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Development of an Inclusive Culture of Pre-service Teacher

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Abstract

The new social situation has changed the paradigm of teacher training. The individual training is one of the key trends of Russian education. Many educational organizations worldwide have their own unique experience in the implementation of inclusive education. Currently, Russian education is undergoing a transition process to create a holistic system of inclusive education that develops cultural values, defines the methodology, principles and arrangements for implementing the ideas of inclusive education. Nowadays the most important role in inclusive education takes a teacher. The readiness of a teacher to provide career guidance and inclusive education, to promote employment and to build value is of a particular relevance. To make inclusion more effective and change a mindset, acceptance of inclusion ideas are required, first of all, by teachers themselves. Thus, the creation of an inclusive culture becomes an essential issue for teachers. The purpose of the study is to analyze the implementation strategy to develop an inclusive culture of teachers. The article considers the experience of Minin University. The conducted research allows us to conclude that it is necessary to develop an inclusive culture of teachers, which determines the efficiency of the inclusion process as a whole, and also gives an opportunity to maintain and convey the values of inclusion in the society. The results of the study can be used in comparative studies for the development of methodology for inclusive higher education, as well as by employees of universities who are responsible for the issues of inclusive education.

Keywords: inclusive education, a culture of inclusion, inclusive culture, teacher training, teacher, vocational training

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Introduction

The implementation of educational integration is emphasized by merging general and special education, the introduction into practice of various models and options for integrated teaching and whole-person development. Teachers of higher education institutions are involved in counseling and guidance of students with special needs, they arrange their learning environment. The new conditions of a teacher's professional activity, the conditions of educational integration (inclusive education) generate the need to determine the content and forms of special knowledge, skills, competencies, integral personality qualities of teachers during pre-service teacher training. The conditions provide, on the one hand, a high quality of the learning process, and, on the other hand, success in the employment. It is an obvious task to train a new thinking of a teacher, a teacher who perceives an inclusive aspect of professional culture, which gives an opportunity to establish effective interaction with all participants of the learning process. The culture of inclusion, in our opinion, contributes to the creation and development of values and technologies of inclusive education, which incorporate a knowledge system, skills, social, personal and professional competencies that allow teachers to work efficiently in an inclusive education (integrative learning), to determine the optimal conditions for the personal development of each child. The efficiency of the inclusion process as a whole depends on the culture of inclusion in an educational organization, and the values maintained and conveyed in the society. However, inclusion is impossible without the change of the mindset of all participants in the educational process, which is formed as a result of events directly related to the problems of personal education (Mamedova, 2017).

Purpose and objectives of the study

The purpose of this research is aimed at studying the experience of Minin University in creating inclusive culture of trainee teachers. Minin University today gives particular consideration to the development of the teaching and learning process of trainee teachers and it is one of the major teacher resource centers for teaching students with disabilities and health restrictions in the Nizhny Novgorod region. The center pays special attention to creating the learning process and inclusive educational environment.

Literature review

Traditionally, higher education institutions act as cultural centers of the society, inventors and executives of innovative ideas and values that affect the interrelations in the society. The culture of inclusion directly depends on its creation in higher education institutions.

The development of inclusion in higher education takes place according to its own unique scenario, depending on the staff, facilities, and categories of students with disabilities and other factors of educational institutions. Researchers consider that the United States and Norway are the countries with a developed system of inclusive education (Ardzinba, 2010; Kurmysheva, 2012). The United States was successful in creating inclusion by implementing an integrated approach with the specialists from various fields of knowledge. Even launching a special campaign in the media to change the attitude of the society to the people with disabilities, psychologists and other specialists were involved (Ardzinba, 2010). In a number of other developed countries, such as Germany, France, Spain, and Canada, the problems of teaching people with health restrictions and disabilities are solved with the help of inclusive approaches (Hill & Brown, 2013; Kurmysheva, 2012; Khotyleva & Akhutina, 2010).

