

Development of inclusive competence in future socionomy specialists: challenges in constrained settings

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ABSTRACT

The relevance of the study is determined by the crucial importance of socioeconomy specialists' readiness to work in an inclusive environment and the need to identify the factors that contribute to developing their competence. The study aims to identify gaps in existing research and propose new directions for studying the psychological and pedagogical features of developing inclusive competence in future professionals in socionomy under constrained conditions. The article presents data from respondents (30 respondents were in their 3rd year of study and 20 in their 5th year) regarding their understanding of the concept of inclusion, acceptance of children with special needs, tolerance, empathy, and willingness for self-development. A crucial aspect is understanding the psychological and pedagogical characteristics of preparing future specialists in socionomy under limited conditions. The study employed surveys, generalization, categorization, comparison, observation, and qualitative data analysis. It was established that modern challenges, such as military aggression, pandemics (COVID-19), social and economic inequality, technological progress, and demographic changes have a significant impact on the development of inclusive competence in future socionomists. Factors essential for developing inclusive competence are identified. The findings of this work have both scientific and practical significance for training future professionals in the field of socionomy and for shaping their inclusive competence.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Socionomics represents an interdisciplinary field of study that crosses the boundaries of psychology, economics, sociology, biology, and history. In turn, socionomic professions are subject-subject professions, the object of study, change, development, and maintenance of which are people of different ages, population groups, communities, and entire social systems [1]–[3]. Today, Ukraine is witnessing a trend aimed at improving the quality of life for people with special needs, particularly in providing educational services by the state. It also requires ensuring local-level conditions for education in general schools and the creation of barrier-free environments [4], [5]. In a democratic society, where education is considered an essential tool for self-realization, the opportunity to fulfill one's potential is available to all, including children with special needs [6]–[8]. To ensure the efficacy of inclusive education, it is imperative to cultivate and perpetually

refine the inclusive competences of professionals in socionomy [9], [10]. Consequently, there is an urgent need in higher education institutions to create conditions for the formation of professional competence, increase the responsibility of educators for the outcomes of their professional activities, and improve the procedures for assessing the level of professional competence of academic staff [11]–[13].

This creates for the development of inclusive education. These conditions are that students will be exposed to material appropriate to their level and related to their interests. They will receive specialised interventions and support that enable them to meet the core curriculum of regular students [14]–[17].

Nowadays, much attention is paid to the training of highly qualified teachers in many countries of the world [18]–[22]. Contemporary challenges, including wars, famines, natural disasters and socio-economic crises, have resulted in the establishment of limited conditions in the educational process. For instance, the recent global pandemic of the Coronavirus and military aggression have dramatically changed the lives of millions of people, as well as the forms of education. These restrictive conditions have precipitated the urgent introduction of distance education, necessitating the discovery of novel alternative educational modalities to sustain the inclusive learning process. Virtual classrooms have emerged as the sole viable option in this context [23]–[26]. However, these virtual classrooms have been observed to exhibit significant disadvantages, including low attendance, a paucity of individual attention, and a paucity [27], [19], [28]. However, it should be noted that due to the high level of pedagogical competence, it was possible to adapt to difficult crisis conditions and effectively switch to distance learning, thereby mitigating the adverse effects of the pandemic on the educational process [29]–[33]. At the same time, the under-researched area in the specified domain is the inclusive competence of socionomy professionals under constrained conditions, which themselves impact a professional, making stable implementation of the profession's competence elements more difficult task.

The aim of the study is to identify gaps in research and propose new directions for exploring the psychological and pedagogical features of developing inclusive competence in future socionomy professionals under constrained conditions. To achieve the goal, the objectives of the work were defined:

- To investigate the current state of the problem according to scientometric sources and identify the main aspects of the development of professional competence of future professionals in inclusive education.
- To determine the peculiarities of inclusive competence of future socionomic workers in limited conditions.
- To assess the state of professional competence of specialists, its psycho-pedagogical features.
- To determine the level of readiness to accept a child with a disability, the readiness of professionals to work in an inclusive environment, tolerance, empathy, and readiness for self-development.

Achieving the specified aim of the research will contribute to enhancement and better customization of educational paradigms, courses programs, and curriculum design in training future socionomy specialists, allowing better preparing them to the work in constrained and uncertain conditions. In turn, the question to be addressed is to identify the indicators contributing to the most effective formation of inclusive competence.

