Modern Approaches to Inclusive Education of Children with Disabilities in Russia: Mini Review

Alexey Andreевич Dmitriev1*, Olga Nikolayevna Tverskaya2

1Moscow Region State University, 10A, Radio Str, Moscow 105005, Russia
2Perm State Humanitarian Pedagogical University, 24 Sibirskaya, 614990 Perm, Russia

Abstract

The article is devoted to the analysis of the present status of inclusive education of children with disabilities in the Russian Federation. It analyzes the existing normative-legal base of international and all-Russian level, availability and training of teachers who can implement inclusive education of such children. The article lists federal state educational standards, including the standards of higher special (defectological) education, of pre-school, primary, and secondary general education, which laid the scientific and methodological basis of inclusive education implementation by both teacher training and by the teaching process of children with disabilities within the system of general and special education.

Keywords

Inclusive education; Children with health disabilities; Convention; Federal State Educational Standards

Introduction

United Nations Convention “On the rights of persons with disabilities” was adopted by Resolution # 61/106 of the UN General Assembly on December 13, 2006. It enshrines the basic rights and freedom of people with disabilities, marking the first comprehensive human rights treaty of the twenty-first century and actually changing the world paradigm on approaches to persons with disabilities. This Convention was signed by more than 150 states and more than 120 countries, including our country, ratified it. Federal law # 46-FZ “On ratification of the UN Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities” from May 15, 2012 declares it.

Ratification of the Convention marks the state's intention to create the material basis for the invalid's complete life, for his/her being a full-fledged society member, and, what is especially important for education, the intention to develop the inclusive education system. Article 24 of the Convention and Act of the RF # 273 “On education in the Russian Federation” both declare it, that is, ratification of the Convention essentially determined the further development of the mechanism for implementing the ideology of inclusive education in our country.

The Convention admits that disability is an evolving notion that determines that a person is disabled not only because of his physical limitations but also because of the barriers that he has to face in the society.

If you think about the above-mentioned ideas, then all of us are in a kind of inclusive educational space, because each of us has a different education (psychological, linguistic, defectological, etc.) and we all feel that we are participants in the common objectives and tasks implementation in the further development of the educational system in our country.

We cannot say that in Russia there was no inclusive education of children with disabilities earlier—there was, of course, but it was called “integrated training” until 2007.

To understand the transformation of the term “integrated learning” into “inclusive education,” it is necessary to look into the recent past.

In 2001, Russia adopted the “concept of inclusion of persons with disabilities of different categories into the educational area of educational institutions of general type,”[1] pre-school institutions, schools, and specialized secondary and higher educational establishments. The document had twenty-five major statements.

We would like to draw your attention to these two terms: “inclusion” and “integration” being a union for implementation of some purposes. So, when we speak about the inclusive education of children with disabilities, or about their integrated training, we do not see much essential difference. We can only note that inclusive education is a new modern stage of integrated education development as a phenomenon. Also note that the English term “education” can also be translated as “training” in Russian.

To date, the concepts of inclusive education for children with disabilities get modern forms and content, take some finished format as a substantiation of the necessary, accessible, and barrier-free environment appropriate for education, upbringing, and formation of the disabled child’s personality as a whole. Today adapted programs are being developed for all categories of children with disabilities. They are adapted in our country while on many Russian territories, teachers-practitioners have been teaching children in integrated education classes for a long time already without waiting for such developments—they call them inclusive education classes [2-6].

Here it should be noted that in many regions of our country, territorial provisions on integrated teaching of disabled children were developed in 2008–2010. On their bases, such an education was implemented in the regions and is currently being followed; therefore, it should be noted that the UN Convention “On the rights of persons with disabilities” is being put into practice in Russia. Another thing is that

*Corresponding author: Dmitriev AA, Moscow Region State University, 10A, Radio str, Moscow 105005, Russia

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its full implementation lacks funds, trained personnel, logistics, etc. Yet where is 100% assistance available, and who today will define the 100% of financing needed? However, we must not forget the most important thing—children can’t wait until science and practice finally come to the conclusion in the realization of this idea.

Results and Discussion

The regulatory base for integrative and inclusive education is a series of international instruments: the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948); UN Convention “On the rights of the child” (1989); the UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education (1960); the Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities (UN General Assembly resolution, 1993); the Salamanca Statement on principles, policy, and practice in education for persons with special needs (1994); the Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities, UN (2006).


If one is to implement every law available on inclusive education today in Russia, there is quite a lot.

Practice-oriented foundations of inclusive education for disabled children are developed in educational organizations, starting with kindergartens, Federal State Educational Standards of higher, general, and pre-school education (Figure 1).

A thorough and insightful analysis presented in Figure 1 suggests that all the FSES contain both conceptual and practical frameworks of inclusive education implementation within a standard (preschool, primary, or secondary).

