

## Interviews with Teachers about Inclusive Education

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### **Abstract:**

**Introduction:** In the proposed paper, the key findings of the national project “School Open for Everyone” are presented. The research focused on the conditions and preparedness of schools for inclusive education. As a part of the project, an investigation into first-grade teachers’ attitudes towards and opinions on the education of pupils with special educational needs in primary schools was carried out.

**Methods:** In the research, the qualitative phenomenological method based on the grounding theory was applied. The sample consisted of 218 female teachers with a minimum of 20% of disadvantaged students in their classroom.

**Results:** The main findings show that the teachers’ opinions and attitudes towards inclusive education are positive and they appreciate their cooperation with specialists in schools. The research revealed some barriers to the realization of inclusive education - e.g. the disadvantaged children’s poor school attendance or their general unpreparedness for school.

**Discussion:** In their suggestions, the respondents did not come up with any new, revolutionary or creative ideas. Therefore, searching for solutions should not be limited to teachers’ suggestions, but inspiration should be found in examples of good practice from abroad and in the activities of creative teachers and movements.

**Limitations:** Having “only” a homogenous sample of first-grade teachers can be perceived as a limit, but it is balanced by the fact that these teachers represent the children’s first contact with schools and with people outside their families.

**Conclusions:** The key findings show that teachers have positive attitudes towards the concept of inclusive education, but they call for more favourable conditions ensured by the state and the respondents proposals were located externally. The findings revealed a number of new or growing problems to be immediately dealt with and an urgent need for changing our school system.

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**Key words:** inclusion, diversity, teachers, special education needs, inclusive schools, causal attribution.

## **Introduction**

The UNESCO Salamanca Statement (1994) initiated intensive international efforts to implement inclusive education into school systems. As clearly declared in the Statement, it is a necessity to develop and build inclusive education and successful education for all. The Salamanca Statement was adopted by the Slovak Republic as the national education concept for all pupils, especially the disadvantaged ones. As a result, in the last 15 years, several extensive research studies on the realization of inclusive education in Slovakia have been carried out. In Slovakia, the Act no. 245/2008 Coll. on education and training (School Act) and on amendment of certain acts is still in force. It was created on the basis of the theory of creative-humanistic education, which includes the principle of education for all. Many authors working on the realisation of inclusive education in Slovakia (Hlásna, 2014; Barnová & Krásna, 2018; Geršicová, 2012; Tamášová, 2019; Zelina, 2019, Porubčanová & Pasternáková, 2018, etc.) have adopted this orientation. A lot of research on inclusive education have been published at the University of Prešov (Portík, Hornák and others), at the Pan-European University in Bratislava (Gajdošová et al.), at the Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica (Kosová et al.), and at the Catholic University in Ružomberok (Klein, Šilonová).

In Slovakia, three important projects on inclusive education supported by the European Union have been realised. The first one was focused on children and pupils from marginalized Roma communities. It dealt with the opportunity to apply the all-day educational system in schools with disadvantaged - especially Roma pupils. In the second project entitled “The Project of Inclusive Education” (PRojekt INkluzívnej EDukácie - PRINED), in schools with a high proportion of disadvantaged pupils, they investigated into the opportunities in the work of inclusive teams, as well as teaching staff’s and specialists’ attitudes towards and opinions on inclusive education. Within the third project “School Open for Everyone” (Škola otvorená všetkým), the research was focused on the conditions and preparedness of schools for inclusive education. As a part of the project, the investigation into first-grade teachers’ attitudes towards and opinions on the education of pupils with special educational needs in primary schools was repeated after a year. The decision regarding the selection of first-grade teachers in primary schools was based on the presumption that the opinions and attitudes of first-grade teachers are decisive as the first year of school attendance represents a turning point for motivating children and the development of the child - pupil - teacher - education relationship. It specifically applies to children from socially disadvantaged environments as many of them have neither attended kindergartens, nor speak Slovak.

