Evaluating the social outcomes of inclusive education
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Document Version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Publication date:
2008

Link to publication in University of Groningen/UMCG research database

Citation for published version (APA):

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CHAPTER 1

General introduction
1.1 Introduction

For a long time it was assumed that pupils with special needs would not be able to attend regular schools and that it was better to send them to special ones (Pijl, 1997). Consequently, many countries had a system of special education consisting of different types of special schools aiming at pupils with various types of disabilities. Special education settings were viewed as possessing various advantages, like lower teacher-pupil ratios, specially trained teachers, greater individualisation of instruction in homogeneous classrooms and an increased curricular emphasis on social and vocational goals (Johnson, 1962, in Kavale & Forness, 2000).

However, the segregation of pupils with special needs came increasingly into question as many of the presumed advantages could not be proved in practice. For instance, Gartner and Lipsky (1987) concluded, on the basis of 50 studies concerning the academic performances of mainstreamed and segregated pupils with disabilities, that there was no significant evidence that separate special education programmes offered any significant benefits for these pupils. On the contrary, academic achievement of segregated pupils with disabilities was even lower compared to that of their counterparts in regular education settings. Baker, Wang and Walberg (1994) came to similar conclusions after having summarised the results of several studies on the effects of inclusion on pupils’ learning performances. They found that in the majority of cases, pupils with special needs educated in regular classes performed better academically than their counterparts in special settings (Baker et al., 1994). According to Rea, McLaughin and Walther-Thomas (2002), findings regarding academic achievement and social outcomes of pupils with learning disabilities are not conclusive but suggest a positive trend when these pupils are integrated into general education classrooms. In line with these findings, Kavale and Forness (2000) state that empirical evidence about the efficacy of special education continues to be equivocal.

It should be kept in mind that the above-mentioned results apply largely to pupils with learning disabilities, as studies comparing performances in regular and special education settings often aim at these pupils. Such comparative studies are relatively rare for pupils with other categories of disabilities.
The lack of satisfactory academic performance by pupils in segregated settings (in particular pupils with learning disabilities), combined with growing demands for social equity and civil rights and increasing costs of special education, prompted a drastic reconsideration of the special education delivery system in the mid 1980s (Rea et al., 2002). Next to academic advantages, civil-rights aspects of inclusion were emphasised. Segregating pupils with special needs was increasingly considered as a violation of a pupil’s right to be educated with typical peers in age-appropriate settings (Fisher, Roach & Frey, 2002; Rea et al., 2002). Inclusive education was championed as a means to remove barriers, improve outcomes and avoid discrimination (Lindsay, 2003).

As a result of this change in ideas about special-needs education, including pupils with special needs into regular education became, and still is, an important educational policy in many countries. Next to complying with children’s right to be educated with their typical peers in public schools and improving academic performance, increasing the social participation of pupils with special needs is a major goal of inclusive education. Parents often report the latter as being their first motive for sending their child to a regular school (Sloper & Tyler, 1992; Strayhorn & Strain, 1986). However, successful social participation of pupils with special needs turns out to be no matter of course. Research has repeatedly shown that making friends and building positive relationships with classmates can be difficult for these pupils. They often have a lower social position in the classroom and report higher loneliness scores than their typical peers. Since these negative social experiences can influence a child’s further development, it is important to monitor the social participation of pupils with special needs. Teachers can have an important role in the monitoring process.

This study tries to provide assistance for teachers to monitor the social participation of pupils with special needs. Before proceeding to present the design and aims of the study, this introductory chapter will briefly discuss the historical background of educating pupils with special needs. The world-wide trend from segregation towards inclusive education will be described. In addition, attention will be paid to the Dutch educational policy with regard to pupils with special needs and to the social dimension of inclusive education.
As described in the Introduction section, segregation of pupils with special needs was increasingly regarded as undesirable, and policymakers grew more and more convinced that these pupils should be educated alongside their typical peers in regular schools to the greatest extent possible (Pijl & Meijer, 1994). In many countries it was assumed that with extra effort pupils with all kinds of special needs could attend regular schools (Nakken & Pijl, 2002). As a result, in almost all countries with a system of separate special education, new ideas about the educational care for these pupils arose, new regulations were introduced and legislation was amended.

