



Zhytomyr Ivan Franko State University Journal.
Pedagogical Sciences. Vol. 4 (103)

Вісник Житомирського державного
університету імені Івана Франка.
Педагогічні науки. Вип. 4 (103)

ISSN (Print): 2663-6387
ISSN (Online): 2664-0155

UDC 378:37.013.75:811.111

DOI 10.35433/pedagogy.4(103).2020.109-117

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF WEBQUESTS PROMOTING ENGLISH- LANGUAGE TEACHER TRAINING FOR INCLUSIVE INSTRUCTION OF LEARNERS WITH DISABILITY

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Inclusion in Ukraine has been the national educational policy since 2018. Most of post-graduate educational institutions that provide professional development opportunities, responded to the need for preparing in-service teachers for addressing inclusion-related challenges. Relevant academic modules and courses have been designed and are being delivered all over the country. In the same time, a survey conducted among 136 teachers of English-as-a-foreign-language (EFL) revealed that its results are insufficient for effective teaching. It may be caused by three factors. The first one is the lack of trainers' knowledge, skills and experience of teaching learners with disabilities that influences the quality of professional development. The second one is the segregation mentality that can still be found in educationalists and which explains their unwillingness to accept inclusion of learners with disability. The last reason is the complex nature of a typical professional development course that highlights numerous issues related to language teaching and leaves little time for reflection and practice. Thus, the theoretical input provided cannot result in readiness for inclusion.

The present research is aimed at studying the potential of WebQuests as means of EFL teacher training for inclusive instruction of learners with disability. The study has shown that WQs promote the development of teachers' low-order and high-order thinking skills irrespectively of their level (shorter-term or longer-term). Besides, such WQ characteristics as: their practical orientation, holistic, pro-inclusive, comprehensive, proactive and subject-specific nature provide effective preparation for inclusive instruction of learners with disability. Among other benefits of WebQuests is the simplicity of their dissemination among would-be and working EFL teachers.

Key words: *WebQuest, a teacher of English-as-a-foreign-language, pre-service teachers, teacher training, special educational needs, a learner with disability.*

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ХАРАКТЕРИСТИКИ ВЕБ-КВЕСТІВ, ЩО СПРИЯЮТЬ ПІДГОТОВЦІ МАЙБУТНІХ УЧИТЕЛІВ АНГЛІЙСЬКОЇ МОВИ ДО НАВЧАННЯ УЧНІВ З ІНВАЛІДНІСТЮ

Н. С. Щерба

Інклюзія в Україні є національною освітньою політикою з 2018 року. У відповідь на необхідність підготовки вчителів до подолання труднощів інклюзивного навчання, більшість вишів та післядипломних освітніх закладів пропонують сьогодні можливості для підвищення їх кваліфікації. Відповідні освітні модулі та курси розробляються та запроваджуються по всій країні. Водночас, як показало опитування, проведене серед 136 учителів англійської мови, результати такої підготовки є недостатніми для ефективного викладання. Причинами цього можуть слугувати три фактори. По-перше, в учителів бракує базових знань, умінь і досвіду навчання учнів з інвалідністю, що впливає на загальний рівень їх готовності до інклюзивного навчання. По-друге, ізоляційні моделі інвалідності все ще характерні для деяких освітян, що негативно впливає на їх бажання та готовність до прийняття інклюзивного навчання учнів з інвалідністю. Нарешті, третьою причиною є комплексна структура типового курсу підвищення кваліфікації, що висвітлює численні питання, пов'язані з лінгвістикою та методикою навчання іноземної мови, має інтенсивний характер і не передбачає тривалої практики.

Дане дослідження націлене на вивчення потенціалу веб-квестів як засобів підготовки майбутніх учителів іноземної мови до інклюзивного навчання учнів з інвалідністю. Як було виявлено, веб-квести сприяють розвитку розумових умінь нижчого та вищого порядку учителів незалежно від своєї тривалості (рівня). Крім того, такі характеристики веб-квестів, як: практична зорієнтованість, а також їх холістична, про-інклюзивна, комплексна, про-активна та предметна природа забезпечують ефективність підготовки майбутніх учителів до інклюзивного навчання учнів з інвалідністю. Серед інших переваг веб-квестів – простота їх розповсюдження серед майбутніх і працюючих учителів іноземних мов.

