

Trends in the development of inclusive education in Ukraine

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Abstract. The purpose of the article is to identify trends in the development of inclusive education in Ukraine and related challenges. Their understanding and consideration in the formation of educational policy will contribute to a more successful process of its implementation. To achieve this goal, the method of desk research was used. It is established that at present the main trends in the implementation of an inclusive approach in education are the focus on the development of a multi-track model, a significant increase in special and inclusive classes of secondary schools and students who study there, decrease in the number of special educational institutions. Difficulties in implementation of inclusive approach in education are associated with the lack of a common understanding of inclusive education, the imperfection of the regulatory framework, the institutional weakness of the newly established amalgamated territorial communities which are responsible for the introduction of inclusive approach at the local level, the uncoordinated efforts of state and local governments, poor material and technical resources of educational institutions, lack of qualified teachers prepared to work with children in conditions of inclusive education.

Keywords: inclusive education, special educational needs, implementation of inclusive approach.

1 Introduction

The development of inclusive education as a means of ensuring equal access to quality education for all students is on the agenda of most countries of the world, including Ukraine. The introduction of an inclusive approach to the mainstream school began here in the 90s of the last century, after the ratification of the Declaration on the Rights of the Child by the Supreme Court of Ukraine in 1991. However, as the researchers note [1, 2] by the early 2000s, this process was mostly spontaneous. During the first decade of the XXI century, the theoretical, methodological, and organizational foundations of inclusive education were developed in the studies of Ukrainian scholars [3–8]. Their systematic introduction into the system of general secondary education in Ukraine began in the 2010s when several laws were adopted at the national level aimed at ensuring access to

education for children with special educational needs (SEN). In particular, an important step for the legal regulation of inclusive education was the adoption of the Procedure for organizing inclusive education in general education institutions in 2011 [9] and The law of Ukraine “On education” in 2017 [10].

Recent studies on inclusive education in Ukraine have shed light on peculiarities of the formation and development of inclusive education in Ukraine [11–13]. Generally speaking, the authors acknowledge that the country is quite progressive in the pursuit of inclusive education implementation, although this process isn’t easy and encounters many problems.

Research has also examined the public administration and legal aspects in the area of inclusive education [14–17]. Findings from these studies suggest the need to enhance the effectiveness, transparency, and efficiency of mechanisms for the implementation of the right to inclusive education through the development and adoption of a separate law on inclusive education, preceded by its public and academic discussions.

Researches have also been undertaken on teacher education for inclusion [18–20] and the attitude of different population groups to inclusion in education [21, 22]. The former states that teachers are not ready to work in inclusive classes due to the lack of appropriate training, the latter demonstrate less than a positive attitude to inclusive education, a lack of understanding of its essence and role, both for children with SEN and for the whole society.

Additionally, there is some published research on inclusive education abroad [23–27] which offers some solutions to the problems of inclusion, taking into account the experience of other countries.

Today, after almost thirty years since the introduction of inclusive education in Ukraine, some trends emerged that are important to understand, compare with global ones and adequately assess to effectively implement the policy of inclusive education. Despite a large number of studies devoted to various aspects of inclusive education in Ukraine, there are no studies that systematically analyze current trends in its development in the context of international experience.

The purpose of the article is to identify trends in the development of inclusive education in Ukraine and related challenges.

2 Method

The study employed the method of desk research, which was used to collect, summarize, analyze, systematize and perform an analysis of

information on inclusive education development in Ukraine. For the study, statistics, legal acts, information and analytical materials of state authorities and local self-government, scientific publications of foreign and domestic scientists were used. Information was searched in the scientific metric databases Research Gate and Google Scholar, the database “Legislation of Ukraine”, the official websites of state and local authorities. Within the framework of this research, general scientific methods of analysis, synthesis, generalization, and comparison were used.

3 Results and discussion

An important factor for the effective implementation of inclusive education is the understanding of its essence. In Ukraine, there is no commonly accepted approach to the interpretation of the concept of “inclusive education”. The vast majority of scientific papers present a narrow interpretation of inclusion in education as ensuring the right of children with special educational needs, caused by developmental disorders, to education and the possibility to receive it at the place of residence. However, the basic legal acts in the field of education [10] demonstrate a broad understanding of inclusion as ensuring equal access to quality education for all children without exception.

