

# An Analysis of Polish Teachers Attitudes towards Inclusive Education

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*The purpose of the study was to determine the relation to inclusive education involving teachers of both public and special schools. The study was conducted on a sample of 224 teachers. In the study, a diagnostic survey was used with the Scale for Measuring Attitudes towards Inclusive Education. The tool was designed for the purposes of this study and it was analyzed for internal consistency and reliability. A key for the attitudes' verification was established and it is based on a sten scale. The measured values were treated as the basis for ordering the material in the direction of the attitude.*

*The findings show the neutral attitude in the tested sample and there is no difference observed based on the type of represented school.*

*Keywords: educational inclusion, child with special needs, teacher, attitudes*

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## Introduction

The education system in the countries of the world emphasizes the importance of the individualization of teaching processes resulting from the diversity of the students' needs and the developing reality in which an adult must have personal resources that allow for flexible and effective functioning in a changing environment [Cambell, 1976; Sęk, 2003]. The purpose of modern education is to teach and educate the human being in a way that lays foundation for awareness and develops open attitudes to continuous work to deepen and broaden the acquired knowledge. Understanding individual differences is a key to open education. Equally important is aligning educational goals, methods and means of their implementation. By moving away from a system that classifies children into categories, including age, culture, language, health, and more, the present tends to create environments that are tailored to the needs of the individual rather than the masses. This is the idea of educational inclusion that does not divide, but connects. In a way, all students become special needs education participants,

where the basic premise is to allow and optimize the growth of each child according to his or her individual developmental rhythm. Report of the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education from 2009 notifies that the condition of proper implementation and development of inclusive education is primarily a permanent monitoring of the process, evaluation and verification of performance indicators, identifying weaknesses and introducing remedial interactions. The most important determinants of the inclusion system effectiveness are financial, legislative, structural and social factors, including the openness of all participants to equal opportunities and education. This equality of all persons was first expressed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 and recalled at a conference in Salamanca in 1994 (articulated in many other legal acts and declarations signed at international meetings aimed at spreading the idea to equal social asymmetries<sup>1</sup>). Equal opportunities' policy is possible when, however, not only laws and declarations require the creation of open, inclusive schools, but when it arises from social attitudes that promote the development of problem-solvers and can meet the individuals needs of students.

### **Attitudes of Teachers as a Determinant of Subjective Conditions of the Introduction and Implementation of Inclusive Education**

Since the first time in the scientific nomenclature *attitude* appeared and was defined, almost a century has passed. William Thomas and Florian Znaniecki in the 1920s for the first time used and described what an attitude is: by attitude, we understand a process of individual consciousness which determines real or possible activity of the individual in the social world [Znaniecki & Thomas, 1918: 19]. The work of these scientists show that it is not a state of mind — psyche. It is the attitude towards the surrounding reality, conditioned by actions resulting from predispositions and tendencies. Attitudes and values are recognized as the key to social theory, explaining the relationship between an individual and a social organization — culture. Polemic understanding of attitudes as actions of a specific structure, according to the scheme taken against the object, proposed Herbert Blumer. Author stated that human action is a process of interpreting existing social situations and responding to a specific, purposeful way of transmitting meanings to objects. As the key distinction of attitudes, Herbert Blumer has made the sentiments and feelings that a person holds towards an object. He referred to the affective nature of attitudes, which is a distinguishing feature for this notion, in addition to its symbolic character and ideological content [Blumer, 1936]. Further work enriched the understanding of attitudes. Zbigniew Boksański defined attitudes as actions directed to the object. He considered that not one but the set of attitudes shapes the attitude of the object. This phenomenon was defined as a polymorphism of attitudes. In addition, he pointed out in analyzes of other theorists that psychological propensity may lie at the root of the attitudes — e.g. confidence, risk, which in some way characterizes the attitude [Boksański, 2010].

