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Increasing the Competence of Teachers in the Formation of Socio-Emotional Skills of Inclusive Classes Pupils

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Abstract

The article presents a study aimed at increasing the competence of teachers in the formation of social-emotional skills of inclusive classes pupils. Preliminary study showed a low level of teachers' awareness of strategies to influence the social-emotional sphere of pupils and the lack of purposeful and consistent action in this direction. The proposed program of increasing the competence of teachers was based on the stages of consistent development of social-emotional skills. The conducted training program demonstrated a significant improvement in the ability of teachers to meaningfully develop social-emotional skills of inclusive classes pupils, which is an important factor for their success in social interaction and life in general.

Keywords: *social-emotional skills, teacher competence, pupils with SEN, inclusive education, expert coaching*

Introduction

The success of inclusive education depends on many factors, among which an important role is played by a favourable psycho-emotional atmosphere for learning and development of all participants in the educational process. A teacher can create such an atmosphere if he/she is aware of the value of personal and social development of all pupils in the class.

More and more information confirms that social qualities, emotional intelligence, soft skills and all the components related to the socio-emotional sphere, are extremely important for social, personal and professional development. Despite that fact, Ukrainian pedagogy has no traditions aimed at the purposeful and consistent development of this area of preschool children and pupils of educational institutions. Instead, the concept of “emotional-volitional” sphere has been enshrined in the educational thesaurus since Soviet times, the main meaning of which is to restrain one’s emotions. The attitude to emotional manifestations as those that need to be restrained becomes an obstacle on the way to self-knowledge, feeling and understanding of other people, complicates the formation of relationships with peers and adults. The lack of specially organized activities of teachers in this direction causes an inappropriate atmosphere in the classroom, devoid of signs of tolerance, interest in each other, mutual support and respect.

In contrast to cognitive intelligence, the available research results show that emotional intelligence can equally contribute to psychological, academic, professional and social functioning (Trevisan et al., 2021); social skills have also been shown to be negatively associated with aggressive behaviour in education (Zirkel, 2000); there are findings that researchers directly link emotional states to mental health issues (Moeller et al., 2020; Zhao et al., 2020).

It has been proven that purposeful teaching of pupils the ability to recognize emotions helps to improve their ability to interact. For example, pupils who develop social qualities more effectively integrate social signals into the process of recognizing emotions compared to pupils who can only spontaneously, disorganized acquire social skills and abilities (Denervaud et al., 2020). The authors of another study argue that social skills training has enabled people with special needs to receive a statistically significant improvement in social cognition, social functions, and social confidence, as well as a significant reduction in anxiety and a tendency to reduce depressive symptoms (Connor et al., 2020).

It was also concluded that pupils in classes where there was a special socially oriented impact on the social sphere master various models of emotion processing (unlike pupils who were not specifically taught social skills). According to the

study, there were such diverse models of emotion processing as: 1) the higher fear sensitivity and related threat calibration in schoolchildren exposed to traditional practices may tentatively reflect their experience of a more competitive environment; 2) a bias toward positive stimuli (positivity bias) is related to an increase in positive emotion and better regulation of negative emotions, as well as predicts an individual's resilience to stress (Van Bockstaele et al., 2019). The main factors of the advantages of the educational environment, where the influence on the formation of the social sphere was used, are: conditions for positive interaction with peers in micro groups, teachers and pupils' partnership, personally oriented communication by teachers, lack of formal assessments or punishments.

It is important to pay attention the study of the social-emotional qualities formation of the students because the success of this process depends on the content and direction of pedagogical practice (Denervaud et al., 2020). In this context, the socio-emotional competence of the teachers themselves is important. It is confirmed that the developed social qualities of teachers allow them to create an environment that is physically and psychologically safe, promotes interaction between students, increases their activity, enthusiasm and maximum involvement in educational activities, has a positive impact on pupils' academic achievements (Hoffmann et al., 2020; Tveit et al., 2020).

Our previous research (Skrypnyk et al., 2020) showed an insufficient level of ability of Ukrainian teachers to create an appropriate inclusive educational environment, which should acquire the following characteristics: respect for pupil diversity; planning, organization of individual assistance; teamwork of specialists and parents, constant personal and professional development, etc. A low level of practice-oriented component in the training of future specialists of inclusive educational institutions was also revealed, which will significantly complicate the ability of future specialists to implement successful support for people with special educational needs (Martynchuk et al., 2021). The Individualized Education Program (IEP) *team members* should be competent to implement specially organized activities to develop the ability of inclusive classes pupils to perceive another person, focus on him or her and interact productively. This will enable the success of both educational activities of pupils and their life in society, including further professionalization and independent living.

