

# EXPERIENCES OF YOUTH STUDYING TOGETHER WITH CLASSMATES WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS AND DISABILITIES

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## ABSTRACT

**Aim.** Most children and young people do not have a social experience of dealing with peers with disabilities and disadvantages which causes various problems for both sides. The relevant reactions of the class group to the behaviour of a classmate with learning disabilities can have the same positive effect on the individual as the professional help of the class teacher or psychologist. The study research question was to understand how classmates perceive their experiences communicating and cooperating with peers with special educational needs or disabilities.

**Methods.** The phenomenographic research approach was chosen to carry out the study. Face-to-face in-depth interviews were carried out to collect the data. The informant's selection criteria were students who had studied for at least one year in a standard classroom with peers with special educational needs or disabilities and had been in contact with and cooperated with them in general education secondary school.

**Results.** The positive experience is related to the development of will and character traits, lessons of tolerance, development of empathy, building social support skills, and lessons in sociability. The negative experience is related to dealing with outbreaks of aggression and egression, communication problems and mistakes, and disturbances during lessons.

**Conclusion.** The participants' positive experiences show that the social environment and education accelerate the formation of the personality and direct it towards sociability. Participants' negative experiences signalled the abundance of problems existing in the reality of education and their multifacetedness.

**Keywords:** inclusive education, special educational needs, disability, school, pupils

## INTRODUCTION

Several guidelines have been developed to support inclusive education, and numerous studies have been conducted since the Salamanca Declaration (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 1994), which initiated the empowerment of schools to serve all children (Kielblock & Woodcock, 2023). Research and educational policy have acknowledged the necessity of school becoming a place where all students have the same chances (UNESCO, 2020) and feel included.

Like all European Union countries, Lithuania has implemented inclusive education policy guidelines. Inclusive education took a new form, and the vision became a reality. Tony Booth and Mel Ainscow (2002) define the concept of inclusion in three dimensions: inclusive culture of the school community, inclusive education policies, and inclusive, "harmonised" educational practices. The realisation of inclusive education in the education system is based on three components: ideology, policy, and practice (Magnússon et al., 2019).

The need to systematically provide effective pedagogical and psychological support to pupils with learning difficulties is important, as well as to prepare the classmates to accept them into the community. Implementing the inclusion policies usually means accepting these pupils with learning difficulties, understanding their learning difficulties, and working towards overcoming them. That can make the education of all pupils more effective (Clart et al., 1995, as cited in Ainscow, 1995).

According to the literature, social participation (e.g., peer interactions) of students diagnosed with special educational needs (SEN) has to be focused upon as they are at a higher risk of being socially excluded compared to students without SEN. Susanne Schwab et al. (2021) indicated that students without SEN were less likely to interact with their classmates with SEN. Their own social behaviour did not significantly influence peer interactions of students with SEN. The literature reviews of Marloes Koster et al. (2009) and Goele Bossaert et al. (2013) showed that students with SEN social participation are lower than their peers without SEN. The reviews showed that students with SEN have lower peer acceptance, fewer friendships, and fewer peer interactions than students without SEN. That can be affected by the attitude and behaviour of their classmates. Some studies report that students' attitudes towards the disabilities of university students are quite positive (Klooster et al., 2009; Moreno et al., 2006; Polo Sánchez et al., 2011; Suriá, 2011). However, Alev Girli et al. (2016), Evangelos I. Kritsotakis et al. (2017), and Murat Uysal et al. (2014) report that university students show more neutral or negative attitudes toward their classmates.

However, negative experiences described by several studies cannot be excluded. According to Norah Frederickson et al. (2007), pupils with SENs encounter significant difficulties in forming social relation (Didaskalou et al., 2009). Eleni Andreou et al. (2015) stated that bullying and victimization were associated with loneliness/social dissatisfaction and self-efficacy for peer interactions. It can lead to self-isolation, outbreaks of aggression, or other undesirable conduct, which causes communication difficulties and disturbs the learning process. Prior studies have repeatedly suggested that teachers generally experience poorer-quality relationships with students with disabilities than with typically developing peers (Al-Yagon & Mikulinecer, 2004; Pasta, 2013). However, there are few studies about the classmate's experience of how they interacted or perceived their interaction with pupils with special educational needs.