Ключові слова: веб-квест, вчитель англійської мови як іноземної, майбутні вчителі, професійно-педагогічна підготовка, особливі освітні потреби, учень з інвалідністю.

Introduction of the issue. The necessity of preparing pre-service teachers for inclusive instruction of children and youth with special educational needs is stated in the Salamanka Declaration [11]. Especially crucial is such teacher-training for learners with disability whose special educational needs are diverse and sometimes not easy to cater to. Numerous researchers (Alawadh, 2016; Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; Giangreco et al., 1993; Haq and Mundia, 2012; Hay, Smit and Paulsen, 2001; Kirillova and Faizrakhmanova, 2016; Leyser and Abrams, 1982; Ross-Hill, 2009; Taylor, Ahlgrim-Delzell and Flowers, 2010 and others) believe that the development of educationalists' ability to cope with challenging inclusive classroom situations is promoted by relevant

customized knowledge, skills and experience. In the same time, the lack of appropriate training contributes to the dissemination of isolation disability models in the society which results in numerous negative consequences (like segregation of children with disability, bullying, and other forms of discrimination).

Since 2016, 14 Ukrainian universities, that participate in "New Generation School Teachers" project, have been providing their fourth-year students with an academic module called "Catering for Special Educational Needs" [10]. It is a part of a cross-cutting training course entitled "The Methodology of Teaching English as a Foreign Language". The project was launched by the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine and the British

Council. The module materials cover all the key concepts and vital topics of inclusive instruction, but its content is outlined as theoretical rather than a set of hands-on activities. To make it more practice-oriented and problem-solving, academics need to have relevant expertise of inclusive teaching at school. But no relevant mechanisms are devised, so "the blind are still leading the blind". There is another option of teacher-training for inclusive classroom.

Several higher educational institutions (such as Zhytomyr State Ivan Franko University, Khmel'nyts'kyi National Pedagogical Hryhoriy Savych Skovoroda University, Uman State Pedagogical Pavlo Tychyna University, Rivne State Humanitarian University and some others) support fundamental researches dedicated to preparing pre-service or in-service teachers for inclusive instruction. A number of short-term academic courses have been designed to share the relevant findings with students. But these are only available for those enrolled in correspondent programs of these institutions. Besides, there are no mechanisms for spreading such findings. In this situation the research into blended and virtual learning tools might become a viable solution to the issue described. These classroom formats might help disseminate high-quality courses and add educational value to the existing ones.

Nowadays, traditional classroom instruction is considered the foundational method of teacher training in Ukraine. A typical academic course employs a succession of face-to-face lectures and practical sessions followed by a credit or an exam. In the same time, the number of academics using supplemental virtual learning tools in their professional activities has been constantly increasing in the last decades. Besides, the COVID-19 pandemic encouraged educationalists to experiment with diverse virtual

learning tools, like: videoconferencing, virtual classrooms, WebQuests (WQ), social networking etc. The author of this article, likewise, had an opportunity to try out conventional, blended and virtual classroom formats while delivering a course "Foreign Language Instruction of Children with Special Educational Needs" to master degree program students of day and extramural department in Zhytomyr Ivan Franko State University. This article is dedicated to the analysis of challenges and educational potential of using WQs as means of preparing would-be English teachers for inclusive instruction of children with disability.

Current state of the issue.

WebQuest as a method and a means of teaching was originated by Dr. Bernie Dodge, Tom March, the San Diego Unified School District's Educational Technology staff and participants from the Teach the Teachers Consortium [1; 6; 9]. Dodge [1] defined it as "*an inquiry-oriented activity in which some or all of the information that learners interact with comes from resources on the internet, optionally supplemented with videoconferencing*". According to Dodge, its possible outcomes depend on a WQ level that may be short- or long-term. Short-term WQs take 1-3 class sessions and long-term ones take between one week and a month [1]. The author believes that shorter term WQs are aimed at knowledge acquisition and integration. Their possible outcomes are awareness and understanding of a significant amount of new information. Longer term WQs are aimed at "extending and refining knowledge". Their results are: ability to analyze a body of knowledge, transform and apply it for creating an on-line or off-line product [2]. According to Godwin-Jones, by completing long-term WQs learners may produce documents that collect, summarize, and synthesize the information gathered. Their genres may range from a report, presentation, questionnaire to a website [5].