The research aim was to increase the level of competence of teachers in terms of content, algorithm and methodological resources for purposeful and gradual formation of social-emotional skills of inclusive classes pupils.

Methodology of Research

Research sample and participants

The study involved 38 teachers from 6 educational institutions with inclusive education, as well as 48 pupils of these institutions and 37 parents. Pupil's age was from 7 to 12 years. Upon receiving ethical approval for the research from Institute of Human Sciences Scientific Council of Borys Grinchenko Kyiv University, individuals were approached to participate. The study was conducted according to the general ethical principles. Confidentiality of personal information was ensured, and the participants were informed regarding the study purpose and that its results would be presented only in a generalized form. The consent of pupils, their parents and teachers was also obtained.

Instrument and Procedures

In accordance with the purpose of our study, the “Profile of emotional well-being in classroom” developed by us on the basis of the Professional Development Tool for Improving Quality of Practices in Primary School (Tankersley et al., 2012) was administered to examine the existing activities of teachers to develop social-emotional skills in their classes. The modeling of structural components of social-emotional development, as well as training in artificial and natural conditions, and Classroom Management Strategy elements (visual means to influence the socio-emotional qualities) were used for the development of teacher training program.

A New Layered Model on Emotional Intelligence (Drigas & Papoutsis, 2018) was modified for the study purpose (as the participants are primary school pupils), namely: the certain characteristics were streamlined and clarified, and the number of structural components was reduced from 9 to 5 (Emotional Competence; Social Awareness; Emotional Self-management; Emotional self-observation; Emotional Sensory Encoding). In current study these characteristics are considered as stages in the formation of socio-emotional skills of pupils.

On the basis of these stages and the content devoted to social-emotional development within the Professional Development Tool for Improving the Quality of Practices in Primary School (Tankersley et al., 2012) the “Profile of emotional well-being in classroom” was designed. The questionnaire contained 5 items concerning 5 domains of social-emotional skills development: Pleasant Environment, Emotional Awareness, Emotional Self-management, Sense of Unity, Leadership Qualities. The participants were asked to evaluate each of the 5 provisions of the

“Profile of emotional well-being in classroom” based on a 5-point scale: always (5 points), often (4 points), from time to time (3 points), rarely (2 points), never (1 point).

After studying the state of maturity of pedagogical practice in the formation of social-emotional skills of inclusive classes pupils, the content of the training program of increasing the competence of teachers was determined (Table 1).

Table 1. Methodical guidelines of the teacher training program

№	Learning blocks	Methodical tasks	Methods, strategies and tools
1	Pleasant Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plan and prepare an educational space to minimize pupils' stress and to increase their tolerance for other people. • Create conditions for gaining a positive experience of pupils with SEN in the group of peers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Structuring the space (including the calming corner and the sensory corner). • Application of visual support, rules, routines.
2	Emotional Awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage the resources of the Social-emotional learning (SEL) approach. • Differentiate emotions. • Improve emotional rapprochement through common experience. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ranking of emotions on the cards (photo). • Gradations of emotions by intensity. • Ordering emotions by associations with colors. • Tracking emotions in life.
3	Emotional Self-management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Practice rules and algorithms to build self-management skills. • Develop pupils' ability to apply one of the methods in a situation of stress or frustration. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participation in role-playing games in a complex scenario. • Elaboration of techniques and rules for self-calming. • Working in pairs and groups for practicing social interaction skills.
4	Sense of Unity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Train the ability to notice the others' and oneself's feelings. • Develop decision-making skills. • Promote the sense of belonging to group. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using the “Emotional Thermometer” technique. • Using the board “Star of the class” technique. • Setting goals for the whole class along with their coordinated achievements.
5	Leadership Qualities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Train the skills of self-productivity, conflict-management, and cooperation with peers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementation of children's corners and classroom duties board. • Application of rules for group interactions.

The teacher training program consisted of 2 modules: the Training Module and the Practical Module. The Training Module, which lasted for 1 month, contained seminars and workshops conducted by experts, and covered 5 learning blocks, according to the 5 domains of social-emotional skills development, such as: Pleasant Environment, Emotional Awareness, Emotional Self-management, Sense of Unity, Leadership Qualities. The Practical Module was conducted for 5 months as an expert coaching with the participation of IEP *team members* in order to practice what teachers have learned in the Training Module.

