

## СОЦИАЛНА ПЕДАГОГИКА

### ИЗСЛЕДВАНЕ НА ПОВЕДЕНИЕТО НА СТУДЕНТИТЕ, ПОДГОТВЯЩИ СЕ ЗА ИНТЕГРИРАНО ОБУЧЕНИЕ

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### THE EXAMINATION OF THE ATTITUDE OF THE MENTOR STUDENTS TOWARDS INTEGRATED EDUCATION

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**Abstract:** *The study commences with the introduction of the major Hungarian and international tendencies of the integrated education of children with special educational needs, then it presents the results of an exploratory-developmental empiric research. The research investigates the attitude of the educators who participate in the mentor training at the University of Szeged. The study solely focuses on the education of children who have some kind of psychic disorder or mental disability. It does not discuss the question of educating ethnic, religious and cultural minorities. The methods applied in the examination of the attitude of the mentor students were based on the method of quantitative and qualitative content analysis. The main methods were the observation, questionnaires, written reports based on specified aspects, mind map and documentation of project tasks. The results of the research demonstrate the typical characteristics of the attitude of the mentor students, the mentoring roles and competences in terms of the integration.*

**Key words:** *inclusion, integration, special educational need, mentor training, mentor educator, attitude*

**Резюме:** *Статията разглежда въвеждането на основните унгарски и международни тенденции в интегрираното обучение на деца със специални образователни потребности и представя резултатите от експериментално-развиващо емпирично изследване. Това изследване проследява отношението на обучаващите, които участват като ръководители на обучението в университета в Сегед и е фокусирано върху деца, които имат някакъв вид психично или ментално разстройство. То не дискутира проблема за етнически, религиозни или културни малцинства. Методите на изследване, използвани в разработката, са основани на метода на количествения и качествения контент-анализ. Главните методи са наблюдение, анкети, писмени доклади върху специални теми, мисловни карти и документиране на проектни задачи. Резултатите от изследването показват типичните характеристики на отношението на ръководените студенти, ролята на ментора и компетенциите относно интеграцията.*

**Ключови думи:** *включване, интеграция, специална образователна необходимост, насочено обучение, ръководещ учител, отношение*

#### 1. Introduction. Problem of research

In the last few decades in Hungary the number of children with special needs for whom the educator has the most important role in education increased. Many Hungarian and international researches revealed

that the success criteria of integration largely depends on the attitude of the teacher. Recently, the mentor as a reference person has a determining role in forming the perspective of teacher trainees and beginner pedagogues (mentees) on integrated education. The mentor's pedagogical culture, mentality, values and the attitude towards integrated education show a blueprint to the mentees. Thus, it is important to investigate what kind of attitude the mentees have in connection with the integration and children with special educational needs.

The European Union treats the integrated education of children with special educational needs, and the reduction of social difference of opportunity as a primary aim. According to the report of the European Commission (2012), the social acceptance can only be reached by inclusive education, thus the integrational endeavors have already become educational political intentions. The goal is the universal acceptance that is the realization of inclusion in both society and education.

In the study the concept of inclusion is based on Réthy's (2002) definition which is interpreted as the complete realization of integration from pedagogical point of view. Integration is a process in which the healthy children and children with special needs participate in the same education (kindergarten, schools) in the pedagogical frames of the majority. The integrated education is the practical realization of the process which can be interpreted as a tool for creating opportunity in public education. As children with special needs are different from the healthy ones in certain aspects, they need more attention. Their education makes the larger extent of differentiation, the application of special proceedings and the additional developmental, correctional, habilitation, rehabilitation therapeutic pedagogical proceedings on the basis of expert opinion necessary.

The educational system of the countries of the European Union and the education of children with special needs are based on practices which varies from country to county. The states have separate legal, professional and content regulations (EADSNE, 2011). In Hungary, in the last two decades, important changes can be detected in public education in relation to the cooperation of healthy children and children with special needs<sup>3</sup>. The integrated education got green light with the public educational law of 1993, the perspective, the requirements of it largely contributed to the transformation of public educational institutes. This guideline was further supported by the 1998 XXVI Law about the rights and equality of opportunities of people with disability which prescribed that all members of the society must be provided with opportunities which help their social integration. All children must have the opportunity, regardless of their disabilities, to participate in the institutional education without distinction. In accordance with the law about national education in 2011, the education of children with special needs should be conducted in special educational institutes established for that reason, and in conductive pedagogical institutes in segregation or partly or fully integrated with other children. In the Hungarian educational system, the special educational institutes and integrating classes are nearly in the same ratio. According to the law the parent, while taking the opinion of the expert into consideration, has the right to choose the institute. The typical tendency is that the professional committees prescribe those major institutes which accept the common education for those children whom they judge capable of developing in kindergartens and schools of the majority. The Central Statistics Bureau's (Központi Statisztikai Hivatal) data published in April 2015 shows that in the past few years children with special educational needs are present in the integrating institutes in an increasing ratio. In 2014/2015 school year the number of children with special educational needs in kindergarten was 7500 (2,3%), 81% of them participated in integrated kindergarten education. The number of children in elementary schools was 52 500 (7%), 68% of them received education in integrated elementary schools.

