

**Integration, acceptance, experience from the perspective of former students of
Conductive Education**

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Abstract

Perhaps one of the biggest challenges of today's education is how to integrate young people with disabilities into both secondary and higher education. Although conductive education takes place in a segregated manner within the walls of the long-established Pető Institute, Dr András Pető, the founder of the method, set the social integration of young people with disabilities as a goal from the very beginning.

In this study, the author wishes to present her interview research to a wider audience, which she conducted with people who received regular conductive education at Hungary and abroad. Due to the size of the sample (N= 31) and the uniqueness of the topic, this time the writer of the study formulate no hypothesis only research questions.

G1: We aim to explore the most significant problems in the everyday school life of people receiving conductive education, the most difficult factors in the school integration process, according to their opinion.

Q1: What were the biggest difficulties in school integration of people with previous conductive education experience and why?

G2: To get to know better the quality of life and their plans for the future.

Q2: How much do the people still live according to the principles of conductive pedagogy? How satisfied are they with their quality of life? What are their future plans?

The research method was a subtype of non-probabilistic sampling methods, snowball sampling. The author fully aware of the fact that the data obtained in this way refer only to persons with cerebral palsy who received conductive education earlier in their life and cannot be considered statistically representative.

Keywords: Conductive Education, cerebral palsy, integration, snowball sampling

What is Conductive Education (CE)?

The basic principles of CE (Conductive Education) take into account the facts proven by modern brain science, according to which the brain needs continuous activity to achieve maximum individual performance. The damaged brain can effectively improve its own functions in a controlled, planned system of goals and tasks, the functioning of the senses and perception systems continuously develops in a stimulus-rich environment, while the immune system also strengthens" (Feketéné Szabó and Gruber 2019: 10).

The Hungarian creator of Conductive Education, Dr. András Pető – ahead of his time – emphasized the role of the brain's plasticity and capacity for learning, and strove to help people with central nervous system injuries participate in mainstream education as early as possible. Pető therefore created a complex, holistic system based on group learning.

The core principle of Conductive Education is that central nervous system injuries should not be viewed as biological obstacles, but rather as pedagogical challenges—disruptions in the learning process. The symptoms stem from damage to the overall functioning of the nervous system and the disorganization of activities, making localized treatment ineffective. (Balogh, 1998; Feketéné, 2013; Hári, 1991; Pető, 1955).

The foundations of conductive pedagogy were laid by Dr. András Pető, but it was his student who perfected and made conductive education internationally renowned. On the occasion of the 100th anniversary of Dr. Mária Hári's birth, the Pető András Faculty of Semmelweis University commemorated the tireless and dedicated director of the institute who worked with heart and soul for conductive pedagogy, with a special Hári 100 article series. Dr. Mária Hári's greatest achievement was her ability to win over key professionals and influential figures from various foreign countries, thanks to her charming personality and excellent diplomatic skills. Balogh's 2023 article, written in connection with the Hári centenary, specifically reflects on how and through what means conductive pedagogy spread internationally. Not only does Balogh's article reflect on the international success of conductive pedagogy, but the centenary special issue also features writings by Benyovszky and Lengyel. The former primarily recalls the beginnings of the training established in the United States, while Lengyel's work presents the introduction of conductive pedagogy in Russia through the reminiscences of Russian students. The initial strong international interest gradually but steadily declined.

At the International Conductor Day held on November 29, 2024, many conductors currently working abroad reported that it is very challenging to gain recognition for their conductor diplomas obtained in Hungary. Their expertise is often not acknowledged by related professions. However, in some countries, conductive education is state-supported as a form of motor rehabilitation. Examples of such countries include Germany and Sweden.

In a recent 2023 non-representative questionnaire-based study, Vissi aimed to explore how representatives of related professions perceive the conductor profession. The study also examined what prior knowledge these professionals have, and last but not least, it investigated what results current users of conductive pedagogy attribute to the Pető Method. The responses suggest that many respondents from related professions are aware that conductors not only work on motor skill development but also have a much more complex role. The former and current clients interviewed by Vissi mainly highlighted the positive changes achieved in mobility and how these improvements positively influenced other important aspects of life, such as education or work.

The research sample

31 structured interviews were conducted with individuals receiving former Conductive Education (CE).

In most cases, contact was made via e-mail or social media.

The selection and inclusion in the sample were based on the following criteria:

- Young adults living with CP (cerebral palsy) were eligible for the sample.
- We only included individuals who received long-term Conductive Education, starting from early childhood.
- Despite their disability, they were able to achieve success in academics, sports, or the arts.