## **1 Purpose of the study**

The purpose of the study was to identify first-grade teachers' opinions on the opportunities for the acceleration of the education and the personal development of pupils from disadvantaged environments and with special educational needs in primary schools. One of the goals was to carry out a qualitative analysis of placing the causes of failure of disadvantaged pupils in schools and to make proposal for the improvement of inclusive education.

## **2 Research methodology**

In the research, the qualitative phenomenological method based on the grounding theory was applied. The grounding theory is a systematic methodology in social sciences including building theories by means of gathering data and their analysis. From among a number of conceptual approaches to inclusive education research, we opted for Frederickson and Cline's (2015) theory, and Booth's (2007) and Lukas's (2012) methodological procedures for the purposes of observing the relevant fields of schools' preparedness for inclusive education (schools' practice, policy, and culture). The causal attribution of success and failure was based on the classification by Kelly (1972) and his attribution theory, which classifies causes into internal vs. external, and reversible vs. irreversible. Throughout the realization of the "School Open for Everyone" project, quantitative and qualitative approaches were applied - questionnaires for school directors, the teaching staff, and specialists were used, the participating schools' preparedness for inclusive education was investigated into, and the parameters of the barriers to the implementation of inclusion were observed. A triangulation of methods was used for the interpretation of the gathered data in the final report. Within this battery - set of methods - the role of first-grade-teachers' approaches towards inclusive education in primary schools was dealt with.

### *2.1 Research sample*

130 primary schools and 50 kindergartens participated in the project "School Open for Everyone". By selecting schools, the basic criterion was that at least 20% of children and pupils were from socially disadvantaged environments. In one of the partial tasks - interviews with teachers - the sample grew to 218 teachers as in some primary schools, there were more than one class of first-graders. On average, there were 18 pupils in one class, among which 9 were from socially disadvantaged environments. The selection of the sample was determined by the importance of children's first contact with schools. The involved teachers had several years of teaching experience and taking into account the sample of disadvantaged pupils, it can be considered a representative sample of teachers working with these pupils.

## 2.2 Methods

In the study, the method of structured interviews was applied. Interviews with the participating teachers were carried out by trained interviewers. The transcript of interviews was 139 pages long. The interviewers were instructed to ask clear questions, encourage teachers to answer the questions, but they were not allowed to ask additional questions, or questions, which could evoke the impression of “investigation” on the respondents’ knowledge. In the first stage, the teachers’ responses were transcribed and protocols were made, open coding was applied. Subsequently, in the second stage, axial coding was carried out. It was based on six basic themes with the possibility to add new proposals. The teachers were asked the following seven questions:

1. Do you consider your school inclusive? Why “yes” or “no”?
2. What is the most important thing by creating an inclusive school environment?
3. How do you evaluate the collaboration with specialists?
4. Are children from socially disadvantaged environments entering the first grade of primary schools sufficiently prepared?
5. What can be the positive effects of the “School Open for Everyone” project for inclusive education? What should be done?
6. What should be done in order to improve especially Roma pupils’ education?
7. Have you got any other suggestions?

## 3 Results

### 3.1 *Do you consider your school inclusive? Why “yes” or “no”?*

Even though the teachers were asked whether the school was inclusive or not, we were not sure if they understand what inclusion means and we were interested in what the criteria based on which they evaluate their school as inclusive are.

1. Most frequently, the respondents’ answers showed that they perceive the notion of inclusive schools in a broad sense. The typical answers were: *“Our school is inclusive - we attempt to provide pupils with equal opportunities to study.”*; or *“I think yes - our school tries to place an emphasis on every pupil’s right for high quality education.”*
2. In a number of answers, the fact, that disadvantaged pupils with a range of handicaps are educated in the school was pointed out. Examples of answers: *“Our school is inclusive. In the classes, pupils with learning disorders, with physical and hearing disabilities are included.”*; or *“Yes, handicapped pupils and intact pupils are educated together in the same classroom.”*; *“Yes, in the classrooms, there are students with various ethical backgrounds.”*; *“Yes, Roma students are prevailing.”*
3. A high frequency of answers by teachers seeing their school as inclusive because of the presence of specialists was observed. Examples of responses:

