

## Inclusive Education as a Basis for Sustainable Development of Society

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### Abstract

According to statistics, currently, approximately 4% of individuals with disabilities or incapacity for work are enrolled in higher education institutions of the Russian Federation. Thus, according to this figure, it is clear that higher education in the Russian Federation is available to a limited number of individuals with disabilities or incapacity for work. To involve more people with disabilities in the higher education system, it is necessary to create special conditions that make training possible and attractive for these individuals. The growing disparity between healthy and physically disabled people has recently created more and more contradictions and crisis situations, due to which the world community is faced with global questions concerning the possibilities of the future existence of human civilization. These dangers to society have become particularly acute in recent decades; this is evidenced by the awareness of the need to develop a concept of sustainable development. The meaning of the original English concept is self-sustained development, i.e. the development of the society that is kind of consistent with the state of all its components, as a result of which society should be considered as a single holistic system. The aim of this study is to determine the role and place of inclusive education in developing the concept of sustainable development of society as a whole. To achieve this, the authors propose to identify the problems that both ordinary students and students with disabilities may face when studying at a university and to outline ways to solve them in order to ensure that the interests and needs of all participants are taken into account and balanced, as it is impossible to ensure the sustainable development of society in a socially unfair world.

**Key words:** *inclusive education, society, respect for rights, educational environment, sustainable development.*

### Introduction

The essence of sustainable development, in the authors' opinion, is that the development of the current generation does not contradict the interests of future generations. According to the classical definition, the balance between generations is understood as a balance of needs.

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The existing approach to the concept of sustainable development has been developed during several decades; this approach is based on the experience in the field of development gained during this time. Important steps towards the concept of sustainable development were the concept of dynamic growth, the concept of organic growth, and the concept of dynamic equilibrium discussed in the works of the Club of Rome. The common feature of all these approaches is the comparison of the global economic system with a living organism, which is particularly evident in the concept of organic growth. Quantitative growth is of no importance for the evolution of living organisms or biological systems. The main part is played by the vitality and ability to survive, i.e. qualitative improvement and adaptation to the environment. Organic growth leads to dynamic equilibrium since a living, mature organism is constantly renewed. A society that has achieved a state of dynamic or sustainable equilibrium is a society that, in response to changes in internal and external conditions, is able to establish a new equilibrium corresponding to these changes, both within itself and within its environment.

In recent years, the tolerance of our society has been growing. This is related to the rethinking by society of its attitude towards people with disabilities, with the recognition of not only the equality of their rights, but also the awareness of society of their duty to provide equal opportunities for such people. The steps taken by the Russian society in the direction of provision of equal opportunities for all categories of citizens to get higher education lead our society to the idea of the need for inclusive education in universities (Alajmi, 2019; Korableva et al., 2019; Miftakhov et al., 2019; Rupeika-Apoga et al., 2019;). The issue of availability of higher education for the individuals with disabilities (hereinafter “IWD”) and incapacity for work or isolation from it shows the degree of maturity of our society, as well as the readiness of our society to accept, integrate and socially adapt people with disabilities and incapacity for work (Adamczyk et al., 2019; Bochkareva et al., 2017; Dev, 2018; Kuznetsova et al., 2019; Shatunova et al., 2019).

The term “inclusion” in English means “inclusiveness”. Inclusive education (fr. *Inclusif* – including, lat. *Include-conclude, include*) – the process of development of general education, which implies accessibility of education for all categories of children, in terms of adapting to the various needs of these children by finding the optimal way of their education. The restriction of the access of children with disabilities to higher education does not meet certain minimum public perceptions and expectations (Essary & Szecsi, 2018; Korepanova, 2011).

Counteraction to such discrimination, as well as provisions on inclusive education, are laid down in the text of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, approved by the UN General Assembly on December 13, 2006. In 2008, Russia ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. As indicated in the Convention, persons with disabilities include persons with persistent physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments who, when interacting with various barriers, may interfere with their full and effective participation in the life of society on an equal basis with others.

However, there remain quite a few problems for people with disabilities in access to education: lack of specialists, poor accessible environment, unpreparedness of the majority of the population for contacts with “special” people, etc.

In our opinion, the only tool that can change people's behavior so that they can evaluate their actions and make decisions taking into account the requirements of sustainable development is education and enlightenment in all its forms and manifestations. It should be aimed at the formation of skills and behaviors, at changing the value and ethical attitudes of society in the direction of more rational activities in environmental issues, economic and social development (Batkovskiy et al., 2019; Popova et al., 2019; Sharafutdinov et al., 2019; Thalassinou et al., 2011; Voronkova et al., 2019).

