

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE COOPERATION BETWEEN PARENTS AND A PRIMARY SCHOOL TO ACHIEVE SUCCESS IN THE INCLUSIVE EDUCATION OF CHILDREN WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER

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Abstract

One of the priority goals of future education is inclusive education. When creating inclusive educational environments, it is important to ensure that every child would have the opportunity to receive quality education together with his peers in the local community closest to him, in the educational institution closest to his home. This obliges schools to constantly monitor the quality factors of education and improve their readiness to accept all learners regardless of any individual characteristics, obstacles or arising difficulties, and to strive to ensure the effective education of pupils. Research shows that in many countries, including Lithuania, general education schools experience a number of difficulties in educating children with autism spectrum disorder (hereinafter referred to as ASD). It is appropriate to conduct research on good practices in inclusive education based on the subjective perceptions and attitudes of different participants. The purpose of the study is to reveal the importance of cooperation between parents and primary school in order to achieve the success of inclusive education in children with autism spectrum disorder based on the experiences of parents.

Qualitative research type was chosen for the study. In the study, the method of a semi-structured interview was used. The study data were processed by using the method of content analysis. Six parents, whose child had been diagnosed with ASD and attended primary school of general education, participated in the study.

The study revealed that in order to achieve the successful education of a child with ASD in primary school, it is important to establish a cooperative relationship between parents and the school before a child with ASD begins to attend school, to maintain the continuity of cooperation between parents and the school after the child begins to attend school, and to have the cooperation of parents when creating a favourable educational environment in the classroom. The establishment of a cooperative relationship between parents and the school before a child with ASD begins attending his school is associated with the parents' openness and the disclosure of their child's disability, the emphasis on the child's abilities, not his disability and the difficulties arising for the child when presenting a child to the school administration and his future teacher, the willingness of the school to engage in equal cooperation with parents while considering them experts of their child, the creation of conditions for a child with ASD and his parents to get acquainted in advance with the school and his class environment and the class teacher, the discussion of the peculiarities of the child's education and his needs with his parents, the drawing up of a plan for individual assistance to the child, as well as the positive attitude of a child with a autism spectrum disorder to start attending school. The continuity of cooperation between parents and the school, after a child with ASD began attending school, is associated with the activeness of parents in cooperation with the school, their involvement in the educational process, cooperation of parents with educational assistance specialists and the involvement of parents in assessing the quality of their child's inclusive education. The cooperation of the parents of a child with ASD in creating a favourable educational environment in the classroom is associated with their close cooperation with the teachers working in the classroom, their cooperation with the class children and their parents in building and maintaining positive relationships.

Keywords: autism spectrum disorder, child, parents, primary school, cooperation

1 INTRODUCTION

Article 24 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities governing education obliges Member States to ensure that the right to education of people with disabilities is realized by creating a system of inclusive education at all levels, including pre-school, primary, secondary and higher education, vocational training and lifelong learning. Inclusive education is one of the most important tasks of future education (until 2030), which, in 2015, was announced by UNESCO at the World Education Forum. Ensuring the right to inclusive education means changes in culture, policy and practice in all educational institutions in order to ensure quality education for all learners, to take into account the individual needs of each, as well as foresees a commitment to remove barriers hindering the implementation of this opportunity (The Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2016).

Countries that have adopted the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities undertake to create and to implement inclusive education systems and to base them on common ethical and political provisions. The implementation of inclusive education is based on the child's right to learning and educational assistance and the systematic approach to strive for high-quality education for each learner, which entails political, legal, educational and assistance practice aspects of its implementation, based on the principles of social justice, assistance for learners, access to high-quality educational services, efficiency, effectiveness, participation, satisfaction of education needs and expectations. In this context of an international inclusive education policy, there arises a need to analyse and evaluate the educational experience of children with disabilities at schools of general education at the national level. Lithuania, having signed the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006) in 2007 and having ratified it in 2010, undertook to abolish all discriminatory legal and political provisions and practices towards people with disabilities and to ensure their rights in all the areas of life (Ruškus, 2020). Although children with disabilities have the right to be educated in the system of general education and to receive high-quality education, responding to their individual abilities and needs, however, in practice, in other countries and in Lithuania, there are significant shortcomings in this area. Research shows that every country in the European Union, when implementing inclusive education at the school level, encounters similar problems, which make it necessary to improve the preparation of teachers and other specialists to educate students with special educational needs, to improve the physical and the informational environment at schools, to update the content of education and teaching tools, and to introduce information technologies in the educational process, to remove barriers to cooperation between the school community and their partnership, to strengthen the participation of students with special educational needs and their families in the making of important decisions regarding their child's education (Report on 'inclusive education in the European schools', 2019). It should be noted that in many countries, including Lithuania, the education of children with autism spectrum disorders arises as the biggest challenge for inclusive education (Ališauskas et al. 2011).

