

# The State of Professional Development Programme of Specialists in Correction and Development Training Centres regarding the Assessment of Quality Education among Pupils with Severe Multiple Disorders in the Republic of Belarus

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## **Abstract**

In 1999, the Republic of Belarus began to educate children with severe multiple disorders (SMD). For this purpose, new special educational institutions – correction and development training centres (CDTC) – were opened across the country. Curricula for preschoolers with SMD appeared only in 2011, and curricula approved by the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Belarus appeared in 2014. Before 2011, teachers were more engaged in the care and supervision of preschoolers with SMD than in the actual educational process. Currently, changes are taking place in preschool education. The education of children with SMD should be built on a competency basis where the formation of their life competencies should play the leading role. The need to assess the quality of such education has emerged, and, consequently, the issue of professional training of specialists of CDTC in this direction. The aim of the article is to determine the possibilities of the system of professional development of teachers of specialized institutions on the issues of quality assessment of education of pupils with severe multiple disorders at the present stage in the Republic of Belarus. The basic methods in the study of this problem were questioning and content analysis. The experimental base of the study is represented by 63 state educational institutions “Centre for Corrective and Developmental Education” (Brest, Vitebsk, Gomel, Grodno, Mogilev, Minsk regions and the city of Minsk, Republic of Belarus), as well as 8 institutions providing professional development of CDTC personnel (Brest, Vitebsk, Gomel, Grodno, Minsk regions, the city of Minsk, Republic of Belarus). The study involved 345 respondents: 334 teachers of CDTC and 11 employees of professional development institutions. The study was conducted in 2020. The article presents the author’s view on assessing the quality of education of preschool children with SMD, highlights the results of the empirical study, and substantiates the possibility of changing the training of teachers of CDTC in the context of professional development institutions. The obtained data allow us to see a holistic picture of the modern system of professional development for special teachers on the problems of assessing the quality of education of preschool children with SMD, which further allows to adjust the training programs of professional development in specialized institutions (Academy of Postgraduate Education, Institutes of Education Development), to include the most popular topics in their content.

**Keywords:** preschool children, assessment, quality of education, professional development, severe multiple disorders, advanced training, correction and development training centre.

## Состояние повышения квалификации специалистов Центров коррекционно-развивающего обучения и реабилитации в вопросах оценки качества образования воспитанников с тяжелыми множественными нарушениями в Республике Беларусь

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### **Аннотация**

В 1999 году в Республике Беларусь начали обучать детей с тяжелыми множественными нарушениями (ТМН), для этого были открыты специальные учреждения образования – Центры коррекционно-развивающего обучения и реабилитации (ЦКРОиР). До 2011 года педагоги этих учреждений занимались в основном присмотром и уходом за дошкольниками с ТМН, но в 2011 году появились учебные планы для дошкольников с ТМН, а в 2014 году – учебные программы, утвержденные Министерством образования Республики Беларусь. В настоящее время приходит понимание, что обучение воспитанников с ТМН должно быть выстроено на компетентностной основе, ведущим должно стать формирование их жизненных компетенций. Появилась потребность в оценке качества такого образования, в профессиональной подготовке специалистов ЦКРОиР по этому направлению. Цель исследования – характеристика системы повышения квалификации педагогов профильных учреждений с точки зрения оценки качества образования воспитанников с тяжелыми множественными нарушениями. Ведущими методами исследования стали анкетирование и контент-анализ (за единицу анализа текста принята тема, за единицу счета – число определенных словосочетаний). Экспериментальную базу исследования составляют 63 государственных образовательных учреждения «Центр коррекционно-развивающего обучения» Брестской, Витебской, Гомельской, Гродненской, Могилевской, Минской областей и г. Минска, а также 8 учреждений, обеспечивающих повышение квалификации сотрудников ЦКРОиР Брестской, Витебской, Гомельской, Гродненской, Минской областей и г. Минска. В исследовании приняли участие 345 респондентов: 334 педагога ЦКРОиР и 11 сотрудников учреждений повышения квалификации, курирующих данное направление. Изучение проводилось в 2020 году. В статье представлен авторский взгляд на оценку качества образования дошкольников с ТМН, приведены результаты эмпирического исследования, обоснованы возможные изменения подготовки педагогов ЦКРОиР в учреждениях повышения квалификации. Представленные в статье материалы позволяют увидеть целостную картину современной системы повышения квалификации специалистов по проблемам оценки качества образования воспитанников с ТМН, что в дальнейшем позволит скорректировать учебные программы повышения квалификации в профильных учреждениях (в Академии последипломного образования, Институтах развития образования), включить в их содержание наиболее востребованные темы.

