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Social and Educational Barriers to Inclusive Education of Individuals with Special Health Needs

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Abstract

Inclusive education development has objectified new tasks for teachers on the individualization of training and upbringing learners with special health needs. At the same time, significant efforts have been made by the pedagogical community to solve these tasks causing challenges for teachers, increasing the risks of inclusive education and reducing the quality of students' achievements. Studying the barriers in teachers' perceptions of the inclusive education and its principles, on the one hand, and teachers' professional difficulties in implementing inclusive practices, on the other hand, is an urgent research task that has both theoretical and practical meaning. This article is aimed at identifying and classifying professional difficulties that create social and educational barriers to the development of inclusive practices. The key research method is the pedagogical dialogue with the expert, developed by the authors of the article. The research involved 110 teachers of general education institutions of the Murmansk region. This method allowed experts to objectify the teachers' difficulties both mental and practical in relation to their implementation of inclusive educational practices. The results are presented by identifying, describing and classifying the professional difficulties of teachers in inclusive education, due to the social and educational context, as well as highlighting the contradictions in the essence of these difficulties. The research results allow predicting the risks of inclusive education in the inclusion itself, keeping the learners with special health needs within the educational activities, together with peers with healthy development, and developing the effective ways to resolve problem situations.

Keywords: inclusive education, special educational needs, barriers, professional difficulties of teachers.

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Introduction

Inclusive education today is the factor that changes both the modern school and Russian society as a whole. There is no doubt that the idea of inclusive education in Russia is perceived as progressive and in demand by modernity, as evidenced by numerous fundamental and applied research, as well as widespread public discussions. The Federal Law “On Education in the Russian Federation” provides the concept of inclusive education as ensuring equal access for all students, taking into account the diversity of their special educational needs and individual opportunities, which determined the need for serious transformations of existing educational practices in the direction of ensuring accessibility and quality of education for students with disabilities.

Teachers in general education schools face the task of ensuring high learning achievement of schoolchildren with special health needs, taking into account the diversity of their individual development and the corresponding options for educational programs and individual educational patterns. Diversity creates a new context for the teachers’ professional activities associated with individualization based on the identification and interpretation the features of the individual psychosocial development of learners. Particularly important is bringing into line with the knowledge about the schoolchild by the teacher within the pedagogical activity. It is precisely the individualization, in our opinion, that leads to effective transformation in traditional educational practice and allows achieving the changes necessary for promoting inclusion, providing a social adaptation of the educational environment sufficient to satisfy a wide range of general, special and individual needs of learners.

As Smolin (2020) rightly notes, one of the main conditions for successful inclusion is its gradual implementation. At the same time, we have to admit that the development of inclusive processes in education occurs with varying level of success. Our studies show that today about 35% of children with special health needs studying in inclusion do not master the educational program and face persistent educational difficulties. The teacher does not always succeed in adapting educational activities sufficiently to the needs of learners. Thus, various barriers are created to the achievement of the inclusive education quality. This is not just about the lack of physical accessibility, but also about the barriers to the inclusion of a schoolchild in educational activity, keep him/her in it and help to achieve high educational results, both academic and social.

Thereby, the following options to individualize the educational activity are suggested: the teacher studies the individual psychosocial characteristics of a schoolchild with special health needs and establish a hierarchy of the schoolchild’s specific educational difficulties. The problem of individualization of

learner's educational activities in an inclusive education should be the subject of deep theoretical understanding and comprehensive empirical analysis with the use of new research tools that allow not only to state the problem, but also to understand the ways to solve it.

So, the research problem is determined by the contradiction between the urgent need to increase the accessibility and quality of inclusive education for learners with special health needs and the teachers' unwillingness for effective and timely transformation of their professional activities, taking into account the characteristics of the individual psychosocial development of the schoolchild. This problem is determined by the identification and classification of professional difficulties of inclusive education teachers in the field of individualization of learners' educational needs. Moreover, it is important to find out the ways to transform teachers' professional activities aimed at the interaction and inclusion of all subjects of education, which determines the scientific novelty of the research.

The obtained research results are of theoretical importance, revealing new research angles for studying the phenomenology of inclusive education, thereby enriching scientific ideas. The practical meaning of the research is to create a scientific basis for managing the development of inclusive processes in education by effectively designing and implementing individualized models of educational activity with learners, as well as developing technology for training teachers to solve the professional tasks due to the inclusive context of their professional activities.

Purpose and objectives of the study

The purpose of the research is to identify and classify social and educational barriers that are reflected both in the teachers' minds and in their professional actions that impede the development of inclusive educational practices.