The presence of children with ASD at school of general education does not guarantee their inclusion. There are three important conditions for inclusive education: being together, participation and achievements (Ainscow et al., 2006). Only being together is not sufficient, it is important to ensure the meaningful and active participation of the child in the educational process, involvement in joint activities with peers, to be accepted by others, to feel being a part of a class, school community, as well as to achieve educational goals and results corresponding his opportunities and his full potential. Goodal (2015) notes that a school needs to create conditions to respond to individual needs of children, to ensure the quality of education, however, it is impossible to achieve that, if the environment, ethos and culture of the school are not favourable to children with ASD. The organisation of inclusive education begins from the preparedness of the school and all its members to respond to the needs of every pupil. Preparedness for inclusion at school, classroom and pupil level are important criteria of inclusive education. Therefore, it is no coincidence that the focus is directed to the preparedness of both a school and a child for inclusion both at political and practical level. In Lithuania, the order of the minister of education, science and sport of the Republic of Lithuania on the recommendations for the organisation of education to pupils diagnosed with autism, which was issued in 2020, emphasises the preparedness of schools to receive children with ASD and to develop conditions favourable for their education. Attention should be drawn to the fact that one of the success criteria of inclusive education in children with ASD is close cooperation between their parents and the school. In the context of inclusive education, cooperation plays an important role. Scientists (Falkmer et al., 2015; Larcombe et al., 2019) regard cooperation as one of essential conditions for inclusive education, which

enable meeting the foreseen objectives. According to Smith (2012), one teacher or another specialist is not able to create educational environment for inclusive education, therefore, teamwork and cooperation with parents of a child with ASD are important. The results of research conducted abroad (Majoko, 2016; Kurth et al., 2020) show that close cooperation positively affects the changes in the attitudes of the participants of educational process, encourages the exchange of information, mutual trust and respect, enables to avoid unrealistic expectations. Although an increasing amount of positive shifts and changes are observed in the area of the cooperation between the school and parents, while acknowledging parents as equal partners in the educational process of their child, however, the cooperation between the school and parents remains problematic (Urkmez, Gedik, Guzen, 2022; Li et al., 2022). The assessment of inclusive education at schools of general education in Lithuania, which was carried out in 2021, shows that the cooperation between the school and parents was more often indicated as an aspect of activity which is weak or needs improvement (National Education agency, 2021). It is noteworthy that parents are the closest people, who know their children best (they know their character and personality traits, their likable and dislikable methods of action, strongest and weakest areas of their expertise etc.). Parents can provide teachers and specialists with a great deal of useful information on their child. The ability to obtain and to use the information and experience provided by parents determines the results of educational process and the possibility to achieve the objectives that have been set. Therefore, teachers and specialists should assume an attitude that parents are equal partners, who are responsible for the education of their child and it is important to involve them in the educational process of their child, to encourage parents, to counsel and to support them, not to leave them alone with the educational problems of their child. Regardless of whether families wish to communicate and to cooperate with specialists and teachers, whether they are of hostile and indifferent disposition, the aim must be to involve them in the processes of the assessment of their child development and achievements, activity planning and education (Kurth et al., 2020). According to Josilowski, Morris (2019), when parents feel strong they can create significantly more positive environment for their child. Specialists and teachers should assist parents in feeling empowered to educate their child. The responsibility of parents and their satisfaction with themselves will increase only then, when they feel able to help their child. Therefore, it is very important to understand what and how much parents, teachers and specialists and various institutions related to them have in common and how much they should learn one from another. In order to achieve effective cooperation, every participant of education process needs to know and to understand what positive influence cooperation has on all the participants of education.

Although recently there has been an increase in research related to inclusive education of children with ASD at schools of general education, however, in their context, there is lack of research, revealing positive experiences of cooperation between parents and the school. Ruškus (2020) emphasises that the research of good practices in education, which is based on the subjective perception and approach of different participants, should be encouraged. The objective of this study is to reveal the importance of the cooperation between parents and primary school for the success of inclusive education in children with autism spectrum disorder based on parental experience.

