

Age Dynamics of Social Situation of Development in Elementary School Students in Inclusive Education

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The article presents results of an empirical study of the age dynamics of the social situation of development in primary school students in inclusive education. The study sample consisted of 328 children aged from 7 to 11, including 18 children with SEN, studying in two inclusive schools in Moscow. The hypothesis of the study was that the characteristics of the objective and subjective aspects of the social situation of children's development change in accordance with the two phases of primary school age. The characteristics of the social situation of the development of children were measured using the "Sociometry" method and two projective methods: "Color Test of Relationship" and "Sentence Completion Test". The age dynamics is observed in changes in the social position and the system of orienting images of primary school students. The significant differences between the distribution of sociometric statuses of students in inclusive classes and the age standard obtained in the conditions of traditional education were found. The results of the study reveal the specificity of elementary school students' development in conditions of inclusive education.

Keywords: social situation of development, inclusive education, sociometric status, distribution of statuses, emotional acceptance, elementary school age.

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Introduction

The idea of inclusion as a value idea of social transformation first of all makes changes in the system of education. Following the analysis of organizational transformation and the content of inclusive values, the questions of psychological and pedagogical character are posed in the research field of inclusive educational practice.

For Russian psychological science the idea of inclusion is not new. The methodological basis of its implementation is the thesis of L.S. Vygotsky, condemning the principle of homogeneity in the selection of a children's group: «... deeply anti-pedagogical is the rule according to which we, for convenience, select homogeneous groups of retarded children. By doing this, we not only go against the natural tendency in the development of children, but, much more importantly, by depriving a mentally retarded child of collective cooperation and communication with other children standing above him,

we exacerbate rather than alleviate the immediate cause of his higher functions' underdevelopment» [4, p. 209].

Psychological analysis of inclusive educational practice allows to discuss the strategies of psychological support, the educational technologies of individualization, the basis of subjectivity, the forms of joint activity, etc. The educational environment, built on the principles of social interaction between children with different educational needs, and the inclusive process, as a dynamically unfolding process of changes in specially created conditions and forms of support, determine the conditions for inclusive education, which become the social environment in which new forms of relationships and activities arise [16]. A special problem, which until now has received very little reflection in the scientific publications, is the problem of psychological development in conditions of joint education of children with different educational needs.

The problem of development is regarded in cultural-historical psychology as a social problem. Discussing

the genesis of higher psychological functions, L.S. Vygotsky has considered interpersonal relationship as the original form of their existence. In this context, the necessity to study the quality of peers' relationship in the educational process becomes obvious [8]. According to L.S. Vygotsky, the sphere of relations being the basis of the child's psychological development constructs the social situation of development at each age stage. The concept of the social situation of development is defined as «a peculiar, specific for a given age, exclusive, unique and inimitable relationship between the child and the surrounding reality, primarily social one» [3, p. 903]. A qualitative transformation in the social situation of development is considered to be the source and the basis of psychological development.

The dynamic structure of the social situation of development consists of two aspects: 1) the objective aspect, including the child's social position, the system of expectations, norms and requirements, as well as forms of cooperation and joint activity; 2) the subjective aspect, including the system of orienting images, as well as the child's subjective reflection of his/her objective place in the system of social relations [6]. According to O.A. Karabanova and N.N. Malofeev, it is necessary to take into account the structure of the social situation of development and all its components, when planning psychological and pedagogical support for students in inclusive education [7].

On the basis of an empirical study of children's social situation of development in the Elkonin-Davydov educational system G.A. Zuckerman [14] made a conclusion that there are two phases of elementary school age. The content of the first phase of the age (the first two years of schooling) is associated with the formation of students' agency position in learning activity. The second phase of the age, called the phase of autonomization of student as an agent of learning activity within the class community, arises at the age from 10 to 12 and is associated with changes both in the form of learning collaboration and in the students' self-consciousness. In the study, by the third year of schooling a "true class community" has been formed and a "social stratification" of the peer group has arisen, i.e. the setting of the status categories distribution [14, p. 59].

The conclusion about changes in the children's statuses distribution by the third year of schooling was also made by M.Yu. Kondratyev and A.A. Lisitsyna in the study of class intragroup structuring in the conditions of traditional education. At the beginning of primary school age, especially in the first grade, the sociometric structure of the class mostly reflects the teacher's attitudes towards children, but by the third year of schooling, an informal status structure of the class begins to emerge, that reflects the personal characteristics of peers and is independent of the teacher's opinion [10]. The informal structure of the class develops most intensively later, in adolescence.

