

## **RUSSIAN STUDENTS' ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE INCLUSION OF STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS INTO THE UNIVERSITY EDUCATIONAL PROCESS**

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**Abstract:** The topicality of the research is due to the contradiction between the growing demand for the accessibility of quality education to all categories of students and the current state of educational practice in post-Soviet Russia, which is not quite ready to implement an inclusive approach of people with disabilities. In this regard, this article is aimed at assessing some psychological conditions for implementing of inclusive education and revealing possible ways to improve them by transforming the content and methods of teaching in higher education. The main method used in the research is a polysubject approach, which allows to consider inclusion as a process of communication, and a student as a social group interlocutor. The article presents the results of the empirical study in which the students of the Russian university (n = 113) took part. Diagnostics of their perception of students with disabilities was run, and assessment of the attitude towards inclusive education was made. As a result, it was found that psychological portraits of the student with disabilities compiled by the respondents, as a whole have a neutral character with a slight tendency towards positive features. At the same time, the attitude of the interviewed students of different age and gender groups to inclusion is ambiguous and depends more on vocational streams. The attitude of the students, who, major in adaptive physical education, towards inclusion was found to be different from the way the students of other majors treat it. It is consistent with the existing data of the impact of special knowledge and vocational education on the attitude to inclusion. This research has resulted in some recommendations for "Adaptive physical education" baccalaureate curriculum improvement and the formation of the corresponding social competences of the students of other fields of study within the framework of Physical Education course. The findings of the research are of practical value for inclusive education organizers in the university and teachers of humanitarian disciplines.

**Keywords:** Inclusive education, students with special educational needs, adaptive physical education.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Nowadays higher education in Europe is facing a substantial transformation, called "the Bologna process," which promotes the advancement of European institutions to the top of the world's higher education markets (Campos et. al., 2015). The introduction of inclusive education, as a rule, is considered as the highest form of the educational system development in the direction of the human right implementation to receive quality education in the environment relevant to students' health. Moreover, inclusion is defined as a holistic international process that influences not only the education system, but the society as a whole, and aims

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at identifying and eliminating of discrimination at the international, national and local levels (Armstrong et. al., 2011).

Europe is in the process of making a positive move towards greater inclusion of students with both mild to severe disabilities (O'Brien et. al., 2009). Due to the needs of educational practice, a significant number of researches, including the ones made in European countries, are devoted to the analysis of stimulating factors and barriers to inclusion development.

At the present time Russian education is making its first steps in the field of inclusion. After the adoption of the Federal Law "On Education in the Russian Federation" issued in 2012, this process has been significantly intensified. Taking into account the foreign experience, and on the basis of the reconsideration of Russian educational practice, favorable conditions for inclusion of people with special educational needs are gradually being created in Russia. However, the implementation of inclusive education in Russian schools and universities encounter significant obstacles that determine the need to analyze the existing conditions of inclusion implementation and the need to find ways to improve them.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The formation of readiness for a variety of vocational activities including practical skills, knowledge, attitude, ethical norms to inclusive education as well, is widely discussed in the scientific literature (Lo et. al., 2014; Zundans-Fraser & Lancaster, 2012; Kim, 2011; Pijl, 2010). Researchers note the importance of special training of teachers to work with disabled students as a primary factor of inclusion development (Campos et. al., 2015; de Boer et. al., 2011; Maher, 2010; Goodwin, 2012; Cagran & Schmidt, 2011). Numerous research works are devoted to the organization of physical education of students with disabilities in general physical education (O'Brien et. al., 2009; Maher, 2010; Goodwin, 2012; Hilderley & Rhind, 2012; Overton et. al., 2016; Barry-Power, 2014). The main barrier for joint physical education is a significant gap between the physical abilities of students, which, in particular, makes it difficult to organize team games (Maher, 2010; Barry-Power, 2014). In some publications on the problems of general physical education, the issue of the attitude of physical education teachers to inclusion is touched upon. According to Hilderley & Rhind (2012), the attitudes of everyone involved appeared to play a fundamental role. Interestingly, the attitudes of peers, support workers, teachers and, in particular, the child, could all represent significant barriers or ways in which barriers could be overcome.

