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## Contents

## Economics

*Assande Desire Adom, Nasr G. Elbahnasawy*

**Saving-Investment Gap and Economic Growth in Developing Countries:  
Simulated Evidence from Selected Countries in Africa.....9**

*Hisham H. Abdelbaki*

**Assessment the Impact of Zakat on Aggregate Consumption and Poverty:  
Evidence from Egypt.....25**

*Alan C. Maltz, Aaron J. Shenhar, Dov Dvir, Haoyu Gao*

**Success Comes in Many Dimensions: The Critical Role of the Human  
Capital and Preparing for the Future in Every Organizational Scorecard.....49**

*Ali Veysel*

**“Think Small First” in the Accounting Regulations – Evidences from Bulgaria.....77**

*Gulnora Abdurakhmanova*

**Small business is a guarantee of economic and social sustainability.....83**

*Gulnora Abdurakhmanova*

**Small business – a source of innovations.....88**

*E.V. Burdenko*

**The use of industrial policy to support the United States national light industry.....93**

*E.N. Morozova*

**The questions of economics and management systems of environmental management.....104**

*Elena Nesmeyanova, Evgenia Starikova*

**Management as a stereotype in consciousness of the manager.....111**

*Irina Ignatyuk, Natalia Kovshun, Svetlana Moshchych, Irina Tymoshchuk*

**Ecological-economic assessment of the feasibility of reclaiming peatlands.....118**

*Volodymyr Malyi, Iryna Timanyuk, Olga Rogulia*

**Pharmaceutical Marketing on a subconscious level.....125**

*Irina Yarygina*

**Public support for turbulent econom.....130**

*Konstantin Khartanovich, Lyudmila Vasilyeva*

**The dialectics of globalization and regionalization in the national economy.....138**

*M. Alieva*

**Macro-economic aspects of development of regional tourism in Uzbekistan.....147**

*Nataliya Kazakova, Aleksey Bolvachev, Irina Dun*

**Analytical study of sustainable development of the region.....154**

*S.O. Tairov*

**Perfection of a technique of an estimation of the human capital.....161**

<i>Tatyana Derkach</i> <b>The liberalization of foreign trade in the context revitalization of the economies of the integrating countries.....</b>	166
<b>Humanities &amp; Social Sciences</b>	
<i>Maurice Mongkuo, Nicole Lucas, Kelli Walsh</i> <b>Initial Validation of Collegiate Learning Assessment Performance Task Diagnostic Instrument for Historically Black Colleges and Universities.....</b>	173
<i>Anwar Mourssi</i> <b>Which is Learnt First Regular or Irregular Simple Past Forms? A Quantitative Study in the Context of the Undergraduate Arab Learners of English (ALEs) under Two Different Teaching Methods.....</b>	196
<i>Ngozi Sydney-Agbor, Barnabas Ekpere Nwankwo, Manasseh N. Iroegbu, Ezuruike Wisdom</i> <b>The Work Ethical Behaviour of Nigerian Police Officers as a Function of Self-Esteem, Gender and Age.....</b>	219
<i>N. Qamhie, A.I. Ayes, S.T. Mahmoud</i> <b>Web-Based Homework Assignments for Introductory Physics Courses.....</b>	232
<i>A. Kulsarieva, A. Iskakova, M. Tadjiev</i> <b>Categorical-conceptual apparatus case-study in education.....</b>	243
<i>A.S. Kuznetsov, A.V. Ryabchuk, U.U. Krikukha</i> <b>Greco-Roman style wrestlers training individualization taking into account their belonging to certain bioenergy types.....</b>	252
<i>Alexander Schastlivtsev</i> <b>Beautropy as measure of determinacy of a state of system.....</b>	259
<i>Anatoly Davidovsky</i> <b>The criteria of the information-entropic analysis of individual educational routes of the students at technical university.....</b>	269
<i>B. Arzanbaeva, G. Taubaeva</i> <b>Professional training to work with children early age.....</b>	281
<i>V.A. Degterev, I.A. Larionov</i> <b>Corporate competencies model at the university.....</b>	286
<i>Iskra Petkova, Danelina Vacheva</i> <b>The project method in students education – conditions and effectiveness to build the collaboration.....</b>	293
<i>Dmytro Kolomyichuk</i> <b>The global food problem phenomenon at the present stage of international relations development.....</b>	302
<i>Eugene Lodatko, Anatoly Yarygin, Nelya Yarygina</i> <b>Information upbringing of pupils as a pedagogical task.....</b>	309
<i>Z.M. Kuznetsova, I.I. Dauletshin, S.A. Kuznetsov</i> <b>Integrated selection of young gymnasts.....</b>	319