The sociometric structure of classes as peers' groups has normal distribution. In the opinion of Ya.L. Kolominsky, the shift of the group status structure curve relatively to the normal distribution curve should be con-

sidered a diagnostic indicator of social and psychological processes in the class, while the most "sensitive" are the extreme status categories such as "stars" and "isolated" [9]. Another factor influencing the status structure of the group is the homogeneity of its composition [18]. According to a few empirical studies, the percentage of students in extreme status categories is decreasing in heterogeneous groups [9].

Learning conditions, requirements for students in the educational system, as well as the social position of children in study groups constitute an objective aspect of the social situation of development. As a subjective aspect, the authors consider the developmental features associated with the attitude of children to their social conditions, including their attitude to themselves and acceptance of their place in the system of social relations [6]. A positive attitude towards oneself is considered as one of the indicators of the children's psychological well-being [2].

In the study of the age dynamics of the psychological well-being indicators in primary school children in the context of traditional education, A.D. Andreeva and O.A. Moskvitina shows a general decrease in the self-esteem, the level of aspirations and the satisfaction with age among fourth-grade students with their subsequent increase in the fifth grade [1]. The authors explain this fact by a change in the children's social situation of development in advance the transition to secondary school [1]. The decrease in the indicators of psychological well-being among fourth-grade students has been confirmed by other authors [5], however, due to different methods of diagnostics, the possibilities for the data comparison are limited.

Based on previous research on the age dynamics of elementary school students' social situation of development in traditional education and the Elkonin-Davydov educational system we expect to observe an age dynamics in students' social position and their system of orienting images in the conditions of inclusive education in accordance with two phases of elementary school age. As inclusive classes constitute heterogeneous groups of students with different educational needs, we expect the distribution of sociometric statuses in inclusive classes has a specific character with a decrease of the extreme sociometric status categories such as "stars" and "isolated".

Study Program

This study aims to reveal the specifics and the age dynamics of the social situation of development in elementary school children studying in inclusive education. The following hypothesis are tested: Hypothesis 1: the distribution of sociometric statuses of students in inclusive classes has specific character.

Hypothesis 2: the age dynamics of the social position of elementary school students is observed in the conditions of inclusive education.

Hypothesis 3: the age dynamics of the system of orienting images of elementary school students is observed in the conditions of inclusive education.

The study sample consists of 328 children aged 7 to 11 years, including 18 children with special educational needs, studying in two inclusive schools in Moscow. The special educational needs of the 18 children (11 girls and 7 boys) have been confirmed by the conclusion of an independent psychological, medical and pedagogical commission. The children with SEN learn according to adapted educational programs together with their normatively developing classmates. From one to three children with SEN learn in each surveyed inclusive class. The proportion of students with disabilities in the study sample corresponds to the proportion of children with SEN in the general Russian child population.

The social position of children was measured using sociometric method. To identify the system of orienting images of children two projective techniques were used: "Color Test of Relationship" and "Sentence Completion Test".

The study was carried out frontally in each class. The diagnostic procedure began with the projective technique "Color Test of Relationship", which consisted of children's choice among the proposed color cards of color associations to the character of each classmate from the class list, including their own character. Then, in accordance with the diagnostic procedure [12], the students were asked to go to another activity (sociometric peer nominations), after that they were asked to rank the color cards from the most pleasant to the least pleasant according to their personal preferences. Thus, an individual profiles of color preferences were identified for each student, then color associations of classmates were translated into ranks of emotional acceptance. Emotional acceptance was defined as the choice from the first to

the third ranks of color preferences, emotional rejection was defined as the choice from the sixth to the eighth ranks of color preferences, and the fourth and fifth ranks were defined as neutral attitude.

At the end of the diagnostic procedure, the students were asked to compose and to write down the endings of sentences. The "Sentence Completion Test" was used to diagnose the students' representations of themselves, their classmates and relationships with them.

In sociometric diagnostics, students were asked to answer three questions by choosing among their classmates three desirable and three undesirable partners for joint learning and recreation activities. Thus, positive and negative sociometric statuses were figures out for each student. To analyze the distribution of sociometric statuses based on the number of positive choices received by every student from his/her classmates, four categories were identified: 1) "stars", i.e. children received 6 or more choices, 2) "accepted" – from 3 to 5 choices, 3) "not accepted" – from 1 to 2 choices, 4) "isolated" – 0 choices [9].

