

A model of the psychosocial environment for integrated education opportunities of the disabled in Lithuania

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The positive attitude of people with and without disabilities towards their interrelations can create favorable psychosocial preconditions for optimal interrelations in the integrated social system. On the basis of the theoretical model, the article presents comparative data of a research which served as a basis for the model of psychosocial preconditions and possible obstacles for the integrated education of the disabled in Lithuania.

Materials and methods: An anonymous survey was carried out. It included 393 teachers working in not integrated (276), integrated (15) and special (102) schools and 2471 children from the same schools (1958, 126 and 382, respectively). Statistical analysis was carried out using SAS.

Results: About 57% of teachers from integrated and 93% from unintegrated comprehensive schools and the absolute majority of teachers from all types of schools (about 78%) had low or very low knowledge about the disabled. Both disabled and able-bodied schoolchildren showed positive feelings towards each other and were inclined to communicate among themselves. Many able-bodied schoolchildren (78%) as well as those with disabilities (68%) have little knowledge about the disabled.

Conclusions: The practical value of the research is determined by: 1) the data which confirm a positive interpersonal relationship of schoolchildren with and without disabilities as well as their feelings towards each other, and 2) the data which propose that the general attitude of teachers from comprehensive schools to the integration of the disabled is positive and that they experience a great need for knowledge about the problems of the disabled.

Key words: attitudes, integrated teaching, disabled schoolchildren, able-bodied schoolchildren

INTRODUCTION

According to the social model of disability, a disabled person is not a patient but an individual with an irreversible physical, visual, aural or mental disorder, which is to be considered as a permanent personal characteristic and not a clinical symptom of a disease or injury (1). In various countries of the world people with disabilities make a relatively large social group – between 5 and 20% of all population (2). An average of the

disabled in the EURO countries amounts to approximately 14% of the population (3). This group of people should not be socially isolated. Public social institutions, including health care institutions, are to pursue policies combating social exclusion of the disabled and to embody these policies both in theory and in practice (4, 5).

As the universally acknowledged theory of self-actualization and motivation (6) proposes, an individual has no higher needs of self-actualization or a desire to actively participate in public life unless hierarchically lower needs of physical survival and safety, communication, love and affirmation in the family and other environments as well as self-esteem are met.

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Attitude is one of the major objectives in the scientific research of social psychology. It determines personal behaviour as well as interpersonal relationships (7). Therefore, a positive attitude of people with and without disabilities towards each other can create favourable socio-psychological assumptions for optimal personal relationships in the integrated social system, whereas an unfriendly attitude, on the contrary, can become a barrier for policies combating social exclusion of the disabled.

Despite the fact that different theories raise no more doubts about a multidimensional character of attitude and that an attitude to the integration process in the special education system is no longer unilateral, up till now no scientific research on the attitude to the integration process of the disabled and their relation to others has been undertaken in several respects (cognitive, behavioural and sensual) and comprehensively (in respect of interpersonal relationships and knowledge of teachers as well as schoolchildren with and without disabilities) (8–10).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The research was done during 1999–2003. Among the participants there were schoolchildren aged 9–13 years. The authors of the study got approval for their work from the Special Education Sector of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania. The criterion of moral development played a crucial role in choosing the age of schoolchildren. Our interest lay in the early adolescence when morality of social rules is established, and adolescence when a teenager follows the principles of his / her indisputable rights and personal ethics (11–13). The exploratory research was performed at integrated schools where 150 respondents – teachers and schoolchildren – were interviewed. Later on the same research was repeated at Vilnius, Kaunas and Prienai schools. Comprehensive schools in Vilnius were chosen at random, whereas institutions of special education in Vilnius, Kaunas and Prienai were chosen according to the form of disability. The research was conducted anonymously and the respondents were free in filling the questionnaire. 500 questionnaires were distributed to teachers and 2700 questionnaires to schoolchildren. The total questionnaires were filled and handed back by 78.6% of teachers and 91.6% of schoolchildren. The research sample was represented by 2867 respondents – groups of teachers and schoolchildren from integrated and unintegrated comprehensive schools as well as from special education schools. The homogeneity of the respondent teachers' group was determined by the subject they taught, and that of schoolchildren by their age and sex. The type of school where teachers worked and the form of disability of schoolchildren determined the heterogeneity of the groups. As some foreign scientists who studied teachers' attitude to integrated education point out in their works (14), the age and sex do not make any impact in shaping that attitude.

