

VI International Forum on Teacher Education

# Inclusive Educational Practice in Higher Education: Questions of Theory and Applications

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## Abstract

Changes taking place in modern Russian society, it is necessary for a person with special educational needs to be included in various social processes. One of the social institutions that helps a person with special educational needs to integrate into society is inclusive higher education. Hence, the description of the phenomenon of higher inclusive education in the Russian Federation is relevant. The purpose of the article is a theoretical and methodological justification of the importance of creating and implementing pedagogical conditions for inclusive education for people with special educational needs in the higher education system of the Russian Federation. The leading approaches to the study of the problem of higher inclusive education are institutional, sociocultural, systemic, activity, subject-subject. As a result of the study, a model of inclusive higher education was developed on the example of Ulyanovsk State Pedagogical University named after I.N. Ulyanov. An example of creating an educational space for people with special educational needs was described at the Ulyanovsk State Pedagogical University named after I.N. Ulyanov, characterized by the properties of openness, inclusiveness, variability, activity orientation. The general professional readiness of teachers of the Ulyanovsk State Pedagogical University named after I.N. Ulyanov to work with students with special educational needs in inclusive conditions after carrying out experimental work has increased from the middle to the high level, all components of its structure are developed. The results obtained can be used for implementation in various higher education organizations of the Russian Federation.

*Keywords:* inclusion, inclusive higher education, special educational needs, modeling, psycho-pedagogical conditions.

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Published by Kazan federal university and peer-reviewed under responsibility of IFTE-2020 (VI International Forum on Teacher Education)

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## **Introduction**

Modern Russian society is characterized by rapidly changing innovative processes taking place in various spheres of life – social, political, economic, labor, and therefore the person of our time must be active, purposeful, dynamic, and fast. This applies to a certain extent to a person with special educational needs, who in the last twenty to thirty years in the Russian Federation has come to be considered in terms of a model of an independent lifestyle as an independent and independent subject of various spheres of human life. In order to form a subject-matter position in a person with special educational needs in childhood, adolescence and youth, pedagogical work in an inclusive educational environment should be organized and carried out in accordance with the goals, forms and content. According to the Act “About education in the Russian Federation” (2012), inclusive education is defined as “ensuring equal access to education for all people, considering diversity of special educational needs.” In foreign studies, inclusive education is interpreted, first, as "teaching people with special educational needs together with typically developing peers in the natural environment" based on full integration into the overall learning process until the learning goals are achieved; Secondly, changing the organizational culture (increasing the number of students with differences, increasing their participation in different activities, strengthening the communication factor) is considered important in the organization of inclusive education; Fourthly, physical integration (cohabitation of healthy people and people with special educational needs) is highlighted in inclusion; Social integration (relationships of people with special educational needs with healthy peers and adults); Educational integration (co-education of people identified and not identified with special educational needs based on their characteristics). Russian studies emphasize the consideration of inclusive education as a form of social inclusion and the creation of special equal conditions for the education of people with special educational needs in the general education group. In our view, the concept of inclusive education can be defined as equal and equal interaction of people with special educational needs with their healthy peers with a view to their full psychophysical, personal and social development in an open educational space. The essence of inclusive education is the harmonious interaction of people identified and not identified with special educational needs, acquisition of experience of social relations, formation of useful for all social skills, inclusion of active processes of personal self-development.

## **Purpose and objectives of the study**

Purpose of the study is a theoretical and methodological justification of the importance of creating and implementing pedagogical conditions for inclusive education for people identified as having special educational needs in the higher education system of the Russian Federation.

## **Literature review**

One of the social institutions that enable a person with special educational needs to integrate into society is higher inclusive education. Therefore, in describing the peculiarities of the development of higher inclusive education in the Russian Federation, it is necessary to pay attention to the following key characteristics. Theoretical and methodological bases of social integration of people with special educational needs are presented in the works of Yarskaya-Smirnova and Zaitsev (2019). Bryzgalova and Tenkacheva (2015) describes the transformation of the education system and the emergence of different modes and forms of the educational process for those identified as having special educational needs at different levels of the education system (integrated, inclusive, remote and interactive sociocultural practices) at the federal, regional and municipal levels. Technological component of social integration of persons with special educational needs in the system of higher inclusive education is described by Margolis, Rubcov, and Serebrjannikova (2017). Modern challenges and barriers of inclusive higher education have been identified by Kulikova (2015). The problem of tolerance in inclusive higher education institutions is described by Medvedeva and Ol'hina (2015).