In the nineties, integration and mainstreaming were the terms typically used to describe the provision allocated to pupils with special needs. Both terms referred primarily to the physical placement of pupils with special needs in regular schools (Farrell, 2004; Farrell, 2000; Gottlieb, 1981; Kauffman, 1995, in Kavale & Forness, 2000). Several countries made an effort to implement policies that fostered the integration of pupils with special needs (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002). Integration became one of the central themes in education. However, there was a large variety of ways in which pupils could experience integration, ranging from occasional visits of special-school pupils to a regular school to full-time placement in a regular classroom of the local school (Farrell, 2000). Gradually, the term integration became discredited, as it said nothing about the quality of education but only about the setting in which a pupil was placed (Farrell, 2004). Questions about how pupils should be best taught remained unanswered (Gottlieb, 1981; Kauffman, 1995, in Kavale & Forness, 2000).

The term ‘inclusion’ was introduced as a more accurate way of describing the quality of education offered to pupils with special needs within an integrated school setting. Compared to integration, inclusion is a much broader concept that implies that schools restructure themselves so as to be able to cater to all children, irrespective of their disabilities or background (Frederickson & Cline, 2002). According to inclusive ideals, inclusive schools should meet the needs of all pupils (Ferguson, 1996, in Kavale & Forness, 2000) and every pupil should feel himself/herself as a full member of the school community (Ainscow, 1999, in Freire & César, 2002). Farrell (2000, pp. 154) expresses these ideals clearly, by stating that pupils in inclusive schools ‘take a full and active part in school-life,
are a valued member of the school community and are seen as an integral member’. The movement towards inclusion has been strongly endorsed internationally by the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994, in Ainscow & César, 2006). In recent decades many countries have made efforts to move educational policy and practice in a more inclusive direction (Freire & César, 2002; Mittler, 2000, in Ainscow & César, 2006).

1.3 Changes in educational policy in the Netherlands

The Netherlands have a long history of separate special education for pupils with various categories of disabilities (Tadema, 2007). In the early years of the 20th century, a small-scale system of special schools for various groups of pupils gradually arose alongside regular education (Den Boer, 1990). Special schools were legally recognised in 1920, and in the following decades the number of schools for pupils with special needs increased rapidly (Tadema, 2007). The result was a wide-ranging system of special education, consisting of 15 different types of special schools (Meijer, 1994). However, more and more policymakers, educators and parents believed that segregation in education had gone too far and became uneasy about the high proportion of pupils being educated in a segregated system (Pijl & Van den Bos, 2001). Questions arose about the extent to which pupils profited from separate education (Den Boer, 1990), and in politics it was increasingly thought that pupils should have the right to be educated with their typical peers in neighbourhood schools. Moreover, the ballooning costs of special education were considered as alarming. As a result of the increasing dissatisfaction about the growth of special education, attempts were made to promote the integration of pupils with special needs into regular schools. To put a stop to the growing number of pupils attending special schools, the Special Education Interim Act (ISOVSO) was put into practice in 1985. The purpose of the Act was to enable schools to develop themselves into ‘orthopedagogical-educational institutes’ (Den Boer, 1990). Within the context of this Act, peripatetic supervision, which in fact is a visiting special-teacher model (Pijl & Meijer, 1991), was made possible. The purpose of this type of supervision was to stimulate replacing pupils from special schools into regular ones and to prevent special-education referrals (Boerman & Hoogendoorn, 2002). In addition to the arrangements for peripatetic supervision, schools were able to apply for
extra teaching staff via the *Aanvullend Formatie Beleid* (Additional Staff Policy). Pupils with problems who were beyond the scope of the usual regulations but needed extra support, could make use of this policy (Scheepstra, 1998). For instance, primary schools who educated pupils with Down Syndrome were allowed to make an appeal for additional funding under this policy. In 1990 a new government policy document, *Weer Samen Naar School* (WSNS, Together to School Again), was intended to accommodate pupils with special needs in regular education and to put a stop to the growth of special education (Karsten, Roeleveld, Peetsma & Vergeer, 2001). Under this policy, all primary schools and special schools for children who had learning and educational problems or who had mild intellectual disabilities were grouped into regional clusters. As a result, regular and special schools in the clusters started to collaborate (Pijl & Van den Bos, 2001). The WSNS policy aims at pupils with relatively mild special needs. With the introduction of the *Wet op de Expertise Centra* (Centres of Expertise Act) in August 2003, the integration of pupils with more complex special needs was stimulated.

