

Article

Psychological and Pedagogical Characteristics of Children with Mental Retardation.

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Abstract: This article examines the psychological and pedagogical characteristics of children with intellectual disabilities. It analyzes scientific research on the development of higher mental functions and cognitive activity in this category of children. It also explores key areas of special education aimed at developing cognitive activity and social adaptation in students with intellectual disabilities.

Keywords: mental retardation, intellectual disabilities, children with disabilities, cognitive activity, correctional pedagogy, social adaptation.

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Introduction

In the modern education system, special attention is paid to the education and upbringing of children with disabilities, driven by the trend toward inclusive education and expanding opportunities for such children to participate in society[1]. One of the most numerous categories are children with intellectual disabilities, whose development is characterized by persistent underdevelopment of cognitive function and personality. Ensuring their full participation in the educational process requires not only the creation of special conditions but also a thorough understanding of their psychological and pedagogical characteristics[2].

The relevance of studying this category of children stems from the need to organize effective corrective assistance and develop individualized educational pathways. As N. N. Malofeev notes, it is precisely by taking into account the specific developmental characteristics of children with intellectual disabilities that we can build a system of special and inclusive education focused on their actual capabilities and needs. In this context, research on the structure of the defect, the characteristics of cognitive activity, the emotional-volitional sphere, and the behavior of children with intellectual disabilities is of particular importance[3]. Mental retardation is a persistent impairment of cognitive function resulting from organic damage to the central nervous system in the early stages of development. M.S. Pevzner emphasized that mental retardation is based on a profound underdevelopment of the psyche, affecting not only the intellect but also personality, emotional-volitional regulation, and behavior.

Materials and Methods

This study is based on the analysis of psychological, pedagogical, and clinical literature devoted to mental retardation. The works of researchers such as M.S. Pevzner, V.G. Petrova, I.V. Belyakova, S.Ya. Rubinstein, L.V. Shipova, and N.N. Malofeev were examined.

The study also uses the classification principles presented in the International Classification of Diseases to determine the degrees of mental retardation. A comparative approach was applied to distinguish mental retardation from developmental delay, particularly based on the works of Petrova and Belyakova.

A comprehensive analytical approach was used to examine cognitive, attentional, memory, speech, emotional-volitional, and pedagogical characteristics of children with mental retardation, as well as correctional and educational strategies.

Results and Discussion

According to the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-10), there are several degrees of mental retardation: mild, moderate, severe and profound, each of which is characterized by varying severity of the intellectual defect and features of the child's mental development [4].

Children with mild mental retardation, with appropriate support, are able to master adapted educational programs, whereas with more severe forms of mental retardation, the primary focus is on developing life skills, self-care, and social adaptation. It is important to distinguish mental retardation from developmental delay. V. G. Petrova and I. V. Belyakova emphasize that with developmental delay, cognitive deficits are partially reversible and can be compensated for by creating favorable conditions, whereas with mental retardation, the impairments are persistent and irreversible [5]. An accurate differential diagnosis determines the choice of educational path and the content of correctional and pedagogical work.

The psychological characteristics of children with mental retardation largely determine the specifics of their education and upbringing. These same researchers noted that such children exhibit slow mental processes, difficulties with analysis and synthesis, and insufficient ability to generalize and abstract [6]. This leads to the fact that the assimilation of even relatively simple educational material requires more time, systematic repetition, and extensive use of visual aids. S. Ya. Rubinstein emphasized that the thinking of mentally retarded schoolchildren is predominantly concrete in nature and is closely linked to visual situations. They have difficulty using abstract concepts, establishing cause-and-effect relationships, and transferring acquired knowledge to new situations, necessitating the gradual development of concepts and reliance on practical activities [7].

Attentional characteristics are particularly important in the structure of this defect. According to available data, the attention of mentally retarded schoolchildren is characterized by low stability, limited capacity, and increased distractibility. Children tire quickly and have difficulty maintaining concentration on a task for long periods of time, leading to superficial learning and frequent errors. These characteristics require specialized organization of the educational process: a clear lesson structure, a rotation of activities, and the appropriate dosage of the volume and complexity of assignments [8].

Memory in children with mental retardation also has specific characteristics. L. V. Shipova noted that this category of children is better able to memorize visual, concrete material, while verbal and abstract information is significantly less easily assimilated.