Statistical data analysis was done applying the mathematical methods. To compare the groups, Wilcoxon's two-sample test was chosen. In an analysis of correlative sample data relations, Spearman's correlation coefficient (r) was applied. The significance level $p < 0.05$ was chosen for verification of statistical hypotheses. In order to determine the questionnaire filling reliability, Cronbach's alpha data reliability procedure was used (teachers $\alpha = 0.54$ – sufficient, schoolchildren without disabilities $\alpha = 0.73$ – reliable, and schoolchildren with disabilities $\alpha = 0.64$ – reliable).

Questionnaire poll

With a view to investigate the multidimensional attitude of the respondents towards each other as well as their attitude to the process of integration in the area of education, three types of authentic questionnaires were prepared for teachers as well as for schoolchildren with and without disabilities. Q-type diagnostic data were expressed on a ternary scale. The exploratory research was completed among all age groups of the integrated type of schools. There were no difficulties encountered while filling the questionnaires. The questionnaire reliability was satisfactory.

The questionnaire for teachers was the same in all schools. The teachers' index of knowledge was composed of the following factors: knowledge of the legal acts, knowledge of the problems of the disabled, and a need for knowledge. The cognitive component of teachers' attitude to integrated education was composed of three factors: general approach to integrated education, approach to integrated education at school, and the desire to work with the disabled. The cognitive component of teachers' attitude to the training of the disabled at home was composed of these factors: training of the disabled at home, an experience in training at home, and a desire to work with the disabled at home.

The questionnaire for schoolchildren without disabilities was composed of the following components: the behavioural component of attitude (a desire to communicate with the disabled schoolmates occasionally, in spare time, at school, readiness to help them in a conflict situation, in daily living needs), the sensual component, and the index of knowledge (the level of knowledge and the need for knowledge).

The questionnaire for disabled schoolchildren was composed of these components: a relation to the schoolmates without disabilities (desire to relate to them separately, in spare time, at school, to communicate at home, in a conflict situation), relation to other disabled (interpersonal communication, relation, self-expression), sensual components of the disabled schoolchildren's attitude towards their schoolmates with and without disabilities (emotions towards each other, self-worth and self-image of the disabled), and the index of knowledge of the disabled schoolchildren (the level of knowledge and the need for knowledge).

RESULTS

On the basis of the theoretical method, according to the comparative research data on the immediate participants in education (teachers, schoolchildren with and without disabilities), psychosocial assumptions as well as possible barriers for the integration of disabled schoolchildren into comprehensive schools could be envisaged.

Contrary to schoolchildren, data about the attitude and level of knowledge of teachers from all types of schools (Diagram 1) point to controversial assumptions for the psychosocial environment of integrated education. Teachers from integrated comprehensive schools (ICS) provide the best assumptions for a favourable environment of integrated education. Despite the fact that more than a half of them (57%) are not familiar with the legal acts and have little understanding of the problems of the disabled (KIA and KPD obstacle positions), almost all of them acknowledged the necessity of the integrated education of the disabled and are ready to teach the disabled in their own classes (AIE and PAI positions). The majority of teachers from this type of schools (72%) experience a tremendous need for knowledge about the disabled (KN obstacle position). This shows that a concrete and well organized experience in integrated education compensates the lack of information and allows positive assumptions on the psychosocial environment to teach schoolchildren with and without disabilities. Obstacles for the implementation of the idea of the integrated education of the disabled may be a flat position of the majority of teachers (72%) from special schools (SCS) against the integrated education of the disabled together with schoolchildren without disabilities (AIE position). This clearly stands in contradiction to their better knowledge of the international legal acts and the problems of the disabled (KIA and KPD assumption position). Thus, it becomes apparent that an exclusive contact with disabled schoolchildren alone in special schools creates a negative attitude towards integrated education. The unwillingness of the absolute majority of teachers from unintegrated comprehensive schools (83%) to teach disabled schoolchildren in *their* classes as well as their little knowledge about the disabled (93–94%) (PAI, KIA, and KPD obstacle position) may also become a serious barrier to the psychological and social wellbeing of the disabled and to their successful integration into comprehensive schools.