If we talk about preschool education FSES, we can say that it is literally saturated with inclusion and competencies, although they are never called so. But it’s a good start, and is the basic framework for the future development of different children—normal ones, disabled ones, immigrants’ children etc.

Primary general education FSES has Article 19.8., which states the program of corrective work. It aims at ensuring the correction of the deficiencies in the physical and (or) mental development of children with disabilities and in assisting such children in comprehension of the main educational program of basic primary education.

The program of corrective work aims at:

- identification of the special educational needs of children with disabilities resulting from deficiencies in their physical and (or) mental development;
- implementation of individually oriented psychological, medical, and pedagogical assistance for children with disabilities, taking into account the peculiarities of their psycho-physical development and children's individual capacities (in accordance with the recommendations of psychological, medical and pedagogical commission);
- opportunity for the children with disabilities to master the main educational program of basic primary education and to get a chance for their integration into the educational institution.

The content of this program of correction work reflects:

- the list, contents, and plan of implementation of individually oriented rehabilitative activities which meet the special educational needs of children with disabilities and their integration into the educational institution as well as their comprehension of the basic primary education program.
- the system of integrated psycho-medico-pedagogical control of disabled children in the educational process that includes psychological, medical, and pedagogical examination of children aiming at identifying their special educational needs, monitoring the dynamics of the children's development, their success in mastering the basic educational program of primary general education, adjustment of corrective actions;
- special conditions for training and teaching children with disabilities, including a barrier-free environment for their livelihoods, the use of special educational programs and methods of training and education, special textbooks and teaching materials, collective and individual teaching aids, an assistant’s service delivery, providing children with the necessary technical assistance, conducting group and individual remedial classes;
- mechanism of interaction in the development and implementation of corrective actions of teachers, specialists in the field of special education, health professionals in educational institutions, and other organizations specializing in family and other societal institutions that should be guaranteed in the unity of regular, overtime, and extracurricular activities;
- the planned results of corrective work.

The basic general education FSES has an Article 18.2.4. which states the program of corrective work that is also directed at the diagnosis and correction of mental and (or) physical development of children with disabilities, at overcoming difficulties in mastering the basic educational program of basic general education, and of assistance and support for children of this category.
The program provides and contains essentially the same items as the program of correction works in primary education FSES.

It is reasonable to raise the question: who is to implement this part of the program and these articles of the program? Of course, the teacher-defectologist should, which means the massive school, as well as kindergartens, will have to provide defectologists-teachers' jobs, as it has been done in our best schools, for example, by E. A. Yamburg [7].

While organizing and conducting the joint educational process of normal children with standard physiological development and for children with mental retardation, we have reflected on the issue of the condition and level of educational training of the both groups in the process of their studying. We'd like to understand how comparable their levels are, what get these and those in order to correctly plan the remedial educational activities with disabled children. It was necessary to understand and realize how useful and effective the process of inclusive education for children with mental retardation is, whether the enormous nervous and emotional load the primary schoolteacher bears is needed when the teacher works with two essentially very different groups of children, different in their level of training, their perception, thinking, and many other parameters of the children's mental development.

To realize this idea, we found it possible to undertake a comparative analysis of the residual knowledge in the first four grades of primary school. With this purpose, at the end of each tests, and then at the end of the school year, we conducted pilot cuts of the children's acquired knowledge in two main subjects—the Russian language and mathematics. For example, in the first term, the children learnt a certain amount of educational material guided by the standard school program for normal healthy students, which essentially lay at the heart of that residual knowledge which was tested in a general way. Together with the healthy children, disabled children wrote the same control works.

Of course, here you can talk about the correctness of the comparison and criticize us for it, but on the other hand, which is very important, in our view, the children weren't concerned here; the data received was not compared openly but was used solely for the purpose of formulating analytical parameters of the educational process, as well as with the aim of optimizing the construction of the further pedagogical remedial educational process for the children with delayed development. Since it was clear from the start that the children with delayed development were unable to master the program, it was necessary to understand what part of the program they actually could manage. This in turn was important primarily for the practice of education, for the teachers, who will plan the real component of their educational training.

Having spent a year in this mode, the teacher could go on real volumes of knowledge representation of such students, only after such a teaching algorithm, it was possible to imagine a real program of their study and knowledge consolidation. Only after such an experiment, one could create the adequate content of the adaptive educational programs.

Figure 2 presents the results of the experimental slices of the residual knowledge after the first term with the pupils of the first class, where the inclusive learning mode was suggested to four children with mental retardation and to sixteen children whom we call normal, physiologically healthy children.

The test results showed that the children with delayed development significantly lagged behind the healthy children in the volume of acquired knowledge. The amount of the healthy children's knowledge ranges from 20 to 37% in individual indicators, while the average data made 31% in Russian and 34% in mathematics. The results were about the same in the tests in other terms and in year-end tests, but here we would like to point out that by the end of the year the results of disabled children decreased by 3–7% compared to the healthy ones, which, in our view, is related to the complexity of programmes and, consequently, to the development lag in abstract thinking level of such infants.

