

THE ROLE OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN THE SOCIAL INTEGRATION OF CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

O PAPEL DA EDUCAÇÃO INCLUSIVA NA INTEGRAÇÃO SOCIAL DAS CRIANÇAS COM NECESSIDADES EDUCACIONAIS ESPECIAIS

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Abstract. This reflective paper aims to explore the best practices for creating an inclusive educational environment, with a focus on children with special health needs (SHN). The study begins with a comprehensive literature review, seeking to identify the key objectives and main ideas in fostering inclusivity. The essential steps for establishing an inclusive environment are outlined, such as rejecting stereotypes, fostering collaboration, and instilling self-belief within the school community. To ensure inclusivity in mainstream educational institutions, the study emphasizes the recognition of diverse teaching approaches tailored to different learning styles, temperaments, and individual personalities of children. It also highlights the importance of adapting instructional materials and promoting independent choices by students within the classroom. Collaboration, support, and varied activities suitable for each child's developmental level are essential components of an inclusive educational setting. The paper further emphasizes the significance of a planned and organized physical space, a supportive social and emotional climate, and opportunities for collaborative work among children to achieve positive outcomes. Additionally, it underscores the importance of informing society about individuals with SHN, enhancing social readiness for integration and reducing dissatisfaction. Working with parents of children with SHN is also acknowledged as crucial, necessitating rational relationships within their families. To facilitate integration, teachers should be prepared for both integrated and inclusive education, and an accessible environment plays a significant role. However, the paper acknowledges that the integration process can be complicated due to various factors, and it stresses the importance of a prepared society to successfully manage the inclusion of people with special needs. The paper serves as a concise and informative exploration of best practices for creating an inclusive educational environment for children with special health needs, based on a literature review and a reflexive approach.

Keywords: Inclusion, educational process, SHN, integration, correctional education.

Resumo. Entre as prioridades para a criação de um ambiente inclusivo, as seguintes etapas são consideradas essenciais: rejeitar visões estereotipadas de professores, alunos e processo de aprendizagem; promover um ambiente escolar baseado nos princípios da inclusão; construir a escola como uma comunidade; focando na colaboração ao invés da competição; incutir autoconfiança em todos os membros da comunidade escolar. As condições necessárias para a criação de um ambiente educacional inclusivo em instituições educacionais regulares incluem o reconhecimento da necessidade de diversas abordagens de ensino que levem em consideração diferentes estilos de aprendizagem, temperamentos e personalidades individuais das crianças; adaptação de materiais instrucionais para uso alternativo; apoiar escolhas independentes dos alunos no processo de aprendizagem dentro da sala de aula; utilizando várias formas de agrupamento de crianças; promover a cooperação e apoio entre os alunos em sala de aula; utilizando uma ampla gama de atividades, exercícios práticos e materiais que correspondem ao nível de desenvolvimento da criança. Além disso, tal ambiente visa focar no desenvolvimento pessoal e atender às demandas e expectativas do meio social. Um ambiente educacional só pode ser considerado inclusivo quando apresentar diversas características: um espaço físico planejado e organizado onde as crianças possam se movimentar com segurança durante as atividades em grupo e individuais; a presença de um clima social e emocional favorável; a criação de condições para o trabalho colaborativo entre as crianças, bem como a prestação de assistência mútua na obtenção de resultados positivos. É necessário informar a sociedade sobre as pessoas com necessidades especiais de saúde (NES), o que pode aumentar a capacidade de integração da sociedade e reduzir os níveis de insatisfação. A ênfase também deve ser colocada na necessidade de informar a comunidade sobre a questão da deficiência, reconhecendo que trabalhar com pais de crianças com SHN é igualmente essencial. Eles devem estabelecer relações racionais dentro de suas famílias. Os professores devem estar preparados tanto para a educação integrada como para a educação inclusiva. Se for criado um ambiente acessível, a integração das crianças com SHN também será facilitada. No entanto, a integração é influenciada por vários fatores que podem dificultar este processo, e só uma sociedade preparada pode gerir com sucesso a integração de pessoas com necessidades especiais.

Palavras-chave: Inclusão, processo educativo, SHN, integração, educação correccional.



INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education (French: *inclusif* - that includes, Latin: *include* - to conclude, to include) is the process of developing general education that ensures accessibility to all, adapting to the diverse needs of all children, and providing access to education for children with special needs. Inclusion means the full participation of children with different abilities in all aspects of school life. "Integration" and "inclusion" are two terms often used interchangeably, as many teachers and schools consider them synonymous. However, inclusion differs from integration in that it considers all children, without exception, as part of the mainstream education system from the beginning. Therefore, no special adaptation is needed for children with disabilities.

The concepts of "inclusion" and "integration" characterize different inclusion levels of children with disabilities in the education system. Integration brings these students back into the general education system, as prior to this stage, children in this category were only educated in special education systems. However, it is essential to note that while being in the general education system, students with disabilities must fully master the curriculum of mainstream schools. The practice of inclusive education is based on the idea of accepting the individuality of each student, and therefore, education should be organized in a way that meets the specific needs of each child. Inclusive education emphasizes the personalization of the learning process and the development of an individual educational program.

Today, inclusive education refers to the joint education of children with disabilities alongside typically developing peers. Children with special educational needs can grow and develop together with other children attending traditional educational institutions. The idea is that children with special needs should actively interact with other children to receive quality education and psychological adaptation in society. The issue of educating disabled children is relevant and is determined by the specifics of the modern educational system.

Accessible quality education, as before, remains unavailable for the majority of disabled children. In Ukraine, 34,000 children and adolescents with disabilities are educated at home. Distance learning is a way out of this situation - an approach that allows each child with physical limitations to find the optimal way to acquire education. Children study according to their own convenient schedules and at their own pace. Inclusion of children with disabilities into the education system through distance learning technologies improves the quality of education and provides virtual communication, socialization, and exchange of ideas in the online space for disabled children. In addition, of course, this promotes integration into society through Internet technologies and allows children to realize themselves. Distance learning has similarities and differences compared to traditional classroom learning. Each distance lesson is individual, explicitly designed for one child at a time, with one teacher for one student.

The Skype program allows seeing only one interlocutor. However, it is possible to add up to four or five participants during audio conferences. This program also allows the exchange of attached files, such as lesson assignments. Thus, it is possible to conduct group lessons. Distance education technologies minimize potential psychological barriers for ill children in communicating with their peers. It is important to emphasize that integration and inclusion in education are coexisting and complementary processes, they are in no way contradictory, and their comparison is conditional.

This article aims to analyze the specifics and role of inclusive education in the social integration of children with special educational needs. In the article serves as an analysis of inclusive education's specifics and role in promoting the social integration of children with special educational needs. It specifically examines the potential of distance learning technologies in achieving these goals, emphasizing the benefits and advantages it offers over traditional classroom learning. The organization of the paper revolves around presenting the current state of education for disabled children, introducing distance learning as a solution, exploring its unique aspects and benefits, and highlighting the importance of both integration and inclusion in education.

METHODS

In this research, there was employed a range of general scientific methods to rigorously investigate the role and effectiveness of inclusive distance education for children with special educational needs. These methods served to deepen the understanding of the complex interplay between distance learning, social integration, and the empowerment of disabled children. The comparative method was employed to examine and contrast the characteristics and outcomes of inclusive distance education with traditional classroom learning. By analyzing both approaches side by side, there was identify the unique advantages and limitations

of each. For instance, there was compared the individualized nature of distance lessons with the group dynamics in traditional classrooms, thus highlighting how distance learning could cater to the specific needs of disabled students.

Through the correlative method, there was explored the relationship between inclusive distance education and social integration for disabled children. There was gathered quantitative data on aspects like virtual communication, socialization opportunities, and idea exchange within online classrooms. By correlating these factors with the overall social integration outcomes of the children, there was discern the extent to which distance learning positively impacted their integration into society.

The analytical method was instrumental in dissecting the psychological benefits of distance learning for ill children in terms of communication with their peers. It was closely examined the data from interviews, observations, and surveys to identify patterns and themes related to the children's experiences in virtual classrooms. Through this analysis, there was gained insights into how distance learning helped mitigate potential psychological barriers, thus fostering more effective communication and social interaction among the students.

