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Experimental Values in developing communication attitudes for children with learning difficulties

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Abstract

Currently, a special role belongs to the identification and use of both the procedures and means necessary to organize and facilitate the instructive-educational process, as well as the accountability of school institutions, the collaboration between teaching staff and parents with the aim of ensuring the success of the child in difficulty. Today's psychopedagogical science strives to respond to the existing crises, by initiating and implementing reform projects, which include a varied multitude of strategies and methods, appropriate, to satisfy individual needs in the instructive-educational field. In our study, we will argue the role and importance of developing communication attitudes in students with learning difficulties by presenting the research methodology and development of these skills. As well as the presentation of curricular interventions in the individualization of the instructional-educational process for students with learning difficulties, the description of the sociometric method of knowing the affinities expressed by the group members and implicitly the relationships within the class group. Completing the study by developing and validating the proposed pedagogical model, the intervention program and the teacher training program, various interactive methods and techniques adapted to students with learning difficulties being proposed in order to effectively organize the educational approach centered on the student.

Keywords: competence, communication, development, individualization, learning difficulties, psychopedagogical model.

Introduction

The entire school community, including each class of students, represents a favorable and favorable environment for communication, which is determined by common purpose and interests, by the interpersonal relationships of all actors involved. Communication based on free and open trust increases the trust of school group members.

As Professor Pislaru Vlad (2021, p.28) argues, "education is achieved through values and for values, the notion of value being close to that of *attitude*". Pedagogy teaches the child to communicate, form competences, and develop communication skills. And through communication, each personality manifests its attitudes, reflecting itself through communicative behavior. Education is that positive change in human beings, namely as a result of the inclusive instructive-educational process, through the joint effort of all actors involved, we achieve the expected expectations.

Education Development Strategy "Education-2020", 2014-2020, approved by Government Decision of the Republic of Moldova nr. 944 of 14.11.2014, Development Strategy "Education-2030, approved by GD of RM nr. 114 of 07.03.2023, SDG 4 - Quality Education, Education Code of the Republic of Moldova, Order no. 125 of 17.07.2014, in the Official Gazette No. 319-324,

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art. No. 634 - educational policy documents of the Republic of Moldova; Reference Framework of Early Education in the Republic of Moldova Chisinau, 2018, MECC Order nr. 1592 of 25.10.2018 – served as an indicative basis in the envisaged research activity.

At the same time, we find insufficiently investigated the problem regarding the development of communication skills in children with learning difficulties in general education institutions. We definitely consider it necessary to investigate the issue that is driven by:

- a. *the large number of children with SEN, including those with DF, who are part of the inclusion process in general education institutions following the process of deinstitutionalization;*
- b. *insufficient complex research on this issue;*
- c. *implementing contents, strategies and educational policies to develop and promote inclusive education.*

The decisions of any teacher regarding teaching-learning methods and strategies are influenced by the knowledge of the potential, interests and individual capacity of participation and involvement of each child in the instructive-educational process. In the case of children with CI, teachers apply psycho-pedagogical adaptations and curricular changes/adaptations of the corresponding contents in order to achieve educational goals. Thus, an indicative sense of the optimal route to achieve the objectives is indicated, so the teaching methods and strategies are flexible, being adapted for each child according to the individual potential.

Each class of students and, in general, the entire school community, represents the favorable environment for communication, which is determined by common purpose and interests and by the interpersonal relationships of all actors involved. Communication based on trust, free and open increases the trust of school group members.

It has been observed that if effective communication techniques, although known, are not applied, when analyzing communication deficiencies, people launch into explanations, more or less argued. The causes of inefficient communication, according to the authors D. Ștefăneț (2018) and P. Anghel (2003), find their origin in the non-observance of communication techniques (Table 1).

Table 1. *Causes of ineffective communication and solutions to streamline communication*

Causes	Solutions
<i>Problems of listening</i>	Use of <i>active listening technique</i> . Active communication operates with messages of understanding, compassion and affection towards the interlocutor.
<i>Absence of feedback</i>	Using verbal, visual and nonverbal confirmations to support the interlocutor in what he says. Understanding the point of view of the interlocutor.
<i>False feed-back</i>	Speakers should talk about things that do not interest them, change the topic in the direction of their interest.
<i>Resistance to criticism</i>	We are not criticizing, but we are leading the discussion towards exploring alternative solutions.
<i>Uninspired choice of place or moment</i>	Respecting personal space, ensuring the necessary comfort during communication.

The teacher should be aware of the responsibility for any word spoken in this society, where everything proceeds at an accelerated pace, when mistakes of expression are not considered

important and no one is accountable for what he said, in which no response is expected to intervention during a discussion.

Children, like all people, feel the need to communicate as effectively as possible with those around them. Being integrated into a social system, which demands more and more, where the need for communication is more and more fierce, children want to be as good and practical as possible in language.

