

Teachers' Attitudes Toward People with Disabilities



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Abstract

The aim of this paper was to characterize the attitudes of teachers in general and physical education teachers in particular towards people with disabilities. A total of 67 teachers (37 from physical education; 30 from other subjects), aged 25 to 65, were interviewed, using the Portuguese versions of the 'Attitudes towards disabled persons scale' [Escala de atitudes face a pessoas com deficiência]. Dependent variables were the attitude towards general disability and the five subscales - Valorization of Capacity and Limitations (VCL), Recognition/Denial of Rights (RDR), Personal Implication (PI), Generic Classification (GC), and, Assumption of Tasks (AT). Independent variables were: type of teacher, age, gender, education, prior contact with persons with disabilities, participation in physical activity with persons with disabilities, years of school service, years of service with pupils with special educational needs (SEN) and specific training in SEN. Data were analyzed using T-test and descriptive statistics, using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS 25.0) program. The results suggest that overall teachers have a positive attitude towards people with disabilities and few attitudes differ according to some independent variables. Statistically significant differences were found in the general attitudes towards disability and in the factor's VCL and GC of the attitude scale. There is no significant difference between physical education teachers and teachers of other subjects in attitudes towards disability.

Keywords: Attitudes; Disability; Physical education; Inclusion; Teachers

Abbreviations: SEN: Special Educational Needs; PET: Physical Education Teachers; TOS: Teachers of Other Subjects; VCL: Valorization of Capacity and Limitations; RDR: Recognition/Denial of Rights; PI: Personal Implication; GC: Generic Classification; AT: Assumption of Tasks

Introduction

The inclusion of people with disabilities in society in general and in the school environment in particular depends on a wide range of factors and conditions, including the teachers position as key partners, essential to changing attitudes [1]. Although the road to inclusion has been traced through various public policies, in educational institutions it is still far from ideal; the attitudes of some school community reserve, educational policies and investments in human and material resources are still insufficient, compromising the goal of universality of the traditional school in order to guarantee the right of quality education for all, including people with disabilities. Disability as a concern has long focused on student support rather than intervention with the teacher and the school as a whole [2,3].

Individual attitudes and beliefs play a crucial role in explaining teachers' actions in teaching students with difficulties or disabilities in mainstream classes [4]. Some authors [5-7] have proven that most teachers adopt positive attitudes towards inclusion, but there are still many with attitudes opposed to the principles of inclusion [1]. The proclamation of the UNESCO Salamanca Declaration in 1994, made a decisive contribution to put on the political agenda the question of the obligation and universality of education; indeed, if so-called special education was concerned exclusively with the education of people with disabilities in specialized institutions, inclusive education increase their participation in mainstream schools [8] and also with pupils with special educational needs (SEN) [2], concept that

encompasses all the degrees and types of difficulties found by students in monitoring the school curriculum.

With the increasing presence of students with disabilities in schools, there was a progressive change in schools, either in terms of teaching procedures, assessment, curriculum adjustment, or even in all areas of the school system [7]. However, inclusion is a complex question and has been interpreted differently by different people, which resulting in different attitudes towards these problems [8,9]. We now know that people with special educational needs have less participation and intensity in the regular physical activity, due to lack of opportunities for practice, limited provision of appropriate programs and lack of regular school training and information; when these people grow up, they will have less participation in physical activity [10].

Given the importance that teachers' attitudes seem to have in the inclusion process, we aim to know the attitudes of teachers in general and physical education teachers towards people with disabilities. We want to answer the following research questions:

- i. Are there differences in attitudes towards people with disabilities by teachers in general considering a set of sociodemographic variables?
- ii. Are there differences between Physical Education Teachers (PET) and teachers of other subjects (TOS) in their attitudes towards people with disabilities?

Methodology

Population

The target audience was 67 teachers from two regions, Lisbon and Oporto, including Physical Education Teachers (n=37) and teachers from other subjects (n=30), aged 25 to 65, 33 of them with more than ten years of professional experience and 34 with under ten years, 33 and 34, 29 have a postgraduate diploma (Master or PhD) and 38 have a diploma; of the total teachers, 46 have five or fewer years of service with students with SEN and 21 have more than 5 years. The characterization of the sample in more detail is illustrates in Table 1.

Table 1: Sample characterization.

