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## MODELS AND TRENDS OF DEVELOPMENT OF SPECIAL EDUCATION IN THE EUROPEAN PRIMARY SCHOOL

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**Abstract.** The article examines trends in the development of special education in European primary school at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> -21<sup>st</sup> centuries. It points to the different views on the definition of the concept 'integration' or 'inclusive education' and characterizes its physical, psychological, administrative, social, and training levels. The integration models for pupils with special educational needs and factors affecting the results of the learning process are analyzed. At ISCED 1 the European Union successfully implements a model integrating children with special needs in mainstream education, a model of segregation in special schools, and a model of flexible cooperation between the two educational systems – general and special elementary education. The positive experience of EU countries in organizing educational support for junior students with special needs is represented by the general trend of converting special schools into resource centers.

**Keywords:** trends; special education; inclusive education; primary school; integration models.

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At the turn of the centuries the processes of reforming and modernization of school education in the European Union are covering educational content, management and financing, the system of quality control and assessment. Changes occur at all school levels, including primary education, which is paid special attention to by state and community. More than ever parents want schools to equip children with knowledge and skills necessary to be effective in the community and judge on the quality of schooling by

children's performance. At the same time today's junior student expects primary school to take into account his educational interests and respect his identity.

Illustrative in this respect are the challenges of educating children with special needs. As long as educational authorities and schools formulate their goals and plan activities with the use of standards and norms there will always be a category of children who do not meet these standards. They need additional medical, psychological and

educational support, and sometimes special conditions.

All European countries recognize the integration as the most promising form of teaching children with special educational needs, but each country chooses its own way of solving this problem. There exist different views on the definition of the term 'integration' or 'inclusive education'. On the one hand, integration is seen as an extension of special education. Another position understands inclusion as a combination of general and special education, which can be problematic in the sense that there are still medical contours of the issue. In any case, the fundamental principle of inclusive education is societal recognition of the values of human diversity and invaluable contribution that each person can make to the development of this society.

Foreign practice of teaching children with disabilities shows that the national system of special education at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup>–21<sup>st</sup> centuries needs fundamental modernization. If Western Europe entered this process at the end of the 1970s, the countries of Eastern Europe started upgrading their systems of special education in the second half of the 1990s.

International trends in policy, research and teaching practice established the right of students with disabilities to be educated in mainstream schools. The Salamanca Declaration (UNESCO, 1994), which was signed by "World Conference on Education for Persons with Special Needs: Access and Quality", guaranteed the right of all children, including those with disabilities, to schooling. The next step

was the work of the World Education Forum in Dakar (UNESCO, 2000) which adjusted the international commitments to education for all children in an inclusive educational environment. The adoption of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN, 2006) made it mandatory for state parties and signatories to provide information on the implementation of the policy of integrated education. The result of rethinking the problem can be seen today in the society's new attitude to the disabled, to children with disabilities, and to children with special educational needs.

Statistic data show that about 10–15 % of primary school pupils in European countries fall into this category [1, p. 97]. The accuracy of these estimates greatly depends on how the regulations define the status of a child with special educational needs. For instance, Poland specifies more than 10 categories of pupils with special educational needs, while Denmark – only two; in Liechtenstein legislation points out only the category of students who need support. On average the EU countries allocate 6–10 categories of pupils with special educational needs [5, p. 8].

Today the European Union implements three models of integrated education for children at primary school [1, p. 98]:

- a model integrating children with special needs in mainstream education;
- a model of segregation: children with special needs are educated in special schools;

– a model of flexible cooperation between the two educational systems: general and special elementary education.

The selection of an option is influenced by philosophical, sociological and pedagogical factors. For example, while teachers require special facilities and equipment for teaching children with severe mental illnesses, which can not be provided inside the usual elementary school, sociologists might argue that all children – at least, as many as possible – should be trained together in the same school.

So, what is meant by ‘integration’? First, we could highlight the organizational aspect, where additional support for children is provided. In teaching practices of primary school the following options for students with special educational needs are possible:

- a) primary school with additional support in the classroom;
- b) primary school with additional support in resource classes;
- c) primary school with special classes or clinic where students are educated temporary or full-time;
- d) a combination of learning: students with special needs spend part of training time (a few hours, a few days) in a special school, the rest of the time they attend a regular school;
- e) a special school: temporarily (for example, for a year), or for the entire period of primary education.

