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<https://kerjournal.com/>**Teacher Perceptions of the Barriers to Learning for Pupils with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities in Kosovo****Julia F W Heinink**

Abstract: Kosovo's government recognizes that children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) have a right to education, yet these children face significant challenges. This project uses teacher perception to identify the barriers to learning for children with SEND, then suggests ways to remove them. Children have the right to be educated in a mainstream school (alongside their peers or in a separate classroom) or in a special school. Using a pragmatic paradigm, questionnaires were distributed at a mainstream primary school (with a separate class for those with SEND) and a special school. A semi-structured interview was also carried-out. This project found that class size, a lack of accurate diagnoses, low attendance rates, poor resourcing, a lack of additional adults, and inadequate teacher training were perceived to be barriers to learning for those with SEND. Problems with the building were raised in the special school; problems with Individual Education Plans (IEPs) and teaching conditions were raised in the mainstream school. Intervention is, therefore, needed at national*, municipal and school levels to ensure appropriate training, resourcing and staffing, alongside improvements to the diagnostic process.

Keywords: *Special Educational Needs; disability; Kosovo; teacher perception; barriers to learning; inclusion*

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1. Introduction

This paper explores the barriers to learning that children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) face in Kosovo. It aims to identify these barriers, through teacher perception and existing research, then suggest routes to removing them.

The challenging context in which this research was undertaken demonstrates its necessity. Kosovo still has many physical reminders of the 1998-9 conflict and war crimes trials of high-profile political figures continue (Haxhiaj, 2021). Kosovo's statehood remains contested (Lefteratos, 2023), which causes significant problems. Unemployment stands at more than 20%, with youth unemployment at 38% (Trading Economics, 2022). The average salary is just 466 Euros per month (Jones, 2021). These political and economic struggles impact on education, whilst highlighting its importance for empowering the workforce.

Additionally, after the 1998-9 conflict, the UN aimed to create 'a single coherent system that met the desires of every individual' (Kuhn and Dragidella, 2007, p.410). Instead, two parallel education systems emerged; they continue to operate today. Most schools are run by the Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation (MESTI), formerly known as the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEST) in Prishtinë/Priština, Kosovo. In the majority Serb areas, however, schools are run from Belgrade, Serbia (Warrander and Knaus, 2010). Teaching is carried out in Albanian and Serbian respectively, and the schools have different curricula. This deepens divisions between ethnic groups (Jones, 2021) and prevents a levelling of educational standards. The Prishtina-run system will be the focus of this paper because Kosovo is the topic of this project and the majority of children in Kosovo attend schools run from Prishtinë/Priština.

In addition to these broader societal issues, recent research shows that children with SEND experience social stigma and discrimination (Hunt and Belegu-Caka, 2017), a lack of legal protections (Sheeren, 2018), and low school attendance rates (Maloku and Landsman, 2009). In this context, there are clearly barriers to learning for pupils with SEND. Whilst some scholars avoid the term 'barriers', it is appropriate because it recognises the significance of impairment and echoes the aim of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD, 2006). Given the prevalence of the medical model of disability in Kosovo, viewing disability as personal deficit, it is particularly significant to ask for teachers' opinions on barriers which could be addressed through social changes. Using teacher perceptions, this project aims to sharpen understanding of existing barriers and suggest pathways to eliminate them.

2. Literature Review

Literature shows that Kosovo is a challenging context for those with SEND. The number of children with disabilities in Kosovo is unknown (Hunt and Belegu-Caka, 2017), which means policy-makers cannot make well-informed decisions (Bytyçi, 2019) and do not prioritize vital services. These are often left to Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), who are constrained by limited funding (Bytyçi 2019).

Whilst CSOs provide many services, MEST recognise the ideal of inclusion as a form of social justice (Norwich, 2013), aiming to: '*Build an all-inclusive system of education that provides conditions for quality education and training of all individuals by actively involving in and promoting practices of lifelong learning and values of democratic society*' (2006, p. 41). MEST has, however, struggled with the practicalities and definition of Inclusive Education (IE). Pupils can be educated in mainstream classrooms, special schools – which provide learning environments for those whose needs are not met in mainstream schools (MEST, 2005) – or special education classrooms in mainstream schools – which enable specialized teaching in the same building as other learners. This is moderate rather than universal inclusion (Norwich, 2012).

Since mainstream schools are the most appropriate learning environment for most children, it could be seen to be positive that only 349 (Kosovo Agency of Statistics and MEST, 2020) of the estimated 75,000 school-aged children with SEND (Riegler, 2015) attend special schools. Unfortunately, it is not a sign of IE but is part of a wider problem. Across all settings, attendance rates are as low as 10% amongst children with disabilities (Maloku and Landsman, 2009). This can be explained, in part, by the situation in mainstream schools; some school directors have reportedly refused to make accommodations for children with SEND (Hunt and Belegu-Caka, 2017) and children in mainstream classrooms cannot always access the learning (Sheeren, 2018).