Variables	n	%
Teachers		
Physical Education Teachers (PET)	37	55.2%
Other Subjects (TOS)	30	44.8%
Place		
Lisbon	51	76.1%
Oport	16	23.9%
Age		
≤ 38 years old	30	44.8%
> 38 years old	37	55.2%
Gender		
Male	33	49.3%
Female	34	50.7%
Education		
Graduation	38	56.7%
Master and/or PhD	29	43.3%
Contact with people with disabilities		
Yes	60	89,6%
No	7	10,4%
Participation in Physical Activity with people with disabilities		
Yes	39	58,2%
No	28	41.8%
Years of school service		
≤ 10 years	34	50.7%
> 10 years	33	49.3%
Years of service with pupils with SEN		

≤ 5 years	46	68.7%
> 5 years	21	31.3%
Specific training in SEN		
Yes	23	34.3%
No	44	65.7%

Instruments

We used the Portuguese version of 'Attitudes toward disabled persons scale' ["*Escala de atitudes face a pessoas com deficiência*"] (Verdugo, Arias e Jenaro, 1995) [11] composed by 37 items evaluated with a six point likert scale (1=strongly disagree, 2=enough disagree, 3= partially disagree, 4=partially agree, 5=enough agree, 6=strongly agree).

This scale is grouped into five factors, namely:

- i. Valorization of Capacity and Limitations (VCL) (items 1, 2, 4, 7, 8, 13, 16, 21, 29 e 36),
- ii. Recognition/Denial of Rights (RDR) (items 6, 9, 12, 14, 15, 17, 22, 23, 27, 35 e 37),
- iii. Personal Implication (PI) (items 3, 5, 10, 11, 25, 26 e 31),
- iv. Generic Classification (GC) (items 18, 20, 24, 28 e 34), and
- v. Assumption of Tasks (AT) (items 19, 30, 32 e 33). The items that expressed negative evaluation (1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 15, 17, 18, 23, 24, 25, 26, 28, 29, 31, 34, 35 and 37) were coded inversely when we analyze responses.

Regarding the variables:

- i. independents - type of teacher, place, age, gender, education, contact with people with disabilities, participation in physical activity with people with disabilities, years of school service, years of service with pupils with SEN and specific training in SEN;
- ii. dependents - the general attitude towards disability (considering the five factors on the attitude scale).

Table 2: Descriptive statistics of dependent variables in the total sample.

Dependent Variables		n	Min	Max	M	SD
General Attitude towards Disability		67	1,73	5,59	4,66	0,62
Factors	1 - Valorization of Capacity and Limitation (VCL)	67	1,60	5,80	4,39	0,79
	2 - Recognition/Denial of Rights (RDR)	67	1,73	6,00	5,14	0,70
	3 - Personal Implication (PI)	67	2,14	6,00	5,34	0,79
	4 - Generic Classification (GC)	67	1,40	6,00	4,09	0,91
	5 - Assumption of Tasks (AT)	67	1,75	5,75	3,59	0,76

Legend: Factor 1 - Valorization of Capacity and Limitation (VCL); Factor 2 - Recognition/Denial of Rights (RDR); Factor 3 - Personal Implication (PI); Factor 4 - Generic Classification (GC); Factor 5 - Assumption of Tasks (AT).

Procedures

Informed consent was obtained from study participants, followed by individual application of the questionnaire (which ensured confidentiality and anonymity in order to comply with the data protection regulation); the questionnaires were completed individually without interaction with third parties, were completed in an appropriate place; the time required to complete it was ensured, including the possibility of clarifying doubts.

Data analysis

We used some descriptive statistics (frequency analysis, mean, standard deviation, maximum and minimum values) and comparative tests (T-Student test), after checking the normality and homoscedasticity assumptions (Levene test). The level of significance was $p \leq 0.05$; for data processing the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS 25.0 Inc. Chicago, IL) for Windows was used.

Results and Discussion

Characterization of teachers' general attitude towards disability

Teachers' overall attitude towards people with disabilities (Table 2) scored an average of 4.66, demonstrating that this general attitude can be considered positive. Analyzing the five specific factors of the measurement scale, the one with the highest average is 'Personal Implication' (M=5,34) and the one with a lowest average is the 'Assumption of Tasks' (M=3,59). The results follow the trend of those obtained by other authors [12] presenting a similar hierarchization.

