25 and 35 years, and 12% have an experience higher than 35 years, which means that only 20% of the respondents have less than 15 years of teaching experience (see Figure 2).

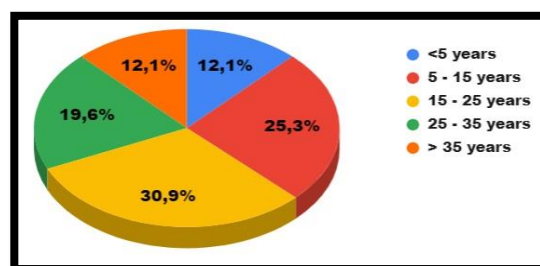


Figure 2. The distribution of educational staff by length of service in teaching

Figure 3 illustrates the level of psycho-pedagogical training completed by respondents. Accordingly, more than half of the participants declared that they graduated from Level I (52.3%), while Level II was graduated by 26.2% of them, and just 1/5 of the respondents are master's graduates (21.5%).

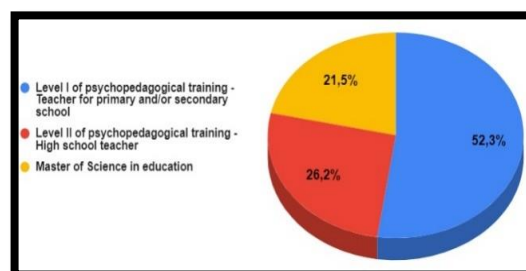


Figure 3. The distribution of teaching staff according to the level of psycho-pedagogical training completed

Although inclusive practices are very difficult to apply without taking a professional training course concerning children with SEN, 48.6% of teachers declare they have not yet attended any course in this regard.

On the other hand, the Romanian educational system provides that each member of the teaching staff continues their professional development by participating in and graduating from courses quantified in transferable credit points (ECTS). Still, acquiring inclusive education competences

throughout these courses is not mandatory. Consequently, the total freedom of teachers in their decisions regarding the completion of certain subjects considered useful by them entails not only their distancing from the natural metamorphosis of the educational system towards an inclusive setting but also the perpetuation of inefficient and outdated practices in total discord with the contemporary era.

4.3. Analysis of teachers' opinions

In spite of the fact that nearly half of the participants have stated that they have not yet taken a professional training course for inclusive education, the vast majority of them (79.4%) appreciate that this step is very important for them.

Awareness that educators need to follow a training course on inclusive education is often determined by the interest shown by the community in the problem of students with SEN. For this reason, it is important to highlight that the majority of teachers (91.6%) consider their community to be confronting the issue of children with SEN, which is a very important problem. Only 4.7% of teachers state that this is not an important issue for their community, while 3.7% do not know if children with GLD represent a problem for their societies.

Students without GLD can only manifest positive attitudes towards their colleagues with SEN if they have been exposed to prior formal or informal training with regards to inclusive education and non-discrimination practices. Even though only half of the teachers inquired have attended a professional training course for inclusive education, it must be noticed that they consider a small number of their students without SEN (20%) to express negative attitudes such as ignorance or isolation towards their peers with GLD.

Moreover, the participants state that the level of support manifested by the students without GLD in relation to their colleagues with SEN is slightly higher (15.9%) than the negative attitude of ignorance (13.1%). Furthermore, teachers state that most students display acceptance (36.4%) and tolerance (29.9%) with regards to their classmates with SEN.

Inclusive education cannot be achieved in the absence of close collaboration with the parents of children with GLD and a deep level of their involvement in the inclusive educational process. As Fig. 11 illustrates, more than a third of the teachers questioned (38.3%) appreciate a moderate degree of parents' collaboration, while another third of them acknowledge that parents of students with GLD are very involved in their children's education.

With regard to their own attitudes towards students with SEN, most of the teachers (81.3%) state they show support. Still, a small percentage of teachers (5.6%) acknowledge that they simply tolerate children with GLD instead of supporting them.

An inclusive approach to education highlights the development of a close educational partnership between school counsellors, teachers, parents, and competent institutions. For that matter, teachers' opinions concerning the degree of satisfaction with the educational partnership were mostly positive. For instance, a quarter of the teachers (25.2%) declare that they feel a moderate level of satisfaction, and more than a third of them (34.8%) are very satisfied with this partnership.

As for the degree of involvement of the management in the implementation of an inclusive education, teachers' opinions converge towards a high level of satisfaction determined by a strong cooperation regarding the promotion of inclusive practices. Thus, only 8.4% of teachers believe that management is not involved at all, and 9.3% of educators believe that management is not involved enough in the implementation of inclusive education.

It was assumed that the initial teacher training for inclusive education could have a positive impact on creating inclusive learning environments for students with special educational needs. In spite of the fact that 48.6% of the participants state that they have not yet attended a professional training course for IE, almost 60% of the teachers declare that they promote an inclusive didactic strategy at school, while the rest of the respondents (41.1%) acknowledge that they adopt an integrative approach to their pedagogical strategy.

A close analysis shows that nearly 63% of the educators included in the research have more than 15 years of teaching experience. As a result, there is a positive correlation between the length of teaching service and the adoption of inclusive pedagogical strategies.

Nevertheless, the vast majority of teachers (93.5%) declare that they express a high or very high degree of empathy towards their students with special educational needs. In contrast, there are only two respondents who declare that they have a low or absent level of empathy.