**Ключевые слова:** дети дошкольного возраста, оценка качества образования, повышение квалификации, тяжелые множественные нарушения, центр коррекционно-развивающего обучения и реабилитации.

## Introduction

The statement “all children are teachable” began to be actively implemented in the Republic of Belarus at the end of the 20th century. In this connection, in 1999, a new type of educational institution, the correction and development training centre (CDTC), appeared. According to the order of the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Belarus No. 559 of August, 31, 1999 “On Approval of the Model Situation on the Centre for Corrective and Developmental Training and Rehabilitation”, this institution “provides for a comprehensive system of psychological, medical and pedagogical assistance to persons with special needs, the education of persons with severe and/or multiple physical and/or mental disorders, and carries out diagnostic, educational, corrective and developmental, social and psychological, methodological, advisory and information and analytical activities” (Ministry of Education of the Republic of Belarus, 1999). However, it was not until 2002-2003 that the first preschool groups began to appear at CDTC (Ministry of Education of the Republic of Belarus, 2011b). It took seven years before we began to manage the branch topic “Scientific rationale and development of the software of the educational process for preschool children in the context of correction and development training centre” by order of the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Belarus (state registration number 20111293). The result of the work of a temporary research team was the curriculum of the correction and development training centre for children with severe and/or multiple physical and/or mental disorders approved by Decree No. 242 of the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Belarus as of August 26, 2011 (Ministry of Education of the Republic of Belarus, 2011a) and curricula for preschool children with severe multiple disorders (SMD) (Ministry of Education of the Republic of Belarus, 2014). With the advent of these normative documents, the educational process in the preschool department of CDTC became more streamlined. However, numerous teachers still sought to provide care and supervision for children with multiple disorders, rather than their development and the formation of their life competencies.

The changes taking place in preschool education, the introduction of new approaches, forms and means of assistance to children with special educational needs, and the provision of educational services to a wide range of people with needs result in higher requirements for the professionalism of teachers working with such children, and, consequently, there is a need to assess the quality of such education. This, in turn, requires addressing the issues of professional training of specialists (teachers, special needs teachers of preschool groups of CDTC, teachers-psychologists and teachers of social CDTC). At the same time, we did not find any studies devoted to the problem of assessing the quality for children with SMD, or scientific papers describing professional development programs in the described direction.

Thus, the problem of the study was determined by the contradiction between the society’s demand for the inclusion of children with SMD in the educational process and the impossibility of assessing the effectiveness of such training and education. The novelty and undeveloped nature of the problem, as well as lack of professional competence of specialists working with preschool children with severe multiple disorders, constituted the problem under study.

## Purpose and objectives of the study

The study aims to determine the possibilities of the system of professional development of teachers of specialized institutions in terms of assessing the quality of education for pupils with severe multiple disorders at the present stage in the Republic of Belarus.

### Literature review

Raising the problem of professional training for specialists of correction and development training centres in the quality of preschool education for children with severe multiple disorders, it is necessary to consider the following:

– This type of educational institutions has existed since 1999, i.e. relatively recently, so there is no integral system for assessing the quality of education in the CDTC;

– The institution provides special education for individuals with SMD in accordance with their cognitive abilities. The education of such children is a complex and specific process, since they have disorders of the intellect, motor skills, behaviour, activity and the personality in general. This determines their special educational needs, hence the specific understanding of the quality of the educational process, the quality of the conditions created and the quality of the results obtained.

Currently, domestic and foreign scientists are addressing the problems of assessing preschool education quality (Bogoslavets & Mayer, 2009; Flisi, Goglio & Meroni, 2014; Sleptsova, 2018), monitoring education quality and care for children in early childhood (Litjens, 2013), evaluating and monitoring the effectiveness of preschool curriculum (Zill, 2007), validating children's in early childhood assessment systems (Goldstein & Flake, 2016). Nevertheless this all relates to preschool education of normally developing children. We have not found studies with dedication to the quality of education for preschoolers with severe multiple disorders.

