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INFORMATION ABOUT THE JOURNAL

“KLAD” is a student journal first published at M. Narikbayev Kazguu University School of liberal arts. This journal is aimed at enhancing students’ involvement into science and research.

«KLAD” journal admits for publication various types of articles: original research, review articles, short reports or essays, reflections, case studies, methodologies and cases in english; containing the results of fundamental and applied research in the field of philosophy and identity, history of kazakhstan, pedagogy, linguistics and methods of teaching languages, translation, and tourism.

CONTENTS

Проблемы с социализацией подростка в школе и как это влияет на его индивидуализацию	7
Ашкенова К., Жумагазина М., Насанова Ж.	
Жас дағдарысы кезіндегі бастауыш сынып оқушысының жеке басының дамуының жағымсыз факторларының психологиялық диагностикасы	17
Бағайқызы А., Шаку Ұ., Асаналі М., Жабенова Т., Максұтова Ж.	
Психология личности и гендерная специфика. Как гендер влияет на становление личности?	27
Бахромова А., Изтелеуова К., Ким И	
Влияние типа родительского воспитания на адаптацию ребенка в социуме	34
Бекенова А., Берғалиева А., Жанкина Д., Жумадилова А., Константи́ниди А.	
Sociolects used in M. S. Narikbayev KAZGUU University	49
Akizhanova M.	
Phraseological Units of the English Language Containing Proper Names	54
Gulnaz E. Baltabolat	
Peculiarities of Political Discourse in the English Language	61
Lunara Barysheva	
Use of Compounds in Scientific Texts	69
Yelizaveta Frolova	

Word Order in English and Chinese: A Case Study of the Chinese Folk Tale	76
Assemgul Khamidullova	
Representation of the Trilingual policy by Kazakhstani Media and Information Portals	86
Russalina Akhmerova	
Competitive Environment	98
Barysheva Lunara, Frolova Yelizaveta, Serikbay Dilyara	
Bilingualism from early childhood	104
Baigazy Zhamilya	
What Are the Challenges of International Students in the Adaptation in Another Country?	116
Indira Kabdrasheva	
Experiences of the NIS Graduates with the CLIL Approach	128
Kalymzhanova Azhar	
Experiences of the Individuals with Multilingual Upbringing in Kazakhstan	140
Tokzhan Yessengali	
Language Learning Motivation	148
Tomiris A. Zhilkibayeva	
Experiences of students with disabilities at KAZGUU University	167
Abylgazina Aidana, Askhatova Meerim, Erik Aigerim	
Young women should get married according to civil law but not to traditions	175
Akkuzinova Leila	
Young women should get married according to civil law but not to traditions	178
Leila Akkuzhanova	
Young women should get married according to civil law but not to traditions	181
Anelya Ayapbergenova	
Young women should get married according to civil law but not to traditions	184
Anuarbek Shugyla	

Young women should get married according to civil law but not to traditions	187
Kazi Venera	
Each president should be elected only once	191
Koltsov Konstantin	
Young women should get married according to civil law but not to traditions	194
Kuandykova Aibibi	
Ladies in Eastern countries must cover their bodies	197
Orazbayeva Aruzhan	
The Day of the Dead	201
Kurdykenova K.	
PARIS FASHION WEEK	203
Sagadiyeva Yerkezhan	
Saint Patrick's Day in Ireland.	205
Danish Aisulu	
Members of Editorial Board	207

PART 02

KAZGUU LIBERAL ARTS DIGEST

RESEARCH
PAPERS



EXPERIENCES OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES AT KAZGUU UNIVERSITY

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Abstract: This small-scale research examines the experiences of students with disabilities at M. Narikbayev KAZGUU University. It therefore addresses the main research question: What are the experiences of the inclusive education of the students with disabilities at KAZGUU University? To answer this question, a basic qualitative research strategy was used. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with five research participants with various disabilities. Through qualitative data analysis, three key themes were identified that reveal their experiences. These are: responsiveness of faculty and staff, challenges in education process, and social visibility of students. Moreover, the findings helped to answer subsidiary questions: 1) Are students with disabilities satisfied with the inclusive education at the university? 2) What kind of recommendations can be given based on the results of this small-scale study?

