



**PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE OF EDUCATORS OF THE SYSTEM OF INCLUSIVE PRESCHOOL EDUCATION AS A CONDITION FOR SOCIOLIZING THE PHYSICALLY CHALLENGED CHILDREN**

**COMPETÊNCIA PROFISSIONAL DE EDUCADORES DO SISTEMA DE EDUCAÇÃO PRÉ-ESCOLAR INCLUSIVA COMO CONDIÇÃO PARA SOCIOLIZAR AS CRIANÇAS COM DEFICIÊNCIA FÍSICA**

**COMPETENCIA PROFESIONAL DE EDUCADORES DEL SISTEMA DE EDUCACIÓN PRÉ-ESCOLAR INCLUSIVA COMO CONDICIO PARA SOCIOLIZAR COMO CRIANÇAS COM DEFICIÊNCIA FÍSICA**

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**Abstract:** An important condition ensuring the adaptability of educational environment, hence, socialization of physically challenged children under inclusive conditions, is the competence of specialists implemented under new professional circumstances. Special attention should be paid to professional competence of specialists under inclusion in the system of preschool education. The theoretical analysis of the issue of professional competence of pedagogues in the practice of inclusive preschool education is reflected in the Russian and foreign researches, which testifies to the topicality of the issue. The research objectives are: to describe the conceptual basis of professional competence of the pedagogues of the system of inclusive preschool education (by the example of combined groups), which consists of cognitive, operational-functional and personality components; to prove the influence of professional competence of the pedagogues under inclusion on socialization of preschool physically challenged children. The practical part of the research was carried out by the following methods: analysis of scientific psychological-pedagogical sources, dissertations on the topic; summarization of theoretical conceptions; comparative analysis of the practices of inclusive education; questioning; interviews with various categories of specialists; analysis of the process and products of activities; mathematical processing of the results. The research results allowed identifying the key features of professional competence of the pedagogues of inclusive preschool educational establishments, which not only provide the efficient psychological-pedagogical support of physically challenged children, but also serve as the condition for socialization of these preschool children.

**Keywords:** Professional Competence. Competencies. Inclusive Preschool Education. Physically Challenged Children.

**Resumo:** Uma condição importante que garante a adaptabilidade do ambiente educacional, portanto, a socialização de crianças com deficiência física em condições inclusivas é a competência de especialistas

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implementados sob novas circunstâncias profissionais. Atenção especial deve ser dada à competência profissional de especialistas que estão sendo incluídos no sistema de educação pré-escolar. A análise teórica da questão da competência profissional dos pedagogos na prática da educação pré-escolar inclusiva é refletida nas pesquisas russas e estrangeiras, o que atesta a atualidade da questão. Os objetivos da pesquisa são: descrever a base conceitual da competência profissional dos pedagogos do sistema de educação pré-escolar inclusiva (pelo exemplo de grupos combinados), que consiste em componentes cognitivos, operacional-funcionais e de personalidade; comprovar a influência da competência profissional dos pedagogos incluídos na socialização de crianças com deficiência física pré-escolar. A parte prática da pesquisa foi realizada pelos seguintes métodos: análise de fontes psicopedagógicas científicas, dissertações sobre o tema; sumarização de concepções teóricas; análise comparativa das práticas de educação inclusiva; questionamento; entrevistas com várias categorias de especialistas; análise do processo e produtos das atividades; processamento matemático dos resultados. Os resultados da pesquisa permitiram identificar as principais características da competência profissional dos pedagogos de estabelecimentos de ensino pré-escolar inclusivos, que não apenas fornecem o apoio psicopedagógico eficiente de crianças com deficiência física, mas também servem como condição para a socialização dessas crianças em idade pré-escolar.

**Palavras-chave:** Competência Profissional. Competências. Educação Pré-escolar Inclusiva. Crianças com Deficiência Física.