The approach to this aspect of communication can be found in a series of scientific papers, signed by Romanian and local authors (Pînișoara 2006; Abric, 2002; Bolboceanu, 2007; Racu et al., 2012; Mîslîțchi, 2020), Russians (А. А. Леонтьев, 2010; А. В. Запорожец, 1988; Д. Б. Эльконин, 1980; П. Я. Гальперин, 1989) etc. in which the communication process is analyzed from the point of view of the theory of activity by dissociating its structural components. The researchers emphasize in particular that, in the process of communication, interlocutors / participants are in a continuous exchange of roles, which allows them to influence each other through the structural qualities of the personalities they possess: specific characteristics, motivations, experiences and capacities innate or acquired during life, etc.

Traditionally, communication remains to be approached in the specialized literature from the perspective of its quality of "background for establishing and developing interpersonal relationships, way of their existence". (J. C. Abric, 2002, p. 35).

Method

At the stage of the pedagogical experiment, we designed a pedagogical model for communication development in children with learning difficulties, in accordance with the objectives of this research: *elaboration of a Pedagogical Model for communication development in children with DF and experimental approval and evaluation of the efficiency of the Pedagogical Model for communication development in the activity of children with learning difficulties.*

At this stage, *the research hypothesis* assumes the following: *children with learning difficulties in experimental classes having developed communication skills, the Phased and Efficiently Targeted Pedagogical Model will be applied.*

The training sample will consist of 56 students with learning difficulties (*grades III-IV*) from the 5 educational institutions in Chisinau, Ialoveni, Rascani, Hancesti.

The purpose of the Intervention Program was oriented towards developing the communication of students with learning difficulties by organizing, carrying out and promoting the targeted activities.

Specific objectives of the Intervention Programme:

- *Improving communication skills components in students with learning difficulties;*
- *Promoting an authentic teaching approach focused on intensifying communication and involving students with learning difficulties;*
- *Strengthening interpersonal relationships between students with learning difficulties and typical students focused on assertive communication;*
- *Involving parents in activities to develop communication of students with learning difficulties.*

The intervention program developed within the "Model of the 3 pillars of support in the development of communication of students with learning difficulties" is focused on the 3 pillars.

The uneven division of specific objectives on the 3 pillars of support is determined by the degree of their intervention and control as factors of the internal school environment (teachers and colleagues) and of the school microenvironment (parents and other family members).

The main activities and actions that will lead to the achievement of the objectives set, together with the responsible persons, deadlines, resources, performance indicators, but also the risks that may arise are described in stages in the following.

For **PILLAR 1 - Teachers and auxiliary teachers**, in the context of the 2 specific objectives outlined: (1) *improving the components of communication skills in students with learning difficulties* and (2) *promoting an authentic teaching approach focused on intensifying communication and involving students with learning difficulties*, we will carry out the following activities:

- **Organization of communication development games.**
- **Application of differentiated training techniques.**
- **Adapting the didactic approach to students with PI.**
- **Monitoring students with learning difficulties by completing progress sheets.**
- **Organization of STEAM activities.**
- **Assistance of psychologist and speech therapist in teaching and extradidactic activities.**
- **Application of ICT in streamlining students' communication with CI.**

- For **PILLAR 2 - Classmates**, in order to achieve the specific objective (3) *strengthening interpersonal relationships between learners with learning difficulties and typical learners focused on assertive communication*, activities will be carried out:

- **Initiating mentoring activities for children with CI.** Mentoring microgroups *can also be created*. Mentoring microgroups describe a teaching method based on grouping students (both typical and with SC), groups led by leaders with whom the teacher contacts regularly to analyze content and working procedures. The leaders return to their groups (consisting of about 6-8 members) to have completed the training process and the development of students' communication with the SC. [Panish. pp. 387-388]

In an illustrative approach, according to I. O. Panisoara this process is carried out in the following way:



Fig. 1. *The traditional manner of instruction versus the process of mentoring micro groups*

Thus, the atmosphere becomes more relaxed, the fear, anxiety and silence of some students of the group being combated by increasing the level of interaction and intensifying communication. I

have noticed that students with learning difficulties train better in groups led by their peer-mentors than traditionally in whole-class activities.

No less important, parents are the ones who have a decisive role in remedying learning difficulties, by providing the child with real affective support, collaborating with teachers, being actively involved in all school and extracurricular activities of their children.

PILLAR 3 – The family, is a very important one in the formation and development of communication skills in students with DF from an early age. Having as *specific objective (4) to involve parents in activities to develop communication of students with learning difficulties*, we propose for our training program:

- *Organizing individual and group meetings with parents of students with SC;*
- *Organizing (individual/group) parent counseling sessions;*
- *Implementation of the "Family Advent Calendar".*

All activities will focus on developing communication skills, encouraging communication in front of peers, friends, colleagues, communication in front of an audience.

