

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: APPROACHES AND METHODS OF WORKING WITH CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

EDUCAÇÃO INCLUSIVA: ABORDAGENS E MÉTODOS DE TRABALHO COM CRIANÇAS COM NECESSIDADES ESPECIAIS

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Resumo. O presente artigo acadêmico explora as opiniões científicas recolhidas sobre a contribuição e os benefícios de uma abordagem inclusiva à educação para o desenvolvimento sustentável nas instituições educativas para cada aluno ou estudante. Atualmente, a inclusão é a melhor forma de garantir o acesso a uma educação de qualidade, já que o aluno está no centro das atenções neste caso. A base da inclusão é que as diferenças individuais e a consequente diferenciação das crianças contêm um conjunto de oportunidades e recursos dos quais todos podem beneficiar. Portanto, é necessário garantir a participação igualitária e conjunta nas instituições de ensino de todos os níveis. Contudo, ainda existem obstáculos a superar neste campo de atuação pedagógica. O artigo acadêmico mostra que a inclusão no quadro da educação para o desenvolvimento sustentável visa combater e contrariar a educação desfavorável, a segregação e a discriminação.

Palavras-chave: educação para o desenvolvimento sustentável; Educação inclusiva; ESD inclusiva; diversidade; superando a complexidade

Abstract. The present academic paper explores the scientific views collected on the contribution and benefits of an inclusive approach to education for sustainable development in educational institutions for every schoolchild or student. Currently, inclusion is the best way to ensure access to quality education since the student is at the centre of attention in this case. The basis of inclusion is that individual differences and the resulting differentiation of children contain a set of opportunities and resources that everyone can benefit from. Therefore, it is necessary to ensure equal and joint participation at educational institutions of all levels. However, there are still obstacles to overcome in this pedagogical field of activity. The academic paper shows that inclusion within the framework of education for sustainable development is intended to combat and counteract disadvantageous education, segregation and discrimination.

Keywords: education for sustainable development; inclusive education; inclusive ESD; diversity; overcoming complexity

INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education is a central issue addressed by UNESCO: all people around the world should have access to high-quality education. Everyone should have the opportunity to develop his or her potential. This statement is universal, and it applies regardless of gender, social and economic background, or special learning needs. The UNESCO Salamanca Declaration as of 1994 has already set the goal of making education systems inclusive. At the end of 2008, the participants of the UNESCO World Conference of Ministers of Education confirmed this need. In the final declaration, they call for implementing systems of inclusive education in which the individuality of each person is used as a resource.

If one links Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 “Quality education – Provide inclusive, equitable and quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all” and the “Convention on the Rights of

Persons with Disabilities” (United Nations, 2006), it becomes clear that education for sustainable development (ESD) and inclusive education and their joint implementation are relevant and up to date. Inclusion requires equal access to education for all, as well as recognizing and overcoming barriers, and the ESD seeks to develop resilience skills for all students.

However, so far, scholarly discourse regarding ESD and inclusive education has tended to be conducted separately, although both concepts are highly relevant to the entire education system. Developing a common view on ESD and inclusive education is still desirable (Ball, S. J. (2016). There are currently few publications on the relationship between EDC and inclusive education and only a few materials for practical educational work have been developed. The training series developed by Svinos and Westermeier is an exception to this (Svinos, 2019; Westermeier, 2015).

Within the context of SDG 4, the challenge in terms of high-quality and effective education is to link ESD and inclusive education to each other, to establish linkages, to present pioneering projects, and to consolidate both concepts together in the structures of the education system and educational practice (European Commission, 2022). For this purpose, scientific and practical research and development should be encouraged. Theories, concepts and materials can be advanced since there is still a lot of potential here. It can also lessen the burden on educators, who, for instance, have so far perceived EDC and inclusive education at schools as two parallel cross-cutting issues and, thus, as additional challenges. One of the concerns arising in this case is how teachers can be trained to teach in inclusive classrooms and develop sustainable development skills in all students, taking into account their individuality.

