

Научная статья | Original paper

# Peculiarities of personal development of students in inclusive educational environment

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## Abstract

**Context and relevance.** The educational environment of a modern school is characterized by a variety of special educational needs of students. A condition for obtaining quality education in a situation of diversity is psychological assistance to all students who need it, aimed at developing their personality. An important indicator of the personal development of a primary school student is his or her self-assessment, which can indirectly indicate the adequacy of the conditions created in the educational organization for the development of the child as a subject of activity and interpersonal relationships. **Objective.** The aim is to identify the features of self-assessment as an important indicator of the personal development of primary school students with special educational needs and normatively developing peers within the context of joint education in an inclusive educational environment. **Hypothesis.** The personal development of different categories of primary school students is characterized by the features of self-esteem and the level of aspirations, which should be taken into account when providing psychological assistance in an inclusive educational organization. **Methods and materials.** The study involved 1713 fourth-grade students (aged 10 to 11 years) from 55 inclusive schools in 6 regions of the Russian Federation. The Dembo-Rubinstein method (modified by A.M. Prikhodzhan) was used to study self-assessment and the level of aspirations; the following statistical methods were applied: the Shapiro-Wilk test was used to assess the normality of distributions, and the Kruskal-Wallis nonparametric ANOVA with a post hoc assessment was applied to compare the distributions of self-assessment indicators. **Results.** Significant differences in self-assessment indicators were revealed between different categories of students (students with normal development, students with disabilities, students with a non-native Russian language, gifted students) of primary school age in an inclusive educational environment. In general, in the sample of inclusive schools, a favorable variant of personal development prevails among primary school students (74%). Every fourth junior schoolchild is at risk of developing an unfavorable variant of personal development, which requires psychological assistance. The greatest risk of an unfavorable variant of development is observed in students with disabilities (34%), demonstrating low self-assessment. **Conclusions.** As shown in the study, self-assessment as an indicator of age-related personality development of a junior schoolchild varies among students with different special educational needs. This necessitates the development of various models for providing psychological assistance to different categories of children with special educational needs in an inclusive educational environment.

**Keywords:** primary school age, special educational needs, self-esteem, level of aspirations, inclusive educational environment, personal development

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## Особенности личностного развития обучающихся в инклюзивной образовательной среде

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### Резюме

**Контекст и актуальность.** Образовательная среда современной школы характеризуется разнообразием особых образовательных потребностей обучающихся. Условием получения качественного образования в ситуации разнообразия является психологическая помощь всем нуждающимся в ней обучающимся, направленная на развитие их личности. Важным показателем личностного развития младшего школьника является его самооценка, которая может косвенно свидетельствовать об адекватности созданных в образовательной организации условий для развития ребенка как субъекта деятельности и межличностных отношений. **Цель.** Выявить особенности самооценки как важного показателя личностного развития младших школьников с особыми образовательными потребностями и нормативно развивающихся сверстников в условиях совместного обучения в инклюзивной образовательной среде. **Гипотеза.** Личностное развитие разных категорий обучающихся младшего школьного возраста характеризуется особенностями самооценки и уровнем притязаний, которые следует учитывать при оказании психологической помощи в инклюзивной образовательной организации. **Методы и материалы.** В исследовании приняли участие 1713 обучающихся 4-х классов (от 10 до 11 лет) из 55 инклюзивных школ 6 регионов Российской Федерации. Для исследования самооценки и уровня притязаний была использована методика Дембо—Рубинштейн (модификация А.М. Прихожан); применены статистические методы: для оценки нормальности распределений — тест Шапиро—Уилка, для сравнения распределения показателей самооценки — непараметрический дисперсионный анализ, по Краскелу—Уоллису с апостериорной оценкой. **Результаты.** Выявлены значимые различия в показателях самооценки между различными категориями обучающихся (ученики с нормативным развитием, обучающиеся с ОВЗ, с неродным русским языком, одаренные обучающиеся) младшего школьного возраста в инклюзивной образовательной среде. В целом в выборке инклюзивных школ у младших школьников преобладает благоприятный вариант личностного развития (74%). Каждый четвертый младший школьник находится в зоне риска по формированию неблагоприятного варианта личностного развития, нуждается в психологической помощи. Наибольший риск неблагоприятного варианта развития наблюдается у обучающихся с ограниченными возможностями здоровья (34%), демонстрирующих низкую самооценку. **Выводы.** Как показано в работе, самооценка в качестве показателя возрастного развития личности младшего школьника различается у обучающихся с различными особыми образовательными потребностями, что требует разработки различных моделей оказания психологической помощи разным категориям детей с особыми образовательными потребностями в инклюзивной образовательной среде.