Keywords: students with disabilities, inclusive education, qualitative research, grounded theory analysis

INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Inclusive education (from French “inclusif” - including) - the process of developing general education, which implies the availability of education for everyone, including people with special needs. According to the results of large-scale research, involving more than 30 German universities, students are restricted by various means to get inclusive education (Bartz, 2020). In particular, the problems that they face are appropriate learning materials, accessibility of special spaces, and the relationships with teachers. Therefore, it is important to examine each situation of students with disabilities to properly plan a learning course and make them inclusive and accessible for those students. Moreover, Ekelman, et al. (2013) found out that the students with disabilities

experience social significance problems, and especially in the relationships with academic staff and university environment. In this study, 10 students with disabilities were interviewed to learn about the problems they face. As a result, retention, transition issues and concerns have been identified as important problems. Sometimes academic staff does not have the ability to fully provide comfort for such students. It was confirmed by Moriña, et al. (2017), where the participants in the study say that the academic staff are not well enough prepared to deal adequately with students with disabilities. Earlier, Duquette (2000) found out that the staff may not always fully understand the needs of such students. For this reason, it is important to be able to focus on giving information about disabilities and improve communication with disabled students as it was suggested

by the study by Spassiani, et al (2017). Even though there were only 12 students who took part in their study, it was a good starting point for colleges to begin thinking about what students

with disabilities prefer, and what barriers and supports they experience. As said by the authors of that study: "... it is so important for people with disabilities to be part of research so that their experiences and opinions can be heard" (Spassiani et al., 2017, p. 137). We support this opinion and believe that people with disabilities need to be part of research so we can figure out how to best support students in the way they want to be supported. Our research aims to voice the experiences of disabled students at our university so that KAZGUU University's administration and faculty members can get some valuable information about how disabled students can better be provided with inclusive education conditions. This study not only focuses on the problems, but also suggests recommendations for solving problems by introducing some kind of improvement. It is also important that this is apparently the first study on this topic, which was conducted within the walls of KAZGUU University.

MAIN AND SUBSIDIARY QUESTIONS

The main question of this research is:

What are the experiences of the inclusive education of the students with disabilities at KAZGUU University?

The subsidiary questions are:

Are students with disabilities satisfied with the inclusive education at the university?

What kind of recommendations can be given based on the results of this small-scale study?

METHODOLOGY

Data collection. We applied basic qualitative research design as it focuses on researching particular experience and opinions (Corbin & Straus, 2015), and suits the most the needs of novice researchers. We used semi-structured interviews as the primary instrument of data collection. Participants were purposefully sampled (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). We have selected our participants based on the following criteria: 1) they are students of KAZGUU University, 2) they have all reached the age of 18, and 3) they have various disabilities (physical and/or mental). It did not matter what course and what specialty the students were studying. There were representatives of all four courses, and such specialties as jurisprudence, psychology and law enforcement. Overall, five students agreed to participate in our research. Among them are 3 males and 2 females. Our research explores sensitive topic. However, the questions of interviews were formulated in a way to bypass unpleasant associations of participants. During the interview, to build the rapport, we asked several warm-up and demographic questions to get to know our participants as best as possible. Since this is a semi-structured interview, the questions varied depending on the mood of the students. Basically, in this section there were simple questions, such as: "Introduce yourself", "Tell about your day and your hobbies" and others. Broad questions consisted of, firstly, telling about the nature of the disability and, secondly, sharing the experience of studying at the university. To achieve more detailed information, probing and reflexive questions were asked.

Each participant was aware of the anonymity and confidentiality procedures. For anonymity, the names of students were replaced with alphabetical letters: A, B, C, D and Z. For confidentiality purposes, all information was stored on Google drive protected by password known only to researchers. Each of the participants signed an informed consent

form, which, in brief, described what is required of our participants, their rights, as well as our contact details in case the participant decides to file a complaint. Two copies of the document were made, one of which remained with the participant. Each interview took approximately 20-30 minutes. The interviews were conducted in Russian language, were audiotaped and later transcribed.

Data analysis. The collected data was analyzed through the constructivist grounded theory approach studied during the lectures. This method focuses on organizing data into several categories, which could help to answer the main question. The steps of analysis are: Open codes -> Axial codes -> Thematic codes. We, as researchers, collected the information from the given interviews and processed it several times until the themes emerged naturally. Immediately these natural divisions appeared, we started to code the raw data and search for the similar codes to create subtopics. These subtopics later developed into larger themes. The data was analyzed to identify topics that fully reveal the experience of students with disabilities in the process of inclusive education. For more convenience, we have divided the themes and related axial codes by colors (see Table 1). Overall, 320 axial codes were identified, among them 3 key themes were distinguished. In addition, it is

noteworthy that 18 discrepant codes were left and they did not fit into any category.

To ensure the validity and reliability of our research, we used such strategies as member-checking, rich and thick description, presentation of the negative information that runs counter to the themes, and peer debriefing. First of all, a member-checking strategy is used to match the experience of participants and researcher's interpretation of it. Second of all, a rich and thick description strategy was used in order to describe in a detailed way a particular case that is connected with the participant's experience and university's conditions in terms of providing inclusive education. Thirdly, presentation of the negative and discrepant information. The use of this strategy can be considered one of the key factors for this study to acquire a natural and realistic character. Since the topic of this study and the results that have been achieved by the researchers may be contradictory. The last one, which is peer debriefing strategy, is aimed to make the results of this research valid and credible by involving another person into this study and let them ask questions that the researchers should take into account.