In line with the international legislative framework [36, 37, 38], the integration of children with special educational needs depends on the following factors: the psycho-pedagogical training of teaching staff, the level of cooperation between teachers and parents, the educational policies on inclusive education, the early detection of specific learning disorders in children with SEN, and the intervention through individualised learning plans for each student with GLD (Fig. 4).

However, most of the respondents (70.1%) point out that the most important factor is the intervention through individualised learning plans, followed by the psycho-pedagogical training of the educational staff (65.4%), and the early detection of specific learning difficulties in students with SEN (59.8%). Though all those factors are equally important for IE, less than half of the participants (47.7%) consider that

educational policies play a decisive role in achieving inclusive teaching settings (Fig. 4).

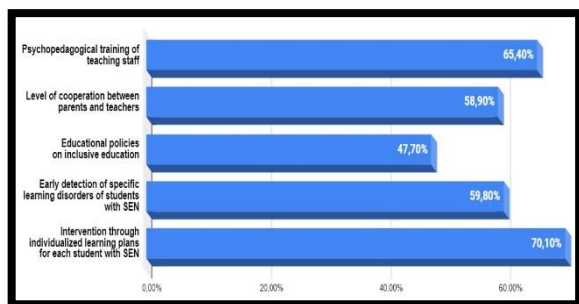


Figure 4. The teachers' opinion on the factors influencing the integration of SWD

As the narrative of the bibliometric analysis has already shown, inclusive education has greatly evolved over the last three decades. Yet, one third of the teachers questioned estimate that inclusive education will have a modest evolution (30.8%), and nearly 14% of them expect a bad or very bad development. More optimistic predictions were given by 55% of the educational staff included in the research.

Bearing in mind that all questionnaires were completed via Google Forms, all participants needed Internet access, which means that they could have tried to search online for the correct answer to Item 18 (the definition of an efficient IE).

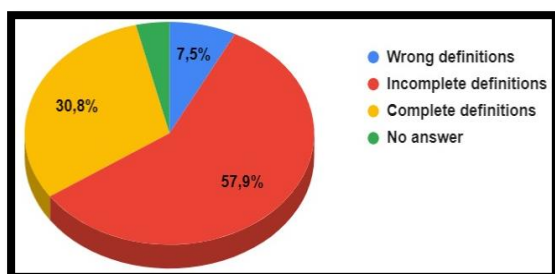


Figure 5. Teachers' responses to the definition of IE

Still, concerning the definition of IE, only 30.8% of the respondents managed to answer correctly and completely, while almost 60% gave incomplete definitions and 7.5% responded wrongly (see Figure 5).

5. Discussion

The limitations of this scientific research must also be acknowledged. First of all, the bibliometric analysis only included articles from scientific journals written in English and Romanian. Indeed, there is valuable information on the role of ITTIE from researchers that has been published in other languages, and that could be informative. Yet, the

bibliometric synthesis covered meta-analyses from all over the world in order to offer a holistic perspective on the research on IE: from Europe, Northern America (Canada), South America (Brazil), and Central Asia.

In addition, limitations within the current literature review must also be addressed. Thus, there is a noticeable absence of large-scale, longitudinal studies concerning the relationship between the initial teacher training for inclusive education and the identification of the most efficient inclusive practices for educators. The dearth of longitudinal designs could be justified by the prodigious amount of resources required for the effective execution of the research.

Lastly, the indirect inquiry was sent to teaching staff from large school units in all 41 counties of Romania, including the capital city of Bucharest. This means that data interpretation might omit teachers' opinions from small and medium school units. However, the statistical distribution and representation of the study have been achieved.

6. Conclusions

The most important factor in achieving good outcomes for all students is the quality of teachers and their teaching. Initial teacher education (ITE) is crucial for the quality of teachers, instructors, and trainers because it provides the knowledge and skills the staff need to teach effectively and to meet the needs of their students and institution, whether they work in early childhood education and care, a primary or secondary school, a college, or a university. By promoting inclusive education, teachers have the opportunity to crush the social inequities that have been dominating our societies for far too long.

The bibliometric analysis of 16 scientific papers examining the IE published in the last five years shows that there is a positive correlation between professional training in inclusive education through course-based programmes and teachers' attitudes towards children with SEN [8], [16], [17], [22]. Also, the vast majority of studies associated with IE focus on methodologies and resources rather than on their improvement [1], [7].

The interpretation of the results of the questionnaire indicates that a considerable number of the teaching staff participating in this study have acknowledged the necessity of a professional training course for IE. Although nearly 60% of the respondents self-evaluate their didactic strategy as an inclusive approach to education, only 30% were able to indicate a complete definition of the IE. On the other hand, only 51% of the teachers declare to have graduated from a professional training course for inclusive education. For this reason, there is an evident need for course-based training concerning IE, which confirms the research hypothesis H2.

Furthermore, findings from previous studies suggest that teachers who have strong experience

working with students with SEN tend to have a low level of stereotyping [27]. The analysis of teachers' demographic profiles revealed that the majority of participants are women (94.4%), located in urban areas (77.6%), and have a highly significant length of teaching service (63% of them have more than 15 years of experience). With respect to their opinion regarding their own attitude towards children with SEN, most teachers (81.3%) state that they show support. In this regard, participants in this study confirm the conclusion that the length of teaching service positively impacts the educational staff's attitudes and beliefs, and the research hypothesis H1 is also verified.

Since the bibliometric synthesis revealed poor collaboration among researchers from different countries and/or continents, further research should focus on examining the role of initial teacher training for inclusive education from multiple perspectives with the purpose of providing a clear and effective set of inclusive teaching practices.

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