The following methods were used for statistical data processing: Pearson's chi-square test, Mann-Whitney U-test, F-test. Statistical data processing was performed using MS Office Excel and IBM SPSS Statistics programs.

Results

To test hypothesis 1 the revealed distribution of statuses in the inclusive classes was compared with the normative distribution of sociometric statuses in elementary school children studying in the conditions of traditional education [9; 11; 13]. The results are presented in Figure 1.

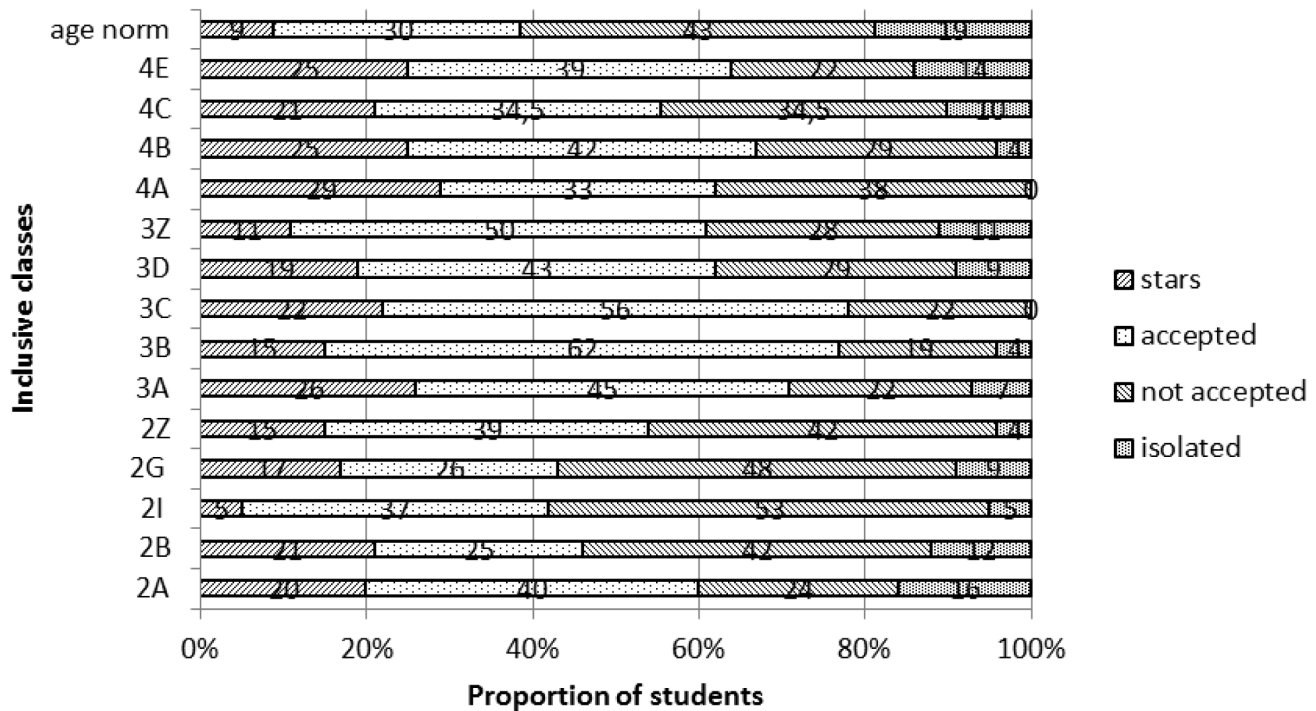


Fig. 1. Sociometrical statuses distribution in elementary school children studying in inclusive classes versus age norm in traditional education (N = 328)

In the studied inclusive classes, the proportion of students with advantageous sociometric statuses (i.e. “stars” and “accepted”) amounts from 42 to 78% and exceeds the analogic proportion revealed in the conditions of traditional education – 39%. At the same time, the proportion of students who had not received any positive choices from their classmates (so-called “isolation index”) in the studied classes does not exceed 16%, in the six of fourteen classes it is less than 5% (comparing with an age norm of 19%). The results allow to conclude about the positive quality of relations between classmates in inclusive classes. The differences between the distribution of sociometric statuses in inclusive classes and the age norm revealed in the conditions of traditional education are statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 140,0$; $p < 0,001$). These data support hypothesis 1 of the study.

