

SPECIAL NEEDS CHILDREN IN SCHOOL (INCLUSION): QUANTITATIVE STUDY ON STUDENT ATTITUDES

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Abstract. *The study's goal is to pinpoint student attitudes relating to the presence of special needs students in ordinary schools. The study was based on Triandis' conceptual model regarding attitudes (Triandis, 1971). The Chedoke-McMaster Stroke Assessment (CMSA) was the tool we chose and, in particular, the Chedoke-McMaster Attitudes towards Children with Handicaps (CATCH) scale to measure the attitude of ordinary students towards handicapped students. Our sample includes data from schools in the seven countries (France, Greece, Italy, Romania, Belgium, Portugal, and Poland) participating in the Erasmus+ "Heading for inclusive school in Europe" program, with APAJH/LOT¹, France, as the leader. Our study implemented descriptive and deductive statistical analyses and our ANOVA model pointed to the statistically important factors. Based on those findings, interesting associations were revealed which helped us fathom young people's views on handicaps; and redefine the issue of inclusion of handicapped students in schools. It also allowed us to design a broader dynamic regarding the agencies championing this inclusion effort. Last, our conclusion has been that, in order to redefine the issue of special needs students, all involved should modify their own attitudes and perceptions.*

Keywords: *attitudes, disability, handicap, inclusion, special needs*

Introduction

The number of children with disabilities enrolling in regular schools is steadily increasing. However, one of the gravest impediments they face after enrolment is the inappropriate behavior maintained towards them by their able-bodied classmates, an obstacle which leads to the difficulty handicapped children experience when trying to attend classes designed for regular students. In our study, and in order to probe into the factors which determine attitudes as well as the methods that lead to attitude improvement, our study uses the Model of Interpersonal Behavior as conceived by Triandis (1971). The Triandis model proposes a definition comprising three components: the idea, i.e., the personal

¹APAJH Association pour adultes et jeunes handicapés

normative beliefs that a student has about a handicapped classmate (cognitive component); the emotions attached to it, i.e., the emotions experienced by a student for a handicapped classmate (affective component); and the predisposition to action, i.e., the behavior a student intends to adopt towards a classmate with disabilities (behavioral component). The tool based on that tri-level model that we used in our study to measure the attitude of normative students towards disability was the Chedoke-McMaster Attitudes Toward Children with Handicaps (CATCH) scale (Rosenbaum et al., 1986a). The Chedoke-McMaster Attitudes towards Children with Handicaps Scale (CATCH) has been developed to measure the attitudes of children toward peers with disabilities. The structure of the scale, as proposed by the developers, was tested and its stability was evaluated across gender, disability status, awareness of the disability status of classmates and having a classmate with a disability as a friend.

Thus, the goal of the present research is to determine the attitude of normative students towards handicapped classmates, in the schools of the study's European partners or in collaborating schools participating in the Erasmus+ program "*Heading for inclusive school in Europe*", so that we may determine and optimize those best practices that we believe would be useful to implement following our study.

Methodology

As already mentioned, we used the CATCH scale, a self-report tool comprising 36 items with some of them correlating either positively or negatively. There are twelve items corresponding to each one of the three dimensions (cognitive, affective, and behavioral). Initially, the scale was tried and validated on a population of Canadian students ages 9-13 and has been since employed towards assessing the impact of interventions in behavior associated with disability (Rosenbaum et al., 1986b; Armstrong et al., 1987). The scale has proved particularly useful in studying the factors which determine behavior and in evaluating the related interventions with a view to improving them. CATCH is a scale that has been used by a number of studies, including the CREATIVE² Project whose designers translated the CATCH scale into French. It is that same CATCH version we used for our project since French is our study's working language. In collaboration with the scale's designer, the CREATIVE team updated the scale to reflect such developments as modern communications media. It is worth noting that it was thanks to the CREATIVE Project that

² CREATIVE (Comprendre, Respecter, Écouter l'Autre: Travailler, Imaginer pour Vivre Ensemble [Understanding, Respecting, Listening to Others: Working and Thinking to Live Together]) is a study targeting improvement at the secondary school level of student attitudes towards their classmates who have disabilities.