**Ключевые слова:** младший школьный возраст, особые образовательные потребности, самооценка, уровень притязаний, инклюзивная образовательная среда, личностное развитие

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## Introduction

The contemporary educational environment is marked by growing diversity in students' learning needs and developmental profiles. These differences arise from disabilities, linguistic backgrounds, giftedness, and adverse life circumstances. Under such conditions, children's personal development acquires distinctive features that must be considered when designing psychological support programs (Decree of the Ministry of Education of Russia No. R-193, 2020). When students encounter difficulties in learning or social participation, successful inclusion requires systematic psychological and pedagogical support—one of the core functions of school-based psychological services (Levchenko et al., 2016; Babkina, 2023; Samsonova et al., 2023). These principles are codified in Federal Law No. 273-FZ (2012) and the professional standard for educational psychologists (Order No. 514n, 2015). Services for providing psychological assistance must, therefore, account for both educational needs and the age-related characteristics of students.

Primary school age is a period of significant personal transformation. According to Vygotsky (2009), self-esteem at this age becomes a generalized, stable, and differentiated attitude toward oneself (Vygotsky, 2009, p. 203). Self-esteem serves as a crucial indicator of a child's development as an agent of activity and a key component of personal self-regulation. It mediates the child's self-attitude and integrates their experiences. Learning activity—the leading activity of primary school age—plays a decisive role in shaping children's evaluative relations (Gutsu et al., 2023). Evaluative processes grow increasingly sophisticated and rely on formal academic outcomes, peer comparison, and parental feedback (Borozdina, 2011; Fomina et al., 2022).

An inclusive educational environment aims to ensure support, acceptance, and meaningful participation for all students. Under these conditions, positive changes in self-esteem and aspirations may be expected, making these indicators sensitive indirect markers of environmental adequacy.

Based on this rationale, *the aim* of this article is to identify the specific features of self-esteem and aspiration as key indicators of the age-related personal development of primary school children with diverse educational needs (DEN) and their typically developing peers in inclusive settings.

*Hypothesis:* In inclusive settings, the personal development of different categories of primary school-age students is characterized by distinct features of self-esteem

and aspiration, which must be considered when designing psychological assistance.

## Materials and methods

*Methodological framework:* The study is grounded in the sociocultural theory of L.S. Vygotsky, which posits that psychological development is shaped by social interaction, cultural tools, and communication. This framework aligns with contemporary research emphasizing the socio-historical foundations of development, continuity between typical and atypical pathways, and the central role of agency. We also draw on studies of inclusive educational environments and their influence on personal development (Bystrova, 2022; Konokotin, 2022; Williams et al., 2024).

*Participants:* The study involved 55 inclusive schools, selected through regional initiatives to pilot an inclusive school model developed by the Ministry of Education of Russia (participating regions included Kaliningrad Oblast, Stavropol Krai, Lipetsk Oblast, Krasnoyarsk Krai, Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug, and the Donetsk People's Republic). A total of 1713 fourth-grade students, aged between 10 and 11 years at the time of assessment, participated in the study. The sample included students both with DEN and with typical development (see Table 1). The category of students with disabilities was not further differentiated in this study. As demonstrated in our prior work from 2022, based on an analysis of 3054 randomly selected schools from 82 regions of Russia, among students with SEN, those with intellectual disabilities and developmental delays significantly predominated, constituting 21,23% and 60,23%, respectively (Alekhina et al., 2024). There is no reason to believe that the sample in the present study deviates substantially from this established trend. Schools assigned students to DEN categories other than disabilities independently, based on their own criteria. Proportions of students with DEN were calculated from frequency data provided by the schools for each DEN category.

