

Pro-inclusive Character of Pupils' Relations in Compulsory Education

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Abstract The paper focuses on the analysis of inclusive attitudes of pupils in compulsory basic education to individuals with different types and levels of disabilities. In a sample of 125 girls and 129 boys, it monitors the positive or negative nature of mainstream pupils' relationships, gender and age differences in terms of their approaches to disabled individuals. It analyzes data from a non-standardized questionnaire using selected tools of descriptive and inductive statistics. Through them, it presents the results of a research probe carried out in the first quarter of 2022 at seven selected primary schools in the Hradec Králové Region.

Keywords pro-inclusive approaches, mainstream pupils, individuals with disabilities, gender and age differences related to the disabled, determinants of influence.

1. PRO-INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENT OF SCHOOLS

The basis of pro-inclusive school settings is their willingness to open up to the external environment and accept its diversity (Lazarová et al., 2015). Supportive models and procedures for creating a pro-inclusive school environment are known from abroad, such as the Lippit-Knoster model for managing complex change (Caredda, 2020) or the Booth and Ainscow inclusive education model (2011). The first proposes to proceed consistently in six steps to achieve pro-inclusive change (from the formulation of the vision, through an honest evaluation of knowledge and experience, levels of motivation and resources to the action plan). The authors point out that if one of the above steps is not tightened to its optimum, then the desired change cannot take place. The second model describes the necessary indicators of school pro-inclusiveness (culture, politics, practice), without the fulfilment of which it is also impossible to achieve actual positive changes in the school environment. In the Czech conception, Svoboda et al. (2015) and Tannenbergerová (2016). It summarizes the most important indicators of inclusion, which states that:

- Culture is reflected especially in the attitudes, values and behaviours of the school staff. If a pupil's education fails, the school looks for the causes in itself, not in the pupil. Lazarová et al. (2015) also emphasize that school culture is reflected not only in internal communication but also in the willingness and manner of communication outside school;

- The conditions of inclusive education are mainly reflected in the way in which the school organizes the running of the entire institution and in the school's ability to support the entire educational process materially and personally. As an indicator, it mentions the school budget supporting the requirements of inclusion, the diversity of classes, in-service teacher training and activities that are accessible to all pupils and not only at school;
- The practice is reflected in the consideration of the pupil's individuality and the diversity of teaching strategies. It is mainly the didactic-psychological skill of the teacher (Škoda, & Doulík, 2011) and his willingness to work professionally. If they succeed in actively involving students in the co-creation of the concept of teaching and cooperation in it, every student can benefit;
- Relations represent the mutual relations between the actors' teacher-parent, teacher-teacher or teacher-assistant, with an emphasis on openness, mutual trust and respect, willingness and a positive approach to all persons, situations and events. Zilcher and Svoboda (2019) especially emphasize the focus on specific actors as carriers of a pro-inclusive climate, in particular teachers, special pedagogues, school psychologists, prevention methodologies, etc.

The present paper also focuses on the relations, on those between mainstream pupils and pupils with disabilities. It analyses the one-sided statements of pupils of the majority population about their perceptions, attitudes and relationships with individuals with certain disabilities or disadvantages. It is the mainstream students who have the potential for possible changes in their relationships, but they are also the bearers of their limitations, e. g. due to negative stereotypes from the social environment that surrounds them. The positive or negative nature of their relationships is the subject of this paper.

2. DETERMINANTS OF APPROACHES TO DISABLED INDIVIDUALS

The school class is the environment of the group's direct influence on the socialization of the individual, in which the pupils are confronted with certain rules. Properly set rules are one of the determinants that form relationships in a class. The position of a pupil in a class group develops and strengthens depending on the social role it plays and the pupil-pupil relationship, for which the presence or absence of disorder and handicap may be decisive

(Výrost, & Slaměnik, 2015). The inclusion of individuals with disabilities in mainstream schools depends to a large extent on negative prejudices or, on the contrary, positive attitudes and stereotypes. Pipeková and Vítková (2014) point out negative attitudes as determinants that can result in social distance from individuals with disabilities. If the causes of negative attitudes and thus barriers in mutual relations are mitigated, concerns about social closeness and interactions with individuals with disabilities disappear or decrease significantly. Therefore, the school class should always be prepared in advance by the teacher for possible differences and problematic situations that bring with it the pupils' otherness (Michalová, & Pešatová et al, 2015). The pedagogue should be able to prevent by appropriate pedagogical means the possible non-admission of a pupil with a disability to the class, otherwise, he/she may increase and grow into ostracism or even bullying.

