



Article

Perspectives of Students with intellectual disabilities on Inclusive Physical Education in Germany

Matthias Zimlich ^{1*} and Christiane Reuter ²Received: 24th October 2022; Accepted: 17th April 2024; Published: 28th October 2024

Abstract: The perspectives of students are considered an essential aspect for a successful inclusive Physical Education (PE). However, the voices of students with intellectual disability (SIDs) have hardly been heard so far. This qualitative study conducted semi-structured interviews with 17 SIDs in two cooperative PE settings and analysed them by using thematic analysis. From the results, the perspectives are equivocal and seem strongly to depend on the school setting, which comprises teachers, students without disabilities (SWDs) and the school environment and thus support the bio-psychosocial model of disability. From the findings, we also show that physical inclusion doesn't necessarily lead to social inclusion. As a conclusion, we suggest that not only PE, but also the whole school must be as inclusive as possible, and that co-teaching should be constantly implemented in inclusive PE.

Keywords: qualitative; interviews, special need, school, sport, impairment

Introduction

Inclusion as an educational concept has been widely spread across Europe (Campos et al., 2013; Fröberg, 2021) and more and more students with special educational needs (SENs) are taught in regular PE worldwide (Wang, 2019). The transition to an inclusive school system in Germany, however, has just started after the ratification of the “Convention of the United Nations on the rights of persons with disabilities” (CRPD) in 2009 (Radtke & Adolph-Börs, 2020). It is worth mentioning, though, that there have been integrative schools in Germany at least since the 1970s, but only occasionally for students with an intellectual disability (SIDs) (Knoll & Fediuk, 2015).

German-Bavarian inclusive education

Before 2009, Germany had established an elaborated school system for SENs and thus hoped to address their specific needs best (Haegeler et al., 2020). Since then, German governments have promised to put the CRPD into practice. However, since in Germany the federal states are in charge of the education system, the development to an inclusive system differs from state to state. Therefore, the development to an inclusive education system in Germany is at least officially set in motion, but at a different speed and in different ways. Whereas some states have chosen to abolish special schools on their way to an inclusive school system, in Bavaria, which is the state where the University of Würzburg is based and where we did our research, in 2020, only 14% of SIDs attended a regular school (Secretary's Office of the Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs (KMK), 2021). Here, the parents can choose between an inclusive, separate (i.e., special school) and cooperative setting. The latter is the one where we carried out our project. It means that

some classes of a special school are in the building of a regular school and that one class of both schools are taught together by a regular teacher and a special educator in some subjects according to the needs and possibilities of the schools. Though the goal of that setting is to realize as much joint lessons as possible, these cooperative lessons mostly take place in PE, art, music, and joint projects.

Concepts of inclusion and intellectual disability

Nilholm and Göransson (2017, p. 446) ascertain “that there is a lack of clarity concerning the definition of inclusion”. Their analysis of international research on inclusion results in four different categories of definitions, they label as (A) Placement definition, (B) Specified individualized definition, (C) General individualized definition, (D) Community definition (Göransson & Nilholm, 2014). The placement definition of inclusion is defined as “placement of pupils with disabilities/in need of special support in general education classrooms” (Nilholm & Göransson, 2017, p. 441). As you can see later in this paragraph, our approach to define ID is also closely linked to the placement definition, so we used it as a pragmatic concept of inclusion for our study, as most studies seem to do (Nilholm & Göransson, 2017), although we believe that inclusive education should aim for more than just placing SENs in regular schools (Fröberg, 2021).

As with the term inclusion, there also appears to be a lack of clarity concerning the definition of (intellectual) disability. Research on disability has for a long time mainly focused on physical disabilities and only in recent years “has expanded the general umbrella to include mental, emotional, and intellectual impairment studies as part of the overall scope of disability or impairment studies” (Turner, 2022, p. 2). The diagnosis of a disability applied in large parts of the 20th century the medical or individualist model, which in the case of intellectual disabilities meant to be diagnosed by sub-average scores in intelligence quotients as a deviation from a norm (Grenier, 2007). In Germany, it was not before 1994 that the KMK changed the term ‘Disability’ to the term ‘Special Education Need’ and thus – according to Lindmeier and Lindmeier (2012) – followed the concept and wording of the Warnock-Report from 1978 (Report of the Committee of Enquiry into the Education of Handicapped Children and Young People, 1978). However, the new term ‘Special Need for Intellectual Development’ still described a rather unspecific special need, which comprised measures concerning the cognitive, linguistic, psychomotor, emotional, and social development (Musenbergh, 2015). In 2001, the World Health Organization (WHO) (2001) developed the “International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health” (ICF). ICF is a bio-psychosocial model, “which is an attempt to make a synthesis of the individualist and social model” (Reindal, 2009, p. 163) and understands a person’s functioning and disability “as a dynamic interaction between health conditions [...] and contextual factors” (WHO, 2001, p. 12). Although this model has been criticized (Reindal, 2008), it is considered as a minimum consensus in German special education (Lindmeier & Lindmeier, 2012) and thus the model we used as a theoretical framework for disability.

