

COOPERATION BETWEEN SPECIALISTS WHILE PROVIDING PSYCHO-PEDAGOGICAL SUPPORT TO CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL EDUCATION NEEDS

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ABSTRACT

The planning of cooperative work in the process of providing psycho-pedagogical support to children with special educational needs, as well as the detection, study, assessment, prevention and modern professional interventions are among the important issues, which justify the importance of collaboration between psycho-pedagogical support team members while providing support in different settings to learners with different needs. The planning of cooperative work with children with special educational needs is a very responsible and important process, in this case, the cooperation of specialists considered to be a point of interest, as well as the direct connection of the specialist with the relatives and parents of the child.

As such, there is a few literatures on collaborative work between specialists providing psycho-pedagogical support to children with special educational needs, and there is no any representing the situation in Armenia or presented in Armenian language literature as such, despite the fact that in various developmental centers, public schools and regional psycho-pedagogical support centers, they are already trying to collaborate and make the work process more structured.

Within the frame of this study observation and literature review as research methodology are used to understand the main gaps and challenges of cooperative work between specialists while providing psycho-pedagogical support to children with special education needs.

Keyword: *psycho-pedagogical support, children with special educational needs, collaboration, interdisciplinary team, professional cooperation in education, multidisciplinary approach, support services for children with special needs, special education professionals.*

INTRODUCTION

The organization and implementation of education cannot be supposed to be changed, as is the case with any reform. This is because implementing a comprehensive reform first necessitates adopting pertinent educational policies that address certain troubling issues. In addition to the beneficial adjustments, lead to some troublesome problems. Examining all of these issues is undoubtedly necessary because educational innovations affect not only students, teachers, and parents in schools, but also the entire society. These innovations have the potential to be the most effective means of preventing discriminatory attitudes, developing and creating favorable conditions, and creating inclusive communities that support the educational process for all students.

The results of the research conducted within the frame of the cooperation of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs of the Republic of Armenia revealed that children with physical and mental disabilities in the Republic of Armenia face serious obstacles in accessing various services, in particular, inclusion in public schools, rehabilitation in terms of using services and participating in community life. Moreover, in addition to the availability of qualified and trained professional staff, a priority issue in the Republic of Armenia is also the provision of access to the important physical environment in institutions implementing inclusive education, particularly in schools, universities and various institutions, for students with special educational needs (SEN) who can have various limitations.

Inclusive education is a global concern aimed at promoting inclusion and equity, influencing education policies and practices around the world. However, there are more than a few challenges involved in realizing inclusive education as such. Those are clear (1) understanding of **inclusion and equity**, with their concrete and precise definitions; (2) **contextual barriers**: the barriers facing some learners and the resources that can be used to overcome these difficulties can vary greatly depending on the context; (3) **discriminatory attitudes**: inclusive education aims to eliminate social exclusion resulting from discriminatory attitudes, that can often present significant challenges to the implementation of inclusive education.

Addressing these challenges requires opening dialogs about the meaning and importance of inclusive education, and rejecting the stigma associated with diversity. By emphasizing inclusion and equity, it is possible to improve the quality of provided psycho-pedagogical support services to children with SEN, their education within a national education system.

The cooperative work between psychologists and pedagogues is crucial for addressing various aspects of student learning and development. Psychologists can offer insights into cognitive, emotional, and behavioral patterns, while educators implement these insights to tailor teaching methods and support strategies that cater to diverse learning needs. Collaboration often leads to the development of effective intervention plans, promoting positive outcomes in education and student well-being. It involves sharing expertise, strategies, and resources to create comprehensive approaches to support the holistic growth of learners.

Cooperation between specialists working with SEN children is crucial for providing comprehensive care. This collaboration often involves professionals like pediatricians, psychologists, special education teachers, speech therapists, occupational therapists, physical therapists, and social workers. They coordinate efforts, share insights, and create tailored intervention plans to address the diverse needs of each child, aiming to ensure holistic support and development. Regular communication, mutual respect, and a team-oriented approach are key elements for effective collaboration among these specialists.

Within the frame of current study, the contextual barriers will be investigated using observation and literature review research methods. Those the research question of the study is formulated as follows: *What are the main gaps and challenges of cooperative work between specialists while providing psycho-pedagogical support to children with SEN?*

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Inside the structure of the current study literature review and observation as research methodology are used to understand the main gaps and challenges of cooperative work between specialists while providing psycho-pedagogical support to children with SEN.

