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# HIGHER-EDUCATION TEACHING STAFF ATTITUDES TOWARDS ADJUSTMENTS OF THE ACADEMIC PROCESS FOR STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

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## Abstract

Adjustments to the academic process are one of the most crucial factors that enable students with special educational needs (SEN) to succeed in higher education. They can also be viewed as positive discrimination, enabling students with SEN to fully participate in their studies and achieve their educational goals. Students with SEN can be as successful in their studies as their peers without SEN, provided that higher-education teaching staff adjust the academic process. However, willingness to adjust in the academic process is also influenced by teachers' attitudes toward and provision of adjustments. Research shows that the more positive higher-education teacher' attitudes toward adjustments are, the greater their willingness to adapt the academic process. In the present study, we investigated the attitudes of higher-education teaching staff involved in the teaching process at the University of Ljubljana, Slovenia, towards adjustments in the academic process for different groups of students with SEN. We found that higher-education teaching staff have a positive attitude towards adjustments in the academic process for all groups of students with SEN, but there is a greater reluctance to adapt the academic process for students with emotional and behavioural problems, blind and visually impaired students, and students with speech and language disorders.

**Key words:** Higher education; teachers' attitudes; adjustment; students with special educational needs; inclusion; accessibility

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## Introduction

Most students who have SEN have them because of barriers, disabilities, or deficits due to lifelong neurological or physical causes. Some of them succeed in developing compensatory strategies that help them overcome barriers in the academic environment, while others are unable to do so or their SEN is such that overcoming barriers is not possible. These students with SEN need adjustments in the academic process to overcome barriers (Gibson, 2012; Jakšič Ivačić & Danilovska, 2019; Quinn, 2013; Wilson et al., 2016). Adjustments can be viewed as a form of positive discrimination (Rebolj, 2018) that allows students with SEN to fully participate in their studies and find a way to achieve the same educational goals. Thus, adjustments are not an advantage or privilege that is due or granted to an individual, but rather it means recognising diversity and opening up opportunities while taking into account the diversity of students (Rebolj, 2018). Adjustments to the academic process is one of the most important factors that enable students with SEN to succeed in the higher education environment. Students with SEN face more obstacles in their studies than other peers, which is why they need additional support and help from teachers as professionals specifically responsible for them (European Agency /.../, 2006; Heiman & Kariv, 2004).

Higher-education teachers have a key role in supporting students with SEN (Sandoval, Morgado & Domenech, 2021). Because they are most familiar with students with SEN and the requirements of the course they teach, they are in the best position to support students with SEN. It is the higher-education teachers who, through their pedagogical work, can help improve the self-esteem and self-image of students with SEN (Emmers, Baeyens & Petry, 2020; Košak Babuder, 2020; Rieser, 2006).

Students with SEN are more likely to succeed in their studies and can be as successful as their peers without SEN, if higher-education teachers make adjustments of the academic process (Martins, Borges & Gonçalves, 2018). Higher-education teachers' attitudes toward students with SEN and toward reasonable adjustments in the academic process have a significant impact on their willingness to adjust (Bourke, Strehorn & Silver, 2000; Lane & Nagchoudhuri, 2015). The more positive the attitude, the greater the willingness of higher-education teachers are to adjust (Bourke et al., 2000; Lane & Nagchoudhuri, 2015; Martins et al., 2018).

Higher-education teaching staff should respond to requests for adjustments for students with SEN. Many respond positively and

offer adjustments. It is not only important that they offer adjustments, but equally important is how they feel about it or what their attitude toward adjustments is. Research in this area has produced a range of results, from positive to negative attitudes of higher-education staff toward adjustments of the academic process. Goltnik Urnaut (2016) and Rebolj (2018) both conclude that higher-education staff in Slovenian higher education have a positive attitude towards adjustments in the academic process and are willing to make adaptations. In the U.S., Behling & Tobin (2018) come to the opposite conclusion, finding that the requirement to adjust the academic process for students with SEN evokes feelings of uncertainty, confusion, frustration, and even anger among many higher-education teachers. In a review of research on students with SEN in higher education, Moriña (2017) found that students with SEN perceive feelings of higher-education teachers, as students indicated that they frequently encounter negative attitudes from teaching staff in the academic process, manifested in negative comments, observations, use of derogatory terms, or terms with negative connotations.