- “Yes, there are specialists in the school and we have a high-quality cooperation with all teachers. It makes the work of individuals easier. We have many students with special educational needs.”; “Our school is inclusive because it employs a special needs teacher and a psychologist.”, or “Yes, the presence of specialists, the teachers’ approach to students, the school’s concept.”*
4. Some respondents saw inclusive education through the application of specific methods of work. Example: *“Our school is inclusive as the teachers use activating methods in the teaching process - venn’s diagram, didactic games, T - scheme, inserta, etc. They try to alternate various methods and so, increase pupils’ activity.”; “Yes, in our school, we apply an individual approach to pupils and we show interest in them as personalities.”; “Yes, our school provides each pupil with full-fledged forms of education. Each pupil - alongside with traditional education in the classroom - is offered an opportunity to take part in after-school activities. During classes, pupils use multimedia technology and a range of didactic techniques...”;* *“Every day, pupils are provided with an opportunity to lean in a positive atmosphere and their abilities are taken into account.”*
  5. They accentuated various aspects of after-school and extracurricular activities when describing inclusive schools, e.g.: *“Yes, from the first grade, pupils are in mixed ability classes, they visit various cultural or sports events, are involved in extracurricular activities, take part in competitions, have rehearsals, etc.”; “Yes, our school is inclusive as both in classes and during extracurricular activities, healthy, physically and mentally disadvantaged children are educated together. Teacher assistants help us, which allows pupils to work at their own pace, and they are also provided with help and support.”*
  6. Also answers criticising some aspect of the school’s work occurred. E.g.: *“Pupils have equal opportunities to learn. Roma pupils have additional opportunities to improve within projects, but they do not show much interest.”; “Our school is not inclusive. Most pupils come from socially disadvantaged environments, their parents are not interested in any cooperation. Efforts made towards inclusion are not successful because of parents and their contradictions!”*

We also found quaint answers: *“Our school is inclusive for sure. In our school, besides traditional classes, there are also special needs classes. Pupils from the primary school’s traditional classes and special needs classes meet in the hallways every day and during joint school events.”* Another example of weird statements: *“Our school is conclusive as healthy and disadvantaged pupils study together...”*

3.2 What is the most important thing in creating an inclusive school environment?

The gathered answers were ordered according to their frequency:

1. Cooperation of the whole teaching staff and specialists. Some statements: *“The cooperation of teachers with teacher assistants and specialists.”*; *“Cooperation with specialists and pupils’ parents.”*; *“A greater cooperation with specialists (school psychologists, speech therapists, etc.).”*; *“Cohesion in teacher-pupil and pupil-parent relationships.”*; or *“Provide teachers with help and assistance - to hire teacher assistants, psychologists, ...”*
2. Collaboration within the inclusive team is closely related to a favourable school climate and atmosphere. Some typical answers: *“Positive atmosphere, an individual approach to students.”*; *“School climate, the teacher’s personality, didactic and material school equipment.”*; *“By creating inclusive school environments, school climate enabling pupils to attend mainstream schools is very important - even indispensable. Our school environment provides such conditions that even parents participate in making their children feel good at school.”*; *“A pleasant atmosphere, desire to work and accepting all pupils as they are.”*; *“School atmosphere, mutual respect between all stakeholders - participants of the educational process.”*
3. Teacher’s personality – during the interviews, teachers commented on various aspects of teachers and specialists. Some ideas: *“Patience, tolerance, trust, and efforts made to help.”*; *“A teacher seeing the differences in pupils who approaches to pupils individually and compares their results with their earlier results and thus, monitors their growth and development, as well as their needs. The result is that pupils experience success as they find themselves in a supportive social environment.”*; *“Teachers should possess sufficient knowledge about learning styles. Sufficient equipment - teaching aids and using interactive whiteboards and digital technologies.”*; or *“Personnel’s zeal.”*
4. Parents and their share on creating an inclusive school environment is a must. Here are some examples of teachers’ statements: *“Cooperation with parents and the best possible lesson planning from the aspect of differentiated education.”*; *“After school and school activities with the pupil’s families, various performances, rehearsals, sports and cultural events.”*; *“To be spatially, materially and technically well-equipped, creation of inclusive teams and their cooperation with the pupils’ families. The school management’s willingness to be inclusive.”*
5. Surprisingly, creating favourable conditions - starting from the school’s material and technical equipment, through teaching aids, technical tools etc. - did not rank high as for the frequency of their occurrence. Examples of teachers’ comments: *“Specialists - teaching aids, courses.”*; *“School*

