On the role of psychological and pedagogical support to improve the life quality of persons with disabilities in higher education institutions

Sobre o papel do apoio psicológico e pedagógico para melhorar a qualidade de vida das pessoas com deficiência nas instituições de ensino superior

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ABSTRACT

The objective is to assess the psychological and educational support for individuals with disabilities in higher education, evaluate their present status, and anticipate future advancements in enhancing their quality of life. The article used the methods of prediction, analysis, synthesis, and survey, due to which it was possible to form an idea of assessment and self-assessment of persons with disabilities. The results reflect the essence of inclusion in modern higher education, the process of introduction of which began in the 1970s. Based on theoretical analysis it is proved that inclusive education is intended to form the most favorable environment, to establish humanization of social relations in universities, and to obtain opportunities for quality and accessible higher education for all categories of the population. The conclusions also identify further ways of modernizing the psychological and pedagogical support for the quality of life of persons with disabilities.

Keywords: Inclusion, Persons With Disabilities, Improvement.

RESUMO

O objetivo é analisar a prestação de apoio psicológico e pedagógico à qualidade de vida das pessoas com deficiência nas instituições de ensino superior, para determinar o estado atual desta categoria e prever a provável evolução no futuro. O artigo utilizou os métodos de previsão, análise, síntese e inquérito, graças aos quais foi possível formar uma ideia de avaliação e autoavaliação das pessoas com deficiência. Os resultados reflectem a essência da inclusão no ensino superior moderno, cujo processo de introdução teve início na década de 1970. Com base na análise teórica, ficou provado que a educação inclusiva tem como objetivo formar o ambiente mais favorável, estabelecer a humanização das relações sociais nas universidades e obter oportunidades para um ensino superior de qualidade e acessível a todas as categorias da população. As conclusões também identificam outras formas de modernizar o apoio psicológico e pedagógico para a qualidade de vida das pessoas com deficiência.

Palavras-chave: Inclusão, Pessoas com Deficiência, Melhoria.

Introduction

The importance of the problem of inclusion for applicants for higher education is justified primarily by the fact that the number of students with disabilities, the work with whom requires remedial intervention, is constantly growing. In particular, the number of potential students in need of some adjustment in physical and (or) mental development in Ukraine alone is about 1 million people, which is more than 10% of the total number of applicants to universities in the country. At the same time, the number of persons with disabilities is growing and requires more detailed consideration. There are noticeable trends, according to which qualitative changes in the structure of disabilities are progressing, which requires a comprehensive consideration of the impairments of each individual case.

It is also not only about the additional requirements of physical rehabilitation, but also about psychological assistance capable of integrating such students into the learning environment, eliminating possible complexes or other problems of inner life. The solution to these issues is inclusive education, designed to adapt people with additional needs to a normal life in society.

At the heart of inclusive education is an ideology that disqualifies any manifestations of discrimination, guarantees equal treatment of all applicants for higher education, creates additional conditions for students with special needs. Education of students with disabilities is based on the principles of balanced pedagogy, the validity of which is proven, and its application benefit all sides of the educational process. Turning to this form of learning assumes that the diversity of detection of human nature is a valid phenomenon. Because of certain limitations in communication, self-care opportunities, normal movement, the integration of such students in education depends a lot on meeting their needs and the help of others. This constitutes a multifaceted process of socio-pedagogical adaptation and inclusion.

Providing access to higher education for people with disabilities is a revealing and crucial task for any modern state. Forming and implementing a special inclusive environment in which all students in need can feel like full members of the student body actualizes certain requirements for higher education institutions. In particular, the academic environment, as an integral part of society, must give opportunities to all those who wish, regardless of their needs or other circumstances, to realize their full potential, to be useful to society, to be full members of it (DANIELA; LYTRAS, 2018, p. 219–225). On the other hand, Miliutina et al. (2022) believe that tolerance and social inclusion are basic conditions for the successful integration of students with disabilities. O'Leary et al. (2020) described key mechanisms for creating an inclusive environment through the use of STEM education principles. Martynchuk et al. (2021) identified the state of inclusive education in Ukraine. Grassi (2018) described the main possibilities of building an inclusive society. At the same time, this process is associated with changes in global

axiological paradigms, an additional definition of human diversity, the introduction of humanistic role models in the educational environment (BEŠIĆ, 2020).

