

Special Educational Needs: A Romanian Approach

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ABSTRACT

In recent decades, the international community has been intensely preoccupied of the principle of free access to education, paying greater attention to children, students, or young people with special educational needs (SEN). Found in education specialists' attention, the concept was included in the agenda of decision makers, the inclusive education process currently being supported by several international and European documents.

Considered differentiated and adapted forms of school instruction, educational, social and medical assistance, intended for persons with SEN, special education and special integrated education in Romania is achieved based on the principle of democratic education: the access to any form of education, the right to education at all levels regardless of social or material condition, sex, race, nationality, religious or political affiliation or any other restriction that might be considered discrimination.

The purpose of this paper is to provide a comprehensive overview concerning the organization and functioning of special education and integrated education in Romania.

KEYWORDS: *special educational needs, special education, inclusive education, school integration, school inclusion*

1. THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

For explanatory reasons we consider appropriate to define from the very outset the terms currently used in the legal framework that regulates the organization and functioning of special education and special integrated in Romania.

The normative documents to which we refer in this process are: a) The Regulation of organization and functioning of special education and special integrated [1]; b) The Methodology for organizing educational support services for students with SEN integrated in mainstream education [2]; c) The Methodology for evaluation, psycho educational assistance, educational guidance and vocational guidance of children, pupils and young people with SEN [3]; d) The Regulation on the organization and operation of the centers of resources and educational assistance from the county/Bucharest [4].

In view of the above mentioned documents, the terms have the following meanings:

✓ *special educational needs (SEN) – additional educational needs, complementary to the overall objectives of education adapted to individual features and to those characteristic of a certain deficiency/disability or disorder/difficulty in learning or in another nature as well as a complex assistance (medical, social, educational etc.);*

✓ *disability – the result or effect of the complex relationship between the health of the individual, the personal factors and external factors that represent the life circumstances of this individual. Because of this relationship, the impact of different environments on the*

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same individual with a given health condition can be very different. "Disability" is the generic term for impairments, activity limitations and participation restrictions, according to the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health;

✓ deficiency – lack, loss or alteration of a structure or of a function (anatomy lesion, physiological or psychological disorder) of the individual, resulting from an illness, an accident or a disruption that prevents normal participation in society activities;

✓ special education – the entire process of implementing the programs, learning activities and complex support recovery-compensation (psychotherapeutic, medical, social, cultural) for persons who fail to attain independently a schooling level age-appropriate development for basic skills training to prepare them for adult life temporarily or throughout the schooling period;

✓ inclusive education – continuous process of school improvement, aimed at exploiting existing resources, especially human resources to support the participation in the educational process of all people of a community;

✓ integration (in school) – the process of adaptation of the person with SEN to school rules and requirements that follow, establishing positive affective relationships with the members of the school group (group/class) and the successful ongoing of school activities;

✓ inclusion (in school) – the ongoing improvement of the services offered by the schools to include in the educational process all community members, regardless of their characteristics, disadvantages and difficulties;

1.1. Special educational needs: the international legal framework

One of the most important international agreements in which Romania is a signatory, with a major impact on local special education and special integrated, is the Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities. The document was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 20 December 1993 (resolution 48/96). This document consists of 22 rules summarizing the message of the World Program of Action. Rule 6 expressly aims at the education of persons with disabilities [5]: *states should recognize the principle of equal primary, secondary and tertiary educational opportunities for children, youth and adults with disabilities, in integrated settings. They should ensure that the education of persons with disabilities is an integral part of the educational system.*

Another reference document is The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education, adopted at the world conference „World Conference on Special Needs Education: Access and Quality” organized by UNESCO and the Ministry of Education of Spain (June 7 to 10, 1994). The meeting of more than 300 participants representing 92 governments and 25 international organizations has occasioned some recommendations on inclusive education, of reference for the entire international community.

Article no. 2 explains best the vision of this agreement [6]:

✓ every child has a fundamental right to education , and must be given the opportunity to achieve and maintain an acceptable level of learning;

✓ every child has unique characteristics, interests, abilities and learning needs;

✓ education systems should be designed and educational programs implemented to take into account the wide diversity of these characteristics and needs;

✓ those with special educational needs must have access to regular schools which should accommodate them within a child-centered pedagogy capable of meeting these needs;.

✓ regular schools with this inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes , creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all; moreover, they provide an effective education to the majority of children and improve the efficiency and ultimately the cost-effectiveness of the entire education system.

1.2. Special educational needs: the legal framework in Romania

In Romania, the right to education and the access to culture is guaranteed by the Constitution [7]. The right to education is ensured through compulsory general education, collage and vocational education, higher level education, as well as other forms of instruction and training. Special education and integrated special is a part of the national education system. Its stated aim is teaching, school, professional and social education, rehabilitation, recovery, adaptation and integration of children/pupils with SEN or other types educational needs [8].

