

Conference Paper

Readiness of Higher Education Institutions Faculty Staff to Work in Inclusive Groups

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Abstract

Inclusive education is regarded as a valuable resource for the development of Russian society. Teachers play a distinctive role in its implementation. The study of this role is based on the principles of structural and functional and systemic approaches, as well as the sociology of education, the sociology of culture, pedagogy, psychology, and the monitoring of inclusive education. The empirical basis of the research was formed by the materials of a quantitative, representative sample and sociological study of the readiness of teachers of higher education institutions to work in inclusive groups, in which students with disabilities are studying. A total of 777 teachers from 23 universities in Sverdlovsk, Chelyabinsk, and Kurgan regions were interviewed in November 2019. The analysis showed that most teachers of higher education institutions support the idea of inclusive education, as well as are ready to work in inclusive groups and have a need for professional training on inclusive higher education. The overwhelming majority of teachers of higher education institutions in the region do not experience any particular psychological difficulties and methodological challenges in working with streams and groups with students with disabilities. Teachers with longstanding teaching experience, associate professors, professors, and people with good knowledge of inclusive education express a greater interest in working with inclusive groups. At the same time, a significant number of teachers of higher education institutions in the region do not support the idea of teaching people with disabilities in inclusive groups. Some teachers are not familiar with or lack knowledge in the concept of inclusive higher education, and they also point to psychological and methodological problems when working in inclusive groups, which is particularly characteristic of young teachers and those who have not taken advanced training on inclusive education. In order to increase the role and responsibility of the teaching staff in inclusive education, it is recommended to continue monitoring it by reaching out to every inclusive group, student, and teacher.

Keywords: inclusive higher education, monitoring studies, teacher, student, people with disabilities

1. Introduction

The implementation of the ideas of inclusive education is one of the current trends in the educational policy of Russia. The development of domestic inclusive education is enshrined in the federal law “On Education in the Russian Federation” (2012), as well as

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in various state programs of the Russian Federation and federal state educational standards of higher education. At the current stage of development of inclusive education in higher education institutions, the requirements to the qualification of teachers and their ability to work with different students, while choosing the necessary educational technologies, significantly increase.

In recent years, Russia has accumulated a certain amount of experience in inclusive education. It is implemented in general education schools and vocational education institutions. The necessary material and technical resources are being created and developed on a systematic basis, and the training of teachers is being conducted. At the same time, in the course of the implementation of such education, both students and teachers found themselves in new challenging conditions. There are also difficulties, problems, and contradictions. The differences in its starting conditions by regions and by organizations, the non-acceptance and unpreparedness of some teachers to work in an inclusive environment, and the unfamiliarity with the peculiarities of inclusive education is evident as well. These and other problems are studied by sociologists, teachers and psychologists [2, 5, 7, 10, 16, 18]. At the same time, the success of inclusive education is primarily determined by the competence of teachers, their ability and readiness to accept and meet the specific educational needs of students with different types of disabilities (deaf and hearing-impaired, blind and visually impaired, motor disabilities, wheelchair users, persons with autism spectrum disorders, etc.) who study alongside fellow students with no health problems [4, 9, 11, 12, 14].

In modern pedagogical science researchers conduct studies on the concept, structure, content of the phenomenon of readiness of teachers of higher education institutions to work in the environment of inclusion, the specific character and conditions of its formation are studied, and the methods of its evaluation are developed as well [1, 3, 6, 8, 9, 13, 15, 17]. The readiness of the teacher to work with students with disabilities in inclusive groups is understood as integrative person-based unit, which determines teacher's ability to carry out professional functions in an inclusive education process, taking into account the individual characteristics and educational needs of students with disabilities, and provide inclusion of these students in the educational environment, creating conditions for their development and self-development.

The aim of our study is to monitor the readiness of teaching staff to work in inclusive groups.

Tasks of the research: to identify teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education, their views on the most appropriate forms of its implementation and teaching; to examine teachers' readiness to work with students with disabilities and inclusive groups.

The object of monitoring is inclusive education and teachers of higher education institutions of the region. The subject is the readiness of teachers of higher education institutions to work in inclusive groups.

2. Methodology and Methods

The readiness of teachers to work in inclusive groups was studied from the standpoint of the principles of structural and functional and systemic approaches, as well as the sociology of education, the sociology of culture, pedagogy, psychology, and monitoring of inclusive education.

The empirical basis of the study was formed by the materials of a quantitative sociological study — monitoring of the readiness of teaching staff to work with inclusive groups, carried out by Chelyabinsk State University in the framework of the network of resource educational and methodological centers for the education of persons with disabilities of the Russian Federation. In November 2019, a total of 777 teachers from 23 universities of the Sverdlovsk, Chelyabinsk, and Kurgan oblasts (hereinafter referred to as the region) were interviewed. The research tool was a questionnaire of a teacher, which consisted of 23 questions, and was developed by a network of resource educational and methodological centers.

