The Current State of Special Needs Education in Russia: Inclusive Policies and Practices

Liliya A. Valeeva a *  

*Kazan (Volga Region) Federal University, Institute of Economics and Finance, Butlerova str, no.4, 420012, Kazan, Russia

Abstract

Modern educational system in Russia fully takes in only those who meet its specific requirements, i.e. those who can study on the program equal to everyone and thus those who can show expected progress. And the result is that children with special educational needs are often isolated from their healthy peers and drop out of the total educational process. Inclusive education is the way to settle this problem. This article focuses on inclusive education, providing an overview of the developments of inclusive education in Russia. The challenges and progress are being discussed as well as the main trends in policies and practices.

1. Theoretical Perspective

Integration of children with special needs in educational institutions is a logical stage in the development of special inclusive education in any country of the world. It is the process that involves all advanced countries, including Russia. It’s not surprising that recently special attention in psychological and educational research is given to this problem. Among the researchers who constructed theoretical concepts of inclusive education are Barton & Slee (1999), Loreman (2010), Slicker & Palmer (1993), Zaitsev (2003), Malofeev & Shmatko (2008), Yarskaya - Smirnova (1997), etc. A variety of interpretations of a special child are reflected in the works of Akatova (2003), Levy (1989) and others. The technologies applied in inclusive education were considered by Banerji & Dailey (2000).

* Liliya A. Valeeva. Tel.: +7-987-269-2204  
E-mail address: melilekr@yandex.ru
In autumn of 1992 Russia launched the project "Integration of disabled people", which resulted in setting up pilot and home-based schools, as well as in any other educational institution (Moscow City Law... 2010). The new law guarantees the acceptance of children with disabilities to comprehensive schools should be organized on the basis of the findings of medical and psycho-pedagogical commission and the number of students with disabilities in a school is determined in accordance with other laws of the Russian Federation and the city of Moscow. In addition, the new law provides for the establishment of a system of early care and psychological, medical and pedagogical correction of disabilities after they are discovered, regardless of their degree. The Legislation established the rules of admission, transfer and dismissal of disabled children from educational institutions, funding of educational institutions, where persons with disabilities study, as well as measures of social support for teachers working with disabled children (Moscow City Law... 2010).

2. Inclusive Policies and Practices in Moscow and the Republic of Tatarstan

Currently, 4.5% of children living in Russia belong to the category of people with disabilities. They require special (remedial) education to meet their special educational needs. Unfortunately, Russia's inclusive education is the term used to describe the process of teaching children with special needs in mainstream schools. Inclusive education is based on the ideology that excludes any discrimination against children, guaranteeing equal treatment of all people, and creates special environment for children with disabilities.
In Moscow, there are currently more than 1,500 schools. About 50 of them implement the program of inclusive education. Besides, there is a network of specialized educational institutions for children with disabilities, which provide individually adaptive environment:

- kindergartens of compensating (or combined) form;
- special (remedial) schools and boarding schools;
- primary schools - kindergartens of compensating (or combined) form;
- comprehensive school «The school of home-based learning»;
- comprehensive school «The school of health»;
- sanitation and forest schools;
- sanatorium-type boarding schools;
- education centres;
- educational institutions for children in need of psychological, educational, medical and social care;
- institutions of primary and vocational secondary education (Inclusive education... 2013).

Unfortunately, there are problems. Funding of both inclusive and comprehensive schools is done on the basis of the number of students. However, money is scarce and expenditures are abundant, which means the impossibility of the school that has taken on the mission of training the "special" children to perform its function perfectly. Today in Russia there is an urgent need to review the system of funding of such schools, for example, under the scheme of specialized remedial school. At the same time, the adoption of a special law in Moscow on education of children with special needs is a large step towards the creation of a barrier-free environment, which proves that inclusive education in Russia is no longer an experiment. This is the official program, which proclaims the rights and responsibilities of all stakeholders.

Inclusive policies and practices in different regions of Russia vary. Let's consider the state of inclusive education in the Republic of Tatarstan. The Republic of Tatarstan has currently no practice of providing inclusive education for children with disabilities in comprehensive schools. According to the Ministry of Social Protection of the Republic of Tatarstan, 25% of children with disabilities enrolled in remedial schools, can be trained in normal conditions. At present, the issues of implementing inclusive education in the region are under discussion. Here we can see that the government provides education for disabled people only in primary schools. Despite the current federal legislation guaranteeing benefits for students with disabilities, a number of factors make the admission to higher educational institution rather challenging. The situation is that at the present time in Tatarstan only one higher educational establishment trains students with disabilities – the Academy "TISBI" in the city of Kazan. It created special conditions for hearing-impaired children for their normal functioning (Durandina, 2013). For children with disorders of locomotor system our architectural environment of schools is a great obstacle. Despite the Federal Law "On social protection of disabled people in the Russian Federation" № 181 the construction of schools without vital facilities for disabled is still continuing. The creation of accessible living environment for people with disabilities should be an integral part of the state policy of the Republic. Today, the comprehensive schools of our republic have started the repairs based on a special program called "Accessible Environment". Disabled persons with hearing and vision impairments also do not have access to the educational process due to the fact that in ordinary schools they still do not use modern technologies (e.g. sign language, Braille table). In the Republic of Tatarstan, along with the precarious architectural environment and the lack of specific programs there is a problem for disabled children to get education in the schools of their neighbourhood, which is compounded by the fact that there is no public transport available for them. Many disabled children living in villages have to travel from area to area, which is difficult to do every day. As a result, they are to stay in educational institutions for months, if not more (Durandina, 2013). The draft law "On education of persons with disabilities (special education)," submitted to the State Duma of the Russian Federation, established the possibility of teaching children with disabilities in comprehensive schools. On March 6, 2013 it was decided to create the Association of teachers and teachers of inclusive education of the RT, the purpose of which will be the development of inclusive education, assistance in the development of teaching recommendations, and research in the field of inclusive education, improvement of social-state forms of management of inclusive education, the creation of conditions for creative development in the process of training and education of pupils and students with disabilities.
3. Conclusions

Single standards of organizing educational and rehabilitation processes, and mechanisms for their logistical, social, psychological, pedagogical, human and rehabilitation support haven’t been developed so far in Russia. We are to approve the governmental standard of professional rehabilitation of disabled persons and to organize a system of special training and retraining, professional development of teachers - specialists of inclusive education. Such measures can help to improve the access to education for children with disabilities. Thus, more favorable conditions for social mobility of those from the poorest segments of the Russian society will be created.

References