Researchers have made other important findings in their studies of higher-education teaching staff attitudes toward students with SEN and adjustments of the academic process. Jensen, McCray & Krampe (2004) and Behling & Tobin (2018) find that higher-education teachers feel that implementing adjustments takes too much time that could otherwise be spent on other students and research. Rebolj (2018), however, comes to a different conclusion in her dissertation: teaching staff at the University of Ljubljana, Slovenia, report that they rarely spend additional time implementing adjustments. Claiborne et al. (2011), based on interviews with teachers about their experiences teaching students with SEN in New Zealand, found that teachers would be grateful to receive information in advance about the adjustments each student would need, as it would allow them to prepare before beginning the teaching process. For the teachers interviewed, building a good relationship with students with SEN was crucial. They also emphasised that it was important for them to create an atmosphere where students with SEN felt accepted. Claiborne et al. (2011) found that in such an environment, it was easier for students to identify as students with SEN, make the necessary adjustments, and become more actively involved in their academic lives.

The nature of the student's deficit or special needs also influences the attitude of higher-education staff towards students with

disabilities and the adjustment of the academic process. In Slovenia, according to the Higher Education Act (2022), students with SEN include physically disabled students, students with long-term illnesses, blind and visually impaired students, deaf and hard-of-hearing students classified as students with visual deficits, as well as students with severe specific learning difficulties, students with speech and language disorders, students with emotional and behavioural difficulties, and students with autism spectrum disorders classified as students with invisible or hidden deficits (Fuller et al., 2004; Wolf, 2001). Invisible or hidden deficits refer to those barriers, disorders, deficits that rarely manifest in physical form and occur due to impairments in psychological processes - e.g., organisation, reading and writing, attention, memory, communication, coordination (Couzens et al., 2015; Košak Babuder, 2020; Wolf, 2001). Because their deficits are hidden, these students are often overlooked by teaching staff in higher education (Košak Babuder, 2020), although their numbers are increasing each year (Couzens et al., 2015; Košak Babuder, 2020; Rehfuss & Quillin, 2005). Deckoff-Jones & Duell (2018) point out that there is a significant difference in how an individual is treated depending on whether they have visible or invisible deficits. When a student has visible deficits, both teachers and peers are more likely to understand the need for adjustments of the academic process than when the deficits are invisible (Rehfuss & Quillin, 2005), as the latter are often questioned for legitimacy. In addition, higher-education teachers often believe that invisible deficits disappear in adulthood (Tuomi & Jauhojärvi-Koskelo, 2015). Because of potential stigma, students with invisible deficits are less likely to disclose their needs and therefore less likely to be understood (Couzens et al., 2015; Košak Babuder, 2020; Ryan, 2007; Woodcock & Vialle, 2011).

### **Research problem and research question**

The success of students with SEN in higher education is influenced by the attitudes and willingness of teaching staff to provide and implement adjustments in the academic process (Burgstahler, 2005; Dona & Edmister, 2001; Lane & Nagchoudhuri 2015; Leyser et al., 1998; Leyser et al., 2000; Leyser et al., 2011; Rebolj, 2014; Scott & Gregg, 2000; Skinner, 2004; Vogel et al., 2008). The more positive higher-education teachers' attitudes toward students with SEN and implementing adjustments in the academic process, the more likely they are to offer them (Bourke et al., 2000; Lane & Nagchoudhuri, 2015).

This paper presents the results of a study investigating the attitudes of teaching staff at the University of Ljubljana, Slovenia, toward adjusting the academic process for specific groups of students with SEN.

### **Method**

Descriptive and causal non-experimental research methods and a quantitative research approach were used in the study.

#### **Participants**

323 higher-education teachers, researchers, and assistants participated in the survey, representing 5.2% of the total population at the time of the study. Survey participants completed an online questionnaire designed for the purposes of the survey.

#### **Instrument**

In the questionnaire designed for the survey, we used a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = neither agree nor disagree; 4 = agree; 5 = strongly agree) for 11 items that were divided into two groups to assess the views of the surveyed higher-education teaching staff on adjusting the academic process for different groups of students with SEN (blind and visually impaired students; deaf and hard-of-hearing students; students with speech and language disorders; students with severe specific learning difficulties; physically impaired students; students with long-term illnesses; students with autism spectrum disorders; and students with emotional and behavioural difficulties).