From this example you can see that in mastering the knowledge the disabled children are significantly behind, they need a program different from that of the healthy children. Obviously, the teacher finds it quite difficult to work with different level groups too. Still, the children with delayed development became much more active socially and they had an increased level of socialization, in general, in comparison to their peers, whom we had observed in special schools. Our experience also shows that, of course, you can teach different level of children in such an inclusive mode, but you need to use appropriate remedial educational technologies. These children need help and support in the afternoon, they need a defectologist-teacher, a speech therapist and a psychologist, which is stated in the regulations of our modern education.

The program provides and contains essentially the same items as the program of correction works in primary education FSES.

The results of the residual knowledge tests in the Russian language and mathematics by students of the second grade, studying in the inclusive education mode.

Figure 3: The system of psycho-medico-pedagogical guarantee of special and inclusive education.

Next, a series of curricula in higher education system is designed and implemented; many Russian Universities offer such bachelor and master courses in the field of inclusive education. The system of teacher training in this area is being implemented.
The system of psycho-medico-pedagogical insurance of special and inclusive education has been working systematically for a long time in the form of psycho-medico-pedagogical commissions (PMPC) of different levels—from Federal to school conciliums (Figure 3).

In turn, the PMPC are included in various psychological-pedagogical and medico-social centers for diagnosis and advice. We should not forget about the medical and social assessment boards (MSAB)—very important structural units of medical and social support for both special and inclusive education, because this Commission determines the child's disability. A number of educational institutions, including kindergartens and schools, work in the inclusive education system, especially kindergartens.

Bachelor curricula of "Pedagogical education" specialty represent such a discipline as "Correctional pedagogy with the fundamentals of psychology", though 72 hours only (two credits).

Continuing to analyze Figure 1, we shall note that FSES for disabled children (2013) was divided by its developers into four levels—four options [8]. The first is for children with mild forms of pathologies or a variant of inclusive education, the second and the third are for children with middle forms of pathologies, and the fourth is for profound disabilities. In each version of the standard, such a thing as life competence is considered: it is an integrated set of knowledge and skills needed for social adaptation of the child.

The task of forming the vital competence and basic directions of corrective work is relevant to all the variants of the standard. At this, the meaning of the work at vital expertise formation, as we have already noted, increases from the first version to the fourth. In the first variant of the standard (inclusive) the work on the students' vital competence formation is the content of the correction program that supplements the basic educational program specified by FSES.

The second and the third variants of the standard differ from the first by the fact that the formation of life competence is included into the content of each educational field. It is the component of each discipline in all kinds of special (corrective) educational establishments, what is the tradition of Russian correcting pedagogics and special education system.

The fourth version of the standard is different from all the others by the fact that the formation of life competence makes the core content of special education and, accordingly, of the individually created program for each student.

In the last 10 years, some fairly active work devoted to the development of competence-approach problems was being done in defectology—both in higher and in special education. For example, I. M. Yakovleva's work of [9], is devoted to the formation of professional competence of an oligophren-pedagog-teacher. A number of doctoral and candidate theses on this subject were written in the special education system.

Thus, T. V. Tumanova's doctoral thesis [10] deals with the word-formation competence of children of preschool and primary school age with a general speech underdevelopment, where the author examines in detail, outlines these competencies, and suggests the system of its formation.


Finally, there are a number of publications from the Federal State Autonomous Institution "Institute of special education" RAS about the FSES project for disabled children [8] and on the formation of vital competence in children with disabilities, as well as foreign colleagues' publications [16-21].

Citing materials of this kind, I would like to say that there are quite a few achievements on the formation of disabled children's competences and students-defectologists' professional competences. Clearly, the time has come to implement such know-how into state standards for teachers, disability specialists, teachers of primary education, and preschool staff training. I think these are important problems in the content of higher special (defectological) education in the near future. So, for example, a teacher, working in a class of inclusive education should understand what competences he is going to form with healthy students and disabled children, and to which degree such a competence can be formed.

**Summary**

1. To date, it can be noted that in the Russian Federation a regulatory framework of inclusive education for disabled children has been established.
2. The level and condition of the psycho-medico-pedagogical management of such disabled children today are allowed to select the categories of children who, with their psycho-physical and intellectual potential, are capable of studying in the inclusive system, both at pre-school and at school.
3. Currently, the development of didactic education contents for the disabled children as adapted educational programs has been almost completed.
4. A lot of work is done all over the country to provide primary education teachers and kindergarten educators with higher qualification, that is, teaching the staff to implement the inclusive education for disabled children.

However, despite the considerable amount of work carried out, a further improving of the inclusive education legal framework at the Federal and municipal levels is needed as well as additional training for teachers, psychologists, and speech therapists for different groups of children with disabilities, taking into account the structure and depth of defects in their development.

**References**