



Research Article

© 2023 Ornedo Gega and Menada Petro.
This is an open access article licensed under the Creative Commons
Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License
(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>)

Received: 21 February 2023 / Accepted: 21 April 2023 / Published: 5 May 2023

The Role and Responsibilities of the Special Education Teacher in Albanian Pre-University Education: A Case Study in the County of Durrës

Ornedo Gega

Menada Petro

Lifelong Learning Center,
University Aleksander Moisiu,
L. 1, The street of Currilave,
Durrës, 2001,
Albania

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.36941/jesr-2023-0069>

Abstract

Pre-university institutions in Albania are encouraged by the applicable legislation in force to provide the most appropriate general education for students with disabilities. It is yet unknown, nevertheless, whether special education teachers carry out the obligations set forth in the relevant legal framework and if students with disabilities are sufficiently integrated into the academic community. The purpose of this study is to determine the challenges faced by special education teachers in carrying out their duties while adhering to the applicable laws, as well as in carrying out their roles and obligations in the pre-university institution where they currently work. The given study was carried out using a survey based on quantitative and qualitative methods that are related to reaching the objective. The data used in these methods are both primary and secondary. The secondary data were obtained through a review of a wide body of literature on the role, responsibilities, and services provided by special education teachers in pre-university education. This review included perspectives from special education teachers themselves, classroom or subject teachers, parents, and others. The primary data were obtained through interviews with parents, special education teachers, teachers of the class or subject, and cooperating actors, as well as data collected through a questionnaire survey. It is clear from the answers provided by the three target groups—special education teachers, classroom or subject teachers, and parents—that different interest groups responded differently to the same question. The special education teacher and the classroom or subject teachers all stated that they had drawn up Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) that included the options (always, in most cases), while the parents stated that IEPs had never been drawn up (37%), were drawn upon infrequently (8%), and had ever been drawn upon (19%). According to special education teachers and classroom teachers, the primary collaborators in the establishment and execution of IEPs are school psychologists. Regarding the academic and developmental progress of students, 72% of special education teachers answered that they inform their parents, while 25% answered that they do so in most cases, and 3% of them answered that they never inform the parents of the students. More than half of the parents (51.4%) answered that they are not informed by the special education teachers, and 21% of the parents were never informed. In terms of professional development, 87% of special education teachers adhere to the principles of both inclusive education and special education. In conclusion, we can highlight that cooperation between professionals and parents is crucial, as is participation in training, the implementation of resources and physical conditions, and the establishment of a closer relationship between psychologist and student, special education teacher and student with disabilities, so that these special education teachers can fulfill their duties and the responsibilities assigned by the law as well as deal with students with disabilities, their skills, and integration in the community.

Keywords: special education teacher, pre-university education, parents, students with disabilities

1. Introduction

The role of the assistant teacher is very important in the whole process that is followed with students with limited abilities, not only in the educational role but also in the collaborative, managerial, drafting, implementing, planning, etc. roles. Albanian legislation has changed the role of assistant teachers in pre-university education. The changes took place over a decade, starting in 2010 and ending in 2019. The last instruction No. 26 of 2019 defines the criteria and procedures for the selection of assistant teachers as well as their roles and responsibilities. Changes have also occurred in the increase in the number of assistant teachers in education, where currently 1749 assistant teachers are employed in pre-university education for the year 2022-2023. But on the other hand, the study reports of Portes Vendore (2019), ASCAP (2020), etc. have concluded that the ratio of assistant teachers to students with limited abilities is 1 to 3 or more students. The problem that arises in this study is how much it is possible for the assistant teachers to fulfill the obligations assigned to them by the legislation in the conditions that are offered to them, as well as in a ratio of one teacher to three or more students with limited abilities.

Above all, this study is interested in answering three research questions:

1. How cooperative are assistant teachers with other actors who influence the inclusive education system?
2. What are the conditions offered to children with disabilities in pre-university education? How possible is it for the assistant teacher to fulfill his role and responsibilities in pre-university education?

In order to answer the above questions, three actors were interviewed who play an important role in this relationship, such as the assistant teacher, the class teacher/assistant, and the parents.

2. Literature Review

Albanian legislation has made changes related to the role and responsibilities of assistant teachers for a decade. Therefore, instruction No. 21, dated 23.7.2010, was approved in 2010 on teaching-educational work rates and the number of students per class in pre-university education institutions and was updated with instruction No. 44, dated 16.10.2014, article d) educators (special education teachers) in institutes for children with disabilities working 30 hours per week. The requirements that belong to educational institutions for students with disabilities, such as the Individualized Education Plan (IEP), the committee, staff training, etc., are outlined in Article 65 of Law No. 69/2012 on the Pre-University Education System in the Republic of Albania. Specifically, this article stipulates that: 1. Students with disabilities learn according to the curriculum of general subject programs adapted for them or according to the curriculum of specialized subject programs adapted for them. 2. In general educational institutions, the personalized program for students with disabilities is drawn up by a committee, which is made up of teachers from different fields of learning from the institution and psychologists. The draft of this program is carried out in cooperation with the parents of these categories of students. The committee within the educational institution, in collaboration with the child's parents, decides whether to alter the individualized or specialized curriculum. 3. Students with disabilities are provided with special education teachers and rehabilitative services, according to the criteria determined by the minister's instructions. Educational employees of institutions that deal with students with disabilities are certified in training programs for the treatment of such students. 4. The relevant basic unit of local government provides students with disabilities with appropriate teaching and learning environments, according to the standards set by the ministry.

