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## **Universal Design for Learning and Differences in the Preparation of Pedagogy Students to Work with a Student with an Immigrant Experience and His Family**

**Czas trwania studiów a przygotowanie studentów pedagogiki do pracy z  
uczniami-imigrantami w kontekście projektowania uniwersalnego w edukacji**

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### **Abstract**

**Aim.** This article draws on the results of empirical research focused on the opinions of students at the University of Siedlce regarding their preparedness for working with immigrant students and their families. The aim of the research was to identify statistically significant differences in the declared knowledge and skills in working with students and families, which are relevant to the definition and universal definition based on the duration of their studies. The research results, opinions of students at the University of Siedlce, published by teachers and educators regarding their preparedness for working with students with immigrant students and their families.

**Methods and materials.** The study utilised a diagnostic, pilot study among students of pedagogy at the University of Siedlce, with a sample of 124 participants. The Kruskal-Wallis test was used for analysis.

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**Results and conclusion.** The results partially confirmed the research hypotheses. Significant differences were observed in knowledge of the Accessibility Act, understanding of UDL, and competencies in identifying the causes of exclusion, methodological approaches, and needs of immigrant students. These competencies increased with time spent studying. No differences were found in the recognition of students' special educational needs or in the self-assessment of barriers to preparing participants to work with immigrant students and families. The hypothesis that competencies did not differ based on years of education was partially rejected. However, the results of the pilot study conducted on such a small sample cannot be generalised to the entire population. Empirical research on this topic should be expanded.

**Keywords:** accessibility, universal design, immigrant student, Universal Design for Learning (UDL), students' competition, inclusive education, study period

### **Abstrakt**

**Cel.** W artykule przedstawiono wyniki badań empirycznych zogniskowanych na opinie studentów Uniwersytetu w Siedlcach na temat ich przygotowania do pracy z uczniem z doświadczeniem imigranckim i jego rodziną. Celem badań było określenie istotnej statystycznie różnicy w deklarowanej wiedzy i deklarowanych umiejętnościach z zakresu pracy z uczniem i rodziną imigrantów w aspekcie dostępności i projektowania uniwersalnego ze względu na czas studiowania. Przedmiotem badań uczyniono opinie studentów Uniwersytetu w Siedlcach, przyszłych nauczycieli i wychowawców, na temat ich przygotowania do pracy z uczniem z doświadczeniem imigranckim i jego rodziną.

**Metody i materiały.** W badaniach wykorzystano metodę sondażu diagnostycznego, badania pilotażowe przeprowadzono wśród studentów kierunków pedagogicznych w Uniwersytecie w Siedlcach na próbie 124-osobowej. Do analizy wykorzystano test Kruskala-Wallisa.

**Wyniki i wnioski.** Wyniki częściowo potwierdziły hipotezy badawcze. Zaobserwowano istotne różnice w znajomości Ustawy o Dostępności, rozumieniu UDL oraz kompetencjach w zakresie identyfikowania przyczyn wykluczenia, podejść metodologicznych i potrzeb uczniów-imigrantów. Kompetencje te wzrastały wraz z czasem studiowania. Nie stwierdzono różnic w rozpoznawaniu specjalnych potrzeb edukacyjnych u uczniów ani w samoocenie barier w przygotowaniu badanych do pracy z uczniem i rodziną imigrantów. Hipotezę zakładającą brak zróżnicowania kompetencji ze względu na lata nauki częściowo odrzucono. Jednak wyniki badań pilotażowych przeprowadzonych na tak nielicznej próbie nie mogą zostać uogólnione na całą populację. Należałoby poszerzyć badania empiryczne dotyczące poruszanej problematyki.

**Słowa kluczowe:** dostępność, uczeń imigrant, projektowanie uniwersalne w edukacji (UDL), edukacja inkluzyjna, czas studiowania, projektowanie uniwersalne, kompetencje studentów

## Introduction

The last few years have been a time of unrest and uncertainty for humanity. Omnipresent health, climate, civilisation, and war crises have led to the development of concepts referring to consideration for oneself and others—Slow Life (Glogaza, 2016), Mindfulness (Kabat-Zinn, 2013), including the development of competences related to accessibility and universal design. The essence of the individual's needs in a participatory context has begun to be noticed.

