

## SOCIAL EDUCATION OF CHILDREN WITH AUTISM IN AN INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENT

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**Abstract:** The study analyzes the features of social education of children with autism in an inclusive school. Theoretical principles of social upbringing of children with autism in the conditions of inclusive education are considered. The organization of social education of children with autism is analyzed and substantiated. "Social stories" are developed and implemented, as a method of social education of children with autism in an inclusive primary school; the quality of conducted work was evaluated, and guidelines for the use of methods of intervention in the process of social education of students with autism in inclusive education are drawn up.

**Keywords:** Children with autism, Inclusive environment, Inclusive education, Social education, Social stories.

### 1 Introduction

Autism is called the disease of the 21st century, because the birth rate of children with autism spectrum disorders is steadily increasing (since 2017, autism statistics diagnose 1 child with autism spectrum disorders per 50 children, while in 1995 1 child with autism was diagnosed per 5,000 children with normal development) [2].

As the percentage of children in this category increases, in today's society one of the pressing issues is the inclusion of children with special educational needs, including children with autism. The issue of particular importance is the need to create in the conditions of inclusive educational institutions such a model of social education, which would allow forming in all participants of the primary educational process a system of values that corresponds to living conditions. This issue is reflected in the Laws of Ukraine "On Education", "On General Secondary Education", the National Doctrine of Education in Ukraine, the Concept of Civic Education, the National Program for Education of Children and Youth, and other valid documents.

For children with autism, as participants in inclusive education, social education can be a process that will contribute to their productive personal growth, interaction with the environment, the formation of social competence. At the present stage in Ukraine, there is an urgent need for an effective, scientifically sound system of social education, which could protect students with special educational needs from the negative impact of the crisis. In this regard, the study of the essence and content of social education of children with autism in the context of inclusive education becomes especially relevant.

### 2 Literature Review

Research by V. Bocharova, M. Galaguzova, G. Laktionova, L. Mishchuk, V. Orzhekhovska, L. Mardakhayev, A. Mudryk, L. Nikitina, K. Chertova, S. Chistyakova are devoted to various aspects of social education. Foreign and domestic scientists E. Bayenska, S. Baron-Cohen, I. Bekh, L. Vygotsky, V. Kagan, K. Lebedynska, A. Leontiev, A. Leslie, A. Luria, S. Maksimenko, V. Tarsun, M. Shelemet, D. Shulzhenko studied autism. The problem of developing models of socio-pedagogical activities of secondary schools of integrated and inclusive orientation is covered in the works of scientists such as T. Alekseenko, A. Malko, S. Palchevsky, and others.

However, despite sufficient research in the field of social pedagogy and inclusive education, the problem of social education of children with autism remains poorly studied. The analysis of the practice of inclusive education for children with

autism gives grounds to state the difficulties of its implementation, which are related to the following:

- Lack of systematic early care as the first and necessary part of the educational process (education, social education and development), which does not allow identifying disorders at an early stage and beginning the necessary work to correct abnormalities in the development and restoration of impaired functions;
- Lack of culture of correctional and developmental work with autistic children and work with the family as a whole;
- Lack of centralized professional training of specialists to support children with autism and their families;
- Lack of a structured and continuous educational process for children with autism.

It should be noted that with the advent of works on social pedagogy in the late 19th century, the category of social education first appeared in a scientific context. Currently, studies that reflect the features of social development of the individual, the social conditionality of education, are represented by the works of foreign and domestic researchers [9, 10, 11, 12, 13]. These works have one feature in common – the recognition of the importance of the social environment and its educational potential for personality development.

In 50-60s of 20<sup>th</sup> century, interest in the scientific development of social education and the role of the educational potential of society, initiated by a number of German scientists (K. Mollenhauer, X. Miskes, A. Meringer, A. Flutner), actualized. During this period, the position of foreign scholars on social education differed from the opinion of domestic scientists: from the point of view of the latter, the student is a separate subject of study, while foreign scholars considered the student as one of the facets of a holistic personality [17, 22].

