

Enhancing the professional development of adapted physical education teachers in Russia and Serbia: challenges and best practice

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Abstract

Objective of the study is to conduct a comparative analysis of training and professional development programs for teachers of adapted physical education in Russia and Serbia to identify similarities and differences between the two systems, which operate in accordance with their national regulations.

Methods and structure of the study. This paper examines the current legal framework governing teachers' professional development, along with the procedures and regulations that shape this process within the educational systems of Russia and Serbia. By analyzing theoretical frameworks and existing training programs, it provides insights into the extent to which teacher development supports the successful implementation of educational reforms, according to modern challenges and trends.

Results and conclusions. Research has shown that the regulations introduced in Russia and the Republic of Serbia over the past decade have significantly increased awareness of the importance of professional development for teachers in the field of adapted physical education. The available programs have the potential to encourage greater teacher participation in this specialized area of physical education. There are a lot of similarities in the systems of professional development of adaptive physical education teachers in Russia and Serbia, but there are also significant differences. Among even models of professional development and advanced training that are similar in form, there are their own specifics and some differences in relation to: the mandatory nature of professional development, time of retraining and advanced training (working, non-working), the number of mandatory hours (from 15 to 166 hours), frequency (from once every 5 years to annual training), the degree of centralization of advanced training management - centralized and decentralized, etc.

Keywords: *teachers, continuous professional development (CPD), Adapted Physical Education (APE), comparative analysis*

Introduction. Modern trends in the development of education and the challenges, associated with them, determine the appeal to the problem of professional development of teachers in Russia and abroad as a response to the growing requirements of society for the personality of a teacher and his/her activities in the context of globalization and internationalization of education [3, 7, 12].

Teacher professional development is essential for the continuous modernization of the educational process, whether in secondary, upper-secondary or professional education. Acquiring additional qualifications and enhancing teachers' competencies in to-

day's challenging environment require the continuous monitoring of achievements in both theoretical and practical aspects. Multiple researches indicate that professional development can sustainably enhance the quality of teaching and learning, improve the efficiency of education and training, and provide added value for students, teachers, and employers [8, 13].

Professional development takes place through direct work, practical teaching experience, and participation in training programs. Therefore, the professional development of teachers and trainers is essential for implementing educational reforms and improving overall education quality.



Theoretical and practice-oriented analysis of the problem of professional development of specialists working with students with special educational needs is an urgent problem and requires the fundamental research of this problem from the point of view of updating pedagogical knowledge and pedagogical practice.

Since 2018, the Russian Federation has been implementing the Decade of Childhood program, aimed at increasing the attention of the state, research teams and the public to address the most pressing issues in the life and health of children. The section «Comprehensive development, education and upbringing of children» of the plan of main activities, carried out under this program for the period up to 2027, includes measures to identify and state support for gifted children, including children with disabilities and disabled children, orphans and children left without parental care [3]. Professional standards have been introduced that establish qualification requirements for specialists working with disabled children and children with disabilities (teachers/educators, psychologist teachers, tutors). Pedagogical workers, along with secondary or higher professional pedagogical education in the relevant position of training, must have appropriate competencies in the field of education and upbringing of children with special education needs [3, 11].

So, the challenges posed to teacher education in the field of adapted physical education require high professional skill and competence of teaching staff, and successful practices of organizing the professional development of a teacher abroad have adaptation potential and can serve as a resource for Russian professional education reformers in the context of the state educational strategy.

All these facts clearly testify to the importance of the problem of professional development of teachers, working with disabled children, and the value of using the best international practices in this area. The Republic of Serbia, as a friendly country to Russia, provides rich experience in teachers' professional development, and is ready to share it with the Russian colleagues.

This paper particularly emphasizes the available programs for professional development of teachers of adapted physical education in Russia and Serbia, as well as initiatives undertaken by relevant institutions to encourage greater participation in these programs.

Objective of the study is the comparative analyses of the functioning of the professional development system of teachers in the field of adaptive physical culture in Russia and in Serbia, and it is caused not only by the friendly attitude of this country towards the Russian Federation, but also by the fact that Serbia has a rich constructive experience in this area, which can be used in Russian universities that train specialists in this area.

Methods and structure of the study. A set of approaches was used, including competence, system, axiological, and comparative approaches. The research materials also included the authors' early scientific research: the development of a modern paradigm of professional development of teachers in universities and a comparative analysis of international projects to support the professional growth of higher education teachers, which are the basis for organizing a system of professional development of adaptive physical education teachers in a university and determining its current content. Theoretical methods were used: system and comparative analysis and generalization; empirical methods include «participant» observation, conversations, questionnaires, and interviews.