Distortions, omissions, and disruptions in sequence are often observed during recall, which is associated with a lack of meaningful memorization and weaknesses in voluntary memory regulation. Therefore, techniques relying on visual aids, practical actions, and repeated practice in various situations are particularly important.

The speech development of children with intellectual disabilities is closely linked to the characteristics of their cognitive functioning. Research shows that the speech of these children is characterized by a limited vocabulary, agrammatical errors, an inaccurate understanding of word meanings, and insufficient coherence. This complicates both oral and written communication and hinders the full development of verbal and logical thinking. Special attention is paid to developing an active vocabulary, developing the grammatical structure of speech, and teaching the construction of expanded statements, which lays the foundation for the child's successful inclusion in the educational process [9].

The emotional-volitional sphere of children with mental retardation is characterized by immaturity and idiosyncrasy. Increased suggestibility, decreased criticality toward one's own actions, and difficulties in regulating behavior are noted [4]. Emotional reactions are characterized by polarity, ranging from increased excitability and affective outbursts to pronounced passivity and indifference. Reduced frustration tolerance leads to refusal to engage in activity even in the face of minor difficulties, necessitating tactful pedagogical intervention, support, and the deliberate creation of a successful environment [10].

Psychological characteristics directly impact the pedagogical characteristics of children with mental retardation and determine the specifics of their education. The process of knowledge acquisition for this category of students is significantly slower, and the development of even basic learning activities requires repeated repetition and reliance on visual aids [11]. Important importance is placed on clearly structured lessons, the gradual presentation of educational material, and systematic monitoring of understanding. Mentally retarded schoolchildren experience difficulties in independently planning and controlling their own activities, which manifests itself in impulsiveness, a lack of focus, and a rapid loss of motivation when difficulties arise. In this regard, the teacher acts not only as a source of knowledge but also as an organizer of the child's activities, helping them set goals, plan a sequence of actions, and monitor and evaluate results [12]. A significant component of the educational profile is the development of self-care and everyday orientation skills. For many children with intellectual disabilities, these skills develop significantly later and require targeted intervention. The educational process in special educational institutions includes not only the acquisition of academic knowledge but also the development of life skills: personal hygiene, self-care, and social orientation. The success of subsequent social adaptation and the possibility of further professional development largely depend on the degree of mastery of these skills. Correctional and pedagogical work with children with mental retardation is based on the principles of individualization, comprehensiveness, and reliance on intact mental functions. Particular attention is paid to considering the structure of each child's disability, including the combination of intellectual, speech, and emotional-volitional disorders. This requires close collaboration between the teacher, psychologist, speech therapist, and other specialists involved in supporting the student, as well as coordinated efforts between the school and family. Special developmental programs, aimed at developing basic learning skills: the ability to listen to and understand instructions, plan task completion, and monitor and evaluate results, occupy a significant place in the corrective assistance system. Textbooks on the psychology of mentally retarded children note that such programs are implemented through individual and group sessions, as well as during classroom activities, using play-based and practice-oriented methods [13]. Speech therapy plays a special role, aimed at developing phonemic perception, vocabulary, the grammatical structure of speech, and

coherent utterance. Correction of speech disorders not only improves communication skills but also indirectly influences the development of thinking, as speech is a vital means of generalizing and comprehending experience[14]. The inclusion of speech therapy and neuropsychological methods in a comprehensive correctional program improves the effectiveness of learning and facilitates children's inclusion in the educational process. Interaction with the family of a child with mental retardation is considered a mandatory component of correctional and pedagogical work. N.N. Malofeev emphasizes that the success of education and upbringing largely depends on the alignment of school and family requirements, as well as the degree of parental involvement in the child's support process. It is important for teachers not only to inform parents about the developmental characteristics of their children but also to provide them with advisory support and help organize the home environment taking into account special educational needs[15].

Conclusion

Thus, mental retardation is a complex and multifaceted developmental disorder affecting all aspects of a child's mental and personal development. Classic studies by V.G. Petrova, I.V. Belyakova, S.Ya. Rubinstein, M.S. Pevzner, and contemporary authors highlight the characteristic features of cognitive activity, speech and emotional development, as well as the specific learning difficulties of children with mental retardation. Considering these characteristics is essential for building an effective system of special and inclusive education. Organizing special education requires a comprehensive approach, including individualized instruction, the use of specialized methods, speech therapy and psychological support, and active interaction with the family. Creating a favorable educational environment, emphasizing the child's abilities, and consistently developing life skills contribute to the expansion of their adaptive resources and more successful integration into society.

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