*climate, the teacher's personality, the school's didactic and material equipment.”; “Family-school cooperation. Favourable conditions, teaching aids, sufficient number of assistants.”; “A corner - a place in the school, where there are school supplies, teaching aids, textbooks, and a person who has enough time to pay attention to them.”; or “To prepare appropriate didactic and methodical materials.”*

6. Rarely but still, also other requirements for creating inclusive school environments occurred: *“The most important thing is the state's help, to have a sufficient number of specialists helping in classrooms with included students.”; “To adapt education to the individual needs of pupils with special educational needs.”; “To ensure favourable conditions for their education - teacher assistants on lessons, appropriate diagnostics of pupils that is helpful in the teachers' work.”; or “Pupils should not feel that they are ‘different’.”*

### *3.3 How do you evaluate the collaboration with specialists?*

We presumed that the answers of the vast majority of first-grade teachers in primary schools will be positive. We were interested in things that they appreciate in the process of cooperation. Below, we present some of their comments: *“I think the cooperation is positive - it has benefits for both the pupils and teachers.”; “Positively. Specialists are a big help in working with special needs students - they provide us with guidance, give us advice, and they know what the problems are.”; “Positively. They are a big help, but there is a lack of them.”; “I evaluate the cooperation positively; I am really satisfied with the work of the assistants.”; “They are helpful, especially in the application of an individual approach and they help during lessons.”; “The cooperation is on a high, professional level.”; “They are helpful; they make teachers' job easier. I surely recommend to have them in the classroom during lessons, they can help the pupils with special educational needs.”; “I evaluate the cooperation with specialists very positively. In the school, a social pedagogue and a teacher assistant implementing the “School Open for Everyone” project are at the disposal. They are responsible, helpful, and full of fantasy in practicing their profession. Our school does not have a school psychologist.”; “Positively, although there are some barriers (disinterest by pupils and their parents).”; “I consider the cooperation with specialists beneficial. The teacher assistants', school psychologists' and social pedagogues' help is really positively evaluated not only by me, but also by pupils during their everyday activities in the classroom or outside it.”; or “Very positively. Currently, they are really needed in schools.”*

Similar answers occurred in all the gathered reactions. Exceptionally, we encountered two types of responses of a different character. Schools without teacher assistants or specialists, which could cover the cooperation with families, belong to the first type. In these schools, teachers talked about a partial

cooperation or usefulness. In the answers, it was formulated by the respondents as follows: *“I am not an expert, so, I am not able to help. We need special needs teachers, speech therapists - they visit families, but, for teachers, such help is not enough.”* In some cases - fewer than ten - we received the following answers: *“Poor.”*; or *“Insufficient.”*

In general, the cooperation between the teaching staff and specialists can be evaluated highly positively.

### *3.4 Are children from socially disadvantaged environments entering the first grade of primary schools sufficiently prepared? What are the main problems?*

Also in this case - similarly to the responses regarding the cooperation between the teaching staff and specialists - many of the answers occurred several times. In the first part, there is a list of fields, in which pupils are prepared for school and in the second one, there are the teachers' statements regarding their satisfaction with pupils' school preparedness.