Above all, the rise of the concept of inclusion and the disability studies has linked the question of how to understand impairment and disability with the process of labelling, i.e., is the diagnosis of a disability and/or sending these students to special schools an act of “actively disabling students”, as considered in social constructionist ideas of disability (Grenier, 2007, p. 302)? International (Lauchlan & Boyle, 2020) and German (Wocken, 2015) scientists discuss this question intensively and the discourse runs from (almost) completely abolishing classification systems (Wocken, 2015) to more pragmatic views, which consider the diagnosis of a special need as a precondition for a special support such as providing learning aids or more teaching and supporting staff. The latter view is also known as ‘labelling-resources-dilemma’ (Neumann & Lütje-Klose, 2020; Reindal, 2008).

Although the authors of this article support the idea of a de-labelled society, we chose a pragmatic approach for our research. Therefore, in this study, SIDs are students who visit a special school for SIDs (placement definition) because of their special need, which is declared by a teacher for special education after a comprehensive child-surrounding-diagnosis.

Study purpose

According to international research, PE as a compulsory subject in the school curriculum may be used as a fundamental tool to transform regular schools into a more inclusive environment and is also considered to be an effective academic area to promote abilities over disabilities and help students to understand one another and their capabilities (Campos et al., 2013). Block and Obrusnikova (2007) (Also Grenier, 2007 and Seymour et al., 2009) additionally suggest that PE offers opportunities for social acceptance and interaction between students with and without disabilities that are not available in other subjects in school due to its unique instructional setting. They also identify the perspective of the students as an essential aspect for a successful inclusive PE (Block & Obrusnikova, 2007). Consequently, international research has produced numerous studies, which tried to explore these perspectives. While the first studies focused on the attitudes of students without special needs (Wang, 2019), more and more studies also turned their attention to the experiences of SENs, since “[u]nderstanding the perceptions and feelings of students with special needs in relation to their PE inclusion is crucial” for the transformation to an inclusive PE setting (Wang, 2019, p. 243; also Fröberg, 2021; Haegele et al., 2020; Ruin & Meier, 2018). The vast majority of these studies focuses completely or at least mostly on students with a physical disability (Amsterdam et al., 2015; Bredahl, 2013; Fitzgerald & Stride, 2012; Seymour et al., 2009; Spencer-Cavaliere & Watkinson, 2010; Svendby & Dowling, 2013; or students with a visual impairment Haegele et al., 2020). Other studies reconstruct the experiences of students with social, emotional, and behavioural difficulties (Medcalf et al., 2011), autistic disorder (Healy et al., 2013; Verret et al., 2022) or do not focus on one specific disability (Coates & Vickerman, 2010; Wang, 2019). Reviews of international research from 1995-2020 suggest that these experiences of SENs vary. They reach from rather equivocal (Block & Obrusnikova, 2007; Reuker et al., 2016; Wilhelmsen & Sørensen, 2017) to “mostly negative” (Fröberg, 2021, p. 14).

Interestingly, the voices of students with intellectual disabilities have hardly been heard so far. This seems to be in alignment with Nilholms (2017, p. 489) claim, that “[p]eople with intellectual disabilities have historically been placed in the margins of Western society, often segregated in institutions and/or special schools.” Therefore, our study tries to address the voices of SIDs in inclusive PE and thus follows Schuppeners (2017) demand, to get to know their specific individual views and competences and learn from these perspectives. This is even more important in the context of PE, since Streicher and Leske (1985) consider sports as a social environment that is especially suited for the inclusion of SIDs and participation in sport “has important implications for the overall well-being of individuals with ID and has been linked to improved physical, psychological, and social outcomes, including greater self-worth and positive emotionality, as well as increased social skills, friendships, and perceived social acceptance” (Albaum et al., 2022, p. 86f.).

Although recent German publications also turn to the perspectives of students on inclusive PE (Ruin & Meier, 2018) and focus on how to teach PE in classes with SIDs (Reuter, 2019), there have only been two studies in Germany so far, which addressed the perspectives of SIDs on PE. While Grüning (2015) focused on the preferences on types of sport of SIDs in inclusive PE, Streicher and Leske (1985) employed an experimental design with a sociometric experiment and a questionnaire to gauge the attitudes of both students with and

without ID. Therefore, to our knowledge, our study is the first addressing explicitly the experiences of SIDs in inclusive PE in Germany, following the call of Wang (2019) that it is necessary to further explore the views of SENs with a specific disability in other countries and cultures than the ones that have been addressed so far. Our research question was to find out how SIDs experience inclusive PE and discuss it in context of international research and the German special education and sport pedagogy discourse. Moreover, we also consider research with SIDs as a means of empowerment of these students (Schuppener & Hauser, 2014).

Materials and Methods

Participants and Settings

According to the research question of the study, we employed a qualitative design, which “aims to enrich understanding of human experience” and “enables individuals with disabilities opportunities to voice their experiences and opinions related to their participation in various physical activity contexts. It thus has emancipatory potential by enabling these individuals to exercise their human right to be heard” (Zitomer & Goodwin, 2014, p. 194; Haegele et al., 2020). To reach this goal, we conducted 17 semi-structured interviews in two different cooperative settings in Bavaria. Setting A is a 6th grade of a secondary modern school cooperating with an 8th grade of a school for SIDs in a village close to the city of Wuerzburg, where three girls and three boys aged 13 to 14 were interviewed (Flock, 2018). Setting B is a 6th grade of a secondary school cooperating with a 6th grade of a school for SIDs in the city of Nuremberg, where five girls and six boys aged 12 to 13 were interviewed. Included were all SIDs in the two settings with a basic oral communication competence (see table 1) as reported to us by the teachers at both schools.

Table 1. Study Participant Demographic Information.