Currently, inclusive education is reduced to the acquisition and application of certain knowledge and skills that provide only a passive adaptation of a person to the environment. We believe that training systems aimed at the sustainable development of society should be dynamically rebuilt in accordance with the problems and difficulties in the development of mankind, thereby allowing them to begin their active solution. Our study seeks to prove the thesis that inclusive education for sustainable development is education that enables the social transformations necessary to create more socially equitable societies and achieve sustainable development.

## **Method**

### **Research Design**

Our study is theoretical. It is based on a comparative analysis of existing teaching practices for students with disabilities in Russia and abroad, and an author's assessment of the degree of influence of inclusive education on the sustainable development of society. The theoretical and methodological basis of the study are the works of domestic and foreign scientists on the problems

of ensuring the sustainable development of society based on the formation of an accessible environment; problems of inclusive education; scientific studies on accessibility of higher education for people with disabilities and incapacity for work, the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the laws of the Russian Federation, the decrees of the President and decrees of the Government of the Russian Federation, regulatory acts of the Federal subjects.

The development of inclusive education in Russia is the imperative of the present time and the responsibility of a social welfare state that has made a number of commitments concerning students with disabilities as a member of the UN (Dobrovolskienė et al., 2017; Senan, 2018; Monni et al., 2017). The successful implementation of these commitments depends not only on the state but also on the attitude of society towards individuals with disabilities in general and their education in particular. The idea of co-education of physically disabled and healthy students is faced with the opposition under the pretext of the lack of conditions for its implementation: material, organizational, financial conditions, the mentality of the population and teachers (Bozhkova et al., 2019; Dalevska et al., 2019; Limba and Šidlauskas, 2018; Oganisjana et al., 2017; Strunc, 2019).

The degree of scientific development of the problem. Despite the interest of teachers, psychologists, and sociologists (N.N. Malofeev, N.I. Skok, E.R. Yarskaya-Smirnova, T.A. Dobrovolskaya and N.B. Shabalina, V.P. Gudonis, N.D. Shmatko, etc.) in the issues of integrating individuals with various developmental disabilities into the social environment, this problem remains insufficiently developed in theoretical and practical terms, as evidenced by the small amount of fundamental works, the conflicting views on the qualitative assessment of the integration process, and the fragmentary nature of its practical implementation in modern Russia. The problem of the study is the contradiction between the declared equality of students with disabilities with healthy students in Russia in terms of their equal rights to receive higher education and the actual discrimination of this group of population, which hinders their social integration into the society and leads to the deprivation of a large part of Russian disabled people and their social exclusion, which significantly slows down the sustainable development of society as a whole.

The object of the study is the process of training students with disabilities in higher school as the basis of sustainable development of society. The subject of the study is the relationships arising as a result of inclusive education of students with disabilities as a factor of their social integration.

The aim is to study the development of the practice of inclusive education of students with disabilities in Russia as the basis for the sustainable development of society.

Objectives of the study:

1. Based on an analysis of normative legal documents, to determine the degree of readiness of higher school for the practice of inclusive education.
2. To carry out a comparative analysis of international and Russian studies and practices related to the application of integration processes in the education of physically disabled students.
3. To examine the public opinion on inclusive education in modern Russia.

The theoretical and methodological basis of the study includes fundamental theoretical provisions, which consider the development of personality as a consequence of specific relationships between people that are formed in the space of social bonds (G. Simmel, G.H. Mead, C. Cooley); concepts dedicated to the development of the personality with disabilities (L.S. Vygotsky, V.I. Lubovsky, E.R. Yarskaya-Smirnova, N.N. Malofeev); basic provisions related to human rights enshrined in international documents and the Constitution of the Russian Federation.

The empirical basis of the study is the data obtained as a result of the analysis of international and domestic regulations on the issues of human rights, education of persons with disabilities, and data of state statistics.

