

INFLUENCE OF TEACHING METHODS ON THE PERCEPTION OF THE LEARNING MATERIAL BY STUDENTS – FUTURE PEDAGOGICAL SPECIALISTS

Elena Nedeva, Assist. Prof.
Trakia University – Stara Zagora (Bulgaria)

Abstract. The article examines the theoretical and empirical aspects of the need for specific training of future pedagogical specialists to work with children with chronic diseases and their families. The study evaluates the influence of the used methods on the perception of the learning material, the assimilation of knowledge, skills and competences by the students. The effectiveness of these methods is considered as the extent to which the learning objectives are achieved, including the depth of understanding, practical applicability and long-term acquisition of knowledge. The goal is to identify the most effective teaching methods, to obtain feedback from students, and to optimize relationships between children with chronic illnesses, their families, and future teachers. The expected benefits are higher quality of education, better preparation of students, greater satisfaction with the learning process and better care for children with chronic diseases. The article presents initial results of an empirical study, including a conceptual framework, toolkit, and data analysis.

Keywords: children with chronic diseases; effectiveness; teaching methods; students; future teachers

*I heard and forgot.
I saw and remembered.
I experienced and understood.*
Confucius

Clarification of the main concepts

The study uses the concept of effectiveness in the context of training. According to Katanski (2009), effectiveness can be considered as the degree to which training objectives are achieved. In addition, the author distinguishes between internal (pedagogical) effectiveness – which measures the correspondence between the set goals and the achieved results, and external (economic) effectiveness – which includes the

value of the results in relation to the resources invested (Panova & Katanski 1987). In this study, the emphasis is on pedagogical effectiveness, measuring the degree of acquired knowledge, developed skills and application of what has been learned in pedagogical practice.

Distinguishing between the concepts of “approach” and “method”.

The text uses the terms method and approach. In order to avoid terminological ambiguity, the term approach is considered as a broader concept, including specific methods. Methods are seen as specific teaching tools, while approaches describe more general teaching strategies (e.g. cognitive, socio-emotional approach, etc.).

Introduction to the research problem

The progress of information technologies (IT), artificial intelligence (AI), innovations in the digital world, as well as intensively changing social and personal needs, determine the need for new approaches in education. These approaches should be based on innovation, creativity, empathy, emotionality and others, in order to increase the effectiveness of the learning process.

An emotional approach in education does not mean excessive emotional load on the students, but rather the teacher's ability to make them empathize with the course. The goal is for students to experience the learning process as active participants in it.

Modern education faces many challenges, determined by the rapid development of technologies, their impact on society and a number of other factors. One of the significant challenges is working with children/students with chronic diseases. Today's students, reflecting the cultural continuum of society, require a multi-component and complex approach to their studies to overcome these challenges.

In general, chronic disease can be defined as a disease occurring over a long period of time and slowly progressing pathological changes in the body¹.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), a chronic disease is a persistent condition that can be controlled and have periods of remission, but cannot be cured. It accompanies a person throughout his life (Buyuklieva 2018).

In its report “Fighting Chronic Diseases in Europe”, the WHO emphasizes that years ago these diseases were perceived as a problem affecting mainly wealthy and elderly people. However, new research shows that the age limit at which chronic diseases appear is lowering with each passing year, with more children suffering from them. Moreover, these diseases are no longer a “privilege” of only financially stable families (Buyuklieva 2014).

Data from a report by the Ministry of Health (MH) from 2012 confirms this trend. The annual report of the MH presents the percentages of children suffering from chronic diseases. The largest share is occupied by diseases of the respiratory system, with the most common cases of asthma, followed by allergic rhinitis and chronic bronchitis. Among the common diseases are obesity, insulin-dependent diabetes and epilepsy¹. These data, concerning the increase in the number of chil-

dren/students suffering from chronic diseases, are becoming a trend, not only in Bulgaria, but also worldwide.

Other studies indicate that there is a lack of information and a need for additional training among current teachers (Buyuklieva 2014). This determines the need to prepare future teachers and pedagogical specialists for working with children with chronic diseases and their families.

The lack of specialized training for working with these children and their families emphasizes the topicality of the researched topic and provides an opportunity for future research. (Buyuklieva 2018).

The presented data confirms the need for additional training for future pedagogical specialists, in particular future teachers, who will increasingly encounter children with chronic diseases in their¹ classrooms.

This requires the teacher to go beyond the conservative teaching material. As Georgian educator Shavla Amonashvili wisely notes: “Enter the classroom with reverence. Before you are the messengers of the future.” These “messengers” are our “reflection” – of our parents, of our teachers, of society. What kind of future we want to build and what kind of vision we want to see realized depends on the messages we send them today.

Given the specificity of working with children with chronic diseases and the multidisciplinarity of the studied discipline, future pedagogical specialists need specific knowledge and skills when working with them. It is essential to select appropriate teaching methods, techniques, approaches and tools to ensure the accessibility of the learning material.

The American philosopher and educational reformer John Dewey (1859 – 1952) believed that art deepens our understanding of the world, enabling us to experience worlds beyond our personal context. Thus, it becomes a means of expanding the boundaries of the personality and expressing a global experience.