One of the concepts referring to counteracting social exclusion is the concept of universal design, which assumes the possibility of full participation of individuals and groups in all spheres of social life (Jówko *et al.*, 2023). Universal design has also become a utilitarian approach in the educational space (Perkowska & Bajkowski, 2022).

The foundations and objectives of universal design have become the basis for building the concept of UDL – Universal Design for Learning (Galkienė, 2021), which is the theoretical foundation of the empirical research presented in this article. The concept of Universal Design in Learning was created so that each student has the opportunity to control their own learning process. It provides opportunities for teachers to set sustainable goals, anticipating as many barriers as possible, to finally enable the design of inclusive, universally acceptable solutions that will allow each student to maximise their potential in diverse groups.

The UDL concept helps students with different learning deficits to achieve equal opportunities in terms of education and upbringing (CAST, 2025), it applies three main principles: 1) providing various means of information transmission during educational activities, 2) providing opportunities for various forms of expression and presentation of educational achievements, 3) providing various forms of motivation to work (Hitchcock *et al.*, 2002). Thanks to these principles, teachers can effectively instruct a diverse group and support the parents (Knopik *et al.*, 2021).

The migration crisis in Poland, largely caused by the war in Ukraine, particularly implicates the use of the UDL concept to support students and their families in the process of adaptation in a new environment, as well as in the process of their education and upbringing. The literature on the subject indicates several significant difficulties in the functioning of students from immigrant families (including refugees) in the education system. Typical ones include: difficulties related to the experienced emotions, difficulties in adapting to new requirements, difficulties related to precarious functioning in the new school, cultural, the religious environment, unfamiliarity with the language, difficulties in integration with the peer group, incompetence and misunderstanding on the part of educational authorities, as well as ethnic and racial stereotypes functioning in the social environment (Błęszyńska, 2010; Skałbania, 2017).

Inferring from the analysis of reports and research results published in various sources, the primary area requiring proper preparation becomes the education system (Błęszyńska, 2010; Skałbania, 2017). In the process of education, upbringing, and support of a foreign student and his family, the proper preparation of teachers, tutors, educators, and special educators plays an important role (Janik-Płocińska & Pawlic-Rafałowska, 2010).

Therefore, the *conditio sine qua non* is the development of study programs in universities so that they include the content of UDL in the preparation of candidates for work. Such activities are currently not an innovation; they do not make the candidate more attractive on the labour market but constitute a standard in preparing future teachers for the exercise of the profession.

The standard of education preparing for the profession of the teacher provides for the introduction into the study programs of modules containing learning outcomes related to Universal Design for Learning, taking into account the preparation of students to work in diverse and multicultural groups (Act, 2018, Article 68, paragraph 3, point 4; Act, 2019).

Among the many benefits of implementing universal design into study programs in working with a foreign student and his family, the following should be mentioned: 1) spreading knowledge about accessibility related to immigrant students and families (including refugees), which is necessary to correctly identify the needs and expectations of the final recipient (parent, guardian, student); 2) raising awareness of the correct ways of communication with the student and their family; 3) shaping the ability to diagnose individual needs and expectations of a student from an immigrant family – including a refugee family (Narodowe Centrum Badań i Rozwoju [National Centre for Research and Development], n. d.).

In the discourse on inclusive education of children from foreign families, *inter alia*, the role of educational policy directed at creating equal opportunities for children from immigrant families seems to be crucial. Forming the personality of young people, developing and stimulating their individual abilities and skills, will largely depend on the level of preparation of a given institution for the process of inclusion, *i.e.*, an institution ready to think about the needs of a given student and meeting the special needs of him and his family.

## Methodology

The empirical study was developed on the basis of theoretical objectives of inclusive education, in which the concepts of accessibility and Universal Design for Learning are included. The pilot study involved 124 students of pedagogical studies at the University

of Siedlce (UwS). A targeted and screening selection of the tested sample was made. The statements of students who started to study pedagogy only from the Master's level and those students who took part in the project raising competences in the field of accessibility and universal design (project co-financed by EU funds – "Doświadcz tego sam" [Experience it for yourself], No. POWR.03.05.00-00-PU14/19-00) were rejected. The research was conducted online with the help of Google's tool (Forms). The respondents were informed about the purpose and anonymity, as well as about the voluntary nature of their participation in the survey.