**Resumen:** Una condición importante que garantiza la adaptabilidad del entorno educativo, por lo tanto, la socialización de los niños con discapacidades físicas en condiciones inclusivas, es competencia de especialistas implementados en nuevas circunstancias profesionales. Se debe prestar especial atención a la competencia profesional de los especialistas incluidos en el sistema de educación preescolar. El análisis teórico del tema de la competencia profesional de los pedagogos en la práctica de la educación preescolar inclusiva se refleja en las investigaciones rusas y extranjeras, lo que demuestra la actualidad del tema. Los objetivos de la investigación son: describir la base conceptual de la competencia profesional de los pedagogos del sistema de educación preescolar inclusiva (por el ejemplo de grupos combinados), que consiste en componentes cognitivos, operacionales-funcionales y de personalidad; para demostrar la influencia de la competencia profesional de los pedagogos incluidos en la socialización de niños preescolares con discapacidades físicas. La parte práctica de la investigación se llevó a cabo mediante los siguientes métodos: análisis de fuentes científicas psicopedagógicas, disertaciones sobre el tema; resumen de concepciones teóricas; análisis comparativo de las prácticas de educación inclusiva; interrogatorio; entrevistas con diversas categorías de especialistas; análisis del proceso y productos de actividades; procesamiento matemático de los resultados. Los resultados de la investigación permitieron identificar las características clave de la competencia profesional de los pedagogos de los establecimientos educativos preescolares inclusivos, que no solo brindan el apoyo psicológico-pedagógico eficiente de los niños con discapacidades físicas, sino que también sirven como condición para la socialización de estos niños en edad preescolar.

**Palabras clave:** Competencia Profesional. Competencias. Educación Preescolar Inclusiva. Niños con Discapacidades Físicas.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

In the recent years, inclusive processes in education set the pace of development of educational systems in many countries, Russian Federation among them. Inclusive education implies involving physically challenged students into a single educational process together with their healthy peers.



By statistical data, the number of physically challenged and disabled children in preschool educational establishments in the Russian Federation increases every year. In 2016, the number of physically challenged and disabled children in the total number of children attending preschool educational establishments was 6.7% (by the data of various researches – from 5 to 8% of the total number of children).

In 2016/2017, the system of preschool education comprised over 25,900 groups of compensating orientation, attended by 305,292 children; 12,224 groups of combined orientation, attended by 51,992 physically challenged children; 270,854 groups of general development orientation attended by 39,772 physically challenged children; 4,023 groups of health improving orientation, attended by 5,727 children with psycho-physical divergences.

In Lipetsk oblast, there are 92 kindergartens with groups of compensating orientation, accommodated for attendance by physically disabled and physically challenged children; this makes 28% of the total number of preschool educational establishments. These groups are intended for children with impaired sight, hearing, locomotor apparatus, retarded mental development, and other divergences.

By the beginning of 2017, kindergartens in Lipetsk were attended by 2748 physically challenged children, which is 5% of the total number of children attending kindergartens.

In 322 kindergartens of Lipetsk oblast (74 – in Lipetsk) there are about 108 combined groups with about 2640 children.

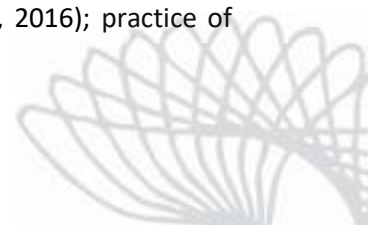
The growth of the number of physically challenged children and, due to this, significant changes taking place in the Russian educational system make researchers solve the complex tasks of providing the quality training of would-be pedagogues, enhancing their qualification and ensuring retraining of the already working specialists, so that they could effectively solve the professional issues within the frameworks of their competencies under inclusive education.

The research objective is to describe the conceptual basis of professional competence of the pedagogues of the system of inclusive preschool education (by the example of combined groups), which consists of cognitive, operational-functional and personality components; to prove the influence of professional competence of the pedagogues under inclusion on socialization of preschool physically challenged children.

## 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

As stipulated by Federal Law “On education in the Russian Federation”, provision of equal access to education for all children with the account of special educational needs and individual capabilities is denoted by the term “inclusive” (French *inclusif*, from Latin *include* - *comprise*, *contain*, *involve*, *embrace*, *comprehend*) education (Federal Law, 2012).

