



Webquests as a Tool of Preparing in-Service and Pre-Service Teachers of English for Inclusion of Learners with Disability

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WEBQUESTS AS A TOOL OF PREPARING IN-SERVICE AND PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS OF ENGLISH FOR INCLUSION OF LEARNERS WITH DISABILITY

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ABSTRACT. Inclusion in Ukraine has been the national educational policy since 2018. It was preceded by a nation-wide experiment of teaching children with disability in mainstream schools and also by numerous researches and debates. Higher and post-graduate educational institutions, that provide teacher training and professional development, responded to the need for preparing pre-service and in-service teachers for inclusion and disability issues. Relevant instructional modules and academic courses have been designed and are delivered in different parts of the country.

In the same time, the research conducted among in-service English teachers revealed that their self-assessment indices of knowledge and skills required for teaching children with disability are highly insufficient. This can be explained by two reasons. The first one is the complex nature of typical teacher professional development course which may include numerous topics that refer to the Methods of Teaching English and Linguistics. As a result, teachers are denied opportunities for reflection and practice (e.g. in the course of relevant paraprofessional activities). That is why their experience indices also proved to be low. The second reason is the theoretical character of such courses that promotes the development of low order thinking skills.

The consideration of the problem mentioned led us to studying the potential of WebQuests as self-instruction and distant learning tools. The current research suggests principles that may be used by WebQuest designers, a list of trainees' skills that may be developed and desired outcomes to be produced by English teachers as a part of relevant training.

Key words: teachers of English as a foreign language, learners with disability, teachers' readiness for inclusion, teacher training, WebQuests.

I. Introduction and setting the problem

The expedience of preparing mainstream school teachers for educational inclusion of children and youth with disability is internationally acknowledged. Numerous researches (Kirillova & Faizrakhmanova [1], Ross-Hill [2], Haq & Mundia [3], Hay et al. [4], Leyser et al. [5], Avramidis & Norwich [6], Taylor et al. [7], Giangreco et al. [8], Alawadh [9] and others) prove that correspondent knowledge, skills and experience promote teachers' positive attitude to inclusive instruction, its acceptance, and the development of their ability to cope with challenging classroom situations. Reversely, the lack of appropriate teacher training contributes to the dissemination of isolation disability models in the society which results in numerous negative implications (like segregation of children with disability, bullying, and other forms of discrimination).

In Ukraine inclusion has been the national educational policy since 2018. Teacher training courses on disability and inclusion emerge in universities and post-graduate professional development institutions. In the same time the general readiness of teachers for work with learners with disability is insufficient. Owing to this, the search of effective methods and means of training is highly topical.

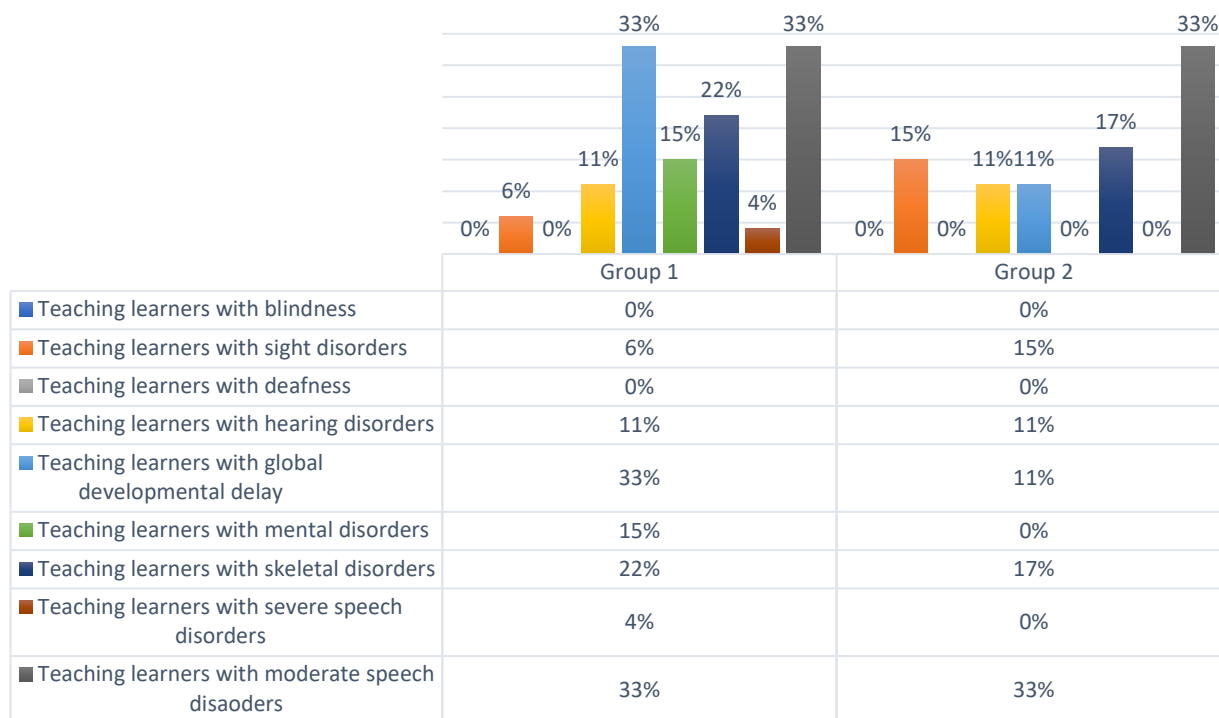
To assess English-as-a-foreign-language (EFL) teachers' readiness for work in inclusive setting a questionnaire was created. It included questions to define teachers' knowledge, skills and experience in the context of teaching learners with disability of different categories. As the questionnaire results show, a substantial part of research participants has neither sufficient knowledge nor proper skills or experience. The questionnaire was suggested as a part of professional development course and completed by 2 groups of EFL teachers subsequently: in April 2019 and in October 2019.

