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Analysis of models of inclusive education in European countries (experience for Ukraine)

Análisis de los modelos de educación inclusiva en los países europeos (experiencia para Ucrania)

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Abstract

The purpose of scientific exploration is to harmonize the principles of inclusive education in the social and pedagogical dimensions. The task of the article can be conditionally divided into two

stages: differentiation of social and pedagogical segments of inclusive education (to make optimal strategic decisions on the organization of inclusive education); search for a synergistic model (combination of social, pedagogical, and other elements) in the formation of a favorable educational environment for inclusive principles. The methodological basis of the study was scientific and pedagogical methods. The results of the study point to those elements of inclusive education in European states, which can be actualized in the Ukrainian system of education. Consequently, inclusive education in Europe has formed clear universal principles and mechanisms that can be implemented in public education strategies, developing countries.

Keywords: children with special educational needs, inclusive educational environment, inclusive education, European education, inclusive education.

Resumen

El propósito de la exploración científica es armonizar los principios de la educación inclusiva en las dimensiones social y pedagógica. La tarea del artículo puede dividirse condicionalmente en dos etapas: diferenciación de los segmentos social y pedagógico de la educación inclusiva (para tomar decisiones estratégicas óptimas sobre la organización de la educación inclusiva); búsqueda de un modelo sinérgico (combinación de elementos sociales, pedagógicos y otros) en la formación de un entorno educativo favorable a los principios inclusivos. La base metodológica del estudio fueron los métodos científicos y pedagógicos. Los resultados del estudio señalan los elementos de la educación inclusiva de los estados europeos, que pueden actualizarse en el sistema educativo ucraniano. En consecuencia, la educación inclusiva en Europa ha formado claros principios y mecanismos universales que pueden ser implementados en las estrategias de la educación pública, los países en desarrollo.

Palabras clave: niños con necesidades educativas especiales, entorno educativo inclusivo, educación inclusiva, educación europea, educación inclusiva.

1. Introduction

The educational space for applicants for education with special needs has its own specifics related to organizational, educational and methodological, and psychological and pedagogical aspects. Given the specificity of the problem of inclusive education, it is impossible to develop a unified format of this global cluster. Therefore, any state educational system builds its own unique inclusive cluster strategies.

“Inclusive education is not dead, it has simply acquired a strange new characteristic” (Slee, 2018). Such a motto eloquently expresses the results of innovative methods on inclusive pedagogy in the education system of European countries. It should be noted that the processes of integration of the inclusive element of educational environment should ideally completely level the differences between inclusive and ordinary learning environments. This ambitious task is rapidly being implemented in different European countries through different ways and with heterogeneous results. Therefore, it is still inappropriate to recommend a complete transition of inclusive education from a socio-pedagogical dimension to a purely pedagogical cluster in the Ukrainian educational system.

A more pragmatic way is to borrow some elements of the experience of implementing inclusive innovations of individual European communities in accordance with the socio-cultural characteristics of Ukrainian education. However, this requires a comprehensive analysis of inclusive education models that have been implemented in European educational systems in recent decades.

“Although there have been many differences between 'special' and 'inclusive' education that continue to be actively debated, the two concepts remain clearly separate in the policies and practices of many countries” (Florian, 2019). In European scientific and pedagogical discourse, there is a definite starting point for positioning inclusive education as a distinct segment of the educational space.

2. Literature review

The problem of inclusive education in the European scientific and pedagogical discourse is represented by studies on the implementation of inclusive strategies and principles in the educational space. Despite the integration processes in the European Union in general and in education in particular, it should be noted that the issues of inclusive education have not acquired a global international dimension. The reason for this is the diversity of factors that ensure the implementation of inclusive elements in the educational space.

Hernández-Torrano et al (2022) were guided by a review of the literature on inclusive education in Europe since the Salamanca Declaration regarding inclusive education on a global international level. After working through more than 6,000 scientific publications, they pointed out problematic points in the study of inclusive education: the lack of scientific cooperation between scholars from different countries on the unification of inclusive education, little increase in academic interest in the problem of inclusion (although by the Salamanca Declaration this problem was actually absent as an independent).

A 30-year period of the global diffusion of inclusive education principles and mechanisms in European countries is revealed in their study Amor et al. (2019) by analyzing the development and transformation of the status and positioning of the inclusive segment in the education system. A similar systematic study of the revisions of inclusive educational strategies in European countries was presented by Van Mieghem et al. (2020), which presented the reorientation of the principles of inclusion from the socio-psychological to the pedagogical-psychological segment of the educational space.

3. Aims

The study aims to correlate the practical models of inclusive education in European states with the sociocultural realities of particular communities or countries. The objectives, however, are to focus the inclusive educational strategy on a purely pedagogical dimension (excluding the dominant social factor) of the implementation of the principles of inclusive education.

