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## PROVIDING EFFECTIVE SUPPORT TO DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING UKRAINIAN STUDENTS ENROLLED IN INCLUSIVE HIGHER EDUCATION PROGRAMS

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*The article is devoted to the problem of education and rehabilitation of students with special educational needs in Ukraine. The main conditions of providing students with equal rights for high quality education were defined. The article raises several issues concerning legal, educational and organizational problems of inclusive education implementation, provision effective support to deaf and hard of hearing Ukrainian students enrolled in inclusive higher education program.*

**Key words:** *rights of students with disabilities, students with hearing loss, inclusive higher education, special educational needs.*

*“The current segregated system of education is injurious to Ukraine as much talent and potential is being wasted by failing to provide capable students an opportunity to attend universities and other programs of higher education.”*

*(Dr. Olga Krsek, Dean of the Department of Philology, Volodymyr Dahl East Ukrainian National University, Severodonetsk, Ukraine)*

**General problem definition and its connection with important scientific and practical tasks.** In 2009, Ukraine took a step towards improving equality for individuals with disabilities by ratifying the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities [9]. While this was clearly a positive development, the path toward improving educational and social opportunities for individuals with disabilities has been excruciatingly slow and labored. The government of Ukraine is still very young, and the country continues to face many daunting challenges regarding the economy, the justice system, political system, the battle against corruption, and the ongoing war with Russia. Consequently, development and implementation of special education laws protecting the rights of children with disabilities has been highly inconsistent [18], with the result that special education legislation in Ukraine has stalled. Currently, while

Ukrainian law states that all individuals with disabilities have a right to an education, in reality, the law does not protect equality in education for individuals with disabilities [15], and, furthermore, laws that are on the books are not enforced, so in reality students with special educational needs are not guaranteed the same education provided to students without disabilities.

In addition to inadequate and unenforced laws, teachers and the general public are frequently resistant to inclusive education. Indeed, Kolupayeva has suggested that many teachers may even be intentionally thwarting progress towards inclusion of students with disabilities. When school teachers in Lviv were surveyed about their opinions of inclusion, only 6% said they supported inclusive education [3; 10; 11]. The present author has spoken in schools and universities throughout Ukraine, and while many Ukrainians are beginning to support inclusive education, he continues to encounter teachers and administrators who are strongly opposed to inclusive education at all levels of education, including postsecondary programs. Continued opposition to inclusion has resulted in reform delays as educators face resistance to the implementation of inclusive education programs [10; 15].

Consequently, the absence of effective special education law and active opposition to inclusion has resulted in a de-emphasis on equality for students with disabilities at all levels of education, leaving Ukraine highly dependent on an extensive network of special and residential schools for children with disabilities [15; 17]. Most children with disabilities do not go to school with their peers without disabilities, but rather attend segregated schools which are organized according to eight categories: deaf, hard-of-hearing, blind, partially sighted, cognitively challenged, learning-disabled and children with speech disorders [10; 20]. Additionally, it is not uncommon for students with disabilities to be home schooled rather than attend a public school (program), while many other students with disabilities are not educated at all [17; 18]. During his travels throughout Ukraine, the present author has been told repeatedly of instances when students with disabilities have not been permitted to attend school, and most experienced Ukrainian educators will also be aware of the same situation. Even students having just a physical disability and normal cognitive ability may not be permitted to attend school or take secondary school exit exams following home schooling [18], making admittance into postsecondary programs exceedingly difficult.

**The aim of the article** is to disclose the problem of university education and rehabilitation of students with special educational needs in Ukraine.

Sadly, the situation worsens as students with disabilities grow into adulthood. Following graduation from high school, students without disabilities continue on to post-secondary programs, while adolescents with disabilities live at home with their parents and do not further their education, resulting in high unemployment. Adults with disabilities have an extremely difficult time obtaining jobs. According to Ukrainian law, 4% of workers hired by employers must have disabilities, but unfortunately, the law is not enforced, so employers usually either avoid hiring such employees or hire those with only the mildest of disabilities [15]. After graduating from high school, young people with special educational needs usually live at home and face chronic unemployment and social isolation. Without opportunities to work, they become perpetual wards of their parents and ultimately the State, because they are unable to support themselves and live independently. Consequently, they do not become integrated, productive members of the community, and the resulting social isolation and dependence on public assistance comes at a very high cost, not just for individuals with disabilities, but also for society, which ultimately pays pensions to individuals who remain at home and do not productively contribute to the community. One way of ending this vicious cycle of poverty and dependence is by ending segregation in postsecondary schools.