“We’re all heading to college”, a new, educational and teaching tool, emerged. The tool aims at bolstering the able-bodied students’ critical thinking process so that they may challenge the way the disabilities and chronic diseases of special needs students have been depicted so far. We responded to that goal by including the concept of that teaching tool into the design of our educational module and work sheets necessitated by the Erasmus+ program “*Heading for inclusive school in Europe*”.

Results

As jointly decided with our Belgian partner, all partners involved in the project were given the French version of the questionnaire. In the case of the participating partner-countries, the questionnaire was translated in a partner-country’s native language as needed. To ensure trustworthiness, all translations have been tested and reviewed. Questionnaire forms, once filled out by the students in the schools selected, were gathered together by each one of the corresponding partner-countries. Next, during a trans-national meeting, the questionnaires were delivered to us since, as the designers of the action in question, we wished to be the ones to process them statistically.

The study population comprised 196 students, 84 boys and 112 girls (43.5% and 56.5%, respectively), drawn from the project partners’ schools -or from schools collaborating with the partners- in France, Portugal, Italy, Greece, Romania, Poland, and Belgium.

The sample’s participating student population percentages per country were: France, 18%; Portugal, 10.5%; Italy, 10%; Greece, 21.5%; Romania, 10%; Poland, 19.5%; Belgium, 10.5%.

The age of the students participating in the sample ranged from 9 to 17 years, with 12.8929 being the mean age. More specifically, 10.2% of the sample’s students were 9-10 years old; 9.2% were 10-11 years old; 20.4% were 11-12 years old, 25.5% were 12-13 years old; 13.3% were 13-14 years old, 19.4% were 14-15 years old; 1.5% of the sampled students were 15-16 years old; and 0.5% corresponded to 16-17 years of age.

Out of the sampled students, 83% had families with no special needs members and 17% had at least one handicapped family member. The number of siblings in each family was determined from the answers to the following specific questionnaire items: (a) “I have no siblings” drew a 12%; (b) “I have one sibling” drew 69% of the responses; (c) “I have two siblings” accounted for 16% of the answers; (d) “I have three siblings” regarded 1.5% of the sampled students; and the item “I have four siblings” was answered by 1%.

Table 1 below shows the analysis of the mean variables of the responses to the questionnaire’s items by the grand total of participants from all partner-

countries. Items falling under the affective dimension are marked (A); items under the behavioral dimensions are marked (B); and items entailing the cognitive dimension are marked (C).

Table 1 Mean Variables

Questionnaire Items	Mean	SD
Q12 (A) Children with a disability don't like to make friends	9.07	2.64
Q16 (B) I would try to stay away from a child with a disability	8.77	2.64
Q10 (A) I would be afraid of a child with a disability	8.63	2.91
Q28 (A) I would be embarrassed if a child with a disability invited me to his birthday party	8.60	2.86
Q26 (A) Being near someone who has a disability scares me	8.37	2.93
Q24 (C) Children with a disability don't have much fun	8.175	2.75
Q32 (B) I would not go to the house of a child with a disability to play	8.10	2.81
Q2 (B) I would not introduce a child with a disability to my friends	7.91	3.15
Q18 (A) I would not like a friend with a disability as much as my other friends	7.81	3.13
Q20 (B) In class I wouldn't sit next to a child with a disability	7.59	3.04
Q30 (C) Children with a disability are often sad	7.38	2.82
Q22 (B) I try not to look at someone who has a disability	7.21	3.51
Q34 (C) I feel upset when I see a child with a disability	6.77	3.12
Q14 (A) Children with a disability feel sorry for themselves	6.68	2.65
Q4 (B) I wouldn't know what to say to a child with a disability	6.63	3.30
Q25 (B) I would invite a child with a disability to sleep over at my house	6.44	3.04
Q11 (B) I would talk to a child with a disability I didn't know	5.47	3.11
Q31 (A) I would enjoy being with a child with a disability	5.27	2.89
Q13 (A) I would like having a child with a disability live next door to me	5.23	2.57
Q15 (A) I would be happy to have a child with a disability for a special friend	5.17	2.92
Q29 (B) I would tell my secrets to a child with a disability	5.06	3.29
Q36 (C) Children with a disability need lots of help to do things	4.98	2.54
Q17 (C) Children with a disability are as happy as I am	4.83	3.15
Q6 (C) I feel sorry for children with a disability	4.83	3.73
Q19 (C) Children with a disability know how to behave properly	4.43	2.80
Q9 (B) I would invite a child with a disability to my birthday party	4.41	2.78
Q8 (C) Children with a disability want lots of attention from adults	4.25	2.81
Q35 (B) I would miss recess to keep a child with a disability company	4.23	2.97
Q21 (A) I would be pleased if a child with a disability invited me to his house	4.20	2.83
Q1 (A) I wouldn't worry if a child with a disability sat next to me in class	4.18	3.28
Q3 (C) Children with a disability can do lots of things for themselves	4.00	2.78
Q23 (A) I would feel good doing a school project with a child with a disability	3.90	2.62
Q27 (C) Children with a disability are interested in lots of things	3.15	2.59
Q5 (C) Children with a disability like to play	2.58	2.41