For the items in the first group (I1–I5), respondents were asked to identify all students with SEN, regardless of group. The second group of statements (I6–I11) referred to each group of students with SEN separately.

### **Research design**

Data were processed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20.0, Windows environment. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to describe the main characteristics. The following methods were used: Counts/absolute frequencies (f); structural percentages/frequencies (f%); arithmetic mean (M); standard deviation (SD).

### **Results**

The first step was to investigate the views of higher-education teaching staff on adjusting the academic process for specific groups of students with SEN. For this purpose, five items (I1–I5) were

created to apply to all groups of students with SEN. We were interested in how respondents rated their knowledge of the basic educational needs of students with SEN and their knowledge of the possible adjustments that could be offered to them. We also wanted to find out what their attitudes were toward adjustments in the academic process. The results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Frequency and structural distribution of responses to items I1 to I5 regarding knowledge of basic educational needs of students with SEN and of reasonable adjustments in the academic process

Items in support of attitudes		1- strongly disagree	2- disagree	3- neither agree nor disagree	4- agree	5- strongly agree	Total	Arithmetic mean	Standard deviation
		f	f %	f	f %	f	f %		
I1 - I am aware of the basic educational needs of students with SEN.	f	24	62	83	127	27	323	3.22	1.083
	f %	7.4	19.2	25.7	39.3	8.4	100		
I2 - I am aware of the various academic process adjustments that I can provide to students with SEN.	f	20	62	74	132	35	323	3.31	1.091
	f %	6.2	19.2	22.9	40.9	10.8	100		
I3 - Course adjustments and addressing the educational needs of students are part of my professional responsibility.	f	3	22	49	152	97	323	3.98	0.900
	f %	0.9	6.8	15.2	47.1	30.0	100		
I4 - Course adjustments are an important means of removing barriers so that students with SEN can be successful in their studies.	f	3	8	26	141	145	323	4.29	0.793
	f %	0.9	2.5	8.0	43.7	44.9	100		
I5 - Course adjustments can benefit all students. not just students with SEN.	f	7	33	77	106	100	323	3.80	1.056
	f %	2.2	10.2	23.8	32.8	31.0	100		

Legend: f = frequency distribution; f % = structural distribution

The respondents' level of agreement with the items studied can be divided into two groups. The first group consists of "principled" items: I3, I4 and I5, with an agreement value of  $3.22 \leq M \leq 4.29$  (I4 - SD = 0.793; I3 - SD = 0.900; I5 - SD = 1.056). The second group is represented by the "practical" items, namely I1 and I2, with agreement rates of  $M = 3.22$  (I1) and  $M = 3.31$  (I2). However, the dispersion of agreement rates in this case is slightly higher ( $1.083 \leq SD \leq 1.091$ ).

The area of respondents' attitudes toward adjustments and accommodations of academic process for students with SEN was further explored with items from I6 to I11, where respondents expressed their attitudes toward each group of students with SEN separately according to respondents' attitudes. Results are presented in tables 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7, which show the percentages of respondents' answers to Items I6 to I11.

Table 2: Frequency and structural distribution of responses to item I6 and by groups of students with SEN

I6 – Students have a right to adjustments of the academic process, and this is not a privilege.										
Groups of students with SEN		1- strongly disagree	2- disagree	3- neither agree nor disagree	4- agree	5- strongly agree	No answer	Total	Arithmetic mean	Standard deviation
Blind and visually impaired students	f	13	16	20	71	203	0	323	4.35	1.065
	f %	4.0	5.0	6.2	22.0	62.8	0.0	100		
Deaf and hard-of-hearing students	f	9	6	25	76	202	5	323	4.43	0.926
	f %	2.8	1.9	7.7	23.5	62.5	1.5	100		
Students with severe specific learning difficulties	f	5	12	33	86	181	6	323	4.34	0.924
	f %	1.5	3.7	10.2	26.6	56.0	1.9	100		
Students with speech and language disorders	f	7	16	33	78	183	6	323	4.31	0.996
	f %	2.2	5.0	10.2	24.1	56.7	1.9	100		
Physically disabled students	f	7	10	25	73	202	6	323	4.43	0.927
	f %	2.2	3.1	7.7	22.6	62.5	1.9	100		
Students with long-term illnesses	f	4	5	42	74	192	6	323	4.40	0.868
	f %	1.2	1.5	13.0	22.9	59.4	1.9	100		
Students with autism spectrum disorders	f	7	12	48	80	169	7	323	4.24	0.992
	f %	2.2	3.7	14.9	24.8	52.3	2.2	100		
Students with emotional and behavioural difficulties	f	14	24	64	69	146	6	323	3.97	1.169
	f %	4.3	7.4	19.8	21.4	45.2	1.9	100		