Literature review

The problem of inclusive education is the subject of pedagogical research, both theoretical and applied. The professional community unanimously stresses the need to concentrate efforts not on quantitative indicators of inclusion, but on the quality of inclusive education. That is why today there is an idea that the goals of inclusive education are already beyond the scope of purely educational results. Inclusive education is understood as a social institution that ensures the inclusion of people with special health needs in society, improvement of their social status and contribution to their independent life.

The essence of the changes in modern education in the direction of individualization in the tradition of Russian defectology is driven by the development of the concept “special educational needs”, and the lack of conditions to ensure training of a schoolchild with special health needs violates his right to quality education (Lubovsky, 2013; Malofeev, 2018). Developing ideas of individualization Goncharova, Kukushkina and Nikolskaya (2019) describe the approach in Russian science that involves differentiating the educational needs of learners in three groups: common for all children with special health needs; specific for each category of children with special health needs and individual for children with a unique history of life, upbringing and education. We emphasize that the solution to the problem of individualization involves taking into account all these groups of educational needs, paying the significant attention to the third group being the least studied.

In the context of the variability of educational patterns, Abkovich (2018), Babkina (2018), Levchenko and Abkovich (2017), Soloveva (2019), Kuzmicheva (2019) and others analyze the children’s special educational needs. These studies have made a significant scientific contribution to the development of inclusive educational practices, allowed classifying the educational needs of different categories of learners with special health needs, showed the possibilities and resources of the educational environment to create special conditions for their learning and upbringing in the context of inclusion.

The scientific approaches of the authors allow us to say that the individualization of educational activity is a way to build education with a focus on the “zone of proximal development”, that is, to maximize the activation of the compensatory and adaptive mechanisms of the learner’s personality. Studies carried out by Korobeinikov (2002) in the theory of functional diagnosis set a new vector in understanding the problem of individualization of educational activities of schoolchildren with special health needs. The focus of the researchers is not on dysontogenesis as such, but on a variety of options for individual development in the totality of mental disorders and compensatory resources, adaptive capabilities, abilities as “strengths” of development.

Today, the scientific discussion of foreign researchers on the choice and use of different inclusion models at schools that reflect the variety of ways of social interaction remains relevant (Forlin & Lian, 2018). The issue of teacher’s role in inclusive education is also described by Poon-McBrayer (2004) where the author shows that teachers are the key to determining inclusion success. Dukuzumuremyi and Siklander (2018) describe variable models of teacher-student interaction in different educational situations, which gives the importance of such qualities as flexibility and empathy of a teacher for solving problems of inclusive education.

Taking the foreign studies of inclusive education problems and the scale of the practical implementation of the inclusion in educational practices into account, their risks are noted through an analysis of the social field of educational activity, being important to be understood by the teachers (Ben-Peretz & Flores, 2018). Theoretical understanding of the problems of inclusive education, scientific justification and development of resources and tools for its development are set out in the comparative studies that reveal its semantic and practical aspects and link the specifics of its risks and opportunities with the sociocultural field (Väyrynen et al., 2016).

Therefore, a synthesis of modern scientific approaches to the problems of inclusive education shows a change in priorities from fixing shortcomings in the development of learners with special health needs to the search for resources to double their special educational needs by individualizing educational activities, integrating educational and social components.

Methodology

To collect empirical data, we have designed and applied the method of pedagogical dialogue with an expert as a kind of interview. Traditional survey methods suggest that the researcher plays a guiding role for the respondent. The method of pedagogical dialogue with an expert involves free presentation by teachers of their professional difficulties based on the reflection of their own experience and understanding of existing knowledge.

This method not only allows understanding the essence of the teacher's difficulties, but also directing him/her to a deep self-analysis of the professional activity, objectifying his/her experience in relation to different aspects of professional activity, professional self-consciousness.

In our study, the authors of the article acted as experts. The average duration of a dialogue is 1.5 hours. The pedagogical dialogue ends with the recommendations of an expert on resolving a problem situation. In the process of analyzing the dialogues was held with principle of confidentiality and anonymity.

The experimental base of the study

Eleven (11) general educational institutions in the Murmansk region became the experimental base of the research. One hundred and ten (110) teachers with professional experience in inclusion were included in the research sample.