Such terminological problems are typical not only for Ukraine but also for other countries, including those that have a long experience of introducing inclusion in education. In the United States, for example, the understanding of inclusive education is more consistent with the principles set out in the 1994 Salamanca Declaration, but the lack of an officially approved definition gives rise to different interpretations of this concept. In England, inclusion is perceived ambiguously because of “deep-seated dilemmas” that, in turn, rely on fundamental social and economic processes. In Latin American countries, the lack of a clear understanding of the concepts that reveal the essence of inclusion prevents the consolidation of models of inclusive education [28].

It should be noted that a lot has changed in the perception of inclusive education in many countries around the world since the time the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education (UNESCO, 1994) were adopted. These documents increased universal commitment to the full participation of all children in education, not only those with disabilities or special educational needs (SEN) [29]. As stated by T. Booth, “there is no point in including some while ignoring others” [30]. The position of proponents of this approach can be illustrated

by the following statement: “programs that promote equality often tend to focus on one of the factors of discrimination and thus lose touch with others” [31].

Unifying the understanding of inclusion in education is a complex and time-consuming process, especially when it comes to different cultures and societies. However, there is no doubt that, at the country level, the lack of coherency in approaches to what we understand as inclusion in education hinders its development. We share the view that inclusive education should be applied to all, however, given its prevalent understanding as related to children with SEN, further consideration of its development will be given from this very perception.

In addition to understanding what inclusive education is, it is important to understand what model of such an education we are building. Currently, there are three main models of inclusive education in the world [32]: one-track, in which all children are taught in one system of institutions; dual-track, in which students with special educational needs are taught in one system and all others in another, the main system; multi-track, in which different groups of students are taught in different, parallel systems.

The one-track model is common in countries that aim to provide all students with equal access to a single inclusive educational system. These countries include Italy, Portugal, Sweden, Greece and Norway, the United States, Canada, Australia, China, and South Africa. In countries with a dual-track model, there are two different education systems: with separate placement in special schools or classes for students with special educational needs and healthy children in regular schools. Often these two types of institutions are subordinate to different ministries or other government bodies. This model is being implemented in Belgium, Switzerland, Japan, Singapore, Qatar, Bahrain, and Kuwait. In countries where the multi-track model has become widespread, there is a variety of approaches to inclusive education and services offered. This model is practiced in Denmark, France, Finland, the Czech Republic, Poland, Great Britain, the Netherlands, and Ireland.

In Ukraine, a multi-track model is being introduced. Opportunities to get an education are provided by special and inclusive classes in secondary schools, special schools, and individual forms of education.

Education of children that require correction of physical and/or mental development in special classes of mainstream schools became possible after the adoption by the Ministry of education of Ukraine in 2010 of the Regulation on special classes for teaching children with SEN in general education institutions. It should be noted that the development of special

classes for children with visual, hearing, muscular and skeletal disorders, severe speech disorders, mental and growth retardation even in mainstream school is criticized by some foreign researchers [31–33] as it does not comply with the principles of inclusive education and supports the segregation of children with SEN.

However, inclusive education is not always available to all students with SEN, in particular, those with severe or multiple health problems. Currently, there hardly is a country in the world where all students with disabilities are being educated in inclusive educational institutions. Even in countries that are committed to inclusive education, it is considered a conditional right. In some cases, the grounds for exclusion lie in a certain category or level of complexity of the disorder, in other cases, this decision is made on an individual basis or reflects the parents' choice [32].

In the USA, for example, children with high levels of aggression whose behavior is dangerous to others cannot study in regular classes. Besides, it is believed that for inclusion to achieve its goal, students must be able to achieve a certain level of knowledge or acquire specific skills. In other words, in the USA, inclusive education is not a universal right but depends on the goals of each student's development program. Differences in the inclusive placement of students with SEN also depend on the type of disorder. For example, students with learning disabilities, speech and communication disorders are most likely to study in regular classes, while a third of all students with emotional disabilities and more than half of all students with intellectual disabilities spend most of their school day outside of general education classes [34]. Similar restrictions apply in other countries, such as Australia, China, Mexico, and others [31].