Nowadays, the attitude is understood as the expression of the relation to the object on the continuum: rejection — acceptance. The specific type of rejection is a stereotype containing

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<sup>1</sup> *Kluczowe zasady służące promocji jakości w edukacji włączającej — zalecenia dla decydentów*, Europejska Agencja Rozwoju Edukacji Uczniów ze Specjalnymi Potrzebami. Denmark. Odense. 2009; *Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948*, UNESCO, 1948; *The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education*. UNESCO, Paris, 1994; *Deklaracja Lizbońska. Edukacja włączająca z punktu widzenia młodzieży*. Portugalia, 2007; *Pathways to Success. Integrating Learning with Life and Work to Increase National College Completion*. A Report to the U.S. Congress and Secretary Of Education Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance. Washington Dc. 2012.

the same components as the attitudes, but understood as a simplified way of perceiving reality based on the separated common features, creating collective conviction about the given object — named pseudo reality [Lippmann, 1922; Chlewiński, 1992]. This simplified way of perceiving reality arises, inter alia, based on nationality, identity, religion [Schaff, 1981] and prejudices, which are now understood as rejection — no acceptance of the object without reasonable grounds [Rosnow, 1972]. To this day, it was crucial to add components to the original attitude' definition. The emotional, cognitive and action component, and the comprehension of their integrity, form a complex construct [Zimbardo & Leippe, 2004; Oppenheim, 2004]. Moreover, it seems rational to accept the thesis that the attitude does not exist in itself. It is always the attitude towards the object [Marody, 1976], and that the attitude is dependent on many variables remaining in relation to its direction and intensity. Many scientists underline the relative stability of attitude [Rathus, 2004; Oppenheim, 2004], which does not imply its immutability, but the ability to shape under different impulses, events, environmental and social transformations, etc. In scientific studies, it is confirmed that the attitude of potential and real participants in equal education opportunity is one of the factors determining its success [Rakap & Kaczmarek, 2010; Ross-Hill, 2009]. Persons directly related to the functioning of the educational system include:

- a) Students and teachers;
- b) Support staff and authorities of the institution;
- c) Members of the educational community that are directly related to shaping attitudes, but not strictly forming a school environment.

The teacher is a particularly important link in the educational system. From teachers' attitude, their beliefs about the environment, the value-system, the preparation of the content and the ability to work with children, depends the quality of education. They convey not only the knowledge, but they shape the worldview and broadly understood attitudes towards reality. Teachers are directly responsible for the work that is consistent with the assumptions of the inclusion, so also for the correctness of adapting the methods, resources, infrastructure, working time and knowledge about each child. Teachers make themselves responsible for shaping the educational environment and the development of their pupils in this environment. The key to the success of inclusive education is the right attitude of teachers to the idea of equal opportunities. Some of the attitudes that promote the development of education for all are [Ahmmed et al., 2012; Waddington, 2010; Czyż, 2016; Jordan et al., 2009; Sucuoğlu et al., 2013]:

- a) The conviction of the right to include students with diverse needs in schools;
- b) Understanding the needs of pupils;
- c) Initiating activities for equal opportunities,
- d) The preparation students' own work in the inclusive system including self-improvement and understanding of their own imperfections and ongoing work on eliminating them.

Current research around the world has not provided an unequivocal response to teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education. For example, some of the study show negative attitudes towards inclusions [Moberg, 2003; Hammond & Ingall, 2003; Barnes & Gaines, 2015; Brackenreed, 2011; Doukeridou & Evaggelinou, 2011; Fuchs, 2010; Hwang & Evans, 2011; Schwarzer and Hallum, 2008], while some, positive — present results at the other end of the continuum [Barnes & Gaines, 2017 ; Cornoldi et al., 1998; D'Alonzo et al., 1997; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996; Smith & Smith, 2000]. Causes of the phenomenon should be sought in different research strategies, measuring tools, the range of measured attitudes, the size and

homogeneity of the sample (as shown above). It is also worth emphasizing the specificity of the education system in the country, the degree of its cohesion, experience, geopolitical situation, culture of the country and many others. Considering the above, there are variables that determine one or other attitude towards inclusive education [Brady & Woolfson, 2008; Moberg, 2003; Adeniyand et al., 2015]. Studies also show that attitudes towards the inclusion of children with special educational needs may depend on, among others, from gender [Ahmmed et al., 2012] the age of teachers and seniority [Barnes & Gaines, 2017; Chodkowska & Kazanowski, 2005], type of difficulty of the students or previous working experience with special educational needs children [Avramidis & Kalyva, 2007].