We compiled a self-made, structured interview. We decided to use a structured interview because of the characteristics of individuals living with CP. We wanted to ensure the content validity of the interviews by ensuring that both the interviewees and the researcher had to think in a precise structure regarding the topic of the research. See 1. Figure the structured interview below.

Interview questions for former CE students:
1. Please tell me about yourself, the circumstances of your birth, your family background? What are you doing now? Are you living alone or with your parents? How accessible is your living environment?
2. Let's talk a little bit about your school years from primary to higher education, as I know you've studied in an integrated way, with your healthy peers. How do you remember those times? What experiences did you have? Positive and negative ones? Did you have an exemption from any subject?
3. When and how did you become acquainted with conductive education? How has this changed your life mentally and physically? What have you been able to do with it? For example, your gait has improved, you have become more confident, and so on. Have you received any other therapies, such as Dévényi or horse therapy?
4. How much do you pay attention to healthy eating? Do you do regular sports activities?
5. Do you have any hobbies or special talents for something?
6. How do you imagine your life in 5 years? What are your goals and plans?
7. What do you think you achieved your individual goal? For example, in independence, in your career, and so on.
8. Looking back, is there anything in your life that you would do differently? If so, what would it be?

1. Figure The structured interview plan for former individuals receiving CE Source: The author
In terms of age distribution, the majority of interviewees were between 20 and 30 years old. Only three participants were slightly older than 30 years old: one was 33, while two were 34. Based on the gender distribution of the sample, 17 men and 14 women participated in the interviews.

Regarding their marital status, a significant majority of the participants (28 persons) were single, and only three participants stated that they were in a relationship.

Based on the distribution according to education, at the time of data collection, 10 participants had already graduated from university, 8 were still studying at the university, and 6 were participating in vocational training.

There were a total of 3 people who started but did not attend university or vocational training. Most of the interviewees (12 people) live in Hungary, while we reached 10 people in Germany, and 3 in England, who shared their personal experiences for our research.

We also managed to talk to two people each from Norway and Sweden; one participant currently lives in New Zealand and one in Israel.

Based on the Perlstein index, the majority of our interviewees belonged to the severe mobility category (were in wheelchairs), which was often accompanied by communication impairment. Their speech was often difficult to understand and stuttered, so, for example, during the interviews in Sweden, we had to involve the participants' relatives or personal assistants in the interview and data recording process to obtain usable information, as the individuals were not capable of verbal communication.

Presentation of the research method

The interviews with the adults were analyzed and evaluated using the Maxqda 2020 software. During the coding, we could only use intra-coding, where the coefficients of the two codings match 100 percent.

Grounded theory prepares the final code structure by applying three coding mechanisms.

The initial phase of the coding process is open coding, when we associate appropriate concepts with each piece of text. Axial coding is already the phase when we create basic and subcategories. During the coding, the axial coding phase was developed using the main topics of the questionnaire. Axial code categories were the following:

- 1: Family background and living environment.
- 2: School years and experiences at school.
- 3: CE and other therapies.
- 4: Healthy eating and sports.
- 5: Hobby and special talent.
- 6: 5 year plan.
- 7: Individual achievement.
- 8: Do something differently

The final phase of the coding process is selective coding, which is used to highlight and compare the code system. In the case of adults, we also used the emoticon coding found in the Maxqda 2020 program several times. The obtained data are described using descriptive statistical procedures, mainly by presenting code frequency distributions.

During the selective coding, what was similar in the interviews with Hungarian and foreign students of Conductive Education was that they spoke very positively about the impact of conductive pedagogy.

What was different was the other field treatments and their experiences related to the school years. Former conductive students from abroad received more therapy and generally spoke more positively about the years they spent in mainstream education.

The emoticons found in Maxqda were used to present the positive and negative experiences of the adults more vividly.

Goals and research questions

In this study, we wish to present our interview research to a wider audience; the research was conducted with people who received regular conductive education in Hungary and abroad.

Due to the size of the sample (N= 31) and the uniqueness of the topic, we formulated no hypotheses, only research questions.

g1: We aim to explore the most significant problems in the everyday school life of people receiving conductive education as well as the most difficult factors in the school integration process, according to the participants' perspectives.

q1: What were the biggest difficulties in the school integration of individuals with previous conductive education experience and why?

g2: To get to know better the quality of life and their plans for the future.