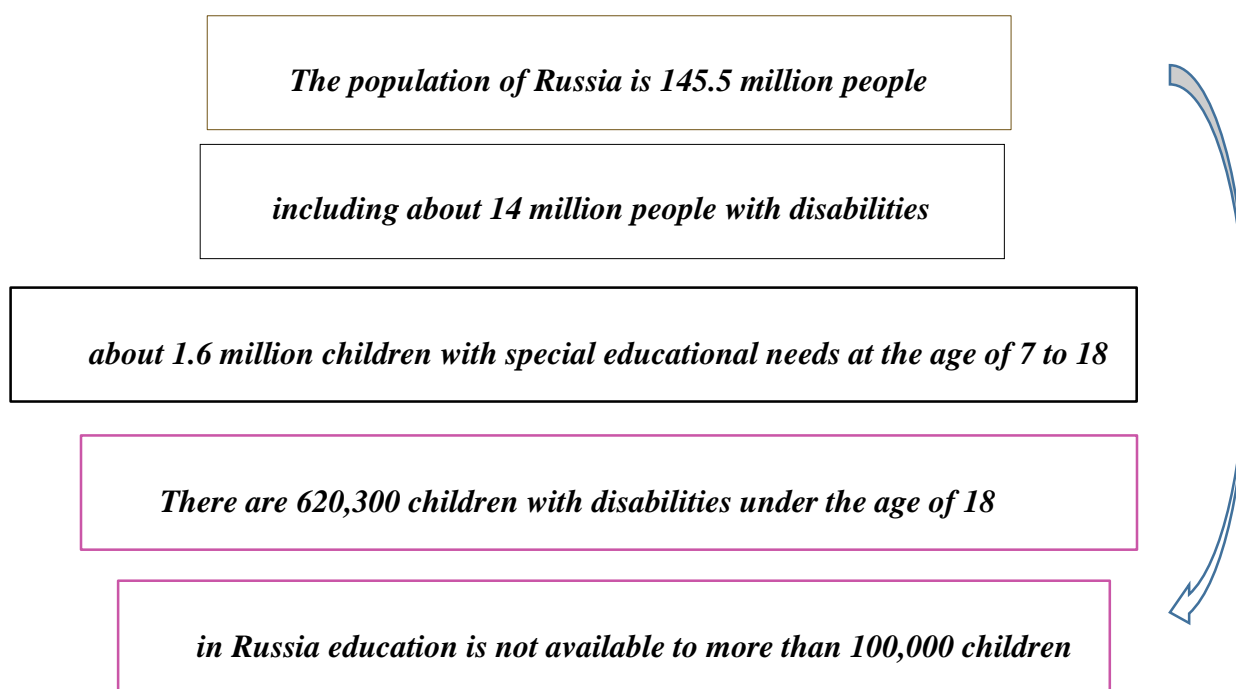
### **Data Analysis**

The systematic approach serves as the methodological basis, which ensures the comprehensiveness and purposefulness. The analytical, abstract-logical, economic-statistical, monographic and experimental research methods are also used herein.

### **Findings**

Since 2012, inclusion has been included in the federal educational standards of the Russian Federation. Environment, adapted for individuals with disabilities (IWD) and inability for work, retraining of the higher-education teaching personnel (HETP) for inclusive education are now mandatory requirements for all universities in the country. What should the inclusion begin in high school? Who is the subject of inclusion? Why is it necessary to learn inclusive interaction? Let's try to understand using particular examples and facts.