Studies have been carried out by foreign specialists, who have confirmed that the social education of children with special educational needs of health opportunities will be successful if from early years it is carried out in a real integrated environment, therefore, education and education begins in integrated groups of kindergarten and ends in higher educational institutions of general (rather than specialized) profile (Mahbub, 2008).

Inclusive education is a specific phenomenon driven by political, economic and sociocultural conditions (Nilholm, 2006) and involves the transformation of the school and university culture by increasing access to education of all children, increasing their participation in various activities, increasing the level of academic success (Artiles, Kosleski, Dorns, & Christensen, 2006), establishing quality and democratic schools and universities (Wotherspoon, 2004).

Currently, there are different approaches to the interpretation of inclusive education: the principles and practices of treating general education as a place of the first choice for all learners (Villa & These, 2003), providing children with special educational needs in the general education system with the necessary resources and support (Taylor, 2006), the full inclusion of children with special educational needs in the general education system for additional educational goals based on the principles of support (Mitchell, 2004); organization of general education classes for children with special educational needs in their place of residence (Smith, 2004); higher inclusive education plays an essential role in the formation and development of educational, communicative and social skills.

### **Methodology**

Methods of research: methods of theoretical analysis (comparative, retrospective); Stating (study and synthesis of materials of normative Russian, domestic experience of inclusive higher education); Prognostic (modeling of the higher inclusive education system) empirical (questionnaire, survey, conversation, interviewing, testing), method of pedagogical experiment. The research was carried out at Ulyanovsk State Pedagogical University.

Experiment stages:

1. Preparatory stage (March – April 2019) – based on the analysis of philosophical, cultural, psychological and pedagogical literature, the methodological apparatus of scientific research was formulated, a questionnaire of teachers teaching students with special educational needs was conducted.
2. The main stage (May – November 2019) – was conducted a statement, forming and final experiments with the participation of students with special educational needs and their teachers; The model of higher inclusive education was designed and introduced into the management cycle of the Ulyanovsk State Pedagogical University.
3. Final stage (November – December 2019) – the results of the pilot work were summed up, the results were analyzed.

### **Results**

#### ***Methodological basis for research on inclusive higher education***

The study of philosophical literature made it possible to identify levels of methodology and leading methodological approaches to the study of inclusive higher education: the philosophical level of

methodology makes it possible to consider inclusive higher education in unity with differentiated education as its diametrical opposite; Describe the possible links and interactions between the above-mentioned types of education for persons with special educational needs; Describe inclusive higher education as a global phenomenon.

At the national methodological level, we rely on institutional, sociocultural, systemic, activity, subject-subject approaches, which allow us to comprehensively characterize the phenomenon of inclusive higher education, the peculiarities of its organization and implementation in modern Russian conditions.

Institutional approach understands inclusive higher education as one of the leading social institutes of modern Russia allowing the person to realize with special educational needs of health activity, independence, commitment, professional knowledge, abilities, skills in the available barrier-free social environment.

The study of sociological literature on the topic of research makes it possible to consider inclusive higher education as a social institution characteristic of modern Russia, to explore sociological concepts that have formed the basis for models of education of persons with special educational needs, among whom the medical model (which is the basis of segregation), the concept of normalization (which is the basis of integration) and the social model (which is the basis of inclusion) is highlighted. The concept of normalization is represented by "essentialism" in the approach to disability and is focused on the perception of a person with special educational needs through violation. Inclusion (inclusive) education manifests itself in the social model through social constructivism (concept of social reality design – Berger & Luckmann, 1995).

The study of sociological literature has revealed different directions of concepts of integration and inclusion, for example, the main task of integration is to ensure the right to be included in the general flow through special pedagogical techniques that take into account special educational needs, ensure equal rights and start-up opportunities in the path of social achievements; The main objective of inclusion is to ensure the right to distinction, which does not imply their correction towards a dominant social and cultural norm; Recognition of the value of cultural diversity.

