Study of Distance Learning Opportunities in Inclusive Education System

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Abstract: Relevance of the study of distance learning is based on the need to provide an available education for all social groups to exercise the rights of people with special educational needs as well as for children with disabilities. Since distance learning is one of the alternatives for a comprehensive and high-quality education for people with disabilities, it becomes of particular relevance and value in the system of inclusive education. Objective of this study is to promote distance learning technologies that address the main problem of children with disabilities lying in the lack of communication with other people, especially their peers. Distance learning technologies create the real possibility of intercommunication between children during the disciplinary and thematic collective activities both vertically (teacher pupil) and horizontally (between pupils), via e-mail, conferences, chat, virtual seminars, etc. The leading fields of distance learning were open-ended free pace of work; studying the place comfortable for student, i.e., home-like environment; modularity of educational process where each section of the content of educational material creates a holistic view of a specific field of knowledge; person-centered learning approach and the use of different methods, forms and means of cooperation in the independent but controlled learning of knowledge and skills. Developing a model of inclusive education based on distance learning will allow students to achieve the following results: to get an education in accordance with their individual educational needs, aptitudes and abilities; allay their fear of human differences and strengthen calm and understanding of reality and create tolerance in accepting both ordinary people and people with disabilities, etc. Materials of this study may be useful in both organization of inclusive education and general education system as a whole.

Key words: ICT tools, inclusive education, education of children with special needs (disabilities), quality of education

INTRODUCTION

Currently, Russian state policy suggests availability of education for all social groups as one of its priorities. Access to education is especially important for people with disabilities, the major part of which are children. To implement the rights of children with permanent or temporary disabilities to quality education, more flexible forms of education have been introduced: education in the inclusive (integrated) classes of secondary schools, home schooling and distance learning become alternative to education in institutions (open or closed). "The use of distance technologies is of particular value in the inclusive education. We need to create the appropriate conditions to give people with disabilities the opportunity of comprehensive education and personal development. Distance learning is just one of the alternatives for a comprehensive and high-quality education for people with disabilities".

According to UNESCO approach, "education must take on the difficult task of transforming the differences between people into a constructive factor contributing to the strengthening of mutual understanding between individuals and the entire community". We are talking about inclusive education here, the meaning of which is Education for All (EFA).

New Zealand professor David (2009) has well defined the meaning of inclusive education: "Inclusive education is a step towards the ultimate goal the creation of an inclusive society that will enable all children and adults, regardless of their gender, age, ethnicity, abilities, the presence or absence of developmental disorders and HIV infection to participate in society and make a contribution thereto. This society will respect and value the differences and actively struggle with discrimination and prejudice in politics, everyday life and institutions".

MATERIALS AND METHODS

It is obvious in our opinion that distance learning provides a great methodological possibilities for children with special needs. Due to well-developed technical capabilities of modern computers and software that allow

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for example, entering voice information, the distance learning may engage different categories of children with disabilities not just with the problems of the musculoskeletal system. Especially because there are specialized adaptation hardware that enable children with different disabilities to interact fully with the computer. Therefore, the educational environment should rather help each child with disabilities to find its best method to adapt successfully to life than be aimed strictly at educational goals.

An effective mean for organizing education of children with disabilities who cannot attend educational institutions for health reasons and need home schooling is the development of distance learning forms using modern information and communication technologies. Since, children with disabilities are more prone to diseases, this technology can be used in teaching pupils who temporarily cannot attend school for medical reasons. In this case, we can recommend the following areas for arranging distance learning:

- Open-ended free pace of work; studying place comfortable for student, i.e., home-like environment
- Modularity of educational process where each section of the content of educational material creates a holistic view of a specific field of knowledge
- Person-centered learning approach
- And the use of different methods, forms and means of cooperation in the independent but controlled learning of knowledge and skills

Main part: Rapid technological development of all spheres of human activity requires the inclusion of people with special needs into the new educational environment as the essential prerequisite for development and prosperity of the state. Making proper and timely political decisions in this area as well as attracting international experience will promote active development and implementation of strategies that ensure equal opportunities to people, especially children with special needs for integration into society. The key factor for successful learning of a comprehensive program by children with disabilities is the creation of necessary conditions, i.e., barrier-free environment rather than their simple integration into mainstream schools. Organizing an inclusive education of children with special needs in the general educational institutions contributes, firstly to the education of children at their local schools that allows creating the conditions for them to live and receive education in their family and secondly to their continuous communicate with other children. All this facilitates an effective solution to the problem of social adaptation and integration of children with disabilities to the society.

In recent decade, an increasing attention has been paid at the national level to the wide application of information and communication technologies in educational process to improve learning efficiency in our country. Special popularity was gained by distance learning technologies which in our opinion are highly valued in the inclusive education. "Distance learning is the support to all teachers, both in primary and in secondary school it meets various additional needs of pupils. Online education provides a much more flexible form of delivering educational information than traditional courses that gives a variety of learning options to the participants of educational process all together, individually at home or a combination thereof".

We are pleased that the Law on Education in the Russian Federation, being effective since this September, clearly defines the concept of "inclusive education" (Art. 2, p. 27) and there are special provisions that take into account the educational needs of individuals:

Thus paragraph 4, Article 79 "Organization of education for persons with disabilities" states that "Education of pupils with disabilities can be organized both jointly with other pupils and in individual classes groups or individual organizations engaged in educational activities"(Federal Law, 2012).

