

THE MODEL OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION OF PRESCHOOLERS AS A BASIS FOR EDUCATIONAL BARRIER-FREE EDUCATION

O MODELO DE EDUCAÇÃO INCLUSIVA DE CRIANÇAS EM IDADE PRÉ-ESCOLAR COMO BASE PARA UMA EDUCAÇÃO SEM BARREIRAS

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ABSTRACT

The modern educational paradigm recognises inclusive preschool education as an important aspect that requires attention. The relevance lies in rethinking the attitude of society and the state towards children with special educational needs, taking into account changes in pedagogical theory and practice. The article is aimed at highlighting the key aspects of inclusive preschool education, as well as analysing changes in the modern pedagogical paradigm aimed at improving conditions for children with special educational needs. The article analyses the essence of inclusive education, identifying key aspects such as an individual approach to children and creating conditions for their equal participation in joint groups. This was made possible by using the method of documentary research and analysis of the current regulatory framework. The authors emphasise the importance of inclusive preschool education as a key step towards creating a more inclusive and equal society. The article highlights that inclusive education provides an opportunity for children with special educational needs to become equal members of society, reducing the risks of isolation and segregation. The authors examine other aspects of inclusive preschool education, such as the professional training of teachers and specialists, the organisation of developmental environments for children with different needs, and the importance of partnerships with families. The article emphasises that inclusive preschool education is a key step towards creating a more inclusive and equal society.

Keywords: Inclusive education; Educational environment; Modern education; Preschool education.

RESUMO

O paradigma educativo moderno reconhece a educação pré-escolar inclusiva como um aspeto importante que requer atenção. A relevância reside no facto de se repensar a atitude da sociedade e do Estado em relação às crianças com necessidades educativas especiais, tendo em conta as mudanças na teoria e na prática pedagógicas. O artigo tem como objetivo realçar os aspectos fundamentais da educação pré-escolar inclusiva, bem como analisar as mudanças no paradigma pedagógico moderno destinadas a melhorar as condições das crianças com necessidades educativas especiais. O artigo analisa a essência da educação inclusiva, identificando aspectos-chave como a abordagem individual das crianças e a criação de condições para a sua participação igualitária em grupos conjuntos. Para tal, recorreu-se ao método da pesquisa documental e à análise do atual quadro normativo. Os autores salientam a importância da educação pré-escolar inclusiva como um passo fundamental para a criação de uma sociedade mais inclusiva e igualitária. O artigo salienta que a educação inclusiva oferece uma oportunidade para as crianças com necessidades educativas especiais se tornarem membros iguais da sociedade, reduzindo os riscos de isolamento e segregação. Os autores analisam outros aspectos da educação pré-escolar inclusiva, como a formação profissional de professores e especialistas, a organização de ambientes de desenvolvimento para crianças com diferentes necessidades e a importância das parcerias com as famílias. O artigo sublinha que a educação pré-escolar inclusiva é um passo fundamental para a criação de uma sociedade mais inclusiva e igualitária.

Palavras-chave: Educação inclusiva; Ambiente educativo; Educação moderna; Educação pré-escolar.

Introduction

The inclusive approach to education is a global trend that is leading to significant transformations in both education systems and educational environments, as well as in the relationships between all participants in the educational process (United Nations, 1989). According to UNESCO's 2020 and 2021 reports, the inclusive approach promotes inclusive educational practices aimed at the joint learning of all children, including those with different types of disabilities and disabilities (DCD) (UNESCO, 2020, 2021).

An important element of the inclusive approach is the creation of a set of special conditions in general education organisations aimed at ensuring the full learning and development of each child. This includes the development of adapted educational programmes, the creation of barrier-free architectural environments, access to special equipment and materials, as well as a cultural and social adaptation to create an inclusive environment (Immordino-Yang et al., 2019).