In the late 80's - early 90's of the twentieth century, socio-pedagogical approach was focused on the harmonization of relations between human and society, person and the environment, spiritual and moral education of people. Socio-pedagogical knowledge has become part of social education, an integral part of general culture and social policy, a kind of catalyst for intellectual and moral potential of human in the macro-society and micro-society [3, 5, 26].

In modern socio-pedagogical literature, both domestic and foreign, there are different approaches to defining the category of "social education". Most researchers focus on the interests and needs of society and the state, social order and see the purpose of social education in regulating the social behavior of the individual in accordance with the values and norms that exist in society [20, 24, 25, 27, 29].

Social education can also be described as a system of purposeful influence of society on the values and attitudes of people and social macrogroups with the support of the assessment of personal and social development.

Social education, which is carried out in educational organizations of different types, gives a person the experience of interacting with people, creates conditions for positive self-knowledge, self-determination, self-realization and self-change, and in general – for experience of adaptation in society [4].

The purpose of social education, according to V. Bocharova [6], is the formation of human ability to function actively in a particular social situation, while ensuring the full development of the person as a unique human personality.

For successful social education it is necessary to create conditions and measures in society aimed at the assimilation of the younger generation of universal and special knowledge, social experience in order to form in it socially positive value orientations. Social upbringing of children is one of the most important factors in stabilizing society [30, 31, 32, 25]. Social

education should achieve two goals: the success of socialization of the younger generations in modern conditions and human self-development as a subject of activity and as a person [33].

In general, the efforts of social educators should be aimed at promoting the social adaptation of the child, i.e., its active adaptation to socially accepted rules and norms of behavior or to overcome the influence of negative factors. Thus, the problems of social education are extremely relevant at critical stages of society. Therefore, further research is needed on social education in the context of inclusive education as a mechanism for forming a personality adapted to the conditions of the new society, despite the special educational needs.

Until recently, the organizational and methodological principles of the educational process of secondary school were focused on the child without taking into account the specifics of psychophysical development of children with special educational needs. It is now widely believed that institutionalized socialization from an early age is important for everyone, especially for children with disabilities, and above all the school plays a crucial role in the process of including a child in a full life [21, 30]. In domestic and foreign science, special attention is paid to the process of socialization of primary school students, in particular, its managed component – social education.

On the basis of theoretical provisions of philosophical concepts of personality development by E. Bern, K. Jung, K. Young and socio-psychological – by B. Ananiev, L. Vygotsky, I. Kon, O. Leontiev, V. Petrovsky – modern researchers define tasks, mechanisms, and factors of socialization of children's personality taking into account the environment and the situation in which they are [28].

Social pedagogy considers the real possibilities of increasing the educational potential of social institutions in the social situation of development of children with special educational needs in connection with the system of existing social factors, including family, teaching staff, friends. The determining factor is to ensure pedagogically appropriate organization of students' interaction with the environment.

Concretizing the methods of social education of children in inclusive educational institutions, scientists (V. Guzeev, O. Kobernik, N. Matyash, O. Infantry, E. Polat, V. Radionov, V. Slobodchikov, S. Sysoeva, I. Shendryk, and others) attach importance to the resources of project activities, the inclusion of which in children with special needs is of paramount value, as it promotes their self-realization in various types of work, creative activities, integration into society. The phenomenology of project activity covers many concepts: project, design, educational project, activity, creativity, etc. It ensures the integrity of the socio-pedagogical process, the unity of teaching and education, social education of students [7, 19].

Social education, integration of children with special needs into groups of normative peers is possible by stimulating their activity, initiative, etc. If we talk about social education by methods of developmental work, the priorities of the program of social support for children with special educational needs are as follows:

- Prevention of pathological personality traits of the child under the influence of special conditions of education, upbringing and development;
- Prevention of delay in the child not only in the acquisition of knowledge, but also in the development of personal qualities, as well as the prevention of infantilism;
- Assistance to children with special needs in mastering the system of relations with the world and themselves;
- Proper stabilization of emotional state, strengthening and development of volitional traits;
- Correctional and developmental work with existing defects;
- Conducting informational and educational work with other children and teachers on the characteristics of children with

psychophysical differences and the formation of an adequate attitude towards them;

- Optimization of the child's communication with peers, parents, teachers; development and implementation of appropriate forms and methods of socio-pedagogical work as a condition for successful education and upbringing of children with special needs [34].

