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INCLUSION IN UKRAINE: FIRST IMPLEMENTATION EXPERIENCE IN EXPERT'S ASSESSMENTS

The article considers the situation of inclusive education implementation in general secondary education institutions of Ukraine, which should provide quality education to all applicants. Providing quality and accessible education, including secondary education, realises every individual's right full, economically independent life through obtaining an education, and the profession later on. This will allow one to become a complete actor in all social processes; it will help overcome social exclusion. The author specifies the definition of exclusion and outlines social groups of excluded, which are represented not only by people with health problems but also by those who find themselves in difficult life circumstances, such as migration, resettlement, and being in a new socio-cultural environment, etc. Special attention is paid to the social group of talented children who require particular professional sensitivity. Paper emphasises the peculiarities of the organisation of education of children with disabilities according to the traditional system, which was inherited from the Soviet Union, and forms the idea of changing approaches to the special children's educational process. The situation regarding the real state of implementing inclusive technology, which was massively initiated in educational institutions of general secondary education, is outlined. The results of expert interviews are analysed, which allows the author to determine the achievements in implementing the concept of inclusion in the educational process; the first challenges faced by direct participants in the inclusive educational process, the main risks and expectations of managers in education. Recommendations for optimising the educational process based on the inclusion are offered.

Keywords: inclusion, exclusion, social groups of the "excluded", inclusive education, advantages and disadvantages of inclusion technology, first risks and expectations of implementation.

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ІНКЛЮЗИЯ В УКРАЇНІ: ПЕРШИЙ ДОСВІД ВПРОВАДЖЕННЯ В ОЦІНКАХ ЕКСПЕРТІВ

Розглянуто ситуацію впровадження інклюзивного навчання в закладах загальної середньої освіти України, що має забезпечити якісну освіту всім здобувачам. Надання якісної та доступної освіти, зокрема середньої, реалізує право кожної особистості на економічно незалежне життя через отримання освіти, а в подальшому – професії, що дозволить стати повноцінним актором всіх соціальних процесів, допоможе подолати ситуацію соціального виключення. Уточнено дефініцію ексклюзії, окреслено соціальні групи "виключених", які представлені не тільки особами, які мають проблеми зі здоров'ям, але й таких, які опинились у складних життєвих ситуаціях (міграція, переселення, перебування в новому соціокультурному

середовищі тощо). Особливу увагу приділено соціальній групі обдарованих дітей, які потребують професійної чутливості. Акцентовано увагу на особливостях організації навчання дітей з інвалідністю за традиційною системою, яка перейшла у спадок від Радянського Союзу, сформовано уяву щодо зміни підходів в організації освітнього процесу "особливих" дітей. Окреслено ситуацію щодо реального стану впровадження інклюзивної технології, що була масово започаткована в освітніх закладах загальної середньої освіти. Проаналізовано результати експертних інтерв'ю, що дало змогу визначити досягнення у реалізації концепції інклюзії в освітньому процесі, перші проблемні питання, з якими стикаються безпосередні учасники інклюзивного освітнього процесу, основні ризики й очікування управлінців у сфері освіти. Запропоновано рекомендації щодо оптимізації освітнього процесу на засадах інклюзії.

Ключові слова: *інклюзія, ексклюзія, соціальні групи "виключених", інклюзивне навчання, переваги та недоліки технології інклюзії, перші ризики й очікування впровадження.*

Any state that declares a course for implementing democratic governance principles is obliged to ensure equal access to all benefits, including quality education, for all its citizens. In this context, the concept of inclusion becomes relevant, meaning the full inclusion in social processes of representatives of all social groups and directly persons in the social exclusion). By exclusion, we mean a social situation characterised by the disruption of social ties, all forms of communication, which leads to the performance of atypical social roles.

According to the mentioned features, the social groups of "excluded" include persons with disabilities, people with mental disorders, representatives of cultural and religious minorities, gifted people, persons with social adaptation disorders. The range of these groups, depending on the social situation, may vary. Thus, only in the last five years, social groups of internally displaced persons and the "victims of war", in particular children, have been logically added to these groups. European experts emphasise that the aggravation of the socio-political situation in the world increases the number of people who find themselves in an "exclusion" situation, including refugees and migrants.