General attitudes towards deficiency due to variables in study

Table 3 presents the results between the comparison of the general attitudes towards people with disabilities, among the different independent variables under analysis; in general, this attitude is positive (the average is always 4.43 or above). Only in among the different independent variables.

the age variable significant differences occur; teachers younger than 38 years old have a better attitude than older colleagues 38 years old. Some authors [13-15] also report that older physical education teachers have less favorable attitudes when compared to younger ones. Can fatigue and occupational stress explain these results? This will need to be considered in future research.

Table 3: Comparison between the general attitudes towards disability

Variables	M	SD	t test
Teachers			
Physical Education Teachers (PET)	4,69	0,62	
Other Subjects (TOS)	4,63	0,63	0,689
Place			
Lisbon	4,61	0,68	
Oport	4,83	0,33	0,213
Age			
≤ 38 years old	4,83	0,34	
> 38 years old	4,53	0,76	0,035
Gender			
Male	4,60	0,68	
Female	4,73	0,56	0,421
Education			
Graduation	4,62	0,68	
Master and/or PhD	4,72	0,54	0,508
Contact with people with disabilities			
Yes	4,69	0,60	
No	4,43	0,79	0,303
Participation in Physical Activity with people with disabilities			
Yes	4,72	0,65	
No	4,58	0,58	0,366
Years of school service			
≤ 10 years	4,69	0,51	
> 10 years	4,64	0,73	0,716
Years of service with pupils with SEN			
≤ 5 years	4,72	0,49	
> 5 years	4,55	0,85	0,309
Specific training in SEN			
Yes	4,71	0,79	
No	4,64	0,53	0,684

Although we found no significant differences, the general attitude towards people with disabilities is more positive:

i. In physical education teachers compared to teachers of other subjects. Similar results were obtained by other authors [7] who found that physical education teachers had positive attitudes towards inclusion,

ii. In teachers from the Oporto region compared to teachers from Lisbon region,

iii. Female teachers when compared to male peers, which is in agreement with other data [2] that stated that women have more favorable attitudes towards inclusion, although other authors have a contrary opinion [1],

iv. Those with postgraduate higher education; we agree that teacher education contributes to the professional development and implementation of inclusive education in schools, ensuring personalized educational responses to pupils with SEN and creating positive attitudes towards the principles of inclusion [1],

v. Those with less years of service; these results are similar to those found by other authors [1] in considering that teachers with less service time (6-10 years) have a more positive perception of inclusive school ideas,

vi. Those who have had contact with people with disabilities, those who participated in physical activities with people with disabilities, and those with specific disability training. Several studies [2,5,14,16-18] point out that teachers who have live various types of previous experience with students with SEN tend to develop more positive attitudes towards inclusion.

Comparison of attitudes towards people with disabilities considering the five specific factors of the measurement scale

From comparison between the different independent variables under study (type of teacher, place, age, gender, education, contact with people with disabilities, participation in physical activity with people with disabilities, years of service at school, years of service with pupils with SEN and specific training in SEN) we obtained Table 4 which summarizes the data of each factors analyzed Only significant differences are found in factor 1 (VCL) and factor 4 (GC); in the first case, teachers from the Oporto region value the abilities and limitations of people with disabilities more than those from the Lisbon region; In the second case, younger teachers value the generic classification of people with disabilities more than older teachers.

Table 4: Comparison of attitudes towards people with disabilities among the different independent variables.

