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PRACTICAL RESULTS OF A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF THE WRITING SKILLS OF STDUENTS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES ON THE EXAMPLE OF PUBLIC SCHOOLS IN THE TELAVI MUNICIPALITY

Abstract: Practical Results of a Qualitative Study of the Writing Skills of Students with Learning Disabilities on the Example of Public Schools in the Telavi Municipality

In teaching, along with various academic skills, the development of students' writing skills plays an important role. The purpose of our study was to study the problems associated with the writing skills of students with learning disabilities in grades V-VI. Subsequently, we sought to identify a methodology that could mitigate these challenges while facilitating the development of this crucial functional skill among students.

First of all, it was important to choose/identfy schools in Telavi district where fifth-grade students with learning disabilities were enrolled. To determine their initial level and assess their academic skills after the intervention, we administered the MWRATR test, which is validated in Georgia. Subsequently, we processed and analyzed the pre- and post-test MWRATR results of students with learning disabilities.

The culmination of our qualitative research comprises the collection and analysis of data from six cases involving students with learning disabilities.

Hence, the analyzed data is not interchangeable. Our objective was to identify positive trends within the target group resulting from the implementation of a self-regulation strategy. Through the analysis of pre- and post-studies conducted by the Ministry of Education and Science on Students with Learning Disabilities, it was observed that while the deviation indicator from the norm of development remained consistent across all students, there was an increase in the number of raw scores for all children. This progression was clearly evident in the diagram, indicating promising progress and potential.

Key words: student, pupil, learning disability, writing skills.

Language: English

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Introduction

The PIRLS International Literacy Survey, conducted every five years with participation of more than two hundred countries, allows assessing the progress of individual countries in this area reveals alarmingly low literacy achievements among Georgian children. „Their average literacy score, standing at 471, is statistically significantly below the PIRLS average" [7, p 18].

Literacy stands as one of the penetrating (functional) skills outlined in the national curriculum, encompassing „a student's capacity to receive, process, comprehend, organize, analyze, interpret, and effectively communicate information both orally and through written forms of speech" [6]. In many cases, students with special educational needs require supplementary assistance in acquiring the skills essential for independent integration into society. These skills may encompass self-care, mobility,

grocery shopping, daily tasks, as well as functional and academic proficiencies such as reading, writing, and mathematics. These skills can be achieved through the development and implementation of the programs designed with relevant content and goals [8, p.6].

As a result of these processes, the development of writing skills assumes a pivotal role in education alongside various academic proficiencies. Our study aimed to investigate the challenges related to the writing abilities of students with learning disabilities in grades V-VI. Subsequently, we sought to identify a methodology that could mitigate these challenges while facilitating the development of this crucial skill among students. Reid, Linemann and Hagaman note that learning disability is not an indicator of a low intellectual abilities in a student. It's important to recognize that impaired "learning ability is not solely attributable to sensory deficits, psychoemotional states, impaired intellectual development, or socioeconomic factors" [5, p.125]. Recognizing that learning disabilities often persist throughout an individual's life, mastering functional skills becomes vital for their social integration and self-establishment. Consequently, we advocate for the adoption of a self-regulation strategy, which has been gradually evolving in successful foreign schools and universities, to foster the development of writing skills among students with learning disabilities.

The theory of social learning, pioneered by Albert Bandura, provides strong justification for the significance and necessity of developing students' ability for self-regulation as a crucial means of effective societal integration. Bandura emphasizes the pivotal role of self-regulation as a vital functional skill essential for students' development and success. The national curriculum of the third generation focuses on the type of curriculum, the results of which, together with academic skills, are aimed at developing students' functional skills, namely, among other things, the development of students' self-regulation skills. Six functional skills and related cognitive operations are presented and highlighted, which cannot be focused on without special attention. It will be possible to develop target concepts. All subject teachers should work on these skills at all levels in relation to each target concept. The third-generation national curriculum prioritizes a curriculum type the results of which, together with academic skills, aim at developing students' functional abilities, including the cultivation of self-regulation skills. 6 key functional skills and their associated cognitive operations are outlined and emphasized, requiring special attention for effective development of target concepts. All subject teachers should work on these skills at all levels in relation to each target concept [6].