Approaches to individuals with disabilities are influenced by other determinants, such as prejudices (Nakonečný, 2009). These are already socially anchored, frequently in advance, and are significantly reflected in the behaviour of a particular person. Prejudices tend to be very emotionally strong, which is why they also resist change. Among the classic manifestations of negative prejudices is, among others, the false generalization manifested by an incompetent generalization, which is further disseminated and accepted. Even stereotyping, which classifies individuals according to predetermined criteria based on superficial characteristics, is also a common misconception (Hayesová, 2013). Creating misconceptions that do not depend on the objective characteristics of the individual or situation leads to unjustified labelling, which at school may not only apply to individuals with disabilities but also other students, see e. g. "unfortunate causal attribution" (Helus, 2015). Fortunately, these stereotypes can be changed, as they do not represent a stable construct (Výrost, & Slaměnik, 2015). Another factor influencing people's behaviour is so-called social cognition (Vágnerová, 2005). This type of cognition carries with it certain established social patterns of approaches, both for individuals on the one side and for events and happenings on the other side. The social experience is crucial here for the categorization of social objects, which may include, for example, "pupil without a disability" or "pupil with a disability". It is generally stated that personal experience can shift the concepts and constructs of social cognition concerning individuals with disabilities, provided that these individuals are not isolated and become a visible part of the society in which they live. The pro-inclusive school environment is a suitable platform for this (Vomáčková et al., 2015).

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research was focused on the analysis of the relationship of mainstream students to individuals with disabilities or disadvantages¹. It took place in the first quarter of 2022 at seven cooperating primary schools in the Hradec Králové Region. The research sample consisted of a total of 254 pupils, of which girls accounted for 48% and boys for 52%. These were only 9th grade pupils (51% of all respondents) and 6th grade pupils (49% of all respondents). The main goal of the survey was to find out whether there are connections between the manifested relationships of pupils towards disabled individuals (dependent variables) and their age and gender (independent variables). For this purpose, two research hypotheses were formulated:

- H1 6th graders show different approaches to individuals with disabilities than 9th graders,

- H2 Girls have different relationships with disabled individuals than boys.

The test methods for inductive statistics were the Shapiro-Wilk data normality test, the Mann-Whitney U test, the Kruskal-Wallis test and methods for subsequent analysis, data interpretation and processing of relevant tables and graphs. Statistical processing of the obtained data was performed using Microsoft Excel, Statistics Kingdom and Quantitative Data Analysis software (Chytrý, 2021). The research data were obtained using a non-standardized questionnaire consisting of 16 items (the first four were nominal and the remaining data were ordinal). The preparation of the questionnaire was based on selected factors influencing changes in the relationships of individuals, e. g. according to Urbanovská (2019); Hayes (2013); Ultimate (2009); Atkinson and NolenHoeksem (2012). These factors were always represented in the questionnaire by several items:

Factor A: meeting and working with a pupil with a disability, questionnaire items:

5. I would mind if a classmate with a disability was sitting next to me in class.
6. I would try to avoid a classmate with a disability.
7. I would not like to work on projects with a classmate with a disability at school.

Factor B: willingness to limit the benefit of pupils with disabilities, questionnaire items:

8. I would not mind if the teacher paid more attention to students with disabilities than others.
9. I would help a classmate with a disability at any time, even at the expense of my free time.
10. My study results do not worsen when I educate a student with a disability.

Factor C: knowledge of resolving conflict situations associated with an individual with a disability, questionnaire items:

11. Pupils with disabilities should only be educated in special schools.
12. Pupils with disabilities learn more slowly and would delay the whole class.
13. Decide which of the options you will take in the situation where you take a classmate in a wheelchair to school and find that the door is too narrow. What will you do?
 - a. I'll wait with a classmate at the entrance and try to contact an adult person to help.
 - b. With a classmate in a wheelchair, we will try to find another entrance.
 - c. Together with incoming classmates, we'll find a way to transport a classmate in a wheelchair to the school building.
 - d. I'll leave a classmate at the door to handle the situation himself.

