

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGIES AS IMPROVING TOOLS OF INCLUSIVE SOCIAL WORK PRACTICES

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ABSTRACT

The organization of inclusive practice presupposes a creative approach and a certain flexibility of the educational system, which adapts to the individual educational needs of the individual. A unique role in preventing social exclusion is assigned to the institution of social work. Social integration is aimed primarily at the social adaptation of people with special needs to the general system of social relations within the environment into which they are integrated. The article proposes information technologies that contribute to improving tools for inclusive social work practices. The developed proposals for the use of IT technologies to improve inclusive social work practices have 4 areas: vision, tools to facilitate interaction, hearing and tools to facilitate perception. A feature of the proposed concept is using both software tools (PowerPoint, Office 365), modern IT technologies (Kahoot, Zoom, Teams, Web sites, Social networks), and physical objects (mouse, keyboard, screen).

Keywords: *Inclusive Practices, Information Technologies, Social Work.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The organization of inclusive practice presupposes a creative approach and a certain flexibility of the educational system, which adapts to individual educational needs. At the same time, new approaches to teaching are used, varying educational forms and methods of education and upbringing are applied [1; 2].

The UN Secretary-General defined the importance of information technology as follows:

1. Information and communication technologies are one of the driving forces of globalization, and they bring people together and bring new tools for development. In the field of education, the widespread introduction of new digital technologies presents significant opportunities and initiates new pedagogical approaches to the increasing demands of modern society.

2. This vision of the development of the information society presupposes the use of new pedagogical technologies and appropriate teaching methods. In this regard, information and communication technologies have become the

most appropriate tool that can help people with different learning requirements exercise their right to education, employment, social life and recreation, and access to information. The use of new technologies in education should enhance independence, integration, and equal opportunities for all people [3].

Thus, information technology today is a powerful tool for inclusive social work practices, which is the purpose of the study.

The rapid pace of development of society accelerates the course of life and radically changes many processes in it. These phenomena have both good and negative aspects. Regarding social work, the undoubted negative point is the disunity of people, the decrease in communication and the need for it, the increasing exclusion. At the same time, global digitalization, which, on the one hand, exacerbates these processes; on the other hand, the possibilities of IT tools are endless and can significantly help improve inclusive social work practices.

Thus, the purpose of the article is to study ways to use information technology to improve the tools of inclusive social work. To achieve the goal

of the study, it should be divided into several interrelated tasks:

- the study of the issues of inclusion;
- studying the experience of successful application of IT technologies in related fields, such as education;
- development of the concept of using information technology as a tool for inclusive practices of social work.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research is divided into 2 stages:

Stage 1 – theoretical and methodological. At this stage, general scientific methods were used, such as logical – to build the structure of the study, describe its results; generalization and systematization – to determine the fundamental and tangent concepts of inclusion, the essence and problems of applying IT technologies;

Stage 2 – empirical – included such methods as abstract-logical – to justify changes and acquire new features of inclusive social work practices due to the use of IT technologies; systemic and logical – to develop the concept of inclusive practices of social work using information technology.

3. THE THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL BASIS

The problem of inclusion has been actualized at present in all spheres of life (political, economic, social, educational, cultural, etc.) in connection with the movement towards the creation of an inclusive society that ensures equal treatment of all people, regardless of their capabilities and abilities [4-6]. In a social sense, inclusion aims to eliminate exclusion, which is a consequence of a negative attitude towards the diversity of people based on age, health, nationality, ethnic origin, social status, physical capabilities, mental abilities, behaviour, etc.

The humanistic idea of inclusion has gone through its development history and has become a worldwide trend. In the documents of international organizations (UN, UNESCO, WHO), social inclusion is defined as a process that includes specific conditions for achieving equal opportunities for all individuals and social groups, regardless of gender, age, social status, education, ethnicity, etc.

Social exclusion can refer to both an individual and a group and can characterize various areas of social life. Consequently, social inclusion should provide protection from any situations of exclusion, prevent the emergence of new socially excluded individuals and groups, and help return to a full-fledged society.