1. Most frequently, there is not only one field of unpreparedness - usually, there is a whole list of them. Below are some examples of the answers of this type: *“No. Speech, hygiene, attendance.”*; *“Pupils with special educational needs come to the first grade unprepared. They do not speak Slovak, their hygienic habits are poor, they do not have school supplies. Any form of cooperation with parents is difficult. The pupils are not able to learn hygiene and discipline in the school. It takes longer while parents ensure school supplies, slippers, toiletry bags, sports clothes for PE classes, even though they receive a list for the first grade during the enrolment to the primary school.”*; *“Problems with communication. Children - pupils - come from socially disadvantaged environments with poor hygienic habits. They cannot name colours, there are problems with their school attendance.”*; *“Speech - very poor vocabulary. Hygiene - pupils have poorly developed hygienic habits, self-service activities. Discipline, routine - they do not respect the rules, they do not have any experiences with following rules at home.”*; *“Children with special educational needs come to school unprepared. They often lack pre-school education in kindergartens. Their parents have not taught them the basics of hygiene, they have communication problems, problems with speech, and discipline issues.”*; *“Children with special educational needs are not prepared for school. The major problem is the existing language barrier - speech and language issues. They lack both internal and external motivation. Poor motor skills. Behavioural disorders, aggression - verbal and non-verbal.”*; *“No. Basic hygienic habits, self-service (dressing, tying laces, etc.), they do not understand the teachers' instructions.”*; *“Children come to school unprepared, they often speak only the Roma language, they do not know the toilet, attend school irregularly, and lack discipline.”*; or *“Children with special educational needs often have improper pronunciation, incorrect*

*pen grip, are insufficiently socialized. Many of them have problems with following rules and have discipline issues at school.”*

2. Exceptionally, also more positive opinions occurred. Below are listed some of the teachers' responses: *“We have a zero grade class, so, our pupils are prepared.”; “If a child attends the zero grade class, then he/she is sufficiently prepared for the first grade.”; “They come to school uncultivated, only those who attend the zero grade class achieve a sufficient level of preparedness for the first grade.”; “If they attend kindergartens, everything is ok.”; or “Not all pupils from socially disadvantaged environments are weak. Some of them only need to attend the zero grade class or a kindergarten.”*

### 3.5 *What can be the positive effects of the “School Open for Everyone” project for inclusive education? What should be done?*

The same answers occurred repeatedly in this case, too. The process of coding based on the criteria of field and frequency have brought the following results:

1. Based on the following statements, “School Open for Everyone” brings better educational results: *“Better learning results.”; “Pupils achieve better results. A willingness on both sides.”; “Better performance of pupils with special educational needs during the educational process. A better use of various methods.”; “The pupils spend more time in the school, which very slowly increases their educational level. Involvement in leisure time activities.”; “They spend their leisure time by meaningful activities, they develop new skills, it comes to an improvement in doing their homework and learning at home.”; “Help by specialists and teacher assistants during the educational work.”; “The “School Open for Everyone” project can have the following positive effects: paying positive attention to pupils. Correction of pupils' inappropriate behaviour. Better school achievement.”; “The first impulse towards increasing the quality of education provided to pupils with special educational needs, development of pupils' working habits, promoting self-confidence, improvement of communication skills and leading children towards independence. A better quality of relationships between teachers and pupils.”; or “The “School Open for Everyone” project and its benefits: inclusive teams, better achievement in all fields, after-school activities, hygienic habits, better discipline, vocabulary, inclusion into the collective. It requires financial and material resources, an inclusive team and the parents' willingness to cooperate.”*
2. “School Open for Everyone” improves cooperation between specialists, the teaching staff and the school's management. *“To take the advantage of the cooperation between teachers, assistants, and special needs teachers in schools in order to improve the educational results of pupils with special educational needs, to improve the cooperation with parents.”; “Teacher assistants are a big help. We do not have a school psychologist. The school has not found a psychologist who speaks Hungarian. The material supplies*

*should be distributed to schools at the beginning of the project.”; “The presence of specialists - to make the original idea of the School Open for Everyone project work.”; “More specialists, to ensure high-quality material supplies for school.”; “The main benefit of the project lies in the help by assistants and other personnel as they can apply an individual approach to particular children. They receive immediate feedback and they feel supported.”*

