

Special Education of Blind Students in Albania

FLORENTINA BEJDULLAJ

Department of Pedagogy, Social Sciences Faculty
University of Tirana, Albania

Abstract:

The aim of this study is the examination of special education of children with visual impairments (VI) in Albania within the larger area of special education. The study enables the acquirement of a better knowledge of the Albanian reality regarding special education for children with visual impairments.

Nowadays, special education, as one of the main priorities within the general education area is in a constant evolving and improving process.

This study aims to identify the challenges and difficulties that children with vision impairment in Albania face during their learning process. The focus of the study is the views and opinions of the parents and special education teachers in Albania about the process of education of children with visual impairments.

Key words: special education, students with visual impairment, partial visual impairment, complete visual impairment, special school

INTRODUCTION

Special Education

Throughout the centuries, education of children with special needs is generally considered as a difficult and unique process separate from the general education process of other children.

All children have special traits and every child needs support in his growth and integration in education. Some children need specific assistance more than the others. This special and unique assistance, is otherwise known as special education.

Special education is a term often used in the discipline of education nowadays. However the term is commonly misunderstood, even among teachers. What special education consists of, who it is given to or who must have access to, or why it is needed, are issues that only some of the teachers, parents, school administrators or educators can correctly explain or be confident about (Daniel P. Hallahan Daniel P. Hallahan James M. Kauffman, 2005).

Sometimes visually impaired students need more than one educational program. They can be educated either in full-time classes or in special ones offered at local school districts, in special day schools, or private schools but also in specialized schools available at the students' residence (often referred to as residential schools for the blind people). Daily classes or schools which offer education on daily basis, mainly in large cities, include specialized programs which meet the needs of students with visual impairments and of children with multiple disabilities (Lewis & Allman, 2000). Most states have also a boarding school for visually impaired students.

Public education is one of the citizens' right in any society. The right to education for children and youth with special educational needs is implemented in varying degrees in different countries of the world. In many countries, access to education is still denied or limited on the basis of gender, race, social or economic status, and disability (Gary L. Albrecht 2006). For children with disabilities, the right to education is fulfilled only in recent decades. In Albania, the Law "On the Status of the Blind" Nr. 8098, dated 28.03.1996 (amended) Article 8, provides support for the education of blind people at all levels as well as for their training.

But, regardless of the level of laws, in reality the right to education does not meet the needs and abilities of students with

special needs, especially of children with visual impairments. The efforts to educate children with visual impairments made by the state structures that are responsible for such kind of education and also by families have been insufficient.

Nowadays, the concept of education and training has changed from the traditional concept "according to which one gets educated during a certain period of life in a systematic, precise and voluminous way", to the concept that "education continuous steadily throughout one's life."

Good quality education is distinguished from its organization, systematicness, goal-setting and the various objectives. In Plato's writings, the term "education" appears to have both a psycho-spiritual dimension as well as a physical one.

The concept related to children with special educational needs refers to those whose progress at school is hampered by various causes. Whether such a particular group of children need additional support, it depends on the extent to which the curriculum of schools is adapted to their needs, on the teaching organizations and on the fact whether some kind of stimulus is provided for more effective learning (ISCED, 1997). Students with visual impairments are students with limited opportunities not abilities.

THE HISTORY OF SPECIAL EDUCATION IN ALBANIA

Special education in Albania has a history of its own. It started in 1963 with the opening of the Institute of Blind and Deaf Students (IBDS), which after many years in 1993 was split into two separate institutions, one for students who could not hear and the other for students who could not see. They continue to function as separate even today, and are the only schools that provide special education in Albania.

A special school is that kind of school which provides education and other related services to children with

disabilities and which consists of teachers trained specifically to work with this special category of children.

The first two teachers who brought to Albania the experience they had gained in the Soviet Union about special education, were Mrs. Liri Panajoti who was specialized in the application of the "Braille" system for children with visual disabilities and Ms. Bedrije Tare.

Later, in the 70s to 80s a range of special education schools for children with mental retardation started to function in Tirana, Shkodra, Durres, Elbasan, Vlora and Korca, while in the 90s three day care centers were built for children with severe mental retardation in Shkodra, Librazhdi and Lezha(Nano. V, 2002). Currently in Albania, in support of education for children with disabilities, there are 2 institutes and 7 special schools in the largest cities of the country (Save the Children). Children in these schools are isolated from the rest of society.