<i>Denis Edyshev, Zinaida Kuznetsova, Aleksandr Nazarenko</i> <b>Theoretical justification of cultural and leisure activity importance for future teacher identity professional properties formation.....</b>	326
<i>Irina Annenkova</i> <b>Higher School Teaching Staff Professional Competency as a Basis for Monitoring of their Performance.....</b>	334
<i>Liubov Terletska</i> <b>Teaching foreign languages at pedagogical schools of Ukraine (the second half of XX century).....</b>	343
<i>Ludmila Burnyasheva</i> <b>Tourism as a factor of intercultural communication.....</b>	349
<i>Marina Goryn</i> <b>Getto on the territory of occupied by German nazi Podillia region in 1941-1944.....</b>	353
<i>Mehman Mehbaliev</i> <b>Mud volcanoes in the Azerbaijan and tourism importance of them.....</b>	361
<i>Myroslav Savchyn</i> <b>Methodological resourcefulness of spiritual paradigm of psychology.....</b>	376
<i>Naiba Ahmadova</i> <b>Annexation of Azerbaijan to Russia and Tsarist's economic policy.....</b>	382
<i>Tatiana Shebzuhova, Ekaterina Sosnina, Natalia Bondarenko</i> <b>Orientalism problem in world historical science and studying of the Caucasus by the French travelers of the XVIII-XIX centuries.....</b>	390
<i>N.V. Moskalets</i> <b>Mathematical modeling of electromagnetic interactions in the large radioelectronic systems.....</b>	398
<i>Marina Novozhilova, Irina Loshkova, Raushana Balgabekova</i> <b>Content-based instruction: making content comprehensible.....</b>	403
<i>Zhazira Abdrakhmanova, Saltanat Imankulova</i> <b>Reasons for rational and irrational deviations from the idiom norms.....</b>	410
<i>Sergey Kuzmenkov</i> <b>The solving of astrophysical problems-paradoxes as method of development of dialectical thought.....</b>	420
<i>T.S. Pronina</i> <b>The religiosity of the late Soviet period and the revitalization of religion in post-Soviet Russia.....</b>	428
<i>Tatyana Yakovenko, Olga Volkova</i> <b>Readiness of teachers of educational establishment for improvement of professional competence in the area of realization of distance educational technologies.....</b>	437
<i>Elmira Zhanysbekova, Khafiza Orazbayeva</i> <b>Myth function in the artistic work: classification aspect.....</b>	449



<i>Yuriy Kirichenko</i> Securing of National Minorities' Rights in Modern Constitutions of European States.....	460
<i>Yury Neduzhko</i> The Activity of Ukrainian Diaspora of Canada in the Revival of the Independence of Ukraine (End of 40-th – Middle of 60-th Years of XX Century).....	467
<i>N. Kononova, Z.K. Kishkenbayeva, A.E. Zhusupov</i> Functional characterization of colors in works of art.....	477
<i>Zhuldyzay Kishkenbayeva, Zhanat Aimukhambet, Rysgul Abilkhaitkyzy, Aigul Sandybayeva</i> The integrity of the author-narrator-character in fictional prose (based on a story by M. Magauin "Kipchak girl").....	492
<i>Olena Martynchuk, Yulia Naida</i> Current Trends in the Development of Inclusive Education in Ukraine.....	503
<b>Mathematics, Technology &amp; Engineering</b>	
<i>Herbert F. Jelinek, Andrew Yatsko, Andrew Stranieri, Sitalakshmi Venkatraman</i> Novel Data Mining Techniques for Incomplete Clinical Data in Diabetes Management.....	510
<i>Hanifi Binici, Selim Kapur, Tamer Rizaoglu, Mehmet Kara</i> Resistance to Thaumassite Form of Sulphate Attack of Blended Cement Mortars.....	531
<i>Thongchai Taechowisan, Srisakul Chanaphat, Wanwikar Ruensamran, Waya S. Phutdhawong</i> Anti-Inflammatory Effects of New Flavonoids from <i>Streptomyces</i> sp. BT01 in Lipopolysaccharide-Stimulated RAW 264.7 Murine Macrophages via Inhibition of NF-Kappa B Activation.....	558
<i>S.N. Hoseinimotlagh, M. Ghasemi Shabankareh</i> Theoretical Scrutiny on the Atomic and Molecular Formation Rates in Stau Catalyzed Fusion.....	583
<i>Alexandra Alexeyeva</i> 1-soliton of the (2+1)-dimensional nonlinear A6-equation.....	598
<i>Vladimir Milyutkin, Sergey Tolpekin, Nikolai Strebkov</i> Improved tillage-sowing technologies and equipment technologies «No-Till» and «Strip-Till».....	604
<i>Valentina Luzan, Tamara Chircina, Svetlana Carenderiava, Irina Badmaeva, Valentina Anikina</i> A study on the of non-traditional vegetable raw materials in the production of foods.....	613
<i>M. Kulikova, V. Kotelnikov</i> Prospects of using the coal of Ulug-Khem basin.....	621
<b>Medicine, Biology &amp; Chemistry</b>	
<i>Chivorn Var, Sheryl Keller, Rathavy Tung, Lu Yao, Alessandra N. Bazzano</i> Minor Side Effects, Tolerance and Discontinuation of Oral Contraception among Women in Rural Cambodia.....	631

