

PROMOTING INCLUSION AND DIVERSITY: A PATHWAYS TO PREPARING FUTURE TEACHERS (Insights from Ukraine and Poland)

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Abstract. This article explores the theoretical and practical aspects of inclusiveness and diversity in education, focusing on attitudes toward individuals with special educational needs (SEN). The authors substantiate principles of equal access to education, gender equality, the rights of persons with disabilities, and cultural diversity, aligning them with the Sustainable Development Goals and the strategic priorities of the European Union. To address the research objectives, the following methods were employed: analysis of scientific literature on inclusive education and educational equality; media monitoring of various aspects of tolerant and intolerant attitudes toward individuals with disabilities across different countries; a comparative approach to examine best practices in teacher training across European nations; a questionnaire survey to identify cases of discrimination or inclusion in schools; and mathematical-statistical methods to process quantitative survey data. The article presents the findings of a study conducted among 240 future primary school teachers at Vasyl Stefanyk Precarpathian National University (Ukraine) regarding their readiness to embrace diversity and apply innovative technologies in inclusive classrooms. It also highlights the university's strategy for collaboration with schools and communities to promote inclusion and educational equality. Additionally, it explores the implementation of student exchange programs and international initiatives that enhance the professional experience of future teachers, as well as the support for social initiatives fostering an inclusive culture, as exemplified by the Pomeranian University in Słupsk (Poland). The article emphasizes the crucial role of mentoring in education and the need to support children from diverse social and ethnic backgrounds, including migrants, students with special educational needs, and national minorities. It also presents examples of pedagogical innovations that foster inclusivity and various barriers to access – mental, physical, informational, educational, and psychological – implemented in teacher training programs in Ukraine and Poland. The article explores several approaches to enhancing future teachers' infomedia literacy in the context of inclusion and diversity by analyzing media materials and online sources. Examining methodological case studies helps identify common trends and innovative strategies in teacher training, which can be adapted and integrated into educational practices across different countries.

Keywords: teacher training, diversity, inclusion, inclusive competence, (in)tolerance in an inclusive classroom, discrimination, people with special educational needs (SEN).

1. INTRODUCTION

The issue of promoting inclusion and diversity in education is critical in the modern world to ensure accessibility for all students, regardless of their features (OECD, 2023). This issue is reflected in the

Sustainable Development Goals and the European Union's (EU) strategic directions for equity and inclusion in education (Yakymenko, 2022). In particular, the fourth Goal of quality education contains several targets related to ensuring diversity, equitable access to education, and educational opportunities for all (United Nations, n.d.). Particular attention is paid to gender equality, the rights of persons with disabilities, and cultural diversity. The main objectives in this area include guaranteeing that all children, regardless of gender, have access to free, equal, and high-quality primary and secondary education by 2030; eliminating gender-based barriers in education; ensuring equal educational opportunities for individuals with disabilities; and fostering the skills needed for sustainable development, human rights protection, gender equality, and the promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence. Advancing educational equality and inclusion, a key policy priority for the EU plays a crucial role in achieving these goals (OECD, 2013).

The problem has been widely covered in scientific research (Blândul & Bradea, 2017; Budnyk, Rembierz et al., 2022; Piekarski, 2024; Sánchez et al., 2019) and international educational studies (Fernandez et al, 2023; Lyons et al., 2016; Main et al., 2016) in the context of constant socio-cultural changes (Witkowski, 2024), migration processes (Rizzi et al., 2022), digitalization, challenges of pandemics, crises, wars, etc. (Lee et al., 2023).

Globally, inclusive education is recognized as a fundamental element in guaranteeing equal access to quality education for all children, including those with special educational needs (SEN), members of national minorities, migrant children, and other vulnerable groups (Nazaruk, Ruszkowska et al., 2024). It is rooted in the principles of equal educational opportunities and respect for diversity, emphasizing the need to create conditions that enable the meaningful participation of all students in the learning process (Ashman & Elkins, 2012). However, many children in inclusive classrooms encounter various barriers: physical, cognitive, psychological, and informational making their educational journey more challenging. These difficulties often stem from so-called 'soft barriers,' which contribute to the social stratification of students based on social status and special educational needs (SEN) (Cahill, 2021). Additional obstacles include resistance to shifting from traditional educational methods and a lack of clear strategies for integrating children with disabilities into mainstream schools while ensuring individualized support tailored to their specific health needs (Villegas, 2021).

Despite advancements in legislation and increased opportunities for children with disabilities, significant challenges remain in implementing inclusive education in Ukraine. The full-scale war has further exacerbated these difficulties, placing children with disabilities in an especially vulnerable position where they face discrimination, constant danger, limited access to essential services, and inadequate support (Budnyk, 2024). The hardships faced by individuals with disabilities during the war are primarily linked to evacuation difficulties and accessibility barriers. Many children with musculoskeletal, visual, or hearing impairments struggle to evacuate quickly during shelling, bomb shelters are often not equipped for wheelchair users or those requiring specialized care, and some parents of children with SEN have remained in conflict zones due to the lack of suitable transportation for evacuation (The Impact of War...). Additionally, children with disabilities require regular rehabilitation, yet many have lost access to specialized hospitals and centers that have been either destroyed or repurposed for military use. Beyond physical challenges, psychological factors also play a critical role—minors from the DGCA who remain in combat zones are particularly vulnerable to psychological and physical violence (Rembierz, 2023). The ongoing military aggression has further intensified stress, fear, anxiety, and overall mental health deterioration among these children (Murray, 2019).

