

SPECIAL EDUCATION AS AN INSTRUMENT OF SOCIAL CHANGE IN CROATIA

EDUCAÇÃO ESPECIAL COMO INSTRUMENTO DE MUDANÇA SOCIAL NA CROÁCIA

LA EDUCACIÓN ESPECIAL COMO INSTRUMENTO DE CAMBIO SOCIAL EN CROACIA



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ABSTRACT: This text will deal with the development of special pedagogy and its approach to students with developmental disabilities. The first part of the paper will describe the development of special pedagogy, its basic concepts, the development in Croatia and the challenges faced by specialists in special pedagogy in Croatia. The second part of the paper will focus on the difficulties faced by pupils in regular schools and ways in which help can be provided to pupils with different learning disabilities. Special emphasis will be placed on working with autistic students. The final part of the paper will present conclusions on the importance of special pedagogy in modern education and on the need for further development and improvement of special pedagogy in Croatia. All of the above will be supported by scientific papers and research in this field. The aim of this paper is to provide insight into various aspects of special pedagogy, especially with a focus on working with autistic pupils, in order to ensure adequate education for all pupils regardless of their developmental difficulties.

KEYWORDS: Development. Education. Inclusion. Republic of Croatia. Special education.

RESUMO: *Este texto tratará do desenvolvimento da pedagogia da educação especial e sua abordagem com alunos com deficiências de desenvolvimento. A primeira parte do artigo descreverá o desenvolvimento da pedagogia especial, seus conceitos básicos, o percurso na Croácia e os desafios enfrentados pelos especialistas no assunto nesse país. A segunda parte do artigo enfocará as dificuldades enfrentadas pelos alunos em escolas regulares e as maneiras pelas quais a ajuda pode ser fornecida a aqueles com diferentes dificuldades de aprendizagem. Ênfase especial será dada ao trabalho com discentes autistas. A parte final do documento apresentará conclusões sobre a importância da pedagogia especial na educação moderna e sobre a necessidade de maior desenvolvimento e melhoria desta na Croácia. Todos os itens acima serão apoiados por artigos científicos e pesquisas neste campo. O objetivo deste artigo é fornecer informações sobre vários aspectos da pedagogia especial, especialmente com foco no trabalho com alunos autistas, a fim de garantir uma educação adequada para todos, independentemente de suas dificuldades de desenvolvimento.*

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: *Desenvolvimento. Educação. Inclusão. República da Croácia. Educação Especial.*

RESUMEN: *Este texto tratará sobre el desarrollo de la pedagogía de la educación especial y su enfoque para los estudiantes con discapacidades del desarrollo. La primera parte del artículo describirá el progreso de la pedagogía especial, sus conceptos básicos, el viaje en Croacia y los desafíos que enfrentan los expertos en la materia en ese país. La segunda parte del artículo se centrará en las dificultades que enfrentan los estudiantes en las escuelas convencionales y las formas en que se puede proporcionar ayuda a las personas con diferentes discapacidades de aprendizaje. Se dará especial énfasis al trabajo con estudiantes autistas. La parte final del escrito presentará conclusiones sobre la importancia de la pedagogía especial en la educación moderna y sobre la necesidad de un mayor desarrollo e incremento de esta en Croacia. Todo lo anterior estará respaldado por artículos científicos e investigaciones en este campo. El propósito de este artículo es proveer información sobre diversos aspectos de la pedagogía especial, centrándose especialmente en el trabajo con estudiantes autistas con el fin de garantizar una educación adecuada para todos, independientemente de sus dificultades de desarrollo.*

PALABRAS CLAVE: *Desarrollo. Educación. Inclusión. República de Croacia. Educación especial*

Introduction

Special pedagogy has a long history, and its development is the result of various social, political, economic and pedagogical factors. According to Pavičić and Bakota (2021), the concept of special pedagogy first appeared in the 19th century in the context of solving the problem of students with disabilities. However, it was not until the 20th century that special pedagogy began to develop as a scientific discipline dealing with various forms of student difficulties.

