



SOCIAL INTEGRATION OF STUDENTS WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES THROUGH SPORT

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Abstract

The study demonstrates the efficiency of sports competitions in the social integration of mentally disabled students. Aiming to achieve the research objectives, we formed two groups, each of 25 subjects, aged between 10 and 15, from the Special School no. 5. The experimental group participated in a series of competitive sports activities for students with special educational needs. After analyzing data on the level of social integration, we found that students who participated in competitive sporting activities achieved higher levels of social integration compared to students who did not participate in competitions of this kind.

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JEL Classification: I. I12, I10, I.O

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Introduction

Social integration, educational integration, vocational integration, cultural integration, of persons with disabilities are extremely important elements in the current context in the European Union and in Romania. The persons with disabilities right to independence, social integration and participation into community life are governed by the Revised European Social Charter, article 26 - Integration of persons with disabilities². The social integration means „the process by which an individual assimilates cultural norms in a society or a group”³. The group is a formation of at least two people performing at least one activity in common with purpose and common goals and having a system of rules for efficient cooperation.

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² FRA European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights

³ Păunescu C., Mușu I., 1990, p. 39



„People with intellectual disabilities have diverse abilities and potential.... Intellectual disabilities present a substantial disadvantage to people attempting to function in society. They are characterized by cognitive limitations as well as functional limitations in such areas as daily living skills, social skills and communication”⁴

Sport promotes fundamental social, educational, and cultural values. It involves integration, involvement in life and society. The researches findings provide evidence that sports participation may have positive impacts on physical self-concept toward athletes with intellectual disabilities⁵. Sporting activities are very suitable for achieving the objectives against of any form of discrimination. According to Pfau (2017) sport “can also serve for disadvantaged groups as means of catching up in the society”⁶.

Considering that sports activities can contribute to the funding of independent living for people with disabilities, facilitating their economic and social integration while offering opportunities for reintegration, leisure and competition, the European Committee of Sports for people with special needs set up on November 19, 1993, encourages national sports committees for people with special needs to develop programs that promote equal opportunities for the integration of people with special needs, including the integration through sport.

„Both national and international decrees point out the role of sport in enhancing social inclusion, and they set common goals in this regard. Tolerant social approach and unprejudiced attitudes promote inclusion.”⁷

The purpose of the study: highlighting the effectiveness of sports competitions in the social inclusion of students with mental disabilities and encouraging students with disabilities to develop skills to decrease the level of social dependence.

The hypothesis: If students with intellectual disabilities participate in sports competitions, then the level of the social integration is improved.

Research tasks are:

- literature study in order to know basic scientific fund which includes theme, as well as new data with highly dynamic content that are offered in the literature;
- selection of the experimental group;
- examination of social integration;
- participation in competitive sports;
- assessment and interpretation of final data.

Research methods used:

⁴ Winnik J., 2011, p. 152

⁵ Pan C. C, Davis R., 2019, pp 293-301

⁶ Pfau, 2017, p. 13

⁷ Emese Balázs-Földi, Miklós Villás, 2020, p. 31



- Pedagogical observation method to obtain information regarding the level of social integration.
- The method of measurement and evaluation - through testing.
- The experimental method.
- The statistical-mathematical method.

The Content of the Experiment

The experiment took place between September 2018 - June 2019. In order to achieve the research purpose, we formed two groups, each of 25 subjects aged 10-15 years from the Special School no 5. The groups have been established by "lottery method". The experimental group attended a series of competitive sports activities and unified competitions.

The concept of Unified Sports has been promoted by the Special Olympics. In 2016 approximately 1.4 million players worldwide took part in a program which has become the fastest growing project from the organization.⁸ Unified Sports forms teams of athletes with intellectual disability of higher sports skills and their age peers without disabilities (also called partners) who may have average or lower abilities in the selected sports. Therefore, teams aim to select players with a similar level of sports skills. The list of sports includes basketball, athletics, soccer, table tennis, handball, and volleyball. The players train together almost on a weekly basis and take part in competitions with other Unified teams at local, national, and international Games stages. Unified Sports are implemented in Special Olympics Clubs, schools, and mainstream sports clubs. Coaches are volunteers recruited from Special Olympics, schools, mainstream sports organizations, or disability services. There are training resources available for coaches⁹.

Test assessment: We used in our study the scale of adaptation behaviors¹⁰. This scale assesses different levels of adaptation behaviors required for social and professional integration. The scale is a questionnaire with subject's answers and several observations established by the therapist.

It investigates:

- Personal autonomy - maximum score = 101 points;
- Economic activities - maximum score = 17 points;
- Participation in domestic activities = 18 points;
- Professional activity = 10 points;
- The level of self control = 19 points;
- The level of responsibility = 6 points;
- The level of socialization = 27 points.