Results of the study and discussion. The professional development of teachers in Russia and Serbia, including those in the field of adapted physical education, is governed by the Russian Law Of Education (2012) and the Serbian Law on the Fundamentals of the Education System (2017). Special Articles of these Laws require teachers, educators, and professional associates to engage in continuous professional development to enhance their competencies, improve work quality, and achieve educational goals and standards of academic achievement. The policy of continuous professional development (CPD) for teachers is reinforced by the Decree of the President of the Russian Federation of 07.05.2024 No. 309 "On the national development goals of the Russian Federation for the period up to 2030 and for the future until 2036". In Serbia, the same key strategic goals were declared in 2021 in the National Strategy of Education Development in the Republic of Serbia until 2030. The Law on the Fundamentals of the Education System (2017) explicitly states that only individuals holding a work permit, i.e., a license issued by the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Serbia, can serve as teachers. The procedures governing teachers' pro-



Table 1 - Overview of available CPD programs in APE [15-16]

| Program title | Program organizer | Fundamental goal |
|--|---|--|
| “Movement and Physical Activity as Key Drivers of Developmental Processes in Children with Developmental Disabilities – A Modern Approach” | Serbian Association of Physical Education and Sports Teachers | Focusing on contemporary methods for working with children with special needs |
| “Directions for the Development of Inclusion in Physical and Health Education” | Singidunum University | Exploring inclusive teaching methods in physical education |
| “Step to Health – Corrective Gymnastics” | Regional Center for Professional Development of Education Employees | Incorporating corrective exercises to enhance students’ motor abilities |
| “Application of ICT in Teaching Physical and Health Education” | Association of Physical Education Teachers | Training teachers to integrate information and communication technologies into physical education |
| “Application of IEP in Outcome-Oriented Physical and Health Education Teaching” | Faculty of Sports, University “Union-Nikola Tesla” | Strengthening teachers’ competencies in planning and designing lessons for students with disabilities and developmental challenges |

professional development are defined in the Rulebook on Continuous Professional Development (2021), which specifies details regarding training programs, priority areas, and the accreditation process [5].

One of the most important objectives in both documents is the establishment of a system for professional and pedagogical training of teachers, the development of Centers for enhancing teaching competencies and skills, and the provision of training to improve personal capabilities [10]. Together, these documents establish the legal framework for the continuous professional development of teachers in Serbia and in Russian Federation.

As for the structure of the teachers’ professional development system in the field of adapted physical education in Russia and Serbia, it is organized quite diverse - each educational organization acts in this matter in accordance with its own strategies and traditions. The most popular is the functioning of the continuing education system on the basis of the educational organizations themselves.

Let us point out that often, among models of professional development and advanced training, that are similar in form, there are their own specifics and significant differences in relation to the mandatory nature of professional development, time of retraining and advanced training (working, non-working), number of mandatory hours (from 15 to 166 hours), frequency (from once every 5 years to annual training), the degree of centralization of advanced training management - centralized and decentralized. For example, the professional development of teachers in Russia is carried out without the intervention of federal educational authorities, while in

Serbia, on the contrary, the professional development of teachers is under state control.

In Russia and Serbia, teachers’ professional development in adaptive physical education is offered through various programs conducted by educational institutions. In this article, we are going to present some good practices, provided by the Institute for the Improvement of Education in Serbia [16], and the Volga Region State University of Physical Culture, Sport and Tourism (VRSUPhCS&T), Kazan, Russia. These programs cover key topics, including:

- Lesson Planning and Implementation: Educators enhance their competences to adapt teaching methods and activities to accommodate students with diverse needs.
- Inclusive Education: Training emphasizes the development of skills necessary for teaching in inclusive classrooms, with a focus on integrating students with disabilities.
- Use of Specialized Equipment: Teachers receive instruction on utilizing tools and equipment that facilitate adaptive physical activities.
- Interdisciplinary Skills: Programs explore connections between physical education, health, and social development.

The training and re-training of teachers in adaptive physical education through accredited programs is a significant aspect of professional development in Serbia. There are 30 accredited professional development programs in the field of physical education, a few specifically focus on adaptive physical education. According to the catalog of the Institute for the Improvement of Education, Table 1 represents the most notable programs.



These programs are in great demand for teachers in adaptive physical education, and, at the same time, it is evident that the offerings are highly limited compared to the actual need in this field. Expanding the number of such programs aligns with the growing significance of inclusive education and its role in modern teaching.

