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RUSSIAN AND BRITISH PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS' SELF-EFFICACY AND ATTITUDES REGARDING INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

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Abstract

Teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education and their perceived self-efficacy beliefs have a huge impact on the quality of education when transferring knowledge and skills from teachers to pupils in an inclusive classroom. Positive attitudes and strong self-efficacy beliefs may be shaped and reached by pre-service teachers when studying at a university and preparing to become teachers. A number of factors may also influence these variables, including specially designed university modules about inclusive and special education. Attitudes and self-efficacy beliefs can also be mutually dependent. This study examined the attitudes and self-efficacy beliefs of pre-service teachers from two countries, Russia and the UK, enrolled in teacher training programmes. The research showed that students from the UK held more positive attitudes towards inclusive education, and levels of their teacher self-efficacy beliefs were higher compared to the results displayed by their Russian counterparts. The students who completed university modules on special and/or inclusive education were more accepting of inclusion in contrast to those who did not have an opportunity to undertake such a module (this was mainly the case with pre-service teachers in Russia). Other factors like knowledge of the local legislation, levels of self-confidence, year of studies, relevant experience had a certain impact on pre-service teachers' attitudes and self-efficacy. This study provides suggestions for some changes in the system of teacher education for the countries that only recently started implementing inclusive practices in their education systems.

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Keywords: Inclusive education, pre-service teachers, teacher education, self-efficacy, attitudes.



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1. Introduction

A comprehensive vision of the major incentives for inclusive education was drawn during the World Conference in Salamanca, Spain, in 1994. Although the main focus of the participants of the Salamanca Conference was the access and quality of education provided to children with special educational needs (SEN) the representatives of 92 countries agreed on the necessity of fundamental reforms in general educational strategies in all the countries (UNESCO, 1994). One of the central changes that, according to the statement, is designed to support the process of “combating discriminatory attitudes, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all” (UNESCO, 1994, p.4) is orienting regular schools towards being inclusive. During the subsequent years substantial efforts have been made by many countries that tried to step on an inclusive pathway (Freire & Cesar, 2002; Engelbrecht, 2006; Forlin, 2006). It resulted in considerable shifts in education, social and economic policies in the countries that signed the Statement (Ainscow & Cesar, 2006).

Although the attempts and measures were taken it may be logical to assume that the results and the scope of such shifts depend greatly on how inclusive education and inclusion is understood by different countries and perceived by a range of different cultures. Rose (2010) underlines that introduction of inclusive schooling systems that originated in one country may not be successful in other countries due to unique social and cultural values. For example, vision and understanding of the concept of inclusive education vary in such countries as Russia and the UK. Thus, in the UK the movement towards integration and later, inclusion commenced as early as 1970s and received a lot of attention with the recommendations made by the committee under the chairmanship of Baroness Mary Warnock (Hodkinson, 2015). The Warnock Report (Department of Education and Science, 1978) recommended that children should no longer be categorised as being identified as having or not having SEN and that wherever possible all children should be educated together in mainstream schools. Whereas Russia, though signing the Salamanca Statement in 1994, initialised the evolvement towards social inclusion as late as 2011 with adopting the policy Accessible Environment (Ministry of Health and Social Development of the Russian Federation, 2011) followed by the policy On Education (Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation, 2011) which stated that all the children regardless of whether they are diagnosed as having SEN or not may choose to study in mainstream schools.

Obstacles to inclusive education are mostly encountered by those with a vested interest, who are primarily affected; they are children, parents, educators and practitioners in educational institutions (Rose, 2010). Teachers and practitioners in schools are one of the most essential stakeholders in inclusive education environment as they play a crucial role educating all children (Forlin, 2010). It is therefore not unexpected that teachers are believed and anticipated to have the best knowledge and skills to work with both children identified as having SEN and not having any special needs simultaneously in one classroom. However, while teachers are awaited to provide the best education they are capable of it has been reported that both experienced and inexperienced teachers struggle their ways through difficulties that can happen in an inclusive classroom (Soodak, Podell, & Lehman, 1998; Talmor, Reiter, & Feigin, 2005; Allan, 2007). In addition to having a heavier workload and the need to adapt to changing curricula constantly, teachers show a high rate of emotional and psychological burnout (Hargreaves, 2004). The reasons behind such stumbling blocks are numerous and relate to a number of various factors such as

attitudes to inclusive education, beliefs, perceptions, motivations held by teachers in an inclusive education environment (Allan, 2007).