Dudenev, whose point we support, argues that WQs do not only improve low order thinking skills (LOTS) but they also encourage critical (or higher order) ones (HOTS), including: comparing, classifying, inducing, deducing, analyzing errors, constructing support, abstraction, analyzing perspectives, etc. irrespectively of their level [4: 123]. Marzano supplies an extended list of HOTS that includes: 1) *Comparing* (identifying and articulating similarities and differences between things). 2) *Classifying* (grouping things into definable categories on the basis of their attributes). 3) *Inducing* (inferring unknown generalizations or principles from observations or analysis). 4) *Deducing* (inferring unstated consequences and conditions from given principles and generalizations). 5) *Analyzing errors* (identifying and articulating errors in one's own or others' thinking). 6) *Constructing support* (constructing a system of support or proof for an assertion). 7) *Abstraction* (identifying and articulating the underlying theme or general pattern of information). 8) *Analyzing perspectives* (identifying and articulating personal perspectives about issues) [7].

In other words, WQs of any level that provide activities listed above promote the development of both – LOTS and HOTS [4; 7].

The outline of unresolved issues brought up in the article. Aiming to implement WebQuests into pre-service English teacher training, it is crucial to find an answer to the research question that has not been resolved in scientific literature: What WebQuest characteristics can promote the subsequent development of teachers' knowledge, skills and experience necessary for teaching learners with disability?

Aim of research is to select and substantiate WQ characteristics that would make them compatible with the

aims of preparing would-be English teacher for inclusive instruction.

Results and discussion. To single out the prerequisites of designing WQ aimed at preparing would-be English teachers for inclusive instruction, it is important to realize both – the current state of teachers' knowledge, skills and experience, and the desired results of their preparation by means of WQ application. Thus, in 2018-2019 and in 2019-2020 two survey sessions were conducted among 45 and 91 English-as-a-foreign-language (EFL) teachers enrolled in post-graduate professional development courses in Zhytomyr. It included 3 questions:

1. Do you have any experience of teaching children with disabilities? (The relevant categories were listed below).

2. Knowledge of teaching English to learners with disability of what categories do you lack?

3. Do you think that you have sufficient skills for teaching children with disabilities? (The relevant categories were listed further).

As the survey results showed, a substantial part of the teachers had neither sufficient knowledge nor proper skills or experience. Figure 1 illustrates relevant self-assessment indices of *teachers' experience*.

As it is confirmed by Fig. 1, the teachers in both groups had no experience of teaching learners with blindness and deafness. It is explained by the fact that practically all of these children study in special schools. The highest experience index was revealed in teaching learners with moderate speech disorders (33%) as they traditionally study in mainstream schools. A need to learn more about such impairments was singled out by EFL teachers as important in the questionnaires. The same index (33%) was revealed in the first group concerning teaching students with global developmental delay. According to Figure 1 no index in both groups exceeded 50%. Thus, teachers'

experience may be assessed as highly insufficient.