Early childhood autism is a common disorder of mental development, as it affects all areas (most suffer from cognitive and emotional-volitional), which necessitates the use of special forms, methods and conditions for the correction and education of autistic children [32]. That is why providing inclusive education for them today is a difficult and urgent task.

Many researchers (W. Frit, A. Leslie, S. Baron-Cohen, O.S. Nikolskaya) point to the huge number of problems faced not only by a child with autism when entering school, but also by family and professionals, involved in her upbringing. From the first day of school, such a child shows many manifestations of decompensation: autistic reactions, regressive symptoms, emotional disorders, as well as violations of the instinctive side of life [8].

The advantage of inclusive education for children with autism spectrum disorders is that school is a natural environment that can prepare a child with autism for later life. After graduation, a child with autism will live and function in the same society as graduates of regular secondary schools. Therefore, the earlier these children get to know each other, the higher the chance that there will be mutual understanding and interaction between them. For a child with autism who attends secondary school with ordinary students, it will be much easier to integrate into society, to establish social interaction compared to graduates of special schools [23].

At the same time, the risks of inclusive education for children with autism should also be focused on. Foreign researchers [37] have found a number of difficulties in including children and adolescents with autism in regular school activities to master educational programs.

When teaching children in regular school classrooms, the possibility of using an individual approach and individual instructions for children with autism decreases. This can lead to the fact that such a child, who does not have basic language and communication skills, in the absence of a qualified individual approach will lag far behind the curriculum in various disciplines, as well as in acquiring skills and abilities that will lead to a sharp decline in self-esteem.

In this context, in the activities of a social educator in the context of inclusive education, the following areas of educational work can be identified: individual correctional and developmental work with an autistic child; social support for a family raising a child with autism; preventive psychological work with parents and other professionals who work with such a child; games and mass educational activities [1].

Social education of children with autism spectrum disorders, who study in general education classes, should be aimed at the development of social, communicative competencies. It is clear that it is necessary to maintain normal learning conditions for other, normally developing children [14, 15, 16]. In this case, the social educator can help by ensuring a gradual process of integration of the child into the general classes, starting with those subjects for which the child is already preparing individually.

The task of a social educator in this context is to help the teacher realize the importance of a clear functional organization of space in the classroom, the creation of a 'ritual' of communication with students, the reproduced order of the lesson, random social interaction. Naturally, this implies the need for empirical studies aimed at the practical implementation of social education of children with autism in an inclusive school, to support theoretical discussions in the available literature.

### 3 Materials and Methods

The study involved students with autism spectrum disorders of primary inclusive classes of Kyiv Secondary School No. 281. A total of 10 respondents took part in the empirical study, including 8 boys and 2 girls. The age requirement of the sample was from 8 to 9 years.

The empirical study took place in three stages. The first stage is exploratory-theoretical. During this period, there was a comprehension of the problem and its current state. In the process of studying and analyzing the literature, the methodology and problems of the study were identified, the purpose, tasks are formulated, the relevance of conducting empirical research is substantiated.

Based on the theoretical study of the problem, the essential characteristics of the phenomenon of autism are determined, the peculiarities of autistic children as participants in the educational process, the difficulties to be considered in social interaction with these children were considered.

In the second, research-experimental, stage of the research, an experimental group was recruited, methods for social and educational work were selected, questionnaires were created for parents and teachers to assess the effectiveness of the work. Children with the same level of development (on the recommendation of the school's social pedagogue) were selected to participate in correctional and developmental classes.

Themes of social stories for working with children were selected based on the request of parents and teachers who directly know the needs of children. Social stories were selected in accordance with certain topics. During the development of social stories, the materials of the social project Planik were used; plots of social stories from English-language resources, as well as author's materials.