AIMS

The purpose of the research is to explore approaches and methods of working with children with special needs at all levels by the EDC and inclusive education following the whole-school approach.

Considering the common perspective on ESD and inclusive education, the questions that are crucial to the present academic paper can be asked: How can these two concepts be connected to complement each other? This is accompanied by the following sub-questions:

- Are there common regulatory frameworks and goals for ESD and inclusive education?
- How can ESD be developed to be inclusive in its methodological and didactic implementation?
- To what extent does inclusive education offer suggestions on the possibilities and limitations of individual development of very sophisticated resilience skills?
- What skills do teachers require for ESD and inclusive education?

Before answering these questions, the relevant understanding of ESD and inclusive education is outlined.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Since the late 1990s, sustainable development has been increasingly mentioned in discussions about education and in educational practice. In this context, the concept of education for sustainable development (ESD) was developed (Rieckmann, 2016; Michelsen & Fischer, 2015).

Sustainable development will be impossible without learning processes (Vare & Scott, 2007). Therefore, education for sustainable development should contribute to the promotion of sustainable development of society. It aims to provide people with opportunities to engage in processes of social learning and understanding for sustainable development, the implementation of the SDGs and thus contributing to the “Great Transformation” (WBGU, 2011).

Students – as “citizens of sustainable development” (Wals & Lenglet, 2016) – should be able to “contribute to the formation of sustainable development and critically reflect on their actions in this regard” (Belcher, B. & Palenberg, M., 2018). First of all, this includes the ability to critically examine sustainable development and the complexity, uncertainty and contradictions related to it. The formation of leadership in the process of professional and managerial activity is important, and its problems were considered through the prism of theoretical analysis (Desiatnyk, K., Novakivska, L., Pryma, V., Klochko, L., & Vdovina, O., 2022).

This emancipatory approach to education for sustainable development considers the cultivation of key competencies as an important educational goal enabling people to actively influence the process of sustainable development. In the context outlined, the following sustainability skills are considered particularly relevant: networking skills, forward-thinking skills, normative skills, strategic skills, collaboration skills, critical thinking skills, personal skills, and integrated problem-solving skills (Rieckmann, 2016; UNESCO, 2017).

In addition, education for sustainable development is expected to promote critical discourse on values (Rieckmann, 2016). Such a discourse can and should provide suggestions for reflecting on one’s values and taking a position in the discussion of values on the path toward sustainable development. Their potential also

lies in expanding the horizon of students' values. Education for sustainable development implies that learning processes should be developed as participatory processes and should be focused on participation (Rieckmann, 2016). After all, competencies cannot be simply taught, they must be achieved through one's efforts (Wals, A. E. J. & Lenglet, F., 2016). Thus, education for sustainable development requires action-oriented transformative pedagogy (Rieckmann, 2016; UNESCO, 2017), which is characterized by such didactic principles as learner-centred and accessible, action-oriented and reflective, participatory, networked, visionary, and transformative learning (Rieckmann, 2016; UNESCO, 2017).

At the same time, these innovations in teaching and training require new teaching and training skills from teachers (Belcher, B. & Palenberg, M., 2018). Ultimately, teachers should possess sustainability skills and be able to develop them with their students. This means that they should possess a critical understanding of sustainable development, on the one hand, and a pedagogical approach to education for sustainable development, on the other hand. Therefore, teachers require knowledge of innovative teaching and training methods and the skills to apply them. They also need the skills to guide students, which also include thinking critically about their role as a teacher and perceiving themselves more as a learning companion. Education for sustainable development is not only about integrating sustainable development into teaching and adding new content to school subjects or courses, for example. Schools and universities, as well as other educational institutions, should perceive themselves as places of learning and gaining experience for sustainable development, and, therefore, align all their processes with the principles of sustainable development. To make ESD more effective, it is necessary to change the educational institution as a whole. Such a holistic concept (the approach to the entire educational institution) aims to integrate sustainability into all aspects of the educational institution (curriculum, functioning, organizational culture, etc.). Thus, the educational institution should become a model for students (UNESCO, 2017).

