Inclusive higher education as a factor of socio-psychological adaptation of special students

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Abstract. Introduction. The current practice of introducing inclusive education in educational institutions shows certain problems, despite the regulatory documents and algorithms that position the widespread development of this direction in Russia. The process of adaptation of students with special needs in the university environment is complex and requires constant monitoring for its improvement, which actualizes this research. Task setting. In order to study and analyze the social adaptation of students with disabilities to successful education at the university, the authors developed a questionnaire and conducted a survey of project participants using Google Forms. The results obtained by groups were statistically analyzed. Methods and materials of the study. The study involved 53 students of the 2nd-4th year of full-time education of TBGU. The experimental group included 28 students with special needs and 25 people without disabilities made up the control group. The mean age of the project participants was 22.88±2.03 years. The survey was conducted using methods accessible to the respondents according to the plan approved by the ethical committee of the university. Results and Conclusions. Despite the existing differences in the studied groups, a significant number of respondents noted their satisfaction with the created conditions for inclusive education in TBSU. Identified difficulties of adaptation and barriers can be considered as aspects for improving the inclusive environment of the university.

1 Introduction

The adaptation process when entering a university in a higher educational institution is extremely important for all students. It is particularly important for students with disabilities (DS) [1]. Socio-psychological adaptability, as a trait of an individual, reflects the ability of a person to adapt to changing circumstances, thereby modifying the priorities of his activity in conditions of real need [2]. In the recent past, during the total distance learning of all students due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the adaptability of students with disabilities made it difficult to social communications and the optimality of the available learning conditions at the university.
Inclusive education studies at the university mainly focus on the existing problems and barriers faced by students with disabilities. «Hybrid format» of learning allows bypassing some elements of barrier-free environment by low mobility students [3]. However, a significant number of factors, in general, have a negative impact on self-assessment of success, academic stress resistance and the possibility of further education of persons with disabilities [10]. According to the literature, among such factors are the lack of assistive tools and technologies to support training sessions, the lack of accessible conditions for passing credits and exams [4, 5], insufficient professional competence and the lack of teachers readiness to work with special students according to adapted educational programs [6, 7], difficulties of perception of certain disciplines by DS [8], difficulties of communication and support, as well as detachment on the part of the group [9]).

Prolonged psychoemotional and intellectual tension and increasing the intensity of the body’s compensatory and adaptive systems often cause disturbances in the adaptation process and aggravation of the course of existing diseases in students [11]. According to publications [12, 13] the student’s personality characteristics and existing risk factors largely determine the course of psychophysiological adaptation.

Meanwhile, studying at the university for many students is associated with active life, friendship and acquaintance with interesting people, participation in student projects, which hypothetically should positively affect the restructuring of their adaptation processes. At the same time, there is no denying the stress, the disappointment from the unrealistic expectations in the process of higher education [14]. “Academic stress” largely depends on the physical and DS psycho-emotional strain, interrelated with the requirements of the educational university environment and individual capabilities of students with special educational needs (SEN) [15, 16].

Creation of special educational conditions and an adapted social environment for all students with different diseases is currently the main subject of discussion in the general pedagogical community [17, 18].

For students with profound sensory visual impairments and musculoskeletal lesions (wheelchair disabled), adaptation in the university begins with spatial orientation, tactile sensations, acquaintance with unfamiliar environment, filled with noise and voices of strangers. The inner sensations and self-confidence of DS largely depend on the available architectural environment. The process of adaptation of students with SEN at the university, in most cases, is prolonged by the lack of support, social environment, assistance from students and volunteers.

Social competence and the support provided by specialists in inclusive education are particularly important, as they relate to the successful training and involvement of special students in the student environment. Furthermore, acceptance by a group of DS students is an integral part of the student’s self-identification and demonstrates a great impact on the socio-psychological well-being [19]. Closedness, self-doubt and low self-esteem in one's own abilities lead to low social activity [20].

DS educated in regular classes outperform their peers educated individually or in separate classes [21]. According to Yu.V.Boginskaya [22], it is important to be the subject of social interaction, to transform oneself and the surrounding community in order to achieve personal and socially oriented goals.

N.V.Bolshakov and A.S.Babkina [23] proposed a three-stage adaptation of students to the environment preventive, urgent and long-term. According to the authors of this article, these patterns for people with limited mobility are not realized at the first stage. Many students with limited mobility living in other cities do not have the opportunity to first be acquainted with the architectural environment, transport logistics, social environment and university facilities before studying. Large distances between settlements and problems with
information communications do not allow regional universities fully incorporate preventive measures in their comprehensive program for the accessibility of higher inclusive education.