Given the current political and educational climate, it is critical for Ukrainian educators to be able to effectively justify why it is important to desegregate higher education programs in Ukraine. Providing an inclusive education to students with disabilities achieves a number of significant goals, one of the most important of which is to develop students' independence, thus ending the cycle of poverty and perpetual dependence. Students with disabilities who are successful in higher education learn skills and earn academic degrees which help them secure employment following graduation [17; 19]. Inclusion also gives students with special needs opportunities to learn and socialize with peers without disabilities, helping them develop valuable social skills. It has also been observed that the motivation and academic learning of students with special educational needs improves when they are educated in an inclusive environment, leading to greater academic achievement, which culminates in improved feelings of self-worth [10; 17].

Inclusive education is beneficial to students without disabilities, as well. For instance, they learn how to live and work cooperatively with students with special needs, and they develop acceptance of their peers, which encourages positive social interactions and successful integration within the wider community [10]. The changes are significant, as students

learn to be more open, while improving their relationships with their peers with disabilities. Additionally, by working and studying with students with special needs, students without disabilities develop positive attitudes of their peers, leading to greater social cohesion [17]. Finally, inclusive education reduces stigmatization of individuals with disabilities as students learn tolerance and acceptance of individual differences and respect for diversity, which are important characteristics in democratic societies [17].

If Ukraine can successfully desegregate postsecondary education, the results will be significant. Students with disabilities will complete higher education programs and become contributing members of society, rather than exist as wards of the State. Our experiences in the U.S. demonstrate that students with special educational needs can succeed in higher education. In the U.S., more than 20,000 deaf and hard of hearing students attend higher education programs, and career options for these students are limitless. For instance, deaf and hard of hearing individuals successfully work as teachers, professors, researchers, university administrators, physicians, dentists, business leaders, scientists, engineers, theologians, veterinarians, lawyers, psychologists, artists, and many others. It is important that Ukraine take active measures to begin desegregating higher education without delay to give deaf and hard of hearing students similar career opportunities [13].

While it is essential that Ukrainian universities begin the process of developing inclusive education programs, it is not enough to simply admit students with disabilities. While placing students with disabilities in university classrooms may be considered a form of integration, it is not inclusion [10]. Inclusion is a philosophy and process that allows all students to participate in all academic and extra-curriculum programs [10; 12; 17]. Furthermore, in order for individuals with disabilities to succeed in higher education, a university must develop critical support systems and services for these students. Academic support services and classroom accommodations aim to provide deaf and hard of hearing students equal access to the same instructional content as their peers without disabilities [6], which provides students with special educational needs with full and unfettered access to the curriculum. These supports and accommodations equalize educational opportunities for students with disabilities and facilitate their academic success. It is critical to remember that ***success will not occur by merely placing students with special needs in university classes***. In cases where students with disabilities have been admitted to universities without being provided support, the consequences have been failure, which is then used as evidence against inclusive education. In the United States, deaf students hard

of hearing students in successful inclusion programs are provided the following supports to facilitate learning during their studies:

- **Resource centers:** These are safe and quiet environments where students with disabilities can meet with their academic advisors, study or do research. Additionally, these centers are equipped with a range of resources such as Wi-Fi, computers, books, a video/CD library, and other helpful materials.
- **Academic tutoring:** Many deaf and hard of hearing students benefit from tutors who can help them master course content and prepare for exams [5; 8]. Tutoring services can be provided in the university Resource Center.
- **Metacognitive Strategies:** Metacognition is literally “thinking about thinking,” or “knowing about knowing,” and students skilled in metacognition have a keen awareness of self-learning. It is a critical skill that Fox (1994) suggested should be included in a program of academic supports for students who are deaf or hard of hearing. Benedict, Rivera and Antia (2015) found that deaf students can be taught metacognitive strategies to improve reading comprehension, a critical skill in any higher education program [2; 7]. Students skilled in metacognitive skills self-monitor during the learning process and identify intervention strategies when they realize they do not understand the material. They also self-evaluate their thinking and comprehension after completing learning tasks.
- **Testing accommodations:** These accommodations may include extended testing time, a quiet testing environment, a test administrator familiar with the student, an interpreter, or the use of a scribe or computer, which may be more effective for the student than hand written answers [6].
- **Sign language interpreters:** Sign language interpreters are critical in providing equal access to the curriculum, lectures, and class discussions [6].
- **Note takers:** Deaf and hard of hearing students frequently benefit from classroom note takers [5,6]. These are dependable and competent classmates who volunteer to share their written or word processed lecture notes with deaf and hard of hearing peers. It is very difficult for individuals with hearing loss to watch a sign language interpreter or speech read a lecturer while simultaneously taking notes. Hearing students can look down at their copy books or

- laptops while listening to the professors, but deaf and hard hearing students cannot.
- **Braille and large print materials for deaf-blind students.** Deaf and hard of hearing students with visual impairments require materials modified in Braille or printed in large type [6].
- **Captioned video presentations:** When showing videos in class, it is necessary that they are captioned, which will provide deaf and hard hearing students access to the information presented in the video [6; 8].
- **Captioning services:** Another helpful support is real time captioning, or speech to text, whereby a speaker's lecture is immediately projected in text on either a student's laptop or onto a projection screen for large audiences by skilled stenographers. A printout of the lecture text can be made available to the deaf and hard of hearing students following the presentation [8].
- **Audiological services and digital hearing aids:** Many deaf and hard of hearing students benefit from the use of digital hearing aids, but to be effective these should be individually fitted by fully trained and licensed audiologists. In order to succeed, students must have access to the curriculum, but that access will be denied if they cannot effectively hear in class.
- **Environmental modifications:** Many classrooms have very poor acoustics. To improve the listening environment for deaf and hard of hearing students, the following modifications can be made: acoustic ceiling tiles, carpeting, and drapes to minimize disrupting environmental noise and providing appropriate lighting to effectively illuminate a speaker's face [8].
- **Priority seating:** This extremely helpful accommodation allows the student who is deaf or hard of hearing to determine the best seating arrangement depending on his or her individual needs. For the majority of students with hearing loss, sitting in the front row of the classroom provides the best opportunity for visual learning. This is particularly helpful for deaf students using a sign language interpreter. Hard of hearing students benefit from front row seating, because it allows them to better hear the instructor's voice and see his or her face for more effective speechreading [5].
- **Assistive listening devices and amplification:** There are a number of technologies that help deaf and, in particular, hard of hearing students hear better in classrooms, some of which, incidentally,

benefit hearing students, as well. These technologies include wireless FM systems, which send the teacher's voice from a microphone he or she wears directly to the student's hearing aids via radio waves; infrared devices, in which a transmitter converts sound into a light signals and transmits it to a receiver that is worn by a student before sending the sound to a his or her hearing aids; induction loop systems, whereby a coil of wire around a room or under carpeting uses electromagnetic energy to transmit sounds from a microphone to hearing aids or loudspeakers and sound field systems, which integrate loudspeakers with a wireless microphone. As a teacher talks into a microphone his or her voice is transmitted to a specialized receiver/amplifier connected to a loudspeaker assembly mounted on a wall or ceiling, benefitting not just students with hearing loss, but normally hearing students, as well [5; 6; 16].