Results of Research

The survey of teachers on the “Profile of emotional well-being in classroom” showed that, in general, they appreciate their work in the direction of socio-emotional development of inclusive classes pupils. Thus, it turned out that a significant number of them believe that they “always” or “often”: 1) are concerned with the surrounding space which should be attractive and comfortable for a variety of student activities (44%); 2) create such forms of activity that allow to recognize and distinguish the others’ and oneselves’ feelings, as well as to be able to express them (57%); 3) use methods that promote the formation of pupils’ skills of emotional self-management and positive relationships with others (56%); 4) create conditions that promote the social development of pupils and develop skills of mutual support and a sense of unity (55%); 5) develop initiative and leadership of pupils (54%). At the same time, the indicators “rarely” and “never” were minimal (from 0 to 11%).

At the same time, the answers of inclusive classes pupils and their parents to the “Profile of emotional well-being in classroom” were fundamentally different from the teachers’ ones.

A generalized table of data obtained separately from teachers, pupils and their parents is presented in the Figure 1.

The obtained data analysis makes it possible to understand that pupils showed the least (among other respondents) satisfaction with the current situation regarding the emotional climate in the classroom and the efforts of teachers in terms of developing socio-emotional qualities. Firstly, the pupils have a choice of point “never” (1 point) in 4 parameters out of 5 (their parents – only in two parameters, and teachers do not have a choice of this point); secondly, the two highest points (“always” (4 points) and “often” (5 points) together) have the lowest values among the pupils, especially in the domains, such as:

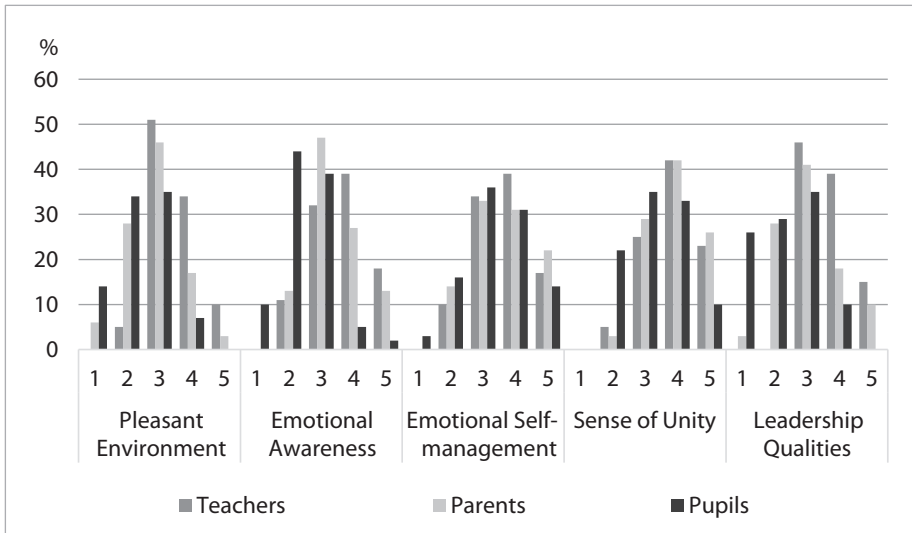


Figure 1. Distribution of points of the “Profile of emotional well-being in classroom” among the teachers, inclusive classes pupils and their parents.

- “Pleasant Environment” (7% among pupils, 20% among their parents, 34% among teachers);
- “Emotional Awareness” (7% among pupils, 40% among their parents, 57% among teachers);
- “Leadership qualities” (10% among pupils, 28% among their parents, 55% among teachers).

The discrepancy between the perceptions of teachers, inclusive classes pupils and their parents in such an important qualities of socio-emotional development showed a lack of understanding of the meaning of the parameters: Pleasant Environment, Emotional Awareness, Emotional Self-management, Sense of Unity, Leadership Qualities.

After conducting the training program of increasing the competence among teachers, according to methodological guidelines (Table 1), the survey of teachers, inclusive classes pupils and their parents on the “Profile of emotional well-being in classroom” was repeated (Table 2).