Thus, despite the considerable amount of research on this topic, there is still a need for a practical study that considers specific situational contexts and time frames. Also, the results of previous studies may not reflect the current situation of a particular country or region. Therefore, this study *is aimed* at partially addressing these issues: (1) to examine the perspectives of future teachers at Vasyl Stefanyk Precarpathian National University in Ukraine regarding (in)equality and inclusion in education by

analyzing their emotions, perceptions, challenges, and concerns; (2) to substantiate the results of the students' survey on the real situation in school practice, and (3) to present several methodological cases of practical solutions to the outlined problems, in particular, the formation of inclusive competence in the educational process, on the example of the Pomeranian University in Słupsk in Poland.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

The primary goals of this research were to analyze the current issue in scientific literature, present our empirical data, and explore methodological aspects of training future teachers in the areas of inclusion and educational equality. To achieve these objectives, the following research methods were employed.

The analysis of scientific literature on inclusive education and equality in higher education institutions has been implied to theoretically comprehend and evaluate the issue's significance in the context of contemporary challenges.

Media monitoring was used to identify relevant publications that reveal various aspects of (in)tolerant attitudes towards people with disabilities in educational institutions in different countries.

The comparative method was employed to examine best practices in teacher training across European countries, particularly in Poland. This approach enables a comparison of inclusive education models, an assessment of their effectiveness, and an evaluation of their adaptability to Ukraine's educational system.

The questionnaire survey method enabled the identification of emerging challenges in educational practice, including instances of discrimination in inclusive education and initiatives designed to support individuals with SEN and promote social equality.

Methods of mathematical statistics have been introduced to quantitatively and qualitatively analyze the questionnaire data.

2.1. Participants

This study involved 240 prospective teachers – undergraduate students from Vasyl Stefanyk Precarpathian National University – majoring in Primary Education, either full-time or part-time. The participants comprised 49.6% ($n = 227$) female and 5.4% ($n = 13$) male students. This gender imbalance reflects the predominance of women in the teaching profession, which, at the state level in Ukraine, is not regarded as highly prestigious or well-paid. Among the respondents, 46.7% ($n = 112$) were third-year students, while 53.3% ($n = 128$) were in their fourth year.

2.2. Tools and Procedures

To gather data for this study, we designed a specialized questionnaire. The survey was conducted anonymously and included both open-ended and closed-ended questions. Its primary objective was to assess future teachers' readiness to work in modern primary schools. Consequently, the survey was administered after participants had completed their in-service training in regional schools, allowing them to gain practical teaching experience. This approach also helped identify any gaps in their knowledge, practical skills, or competencies necessary for effective work in an inclusive classroom.

Since the study was based solely on respondents' subjective opinions regarding inclusion, equality, and attitudes toward individuals with SEN in higher education, its findings cannot be considered representative of the broader population. However, it underscored the importance of this issue, emphasizing the need for a comprehensive strategy to address it at multiple levels, including in the context of Ukraine.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The purpose of the article is to explore how quality education can be achieved in the digital age by

adapting teaching practices to the characteristics and needs of 21st-century primary school learners. It seeks to identify effective strategies for integrating digital tools into primary education while addressing existing challenges. By examining global trends, innovative practices, and the barriers to implementation, this study provides actionable insights for educators, policymakers, and researchers striving to create equitable and impactful learning environments and use digital open education resources (here and after OER).

3.1 Theoretical basis of the study

The analysis of scientific literature indicates a trend of inadequate preparation among teachers to implement inclusive education tasks in secondary schools (Budnyk, 2024; Kołodziejczyk, 2020), particularly in providing personalized support for children with SEN (Szumski, 2022) or utilizing ICT tools that cater to the specific conditions of students' diagnoses (Budnyk & Kotyk, 2024).

In terms of higher teacher education, existing research reveals that future primary school teachers (Sánchez et al., 2019) experience the highest levels of anxiety and uncertainty when it comes to working with diverse students. Therefore, "(...) *we must bear in mind the importance of creating truly inclusive schools where all people in society co-exist with people with functional diversity since this real and first-hand contact will be the optimal strategy for promoting inclusive societies in the future. But to create such an inclusive climate, it is also essential that teachers who lead the classrooms introduce inclusive pedagogies within them, and it will therefore be essential to work on their feelings, attitudes, and concerns toward diversity, which begins at university*" (Fernandez et al., 2023).

In both Polish and Ukrainian education systems, there is still a lack of adequate support for secondary school teachers in the area of inclusion (Gajdzica, 2022), which necessitates collaboration (Szumski, 2022) among the entire team of psychological and pedagogical support for students with SEN (including child assistants, psychologists, social educators, healthcare professionals, etc.). Numerous professional development courses or training on diversity and inclusion in education will be ineffective unless teachers have proper acceptance, understanding, and cooperation in carrying out the tasks of inclusive education within the institution (Śliwerski, 2022, p. 305). Common challenges faced by teachers include managing time in an inclusive classroom, addressing the needs of all students, and engaging in ongoing professional development to effectively respond to the diverse needs of students (Horne & Timmons, 2009).

Therefore, in the following subsection, we will discuss various aspects of promoting inclusive practices within the educational program for future primary school teachers by focusing on diversity issues.

3.2 Survey Results

In response to the question, "*What difficulties do teachers most often face in the practice of working in an inclusive classroom?*" we received the following answers (Fig. 1). Respondents were given the option to select multiple answers, and it is evident that a common trend exists in many schools within the Ivano-Frankivsk region, where the students who participated in the survey completed their internships. Specifically, the majority of students (60%) identified challenges related to ensuring physical barrier-free access to schools and the need to adapt the learning environment in line with inclusive design principles.

A considerable portion of respondents (66.7%) reported that the school where they completed their internship faced challenges in providing psychological and pedagogical support, as well as additional services for children with various conditions, due to a lack or insufficiency of qualified staff (such as psychologists, speech therapists, rehabilitation specialists, sign language teachers, etc.). Furthermore, not all primary school teachers are adequately trained to work in an inclusive and diverse environment, and there is a shortage of teaching assistants to support the learning process. The survey was conducted during the 2023-2024 academic year, a period marked by the Russian-Ukrainian war, which led some

specialists to relocate abroad due to threats to their lives and health. However, as the survey results indicate, the issue of funding for inclusion and equality in education remains unresolved. This challenge is linked to another problem highlighted by respondents – the difficulties in creating supportive conditions for inclusion and equality in the classroom (35.4%).