3. The “School Open for Everyone” project broadens the opportunities for working with students after school, and for an all-day educational system. Examples of opinions: *“Better quality of pupils’ home preparation.”; “Children spend their leisure time with their friends actively practicing their hobbies, they do their homework in the school as they would not do it at home.”; “Pupils are happy to take part in afterschool activities; and our assistants - together with our teachers - can pay attention to the integrated pupils. Pupils can do their homework in the school, what I really appreciate.”; “We have been working inclusively in an all-day educational system for several years, leisure time activities.”; “Greater cohesion of the class, better collaboration among students, there are more opportunities to express one’s opinion in a smaller collective of individuals.”*
4. Better opportunities to educate pupils. *“The benefits lie in the presence of specialists, a good selection of afterschool activities, developing creativity and talents in sports, music, and art techniques.”; “Including students into the class based on the level of their knowledge.”; “Developing the habit of regularity and their relationship to school duties, developing hobbies and interests.”; “Improving pupils’ communication and social skills.”; “Leading towards socialization, development of fine motor skills. A close cooperation between all stakeholders, ensuring good material conditions, and providing education to parents, teachers, and teacher assistants are important.”*
5. Teaching staff’s efforts. *“It requires money and willingness. I wish a lot of success both to us teachers and you.”; “It requires a lot of effort on the side of the teaching staff, financial support from the state, a creative approach to pupils, support from parents, support from the school’s management, teaching aids and less paper work.”; “School Open for Everyone brings new information at least.”; “The project is limited in time - during the available period, it can help pupils and teachers in their work, but there is a need for employing teacher assistants and special needs teachers indefinitely, because there are many pupils with special educational needs and where these children are educated, assistants should be present all the time, i.e. normative funding in the case of assistants.”; “Inclusive education can be beneficial, but only if it is applied for a long time, a systematic approach is required.”*

In many of the teachers' answers, there is a whole list of positives, which the School Open for Everyone project could bring. There is an agreement in the below listed fields.

*3.6 What should be done in order to improve especially Roma pupils' education?*

Firstly, we ordered the suggestions according to their frequency.

The most frequent answers were:

- compulsory pre-school education - kindergartens;
- more specialists in schools;
- new curriculum, new standards;
- change the Ministry of Education's approach to solving the issues of disadvantaged children;
- improve and ensure high quality leisure time activities - after school clubs; all-day educational system;
- improve the cooperation with pupils' parents;
- improve the schools' material, financial and methodical conditions, teaching aids.

Less frequent suggestions were as follows:

- limit the school founders' competencies;
- open zero grade classes;
- edification work;
- involve community centres in the cooperation;
- reduce the number of lessons;
- use more project and experiential learning activities;
- continue with the realization of the project.

The respondents' suggestions were divided into the following fields:

1. What the state should do - examples of teachers' suggestions: *"The biggest change should be made by the Ministry. Create favourable conditions and, above all, take measures to ensure that pupils go to school regularly and parents should bear real responsibility for their children's achievement at school"; "On the level of the state and Ministry of Education - to unify the conditions for pre-primary and primary education, to work out methodical guides for working with children with special educational needs, to increase the quality of university education in the field of working with children with special educational needs. On the level of school founders - to provide schools with sufficient funding, to adapt the school's work to the needs of pupils. On the school level - to create a positive environment for pupils, to apply attractive and innovative forms of education, to cooperate with teacher assistants and specialists"; "The state - to allocate more finances for schools and teachers."; "The state - to change the state curriculum for primary*

*schools, to lower the performance standards for these children, to introduce compulsory education in kindergartens from three years of age in order to achieve an active knowledge of the language in children.”; “To ensure compulsory pre-school education for all Roma children. To tighten the penalties for parents responsible for neglecting children and their truancy.”; “To ensure more assistants, speech therapists, and specialists”; “New curricula and teaching aids.”; “On the level of the state, and the Ministry of Education - to reduce the number of lessons in individual school subjects and a second foreign language should not be compulsory in higher grades.”; “A better and targeted control over the use of finances from the state in families. Provide more material support.”; “Edification of families, promotion of employment, realization of long-term projects (not for one, two or three years).”; “An unambiguous change of rules for Roma students and their parents. They do not have any duties in relation to their children, they do not have to come to teacher-parent meetings, the children are on a sick leave all the time, they do not care about them, although they get school supplies and lunch for a few cents.”;*

