

# Readiness Of Future Special Educators (Defectologists)

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## Abstract

The article is devoted to the problem of training at higher educational institutions of the Republic of Kazakhstan of special educators (disability specialists) for the psychological and pedagogical support of inclusive education. At present, the traditional training of specialists for working with children with special educational needs is mainly focused on special boarding schools. Therefore, it seems important to modernize their training for work in inclusive schools due to the active spread of inclusive education in the country. There are presented the results of a sociological survey of practicing special educators (disability specialists) working with children with special educational needs in inclusive schools. It was revealed that a significant part of special educators working in inclusive schools does not fully represent the purpose and content of their functional responsibilities in a comprehensive school and has difficulty in developing and implementing an individual educational program for a child with developmental disorders. Practicing specialists have the greatest difficulties in the process of counseling teachers and parents, in organizing interdisciplinary interaction and coordinating the psychological and pedagogical support of a child with special educational needs at school. In order to prevent possible similar difficulties for future special educators (disability specialists), there was conducted a survey among students studying defectological specialties as a part of the study. The aim of the survey was to identify the motivational, informative and operational readiness of future educators and existing special educators (disability specialists) to work in conditions of an inclusive education. Mainly positive attitude of students to inclusive education, positive motivation to improve their own professional qualifications in the field of inclusive education were revealed. At the same time, students note the insufficient formation of professional knowledge about the content, methods and techniques of psychological and pedagogical support of inclusive education, not fully developed motivational, communicative and emotional components of psychological readiness to work in an inclusive school. The identified disadvantages in the preparation of special educators to work with children with special educational needs in inclusive schools allowed the authors to offer some recommendations for implementing this process.

**Keywords:** Children with special educational needs, inclusive education, special educator, specialist training, higher education institutions.

## INTRODUCTION

In modern world, serious demands are made on graduates of higher education institutions from the side of employers and the professional market, which imply that they have the ability to understand and perceive various changes, to make

the right choice, and to be able to adapt to changing conditions of the labor market and society. The importance of personal results is growing: socialization, the formation of a system of orientations and values, as well as meta-subject results: formed key competencies as universal methods of activity used for solving problems.

Compliance with these requirements ensures a high degree of mastery of the profession and allows the individual to freely navigate in difficult conditions.

It is especially important to follow these requirements at preparing special educators for teaching children with special educational needs, as these educators need the ability to rebuild, adapt and modify their professional activities depending on the type and nature of developmental disorders of children (hearing, vision, intelligence, movements, speech and behavior), age and type of educational, medical or social organization in which the children are located. Despite the fact that in 2009 in the OECD National Education Policy Review “Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic and Tajikistan 2009: students with special needs and disabilities” among the problems of ensuring the creation of an inclusive educational system, the OECD noted the low efficiency of the teaching staff training system, today the training of special educators in Kazakhstan is carried out traditionally (OECD, 2017). Such training took part in Soviet times in accordance with the traditions of training teachers only for special boarding schools: oligophrenic educators - for working in boarding schools with children with intellectual disabilities, sign language educators - for working with children with hearing impairments, visual impairment specialist - with visual impairments, speech therapists - with speech impairment.

Over the past twenty years, Kazakhstan has followed international trends regarding inclusive education. At present, in parallel with highly specialized special organizations (separately for deaf and hard of hearing children; for the blind and visually impaired; for children with intellectual disabilities, etc.), inclusive (integrated) groups and classes are beginning to be created in which children with developmental disorders trained and educated with ordinary children. In these ordinary classes and schools, they are provided with special psychological and pedagogical support from the side of a special educator (disability specialist), assistant teacher, speech therapist, psychologist, social teacher. Moreover, the leading role in coordinating the activities of all specialists belongs to a special educator (disability specialist). Naturally, the national model of inclusive education created in the country presupposes the training of qualified and competent specialists in the field of special and inclusive pedagogy. Active implementation of inclusive education policy in Kazakh society actualized the need for orientation of special

