

TRANSFORMATION OF EDUCATION: A STUDY OF FACTORS AFFECTING THE QUALITY OF LIFE OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

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ABSTRACT

The relevance of this study is determined by the importance of improving social support for students in Russian universities. In modern conditions, social support for students takes on particular significance as a necessary factor in assisting their personal and professional self-determination and development. In this regard, research on people with disabilities (PwD), who are among the most in need of social support, is becoming increasingly widespread. In addition to universities' efforts to adapt the educational process, it is also crucial to explore the predictors of life satisfaction among students with disabilities. The aim of this article is to analyze social support as a factor in increasing life satisfaction among students with disabilities. The article presents the results of a study conducted on a group of 51 students with disabilities. Correlation analysis revealed significant positive relationships between received social support and respondents' life satisfaction. Empirical analysis shows that for students with disabilities, social support from academic faculty and fellow students, who help them fulfill their social role obligations, as well as from public organizations, plays a crucial role. The importance of social contacts for students with disabilities is further confirmed by the relationships between life satisfaction and support received from close individuals such as family members and friends.

Keywords: Life Satisfaction; Students with Disabilities; Higher Education; Inclusive Education; Psychosocial Well-being.



INTRODUCTION

Social support for individuals (or groups) exists in all areas of social life, including education (Ismailov, 2023; Ansabayeva et al., 2023). The need for social support arises due to challenges in human interactions with society that individuals cannot resolve on their own or can only do so with significant effort (Nazarov & Posharats, 2017; Zagutin et al., 2017; Gryshchenko et al., 2025). In the context of education, social support is provided to individuals facing difficulties during their studies (Akhmetshin et al., 2020).

Student social support is recognized as an important and necessary form of social work with young people (Bubnovskiy, 2023). This is because students often lack life experience, require professional and personal self-determination, and face the challenges of mastering a profession while developing themselves both professionally and personally. The presence or absence of social support significantly impacts both the educational process and its outcomes. Students who receive support throughout their studies are more efficient in acquiring knowledge, developing new skills, and overcoming difficulties (Budnik, 2023).

The need for social support becomes particularly acute for students with disabilities (SwD), who have special educational needs, as well as for young student-parents balancing education with childcare. As a result, in modern conditions, social support for students gains special importance as an essential factor in their personal and professional development (Slanov, 2023; Katanani et al., 2023; Salih et al., 2024; Wahsheh et al., 2024).

The necessity of social support and its evident positive influence on educational success have made it a frequent subject of scientific research. According to (Bubnovskiy, 2023), student social support is the activity of a university's social service aimed at assisting students in resolving pressing social, psychological, and pedagogical issues that arise during their studies and daily lives. Social support for students is directed toward creating optimal learning conditions, raising awareness of existing problems, and preparing students to prevent or independently resolve them (Zakharova et al., 2023; Zhang et al., 2020).

As a form of social work, student social support contributes to the assimilation of societal norms and values, the development of behavioral skills, and the acquisition of necessary functions for future self-realization in society. It also fosters the formation



of social qualities and the readiness to be fully integrated members of society and competent professionals (Zakharova et al., 2023). We align with scholars who define student social support as preventive and responsive assistance provided to individuals (students) or groups (academic cohorts) in resolving social and psychological-pedagogical issues, encouraging problem awareness, and fostering proactive engagement in finding solutions (Veselova et al., 2021; Shugai, 2020).

Our research also found that one of the most in-demand areas of social support in universities – both in Russia and in Western countries such as the United States and Europe – is assistance for students with disabilities. This category accounts for approximately 47% of all student support requests (Ennis et al., 2019).

As part of the academic community, students with disabilities gain opportunities to establish strong psychological and social connections, develop new interests, and adopt new social behavior models associated with their student role. The knowledge and competencies they acquire during their education prepare them for future professional responsibilities, particularly in creative or research-related fields that involve managing teams (Aleksandrova et al., 2014).

Researchers (Voroshilova & Chernyshova, 2019) identify three key levels of how social relationships influence the development of students with disabilities:

1. Fulfilling basic social needs, including the need for security.
2. Enhancing intellectual, emotional, and moral development through interactions.
3. Improving communication skills and reinforcing constructive social norms through positive peer relationships.

Thus, the university years represent a crucial phase in a young person's life and, for students with disabilities, a vital element of social and professional rehabilitation. This period allows them to develop social competencies that will be essential in their future careers (Grabchuk, 2017; Abdullayev et al., 2024).

During their education, students with disabilities are influenced by various social forces, including peer groups, academic faculty, and public organizations. Their personal development is shaped not only by the challenges arising from their health conditions but also by the positive impact of the academic environment (Golikova & Kozurman, 2015; Njadat et al., 2024). According to (Taranovskaya & Bura, 2018), education contributes to positive personal changes, primarily associated with higher knowledge and skill levels, highlighting the compensatory role of universities.