2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES

2.1 Research methods

To conduct the study, qualitative type of research was chosen. "Qualitative research assists a researcher to better understand human condition, his behaviour in different contexts and in different situations" (Bengtsson, 2016, p. 8). The study was conducted by using the method of a semi-structured interview, which enables to move closer to the perception of human experiences, the identification of meanings, the definition of situations and the interpretation of reality (Craswell, 2014). In order to reveal the importance of the cooperation of parents and the primary school for the success of inclusive education of children with ASD, the parents of children with ASD were presented with the following questions: What kind of cooperation between parents and the school guarantees successful inclusive education at primary school of general education? How do parents of children with ASD cooperate with the school while implementing inclusive education?

2.2 The sample of the research

Targeted selection of the study participants was used in the study. The participants of the study were selected according to the following criteria: 1) parents, whose child was diagnosed with ASD, 2) a child with ASD, who is a pupil of primary classes, 3) a child with ASD, who attends the school of general education. The study was conducted in the March-May of 2021. The participants of the study consisted of six people, whose child, who is diagnosed with ASD, attends the primary school of general education, i.e., meeting all

the criteria laid out by the researchers. The participants of the study relied on their reminiscences and ponderings while reflecting their experiences. All the interviews were conducted remotely while recording them.

2.3 Ethics of the research

The researchers addressed organizations, uniting families, who have children with ASD and providing support to them, requesting them to allow information to be placed in the virtual space of their websites with references to possible participants of the study, parents rearing children with ASD, whose children learn in primary classes of schools of general education. The request - address of the researchers presented the objective of the study, its nature and conditions ensuring anonymity and confidentiality. The researchers asked the ones, who agreed to participate in the study, to respond by writing a private message. The study is based on the principles of respect for the individual's free decision to participate in the study, information about the study, sensitization to the purpose of the study, the method of research data collection and the study procedure, benevolence and intention not to harm the researcher, confidentiality and anonymity (Wiles, 2013). The researchers abstained from collecting data not related to the research questions, avoided collecting the data, which was more sensitive than it was needed (Cypress, 2017). When analysing the findings of the study, the characteristics of the participants of the study are presented generally, ensuring that personal information, which would allow to recognise a particular study participant, is not presented, anonymity and confidentiality, non-disclosure of personally identifiable information of the participants of the study were ensured, the names of the participants of the study were encoded by using the letter P and a number (1,2,3,4,5,6). Only the researcher has access to all encoded data of the participants of the study.

2.4 Data analysis

The obtained data have been analysed by using the method of qualitative content analysis. The qualitative content analysis was performed while adhering to inductive theme development logic, which is based on research data. When performing the qualitative content analysis, the following consistency was adhered to (Creswell, 2014): multiple reading and rethinking of transcribed interview texts, data encoding, while distinguishing semantic units in the text, the grouping of codes into subthemes, theme formation from subthemes, integration of themes/subthemes into the context of an analysed phenomenon, the research data analysis in the context of the insights of other researchers. The research data was analysed by two researchers. Before beginning the data analysis, the researchers agreed regarding the data analysis. The primary data analysis was performed by the researchers individually, while encoding data and forming primary subthemes and themes. This enabled the researchers to understand and to go deeper into the collected data (Cypress, 2017). After that the researchers compared the primarily distinguished subthemes and themes, discussed and finally formed them by common agreement.

3 ANALYSES OF RESEARCH RESULTS

Having analysed the research data, the preconditions for the cooperation between parents and the school, guaranteeing successful inclusive education of children with ASD at primary school of general education, were distinguished: the establishment of a cooperative relationship between parents and the school before a child with ASD starts attending his school, the continuity of cooperation between parents and the school after a child with ASD began attending his school, the cooperation of parents of a child with ASD when creating a favourable educational environment in the classroom (Table 1).

Table 1. Preconditions for cooperation between parents and school guaranteeing successful inclusive education of children with ASD at primary school of general education

Themes	Subthemes
The establishment of a cooperative relationship with school by parents before a child with ASD begins attending his school	Openness of parents and avoidance of concealment regarding their child's disability
	When presenting their child to the school administration and the future teacher not to begin with child's disability and difficulties arising to him, but his abilities
	School's disposition to cooperate with parents on equal footing considering them experts of their own child