It is worth-noting that during the period 1970-1990 there was a significant increase in the number of children enrolled in these institutions. This was due to an increase in the level of family awareness and of the special care provided by social, educational and health politics of the time. The parents of these children became more aware of the importance of their children's education, and in addition to that, the politics of the time took seriously into consideration the needs of these children, treating them not only from the perspective of the medical model, but also from the educational and pedagogical perspective([http://unmesoj.al/wpcontent/uploads/2015/07/Studi mi_Femijet_ANAD.pdf](http://unmesoj.al/wpcontent/uploads/2015/07/Studi_mi_Femijet_ANAD.pdf)).

The efforts for inclusive education in Albania started during the period of democracy when local organizations in cooperation with the financial fund of foreign donors initiated a series of projects. In these projects parents were considered to be good collaborators who would help to achieve satisfying results in the inclusion of their children (Nano, 2002.)

After 1990 the number of students attending these institutions, had a significant decline. This can be explained by the major changes that the country faced.

Unlike the two national institutes, which are under the administration of the Ministry of Education and Sports, the special schools function under the Regional Education Directorates of the respective districts. In general, buildings have good facilities. Although special school buildings are seemingly similar to the general school buildings, they have in fact more facilities for an easier access. However, there are numerous significant differences between the two categories of schools. Usually, special schools lack infrastructure, facilities and ease of access for students with disabilities.http://resourcecentre.savethechildren.se/sites/default/files/documents/inclusive_education_in_albania_in_albanian.pdf.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study is based on the qualitative research method, and falls under the category of case study. The reason for choosing this method is its appropriateness in relation to the circumstances in "Ramazan Kabashi" Institute of Blind Students, in Tirana, this being the only special institute for the blind students in Albania.

The method of this case study is in fact a methodological procedure in which the relevant case is studied, in order for it to be explained to its state, genesis and original projection. (Prof. Dr. Sci. Mujo Hasković Sarajevo / Pristina in 2006 *Methods and Techniques of Research in Psychology*) (<http://www.slideshare.net/NasufGrmizaj/mh-psikologj>)

The focus of this study is a special and unique case of a special institute, which is the only special school for the blind in Albania since 1963.

The sample selected for this study consists of parents of children with visual impairments and teachers who provide

special education for children with VI (Visual Impairment). Actually this was the only sample in my disposal since in Albania there are no other schools or institutions for children with visual impairments.

The reason why I chose the respective method lies in the fact that it was apparently the most appropriate method to accomplish the main goal.

Important aspects of the selected method of study are literature reviews, direct observations inside the institute, questionnaires with open- ended and close – ended questions such as semi-structured interviews with parents and teachers of the Institute of Children with Visual Impairment.

The Study population and the selected sample

The study population consists of parents and teachers of children with VI studying at the Institute of Children with Visual Impairment (ICVI) in Tirana. The study was based on a sample of 80 persons for the questionnaires, more specifically 63 parents and 17 teachers, as well as 16 parents and 8 teachers for the semi structured interviews.

The sample selected for the questionnaires consisted of parents of children with visual impairments.

The main criterion for the selection of participants was being a parent of a child with visual impairment.

The data collected from the questionnaires showed that the sample in the study included all parents of the children in the institute. Some information about the selected sample of parents for the questionnaires follows below:

- The participants in the study were from different areas of the country
- The sample for the questionnaire consisted of 63 parents aged 27-50 years old, 37 women and 26 men

Regarding the employment of parents who were surveyed, 27 of them were unemployed, 32 of them were common employees, and only 4 of them had intellectual jobs.

Parents' questionnaire was composed of 41 yes/no questions:

The sample selected for the interviews with parents of children with visual impairments.

Data collected from the interviews showed that the sample of the study, although there was the common criterion of being a parent of a child with visual impairment, differentiated by other specific features in terms of location, sex, age, civil status, education and employment.

Some information about the sample selected for the interviews with parents:

- The participants in the study were from different areas of the country
- The interviewed sample consisted of 11 mothers and 5 fathers.
- The age of the participants in the study sample ranged from 30 to 45 years old.
- The marital status for 16 parents participating in the study was: 12 parents were married, 3 were divorced and 1 was a widow.
- In terms of education only one of the parents was highly educated, 8 parents had completed secondary education and seven others had finished only elementary education.
- The data showed that 8 participants in the study were employed and 8 others were unemployed.