In addition, a comparison of the sociometric statuses of normatively developing children and their classmates with SEN was made. The differences between positive sociometric indices of normatively developing children and children with SEN are not significant ($U = 2146,5$; $p > 0,1$). The distribution of sociometric statuses of students with SEN corresponds to the age norm for elementary school children revealed in the conditions of traditional education, the differences in two distributions are not statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 0,599$; $p > 0,93$). Table 1 presents the data.

At the same time, the negative sociometric indices of elementary school children with SEN are significantly lower than those of their normatively developing class-

mates ($U = 1241,5$; $p < 0,01$). These conclusions are consistent with the results previously revealed by a number of researchers [17; 19; 20; 21; 22; 23; 24]. The results show the necessity of psychological support to facilitate inclusion of children with SEN in peers’ group. A detailed comparative analysis of the social situation of development in normatively developing elementary school children and their classmates with SEN in conditions of joint education in inclusive classes was published earlier [15].

To test hypothesis 2 on the age dynamics of the social position of students, a comparison of the sociometric statuses distribution in the first (students of the second grades, $N = 117$) and the second (students of the third and fourth grades, $N = 211$) phases of age was made. The proportion of children with advantageous statuses (“stars”, “accepted”) increases in the second phase of the age compared to the first phase, the difference is statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 43,696$; $p < 0,001$). These data support hypothesis 2 of the study.

To test hypothesis 3, the system of orienting images, including the self-image, the image of a partner, the image of interpersonal relations [6], was identified using two projective methods: “Color Test of Relationship” and “Sentence Completion Test”.

The data of the “Color Test of Relationship” show that the majority of elementary school children accept themselves emotionally. The proportion of children who have positive self-attitude slightly increases from the first to the second phase of age ($\varphi^* = 0,73$; $p > 0,1$) (see fig. 2).

Table 1
Distribution of sociometric statuses in children with SEN studying in inclusive classes (N = 18)

| Sociometric status | Second grade | Third grade | Fourth grade | Sum | Distribution of statuses | Age norm |
|--------------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|-----|--------------------------|----------|
| “Stars” | 0 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 11% | 9% |
| “Accepted” | 1 | 2 | 2 | 5 | 28% | 30% |
| “Not accepted” | 4 | 2 | 1 | 7 | 39% | 43% |
| “Isolated” | 3 | 0 | 1 | 4 | 22% | 19% |

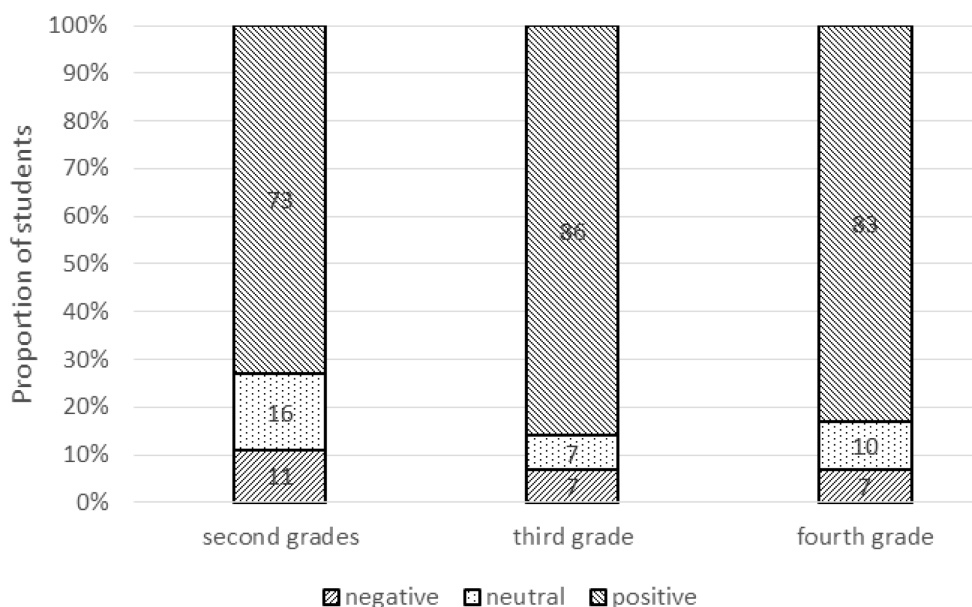


Fig. 2. Age dynamics of emotional self-attitude in elementary school children studying in inclusive classes (N = 328)

In all inclusive classes, examined in the study, the emotional acceptance of students by their classmates prevails, the average for the classes is from 57 to 76%. The level of emotional acceptance gradually decreases, the differences in the distribution of this indicator between the second, third and fourth grades are statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 427,695$; $p < 0,05$).

