Influence of self-esteem on relationships in inclusive educational environment[1]

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Abstract

The article considers the features of social integration children with special needs in inclusive educational environment. The importance of appropriate self-esteem is emphasized. The main points of self-esteem are examined in children of traditional and inclusive classes in schools of Lviv region Ukraine. Tolerance and respect for children with special needs by pedagogical staff and students brings their result in the process of communication. Creating a supportive, casual atmosphere in the school, recognizing the uniqueness of each, supporting each member of the team, significantly improves the effectiveness

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of children's education and communication. The author also emphasizes the importance of using differentiated approach to children with special needs in inclusive educational environment. It was found that more students with low self-esteem are in inclusive classes, and the level of self-esteem in general among inclusive students is slightly lower than the self-esteem level of students in traditional classes in Ukrainian schools according to the data of the research.

Key words: inclusive educational environment; differentiated approach; self-esteem; social skills

Introduction

One of the problems of inclusive education is the establishment of relationships between children with psycho-physical disabilities and peers with typical development in the inclusive class. One of the most difficult aspects of this problem is finding ways and means to overcome obstacles in the student's interaction with the class. The work of many scientists is devoted to the study of the peculiarities of mutual relations in the team (Vettese, Dyer, Li, Wekerle, 2011). Approaches to solving the problem of student's joining a new class, problems of self-perception and transition to next level of education are especially important scientific issues (Wigfield, Eccles, MacIver, Reuman, Midgley, 1991). The problem of influence of social and psychological environment on the adaptation of students in the new class group is very relevant nowadays, because of significant amount of children with behavioral problems such as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (Rief, 2005) Previous literature has shown that higher levels of self-esteem help youths to engage in positive health maintenance behaviors and avoid substance use (Dalgas-Pelish, 2006)

Children with disabilities, who are enrolled in an inclusive class, are not always adequately perceived by the peer group. The formation of relationships of students in inclusive class is influenced by many factors, in particular, the influence of parents of students with typical development on positive relationships in the classroom, the individual features of psychophysical development of each student-participant of inclusive collective. Also, important items are training of typical children and their parents, work of pedagogical staff, level of cooperation of specialists (Chopik, 2011). At present, the problem of forming a team in an inclusive class is urgent due to the lack of competence of teachers. The priority of inclusive school teachers is the formation of positive relationships between children, the creation of a favorable atmosphere in the team by involving children to extracurricular activities, etc. Forming positive relationships among children in an inclusive classroom is an important area of work for the classroom teacher.

The relationships of the students in inclusive classes do not form spontaneously; the use of traditional ways and methods is insufficient to educate the team. The analysis of literary sources and practice shows that one of the conditions for forming relationships between children in an inclusive class is a positive attitude towards teachers from parents. Often in Ukraine teachers are not competent enough to form an inclusive class (Chopik, 2013). Positive relationships are also important part of successful interventions targeting social-emotional behaviors in the school (Taal, Ekels, van der Valk, van der Molen, 2017). It is important to avoid physical and mental health impairment caused by stress (Shankar, Park, 2016).

The aim of the study is to discover the main conditions for successful integration of the child with special needs into inclusive educational environment, to compare the level of self-esteem in traditional and inclusive classes and to analyze the role of appropriate self-esteem of children in inclusive educational process.

Theoretical framework. In the educational process of an inclusive class, behavioral and social goals are prioritized over training goals in the structure of an individual program of development of a child with special needs. Therefore, a differentiated approach to children with special needs should be focused on the needs of all students (Chopik, 2014). A differentiated approach to different groups of students, taking into account typological features of their neurodynamics, mental capacity, purposefulness and independence in activity, its motivation, volitional qualities is manifested not only in the differentiation of program requirements of mastering the relevant educational material, but also the differentiation of corrections. Differentiation provides a systematic approach to the education of diverse children's teams and is an important component in the planning of the educational process. The differentiated approach in an inclusive educational process is based on the following beliefs: students of one age differ in their readiness for learning, interests, learning styles, experiences, inclinations, life circumstances, and personal experiences. Pupils of an inclusive class also differ in individual psychological characteristics, which certainly influences the formation of their interpersonal relationships, communication and understanding each other, one of the most important item of this process is the forming appropriate (positive) students' self-esteem, but high self-esteem is not always a good thing. There is increasing recognition that high self-esteem is heterogeneous. Recent research suggests that individuals who report having high self-esteem (i.e., have high explicit self-esteem) behave more defensively to the extent that they have relatively low implicit self-esteem (Jordan, Zanna, 2005).

