

## **Initial training of students - teachers in the field of inclusive education in the pandemic period**

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### **Abstract**

Inclusive education in the Republic of Moldova is undergoing a qualitative transformation. Universities have the opportunity to direct their efforts to the competent construction of the educational process in this area. The process of formation of specialists in the field of inclusive education has ceased to be strictly academic in nature, the independent work of students has taken a clear shape, and the work of the tutor has intensified. The ongoing changes in the educational process in the context of inclusive education cannot but affect the effectiveness of the university learning process itself, as well as the development of the personality of each student and teacher. The psychological and pedagogical aspects of training specialists in the field of inclusive education, which require serious research, have been identified.

**Keywords:** inclusive education, initial training, student-teachers, pandemic period

The transition of universities to the online training regime for specialists in various fields was imposed by the pandemic period, which required the creation of special conditions in the field of initial teacher training in the field of inclusive education. In our opinion, the training of student-pedagogues on the dimension of inclusive education in the pandemic period presents itself as a difficult stage for the higher education of the Republic of Moldova. However, the training of pedagogical students on professional competences on the dimension of inclusive education is currently in the stage of searching for qualitative solutions.

Starting from the fact that the “Inclusive Education” university course has become compulsory in all pedagogical specialties and that students can receive such training during the first and second cycle of university education, we will consider as positive the fact that, during the pandemic period, universities have the opportunity to focus their efforts on the competent organization of the online educational process from the perspective of implementing inclusive education policies.

We will mention that the level of training of pedagogical students in the field of inclusive education, offered by the undergraduate studies, is largely perceived as insufficient by students motivated for knowledge. Taking into account this fact, pedagogical students, after graduating with a bachelor's degree, have the opportunity to continue training their professional skills in the field of inclusive education at the level of master's studies at any university with a pedagogical profile in the country. In this way, there is, on the one hand, the exchange of students between universities at the republican level and, on the other hand, the verification of the quality of skills developed in students on the dimension of inclusive education, skills formed in a concrete pedagogical university (Пыгачев, 2012, с.374).

It seems that everyone in academia will agree with the view that the quality of competencies formed in online student-teachers in the field of inclusive education should be objectively assessed not only by the university issuing a document on graduation from a higher education, but also by the student who has acquired this knowledge, skills, attitudes, values. Of course, the evaluation of one's own competences depends on a lot of reasons, but first of all on

the student's own attitude towards the phenomenon of inclusive education, towards his Self, which he conceives or not as different from the others.

In our opinion, this problem could be solved in collaboration with all the universities in the country with a pedagogical profile, in this way it would be possible to minimize the isolation between universities specialized in teacher training, discussing the common requirements regarding the organization of the educational process. During which the training of future specialists with working skills with atypical students (with special needs) in the field of education sciences takes place in our republic.

Next, we propose to reflect on some problems that appear in the educational process during the pandemic period and that need to be solved. We argue that in the pandemic period it is no longer fair to strictly address the issue of training future pedagogues on the dimension of inclusive education, neglecting non-formal educational contexts.

We will mention that currently, the feedback of the educational process, namely, the competencies of the student-pedagogues in the field of inclusive education, is immediately requested in the educational practice. In such a situation, we can no longer continue to carry out the educational process in the old style, in the sense that knowledge in the field of inclusive education is transmitted "ready", and the student, during the exam only reproduces the teacher's ideas, written under dictation in class. This would mean not understanding the demands of time, thus slowing down the implementation of state policies in the segment of inclusive education.

During the pandemic period, university teachers, addressing the issue of training students in pedagogy to work with atypical students in class, adjust communication strategies with students to the new online context; necessarily analyzes the educational potential of interactive strategies for working with students with special needs. This helps pedagogical students to consciously assimilate their knowledge in the field of inclusive education, to apply them in practice at seminars and in specialization internships (Алехина, 2014, c.7).

We would like to mention that the initial training of teachers on the dimension of inclusive education online and the implementation of inclusive education policies in the pandemic period required a reconsideration of the attitude of university teachers towards individual study with the theme of inclusive education of students. The evaluation of the individual work of the future pedagogues on the inclusive dimension caused the need to delimit the volume necessary for the study of the course "Inclusive education" from the entire curricular content of the respective course; rethinking the ways to carry out this course online; reviewing the evaluation criteria of the individual study.

We will mention that for the accumulation of the independent and conscious learning experience it is important for the student to understand the requirements of the teacher-tutor: what teaching material needs to be studied individually, how it will do and with what results will complete the individual study. To be evaluated by the university teacher.

During the pandemic period, university teachers, online, train students in specific skills, which they need to independently perform certain learning activities, such as: skills to work with scientific texts; the ability to analyze and synthesize the studied material; the competence to present the selected information / the realized projects; communicative skills, presentation of information studied in a complex and concise way, orally and in writing with terms specific to inclusive education.