The main aspects of an inclusive approach are not only material conditions but also the development of an inclusive culture that promotes acceptance and understanding of diversity among children and the community at large. It is also important to provide psychological support for children's development to ensure their successful learning and socialisation. An inclusive approach in preschool and general education institutions is an important step towards creating a more inclusive and equitable educational environment where every child has the opportunity to develop and learn on an equal footing with others, regardless of their individual needs or characteristics (Gvozdikova & Amandykova, 2023).

In an inclusive educational environment, different social groups merge, bringing together children with different characteristics and needs for joint learning. This is the new reality of the national education system, where not only normatively developing children, but also those with physical or mental disabilities have the opportunity to join the same educational process.

Co-education of children with different needs in inclusive groups is an important innovation that requires deeper study. In fact, this phenomenon requires

scientific substantiation and research to understand the psychological characteristics of the development of children studying in such conditions. Research will help to build an understanding of the effectiveness of inclusive education and develop optimal strategies for improving this educational model. Such analysis will help to create more effective methods and approaches for inclusive education and improve the quality of education for all children, regardless of their individual needs and capabilities (Iskakova et al., 2023).

This study addresses the issue of the controversy between the need to provide psychological support for the development of preschoolers studying in inclusive groups and the lack of scientific data on the specifics of the social situation of children of this age in the context of the new educational paradigm. Preschoolers studying in inclusive groups face unique challenges and opportunities that require special attention. Co-education of different groups of children requires psychological support that takes into account the individual needs and capabilities of each child (Tytova & Mereniuk, 2022).

However, to date, the scientific community does not have enough data and research that would reveal the peculiarities of the social development of children in the context of inclusive education. This creates a gap in our understanding and support for this important group of children.

The study should fill this gap and contribute to the development of effective psychological approaches to supporting children in the context of inclusive education. It will contribute to the creation of a more favourable environment for the learning and development of this important group of children, facilitating their successful entry into society and the educational system.

The focus of the study is to examine and understand the contradictions that arise in the context of inclusive education of preschool children. Specifically, the study aims to analyse the problem of the discrepancy between the need to provide psychological support for the development of this category of children and the lack of scientific data that would reveal the peculiarities of their social development in inclusive education.

Literature review

The study of previous research is an extremely important step in assessing the current state of knowledge in this area, identifying the main trends and methodological approaches. It helps to avoid duplication of work and directs the research approach to fill gaps and address essential aspects. Previous research provides context and background knowledge that helps to better understand and analyse the topic of inclusive education for preschool children.

A study conducted by Hasiuk et al. (2022) examines the correlation of physical performance with subjective physiological and neurophysiological health parameters. This article is relevant to this study as it explores physical and psychological development, as well as health, which are important aspects of inclusive education for preschoolers. It contributes to a deeper understanding of the physical and psychological aspects of health and development. The information obtained from this study can be used to develop more effective strategies and programmes of inclusive education for preschoolers with different needs and individual capabilities.

The article by Akpan et al. (2020) highlights social constructivism and its impact on learning and teaching. It explores the methods and approaches to teaching and learning that are important in the context of inclusive education for preschoolers and can provide information on methods and strategies that promote knowledge construction and social interaction in inclusive preschool environments.

The work of Marie and Bailey (2023) is devoted to the study of the role and importance of theatre as a tool for creating an inclusive community in schools. The researchers analysed methods of creating inclusive environments in educational institutions, which is a relevant topic in the context of inclusive education for preschoolers. The article provides valuable information on methods and strategies that promote inclusive learning and development in preschools. The contribution of this study is to reveal the potential of theatre art to create inclusive communities in educational institutions. The findings can be useful for the development of

programmes and pedagogical approaches aimed at creating inclusive environments for preschoolers with different needs and individual capabilities.

The research team in Duckworth et al. (2021) examines the impact of remote learning on children' social, emotional, and academic aspects. This article focuses on the impact of distance learning on children' psychosocial development, which is an important aspect of inclusive education for preschoolers.

Hannigan et al. (2019) investigate the use of creative art therapy to improve inclusive school culture and children well-being. The researchers explore approaches that can help create inclusive environments for preschoolers. The work can provide valuable information about methods and strategies that promote the psychosocial development of children, including preschoolers, with different needs and individual capabilities.

