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EVALUATION OF OPPORTUNITIES AND KEY PROBLEMS OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION ON BOTH BANKS OF THE DNIESTER

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The article presents the results of a study of the conditions of inclusive education in educational institutions on the banks of the Dniester. We hereby propose the ways to improve the situation, taking into account the level of development of the educational system on each river bank in the framework of providing equal access for all children to quality educational services.

Keywords: *inclusive education, friendly educational environment, children with special educational needs, children with disabilities, barrier-free architectural educational environment.*

EVALUAREA OPORTUNITĂȚILOR ȘI A PROBLEMELOR-CHEIE ALE EDUCAȚIEI INCLUZIVE DE PE AMBELE MALURI ALE NISTRULUI

Articolul prezintă rezultatele unui studiu pedagogic asupra condițiilor educației incluzive în instituțiile de învățământ de pe ambele maluri ale Nistrului. În baza acestuia, se propun modalități de îmbunătățire a situației, ținând cont de nivelul de dezvoltare a sistemului educațional în fiecare context, în vederea oferirii accesului egal tuturor copiilor la servicii educaționale de calitate.

Cuvinte-cheie: *educație incluzivă, mediu educațional prietenos, copii cu nevoi educaționale speciale, copii cu dizabilități, spațiu educațional fără bariere.*

Introduction

Inclusive education is a continuous process of change and development of the educational system and institutions in order to turn the school into a friendly and accessible educational environment. Such educational services should be available in all schools and provide the possibility of individual and group work, including personal interaction, distance learning and using web services.

The development and theoretical and methodological justification of the conditions for the formation of the teacher's competencies for organizing an inclusive educational environment in a comprehensive school will expand the practice of inclusive education on both banks of the Dniester.

We assume that the leading role in the organization of inclusive education belongs to the formed universal competencies of the teacher, which allow providing effective conditions for children development, regardless of their level of ability. Universal competencies are represented by pedagogical skills for the development of students' communicative skills, the organization of barrier-free spatial environment and the individualization of the educational process.

The basis for determining the level of teachers' and mentors' competencies in terms of organizing and supporting an inclusive educational environment was the text of the "golden" rules for creating an inclusive environment by L. Kandu¹.

- Qualities necessary for an effective teacher within inclusive education system - professional skills, experience, approaches.
- The most important elements in the learning process for students such as organization, teaching style, curriculum and assessment of the child's achievements in relation to its dynamics.
- Avoiding "labeling" and categorization of needs.
- Expanding the definition of which groups should be considered as part of the educational process providing access to services.
- Children with disabilities is a separate group of people with special educational needs within the educational continuum of individual needs.

¹ L. Kandu. *Understanding and meeting the needs of children in inclusive classes. A manual for teachers.* Chisinau, UNESCO, 2003.

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The study involves assessing the opportunities and key problems of inclusive education in schools on both banks of the Dniester River, being a starting point for measuring subsequent changes, which would provide a "benchmark" for the level of representation of inclusive practices and the mentality of the population on both river banks. This action will allow determining the "road map" for changes, taking into account the available capabilities of each coast.

The aim of the study is to obtain basic information about the current assessment of the conditions of inclusive education on both banks of the Dniester. This assessment will identify the needs of beneficiaries and stakeholders in inclusive education. This will allow us to ascertain the level of created opportunities for equal access of children to educational services on both banks of the river Dniester through a synthesis of information from the results of the survey, interviews and focus groups with teachers, managers, parents and government officials.

The study is based on the definition of inclusive education, which is a synthesis of definitions originating from the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UN, 1948). The concept of inclusive education is enhanced by such authoritative organizations as UNESCO, UNICEF, and the WORLD BANK: "Inclusive education is an educational process that takes into account individual differences of children, promotes the learning process and meets the individual needs of the student".

The main assumption and the working hypothesis of the study is that inclusive education is able to provide all children with equal access to quality educational services if the education Managers have competencies in managing and creating an architectural barrier-free environment, as well as through the development of competencies for teachers to include all the children in educational process.

The introduction of inclusive education is an expensive arrangement; therefore, taking into account the peculiarities of the architectural environment by managers and the presence of appropriate competencies among teachers can justify significant investments in terms of time, human and material resources.

Methods and materials

To carry out a full assessment of the level of inclusive education development on both banks of the Dniester we have made:

- analysis of regulatory documents on inclusive education on both river banks;
- we have studied the models of organizing an inclusive educational process in several European countries;
- a quantitative analysis of the problem on the basis of a survey of teachers and authorities from both banks of the Dniester;
- we have carefully analyzed in-depth interviews with administration, parents and representatives of educational institutions, as well as reports of focus group discussions.