But once the decision is made, where the additional support for children with special needs will be provided, there is a question about the content of education. Can the full integration mean that all children receive the same education in the same place?

Does segregation mean that children learn in different ways and in different places?

To answer these questions, it is necessary to clearly distinguish between the levels of integration, as it is offered by the Swiss educator Kobi. Indeed, the *physical* integration takes place when all the children are taught in the same school building. Terminology and administrative level of integration determine the category of children with special needs and their belonging to particular pupils group. Therefore, *terminological and administrative* integration becomes a reality, where all students, regardless of need, are one school team. *Social* integration offers opportunities for social contact between all the children. *Training* integration involves the overall training program for children with special needs or without them. At the stage of *psychological* integration school and teachers do not make a distinction between students: all children are regarded as ‘special’ [1, p. 101].

The idea of integrated education, as the experience of European countries shows, is the most developed one where it occurs in the context of the educational policy of the state: the results of England and Spain can be exemplary. The creation of an integrated system of education in these countries has become part of reforms aimed at improving national educational system as a whole. Integration is a necessary condition under which it is possible to realize the goals of education for all. And this idea affects the interests not only of a certain group of individuals, but also of the whole society. In this case, the state provision of the finan-

cial component of reforms and transformations determines the success of integration.

The experience of countries implementing the Education for All programs confirms the fact that the integration process requires considerable expenses. If funding is not made in sufficient quantities, the idea of integration is unlikely to be realized in practice. Therefore the differences between the basic provisions of the integration policy and its practical implementation are partially explained by the imperfection of the funding mechanisms.

In most European countries a key role in working with integrated pupils with special educational needs is played by a school teacher. Additional educational support has to be ensured by professionals, mainly by special educators, whose work is regulated, as a rule, by the local education authorities.

In Sweden exclusively special educators can work with students from special classes (schools). In Italy these students can be taught and assisted by special educators as well as regular ones, and both groups are equally responsible for the education of children with special educational needs. There may be other options. For example, in France school teachers are provided assistance service under the Ministry of Justice. In the schools of Luxembourg in a classroom with integrated students there are 'assistants' who may not know the school curriculum, but have the knowledge of correctional pedagogy and special psychology. In Ireland the social agencies are not directly involved in the provision of services to

students with special educational needs, but regional Health Councils finance health and social services [3].

At Danish comprehensive school responsibility for meeting the students' special educational needs is assigned to the teacher. These needs are defined by the psychological and pedagogical service, which will continue monitoring the student's development and make adjustments to his training program. The question whether to direct a student for special education is the responsibility of the head teacher. In the case of integration the child may take advantage of different types of support: special education in the classroom with a special teacher, or 'team teaching' outside the class (if the student is in need of regular support for one or more subjects). A student may also receive assistance from a special educator co-working with the classroom teacher for several hours a day. The teacher can have an assistant who will accompany the student during recess and after-class activities. The teacher, special education teacher, and assistant work in close collaboration.

In Norwegian school the integration of all students regardless of their functional characteristics is a general principle, and as a result of its implementation they largely succeeded in including students with special needs in mainstream classes. But research still shows numerous difficulties, when the question of inclusion rises. Inclusion involves the construction of a bridge between traditional and special pedagogy in the form of adapted training, which involves changes of school practice itself: school should focus on

the diversity and uniqueness of each student rather than on a certain average student. At the same time it should be taken into account that some students have serious and incurable health problems and measures to meet their special educational needs require much effort. Therefore, schools and teachers face a variety of ethical, professional and organizational dilemmas related to inclusion [2].

One of the general trends in the development of special education in Europe at the present stage is the transformation of special schools and institutions into resource centers. Most governments reported that they plan to develop, are developing or have already established a network of resource centers in their countries. Such centers may have different names and different tasks: in some countries they are called centers of knowledge, in others – expert or resource centers. As a rule, they fulfill the following tasks:

- organization of training courses and refresher courses (training) for teachers and other professionals;
- development and dissemination of information and educational materials;
- consultation of parents and school staff;
- periodic assistance to individual students;
- support for students in entering the labor market.

