

## GENDER DIFFERENCES IN SATISFACTION OF PARENTS OF CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS WITH THE TEACHING PROCESS

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### ABSTRACT

This study investigated the gender differences of parents of children with special needs in satisfaction regarding the indicators of teaching process. The sample consisted of 53 subjects/parents (18 or 34 % mothers and 35 or 66% fathers). The Chi-square test showed differences of statistical significance among them. To evaluate parent's perceptions of teaching process satisfaction indicators, a structured questionnaire was developed, piloted and validated. The questionnaire included one part of questions related to some demographic data, such as gender and the type of child's impairment, and 13 multiple choice questions with answers from 1 (not satisfied at all) to 5 (very satisfied). Croanbach Alpha was used to measure the questionnaire reliability. The value we obtained was .834 (.783-fathers and .844-mothers). In order to find the differences between mothers and fathers we used the T-test for independent groups. The results of our research showed a relatively moderate to high value in most of the variables that reflect the parent's satisfaction with the teaching process. In some of them our results showed that fathers were more satisfied than mothers, while in some others there were no differences of statistical significance. The practices of child care in our country are seen as closely associated with mothers, who are assumed to have higher expectations from the services provided to their children. Nevertheless, such results indicate a need for further, thorough research that will include additional variables, in order to understand more clearly the impact of additional indicators on parents' perspectives.

**Keywords:** Special needs student, parents, satisfaction, teaching, differences.

### INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education policies and procedures are designed to ensure equal rights for all children (Edmunds & Edmunds, 2008). The notion 'inclusive education' is nowadays broadly conceptualized to include students of various backgrounds, as well as students with disabilities (Ashman, 2002). The same concept of inclusive education is respected in Kosovo, as well, and is now well defined in the Law on Pre-university Education in the Republic of Kosovo, according to which 'educational and training institutions should accommodate all children regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, linguistic or other conditions and should promote integration and contact between children; relevant support should be offered based on pupils' individual needs; separate educational settings or special schools are justified only where after expert assessment it is considered impractical to enroll a child in a regular municipal school or training institution' (2011:26).

However, for an inclusive system to be successful all the stakeholders involved in its implementation must believe in the competences of the education system for meeting the needs of all children equally. Parents, in particular, must believe in the capacities of schools to aptly understand and educate their children with special needs. Taking into account the current inclusion policies of the education system, children with special needs are increasingly being integrated into regular classroom with their peers who have no impairments, in addition to other forms of organizing their education. However, regardless of

the form of organizing the teaching, the focus is increasingly being put on the quality of the teaching and learning process. Therefore, the aim of this study was to unveil the views of the parents of students with disabilities regarding the teaching and their children learning in any of education forms in which their children are involved. The research question of this study was:

- Are there differences in the satisfaction level of male and female parents/guardians of children with disabilities in inclusive schools?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Active family involvement has long been considered an important factor related to better outcomes in the education of children with and without disabilities in inclusive programmes (Levy, Kim, & Olive, 2006; Pérez Carreón, Drake, & Barton, 2005). Parental involvement is important for the education of children of all ages, but it is critical for the success of young children in inclusive settings (Filler & Xu, 2006).

The research literature indicates that there is a wide range of opinion amongst parents related to the placement of children in educational settings. Some parents prefer and advocate for inclusive placement, while others favour separate placement (Grove & Fisher, 1999). It is now undoubtedly evident that the tendency towards inclusion is increasingly growing. From the parents' perspective, one of their main concerns is the protection of support services for their child, as they see these services as very important. Another concern they see is the necessary professional training of teachers for working with children with special needs (Grove and Fisher, 1999). Furthermore, according to Lake & Billingsley (2000), even when a teacher has gone through professional training for working with these children, conflict can arise from divergent perspectives about the child's needs. Another concern parents had was related to the socialization of children with special needs when they were placed in regular classrooms (Freeman and Alkin, 2000).

However, it should be noted that some studies have shown parents also believe that there is a number of benefits for their children when they are placed in inclusive settings (Gilmore et al., 2003; Palmer et al, 2001). Children with special needs receive very good professional support according to Elkins et al, (2003), Danieli & King, (1997); Grove and Fisher, 1999). Parents must feel that regular classroom teachers are able to accommodate their children's learning needs (Palmer et al., 2001).

In examining the views of parents/guardians on inclusive education, differences in views between mothers and fathers showed that even though women (74.4%) have more knowledge on inclusive education than men (28.6%), studies show that men have a more positive attitude towards inclusive education than mothers (Kasonde-Ng'andu et al., 2001).

## METHODOLOGY

### Study sample

The participants in the study were 53 parents (18 mothers or 34 % and 35 fathers or 66%), who had children with special needs included in various forms of education. In the Chi-square test, important differences were reported in the distribution of the percentages of gender representation in this study ( $\chi^2(1) = 5.45, p = .020$ ) between mothers and fathers. Table 1 shows the characteristics of special needs children of parent participants. The Chi-square test showed significant statistical differences in the types of impairments ( $\chi^2(7, N=53)$

=15.377,  $p = .031$ ) among children and the type of educational institution they attended ( $\chi^2(2, N=53) = 15.094, p = .001$ ). Parents participated voluntarily in the study.