Existing research on inclusive education for preschoolers has identified some under-researched aspects and gaps that require further research. One of these gaps is the limited number of studies that examine the impact of different forms of inclusive education on the psychosocial development of preschoolers with different needs and individual capabilities. Another underreported aspect is the lack of research on effective methods of training teachers to work in inclusive preschool groups and developing their competencies in this context. It is important to study both the pedagogical training and practical experience of teachers in the field of inclusive education for preschoolers. In addition, insufficient attention is paid to adapted educational programmes and methods for preschoolers with different types of disabilities, which requires further research and development of effective educational approaches. It is also necessary to study the interaction between different groups of preschoolers, including children with disabilities and their peers, to better understand the social and psychological aspects of inclusive education.

Research Aim and Research Questions

The purpose of the study is to thoroughly examine and understand the psychological and social aspects of the development of preschoolers studying in inclusive groups. The study is aimed at analysing the contradictions that arise in the context of inclusive education, where children with different developmental characteristics study together with their peers.

To achieve the research objective, the following tasks were solved.

(1) The peculiarities of social development of preschoolers studying in inclusive groups, in particular, interaction with their peers and others, are studied.

(2) The necessity of psychological support for the development of this category of children in the context of inclusive education is determined and substantiated.

(3) The possibilities and strategies that contribute to the psychological support of preschool children in inclusive environments, as well as the improvement of practical approaches to ensure their successful learning and development are investigated.

Methodology

The article uses the documentary research method, which is a widespread and important tool in the humanities and social sciences. To achieve the research objective, the author analysed domestic and international documents related to the research topic.

This method made it possible to collect and systematise a large amount of information that was necessary to answer the research questions. The use of documentary analysis became the basis for drawing reasonable conclusions and developing analytical studies in the article.

The analysis of previous studies and the regulatory framework helped to take into account the various approaches, methods, and results related to the chosen topic.

Results

Inclusive education means ensuring that all children have equal access to education, regardless of their special educational needs and individual abilities. In UNESCO's words, inclusion is recognised as the process of integrating children into the general education process, regardless of gender, ethnicity or religion, previous achievements, health, developmental level, socio-economic status of parents, and other differences. Inclusion is seen as a dynamic approach that involves a positive attitude to the diversity of children and the perception of their characteristics as an opportunity to enrich the learning process (Resvani et al., 2020).

The term “inclusive education” is based on the French word “inclusive”, which means “including”, and is derived from the Latin “include”, which means “to include”. Inclusive education is used to describe the process of educating children with special educational needs (SEN) in mainstream schools. Its ideology excludes any form of discrimination against children and ensures equal treatment of all people. It creates special conditions for children with special educational needs, facilitating their full participation in the educational process (Humeniuk & Romaniuk, 2023).

Inclusive education is the process of joint education and training of children with SEN and children without such disabilities. The importance of inclusive education lies in the fact that it creates conditions in which all children have the opportunity to achieve the best results in their social development. This form of education helps children with SEN and their non-disabled peers to reach their full potential and acquire the necessary knowledge and skills. Table 1 shows a comparison of traditional and inclusive education.

Table 1 – Comparison of traditional and inclusive preschool education

Parameter	Pre-school traditional education	Preschool inclusive education
Focus	Aimed at healthy children	Includes children with disabilities
Groups	Usually homogeneous in age and development	Diverse in needs and development
Educational process	Focused on standard methods and approaches	Uses individual methods and adaptations
Communication with parents	Usually formal, limited to information about training	Active cooperation, tailored to individual needs
Perception of diversity	May contribute to the formation of a perception of the “norm”	Convincing of value and diversity
Accessibility for all children	Limited access for children with disabilities	Equal opportunities for all
Advantages.	Standardisation of education is beneficial for healthy children	Develops tolerance, teaches compassion and understanding
Disadvantages	Excludes children with disabilities and supports stereotypes	Requires more resources and training adaptation

Note: Based on the analysis of Alila et al. (2022).

