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IMPLEMENTING INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN UKRAINE: PROBLEMS AND PERSPECTIVES

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Abstract. The article defines the essence of inclusive education and characterizes students with special needs. The status and problems of implementing inclusive education in Ukraine are analyzed. The basic ethical principles of educational activities for pupils with special educational needs are defined. The authors set emphasis on the following issues: adaptation of the physical environment for the proper functioning of persons with disabilities; overcoming stereotypes of teaching professionals concerning psychological acceptance of inclusion; financing institutions with planned implementation of inclusive education; developing special educational programs for schools with inclusive education and training of qualified professionals to work in inclusive educational environment.

Keywords: integration, inclusive education, children with special educational needs, inclusive educational and developmental environment, adaptation and socialization.

1. INTRODUCTION

Being in the process of integration into the European educational space Ukraine is undergoing significant changes in its social policy to create the necessary conditions for persons with special educational needs. Out of 129 thousand children with special educational needs who are integrated into comprehensive schools, children with disabilities constitute 45 percent (2010) [5]. According to statistical data as of 01.01.2015 there were already 151.1 thousand children with disabilities [6, p. 66]. However, experts claim that the number of children with physical and (or) mental disabilities is much higher. Therefore, society must form a new cultural and educational paradigm that is based on respect for children with physical or intellectual disabilities. The issue of their education is very important. A model of inclusive education is gaining wide recognition that provides for reciprocal training and education of children with special educational needs in mainstream education together with their peers.

The Concept of Inclusive Education Development (2010) marked the beginning of significant changes in Ukraine at the legislative level that defined the basic principles of its development:

- scientific quality (defining theoretical and methodological foundations of inclusive education, program and method tools, analyzing and monitoring results of its implementation and evaluating effectiveness of technologies to achieve positive results, conducting independent evaluation);

- consistency (ensuring equal access to quality education for children with special educational needs, the continuity between levels of education: early care – pre-school education – secondary education, etc.);

- variability, correctional orientation (organizing an individually oriented educational process together with correction and development to meet social and educational needs of children with psychophysical disabilities, including children with permanent disabilities);

- personalization (making an individually oriented, person-centered, differentiated approach);

- social responsibility of the family (upbringing, educating and child development, creating appropriate conditions for the development of natural abilities, participation in an educational and rehabilitation process);

- interagency integration and social partnership (coordinated activities of various departments, social institutions and services to optimize the process of educational integration of children with special educational needs) [5].

The main idea of the Concept is humanization and liberalization of the process in terms of continuing education (pre-school, secondary school, higher education, postgraduate studies, etc.). This is not surprising, as today's school leavers from specialized boarding schools or those who study at home, have serious socialization and adaptation problems. They often have difficulty in receiving higher or vocational education, employment, socializing.

Strategy objectives for implementing inclusive education in Ukraine are also stated in the following regulatory and legal documents: Order of Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine "On Creating Conditions for Ensuring Right to Education of Persons with Disabilities" (2005), Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine "Procedure of implementing Inclusive Education in Comprehensive Schools" (2011), National Strategy for Development of Education in Ukraine up to 2021 (2013) and others. All governmental measures are aimed at integrating people with special needs into society, i.e.: education, employment, leisure and more. However, most of these documents currently remain unimplemented in practice. Many problems arise in education when it comes to the transition from medical to social model of working with children with disabilities. Therefore, in this article we consider problems of implementation of inclusive education in modern educational institutions of Ukraine.

2. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The integration of persons with disabilities in a community for studying, education, employment, leisure and so on is the main purpose of implementing inclusive education. Rights of children with disabilities to being integrated into society are basic principle of international standards that ensures their access to quality education.

Inclusive education provides for social integration, thus some individuals and groups are combined into a single integrity (system). The leading model of modern social and community activity for people with disabilities, including disabled children is defined as inclusion. It is based on recognition and respect for individual human differences and provides for preserving a relative autonomy of every social and community group, whereas ideas and modes of behavior, characteristic of a traditionally dominant group should be modified basing on pluralism of customs and opinions [4, p. 10].

The inclusive approach in education involves the creation of conditions to meet the specific peculiar needs of each individual in society. It is important that these peculiar features are not seen "as something exceptional, doomed" because the existence of various disabilities must not result in marginalizing human lives. At the core of the inclusive model of social behavior there is an autonomous participation in social activities, building a system of social contacts, acceptance of an individual by society.

2.1. ESSENCE OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

There is a growing tendency in society for elimination of the terms “invalid”, “handicapped” “disabled” and the use of such definitions as “students with special needs”, “children who have physical or mental impairment”, “students with disabilities” and so on. These terms are not currently made official by law, but they are widely used in current regulations on education.