Higher education also fosters greater independence, enabling students to meet their own life needs more autonomously (Kurgansky & Kireeva, 2022; Gloria et al., 2024). However, fulfilling the obligations of a student role requires not only the efforts of the student with disabilities but also the engagement of those around them. Due to health-related challenges, students with disabilities face several types of difficulties:

1. **Functional barriers** – These arise due to an unfavorable environment, including:

- Architectural barriers (for students with physical disabilities).
- Communication barriers (for students with hearing impairments).
- Informational barriers (for students with sensory impairments) (Pereira et al., 2023; Gamonales et al., 2024).

2. **Academic challenges** – These are linked to difficulties in acquiring new knowledge and skills, which may result from:

- An insufficiently adapted educational process that fails to meet their needs.
- Low self-esteem and difficulties with self-acceptance.

3. **Psychosocial issues** – These manifest as social exclusion from academic life, leading to feelings of fear, alienation, and loneliness. Additionally, students with disabilities may experience stigmatization, which reinforces their social differentiation from peers.

4. **Economic challenges** – These involve additional financial burdens on families, including medical expenses, rehabilitation costs, and the purchase of assistive devices that enhance independence.

Overcoming these difficulties becomes more manageable for students with disabilities when they can rely on support from their immediate social circles. Friendships and family relationships, beyond their general social dimension, also serve as crucial sources of social support. Social interactions that provide support help students navigate challenges by offering emotional encouragement, informational guidance, and practical assistance. This aligns with the broader definition of social support, which emphasizes the role of close social networks alongside institutional aid (Test et al., 2009).

Social support manifests in various aspects of life, and literature on the subject highlights several key types:



- **Emotional support** – Providing reassurance, comfort, and encouragement in difficult situations, which positively affects self-esteem and overall well-being.
- **Informational support** – Offering knowledge and feedback that helps individuals better understand and address their circumstances.
- **Instrumental support** – Providing specific instructions or guidance on how to act in a given situation.
- **Evaluative support** – Affirming an individual's value and significance in society.
- **Material support** – Offering financial or material assistance.

For students with disabilities, the social role of being a student can strengthen their self-esteem but also presents numerous challenges in daily life. Research shows that most students without disabilities are willing to assist their peers with disabilities when asked. Only a small percentage report being unable to provide adequate help (Stepanova et al., 2019). This attitude aligns with the broader concept of social support, which emphasizes positive interpersonal networks based on subsidiarity—the principle that support should be provided by those closest to the individual whenever possible (Vakorina, 2018).

Thus, social support is a crucial component in enhancing the quality of life for individuals with disabilities. The term **quality of life** is associated with concepts such as life satisfaction, well-being, life wisdom, and a positive outlook (Nikonenko, 2017).

Life satisfaction, in particular, is a cognitive aspect of quality of life, reflecting how individuals perceive and evaluate the fulfillment of their needs and aspirations. Understanding life satisfaction and its link to well-being is important, as research suggests that positive emotions and moods enhance creative thinking and problem-solving abilities. Furthermore, students with disabilities who experience positive emotions are more likely to initiate social interactions and express warmth toward new acquaintances (Tashcheva et al., 2019).

Conversely, a lack of social connections can lead to depression and a significant decline in perceived quality of life. Due to the barriers they face, individuals with disabilities may experience social isolation and reduced opportunities for meaningful social interactions. They may also struggle with negative self-perceptions stemming from societal stigma (Koreneva et al., 2016). Hostile attitudes toward people with disabilities can lead to feelings of threat, fear, and low self-esteem, ultimately



diminishing their quality of life. Studies indicate that students with disabilities report significantly lower life satisfaction than their non-disabled peers, feeling less content with their daily lives and perceiving their existence as far from their ideal (Osmuk et al., 2017).

For these reasons, it is essential to identify the **predictors of life satisfaction** among students with disabilities.

The purpose of this article was to analyze the **transformation of education and the factors influencing the quality of life of students with disabilities**

METHODS

The following research objectives were formulated:

1. What is the level of life satisfaction among surveyed students with disabilities, as measured by the **Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS)**?
2. What is the level of social support among surveyed students with disabilities, as measured by a **modified version of the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS)**?
3. Is there a correlation between social support and life satisfaction among the surveyed students? If so, what is the nature of this relationship?

Regarding the research question on the nature of this relationship, a **hypothesis** was proposed suggesting a **positive correlation** between the considered variables. It was assumed that students with disabilities experiencing a high level of social support would report a **higher level of life satisfaction**, whereas a low level of social support could lead to **lower life satisfaction**. The effect of social support was described as a "**main effect**", emphasizing its beneficial impact on **health and well-being**

Empirical data for this study were collected using two standardized measurement tools:

- The **Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS)**, which consists of five statements assessing the respondent's overall perception of life satisfaction. The results of this test reflect the general level of life satisfaction among participants.
- A **modified version of the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS)**, which evaluates the extent of perceived social support from



various groups, including **family, friends, significant others, university peers, and public organizations.**

The study was conducted with **51 students with disabilities** at the **University Social Support Center** through in-person meetings. The sample was predominantly composed of **female students with disabilities (65-64%)**, with participants ranging in age from **18 to 24 years**. The **average age** was **22 years (SD = 3.18)**. The majority of respondents (**94-93%**) were enrolled in **full-time academic programs** and actively participated in university life, as evidenced by the setting in which the survey was conducted.

