Časopis pre špeciálnopedagogickú teóriu a prax
EARLY SOCIAL INTERVENTION AS A PREVENTING TOOL AGAINST THE SOCIAL EXCLUSION OF DEAF YOUTH

Prevenčia sociálnej exklúzie nepočujúcej mládeže prostredníctvom včasnej sociálnej intervencie

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Abstract: In the world of information technology, full of various stimuli, the aurally-impaired people might remain excluded in terms of social and vocational life. It is possible, however, to prevent social exclusion of the deaf by means of available information technologies serving as a compensation for their weaknesses and limitations. Consequently, it seems to be the way to equalize the chances of the deaf. The introduction of an innovative method of making use of e-assistant services might considerably improve the situation of young deaf people on the labour market.

Key words: social exclusion, prevention, the deaf the aurally-impaired individuals, innovation.

Abstrakt: Vo svete informačných technológií plnom rôznych podnetov, hrozí ľudom so sluchovým postihnutím vylúčenie, pokiaľ ide o ich sociálny a profesiný život. Je však možné zabrániť sociálnemu vylúčeniu ľudí so sluchovým postihnutím prostredníctvom dostupných informačných technológií, služiacich ako kompenzácia ich nedostatkových schopností a ďalších obmedzení. V dôsledku toho sa uvedená myšlienka zdá byť spôsobom ako zrovnapravité príležitosti pre nepočujúcich. Zavedenie inovatívného spôsobu využitia elektronických asistenčných služieb môže značne zlepšiť situáciu na trhu práce pre mladých nepočujúcich ľudí.

Kľúčové slová: sociálne vylúčenie, prevencia, nepočujúci (ďalej len sluchov postihnuté osoby), inovácie.

In a globalized world, in a knowledge-based economy and in the information society, new media and information technologies are of crucial significance for continued functioning in this modern reality. Rapid development of IT technologies and technology in general, of digitization and computerization are having an increasingly stronger impact on human life.

A world oversaturated with a diversity of information is in stark contrast with the world experienced by deaf people. One huge obstacle that deaf people face in receiving stimuli from the modern world, in understanding them and reacting to them, is the significant amount of limitations or the complete shutdown of the auditory channel of reception, in turn leading to an imperfection in cognitive functions. As a result, deaf people are at risk of remaining on the margin of social life. Therefore, it is incredibly important to undertake concrete actions, using the available information technologies that would compensate for the deficiencies and limitations, thus providing equal opportunities to deaf people and at the same time preventing their social exclusion.

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The overall crisis on the job market reminds us that it is not a trivial problem as the employers have increasingly higher requirements towards future employees in terms of professional knowledge and skills and also one's attitude. In this context, the position of disabled people on the job market is unsatisfactory, further worsened by the fact that employers seem to have unjustified mental barriers regarding disabled people. Unfortunately, this disadvantageous situation is compounded by the fact that discriminated people have poor orientation on the job market and are characterized by low self-esteem and a lack of faith in their own capabilities. It is also worth mentioning that employers who decide to hire a disabled person, must deal with additional costs related to adapting the workplace and sometimes also with a generally lower productivity of people with dysfunctions (Najmie, 2007, p. 5).

All of these factors contribute to the exclusion of deaf people from the open job market and from many important areas of everyday life. It also turns out that the commonly known, traditional instruments of the job market, i.e. career advisory, counseling, training or mediation for deaf people, bring very low results. Increase in job activity and gaining entrepreneurship traits are very limited in the case of deaf people. Although counseling is ascribed as a key role in the occupational rehabilitation of disabled people (Szczepański, 1999, p. 244), there exists a necessity of building a modern, multi-aspect support for these people, e.g. through a trainer, assistant (coach) or a job guide. This allows deaf people to systematically gain and solidify working habits because a deaf person is in need of specific and understandable actions in order not to lose interest and motivation to act (Dunaj, 2011, p. 60).

Although, it is thought that deaf people can, in theory, choose from many numerous jobs, (since few jobs require direct and constant listening, though even this inconvenience could be compensated for), the basic barrier and fundamental difficulty in interpersonal contacts continues to remain language, i.e. the inability of communicating language freely, therefore the problems of deaf people place them lowest on the job market, among the most disadvantaged group.