2. Problem Statement

Researchers in the field of inclusive education from a range of different countries underlined a pivotal role of teachers' attitudes towards inclusive practice in mainstream schools (Avramidis, Bayliss, & Burden, 2000; MacFarlane & Woolfson, 2013). Dutch scholars carried out the research that involved slightly over eight thousand children with SEN (Van der Veen, Smeets, & Derriks, 2010). Those pupils whose teachers expressed a positive acceptance towards them showed a higher level of academic attainment compared to their peers whose teachers adhered closely to an opposite attitude. According to Avramidis and Norwich (2002), teacher attitudes may depend on at least three groups of factors which are child-related, educational environment-related and teacher-related. Teacher-related factors may be assumed to be one of the most significant factors because unlike child-related factors, which are more connected to a medical model of inclusion, teacher-related factors reflect a social model of inclusion. These factors are represented by teachers' gender, age, education, experience, contact with children with SEN and training on special and inclusive education (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002). Training on special and inclusive education may be considered as one of the central factors in forming positive attitudes of teachers towards inclusive education as it prepares them in the terms of both methodology and psychology. Indeed, there is a robust body of research carried out in Australia, the US and some European countries proving that both in-service and pre-service teachers who received a respective training show more positive attitudes towards inclusive education compared to their colleagues, who did not have modules about special and/or inclusive education during their teacher training courses (Sharma, Forlin, Loreman, & Earle, 2006; Cook, Cameron, & Tankersley, 2007).

In addition to attitudes, such trainings may increase teachers' self-efficacy which, alongside to attitudes, is also essential in making inclusive education practice more successful (Romi & Leyser, 2006; Savolainen, Engelbrecht, Nel, & Malinen, 2012). Moreover, the idea that the level of self-efficacy correlates with the quality of teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education is brought forward in this research. In other words, it is hypothesized that if a teacher believes in his or her abilities to work in an inclusive classroom then, a teacher's attitudes towards inclusion evolve into being more positive.

International practice shows that although transition from exclusive into inclusive education is a global trend in the educational sphere such changes are subject to a particular country's social rules and culture (Armstrong, Armstrong, & Spandagou, 2009). Nonetheless, in the scope of this study, it is argued that inclusive education may be successfully implemented in case of teachers' positive attitude to it regardless the country and the stage of its implementation. It is further claimed that attitudes are partially the result of a high level of self-efficacy which, in its turn, is dependent on quality teacher training of pre-service teachers in universities that include modules designed to increase knowledge and perfect skills in the sphere indicated.

However, up to date, there seems to be a lack of similar substantial cross-cultural research investigating the question of how countries differ regarding the vision and strategies applied while implementing inclusive education. In addition, opinions vary on whether it is necessary and useful for one

country's educational system to adopt other countries' leading practices in the field (Armstrong et al., 2009) or it is preferable to follow its unique way towards inclusion (Duke et al., 2016).

3. Research Questions

This research aimed at answering the following questions: (1) What are the attitudes of pre-service teachers towards inclusive education in Russia and the UK? (2) What are the levels of self-efficacy of pre-service teachers in the condition of an inclusive classroom in Russia and the UK and do they correlate with their attitudes? (3) Does training on special and/or inclusive education influence attitudes and the levels of self-efficacy of pre-service teachers in Russia and the UK considering that Russian universities do not all provide such modules in the curriculum?

4. Purpose of the Study

There is clearly a need to carry out an empirical research comparing attitudes and self-efficacy in inclusive education environment of Russian pre-service teachers, most of whom do not have university modules preparing them to work with children with SEN, and British pre-service teachers, who are taught such modules at universities. The findings of this study may be beneficial for Russian policy-makers, university educators, teachers and consequently children in educational institutions. In addition, international researchers in the field may use the research design and findings in order to conduct similar studies in other countries that currently make the first steps of introducing inclusive educational practices (Broadfoot, 2000).