However, the attention of our state attracted children with disabilities, according to the Law of Ukraine "On Education" and the Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine "On Approval of the Procedure for Organising Inclusive Education in Secondary Educational Institutions"¹.

To understand the problem, it is necessary to clearly understand the essence of inclusion, its tasks and the conditions under which it can be implemented.

"Inclusion" is a term of English origin, which means involvement. In our opinion, inclusive education enables all students, including those with functional disabilities, to fully participate in life, be included in groups – kindergarten, school, out-of-school educational institutions, structures of higher education institutions of all levels. The mentioned system of education and upbringing considers the needs of "special" children, and it adapts to each specific participant of the educational process, but not the child / young person adapts to the

¹ The Law of Ukraine "On Education" from 05.09.2017. No. 2145-VIII. URL: <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2145-19>; Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine "On Approval of the Procedure for Organising Inclusive Education in Secondary Educational Institutions" from 15.08.2022 No. 872. URL: <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/872-2011-%D0%BF#Text>

system. The task of the educational institution team that implements the technology of inclusion is to assist a child with specific health disabilities to realise their needs through a specially built system of education.

Inclusion has two planes of implementation. The first one – a child with functional disabilities has full opportunities to meet their educational needs by adopting individual characteristics, taking them into account when building professional interaction. This will make it possible to realise these special needs of a child with a disability.

The second plane is inclusive education aimed at typical children. After all, being in a shared educational field, students form an idea of the complexity of the life plot of "special" children, which develops their tolerance, compassion, responsibility, forms the skills of mutual assistance and subsidiarity.

Modern society should focus on personality development when a human personality is seen as the most significant value, and inclusion is the improvement in the person's life quality with functional health limitations. There can be no discomfort in this process for typical children and their families.

International experience shows that inclusive education is a long-term strategy that requires consistency, system, continuity, structure, exact algorithm and teamwork of professionals. The purpose of the educational institution is to remove barriers to education and training of citizens. Inclusive education covers all areas of education, creates optimal conditions for the development, education and training of all categories of children. Inclusion provides the right and opportunity to participate in all spheres of public life.

The **purpose** of the article is to investigate the experience of mass introduction of inclusive education technology in general secondary education institutions of Ukraine in the assessments of heads of educational institutions of different levels, who implement inclusion according to current legislation.

The world scientific community has actively studied the problems of inclusive education. Theoretical and practical research conducted by experts from the United States, Scandinavia and the United Kingdom can be divided into three groups. The first concerns the training of specialists, in particular, teachers (A. Boer, A. Minnaert, S.J. Pale, B. Chagran, M. Schmidt, J.-R. Kim, T. Brandon, J. Charlton), the second was aimed at the study of the interaction of children with functional disabilities with typical peers (R. Pearl, F. Rodkin, J. Thompson, T. Farmer, P. Fedora, van R. Ecker, B. Kagan, M. Schmidt), the third group represents the direction of the education process organisation in inclusive classes (V.Yu. Diker) [1–5].

The problem under study is interdisciplinary. It covers such areas of scientific analysis as social policy, social protection system, social work, psychology, pedagogy, special one, etc.

In sociological science, a current has been formed, which defines the problem of disabilities as the object of sociological analysis (I. Hoffman, M. Priestley, S. Hall) [6]. Disability as a sociological category, a special social status of people with disabilities is in the focus of scientists T. Dobrovolska and N. Shabalina [7].

In-depth research by O. Yarska-Smirnova allowed structuring the socio-cultural theory of atypicality, which from the standpoint of phenomenology explains the perception of disability and the phenomenon of social exclusion [8; 9].

The problem of inequality (methods of overcoming it) is generally sociological and is the subject of analysis in the works of M. Weber, E. Giddens, E. Durkheim, T. Parsons [10–13].

