

Pupils With Intellectual Disabilities and Service to Education. The Specifics of Special Education System in Romania

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Abstract

Disability is the umbrella concept resulting from the interaction between impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers that prevent a person's full and effective participation in the society. Intellectual disability belongs to the general aspect of disability, being a disorder with onset in the child's developmental period. It includes deficits in intellectual and adaptive functioning in the conceptual, social, and practical areas. Children with intellectual disabilities constitute one of the most vulnerable population groups in any society, facing barriers to participation in society and being at increased risk for a wide range of associated problems. Their education is both a priority and a concern for societies, and it is often marked by challenges in terms of inclusion in the appropriate form of education.

Keywords: pupils with intellectual disabilities, learning disabilities, special education system, teaching methods, educational system.

JEL Classification: I20, I21, I24

1. Introduction

Whereas in the past attitudes towards children were dictated by the economic, moral, and religious power of the society in which they lived, today children can enjoy a status of their own, thanks to effective measures supporting the quality of life and the influence of international

organizations campaigning for their rights. In this respect, the second half of the 20th century was one during which important steps were taken in terms of international policies to improve legislation, increase the welfare of children, and make school attendance compulsory (Meynert, 2017).

An important desideratum of modern, democratic societies is the elimination of factors that disrupt the proper development of children with disabilities (Gherghuț, 2013). Over the last two decades, the development of a wide range of residential facilities, respite centres, daytime activities, supportive assistance in choosing a subsequent job and their inclusion in various forms of education represent important steps in community services for people with disabilities. In many countries these services are still disparate and variable and a clear and comprehensive national policy can be found in very few countries (Bouras & Jacobson, 2002). Serving children with disabilities in education is a fundamental process through which children can benefit from reaching their potential. Education authorities have an obligation to recognise the rights of persons with disabilities to equal educational opportunities with others, and where the structures of the regular school system are unsuitable for children with disabilities, their schooling can also take place in special educational structures (Zlătescu, Neagoe, & Mocanu, 2014).

2. Intellectual disability in children and specific learning disabilities

The concept of "disability" has been given an impactful definition in the literature through the UN, 2006, under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities: "disability is a concept resulting from the interaction of persons with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers that prevent their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others" (UN, 2006, p.3). Intellectual disability belongs to the disability construct, and definitions of intellectual disability have focused on measuring intellect, emphasising care and maintenance over appropriate education of the disabled persons. Today, it has been concluded that the latter have a well-deserved place in society and can make valuable contributions to their lives (Shree & Shukla, 2016).

DSM-5 includes intellectual disability (intellectual developmental disorder) along with communication disorders, autism spectrum disorder, attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder-

ADHD, motor disorders and specific learning disorders in the category of neurodevelopmental disorders (APA, 2016). But what is extremely important is that neurodevelopmental disorders usually occur in comorbidity with each other (Simpson, Mizen, & Cooper, 2016). In pupils with intellectual disabilities, many other difficulties that affect their learning process can be encountered, such as lack of motor control and poor coordination, sensory blocks / limitations of varying degrees, language and speech disorders, difficulties in cognitive functions. All of these make it necessary to adopt an individual process of identification and development of an individual work plan for their rehabilitation.

All pupils with intellectual disabilities have specific learning difficulties. They make acquisitions and progress throughout their lives, but at a slower pace (Keskinova & Ajdinski, 2018). With specialized educational support, pupils with mild intellectual disabilities can make progress in academic skills, even if their rate of learning is slower than that of a typically developing child (APA, 2016). Although similar characteristics may overlap in the personalities of these pupils, in school practice it is important to distinguish between these two groups of learners: those with intellectual disabilities and those with disabilities / specific learning disabilities (dyslexia, dysgraphia, dyscalculia) (Keskinova & Ajdinski, 2018).

Attending educational activities is very important for children with intellectual disabilities in order to develop useful academic, social, and practical skills for full participation in community life. Whatever the approach (inclusive education, integrated classes, or segregated education / special education), pupils with intellectual disabilities have a primary need for education to maximise their development and increase their chances of success in life (Ke, Liu, & Rey, 2012).

3. Specifics of special education in Romania

All children should benefit from an education that promotes equal opportunities and non-discrimination in rights. This education must be based on individualised training, with a view to preparing the child for adult life (Bonea, 2011). The development of special education as an alternative to the traditional system has internationally gained momentum only since the latter part of the 20th century as a response to the needs of children with disabilities (idem).

In Romania, the term "special and integrated special education" refers to differentiated, adapted forms of schooling and complex educational, social, and medical assistance for people with special educational needs (or CES, as it is commonly abbreviated). Special education is the set of processes for the implementation of programmes, learning activities and complex remedial-compensatory assistance (psychotherapeutic, medical, social, cultural) adapted to people who do not succeed independently in reaching, temporarily or throughout their schooling, a level of development appropriate to their age, for the formation of basic skills in preparation for adult life (OMECTS nr. 5573, 2011).

Special schools are educational units in which education and psycho-pedagogical intervention is provided by specialised teachers to people with different types and degrees of disabilities, and pupils are included in separate school units with specialised teachers, where special education is carried out (*idem*). In the case of integrated education, children can be included both collectively (class of pupils/group with disabilities) and individually in mainstream education, benefiting from a support teacher for a maximum of 2 hours per week (The Romanian Parliament, 2011). Special education is the only component of Romanian education that is fully subsidized by the state budget, in terms of the following aspects: daily food, financial support for school supplies, their accommodation in special schools with boarding facilities, their care and social and professional integration. (Manea, 2006).

When referring to one of the most recent statistical bulletins in the field of labour and social protection (1 January-31 December 2021), issued by the National Authority for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Children and Adoptions, we find that the total number of children with disabilities in Romania is 78,190, and the number of children with intellectual disabilities reaches as far as 10,203. Still, what is really worrying is that the evolution of the number of disabled children is constantly increasing (ANDPDCA, 2021). Special education is very important in the upbringing and development of children with disabilities and therefore more attention needs to be paid to this sector in terms of allocating funds to support the quality of services and the continuous specialisation of teachers (Bonea, 2011).

The Ministry of National Education, as a specialized body of the central public administration through school inspectorates, is obliged to take the necessary measures to facilitate access to education and ensure compulsory and free general education for all children. In this context, the

child with a disability has the right to education, rehabilitation, compensation, rehabilitation, and integration, adapted to his/her possibilities, in order to develop his/her personality appropriately (Article 49, The Romanian Parliament, 2004). In Romania, the inclusion of children in one of the forms of education described above is the decision of a complex assessment carried out by a specialised commission within the County Centres for Resources and Educational Assistance¹.

4. Conclusions

As intellectual disability is a condition of the person, diagnosed since childhood, it is very important that the person benefits from services appropriate to his/her particular needs. In our opinion, the service to education, adapted and appropriate to the individual particularities of the child with intellectual disability is the basis for optimal development in adulthood.

Regardless of the form of education in which the child is placed (mainstream/traditional education or special education, but without denying the additional benefits provided in special education) it is very important that the child receives individualised educational support, that the learning content is adapted to the child's needs and that the teachers working with and for these children are properly trained.

We believe that such studies dedicated to the category of children with intellectual disabilities are far too few in the literature, as the category of children with disabilities is often neglected by researchers, even more so in the case of studies dedicated to children diagnosed with intellectual disabilities.

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¹Each county has a County Centre for Resources and Educational Assistance, hereinafter referred to as CJRAE. These centres are related units of pre-university education, subordinated to the Ministry of Education and methodologically coordinated by the county school inspectorates (ISJ).

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