5. Research Methods

To identify and compare predictive patterns of pre-service teacher attitudes towards inclusive education and its correlation with levels of their self-efficacy in inclusive classrooms and some other teacher-related variables in Russia and the UK a three-part correlational survey instrument was utilised to collect the data. Data for this research was collected through the use of a questionnaire. The participants for this study were pre-service teachers enrolled in teacher training courses in two universities, in England and Russia. The questionnaire was offered to pre-service teachers in the both universities via the means of the social media networking. The total number of participants that took part in the research is 88 students who are enrolled in teacher training programmes in the two universities. 69 Russian and 19 British students voluntarily participated in the research and completed online questionnaires SACIE and TSDES (Forlin & Chambers, 2011; Dawson, 2008).

There were 69 female and 19 male in total from both countries. The proportion of males and females in Russia is 20% and 80% and in the U.K. 26% and 74% respectively. None of the respondents abstained from indicating their gender. The mean age of the participants was 22.79 years (SD=2.54). The age profile is clustered around the range of 18 and 31 years.

Data collected from the participants' questionnaires were entered into IBM SPSS Statistics version 24.0 for quantitative analysis. The set of tests including Pearson's correlation test, t-test, 1-way ANOVA and correlation tests were conducted.

6. Findings

The two questionnaires SACIE and TSDDES used in this research are regarded to be reliable tools (Forlin & Chambers, 2011; Dawson, 2008). Nevertheless, internal consistency reliability for each of the scales should be calculated. In the case of SACIE Cronbach's $\alpha=.88$ and for TSDDES Cronbach's $\alpha=.99$.

The participants were asked if they had significant interaction with people with disabilities as this factor might have some influence on overall attitudes and self-efficacy beliefs of pre-service teachers in an inclusive education environment. 32% of Russian students and 53% of British students had such an experience versus 68% and 47% of students from the respective universities did not have the experience of significant interaction with persons with disabilities.

Two more factors that may have impact on attitudes and self-efficacy beliefs are concerned the participants' knowledge of the local legislation and policy as it pertains to children with disabilities and the participants' self-estimated level of confidence in working with children with disabilities. As for the level of knowledge students from Russia estimated their awareness of the relevant legislation as mostly average (46.4%) and poor (31.9%) while the U.K. students in the majority of cases indicated average (42.1%) and high (15.8%) levels of knowledge in the field of the policy and legislation. Slightly different picture was drawn with regard to pre-service teachers' confidence when teaching students with disabilities. Students from Russia rated that item as average (37.7%) and low (33.3%) in most cases and participants from the U.K. evaluated their confidence as low (42.1%), average (21.1%) and high (21.1%).

6.1. Correlation of scales

A Pearson's r correlation analysis was calculated on the both scales measuring pre-service teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education and their beliefs about self-efficacy in the inclusive environment. It was established that there is a significant positive correlation between the mean scores of these two scales. The interpretation is being that more positive attitudes toward inclusion positively and significantly correlate with strong self-efficacy beliefs. However, it is important to keep in mind that correlation does not imply any causation that is positive attitudes do not lead to strong self-efficacy beliefs or vice versa (Table 1).

Table 01. Pearson's correlations between scales

		Self-efficacy beliefs	Attitudes towards inclusive education
Self-efficacy beliefs	Pearson Correlation	1	.490**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	62	62
Attitudes towards inclusive education	Pearson Correlation	.490**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	62	76

Note: ** Correlation is significant at the .001 level (2-tailed).

A number of variables effecting overall negativity or positivity of attitudes towards inclusive education together with levels and directions of teacher self-efficacy were further closely examined. First, a Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was computed to test the effects of students' knowledge

of the local legislation and policy as it pertains to children with disability on the two dependent variables indicated above. Results illustrated a significant main effect for the attitude factor indicating a strong negative correlation between the two variables, $r=-.347^{**}$, $N=77$, $p=.002$. Overall, these results suggest that very good knowledge in the legislative area contributed to more positive attitudes whereas poor knowledge or none of that led to less positive attitudes. Afterwards, a discovered effect was examined with regard to the two different groups of students in the two countries. Although the tendency remained the same for the both groups, it was not significant for British students; however, it played a differentiating role for Russian students.