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Setting	Interviews Reconstructable
Anastasia	Female	14	A	Yes
Deniz	Male	14	A	Yes
Ilkay	Male	13	A	Yes
Juliane	Female	14	A	Yes
Melanie	Female	13	A	Yes
Mesut	Male	14	A	Yes
Ahmed	Male	13	B	No
Can	Male	12	B	Yes
Emre	Male	12	B	No
Hakan	Male	13	B	Yes
Katharina	Female	12	B	No
Lucia	Female	12	B	Yes
Mohamed	Male	13	B	Yes
Nasrin	Female	12	B	Yes
Samira	Female	13	B	Yes
Sandra	Female	12	B	Yes
Susanne	Female	12	B	Yes

Beside other joint lessons in different subjects, in setting A students have two hours of joint PE, but also two hours of separate PE. In setting B, the students spend six hours in joint PE. Additionally, in setting B, PE-classes are particularly considered as a very helpful tool by the teachers to initiate group dynamic processes that should help to facilitate successful inclusion. Whereas in setting A a typical 90 min-PE class comprises mainly of team sports with no particular educational goal, in setting B one 90-minutes PE class focusses on basic teaching of sport skills in different types of sport, whereas the other two 90-minutes-classes particular address the goal of achievement and thus try to prepare the students for the

highlight of a handball tournament at the end of the school year. All PE classes are administered by certified PE teachers, but while in setting A only the regular PE teacher teaches the joint PE-class, in setting P all regular and special education teachers plan and carry out PE-classes together.

Instrument

In alignment with our qualitative approach, we conducted semi-structured interviews. They have the advantage to use an interview guide to establish a thematic structure for the interviews and thus are particularly recommended for people with ID, because otherwise interviews could be too much for them (Keeley, 2015). Consequently, we designed our interview guide based on findings of research on inclusive PE. The interview guide (see table 2) focused on the following main topics but allowed flexibility in the order of the questions and follow-up on interesting answers. We started with the personal relevance of sport in the lives of the SIDs as icebreaker as it is recommended in interviews with people with ID to start with a reference to their lifeworld (Keeley, 2015). Besides, it is consensus in German sports pedagogy that the experience of PE is influenced by the experience and personal relevance of sport outside PE (Zander, 2018). Our next topic focused on the experience of PE as our central research purpose. Since social inclusion is a central goal of inclusive education (Seymour et al., 2009), we also focused on this social dimension by asking how the students experience their classmates of their regular partner class. Additionally, we know that the relationship to the students without disabilities (SWDs) is an important aspect for the experience of PE of SENs (Fröberg, 2021). Then we addressed how the SIDs experience their teachers since a good student-teacher cooperation is important to promote participation at school (Asbjørnslett & Hemmingsson, 2008). Finally, we wanted the students to tell us how they assess and experience their own ability in PE, since we know that the feeling of being as able as their classmates is vital for successful inclusion of SENs (Bredahl, 2013).

Table 2. Interview Guide.

No	Leading interview questions
1	How do you like sport in general? Do you do sport outside school?
2	Please tell me/us about your last PE lesson How do you experience PE lessons?
3	How do you experience your teacher/s?
4	How do you experience your classmates
5	How do you experience/assess your own ability In PE lessons?

Data Collection

After school authorities and the heads of the Institute for Special Education and the Centre for Sports and Physical Education of the University of Wuerzburg approved the study, all parents were informed about the goal of the study and subsequently gave their written consent to the authors.

The interview guide was at first discussed with the experts on SIDs of the Institute for Special Education of the University of Wuerzburg. After that, Flock (2018) used her first two interviews as test interviews. These interviews indicated that the SIDs could understand at least the main questions. Thus, the interview guide remained unchanged.

The data were collected in setting A in January 2018 and in setting B in March 2019. The interviews were carried out by a master student (Flock, 2018; setting A) and lecturer (C.R.; setting B) in the field of special education for SIDs respectively. In both cases, the

interviewers visited the schools a couple of days before the interviews to get to know the students and the specific school environment and to give the students the chance to get acquainted with the interviewers. During these visits, the students were also informed that we would come back to ask them about their PE experience. According to specific research concerning interviews with persons with ID (Bedoin & Scelles, 2015; Høybråten Sigstad & Garrels, 2018; Keeley, 2015; Schallenkammer, 2016), the interviews in both settings were carried out in a room the students would know so that they would feel comfortable during the interview. Every interview started with the interviewers explaining who they were and what the purpose of the interview was. We also asked again whether they would like to take part in the interview or not and, since all students consented, we tried to make clear that the interview was not a test and encouraged them to speak as freely as possible. After that we employed our interview guide, but at the same time tried to establish an atmosphere of a chat between friends. According to our qualitative approach we followed Bedoin and Scelles' (2015, p. 484) demand for interviews with people with ID to use "as many open questions as possible". However, quite often we had to turn to more leading questions to initiate/keep up a conversation, which is a common procedure in interviews with people with ID (Keeley, 2015). At the end of every interview, the students were asked whether they would like to add something as additional information concerning our topic. Each interview lasted between 10 and 20 minutes. The interviews were conducted in German and audio recorded. During the interviews, the interviewers tried to note the most relevant content but also the behaviour of the students, since "the importance of the non-verbal and the visual is crucial" in interviews with SIDs (Bedoin & Scelles, 2015). Shortly after the interviews, the data were transcribed verbatim, and pseudonyms were used for confidentiality. The quoted text was translated into English by one author and back translated into German by the other author. Both authors have the experience of numerous oral presentations in English and one (M.Z.) also has a master degree in English.