Figure 1 highlights relevant self-assessment of *teachers' experience*.

As it is confirmed by Figure 1, none of the teachers in both groups had any mainstream school experience of teaching learners with blindness and deafness. It is explained by the fact that education of these categories of learners in special school setting is viewed in Ukraine as the only reasonable option. The highest experience index was revealed in teaching learners with moderate speech disorders (33%). Students' ability to pronounce sounds correctly is important for developing their communicative competence. Correspondent impairments may significantly hinder teaching them English pronunciation and speaking. That is why teachers were supposed to contribute additional efforts into developing learners' habits and skills. It discovers the reason why this questionnaire item drew teachers' attention and was frequently singled out in the questionnaires. The same index (33%) was revealed in the first group concerning teaching students with global developmental delay.

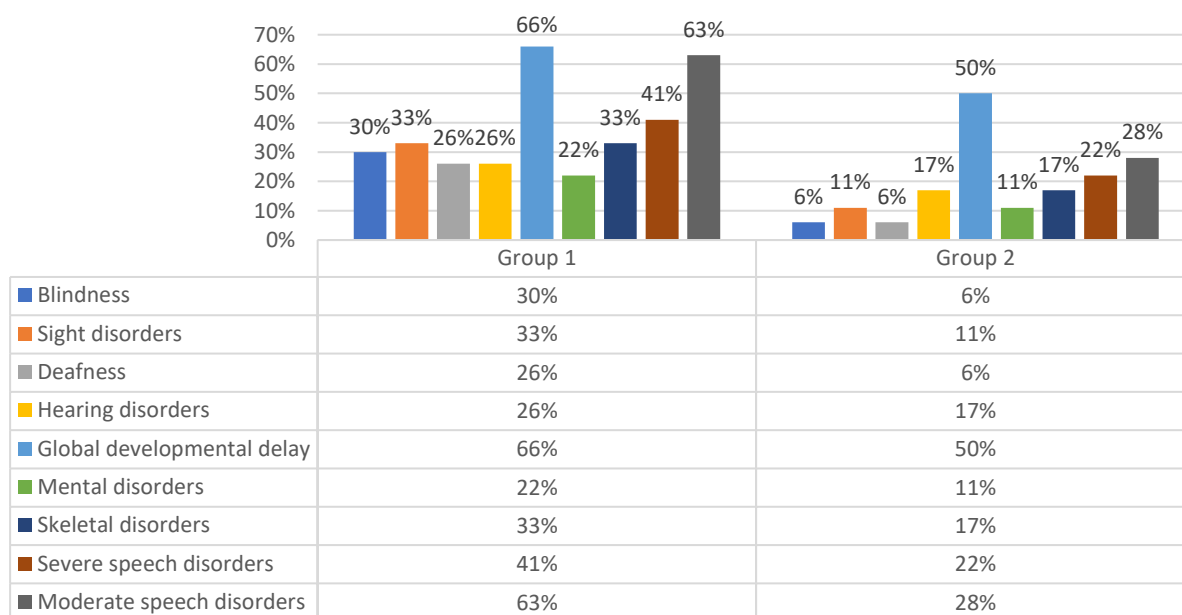
According to Figure 1 no index in both groups exceeded 50%. Thus, teachers' experience may be assessed as insufficient.