The interview contained 15 questions.

The sample selected for the questionnaires to teachers of children with visual impairments.

The questionnaire process was conducted by giving out questionnaires to teachers and the questionnaires were collected after a few days.

From a total of 21 teachers who teach at the Institute of Blind Students, only 17 teachers (13 women and 4 men)

participated in the survey and answered the questionnaires designed for the teachers of students with visual impairment.

Persons involved in the study were the teachers of different subjects who practice already worked in the institute.

Data obtained from the semi-structured interviews with teachers, were processed and analyzed using the method of coding.

Teachers' questionnaire was compiled of 29 questions.

The sample selected for the interviews with teachers of children with visual impairments.

Another very important instrument in the methodology of this study were the semi-structured interviews with 8 teachers (all females) working at the Institute of Blind Students in Tirana.

The interview contained 15 questions. All the interviews with teachers serving as sample of the study were conducted at the premises of the Institute for Blind Students in Tirana. The questionnaire process was handled face to face.

Data collected from the survey in the institute

The goal of data analysis in this study has to do with special education at the Institute of Blind Students in Tirana.

In Albania special education for children with visual impairments is made possible only at the Institute of Blind Students in Tirana. The Institute already has a semi-centenarian tradition.

According to the observations made by the researcher at the premises of the special school for blind students, the following data was collected:

- Out of 63 children, 36 were boys and 27 were girls.
- The age of children with visual impairments ranged from 6 to 18- year-old, the dominant age being 10 to 12.
- The first group of children had 16 students and the second group had 47.
- Their time spent in this institution ranged from 1 year to 10 years.

- Fifteen children at the Institute were non-resident, 48 were resident.
- 27 children were living in difficult economic conditions and 26 had average economic conditions
- 54 children had both parents and 9 of them were children with one parent only or their parents had been divorced.

The social-economic level of these families was below the minimum level of living and they lacked information about the problems related to visual impairment. Education at an early stage of life is crucial in child development. Due to lack of information on the part of their family regarding blindness and its treatment, children, when they first came at the Institute, lacked perception, imagination, motion and orientation within the premises of the Institute. The work with visually impaired children involves special commitment since within this category, there are children with a zero Vizus and mental retardness, or with a zero Vizus and physical disabilities, children with autistic elements, or children with partial visibility and various physical or mental problems, epileptic children who are not able to take care of themselves etc. Failure to integrate children at a young age, because their family chose to isolate them from the rest of the society or because of their parents' self-judgment, or because of their refusal by public institutions and society's rejection in general, brings lots of challenges throughout the entire learning process and education.

Considering the situation at the Institute which is also a boarding school with 24 hour service, new ways and further motivation is required to fulfill the needs of the groups mentioned above. During the learning process there are three groups of children within a class, those with zero Vizus, the second group of children with partial visibility and children with IEP (Individual Education Plan) who require special engagement on the part of teachers who must prepare

supporting aids for their curriculum, draft special plans and provide professional assistance for a prolonged time period. The assisting staff faces various difficulties in the practical implementation of the whole integration process and in children's self service. Orientation, movement and self-service are vital processes that require maximum commitment by the assisting staff. There are children who cannot control their personal needs or are not guided to perform the respective process in the right place. There are also children who need medical control within 24 hours, children who do not eat by themselves, children who cannot wash themselves, or get dressed by themselves. Hence, in order to fulfill the above needs correctly, professionalism, correctness and time is needed to be provided by all levels of the institution in order to enable them and integrate them as healthy people in our society. The teaching staff, teaching assistants, support staff, nurses, caregivers, kitchen staff, cloakroom staff, sanitation, psycho-social service, psychologists and social workers carry out their work as part of a chain operation of educational, learning and life processes at "Ramazan Kabashi" Institute.

According to the observations at the Institute of Blind Students, the researcher confirms that students assimilate the same educational program in the same way that the pupils of 9-year education system do. Besides general education programs they can easily learn also additional subjects such as writing or reading their language in the Brail alphabet, the use of tiflo-pedagogical aids, orientation, the use of special computer programs related to vocal synthesis, special musical programs as well as professional classes.