Instruction No. 38, dated October 7, 2014, "On the criteria of special education teachers for students with disabilities in public institutions of pre-university education," was approved in 2014. The duties of the special education teacher and their collaboration with other collaborating actors, such as the staff, parents, and others, are outlined in this instruction, as are the evaluation of the student with disabilities, the drafting of the IEP plan, teaching hours, teacher qualification, teaching

rate, number of students, etc. In 2018, Instruction No. 30, dated September 12, 2018, was approved for the number of students per class and the teaching working hours in the pre-university education institutions, point II. d, the weekly teaching rate of teachers and leaders, point 1, the educator in institutes for children with disabilities: 30 hours a week. In 2019, instruction No. 26, dated November 25, "On special education teachers for students with disabilities in public institutions of pre-university education." This instruction defines the criteria and procedures for the selection of the special education teacher and the duties of the special education teacher. The special education teacher plays a crucial role throughout the entire process of working with students with disabilities. This includes their collaborative, supervisory, drafting, implementing, and planning roles, etc.

3. Methodology

A study based on quantitative and qualitative methods that are related to the achievement of the goal was conducted to create a broad perspective on the role and responsibilities of the special education teacher in the context of cooperation with other actors who influence the inclusive education system and to learn the challenges they face in carrying out the duties mandated by the current legislation.

These methods combine primary and secondary data. The secondary data are the result of a review of a wide body of literature regarding the role, duties, and service of the special education teacher in pre-university education, seeing this role from the point of view of the special education teachers themselves, classroom or subject teachers, as well as parents, etc. This literature was found through numerous online library searches and data obtained from different official websites. The primary data were obtained through a questionnaire survey and conversations with the cooperating actors, teachers, special education teachers, classroom or subject teachers and parents, and the school directors of different schools.

Surveys and conversations were used as techniques, while questionnaires with special education teachers, classroom or subject teachers, and parents, and notes taken during conversations with the three target groups included in the survey and with school directors were used as relevant instruments. The questionnaires contain statements from the Likert scale: never, infrequently, ever, in most cases, and always; other questionnaires containing statements such as not at all, a little, on average, and to a great extent were completed online. They were drafted in September 2022 and remained open until December 2022, i.e., for 4 months. The collected data was administered by the researcher and processed through Google Forms and the Excel program during January 2023.

3.1 Description of the instruments used

The questionnaire for special education teachers is made up of 20 questions in total, organized into four sections: Section I includes 3 questions that provide us with information on the demographic data and a general description of the sample; Section II includes 12 questions that provide general information on the actors with whom the special education teachers work; Section III consists of 3 questions that aim to evaluate the conditions offered to children with disabilities in pre-university education; and Section IV consists of 2 questions that provide information on the commitment of special education teachers to professional development.

The questionnaire for classroom or subject teachers at schools is made up of 20 questions in total, organized into sections: Section I includes 3 questions that provide us with information on the demographic data and a general description of the sample; Section II includes 12 questions that provide general information about the actors with whom the classroom or subject teachers collaborate; Section III consists of 3 questions that aim to evaluate the conditions offered to children with disabilities in pre-university education; and Section IV consists of 2 questions that provide information on the commitment of special education teachers to professional development.

The questionnaire for parents is made up of 18 questions in total, organized into sections. Section I provides the parents' demographic data and is summarized in 4 questions; Section II

includes 11 questions that provide general information about the actors who work with parents; and Section III consists of 3 questions that aim to evaluate the conditions that are offered to children with disabilities in pre-university education.

3.2 Sample Description

As previously indicated, this study included parents, school teachers, and special education teachers. The legal requirement that educational institutions register children with disabilities and draw up individualized education plans for them is provided for in Joint Instruction No. 22 for the academic year 2022-2023 in the pre-university education system, specifically Article 6 Point j): Priority registration in a school of children from the underprivileged strata, such as Roma, Egyptians, people with disabilities, returnees from emigration, child victims or potential victims of human trafficking, etc., g) Drafting and implementation of educational plans for children with disabilities.

From one academic year to the next, there are more special education teachers being employed. The chart of special education teachers for the previous five academic years is summarized below.

Table 1:

Academic year	No. of special education teachers
2017-2018	510 ¹
2018-2019	940 ²
2019-2020	1100 ³
2020-2021	1312 ⁴
2021-2022	1499 ⁵
2022-2023	1749 ⁶

The State Social Service has recorded 15,487 children with disabilities who are treated with disability payments. Although only 8,257 children with disabilities attend school, according to the table provided by Porta Vendore (Local Gateway Platform), nearly 2,000 children attend preschool, 4,831 are enrolled in lower secondary education, and 1,515 attend upper secondary education. [1] This fact also reinforces a study supported by UNICEF that found that only 5,839 children, or 57.6% of all children with disabilities aged 6–17 registered by the State Social Service, are included in the education system (J. Rogers and EM Sammon: 2018).

Table 2:

Description	Number of children with disabilities in total			The educational system they attend				
		According to age groups						
No. of persons	in total	0-6 years old	6-15 years old	15-18 years old	in total	Pre-school	Lower Secondary Education	Upper Secondary Education
in total	15487	4323	7587	3577	8257	1911	4831	1515

¹ <https://gazetadita.al/mesuesit-ndihmes-ne-shkolla-urdhri-i-mas-me-standardet-profesionale-qe-duhet-te-zoterojne/>

² <https://faktoje.al/mesuesit-ndihmes-ne-shkolla-te-pasigurte-per-vendin-e-punes/>

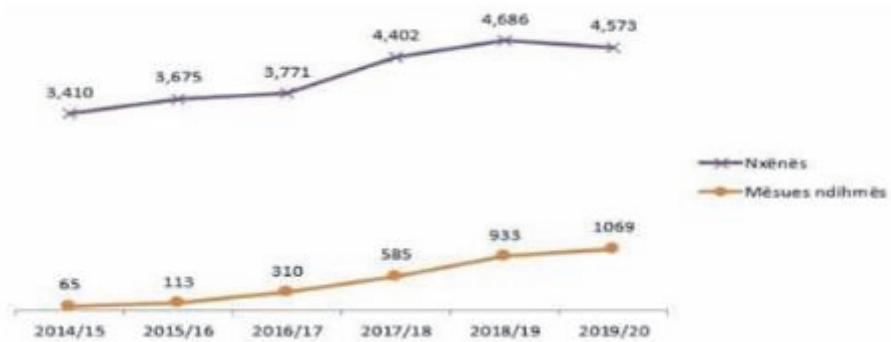
³ <https://www.kmd.al/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/reporti-monitorimit-me-focus-te-vecante-femijet-ne-arsim..pdf>

⁴ <https://faktoje.al/evis-kushi-kemi-shtuar-mesuesit-ndihmes-ne-shkolla/>

⁵ <https://arsimiparauniversitary.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Raporti-i-DPAP-per-monitorimin-financiar-Janar-Gusht-2022.pdf>

⁶ <https://www.portalishkollor.al/news/vitin-e-ardhshem-shkollor-do-te-rritet-numri-i-punonjesve-psiko-sociale-dhe-mesuesve-ndihmes>

The ratio is one teacher to 4.2 students, although there are teachers who help even one student with disabilities up to those who help up to six or seven students, which decreases the effectiveness of learning for these children.