The formative experiment is valuable for our research; however, its value is reinforced by the results of the *validation experiment*, which is essential to provide conclusive evidence on the effectiveness of pedagogical intervention (*Model of the 3 pillars of support in developing communication of students with learning difficulties* and *Intervention Program implemented*). The *validation experiment* plays a key role in the context of assessing the impact of the *Intervention Programme* and all its activities.

As a result of the validation experiment, we will compare the progress and performance recorded by the students of the experimental sample focusing on the following: identifying the causality between the intervention performed and the results obtained; internal viability and external generalizations, its reliability. And last but not least, through the validation experiment we will determine to what extent the didactic strategies applied in developing the communication skills of students with learning difficulties are relevant or not, could be replaced by others, could be adapted or connected to certain contexts and to other students with learning difficulties.

Findings and discussions

The comparative analysis will focus on the *test* and *retest* results of the experimental samples (students of grades III (E1) and IV (E2)) from the studied schools, but also on the results of students in experimental control groups C1 and C2.

We will start the analysis by comparing the results of the performance descriptors granted to students with learning difficulties at the end of the first semester (grades III-IV). Figure 2 shows the small progress made by students during the reference period by increasing the number of students performing tasks independently (2-3 people per sample) and those guided by the teacher (2-4 people per sample), while the number of students requiring more support is reduced by about 3-6 people. If at the testing stage, out of the 84 students with learning difficulties – 48 students (57.1%) were evaluated by the "s" descriptor, then at the retest their number was reduced to 29 students (34.5%).

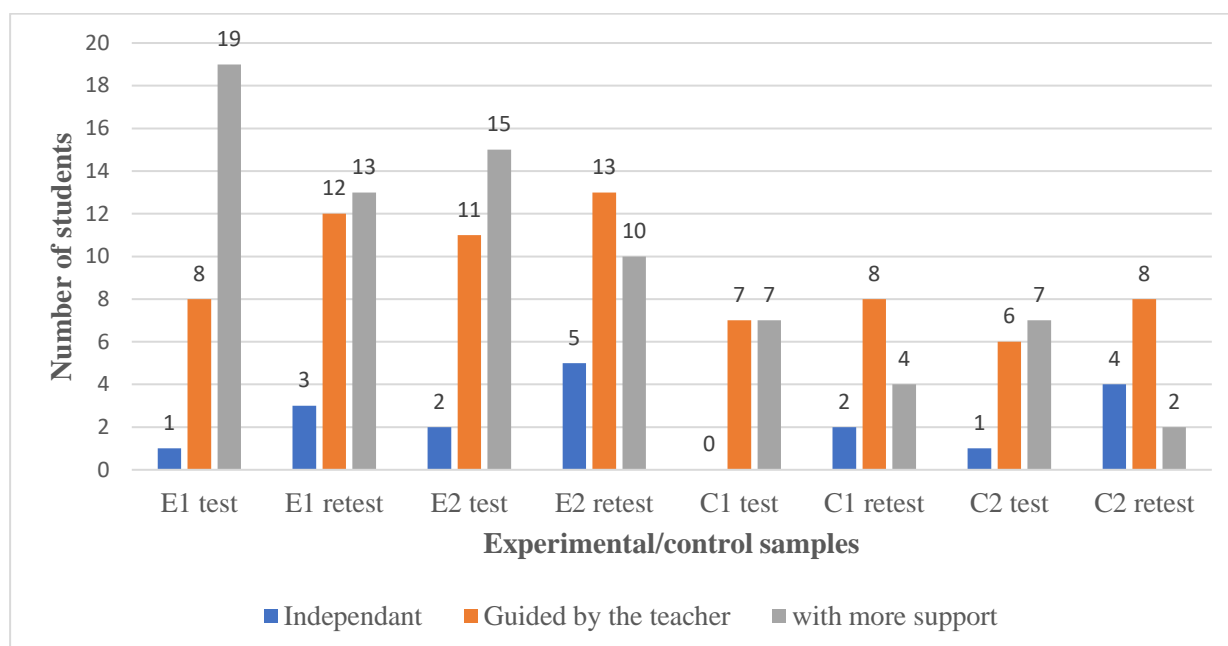


Fig. 2. Student outcomes assessed by test-retest performance descriptors at the end of semester I, grade III and IV

The results collected at the stage of the finding experiment (test) and at the stage of the validation experiment (retest) will be evaluated considering the variables independent of the intervention program, because the behavior of students with learning difficulties changes depending on their mood and mood. Therefore, some results may even regress.

The results of the *Checklist for identifying problems in child development, test-retest*, in terms of assessing the degree of social integration are reflected in *Figure 3* and *Figure 4*. Of the total number of pupils included in the finding experiment (84 pupils) at the test stage, 82.1% (69 pupils) knew about their identity, at the retest stage their share increases by 8.3 percentage points, reaching 90.4% (76 pupils).