The peers' lack of knowledge of alternative communication skills and their friend's influence on students with SEN were discussed as additional barriers to building relationships with students with SEN. Following this, the attitude of peers has to be named as an important factor of social inclusion (Woodgate et al., 2020).

The success of integrating pupils with SEN consists of two sides—their ability to integrate into all forms of socialisation at school and the ability of their classmates to interact with them. Pupils who have positive attitudes toward their classmates with SEN can increase the integration success and that can give the added value to both sides. However, too much effort to interact or too sensitive attention to the needs

of the classmates can be accepted negatively. According to Alison Ekins (2015), some pupils with special educational needs may prefer less support in the teaching process in a classroom, because it makes them feel less different from their peers. Also, the reactions of the class group to the behaviour of a classmate with learning disabilities can have the same positive effect on the individual as the professional help of the class teacher or psychologist. The educational strategies used in the classroom must reflect an understanding of the social identity development of pupils so that the teacher can anticipate the tensions that might occur in the classroom and be proactive about them (Ambrose et al., 2010).

The school climate is an important factor in promoting positive student health and academic outcomes (Daily et al, 2019). The attitude of classmates and the quality of interaction with the students with SEN can make a great impact on the class climate. Affirmative learning environments promote healthy relationships, a sense of connectedness, increased learning gains, fewer disciplinary problems, and higher promotion/graduation rates (Mariani et al., 2018; Reyes et al., 2012; Thapa et al., 2013). Classroom social integration with peers is vital to students' school success, and all students can benefit from contact with peers who are different in various ways.

One condition for transferring the inclusive education paradigm from the theoretical space to the reality of education is the quality construction of the pedagogical interaction educational environment. In such an environment, a positive emotional experience prevails, allowing educational actors to seek interaction between educational participants in cognitive, emotional, and behavioural contexts. Therefore, it is important to understand what students with SEN experience and how teachers and specialists can help them, how their classmates feel, and what challenges they face interacting with classmates.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

### Methodology

This study aims to explore the secondary school experiences of youth who studied along with their peers with special education needs or disabilities. The qualitative study was carried out to gather the previous experiences of young people. The method of unstructured interviews was chosen to collect the data.

The phenomenographic research approach was chosen to carry out the study. The study aims not to summarise the Experience but to present the various aspects that characterise the Experience of interacting with students with special educational needs or disabilities (Marton, 1986; Walker, 1998; Yin, 1984). Phenomenography acquires a certain degree of transferability because the descriptive categories are abstracted as phenomenon concepts to the experiential level (Marton & Booth, 1997). The re-

sults of phenomenological research allow the identification of individual experienced phenomena and ways of perception, showing their connections and revealing people's relationship with the world (Marton, 1994; Stenfors-Hayes, 2013). The analysis identifies a few qualitatively different descriptive categories of informants' understanding of the phenomena (Booth, 1997; Yin, 1984).

The empirical research was based on the attitudes of structural functionalism, that: society is a homogeneous, integral social system consisting of many elements; each element has a specific function; all elements function according to their interaction and form a coherent system that ensures the normal functioning of the whole organism; from the point of view of functionalism, education is a part of the social system (element) and makes a significant contribution to the functioning of society (Parsons, 2017).

Empirical research is based on the methodological attitude of social constructivism, which states that a person forms his understanding and "it is not the mirror of their acquired knowledge" (Targamadze et al., 2020, p. 121). It is constructed based on one's views, Experience, and relationships between people, things, and events.

Special educational needs in this study are the need for assistance and services in the education process arising from exceptional abilities of a person, congenital or acquired disorders, and unfavorable environmental factors.

The study limitation: youngsters from disadvantaged socio-economic and cultural backgrounds are outside the scope of this study. However, the study includes experience interacting with persons with disabilities living in a disadvantaged social, economic, and cultural environment or with learning, behavioural, emotional, speech, and speaking disabilities.