Figure 1. EFL teachers' experience self-assessment concerning teaching learners with disability (Group 1 (n=27). Group 2 (n=48)).



As for *knowledge self-assessment* concerning disability issues (and namely of possibilities, restrictions and special educational needs of learners with disability) teachers showed the following results (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Self-assessment of the need for acquiring additional knowledge of teaching different categories of learners with disability (Group 1 (n=27). Group 2 (n=48)).

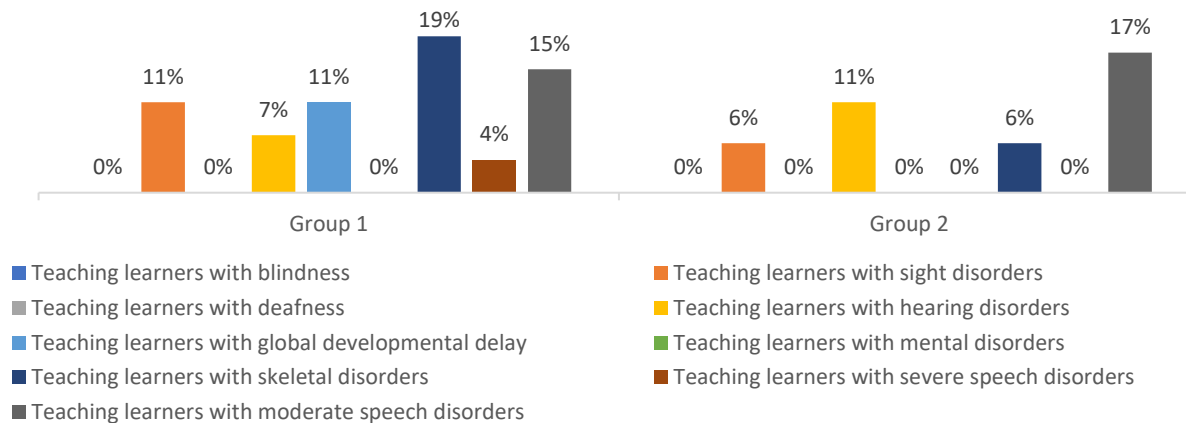


The Figure 2 reveals both: teachers' interest in learning more about the peculiarities of work with different categories of learners with disability and the relevant need for knowledge. As it can be observed, the most intensive interest was shown in the contexts of teaching learners with developmental 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 Ukrainian mainstream schools. As for the 2nd and the 3rd ones, teachers' awareness of the ways of reducing their effects is crucial for teaching language.

Finally, the Figure 3 illustrates teachers' *self-assessment of skills* of teaching learners with disability.

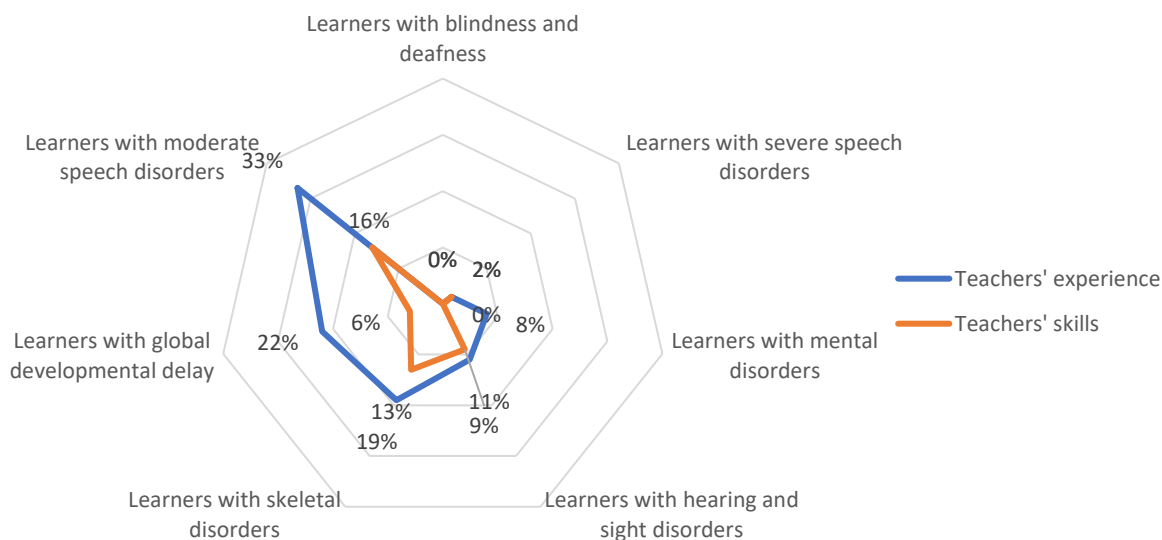
Figure 3. EFL teachers' skills of inclusive teaching learners with disability (Group 1 (n=27). Group 2 (n=48)).