Amid the ongoing war, Ukrainian schools face the challenge of ensuring a safe learning environment while integrating children affected by war trauma and those displaced from other regions, including students with SEN. They must also swiftly adapt individual learning programs to meet these students' needs. The growing number of children with traumatic experiences requiring psychological support and specialized teaching methods (Budnyk, Okliievych et al., 2024) further intensifies the issues of inclusion and equality in education. This primarily concerns barriers related to educational, methodological, informational, and psychological accessibility, as well as digital accessibility (34.6%). Specifically, 83 out of 240 respondents (one-third) reported difficulties implementing digital technologies for inclusive education of children with various disabilities. The challenges stem from a lack of assistive equipment for individuals with SEN and insufficient methodological expertise in its practical application. Many schools lack the necessary accommodations for students with hearing or visual impairments, and most didactic materials are not adapted for digital use that enhances information perception. Additionally, many teachers lack the experience and methodological tools needed to effectively integrate these technologies into inclusive classrooms, resulting in further difficulties.

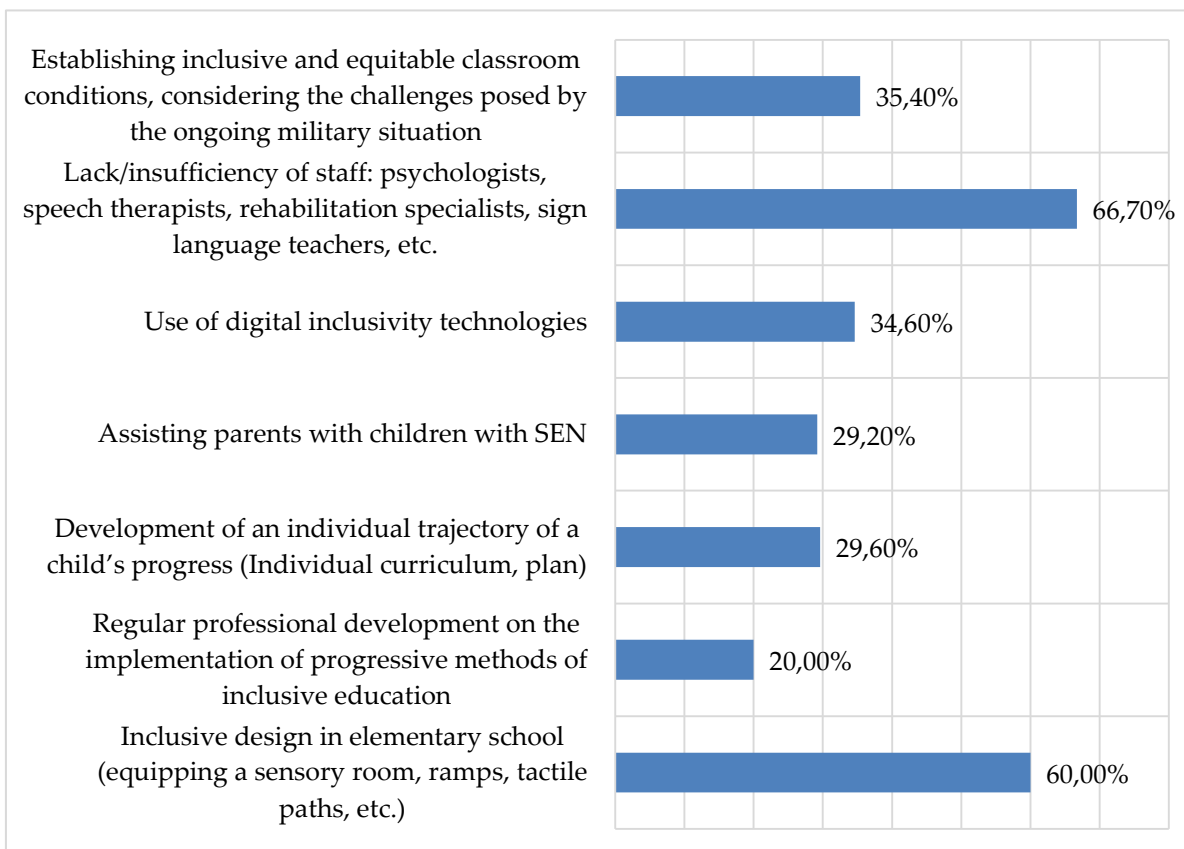


Fig. 1. Typical challenges of working in an inclusive classroom

Source: Own elaboration

The following survey questions focused on inclusion and diversity in primary education, as well as the attitudes of typically developing classmates and their parents toward students with SEN (Figs. 2, 3). Specifically, Fig. 2 presents the responses of student interns to the question: "Have there been instances of negative attitudes toward children with SEN by their classmates?".