Stages of the experiment

The study was carried out in 2019-2020. Three stages were identified in its process. At the first stage, the theoretical and methodological framework was determined, and then goals, objectives and hypothesis were formulated. At the second stage, a method of pedagogical dialogue with an expert was developed, aimed at studying the professional difficulties of teachers working in inclusive education. At the third stage, an empirical study was carried out, a qualitative and quantitative analysis of its results was carried out and made it possible to identify and classify the professional difficulties of teachers that determine the social and educational barriers to inclusive education. At the fourth stage, taking into account the results obtained and the conclusions made, a reflective algorithm was developed to find out the effective ways and means to overcome problem situations.

Results

The analysis of the pedagogical dialogue with the expert and its results was carried out according to the following criteria:

1. The type of professional difficulties objectified by the teacher as a problem in accordance with the content of the situation: methodological, organizational and social.
2. The context of the problem situation, determined by the following criteria:
 - subjects – all the participants involved in the problem situation (the teacher, the learner and his/her parents, other teachers, someone else), the level of their involvement in the situation;
 - features of the problem;
 - assessment of the situation by the teacher in terms of complexity and foundation;
 - understanding of the situation dynamics, its background by the teacher;
 - features of the teacher's interpretation of the possible causes of the contradictions;
 - determining the area of responsibility of each participant in the situation;
 - character of actions taken by the teacher and/or other participants in the situation to resolve contradictions;

- understanding the meaning of the actions taken and assessment of their effectiveness by the teacher;
- the teacher's view on the development of the situation, its outlook.

Let us pass to the analysis of the statements received during the pedagogical dialogue with the expert. From the point of view of the classification, methodological, organizational and social types of difficulties in their combination are distinguished. However, such an approach allows differentiating the content of the pedagogical request, and is necessary to find the most effective ways to solve the problem reflected in the request.

Based on our analysis of the dialogue between the teacher and the expert, we can talk about the predominance of methodological and organizational types of difficulties in the perception of teachers.

Therefore, methodological difficulties (the first type) appeared in 82% of the teachers. However, most of them (63.3%) are making efforts to overcome them, although not quite successfully. Methodological difficulties noted by teachers are clearly subdivided into several varieties.

Didactic difficulties (72%) are determined by insufficiently successful/unsuccessful adaptation of the methodology for teaching subjects to the individual characteristics of learners with special health needs.

To the difficulties of an informational nature, we attributed the need of the development of digital educational and methodological complexes, which require free access; information and educational portals of professional orientation (64.5%), which reflects the successful experience of involving schoolchildren of a specific age and a specific nosological group in educational activities.

We also note the diagnostic difficulties that appeared in the requests of 49% of the participants. These difficulties are in recognizing the individuality of the child, his abilities, adaptive and compensatory resources. So the teachers pointed to the need for informative and easy-to-use diagnostic tools, which, as one of the subjects noted, "would easily fit into the educational process...".

In addition, many teachers pointed out the difficulties of a correctional and developing nature. In general, they understand the importance of corrective development work with schoolchildren with special health needs and the need for its integration into the structure of the lesson (51%). 23% of respondents were not well acquainted with the mental characteristics of the children of a particular nosological group. Those of the participants who emphasized the presence of such knowledge (28%) indicated a lack of understanding of the possibilities and specific ways of taking them into account in educational activities.

Organizational difficulties (second type) were noted in 63% of requests. These difficulties also turned out to be heterogeneous in content. There are regulatory, infrastructural and disciplinary difficulties related to this type.

Regulatory difficulties appeared in 20% of requests; they were associated with determining the area of responsibility, rights and obligations of subjects of educational relations, including parents. Being unaware of the content of regulatory legal norms, they tried to consider many problematic situations in terms of their own opinion, which often did not correspond to legislatively fixed rules.

Infrastructure difficulties of teachers, as shown by their requests, have 51% of teachers. They noted the need for multimedia equipment and appropriate licensed software, special didactic tools, the availability of specially equipped certain rooms (a game room, a psychological unloading room, leisure and study rooms, a separate locker room, etc.), a library adapted for children with special health needs in safe and comfortable logistics inside or outside school.

A significant number of teachers (56%) indicated disciplinary difficulties in the inclusion and retention of a child with special educational needs in the general pace and rhythm of the lesson: motivation for active work, creation of conditions that allow different children to show their own initiative, establishing the optimal combination of joint and individual forms of learners' activity. They are expressed in the fact that the teacher cannot create the conditions for the child to adopt the rules of school life and act in accordance with them.