The most relevant is urgent adaptation. It is necessary at the first stage of education and implies, first, effective cooperation between a student with a special education program who needs special learning conditions and university officials, student youth. A student with SEN is required to include internal reserves that contribute to the maximum educational adaptation and integration. Predicting the speed of passing through this stage of adaptation is associated with the balance of the organization of the educational process and the interaction of all interested groups.

The final stage is a long-term adaptation, which implies the consolidation of all the acquired social, communication and educational skills by students with disabilities for the entire period of study and the ability painlessly to integrate into the daily active student life. Senior students with disabilities, effectively adapted to learning, are a good example and a source of accumulated experience for first-year students in overcoming existing barriers in the university environment.

Despite the regulatory documents, algorithms focused on the widespread development of inclusive education in all educational institutions of our country, the practice of its implementation shows the opposite.

2 Statement of the problem

In the Trans-Baikal Territory, Transbaikal State University (TBSU) is the only university that purposefully works with special students, representing not only our region, but also students from the Irkutsk and Amur regions.

At present, TBSU has 11 faculties studying part-time 82 students with special educational needs who have all 4 categories of impairments: sensory (hearing / vision), damage to the musculoskeletal system (including a disabled person in a wheelchair) and a wide range of diseases that have persistent disorders. The University is positioning itself as an educational institution ready to provide inclusive educational services, fully relying on the comprehensive facilities created by the Regional Center for inclusive education.

Conditions for comfortable stay and study are constantly improved at the university [24]. However, there are socio-psychological barriers that negatively affect the success of learning and social adaptation of students with disabilities.

The purpose of this project is to study and analyze the social adaptation of students with SEN to successful learning at the university.

3 Methodology and methodology of research

In September 2022, a study was conducted to identify situational problems that negatively affect the quality of the proposed forms of education for students with and without health impairments. The features of adaptation of 53 students of 2-4 courses of full-time education in various specialties at the psychological, pedagogical, sociological and natural science faculties of TBSU were studied. The experimental group (Group 1) consisted of 28 students with disabilities and 25 people without physical disabilities made up the control group (Group 2). The average age of the project participants was 22.88±2.03 years.

The studied groups were comparable by sex (in 1st group there were 28.6% of boys and 71.4% of girls, in 2d group there were 36% and 64%, respectively).

Hearing impairments were detected in 3.6%, visual impairments were 42.9%, musculoskeletal disorders were 32.1%, and general diseases caused other disorders among persons with disabilities.
To study the success of the socio-psychological adaptation, we developed a questionnaire and conducted a survey of project participants using Google Forms. Visually impaired students were presented with an enlarged font. For blind students, questions were read aloud at a face-to-face interview.

The study was conducted within the framework of the work plan of the Scientific and Educational Center «Inclusion and Human Health» TBSU and approved by the Ethical Committee of the University. All respondents were given an explanation of the conditions and objectives of the pilot study.

The results of the survey became the basis for statistical analysis using Pearson's Chi-squared test. A 95% level of faultless prognosis was considered minimally sufficient (p<0.05). The resulting criterion value was compared with the critical value (according to the table). To compare the mean values, Student's t-test was used with a normal distribution of values. Licensed versions of programs (STATISTICA 10.0, MS Excel 2010) were used for data processing.

4 Results

An analysis of satisfaction with the organization of the educational process at TBSU showed a statistically significant satisfaction with the comfort of the internal space of classrooms, offices and other premises for people with disabilities of the second group (χ²=11.9, p=0.003, p<0.05). At the same time, 18.9% of the students of the experimental group noted the existing problems in providing a barrier-free environment, including the presence of elevators, lifts, ramps and other adapted devices for students with disabilities (p<0.05).

Dean's work evaluation, the availability of class schedules, the schedule of the educational process and the provision of other information materials did not differ in the studied groups (χ²=4.3, p=0.232, p>0.05). Tutors and curators activities responsible for the individual educational trajectory and educational work in study groups, according to the respondents, did not show a statistically significant difference (χ²=4.8, p=0.091, p>0.05). No fully dissatisfied services were identified from the survey. 17.9 per cent were unable to determine the quality of work. Lack of dialogue, lack of trust in relationships, such students cause uncertainty in the effectiveness of further social contacts. They feel they are a burden to the entire study group.

More than 70% of respondents from both groups fully supported the idea of providing education for all students in mixed groups. Only a few expressed doubts about students with disabilities and felt that they needed separate training in special groups.

The training of first-year students with the SEL in mixed groups requires some control and help from tutors and group curators, as well as psychological support from the Scientific and Educational Center «Inclusion and Human Health» TBSU staff.

To the question “if you were told when you entered TBGU that you would study in a mixed group, how would you react to joint training with you for totally blind, deaf or students with a violation of the musculoskeletal system?” 96 % of respondents without health disorders and 92.9% of students with disabilities stated that a mixed learning format is preferable for them without any restrictions or the creation of special conditions (χ²=0.24, p=0.62, p>0.05). Students who would like to change the group of their studies in their chosen specialty are not registered in both groups.