As it is confirmed by Figure 3, EFL teachers assess their skills of teaching children with disability as highly insufficient. None of them can teach learners with deafness, blindness and mental disorders. 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 skeletal disorders (19%) (with 6% index in group 2).

As it is illustrated by Figure 4, such areas of inclusive education as: teaching learners with blindness and deafness, mental, hearing and sight 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 skeletal and moderate speech disorders, as well as global developmental delay.

Figure 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, we can draw the following conclusions:

1) The indices of skills and experience acquired by EFL teachers do not exceed 33%. This means that they are ill-prepared for work with learners with disability in mainstream school setting. As 2 subsequent research sessions (divided by a 6-month period) confirm, the situation does not change spontaneously.

2) The professional development programs aimed at preparing EFL teachers for teaching learners with disability should be practice-oriented (e.g., in the course of modelled paraprofessional activities) as the lowest position in the research results was taken by skills index.

3) Teachers revealed interest in disability of certain categories which should be taken into consideration while designing professional development programs.

Mainstream school EFL teachers in Ukraine are entitled with 30 hours of annual professional development. The correspondent courses are usually highly intensive. They may include topics for training in numerous areas of Methods of teaching foreign languages and Linguistics. Thus, in-service teachers may be denied the possibility of deep reflection of the matters of disability and inclusion. That is why, it is expedient to provide them with additional electronic resources that would contribute to their constant professional development.

Besides, there are categories of pre-service teachers who would also benefit from relevant on-line activities in their preparation for teaching learners with disability. According to Ukrainian legislation, persons who choose to enter the profession of a teacher may enroll in extramural departments of correspondent higher educational institutions. During the term they are supposed to do most of their assignments independently which may reduce the overall effectiveness of the training. Thus, relevant electronic resources (and namely WebQuests) may provide them with extra independent practice-oriented training.

II. Summary of previous research on WebQuests

WQ as a method and a means of teaching was originated by Dr. Bernie Dodge [10], Tom March [11], the San Diego Unified School District's Educational Technology staff and participants from the Teach the Teachers Consortium [12]. Dodge [10] 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 its level which may be: short-term and long-term. *Short term WQs* are aimed at knowledge acquisition and integration. Their possible outcomes are awareness and understanding of a significant amount of new information. *Long term WQs* are aimed at "extending and refining knowledge". Their desired results are: ability to analyze a body of knowledge, transform and apply it for creating an on-line or off-line product [10]. According to Godwin-Jones [13], learners may produce documents that collect, summarize, and synthesize the information gathered. Their genres may range from a report, presentation, questionnaire to a Web site [13].

Comparing the outcomes of both WQ levels mentioned – with Bloom's Taxonomy of learning objectives and levels of thinking [14; 15], we can draw the conclusion that activities included into short term WQs refer to the *first two levels* of the taxonomy (of knowledge and comprehension) and the long-term ones require the *first five levels* of thinking (of acquiring knowledge, providing comprehension, of application, analysis and synthesis). The first 3 levels of the taxonomy require *low order thinking skills* (LOTS) and the rest of them are based on *high order thinking skills* (HOTS) [16]. Thus, by completing the longer WQs trainees contribute to their HOTS development. This conclusion is confirmed by Owens et al. [17]. According to Marzano [18], to such thinking skills refer:

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.

Most of researchers align WQs with the *constructivist philosophy* [11; 19; 20] based on the following principles:

1. Knowledge is constructed, rather than innate, or passively absorbed.
2. Learning is an active process.
3. All knowledge is socially constructed.
4. All knowledge is personal.
5. Learning exists in the mind [21].

By providing all necessary information, that can be read as many times as necessary, and cues for using it, WQs "promote *scaffolding of instruction*" [20]. The latter is interpreted as "a key feature of effective teaching, where the adult continually adjusts the level of his or her help in response to the learner's level of performance" [22]. WQs also promote development of *autonomous learning skills* [20; 23] as learners have to work without immediate interaction with the teacher meeting challenges that occur themselves. Besides owing to their integrated nature, WQs can combine multiple elements of instructional process [11].

