

# *Some Notes on Higher Education Professional Training for Inclusive Education Teachers*

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**Abstract**—The article deals with the problem of future educators' professional readiness to work with special needs children within the system of inclusive education. The authors explain why it is essential to give the relevant professional training to teachers at all educational levels and prepare them for the participation in inclusive education. They also provide an analysis of the results of the research study which was carried out to estimate the preparedness of teachers and students for inclusive education implementation. The article details the concept of professional readiness as preparedness of future teachers to participate in inclusive education and specifies the structure of professional readiness which includes a number of components. The authors of the article propose a model of professional training for the bachelor's degree students which is aimed at engaging them in inclusive education; the key components of this model are described in the article. The authors present the modular approach which aim is to develop students' professional readiness. The article describes the special aspects and conditions for the implementation of the presented model as well as the procedures of its implementation applied at Orel State University named after I. Turgenev.

**Keywords**—*inclusive education; professional readiness development; children with special educational needs.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

The introduction of inclusive education concepts in Russia and worldwide requires a thorough and thoughtful evaluation of the existing higher education system for teaching staff training since it is an educator's and a teacher's professional readiness that plays a key role in successful adaptation of children with special needs to the general (secondary) education system (S.V. Alyohina, O.S. Kuzmina, N.Y. Semago, I.M. Yakovleva etc.). The majority of Russian and foreign scholars in a number of research papers consider the inclusion approach essential and rational and admit that special inclusive education training should be given to teachers of all academic specializations [1, 2]. From this perspective, a greater emphasis is placed on the development of a teacher's professional readiness to participate in inclusive education [1].

A research study was carried out at Orel State University named after I.S. Turgenev; the aim of this research was to define the structure of professional readiness for teachers

engaged in special needs inclusive education. The research work included reviewing the existing projects related to inclusive education in Russia and abroad, empirically studying professional readiness of both practising teachers and Bachelor of Education undergraduates and finally working out and applying the model of inclusive education professional training for teachers.

## II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The research that has been completed enables us to define teachers' readiness to participate in inclusive education as an integrative, both professional and personality-centred phenomenon which characteristic feature is possessing a certain mindset implying a teacher's active disposition and motivation to work with special needs children within inclusive education. This readiness is also observed through acquiring and applying special knowledge and skills necessary to participate in inclusive education. The basic features of professional readiness are: the goals set by inclusive education teachers, the structure of their work, a range of problems which teachers should solve and a set of professional functions they should perform to achieve the desired outcome [3].

The structure of professional readiness for inclusive education teachers includes a number of key components. The personal meaning component implies internal and external goals, teachers' motivation to offer inclusive education to special needs children, the ability to work within the inclusive education system as well as teachers' personal values, which become essential and consistent as they undergo reflective thinking. The importance and necessity of this component for a future inclusive education teacher is obvious, and a great number of research papers present their authors' ideas concerning this topic (T.V. Kozhekina, A.A. Sinyavskaya, et al.) [4].

The cognitive component includes the complex of special, methodological, theoretical and practical knowledge which is essential to carry out special needs inclusive education and necessary to comprehend the basic concepts of the inclusion approach.

The procedural component encompasses practical skills and competencies which can be used to apply methods, procedures, techniques and any means to achieve optimal

results in using the inclusion model for students with special educational needs [5]. This component includes a set of procedural characteristics of the inclusion process and also the ability of teachers to participate in inclusive education using their professional practical skills and pursuing relevant goals as well as it defines the readiness to set up a development-friendly environment and use various methods in teaching and child guidance. The procedural component also includes mastering modern techniques of managing special needs inclusive education.

The authors consider it possible and reasonable to introduce the developing of the above-mentioned professional readiness components as part of higher education training for students pursuing a bachelor's degree in Pedagogy (Education). Paragraph №12 of article №79 in The Law of the Russian Federation on Education points out that it is essential to offer teachers a professional training that will provide them with certain educational methods and techniques of working with special needs children [6]. It should be noted that in relation to inclusive education, this requirement means that it is not only a special education teacher or a speech-language pathologist with a full training for special needs education but also any teacher that should be competent in working with special needs children. "Any teacher" may refer to a special subject teacher, a music teacher, a physical education teacher or a counselor employed at any educational institution etc. However, the real situation shows that only special needs psychologists and special education teachers fully master the skills and techniques required to work with special needs children. Meanwhile, graduate teachers of preschool, primary, secondary and supplementary education have either scarce knowledge or no knowledge at all of the ways to organize their work within the inclusion educational system.

This research study aimed at estimating inclusive education professional readiness was carried out with participation of preschool teachers who work in general education institutions. The research showed that these teachers are generally unprepared to perform their professional functions with special needs children included into the educational process: 68% of respondents demonstrated the adaptive (low) level of inclusive education readiness while 32% showed the reproductive (satisfactory) level of inclusive education readiness. The reviewed research papers and the research studies that have been carried out prove that the attitude of secondary school teachers to inclusive education is the same [7]. Thus, one can state that there is certain deficiency of teachers' professional skills related to the inclusive education approach at different educational levels.

Teachers' lack of readiness to work with students within the inclusive education framework considerably decreases their professional competence and, thus, they have fewer opportunities to be employed. The authors consider that every student receiving training for Specialization 440000 "Education and Pedagogical sciences" must be prepared to work with special needs children within the inclusive education system while the inclusive education approach must be introduced in educational institutions at all stages [8].

