Development of Subject Competence of Deaf Schoolchildren by means of Sign Language

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The present stage of development of the special education system is characterized by a change in educational priorities: the humanization of training and education of children with special needs, changing of rehabilitation and
educational paradigms (the transition, in general, from biological-medical paradigm to the socio-cultural); emphasis on competence-based approach (S. E.Gaidukevich, T. A.Grigorieva, G.L.Zaitseva, T.L.Leschinskaya, N.N.Malofeev, etc.)

All these trends are interrelated and interdependent. It is believed that education at this stage of development is experiencing a global crisis: it does not create sufficient conditions for the development of man's essential powers, for actualization of capabilities ingrained in their genetic nature, it operates as a closed system, the graduates of which experience difficulties. The issue of the lack of effectiveness of training of graduates of special educational institutions to further independent and professional life is particularly acute. The need to compensate for the lack of social development of students in the current special education system encourages rethinking of existing experience, developing new teaching ideas and approaches based on maximum use of axiological principles of modern pedagogy.

It has presented a new possibility of using sign language as a means of development of deaf students in a special school for children with hearing impairments. State educational policy in the Republic of Belarus in respect to persons with impaired hearing, on the one hand, conforms to traditional ideas about the content of correctional-educational process, on the other hand, focuses on the development of innovations that meet the demands of the times and society. Recent findings show that, on the one hand, there have been increasing favorable forecasts of successful adaptation of children with hearing impairments, their socialization and integration thanks to technological advances, the latest methods of hearing aids, hearing and speech correction that have contributed to the maximum approximation of the deaf and hard of hearing children to normal hearing and speech auditory abilities children. On the other hand, among the hearing-impaired children have been and are those for which the oral-aural rehabilitation does not bring the expected results, and therefore, for them sign language for life remains the only available channel of communication, learning and development. In foreign and this country’s literature in our field deaf children
are defined as the group "possessing visual thinking" (G.L. Zaitseva, B.M. Patten, A. Kibrik, etc.), most of whom can not realize their creative potential in the situation when the basic means of instruction is spoken speech.

Applicable national regulations in the Republic of Belarus shall follow the provisions of rehabilitation and socio-cultural educational paradigm. Status of sign language in the educational space Belarus is legalized: the Code of the Republic of Belarus in the Education Act (2011) defines the role of sign language as a means of education, upbringing and communication of deaf children, along with a verbal (Russian and Belarusian) language. There have been developed and implemented the syllabus and methodological support of the subject "Development of sign language" (corrective component) I-XI forms (T.A. Grigorieva, I.K. Rusakovich, 1993). The pilot project of learning sign language as a school subject has been successfully tested (2006-2011). Thus, the national special education system provides support for various forms of speech in teaching deaf children, it creates conditions of "total communication", of polyglossia, in such a way providing more comprehensive intellectual and moral development of a deaf person, about which L. S. Vygotsky wrote.

Analysis of fifteen years of experience confirms the viability of the concept of national education, allows to provide evidence that the use of sign language in the educational process of correction meet modern demands, provides more rapid pace, qualitative differences between the linguistic, communicative and subject competence of the deaf students in comparison with the data of the development of their peers enrolled in a different paradigm. The evidence of developing linguistic interest of the participants of the experiment is particularly noteworthy. An unusual for deaf children picture has been detected – they show curiosity, high speech and cognitive activity, a high degree of independence in their statements. Through the recognition of laws and uniqueness of sign language these students form a positive "image of Myself" (as its carrier); a sense of pride of mastering two languages (verbal and sign) is brought up, the interest in the traditions and norms of life of macro- and microsociety is stimulated, the desire for self-identification and
readiness to life in the integration and interaction of two societies: the hearing majority with the verbal language and the deaf community with sign language.