	School creates conditions for child with ASD and his parents to get acquainted with his school in advance
	School creates conditions for a child with ASD and his parents to get acquainted with his classroom teacher in advance
	School discusses with parents educational specificities and needs of their child and prepares the plan of individual assistance to the child
	Positive disposition of the child to start attending his school
Continuity of cooperation between parents and school when a child with ASD starts attending his school	Parental activeness when cooperating with the school
	School involves parents of a child with ASD in his educational process
	Close parental cooperation with teachers, educational support specialists and administration
	Parental involvement when assessing the quality of inclusive education of their child
The cooperation of the parents of a child with ASD when creating a favourable educational environment in the classroom	Close parental cooperation with teachers working with the class
	Parental cooperation when creating positive relationships with classmates
	The creation and maintenance of a positive and cooperative relationship with the parents of their child classmates

3.1 Establishment of Cooperative Relationship with School before Child with ASD Starts Attending his School

The study revealed that in order that parents would establish a cooperative relationship with the school, before a child with ASD starts attending his school, it is important that parents be open and not hide the disability of their child. The participants of the study noted that "it is important that parents be open while talking with the school administration and not to conceal their child's disability" (P6), because „if the school doesn't know what is going on, how they are going to know how to help" (P3). Attention should be drawn to the fact that some participants of the study acknowledged that, in the beginning, they concealed the child's disability and that was an impediment to establishing open relationships with the school, which are based on cooperation and trust, whereas the absence of the latter hampered the response to individual educational needs of the child. This is evidenced in the following statements of participants of the study: „Up till the second form, I didn't tell anybody that he was diagnosed with ASD. I was afraid that the diagnosis would serve as a judgement and that my child wouldn't be admitted. Now I understand that I was wrong, I shouldn't have done that, because it hinders an open, sincere cooperation and the education of the child" (P1), „there are instances that parents deny the child's disability and don't present the recommendations of the Pedagogical Psychological Service regarding the education of their child to the school, then we harm the child, then both teachers and other specialists can't provide the child with the necessary assistance" (P5). Consequently, in those instances, when parents conceal the child's disability, do not discuss his situation with the administration, his teacher, other educational support specialists, the child does not receive targeted assistance in a timely manner. Falkmer et al. (2015) underline that it is important that parents be open and

provide the school with information on individual educational needs of their child in order that the school be able to respond better to the child's needs in the educational process. Azad, Mandell (2016) also note that parents need to be active, willing and disposed to cooperate with the school in order that the effective exchange of information related to the child's needs and his education take place.

The study established that although it is important not to conceal the child's disability, but the introduction of the child to the school administration, his future teacher, other specialists should not begin from the child's disability and difficulties arising to him, but from the strengths of the child. The participants of the study pointed out: "When talking about my child, I outlined what she can and is capable of. I mentioned her diagnosis as such and I think that you must not hide it, because you will harm your own child, autism won't disappear, you won't be able to hide it, but you need to start the conversation not from the diagnosis, but from the strengths of the child, his skills" (P3). Hence, parents acknowledge that, when discussing the child's situation with the school, it is important to be open, but to highlight the strengths of the child and only later to discuss difficulties arising to their child and to resolve them through cooperation.

The findings of the study show that the disposition of the school to cooperate with them on equal footing while considering them to be the experts of their own child is important for parents. According to the participants of the study, „during the meetings with the school administration, before the child starts attending his school, it is important that parents pay attention whether the school acknowledges that parents are the experts of their child's situation, are willing to cooperate in a spirit of partnership, to talk about child's successes and difficulties arising to him and to consult what to do, to look for resolutions together“ (P5), „the main decision to choose a school is when during the conversation you understand that the school wants to cooperate, that you communicate, you talk as an equal partner“ (P3). This is evidenced in the fact that parents are acknowledged as equal partners and the willingness to cooperate with them supposes the trust of parents towards the school and encourages mutual cooperation. The cooperation between the school team and parents, the acknowledgement of them as equal partners is one of the main criteria of parental satisfaction with the school and their inclusion in the educational process of their child (Chaidi, Drigas, 2020). Parents are the experts of their child and can provide information, which will be valuable when educating a child with ASD (Bolourian, Stavropoulos, Blacher, 2019).

Having analysed the research data, it was established that, for the establishment of a cooperative relationship between parents and the school before a child starts attending his school, it is important that the school provide opportunities for a child with ASD and his parents to get acquainted with the school and the classroom. According to the participants of the study, “ it is important that there be a possibility to take a child to the school, to acquaint him with the school, the classroom before he starts attending it. While having such opportunities both we and the children feel safer and when we see the care and benevolence of the school we become more open for cooperation” (P6). On the one hand, the acquaintance of the child with his school and his classroom creates a sense of safety for a child with ASD, reduces the likelihood of mistreatment. On the other hand, when parents see the positive disposition of the school towards a child with ASD and careful acceptance of their child the way for multifaceted cooperation opens up. Stoner et al. (2007) note that it is very important to pay attention to transitional periods when the child progresses from one educational stage to another or from one educational institution to another. Children with ASD are highly sensitive to the changes of transitional periods, which can cause confusion, anxiety to them. Therefore, it is important that parents prepare their child for these transitions in advance. The school also needs to focus on transitional periods of the child before he starts attending his school and during his school year and to prepare for them in cooperation with parents. Attention should be drawn to the fact that, for children with ASD, the success during transitional periods depends on close cooperation between their parents and the school when planning and creating the strategies of transitions.