It is noteworthy that a small number of teachers identified difficulties as social difficulties (40%), although in most queries indirect indications of such difficulties could be found. For the purpose of a more detailed interpretation of this type of difficulties, we divided them into semantic and operational,

The semantic difficulties are caused by the specifics of the teachers' understanding of inclusion as a social idea. All research participants support the idea of inclusive education. However, 35% of them believe that for children with special health needs the most effective are individual forms of education, explaining this by the fact that it is difficult for them to learn things simultaneously with other children. This approach contradicts the very nature of inclusion, since it does not unite, but divides the subjects of educational activity, and the teacher focuses not on finding ways to involve and retain the schoolchild in collective learning formats, but on sharpening his difficulties in educational activities and using them as a factor for explaining low educational results. Teachers did not pay enough attention in their answers to the socialization of learners with special health needs through educational means.

It is noteworthy that less than half of the respondents were able to name some of the international principles of inclusive education (46%), and 23.1% of them found it difficult to illustrate these principles with specific actions or activities that would fully reveal their essence.

Operational difficulties are determined by unresolved contradictions in the specific interaction of subjects of educational relations (“the children do not accept the child”, “the children do not offend him, but they do not communicate with him/her the way they do it with others”, “it is not possible to establish contacts with parents”, “it is difficult to establish contact, the child does not tends to communicate”) (38%). It was this kind of difficulties that were presented in the requests of teachers. Among them, most situations were associated with communication between children. Adults as parents and teachers were represented less.

Let us imagine the types of professional difficulties of teachers and their varieties, highlighted on the basis of the analysis of their requests (Table 1).

Table 1. Professional difficulties of teachers and their varieties

| Type | Variety | Representation in teachers' requests |
|--|-----------------|--------------------------------------|
| Methodological difficulties (82%) | didactic | 72 |
| | informational | 64,5 |
| | diagnostic | 49 |
| | developmental | 51 |
| Organizational difficulties (63%) | regulatory | 20 |
| | infrastructural | 51 |
| | disciplinary | 56 |
| Social difficulties (40%) | semantic | 35 |
| | operational | 38 |

Next, we turn to the analysis of the context of the request, without which the essence of the problem situation cannot be fully and objectively interpreted and effective ways and means of resolving it are found. We emphasize that of the entire array of requests, 92% were related to the lesson, and only 8% were related to extracurricular activities.

Subjects are participants in the situation, the level of their involvement in the situation. An analysis of problem situations from the participants' point of view shows that in most of them (54%) there are two subjects: a teacher and a student with special health needs, in 35% of requests: a teacher, a schoolchild with special health needs and other children, and the activity of other children is more often interpreted by teachers as a kind of "background" to the problem situation. In 26% of situations, the interaction between teacher-child-parents is reflected from the standpoint of the latter's disinterest in the child's achievement of educational results.

Features of the formulation of the problem. With regard to the peculiarities of the formulation of problems by teachers, the following trends have emerged. Most educators do not formulate the problem as such, but strive to get some kind of "long-term recipe" for normalizing their current activities, considered outside their context ("the child is aggressive ... tell me what to do?") - 53%. Note that most teachers broadcast a request for assistance, and only a few asked for assistance in assisting a child with disabilities.

Assessment by the teacher of the situation by the degree of its complexity and its foundation. Most of the situations that made up the content of the request were rated by teachers as having significant or very significant complexity. 27% of respondents said that the situation can be resolved itself in some way without the intervention of a teacher (for example, "the child will move to another school", "he is with us temporarily," "maybe nothing needs to be done, V. get used to the requirements of the school and everything will get better", "maybe parents will change their mind and take up the upbringing of their child"), etc.

The teacher's understanding of the dynamics of the problem situation, its background. The dynamics of the problem situation, its background is presented in the requests of 35% of teachers. Most of them perceive and describe it as local, unrelated to other situations and facts, which does not allow them to interpret its causes or at least build hypotheses regarding them.

Features of the interpretation of the teacher of the possible causes of the contradictions. Determining the area of responsibility of each participant in the situation. The area of responsibility of each participant in the situation is reflected in the requests of teachers as follows. 34% of them accept responsibility and/or seek to share it with other school specialists. They note their willingness to solve the problem, but note that they need the help of a psychologist, speech therapist, etc. 36% shift the responsibility to the child and explain their professional difficulties with the shortcomings of his development ("cannot concentrate", "doesn't remember things well" "doesn't want to think" , "cannot control his emotions," etc.). 28% of respondents consider other school specialists to be responsible. 46% of teachers indicate

parental responsibility. In the requests of teachers there were options for assigning responsibility to different subjects.

