

# Student's attitudes and opinions of Special Education for the inclusion of Individuals with Disabilities

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Granter: Support of Innovation and Creation of Inclusive Environment in Higher Education for Students with Disabilities - Principles, Goals, Methods, Tools, Terms

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**Abstract** Scientific study is aimed at presenting the results of research focused on the researching analysis attitudes and opinions of the student's of special education for the inclusion of individuals with disabilities. The author is based on present knowledge and position of the inclusion in the world and emphasis on research findings.

**Keywords** Inclusion, disability, attitudes, opinions.

## 1. THEORETICAL INPUT INTO THE ISSUE

Opinions and attitudes of society towards individuals with disabilities and their inclusion influenced many factors in legislation, in economic and organizational area in personal resources and social situations in the personal competence of individuals alone with disabilities and others. On the one hand they can often be the reflection of certain incoming trends, but on the other hand, also conservative mind. Therefore, sometimes we become witnesses of situations where opinions and attitudes are often ambivalent and are the reflection of social difference.

Attitudes and opinions of society towards individuals with disabilities are determined by many factors, from which some of can be *facilitators, as well as inhibitors*. Subdivision stated Schmidtová (2009), which refers *subjective and objective determinants*. The subjective factor classifies health of individuals with disabilities; type and degree of disability; compensation aids and their use; personality traits of disabled and his strengths and weaknesses; effect of school, family and also the personal background of individuals with disabilities; the level of previous education; the effectiveness of teaching methods and until today existing special educational care.

By the author, objective factors are dependent since perception of disabled by healthy population. Social consciousness and attitudes of people towards disabled population can significantly influence social policy and relation of the state towards them. Level of education classifies towards them; professional preparation for people with disabilities; the willingness of society to create workstations; state of the environment but also the possibility to compensate consequences of disability by facilities of social support.

If we add to this mutual understanding, tolerance and acceptance of disabled by intact society, we can talk about implementation of one from the principles (and also goals) of the successful inclusion.

The aim of inclusion/inclusive education is not to *remove differences* between individuals with disabilities, but to allow them to develop their skills in maximum possible rate together with other intact individuals. This method of comprehension is came out from the diversity of individuals with disabilities (and their specific needs) and by the assumption of changes of the system so that to prove to saturate individual and specific needs of all the individuals.

Inclusive education should be in full extent *accepting each of persons* with his needs and requirements and also should be allow of individuals to operate in their *natural social environment*. The whole process of inclusive education would lead to the maximum development of all aspects of the personality of the individual with a disability, to the acquisition of new knowledge and know-how would also enable it to promote alone in the society, to build a strong social interaction and be contribution for the society.

However, it is necessary to inclusive thinking didn't assert only in the educational field for individuals with disabilities, but that was transferred into common life in the society (on the elderly person, ill persons or poor health for mothers with young children, other minority groups and others.).

In recent years, we are witnesses of many changes that are realized with objective to research a higher level of inclusion of individuals with disabilities. These changes are closely linked to acceptance of international documents such as the Charter of the Human Rights, the Charter of the Rights of the Child, the Charter of the parental rights, the Convention about the Rights of handicapped persons and others.

To these changes, however, contribute also results of the research of the science and technology, both in general pedagogy, psychology, linguistic, medicine, technology, neuropsychology, acoustics, anthropology, and others, as well as in the field of special education. The requirements arising from these changes as well as changes of paradigms in special education and in other helping disciplines, related to globalization of the world and the gradual transformation of the world (not only) school policy, that reflect directly also in the education of individuals with disabilities. Important in this context to realize that in the context of humanization and democratization of

education, there are changes at all levels and types of schools, thus on universities (Gavora, 2008).

Inclusive education should be each individual, and thus individuals with disabilities *secure the right to study at the university selected study program*. Rights are appointed legal standards is guaranteed equally to all applicants and students in harmony with the principle of equal treatment in education. In harmony with the principle of equal treatment is forbidden discrimination also because of age, gender, sexual orientation, matrimony, family status, race, color, disability, language, political or other opinion, membership of a national minority, religion or belief, trade union activity, national or social origin, property, origin of the family or other status (Růžicková, 2007; Joklíková, Stejskalová, 2013).