Data Analysis

The interviews were analysed by means of a qualitative thematic analysis according to Ruin (2019). Ruin's approach allows us to consider the specific circumstances of the interview situations and to focus – where appropriate – on our different perspectives as researchers in the field of special education (C.R.) vs. physical education (M.Z.) respectively. Thus, we meet the demand of Creswell and Creswell (2018; Zitomer & Goodwin, 2014) to explicate the researchers' experiences and how they (might) shape the interpretation of data in qualitative research. Following the idea of social constructivism (Schütz, 1962), the work of qualitative researchers is to (re)construct the constructions of a person's social world. This reconstruction process already starts in the interview situation but mainly depends on the statements of the interviewed people. The aim of the reconstruction process when applying a thematic analysis is to reduce the complexity of the interview material by describing this very material in the context of categories (Früh, 2015). However, in the case of our study, some interviews couldn't be reasonably reconstructed (see also table 1) due to a limited ability to speak of some participants. This resulted in us simply asking "Yes/No-questions" with subsequent answers. Thus, we opted to apply a deductive approach to get at least a basic idea how the main topics of our interview guide were viewed by all SIDs. Although our analysis was still open for inductive categories, no reasonable additional main category emerged. The analysis began with Flock (2018) analysing the complete data of setting A on her own, since it was her master thesis. She went over the transcript line by line and conducted a deductive coding guided by the topics of the interview guide (table 2) as main thematic categories of the analysis. In a second step, the authors re-analysed separately the data of setting A and applied an inductive approach to look for sub-categories by going over

all coded sequences of each main category. In this process, we determined ‘positive vs. negative experiences’ as the basic sub-categories (see tables 3-5) for the main categories ‘Experiencing PE’, ‘Experiencing Teachers’ and ‘Experiencing Classmates’. After that, we applied the same procedure for each sub-category to look for 3rd- and 4th-order categories (see also tables 3-5). This was done in a consensual deductive-inductive coding process. Finally, the authors analysed separately the data of setting B using the already established category system of the analysis of setting A, completed sub-categories or 3rd-order categories when appropriate and again tried to ensure reliability in a consensus meeting. Since it wasn’t our intention to compare the two settings, we analysed the interviews of both settings as one set of data with the same interview guide and the same category system.

We used consensual coding or “investigator triangulation” as a strategy to increase the credibility of our study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 245). Another strategy we used in that matter is the researchers’ reflexivity (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), which we followed by addressing our theoretical and scientific background as well as the limitations of our study..

Results

Personal relevance of sport

From the data analyses, sport was hardly part of the lifeworld of the interviewed students. Only one student participated in a sport club. However, some of the students talked about physical activities like playing hide and seek, going for a walk or jog, dancing, or visiting a public swimming-pool sometimes. Interestingly, these activities were mostly done in the family context, like Nasrin explains: “I sometimes play sport with my brothers.” And they all seem to know that sport or physical activity is healthy, as Mohamed pointed out, “Sport is okay and keeps you fit.” What is striking is the fact that many of the students don’t seem to have a precise concept of sport. Therefore, when we asked them whether they would like other types of sport in PE, many couldn’t answer this question, as Samira admitted, “I somehow don’t know many games.”

Experience of PE

The students’ experienced inclusive PE basically in a positive way and felt comfortable. However, these experiences seemed to depend on the school setting. While all students in setting B appreciated the fact to have PE class together with the SWDs, the students of setting A seemed to be more ambivalent. While all of them were looking forward to inclusive PE, they often experienced PE in a negative way, for instance the experience of losing in competitive team sports, “When I play in a team, and we are losing, that makes me feel ashamed” (Deniz). Some students in setting A indicated that they would appreciate if other types of sport could be played, which are not “so difficult like dodge ball. That is mostly a bit too difficult” (Juliane). One aspect, which we also addressed in our interviews was the understanding of rules when playing games. While in setting B, about half of the students said that they would basically understand all the rules and the others said they could ask their teachers and they would explain it again and then they would understand. The students in setting A differed in their opinions. Some indicated that they had problems understanding the rules because the SWDs were joking around while the teacher was explaining the rules, and this was because they already knew them. Thus, they disturbed the students’ understanding, as Ingo remarked, “Yes, they [students of the partner class] are always loud and we don’t understand anything, he [teacher] is explaining. Then he has to tell it again.” Others, like Juliane, don’t seem to have problems,

Yes, we understand this game, so when he [teacher] explains it to us, then, ehm, we listen and then Mr. W. tells us how the game works and then he first explains it to us and then he shows us how it works.

Other negative experiences in PE were based on the behaviour of the students of the partner class and the PE teacher of the partner class. This issue is addressed in detail in the corresponding sections. Thus, it doesn't really come as a surprise that the students in setting A felt more comfortable in their regular PE than in inclusive PE, as Melanie admitted, "I feel better in PE when I am with my own class."

With the students who are in favour of having PE together with their partner class, it remained vague why. Most answers can be summed up as "it's because", since no reason was told. Some remarks indicated that it was simply because the subject is fun, as Juliane stated, "I like both [inclusive PE and regular PE], because you can romp around." Others, like Mohamed, add social reasons: "It is good that they [SWDs] take part, because I get to know them."

