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Inclusive Education in Ukraine: Current Status and Problems in Development

Edukacja inkluzyjna na Ukrainie: stan obecny oraz problemy rozwoju

KEYWORDS

inclusion,
integration,
education, school

ABSTRACT

An important issue of modern Ukrainian pedagogical science is the education of children with special educational needs in a comprehensive school. The main slogan of such a school is the accessibility and equality of educational opportunities. The goal is to provide a good education. The insertion of students with special educational needs in the classes and school community requires that the administration and teachers create an appropriate educational environment. They have to create the conditions for the full integration of such students. Referring to the research of Ukrainian scientific literature, the article reveals the concept of integration and inclusion as modern forms of teaching children with special educational needs. The article raises the following issues: the changes in the school system, the ways inclusive education is implemented in Ukraine, and the problems that Ukrainian schools face.

SŁOWA KLUCZE ABSTRAKT

inkluzja, integracja,
włączenie, edukacja,
szkoła

Ważnym problemem współczesnej ukraińskiej nauki jest nauczanie dzieci ze specjalnymi potrzebami edukacyjnymi w szkole ogólnodostępnej. Głównym mottem szkoły jest dostępność i równość szans edukacyjnych w celu uzyskania dobrego wykształcenia dla wszystkich dzieci. Włączenie uczniów ze specjalnymi potrzebami edukacyjnymi do zespołu klasy oraz wspólnoty szkoły wymaga od dyrekcji i nauczycieli stworzenia odpowiedniego środowiska edukacyjno-wychowawczego oraz organizacji niezbędnych warunków do integracji uczniów ze specjalnymi potrzebami edukacyjnymi.

Na podstawie literatury ukraińskiej w artykule zostały zdefiniowane pojęcia „integracji” i „inkluzji” jako współczesne formy nauczania dzieci ze specjalnymi potrzebami edukacyjnymi. W artykule zostały opisane także zmiany, jakie dokonują się obecnie w szkolnym systemie, naświetlony stan obecny wdrażania edukacji inkluzyjnej na Ukrainie oraz problemy, z którymi borykają się szkoły.

If we understand inclusion as transformation, we must completely change our attitude to the diversity of the human community included in the educational system. This diversity must not be seen as a source of a problem, but rather as a reality that should be welcomed and appreciated in society. Thanks to this view, we can reject the deep-seated approach to the norm as something homogeneous and permanent. Diversity is the norm. (But 2003: 42)

Introduction

The place and role of students with special educational needs (SEN) has been improving around the world. In our time, there are practically no children with-out dysfunctions: they are hyperactive, cannot focus, or are socially withdrawn; they cannot cope with memorizing content or even adding numbers. The “social model” is becoming more and more common, according to which the environment adapts to the needs of people with SEN and society develops special integration programs which are responsive to the interests of all citizens, including those with special educational needs.

Recently, the topic of students with SEN has particularly attracted the attention of Ukrainian scholars (Astoyants 2020; Banch 2008; But 2003; Ekzhanowa 2008; Erwin, Kufelmas 2000; Gewko 2018; Groznaya 2006; Kolupaeva 2009, 2012; Konopleva 2003, 2005; Migalush 2009; Nazarowa 2008; Shipitsyna 2001; Sofiy 2000; Taranchenko, Nayda 2007; Wlasowa 1972; Zaytsev 2004; Zwerewa 2012; Zhuk 2010).

The package of documents in the Law of the Supreme Council of Ukraine on Education (1991)—the Concept of Special Education for Children with Psycho-physical Development Disorders (1996), the Concept of Rehabilitation of Children with Reduced Mobility (1998), and the Regulation of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine of September 11, 2009 on Approval of the Plan to Implement Inclusive Education in Mainstream Schools for 2009–2012—guarantees students with SEN access to secondary education near their place of residence, provision and organization of psychological and pedagogical help, respect for their needs and abilities, and conditions necessary to realize their creative potential and develop their skills (Kolupaeva 2012: 148).

The Law On Inclusive Education (2017) and the regulation of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine on Modern Approaches to the Educational Process of Students with Special Educational Needs (2017) established that the fundamental right of all students is the right to free education in all types of schools.

For this purpose, students can follow an individual education program or use distance learning; they also have the right to psychological, pedagogical, corrective, and rehabilitation assistance (Zakon 2019).