The research was conducted at the beginning of the fourth grade, when the approximate age of primary school children is about 10 years (between 10 and 11). This age marks the formation of self-esteem as a key developmental acquisition of the primary school period (Borozdina, 2011).

For the subsequent analysis, student groups with DEN that were significantly represented in the overall research sample were selected: typically developing students (79,98%), students with disabilities (7,71%),

Table 1

**Number of students of different categories with special educational needs in schools  
which participated in the study (N = 1713)**

Categories of students with special educational needs	Fourth grade	
	N	%
Total students	1713	100
Normotypical students	1370	79,98
Students with disabilities	132	7,71
Students with deviant behavior	38	2,22
Students from orphans	2	0,12
Students in difficult life situations	13	0,76
Students from ethnic minorities	4	0,23
Students from foster families	9	0,52
ifted students	69	4,03
tudents whose mother tongue is different from the main language of instruction (with a non-native Russian)	76	4,44

gifted students (4,03%), and students with a non-native Russian language (4,44%).

*Measures:* To investigate the personal development of primary school-age children in inclusive settings, the Dembo-Rubinstein method for assessing self-esteem and aspiration (modified by A.M. Prikhodzhan) was employed. According to A.M. Prikhodzhan (2007), cases unfavourable for personal development and learning include: all instances of low self-esteem (Type 1); cases where a student exhibits average, poorly differentiated self-esteem combined with an average level of aspiration and characterized by a weak discrepancy between aspiration and self-esteem (Type 2); and cases of very high, poorly differentiated self-esteem combined with extremely high, poorly differentiated aspirations and a weak discrepancy between the two (Type 3).

*Statistical analysis:* The Shapiro-Wilk test was used to assess normality of distributions; Levene's test was used to test for equality of variances; and the non-parametric one-way analysis of variance (Kruskal-Wallis test) with a post-hoc Dwass-Steel-Critchlow-Fligner test was used to compare samples across student DEN categories. All analyses were conducted using the SPSS v. 23.0 statistical software package.

The normality test for self-esteem indicators (Shapiro-Wilk) showed a statistically significant deviation of all indicator distributions from normal ( $p < 0,001$ ). Testing for equality of variances (Levene's test) also revealed statistically significant differences in variances between DEN categories for level of aspiration ( $p < 0,01$ ), degree of discrepancy between aspiration and self-esteem ( $p < 0,05$ ), and degree of differentiation of aspirations ( $p < 0,001$ ).

The sample size of fourth-grade students allowed for the establishment of sample-specific norms for the

level of self-esteem, level of aspiration, and degree of discrepancy between aspiration and self-esteem, using the 25th and 75th percentile values of the distribution after converting raw scores to Z-scores. For the other two variables, norms from the methodology established in the prior work of A.M. Prikhodzhan were adopted. Norms were defined with a split into 3 ranges, unlike Prikhodzhan (2007), where medium and high levels were considered normal, and the entire normal range for children aged 10–11 spanned 61–85 points. In our study, normal self-esteem values fall within the range of 65–85 points. In Prikhodzhan's work, normal values for the level of aspiration are in the range of 68–97, whereas in the present study the medium range extends from 84 to 96. According to our data, the degree of discrepancy between aspiration and self-esteem has normal values in the range of 8–23. Normal values for the degree of differentiation of self-esteem and for the degree of differentiation of aspirations, based on Prikhodzhan's data, are within the ranges of 6–20 and 5–19, respectively.

## Results

According to the established norms, self-esteem indicators were classified into low, medium, and high levels (see Table 2).

As evident from Table 2, the distribution of self-esteem values across these ranges among students with a non-native Russian language is similar to that of typically developing students. In contrast, gifted students predominantly demonstrate a high level of self-esteem, while students with disabilities more frequently exhibit low self-esteem. This distribution suggests that students

with disabilities may be at heightened risk of adverse developmental outcomes due to low self-esteem.

It is important to note that no statistically significant differences in levels of aspiration were found among students of different categories (see Table 4).