Attendance is also low because many parents are unaware of the educational options available, particularly in rural areas (Riegler, 2015). Additionally, the stigma attached to disabilities in Kosovo is so great that some parents ask doctors not to diagnose their children (Hunt and Belegu-Caka, 2017). With accounts of bullying and prejudice from pupils, parents and even teachers (Bytyçi, 2019), it is unsurprising that some parents do not enroll their children. Pleasingly, the Office of Good Governance (OGG) is working on a national* strategy for those with disabilities, including education, healthcare, social services, and accessibility (Sheeren, 2018), which should reduce stigma from the top-down.

With attendance so low, it is concerning that MESTI has seemingly reduced its focus on pupils with SEND. In the Kosovo Education Strategic Plan from 2017-2021, the first strategic objective was 'participation and inclusion' (MEST, 2017). Although there are 21 in-text mentions of pupils with SEND in the current strategy, SEND no longer features in the strategic objectives (MESTI, 2022). MEST identified that increasing inclusion would take time and full implementation of existing laws (2017). This has not been achieved. The European Commission recently noted that considerable improvements are still needed in IE (2021) and the Chair of OGG observed that: *'Implementation of laws is the greatest challenge facing people with disabilities'* (Sheeren, 2018). Consistent implementation is certainly necessary, and it must be accompanied by the redrafting of legislation to encompass a holistic understanding of disability (Hunt and Belegu-Caka, 2017) and protection for the rights of everyone with disabilities (Sheeren, 2018).

As well as legislative improvements, adequate and equitable resourcing is needed (Hunt and Belegu-Caka, 2017). Neither sufficient didactic materials nor Assistive Technology (AT) are provided by the government (Bytyçi, 2019). Most funding for those with disabilities is given as a monetary contribution to adults with formal diagnoses (Bytyçi, 2019). Since Kosovo struggles with corruption (O'Connell, 2015), the need for formal diagnosis is understandable. This does, however, reinforce the medical model, viewing disability as *'a personal deficit to be fixed, cured, or addressed through individual adjustment'* (James et al., 2018, p.1). Consequently, society is absolved of its responsibility to remove barriers. It also requires a robust system of diagnosis, rather than the *'superficial evaluation'* (Hunt and Belegu-Caka, 2017, p.45) currently offered. Even superficial diagnoses are hard to secure outside the capital and in a timely manner. Diagnosis often takes place when a child starts school (Hunt and Belegu-Caka, 2017), preventing the early intervention crucial to ensure the best outcomes for those with SEND

(Guralnick, 2011). Promisingly, MEST has identified improvements in pre-primary education and recognized the need for better enrolment in pre-school education in Kosovo (2017). This is a step toward earlier identification of children's needs, which must be accompanied by government-led improvements to the diagnostic process.

Sheeren's article identifies a further issue. There is a lack of budget for assistants (2018). Families often pay for their child's support teacher (Bytyçi, 2019). Positively, specialist assistants began graduating in June 2018 (Bytyçi, 2019). Increasing support staff is arguably the most significant factor in enabling pupils with SEND to be educated in a mainstream classroom (Clarke, Dyson, Millward and Robson, 1999). Concurrently, teachers must be trained to deploy support staff correctly (Farrell, Alborz, Howes and Pearson, 2010). This must form part of the improved teacher training, which MEST recognizes is needed (2017). There is no standardized curriculum for pre-service or in-service teacher preparation (Hunt and Belegu-Caka, 2017). Much training on IE has been provided by NGOs, leading to a variety of practices (Hunt and Belegu-Caka, 2017). A harmonized curriculum of teacher training must, therefore, be developed.

Sheeren also observed that overcrowded classrooms make it hard for teachers to meet pupils' needs (2018). Although there is great variation, classes can have up to 53 children in urban areas (Kasumi, 2015). Research suggests that smaller class sizes improve attainment (Blatchford, Bassett, Brown, Martin and Russell, 2004). Combined with the lack of additional adults in Kosovo, large classes mean child to adult ratio is often significantly higher than the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) average of 15:1 (2021).

This review of the literature highlights many barriers to learning for children with SEND in Kosovo. This paper will consider teacher training, accurate diagnosis, resources, class sizes and attendance, all of which emerge from current research. Whilst there is a lot of research about shortcomings in the education system for those with disabilities, the views of teachers have not been examined in detail. Since teachers are major stakeholders, gaining a more detailed understanding of their perceptions fills a gap. Furthermore, much research talks about disability but not explicitly about special educational needs. Since those with intellectual disabilities are receiving the least support in Kosovo (Bytyçi, 2019), a project focused on SEND is needed.

3. Methodology

Following Blandford's reasoning, this paper used the resources available to achieve its purpose (2013), namely gaining an understanding of the barriers to learning for pupils with SEND in Kosovo. A small-scale, mixed-methods project, using a pragmatic paradigm, was undertaken. This was influenced by cross-sectional studies. A small-scale survey was carried-out, using a questionnaire to collect the data. This was completed by 31 classroom-based education professionals in one of Kosovo's 38 municipalities. These professionals represented a mainstream and a special education setting. One

teacher also attended a semi-structured interview, which provided supplementary data and formed a mini case study.

