

## Backgrounds and Prospects of Implementation of Inclusive Education in Ukraine

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Being on the path of celebrating values of democracy and entering Europe's educational space, Ukraine has undergone significant changes in its social policy to create equal opportunities for students with SEN. Still there is much to accomplish. Before the war with the Russian Federation the statistical data showed the growth in the number of children with disabilities from 151,100 in 2015 to 163,900 in 2021 (Social security of population of Ukraine, 2015, p. 66; State Statistics Service of Ukraine, 2022). Ukraine's law does not define students with dyslexia and ADHD as having disabilities that adds approximately 151 thousand (Tichá et al., 2020).

Out of 129 thousand children with SEN who studied in mainstream schools, students with disabilities constituted 45 percent (Concept of development of inclusive education, 2010). However, experts claim that the number of children with physical and (or) intellectual disabilities is much higher. It is time society formed a new cultural and educational paradigm based on equality for children with disabilities. A model of inclusive education is gaining wide recognition that provides for reciprocal instruction and education of children with SEN together with their peers. The Concept of development of inclusive education marked the beginning of significant changes in Ukraine at the legislative level that defined the basic principles of its development:

- research-based approach (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 SEN;
- continuity between age levels of education: early care – pre-school – elementary – secondary – higher education;
- accessibility and supported study (organizing an individually oriented educational process together with special services to meet social and educational needs of students with disabilities);

- individualization (a person-centered and differentiated approach);
- social responsibility of a family (upbringing, educating and instructing a child, creating appropriate conditions for development of natural abilities, participation in an educational and rehabilitation process); and
- multidisciplinary support and social partnership: coordinated activities of various departments, social structures and services to optimize the process of educational integration of children with SEN (Concept of development of inclusive education, 2010).

The main idea of the Concept is humanization and liberalization of continuing education (pre-school, secondary school, higher education, postgraduate studies). This is not surprising, as today's graduates from special education boarding schools or those who receive home education, have serious socialization and adaptation problems. They often have difficulty in studying in a vocational college, employment, social life, and independent living. Regulatory and legal documents define strategic aims for implementing inclusive education in Ukraine. Current international trends of social policy and reforms in education suggest a social model term "a person with disabilities" is the most acceptable because the main focus is on a human being, not on his/her disability. However, many educators still adhere to a medical model of a disability, even when they understand the difference between these two models,

Kolupayeva (2012) underlined that inclusive education provides for social integration, so that individuals and groups constitute a single integrity (system). Inclusion, as a leading model of modern social and community activity for people with disabilities, recognises and respects 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 altered based on pluralism of thoughts and opinions (p. 10).

Enabling persons with disabilities to be present and participate in community life, education, employment, leisure and so on is the main purpose of implementing inclusive education. The right for children with disabilities to be in society is a basic principle of international standards that ensures their access to quality education. Inclusive education involves creation of conditions to meet the specific special needs of each individual in society. It is important not to see disabilities as something extra-exceptional, stigmatizing or marginalizing. There should be autonomous participation in social activities, building up social contacts, and acceptance of an individual by society at the core of the inclusive model of social behavior.

## 1 The Idea of Inclusive Education as a Humanistic Value

Thirty years after the demise of the USSR, Eastern Europe is still living in the shadow of Soviet Communism and its legacy. The Soviet mentality of conformity and corruption and the deformation of social consciousness has far outlived the Soviet Union as a political entity. One of the most important tasks in this region of the coming years will be to facilitate the emergence of civil society in order to consolidate democratic freedoms and embed Christian values of justice, compassion and solidarity in the public space (Searle, 2020). In order to sustain inclusive education in times of war, Ukraine's society, government, faith and education organizations should combine their forces.

There is still a discriminatory tendency in society for labeling persons with disabilities as "invalids", "handicapped", "disabled", "impaired" and so on. It is advisable to restrain from using such incorrect terms. Traditionally government social security services listed groups of people with disabilities by age, type and severity of disability, type of illnesses and functional inability. This approach aimed at providing benefits and social support. Socio-psychological or pedagogical support should strive, above all, to reduce (or eliminate) barriers for physical, psychological, educational, social and cultural integration of persons with disabilities.

There is not a consensus which of the terms to use: disabilities versus special educational needs when referring to education. While the former implies classification systems and special educational placements, the latter bears the sense of including each student instead of labeling and identification (Anastasiou & Keller, 2011, p. 774). Before the 2017 Law on Education, many teachers used the disability-based system, whereas now the SEN-system is preferable in mainstream and inclusive schools.

The role of global intergovernmental organizations, such as UNESCO, or World Bank in restructuring special education and introducing inclusive components on national and regional level is also vital (Anastasiou & Keller, 2011, p. 785). Ukraine as a country in transition towards democratic values requires international assistance, sufficient time and stability of its economy to walk this path successfully.