In the same vein: at the test stage 19.04% (16 students) easily established contacts with other people, at the retest stage their share increases by 13.06 percentage points to 32.1% (27 students); at the test stage 45.23% (38 students) complied with school and social rules, at the retest stage their share increases by 13.1 percentage points, reaching 58.33% (49 students).

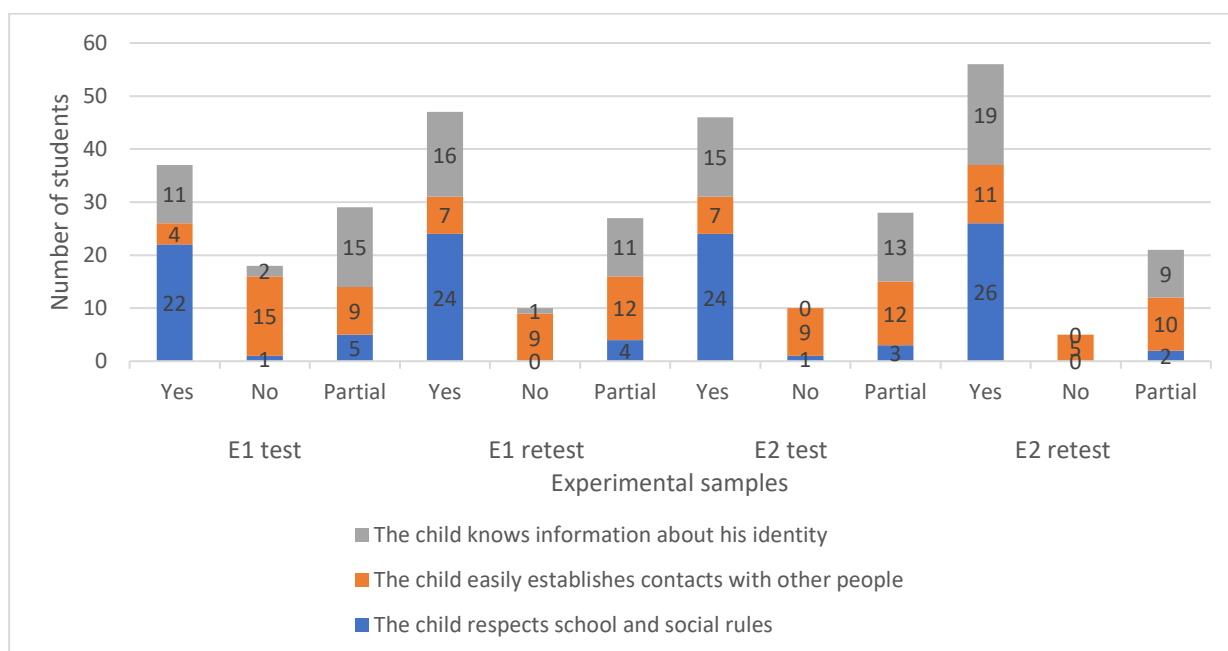


Fig. 3. Checklist results *to identify problems in child development, test-retest*

The establishment of relationships and contacts with other people reflects the degree of integration and adaptation of students with learning difficulties to the school environment. School and social integration of students emphasizes diversity and equality in education, the teacher contributing to the creation of a learning environment that promotes collaboration and mutual support between all students, while identifying strategies to adapt to the individual needs of students.