The sociocultural approach, i.e. understanding society as a unity of culture and sociality formed and transformed by human activity, integrates three dimensions of human existence (human being in relation to society, nature of culture, type of sociality) as fundamental components of human communities. In this case, inclusive higher education is studied as a translational horizontal process, i.e. as the transfer of

values, skills and knowledge within one generation through a sustainable system of symbols developed in two interconnected cultural communities: people with special educational needs and their healthy peers. This process is based on the identification and socio-psychological mechanisms of socialization and involves the acquisition by a person with special educational needs of norms of behaviour, standards, views, stereotypes, values based on comparison with the social environment and cultural traditions. Therefore, it is necessary to rely both on the influence of an unorganized environment and specially created conditions in a pedagogically appropriate environment. In our opinion, the application of a sociocultural approach in the analysis of the phenomenon of inclusive higher education defines new horizons for studying attitudes towards people with special needs, as well as towards inclusive higher education of the population of modern Russia (in particular, the professional community and ordinary residents).

A systemic approach that examines all objects and phenomena of the natural and social world as holistic systems at different hierarchical levels allows us to consider inclusive higher education as a holistic unity of biological (physical), psychological, spiritual, social change; As the interaction of a person with special educational health needs with the social environment, in the process of which there is a bilateral change in both the person with special needs and the social environment.

Inclusive higher education within the framework of the system methodology is described as an integral part of the higher education system of persons with special educational needs in the Russian Federation, as a unity of various elements of educational and non-educational activities (educational, rehabilitation, social) aimed at mastering professional competences and expanding social interaction.

The activity approach focuses the real research on consideration of inclusive higher education as joint activities for the formation of knowledge, abilities, skills, ways of thinking and activity, moral and valuable orientations, carried out by teachers, young people with special educational needs and their healthy peers. The ideas of activity approach will be productive at the organization of concrete types of activity within inclusive higher education, for modeling and creating individual educational trajectories for young people with special educational needs and their peers.

In the solution of an objective we will also rely on the idea of the subject activity of the personality in the course of her activity, i.e. on a subject - subject approach which recognizes that the person with special educational needs actively participates in process of socialization and not only adapts to society but also influences the vital circumstances and itself.

Subject-subject approach allows to describe the person with special educational needs as the active social subject capable of self-determination, self-realization and self-affirmation in various spheres of activity. We treat personal self-development of the person with special educational needs in the two-dimensional system of coordinates: on abscissa axis as specifically organized activity directed to transformation of own valuable and semantic sphere, which is characterized by slower in comparison with healthy peers the stadial nature of course; later beginning and the termination in age ontogenesis that is connected with slow rate of formation of self-regulatory mechanisms of behavior and also with contents and the nature of the social development of persons which is saved up by a certain moment with special educational needs of social experience; on ordinate axis personal self-development of persons with special educational needs appears as the result of this activity expressed available the created valuable orientations, the vital purposes, the vital plans promoting adequate adaptation and isolation of the person with special educational needs in the company of healthy (at persons with special educational needs valuable orientations differ from valuable orientations of healthy peers, namely: terminal valuable orientations, for example, "physical and mental health", "presence of good and loyal friends", "interesting work" prevail; goal-setting process, including formation of the vital purposes at persons with special educational needs, is long and is complicated by existence of experience of own disease that, according to persons with special educational needs and their parents promotes formation of negative living position; vital plans of persons with special educational needs are not long-term and generally concern household aspect of life, less often they stretch to the educational and professional area, are connected with performance of family functions).

At the concrete and scientific level of methodology within pedagogical and psychological sciences, it is possible to record the existence of several theoretical positions. In pedagogical literature (books, articles, theses) in Russian and foreign languages the theoretical constructs characterizing inclusive higher education (definition, essence, types) are described and also experience of the organization and implementation of inclusive higher education for persons with different types of violations of development (hearing disorder and sight, the musculoskeletal device and the speech) is described.

The psychological literature on the subject of the research is presented by the works connected with studying the relation to inclusive higher education as to a phenomenon and also to people with special educational needs.

Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006), Salamanca Statement on principles, policy and practice in special needs education (1994), UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity (2001) and the Russian regulatory framework (About education in the Russian Federation, 2012) helped us

to identify sociocultural, political and economic determinants of emergence and development of a phenomenon of inclusive higher education in the world and in Russia.

Thus, in modern Russian reality, inclusive higher education is a structural element of an education system, characterized by creation of conditions for education to persons with special educational needs depending on their individual requirements and inquiries on the basis of federal educational standards of the higher education (a bachelor degree, a specialist programme, magistracy).

### ***Concept of inclusive higher education***

On the example of Ulyanovsk State Pedagogical University, the concept of inclusive higher education of persons with special educational needs is developed; the description of essence and distinctive features of inclusive higher education of persons with special educational needs; original classification of inclusive higher education of persons with special educational needs is offered; mechanisms of implementation of inclusive higher education are described.

In our opinion, inclusive higher education is an equal and equivalent interaction of persons with special educational needs with their healthy peers for the purpose of development of a complex of professional competences and acquisition of experience of professional activity; their full psychophysical, personal and social development in an open educational space.

The essence of inclusive higher education is the harmonious interaction of healthy people and people with special educational needs, acquisition of experience of the social relations, formation of social skills useful to all, personal self-development.

We allocated the following functions of inclusive higher education and according to the inclusive educational environment in relation to healthy faces and persons with special educational needs: contributes to formation and the development of professional and social skills, skills of interaction between people, vocational guidance and the moral relations; creates space of understanding and mutual understanding between persons with special educational needs and their healthy peers; contributes to formation and the development of practical skills in professional activity; social knowledge and self-knowledge of the individual and group phenomena; creates new opportunities for self-realization of persons with special educational needs and their healthy peers; is a component of the environment of interaction of the person with special educational needs and the platform for performance of professional,

social, labor functions; allows to train purposefully healthy people for unconditional acceptance of the person with special educational needs, to form the tolerant relation and respect for human distinctions.

The concept of inclusive higher education assumed creation of a model of the organization of inclusive higher education at the Ulyanovsk State Pedagogical University. The model of inclusive higher education of persons with special educational needs is developed on the basis of the ideas of the system approach. From a systemic perspective, inclusive higher education for persons with special educational needs is a system consisting of the following interacting elements: the group subject of inclusive higher education; the goals and objectives of inclusive higher education; principles of inclusive higher education; content of inclusive higher education; outcomes of inclusive higher education.

As supersystem elements affecting the life of inclusive higher education of persons with special educational needs, we consider the external conditions of the social environment (for example, resources of various types and types of organizations with which the university interacts); Internal conditions of the university (material-technical, financial, psychological-pedagogical, etc., which allow to carry out qualitative and effective educational process).

The subject of inclusive education is a group, because the processes of self-determination, self-realization and self-affirmation of the person, including those with special educational needs, are more effective when the person interacts with other people in the collective. The group subject of inclusive higher education in our case are young people with special educational needs, their healthy peers, teachers, deputy dean for educational work; Specialists of the Department of Educational Work of UIGPU named after I.N. Ulyanov. The group subject of inclusive higher education is heterogeneous in age composition, level of health status, nature and severity of development disorders, level of individual social development (including the ratio of signs of social adaptation and isolation), i.e. we can simultaneously say that the group subject of inclusive higher education has invariance and variability. Let us explain our point of view: the invariance of a group subject is explained by the consideration of it as a holistic entity, which is systemically important, and when it changes, the whole system is modified. The variability of the group subject of inclusive higher education is characterized by different ages of participants, different types of developmental disorders, the variability of individual interests and needs, etc.

The theoretical goal of inclusive higher education of persons with special educational needs is to learn systematic knowledge, practical skills and professional activities in a certain professional sphere.

The goals and objectives of inclusive higher education of persons with special educational needs are determined by the State Educational Standards of higher education. We believe that, given the special educational needs of students, inclusive higher education will have two interrelated goals: general development and corrective-compensatory. The general development goal defines the direction of the educational process on the formation and development of universal, professional and professional competences for students with special educational needs, corresponding to the direction of training and constituting a common central invariant core. The corrective-compensating goal helps to prevent the occurrence and timely correction of secondary personal (social) defects that affect the behavior of a person with special educational needs; In the content of inclusive higher education - it will be a peripheral variable part (adaptation module), taking into account the specificity and severity of developmental disorders, the degree of mastery of general medical and communicative abilities.