As for the mean beliefs score, there was a strong correlation between this dependent variable and the level of knowledge variable, $r=-.300^{*}$, $N=63$, $p=.017$. Such an outcome illustrates that as long as students are well aware of the legislation and policy concerning inclusive education they believe that their performance and confidence while working in an inclusive environment are more vigorous and solid.

Second, a self-reported level of confidence in teaching students with a disability was treated as possibly having an effect on pre-service teachers' attitudes and self-efficacy beliefs. A strong negative correlation between a self-reported level of confidence in teaching students with a disability and their attitudes towards inclusion was established with $r=-.344^{**}$, $N=77$, $p=.002$. In general, the higher the levels of confidence, the more positive attitudes tend to be. Although this concerns students from both the universities, British participants rated their levels of confidence higher than Russian ones.

The similar correlation was carried out for the mean self-efficacy beliefs score. It turned out that the relationship between the two variables is statistically significant with $r=-.388$, $N=63$, $p=.002$. However, in this case, such variable as confidence in teaching students with a disability was slightly more essential for participants from Russia in establishing higher self-efficacy beliefs when being an inclusive education teacher rather than for those from the U.K.

6.2. Independent-samples t-test

6.2.1. University-variable

In addition to a Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient, an independent-samples t-test was conducted when the means of the two groups of the participants were compared. First, the discrepancy between the mean score of attitudes towards inclusion and the mean score of self-efficacy beliefs were compared depending on the university and consequently on the country. As Sig. value in Levene's Test (as cited in Avramidis et al., 2000) for Equality of Variances is .005 which is $>.05$, the assumption of homogeneity of variances is violated which is why it is important to consider the row Equal variances not assumed when comparing attitude scores for the two samples. The p-value is .005, implying that there is a significant difference in the scores for a Russian group of the participants ($M=2,26$, $SD=.34$, $N=60$) and for a British group of the participants ($M=2,69$, $SD=.53$, $N=17$) conditions; $t(20)=-3.94$, $p<0.005$. Furthermore, in order to examine relationships between the variables from a closer perspective a Pearson's r correlation analysis was carried out. The results confirmed rather a notable correlation with $r=.414^{**}$, $N=77$, $p<.0002$. This means that attitudes towards inclusive education differ significantly for the both groups with British pre-service teachers having more positive attitudes.

A slightly different picture was drawn for teacher self-efficacy beliefs score of the both groups. With the p-value equaling .582 it is assumed that the two groups are not significantly different in the

levels of their self-efficacy beliefs. The scores of pre-service teachers from Russia are ($M=6.88$, $SD=2.05$, $N=48$) and from the U.K. – ($M=7.28$, $SD=2.50$, $N=15$); $t(20)=-.56$, $p=.582$. Specifically, the results suggest that pre-service teachers' self-efficacy beliefs do not depend on the university, therefore, they do not depend on a particular country.

6.2.2. Module on special education-variable

One of the main hypotheses of this study research was whether the students who have a university module on special and/or inclusive education in their curriculum have higher levels of self-efficacy and more positive attitudes working with children in an inclusive education setting. An independent t-test was run to test that hypothesis. It turned out that there was a significant difference in the scores for students having a module ($M=2.56$, $SD=0.57$, $N=19$) and not having a module ($M=2.28$, $SD=0.35$, $N=56$) conditions; $t(23)=1.98$, $p=0.16$, $r=.28$ with regard to their attitudes. These results suggest that attitudes towards inclusive education do change depending on whether or not pre-service teachers have a specially designed module on special and inclusive education at universities. The completion of such module leads to obtaining more positive attitudes towards inclusion by students. The next step was to establish whether this finding relates to both of the groups of students. With this aim in mind, a Pearson's r correlation analysis was calculated. It was concluded that a correlation between the two variables was significant for the participants from the U.K. and not for their colleagues from Russia with $r=.279^*$, $N=75$, $p<.002$. In other words, the fact, that British pre-service teachers took the module on inclusive and/or special education, significantly contributed to their affirmative attitudes towards inclusion, whereas that did not influence pre-service teachers' stance from the Russian university. However, one should be cautious with regard to these results as, according to the descriptive statistics, only 9 students from Russia indicated the module in their curriculum while 58 informed that they did not have such a module.