Each university should develop generally accessible academic environment by creating appropriate conditions of study for all students, and therefore students with special needs without reducing the demands on their academic performance. Student with special needs has according to the extent and type of special need before entering the university, during study *title to support services*, particularly to secure the possibility to using specific educational resources; on the individual learning resources, individual learning approaches, especially individual teaching selected subjects for students with sensory disabilities; on special conditions for the completion of the study duties without reducing demands on school performance; on the individual access of the university's teachers; the exemption of tuition fees in evincible cases, in the case of a longer study than the standard length of the appropriate study program.

Support for students of universities with special needs is provided in various forms and institutions. The most frequent is particularly *special coordinator for students, special pedagogy workplace at universities, knowledgeable teachers* who speak the appropriate educational strategies, various elements of accessibility. Last but not least, are also important *personal competencies* of the students themselves and their readiness to influence and to be educated in an environment of the university.

How do though intact students perceive tertiary education of the students with special needs? What are their opinions and attitudes to this up-to-date phenomenon? This issue will devote in following lines (typescript).

## 2. ANALYSIS OF ATTITUDES AND OPINIONS OF THE STUDENTS OF SPECIAL EDUCATION FOR INCLUSION OF THE INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES – SELECTION FROM RESULTS OF EMPIRICAL ACTIVITIES

The aim of our research was to determine the attitudes and opinions of the students of special education for the inclusion of individuals with disabilities. The partial aim of the study was to analyze the separate determinants qualifying the process of inclusion of individuals with disabilities.

Research group constituted of 114 students of special education studying in Bratislava, Ružomberok, respectively in Levoča and Prešov. From that were 94% of women and 6% of men. 72% of students studying at bachelor's degree studies and 28% at master's degree studies. With take into account the form of studying, the sample constituted 68% of part-time students and 32% of full-time students.

### 2.1 Research results are acquired by the Questionnaire

Within the questionnaire which we have compiled for the purposes of our research, we used to expose of the attitudes of students Likert scale five-fold. We obtained such a more accurate results that make our research more relevant.

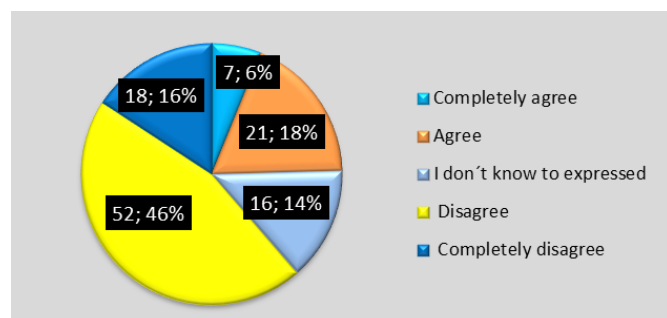
It is generally known that as mature is the society, so is mature also it is also education system in the country, not excluding education of individuals with disabilities. Inclusion process is complicated and it is necessary to participate on it multidisciplinary teams. In what proportion should, however, involved whole society on the inclusion? This was also one of the statements that we presented to students studying special education. With the argument that on the *inclusion should be involved in the whole society, completely agreed* 63 students (56%) and *agreed* 43 students (38%). With this statement didn't agree only four students (3%) and also 4 students were not able to express themselves.

Given the above, we assumed that between the respondents find themselves the opponents of inclusion and therefore we offered the statement that *in our country, inclusion does not make a sense*. With these statement, It disagreed 59 students (52%) and completely disagreed 14 students (12%). Opportunity of answer *I do not know to express* labelled 20 students (18%). With statement agreed 15 students (13%) and *fully agreed* 6 students (5%), what partly confirms our assumption.

Two other statements partly linked to the previous one. We start from the hypothesis that the inclusion in present understanding is not the problem disability itself but should be the point of interest of the whole society (including the disabled). Therefore, we have formulated a statement if the students of special *education perceive disability as a socially conditioned problem*. Possibility to Agree, said 42 students (37%) and disagreed 28%, with the possibility *I do not know to express* said 26 students (23%). Absolute agreement marked 8 students (7%), and on the other hand absolutely disagreed 6 students (5%).