Variable	Factor 1 (VCL)			Factor 2 (RDR)			Factor 3 (PI)			Factor 4 (GC)			Factor 5 (AT)		
	M	SD	Sig.	M	SD	Sig.	M	SD	Sig.	M	SD	Sig.	M	SD	Sig.
Teachers															
PET	4,48	0,80		5,13	0,73		5,40	0,74		4,14	0,82		3,47	0,74	
TOS	4,28	0,75	0,303	5,14	0,68	0,956	5,26	0,86	0,489	4,03	1,03	0,616	3,74	0,78	0,144
Place															
Lisbon	4,27	0,85		5,14	0,76		5,31	0,85		4,05	1,00		3,49	0,74	
Oporto	4,78	0,27	0,001	5,14	0,52	0,997	5,41	0,57	0,672	4,23	0,56	0,374	3,91	0,77	0,057
Age															
≤ 38 years old	4,54	0,58		5,30	0,38		5,46	0,48		4,33	0,78		3,78	0,74	
> 38 years old	4,26	0,90	0,130	5,00	0,87	0,074	5,24	0,97	0,218	3,89	0,97	0,048	3,43	0,76	0,061
Gender															
Male	4,25	0,78		5,04	0,80		5,27	0,82		4,06	1,00		3,75	0,85	
Female	4,52	0,77	0,164	5,23	0,60	0,290	5,40	0,77	0,517	4,12	0,84	0,800	3,43	0,65	0,091
Education															
Graduation	4,39	0,80		5,08	0,80		5,30	0,91		3,99	0,86		3,52	0,84	
Master or PhD	4,39	0,76	0,999	5,21	0,57	0,444	5,38	0,61	0,704	4,22	0,97	0,308	3,68	0,65	0,396
Contact with people with disabilities															
Yes	4,42	0,76		5,16	0,68		5,33	0,79		4,16	0,88		3,62	0,77	
No	4,11	0,93	0,327	4,94	0,92	0,427	5,41	0,83	0,803	3,49	1,07	0,064	3,32	0,67	0,331
Participation in PA with people with Disabilities															
Yes	4,49	0,79		5,21	0,75		5,33	0,76		4,24	0,89		3,51	0,79	
No	4,24	0,75	0,193	5,05	0,63	0,371	5,34	0,84	0,966	3,88	0,93	0,110	3,71	0,72	0,297
Years of school service															
≤ 10 years	4,43	0,68		5,15	0,54		5,29	0,69		4,19	0,87		3,66	0,64	
> 10 years	4,35	0,88	0,651	5,12	0,85	0,882	5,39	0,89	0,625	3,99	0,96	0,373	3,51	0,88	0,437

Years of service with pupils with SEN															
≤ 5 years	4,41	0,70		5,21	0,55		5,44	0,61		4,10	0,85		3,62	0,72	
> 5 years	4,34	0,94	0,718	4,98	0,96	0,203	5,10	1,07	0,101	4,08	1,06	0,936	3,52	0,88	0,638
Specific training in SEN															
Yes	4,53	0,87		5,13	0,90		5,30	0,93		4,20	0,92		3,60	0,90	
No	4,32	0,73	0,288	5,14	0,59	0,930	5,36	0,71	0,774	4,03	0,91	0,478	3,59	0,69	0,950

Legend: Factor 1 - Valorization of Capacity and Limitation (VCL); Factor 2 - Recognition/Denial of Rights (RDR); Factor 3 - Personal Implication (PI); Factor 4 - Generic Classification (GC); Factor 5 - Assumption of Tasks (AT); Physical Education Teachers (PET); Teachers of other subjects (TOS); Physical Activity (PA).

In the other cases we don't find significant differences in attitudes towards people with disabilities, considering the five specific measurement factors, but we can say that:

i. The physical education teachers have higher averages than teachers of other subjects in three factors ('valorization of capacity and limitation', 'personal implication' and 'generic classification'), while in the two remaining factors ('recognition/denial of rights' and 'assumption of tasks'), the teachers of other subjects get higher average values than the firsts. The specific characteristics of the disciplines may explain this; the results are similar to others [12].

ii. The female teachers have higher averages than their male peers in all factors except factor 5 (TA). This hierarchical order of attitudinal scale factor is similar to that of other cases [1].

iii. The teachers with higher education than undergraduate have higher averages on all factors, and identical on factor 1 (VCL); Here too, the hierarchical order of the different factors is similar to that obtained in other research [12].

iv. The teachers with fewer years of service have higher averages on all factors than those with more years of service. Other research [1] also notes that teachers with less service time have a more positive perception of inclusive schooling.

v. The teachers who had contact with people with disabilities, participated in physical activities with people with disabilities and had specific training in SEN have more positive averages than their peers in most factors. Once again, we find similarities with the results of other works [12].

Conclusion

Through the obtained results we can affirm that all the teachers analyzed presented: i. a positive attitude towards people with disabilities, which is in line with other studies [5-7]; ii. we found no significant differences between physical education teachers and teachers of other subjects in the attitude towards people with disabilities, although teachers' attitudes depend on several factors [2]. Most teachers have positive attitudes towards inclusion and

believe that the participation of students with disabilities in class helps their inclusion in the school community [5-7].

Limitations

The gap of studies on attitudes and beliefs towards people with disabilities targeting physical education teachers and teachers in other subjects has limited the comparison of results. The type of disability has not been questioned, a fact that will certainly limit and influence the attitude of teachers towards pupils with SEN as suggested by other authors [17,19].

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