Children/students with SEN operate, as appropriate, in special education units or in mainstream schools. In special education units can be enrolled children/pupils with medium disabilities/disabled, severe, critical, and associated. In groups or classes integrated into mainstream education may be enrolled children/students with disabilities, learning disorders, adjustment difficulties, integrating difficulties, as well as those with mild or moderate disabilities/disabilities.

The evaluation, psychological educational assistance, school and professional guidance/reorientation of children, pupils and young people with SEN is performed by the County Centers for Resources and Educational Assistance (CCREA)/Bucharest's Center for Resources and Educational Assistance (BCREA), by services of evaluation and school and professional guidance/reorientation, prioritizing integration into mainstream education [9]. The purpose of evaluation, psychological educational assistance, professional school orientation/reorientation of children, students and young people with SEN is to identify their specific needs and ensure optimal conditions for school, occupational and social integration [10]. The assessment may be medical, psychological, educational or social. Medical evaluation involves conducting clinical examination and laboratory investigations, if needed, to establish a full diagnosis. Psychological assessment involves determining the level of development of mental functions and processes, in order to report to existing standards. Educational assessment involves determining the level of knowledge, and the degree of assimilation and their correlation with the possibilities and the intellectual level of the child / student/young adult, the level of school and social adaptation, and identifying the problems and special educational needs. Social Assessment involves, where appropriate, the investigation of the developmental environment of the child/student/young adult: housing, food, clothing, hygiene, mental and physical security, environmental factors, and personal factors. The evaluation is aimed at the orientation of the educational decision, the proposal of formative and improvement programs for certain levels of development and establishing optimal educational services according to the needs of the child/young person with SEN [11].

2. CURRENT STATE OF SPECIAL AND SPECIAL INTEGRATED EDUCATION

We believe that through its central geographical position and demographical characteristics of the stable population, Brasov County provides representative data to support an enlightening analysis on the current situation of the special education system and special integrated in Romania. According to the latest population and housing census in 2011, Brasov

County counted 505,442 inhabitants, 72.71% in urban areas, respectively 27.29% in rural areas [12].

2.1. Brasov County school population in school year 2013-2014

According to the National Institute of Statistics, Department of Statistics Brasov, in the school year 2013-2014 the school population, including private education, was of 101,509, of which 18,123 in higher education [13]. Fig. 1 illustrates Brasov school population in pre university education.

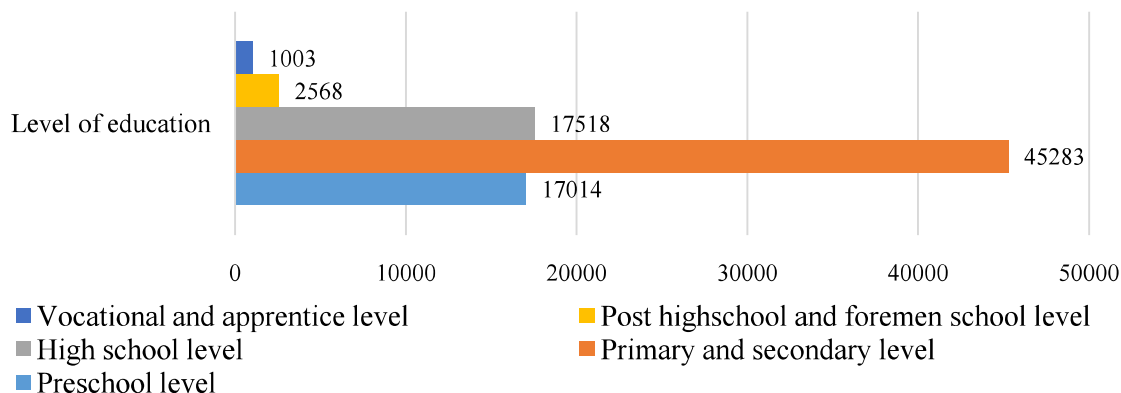


Fig. 1. The school population, on educational levels

2.2. Special education unit network

Brasov County School Inspectorate data, published in the report on the state of pre-university education of Brasov at the end of school year 2013-2014, provides information on the network of special education schools, the number of students enrolled in special education, the types of deficiencies, the distribution of pupils with SEN in years of study as well as the total number of cases investigated to guide, educational wise, students with SEN in Brasov County.

In Brasov operate six special education units: three school centers for inclusive education (SCIE), a special vocational school and two colleges. The schools listed in Table 1 cover all levels of pre-university education (preschool, primary, secondary education, vocational and high school education) [14].

