

Training a special teacher: Opinions and experience of teachers in the conditions of inclusive education

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Abstract

In the context of the active spread of inclusive education in Kazakhstan, it seems important to modernize their training for work in inclusive schools. Accordingly, the problems of effective preparation of teachers to work with inclusive classes have acquired particular relevance. The aim of the proposed study was a comparative study of the opinions of teachers-defectologists in secondary schools of the region on the organization and implementation of practice in inclusive education. Thus, an interview was conducted with teachers in North Kazakhstan. The development of inclusively oriented professional and personal competencies among teachers largely depends on the success of the inclusion of children with special educational needs in the general educational process. Based on the study of the opinion of special teachers practicing in inclusive organizations, it is argued that inclusive education of children with special educational needs requires a change in approaches to the training of special teachers, modernization of the content, and directions of their training.

Keywords: Defectologists; inclusive education; special educational needs; teacher training.

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1. Introduction

In modern conditions of active development, the tendencies of including children with special educational needs in the general educational process are actualized and are under the close attention of the state and society on the preparation of special teachers (defectologists) to work in inclusive education (Akramova, 2020). Despite the importance to society and the value of science and practice, this problem remains insufficiently developed and studied and requires serious research, since the number of children with special educational needs studying in educational institutions is growing every year, and the “range of restrictions” is expanding.

At the same time, it is necessary to take into account the fact that the problems of “inclusion” are not concentrated on special education, but on the construction of an effective general educational process for children with special educational needs (Kamenez, Vaganova, Smirnova, Kutepova & Vinokurova, 2019). Inclusive education is a concept that allows these students to be and to develop in the environment of “healthy” peers, to receive an education appropriate to their characteristics and capabilities in regular schools and classes. This can be understood as the presence (access to education and school attendance), participation (the quality of the learning experience from the learners' perspective), and achievement (learning processes and curriculum outcomes) of all students in general education schools. This educational trend is being promoted around the world as a positive tool for improving overall development.

In addition, today the problem of the lack of the necessary training of educators (defectologist) to work with special children in a general education school is quite acute. It lies in the lack of professional knowledge and skills of educators in the field of inclusive education, the presence of certain barriers, and professional stereotypes. Therefore, the issue of modernizing the training of electrologists with a focus on professional activity in general education is of particular importance. In this direction, you can use successful foreign experience, for this, we consider it necessary to analyze the scientific and pedagogical sources characterizing various national education systems for the preparation of an educator for work in inclusive education. So, for example, in the studies of Florian & Linklater (2010), studying inclusive processes in primary school as a prerequisite for working with teachers problematizes not the special knowledge and skills of a teacher of an “inclusive” class, but how teachers can use the existing knowledge most optimally on working with students with learning difficulties .

Many scientific sources are devoted to the theoretical analysis of the quality of relations between the teacher and students in primary school, but little attention is paid to the study of the relationship between teachers and students of inclusive classes in secondary school. As a result of the information obtained by the authors, Hoffman (2011), allows to consider benevolent attitudes among teachers and students of “inclusive” classes and to feel their belonging to the class, as well as in models of cooperation and co-learning .

French & Chopra (2006) devoted the analysis of pedagogical skills to the need for the transition process to inclusive education. The authors consider the role of the teacher in an inclusive classroom of the following skills: leadership, cooperation, and communication skills. Teachers demonstrating skills in 5 key functional areas (planning, accompaniment/support, explanation, collaboration, peer supervision) contribute to the more successful adaptation of students to inclusion.

1.1. Related studies

It is now obvious that the degree of success of inclusive education depends on the “universality” of the teacher (Forlin & Chambers, 2020) . In the studies of Kargan, & Schmidt (2011), it was found that the attitude of teachers to inclusion depends on the type of student’s disability. Educators demonstrate a high degree of acceptance of students with physical disabilities and less in the case of children with behavioral/emotional disorders . The new paradigm for teacher training is an interdisciplinary approach to make it easier for teacher-trainees working in inclusion, that is, a curriculum should be included that covers all disciplines studied (Zelizen, 2010).