The research data revealed that, for the establishment of a cooperative relationship between parents and the school before a child starts attending his school, it is important that the school creates opportunities for a child with ASD and his parents to get acquainted with his classroom teacher in advance. The participants of the study pointed out: „My child was helped a lot by the fact that he had an opportunity to meet his teacher and to communicate with her. After the conversation with his teacher, the child was less nervous about the school and was more eager to go to it, to meet his teacher. I also communicated with his teacher, enumerated his strengths, his individual needs and difficulties arising to him, we agreed to cooperate and to help each other (P2). The establishment of a relationship between the child and his teacher, an open conversation of parents with the teacher even before he starts attending his school, assists the teacher in understanding individual needs of a child with ASD and preparing to respond to them, establishing cooperative relationships with the child and his parents. When a child has an opportunity to get acquainted with his teacher in advance he feels calmer, becomes positively disposed towards the teacher. The meeting

of parents and their conversation with the teacher assists in establishing a cooperative relationship. Larcombe et al. (2019) note that preparedness of children with ASD for school depends on the establishment of a cooperative relationship with their future teacher before they start attending their school. A cooperative relationship is useful both to the child, and the teacher and parents, because a possibility to share experience opens up.

The study revealed that, to establish a cooperative relationship between parents and the school, before a child with ASD starts attending his school, it is important that the school involves parents in the discussion of the child's educational specificities and his needs and prepares the plan of individual assistance for the child together with them. According to one participant of the study, "just before our child started attending his school, we discussed the child's needs with the school, what assistance he would need, we prepared an assistance plan for my child and I think that it is very important, because the school must cooperate with parents from the very beginning" (P1). That shows that the school, before commencing to educate a child with ASD in cooperation with parents of the child should discuss individual needs of the child and should prepare the plan of individual assistance for the child in advance. It is no coincidence that the recommendations on education organisation for pupils diagnosed with autism, which were approved by order of the minister of education, science and sport of the Republic of Lithuania in 2020, emphasise that, before beginning to provide education to a child with ASD, it is important to prepare the plan of individual assistance for the child. The main benefit of the plan is that it contains information both about individual needs of a pupil, the need for individual assistance for him, parental expectations both about education of the child and the objectives, tasks and organisation of the provided assistance.

The study established that positive disposition of a child with ASD to start attending his school is an important part of a cooperative relationship with the school, on which parents need to focus. According to one participant of the study, "to my child, the school seemed something unknown, therefore, we also talked about the school in advance, how everything will take place at school, we looked at photos, watched video material about the school, we went to the school, we talked with the teacher and that helped my child understand, what he would do at school, and get prepared for it" (P5). "My child has a friend, who is a little bit older than him, so the friend also told about school together with me. My child needs to know everything in advance, he likes being prepared mentally, he dislikes those surprises, changes very much, he experiences a strong negative reaction immediately" (1). Larcombe, Joosten, Cordier and Vaz (2019) emphasise that preparedness for school depends on the child and the school factors. It is noted that parents, when preparing a child with ASD for the school, need to zero in on the preparation of the child to start attending his school while looking for opportunities to acquaint him with the school. Whereas the school, for its part, needs to create opportunities for the child to get acquainted with the school and to get prepared for the coming of the child to school.

3.2 Continuity of Cooperation between Parents and School when Child with ASD Began Attending his School

The study revealed that parental activeness, when cooperating with the school when a child with ASD began attending his school, is important for the success of inclusive education at primary school of general education. According to the participants of the study, "parents need to be active and assume responsibility for the education of their child" (P5), "parents must be willing and get involved in the educational process, but it happens that when something needs to be done, then parental initiatives to do something evaporate, only willingness or demands regarding the school remain" (P2). It is noteworthy that parental cooperation with a school is important for academic consistency and continuity of the education of a child's with ASD. Parents pointed out: "At school - remarks or recommendations of specialists, we do that, but you continue that work at home, because otherwise he educational process will be complicated" (P1), "there is a need for parental contribution, their involvement in the educational process of their child, if parents get recommendations, but do nothing, then there are no results" (P2). That shows that parental activeness, the assumption of responsibility for the education of their child, their multifaceted cooperation with the school can assist them in becoming involved in the educational process of their child more successfully. Therefore, not only the school, but parents also need to be active, willing and disposed to cooperate with the school, in order to that effective exchange of information related to the child's needs and successful education of his take place, strategies, which assist in creating favourable educational environment, resolving educational problems arising for the child at school or at home, be created (Azad, Mandell, 2016).