In the distributions of values for the degree of discrepancy between self-esteem and aspiration, shown in Table 3, the medium level predominated across all student categories except for gifted students, who more frequently exhibited a weak level of discrepancy, likely due to an initially higher baseline level of self-esteem. Students with disabilities more often showed a high degree of discrepancy, students with a non-native Russian language showed a weak one, while among typically developing students, strong and weak discrepancies between self-esteem and aspiration occurred approximately equally.

Table 4 presents descriptive statistics for various self-esteem indicators for the total sample and by SEN categories of fourth-grade students.

The Kruskal-Wallis analysis showed statistically significant differences between groups for all self-esteem indicators except for the level of aspiration, with a significance level of at least  $p < 0,05$  (see Table 4).

The values of self-esteem indicators (Table 4) and pairwise comparison of student categories (Table 5) indicate that students with disabilities have lower self-

esteem ( $p = 0,002$ ), while gifted students have higher self-esteem ( $p < 0,001$ ), compared to their typically developing peers. The self-esteem value for students with a non-native Russian language and those with typical development is approximately the same. Thus, students with disabilities are potentially more vulnerable to the risk of an adverse developmental pattern associated with low self-esteem.

This is further supported by Table 2, which shows the highest proportion of students with low self-esteem among students with disabilities (34%), and the lowest among gifted students (12%). For students with a non-native Russian language and typically developing students, this proportion is practically identical (26% and 25%, respectively). Across the total sample, the proportion of students with low self-esteem is 26%. These results sufficiently confirm our hypothesis regarding the differences in self-esteem indicators as markers of risk for adverse development among different categories of students with DEN.

Among the types of adverse developmental patterns (Prikhodzhan, 2007), Type 1, characterized by low self-esteem, strongly predominates: typically developing students – 336, students with disabilities – 45, students with a non-native Russian language – 19, gifted students – 7. This totals 407 students (96,9%) out of

Table 2

**Distribution of students of different categories by self-assessment level**

Categories of students		Самооценка / Self-assessment				
		Missed	Low	Intermediate level	High	Total
Normotypical	N	47	336	694	293	1370
	%	3,4	24,5	50,7	21,4	100,0
With Disabilities	N		45	72	15	132
	%		34,1	54,5	11,4	100,0
With a non-native Russian	N		19	35	22	76
	%		25,0	46,1	28,9	100,0
Gifted	N		7	33	29	69
	%		10,1	47,8	42,0	100,0

Table 3

**Distribution of students of different categories by level of discrepancy between aspirations and self-assessment**

Categories of students		Level of discrepancy				
		Missed	Weak	Moderate	Strong	Total
Normotypical	N	79	334	659	298	1370
	%	5,8	24,4	48,1	21,8	100,0
With Disabilities	N	2	22	66	42	132
	%	1,5	16,7	50,0	31,8	100,0
With a non-native Russian	N		23	43	10	76
	%		30,3	56,6	13,2	100,0
Gifted	N		31	28	10	69
	%		44,9	40,6	14,5	100,0



Table 4

**Descriptive statistics on self-assessment indicators  
and level of aspirations for the main categories of students**

Categories of students	N*	SA (N* = 1671)	LA (N* = 1638)	LD SA and LAN* = 1637)	LDA (N* = 1606)	LDSA N* = 1670)
Normotypical	1370	73,54 ± 14,1	88,30 ± 11,4	15,81 ± 11,2	24,91 ± 24,4	38,62 ± 21,1
With Disabilities	132	68,24 ± 15,9	86,52 ± 12,4	20,20 ± 14,9	27,18 ± 26,0	43,56 ± 23,6
With a non-native Russian	76	74,91 ± 14,6	87,03 ± 12,2	14,25 ± 11,2	19,72 ± 18,5	38,28 ± 19,0
Gifted	69	79,86 ± 13,0	91,05 ± 7,47	11,93 ± 11,9	15,08 ± 14,2	34,14 ± 17,6
$\chi^2_{emp}$	-	30,12	5,17	24,57	8,69	12,41
p-value**	-	<0,001	0,160	<0,001	0,006	0,034
<b>Bcero / Total</b>	<b>1713</b>	<b>73,2 ± 14,5 (Me = 74,3)</b>	<b>88,1 ± 11,5 (Me = 92,0)</b>	16,2 ± 11,8 (Me = 14,7)	24,4 ± 23,9 (Me = 18,0)	39,2 ± 21,2 (Me = 39,0)