Questionnaires with parents and a teacher were conducted to assess the effectiveness of social education activities, to get feedback. To create the questionnaires, all six social stories were divided into two groups: those related to the educational process and those aimed at developing general skills. The first group was evaluated by teachers, the second – by parents.

The third stage – the final-generalizing – was devoted to the systematization of the developed material, generalization of research results, drawing conclusions. During this generalizing stage of the research, the analysis, systematization and interpretation of the obtained results of the empirical research were carried out with the help of frequency analysis, calculation of average statistical indicators, grouping of data.

### 4 Results

At the first stage of the study (before conducting the activities of social and educational work) with parents and teachers of children with autism, a survey was conducted, during which each skill, at the formation of which social story is aimed, was rated on a 10-point scale. The results of the survey were as follows (Figure 1):

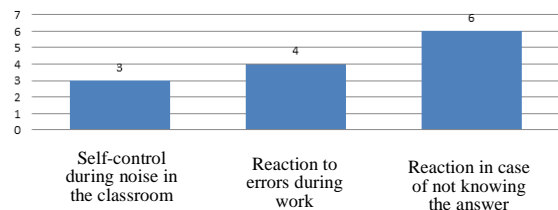


Figure 1 – Average values according to the results of the survey of class teachers

Thus, as can be seen from the results, the worst formed skill in children is self-control during noise in the classroom (3.2

points); teachers assessed below average the adequacy of the response of children with autism to mistakes at work (3.6 points). According to class teachers, both indicators are necessary components not only of educational activities, but also of social life and behavior of the child in the team. That is why the class teachers paid attention to their formation. The third indicator – the reaction in case of not knowing of the answer - is rated among the others the highest (5.6 points), but also needs correction. The answers of parents, who also evaluated the three parameters, are shown in Figure 2.



Figure 2 – The results of the survey of teachers

According to the presented data, the parents assessed the children's ability to calm down and behave with animals at a low level (3.3 and 3.0 points, respectively). Also, children's ability to navigate if they are lost requires the development, because this parameter is also rated by parents below average (3.6 points).

According to the definitions of social education, all the outlined skills are necessary for children with autism in order for their social interaction with others to be as comfortable and productive as possible, so that emotional reactions and other factors caused by autism do not become a barrier to social life.

Since the correctional and developmental work on the social upbringing of children with autism involves a trusting relationship, which is preceded by acquaintance and joint activities, our study is part of a number of activities in which children are involved in inclusive secondary school.

A clear implementation algorithm was developed for social education classes. According to the algorithm, the development of social history was carried out with each child individually once a week, in a group – twice a week.

Parents at home also read social stories with their child every day for five weeks. Then the evaluation of their effectiveness was carried out. The children who participated in the study were divided into target groups according to the purpose of the social stories they worked with.

Group 1: children in this group are united by an excessive emotional reaction to noise, other stimuli (aggression, crying, fear, etc.). Such behavior has a negative effect on the socialization of children, inhibits their interaction with other students and the class teacher, and, therefore, three social stories were selected to correct these problems.

Group 2: Children in this group are united by an excessive sensitivity to educational problems, namely the situation of making a mistake or not knowing the answer.

Group 3: social stories for the children from the third group were developed together with the parents, because they are aimed at correcting specific behavioral acts that block the full interaction of the child with the social environment.

At the final stage of the study (after social and educational work), a survey was conducted again with parents and class teachers of children, during which each previously assessed skill, which social stories were directed to, was evaluated by the respondents again on a 10-point scale. The results of the survey were as follows (Figure 3):

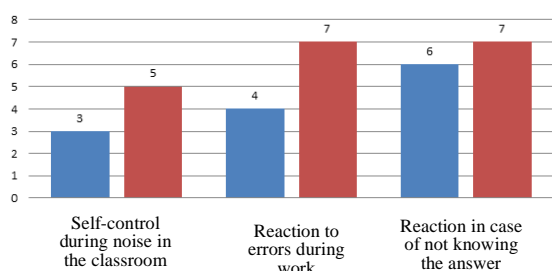


Figure 3 – The average values of evaluation of the effectiveness of classes conducted by teachers

So, as can be seen from Figure 3, according to the results of social education activities, there is a positive trend in all parameters, but with different intensity. The least effective was the direction of formation of self-control during the noise in the classroom (the average increased by 1.3 points). In our opinion, such results are explained by the fact that the circumstances that cause excessive activity of children in class are different each time (joke, textbook illustration, situation outside the window, etc.), and, therefore, social history, not reflecting all these aspects, appeared to be ineffective.

