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CREATION OF SPECIAL CONDITIONS FOR RECEIVING HIGHER EDUCATION BY BLIND STUDENTS

Abstract. The article contains references to international and federal normative acts regulating the creation of special conditions for receiving education by persons with special educational needs and disabilities. The author suggests a list of recommendations for the creation of special conditions for receiving higher education by blind students. The creation of special conditions for receiving higher education by students with severe visual impairments presupposes the provision of physical accessibility to the buildings of higher education institutions via equipment of the system of tactile, auditory and color cues, and information accessibility to the education process through provision of computer typhlo equipment and learning materials in special formats adapted for the comprehension by the blind (in large letters or Braille on paper, in an electronic format in a text editor, etc.), as well as the organization of pastoral activity taking into account the specific needs and interests of the students with disabilities of the given nosological group. The suggested recommendations have been worked out in accordance with the requirements of the current federal legislation, and taking into account the specificity of organization of the education process in higher education institutions and the special educational needs of the students with visual analyzer function impairments.

Keywords: special educational conditions; typhlopedagogy; students; inclusive education; visual impairments; children with visual impairment; blind students.

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At present, our country has extensive experience of education of blind students at higher education institutions which, no doubt, should be used while organizing the education process of the students of the given category. Nevertheless, for a long time, higher education of students with visual impairments has been integrated, i.e. there have been no requirements to the education process to create special conditions for receiving education by the students of this category. After ratification by the Russian Federation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (*hereinafter* Convention) adopted by the UN General Assembly Resolution No 61-106 on December 13, 2006, under Federal Law No 46-FZ of May 15, 2012 “On Ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities”, amendments were made in the Russian normative legal acts regulating the organization of the education process in accordance with the special educational needs of persons with disabilities.

The main aim of the abovementioned Convention is to protect persons with disabilities from discrimination and to establish equality among people having different physical and mental abilities in the field of civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights. The international normative legal act men-

tioned above says that the member states recognize the right of persons with disabilities to education. With the purpose of realization of this right without discrimination and on the basis of equal opportunities, the member states ensure inclusive education at all levels and guarantee the conditions for lifelong education. In accordance with the Convention, education should be aimed at development of mental and physical abilities to the highest degree possible; provision to persons with disabilities of a chance to take active part in the life of the free society; guarantee of free access to education for all persons with disabilities at the place of their residence ensuring rational satisfaction of the person’s needs; provision of efficient measures of individual support in the general system of education; creation of conditions for successful acquisition of social skills; and organization of training and retraining of pedagogues [5].

As a consequence of ratification of the Convention by the Russian Federation, our country took the obligation to include all the abovementioned provisions of the given international document in the normative legal acts regulating organization of the education process of persons with special educational needs and disabilities. The list of the main federal documents regulating the creation of special condition

for receiving education by this category of persons includes Federal Law No 273-FZ of December 29, 2012 “On Education in the Russian Federation”, Federal Law No 181-FZ of November 24, 1995 “On Social Protection of Persons with Disabilities in the Russian Federation”, and many others.

In accordance with the current federal legislation, special conditions for receiving education by persons with disabilities are interpreted as the conditions of education, upbringing and development of such students including application of special educational programs and methods of teaching and pastoral care, special textbooks, teaching aids and didactic materials, special technical teaching aids for collective and individual use, provision of the services of an assistant giving the students the necessary technical support, conduct of group and individual rehabilitation sessions, guarantee of access to the buildings of organizations providing educational services, and other conditions the absence of which makes the acquisition of educational programs by students with disabilities either difficult or absolutely impossible [15]. The state guarantees the creation of the necessary conditions for receiving education by persons with disabilities [14].

Before passing on to the consideration of the list of recommendations on creation of special condi-

tions for receiving education by blind students at higher education institutions, it would be worthwhile to dwell on what definite category of persons with visual impairments are considered to be blind.