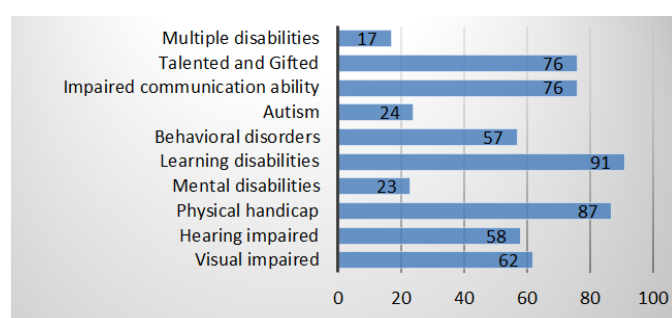
The second sentence was statement if students of the special *education perceive an individual with a disability as a problematic individual (personal entity)*. We were surprised, given the focus of the study that 6 students (5 %) perceived individuals with disabilities as problematic. What is positive, however, up-to 67 students (59%) labeled the possibility of disagreement with this statement and categorical disagreement expressed 33 students (29%). While up 94% of quizzed students *accepts student with disabilities unconditional (with its positives, negatives and also specifics)*. However, we found two percent of students who fail to accept students with disabilities such as he really is.

By statement, *whether every individual with a disability is suitable for inclusion*, more than half - 52 students (46%) *disagreed* with the given statement. As contrast *agreed* 21 students (18%) and completely agreed 7 students (6%). *Strongly disagreement* expressed 18 students (16%).



Graph 1 Suitability of the inclusion for each individual.

Even though, we are interested in this *which from disabled people, students consider as most suitable for the process of inclusion (possibility of mark of different possibilities):*



Graph 2 Suitability of different types of disability for inclusion.

To expression of the maturity of each state is the systematic and efficient operation of all interested systems, in our case particularly for studying, counseling, medical, social, legal, economic ... That's why we included in research included in statement, whether *inclusion makes sense only if all government work systems are operated*. Students interested this statement. By total number of 114 students absolutely agreed with the statement 41 students (36%) agreed 59 students (52%), what is together 88% positive opinions to the statement. But 4 students disagreed and 3 students completely disagreed.

One of the most important systems of the state, which should be supported individuals with disabilities and their close social environment is the social system, which is by means of a different legal standards anchored in each country. In Slovakia, for many years, also due to the political changes it is precisely the social system, which is constantly is subject to changes. In our research, we submitted statement to respondents that *the social system in our country is strongly supporting on the inclusion of individuals with disabilities*. Students in 54 cases (47%) said that with given statement *disagree* and the social system in their country is not strongly supporting of the inclusion of individuals with disabilities, whereby following 19 students (17%) labeled the possibility of *completely disagree*. With statement on the contrary agreed 5 students. 36 students (32%) don't know to expressed to the verdict. Not only the maturity of the social and educational system is an expression of the maturity of the given country. In our opinions, it is important to also think about it, which way and how quickly an individual is able to find adequate employment and establish themselves in praxis. We offered respondents statement that *individuals with disabilities don't have sufficient support by the State and also motivation in finding the employment*. With the statement *agreed* 59 students (52%) and *completely agreed* 43

students (38%). Three students have pointed out the possibility of replies *disagreed*. Other students didn't reply.

An important part of the learning of inclusive teacher is his pursuit of continuous education and, if it is necessary also various specialized courses and programs. In our research, we offered students a statement, whether is in their opinion *important to keep teachers of common schools to increasing their professional interest in the field of special education*. To the verdict labeled all 114 respondents, of who 69 students (61%) said they completely agree with this it is important to keep teachers of common schools to increase their professional interest, respectively completing specialization in special education and 39 students (34%) *agreed with continuity of education*. Against *education of common teachers in the field of special education were expressed* 4 students (3%).

An important support mechanism within the inclusive education of individuals with disabilities is an assistant of teacher. It is professional, which, as the name implies, is an teacher's assistant and therefore is an integral part of the educational process. Legislatively, it defines, in particular three legal norms, in Slovakia; namely: National Council Act No 245/2008 Z.z. about education and training; Law NR SR number 317 / 2009 Z.z. about teaching and professional staff; and the Ministry of Education Decree 437/2009 Z.z. which were established qualifications and specific eligibility requirements for each category of teaching staff and specialists. In our research, we included statements within the statement that teachers in common schools which teach disabled pupils should have their teaching assistant. Up to 109 students with this statement agree / totally agree (96%). Five students didn't know a given expression to express.

The issue of inclusive education is a multi-disciplinary issue, and underlie it an amount of factors and determinants. In praxis is resonating ambivalent views on the education of individuals with disabilities and so even teachers are not united in the views. We are submitted the statement students of special education whether they think that students with disabilities are educated at the expense of development and education of the intact students. The students, as it is in praxis were identified ambivalent replies. Most of the students, up to 71% disagreed with that given statement. On the contrary, 16% of students agreed with the statement. 13% of the students labeled *I do not know to express*.