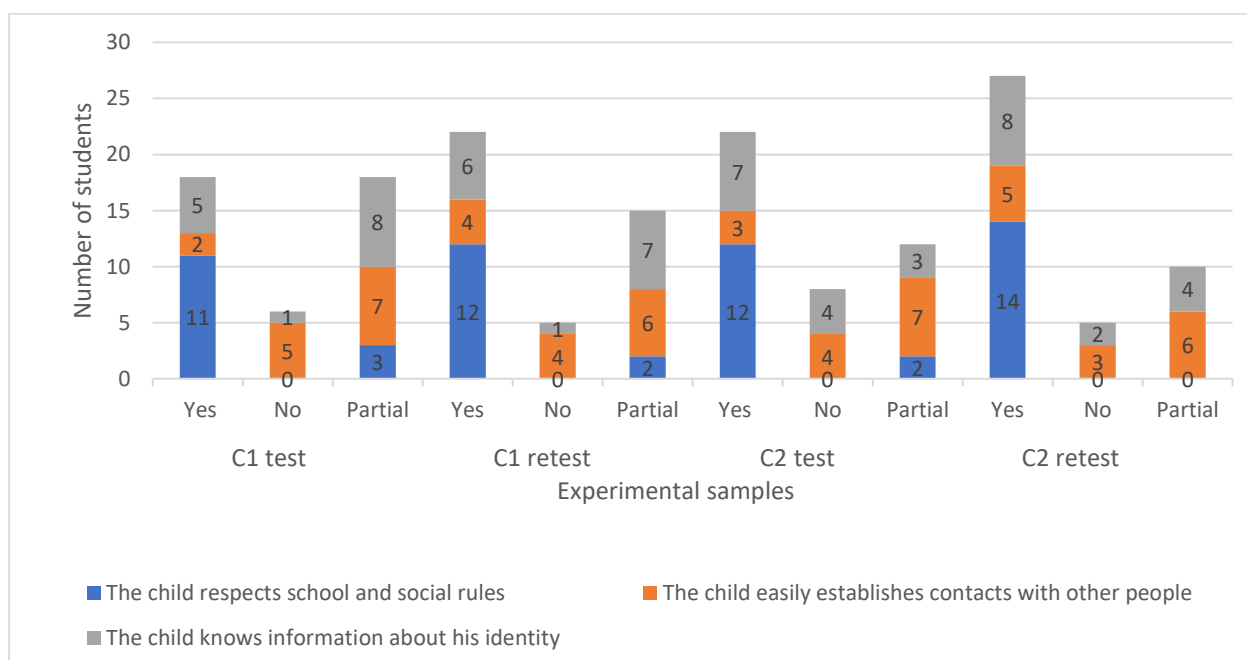


Fig. 4. Checklist results *to identify problems in child development, test-retest*

Another indicator of progress in the development of communication skills of students with learning difficulties focused on the reassessment of behavioral manifestations at the *retest* stage .

Table 2 shows the average scores calculated at the *test-retest* stages with the manifestation of positive trends for most behaviors observable during gaming activities.

Table 2. Average *test-retest* scores calculated based on *the Grid for assessing the student's communication skills during the game activity*

Behavioral manifestations	E1 test	E1 Retest	E2 test	E2 Retest	C1 test	C1 Retest	C2 test	C2 Retest
Ability to follow instructions	2,3	2,7	3	3,2	2,2	2,3	3,1	3,2
Ability to understand the meanings of words	2,3	2,5	2,8	3,4	2,1	2,2	2,7	2,9
Ability to understand discussions within the activity	2,7	2,8	3,2	3,8	2,8	3,0	3,4	3,6
Ability to express oneself	1,9	2,1	2,7	3,3	1,8	1,9	2,6	2,9
Ability to communicate through nonverbal language	2,6	2,8	2,4	2,9	2,5	2,5	2,9	3,4

However, based on *Figure 5*, we notice that the average scores are maintained within the range of tuning fork 2-3, with more pronounced results being attested for the experimental sample E2 *retest* (fourth grade students) and the control sample C2 *retest*. These data lead us to the conclusion that, along with the experimental stimuli applied within *the pedagogical intervention program*, students with learning difficulties who have worked in the usual school environment also perform well.