According to a study report made by ASCAP, they found that 41.74% of special education teachers stated that they work with three or more children with disabilities (2020). There is no clear answer to the question of sample size, but it depends on the purpose of the study and the nature of the population. The questionnaire was distributed to 40 special education teachers, and 32 of them filled it out. 32 (100%) of the participants in the study are women, and 0 (0% are men. Work experience in education was about 5 years at 24.1%, 6–10 years at 31%, 11–15 years at 10.3%, 16–20 years at 10.3%, and over 20 years at 24.1%. The General Directorate of Pre-University Education in Albania is divided into four Regional Directorates; the Regional Directorate of Durres, which is the largest in the nation and has the most schools and teachers, including all of the teachers. Thirty-three teachers from the class—90% of them women and 10% of them were men—completed the questionnaire.

Although it is impossible to estimate sampling and error when there are unknown numbers of parents in the population, questionnaires were delivered to schools to reach the same number of parents as children, with the understanding that one parent would respond to each student. The study included 157 parents, 90% of whom were female and 10% were male.

4. Data Analysis

The collected data were processed with Google Forms and the Excel program.

4.1 Data collected from the questionnaire conducted with the special education teachers.

Section II. Actors with whom they collaborate to draw up the Individualized Educational Plan

In this survey, 32 special education teachers of lower secondary schools were included, and most of the special education teachers (66%) answered that they draw up and make the IEP in the school where they work. All the teachers answered the next question, ranking the psychologist (70%), the classroom or subject teacher (17%), the social worker (7%), and the parent (6%).

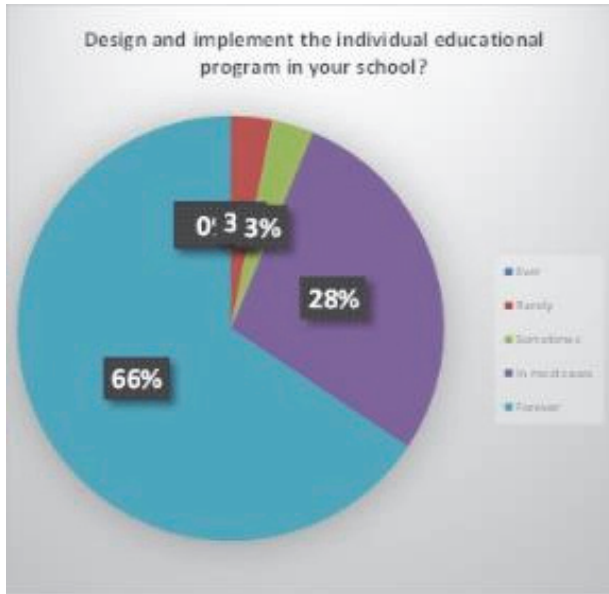


Figure 1:

Regarding question 6 (six), "Do you cooperate with the classroom teacher or subject teacher when planning modifications to meet the priority learning needs of the student?" half of the teachers answered that they cooperate in most cases, always (38%), and ever (12%).

For the evaluation of the student, according to the level of achievements in the areas of development defined in the IEP, special education teachers cooperate with the classroom teacher (56.3%), with the school psychologist (34.4%), and with the social worker (9.4%).

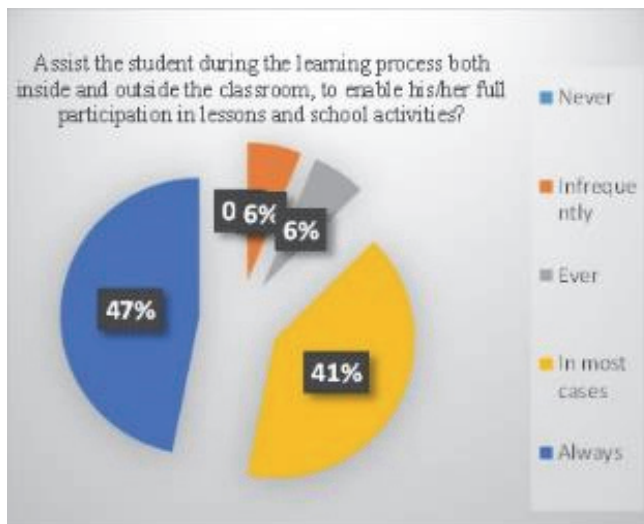


Figure 2:

Regarding assisting the student during the learning process both inside and outside the classroom to enable his or her participation as fully as possible in lessons and school activities, it was found that teachers always answer 47%, in most cases 41%. The daily assistance time for the majority of teachers 46.9% is 2 hours; the same percentage (22%), however, will receive 3, 4 hours; and 9.4%, 1 hour. Most of the special education teachers cooperate with the school committee—about 97% of them. Regarding the report to the school committee on the progress of the child and the implementation of the IEP, although they cooperated with the school committee, 44% always, 34% in most cases, and 20% ever. Regarding the educational and developmental progress of the students, special education teachers said that they inform their parents in 72% of the cases, while 25% said that they do so in most cases but never in 3% of the cases. Parent-Teacher Conferences (information meetings) are determined by the school director for the majority of teachers (47%), always 38%. 6% never, in most cases, and 3% infrequently. In terms of the cooperation of special education teachers with parents so that the activities that develop the knowledge acquired in the educational institution and at home to complement and reinforce each other, according to the teachers, 50% answered always, 41% in most cases, and 9% ever. Regarding the question of how cooperative parents are with teachers, the majority of teachers answered in most cases: 44%, 31% always, 13% ever, 9% infrequently, and 3% never.