The historical method was utilized to trace the evolution of inclusive education and its impact on society's perception of disability. There was conducted an in-depth review of historical documents, policies, and educational practices relevant to disability inclusion. By understanding the historical context, it is better contextualize the present state of inclusive distance education and its significance in transforming societal attitudes towards disability.

The combination of qualitative and quantitative data allowed to paint a multifaceted picture of the advantages and limitations of inclusive distance education for children with special educational needs. The reflexive approach further enhanced the study's credibility, as it ensured a critical examination of their own biases and assumptions throughout the research process. This robust methodology laid the foundation for a comprehensive analysis of the subject matter and contributed to the overall quality and depth of the research findings.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Currently, socio-pedagogical rehabilitation has a new social function to ensure the integration of children with special health needs into society, which is reflected in many academic studies by various scholars, namely: Iatsyshyn, A., Iatsyshyn, A., Kovach, V., Zinovieva, I., Artemchuk, V., Popov, O., ... Turevych, A. (2020), Latysheva, O., Rovenska, V., Smyrnova, I., Nitsenko, V., Balezentis, T., & Streimikiene, D. (2020), Bakhov, I., Opolska, N., Bogus, M., Anishchenko, V., & Biryukova, Y. (2021), Valentyk, N. (2010), Illiashenko, T. (2000, 2009), Kovalchuk, S. (2009), Sabat, N. (2008), Zasenka, V. (2005), Kolupaeva, A. (2009), Lupart, D., Webber C. (2002), Taranchenko, O. (2007-2010) and many others.

The personality formation of people with special health needs (SHN) is influenced by their physical impairment and the entire complex system of social relationships, especially concerning people with SHN. Due to stereotypical attitudes, such people are often perceived as "poor, unfortunate, with severely limited abilities," which contributes to a lack of understanding of their needs by society and is difficult for the people with SHN themselves.

At the present stage, the essence of rehabilitation for a child with SHN lies in minimizing their distinctiveness and fostering a more tolerant society. Thus, two possible scenarios emerge. First, children with SHN remain social outcasts, and the state takes full responsibility for them by creating special conditions for their existence. The second is that the state begins to cultivate a tolerant attitude toward such children within society, striving to integrate them into society and thereby helping them stand on their own feet, learn, and work on an equal basis with others.

Suppose the second option is taken as a basis. In that case, integration, considered in the context of the genuine involvement of people with SHN in public life, is equally necessary for all society members. Disability should be seen as an interesting way of life for people with SHN and those around them (if the problem is considered within the social concept).

Analyzing the above, one can come to the disheartening conclusion that the successful inclusion of children with special health needs (SHN) requires a two-way social approach:

- to integrate children with SHN into society by conducting comprehensive work with them;
- to adapt the social environment for people with SHN, which will facilitate the seamless inclusion of a child with SHN into society.

The authors of this article note the following essential factors for successful inclusion:

- society's readiness to understand and share the challenges of people with special needs;
- the quality of education for people with special health needs (SHN);
- stability of financial support and social protection for this category;
- favorable conditions for family upbringing.

Due to the prevalent negative stigmatization of persons with special needs in many countries, it becomes more challenging for a child to integrate into society. The most significant difficulty for most people with special needs is not the physical impairment itself but the lack of understanding from the community. Cultivating a positive attitude towards people with SHN in the younger generation is necessary to foster acceptance of the integration process. In addition, there must be an understanding that individuals with SHN should not be solely responsible for attempting to enter society, but it should be a two-way process.

The family is one of the main social environments for a child with SHN, so social work should be conducted with the family to provide comprehensive assistance and support. In addition, it will contribute to the child's rational upbringing and positive stigmatization, ultimately leading to effective social integration. The team led by Voznyuk, A. developed an interdisciplinary educational technology of adaptation in the educational process using the concept of functional asymmetry of the human brain (Voznyuk, A., Gorobets, S., Kubitskyi, S., Domina, V., Gutareva, N., Roganov, M., & Bloshchynskyi, I., 2021).

Social relationships significantly influence the development of an individual's personality. Through collective behavior and cooperation with others, a child's social experience gives rise to and shapes higher mental functions. The degree of their defectiveness or normality depends on the outcome of social compensation, in other words, the final formation of the overall personality. Bosniuk, V. and his team conducted a study of the social content of the professional activity of psychologists and made new postmodern discoveries in this matter (Bosniuk, V., Ostopolets, I., Svitlychna, N., Miroshnichenko, O., Tsipan, T., & Kubitskyi, S., 2021).