To collect data on the current situation in inclusive education on both banks of the Dniester, we have used a mixed approach, which involves quantitative methods (questionnaires) and qualitative methods (interviews and focus group discussions).

The survey was attended by 234 educators (managers and teachers) from 9 pilot educational institutions on both banks of the Dniester. On the left bank 108 people were interviewed, including 103 teachers and 5 managers. On the right bank, 126 people were interviewed, including 118 teachers and 8 managers.

In addition, a discussion was organized on the issue of introducing inclusive education in two focus groups of 12 people in 2 schools (Comrat, Tiraspol). We have conducted 8 in-depth interviews with pilot schools' authorities, parents and public authorities in the field of education from both banks of the Dniester.

Based on the scientific and pedagogical literature studies, we have developed a questionnaire for educators, the purpose of which was to determine the level of representation of pedagogical competencies that contribute to the effective children inclusion. The list of questions in the questionnaire consisted of a set of competencies, combined in four blocks, each representing pedagogical skills needed for effective organization and support of a friendly educational environment in relation to children.

So, in the first block we included general pedagogical competencies, implying recognition and respect for the diversity of people. An inclusive educational process involves the creation of an educational situation in which students themselves determine how to work with their classmates. These skills include the competencies of teachers in organizing and planning lesson activities, organizational and methodological skills. In inclusive

education pedagogical intuition is very important, it allows choosing the appropriate way to comfort the student or offer him the best way of motivating to continue working. The block of these competencies included:

- treat all children equally regardless of opportunities and features;
- do not rush children on the answer, as well as provide them with additional time to complete tasks;
- set no more than 1 task, ask direct questions, consolidate the theory with practical skills;
- maintain a minimum noise level in the group or class;
- be able to organize a lesson so that the number of pauses or breaks was at least 2;
- eliminate annoying and distracting factors in the classroom;
- be able to emphasize the basic ideas of the new material at least 3 times during the lesson;
- encourage all creative activities of children.

The second block of the questionnaire on the self-assessment of educators included questions on determining the level of competencies in organizing communication during the lesson between teacher and students. Communication is of great importance in education, it implies constant interaction between teachers and pupils. Teachers should use clear and understandable language in their communication and be able to visualize information for visuals and to audit for auditory learners. The definition of the level of organization of communication by the teacher during the lesson is represented by the following competencies:

- to speak clearly and concisely;
- to create and maintain a positive atmosphere in the classroom;
- to notify the child of his actions before committing an action in relation to him;
- to provide the child with a choice to respond verbally or in writing;
- to organize the work in pairs or groups;
- to focus on children's communication skills;
- to develop a code of effective communication with parents and children in a group or class;
- to be guided by the following rule: the eyes of the child should be at the eye level of the teacher;
- to avoid sudden abrupt movements in the classroom.

A school is not just an educational space; it serves as a cultural environment. A properly organized architectural environment of the school may act as a powerful educational factor in developing a tolerant attitude towards people with special needs. Within a single class, the teacher is able to organize the space in the classroom so that children could study comfortably. To do so you need to take into account where and with whom you should seat a child with special needs, apply visualization of the material, work with children according to the rule and model. The third block of the questionnaire included questions regarding competencies in organizing the spatial environment. To determine the level of teacher's skills for organizing a spatial environment for a lesson it is required a sufficient level of the following competencies:

- to organize the space in the classroom so that the places for children with special needs were behind the first desks, with accessibility for wheelchairs, closer to the window for children with visual disorder, etc. The rest of the seats to be located symmetrically, facing each other, so that it is possible to organize the group work;
- to organize the space so that successful learners with a high concentration of attention and emotionally stable nervous system were sitting next to children with special needs;
- to constantly apply interactive teaching methods, mind maps, mnemonics, pictograms;
- to maximally visualize the studied material;
- to use the methods of working according to the rule model.

Children with special needs need help and support, so they will learn better if the "teaching-learning- assessment process" is directed to their specific needs. The fourth block of the questionnaire includes competencies that determine the ability of the teacher to organize assistance and support for the student. This block includes the following competencies:

- to contact a child with special needs only face to face;
- to provide the number of rewards and praises for children according to the formula 3 to 1, and for children with special needs - 10 to 1. The first figure is the number of rewards; the second figure is the number of corrections;
- to provide children with physical and emotional contact: a handshake, applause, etc.;
- to emphasize the strengths of the learner while teaching;

- to evaluate the achievements of the child in relation to his own development;
- to draw up an individual work plan;
- to organize the work of the whole class taking into account the implementation of individual plans of students;
- not to compare children with each other;
- not to indulge the whims of the child and respond to whims through their quiet disregard.