As stated by T. Saed et al., it is not always possible to put an equal sign between access to a general education institution and inclusion: "students who are placed in an inclusive environment may be subject to exclusion, despite formally sustained aspects of access, cultural and political environment both inside and outside of educational institutions" [31]. The study conducted by A. Dyson [35] shows that many students with SEN who seem to be integrated are completely or partially segregated in mainstream schools, being isolated from their peers.

This aspect of a national model of inclusive education in 2015 drew the attention of the UN Committee on the rights of persons with disabilities. In response to the first published report of Ukraine on implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities [36], it was noted that education of children with SEN in special classes of mainstream schools is qualified as a segregated approach.

Despite this, the number of children enrolled in special classes in Ukraine has been growing in recent years, although only slightly. Thus, in the 2016/2017 academic years, the number of children who were enrolled in special classes was 5.569, in 2017/2018 — 5.618 people; in 2018/2019 — 6.230. The number of schools with special classes has increased by 1.2 times over the past three years. As of the 2018/2019 school years, there were 577 special classes in 152 general secondary education institutions. The number of special teachers increased by 1.4 times — from 1.217 in 2016/2017 to 1702 in 2018/2019 (Fig. 1).

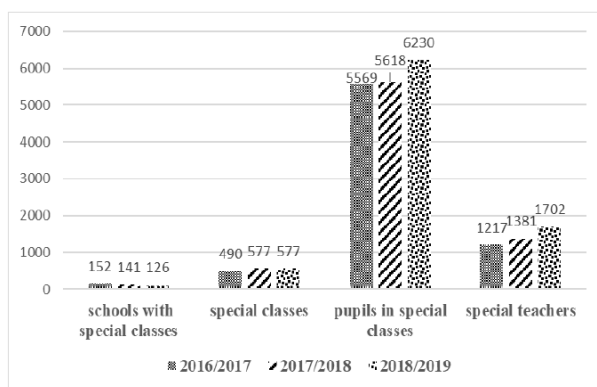


Fig. 1. Dynamics of indicators of special education. Source: compiled by the author based on the Ministry of education and science of Ukraine data [37]

The increase in the number of special classes and children enrolled in them can be explained by a decrease in the number of special educational institutions. In the 2018/2019 academic years, the number of special schools decreased by 2.4% compared to 2016/2017, and the number of students in them decreased by 4.2%. However, the number of special schools in Ukraine is still significant: 325 with 37.787 students receiving an education there [37]. 12.115 students with SEN who are temporarily or permanently unable to attend school due to health problems are taught at home [37]. The opportunity to get education for children with SEN appeared only in 2016 after the corresponding decision was made by the Ministry of education and science of Ukraine [38]. Due to the short existence of this form of training and the lack of statistical data, it is difficult to track certain trends.

In recent years, there also has been some progress in the development of inclusive education. The number of inclusive classes has increased by 3 times

over the past three years — from 2.715 in 2016/2017 to 8.717 in 2018/2019. Besides, if in the 2016/2017 school years the number of children enrolled in inclusive classes was 2.720 [12] in 2017/2018 their number increased to 7.179 people and in 2018/2019 — up to 11.866 [37]. Thus, the number of children who receive inclusive education has increased by 4.4 times. The increase in the number of SEN tutors was 4 times for the period concerned: only 1.825 such professionals provided support for SEN students in 2016/2017 as compared to 7.636 in 2018/2019 school years (Fig. 2).

