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## **EQUAL ACCESS TO EDUCATION FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES IN RUSSIA: CONCEPT, PROBLEMS, AND A VARIETY OF SOLUTIONS**

### **Introduction**

One of the most important rights and freedoms of citizens in modern society is the universal right to education, which is guaranteed by the basic regulatory acts of the state. The opportunity to get an education, while being instrumental for every person to ensure his or her personality development, also determines the main vector of development of the society as a whole.

An analysis of the current state of the education system allows us to state that by the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Russia had a well-developed system of education coupled with a system of psychological, medical, pedagogical and social assistance given to children with sensory, speech and intellectual disabilities through educational, health and social protection institutions. The system supported children with visual, hearing, intellectual, speech, and musculoskeletal impairments with various forms of education and necessary developmental assistance (Baryaeva, Zarin, 1999; Malofeev, 2001, 2011). Inevitable development of society involves setting new tasks for social institutions and the educational system is no exception. Despite the significant achievements of Russia in the field of educating people with developmental problems and providing them with

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comprehensive correction and assistance, it is possible to identify the ‘blinds-pots’ and, accordingly, the problems that became apparent at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In our opinion, these include, firstly, a certain isolation of educational institutions for students with disabilities. As a result, the unity of the educational space was violated, which, in turn, could affect the step-by-step solution of the main problem, that is, their socialization. Secondly, children with certain types of disabilities were not included in the educational process. Particularly up to a certain time in the past, children with a complex defect structure and severe multiple developmental disabilities were not fully included in the educational process (Malofeev, Kukushkina, Nikolskaya, Goncharova, 2013).

Thus, a comprehension of the education system’s functioning together with a humanization of public and state attitudes toward disabled children underlie the system’s improvement, which was carried out in three directions:

- improving the regulatory framework for the education of children with disabilities;
- improving the program-methodological support for the education of children with disabilities;
- improving personnel training.

In this article, we will only consider the first direction – the regulatory framework for the education of children with disabilities. In the past three decades, educational issues concerning children with disabilities have attracted a lot of legislative attention. They are mentioned in such federal laws as: ‘On Basic Guarantees of the Rights of the Child in the Russian Federation’, ‘On Ratification of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities’, ‘On the Social Protection of Persons with Disabilities in the Russian Federation’, etc. This allows us to state that a modern legislative system has been created in Russia that guarantees the realization of the right to education for all.

Normative clarity is the most important condition for the development of any education system. Its modern status is determined by the Law ‘On Education in the Russian Federation’ as a unified system that meets the educational needs of all people. It should be emphasized that the law clearly regulates issues related to the education of persons with disabilities. First of all, their realization of the right to education requires a creation of the **necessary conditions** for receiving, without discrimination, a quality education. These conditions should ensure: the correction of developmental disabilities, social adaptation, provision of early corrective assistance using special pedagogical approaches, communication methods and modes, as well as the social development.

It is possible to achieve the goals by developing a set of **tools**. The key tools include:

- federal educational standards for general education of students with disabilities;
- adapted basic general education programs;

- special conditions for obtaining education;
- variability of the choice of forms of education.

Without a doubt, a federal educational standard is the first tool that ensures the accessibility of education for students with disabilities.

Based on the implementation of the provisions of the Law ‘On Education in the Russian Federation’, the following two state educational Standards were developed and enforced: the federal educational standard for primary education for students with disabilities and the federal educational standard for students with intellectual disability.

It should be emphasized that the Standard for students with disabilities regulates the conditions for obtaining education, the structure of the adapted program and the final outcome after finishing it, but only at the level of primary education. The standard for students with intellectual disability does not introduce a mastery of any level of education (the period for obtaining the education is from 9 to 13 years). This makes it possible for a large number of schoolchildren with visual, hearing, speech, and motor impairments, and also with learning difficulties to complete in the future primary and secondary education programs along with their peers. The experience gained in recent decades proves this convincingly.

The development of federal standards for different categories of disabilities does not imply contrasting them with general education standards. On the contrary, while serving as a tool for organizing the educational system, they have become an effective means for its improvement and development, primarily in the part related to the education of children with disabilities (Ilyina, 2014). The implementation of standards helps to expand the **variability and accessibility of education** for all groups of children with disabilities, including children with severe and complex developmental disorders. Secondly, it provides children with a high developmental potential with the opportunity to transfer at any stage of study to general education educational programs or to continue education according to the general education program at the basic education stage after completing the primary education stage.