Sociological theories presented in E. Erickson, G. Spencer, J. Habermas' works are focused on understanding disability as a specific social status of individuals [14; 15]. C. Cooley and J. Mead analysed persistent stereotypes of individuals' behaviour and society's attitude [16; 17]. D. Mitchell's works generalise effective technologies of education organisation in the system of special and inclusive education [18]. Belarusian colleagues' work, whose experience in development and implementations of the inclusive education concept is recognised as the best in the post-Soviet space. Research of Belarusian scientists related to the development of inclusive processes can be divided into two main areas: 1) the organisation of education and the educational process in the context of inclusion; 2) training of teachers to work in an inclusive environment.

V. Khytryuk developed the concept of forming inclusive readiness of future teachers in higher education conditions [19]. The issue of organisation of the educational process based on the inclusion in general secondary education institutions is considered in the works of T. Varenova, Y. Zagumyorny [20; 21]. T. Lisovska's publications are devoted to the competence approach in inclusive education [22]. Pedagogical readiness of teachers for professional activity in the conditions of inclusion is presented in research of Yu. Zagumyorny, A. Smancer, V. Khitryuk [23].

Ukrainian researchers are actively studying the resource of inclusive education to ensure every child's right to quality education. Summarising world leaders' experience, mainly through cooperation in international projects (for example, the TEMPUS program), a significant amount of both scientific and methodological materials has been developed, which allows to effectively prepare and increase the level of competence of inclusive education specialists (O. Martynchuk, Iu. Naida and others) [24].

An essential contribution to the organisation of inclusive education in higher education institutions was the collective monograph "Theoretical and methodological principles and technologies of inclusion in the higher educational institutions. The experience of the University "Ukraine"". The authors deeply reflected on their many years in higher education institution of inclusive type [25].

In July 2019, the textbook "Inclusive Education" was published, which reveals the conceptual foundations of inclusive education, presents an analysis of international and national legislation, reveals successful foreign experience practices, and identifies management aspects of the organisation that implements inclusion. Particular attention is paid to the characteristics of the child with functional disabilities and the process of socialisation. It is important to understand the child's professional support, the procedure for assessing its learning outcomes [26].

The philosophy of inclusive education is based on equal rights to education and dignified life for all children, regardless of their physical, mental, ethnic, linguistic and

intellectual characteristics. The main provisions of inclusion are set out in documents such as the Convention against Discrimination in Education, the World Declaration on Education for All and the Framework For Action: Meeting Basic Learning Needs, the Salamanca Statement on Principles, Policy and Practice in Special Needs Education, etc.

According to the UN and UNESCO Guidelines On Inclusion in Education Policy, the inclusiveness of education takes into account the needs and demands of a wide range of social groups; poor and vulnerable groups, including working children, people living in remote rural areas and nomads, ethnic and linguistic minorities, children, young people and adults affected by conflict, people affected by the HIV epidemic or in poor health, and people with disabilities or people with special educational needs [27].

According to the official data of the State Statistics Service of Ukraine, as of January 1, 2019, the number of persons with disabilities amounted to 2659,7 thousand or 6,3% of the total population; since the beginning of 2015, the number of people with disabilities has increased by 91,2 thousand people, including children – by 10,5 thousand people [28] (Table 1).

Table 1

**Dynamics of the total number of people with disabilities in Ukraine
as of the beginning of 2001–2019, thousand people**

	2001	2006	2011	2015	2017	2018	2019
Total	2597,5	2495,2	2710,0	2568,5	2603,3	2635,6	2659,7
I group	337,7	337,7	310,5	251,8	240,6	235,4	226,3
II group	1337,0	1128,4	1078,7	915,9	900,5	899,2	896,1
III group	768,5	906,5	1155,7	1249,7	1306,2	1341,9	1375,7
Children with disabilities	154,3	122,6	165,1	151,1	156,1	159,0	161,6

Source: data of the State Statistics Service of Ukraine. URL: www.ukrstat.gov.ua; <https://niss.gov.ua/sites/default/files/2019-12/analit-yakushenko-social-policy-9-2019.pdf>

Persons with disabilities, especially children, need to improve public policy in addressing family socialisation, creating conditions for self-realisation and integration into society.

The state's amount of financial aid is minimal and does not allow a person with functional disabilities to live a full life due to poverty, isolation, and limited resources to change life strategy.

