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PREPAREDNESS AND COMPETENCES OF POLISH TEACHERS ON THE THRESHOLD OF CHANGING THE STRUCTURE, ORGANIZATION AND STANDARDS OF THE EDUCATION SYSTEMS

S u m m a r y: This study aimed to discover whether there are differences between teachers with different professional competences (general teacher, support teacher, special teacher) in their assessment of their own preparedness for working with SEN students, and also determining whether differences in levels of preparedness are connected to differences in the level of emotional intelligence and social competences. The timing of the study was in the context of the changing structure, organization and standards of the education systems for pupils with SEN and in pre-service teacher education in Poland. It analysed 225 teachers using the Two-dimensional Emotional Intelligence Inventory (DINEMO) and the Social Competence Questionnaire. The obtained results show that not all teachers are ready to work with a diverse group, implementing the inclusive model of education. Moreover, they indicate the importance of a carefully chosen study program and practical preparation of future teachers.

K e y w o r d s: teachers' preparedness, standards of the education systems, professional development, emotional intelligence, social competences, special education needs students

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Introduction

Teaching as a complex multi-dimensional profession[2] requires numerous skills[3]. However, not only factual knowledge, but also teachers' social and emotional skills have a significant impact on the better learning achievements of their students and create and care for relationships with students[4]. Their awareness of self-efficacy is related, according to Sutton and Wheatley[5], to higher rates in various dimensions of emotional intelligence (EI). At the same time, Nias[6] drew attention to the importance of emotional intelligence in education.

Emotional intelligence is a relatively recent psychological concept which refers to the effective integration of emotion and thought[7]. Gardner[8] indicated the relationship between emotion and cognition but the concept of EI was proposed in psychology by Salovey and Mayer[9] and defined as "the subset of social intelligence that involves the ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one's thinking and actions". There is a lot of research on the role of EI in the teaching profession, in particular in developing relationships with students[10], in maintaining classroom discipline[11], its importance for the educational success of students and its value in skilfully shaping students' behaviour and preparing them for independent functioning in everyday life[12].

The levels of EI and social intelligence have an impact on the effectiveness of social training in which the social competences of an individual are shaped.

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[2] James H. Stronge, Pamela D. Tucker, Jennifer L. Hindman, *Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. 2004 Qualities of Effective Teachers*, 2nd ed. (Alexandria: ASCD, 2004).

[3] Christopher Day, Pam Sammons, Gordon Stobart, Alison Kington, Qing Gu, *Teachers Matter: Connecting Lives, Work and Effectiveness* (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2007).

[4] James H. Stronge, *Handbook for qualities of effective teachers* (Alexandria: ASCD, 2004).

[5] Rosemary E. Sutton, Karl F. Wheatley, "Teachers' Emotions and Teaching: A Review of the Literature and Directions for Future Research". *Educational Psychology Review* 15 (4) (2003): 327–358.

[6] Jennifer Nias, "Thinking about Feeling: the Emotions in Teaching". *Cambridge Journal of Education* 26 (3) (1996): 293–306.

[7] John D. Mayer, Peter Salovey, David R. Caruso, "Emotional Intelligence as Zeitgeist, as Personality, and as a Mental Ability". In: *The Handbook of Emotional Intelligence: Theory, Development, Assessment, and Application at Home, School, and in the Workplace*, eds. Reuven Bar-On, James D.A. Parker (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 92–117.

[8] Howard Gardner, *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences* (New York: Basic Books, 1983).

[9] Peter Salovey, John D. Mayer, "Emotional Intelligence". *Imagination, Cognition and Personality* 9 (3) (1990): 189.

[10] Khristina Sayko, "Psychological characteristics of emotional intelligence of teachers working with children of developmental disorders". *The Journal of Education, Culture and Society* 2 (2013): 29–35.

[11] Sabina Valente, Abílio Afonso Lourenço, Paulo Alves, Sergio Dominguez-Lara, "The role of the teacher's emotional intelligence for efficacy and classroom management". *CES Psicología* 13 (2) (2020): 18–31.

[12] Ivett Rita Guntersdorfer, Irina Golubeva, "Emotional intelligence and intercultural competence: theoretical questions and pedagogical possibilities". *Intercultural Communication Education* 1 (2) (2018): 54–63.

Matczak[13] defines them as "complex skills conditioning the effectiveness of coping with specific types of social situations, acquired by the individual during social training" and distinguishes three types of such situations:

- intimate, related to building and maintaining close interpersonal contacts, accompanied by self-disclosure (e.g. confiding or listening to confessions),
- social exposure, where the individual is the centre of attention, subject to the assessment of others,
- requiring assertiveness, where you achieve your goals or needs by exerting or resisting influence.

Studies have shown the role of teachers in developing social competences in students[14], in particular in students with SEN who have deficits in the area of these competences[15] and the impact of inclusive education on the development of these competences[16]. Accordingly, Bar-On, Maree and Elias[17] noted that "there is ample evidence across studies of teacher selection and preparation to suggest that EI is a valuable quality for teachers to have, although these studies may never mention the words EI or SEL (Social Emotional Learning)". There is a lack of research on the relationship between the level of emotional intelligence and social competences and the level of teachers' preparation, including teaching students with SEN. It is also worth asking about teachers' capabilities amidst the changing organization and structure of the educational system.

The organization and structure of the education system in Poland before and after 2017

Until 2017, compulsory education in Poland lasted for 10 years and included the final year of preschool education, 6 years of primary schooling (for students aged 6/7–13) and 3 years of lower secondary schooling (youth aged 13–16). Primary school consisted of two stages: grades 1–3 (early school education) and junior grades 4–6. Following the recent 2017 education reform (Journal of Laws of 2017, item 60), compulsory education now lasts 9 years and begins in grade zero at the age of 6 years, and ends with the completion of 8 years of primary school education. Lower secondary schools (3 years) were eliminated and 8-year primary

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13　Anna Matczak, *Kwestionariusz Kompetencji Społecznych KKS. Podręcznik*, 2nd ed. (Warszawa: Pracownia Testów Psychologicznych PTP, 2007), 7.

14　Sophia Heejeong Han, Kisten M. Kemple, "Components of Social Competence and Strategies of Support: Considering What to Teach and How". *Early Childhood Education Journal* 34 (3) (2006): 241–246.

15　Karen E. Diamond, Hsin-Hui Huang, Elizabeth A. Steed, "The Development of Social Competence in Children with Disabilities". In: *The Wiley-Blackwell Handbook of Childhood Social Development*, eds. Peter K. Smith, Craig H. Hart, 570–587. Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2011.

16　Dorina Tápai, "Social and Emotional Learning – Prevention and Promotion". *Hungarian Educational Research Journal* 5 (1) (2015): 62–70.

17　*Educating People to be Emotionally Intelligent*, eds. Reuven Bar-On, J.G. Maree, Maurice Jesse Elias (New York: Praeger), 145.

schools, as in the 1990s, were restored. Upon graduation, students have a choice of secondary schools such as: general secondary school (4-year), technical secondary school (5-year), sectoral VET school, stage I (3-year) and sectoral VET school, stage II (2-year).

