

PHYSICAL CULTURE AND INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN UNIVERSITIES OF
UZBEKISTAN: SOCIAL ADAPTATION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES*Kozlova Galina Gennadievna**Fergana State University, Senior Lecturer**asd68galina@gmail.com +998902915576**ORCID ID: 0009-0006-4216-6836*

ABSTRACT: This article examines the critical role of physical education and adapted physical activity programs in promoting social integration of students with disabilities (SWDs) within the inclusive higher education system in Uzbekistan. The article argues that well-designed and implemented physical activity initiatives can significantly improve SWDs' social integration, self-esteem, and overall well-being, contributing to a more equitable and inclusive learning environment. The article reviews the current state of inclusive education in Uzbek universities, as well as the existing opportunities and challenges associated with SWDs' participation in physical education classes. It then proposes practical strategies for developing and implementing effective adapted physical activity programs that promote social integration and enable people with disabilities to fully participate in university life.

Key words: Physical education, adapted physical activity, inclusive education, students with disabilities (SWD), social adaptation, accessibility.

The Republic of Uzbekistan strives to create an inclusive society in which all citizens, including people with disabilities, have equal rights and opportunities to participate in all spheres of life, including higher education. Inclusive education is a fundamental principle aimed at integrating people with disabilities into the general educational environment and providing them with the necessary support and resources to succeed. However, successful integration is not limited to the academic sphere and requires attention to the social adaptation of people with disabilities, which allows them to build meaningful relationships, develop a sense of belonging and fully participate in the social life of the university community. Physical education and adapted physical activity programs are an effective means of promoting social adaptation, strengthening self-confidence and improving overall well-being.

The Importance of Physical Culture for Social Adaptation

Physical activity has long been recognised as a valuable tool for promoting physical and mental health. However, its benefits extend far beyond these individual benefits. For people with disabilities, participation in physical activity can be particularly beneficial, promoting social inclusion and boosting self-esteem.

- **Establishing social connections:** Adapted physical activity programs provide a structured and supportive environment for individuals with disabilities to interact with their peers, both with and without disabilities. Such interactions can lead to the development of friendships, a sense of belonging, and a reduction in social isolation.

- **Increased self-esteem and confidence:** Achieving success in physical activity, regardless of the level of participation, can significantly increase self-esteem and confidence. Adapted programs are designed to provide people with disabilities with the opportunity to succeed by developing a sense of competence and self-confidence.

- **Improved physical and mental health:** Regular physical activity can improve physical health, reduce stress levels, and increase overall mental well-being. For people with disabilities, these benefits are especially important because they may face unique physical and mental health challenges.

- **Challenging stereotypes and promoting inclusion:** When people with disabilities participate in physical activities on an equal basis with their non-disabled peers, it challenges stereotypes and helps create a more inclusive and accepting environment. This can lead to a better understanding and appreciation of diversity within the university community.

Challenges and Opportunities in Universities of Uzbekistan

Despite Uzbekistan's commendable progress in developing inclusive education, significant challenges remain in ensuring equal access to physical education for students with disabilities (SWDs) at universities. One of the main barriers is the lack of adapted spaces and specialized equipment needed for SWDs to participate in physical activity programmes. Many educational institutions lack accessible gyms, modified sports equipment, and adapted training grounds, which hinders SWDs' participation and limits the range of activities available to them. In addition, the limited number of physical education teachers with specialized training in adaptive physical activity is a major barrier. Lack of experience limits the ability of instructors to effectively support people with disabilities, develop appropriate programmes, and adapt exercises to individual needs. In addition to infrastructural and training limitations, barriers related to attitudes towards people with disabilities pose a significant challenge. Negative attitudes and prevailing stereotypes towards people with disabilities can create a hostile environment, hindering their participation in physical activity and exacerbating social exclusion. These biases may be due to a lack of awareness, fear of the unknown, or ingrained prejudices. Finally, there is a pressing need to raise awareness among university administrators, faculty, and students about the many benefits of adapted physical activity for people with disabilities. These benefits extend beyond physical health to include improved social integration, self-esteem, and overall well-being.