In this paper we consider the quality of education of pupils with severe multiple disorders as an aggregate characteristic of the correctional and educational process and educational conditions that lead to an educational result reflecting the formation of life competencies that improve the quality of life within the possible limits for pupils with severe multiple disorders (Lemekh, 2020). By quality assessment of preschool education of children with severe multiple disorders we mean the determination by diagnostic and evaluation procedures of the degree of correspondence of the correctional and educational process and educational conditions to the educational result allowing to form the level of life competencies possible for preschoolers with SMD (Lemekh, 2020).

The readiness of teachers to ensure the quality of preschool education has recently become the subject of research (Nenartovich & Yatsenko, 2018). The authors point lack of gained knowledge in the university and state shortage of knowledge about the problem of the teacher's readiness to ensure the quality of preschool education, even for relatively normally developing pupils.

At the same time, a study of psychological and pedagogical literature suggests that there are no special studies devoted to the problem of professional development of teachers of correction and development training centres in terms of the quality assessment of education for preschool children with severe multiple disorders at the present stage in the Republic of Belarus.

### Methodology

In this study the following methods were used: theoretical methods, including the review of psychological and pedagogical literature (analysis; synthesis; generalization); empirical (questionnaire); content analysis; methods of mathematical statistics and graphical representation of results.

The theoretical and methodological basis of the study were modern approaches to the quality of education (Bogoslavets & Mayer, 2009; Bogoslavskaya, 2012; Lemekh, 2020; Rusetsky, 2018; Sleptsova, 2018; Yuganova, 2009); phenomenological and humanistic paradigm (Lisovskaya, 2016).

## Results

The questionnaires were developed in Google forms. The experimental base of the study was represented by 63 state educational institutions “Centre for Corrective and Developmental Education” (Brest, Vitebsk, Gomel, Grodno, Mogilev, Minsk regions and the city of Minsk, Republic of Belarus), as well as 8 institutions providing professional development of CDTC personnel (Brest, Vitebsk, Gomel, Grodno, Minsk regions, the city of Minsk, Republic of Belarus). The study involved 345 respondents: 334 teachers of CDTC and 11 employees of professional development institutions. Respondents included 232 (67.2%) teachers of correction and development training centres working with preschoolers with severe multiple disorders; 102 (29.6%) directors and deputy directors of CDTC; 11 (3.2%) employees of institutions providing professional development for CDTC teachers. The survey was conducted in 2020.

Respondents with different pedagogical experiences have participated in the survey. This enabled us to take into account the positions of both young specialists and professionals. The majority of respondents, both among teachers and administrators, have 10 to 20 years of experience. Most professionals working in the area of professional development have 5 to 10 years of experience (45.5%) and 1 to 5 years of experience (36.4%).

In order to identify the need to improve professional competencies on the studied topic, teachers were asked the question “Do you need professional development in terms of quality assessment of preschool education of children with severe multiple disorders?” 80% (275 respondents) answered positively. Among them, the number of teachers, directly working with children, in need of professional development was 82.8% (192 out of 232); the number of directors and deputy directors of CDTC was 70.6% (72 respondents out of 102); and the personnel of professional development institutions was 100%. The results are shown in Figure 1.

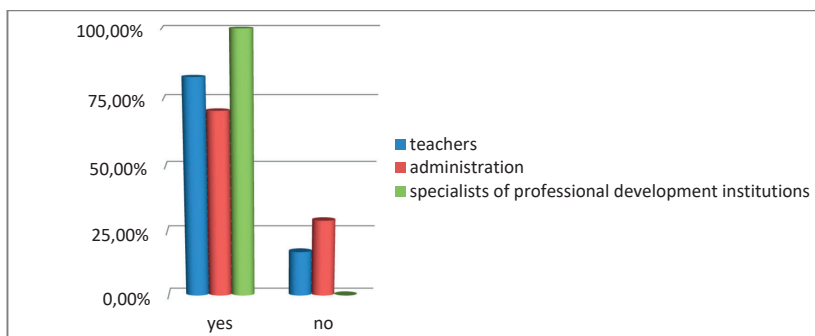


Figure 1. The need for professional development in quality assessment of preschool education for children with SMD among teachers, administrators, and specialists of professional development institutions

Out of those teachers of CDTC who need professional development (192 people) are teachers (32.8%) whose work experience ranges from 10 to 20 years. The smallest group of respondents includes teachers with less than 1 year of work experience and with more than 20 years of work experience (7.3% each). According to the analysis of the survey, teachers with more than 20 years of work experience feel more confident in assessing the quality of preschool education at CDTC environment. Teachers with less than 1 year of experience probably have not yet realized this problem. The concurrence of the opinions of administrators and teachers suggests that the issue of quality assessment

of preschool education at CDTC is vital. Today it is understood that preschool children with severe multiple disorders are not merely cared for and looked after, but that there is a full corrective and educational process, the quality of which can be determined.