## **Research Aim and Purpose**

The following research question guided data collection for this study: How did participants perceive their experiences communicating and cooperating with peers with special educational needs or disabilities?

## **Participants**

Purposeful convenience sampling (Palinkas et al., 2015) was used in this study. Face-to-face in-depth interviews were carried out to collect the data. 17 Lithuanian students in the first Year of undergraduate social sciences studies participated in the interviews. The informants, that met the selection criteria were invited to participate in the interview voluntarily. The informant's selection criteria were as follows: students who have studied for at least one Year in a standard classroom with peers with special educational needs or disabilities and have been in contact with and cooperated

with them in general education secondary school. The Ethical aspects were taken into account when performing the interviews. The informants were informed about the aim of the study and their rights to tell only the information they wanted to share. The participants were informed they could stop the interview at any time. The research participants were 18-20 years old, so their consent was sufficient for conducting the research.

Geography of the study: participants by place of residence represent schools located in the territory of cities, districts, and municipalities of the country. However, there was no aim to achieve even coverage of towns and districts in Lithuania, as it is considered that this does not affect the informants' experience or is the subject of another study.

## Data Collection

Face-to-face interviews were carried out from September 2022 to November 2022. During an unstructured interview, participants were asked to share experiences gained in communication and cooperation with their peers with special educational needs or disabilities. Data saturation was the indication to terminate the surveys. A higher number of informants might have changed the results; however, the descriptive category system of phenomenography research is not final. The results in phenomenography are always collected from a limited number of sources, and as far as the variation of experiences is achieved, the investigated material can be described (Marton, 1997).

Confidentiality was assured as the persons were anonymised and assigned a code kept in safe custody.

## Data Coding

The phenomenographic research method was used to process the data. The purpose of the study was to present various aspects of experiences in communicating with peers with special educational needs or disabilities (Marton, 1986; Walker, 1998). The results allowed us to show the subjective characteristics of the experienced phenomenon of the individual up to reveal his attitude towards the world around him (Marton, 1994; Stenfors-Hayes, 2013). The data were analysed in seven phases: (a) synthesis, (b) compilation, (c) reduction (research), (d) grouping, (e) preliminary comparison of categories, (f) naming categories, and (g) comparison of the categories (Dahlgren & Fallsberg, 1991). The transcribed texts and the resulting categories were coded and compared by researchers. Dialogic credibility checks were conducted during research discussions (Åkerlind, 2005). A "critical friend" approach was used to ensure accuracy, and emphasis was placed on a reflexive approach (Bevington & Wolcott, 1996). Validation was achieved by reviewing results throughout the research process and continually

examining the results' validity, reliability, and trustworthiness (Entwistle, 1997). No verification of the accuracy of communication was conducted because the purpose of the study was not to assess the understanding of a specific individual but rather the level of understanding of a specific group (Åkerlind, 2005). Ethical issues were carefully considered. All interviews were anonymous and voluntary to ensure that all interviewees were comfortable with this sensitive topic. The entire process followed the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

The phenomenographic investigation results in the descriptive categories and the resulting conceptual space (Figure 1), expressed in a network of logically related, hierarchically ordered, and systematised categories (Åkerlind, 2005). Phenomenographic research has identified categories that depict the phenomenon under study, revealed hidden and unspoken meanings of depth, and demonstrated their connections. When analysing the survey data, no attempt was made to find as many descriptive categories as possible. Descriptive categories represent the way a phenomenon or situation is experienced. Category descriptions indicate that a phenomenon is experienced collectively differently (Åkerlind, 2005). Descriptive categories must reflect the experiences of research participants and not be assigned actual meanings (Bowden, 2000). From the analysis of individual experiences, a collective understanding of the phenomenon emerges (Sandberg, 1997). Therefore, the categories are described with an emphasis on the collective level (Marton, 1997). The description of the experiences of research participants was the main criterion for including the category in the study (Marton, 1986).