The study identified that the school's willingness to involve parents in the educational process of their child is also important. The participants of the study stated, "those schools, which think that parents don't need to participate in the educational process, are wrong" (P5). "Parents know their child best, therefore, they need

to participate in the education of their child, therefore, in principle, one of the tasks of the school is to involve parents” (P3). Hence, the cooperation of the school with parents assists in creating inclusive culture and practice of the school. At schools, in which the aspect of cooperation with parents is strong, most of the parents actively and benevolently cooperate with the school to benefit for the education of their child, the overcoming of arising obstacles, they participate when improving the school. The findings of other studies (Starr, Foy, 2012; Kurth et al., 2020) also show that it is important that the school focus on the creation of relationships with the child's parents, which are based on trust, by regularly communicating and cooperating with them, involving them in the educational process of their child. Kurth et al. (2020) note that parents highly value the cooperation and communication of the school administration, teachers, other specialists with parents and its lack can be an important source of dissatisfaction both when choosing a school and while their child attends the chosen school. In addition, the research (Tucker, Schwartz, 2013) shows that one of the obstacles for successful education of a child at school is limited involvement of parents in the educational process of their child by transferring responsibility to the school, as well as too poor cooperation of the school with parents, the lack of encouragement regarding their involvement in the educational process of their child.

The study highlighted that the close cooperation of parents with teachers, educational support specialists and administration is important for the success of the inclusive education of a child with ASD. The participants of the study noted: „it is very important that, when educating a child, parents, teachers and other specialists cooperate closely. That tripartite cooperation can help a lot“ (P3), “together with the administration, teachers, educational support specialists, we discussed how we are going to help the child adapt at school, that it is a transitional period both for the child, and to all, what we are going to do, what we are doing now. So, through cooperation, everything normalised after a month“ (P4). That shows that the focus and cooperation of the school administration, teachers, parents and educational support specialists, when consulting and assisting each other, empower a child with ASD to successfully adapt at school. When creating the practice of inclusive education at school in order that individual needs of pupils be met, quality education for every child is ensured, there is a need for active involvement of all the participating people, their mutual cooperation (Falkme et al., 2015). Teamwork is the basis of the inclusive school.

The research data revealed that one of aspects of cooperation between parents and the school is the inclusion of parents when assessing the quality of inclusive education of their child with ASD. Inclusive education is a process an important component of which is quality education for all the children, the identification of obstacles stalling it in order to make inclusive education at school effective. According to the participants of the study, “it is good that the school invites us when preparing an assistance plan for the child, later, they involve us in assessing it” (P6), “we, together with teachers, support specialists, envisage objectives to be achieved, plan their implementation, foresee responsibilities, periodic meetings to discuss the results of the provided assistance” (P1). Hence, the findings of the study show that, during a year, it is important to continually assess the impact and the effectiveness of the provided assistance and to adapt it flexibly to respond to individual needs of the pupil. The inclusion of parents in the assessment process facilitates the education of a child with ASD when creating inclusive educational environment, performing the monitoring of individual progress, reacting rapidly to the problems arising in the educational process. Anglim, Prendeville and Kinsella (2018) maintain that in order that school support strategies be effective, they need to develop conditions for the participants of an educational process to assess the quality of inclusive education: to advise, consult one other, to share experience, to resolve arising difficulties. Cooperation and reflective practice offer opportunities to share the examples of good practice and to strengthen the trust of education participants in their abilities to educate a child with ASD by responding to his needs (Anglim et al., 2018).