The development of the Standard was based on the main ideas of the Russian defectology school (Babkina, 2018; Malofeev, Kukushkina, Nikolskaya, Goncharova, 2013):

- Children with disabilities have special educational needs, which determines the need to create special conditions for their education;
- The heterogeneity of the composition of different groups of children with disabilities determines a wide range of their capabilities in mastering the content of education and the variability of the forms of their education.

In the process of developing the Standard, the question arose of determining the special educational needs common to each individual group of children. The solution to this question was based on the cultural-historical theory of the mental

development and personality development of Vygotsky. It allowed us to consider the educational environment formed by the cultural traditions in the family and school environment as the main factor in the child's development (Vygotsky, 1983a). Deviations in the development of a child with disabilities lead to an exclusion from a socially and culturally determined educational space. The child's connection with society and culture as a source of development, is flagrantly violated, because an adult member of a culture cannot or does not know how to convey the social experience which is often mastered without specially organized learning conditions. It is possible to overcome the 'social dislocation' and introduce the child into the culture using the 'workarounds' of the specially constructed education (Vygotsky, 1983b). This goal set can be achieved by means of posing and solving special problems, making the content of education specific, using appropriate means, methods, techniques, and systematic psychological and pedagogical support for the education of a child with disabilities.

The implementation of the variability and accessibility of education for students with disabilities which takes into consideration not only typological, but, if necessary, individual educational needs, is provided by:

- development and implementation of adapted basic educational programs, including individual ones;
- creation of several options of adapted programs for each group of students with disabilities within a particular category;
- longer period of education;
- specification of the conditions for obtaining education for each group of students with disabilities within a particular category.

**The second tool** that ensures the accessibility and variability of the education for students with disabilities comprises the adapted basic educational programs as a set of basic characteristics of education (scope, content, planned results) and the organizational and pedagogical conditions of their education. Based on the requirements of the Standard, exemplary adapted education programs have been developed for each group of students with disabilities (Federal Law of Russian Federation...). Each of them is represented by several options. Given the content of these programs, each educational organization has the opportunity to take into account special educational needs of its students, which ultimately has a positive impact on improving the quality of education (Ilyina, Zarin, 2015).

Special educational needs differ among children of different groups, because they are determined by the specifics of the disabilities, dictate the special logic of the educational process, and they also are reflected in all its components (Malo-feev, Nikolskaya, Kukushkina, 2009). The general and specific educational needs of different groups of children with disabilities are presented in the texts of federal educational standards and exemplary adapted educational programs (Exemplary adapted basic general educational program...; Federal state educational standard...; The federal state educational standard).

Each of the options of the adapted program, as noted above, takes into account special educational needs. This results in:

- changing the content of education (for example, both by introducing special sections in the education content that are not present in the Program addressed to peers without health restrictions, and by reducing the amount of content);
- if necessary, the use of special methods, techniques and training tools (including specialized computer technologies) allowing for special educational needs (providing ‘workarounds’ in training);
- individualization of education (required to a greater extent than for a child without disabilities);
- providing a special spatial and temporal organization of the educational environment;
- maximum expansion of the educational space (going beyond the educational institution to expand the sphere of life competence).

For example, the first option of the adapted program for all categories of students with disabilities (with the exception of schoolchildren with intellectual disability) involves their education together with healthy peers, and within the same period. The main difference between the education of children with disabilities according to this option is that it includes the development of the correctional program (determining the list and content of correctional cycles), as well as determining the requirements for personnel and material and technical conditions which can account for the specifics of typological and individual educational needs. It should be noted that the prospect of entering the group of at least one child with a hearing, vision, or other developmental problem determines the need to develop an adapted educational program for him or her. We may consider this as the highest degree of realization of the child’s right to receive a quality education in accordance with his or her real capabilities and needs.

The second option of the adapted program assumes that children with disabilities receive an education that is consistent, at the time of completion of education, with the final achievements of the education of students without disabilities. However, in this case, the period of learning is increased by 1–2 years. This option of the program provides an introduction of subjects that are not in the first option, as well as the specification of requirements for methods, means and forms of organization of education.

The third and fourth options of the adapted programs are intended for students who have sensory or motor impairments, or autistic spectrum disorders combined with different levels of intellectual disabilities. In accordance with these program options, children with disabilities receive an education that is not comparable to the education of students without disabilities in terms of final achievements and is also carried out within a prolonged period. This education is not qualified. These program options due to their content, learning outcomes and conditions of implementation for the first time allowed for the opportunity

for the children to receive an education in accordance with their real educational needs.