Since this law came into practice, parents of children with special needs have the right to choose between regular and special education for their child. Pupils with auditory, speech/language, motor, intellectual or multiple disabilities as well as severe behavioural, emotional and/or psychiatric problems can attend a regular school. This is funded with a pupil-bound budget (financial ‘backpack’). Only pupils who, on the basis of formal comprehensive assessment procedures, have been labelled as having special needs, qualify for this budget. The budget caters for educational personnel and teaching aids. Recent data show that an increasing number of parents decided to send their child with special needs to a regular school (De Greef & Van Rijswijk, 2006). Especially the number of pupils diagnosed as having autistic spectrum and/or behavioural disorders attending regular education (receiving a pupil-bound budget) grew rapidly, from 1549 pupils in October 2003 to 8055 in October 2005 – a growth of more than 400 percent (Grietens, Ghesquière & Pijl, 2006). However, not only the percentage of pupils with special needs attending regular education has grown: the percentage of pupils in special education settings has increased too. Similar to the situation in regular settings, in special education settings particularly the number of pupils diagnosed as having autistic spectrum and/or behavioural disorders has increased drastically (De Greef & Van Rijswijk, 2006). In a period of five years
(2000 to 2005), the percentage of pupils diagnosed as having these types of disabilities attending separate special education increased by 55 percent (De Greef & Van Rijswijk, 2006). It seems that because of earlier and refined diagnostics, more pupils receive an indication regarding autistic spectrum and/or behavioural disorders. The same tendency might, to a lesser degree, apply to pupils diagnosed as having other types of disabilities, as there seems to be an overall increasing identification of pupils requiring extra services. In conclusion, the introduction of the pupil-bound budget into the Dutch educational system seems to have led to a new category of users of extra educational care: pupils attending regular education, who in former years were deprived from extra educational care, now qualify for this extra care thanks to the pupil-bound budget (Grietens et al., 2006).

1.4 The social dimension of inclusive education

Relationships among pupils is a key issue of inclusive education (Pijl, 2007). Many parents of children with special needs hope and expect the physical presence of their children to lead to their social participation as well (Scheepstra, 1998; Sloper & Tyler, 1992; Strayhorn & Strain, 1986). They wish their child to build positive relationships with mainstream pupils. However, reality turns out to be less favourable. Research has repeatedly shown that inclusion of pupils with special needs does not automatically lead to an increase of positive contacts and friendships between these pupils and their typical counterparts (De Monchy, Pijl & Zandberg, 2004; Guralnick, Connor, Hammond, Gottman & Kinnish, 1996; Guralnick, Hammond, Connor & Neville, 2006; Guralnick, Neville, Hammond & Connor, 2007; Lee, Yoo & Bak, 2003; Scheepstra, Nakken & Pijl, 1999). A study by Frostad and Pijl (2007) of Norwegian inclusive classrooms, comprising pupils with various categories of disabilities, suggests that nearly one-quarter of pupils with special needs have serious difficulties in forming relationships in their peer group, while for their typical peers this is only 8 percent. It is known from several studies that within the group of pupils with special needs, pupils diagnosed as having autistic spectrum disorders and pupils diagnosed as having behavioural disorders find it particularly difficult to build relationships with typical peers and are at risk of becoming isolated in the classroom (De Monchy et al., 2004; Garrison-Harrell, Kamps & Kravits, 1997).
This is worrisome, all the more so because having a low social position in the class might negatively influence the functioning of the pupil in different areas. For instance, Jackson and Bracken (1998) found that the self-concept across various domains of rejected pupils was relatively low, as was the social self-concept of neglected pupils. Ollendick, Weist, Borden and Greene (1992) found that the academic achievements of pupils with a low social position, especially the rejected ones, tend to be weaker. They also showed that these pupils tend to have a higher failure rate in school as well as increased chances of dropping out and of committing delinquent offences. A substantial number of studies have shown that a low social position at school and peer relationship difficulties might lead to maladjustment in later life (Bagwell, Newcomb & Bukowski, 1998; Nelson, Rubin & Fox, 2005; Parker & Asher, 1987; Terry & Coie, 1991).

