

CHALLENGES OF TEAM-BASED TRAINING FOR EDUCATORS

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Summary

The article addresses the critical challenges of forming interdisciplinary teams in special and inclusive education and evaluates the effectiveness of team-building training for future professionals (Speech-language Therapists). Based on a literature review of international practices (2021–2025), the authors identify key barriers: role ambiguity, communication gaps between pedagogical and medical staff, lack of co-teaching skills, and emotional distance in family partnerships. The study presents the results of an updated "Team Building Training" program at Borys Grinchenko Kyiv Metropolitan University. A survey of 35 students (30.4% response rate) demonstrated a significant positive impact: 87% of respondents reported high or sufficient levels of improvement in understanding support team operations, communication (soft skills), and collaboration. Correlation analysis ($p = 0.892$) confirmed a strong link between communication skills and effective teamwork. Qualitative data highlighted that students most valued interpersonal bonding and practical case-solving, confirming the training's success in bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and collaborative practice. The empirical part of the study focuses on the internal dynamics of professional competence development through quantitative and qualitative indicators. Statistical processing of the data revealed a strong positive correlation between communication skills and the effectiveness of teamwork, as well as between collaborative interaction and a clear cognitive understanding of the support team's structure. Qualitative analysis of open-ended questions showed that students prioritized "interpersonal bonding" and "practical case modeling" as the most valuable resources for their future careers. These findings suggest that addressing the "soft skills" deficit is a primary factor in increasing the resilience of special education teams to professional burnout and ensuring a non-formal approach to inclusion.

Key words: team building, training, professionals of special education, inclusive education, soft skills, interdisciplinary collaboration.

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1. Introduction

Contemporary assistance for children with special needs extends beyond special education alone. According to Ukrainian and international research, an interdisciplinary approach

and team-based activity serve as the primary effective strategies in this field. However, scholars note a series of challenges in implementing these strategies. Within the system of training special education professionals, there are tools for developing teamwork skills, specifically training technologies. There is a need to ascertain the success of these tools and their alignment with current societal needs and global trends. These considerations helped outline **the purpose of this study**: to analyze contemporary challenges in the work of support teams and the success of addressing them through team-building training for students.

2. Review of literature

Research into international experiences regarding the work of support teams and the challenges their participants encounter reveals several distinct characteristics.

The works of Gilson & Biggs (2024) and Yates et al. (2025) uncover the existence of role ambiguity and difficulties in hierarchical relationships among team members. Researchers note that teacher assistants may not clearly understand their duties, while teachers often lack sufficient experience in interacting with and managing another adult in the classroom. This situation creates emotional tension between the adult team members, which hinders the child's learning (Gilson & Biggs, 2024; Yates et al., 2025).

Communication difficulties among team members are identified by Campbell et al. (2025), Kungwane & Boaduo (2021), and Sanford et al. (2022), specifically barriers encountered while developing a unified strategy for child support between pedagogical and medical professionals (Campbell et al., 2025; Kungwane & Boaduo 2021; Sanford et al. 2022).

The work of Brooks et al. (2023) draws attention to obstacles in collaborating with parents: emotional barriers regarding the parents' state, which leads to distancing or conflict instead of partnership (Brooks et al., 2023).

Research by Weiss & Rodgers (2025) reveals conceptual challenges such as the lack of co-teaching skills among educators. Consequently, the child does not participate actively in classroom activities, and inclusion remains formal, losing its core meaning (Weiss, M. P., & Rodgers, 2025). Another deficit regarding social competencies was identified by Shkoda et al. (2022): even young professionals do not possess a sufficient level of soft skills. An educator who cannot communicate successfully themselves is unlikely to effectively teach a child good communication. This aspect causes low resilience of the support team to emotional burnout (Shkoda et al., 2022).

Analysis of INJOE (2025) data and research in the Netherlands (Willemse et al., 2023) reveals organizational challenges in the work of support teams within the inclusive educational space. Some schools lack holistic school-wide support for inclusion; therefore, a specialist in such a classroom remains alone and in a certain state of isolation with the difficulties of such work. The absence of systemic administrative support leads to the fading of inclusive practice (Willemse et al., 2023).

The identified difficulties and the generalization of teaching experience in the "Team Building Training" discipline for students specializing in 016 Special Education (Speech and Language Therapist) led to a revision and update of the curriculum. Professional-oriented practical sessions were introduced. Specifically, exercises for modeling introduction situations and discussions between support team members and the family/child based on real cases were added. The number of exercises for participants' introduction and for improving interaction skills (both verbal and non-verbal) was increased. Exercises for developing skills in leading

discussions and formulating arguments and counter-arguments on selected topics were also utilized.