<i>Parag Deepak Dabir, Jens Johannes Christiansen</i> <b>Not to be Missed Entity: Dieulafoy's Lesion!</b> .....	654
<i>Ebtesam M. Al-Zabedi, Mahmoud A. Ogaili, Mohamed T. Al-Maktari, Mohamed S. Noman</i> <b>Hepatitis B Virus Seropositivity among Schistosomiasis and Diabetes Mellitus Patients in Sana'a City, Yemen</b> .....	658
<i>Hamid Soori, Ali Nasermoadeli, Elaheh Ainyy</i> <b>The Role of Graduated Drivers' Licensing on Incidence and Severity of Road Traffic Injuries in Iran</b> .....	684
<i>Albena Vatkova</i> <b>Comprehensive documentary investigation of the occupationally diseased for the periods of 1996-1998 and 2005-2007. Juxtaposition according to main occupationally-medical characteristics</b> .....	694
<i>V.V. Kaminsky, O.I. Litus, O.I. Grynevych, Tran Chi Dung, M.N. Shalko, O.T. Ostapenko, L.M. Solomakha</i> <b>PROTEFLAZID®: Efficacy and Safety in Urogenital Herpes Virus Infection (Systematic Review)</b> .....	705
<i>Feisa Snizhana, Angela Popovych</i> <b>Clinical and laboratory peculiarities of the course of nonalcoholic steatohepatitis in patients with metabolic syndrome in the practice of family doctor</b> .....	728
<i>Victor Ognev, Andrew Zinchuk</i> <b>Conceptual model for optimization of early detection of pulmonary cancer among the population</b> .....	736
<i>E.A. Karlova, O.P. Yavorovskiy</i> <b>Pathogenic mechanisms of formation of cytolytic toxin-induced reactions at the professional lead intoxication</b> .....	746
<i>E.A. Karlova, O.P. Yavorovskiy</i> <b>Mechanisms of formation of endotoxemia at professional lead intoxication</b> .....	753
<i>Imir Aliyev, Nagi Yaqubov, Ogtay Aliyev, Ceyran Veliyev</i> <b>Investigation of the internal incision in ternary Ca-In-Te system</b> .....	763
<i>Nickolay Popov, Marina Mishina, Svetlana Malanchuck, Michail Mishin, Oleksandr Kozlov, Roman Malanchuck</i> <b>Post-mortal signs analysis under multiple organ failure determined by Streptococcus pyogenes</b> .....	772
<i>Nickolay Popov, Marina Mishina, Svetlana Malanchuck, Bogdan Malanchuck, Yuriy Mishin</i> <b>Functional status of cellular and humoral immunity under purulent-inflammatory process due to Pseudomonas aeruginosa (experimental trial)</b> .....	779
<i>Y.B. Grechanina, E.Y. Grechanina, H.P. Zdybskaya, I.A. Volobueva</i> <b>The successful correction of the mitochondrial trifunctional protein (MTP) deficiency (OMIM # 609015) (mutation g.26477125 G GACT in exon 2 of gene HADNV chromosome 2) associated with the failure of cbl E (mutation MTRR GG) in a patient with the syndrome Johanson-Blizzard phenotype</b> .....	785

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## **Current Trends in the Development of Inclusive Education in Ukraine**

### **Abstract**

The paper considers the current situation with inclusive education in Ukraine, describes the trends (directions) of the development of inclusion as educational option for children with special educational needs in mainstream education environment.

**Keywords:** inclusive education, inclusive education format, children with special educational needs.

This article familiarizes the international academic and educational community with the current trends in inclusive education in Ukraine. The idea for writing it came from the need to understand the big picture of the current developments in the area of inclusive education for children with special educational needs (SEN). The paper presents a snapshot of the national inclusive space which is being created by ongoing hard work of committed professionals who care about these children and the quality of education services they receive.