Section III: Conditions provided to children with disabilities in pre-university education.

Most of the special education teachers answered that the school has developmental spaces (59.4%), while 34.4% gave a negative answer. Regarding the possibility of implementing an alternative curriculum by the student's IEP, special education teachers answered that they exploited ever 34%, in most cases 30%, never 20%, and always 13%. Confidentiality for students is preserved in most cases (73%), infrequently (7%), and never (3%).



Figure 3:

Section IV: The commitment of teachers to encourage their professional development

Special education teachers follow the training offered for professional development with the principles of inclusive education and special education to the extent of 87%; the rest 10% have chosen the no-answer option, while only 3% have answered that they do not participate in training. 50% of respondents said that trainings helped them a lot in their work (50%), they helped them on average (33%), and only 10% said that it helped them a lot.

4.2 Data collected by questionnaire with classroom teachers/subject teachers.

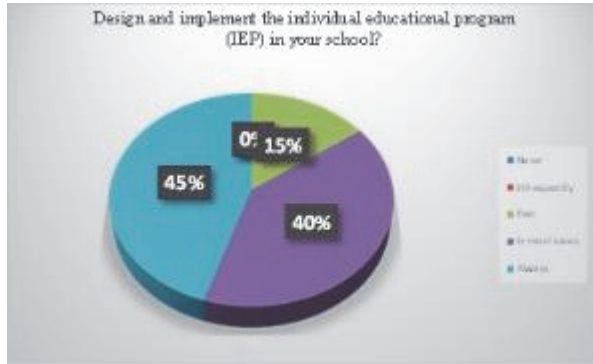


Figure 4:

Section II. Actors with whom they collaborate to draw up the Individualized Educational Plan

The given survey included 33 classroom/subject teachers. Most of the classroom teachers or subject teachers answered that in their school they always (45%) implement the Individualized Educational Program, 40% in most cases, and 15% ever. The professionals with whom they collaborate the most to draw up an IEP plan are school psychologists (65%), special education teachers (30%), and social workers (5%).



Figure 5:

Regarding the cooperation with the special education teacher during the planning of modifications to meet the priority learning needs of the student, the majority cooperates in most cases (55%) and the rest always (45%). For the evaluation of the student, according to the level of achievements in the areas of development defined in the IEP, the teachers collaborate mostly with the school psychologist (50%), with the special education teacher (45%), and the rest with the social worker. Regarding the

role of the special education teacher, the classroom teachers or subject teachers answered that the special education teacher assists the student during the teaching and learning process both inside and outside the classroom to enable his/her full participation in the lessons and school activities, always (40%), in most cases (35%), and ever (25%). Daily assistance time from the assistant teacher according to the class/subject teachers: 1 hour (5%), 2 hours (40%), 3 hours (5%), 4 hours (40%) and 5 hours (10%).

Section III: Conditions offered to children with disabilities in pre-university education.

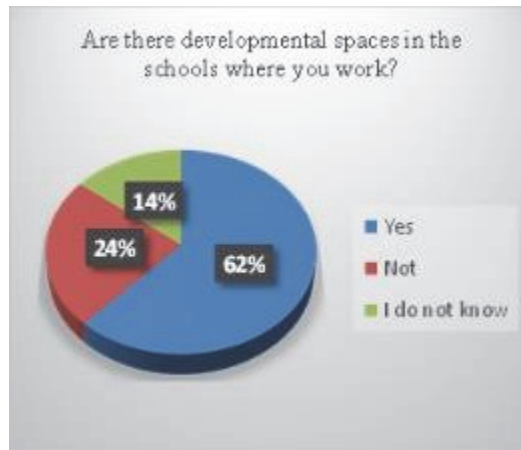


Figure 6:

On the question of whether the school where they work offers developmental spaces, the majority (62%) answered yes, 24% answered no, and 14% did not have any information. According to the classroom or subject teachers, the special education teacher uses the opportunities to implement an alternative curricular program by the student's IEP to the extent of 45%; to the same extent (20%), they answered ever, and always, and to the same extent (10%), they answered infrequently, and never. Regarding the preservation of confidentiality, the majority (65%) of teachers preserve the confidentiality of information for the student, in most cases (30%), ever (5%).

Section IV: Engagement of classroom or subject teachers in professional development

80% of the classroom or subject teachers are offered trainings on professional development for the principles of inclusive education and special education. 20% of them chose the no-answer option. The majority (45%) answered in most cases, 35% answered ever, and 10% of them answered infrequently and always at the same percentage.

Most of the parents answered that the special education teacher cooperates with the school committee (80%), and to the same extent (10%), yes, but they are not informed. To your knowledge, the special education teacher reports to the school committee on the child's progress in achieving the IEP in most cases, answering 40% of the respondents, always 30%, ever 25%, never 5%. The special education teacher informs parents about the educational and developmental progress of students with disabilities: always 55%, in most cases 30%, ever 10%, and infrequently 5%.

In most cases (45%), always (25%), ever (15%), infrequently (10%), and never (5%), information meetings with the parents of students with disabilities are determined by the school director. The special education teacher cooperates with parents so that the activities that develop the knowledge acquired in the educational institution and at home in order to complement and reinforce each other, according to the classroom teachers, always at 50%, ever at 30%, and in most cases at 20%. According to the classroom teacher, parents cooperate with them, and the special education teacher

always (50%), in most cases (30%), and ever (20%).

4.3 Data collected from the questionnaire with parents.



Figure 7:

Section II: Actors who cooperate with parents.