Studying in inclusive classes of children with special educational needs, on the one hand, helps them to adapt to usual life situations, get rid of the feeling of isolation, alienation, promotes the disappearance of social barriers and integration into society, on the other hand - teaches the student community to work

together, they create a sense of responsibility for those who need not only help but, above all, acceptance and recognition.

The main purpose of inclusive education is to achieve qualitative changes in the personal development of children with special needs. However, inclusivity does not mean assimilation or the desire to make everyone the same; its key component is flexibility, considering the personal characteristics of each child. In establishing effective communication of students in inclusive class, there is the social and psychological characteristics of each student that is one of the determining factors for successful interaction.

The modification and adaptation of the educational environment implies the creation of an acceptable and favorable environment for the realization of developmental and educational tasks. Effective correction and development process contributes the development of the personality of a child with special needs on the basis of their abilities, motives and opportunities, the development of motivational, informational, operational and emotional components of communication activities, special organization of communication of a special child with peers, aimed at forming ideas, assessing interpersonal relationships, gaining communicative experience. Tolerance and respect for children with special needs by pedagogical workers and students brings its result in the process of communication of students of inclusive class, because a special child will not feel tension in relations, will feel interested in his friends and feel his own value (Trautwein, Lüdtke, Köller, Baumert, 2006)

One of the problems of inclusive education is the establishment of relationships between children with disabilities and their peers. Children with disabilities who are in an inclusive class are not always adequately perceived by the peer group. Typical children's behavior can be a decisive component of the success or failure of students with special educational needs. The integration of children with special needs into the peer group contributes the development of their communication skills (Shilling, 2015). The setting of typical children can become a decisive component of the success or failure of students with special educational needs (Shipitsina, 2004). Children with special needs become bullying more often than other children. They are more often can be ignored by peers and feel alienated. Even though the difference between children with special needs and their peers is insignificant, it is still reflected in many areas (Chopik, 2012). Objective complication of contact of children with special needs leads to slowing down of social settings, they have a low mood, tendency to seclusion, increased irritability, negative tendencies of development of all components of self-consciousness. We can meet even the cruelty of healthy children in modern schools to children with special needs.

Creating a supportive, casual atmosphere in the school, recognizing the uniqueness of each, supporting each member of the team, significantly improves the

effectiveness of children's education and communication. Teachers should encourage friendly relationships, promote communication and interaction between students, which will certainly reduce social stratification. Friendship in a team is one of the most important outcomes of the learning process (Tanaka at al., 2011)

Inclusive education helps children with special needs to adapt to normal life situations, integrate into the general society, get rid of complexes, sense of isolation, promote the disappearance of social barriers and segregation, the emergence of a sense of identity and involvement. Integration of children with special needs into the peer group contributes to the formation of their communicative skills - communication, finding common ground and consensus, solving conflict situations. An inclusive teaching approach overcomes the psychological barrier in the process of combining and understanding typical and special needs children at school and in society in general (Twenge, Twenge, Campbell, 2010).

In order to compare indicators of individual and group characteristics of students of inclusive class with identical characteristics of peers, research was also conducted in classes with traditional education.

Methodology. Method of research is Dembo-Rubinstein's self-esteem examination in the modification of A. M. Prichozhan (1999).

This technique is based on the students' direct assessment of several personal qualities, such as health, ability, character, and so on. The subjects are asked to mark on vertical lines the level of development of these qualities (self-esteem index) and the level of tries, that is, the level of development of the same qualities that would satisfy them. Each subject is offered by a method sheet containing instructions and tasks.

Instruction. "Each evaluates his/her abilities, capabilities, character, etc. The level of development of each quality, the sides of the human face can be conditionally depicted by a vertical line, the lower point of which will symbolize the lowest development, and the upper - the highest. Students are offered five such lines. They denote:

1) intelligence;
2) peer authority;
3) skillful hands;
4) appearance;
5) self-confidence.

On each line, mark with a (-) mark how you evaluate the development of this quality, the side of personality now. After that, mark (x) at which level of development of these qualities, the parties you would be satisfied with yourself or feel „proud of yourself".

The test subject is given a form showing five lines, each height 100 mm, with the upper, lower points and the middle of the scale. In this case, the upper and lower points are marked by prominent features, the middle - barely noticeable point.

The technique can be carried out both frontally – with the whole class (or group) and individually. In frontal work, it is necessary to check how each student has completed the first scale. It is needed to make sure the suggested icons are applied correctly, and the question answered. After that the subject works independently. Time taken to complete the scale with reading the instruction, 10-12 min.