In Poland, there are around 50 thousand people with significant or deep hearing impairment, and people of poor hearing is a group of around 800-900 thousand (Szczepański, 2004, p. 69).

In 2009, a study was conducted as part of the project called “Ogólnopolskie badania sytuacji, potrzeb i możliwości osób niepełnosprawnych” (National Study of the Situation, Needs and Opportunities of Disabled People). The analysis of the study results shows that 73.7 % of deaf people in working age in Poland are unemployed (Brzezińska, 2010, p. 66).

These factual data show the particular significance of those activities that are related to the support on the job market, with professional career counseling for deaf youth, both those studying at schools and those entering the job market. It appears that the most beneficial solution for deaf people is to afford them an individual approach and also to search for innovative solutions of a holistic character, providing an opportunity to limit or nullifying their life and job problems.

2. Description of the innovation

The basic assumption behind this innovative search was the thesis that new technologies are supporting the lives of deaf people to an increasingly larger extent. The standard solutions used in the world and occasionally in Poland include direct translation services from sign language to phonic languages and vice versa – however, this requires the presence of a translator in specific situations, every single time.

In terms of the job market, the care of a trainer or assistant (guide, coach) with proficient knowledge of sign language is recommended. Such a solution certainly has many advantages, but is also cost-intensive and logically difficult (there are few professional translators on the market and this service needs to be provided throughout the whole country).

The developed innovation consists of a solution that is independent from the geographical location that lowers costs. Moreover, its implementation will support Deaf people in various life situations, not just job-related ones. The innovation compensates for the communicative dysfunction of deaf people by using professional sign language translators and modern technological solutions. This is supposed to ensure effective interpersonal communication; furthermore, a deaf person will receive many additional forms of support and activation opportunities, e.g. in terms of training, participation in workshops and internships, which will certainly make it easier for them to function socially.

The proposed innovative idea can also be successfully utilized in state offices, which are obligated by the relevant Polish act to provide deaf people with service in sign language.

The solution prepared, as part of the project, will make it possible to connect a deaf person with an on-line translation center with the use of IT technology. In this case, web access or 3D cellular network access must be ensured. The innovation also ensures multifaceted translation services for deaf people throughout the entire day, providing them with a specific service and support in various job- and life-related situations. The professionalism and proper qualifications of employees proficient at sign language who will provide services on-line (they will be people certified by the The Polish Federation of the Deaf) guarantee that the level of communication will be appropriate and satisfactory on both parties.

The crucial element to this innovation is the use of an on-line translator in the context of job market instruments. These actions are, first and foremost, intended for deaf people and not, as it are the case now, for state offices. This solution – its meaning and necessity – finds confirmation in the interviews that were conducted in 2011 by the Project’s Patron among the representatives of Small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in the Łódź Voivodeship. Based on the analysis of these interviews, it turns out that entrepreneurs are interested in employing people with hearing impairment, but their
inability to communicate with deaf people makes this undertaking not very realistic in practice. Employers also emphasized that if they do hire a deaf person, it is necessary to provide a translator’s support and help, e.g. during periodic examinations, visits to state offices, to doctors and in all other situations that are related with professional work and with fulfilling professional duties. Attention was also paid to the positive sides of solutions based on online translations, e.g. they can be used at any time of day and in any place that has an active Internet connection. This provides a deaf person with unlimited opportunities to take advantage of many forms of support, career counselors, or teachers.

The novelty of this solution lies in the fact that both a deaf person, as well as the employer is aware that, if it is necessary, they have a way to quickly communicate with each other. Because of this, both entities gain a sense of security; this is especially important when hiring a deaf person and when introducing them into work duties. It is assumed that during the initial, critical period, the on-line translator will offer support to both parties, i.e. the employer and the employee, because an employer must take to the person with hearing impairment. It is highly probable that contact between both parties with the help of an online translator will, over time, cause the employer to learn the basics of sign language and subsequently result in a relatively free communication with the employee in question. Such a solution is justified because emotional bonds will form between the employer and the deaf person; moreover, difficulties and barriers will also vanish because continued professional contact with the help of an online translator will result in mutual understanding and acceptance between both parties.