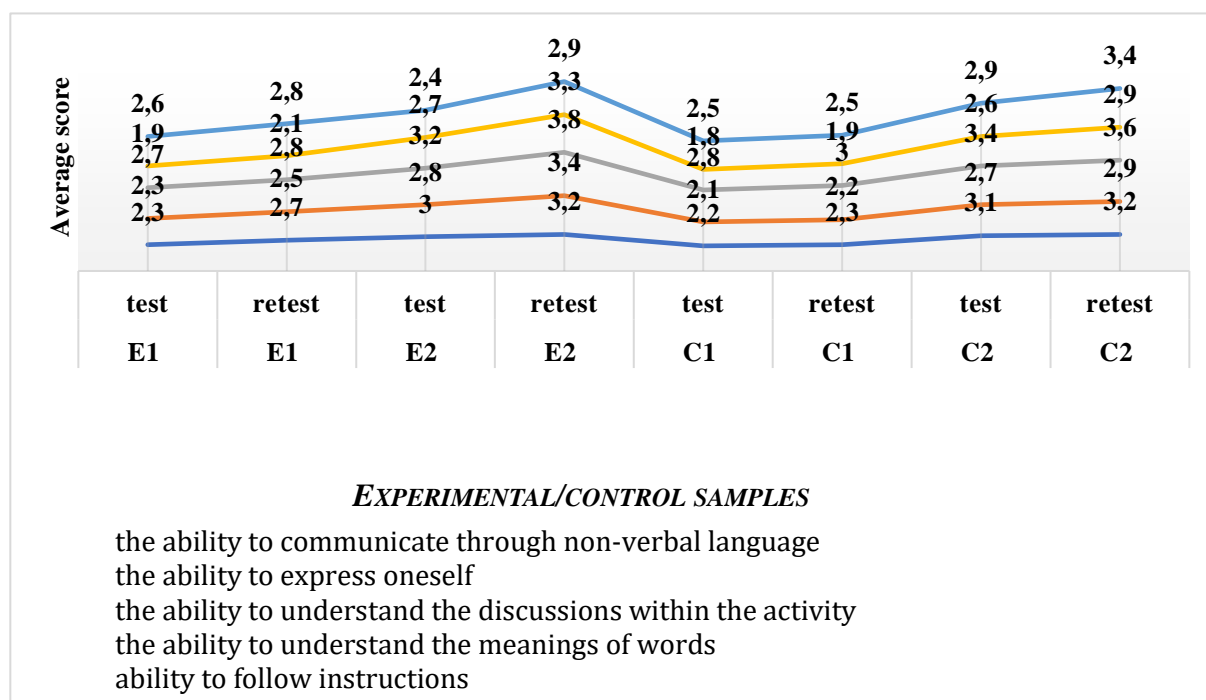


Fig. 5. *Grid for assessing the student's communication skills during the game activity*

The experiment to validate the pedagogical intervention for the 7 samples of *the A. Descoedres Test* reflects increasing results. There is an increase in the exact answers for *Exhibit 1 Opposites* (with pictures and objects). It increased by a median unit *Me*, the values of which explain that for samples E1 and E2 *retest*, half of the exact answers given by students involved in the validation experiment are less than 5 and half are greater than 5. For control sample C1 - half of the exact

answers given by the students involved in the validation experiment are equal to or less than 4 and half are equal to or greater than 4, and for control sample C2 the median value remained unchanged. As a result of calculating the *simple mode* for the analyzed data series (*retest*), it is attested that it has the following values for the 4 samples: **Mo** - 4 for control sample C1, **Mo** - 5 for E1, C2 and **Mo** - 6 for E2. Thus, the highest frequency of exact responses is given by the number 6 (subjects responded exactly to 6 out of 10 items) and 4 (subjects responded exactly to 4 out of 10 items). In *Challenge 2 Gaps*, most students filled the spaces with the right words or framed perfect synonyms in the context they read. This is due to the exercises carried out by teachers during the training experiment. In the memorization test (*Figures*) the results are insignificant, which determines us to continue making joint efforts to make progress. From *Table 3*, we see that in test 7, students with learning difficulties performed the task correctly, but we must mention that the selected verbs were simple to imitate.

Table 3. Mean, median, mode of results of students with DF from experimental and control groups at *Test A. Descoeudres, test-retest*

Try	E1 test	E1 retest	E2 test	E2 retest	C1 test	C1 Retest	C2 test	C2 Retest
I. Opposites (with objects and images)	4	7	5	8	3	4	5	6
<i>Median (sample 1), M_e</i>	4	5	4	5	3	4	4,5	4,5
<i>Module (Exhibit 1), Mo</i>	4	5	4	6	3	4	4	5
II. Gaps	6	7	6	8	7	8	5	6
III. Figures	3	4	4	5	4	5	4	5
IV. Materials	2	4	3	5	3	4	3	4
V. Opposites (without objects and images)	6	7	6	7	6	7	7	7
VI. Colours	8	9	9	9	8	9	8	9
VII. Verbs	8	10	11	12	9	10	11	11

The reading skills of children with learning difficulties can be developed by practicing minute reading, but also assessed by the Bovet reading test. Minute reading contributes to the development of oral communication skills and clarity of speech. Students can convey messages confidently to the listening audience, using intonation and capturing attention. The quantitative and qualitative evaluation of this indicator at the *retest stage* is presented in *Table 4*, where the correction coefficient for experimental and control samples is elucidated. Increases in value attest to the progress of students in the E1 *retest*, E2 *retest* and C2 *retest sample*.

For sample C1, the correction coefficient decreases by 0.19, which can be determined by the context of applying the *retest*: mood, emotions, feelings, health status of children with learning difficulties or insufficient reading in class/home.

Table 4. Bovet Reading Sample *results*, experimental samples (E1, E2) and control (C1, C2), *test-retest*

Indicators	E1 test	E1 retest	E2 test	E2 retest	C1 test	C1 Retest	C2 test	C2 Retest
<i>Average number of words read, $N_{mediu_cuvinte}$</i>	62	71	76	82	60	64	70	79
<i>The average number of errors, N_{mediu_erori}</i>	11	12	9	9	10	11	8	9
<i>Correction coefficient, $C_{correction}$</i>	5,64	5,91	8,44	9,11	6,00	5,81	8,75	8,78

Thanks to the pedagogical intervention program and the joint efforts of teachers, parents, and classmates of students with learning difficulties, we notice an increase in the *cohesion index* in 2 third grades from 2 educational institutions in Chisinau (*Table 5*). Even an insignificant increase

in its value signifies the strengthening of solidarity and unity among classmates. Giving confidence and support to students with learning difficulties in the mentoring activities described in the phase of the training experiment led to the creation of an educational environment in which these students feel supported, aware of certain norms of behavior and values of the class they are trying to respect. An absolute deviation of about 0.40 points is insignificant progress but motivating for the teacher and the class of students.

