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SOCIAL COMPETENCE OF FIRST-GRADERS WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES

Abstract. Formation of social competence of students is a particularly important issue in the context of solving the problem of integration of children with problems in intellectual development into society. Its urgency is enhanced in connection with the implementation of the Federal State Educational Standards for children with disabilities. In this perspective, the study and understanding of various aspects of social competence becomes especially important. The article presents results of an experimental study of social competence of first-graders with intellectual disability and disorders of psychological development.

Knowledge of specific features of acquisition of communication skills and typical norms of social interaction, and ability to orient in a concrete social environment by children with disorders of psychological development would help the teacher to design a program of academic and pastoral work clearly focused on their capabilities and needs, which may ensure the effectiveness of work with first graders.

The study of social competence of children was carried out in the course of an individual psycho-pedagogical experiment and inspection of documentation and the products of children's activity.

The study revealed a low level of development of cognitions about oneself and the surrounding people in children with intellectual disability. The progress and quality of formation of social competence in junior schoolchildren with intellectual disability and disorders of psychological development are different; but both groups of children require a special approach in organization of the academic-pastoral process.

Keywords: primary school; junior schoolchildren; first grader; mild intellectual disability; intellectual disorders; intellectual disability; oligophrenopedagogy; psycho-pedagogical experiment; children with intellectual disability; children with disorders of psychological development; social; experience; social competence.

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Modern educational standards and adapted basic general education programs (ABGEPs) for children with special educational needs presuppose not only the formation of a system of knowledge, activity experience and

relationships but also the development of social competence which constitutes a necessary condition of integration of such schoolchildren in society.

The problems of formation of social competence of children with intellectual disability are dealt with in many researches [1; 2; 4; 6; 14; 15].

Drawing on the works of V. N. Kunitsyna, we interpret social competence as a system of knowledge about social reality and oneself, a system of complex social skills and habits of interaction, scenarios of behavior in typical situations allowing a person to make the best of the existing circumstances [11].

The social competence of a person is formed during his whole life but it is in childhood that the basic methods of interaction and behavior in standard situations are formed [9; 10; 13]. When a child comes to school he acquires his own social experience through taking part in various kinds of activity, in the process of communication with teachers and peers, playing different social roles (schoolchild, first grader, peer, etc.), mastering behavior models, social aims and values [8; 12; 16]. And naturally, social competence of the schoolchild is the main personal result of the ABGEP acquisition.

L. S. Vygotskiy stressed that the impact of the environment upon the child is determined not only by the specificity of this environment but also by the individual properties of the child [5]. Weakness of the speech function, immaturity of interests, and underdevelopment of cognitive activity have a negative impact on the quality of communication and interaction with

the environment in children with disabilities [3].

To develop a program of social competence formation in junior schoolchildren with intellectual disability a teacher should evaluate the peculiarities and level of formation of the competence at the time of enrolment. With this end in view, we carried out an experimental study of social competence of first graders with intellectual disability learning at Saint Petersburg schools. We examined 71 children aged 7-8, including 53 children with mild intellectual disability and 18 children with disorders of psychological development.

The given article presents the results of our research of the sphere of interaction between the first grader and his peers and adults according to the following parameters: first graders' knowledge about themselves and peers; initiative and selectiveness of the child in communication with peers and adults; presence of joint activity conflicts; methods of behavior in conflict situations. Each parameter was evaluated using a seven point scale (from 0 to 6) in which each numerical expression corresponds to a qualitative characteristic of its manifestation [7].

The data presented in table 1 show that at the time of enrolment all children with disorders of psychological development have clear ideas about themselves, know and independently say their first name and surname separately (6-5 points). A little over half of the pupils with intellectual disability can do the same (54.5 %). Another 40% call their first name and sometimes surname (3-4 points). But we

have found a small number of first graders with intellectual disability (5.5%) who cannot introduce themselves because of speech absence or autistic personality traits but respond to their name or reproduce it after the adult (1-2 points).