## **Results/Data Analysis**

The data analysis revealed two rather pronounced antipodes: students' experiences were associated with positivity, and students' experiences were associated with negativity. Such radically opposing experiences of our participants emerged as the criteria for compiling the source information received for data structuring: there are two categories.

### **Students Experiences that Describe Their Positive View**

Five subcategories were identified as experiences associated with positivity (see Table 1).

- Development of will and will character traits. (Will — conscious, voluntary handling of one's actions, behaviour, or activities (Bagdonas & Bliumas, 2019);
- Lessons of tolerance. Tolerance — acceptance, respect, and tolerance of different opinions, views, beliefs, physical qualities, ethnicity, and race (Bagdonas & Bliumas, 2019);

- Development of empathy. Empathy — perception, and understanding of another person’s intellectual and emotional state (Bagdonas & Bliumas, 2019);
- Building social support skills. Social support is actions that build confidence in self-confidence in overcoming difficulties and failures (Jovaiša, 2007);
- Lessons in sociality. Sociability — a characteristic of a personality that includes the ability to communicate easily, be friendly, and help take care of everyday activities and matters. (Jovaiša, 2007).

**Table 1**

*The Experience of participants is associated with positivity*

<b>Subcategories</b>	<b>Confirmatory statements</b>
Development of will and will character traits	<p>„... I slowly dared to try to make a conversation with a girl with Down syndrome in the class during the breaks. ...”</p> <p>„... I started to help him prepare for classes, find notebooks, necessary writing tools, arrange clothes, because I began to understand how difficult it is to take care of myself while sitting in a wheelchair ...”</p> <p>„... communication with children with special educational needs has developed my patience; I learned not to rush and say words clearly. ...”</p>
Lessons of tolerance	<p>„... I realised that autists react differently to light and sounds. ...”</p> <p>„... I used not to hurry and clearly say words when communicating with children with a hearing disability ...”</p>
Developing of empathy	<p>„... I was taught empathy. ...”);</p> <p>„... in the long run, I realised how my peers who have a visual impairment feel ...”;</p> <p>„... once I tried to empathise with the reality of a blind girl (with a scarf covering my eyes) then I realised what challenges she was constantly facing”;</p> <p>„... I tried to get into the daily life of a young man with diabetes: he experiences daily needle punches but still constantly tries to be cheerful» ...”;</p> <p>„...I realised that people with disabilities are the same as us. They can be happy and sad; they also like we have dreams. ...”;</p> <p>„... it was not easy for a girl to help and explain maths topics, but she constantly asked me for help. ...” ;</p>



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Building social support skills	<p>„... we started helping a girl moving in a wheelchair to reach the bus stop after school and enter the bus...”;</p> <p>„... we talked about plans for the future. The deaf guy had a goal to study at university, so we were happy. ...”;</p> <p>„... I learned to help them change their clothes and put on their outerwear ...”.</p>
Lessons in sociality	<p>„... watching a film with a classmate with Down syndrome ...”;</p> <p>„... visiting the city library, searching for the right book together ...”;</p> <p>„... celebrate together at school centenary. It was fun for everyone ...”;</p> <p>„... A girl with Down’s syndrome invited to her birthday party ...”;</p> <p>„... a guy in a wheelchair asked for a dance! ...”</p>

Source. Own research.

The participants’ experiences with their peers with special educational needs or disabilities indicate the speed of the socialisation process and the peculiarities of personality change in ontogenesis. Analysis of empirical research data revealed that motivation of an exogenous force and activity and relationships during childhood and adolescence accelerates the process of personality formation, subsequently directing it towards sociability. The examples of analyses of the participants’ experiences associated with positivity are presented in Table 1. Leonas Jovaiša (2007) states that socialisation results from moral-social, family, and school education. In the integrated environment, a person is formed in a way he perceives himself within their surrounding society and respond to its need. The quality of life of people (especially those with special educational needs) partially depends on their efforts and partially on the perception and support of others. The attitudes and prevailing values of the people surrounding them draw the trajectories of activity and help to set the mindset that influences the person’s future.

