

ENHANCING HUMAN DIGNITY AS THE FOUNDATION OF INCLUSIVITY

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<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18859084>



ARTICLE INFO

Received: 26th February 2026

Accepted: 27th February 2026

Online: 28th February 2026

KEYWORDS

Inclusive society; integrative-inclusive education; equality; tolerance; human rights; humanistic pedagogy; children with special needs

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the development of inclusive society and integrative-inclusive education, focusing on the inclusion of children with unique developmental needs in mainstream classrooms. Tracing its historical evolution from S. Ganike's early ideas to L. S. Vygotsky's humanistic pedagogical approaches, the study highlights challenges of segregational education and the influence of socio-economic factors. The emergence of inclusivity in the mid-20th century, supported by human rights frameworks, emphasizes equality, tolerance, and social cohesion as foundational principles.

Enhancing human dignity in society constitutes the core principle of inclusivity, as the primary objective of an inclusive approach is to ensure equality for every individual. The main directions for promoting human dignity include:

1. Ensuring equal rights and freedoms. The primary goal of a democratic society is to provide individuals with equal opportunities to live and act within a just legal environment.
2. Ensuring a decent standard of living. Human dignity is directly linked to economic conditions. Adequate income, quality living environment, and accessibility to social services are among the fundamental criteria of value.
3. Education and potential development. Allowing each individual to realize their abilities enhances society's intellectual capital.
4. Social state and protection. Supporting vulnerable, underprivileged, or socially dependent groups reflects society's social responsibility.
5. Moral excellence and human honor. Recognition of an individual's dignity and reputation by society fosters a sense of self-worth, contributing to psychological stability.

In an inclusive society, no individual is marginalized, which represents the clearest manifestation of human dignity. Moreover, inclusivity actively protects human dignity, making its promotion the principal goal and ideological foundation of inclusive policies.

The respect for human dignity shapes the state's relationship with each individual, while inclusivity represents the practical implementation of these values. Their interrelation is manifested in:

- Equality – no individual is excluded in an inclusive system.
- Enhanced self-confidence – social support helps individuals recognize their own value.
- Increased social activity – empowered individuals participate actively in societal life.
- Social solidarity – tolerance, cooperation, and cohesion are strengthened.
- Economic efficiency – participation of all social groups expands the labor market.

The principle of inclusivity serves as a primary tool for promoting human dignity, engaging all societal layers in positive transformation and reinforcing equality, justice, and solidarity. An inclusive system that considers the needs, potential, and capacities of each individual is essential for sustainable development, a democratic society, and robust social policy.

An inclusive society prioritizes the needs of every individual, especially vulnerable groups, ensuring equal rights and opportunities while preventing social exclusion. This not only strengthens social justice but also enhances the intellectual, economic, and cultural potential of society. Implementation of inclusivity in education, labor markets, social protection, and digital sectors promotes individual self-worth, trust, and engagement with society.

Modern definitions of inclusivity, viewed as a socio-cultural phenomenon, remain imprecise due to the lack of fully established theoretical foundations. Approaches to inclusivity vary across social domains (education, leisure, labor, etc.) and are applied in practice in diverse ways.

The study of inclusivity in society is complex yet highly relevant in contemporary scientific and social discourse, as it is closely linked to democratization and humanistic processes, which are widespread in many countries worldwide.

Historical efforts to promote tolerance, equality, and unity toward people differentiated by race, nationality, psychophysical characteristics, or other factors have been observed since antiquity. Such ideas are reflected in the philosophies of Aristotle, Plato, Socrates, and other ancient thinkers. However, complete societal acceptance was not achieved in those times, as societies and states were not yet ready to modify established principles of interaction and governance.

In ancient Greek and Roman civilizations, several factors influenced the development of concepts regarding human rights:

1. State structure and political system;
2. Religious beliefs;
3. Philosophical works and ideas.

These philosophical perspectives laid the groundwork for the formation of ethical, aesthetic, and political notions and later contributed to the development of universal human values.

Ideas of the inherent equality of all humans appear in the works of ancient Greek philosophers such as Lycophron, Antiphon, and Akidamos (11th–10th centuries BCE). Similarly, the ancient Chinese philosopher Mozi promoted the idea of the nature of law and the equality of all people before “Heaven,” which later influenced Confucianism, emphasizing ethics, equality, and humanitarian principles.

Buddhist ideas (6th–4th centuries BCE) also contributed to the conceptualization of an ideal society, characterized by limited central authority, small hierarchies, consensus-based decision-making, and gender equality. Aristotle’s philosophy and his concept of “civil rights,” recognizing citizens’ rights, greatly influenced the humanization of society.

The alignment of this concept with Christian religious and ethical values facilitated the widespread recognition of humanitarian ideas as supreme values. Subsequent reflections on equality appeared in the works of educators, humanists, and philosophers.

Scholars such as J.-J. Rousseau, S. Gänike, and L. S. Vygotsky contributed to the formation of the modern notion of “inclusivity,” whose structural elements are observable in contemporary education and social life.

Rousseau, in particular, emphasized the societal significance of inclusivity, asserting that governance should rely not on individual desires but on common laws that satisfy all. According to him, wise implementation of education, customs, and social norms ensures compliance even among particular citizens, fostering satisfaction with government and reducing concern for the performance of other states. Rousseau’s early ideas on inclusivity, expressed in his “Theory of Natural Rights,” underline that humans are initially equal in a natural state, and the purity of morality ensures unity among them.

One of the key indicators of an inclusive society is the presence of integrative-inclusive education, in which children with unique developmental characteristics are included in mainstream groups and classrooms.

The initial ideas of this educational approach were proposed in the 18th century by S. Gänike. Subsequently, concepts of equality became increasingly applied within the field of education. The first models of integrated education focused on teaching children with hearing impairments in general education schools alongside typically developing peers, guided by specially trained educators (today’s specialists in defectology).

However, the segregational model of education quickly spread throughout Western Europe and, later, the territories of the contemporary CIS countries, making joint education of children more challenging. In the Russian Empire, segregated education was successfully implemented, although during this period L. S. Vygotsky advanced ideas emphasizing the necessity of including children with special educational needs in environments with typically developing children. He considered segregated education deeply anti-pedagogical.

These ideas found reflection in humanistic pedagogy, forming the basis for attempts to educate certain groups of children together with their normative peers. However, economic crises and slowed social development caused by various military conflicts hindered the progress of this pedagogical direction.

The subsequent development of inclusivity in society and education coincides with the 1950s. During this period, the foundational principles of the “normalization” theory were established, and the first documents dedicated to human and children’s rights were adopted:

- Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UN, 1948)
- Declaration of the Rights of the Child (UN, 1959)

Inclusive education, as a distinctive concept of societal development, began to gain significant momentum in the 1980s. This process was largely driven by mass movements advocating equality and tolerance. These movements opposed segregation and exclusion, promoting inclusivity as a means of providing equal opportunities for diverse groups with special life needs.

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