Progress on children's response to not knowing the answer was also negligible (the average increased by 1.4 points). Probably, just like in the previous case, social story does not take into account all the situations in which children may not know the answer.

The most effective was the use of social story to respond to errors (the average increased by 2.7 points). We believe that despite the fact that a child may make mistakes in different situations, in this case, his subjective assessment of the situation is more important than the circumstances, and, therefore, the lesson was aimed at its correction. Evaluating this parameter, teachers pointed out that optimizing children's response to mistakes had a positive effect on their interaction with other children, as it highlighted their strengths, creating an example of self-improvement that can even be set as an example to classmates. In turn, parents' answers are shown in Figure 4.

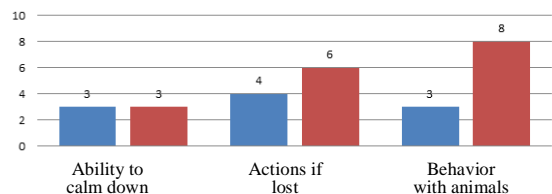


Figure 4 – The average values of the parents' evaluation of the effectiveness of classes

Thus, no progress was observed in terms of the ability to calm down (the average value remained at 3.3 points). In our opinion, the lack of results can be explained by several reasons: excessive abstractness of social history, which does not create specific points of support. Comparing the results of the survey of teachers and parents, we can conclude that the development of self-control skills requires more specific social stories to get the result. After all, the formation of self-control is one of the criteria for effective interaction with others, an important component of social education.

In the application of social story to the actions of children in a situation of getting lost, there is a positive progress (the average value increased by 1.4 points). In our opinion, the development of this social story is an important component of social education, because it reflects the optimization of social interaction with others. Assessing this social story, the parents of the two children pointed out that when children got lost on the way to class, they behaved more constructively and were able to ask for help, which had not been observed before.

The most effective was the social story of behavior with animals (the average value increased by 5 points). In our opinion, this result is due to the fact that the social story was created specifically for a particular child, taking into account only the peculiarities of his behavior. The child's parents noted that before the application of social story, the child, seeing a cat or dog could start screaming, crying, running away, but after correctional and developmental work, the child's reactions became more controlled, a proactive component appeared in his behavior, which changed the reactive one. We consider it necessary to take such a high result of social and educational influence through the use of this story as an example and for effective elaboration of other social situations.

## 5 Discussion

Based on the above analysis, we offer several methods of intervention in the process of social education of children with autism [21]:

- Behavioral Package;
- Strategy "Development of joint attention" (Joint Attention Intervention);
- Modeling;
- Naturalistic Teaching Strategies;
- Peer Training Package;
- Training of basic reactions (Pivotal Response Treatment, PRT);
- Structured training based on visual support (elements of the TEACCH Program);
- Strategy "Management of own behavior, self-management" (Self-management);
- Strategy "Social Stories" (Story-based Intervention Package);
- Strategy "Game Time" (DIR / Floortime);
- Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS).

Among the methods that belong to the group with unproven effectiveness – animal therapy (Animal-Assisted Activities), music, games, art therapy, etc.

It is clear that the methods of this group are not high-tech, and it is difficult to apply to them indicators of measurability and repeatability of results. Indeed, most professionals in these fields are of little benefit to children with autism, as they mostly do not understand what they are doing and what to do first with a particular child. This is the visibility of work, time, tactics "it is better to do something than to do nothing".