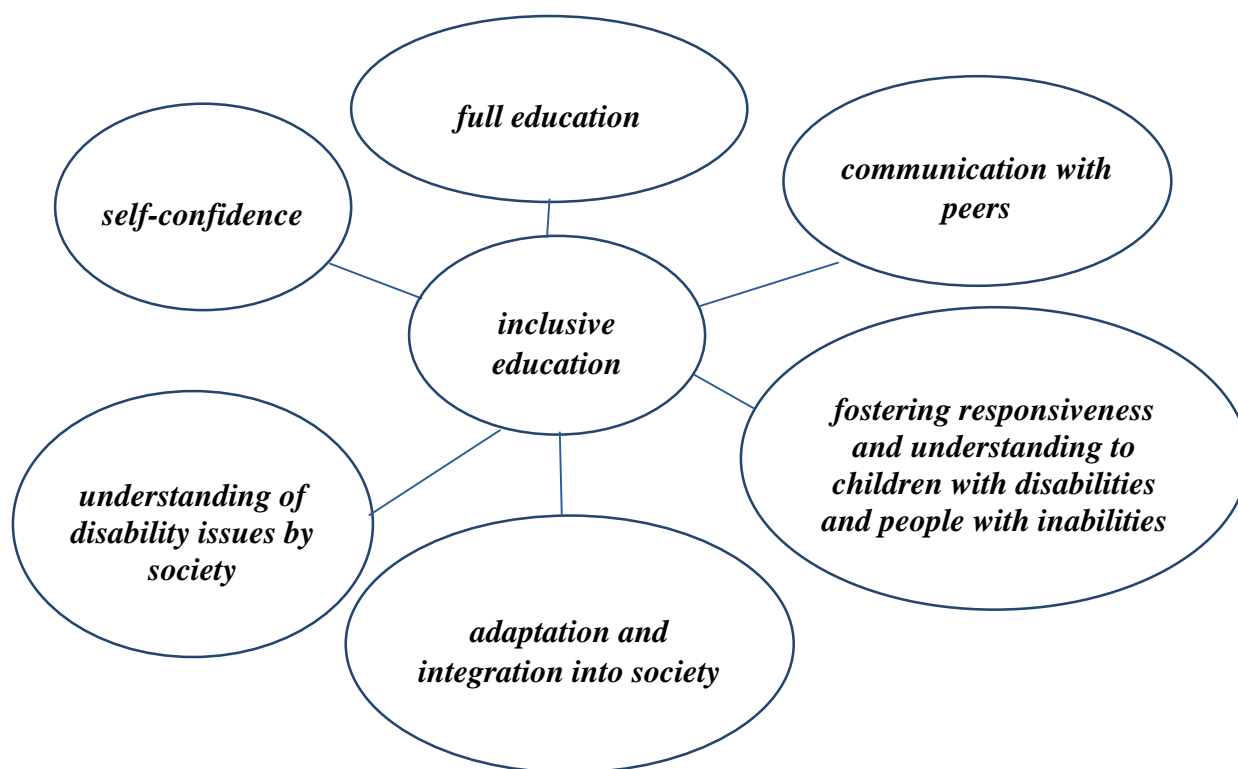
The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, ratified by Russia, is still perceived as something exotic and irrelevant, including in universities in the country. An inclusive society based on respect for differences is discussed as a fashion trend, the concept of post-humanism. Everything seems quite simple. Devices convenient for movement in wheelchairs appear in the streets, individuals with disabilities attend classes in universities along with the rest of the "ordinary" students. However, ramps on the stairs of institutions and tolerant attitude towards "unordinary students" in universities are far from being an inclusion. When people with disabilities are admitted to schools only formally, the opposite phenomenon occurs, which is antagonistic to the concept of inclusion itself (Fayzrakhmanova, 2014).



**Figure 1. Current state of the problem**

According to current research conducted by the Public Chamber of the Russian Federation with the support of the Commission under the President of the Russian Federation for the Disabled, universities are not ready for such students, either morally, or methodologically, or technically. (Figure 1) In the country, up to 70% of enrolled individuals with disabilities – visually impaired, hearing impaired, with motor limitations – do not complete their education, and most of the

applicants with disabilities do not even try to enter the university. This is due to the whole complex of problems characteristic to Russia at all levels of social life support for people with disabilities, including the lack of a clear understanding of the concept of inclusive education (Figure 2). Paradoxically, despite the many years of successful experience of defectology institutions oriented to higher education, the educational process interrupts particularly at the level of universities, and as a result, an insignificant percentage of graduates with disabilities acquire the relevant diploma competencies and employment.



**Figure 2.** *The concept of inclusive education focused on the sustainable development of society*

Let us consider in detail what constitutes an inclusive interaction, what needs to be learned, what changes are required.

An adapted educational program in higher education institutions is the entire set of conditions that reflect an adapted environment for disabled students. But the adaptation of the conditions is not equal to the adaptation of the content. Students shouldn't get "curtailed" knowledge, they must have a complete retrospective of education in the specialty. That is why inclusive interaction on the part of the university implies not only an architectural, technical and educational basis, but also

such items as the development of an individual educational route, tutoring support, selection of methods corresponding to a disability, rehabilitation and wellness practices, monitoring and much more. An individual itinerary begins before admission with the applicant's vocational guidance. This includes vocational guidance, provision of complete and accessible information, counseling psychologist and expert assistance in preparation for admission. Tutoring lasts not only throughout the entire course of study, employment assistance is part of the program (Artemyeva, 2015).

Experience in the field shows that even with a technically equipped audience, teachers who do not have the skill of working with disabled students prefer to give the material in the old manner, ignoring the student's educational needs. Often, the teacher is satisfied just with the attendance of the lectures by a disabled student, instead of an adequate presentation of the material, he tries to buy his freedom with good marks in the record book. Or, on the contrary, frequently a student with disabilities is confronted with impracticable requirements for examinations. That is why the acquisition of HETP competencies in the methods of inclusive education is a prerequisite in high school of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Ponomareva et al., 2019; Yemelyanov et al., 2018, 2019; Prodanova et al., 2019). No less significant psychological and communicative aspects of the HETP. The mental acceptance by teachers of persons with disabilities as full-fledged students is one of the most difficult and necessary conditions. But only a holistic approach will give students with disabilities the opportunity to integrate into society.