In the analysis and evaluation of the qualitative research material, the attitude formed by participants' successful and unsuccessful relationships to increase or reduce the goals of their activities in communication with disabled children was revealed. Increased or decreased pupils' aspirations negatively impacted the emotional currency of the class and may have affected their decision on the level of their goals. The aim for aspirations is to be adequate, i.e., to match learners' objective and subjective opportunities: "When communicating with a girl with a physical disability, I learned to help her manage a wheelchair. After a while, I dared to offer my assistance to a person with a wheelchair entering the bus ... this experience is unrealistic," — explains the student.

All positive students' experiences indicate the peculiarities of the socialisation process within the school. Classmates — as a primary social group — can become an entity of joint activities with children with special needs. These are social lessons for everyone, and their essential characteristics are transferred from school to family and vice versa. This is an apparent positive socialisation lesson for all participants in education.

## Students Experiences that Describe Their Negative View

Three subcategories were identified in the second category, which covers students' negative experiences (see Table 2).

- Prevention of outbreaks of aggression and egression.

Aggression — behaviour caused by hostility, rivalry, or anger, manifested in the assault, physical or mental violence (Bagdonas & Bloomas, 2019).

Egression is an emotional frustration that leads to bypassing obstacles and avoiding difficult, unpleasant things, events, and threats (Jovaiša, 2007).

- Communication problems and mistakes.
- Disturbances during lessons.

**Table 2**

*The Experience of participants associated with negativity*

Subcategories	Confirmatory statements
Prevention of outbreaks of aggression and egression	<p>„... be careful not to provoke attacks of aggression or anger ...”;</p> <p>„...I understand that when dealing with children with special needs, you need to be aware of them constantly...”;</p> <p>„ ...I had to learn to tolerate anger. ...”;</p> <p>„... I learned to leave in time, retreat, stop communicating with a classmate before the attack of anger begins ...”;</p>

<b>Subcategories</b>	<b>Confirmatory statements</b>
Communication problems and mistakes	<p>„... I have avoided Down syndrome girl because I did not know how to communicate with her ...”;</p> <p>„... for a long time, I avoided communicating with peers with disabilities because there was a lack of knowledge about disabilities, about the peculiarities of communication with peers with special needs ... ”;</p> <p>„... I have noticed that teachers also lack knowledge. It’s not easy for them to communicate with children with autism spectrum disorders. ...”;</p> <p>„... my parents are afraid that autistic will be taught together in my class. ...”;</p> <p>„... I searched for information about children’s disabilities online. ...”;</p>
Disturbances during lessons	<p>„... they bother during the classes, so teachers were bothered and unable to explain the material. ...” ;</p> <p>„... noisy during the lessons ...”;</p> <p>„... walked around the class when we were working. ...”;</p> <p>„... teachers often failed to reassure them. ...”;</p> <p>„... looked for medications during the lessons and often didn’t find them. ...”;</p> <p>„... teachers tried to make those children with disabilities less disturbing during the classes.</p>

*Source.* Own research.

The examples of analyses of the participants’ experiences associated with negativity are presented in Table 1. Statements of the subcategory “Prevention of outbreaks of aggression and extremity” reveal that participants had to survive a state of frustration, overcome personal hostility, or come to terms with the current situation and manage or tolerate anger. They often had to distance themselves from their peers with special educational needs or disabilities. These painful socialisation lessons can guide a person toward social insecurity. During outbreaks of aggression prevention and its execution, specialists are necessary for the here and now. Only intervention by professionals can normalise and maintain the emotional climate of the class. According to their professional competencies, support specialists should help all educational participants create and maintain an appropriate educational environment. There is no doubt that specialist counseling would be helpful for both pupils and their parents. The coherence and strength of family-school interaction are essential to promote positive socialisation.

The Experience of participants associated with negativity, in principle, have a lack of knowledge and relevant competencies skills in communication and cooperation to deal with their peers with special educational needs and the need to educate society. Members of all social groups should consistently improve their knowledge of disability and social, emotional, and cultural environments.