Comparative data on the disabled schoolchildren's attitude to themselves are presented in Diagram 1. The estimation level of self-actualization of the overall group of the disabled schoolchildren (B position), of all indicators of self-worth and of two indicators of self-image, is high or very high, the average reaching from 2.57 to

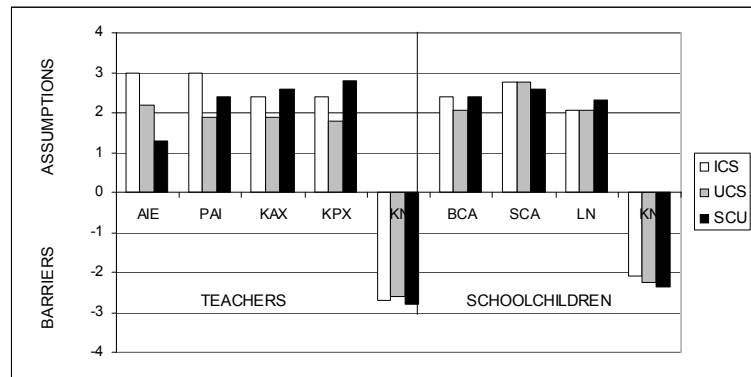


Diagram 1. Comparative data on disabled schoolchildren's attitude to themselves.

Explanations: indicators of schoolchildren: BCA – behavioural component of attitude, SCA – sensual component of attitude, LN – level of knowledge; indicators of teachers: AIE – general attitude to the integrated education, personal attitude to the integrated education, KAX – index of knowledge, knowledge of the legal acts, KPX – knowledge of the problems of the disabled, KN – need for knowledge; SCS – special schools, ICS – integrated comprehensive schools, UCS – unintegrated comprehensive schools.

2.95 points (of 3) (positions SX, SP, S, L, W, SI and O). This shows positive psychological assumptions for communication of equal value between schoolchildren with and without disabilities in integrated education. Most of disabled schoolchildren associate their future plans with work or further studies (SX); they do not experience self-pity or sadness because of their disability (SP and S); they are content with a sufficient attention others pay to them (L); they positively judge (W) and identify themselves as equal to those without disabilities (SI); and they give a rather high estimation to their opportunities (O). The level of their independence (SE) and rejection of others' help (H), however, is lower and reaches 2.4 and 2.2 points. This, of course, could become an obstacle for the integration of the disabled into the general education system.

The research data represented in Diagram 2 also reveal some possible psychological barriers for schoolchildren with visual, aural or multiple disabilities to be integrated to the general education system on equal basis. This is shown by several indicators: 1) rejection of self-pity (indicator SP) among schoolchildren with visual disabilities (position V) and of the absence of sadness because of disability (indicator S) among schoolchildren with aural disabilities (position A) are rather low (2.3 points); they show that about 60% of these children experience a great self-pity or sadness because of their disability; 2) the indicator of self-estimation (indicator SE) among the schoolchildren with aural or multiple disabilities (position MU) in comparison to other disabled schoolchildren is low (2.3 and 2.1 points), implying that over 60% of schoolchildren with this form of disability view themselves as less worthy than others; 3) the indicator of rejection of help by others (indicator H) among schoolchildren with visual,



Diagram 2. General average data on the disabled schoolchildren’s attitude to themselves (Ath) and indicators according to the form of disability (V, M, A, MU)

Explanations: indicators: SX – index of self-estimation (future plans for work and further studies), SP – absence of self-pity, S – absence of sadness because of disability, L – sense of attention or love by others, W – sense of self-worth, SI – acknowledgment of self-identity equal to that of schoolchildren without disabilities, O – estimation of one’s opportunities, SE – estimation of independence, H – rejection of help by others.