2. METHOD

The research is both of theoretical and empirical nature, carried out within qualitative analysis and overall constructivist paradigm of research. The study employed surveys, generalization, categorization, comparison, observation, and qualitative data analysis.

2.1. Participants

The study's demographic focus is on the younger generation pursuing higher education. During the study, 100 students (84 women and 16 men) and future specialists in the socionomic sphere (teachers, methodologists, defect teachers, speech therapists, and psychologists). The samples consisted of 30 respondents studying in the 3rd year and 20 in the 5th year, ensuring a comprehensive representation of the higher education student population. The respondents ranged from 19 to 27 years, with an average age of (22.5 ± 2.4) years. This detailed socio-demographic profile aligns with the study's research design and empirical objectives, ensuring that the data is representative and relevant to a representative and relevant sample. The work was carried out in compliance with ethical requirements and confidentiality. The voluntary survey was conducted during classes, and all respondents were informed about it in advance.

2.2. Data collection

The questionnaire included questions to determine inclusive competence, tolerance, attitude to inclusion, self-development, resilience, and empathy. We used the tolerance to uncertainty methodology developed by Badner [34] to determine the tolerance level. This questionnaire is one of the most common tools for assessing tolerance for uncertainty. This questionnaire indicates the attitude towards the environment and other people and social interactions in various areas with signs of tolerance and intolerance.

The number of points and the levels of intolerance and tolerance are determined when analyzing the data. Thus, 16-50 corresponds to a low level of intolerance; 51-70—to an average level; 71-112—to a high level. That is, the higher the score, the lower the tolerance level.

3. RESULTS

3.1. Determining of the level of inclusive competence of future specialists in the socioeconomic sphere

In the course of the work, a survey was conducted among respondents—future specialists in the socioeconomic sphere. The survey asked several questions to determine future specialists' level of inclusive competence, tolerance, attitude to inclusion, self-development, resistance, empathy, and identification of limited conditions that affect competence formation. The analysis of the study's results showed that the 5th-year students had a higher level of formation than the 3rd-year students, as in Figure 1.

The level of formation was influenced by the understanding of inclusion, motivation, participation in inclusive activities, ability to perform tasks in crisis conditions, ability to plan activities related to inclusion, the desire to show responsibility, the desire to conduct self-analysis, and the desire for independence and self-development [20]. It is therefore reasonable to hypothesize that the higher the level of these components, the higher the inclusive competence of future specialists. Further analysis allowed us to assess the psychological and pedagogical indicators of competence: tolerance, empathy, resilience, readiness for self-development, and attitude to inclusion, as in Table 1.

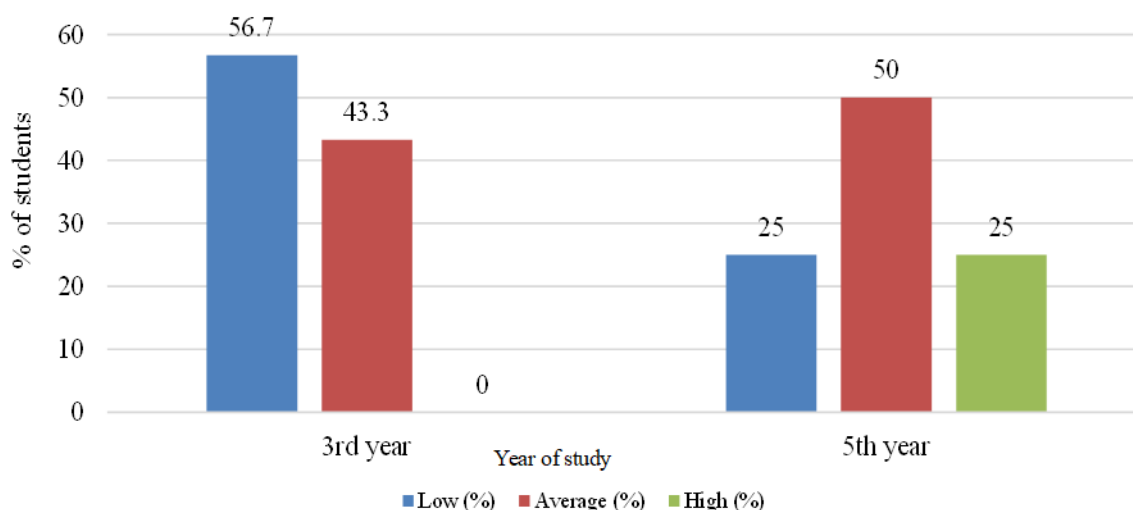


Figure 1. Distribution of future specialists by the level of inclusive competence formation