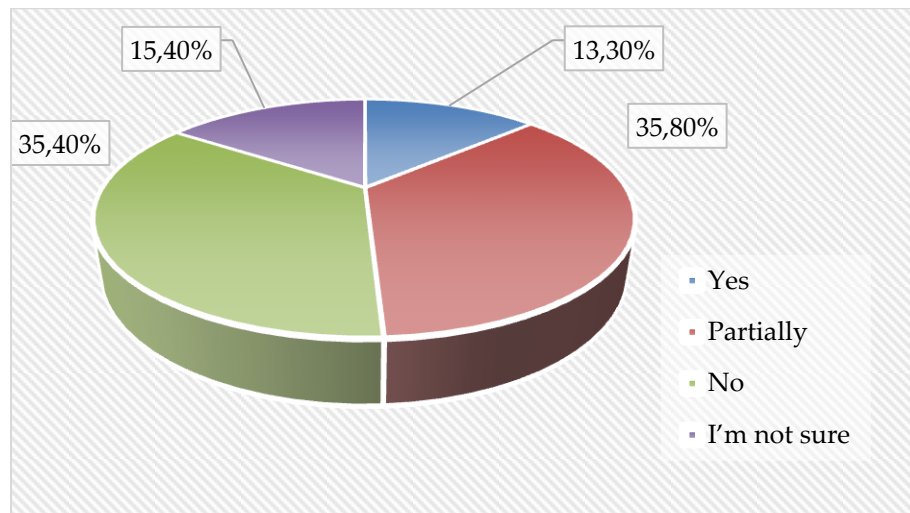


Fig. 2. Classmates' attitudes towards people with SEN in an inclusive classroom

Source: Own elaboration

The findings revealed that over a third (35.4%) of respondents reported no such incidents, while a similar proportion (35.8%) acknowledged instances of minor bullying or rejection of students with SEN in inclusive classrooms. Additionally, 13.3% responded affirmatively, indicating that they regularly observed such cases. This suggests that, unfortunately, stigmatization of children with SEN persists within the school environment.

Concerns persist among parents of typically developing children regarding the possibility that their child may receive less attention from the teacher in an inclusive classroom, as a significant portion of teaching resources might be allocated to students with SEN. Although these fears are largely unfounded, instances still occur where parents express dissatisfaction or even oppose their children's education alongside students with SEN. This is confirmed by the results of our survey.

Figure 3 presents the responses of future teachers to the question: "Have you observed instances of parents of typically developing children expressing dissatisfaction with their child learning alongside a student with a disability in an inclusive classroom?".

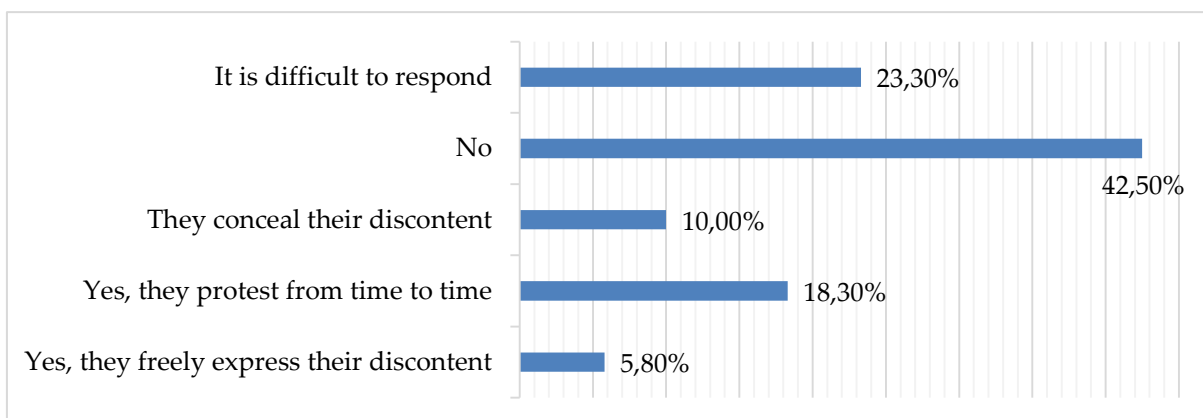


Fig. 3. Parents' attitudes towards children's schooling in an inclusive classroom

Source: Own elaboration

As shown in Figure 3, some parents of typically developing children have concerns about the quality of education in inclusive classrooms. A small percentage (5.9%) openly express doubts about their children studying alongside peers with SEN, fearing potential negative impacts on the educational process. Additionally, 18.3% occasionally voice dissatisfaction with their child's education in an inclusive and diverse environment, while 10.0% conceal their negative attitude toward inclusion. There is a lack of sufficient informational support for all families with children in inclusive classrooms,

including parents of students with SEN, regarding their rights and opportunities within the educational process. Only 42.5% of primary school parents fully understand the objectives and prospects of inclusion. In conclusion, it was suggested that teachers share their insights on practical solutions to these challenges, fostering a tolerant public mindset and promoting an unbiased attitude toward individuals with disabilities in the educational environment. Figure 4 presents the responses to the question: "How can mental barriers toward people with disabilities be overcome in schools?".

