Modern Challenges of Inclusive Education in Russian Higher Education

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Abstract – **The article highlights the most important challenges facing the educational policy of the Russian Federation in the implementation of the principles of inclusive education. In fact, the definition of strategic and operational objectives of the introduction and implementation of inclusion in higher education by the subjects of the educational process at all levels of education will reduce the risks of educational inclusion and increase its potential to ensure an independent life for citizens with disabilities. The article formulates theoretical and methodological recommendations for the implementation of inclusion in higher education. The key issues and the ways of overcoming them are outlined. The authors support the idea of "equal opportunities" discourse as a key for inclusive educational process modelling based on social services, which change the position of universities in general, and force to change the organizational environment and culture towards inclusion.**

Keywords – inclusive education, higher school, universal design

I. INTRODUCTION

Over the past twenty to thirty years, in Russia more and more attention has been paid to the education of people with disabilities, including professional training. In our opinion, this can be explained by a number of reasons.

Firstly, the government social policy in the education of people with disabilities is focused on the ideas of the international community and the National Doctrine of Education of the Russian Federation, both of which proclaim the principle of equal education for all.

Secondly, the number of people with disabilities due to the worsening financial situation, environment, wars and conflicts is not changing significantly, which requires additional initiatives to create the conditions for their education.

Thirdly, the state policy on professional education of a person with disabilities is not sufficiently developed [1].

In 2012, Russia ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities [2], which is the leading international document defining the strategy, programs and recommendations on the right to education. This document has a particular importance, especially its Article 24 on the system of inclusive education, in achieving UNESCO Education For All goals. Recognizing the right of persons with disabilities to education, the participating countries undertake to apply inclusive education at all levels and throughout the life of an individual. This marked the beginning of the systematic development of theoretical and practical approaches, primarily in the logic of inclusive / universal design.

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

In this article, we rely on the institutional approach that allows us to explicate the concept of inclusive education as a social practice as well as a social institution. Moreover, systematic and social-cultural approaches as well as psychosocial theories of stigmatization and socialization in general are used as a theoretical and methodological basis for conceptualization of the stated ideas.

At present contemporary phenomena and processes cannot be explored through the structural and functional approach because of its low explanatory capacity regarding the practice of social interactions at the micro level. Inclusive environment is very specific and it changes at the different systemic levels (legislative, organizational, information).

In this regard, inclusive education has become a multidisciplinary subject of study while multidisciplinarity has become the leading cognitive principle.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The change of legal discourse towards ensuring the accessibility of all social institutions for people with disabilities was determined by the growing number of social integration practices of people with disabilities, and, at the same time, provided the opportunity for expansion and dissemination of these practices. These trends are mutually directed and define the direction of social policy in the present, which should be based not on the principles of social security, but on the principles of social participation. These principles express the rejection of the idea of "social dependence", moving us to the idea of full social participation, including the economic

participation of people with disabilities. It is important to recognize the positive nature of modern RF legislation in the field of ensuring the right to education for people with disabilities. The implementation of the educational policy for citizens with disabilities is very much about ensuring accessibility. This strategy draws our attention to the consolidation of the principles of universal design into practice in the internal policy of universities.

The implementation of the principles of universal design is associated with the tasks of adapting the physical and technological environment of higher education. This is expressed in the clearly defined criteria of accessibility of higher education (Orders of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation dated November 9, 2015, no. 1309 "On approving of the procedure for ensuring accessibility of facilities and services in education for persons with disabilities, as well as providing them with the necessary assistance" [3] and dated December 2, 2015, no. 1399 "On approving of the action plan ("road map") of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation to improve the accessibility of educational facilities and services provided in the field of education for disabled" [4]), but also in the development and implementation of innovative educational and social technologies in higher education. The object of the design is not only the architectural environment of a university, but also the learning and socializing environment in general. Within the framework of universal design, a university should provide the opportunity to obtain social services.

The following can serve as examples of social technologies: integrated social, psychological and rehabilitation support technologies [5], tutoring, supervision, social assessments, outsourcing, PR support, and situational support in an educational institution, etc. In practice, the use of social technologies allows accomplishing a core mission of higher education and providing professional education in relation to students with disabilities [6].

We will outline the key approaches to the implementation of universal design in higher education: accessible students physical environment (classrooms and recreation zones), advanced information infrastructure of a university (technologies and resources), accommodation for students, safety of educational environment, training of employees who share the concept of universal and/or inclusive design, adaptation of educational programs, availability of specialists providing advice and support to students, the possibility of extracurricular interaction of educational process participants, adaptation of educational materials to formats available to students with disabilities, advanced assistive technologies, the policy of a university in relation to inclusive design of higher school environment, the possibility of feedback and assessment of the educational environment of a university in accordance with the principles of universal and/or inclusive design [7, 8].