A unique role in the prevention of social exclusion is assigned to the institution of social work, the development of which in the second half of the twentieth century as a sphere of professional practice led to the definition of new tasks – the solution of social problems of the most vulnerable categories of the population [7-8]. The goals and objectives of social work, the practice of which is aimed at overcoming the phenomena of social discrimination, social exclusion and at the maximum social integration of socially excluded communities, is the closest to the concept of social inclusion. One of the mechanisms for social inclusion is inclusive practices.

In the context of our research, inclusive practice means *socially significant activities aimed at solving social and educational problems, gaining new experiences of social interaction [9-10]*.

In the scientific literature, the concept of inclusion is considered from various angles (Fig. 1).

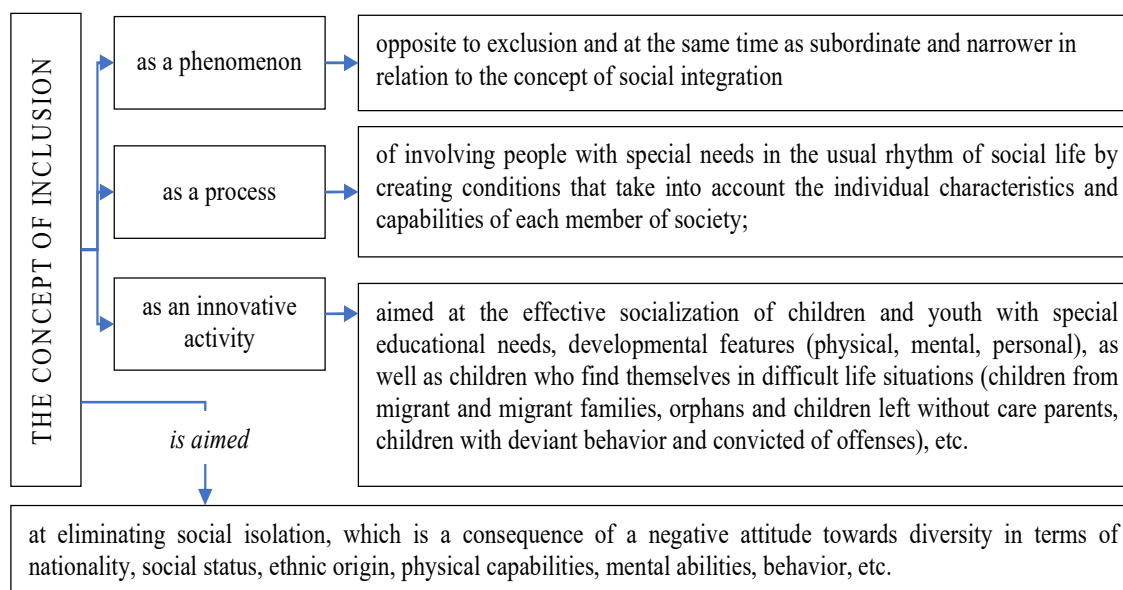


Figure 1. The Concept Of Inclusion

Within the framework of the socio-cultural direction of inclusion, affordable and high-quality education, the inclusion of individual and social groups in the social and cultural life of society are assessed [11; 12]. As the opposite of social inclusion, the concept of exclusion is quite broad and implies a variety of manifestations affecting different spheres of human life. Social exclusion as an individual experience may indicate an ineffective socialization process in childhood, adolescence and adolescence, problems of personal development, life and professional self-determination, dissatisfaction with personal needs, the consequences of mental trauma, which ultimately negatively affects the well-being of the individual.

Correlation of the concepts of "inclusion" and "integration" shows that inclusion is a process that occurs with individuals (social groups), while integration is a process associated with society itself. Integration is often viewed as a prerequisite and preparatory stage for inclusion.

Researchers distinguish educational and social types of integration. The educational type of integration considers the possibilities and conditions necessary for receiving educational, psychological and pedagogical services by

students with special needs (disabled people, persons with disabilities) or a high risk of social exclusion (orphans and children left without parental care, children from dysfunctional social families, international students, etc.).

Social integration is aimed primarily at the social adaptation of people with special needs to the general system of social relations within the educational environment in which they are integrated [13; 14]. This is a process and, at the same time, a system for including an individual into various social groups and relationships through the organization of joint activities (educational, leisure, labour, etc.).