Factor D: social environment including personal experience, questionnaire items:

14. Parents would not mind if I invited a classmate with a disability home.
15. My friends and I would be friends with a disabled classmate.
16. We would like to help a disabled classmate in the classroom.

In addition to gender and grade, students were structured into three categories according to personal experience with disabled individuals: Category 1: those who meet regularly, Category 2: those who meet occasionally, and Category 3: those who never met in person. An assumption was made: The more frequent encounters with disabled individuals, the more positive attitudes can be expected.

¹ See section 16 of Act No. 561/2004 Sb., On pre-school, basic, secondary, higher professional and other education as later amended

The four-point Likert scale "strongly agree, rather agree, rather disagree, strongly disagree" was used for the evaluation. The individual scales were assigned a score: the lower the values were reported (for individuals, for groups, for all pupils in total), the more positive the pupils expressed (negatively formulated questionnaire items were therefore inverted). The arithmetic mean, mode, median and standard deviation were used in the descriptive statistics.

4. RESULTS OF THE INVESTIGATION

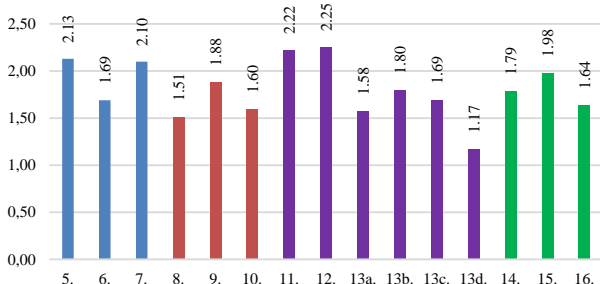
4.1 Descriptive data analysis

Descriptive data analysis was performed in four steps:

1. in the first step, the average, middle (median) and most frequent (modus) value for all respondents, regardless of age or gender, was determined for each questionnaire item,
2. in the second step, a similar analysis was performed, but in the breakdown of respondents according to the school year,
3. in the third step, a similar analysis was performed, but in the breakdown of respondents by gender,
4. in the fourth step, a similar analysis was performed, but in the breakdown of respondents according to personal experience with disabled individuals.

In the first step in the sum of all respondents, the variability of pupils' statements was monitored for each questionnaire item in terms of their positivity or negativity towards individuals with disabilities. Pupils expressed a dominantly positive attitude with the statement 13d. *I will leave a classmate with a disability to solve the situation himself*, where the average value of 1.17 was the lowest recorded and thus expressed a positive attitude towards the disabled student, which the vast majority of respondents would not leave to fend for themselves, see graph 1.

Graph 1: Average evaluation of questionnaire items in the sum of all respondents

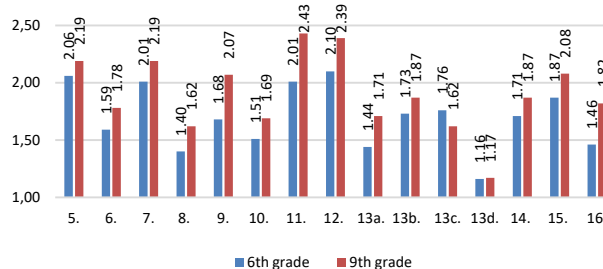


On the contrary, the strongest negative attitude was recorded with an average value of 2.25 for the questionnaire item 12. *Pupils with disabilities learn more slowly and would delay the whole class* and with an average value of 2.22 for item 11. *Pupils with disabilities should learn only in special schools*. The negation of classmates with disabilities expressed here demonstrates the lack of knowledge of pupils about the possibilities, conditions and tools of the solution, from which, however, the influence of prejudices taken from the environment of the majority society cannot be separated. Given that in total all respondents the average for the item of the questionnaire was 2.5 and both of the above values are below this value, it is not negative in the true sense of the word. It is also interesting that all the above-mentioned thresholds of the questionnaire items fall into factor C: knowledge of the solution. The difference between the most and least favourable average ratings is (1.08). Respondents showed the second-largest disproportion in their statements for items in factor A: meetings and work (0.4), and even a bit lower difference was realized for factor B: willingness to limit (0.37) and

the lowest difference was reported by respondents for factor D: social environment (0.34). The values of the detected standard deviations also correspond to these facts.

