

ATTITUDES OF PARENTS OF CHILDREN WITH SEN TOWARDS INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN UKRAINE

Research in the field of inclusive education in Ukraine, especially, of those aspects that deal with its methodology, practical implementation and evaluation of its results, are now, doubtless, very acute; almost every leading scholar, whose professional interests include pedagogical studies, pay their attention to the issues of engaging children with special educational needs (SEN) into mainstream schools and kindergartens. Governmental and non-governmental agencies, as well as public sector activists of all levels express their concerns about effectiveness of psychological and pedagogical work, intended to make Ukrainian society more inclusive and prepare all educational settings to meet children's special needs. Although this activities are, in general, very positive, they lack a profound system of getting feedback from the main beneficiaries of inclusion – families who have children with SEN. Most often, parents, or persons who substitute them, have to enforce creating of inclusive classrooms at kindergartens and schools, have to stimulate the state machine of social services, too slow in its actions, criticize mechanisms of implementing inclusive education, developed by governmental officials, and almost never take part in decision-making nor have an opportunity to meaningfully participate in policy-making in order to create a holistic approach to solving their own problems on the first place.

This, partly, is due to the fact that parents of children with SEN in Ukraine are not viewed as a powerful self-advocacy group, as the main stakeholders of inclusive education, because they are still, analogous to the Soviet Union practice, perceived as recipients, but not participants, of social, medical, educational and other services [5]. On the other hand, modern human rights paradigm of public political sector requires equal access and opportunities for all interested persons in development of inclusive environments [3], that is secured by international and domestic legislation functioning in Ukraine.

Analytical review of the appropriate academic sources gives evidence to emphasize the importance of deep involvement of families that have children with SEN into the process of resolving acute problems of inclusive education at all levels (Turnbull, A., Turnbull, R., Erwin, E. J., Soodak, L. C., & Shogren, K. A., 2011). These authors, above all, provide evidence of the major expertise of parents in the field of their children's interests, needs and abilities, and, therefore, are of a great help when it is necessary to find the ways of including their children into mainstream education.

Other problems of involving parents of children with SEN into collective decision-making in the sphere of creating inclusive environments, setting collaboration teams, developing inclusive strategies and practices have been discussed in the works of such researchers as Blue-Banning, M., Summers, J. A., Frankland, H. C., Lord Nelson, L., & Begle, G. (2004), Ryan, T. G. (2009), **Cobigo, V., Ouellette-Kuntz, H., Lysaght, R., & Martin, L. (2012)**, *Day, C. G. (2016) and many others*. All these authors prove the fact that considering parents' opinions and expectations can lead to increase in academic progress of children with SEN and enhance the quality of inclusive education as a system.

The purpose of this article is to define the attitudes of parents of children with SEN towards inclusive education in Ukraine by means of registering and exploring their opinions about the quality of educational services that their children receive.

In order to reach our goals, we have planned and conducted the anonymous internet questionnaire for parents of children with SEN, in which we aimed to understand the level of satisfaction of respondents with the quality of educational services that their children receive, to see their expectations regarding inclusive education and willingness to participate in active self-advocacy campaigns in order to resolve existing problems.

Research was undertaken during the 2019, as questionnaire was available for filling in during several months in many theme groups on popular social networks and open-access internet resources where parents of children with SEN could easily find them.

The used methodology included qualitative research methods of comparing expert evaluations, methods of mathematical and statistical data analysis.

800 people from 16 regions of Ukraine took part in the research. Those were parents of children with SEN aged from 2 to 15 years and attending either inclusive educational settings (63.75%), or special educational settings ((25%), or learning at home (11.25%). This last category was constituted purely by children with severe forms of disabilities (mainly, disorders of autistic spectrum with hard speech, emotional and intellectual disorders) and the necessity to keep a strict diet. The group of children attending special educational settings was constituted by those with severe multiple disabilities (a child with sight and hearing loss on a wheelchair, some children with severe intellectual disabilities and emotional disorders etc.).

Correlative analysis of the answers given by respondents has shown that about 15% of parents of children with SEN (mainly, those, whose children learn at home or attend a special educational setting) expressed clearly negative attitudes towards inclusive education in Ukraine, claiming that “Inclusion is not for every child”, that it is the responsibility of governmental bodies to engage children into an educational environment, that inclusive education in Ukraine has reached “the minimal achievements”; nearly 40% of respondents expressed rather positive and optimistic views of inclusive education, they clearly understand its meaning and know all the details of all required proceedings, can freely define weaknesses and strengths of the Ukrainian inclusive educational system, and feel a strong desire to actively participate in the self-advocacy campaigns in order to make all educational settings in the country inclusive; all the others (slightly less than a half of respondents) are interested in discussing the problems of inclusive education and feel like ready to participate in decision and policy-making only as far as it is necessary for their child involvement.

In conclusion, our research gave the evidence to state that parents of children with SEN express generally positive attitudes towards inclusive education, putting their own child’s needs on the first place, and expecting that society would understand and respect their family, that other children would like to communicate and make friends with their kid, that educational

system would be more accessible and inclusive. Although most respondents complain with poor financing, rather low level of teachers' awareness and preparation, and lack of appropriate resources in inclusive education, they appear to be ready to personally participate in any team work intended to foster inclusion, in general, and of their own child, in particular, however, hardly knowing what to do, when and how. Almost all participants of the research have claimed that the Ukrainian society is badly informed about human rights and is mostly not ready to understand and respect a child with SEN on basis of equality and participation. Although a small part of respondents had expressed a clearly negative attitude toward inclusive education, qualitative and quantitative data analysis has shown that most parents of children with SEN acknowledge "some rather success" in its sphere, making remarks, however, about very poor provisions for inclusive education in many small towns and villages, stating that "in big cities education is more inclusive".

These results, in our opinion, not only demonstrate the attitudes of parents of children with SEN toward inclusive education in Ukraine, but also show a great necessity to work out closer collaboration strategies, intended to reinforce person-to-person talks and collective decision and policy-making hearing and taking into account thoughts and opinions of all participants (children with SEN, their parents, teachers and professionals, governmental officials, legislators etc.). Regular evaluation of the effectiveness of inclusive educational practices is also needed, as honest feedback from the main stakeholders can improve the whole system of service provision.