Among those specialists who deny the need for professional development (out of 232, only 40 people (17.2%)) more than a half (28 respondents) has acknowledged the insufficiency of methodological materials. We assume that, since the methodological materials are available, it means that professional development in terms of assessing the quality of preschool education at CDTC is not relevant for these teachers. However, out of 39 teachers with all the methodological materials available, 29 (74.3%) still acknowledge the need for professional development. The proportion of specialists who do not need professional development and have all the necessary materials is only 4.3% (10 people). Among administrators who considered it necessary to improve their qualifications in assessing the quality of preschool education at CDTC, 50% (72 people) had 10 to 20 years of experience. The smallest group of respondents included administrators with less than 1 year and more than 20 years of experience (8.3% and 6.9%). We observed the same situation with the surveyed teachers. The deputy directors and directors of CDTC who have less than 1 year of experience still only understand their functions, while those who have worked for more than 20 years believe that they already have a good understanding of the raised issue. Specialists working in educational institutions that provide professional development recognize the lack of knowledge in the field under study. All respondents have the need to improve their competencies in this area regardless of education and length of service.

Both teachers from regional and district CDTCs took part in the survey. Employees of regional structures provide methodological and advisory assistance to teachers from district centres. Therefore, we were interested to see whether there was any difference in the answers about the need for professional development between the pedagogical personnel of regional and district CDTCs. No significant difference was revealed (81.6% and 90.3%): all participants need advanced training.

Pedagogical psychologists and social pedagogues provide psychological and pedagogical support, but there is an opinion that the direct implementation of the monitoring of children's progress is not their functional responsibility. Thus, probably one fifth (20% of educational psychologists and 23% of social teachers) of the specialists participating in the survey do not consider it necessary to improve their skills in this area (Fig. 2).

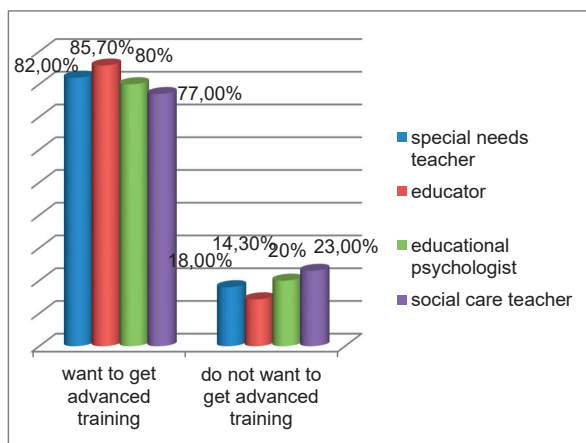


Figure 2. The need for professional development among the teachers of CDTC working directly with children with SMD

There is a need to create special tools for teachers, psychologists and teachers of social CDTC to assess the quality of education of children with SMD, because we can consider the quality of education in an educational institution only considering all of its components, including psychological correction work with the child and work with the family.

Figure 3 shows the need for professional development depending on the length of work experience. A curious correlation has been revealed: the more experience a teacher has, the greater the desire to learn about the system of quality assessment of preschool education for children with SMD.