In turn, researcher Haug notes that the skills, knowledge, and understanding required by educators cannot be developed through simple measures and teacher education. A much broader perspective and a more general approach need to be adopted in preparing the educator to work effectively in an inclusive education environment. The expert notes that it is necessary to focus not only on working in special organizations but also on building team interaction with general education teachers in inclusive education (Haug, 2011).

In recent years, scientists from Kazakhstan have also begun to actively raise issues of modernization of defectological education and develop ways to form the readiness of educators (defectologists) to work in inclusive education (Movkebaeva, 2015; Duzelbaeva, 2017). In addition, there are several works on the problem of inclusive competence of teachers: Khitryuk V.V., Khafizullina I.N., Romanovskaya I.A., Bunimovich E.A., Suleimenova R.A., Movkebayeva Z.A., Oralkanova I. A., Rymkhanova A., and others. The basis of their research was the understanding of the fact that the psychological and pedagogical competence of a special teacher (dermatologist) is the main indicator of his professionalism and, accordingly, a fundamental condition for the effective organization of the educational process.

To define the inclusively oriented competencies of an educator, it seems necessary to define the concept of "professional competence of a teacher". So, researchers Rakhmetova, Sandibayeva, and Kalabayeva (2016) understand the professional competence of a teacher as a process of mastering a set of professional knowledge and experience (competencies), as well as a positive attitude to work, required for the effective performance of work duties in a certain area of activity.

The famous Kazakh scientist Khmel, (2002) defined the teacher's professional competence as the unity of his theoretical and practical readiness to carry out pedagogical activities. Researcher Kenzhebekov (2005) believes that professional competence is a set of integrated fundamental knowledge, generalized skills, and abilities of a person, his professionally significant and personal qualities, a high level of technology, culture, and skill, a creative approach to organizing activities, readiness for constant self-development .

Russian researcher Khafizullina (2008) defines the inclusive competence of future teachers as an integrative personal education that determines the ability to perform professional functions in the process of inclusive education. Taking into account the different educational needs of students and ensuring the inclusion of a child with disabilities in the general educational institution environment, creating conditions for his development and self-development in the educational process.

Khitryuk (2015) considers inclusive competence through the prism of inclusive readiness as a complex integral subjective quality of the teacher's personality, based on a complex of academic, professional, and social-personal competencies and determining the possibility of effective professional and pedagogical activity in the conditions of inclusive education, determined by the specifics of the conditions of his professional activity .

1.2. Purpose of study

All scientists researching this topic must agree that working with children with special educational needs in an inclusive education environment makes special demands on the practical readiness of teachers-defectologists, who require a reorientation of their training from the system of special education for future activities in the context of inclusive education. The article aims to analyze foreign and domestic scientific approaches to determining the experience of training a special teacher for work in inclusive education.

2. Materials and Method

This provision was decisive for conducting a special study with teachers and educators working in general education schools.

2.1. Data collection instrument

An interview was conducted with subject teachers of the North Kazakhstan region, the purpose of which was to study their difficulties in teaching children with special educational needs and the nature of the help and support provided to them by educators in solving these difficulties.

2.2. Participants

The participants included subject teachers of the North Kazakhstan region. These are graduates of universities in the specialty of "Defectology" who work in inclusive schools.

For this goal, the following research questions were identified:

1. The presence and nature of the difficulties experienced by teachers of general education schools in teaching children with special educational needs.
2. The nature of assistance and support provided to teachers of general education schools by educators in solving difficulties arising in the teaching of children with special educational needs.
3. Assessment by teachers of general education schools of the resources and contribution of educators to the successful inclusion of children with special educational needs in general education.

3. Results

Teachers agree (85%) with the general concept of inclusive education, only (10%) are not ready to include children with special educational needs, due to low knowledge in the field of inclusive education. It should be noted that among the respondents, those who noted a lack of knowledge in the field of special education had a less positive attitude towards the inclusion of children with SEN. 80% of the respondents believed that they lacked the practical skills to organize a differentiated approach to students with special educational needs, while 69% of them said that they did not have time and had difficulties in allocating time for individual visits to all their students. Many teachers do not know the psychological and pedagogical features of their students with special needs and do not take these features into account when planning lessons.