According to Bakker, Verhoeven and Boonen (2019), the development of special pedagogy was aimed at developing specific approaches for different forms of student difficulties, such as learning difficulties, motor difficulties, emotional and behavioral difficulties etc. The development of special pedagogy continues today and is aimed at adapting the education system and working methods to enable equal access to education for all pupils, regardless of their characteristics and difficulties.

In Croatia, the development of special pedagogy began in the second half of the 20th century, at a time when the importance of social welfare and support for vulnerable groups of society became increasingly emphasized in the world. According to Vidović (2011a; 2011b), special pedagogy in Croatia was closely related to social policy and experienced its development most through the activities of social welfare centers, children's homes and other institutions providing social welfare and support to children and young people.

However, it was only at the beginning of the 21st century that the application of special pedagogy in the educational system began to develop. According to Matijević (2016), special pedagogy in Croatia has become increasingly important in the context of education in recent years, especially in working with students with developmental disabilities. Special pedagogy is increasingly applied in primary and secondary schools, through various educational programs and projects aimed at encouraging social inclusion, support and adaptation for students with different needs.

According to the Mažar (2021), special pedagogy in Croatia is also increasingly developing in higher education, through the introduction of new study programs, such as special pedagogy studies, which enable the acquisition of knowledge and skills for work in the field of social welfare, education and support to different groups of societies.

Although special pedagogy is growing in Croatia, as in other countries, there are many challenges and difficulties that it faces in its activities. According to the Petrović (2018), one of the challenges for special pedagogy in Croatia is the lack of systematic support and resources

to work with vulnerable groups, such as children with developmental disabilities or families at risk.

Another challenge for special pedagogy in Croatia is the lack of skilled staff and specialized education programs, which would enable the acquisition of the knowledge and skills necessary for work in the field of social welfare and support. According to Vidović (2011a; 2011b), there is a shortage of highly educated experts in the field of special pedagogy in Croatia, which may limit the quality of services and support provided to vulnerable groups.

The third challenge for special pedagogy in Croatia is the insufficient integration of special pedagogy into the educational system, which may make it difficult to support students with developmental disabilities in schools. According to the Matijević (2016), despite the increasing use of special pedagogy in education, there are challenges in integrating this discipline into the formal education system, such as lack of specialized education for teachers and lack of cooperation between education experts and social workers.

Special pedagogy in Croatia faces numerous symbolic and real limits that affect its application and development. Symbolic boundaries refer to prejudices and stereotypes towards specific groups, which may affect the provision of social welfare and services. The actual limits, on the other hand, relate to material and institutional conditions which may make it more difficult to provide support and services.

One of the symbolic boundaries for special pedagogy in Croatia is stigma and discrimination against persons with various difficulties, such as persons with disabilities or mental health problems. According to a survey by Matković, Hržica and Ivanović (2020), people with disabilities in Croatia often face prejudices and stereotypes, which can affect their inclusion in society and the provision of appropriate support. The actual boundaries for special pedagogy in Croatia include the lack of material and institutional resources to support vulnerable groups. According to the Petrović (2018), one of the real limits for special pedagogy in Croatia is the lack of financial resources to work with vulnerable groups, such as children with developmental disabilities or families at risk. These insufficient financial resources may limit the quality of services and support provided to vulnerable groups. Another real frontier for special pedagogy in Croatia is the lack of specialized education programs and education for social care and support professionals. According to Vidović (2011a; 2011b), the lack of highly educated special pedagogy experts, as well as the lack of specialized education and training programs, can limit the quality of services and support provided to vulnerable groups. Apart from the lack of resources and specialized educational programs, as well as prejudice and

stereotypes, another symbolic border for special pedagogy in Croatia is the lack of recognition of the importance and need for special pedagogy by society and government institutions. According to Veček (2013), the lack of recognition and support for special pedagogy in Croatia can affect its development and application in support of vulnerable groups. Another real frontier for special pedagogy in Croatia is the lack of cooperation and coordination between different sectors involved in supporting vulnerable groups. According to Petrović (2018), the lack of cooperation between different sectors, such as education, health and social care, may limit the quality of services and support provided to vulnerable groups. In addition to these borders, another challenge for special pedagogy in Croatia is the growing number of migrants and refugees seeking support and integration into society. According to a survey by Kovačić and Kuzmanić (2019), integration of migrants and refugees into society is a challenge for special pedagogy, which requires the development of new strategies and approaches.