Traditionally experts define groups of people with disabilities by age, origin of disability, type of illness and restrictions, also those with internal diseases or neuro-psychiatric diseases. This approach to understanding the problem of disability characterizes peculiarities in the minds and behavior of these categories of people, giving grounds for the development of strategies to give them appropriate social assistance. Socio-psychological or pedagogical support should aim, above all, at making it possible for people with disabilities to reduce (or eliminate) certain differences by a particular impact on the physical, psychological, educational, social and cultural integration processes.

Current international trends of social policy and reforms in education suggest the term “a person with disabilities” being the most appropriate because the main focus is on a person, not on his/her abilities.

Social activists among people with various mental and physical impairments made the public, scientists, experts, government officials seek to find the most effective forms and methods of facilitating issues of people with mental and physical disabilities, building a fundamentally different, new, scientifically proved models of disability. This highlighted the problem of standardizing approaches to disability, producing personality oriented concepts that would more fully reflect the rights and interests of both an individual and the public interest in general.

A significant number of students is different from the average, thus, they are characterized as having special needs from the pedagogical, social, psychological or medical perspective. The most common and acceptable definition of “special educational needs” is given in International Standard Classification of Education: “special educational needs have persons who are in need of additional resources and support. Additional resources may be: personnel and organization (to aid the learning process); materials (a variety of learning tools, including support and correction); financial (budget allocations for obtaining additional special services)” [4, p. 12].

Let us consider the essence of the concept of “students with special needs” (Fig. 1).

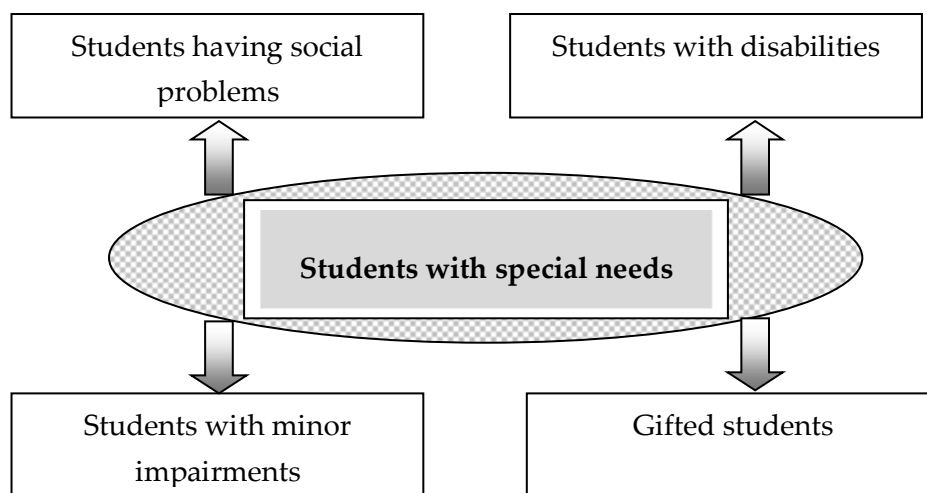


Fig. 1. Categories of students with special needs.

Usually this category of people include those whose needs are conditioned by certain physical or mental impairment or learning difficulties: students with developmental delays, students with mental impairments, with impairments of hearing, vision, speech, hyperactive, children with autism and others. Students with mental and physical impairments are usually those with physical (or) mental disorders that affect their overall development and prevent from gaining socio-cultural experience unless special conditions are created.

At the same time, students with special needs are not only those who have different psychological and physical deviations in their development. Gifted children are also included in this group. They may have problems with establishing social contact and interaction in society. For example, gifted, talented persons are characterized by high development capabilities, they have great intellectual potential and can achieve significant results in one or more activities that are valuable to society. Hence gifted children need a special attention from teachers and parents because they possess peculiarities in thinking and learning, activity, motivation and so on.

2.2. IMPLEMENTATION OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: UKRAINE'S STEPS

The analysis of world experience of the implementation of inclusive education proves that the state has a leading role. It is therefore important that the policy towards persons with disabilities is based on the principles of equality and observance of human rights.

Stressing on the importance of the government's role in the development of inclusive education in Ukraine, O. Zaiarniuk notes that the most significant obstacles are on the macro level. The main obstacles are "loopholes in legislation concerning children with disabilities; its inconsistency with international standards; lack of legislation on special education where the legal grounds of the institute of inclusive education, principles and mechanism for the creation of economic conditions for the realization of inclusive approaches to education of people with special needs will be clearly defined" [2, p. 191].