Russian scientist Pugachev A.S. argues that a conscious attitude towards the knowledge gained in the field of inclusive education has a positive effect on the development of students' personality in general. Conscious acceptance of inclusive education policies by future pedagogues is a long process that is associated with many difficulties (Пугачев, 2012, с. 376).

Practice shows that students come to study at university with different levels of knowledge and attitudes in the field of inclusive education. This is why, especially in the first year, first year students need emotional support in understanding the issues of inclusive education, this support helps them become adherents of inclusive education policies and demonstrate active tolerance towards atypical people with needs special.

It seems that the understanding that the training of student-pedagogues on the dimension of inclusive education in the pandemic period should not be just a formality is one of the current problems of today's universities. The "pedestal", which is given to a university professor, is given to him so that he can see, from the height of the state he holds, the problems of his disciples and, after discovering them in time, can come to the aid of time (Есаулов, 1982, с. 56). This principle remains extremely relevant during the pandemic period.

In our opinion, contemporary universities, in the pandemic period, should not create greenhouse conditions for students: to simplify the requirements for assessing knowledge in the field of inclusive education, to reduce the volume of learning activities, individual study. We refer to the problem of the path of personal development of students, which, as we know, in most students personal development lags behind in relation to learning experiences, acquired knowledge, skills and attitudes formed in an evolutionary way.

Today, when universities have switched to an online vocational training regime, we notice that second and third year students, who demonstrate a good knowledge of academic disciplines, demonstrate a low level of awareness of their own attitude towards the phenomenon of inclusive education, students find it difficult to give up stereotypes related to inclusive education, as a result they tolerate discrimination against the rights of people with special needs and do not express the desire to change anything in their behavior.

We see the solution of the problem approached through an adequate understanding and organization not only of the training process of future teachers on the dimension of inclusive education in the pandemic period in the context of the correct approach of the concept of inclusive education, but also of the entire educational activity (Лич, 2015, р. 49).

We will mention that both the activity of the teacher-tutor with online students and the activity of learning and research of students in the field of inclusive education during the entire study period should not be limited only to the classes provided in the Curriculum studies for the discipline "Inclusive education", not only the educational activities organized in a formal context. This activity should also capitalize on the potential of non-formal, planned, organized, targeted educational contexts; it can and must bring that intellectual satisfaction to both students and university teachers.

To this end, we pay great attention to extracurricular activities dedicated to the issue of inclusive education, organized online. We select the educational activities to be carried out in a virtual context in accordance with the requirements of the initial professional training of student-pedagogues and the integral development of the personality of future specialists, of their emotional, behavioral, volitional state.

During the pandemic period, we were able to evaluate the experience of organizing thematic educational activities under the motto "All different - all equal". Through the active participation of students in extracurricular activities carried out online, they had the opportunity to display their personal qualities: tolerance, empathy, sensitivity, responsibility, ability to work in a team, creativity. Such activities had a beneficial impact on the entire didactic-scientific approach, as a result of increasing its efficiency.

The results of that study showed that extracurricular activities, focused on the dimension of inclusive education, conducted at a distance, perform not only diagnostic functions, helping to identify personality problems in students (low creativity, inability to work in a team, lack of tolerance) , but also - formative functions, carrying a strong educational load. The very strategy of planning and organizing extracurricular activities online, dedicated to inclusive education, motivates students-pedagogues to engage in new interpersonal relationships with each other and to collaborate with university professors in non-discriminatory contexts (Ovcerenco, 2017, pp. 254-256).

On the one hand, diagnosing interests, personality traits and, on the other hand, changing and shaping these qualities and values as a result of organizing extracurricular activities dedicated to inclusive online education, causes students to experience new behavioral options, makes them live strong collective experiences and accept the change in his attitude towards the phenomenon of inclusive education if it turns out to be incorrect, discriminatory.

Through this research we tried to find answers to some questions: What direction can these changes take? How could we increase the level of awareness among students of the issue of inclusive education in the conditions of achieving the professional training of future distance teachers?

The questions asked were studied in the context of changing the attitude of university teachers towards the non-formal educational activity dedicated to the topic of inclusive education, carried out online.

We started from the idea that the university professor includes students in his personal space, whether he wants to or not. And for communication with students during the pandemic to be authentic, this virtual space must be one explored for both formal and non-formal educational activities. We believe that non-formal educational activities have an enormous potential to cause a change in attitudes towards the problem of inclusive education not only of the student, but also of the teacher himself.

