

Dissertation evaluation

Title of dissertation: Study on mainstream teachers' awareness of strategies to enhance social interaction among children with autism in Czech Republic

Author of dissertation: Asha Yadav

Evaluator: PhDr. Iva Strnadová, Ph.D.

Qualitative impairment in reciprocal social interaction is one of the three main impairments characteristic for autistic spectrum. The area of social interaction is crucial for successful integration of children into mainstream education as well as into the community. The submitted dissertation presents from this point of view a well chosen study topic. It is logically structured into six chapters, bibliography and seven appendices.

The main objective of this study is to examine the mainstream teachers' awareness of strategies aimed at encouraging social interaction of children with autism. Furthermore the special education teachers were approached in order to become acquainted with their recommendations in relation to better execution of evidence-based classroom strategies.

You have made an effort to define the terms necessary for your dissertation, however some of your definitions are rather simplistic and lack the reference of literature you were using (e.g., "inclusive education" on page 16). Some of the terms you have decided to define in subchapter 1.6 are defined in "circle way" (e.g. children with autism being described as children "living with neurodevelopmental condition called autism..." on page 16).

Subchapter 1.7 contains factual mistakes when stating that „it is common to have number of schools of various type and level concentrated in one area (e.g. kindergarten, a basic, remedial and auxiliary school, a secondary technical school, a practical school, a secondary vocational school, a training centre, a special pedagogy centre, a boarding house etc)". Special Education Centre is not a school but a counseling facility for children with special educational needs. In the following paragraph you state that "There are 14 districts in

Czech Republic and each district has special pedagogy centre, appointed by Ministry of Education.” In fact there are about 120 Special Education Centers in the Czech Republic and one Special Educational Centre in each district has to provide one full time position for special educator working with people with autism and their families.

I believe if you have engaged more in meetings and discussions with your supervisor, these mistakes could have been avoided.

The methodology was appropriately chosen in regards to the aim of the dissertation; however using the mixed method approach would allow you to gain greater insight into the investigated topic (e.g., using interviews).

The number of participants being 90 teachers (28 mainstream and 62 special education teachers) is sufficient for a questionnaire-based survey.

Chapter four displays your ability to analyze the quantitative data which are commented in more depth in chapter 5. However the resources are sometimes not mentioned (“This result was in line with existing literature”, page 76 – what concrete literature do you mean?).

The conclusions are commented on the basis of reviewed background literature. The research questions have been properly formulated and answered in chapter six together with recommendations for practice. However some of the recommendations seem to be rather discovering something that has already been discovered some time ago. I refer especially to recommendation number one where you state that “teacher training colleges or special pedagogy centers could offer classes or workshops specific to autism and classroom intervention”. Courses and workshops of this kind are already offered by universities as well as by Special Education Centers and Autism Associations (APLA, Autistik).

The suggestions for improvements:

- ❖ There are some English mistakes present in the dissertation (e.g., “Date was collected questionnaire”- page 4, “The results of the study indicate that there is no marked deficits...” – page 4). You also seem to have problems with capital letters (e.g., “asperger’s syndrome on page 11, march on page 13, etc.).
- ❖ I recommend consistency in terms you use in your dissertation (e.g., “mainstream teachers” are sometimes referred to as “regular teachers” (page 4).

- ❖ It would be desirable to quote the most recent sources (e.g., DSM-IV-TR instead of DSM-IV on page 11, 21 or 55).
- ❖ I find using the term “disabled children’s rights” (page 13) and “autistic children” (page 75) unfortunate expressions. We use the term “special educational needs”, not “special education needs” (page 16).
- ❖ There are missing details in your quotations (see page 50 – “(Dencombe, p.)” and (Dencombe, p...2003)”).
- ❖ The bibliography should be in alphabetical order.

Recommendations for the viva:

- ❖ *While mainstream teachers were asked to fill in all five sections of the questionnaire, special education teachers were asked only to complete sections A and E. What was the reason for this decision?*
- ❖ *In recommendation number 2 (page 86) you state that “The link between regular schools and special pedagogy centers need to be relooked for more accessible specialized professional support for regular schools catering to children with autism”. What exactly do you mean by the term “relooked”?*

I recommend the dissertation to be accepted to the viva.

Evaluation: 2

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PhDr. Iva Strnadová, PhD.