The researchers of the inclusive practice in Russia currently note the formal nature of inclusion (Denisova & Lekhanova, 2017). In order to overcome it, universities are proposed to support the idea of lifelong learning of people with health restrictions and disabilities, to carry out regular research, consulting, information and awareness-raising, psychological and correction-pedagogical work, to improve the quality of pre-university training and career guidance (Denisova & Lekhanova, 2017). Defining inclusive education as both an innovation resource and a social good, universities suggest work to overcome social risks of inclusion in the educational modernized process, lack of learning resources, and social uncertainty (Volosnikova, Efimova & Ogorodnova, 2017). Some authors state a lack of special education and social, cultural and psychological reluctance to inclusive education shown by the majority of children with disabilities and their parents (Volosnikova, Efimova & Ogorodnova, 2017; Kantor, Antropov & Proekt, 2020; Sorokin & Lukovenko, 2018; Khusnutdinova, 2017).

The development of inclusive practices in education is based on interaction of students with disabilities and all agents of the educational process. According to Alyokhina (2014), the idea of inclusion requires not only "inclusion" itself, but also "inclusion" in the process of interaction with others, learning to be open to communication, to see the need for their own changes, to be able to accept the peculiarities and differences of other people. Today, a rapid process is underway in the field of education, aimed at adapting curricula, improving teaching skills. However, despite this, psychological barriers are serious restraining factors in inclusion development (Alyokhina, 2014). According to the researchers, the main reason for low motivation of school graduates with disabilities to obtain higher education is a lack of subjects based on inclusive learning (Kashtanova & Filchenkova, 2016). To overcome the barriers a special culture should be created, in which "inclusive values, beliefs and behaviors will be shared by the majority and determine the norms of behavior in the establishment of individuals and groups" (Leonenko & Pankova, 2015).

The events to install a culture of inclusion among students, taking into account the special needs, opportunities, abilities and interests of students with health restrictions and disabilities are characterized by fragmentary nature, lack of coordination and consistency. Currently, there is an urgent need for developing a plan to install a culture of inclusion. It is to be aimed at integration and social engagement among people with various health disorders in different educational and socio-cultural systems to develop a culture of acceptance and support.

Methodology

This work is based on speculative methods, including the analysis of the research subject based on the study of philosophical, psychological and pedagogical literature; reflexive and system-oriented analysis of the university activities to create a culture of inclusion. As empirical methods, factor qualitative evaluation of student interviews and questionnaires were used.

The role of culture as a leading one in the development of inclusive education is noted by many researchers. Thus, the model developed by the Center for Studies on Inclusive Education (Bristol, UK), identifies three components that affect the development of inclusion in education. Firstly, it is inclusive culture creation (values and principles shared by the whole team and implemented in behavior). Secondly, it is inclusive policy development (regulatory documents, a set of occupational guidance and support, etc.). Thirdly, it is introduction of an inclusive practice in an educational establishment through technologies, equipment, methods, etc. (Booth, 2007). Inclusive culture in such a model is the key element that sets changes in other areas.

The concept of "inclusive culture" is widely discussed in the Russian research literature and does not have a single definition. Khitryuk defines an inclusive culture in terms of personal development. This is an integrative personal quality, which both contributes to the system of values and the development of inclusive education technologies, and integrates a system of knowledge, skills, socio-personal and professional competencies that allow a teacher to work effectively in an inclusive education (integrative learning), to determine the optimal conditions for the development of each child (Khitryuk, 2012; Khitryuk, 2015). Starovoit interprets an inclusive culture as a certain "level of society consisting in a tolerant and safe attitude of people to one another", which implies the acceptance of individual values, the creation of inclusive values (2016). Here, the main ideology issues are a safe and tolerant community and the ideas of equality that encourage inclusive education.

Some researchers distinguish between the concepts of "inclusive culture of an educational institution" (an element of corporate culture) and "inclusive culture of the subject of the educational process" (inclusive culture of teachers, students, their parents, and social partners, based on behavior and reflection) (Alyokhina, 2014). In this sense, an inclusive culture can be defined as the foundation to create an inclusive culture.