In the opinion of Olena Kryzhaniwska, there is no clear definition of the concept of “children with special educational needs” in Ukraine. For a long time it had been associated with the term “invalid.” Ukrainian laws use the terms “children who need rehabilitation or psychological assistance,” “children with physical or intellectual developmental disorders, who cannot fulfill their potential in society and learn in mainstream schools on general terms” or “disabled children” (Kryzhaniwska 2012: 87). It is worth noting that the term “invalid” is not currently very widely used due to its derogatory, offensive connotations. In the literature on the subject, it has been replaced by the term “children with special needs.” The Ukrainian researcher argues that “although the equals sign between the concepts of ‘disabled’ and ‘special needs’ is gradually disappearing, this is debatable, because being an invalid means being a person with a disability” (Kryzhaniwska 2012: 87).

The concept of children with special needs is general in nature, as it specifies children whose needs go beyond the limits of accepted norms in society. As this term has entered the common discourse, the terms “children with developmental disorders” and “children with abnormalities” have fallen from public acceptance. The prominent Russian psychologist and educator Lev Vygotskiy elucidates why it is logical to use the concept of children with special needs: “Everyone understands that a child with a disability is first a child, and only then is a particular child, a person with a disability” (Vygotskiy 1983: 256).

The latest term, “children with special educational needs,” is gaining currency in all countries as citizens are realizing the importance of the rights of children with

psychophysical and intellectual developmental disorders. The term is used in a broad social and scientific context. The definition of children with special educational needs shifts the emphasis from disorders and deviations from the norm, to the needs of children. The terms “children with special educational needs” and “children with special needs” are often used in Ukrainian literature to describe only children with limited abilities or developmental disorders, because they identify themselves as children with special needs (Polowyk 2010: 99). According to the Law on Education, a child with special educational needs is a person who needs constant help or temporary support in order to receive an education (Law of Ukraine, the “Pro oswitu” Act 2017).

In Ukraine, inclusive education is a pedagogical innovation that has been in place for several years now, and yet it still encounters quite a few challenges; for example, some schools are not able to meet the needs of pupils with SEN. These obstacles are architectural barriers: a lack of necessary funding for schools, inadequate curricula, a lack of parking spaces for transporting children in wheelchairs, the reluctance of teachers to work with such children, and the negative attitudes of parents of healthy children. All of this makes the process of introducing inclusive education in Ukrainian schools much more difficult.

The purpose of the question posed in this article is to draw attention to the changes that are currently taking place in Ukraine’s school system. In particular, I would like to discuss the state of instituting inclusive education and the problems that Ukrainian schools confront today.

The Genesis of Inclusion in Ukraine

For many years, the ideology of the USSR era had affected the formation of public opinion, stressing the primacy of collective interests over the interests of the individual. The states which were committed to building communism were set as role models. Children—the future of the nation—were to be healthy and happy. “The exception to the rule were sick children from dysfunctional families and families of alcoholics. These children were punished for the sins of their parents and the state has nothing to do with it”—this is exactly the explanation that Soviet ideologists produced when talking about people with disabilities. Ideology became ingrained in the minds of citizens and shaped public opinion, thus “solving” all problems of people with disabilities. The term “person with special needs” was not used in society; the term “invalid” was in common usage. Most people with disabilities were educated in closed schools, and some of them were outright denied the right to an education. As a consequence, all of the responsibility for the psychological, mental, emotional, and physical

development of children rested on the parents. The only place where a person with a disability had been taught for many decades was inside four walls.

There were nine types of special schools in the USSR. In these schools, students obtained an incomplete secondary education (they finished school after 9 years), at a different pace and time, and were prepared to do simple work in agriculture or industry (Wlasowa 1972: 3–5). As adults, most graduates of special schools had a sense of injustice because of their maladjustment and societal undervaluation. After the transition from a state that demeaned people “who are useless to society” to a state of segregation and integration, the idea of inclusive education, whose aim is to make education accessible to all without exception, is gradually being introduced in most Ukrainian schools. By creating an inclusive environment at school, we offer a chance for children with SEN not only to obtain an education, but also to feel like full-fledged citizens of their country, with equal rights and obligations regardless of their abilities. Between 1991 and 2016, many significant changes took place in the education of children with SEN. They can be divided into three eras:

- 1991–2000 began with the ratification of international documents on acceptance of and respect for human rights, as well as the legal recognition of the right to provide education to all citizens, in particular to people with SEN in mainstream schools.
- 2001–2010 was characterized by a lack of systemic integration of children with SEN into mainstream schools.
- The period from 2011 to the present has seen the optimization of special schools and the implementation of inclusive policies. One significant achievement has been the introduction of inclusive education: an educational system that provides educational services to children with SEN in mainstream schools near their place of residence (Kolupaeva 2009: 78).