By law, a student with disabilities is entitled to be qualified for an adapted educational environment. By enrollment of such a student, a university assumes the responsibility to provide a student with the environment which complies with the disabilities. In turn, the student must be equally responsible for the quality of study and academic performance.

Inclusive interaction takes place when a student with disabilities is highly motivated, claims the full knowledge and strives for self-realization. Under such circumstances, common behavioral strategies, such as dependency and speculativeness, are excluded. "Give me "satisfactory", because I'm disabled" – this is not an inclusion. In fact, the state, by building an inclusive society and creating the rehabilitation conditions for higher education for individuals with disabilities, makes an economic investment. According to the Swedish model of "pragmatic humanism", the practice of inclusion is the provision of the opportunity for people with disabilities to be independent and able to work, and, therefore, less costly for the budget as dependents. According to the Swedish model, the payback period for an investment in inclusive education is 7 years. The



principle strategy – “fishing rod, not a fish” – in relation to disabled students gives a good start to a quality independent life.

The third party of inclusion is the “ordinary students”. According to the results of surveys in universities, ordinary students treat students with disabilities “reservedly-positively”. On the one hand, they “have nothing against” the very fact of the presence of such students, on the other hand, without having experience of inclusion, they do not know how to join, interact, communicate and help. Often a person with disabilities, having studied for the whole term, remains an outcast, aside from student life. For example, if it comes to coexistence in a room in a dormitory, students with disabilities most often refuse such a neighborhood. Experience shows that it is easiest to achieve inclusive interaction with students from non-disabled students, involving them in volunteer programs, to help with tutoring support for applicants, students with disabilities. Not the last role is played by common student events and joint volunteer projects. Thus, at Herzen University blind students along with other students participate in volunteer studios for the preparation of adapted books and textbooks for the blind. It is necessary to teach students to accept people with disabilities inside the community according to the principle “differences are a reason to unite”.

### **Discussion**

Let's try to understand the problems that HETP may face when working with students with disabilities and inabilities for work. The first thing to know is that inclusive education is the education that is organized in a special way. If without any substantive changes, the university accepts people with disabilities as students, then the university can be immediately suspected of corruption. For the university becomes inclusive only after changes and the creation of special educational conditions: investments in infrastructure are required, serious investments in the retraining of personnel, costs for additional specialists (tutors, teaching assistants, supervisors), contribution to the change of didactics and pedagogical approaches.

If a student is accepted with a disability (the type – musculoskeletal, sensory, behavioral, mental – does not matter) and the university does not change anything in equipment and in the modeling of the educational process, then this is not an inclusion.

Let us not forget that the main essential characteristic of inclusive education is flexibility. A huge number of talented children is not motivated, studies satisfactorily and shows their abilities after

graduation. Inclusion requires pedagogical creativity, a departure from the uniformity of teaching directives, maximum individualization of learning.

This is a basic condition for students with disabilities. But in the end, all this applies to ordinary students. Didactic arsenal is increasing incredibly. As a result, research shows that the use of graphic organizers, visual schedules, textbooks and computer programs leads to a significant improvement in the results of tests and quizzes for both groups of students: with disabilities and without them. (Horton, Lovitt, & Berglund, *The Underground Students in content area classes*. 1990).

The likelihood that a student with mental disability lags behind in mastering an educational program is very high. Does this mean that inclusion is impossible for him? Of course not. Higher education, as interpreted by its Law on Education of the Russian Federation, is training and education. Higher education is not only an educational program. Intellectual goals certainly belong to the goals of higher education. But still the goals are social and the goals are legal. And inclusion is, first of all, a right.

Any student comes to university to study. And the university created for this, it is an educational institution. However, it is impossible to say with what certificate he will graduate from a university about even the most capable student at 16, and it is impossible to predict about a student with a disability what achievements he will receive in the general educational environment.

Any assumptions on this topic cannot be scientifically predictable. The level of education before any student must be overstated – only this way development is stimulated.

In segregation education, however, it is always underestimated. Therefore, we will never be able to find out what real achievement graduates of Soviet correctional schools were capable of.

Inclusion is, first of all, the openness and transparency of the community and all relationships in it.