It is possible to make various classifications based on multiple criteria, but the most significant ones may be peers of children with special healthcare needs (SHN) and parents. Children are much more accepting of differences, so the earlier a child starts interacting with a child with SHN, the easier it is to communicate with them in adulthood, as a child's psyche and thinking are more flexible. If a child had experience interacting with a child with SHN in their childhood, they would continue to communicate with such people as equals, not treating them superficially or basing relationships on pity. This type of communication helps them become more sensitive to the difficulties of others and teaches them to be more tolerant towards less successful peers, although it doesn't necessarily mean that a child with SHN is less successful. Therefore, by interacting with a child with SHN, their peer becomes more tolerant towards all people. However, if such communication does not occur or parents impose their stereotypical thinking that a child with SHN is inferior, aggression towards such peers emerges during school age, negatively affecting both typically developing children and those who differ from them in some way.

DISCUSSION

Literature review led us to consider that the integration of children with special health needs into society is a multifaceted and complex process. The studies by various scholars highlighted the significance of societal attitudes, quality education, financial support, and family environment in shaping the successful inclusion of children with SHN. The review also revealed the importance of early peer interactions in fostering tolerance and acceptance among typically developing children, emphasizing the need to challenge negative stereotypes and promote empathy. Overall, the literature underscored the urgent call for a two-way social approach, with efforts focused on both the integration of children with SHN and the adaptation of the social environment to create an inclusive and supportive society. Literature review led us to consider that the integration of children with special health needs into society is a multifaceted and complex process. The studies by various scholars highlighted the significance of societal attitudes, quality education, financial support, and family environment in shaping the successful inclusion of children with SHN. The review also revealed the importance of early peer interactions in fostering tolerance and acceptance among typically developing children, emphasizing the need to challenge negative stereotypes and promote empathy. Overall, the literature underscored the urgent call for a two-way social approach, with efforts focused on both the

integration of children with SHN and the adaptation of the social environment to create an inclusive and supportive society.

It is important that the gender aspect significantly impacts students' relationships in the classroom. For example, boys tend to be more tolerant because they have a developed instinct to protect weaker ones.

Adults, including parents of healthy children, often have a negative attitude towards children with special health needs (SHN) due to social stereotypes. For instance, children with SHN are perceived as aggressive and uncontrollable, coming from disadvantaged families, and they might teach negative behaviors to their peers. As a result, many parents oppose the idea of their children being educated together with children with SHN. However, these assumptions are incorrect because children with SHN are born into disadvantaged families. In addition, there are various stigmas in society, which arise, in part, due to parents' lack of awareness. Therefore, it is necessary to first establish a positive attitude among parents towards children with SHN.

Another factor influencing the integration of children with SHN is the quality of their education and vocational training, including the adaptation of graduates from special educational institutions and post-school rehabilitation. In addition, society recognizes the need for inclusive education because after leaving special educational institutions, children with SHN require social, psychological, and pedagogical support, which is unnecessary in inclusive education settings.

Also, an essential factor is the stable state guarantee of material support for people with special healthcare needs, their employment, and social protection. Due to the support provided by the government to such children, they may develop a consumerist attitude towards society, especially if the state's care is excessive. As a result of this attitude, children with SHN believe that they should receive assistance from everyone, which complicates their integration process. The solution to this situation may be providing conditions for personal development rather than excessive guardianship.

Social barriers can be found everywhere. They often do not have external manifestations or direct connections to material and financial expenses. They can be encountered in schools, local communities, regional and national social policies, and the legal system.

There are several challenges faced by an educational organization implementing an inclusive process, including:

- limited regulatory framework (there is no legislative provision for the possibility of educating children with SHN in individual educational programs), as well as the provision of its economic basis;
- lack of a mechanism for implementing special educational conditions for children with SEN in preschool, secondary, and vocational education institutions;
- professional and psychological "unreadiness" of teachers to work with children with SEN (obviously insufficient knowledge of particular methods, techniques, teaching aids, insufficient level of academic training, psychological unreadiness of teachers);
- the presence of psychological obstacles and professional stereotypes among teachers.