The representations of themselves, classmates and relationships with them in the system of students' orienting images were identified by the "Sentence Completion Test". The image of desirable social position in the class among elementary school children ("In my class I would like to be...") is associated mostly with a position of successful student (to be an "excellent student", "good student"): 29% answers in second grades, 38% – in third grades, 52% – in fourth grades. In the second phase of the age the proportion of children who define the desirable social position through friendship with their classmates increases (to be a "friend", "good friend", "insider"): 4% answers in second grades, 25% – in third grades, 17% – in fourth grades. At the same time, the number of answers related to general abilities (to be "the smartest", "most fun", "prettier and smarter than everyone else") and with the position of a teacher (to be a "teacher") decreases. To test the hypothesis about age dynamics, the data of the second, third and fourth grades were compared by using the Pearson test; statistically significant differences were found ($\chi^2 = 519,855$, $p < 0,001$). These data support hypothesis 3 of the study. The distribution of students' answers is presented in the Table 2.

Children's representations about their abilities were defined in the sentence "I am capable enough to...". Their answers are associated with successful learning activity ("to study well", "to get excellent marks", "to write a test", "to complete a difficult task", "to graduate school", "to do my homework on my own", "to go to the fifth grade"), as well as extracurricular activities ("to play the guitar", "to swim", "to paint and play the piano", "to get the sports category in figure skating", "to make pocket money", "to become a champion") and general self-real-

ization ("to make my dreams come true", "to be cool", "to overcome all obstacles"). The distribution of students' responses on the sentence is presented in the Table 3.

Students most often associate the realization of their abilities with learning activity (63% of the answers), the proportion of such answers increases with age: in the second grades – 50%, in the fourth grades – 65%. To test the hypothesis about age dynamics, the data of the second, third and fourth grades were compared using the Pearson test; no statistically significant differences were found ($\chi^2 = 5,613$; $p > 0,23$).

Children's representations about their friends were defined in the sentence "My friends often...". To analyze the children's responses were divided into three categories: 1) responses showing positive peer relationships ("make friends with me", "help me", "share with me", "play, draw with me", "cheer up", "support me in difficult times", "love to play with me", "call me for a walk"); 2) neutral responses, not affecting peers' interactions with the respondent ("play", "laugh", "have fun", "run", "tell funny stories", "come up with something"); 3) responses showing negative peer relationships ("I have no friends", "they betray me", "they do not notice me", "they hate me"). The distribution of students' responses on the sentence is presented in the Table 4.

Quantitative analysis shows that most of the responses (85%) reflect positive or neutral experience of peers' relationships, meanwhile 15% of the answers reflect conflicts between peers. An age dynamics for this parameter was not found ($\chi^2 = 6,37$; $p > 0,18$).

The image of elementary school children about the attitude of their classmates to them were determined in the endings of the sentence "When I am absent, my classmates...". To analyze the children's responses were divided into three categories: 1) responses showing positive peers relationships ("worry about me", "they call me", "they might be sad", "they miss me", "they help and send me homework"); 2) neutral responses, not affecting peers' interactions with the respondent ("learn", "walk", "run in the school", "play with guys from other classes"); 3) responses

Table 2

Distribution of answers of normatively developing students on desired social position in the class (N = 131)

| Classes | Categories of answers about the desired social position in the class | | | |
|---------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|---------|------------|-----------|
| | student | teacher | friendship | abilities |
| Second grades | 14 | 11 | 2 | 21 |
| Third grades | 14 | 4 | 9 | 9 |
| Fourth grades | 25 | 1 | 8 | 14 |
| Sum | 53 | 15 | 19 | 44 |

Table 3

Distribution of answers of normatively developing students on their abilities (N = 126)

| Classes | Categories of answers about their abilities | | |
|---------------|---------------------------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|
| | learning activity | extracurricular activities | general self-realization |
| Second grades | 21 | 13 | 8 |
| Third grades | 26 | 4 | 5 |
| Fourth grades | 32 | 10 | 7 |
| Sum | 79 | 27 | 20 |

showing negative peers relationships (“they pay little attention to it”, “they don’t even call me”, “they say: truant”, “they forget about me”). The distribution of students’ responses on the sentence is presented in the Table 5.