Processing is carried out on six scales (the first, training – „health" – not considered). Each answer is expressed in points. As noted earlier, the length of each scale is 100 mm, according to this answer students get a quantitative characteristic (for example, 54 mm = 54 points – 54%).

1. For each of the six scales, determine:
   a) level of claims - the distance in mm from the lower point of the scale („0") to the sign „x";
   b) the height of self-esteem - from „o" to the sign „-";
   c) the value of the discrepancy between the level of claims and self-esteem - the distance from the sign „x" to the sign „-", if the level of claims is below self-esteem, it is expressed by a negative number.

2. Calculate the average of each indicator of the level of self-esteem on all six scales. The level of tries. Norm, a realistic level of tries, characterizes the score from 60 to 89 points. Optimal – relatively high level – from 75 to 89 points, confirming the optimal idea of their capabilities, which is an important factor in personal development. A score of 90 to 100 points usually attests to the unrealistic, uncritical attitude of children to their own capabilities. A score of less than 60 points indicates a low level, it is an indicator of a person's unfavorable development.
The height of self-esteem. Scores ranging from 45 to 74 („medium" and „high" self-esteem) indicate realistic (adequate) self-esteem.

A score of 75 to 100 and above indicates an overestimation of self-esteem and indicates some deviations in personality formation. Excessive self-esteem can confirm personal immaturity, inability to properly evaluate the results of their activities, compare themselves with others.

1. Processing and interpretation of results

1.1. General characteristics of the groups studied

Experimental research base:
1. Zolochiv Secondary School №2 them. M. Shashkevich (inclusive education experience – 4 years), 7th grade classes.

2. Zolochiv Secondary School №4 (inclusive education experience – 5 years), 6th grade classes.
3. Gliniansk Secondary School (inclusive education experience – 4 years), 5th grade classes.
4. Voronyatska Secondary School (inclusive education experience – 6 years), 6th grade classes. All the schools are in Lviv region, Ukraine.

The study groups are classes of general secondary education institutions in urban and rural areas. In total, four general secondary education institutions were covered by the study, three of which were general education schools of urban area and one institution – a secondary school of countryside. At each educational institution, students were studied in two parallel classes: inclusive and traditional.

Table 1
Level of self-esteem of students from inclusive and traditional classes

Criteria of self-esteem	Inclusive class			Traditional class		
	Low level of self-esteem	Medium/high Level of self-esteem	Overstated level of self-esteem	Low level of self-esteem	Medium/high Level of self-esteem	Overstated level of self-esteem
Intelligence	19.7%	65.1%	24.2%	12.1%	63.6%	24.2%
Peer authority	19.7%	44.0%	36.4%	19.7%	42.4%	37.9%
Skillful hands	22.7%	37.9%	39.4%	19.7%	41.0%	39.4%
Appearance	19.7%	47.0%	33.3%	9.1%	54.5%	36.4%
Self-confidence	24.2%	30.3%	45.5%	6.1%	39.4%	57.6%

In the course of empirical work, personal traits (self-esteem level) in classes with inclusive and traditional education were explored. Comparison of the results of self-esteem of students with inclusive and traditional education showed that in the classes with inclusive education low self-esteem was observed in 21.2% of students, medium/high – in 43,0%, overstated – in 35.8% of students. In classes with traditional education, a low level of self-esteem is observed in 13.3% of students, medium/high – in 47.6% of students, overstated – in 39.0% of students. Consequently, more students with low self-esteem are in inclusive classes, and the level of self-esteem in general among inclusive students is slightly lower than the self-esteem levels of students on traditional education.

1.2. Analysis of the results of the study of the social and psychological position of students in a classroom with an inclusive education (experimental group)

In the 6th grade with inclusive education emotionally disadvantaged position is observed in 12 students, expressive cognitive interests – in 2 students, a favorable social and psychological position – in 4 students, play position – in 0 students.

In the 6th grade with inclusive education (6-A class), an emotionally disadvantaged position is observed in 11 students, expressive cognitive interests – in 3 students, a favorable socio-psychological position – in 0 students, play position – in 0 students.

In the 5th grade with inclusive education, an emotionally disadvantaged position is observed in 9 students, expressive cognitive interests – in 1 student, a favorable socio-psychological position – in 6 students, a playing position – in 0 students.