Other items that we have formulated for the students of special education were directed to detection of opinions of students on inclusion and issues associated with it. We asked in what do they see the biggest problems in the process of inclusion of individuals with disabilities. Students (25%) see the biggest problem in the lack of support resources (financial, social, personal) by the state. Other students (17%) see the biggest problems in a insufficient readiness and the misunderstanding of disabled by the society alone (18%). Furthermore, it is the students' view the problem is ignorance of the information, respectively. ignorance of the society about the given problem (15%). To Fourteen students minds, schools are not sufficiently prepared for inclusion and 15 students think that the school are missed adequate material security (13%).

Chart 1 Problems in the process of inclusion of individuals with disabilities.

Possibility of replies	Amount	Percent
Lack of resources by the state	28	25%
The lack of readiness of teachers	20	17%
Misunderstanding of society	20	18%
Ignorance of society	17	15%
Material security	15	13%
Un readiness of schools	14	12%

The inclusion of individuals with disabilities has undoubtedly many positives for both the individuals themselves and for the society. Therefore, we asked respondents *what is the benefits of inclusion, to their minds?* Students of Special Education (had a possibility of marking of multiple answers) said that the greatest benefit of the inclusion is the *integration* of individuals with disabilities into society (14%), another benefit is the equality (14,12 %), understanding (13, 11%), socialization (12,11%), the possibility to share the team (12,11%); higher quality life (12,11%), empathy (6%), responsiveness (6%) and tolerance (6%). Nine percent of students said that in their opinion, inclusion has no benefit.

Also, we asked students *what are the biggest positives and negatives of the inclusion to their mind? The results are well arranged in Chart 2 and 3.*

Chart 2 Positives of the Inclusion

Possibility of replies	Amount	Percent
<b>Emancipation</b>	12	10%
<b>Help</b>	18	16%
<b>Empathy</b>	16	14%
<b>Accepting</b>	17	15%
<b>Socialization</b>	20	18%
<b>Progress</b>	13	11%
<b>Tolerance</b>	12	11%
<b>Others</b>	6	5%

Chart 3 Negatives of the Inclusion.

Possibility of replies	Amount	Percent
<b>Attitude of society</b>	9	8%
<b>Condemning</b>	10	9%
<b>Unpreparedness</b>	12	10%
<b>Finance</b>	11	10%
<b>Time-consuming process</b>	15	13%
<b>Ignorance of information</b>	12	10%
<b>Incompetence</b>	10	9%
<b>Rejection</b>	8	7%
<b>Misunderstanding</b>	9	8%
<b>Resources</b>	7	6%
<b>Any</b>	11	10%

We also wonder, according to the opinions of respondents, what is difference in the education of individuals with disabilities by non-disabled population. In students opinion(19%) the biggest difference in the education of individuals with disabilities is time-consuming in the access, patience (9%), saturation of special needs ( 9%), different educational conditions (7%), preparation for education (7%), intensity of education (7%), material equipment (7%). Nine students minds they are any differences in education of individuals with disabilities and non-disabled population (8%) and 8% of the students to this item were unable to commentate.

In the final research activity, we wanted to know what is the general opinion of the students of special education for the inclusion of individuals with disabilities. The results are presented in the following Chart.

Chart 4 Opinions of the students of special education on the inclusion of the individuals with disabilities.

Possibility of replies	amount	percent
<b>I don't know to say</b>	9	8%
<b>Insufficient awareness of the society</b>	8	7%
<b>Depends on type and degree of disability</b>	12	11%
<b>Realizable only if are fulfilled all the necessary conditions for</b>	22	19%

<b>its successful process</b>		
<b>Insufficiently financial</b>	9	8%
<b>Positive</b>	22	19%
<b>Negative</b>	11	10%
<b>Integration/inclusion is needed</b>	21	18%

As a final question we asked students whether their attitudes and opinion to inclusion may be influenced by the study of department of special education at University. Up to 69 students from the sample (60%) think that their study has affected and affects the attitude to the inclusion of individuals with disabilities. But on the other hand, 29 students disagreed with the statement and don't think that studying might be their attitude toward inclusion somehow influenced. To this statement didn't know to express 16 students (17%).

## 2.2 Evaluation the results of the research in relation to the stated goals and discussion

As the goal of our research activities, we determine to find out the attitudes and opinions of students of special education in Slovakia. Based on the obtained data, we found out that respondents considered inclusion for relatively positive step forward. However, despite this statement and at the same time the fact that inclusion should be implicitly involve to anyone who has special needs (not just groups of individuals with disabilities) students in their answers tended towards the possibility that disagree with the fact that every individual with a disability is suitable for inclusion. At the same time they identified themselves which disability consider appropriate for the process of inclusion.

