Attitudes Toward Students with Special Needs Held by Trainee Teachers Who Aspire to Obtain an HPE Teacher’s License

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Background: In the run-up to the 2020 Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games, various efforts are being made to raise awareness and interest in sports for the disabled. Enriching the sports curriculum in schools is an important step in promoting sports for the disabled. Furthermore, health/physical education (HPE) teachers also have a vital role to play in this area. This study explores how trainee HPE teachers’ attitudes toward students with special educational needs are affected by whether or not they attended classes on special support education as part of their HPE teacher-training curriculum.

Method: We surveyed 278 third-year university students who aspire to obtain an HPE teacher’s license. We conducted the survey after the students had undergone practical teacher training in their third year. We divided the students into two groups: those who only aspire to obtain an HPE teacher’s license (171 students) and those who additionally aspire to obtain a special needs school teacher’s license (107 students). We then analyzed the difference between the two groups.

Results: The students who additionally aspired to obtain a special needs school teacher’s license were more likely to have been involved in some way with a person with disabilities in the past. The two groups did not differ significantly in terms of specific special needs strategies, although the students who aspired to obtain a special needs license were more likely to show consideration to students with special educational needs during their HPE training, and they also exhibited a better overall understanding of terminology related to special needs education. On the other hand, the two groups did differ significantly in terms of their basic attitudes toward special needs education, with those aspiring to earn a special needs license being more aware of inclusive education and physical education.

Conclusion: Recently, children with various disabilities have been registered not only at special needs schools but also in regular elementary, junior high, and high schools. For this reason, a high level of expertise in special needs is required not only among those who teach in special needs schools, special needs classes, or special support classrooms but also among those who teach in regular classes. HPE is no exception; it is essential that HPE teachers learn about special needs education during their training process. In addition, there is also a need to consider ways in which to configure the teacher-training curriculum so as to ensure that trainee teachers will master not only the necessary knowledge but also specific special-needs strategies.

Key words: special needs, health and physical education, teacher training