⁸ Special Olympics, 2018

⁹ McConkey, R. et al, 2019, 235

¹⁰ Vlad E., 2000, pp. 289-310



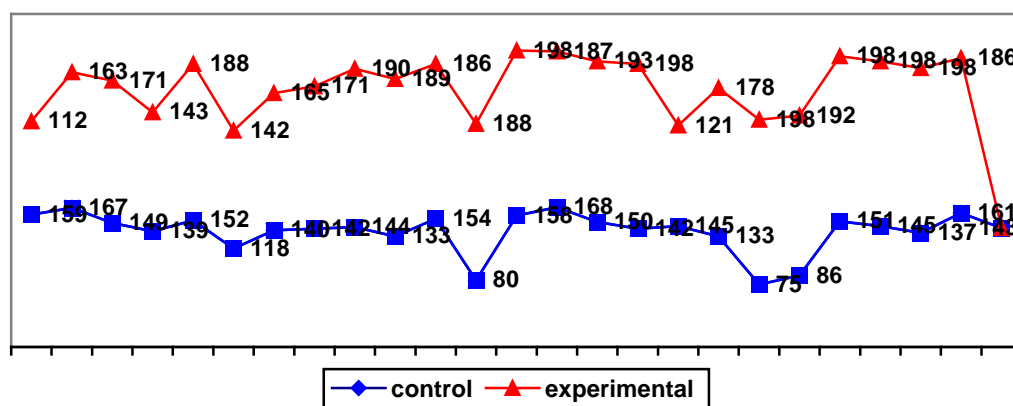
Two assessments of the integration level were made: the initial in September 2018 and the final in June 2019.

Analysis and Interpretation of Data

The results obtained in the initial and final assessment of the two groups - control group and experimental group were included in the tables, statistically processed, and interpreted.

Statistical indicators The scale of adaptation behaviors	Values	
	Control	Experimental
I.I.	75	112
S.I.	168	198
W	93	86
Σ	3471	4447
X	138,84	177,88
S.er.	4,94	4,89
S	24,72	24,47
S^2	610,97	598,69
C.V.	17,97	13,75

The scale of adaptation behaviors - the coefficient of variation for final testing has a value of 13.75% for the experimental group which means a high homogeneity, the average is representative and a value of 17.97% for the control group which means a moderate spreading, the average is sufficiently representative.

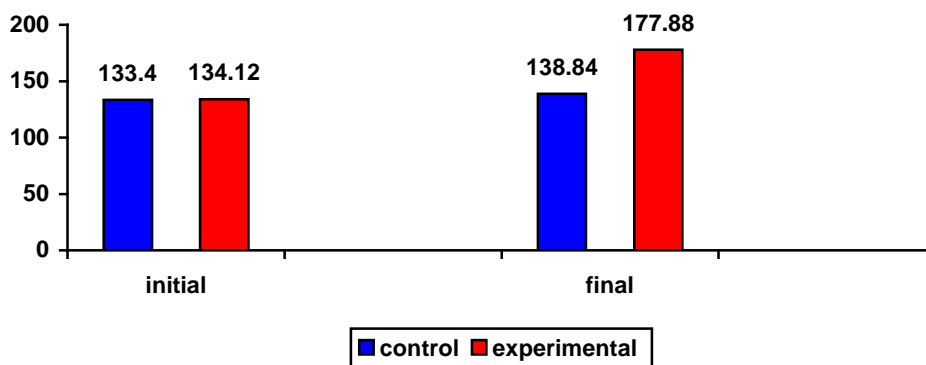




To check the normality distribution of data sequences we applied the Shapiro-Wilk test from descriptive statistics, and obtained a value of Sig. 0.000, which requires the application of a non-parametric test - Mann-Whitney U.

Test	Group	No. of subjects	Mean rank	Sum of ranks	Test „U”	Test values
The scale of adaptation behaviors	g.c.	25	16,02	400,50	Mann-Whitney U	75,500
	g.e.	25	34,98	874,50	Wilcxon W	400,500
					Z	-4,603
					Sig.	0,000

Analyzing the values listed we find that values of the experimental group tend to be higher than the control group, the results are statistically significant with minimal chances to occur randomly for a bilateral threshold $\alpha = 0.01$, - Z. crt. = $+ / - 2.58 < z$ calculated. Statistical decision: reject the null hypothesis with a probability of 99%. The hypothesis is accepted.



Mean values

As the social integration level, the initial arithmetic averages were close, highlight the beginning values of the subjects before participation to sporting activities. It is noted at initial testing close results of the control group compared to experimental group. To final test is noted a higher improved in the experimental group compared to the control group - 158.32 pts > 147.8 pts. As a result of participation in sports activities, the experimental group progressed considerably compared to control group.



Conclusions

1. Activities of sports competition optimize the social integration and train social behaviors that lead to independence in social network.
2. Students from Special School no. 5 gladly participated in sports competition with students from general schools and high schools in Bucharest.
3. During these events they have promoted a different image than „humble“, which is unjustly allocated.
4. The sports competitions contribute to forming the decision making, fairness, respect, sense of friendship, cooperative spirit, spirit of initiative, ambition, willingness to improve themselves. They facilitate the desire to be as good as possible, gaining respect for others - partners and opponents, respect for rules, solidarity and tolerance, acceptance of the effort, acceptance of individual and collective discipline and acceptance of group life.
5. Physical education and sports activities have a positive impact on the intellectual capacity of the student with special educational needs, encouraging initiative and inventiveness, defining features of professional integration.
6. As the course of dynamic games and sports is developing for children discipline, punctuality, precision, which persist later in their attitude towards work.
7. Through team games, students, beside the intellectual and physical effort, learn to work together, to help in the development and completion of actions, to coordinate efforts in the team, contributing to the formation of character features and attitudes towards work.
8. Following the application of questionnaires to students from Special School no. 5, which frequently participate in competitive sports activities, showed that they are more responsive, more responsible, more easily comply with social rules, have a higher level of psychomotor intelligence (development of motor activities appropriate to the situation).

Proposals

- Increasing the number of classes of physical activity and sports.
- Providing material resources so that all students with special educational needs to participate in competitions and sports activities (means of travel, equipment, food)
- The sports activities must be an important element in the complex recovery process of the intellectual deficient.



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