The most representative sample possible was secured for the questionnaire, so that teacher perceptions of the barriers to learning for children with SEND in Kosovo could be gauged. To further ensure the validity of the research, the data were triangulated using a mini case study. Based on the barriers identified in recent research, the project focused on teacher training, accurate diagnosis, resources, class sizes and attendance.

Data collection method	Type of data generated	Purpose
Questionnaire	Qualitative Quantitative Semi-quantitative	To maximize responses and gain the most representative sample possible. To directly answer the research questions. To gain background information.
Semi-structured interview	Qualitative	To gain deeper insights into the research questions. To clarify issues raised in the questionnaires. To enable triangulation.

Table 1: Data Collection Methods and Purposes

3.1 Ethical Considerations

British Educational Research Association (BERA) guidelines (2011) were followed to ensure the research was ethical. All participants received an explanation of what they were contributing to before they completed the questionnaire; this comprised part of the consent form and enabled participants to give informed consent. All participants completed the questionnaires voluntarily, their anonymity was ensured and their responses were kept confidential. Ethical approval for the project was granted by the University of Birmingham. In addition, permission was requested from the school directors before the project was carried-out. The teacher, who completed the semi-structured interview, did so voluntarily. She gave verbal consent to be recorded. These actions fulfilled all ethical responsibilities to the participants, the schools, the university and the profession.

The final ethical consideration related to the provision of an incentive for participation. Since the largest possible sample would provide the most representative findings, the translator suggested giving a chocolate bar to participants. Nobody experienced punitive measures for not participating, participation remained voluntary, and no record of participation was kept; this was, therefore, in-line with the BERA ethical guidelines (2011). The data were not compromised, as chocolate was given to every participant, when the questionnaire was returned, without knowledge of their responses. The incentive purely increased the participation rate.

4. Findings, Analysis and Discussion

To gauge teacher perceptions of the barriers to learning for those with SEND in Kosovo, this paper will consider the research questions in turn. It will present and analyse the findings of the survey, using the mini case study to triangulate the data and referring to the existing literature.

4.1 How Significant a Barrier to Learning is Class Size for Pupils with SEND?

Mainstream School			
None	Small	Big	Very Big
2	4	13	8
Special School			
None	Small	Big	Very Big
		3	

Table 2: Teacher Perceptions of Class Size as a Barrier to Learning*

*One respondent missed this question.

Consideration of class sizes is needed, since 24 of 30 educators viewed it as a big or very big barrier to learning (Table 2) and four educators perceived it be the biggest barrier (Figure 6). Figure 1 shows that class sizes vary dramatically – from six pupils to 37 pupils – in the mainstream school. The class for those with SEND is smaller than most; there are eight pupils and one adult. This suggests that the school's leaders agree with the interviewee that: *'a teacher who has more children with Special Needs should have fewer pupils*. Teachers with smaller classes still perceived class size to be an issue, suggesting that reducing class sizes is insufficient in addressing the issue of child-adult ratio. Employing Teaching Assistants (TAs) is one of the most common ways of enabling IE globally (Webster and De Boer, 2021) and this is needed in Kosovo. Whilst contingent on appropriate deployment, additional adults are known to play a vital role in enabling IE. This explains why ten respondents identified the lack of additional adults as the greatest barrier to learning for pupils with SEND in mainstream schools (Figure 6).

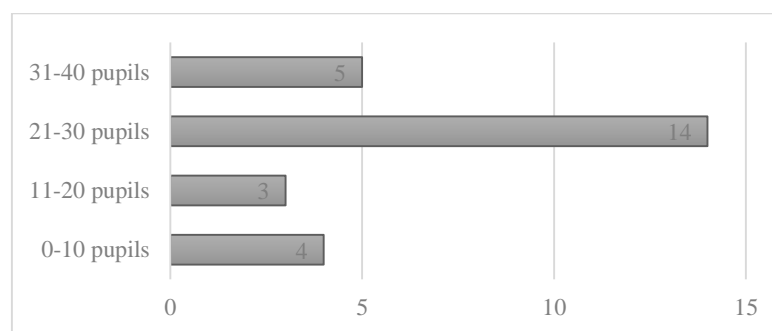


Figure 1: Mainstream Class Size*

*Two respondents missed this question

In the special school, class sizes were much smaller and child-adult ratio was much lower. The class with six pupils has one adult and the class with seven pupils has two adults. Very few children with SEND in Kosovo attend special schools, so the needs of the children in these settings are generally quite severe and small classes still place great demands on the teacher. This explains why a smaller child-adult ratio generally improves outcomes in Special Education (Thurlow et al., 1993). Nonetheless, the teachers felt that class size was a big barrier to learning. Since all three teachers considered the space in which they taught to be the biggest barrier to learning (see Figure 6), it follows that the size of the class is problematic, in part, because of the lack of space. To reduce barriers, therefore, appropriate buildings

must be provided, and the complexity of each child's needs must be considered when deciding on child-adult ratio.