4. Materials and methods

The study actualizes two educational environments:

- educational systems of European countries and the unified educational space of Europe;

- the educational system of Ukraine as a developing country.

State educational environments have cultural-historical, mental-psychological, practical-pedagogical peculiarities of development. Therefore, it is necessary to carefully analyze not only the organizational and practical mechanisms for the introduction of inclusive education, following the example of another state, but also to take into account the correlative principle of harmonization of educational systems.

The methodological arsenal that can provide analysis of the development of European inclusive education and determine its prospects in the Ukrainian educational environment are general scientific methods (analysis, systematization, forecasting, comparison) and scientific and pedagogical special methods (pedagogical observation, educational experiment).

Currently, researchers observe a certain lack of data on the features of inclusive pedagogy obtained directly through pedagogical observation and pedagogical experiments. Pedagogical practices used by teachers in mainstream classrooms create correspondingly qualitatively new effects for children with special educational needs. The results of the implementation of the principles of inclusion point to the expansion of such aspects as teamwork, learning organization, behavioral and emotional support of learning (Finkelstein et al., 2021).

Since inclusion in education has lost the dominant influence of the social dimension, a process of reinterpretation of inclusion has begun, which includes the coordinated involvement of all children in the inclusive educational environment. Using the methodological principle of systems theory, scholars define the diversity of educational inclusion (Qvortrup & Qvortrup, 2018).

In the research conducted, significant attention was paid to the role of the teacher and the availability of appropriate professional competencies to work with children with special educational needs. The Teacher Attitude Scale for Inclusion (TAIS) has been successfully used in contemporary scientific and pedagogical discourse and has been positioned as a progressive technology that can accurately identify the necessary cognitive and behavioral components (Ewing et al., 2018).

5. Results

The European experience of implementing inclusive education is diverse. In fact, each European country has developed its own strategies for the development of inclusive education. However, some state strategies still have their own features, indicating the success and effectiveness of the inclusive cluster in the educational system (see Fig. 1).

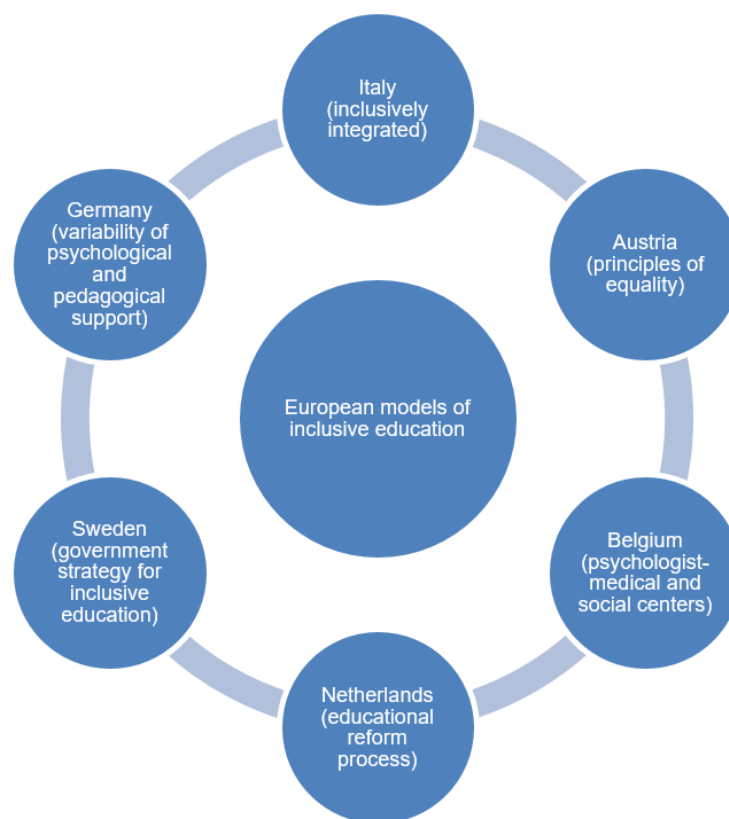


Fig. 1. Models of implementation of inclusive education in European countries.
Source: (All-Ukrainian Foundation "Step by Step" (n/d))

Analyzing the models of the European experience in implementing inclusive education, it should be noted that for the Ukrainian educational system none of them can be fully implemented. The reason for this is the difference in socio-cultural principles of social development. For example, the German model of variability contradicts the traditional notions of the centralized Ukrainian education system. The Swedish state model cannot be relevant because of the mismatch between the needs and opportunities of this system of inclusive education in Ukraine.