## **Material and Method**

### **Purpose, Research Questions and Hypotheses**

The aim of the research was to determine the attitudes of Polish teachers towards the inclusive education of disabled students. The research objective was to learn the direction of attitudes towards education involving teachers of mass and special schools. The following general question was asked: What is the direction of teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education?

Considering the following:

- a) An ambiguity in determining the direction of attitudes in the field of world research;
- b) Research conducted in Poland [Czyż, 2013];
- c) Knowledge about the organization of the educational system for students with special needs [Czyż & Gałuszka, 2017];
- d) The inhibiting influence of the prevailing system on the assumption of inclusion, despite the high teacher qualifications, positive attitudes towards people with disabilities but linked to the segregated education system in Poland [Farbairn, 1996; Gething, 1991; Czyż, 2013, Czyż, 2016], and sufficient school infrastructure,

the hypothesis was formulated that one of the reasons for this is the negative attitudes of teachers towards the strict idea of educational inclusion.

Hypothesis 1. The direction of teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education is negative; Attitude towards inclusion education is negative.

In addition, the multitude of defined variables have been notes and it is assumed that the attitude direction is differentiated by the type of educational institution represented by the teacher (special/public school).

Hypothesis 2. The direction of attitude is varied by the type of represented educational institution (special/public school).

### **Participants**

226 teachers from Polish educational institutions representing the whole country took part in the study. 224 received questionnaires were analyzed. Table 1. presents the characteristics of the tested sample including gender, age, seniority, type of represented institution, level of education, position, conducted activities.

The number of women in the sample is much higher (91,1%) than men (8,93%). The highest number of representatives is recorded for the age above 46 years, which, together with the range 36-45 years, composes 70,98% of the tested sample. The above data are consistent with the national report on monitoring the state and employment structure of teachers in educational

institutions, showing that the average age of teachers is 40,9 years, most of them are in the range 38 — 48. The employment structure regarding gender is 81 % of women teaching in schools. 85,71% of the sample are employees of public schools, where the report says that they constitute 79,6% of persons employed in Polish education. Persons with long working experience are also included in the sample, which corresponds to reports on the condition and structure of Polish teachers' employment [Zarębska, 2009].

**Table 1.** Characteristics of the tested sample

Characteristics	N	%	Combined categories	N	%
Gender					
Man	20	8,93			
Woman	204	91,07			
Age					
≤30	33	14,73	≤35	65	29,02
31 — 35	32	14,29			
36 — 40	43	19,20	36-45	84	37,50
41 — 45	41	18,30			
≥46	75	33,48	≥46	75	33,48
Seniority in years					
≤5	36	16,07	≤10	76	33,93
6-10	40	17,86			
≥10	148	66,07	≥10	148	66,07
Type of institution					
Mainstream	192	85,71			
Special	32	14,29			
The level of education					
Preschool	44	19,64			
Elementary school	73	32,59			
Secondary school	37	16,52			
Upper secondary school	35	15,63			
Secondary school/ Upper secondary school	4	1,80	More than one level of education	35	15,63
Preschool/ Elementary school	1	0,45			
Preschool/ Elementary school/ Secondary school	5	2,23			
Preschool/ Upper secondary school	2	0,89			
Elementary school/ Secondary school	20	8,93			
Elementary school/ Secondary school/ Upper secondary school	1	0,45			
Elementary school/ Upper secondary school	2	0,89			

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Position					
Teacher	156	69,64			
Pedagogue	68	30,36			
Contucted classes					
Preschool education	42	18,75	Preschool and early school education	58	25,89
Early school education	16	7,14			
Theraphy	68	30,36			
Subjective teaching	98	43,75			