Poland is a country of many educational paths[18]. Apart from kindergartens and, mainstream schools there are also integrative and special institutions (Journal of Laws of 2017, item 1578), which have different goals and approaches to educational and upbringing tasks, as well as the difficulties associated with teaching students with SEN. The oldest form of education for those with disabilities is special education, which carries out educational tasks, taking into account the individual needs of students with disabilities. Depending on the degree of disability, groups of 4–6 or 1–2 students are formed. Special education equips them with knowledge, skills and attitudes, and aims in the compensation, correction and improvement of the disturbed mental and physical processes and prepare them for a relatively independent life, in which they will play roles consistent with their social needs and expectations[19].

The integrative model, through a range of specialist revalidation activities, is considered to be one of the forms of special education. Its goal is to include children and adolescents with difficulties in functioning in the group of able-bodied peers[20]. This model largely reflected the model of integrative education practiced in the countries of Western and Northern Europe. Currently, an integrative class in Poland is attended by 15 to 20 pupils, and there may be three to five students with disabilities. Within one class, children with various difficulties as well as those without difficulties can learn together, they follow the core curriculum and take exams at various educational stages. In an integrative school or kindergarten there are two teachers (a general teacher and a support teacher) who have different professional qualifications, tasks and competences. In accordance with the law[21], the support teacher recognizes the educational needs and psychophysical abilities of students, co-organizes educational activities and educational work in integration forms (adjusts the implementation of programs, co-creates educational activities, develops individual educational programs, and provides support to general teachers and parents. Support teachers may also work in mainstream schools, but only with children with autistic spectrum disorders or with multiple disabilities. The general

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[18] Zbigniew Woźniak, *Niepełnosprawność i niepełnosprawni w polityce społecznej. Społeczny kontekst medycznego problemu* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo SWPS, 2008).

[19] James M. Kauffman, Marion Felder, Bernd Ahrbeck, Jeanmarie Badar, Katrin Schneiders, "Inclusion of All Students in General Education? International Appeal for A More Temperate Approach to Inclusion". *Journal of International Special Needs Education* 21 (2) (2018): 1–10.

[20] Zenon Gajdzica, *Sytuacje trudne w opinii nauczycieli klas integracyjnych* (Kraków: Oficyna Wydawnicza „Impuls", 2011).

[21] Journal of Laws of 2019 pos. 2215, https://isap.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/DocDetails.xsp?id= WDU20190002215.

teacher should agree with the support teacher on the curriculum issues, assessment criteria, the course of the lessons, and teaching aids.

Strategies for supporting mainstream schools towards pupils with SEN are in line with the European policy of inclusive education and human rights, including The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The ratified provisions of the legislation ensure the implementation of inclusive education at all levels of education[22], and in practice obliges all public primary schools to admit every child residing in its district who has a certificate of the need for special education. This document is issued by a group of specialists (psychologists, educators, speech therapists, pedagogical therapists) employed in psychological and pedagogical counselling centres. The adjudicating panel recommends the form of implementation of education (special, integrative or inclusive), but the final decision rests with the parents. Parents also have the right to participate in the development and modification of an individual educational and therapeutic program for their child, which is created by teachers and specialists working at the school. In Polish schools, apart from teachers conducting didactic classes, there are also educators, psychologists, pedagogical therapists and speech therapists, whose task is to support teachers in diagnosing the developmental needs of a student, providing psychological and pedagogical help to students and parents, and conducting preventive and therapeutic classes, developing students' skills[23].

In the implementation of didactic, educational and care tasks, kindergartens and schools can use the support of psychological and pedagogical counselling centres, which employ psychologists, educators, speech therapists, pedagogical therapists, but also psychotherapists and sociotherapists. The aim of the institution is primarily to diagnose school and development difficulties, to prepare recommendations for schools, issue decisions, as well as conduct individual and group therapy and activities supporting development. The specialists also help parents through counselling, workshops, lectures and training[24]. The scope of operations of the counselling centres, as well as the entire support system for pupils with SEN in Polish schools, may change again due to the developed model of functioning of Specialist Support Centres for Inclusive Education. In its assumptions, the institution, which will be created on the basis of schools and special institutions, will be aimed at supporting the work of mainstream schools teachers in working with students

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[22]   Małgorzata Sekułowicz, Agnieszka Sekułowicz, „Edukacja włączająca w polityce oświatowej. Możliwości i ograniczenia". *Dyskursy pedagogiki specjalnej* 22 (2016): 60–72.

[23]   Journal of Laws of 1982 pos. 19, https://isap.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/DocDetails.xsp?id=WDU19820030019.

[24]   Journal of Laws of 2013 pos. 199, http://isap.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/DocDetails.xsp?id=wdu20130000199.

with SEN and improving the quality of inclusive education. The project is currently at the pilot stage of implementation.

Standards for educating teachers of students with SEN before and after 2019

The teacher education system has also changed recently. From 2001 to 2019, according to the Bologna Declaration, the higher education system in Poland followed the objectives of the EHEA based on, among others, two or three levels of education. In the new ordinance of August 3, 2019 there was a return to 5-year Master's studies (such a model was already in use in Poland under the Act of 27 July 2005) and new standards of education preparing for the teaching profession were introduced.

Before the change was introduced in 2019, in order to become a special educator, the candidate had to complete studies in the field of a particular type of disability, chronic diseases, social maladjustment, as well as specificity of functioning of gifted students. In addition to theoretical knowledge, the candidate also had to have the necessary practical knowledge. Support teachers obtained qualifications in the field of special education: co-organizing the inclusive education of students with disabilities, those who are socially maladjusted or at risk of social maladjustment. They could complete five-year full-time studies in special education or postgraduate studies in this field. However, their specialization was not specified in detail, but students did the training at integrative and inclusive institutions. General teachers would complete a university course in early education, they may also specialize in a selected subject such as biology or geography. Until 2019, the standards of educational preparation for the teaching profession, contained psychology and pedagogy, and did not include the specificity of teaching students with SEN. The program also included training, mainly in an inclusive school or kindergarten, but also in integrative ones.

Following the new regulation from the 2020/2021 academic year, universities will prepare trainee teachers for working with SEN pupils during their 5-year studies. After completing their education, teachers, regardless of the type of specialization will be able to work in special schools with pupils with a more severe degree of disability, and also inclusive education classes, which will help to prepare them to work with students with various difficulties in functioning. The program encompasses theoretical foundations of integrative and inclusive education, organization of inclusive education and diagnostics of special educational needs. The trainee teachers study the methods of educating diverse groups and complete practical training in all school types. Whereas, trainee teachers of early education and specialist subject teachers continue to acquire general psychological and pedagogical knowledge, but without content on the specificities of teaching students with SEN.

In Poland, as in Germany, USA and UK, the special education system exists alongside challenges and efforts to make mainstream schools more inclusive. In the 2016/2017 school year, over 60% of pupils with disabilities studied in the inclusive education system, and in 2018/2019 this indicator increased to 67% (the Ministry of National Education). Additionally, about 30% students receive psychological and pedagogical help and other forms of support. An open question is whether the new standards of training for the teaching profession will meet the needs of Polish schools, which may be mainstream, inclusive or special, and whether they provide teachers with the competences for effective classroom management and modelling students' behaviour in the school and classroom environment. According to the standards, special educators will be able to work with pupils with difficulties in all three types of schools. Special and inclusive schools are based on different philosophies and provide alternative, and in some respects diametrically opposite approaches to the education of children with disabilities[25]. Among the voices criticizing full inclusion[26], there are approaches that combine the ideas and practice of special and inclusive education[27]. Perhaps the Specialist Centres for Supporting Inclusive Education in Poland will go towards creating inclusive special education, which Hornby writes about. Appropriate preparation of teachers to work with pupils with various levels of cognitive, social and emotional difficulties would play an important role.