Inclusion in the educational environment becomes mandatory after ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The European Union's states have undertaken the relevant commitments since the beginning of 2011. It nominally entered into force in Ukraine on March 6, 2010. The convention in its 50 articles calls for the full participation of people with disabilities and considers inclusive development as a challenge for society as a whole.

Article 24 is particularly important in this convention since it concerns the recognition of the right to effective education for people with disabilities. This is confirmed by a long history of legal and normative developments, as exemplified by: the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the UN Social Covenant and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

While the UN Convention refers to a narrow understanding of inclusion and focuses on people with disabilities, many other documents and regulations are based on a broader concept of inclusion.

This includes many other aspects of diversity, such as gender, socioeconomic class, background, marital status, and culture, in addition to a group of persons with disabilities or impairments. A heterogeneous society is envisaged, which should develop in such a way that everyone can participate in all spheres of public life, depending on their preferences, but regardless of their background, and receive the necessary support for this, or conditions should be adjusted in such a way that this access is enabled (Bhatia, S. & Singh, S., 2015).

The variety of special educational needs of students (in particular, students) is given in the work of Horn (Horn, Laura & Berkold, 1999), where it is shown that they can be physical, psychological, intellectual, communication, social and others, and inclusive education is designed to take into account this diversity and its mission is to provide support and resources to meet these needs.

In addition, in inclusive education, it is important to individualize the approach to learning for each student. This may include tailoring the curriculum, teaching methods and assessment to the individual needs of each learner. In inclusive education, students with special needs often study together with their peers in general classes. This promotes mutual understanding, cooperation and social integration (Loreman et al. 2010).

Different learning strategies, including face-to-face learning, require special attention to ensure different aspects of inclusiveness. Direct instruction is a strategy that involves clear, step-by-step instruction that can be done with a whole class, a group of students, pairs, or individual students (Loreman et al. 2010). Although this strategy may exhibit exceptional characteristics compared to the whole class, it has some positive elements that can benefit students with different learning needs by offering individualized instruction.

The legal situation is clear, but the implementation in reality largely contradicts the statements. Much remains to be done, and inclusion should be understood as a process. The discussion regarding inclusive education is often connected exclusively to the school context. However, the scope of inclusive education goes far beyond this, and simply changing the school is not enough. It provides the following definition: "INCLUSION describes the basic values of society: inclusion is a human right. All people are perceived, accepted and valued in their diversity and individuality. Diversity is perceived as a resource. In terms of education at school and especially in the classroom, inclusion for us means responding to the needs of society and individuals and recognizing, considering and facilitating individual learning requirements. Individualization and community are equally

significant” (Dyson, A., 1999, Belcher, B. & Palenberg, M., 2018). Schools play a crucial role in education; they perform a pioneering function in developing an inclusive society. In this case, the whole-institution approach can be transferred from the context of ESD: inclusive education requires changes in the entire school structure, not just providing access to school for individual students with disabilities. Teachers play an important role in implementing inclusive education since it is significant how they design lessons and the learning environment as well as take into account the social climate and students’ requirements. However, what do teachers need to implement inclusive education?

The European Agency for the Development in Special Needs Education (2011) identifies three aspects as essential for the successful education of teachers:

- Knowledge: Knowledge of effective measures and concepts;
- Skills: Testing and implementing new measures
- Attitudes and beliefs: reflections on social values and norms.

All three dimensions interact with each other (Bhatia, S. & Singh, S., 2015) and should be taken into account in educating and training teachers. In addition to the required specialized knowledge, teachers need knowledge of the development of children and young people and pedagogical skills to be able to offer their students relevant approaches to support and learning opportunities. Knowledge of such appropriate and effective measures and strategies plays a fundamental role therein. In this model, action can also be understood as capacity: not only knowledge of measures and strategies but also the ability to change and implement them. Finally, teachers need a positive attitude toward inclusion and a belief that they are responsible for all students. Working on only one of these three components is not enough; this triad is necessary for the successful inclusive education of teachers.