4.2 How Significant a Barrier to Learning is Accurate Diagnosis for Pupils with SEND?

Mainstream School			
None	Small	Big	Very Big
1	1	15	11
Special School			
None	Small	Big	Very Big
		3	

Table 3: Teacher Perceptions of Accurate Diagnosis as a Barrier to Learning

Since the medical model is the prevailing understanding of disability in Kosovo (Hunt and Belegu-Caka, 2017), it is unsurprising that diagnoses are considered significant. Troublingly, however, 29 of 31 educators perceived there to be a lack of accurate diagnoses, providing a big or very big barrier to learning.

Number of children with SEN	Classes
0	20
1	4
5	1
8	1*
Omitted	2

Table 4: Number of Children Identified as Having SEND per Class (Mainstream School)

*Class for children with SEND

Interestingly, 20 of the 28 mainstream classes had no children with identified SEND (Table 4). Whilst low attendance partially explains this phenomenon, it appears that the needs of some children with SEND are not being identified in mainstream schools. Given the major issues with the diagnostic processes (Hunt and Belegu-Caka, 2017), this is expected. Teachers also appear unwilling to identify children as having SEND if they have no formal diagnosis, as supported by the mini case study. In the questionnaire, the teacher stated that there were no children with SEND in her class. In the interview, however, she described a learner, whom she recognized was struggling but had not listed as having SEND because he had no formal diagnosis. Teachers' reluctance to identify children as having SEND without a formal diagnosis is understandable. Prior research established that the stigma associated with disabilities in Kosovo leads some parents to discourage doctors from making a diagnosis (Hunt and Belegu-Caka, 2017). The case study indicated that this was the same with teachers; once, when raising concerns with a pupil's parents, she was told: *'Here, just take the child!'*

Whilst a child's needs can be met without diagnosis, diagnosis gives access to funding (Bytyçi, 2019). Additionally, mainstream teachers currently require diagnoses to identify children's needs. Improved training will increase confidence and expertise amongst mainstream teachers – something shown by the

existing literature (Sheeren, 2018) and this project (see Figures 9 and 12). This training will enable teachers to identify and meet children's needs without diagnosis. Concurrently, diagnostic services require improvement.

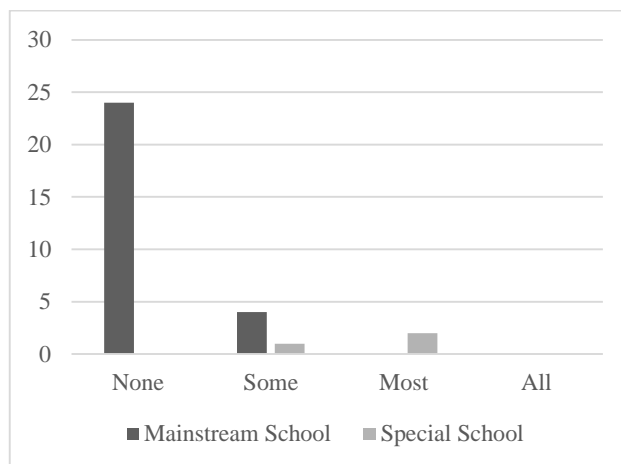


Figure 2: Children with Accurate Diagnoses

Despite all the children having formal diagnoses, none of the teachers in the special school felt these were all accurate. In this instance, it is unlikely that parental objections contributed, as the parents' secured diagnoses for their children. Instead, the lack of accuracy can be explained by the limited nature of the services available (Hunt and Belegu-Caka, 2017). The teachers' belief that not all the children have accurate diagnoses demonstrates a greater level of confidence in identifying children's learning needs than is present in mainstream schools. Experience working with children with SEND doubtless contributes to this, as well as more training (see Figure 5). This demonstrates a need for increased training and increased exposure to children with SEND among mainstream teachers. The case study supports this. The teacher noted that she had learned 'a lot' from teaching a child with identified SEND. Opportunities to work with children with SEND should, therefore, be offered as part of pre-service and/or in-service teacher training. Of course, increased levels of Inclusion would increase mainstream teachers' experience of working with children with SEND. Ensuring parents know their children with SEND can attend mainstream schools would help achieve this.

Teachers in special schools are more confident identifying pupils' needs because the parents have already secured diagnoses for their children. Teachers, therefore, know that they will not face the same levels of resistance that teachers in mainstream schools face regarding diagnosis. Clearly, societal change is needed in Kosovo, so those with SEND and their families can live without stigma, allowing children's needs to be identified and met. Increased levels of IE would allow progress towards this by increasing levels of social inclusion (Schuelka, 2018). The interviewee's experience supported increased levels of Inclusion. After teaching a child with identified SEND in a mainstream school, she said children: '[should] not just be in a special school but be in a normal, mainstream school all the time.' She noted, however, that many teachers did not want to teach children with SEND in mainstream

schools. The challenges presented by a lack of teaching resources, a lack of teacher training, a lack of additional adults, large class sizes, a lack of accurate diagnoses and a lack of space (see Figure 6) help to explain this reluctance. These issues must, therefore, be addressed at school, municipal and national* levels.