What Dewey offered as a model is “learning by experience” instead of “learning by memorization.” He believed that since a person is formed by his experiences in childhood, then experience is the best means of imparting experience and understanding. It is on experience and learning through experience that the curriculum in the discipline *Pedagogical Support for Children with Chronic Diseases and Their Families* is based, structured and prepared. The multidisciplinarity of the subject requires a non-unilateral approach to learning and a departure from the traditional teaching methods. Given the specificity of the studied discipline, the need for a wide assortment of methods, techniques and tools is imperative, not only in order to enrich the educational content, but also in order to evaluate the effectiveness of the methods used.

This report examines the influence of the used methods and approaches in the studying of the learning material in the discipline *Pedagogical Support for Children with Chronic Diseases and Their Families* (hereinafter referred to as the Dis-

cipline) by students (BA and MA) at the Faculty of Education of Trakia University, Stara Zagora. The exact definition of the object of the study shows the differences in the needs of children with chronic diseases, on the one hand, and the need for awareness of future teachers/pedagogical specialists, on the other.

The purpose of the research is to determine the degree of influence of the used teaching methods in the studied discipline and their relationship with the assimilation of knowledge, to identify the most effective teaching methods.

The influence of teaching methods is essential, especially when working with a vulnerable group such as children with chronic illnesses and their families. It is determined by a number of factors such as: the specifics of working with children with chronic diseases, the chronic diseases themselves, the age characteristics and specifics of children with chronic diseases, the way of family functioning and a number of others (Buyuklieva 2014; Buyuklieva 2018).

Instruments

The growing number of children who suffer from a chronic disease, the need for additional training for working with children with chronic diseases and their families, considered from a scientific and theoretical point of view, determine the main scientific and theoretical basis of the conducted empirical research (Buyuklieva 2014).

The main object of the research is the effectiveness of the used teaching methods in the Discipline studied by students, the correlation between the used methods and the assimilation of knowledge among the students. A questionnaire was conducted, thanks to a specially developed instrument, which collected extensive and valuable empirical material. It was conducted in the groups of the Bachelor's degree and Master's degree who studied the Discipline. The questions were formulated to be relevant in order to ensure the comparability of students' attitudes toward the research problem in terms of finding or not finding a relationship between the teaching methods used and learning effectiveness. The mutual reciprocity of the questions was sufficient to ensure the accuracy of the empirical data. The questions aimed to identify the perceptions, attitudes, positions, and proposals of the participants in the study.

The survey card covers 13 questions, as well as information about the respondents (course, specialty, etc.) A total of 144 students took part in it – 79 studying in master's programs or 55.2% and 64 studying in a bachelor's program or 44.8% of respondents, both in full-time and part-time education. The students who took part in the study are in different majors: Pre-school and Primary Pedagogy, Primary School Pedagogy with a Foreign Language, Pre-school Pedagogy, Information Technology Education Pedagogy, Special Pedagogy, Social Pedagogy, Special Pedagogy Module Speech Therapy, Special Pedagogy Resource Teacher, Elementary School Pedagogy, Information and Communication Technologies in Primary School.

Analysis of the received data

The applied methods in the discipline demonstrate a clear focus on the concept of experiential learning, which plays a key role in developing empathy and understanding the complexities in the lives of children with chronic illnesses and their families. This approach provides students with the opportunity to put themselves in the shoes of affected families, thereby not only acquiring academic knowledge, but also emotionally engaging with the issue.

The data analysis is organized into three main criteria: Criterion 1 – satisfaction and perceived usefulness of the training, Criterion 2 – development of empathy and social skills, and Criterion 3 – effectiveness of the teaching methods used. In order to ensure the reliability of the results, it is important to note that the study was conducted among students who have already completed the course and passed the relevant exam. This avoids potential data distortion that could occur when conducting the survey before the exam, when students may have other expectations or learning goals.

Criterion 1 – Satisfaction and usefulness of training

The survey shows that 75.7% of students rate their overall level of satisfaction as “completely satisfied” and 20.1% as “partially satisfied” (Fig. 1). These high percentages clearly demonstrate the positive effect of the methods used. In addition, 77.8% of students indicate that the knowledge gained in the course will be very useful for their future teaching practice. This is also confirmed by the fact that 71.5% believe that the acquired skills are very applicable in their work with children with chronic diseases.

1. How would you rate your overall level of satisfaction with the discipline?

144 answers

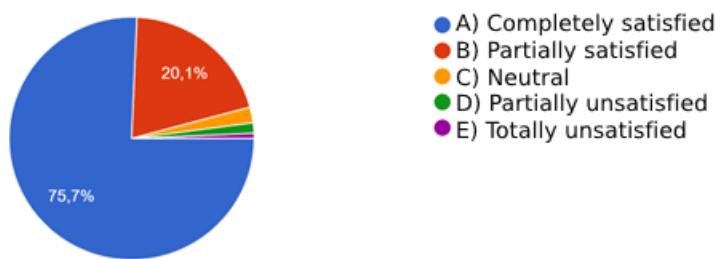


Figure 1

Criterion 2 – Successful development of empathy and social skills

One of the main goals of the methods used in the discipline is related to the development of empathy and sympathy for the problems of children with chronic diseases and their families. The high percentage of 81.9% of students who strongly agree that the teaching methods helped them develop empathy confirms the effectiveness of the approach (see Fig. 2). A similar result was observed in the response to the question related to the development of empathy and understanding for families with children with chronic diseases, where 79% indicated that discipline helped them a lot with this, and 2.4% did not help at all.