Partly objective of the research was to analyze the various determinants qualifying the process of inclusion of the individuals with disabilities. To our empirical activity, we found out that the main determinants qualifying inclusive process is especially the *society*, but also *insufficient awareness* by intact society, *lack of financial, material and social support from the state*, *incompetence of teaching staff* in the process of education of individuals with disabilities in common schools, *lack of material and technical aids* and others. On the contrary, students highlighted *effective multidisciplinary cooperation of special teachers, assistant of teacher and teacher*.

The majority of respondents move towards the view that the *process of inclusion does not take place as expected*, and according to them is possible only provided that the society will be sufficiently informed and expertly (and also human) ready. Already expression of the students, the society does not have sufficient information and knowledge about inclusion of individuals with disabilities hampering the creation of available conditions for their full (not only social) inclusion. Students of special education in Slovakia said that inclusion is for the development of individuals with disabilities needed. On the other hand the process of the inclusion should take place only if all the conditions are fulfilled for its successful implementation.

In our research, we focused on the detection of attitudes and opinions of the students of special education in Slovakia for the inclusion of individuals with disabilities.

Many authors, as we are mentioned in the beginning, Jesenský (1993, 1995, 1998, 2000), Požár (1996, 1997) and Lechta (2010) in their scientific and professional publications is written about inclusion and their books are aimed particularly at the description of the system and the process of inclusion, as well as very effective education of individuals with disabilities, which is a precondition for successful social inclusion of these individuals.



By empirical activity, we found out that the students of special education are, despite of several positive comments in many aspects skeptical in face of the inclusion. According to their inclusion does not have enough support from the government, especially its lack of financial or social support and it is needed to strengthen the system so that to saturated the specific needs of all individuals.

Despite the fact that in many countries the process of inclusion is an integral part of the state politics, in Slovakia we have recorded a lot of failings. However, addressing students said that their relation into individuals with disabilities is very positive and perceive them as equal, without exception, and therefore is needed to have been an integral part of society.

More than half of the respondents stated that the inclusion could be move to a higher level thanks to the assistants of teacher. Support of cooperation of assistants of teacher and special teacher would ensure higher effectiveness of the process of inclusion. This is evidenced also by the expression of one of the student: *...“in the system of education of the Slovak republic - for one teacher is very exhausting to work with 20 intact pupils plus with integrated individuals with disabilities... in my opinion, this problem could solve assistant of teacher!”*

Here are some other statements of students, which may be even more closer to their opinions: *...“it is very difficult, the inclusion depends on the type and degree of disability. Personally I think that the idea of inclusion is good, but it is not possible to fill it in detail. The child is also so segregated, is outside of the team in the learning process, because either has a separate work in the class, or is taught with an assistant.*

The answer of next student: *...“I confirm the inclusion because working with a group of intact pupils is compatible with one or two pupils with disabilities. But the inclusion, where they can mix different types of disability across a wide range of the degree of disability, I perceive as not very speculate solution. One special teacher can't "switch" and quickly refocus during 45 minutes for all the pupils with different types and especially the different degree of disability. He would have to be a machine that has such properties programmed. I also think that not each type and degree of disability it is appropriate for inclusion. I think that special schools are focus on a specific type of disability, they have their important position in the school system and the children in these schools are progressing more, as would be progressed in a mixed group with intact children.* As Horňák writes (2010) inclusion is necessary, but it is important that we in the issues of inclusion, followed slowly and carefully. Jesenský (1995) adds that the level of integration/inclusion is significantly determined also the degree of equivalence (autonomy and independence) of the disabled.

The students of the special pedagogy expressed the view that the greatest benefit of inclusion is participation and equality of disabled people with intact individuals (28%), understanding (13%), socialization (13%), team (14%), higher value life (14%), empathy by common society (6%), helpfulness (6%) and tolerance (6%) of the intact population.

As two students expressed: *"Even though we are all equal, persons with disabilities are often less-favored and disparaged. Therefore, we think that the inclusion could into our relationship bring equality, mutual concentration. The society will know more objectively approach to the people with a certain lack of, work could be more effective. People will learn to work more cooperate, if they will gradually perceive the difference as an ordinary, normal and not as a burden".*

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