It is known that some representatives of these "non-technological" approaches, in their work achieve extremely high results, have followers, and in practice prove their effectiveness. This can be said about such well-known techniques as: author's music therapy by Juliet Alvin (USA); habilitation pedagogy on the basis of art therapy by Borozdin (Novosibirsk, Russia), types of game therapy: "Mifne" (Israel), "Son-Rise" or "Method of choice" (USA), "Development of interpersonal relations" (Relationship Development Intervention, RDI), (USA) and others. Thus, it becomes clear that the key role in psychological and pedagogical practice is played by the human factor, because not a "method" works but a specific person as a carrier of the method.

However, the main thing, in our opinion, is not just one or another method, and not the talent of one or another carrier of the method, but a well-thought-out strategy of correctional and developmental work and its consistent implementation in practice.

Regardless of the age at which a child is diagnosed with autism spectrum disorders, intensive correctional, developmental, and educational work should be performed with him. This means that specialists who examine the child (be it a therapist, special psychologist, counselor of psychological, medical and pedagogical counseling), together with a conclusion about the peculiarities of its development, must give clear instructions on

whom parents can address to start systematic qualified care for the child.

Analyzing the existing approaches to the development of a strategy for socio-psychological and pedagogical assistance to children with autism, we do not find any method that would seek to cover the integrity of the child's social development.

Such a strategy can be developed on the basis of a systematic approach, which involves the comprehensive disclosure of the object (phenomenon), identification and study of its internal structure, as well as links with the external environment.

Resources of children with autism are the main structures, prerequisites for their psychophysiological development, as well as their strengths. This potential of the child must be revealed through purposeful correctional and developmental work. In our opinion, the basis of successful child development in all areas are such basic structures as tonic regulation, sensory experience, and a basic sense of security and trust.

Strengths of children with autism are a tendency to order, completeness, structure, landmark in time and space, developed mechanical memory, intelligence. Systemic care for children with autism should begin with purposeful and consistent work to normalize the basic structures and create a basis for their effective further development.

## 6 Conclusion

Today, the issue of education and upbringing, in particular, the social upbringing of children with autism spectrum disorders, is extremely acute. As a result of studying the features of social education of children with autism in the context of inclusive education, we came to a number of conclusions.

1. Social education is a system of measures aimed at the formation of adequate socially-oriented behavior of the individual; it is a socially controlled part of socialization with an emphasis on social order, regulation of social behavior, in accordance with social values and norms. The choice of the form of social education depends on the individual characteristics of children and their needs, traditions and opportunities for educational work in educational institutions.

2. Inclusive social education is one of the educational aspects of inclusion and is to ensure pedagogically appropriate organization of students with the environment. For children with autism, social education can be carried out in the form of activities, cases, games, the introduction of which is preceded by prognostic, diagnostic, corrective, developmental work.

Social and educational work with autistic students in inclusive primary school involves the creation of special environmental conditions, taking into account the current capabilities of children with special needs and the reserve of their healthy talents. The social educator conducts social education in the following areas: correctional and developmental, social support of the family, preventive and educational.

3. Carrying out social and educational work by the method of social stories with children with autism in an inclusive school was based on social demand as the first component of inclusive social education, and a preliminary assessment of the level of formation of children's skills, determined by teachers and parents. The results of the socio-pedagogical request were the basis for the development of a series of social stories for correctional and developmental activities aimed at the following: improving self-control skills in the classroom, reactions to mistakes, reactions in case of not knowing, the ability to calm down in general situations, constructive action if getting lost and behavior with animals.

At the same time, the effectiveness of the application of social history depends on its specificity for the child, reflected in the events depicted in story. The more abstract social history, the less effective it is.

The effectiveness of social story is due to its compilation at the request of adults for a particular child, the orientation of social story on its subjective perception by the child with autism.

The developed methodological recommendations allow social educators to build the process of social education of autistic children taking into account their features and use modern technologies of social education, in particular, the technology of "social stories". The study does not cover all aspects of the problem, but reveals new ways to study it. For example, the use of social stories as a method of social education in the direction of correctional and developmental work represents a preparatory stage for involving a child with autism in group educational activities in an inclusive education.

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**Primary Paper Section: A**

**Secondary Paper Section: AM**