### Instrumentation

The research was embedded in the positivist paradigm of quantitative strategy. The research was conducted in April — May 2017, in Polish educational institutions. The diagnostic survey method was used to measure teacher attitudes towards inclusive education. The tool was developed by the researcher. Substantive bases for the design of the tool have been provided by the guidelines of the European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education created with the support of the Directorate General for Education and Culture at the European Commission [Kyriazopoulou & Weber, 2009]. In addition, guidelines were included in the Ministry of National Education laws and regulations concerning the organization of the education system and the preparation of teacher's profession in Poland<sup>2</sup>. For the measurement of attitudes as an ordinal variable, a research tool was prepared. The tool is a complex measure, which has been sketched with varying proportions considering the three components of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral attitudes. A special orderly, estimated and dependable scale was developed, using the Likert's five-level item (1932), which expresses the degree of favorability of the tested persons in relation to the object, including the part of the statements consistent or opposite to the direction of the attitude [Mayntz et al., 1985; Babbie, 2003]. The scale examines the level of verbal reactions apart from non-verbal reactions. The original version of the tool was based on 48 assertions, exploring the most important aspects and considering the selected indicators of attitudes towards inclusive education, i.e.:

- a) The right to common teaching of healthy and disabled people;
- b) Preparation of the content and improvement of the teacher's competence and knowledge, considering the diversity of children needs;
- c) School environment preparedness for the implementation of joint education including infrastructure preparation;

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<sup>2</sup> Ustawa Ministra Edukacji Narodowej z dnia 7 września 1991 r. o systemie oświaty z późniejszymi zmianami (Dz. U. z 1991r. Nr 95).

Zarządzenie Nr 29 Ministra Edukacji Narodowej z dnia 4 października 1993 w sprawie zasad organizowania opieki nad uczniami niepełnosprawnymi, ich kształcenia w ogólnodostępnych i integracyjnych publicznych przedszkolach, szkołach i placówkach oraz organizacji kształcenia specjalnego (Dz. Urz. MEN Nr 9).

Rozporządzenie Ministra Edukacji Narodowej z dnia 21 lutego 1994 r. w sprawie rodzajów, organizacji i zasad działania publicznych placówek opiekuńczo — wychowawczych (Dz. U. z 1994 r. Nr 41).

Rozporządzenie Ministra Edukacji Narodowej z dnia 17 listopada 2010 r. w sprawie warunków organizowania kształcenia, wychowania i opieki dla dzieci i młodzieży niepełnosprawnych oraz niedostosowanych społecznie w przedszkolach, szkołach i oddziałach ogólnodostępnych lub integracyjnych, (Dz. U. z 2010 r. Nr 228).

- d) Undertaking activities to increase social awareness;
- e) Implication of introducing the inclusive education.

After carrying out research to check the internal consistency of the scale, 43 items were qualified for the definitive version used in the study. The consistency verification of the tool was based on analysis of the research carried out on a 30-person teachers' research group. Elimination of questions was made by using the approximation method, based on the power analysis of discriminatory statements. In the case of 20 questions, an inverse score was used. Finally, the high reliability of the Alpha-Cronbach scale was reached = 0.85. A weight scale was used to determine the value of questions for the final result, based on the data obtained from the target sample (the average number of points for each question was then used as weight). The next step was to develop a key to the questionnaire. The questionnaire was created on the normal distribution (z), determined based on the observed frequency of the fixed weight (Table 2).

**Table 2.** Table with established standards for the test tool

Weight average	Frequency	cf	adj cf	p	Centile	z	Stenes
<8,9	1	5	4,5	0,020	2	-2,053749	1
8,9	1	6	5,5	0,025	2	-1,959964	2
9,4	1	16	15,5	0,069	7	-1,483280	3
9,9	1	37	36,5	0,163	16	-0,982203	4
10,6	1	70	69,5	0,310	31	-0,495850	5
11,3	1	113	112,5	0,502	50	0,005013	6
12,0	1	156	155,5	0,694	69	0,507221	7
12,9	1	189	188,5	0,842	84	1,002712	8
13,8	1	210	209,5	0,935	94	1,514102	9
14,4	1	220	219,5	0,980	98	2,053749	10

For further analysis, a sten scale was used. For the interpretation of the attitude, the following key was used to change the sten' performance to qualitative (Table 3). The obtained results were used to organize the examined population in the direction of attitude.