According to V.Z. Deniskina, blind persons include:

- blind persons *with a sense of light*;
- blind persons *with a sense of light and color*;
- blind persons *with only a very small fraction of the typical visual acuity* (approximately from 0.005 to 0.009);
- blind persons *with residual vision capable to detect forms and objects*; visual acuity of such people varies within the range of 0.01—0.04 (on the eye with better vision with glasses);
- persons *with better vision acuity* (up to 1, i.e. 100 %), with the field of vision narrowed down to 10-15 degrees or to the point of fixation [4].

In addition, it is only natural that the category of the blind includes persons with complete absence of visual perception.

Let us dwell now on the list of recommendations on creation of special conditions for receiving education by persons with severe visual impairments at higher education institutions.

1. The provision of physical accessibility of higher education institutions. Physical accessibility of the

buildings of education institutions and the adjoining territory for blind students is achieved via equipment of the system of tactile, auditory and color cues (guiding railings; Braille plaques and signs; tactile tiling; stoppers of contrasting colors, etc.). Spatial orientation of blind students both in the building of the higher education institution and on the adjoining territory would be made much easier by an interactive tactile-auditory map that can be situated in the foyer of the education institution.

2. The provision of information accessibility to the education process. Under the current federal legislation, students with disabilities are guaranteed provision of free access to information [14].

Information accessibility can be achieved in higher education institutions through creation of the following conditions:

- provision of literature published in special formats for persons with disorders of the visual analyzer functions (in large letters or Braille, etc.) on paper in the libraries of higher education institutions or from the funds of special libraries for persons with visual impairments using the interlibrary loan system;
- creation of library workplaces equipped with computer and typhlo hardware (Braille display, Braille printer, etc.), as well as a computer with special software for blind users (*Jaws*, *Nide*, *Lookout*, etc.), and

information of the blind students about availability and whereabouts of such workplaces by the staff of the dean's offices, social work departments, and members of the students' councils;

- organization of free electronic delivery of documentation (fragments of textbooks and teaching aids, articles from scientific journals and collections of materials of scientific conferences, etc.) to blind students from the library funds of higher education institutions;

- provision of the support of an assistant who can render students with severe visual impairments the necessary technical assistance in their work with academic literature and in the process of technical preparation of student works for publishing (reviews, course and graduation qualification papers, etc.);

- application of only audio methods of teaching, i.e. full refusal from using multimedia presentations by the academic staff while teaching in the groups in which there are students with severe visual impairments;

- design of a list of tasks and learning materials accessible to the students with the visual analyzer dysfunction and their inclusion in the syllabi of the taught disciplines;

- adaptation of the educational platforms and official sites of higher education institutions in accordance with the requirements of the current

federal legislation and the specificity of information perception by persons with severe visual impairments.

3. The organization of pastoral activity in higher education institutions taking into account the specific needs and interests of the students with disabilities including persons with severe visual impairments, i.e. preparation and conduct of events in which blind students can take part. Persons with severe visual impairments can take part in vocal competitions, intellectual games, exhibitions of decorative and applied arts, etc. Participation of students with severe visual impairments in the events carried out outside academic activity would facilitate establishment of interpersonal contacts between blind and typical students, improvement of the emotional state of the persons with visual impairments, realization of their creative potential, development or individual capabilities and skills, etc. It should be stressed that interaction between the blind and the pedagogues and peers with typical vision outside the lecture room is very important for the development of the personal traits and the formation of habits and skills necessary for further integration in the student environment and in professional collectives.

By way of summing up we may say that today, the organization of the education process for blind

students of higher education institutions leaves much to be desired. And what is necessary to do first and foremost is to guarantee information accessibility of the education process to persons with visual analyzer function disorders. It is the most critical problem the solution of which is necessary for successful acquisition of the professional educational programs of higher education by blind students. What is more, provision of information accessibility does not need heavy investments. The recommendations on provision of information accessibility can be realized via organization of the education process in compliance with the current federal legislation.

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