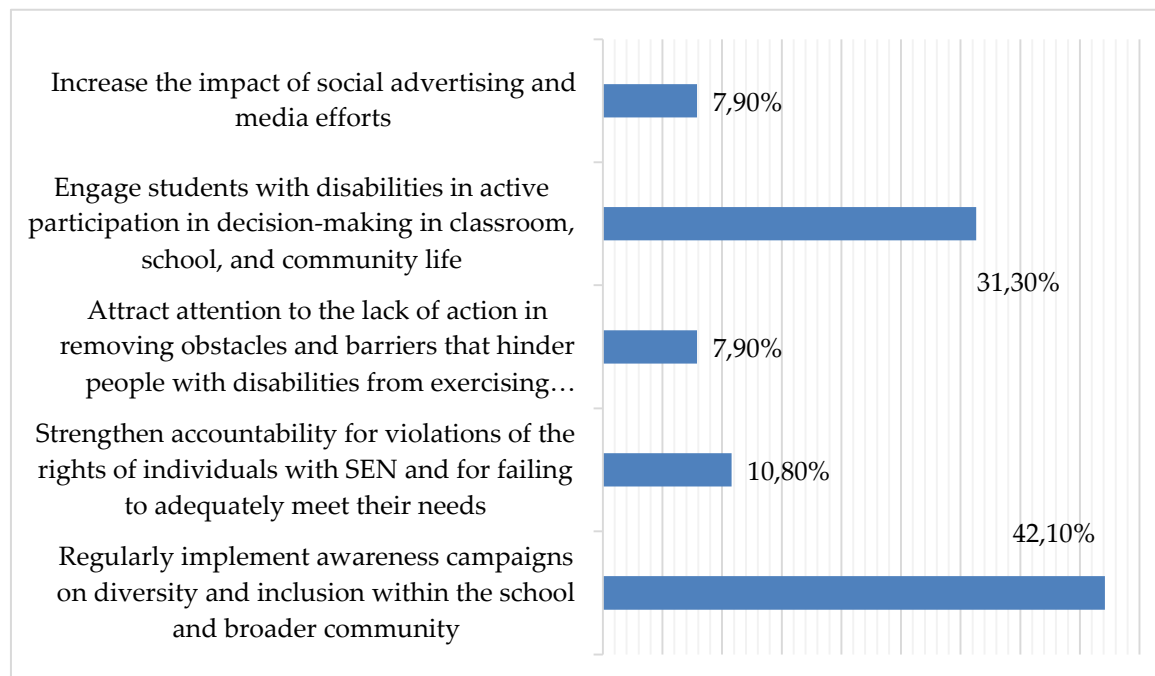


Fig. 4. Pedagogical perspective of building tolerance in the context of inclusiveness and diversity at school

Source: Own elaboration

According to nearly one-third of respondents (31.3% or 75 out of 240), a potential solution to this issue is actively involving children with SEN in joint activities, school governance, and decision-making. This participation fosters a sense of self-worth and social interaction, enabling students with SEN to not only adapt to the educational environment but also become integral members of it. Such an approach helps break down stereotypes and prejudices among their peers.

This also necessitates focused and organized efforts to raise awareness about diversity and inclusion in education, as highlighted by 102 respondents (42.1%). These efforts could involve activities such as workshops promoting tolerance for all individuals in the inclusive process, information campaigns, documentary screenings, meetings with successful people with disabilities, and the establishment of Inclusion Days. During these events, students could 'experience' the challenges faced by individuals with different types of disabilities, such as walking a route blindfolded or attempting to write with their non-dominant hand.

3.3 Methodological Case Study

3.3.1 The Potential for Implementing Inclusive Media Education in the Training of Ukrainian Teachers

The professional standard of a teacher, in light of modern challenges, combines both professional and general competencies, along with opportunities for professional growth and self-assessment of their work. In the digital age, key characteristics for teachers include digital literacy, internet safety skills, the effective use of online teaching methods, gathering audience feedback, and the ability to incorporate high-quality digital content, among other aspects.

In the context of professional training, media literacy as a part of media culture refers to the acquisition of knowledge about media, including its benefits and potential harms, the ability to protect oneself from harmful media influences, and the capacity to navigate the information world confidently (The Concept of Media Education Implementation..., 2016). In other words, media literacy is seen as “a set of skills that enable critical engagement with messages produced by the media” (Bulger & Davison, 2018). Thus, media literacy involves a profound understanding of the media’s impact on individuals (especially children) and society, an awareness of the mass communication process and its consequences, the ability to analyze and discuss media texts, an understanding of the media's context, as well as the skills to assess and evaluate media content.

In this context, it is important to highlight several aspects of future teachers’ preparedness to foster students’ ability to critically analyze information from various sources on the topic of tolerant attitudes toward people with SEN. Different academic disciplines can contribute to this goal. For instance, we can illustrate some methodological approaches used in the study of ‘Fundamentals of Inclusive Education’ at Vasyl Stefanyk Precarpathian National University. Through this course, higher education students learn to: analyze the challenges of implementing inclusive education in Ukrainian schools, particularly in rural (mountainous) areas; apply theoretical knowledge to differentiated teaching and assessment in inclusive education; develop practical skills in organizing educational processes in primary schools with inclusive/integrated education; and use interpersonal interaction methods with parents of children with SEN, while also demonstrating tolerance toward people with disabilities (Budnyk, 2019). A key portion of the material focuses on developing teachers’ communication skills in an inclusive classroom, particularly their ability to overcome communication barriers when interacting with students with SEN and their parents (Villegas, 2021). It also emphasizes mastering the techniques for organizing educational dialogue in a diverse environment and fostering pedagogical collaboration with the parents (or guardians) of children with special needs.

Through participation in the project ‘Study and Distinguish: Infomedia Literacy in Education,’ the content of inclusive courses has been updated by incorporating innovative teaching methods and relevant media content. It is important to highlight the approaches and mechanisms aimed at developing critical thinking when processing information from various sources, as well as promoting “reflective and metacognitive thinking,” which plays a key role in enhancing media literacy (Hobbs & McGee, 2014). This approach is crucial not only for teachers but also for students, particularly in the context of their research activities and professional development. It is especially relevant in the era of distance or blended learning, where a large portion of educational information is accessed through electronic resources and online platforms.

To achieve this, media materials on topics such as equality, diversity, and discrimination in education are extensively utilized in the educational process. For instance, during practical classes, students engage in discussions based on pre-prepared information sources and are assigned independent tasks using online materials, including content from social networks, focusing on societal attitudes toward people with SEN. One example of such an assignment is creating a knowledge map on ‘Barriers to the Development of Professional Cooperation and Ways to Overcome Them’; and analyzing materials from pedagogical journals (electronic resources) on the challenges of adapting children, their parents, and teachers to the educational process in primary schools within the context of inclusive education; and studying public attitudes toward individuals with disabilities, as well as instances of social or gender discrimination as presented in the media.