Legend: f = frequency distribution; f % = structural distribution

The mean of the agreement rates for item I6 shows that agreement ( $M \geq 4$ ) prevails among the respondents. There is also no significant difference in the level of agreement ( $0.868 \leq SD \leq 1.169$ ). In comparison, the level of agreement is lowest in the group of students with emotional and behavioural problems ( $M = 3.97$ ).

Table 3: Frequency and structural distribution of responses to item I7 and by groups of students with SEN

17 – I am willing to teach and support students to engage them in the academic process.		1- strongly disagree	2- disagree	3- neither agree nor disagree	4- agree	5- strongly agree	No answer	Total	Arithmetic mean	Standard deviation
Groups of students with SEN										
Blind and visually impaired students	f	13	17	45	104	144	0	323	4.08	1.075
	f %	4.0	5.3	13.9	32.2	44.6	0	100		
Deaf and hard-of-hearing students	f	9	9	42	113	145	5	323	4.18	0.962
	f %	2.8	2.8	13.0	35.0	44.9	1.5	100		
Students with severe specific learning difficulties	f	4	5	39	118	152	5	323	4.29	0.835
	f %	1.2	1.5	12.1	36.5	47.1	1.5	100		
Students with speech and language disorders	f	3	4	26	120	165	5	323	4.38	0.768
	f %	0.9	1.2	8.0	37.2	51.1	1.5	100		
Physically disabled students	f	5	4	33	111	165	5	323	4.34	0.836
	f %	1.5	1.2	10.2	34.4	51.1	1.5	100		
Students with long-term illnesses	f	3	3	46	114	152	5	323	4.29	0.816
	f %	0.9	0.9	14.2	35.3	47.1	1.5	100		
Students with autism spectrum disorders	f	7	16	47	112	135	6	323	4.11	0.983
	f %	2.2	5.0	14.6	34.7	41.8	1.9	100		
Students with emotional and behavioural difficulties	f	15	18	51	103	131	5	323	4.00	1.108
	f %	4.6	5.6	15.8	31.9	40.6	1.5	100		

Legend: f = frequency distribution; f % = structural distribution

The results for item I7 also show high agreement values, as they range from  $4.00 \leq M \leq 4.38$ . The highest dispersion of agreement is found in the group of students with emotional and behavioural difficulties ( $SD = 1.108$ ) and in the group of blind and visually impaired students ( $SD = 1.057$ ), and the lowest in the group of students with speech and language disorders ( $SD = 0.768$ ). For all groups of students with SEN, on average, respondents agree or strongly agree that they are willing to teach and support them to participate in the academic process. The highest willingness to teach and support them is expressed by respondents for students with speech and language disorders, where the results are also the least dispersed ( $SD = 0.768$ ), while the lowest willingness is found for the group of students with emotional and behavioural difficulties ( $M = 4.00$ ;  $SD = 1.108$ ) and the group of students who are blind or visually impaired ( $M = 4.08$ ;  $SD = 1.075$ ).

Table 4: Frequency and structural distribution of responses to Item 18 and by groups of students with SEN

