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**PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY OF FUTURE MASTERS OF SPECIAL  
(SPEECH PATHOLOGY) EDUCATION**



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**Abstract**

The relevance of research is caused by high standards for higher psychology and education institution during the Russian education system reforms. This is particularly about special education teacher training, whose career deals with the support of children development with disabilities in the learning process, with their conflict-free integration into everyday life, and is held in the advanced complexity conditions. In this regard, this article is concerned with the study of the peculiarities of students' professional identity who take the Master's course in the field of Special (speech pathology) education. By identity, the authors imply an integrated education that includes comprehension of a representative of the worthy occupation being mastered, an adequate assessment of significant proficiency of one's personality, willingness to do work and constantly improve oneself. The principle research technique is an experiment that allows one to explore one of the least developed aspects of a special education teacher training, i.e. the motivational and personal component of professional identity. The authors use an original technique whilst experimental testing. The participants of the study are first-year undergraduates who are already engaged in independent teaching activities and therefore can assess their occupational levels properly. The article presents the peculiarities of their attitude to their chosen occupation, to its requirements and values, skillfully significant personal qualities and their vocational aptitude. The materials and results of this study, experimentally approved and involved in the learning process, can be successfully used in the vocational training of Masters in Special (speech pathology) education arrangement.

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## 1. Introduction

The intensive reform of Russian education involves rethinking its goals and results while ensuring socially acceptable quality. At present, any child is not a passive object of educational influence, but a unique personality worthy of respect and the best conditions for psychological and pedagogical counselling support. This goes to high standards to the training of psychological and educational professionals for mainstream and special (Remedial) educational institutions and also emphasizes the relevance of the problem-focused in this study.

Vvedensky (2015) and Markova (2016) emphasize that a true professional is an educator who varies with education technologies easily, encourages initiative and does not take much advantage of personal example. The teacher's proficiency also implies respect for the chosen profession, a deep awareness of its social significance, readiness for constant self-improvement and enrichment of the skillfulness with creative innovations. Therefore, the issues related to the motivational and personal component of teacher training and professional identity draw experts' attention.

As Saitbayeva and Graboreva (2018) and Slobodchikov (2019) note, the professional identity of a teacher is meant as an integrated education, including awareness of oneself as a representative of the pedagogical profession, a combined grade of one's personal qualities concerning professional norms and values, and finding the meaning of life in professional activities. Moreover, the researchers have not covered all aspects of this urgent problem sufficiently. This is especially true of the development of the professional identity of a special education teacher, who is assigned a very difficult mission.

## 2. Problem Statement

The foundation of the vocational activity of Master in special (speech pathology) education is the psychological and educational support of children with disabilities in the learning process. In other words, they are to provide conditions that encourage the development of their personality. Children with disabilities are those who have habitual (congenital) or acquired disorders that make it difficult for them to socialize and require special educational needs.

Depending on the type and degree of a child's health problem, one can drive for one's needs in mainstream or special (Remedial) educational institutions. In mainstream institutions, such children are taught and brought up together with normal peers (inclusion), and special schools and kindergartens actualize the educational needs of a certain category of children with disabilities (for example, those with defective eyesight, hearing disorder, or mental disabilities).

In both cases, it is necessary to focus not only on didactic problems but also to cope with challenges that distort the interaction of such children with the environment, as well as the development of mentally safe qualities. And this is only available to a highly skilled professional.

The task of this study is directly related to one of the main aspects of training such professionals, with the development of future defectologists' professional identity.

### 3. Research Questions

The vital role of an educator in the development of the children's personality with disabilities and the high social requirements for his training has been the subject of study by both national and foreign experts for a long time.

For example, French and Chopra (2006) emphasize that the quality of a teacher's professional activity working with special children is significantly dependent on certain traits of his personality. Cagran and Schmidt (2011) argue that the effectiveness of co-education of children with disabilities and normal schoolchildren is determined by the psychological readiness of the teacher to work in inclusive education, and classroom climate also depends on it. Studies by Kim (2011) and Pijl (2010) show how the issue of training psychological and pedagogical staff to work with children with special educational needs is solved in different countries. In Russia, issues that are concerned psychological and pedagogical support for children with disabilities are solved among the state priority. The effective training of psychological and pedagogical staff capable of solving these issues in the context of inclusive and special education is no less great importance is attached to. The studies devoted to this problem, particularly emphasize the motivational and personal component of special education teacher training, because their job requires not only advanced knowledge, but also maximum concentration, devotedness, and responsibility. Therefore, along with the development of the approved Master's in special (speech pathology) education educational standard, it is necessary to nourish a psychological culture that is fundamental to professional identity. Yakovleva (2019) and Yamburg and Zabramnaya (2013) insist on the creative nature of the profession of a defectologist, considering initiative and innovation among the most important professionally significant personal skills. Neither taking intervention and educational course, nor the prediction of the results is possible without them. This is a creative principle that underlies psychological culture and the professional identity of a defectologist.

According to Nazarova (2000) a defectologist work is consistent with the works of the Biblical wonder workers who turn the deaf, dumb and blind to normalcy. This is one of few professions that do not comprise the official duties only but requires high-level tolerance, a humanistic worldview, and kindness of heart. The lack of these qualities is a serious contra-indication against mastering the profession of a defectologist. According to Filatova (2015), multi-level education should contribute to the professional development of the personality of future defectologists, the enhancement of their readiness for criterion behaviour based on the structure of the values adopted in national defectology, and providing a socially acceptable level of professional competency.