The European Committee's (2012) research results highlight that among the success criteria of children with special educational needs the determining ones are the attitude of the teacher, the educational competences and the supportive environment. In recent days, in Hungary the mentor pedagogues<sup>4</sup> have important role in the formation of the mentees' (teacher trainees and pedagogues) point of view. The mentor supports the mentee in the professional improvement, the pedagogical-methodological exercises on the basis of the career model<sup>5</sup>. Moreover, one of their special tasks is to prepare the mentee for the education of children with special needs. In accordance with this, the mentor has an exemplary role in terms of the teacher training, the phase of the beginning of the career, because one works with one's personality which is one of the major sources of mentoring. The mentee can easily adopt the certain elements of the mentor's style,

values and norms. Thus, the mentor is an authority, reference sample who serves as a model for the mentee with his/her behavior and attitude towards children with special needs.

The research results about the mentoring competences and roles (such as Bullough, R., 2005; Dombi, 2006; Martínez-Figueira and Raposo-Rivan, 2015; Dombi és Kovács, 2015) allow me to conclude that the mentor's attitude towards integrated education and the experiences during practical work influence the extent to which they can help the mentees in fulfilling their tasks in the discipline. The mentors have opportunities to improve their professional competences in further trainings. On one hand, the increase of professional knowledge is facilitated by the specialized further trainings in relation to the children with special needs, on the other hand, the knowledge of the mentors is also improved by the courses about inclusive and integrated education integrated to the program of specialized further trainings of mentors.

## **2. Methodology of Research. General Background of Research**

The attitude examination was conducted among the pedagogues who participated in the mentor training at the Gyula Juhász Faculty of Pedagogy of the University of Szeged in April 2016. The specificity of the further training started in 2011 is that it interprets the mentor's tasks widely. In accordance with this, it includes four aims: (1) The help of the professional socialization of beginner pedagogues, (2) the support and direction of the activity of teacher trainees, (3) the harmonization of the work of mentor students, (4) the harmonization of disciplinary mentor activities. Another specificity of it is that among the content elements the knowledge in connection with integrated education receives a determining role. The courses related to the topic put emphasis on the improvement of the mentor students' special competences (knowledge, abilities and attitude).

The major goal of the empiric examination in the spring of 2016 was the exploration of the attitude of the pedagogues towards children with special educational needs. The study discusses a minor segment of the results of the research. It analyses the positive and negative attitudes of the teachers in relation to the topic, but it does not elaborate on the circumstances that influence the pedagogues.

Experiences demonstrate that those mentor pedagogues who apply to the mentor program conduct their educational work on a high level and they are dedicated to fulfill their complex scope of duties (Dombi and Kovács, 2015) which positively affect the forming attitudes. In consequence, the hypothesis is that teachers of various age, working on the different levels of public educational institutes who have certain pedagogical experience have positive attitudes towards the co-education of healthy and handicapped children.

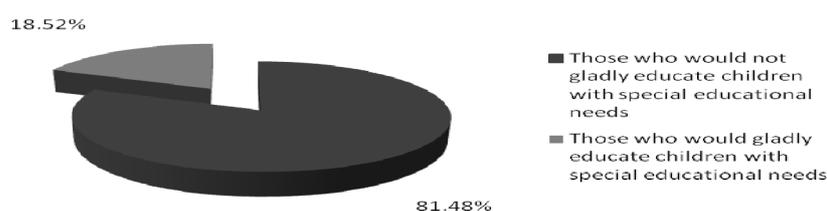
The results of 81 students of the four participating mentor groups were processed in the investigation. The sample is narrow, so it cannot be regarded as representative. The statements are limitedly valid and only valid for the mentor pedagogue students. However, the results can raise the attention to various tendencies, correlations, they can contribute to the improvement of the program, and they can be the antecedents of a research with a larger sample, too.