**Table 3.** Interpretation of sten scale — key

Quality interpretation	
Direction of attitude — basic interpretation — basic key	Stens
Negative (low scores)	1-3
Neutral/ indifferent (average results)	4-7
Positive (high results)	8-10
Direction of attitude — interpretation of expanded, extended key	Stens

Extremely negative (low results)	1
Very negative (low results)	2-3
Negative (decreased results)	4
Neutral (avarage)	5-6
Positive (increased)	7
Very postivie (high)	8-9
Extremely positive (very high)	10

### Findings

In a 224-person sample, the sten analysis was performed regarding the key interpretation, which distinguished 3 types of attitudes: negative, neutral/indifferent and positive. Regarding the extended key following attitudes were described: from extreme negative to extremely positive (Table 3). The analysis was also made into subgroups of research related to the type of represented institution — public and special, despite differences in a sample size. A more numerous group of primary school teachers was randomly reduced to N = 48 participants. The non-parametric Mann-Whitney U Test was used to examine the significance of the compound.

In the summary of the results of general tests for N important = 224, it has been noted that Me = 5, Mo = 5, SD = 1,99, M = 5,49, SKE = 0,05, and K = — 0,29, as compared to the basic key and extended one, results indicate to the direction of neutral/indifferent attitude. The results of the research are presented in Table 4, Figure 1.

**Table 4.** Summary of research results on teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education

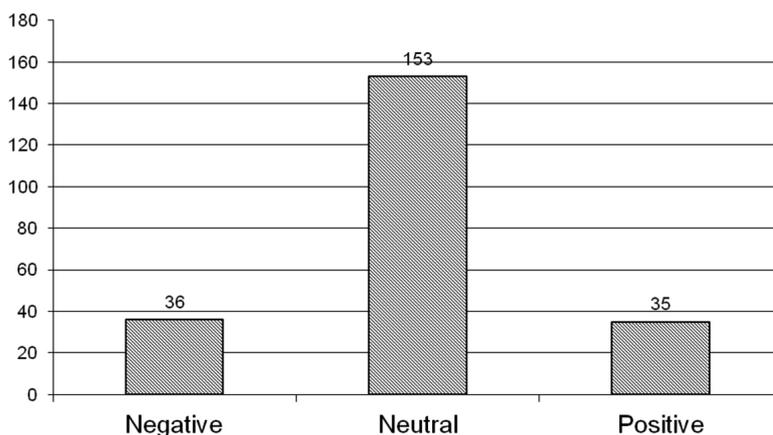
Interpretation of the attitude — the primary key	N=224	%
Negative	36	16,07
Neutral/ indifferent	153	68,30
Positive	35	15,63
Interpretation of the attitude — the extended key	N=224	%
Extremely negative	5	2,23
Very negative	31	13,84
Negative	34	15,18
Neutral/ indifferent	85	37,95
Positive	34	15,17
Very positive	28	12,50
Extremely positive	7	3,13