The subject of the study was the opinions of students at the UwS, future teachers and educators, on their preparation to work with a student with an immigrant experience and his family.

The aim of the research is to identify significant differences in the declared knowledge and skills in the field of work with immigrant student and their families in the aspect of accessibility and universal design due to the length of study.

Research question: Is the opinion of the students in terms of declared knowledge and skills to work with an immigrant student and family in terms of accessibility and universal design significantly varied depending on the years of study?

Research hypotheses: The opinion of students in terms of declared knowledge and skills to work with the student and the immigrant family in the aspect of accessibility and universal design is not significantly varied depending on the length of study.

The study was conducted using the diagnostic survey method, the survey technique was used. The research tool was a questionnaire addressed to students at UwS in pedagogical studies: pedagogy, pre-school and early school pedagogy, and special pedagogy. The declared number of years of study meant that the student studied pedagogy both in the uniform Master's studies as well as in the Bologna system. In the case of students of the Master's level of pedagogy, a screening test was carried out, rejecting the results of those who began to study pedagogy at the Master's level. All respondents, from the 2<sup>nd</sup> to the 5<sup>th</sup> year, studied exclusively in pedagogical fields.

The number of years studied in the examined area was an independent variable. The dependent variable was the declared opinion of students in terms of knowledge and skills to work with an immigrant student and family in the aspect of accessibility and universal design. This variable had 10 indicators, which were analysed separately, relating to: the declared ability to identify special needs, the causes of social exclusion of people with immigrant experience, knowledge of the Accessibility Act (Act, 2019), the concept of "universal design," the scope of the foundations and objectives of "Universal Design for Learning," the methodology of working with a child with special needs and their family, knowledge and skills in the field of accessibility and "universal design," the need to develop compe-

tences in the methodology of working with students from immigrant families, including refugee families, the existence of barriers in preparation for working with a student with immigration experience, including a refugee student, the ability to identify the needs of students with immigration experience, including refugee students.

There were 10 questions in the tool; each of the items constituted a separate indicator of the dependent variable. Answers to the questions were placed on the Likert ordinal scale from 1 (*definitely not*) to 5 (*definitely yes*).

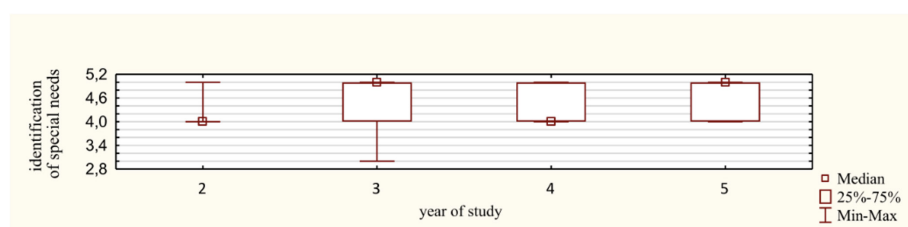
Non-parametric statistics were used in statistical analyses, and the Kruskal-Wallis test was used to determine the significance of differences.

## Analysis of test results

The analysis of the collected research material allowed for to determination of the differences in the scope of knowledge and skills in the area of accessibility and universal design, in the group of students of pedagogical studies at the University of Siedlce, to work with a student and family with immigrant experience, in relation to the years of study.

**Figure 1**

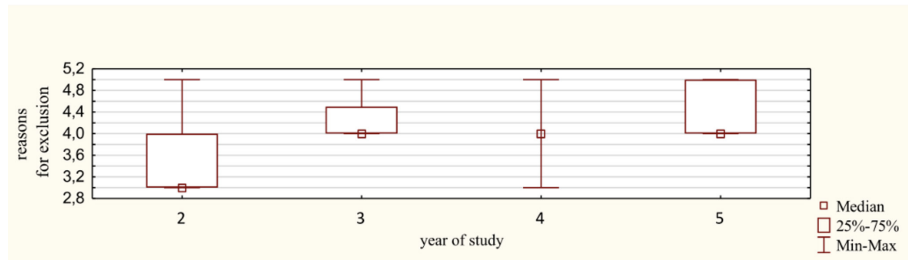
*Differentiation of the approach to recognizing the special needs of students, due to the length of study*



The average rank for recognition of special needs by students of pedagogical studies studying for the second year is  $M_{rank}=14.87$ , third year  $M_{rank}=26.87$ , fourth year  $M_{rank}=19.66$ , fifth year  $M_{rank}=27.33$ . These averages do not differ significantly from each other statistically, as indicated by the Kruskal-Wallis test:  $H(3)=7.532$ ,  $p=0.567$ . The year of study does not significantly differ in the approach to the issue of recognition of special needs. Students, regardless of the number of years of studying pedagogy, declare the recognition of special needs at about the same level.