In the 7th grade with inclusive education, an emotionally disadvantaged position is observed in 5 students, expressive cognitive interests – in 8 students, a favorable socio-psychological position – in 5 students, a playing position – in 0 students (Figure 1. Socio-pedagogical position of the 6th grade students).
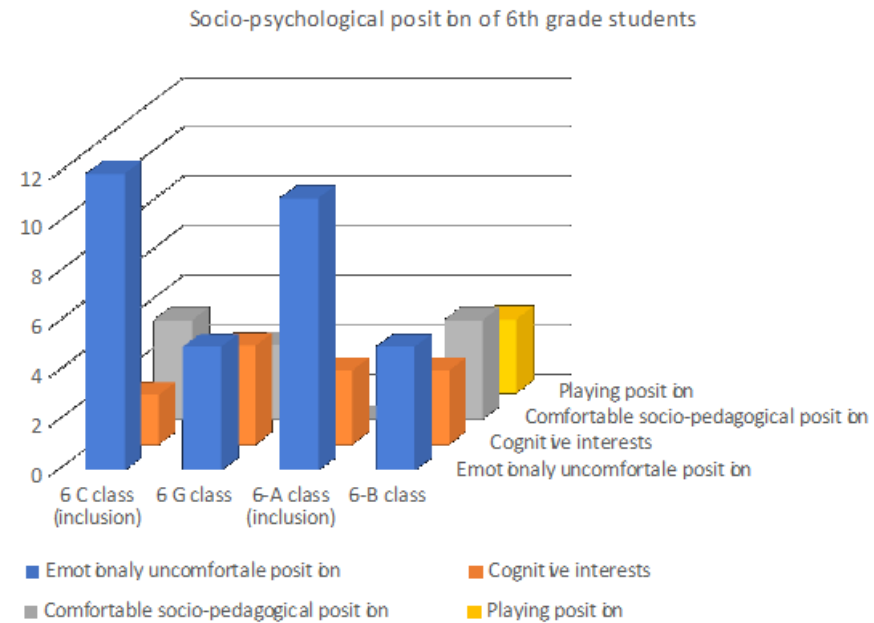

Figure 1. Socio-pedagogical position of the 6th grade students.

1.3. Analysis of the results of the study of the social and psychological position of students in the classroom with the traditional education (control group)

In 6th grade with traditional education (6-G class), an emotionally disadvantaged position is observed in 5 students, the expression of cognitive interests – in 4 students, a favorable socio-psychological position – in 3 students, the playing position – in 0 students.

In 6th grade with traditional education (6-B class), an emotionally disadvantaged position is observed in 5 students, expressive cognitive interests – in 3 students, a favorable socio-psychological position – in 4 students, play position – in 3 students.

In 5th grade with traditional education, the emotionally disadvantaged position is observed in 3 students, the expression of cognitive interests – in 4 students, the favorable socio-psychological position – in 9 students, the playing position – in 1 student.

In the 7th grade with traditional education, an emotionally disadvantaged position is observed in 12 students, the expression of cognitive interests – in 0 students, a favorable socio-psychological position – in 5 students, the playing position – in 5 students (Figure 2. Socio-psychological position of 5 and 7 grade students).

Despite, lower level of self-esteem of students in inclusive classes, we discovered that there are more students in emotionally disadvantaged position in traditional classes. In our opinion, that means that support and psychological climate is more developed in inclusive classes.
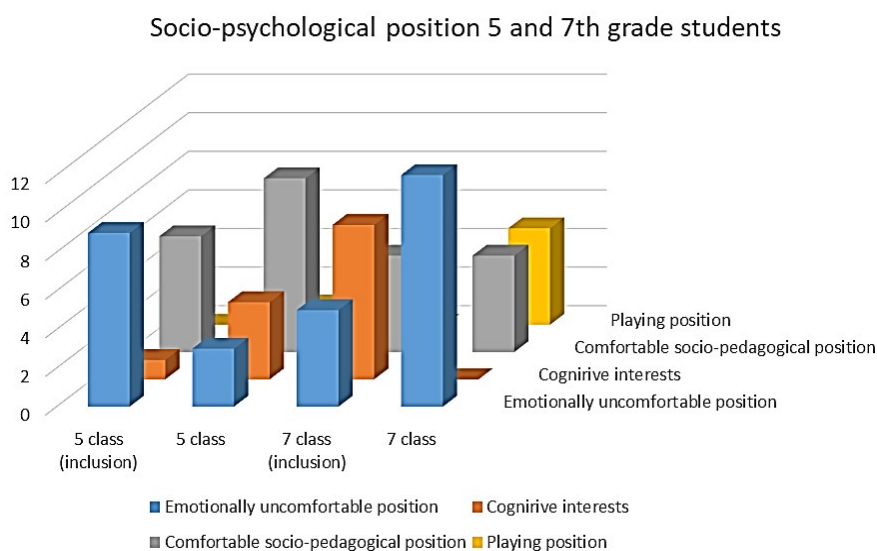

Figure 2. Socio-psychological position of 5 and 7th grade students.