There were no statistically significant differences (χ²=0.249, p=0.9, p>0.05) regarding the socio-psychological climate in student groups. A friendly atmosphere and a favorable climate were noted by about 60% of the respondents in both groups, and about 35% of the two groups indicated a favorable climate. Evaluation of explicit and hidden conflicts among the studied did not show a statistically significant difference (χ²=5.87, p=0.12, p>0.05). A decrease in the number of participation in intra-group conflicts of special students can be
explained by a decrease in their active life position, limited initiative and readiness for open discussion.

In the study of the need for additional support by a teacher-psychologist of students with unstable psychoemotional states during the session, passing tests and other borderline situations, a statistically significant difference was revealed.

The ratio of those requiring consultations was significantly higher in the first group ($x^2=8.63$, $p=0.035$, $p<0.05$). The help of a specialist was not required at all 32, 2% and 72%, respectively, for the respondents of the first and second groups. The presence of a complex of emotional experiences, behavioral reactions and impressions with emotional-cognitive, value-motivational and behavioral components of the personality structure fully reflects the realities and integrity of the self-perception of an individual with disabilities.

The inability to express one's feelings and emotions is one of the problems of psychological adaptation during the period of study at a university. The need for internal restructuring and motivation for an intensive training regime, loads, despite the existing psychophysical defects, lead to a slowdown in cognitive processes, a change in mood and emotional well-being. There was no significant difference between the two groups of mood variability ($\chi^2=3.02$, $p=0.39$, $p>0.05$). At the same time, students of the first group note the deterioration of their health, the need for compensatory, rehabilitation procedures and measures ($\chi^2=7.57$, $p=0.023$, $p<0.05$).

Comparative indicators of the degree of self-realization of respondents in the research work of students (SRW), social activities, culture and sports, no significant differences were found. According to the study, the average assessment of educational activities by respondents in the first group was $2.8 \pm 0.6$ points, in the second - $3.2 \pm 0.65$ ($p>0.05$, $t=0.57$). Activity in SRW was also low and amounted to $6.0 \pm 0.53$ and $6.4 \pm 0.57$ points in the first and second groups, respectively ($p>0.05$, $t=1.26$). Participation in public life was assessed in the first group as $2.2 \pm 0.58$ points, in the second were $3.7 \pm 0.77$ points ($p>0.05$, $t=1.45$). Participation in sociocultural life were $3.1 \pm 0.6$ and $3.8 \pm 0.69$ points in the first and second groups, respectively ($p>0.05$, $t=0.32$) and sports activity were $2.25 \pm 0.44$ and $3.2 \pm 0.55$ points ($p>0.05$, $t=0.01$).

An analysis of the results of assessing the degree of self-realization showed the absence of statistically significant differences between the groups ($p>0.05$), however, the minimum participation in the SRW of the students of the first group was established. The students of the first group were engaged in adaptive physical culture and adaptive sports much less than the students of the second group, which is explained by the absence of physical limitations and motor mobility.

No statistical significant difference was found with respect to respondents' assessment of their student satisfaction ($\chi^2=0, 222$, $p=0.895$, $p<0.05$).

### 5 Conclusion

The conducted research showed that there were significantly more people who were completely satisfied with the improvement of classrooms, office space and other elements of the barrier-free environment of the university in the first group. 18% of students with SEN noted difficulties with mobility in TBSU buildings (lack of elevators and ramps in some rooms). Satisfactory organization of the educational process on the part of the dean's office and other social institutions of the university was noted. There is an increase in the number of tolerant students for whom co-education with special students is not a problem.

In general, more than half of the studied students noted the favorable socio-psychological climate that has developed in the study groups. The existing conflicts do not depend on the level of disability.
The results of the analysis confirm the need for the support of the teacher-psychologist of the university for the students of the second group due to the existing psycho-emotional experiences and low stress tolerance during the training period. There were no significant differences in the indicators of self-realization in various spheres of life.

Despite the existing differences in the studied groups, in general, more than half of the respondents were satisfied with the conditions created at TBSU.

For successful socialization and adaptation of students with disabilities, additional resources are needed not only financial, educational, but also human resources.

The formation of an educational concept in the field of inclusion, often, is not a guarantee of effective education for a student with disabilities. Only the coordinated work of all officials and services of the university, students, as well as the student's family, will allow us to hope for decent development, self-organization and integration into a full-fledged student life.

Adaptation and effective professional socialization can be considered as a fundamental result of a positive educational impact that guarantees the demand for a young specialist with disabilities in the labor market.

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