**Figure 2**

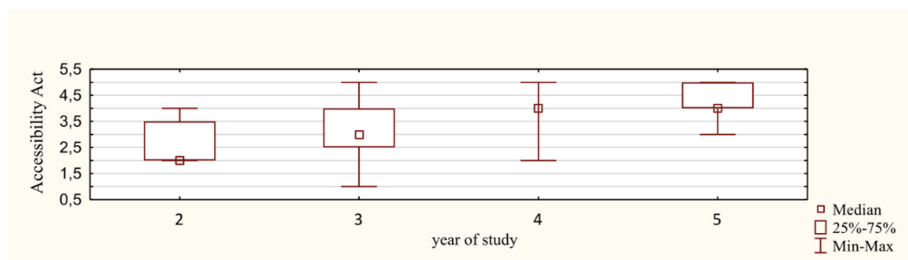
*Differentiation of the approach to identifying the causes of social exclusion, due to length of study*



The average rank of recognition of the causes of social exclusion by students studying for the second year is  $M_{rank}=12.81$ , third year  $M_{rank}=26.62$ , fourth year  $M_{rank}=21.91$ , fifth year  $M_{rank}=28.33$ . The Kruskal-Wallis test:  $H(3)=9.985$ ,  $p=0.018$ , indicated statistically significant differences. The year of study significantly diversifies the approach to the issue of identifying the causes of social exclusion. On the basis of average ranks and the median, it can be concluded that students studying for the third, fourth, and fifth year in a row declare a higher degree of recognition of the causes of social exclusion than students studying in the second year of pedagogical studies.

**Figure 3**

*Differentiation of the approach to knowledge by the respondents of the Accessibility Act, due to the length of the study*

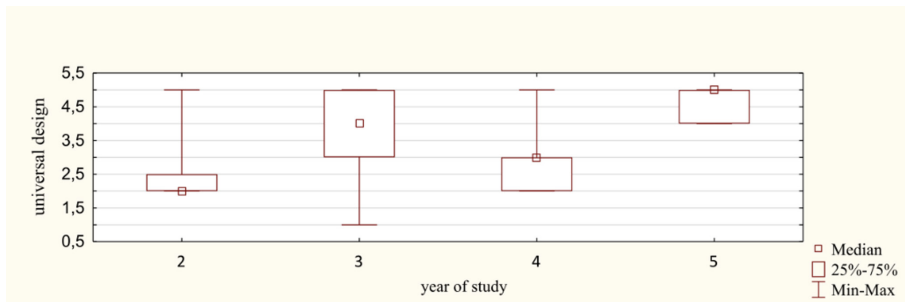


The average rank of knowledge of the Accessibility Act among students studying for their second year was  $M_{rank}=14.50$ , third year  $M_{rank}=22.62$ , fourth year  $M_{rank}=29.41$ , fifth year  $M_{rank}=32.50$ . Averages differ significantly statistically, as indicated by the Kruskal-Wallis test:  $H(3)=9.111$ ,  $p=0.027$ . The number of years studied significantly diversifies the approach to the issue of the knowledge of the Accessibility Act by students.

Based on the average ranks and the median, it can be assumed that the level of declaration of the degree of knowledge of the Accessibility Act increases with the duration of study.