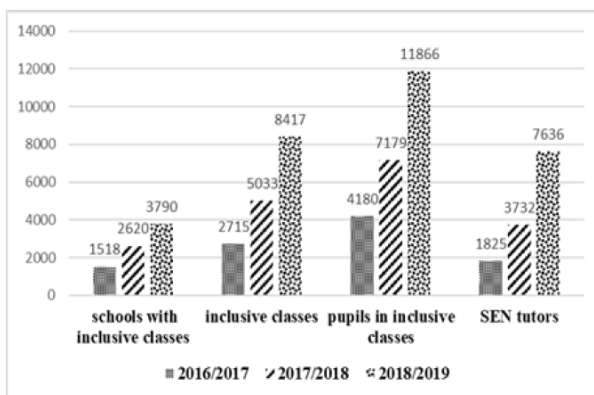


Fig. 2. Dynamics of indicators of inclusive education. Source: compiled by the author based on the Ministry of education and science of Ukraine data [37]

According to the decision of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine [39] since the 1st of September 2017, the recruitment of students with mental retardation in the first grades of special schools has been discontinued. Educational opportunities for these children should be created in special and inclusive classes in mainstream schools. The document stipulates that by 2022, all students in special schools will go to regular schools, thus gaining equal access to education, which will contribute to their successful development and socialization. This gives grounds for the assumption that the tendency to an increase in inclusive and special classes will continue in the future.

It should be noted that the introduction of inclusive education in Ukraine since 2014 takes place in the conditions of the decentralization of power. The basic level of local government bodies is represented by the amalgamated territorial communities (ATC), which are responsible for

creating conditions for providing quality educational services and improving the quality of education of children living and studying in a certain territory.

In particular, they are responsible for ensuring the accessibility of general secondary education (creation of educational districts and educational institutions, including classes and groups with inclusive education, organization of students' and teachers' transportation of); ensuring the rights and opportunities of persons with SEN for their education, taking into account their individual needs, capabilities, and interests (provision the means for training, development of an inclusive environment, implementation of universal design and reasonable adaptation); organizing the provision of educational, psychological, and correctional services (creation of inclusive resource centers, their staffing).

As of March 2018, the number of ATC in Ukraine was 725; they were home to 6.3 million citizens, which is 14.9% of the country's population. At the beginning of 2019, the number of inclusive classes in community schools was 443 (38%) out of a total of 1.172; the number of students who studied there was 443 (76%) out of a total of 586 students [40].

Inclusive resource centers are being established at the community level. They provide a comprehensive psychological and pedagogical assessment of child development, psychological and pedagogical support to the learning process, psychological and pedagogical, correctional and developmental services to children with SEN aged 2 to 18 years. At the beginning of 2019, there were more than 500 such institutions in the country [37].

These indicators demonstrate that inclusive education is being successfully implemented at the local level. However, today there are no serious analytical studies in Ukraine that would reveal the advantages and disadvantages of decentralizing the education system in relation to inclusion. Though in general, the impact of decentralization on inclusive education has received little attention abroad [33], it is actualized in countries such as Germany, Poland, Portugal, Sweden, and Switzerland. Some countries see decentralization as a challenge for implementing reforms, while others consider local and school responsibilities to be essential [41]. Having summarized information on its member countries, European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (EASNIE) concluded that education systems, which are decentralized can better impact the way that the three interconnected goals of equity, excellence and inclusiveness are addressed in policy and practice [41].

Another view is that educational decentralization hinders the development of inclusive education since the central government doesn't hold most or all authority and power on behalf of neglected and excluded

groups [28]. Over the past decades, education reforms aimed at improving its quality have been implemented in many countries within marketing approaches and striving for excellence in educational performance.

Shifting the focus of the education system to results makes students with SEN less desirable in schools. As a result of increased competition between schools, such students are considered to be “non-marketable commodities”, since they are likely to decrease school’s performance [42]. Therefore, schools are afraid to accept students with SEN and even to recognize students as having such needs. The issue of the contradiction between the concept of improvement of the quality of education and those of ensuring diversity and inclusiveness is a subject of discussion in the circles of educators and researches in the USA, Canada, Great Britain, Singapore, and the Middle East countries [28]. Government intervention is necessary to reduce or eliminate these risks to the education of students with SEN. The main condition for quality education for all students, according to Blackmore (2000), “is a reassertion of the value of a strong state supporting public education systems” [42]. However, having received little attention in academic research, the issue of the state’s and local governments’ roles in the provision of quality education for all requires more detailed study.