In the context of inclusive education, teachers also should perceive themselves as “lifelong learners” (the European Agency for the Development in Special Needs Education, 2011, p. 77), whether by using and applying current research findings or collaborating with other professionals. Cooperation and multidisciplinary teamwork are becoming increasingly important in the context of inclusive education.

Teachers and schools should be involved in a wide network with internal and external interested parties. Teachers should collaborate with other teachers or pedagogical professionals in designing, conducting and reflecting on lessons together, giving the example of co-teaching as a possible area of collaboration.

RESULTS

Correspondingly, the task is to combine two complex concepts of education for sustainable development and inclusive education. The need for inclusion and sustainable development poses new challenges for education: “Globalization requires pedagogical responses as well as does the public desire to no longer systematically exclude people with disabilities from social participation and to welcome diversity in society in a non-discriminatory way” (Svinos, M., 2019). However, so far, discussions and substantive debates on both challenges have largely taken place in parallel and without mutual reference.

Therefore, we are talking about “building a bridge between two pedagogical principles which are almost predetermined for joint comprehension and implementation” (Chamberlain, D. & Shamberger, C., 2010). It should be done to enable students with disabilities to help create sustainable development (empowerment) and not to exclude them from such participatory processes as developing an inclusive ESD (Bhatia & Singh, 2015; Svinos, 2019).

ESD and inclusive education have a common normative core: the idea of empowerment is central to both concepts, and they are committed to human rights, human development and social justice (Belcher, B. & Palenberg, M., 2018). Thus, both concepts are based on high ethical standards that must be adhered to in everyday life. In this sense, ESD can also contribute to empowerment to overcome a disadvantageous situation: “Many students with special educational needs or with a migration background face structural violence in their daily lives in the form of discrimination and alienation. These students should acquire skills that will allow them to identify this structural violence as such and learn about possible options for action” (Bhatia, S. & Singh, S., 2015). It becomes clear here that sustainable development and inclusion are, on the one hand, about changing the structures of society and everyday life, and, on the other hand, about supporting children, youth and adults to develop skills and strategies for participating and helping to create the complex environment of the developing world.

In terms of goals, inclusive education is about fundamental social participation, while ESD specifically aims to empower people to help in the formation of sustainable development. Thus, inclusive education can be considered a prerequisite for ESD. Furthermore, only when all learners are supported according to their individual needs (and access to society and education is guaranteed for everyone), everyone will be

able to develop sustainable development skills and contribute to sustainable development according to their individual needs (Andersone R., 2015).

Two educational concepts also have similarities concerning some didactic principles. After all, both ESD and inclusive education are learner-centred; they relate to the world around them; they are action-oriented and imply the need for differentiation/individualization (Bray, L. E., & Russell, J. L., 2018, Friend, M., Cook, L., 2010). While Bray and Russell (2018) believe that global learning activities “[can] be designed effortlessly in a way that can engage students with a wide range of learning requirements”, we believe that the following task of methodological and didactic implementation of inclusive ESD is more demanding.

Primarily, the issue of classroom management as an overarching concept will also be relevant to inclusive education. How can you prepare a classroom or a place of study? How intensively does the teacher plan the lesson? How does the planning and teaching of training rules and procedures go? How can a positive (learning) climate be created and supported? What responsibilities are assigned to particular students? What cooperative forms of learning can be used? First of all, proactive criteria for managing the classroom (an overview of the criteria can be found, for instance, in (Friend, M., Cook, L., 2010) should be taken into account in inclusive ESD. In addition, there should also be reactive criteria, that is, strategies for potential problems.