Furthermore, an independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare the levels of self-efficacy beliefs in the first and second group conditions depending on having the course on special and/or inclusive education. The following results suggest that there is no significant difference in the scores for the participants having a module ($M=7.44$, $SD=2.04$, $N=17$) and for the opposite group ($M=6.79$, $SD=2.23$, $N=44$) conditions; $t(59)=1.04$, $p=.30$. In this case, the null hypothesis cannot be rejected meaning that self-efficacy beliefs are not contingent on whether or not students completed a specially designed university module on inclusive and/or special education.

6.2.3. Year at the university-variable

The next variable related to the university variables is a year of studies the participants are at. While teacher self-efficacy beliefs were not influenced by this variable at all, attitudes of the British students ($M=2.69$, $SD=.53$, $N=17$) were discovered to be affected by it in comparison to attitudes of their Russian peers ($M=2.26$, $SD=.350$, $N=60$), $t(75)=-3.94$, $p<.001$, two-tailed. Those students who study at their final years at the British university appear to hold much more favourable attitudes than those who have just entered the courses which was illustrated by the graph with $R^2=0.026$.

6.2.4. Significant interaction with a person with a disability-variable

Results from an independent samples t-test indicated that pre-service teachers who had interactions with a person with a disability ($M=2.53$, $SD=.45$, $N=27$) appeared to have more positive attitudes towards inclusion than the participants without such an experience ($M=2.26$, $SD=.39$, $N=50$), $t(75)=2.81$, $p=.006$, two-tailed. Further scrutiny employing a Pearson's r correlation analysis and a scatterplot pointed out that this factor shaped attitudes of the Russian participants only with $R^2=0.121$ in scatterplot. On the other hand, this variable had no effect on teacher self-efficacy beliefs.

6.3. Discussion

This study clearly indicated a strong connection between the participants' attitudes and self-efficacy beliefs which was also mentioned earlier by some researchers (Weisel & Dror, 2006; Savolainen et al., 2012). However, the hypothesis that high levels of pre-service teachers' self-efficacy beliefs boost their attitudes cannot be unambiguously confirmed as the direction of the relationship between these two variables can only be assumed. On the one hand, the stronger teachers believe in their ability to successfully implement teaching strategies in an inclusive classroom, the more accepting of inclusion they might become (Savolainen et al., 2012). On the other hand, being initially pro inclusive trends in education, teachers may already feel more confident about their actual work in a classroom. This uncertainty of the tendencies suggests that additional qualitative study may be required to shed the light on the matter.

Another assumption was based on the idea that a module on special and/or inclusive education in university curriculum bolsters increasing pre-service teachers' confidence in teaching the diversity of pupils, thus, altering their attitudes to being more accepting and tolerant. However, contrary to existing handful of studies (Armstrong, Price, & Crowley, 2015) the results showed that pre-service teachers do not necessarily become more self-reliant about actual teaching after having completed a relevant module during their teacher training programme at university.

While it is evident that teacher educators have to focus on honing both self-efficacy and attitudes of future teachers they should also pay a close attention to the way these variables are connected. It may be inferred that self-efficacy beliefs determine directions of pre-service teachers' attitudes and not the other way round. According to Bandura (1977), it is enactive mastery experience that creates and strengthens efficacy beliefs no matter how solid students' knowledge about inclusive education and teaching strategies, which they are taught at universities, may be.