Note: «\*» — number of valid measurements by variables; the columns in the table present the means and standard deviations: SA — self-assessment, LA — level of aspirations, LD SA and LA — level of discrepancy between self- assessment and level of aspirations, LDA — level of differentiation of aspirations, LDSA — level of differentiation of self-assessment, Me — median; «\*\*» — based on the results of comparison using the nonparametric one-way Kruskal–Wallis analysis of variance.

Table 5

**Pairwise comparison of self-assessment  
values of students without SEN and different categories  
of SEN using the Dwass-Steele-Critchlow-Fligner post-hoc test**

Variable	Categories of students	Categories of students	W	p
Self-assessment (SA)	Normotypical	With disabilities	–5,01	0,002
	Normotypical	Gifted	5,50	<0,001
	With disabilities	With a non-native Russian	3,84	0,033
	With disabilities	Gifted	7,57	<0,001
Level of discrepancy of SA and LA	Normotypical	With disabilities	4,56	0,007
	Normotypical	Gifted	–4,72	0,005
	With disabilities	With a non-native Russian	–4,34	0,012
	With disabilities	Gifted	–6,25	< 0,001
Level of differentiation of aspirations	Normotypical	Gifted	–4,39	0,010
	With disabilities	Gifted	–4,28	0,013
Level of differentiation of self-assessment	With disabilities	Gifted	–3,86	0,032

Note: Only statistically significant comparisons are shown.

420 students identified with an adverse developmental pattern across these categories. Only one typically developing student was classified under the second type of adverse pattern. The third type included 10 individuals from typically developing students, 1 from students with a non-native Russian language, and 1 from gifted students (totalling 13 students with the 2nd and 3rd types of adverse developmental pattern).

**Discussion**

The study revealed significant differences in self-esteem indicators with the except of aspirations between the studied categories of primary school-age students in inclusive settings. Thus, the proposed hypothesis

was confirmed. Across the total sample of fourth-grade students, the proportion of those with low self-esteem as an indicator of risk for adverse development stands at 26%.

The highest proportion of students at risk for adverse developmental pattern was found among students with disabilities (34%). Since all studied categories included schoolchildren at risk for adverse development, it can be assumed that such risks are present among students with all types of students with disabilities. The distribution of students with disabilities who are at risk for adverse development by specific type of disabilities was not examined in this study and could be a subject for future specialized inquiry.

The self-esteem indicators of students with different educational needs may depend on both the characteris-

tics of the students themselves and external factors, such as the attitudes of teachers, parents, and peers.

B.I. Pinsky noted that the level of self-esteem can depend both on the type and severity of an impairment and on “the assessment by the surrounding world” (Pinsky, 1985, p. 111). According to G.N. Penin and N.M. Nazarova (2021), individuals with disabilities of all categories may experience “insecurity and unjustified dependence on others, low sociability, egocentrism, pessimism, and low or inflated self-esteem.”

Lack of adequate support from the teacher and a low level of acceptance by peers are often causes for the development of feelings of inferiority and low self-esteem in a child with disabilities. Coupled with a high level of aspiration due to intellectual characteristics, this can lead to adverse personal development. Several researchers note that overprotection can lead to a phenomenon in children with disabilities similar to “learned helplessness” (Zaretsky, Gordon, 2011). This phenomenon inhibits the development of not only self-esteem but of self-awareness as a whole, as it prevents the child from becoming the agent of their own activity. The sense of belonging to the school and class is considered a significant factor influencing the self-esteem, self-respect, and subjective well-being of students from various vulnerable groups, and is an important indicator of the success of their inclusion (Zaman et al., 2025). Placement in inclusive or separate classes has been shown to affect the academic self-concept of 5th–6th grade students with disabilities, and the presence of students with disabilities in a general education classroom affects the same indicator in students without disabilities (Pirker et al., 2025).