Although the issue of ESD is developed through self-discovery using very open-ended teaching methods, the threshold is often reached with children with cognitive or behavioural disabilities. For this target group, ESD should be addressed in a more structured way and, if necessary, with a different pace of learning. The learning process should be “designed to be so flexible in terms of time and staff that individualized learning success for all students can be ensured” (Ramberg, J., Watkins, A., 2020). Further, it becomes clear that inclusive ESD offers many chances and opportunities, but if they are not (cannot be) utilized, there are also limitations and barriers.

More orientation, structuring and strictness are often required. In some circumstances, strategies (training) should be first developed before the more open form of independent discussion of the topic takes place. There are many options for support, but they should be identified, adapted to the needs of students and implemented. Perhaps the training should be a bit more closed and, at least partially, start with different methods than an open project work.

In addition, differentiation of goals is possible and even necessary in some cases: several small and easily achievable goals (if possible also well visualized for orientation), instead of one large and too distant objective. Encouraging and motivating feedback should be linked to clearly stated and achievable goals (for differentiated views on feedback in inclusive education, see Krammer, M., Seifert, S. & Gasteiger-Klicpera, B., 2021). The individual steps that should be taken to accomplish something or achieve a goal often need to be more clearly defined. Targeted training is, of course, also possible and sometimes necessary with ESD. It is not always possible for everyone to attain the same goal in heterogeneous study groups; however, this differentiation should not be an ultimate goal; it also should not become a selection tool (Meyer, A., Rose, D.H. & Gordon, D., 2014), Messiou, K. & Ainscow, M., 2020). It is also possible to develop a checklist together and write it down, which each student can take with him or her during the discussion. Step-by-step instructions that students can follow can also be very helpful to get started.

Discussion should also include a stronger product and experience orientation for developing or ensuring outcomes, instead of a purely cognitive, conversation-oriented handling of aspects. In addition, students with cognitive disabilities, in particular, may have affective approaches to sustainability issues: this can be done, for instance, through music, creative approaches such as drawing, observing nature with all the senses, or through feeling (Mustayeva, G. S., Tulaboeva G. T., Saydaliyeva D. Z., & Kurbanova M. M., 2022). Repeated cycles of feedback during the process provide additional support for some students. These are just a few possible starting points and they already offer a wide range of help and approaches to differentiation.

Despite all the opportunities and possibilities for differentiation, dealing with complexity and uncertainty is a particular challenge (Krammer, M., Seifert, S. & Gasteiger-Klicpera, B., 2021). This is because ESD is characterized by working with very complex topics (for instance, globalization, and climate change). To provide all students with access to these topics, special strategies are required to reduce complexity. This includes, among other things, explicit reference to life and the use of simple language (Paleczek, L., Ender, D., Berger, J., Prinz, K. & Seifert, S., 2022) to ensure that “all learners can penetrate the content” (Messiou, K. & Ainscow, M., 2020).

The above considerations make it clear that to be able to develop ESD comprehensively, a specific target group should be analyzed initially and repeatedly throughout the process. How diverse is the group

in terms of various aspects? What is the need for (special educational) support? What languages do they speak? What structural aids are required? How should the learning environment and materials be prepared and arranged to ensure that all learners can achieve the goal and participate in the process? Does the goal need to be adjusted for some to increase participation? Such differentiated processing of topics in heterogeneous groups can be considered as an enrichment of the educational process (Paleczek, L., Ender, D., Berger, J., Prinz, K. & Seifert, S., 2022). Adaptation of procedures and materials is significant not only for students with special needs; all participants also benefit from it if inclusive education is implemented properly (the European Agency for the Development in Special Needs Education, 2014). “Some students will have difficulty with network thinking; consequently, they need differentiation measures and emotional, empathetic approaches, which, however, also mean extending and deepening their range of experiences for other students” (Littlelyke, M. & Manolas, E., 2011, Pickl, G., Holzinger, A. & Kopp-Sixt, S., 2015). Therefore, we are talking about a positive and productive attitude towards diversity (Krammer, M., Seifert, S. & Gasteiger-Klicpera, B., 2021), which, however, cannot be implemented by teachers intuitively, and requires particular know-how.

