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**PSYCHOLOGICAL-PEDAGOGICAL SUPPORT OF PRIMARY  
SCHOOL PUPILS WITH MENTAL RETARDATION**

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***Abstract***

The article justifies the necessity of transformation of traditional paradigm of psychological-pedagogical support in accordance to new priorities of educational practices. The article represents author's approach to university training of teachers and psychologists, based on the integration of their training to the individualization of educational paths at psychological-pedagogical support of primary school children with mental retardation. The novelty of the research findings, reflected in the article, is in theoretical underpinning and practical development of the technology of integrative University training of future primary school teachers and special psychologists. It presupposes the formation of integrative professional skills of students at interaction, which is aimed at identifying peculiarities of academic behavior of primary school children with mental retardation.

The purpose of our research is the development and scientific substantiation of technology of integrated academic training of primary general education teachers and special psychologists in the field of psychological-pedagogical support of primary school children with mental retardation.

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**Keywords:** Inclusive education, children with disabilities, psychological-pedagogical support, professional training, integrative professional skills.



## **1. Introduction**

### **1.1. The importance of the issue.**

Worldwide the priorities of the development of society towards democratization rise new challenges, the most important of which is the organization of inclusive education of children with disabilities, which presupposes the enforcement of their right to affordable and quality education, "education for all".

It should be emphasized that any progressive transformations, in this case, in the inclusive context, having the undoubted positive effect, carries various risks, prevention of which depends on the correctness of administrative and psychological-pedagogical measures aimed at strengthening the positive impact of inclusion and smoothing of potentially undesirable tendencies.

Formation and development of inclusive practices, primarily, allowed to draw the attention of the pedagogical community towards the problems of general education, namely, lack of sensitivity of the pedagogical practice to individual peculiarities and needs of children with normative development and children with mental retardation. In addition, the program-methodical development of inclusive processes in the system of general education has also turned to be extremely inflexible, focusing mainly on meeting the needs of special education of students with disabilities, and often ignoring the needs shared with their age-mates with conditionally normative development: in self-assertion, support of life meanings and values, social interaction, i.e. their life competencies.

Means of overcoming these problems is psychological-pedagogical support of pupils with disabilities, which presupposes overall support in case of educational and other difficulties.

Today in Russia pupils with mental retardation make up the largest group among pupils with disabilities as introduced in inclusive education in Russian schools. Mental retardation is the psychological-pedagogical definition which characterizes cases of retarded mental development and relatively persistent state of immaturity of emotional-volitional spheres and intellectual incapacity, without reaching mental handicap. In general, given condition is characterized by heterochronism of evidences of deviations and significant differences in the intensity and prognosis of the effects. Mental retardation is often complicated by various mild, but often persistent neuropsychic disorders (asthenic, cerebral-asthenic, neurotic, neurosis-like and others) which violate the intellectual performance of a child.

Inclusive terms for getting education by primary school children with mental retardation due to the diversity of educational difficulties presuppose significant individualization of their educational routes at the stage of primary general education (1-4 grades), i.e. in the primary school age, which in its turn requires new formats of interaction between teachers and psychologists in the process their of psychological-pedagogical support, reflected in their integrative professional skills.

In the view of the above said, the need to improve the content of the training of future primary general education teachers and special psychologists (key players of psychological-pedagogical support of primary school children with mental retardation in inclusive education) to carry out professional activities towards the formation of integrative professional skills.

### **1.2. The status of the issue.**

The problem of psychological-pedagogical support of pupils with disabilities was reflected in studies of Korobeinikov and Babkina (2016), Indenbaum (2011), Vilshanskaya (2012), Ulienkova (1994).

The authors justified the idea of holistic character of such support. The results of the study, which helped to identify specific educational needs of primary school children with mental retardation, formed the basis of a differentiated approach to establishing special terms of compensation of disorders of their development, educational and social integration and inclusion. However, the research does not presented a problem of interaction between teacher and psychologist in the process of psychological-pedagogical support of primary school children with mental retardation.

At the same time despite the progress in practice of the ideas of inclusive education, unconstructive isolation of professional activity of primary school teachers and education psychologists is still dominating in educational practice, in the part of the selection of diagnostic tools, organizing and conducting of the diagnostic study description and interpretation of the received facts about the child, which causes incoordination both in development and in the implementation of individual programs on psychological-pedagogical support and evaluation of their impact. The technology of interaction between specialists did not receive scientific justification and reflection at theoretical level.

Due to introduction into practice of Federal State Educational Standard of primary general education of children with disabilities, including children with mental retardation, the task of efficient and sensible update of the content and the forms of training students in the field of teaching, upbringing and psychological-pedagogical support of children of the mentioned category became actual in the system of higher education.