Inclusive education in Ukrainian schools was introduced experimentally as the first alternative for people with disabilities in special education. This took place during the program of the charity foundation “Step by Step” of the International Fund “Renaissance” (1999). The objective of this program was to include children with SEN in mainstream schools (“Krok za krokom” 1999). Several projects were implemented under the program, such as “Enforcement of Human Rights Through Equal Access to Education,” “Let’s Change the World for Children with SEN – Steps to Partnership,” “Development of Inclusive Education Centers for Children with SEN,” and “Establishing Support Centers for Parents of Children with SEN.” This program was put into effect in 20 pilot educational institutions. In 40 classroom groups, 178 children with special educational needs were examined. Since 2001, the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, together with the Institute of Special Education of the National Academy of Pedagogical Sciences of Ukraine and the support of the

“Step by Step” Foundation, developed a program of inclusive education as part of the pedagogical experiment “Adaptation and Social Integration of Children with Special Educational Needs in Mainstream Schools” (“Krok za krokom” 1999).

Inclusive education is an ongoing process geared towards educating children, especially those who are at risk of being excluded. Thus, the following question arises: How can all children, without exceptions, be given a high level of education? Scholars are convinced that teaching students with SEN should follow the same rules as teaching healthy students. The goal is to have children with SEN fully participate not in segregated classes, but in a regular classes, where they would spend most of their time and take part in all events. This means that it is not the student who must adapt to the rules of mainstream schools, but the school and the teaching staff that must remove the barriers that impede the health and mental and social functioning of a student with special needs. Therefore, schools, classrooms, teachers, students, and parents—the whole system—should be overhauled to meet the needs of all students. There are many good practices in many successfully operating inclusive schools in Ukraine. However, so far there has been no single algorithm of how a school can become an inclusive school in the full sense of the word, and how to involve all children in this process.

Inclusion or Forced Integration?

The integration of students with SEN in a mainstream school is already a fact. The main aim of integration is to create a welcoming environment for the children’s development and creative self-realization. The term “integration” comes from the Latin word *integrare*, which means to merge. In Europe, the concept of “integration” was first used in the 1960s in the process of including people with disabilities in society (Nazarowa 2008: 215). The very concept of “integration” in special education has been around for a long time. The Scandinavian countries which introduced the concept of “normalization” played a key role in instituting integration in education. According to this concept, people with disabilities should have normal living conditions in accordance with international regulations (Kolupaeva 2009: 35).

In the scientific literature, the term “integration” in a broad sense should be understood as providing people with SEN an opportunity to participate in all facets of social life on an equal footing with other members of society (Zhuk 2010: 17–18). Integration is one method for shaping and developing an active individual and for social rehabilitation. It extends social and educational partnerships between special and mainstream schools and reduces the distance between students with disabilities and non-disabled people through learning together (Konopleva, Leshchinskaya 2003: 32).

Scholars distinguish between *educational* and *social* integration. According to Larisa Shipitsyna, *educational integration* provides children with special educational needs with the opportunity to study in regular classes in a mainstream school. In turn, the goal of *social integration* is to adapt children with SEN to the educational setting (Shipitsyna 2001: 75). According to Anna Konopleva, social integration is aimed at establishing spontaneous communications and relationships. During school activities, children learn to initiate relationships with their peers and communicate effectively and learn about the norms and rules of the group. People with disabilities need to interact with other people in order to learn to live in society and increase their self-confidence and self-esteem. On the other hand, non-disabled people, when mixed in a group with people with disabilities, learn tolerance and become more sensitive and caring (Konopleva 2005: 74).