Consequently on the meso level the main obstacles in the implementation of inclusive education are: cultural stereotypes about people with disabilities; unwillingness of the existing education system to meet individual needs of each child; the absence of specific standards of education and variable teaching programs for people with special educational needs; the lack of legitimate opportunities for students with special needs to study according to an individual plan that allows adaptation of a standard educational program to the special educational needs of a student and implementation of a personality oriented approach; lack of programs in support of persons with disabilities enrolled in standard educational institution [Ibid].

At the same time, there are obstacles on the micro level in introducing inclusion in Ukraine. They are related to the activity of specific organizations and experts in this field. Inclusive education faces an extremely acute problem of *teachers' psychological acceptance of the possibility of reciprocal education of persons with disabilities together with their "healthy" peers*. Their professional stereotypes are mostly conservative on the organization of educational process. Obviously, society and those who educate should be ready to change their stereotypes and fully accept people with disabilities in a social life.

Inclusive education involves teaching children (in kindergarten, school or vocational school) in the local community. A person is in society, learning to establish contacts and communicate with others. Of course, it is extremely important to form tolerance and respect towards children with special needs, to show humanity, compassion, kindness and desire to help. Such relationships form the ability to perceive, understand and be tolerant to human differences in each individual.

Thus, the basic *ethical principles of educational activities* with this category of students are: compassion, positive attitude to every individual; provision of opportunities in different areas of life; freedom of choosing various kinds of social and educational assistance.

At the same time the country has *difficulty adapting physical environment to the needs of persons with disabilities*. The entire infrastructure requires adaptation: public transport, facilitated wheelchair ramps, entries and exits in buildings, schools and other institutions. For example, in Ukraine only 27.4% of higher education and 8.4% of vocational education are equipped with ramps for wheelchair access. [2, p. 192]. *Funding education establishments to make them suitable to implement inclusive education and provide special support training equipment* is another problem.

The creation of special teaching programs for schools with inclusive education needs special attention. Effectiveness and efficiency of the educational process for children with special needs requires an extra (and sometimes special) support in learning that will help them to participate in the classroom and realize their potential to the fullest. To meet the diverse educational needs of students, teachers need to

adapt teaching methods, school environment, materials and so on. However, depending on the health and learning abilities of children with mental and physical impairments in special classes recommended teaching curricula and textbooks for comprehensive schools are used.

An important aspect of the implementation of inclusion is a *problem of parents' biased attitude towards institutions of correctional education*: it is either negative or lacking understanding of its necessity. Sometimes parents being ashamed of diagnosis of their child, against the advice of health professionals, send him/her to a standard comprehensive educational institution. In school where there are no conditions to teach a child with impaired mental and physical development, he/she suffers even more stress, there may develop aversion to any activity and fear of teachers and peers. The entire psychophysical development of children is impeded and the existing deviation is not corrected. Unfortunately, families in which such children are raised, often ignore recommendations of experts about institution suitable for their children.

Some parents being aware of global trends, insist on the right of the child to be in an ordinary comprehensive schools on par with their peers. Often these parents do not want to admit physical or mental impairments of their child in order to avoid being considered "special". However, they do not always understand the essence of inclusive education. Real integration and inclusion provides for mandatory psychological and pedagogical support of a student by experts (an assistant teacher, a correctional educator, a practical psychologist, a social worker, a speech therapist, a doctor). The absence of their assistance to a student with special needs in a mainstream education institution results in formality and negatively affects socialization. Moreover, a student with disabilities may be harmed in a mainstream education establishment because his/her psychophysical development is only complicated without appropriate correctional help.

Designing appropriate social and educational environment is the organizational and methodological basis for effective implementation of inclusive education in comprehensive school.

Let us determine the following components that form this environment [1, p. 73-74]:

- *socio-psychological* (taking into account individual psychological development and behavior specific to a person in the process of social interaction, promoting ethical and moral standards in socialization and communication, adequate attitude to positive or negative traits in the behavior of others, pedagogical aiming at correcting deviations, forming habits of tolerant interaction between a child with special needs and classmates, etc.);

- *informational* (availability of up-to-date regulatory and educational support of the inclusive process);

- *cultural and educational* (pedagogical competence of participants of the educational process in inclusive school that encompasses content, forms, methods, tools, innovative technologies, etc.);

- *logistical* (availability of modern multimedia, audio and video facilities, adaptation of school's physical environment, taking into account elements of aesthetics in the interior of school, etc.).