The pedagogical discourse within the framework of ‘equality – diversity – anti-discrimination’ (Piekarski, 2024) should involve discussing resources that can be applied in pedagogical practice (Budnyk et al., 2022). Online materials reveal the prevalence of various forms of psychological discrimination and social inequality faced by children with SEN in many countries worldwide. For instance, in the Middle East, children are frequently denied access to school due to their disabilities, and those who can study often lack the essential psychological and pedagogical support needed for their

development. As one source highlights: *“Without any real option to get a quality inclusive education, thousands of children with disabilities are being left behind.”* (Lebanon..., 2018). In Lebanon, most schools are not equipped to educate children with SEN, and the government fails to provide adequate support to create the necessary conditions for their successful education (Ibid.). In India, fewer than five percent of children with disabilities are enrolled in schools (Sanjeev & Kumar, 2007). In Africa, girls with SEN are far more likely to suffer from sexual violence than boys with similar conditions. In West and East Africa (including Guinea, Zambia, Sierra Leone, Nigeria, and Zambia), entrenched gender stereotypes often hinder the education of children with mental, intellectual, or physical disabilities. Studies indicate that children with disabilities – both boys and girls – are significantly more likely to experience social isolation in educational settings than their peers without disabilities (Hui et al., 2018).

However, the challenges related to fostering tolerant attitudes toward inclusion in education are not confined to developing countries. Even in countries like the United States and Canada, instances of social exclusion of children with SEN are prevalent. As researchers have pointed out (Lyons et al., 2016), the effectiveness of inclusive education varies across different regions of Canada. While the majority of citizens support the principles of inclusion and acknowledge its importance for the socialization of children with SEN, a significant portion of society still holds traditional views and advocates for segregated education for children with psychophysical disabilities. This problem is confirmed by official statistics on discrimination against persons with disabilities: *“Statistics Canada reports that Ontarians with disabilities continue to have lower educational achievement levels, a higher unemployment rate, are more likely to have low-income status, and are less likely to live in adequate, affordable housing than people without disabilities.”* Furthermore, discrimination based on disability continues to be the most frequent reason for complaints submitted to the Ontario Human Rights Tribunal (Policy on ableism and discrimination based on disability, 2016).

In the United States, while physical accessibility has been significantly improved, with many schools adapted for inclusive education, instances of negative attitudes toward diversity still occur. One example is the case of Roncalli High School in Indianapolis, where the family of an 18-year-old boy with Down syndrome filed a lawsuit against the school and the archdiocese, citing ongoing humiliation and bullying he endured during the 2019-2020 school year. According to the lawsuit: *“The bullying, harassment, hazing, discrimination, and abuse were more than isolated and sporadic incidents; they were serious, ongoing, and continuous and had the systemic effect of depriving John Doe of educational programs and activities”* (FOX 59, 2021).

Similar cases are also reported in other countries, including Australia. For instance, at Brisbane State School, a mother sought assistance for her 9-year-old son, who was born with achondroplasia (the most common form of dwarfism). The boy became a target of bullying by other students, leading to severe psychological distress and even suicidal thoughts. As a result, parents of children with SEN emphasize the importance of integrating inclusion and equality into the curriculum (Perry, 2020).

Research shows that students with disabilities are more likely to experience social exclusion in educational institutions, with girls with SEN facing even greater challenges due to societal prejudices about their educational capabilities. Therefore, for inclusive education to be effective, it is crucial not only to create a safe educational environment but also to actively address gender and other stereotypes associated with children with SEN (Hui et al., 2018). Ultimately, the primary goal of inclusion and equality in education is to ensure equal opportunities for all students, so that no child feels excluded from educational, social, or cultural life (Ashman & Elkins, 2012). At the same time, it is crucial to address challenging questions: Why do some media outlets cover the public perception of people with SEN in (in)appropriate ways? How do such reports affect the emotional well-being of families raising children with disabilities? How is public opinion on (intolerance) in the inclusive process shaped? How can we understand diversity in education and combat discrimination? Engaging students in researching and analyzing information on (non)discrimination in education, exploring best international practices for integrating people with SEN into school communities, and fostering acceptance and understanding

of diversity will enhance their preparedness for inclusive practices in their future professional roles (Piekarski, 2024).

To develop professional competencies in inclusive education, it is also recommended to assign future teachers practical and research tasks in the following areas::

Analytical objectives:

- Conduct a comparative analysis of the inclusive education system in Ukraine and a selected EU country, identifying key similarities and differences.
- Develop a SWOT analysis of the inclusive educational environment in a primary school (if available data permits or through the analysis of open sources).

Research objectives:

- Survey practicing teachers to assess the current state of implementing best inclusive practices and summarize the findings.
- Analyze the content of regulatory documents governing the implementation of inclusion in educational institutions within a specific country and evaluate their impact on the situation in primary schools.
- Present a real case study of inclusive education, offering recommendations for teachers to support students with SEN in the classroom.

Practical tasks:

- Develop an adapted learning task that considers the individual educational needs of a student with a disability (e.g., a child with hearing, visual, musculoskeletal, or autism spectrum disorders).
- Create a video titled 'How to Communicate with Children with SEN in the Learning Environment.'
- Develop recommendations for parents of children with SEN on how to engage with an inclusive classroom and collaborate with the psychological and pedagogical support team.

Creative tasks:

- Design an interactive infographic or a memo for teachers with methodological guidance on working in an inclusive classroom.
- Write an essay or a reflective note on the topic 'My View on Inclusion: How I Imagine My Role in Supporting Diversity.'
- Organize a social campaign (posters, slogans, or a flash mob on social media) to promote inclusive education within society.

Team assignments:

- Develop a project for an inclusive school environment (e.g., design a sensory classroom, create adapted teaching materials for children with specific disabilities, etc.).
- Participate in a simulation game where students take on the roles of teachers, parents, and student assistants while analyzing a case study on adapting the educational process to meet diverse needs.
- Lead a discussion on the topic 'Challenges of Inclusion Through the Eyes of Students.'

These and other tasks will help future teachers not only deepen their understanding of inclusion but also apply it in practice, fostering critical thinking, research, communication, and creative teaching skills. Importantly, engaging in creative activities will encourage students to actively navigate the information space to find relevant information and media resources. This process will contribute to the development of critical thinking and raise their awareness of the social, psychological, and pedagogical aspects of inclusive education, enabling them to practically apply the knowledge they gain (Mezzanotte, 2022).