Results and Discussion

Students with developmental disabilities

Article 65 Of the Act on Primary and Secondary School Education (NN 87/08) reads as follows: “Pupils with disabilities have the right to an individualized approach to learning, and in order to achieve equal opportunities, they are included in educational work adapted to their needs and possibilities. The student with disabilities has the right to professional assistance and support, and an individual educational plan is being drawn up for him.” (OFFICIAL GAZETTE, NO. 87.08.)

There are many different types of problems in pupils, and some of the most common are dyslexia, dysplasia, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and autistic spectrum disorder (ASD). According to Mazar, the types of developmental difficulties are:

- Children and students with visual impairment
- Children and students with hearing impairment
- Children and students with language, voice and speech disorders
- Children and students with reduced intellectual ability
- Children and students with autism spectrum disorder.
- Children and students with motor disorders and chronic illnesses.
- Children and students with attention deficit with hyperactivity.
- Specific learning difficulties.

Each of these difficulties affects different aspects of learning and behavior and requires specific approaches and strategies to cope successfully.

One of the key factors in successfully coping with student difficulties is early detection and diagnosis. According to a study by Kuliša and Šimić (2018), early detection and adequate diagnostics are important for planning individualized support and adapting the teaching process.

After diagnosing the difficulty, it is necessary to establish an individual approach and adjust the teaching process and environment of the pupil. According to the Stojanović (2018), adapting the teaching process and environment should focus on the specific needs of students and should include individual teaching strategies and methods.

As mentioned in the paper, inclusive education is the most effective strategy for integrating all students into the regular education system and adapting the teaching process to their individual needs. According to the Radošević-Vidaček and Pejić (2020), inclusive education can improve the quality of education for students with disabilities, reduce discrimination and stigmatization and contribute to the development of socially responsible behavior.

Access to students with disabilities is based on an individual approach and adaptation of educational strategies and working methods. According to Pavičić and Bakota (2021), an individual approach implies that each student is treated as a unique person with special needs and characteristics. This is why access to students with disabilities involves the application of different educational strategies, methods and techniques adapted to their needs. According to Lee (2014), the adaptation of educational strategies and working methods for students with disabilities includes the application of different approaches, such as inclusive education, collaborative learning, individualized learning, etc.

- Inclusive education implies that learners with developmental disabilities engage in a regular educational process using appropriate adaptations, support and resources.
- Peer learning implies that students encourage and support each other in learning.
- Individualized learning enables educational content and methods to adapt to the needs and interests of an individual pupil.

Access to students with disabilities also involves the use of different educational technologies and tools that facilitate learning for students with disabilities. According to O'Sullivan *et al.* (2020), the use of technologies such as computers, mobile devices, different software and applications and specialized learning tools can be extremely useful in educating students with developmental disabilities. Such technologies enable the adaptation of educational content and working methods, enable interaction and communication, and provide

support and motivation for learning. Pupils with disabilities in regular school often need additional support to reach their full potential. According to Lovrić *et al.* (2020), the most important factor in helping students with disabilities in regular school is the individualization of the approach. This includes understanding the specific needs of each student and adapting the teaching process and environment to meet those needs. One of the most adequate types of assistance for pupils with disabilities in regular school is inclusive education, which is committed to integrating all pupils into the regular education system and adapting the teaching process to their individual needs. According to the Vrbnjak and Pavković (2019), inclusive education can improve the quality of education for students with disabilities, reduce discrimination and stigmatization and contribute to the development of socially responsible behavior.

In addition to inclusive education, another type of assistance that can be provided to pupils with difficulties in regular school is individual support, which can consist of additional lessons, learning assistance, psychological support and counselling. According to research by Vujičić *et al.* (2017), individual support can improve the self-confidence and self-esteem of learners with disabilities and contribute to better academic outcomes.