According to some studies, there is an ambiguous attitude towards inclusion both from teachers (Pijl, 2010; de Boer et. al., 2011; Cagran & Schmidt, 2011; Hoffman, 2011) and from school principals (Mattson & Hansen, 2009). At the same

time, there are data that more active non-disabled schoolchildren and teachers' contacts and communication with children and adults with disabilities, as well as acquiring knowledge about various health disorders, contribute to the formation of participants' positive attitudes to inclusion in the educational process (Barry-Power, 2014). In general, there is a similar opinion of the inclusive education phenomenon complexity. It is noted that being physically present in a mainstream setting, it does not automatically result in inclusion (Beckett, 2009).

In Europe the process of creating favorable conditions for the vocational education of people with disabilities is currently under way. The problem of inclusive education is more urgent in Russia, than in countries of Western Europe because Russia is catching up with the countries which have tried to solve this problem for a long time (Bordovskij & Kantor, 2008). Full implementation of inclusive education system in modern Russia will become possible on condition that a complex problem of spiritual values acquisition and considerable change of views on educational system will find its solution (Shilov, 2008).

The researchers claim that a lack of flexible educational standards that take into account the psychological and physiological features of students, as well as teachers' low level of knowledge of the basics of correctional pedagogy and special psychology, turn out to be the most serious obstacles on the way to inclusive education implementation in Russian schools (Zhilkina & Ahmirova, 2016). In general, middle school teachers are rather optimistic about the introduction of joint education (Bogdanova, 2015).

Inclusion in higher education has some peculiarity, and the issues of financial and technical provision of the educational process and accessibility of the architectural environment are brought to the fore (Zhilkina & Ahmirova, 2016). At the same time, in higher education as well as in secondary one, the issues of teaching staff training to work with students with special needs and the problems of developing of adapted educational programs are relevant. The formation of a tolerant socio-cultural environment and inclusive educational culture is also recognized as an important aspect of the introduction of inclusion in the university (Denisova & Lehanova, 2016).

In the Russian pedagogics inclusive education is considered as one of the mechanisms forming a barrier-free environment and contributing to the successful integration of people with disabilities (Rostomashvili, 2014). In accordance with the idea of inclusive education, it is very important to form a tolerant attitude of healthy students and disabled students to each other (Filippova & Mitin, 2013). It manifests itself in the skills to build interaction based on cooperation and mutual understanding, willingness to accept other people the way they are (Rostomashvili, 2014).

## RESEARCH METHODS

The empirical research was conducted on the basis of Cherepovets State University (north-west of Russia) in March 2017. The aim of the research is to study Russian students' attitude towards the inclusion of students with special educational needs.

The research objectives are as follows:

- to evaluate the respondents' perception of the students with special educational needs and their attitudes to inclusive education;
- on the basis of comparing of the survey results of students of different areas of training, to determine the extent to which the content of the vocational education program influences attitudes towards inclusion;
- to reveal some methods of forming healthy students' tolerant attitude towards students with special educational needs.

The students of the first, second and third years of study ( $n = 113$ ) participated in it, including the students majoring in technical and natural sciences ( $n = 30$ ), pedagogy and humanities ( $n = 55$ ). A special group of the respondents consisted of the students majoring in adaptive physical education ( $n = 28$ ). The respondents were 18-25 years old, female (61.1%) and male (38.9%). It should be noted that none of the respondents had any experience of inclusive education at the university before.