Q7 (B) I would stick up for a child with a disability who was being teased	2.56	2.37
Q33 (C) Children with a disability can make new friends	2.36	2.22

Table 1 makes it evident that the highest results were yielded from responses to questions belonging to the affective dimension, while the lowest results are grouped around the cognitive one. Needless to say, exceptions do exist, such as item Q23 which entails the affective component and Q24 which belongs to the cognitive component. The values in the table are presented in declining order.

There were further statistical analyses carried out. From the analysis of variance (ANOVA) we observe that sex, age, the presence of special needs siblings in a family, and country yield responses which are statistically significant. More specifically, we see that: the independent variable “Sex” yields $F=1.78009$, $p=0.009150<0.01$; the independent variable “Age” yields $F=1.51274$, $p=0.000007<0.01$; the independent variable “Presence of siblings” yields $F=1.38284$, $p=0.000065<0.01$; and the independent variable “Country of Origin” yields $F=4.107914$, $p=0.000000<0.01$.

Next, we ran statistical correlation tests between independent and dependent variables. The resulting Table 2 follows.

Table 2 Correlations

Questionnaire items	Sex	Age	Special needs member in the family	Presence of siblings	Parental educational level	Count-ries
Q2 (B) I would not introduce a child with a disability to my friends		0.18				
Q3 (C) Children with a disability can do lots of things for themselves						-0.15
Q4 (B) I wouldn't know what to say to a child with a disability				-0.19		
Q5 (C) Children with a disability like to play			0.17			
Q6 (C) I feel sorry for children with a disability					-0.26	0.19
Q8 (C) Children with a disability want lots of attention from adults					-0.19	
Q9 (C) I would invite a child with a disability to my birthday party						-0.28
Q10 (A) I would be afraid of a child with a disability			-0.17			
Q11 (B) I would talk to a child with a disability I didn't know					0.16	
Q13 (A) I would like having a child with a disability live next						-0.19

door to me						
Q14 (A) Children with a disability feel sorry for themselves					0.21	
Q15 (A) I would be happy to have a child with a disability for a special friend		0.19	0.21		0.14	-0.16
Q17 (B) Children with a disability are as happy as I am	-0.16			0.19		-0.16
Q18 (A) I would not like a friend with a disability as much as my other friends		0.14		-0.24		
Q19 (B) Children with a disability know how to behave properly				0.15		
Q20 (B) In class I wouldn't sit next to a child with a disability					-0.15	
Q 21 (A) I would be pleased if a child with a disability invited me to his house	-0,15			0.15		-0.19
Q22 (B) I try not to look at someone who has a disability						0,19
Q25 (B) I would invite a child with a disability to sleep over at my house		0.22			0.20	-0.21
Q26 (A) Being near someone who has a disability scares me			-0.14			
Q27 (B) Children with a disability are interested in lots of things	-0.15		0.17			
Q28 (A) I would be embarrassed if a child with a disability invited me to his birthday party				-0.18		
Q29 (B) I would tell my secrets to a child with a disability				0.14		
Q31 (A) I would enjoy being with a child with a disability				0.15		-0.20
Q32 (B) I would not go to the house of a child with a disability to play				-0.16		
Q34 (C) I feel upset when I see a child with a disability					-0.18	0.20
Q35 (C) I would miss recess to keep a child with a disability company	-0.16					
Q36 (C) Children with a disability need lots of help to do things		0.15				