Table 5. Cohesion index for subgroups of experimental sample E1, *test-retest*

Sociometric indices	S1E1 test	S1E1 Retest	Absolute deviation, +/-	S2E1 test	S2E1 test	Absolute deviation, +/-
Number of mutual relations, <i>R</i>	9	11	2	11	13	2
Number of unilateral relations, <i>U</i>	24	22	-2	27	25	-2
Number of elections allowed, <i>k</i>	2	2	0	2	2	0
Calculation coefficient, <i>p</i>	2/9	2/9	-	2/9	2/9	-
Calculation coefficient, <i>q</i>	7/9	7/9	-	7/9	7/9	-
<i>Group cohesion index, Ic</i>	<i>1,31</i>	<i>1,75</i>	<i>0,44</i>	<i>1,42</i>	<i>1,82</i>	<i>0,40</i>

The students' progress during the pedagogical experiment was guaranteed by the unconditional involvement of the parents of students with learning difficulties, who became aware and accepted the problem given to their children. The parents' effort was enormous in carrying out various activities, but also in agreeing to participate in meetings and trainings organized by the school psychologist, the support teacher or the class teacher.

The number of parents who recognized and accepted their children's learning difficulties at the test-retest stages is increasing, which is a positive indicator, because an acknowledged and accepted problem leads to identifying solutions and accepting the challenges of organizing, participating and fully involving in various activities. Figure 6 shows that 11 parents of third-grade students in experimental sample E1 and control sample C1 at the *retest stage* became more confident that their children were experiencing learning problems, and the number of categorical ones was reduced by 4 people. We observe the same results for samples E2 and C2, the number of "categoricals" being null.

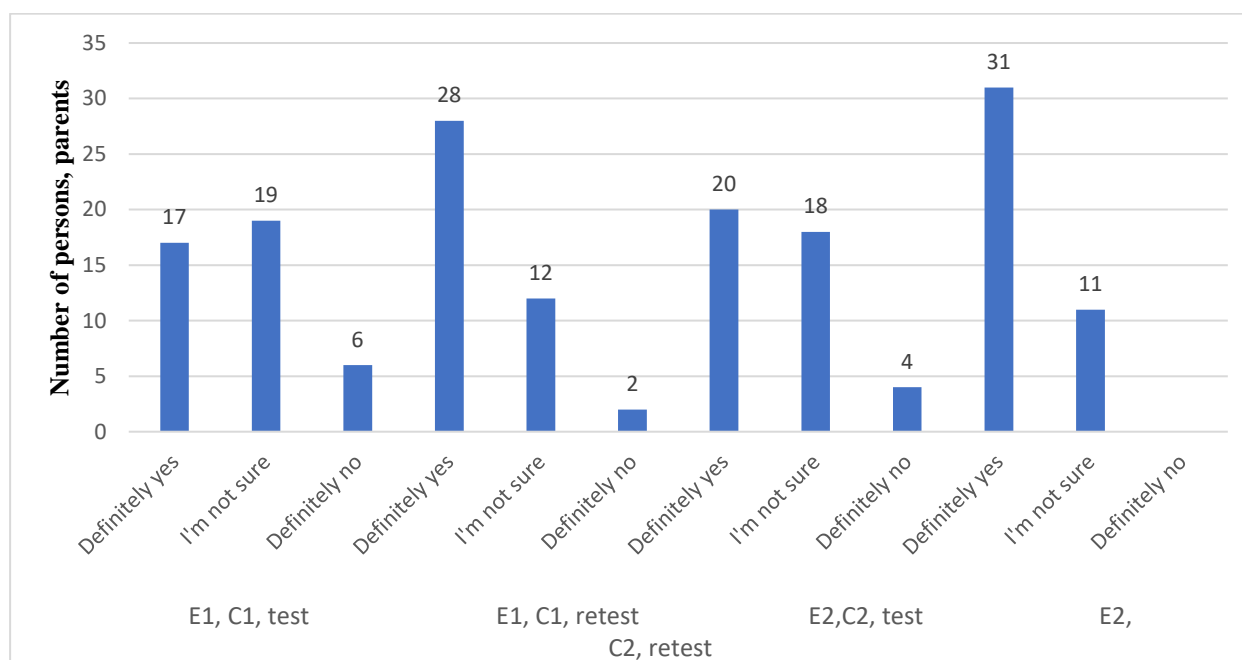


Fig. 6. Recognition of learning difficulties by parents after discussions with the psychologist

At the end of the impact assessment of the intervention program, we will analyze the feedback obtained from students with learning difficulties, parents, but also teachers as a result of implementing the interactive tool "Advent calendar". Creating, adapting and implementing it to the particularities of students with PID was a challenge for all subjects of the training experiment having a total involvement and openness for the activities described. After the first days of implementation, students became more curious and impatient for the next activities. Although she called for a sustained effort from the families of the children involved, the parents' opinions focused on the following:

- Children were positively motivated by "every day's surprise";
- The dynamism of the activities stimulated children for constructive and engaging dialogues;
- Emphasis was placed on encouraging communication in various contexts;
- The tool promotes cultural values related to winter holidays;
- Challenging children to search and find facts and events, to experience emotions;

At the same time, the limits of this tool determined by the busy schedule of children's school activities were mentioned, and as a proposal was to reduce the complexity of activities for the next "Advent Calendar".