The idea of integration of selected professional competencies set in the Bachelor's programs for "Teacher Education" and "Special education (teachers of primary general education and special psychologists, respectively)", performs as mechanism of implementation of such task, on the basis of which the type of the remodeling of content and forms of such training is defined and practices for their joint study are developed. Integration in this context serves not only as the interaction of some elements of the educational system of higher education, but also as mutual enrichment of the content of preparation of teachers and psychologists to work with primary school children with mental retardation. Such approach is the foundation of the development of the integrative model of their joint academic study.

## **2. Problem Statement**

### **2.1. Theoretical and practical contribution.**

Theoretical significance of the research is determined by the fact that the technology of integrated institutional training of teachers of primary general education and special psychologists on capturing of integrated professional skills on identifying peculiarities of academic behavior of primary school children with mental retardation and on their basis individualization of educational paths was developed and justified; types and content of the joint activity of future primary school teachers and special psychologists within the frame of which these skills are developed were defined.

Practical significance of the research is that its results contribute to the decision of crucial tasks of educational practice, such as individualization of educational paths of primary school children with mental retardation in terms of inclusive education in the process of psychological-pedagogical support.

Main results of the research provided the basis for the development of the technology of professional training of teachers of primary general education and special psychologists in system of institutional and

postgraduate training in such fields as Teacher Education and Special Education, besides they are currently used for working out of educational materials and recommendations for educators carrying out psychological-pedagogical support for children with mental retardation in the context of introduction of Federal State Educational Standard of primary general education of children with disabilities.

## **2.2. Russian academic literature review.**

Attention to various aspects of the support of children with mental retardation of different age groups was reflected in the works of Belopolskaya (2013), Babkina (2017), Vilshanskaya (2017), Indenbaum (2016), Kuzmicheva (2012), Lubovskii (2012), Mamaichuk (2008), Shevchenko (2003).

Analysis of formation, current condition and prospects of development of educational practices in relation to tasks of psychological-pedagogical support of children with disabilities based on a social-cultural approach is presented in works of Malofeev (2016) and Goncharova (2015). Main ideas of the Concept of special differentiated standard of school education of children with disabilities (Malofeev et al., 2013), the concept of functional diagnosis for children with mild disorders of mental development formed the basis for the development of an integrated model of training of teacher of primary general education and special psychologists who are able to organize psychological-pedagogical support of primary school children with mental retardation in inclusive education.

## **2.3. International academic literature review**

Many international researches devoted to the study of approach of teachers to the problem of training children with disabilities in general academic school. Such authors as Avramidis and Norwich (2002), De Boer, Pijl, and Minnaert, (2011) provide a vast amount of researches and factors which can influence taking principle of inclusion by a teacher. For example, as some researchers note nature and severity of disability influence attitude of teachers in a greater degree and while variables connected to teachers – in a lesser degree. Teachers are considered as key objects for carrying out inclusive education. That is why it has been affirmed that positive attitude plays a significant part in successful implementation of this change in educational sphere.

Special attention of researchers is focused on studying skills of social interaction between teachers and students studying in inclusive processes. Thus, some scholars believe that effective teaching skills include the rate of engagement of students based on good skills of managing a class and time, capacity to study, adapted to current level of understanding of students, cognitive engagement of students, encouragement and support for success (Jordan, Schwartz, & McGhie-Richmond, 2009). The research carried out by the authors shows that effective teaching skills are effective for all primary school children both with special needs and without them. Russian and Finnish researchers Vayrynen et al. (2016) carried out comparative study of inclusive practices in Finland and Russia, revealed the trends of social interaction in inclusive education, which let consider social interaction as a social condition of the effectiveness of inclusion.

### **3. Research Questions**

How to develop technology of formation of integrative professional skills on revealing peculiarities of academic behavior of primary school children with mental retardation?

### **4. Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of our research is the development and scientific substantiation of technology of integrated academic training of primary general education teachers and special psychologists in the field of psychological-pedagogical support of primary school children with mental retardation. Solution of the following research objects contributed to pursuing stated objective:

1. To conduct analysis, evaluate and describe the current state of the problem of psychological-pedagogical accompaniment of primary school children with mental retardation by primary general education teachers and special psychologists on the basis of their joint activities with the purpose of planning and carrying out remedial work, evaluation of educational achievements and difficulties of a particular child.
2. To identify main professional difficulties of future primary general education teachers and special psychologists in the field of defining academic behavior peculiarities of primary school children with mental retardation and on their basis individualization of educational paths.
3. To identify, describe and systematize integrative professional skills of primary general education teachers and psychologists in the field of defining academic behavior peculiarities of primary school children with mental retardation as a significant input of their psycho-pedagogical support of pupils studying in terms of inclusive education.
4. To develop technologies of integrated Institutional training of primary general education teachers and special psychologists in the context of the individualization of educational paths of pupils with mental retardation.
5. To review experimentally the effectiveness of practice of the developed technology for the students to learn integrative professional skills in the field of academic behavior peculiarities of primary school children with mental retardation.