Resource centers depending on their responsibilities can operate both at the national and regional levels. Some European countries already have positive experience with resource centers. For example, Austria, Norway, Denmark, Sweden, and Finland. Cyprus, the Netherlands, Germany,

Greece, Portugal, and the Czech Republic are actively developing this system. In Spain, the special schools are required to cooperate with the regular schools on a territorial basis, and in Belgium, the Netherlands, Greece and the UK special schools provide counseling and other services to schools [5, p. 11].

Despite the changes in the legal framework, active position of community organizations, and a change of attitude to this issue at the state level, effectiveness and quality of integration is still highly dependent on a number of factors, and often on their combination. As for the *sociological* factors that must be considered, students with special educational needs often belong to a particular social or ethnic group. As a consequence of such belonging, elementary school teachers note behavioral problems of students, delay in development, poor performance, etc. In the planning and organization of the educational process, it is also important for teachers to know and understand gender characteristics: there are usually more boys than girls among pupils with special educational needs.

*Technological* factors that make integration a reality are in the field of modern technological developments, ranging, for example, from new hearing aids for children with hearing problems to the unlimited potential of information and communication technologies. Although the impact of ICT on the quality of education is still a topic of discussion among psychologists and educators, the need for their use in the educational process is without question. But almost all European

countries are faced with the problem of staffing. Schools need specialists with dual qualifications: an ICT teacher and a special education teacher. In this regard, changes have to be made in university teacher training programs. And this is already a group of *pedagogical* factors that, according to researchers, equally with economic (funding), determine the success of integration. Only professionals taking a new value system (pedagogical tact, tolerance, open-mindedness in education) are able to solve problems of personal, emotional, creative and social development of a child.

Maintaining a system of special education, even in countries with a developed economy and a high standard of living, is a significant article of domestic spending, therefore the *economic* factors influence the choice of the state: to keep a separate system of special education or imply that comprehensive school can cope with the special needs of students. For example, in the Netherlands the cost of a child in a special school for children with mild learning disabilities and behavior is about four times more than that of a 'normal' primary school student. If we compare the cost of teaching a child with severe physical and mental disabilities, who attends a school for children with disabilities, with the cost of educating a child at a regular school the ratio is 20 to 1 [5, p. 102].

One way to solve this problem is to restructure the traditional system of financing education for children with severe and multiple disabilities. The process of de-institutionalization, of which the main features are rational

expenditure of public funds and the possibility not to separate the child from the family, started over 20 years ago in the United States and in a number of developed European countries. The positive experience of de-institutionalization of special education makes it possible, first, to preserve and develop this system, and second, to meet the special educational needs of students with disabilities to the extent that is provided by modern humanistic international standards. In addition to the economic impact of de-institutionalization, foreign experts offer transfer of funding priorities into the system of early care and preschool education for children with developmental problems: early diagnosis and timely assistance will allow many children to integrate into mainstream education, so fewer children would need special schools.

Analyzing the development of special education in the countries of Western Europe, we can talk about lack of common approaches and rules for organizing the maintenance and support for children with special educational needs which are integrated into mainstream institutions. Economically developed countries with a developed civil society and the high quality of life understand and solve the problems of integration in different ways. Thus, support for children with special educational needs in some countries is carried out by in-house staff of the institution, teaching an integrated student, in other countries – by experts from outside. The scale and depth of support depends on the needs of each individual child. A number of

countries guarantee assistance to integrated students both in class and outside the classroom. In the case of rehabilitation treatment and other help can also be provided outside of school. Everywhere there is a tendency of providing information and methodological support both for school teachers and parents.

Now states and schools practice such activities as a preventive or early intervention, information support, de-institutionalization of special education, differentiation or adaptation of the curriculum and learning opportunities to the individual student, the improvement of comprehensive school to the needs of its integrated students, including special training of subject teachers and the sharing of teachers' responsibility.

Most European countries have outlined the main directions of development of special education, among which are the provision of information (general and specific), involvement in action (non-governmental organizations, school groups, parents), the transformation of school systems (transition to unified educational system with the functions of integrated child support, counseling their parents

and mass school teachers), and the extension of time limits of special education from the early months and throughout life.

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