Research by the European and the USA scholars are carried out in various directions of inclusive education: philosophical-methodological aspects of inclusive education (Bartolo et al., 2016); practice of



inclusion at the level of preschool and secondary school education (Polivara et al., 2017; Stemberger and Kiswarday, 2018); competence of specialists of preschool establishments within the structure of inclusive educational practice (Hannas and Hanssen, 2016); interaction of all participants of educational process as a condition for successful inclusion of physically challenged children into the environment of their healthy peers (Levchenko, 2015); attitude of preschool teachers to inclusive education (Lohmann et al., 2016); competencies of preschool teachers as the necessary prerequisite for implementing inclusion at preschool establishments, their training as an important factor in developing these competences (Milenkovic et al., 2016).

Russian researchers focused at such topics as: philosophical and methodological bases of inclusive education (Malofeev, 2000; Nazarova, 2011; Purgina, 2014; etc.); formation of inclusive educational environment and interaction of its participants (Kozhekina, 2013; Tsyrenov, 2015; etc.); enhancing qualification of practicing pedagogues and other pedagogical personnel (pedagogues-psychologists, special education teachers, etc.) for working under inclusive education (Alekhina et al., 2011; Alekhina, 2014; Akhmetova et al., 2013; Alekhina and Kutepova, 2013; etc.).

N. N. Malofeev notes that the need for inclusive approach to education of disabled children is determined by the social and state order at a certain stage of economic, cultural and legal development. The researcher states that this stage occurred due to the recognition of equal rights of the disabled and physically challenged persons by the society and the state (Malofeev, 2000).

J. Corbett distinguishes three aspects influencing the development of culture of an educational establishment: underlying personal attitudes (beliefs and fears) of pedagogues, determined by the specific features of physically challenged children; prejudices of healthy children towards their physically challenged peers; tolerance towards uniting with the children representing a cultural minority. Thus, J. Corbett denoted the aspects providing formation of the culture of inclusive education (Corbet, 1999).

British researchers R. Bond and E. Castagnera believe that the success of inclusive education is provided by applying various means of pedagogical support and guidance of physically challenged children. In their opinion, such guidance should be provided not only by pedagogues, but also from healthy students, which is denoted as Class-Wide Peer Tutoring (CWPT) and cross-age tutoring (Liventseva, 2011).

In the context of the present research, of special interest are the publications devoted to forming the inclusive competence of pedagogues, determining the methodological approaches to working under inclusion and techniques for such work (Denisova et al., 2013; Saitgalieva, 2015; Khafizullina, 2008; etc.).

Professional competence of pedagogues was actively studied and discussed in psychological-pedagogical literature in the 1990s.

Most scholars view professional competence as one of the key features of a personality, promoting the efficiency of professional activity (D. M. Grishin, N. V. Kuzmina, A. K. Markova, etc.).



The issue of forming the professional competence of preschool teachers is reflected in the works by A. A. Mayer, M. I. Lukyanova, E. E. Symanyuk, etc. The essence of professional competence of preschool teachers is viewed as their ability to ensure the emotional wellbeing of preschool children, to maintain their initiative and individuality.

Analysis of interpretations of the notion “competence” by different authors showed that this phenomenon is viewed as a characteristic in a specialist’s training, while its constituents are competencies.

We support the opinion by G. I. Zakharova, who understands “professional competence” as an integrative personality property of a pedagogue characterizing his/her awareness in the sphere of professional activity, based on acquirements, skills and personal experience (Zakharova, 1998).

Today, professional competence of specialists for the system of inclusive education is studied by S. V. Alekhina, M. N. Alekseeva, and E. L. Agafonova, O. S. Kuzmina, etc., within the frameworks of personality-functional, axiological, competence and other approaches. The theoretical analysis enables to determine such constituents in the structure of professional competence of inclusive preschool teachers as: personality, value, cognitive, activity and reflexive (Alekhina et al., 2011; Kuzmina, 2015).

A. K. Markova asserts that, during training, the constituents of professional competence of a pedagogue should be formed: professional (objectively necessary) pedagogical knowledge (gnostical component); professional pedagogical attitudes of a teacher, necessary in the profession (value-meaning component); professional (objectively necessary) pedagogical skills (activity component); personality traits, providing the mastering of professional knowledge and skills by a teacher (personality component) (Markova, 1993, p.11).