### **5. Research Methods**

#### **5.1. Research objective.**

The object of the research was in development, approbation of technology of integrated academic training of teachers of primary general education and special psychologists in the field of psychological-pedagogical support of primary school children with mental retardation and evidence of a hypothesis for its effectiveness.

#### **5.2. Theoretical and empirical methods.**

Theoretical and empirical methods were: method of theoretical analysis and generalization of Russian and foreign approaches to the problem of the research, analysis of the results of activity, methods of qualitative-quantitative analysis of empiric data and interpretation of the data, methods of expert review of activity of students.

### **5.3. Research base.**

The basis for the research was Psychological-pedagogical Institute of Murmansk Arctic State University and Murmansk general academic schools. Forty students of the fourth year studying in the field of “Teacher Education” (specialty is primary education) and 40 students of the 4<sup>th</sup> year studying in the field Special education (specialty is Special Psychology).

### **5.4. Research stages.**

The research was carried out in the period from 2010 to 2018. Six stages of the experiment were defined during the development of the research.

At the first we defined theoretical and methodological background to the research, represented its hypothesis, object and purpose, formed out and described professional skills of teacher of primary general education and special psychologists in the sphere of revealing of peculiarities of academic behavior of primary school children with mental retardation in inclusive conditions.

At the second stage the technology of integrated Institutional training of teachers of primary general education and special psychologists in the field psychological-pedagogical support of primary school children with mental retardation was worked out.

At the third staged use of integrated professional competence by students was founded at the base of accomplishing the following tasks: supervision of primary school children with mental retardation in the context of learning activity and fixation of the observed facts on the record, which characterize their academic behavior, interpretation of the established facts, development of recommendations on individualization of their educations paths.

At the fourth stage program implementation of the developed technology revealing substantive aspects at the base of joint professional activity of future primary school teachers and psychologists was carried out.

At the fifth stage the degree of formedness of integrative professional skill of students was defined according to the results of execution of tasks identical the third stage and on the basis of expert review. Teachers – supervisors of the practice worked as experts.

At the sixth stage of the research obtained results were explained for confirmation of hypothesis about the effectiveness of the developed technology.

### **5.5. Research methods.**

Research method was continuous unembodied supervision of academic behavior of primary school children with mental retardation.

## **6. Findings**

### **6.1. The results of the reporting stage**

Competence to fix and interpret facts received during supervision of academic behavior of primary school children with mental retardation were specified at the ascertaining stage. To do this we analyzed supervision records made by them, developed psychological and pedagogical characteristics as well as recommendations on individualization of academic paths of students developed by them.

Analysis of the supervision records made by students exposed the following main difficulties: integrated fixation of observed facts, insufficient informativeness, when child's behavior described without mentioning the reasons that caused its activity, adding to the record interpretative conclusions instead of perceptive facts.

As a result of the conducted analysis of psychological and pedagogical characteristics made by students, it was discovered that after traditional theoretical training student-teachers of primary general education and students – future special psychologists turned to be unprepared for professional analysis of academic behavior of primary school children with mental retardation. None of the students from both groups could without mistakes analyze academic behavior of children (percentage of mistake varied from 65% to 42,5%), despite the fact that students of the two departments earlier took theoretical courses in the field of psychological-pedagogical diagnostics of primary school children with mental retardation. Analysis of experimental material showed that majority of students have main difficulties when analyzing academic behavior of pupils for selected criteria of self-regulation (acceptance of a task, presence of the orientational stage, degree of self-sufficiency, a response to teacher's assistance, interest to the process and results, correspondence of the results to the specified sample), students understate child's potential. In so doing, when analyzing child's ability to accept task students thought that a primary school child does not also show interest (or initiative) when executing the task.

Analyzing the result of task execution by a child upon criterion of "correspondence of the results to the specified sample" often instead of choosing "incomplete correspondence of the results to the specified sample" participants of the experiment chose the "dissonance" option.

Analyzing activity of children at the lesson upon criterion "degree of self-sufficiency" the students of the two groups in many cases fixed self-sufficient task execution while a pupil only partially executed the task after teacher's help.