Statistical analysis confirms the significant differences in the indexes of the “Profile of emotional well-being in classroom” before and after the implementation of the teacher training program, both among the teachers ($p < 0.001$), inclusive

Table 2. T-Student's criterion for the "Profile of emotional well-being in classroom" before and after the implementation of the teacher training program

Domains		Average values		The difference of average	T-Student's criterion	Significance Level
		Before the implementation of the Program	After the implementation of the Program			
Teachers	Pleasant Environment	3,5	4,6	-1,1	-12,0	0,000
	Emotional Awareness	3,7	4,6	-0,9	-10,1	0,000
	Emotional Self-management	3,7	4,5	-0,8	-9,4	0,000
	Sense of Unity	3,9	4,6	-0,7	-7,3	0,000
	Leadership Qualities	3,7	4,4	-0,7	-3,8	0,000
Parents	Pleasant Environment	2,9	4,4	-1,5	-14,4	0,000
	Emotional Awareness	3,4	4,4	-1,0	-11,8	0,000
	Emotional Self-management	3,6	4,4	-0,8	-7,8	0,000
	Sense of Unity	3,9	4,5	-0,6	-6,7	0,000
	Leadership Qualities	3,0	4,4	-1,4	-12,1	0,000
Pupils	Pleasant Environment	2,4	4,4	-2,0	-30,0	0,000
	Emotional Awareness	2,5	4,1	-1,6	-20,7	0,000
	Emotional Self-management	3,3	4,3	-1,0	-10,6	0,000
	Sense of Unity	3,3	4,5	-1,2	-14,3	0,000
	Leadership Qualities	2,3	4,3	-2,0	-32,0	0,000

classes pupils ($p < 0.001$), and their parents ($p < 0.001$). The biggest difference is demonstrated by pupils: the average values on the scales "Pleasant Environment" (4.4), "Emotional Awareness" (4.1), "Emotional Self-management" (4.3), "Sense of Unity" (4.5), "Leadership Qualities" (4.3) are close to the maximum values, and significantly exceed the points of the same pupils before the implementation of the program ($p < 0.001$). It was found that as a result of the implementation of the proposed program, all the teachers, inclusive classes pupils, and their parents evaluated the educational environment as more pleasant, comfortable and convenient for a variety of educational activities. All the respondents noted an increasing level of emotional awareness and ability to recognize emotions, as well as improving

of emotional self-management skills among inclusive classes pupils. In addition, teachers, pupils and their parents emphasize the increasing level of mutual support, cooperation, initiative and a general sense of unity in their inclusive classes.

Discussion

The study made it possible to understand that Ukrainian teachers were not aware of the need to develop the socio-emotional qualities of their pupils purposefully, consistently and technologically. Achieving success in academic skills is still the main priority for Ukrainian teachers. Therefore, the general atmosphere of the class depends solely on the personal qualities of teachers, their ability to create a favorable microclimate for good relations, and the development of social-emotional skills can be engaged in individual classes by an individual specialist, such as a psychologist or social pedagogue. At the same time, the experience of successful inclusive education in other countries confirms the importance of a thoughtful approach to the formation of social-emotional competencies of pupils, as there is a strong positive link between a person's sense of interpersonal identity and his/her assessments of happiness and subjective well-being (Moeller et al., 2020). We are close to the idea that those teachers will be able to succeed in the formation of social-emotional skills of pupils, who themselves have developed emotional intelligence. Thus, as a result of systematization of numerous researches, the substantiation of the existing interrelation between social-emotional qualities of the teacher and his efficiency in management of class, that raises level of his satisfaction with work, prevents stress and professional burnout is presented (Valente et al., 2020).

The authors of the study, who analyzed numerous articles with evidence that emotional intelligence determines academic success, suggest that the relationship between emotional qualities and academic success is based on three mechanisms: (a) regulation of academic emotions, (b) construction of social relations in the educational institution, (c) the academic content superimposed on emotional intelligence (MacCann et al., 2020). In our opinion, all these mechanisms can be implemented when teachers have a conscious position on the purposeful development of social-emotional qualities of pupils, as well as they are able and willing to do so. We believe that the conscious development of social-emotional skills acquires special importance in inclusive classes, where friendly supportive and developmental environment becomes a top priority.

Conclusion

The current study was aimed at developing a program to increase the competence of teachers in terms of purposeful and consistent formation of social-emotional skills among inclusive classes pupils. The preliminary research on the level of emotional well-being in classroom showed that teachers of inclusive classes significantly exaggerate the importance of their efforts towards the formation of socio-emotional qualities of pupils. Raising teachers' awareness of technologies for social-emotional skills development and the ability to practice them with pupils in the natural environment allowed them to discover the possibilities of these pupils for productive interaction, and also helped to acquire emotional self-management skills by applying appropriate strategies.

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