Dmitriy Zaytsev defines social integration as a process as well as a system of including an individual in various social groups in order to organize joint activities (education or work) (Zaytsev 2004: 115). Nikolai Malofeev understands social integration as the ultimate goal of special education, the task of which is to integrate the individual into society (Malofeev 2017). The main tasks of social integration are:

- to make it possible to receive a secondary education in a mainstream school in conjunction with correction and rehabilitation classes;
- to comprehensively develop the child's personality, matched to their predispositions and abilities;
- to develop the interests and needs of students;
- to encourage children to work together; and
- to shape the norms of behavior in the community.

Later, the concept of "integration" was supplemented with the concept of "inclusion," which more aptly reflected the view on education and the place of the human being in society (Migalush 2009).

Many Ukrainian scholars believe that the terms "integration" and "inclusion" are interrelated. According to Marina Astoyants, the difference between social integration and social inclusion is that integration is a state that occurs in relation to the individual, while inclusion is a process that takes place in society. Hence, in this sense, integration may be the result of inclusion and not the other way around (Astoyants 2009).

Tatyana But regards educational integration and inclusion as two phases of the same process: a disabled person's presence in a group of non-disabled people, followed by their preparation for living in a society that is changing and adapting to the needs of people with disabilities. In But's opinion, integration and inclusion use the identical terminology of "access" and "participation." In the processes of integration as well as inclusion, this system must be flexible enough to satisfy the needs of people, including those with disabilities (But 2003: 36–38).

Anna Konopleva and Tatyana Leszhinskaya claim that the concept of “integration in education” boils down to students with SEN learning in a mainstream school. Proponents of this method believe that the students must be prepared for integrated teaching at school, demonstrating a mastery of knowledge and skills set out in the curriculum (Konopleva, Leshchinskaya 2003: 85). In this sense, integration is regarded as an assimilation process that requires the individual to adopt the specific laws and norms that govern the culture of a society. This means that people with SEN should be prepared to join social structures and carry out various types of activities, while the society should provide them with appropriate living conditions in line with generally accepted norms (Groznyaya 2006: 89–90).

On the other hand, inclusion demands a restructuring of the educational system because it is not only an education reform: it is based on a new model and philosophy of social justice which says that which all people have the right to fully participate in all spheres of social life” (Banch 2008: 13).

Elena Ekzhanova lists the following types of integration:

- full integration – joint teaching of children with SEN in mainstream schools (2–3 students per classroom) and non-disabled students close to their place of residence;
- combined integration – children with a similar level of intellectual and physical development (1–3 people in each classroom) learning together with non-disabled students and receiving help from supporting teachers during their education;
- partial integration – children with SEN (1–3 people in each classroom) who are unable to master the same level of education as their peers participating in classes for several hours; and
- temporary integration – children with disabilities temporarily joining a group of non-disabled students 2–4 times a month.

There is also *reverse* integration, when healthy students visit special schools and *spontaneous* integration, when children with special educational needs attend mainstream schools without receiving special support and care (Ekzhanova 2008: 27–28).

When it comes to educating children with SEN, the basic principles of education must be re-examined. Including children with SEN in schools provides for specialist assistance in correction and rehabilitation, as well as psychological support. The aim of these activities is to control the child’s development and the effectiveness of the teaching efforts and to help them adapt to the community at large (Gewko 2019: 53).

Organization of the Activities of Inclusive Schools in Ukraine

Inclusive education excludes any form of discrimination, recognizes the equality of all individuals, and ensures comfortable conditions for students with special educational needs. In inclusive classes, children with SEN are integrated into the entire educational process. They master the rules of group and team life; they model new forms of behavior, interaction, and cooperation; learn they to show initiative, make conscious choices, reach compromises while solving problems, and make independent decisions. The main goal of education is for the disabled child to develop in their immediate social group and to participate in playing and learning with their peers.

According to statistical data, in 2018 there were 7.6 million children in Ukraine; this figure includes 37,700 children who attended special schools in the 2018–19 school year, 15,800 children who attended sanatorium-type schools, and only 11,800 children who benefited from inclusive education in mainstream schools (Poroshenko 2019: 10). Table 1 shows the functions of inclusive education.