Conclusions

Following the research given, we can draw the following **general conclusions**:
The importance of training and developing communication skills in children with learning difficulties is determined by the goals of education and key competences stipulated in the Education Code of the Republic of Moldova correlated with the European Framework, in which communication competence is imminent to the process of social integration, or communication can be combined with the integrity of all social processes. The development of communication for children with learning difficulties refers to the early age, because they need teachers, who

understand the individual way of learning, can help them overcome their given difficulties, highlighting their strengths, which usually underpin learning skills.

The logic of theoretical and practical reasoning conditioned us to place special emphasis on the methodology of involving parents in the process of developing communication in students with learning difficulties, describing strategies for overcoming problems and crisis situations (caused by children's learning difficulties), along with parents' counseling sessions.

In order to establish the particularities of communication in children with learning difficulties, we described a complex methodology focused on the synthesis of relevant tools for finding, training and validation, selecting and adapting the investigative apparatus according to these particularities. In order to conceptualize the integrated picture of the experimental/control group, the *Integrated Sheet on the description of the experimental/control sample was developed in order to diagnose learning difficulties* in students of grades III and IV, in which were included *the Checklist for the initial identification of problems in child development; Grid for assessing the student's communication skills during the game activity; tests A. Descoeudres, Rey, Bovet test, sociometric test*. The quantitative analysis of some indicators highlights the fact that *most children with learning difficulties show a balanced and benevolent behavior – 98%; about 74% get involved in extracurricular activities; most of the evaluated children orient themselves in space and time – 82%*. In classroom games or extracurricular activities: *the child usually follows simple oral instructions and often needs help; the child has difficulty understanding the meaning of simple words or misunderstands them; the child listens and follows the discussions during the activity; the child has difficulty expressing himself, speaks slowly, does not express his point of view, the tone is uniform; the child has posture, Mostly rigid with a slight inclination to relax*. We also applied a questionnaire for parents, which reflects the fact that over 40% are aware of the problem of learning difficulties in their children, and some categorically deny this problem.

For the experimental approval and evaluation of the efficiency of the Pedagogical Model for the development of communication in the activity of children with learning difficulties, at *the retest stage* we analyzed in comparative aspect the results, which highlighted the following: if at the testing stage, out of the 84 students with learning difficulties – 48 students (57.1%) were evaluated by the descriptor "S - with more support", then at the retest their number was reduced to 29 students (34.5%); at *the test stage* 19.04% (16 students) easily established contacts with other people, at *the retest stage*, their share increases by 13.06 percentage points, reaching the value of 32.1% (27 students); at *the test stage* 45.23% (38 students) respected school and social rules, at *the retest stage*, their share increases by 13.1 percentage points, reaching 58.33% (49 students); There is also an increase in the group cohesion index and an increase in the value of the correction coefficient); enrichment of pupils' vocabulary (Rey test); average scores calculated at the retest stage show positive trends for most observable behaviors during gaming activities; positive results recorded in the progress sheet .

Based on the above, we conclude that the results of the pedagogical experiment carried out contributed to solving the *scientific problem* that was configured on the theoretical-applicative argumentation of the efficiency of the communication process in children with learning difficulties based on the application of the Pedagogical Model for communication development, taking into account that each child is unique, *the practical recommendations* aim at:

Implementation of the Model of the 3 pillars of support in the development of communication of students with learning difficulties and of the *Intervention Program* oriented both on *promoting an authentic didactic approach focused on intensifying communication and involving students with*

learning difficulties, and strengthening interpersonal relationships between students with learning difficulties and typical students focused on assertive communication.

Organization and conduct of the *Teacher Training Program*, which aims to promote didactic strategies for relating and developing communication skills in primary school students with learning difficulties, with the following topics: *psycho-pedagogical aspects of children with learning difficulties; regulatory policy documents on identifying and managing primary school pupils' learning difficulties; didactic strategies to develop communication skills of students with learning difficulties; ways to integrate digital technologies into the development of communication skills of students with learning difficulties; family involvement in the development of communication competence in students with learning difficulties.*

Raising awareness and involving parents in extracurricular activities with children who manifest learning difficulties, including the implementation of the "Family Advent Calendar" tool.

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