educators on the implementation of corrective and developmental activities in the context of general education and revealed serious disadvantages in their preparation. In inclusive schools of the country special educators (disability specialists) are hired to organize psychological and pedagogical support for children with various developmental disorders. However, a serious obstacle to their effective activity is the lack of special training of future special educators (disability specialists) in higher education institutions for coordinating and accompanying work in an inclusive education environment. An analysis of the educational programs for training special educators existing in universities of Kazakhstan conducted as a part of this study showed that they are mainly aimed at mastering the methods of teaching mathematics, mother tongue, manual labor and other educational subjects in a special school for children with hearing impairment (visual impairment, impaired intelligence and speech impairment). The curricula of universities practically do not contain the discipline that forms the necessary competencies for working in inclusive schools. At the same time, in the State Program for the Development of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2020-2025, there is a serious lack of specialists for the psychological and pedagogical support of children in an inclusive environment, which is 64% (SPDES, 2020). Therefore, the solution to this problem becomes extremely urgent, since the professional lack of readiness of special educators to work in an inclusive education environment is one of the serious barriers for the full implementation of inclusive education in the country.

## LITERATURE OVERVIEW

The analysis of researches on the problem of training special educators for the organization of psychological and pedagogical support of inclusive education demonstrates the diversity of views and opinions of the authors. Researchers consider this problem from a philosophical point of view and from the position of psychological and pedagogical content, develop a methodology and tools for training special educators. The state of the university practice of preparing future educators for innovative activity shows that it does not meet current social needs (Tyunnikov, 2015). However, many researchers agree that the successful implementation of inclusive education largely depends on the positive attitude of qualified educators towards inclusive education (Forlin, etc. 2011). The researcher (Movkebayeva,

2016) notes the development of this idea and the consideration of the issues of preparing teaching staff to work in an inclusive education environment.

Some researchers (Forlin, etc., 2011) note the need to expand knowledge about legislation and policies related to inclusive education in the process of preparing educators to work in inclusive classes. Scientists argue that this process should be considered as an essential factor, because we are talking about a teacher's special education.

Other authors (Florian, etc., 2010; Kurnyavati, etc., 2014) argue that teachers do not have the necessary knowledge and skills to work with such students in inclusive classes, therefore they need effective pedagogical skills in class and time management, the ability to maintain the learning process, adapted to the current level of students' understanding, ability to engage students in higher order thinking, and to encourage and support elementary school success. Accordingly, modern studies (J-R. Kim, 2011; Mary, etc., 2011; Carroll, etc., 2016) rightly point out the need for teachers to master a more complex knowledge base and a diverse repertoire of teaching methods. At the same time, according to a number of researchers (Alekhine, 2016); Emine Ozel, etc., 2018), it seems important the creation of electronic services for teachers and the presence of the ability to develop learning skills in students with special educational needs. Modern authors, studying inclusive processes in primary school in Turkey (Akdag, etc., 2017; Brandon, etc., 2011), insist that modern training programs should be most effective in preparing future teachers in the framework of inclusive education.

Studies conducted in Russia (Kalinina, 2016; Konanova, 2015) state that a special educator is a key actor in the development of inclusive education practice. Almost all researchers agree on the need to create a strong and diverse research base in the field of education in order to improve the quality of teacher training, including special educators, in motivational and orientational, cultural and value development. Therefore, there is a need to develop new methodological and technological approaches for training special educators in higher educational institutions to work in an inclusive education environment with a focus on achieving highly professional educational results, since the activities of a special educator largely determine the effectiveness of psychological and pedagogical support of a child

with special educational needs in inclusive schools.

## Materials and Methods

As a part of the research, there was organized a sociological survey of practicing special educators who work in inclusive (regular) schools. The purpose of this survey was to identify the nature of the difficulties they experience in organizing the psychological and pedagogical support of children with special educational needs in inclusive education environment.