Direct survey concludes that children are unable to get dressed by themselves, because many of them lack the respective practice. This data is proved by semi-structured interviews with parents, who claim that they find it easier to dress children rather than to exercise him or her to dress himself/herself.

Observations at the institute showed that the teachers of the institute did a very good job but the results of students were not in their highest level especially in the self-service aspect. Along with students with visual impairments there were other disabled children with other disabilities and this posed a harder challenge to the staff, not to mention the shortage of tiflo-pedagogical aids, the lack of gym and spaces for free-time activities, and lack of a specialized staff for teaching through individual special programs for more qualitative results in the process of education.

Residence to the students is provided from first to ninth grade while in the first grade there was also a 4- year old preschool child.

The area consists of two buildings in separate spaces. In the first building, on the first floor, there is the secretary, the cafeteria, the kitchen, the first grade class and other offices. On the second floor, there is the dormitory which has separate space for girls and boys, the director's room, the cloakroom and the psychosocial service center. Behind this building there is a large football field. Next, it is the school building which has two floors: on the first floor, there is the teachers' room and on the second floor there are grades 2 to 9 as well as the laboratories of biology, mathematics, and music. The place is very clean and functional.

The Institute has good facilities for the implementation of various teaching practices. It possesses labs and cabinets for biology, music, language and mathematics. The number of students in each class varies from 6 to 8 students with VI (Visual Impairment) and other with extra disabilities. One of the major deficiencies in the institute are the insufficient tiflo-pedagogical devices. Each student needs personal tiflo-pedagogical equipment. Students still use the plate and Bizet, and only few of them are equipped with a Brail typewriter. Also there is lack of large font books, colored primers, contemporary electronic gadgets and gyms for physical education classes.

Data collected from the questionnaires to teachers

This chapter will present the most important findings about teachers' attitudes, successes and failures during their daily work in classes with VI students.

The questionnaires designed for teachers contained open-ended and close-ended questions thus giving the opportunity to the participants to freely express their opinions on the issues involved in the survey.

When asked whether they had attended workshops or other training programs before, 11 teachers answered that they had attended workshops on serious visual problems, 1 teacher answered that he had attended workshops on motion disability, 2 teachers had attended workshops on learning disabilities and 3 of them had attended general workshops.

On the question run by the researcher whether they had recorded students' progress, 1 teacher answered: rarely, 2 teachers: several times, 9 teachers: often, 4 teachers: always, and 1 teacher did not answer the question.

When teachers were asked about the implementation of technological aids in their educational program (equipment, computers, Braille typewriters for each student) 11 teachers answered: always, 4 teachers answered often, 1 teacher answered: several times and another very rarely.

Regarding the question about the kind of relation which existed between teachers and parents, 11 teachers responded that it was a very good relationship and 6 of them responded that it was just a good one.

Data collected from semi-structured interviews with teachers

During the interviewing process with teachers, like it happened also with parents, a relationship of trust was established by the applicant who introduced and explained the study and the interviewing procedures even further, and also answered their questions.

When asked what they thought about special education in Albanian general and the more inclusive one in specific,

almost all of them responded that special education is essential in the present conditions in Albania, whereas the all-inclusive one, although they were for it, they were afraid that there are not any facilities yet, especially for children with visual impairments. More specifically, they claimed the following:

“Special education (for visually impaired students) in Albania, particularly in our institute is at a good level, both with regard to teaching environments, the educational process and training methodologies for inclusive education. As far as the inclusive education is concerned, I am for it, but in my opinion there are no appropriate conditions provided yet for children with visual impairment.” (Institute of Visually Impaired Pupils [IVIP] *Teacher*, CU, 24)

“In a country like Albania, special education is a necessity for people and the only possible one given the infrastructure conditions. Whereas inclusive education would not assist the progress of children with visual impairments.” (IVIP *Teacher*, CU, 9)

“Inclusive education is a requirement of our time for the integration of disabled students in society. But in Albania, there is still no appropriate infrastructure for such an education to be practically effective.” (IVIP *History and Geography Teacher*, 18)

“Special education is a necessity for the particular specifications of these children. Inclusive education sounds impossible due to infrastructure problems.” (IVIP *Music teacher*, 8)

“Special education is imperative given the present conditions whereas education of students with Visual Impairments might occur at a later time.” (IVIP *Teacher* CU, 10)

“One of the best things in this impoverished country is the existence of such a school only for students with visual impairments.” (IVIP *Assistant teacher* 1)

“The existence of special education is a necessity at present. Perhaps later, inclusive education would work better.” (IVIP *Assistant teacher*, 6)

In addition, teachers claimed that their role in the education of children with VI was very important.