Table 1: Data on children of parents who participated in the study

		<i>N</i>	%
Type of impairment	Visual impairment	3	5.7
	Hearing impairment	10	18.9
	Intellectual impairment	7	13.2
	Physical impairment	5	9.4
	Autism	7	13.2
	Speech impairment	4	7.5
	More than one impairment	14	26.4
	Down Syndrome	3	5.7
	Type of institution students attend	Resource Centre	11
Attached class		31	58.5
Regular class		11	20.8

### Data collection instrument and method

For data collection in this study a structured questionnaire was designed, containing one part of questions related to demographic data, such as gender, type of children's impairment, and the type of institution children attended, and 13 multiple choice questions with answers from 1 (not satisfied at all) to 5 (very satisfied). Cronbach Alpha was used for evaluating the questionnaire reliability. The value obtained was .834 (.783-fathers and .844-mothers). The data were collected in direct meetings with parents, who were informed in advance about the purpose of the study and agreed to voluntarily participate in the research. The questionnaire was completed individually by each parent and was returned to the author on the same day.

### The procedure of data analysis

The numbers of responses and the respective percentages have been calculated in order to evaluate the distribution of satisfaction indicators according to all parents and their gender. Chi-square and T-test for independent groups was used to find the significant statistical gender differences. A specific code for the identification of information was used. The statistical package used in the present study is SPSS Ver. 19.0.

## RESULTS

The values in Table 2 represent the arithmetic mean and the standard deviation for all variables of all parents who participated in the study.

Table 2: Results in AM and SD of parents

Statements: How satisfied are you with:	<i>AM</i>	<i>SD</i>
The services provided by the educational institution where your child is placed?	3.36	.88
The possibilities for the movement of students in the school?	3.72	.86
Lighting in the classrooms?	3.64	.76
Professional staff of the school?	3.68	1.02
Your child's integration?	3.19	1.13
Teachers' approach to your child?	3.64	1.11

Learning content offered to students?	3.40	.82
Textbooks?	3.32	.850
The engagement of your child in the school?	3.38	.860
Students' motivation?	3.26	1.06
Document handling by the school?	3.51	1.17
The way teachers treat your child?	3.62	.95
Teachers' cooperation with you?	3.77	.95

The level of satisfaction of mothers and fathers is presented in Table 3 through arithmetic mean and standard deviation 3.

The t-test analysis for independent groups showed differences between mothers and fathers in their satisfaction levels in some of the variables. Differences of statistical significance were found on services provided by the institution  $t(51) = 2.242$ ,  $p = .029$ , where fathers showed higher values in comparison to mothers (3.72 vs. 3.17); on classroom lighting  $t(51) = 2.443$ ,  $p = .018$ , fathers also showed a higher level of satisfaction in comparison to mothers (3.94 vs. 3.49); and on the teachers' approach to children  $t(51) = 2.134$ ,  $p = .05$  higher values were shown by fathers (4.06 vs. 3.43) in comparison to mothers. Also on student motivation in the school  $t(51) = 2.044$ ,  $p = .046$ , the differences were 'in favour' of the fathers (3.67 vs. 3.06); as they were on the variable document handling by the school  $t(51) = 3.178$ ,  $p = .003$ , with fathers showing a higher level of satisfaction (4.17 vs. 3.17). Regarding other variables, even though there were differences in values, they were not statistically valid.

Table 3: Parents' results in AM and SD across gender

Statements	Mothers		Fathers	
	AM	SD	AM	SD
How satisfied are you with:				
The services provided by the educational institution where your child is placed?	3.17	.86	3.72	.83
The possibilities for the movement of students in the school?	3.66	.91	3.83	.79
Lighting in the classrooms?	3.49	.81	3.94	.54
Professional staff of the school?	3.57	1.04	3.89	.96
Your child's integration?	3.00	1.11	3.56	1.10
Teachers' approach to your child?	3.43	1.15	4.06	.93
Learning content offered to students?	3.26	.74	3.67	.91
Textbooks?	3.17	.82	3.61	.85
The engagement of your child in the school?	3.23	.77	3.67	.97
Students' motivation?	3.06	.91	3.67	.91
Document handling by the school?	3.17	1.18	4.17	.86
The way teachers treat your child?	3.43	.82	4.00	1.09
Teachers' cooperation with you?	3.63	.91	4.06	.99

## DISCUSSION

Results of our research show a relatively moderate to high value in some of the variables that reflect the satisfaction of parents of children with special needs with the teaching process, such as 'the possibilities for the movement of students in the school', 'teacher's cooperation with parents', 'professional staff of the school', 'teachers' treatment of special needs children', 'teachers' approach to children' and 'classroom lighting'. All other indicators on the teaching process had moderate values. These results are consistent with some studies (Gilmore et al., 2003; Palmer et al, 2001; Elkins et al, 2003).

The differences between mothers and fathers are mostly 'in favour' of fathers, who according to the analysis have experienced more satisfaction than mothers. Fathers showed more

satisfaction with ‘services provided by the institution’, ‘teachers’ approach to children’, ‘student motivation in the school’, document handling by the school’, and ‘classroom lighting’. The gender differences on other indicators in the questionnaire were not significant. Our results are consistent with some other studies that dealt with gender differences among parents in their experiences with the inclusion of children with special needs (Kasonde-Ng’andu et al., 2001). However, for such studies of perceptions, satisfaction or conceptions of parents’ roles in the family, it is recommended to consider the role of the culture.

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