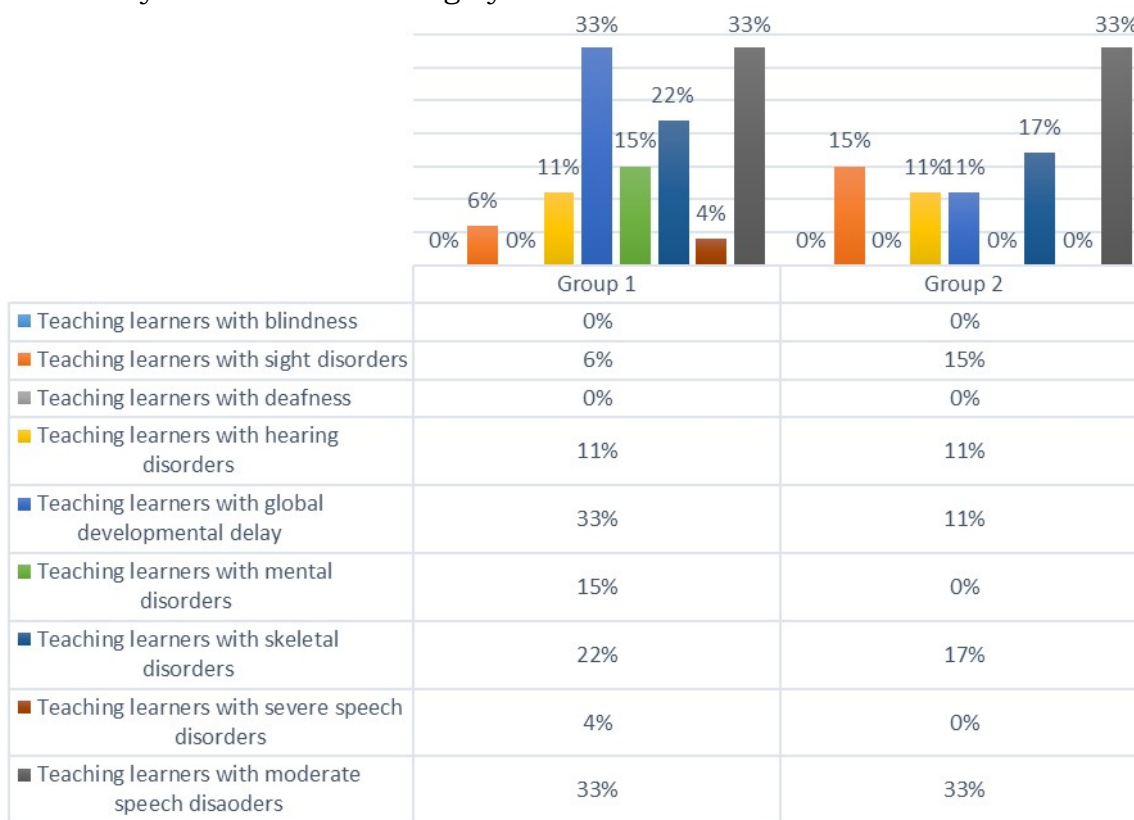


Fig. 1. EFL teachers' self-assessment of the experience concerning teaching learners with disability

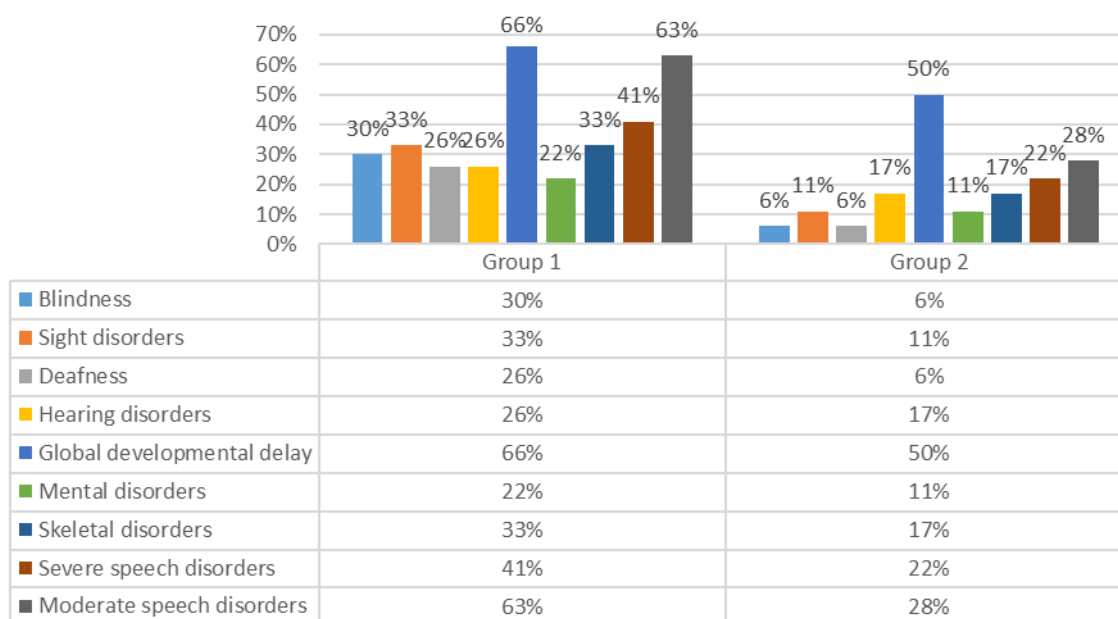


Fig. 2. Self-assessment of the need for acquiring additional knowledge of teaching different categories of learners with disability