At the same time, specific mechanisms of implementation of these programs require further research since there are no unified guidelines for the vision of certain aspects of inclusion in the future among specialists. The article aims to analyze the psychological and pedagogical support for the quality of life of persons with disabilities in higher education institutions, to determine the current state of this category and forecast the likely development in the future.

Methodology

Design

The work has a complex character: it refers to theoretical-empirical knowledge. This leads to the specificity of the used methodological toolkit. At the first stage of the study, an experiment was conducted, the aim of which was to determine the level of attitude of students and employees of higher educational institutions to persons with disabilities, and a survey was conducted directly among students with disabilities. The other part of the study took the theoretical processing of the obtained results. In particular, the work used theoretical pedagogical methods of research: analysis, synthesis, concretization, prediction.

Participants

A total of 300 people participated in the experiment (190 students and 110 faculty members). Note that all respondents to the experiment had higher education (65% - bachelors, 75% - masters). The participants of the experiment were divided by gender, age, and level of education (for students) (See **Table 1-2**).

Table 1 – Diagnostic data of the student of empirical research

Gender of the participants of the experiment				
Men		Women		
59%		41%		
Age of participants in the empirical study				
Under 17 years old	17-18 years old	19-20 years old	21-22 years old	Over 22 years
Absent	11%	46%	18%	25%
Level of education of respondents				
Basic	Incomplete basic	Basic (bachelor)	Incomplete higher education	Higher (master)
Absent	Absent	45%	22 5%	32,5%

Source: Authors' development.

Table 2 – Diagnostic data of teachers of empirical research

Age of participants in the empirical study				
Under 25 years old	25-30 years old	30-35 years old	35-50 years old	Over 50 years
Absent	13%	24%	30%	32%
Gender of the participants of the experiment				
Men		Women		
52%		48%		

Source: Authors' development.

The participants of the experiment had some experience of cooperation and training with students with disabilities.

Instruments

The main tool for organizing and conducting the experimental part of the study was an anonymous survey based on the online resource Google-survey. The authors compiled a list of closed questions preloaded into the system. Note that the anonymity criterion allowed participants to freely express their thoughts. In addition to this survey, an Instagram-bot and a Telegram-bot were created, to which everyone was invited to communicate. Predominantly teachers preferred to use the Google survey, while students actively followed the link via Instagram or Telegram.

Data collection

The survey was conducted anonymously and voluntarily in 2 stages. On the first – on the proposed modification of the so-called Bogardus' method of social distancing based on the data obtained, a specific scale of social distance was created, measuring the distance with students in an inclusive community. Regarding students, the following scale was created: "I agree that a student of this social group": 1. Will be friends with me, and we will often spend time together. 2. I wouldn't mind sitting at the same desk with a student with a disability. 3. Will study in the same group. 4. Will study in the same stream. 5. Will go out with me sometimes. 6. Will communicate with me sometimes. 6. Will study in a special institution.

As for the teachers, they had to answer the following questions regarding the self-assessment of persons with disabilities. 1. High progress 2. Medium progress. 3. Lack of regression 4. Lack of progress and regression 5. Difficult to determine. 6. Slight regression 7. Complete regression.

The collection and interpretation of the results took place over a period designed to organize the survey and the selection of materials obtained through the above resources.