The nature of the actions taken by the teacher and/or other participants in the situation to resolve the contradictions. The teacher understands the meaning of the actions taken and assesses their effectiveness. Inquiries of 94% of teachers reflected their actions taken to resolve the problem situation. However, for the majority of these actions fit into the traditional paradigm of professional activity, reflecting general pedagogical methods, and were not based on an objective idea of the individual psychosocial developmental features of a child with disabilities (exercise, reminder, repeating instructions, etc.). In a number of cases, they were described non-differentially, for example, "All my efforts were useless".

25% of teachers described their actions to provide individualized organizing, motivating, educational assistance to the child, based on the zone of his closest development. However, their difficulty consisted in individually determining the type of such assistance, its volume and specific educational conditions for its provision. More often, help is provided when the child does not cope with the task or demonstrates a violation of the rules of behavior and does not have a proactive, propaedeutic character.

The actions of parents in relation to solving a problem situation were identified by 42%, 25% recognized their actions as ineffective.

Teacher's ideas about the forecast of the situation. The teachers associated the forecast of the development of the problematic situation, first of all, with the child's lagging behind in educational activity, the appearance of systemic knowledge gaps, aggravation of behavioral deviations and a further decrease in the motivation for cognitive activity (64%).

In general, teachers in their requests are not sufficiently focused on the systematic identification of the individual identity of the student's development with disabilities, experience significant difficulties in determining the possibilities of taking individualized knowledge of the child into account when solving educational problems, selecting effective pedagogical tools, for the most part they do not know how to adapt educational activities taking into account individualized knowledge of the child, do not implement effective interaction algorithms of school specialists in the process of his psychological and pedagogical support.

Discussions

The study shows that teachers, mentally accepting the idea of inclusive education and mostly striving to achieve high quality education of students with disabilities, do not have enough specific methods for determining individual characteristics in educational activities. In our opinion, one of the most important conditions conducive to the successful solution of educational problems in the context of the development of inclusive practices and to overcome the professional difficulties of teachers is the rejection of prescription recommendations. This can be facilitated by the development of a reflective algorithm for the analysis by the teacher of his request, based on the understanding that in any problem situation there are means to resolve it.

Conclusion

The development of inclusive education is focused on the creation of conditions for students with special health needs to achieve educational results. Before teachers, the need to ensure individualization is being updated on the basis of bringing educational activities and the special needs of a particular child into line. The solution to this problem requires a successful solution by the teacher in two interrelated tasks: firstly, his understanding of the characteristics of the individual psychosocial development of students, and, on the other hand, the possession of ways to transform his professional detail, taking into account individualized knowledge about the child. These tasks present significant difficulties for educators. This creates social and educational barriers that impede the effective development of inclusive practices. To study them, we proposed a method of pedagogical dialogue with an expert, which included 110 teachers of general educational institutions of the Murmansk region.

The diagnostic capabilities of the proposed method are that the teacher discusses with the expert the problematic situation of his professional activity, reflecting on his experience, and receives qualified assistance in the form of recommendations. Thus, the essence of the methodology is the work with the pedagogical request. A scientific analysis of teacher requests was conducted in terms of the content and context of the situation.

A generalization of the empirical results obtained made it possible to identify methodological (didactic, informational, diagnostic, and developing), organizational (regulatory, infrastructure, disciplinary) and social (semantic and operational) difficulties of teachers in inclusive education as a typology. They are both mental and practical.

From a practical point of view, the results of the study undertaken made it possible to predict the risks of inclusive education, revealing the socio-educational barriers to inclusion. They also allowed us to develop, on this basis, as a way to resolve problem situations in the teacher's professional activity, a reflexive algorithm to help the teacher to overcome the problem. It includes research questions for the teacher on the content of his request:

- What professional difficulties (didactic, organizational, social) and in what combination are reflected in the request, what is their interdependence?
- -Who are the subjects of the problem situation? What influence does each of them have on the problem?
- How does the situation develop? What is its background, temporal and spatial dynamics?
- What is the area / zone of responsibility of each subject of a problem situation?
- What did the subject(s) of the situation do to resolve it?
- What is the meaning of the actions of each subject of the situation?
- What prevents each subject from acting more actively and efficiently?
- What contradictions become noticeable in a problem situation? What does this situation show?
- What are the reasons for the contradictions that are objectifying in a problem situation?
- What was possible and what could not be done in order to come closer to resolving the problem situation?
- How will the situation develop if it is not resolved?
- What is the complexity of the situation, which prevents its resolution?
- What can be changed in their actions and what can be done to overcome a problem situation?
- The proposed algorithm directs the teacher to expand the context of the problem situation, to include it in a wide system communicative relationships, to change its perception towards greater

objectivity based on the establishment of causal relationships between facts, to “heuristically discover” the resources for resolving a professional problem.

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