“My role as a teacher in the treatment and education of children with visual impairment involves much respect and love for these children who are treated as equal among equals.” (IVIP *Teacher*, CU, 24)

To the question regarding the problems that the teachers usually face in the education of children with visual impairments, teachers mentioned the infrastructure problems, the lack of teaching materials and the inappropriate textbooks.

“In summary, some of the problems related to the education of children with visual impairments are:

- Insufficient didactic materials, especially for the acquisition of abstract concepts and in the practical work domain.
- Insufficient space for the free-time activities
- Lack of gym for Physical Education classes.
- Lack of assistant staff, for students following special educational programs and for the afternoon study hours.” (IVIP *History and Geography Teacher*, 18)

“Some of the problems in the education of children with visual impairments are caused by lack of inappropriate infrastructure, lack of teaching aids, inappropriate text materials, etc” (IVIP *Assistant teacher*, 6)

“Our institute basically possesses most of the necessary equipment to help children. I would prefer the primer book to be colored since we have a color monitor.” (IVIP *Teacher*, CU, 24)

To the question whether in the Institute there are students with visual impairments only or even students with other disabilities, the teachers answered that for the moment there

are multi-disabled students at the institute but, as they claimed, they are not totally in favor of this fact. To the question whether they agree or disagree with this fact, teachers responded in different ways: Half of them agree, while the other half does not agree, claiming that having a school of multi disabled students is not helpful for any of them. They should be educated and treated in more specialized institutions otherwise there should be additional staff to work with these students at the particular institute.

“The institute has students with visual impairments plus other limited abilities and I am in favor of this because these children have the right to education and to be supported by the whole multi-disciplinary group in our school.” (IVIP*Teacher*, CU, 24)

“But there are other students in our institute with limited abilities, in addition to the ones with visual impairments. Teachers use special educational programs to work with them and their work has turned out to be very successful. Since these students have visual impairment, they can certainly study here in spite of the other disabilities they possess.” (IVIP*Assistant Maths Teacher*, 1)

“In our institute, there are students not only with visual impairments, but also with other disabilities. I am not in favor of this situation because most of the time students miss classes, they have deficiencies in their learning, and their motor movements or impulsive behavior harms the others.” (IVIP*Music teacher*, 8)

“Yes, there are also students with multi-disabilities besides visually impaired students in our institute. Taking into consideration the facilities and conditions provided in our country, it would be better if additional staff was hired to work with these students, although the best thing for them would be to be educated in more specialized institutions according to their disabilities.”(IVIP*History and Geography Teacher*, 18).

To the question whether they were involved in the designing of special curricula for students, all teachers responded with a 'no' although they strongly wanted to have been asked for their opinion when the special curricula for students with visual impairments was designed.

“No. In our institute we use the curriculum approved by the Ministry of Education in Albania and as specialist teachers, we try to adapt it to the needs of children with visual impairments.” (IVIP*Teacher*, CU, 24)

“No, we do not participate in the development of the curricula, but it would be very important if we were asked to give our opinions on the process.” (IVIP*Teacher* CU, 10)

But to the researcher's question whether they had been involved in the drafting of the Individual Educational Programs (IEP), when it was a necessity on the occasion of a student with visual impairment, all teachers responded positively.

They answered also positively to the question whether individual or team counseling sessions were conducted with the parents of the children at the institute.

“Yes, every quarter.” (IVIP*Teacher*, CU, 9)

When teachers were asked to describe the relation between the parents and the teaching staff in order to meet the needs of children within the institute, they responded that most parents are generally *not* very cooperative and see the institute simply as shelter and not as a domain of education.