Analysis of data

Based on the analysis the main subject of the study is divided into smaller parts: the definition of the role of inclusion in the modern world, the analysis of psychological and pedagogical support for the quality of life of persons with disabilities. By means of synthesis, these elements are combined. As a result of the use of abstraction, it was possible to move from general theoretical judgments to the interpretation of our own results and the formation of conclusions. By means of prediction, further ways of improving the psychological and pedagogical support of the quality of life of students with disabilities are reflected. The data obtained on the survey were evaluated using the fundamental principles of the Bogardus method of social distancing. Also used was the Personal change-readiness survey, the system of which includes a scale "tolerance for ambiguity". This technique is effective in the

study of psychological situations that occur due to life changes. Understanding the mechanisms of coping with psychological problems will help students to protect themselves from additional stress when organizing learning situations.

Based on modeling the main ways to improve the psychological and pedagogical conditions for the quality of life of persons with disabilities are reflected.

Ethical criteria

The article contains no conflict of interest. The survey was conducted anonymously, voluntarily, and correctly.

Results

Role of inclusion in modern higher education

Inclusion is based on the concepts of "normalization", which is based on views about the importance and comfort of the lives and livelihoods of persons with disabilities, requiring a much greater approximation to the conditions and lifestyles of all other citizens (CASTILLO IBÁÑEZ, 2019). The principles of such "normalization" have been enshrined in a number of recent international regulatory legal instruments: the UN Declaration on the Rights of the Mentally Retarded (1971), the Declaration on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (1975), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), etc. In particular, the first UN Declaration on the Rights of Mentally Retarded Persons, as a normative legal document, stated the recognition of persons with mental, psychological, and physical developmental disabilities as full participants in society, while requiring additional attention and support from other members of society (DANIELA; LYTRAS, 2018, p. 219–225).

The survey demonstrates that some applicants may drop out of the rigid educational systems. The vast majority of students responded that they only did not mind studying in the same group as a person with disabilities. However, only 8% of respondents answered that they did not mind being friends with such people and

actively spending time together. As a rule, this was the answer of those who had experience with people with disabilities.

Consequently, the organized study demonstrates a negative trend: a certain part of applicants may drop out of the rigid learning systems because its other participants are not ready to meet the individual needs of such students during their studies. The ratio in question may be 15% of the total number of respondents. On the other hand, we believe that properly formed conditions of psychological and pedagogical quality of life of persons with disabilities will affect the improvement of the lives of these people. Teachers who participated in this survey generally noted that predominantly students with disabilities have an average rate of progress (38%), or no regression (29%), which is generally a good indicator.

For this reason, many potentially talented individuals may drop out, becoming detached and segregated parts of the general university system. Also, such applicants may fail during their studies, so the general system may disqualify them. Inclusive teaching methods are designed to support such applicants in their education and other successes, enabling them to subsequently establish a major and find their place among social role (NAMESTIUK, 2022).

Of particular importance in a democratic society in terms of social care are citizens with disabilities, so an important problem that must be solved by educational institutions together with the public authorities is the application of special tools for social and psychological rehabilitation, additional adaptive learning, socialization, and integration into society of young people with disabilities. It has been proven that without additional attention, the development of such students occurs in deformation and associalization, which extremely underestimates the processes of formation and education of full-fledged personalities (GRASSI, 2018, p. 364–378). The most common tools used to partially solve this problem include special educational techniques, psychological and pedagogical integration, and rehabilitation, spiritual influence on the formation of personality (AZZOPARDI, 2023, p. 183-190).

An analysis of the European experience of educating students with special developmental needs demonstrates that for the vast majority of them, inclusive