In this survey, 157 parents of lower secondary schools were included, out of which 54 (37%) of them answered that in the school where their child studies, the Individualized Education Plan is never drawn up and implemented; 28 parents (19.3%) answered ever, 27 (18.6%) parents answered in most cases, 24 (16.6%) parents answered always, and 12 (8.3%) parents answered infrequently. The graphs above indicate that almost half of the parents refused to answer the question, "If you agree with the statement that the IEP plan is drawn up and implemented, who are the actors who contribute to its drafting?" The rest of the 34% were answered by the classroom teachers or subject teachers, 12% by the school psychologist, 6% by the special education teacher, and only 1% by the school psychologist. In relation to cooperation with the special education teacher and the classroom/subject teacher during the planning of modifications to meet the priority learning needs of their child, parents answer that they always cooperate with them (33%), in most cases (18%), ever (22%), infrequently (10%), and never (17%). The parents answered that, to their knowledge, the special education teacher assists their child during the learning process both inside and outside the classroom to enable his/her full participation in lessons and school activities at all times (35%), in most cases (19%), ever (12%), infrequently (9%), and never (26%).



Figure 8:

Regarding the time of daily assistance, 39% of them answered 1 hour after this, 2 hours (21%), 3 hours (16%), 4 hours (7%), and 5 hours (17%).

Regarding the cooperation of the special education teacher with the school committee, the majority of parents—50.3%—answered that they do not know if they cooperate, 46.9% answered that they cooperate, and only 2.7% answered that they do not cooperate. The majority of parents (33%) answered that the special education teacher always reports to the school committee on the child's progress and the implementation of the IEP, ever (23%), in most cases, never answered (18%), and only 8% answered infrequently. Regarding the question of whether you are informed by the special education teacher about your child's educational and developmental progress, more than half (51.4%), never (21%), and in most cases (16%), ever (10%), and infrequently (2.9%). Parents answered that they never participated in information meetings organized by the school director (28%), and they always answered (42%). If parents cooperate with the special education teacher so that the activities for the child to develop the knowledge acquired at school and at home complement and reinforce each other, parents answered always (38%), ever, and never (20%), in most cases (15%), and infrequently (8%). On the other hand, with regard to the question of whether the special education teachers cooperate with them, according to the opinion of the parents, they are always cooperative (43%), in most cases (23%), ever, and never are answered by (14%), and infrequently (7%).

Section III: Conditions offered to children with disabilities in pre-university education.

Regarding this section, based on the data in the graphs, more than half of the respondents said that the school provides the students with developmental spaces; a significant percentage, 43%, did not know that there were. On the other hand, we see that even though they believe there are developmental spaces, they are never used on behalf of the children (26%), to implement an alternative curricular program in accordance with their child's IEP; they use them infrequently (14%), never (23%), in most cases (21%), and always (17%). Regarding the preservation of the confidentiality of information about their children, the majority of the parents (61%) answered that confidentiality is always preserved and there is no confidential information disclosed.



5. Findings and Discussion

5.1 Findings

Based on the data analysis, we are presenting a summary of the findings for each target group, participating in this quantitative survey.

Data collected from the questionnaire with the special education teachers.

Section II. Actors with whom they collaborate to draw up the Individualized Educational Plan
Drafting and planning of the IEP plan

In this survey, 32 special education teachers of lower secondary schools were included, and most of the special education teachers (66%) answered that they draw up and make the IEP plan in the school where they work.

Cooperation to draw up and make the IEP plan

To draw up and implement the IEP plan, special education teachers collaborated mostly with the psychologist (70%).

Collaboration during the planning of modifications to meet the priority learning needs of the student.

Half of the special education teachers in most cases, always (38%) with the classroom or subject teacher when planning modifications to meet the priority learning needs of the student.

Cooperation for student evaluation, according to the level of academic achievement of the areas of development defined in the IEP.

For the evaluation of the student, according to the level of achievements in the areas of development defined in the IEP, special education teachers cooperate with the classroom teacher (56.3%), with the school psychologist 34.4% and with the social worker (9.4%).

Assisting the student during the learning process both inside and outside the classroom, to enable his/her full participation in lessons and school activities.

Regarding assisting the student/s during the learning process both inside and outside the classroom, to enable their participation as fully as possible in lessons and in school activities, it was found that 47% of the special education teachers answered "always" and 41% responded "in most of the cases".

Daily assistance time

The daily assistance time for the majority of special education teachers 46.9% is 2 hours.

Cooperation of special education teachers with the school committee

Most of the special education teachers cooperated with the school committee (97%).

The cooperation of the teachers is related to the progress of the child and the implementation of the IEPT.

Regarding the report to the school committee on the progress of the child and the implementation of the IEP, they cooperated with the school committee the majority answered (44%) always.

Cooperation of special education teachers with parents

Regarding the educational and developmental progress of the students, the majority of special education teachers answered that they inform their parents 72%. Regarding the cooperation of special education teachers with parents so that the activities that develop the knowledge acquired in the educational institution and at home complement and reinforce each other, according to the teachers, 50% answered always. Regarding the question of how cooperative parents are with teachers, the majority of teachers 44% answered in most cases.

Section III: Conditions offered to children with disabilities in pre-university education.

Most of the special education teachers answered that the school has room for development, 59.4%. Regarding the possibility to implement the alternative curricular program in accordance with the student's IEP, the special education teachers answered that they made use of it ever 34%. Confidentiality for students is preserved in most cases 73%.

Section IV: The commitment of special education teachers in professional development

Special education teachers follow the training offered for professional development with the principles of inclusive education and special education to the extent of 87%. 50% answered that the trainings helped them a lot in their work.

Data collected by questionnaire with classroom teachers/subject teachers.

Section II. Actors with whom they collaborate to draw up the Individualized Educational Plan

Drafting and planning of the IEP plan

33 classroom or subject teachers were included in this survey. Most of the classroom teachers/subject teachers answered that in their school they always do (45%).

Cooperation to draw up and make the IEP plan

The professionals with whom they collaborate the most to draw up an IEP plan are school psychologists (65%).