It aims to create an environment in which every child and his or her family feel like full members of society and are given the opportunity to live and learn on an equal footing with others. It contributes to the development of a society that is open to diversity and guarantees every child the right to quality education. Inclusive education is a process of developing general education that takes into account the diverse needs of all learners and provides access to education for children with special educational needs. It seeks to ensure that no child is excluded from the educational process because of their characteristics and needs.

Inclusive education is based on numerous principles that define its essence and focus on achieving the maximum development of each child. The main principles of inclusive education include:

1. Inclusive education is a dynamic process that gradually develops and improves over time. Changes occur consistently and systematically.
2. Inclusive education involves comprehensive changes in values, organisational structures, and learning content. It creates a system where each component is interconnected and supports common goals.

3. Inclusive education takes into account the unique characteristics of each child. It is not only respect for their needs but also an opportunity for each child to discover their individuality.
4. The main goal is to form active individuals. Children should have the opportunity to be active in their own education and upbringing.
5. Inclusive education promotes mutual understanding and interaction between all participants in the educational process, creating a favourable context for joint learning and development.
6. Inclusive education involves the use of comprehensive and interdisciplinary methods and approaches to provide children with the support and assistance they need.
7. In an inclusive environment, it is possible to change approaches and teaching methods depending on the needs of each child, as well as to create a varied learning environment.
8. The success of inclusive education depends on the cooperation of teachers and parents. Promoting mutual understanding and support for families is an important aspect of this principle.
9. The model of an educational institution can be constantly changing, supplemented by new structural units, specialists, methods, and means of teaching and upbringing (Sanetra & Małodobry, 2022).

These principles form the basis of inclusive education and contribute to the creation of a fair, equal, and dynamic educational environment for all children.

In order to successfully implement inclusive education for children with special educational needs (SEN), the education system itself needs to change. The general education system needs to become more flexible and capable of providing equal rights and opportunities for learning for all people without discrimination. Meeting the needs of a child's SEN is one of the key conditions for their mental health and development. Inclusive education is a two-way process. On the one hand, a child with SEN prepares for joint learning with peers without special needs and adapts to the educational environment of the educational institution. On the other hand, the educational institution is preparing to work with a child with a developmental

disability. This takes into account the fact that special learning conditions need to be created for people with special educational needs (Wiedebusch et al., 2022).

The inclusive model of preschool education, based on the idea of healthy children and preschoolers with disabilities being together, is a leading edge in education. This innovative approach to organising the educational process has numerous advantages. It not only helps to avoid the unification of the system of distribution of children between preschool institutions but also creates a favourable environment for developing the potential and meeting the needs of all children, without exception. Table 2 shows the benefits of an inclusive model of education.

Table 2 – Benefits of an inclusive learning model

Benefits of Inclusive Preschool Education	Explanation
Contributes to the development of an inclusive society	Inclusive education fosters a culture of acceptance of diversity and equality, contributing to a more inclusive society.
Improves social adaptation	Children in inclusive groups learn to communicate and interact with peers of different abilities and needs, which contributes to better social adaptation in the future.
Provides an individual approach	Inclusive education involves taking into account the needs and characteristics of each child, which allows for individual support and the development of their abilities.
Develops cooperation between teachers	Teachers in inclusive groups work together to provide optimal learning for children with different needs, which facilitates the exchange of experience and the development of professional skills.
Promotes diverse development	Inclusive education creates the conditions for the development of various aspects of the individual, including physical, intellectual, social, and emotional.
Reduces stigma	Inclusive education helps to reduce stigma against children with special needs, as they are seen as equal participants in the educational process.
Enriches the learning process	The interaction of children of different abilities makes learning more interesting and enriching for all participants.

Note: Created by the authors, based on Ridei (2021).

This model supports and develops the different abilities and interests of children, promoting their psychosocial development and preparing them for future schooling. Inclusive preschool education is designed to take into account the

individual needs and capabilities of each child, contributing to the creation of a fair and equal society where everyone has a chance to participate fully.