Most of the answers (63%) reflect a positive image of relations with classmates, 24% – a neutral image and 13% – a negative image. An age dynamics for this parameter was not found ($\chi^2 = 5,920$; $p > 0,24$).

Thus, in the system of orienting images of elementary school children studying in inclusive classes, the age dynamics in the desired social position was revealed. In the second phase of the age the proportion of children who define the desired social position through successful learning and friendship with their classmates increases. The results indicate the development of a student’s position in children, as well as an increasing role of relationships with peers in the formation of self-attitude of elementary school students.

The level of children’ emotional self-acceptance remains high throughout the entire elementary school age. A normative crisis of self-acceptance [1] was not found in our fourth grades students. This fact can be explained by such features of the social situation of development in inclusive education as a positive peers’ relations and emotional support from teachers. But since the authors of the studies on psychological well-being, that indicate the normative crisis of self-attitude of fourth-grade students in the context of traditional education [1; 5] used other diagnostic methods, this conclusion requires additional verification.

A gradual decrease in the level of classmates’ emotional acceptance was found in the system of orienting

images of elementary school children studying in inclusive classes. At the same time the proportion of children with advantageous sociometric statuses in the classroom increase in the second phase of the age. The facts indicate the development of children’s selectivity in relationships with peers. In general, an increase in the proportion of children with advantageous statuses and a decrease in the proportion of children who have not received matches from their classmates (the “isolation index”) indicate the formation of class community, where children with different needs and developmental characteristics are included and accepted, that corresponds to the principles of an inclusive approach in education.

Conclusion

The study verifies the hypothesis about age dynamics in the social situation of development at elementary school inclusive classes, that appears to show a developmental effect of inclusive educational environment. In addition, for the first time in a Russian sample, the study shows the specific features of the social situation of development in elementary school children studying in the conditions of an inclusive educational model.

A detailed study of the psychological well-being in children studying in inclusive education, a study of students’ social position in a larger sample, as well as a longitudinal study of the dynamics of the social situation of development during the transition from elementary to high school seem to be promising directions for further research.

Table 4
Distribution of answers of normatively developing students about their relations with friends (N = 132)

| Classes | Categories of answers about the relations with friends | | |
|---------------|--------------------------------------------------------|---------|----------|
| | positive | neutral | negative |
| Second grades | 19 | 19 | 7 |
| Third grades | 14 | 19 | 6 |
| Fourth grades | 24 | 18 | 6 |
| Sum | 57 | 56 | 19 |

Table 5
Distribution of answers of normatively developing students about their relations with classmates (N = 117)

| Classes | Categories of answers about the relations with classmates | | |
|---------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|---------|----------|
| | positive | neutral | negative |
| Second grades | 28 | 6 | 2 |
| Third grades | 21 | 10 | 4 |
| Fourth grades | 25 | 12 | 9 |
| Sum | 74 | 28 | 15 |

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Возрастная динамика социальной ситуации развития младших школьников в условиях инклюзивного образования

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В статье представлены результаты эмпирического исследования возрастной динамики социальной ситуации развития младших школьников, обучающихся в условиях инклюзивного образования. Выборку составили 328 младших школьников в возрасте от 7 до 11 лет, в том числе 18 детей с ОВЗ, обучающихся в двух инклюзивных школах г. Москвы. Гипотеза исследования состояла в том, что характеристики объективного и субъективного аспектов социальной ситуации развития детей изменяются в соответствии с двумя фазами младшего школьного возраста. Характеристики социальной ситуации развития школьников определялись с помощью метода «Социометрия» и двух проективных методик – «Цветовой тест отношений» и «Незаконченные предложения». Показано, что возрастная динамика проявляется в изменении социальной позиции и системы ориентирующих образов младших школьников. Обнаружены достоверные различия между распределением социометрических статусов обучающихся инклюзивных классов и возрастным нормативом, полученным в условиях традиционного образования. Результаты исследования выявляют специфику возрастного развития младших школьников в инклюзивных условиях обучения.

Ключевые слова: социальная ситуация развития, инклюзивное образование, социометрический статус, распределение статусов, эмоциональное принятие, младший школьный возраст.

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