Based on the data of a sociological survey in two universities of Kazakhstan, in which special educators (disability specialists) are trained, there were organized questionnaires. The aim of the survey was to study the state of readiness of future special educators (disability specialists) to work in an inclusive education environment. Achieving this goal involved solving problems aimed at identifying the current knowledge of future special educators about the specifics of professional activity in an inclusive education environment and emotional attitude to it. In the course of the questionnaire, students assessed the level of their own readiness for psychological and pedagogical support of children with special educational needs in general education.

The questionnaire was attended by students of higher educational institutions studying on specialties 5B010500 - "Defectology" and 6B019 - "Training of specialists on special pedagogy". Among them: 90 people study in Kazakh and 46 people in Russian language. The total number of respondents was 136 people.

An adapted questionnaire of the Russian author I.L. Solomin was used as a diagnostic toolkit. The questionnaire included three main blocks, each of which contained 14-17 questions and statements. The first block revealed the motivation of respondents to organize the training and education of children with special educational needs in an inclusive education environment. The second block involved determining the sufficiency of the necessary methodological knowledge about the features of the learning process organization in an inclusive education environment. The third block was aimed at identifying the presence of practical skills in organizing training and education in an inclusive education environment. The criteria scale included the following ratings: "Yes", "More likely yes than no", "More likely no, than yes", "No", "No answer."

The questions of the first (motivational) block included 14 statements that respondents noted as true or false. As already mentioned above, the proposed statements were aimed at identifying the motivation and readiness of students and practicing disability specialists for pedagogical activities in general education. The following statements can serve as an example: "I am ready and able to carry out corrective and developmental work in the conditions of a comprehensive school", "I fully understand the importance of the work of a special educator (disability specialist) in an inclusive organization and will try to be as useful as possible."

The second (informative) block of the questionnaire included 14 statements, an example of which are the following: "I am able to carry out the educational and correctional process taking into account the psychophysical, age characteristics and individual educational needs of students", "I have effective methods for teaching in heterogeneous classes". The third (operational) block consisted of 17 statements, an example of which are the following: "I can organize joint educational activities of healthy children and children with special educational needs," "I have the ability to plan educational work aimed at developing a tolerant children's team."

## Results and Discussion

A preliminary sociological survey of practicing educators who have experience working with children with special educational needs in comprehensive schools conducted as a part of the research showed that they do not fully understand the purpose and content of their functional responsibilities in a comprehensive school. These teachers are mainly engaged in conducting individual classes to correct these or other impaired functions of children. At the same time, they deal only with the category of children on which they passed specialization (typhlopedagogy, surdopedagogy, oligophrenopedagogy and more). Practicing educators experienced difficulties in developing and implementing an individual educational program for a child with developmental disorders. The greatest difficulties they have in the process of counseling teachers and parents, in organizing interdisciplinary interaction and coordinating the psychological and pedagogical support of a child with special educational needs at school. Practicing educators also pointed out the existence of problems in the relationship and communication with other specialists.

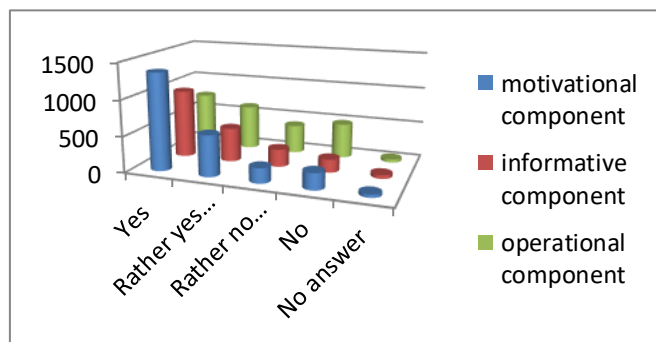
Respondents note that the administration, school teachers and other specialists (psychologists, social educators) assign responsibility for the effectiveness of inclusive processes in the school only on them, thereby recognizing the lack of ability of respondents to work in a single team. In addition, respondents noted insufficient, in their opinion, knowledge about effective pedagogical methods in heterogeneous classes, lack of practical knowledge on monitoring the achievements of children with special educational needs.