It is difficult for children with intellectual disability to remember the names of all classmates. After the first

month at school, 98% of children know the names of not more than half of the group of peers (0-2 points). Children with disorders of psychological development remember the names of all their classmates during the first month of schooling, but only 40% of them always use them independently while asking for help or claiming attention to a joint activity (6 points).

Table 1.
Indicators of development of knowledge about themselves and peers
in children with intellectual disability, %

Parameters	Pupils with intellectual disability, n=53							Pupils with disorders of psychological development, n=18						
	Points													
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Knowledge about oneself	–	3.5	2.0	6.0	34.0	48.5	6.0	–	–	–	–	–	20.0	80.0
Knowledge about peers	6.0	75.0	17.0	–	2.0	–	–	–	–	–	–	40.0	20.0	40.0

Table 2.
Indicators of development of the basic properties of communication
in children with intellectual disability, %

Parameters	Pupils with intellectual disability, n=53							Pupils with disorders of psychological development, n=18						
	Points													
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Initiative in communication with peers	5.5	5.5	28.0	16.0	45.0	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	28.0	72.0
Selectiveness in communication with adults	–	5.0	12.0	72.0	5.5	–	5.5	–	–	–	–	20.0	40.0	40.0

Table 3.
Indicators of readiness to communicate of children
with intellectual disability in interaction with peers, %

Parameters	Pupils with intellectual disability, n=53							Pupils with disorders of psychological development, n=18						
	Points													
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Conflicts while playing together	–	5.5	17.0	38.0	15.0	24.5	–	–	–	–	5.0	25.0	50.0	20.0
Methods of behavior in conflict situations	–	5.5	17.0	39.5	38.0	–	–	–	–	–	5.0	30.0	40.0	25.0

The data presented in table 2 show that all children with disorders of psychological development often initiate communication with peers under all circumstances (5-6 points). First graders with intellectual disability are not apt to express initiative but if necessary, 45% of them are able to initiate communication with unknown people (4 points), and 44% - with peers they know well (2-3 points). A small number of first graders with intellectual disability (5.5%) are indifferent to the surrounding people and do not contact them (0 points).

The majority of children of both groups show selectiveness in communication. 72% of first graders with intellectual disability often refuse to get in contact with little known people (3 points). And stable personal preferences are formed in a small proportion (5.5%) of children with intellectual disability (4 points), and about the same number of children (5.0%) do not evade contacts with even unknown people under any circumstances (1 point). Schoolchildren with disorders of psychological development much more often (40%) demonstrate reticence in communication and stable personal preferences (6 points).

The data presented in table 3 show that the majority of children with intellectual disability are ready to take part in joint activity and games without conflicts or rare conflicts about having toys or separation of roles. Only 22.5% of first graders with intellectual disability often conflict with peers on different occasions (1-2 points).

The majority of children of both groups (77.5% and 95% correspond-

ingly) try not to initiate conflicts (4-6 points), and 65% of first graders with disorders of psychological development would give in and even try to calm conflicting children (5-6 points).

The undertaken research allows us to make the following **conclusions**.

The knowledge and life experience of children with intellectual disability and disorders of psychological development enrolled in the first grade of special schools are inadequate for efficient social interaction. The majority of children have rather limited experience of behavior in typical situations.

First graders with intellectual disability and disorders of psychological development show individual differences in the level of development of social competence, which should be taken into account especially at the beginning of schooling in concretization of tasks and development of the program of rehabilitation work with the class.

Children with intellectual disability show different progress in acquiring knowledge about their environment and mastering various methods of communication with people. First graders are capable of demonstrating caution, selectivity and stable personal preferences in communication. Conflict situations in the process of joint activity emerge rarely.

Development of social activity in schoolchildren with disorders of psychological development is more intensive than in children with intellectual disability. Children with disorders of psychological development can remember the information about classmates and teachers after a month of

study; they show interest in communication with pedagogues and peers; the majority of them try to calm the conflicting pupils. All this facilitates effective interaction with the surrounding people.

Thus, the majority of children with mild intellectual disability and children with disorders of psychological development have pre-conditions which can make up a foundation for successful formation of their social competence in case all specialist working with the class and the parents take part in the work in this direction.

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