Collaboration during the planning of modifications to meet the priority learning needs of the student.

The majority of classroom/subject teachers collaborate with special education teachers in most cases (55%), when planning modifications to meet the priority learning needs of the student.

Cooperation for student evaluation, according to the level of achievement of the areas of development defined in the IEP

For the evaluation of the student, according to the level of achievement in the areas of development defined in the IEP, the teachers collaborate mostly with the school psychologist (50%).

Assisting the student during the learning process both inside and outside the classroom, to enable his/her full participation in lessons and school activities.

Regarding the role of the special education teacher, the classroom teachers/subject teachers answered that the special education teacher assists the student during the teaching and learning process both inside and outside the classroom to enable his/her full participation in the lessons and school activities, always (40%).

Daily assistance time

Daily assistance time from the special education teacher according to the classroom/subject teachers: 2 hours (40%).

Cooperation of special education teachers with the school committee

Most of the parents answered that the special education teacher cooperates with the school committee (80%).

The cooperation of classroom/subject teachers regarding the child's progress and the implementation of the IEP.

To your knowledge, the special education teacher reports to the school committee on the child's progress in achieving the IEP in most cases 40%. The special education teacher informs parents about the educational and developmental progress of students with disabilities always 55%. Information meetings with parents of students with disabilities are determined by the school director in most cases (45%). The special education teacher cooperates with parents so that the activities that develop the knowledge acquired in the educational institution and at home complement and reinforce each other, according to the classroom teachers, always 50%.

According to them, parents cooperate with them and teachers always provide their assistance (50%).

Section III: Conditions offered to children with disabilities in pre-university education.

The schools where the classroom/special education teachers work offer development spaces, the majority (65%) answered yes. According to the classroom/subject teachers, the special education teacher uses the opportunities to implement an alternative curricular program in accordance with the student's IEP to the extent of 45%. Regarding the preservation of confidentiality, the majority (65%) of teachers preserve the confidentiality of information for the student.

Section IV: Engagement of classroom teachers/subject teachers in professional development

The trainings offered for professional development with the principles of inclusive education and special education are attended by 80% of the classroom/subject.

Data collected from the questionnaire with parents.

Section II: Actors who collaborate with the parents.

Drafting and planning of the IEP plan

In this survey, 157 parents of lower secondary schools were included, of which 54 (37%) of them answered that in the school where their child studies, the Individualized Education Plan is never drawn up and implemented.

Cooperation to draw up and make the IEP plan

Approximately half of the parents refused to answer the question of whether they are drawn up

and implemented, and who are the professionals who contributed to the drafting of the IEP plan, the rest, 34% answered with the classroom teachers/subject teachers.

Collaboration during the planning of modifications to meet the priority learning needs of the student.

Related to cooperation with the special education teacher and the classroom/subject teacher during the planning of modifications to meet the priority learning needs of their child, parents answer that they always cooperate with them 33%.

Assisting the student during the learning process both inside and outside the classroom, to enable his/her full participation in lessons and school activities.

The parents answered that, in their knowledge, the special education teacher assists their child during the learning process both inside and outside the classroom, to enable his/her full participation in lessons and school activities at all times (35%).

Daily assistance time

Regarding the daily assistance time, 39% of them answered 1 hour.

Cooperation of special education teachers with the school committee

Regarding the cooperation of the special education teacher with the school committee, the majority of parents, 50.3%, answered that they do not know if they cooperate.

The cooperation of parents regarding the progress of the child and the implementation of the IEP.

The majority of parents (33%) answered that the special education teacher always reports to the school committee on the child's progress and the implementation of the IEP. Regarding the question of whether you are informed by the special education teacher about your child's educational and developmental progress, more than half answered 51.4%. Parents answered that they never participated in information meetings organized by the school director they always answered (42%). If parents cooperate with the special education teacher so that the activities for the child to develop the knowledge acquired at school and at home complement and reinforce each other, (38%) of the parents answered always. On the other hand, do the special education teachers cooperate with you according to the opinion of the parents, they are always cooperative (43%).

Section III: Conditions offered to children with disabilities in pre-university education.

Regarding this section, as can be indicated in the graphs, more than half answered that the school provides developmental spaces, and a significant percentage, 43%, did not know that there were developmental spaces, on the other hand, we can realize that even though they think that there are developmental spaces, they are never used (26%) to implement an alternative curricular program in accordance with their child's IEP. Regarding the preservation of the confidentiality of information about their children, parents answered that the majority, 61%, answered that confidentiality is always preserved.

Assisting the student during the learning process both inside and outside the classroom, to enable his/her full participation in lessons and school activities.

Regarding the role of the special education teacher, the classroom teachers/subject teachers answered that the special education teacher assists the student during the teaching and learning process both inside and outside the classroom to enable his/her full participation in the lessons and school activities: always (40%).

Daily assistance time

Daily assistance time from the special education teacher, referring to the majority, according to the classroom/subject teachers 2 hours (40%).

Cooperation of special education teachers with the school committee

Regarding the cooperation of the special education teacher with the school committee, the majority of parents, 50.3%, answered that they do not know if they cooperate.

5.2 Discussions

Actors with whom the assistant teacher collaborates to design and implement the IEP plan according to Instruction No. 26, Chapter II, point c.

The Individualized Educational Program (IEP) is drawn up and implemented by the special education teachers, the classroom or subject teacher, the psychologist, the school social worker, and the parent. Based on the literature findings, many academic health center programs have physicians, nurses, social workers, nutritionists, and other therapists working together. (Soucie, Nuss, Evatt, et al. 2000; Yang, Shah, Watson, et al. 1995). Based on the answers received from the three target groups of special education teachers, classroom/subject teachers, and parents, it can be noticed that, for the same question, different interest groups provide various answers. Therefore, when asked if they had drawn up IEP plans that included options, the special education teacher and the class/subject teachers all responded the same way (always, in most cases), while most of the parents answered that the IEP had never been drawn up. To enhance children's learning and development, collaboration with professionals highlights the significance of engagement and partnership among all experts who interact with children and their families. (Saffigna, M et.al ;2011) draw up and implement the IEP plan, and then there are special education teachers for classroom teachers, and vice versa. In the end, a small percentage are social workers.