WQs have a typical structure: an introduction, task, process, resources, evaluation, conclusion [24] and usually – teacher's page. According to [13], they may also contain such motivational elements as: gaming aspect, extra credit, contest, which stimulate group competition.

According to Dodge, WQs are divided into types. In 1998 the author singled out: "Persuasive Message," "Travel Account," "Exhibition," "Parallel Diaries" [24]. But in 2002 the classification suggested included:

1. Retelling Tasks.
2. Compilation Tasks.
3. Mystery Tasks.
4. Journalistic Tasks.
5. Design Tasks.
6. Creative Product Tasks.
7. Consensus Building Tasks.
8. Persuasion Tasks.
9. Self-Knowledge Tasks.
10. Analytical Tasks.
11. Judgment Tasks.
12. Scientific Tasks [25].

As it may be observed, the classification is based on the "goal and focus" expressed in their tasks [25].

III. Contradictions

The literature analysis conducted revealed numerous researches dedicated to the application of WQs in teaching EFL and English-as-a-second-language (ESL) in secondary school and university [13; 26-30]. There are also researches dedicated on WQ-design for students with disabilities [31]. In the same time, the issue of applying WQs for preparing (would-be) teachers of EFL for teaching learners with disability has not been studied.

Thus, the **object** of this research is in-service teachers' professional development and pre-service teacher training. The **subject matter** is the role of WQs in preparing (would-be) EFL teachers for teaching learners with disability. Its **aim** is the investigation into the possibilities provided by WQs for relevant distant or independent teacher training.

IV. Findings and suggestions for further research

Taking into consideration the summary of the previous research on WQs (considered above) and the questionnaire completion results on (would-be) EFL teachers' experience, knowledge and skills of teaching learners with disability, we singled out the principles of designing relevant WQs, skills to be acquired by trainees and desired outcomes that may be produced as a result of this activity (see Table 1):

Table 1. Prerequisites of designing WebQuests as a method and means of preparing (would-be) EFL teachers for teaching learners with disability

1. Principles to be considered by WQ designers	2. Skills to be developed in (would-be) EFL	3. Outcomes to be produced by (would-be) EFL
<p>A. Topics selected by a WQ designer should be correspond with teachers' needs in teaching learners with disability (see Figure 2).</p> <p>B. Practice-oriented active training is based on HOTS development; thus, these should be considered an inseparable part of WQ design.</p> <p>C. Scaffolding of instruction should be provided by means of linking WQ Process part with all sufficient information required for accomplishing these activities.</p> <p>D. The standard WQ structure should be followed.</p> <p>E. Possibility of considering WQ taskonomy a prerequisite for selecting their desired outcomes should be considered.</p> <p>F. Practical value of WQ outcomes should be considered.</p>	<p><i>Of teaching learners with:</i></p> <p>a) sight disorders.</p> <p>b) hearing disorders.</p> <p>c) skeletal disorders.</p> <p>d) mild mental retardation.</p> <p>e) global developmental delay.</p> <p>f) moderate speech disorders.</p> <p>g) severe speech disorders.</p>	<p>A. <i>Suggestions on adjusting:</i></p> <p>a) approaches and principles of teaching individual SEN learners;</p> <p>b) teaching methods and strategies to a SEN learner;</p> <p>c) means of teaching EFL a learner with disability;</p> <p>d) learning environment to special educational needs of a learner with disability.</p> <p>B. <i>Suggestions on modifying:</i></p> <p>a) the number of assignments;</p> <p>b) the complexity of assignments.</p> <p>C. <i>Suggestions on co-teaching and cooperation modes.</i></p> <p>D. <i>Suggestions on rapport building.</i></p>

The prerequisites presented in Table 1 are provisional. In the same time, they can provide guidance for those choosing to design WQs as a method and tool for preparing in-service and pre-service EFL teachers for teaching learners with disability.

V. Conclusions

Teaching learners with disability is a challenge for general educators irrespectively of a country. Teachers may be obliged to provide instruction for learners with disability by educational legislation and deny inclusion philosophies by their actions and attitude. They can refuse to contribute additional effort and time into these children or follow other reasons. But teachers' rejection of children with disability leads to a deeper hidden form of segregation inside a classroom. That is why preparing them for teaching learners with disability is crucial.

As most researches worldwide confirm that it is teachers' readiness (and primarily, knowledge, skills and experience) that cause acceptance of children with disability, all relevant resources should be used.

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