It is precise because an inclusive university is the safest, because there, in the face of “special” students, is a lot of markers and signals, even barely involved in pathological processes. And the inclusive environment will not allow to hide these markers, to make them invisible, to bring them beyond the boundaries of attention and critical perception of HETP.

The fact is that the value of inclusion is that in a truly inclusive group there are no worse and better ones. The inclusive group assumes no longer a competitive type of training, but a team one.

In an inclusive group, there is less declarative learning and more project and participatory (complicity) work. Explaining the rejection of inclusion as a danger to children with disabilities is the same myth-creating trap. Under the formal care of the weak, there is a departure from reality (Nigmatullina, 2015).

You need to think not about what might offend a disabled person, but about the fact that any child, including a student, can be persecuted. If there is a buller in this team, then, whether a student is disabled or not, the victim will be found. And it can be your healthiest and smartest child.

Therefore, attention should be paid not to the hypothetical disabled trigger, but to the very problem of harassment. And we must fight it, and not with students with disabilities assigned to mandatory sacrifices only by our imagination.

The fact is that special children really are not like everyone else. To insist that they are no different is ridiculous. But, oddly enough, in general, all children are different, and so conceived by nature and God.

However, one or another perception of the difference is connected with only one thing – the experience of interaction with this difference.

Even if a completely typical student comes for the first time to an already formed team, the group focuses on it particular attention, looks at it, highlights it and keeps it apart for some time, without immediately recognizing the equality of the newcomer in its ranks. Over time, acquaintance, which, in turn, forms the habit.

The point is not that students with disabilities have no differences. The point is how this difference is perceived.

If ordinary children have a classmate with a disability from the first class, the difference of the latter becomes a routine. And children really stop seeing this difference. There is no hypocrisy, no slyness – just the difference between a classmate goes beyond the limits of awareness.

None of the white American schoolchildren perceives the black skin of an African American classmate as a feature (although it was once on this basis that schoolchildren in America segregated). Today, skin color does not refer to features that require children's attention and some kind of awareness. And this does not mean, firstly, that black children are perceived as white, and secondly, those children who do not attach any importance to the skin color of their classmates are lying and cunning.

This means only one thing: the singularity is “terrible” only if it is not used to it, the singularity acquires a negative meaning only in the absence of experience and practice of interaction.

As soon as such experience is available from early childhood, the peculiarity of a classmate, and later – a group mate, becomes a property as neutral as someone's height, someone's hair color or someone's freckles.

But here there is comforting research. In one of them, the level of comfort of children without disabilities was studied with children who have special needs. Studies of students of middle and high school students without features showed a reduction in the fear of people with disabilities and simplification of interaction with them. But an interesting side effect was also noted: parents reported that they also feel more comfortable with people with special needs due to the experience of their children (Fayzrakhmanova, 2014).

Inclusion is a social concept. First of all, the concept of inclusion should not be limited only to the educational sense. Inclusive education is a channel, it is a means of achieving social inclusion. It is not an end in itself. It's just that without inclusive education it is impossible to build social inclusion – one where anyone weakened due to various circumstances (sick, ruined, lost family, just aged) can maintain his social role and have his place among people, without which sustainable development of modern society is impossible (Mikhailushkin et al., 2018; Leonteva et al., 2018). Inclusion is a right, and to say that inclusion is suitable for the smart, but not mentally retarded is as absurd as to say that oxygen is not suitable for everyone for breathing.

### **Conclusion**

The conducted research made it possible to reveal the extremely low degree of readiness of state and educational institutions for the practice of inclusive education of students with disabilities, which is indicative of problems in the development of society.

A comparative analysis of Russian and international norms showed the insufficient development of Russian legislation in the field concerning the integration of students with disabilities into society: they are focused mainly on social protection rather than on positive social integration of individuals with disabilities. In fact, students with disabilities can obtain the opportunity to study in Russian higher school only through a court decision.

Successful approaches to the implementation of inclusive education of students with disabilities abroad may include: the availability of legal documents regulating the common practice of

education; actively involvement of students with disabilities in building an inclusive space; using the accumulated potential of remedial schools to form support centers for inclusive learning on their basis, etc.

All this suggests that the development of inclusion in Russia is planned, but there is always the risk that a great idea can easily turn into opportunistic formality – with the calculation of reporting figures for students with disabilities, while behind each statistical unit is a specific person, which is often forgotten. In fact, such a large-scale social project as an inclusive education in Russia can be implemented only if there is an act of goodwill of all participants in the higher educational process.

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