Table 1. Functions of Inclusive Education (Poroshenko 2019: 13)

Contents	Characteristics
Legal	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Recognition of the right of children with SEN to receive an education close to their residence 2. Prevention and fight against exclusion in education 3. Exposing and removing factors that stand in the way of the children's right to education
Social	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Teaching children with SEN values and social roles, as well as the values promoted by the school 2. Shaping students' personality on the basis of knowledge, habits, and the cultural heritage of the society 3. Including children with SEN in the activities of the class, school, and state
Educational	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Promoting a positive and tolerant attitude in society towards people with SEN 2. Developing in children with SEN a feeling of self-respect and dignity, providing them with the assurance that they are full members of society
Didactic	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Teaching children the necessary knowledge, skills, and habits to help them reach their potential and successfully integrate into society
Economic	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Preparing people with SEN to work, develop, and use their potential on the job market

Children with special educational needs can attend one of the following types of school:

- a special school – an open-access special school for children who need to correct their physical or intellectual development;
- a sanatorium-type school – an open-profile school for children who need treatment;
- an educational and rehabilitation center – an open-access school for children with significant developmental disorders; or
- an inclusive school (Poroshenko 2019: 57–58).

An inclusive school is a school where barriers preventing the full participation in the educational process of students with SEN have been identified and actions have been taken to remove these barriers. The school adapts the curricula, methods, and forms of teaching, involves parents in cooperation, partners with specialists, and creates a positive atmosphere in the school setting. Adapting educational requirements presupposes that the learning process is organized in such a way that a child can succeed. The main principles of inclusive school are as follows:

- all children should learn together, bearing in mind certain difficulties or differences between them;
- schools should recognize and meet the needs of students by matching the style and pace of teaching;
- the appropriate level of education should be ensured by developing appropriate plans and curricula, using various forms and methods of working with students, and teaching strategies; and
- students with SEN should receive any help they require in order for the education process to work at maximum effectiveness (Taranchenko 2007: 35).

Diagnoses and assessments of an SEN child are issued by the specialists of the Inclusion and Information Centers at the parents' request. In 2019, the website of the Inclusion and Information Center (<https://ircenter.gov.ua/>) was created on the website of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine. Parents can use the help of specialists and receive the necessary consultation. The Center can offer the following assistance:

- a comprehensive assessment to identify and meet the individual development and educational needs of students with SEN;
- curriculum recommendations;
- help for students with SEN;
- consultation and collaboration with employees of kindergartens and public schools for implementing inclusive education; and
- psychological help for parents.

It is the parents who decide on the type of school their child will attend. Knowing the child's strengths and weaknesses and their coping strategies should be a very important factor. Any child who enters a school building should be covered by activities to support their development.

Teachers play an important role in carrying out inclusion policies. They are required to learn new ways of organizing the educational process and the modern methods of diversified teaching—which take into consideration the different needs of the students—and they should team up with other teachers, as well as parents, to identify the need for changes in their classrooms. The research by Natalia Groznaya shows that teachers do not immediately join this process. They very often experience fear and anxiety: they are afraid that they will not be able to cope with the students' problems or that they will lose their job, and they are afraid of responsibility. They are constantly asking themselves whether they will be able to do it. The anxiety and self-doubt also stem from the fact that a teacher is unable to control what goes on in the classroom, that they will be forced to ask for help from students, parents, or the school psychologist, thus inadvertently admitting that they do not have all the answers (Groznaya 2006: 103). This is because the teacher is obliged to adjust the educational requirements to the individual developmental and educational needs and psychophysical abilities of the student. Therefore, every teacher who works in an inclusive class should remember to follow certain rules:

- regularly make students aware of the learning objectives;
- adequately motivate them to achieve positive results;
- adjust the teaching material, teaching methods, and teaching aids to the level of development and psychophysical abilities of the students;
- combine theoretical and practical knowledge;
- guide the educational process in accordance with the individual aptitudes of each student, cooperate and interact with all students, and use an individual approach to the student in a teamwork setting;
- gradually direct students towards independent action and thinking; and
- cooperate with parents and colleagues.

In addition, the teacher should constantly update their knowledge, improve their qualifications, and keep up with the progress of science and technology. All forms of personalization of work at school should be based on recognizing and using the child's potential. If the teacher allows the child to achieve success to the best of their ability, then the child has a chance for general and educational development.

Conclusion

Inclusive education is currently an opportunity for modern education. Today, the content, forms, and methods of teaching are supposed to correspond to the child's development stage. This means that each topic and each method should not so much encourage acquisition of knowledge and improve the students' skills and habits, but

support the right of disabled people to fully participate in all spheres of life. Successful implementation of the inclusive education model depends on an effective partnership between teachers, the relevant specialists, parents, and students.

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