The present study

This study aimed to discover if there are differences between general, support and special teachers in their assessment of their own preparedness for working with SEN students, and also whether the declared differences in levels of preparedness for work relate to differences in the level of emotional intelligence and social competences.

In terms of planning the implementation of inclusive education, it should be asked whether teachers of various educational paths in Poland feel prepared to work with each student, including those with more severe difficulties in functioning. Substantive preparation plays an important role in teacher education, but it is worth emphasizing the importance of acquiring skills in the field of personal and social competences. It seems that the specificity of teaching students with SEN may differentiate these competences of teachers depending on the sense of preparedness for work.

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[25]   Spencer J. Salend, *Creating Inclusive Classrooms: Effective, Differentiated and Reflective Practices* (New Boston: Pearson, 2016).

[26]   Kauffman, Felder, Ahrbeck, Badar, Schneiders, "Inclusion".

[27]   Gary Hornby, *Inclusive Special Education: evidence-based practice for children with special educational needs and disabilities* (New York: Springer, 2014).

Method

Participants

The research involved 225 teachers (Table 1), including 64 (28%) from mainstream schools, 97 (44%) from inclusive schools and 64 (28%) from special schools (for students with ID and autism), $\chi 2(2) = 9.680$; p <.01. The teachers were subdivided into: 130 (58%) general teachers, 62 (27%) support teachers and 33 (15%) special teachers, $\chi 2(2) = 66.107$; p <.001. The listed groups did not differ significantly in gender, age and education.

Length of professional service ($\chi 2(6) = 14.618$; p <.05) significantly differentiates teachers due to the type of work. Among general teachers, people with experience over 15 years predominate (50%), while among support teachers – people with experience over 5 years (30%). Among the latter, there is also a large group of people with less than 5 years of experience (26%).

Procedure

The study was conducted in 6 schools: 2 integrative, 2 special, and 2 mainstream in the Mazowieckie province. The research was conducted in schools, therefore it required the consent of the headmaster, which was granted in each facility. During the information meeting, the purpose of the study was explained and teachers were invited to participate. The research was anonymous, it did not include sensitive data about teachers or students, and was in line with the procedures for conducting academic research at an educational institution. Study participants' identities were coded for report preparation and subsequent scientific publication. The questionnaires were assigned codes. At each stage, participants could opt out. Participants could take the questionnaires with them and then transfer the completed material to the collective pool.

Research instruments

A questionnaire was used for the collection of teachers' opinions on their preparedness for working with learners with intellectual disabilities, autistic spectrum disorders, physical disabilities, hearing impairment, visual impairment, chronic illness and mental illnesses.

The Two-dimension Emotional Intelligence Inventory[28] (DINEMO) was used to measure EI, based on Salovey and Mayer's[29] theory. It is a self-reporting tool

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[28]   Anna Matczak, Aleksandra Jaworowska, *Dwuwymiarowy Inwentarz Inteligencji Emocjonalnej DINEMO. Podręcznik* (Warszawa: PTP, 2006).

[29]   Salovey, Mayer, "Emotional intelligence", 185–211.

Table 1. Descriptive characteristic of teachers according to the type of teacher and type of work (N = 225).

	School				Teacher			
	Special	Integrative	Mainstream		General	Support	Special	
Gender[a]								
Female	56 (87.5)	82 (85.4)	56 (87.5)	$\chi^2(2) = .205, p = 0.902$	109 (83.8)	56 (91.8)	29 (87.9)	$\chi^2(2) = 2.320, p = 0.313$
Male	8 (12.5)	14 (14.6)	8 (12.5)		21 (16.2)	5 (8.2)	4 (12.1)	
Age[a]								
up to 30	8 (12.5)	14 (16.4)	15 (23.4)	$\chi^2(6) = 9.907, p = 0.129$	17 (13.1)	13 (21.3)	7 (21.2)	$\chi^2(6) = 5.430, p = 0.490$
from 30 to 40	22 (34.4)	33 (34.5)	24 (37.5)		44 (33.8)	23 (37.7)	12 (36.4)	
from 40 to 50	23 (35.9)	26 (27.1)	9 (14.1)		34 (26.2)	15 (24.6)	9 (27.3)	
over 50	11 (17.2)	23 (24.0)	16 (25.0)		35 (26.9)	10 (16.4)	5 (15.1)	
Education[a]								
Bachelors	–	1 (1.0)	–	$\chi^2(4) = 2.650, p = 0.618$	–	1 (1.6)	–	$\chi^2(4) = 4.328, p = 0.375$
Masters	63 (98.4)	93 (96.9)	64 (100)		128 (98.5)	60 (98.4)	32 (97.0)	
Doctorate	1 (1.6)	2 (2.1)	–		2 (1.5)	–	1 (3.0)	
Length of service[a]								
less than 5 years	4 (6.2)	20 (20.8)	13 (20.3)	$\chi^2(6) = 9.587, p = 0.143$	18 (13.8)	16 (26.2)	3 (9.1)	$\chi^2(6) = 14.618, p <0.05$
more than 5 years	12 (18.8)	22 (22.9)	16 (25.0)		24 (18.4)	18 (29.5)	8 (24.2)	
more than 10 years	16 (25.0)	16 (16.7)	10 (15.6)		22 (16.8)	11 (18.1)	9 (27.3)	
more than 15 years	32 (50.0)	38 (39.6)	24 (35.7)		65 (50.0)	16 (26.2)	13 (39.4)	

[a]Actual figures given (% in parenthesis)

that consists of 33 items, describing situations that are sources of emotions and four types of response for each of them. The respondent chooses the one they consider most typical for them. The inventory includes the overall score (EI) and its two dimensions: interpersonal and intrapersonal. Reliability, measured by the Cronbach's α coefficient, was .635 for the overall result, and .639 and .341 for both scales, respectively.

The Social Competencies Questionnaire[30] (KKS) was also used. It consists of 90 items, expressing a variety of activities which were self-assessed on a 4-point response scale (1 – very poorly; 4 – very well). The Questionnaire includes the overall score (SC) and 3 scales: situations involving social exposure (SE), situations demanding assertiveness (A) and situations demanding close interpersonal contact (Int) [.953 (SC) and for scales respectively: .833 (Int), .917 (ES), and .861 (A)].

Data analysis

In order to carry out comparative analysis of teachers declaring different levels of preparedness to work with students with SEN, we used the following question from our survey: *Which group of SEN students are you best prepared to work with?* Respondents used a five-point scale (1 – *least prepared*; 5 – *most prepared*) which referred to each group of students with SEN separately. Based on the answers collected regarding each of these groups, teachers were divided into three sub-groups: those declaring to be least prepared (answers 1 and 2), neither prepared nor unprepared (answer 3) and best prepared (answers 4 and 5) to work with students with a specific SEN. In the groups thus created, we compared the average level of EI and social competences. The analysis was carried out using the Kruskal-Wallis test with Dunn-Bonferroni's post hoc method for pairwise comparisons. To determine which type of school and teacher the observed differences applied to, we used the chi-square test of independence. In each analysis, respondents with missing data were excluded. The software used was SPSS ver. 26.