Almost all general education teachers noted the presence of certain methodological difficulties, while all of them noted the lack of assistance from educators, the lack of resources, and their appropriate support. The results of the survey showed that the respondents believed that special teachers lacked sufficient training, as well as insufficient time, material resources, and personal desire to provide feasible assistance to general education teachers in organizing the differentiated assimilation by children of the program of the updated content of educational knowledge, establishing adequate relationships between children with special educational needs and children without such characteristics; and much more.

Teachers noted the insufficient preparedness of educators (defectologists) and their lack of effective tools and support for the inclusion of children with special educational needs in general education. Thus, the respondents argued that educators (defectologists) working in inclusive education have a lack of knowledge in the field of updated educational content and criteria-based assessment and little practical experience in inclusive (and not special) organizations during industrial practice. All this, in the opinion of both general education and educators, is facilitated by the absence of a small number of inclusively oriented academic disciplines: consulting parents and teachers, organizing interprofessional cooperation, selecting individually differentiated approaches to children in the context of their diversity, adapting educational material to conditions of inclusive education and criteria-based assessment of students with special educational needs.

To study the adequacy of the inclusive training of educators at the university, we organized a semi-structured interview with graduates of universities in the specialty "Defectology" who work in inclusive schools.

For defectologists working in inclusive schools, the following responses were given to the questions that were asked:

Table 1
Responses to the interview

What problems did you face in your work (in the conditions of inclusive organizations) after graduation?	
Olga Sergeevna	With my specialization "Oligophrenopedagogy" I felt that I had a very small amount of knowledge. It was necessary to study defectology in a wider spectrum (deaf-pedagogy, typhlopedagogy, etc.) because completely different children with different and often complex disabilities study in inclusive classes. Moreover, practical skills are very scarce. General education teachers of schools are treated as competitors.
Ayda Saidalievna	At the moment, the problem is revealed more in the lack of practical knowledge, everything is changing rapidly in our life. The teacher defectologist must be fully prepared.
Anar Amandykovna	Problems with organizing the lesson so that the whole class is involved in the educational process, insufficient ability to feel the atmosphere in the classroom, inability to build communication with all participants in the educational process, etc.
Do you experience difficulties in communicating with parents, teachers, or children?	
Olga Sergeevna	I experienced significant difficulties in communicating with parents of "healthy" children, that is, I did not know exactly how to work with parents who are not in the mood and do not accept children with special educational needs. Moreover, not all teachers accept this situation either.
Ayda Saidalievna	Big problems arise in the process of relationships with teachers, both with great experience in teaching and with young teachers. They misunderstand a lot and do not fully accept the peculiarities of children with special educational needs. So, I often hear from teachers their indignation: "Why are you arranging walking in the classroom," "No one should run and do everything for him" etc. Teachers do not understand the situation when they have tutors in their lessons. I work as a tutor, we have a Communication Sheet, through which the tutor exchanges views with parents, where they describe the success of their child, his behavior, work at the lesson, etc. On the back of the Communication Sheet, the parents write about his condition, how he slept, and what medications drank. The tutor reads these notes, prepares to work with the child, and warns the teacher about this.
Anar Amandykovna	Lack of experience in working with parents, in overcoming difficulties in communicating with parents. This is important because working with parents is one of the components of an inclusive process in which we must teach parents to accept the characteristics of their children.
What should be taught to future educators in universities?	
What disciplines need to be taught?	
Ayda Saidalievna	We suggest including Visual support and social stories.
Olga Sergeevna	Today, even if we predict, then from the base of elective courses in the list of basic disciplines, I would recommend adding the discipline for resolving disputes (Conflictology), on interaction and documentation of specialists of the psychological and pedagogical support service, I would deepen diagnostics (especially differential), introduce discipline for the study of modern technologies of correctional work (and not only in general terms, as is usually at the universities, but specifically to disassemble technologies, techniques, methods, techniques, modern equipment, taking into account updates), dermatologists also need the ability to lead and guide teachers, organize the interaction with specialists and parents. There is currently a lack of knowledge on these issues. And, of course, for all defectologists to give knowledge on deaf-, typhoon-, oligophrenopedagogy, and speech therapy. A diploma with the broad title of the specialty "Defectology" must correspond to this.
Anar Amandykovna	It is necessary to form the skills of strategic planning, teach how to select teaching methods, and create materials for the lesson.
How do you rate your level (after graduation) of the skills for working with documentation in an inclusive education environment?	