In the Volga Region State University of Physical Culture, Sport and Tourism (Kazan, Tatarstan Republic), the Department of Adaptive Physical Education and Life Safety (Chairperson – associate professor L.A.Parfenova) trains highly qualified specialists to work with a contingent of individuals assigned to special medical groups in educational institutions of all types and kinds, including in special educational institutions (auxiliary schools and preschool institutions, boarding schools for children with developmental defects, leveling classes, orphanages, neuropsychiatric dispensaries, correctional education classes, etc.). An integral component of training at the department is its practical orientation. Starting from the first year, students practice in various state and non-state institutions. The training is conducted by a team of high-class professionals who are involved in the system of continues professional development (CPD). The Volga region State University pays special attention to the enhancing the professional development of adapted physical education teachers, and it is worth mentioning that the university has a fairly effective system of professional development of teachers, the main valuable initiatives and supporting activities of which are [6, 12]:

- organization and support of motivational environment for the teaching staff;
- development of start-ups for teachers aimed at formation of intellectual capital of the university;
- stimulating creativity and retaining «young talents» in adaptive physical education at the university;
- ensuring the independence, initiative, self-organization of young teachers in adaptive physical education;
- material remuneration of talented and effective teachers;
- availability of educational «platforms» where the teacher can receive support and assistance in professional development;
- high degree of integration of teaching with research as a tool for CPD;

- actual and «virtual» scientific and educational internships;
- mentoring and training in up-to-date MOOC courses;

- promotion of participation in «winter» and «summer» Schools of pedagogical mastery, etc.

There is no doubt that adaptive physical education increasingly needs «new» teachers who can easily reconfigure their teaching, who can establish contact with any audience of students, regardless of the level of its «digital gap» who own multimedia technologies (video lessons, tutorials, interactive platforms) and are fully «integrated» into the global network. In this regard, today educational organizations in Russia and Serbia organize retraining and professional development programs for teachers in the most attractive areas of professional improvement, adaptive physical education is among them. In fact, a total system of «re-education of educators» is being deployed, which contributes to the growth of human capital of the educational organization. The CPD system is provided by the Centers for Teaching Methods, Centers for Technical Support of Education, Centers for Improvement and Professional Development created at universities and supported by universities in both countries.

Furthermore, the comparative analysis shows that the current stage of development of the system of teachers' professional development in Russian and Serbia is characterized, first of all, by a rethinking of key values in the essential-content characteristics and technologies for improving professional skills and professional retraining of teachers [9, 14]. The «new» teacher of adaptive physical culture is characterized by the properties of high potential for research and professionalism, pedagogical reflection and pedagogical leadership, mastering new professional roles in his/her development:

- from the knowledge consumer - to their generator and production;
- from the use prescribed - for the design of the new;
- from a responding performer - to a socially responsible representative of the pedagogical profession, a reflexopractor-professional;
- from the performance of professional pedagogical duties - to work in a team through cooperation;
- from designing only their own actions - to complicity in the development of an educational organization, etc.



In modern conditions, the teacher of adaptive physical culture also acquires and successfully implements new roles, such as «integrator of various multimedia tools, programs and resources», «developer of complex educational scenarios», «student» etc. [1, 9, 12]. At the same time, a large number of innovative specialists also appear on the modern educational labor market, working in on-line training formats and designed to ensure the success of the professional development of teachers. Among them:

- a developer - a methodologist-developer who creates educational content to fill an electronic training resource, regularly updates the content of the online platform, and also advises teachers who use web resources in the learning process;

- a tutor – a network teacher-mentor (curator, consultant, instructor), who simulates pedagogical interaction in a digital educational environment, studying according to an individual educational program;

- a facilitator - a teacher-coordinator whose main task is to organize networking of students in the format of audio and video conferencing;

- an invigilator - a specialist in monitoring the results of development in a digital educational environment, etc. [11, 15].

Indeed, comparative research on the international experience of teachers' professional development in adaptive physical education can be very valuable and in demand if it is considered from a critical perspective and in terms of potentially useful information for Russian system of education.

Conclusions. The analysis of documents defining national and global prospects for improving the process of professional development of teachers in Russia and Serbia made it possible to find and substantiate those general constants and basic characteristics that determine the professional development of teachers as scientific knowledge, as a process, and as a social value.

The comparative analysis found that it is advisable to include the following characteristics of the Serbian system of teachers' professional development in adaptive physical education into the Russian one:

- multi-model and multi-variability of the professional development system;

- diversification of formats, structures and programs of the CPD system; replacing the tradi-

tional model with non-linear (asynchronous) models;

- approval of paradigms of personality-oriented development and the use of modular competence technologies as a new organizational framework for the professional development of teachers;

- internationalization of the system of professional development of teachers;

- development of social partnership and dialogue between the subjects of the professional development of teachers, etc.

To a certain extent, these characteristics can be also attributed to the Russian systems of professional development, adding the following essential features:

- strengthening the professionalization of the process of professional development of teachers, namely: updating the need for quality control and professional certificates, their recognition; closer connection with research activities; the increasing need for educational programs for professional development in adaptive physical education, etc.;

- expanding sources for grants and scholarships to support the CPD of teachers in adaptive physical education;

- increased competition in the international and national markets of educational services to improve the professional skills of teachers, etc.

In conclusion, we point out that in the era of digitalization of education, the growing role of professional development of teachers is becoming global, where innovative experience, support for the interaction of successful pedagogical practices, dissemination of initiatives and innovations of teachers, and strengthening the personality-oriented orientation of professional development system are becoming in great demand.

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