“The teaching staff does its best to meet the students' needs, but their parents should be more cooperative with teachers, and not so indifferent. They must not see the school as a shelter for their disabled children, they should first of all consider this place as a school, a domain of education and culture.” (IVIP*Music teacher*, 8)

To the question regarding the causes that prevent parents to cooperate with teachers and vice versa, all teachers listed the

following factors: Geographical location, distance from their hometown, economic and social causes, cultural and educational level, etc.” (IVIP*Music teacher*, 8)

To the question made by the applicant about the teachers’ suggestions for a better cooperation between teachers and parents in the future, almost all teachers required to have a stronger cooperation with parents, while when parents on the other side, were asked the same question, unlike teachers, they were all satisfied and did not see any obstacle to cooperation.

“It would be useful if training was provided for parents of children with visual impairment, so that they became more aware of their role in the education process of their children and in their life.” (IVIP*History and Geography Teacher*, 18).

“Each parent should get informed on daily basis about the progress of their children in the education process. And possibly to be a member of the multi-disciplinary staff who designs the special education programs for meeting his child’s needs.” (IVIP Teacher, CU, 24).

To the question regarding any problems with the services offered currently in the school or outside it, almost all teachers responded that more should be done for children’s self-service aspect.

“They should get more involved in self-service practices like for example in the cafeteria, in the dormitory, in the school yard, etc.” (IVIP*Teacher CU*, 10)

When teachers were asked about the policies which should be set up by the state and community to support these children, almost all teachers responded that a lot needs to be done in the areas of infrastructure, community awareness, integration and inclusion of this category of students.

“Greater funding towards their education and integration; specialized training sessions for the staff and parents; evocation of the best global practices in this regard.” (IVIP*History and Geography Teacher*,18).

“The environment should be adapted in accordance to the needs of visually impaired students. A good job is done in this direction at the center along Lapraka Highway Street. Also the public services should also be provided in Braille.

(IVIP Assistant Mathematics teacher, 1)

To the free question whether they wanted to add their opinions on any subject or to mention any other problems not addressed during the interview, teachers did not respond. One of the teachers made a simple generalization for the institute children saying that they have extraordinary gifts, while another teacher suggested the following, “To children with visual impairments, urban service is provided abroad every 2 weeks in order for them to go to their families and this is achieved in cooperation with the respective municipalities. My desire is that this is made possible in our country as well so that our children have such a service provided too. *(IVIP Teacher, CU, 24)*.

Data collected from the questionnaires to parents

This chapter will present you with the most important findings regarding the attitudes and the difficulties encountered by parents in the process of education, inclusion and integration of their children inside the school and outside it. The results represent the most frequent attitude dynamics of parents in relation to the surveyed issues. They clearly express the children's relationships within the school community at their discretion. According to the data arising from questionnaires to parents of children with visual impairment, the following results are available:

- 24 parents have only primary education,
- 36 parents have high school education
- 2 parents are university graduates.

When parents were asked about the frequency of attendance at the meetings between parents and teachers;

- 20 parents responded that they meet with teachers each month
- 19 parents responded that they meet every week
- 11 parents responded that they meet on daily basis
- 13 parents responded that they meet very rarely

On the question of whether teachers are able to find solutions to any conflicts or problems that a child has with his classmates;

- 58 parents responded positively
- 5 of them negatively

Likewise, on the question of whether teachers can help the children to manage his own "difficult" feelings like (anger, fear, etc.)

- 58 parents responded positively
- 5 of them negatively

As the responses to the questionnaire revealed, 5 parents were dissatisfied with the overall work of teachers at the institute.

Regarding the employment of the surveyed parents, 27 of them are unemployed, 32 are ordinary employees, and only 4 of them have intellectual jobs.

Data from the questionnaires show that only 2 parents are university graduates, 36 of them have finished high school and 24 of them have only primary education. So, data demonstrates that the social and educational level of parents leaves much to be desired.

The data collected from surveys of parents helped us to interpret the results of the study.

Data collected from semi-structured interviews with parents

Semi-structured interviews include a series of open-ended questions referring to topics that the researcher wants to explore (Hancock, B. 1998).

Data obtained from semi-structured individual interviews with parents, were processed and analyzed using the method of coding.

All interviews with parents in the study were performed in the location of IVIP in Tirana.

In these interviews the parents say it is not easy to cope with a child with visual impairment, or with children with other disabilities.