To summarize, we can outline the following principles for developing an inclusive ESD:

- A reference to a relevant topic that students are familiar with and that is relevant to them in their daily lives (a reference from the world of life);
- Opportunities for practical work, for instance, specific material and as pure cognitive and abstract aspects as possible (action orientation);
- Working together in heterogeneous learning groups, possibly using methods supported by peer-to-peer learning;
- Differentiated tasks depending on skills or need for support (internal differentiation) and reduction of complexity;
- Development of cognitive and affective competence, for instance, through preparatory stages of practical strategies, as well as accompanying assistance and feedback;
- Multisensory work: using different senses without overloading them. In certain circumstances, it is possible to repeat different accesses instead of using them in parallel;
- Changing the point of view: realizing one’s values and the values of other people, putting oneself in the place of other people and evaluating their values;
- Developing the ability to empathize with other students, as well as people in other countries and nature.

At the same time, according to the whole-school approach, ESD and inclusion should not only find their way to the classroom, but they should also become the basis for comprehensive changes at schools as an institution (Paleczek, L., Ender, D., Berger, J., Prinz, K. & Seifert, S., 2022). This can also refer to sustainable and barrier-free design of school grounds and buildings as well as sustainable and diverse assortments in the school cafeteria or a school stall that are designed for all students and are accessible to everyone. This provides all students with a diverse and holistic approach to sustainability and inclusion.

You will be offered practical experience. In addition, students can participate in school formation by themselves, take responsibility and contribute their (heterogeneous) viewpoints. Last but not least, the school takes on the role of a reference model with a comprehensive consideration of sustainability and inclusion criteria. Support on the part of school leadership and the involvement of all staff are fundamental to implementing a whole-school approach. Establishing a leadership team and collaborating with non-governmental organizations or partners from the Global South can also be beneficial (Messiou, K. & Ainscow, M., 2020). The existing network of schools should be expanded and cooperation should be strengthened.

Both ESD and inclusive education impose high demands on teachers and their professionalization (the European Agency for the Development in Special Needs Education, 2011). In the context of pedagogical education, teachers should acquire knowledge about the concepts of ESD and inclusive education, as well as skills to implement them. Implementing the above options for differentiation and modification of methods or materials requires a wide range of knowledge and skills. In addition, it is relevant for both concepts that a positive attitude towards sustainable development or inclusion facilitates the work with pedagogical concepts. There is potential for combining both concepts for all three stages of the teacher’s training.

CONCLUSION

To summarize, it can be stated that both ESD and inclusion have great potential for joint consideration and implementation. Inclusion should be considered as a prerequisite for ESD. Inclusive ESD is very complex and it requires careful planning and implementation. The requirements for teachers are very high. At the same time, the two concepts can be combined very well, and the connection between ESD and inclusion seems to be beneficial for both concepts. There is a common regulatory core. Inclusive methodological and didactic design is an advantage for all students. Inclusive ESD as a holistic institutional approach at school seems to be beneficial for the positive organization of everyday school life and promises a positive impact on society. This is because both teachers and students can serve as positive models for each other and in their social contexts outside the school. It is expedient to develop additional educational materials and test the approaches outlined in the present academic paper in practice, with scientific support for further development of inclusive ESD.

As we can see, the combination of inclusive education with sustainable development education will allow relevant institutions to better understand and take into account the individual needs of all learners, including those with different types of disabilities or special educational needs.

We have shown that, on the one hand, inclusive education is designed to ensure access to education for all students, including those with physical or cognitive limitations. This is important to ensure equal opportunity to receive quality education. On the other hand, sustainability education aims to build students' skills that will enable them to understand and address global challenges such as climate change, biodiversity and social justice. Inclusive education includes all students in the learning process, allowing them to collaborate and develop these skills together.

The synergy of these two approaches therefore emphasizes the importance of understanding and respecting diversity, both in the context of learning and in the context of society. It will contribute to the creation of a more inclusive and diverse society that values every person.

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