Table 1. Special education units in Brasov County

Education Units	Level of Education					
	Kindergarten	Preparatory and I-IV classes	V-VIII	IX-X	IX-XII (HighSchool)	Special Technological Highschool
SCIE Braşov						
SCIE RH Braşov						
SCIE Brădet						

Codlea Special Vocational School						
Technical College „Dr. Alexandru Bărbat”, Victoria						
„Aurel Vîjoli” College, Făgăraş						

Schools have special education plans, curricula, pedagogical and psychological assistance programs, textbooks and alternative teaching methodologies adapted to the type and degree of impairment/disability. All these documents are approved by the Minister of Education and Scientific Research. The methodologies used in teaching special education and integrated special are adapted to the type and degree of deficiency/disability, and to the level of development and potential of the individual as well as to the learning specifics of children/pupils with SEN [15]. Each child/student benefits of a service plan and of a customized intervention program. Fig. 2 shows the percentage of the types of disabilities/deficiencies of children/pupils with SEN enrolled in special education [16].

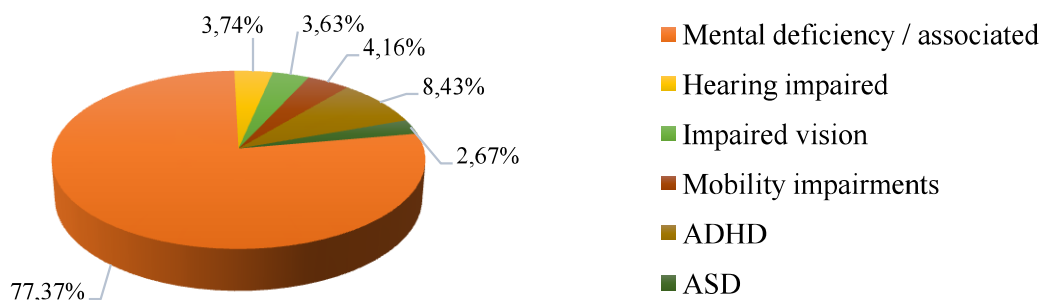


Fig. 2. Pupils with SEN included in the special education schools

2.3. The distribution of children/students with SEN integrated in mainstream education

In the school year 2013-2014, the specialized service of evaluation has investigated 740 cases: 520 certificates for school guidance for children/students with SEN within mainstream education units and 220 school orientation certificates for children / students with SEN within special education units.

The number of children/pupils with SEN in the school year 2013-2014, integrated in mainstream education, is 561. Of these, 65.24% are integrated in schools in urban areas, the difference of 34.76% are integrated in rural schools. [17]

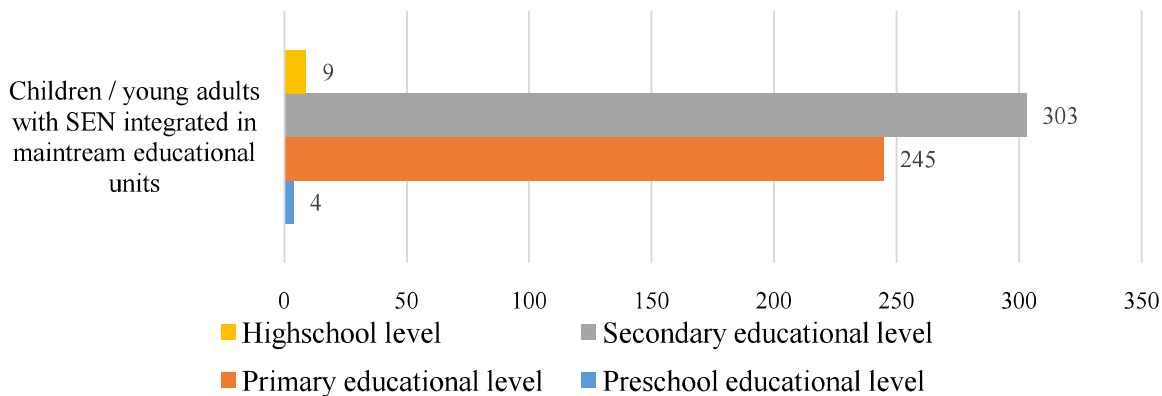


Fig. 3. Distribution of pupils with SEN on educational levels

The integrated children/students benefit of educational support services and psychological and pedagogical assistance and/or other types of educational services, where appropriate, speech therapy, physical therapy etc. Within mainstream education, specialized services needed for the integration of pupils with SEN are provided by itinerant teachers and support teachers during pre-school and throughout their schooling, in collaboration with all factors involved.

The 16 hours/week related to the itinerant teacher or support teacher are direct activity with the integrated child/pupil. The number of hours and learning disciplines involving the itinerant teacher and support teacher are agreed upon with teachers of the group/class [18].

3. CONCLUSIONS

Despite the complementarity of special education and special integrated education there are enough clues that reveal their asynchronous development, existing significant differences in the adequacy of the two subsystems to the real needs of children with SEN [19].

Special education and integrated special education in Romania, in the past 10 years, has made notable progress towards creating conditions for the integration of children/pupils with SEN in mainstream schools. Romanian Education makes efforts towards the execution of a coherent process of reform of school and education in general. Although this process is slow, the success of school integration and inclusion remains determined by many factors, the most important originating in economic, social and cultural current evolution and the future evolution of Romanian society.

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