The mentor students are practicing pedagogues who possess professional theoretical and practical knowledge. 69,96% of the sample are kindergarten teachers, 7,4% are educators, 14,81% are primary school teachers, 3,7% are secondary school teachers, 11,11% are professional tutors. There is no one who has less than five years of professional experience among who have chosen the program, and those who have spent between five and ten years in the discipline of pedagogy are in a smaller ratio (11,11%). A significant part of the students, 33 people (40,74%) have 11-20 years of professional experience, furthermore, there are 36 people (44,44%) who have between 20-30 years of professional experience. There are certain people (3,7%) included in the sample who have 30 years of pedagogical experience.

## **3. Instrument. Results of research**

The attitude of mentor students towards the integrated education of children with special educational needs was measured by the technic of questionnaire. During the course of the research self-made questionnaire was used. There are three groups of questions: (1) matter of facts necessary for the circumstances, (2) 5 graded Likert scale, (3) open questions about the mentoring tasks in relation to children with special educational needs. The data was processed by qualitative and quantitative analysis. The limits of the method of questionnaire was reduced by the voluntary and anonymous nature of the responses.

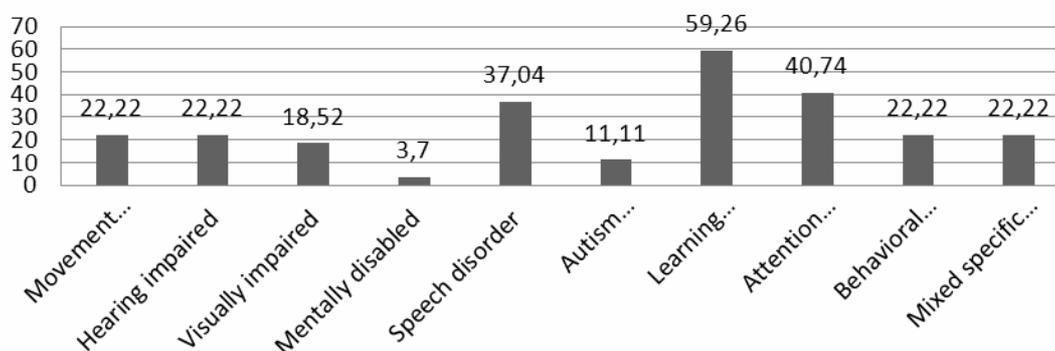
The research examined whether the students participating in the mentoring program gained any experience in terms of the integration during their pedagogical work, and if they did so, what type of children with special educational needs they had the opportunity to handle with. According to the responses, all students taking part in the examination have dealt with children with special educational needs. The majority of the participants acquired experience with children with psychic disability. The mentor students' 55,55% dealt with learning disorder, 40,74% dealt with mixed specific developmental disorders, 48,15% with attention deficit disorder, 37,04% handled with children who have behavioral problems during their career as a teacher. 3,7% of the subjects were willing to take the responsibility to educate children with autism spectrum disorder, 25,96% children with speech disorder, furthermore, 18,52% pupils with movement and visual impairment. According to the answers, all teachers in the sample have experience in relation to the integration. They acquired their knowledge by their everyday educational activity, aid by professionals and in an autodidactic way collecting information on their own. However, only 37,03% of the mentor students had the opportunity to acquire formerly-gained specific extra knowledge in an organized manner.



**Figure 1.** The attitude of mentor students towards children with special educational needs

The research results confirmed the statements of several researches, according to which the knowledge, the experiences help the teacher to form a positive attitude (for example, Scruggs and Mastropieri, 1996; Réti és Csányi, 1998; Horváthné Moldvai, 2006; Némethné Tóth, 2009). On the basis of the answers, the majority of the students taking part in the research (81.48%) has inclusive attitude towards children with special educational needs, in contrast, 18,52% of them would not take children with special educational needs wholeheartedly (Figure 1.). The pedagogues belonging to the latter group claimed that they are not capable of fulfilling the tasks related to these children yet.

The research result refer to the correlation between the enthusiasm for integration and the educational need of a certain group (Figure 2.). The mentor students are more or less inclusive in accordance with the type of the special educational need. This statement corresponds with earlier research results (for example, Gebhardt and mtsai, 2011; Réti and Csányi, 1998; Petó and Ceglédi, 2012).



**Figure 2.** The degree of acceptance of certaintype of children with special educational needs

The mentor students show more positive attitude towards certain groups, for example, they are more inclusive with the psychic developmental disorder than children with some type of disability. The participants are the most inclusive in relation to the integrated education of those children who have learning and attention deficit disorders. Analyzing certain groups of disability similar results can be demonstrated in connection with Yvonne Csányi és Andrea Perlusz's earlier research, the pedagogues would deal with children with speech disorders, however, the education of the children with movement and sensory issues are in the middle range of the motivation, furthermore, they are the least inclusive towards imbecile children.