In the second step, the descriptive analysis followed the differences of the respondents concerning disabled classmates in terms of their age, respectively the year of their school attendance. It turned out that the relationship of 9th grade students to classmates with disabilities was higher in most questionnaires than in 6th grade students (the only exception was item 13c. *Together with incoming classmates, we'll find a way to transport the classmate in a wheelchair to the school building* and 13d. *I'll leave the classmate at the door to handle the situation himself*), see graph 2.

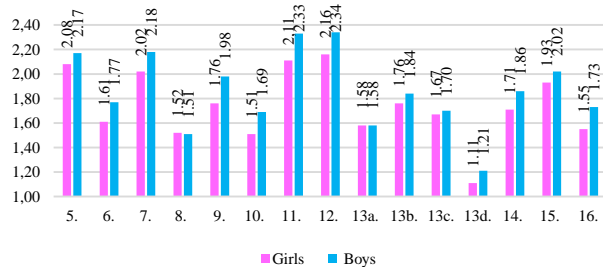
Graph 2: Average ratings by age of respondents



Here, too, the higher the values of the arithmetic averages, the more negative the respondents expressed a negative attitude towards classmates with disabilities. The biggest difference between the expressions of older and younger pupils was again achieved in item 11. *Pupils with disabilities should only be educated in special schools* (0.42) and it was also relatively high in items 9. *I would help a classmate with a disability at any time of our free time* (0.39) and item 16. *We would like to help a classmate with a disability in the class* (0.36). The above suggests that lower-grade students were more empathetic and less selfish in our sample.

In the third step of the descriptive analysis, the gender difference in relationships with disabled classmates was monitored. The results of the research revealed that the girls in the research sample generally showed lower average values and thus a more positive attitude towards disabled classmates than boys, see Graph 3.

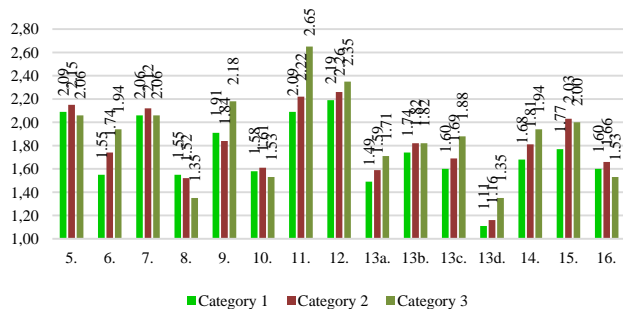
Graph 3: Average ratings by gender



The only exceptions were the two items of the questionnaire, which were value balanced (8. *I would not mind if the teacher paid more attention to the students with disabilities than the others, and I will wait with a classmate at the entrance and try to contact someone to help*). On the other hand, the biggest difference in the statements of boys and girls (0.22) was recorded for items 9. *I would help a classmate with a disability at any time at the expense of my free time* and 11. *Pupils with a disability should only be educated in special schools*. Although the differences in average values are lower than in the second step, they point to greater helpfulness and sensitivity of girls to disabled individuals than to the boys in our sample.

In the fourth step, the difference in the respondents was analysed in terms of their personal experience with disabled individuals. Respondents were divided into three categories. Category 1 consisted of 53 pupils (*they meet regularly*), Category 2 consisted of 184 pupils (*they meet occasionally*) and Category 3 consisted of only 17 respondents (*they never met in person*), see Graph 4.