A specially organized survey of students-future special educators (disability specialists) revealed that 37.4% of respondents demonstrate their interest in working in conditions of inclusive education. In general, there is noted their desire to get the necessary knowledge, students understand the advantage of teaching children with special educational needs in a regular, comprehensive school, rather than in a special one. However, the vast majority of students have not fully developed motivational, communicative and emotional components of psychological readiness to work in an inclusive school. An alarming fact is that a small proportion of students believe that it is better for children with various developmental disorders to learn in special boarding schools. Perhaps one of the reasons for this fact is that in universities of Kazakhstan special educators are still predominantly trained to work in special schools, and with children with a specific type of impairment (impaired vision, hearing, intelligence, speech, etc.).

Based on the analysis of the results of the survey of respondents for the informative and operational block, 32.4% and 30.2% (respectively) of respondents were identified who, despite their interest in the process to include children with special educational needs in the general educational process, noted a lack of readiness to work in an inclusive education environment. At the same time, an analysis of students' answers indicates that they have insufficiently formed professional knowledge about the content, methods and techniques of psychological and pedagogical support of inclusive education. A qualitative analysis of the obtained data indicates a low self-esteem of readiness to work in the conditions of inclusive education of future special educators (disability specialists). Respondents note both the lack of theoretical knowledge and the lack of competencies required to work effectively with all participants of an inclusive educational space.

**Table 1.** The level of formation of motivational, informative, and operational components of students (%)

Statement	Yes	Rather yes than no	Rather no than yes	No	No answer
Motivational component	1353	573	209	230	44
Informative component	953	474	244	182	51
Operational component	953	474	244	182	51

**Figure 1.** The indicator of formation of motivational, informative, and operational components of students

The survey results showed that 48% of future teachers are motivationally ready to work in inclusive preschool and school organizations, answered in the motivational component, 33.4% know the characteristics of children with special educational needs (informational component). Only 18.4% of respondents noted sufficiently formed practical skills (operational component).

55.6% of respondents showed the average formation of the motivational component, 67.2% - the informational component and 77% - the operational component.

The lack of motivation for future professional activity in inclusive organizations (motivational component) was revealed in 27.4% of students,

lack of informative readiness in 20.3%, lack of methodological knowledge (operational component) - 52.3%. Difficulties in assessing the degree of their motivational readiness have 22% of respondents, informational readiness - 49.4% and operational readiness - 28.6%.

Analyzing the motivational component of students of defectological specialties, it was revealed that future educators as a whole demonstrate not only interest in coordinating and organizing inclusive education in practice and strive to obtain the necessary knowledge, but also demonstrate a value attitude towards children with special educational needs in conditions of inclusive education. Information about the state of formation of future special educators of the motivational component is presented in table 2.

**Table 2.** The level of formation of the motivational component of students

Statement		Yes	Rather yes than no	Rather no than yes	No	No answer
<b>Motivational component</b>		353	573	209	230	44
1.	I am ready and able to carry out corrective and developing work in the context of new types of organizations (rehabilitation centers, psychological and pedagogical correction rooms, psychological, medical and pedagogical consultations, etc.)	90	22	7	13	4
2.	I fully understand the importance of the work of a special educator (disability specialist) in an inclusive organization and try to be as useful as possible	81	31	13	0	1