Fig. 2 reveals both: teachers' need to learn more about the peculiarities of work with different categories of learners with disability and the relevant professional interests. As it can be observed, the most intense interest was shown in the contexts of teaching learners with developmental delay (66% and 50%), and learners with moderate (63% and 28%) and severe speech disorders (41% and 22% respectively). The first index is explained by the fact that children with developmental delay

are supposed to be enrolled into mainstream schools and they are often not exempted from language learning. As for the 2nd and the 3rd ones, teachers' awareness of the ways of reducing their effects is crucial for teaching English pronunciation and speaking.

Finally, Fig. 3 illustrates *self-assessment of skills* of teaching learners with disability.

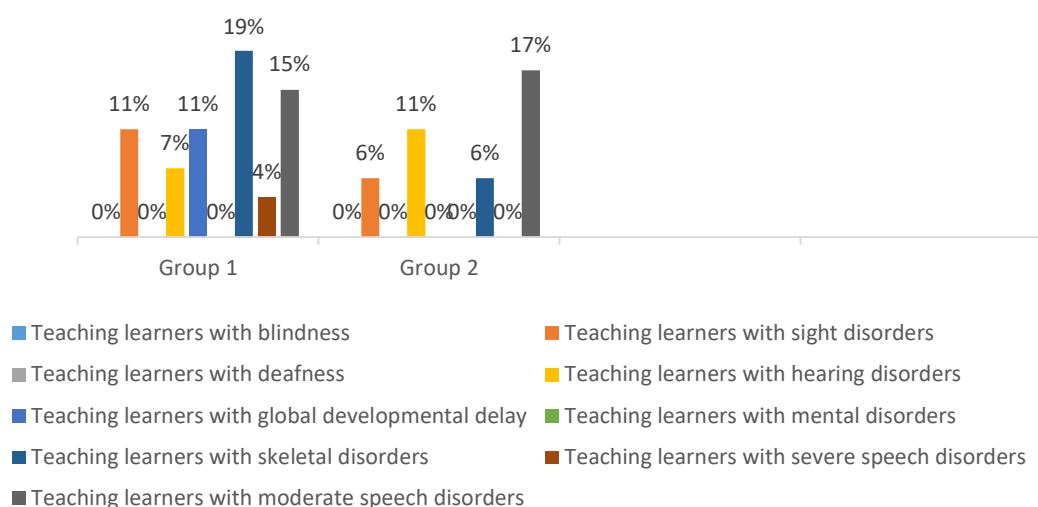


Fig. 3. EFL teachers' skills of inclusive teaching learners with disability

As it was found out, EFL teachers assess relevant skills as highly insufficient. None of them can teach learners with deafness, blindness and cognitive challenges. Only 4% in group 1 can teach children with severe speech disorders (with 0% index in group 2), only 11% in group 1 can teach learners with global developmental delay (with 0% index in group 2), and only 4% in group 1 claim to be able to teach learners with severe speech disorders (with 0% index in group 2). In the same time, the highest index in both groups refers to teaching learners with moderate speech disorders (15% and

17% respectively). The highest skill index in group 1 refers to teaching learners with musculoskeletal disorders (19%) (with 6% index in group 2).

As it is illustrated by Fig. 4, such areas of inclusive education as: teaching learners with blindness and deafness, cognitive, hearing and visual disorders are least familiar to EFL teachers of both groups: they have neither skills nor practical experience. In the same time the participants revealed some experience and skills of teaching learners with musculoskeletal and moderate speech disorders, as well as global developmental delay.