### III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The competencies of the inclusive education approach must be a part of professional training standards for all pedagogical specializations and the development of the relevant competence can be best achieved through applying a special professional training model of inclusive education for Bachelor's degree students. The professional training model that the authors offer was applied at the Institute of pedagogy and psychology of Orel State University named after I. Turgenev. While implementing this approach, the authors took into consideration the following aspects: the process of development of teachers' inclusive education readiness is a subsystem within the whole system of teachers' higher education training; the goal of this process is to achieve a certain level of inclusive education readiness which should correspond to the specified criteria and indicators; the structural units of the model include both components of general teachers' training and additional components which together with the former provide the integrity of inclusive education readiness development. The foundation of the process of inclusive education readiness development for teachers is a step-wise and gradual implementation of the modular programme which implies acquiring specific knowledge and skills. The first module provides orientation and gives a basic framework of relevant knowledge, its aim is to help a student to initiate the comprehension of inclusive education basics. The implementation of this module included, first of all, the introduction of the academic discipline "The basics of special education and psychology" into the curricula of pedagogical students' training. While studying this discipline future educators learn about the basic groups of people with special needs, the peculiarities of their development and their basic needs related to education. The second module gave the opportunity to take up a course in Inclusive education and study the basic concepts and methods of inclusive education. This course was added to the basic curriculum for Bachelor's degree students specializing in Psychological and pedagogical education. The learning materials for this course were specially compiled to match the goal, the components and criteria of professional readiness. The authors believe that it is significant to include this academic discipline into the curricula of Bachelor's degree students of all pedagogical specializations. It is important to remark though that the contents of this academic discipline should reflect the specific features of each specialization respectively and definitely include the materials related to certain aspects of teaching a specific subject, for example, the aspects of teaching Physics in an inclusion class at a secondary school or the aspects of giving music lessons in an inclusion class etc. The third module was aimed at practical mastering of inclusive education techniques during both professional simulation and practical class work in accordance with a relevant specialization. This module should be regarded as the most important because its goal is to develop practical skills which come helpful in inclusive education implementation. The authors find it necessary to organize teaching practice and training workshops for Bachelor's degree undergraduates, who are future teachers, which should take place in educational institutions involving special needs children. Those can be secondary schools with inclusive

education, summer recreation camps for children, supplementary education institutions, lekoteks etc. The students who are trained in various specializations within Pedagogy (Education) can be active members of volunteer programs which quite often give help to people with disabilities through different social activities. The experience that students acquire as a result of such participation coupled with their theoretical knowledge will contribute to developing professional competence in inclusive education.

Besides offering the study of special disciplines and practical experience in inclusive education, a higher educational institution should create a certain educational environment which is to contribute to inclusive education introduction and help future teachers to shape up the skills they need to interact with special needs people. The significant aspect of preparing a teacher for inclusive education activities is forming a system of values or the axiological basis of the inclusion approach competence. The axiological basis in this case comprises the ability to feel empathy for special needs people, the willingness to give them help and the readiness to treat them as equal as well as the awareness of one's own responsibility as a culture bearer to convey the elements of cultural values to children with developmental disabilities etc. [4]. What can add to achieving this goal is the proper organization of interaction between undergraduates and special needs students within the same higher education environment. The willingness of a higher educational institution to give admission to people with different background is a key factor of the inclusive education approach efficiency [9, 10].

Orel State University named after I.S. Turgenev actively participates in the process of offering educational opportunities to special needs applicants. Every year, students with special needs, those having movement disorders and sensory processing disorders in particular, enter the university and successfully study pursuing various academic specializations. There is no discrimination whatsoever against the students with the disabilities at the university. The university provides all the possibilities to engage special needs students in the academic process as well as social cultural activities. It should be noted that students with health disorders do not demand any special attitude from either teachers or fellow students, and in some cases, they refuse having special learning conditions, such as extra time to prepare a task, a milder knowledge assessment approach or distance learning in case of some topics and, thus, one can observe that they wish to be equal to others having not only equal rights but also the same responsibilities. Special needs students are involved in leisure and extra-curricular activities at the university which is an essential aspect of their socialization in general and adjustment to higher education environment in particular. The educational work which is organized at the faculties is also intended for all the groups of students since all the events are held in easily accessible rooms and there is also sign language interpretation (if necessary) and special computer equipment available. The venues for offsite events (such as contests, festivals, exhibitions) are also easily accessible locations. All the students both with and without special educational needs are welcome to participate

in the work of the student government if they are willing to do it. Such arrangement of the academic process enables its participants to adopt the concepts of the inclusive education approach and to embrace tolerance which is one of the most important components of future educators' personal readiness to implement the inclusive education approach.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Considering everything that has been mentioned above, the authors can make a conclusion that future educators' readiness to work within the inclusive education system is an important factor of their professional and personal development; this phenomenon has a three-component structure and requires a complex approach in order to be developed through higher education training. This allows the research study to prove the effectiveness of using the integrative three-component model of inclusive education professional training for undergraduates pursuing a bachelor's degree in Pedagogy (Education) since this model provides gradual development of readiness components through consistent modular training. The model proposed above and the methods of its implementation in a higher educational institution make it possible to provide rational conditions for the effective training of Bachelor's degree undergraduates, future educators, for working within the inclusive education system. Such professional training should consider the axiological basis of teachers' inclusive education competence which reflects the presence of empathy for special needs people as well as the awareness of teachers' role as mediators, equal in rights and possibilities to their pupils, who should give knowledge to disabled students and convey cultural values to them. The achievement of this goal definitely depends on the creation of a proper higher education environment related to both physical accessibility and to a favorable emotional and psychological climate.

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