Social activism, advocacy and self-advocacy made the public, educators, and government officials seek to find the most effective forms and methods of removing barriers and building fundamentally different, new, evidence-based models of inclusion. This highlighted the problem of standardizing approaches to disability, producing person-oriented concepts that would more fully reflect the rights, interests and values of both the individual and society.

A significant number of students require special support and an organized environment to develop academically, intellectually, emotionally, socially and physically; thus, they are defined as having special educational needs. The most common and acceptable definition of “special educational needs” is given in International Standard Classification of Education: “Persons who are in need of extra resources and support have special educational needs. Additional resources may be school staff and organization to aid the learning process; didactical materials and instruction (a variety of tools for learning, including support, skill-building and special services); financial (budget allocations for obtaining additional special services)” (Kolupayeva et al., 2012, p. 12).

Let us consider the essence of the concept of *students with special educational needs*.

Usually this category of students includes those whose needs are caused and shaped by certain physical or intellectual disability or learning disorder: students with developmental delay, intellectual disability, loss of hearing or vision, speech and language disorders, ADHD, autistic students and others. Intellectual and physical disabilities usually affect the student’ overall development and prevent them from making progress and gaining skills, unless barriers are removed and special conditions are created.

At the same time, students with SEN are not necessarily those who have psychological and physical disabilities (Figure 13.1). When a student does not understand the language of instruction or comes from a disadvantaged family, he or she may need special support in school. Gifted children are also included in this group. They have big intellectual potential and can achieve significant results in one or more activities that are valuable to society. At the same time, they may have difficulties with establishing social contact and interaction with classmates. The way they think, learn and act may differ from others, hence, gifted children need special attention and support from teachers and parents.

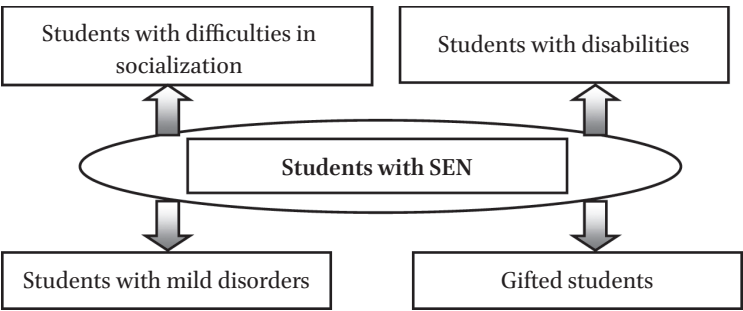


FIGURE 13.1 Categories of students with SEN (Dubkovetska et al., 2016, p. 101)

## 2 Implementation of Inclusive Education in Ukraine

The analysis of international practices in implementation of inclusive education proves that the government policies have a leading role. It is therefore important that the policy towards persons with disabilities is based on the principles of equality and human rights.

Stressing on the importance of the government's role in the development of inclusive education in Ukraine, Zaiarniuk (2015) 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 SEN will be clearly defined. (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;
- absence of specific standards of education and variable teaching programs for people with SEN;
- lack of legitimate opportunities for students with SEN 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; and
- lack of programs in support of persons with disabilities enrolled in mainstream educational institutions (Zaiarniuk, 2015).

At the same time, there are barriers 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 a problem of teachers' psychological readiness for reciprocal education of persons with disabilities together with their 'healthy' peers. Their professional stereotypes are mostly conservative and non productive and need to be changed.

Inclusive education is teaching students (kindergarten, school or vocational college) in the local community where they establish contacts and communicate with others. Therefore, it is important to base education on principles of

respect and compassion towards children with SEN, show humanity, kindness and readiness to help. Such relationships form the ability to perceive, understand and celebrate human diversity and equality.

Thus, the basic ethical principles of educational activities in inclusive settings are compassion, positive attitude to every individual; provision of opportunities in different areas of life; freedom of choosing various kinds of social and educational support.

At the same time, the school system has difficulty applying the physical environment to the needs of persons with disabilities. The entire infrastructure requires adaptation: public transport, facilitated wheelchair ramps, entries and exits in buildings. For example, only 27.4% and 8.4% of high and vocational schools respectively are equipped with ramps for wheelchair access in Ukraine (Zaiarniuk, 2015, p. 192). Funding education establishments to make them suitable to implement inclusive education and provide special support training equipment is another problem.

The development of special teaching programs and curriculum for inclusive schools needs special attention. Effectiveness of schooling students with SEN requires additional support services and interventions to help them perform in the classroom and realize their potential to the fullest. In order to meet the diverse educational needs of students, teachers need to adapt methods, school environment, materials and so on. However, depending on the students' cognitive disabilities, recommended teaching curricula and textbooks for comprehensive schools are used.

An important aspect is a possible problem of parents' biased attitude towards inclusive and special education. Sometimes parents, being ashamed of their child's disability, send him/her to a regular school where they do not receive special support. If a school or parents refuse the child to receive special needs services, he/she may suffer from bullying and even more stress, develop aversion to any activity and fear of teachers and peers. The entire psychophysical development of children is impeded and the existing barriers are not removed. Unfortunately, parents of children with disabilities often ignore recommendations of experts about schools that provide special support for their children.