“My daughter is in the 9th grade and she has both epilepsy and sight impairments. Her situation got worse when she saw her father dying in front of her eyes due to an electric shock. My problems and concerns are countless, but what concerns me most is my little girl. On the other side, doctors suspect that I suffer from serious stomach illness for which I get medical assistance but I am afraid I won’t be able to cope with all this (and her eyes filled with tears).I know that my daughter causes a lot of trouble to the staff here because she gets really nervous at times.” (Tirana, 16, 44, *Mother*)

“I have two children at the institute, one in the sixth grade and the other in third grade. They have sight impairment so I brought them to this institute. I am a divorced and unemployed mother. Only my heart knows how much I have endured and how much effort I make to face the hardships of life. Although the staff at the institute has helped me a lot and I would like to thank them over and over again, my problems do not end. Oftentimes I miss my children a lot, and I hire a driver to collect them from the institute at times to bring them home since I cannot go to visit them by myself.” (Lezha, 10,12,42, *Mother*)

Almost all parents confessed they were satisfied with the service provided for their children in this special institute.

“My son is in the 9th grade and he has been staying here for 10 years here since when he was at preschool. He feels that he is home here. I live in Tirana and bring my child every day at the institute for his classes, and we are all pleased with the work done here.” (Tirana, 15.42, *Mother*).

“I bring my child every day at school and I see great progress in him compared to the school where he was before.” (Tirana, 8, 44, *Father*).

“The beginning was very difficult for my son, because in addition to visual impairment, he has epilepsy as well, but the work they do here through the Individual Education Program has helped my child to adapt and make remarkable progress day by day. Before he was taught through Braille system, but he could not learn well enough and thus he has not acquired the necessary information, although he is in the fifth grade now. However I hope that things will get better and his performance in classes will improve.” (Fier, 11.36, *Father*)

“My son has had meningitis and is also visually and mentally impaired. It is four years now since I first brought him here and he is progressing more than before; he can write and read. The individual educational program has helped him a lot in this direction.” (Elbasan, 14.35, *Mother*).

Asked about special education and the inclusive one, most parents of children with partial sight impairments responded that inclusive education would be much better since their children would be closer to their neighborhoods, but this seemed to them far impossible to be achieved. Whereas parents of children with more severe sight impairments considered the institute and all the other institutions of the same kind to be very helpful. They even suggested that it would be good if a high school existed also for this category of children.

“I totally agree with children being incorporated in the inclusive education not only because my child would not live far away, which really worries me, but also because when staying among other abled children, my child would learn from them. But for this, we need to have specialized teachers and teaching aids and tools to facilitate his education.” (Elbasan, 14, 35, *Mother*).

“I would very much like my child to be close to me. He would attend the school which is in our neighborhood but there are no textbooks or appropriate tool sat his school to match his disabilities and except that his classmates would tease him.” (Barbullush, Shkoder, 10 x *Mother*).

“Every parent loves his child to be close to home, but it was almost impossible for my children to attend normal schools because they did not have the appropriate books and teaching aids and every day I remember them coming home in tears because their friends would make fun of them.” (Mamurras, Lezha, 10,12,42, *Mother*).

“My daughter feels much more comfortable at the institute rather than in the other school since there she was mocked by her classmates.” (Tirana, 8, 44, *Father*).

“Until now I've had my daughter here at the institute but now that she is finishing school since she is in the 9th grade, I am not sure in which school I should take her since there are no Specialized High Schools in Albania. So, I am forced to keep her locked at home. It would be very helpful, if there were high schools here for children with vision and mental problems.” (Tirana, 16, 44, *Mother*).

“My son has zero Vizus; he felt very nice here; but now that he is finishing his ninth grade, the problem is that there is no special high school for him and for children like him.” (Tirana, 15.42 *Mother*)

“My two daughters are twin sisters and they first went together to the elementary school in our neighborhood. But one of them couldn't progress as well since she has visual impairment. If the school provided appropriate education program and teaching materials for her, it would be great for her since the sisters could still stay together and go to the same school again. This would be the best solution for them and for me too.” (Tirana, 12, 41, *Mother*)

When parents were asked to think about their child's future, some of them were optimistic but the others were quite pessimistic.