The subcategory “Communication Problems and Mistakes“ demonstrates that pupils and teachers lack the knowledge and communicative competencies to get along with students having special educational needs or disabilities. In particular, the issue of inclusive education is of interest to students’ parents because the family is the first and essential institution of human socialisation. Within families, the provision of inclusive education is fundamental. Furthermore, social provision is the individual’s position concerning the subject. “Parents are afraid that an autistic will be taught in my class” — the participant’s statement unequivocally indicates the need for targeted education. Value orientation (the ability of the consciousness to regulate activities and behaviour according to beliefs and moral norms) is also developed within the family. The school continues and develops the social capital within the child’s family and enables the functioning of values at cognitive, emotional, and behavioural levels. The Experience of participants, which revealed an abundance of interference and disturbances during the lessons, illustrates the multifaceted nature of the current education problems, which require immediate attention. That is an adaptation of the physical environment, provision of support specialists, improvement of educators’ professional competencies, and preparation and assembly of appropriate training tools. Problem-solving begins with identifying, recognising, and visualising concrete, practical initiatives that pragmatically suitable education needs in reality.

## DISCUSSION

The findings of this study present a compelling dichotomy in students’ experiences within inclusive educational settings, where they fall into two distinct categories: positive and negative encounters. These divergent experiences provide valuable insights into the dynamics of inclusive education and its impact on students. Pupils lack the knowledge and skills to engage socially and communicate effectively with their peers with SEN. Through peer support, cooperative learning, or social community, pupil participation is crucial to effective social inclusion (Tsang, 2013). Knowing pupils’ perception and understanding of the lack of knowledge of how to interact with and react in various situations could make a positive difference towards inclusiveness in education.

### **Positive Experiences: Fostering Empathy, Tolerance, and Social Skills**

One prominent aspect of positive experiences within inclusive education is the development of essential life skills. Students reported that engaging with peers with special educational needs or disabilities facilitated the development of empa-

thy, tolerance, and social support skills. These findings resonate with the findings of Silvia Molina Roldán et al. (2021) which show that students without SEN benefit from participating in interactive learning activities with peers with SEN in different ways: (a) they learn to respect others, accept differences, and acknowledge different abilities, thereby creating opportunities for new friendships to develop; (b) they learn about abilities related to helping others participate and learn, to be patient and to gain the satisfaction in helping others learn and behave better; and (c) they benefit from the cognitive effort required to explain themselves and from the contributions of peers with SEN from which they can learn. emphasizing the importance of fostering these qualities in inclusive environments (Molina Roldán et al. (2021).

The study underscores the role of inclusive education in promoting empathy by immersing students in the daily lives and challenges of their peers with disabilities. This heightened awareness of others' experiences can contribute to a more inclusive and compassionate society. Moreover, developing tolerance and social support skills among students reflects the potential for inclusive settings to enhance social cohesion and support systems within schools.

### **Lessons in Sociability: Enhancing Socialisation and Personality Development**

A significant positive outcome of inclusive education is the enhancement of sociability and personality development among students. Inclusive settings allow students to engage in joint activities, celebrations, and social interactions with their peers with special needs. These experiences contribute to the socialisation process, not only within the school but also in other spheres of life. The positive impact of inclusive socialisation was described in several studies and literature reviews (Kefallinou et al., 2020; Valero et al., 2018; Zubiri-Esnaola et al., 2020,).

The study's findings highlight the importance of fostering positive socialisation lessons for all participants in education, emphasising that classmates serve as a primary social group for students with disabilities. These socialisation experiences transcend the boundaries of the school environment, influencing family dynamics and societal perceptions (Tsang, 2013).

### **Negative Experiences: Challenges in Managing Aggression, Communication, and Disturbances**

The experiences of youngsters who studied with their peers with SEN centre around three key challenges: dealing with outbreaks of aggression and egression, communication problems and mistakes, and disturbances during lessons.