Thus, the management policy of a university should be implemented at the following levels: development of internal local acts regulating the interaction of actors of educational process, as well as the development of the university infrastructure (1); monitoring and evaluation of the environment according to the principles of universal design (2);

provision of educational and social services (3); personnel management (4).

We referred to the idea that the object of inclusive design is the physical and technological environment. We should explain that the technological environment of a university is described as a set of information, social, engineering technologies used in the implementation of the educational organization mission.

At the same time, the object of technological design is not only educational programmes, but also the means of their implementation (educational technologies, forms of training, etc.), communicative means (screen access programmes, translation into of the Russian sign language, electronic dictionaries of the Russian sign language, mobile applications), etc. In addition, while changing the organizational design, the main challenges relate to the changes in the university communicative environment and, more importantly, to the possibility of inclusion of all participants of the educational process in a single communicative field. This means that the participants of the educational process in higher education should share the concept of inclusion, be coherent with the discourse of equal opportunities.

In this regard, a special task of the university is to work with students, university faculty and to increase their willingness to be included in the educational, practical, research, extracurricular daily practices [9, 10]. In combination, the highlighted elements become indicators of an inclusive culture of a university. This means that the values and practices of inclusion in higher education are being institutionalized. This process should be promoted not only from the" top", on the part of the executive authorities, but, more importantly, should be shared by all participants of the educational process. In fact, we are moving away from the discourse of "social justice" to the discourse of "equal opportunities".

We are dealing with the discourse of empowerment of people with disabilities, going beyond the concern for the participation of such categories of citizens in various social and cultural practices - education, employment, leisure, etc. The focus is on the potential of people - educational, economic, spiritual, cultural, etc. It is the development of the potential of an individual, which becomes the leading social idea that determines the possibility of social integration of those social actors whose opportunities and resources are limited due to objective reasons.

Such ideas were developed in the works of E. R. Iarskaya-Smirnova and other colleagues [11, 12]. In this context of the inclusive practice should be regarded as a practice, which creates the conditions for realization of the existing potential of individuals with disabilities. However, if the idea is not reflected in a practical way, it creates social tension in society.

Nevertheless, speaking about the current challenges in terms of creating conditions for accessibility of higher education for persons with disabilities, it becomes important to question the purpose of such changes. It is obvious that the objective of higher education is further employment opportunity for graduates with disabilities. This pressing issue is still pending in today's Russia. The Federal Service for State Statistics data show that in 2011 − 2018 the percentage of the employment of

citizens with disabilities decreased by 3% [13], and the number of graduates employed in the area of expertise as specified in their degree certificate is still low. This means that job offers for this population group are limited on the job market [14].

Data on the quota of jobs for individuals with disabilities in the Siberian Federal district were collected from the results of the monitoring carried out by the of the Resource Training Centre for Disabled People and Individuals with Disabilities (the Novosibirsk State Technical University). 9 regions were covered in the study: Novosibirsk region, Kemerovo region, Irkutsk region, Altai Region, the Republic of Altai, TRANS-Baikal region, the Republic of Tuva, the Republic of Khakassia, the Republic of Buryatia). On the labour market the largest number of offers for graduates with disabilities is in the field of production (27.5%); science and education (10%), sales of goods (purchase, supply, trade) – 10.8%; financial system (6.6 %).

However, it should be noted that due to medical contra-indications not every individual with disabilities can be permitted to perform certain professional duties. At the same time, owing to low salary not every quota job offer has a response. There is a serious question as to what kind of labour market future professionals with disabilities are being trained for. And what is the mission of universities in their training?

Challenges for inclusive educational practices, on the one hand, reflect the general challenges and tasks the Russian higher school faces. Higher education follows the path of extensive development, the priority being the provision of knowledge, allowing to solve tasks of the modern economy here and now. At a time when education is focused on today's competence, the mobility of the labour market requires changes to be made in the educational process. Thus, one of the principle features of the educational institutions - focus on the future, perspective development - is being undermined. The change of the area of expertise cannot go at the same pace as for people with a normal state of health.

Essentially, in higher school the inclusion is a "unique project", rather than a routine practice. Setting goals for higher education in terms of the needs of a specific business, production, company gives rise to the idea of a "utilitarian"/functional specialist, who is not ready to solve professional tasks under the changing conditions. Since modern economy is facing numerous crises and is unable to respond timely to the challenges of our time, the question arises whether there is a need for this *catching-up education* in higher school. All of these results in certain tasks of resource provision, including the development of inclusive educational practices.

