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COVID-19 CHALLENGES FOR INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

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In the last few decades the recognition of students with special needs has increased significantly that presupposes the necessity of their receiving a broad, well-balanced and relevant education. The problems of socialization as well as supportive school programs for launching a process of their adjustment to educational environment and self-evaluation are in the scope of sociological, psychological, methodological, and pedagogical studies nowadays.

During the COVID-19 pandemic education systems around the world need urgent change as permanent quarantines require transformation of the educational process and it is time to adapt learning environment to students with special educational needs that will allow them to study effectively. In this concern, consideration of the appropriate strategies of teaching English as a foreign language to students with special educational needs that will supply their psychological adaptation is relevant.

The purpose of our survey is to identify the main obstacles that educators face in teaching inclusive classes during the pandemic period and to analyze the experience of different countries in these harsh conditions.

From a sociological perspective people with learning problems or disabilities that make their studying harder than most children of the same age undergo stress, cope with life hardships, changes of values, and experience disability issues across their lifespan. They have to deal with the consequences of negative attitude towards people with disabilities as a whole, and it is the task of professionals to assist them with adjusting. Nevertheless, some families, despite having children with severe disabilities have still managed their successful psychological adaptation.

Inclusive education is a way of acquiring new knowledge and skills by children with special educational needs included in the General Education program that will ultimately influence their further attitudes, decisions and actions. It helps develop children's cognitive abilities, provides them with the opportunity to socialize. Most countries in the world at the beginning of the COVID-19 outbreak urgently decided to transfer educational institutions to distance (online) mode. However, children with special educational needs and teachers face certain challenges in distance education [3].

Schools and teachers in Ukraine have rather low readiness in either educating abilities or material advancement to meet the special needs of students. In Soviet Ukraine, children with inabilities were taught in special schools but nowadays in Canada, the USA and European countries there is an impressive experience in involving children with special educational needs to study within the closest state schools.

Nowadays institutions and individual teachers from around the world deal with the issue of combining distance and inclusive learning environment with the task of ensuring the fulfillment of the right of all children to educate. The main challenges of inclusive education during the pandemic are [4]:

1. Providing students with technical facilities. These include difficulties with access to the Internet, lack of equipment for families, as well as problems with digitizing educational materials.

2. Adaptation of educational products, developmental and corrective techniques to the online mode. There is a problem of translating teaching aids (games, visual aids, developmental simulators, correctional aids) into electronic format. Some materials (for example, books for visually impaired children) cannot be submitted electronically.

3. Unwillingness and inability of parents and guardians to assist students during classes remotely. Children with special educational needs need the presence of an assistant at least at some stages of classes to help them with the connection of equipment, additional explanations of instructions, monitoring the child's health, because it is quite difficult to do to the teacher «through the screen». Many parents and guardians work while children attend classes, that also creates inconvenience.

4. New challenges for teacher–assistant/teacher–parent interaction.

With the transition to distance learning, the need for communication and interaction between teachers and parents is much greater than before. In order to ensure the most effective learning for a child, communication between parents and teachers must be constant and detailed. One of the tips that researchers highlight for this problem is to create an observation of the student at home, this is especially important in the first weeks of distance learning. The teacher, in turn, can then adapt the learning strategies according to the child's condition at a particular time.

5. Psychological health of all participants in the educational process. A new schedule, new ways of communication, the inability to physically attend school and see classmates or teachers – all these have a negative impact on the emotional and psychological state of the child. The need to change approaches to learning puts pressure on teachers who urgently need to readjust and change a lot of material, and on parents who need to organize their child's learning differently.

6. Lack of additional training of school staff. With the transition to a new type of work, it is useful to conduct training for teachers, principals and school methodologists to ensure a quality educational process to facilitate adaptation to the digital format of education.

N. Gladkikh [1] identifies four main principles of distance learning and inclusive education, namely:

1. The principle of interactivity (interaction of students with each other and with teachers).

2. The principle of differentiation (application of technologies of different levels of learning).

3. The principle of individual approach (taking into account the individual characteristics of the child's perception according to the type of violation).

4. The principle of flexibility (taking into account the peculiarities of the pace of perception of information by a child with special educational needs).

Experts of the New Ukrainian School highlight several features of distance learning in inclusive classrooms:

1. Transition from a direct model of learning to coaching (the teacher does not have close contact with the child, but advises parents on learning).

2. Synchronous and asynchronous learning (lessons in online mode, recording video lessons for self-study by the student and a combination of these methods).

3. Visual material – use for learning things that can be found at home.

4. Sustainability of training (maintaining the same training schedule).

5. Taking into account the safety and health of a child with special educational needs [1].

Countries around the world began to take measures to adapt the learning process to the needs of inclusion, as well as implemented various programs to support students, families, teachers. etc. [2]. Initiatives of communities and NGOs, including international ones (UNICEF) [4], provided support to children, their families and teachers during the transition to distance learning (for example, the Portuguese organization of psychologists, the Special Friends Network in Ontario, Canada [5]). These projects are aimed at effective education and socialization of children, even if secondary schools are closed.

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced governments around the world to take urgent actions to protect the health and lives of the population. Schools have largely switched to distance education, but teachers and students are still facing the problems with access to learning resources and difficulties in adapting to a new mode of teaching / studying. Inclusive education is suffering from new challenges, as it used to be completely dependent on the physical involvement of all participants in the educational process. Schools relied heavily on the help of governments and public organisations.

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