3.3 Cooperation of Parents of Child with ASD when Creating Favourable Educational Environment in Classroom

It is important, while organising an educational process at classroom level, to create a favourable educational environment, assisting in ensuring smooth activity in the classroom, endeavouring that all the pupils would feel good, safe and would be able to seek the best academic results. When creating a favourable educational environment in the classroom, parents contribute as well. The study revealed three important aspects of parental cooperation when creating a favourable educational environment. One of them is close parental cooperation with teachers, working in the classroom. According to the participants of the study: “between parents and teachers, close, mutual communication, which is based on respect, must be established, consulting, experimenting what works, what doesn't work and the searching for solutions together. When there is such cooperation, then there is no room for tensions and all feel better“ (P5), „we

were successful, because we discuss together with the teacher, where the strengths of the child lie, where he encounters difficulties, what and how to do in order help the child get educated" (P4), "simply there is a need to communicate openly, to move together, to listen to each other, not to disparage each others opinion, to receive recommendations or remarks regarding child's education favourably" (P6). This is evidenced in the fact that close cooperation between parents and teachers develops conditions to know a child with ASD better, to identify his strengths, needs and to properly select strategies, which work best when educating a particular child with ASD and assists him in participating fully in the educational process. In addition, close cooperation assists in ensuring academic consistency and continuity and achieving foreseen objectives. Other studies (Tucker, Schwartz, 2013; Azad, Mandell, 2016) also show that systematic individual cooperation with the teacher is important for parents. Such relationship provides parents with information about educational processes, empowers them to participate in those processes, enables to show initiative, to inquire, to present suggestions.

The study highlighted that, when creating a favourable psychosocial environment in the classroom community, the creation and maintenance of positive relationships with classmates by the parents of a child with ASD are important. When a child with ASD is in the classroom, different questions and uncertainties arise to other children in the classroom regarding the communication and behaviour of a child with ASD. Therefore, it is important that parents of a child with ASD talk with his classmates openly, explain to them inexplicable issues, answer arising questions, which are related to the child with ASD, to them and assist in creating friendly relationships in the classroom. One participant of the study noted: "parents need to come to the classroom with a positive disposition towards other children, to establish with them friendly relationships, to resolve arising difficulties benevolently, to answer questions arising to children" (P6), "You need to be a mediator...between the child and other children ... It is important to talk with children, not to be afraid to search together" (P3). The study shows that parents understand and acknowledge that, when creating positive relationships between the children in the class, an important role and responsibility are undertaken not only by the classroom teacher, but by parents as well.

In order to create a favourable psychosocial environment, the establishment and maintenance of a positive and cooperative relationship with the parents of classmates by the parents of a child with ASD is also important. Open cooperation of parents of a child with ASD with the parents of the classmates of their child, the explanation of the disability, its characteristics, individual needs of their child assists other parents in understanding the child with ASD better and not becoming hostile towards the child with ASD. The participants of the study pointed out that in order that "the parents of classmates not become ill-disposed towards a child with ASD and not make their children ill-disposed towards a child with ASD, it is important to communicate with them openly and sincerely" (P1), "Children talk in the the same manner as their parents, so you need to communicate a lot and to talk with the parents of their child's classmates... I talked a lot, there was more than one meeting and gathering... When we talk, when parents don't dispose their own children hostilely, then children accept each other in a more tolerant manner" (P5), " during the meetings with the parents of the classmates, I talked about what autism is, I told about my child in order that they would understand to what he reacts and how he reacts, what hurts him, what he likes, how he likes to communicate, when he communicates, what his hopes are about their future communication with him. If we want that our children wouldn't feel tension in the classroom, we all need to create that harmony together... It is only through joint efforts that we'll be able to achieve a lot" (P4). The study shows that the involvement of the parents of a child with ASD by providing the parents of classmates with information about the strengths of their child, his needs, difficulties arising to him, while discussing together with other parents how they all, through joint efforts, can create a favourable microclimate in the classroom and to resolve arising difficulties benevolently together, can contribute to the creation of an inclusive educational environment. In addition, the participants of the study pointed out that all classroom community (pupils, parents and teachers) can be assisted in rallying and becoming closer through the inclusion of parents into the planning and organisation of various joint events (meetings, festivals, excursions etc.), the organisation of open days when parents can participate in the lessons through parental involvement while preparing and implementing educational and other projects in the classroom. This is demonstrated by the following statements of the participants of the study: "the parents of classmates, when participating in the lessons during open days, getting involved in the planning and organising project activities of the class and participating in them, notice other children, including the strengths, abilities of our child..." (P1), "other parents, when participating in various events of the class, for example, hikes, festivals, picnics, have an opportunity to get to know our child, to understand his and our situation better, to strengthen mutual relationships of the classroom community" (P3). Parents acknowledge the importance of different forms in cooperation with them, which would encourage the involvement of all the parents of the classmates when creating a favourable educational environment in the classroom.