It is known that the professional competency of a special education teacher is based on knowledge, and is specified and implemented through purposeful activity. Shklyar's (2015) research speaks volumes for that neither skills, experience, nor professionally significant personal qualities necessary for successful support of children with disabilities are developed spontaneously. A special organization of the learning process, its scientific and methodological support and must-have curricular practical training in educational institutions, taking into account the main types of future professional activities, is necessary (Shklyar, 2015).

It should be noted that pride of place goes to this urgent and complex problem at Sholom-Aleichem Priamursky State University, and the accumulated experience is brought to the notice of teaching community in time (Karynbaeva et al., 2017, 2019).

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

This study was conducted in February-March 2020 at Sholom-Aleichem Priamursky State University. Its purpose was to study the features of the professional identity of future Masters in special (speech pathology) education, their attitude to the requirements imposed on the personality of a special education teacher and the assessment of their skills in the context of these requirements.

The novelty of this study is represented by a large amount of factual data that essentially enlarge the available scientific ideas about the motivational and personal component of professional training of special education teachers.

#### **5. Research Methods**

The 18 first-year master's woman students in Special (speech pathology) education, participate in the study. External studies allow them to combine the enhanced educational level with professional activities, so all the subjects are already engaged in psychological and educational support for children with disabilities.

After a robust and complete analysis of the qualification skills of a special education teacher, they had a conversation about the psychological culture of a special education teacher, about the requirements for his personality and social role of this worthy but strenuous profession. Then the subjects were offered an original method of significant personality traits, aimed at reviewing the level and features of their professional identity. The students did the task in an individual writing form. First, the educators asked the girls to assess the professional significance of 10 personality traits (love for children, empathy, responsibility, sociability, tact, self-control, and self-discipline, ability to be quick in decisions, the sixth sense, and psychological resistance). If in the student's view, this or that quality is necessary for the performance of professional functions of a special education teacher, it should be rank at 2 points. If it does not interfere, it pays to 1 point. And those qualities, which a special education teacher can do without, the authors suggest not to evaluate (0 points). Next, the girls should evaluate these qualities in the structure of their personality (fully developed-2 points, still need to master-1 point, did not think about it-0 points). And in conclusion, the subjects were asked to give additionally 3 more qualities, without which, in their opinion, the work of a special education teacher will not be effective enough, and to rank their own.

#### **6. Findings**

As the authors expected, during the conversation, it turned out that all our subjects understood and accepted the main patterns of qualification characteristics of a special education teacher, have a fairly clear idea of professional culture. They respect their chosen profession, are aware of the prospects and opportunities for personal growth that it gives.

When performing significant personality qualities method, the girls quite adequately evaluate the proposed qualities in terms of their professional significance. Of 180 ratings received, only 3 (1.7%) are relatively negative. Three students decide when solving professional problems, it is quite possible to do without the ability to make quick decisions. They explain, without discussion, that when it refers to children with disabilities, the right solution is not always found quickly, and a quick solution is not always correct, since any conclusion needs repeated verification.

6 more students think about the same. They answer that the ability to make decisions quickly would not harm, but is not considered to be necessary for a successful teacher. In total, there are 17 such ratings (9.4 %), including 6 answers related to ultimate belief, and 5 - to self-control. The girl's ultimate belief is said to be less reliable than objective findings. And as for self-control is concerned, it should not affect the positive emotions that are necessary for effective communication with children and their parents. Future Masters' 160 responses (88.9 %) stand for the highest assessment of the professional significance of the observed personality qualities, which are necessary for a special education teacher. What is more, the students add 3 more qualities that they think to be especially important for performing professional duties of a special education teacher. A total of 54 responses are received, and the authors divide all these qualities into 3 groups: emotional, communicative and intellectual.

The first group includes 27 responses (50%) that involve the emotional qualities of an individual (tolerance, empathy, optimism, self-confidence, professional pride, kindness of heart, emotional generosity, etc.). None of the students can imagine professional activity without them, and four girls have all three responses in this group.

The second group consists of communicative qualities (cooperativeness, communicate nicely with children, loyalty to children's interests and opportunities, agreeableness, amiability, politeness, human decency, etc.). There are 17 such responses (31.5%). Intelligent qualities (creativity, outwardness, a quick eye, alertness, punctuality, readiness for self-evolution, etc.) are presented in 10 responses (18.5%).

It should be noted that the qualities listed by future Masters, significantly supplemented the list proposed and confirmed a fairly high level of awareness of the requirements that are imposed on the personality of a special education teacher. Assessing professionally significant qualities in their personality structure, the students answered the questions in all modesty. They worked with ten basic and three additional qualities. Eight girls have a maximum score of 26 points. They believe that they have fully developed all these qualities. Therefore, their choice of the profession of a special education teacher is conscious and correct. The other ten students have more than 20 points. It also corresponds to a high level. In their opinion, it is still possible to master some certain qualities, although they already feel quite comfortable in the profession. That is quite what gives a little pause. On the one hand, the obtained data send a message that the students consider that they are suitable for the field they are studying and already practising, have found personal reasoning of it and are convinced of the correct choice. But on the other hand, there is an obvious overestimation of the required matching imposed on a teacher personality. As the students' behaviour in learning and research shows, most of them still need mastering professionally significant personal qualities. Moreover, it is supposed to be a continuous process, and being sure of that all the necessary qualities for a successful job are already fully developed, can negatively affect the future Masters' will to develop and improve.

## 7. Conclusion

In closing, the study shows that future Masters in Special (speech pathology) education respect the chosen profession, realize both its social significance and personal meaning. Their ideas about the requirements for the personality of a special education teacher are adequate. They value their emotional and personal readiness for professional activity. It emphasizes the socially acceptable quality of their studying. Nevertheless, the problem of the professional identity development of present and future special education teachers is valid for further intensive investigation.

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