In this context, we consider education a powerful mechanism for implementing change, achieving economic independence of this social group by acquiring an appropriate level of quality education, including higher education. Education as an independent holistic system with an institutional character is one of the factors that determine the progress of culture, provides heredity and reproduction of social experience, enables "public relations to transmit and accumulate social experience aimed at forming stability and certainty in the individual" [13, p. 117–166].

However, the organisation of education for people with disabilities requires a special approach to innovative technologies in the educational process.

The Soviet education system formed a strong network of special educational institutions: from closed boarding schools for children with profound lesions, a complex course of certain nosologies to special schools, where depending on the disease (e.g. poor eyesight and poor hearing) the educational process was organised. All special educational institutions had the appropriate material base, methodical materials, unique methods and highly qualified personnel. However, the children were separated from their families, held in a closed boarding school, mostly located in another city, which disrupted family socialisation. The situation of exclusion was aggravated by being among children who had the same disease, which contributed to the formation of the child's idea that the world consists of blind people (visually impaired) or deaf (with degrading hearing). Lack of full-fledged communication with healthy (typical) peers formed a distorted picture of the world. Therefore, realistically assessing the advantages and disadvantages of special education, it is necessary to understand that social experience, opportunities for full integration into the world of healthy (typical) should be relevant in modern educational practices.

The concept of inclusive education would solve the problem of ensuring equal access to quality education. After all, inclusive education involves the organisation of the educational process in which all students, regardless of their physical, mental, intellectual, cultural, ethnic, linguistic and other characteristics, are included in the general education system and study with peers who do not have deep health problems in mass educational institutions, where their special educational needs and requests are taken into account, and special professional support is provided.

However, the current situation in Ukraine with inclusive education causes some tension in the professional environment. The mass introduction of inclusive education to the general secondary education system is a highly humane and timely. In recent years, the processes of democratisation, humanisation of Ukrainian education and its approximation to world standards have intensified. However, inclusion is a delicate matter and requires thorough preparation at the start. The first results of this activity show that the process is based on enthusiasts, but for any case, it is crucial to building a particular algorithm – what, how, for what purpose and in what sequence you need to act to achieve the expected result, and in our case the goal is the success. There is a substitution of concepts – integration and inclusion. Integration is the process of adopting a child to new social conditions, including a new educational environment, and inclusion is a technology of barrier-free access, modern information technology, the use of unique methods in the educational process, introduced by teachers who are adequately trained to work in inclusive classrooms. The real situation of the introduction of inclusion shows a disappointing picture. School leaders and local education officials report on inclusion, but none of these conditions are in place. The result of the work lies with the teachers, the state of psychological discomfort and professional burnout deepens, the dissatisfaction of parents of both healthy and "special" children grows. Incompetence in terms of inclusive strategies, organisation of the educational environment, teamwork, additional educational services, and supporting documentation shakes the technology and does not give the desired result.

Therefore, inclusive education as a progressive pedagogical technology, which is legally supported at the mass start, is our study's object. Having the opportunity to participate in the International Austrian-Ukrainian project "Leadership and Management Competencies for Effective Quality Development in Supporting Schools", which provides training for heads of basic secondary education institutions, including inclusive, we conducted a qualitative sociological study to determine the situation in general secondary education institutions of Ukraine, which implement the concept of inclusion (the method of focused group interview was used; a series of discussions was organised within the project).

Project participants were selected according to specific criteria: high performance in the management of the educational institution, successful implementation of innovations, the experience of project activities; effective teamwork. Such participants were gathered to discuss the management of educational institutions, which implemented inclusion. Representatives of 11 Ukrainian regions participated in the study.

Respondents were principals of inclusive secondary education institutions (8 people), heads of education departments of united territorial communities (12 people), heads of regional and city education departments (6 people), principals of schools implementing the concept of inclusive education in the region for the first time (20 people). A total of 46 respondents took part in the discussion. The status of respondents allows us to consider this an expert survey.

Focus group interviews took place from October 10 to December 19, 2019. The participants were asked four blocks of questions, the answers to which were to outline the advantages and disadvantages of inclusive education and identify risks and expectations from introducing this technology in secondary education.