However, despite these challenges, there is significant scope for Uzbek universities to expand and improve physical education programs for people with disabilities. First and foremost is the unwavering commitment of the Government of Uzbekistan to the principles of inclusive education. This commitment provides a solid foundation for the development and implementation of adapted physical activity initiatives, demonstrating that inclusivity in education is of paramount importance. In addition, there is a growing influx of resources from international organizations and non-governmental organizations that support inclusive education initiatives in Uzbekistan. These organizations offer financial assistance, technical support, and professional development programs that help universities create more accessible and supportive learning environments for people with disabilities. Another promising development is the emergence of specialists in Uzbekistan who are increasingly being trained and certified in the field of adaptive physical activity. These specialists have the knowledge and skills needed to design and implement effective programs that meet the unique needs of people with disabilities. Finally, technological advances have enormous potential to revolutionize the approach to physical activity for people with disabilities. Innovations such as adaptive sports equipment, virtual reality training programs and assistive technologies are opening up new opportunities to create engaging and accessible physical activity experiences for people with a wide range of disabilities.

Strategies for Developing Effective Adapted Physical Activity Programs

To fully realize the potential of physical education in promoting social adaptation of students with disabilities (SWD) in Uzbek universities, a strategic and multifaceted approach is needed. Universities should prioritize the implementation of the following strategies:

- First and foremost, conducting a comprehensive needs assessment is paramount. This assessment should go beyond simply determining the number of students with disabilities enrolled at the university and consider their specific needs, interests, and preferences for physical activity. This may include surveys, interviews, focus groups, and consultation with disability organizations to gain a holistic understanding of the barriers students with disabilities face and what programs they find most interesting and useful. The assessment should also consider the wide range of disabilities represented in the student population to ensure that programs meet the unique needs of those with mobility impairments, sensory impairments, cognitive impairments, and other conditions.
- Based on a needs assessment, universities should develop specialized, adapted physical activity curricula. These programs should not simply modify existing classes, but create entirely new programs specifically designed to promote social interaction, enhance self-esteem, and improve the physical fitness of people with disabilities. Curricula should include a variety of activities, from individual exercise to team sports, to accommodate a variety of interests and abilities. Particular attention should be paid to creating a supportive and inclusive environment in which people with disabilities feel comfortable and can challenge themselves. In addition, curricula should be adaptable and flexible so that teachers can modify assignments based on individual needs and student progress.
- Investment in adapted facilities and equipment is another important element of a successful adaptive physical activity programme. This may include building or renovating existing sports facilities to ensure accessibility for people with disabilities, including through facilities such as ramps, accessible toilets and adapted changing rooms. In addition, universities should invest in the purchase of specialised adaptive sports equipment such as sports wheelchairs, adaptive bicycles and modified weights to enable people with disabilities to participate in a wide range of activities. The equipment should be of good quality, in good working order and accessible to all students who need it.
- To ensure effective and safe implementation of programs, comprehensive training for adaptive physical education instructors is necessary. Such training should cover topics such as disability awareness, adapted training methods, communication strategies, and strategies for creating an inclusive learning environment. Instructors should also be trained in how to assess the individual needs of individuals with disabilities and develop individualized training plans. In addition, universities should provide instructors with ongoing professional development opportunities to keep them up to date with the latest research and best practices in the field of adaptive physical education.
- Developing peer mentoring and support programs can greatly improve the social integration of students with disabilities. These programs connect students with disabilities with students without disabilities who can provide support, advice, and friendship. Peer mentors can help students with disabilities navigate campus, participate in social events, and connect with other students. Not only do these programs benefit students with disabilities, but they also provide peer mentors with valuable opportunities to develop leadership skills and empathy.
- Conducting comprehensive information campaigns is crucial to creating a more inclusive and accepting campus environment. These campaigns should aim to educate the university

community about the benefits of adapted physical activity for people with disabilities, as well as combat negative stereotypes and misconceptions associated with disabilities. Campaigns can use a variety of channels to reach a wide audience, such as social media, posters, presentations, and campus events. Campaigns should also highlight the achievements of people with disabilities in sports and other physical activities, showcasing their abilities and inspiring others to participate.

- Finally, to gain access to expertise, resources, and support, it is important to develop strong partnerships with local and international disability organizations. These organizations can provide valuable guidance on programming, training, and advocacy. They can also help universities connect with potential sponsors and partners. By partnering with disability organizations, universities can ensure that their adapted physical activity programs are aligned with best practices and the needs of the disabled people they serve.

Conclusion:

Physical education and adapted physical activity programs can be a powerful tool to promote social adaptation of students with disabilities within the inclusive higher education system of Uzbekistan. By addressing existing challenges, seizing new opportunities, and implementing the strategies described in this article, Uzbek universities can create a more equitable and inclusive environment in which all students, regardless of their abilities, can develop and reach their full potential. Further research is needed to evaluate the effectiveness of various adapted physical activity programs and identify best practices to promote social adaptation of students with disabilities in Uzbek universities.

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