The sample is representative. Of all those surveyed across the region, 9.8% are professors, 60% are associate professors, 20% are senior teachers, 7.3% are teachers, and 3.5% are assistants. According to the length of teaching experience in higher education institutions: more than 20 years — 36% of teachers, 15–20 years — 25%, 10–15 years — 19%, 5–10 years — 12%, up to 5 years — 9.0%. Overall, 74% of teachers were women, and 26% were men.

About two-thirds of the respondents had received advanced training on inclusive higher education, and 38% did not have such training. Every second teacher has had or now has to teach students with disabilities, and 41% have no such experience. Every second teacher has relatives, friends, or other acquaintances with a disability, and almost the same number of teachers does not have them.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education.

The implementation of higher inclusive education is mostly dependent on the understanding and attitude of teaching staff, their qualifications, and knowledge of the specific characteristics of this education. A survey conducted among teachers of higher education institutions in the region showed that the vast majority of them — 91% are familiar with the concept of an inclusive approach in higher education. Only 7.5% are not well familiar with inclusive education, while people who have no idea what inclusive education is can be counted as a few. It should be noted, however, that 44% of teachers are well informed, or 2.3% are experts in this field. And 45% are familiar with inclusive education, but only in more general terms.

The number of teachers who are knowledgeable about the concept of inclusive education is relatively bigger. It is the teachers who advocate for the education of people with disabilities in conventional higher education institutions in joint groups and streams (52%) or have more than 20 years of teaching experience (49%). There is also a greater familiarity with the concept of inclusive education among associate professors and professors (48% and 50% respectively) and those who have taken part in advanced training on inclusive higher education (57%).

It is quite notable that more than half of teachers of higher education institutions of the region consider studying in the same stream or joint groups as the most appropriate form of higher education for people with disabilities in conventional higher education institutions. Every third supports the education of disabled people in conventional higher education institutions, but in separate groups or specialized departments. Only a small number of teachers — 6.6% support the education of people with disabilities in specialized higher education institutions. An insignificant part of the interviewed teachers — 1.3% pointed to the inappropriateness of educating people with disabilities in higher education institutions. A small part of respondents — 5.9% found it difficult to answer the question.

Teachers with 15 to 20 years of teaching experience (58%) are most supportive of teaching people with disabilities in conventional higher education institutions in joint groups and streams, while there is less support among teachers with 10 to 15 years of teaching experience (49%). More support for this type of organization of higher education for people with disabilities is expressed by teachers (58%) and those who have completed advanced training on inclusive higher education (60%).

The considerable part of respondents — 42% of teachers of higher education institutions of the region consider the full-time and part-time education as the most optimal

for people with disabilities. 27% of respondents voted for distance learning, 17% for full-time, and only 4.1% for part-time education. Only 10% of respondents found it difficult to answer.

A considerable majority — almost two-thirds of teachers believe that educating a student with a disability in a student group will not have any impact on the efficiency and quality of the educational process. Every fourth teacher emphasizes that this will have a positive effect on the educational process. Every tenth teacher believes that this will have a negative influence on the educational process.

The majority of teachers of higher education institutions of the region (77%) support the idea of enrolling a candidate with a disability in a higher education institution. The idea of enrolling candidates with disabilities in higher education institutions is advocated by 88% of teachers who are familiar with inclusive higher education, 84% who have received advanced training on inclusive higher education, and 82% who have disabled people among their family, friends or acquaintances.

The survey data demonstrates that the overwhelming majority (91%) of teachers of higher education institutions of the region are interested in advanced training regarding the education of people with disabilities. In general, only 3.6% of teachers are not interested, and most likely, only 5.1% are not interested in advanced training. A relatively higher number of teachers interested in advanced training regarding higher education for people with disabilities. Among them are supporters of organizing the educational process for people with disabilities in conventional universities in joint groups and streams (95%), teachers with 15–20 years of teaching experience in higher education institutions (94%), and teachers by profession (99%).

3.2. Teachers' readiness to work with inclusive groups.

The overwhelming majority (89%) of teachers of higher education institutions of the region are psychologically ready to work with streams and groups with students with disabilities. Almost every second teacher thinks it is difficult, but certainly not to the point where it becomes an insurmountable obstacle. Every sixth teacher sees no particular difficulties in working with inclusive groups. For every eleventh teacher, it is psychologically challenging to work with such groups, and only 2.2% of teachers find it “extraordinarily challenging”.

It should be pointed out that a large number of teachers who do not see much of a difficulty in working with students with disabilities among those who are familiar with the concept of inclusion in higher education. People who advocate for the education of

students with disabilities in conventional higher education institutions in joint groups and streams, who have undergone advanced training on inclusive higher education, who have more than 10 years of teaching experience, senior lecturers, associate professors, and professors also state that they do not see much of a difficulty in working with students with disabilities.