Aside from the innovation’s substantive aspect, its technical dimension is also important. There are three possible methods of implementing the innovation. The first method uses a standard computer and an Internet communicator, such as Skype. The second method utilizes a videophone. Whereas the third solution requires the deaf person to trained in using a special device for videoconferences that uses modified software. The concept’s authors assumed that two professional solutions will be tested, i.e. the specialist device for videoconferences that uses software corresponding to the needs of beneficiaries, and also the use of a videophone.

It needs to be noted that many restrictions were placed on the use of these devices, i.e. there are many important requirements that result from the specificity of communication of a deaf person with a translator. These include: a good screen, a high resolution camera, a microphone with good reception, and also speakers of appropriate quality. These requirements are met in full by devices that are used when organizing videoconferences. In addition, it is important that the devices come with a manual in sign language and with an easy GUI. It is also worth testing out the videophone because while it may have technical limitations, it does have one significant advantage – i.e., its large mobility.

Remote communication with a professional translator will make it possible to provide a deaf person with thorough support. In the case of e-translators, it is also important that career counselors and trainers do not have to learn sign language in order to have contact and feedback directly during classes from a person with a hearing disorder. It is worth adding that e-communication devices are very simple to use and their users require no specialist training to that end. However, in order for deaf people to experience as little stress as possible in this new situation, an additional manual was prepared for them - it is a short guide in sign language.

3. Who can benefit from this innovative solution?
The proposed innovation is a model solution, addressed to people who have a hearing impairment and are in search of employment on the work market. It can be used in the wide dimension of career counseling, when organizing internships and training, when conducting internships or having meetings with employers, also during job interviews. The recipients will be deaf students and graduates of schools for deaf and partially deaf people aged 15 – 24 who live in the Łódź Voivodeship. Currently, the group of such people in total numbers around 1200 people (nearly equal amount of women and men, i.e. 50 %), and the activities that promote the innovation are oriented towards 75 % of people from this group. It is also assumed that 331.4 thousands employers from the Łódź Voivodeship may be interested in this solution because around 77 % of them have a positive attitude towards employing people with a hearing disorder. In the future, the initiated solution will also be used by state offices and work agencies, any and all associations, organizations dealing with searching for and creating workplaces, but also worker unions, medical facility, including work medicine, advertising offices, as well as the many hundreds of training institutions. Moreover, four special high schools for deaf youth are operating in this region.

Promulgating activities are supposed to cover 75 % of target beneficiaries. As for test actions, these include four employers where deaf youth conducts job internships, two institutions working in the employment sector and one special school.

4. Expected effects of using innovation
This innovative solution will allow people with hearing impairment to use the help of professional e-translators. This will offer them the opportunity to become included in the classic instruments of the job market. Thanks to this innovation, it will not be necessary to organize additional training for deaf youth because they will be able to participate in various forms of help, together with non-deaf people. This solution will allow career counselors to diagnose career preferences, to select the appropriate path of job education that is congruent with one’s personal predispositions, to prepare application documents and to teach self-presentation and Individual Action Plan.

In the long-term perspective, this innovation may contribute to a fall in the level of unemployment among the group of deaf people. It is also likely to better integrate these people with non-deaf people, it will make it easier to activate them professionally and it will limit or nullify the social exclusion factor. It will also provide deaf people with the opportunity to use the latest IT technologies. Undoubtedly, its strength is the stimulation of activating behaviors and entering attitudes among people with disorders, which will likely result in them becoming self-reliant and independent. Therefore, implementation of this innovation will afford deaf people with more opportunities for personal development.

Final thoughts
The final product of this innovation will be the development of a support method for deaf people with the use of IT technology and of a functioning translation e-center, thus ensuring the practical realization of the main tasks of this project.

Of particular value for the implementation of innovative solutions will be the experiences and conclusions from the implementation and testing stage as they will provide the basis for perfecting and improving the method. The developed innovation is of a complex character. It is an IT technology; it removes communication barriers, but also mental ones in communication between non-deaf and deaf people. It is