18 – Adjustments of the academic process are a disincentive for students.		1- strongly disagree	2- disagree	3- neither agree nor disagree	4- agree	5- strongly agree	No answer	Total	Arithmetic mean	Standard deviation
Groups of students with SEN										
Blind and visually impaired students	f	182	88	30	4	5	14	323	1.58	0.844
	f %	56.3	27.2	9.3	1.2	1.5	4.3	100		
Deaf and hard-of-hearing students	f	181	84	31	5	3	19	323	1.57	0.818
	f %	56.0	26.0	9.6	1.5	0.9	5.9	100		
Students with severe specific learning difficulties	f	145	96	47	9	7	19	323	1.81	0.961
	f %	44.9	29.7	14.6	2.8	2.2	5.9	100		
Students with speech and language disorders	f	135	90	48	20	11	19	323	1.95	1.092
	f %	41.8	27.9	14.9	6.2	3.4	5.9	100		
Physically disabled students	f	164	87	39	9	5	19	323	1.70	0.919
	f %	50.8	26.9	12.1	2.8	1.5	5.9	100		
Students with long-term illnesses	f	155	95	43	8	3	19	323	1.71	0.875
	f %	48.0	29.4	13.3	2.5	0.9	5.9	100		
Students with autism spectrum disorders	f	154	90	46	10	3	20	323	1.74	0.903
	f %	47.7	27.9	14.2	3.1	0.9	6.2	100		
Students with emotional and behavioural difficulties	f	130	81	68	14	11	19	323	2.00	1.079
	f %	40.2	25.1	21.1	4.3	3.4	5.9	100		

Legend: f = frequency distribution; f % = structural distribution

Most of higher-education teaching staff surveyed strongly disagree or disagree with item 18. Most undecideds, slightly more than one-fifth (21.1%), are found in the group of students with emotional and behavioural difficulties, and the fewest in the group of blind or visually impaired students (9%) and deaf and hard-of-hearing students

(10%). For all other groups, the percentage of respondents who agreed with item 18 is low, ranging from 3% for deaf and hard-of-hearing students to 10% for students with speech and language disorders.

Table 5: Frequency and structural distribution of responses to item 19 and by groups of students with SEN

19 – Students could complete all requirements without adjustments if they tried a little harder.	Groups of students with SEN	1- strongly disagree	2- disagree	3- neither agree nor disagree	4- agree	5- strongly agree	No answer	Total	Arithmetic mean	Standard deviation
		f	f	f	f	f	f	f		
Blind and visually impaired students	f	187	93	22	3	4	14	323	1.52	0.779
	f %	57.9	28.8	6.8	0.9	1.2	4.3	100		
Deaf and hard-of-hearing students	f	175	96	24	7	2	19	323	1.57	0.789
	f %	54.2	29.7	7.4	2.2	0.6	5.9	100		
Students with severe specific learning difficulties	f	131	94	51	21	7	19	323	1.94	1.041
	f %	40.6	29.1	15.8	6.5	2.2	5.9	100		
Students with speech and language disorders	f	126	82	53	27	16	19	323	2.10	1.189
	f %	39.0	25.4	16.4	8.4	5.0	5.9	100		
Physically disabled students	f	156	83	45	13	7	19	323	1.79	0.999
	f %	48.3	25.7	13.9	4.0	2.2	5.9	100		
Students with long-term illnesses	f	143	95	52	12	2	19	323	1.80	0.906
	f %	44.3	29.4	16.1	3.7	0.6	5.9	100		
Students with autism spectrum disorders	f	142	87	59	12	3	20	323	1.83	0.942
	f %	44.0	26.9	18.3	3.7	0.9	6.2	100		
Students with emotional and behavioural difficulties	f	121	80	81	12	10	19	323	2.05	1.058
	f %	37.5	24.8	25.1	3.7	3.1	5.9	100		

Legend: f = frequency distribution; f % = structural distribution

For item I9 the number of respondents who disagree is also significantly higher than those who agree. Disagreement is highest among blind and visually impaired students ( $M = 1.52$ ;  $SD = 0.779$ ) and deaf and hard-of-hearing students ( $M = 1.57$ ;  $SD = 0.789$ ). The highest percentage of undecided respondents is found in the group of students with emotional and behavioural difficulties (25%) and the lowest in the groups of blind and visually impaired students (7%) and deaf and hard-of-hearing students (7%). For all other groups, the percentage of undecided respondents ranges from 16% to 18%. The percentage of respondents agreeing with item I9 is low in all groups, ranging from 2% in the group of blind and visually impaired students to 13% in the group of students with speech and language disorders.