L. M. Mitina distinguishes the activity, communication and personality substructures in the structure of a pedagogue’s professional competence (Mitina, 2010).

Attempts are made to define the content and structure of professional competence of specialists in the system of inclusive preschool education (Alekhina et al., 2011; Alekhina, 2014; Denisova et al., 2013; Sabelnikova, 2009; Saitgalieva, 2015; Khafizullina, 2008).

Based on the above, we define the professional competence of pedagogues of inclusive preschool educational establishments as integrity of professional and personality traits necessary for successful pedagogical activity during implementation of inclusive education of preschool children.

### 3 METHODOLOGY

The research hypothesis is as follows. We hypothesize that the professional competence of pedagogues of the system of inclusive preschool education, comprising the cognitive, operational-functional and personality components, serves as the condition for socialization of physically challenged children.



The task of the first stage of research was to reveal the level of development of professional competence of pedagogues of the system of inclusive preschool education.

The experiment was performed during 2017-2018. The respondents were 80 pedagogues (preschool teachers, music teachers, pedagogues-psychologists) – full-time personnel of combined groups of preschool educational establishments of Lipetsk and Lipetsk oblast. The average age of the respondents was 35 years; 71% of the respondents have higher professional education; the average working experience was 12 years.

The cognitive component of professional competence of pedagogues of the system of inclusive preschool education was identified by questioning. The questionnaires used were L. M. Mitina's "I and inclusive education", part 1, and "Indicators of activity of a preschool teacher implementing inclusive practice" by S. K. Nartova-Bochaver and E. V. Samsonova (Mitina, 2010; Makarov, 2011; Nartova-Bochaver and Samsonova, 2012).

The operational-functional component was assessed by expertise of the process and products of activity. The techniques for estimating the features of operational-functional component of the pedagogues were: modified questionnaire "Self-analysis of difficulties in teacher's activity" (Mitina, 2010; Gorbunova and Tsvelyukh, 2006).

The personality (motivation-value) component of professional competence was assessed by questioning and expert methods. To characterize this component, we used "I and inclusive education" questionnaire by L. M. Mitina and the modified techniques: estimation of teacher's work (questions for indicator 1) (L. M. Mitina), diagnostics of professional pedagogical tolerance (Yu. A. Makarov) (Mitina, 2010; Makarov, 2011).

The modifications of techniques by L. N. Gorbunova, Yu. A. Makarov, L. M. Mitina, I. P. Tsvelyukh consisted in changing certain questions to take into account the age category of children and their state of health.

## 4 RESULTS

The quantitative indicators showed a low level of development of all components of professional competence in pedagogues (cognitive component – in 50.5%; operational-functional component – in 47.8%; personality component – in 48.5%).

Within the cognitive component of professional competence of pedagogues, the majority of the respondents showed limited knowledge in the sphere of special education and prospects of its development; the respondents showed insufficient knowledge of the key documents providing the rights of physically challenged children (in most cases, Convention on the Rights of the Child was mentioned). Many pedagogues do not distinguish between the notions of "integration" and "inclusion". The majority of the respondents showed vague knowledge about psycho-motor development of physically challenged children. Most





pedagogues (about 70%) are not acquainted with the specific features of teaching the physically challenged children, as well as with the specific features of inclusive education. At the same time, all research participants admitted that they had faced the need to arrange educational process in combined groups attended by both healthy and physically challenged children. Only 40% of pedagogues have experience of working with physically challenged children; the same number of the respondents have theoretical knowledge about inclusive education (principles, tasks, etc.).

The expertise of video recordings of the respondents' lessons in combined groups attended by physically challenged children revealed the low level of operational-functional component in 44% of the pedagogues, middle level – in 45% of the pedagogues (had difficulties with rendering individual support and correctional assistance to physically challenged children), and only 11% of the pedagogues demonstrated the high level of acceptance of this category of children. Most teachers did not involve a physically challenged child into discussing the tasks (60% of the pedagogues); did not use any special methods and techniques of organizing attention of physically challenged children (70% of the pedagogues). Such lessons demonstrate the unawareness of special educational needs of physically challenged children, as well as insufficient awareness about the possible emotional problems of such children and the necessity to organize additional psychological support for them.