Olga Sergeevna	I, like all former students after university, had very little understanding of record keeping. Students go through the issues of maintaining documentation in a survey. For example, filling out a card for a child is very difficult.
Ayda Saidalievna	The knowledge acquired at the university must correspond to practice. For example, now there is a new protocol for 25 skills. When a new child with special educational needs comes to us, we test him and determine whether any specific skills from this list are formed or not, and determine at what level they are formed. After graduation, I did not know about it.
Anar Amandykovna	The study of documentation at the university is conducted in a survey.
What difficulties did you experience in assessing children with special educational needs?	
Ayda Saidalievna	We explain to teachers that any response of a child with special educational needs deserves a positive assessment, we teach them to differentiate tasks. For example, all children are given the task to complete 5 examples, and the child with special educational needs is given 4 tasks, that is, we evaluate the child according to the same criteria, but we shorten the tasks. Some children need to write 30 sentences, while others need 20 sentences.
Olga Sergeevna	We have children with musculoskeletal disorders. Someone studies according to the general education curriculum, but there are cases when we were at the PMPK, for example, and experts asked us: "How do you assess the achievements of a child if he cannot write? If his level is lower, why are you pulling him? Etc." Nobody, in principle, reduces the number of SAC and SAQ for our children. The essence and principle remain the same. In the lesson, of course, the formative assessment goes well, but the summative assessment is a problem for me. I am delving into the issues of criteria-based assessment, but for children of the musculoskeletal system, this is a very difficult question.
Anar Amandykovna	Great difficulties associated with psychological disorders in children with special educational needs. So, one day the child is tuned in to study and can complete tasks, and on the other day, he categorically refuses to work. I think it is wrong to consider the results of one or two SACs as the final result, this is the result of a whole quarter of work. I consider it necessary to evaluate the child every day at each lesson, and based on these results of the lessons, it is necessary to put a final mark, that is, put an average mark for a quarter.

Summarizing the list of problems experienced by educators in the inclusive educational environment, it is worth noting some of them:

- Difficult working conditions such as excessive paperwork, unregulated workload, inadequate support, and occupational isolation.
- Insufficient material incentives for the work of educators in the context of an inclusive education environment (the absence of an allowance for working with children with special educational needs, which is available in special schools).
- Narrow specialization, lack of skills to work with different categories of children and with different severity of impairments, who are trained together in inclusive education.

At the same time, it should be noted the commitment of educators to their work, pride in the results achieved, and the desire to change the lives of people with special educational needs for the better. For example, one educator wrote about his practical experience of working with children: "Every day you see your influence on your students, large or small. There are no words to describe the feeling you will experience when your autistic student, who avoids physical contact, gently touches your shoulder. Or when your student, who has learning difficulties and who was many grades below everyone else in reading or math, finally approached his goal. Or when your student using an amplifying speech device says his first full sentence to express himself".

4. Discussion

Summarizing the results of the questionnaire and interviews, it should be noted that the training of educators for work in an inclusive education environment should be focused on the formation of such competencies that would teach them to implement psychological and pedagogical

support for children with special educational needs in their general education, as well as advise and help educators to teach children with special educational needs (Yaraya et al., 2018). For this, in our opinion, educators must have certain personal qualities: communication skills, leadership, responsibility, exactingness, patience, intuition, creativity, hard work, optimism, etc.