Graph 4: Average evaluation by category of personal experience with disabled peers

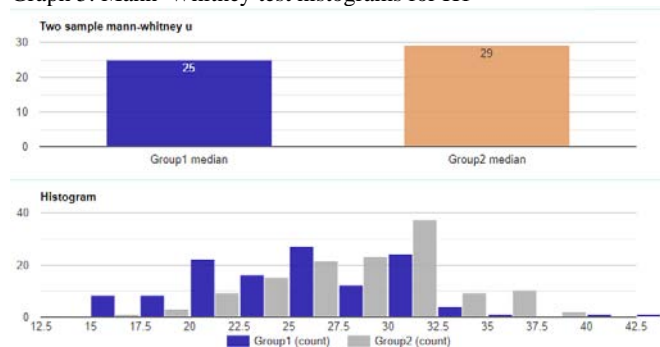


Uneven representation of pupils in individual categories could weaken the explanatory power of the acquired results that are least clear of all. Pupils from Category 2 exceeded the average values of pupils from Category 1 by average values (except for item 9. *I would help a classmate with a disability at the expense of their free time*). This fact confirms the formulated assumption that the more experience with disabled individuals the more positive the reaction to them is. However, the comparison of Category 3 with Category 2 corresponds to the formulated assumption only in two thirds. One third of our sample in our sample showed, contrary to the assumption of a lower average value than Category 2: 7. *I would not like to work on projects with a classmate with a disability at school*, 8. *I would not mind if the teacher paid more attention to students with a disability than others*, 10. *My study results will not worsen when I educate a pupil with a disability*, 15. *My friends have befriended a classmate with a disability* and 16. *We would like to help a classmate with a disability in the classroom*.

4.2 Inductive data analysis

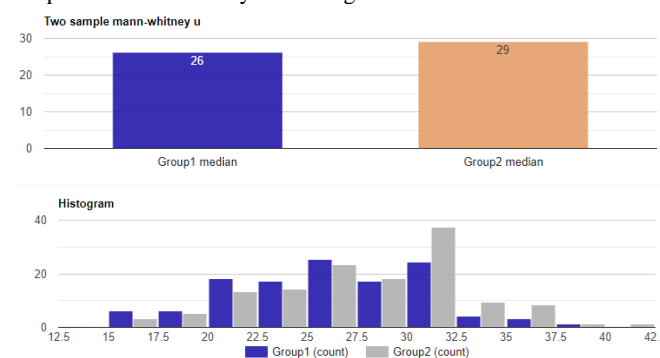
The inductive analysis was focused on the verification of two formulated hypotheses. Their testing took place at a 5% level of significance. In the first case, hypothesis H1: 6th graders show different approaches to individuals with disabilities than 9th graders was tested. The Mann–Whitney U test was used to verify the null hypothesis. The observed value of $p=0.00002479$ was lower than the value of $p<0.05$, which allowed to reject the null hypothesis of identical medians at the 5% level of significance. Hypothesis H1 was confirmed, i. e. the relationship of 6th graders differs statistically significantly from the relationships of 9th graders toward individuals with disabilities, see Graph 5.

Graph 5: Mann–Whitney test histograms for H1²



The second verified hypothesis H2: Girls show different relationships to individuals with disabilities than boys was also verified using the Mann–Whitney U test, where $p=0.002089$ at $p<0.05$ meant that it was possible to reject the null hypothesis of identical medians at the 5% level of significance. In other words, it was possible to confirm H2, i. e. the relationships of girls to individuals with disabilities differ statistically significantly from the relationships of boys to them, see Graph 6.

Graph 6: Mann–Whitney test histograms for H2³



5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The paper follows several research surveys that deal with the attitudes and approaches of students (e. g. Květoňová, Strnadová & Hájková, 2013; Zilcher, 2016) and society in general toward people with disabilities (Pančocha, 2013). The nature of the relations of mainstream pupils towards individuals with disabilities was ascertained from a sample of 254 respondents. Both descriptive and inductive statistics were used.

Descriptive statistics indicated some differences in mainstream pupils' nature of relationships with disabled individuals, both in terms of age and gender, and in terms of the four groups of A–D factors represented by the questionnaire items. Some evaluations seemed somewhat contradictory, e. g. students on the one hand declared that they would not try to avoid a classmate with a disability (item 6), but on the other hand expressed some reluctance about active cooperation with a disabled individual (items 5, 7, and 9). On the other hand, other items of the questionnaire (13 and 16) showed a considerable degree of personal responsibility and commitment. The compactness of the respondents' statements also differed for the individual items of the questionnaires, which were reported using the standard deviation. The greatest discrepancy was recorded in item 11 (SD=0.94), while the most compact pupils

² The histogram shows on the vertical axis 0-40 the frequency of monitored data related to the intervals of point sum values (12.5-42.5) of the agreement in the statements (Group 1=6th grade, Group2= 9th grade).