By studying the table of correlations above, we arrive at the following concluding observations:

- (1) The respondents' sex correlates negatively with items:
 Q17: "Children with a disability are as happy as I am" (C)

Q21: "I would be pleased if a child with a disability invited me to his house" (A)

Q27: "Children with a disability are interested in lots of things" (C)

Q35: "I would miss recess to keep a child with a disability company" (B)

(2) The respondents' age correlates positively with items:

Q2: "I would not introduce a child with a disability to my friends" (B)

Q15: "I would be happy to have a child with a disability for a special friend" (A)

Q25: "I would invite a child with a disability to sleep over at my house" (B)

Q36: "Children with a disability need lots of help to do things" (C)

(3) The presence of a special needs member in the families of students taking the questionnaire correlates positively with items:

Q5: "Children with a disability like to play" (C)

Q15: "I would be happy to have a child with a disability for a special friend" (A)

Q27: "Children with a disability are interested in lots of things" (C)

(4) The presence of a special needs member in the families of students taking the questionnaire correlates negatively with items:

Q10: "I would be afraid of a child with a disability" (A)

Q26: "Being near someone who has a disability scares me" (A)

(5) The number of siblings in the responding students' families correlates positively with items:

Q17: "Children with a disability are as happy as I am" (C)

Q19: "Children with a disability know how to behave properly" (C)

Q21: "I would be pleased if a child with a disability invited me to his house" (A)

Q29: "I would tell my secrets to a child with a disability" (B)

Q31: "I would enjoy being with a child with a disability" (A)

(6) The number of siblings in the responding students' families correlates negatively with items:

Q4: "I wouldn't know what to say to a child with a disability" (B)

Q18: "I would not like a friend with a disability as much as my other friends" (A)

Q28: "I would be embarrassed if a child with a disability invited me to his birthday" (A)

Q32: "I would not go to the house of a child with a disability to play" (B)

(7) Parental educational level correlates positively with items:

Q11: "I would talk to a child with a disability I didn't know" (B)

Q14: "Children with a disability feel sorry for themselves" (A)

Q15: "I would be happy to have a child with a disability for a special friend" (A)

Q25: "I would invite a child with a disability to sleep over at my house" (B)

(8) Parental educational level correlates negatively with items:

Q6: "I feel sorry for children with a disability" (C)

Q8: "Children with a disability want lots of attention from adults" (C)

Q20: "In class I wouldn't sit next to a child with a disability" (B)

- Q34: “I feel upset when I see a child with a disability” (C)
(9) The responding students’ country of origin correlates positively with items:
Q6: “I feel sorry for children with a disability” (C)
Q22: “I try not to look at someone who has a disability” (B)
Q34: “I feel upset when I see a child with a disability” (C)
(10) The responding students’ country of origin correlates negatively with items:
Q3: “Children with a disability can do lots of things for themselves (C)
Q9: “I would invite a child with a disability to my birthday party” (B)
Q13: “I would like having a child with a disability live next door to me” (A)
Q15: “I would be happy to have a child with a disability for a special friend” (A)

Conclusions

At first glance, it is evident that, with regard to the answers’ mean scores, those with the highest values correspond to questionnaire items that entail the affective component and, subsequently, influence answers corresponding to the behavioral component such as those given to item Q16 “I would try to stay away from a child with a disability”. It was that realization that guided the design of our actions within the framework of the Erasmus+ program “*Heading for inclusive school in Europe*”. To that purpose, we essayed to “break the ice” by primarily turning to discreetly handling behavioral issues and providing the kind of information that would positively influence attitudes. At the same time and when designing actions, we took into account the independent variables of sex and age since the analyses had shown that those two variables were statistically significant. Last, on the basis of the results given above, we came to the conclusion that the attitudes of children and adolescents in the seven, participating countries exhibit differences and that only collaboration between and among partners at a European level would give rise to a broader dynamic in the framework of the Erasmus+ program “*Heading for inclusive school in Europe*”: as noted in the CREATIVE Project’s report, the project “...[allowed students], *young people and adults to think positively on the issue of disability or even change their attitudes and perceptions*”. In conclusion, we would like to thank all of the program’s partners who participated in our study, with special thanks going to our Belgian partner, which accepted our proposal and assisted us with the task of collecting the questionnaires.

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