Low marks of teachers during self-examination will indicate the need for the formation of specific pedagogical competencies that are the basis for mental changes in behavior: the position of the teacher in the lesson, the supporting work mode, logical and consistent process of learning, fixing key concepts for better learning by students.

Results and discussions

The analysis of the legal framework for the provision of equal rights to education on the territories of both banks of the Dniester shows a significant gap in the legal framework regulating the foundations and mechanisms of inclusive education. Out of 10 key documents that determine the basis of inclusive education and are valid on the right bank, there are only four of them on the left bank. The following documents do not exist in the legal field of Transnistria:

- Strategy "Education for All";
- Strategy for the social integration of persons with disabilities;
- Education development strategy;
- Quality standards for elementary and secondary schools in terms of a child-friendly school;
- Inclusive Education Development Program;
- Action plan for the implementation of the Inclusive Education Development Program.

Taking into consideration that the right-bank regions of the Republic of Moldova are focused on the pan-European educational space, and the left-bank is more aligned to the educational system of Russia, it should be noted that the fundamental difference between the approaches to creating conditions for equal access to educational services is to determine the target group of beneficiaries for inclusive education. Thus, the regulatory framework of the Republic of Moldova (right bank) is focused on integrating a wider category of vulnerable children into a single educational space: children with disabilities, children with HIV status, children from low-income families, migrant children, Roma children and others. The analysis of Russia regulatory framework showed a significant development of documents to include mainly handicapped children and children with disabilities in a single environment.

The Transdnestrian region significantly lags behind both the right-bank education system of Moldova and of Russia in legal regulation which educational space is declared at the official level.

In our opinion, in the conditions of small territories and limited resources it is more expedient to consider a wide category of children as beneficiaries of inclusive education.

European countries (Poland, Romania, Finland) demonstrate different forms of inclusive education, but are unanimous in defining three levels of inclusion (full, partial and home schooling).

This approach allows you to take into account the peculiarities of the mentality and provides opportunities for a varied approach to the organization of inclusive education. Most countries have inclusive education vertical, which is represented by the work of the state structure, municipal centers under Education Directorates, many schools have institutional resource centers.

The results of a survey of educators on both banks of the Dniester allow us to make the following conclusions:

1. The majority of respondents on both banks of the Dniester (79%) believe that modern education needs inclusive education.

2. Only half of the surveyed teachers from both banks of the Dniester can correctly understand the meaning of the concept of "inclusive education" (most of them are teachers from the right bank). Only 16% of left-bank teachers correctly understand the essence of inclusive education.

3. More than 40% of respondents do not have experience in inclusive education.

4. More than half of the teachers surveyed were never taught the skills of working in an inclusive education.

5. None of the respondents is familiar with the features of barrier-free architectural and spatial educational environment (with the exception of ramps).

6. The main difficulties that teachers experience are in teaching methods, lesson content development, organizing the spatial environment and evaluating students' academic achievements regarding their own development.

The results of a survey of educators on Block 1 "General Pedagogical Competencies", involving the recognition and respect by the teacher of the diversity of people as everyone's natural right to education and development, showed the following:

№	Survey questions	Teachers on the right bank	Teachers on the left bank
1.	Are not sure if they can relate equally to all children in the classroom	58%	61%
2.	Cannot but rush children with the answer and provide them with additional time to complete the tasks	49%	54%
3.	The competence to ask children direct questions and fix the theory with practical skills	57%	56%
4.	Cannot stand working noise in the classroom	63%	62%
5.	Forget to provide dynamic pauses when planning a lesson	58%	63%
6.	Cannot eliminate annoying and distracting factors for children in the lesson	79%	74%
7.	Do not consider it important to do at least 3 times per lesson the emphasis on the basic ideas of the new material	44%	46%
8.	Do not consider it necessary to encourage all creative activities of children	24%	30%

Thus, more than 60% of education workers on both banks demonstrate the need for strict discipline in the lesson, which does not correspond to the concept of creating a friendly environment, and they do not often use forms of work in small groups and pairs.