The expertise of the products of activity of pedagogues showed that the majority of teachers did not elaborate individual or adapted educational programs or individual educational routes. The analysis of prospective year plans showed that 20% of the respondents did not differentiate the goals and objectives; 46% of the pedagogues demonstrated inconsistency with the principles of inclusive education; in 63% cases there was mismatch between the planned results and individual features of the children; 32% of the pedagogues had no section "Psychological-pedagogical support of physically challenged children" in their plans.

The analysis of compendiums of educational activity showed that 35% of the pedagogues used tasks and exercises of different levels, various techniques of organizing children's activity, including physically challenged children. However, 60% of the respondents had difficulties in defining the special conditions of correctional-educational process with physically challenged children.

The value attitude towards physically challenged children and the inclusive education per se was demonstrated by only 20% of the pedagogues of combined preschool groups. In their answers they interpreted the essence of inclusive education as the opportunity to be humane or tolerant towards physically challenged children; granting all children the equal rights and opportunities for acquiring education (*"The purpose of inclusion is to teach children accept every person as he/she is"*). Such interpretation of the purpose of inclusive education shows that they comprehend the value of acquiring diversified social experience by the healthy and physically challenged children.



At the same time, an acute problem for the pedagogues is their willingness to work with physically challenged children, as well as to organize the educational process in preschool educational establishments with both healthy and physically challenged children. Such willingness was only shown by 30% of the respondents. The majority of the respondents explained their unwillingness by the lack of special knowledge about the features of physically challenged children and about the inclusive process per se.

The results of questioning showed interest of the pedagogues in acquiring the necessary knowledge in the sphere of special pedagogy and value attitude towards physically challenged children in 17% of the pedagogues; the interest towards inclusive education and unwillingness to work under it was demonstrated by 69% of the respondents, while 14% of the respondents showed low interest and only studied this problem due to necessity.

To assess the personality (motivational-value) component, the pedagogues had to choose the statements reflecting their professional activity. 12% of the pedagogues with low tolerance were revealed. 54% of the pedagogues demonstrated middle level of tolerance. Their answers were less categorical than those of the group with low tolerance (*"If I ever punish a child, it is just a pedagogical technique aimed at developing the child's necessary living skills"*).

The high level of pedagogical tolerance was revealed in 34% of the respondents. Most often, the respondents chose the answer: *"Whatever a child does, he/she is not guilty, as he/she is a child"*.

## 5 DISCUSSION

Summarizing the 1<sup>st</sup> stage of experimental work, one may make the following conclusions.

1. The predominantly low level of development of the cognitive component of professional competence is explained by the fact that only one third of the pedagogues are aware of the specificity of inclusive education, its normative-legal basis, and experience of implementing inclusive education in our country and abroad.

2. The low level of development of the operational-functional component of professional competence of pedagogues under inclusion is determined by the fact that the pedagogues are not able to project the correctional-educational measures, do not master the techniques of organizing inclusive education at preschool educational establishments, and cannot adequately support each physically challenged child in the inclusive educational environment.

3. The predominantly low and middle level of development of the personality component of professional competence under inclusive preschool education is due to the fact that a significant number of pedagogues are psychologically not ready to work under inclusion.

The results of the 1<sup>st</sup> stage of experimental work allowed revealing within professional competence:





- the cognitive component: high level – in 10.2% of the respondents, middle level – in 37.3% of the respondents, and low level – in 52.5% of the pedagogues;
- the operational-functional component: 11.6% of the pedagogues have high level of this component, 39.1% of the pedagogues have middle level, and 49.3% of the respondents have low level;
- the personality (motivational-value) component: high level – in 10.7% of the respondents, middle level – in 39.3% of the respondents, and low level – in 49.7% of the pedagogues.

The second stage of the experiment consisted in revealing the influence of professional competence of preschool teachers working at inclusive preschool educational establishments on socialization of physically challenged children.

