

Abstract

The Maltese educational system embraces the principle of inclusion; however, despite the many benefits of inclusive education set out in theory and in policy, reality poses several challenges to this concept. Having students with various disabilities, such as autism, in mainstream classrooms can be challenging and, thus requires the creation of a supportive environment for all learners, as well as for the educators working in inclusive schools. This study therefore investigated the perceived needs of professional stakeholders when working with autistic students in mainstream primary schools, namely school management team (SMT) members, teachers and learning support educators (LSEs). The qualitative research approach was employed to acquire depth of information. For the first stage of the study, questionnaires were delivered to SMT members, teachers and LSEs to gather their opinions about the current inclusive system of education for autistic students and also investigate their needs and suggestions vis-à-vis resources and services, training and support when teaching autistic students. Questionnaires were considered as an appropriate data collection method to acquire data from all the SMT members, teachers and LSEs of the primary schools of one college. In the second stage of the research, the first phase was complemented by face-to-face semi-structured interviews to obtain more in-depth qualitative information from a sample of each group of participants on the three themes addressed in the questionnaires. The triangulation amongst the three different sources and the two research methods revealed that educators, in many instances, are not satisfied with the resources and services, training and support available to them, also suggesting that these are noticeably lacking. The educators provided various suggestions on how these can be improved and described their respective perceived needs in the cases where these are lacking, which included more skilled human resources, better school environments and more support and training for educators.