Table 3. Sub-Categories of Experiencing PE.

Positive Experience	Negative Experience
Enjoying the subject	Team sports too difficult
Getting to know the students of the partner class	Experience of losing
It's Because	Not understanding rules

Experience of classmates

In setting B, the interaction is described positively by the students, as Susanne remarked, "Well, quite positive. Because they can help us. Because we can't do certain things, or, well, last time, I didn't do well in handball and then a partner-student told me and showed me how to do it better." This narrative, that it was good to be together with the partner students because they can help us, is – with slightly different wording – used by all students in setting B. In contrast to setting B, in setting A, there appeared to be more negative than positive experiences, which, in some cases already became visible in the interview situation. While one student would always cover his face with his hands when talking about uncomfortable situations with SWDs, others subbed their voice, when being asked whether they preferred separate PE to inclusive PE. Anastasia's answer "mediocre", when asked how she liked the SWDs, seems to give a picture of the perceived relationship in setting A. These negative experiences seemed to be influenced by different factors or happen in different contexts, as we want to show in detail now.

'Group-Alliances' were a phenomenon that can be understood, as SWDs formed such alliances to distinguish themselves from the SIDs. One context of these alliances was competitive ball games like zombie ball. Zombie ball is a game where all participants are supposed to play on their own account and try to hit as many other players as possible, who then must sit down, as Ilkay's experience showed, "They are forming teams and hit us with the ball so that we must sit down. That is getting on my nerves." This behaviour of the partner class sometimes made him "somehow angry and aggressive" and led to preferring non-inclusive PE in his class versus inclusive PE,

Because they always make reasons like 'come on, we hit I.', 'come on, we hit J.'. That is getting on my nerves somehow. So, it's no fun for me to be with the other class, with my class it's okay (Ilkay).

These group alliances already seem to start in the locker room. Although the SIDs and the SWDs are in separate locker rooms, the SWDs seem to go in the locker room of the SIDs and annoy them, as again Ilkay explained, "That we always say 'go out', but they won't. 'You have to go to your locker room', but they won't, and then I go somewhere else, I change in the toilet." Additionally, the SWDs also displayed their superior competence, "Because they sometimes are boasting like 'I can do this, I can do that. I can play soccer well, I can play basketball well, I can play handball, I can play badminton well'. That's getting on my nerves"

(Ilkay). The different pace of understanding rules was another aspect, which sometimes led to conflicts when playing games. As already mentioned above, the SWDs seemed to disturb the teacher while he’s particularly addressing the SIDs, which Deniz experiences as “not nice”. Another aspect, which was indicated in two interviews was gender in terms of girls are not fond of being together with boys in PE class. Nasrin pointed out that she was, “scared of playing together with the boys” when playing handball and the boys threw the ball “too hard” and Juliane added that, “the boys are always so reckless and nearly run me over”.

It appeared in both settings the interaction between the two groups seems to be limited to PE or other joint classes. Only during breaks there seemed to be interaction sometimes, and sometimes quarrels. So, the SIDs do not have friends in the partner-class. Susanne called them “Half-Friends”. However, all would have liked to have friends in the partner-class.

Table 4. Sub-Categories of Experiencing Classmates

Positive Experience	Negative Experience
Can help us	Group Alliances
	- Locker Room
	- Competitive Ball Games
	Disturbing the teacher
	Boasting
	Gender
	Different pace of understanding rules

Experience of the teachers

The students’ experience of the teachers also seemed to depend on the school setting. In setting B, the students perceived their teachers positively, because they “talk to us in a positive way” and “explain everything nicely”, as Susanne explained. In contrast, the students in setting A were, again, more critical. While they do perceive the PE teacher of the partner class as “kind” and are “very satisfied”, they still would appreciate if their class teacher could be present in inclusive PE. In addition, they demanded that the teacher must make adjustments in order to make inclusive PE more fun. One aspect referred to the group alliances of the partner-class while playing games. The teacher should either take care before games by making sure, “that the teams are fair. Sometimes in [inclusive] PE” (Deniz). And according to Ilkay he should have also be ready to take action during games, “So the teacher must pay attention that they [students of the partner class] won’t build teams, because I find it good, when they won’t build teams.” One last context was that the SIDs expected the teacher to adapt games so that all students were able to play them, as Juliane suggested, “That it isn’t as difficult as dodge ball. That is mostly a bit too difficult.” All these aspects showed that the SIDs expected the teacher to take care that all students felt comfortable and had fun in inclusive PE.

Table 5. Sub-Categories of Experiencing Teachers.

Positive Experience	Negative Experience
Explains well	Lack of adjustments
Positive communication	Lack of interventions regarding adaption of games

Assessing and experiencing own ability

An essential aspect of this category was the question of whether the SIDs compared themselves with the SWDs. The answers once again seem to be influenced by the setting. In setting B, they either don’t care too much that they perceived a difference or they seemed to re-interpret the fact, that they are not as good in sport as the SWDs, as Sandra pointed out, “The partner-students are better in sports, but that is good, because then they can help us.”

In setting A, they all compared themselves and seemed to perceive differences between themselves and the students of the partner class. Additionally, they are also aware of the fact that the SWDs were younger and still better in sports.