3.3.2 Concepts of inclusion and diversity in education – practical cases for Polish students

Developing future teachers' readiness to work in inclusive and diverse environments is essential through the integration of relevant topics into the content of various academic disciplines within the educational program. This approach is effectively implemented at Pomeranian University in Słupsk

(Poland), where, among other initiatives, annual scientific and methodological conferences are organized with the participation of top specialists in the field – “Edukacja Równościowa: Wyzwania – Potrzeby – Możliwości” (“Equality Education: Challenges – Needs – Opportunities”), “Disability Health – Education – Therapy series entitled Neurodiversity and Neuroinclusion”, etc. The university is also carrying out a range of engaging projects focused on gender equality, multiculturalism, and support for migrants.

In the study of various psychological and pedagogical disciplines, several methodological techniques have been introduced to help students develop skills for evaluating and interpreting events related to inclusion and diversity in education (Ashman & Elkins, 2012). These include analyzing the background and causes of specific events, examining the context of messages (such as the purpose of the publication and the identity of its author), systematizing information, proposing hypotheses and alternatives, and forming their positions on particular situations. Thus, updating curricula to reflect the principles of inclusion, acceptance of diversity, and multiculturalism permeates various disciplines focused on social justice, working with children from different ethnic backgrounds, and fostering a culture of tolerance. This approach is grounded in an interdisciplinary framework that combines pedagogy, psychology, and sociology to broaden the understanding of diversity in educational practices (Gawęł-Luty et al., 2024).

It is crucial to teach future teachers how to understand the form and structure of online news, as the interactive media environment has evolved significantly with users actively participating in the spread of sometimes unreliable information. Platforms like YouTube, access to new communication technologies, and the creation of online communities all contribute to this shift. This highlights a person’s ability to “be a carrier and transmitter of media cultural values, tastes, and standards” (The Concept of Media Education Implementation..., 2016). As global participation in the social discussion of news continues to grow, it is essential to verify and cross-check information with specific facts.

The analysis of the materials mentioned above serves as an effective pedagogical tool for developing a new philosophy of education regarding people with disabilities and addressing related social stereotypes (Vasianovych & Budnyk, 2024). Special (inclusive) education should employ teaching strategies that emphasize collaboration, co-creation, and communication between students during educational activities, as well as equitable interaction between teachers and students (Szumski, 2022). Simultaneously, future teachers gain valuable experience in sourcing and working with primary materials, distinguishing between copyright and plagiarism, and conducting fact-checking when dealing with media resources on the integration of people with disabilities into society, including within the educational process.

At the Institute of Pedagogy and Psychology at Pomeranian University in Słupsk the course *‘Innowacje pedagogiczne we wczesnej edukacji’* (*‘Pedagogical innovations in Early Childhood Education’*) implies the introduction of modern teaching methods, practice-oriented tasks, mobile learning technologies, and active forms of interaction (Field of study – Preschool and Early Childhood Education).

For instance, one of the current trends in education is the use of the “learning through research” method. In the context of presenting this topic, it is essential to analyze and discuss current research on inclusive pedagogy. Students can be tasked with conducting mini-studies on the effectiveness of various teaching methods for children with special needs, and they should also be involved in preparing reflective reports based on their analysis of inclusive education experiences in specific schools during their practice. Additionally, students can write essays on innovations in inclusive education, drawing from contemporary scientific literature. The value-reflective component of the future teacher’s personality is a key aspect of this process – “What does inclusion mean to me?”.

Training and workshops focused on recognizing stereotypes and prejudices, integrating emotional intelligence into the educational process, practicing non-violent communication and conflict resolution, and using literature, film, and art to discuss diversity issues are valuable. For example, we find that classes where students independently watch specific feature films and then discuss them in groups using guiding questions are particularly engaging. To facilitate this, we recommend offering feature

films that can be watched online:

- the biographical film by director Mick Jackson, 'Temple Grandin' (2010, USA), tells the story of a young woman with autism who successfully socialized within society and became a renowned scholar in the field of agricultural industry;
- the Soviet dramatic film 'Scarecrow' (1983), directed by Roland Bykov, explores the themes of childhood cruelty and the psychology of the crowd;
- the trailer 'In Front of the Class' (2008, USA) depicts the story of a young man with Tourette Syndrome who, despite facing numerous obstacles in his life, not only mastered the teaching profession but also became one of the best in the country.

After watching and discussing, it is important to conduct a concluding discussion on the topic 'How to create a safe and supportive classroom setting for all students.'

The practical case of preparing for work in an innovative educational environment includes analyzing the main methodologies for working with children with SEN and their application in an inclusive classroom, as well as studying international experiences in inclusive education and current trends in its development (Piekarski, 2016).

An essential aspect of teacher preparation for inclusive education is the integration of pedagogical innovations, particularly the application of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles to adapt instructional materials. Given the ongoing digitalization of education, prospective teachers assess the potential of digital resources such as Google Classroom, Padlet, LearningApps, and Canva to facilitate differentiated instruction. Additionally, they must develop competencies in utilizing specialized platforms designed to support the education of students with SEN (for example, AssistiveWare, and Microsoft Learning Tools) (Budnyk & Kotyk, 2024). As part of the course 'Methodology for Computer Science Education and the Use of ICT,' students design and present adapted interactive tasks for learners with hearing, visual, and musculoskeletal impairments. They develop the ability to structure lessons using specialized digital tools for inclusive education, including the creation of didactic comics and educational videos aimed at fostering respect and tolerance for diversity among students. The training of future teachers is further enhanced by their introduction to assistive technologies designed for students with SEN, such as software applications for individuals with hearing or visual impairments. This approach facilitates the development of practical skills necessary for teaching in diverse and inclusive educational environments.