Conducting a literature review as a research method involves systematic exploration and analysis of existing literature on a particular topic (Ridley, 2012). Building the research on and relating it to existing knowledge is the building block of all academic research activities, regardless of discipline (Snyder, 2019). In this regards the meaning of literature review is very important as this is essential method for identifying what has been written on cooperation of interdisciplinary specialist within the frame of inclusive education in different countries in order to analyze the situation and make necessary comparisons with the Armenian context. Besides, this method helps to aggregate the empirical findings linked to a narrow research question to support the evidence (Ridley, 2012).

Observation research is a qualitative research technique wherever the researchers observe participants' constant behavior in usual situation (Angrosino, 2018). The goal of this

type of research in this study is to gather more reliable insights while observing interdisciplinary team meetings and discussions in regional psycho-pedagogical support services. Further, researchers can capture and gather sensitive information and see the participants' behavior in a natural setting.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The recent school is designed to carry out such a philanthropic mission as inclusive education, which provides equal opportunities to all children who need the structures based on the complex actions of different specialists and can provide services both to children with SEN and without to ensure the success of inclusive learning and socialization of children with different abilities and disabilities. Moreover, both categories of children should benefit from the inclusive learning environment.

Cooperation is a fundamental aspect of human interaction across various fields, including education, psychology, sociology, and more. Within the frame of this study exploring theories of social psychology that elucidate the motivations and mechanisms behind cooperation are examined. This includes examining concepts such as social exchange theory, altruism, reciprocity, and the role of understanding and collaboration in fostering cooperative behaviors.

The literature on collaboration among specialists working with SEN children emphasizes the significance of interdisciplinary teamwork and its impact on enhancing outcomes for these children. Studies highlight the importance of effective communication, shared goals, and mutual respect among professionals from various disciplines (Turnbull, Turnbull, Erwin & Soodak, 2015; McLeskey, Rosenberg & Westling, 2013). Research often discusses the benefits of collaborative approaches, including improved coordination of services, better identification of individual needs, and the development of comprehensive intervention plans. Some studies delve into the challenges faced in interdisciplinary collaboration, such as role uncertainty, differences in professional perspectives, and logistical barriers. Moreover, literature in this area often emphasizes the need for ongoing professional development and training to enhance collaboration skills among specialists. It underlines the importance of understanding each professional's role, expertise, and contributions to the overall care of disabled children (Rosenberg & Robinson, 2017). Several models and frameworks have been proposed to facilitate effective collaboration, aiming to optimize the delivery of services and support for these children and their families (Turnbull, Turnbull, Erwin & Soodak, 2015; Swinth, Nelson, Kessler & Weil, 2012).

While talking about inclusive education implementation the availability of qualified and trained professional staff, as well as the provision of easy and accessible physical environment in institutions implementing inclusive education, particularly in schools, for students with SEN who may have various limitations seems to be the most important points (Harutyunyan & Hovyan, Harutyunyan, 2018). Along with these problems, the process of effective cooperative work planning has also become relevant. This work is called to solve the problems that the child with SEN has, to enhance his participation in social life becoming a full member of society.

The main task of cooperative work is to organize the work in such a way that all specialists can fully work with the children, as well as the specialists can ensure the connection with each other, as a result of which the resulting works will only be able to ensure the child comprehensive and harmonious development.

The complex of necessary measures requires the combined work of pedagogical, psychological, socio-pedagogical, special pedagogical services, which are organizationally and content-wise included in the single system. Within the frame of inclusive education, they can serve all participants of the educational process, from learners to the administrative-managers, carrying out educational and preventive activities (McWilliam, 2010).

The efficiency of interprofessional activity of specialists working with SEN children is connected with a process of interaction of common goals, on the one hand, with means and methods of applying professional interdisciplinary knowledge in practice, on the other hand.

For the success of joint actions, the ability to combine informative, predictive and managerial functions of mental development of children in one's own work is necessary. Thus, interdisciplinary interaction-cooperation is expressed by sequential and parallel joint actions of specialists in solving global problems of multidimensional diagnosis, specialized counseling and support to a problem solving (IPEC, 2016). This ensures the effectiveness of the team members' intervention (psychologists, special educators, speech therapists, occupational therapists, physical therapists, and social workers) and the overcoming of difficulties in all aspects of the child's development. At the same time, the agreement of actions with a clear division of responsibilities of specialists becomes an important condition. For this, it is necessary to implement a number of steps in order to achieve positive results while working with a child.

