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# INCLUSION AS A SOCIAL CONCEPT AND EDUCATIONAL PRACTICE

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### *Abstract*

The paper is aimed at theoretical understanding of positive foreign and domestic experience in implementation of concepts of social and educational inclusion. The analysis of the international experience of implementation of concepts of inclusion in social and educational contexts shows that global practice is focused on broad understanding of inclusion, while most domestic studies are focused on concepts of inclusion in a narrowly defined sense as an area related to adaptation, socialization and rehabilitation of disabled people. The study analyzes the results of scientific research in the field of philosophical understanding of concepts of inclusion in the context of its cultural, humanistic and humanitarian aspects. Inclusion is regarded as an objective reality of modern humanistic civil society that implies transformation of the values of upbringing and education of the younger generation, the need to optimize traditional forms, methods and means of treating individuals with special educational needs, transformation of the system of professional personnel training for work in conditions of educational and social inclusion. The paper highlights the main trends characteristic of foreign and domestic studies on inclusion including philosophical understanding of the process of inclusion in the context of humanistic philosophy; the dominance of studies focused on inclusion in its narrow sense; consideration of concepts of inclusion as a social key strategy that affects all aspects of public life. The identified trends determined the leading concepts of the research in pedagogy of inclusive education: interdisciplinarity and practice orientation.

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**Keywords:** Inclusion, inclusive education, educational practice, social concept.

## 1. Introduction

The words "inclusion", "inclusive education", "inclusive culture", etc. currently cause no surprise and do not raise numerous questions. The concept of social adaptation, assistance, "inclusion" of people with disabilities is gradually becoming common in the life of Russian society and no longer causes rejection, which could be observed a couple of decades ago. Inclusion today is becoming, if not common, at least a recognizable component of Russian educational reality. Unlike Russia, inclusion as a social concept and educational practice has been a reality for Western European countries that actively broadcast positive experiences of social and educational inclusion within research and practice-oriented projects for nearly half a century. Despite the presence of positive experience in organizing social and educational inclusion, the Russian Federation currently occupies a catch-up position as compared to Western countries and needs to understand its own and scientific synthesis of foreign experience in this field.

## 2. Problem Statement

Inclusion as a social concept and educational practice allows us to address a wide range of issues that require scientific understanding. Among them: formation of a tolerant public consciousness, functional and psychological unpreparedness of Russian society to implement the concept of inclusion, fostering of inclusive culture among the population, training of teaching personnel for work in the inclusive education system at all its levels and many others. Our research is aimed at theoretical understanding of positive foreign and domestic experience in implementation of concept of social and educational inclusion, which will allow us to systematically present the development of pedagogical concepts of inclusive education in modern Russia.

## 3. Research Questions

The paper analyzes the problem field of foreign and domestic studies in the field of inclusion in social and educational contexts.

## 4. Purpose of the Study

The study aims to highlight general global trends in the world and national theory and practice of implementation of the concepts of inclusion in social and educational aspects, and to identify promising trends of development in national pedagogy of inclusive education.

## 5. Research Methods

In the study, we used methods of analysis and synthesis to identify the main trends of research in the world and national theory and practice of inclusive education.

## 6. Findings

Social inclusion, inclusive education, inclusive culture, preparedness for inclusion – these phrases can often be found in scientific journals and heard in the media. The concept of inclusion in Russia has relatively recently became the focus of researchers. The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities was ratified by the Russian Federation; however, the status of inclusive education was formalized only in 2012 upon adoption of the "Law on Education in the Russian Federation". It should be noted that the definition of inclusive education in the law interpreted as provision of equal access to education for all students with account for the diversity of special educational needs and individual opportunities is focused on broad understanding of the concept of inclusion as a whole. The analysis of international experience in implementation of concepts of inclusion in social and educational contexts shows that global practice considers broad understanding of inclusion (Sigal, 2017). The categories related to inclusion include representatives of ethnic and sexual minorities, gifted people, people with various intellectual, physical and behavioral deviations, HIV-infected, social marginals, etc. On the one hand, the inclusion in this context broadens the research horizons of scientists, and on the other hand, it reduces the risks of social exclusion. "In foreign inclusive practice, the perception of diversity as a value forms the basis for philosophical concepts of inclusion and determines both interpretation of inclusive phenomena and definition of the problematic field of inclusive processes" (Afonkina, Zhigunova, & Kuzmicheva, 2015, p. 110).