Therefore, the best way to take into account the experience of European states to create a system of inclusive education in Ukraine is the allocation and introduction of individual elements in the strategy for the development of inclusion, which can be implemented in specific socio-cultural conditions.

An important aspect of building an inclusive education strategy at the state level is the formation of the proper attitude of all stakeholders of the educational space to this problem. When organizing closed-type inclusive education with the functioning of educational institutions exclusively for children with special educational needs, the need to create an appropriate microclimate in these learning environments was not so acute. However, with the development of tendencies to the integration of inclusive format into the general educational space, the need for socio-psychological harmonization of this process arose.

The formation of a positive, tolerant attitude towards each other by all participants of the educational process is a fundamental guarantee of academic achievement and achieving a high level of quality education. For the pedagogical dimension of inclusive education, the primary task is to train the staff both in the issue of professional competencies and moral and psychological preparation for working with children with special educational needs. Because in addition to the educational process, the teacher must create conditions for healthy relationships between children, despite their peculiarities of psychophysical development.

Integrating the inclusive segment into the regular education system requires adequate staffing. When dividing inclusive and ordinary classes, there was also a division of the teaching staff into those who had professional competencies to work with children with special educational needs and the teaching staff with traditional pedagogical competencies, not provided for the organization of the inclusive segment. Since the gradual creation of a unified educational environment, there has been a need to train teaching staff who will have universal professional competencies to work with all categories of applicants for education. A special role in the process of acquiring these competencies, in addition to education, professional development, and training, was played by the principles of self-organization and self-improvement of teachers' professional skills (Savolainen et al., 2022).

A study in Finland by Saloviita (2020) points to the readiness of educational personnel to work in inclusive settings in mainstream schools. The data indicate that about 20% of teachers are opposed to inclusive forms in general education institutions and prefer to return to the old model of organizing inclusive education with the formation of separate educational institutions or separate classes. These results indicate that even in countries with a high level of development of educational standards adequately funded, there is a significant part of the teaching community, which does not approve of a complete merger of regular and inclusive classes. This result is indicative of the development strategy of the Ukrainian inclusive education system and points to the need to be very careful about reforms in this educational segment.

Ridei (2021) notes that “teacher professional competencies must be relevant to sociocultural realities, so they are projected in educational strategies. At the same time, the correlation of fundamental and flexible professional skills of the teacher will contribute to the implementation of progressive trends in the general education space” (Skakun, 2021). Such approaches are relevant to ensure the implementation of inclusion mechanisms in the education system.

An important part of the study of the principles of inclusion in a separate educational system is the consideration of this cluster at different levels of education: from pre-school to higher education. In particular, when analyzing inclusion in the higher education system, one should consider “moving inclusion beyond education into further employment” (Collins et al., 2019). Modern principles of pragmatism and outcome orientation rule out the thesis: education for education's sake. Consequently, inclusive education is not only the organization of a favorable environment for students with appropriate educational difficulties and levels of support applicants with disabilities but also the design of their professional preparation for competitiveness in the labor market.

Inclusive education has been a factor that has contributed to the interaction between schools in Spain (Azorín, 2020). The need to form a networked pedagogical community oriented to the problems of inclusion has gradually become a prerequisite for the creation of a nationwide inter-

school collaboration on a horizontal level. This approach demonstrates the effectiveness of the synergistic approach in the organization of a unified educational space (at the level of an inclusive cluster or the general state level).

Recent studies of the European system of inclusive education increasingly call for a focus on the principles of culturally sensitive education, implemented by motivational and supportive mechanisms (Kumar et al., 2018). Cultural sensitivity is valued in contemporary European society. Such approaches are positive elements to pay attention to and try to attract them in the development of a national (in this case not state, but culturally and mentally oriented) system of inclusive education.

Ainscow & Messiou (2018), analyzing potential ways to increase inclusion in schools, note that the synergistic effect of interaction at the level of: teacher-educator, teacher-student, teacher-student with special educational needs, student-student with special educational needs have a positive impact on these processes. The synergistic effect, in this case, is crucial because “focusing on individual differences among students can be problematic if the work intended for some is differentiated to the point where they cannot participate in the classroom with others” (Florian & Beaton, 2018). Individualization of pedagogical activity is only possible in specialized educational settings. In the ordinary classroom, differentiating practically oriented pedagogical elements can do more harm than have positive effect.

Separately, the role of information and communication technology innovations in education and their positive impact on the inclusive cluster should be noted (Tsekhmister et al., 2021). In particular, STEAM-education principles emphasizing cognitive indicators contribute to the organization of an inclusive learning environment in both curricular and subject-matter dimensions.