“My son is strong enough to face the challenges of life. He is going to attend the Music School. He has already won the first prize in Shkodra with the song "Your eyes give light to me"

and the third prize in a music competition here in Tirana. As a mother I want to make the impossible possible for his future.” (Tirana, 15.42, *Mother*)

“My son is keen on sports. And I want to encourage him to take up sport not only because it does good to his health but also to consider it as his future career. It would be great if there was a gym here at the institute.” (Elbasan, 14.35, *Mother*)

“My daughter would like to study painting at high school. She likes painting and I will help her finish her high school studies.” (Tirana, 15.38, *Mother*)

The interview results show that parents face many challenges and difficulties in the education process of their children. The most difficult challenge for them are the prejudices and the neglect of society towards children with disabilities, especially when it comes to inclusive education. Whereas for teachers, the hardest challenges were the problems with the infrastructure, the school curriculum and lack of cooperation with parents.

According to the findings of this study, the researcher suggests that contemporary qualification and continuous training are needed for all the school staff. Also support and advice should be provided for parents of children with visual impairments, and the students must be equipped with contemporary tiflo-pedagogical learning materials.

THE LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The above study has its own limitations such as the following:

The first limitation is the small number of participants in the study due to the limited sample.

Despite this, the number of mothers and fathers as well as the number of teachers were enough to give us a clear picture of their experiences.

The second limitation relates to the limited participants in the study.

All participants were parents and teachers of IVIP.

Selection of participants in the study, was limited to parents and teachers of Ramazan Kabashi special 9-year school in Tirana since this is the only institute in Albania for VI students.

The participants who were involved in the study varied on the basis of their education, cultural and social background and the geographical areas where they lived. Not all of them had the same capacity and capability to describe the phenomenon under study. However, the applicant was careful to consistently explain to the participants the purpose of the study throughout the interview process.

The third restriction of the study concerns the composition of the samples: there were more mothers than fathers and more female teachers rather than male teachers of children, this being another limitation of the study.

The fourth restriction of the study has to do with the probability that the discussions and comments of the respondents might have been biased by their desire or intention to present themselves and their situation overall in the best possible way, spoiling thus the data which turn out to be not very realistic and the results more positive than in reality.

THE ETHICS OF THE STUDY

Assessment of ethical issues was the main priority of the study. Despite the voluntary participation in the study, the main principles of ethics were followed. The applicant started to put to work the compiled questionnaires and interviews, after creating beforehand a climate of acceptance and support for parents and teachers of children with VI using good communication skills with them. At first, they were introduced to the purpose of study and the safety of data and later the researcher thanked the teachers for their participation in the

study. At the same time, they were ensured about the privacy of their identity information.

Consent by the participants in the study was given after they had received all the necessary information, had understood it and reflected upon it. To protect the identity of participants in the study and to preserve the confidentiality of the collected data for each participant, different codes were being used. The data collected for this study through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews with parents and teachers of IVIP were kept safe and considered important materials.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Daniel P. Hallahan, Daniel P. Hallahan James M. Kauffman (2005) *Special education What it is and why we need it.p,1* Paperback
2. Lewis, S., & Allman, C. B. (2000). Educational programming. In M. Holbrook & A.
3. Koenig (Eds.), *Foundations of education: History and theory of teaching children and youths with visual impairments* (2nd ed. Vol). Neë York, NY: AFB Press.
4. Gary L Albrecht (2006) *Encyclopedia of Disability*. SAGE Publications Kushtetuta e Republikës së Shqipërisë Miratuar nga Parlamenti
5. Ligji "Për Statusin e të Verbërit" Nr. 8098, dt .28.03.1996 (i ndryshuar)
6. Prof. dr. sci. Mujo Hasković Sarajevë 2006 *Metodat dhe teknikat e hulumtimit në psikologji* Prishtinë
7. Save the Children (2012) *Implementing Inclusive Education. A commonwealth Guide to Implementing Article 24 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (Second Edition)*

8. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization International Standard Classification of Education I S C E D 1997
9. Nano, V., 2002. Shkolla shqiptare drejt proceseve integruese. Raport studimor. Fondacioni Shqiptar për të Drejtat e Paaftësisë.

WEBLIOGRAFIA

<http://adrf2.grigorsevo.info/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/Shkollat-shqiptare-drejt-integrimit-te-PAK.pdf>

http://unmesoj.al/wpcontent/uploads/2015/07/Studimi_Femijet_ANAD.pdf

<http://www.slideshare.net/NasufGrmizaj/mh-psikologj>

http://resourcecentre.savethechildren.se/sites/default/files/documents/inclusive_education_in_albania_in_albanian.pdf