education is the main way to obtain higher education along with other students (CASTILLO IBÁÑEZ, 2019). Researchers note that higher education applicants are equally able to pursue higher education both within special education institutions and on a common basis with other higher education applicants at universities (MARTYNCHUK *et al.*, 2021, p. 148-167). From the perspective of a theoretical and methodological understanding of special needs education, all those who have various kinds of deviations from the norm's average are just as separate, distinct individuals (MILIUTINA *et al.*, 2022). That is, for them there should be no distinctly separate attitude (even extremely lenient). It is a matter of difference in other special needs, which representatives of the educational institution must adapt to their needs. At the same time, the social life and adaptation of students with disabilities turns into a certain compromise in the adjustment of personal work, society, the individual, and the social group. Also, respect for the rights of the individual implies the recognition of all available rights of the student academic community. The educational systems of European countries' universities form special institutions and foundations to assist students with disabilities, which at the same time do not act as certain segregative elements (GRASSI, 2018, p. 364–378). "Boundaries" between assistance in higher or special education are quite transparent, as modern democratic countries promote axiological paradigms of civil society based on ideas of equality, tolerance of others, and inclusion (MILIUTINA *et al.*, 2022; RAKHIMOV; MUKHAMEDIEV, 2022). The basis for such practices of inclusive education were the ideas of approving and understanding the individuality of each individual higher education applicant, respectively - the educational process and quality of life should be organized in such a way as to fully meet the special requirements of each student. Inclusive education is the thorough inclusion of all students in a well-rounded education and university life, regardless of whether there are individual differences or differences between applicants to higher education (O'LEARY *et al.*, 2020). The goal of inclusion is to eliminate any form of discrimination or segregation, particularly special courses for all those who may not meet the conventional accepted standards of "normality". In an inclusive model of higher education, all students study together in familiar classrooms and live on

shared campuses, resulting in a great deal of reciprocity, adaptation, and change that considers and meets everyone's needs. The practical use of inclusive higher education concentrates important democratic ideas-all individuals (students) are important and active participants in community processes. Education with elements of inclusion in higher education institutions is beneficial to both students with disabilities and other applicants, regardless of physical or material condition (TIGHT, 2022, p. 5–22). Inclusive education aims to form such an educational environment, which would meet the requirements and opportunities of each student, including the peculiarities of their psychophysical development. Inclusion by its social content implies the realization of the humanization of social relations and acceptance of the rights of persons with disabilities to receive quality and accessible higher education. Modern inclusion in universities is the leading idea of humanistic social development.

Psychological and pedagogical support for the quality of life of persons with disabilities in institutions of higher education

Given the integration of Ukraine into a single European educational space, there is a need to improve the mechanisms for implementing the educational needs of persons with special needs. The experience of Ukrainian universities shows several examples of the implementation of the model of formation of appropriate psychological and pedagogical support. First of all, we are talking about the implementation of integrative models of education of persons with disabilities at all stages of higher education (MILIUTINA *et al.*, 2022). Working models of support of persons with disabilities in learning and ensuring their integration into active social life have also been formed (MARTYNCHUK *et al.*, 2021, p. 148-167).

The formation of certain socio-pedagogical conditions for the rehabilitation processes of this contingent of higher education applicants in the course of training and mastering professional competencies is possible thanks to the work of special departments of rehabilitation support. In practice, these departments ensure that the necessary learning conditions are met, provide pedagogical and psychological support, interact with representatives of social services, and sometimes provide

medical care (MAHANTA, 2022, p. 205-215). Social work specialists are not directly represented in the work of universities, which can be considered a certain disadvantage. At the same time, current trends point to the gradual need to involve trainers, social psychologists to conduct appropriate social work. First of all, we are talking about the importance of attracting workers with considerable experience in the work of charitable foundations and projects.

The main goal of such work is to form a holistic system of medical, social, and professional support for students with disabilities in the university environment, both for the period of education and for the time after its completion. Undoubtedly, each applicant for higher education with special needs has his/her own peculiarities and limitations that affect his/her education. For quality collaboration with such individuals, it is necessary to implement special methods, pedagogical teaching methods, and certain adaptive technical solutions in the educational process (AMOR *et al.*, 2018, p. 1277–1295). Usually, students with disabilities are inquisitive and diligent, but they experience certain difficulties: a certain lack of knowledge, rapid fatigue, a closed type of character, vulnerability to criticism, etc. (BEŠIĆ, 2020). At the same time, for them there is no need to reduce the rate of learning, to transfer them to asynchronous learning, or to reduce the number of classes, because it reduces the quality of special training. To adapt them to normal learning, systems of accompaniment and training, comprehensive psychological and social assistance, and support are introduced.