4.3 How Significant a Barrier to Learning is Attendance for Pupils with SEND?

Mainstream School			
None	Small	Big	Very Big
1	3	15	9
Special School			
None	Small	Big	Very Big
2	1		

Table 5: Teacher Perceptions of Attendance as a Barrier to Learning

Table 5 shows a stark contrast in the perceived impact of attendance on learning in different settings. 86% of mainstream teachers perceived it to be a big or very big barrier, whilst no special school teachers perceived it thus. It is positive that attendance is not a problem for children in the special school; according to all three teachers, children with SEND usually or always attend school (see Figure 3). Similarly, the educator in charge of the separate class in the mainstream school said that pupils always attended and attendance was only a small barrier to learning.

Nonetheless, very few pupils with SEND attend special schools in Kosovo, so attendance seems problematic for the majority. This is unsurprising, given that as few as 10% of pupils with recognized disabilities attend school (Maloku and Landsman, 2009). There are two ways to address this which fit in with Kosovo's pragmatic approach of moderate inclusion. The first is to increase the number of special school and special class places available for pupils with SEND. The second is to remove the barriers to learning identified by teachers in mainstream schools. Government funding must be allocated so that these steps can be taken. All the while children with SEND are not attending school, their learning and social inclusion is very limited. Although, on paper, the government recognizes that education is an 'inalienable right' for those with SEND (MEST, 2005, p.33), if the provision of special school and special class places is insufficient and too many barriers exist in mainstream schools, their right to education is being violated. Increasing the number of special school and special class places would be a positive step to take while mainstream education undergoes the lengthy process of becoming inclusive.

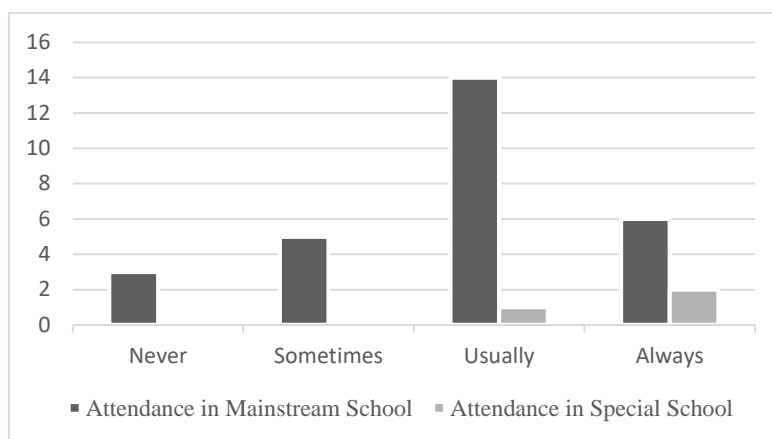


Figure 3: Attendance of Pupils with SEND

4.4 How Significant a Barrier to Learning are Resources for Pupils with SEND?

Mainstream School			
None	Small	Big	Very Big
1	2	19.5	5.5
Special School			
None	Small	Big	Very Big
2		1	

Table 6: Teacher Perceptions of Resources as a Barrier to Learning

26 out of 31 educators perceived resources to be a big or very big barrier to learning, with five viewing a lack of resources as the largest barrier for those with SEND (Figure 6). This demonstrates the scale of the problem with resourcing, as recognized by Sheeren (2018) and Bytyçi (2019).

In contrast, one educator in the mainstream school perceived resources to be no barrier to learning. This wildly different view can be explained, in part, by the uneven distribution of resources in the mainstream school (Figure 4). Uneven distribution was also a problem in the special school. Table 6 shows that two out of three educators perceived resources to provide no barrier to learning, while the third, who perceived there to be few resources rather than a lot (Figure 4), saw resources as a big barrier to learning. Attention is required at school level to address this inequity.