FINDINGS

Responsiveness of faculty and staff. To

Time	Speaker	Open codes	Axial codes	Thematic codes
3:12	Aidana	Какже именно?		
3:13	Student A	Даа...ну например удобные аудитории. То есть, ну, без лестниц, без выступов, как бы, ну есть здесь такие аудитории, да. Мне потом придется идти и просить поменять полностью аудиторию.	Facilities for people with disabilities Seeking help from the university to change the classroom	Academic responsiveness from faculty and staff
3:35	Aidana	А часто ли Вы обращаетесь за помощью к людям, к одногруппникам здесь?		
3:42	Student A	Вообще не часто, но я никогда не сталкивалась тут с такой проблемой как, этот, ну... попросить как бы, люди сами подскажут и помогают	Help from students	Social visibility

Table 1
Screenshot of Data Analysis

answer the main question of the study, three key themes were identified. The first big theme was called “responsiveness of faculty and staff”. Out of 5 interviews, 104 axial codes were allocated for this topic in total. This means that, firstly, faculty and staff is almost always aware of the limited capabilities of a particular student. Thus, for example, Student A with physical disabilities mentioned that she receives a sufficient amount of attention from teachers: “Да, конечно, они сами, как бы, сами индивидуально подходят. То есть идет пара, нам что-то объясняют, какую-то новую тему, и ко мне еще отдельно лично подходит учитель и спрашивает все ли мне было понятно... вот”. Student A also repeatedly notes that she likes to study at KAZGUU due to the fact that the administration cares about her health condition in matters concerning her attendance: “Нет не влияет (посещаемость на успеваемость), вы знаете, университет идет навстречу по таким вопросам...они знают какие у меня условия”. Similarly with Student A, Student B, who has a hearing impairment, says that teachers are aware of his disability: “Ну я вообще сразу же говорю, что я плохо слышу и можете повторить. Преподаватели понимающе к этому относятся как-то”. Student B even repeatedly notes that he has no discomfort when asking for information that he could not hear: “Люди стесняются своих недостатков получается и боятся ну переспрашивать, а лично у меня как бы нет такого”. Secondly, the university administration also makes every effort to ensure the comfort of such students during their studies. For example, Student A was provided with an assistant to climb the stairs. There was also a case where the step to the dining room was removed, which prevented her from entering this territory:

“И они еще некоторые пороги убрали, когда я вот поступила...ээ наверное вы же знаете про столовую? Там раньше был порог, они же его убрали и просто угадайте из-за кого это сделали. Это я вот подняла шум”.

However, the administration is not always able to keep track of the full measure of comfort. Thus, Student C with a physical disability mentioned a not very pleasant case related to a failure in physical education: “Мне на первом курсе сказали, что у меня освобождение есть по объективным причинам. Но почему-то в четвертом курсе заявляют, что у меня незачёт за второй третий и четвертый курс и сейчас идет разбирательство”. According to him, academic staff can sometimes “make mistakes”, but such moments do not spoil the overall impression of the work of the KAZGUU administration.

Challenges in education process. The next theme that emerged naturally from the data analysis is “challenges in education process”, which included 80 axial codes. This topic implies the difficulties faced by students with disabilities in the process of their studies at the university. Since students with different types of disabilities were involved in the study, accordingly, each student had different problems during the interview process. For example, Student C, who has limited physical abilities, said that it is difficult for him to move in places where there is a large space and where there is nothing to grab onto: “Ну опишу ситуацию что, например, я скажем так прикован к стене, потому что я должен ходить возле стены, ну это такая подстраховка на уровне мозга, потому что я могу схватиться типа”. Students who have hearing problems face difficulties such as poor sound insulation inside the classrooms. In our case, these are students B and D who study in different courses:

“Ну вообще, я заметил, в кабинетах некоторых, особенно атриума, там же стены тонкие получается и всегда какой-то гул стоит от студентов снаружи. И как бы речь учителя еще и сливается с этим всем”- Student B.

“У нас же есть атриум, и там вот кабинеты...там в этих кабинетах звукоизоляция плохая как бы...очень шумно бывает,

когда много людей...так еще и эхо возникает...в таких случаях я вообще ничего не слышу” - Student D.

Also some students have to spend a lot of time to get ready and go to the university, as was the case with Student A:

“Я встаю...за 3-4 часа до этого, нужно же мне успеть собраться, еще и накраситься, перекусить, одеваюсь я тоже достаточно долго сами понимаете... сестренка обычно старается, помогает, вместе выходим на остановку, она в свой университет, а я в свой”.