The efforts of university teachers are primarily aimed at creating a comfortable environment and the necessary psychological climate in study groups, establishing normal communication links, ensuring the most favorable mode of education, independent work, leisure, and recreation, etc. Personality-oriented approach, developmental and cooperative pedagogy become important elements of such training.

Other students who do not have health problems, having some experience of coeducation with disabled people, note that it is the social environment in which they receive their education that has a lot to do with the integration of such applicants. It is a question of ensuring the necessary quality of life has several

dimensions. First of all, not only students with disabilities are socially changed and improved by coeducation, but also other students (MARTYNCHUK *et al.*, 2021, p. 148-167). They must go a certain way to understand the special needs of people with disabilities in education, be sensitive to their situation, and demonstrate activity in supporting and integrating such individuals. Therefore, educational processes must be based around the individual, making her the center of a psychological and pedagogical system that aims to implement multifaceted socialization processes. At the same time, students with special educational needs in the conditions of the usual educational process stop feeling like inferior parts of society and fully reveal themselves in terms of personal growth.

At the same time, a rather pessimistic picture is observed at the beginning of higher education among students with disabilities. In particular, researchers summarize that even during initial psychological examinations, next to low self-esteem, changes in social roles, and socioeconomic discomfort with quality of life, scores on adaptive and personality characteristics are also low (ASONGU; NNANNA; ACHA-ANYI, 2020, p. 481–503).

The focus on such deviations allowed us to summarize that the socio-psychological adaptation of students with special needs is procedurally inhibited by the factor of emotional discomfort, which is caused primarily by unformed skills to trust strangers and the low level of formation of the image of personal "I".

Indicators of educational success at the end of the first semester typically show a large advantage for applicants with fairly satisfactory academic performance (DE BENEDICTIS; LEONI, 2021). Understanding the psychological, social, physiological, and pedagogical components of the readiness of higher education applicants with special needs to continue their studies at universities has made it possible to approve and implement an updated system of main activities for their rehabilitation. The main prerequisites of such activities are contained in **Table 3**.

Table 3- Psychological and pedagogical conditions for the implementation of social and psychological adaptation and rehabilitation of students with disabilities
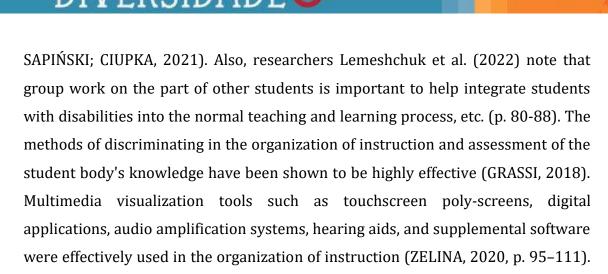
№	Conditions	Meaning
1	Organization of the educational process that meets the functional capabilities of higher education applicants with special needs	Providing appropriate learning conditions and access to classrooms, appropriate attitudes, and a productive psychological environment for learning a specialty
2	Active involvement of students with disabilities in interpersonal relationships within the student body	Addressing the practice of student government and the integration of students with special needs into various self-governing organizations, sports societies, etc.
3	Ensuring the availability of information resources (library, Internet, etc.)	Guaranteeing uninterrupted access to digital technologies and information resources of universities. Software support during the introduction of distance learning.
4	Promoting creativity and opportunities for professional fulfillment	Involvement of higher education applicants with disabilities in creative realization (especially relevant for art departments and faculties)
5	Use of comprehensive wellness supervision (if necessary)	Implemented when necessary. At the same time, every university is required to have the necessary medical department and social work department where students with special needs can get help and counseling.

Source: Authors' development.

These materials demonstrate the current state of the model of psychological and pedagogical support for the quality of life of persons with disabilities in institutions of higher education.