Corrective and compensatory tasks of inclusive higher education of persons with special educational needs are:

- Formation of experience in various spheres of life in persons with special educational needs;
- Formation and development of skills of independent and independent life in persons with special educational needs;
- Formation of skills of self-determination, self-realization, self-development and self-affirmation in modern Russian sociocultural conditions in persons with special educational needs.

As principles of inclusive higher education of persons with special educational needs, we consider the collective principle of inclusive higher education; the principle of variability in inclusive higher education; the principle that inclusive higher education is incomplete.

The principle of the collective of inclusive higher education recognizes that the collective, being an association of people with similar goals, objectives, ideals and principles, allows to more successfully master different social roles, ways and forms of interaction and activity, to test their use in standard and non-standard situations.

Specific functions of the collective in relation to the person with special educational needs: expansion of the circle of communication; development of behavioural skills in different situations; formation and development of emotional-behavioral reactions; positive development of available opportunities.

The principle of the variability of inclusive higher education determines that conditions for inclusive higher education should be created in educational organizations of various types, both at the State and regional, municipal and local levels. Inclusive higher education must meet the interests and needs of everyone with special educational needs, taking into account their age, gender and health. Inclusive higher education should take into account federal requirements and national characteristics of the regions; and use this potential in vocational education and human development with special educational needs. Organizations of higher education, to which a person with special educational needs may become a participant, are characterized by various educational and educational programmes and activities.

The principle of the non-completion of inclusive higher education for persons with special educational needs is based on the idea of the non-completion of the individual development of a person with special educational needs at each age stage. Development is the transition of a system from one state to another, and at each other time, the personality characteristics of a person differ from the initial ones specified in a certain coordinate system. Biologists, psychologists, sociologists have proved that human capabilities and abilities are not limited, so human development (including those with special educational needs) is incomplete, therefore inclusive higher education can be organized and implemented at the level of bachelor's degree (specialization) and master 's degree.

The content of inclusive higher education of persons with special educational needs is a synthesis of the "academic" component (theoretical knowledge necessary for the development of the cognitive sphere, expansion of outlook and a further level of education), the "practical-oriented" component - abilities and readiness to perform various types of professional activities and required in life events of the subject experience of the individual.

The Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation states that "academic" and "practice-oriented" components of inclusive higher education should not differ from "academic" and "practice-oriented" components of healthy peers, as well as the result of inclusive higher education should meet the requirements of state educational standards of the level of education (bachelor, specialty, master's degree) and direction of training. Subject experience of individuals with special educational needs is the most variable in the triad of the content of inclusive education.

Thus, the theoretically developed model of inclusive higher education can be implemented not only in the Ulyanovsk State Pedagogical University but also in other universities of the Russian Federation.

***Determining the readiness of university teachers to work with students with special educational needs in an inclusive group***

The study of the professional readiness of university teachers to carry out educational and educational activities in an inclusive group, including a student(s) with special educational needs and their peers with normotypic development, was carried out at the Ulyanovsk State Pedagogical University with the use of the author's questionnaire. The study was attended by 25 teachers of the Faculty of History and Literature and the Faculty of Pedagogy and Psychology of the Ulyanovsk State Pedagogical University, working in student groups in the areas of training "Pedagogical Education" and "Psycho-Pedagogical Education," in which 20 students with special educational needs study.

We will analyze the most significant results obtained during the questionnaire. First, the indicators of general professional readiness to work with students with special educational needs, as well as its components (information, psychological and activity), have been at a medium level, which may indicate that most teachers have a short experience in inclusion. Secondly, teachers with a low, medium and high level of professional readiness to work with students with special educational needs in the 1:3:1 ratio were identified, i.e. at the 5 of teachers have low and high levels of readiness and its components, 15 teachers have a high level of readiness and its components. The indicators of low-readiness teachers differ from those of medium-readiness teachers by more than 40%; and high-level teachers by about 20%; decreasing and increasing, respectively.