Results

Preparedness for working with different types of SEN pupils

The declared level of preparedness for working with different types of SEN pupils was analysed according to the type of teacher. For this purpose, a non-parametric chi-square test was used. Below are the results for those groups of students in which there were statistically significant differences.

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30   Matczak, *Kwestionariusz*, 7.

The results showing teachers' declarations regarding their preparedness for working with students with moderate and severe intellectual disability found statistically significant differences between the groups ($\chi2 (8) = 43,043$; p <.001). The results showed (Figure 1) that the vast majority of special teachers (70%) considered themselves best prepared, whilst 24% declare that they are rather prepared for such work. It should be emphasized that no special teacher responded with the neutral answer *neither prepared nor unprepared*. Among support teachers, the most common answer (33%) was also a declaration of being best prepared to work with children with this type of SEN, a fifth were rather prepared, and a fifth did not have a clearly defined opinion on this matter. Conversely, the most common answer of general teachers (30%) was being least prepared to work with pupils with these disabilities, however a fifth considered themselves to be best prepared for such work.
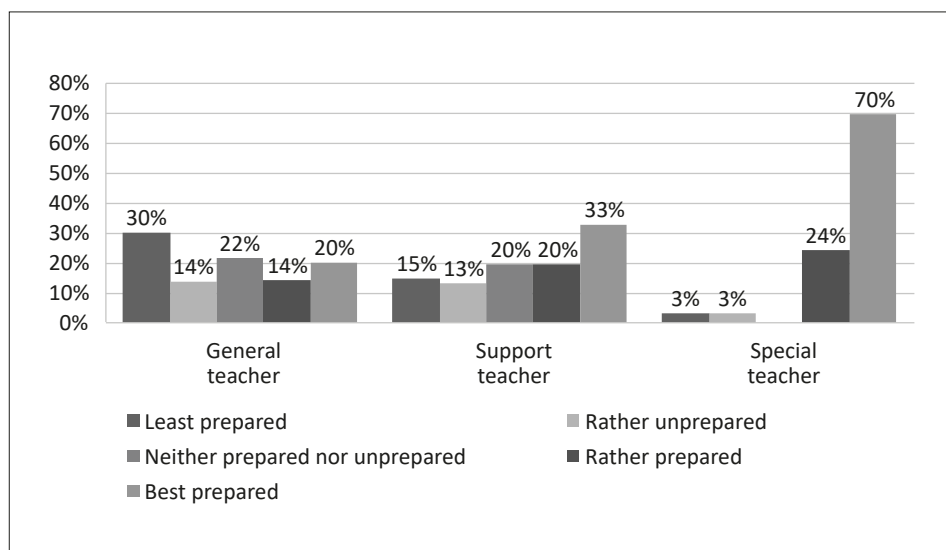

Figure 1. Preparedness for working with pupils with moderate and severe ID in the compared groups of teachers

Division by type of teacher ($\chi2 (8) = 38,214$; p <.001) significantly differentiates the declarations regarding the degree of preparedness for working with children with a profound intellectual disability. Among general teachers (Figure 2) the dominant (56%) belief is that they are the least prepared, it is also the most frequently chosen answer (35%) among support teachers, 22% of support teachers feel rather unprepared. A third of special teachers considered being rather prepared to work with children with a profound intellectual disability and 23% considered that they were best prepared for such work.
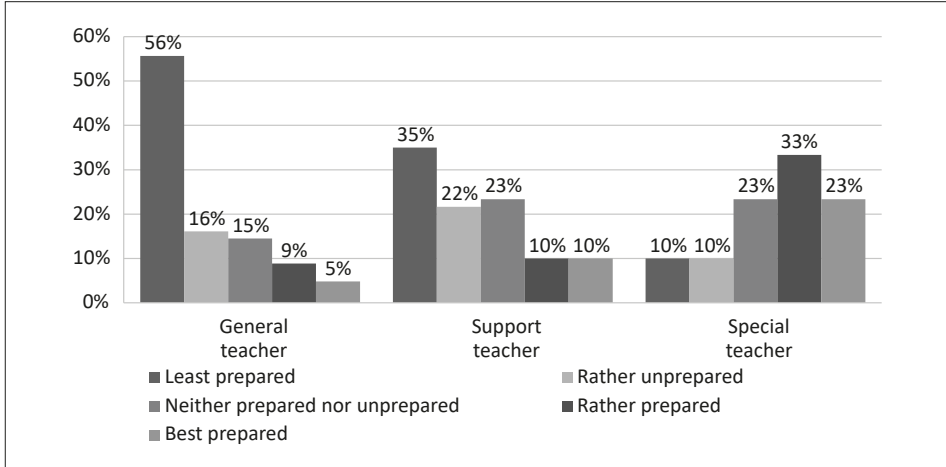
Figure 2. Preparedness for working with pupils with profound ID in the compared groups of teachers

The preparedness of teachers to work with pupils with high-functioning autism significantly divided the declarations according to the type of teacher ($\chi2$ (8) = 24,795; p <.001). An overwhelming (Figure 3) two-thirds of support teachers considered themselves to be best prepared to work with these pupils, among general teachers this opinion also prevails (32%). For special teachers 30% considered themselves to be best prepared although their most common answer (37%) was being rather prepared for such work.
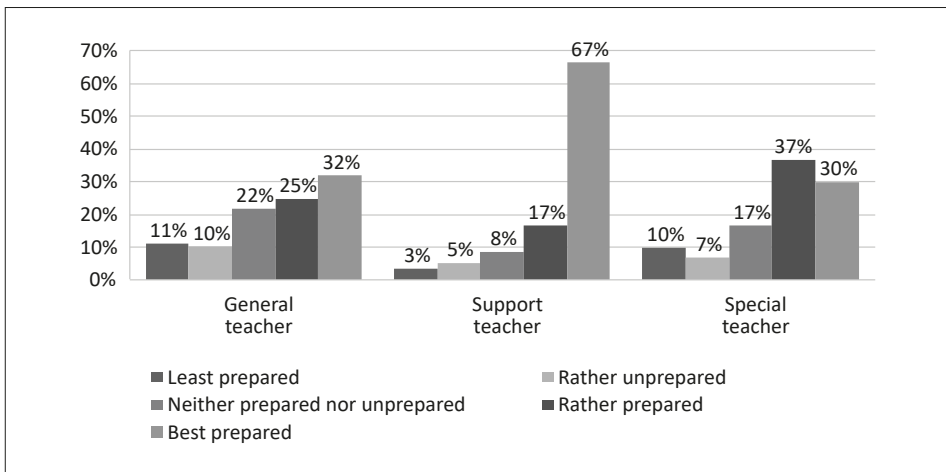

Figure 3. Preparedness for working with high-functioning students with autism in the compared groups of teachers