2. What school founders should do: *“School founders - they should be willing to listen to teachers and hear their requirements.”; “School founders - to promote after-school clubs, reduce the number of pupils in a class and to have more field workers in schools.”; “To reduce the school founders’ competences and improve their cooperation with schools.”; “Compulsory pre-school education, opening zero-grade classes for students who have not taken part in pre-school education.”; “Attendance - they cannot ensure regular school attendance; paediatricians issue pupils a doctor’s certificate of sick leave even retroactively. It comes to failure in this field.”; “To ensure Roma assistants’ help with pupils’ hygiene, appropriate communication, speech.”; “On the level of the school founder - use more project work in the educational process. Pupils achieve better results in the process of experiential learning.” (this should probably be listed for the school, but the respondent addressed it to the founder - author’s note); “With the help of community workers and field social workers, to ensure a better family - school cooperation”; “Moral support and creating favourable conditions for after school activities, more opportunities for leisure time activities for children.”*
3. What should be changed in families: *“Children should be worked with before their school attendance starts. The current model does not work. Parents do not want to take part in educational activities as it is considered as income, and then their social benefits are reduced. Another problem is pupils’ school attendance - pupils should commute for free - as it is with trains (not to have the costs repaid). Their parents are not able to manage the money on*

*travelling costs and so, they cannot commute every day.”; “In extreme cases, to remove children from families.”; “To push parents to improve their children’s school attendance, to ensure school supplies, and finances.”; “Edification of parents.”*

4. What schools should do: *“On the school level, we have applied the all-day education system for a couple of years and we promote leisure time activities.”; “To work out more effective programs for disadvantaged pupils’ inclusion into the collective. To visit Roma families in different intervals. To cooperate with the pupils’ families.”; “To cooperate with pupils’ parents and the social welfare office.”; “Sufficient educational programmes for pre-schoolers.”; “To improve the quality of the family - school cooperation as the parents’ interest in their children’s education is low.”; “On the level of the school, better material equipment and teaching aids.”; “To adapt the school curriculum to the Roma pupils’ abilities.”; “To reduce the teaching content and to adapt it to their habits and abilities. To create favourable conditions (workshops, gyms, etc.). Within the school curriculum, adapt the available lessons to the pupils’ needs.”; “To involve more Roma assistants to the work with Roma pupils as they know their mentality and what their needs are.”; “To add more specialists and assistants to the inclusive team.”*

### *3.7 Have you got any other suggestions?*

*“Definitely, it would be good if the project team members could hold the same positions after finishing the project in order to increase the effect and importance of the project and to promote the vision of inclusive education even outside the School Open for Everyone project.”*

#### *Comments on the suggestions - findings:*

If the theory of casual attributions is applied on the list of suggestions, it must be stated that:

- Only a few suggestions related to the work of schools, teachers, or the educational process - internal localisation. None of the suggestions concerned the issues of improving teachers’ education (lifelong learning – see e.g. Geršicová & Barnová, 2018), the implementation of activating, creative methods (except for one mention of project work and experiential learning), none of them mentioned alternative schools, procedures, or experimental verification. Below are listed the respondents’ typical answers on what should be changed in the work of their school: *Our school does its’ best to educate all pupils.*” is the typical reaction of the participating teachers when asked about things that could be improved within their schools.
- External localisation could be observed on the requirements placed on the state - ministry - social policy - school founders.