Student C experiences the same problem: “Всё это занимает чуть больше времени

чем у обычных людей. Видишь, когда люди одеваются за 15 минут, то мне надо где-то 25 минут примерно так. Потому что, это происходит крайне медленно”. However, as we mentioned earlier, not all students have the same disability, therefore, not all students we interviewed need to spend a lot of time preparing.

An important issue to consider is whether these students feel comfortable when they talk about their disabilities to their friends or classmates. For example, since Student A and C have physical disabilities, one of them moves in a wheelchair, and the other is helped by his friend to move around, so the surrounding people understand their condition. And students who have hearing impairment and post-traumatic syndrome do not particularly like to share what problems they face with their classmates. For example, Student D shares: “Ну просто знакомым я не хочу об этом рассказывать...что у меня проблемы со слухом, мне как-то неловко что ли”. However, Student B does not hesitate to tell his classmates that he has hearing problems and keeps in touch with them for certain reasons:

“Ну зачем это, просто пустая трата времени, тупо общение... ну я люблю конечно общаться, у меня есть друзья, но

именно в большинстве с одноклассниками я бы не сказал, что у меня какие-то дружеские отношения, у меня только с ними деловые отношения: я домашку спрашиваю и так далее”.

Social visibility. The last topic, which also helped us to uncover the experiences of

students with disabilities at university is - social visibility. According to a study conducted by Clifford, social visibility is how an individual is perceived by other members of a group and what place he occupies in this society. This position is achieved through certain skills or their absence (1963). In our study, this theme has sub-themes such as participation in events within the university walls, communication with classmates, and relationships with faculty members. The first sub-theme is called “participation or non-participation in events”, which means non-academic activity within the university walls. The students we interviewed were not involved in such events due to personal reasons. For example, Student A says: “А так из событий я участвовала один раз на посвящении, это было один раз, мне потом самой не понравилось, сама потом ушла, потому что не могла найти общий язык с ребятами”. Student Z has similar attitude: “Шумно там... и мне не нравится вообще публичные выступления”. Other students do not participate in events due to their disabilities as shared by Student D: “Хотелось вот почувствовать университетскую жизнь...а такие шумные мероприятия я не особо люблю... наверно и так понятно почему”. The same reason demotivates Student C to participate in events: “Честно, я не люблю участвовать во всяких мероприятиях, потому что я знаю, что я не могу справиться с чем-то”.

The second sub-theme is called “communication with classmates and other students”. This sub-theme implies what kind of relationships students with disabilities have with their classmates, how often they communicate, and how other students react

to them at the university. As mentioned earlier, Student B adheres to business relations with his classmates, or rather, communicates with them when he needs it. And the same can be said about Student Z, who does not like to communicate with his classmates. However, there are those who have different relationships with their groupmates. For example, Student A who says: “Ну.....я конечно не такой человек, который общается со всеми подряд, у меня довольно узкий круг, но я общаюсь да. Хорошие у меня отношения с...с одногруппниками”. Besides their groupmates, the research participants mentioned readiness of other KAZGUU students to help them whenever it is needed.

The last sub-theme called “relationships with teachers”. This sub-theme uncovers the relationships between the students and their teachers, the problems that they face during their studies, and teachers’ accommodation of the needs of such students so that students with disabilities can feel comfortable. For example, Student A describes her relationship with teachers as follows: “Хорошие отношения у меня с преподавателями. Я с ними...я с ними стараюсь дружить”. Whereas, Student Z when describing her relationship with one of the faculty members notes: “Нет, она всегда старается говорить ребятам “давайте тише, не будем шуметь”. It is also worth mentioning that not everyone shared only positive experience of communicating with faculty members. Thus, Student D, who had hearing impairment, encountered an intolerant attitude on the part of the teacher at the lesson, who didn’t like the idea of repeating the same information to that student.

CONCLUSION

To sum up everything that was mentioned before, this research shows that the responsiveness of faculty and staff of KAZGUU plays a big role in the overall experience of students with disabilities. It was found that, in general, students feel

comfortable precisely because of the way the administration takes care of students and provides their support. It was found that the student experience also consists of the difficulties students face on a daily basis. But, despite this, they have learned to cope with them and nothing prevents students from living and enjoying a full life. And, thirdly, the student experience includes social visibility, which makes us understand that students have equal conditions for participating in student events and sections. Students achieve their goals, have hobbies, make friends and get interesting experiences while studying at the university.

Relying back to the participant’s opinion, it was also found out that the students are partially satisfied with the inclusive education process in the university. It means that some participants are fully satisfied with conditions and others said that there is a way to improvement. However, when coming to recommendations, not many of them were listed. Thus, the research participants offered some recommendations connected with students’ safety and necessary facilities. They are: additional elevators, desks for students who have physical disability or move with the wheelchair, soundproofing in Atrium classrooms, supports at the walls where there is a lot of space, classrooms or recreation areas where it is forbidden to make noise.

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