The results of the survey of educators on Block 2 "Competencies for organizing communication in the lesson with the teacher and students" showed that:

№	Survey questions	Teachers on the right bank	Teachers on the left bank
1.	The ability to speak clearly, concretely and not verbose is not sufficiently developed	53%	51%
2.	Competencies for creating and supporting a positive atmosphere in the classroom	41%	41%
3.	Do not consider it necessary and important to notify a child with disabilities of their actions before committing an action against him	54%	45%
4.	Do not consider it necessary to give the child a choice to respond verbally or in writing	33%	37%
5.	Are unsure of their skills in organizing classes to work in pairs or groups	33%	39%
6.	Forget to focus their pedagogical efforts on communicative skills of children	56%	62%
7.	The skill to develop a code of effective communication with parents and children in a group or in class is not sufficiently developed	61%	74%
8.	Do not consider it important to be guided by the rule: keep the eyes of the child at the eye level of the teacher when referring to a child with disabilities	50%	60%
9.	Do not consider it important to avoid sudden movements in the classroom	55%	46%

The analysis of results of the second block makes it possible to note the need for additional training for teachers on competencies for working with parents and concentration of efforts to develop communication skills of students.

The results of the survey of educators on Block 3 "The competencies of the teachers for adaptation and transformation of the pedagogical educational environment" allow us to state that:

№	Survey questions	Teachers on the right bank	Teachers on the left bank
1.	Assess their ability to organize space in the classroom as insufficient	60%	67%
2.	Do not know how to organize the space so that successful students with a high concentration of attention and emotionally stable nervous system could sit next to children with disabilities	59%	60%
3.	Do not use on a regular basis interactive teaching methods, mental cards, mnemonics, and pictograms	76%	92%
4.	The skill of visualization of the studied material is not formed	70%	74%
5.	Do not use the methods of working with students according to the rule and example	44%	45%

The results of the answers in this block showed a high need for the development of skills in organizing the spatial environment, use of interactive and visualizing methods.

The results of the survey of educators in Block 4 "Individualization and integration of educational programs" demonstrate the following:

№	Survey questions	Teachers on the right bank	Teachers on the left bank
1.	The skill of creating a situation of success is insufficiently developed	64%	77%
2.	Do not consider it important to provide children with physical and emotional contact: handshakes, applause, etc.	40%	39%
3.	Require the development of a skill to rely on students' strengths	35%	41%
4.	Experience difficulties in assessing the achievement of the child in relation to their own development	48%	43%
5.	Consider it necessary to develop the ability to draw up an individual work plan	35%	47%
6.	Experience difficulties in organizing the work of the whole class, taking into account the implementation of individual plans of students	55%	55%
7.	Cannot but compare children with each other	34%	47%
8.	Consider it necessary to further develop the ability to calmly respond to the vagaries of a child through their ignoring	68%	71%

Comprehensive interviews were conducted with the following target audiences: heads of educational institutions (v. Vadul-Rashkov, Soldanesh district, Comrat, Dubossary), government representatives of education departments (Comrat, Dubossary), parents of children with disabilities and children with typical development (Comrat, Dubossary). The main purpose of the interview is to get an idea of the perception and readiness for the organization of inclusive education for all participants in the educational process. All interviews were conducted on the basis of the voluntary wish of the participants.

Key interview questions were as follows:

1. Do respondents consider inclusive education a useful phenomenon for children with disabilities?
2. Can inclusive education be effective for children with typical development?
3. What can hinder the expansion of inclusive education?
4. Can the pedagogical competencies of inclusive education increase the effectiveness of the teacher as a whole?
5. What changes does education need in terms of teacher work, administration and working with parents so that inclusive education could become a real practice?

The generalized results of interviews and focus group studies showed the following results.

The participants attributed to the desired changes in the work of teachers: willingness to adopt a philosophy of inclusive education, the ability to work on individual programs, ability to apply different forms of presenting the information, personal and professional growth of a teacher, and exchange of experience through an open educational environment.

Transformations in the work of the school administration that can improve the implementation of inclusive education are as follows: a team approach to organizing inclusive education, providing normative, material

and technical equipment, optimizing workflow and developing the competence of the entire teaching staff to implement inclusive education.

According to respondents, work with parents at school should begin with the formation of a positive attitude towards the idea of inclusive education and people with special needs. Forms and mechanisms for involving all parents in the educational process should be sought. Partnerships with parents need to be improved through transparency and accessibility of information.

The results of the responses allow us to identify external and internal obstacles that differ on each bank of the Dniester.

External obstacles include:

Right bank

- Increase in payment, increase in the number of hours, decrease in the number of children.
- Opening of resource centers in each school.
- Lack of a clear normative regulation of the conditions of inclusive education (the number of children in the class with full inclusion, etc.).
- A mechanism for the inclusion of individual educational programs in the general system is required that is legally fixed and understandable for implementation.