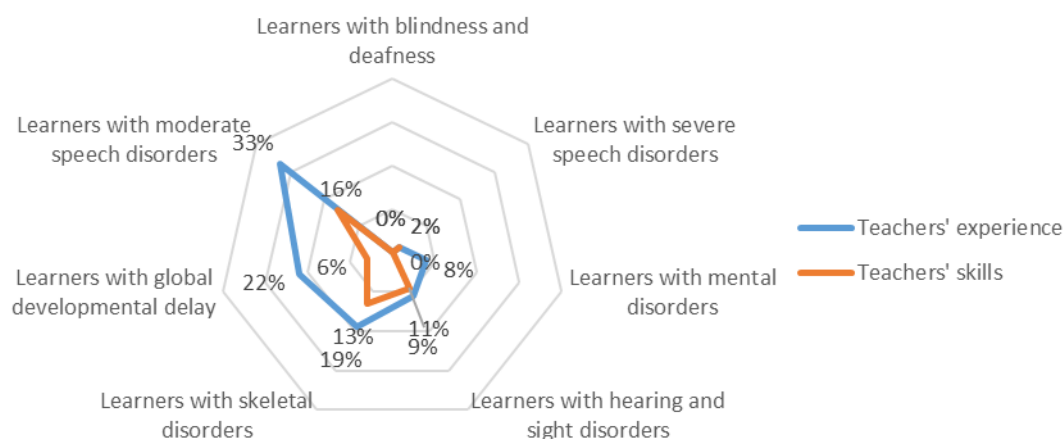


Fig. 4. EFL teachers' self-assessed experience and skills of teaching different categories of learners with disability (arithmetic mean indices of both groups)

By comparing the indices of questionnaire completion, a number of conclusions may be drawn. Firstly, teachers revealed professional interest in all categories of disability, and especially of: developmental delay and speech-sound disorders which should be taken into consideration while designing WebQuests. Secondly, the indices of skills and experience acquired by EFL teachers do not exceed 33%. This means that they are generally not prepared for work with learners with disability in mainstream school setting. As 2 subsequent research sessions confirm, the situation does not change spontaneously. Thus, WQs should be designed in a way that would enable would-be teachers to develop skills and gain initial experience. Thirdly, WQs aimed at preparing EFL teachers for educating learners with disability should be practice-oriented (e.g. modeling and analyzing professional activities) as the lowest position in the research results was taken by the skills indices.

The conclusions mentioned above allowed us to select characteristics of WQs aimed at preparing would-be teachers for inclusive instruction. Such WQs should be:

- *practice-oriented* – involving inquiry into the methods, systems, programs, and policies related to teaching learners with disability and including investigation of particular examples and cases [8];
- *holistic* – encompassing the development of both – lower and higher order thinking skills (LOTS and HOTS) as a result of trainee's inquiry and subsequent problems-solving activities;
- *pro-inclusive* – aimed at overcoming teachers' segregation mentality;
- *comprehensive* – providing EFL teachers with sufficient scientific information and presented as a course covering all vital issues of inclusion and disability;
- *proactive* – providing tools and procedures of addressing inclusion-related problems and concerns that may emerge in the classroom;
- *subject-specific* – concerning the peculiarities of teaching EFL.

Proceeding from the summary of theoretical research, the survey results and the characteristics presented above, four WQs were designed on zunal.com web-platform [12-15]. These can illustrate the characteristics laid out above. All the WQs are Design

Tasks (requiring learners "to create a product or plan of action that accomplishes a pre-determined goal and works within specified constraints" [3] or a combination of tasks including a Design one. All of them are short-term and comprise a case to be solved by creating a plan of actions in a challenging classroom situation and considering accompanying constraints. The topics of WQs were chosen according to teachers' professional needs outlined in the survey above.

Conclusions and research perspectives. Teaching learners with disability is a challenge for general educators irrespectively of a country. Teachers are obliged to provide instruction for learners with disability by educational legislation but they may deny inclusion philosophies by their actions and attitude. They can refuse to contribute additional effort and time into these children due to the lack of the relevant knowledge, skills, experience or other reasons (e.g. financial). But teachers' rejection of children with disability leads to a hidden form of segregation inside a classroom.

Most researches worldwide confirm that it is not only knowledge, skills and experience that cause teachers' acceptance of children with disability. For instance, the sociocultural dimension of preparing would-be English teachers for inclusion is its another important and underestimated factor that is also underresearched. That is why, it is expedient to proceed experimenting with relevant methods, forms and means of teacher-training (including the ICTs) to promote the necessary level of preparing (would-be) EFL teachers for teaching learners with disabilities.

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Received: October 30, 2020
Accepted: December 10, 2020