It is on this aspect that our research is focused on. We will consider using information technologies to improve the tools of inclusive social work practices through the prism of education.

4. ANALYTICAL AND STATISTICAL BASIS

According to official statistics, the development of inclusive education over the past five years has been achieved (Fig. 2 and Fig. 3).

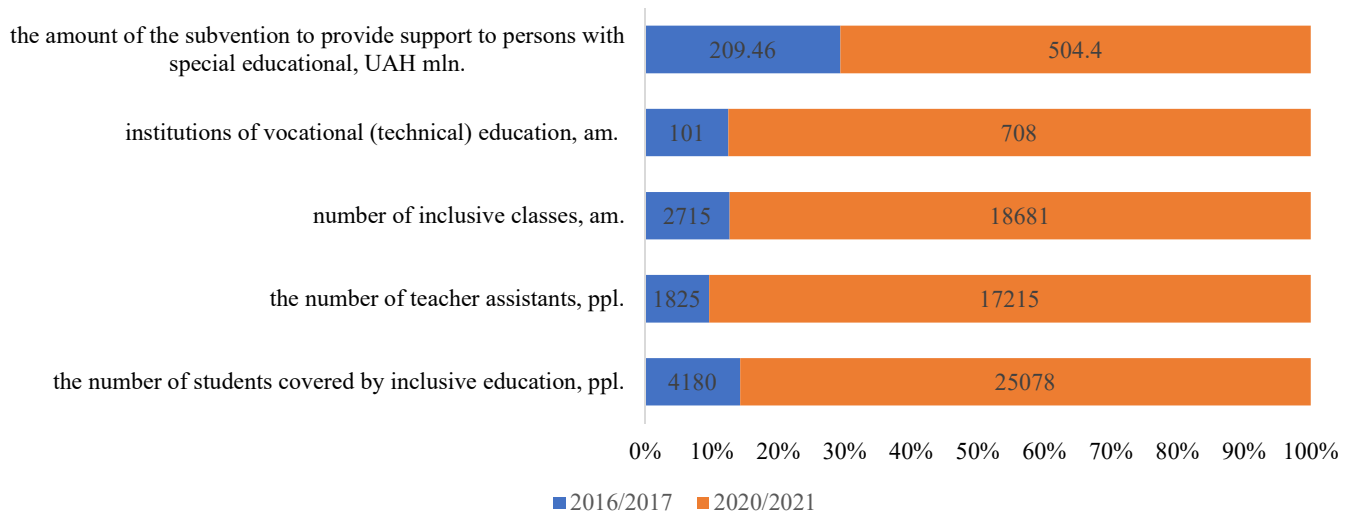


Figure 2. Development Of Inclusive Education In Ukraine Over The Past Five Years (Source: [15])

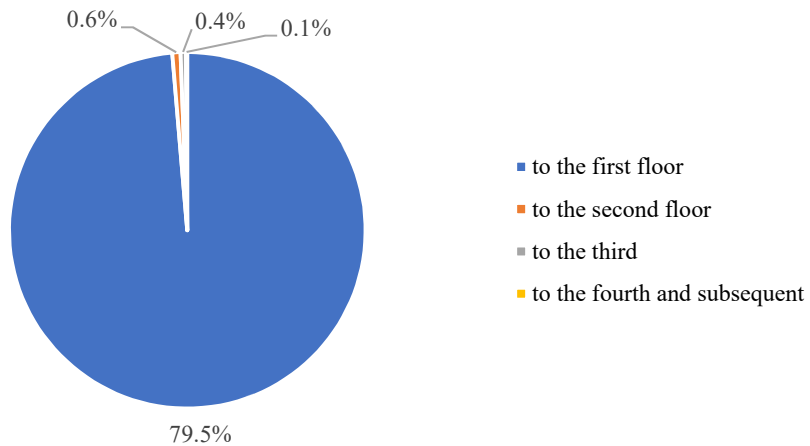


Figure 3. The Barrier-Free Architecture Of General Secondary Education Institutions (Source: [15])

Statistics show that:

- an increase of more than 6 times in the number of students covered by inclusive education;
- an increase in the number of teacher assistants by 8.4 times;
- an increase in the number of inclusive classes by 7 times;
- an increase in the number of institutions of vocational (technical) education by 7 times;
- an increase in the subvention amount to provide support to persons with special educational needs by 2.4 times.