The students' attitude to the disabled students inclusion was assessed according to two criteria: the respondents' perception of the students with special educational needs and their attitude to inclusive education. Diagnostics of the students' perception of the disabled students was carried out using a method based on the semantic differential, structuring the adjectives denoting personality traits. In course of diagnosis measured notions were assessed by a bipolar gradual seven-point scale, the poles of which were set by means of 15 pairs of antonyms: "alert" - "open", "angry" - "kind", "irascible" - "calm", "lifeless" - "vivid", "impulsive" - "balanced", etc. (Ponikarova, 2016). To process the results, the respondents' scores on all 15 positions using this scale and its median value were determined as measurable indicators.

The assessment of the students' attitude to inclusive education was made using the questionnaire "Inclusive education: personal opinion" (Ponikarova, 2016) edited by the authors of the paper. The questionnaire included 14 closed-type questions, and the answers were assessed by a four-point system and expressed the degree of consent ("definitely yes", "yes rather than no", "no rather than yes", "definitely no") with such statements as "I am positive towards having a student with disabilities study in the same group with me", "I am positive towards a graduate with disabilities working on the same team with me", "I am positive towards a disabled student receiving a higher scholarship than I do", "I am positive towards a disabled child

studying with my child in the same group (class)". As a measured indicator the sum of the points for answering the questions was used.

To process the obtained empirical data, we used methods of quantitative and qualitative analysis, methods of mathematical statistics (calculation of the reliability of differences in results using the nonparametric criterion  $\varphi^*$  - angular Fisher transform).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study showed that the psychological portraits of the student with disabilities made by the respondents had a neutral character with a tendency to positive qualities. So, by the median value, the answers with the result  $Md \geq 0$  totaled 91.1%, and by the score, where  $\sum x_k \geq 0$  it's 68.1% of the total number of answers.

According to the criterion of the attitudes towards inclusive education, the share of the respondents who expressed high ("definitely yes") and medium ("yes rather than no") degree of consent with the questionnaire statements was 49.6%, while only 14.1% of the respondents gave the answers "no rather than yes", "definitely no". It should, however, be noted that, the respondents expressed a particularly low degree of consent with some of the statements. For example, more than a third of the students (38,9%) did not agree (chose the answers "no rather than yes", "definitely no") with the statement "I am positive towards a disabled person being my manager in the future", and more than a half (52,2%) didn't agree with the statement "I would like to work in an inclusive educational institution".

The analysis of the survey results was carried out taking into account the age and gender of the respondents, as well as the differences in fields of their study. The assessment results of the respondents' attitude to inclusion in the context of gender and age difference are presented in Table 1.

**TABLE 1: RESPONDENTS OF DIFFERENT AGE AND GENDER GROUPS REGARDING THEIR ATTITUDE ASSESSMENT TO INCLUSION, %**

<i>Age/gender group</i>	<i>Perception of disabled students</i>		<i>Attitude to inclusive education</i>		
	<i><math>Md \geq 0</math></i>	<i><math>\sum x_k \geq 0</math></i>	<i>Positive</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Negative</i>
18-19 y.o. ( <i>n</i> = 68)	94,1	70,6	50,0	38,2	11,8
20 y.o. and older ( <i>n</i> = 45)	86,7	64,4	48,9	33,3	17,8
Male ( <i>n</i> = 44)	90,9	61,4	52,3	31,8	15,9
Female ( <i>n</i> = 69)	91,3	72,5	47,8	39,1	13,1

The data in Table 1 indicate some connection between the students' attitude to inclusion and their age and gender. Somewhat higher results were obtained in the group of the students aged 18-19, to be compared to the group of older students,

and in the female group compared to the male group, but this correlation can't be considered reliable.

The assessment results of the inclusion attitude of the respondents' majoring in different subjects are presented in Table 2.