To evaluate the effectiveness of the changes made to the curriculum after the training, a student survey was conducted. The questionnaire was formulated according to the following parameters: understanding of the support team's work in an educational institution (cognitive aspect), improvement of communication skills with peers (soft skills), and improvement of cooperation with peers (interaction efficiency). Two open-ended questions were added: "What did you remember most during the training?" and "What was the benefit for you in completing the training?". The results of the survey are presented below.

3. Methodology

A survey was conducted among undergraduate (Bachelor's level) students in their 2nd and 3rd years of study, specializing in Special Education (Speech and Language Therapist) at the Faculty of Psychology, Social Work, and Special Education of Borys Grinchenko Kyiv Metropolitan University. The survey included closed-ended questions with answer options evaluated on a five-point scale, where: 1 – low level (not changed at all), 2 – insufficient (changed slightly), 3 – average (improved moderately), 4 – sufficient (improved), 5 – high level (improved significantly). Two open-ended questions were also used, the answers to which were analyzed based on content and quantity. The survey was anonymous and did not collect personal information.

4. Results

35 respondents participated in the survey out of a total of 115 2nd and 3rd-year students. Thus, 30.4% agreed to express their opinion and evaluate the success of the training. The quantitative results of the participants' effectiveness are presented in Table 1 across three parameters: understanding of support team operations, communication improvement, and cooperation improvement.

Table 1

The effectiveness of the "Team Building Training" according to the evaluation of applicants

№	Parameters	Low level	Insufficient level	Average level	Sufficient level	High level
1	Understanding of the work of the support team in an educational institution	0	3	9	13	75
2	Improving communication skills with classmates	0	3	12	22	63
3	Improving cooperation with classmates	0	6	6	25	63
	Together	0	4	9	20	67

The data in the table allow us to state that in general 87% of respondents assessed their achievements at a sufficient and high level, 9% at an average level, and 4% at an insufficient level. It should be noted that the available low-level assessments for all parameters are insignificant 3% and 6%. Such data indicate an improvement at an average and higher level of understanding of the support team's work, communication skills, and cooperation with classmates.

The obtained data were analyzed for the presence of a correlation relationship by the Pearson coefficient at a significance level of $p < 0.05$, which are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Correlation between evaluation parameters

Parameters	1	2	3
1	-		
2	0.795	-	
3	0.823	0.892	-

The obtained data showed a strong positive relationship between all parameters. The strongest relationship was found between "improvement of communication skills with classmates" and "improvement of cooperation with classmates" 0.892 at $p < 0.05$. With a slightly lower correlation value (0.823 at $p < 0.05$), a strong positive relationship was established between "improvement of cooperation with classmates" and "understandability of the work of the support team". A smaller degree of positive correlation (0.795 at $p < 0.05$) was determined between "understandability of the work of the support team" and "improvement of communication skills with classmates". Thus, we can state that students significantly improved their communication skills and team interaction with classmates and improved their understanding of the work of the support team in the educational institution.

The analysis of respondents' answers to open questions is presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Distribution by rank of respondents' answers to open-ended questions

Answer rank	What was most memorable?	What was the benefit to me?
1	Getting to know your classmates	Getting to know and bond with fellow classmates
2	Group building exercises	Improving communication skills (flexibility, openness, expressing your thoughts more clearly)
3	Case discussions, simulation of the support team	New knowledge about the support team, understanding different aspects of its work

The tables show that among the survey participants' answers, the most common options are "getting to know classmates", "getting to know and getting closer to classmates". According to the students, the training allowed them to improve their communication skills (soft skills): to be more open and flexible during communication, to express their thoughts more clearly. The third rank was given to answers indicating the importance of practical case studies, modeling real actions of the support team members.

The results of the survey of higher education students who participated in the "Team Building Training" course have the following features. The sample of respondents was 30.4% (35 people) of the total number of students who completed this training. This level of sampling

is a representative indicator for the educational industry set by SurveyMonkey, SurveyAnyplace, HubSpot (*What's the Industry Standard...*, 2025) and sufficient to reflect the opinions of its participants. The survey was attended by female students of 2-3 years of study at the first (bachelor's) level of higher education.

According to the answers to the questions on a 5-point evaluation system, it can be summarized that the respondents at a sufficient and high level increased their understanding of the work of the support team in the educational institution (88%), their communication skills (85%) and cooperation (88%) with classmates.

Qualitative analysis of the answers to the open-ended question about what was most memorable during the study and what benefit the study had for the student showed the following differences. The higher rank (more mentions) was given to the answers about improving and deepening acquaintance between group participants, emotional rapprochement. This result demonstrates the presence of positive interpersonal changes between applicants.

The second rank among the answers was given to those indicating an increase in communication skills (soft skills), which are part of the structure of key competencies of this specialty. The ability to communicate effectively will increase the competitiveness of special education in the labor market.