The preparedness for working with low-functioning autistic pupils also significantly differs in the respondents ($\chi 2$ (8) = 27,342; p <.001). The results showed (Figure 4) that general teachers have the most diverse assessment of their own preparation, almost a quarter have a neutral opinion, a slightly smaller percentage feels the least prepared for such work, a fifth consider themselves rather unprepared. The declarations of support and special teachers are similar, in the first group, opinions prevail about being best prepared (35%) for such work, while in the second group – about being rather prepared (38%).
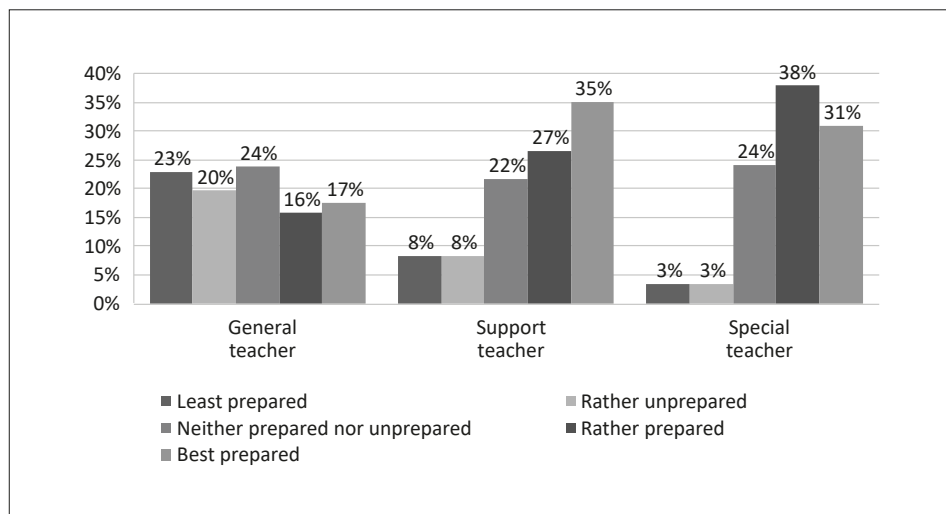

Figure 4. Preparedness for working with low-functioning autistic pupils in the compared groups of teachers

There were also statistically significant differences between the compared groups of teachers ($\chi 2$ (8) = 21,847; p <.01) in relation to pupils with significant physical disabilities. The results showed (Figure 5) that general teachers (41%) were convinced that they were the least prepared, only 9% of this group considered themselves best prepared for such work. Opinions of support and special teachers were similar, the most common answer being *neither prepared nor unprepared*. Among all types of teachers special teachers (24%) were most likely to declare having the best preparation.

Analysing preparedness for working with children with moderate and moderately severe hearing impairments ($\chi 2$ (8) = 15,688; p <.05), the obtained results showed (Figure 6) that, regardless of the type of teacher, the most frequently chosen answer was *least prepared*. What's more, none of the special teachers and just 10% of support teachers considered themselves best prepared.
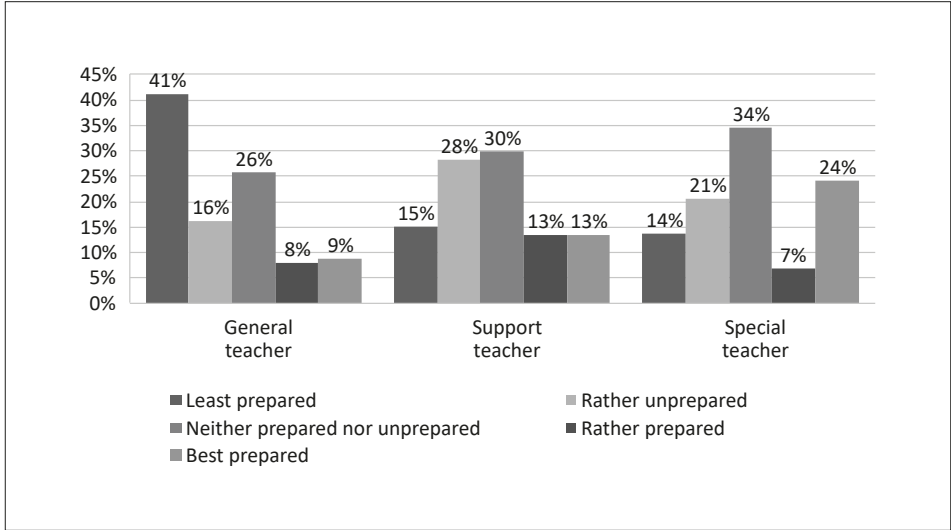
Figure 5. Preparedness for working with severe physical disability in the compared groups of teachers
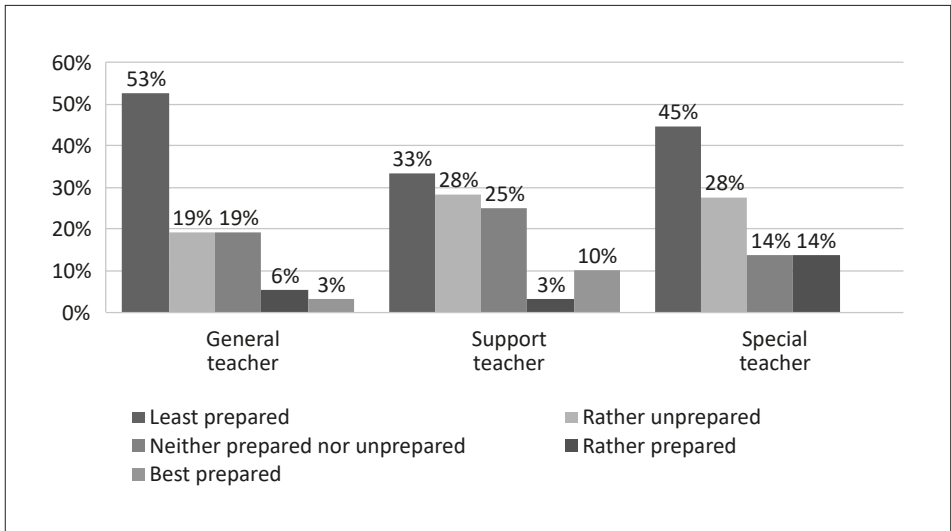

Figure 6. Preparedness for working with pupils with moderate and moderately severe hearing impairments in the compared groups of teachers

Differences in emotional intelligence and social competences between teachers with and without preparedness for working with pupils with SEN

Further analysis was aimed at determining the level of emotional intelligence and social competences depending on the preparedness for working declared by teachers. Statistically significant results are presented in Table 2. The division of teachers according to their declarations to work with children with mild intellectual disability showed statistically significant differences between the compared groups in the intrapersonal dimension of EI ($\chi2$ (2) = 6.133; p <.05; η2p = 0.020) and the level of social competences ($\chi2$ (2) = 11.505; p <.01; η2p = 0.046), as well as their individual dimensions: competences in intimate situations ($\chi2$ (2) = 13.855; p <.01; η2p = 0.057), social exposure ($\chi2$ (2) = 7.398; p <.05; η2p = 0.026) and requiring assertiveness ($\chi2$ (2) = 8.419; p <.05; η2p = 0.031). Teachers who feel prepared to work with students with this type of SEN scored higher on each of the scales listed. In the case of social competences in intimate situations, teachers declaring greater preparedness to work with students with mild intellectual disabilities also obtained significantly higher results than those who felt unprepared for such work. However, the comparisons for the intrapersonal dimension of EI did not reveal statistically significant differences. The probable reason for such a result is the small size of two (out of three) compared groups (n1 = 33, n2 = 35).