Of the parents who answered that another IEP is drawn up, the classroom or subject teachers, psychologists, the special education teacher, and social workers are listed as collaborators. Children and adolescents with disabilities typically need many primary and subspecialty services, including various specialized therapies, to maintain or improve their functioning. (Perrin J. M. 1986). To implement specific modifications, professionals must work together to evaluate the student according to the level of academic achievement in the areas of development defined in the IEP. The school psychologist is primarily responsible for conducting the psychological evaluation of students with disabilities. According to several researchers, a psychological evaluation is a process in which a psychologist aims to: achieve an accurate description of an individual's functioning; identify the person's clinical needs (for example, which modifications are most appropriate); make a differential diagnosis of all types of mental disorders; and monitor progress when an intervention is in progress. Meyer et al., 2001). For the evaluation of the student, according to the level of achievement in the areas of development defined in the IEP, the teachers collaborate in most cases with the school psychologist. Psychological evaluation is a testing method that uses various techniques to find hypotheses about individuals and their behavior, abilities, and personalities (Framingham, 2016).

The studies that were conducted even earlier proved the value of professional collaboration. Therefore, best practice can be achieved by early childhood professionals who respect and esteem one another's knowledge, experience, and comprehension of children's learning and development. Early childhood professional partnerships require participants to be open to exchanging specialized knowledge for the benefit of children (Lumsden, 2009). According to the results of the given study, we noticed that the majority of special education teachers and parents cooperated with the school committee. It is widely recognized that partnership and collaboration are essential to the roles of early childhood professionals, with benefits not only for children, but also for children's families and the professionals themselves (Lumsden, 2009; Woodruff et al., 2005; Dalli, 2008; McWayne et al., 2008). Regarding the educational and developmental progress of students, most part of the teachers, special education teachers, answered that they inform their parents. On the other hand, more than half of the parents answered that they are not informed by the special education teachers.

There is no information about the conditions offered to children with disabilities in pre-university education and the extent to which children with disabilities have access to the services provided, and this has also been proven by studies carried out by UNICEF. However, there is no accurate information on the extent to which children with disabilities have access to such services (UNICEF; 2005). Most of the special education teachers answered that the school provides developmental spaces. Even though they are of the opinion that there are developmental rooms they

are never explored. Most of the parents responded with never in implementing the alternative curriculum program in accordance with the IEP of their children. The professional development of teachers is very important, as proven by other studies. Professional development is more likely to be effective when it matches the real needs of special education teachers (Leslie A., 2018). Most of the special education teachers and subject teachers follow the training offered for professional development with the principles of inclusive education and special education to some extent. Ata u answered that the trainings helped them a lot in their work.

The weekly teaching rate of teachers, as seen in point three of the instructions, is the same as that of the normal classroom teacher. Also according to point g) the special education teacher works with students with disabilities alongside the subject teacher in all or part of the lessons, as well as outside the classroom.

Regarding assisting the student/s during the learning process both inside and outside the classroom, to enable their participation as fully as possible in lessons and school activities, it was found that the classroom teachers/subject teachers answered that most special education teachers assist the student always during the learning process. It is noticed that the assistant teachers and parents responded differently about the time of assistance, which is insufficient time to assist children with disabilities.

6. Conclusions

In pre-university education, assistant teachers collaborate with other actors to fulfill the duties and responsibilities assigned by the law, to design and implement the individual educational program (IEP), and to offer the primary and subspecialty services that children and adolescents with disabilities need. However, on the part of the parents, it is requested that this type of cooperation be even greater, especially regarding the sharing of information.

The conditions offered to children with limited abilities in pre-university education are seen as relatively good, supplementing them in terms of resources and physicality. However, the findings of the study showed that there is a need for increasing, improving, and enriching resource classes. To offer the most specialized and helpful service, the professional growth of teachers plays an important role. Professional development is more likely to be effective when it matches the real needs of assistant teachers, such as participation in trainings for dealing with cases of students with limited abilities, skills, and integration into society, etc.

The weekly assistant teacher's teaching rate and physical presence in the educational institution are the same as those of the regular teacher in the classroom. The teacher must work with students with disabilities alongside the other teachers all the time or in some parts of the lessons; they must also work outside the classroom with special students with disabilities or small groups of classes. Meanwhile, the findings showed that most assistant teachers work with 3-4 students with disabilities, spending only 2 hours with them. Parents answered that they spend only one hour with each student with disabilities. This time is not enough to fulfill the duties and responsibilities of the assistant teacher and the needs of students with disabilities. Hence, an immediate need is to increase the number of assistant teachers in the pre-university education system, considering the tendency to increase the number of students with disabilities.

7. Recommendations

Special education teachers must pay attention not only to the preparation of the documentation related to the Individualized Education Plan but also, in cooperation with other professionals, to pay attention to the content and concepts in such a way that the results of learning for students with disabilities are achieved effectively. This requires pedagogical content knowledge transformation to bring quality learning experiences aimed at the holistic development of students (Behari, A., and Saxena, Astha, 2017). A sound pedagogy, teachers with the appropriate profiles, competent teachers,

and trained teachers are undoubtedly necessary. The collaborative information-sharing efforts amongst professionals to ensure inclusive approaches to the learning and development of children with disabilities are highly important. Professionals among themselves should understand each other's practice, skills, and expertise and make referrals when appropriate. Resource classes and work equipment are also important; the latter must be diverse to be accessible to implement the objectives set by the multidisciplinary committee. The professional training of teachers is important to serve as a guide in the practice of working with students with disabilities by integrating theoretical information with practice. It is also necessary to increase the number of psychologists in schools, since according to Order No. 313 dated 20.10.2020 point 4) one psychologist or social worker for every 500–700 students, since such professionals play a very important role in dealing with the cases of students with disabilities. From the conclusions, it is necessary to immediately increase the number of assistant teachers to have a ratio of one teacher to one student to fulfill the obligations imposed by the legislation. It would be possible to carry out the roles and responsibilities of special education teachers in pre-university education with the cooperation of professionals and parents, being provided with the physical and resource conditions, participating in trainings, establishing a closer relationship between psychologist and student, special education teacher and student with disabilities, and assisting these categories of students with disabilities to become skilled and integrate into society and the community.