Real inclusion provides for mandatory psychological and pedagogical support of a student by a team of multidisciplinary professionals (school vice-principal, teacher, teacher's assistant, special education teacher, school psychologist, social worker, speech therapist, doctor) and parents. The lack of professional assistance and support provided in a mainstream education institution negatively affects socialization of a student with SEND. Moreover, the progress of the students may deteriorate.

Designing an appropriate social and educational environment is the organizational and methodological basis for effective implementation of inclusive education in school. The goal of inclusive learning environments is to maintain a balance between teachers and learners, i.e. learner-centered and learner-positive approaches, so that the learning objectives, needs and interests of students with SEN will get all necessary pedagogical and psychological support.

In a broader sense, inclusive learning environment should perform the following functions:

- reflect the diversity of students in the curriculum and pedagogical style;
- attend to wider and immediate institutional contexts in which students study and live; and
- acknowledge the needs of the communities where students live.

Depending on the teacher, students, and context, each learning environment differs, still educators should recognize that all students bring diverse experiences and perspectives to any learning situation as a result of their (dis)abilities, needs, genders, ethnicities, social status of their families and communities (Imel, 1995)

Difficulties in organizing socio-educational environment in inclusive classrooms can be caused by an increasing number of students from particularly vulnerable groups: economically vulnerable (low-income families, unemployed, families with many children); socially vulnerable (children from disadvantaged families, delinquent or unmotivated students); academically or intellectually challenged (students with delayed intellectual or cognitive development, those having difficulties in establishing social contacts). These students often have problems in adapting to the school environment; they are more prone to manifestation of non-productive behavior, misconduct, social aggression or apathy.

Russia occupied the Crimea and Donbass area of Ukraine in 2014. The aggression resulted in deaths and injuries among civilians, a surge in the number of internally displaced persons, persons with disabilities and dysfunctional families. After 10 years, Russia started bombing all Ukraine targeting the civil infrastructure including churches, maternity houses and schools. Those Ukrainians, who have witnessed military operations, are in a risk group. It is correct to say that several millions of students, their parents and teachers are traumatized as a result of war (physically, psychologically and socially). Among them are those remaining in occupied territories, refugees and displaced persons from a zone of military conflict and those who lost their homes and parents. These students can suffer from acute sense of fear, helplessness, depression, and display stress behavior in social relations. Besides, due to migration processes

the problem of adaptation of children from displaced families to school life in other regions or countries has been aggravated.

Integrated classes can help a child with SEN to achieve high rates of individual personal development, to recognize the value of this development for a child, and 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 the shortage of specially trained teachers to ensure that persons with disabilities enjoy their constitutional right to quality education. Thus, the problem of training teachers ready to work in an inclusive educational environment arises, especially in higher education.

In- and pre-service training aims at equipping teachers with effective methods, forming their outlook of the essence and main objectives of inclusive education; developing skills to implement individual approach in training and education of children with SEN; providing methods of interpersonal interaction with parents, generating skills of differentiated teaching and evaluation.

The content of training future teachers to work in inclusive classrooms involves mastering a number of skills:

- develop individualized education plans and programs;
- use effective social and educational strategies of interaction and cooperation with various professionals;
- apply adaptive teaching methods and standardized testing in an inclusive process;
- establish pedagogical cooperation with parents;
- prevent unfair treatment and prejudice towards persons with disabilities from their peers and educators; and
- develop a psychological climate in a classroom on the principles of humanity, compassion and cooperation.

Teachers are capable of introducing and advocating for effective changes in organizing inclusive environments. The increased understanding of diverse students' learning and beliefs in students' capacity when given the right support can be in line with large-scale lesson study projects. However, the changes to more inclusive education require time, training and cooperation, thus schools will benefit from developing small collaborative research communities in which special needs teachers can be the facilitators. A more pragmatic approach will make the teachers the instigators and engage them with evidence-based programs that support inclusive education (Leifler, 2020, p. 234).



Inclusive education helps children with SEN to adapt to everyday or special events and situations, get rid of feelings of isolation and alienation, overcome social barriers and integrate into society. It fosters communication and teamwork, and creates a sense of responsibility for students. Thus, we seek to humanize the relationship between a teacher and students, including those with SEN, so it is important to overcome social stereotypes and improve teacher's professional culture.

Effective implementation of inclusive education in Ukraine is possible with the combination of certain factors: sufficient funding, improvement of regulatory and legal base, developing teaching strategies and methods, training teachers to apply principles of inclusive education in their activity. Particularly important is to form a positive public attitude towards persons with disabilities. It is reasonable to involve mass-media, NGOs and parental groups to facilitate successful inclusion of students with disabilities in kindergartens, primary and secondary schools, vocational colleges, higher education and postgraduate study.

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