For students with severe speech impairment and intellectual disability two options have been developed (1 and 2); for students with with hearing impaired and with late onset blindness, and also with vision impaired and with late onset deafness three options have been developed (1, 2 and 3). For blind or deaf students and also for students with disorders of the musculoskeletal system and autism spectrum disorders four options have been developed (1, 2, 3 and 4). The adapted program for students with intellectual disability is presented in two options: the first is for students with mild intellectual disability; the second – for students with moderate, severe and profound intellectual disability, and severe multiple developmental disorders.

**The third tool** that ensures accessibility and variability of education for students with disabilities are the **special conditions** of obtaining an education, a list of whom is stipulated in the Law on Education ('the use of special educational programs, teaching and upbringing methods, special textbooks, teaching aids and didactic materials, special teaching aids for collective and individual use, provision of services of an assistant (helper) providing the students with necessary technical assistance, conducting group and individual correction training, provision of access to buildings of organizations', Federal Law of Russian Federation...). All these conditions, with the exception of the provision of assistant-helper services, relate to the group of material and technical conditions, which includes educational and methodological conditions. This group of conditions, like the other two groups (personnel and financial), are specified and clearly defined taking into account the special educational needs of each group of students.

**The fourth tool** that ensures the accessibility of education for every child with disabilities, regardless of the severity of disability, is the variability of the choice of the form of education. When deciding on the forms of organizing the education of students with disabilities, the Education Law gives a definite answer, reinforcing the diverse practice that has developed in recent decades. This position of the state reflects the position of the defectological community, which advocates providing parents with the opportunity to choose one of the forms of education for their child (Baryaeva, Zarin, 1999; Malofeev, 2018; Malofeev, Shmatko, 2007; Kantor, Matasov, Penin, Antropov, 2012). There are three forms of education provided for students with disabilities: together with other students, in separate classes and groups or in separate organizations (kindergartens, schools) that carry out educational activities. In our opinion, this is the best solution to the problem. It allows to take into account the demands of parents and possibilities of the psychophysical development of children to the greatest possible extent, and also ensures that all children, including children with severe and multiple developmental disabilities, are actually included in the educational sphere.

Thus, the cardinal legislative update of the educational process of students with disabilities allows on the one hand, to provide educational tools to cover various nosological categories and groups of students, regardless of the types of developmental disabilities they have and their severity. On the other hand, it ensures that the general and specific educational needs of each group of students are taken into account, which, in turn, is a guarantee of the accessibility and quality of the education they receive.

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## EQUAL ACCESS TO EDUCATION FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES IN RUSSIA: CONCEPT, PROBLEMS, AND A VARIETY OF SOLUTIONS

### *Abstract*

The beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is the period of updating and designing the modern educational system in Russia. A new regulatory and legal framework has been created for the functioning of a unified education system (law regarding education, federal educational standards and exemplary educational programs). It ensures equal access to education in different settings at all levels of education (primary, basic secondary) for every child with a disability, taking into account their capabilities and educational needs. In the article, the authors present conceptual foundations and problems related to the educational integration of students with disabilities in Russia.

*Keywords:* unified education system, equal access to education, capabilities and educational needs, accessibility and variability of education for students with disabilities, students with disabilities in Russia

## RÓWNY DOSTĘP UCZNIÓW Z NIEPEŁNOSPRAWNOŚCIAMI DO EDUKACJI W ROSJI: KONCEPCJA, PROBLEMY, RÓŻNORODNE ROZWIĄZANIA

### *Abstrakt*

Początek XXI w. to okres przebudowy systemu oświaty w Rosji. Stworzona została wspólna normatywno-prawna baza funkcjonowania jednolitego systemu kształcenia (prawo edukacyjne, federalne państwowe standardy edukacyjne i wzory programów kształcenia), która zapewnia równy dostęp do edukacji w różnych placówkach na poziomie edukacji podstawowej, edukacji ponadpodstawowej – średniej dla każdego ucznia z niepełnosprawnością z uwzględnieniem jego możliwości i potrzeb edukacyjnych.

W artykule autorzy prezentują podstawy koncepcyjne i problemy związane z edukacją integracyjną/inkluzywną uczniów z niepełnosprawnościami w Rosji.

*Słowa kluczowe:* jednolity system edukacji, równy dostęp do edukacji, możliwości i potrzeby edukacyjne, dostępność i różnorodność edukacji dla uczniów z niepełnosprawnością, uczniowie z niepełnosprawnością w Rosji