According to the majority of respondents (more than 60%), the most important knowledge when working with students with special educational needs includes knowledge about the peculiarities of people with different types of developmental disorders, about ways to formulate and implement individual educational programs. In a personal interview, teachers clarified that their level of knowledge is higher about the category of students they work with (for example, students with musculoskeletal disorders or hearing disorders) and lower about students with other types of developmental disorders.

According to respondents, special educational conditions dependent on the teacher of the educational institution are organization of the workplace, adaptation of the studied material, inclusion of parents or single groups in the educational process, involvement of specialists of the department on educational work.

Analyzing the answer to the question: "How ready are you to teach a student with special educational needs together with other students?," the following conclusions can be drawn: First, the low and medium level of readiness for joint (inclusive) education of students with special educational needs and their

healthy peers is revealed in both young and experienced teachers of different professional profiles, which can be explained, on the one hand, by the long practice of differentiated specially organized education and rehabilitation; On the other hand, with a lack of precedent and experience in an inclusive environment (for example, in biological teachers).

The majority of respondents surveyed (80%) considered it necessary, among the ways to support their professional activities, to mention the assistance of an assistant in classes, the provision of didactic material and the advice of other teachers.

Summing up the questionnaire, some conclusions should be given. General professional readiness of teachers of Ulyanovsk State Pedagogical University to work with students with special educational needs in inclusive conditions is developed at the middle level, all components of its structure (information, psychological and activity) are developed to approximately the same extent;

To increase the level of general professional readiness of teachers at Ulyanovsk State Pedagogical University to work with students with special educational needs, preparatory training activities should be held in an inclusive group, Aimed at forming motivational, will and evaluation elements in the structure of general readiness, As well as practical seminars and masterclasses on the basics of higher education didactics for persons with special educational needs.

At the stage of the forming experiment, teachers of the Ulyanovsk State Pedagogical University took advanced training courses on the basis of the regional educational and methodological center on higher inclusive education of the Mininsky University (Nizhny Novgorod) and a series of training events developed by the Department of Psychology of our University.

We will analyze the most significant results obtained during the re-questionnaire. First, indicators of general professional readiness to work with students with special educational needs, as well as its components (Informational, psychological and activity) have been at a medium or high level, which may indicate that some teachers, after participating in training sessions and interacting with students with normotypic and deficient development, have increased their level of preparedness to work with students in an inclusive classroom. Although the observed shifts are insignificant, as the experimental study was carried out for a short time, and according to psychological and pedagogical studies, it sometimes takes one to several years for professionalism. Secondly, the number of low-level and medium-level teachers and its components has decreased, and the number of high-level teachers and its components has increased. The

indicators of low-readiness teachers differ from those of medium-readiness teachers by more than 25%; And high-level teachers by about 15%; Decreasing and increasing, respectively.

Summing up the results of the re-questionnaire, it should be noted that the general professional readiness of teachers of the Ulyanovsk State Pedagogical University to work with students with special educational needs in inclusive conditions after the experimental work has increased from the middle to the high level, all components of its structure (information, psychological and activity) are developed, which allows to successfully organize and implement an inclusive educational process.

### **Discussions**

At the moment, the organization of mass higher inclusive education remains open; Demand in the labour market of specialists with higher education, having special educational needs; Universal organization of architectural and socio-psychological accessibility in large and small educational organizations of higher education.

### **Conclusion**

Thus, inclusive higher education is today a modern educational reality and can be considered from a scientific point of view as a separate social institution and subsystem of the education system of the Russian Federation; As a joint activity of people with special educational needs, their healthy peers and teachers aimed at the formation and development of universal, general professional and professional competences in a certain professional sphere; As a sociocultural translational process, providing not only vertical but also a horizontal transmission of social experiences between now-living generations and social groups, including between healthy students and students with special educational needs.

On the example of Ulyanovsk State Pedagogical University we showed the possibility of developing and implementing a model of inclusive higher education, As supersystem functional elements affecting the functioning of the system of inclusive higher education of persons with special educational needs, Consider the resources of different types and types of organizations with which the university interacts and logistics, Financial, psychological and pedagogical conditions, which allow to carry out the qualitative and effective educational process.

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