Students' accounts reveal instances where they had to navigate situations involving aggression and egression from their peers with special needs. These experiences underscore the importance of specialist intervention to normalise and maintain the emotional climate within the classroom. It corresponds with the findings of Ainscow (1995). Our study together with other studies outcomes (Florian, 2019; Reyes, 2012) highlights the need for support specialists who can guide students in managing challenging behaviour effectively.

The communication challenges faced by students and teachers in inclusive settings reveal a significant gap in knowledge and communicative competencies. This emphasises the importance of targeted education and training programmes for students and educators to facilitate effective communication and cooperation.

The disturbances during lessons, coupled with teachers' limited ability to address them, underscore the need for comprehensive strategies to improve the learning environment. Adaptations to the physical environment, support specialists, and teacher professional development are essential in addressing these challenges. Also, schools need clear guidelines regarding when involving special education specialists in a situation is appropriate, and clearly defined guidelines for how specific incidents should be handled (Meade, 2019).

Top of Form

## CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of the material collected revealed that the experiences of young people who studied in classes with peers with special educational needs (in the case of research) reveal that participants have a positive experience, but also the negative that must be addressed. The positive experience is related to the development of will and character traits, lessons of tolerance, development of empathy, building social support skills, and lessons in sociability. The negative experience is related to dealing with outbreaks of aggression and egression, communication problems and mistakes, and disturbances during lessons.

The study demonstrates that inclusive education fosters the development of positive character traits such as willpower, patience, and the ability to take voluntary and conscious actions. It also promotes a sense of responsibility towards others. Students in inclusive environments learn valuable lessons in tolerance and empathy. They gain a deeper understanding and acceptance of individuals with different abilities, ethnicities, and backgrounds. Inclusive education encourages students to develop social support skills, contributing to their self-confidence and ability to overcome challenges. Acts of assistance, like helping peers in wheelchairs or guiding them to the bus stop, become valuable experiences. Inclusive settings promote sociability among students.

They engage in activities together, celebrate milestones, and build friendships that extend beyond the classroom.

The negative experiences were also revealed during the study. Some students reported challenges in managing outbreaks of aggression and egression from their peers with special needs. These situations require specialised intervention and support to maintain a positive emotional climate within the classroom. The study reveals that students and teachers often lack the knowledge and communication skills to interact effectively with peers with special educational needs. This points to the importance of inclusive education training and awareness programmes for both students and educators. Participants mentioned disruptions during lessons caused by students with disabilities, which affected the learning environment. Addressing these disruptions requires adaptive measures, including environmental adjustments, specialist support, and improved teacher competencies.

Participants' responses and contexts highlight the importance of value attitudes. The formation of attitudes and values towards children with SEN should be supported by education and organised in both form and content. To form attitudes and values towards children with special educational needs, a well-organised education of both methods and content is necessary. The study results refer to the important individual social groups (educators, pupils, parents of pupils, and educational and social policy makers) that influence the formation of attitudes and are related to the combination of actions required.

This study presents a nuanced understanding of students' experiences within inclusive education. The positive outcomes, such as the development of empathy, tolerance, and sociability, underscore the potential of inclusive settings to foster social and emotional growth. However, the negative experiences highlight the need for targeted interventions, specialised training, and improvements in the learning environment to address challenges effectively.

Future research should delve deeper into the impact of inclusive education on students' long-term outcomes, including their academic achievements and social integration. Also, policy development should focus on creating inclusive environments that prioritise not only academic success but also the social and emotional well-being of all students.

The study underscores the dual nature of inclusive education experiences—positive and negative. It emphasises the need for comprehensive support systems, including specialist counseling, teacher training, and family-school collaboration, to create a nurturing and inclusive educational environment. Additionally, it highlights the importance of raising awareness and improving communication skills to ensure the success of inclusive education programs. Ultimately, the findings call for a holistic approach to inclusive education that considers not only the academic aspects but also the social and emotional well-being of all students involved. This study provides valuable insights into the multifaceted nature of inclusive education, shedding light on its potential

benefits and challenges. By addressing these findings comprehensively, educational institutions and policymakers can work towards creating more inclusive and equitable learning environments for all students.

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