Reviewer's assessment of doctoral thesis

Programme: Special Education
Study field: Special Education
Student: Sunil KUMAR, M.Ed.

Dissertation thesis title: Inclusive Education the way for future for Fiji schools: A comparative case study of Inclusive Education in the Czech Republic Schools in Brno and Fiji Primary Schools
Supervisor: assoc. prof. Karel Pančocha, Ph.D.
Reviewer: assoc. prof. Vojtěch Regec, Ph.D.
Scope of the dissertation: 138 pages of main text (without references and attachments)
Literature: 121 works cited

The author of the dissertation thesis focuses on selected areas of inclusive education in the Czech Republic and Fiji, which are related to the attitudes of the pedagogical staff working at elementary schools. For the purpose of collecting qualitative and quantitative data, the author mainly uses the following methods: 1) interview (n = 47, primary school staff - director, deputy director, teacher, assistant teacher and also “computer teacher”) and 2) questionnaires (n=78, teachers in primary education) and others (observation and analysis of documents).

The presented results of qualitative and quantitative research present the core aspects of inclusive education in the context of: a) Inclusive culture; B) Inclusive policy; C) Inclusive practices; (D) Diagnostic assessment; E) Existing educational services; F) Latest developments of inclusive education. The author of the thesis comprehensively analyses and accurately evaluates individual findings within the monitored areas. Based on the main findings and formulated conclusions, the author defines strategies and recommendations for successful implementation of inclusive education.

Formally, the thesis is divided into seven main chapters (1 The Review of the Study; 2 The Foundations of the Study; 3 The Research Context; 4 Research Methodology; 5 Findings of the Study; 6 Discussion of Findings; 7 Conclusion and Recommendations) and further structured into logically arranged subchapters. The title of the thesis and the key words of the
thesis are chosen appropriately and in accordance with the overall focus of the dissertation work.

The topic of the thesis is highly topical and has an obvious contribution to the development of the theory of special education in the international context. The outputs presented are outstanding by their processing. The originality of the dissertation and the detailed processing of the theoretical origins in the research can be highlighted. The choice of research methods used is adequate. Inspirational recommendations of the author are presented in detail in chapter 6.2.1 Emerging themes.

Remarks:

1. The abbreviations used in the dissertation (such as SEND, IT, LANA, DIBELS, SPSS and others) are not listed in the list of abbreviations used. In addition, some of the abbreviations used are not explained at all (for example, in their first use in the text).

2. In the "1.6 Key Concepts and Terms" chapter, individual terms are defined inconsistently. Some terms are defined relatively comprehensively. On the contrary, others were described too briefly and without the use of professional literature. For example, the term "Special education" is defined as "a school system that deals with special needs children's education".

3. The author does not proceed rigorously and precisely when using professional literature. For example, in the statement "There are no statistics on the movement of students with special needs in mainstream classrooms in Fiji (UNICEF, 2010)", the author confuses the quote with a substantive aspect of the issue. I believe that the lack of statistics in the specific "UNESCO, 2010" quoted literature cannot be interpreted as a citation about the absence of these statistics.

4. Within the "1.8 Limitations to the Study" chapter, the author only slightly and superficially evaluates the limits of his study. The general assumption on a "what would be if..." basis is not satisfactory from the point of view of the expert opinion on the examined issue. For this reason, it would be desirable to precisely elaborate in which areas would "mainstream classroom" and "special schools" bring deeper insight into the issue, including explanation of the need of this knowledge for this particular type of study.

5. Longer parts of the text are quoted from one source without further compilation of knowledge from other corresponding sources. For example, instead of using primary
sources, the author cites main content of the entire chapter "2.2 Benefits of Inclusive Education" from the publication by Jacob & Olišaemek, 2016.

6. The dissertation contains some typing and grammatical errors. For example Howie vs. Howeii; Viktova vs. Vitkova; Panchocha and others.

7. Citations of literature sources is deficient. The formal treatment of sources does not have a unified structure.

8. The work contains longer parts of texts (entire sentences or parts of sentences) without correct citation of the source of their origin. For example, Intellectual and developmental disability - "refers to significant difficulties with reasoning, thinking and problem solving", etc.

9. In the dissertation, the author freely interchanges some of the terms (child/student/pupil), not exactly distinguish between them.

10. There is no definition of the researched population in the study. Although the author defines some demographic data on the total number of students and schools (as well as population numbers), these data are not clearly defined in relation to the research sample. There is no general information on the number of teachers and other teaching staff. In this area, there is a lack of author's efforts to present significant data with respect to the established research sample in the Czech Republic and Fiji.

11. Qualitative data analysis is presented superficially. Although the author correctly cites the theory of data analysis and the process of coding (Chapter 4.3.2, pages 86 - 87), the results are not described in detail. Therefore, it is questionable how the process of qualitative data analysis was carried out within the framework of the research.

12. Formulated research questions are not sufficiently elaborated in the following stages of research. For example, the research question "How special education needs are diagnosed in selected schools in the Czech Republic and selected Fijian schools?" is only vaguely elaborated in terms of the applied methodological approach. Concurrently, conclusions are limited in this regard by the fact that the author has not clearly explained the procedure leading to individual research findings.

13. In the chapter "5.3 The most common form of disability", the author tries to point out the prevalence of individuals with special educational needs. In this context, the author puts the results from his research into relation with the overall statistical indicators. He points to a large discrepancy between 1.4% and 10.0%. Despite the author's effort, I believe that such author's approach cannot be regarded as correct, because the research
design itself was not aimed at prevalence. Data collection methods and the research sample are not representative for the purpose of drawing conclusions on prevalence.

Questions:

1. With reference to the research population, describe the procedure used for the selection of respondents in schools in the Czech Republic and Fiji. Please indicate how many respondents (principals, assistance headteacher etc.) involved in the interviews represented one school?

2. Please explain the basis on which the prevalence of 1.4% was established in the study.

3. Specify the process of qualitative data analysis in your study. Describe the process of evaluating qualitative data (in line with the coding model, Fig. 7) on a concrete research question "How special education needs are diagnosed in selected schools in the Czech Republic and in selected Fijian schools?"

Conclusion

Submitted dissertation, despite abovementioned objections, meets overall criteria for the dissertation in the Ph.D. studies of Special Education in the study program Special Education. The author demonstrated ability of independent and contributive scientific work, and ability to apply proper scientific research methods. Thereby I recommend the dissertation of Sunil KUMAR for defense process and after successful defense I similarly recommend to grant Sunil KUMAR scientific degree Ph.D.

In Olomouc, May 30, 2017

In Olomouc, May 30, 2017

doc. PhDr. Vojtech Rejec, Ph.D.