Table 1. Assessment of psychological and pedagogical indicators of competence of future specialists in the socioeconomic sphere

Indicator	3rd year respondents (n=60), %	5th-year respondents, n=40
Tolerance level:		
Low	50.0	25.0
Medium	43.3	50.0
High	6.7	25.0
Level of empathy:		
Low	50.0	35.0
Medium	50.0	50.0
High	0	15.0
Readiness for self-development	50.00	65.0
Understanding inclusion	46.7	55.0
Ready to accept a child with special needs	43.3	65.0
Mastering emotions	53.3	55.0
Communication skills	46.7	60.0

The indicators presented in Table 1 reflect the internal psychological and pedagogical prerequisites of inclusive competence. To complement this analysis, it is necessary to examine how these characteristics manifest in the overall structure of competence formation across different stages of study. Figure 1 therefore visualizes the distribution of future specialists according to low, average, and high levels of inclusive competence formation.

3.2. Identification of factors that cause limitations and influence the development of inclusive competence

It is necessary to improve the level of knowledge and personal qualities, such as a positive psychological attitude to acceptance and working with people with special needs, tolerance, empathy, and communication skills. The results of a survey of respondents conducted as part of the study evidence this. In addition, the study identified the factors that cause constraints and affect the development of inclusive competence, as in Table 2. Most respondents from 3rd and 5th year students noted that current global challenges, such as war and pandemics, significantly affect the development of inclusive competence of future socionomic professionals. These factors include social and economic inequality, technological progress, and demographic changes.

In the next stage, we identified the indicators contributing to the most effective formation of inclusive competence: understanding of inclusion, empathy training, support from the state and society, creating a barrier-free environment, and ease of innovative changes. Also, in our study, 53.3% of 3rd-year and 75.0% of 5th-year respondents indicated the need to develop modern methodological programs for socionomic specialists that can be used in distance learning in limited conditions. It was noted that the problems of this form of education should be considered. The participants were selected at random, and the resulting sample is representative of the broader population. This may influence the relevance of the research findings for each field to which the respondents belong. The validity and reliability of the measurement tools are confirmed by their adaptability to various population groups, including sociology students.

Table 2. Evaluation of factors influencing the formation of inclusive competence of future socionomic specialists

Factor	3rd year respondents (n=60), %	Respondents of the 5th year, (n=40), %
Current challenges:		
Pandemics	93.3	85.0
Wars	96.6	100.0
Natural disasters	76.7	25.0
Inequalities:		
Social	53.3	65.0
Economic	50.0	55.0
Technological progress	46.7	75.0
Demographic changes	50.0	75.0

4. DISCUSSION

This study examined the impact of inclusive education on the formation of a modern educational environment that considers every child's individual needs and abilities [16]. While previous research has predominantly focused on the influence of inclusion on educational methodologies, it has not addressed its impact on psychological and sociocultural aspects. For instance, research “rank the problems that exist or may arise in the process of implementing inclusive education into general education” by Kryshtanovych *et al.* [18] analyzed expert responses to the question. The analysis revealed that among the most probable challenges, 59.63% of respondents cited the inadequacy of educational institutions, 62.38% identified the lack of state funding for educational programs, and 29.35% noted the unpreparedness of schools and educators to work with such students, emphasizing the need for professional training. Potapiuk and Kovalchuk [35] emphasized the importance of cultivating inclusive competence, a factor that is instrumental in determining the efficacy of individuals' adaptation to the educational milieu. In the face of the challenges posed by the pandemic and military aggression, there is an urgent need to develop comprehensive and innovative approaches to developing professional competence [36]. Building on these conclusions, our study found that most respondents emphasized the need to develop modern methodological programs for socionomy specialists that can be used in remote learning under constrained conditions.

Our findings align with those of Alves and Starchenk [37] who stress the importance of self-development, self-respect, and self-improvement. Technological progress and changes in the organization of work require socionomists to acquire new skills. Similarly, Shuppe *et al.* [9] argue that awareness of the role of self-control and self-improvement is foundational to the development of professional

educators. The proposed method of training can improve readiness for work in an inclusive environment. Other studies have shown that teachers face significant challenges in “distance education”. For example, Yalovenko *et al.* [38] note issues such as students’ lack of access to information technology at home, limited communication with students and their parents, low student motivation, and health problems in children. At the same time, the experience gained by teachers during remote work provides valuable insights for further developing approaches to online learning for younger children, potentially helping to reduce social inequality that may arise during crises. Our data also revealed that one of the challenges of distance-inclusive education is insufficient communication with teachers and peers, lack of awareness among parents and children, and a low level of competence. These findings complement the conclusions of Pankevych [39] and Khallo *et al.* [40]. Researchers are actively studying the formation of inclusive competence and its impact on professional activity. Pankevych [39] found that students often lack awareness of the essence of professional interaction in sociotomy. Khallo *et al.* [40] argue that future sociotomy specialists must develop a culture of professional interaction during their studies.