It should be noted that the majority of domestic studies on the problems of inclusion consider the problems related to its educational context. It should be emphasized that domestic practice of understanding the concepts of inclusion is focused on its narrow interpretation, primarily as a sphere related to adaptation, socialization and rehabilitation of persons with disabilities. We aim to reveal the provisions of some of them and trace the main trends of relationship between the concepts of foreign and domestic pedagogy of inclusive education.

Shemanov and Popova (2011) consider the concepts of inclusion and believe that the goals of inclusive education should include a "culturological perspective", understanding of special cultural needs of those involved in this type of education, more productive use of cultural knowledge for the purposes of inclusion and integration of people with disabilities in the social environment.

Nigmatov (2013) relates the emerged orientation towards the concepts of inclusion in education to the process that became more active in Western countries in the mid 60's and was associated with elimination of psychiatric hospitals and boarding schools for people with developmental disabilities. "Isolation of the inhabitants of these institutions from society, lack of conditions that stimulate their development, lovelessness, and cruel treatment were the evidence of the worst violation of human rights. It became obvious that a closed institution atrophies person's abilities, narrows the social circle, decreases self-esteem and closes the door to productive life. That is why the concepts of educational inclusion naturally resulted in humanization of education, implementation of "the eternal humanistic dream of mankind about a just world where no group of people is isolated from the rest and the interests of any people are not oppressed by the interests and needs of others" (Nigmatov, 2013, p. 175). According to Sudakova (2016), "the principle of accepting the Other one through awareness of the boundaries of one's own and someone else's, the responsibility for their preservation as the basis for social inclusion strategy

expresses the very essence of the culture of inclusion – the core of the humanitarian paradigm of the new millennium" (p. 152).

Aspects of the development of concepts of educational inclusion in the post-Soviet space are revealed in the study The Long Road to Inclusion by Martin Rouse and Kate Lapham. The authors emphasize that inclusion is not a destination. This is a long process that involves not only changes in the education system, but also significant changes in society as a whole (Rauze & Laphan, 2013). Inclusion is an objective reality of modern humanistic civil society that shows transformation of the values of upbringing and education of the younger generation, the need in optimization of traditional forms, methods and means of treating individuals with special educational needs, and transformation of the system of professional personnel training for work in the system of educational and social inclusion.

The issues of training personnel for the system of inclusive education are addressed in foreign and domestic studies. It should be noted that despite traditional attitudes to implementation of the values of educational inclusion established in the West, the range of studies related to the features of training teachers, psychologists, defectologists, and specialists of assisting professions is quite diverse, which indicates their relevance and high demand.

Briefly reveal the content of the main foreign studies devoted to the issues of training personnel for the system of inclusive education. Kim (2011) presented the results of his study conducted in the United States to investigate the impact of the type of higher education program on the formation of students' attitude towards inclusion. The author analyzed ten higher education programs. Based on the analysis, Kim (2011) distinguished combined, individual and general types of programs. Analyzing the results of his work with different education programs, the author concluded that students studying in the combined program showed a more positive attitude towards inclusion.

Scorgie (2010) carried out another interesting study associated with trainee teachers in the USA. During the experimental work, the trainee teachers were able to try the roles of virtual parents of children with hearing impairment, epilepsy, autism spectrum disorder, Down syndrome, intellectual deficit, mental retardation, cerebral palsy, and difficulties in behavior and learning. A wide range of categories of children with special educational needs shows that US researchers are focused on broad understanding of inclusion.

Numerous studies cover the problems of teacher training for inclusive education, which can be solved through the improvement of existing training programs and the development of new training programs. In their studies, Cargan and Schmidt (2011) and De Boer, Pijl, and Minnaert (2011) stated that most teachers are ready to work with children with normative development. However, due to lack of experience in communication and interaction with special needs children, teachers require additional knowledge on the features of working with these children, the regulatory support and methods of working with children with special educational needs. Above all, teachers lack knowledge of the peculiarities of the development of special needs children. According to the authors, this is the main reason for the lack of preparedness of teachers to work in inclusive classrooms. It should be noted that researchers have different opinions on the effectiveness of courses and advanced training programs in solving the above problems.

The study by Brandon and Charlton (2011) is devoted to the experience of England in the creation of Centers for Excellence in Teacher Training. These centers were established as a result of a series of state-level transformations aimed to develop a system for teacher training. The authors conclude that the creation

of these centers and the possibility of continuous exchange of experience with colleagues contribute to the solution of the individual psychological problems of teachers, which are primarily due to lack of self-confidence, and feelings of isolation and loneliness in solving professional problems.