- **Visual aids:** Visual aids are extremely important in providing full access to the curriculum for students with hearing loss who generally require a visual learning experience. Examples include videos, PowerPoint slides, pictures or photographs. Instructors can also provide printed materials to reinforce information and content that is discussed in class, such as chapter outlines, study guides, and lecture overviews [5]. The more visual a lesson is, the more a deaf or hard of hearing student will benefit.
- **Accessibility to TTYs:** These telecommunication devices for deaf and speech impaired individuals are an important means of making phone calls and reducing dependence on others, and they are especially critical in emergency situations. These can be located in offices and/or the Resource Center.
- **Emergency alert systems:** These devices are a critical means of alerting students when there is a life threatening emergency in the area. They consist of bright flashing lights that deaf students can see in the event of a fire, preventing tragic loss of life. In the U.S., visual emergency alert systems are required by law in all college and university buildings [1].
- **Laptop computers:** Laptops are a critical tool in contemporary education. They can be used to store course lecture notes, write papers, and conduct research beyond the walls of their universities, and for deaf and hard of hearing students laptops are a necessary means of communication. Professors often may not be able to sign, but the laptops can become critical tools which allow professors and

students to communicate with each other effortlessly, breaking down barriers and providing students with limitless access to the curriculum on equal footing with hearing students.

In addition to these direct student support services, there are a number of other indirect supports and university conditions that must be met for a higher education inclusion program to be successful.

**Accepting and Supportive Environment.** Fostering a supportive and welcoming environment is just as critical as providing physical and academic supports. The university environment must be encouraging and promote unconditional acceptance of all students. It is essential that faculty, staff and students espouse a university-wide philosophy that all students should learn together, wherever possible, regardless of any difficulties or differences they may have [12]. Furthermore, it is important that faculty and staff value the presence and contributions of students with special needs as much as they do the other students. They must also accept that deaf and hard of hearing students learn differently, and it is important for instructors to be willing to design lessons compatible with the learning styles of these students.

**Training for University Instructors.** Additionally, it is important to educate administrators, faculty, and staff about the needs of deaf and hard of hearing students. In most Ukrainian universities, members of the faculty are unprepared to work effectively with students with disabilities. Consequently, there is a critical need to prepare professors and teachers for this student population. "To advance inclusion in higher education settings, training must be provided for instructors so they are better able to meet the individual needs of students" [14].

**Remedial Courses.** It is also important to have an understanding that deaf and hard of hearing students will come to universities academically unprepared, not because they are incapable, but because they have not been provided an appropriate curriculum in elementary and high school, which would have prepared them for higher education. Universities should take into consideration that most students with disabilities didn't go to school with their peers without disabilities, but rather attended segregated special schools. Segregation during elementary and secondary school negatively impacts deaf and hard of hearing students' academic development and readiness for postsecondary programs. Colleges and universities must accept deaf and hard of hearing students' lack of preparation and instead of using it as an excuse to deny equal educational opportunities to them, should instead offer these students carefully developed *remedial courses* during their first year to prepare them for university classes and facilitate their success.

**Transition Plans.** It will also be important for universities to work with high schools to help develop postsecondary transition plans for deaf and hard of hearing high school students to help prepare them for university before they arrive on campus. Transition plans for high school students with disabilities are required by law in the U.S., but not currently in Ukraine. Consequently, postsecondary transition plans are not normally written for Ukrainian deaf and hard of hearing students. The present lack of transition planning should not prevent Ukrainian universities from admitting deaf and hard of hearing students, as the need for developing inclusive programming is absolutely critical and should not be delayed.

**Sign Language Courses.** Many universities in the United States offer sign language courses to all students as a foreign language option or a cultural elective. This helps develop a barrier-free communication environment, giving hearing and deaf students the opportunity to communicate with each other. Teaching the other students sign language improves socialization among deaf and hearing students, fostering cooperation and allowing friendships to develop, which in turn helps deaf students' integration within the university community. This also helps deaf students to improve their social skills, while at the time teaching hearing students that it is okay to be different. An integrated social environment helps students without disabilities see that individual differences among peers is normal.

**Belief in Equal Educational Rights of Students with Disabilities.** Faculty and administrators in successful inclusion programs espouse a sincere belief and a strong vision that deaf and hard of hearing students have the same academic potential and educational rights as all other students. This entails a rejection of the stereotypical practice of limiting deaf and hard of hearing students to manual vocational training programs, allowing them to participate in the same academic programs as their peers. Dr. Olga Krsek at V. Dahl EUNU constantly reminds other Ukrainian administrators and professors that the role of universities is to train deaf and hard of hearing students' minds for a future of independence, *not* their hands. It is also important to remember that opening the doors of higher education to individuals with disabilities is a basic human right [17].