**Figure 4**

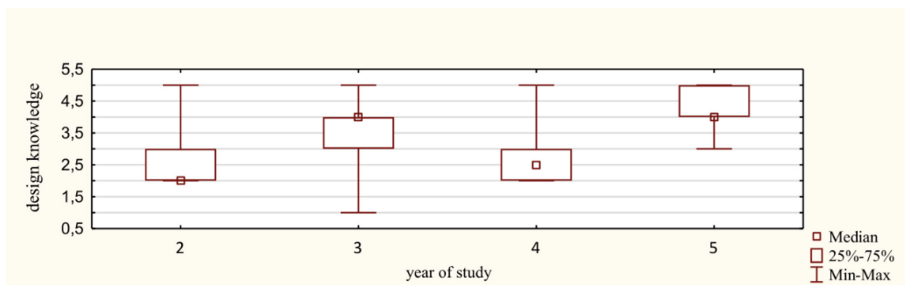
*Differentiation of the approach to the knowledge of the concept of ‘universal design’, due to the length of study*



The average rank of the knowledge of the concept of ‘universal design’ among students in the second year was  $M_{rank}=12.62$ , in the third year  $M_{rank}=25.97$ , in the fourth year  $M_{rank}=17.33$ , and in the fifth year  $M_{rank}=33.27$ . The Kruskal-Wallis test:  $H(3)=12.473$ ,  $p=0.005$ , indicated statistically significant differences. The study duration significantly diversifies the approach to the issue of students’ knowledge of the concept of “universal design.” On the basis of average ranks and median, it can be concluded that students studying for the fifth year in pedagogical studies declare the highest degree of knowledge of the concept of ‘universal design’, followed by students from the third and fourth years; the lowest level was recorded among students from the second year.

**Figure 5**

*Differentiation of the approach to the knowledge of the foundations and objectives of Universal Design for Learning, due to the length of study*

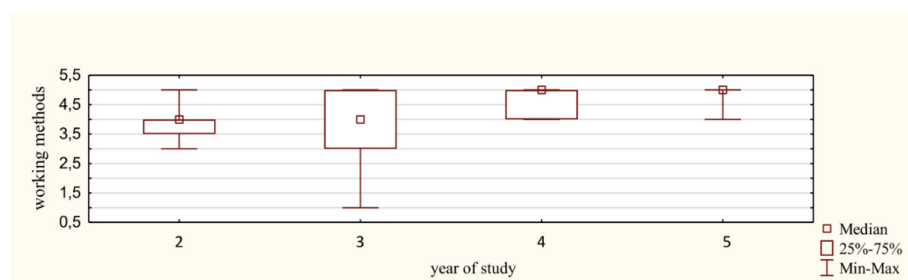




Average ranks for knowledge of the foundations and main objectives of Universal Design for Learning by students, in the second year  $M_{rank}=13.12$ , third year  $M_{rank}=25.91$ , fourth year  $M_{rank}=15.50$ , and fifth year  $M_{rank}=33.22$ . The Kruskal-Wallis test:  $H(3)=13.830$ ,  $p=0.003$  showed statistically significant differences between the years of study. The study duration significantly diversifies the approach to the issue of students' knowledge of the foundations and main objectives of Universal Design for Learning. On the basis of average ranks, it can be concluded that students studying pedagogy in the fifth and third year declare a higher degree of knowledge of the foundations and main objectives of Universal Design for Learning than students from the second and fourth year.

**Figure 6**

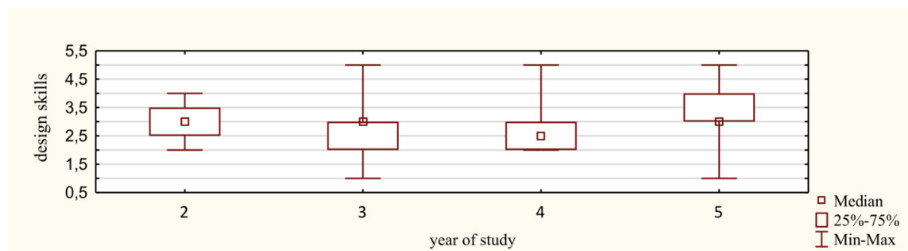
*Differentiation of the approach to recognizing issues related to the methodology of working with a child with special educational needs and his family, due to the length of study*



The average rank in terms of the approach to recognising issues related to the methodology of work with a student with special needs and his family, among students studying for the second year is,  $M_{rank}=19.00$ , third year  $M_{rank}=20.22$ , fourth year  $M_{rank}=31.50$ , fifth year  $M_{rank}=33.50$ . The Kruskal-Wallis test:  $H(3)=10.204$ ,  $p=0.017$  showed statistically significant differences. The study duration diversifies the approach to recognising issues related to students' knowledge of working methods with a student with special needs and his family. On the basis of average ranks, it can be concluded that the declaration variables increase with each year studied. Students studying in the fifth and fourth years declare a higher degree of recognition of methods in working with a student with special needs and with his family than their colleagues with shorter experience, from the third and second years.