Thus, difficulties in modeling socio-educational environment in inclusive classrooms are also caused by an increasing number of students from particularly vulnerable groups: *economically vulnerable* (low-income families, unemployed, families with many children, etc.); *socially vulnerable* (children from disadvantaged families delinquent children, unmotivated, aggressive or pessimistic students); *academically or intellectually vulnerable* (students with delayed mental or cognitive development, those having difficulties in establishment of social contacts). These students often have problems adapting to the school environment, they are more prone to manifestation of misconduct, social aggression, cruelty or apathy.

Those who have witnessed military operations in eastern Ukraine are included to a risk group today. Adults and children were traumatized as a result (physically, psychologically or socially). Among them are those remaining in occupied territories, refugees and migrants from a zone of military conflict or those whose parents fought or died there. These students suffer from acute sense of fear, helplessness, depression, and display stress behavior in society. Besides, due to migration processes the problem of adapting *children from displaced families* to school life in other regions of the country has been aggravated, particularly in inclusive classrooms.

Integrated classes can help a child with special educational needs to achieve high rates of individual personal development, to recognize the value of this development for a child, its functional significance in the process of integration in the social environment. On the other hand, this environment will help create opportunities for healthy children to value their natural potential, to discover alternative ways for personal achievements in mastering basic competencies and experience of socio-cultural behavior.

Another important issue is an insufficient number of specially trained teachers to work in conditions of inclusive education in Ukraine. It prevents persons with disabilities to realize their constitutional right to education. Thus arises *the problem of training qualified professionals ready to work in an inclusive educational and developing environment*, especially in higher education.

The training aims at: forming in students an integral view of the nature and main objectives of inclusive education; developing skills to implement individual approach in training and education of children with special needs; supplying future teachers with methods of interpersonal interaction with parents of children with special needs, generating skills of differentiated teaching and evaluation in conditions of inclusive education.

The content of training future teachers to work in inclusive classrooms involves mastering a number of *skills*: to develop individual training plans and programs for children with special educational needs paying attention to the individual characteristics of development; to use effective social and educational strategies of interaction and cooperation with various professionals and parents of students with special needs; to apply adaptive teaching methods and standardized testing in an inclusive process; to establish pedagogical cooperation with parents of students who need inclusive education; to prevent unfair treatment and prejudice towards children with special needs from their peers and educators, to generate moral and psychological comfort in a class on the principles of humanity, compassion and cooperation.

3. CONCLUSIONS

Education in inclusive classrooms helps children with special needs adapt to typical life situations, get rid of feelings of isolation and alienation, overcome social barriers and integrate into the society. It teaches students communication and team work, creates a sense of responsibility for students who need assistance and above all acceptance. Thus, in the pedagogical process we seek to humanize the relationship between a teacher and students, including those with special features, so it is worth overcoming social stereotypes and working to improve teacher's professional culture. Let us remember about pedagogy of good (I. Zyazyun), concept of humanocentrism (V. Kremen), child-centered pedagogy (A. Kvas), teaching ethics (G. Vasyanovych) and other conceptual trends in modern science and practice.

Effective implementation of inclusive education in Ukraine is possible with the combination of certain factors: sufficient schools funding, improvement of regulatory and legal base, developing teaching and methods base of inclusive education, training teachers for realizing inclusive education in their teaching practice. Particularly important today is the formation of positive public opinion on tolerance towards people with special needs, the implementation of advocacy among parents about the nature and content of inclusive education. It is reasonable to involve mass-media and volunteer organizations that facilitate a successful integration and education of persons with disabilities in educational institutions of different types: kindergartens, comprehensive schools, vocational schools, higher educational institutions, postgraduate education establishments.

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У статті обґрунтовано сутність інклюзивної освіти, здійснено характеристику учнів з особливостями психофізичного розвитку. Висвітлено стан та проблеми впровадження інклюзивної освіти в Україні. Визначено базові етичні принципи педагогічної діяльності з учнями з особливими освітніми потребами. Автори наголошують на таких проблемах: адаптації фізичного середовища для нормального функціонування осіб з інвалідністю; подолання професійних стереотипів психологічного прийняття викладачами навчальних закладів можливостей інклюзії; фінансуванні навчальних закладів, де планується впровадження інклюзивного навчання; створенні спеціальних програм навчання для шкіл з інклюзивним навчанням, а також підготовки кваліфікованих фахівців до роботи в інклюзивному навчально-розвивальному середовищі.

Ключові слова: інтеграція, інклюзивна освіта, діти з особливими освітніми потребами, інклюзивне навчально-розвивальне середовище, адаптація та соціалізація.