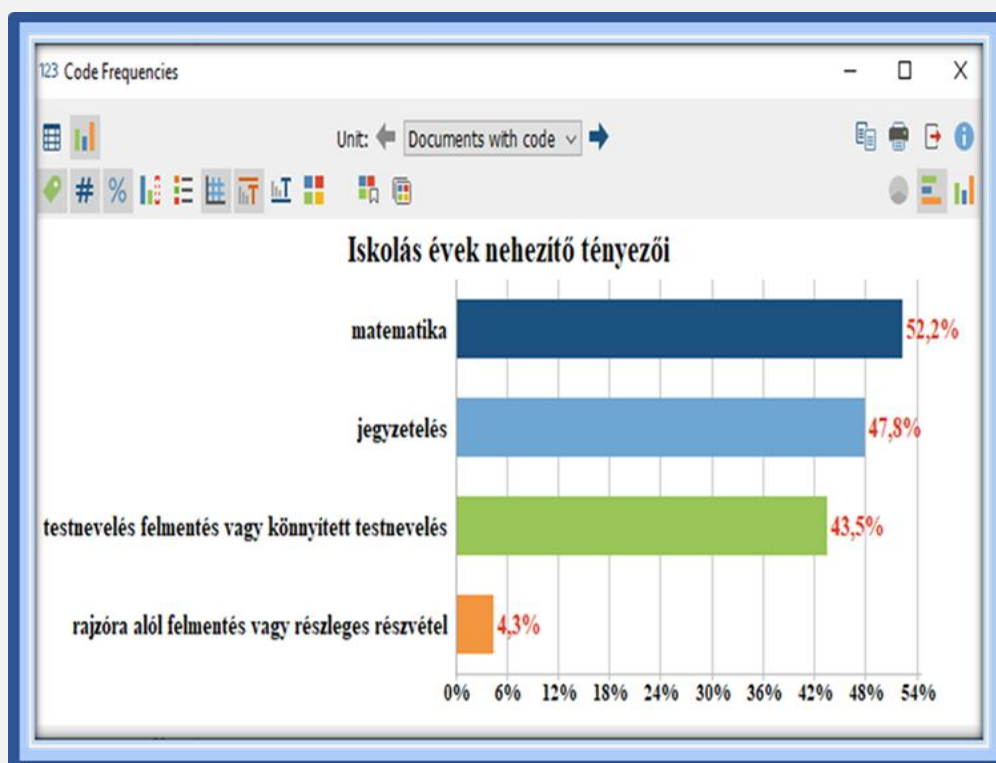
q2: To what extent do individuals still live according to the principles of conductive pedagogy? How satisfied are they with their quality of life? What are their future plans?

Results obtained for research question q1:

Difficulties related to mathematics (52.2%) and taking notes in class (47.8%) are prominent in the opinion of the interviewees.

In addition, the participants of this research highlighted a large number of aggravating factors during physical education lessons (43.5%).

In contrast to the literature, the drawing class (4.3%) caused only a small proportion of negative experiences in connection with co-education at school. See the detailed research results on 2. *Figure*.



2. Figure Difficulties during school years for former individuals receiving CE Source: The author

We wish to present in this study some interesting experiences from the interview material as well. A former individual who received CE in Hungary said the following: *"I needed extra time to solve tasks in mathematics. In the end, I didn't take the written exam in math but instead had an oral exam by drawing two topics."*

The third most frequently mentioned subject in the distribution graph was physical education. However, most students either did not participate in these classes or participated only in an easier form. Regular physical activity would have been particularly important during high school due to bodily changes. If the muscles cannot adequately adapt to growth, it can lead to contractures, which in many cases can only be corrected through surgery. Another participant from Hungary commented on this: *"I participated in physical education classes, only skipping one or two exercises based on my neurologist's advice. I was graded the same way as my classmates."*