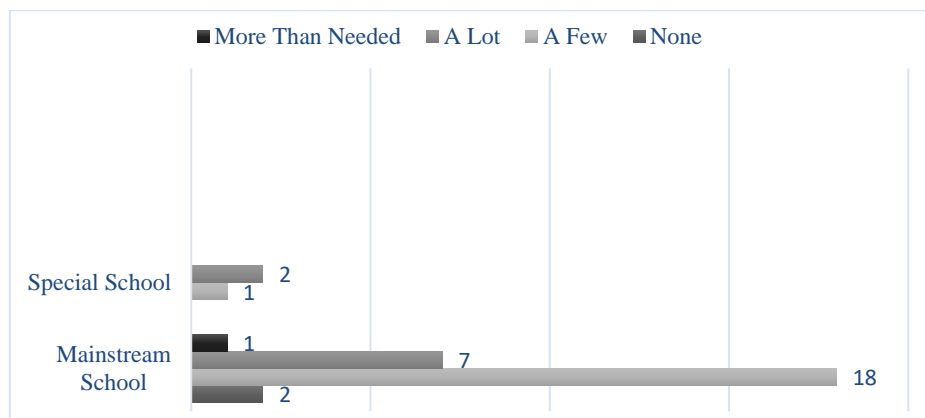


Figure 4: Availability of Resources

Of course, the subjectivity of teacher perception can also explain outlying views. The mainstream teacher who perceived a lack of resources to be no barrier was also one of two who perceived there to be no resources. The other educator who perceived there to be no resources saw this as a big barrier to learning. This shows that, in the opinion of one educator, resources are not necessary while, in the opinion of the other educator, resources are important. The former view could be explained by the lack of children with SEND in the mainstream school, which results in the teacher having little experience of the value of appropriate resources for those with SEND. The latter view is supported by current research, which suggests that the number of resources available for those with SEND needs to increase in Kosovo (Bytyçi,2019).

The need for additional resources was also highlighted by the interviewee. In her experience, the only resources available were: *'just what I could find...when I looked up things'* and that: *'particular teaching materials would have been really helpful'* Since this is based on experience working with a child with SEND in a mainstream school, it is a valuable insight and explains why five educators saw a lack of tools or resources as the biggest barrier to learning for those with SEND (Figure 6). Funding must be allocated to schools, then schools must support teachers to select the didactic materials needed to teach children with SEND effectively.

Didactic materials are not the only resources of benefit to children with SEND, however. Overseas funding has provided AT, which has enabled IE for some pupils with Vision Impairment (Islami, 2017). Interestingly, teachers did not specifically comment on AT. This is perhaps because they have little experience of it. With AT's potential for enabling IE, however, the government must allocate funding for its provision and not rely on foreign investment.

Overall, poor resourcing clearly presents a barrier to learning for those with SEND in Kosovo. The number of resources provided at the national* level must increase. At school level, distribution must be more even and teachers must be supported in the provision of resources for those with identified SEND.

4.5 How Significant a Barrier to Learning is Teacher Training for Pupils with SEND?

Mainstream School			
None	Small	Big	Very Big
1	1	18	8
Special School			
None	Small	Big	Very Big
1			2

Table 7: Teacher Perceptions of Teacher Training as a Barrier to Learning

28 of 31 educators perceived teacher training to provide a big or very big barrier to learning for those with SEND. Whilst research highlights this need (Hunt and Belegu-Caka, 2017), it is significant that teachers also recognize it. Figure 5 shows that of the 27 mainstream educators who responded, nine considered themselves to have had no training at all and seventeen considered themselves to have only had a little training. It is, therefore, clear why this is a barrier to learning. Teacher training must clearly be a priority in Kosovo.

Figure 5 shows that there is a greater level of training for teachers in the special school, with no teachers considering themselves to have had no training and one considering themselves to have had more than needed. Interestingly, the only mainstream educator who considered themselves to have had a lot of training worked in the separate class for pupils with SEND. It is positive that those who work with children with SEND in both mainstream and special schools seem to be receiving training.

Similarly to resourcing, the level of training appears inconsistent in both mainstream and special schools (Figure 5). In this instance, the inconsistency must be addressed by the government to ensure there is parity across municipalities. Prior research has shown that Kosovo requires a harmonized government programme of pre-service and in-service training to improve IE (Riegler, 2015; Hunt and Belegu-Caka, 2017). This is supported by the fact that higher levels of training increase teacher confidence in identifying pupils' needs (as discussed with reference to research question two). Mainstream teachers, therefore, require additional training so that levels of IE can increase in Kosovo and the needs of pupils with SEND can be met in mainstream classrooms. Teachers in special schools require a consistent level of training to ensure they are equipped to meet the needs of the pupils in their classes.

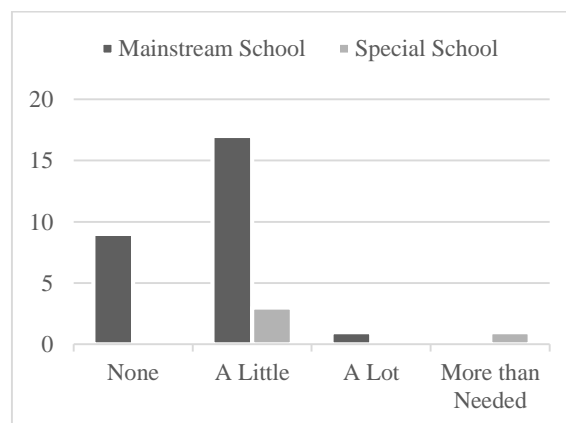


Figure 5: Level of Training*

*One respondent missed this question

4.6 What is the Biggest Barrier to Learning for Pupils with SEND?

To answer this question, instead of using a scale, teachers were asked to write what they perceived to be the biggest barrier to learning for pupils with SEND. Some teachers listed more than one barrier, whilst others did not list any.