OBSERVATION

Based to the Law on General Education of the Republic of Armenia for implementing universal inclusive education policy in RA, Services of pedagogical and psychological

support for the organization of education should be organized and provided in 3 levels: school level, regional level and republican level (Order of Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Armenia N370-N, 13.04.2017).

School-level services are provided to children with SEN by specialists from psycho-pedagogical support services. The duration, load, and logistic schedule are suggested by the support team and approved by the principal. Regional-level services are provided by regional pedagogical-psychological support centers, based on school administration or the child's parent/legal representative. These centers visit schools and provide support to students and teachers, and offer free services after school hours. The support team is responsible for developing the student's Individual Learning Plan and providing consulting and professional support to parents, support specialists, and teachers. All this goes in line with the dimension called to meet the educational needs of persons with disabilities or with SEN suggested by Ainscow, Booth and Dyson (2006).

The results of the observation related to the cooperation between the specialists as well as with the parents of children with SEN showed that there is no structured way of communication and case discussion. Teachers, directors (both in schools and in regional psycho-pedagogical support centers), and members of multidisciplinary teams while conducting their duties faced to the fact that the support centers operated without a set schedule. In some cases, the specialists from the support centers either never visited the school or only visited for a very brief period of time.

Besides this, the specialists (speech therapist, psychologist, special educator) might not be aware about the intervention provided while working with the same child in different time. This is a very sensitive moment that has a direct impact on the quality of service provided to the child.

Support center specialists possess extremely low levels of professional knowledge. The experts are unsure about what materials are needed, what kinds of didactic materials and methods should be used in the learning process for children with SEN, or what specific professional and developmental games, toys, technical equipment, or educational and didactic supplies are currently available when asked about what resources are needed. They don't know what kind of materials are required or what applications they can be used for. Their incompetence in knowledge, skills, and abilities, as well as occasionally their complete ignorance also reflects their low level of professional knowledge. This point, at the same time can be interconnected with other outlined issues that has been observed so far.

Concerning the child's future education, there are certain difficult issues that arise between parents and support centers. When it comes to the education and future learning

of the children with SEN enrolled in inclusive education, there are serious disagreements with parents. For this reason, parents avoid putting their children in the aforementioned system, sometimes to the point of major arguments. Parents frequently only worry about what would appear on their child's final certification and whether or not they will be able to attend colleges or other educational facilities to continue their education. Additionally, as cooperation between multidisciplinary team members, parents and teachers have pointed out, it is unclear what were their actions in this regard.

Support service specialists (multidisciplinary team members) claim that the phenomenon of documentary overload and the reality of continuously changing requirements unnecessarily burden professionals and prevent them from understanding these requirements and the rationale behind their implementation. According to the observation, this fact makes their work less efficient and more complicated and has its negative impact on the process of cooperation.

The precise intervention program steps created as a result of the educational needs assessment of the child are absent from the clear standards of knowledge assessment for children with SEN. The assessment of knowledge was a contentious issue, particularly when it came to the education of kids who had serious and severe disorders. Observation showed that the support service specialists experience difficulties while evaluating the knowledge of children with SEN due to lack of definite standards and instruments. They are unsure about what to evaluate and how. All of them demanded that clear criteria and standards be followed when evaluating the educational needs of children with SEN.

CONCLUSION

Cooperation between specialists providing psycho-pedagogical support services to children with SEN is vital for comprehensive support and development of children. Psychologists and educators, as well as related field specialists often collaborate in educational settings to address diverse needs and challenges faced by students. This cooperation involves sharing insights, assessments, and observations to create tailored interventions that encompass both psychological and pedagogical aspects. Psychologists and therapists offer expertise in understanding cognitive, emotional, and behavioral aspects, conducting assessments, diagnosing conditions, and providing therapeutic interventions. Educators contribute knowledge about teaching methods, learning styles, classroom management, and educational strategies tailored to individual needs.

Effective communication, mutual respect, and a coordinated approach are essential for successful collaboration. When specialists work together, they can create holistic plans

that address not just academic performance but also emotional well-being, behavior, and social interactions, ensuring a more comprehensive support system for children with SEN requiring both psychological and pedagogical services.

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