Problems faced by children with developmental disabilities

One of the main problems faced by children with developmental disabilities in the education system is the lack of tailored education and teaching. In order to support children with developmental disabilities, schools should provide tailored teaching programs and methods adapted to the individual needs and abilities of the child. According to the study (LIPSKY; GARTNER, 1996), the effectiveness of such adjustments depends on whether they are well integrated into the school system and not just targeted at an individual child.

In addition to the lack of tailored education, another problem is the lack of adequate resources to support children with developmental disabilities. Schools should be equipped with adequate materials and equipment to support their needs, and teachers should be well trained in working with children with developmental disabilities. According to the survey (FARRELL, 2008), the lack of resources and resources affects the quality of support provided and can lead to disparities in education for children with developmental disabilities.

Another problem that often arises in the educational system is the stigmatization of children with developmental disabilities. Children are often considered “others” or “others than

others”, which can lead to stigmatization and isolation. According to the study (GOFFMAN, 1963), stigmatization can lead to a loss of self-esteem and confidence in children with developmental disabilities, which can negatively affect their learning and development. In addition to stigmatization, another problem facing children with developmental disabilities is the lack of support from peers and teachers. Children with developmental disabilities often feel isolated and unaccepted by their peers and teachers, which can lead to low self-esteem and negative attitudes toward school and learning.

These problems can be caused by a lack of a tailored and inclusive education system, a lack of teacher knowledge and skills to work with such children, as well as social prejudice towards people with disabilities. One of the key problems faced by children with developmental disabilities in the education system is the lack of inclusive education. According to a UNICEF survey (2014), Croatia ranks 27th among the 28 European Union countries for inclusion of children with developmental disabilities in the education system. Lack of tailored education may lead to incompatibility of teaching methods and programs with the needs of children with developmental disabilities. According to a survey conducted by Kovacevic et al. (2016), teachers in Croatia often do not have enough knowledge and skills to work with children with developmental disabilities. According to their results, only 35.7% of teachers feel safe enough working with such children.

Social prejudice against people with disabilities can also cause problems. According to research conducted by the Goding *et al.* (2022), there are negative perceptions and stereotypes about children with developmental disabilities, which can lead to discrimination and segregation in the education system. Also, this lack of understanding can lead to children with developmental disabilities being treated as a problem for teachers and schools.

As a result of these problems, children with developmental disabilities often face different forms of discrimination and exclusion in the educational system. According to a survey conducted by Ivanković *et al.* (2015) children with developmental disabilities often face discrimination in the recruitment process and are less likely to acquire work skills.

Conclusion

In this paper, the development of special pedagogy and access to students with developmental disabilities were analyzed. The development of special pedagogy is the result of various social, political, economic and pedagogical factors, and today it focuses on adapting the education system and working methods to enable equal access to education for all students. Access to students with disabilities includes individual approach and adaptation of educational strategies and methods of work and the application of different approaches such as inclusive education, collaborative learning and individualized learning. The use of educational technologies and tools can also be extremely useful in educating students with developmental disabilities.

The theme “children with developmental disabilities in the educational system” presents numerous information and facts from scientific literature. By analyzing this information, it can be concluded that children with developmental disabilities in the educational system face numerous challenges and obstacles.

It was stated that there is a lack of adequate support and resources for this population of children, which can result in inadequate access to education, dissatisfaction of children and their families and lower educational achievements. It was also pointed out that the lack of sensitization and education of teachers and other professionals working with this population of children can further complicate the process of education and integration into society.

However, it was pointed out that the integration of children with developmental disabilities into the educational system can have positive effects on their development, socialization and self-confidence. It is important to ensure the adaptations and support necessary to ensure adequate education for each child, regardless of their developmental disabilities.

Therefore, more efforts should be made to develop and implement inclusive strategies in the education system, as well as to ensure adequate resources and support for children with developmental disabilities. This could contribute to improving educational achievements, reducing stigmatization and improving the quality of life of this population of children and their families.

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