Unlike the other post-Soviet countries, Ukraine has been very proactive in **establishing a legislative framework for inclusive education**. A number of laws and regulations were adopted that uphold the education rights of children with special needs. For example, changes were



introduced to the laws and regulations on preschool and school education that support the right of children with special needs, including children with disabilities, to receive educational services in inclusive settings. However, it has to be mentioned, that these changes only partially conform to the provisions of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities as to the right to education of children and persons with disabilities. Therefore, significant changes are still necessary in the legislation on preschool and school education, as well as regulations on supporting children with SEN in mainstream education environment.

This being said, the review of the Ukrainian legislative framework confirms a considerable progress achieved in this area. Ukraine adopted laws and regulations that clearly define the right of children with special needs to inclusive education. Specifically, with the support from NGOs, the Government approved new legal acts on ensuring the right to education for children and persons with disabilities, specifically through inclusive education: Ordinance by the Parliament of Ukraine # 96-VIII of 13 January 2015 'On recommendations of Parliamentary Hearings on the theme 'Education, health protection and social welfare for children with impairments in psychological and/or physical development: challenges and solutions'; Resolution by the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine # 872 of 15 August, 2011 'On the Procedure to organize inclusive education in schools'; Order of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine (MoESU) # 1034 of 23 July, 2013 'Measures to introduce inclusive education in preschool and secondary education establishments for the period till 2015'; Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine # 706 of 1 August, 2012 'On approving the State Program 'National Action Plan to implement the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities' for the period till 2020'; joint order of the MoESU and the National Academy of Pedagogical Sciences of Ukraine # 346/50 of 9 April, 2014 'On the operation of psychological, medical and pedagogical consultations';

MoESU order # 1299 of 20 November 2012 'On approving the Advanced Action Plan to develop education and rehabilitation centres'; MoESU order # 587 of 27 June 2009 'On conducting an experimental project to organize integrated education of persons with special educational needs at higher educational establishments of III and IV levels of accreditation' [1].

The new format for providing education to children with impairments in psychological and/or physical development has been gaining ground in the Ukrainian educational space thanks to the national education policy that supports inclusive education. Yet, it should be noted, that ***in Ukraine academic and educational community does not view inclusive education as an alternative to segregated (special) education*** [2].

Based on the data that the MoESU provided to the Office of National Statistics, as of 1 September 2014, a total of 2,165 students with special needs, including with disabilities, attended inclusive classrooms in mainstream schools. During the 2013/2014 academic year, 5,568 children with special needs, including those with disabilities, were integrated in 533 special education classrooms at regular schools. However, the majority of children with impairments are educated at special schools that, from the point of methodology, are in a good position to provide high quality education services as well as related developmental interventions. Children with special needs, including those with disabilities, can get the highest quality of education, combined with developmental and rehabilitation services at special classrooms and special preschools and schools. This may be explained by the fact that these settings have the relevant material, technical, and curricular resources, as well as specially trained staff. On the other hand, special preschools and schools fail to provide opportunities for socialization to their students, for example opportunities to mix with peers without disabilities.

Ukraine has an extensive network of special schools (special boarding schools) for children with impairments, which consists of 382

education establishments that specialize in different disabilities. They provided education and rehabilitation services to 44,666 children. This includes 45 education and rehabilitation centers where 5,568 children with complex/severe impairments were receiving education and rehabilitation services. A total of 3,287 children with special needs including those with disabilities enrolled in regular schools were following Individual Program Plans [3].

Consequently, it may be concluded that today ***the state is not using the full capacity of inclusive education due to a number of reasons.*** Clearly, in Ukrainian society a new philosophy is emerging as a foundation for the national policy regarding children with SEN; the opinions on the issue of equal opportunities and non-discrimination of children on any basis are gradually changing. The right of children with impairments to education at mainstream settings is increasingly recognized. At the same time, the efforts to ensure their right to education are characterized by serious weaknesses, such as:

- Insufficient attention on the part of the central and local executive agencies as well as local government bodies to the challenge of ensuring the rights of children with disabilities to quality education.

- The lack of consistent interdepartmental statistics regarding the numbers of children with SEN, which leads to discrepancies in the data about these children between different executive agencies responsible to care for them.

- The lack of systemic collaboration between central and local government bodies, and NGOs to provide medical, psychological, pedagogical and social interventions for children with SEN, including those with disabilities, starting from an early age.

- The absence of a unified national policy on life-long pedagogical, medical and social support for a person with disability, for

example regarding inclusive education for children with SEN, including those with disabilities.