Table 6: Frequency and structural distribution of responses to item I10 and by groups of students with SEN

I10 – By adjusting for students with SEN, we discriminate against other students without SEN.		1- strongly disagree	2- disagree	3- neither agree nor disagree	4- agree	5- strongly agree	No answer	Total	Arithmetic mean	Standard deviation
Groups of students with SEN										
Blind and visually impaired students	f	170	77	39	17	6	14	323	1.74	1.005
	f %	52.6	23.8	12.1	5.3	1.9	4.3	100		
Deaf and hard-of-hearing students	f	168	75	40	17	4	19	323	1.73	0.978
	f %	52.0	23.2	12.4	5.3	1.2	5.9	100		
Students with severe specific learning difficulties	f	138	75	52	32	7	19	323	2.00	1.121
	f %	42.7	23.2	16.1	9.9	2.2	5.9	100		
Students with speech and language disorders	f	139	74	54	29	8	19	323	1.99	1.121
	f %	43.0	22.9	16.7	9.0	2.5	5.9	100		
Physically disabled students	f	161	78	43	15	7	19	323	1.78	1.015
	f %	49.8	24.1	13.3	4.6	2.2	5.9	100		
Students with long-term illnesses	f	151	78	52	20	3	19	323	1.84	0.998
	f %	46.7	24.1	16.1	6.2	0.9	5.9	100		
Students with autism spectrum disorders	f	146	76	54	23	4	20	323	1.89	1.036
	f %	45.2	23.5	16.7	7.1	1.2	6.2	100		
Students with emotional and behavioural difficulties	f	127	76	63	28	8	21	323	2.05	1.113
	f %	39.3	23.5	19.5	8.7	2.5	6.5	100		

Legend: f = frequency distribution; f % = structural distribution

Most of respondents disagree or strongly disagree with item I10. The percentage of undecideds is also relatively low, ranging from 12% for blind and visually impaired and deaf and hard-of-hearing students to 19% for the group of students with emotional and behavioural difficulties. However, the percentage of respondents who agree or strongly agree with the item ranges from 6% to 12%. 12% of respondents feel that adjustments for students with SEN would discriminate against other students when it comes to adjustments for students with severe specific learning difficulties, 11% for students with speech and language disorders, and 11% for students with emotional and behavioural difficulties. For other student groups, this percentage ranges from 6% to 8%.

Table 7: Frequency and structural distribution of responses to item I11, and by groups of students with SEN

I11 – I know of adjustments of the academic process that can reduce the impact of a student's deficit on his/her academic performance.		1- strongly disagree	2- disagree	3- neither agree nor disagree	4- agree	5- strongly agree	No answer	Total	Arithmetic mean	Standard deviation
Groups of students with SEN										
Blind and visually impaired students	f	67	74	98	53	16	15	323	2,60	1,155
	f %	20.7	22.9	30.3	16.4	5.0	4.6	100		
Deaf and hard-of-hearing students	f	59	69	103	57	17	18	323	2.69	1.147
	f %	18.3	21.4	31.9	17.6	5.3	5.6	100		
Students with severe specific learning difficulties	f	44	60	99	78	22	20	323	2.91	1.151
	f %	13.6	18.6	30.7	24.1	6.8	6.2	100		
Students with speech and language disorders	f	44	51	111	71	27	19	323	2.95	1.157
	f %	13.6	15.8	34.4	22.0	8.4	5.9	100		
Physically disabled students	f	45	47	94	79	38	20	323	3.06	1.230
	f %	13.9	14.6	29.1	24.5	11.8	6.2	100		
Students with long-term illnesses	f	47	56	109	72	19	20	323	2.87	1.132
	f %	14.6	17.3	33.7	22.3	5.9	6.2	100		
Students with autism spectrum disorders	f	70	69	101	46	16	21	323	2.57	1.156
	f %	21.7	21.4	31.3	14.2	5.0	6.5	100		
Students with emotional and behavioural difficulties	f	65	69	102	48	20	19	323	2.63	1.172
	f %	20.1	21.4	31.6	14.9	6.2	5.9	100		

Legend: f = frequency distribution; f % = structural distribution

For item I11, the percentage of undecided higher-education teaching staff is about 1/3, and this is true for all groups of students. The percentage of respondents strongly disagreeing or disagreeing with this item is about 40% for all groups of students. In the groups of blind and visually impaired students (44%), students with autism spectrum disorders (43%), and students with emotional and behavioural difficulties (41%), more than 40% of respondents disagree or strongly disagree with this item. In the group of deaf and hard-of-hearing students, the percentage of respondents who disagree or strongly disagree with this item is 40%. Respondents in the groups of students with severe specific learning difficulties and students with long-term illnesses feel somewhat more qualified (the percentage of respondents who disagree with the statement is 32% in both groups), in the group of students with speech and language disorders (29% of respondents disagree), and in the group of students with physical disabilities (28% disagree).