References

- ALBAS School Portal (2022) Next school year, the number of psycho-social workers and assistant teachers will increase <https://www.portalishkollor.al/news/vitin-e-ardhshem-shkollor-do-te-rritet-numri-i-punonjesvepsiko-sociale-dhe-mesuesve-ndihmes>
- ASCAP (2020) Professional development needs of special education teachers in pre-university education, Tirana <https://www.ascap.edu.al/nevojat-pe-zhvillim-profesionalte-mesuesve-ndihmes-ne-arsimin-parauniversitar/>
- Behari, A & Saxena, Astha. (2017). Pedagogies in Higher Education: Striding Towards Innovation. 4. 70-89. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/333756305_Pedagogies_in_Higher_Education_Striding_Towards_Innovation
- Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination (2020) Monitoring report with special focus on children in education. <https://www.kmd.al/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Reporti-monitorimit-me-focus-te-vecante-femijet-ne-arsim..pdf>
- Dalli, C. (2008). Pedagogy, knowledge and collaboration: Towards a ground-up perspective on professionalism. *European Early Childhood Education Survey Journal*, 16(2), 171-185. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13502930802141600>
- DITA (2023) Assistant teachers in schools: MAS order with the professional standards they must possess <https://gazetadita.al/mesuesit-ndihmes-ne-shkolla-urdhri-i-mas-me-standardet-profesionale-qe-duhet-te-zoterojne/>
- Framingham J (2016) What is psychological evaluation? *Psych Cent.* <https://psychcentral.com/lib/what-is-psychological-evaluation>
- General Directorate of Pre-University Education (DPAP), (2022) January-August monitoring report 2022, <https://arsimiparauniversitar.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Raporti-i-DPAP-per-monitorimin-financiar-Janar-Gusht-2022.pdf>
- Instruction No. 21, dated 23.7.2010, on teaching-educational work rates and the number of students per class in pre-university education institutions.
- Instruction No. 26, date 25.11.2019 "On the special education teacher for students with disabilities in public institutions of pre-university education"
- Instruction No. 30, dated 12.09.2018 for the number of students per class and the rates of teaching work in pre-university education institutions.
- Instruction No. 38, dated 7.10.2014 "On the criteria of special education teachers for students with disabilities in public institutions of pre-university education"
- Joint Instruction No. 22 for the academic year 2022-2023 in the pre-university education system.
- Law No. 69/2012 for the pre-university education system in the Republic of Albania.

- Leslie A. (2018) Professional Learning and Development for Teacher Aides Working to Support Students with Challenging Behaviour: What are the Needs? What Works? A Review of the Literature, 1 <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1240218.pdf>
- Lumsden, E. (2009) Joined-up thinking in practice: an exploration of professional collaboration. In: Waller, T. (ed.) *An Introduction to Early Childhood: a Multidisciplinary Approach*. 2nd ed. London: Sage. pp. 152-166. <http://nectar.northampton.ac.uk/id/eprint/3421>
- McWayne, C., Broomfield, M., Sidoti, J., & Camacho, N. (2008). Facilitators of and challenges to interagency collaboration: An early childhood perspective. *NHSA Dialog: A Survey-to-Practice Journal for the Early Intervention Field*, 11(2), 90-109. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ811497>
- Meyer GJ, Finn SE, Eyde LD et al (2001) Psychological testing and psychological evaluation . A review of evidence and issues. *Am Psychol* 56:128-165. <https://doi.org/10.1037//0003-066X.56.2.128>
- Nikolli E. & Shpataj A. (2020) Evis Kushi: We have added assistant teachers to the schools <https://faktoje.al/evis-kushi-kemi-shtuar-mesuesit-ndihmes-ne-shkolla/>
- Order No. 313 dated 20.10.2020 "On the organization and functioning of the psycho-social service in Pre-University Education Institutions and the appointment, suspension and dismissal procedures in the psycho-social service"
- Perrin, J. M. (1986). Chronically III Children: An Overview. *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education*, 5(4), 1-11. <https://doi.org/10.1177/027112148600500402>
- Rogers J. and Sammon Elayn M. (2018) We All Matter! Situation Analysis of Children with Disabilities in Albania, <https://www.unicef.org/albania/reports/we-all-matter>
- Ruçi A. (2019) Assistant teachers in schools, insecure in the workplace <https://faktoje.al/mesuesit-ndihmes-ne-shkolla-te-pasigurte-per-vendin-e-punes/>
- Saffigna, M. and Church, A. and Tayler, C. and Victoria (2011), *Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework*, page 5 <https://books.google.al/books?id=HHXhnQAACAAJ>
- Soucie JM, Nuss R, Evatt B, Abdelhak A, Cowan L, Hill H, Kolakoski M, Wilber N. Mortality among males with hemophilia: relations with source of medical care. The Hemophilia Surveillance System Project Investigators. *Blood*. 2000 Jul 15;96(2):437-42. PMID: 10887103. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/10887103/>
- UNICEF (2005). *Children and Disability in Transition in CEE/CIS and Baltic States*, Innocenti Insights, no. 12, <https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/387-children-and-disability-in-transition-in-cee-cis-and-baltic-states.html>
- Wesley, PW, & Buysse, V. (2001). Communities of practice: Expanding professional roles to promote reflection and shared inquiry. *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education*, 21(2), 114-123. <https://doi.org/10.1177/027112140102100205>
- Woodruff, J., & O'Brien, J. (2005). Children's and family services working together. *Australian Journal of Early Childhood*, 30(1), 49-57. <https://doi.org/10.1177/183693910503000109>