Barrier-free architecture of general secondary education institutions:

- to the first floor – 79.5% (1, 175 institutions);
- to the second floor – 0.6% (90 institutions);
- to the third – 0.4% (65 institutions);
- to the fourth and subsequent – 0.1% (21 institutions).

In 2020/2021 n. for children with special educational needs of preschool age created:

- 4369 special groups in 1630 preschool institutions, where 61668 children receive preschool education;
- 3796 inclusive groups in 2242 institutions with 6849 children.

For three years, a network of inclusive resource centres (IRCs) has been developed and operates in Ukraine. They provide systematic, qualified

psychological and pedagogical support for preschool and general secondary education students.

As of January 1, 2021, there were 633 IRCs, where 151,427 children underwent a comprehensive psychological and pedagogical development assessment.

IRC's are provided with salaries and equipment at the expense of the state following the list developed by the Ministry, sets (699 sets) of modern world methods for a comprehensive assessment of children's development, 507 specialists received international certificates after training in these methods, which guarantees quality services at the level of international standards.

During 2020, 170 IRC's specialists were trained to study the needs of children with special educational needs according to modern world methods of methodology; 247 specialists continue their training in 2021 [15].

From October 2020 to June 2021. An all-Ukrainian online training course for inclusive

education trainers was held, which will further train various participants in implementing inclusion permanently. The training was organized by the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine in cooperation with the Lumos International Charitable Foundation (Great Britain).

All IRC's are digitalized; there is an informational, educational system of the IRC's AU and a website to provide convenient access to services, especially relevant to today's adaptive quarantine realities. A mobile application has been created on iOS and Android platforms, which will improve access to services.

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As the analysis has shown, it is necessary to introduce information technologies that are successfully used in inclusive education and adapt them for inclusive social work practices.

Thus, information technology aimed at inclusive social work practice can be divided into several groups (Fig. 4).