³ The histogram shows on the vertical axis 0-40 the frequency of monitored data related to the intervals of point sum values (12.5-42.5) of the agreement in the statements (Group 1=girls, Group2=boys).

expressed themselves in item 13d ($SD=0.42$). In line with Mareš (2013), it can be assumed that the answers reflected both emotions (item 13) and not / knowledge and no / experience given by the maturity of the respondents (items 11, 12) as well as the influence of the social environment (item 14).

The results of the descriptive analysis according to the classification of respondents into the 6th and 9th grades corresponded to the findings on the influence of adolescence on the formation of relationships (Vágnerová, 1999), but in our case inversely. Unlike Vágnerová (1999), in our sample, younger students generally accepted individuals with disabilities more positively than their older classmates. They showed more empathy, less prejudice and selfishness, and gave the impression of "corruption" in the spirit of Rousseau's Romanticism (Kasper, Kasperová, 2008). On the contrary, the 9th grade students showed more orientation towards satisfying their own needs, evaluated what was personally more advantageous for them personally, and were less helpful in their relationship statements to classmates with disabilities. Fixation of negative patterns of behaviour given by their social environment cannot be ruled out here (Tannenbergová, 2016). In all items of the questionnaire, except for item 13c, the average values reported by them were always above the values of 6th grade pupils, mostly in item 11 (the difference of the reported average was 0.42).

Descriptive analysis by gender of respondents pointed to different approaches of boys and girls in identical situations, which could reflect both different social roles and expectations (Illich, 2001), and different values and personalities (Saforek, 2007), as well as biological factors (Dluzen, 2005). The girls in our sample in 13 cases out of 15 showed lower average values, which represent more positive attitudes towards individuals with disabilities than boys. Girls, like boys, were relatively inconsistent in their statements; In contrast, the greatest coherence was evident in item 13d, larger in girls ($SD=0.37$), and smaller in boys ($SD=0.48$).

The descriptive analysis according to the pupils' experience categories indicated certain differences which, concerning the unbalanced representation of pupils in the individual categories, should be perceived only as indicative. This fact could be reflected in the non-fulfilment of the assumption of a direct relationship between the frequency of meetings with disabled individuals and the positivity of the relationship with them. Also, the frequency of meetings reduces uncertainty and fears about the reactions of individuals with disabilities (Nakonečný, 2009; Hayesová, 2013), at the same time, it can bring a negative experience that reduces positivity (Vágnerová, 2005).

The differences identified by the descriptive analysis were also examined in the case of gender and age through inductive analysis. Based on the Mann-Whitney U test, a statistically significant difference in the relationship between disabled individuals was demonstrated between boys and girls and between 6th and 9th graders. The lower median value (25) in 6th graders documented their more positive attitude towards individuals with disabilities than in 9th graders (median 29) and led to the confirmation of hypothesis H1. Similarly, girls showed a lower median value (26) than boys (29), which demonstrated their greater positivity toward the disabled and it was possible to confirm the H2 hypothesis. These facts can be used in educational practice to support the requirement that every student feel welcome, valued and respected in school (Booth, & Ainscow, 2011). A necessary prerequisite for this is that teachers will be positive role models for their students in attitudes toward the disabled (Sayou, Solárová, & Vrabel, 2013), which is not yet confirmed by current practice. At the same time, it must not be forgotten that the strengthening of positive relationships between students of diverse class groups occurs mainly based on positive

interaction (Aiden, & McCarthy, 2014), which can be supported in extracurricular activities. If there is no true friendship between the pupils, the necessary trust between them cannot be established, so that the pupil with a disability does not become a friend, but only an acquaintance (Nakonečný, 1997). The need for tolerance, consideration and patience towards individuals with disabilities, which Lechta (2016) appeals to, cannot then be fully met.

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