Because of the rather negative long-term effects of negative social experiences at school, it is important to monitor the social participation of pupils with special needs. This constitutes a vital task for teachers. There are several instruments teachers can use to measure aspects of social participation, like sociometric questionnaires and observation scales. However, the reliability and/or validity of many of these instruments have not been proven. For instance, Terry and Coie (1991) demonstrate that different methods to assess pupils’ sociometric status yield diverging results.

An instrument which encompasses the total concept of social participation does not exist: most instruments only measure one aspect of social participation. There is a need for a single teacher-friendly assessment instrument that encompasses all important aspects of social participation and which is reliable and valid. Such an instrument might help teachers notice problems in time, in order to promote the social participation of pupils with special needs, for example by encouraging contacts between these pupils and their classmates. In this thesis, the development of an assessment instrument for teachers is central.

Taking into consideration the issues mentioned above, the aims of this study are as follows:

1. To describe the first experiences with the pupil-bound budget in regular Dutch primary education;
2. To elucidate the social dimension of inclusion in education;
3. To develop a teacher questionnaire to assess the social participation of pupils with special needs and to subsequently assess the psychometric qualities of the questionnaire;

4. To describe the current situation with regard to the social participation of pupils with special needs in regular Dutch primary schools.

1.5 Outline of the thesis

This thesis is organised into eight chapters. Approaching the first aim, Chapter 2 describes the first experiences with the pupil-bound budget in regular Dutch primary schools. The focus lies on the social position and development of 20 pupils with special needs who were placed in regular primary schools in the 2003-2004 school year. All pupils, on the basis of formal comprehensive assessment procedures, have been labelled as having special needs and receive a pupil-bound budget.

Chapter 3 concerns a literature review that aims at elucidating the social dimension of inclusion, thereby meeting the second aim. The chapter focuses on clarifying the often-used concepts of social integration, social participation and social inclusion, and revealing their characteristic themes. An analysis of literature was conducted to identify these concepts.

Chapters 4, 5 and 6 are connected with the third aim of the study. The process of operationalising social participation and the subsequent development of a teacher questionnaire is central in Chapter 4. The chapter is divided into two parts. The first focuses on constructing a teacher questionnaire to assess social participation. The second, empirical part of the study addresses whether that questionnaire is a potentially reliable and applicable instrument to assess the social participation of pupils with special needs in regular primary schools.

Chapter 5 addresses the psychometric qualities of the new teacher questionnaire, named Social Participation Questionnaire, to assess the social participation of pupils with special needs in regular primary education. The questionnaire consists of four subscales representing four key themes of social participation: ‘friendships/relationships’, ‘contacts/interactions’, ‘social self-perception of the pupil’ and ‘acceptance by classmates’. This fifth chapter focuses on the psychometric evaluation of the four subscales. In addition, the reliability
and the discriminant validity of the entire questionnaire and its subscales are described.

Chapter 6 aims at validating the Social Participation Questionnaire. More specifically, the focus lies on the questionnaire’s convergent validity. In order to examine the convergent validity, four instruments, each focusing on one of the key themes of social participation, were used. Pupils’ scores on the total questionnaire and on each of the four subscales were compared with their scores on these instruments.

Chapter 7 returns to the situation of pupils with special needs in regular Dutch primary schools, thereby elaborating on Chapter 2. Proceeding from the fourth aim, Chapter 7 addresses the current state of affairs with regard to the social participation of pupils with special needs in regular Dutch primary education. It focuses on the four key themes of social participation: friendships/relationships, contacts/interactions, social self-perception of the pupil and acceptance by classmates.

In the final chapter, Chapter 8, conclusions are drawn and several critical considerations that can be made on the study will be discussed. The chapter ends with implications for educational policy and practice, and with suggestions for future research.

1.6 References