In general, in interpretation of academic behavior of primary school children with mental retardation all students understate their real potential, teacher's assistance in task execution is understated. Both future primary school teachers and special psychologists cannot relate outer facts, which characterize academic behavior of a child, which leads to the conclusions which do not correspond to his actual academic behavior. After making incorrect conclusion about peculiarities of academic behavior of a primary school child with mental retardation, students on its basis provide incorrect and overly collated recommendations on individualization of his educational path.

Recommendations made by students on the basis of psychological and pedagogical characteristics are notable for insufficient specificity, lack of meaningfulness and in some cases for irrationality of stated suggestions, i.e. absence of causal relationships with outer facts.

Received findings are used as a reason of the necessity of development of technology on formation of integrative professional skills of students on defining peculiarities of academic behavior of primary school children with mental retardation. We define integrative professional skills as system of integrated competencies, content of which depends on specificity of professional tasks of psychological-pedagogical character. The definition of integrity provides understanding of the fact that during professional dialogue between a teacher of primary general education and a special psychologist the data about a child are being complemented, received while studying his academic behavior by each specialist, range of problems to be

jointly solved while psychological-pedagogical support of primary school children with mental retardation is pointed out and the ways of overcoming these problems in the practical work with a child are defined.

We would like to emphasize during traditional training of students at the University, integrative professional skills do not act as subject of preparation to the future professional activity. As the research shows, their unembodiedness which leads to professional difficulties and mistakes is indicated among teachers of primary general education and special psychologists later while working with a real pupil.

## **6.2. The results of the formative stage.**

Conception of functional diagnosis served as theoretical basis for the development of authors technology of formation of integrative professional skills on discovering of peculiarities of academic behavior of primary school children with mental retardation while psychological-pedagogical support.

Informative basis of the proposed technology is the developed extensive experimental material on studying intellectual, emotional and personality spheres of psychic activity of children with mental retardation using Russian pathopsychological methods and criteria of qualitative-quantitative analysis of received data, necessary for the development of individual educational paths in the process of psychological-pedagogical support of primary school children with mental retardation.

In regard to organization aspect, authors technology of formation of integrative professional skill on revealing of peculiarities of academic behavior of primary school children with mental retardation among Bachelor degree students of the specialties “Teacher Education” and “Special Education” was built not only in the context of differentiate but also integrated training.

Two interrelated modules are presented in working curricula of the mentioned educational programs.

1. Module of differentiated study of academic disciplines, attending educational and work experience internship, which reflect specificity of psychological (for special psychologists) and pedagogical (for primary school teachers) support of pupils with disabilities including pupils with mental retardation.

2. Module of integrated (joint) study of academic disciplines and joint attending of work experience internship in the sphere of psychological-pedagogical study of primary school children with mental retardation. Issues of monitoring of individual development of primary school children with mental retardation were studied jointly as the central component of their psychological-pedagogical support.

Joint University training of teachers and special psychologists did not suppose and could not provide development of all components of professional competences necessary for mastering the methods of monitoring of individual development of primary school children with mental retardation. Part of them was developed in the context of traditional training of students, another part – in the context of joint education while attending work experience internship.

Internship was considered as the basic premise in the system of training of Bachelors on the specialties mentioned above. After theoretical mastering of a range of basic disciplines, while involving in internship students faced problems and contradictions which were solved by using existing knowledge; as a result they realized the necessity for acquiring of specific new knowledge and moved to the next stage of theoretical training which “led” to new internship (some kind of a spiral of theoretical and practical training).



During joint internship on acquiring professional skills and experience of professional activity in the sphere of psychological-pedagogical support of children with mental retardation students got experience of joint activity on issues mentioned above.

In respect to the activity of students an individual case was considered as integrating moment of the subject. Future primary school teachers describe individual cases, they have developed professional observation with completeness, objectivity and accuracy of the description depending on it. On the basis of the analysis of an individual case future psychologists formulated hypotheses about the reasons of difficulties of a particular child, carried out necessary psychological test, proving the hypothesis and interpreted given case on the basis of fact finding from the point of view of the hierarchy of these difficulties.

During the work experience internship together with future teachers and special psychologists the following group of skills were mastered:

1. Skills to carry out psychological-pedagogical diagnostics of academic behavior of primary school children with mental retardation by using method of observation.

2. Skills to draw up psychological-pedagogical characteristics on the results of supervision of academic behavior of pupils with mental retardation, jointly (teacher and psychologist) actualize their educational difficulties.