Another statistically significant difference occurred for the division of teachers in terms of preparedness for working with children with moderate and severe intellectual disabilities. The observed difference occurred in terms of the level of competences in situations requiring assertiveness ($\chi2$ (2) = 6.197; p <.05; η2p = 0.020). However, additional pairwise comparisons did not reveal statistically significant differences between the compared groups. The reason for obtaining such a result may be the small size of one (out of three) of the compared groups (n2 = 38).

Statistically significant differences were also obtained for the division of teachers in terms of preparedness for working with students with a profound intellectual disability. The difference occurred in the level of social competences occurring in situations requiring assertive behaviour ($\chi2$ (2) = 6.860; p <.05; η2p = 0.024). Teachers who consider themselves prepared to work with these students obtained higher results in this respect (M = 48.36, SD = 5.72) than those unprepared for such work (M = 44.47, SD = 7.63).

Table 2. Emotional intelligence and social competences of teachers with varying degrees of preparedness to work with students with mild ID (n1 = 33, n2 = 35, n3 = 143), moderate and severe ID (n1 = 72, n2 = 38, n3 = 103), profound ID (n1 = 127, n2 = 37, n3 = 44), high-functioning autism (n1 = 37, n2 = 34, n3 = 138), severe PD (n1 = 104, n2 = 58, n3 = 44).

Type of SEN	Variable[a]	Unprepared (1)		Neutral (2)		Prepared (3)		chi^2	p	η^2_p	Adj. p (post hoc tests)		
		M	SD	M	SD	M	SD				1 vs 2	1 vs 3	2 vs 3
MID	EI	20.28	4.66	19.49	4.27	21.17	4.01	4.139	0.126	–	–	–	–
	OTHERS	12.72	3.07	12.20	3.00	12.98	2.82	1.790	0.409	–	–	–	–
	I	7.81	2.24	8.11	1.79	8.73	2.10	6.133	0.047*	0.020	1.000	0.100	0.297
	SC	169.15	18.90	**161.97**	25.21	**177.71**	22.80	11.505	0.003**	0.046	0.845	0.278	0.004**
	Int	**41.82**	4.62	**40.59**	7.23	**44.71**	5.93	13.855	0.001**	0.057	0.005**	0.031*	1.000
	SE	51.15	8.97	**49.14**	9.29	**54.03**	8.85	7.398	0.025*.	0.026	1.000	0.367	0.038*
	A	45.45	6.53	**42.86**	7.07	**47.13**	7.27	8.419	0.015*	0.031	0.494	0.889	0.013*

Type of SEN	Variable[a]	Unprepared (1)		Neutral (2)		Prepared (3)		chi²	p	η^2_p	Adj. p (post hoc tests)		
		M	SD	M	SD	M	SD				1 vs 2	1 vs 3	2 vs 3
MSID	EI	20.39	4.38	20.37	4.80	21.24	3.80	1.876	0.391	–	–	–	–
	OTHERS	12.65	2.87	12.53	3.57	13.02	2.60	0.694	0.707	–	–	–	–
	I	8.34	2.10	8.50	2.08	8.66	2.13	0.778	0.678	–	–	–	–
	SC	169.40	23.63	173.68	22.24	178.00	23.29	4.832	0.089	–	–	–	–
	Int	42.44	6.59	4.29	5.66	44.44	6.10	4.491	0.106	–	–	–	–
	SE	51.49	8.43	52.97	8.38	53.89	9.64	3.198	0.202	–	–	–	–
	A	45.11	7.61	45.13	7.62	47.55	6.89	6.197	0.045*	0.020	1.000	0.108	0.149
PID	EI	20.92	4.14	20.50	4.64	20.62	3.86	0.448	0.799	–	–	–	–
	OTHERS	12.89	2.79	12.63	3.42	12.84	2.67	0.117	0.943	–	–	–	–
	I	8.57	2.06	8.47	2.10	8.24	2.15	1.055	0.590	–	–	–	–
	SC	171.50	24.26	172.11	21.78	181.23	20.96	5.858	0.053	–	–	–	–
	Int	43.13	6.35	43.39	5.45	45.09	6.47	3.432	0.180	–	–	–	–
	SE	52.15	9.21	51.76	9.58	55.32	8.19	5.031	0.081	–	–	–	–
	A	**45.47**	7.63	45.35	7.09	**48.36**	5.72	6.860	0.032*	0.24	1.000	0.035*	0.122

Type of SEN	Variable[a]	Unprepared (1)		Neutral (2)		Prepared (3)		chi^2	p	η^2_p	Adj. p (post hoc tests)		
		M	SD	M	SD	M	SD				1 vs 2	1 vs 3	2 vs 3
HFA	EI	19.83	4.14	21.03	4.45	20.97	4.10	2.339	0.311	–	–	–	–
	OTHERS	12.72	2.96	12.57	2.81	12.93	2.88	0.441	0.802	–	–	–	–
	I	7.78	2.02	8.71	2.37	8.63	2.00	4.622	0.099	–	–	–	–
	SC	**164.83**	20.32	174.56	25.53	**176.20**	23.13	6.328	0.042*	0.021	0.194	0.039*	1.000
	Int	**40.94**	5.31	42.88	7.15	**44.49**	5.96	10.838	0.004**	0.043	0.308	0.003**	0.760
	SE	50.24	9.57	54.00	10.02	53.30	8.73	3.507	0.173	–	–	–	–
	A	44.08	5.93	46.35	7.10	46.65	7.53	3.770	0.152	–	–	–	–

Type of SEN	Variable[a]	Unprepared (1)		Neutral (2)		Prepared (3)		chi^2	p	η^2_p	Adj. p (post hoc tests)		
		M	SD	M	SD	M	SD				1 vs 2	1 vs 3	2 vs 3
SPD	EI	21.17	3.88	19.79	4.06	20.91	4.69	4.787	0.091	–	–	–	–
	OTHERS	13.12	2.57	12.47	2.97	12.52	3.37	1.758	0.415	–	–	–	–
	I	8.64	1.96	7.95	1.98	8.73	2.37	5.161	0.076	–	–	–	–
	SC	171.39	23.64	173.40	20.69	178.47	25.57	3.510	0.173	–	–	–	–
	Int	43.13	6.21	43.82	6.11	44.13	6.49	1.121	0.571	–	–	–	–
	SE	52.31	9.06	**51.62**	7.77	**55.07**	10.67	6.881	0.032*	0.024	1.000	0.093	0.036*
	A	**45.03**	7.59	46.26	6.96	**47.91**	6.33	6.049	0.049*	0.020	0.872	0.043*	0.556

Note. EI – emotional intelligence; SC – social competences; Int – competences in situations of close interpersonal contact; SE – competences in situations requiring social exposure; A – competences in situations requiring assertiveness; MID – mild intellectual disability, MSID – moderate and severe intellectual disability; PID – profound intellectual disability, HFA – high-functioning autism, SPD – severe physical disability. Statistically significant differences are in bold typeface.

[a] The analysis excluded respondents with missing data on at least one of the scales.

* p <0.05, ** p <0.01, *** p <.05.