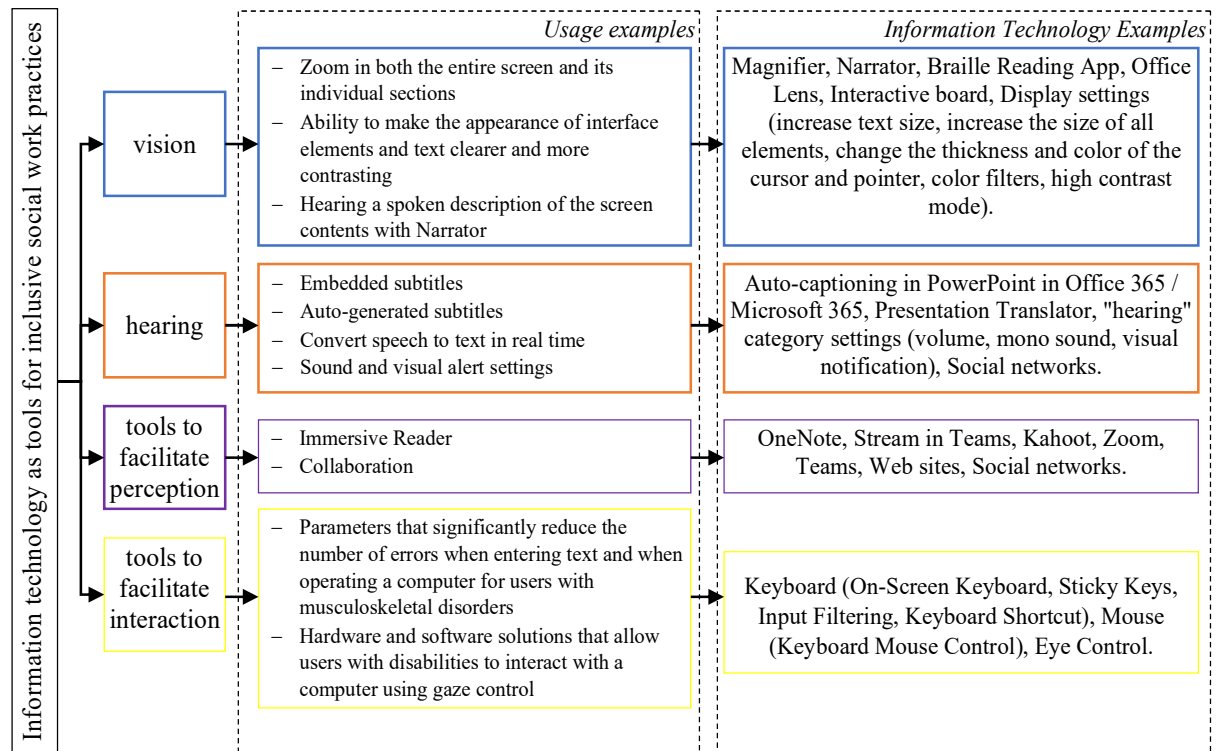


Figure 4. Information Technology As Tools For Inclusive Social Work Practices

However, for inclusive social work practices, information technology is used as a tool that needs to be integrated into the overall concept (Fig. 5).

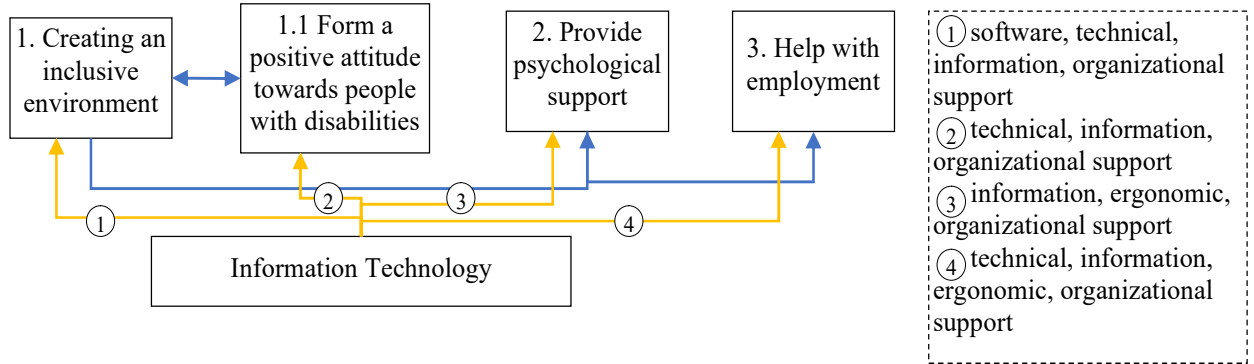


Figure 5. The Concept Of Inclusive Social Work Practices Using Information Technology

Thus, in the social sphere, there has recently been a need to use information technology. The use of systematization of information, quick search, easy change and data management, with a large flow of information in the social work management system, is impossible without providing the necessary information technologies. The need for information technology in the management of social work will become more and more significant over time.

The introduction of information technologies into the social work system will at least lead to an increase in the level of qualifications of specialists in the social sphere and reduce the level of vertical

interconnection. Still, the question will also arise in changing the system of training specialists in social work. Information technology streamlines information flows at the global, regional and local levels.

They play a crucial role in forming the technostucture of inclusive practices, increasing the role of education in training a highly qualified specialist, and are actively introduced into all spheres of socio-political and cultural life, including home life and entertainment and leisure. The study showed that the effectiveness of inclusive social work improves with support (Fig. 6).