All in all, it seemed that the SIDs can participate in all actions, apart from the already mentioned dodgeball and badminton in setting A, which at least for two students seemed too difficult. Although we described some concerns referring to comparing themselves with the SWDs, the basic self-perception of the students in inclusive PE seemed to be positive, as described by Mohamed, “I always think, I am how I am. I am a bit like this, the other is a bit like that.”

Discussion

The data analysis generally indicates that the central aspect that affected the experiences of the interviewed students is the school setting, which comprises the teachers and the partner students, but also seems to be influenced by the whole school as an institution that welcomes inclusion vs. simply must deal with it. We will discuss our findings first according to the main thematic categories and then from our two different scientific backgrounds.

Personal Relevance of Sport

The fact, that neither sport nor physical activity seem to be too relevant in the lives of the interviewed children is according to corresponding research, since we know that young people with ID “exhibit reduced levels of physical activity due to the lack of opportunities to be regularly physically active” (Downs et al., 2016, p. 385; for Germany Grüning, 2015). Thus, we consider that a central goal of inclusive PE, but also PE in special education settings, should be to give SIDs the possibility to experience different sports and different physical activities. At the same time, PE should aim at making SIDs as competent as possible in the field of sport/physical activity. Moreover, since in Germany the social sports life takes mostly place in sports clubs, experiencing the joy of physical activity in PE and at the same time developing some kind of physical competence could facilitate the social participation of these students and consequently help them to lead a (more) self-determined life (Albaum et al., 2022).

Experience of PE

We found that the SIDs experience inclusive PE both in a positive and negative way, which corresponds with the results of Reuker et al. (2016). However, according to their findings, the negative experiences are mostly linked to the teacher, while our study suggests that the school setting is key for this experience. Furthermore, we know from the experiences of SENs in inclusive PE, that they “have positive attitudes towards PE when they are given the opportunity for full participation and when they perceive themselves as legitimate participants that contribute to the games” (Fröberg, 2021, p. 11). Thus, it is not surprising that the students in setting B experience inclusive PE much more positive than the students in setting A, who seem to prefer separate PE. An obvious explanation for this result can be found in the different settings since there is no separate PE in setting B. In addition, the experience of the setting seems to depend on the teacher as attachment figure and the time spent together with the partner class. In setting A, the SIDs spend less time together with their partner class than in setting B. So, they may not be as familiar with the students of the partner class as in setting B. This aspect is in alignment with the findings of Streicher and Leske (1985). Moreover, inclusive PE is taught alone by the PE teacher of the partner class, while the SIDs would prefer their class teacher. This indicates the importance of the teacher as an attachment figure for the SIDs, a person they know and can trust and relate to.

Experience of Classmates

Another very important aspect for the experience of PE of SENs is the relationship to the SWDs (Fröberg, 2021; Healy et al., 2013; Spencer-Cavaliere & Watkinson, 2010). The students in setting A experience negative aspects like the SWDs annoying them already in the locker room, which is in alignment to the experiences of many SENs in inclusive PE (Fröberg, 2021). Additionally, the SWDs also form groups in competitive games and thus demonstrate on the one hand that they are better in sports but at the same time exclude the SIDs to some extent from participating in games. However, such ‘group-alliances’ have already been described in regular PE in a German study by Miethling and Krieger (2004). Moreover, the studies of Grimminger (e.g., 2015) show that students who are not well-liked and/or not very sporty meet deeds and words of disdain in regular PE. Thus, it is difficult to tell, whether the negative experiences are because the students are perceived as being disabled or whether it is because their disability leads to for instance less achievement in PE, which has a negative influence on the attitudes of SWD towards SENs (Block et al., 2017) and/or less communicative competencies. Corresponding research shows that on one hand SWDs tend to have a positive attitude towards their class-mates with a disability (Block et al., 2017; Hoos et al., 2017) and on the other hand students with cognitive impairment participate less in PE than their peers without cognitive impairment (Furrer et al., 2019). This seems to indicate that it is the specific intellectual impairment, which leads to excluding behaviour among SWDs. Another striking aspect concerning this relationship is the fact that although, especially in setting B, the SIDs seem to get sufficient support by their peers, the interviews give the impression of ‘asymmetrical relationships’ between SWDs and SIDs. The relationships are asymmetric in a way that there seems to be an understanding that the partner-students are better in sports and are the ones that can help the SIDs. This understanding is encouraged by teachers and staff in good will and faith as we have already addressed as the phenomenon ‘institutionally learned attitudes’. Finally, although we know that making friends is a very important positive social experience for SENs in inclusive PE (Fröberg, 2021), the interviews show that interaction between the two groups seems to be limited to PE class. No friendships seem to exist between the students with and without ID, although all SIDs would like to have that. Thus, we conclude that taking part in an inclusive PE offers SIDs chances of social participation, but this doesn’t necessarily mean that they do socially participate (Block & Obrusnikova, 2007; Fröberg, 2021).