Another critical aspect of teacher preparation is the practical training of future educators in diverse school environments. To this end, they engage in pedagogical practice within inclusive classrooms, schools, or institutions that serve multicultural student populations, including migrant learners. The educational community in Poland demonstrates that mentoring by experienced teachers in diverse school settings, as well as participation in volunteer projects that facilitate interaction with children from various social and ethnic backgrounds, are effective mechanisms for the professional development of future teachers both during university studies and beyond. Consequently, most university students gain initial experience working with refugee children (including Ukrainian children affected by war), students with SEN, and representatives of national minorities during their practical training. Therefore, it is essential to develop strategies tailored to these students' specific needs, ensuring appropriate psychological and pedagogical support, particularly in crises. The Pomeranian University in Słupsk has developed a strategy for developing cooperation between the university, schools, and communities in the aspect we studied, including inviting practicing teachers, experts, and representatives of international organizations to lectures and seminars; organizing student exchanges and international programs to broaden the experience of future teachers; supporting public initiatives and social projects that promote inclusive culture and diversity in education (Piekarski, 2024).

As part of non-formal education for students (Budzewski, 2024), we also provide access to platforms focused on the outlined topics, which should be considered when evaluating their preparedness for working in an inclusive educational environment. These platforms serve as resources for professional-

pedagogical development, including Coursera (<https://www.coursera.org/>), FutureLearn (<https://www.futurelearn.com/>), Udemy (<https://www.udemy.com/>), OpenLearn (<https://www.open.edu/openlearn/>), Microsoft Learn for Educators (<https://learn.microsoft.com/en-us/training/educator-center/>), Google for Education Teacher Center (https://edu.google.com/intl/ALL_us/teacher-center/).

4. CONCLUSIONS

The integration of children with special educational needs into educational institutions worldwide is recognized as a key objective in ensuring equitable access to quality education and fostering inclusive learning environments. Contemporary researchers (S. Main, D. J. Chambers, P. Sarah, 2016) emphasize that traditional perspectives and societal attitudes toward the education of individuals with disabilities remain significant factors in the inclusive education process. This is particularly relevant for teachers, whose beliefs and perceptions play a crucial role in determining their readiness to effectively engage in inclusive teaching practices.

Despite significant progress in implementing inclusion and promoting diversity in Ukrainian and Polish schools, substantial challenges persist, requiring a comprehensive approach to resolution. Research findings indicate that overcoming mental barriers within the school environment necessitates a multifaceted strategy, including the active participation of students with SEN in school life, targeted educational initiatives, the integration of inclusive practices into the curriculum, and specialized teacher training. These measures contribute to the development of an inclusive culture in which every child, regardless of individual characteristics, feels accepted and valued. Key factors for the effective implementation of inclusive education and the promotion of a tolerant society include enhancing teacher preparation, modernizing educational programs, providing psychological support for students, fostering active collaboration with parents, and analyzing best practices in inclusion and diversity on a global scale.

The preparation of future teachers for working in diverse educational environments necessitates a comprehensive approach that encompasses curriculum modifications, the integration of innovative teaching methodologies, the development of practical skills, and collaboration with educational institutions. Equally essential is the cultivation of not only subject-specific knowledge but also core values, empathy, and adaptability, enabling educators to effectively respond to the challenges of the contemporary educational world.

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Пекарські Гжегож, Будник Олена, Фомін Катерина. Підтримка інклюзії та різноманітності: шляхи підготовки майбутніх учителів (інсайти з України та Польщі). *Журнал Прикарпатського університету імені Василя Стефаника*, **12** (1) (2025), 80-95.

У статті представлено результати теоретичного і практичного аналізу проблеми інклюзивності та різноманітності в освіті, ставлення до осіб з особливими освітніми потребами (ООП). Обґрунтовані авторами положення щодо: забезпечення рівноправного доступу до освіти, гендерної рівності, прав осіб з інвалідністю та культурної багатоманітності, відповідають Цілям сталого розвитку та стратегічним напрямкам Європейського Союзу. Для вирішення завдань дослідження застосовано такі методи: аналізу наукової літератури з проблем інклюзивного навчання та рівності; моніторинг засобів масової інформації про різні аспекти (ін)толерантного ставлення до осіб з інвалідністю у різних країнах; метод компаративного дослідження з метою вивчення кращих практик підготовки вчителів у країнах Європи; метод анкетного опитування – для виявлення випадків (не)дискримінації в шкільній інклюзії; методи математичної статистики – для опрацювання кількісних даних опитування та їх якісного представлення. Презентовано результати опитування майбутніх учителів початкової школи (240 осіб) Прикарпатського національного університету імені Василя Стефаника (Україна) щодо їх готовності до прийняття різноманітності й упровадження інноваційних технологій в інклюзивному класі. Висвітлено стратегію співпраці університету зі школами та громадами у сфері інклюзії та різноманітності в освіті, реалізації студентських обмінів і міжнародних програм, що сприяють розширенню професійного досвіду майбутніх педагогів, підтримки соціальних ініціатив, спрямованих на формування інклюзивної культури, яка реалізується у Поморському університеті в Слупську (Польща). Акцент зроблено на значенні менторства в освіті та необхідності підтримки дітей із різним соціальним і етнічним походженням, мігрантів, учнів з ООП і представників національних меншин. Наведено приклади застосування педагогічних інновацій для забезпечення інклюзивності, різних форм безбар'єрності (ментальної, фізичної, інформаційної, освітньої, психологічної тощо) при вивченні окремих навчальних дисциплін для майбутніх педагогів в Україні та Польщі. Окреслено деякі підходи до розвитку інфомедійної грамотності майбутніх учителів у сфері інклюзії та різноманітності шляхом аналізу медійних матеріалів та інтернет-джерел. Аналіз методичних кейсів сприятиме виявленню спільних тенденцій та інноваційних підходів, які можуть бути інтегровані у практику різних країн, у підготовці майбутніх учителів.

Ключові слова: підготовка вчителів, різноманітність, інклюзія, інклюзивна компетентність, (ін)толерантність в інклюзивному класі, дискримінація, особи з ООП.