Special aids and tools should be used to educate students with special educational needs (Akramova, 2020). With the insufficient elaboration of currently effective and universal techniques, methods, and techniques of psychological-pedagogical support of inclusive education, a trial and error methodology should be adopted. If one method or technique does not work, it should be abandoned and another, more appropriate, should be used instead. Finally, tolerance in the classroom is one of the most important ingredients for an effective inclusive process. A child with special needs should always be rewarded for good behavior and not pointed out wrong things. Negative feedback can be frightening, and this, in turn, will affect their cognitive abilities. Specially trained teachers should have sufficiently deep knowledge in the field of psychology and behavior models of children with special educational needs and, on this basis, build their strategies for organizing the educational process with this category in a general education school (Kamenez et al., 2019).

It is an educator (defectologist) who can help a child with special educational needs to overcome difficulties in learning in a general education school and establish his relationship with peers and teachers. The main ways in which an educator can help their student with special educational needs are:

- The Educator plays a key role in an interdisciplinary team of educators, parents, and professionals, whose work results in meeting the special needs of students with developmental disabilities.

- The special educator must be innovative and flexible in responding to changes in the child's individual development.

- A special educator must be confident in a consistently positive result and can guarantee that every child with special educational needs will achieve high results, regardless of the severity of his violation.

The work of an educator in an inclusive education environment should bring the greatest satisfaction since it solves the important tasks of including a child with special educational needs not only in the educational process but also in the system of real relationships and interactions between different people (bin Nordin, Mustafa & Razzaq, 2020). Awareness of this fact will energize educators and children, give them hope and encourage them to go beyond traditional strategies and relationships.

5. Conclusion

The study of the problem of preparing a defectologist for work in an inclusive education environment has made it possible to develop several disciplines based on a questionnaire for teachers of defectologists, taking into account all aspects of the motivational, substantive, and operational components.

Summarizing the results of the survey, we identified the following disciplines for training a teacher (defectologist) to work in an inclusive education environment. The presented disciplines may be necessary for the professional training of students-defectologists to work in an inclusive education environment: "Individual correctional work with children with special educational needs in an inclusive education environment", "Technology for assessing students in the system of inclusive education", "Interprofessional cooperation with specialists and parents of children with SEN in the context of inclusive education", "Organization of the educational process of children with special educational needs in the context of inclusive education", etc.

Analysis of the identified problems of training educators for work in an inclusive education environment allowed us to identify some pedagogical recommendations:

1. In the context of the active spread of inclusive education in Kazakhstan, it is important to modernize the training of educators and orient them towards psychological and pedagogical support in inclusive schools.

2. It is advisable to reform the system of training educators (defectologists) based on the results of modern interdisciplinary research, an effective combination of productive domestic and foreign educational experience.

3. In the preparation of educators for the implementation of psychological and pedagogical support for inclusive education, it is necessary to provide the formation of the ability to model methodological knowledge and techniques in various pedagogical conditions (kindergarten, school, professional college, university).

4. It is advisable to pay special attention to the formation of competencies in the use of information and distance technologies in teaching different categories of children.

5. The model of training special educators should provide for the presence of professional competencies in providing advice and interaction of a defectologist with all specialists in the form of "interprofessional cooperation".

6. In the model of training an educator, it is advisable to include professional competencies in the use of standardized diagnostic tools (psychodiagnostic, sociological, pedagogical) at all age stages of a child's development.

7. Particular attention should be paid to the development of student's skills in the formation of an inclusive culture and inclusive values.

8. A reasonable combination and modeling of coordinated pedagogical practice with psychological and pedagogical theory are necessary.

Therefore, it is advisable to actively and shortly make the transition from the traditional focus of training educators to the upcoming labor activity in special schools and kindergartens to the inclusively oriented training, since special teacher-practitioners experience significant difficulties in organizing and implementing psychological and pedagogical support for children with special educational needs. Accordingly, higher education in Kazakhstan faces an acute problem of serious modernization of the process of training educators-defectologists with an orientation towards working in inclusive education.

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