### **Discussion**

From the agreement values, it can be concluded that the respondents have a positive attitude toward the adjustment of academic process for all groups of students with SEN and are willing to implement adjustments. The results show that respondents believe that adjustments are an important means of removing barriers for all students with SEN (I7) and that they enable them to be more successful in their studies, as well as that students with SEN have a right to adjustments and that it is not a privilege for students with SEN to receive them (I6). Goltnik Urnaut (2016) came to a similar conclusion in her study: most respondents expressed a willingness to teach all students with SEN and to support them in their inclusion in the teaching process, and believed that providing adjustments in the academic process and addressing students' educational needs were part of their professional responsibilities. In our survey, we also found that most respondents considered providing adjustments in the academic process and addressing students' educational needs to be part of their professional responsibilities (I3).

Based on the observed (dis)agreement with items I9 "Students could complete all requirements without adjustments if they tried a little harder" and I10 "By making adjustments for students with SEN we discriminate against other students without SEN" we can conclude that there are few among the higher-education teaching staff we interviewed who perceive adjustments for students with SEN as a special privilege for this group of students or as discrimination

against all other students. Respondents believe that most students with SEN cannot just try a little harder and complete their studies without adjustments in the academic process, and that by adjusting for students with SEN we are not discriminating against students who do not have SEN and that the adjustments are not concessions (I8). For example, Molina et al. (2016) note that some higher-education teaching staff view adjustments in the academic process for students with SEN as an expression of special affection and preference toward them.

Our survey results also indicate that more than half (68%) of respondents are undecided or believe that there are no known adjustments in the academic process for any group of students with SEN that could reduce the impact of the deficit on student academic achievement (I11). Becker & Palladino (2016) and Sniatecki, Perry & Snell (2015) came to a similar conclusion in their research. This contrasts with the results of the item on their knowledge of the various academic process adjustments (I2) they can offer students with SEN, where 52% of respondents rated their knowledge as good. It is possible that respondents felt they had a good knowledge of academic process adjustments for students with SEN (I2), either because they were referring only to students with SEN whom they had already encountered or because they based their opinions on their own experiences with academic process adjustments. In terms of knowledge about adjustments to the academic process for each group of students with SEN (I11), the results show that respondents had little knowledge about adjustments for some groups of students with SEN. By agreeing with statement I2, they did not take into account the diversity of the group of students with SEN and the fact that students with different SEN may need specific adjustments in the academic process depending on their deficits. Respondents' answers may also have been influenced by their own belief that adjustments in the academic process are part of their professional responsibility and therefore expected to know and implement them.

Thus, while the socially desirable response for item I2 may have been that they are aware of the different adjustments and educational needs of students with SEN, this was not the case for specific groups of students with SEN (I11).

Summarising the results for items I6, I7, I8, I9, I10, and I11, there is a tendency toward higher rates of agreement for certain groups of students with SEN. The group of students with emotional and behavioural difficulties stands out the most for all items where respondents express stronger disagreement and thus more negative

attitudes than for the other groups of students with SEN. Our findings are consistent with those of Cook, Yamaguci & Solomon (1993), Monsen, Ewing & Kwoka (2014) and St-Ong & Lemyre (2018).

Another frequently highlighted group of students is blind and visually impaired students, as respondents are least familiar with adjustments for this group of students of all student groups with SEN (this is also roughly true for the group of students with autism spectrum disorders). It is possible that respondents are unwilling to make adjustments or are unsure because they know little about them, which is also the finding of other research that found that higher-education teacher lack knowledge about how to support visually impaired students in their studies (Miyuchi, 2020; Mushome & Monome, 2013) but have favourable attitudes (Mamah et al., 2011).

### **Conclusion**

Based on the levels of agreement expressed by higher-education teaching staff, it is clear that they are largely positive about adjusting the academic process for all groups of students with SEN. They are willing to make these adjustments and consider them key to removing barriers and enabling an education in which students with SEN can succeed. Such attitudes are an extremely important predictor of the quality and inclusive nature of the educational process for students with SEN (Booth & Ainscow, 2002; Cook et al., 2000; Lane & Nagchoudhuri 2015; Rebolj, 2014).

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