The level of inclusiveness involves taking into account many factors of psychophysical features of applicants for education. Favorable learning environments are formed for students with appropriate educational difficulties and levels of support. Research in the field of physiology notes even such minute details as the difference between psychophysical limitations in representatives of different sexes (Saienko & Gurmazhenko, 2010).

6. Discussion

Inclusive education implies the provision of full-fledged educational services to applicants for education, regardless of the peculiarities of their psycho-physical condition. For a long time in the theoretical-methodological and especially in the practically oriented dimension the issue of education for people with special needs was positioned as a social problem. However, in the European scientific and pedagogical discourse and, subsequently, in practical pedagogy, there has been a long and complex reorientation of inclusive education strictly to the pedagogical cluster (see Fig. 2).

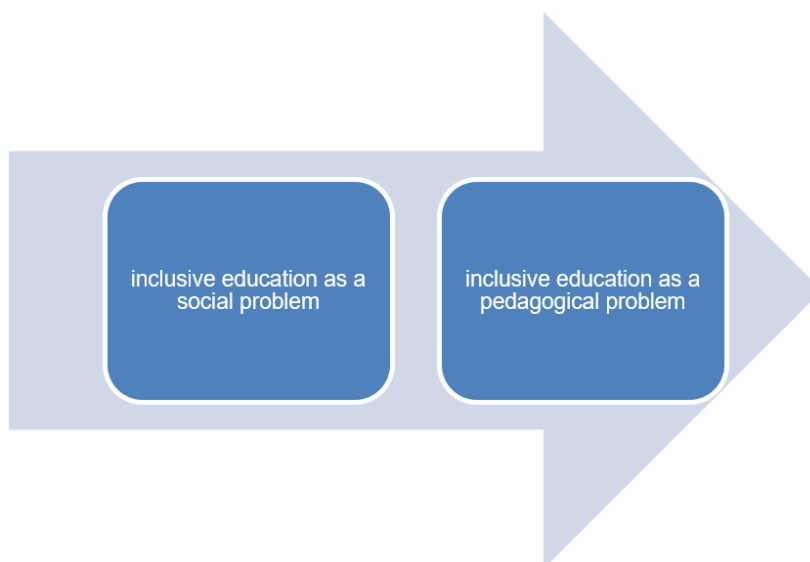


Fig. 2. The transformation of inclusive education in Europe.
Source: Authors' development

At the first stage of this transformation emerged a socio-psychological solution to the problem of inclusive education. At the second stage, the formation of a favorable educational space for the implementation of elements of inclusive education. This process was facilitated by the introduction of innovative learning environments, which made it possible to diversify the educational process to the level in which applicants for education with special needs were able to study in almost the same conditions as everyone else.

There are two tendencies of the positioning of inclusive education in Europe, focused on the pedagogical dimension (see Table 1).

Table 1.

Trends in the development of an inclusive education system in European countries.

Positive elements	Negative elements
1. Establishing a high level of social development in European countries, which indicates the possibility of focusing on practical pedagogical aspects of the development of inclusive education.	1. Extraordinary burden on the organizational cluster of educational systems, because integrating an inclusive cluster into a regular classroom requires significant logistical and logistical resources.
2. The formation of a public consciousness dominated by the principles of equality, tolerance.	2. Unpreparedness or inadequacy of professional competencies of teaching staff to work with children with special educational needs in inclusive classrooms.
3. The rapid development of inclusive pedagogy due to significant state, financial and public support for this cluster of educational space.	3. Uncertainty of the correlation of inclusive and conventional educational practice-oriented pedagogical principles.

Source: Authors' development.

Analysis of positive and negative manifestations of the introduction of inclusive education in European countries allows the development of topical priorities of the Ukrainian system of inclusive education. Using the experience of advanced states, combined with taking into account the peculiarities of the socio-cultural state of society forms the right conditions for the development of inclusive education strategy at the state level.

A comparative analysis is an important method of research on the peculiarities of inclusive education. In particular, it is worth noting the similarities between inclusive education systems for different participants in the educational process. A comparison of the educational difficulties of children with special educational needs and immigrant children have common target priorities (Cerna, 2019). Consequently, the study of the work of the educational system of European countries in extreme conditions on the contingent of children who need to create special learning conditions is relevant and appropriate.

7. Conclusions

Having worked through the experience of European countries on the implementation of inclusive education, we note that the main models are: centralized public policy on inclusive education; a combination of moral and psychological and practically pedagogical elements; variability of inclusive educational strategies; building inclusive qualities on the principles of equality.

The results of the study indicate that there is no ideal model of inclusive education in an individual country. However, there is a general tendency to reorient from the dominance of the social dimension in the issue of the principles of inclusion to their focus on the purely pedagogical segment.

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