Despite the generally positive trends in the implementation of inclusive education, there are also significant negative factors that hinder its more successful development. These include imperfection of the legal framework for inclusive education and organizational and legal mechanisms of state management of education for persons with special needs [17], the institutional weakness of the amalgamated territorial communities [43], problems in monitoring and coordinating the efforts of state and local authorities to ensure the implementation of already adopted legislation and regulations [44], weak material, technical, and educational base, lack of qualified teaching staff to work in an inclusive environment [18].

The success of the further implementation of inclusive education at the local level in Ukraine depends on whether it will be possible to solve the issue of strengthening the institutional and financial viability of the ATC, providing them with methodological and expert assistance in issues of inclusion.

Analysis of the works of foreign scientists shows that these factors are more or less typical for other countries. While many countries declare support for inclusive education in their rhetoric, legislation, and policies, the real action is often insufficient. The reasons for the gap between policies and practices in inclusive education are different and usually include: barriers due to social values and beliefs; economic factors; lack

of mechanisms for implementing decisions; distribution of responsibilities in education; conservative traditions among educators and researchers in education; resistance from parents; low level of professional readiness of teachers to implement inclusion; inflexible curricula and evaluation systems; institutional weakness of civil society institutions; inadequate educational infrastructure, especially in rural and remote areas; large number of children in classes; resistance from the special education sector; top-down approach to the introduction of inclusive education without proper preparation of schools and communities [32].

At the same time, it must be understood that the implementation of an inclusive approach in education is impossible without addressing a wide range of issues, such as employment, recreation, health, and living conditions; it must include changes in all public and other institutions at all levels of society. This position is justified by y. T. Sayed et al. with the statement that “educational inclusivity ... it implies a collective will to implement changes at all levels of society. This requires major changes in architecture, as well as political will at the sectoral, institutional, and class levels to create a truly inclusive environment” [31]. The authors argue that educational exclusion operates “in a sea of social exclusion processes that affect access to basic rights in a number of areas, such as “adequate” or “quality” food, housing, social security, employment, education, etc.” [31]. Not only education policy, but all education actors and other state institutions must be inclusive.

4 Conclusions

One of the main priorities for the development of education systems around the world is to ensure equal rights to education for all citizens, which is implemented through the introduction of an inclusive approach. Currently, there are two approaches to understanding inclusive education. In a narrow sense, it is interpreted as an activity to integrate children with special educational needs into the education system and society; in a broad sense, it concerns all children who are classified as vulnerable.

It is established that currently the main trends in the development of inclusive education in Ukraine are the focus on the development of a multi-track model of education and a significant increase in the number of educational institutions with special and inclusive classes, decrease in the number of special educational institutions. The latter takes place in the context of decentralized education management when the responsibility for implementing an inclusive approach in the education system is assigned to the amalgamated territorial communities.

Difficulties in implementation of inclusive approach in education are associated with the lack of a common understanding of inclusive education, the imperfection of the regulatory framework, the institutional weakness of the newly established amalgamated territorial communities, the uncoordinated efforts of state and local governments, poor material and technical resources of educational institutions, lack of qualified teachers prepared to work with children in conditions of inclusive education.

Analysis of trends in the implementation of inclusive education in Ukraine in the context of international experience shows that there are common challenges that hinder its implementation. In particular, there is a need to develop common approaches to understanding the key concepts that make up its thesaurus and to expand the understanding of inclusive education as a socio-cultural phenomenon, which is not limited to the field of education and the category of children with SEN. The concepts of equality, equity, social responsibility, and freedom from discrimination are prominent in the rationale for inclusive education. This approach eliminates the opposition of inclusive education to special education and lays grounds for the most appropriate model for each country for teaching children with special educational needs, which would consider their socio-economic, political, cultural and historical characteristics. Despite the national peculiarities of inclusive education implementation, the main task is to bridge the gaps between policy and practice, which is possible through the use of a balanced systematic approach to solving problematic issues at all levels of government with the involvement of all stakeholders.

Further research into the various factors which affect the development of inclusive education, such as perceptions, attitudes, and the level of support for inclusion in education on the part of its key stakeholders, organization, coordination, and delivering of inclusive services within the mainstream schools, assessment of inclusive education outcomes should be undertaken.

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