3.	I am interested in developing my knowledge on teaching children with special educational needs	80	23	11	18	4
4.	I wish to expand my skills and practice working with children with special educational needs in conditions of inclusive education	70	23	20	17	6
5.	I am ready to work in a team and cooperate with teachers, parents / guardians and various organizations.	93	19	15	8	1
6.	I am ready for self-education in the field of inclusive education	68	24	28	10	6
7.	At the university I received enough knowledge to work with children with special educational needs in conditions of inclusive education	52	30	31	16	7
8.	I know enough about inclusive education to work successfully	74	28	17	14	2
9.	I am aware of the psychological unreadiness for working with "special" children in conditions of inclusion	51	17	10	24	2
10.	I love all children and therefore am ready to work in any educational organization with any children	82	45	-	9	
11.	I intend to master the methods of working with the parents of all children in the class, including "special" ones	82	21	14	12	2
12.	I will help to create the conditions for the friendship of ordinary children with a "special" child: this is a reliable way to raise a person	57	43	15	16	5
13.	I will strive to know the characteristics and needs of each child and take them into account	65	48	7	14	2
14.	Each person has special educational needs	88	35	-	10	2
15.	Any disorder always limits a person's ability to achieve goals	87	40	2		
16.	Developmental disorders deprive the child of a quality education	72	47	5	12	
17.	Inadequacy of the environment makes a person limited.	73	46	4	13	
18.	Any disorder "knocks out" the child from the children's team	88	31	10		

The results of the analysis of the statements presented in the motivation block allowed to conclude that students are positively inclined to work with different categories of children as a special educator (disability specialist) in an inclusive organization. They also believe that every future educator-defectologist is required special knowledge and practical skills for the implementation of correctional and development works in an inclusive education. However, students emphasized the negative aspects of their preparation, to which they attributed: insufficient

knowledge of practical skills to work with children with special educational needs in an inclusive education environment. In addition, respondents noted that students do not have a complete understanding of effective methods and forms of work for creating conditions of friendly relations between ordinary children and a "special" child.

Information on the state of formation of future special educators of the informational component is presented in table 3.

**Table 3.** The level of formation of the informational component of students

№	Statement	Yes	Rather yes than no	Rather no than yes	No	No answ er
	Informational component	953	474	244	182	51
1.	I have multidisciplinary knowledge for the implementation of inclusive education	3	28	19	11	5
2.	I have skills for rational selection and implementation of correctional and educational programs based on personality-oriented and individually-differentiated approaches to healthy children and children with special educational needs	6	21	17	9	3
3.	I possess the necessary knowledge and skills to properly organize the work on interaction between teachers and specialists (psychologists, speech therapists, etc.)	8	29	13	12	4
4.	I have effective teaching methods in diverse classes	6	31	18	15	6
5.	I know how to organize cooperation between parents of standard-type children and children with special educational needs.	7	38	14	12	5
6.	I can provide advice on the interaction of the disability specialist with all specialists, as "interprofessional cooperation"	3	44	21	14	3
7.	I can organize corrective and pedagogical work with children in an inclusive education environment:	5	57	15	13	6
8.	with hearing impairment	1	28	45	15	7
9.	with visual impairment	01	25	5	5	
10.	with speech impairment	4	47	11	19	5
11.	with musculoskeletal system impairment	7	31	10	8	
12.	I know the features of the development of children with various types of disorders and with special educational needs	7	31	26	19	3
13.	I have skills in diagnosing impaired functions	5	30	15	16	1
14.	I want to learn how to develop an individual educational route for children with special educational needs in an inclusive education environment	0	34	15	14	3
	I am ready to work with children with special educational needs according to an individual plan					

Analyzing the results of the questionnaire, it can be noted that students generally understand the need for inclusive education and demonstrate their readiness to organize corrective and pedagogical work in conditions of inclusive education based on personality-oriented and individually-differentiated approaches to children with special educational needs. This fact, as well as the respondents' positive attitude towards joint education of children, are certainly significant for our research, since the success of inclusive education depends on the level of special

educators' readiness to work in an inclusive education environment.