The educational process in a preschool educational institution (PEI) includes many important aspects, including not only providing care and custody for children, but also education, teaching knowledge and important life skills, and developing personal qualities and abilities. Special attention is paid to correcting possible deficits in the development of each child. It is important to note that the inclusion of children with SEN in the educational process of preschool kindergarten leads to significant changes in approaches to education and training.

This is an important step in recognising that all children have unique needs and characteristics, and they all deserve the opportunity to receive an appropriate education. The inclusion of children with SEN helps to shift perceptions of the 'norm' and emphasises the importance of an individual approach to each child. It also highlights the need for adult training and support to ensure that all children receive a quality education, regardless of their characteristics and needs. The inclusion of children with SEN in preschool education contributes to a more inclusive and equitable society where every child has the opportunity to develop and learn to their full potential (Krymets, 2022).

The analysis of psychological and pedagogical literature and our own empirical experience led us to the conclusion that the existing conditions for inclusion in modern SES, such as the qualifications of specialists and the organisation of an appropriate developmental environment, are insufficient to ensure successful inclusive practice.

Based on this conclusion, we are developing a set of psychological and pedagogical conditions necessary for the optimal implementation of inclusive education in preschool educational institutions. First of all, this includes the professional development of teachers and specialists who provide inclusive education for preschoolers. This will allow them to better understand and respond to the needs of different children and ensure their successful development.

The second important aspect is the creation of an appropriate developmental subject-spatial environment in the preschool. This means creating conditions that

allow children with different educational needs to actively interact with the world around them and learn in a playful and stimulating atmosphere.

The third aspect is the organisation of social partnership between the preschool educational institution and the child's family in the process of inclusive education. The joint work of parents and educators is important to ensure the successful adaptation of children and create a favourable environment for their development. Taking into account the peculiarities of children in the group, including age and individual characteristics, teachers and specialists jointly plan and organise the environment in order to support and promote the development of each child.

Teachers have to actively fill the learning space with objects, attributes, and teaching tools that stimulate children to be active and help them develop, both independently and in collaboration with adults and other children (Tsekhmister, 2021). This process includes a variety of games, sensory materials, tasks, literary works, and artistic materials that expand children's opportunities for creative activity and exploration of the world. Emphasis is placed on the active participation of children in creating a developmental environment, including them in the design of the group, making games and toys. Educators and specialists not only choose developmental materials but also show children how to use these materials properly, providing children with the opportunity to learn and develop.

By creating specific psychological and pedagogical conditions and providing competent support for all pupils, we provide preschools with the necessary resources for the successful implementation of inclusive education. The identified transformations have had a significant impact on the management and organisation of the educational process in preschools. Among them, the readiness of teachers to work in the context of inclusive education in preschool educational institutions is of great importance (Ridei, 2021).

Inclusive education plays an extremely important role in creating a barrier-free learning environment where every child has the opportunity to receive a quality education and develop, regardless of their characteristics and needs. The importance of inclusive education is determined by several key aspects:

1. Inclusive education is based on the principles of equality and justice. It is an opportunity to give every child the right to access quality education and the opportunity to develop according to their potential.
2. Inclusive education takes into account the diversity of children's characteristics. It does not separate children with special needs from their peers but rather promotes their interaction and inclusion in the general educational process.
3. Promoting the social integration of children with special needs. They study together with their peers, learn to communicate and interact, which contributes to their social adaptation.
4. Creating a barrier-free learning environment that meets the needs of all children. This means that educational institutions, teachers, and facilities should be adapted for children with different needs.
5. Supporting collaboration between teachers, professionals, parents, and other stakeholders in the learning process. It promotes the best possible outcomes for all children (Türkmen, 2023).

Inclusive education is important for creating a barrier-free learning environment and promoting positive attitudes towards diversity in society. It promotes inclusive thinking, compassion, and empathy in children, and teaches them to understand and support each other regardless of their differences. This approach contributes to a more tolerant and friendly society where every child has equal opportunities for learning and development.