**TABLE 2: RESPONDENTS GETTING EDUCATION IN DIFFERENT FIELDS OF STUDY REGARDING THEIR ATTITUDE ASSESSMENT TO INCLUSION, %**

<i>Field of study/major</i>	<i>Perception of disabled students</i>		<i>Attitude to inclusive education</i>		
	<i><math>Md \geq 0</math></i>	<i><math>\sum x_k \geq 0</math></i>	<i>Positive</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Negative</i>
Pedagogy and humanities ( $n = 55$ )	92,7	69,1	45,4	38,2	16,4
Adaptive physical education ( $n = 28$ )	92,9	71,4	71,4	21,5	7,1
Engineering and science ( $n = 30$ )	86,7	63,3	36,7	46,7	16,6

Table 2 shows that the students majoring in adaptive physical education demonstrate a more positive attitude to inclusion on both criteria. However, this advantage in terms of their perception of disabled students is minimal, and reliability of the differences can be doubted for both indicators.

At the same time, according to the criterion of the students' attitude to inclusive education, the differences are reliable: for the group of students majoring in humanities and pedagogy,  $\varphi^* \text{ emp} = 2.292$  for  $p < 0.05$ , and for the group of students of technical and natural sciences fields of study  $\varphi^* \text{ emp} = 2.042$  for  $p < 0.05$ .

In order to further stimulate tolerant attitudes towards people with limited health opportunities on the part of future teachers of adaptive physical education, the author have developed the course "Foundations of Olympic Culture" and introduced it into the curriculum (Varfolomeeva, 2016).

According to the author's intention, this course assumes the usage of data on the achievements of Paralympic athletes, the difficulties on their way to Olympic medals. It allows students to learn the basic values of Olympism and the ability to use them in solving life and professional problems. As a result of the course, students come to the conclusion that the right to do sports is the right of any person, that the exercise of rights and freedoms in the Olympic and Paralympic movement is ensured by the absence of any form of discrimination. In general the purpose of the Olympic education is to assimilate such values as human solidarity based on tolerance and mutual respect, respect and conservation of the environment and human identity etc. (Varfolomeeva & Surinov, 2016).

The results of the study also prove that students of other majors should form necessary social competencies. According to the author, the experience of professional training of adaptive physical education teachers can be used in the course of PE with some amendments. Adaptive physical education faculties of Russian universities use special methods helping non-disabled students to form

feelings, perceptions, understanding which disabled athletes have, practicing various adaptive sports. One of these methods is the modeling of various limitations of motor activity, caused by a specific pathology. It can be artificial deprivation of vision (sunglasses, eye patch, etc.), hearing (headphones, etc.) or immobilization of joint movements (in the elbow, shoulder, ankle, knee, hip joints) (Mukhina & Terentyeva, 2009). Introducing such techniques in the training course of physical education will allow both to diversify the motor activity of students, and to enable non-disabled people to “experience first-hand” the sensations of people with limited health abilities when performing physical exercises.

## CONCLUSION

Significant changes in the social and spiritual spheres of the life of Russian society determine the transformations in the educational system. Inclusive education is a modern trend in the development of pedagogical theory and practice, which corresponds to the worldwide trend towards the recognition of human variability and diversity, the rights of people with special educational needs for full socialization.

As a result of the adoption of the Federal Law “On Education in the Russian Federation”, the process of introduction of the inclusive approach into Russian schools and universities has been significantly intensified. At the same time, the implementation of inclusion in vocational education faces a number of problems, including the problem of forming a tolerant socio-cultural environment in the training group.

Numerous studies conducted in European countries as well as in Russia, have shown that a significant factor of inclusive education development is the attitude of the participants involved in the educational process. It has been established that negative attitude of teachers and students towards inclusion can be a serious barrier to effective joint education.

The aim of the research has been to study Russian students' attitude towards the inclusion of students with special educational needs. This study has confirmed the positive influence of special knowledge and purposeful training of future specialists, who will work with disabled students, on inclusion. The obtained results are consistent with the already existing data, and expand the relevant knowledge in relation to the system of higher education and the process of adaptive physical education teacher training.

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