Moreover, the ability to control emotions is critical. Prib *et al.* [41] highlight the importance of developing individual stress-management skills, regulating emotional responses based on critical situational analysis, and avoiding projecting negative emotions onto others. A pivotal aspect of competence development is the cultivation of empathy and an understanding of individuals with disabilities. The provision of psychological support has been demonstrated to facilitate the development of these skills [41], [42]. Another important aspect is resilience, adaptability and stress management skills [43]–[45]. Koval *et al.* [46] emphasize the importance of resilience in developing sociotomy competences in future professionals. Individuals who possess high levels of resilience are able to flourish in a wide range of circumstances and perceive challenges as opportunities for growth. The findings of this study are consistent with these principles, thereby providing a robust theoretical foundation for the development of sociotomy competences in future professionals.

Makedon *et al.* [47] identified the factors that contribute to the effective formation of inclusive competence in future specialists in sociotomy specialists. Furthermore, researchers such as Qizi [48] and Li and Ruppap [49] point to determinants of inclusion development, including understanding the concept of inclusion and inclusive education, a positive attitude toward inclusion, training in empathy, mastery of inclusive education methods and approaches, support for barrier-free environments, counselling, adaptability to innovation, resilience, and preparation for constrained conditions. Our study demonstrated that these factors influence the development of inclusive competence in future sociotomy specialists under constrained conditions. This research comprehensively explored gaps in integrating inclusion development concepts into educational environments. However, further and more in-depth studies may be required to confirm new analytical directions regarding the psychological and pedagogical features of forming inclusive competence in future sociotomy professionals, particularly under constrained conditions.

5. CONCLUSION

The primary objective of contemporary higher education curricula, which are designed to cultivate the competences of future professionals to function within inclusive educational environments, is to foster a comprehension of inclusion, along with the tenets of inclusive education, and to acquire proficiency in contemporary psychological and pedagogical development models. The inclusive education system demands that future specialists be adequately prepared to work effectively with students living with disabilities. The present study has demonstrated that future sociotomic specialists who have already obtained a Bachelor’s degree exhibit a more favorable attitude towards inclusive education than those who have not yet completed their undergraduate studies. A higher level of emotional control, sociability, tolerance and empathy is also observed in this group. The study has identified several key factors that significantly influence the development of inclusive competence in future sociotomic professionals. These include modern challenges such as war and pandemics, social and economic inequality, technological progress, and demographic changes. The findings of this study offer a foundation for the development of effective systems to facilitate inclusive competence formation within the constraints of inclusive education. The article’s materials can help prepare training courses and seminars for special psychological and pedagogical training of future specialists in the sociotomic sphere.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS STATEMENT

This journal uses the Contributor Roles Taxonomy (CRediT) to recognize individual author contributions, reduce authorship disputes, and facilitate collaboration.

Name of Author	C	M	So	Va	Fo	I	R	D	O	E	Vi	Su	P	Fu
Volodymyr Vlasov	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓		✓
Valentyna Mazur	✓	✓			✓	✓		✓	✓				✓	
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Oksana Shevchenko					✓		✓			✓				

C : **C**onceptualization

M : **M**ethodology

So : **S**oftware

Va : **V**alidation

Fo : **F**ormal analysis

I : **I**nterpretation

R : **R**esources

D : **D**ata Curation

O : **O**riginal Draft

E : **E**diting

Vi : **V**isualization

Su : **S**upervision

P : **P**roject administration

Fu : **F**unding acquisition

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

Authors state no conflict of interest.

INFORMED CONSENT

We have obtained informed consent from all individuals included in this study.

ETHICAL APPROVAL

The study was approved by the authors' institutional review board and was carried out in accordance with ethical principles of the Helsinki Declaration's tenets for investigations involving human subjects.

DATA AVAILABILITY

Data availability is not applicable to this paper as no new data were created or analyzed in this study.

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