Experience of Teachers

Almost all studies addressing the perspective of students on inclusive PE highlight the central role of the teachers for a successful inclusive PE (Block & Obrusnikova, 2007; Fröberg, 2021; Wang, 2019). However, our study focuses on slightly different settings than international research, since our settings are not completely inclusive in a way that all students are in joint classes all the time. Thus, as already mentioned above, the part of the special education teacher(s) as an attachment figure seems to be key for the well-being of the SIDs in inclusive PE. In this context, the interviews of our study reveal that the students in setting B are more satisfied with their teacher(s) than in setting A. This might also be influenced by the attitude of the teachers towards inclusion, which generally is considered as a very important factor for successful inclusive PE (Fröberg, 2021; Reuker et al., 2016). While we know from a master thesis (Seidler, 2020) that the attitudes of the teachers involved in setting B are very positive, we don’t know about the attitude of the teacher in setting A and thus can’t be sure about whether this is an important aspect in this setting or not. What is additionally striking in setting B is the ‘multiple co-teaching’ of two regular PE teachers and two special education teachers, since co-teaching in PE is rarely practiced in Germany (Brand et al., 2016). This seems to lead to a more comfortable atmosphere for the SIDs. In contrast, the interviews in setting A seem to indicate that the teacher doesn’t always

react to quarrels or doesn't plan his lessons in a way that could prevent them. This lack of inclusive planning also seems to apply for the choice of types of sport, lack of adapted activities or the way teams are being built, whereas the four teachers in setting B plan, teach and evaluate the PE lessons together from a joint inclusive mind-set. According to Streicher and Leske (1985) the precise planning is key for inclusive PE with SIDs. It also seems essential for teachers to take care of their communication, for example when explaining rules. All these aspects are consistent with the findings of other studies (Fröberg, 2021; Svendby & Dowling, 2013; Wang, 2019). They might be linked to either a lack of knowledge or an unwillingness referring to the participation of the SWDs (Fröberg, 2021; Wang, 2019) or what Fitzgerald and Stride (2012, p. 285; also Fröberg, 2021) sum up as the "resistance to change within the profession" of PE teachers as one of the key factors limiting the prospects of inclusion. A view, which is shared in German sports pedagogy as well (Ruin et al., 2016).

Assessing and Experiencing own Ability

The focus on how the students assess and experience their own ability in PE is important in a way that we know that the feeling of being as able as their classmates is vital for successful inclusion of SENs. Again, these experiences seem to depend on the school setting. Students in setting B perceive differences like a lower sport or understanding competence, but mostly don't assess them (too) negatively, whereas students in setting A seem to perceive themselves less competent. Additionally, the SENs in setting B seem to be able to take part in all activities, which, as already mentioned, seems to be an essential aspect for SENs for a positive attitude towards inclusive PE (Fröberg, 2021). In contrast, at least some students in setting A call for adaptations. Another important part seems to be the understanding of rules. At least half of the students need help in both settings, but the students in setting B are more content with their teachers in this aspect than the students in setting A.

Two Different Perspectives

We finally discuss our results from two different scientific perspectives, namely special education (C.R.) and (German) sports pedagogy (M.Z.). First, both authors agree that setting B can be considered an institutional best practice setting, while setting A can be described as the 'standard model' of a cooperative setting in Bavaria. Setting B is unique in two ways: First, it is not common for a school for SIDs to cooperate with a secondary (and not second modern) school, and second, it is not common to have six hours of joint PE. Moreover, in setting B the managements of both schools developed a written concept of what inclusion should be like for the whole school. What is also unique is the elaborate concept for PE, since PE is mostly a subject, which is considered as not too important in inclusive settings in Germany and thus is quite often neglected (Brand et al., 2016).

However, our views differ on the establishing of asymmetrical relationships between students with and without ID in setting B. From a special education view this must not be assessed (too) negatively, because it is a common way at schools for SIDs in Germany to give the students as much help and direction as possible to make them feel comfortable. In contrast to that view, German sports pedagogy has a strong belief in the 'Bildung'-term, which can be described as self-activity or self-active learning (Wibowo et al., 2022). Therefore, these relationships raise some concerns regarding this very self-activity. This dichotomy 'direction vs. Bildung' also applies to the fact that in both settings the students seem to have limited rights to have a say, for instance about the types of sports played or the goals that should be gained and in what way they could be accomplished. These aspects are considered as key to Bildung and participation in German sports pedagogy (Bindel et al., 2019), whereas recent publications dealing with PE with SIDs (Reuter, 2019) favour the idea

of a basic order as not to be too much for the students. However, Bildung and participation are concepts that demand a high reflective and speech competence and thus might aspire too high for all students, whether with a disability or not, as Giese (2016) has criticized.

Another important aspect circles around the goal of achievement, which is particularly addressed in setting B, but also seems to be followed in setting A and the strong focus on team sports in both settings. While Schuppener (2017) is very critical of achievement in inclusive PE with SIDs, Reuter (2019) argues that SIDs shouldn't be deprived of competitive team sports, even so this might lead to difficulties for some students, and the study of Albaum and colleagues (2022) suggests that competing in team sports is necessary for establishing meaningful contact between people with and without ID. Moreover, from a special education point of view this focus on achievement seems appropriate, since the examination with one's own achievements is part of a lifelong learning process of all students that also must be learned in social comparison. However, the fact, that the students in setting A seem to feel more comfortable in separate PE than in inclusive PE indicates an unwillingness of the SIDs to leave their 'comfort zone'. On the other hand, this focus on achieving is discussed negatively in the German sports pedagogy discourse. While achievement is widely considered the centre of PE it is also widely accepted that it shouldn't be addressed one-dimensionally as students trying 'only' to achieve something but also reflect on the how and why. Moreover, such a one-dimensional understanding of achievement is considered to have a highly exclusive potential (Meier et al., 2016) in inclusive PE, since it might focus on the visible differences (in achievement) between the students. Additionally, Fitzgerald and Stride (2012, p. 285) identify "the domination of competitive team sports" as another key factor limiting the prospects of inclusion.