Relying on the findings of this research, other things being equal, it is possible to conclude that even if pre-service teachers' positive attitudes are shaped by university modules which are designed to familiarize them with inclusion, attitudes do not influence teachers' self-efficacy beliefs. The latter seem to be far more essential in an inclusive classroom. On the contrary, more self-confident teachers hold more accepting stance towards inclusive education. Given veracity of speculations, it is fair to conclude that educators should devise teacher training programmes for university curricula of both the U.K. and Russia based on enhancing first teachers' self-efficacy beliefs in inclusive environment. Consequently, high levels of beliefs will lead to more positive and tolerant attitudes towards inclusion and diversity of pupils.

Admitting the time constraints and the limitations of the current study, the following directions for the future research should be considered. The results of this quantitative study would acquire more value if substantiated by a qualitative study; hence, the same hypothesis should be tested employing a mixed-methods research design which is required in order to confirm and build upon current findings. This would broaden dimensions and scope of the study. Regarding the research questions, further steps to take would be to establish the direction of the relationship between pre-service teachers' self-efficacy beliefs and their attitudes towards inclusive education through the qualitative research tools like interviewing. Besides, thorough analysis of the factors influencing self-efficacy beliefs will also be the next step of the study. With an aim of a more far-going future research a longitudinal study will be conducted. The impact of teacher training programme will be examined through comparing pre-service teachers' attitudes towards inclusion and their perceived self-efficacy beliefs before, during and after completion of the whole university teacher training course. This way it would be possible to spot where the programme needs to be modified or revised.

7. Conclusion

The findings of this study have a number of practical, theoretical and empirical implications for teacher educators and educational institutions. First, the findings concerning the variables that highly influence pre-service teachers' sense of self-efficacy and attitudes towards inclusive education should be taken into account and made use of by both Russian and British colleges and universities which are engaged in preparing qualified teaching staff when redesigning and developing new training programmes. As was suggested by the existing research, data analysis and revealed evidence of this study such training programmes would not benefit from adding only theoretical content about special and inclusive education into existing modules, in the case of the U.K., or creating modules based only on theory, in the case of Russia. A more extensive and varied infusion of field work in inclusive settings should be viewed as mandatory in order to prepare general educators and practitioners to work with a diversity of pupils. During field experience, pre-service teachers have an excellent opportunity to observe successful working techniques that in-service experienced teachers use in an inclusive classroom. These techniques and strategies can be further implemented by university students. Besides, students are provided with constructive feedback from both university supervisors and in-service teachers, which is viewed essential in boosting their self-efficacy and attitudes (Stayton & McCollum, 2002). In general, successful education of teachers to work in an inclusive environment in schools entails programmes in a university curriculum to be based upon the resulting content and teacher competencies that would respond to emergent challenges that may be faced in an actual setting.

One more precaution related to the empirical implications that this study's evidence suggests is concerned with cross-cultural research international differences. While discussing the results of such a study a researcher is always advised to take into account various cultural differences and realities of a particular country. It is essential because sometimes a comparison of two groups of people, holding a variety of culture-related views, seems unreasonable. Moreover, results of the whole research may be highly influenced not by the variables that a researcher set to examine but by cultural differences which may sometimes be underestimated. In the case of this current study, such differences were of a great

importance when comparing Russian and British pre-service teachers' perception of inclusive education and their role in it. Besides, the question remains open for the future research as for whether teacher self-efficacy, which supposedly impacts their attitudes, may be recognized as a global identifier of a teacher's capability to give instructions across the subjects or it is germane only in a particular situation, or a particular school, or a particular country.

Regarding some other further new questions and paths for the future research, the importance of establishing the direction of the relationship between attitudes and teacher self-efficacy should be pinpointed. Since their strong interconnection is evident it is now worth finding out which one should be stimulated during teacher training in order to influence the other variable in a more efficient and positive way. One more direction for the future research is to focus on carrying out similar studies in a comparative framework examining and contrasting inclusive education trends in a number of countries. This will allow education systems of different countries to share already working strategies and adapt them wherever possible in order to provide quality inclusive education.

The process of globalisation facilitates dialogues between various societies regarding practically all the areas of social life including education. Today inclusive education is viewed as a priority route by many countries in the process of educating and upbringing new generations of children. Ensuring quality education for all can be achieved by a proper teacher education and support through both their teacher training and working periods.

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