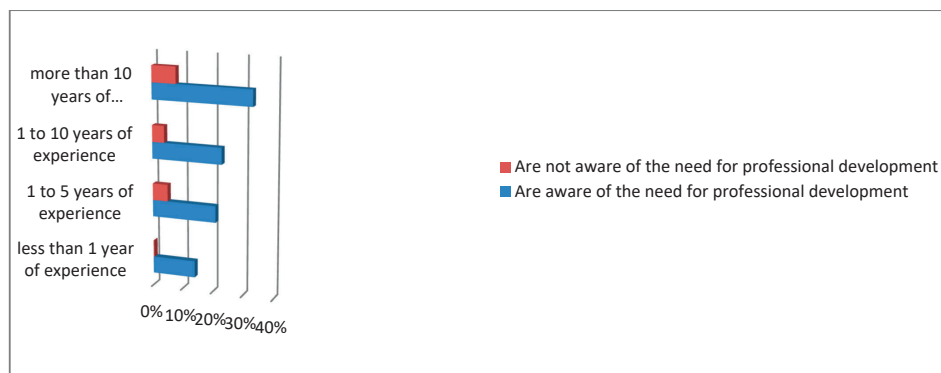


Figure 3. The need for professional development in quality assessment of preschool education for children with SMD, depending on the length of service of teachers at CDTC

It is quite common that children of different ages are in the preschool group at CDTC. This is primarily because there are not many preschoolers with severe multiple disorders in the administrative territory, but help is needed. For the analysis, we selected questionnaires only from teachers and special needs teachers of preschool groups. These were 174 respondents. The diagram shows the sectors and indicates the number of respondents. The percentage of the total number of respondents is given in brackets (Figure 4).

The bars indicate the percentage of the number of employees in a particular group who need professional development on quality assessment of preschool education at CDTC.

The vast majority of teachers work in multi-age groups (86%). And 60% work with three-year-old and elder children. The need for professional development was stated by 80% of the respondents in groups with two-year-old children, 86% working with three-year-old children, and 92% working with children over three years old in one group. It is evident that the need for professional development increases depending on the age composition of children in the groups.

The total number of respondents working in groups with children of the same age was 24 (14%). Five age groups were represented: second junior (3-4 years), first mid-age (4-5 years), second mid-age (5-6 years), first senior (6-7 years), and second senior (7-8 years). 13 people (7.5%) work in the second senior group. The remaining groups are represented sporadically. These respondents who need professional development make up 83%. We received 4 refusals to undergo training in the first senior group.

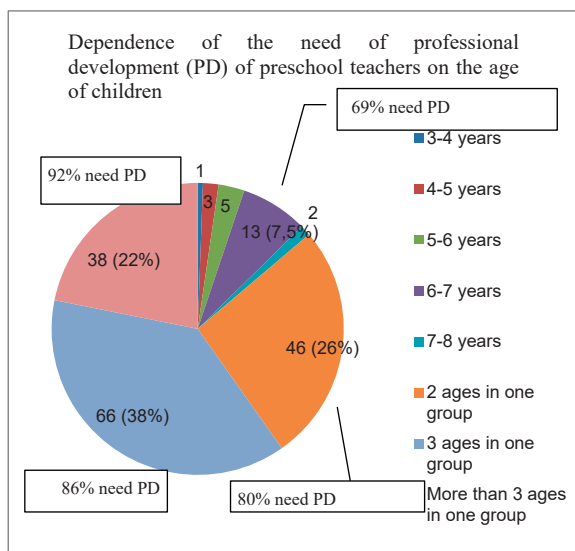


Figure 4. Dependence of teachers' responses on the need for professional development in assessing the quality of preschool education for children with SMD on the age of children

There is another aspect of the complexity of assessing the quality of education of children with SMD. It is the diagnosis of children. Multiple impairments indicate the presence of several disorders, one of which, profound, severe or moderate intellectual disability. Solely, this aspect implies knowledge of the specifics of working with children who have different degrees of intellectual disability, and, consequently, knowledge of the specifics of assessing the quality of education according to the degree of impairment.

The teachers participating in the survey were asked to evaluate the effectiveness of professional development courses by a five-point scale. The majority of teachers rated the effectiveness giving it "5" points (48.7%) and "4" points (36.6%). Only 12.1% evaluated the performance of the courses giving them "3" points. Only 6 people (2.6%) were not satisfied with the obtained knowledge. Almost all CDTC directors and their deputies believe that the system of professional development for teachers is effective.

It has been found that the correction and development training centres regularly hold events, at which teachers share their pedagogical experience in assessing the quality of education for children with SMD. They are highly rated: "5" points - 72%, "4" points - 26.7%, "3" points - 1.3%. The administrators of CDTC confirm that they hold various events designed for teachers to share their experience in assessing the quality of education for pupils with SMD.