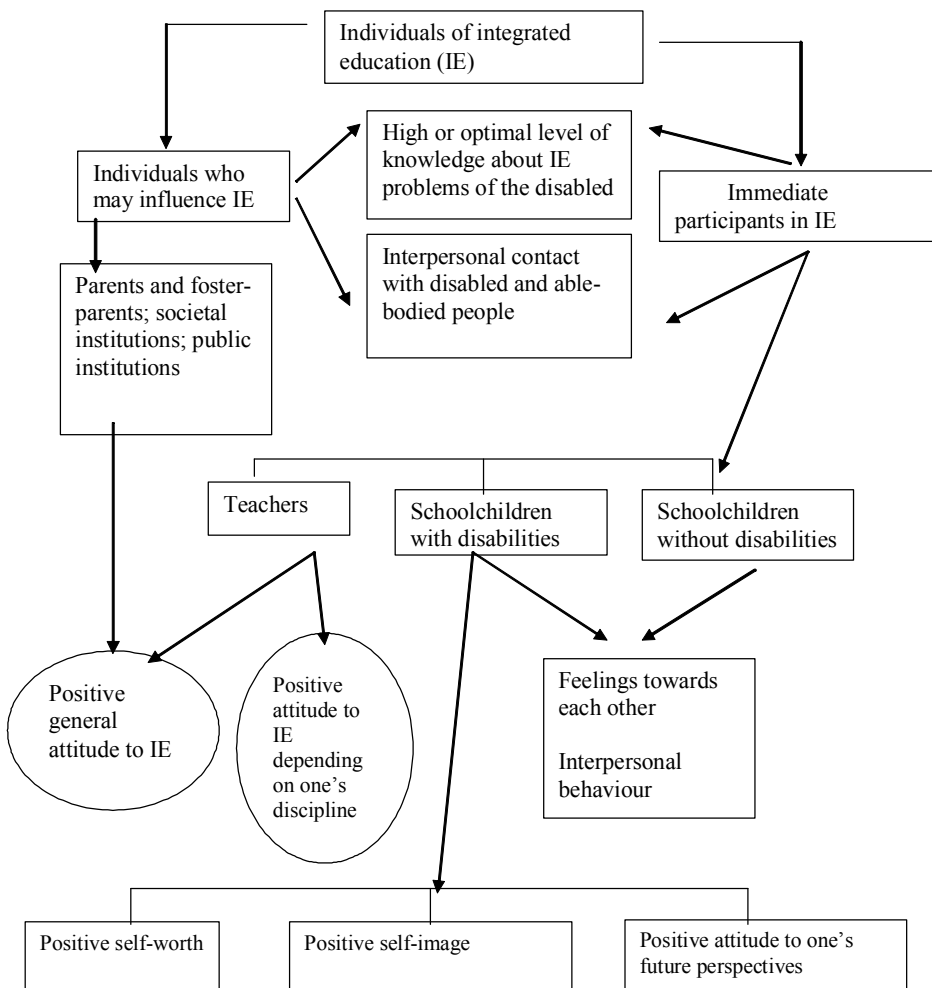
multiple and particularly aural disabilities is much lower (2.3 and 1.6 points) than among schoolchildren with motional disabilities (position M) (2.6 points); thus, more than 60% of schoolchildren with visual, multiple or aural disabilities are convinced that others must help them. This in turn may also become a barrier for interpersonal relationships of equal value in setting integrated education.

DISCUSSION

As the experience from other countries shows, pursuant to the psychological and social wellbeing of people with disabilities in a concrete society first of all the question of the possibility of integrated education is to be met.

Here are two different socio-psychological models describing the opportunities for people with disabilities to participate in the integrated education system.

From many theories of social psychology (theories of learning – behaviour, cognitive integration, consistency, reasoned action) and research data (15–21) it is possible to conclude that: 1) the quality of cognitive, emotional and behavioural components of attitude is one of the basic conditions determining a positive or negative behaviour towards the other; 2) the future relationship between two individuals can be envisaged by a person’s attitude towards the other person; 3) the quality of personal attitude can be changed by interpersonal contact, environmental conditions, personal information and knowledge about the other, leaders’ opinion and judgements; 4) the quality of contact with the social environment can be determined by personal convictions, ideas and feelings towards oneself. On the basis of logical interpretation, a theoretical model of the quality of socio-psychological environment for the integration of the disabled into the general education system (Diagram 3).



On the basis of logical interpretation, a theoretical model of the quality of socio-psychological environment for the integration of the disabled into the general education system (Diagram 3).

The theoretical model names the immediate parti-

Diagram 3. Theoretical model of favourable socio-psychological environment for integrated education of the disabled

participants in the integrated education process of the disabled (teachers, schoolchildren with and without disabilities) and individuals who may influence integrated education (parents and foster-parents of schoolchildren with and without disabilities, societal and public institutions).

Under this theoretical model, the following conclusions may be drawn:

1. Contact of immediate and implicit participants in the integrated education of both schoolchildren with and without disabilities, high or optimal level of knowledge about the disabled and positive aspects of their integrated education may stimulate the socialization process of the disabled in the general education system.