Limitations

Although our study reveals important issues that can help to understand the specific views of SIDs and thus might lead to a better understanding on the behalf of the teachers or other stakeholders, it also has several limitations. First, the study is limited to the experience of 17 students with special needs in one federal state in Germany. Therefore, the results of this study should not be generalized to other populations like for instance other federal states in Germany or other countries respectively. Nevertheless, the reconstruction of experiences calls for a qualitative design and thus has the advantage to explore these experiences much deeper than a quantitative approach. Additionally, these results could be used for further quantitative research that could try to generalize our findings.

Second, we cannot be sure about the reliability and validity of all answers (Høybråten Sigstad & Garrels, 2018). As mentioned before, communication was sometimes limited to very simple „Yes-/No-questions“. Therefore, we strongly recommend filming the interviews as well to get a more authentic impression of the students' emotional responses (Bedoin & Scelles, 2015). Additionally, we also very likely experienced some phenomena, which are widely discussed in the context of research with people with ID. For instance, we possibly experienced the phenomenon of acquiescence (Bedoin & Scelles, 2015). Acquiescence means the tendency to answer with „Yes“, no matter what the question is. This phenomenon is in strong alignment with the so-called 'satisfaction-paradox' (Zapf, 1984), which is the tendency to tell that you are satisfied when you are not. This seems to be a common experience in research with persons with ID (Grüning, 2015). Another phenomenon we experienced in our interviews we coined 'institutionally learned attitudes', which means that, especially in setting B, certain views concerning the regular students are encouraged by teachers and staff in good will and faith. For instance, there were signs on the wall in the room where we conducted the interviews with claims like "the students of the partner-class can help us". All these phenomena can be explained with the specific socialization conditions

of these students, which possibly affect the personality and might lead to a “deformed adaptation” (Schallenkammer, 2016, p. 47). Nevertheless, they very likely influenced at least parts of the data.

Third, the quality of our interviews has probably been influenced by two aspects: in trying to initiate and keep up a conversation we probably used more leading questions than necessary and consequently may have missed some additional insights. Additionally, due to organizational reasons we had to conduct all interviews in setting B on one day, which could also have influenced the quality of the interviews.

Fourth, we were only focusing on one perspective on inclusive PE, namely the SIDs. Finally, our last limitation is strongly linked to the already mentioned labelling aspect. Keeley (2015, p. 8) in our opinion rightly points out, that “research with people with intellectual disabilities is foremost research about people with intellectual disabilities”. And although we tried to follow Zitomer and Goodwin’s (2014, p. 211; Bedoin & Scelles, 2015; Høybråten Sigstadt & Garrels, 2018) demand to “challenge hierarchical relations between [us and our] participants and maintain openness and respect for participants” and despite our understanding of our research as empowering these students, there’s no denying that there was a hierarchical relationship between us and the students. Thus, our research is in “danger of reproducing paternalistic conditions” (Schallenkammer 2016, p. 49).

Conclusions

This study reconstructed the experiences of SIDs of inclusive PE. The results indicate that these experiences are both positive and negative and depend mainly on the school setting. Thus, our findings seem to support the bio-psychosocial model of disability, which understands a person’s functioning and disability as dynamic interaction between health conditions and contextual factors, in this case particularly the school and PE environment. Moreover, the results indicate that inclusive placement doesn’t necessarily lead to social inclusion. The cooperative setting, which is mainly used in Bavaria, also doesn’t seem appropriate to facilitate an inclusive environment since the students only occasionally are taught together. What is also striking is the fact that the SIDs seem to need a special education teacher in inclusive PE classes more as an attachment figure than as PE expert. Thus, we strongly recommend co-teaching in inclusive PE. Moreover, these issues of teacher cooperation as well as the special needs of SENs must be addressed in PE teacher education (Barber, 2018; Rischke & Reuker, 2020).

Perspectives

Our study confirms the equivocal experience of inclusive PE of SENs, which have already been described by European and international APA-research. And though we support the idea of more studies addressing the perspectives of different SENs in different cultural backgrounds, we think that bigger studies comprising and comparing more European countries by means of quantitative methods would be helpful as a next step. Moreover, we would like to draw the attention to the following aspects concerning further research in the field of APA: First, future research on inclusive PE could focus on whether the inclusive setting is a specific setting (Reuker et al. 2016) or ‘just’ intensifies ‘common’ PE-phenomena (Ruin & Meier, 2018) like for instance ‘gender’ or ‘group alliances’, which German research already detected in regular PE before the shift to an inclusive school system started in 2009. Second, we would recommend the use of participatory methods as a means of empowerment of SENs (Coates & Vickerman, 2013). Third, we would recommend studies, which comprise more than just one perspective on inclusive PE. Fourth, we would recommend to also implement other sources of data like observation of the lessons to learn more about the processes going on between students with and without disabilities, but also

between students and teacher(s) in inclusive PE. And finally, it might be useful to take a broader look not only on our subject, but on our subject as part of or maybe even facilitator of an inclusive school development.

Author affiliations:

¹ Centre for Sports and Physical Education, University of Wuerzburg; matthias.zimlich@uni-wuerzburg.de

² Institute for Special Education, University of Wuerzburg; christiane.reuter@uni-wuerzburg.de

* Correspondence: matthias.zimlich@uni-wuerzburg.de; Tel.: +49-931-31-81196

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