8. Do you think that the discipline's teaching approaches helped you develop empathy for the challenges faced by children with chronic diseases and their families?

144 answers

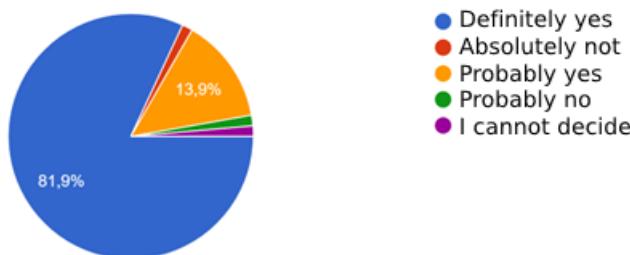


Figure 2

Criterion 3 – Effectiveness of teaching methods

The varied approaches used in the course – experiential learning, stories, role-plays, case studies and discussions – were highly appreciated by the students. Experiential learning in particular was chosen by 76.4% of participants as the most effective, confirming the emotional impact and depth of engagement this approach offers. Next in importance, students indicated fairy tales, with 72.9% reporting as the most effective teaching tool. These approaches, in particular methods, allow students to touch the reality of families of children with chronic diseases, actively participating in their experience through role-playing, creating stories and theatrical productions.

One of the main advantages of experiential learning is that students “step into the shoes” of parents and children with chronic illnesses, thus experiencing first-hand their emotional and social challenges. In addition, by creating stories, students develop creativity and communication skills while learning how to explain complex medical conditions to other children. The theatrical productions that students create during their studies in this discipline further reinforce these skills, as students

use the stories they create to present chronic illness in an interactive way that even the youngest children can understand.

Conclusion

The results of the study confirm the effectiveness of approaches, methods, tools and the concept of experiential learning as a means of developing empathy and practical skills in the context of preparing educators to work with children with chronic diseases. The high rate of satisfaction, applicability of knowledge and skills, as well as the development of empathy, show that the methods used not only provide academic knowledge, but also foster critical social and emotional competencies that are key for future educators.

The analysis of the data obtained showed that the effectiveness of teaching methods is manifested not only in the degree of acquired knowledge, but also in the ability of students to apply what they have learned in real pedagogical situations. For this reason, the assessment of effectiveness covers both academic results and the development of practical competencies. The high levels of satisfaction among students confirm that the methods used correspond to the criterion of pedagogical effectiveness.

Based on these results and the analysis of the attached data, several potential directions for future research were outlined:

Tracking the long-term effects of an experiential learning approach. Future studies could focus on longitudinal studies to track the extent to which students continue to use the acquired skills and empathic qualities in their actual professional practice.

Exploring the impact on families of children with chronic illness. Research focusing on the perception of families who work with educators who have gone through this program can provide feedback on the applicability and impact of teaching methods on the real lives of families.

These ideas for future research will contribute to expanding the theoretical and practical framework of pedagogical methods and allow a better understanding of their impact on the development of empathy and practical skills for working with children with chronic illnesses.

Awareness of the pain of others and “stepping into their shoes” more often, developing our skills, we could create a better quality and supportive education for our children, being an example for them, not in words, but in deeds.

NOTES

1. ANNUAL REPORT ON THE STATE OF HEALTH OF THE CITIZENS OF THE REPUBLIC OF BULGARIA FOR 2021 of the Ministry of Health.
2. IVKOV, B., 2019. *Chronic diseases. definition, types, social dimensions.*

3. IVKOV B., 2015, Sociology and Psychology of Chronic Illness.
4. KATANSKI, CH., 2009, Andragogical approach to the quality and efficiency of vocational training of adults (retrospective study).

REFERENCES

BUYUKLIEVA, E., 2014. *The Point of "Tolerance" between Teachers and Parents of Children with Chronic Illnesses*. Turkey.

BUYUKLIEVA, E., 2018. *Theory of Education and Didactics on the Topic Pedagogical Consultative Support for Parents of Children with Chronic Diseases*. Stara Zagora.

PANAYOTOVA E., 2023. *Applied theatre: theory and practice from Bulgaria to Africa*. Sofia: Iztok-Zapad.

PANOVA, R. & KATANSKI, CH., 1987. *Problems of determining the effectiveness of qualification improvement*. Sofia: CPPR.

✉ **Dr. Elena Nedeva, Assist. Prof.**
ORCID iD: 0009-0001-7295-6613
Faculty of Education
Trakia University
Stara Zagora, Bulgaria
E-mail: elena.nedeva@trakia-uni.bg