Our research is based on the concept of "inclusive culture", proposed by Kudryavtsev, Kashtanova, and others. The authors consider this concept as a certain system-forming socio-cultural phenomenon that ensures the development of "ideology, strategies, means, forms, and technologies of the inclusion process itself" (Kudryavtsev, Kashtanova, Olgina, Medvedeva & Karpushkina, 2018). This requires a system strategy in certain areas of activity: from understanding and accepting total multiculturalism to creation of a just society of equal opportunities.

The study was conducted in Minin University from 2018 to 2019. The study involved more than 3370 students of inclusive groups, as well as of higher school teachers – 596. As a part of the study, a survey was conducted to check the level of organization of the educational process, the physical and psychological state of students as well as the psychological, methodological readiness of teachers to implement inclusive higher education.

Results

A monitoring survey of educational needs of youngsters with disabilities, which is carried out before they enter higher school, creates a fundamental possibility of high-quality, rather than "spontaneous" inclusive education. It provides management tasks related to the design of changes in inclusive education, focused on the right to education of children with disabilities and their successful social adjustment in the society. Let us turn to the results of the research conducted by Minin University in December 2018, which was attended by final year students of 14 special schools from 7 federal subjects of the Volga Federal District: the Republic of Mordovia, the Penza Region, the Perm Region, the Samara Region, the Saratov Region, the Nizhny Novgorod Region, and the Ulyanovsk Region. As the research shows, applicants with various health disorders are ready to study in the general academic (inclusive) group (52% out of 100% of respondents). The majority of teachers also believes that it would make sense to teach general (inclusive) groups.

The results of the study show that the socio-psychological situation in an educational institution is an indispensable aspect of an inclusive educational environment.

The introduction of inclusive education in Russia maintains the task of creating an inclusive culture in higher education, which implies the creation of conditions that ensure social and psychological well-being of both students with disabilities and students in good health. The research of socio-psychological well-being conducted by authors in 2019 showed that students feel equally well in mixed groups. In total, 3,306 students from inclusive groups from 32 universities of the Nizhny Novgorod, Penza, Samara, Saratov, Ulyanovsk regions, the Republic of Mordovia and the Perm Region took part in the survey. However, the research shows that university staffs are not sufficiently ready-to work in inclusive groups.

Thus, it is important to provide necessary conditions to develop readiness of pre-service teachers to work with children with special needs. To solve this problem, the most effective one is the activity approach, which involves all subjects of the educational system in collaboration. In other words, the creation of an inclusive culture depends on the socio-cultural space. Pre-service teacher will not be able to involve students and parents in the process of creating an inclusive practice effectively, if they do not internally accept the ideas of inclusive education. Minin University implements a set of intensive courses, workshops and leisure activities to create a culture of inclusion of trainee teachers in order to provide conditions to adapt to the environmental demands and to correct their behavior.

Discussion

The researchers from different countries note that the socio-psychological situation in an educational institution is an important aspect of an inclusive educational environment (Hill & Brown, 2013; Akhmetzyanova, Artemyeva, Kurbanova, Nigmatullina, Tvardovskaya & Fayzrakhmanova, 2015; Kantor & Proekt, 2019). The majority of researchers also believe that it would make sense to teach general (inclusive) groups (Afanasyev, Denisova, Lekhanova & Ponikarova, 2019; Zakharova, 2020; Kantor & Proekt, 2019; Kudryavtsev, Kashtanova, Olgina, Medvedeva & Karpushkina, 2018; Starovoit, 2016; Krasnopevtseva, Paputkova & Filchenkova, 2019).

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The key forms and means of the work to create a culture of inclusion are:

- 1) An open architectural space based on the principles of universally applicable design and reasonable accommodation.

In Minin University, an integrated approach is used to implement this principle. Its peculiarity lies in the use of project work in groups that develops solutions for the educational environment and helps achieve a high level of accessibility and quality of higher education, allowing creating an inclusive culture of the university. The project groups comprise representatives of the management staff, faculties, financial and economic services, as well as representatives of public organizations of people with disabilities. Their solutions involve designing a comfortable environment in the organization. Design and project-oriented innovations of the educational environment, their use in the educational process of persons with health restrictions and disabilities of all nosological forms imply the transformation of the educational environment giving an opportunity to zone the educational environment for different types of activities and to combine several rooms both for the educational process and for holding cultural, artistic and creative events. The created system in Minin University was highly appreciated by experts as a result of an independent quality assessment of educational activities carried out in 2020 by the Public Council of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Russian Federation for an independent quality assessment. According to the results of the assessment, Minin University received 98 points out of 100.