2. Discussion

Self-esteem's enduring fascination reflects, in part, its associations with important life outcomes, such as psychological adjustment, academic success, physical health, and relationship satisfaction. The extent to which self-esteem causes these outcomes, however, remains controversial (Jordan, Zeigler-Hill, Cameron, 2015).

Moreover, the positive psychological climate is especially important for development of appropriate (positive) self-esteem. Self-critical rumination and its associated negative metacognitions, levels of depression and self-criticism independently predict self-esteem. However, one might not exist without the other (Kolubinski, Nikcevic, Marino, Spada, 2019).

The strategic goal of the education and training of children with special needs is their social integration, which requires the creation of special educational and socio-psychological conditions.

Some researchers showed that there is evidence that positive bias in self-perceptions has the role to protect students with widely spread disorders, such as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, against their common failure and it is linked with executive dysfunction associated with the disorder. It also has a strong impact on the psychosocial adjustment of these children (Molina, 2013). This statement is truly relevant for wide group of students with different special needs in inclusive educational environment. Important thing is also professional preparation in school and educational psychology (Oakland, Hatzichristou, 2014)

An important role in this process is played by the establishment of an effective process of interpersonal interaction of a child with special needs with his or her peers during the educational process. Socio-psychological characteristics of each student is one of the determining factors for successful interaction (Serdiuk, 2018). Tolerance and respect for children with special needs by pedagogical staff and students brings their result in the process of communication of students of inclusive class, because a special child will feel dignity (Vettese, Dyer, Li, Wekerle, 2011). Education is the main way of correcting a child's development, as it is the leading type of activity and is inseparable with education as a means of managing the socialization of the individual (Webster, Kirkpatrick, Nezlek, Smith, Paddock, 2007). It was also proved that interventions to deal with social anxiety and shyness should include a strong focus on self-esteem issues and less on social skills. (Simpson, Atkinson, 2019) Positive student–teacher relationships (student-rated) predicted greater social skills scores in grade 4, but as these children move on to 5th, 6th and 7th grade, the teachers may come to see them as clingy or socially helpless rather than as socially competent (Sørlie, Hagen, Nordahl, 2020).

Thus, the concept of psychology of inclusive education implies understanding of teachers at school, parents of children with typical development and their children features of behavior of children with special needs. Nowadays, interpersonal relationships are complicated, and the role of psychological factors of human relationships is increasing (Jones, 2018). Prior to establishing good communication in student groups, it is necessary to prepare students with typical development and students with special needs, so that the process of joint learning in an inclusive class is as productive and mutually beneficial as possible for all participants in the educational process.

Inclusive learning is based on two aspects of student development: academic (cognitive) and social (affective, emotional). In inclusive schools, more attention is paid to developing a cognitive curriculum to support academic achievement. Much less is given to the social development of children with special needs.

Although, in theory, inclusive learning is based on students' social interaction with each other in the educational process (Wigfield, Eccles, MacIver, Reuman, Midgley, 1991). All the interventions should be used systematically (Bharara, 2019). It is extremely important to build the pattern of attitudes and skills of hardiness that form the pathway to the resiliency (Maddi, 2013). It is known that need for cognition is positively related to preferences for assessment feedback, need for closure with consistency feedback, and need for self-esteem with enhancement feedback (Vaughan-Johnston, Jacobson, 2019).

Conclusions

It goes without saying that the positive, appropriate self-esteem has decisive influence on the social success of the child in inclusive educational environment. But the level of self-esteem is still lower in inclusive classes in Ukraine according to the data of our research in Lviv region. The process of forming positive self-esteem should start from appropriate assessment of individual characteristics of the child, implementation of differentiated approach to forming important social skills and comprehensive multidisciplinary support in inclusive educational environment in general. But better psychological climate in inclusive classes, as it discovered, make us think that inclusive education is useful for personal development of the child with special needs.

It can be supposed, that with further consistent development of inclusive educational policy in Ukraine, the level of self-esteem of inclusive classes' students will be increasing.

Further research is needed for better understanding the practical mechanisms of forming productive social interaction in inclusive educational process of Ukrainian schools. The means of increasing the effectiveness of the teachers in the process of forming appropriate relationships in inclusive educational environment should be discovered as well.

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