**Figure 1.** Graphical illustration of the results of the study for N important = 224

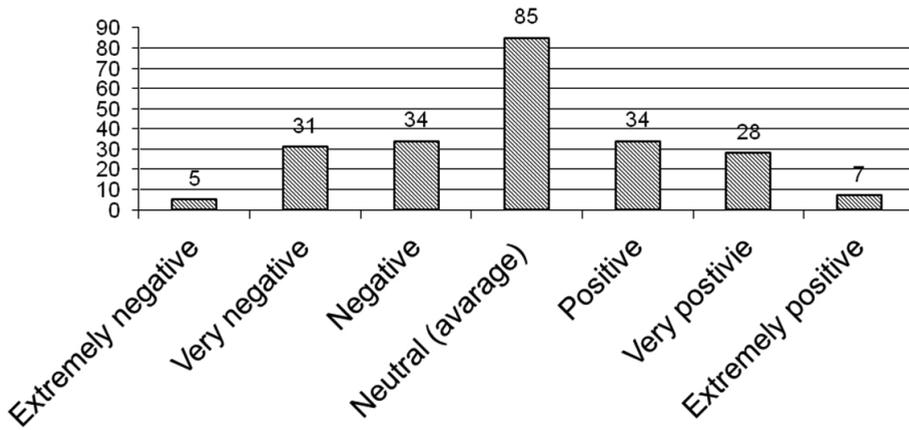


The following graphs present the distribution of the sample due to the direction of attitude. Results are consistent with the basic key interpretation (Figure 2) and with the extended key interpretation (Figure 3).

**Figure 2.** Summary of test results for sample N = 224, considering the basic key interpretation



**Figure 3.** Summary of test results for sample N = 224, considering extended-key interpretation

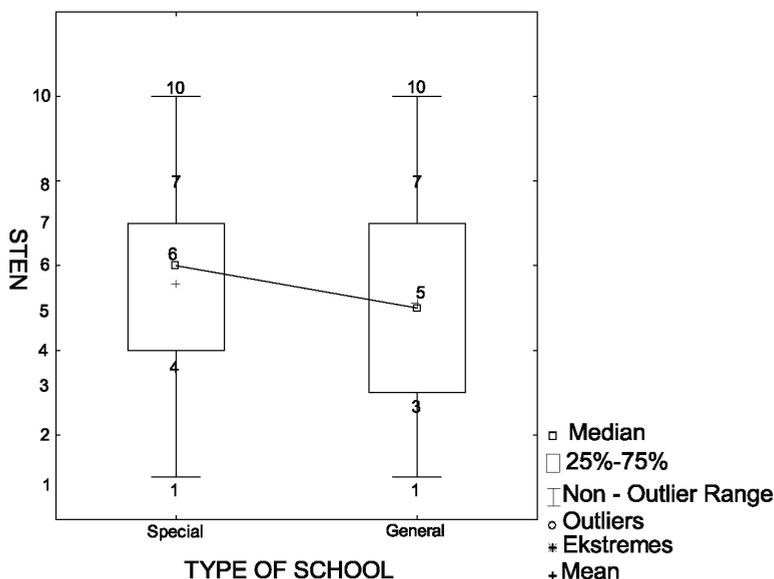


A comparison of the attitudes towards education involving teachers of special and public schools was undertaken. The results of the study have been presented in Table 5 and Figure 4. In the sample of special schools teachers' for N important = 32 value Me = 6, Mo = 6, SD = 2,21 with M = 5,56, SKE = -0,45, K = -0,28, in the sample of public school teachers' N important = 48 value Me = 5, Mo = 3, SD = 2,38 with M = 5,13, SKE = 0,4, K = -0,44. The rank analysis based on U Mann — Whitney Test showed the level of statistical significance is equal  $p = ,261$ .

**Table 5.** Summary of teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education including the type of represented school — special / public

Interpretation of the attitude — the primary key	N=32	%	N= 48	%
Negative	5	15,63	15	31,25
Neutral/ indifferent	21	65,63	26	54,17
Positive	6	18,75	7	14,58
Interpretation of the attitude — the extended key	N=32	%	N= 48	%
Extremely negative	2	6,25	2	4,17
Very negative	3	9,38	13	27,08
Negative	6	18,75	6	12,50
Neutral/ indifferent	9	28,13	13	27,08
Positive	6	18,75	7	14,58
Very positive	5	15,63	3	6,25
Extremely positive	1	3,13	4	8,33

**Figure 4.** Summary of research results on teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education considering the variable represented by the type of institution