Bandura and Bourke go further by providing specialized tables illustrating the progression of self-regulation skills in children across different age groups. Moreover, they formulate strategies that teachers can offer to students of any age to enhance their self-regulation abilities. This resource serves as a potent tool for implementing inclusive education, particularly facilitating the integration of students with learning disabilities into society. One of the notable and scientifically based interventions for students with writing disorders is the "Development of a Self-Regulatory Strategy (SRSD)." This six-stage strategic model aims to refine the writing process across all subjects, making it more proficient, automatic, and adaptable [1, p.87] [4, p.25] [5, p.38].

Self-Regulatory Strategy Development (SRSD) is an approach to learning first developed by Karen Harris and Steve Graham almost 40 years ago. This method was designed to fill the gap in writing instruction for students with disabilities. SRSD integrates various effective learning components with self-regulation processes and is similar to Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support (PBIS) in that it functions as an "educational and methodological framework rather than an educational product. It consists of six interconnected and iterative stages" [1, p.69]:

1) Develop and activate existing knowledge.
2) Discuss skill and strategies.
3) Model skills and strategies.
4) Remember the strategies.
5) Guide with skills and strategies (support).
6) Do independent practice.

Research object: Students with learning disabilities in the 5th and 6th grades of public schools in the Telavi municipality

For the reliability of the research we have chosen, we have chosen a qualitative study. First of all, we identified schools in the Telavi district where fifth-grade students with learning disabilities were enrolled. Following informed consent from the participants, we conducted our study in the public schools of Artana, Gulgula, Ikalto, Pshavali, and Shalauri.

Furthermore, with the assistance of specialists, we assessed students' initial academic skills and post-intervention skills using a written subtest of the MWRATR test, which has been validated in Georgia. We processed and analyzed the results before and after testing students with learning disabilities.

The final results of our qualitative research involve the collection and analysis of data from six cases involving students with learning disabilities. As such, the analyzed data is not transferrable. Our objective was to identify specific trends within the target group following the implementation of self-regulation strategies (as is often the case in qualitative research).

After identifying the writing difficulties among students with learning disabilities using the written subtest of the MWRATR tool, we implemented a methodological framework for adapted self-regulation in Georgian language and literature lessons. This involved employing a six-step methodological approach to self-regulation with students with special educational needs (SEN) when undertaking tasks related to writing skill development.

Initially, we familiarized subject teachers with the methodological principles of self-regulation and provided instructions on their integration into the educational process. During classroom activities, at the initial stage, the subject teacher assisted the student in analyzing the task at hand. This step aimed to help the student recognize their capability to complete the task, identify the specific tasks required, and comprehend the instructions provided by the teacher. The teacher emphasized the critical components of the assignment to guide the student's understanding.

At the second stage, the teacher helped the student to clearly understand the purpose of the assignment. At the third stage, the teacher, together with the student, determined the time needed to complete the written assignment (setting the start and end time of the assignment) and talked about how not to distract attention in case of interruption by other students.

At the fourth stage, the student reads the completed written assignment paragraph by paragraph, evaluates it according to the self-assessment criteria provided by the teacher, and makes improvements independently. At the fifth stage, the teacher acknowledged the student's efforts and diligence throughout the assignment. They praised the student for their hard work and attention to detail at various stages of the writing process. For instance, when completing a paragraph, the teacher reminded the student of the remaining time and offered praise, especially if the student adhered to the time limit despite potential mistakes. At the sixth stage, the teacher sets aside time after completing the task to talk with students about how the workflow went, whether they were distracted, what they can change/improve when performing a similar task to simplify the further process, whether the intended goal has been achieved, whether the task was completed according to the plan, and whether the self-assessment criteria were met and etc.