The data analysis shows that 81.8% of the respondents complain that there are not enough resources to cover the need for professional development of teachers at CDTC. CDTC is a relatively new type of institution. It began functioning only at the very end of the 20th century. These institutions mainly work with children with SMD, who were previously considered as "unteachable". Because of this, there are few highly qualified specialists who work on this problem and can impart knowledge.

The following data was obtained on the questions related to professional development of CDTC employees on the quality assessment of education: 36.4% of respondents believe that the courses will improve the efficiency of work in preschool groups of CDTC; 18.2%



partially agreed with the statement; 9.1% gave a negative answer, stating the reason for the lack of training programs; 18.2% also gave a negative answer, stating the reason “lack of qualified teachers”; 18.2% simply referred to the Order of the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Belarus No. 850 “On professional development of educational institutions providing advanced training and re-training of personnel” as of July 22, 2009 (Ministry of Education of the Republic of Belarus, 2009), according to which they do not have the right to carry out professional development for CDTC employees.

According to the majority of respondents, the frequency of methodological seminars, forums and round tables on the studied issue is insufficient: only 9.1% believe that such events are held often (more than 5 times a year); 27.3% - regularly (1-2 times a year); 63% of respondents believe that such events are held rarely, not every year.

We assumed that the questionnaire would highlight the problem of teachers' difficulties in their professional activities related to assessing the quality of preschool education for children with SMD. Therefore, we were interested to find out if there were any specialists from correction and development training centres who were willing to share their experience in this area. Teachers and administrators were asked the question: “Would you like to share your own experience in assessing the quality of preschool education for children with SMD?”. In 92.2% cases, the answer was negative. Only 7.8% of teachers were willing to share their vision of quality assessment of preschool education.

## Discussions

To assess the quality of preschool education at CDTC, it is necessary to have trained personnel who know the methods, techniques, and tools used to assess the quality of preschool education for children with SMD.

There is a well-founded need for professional development among teachers working in the preschool department of CDTC. We can observe a correlation: the more a teacher comes into contact with a child, the greater the desire to improve their qualifications, and, consequently, to improve the quality of preschool education, to see the results of their work. Probably, it is caused by the fact that teachers, carrying out the educational process with such a difficult category of children, often start to “burn out” quickly. Much effort is made, but there is no result, or it appears after a rather long period of time. The system of quality assessment of preschool education should answer the question “How do I see the results of my work?” and maintain its pedagogical integrity and value.

Teachers at CDTC work with groups of different ages, where children have different disorders. In such groups, the pedagogical staff must have knowledge not only of developmental disorders and their combinations, but also of the age specifics of child growth. This circumstance, in our opinion, explains the need for a large percentage of teachers, special needs teachers to improve their skills in assessing the quality of education for children at CDTC.

Specialists at institutions involved in teacher professional development acknowledge the insufficiency of resources to meet the need for professional development for teachers of CDTC.

The studied issues are raised in the context of the educational institution. Certain experience has been accumulated, and this experience needs to be carefully analysed, systematized and generalized. The pedagogical personnel of CDTC have a positive attitude towards institutions of professional development at the regional and national levels, which may organize not only courses, but also round tables, workshops, and pedagogical seminars. However, the institutions responsible for the professional development of pedagogical personnel at CDTC assert that such activities are carried out rarely; the structural units do not have enough resources for such work, including problems with

highly qualified staff and training programmes. In addition, the order of the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Belarus No. 850 as of July 22, 2009 “On professional development of teachers in educational institutions, providing professional development and retraining”, according to which regional institutions of education development cannot provide professional development of teachers, is an obstacle to the organization of aforementioned activities. In our opinion, this hinders the systematization, generalization and transfer of best practices.

## Conclusion

The obtained data indicate that assessing the quality of preschool education for children with severe multiple disorders is of broad professional interest to the teaching community, and the topic is socially important.

At the same time, on the one hand, the study leads to the conclusion that there is an effective traditional system of professional development in the Republic of Belarus, on the other hand, that this system currently does not allow pedagogical personnel to comprehensively assess the quality process of preschool education at CDTC. Teachers working directly with children, administrators of CDTC, as well as specialists of institutions involved in the professional development, are not confident in their knowledge of assessing the quality of education for CDTC children. This is a proof that the issue is new and not sufficiently studied, and the desire of teachers to be trained shows its promise and relevance.

The study results can be used to develop the content, curricula for advanced training courses intended for employees of correction and development training centres on the assessment of preschool education quality.

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