### Interpretation of Research Results, Verification of Hypotheses

Based on the analysis of the research results, the attitudes of the sample to the inclusive education are considered indifferent/neutral. Both the median and the modal value in the overall sample is 5, which corresponds to the attitudes of the primary and extended key: indifferent/neutral. The distribution of the variable is in the normal distribution (Gaussian curve). In the research teachers' subgroups of public and special schools, differences in median values are noted (Me = 5 for the group of teachers in public schools, Me = 6 for the group of special schools), but using both keys in the interpretation the study indicates a neutral/ indifferent attitude. A different modal values have been noted as well. In the subgroup of public school teachers Mo = 3, and it is interpreted as a negative attitude with using the primary key and very negative with the extended key. For the group of special school teachers, the value Mo is 6, which indicates the direction of the neutral attitude. At the same time, however, the analysis of the U Mann-Whitney Test indicates that the type of represented institution does not differ from the study results ( $p = ,261$ ).

Considering the above, the hypotheses have been verified:

Hypothesis 1: The attitude direction of teachers towards inclusive education is negative; the attitude towards inclusive education is negative — the hypothesis is rejected. It is assumed that the attitude towards education involving Polish teachers is neutral/indifferent;

Hypothesis 2: The direction of posture is differentiated by the type of represented institution (special/public school) — the hypothesis is rejected.

It is assumed that the type of represented institution does not diminish the results of research on the direction of teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education.

## Discussion

In the tradition of Polish schools, the segregation-based system still operates as a leading way of schooling children with special educational needs. Despite the very good preparation of teachers for work, institution facilities and high-quality care and education, this is a separating and poorly prepared environment for preparing to live in society. The late 1990s brought the first attempts at introducing solutions that reduce social isolation, although the legislation on the teaching and education of children with special needs has existed since the early 1980s. Further legal acts have strengthened the idea of integrating disabled environments (the Education System Act 1991, Ministerial Ordinances of 1993, Ministerial Order 1993, 1994), but the real effects of introducing integration into Polish schools appeared in the late 1990s [Apanel, 2008]. Although the integration system is open to a variety of needs, it is still a segregation-based system in which children with special educational needs are divided into those who can participate in integration and those who must attend school obligations at special institutions. The organization of the integration environment is most often based on classes for children with special educational needs in the public facility or, more commonly, groups of children with special needs are organized in the classes of children with no disabilities. The beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century drew attention to the educational inclusion, which is something more than just integration. It is the idea of freedom, equality, and lack of divisions. In Polish legislation to this day, there was no legal act regulating the inclusion issue either from an organizational or financial perspective. There are laws, regulations and ordinances created, but they can only conducive to the possibility of the environment that adapts to the needs of each child. In Poland, where environment is so deeply ingrained and experienced with segregation, the idea of inclusion seemed to be almost impossible. Last few years and the challenging work of international circles have brought some noticeable results in the environment about the validity of the inclusive education system. However, the research does not confirm the negative attitudes of teachers to the idea of inclusion, but they are not optimistic either. The balance between positive and negative attitudes, the very few negative and extreme negative attitudes, and the magnitude of neutral attitudes are the possible expressions of actual indifference, lack of knowledge, or the image of indecision and slow change. On the one hand, the neutral attitude that determines the effectiveness process of introducing and implementing inclusions, does not contribute to the propagation of ideas, but it also does not inhibit it. In addition, the neutral attitude gives the opportunity to pursue even stronger actions that aim to understand the idea of inclusion or convince of its validity. The neutrality of attitude presupposes that a person without adequate resources cannot define his or her own position regarding the value of reality.

## Conclusions

The conclusions of this study have the application character. They will align:

- a) The existing knowledge on inclusions;
- b) The opportunities and ways of organizing work;
- c) More efforts to organize the educational environment in the idea of inclusion.

In addition, it is necessary to create an appropriate legislation governing educational processes of the inclusion and its funding. It seems necessary to revise the system of preparing teachers to practice in changing reality and to provide additional support for teachers

already working in the profession. The organization of courses, trainings, and the creation of information and experiences exchange for teachers should provide both declarative and procedural knowledge, changing neutral attitudes to positive, conducive connection. In addition, for the effects of working in an inclusion environment, care should be taken to spread public awareness of disability and its consequences, and not seeing it only through a medical model.

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