The answers of applicants about improving the understanding and awareness of the essence of the work of the support team in educational institutions, which includes a speech therapist, received the third rank among all options. This aspect testifies in favor of improving the cognitive component of learning outcomes in the discipline "Team Building Training".

Correlation analysis of the data demonstrated a strong relationship between "improvement of communication skills with classmates" and "improvement of cooperation with classmates" 0.892 at $p < 0.05$. These data illustrate the relationship between communication skills and cooperation skills, which are key for teamwork.

5. Discussion

The findings of this study confirm that the integration of team-building training into the curriculum for future Speech and Language Therapists directly addresses the systemic gaps identified in contemporary inclusive education research.

Addressing Role Ambiguity and Collaboration Barriers. Our results show that 88% of students significantly improved their understanding of the support team's operations. This is particularly relevant in light of research by Gilson & Biggs (2024) and Yates et al. (2025), who emphasize that role ambiguity between teachers and assistants is a primary source of tension in inclusive settings. By using the Belbin Team Role test and modeling real-world cases, our training provided students with a structured framework to navigate these hierarchical and functional complexities. The strong correlation between cognitive understanding and interaction efficiency ($p = 0.823$) suggests that when students grasp the "logics" of a support team, their practical readiness for collaboration increases proportionally.

The Primacy of Soft Skills in Professional Longevity. A key highlight of the study is the exceptionally strong correlation between communication skills and teamwork success ($p = 0.892$). This aligns with the arguments of Shkoda et al. (2022) regarding teamwork as a vital component of social competence. The fact that students ranked "interpersonal bonding" and "flexibility" as the most valuable outcomes supports the idea that for a Speech and Language Therapist, communication is not merely a tool for therapy but a fundamental survival skill

within a multidisciplinary team. As Weiss & Rodgers (2025) noted, the transition to genuine co-teaching requires more than technical knowledge; it requires the relational depth that our training aimed to cultivate.

Bridging the "Medical-Pedagogical" Gap. The communication barriers between medical and pedagogical staff described by Campbell et al. (2025) and Sanford et al. (2022) were addressed through the practical modeling of IRC (Inclusion-Resource Center) cases. Our qualitative data, where students highlighted "modeling real actions" as a top-tier benefit, suggests that simulation-based learning is an effective antidote to the "siloes" working culture. By practicing interdisciplinary dialogue in a safe training environment, future specialists develop a "common language" before entering professional practice.

Resilience to Burnout through School-Wide Support. Finally, the organizational challenges and isolation mentioned by Willemse et al. (2023) and INJOE (2025) underscore the importance of the emotional z-score of the team. The "emotional bonding" reported by our respondents is not just a pleasant side effect; it is a protective factor. When students feel part of a "Learning Community" (Yates & Hord, 2023), they are less likely to experience the isolation that often leads to the fading of inclusive practices.

Limitations and Future Directions. While the response rate of 30.4% is consistent with industry standards for voluntary surveys (SurveyMonkey, 2025), the sample was exclusively female, which reflects the current demographics of the Speech and Language Therapy field in Ukraine but may limit the generalizability of the findings regarding gender-specific team dynamics. Future research should explore the long-term impact of such training by tracking these students during their professional internship phase to see how these "soft skills" translate into sustained inclusive practices.

6. Conclusions

The generalization of the obtained quantitative and qualitative data of the survey of students participating in the "Team Building Training" allows us to come to the following conclusions.

The educational discipline "Team Building Training" is an effective tool for overcoming the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical challenges of inclusion. The high level of satisfaction (87% of respondents assessed the results at sufficient and high levels) indicates that the content of the program meets the current needs of future specialists. The identified strong correlation ($p=0.892$) between communication skills and cooperation efficiency proves that the development of soft skills is the foundation for the professional stability of the support team.

The main factors of the success of the updated program were:

Practical-oriented modeling. The processing of real cases and role-playing games allowed students to reduce the level of anxiety about future professional interaction and better understand the structure of hierarchical relationships in the team.

Social and psychological capital. The highest ranking in the students' responses ("acquaintance and emotional closeness") emphasizes that creating a safe interpersonal space is a necessary condition for the formation of professional identity.

Interactivity and flexibility. The use of non-verbal exercises and discussion panels contributed to the development of adaptability, which is critically important in working with children with SEN and their families.

Despite the positive results, the analysis identified areas for further development:

Strengthening the Co-teaching block: Given global trends, it is worth adding more exercises to practice specific co-teaching techniques in an inclusive classroom.

Working with conflict scenarios: In response to the challenges of role ambiguity, it is advisable to include blocks on mediation and resolving hierarchical conflicts within the "teacher-assistant" team.

Systematic involvement: The survey participation rate (30.4%), although representative, indicates the need to find additional methods of motivating students to reflect and provide feedback.

The specified content features and trends are not exhaustive and require further clarification when developing other components of the readiness of future special education professionals to support students with autism.

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