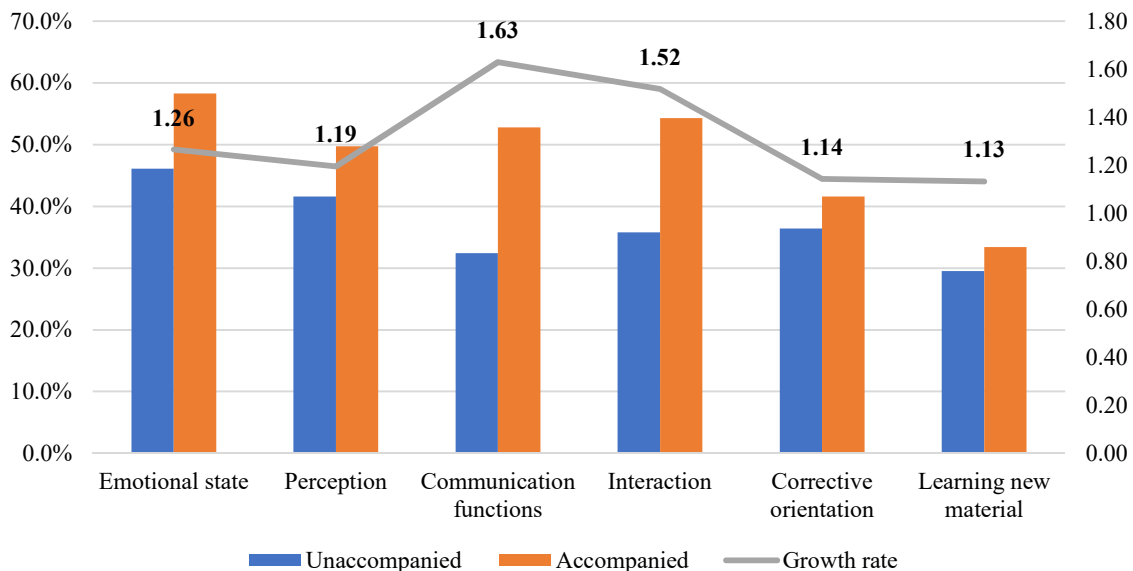


Figure 6. The Effectiveness Of Inclusive Social Work With And Without Support

The study showed that support improves all processes of social work of inclusive education to a greater or lesser extent (minimum 13%, maximum 63%).

Pedagogical support includes the following components:

- organizational,
- scientific,
- methodical
- informational.

Main escort features:

- collection and analysis of information on the education, upbringing and development of children with disabilities;

- analysis of current problems and development of directions for scientific research;

- development of a system of social psychological, pedagogical and medical care and support for children in a general educational organization.

Basic principles of support:

- the priority of scientific interests related to the integration of children with disabilities in the general education space;

- organization of scientific and pedagogical cooperation with teachers, specialists and parents in solving the problems of the development of inclusion in a general educational organization;

- implementation of scientific and methodological support in developing and implementing forms, methods, and ways of organizing an inclusive educational process.

6. CONCLUSIONS

In modern conditions of a rapidly changing world connected with information technologies, established organizational forms are being improved and subject to revision, which allows integrating people with disabilities into society. Social inclusion is an active process of strengthening the sense of belonging of an individual or group to a community, leading to social integration. Information technology has made a breakthrough in inclusion. When considering an inclusive society, issues of social justice, equality and choice arise that are present in all areas of social relations.

Thus, information technology as a tool for improving inclusive social work practices contributes to:

- raising awareness of the educational community, private sector representatives and officials about the potential of information technology in ensuring social inclusion and poverty reduction for people with disabilities;

- development of the competencies of teachers/educators, social workers and other specialists involved in the education and social rehabilitation of disabled people, as well as the competencies of officials on the electronic accessibility and use of information technologies for persons with visual, hearing and motor impairments;

- promoting greater autonomy and full participation in social life for people with disabilities by adapting an electronic environment for their communication, learning and access to information.

- development of computer literacy and professional skills among people with special needs through the use of digital technologies and resources.

The authors believe that the goals of the study at this stage have been achieved: based on the study of the issues of inclusion and the experience of successful application of IT technologies in related areas, such as education, the concept of using information technology as a tool for inclusive social work practices was developed and tested. IT technology in the maintenance process had the most significant impact on 2 aspects: communication function and interaction.

In further research, the authors plan to develop scientific and methodological support in developing and implementing forms, methods, and ways of organizing an inclusive educational process.

7. LIMITATIONS OF STUDY

The study has certain limitations, in particular, subject-semantic limitations (the authors investigated a specific problem - inclusive practices while concretizing the subject of the study - the use of information technology for inclusive practices of social work, which significantly narrows the scope of the object, but gives meaning to the study) and morally -cultural (a study of inclusive social work practices was conducted in a specific region - Ukraine. To scale the recommendations to other countries, it requires additional assessments).

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