2. General positive attitude of teachers, parents, foster-parents, societal organizations of the disabled and public institutions to the integrated education of the disabled may have an impact on the public social policy concerning the integration of the disabled.

3. Positive motivation of the teachers as organizers and leaders to teach disabled schoolchildren along with schoolchildren without disabilities may provide favourable opportunities for communication between schoolchildren with and without disabilities as well as for optimal perception of the teaching material.

4. Warm feelings as well as positive behaviour of schoolchildren with and without disabilities towards each other promote the positive behaviour of schoolchildren without disabilities and their contact with disabled peers.

5. Self-worth affirmation of the disabled schoolchildren, awareness of their equality with other schoolchildren and making plans for future actions may foster equal relationships between schoolchildren with and without disabilities in the integrated education system.

With a view to embody the idea of equal integrated education of the disabled in a concrete society, the proposed theoretical method reveals the complexity of psychosocial conditions and the need to explore them.

CONCLUSIONS

The scientific significance of the research lies in its outcome:

1. Schoolchildren of unintegrated schools, having no experience related to schoolchildren with disabilities, expressed their friendly attitude and feelings towards communication with and help to their schoolmates with disabilities. The research data raise doubts as regards a well established attitude to interpersonal relationships in the consistency theory.

2. Other research data show that the absolute majority of teachers from special schools are against the integration of schoolchildren with disabilities into comprehensive schools. This may confirm the theory of reasoned action.

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PSICHOSOCIALINĖS APLINKOS MODELIS INTEGRUOTAM NEĮGALIŲJŲ UGDYMIUI LIETUVOJE

S a n t r a u k a

Darbo tikslas. Šiame straipsnyje remdamiesi teorinio modelio nuostatomis pateikiame tyrimų lyginamuosius duomenis, kurių pagrindu sudarėme psichosocialinių prielaidų ir galimų kliūčių integruotam neįgaliųjų ugdymui Lietuvoje modelį.

Duomenys ir metodai. Buvo atlikta anoniminė apklausa, kuri apėmė 393 mokytojus iš neintegruotų (276), integruotų (15) ir specialiųjų (102) mokyklų bei 2471 mokinių iš tų pa-

čių mokyklų (1958, 126 ir 383 atitinkamai). Statistinė analizė buvo atlikta naudojant SAS.

Rezultatai. Apie 57% mokytojų iš integruotų ir 93% mokytojų iš neintegruotų bendrojo lavinimo mokyklų mažai žinojo apie neįgaliuosius ir absoliuti dauguma tyrime dalyvavusių mokytojų (apie 78%) pritarė žinių apie neįgaliųjų problemas poreikiui. Įgalūs ir neįgalūs mokiniai pareiškė norą bendrauti tarpusavyje (apie 85%), jautė vienas kitam pozityvius jausmus (integruotos mokyklos – 71%, neintegruotos – 69% bei specialiojo ugdymo – 71%). Daugelis įgaliųjų (78%) ir neįgaliųjų mokinių (68%) mažai žinojo apie neįgaliųjų problemas.

Išvados. Tyrimo duomenys patvirtina teigiamas įgaliųjų ir neįgaliųjų mokinių tarpasmeninių santykių bei puoselėjamų jausmų nuostatas. Gana aukštas neįgaliųjų mokinių savigarbos, saviklojos ir saviraiškos lygmuo paneigia niekuo nepagrįstą neįgaliųjų socialinės integracijos priešininkų mitą, jog neįgalieji moksleiviai bendrojo lavinimo mokyklose neabejotinai būtų skriaudžiami įgaliųjų savo bendraamžių. Tyrimo rezultatai leidžia teigti, jog bendrojo lavinimo mokyklų mokytojų bendros nuostatos neįgaliųjų integracijos požiūriu yra teigiamos, o žinių apie neįgaliųjų problemas poreikis didelis. Tai leidžia integruoti neįgaliuosius į bendrą švietimo sistemą, savaimė suprantama, sudarius mokytojams sąlygas įgyti tinkamą kvalifikaciją dirbti su neįgaliaisiais ugdytiniais.

Raktažodžiai: požiūris, integruotas ugdymas, įgalūs mokiniai, neįgalūs mokiniai, mokytojai.