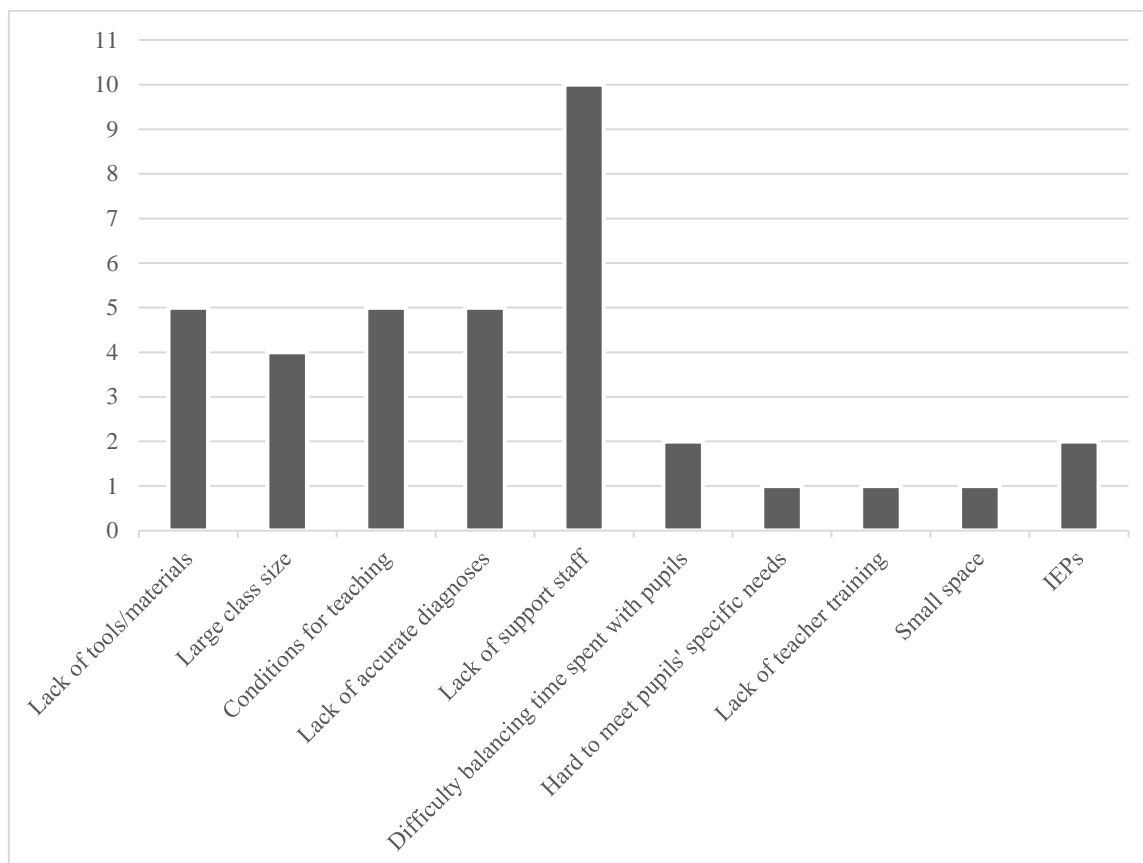


Figure 6: The Biggest Barrier to Learning for Pupils with SEND (Mainstream School)

Figure 6 shows that teachers are largely aware of the same barriers to learning that research has identified. It also highlights the need for the government to address dissatisfaction over working conditions, which recently led to teachers' strikes (Isufi, 2022). The fact that ten of the mainstream educators felt a lack of additional adults was the biggest barrier to learning for those with SEND is stark. It shows that the commencement of training for assistants is a positive step, though it must be expanded to meet demand (Bytyçi, 2019). As noted in the discussion of research question one, well-deployed additional adults are hugely important for effective IE. Also of significance, all of the teachers in the special school considered the building to be the biggest barrier to learning. This lies in contradistinction to the mainstream school where the space was only considered the biggest barrier by one teacher. Clearly, MESTI must provide appropriate buildings for special schools.

5. Conclusion

This paper found that teachers perceive there to be many barriers to learning for pupils with SEND in Kosovo. The relative significance of each barrier varies between mainstream and special schools. In both settings, teachers indicated that recent research was correct, recognizing issues relating to resources, diagnosis, attendance, teacher training and class size. Noteworthy, teachers were able to

identify and assess various barriers to learning, demonstrating that their understanding goes beyond the medical model of disability. Recommendations to reduce these barriers are listed below.

5.1 Challenges

During the COVID-19 pandemic, person-to-person contact was limited. Working with children with SEND and their families proved impossible. It was possible to find other stakeholders, however, through professional contact with teachers. Since there has been less research with teachers than families, this proved a strength of the project.

5.2 Limitations

This paper provides a snapshot of teachers' perceptions of barriers to learning for children with SEND but it has limitations. It was undertaken in one rural municipality in Kosovo-run schools. Since Kosovo has 38 municipalities, the situation is known to vary between rural and urban settings, and Kosovo has more than 65 Serbian-run primary schools (The European Centre for Minority Issues, 2018), it might not represent the situation throughout Kosovo. In addition, the project was undertaken in a primary school and lacks the input of teachers in secondary schools. Of course, the data gathered also only provide information about children attending school. If, as predicted, only 10% of pupils with SEND are attending school, this means that the data do not refer to the majority of those with SEND in Kosovo.