Discussion

The study of inclusive preschool education has revealed a number of significant aspects that contribute to the understanding and improvement of this area of pedagogy. First of all, it is worth noting that inclusive education has a deep theoretical and practical connection with general pedagogy, contributing to the creation of learning environments where every child has the opportunity to develop and reveal their potential.

Research by Kozlova and Polyezhayev (2022) points to the importance of training qualified teachers who must understand the characteristics of children with different needs and be able to implement individualised approaches to education and upbringing. It is noted that teacher education is a key element of a successful inclusive system and requires continuous professional development. Instead, Marie and Bailey (2023) discuss the need for state support for the development of inclusive education and its methodological support. Both the first and second studies are confirmed by the results of this study. It is important to create not only a methodological framework but also to ensure that the ideas of inclusive education are implemented in practice. This idea can be seen in the article by Keleş et al. (2023).

The principle of the individualised approach mentioned in this paper emphasises the need to take into account the unique characteristics of each child and create conditions for their success. As noted in Lebona (2023), preschools should work to create a favourable environment that promotes not only learning but also a social adaptation of children with special educational needs. This paper states that the creation of a special educational environment contributes to the effective adaptation and integration of preschool children.

One of the key findings of the study is also the need for a coordinated approach between all participants in the educational process: teachers, school administrators, parents, and other professionals. Türkmen (2023) notes that shared responsibility and partnerships are important elements in creating successful inclusive pedagogical practice.

It is also important to mention the problem of preserving elements of special education for those cases when an individual approach in an inclusive environment may not be sufficient. Creating combined systems of special and general education may be the best solution (Marie & Bailey, 2023).

The findings of this study emphasise that inclusive education is essential to ensure that every child has equal opportunities for development and participation in society. This is an important prerequisite for creating a just and equitable society where every individual is valued and has the opportunity to fulfil their potential.

The theoretical significance of the study is that it contributes to a broader understanding of inclusive preschool education and its key aspects. The study allows for a deeper study of the essence of inclusion, consideration of pedagogical principles, and practical aspects of its implementation in preschool educational institutions. This enables teachers, educators, and education professionals to better understand the requirements of inclusive pedagogy and improve their skills to successfully work with children with different needs.

The practical significance of the study is that the results of the research can be used to improve pedagogical practice in preschool educational institutions. They provide teachers, administrators, and parents with tools and approaches to create an inclusive learning environment where every child has the opportunity to develop their potential regardless of their special educational needs.

The main limitations include the limited number of studies and sources used for the analysis. Some aspects of inclusive preschool education may remain insufficiently addressed due to a lack of access to a wide range of scientific literature and practical examples. Some specific situations and requirements in different countries or regions may require separate research to better understand the specific aspects of inclusion in these contexts.

Conclusions

The study identified and analysed a number of key aspects of the social development of preschoolers studying in inclusive groups. It was possible to address the issue of studying the peculiarities of social interaction of this category of children, which revealed that participation in an inclusive environment promotes active interaction with their peers and the environment. Children develop social skills, form self-perception skills, and adapt to social norms.

A special role in this study is devoted to the issue of personal support. The need for qualified psychological support to support children's adaptation and psychological comfort in an inclusive environment is highlighted. It is noted that

teaching staff should have the appropriate skills and knowledge to interact with the different needs of children and ensure their psychological well-being.

It was also possible to consider several practical approaches to the implementation of inclusive education. The expediency of developing and improving methods aimed at creating a favourable psychological climate in inclusive groups, as well as supporting the emotional development of children, is determined. It is noted that the development of psychological support strategies can contribute to successful adaptation and ensure effective education for all children, regardless of their characteristics.

The importance of inclusive education as a means of socialisation and development of children should also be emphasised. The study focused on the fact that trained teachers and effective psychological support can make inclusive education not only possible but also an important factor in the successful development of each preschool child. Future research could focus on the development and implementation of pedagogical programmes aimed at setting quality standards for working in an inclusive environment, taking into account the diversity of children's needs.

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