Socialization of physically challenged children is one of the key indicators of efficiency of inclusive education. According to S. A. Kalashnikova, N. V. Miklyaeva, L. M. Shipitsyna, the negative aspects of development of such children are the defects of their socialization, which are manifested in the fragmentariness of their knowledge about social norms, underdeveloped skills of social communication and interaction, lack of understanding of the meaning and direction of socially-significant behavior (Kalashnikova, 2016; Miklyaeva, 2012; Shipitsyna, 2005).

The bases for the research of children's socialization were preschool educational establishments Nos. 32, 36, 40 (city of Elets). Six-year-old physically challenged children took part in the experiment. To study the emotional sphere of children, determining aggression, its orientation and intensity, a graphic technique "Cactus" by M. A. Panfilova was used. To study the level of self-assessment of children, a technique "Staircase" by V. G. Shchur was used. A technique "Houses" by O. A. Orekhova was used for researching the degree of the emotional sphere differentiation, the development of spiritual values, and the development of activity orientations in physically challenged children.

The analysis of the emotional sphere (technique "Houses") showed that the children with the first type of emotional sphere development (expressed preference for positive and rejection of negative emotional categories) constituted 10% of the total. The number of children with the second type of emotional sphere development was 20%. This group is characterized by unambiguity of emotional attitude both to the positive and negative categories, defects in the development of the emotional sphere structure, lack of differentiation between emotions. 50% of children showed the third type of emotional sphere development, characterized by preference for negative and rejection of positive emotional attitudes.

The technique "Cactus" by M. A. Panfilova revealed aggression and overrated self-concept in 32% of children. The emotional sphere of these children is characterized by negativism and rejection of positive emotional attitudes, lack of differentiation between emotions. 48% of physically challenged preschool children manifested anxiety combined with caution and reticence. Only 10% of children manifested expressed optimism, emotional elevation and extraversion.



Interpretation of the results by V. G. Shchur's technique showed that in 35% of children overrated self-concept prevails. Preschool children place themselves on a high step, which does not correlate with ideas of other people about them. 52% of children manifest underrated self-concept: they place themselves on a low step, express lack of self-confidence, anxiety. Only 17% of physically challenged preschool children have adequate self-concept; they explain their actions through the real situation and their own achievements.

By the research results, reliable differences were established between the data obtained by "Cactus" and "Houses" techniques, and the indicators of professional competence of pedagogues (Mann-Whitney U-criterion).

It was shown that the children, whose teachers had middle level of the cognitive component of professional competence, have higher results by "Cactus" technique ( $1.12 \pm 0.72$  at the significance level  $\leq 0.05$  by Mann-Whitney U-criterion), than the children whose teachers had low level of the development of that component ( $0.50 \pm 0.60$  at the significance level  $\leq 0.05$  by Mann-Whitney U-criterion). Consequently, the study of the experience of inclusive education by preschool teachers working under inclusion will normalize the state of emotional sphere of children, hence, increase the efficiency of socialization of physically challenged children.

It was revealed that the children, whose teachers had high level of the personality component of professional competence, have a reliably better state of emotional sphere than the children whose teachers had middle level of this component. Hence, it is necessary to develop a more positive attitude to physically challenged children and organization of their educational process.

## 6 CONCLUSION

The described conceptual basis of professional competence of pedagogues of inclusive preschool education, which comprises the cognitive, operational-functional and personality components, enables to state the limited knowledge of special pedagogy in such aspects as age and individual (psychological and physiological) features of physically challenged children; the diagnostic methods allowing to identify the topical problems and potential capabilities of each child in a preschool group; the methods and techniques of psycho-physical development correction. One may also note the insufficient level of skills in creating the correctional-developmental environment, organization of interaction, joint activity and communication of healthy and physically challenged children.

Transition of the preschool teachers, working under inclusion, to the new quality level of theoretical knowledge, implementation of the obtained knowledge in practice, and the positive attitude towards physically challenged children and the overall process of inclusive education will optimize the process of socialization of physically challenged preschool children within the environment of a preschool educational establishment.



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