At the same time, student's statements about the presence of certain difficulties in providing advisory assistance to parents of children with various developmental disorders and establishing the interaction of a disability specialist with teachers and other specialists are alarming. As possible causes of these problems, future educators include a small experience of practical activity in specifically inclusive (rather than

special) organizations during practical training, the absence or small number of academic disciplines on counseling parents, organization of interprofessional cooperation, and selection of individually-differentiated approaches to children in conditions of diversity, adaptation of educational material in an inclusive education environment and more.

In conditions of the distance education, insufficient informational preparation of students at the university is noteworthy, which, of course, reduces the quality of their future professional activities with limited mobility groups of children.

Information on the state of formation of future special educators of the operational component is presented in table 4.

**Table 4.** The level of formation of the operational component of students

№	Statement	Yes	Rather yes than no	Rather no than yes	No	No answer
	Operational component	747	621	397	484	44
1.	I possess teaching methods and ways of organizing educational activities of healthy children and children with special educational needs	40	32	30	29	5
2.	I have the ability to design the educational process in accordance with the state standard of preschool and general education in conditions of inclusive education	44	38	24	28	2
3.	I have the ability to plan educational work aimed at developing a tolerant children's team	47	38	23	27	1
4.	I know the methods of selection, dosage and differentiation of training tasks	45	34	25	24	8
5.	I know the methods for determining the content for each child in conditions of inclusion	39	42	21	26	8
6.	I know the methods of organizing joint collectively distributed activities of children in conditions of inclusion	45	39	21	24	5
7.	I possess methods of formation of children with different characteristics in the development of primary ideas about themselves, family, society (the closest society), state (country), the world and nature	48	30	27	29	2
8.	I know how to educate children on emotional responsiveness and moral qualities	45	40	23	26	2
9.	I know the methods of providing conditions for the joint education of children with special educational needs and their peers without restrictions	37	38	28	30	3
10.	I possess methods for assessing the dynamics of children development	46	42	21	22	5



	(personal, mental)					
11	I know the methods of scientific and methodological and educational and methodological support of inclusive practice in your institution	45	32	25	27	7
12	I possess methods of ensuring the information awareness about inclusive education	52	30	25	25	4
13	I possess the methods of developing functional literacy with children	45	43	10	36	2
14	I possess active teaching methods	39	35	24	35	3
15	I possess the methods of educational material adaptation for children with different types of disorders	48	34	21	26	7
16	I possess the methods of student assessment in the inclusive education system	41	35	26	33	1
17	I know the methods of involving parents in the process of inclusive education implementation	41	39	23	31	2

The analysis of the operational component questionnaire made it possible to identify an absolutely positive point, that future special educators have an interest in using a variety of teaching methods and forms of adaptation of educational material based on various types of children disorders.

Analysis of the identified problems of training special educators to work in an inclusive education environment allowed to identify some pedagogical recommendations:

- In conditions of the active spread of inclusive education in Kazakhstan, it seems important to modernize the training of special educators and to orient them to psychological and pedagogical support in inclusive schools.
- It is advisable to implement the reform of the training system for special educators (disability specialists) on the basis of the results of modern interdisciplinary researches, an effective combination of productive domestic and foreign educational experience.
- During the training of a special educator for the implementation of psychological and pedagogical support of inclusive

education, the formation of the ability to model methodological knowledge and techniques in various pedagogical conditions (kindergarten, school, vocational college, university) should be taken into account.

- It is advisable to pay special attention to the formation of competencies on the use of information and distance technologies in teaching different categories of children.
- The model for the training of a special educator should provide professional competencies for advisory assistance and the interaction of a disability specialist with all specialists, as “interprofessional cooperation”.
- It is advisable to include professional competencies on the use of standardized diagnostic tools (psychodiagnostic, sociological, pedagogical) at all age stages of child development in the model of training of a special educator.
- Particular attention should be paid to the development of students' skills in the formation of an inclusive culture and inclusive values.

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