While these recommendations may seem daunting, it is critical to keep in mind that the goal of inclusive education is to prepare students for independence. The aim of inclusive higher education programs is to help students with disabilities succeed in their future endeavors. Currently, most Ukrainian students with special needs become perpetual wards of their

parents and ultimately the State, because they are unable to live independently. Effective inclusive university programs correct this problem by allowing deaf and hard of hearing students to become integrated, productive and contributing members of the community.

Obviously, with any reform proposal there will always be detractors opposed to change, and these individuals will insist that inclusion in higher education is not possible. But it is possible. Other programs in Ukraine have succeeded in educating students with special needs, for example, Volodymyr Dahl East Ukrainian National University in Luhansk (now in Severodonetsk), Vinnytsia Institute of Economics and Social Sciences of Open University "Ukraine" in Vinnytsia, and Drahomanov National Pedagogical University in Kyiv. Will this be easy? No, of course not. In fact, it will be very difficult, but being difficult is not a valid excuse to avoid doing the right thing. We must continue striving to make quality education accessible to all students in Ukraine. There is a fundamental relationship between how a society treats all of its members and the success of democracy. A society that systematically disenfranchises and excludes specific groups cannot claim to be truly democratic. Democracy is a fragile system of government, and it becomes increasingly frail, if a society denies education and community participation to targeted groups who do not meet the social norm. One very important way to facilitate the development of democracy is to foster acceptance of and equal opportunity to all individuals and desegregating higher education can help accomplish this goal. Ukraine has made progress, but we cannot stop now, for the future of the nation and its citizens depends on a shared vision of equal educational opportunities for all students. Individuals with disabilities can achieve their goals if given the opportunity, and they can become independent, successful, contributing members of society. To continue denying students with disabilities access to higher education not only holds them back, but it holds Ukraine back as well.

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### **ЗАБЕЗПЕЧЕННЯ ЕФЕКТИВНОЇ ПІДТРИМКИ ГЛУХИХ І СЛАБОЧУЮЧИХ УКРАЇНСЬКИХ СТУДЕНТІВ, ЗАЛУЧЕНИХ ДО ІНКЛЮЗИВНИХ ПРОГРАМ ВИЩОЇ ОСВІТИ**

**Лайл Кауффман**

*Стаття присвячена проблемам освіти і реабілітації студентів з особливими освітніми потребами в Україні. Визначено основні умови надання студентам рівних прав на отримання якісної освіти. У статті піднімається ряд питань, що стосуються правових, освітніх та організаційних проблем впровадження інклюзивної освіти, забезпечення ефективної підтримки глухих і слабочуючих українських студентів, залучених до інклюзивних програм вищої освіти.*

*Ключові слова:* права студентів з інвалідністю, студенти з вадами слуху, інклюзивна вища освіта, особливі освітні потреби.

### **ОБЕСПЕЧЕНИЕ ЭФФЕКТИВНОЙ ПОДДЕРЖКИ ГЛУХИХ И СЛАБОСЛЫШАЩИХ УКРАИНСКИХ СТУДЕНТОВ, ВОВЛЕЧЕННЫХ В ИНКЛЮЗИВНЫЕ ПРОГРАММЫ ВЫСШЕГО ОБРАЗОВАНИЯ**

**Лайл Кауффман**

*Статья посвящена проблемам образования и реабилитации студентов с особыми образовательными потребностями в Украине. Определены основные условия предоставления студентам равных прав на получение качественного образования. В статье поднимается ряд вопросов, касающихся правовых, образовательных и организационных проблем внедрения инклюзивного образования, обеспечения эффективной поддержки глухих и слабослышащих украинских студентов, вовлеченных в инклюзивные программы высшего образования.*

*Ключевые слова:* права студентов с инвалидностью, студенты с нарушениями слуха, инклюзивное высшее образование, особые образовательные потребности.

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