The point of this paragraph is that we need to create the appropriate conditions to give people with disabilities the opportunity of comprehensive education and personal development. Distance learning is just one of the alternatives for a comprehensive and high-quality education for people with disabilities: one can study at home, actively communicating with his/her peers on forums and social networks, video conferences and chat rooms that allow any pupil to get maximum educational information. Use of opportunities for distance learning has become a priority in the development of inclusive education, because this causes changes in the traditional model of the interaction "teacher student" occurrence of on-site and remote subjects of the educational process with new functions that require the appropriate conditions for their implementation. Distance learning technology helps to adapt the learning process to the needs of the individual and rapidly respond to changes emerging. Socially, it can give equal opportunities to students in receiving education.

Equally important that distance learning provides the opportunity to communicate naturally with teachers and other pupils. At the same time, there is development of the interaction between pupils, based on humanistic relations which is one of the prerequisites for a comprehensive inclusive school. Each pupil is a part of this society, even when he/she is physically absent in the same classroom

with other pupils. In case of necessity, however, a child can get away from close contacts with other children, while staying in the educational process. Implementing the distance learning technologies ensures the availability of barrier-free and comprehensive inclusive education.

It is known that distance education is a set of educational services provided for children with disabilities through a specialized educational environment, based on the remote information exchange facilities (satellite TV, radio, computer communications, etc.). Implementation of distance learning requires multimedia equipment (computer, printer, scanner, webcam, etc.), through which a child can maintain contact with the distance learning center, therefore, the inclusive school must be equipped with this facilities. There is even the term "inclusive technology" "which refers to both the software and hardware support of pupils. Inclusive technology is available to all students, regardless their technological competence, confidence, or disability".

Currently, the use of remote technologies helps a disabled child both to get quality education and to communicate with his/her peers (window on the world) which is quite important for his/her socialization, rehabilitation and adaptation. Distance learning technologies address to some extent the main problem of children with disabilities lying in the lack of communication with other people, especially their peers. Despite the physical distance of the subjects of the educational process from each other, there is a real possibility of intercommunication between children during the disciplinary and thematic collective activities both vertically (teacher-pupil) and horizontally (between pupils), via e-mail, conferences, chat, virtual seminars, etc. Foreign scientists consider "distance learning" as a flexible process appropriately included into the inclusive education system. This technology can be used just to support the inclusion. Since, the process of increasing the availability of education for the majority of children and people with disabilities can last long enough, therefore the learning process can continue for other students in a flexible manner". The main types of ICT tools used for learning disabled people are the following:

- Standard technologies for example, computers that have built-in settings for people with disabilities
- The available data formats, also known as alternative formats for example, available HTML, DAISY talking books (Digital Accessibility Information System) and "low-tech" formats such as Braille system
- Assistive technologies: hearing aids, screen reading devices, keyboards with special functions, etc. Assistive technologies (AT) are "devices, products, equipment, software or services designed to strengthen, support or improve the functional capabilities of people with disabilities"

The use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) is crucial for ensuring the availability and quality of education. At the same time, the individualization of monitoring and evaluation learning activities is a necessary prerequisite for the formation of a comprehensive educational activity of pupils by means of ICT. Despite the various spheres of ICT application in the education of people with special needs, their use has the following advantages:

- In the case of motor disturbances, ICTs allow a person to write and in the case of visual impairment to read
- Allow solving the educational and social problems, providing access to information resources
- Minimize the differences between the pupils and allow using modern teaching methods intended to improve pupils' interaction with each other and with teachers
- Act as intermediaries in the communication of people with special needs (in this case, each category of users who have difficulties in communication, should have special assistive devices and software selected and adapted), etc.

One thing is clear: "Online courses require participants to adopt a new, quite different methods of teaching/learning. Pupils have the right to study on their own. Commonly, they rather prefer more intensive written education, than the traditional classroom lessons Moreover, online education contributes to the development of sense of purpose in pupils giving them the priority of autonomy E-learning is now an important component of education. E-learning has changed the essence of education, learning and vocational education for ever" (Mirjana and Biljana, 2010).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Summary: Information technologies help to adapt the learning process to the needs of the individual and rapidly respond to changes emerging. Socially, it can give equal opportunities to students in receiving education.

Using distance learning technologies helps children with disabilities to minimize potential psychological barriers in the communication with their peers while ensuring the confidentiality of medical diagnoses and other personal information in networking. Distance learning gives confidence to students with disabilities, thereby motivating them to study at school with other children, their friends and neighbors. There also was a decision that children with special educational needs require not only special treatment and support but also to develop their skills and succeed in school along with others.

Finally, we would like to note the following. Although, the term inclusion as a scientific concept is a relatively new, the inclusive model of education is in fact the embodiment of eternal humanistic dream of a just world where no group of people is isolated from the rest and no interests of any people are oppressed by the interests and needs of others (Nigmatov, 2013).

Rapid technological and informational development of all spheres of human activity requires to involve people with special needs into the new educational environment based on the use of information and communication technologies as well as to ensure equal opportunities for people with disabilities as the essential prerequisite for development and prosperity of the state.

CONCLUSION

Thus, we came to the conclusion that the development of the inclusive education model based on methodological and technological possibilities of distance learning will allow pupils to achieve the following results and changes:

- Get an education in accordance with their individual educational needs, aptitudes and abilities
- Allay their fear of human differences and strengthen their calm and understanding of reality
- Participate in various social relations
- Create tolerance in accepting both ordinary people and people with disabilities
- Develop the desire to help others and accept help when required
- Provide modern computer equipment and illustrated study guides

Studying this issue, we came to the conclusion that "education technology" today is a concept not common to traditional pedagogy. Therefore we referred to UNESCO documents which consider education technology as a systematic method of creation, application and determination of the whole process of teaching and learning, taking into account technical and human resources and their interaction which concentrates on the optimization of educational forms. This is the definition we have adopted as a basis for the study.

Modern information and communication technologies which generally involve forms of distance learning and recently used to seem something distant and unreal have quickly become a routine in our lives and are used in various fields of activity, ranging from construction to education at schools and nurseries.

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