88% of teachers of the region noted that difficulties of a methodological nature during the educational process are not problematic for them. In comparison, 29% of teachers indicated that the difficulties are either not present or not noticeable, and 59% stated that there are some difficulties, but they can be resolved. Only every eighth teacher in the region noted that these difficulties are rather tough to deal with. Teachers who are not familiar with the concept of inclusion in higher education are more likely to face methodological difficulties. Teachers with more than 15 years of teaching experience and higher qualifications compared to young and inexperienced teachers encounter fewer difficulties.

Every fifth teacher is entirely unfamiliar with the special technical means of teaching, which are used in the educational process with students with disabilities. Every second one is familiar with the special technical means, but only in the most general way.

The vast majority of teachers have a general understanding of the specific character of educational and communication activities for students with disabilities. Moreover, almost every seventh teacher has a very clear understanding of it, nearly every second teacher has a basic understanding of this specific character, and every eighth teacher has no knowledge whatsoever.

The survey revealed that every fifth teacher is not familiar with the requirements for implementing the specialized vocational higher education programs for students with disabilities. Every third teacher in the region is familiar with them, but only in the most general sense. Almost every fourth teacher is "more familiar than unfamiliar" with the requirements. Only every fifth teacher knows these requirements very well. Most of them are teachers with more than 15 years of teaching experience, associate professors, and professors.

It should be noted that 54% of teachers do not know how to develop adapted programs and teaching materials for students with disabilities. Almost every fourth teacher stated that he could do it, but only for a certain category of students with disabilities, and only every ninth teacher of the region indicated that he could do it for various categories of students with disabilities.

Teachers are not sufficiently aware of the presence of students with disabilities in the stream or the group. Every third teacher in the region obtains information about

students with disabilities after the beginning of the course, and every sixth teacher in the region may not even be aware that such students are attending the course. Every fifth person learns about it during the classes, and every fifth person also learns about it during the first class.

4. Conclusions

Monitoring of readiness of the teaching staff to work in inclusive groups shows evident positive improvements in the implementation of inclusive higher education. The overwhelming majority of teachers of higher education institutions in the Sverdlovsk, Chelyabinsk, and Kurgan regions are familiar with the concept of an inclusive approach in higher education. Most of them are teachers with more than 20 years of teaching experience, associate professors, and professors.

The study found that teachers of higher education institutions mostly accept, understand, and support inclusive education and are ready to work in inclusive groups. This is related to the overall orientation of the education system towards humanistic values, as well as the personalization and individualization of the educational process.

A noticeable majority of teachers believe that having a student with a disability in a students' group will not affect the efficiency and quality of the educational process, and every fourth emphasizes that it will have a positive impact. The overwhelming majority of teachers of higher education institutions of the region are psychologically and methodologically ready to work with streams and groups with students with disabilities. There is no doubt that such activity increases the workload of teachers. Still, at the same time, it contributes to the growth of their professional skills and the more active introduction of modern educational technologies and technical means of education into the educational process.

At the same time, over 40% of teachers do not support the integration of people with disabilities into conventional higher education institutions in the same groups and batches. Some teachers of higher education institutions in the region are not familiar with or have little knowledge of the concept of inclusive higher education and have not received advanced training in this field.

We have found that some teachers are not prepared, especially from a psychological point of view, to work with the streams and groups where students with disabilities study, as well as that some teachers face methodological difficulties in conducting classes in such groups. The demand for professional development in inclusive higher education

for teachers in the region has been revealed. Some teachers noted that they were not informed on time about students with disabilities in the stream and the group.

Monitoring the readiness of teaching staff to work in inclusive groups reveals the meaningful role of teachers in inclusive education. It exposes the cognitive component of implementing this role — teachers' knowledge, skills, and abilities.

There are some differences in teachers' assessments across the Sverdlovsk, Chelyabinsk, and Kurgan regions on the most appropriate forms of organization and learning in inclusive education, its specific characteristics, and readiness to work with inclusive groups, psychological difficulties and methodological challenges of such work. These differences require further examination.

We believe that the readiness of teachers to work with inclusive groups is positively influenced by the systematic organization of work with students with disabilities at the higher education institution, as well as the availability of a support system, an accessible environment, and appropriate specialists. High-quality material and technical equipment, as well as the possibilities of using technical means of education, information, and communication technologies, including distance ones, are the keys to the effective implementation of an inclusive approach in higher education. It is also crucial for the teacher to have someone to turn to in order to resolve the psychological and methodological issues that emerge when working with inclusive groups. The readiness of teachers to work in an inclusive environment does not necessarily mean that they will not face problems in educating students with disabilities or that all questions will have ready-made answers but rather supports the strategy that the issues will be resolved with the assistance of various university departments.

Another conclusion of the study is also very valuable in a practical sense. The evident positive improvements in the implementation of inclusive education in the region, the challenges and difficulties identified in its monitoring, as well as the active and committed involvement of teachers, ensure that this work can be continued purposefully and effectively, and make it possible to reach every university, every teacher, every inclusive group and student in the region, thus guaranteeing the integration of young people with disabilities into society.

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