Within the study group, the most common disabilities were related to **musculoskeletal disorders (47%)**. The second-largest group included students with disabilities resulting from **chronic illnesses (27%)**, followed by students with **visual impairments (18%)** and those with **hearing impairments (8%)**.

By examining the relationship between social support and life satisfaction within this diverse group, the study aims to provide a deeper understanding of the role that social interactions and institutional support play in the well-being of students with disabilities.

RESULTS

The findings indicate that the majority of students with disabilities (70%) reported a moderate level of life satisfaction. Additionally, 14% of the respondents exhibited a high level of life satisfaction, while the smallest group (16%) reported a low level of life satisfaction (Table 1).

Table 1. Life Satisfaction Levels Among Students with Disabilities

	M	SD	Range of Results	Score Ranges					
				High		Moderate		Low	
				N	%	N	%	N	%
Life Satisfaction Level	20,86	5,75	5-35	8	16	36	70	7	14

When evaluating their lives in terms of ideals, living conditions, and the achievement of key goals, the surveyed students generally assessed their life satisfaction at moderate to high levels.

The results of the **social support assessment** indicate that students with disabilities receive the highest level of support from their **family members (parents,**



siblings) (M = 30.58) (Table 2). Another significant source of support is **friends (M = 25.45)**. **University peers and faculty members** also play an important role in providing social support (**M = 24.73**).

The distribution of support scores highlights that the **greatest support** is received from **parents, siblings, and university friends**, whereas **public organizations** provide the **least support**, emphasizing the need for improving their effectiveness in assisting students with disabilities

Table 2. Sources of Social Support for Students with Disabilities

Source of Social Support	Social Support	
	M	SD
Family (parents, siblings)	30,58	8,44
Friends	25,45	11,21
Significant Others	23,66	8,71
University Peers and Faculty (Students, Professors)	24,73	6,53
Public organizations	19,79	7,35

The **correlation analysis** (Table 3) revealed **significant positive relationships** between the **social support** received from various social groups and **life satisfaction** among the surveyed students with disabilities.

A **positive correlation** was found between **social support from family members and friends** and **life satisfaction**. Social support from **students and faculty members** also contributed to a more positive assessment of one's life.

Additionally, a **positive relationship** was identified between **social support from public organizations** and **the life satisfaction of surveyed students**

Table 3. Correlation Between Social Support and Life Satisfaction Among Surveyed Students with Disabilities

Source of Social Support	Social Support
Family	0,29*
Friends	0,32*
Significant Others	0,16
University Peers and Faculty (Students, Professors)	0,28*
Public organizations	0,27*

*p<0,05

DISCUSSION

The aim of this empirical study was to analyze the relationship between life satisfaction and social support received by students with disabilities. The correlation



between life satisfaction and social support from individuals and organizations in their immediate environment confirms the hypothesis proposed in this study.

It was found that while social support positively correlates with life satisfaction, it is also closely linked to specific groups of supporting individuals (Damri et al., 2023; Soloveva & Sokolova, 2023). Thus, empirical analysis indicates that social support is a crucial factor in shaping life satisfaction among students with disabilities. University faculty members and peers play an essential role in assisting students with fulfilling the obligations associated with their social roles (Guerra Espinosa et al., 2023; Bravou et al., 2022).

At the same time, peer support within the university often requires emotional involvement from able-bodied classmates, demonstrating high-quality interpersonal relationships. Additionally, the support provided by faculty members – similar to that received from student peers – contributes to greater academic engagement, reinforcing positive self-esteem and enhancing emotional well-being (Ivashchenko & Ogoltsova, 2023; Opoku et al., 2024).

The study results also confirm the importance of family members in shaping students' quality of life. Social support from non-family members enriches their self-perception, reflects high-quality relationships, and provides positive stimuli for social interaction. Receiving such support indicates that students with disabilities are integrated into the social environment (Ashcheulov et al., 2024).

The significance of social contacts in determining quality of life is further supported by the identified relationship between support from friends outside the university and life satisfaction (Díaz Araya et al., 2021; Kicherova et al., 2022). Friendships outside academic obligations allow students to build social connections based on voluntariness, shared interests, preferences, or other meaningful factors for both parties.

CONCLUSIONS

Social support for students is intended to help create optimal conditions for their well-being, as well as for their professional and personal development. Among the student population, those with disabilities are one of the groups most in need of such support.

Analyzing life satisfaction in relation to the perceived social support received by students with disabilities allows for a better understanding of university learning



conditions, ensuring that their educational experience is utilized in the most effective way. The traditional special education model, in which individuals with disabilities were confined to specialized institutions, is gradually being replaced by a social model, which enables them to realize their potential based on their abilities, values, and aspirations.

One of the limitations of this study is the sample size of the empirical research.

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