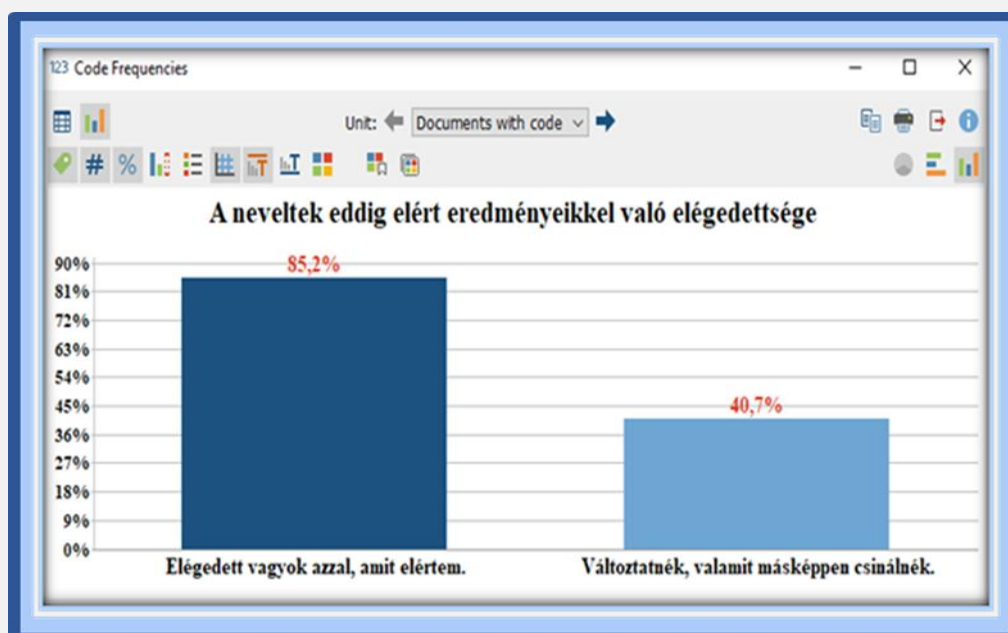
Some students reported that while their classmates attended physical education classes, they received conductive education instead, such as an interviewee from Norway and another respondent from Hungary.

What surprised us was that only one person, from Germany, mentioned difficulties related to art class during the interview: *“I only participated in the art history part of the art classes and didn’t receive grades in this subject.”* However, art came up for several students as a subject that provided them with a sense of achievement. A respondent from England recalled: *“At the Pető Institute, I grew to love drawing and various crafts. At school, my favourite subjects were art and music. My teachers quickly recognized my talent, and they entered me into numerous drawing competitions where I achieved excellent results. For example, my work was often chosen as the most beautiful piece of the month, and I was named the school’s artist of the month.”*

A former individual received CE in Hungary also shared fond memories related to school art classes: *“My art and technology teacher saw potential in my drawings. They regularly entered me into various drawing competitions, and I always won one of the top three places.”*

Results obtained for research question q2:

We can draw the conclusion that – similarly to what we read in the literature – the majority of interview participants (85.2%) are satisfied with their quality of life and their achievements. They have a positive outlook on the future, focusing on building stable relationships and advancing in their careers see 3. Figure.



3. Figure Satisfaction with the achievement of former individuals receiving CE Source: The author

A research participant from Hungary not only expressed satisfaction but also delivered a beautiful message: *“I feel that if this had not happened to me, my personality would be different. My two walking sticks are a part of me, but of course, I also have bad days when I feel like throwing everything away. Despite all the difficulties, this is natural for me. I draw a lot of strength from my family. I grew up in a very positive environment where my family didn’t focus on what I couldn’t do but rather on what I could achieve. My advice is not to focus on disabilities or disadvantages but on what a person can accomplish with their abilities, because if we do that, only good things can come of it!”*

Approximately 41% of respondents expressed dissatisfaction or a desire for change. A participant from Germany stated: *“I would study much harder to achieve better results, especially in higher education. I would trust myself more and care less about how others react to my disability.”* Similarly, another person from Germany expressed: *“I am less satisfied with my physical performance because it’s difficult to balance university studies with maintaining my health and condition.”*

Since conductive education continuously encourages participants to bring out their best every day, it sometimes fosters a perfectionist mindset. Consequently, some individuals frequently feel dissatisfied with their personal performance.

Conclusion

Our question q1 focused on the difficulties of school integration. Similarly to the explored literature sources, the participants identified challenges in mathematics and note-taking as prominent factors complicating everyday life. In addition, the subjects of this research highlighted a large number of aggravating factors in physical education classes, but contrary to the literature, only a small proportion reported negative experiences in drawing class related to co-education at school.

In response to our question q2, which we asked regarding the quality of life and vision of the future of people who received conductive education in the past, we can draw the conclusion that – similarly to the findings of earlier research – the majority of interview subjects (85.2%) are satisfied with their quality of life and their achievements. They have a positive outlook on the future, the focus of which is the establishment of a stable relationship and advancement at work.

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