2) Network interaction with educational and non-governmental organizations to give intensive courses and events related to improve cultural background.

In implementing the idea of creating a culture of inclusion, Minin University has a wide representation of partners, which, in addition to 56 universities, include more than 10 non-governmental organizations of people with disabilities, more than 50 general education and special schools, executive authorities, and experts in the field of inclusive education. The promotion of the inclusive culture is carried out through collaboration of an educative, training and charitable nature, wide involvement of the media in the events. In 2020 alone, more than 150 partners were involved in co-operative activities, and more than 1,000 people from universities, schools, colleges and technical schools, non-governmental organizations of people with disabilities, regional education authorities and employers took part in them. Experts note that the university is becoming a force that changes the environment, the attitude to the society, and network interaction strengthens the role of social inclusion.

When installing inclusive values, Minin University pays special attention to the educational process of trainee teachers. Thus, taking the major curriculum, trainee teachers master the courses "Children with disabilities in the educational and socio-cultural space" and the courses "Psychological and pedagogical principles of working with children with disabilities" and "Background practices and technologies in the system of psychological and pedagogical support for persons with disabilities".

The purpose of these courses is to develop professional competence in pedagogy through the solution of professional and pedagogical tasks of different levels to design the teaching process and use psychological and pedagogical technologies when interacting with different participants of the school community. Such skills are indispensable to make training, development, education more individualized. The result of the obtained knowledge is the ability of the trainee teacher to transform special scientific knowledge and apply it according to the psychophysiological, age and cognitive peculiarities of students, including those with special educational and physical needs.

In order to form a common understanding of the inclusive culture ideology, lectures, seminars (webinars), workshops, competitions of research works are held for university students. Modular extra academic programs are implemented: the volunteer training program "Inclusive volunteering at the university" for students and "Management, psychological and pedagogical fundamental principles of higher education" for employees.

The educational activities at Minin University are aimed at creating student projects following the educational convention "Co-operation", which allow developing the inclusive potential of trainee teachers. Since 2018, the university has been operating an inclusive student association "League of Inclusive People", which unites students regardless of their physical, psychophysical and educational needs.

In order to develop the socio-cultural inclusive environment of the university, aimed at socializing people with disabilities and creating a common space for schoolchildren, students, parents and teachers cultural and sports events, creative events, various PR actions are organized at leisure time, which allow to involve people with disabilities and eliminate the communication barrier.

The main thing in such university activities developing an inclusive culture is to involve the employees and university students in interaction with schoolchildren and students with disabilities on a regular basis. Such an approach changes the attitude of trainee teachers and develops the culture of inclusion. The main results of the presented work are the following: university staff and students are involved in interaction with persons with health restrictions and disabilities; pre-service teachers are more prepared to work with people with health restrictions and disabilities; communication barriers are resolved.

Conclusion

The definition of "inclusive education" is defined in the Federal Law No. 273-FZ of 29.12.2012 (as amended on 24.03.2021) "On Education in the Russian Federation" as "ensuring equal access to education for all students, taking into account the diversity of special educational needs and individual opportunities".

Currently, the teaching community actively discusses inclusive education. Nowadays it is obvious that inclusive education is a model of an inclusive social community, free from stereotypes and discrimination. The implementation of inclusion in the life of educational organizations faces resistance or hesitation of teachers. In order to move inclusion to a new level and make it more effective, it requires a mindset change and acceptance of the ideas of inclusion. First of all, it is a teacher with a new mindset, developed by the inclusive aspect of professional and teaching culture, who is able to manage effective interaction of all participants in the educational process (Gerasimov, 2016; Denisova & Lekhanova, 2017; Akhmetzyanova, et al., 2015; Tvardovskaya & Fedorova, 2015; Mamedova, 2017). Thus, the development of an inclusive culture becomes a strategic point for the teachers training.

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