The response rate also provided some limitation. In the mainstream school, it was 56%, which means a significant number of teachers' views are not included. In the special school, the response rate was 75% but the sample size was small, which makes it hard to generalize using the data.

A small change to the questionnaire would have been helpful, separating class size and child-adult ratio. Based on the teachers' responses, when asked to identify the biggest barrier to learning for those with SEND, the ratio would likely have been very significant; ten of the 28 mainstream teachers listed the lack of additional adults as the biggest barrier.

Using teacher perception was a considered and pragmatic choice, given the restrictions of the COVID-19 pandemic. It gauged the opinion of some key stakeholders, whose views have not been explored in-depth. It is, however, a subjective gauge of the views of only one group of stakeholders. The subjectivity of the data and the omission of other stakeholders' views limit the findings of this paper.

Furthermore, there are issues relating to clarity. It is unclear exactly how teaching conditions are providing a barrier to learning for those with SEND. It is also unclear whether the quality of existing

IEPs or a lack of IEPs was considered the biggest barrier to learning by two respondents. In addition, some respondents omitted questions. Whether deliberate or accidental, this left the data incomplete.

Finally, there were limitations related to the interview process. As only one interview was carried out, it could not be considered part of the survey and had to be treated as a mini case study. This still provided useful insights but limited the generalisability of the findings. Furthermore, the use of a translator provided a barrier to communication.

With a response rate of well over 50%, responses from a mainstream and special school, and insights from an experienced interviewee, the findings of this paper give a good reflection of teachers' perceptions of the barriers to learning for those with SEND in Kosovo. The recommendations made are, therefore, well-founded.

5.3 Recommendations

Child-adult ratio needs to be reduced

Addressing child-adult ratio is vital to diminishing the barriers for children with SEND. Class sizes must be smaller and more consistent. It is also clear that more TAs must be trained and paid by the government. Teachers also need training in how to deploy these additional adults. Significant improvements in learning should be seen if child-adult ratio is addressed in these ways.

The diagnostic process must be improved

The government must make improvements to the diagnostic system. A sufficient number of well-trained Educational Psychologists and Paediatricians must be available to carry out detailed assessments in rural and urban areas. This is vital to reducing barriers for those with SEND; it will require government co-ordination and funding.

The role and situation of special schools need consideration

Very few children are in special schools in Kosovo. Although the place of special schools is a matter of debate globally, there needs to be a drive to see pupils in education in Kosovo. Special schools are staffed by teachers who feel better trained and resourced than those in mainstream schools. Encouraging parents to send their children to special school is a good starting point. Children cannot be asked to wait for the necessary changes to occur in mainstream schools, as this will be a lengthy, multi-level process. The government must, therefore, provide additional funding so special schools can offer more places and operate in suitable buildings. In the future, once mainstream schools are better-equipped to teach those with SEND, the role of special schools should be revisited.

Standardised teacher training is needed

Mainstream teachers need to feel confident identifying and meeting learners' needs, even if they do not have accurate diagnoses. This needs to be addressed at a government level, through a consistent scheme of pre-service and in-service training. Teachers will then feel less reluctant to teach pupils with SEND, as well as being better-equipped to teach them.

Parents need more information

Parents must be made aware of the value of sending their child to school, their rights regarding placement and the benefits of accurately identifying their child's needs. These awareness-raising activities will need government investment, so that they can be carried-out across all municipalities.

Teaching conditions require attention

Discussion is needed at school, municipal and national* levels to identify the conditions that teachers feel constitute the biggest barrier to learning for pupils with SEND. Once identified, these conditions will need to be addressed by the appropriate authorities.

More resources are needed; these must be selected and distributed carefully

To improve resourcing, investment is needed at national*, municipal and school level. Since most teachers in the mainstream school perceived there to be a lack of resources, schools must be provided with a greater budget. The inequity between classes must be addressed at school level. Furthermore, teachers must be supported in selecting appropriate resources to meet learners' needs, rather than being supplied with generic materials. Of course, diagnosis and the provision of resources go hand-in-hand. To ensure adequate resourcing, more children need to go through the diagnostic process and receive accurate diagnoses.

Mainstream schools must become more welcoming and accessible

Mainstream schools must become more welcoming and accessible to those with SEND so that attendance improves. If the above recommendations are followed, this will be achieved. If more inclusive practices are embedded into Kosovo's education system, social inclusion should also increase (Schuelka, 2018).

5.4 Further Research

To provide a fuller understanding of the barriers faced by pupils with SEND in Kosovo, further research is needed to establish the number of pupils with SEND who are not attending school. Issues with IEPs also require further investigation. Additionally, similar studies are needed in urban areas, Serbian-run schools and secondary schools.

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