**Figure 7**

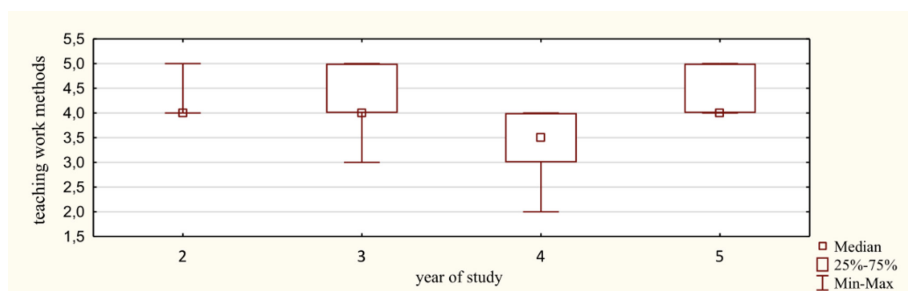
*Differentiation of the knowledge and skills of the respondents, in the field of accessibility and universal design for students from immigrant families, including refugees, due to the length of study*



The average rank for the knowledge and skills of respondents in the field of accessibility and universal design for students from immigrant families and their families (including pupils and refugee families), among students from the second year of study, was  $M_{rank}=25.37$ , third year of study  $M_{rank}=22.37$ , fourth year of study  $M_{rank}=20.91$ , and fifth year of study  $M_{rank}=29.16$ . The Kruskal-Wallis test:  $H(3)=2.296$ ,  $p=0.513$ , indicated that there were no significant differences between the averages. The study duration does not significantly diversify the approach to knowledge and skills of universal design for students and families with immigrant experience, including refugees.

**Figure 8**

*Differentiation of the approach to the need to develop competences in the field of methodology of working with the student and the family of immigrants (including refugees), due to the length of study*

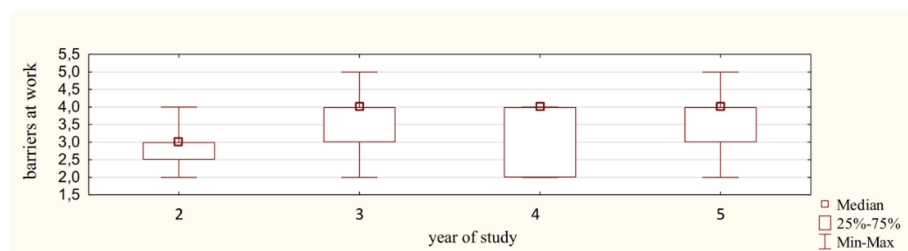


The average ranks for the year-by-year approach to developing competences in the field of methodology of working with a student and family experiencing an immigration (including refugee) problem, obtained by students were as follows: second year students obtained  $M_{rank}=23.00$ , third year  $M_{rank}=25.33$ ; fourth year  $M_{rank}=11.91$ ; fifth year  $M_{rank}=29.38$ . These results turned out to be significantly different, as indi-

cated by the Kruskal-Wallis test:  $H(3)=7.874$ ,  $p=0.048$ . The study duration significantly diversifies the students' approach to the need to improve their competencies in working with a student and a family with immigrant (including refugee) experience. On the basis of average ranks and the median, it can be concluded that students studying for the second, third and fifth year in a row declare with greater firmness that there is a need to improve, among students of pedagogical studies, competences in the field of methodology of working with an immigrant student (including a refugee) and his family, than students from the fourth pedagogical year.