Other studies also show that it is important that parents communicate and cooperate not only with teachers, other specialists, but also with the classmates of their child, their parents. Soulis, Georgiou, Dimoula and Rapti (2016) note that classmates and their parents quite often have a negative approach towards children with a disability, if they do not know what these pupils are able to do, where their strengths lie and how it is possible to use them, what difficulties they encounter, what assistance they need. The presentation of information about a child with ASD, can assist other children, their parents in understanding their classmate with a disability better, changing their attitude towards him, receiving him. Closer communication of parents of a child with ASD with the classroom community would assist their child in feeling better at school of general education and would guarantee the success of inclusive education at primary school.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The study revealed the importance of the cooperation between parents and primary school in order to achieve the success of inclusive education of children with autism spectrum disorder. Real experiences of parents, rearing children with ASD, highlighted three aspects of parental cooperation with the school, guaranteeing the success of inclusive education: the establishment of a cooperative relationship with the school by parents before a child with ASD starts attending his school, continuity of cooperation between parents and the school after a child started attending his school and parental cooperation when creating a favourable educational environment in the classroom.

The study identified that one of the aspects of cooperation between parents and the school, guaranteeing the success of inclusive education of a child with ASD, is the establishment of a cooperative relationship between parents and the school even before a child with ASD starts attending his school in order that the school properly prepares for the education of the child. The analysis of parental experiences shows that when establishing a cooperative relationship with the school before a child with ASD starts attending his school, it is important that parents be open and not hide the disability of their child, however, when talking with the administration, the future teacher, they should not begin from their child's disability and difficulties arising to him, but from his abilities and the positive identification of his possibilities. In addition, for parents rearing a child with ASD, it is important that the school be disposed to cooperate with parents on equal footing, to consider them to be the experts of their child, because they know the situation of their child and his individual needs best and can assist the school in responding to them. Parents also acknowledged the importance of the acquainting of a child with ASD with the school premises and meeting his future teacher in advance. The recognisability of school premises creates a sense of safety to a child with ASD, increases the possibility of proper behaviour, therefore, the educational process can take place smoother. The establishment of a relationship between a child with ASD and his teacher, before he starts attending his school, and an open conversation of his parents with the teacher, assists the teacher in knowing individual needs of a child better and getting prepared to respond to them. Parents acknowledged that their inclusion, while discussing the characteristics of the child education and his needs and when drawing up the plan of individual assistance for the child, is an important part of the establishment of a cooperative relationship with the school, which is able to contribute to successful inclusive education of a child with ASD. The positive disposition of a child with ASD towards school attendance is no less important for the success of inclusive education.

Another aspect of cooperation between parents and the school, which guarantees the success of inclusive education of a child with ASD, is the continuity of cooperation between parents and the school after the child started attending his school. On the one hand, parental activeness, while cooperating with the school, when a child with ASD began attending his school, is important, because multifaceted parental cooperation with the school and the assumption of responsibility for the education of their child, can assist them in becoming involved in the educational process of their child more successfully. On the other hand, the school's willingness to involve parents in the educational process of their child is also important, because, when school endeavours to strengthen cooperation with parents, parents become more involved in their child's education, cooperate in the resolution of arising difficulties, assist in creating an inclusive educational environment at school. Close cooperation of parents with teachers, educational support specialists and administration is of no less importance for the success of inclusive education of a child with ASD. During conversations and discussions between parents and the administration, teachers, specialists, there arises an opportunity to share expectations, to discuss children's development, to respond to the questions of parents, to choose the resolutions of problems, which are appropriate to the family, to plan and to provide assistance for the child and his family, which is based on trust, the use of competences, equality and respect. In addition, the study revealed that the inclusion of parents, when assessing the quality of inclusive education for a child with ASD, is an important aspect of cooperation between parents and the school. The involvement of parents in the assessment of the education of a child with ASD assists in responding to individual

educational needs of the child and contributes to the creation of inclusive school culture.

The cooperation of the parents of a child with ASD when creating a favourable educational environment in the classroom is one more important aspect of cooperation between parents and the school, guaranteeing the success of inclusive education of a child with ASD. When creating a favourable educational environment, close cooperation between parents and teachers, working in the classroom, is important, since it assists in learning about the child's needs better and responding to them and ensuring academic consistency and continuity in order to achieve the foreseen objectives. In addition, when establishing positive relationships in the classroom, the establishment and maintenance of positive relationships with classmates and their parents by the parents of a child with ASD are important. Parents understand and acknowledge that not only the teacher, but parents also are responsible for the creation of a favourable educational environment in the classroom.

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