During the sixth stage, the teacher sets aside time after completing the task to engage in a discussion with students. This discussion focuses on reflecting on the workflow, identifying any distractions encountered, and discussing potential improvements for future tasks to streamline the process. The teacher and students assess whether the intended goal has been achieved, whether the task was completed according to the plan, and whether the self-assessment criteria were met. This reflective dialogue encourages students to actively participate in evaluating their own performance and fosters continuous improvement.

The methodological framework was implemented by teachers of Georgian language and literature with students over the course of one academic semester. The strategies were predominantly employed in tasks aimed at developing writing skills, although teachers endeavored to integrate self-regulation strategies into tasks set for various purposes.

The use of the methodological base of self-regulation slightly improved the students' writing skills, which was evident from the results of their re-evaluation through the post-test of the MWRATR tool.

The document was utilized in classrooms for the entire duration of one semester, from September to December 2023. After the end of the semester, in order to identify the results and possible progress, an assessment (post-survey) of the academic skills of students with learning disabilities was conducted. The results obtained from the comparative analysis conducted before and after the survey, along with the observed progress in students' writing skills during the survey, are presented as follows:

Six students with special learning disabilities, drawn from five public schools in the Telavi municipality, participated in piloting a methodological framework for self-regulation. The students, despite their apparent lack of social skills, were interested in completing assignments tailored to their abilities and needs. They tried to follow the teacher's instructions, incorporating the methodological framework into their work. Over time, both the quantity of tasks requiring independent completion and the quality of independent work steadily improved. Through this process, they gradually acquired the skills to plan and execute their own learning strategies.

The case of student I: Pre-test - The score of 85 obtained by the first student on the Standardized writing test (MwratR) subtest indicates a below-average performance i.e. the student's ability to write corresponds to the lower limit of the age norm for development.

Raw score (number of correct answers) -25
Post-test

The score of 103 achieved by the first student on the Standardized Writing Test (MWRATR) subtest corresponds to an average performance level. This indicates that the student's writing ability aligns with the age norm for development.

Raw score-35,

It increased from 25 to 35 points, i.e. by 10 points.

The case of student II: Pre-test - The score of 74 attained by the second student in the writing skills subtest of the standardized test (MWRATR) reflects a low performance level. This suggests that the student's writing ability is slightly below the age norm for development.

Raw score -25

Post-test - The score of 80 obtained by the 2nd student on the standardized test writing subtest (MwratR) corresponds to a below-average indicator - the ability to write is at the lower limit of the age norm of development.

Raw scoreѕ-30

In this case, the raw score increased from 25 to 30, reflecting a notable improvement of 5 points.

The case of student III: Pre-test - The score of 78 achieved by the third student on the standardized test writing subtest (MWRATR) corresponds to a low performance indicator. This suggests that the student's writing ability is slightly below the age norm for development.

Raw score-25

Post-test - The grade of 88 obtained by the third student on the standardized test writing subtest (MWRATR) corresponds to a below-average indicator. This suggests that the student's writing ability is at the lower limit of the age norm for development.

Raw score-30

In this case, the raw score also increased by 5 from 25 to 30.

The case of student IV: Pre-test - The score of 55 obtained by the fourth student on the standardized test (MWRATR) subtest for assessing writing ability corresponds to a very low performance indicator. This suggests that the student's writing ability is significantly below the age norm for development.

Raw score -8

Post-test - The score of 55 obtained by the fourth student on the standardized test (MWRATR) subtest for assessing writing ability corresponds to a very low performance indicator. This suggests that the student's writing ability is significantly below the age norm for development.

Raw score -15

In this case, the raw score increased from 8 to 15, a rise of 7 points. However, the student's level of age development remains deviant and below the normal range..

The case of student V: Pre-test - The score of 55 obtained by the fifth student in the standardized test (MWRATR) subtest for assessing writing ability corresponds to a very low performance indicator. This suggests that the student's writing ability is significantly below the age norm for development.