Preparedness for working with autistic children significantly differentiated teachers only regarding highly functioning autistic pupils; and concerned the general level of social competences (χ2 (2) = 6.328; p <.05; η2p = 0.021), and the level of competences responsible for the effectiveness of coping with intimate situations (χ2 (2) = 10.838; p <.01; η2p = 0.043). Teachers declaring that they are prepared achieved higher results (M = 176.20, SD = 23.13 and M = 44.49, SD = 5.96) than teachers who were unprepared for such work (M = 164.83, SD = 20.32 and M = 40.94, SD = 5.31) for both variables.

Statistically significant differences occurred in the division of teachers due to their preparedness to work with those with severe physical disabilities, these related to the level of competence in situations of social exposure (χ2 (2) = 6.881; p <.05; η2p = 0.024) and those requiring assertiveness (χ2 (2) = 6.049; p <.05; η2p = 0.020). Teachers who considered themselves prepared scored higher (M = 55.07, SD = 10.67) on the scale of social competences in intimate situations than teachers who assessed themselves as neither prepared nor unprepared for such work (M = 51.62, SD = 7.77). Moreover, prepared teachers also obtained higher scores (M = 47.91, SD = 6.33) in the level of social competences responsible for effective functioning in situations requiring assertiveness than teachers who assessed themselves as unprepared for such work.

Discussion

In addition to establishing whether there were differences in the self-assessment of teachers' preparedness to work with various types of SEN pupils, I wanted to determine whether teachers declaring different levels of preparation for work differed in their level of emotional intelligence and social competences.

The results of measuring emotional intelligence showed that the overall score and its two dimensions were similar. It was assumed that teachers working with SEN pupils would benefit if they possessed a greater level of EI, which include a deeper understanding of the other person and oneself. Although it seemed that teachers who were better prepared for such work received higher scores on scales measuring EI, the results did not confirm significant differences between the different types of teachers. The authors[31] argue that teachers "manage successfully cognitive and emotional challenges of working in different, sometimes difficult, environments". The results suggest that teachers have a similar level of EI regardless of preparedness. One may surmise that teachers, when compared with other professions, manifest the use of emotions and social skills more frequently.

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[31]   Day, Sammons, Stobart, Kington, Gu, *Teachers*.

Those emotions may impact upon teachers' mental health, job satisfaction and sense of self-efficacy[32].

The results showed differences in the scope of social competences of teachers working with different types of SEN pupils. In the case of the assessment of preparedness for working with mild intellectually disabled students, the highest results were obtained by those who assessed their preparation for such work as good, and the lowest results by those who were less prepared. Students with this type of disability are present in all types of schools in Poland: integrative, special and mainstream. Teachers working with this group have to ensure appropriate conditions for the student to implement the same core curriculum as able-bodied peers, using appropriate methods to stimulate emotional, social and intellectual development and adapting the educational process to their individual needs and possibilities[33]. Among mild intellectually disabled students frequently encountered in classrooms, many difficulties faced by their teachers are related to the student mastering the knowledge and skills related to all the subjects at school. The difficult process of acquiring knowledge results from limitations in cognitive functioning as well as in the process of thinking and taking practical actions[34].

It can be assumed that the substantive knowledge of teachers prepared to work with these pupils may be similar, although their assessment of their own personal and social competences may vary. When working with students with a mild intellectual disability, teachers have to demonstrate greater skills during individual work. The teacher should apply clear instructions for performing a task and refer to the child's experience[35]. It would seem that personal competences are as important as methodological competences.

The analysis carried out in relation to the declaration of preparedness for working with a group of pupils with moderate and severe intellectual disability did not show statistically significant differences. However, differences were noted at the level of the statistical trend in the overall score. The best prepared teachers had the highest scores on the scales, although the difference was not as significant as in the case of students with a mild intellectual disability. It may be assumed that when working with pupils with a moderate or severe intellectual disability, the teacher's substantive knowledge may be of greater importance than the teachers'

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[32]   Robert C. Pianta, "Classroom Management and Relationships between Children and Teachers: Implications for Research and Practice". In: *Handbook of Classroom Management: Research, Practice and Contemporary Issues*, eds. Carolyn M. Everston, Carol S. Weinstein, 685–710. Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2006.

[33]   Joseph Boyle, David Scanlon, *Methods and Strategies for Teaching Students with Mild Disabilities: A Case-Based Approach* (Belmont: Cengage Learning, 2009).

[34]   Rena B. Lewis, John J. Wheeler, Stacy L. Carter, *Teaching Students with Special Needs in General Education Classrooms*, 9th ed. (Boston: Pearson, 2017).

[35]   Michael L. Wehmeyer, Ivan Brown, Maire Percy, Alan Fung, *A Comprehensive Guide to Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities*, 2nd ed. (Baltimore: Brookes Publishing Co., 2017).

social competences. The specificity of educating these children is comprehensive, requiring integrated teaching and upbringing. It should be based on multi-sensory exploration of the surrounding world throughout the entire education process[36].

Additional analysis aiming to discover which type of teacher declared most preparedness showed that it was special teachers followed by support teachers. Pupils with moderate and severe intellectual disabilities constitute a relatively large number of pupils in special schools, fewer in integrative schools and very few attend mainstream schools, especially the older grades. Moreover, the obtained results showed that teachers' declarations regarding their preparedness are consistent with the type of preparation they receive during their studies. Special teachers take courses on the specifics of working with children with moderate and severe intellectual disabilities, similarly, although to a lesser extent, so do support teachers. The general teachers' courses do not contain subjects related to the specificity of education for this group of students.

A similar dependence is shown regarding preparedness for work with profound intellectual disabilities. The general teachers, but also support teachers, do not receive sufficient education on how to work with this group of pupils. Only special teachers receive adequate training during their studies. Analysis of teachers' social competences in relation to preparedness for working with students with a profound intellectual disability showed that there was one difference in the level of statistical significance, which concerns the assertiveness scale. Competences in this area were rated the highest by well-prepared teachers, and the lowest by unprepared teachers.

Students with this disability include children with vision, hearing, paresis or paralysis disorders or impaired or lack of perception, involuntary attention or low dexterity, which means that they need constant help. Their communication may take place by means of single and inarticulate sounds. Lack of the child's own experience determines the need to individualize the education process, and also poses many challenges for the teacher[37]. Therefore, it seems that working with students with profound disabilities requires getting to know oneself and one's own boundaries in helping other people. The analysis also showed two results at the level of the statistical trend in the overall scale of social exposure. The highest score was noted by those who indicated that they were well prepared for work, and low scores were more visible for those teachers who indicated lower preparedness.

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[36]   James R. Thompson, Valerie J. Bradley, Wil H.E. Buntinx, Robert L. Schalock, Karrie A. Shogren, Martha E. Snell, Michael L. Wehmeyer, Sharon Borthwick-Duffy, David L. Coulter, Ellis Pat M. Craig, Sharon C. Gomez, Yves Lachapelle, Ruth A. Luckasson, Alya Reeve, Scott Spreat, Marc J. Tassé, Miguel A. Verdugo, Mark H. Yeager, "Conceptualizing Supports and the Support Needs of People With Intellectual Disability". *Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities* 47 (2) (2009); Wehmeyer, Brown, Percy, Fung, *A Comprehensive Guide*.

[37]   Wehmeyer, Brown, Percy, Fung, *A Comprehensive Guide*.