Discussion

Realization of conditions for the psycho-pedagogical quality of life of persons with disabilities in higher education institutions requires well-established preparation and publication of educational and methodological literature, formation of opportunities for asynchronous learning (providing access to the audio folder, media folder, etc.), organization of individual work (TSEKHMISTER, 2021;

SAPIŃSKI; CIUPKA, 2021). Also, researchers Lemeshchuk et al. (2022) note that group work on the part of other students is important to help integrate students with disabilities into the normal teaching and learning process, etc. (p. 80-88). The methods of discriminating in the organization of instruction and assessment of the student body's knowledge have been shown to be highly effective (GRASSI, 2018). Multimedia visualization tools such as touchscreen poly-screens, digital applications, audio amplification systems, hearing aids, and supplemental software were effectively used in the organization of instruction (ZELINA, 2020, p. 95–111). To establish the organizational work of students with disabilities, it is relevant to guarantee access to Internet resources and library resources, which had the aim to prepare and arrange convenient places for work, library catalogs, and educational and methodological literature in the reading rooms.

It is difficult to deny the importance of material resources (CASTILLO IBÁÑEZ, 2019). At the same time, we also propose to emphasize personal growth. Data from sociological surveys have demonstrated that methods of integration into the student body play no less important role than material resources (MAHANTA, 2022, p. 205-215).

However, the results did determine that instructors notice the integrative abilities of students with disabilities and note that in the university environment such people have an average state of progress in assessing their own abilities.

Work with students with disabilities integrated, first of all, the organization of psychological and pedagogical, and social stages. Based on the findings, we can state not only an increase in learning success but also an improvement in the overall level of well-being, psychological resilience, and positive self-esteem.

Psycho-pedagogical aid in such circumstances is based on the results of a determination of the psychological state, talents, and interests, which involves the solution of a certain range of psychological difficulties. For example, low self-esteem, emotional instability, and improvement of communicative skills, including through the use of techniques for psychological training and consultations. The main goal of such work is to achieve a state of psychological comfort in students with disabilities by creating a positive emotional atmosphere of assistance in academic work. Also

next to the psychological and pedagogical was effective social rehabilitation. which consisted of the involvement of students with disabilities in the work of student self-government, organization of student recreation, summer holidays, scientific conferences, a variety of competitions, exhibitions, etc. Such a structure of the organization allows for strengthening the faith of applicants for higher education with disabilities to comprehend success in the context of a variety of life cases.

Conclusions

So, the results of the study demonstrated that a certain proportion of applicants may drop out of modern learning systems, as other participants are not prepared to meet the individual needs of such students during their studies. This proportion may be 15% of the total number of respondents. However, we believe that properly established conditions of psychological and pedagogical quality assurance programs for persons with disabilities will have an impact on improving the lives of these individuals. The implementation of such quality assurance programs meets the modern requirements of international structures, which since the 1980s have been actively engaged in the integration of persons with disabilities into normal social life. Higher education plays a leading role in this process, as it not only gives the appropriate specialty and knowledge, and skills for subsequent professional activity, but also has a powerful socialization influence.

The practical importance of inclusion in higher education is consistent with democratic ideas. Education with elements of inclusion in higher education institutions is important because it ensures the formation of an educational environment that meets the requirements and interests of all students, including those with special needs in psychophysical development.

The results indicate that qualitative socio-psychological adaptation of students with disabilities is hindered by factors of emotional discomfort associated with the problems of low self-esteem and low level of formation of the image of personal "I". Based on the analysis, it is indicated that not only material provision, but also moral guidelines are important for the psychological and pedagogical

provision of the quality of life of persons with disabilities in higher education institutions. First of all, it is said about adequate attitude to the assessment of their activities, inclusion in the social activity of students, and emphasis on internal self-development.

Further improvement of the methods of forming the necessary learning environment is the subject of a broader discussion. Modern technologies are developing rapidly, so their integration into the creation of appropriate psychological and pedagogical support will require further study.

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