Left bank

- Lack of regulatory framework and material and technical conditions.
- Lack of republican, municipal and institutional support services for inclusive education (resource centers)
- Lack of a clear normative regulation of the conditions of inclusive education (the number of children in the class with full inclusion, etc.).
- Lack of a normatively fixed and understandable mechanism for the inclusion of individual educational programs in the overall system.

The internal barriers to the implementation of inclusive education on both banks of the Dniester include:

- The need for managers to learn the basics of transforming the architectural educational environment of inclusive education.
- Developing skills to strengthen partnerships between the community, parents and educators.
- Organization of a systematic and focused work of the school to overcome the stereotypes of parents and the rest of the community in terms of including everyone in a single social system.
- The involvement of the administration in the planning and monitoring of inclusive education should not be based on a formal, but on a real basis.
- The teacher needs additional teaching tools and skills to integrate children with special needs and with typical development and methods of conducting inclusive lessons in teaching.

Conclusions

All study participants believe that for children with special educational needs the benefits of inclusive education are obvious. All participants indicate the need for socialization for children with disabilities and creation of conditions for this.

Interviewees from both banks of the Dniester note that the benefits of inclusive education will be for children with typical development through the development of charity, mutual assistance skills, and communication, which can improve the student's attitude to the world as a whole.

The level of pedagogical competencies in the field of inclusive education of all educators should be increased, but the right-bank teachers have much more specific competencies and work experience in this area. A number of schools from the right bank of the Dniester demonstrate a new philosophy of education: preparing children for life, not for exams (ProSucces school in Chisinau, A. Donici elementary school, Cahul).

Among the reasons that impede the implementation of IE, target groups noted a negative attitude of the society towards the idea of inclusive education, insufficient willingness of teachers, lack of staff at the school to solve the tasks of IE, difficult cases with aggressive children. The situation is aggravated by the lack of authority of the school to decide on the degree to which the child is included in inclusive education. A significant obstacle is the parents who are opposed to such coeducation.

Not all respondents believe that the teacher's ability to work with children with disabilities will be useful for other students.

The analysis allows us to state a significant evolution of the right-bank schools of Moldova in the implementation of inclusive education and, accordingly, providing equal opportunities for quality education for children, regardless of opportunities.

In schools on the left bank of Moldova, a wide segregation of children into specialized schools is continuing due to the type of limitation of health opportunities. In addition to this, in many ordinary schools there are specialized classes for "difficult" children or "leveling" classes, which aggravates discrimination against children in the same school. There are no specialists in education departments to provide assistance and support to schools in which children with disabilities can study. There are no resource centers at schools to assist children, teachers and parents working with this category of children. In accordance with this, at the moment in the system of advanced training of teachers at the budgetary expense, education on inclusive education competencies is not provided. At the same time, according to the report of the Ministry of Education of the region, more than 5,000 children need servants of inclusive education.

The first step in aligning the opportunities for equal access to quality educational services on the left bank can be the development and introduction of the minimum necessary regulatory framework governing the integration of children with special educational needs.

From the statements made during the study, a number of recommendations can be made regarding initiatives aimed at improving the inclusion of children with special educational needs in the unified educational environment.

1. Support from government bodies in charge of education in the development of supporting documentation to expand educational inclusion, including changed in the architectural educational environment.

2. When developing regulatory aspects for the left-bank region, which is located in a small territorial extent and compact population, being limited in resources, it is more expedient to consider as a beneficiary of inclusive education a wide category of children (children with disabilities, handicapped children, children with HIV status, children from low-income families, migrant children, Roma children and others).

3. Organization of teacher training to expand the range of methods and processes used in teaching. Particular attention should be paid to the development among teachers of competencies in organizing an individual approach, and among education managers – the skills to change the barrier-free architectural environment of institutions in the context of its accessibility for everyone, regardless of capabilities.

In addition, at training events attention should be paid to the consideration of issues related to the training of teachers in team interaction in the mixed education of children. It is important to develop the teacher's work skills in the conditions of IE by analogy with work in a low-grade school, as well as to learn to adopt the pedagogical technology "In the corner on the rug".

4. Education managers should be trained in working with the community, especially with parents, to overcome stereotypes about people with disabilities. It is advisable to study the experience of Romania in creating a school-family-community partnership that supports such children.

5. A training manual should be developed for educators to help create "flexible" lessons in an inclusive education environment.

6. Create web communities of practitioners working in the field of inclusive education who are interested and motivated to develop inclusive education on both banks of the Dniester.

7. Create a databank of teaching materials on inclusive education to support beginning teachers and to generalize the effective experience of inclusive education on both banks.

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