The assessment of preparedness for working with students with high-functioning autism showed that statistically significant results were obtained on two scales – the overall score and the competence scale in intimate situations. The best prepared teachers received the highest results, and the lowest results to those unprepared. Students on the spectrum of autistic disorders are a very diverse group in terms of social, communication and intellectual functioning. They have trouble completing a task on their own, and are often unable to apply what they have learned in one situation to another. Their learning is directly related to a specific situation[38].

Therefore, helping pupils with this type of difficulty requires the ability to build a bond, establish a close relationship in which the teacher is trusted. They constitute a relatively large number of pupils in integrative schools, and slightly smaller in mainstream ones. A large number of low-functioning students with autism attend special schools, fewer attend integrative schools. In the case of students having autistic spectrum disorders who follow the core curriculum, it is easier to notice the need to support a student in a class where two teachers are working, a support teacher in addition to the general teacher. When working with a student in a special school, teachers with appropriate qualifications, i.e. mainly special educators, feel more prepared.

The analysis of the results concerning teachers' social competences in working with students with a severe physical disability showed two differences in the level of statistical significance, which were revealed in the scales of social exposure and assertiveness. The best prepared teachers rated their competences in these areas the highest. Teachers less prepared (those who considered themselves neither prepared nor unprepared) received lower scores on the scale of social exposure, and teachers unprepared received lower scores in terms of assertiveness. Physical disability adversely affects the educational chances of children and adolescents, since all school activities are associated with movement, which in these students is usually limited. Cognitive development is based on the child's own activity and independently acquired experience, of which disabled children are more or less deprived[39].

Support teachers and special teachers declare better preparedness for working with pupils from this group, which takes into account the child's disturbances at the level of locomotion, manipulation, body schema, spatial orientation and under-standing of spatial relations[40]. When working with a group of children, the teacher should have the skills to integrate a pupil with a disability into a peer group and

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[38]   Roger Pierangelo, George Giuliani, *Teaching Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders: A Step-By--Step Guide for Educators* (New York: Skyhorse, 2012); Lewis, Wheeler, Carter, *Teaching*.

[39]   Wendy L. Moss, Susan A. Taddonio, *Kids with Physical Disabilities and Challenge* (Minneapolis: Free Spirit Publishing, 2015).

[40]   Snaefridur T. Egilson, Rannveig Traustadottir, "Participation of students with physical disabilities in the school environment". *The American journal of occupational therapy* 63 (3) (2009): 264–272.

work with a diverse group in terms of psychosocial functioning. It is also important to set boundaries and support the child's independence, which shapes their attitude towards themself and other people.

The difficulties of hearing impairments encountered in the education process, may significantly affect the optimal achievement, from the point of view of the capabilities and specificity of hearing impairment, educational successes, independence and social adaptation[41]. Analysis showed that all three types of teacher, general support and special, had the highest percentage response stating that they were least prepared for working with students with moderate and moderately severe hearing impairment. These students require specialist support due to their specific educational needs, which are most often offered to them in special schools intended for them. Research shows that hearing impairment can have a negative impact on the child's schooling. A growing number of these children fitted with a hearing aid now attend mainstream schools[42].

Similarly, Marschark et al.[43] indicate that the average deaf or hard-of-hearing student, comes into and leaves mainstream schools with less content knowledge than hearing peers, even when they have highly skilled teachers and sign language interpreters, although there are researchers who disagree with this opinion[44]. Research shows that hearing impairment can have a negative impact on the child's schooling. A growing number of these children fitted with a hearing aid now attend mainstream schools[45]. So teachers note that these students may learn as much as their hearing peers, even if they come into the classroom with less content knowledge.

Conclusions

The research shows the situation of Polish teachers in the context of these systemic changes. The results were aimed at establishing the level of their preparedness for working with students with SEN and the level of their competences after the

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[41]   Marc Marschark, Peter C. Hauser, *How Deaf Children Learn: What Parents and Teachers Need to Know* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); Lewis, Wheeler, Carter, *Teaching*.

[42]   Martine Françis, M. Boukhris, Nathalie Noel-Petroff, "Schooling of hearing-impaired children and benefit of early diagnosis". *European Annals of Otorhinolaryngology, Head and Neck diseases* (2015): 132, 251–255.

[43]   Marc Marschark, Patricia Sapere, Carol Convertino, Rosemarie Seewagen, "Access to postsecondary education through sign language interpreting". *Journal of Deaf Studies and Deaf Education*, 10 (1) (2055): 38–50.

[44]   Thomas N. Kluwin, "Cumulative effects of mainstreaming on the achievement of deaf adolescents". *Exceptional Children* 60 (1993): 73–81.

[45]   Françis, Boukhris, Noel-Petroff, "Schooling": 132, 251–255.

changes introduced in the education system in 2017. The survey was conducted in the course of introducing changes to the standards of education of teachers, which were initiated in 2019, but also before planned changes in the organization and financing of inclusive education. It appears that those teachers with appropriate professional training feel prepared to work with pupils with various types of SEN. Teachers whose training did not contain information related to the specificity of teaching of pupils with SEN and who had little experience with the particular disability, and therefore had a limited opportunity to acquire appropriate competences, did not indicate a high level of preparedness for such work. The obtained results show that not all teachers are ready to work in a diverse group, implementing the inclusive model of education. Moreover, they indicate the importance of a carefully chosen study program and practical preparation of future teachers.

The use of the DINEMO and KKS tests has shown that well-prepared teachers score higher than those less prepared on various scales measuring their social competences. Perhaps the substantive preparation of the surveyed teachers was similar, but their high assessment of social competences meant that they also rated their professional competences higher. The feeling of being better prepared for the profession may result from higher social competences which, from the metric of preparation, should be developed during teacher education. In working with a student with varying degrees of cognitive, social and emotional difficulties, it seems also necessary to develop EI. The new program preparing Polish teachers to work with students with SEN includes in its assumptions the shaping of such competences. However, the methodology of teaching them seems to be important, so it would be worthwhile to conduct a study to check its effects on education according to the new standards.

S t r e s z c z e n i e: Celem tego badania było ustalenie, czy istnieją różnice między nauczycielami o różnych kompetencjach zawodowych (nauczyciel wiodący, nauczyciel wspomagający, pedagog specjalny) w ich ocenie własnego przygotowania do pracy z uczniami ze SPE, a także ustalenie, czy różnice w poziomie przygotowania są związane z różnicami w poziomie inteligencji emocjonalnej i kompetencji społecznych. Badanie zostało przeprowadzone w kontekście zmian w strukturze, organizacji i standardach systemów edukacji uczniów ze SPE oraz w kształceniu zawodowym nauczycieli w Polsce. Analizie przy użyciu Dwuwymiarowego Inwentarza Inteligencji Emocjonalnej (DINEMO) oraz Kwestionariusza Kompetencji Społecznych poddano 225 nauczycieli. Uzyskane wyniki pokazują, że nie wszyscy nauczyciele są gotowi do pracy z grupą zróżnicowaną, realizującą inkluzyjny model edukacji. Ponadto wskazują na znaczenie starannie dobranego programu studiów i praktycznego przygotowania przyszłych nauczycieli do zawodu.

S ł o w a k l u c z o w e: gotowość nauczycieli, standardy edukacyjne, rozwój zawodowy, inteligencja emocjonalna, kompetencje społeczne, uczniowie o specjalnych potrzebach edukacyjnych

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