When asked to analyse the experience of implementing inclusion and determine the *benefits* of this component, the experts noted the following (*first block*):

1. *Conditions for full socialisation of the child.* Emphasis is placed on the vast opportunities to form a new social experience of being in a group of typical children.

2. *Teaching of typical (healthy) children tolerance, the ability to perceive "special" peers,* the formation of necessary communication practices, building a modern model of interaction of typical and "special" students in solving everyday problems, in particular in working on a team project, where typical children tasks, enjoy the success of "special" children who worked with them in a team.

3. *Opportunities for the formation of an individual approach,* individual rehabilitation program for "special" children in general secondary education. It is the work of the teacher in an inclusive classroom together with the assistant that allows forming individual study routes that will ensure the implementation of the program and enhance the quality of educational services.

4. *Formation of "self-belief", "belief that life ahead is interesting and successful".* This position, in our opinion, is crucial because it forms the emotional resource that will allow a person with functional disabilities to overcome life difficulties in the future, strive for full self-realisation, economic independence through vocational or higher education, employment and more.

Among other advantages, from the standpoint of analysing the first experience of inclusive education in the country, experts note *access to education for all categories of children, respond to the challenges of time, expand communication, state attention, and change the behaviour of "special" children.*

Analysing the first experience of mass implementation of inclusion in Ukraine, the experts were tasked to outline the *shortcomings* in an educational institution's educational process based on inclusion (*second block*).

Almost unanimously, the discussion participants noted the *lack of specialists* ("trained personnel") to work with this technology. Teachers are agitated due to their methodological and psychological unwillingness to work in inclusive classrooms.

The Republic of Belarus' experience was engaging, demonstrating the successful practices of implementing the Concept of Inclusion in mainstream schools, where it is mandatory to obtain a second higher education in "Special Pedagogy" for teachers and assistants working in inclusive classrooms.

During the discussion of teachers' professional readiness for the new working conditions, both principals and heads of departments emphasised the "haste" of the implementation and realisation of the idea without proper professional training of all subjects of the educational process.

As the second component that causes tension in the educational process organisation, half of the experts called the *unpreparedness of the material base*, unsuitability of premises, workplaces, lack of equipment and more.

Also, experts point to the *lack of funding*, which does not allow the necessary adjustments to ensure the operation of lifts, elevators, special toilets, the formation of the necessary training places for students with visual, hearing and mobility difficulties, creating a barrier-free environment.

One-third of respondents insist on the need to *include in the staffing of educational institutions positions of rehabilitation specialists, psychologists, exercise therapy coaches.*

The question of the analysis of legislative acts that regulate inclusive education in general secondary education institutions provoked a rather lively discussion. The experts outlined a number of questions that they could not find answers to and considered being a threat to the further implementation of inclusion. Thus, the participants of the study are concerned about the following questions: *1. Children with what nosologies and in what forms of manifestation can study in inclusive classes? 2. How to assess the achievements of children with profound developmental disabilities?*

Today, general secondary and preschool education includes children with profound mental disorders, whose presence in the classroom creates significant discomfort, especially in aggression and emotional breakdowns. This situation *exacerbates teachers' psychological unwillingness to work in inclusive classrooms and the biased attitude of parents of typical children to co-learning.* According to experts, the presence of children with profound developmental disorders and severe forms of various nosologies "unbalance the learning process". Therefore, it is important to adjust the laws and regulations governing the organisation of inclusive education in educational institutions at all levels, which provide that children with different nosologies, but with preserved intelligence or a mild form of

developmental disorders can study together. It is necessary for children with significant mental disorders to ensure full expanded socialisation, using the resource of extracurricular education, where the child can have an individual route of development without mandatory criteria for assessing educational outcomes, which is mandatory in educational institutions.

In discussing this issue, experts returned to closing (reducing) special educational institutions for children who need systematic work of correctional teachers using appropriate techniques, necessary equipment, and professional support, depending on the child's needs and illness. At the same time, general secondary education institutions should consider the close connection of "special" children and offer joint projects to ensure expanded socialisation, full communication of typical and "special" children. The presented problem turned out to be the most acute during the discussion, where all participants stressed that without the appropriate response of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine at the regional and local levels, this situation does not seem possible to solve.