- Inadequate provision of special education and rehabilitation services for children with disabilities who attend inclusive classrooms at preschools and schools.

- Little progress in implementing multidisciplinary approach to provide comprehensive early intervention services (medical, psychological, and pedagogical) to children with impairments to avoid placing them in boarding schools.

- Insufficient numbers of skilled pedagogical and medical staff, social workers, and special psychology professionals to support children with SEN at inclusive settings; lack of appropriate training for teachers to work with children in inclusive environment.

- The lack of funding for inclusive education. No separate funding is envisaged to educate children with SEN and it is not budgeted for, which leads to insufficient supply of material, technical, and curricular resources, shortages of trained staff at mainstream schools. In practice it translates into the lack of adapted teaching aids and equipment, adapted teaching methods and curricula, and professionals with relevant training to work with students with SEN.

- The lack of appropriate environment, adapted for children with SEN; noncompliance with the rule on the accessibility of school buildings and premises; general absence of barrier-free access to premises; difficulties with transport to take children with disabilities to school. All these make it impossible for children with disabilities to attend mainstream schools.

- The lack of preparedness in Ukrainian society to accept children with impairments as equal members in the classroom in mainstream schools.

A monitoring study, completed in 2014, analyzed the situation with

inclusive education in Ukraine (following MoESU order # 898 of 22 September 2010). The findings demonstrated that Ukrainian public (parents, teachers, preschool and school administrators) was not yet prepared to accept children with SEN as equal members in the classroom in mainstream schools. Only 47% of parents and teachers who participated in the study expressed positive views on inclusive education in regular schools [3]. This may be explained, first of all, by low public awareness about inclusive education, the lack of barrier-free access to educational establishments, the absence of relevant training for educators and parents, inadequate material and curriculum resources to organize the teaching and learning process for children with SEN in inclusive settings.

Thus, the lack of appropriate support from the state, specifically funding, is not conducive to the inclusion of children with SEN to mainstream education environment.

However, it is important to emphasize that ***despite numerous obstacles to inclusion, our educators, are taking steps to promote it in Ukraine.***

According to the Office for National Statistics, 85,053 children with special needs, including 8,519 children with disabilities are enrolled in pre-schools. Inclusive classrooms at regular schools (primary and secondary) serve 2,200 children with SEN, including children with disabilities. Vocational colleges provide training to a total of 5,506 people with special needs in regular and special classrooms. As at 1 January 2014 there were 19,573 students with disabilities studying at higher education establishments [4].

For the first time in Ukraine an international pilot initiative was launched in collaboration with the Ukrainian Step-by-Step Foundation (USSF) and with the support from the International Renaissance Foundation (IRF) to introduce the Index of Inclusion. The Index is a tool to plan the activities of a school to help it move towards inclusion drawing on



the results of self-assessment that is jointly conducted by all school stakeholders. Three methodological guides were developed: *'Index of Inclusion: Preschool'*, *'Index of inclusion: Secondary School'*, and *'Index of Inclusion: Vocational School'*, all of which were endorsed by the MoESU.

There is a small number of mainstream schools with inclusive classrooms that have succeeded in creating the right conditions to offer high quality education to students and equip them with good skills for independent life. For example, secondary school #15 in Bila Tserkva, educational complex #3 in Simferopol, education and rehabilitation centers for children with visual impairments in Kharkiv, Lviv ('Levenia' [Lion cub] and Dnipropetrovsk, and Khortytsa National Education and Rehabilitation Center.

The survey of school administrators, conducted as part of the monitoring study in 2010-2013, showed that only 9.5% of them believed that their schools had practically all needed resources to implement inclusive education; 42.5% pointed to poor material, technical and curriculum provision for such efforts, which impacted negatively on the quality of education for all children, including students with disabilities.

When asked about the quality of education, 81% of the respondents (teachers, parents, NGO representatives, students with disabilities from Grade 5 to 9) stressed the 'need to reform the provision of education services in regular schools starting from Grade 1, for all students, irrespective of their state of health' [3].

Obviously, the quality of education depends on the motivation and training of the staff who work with children in inclusive settings. That is why ***a significant number of research studies have been conducted in Ukraine recently to design and implement new curricula and approaches for teacher training to prepare educators to work in inclusive environment***, including preschool and primary school teachers, social pedagogues, special education teachers who specialize in speech

and language therapy, and teacher assistants (A. Kolupayeva, I. Kuzava, O. Martynchuk, G. Pershko, N. Sofiy and others). ***These research projects have had a positive effect on the process of training professionals to provide inclusive education for children with SEN*** [2].

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