All these factors must be considered when organizing psychological assistance for students with disabilities.

As the primary factors for successful school adaptation and the formation of adequate self-esteem in children with a non-native language of instruction, scholars most often cite acceptance by adults and the presence of peer support. Research indicates that children with a non-native language of instruction require psychological assistance in adapting to a peer group (Alivernini et al., 2019). Among the risks of adverse personal development that hinder the integration of such students, a document from the Ministry of Education of Russia lists: “insufficient proficiency in the Russian language, hindering successful mastery of the educational program and socialization... emotional difficulties caused by experiencing migration stress; absence or lack of age-appropriate social skills... orientation towards the

norms and rules of the culture of the country and region of origin, differing from those accepted in the region of study in Russia” (Letter of the Ministry of Education of Russia No. HH/202-07, 2021). Supporting self-esteem, developing self-regulation, and encouraging a sense of self-efficacy among students from low-income families in South Africa has been shown to help bridge the gap between aspirations and achievement levels (Masinga, 2025).

According to A.A. Semenova (2016), among gifted students there were learners with conflicting self-attitude and inadequate self-esteem, which could be both low and high. Her study revealed that inflated self-esteem served as a defense mechanism. Gifted children are more sensitive to assessments of their reputation, indicating a low level of emotional stability despite high achievement. They often underestimate or overestimate their potential, may find it difficult to establish contact with peers, and to defend their opinions (Parts, 2007). According to E.N. Volkova et al. (2022), gifted schoolchildren often need psychological assistance in developing resilience, agency, a sense of self-efficacy, and positive self-attitude. As M. Elias and colleagues argue (Elias et al., 2024), for building an inclusive and accepting society, it is more appropriate in working with gifted students to direct pedagogical efforts to all students, not singling them out based on giftedness through testing, and to encourage cooperation and socio-emotional interaction among them.

At the same time, as our study and a number of others have shown (Prikhozhan, 2007; Borozdina, 2011), typically developing students can also be at risk for adverse developmental patterns. The causes of risks for personal development can be varied. When organizing psychological assistance for vulnerable students, this risks need to be identified.

Thus, research by both Russian and international scholars confirms our hypothesis that the self-esteem of primary school children, as a key indicator of their personal development, exhibits distinct features across different categories of students with diverse educational needs, necessitating specific consideration when providing psychological assistance in inclusive settings.

## Conclusion

The study demonstrated that within the total sample of school students, a favorable pattern of personal development predominates among fourth-grade students (74%). However, children with low self-esteem, as an

indicator of risk for adverse development, were identified across all studied categories of primary school children. Among students with disabilities, low self-esteem is more pronounced than high self-esteem, while the opposite is true for gifted students. Meanwhile, the mean self-esteem values of typically developing students and those with a non-native Russian language are approximately equal, whereas those of gifted students are higher than those of typically developing peers.

Thus, based on the identified risks of adverse development in children with low self-esteem, our research underscores the importance of paying attention to the psychological state of at-risk students across all studied

categories in order to provide them with timely psychological assistance when necessary.

A prospect for further research is the development of psychological assistance services that account for the personal development risks of students with diverse educational needs in inclusive settings.

**Limitations.** As an indicator of personal development, only self-assessment indicators of students with special educational needs were studied. The assignment of students with special educational needs to the categories of students was carried out independently by the school.

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*Svetlana V. Alekhina* — general organization of the study, the idea of the study; formulating the study hypothesis; planning the study; discussing the results, monitoring the study.

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*Elena V. Samsonova* — planning the study, discussing the results, writing and formatting the manuscript; formulating the objectives and conclusions of the article.

*Alexey Yu. Shemanov* — formulating the study hypothesis; describing and discussing the results, using statistical methods for data analysis; annotating, visualizing the study results, writing and formatting the manuscript; formulating conclusions; formatting the list of references.

All authors participated in the discussion of the results and approved the final text of the manuscript.

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***Conflict of interest***

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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Авторы заявляют об отсутствии конфликта интересов.

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The study was conducted by educational psychologists at schools that had informed consent from parents to conduct psychological measurements on their children.

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