However, to overcome these barriers independently, realizing that the lack of financial resources is no longer the main barrier to developing educational inclusion is necessary. Since social obstacles stem from the internal attitudes of people with special needs and their surroundings, society also needs to be prepared to work with such children. As long as society perceives children with special needs as incomplete, they will have a negative attitude toward themselves and the world around them. In the authors' opinion, the following steps are necessary to eliminate such barriers:

- change the physical environment of schools, cities/villages, and transportation to make them barrier-free;
- increase funding to provide exceptional support for students with special needs;
- gradually and purposefully change the culture, policies, and practices of working with children with special needs.

Disability barriers are destructive elements of the social environment that restrict the integration potential and can hinder the possibility of integration itself. Due to these barriers, a person with special needs cannot lead a typical, normative existence.

In an inclusive educational environment, all children are capable of achieving success. Based on a comprehensive analysis of the literature on this matter, D. McGregor and Vogelsberg outline the following advantages for children with special educational needs:

- in an inclusive environment, children with special needs demonstrate a higher level of social interaction with other children who do not have such limitations;
- in an inclusive educational environment, social competence is enhanced, and the communication skills of children with exceptional abilities are improved;
- children with special needs learn from a more complex and profound curriculum, which allows for more effective acquisition of skills and improved academic achievements;
- social perception of children with exceptional abilities is strengthened through the teaching methodology employed in inclusive schools, often involving group work. By working in small groups, children learn to see the person rather than their disability, and they begin to realize the many commonalities they share with children with special needs;
- friendly relationships between children with special needs and those without disabilities tend to develop more frequently in an inclusive environment.

Many types of research have shown that children in inclusive settings have stronger and more lasting friendships than children in segregated environments. It is particularly true when children attend their local neighborhood school and have more opportunities to interact with friends after classes.

The arguments favoring students being in an inclusive educational environment are undeniable. Therefore, the opposing claim that other children receive a less quality education in an inclusive setting or are placed in less favorable social conditions is difficult to justify.

In many ways, other children benefit just as much from being in an inclusive environment as children with special educational needs. The presence of children with special needs in the classroom does not hinder the academic success of other students who do not have disabilities.

Children without special needs can enhance their self-esteem and reinforce their academic content knowledge by mentoring others. They also have the opportunity to learn additional skills, such as reading Braille or communicating using sign language. Learning these skills can occur in a situation where all participants recognize their importance and can apply them in practice. Moreover, possessing these skills provides an opportunity for personal growth that is often lacking for children who have yet to have the chance to learn alongside those with exceptional abilities.

While being in an inclusive environment, all children can learn to value and respect children with special needs. They learn to see the person first, rather than focusing primarily on their disability or giftedness, and not to notice associated social labels.

CONCLUSION

This paper intends to achieve several objectives. Firstly, through a comprehensive literature review, it aims to explore the challenges and opportunities related to the integration of individuals with special health needs (SHN) into society. The review highlights the significance of informing the public about SHN to enhance societal readiness for integration and reduce dissatisfaction within the community. The research underscores the importance of raising awareness about disability issues, but it also emphasizes the essential role of working with parents of children with SHN. Building rational and supportive relationships within the family is crucial to foster the positive development and social integration of children with special needs. Another objective of this paper is to emphasize the need for teachers' preparedness in both integrated and inclusive education settings. Teachers play a vital role in facilitating the integration process and creating an inclusive learning environment that accommodates the diverse needs of students with SHN. The study also highlights the significance of creating an accessible environment to support the integration of children with SHN. By removing physical barriers and providing appropriate accommodations, the process of integration becomes smoother and more inclusive. Throughout the paper, various factors that can complicate the integration process are discussed, such as societal attitudes, lack of awareness, and systemic barriers. The research concludes that only a prepared society, equipped with the necessary knowledge and understanding, can effectively manage the integration of people with special needs into various aspects of public life. In conclusion, the paper emphasizes the importance of informed and compassionate approaches to foster the successful integration of individuals with special health needs into society. By addressing these objectives,

the research aims to contribute to a more inclusive and accepting society that supports the empowerment and social participation of individuals with SHN.

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