The development of inclusive education involves qualitative and systematic changes in the education system as a whole. The system should take into account the educational needs of all parties of the educational process, namely professionals, students with a normal state of health and people with disabilities. Professional thinking requires a certain semantics of activity, which is expressed in the definition of key concepts related to the inclusive practices - equality, legislation, social adaptation, adaptive environment, adaptive programmes, and support. Which is more significant, the actors of the process should be aware of the importance of the social distance.

Georg Simmel defines inclusion/ exclusion as a certain "social distance", "the mixture of nearness and remoteness", "mobility within a bounded group", which attributes an individual with "a formal position of a stranger". So, the stranger is near in that he interacts with numerous members of the group, he is remote in that he (his behaviour) does not meet the expectations of the group members regarding the given position" [15]. In classical sociological and socio-psychological theories, a lot has been said about the influence of the environment on the development of a personality. Not only in a positive way, but in a negative way as well. Essentially, the environment can equally stimulate and activate the internal adaptive resources of an individual and suppress this personality.

However, let us once again emphasize the fact that the success of real contacts, joint practices of the development and formation of an individual requires to overcome the social distance, solidarity and compatibility orientation. In the context of inclusive practices, it is important to assess the degree of interdependence of the participants of these educational processes. Fundamentally, the question of the value and/or rationality of this educational form is not measured just by its "usefulness" for an abstract society, but for a specific participant of the educational process in higher school. In essence, the objective is to separate the two concepts - the equality of resources and the equality of opportunity. It is important to understand whether the equality is a goal in itself, or a resource for achieving a certain goal, for example, well-being.

Thus, higher inclusive education becomes an issue that we associate with the fact that each party of the education process - students with disabilities, students with a normal state of health, faculty, university administration, etc. - lack a clear understanding of its goals, objectives and results in the framework of the current socio-economic situation. It is obvious that in higher school the inclusive form of education is possible if this model is viewed as an adaptive and adapting system. The objective of this system is to ensure professional self-definition, based on the principle of equal opportunities for an individual in the process of professional realization.

Under these conditions, the most appropriate ways of professional and educational collaboration should be determined in terms of inclusion. Educational strategies of the professional education actors within the framework of inclusion determine the desire and ability to match the individual and institutional vision of the professional education goals and to respond to them appropriately. Thus, certain educational strategies are inherently defined as socio-adaptive strategies that manifest themselves under the conditions of the university environment. The design of educational strategies is based on the acceptance and / or rejection by the actors of the inclusion as a possible form of education. In fact, the nature of educational strategies is determined by the willingness of all members of the university educational environment to become a part of it. At the same time, inclusive education should not be exclusively perceived as a reinforcing practice of helping people with disabilities. The conflict between the actual objectives of education, including the awareness of the selective

function of this social institution, and its rehabilitation component, should be eliminated.

Thus, a set of tools is needed to ensure the development of inclusive education in the Russian Federation. We believe that among these tools there should be included: regulatory and legal (external and internal regulations), organizational (the availability of experts, structures with supporting functions), financial (budgets), information (information portals, media, databases), analytical (Federal and regional monitoring [16]). In addition, in order to remove the contradictions we mentioned, the system of inclusive education should be based on the principles of continuous education within the kindergarten-school-college-university system. Continuity can be implemented in collaboration of all the parties of the education process in terms coordination of educational programmes, early identification of career preferences and abilities, in the promotion of a cooperative strategy of interaction with the parents and/or legal representatives of the students with disabilities, in cooperation with non-governmental institutions of socialization and social adaptation, etc.

We are convinced that this approach will ensure the design and implementation of reliable professional trajectories for higher school students.

This conceptualization will allow harmonizing the motives of the participants of the educational process and developing a cooperation strategy of, and will prevent their exclusion from the university educational environment within the framework of the inclusive practice. Educational strategies are related not only to the essence of the professional education goals set by the actors of the educational process, but also to the essence of the life goals of the members the University educational environment within the framework of the inclusion.

IV. CONCLUSION

Thus, we have identified the following tasks to be solved by the actors of the inclusive educational policy in Russia:

A. *The conceptualization of inclusive education in higher school.*

In this case, it is important to determine the role of the university in the training of citizens with disabilities.

B. *Legal and methodological support of the process of inclusive education development in higher education.*

Clear instructions and recommendations on key processes, inclusive educational technologies are to be in place.

C. *Values of inclusion.*

The values of "atypical", "otherness" should be formed, discrimination practices should be controlled and prevented.

D. *Monitoring the state of higher education.*

Monitoring procedures are required for the adjustment of the university local strategies of the educational policy implementation in relation to students with disabilities.

E. *Comprehensive support of the educational process.*

The development and promotion of various assistive services and resources based on the internal resources and/or outsourcing.

F. *The design and adjustment of the university internal budgets.*

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