**Figure 9**

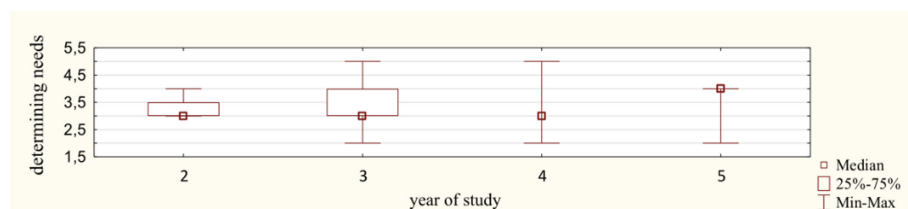
*Differentiation of the approach to identifying one's own barriers in preparing to work with a student with immigration experience, including a refugee student, due to the length of study*



The average ranks for the approach to identifying the barriers in working with an immigrant student (including a refugee) and their family were as follows: second year  $M_{rank}=14.18$ ; third year  $M_{rank}=26.75$ ; fourth year  $M_{rank}=22.33$ ; fifth year  $M_{rank}=26.50$ . These averages do not differ significantly from each other statistically, as indicated by the Kruskal-Wallis test:  $H(3)=6.298$ ,  $p=0.098$ . The study period does not significantly diversify the approach to the issue of determining one's own barriers in working with a student with experience of immigration (including refugee) and their family.

**Figure 10**

*Differentiation of the approach to the ability of the respondents to identify the needs of students with experience of immigration (including refugees), due to the length of study*



The average ranks regarding the area of determining the needs of students and families experiencing the problem of immigration (including refugees) are as follows: second year  $M_{rank}=21.75$ ; third year  $M_{rank}=23.43$ ; fourth year  $M_{rank}=19.75$ ; fifth year  $M_{rank}=30.33$ . Kruskal-Wallis test:  $H(3)=3.182$ ,  $p=0.036$ , showed statistically significant differences. The duration of studies significantly diversifies the students' approach to the ability to recognise the needs of students and families with immigrant (including refugee) experience. On the basis of average ranks and the median, it can be concluded that students studying for the fifth year declare a higher ability to recognise the needs of students from immigrant families (including refugees) than students with shorter-duration years.

## Conclusion

On the basis of the analyses carried out, many significant differences in relation to the years of study have been shown. Longer study time (4–5 years) indicates a higher level of: the knowledge of the Accessibility Act, understanding the concept and objectives of universal design, the knowledge and skills in working with students with migration experience, and recognition of the causes of social exclusion. In addition, the number of years of study does not significantly diversify: the recognition of special educational needs, the self-assessment of barriers in preparation for work with an immigrant child and his family.

The research hypothesis should be partially rejected, as it turned out that, especially, the assessment of the familiarity with the issues in the field of knowledge and skills to work with an immigrant student and family in the aspect of accessibility and universal design is the most diverse due to the time of study. In this case, in the majority of analyses, the declared knowledge and skills increased with the duration of study.

## Discussion

The above analysis of research results, as well as a query carried out by various researchers in Poland (Cukras-Stelągowska & Szwarc, 2023; Okrasa & Dąbrowska-Żmuda, 2020; Perkowska & Bajkowski, 2022), in the field of preparing future teachers to work with a foreign student and his family, points to the lack of uniformity in the implementation of subjects and content regarding Universal Design for Learning, multiculturalism, migration, or refugees (Cukras-Stelągowska & Szwarc, 2023).

This study noted statistically significant differences in the respondents' declarations of the level of knowledge and skills in the field of accessibility and Universal

Design for Learning for students with experience of immigration and support of their families, depending on the length of study. This result can be related to the marginality of information in the study programs in this field. Although with every year this knowledge increases, the question arises whether it is sufficient for the educational and upbringing work with this specific group of students and support, cooperation, and coordination with their families. Badowska (2018) emphasises that today, many educators do not have the awareness and sufficient tools to take actions conducive to the adaptation of immigrants or refugees to the new social environment.

It is necessary to introduce into the students' education system subjects related to the methodology of working with an immigrant student, including a refugee, with particular emphasis on classes on diagnosing the needs of students from the migrant environment. One should agree with the thesis put forward by Okrasa and Dąbrowska-Żmuda (2020) that in the new educational reality, a unified introduction to pedagogical study programs, workshops on intercultural skills, conflict resolution skills, empathy towards diversity, creating a positive emotional relationship for otherness and counteracting aggression is necessary. Therefore, it is safe to recommend the introduction of modules related to universal design in the education of students in heterogeneous groups at all universities.

The conclusions of the presented research and the analysis of research reports from other authors may form the basis for creating new programs in preparing future teachers for work in a changing society. The competences acquired by students in the field of working with a foreign student and their families will implicate a change in the attitudes of all educational entities of a given institution. Only in this way is it possible to build an inclusive environment, free from stereotypical thinking about the "Other."

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