3. Skills to jointly develop individual educational path of a pupil with mental retardation in accordance with the aim of formation of effective academic behavior of this pupil, with providing differentiated assistance when learning the content of education.

With the purpose of effective formation of the defined group of skill they were operationalized and presented via following operations: to notice facts significant for understanding of academic behavior of a primary school child with mental retardation, to fix outer facts in details in records, accurately reflect outer facts in records, make a hypothesis in respect of reasons defining peculiarities of academic behavior of a child, interpret academic behavior on the basis of criteria of self-adjustment, infer cause-and-effect relationships between facts, make conclusions about main individual difficulties, which block efficient academic behavior, differentiate difficulties of academic behavior as related to cognitive and/or regulative spheres, specify priority tasks of correction pedagogic activity, carry out selection of means of correction activity taking into account individual difficulties of academic behavior of a child.

All in all, work experience internship presupposed consequential development among future teachers of primary general education and special psychologists of integrated professional skills, content and sequence of development of which was defined by the logic of their professional activity on psychological-pedagogical support of primary school children with mental retardation.

### **6.3. The control stage of the experiment.**

At the control stage students were repeatedly offered to carry out supervision of academic behavior of primary school children with mental retardation, fix and interpret outer facts and work out recommendations for individualization of their educational path.

It was established that students mastered the skill on supervising and fixation of outer facts (table 1).

**Table 01.** Comparative analysis of mastering by students of operations revealing integrative professional skills on use of the methods of observation of academic behavior of a primary school child with mental retardation (%)

Operations revealed in the process of analysis of results of activity of students	Result of activity of students amenable for expert review	Students-future primary school teachers		Students-future special psychologist	
		Ascertaining stage of the experiment	Control stage of the experiment	Ascertaining stage of the experiment	Control stage of the experiment
Notice the facts significant for understanding of academic behavior of a primary school child with mental retardation	Observation record	45	95	55	95
Fix in detail outer facts in records	Observation record	42,5	100	40	100
Outer facts to be accurately reflected in records	Observation record	50	97,5	57,5	100
Make a hypothesis regarding the reasons specific peculiarities of academic behavior of a child	Pedagogical/ Psychological characteristics	40	77,5	45	87,5
Infer cause-and-effect relationships between the facts	Pedagogical/ Psychological characteristics	40	85	45	95
Make conclusions regarding main individual difficulties impeding to efficient academic behavior	Pedagogical/ Psychological characteristics	40	85	45	92,5
Differentiate difficulties of academic behavior as relating to cognitive and / or regulative spheres	Pedagogical/ Psychological recommendations	40	87,5	47,5	95
Specify primary objectives of correction pedagogic activity	Pedagogical/ Psychological recommendations	35	95	37,5	95
Carry out selection of methods of correctional-developmental activity taking into account individual difficulties of academic behavior of a child	Pedagogical/ Psychological recommendations	40	95	42,5	92,5

As can be seen from the above, comparative analysis of integrated professional skills of students on using the method of supervision of academic behavior of a primary school child with mental retardation before and after the use of the developed technology of integrated university study showed its effectiveness.

Taking into account the fact that specificity of academic behavior of primary school children with mental retardation as a rule is connected to the self-direction disorder of its activity operations on integration of academic behavior of a child by students were subject to expert review on the basis of self-direction criteria. Both future primary school teachers and special psychologists learned to analyze academic behavior of a pupil relying on criteria which on a case by case basis reflect aspects of self-direction at all stages of execution of educational task by this pupil.

## 7. Conclusion

### 7.1. Discussion.

Students learned to notice facts significant for interpretation of academic behavior of a primary school child with mental retardation, determine a dependence of successfulness of achieving of an academic task by a child on the measure and content of rendered assistance, define informative connections between outer facts and rationalize them which let them individualize recommendations on developing an educational route for a primary school child with mental retardation.

Grounded, developed and time tested authors technology of integrated university training of teachers and psychologists forms integrative professional skills of students which will secure development of inclusive educational practices.

### 7.2. Conclusion.

Hypothesis about the efficiency of the developed technology of formation of integrative professional skills on revealing peculiarities of academic behavior of primary school children with mental retardation is confirmed. Integrative skills developed among future primary school teachers and psychologists will form the necessary basis for individualization of educational path of a primary school child with mental retardation during the process of psychological-pedagogical support in the context of inclusive education.

### 7.3. Recommendations.

Materials of the research represented in this article can be used by teachers in the system of higher and secondary education during the process of training teachers and psychologists for individualization of work in the context of inclusive education both with children with disabilities and with primary school children with conditionally normative development.

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