Raw score -8

Post-test - The score of 68 obtained by the fifth student in the standardized test (MWRATR) subtest for assessing writing ability corresponds to a very low performance indicator. This suggests that the student's writing ability is significantly below the age norm for development.

Raw score -23

Despite the improvement, the fifth student's raw score increased from 8 to 23, which is a significant improvement. However, the student's level of age development still remains below the normal range.

The case of student VI:

Pre-test - The score of 55 obtained by the sixth student on the Standardized Test Writing subtest (MWRATR) corresponds to a very low performance indicator, suggesting that the student's writing ability is significantly below the age norm for development.

Raw score, the number of correct answers is also very small and amounts to 7.

Post-test - The score of 55 obtained by the sixth student in the writing skills subtest of the standardized test (MWRATR) also corresponds to a very low performance indicator, suggesting that the student's writing ability is significantly below the age norm for development.

Despite the increase in the raw score from 7 to 18, indicating an improvement of 11 points, the sixth student's level of age-related development still remains below normal.

As can be seen from the comparative analysis of the results before and after the MWRATR survey, when observing students' writing skills, the progress diagram looks like this (Fig. 1):

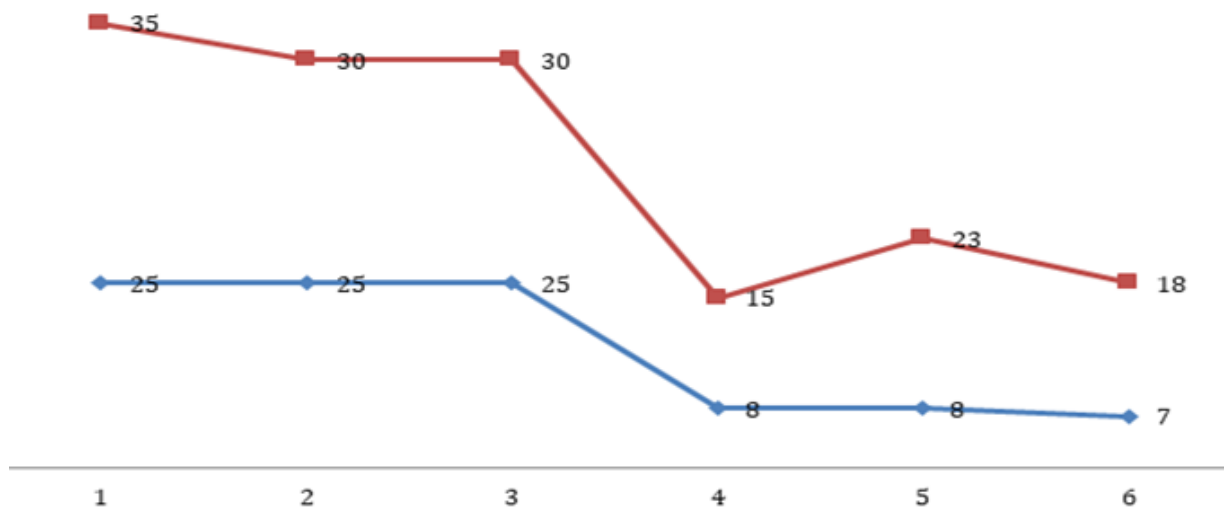**Pre and Post Research**

Fig. 1.

The analysis of pre- and post-MWRATR studies of students with learning disabilities revealed that the deviation from the norm of development remained consistent across all students, as expected. However, there was a notable increase in the number of raw points (correct answers) for all children, which is clearly depicted in the diagram. This change should be regarded as progress and a source of hope for their continued development. The analysis of the use of a self-regulating methodological framework in the process of teaching Georgian language and literature to students with learning disabilities, which we conducted on the basis of pre- and post-MWRATR assessment surveys of students' writing skills, confirmed the hypothesis we expressed before the start of the study.

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