The study by Jones (2010) from the United States provides a description of similar activities, but in a much narrower context. The author offers an online learning format as a means of assisting and consulting colleagues. The program proposed by Jones (2010) suggests a reflexive analysis and interactive discussion of the problems most often encountered in teaching children with special educational needs, in particular with severe mental retardation, and sharing experience and teaching methods for special needs children. According to the author, the pedagogical design of the online course ensures success in solving the problems of professional assistance to teachers and in exchanging new ideas to improve the educational process for children with special educational needs.

In addition to the results provided by Brandon and Charlton (2011), note that similar work is currently underway in the Russian Federation to create resource training and methodological centers. The centers are established to help regions develop inclusive education, design and replicate inclusive education practices and systematize best practices of inclusive educational organizations of all types (Goryunova, Guterman, Kirik, & Romashevskaya, 2017; Yaraya & Rokotyanskaya, 2016).

The experience of Swedish researchers Mattson and Hansen (2009) is of great interest. The project aimed to train special mentors (teachers-supervisors) for teachers who work in inclusive classes has been implemented in Sweden since 1996. According to the researchers, these mentors are an alternative to the additional training programs for teachers. The study showed that school principals highly evaluate the effectiveness of work of teachers-supervisors. At the same time, principals who do not work with teachers-supervisors are mainly focused on the traditional system, when special needs children are trained in the special education system. This is due to the fact that teachers who have worked in the special education system for many years do not need supervision in order to find a solution to any pedagogical problem. Thus, Swedish schools are characterized by two main ways of teaching special needs children: inclusion accompanied by a mentoring system and exclusion oriented towards the traditional segregated education system.

Forlin and Chambers (2011) investigated the preparedness of trainee teachers for inclusion. The presented results allowed interesting conclusions: deep knowledge of the regulatory framework for inclusive education and high professional motivation do not affect the general emotional state of a trainee teacher, the quality of solving his personal problems and stress relief when teaching a child with special needs. Thus, not only a child, but also a teacher working in the field of inclusive education needs targeted psychological and pedagogical support.

French and Chopra (2006) reported a rather original vision of the role of a teacher in an inclusive class. They treat a teacher as an executive director in business. In their opinion, teachers who possess and demonstrate skills of planning, pedagogical support and assistance, explanation, cooperation and consulting (supervision) towards the colleagues in the educational process, more successfully implement strategies for adaptation of students in the context of inclusion.

Thus, based on the presented studies, we can conclude that the world pedagogical science and practice are identical to the Russian ones in many aspects and targets. At the same time, the problem of a

teacher's preparedness to work in the field of inclusive education is relevant and causes a set of related problems associated with the need to expand the sphere of professional and personal competence of the teacher, and to develop, test and introduce effective forms of teacher's support, including maintenance of his emotional status and motivation for professional activities in the field of inclusive education.

The social context of inclusion is inseparable from the concepts of social integration, social cohesion, social adaptation and social protection of vulnerable categories of the population (Aleshina & Pechenkin, 2013; Koltakova, 2017). At the same time, the problem that objectively arises in societies that are not completely ready to accept concepts and values of inclusion is worth mentioning. The problem implies the formation of "pseudo-inclusion" against the background of formalism during implementation of its ideas in society. It is interesting that the task of elimination of negative perception of social exclusion through the implementation of inclusion concepts can lead to the same social exclusion but only in a positive sense. Unfortunately, it is quite difficult to find this fine line. At present, this context of social processes requires perception and generalization in the framework of interdisciplinary research projects covering all areas of society.

## 7. Conclusion

Based on the above, we have distinguished several main trends characteristic of foreign and Russian studies devoted to inclusive education:

1. Orientation to philosophical understanding of inclusion in the context of humanistic philosophy. This trend is characteristic of both the studies that consider inclusion as a modern social concept and the studies focused on the investigation of inclusive educational practice.

2. The studies focused on the investigation of inclusion in its narrow sense, namely, inclusion of people with disabilities and invalids in the social and educational processes, are prevailing. At the same time, this trend can be clearly observed in Russian studies, while foreign studies report a dual situation with a predominance of a broad understanding of inclusion.

3. Consideration of the concepts of inclusion as a key social strategy that affects all aspects of public life. The tasks of inclusion are subject to the processes occurring in politics, economics, education and culture. At the same time, this trend is settled in foreign studies, and in Russian science it is only being formed to set the pace of scientific research in the field of inclusion.

The distinguished trends determine the key principles of research in the field of pedagogy of inclusive education – interdisciplinarity and practice orientation. The implementation of these principles will enable the integral perception of inclusion as the main strategy for the development of modern society.

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