The organisation of inclusive education is a painstaking and systematic matter; it requires enormous organisational, professional, emotional costs. Therefore, it is natural that most experts express fears that "through political games" inclusion will be "*cancelled*" or "*curtailed*". This question remained open, but emotional tension was followed during the discussion.

Less than half of the respondents stressed that the social situation around inclusion indicates the unpreparedness of society and the professional community, typical children and their parents to implement the idea of inclusive education, overcoming the consequences of social exclusion. This process requires training, work to break down negative stereotypes, foster tolerance and social empathy. In this process, inclusive education is the beginning of the path to building a society based on democracy, where the rights and interests of every child (person) are at the centre of the state's attention.

Discussion of the pros and cons of the first experience of inclusive education in general secondary education was active, showed a high level of interest in the results of work, which indicates the responsibility, indifference of professionals at all levels, ensuring the right of "special" children to quality education.

The *third block* of focus interview questions centred on the *risks* of the learning technology. Participants were asked to analyse their first reactions. Risks and threats included: *the imperfection of the work organisation system and lack of trained specialists* capable of working in an inclusive environment.

These two crucial positions, if not adjusted promptly, can lead to "*deformation*", "*profanation*" of the idea, form "*scepticism about the effectiveness of inclusive education*", build "*barriers of misunderstanding*" between parents of typical and "*special*" children, increase tensions in pedagogical collectives", will form fear of problems, "*will strengthen latent conflicts*".

Among the risks, experts named "*turbulence in public education policy*", "*reducing the relevance of this form of education*".

A sensitive point in the discussion was *professional burnout (teachers and assistants)* working in inclusive classrooms. Wages do not correspond, first of all, to the emotional load of employees. It is not clear how the working day of a teacher's assistant (5 hours or more) is

determined if a child with functional disabilities remains in the extended day group. How to organise "recovery" of teachers, if their presence with a "special" child should be constant, every minute.

Thus, the questions discussed were specific, painful, and the answers to which are quite challenging to find even in a collective discussion.

The **fourth block** of questions was to reveal the range of *expectations* as the first reactions to inclusive education.

The reaction to the *social effect of this technology* was unanimous – "formation of social tolerance", "special" child has the opportunity for full socialisation", "self-realisation of such children", "positive perception of "another" child".

This expert position testifies to the participants' professional and managerial readiness in the discussion to implement the concept of inclusion.

However, the issues that are closely related to ensuring the quality of educational services remain unresolved:

- *state support for retraining* (obtaining a second higher education) of teachers working in inclusive classes;
- *change of staffing schedule* with the introduction of units of speech therapists, rehabilitation specialists, specialists in exercise therapy, correctional teachers;
- *professionalisation of inclusive resource centres (IRC)*;
- *increase in funding for the development of the material base of inclusive educational institutions.*

The discussion on optimising the system of inclusive education in general secondary education institutions ended somewhat unexpectedly. Experts raised the issue of organising gifted children's education, who also need inclusion as a special, extremely valuable and influential social group. However, this is the subject of a separate study.

Among the study's limitations are incomplete geographical coverage, lack of research contact with the heads of institutions with a low level of readiness and motivation to implement inclusion in their educational institution. The problems of burnout and the professional community's unwillingness to accept inclusive education in general also require independent research.

Conclusions. Summarising the results of focus group interviews, we can conclude that:

1. Inclusive learning as innovative technology is progressive and provides equal access to quality education for all categories, including children with disabilities.
2. Successful implementation of the concept will allow forming a tolerant, with a high level of empathy society in which everyone will have opportunities for full socialisation and self-realisation.

However, all these prospects are impossible without adjusting the legislation governing the organisation of inclusive education; training of relevant pedagogical staff; formation of a team of professional support, which should be strengthened by specific specialists (rehabilitation specialists, speech therapists, etc.); breaking negative stereotypes both in the professional environment and in parent communities.

Systematic and consistent state policy will ensure the success of the case, allowing to complete the experimental search for innovative teachers and move to the formation

(through successful practices) of traditions of domestic inclusive education that will better combine the experience of Ukraine Europe.

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