The attitude of the mentor students in terms of integrated education was measured on a Likert scale. Those who filled the questionnaire had to indicate the extent of their accordance with certain statements on five degrees. With the presentation of the results, some specific examples are demonstrated without regard to wholeness.

**Table 1.** The attitude of mentor students towards integrated education (%)

Statements	I completely disagree	I do not really agree	I partly agree	I mostly agree	I completely agree	Average
I think it is good to educate children with special educational needs together with healthy children.	3.7	3.7	26.0	48.1	18.5	3.75
The effect of integrated education is that healthy children become more inclusive and socially more sensitive.	0.0	0.0	18.5	37.0	44.4	4.26
As an effect of integrated education healthy children learn the different forms of giving aid.	0.0	0.0	18.5	37.0	44.4	4.26
Integrated education has positive effect on the performance of children with special educational needs.	3.7	3.7	14.8	33.3	44.4	4.10
Integrated education helps the social integration of children with special educational needs.	0.0	0.0	18.5	22.2	59.3	4.37

The mentor students have relatively the same opinion about the arguments in relation to coeducation and integrated education. More than 33% percent of them agree on the integrated education of children with special educational needs which corresponds to Moldvai Horvátné's research result conducted in the teaching staff of six schools. The majority of the examined pedagogues claimed that the integrated education had positive effect on healthy children. Furthermore, the majority of the participants completely agrees on the statement that the presence of children with special educational needs in kindergarten group or in a class ameliorates the social sensitivity of healthy children, and they can also learn the various forms of giving aid. More than one third of the participants (4,37) judges the integration's conductive role in social integration, and the effect on the performance of the children with special educational needs (4,10) positively.

The personality of the mentor is crucial in the process professionally helping the teacher trainees and the beginner pedagogues, it has been examined how the mentor students see the task of the mentor the mentors prepare the mentees for taking part in the integrated education and in the formation of the mentees attitude. In general, the students claim that the mentor's special professional competence is based on the

necessary practical and theoretical knowledge and on the willingness to apply the required values. The answers reflect the mentees' desire to be adequate for the role of awareness-raising. They identify themselves with the mentor model, the role of expert-consultant (knowledge-transfer-personality development) and cooperative helper, but they also realize the limit of their own competences. According to their view, the mentor pedagogues have to be exemplary in terms of the empathic attitude towards children with special educational needs, they have to be prepared in the topic and they have to support the cooperation between those professionals who take part in the integrated education.

#### 4. Conclusions

The importance of the research is that it reviewed the perspectives on the integrated education of children with special educational needs and the roles and competences of the mentor which are related to the discipline from the perspective of the mentor students. The mentor appears as a helper in the process of mentoring, in the mentor-mentee relationship the mentor is a personal guide, and helps the mentee's integrational activity with advices and specific aid. The research confirmed the view of the researchers that the earlier experiences and knowledge has vital role in the formation of positive attitude. The results highlight that the successfulness of the fulfillment of mentoring tasks in the discipline can be improved if the pedagogues have the opportunity to develop their special competences and enlarge their professional knowledge in courses related to the integration in the frames of the mentor program. This study is a good opportunity for reflection on mentor training. It assists the improvement of the quality of training, and if necessary the further development of content of subjects.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> **Attitude:** mental state organized by experience which has dynamic or leader impact on the reaction of the individual to those objects and situations to which the attitude refers.

<sup>2</sup> **International definition** according to OECD is that children with special education needs are those who need different, increased-level personal and material aid unlike others. The OECD divides the special educational needs into three major groups. On the basis of this Category A contains needs originated from organic abnormality, Category B includes needs which are not based on organic disability, and Category C which are those special needs which are grounded in certain social, cultural or linguistic quality (such as minorities or immigrants) (OECD, CERI, 2005).

<sup>3</sup> **According to the Public Educational Law 2011 in Hungary children with special educational needs (SNI):** "the child, pupil who desires special treatment is the one who has musculoskeletal, sensory, mental disability or speech impaired disability or other psychic developmental disorders on the basis of the judgement of an expert committee" (2011 Law CXC about the national public education 4. § paragraph 25.).

<sup>4</sup> **Mentor:** The mentor is a teacher, a counsellor who has more experience and wisdom than his/her mentee, the mentor directs and helps the development of the mentee, furthermore, they establish an emotional bond which is based on mutual confidence.

<sup>5</sup> **326/2013. (VIII. 30). Government regulation about the implementation of Law XXXIII of 1992** about the promotional system of pedagogues and the legal status of public servants in public educational institutes.

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