In this regard, we tried to determine the potential of non-formal educational activities, organized in the pandemic period with an impact on the training of future teachers in the field of inclusive education and to answer a series of questions. These were questions related to the need to organize online extracurricular activities specific to inclusive education. The study involved 82 students from the Department of Pedagogy and General Psychology of the State University of Tiraspol.

Below we describe the results obtained.

To the question: "Is it necessary to organize non-formal educational activities online with the theme of inclusive education?" - most students answered "Yes". Analyzing the students' answers, starting with the first year of studies and up to the third year, we found a dynamic of 30% increase of positive answers in favor of the need to organize online extracurricular activities dedicated to inclusive education and, consequently, a decrease of negative responses.

Following the application of the thematic questionnaire on first year students, there were responses not only in support of organizing extracurricular activities online, dedicated to inclusive education, but also against such an organization, and the difference between positive and negative answers was 8 %. We found that, starting with the second year of studies; this difference increases significantly and rises to 54% in favor of organizing extracurricular activities with students with the theme of inclusive education online. In the third year of studies, a significant majority of students (84%) consider that during the pandemic period it is necessary to plan and organize extracurricular activities in the field of inclusive education, and the difference in favor of these activities was 68%. The qualitative processing of the answers received shows that the students of the first year of studies expect from the teacher-tutor the support, help, understanding and concrete advice regarding the problems related to the field of inclusive education (54%). A good part of the first-year students were also identified, who refused such help (46%), stating that they do not need help to communicate and build relationships with atypical people with special needs.

The students of the second year of studies, who were in the experimental group of that study, argued for the organization in the pandemic period of extracurricular activities dedicated to inclusive education, arguing that non-formal thematic activities provide emotional support in making decisions about acceptance / rejection of the person with special needs, a person different from you,. Respondents described specific cases when they felt the need for such support, and whether or not they received the necessary advice from university professors.

The students of the third year of studies, as respondents, mentioned the need for a teacher-tutor, competent in providing the help requested by students to solve difficult problems related to inclusive education, problems that may occur in a group of students or concerns the student personally. Moreover, the need felt by third year students to be advised by a teacher-tutor competent in the field of inclusive education does not disappear but increases.

The fact that the research showed a positive trend in favor of recognizing the importance of organizing extracurricular activities in the field of inclusive education online, tells us about training students in a conscious attitude towards the field of inclusive education and understanding the value of extracurricular activities professional development and personal development. This hypothesis was confirmed in the next stage of our research, when students were asked about the impact on personal development of extracurricular activities dedicated to inclusive education, organized online.

Analyzing the answers of students-pedagogues to the question: "How do you think, extracurricular activities, specific to inclusive education, organized in the university environment online, influence the personal development of students?", I found the following: students' level of understanding the importance of extracurricular activities organized online, increases to the second and third year of study. We registered an interesting case: in the third year of college there are practically no discrepancies in students' answers regarding their awareness of the importance of organizing extracurricular activities specific to inclusive online education and recognizing the positive impact of these activities on personal development. The difference in the students' answers was only 2%. We consider it natural to record the trend of increasing the level of awareness by students of the impact on personal development of extracurricular activities dedicated to the dimension of inclusive education, organized online.

Our research aimed to determine the impact on the general emotional state of students of extracurricular activities dedicated to inclusive education, organized online. Respondents were

asked to assess their emotional state using the 10-point system. It was observed that in the student groups where extracurricular activities were organized with the theme of inclusive education online, there were no significant differences during self-assessment. Whereas, where such extracurricular activities were not carried out, or were not organized in sufficient numbers, significant differences were found in the results of students' self-assessment of personal emotional state: someone was assessed with 10 points and someone - with 5 points.

Our research allows us to conclude the following:

1. There is a positive dynamic in the awareness of students of the need and importance of carrying out extracurricular activities inclusive education online from the first year of study to the third;
2. Students associate personal development with extracurricular activities specific to the dimension of inclusive education, carried out online;
3. Third year students are more aware of the need to carry out extracurricular activities specific to inclusive online education, emphasizing their beneficial impact on personal development, than first- and second-year students.
4. The stability of the emotional state of students who actively participated in the study of inclusive education during the pandemic, and the lack of significant differences in emotional status in this group of students, is due to the efficient organization of extracurricular activities specific to the size of inclusive education online.

The research showed that in the pandemic period students need extracurricular activities dedicated to inclusive education, which should not be just a formality, but - "full of life". The value of this study consists in the active involvement, online, of student-pedagogues, along with its tutors, in organizing and carrying out extracurricular activities on the dimension of inclusive education, which contributed to the professional training of future pedagogues on the dimension of inclusive education. The research results and the obtained data hope to provoke the pedagogical community towards the elaboration of new pedagogical models for training the competencies of pedagogical students on the dimension of inclusive education by capitalizing on the potential of extracurricular activities, organized online.

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