- The interviews were carried out prior to the adoption of new legislation on compulsory pre-school education in kindergartens - it was suggested by several teachers in our research sample.
- Schools participating in the “School Open for Everyone” project worked out desegregation plans for each school, in which their self-reflexive ability to apply the principles of inclusive education in their own conditions was demonstrated (internal localisation of suggestions).
- Based on the theory of casual attributions, it is possible to see the proposed suggestions from the aspect of reversibility/irreversibility. It is about the possible change, its feasibility, where on one side of the continuum, there is the possibility of immediate change (e.g. adaptation programmes for schools) and on the other side, the changes can be realized in a medium-term and then in a long-term horizon (Roma families’ attitudes towards education), or the changes are irreversible, i.e. unfeasible or feasible with low probability (e.g. changing the school policy).
- From various points of view, the school attendance of pupils from socially disadvantaged environments is perceived as a problem. *Almost all respondents perceive it as a serious issue.* Pupils’ school attendance is the problem of the state - the Government - the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic - Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic (school founders), and also the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic. But school attendance represents a problem for disadvantaged Roma and non-Roma families and, naturally, also for every school and its inclusive policy towards pupils’ parents.

#### **4 Discussion**

In the presented overview of representative suggestions for improving the quality of disadvantaged children’s education, the respondents did not come up with any new, revolutionary or creative ideas. Based on the above, it can be deduced that searching for solutions should not be limited to teachers’ suggestions, which are not innovative, but inspiration should be found in the examples of successful school reforms realized abroad (Estonia, Poland, Singapore, etc.), in the activities of creative teachers and movements, and solutions should also be searched for in educational theories, which should make a link between the modern trends in pedagogy and our conditions, culture, history and psyche. That is our task for the future. Unfortunately, almost 30 years of school reform efforts in Slovakia has not lead to success. Also this overview of suggestions and information provided by practicing teachers reveals a number of new or growing problems, which must be immediately dealt with. The overview of teachers’ opinions confirms the urgent need for changes in our school system.

## **5 Limits**

Qualitative research in its presented form can be considered a targeted type of research, which - unlike academic (basic) or application research - applies a reflexive, hermeneutic discourse. From the methodological point of view, having “only” a homogenous sample of first-grade teachers can be perceived as a limit, but, on the other hand, these teachers represent the children’s first contact with schools and with people outside their families; and - in a broader sense - with education. The application of the method of interviews was confronted by the results of a questionnaire survey realized on the same sample of teachers, as well as the participating teachers’ and headmasters’ opinions. This way, a more complex picture about the schools’ preparedness for inclusive education was created. The realization of interviews by several interviewers can be questioned. Even though they were all instructed, the impact of various local and time, as well as situational variables, which cannot be completely eliminated, occurs. The qualitative methodology based on phenomenological principles of data interpretation brings a lot of data, contents and meanings, which can be generalized and interpreted only carefully. The findings often lead to a need for closer, deeper investigation into the presented opinions, e.g. the disadvantaged children’s problems with school attendance.

## **Conclusions**

Targeted qualitative research - unlike other types of research - has three basic goals (Lukšik, 2008):

1. achievement of the contracting authority’s objectives,
2. gathering data for a change;
3. a better functioning of things.

In its whole complexity, the research project focused on inclusive education and within one of its parts, the participating teachers’ opinions were dealt with in accordance with one of the objectives of the project. The main findings - e.g. the role of teachers’ positive opinions and attitudes towards inclusive education, positive acceptance of the pedagogical staff’s and specialists’ cooperation, the belief that favourable conditions can accelerate the development of children from disadvantaged environments - can form the basis for the educational concept - theory and interpretation of the current situation in the field of schools’ preparedness for inclusive education. Also teachers’ opinions about the fields and processes which represent barriers to their educational work and the children’s progress are important. In particular, these are the obtained information about disadvantaged children’s poor school attendance, their unpreparedness for school from the aspect of their speech, language knowledge, as well as from the aspect of their discipline and hygienic habits. It can be assumed that relevant information for change, for creating better conditions in schools in order to fulfil the goals of an inclusive education policy were

obtained. The findings have brought new ideas for further research, especially in the field of destigmatisation and desegregation programmes, which - as the presented research shows - have already been created and realized in some schools.

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