

Practical implementation of inclusive preschool education in Ukraine

Tetiana S. Kalinina¹ | Antonina V. Karnaukhova² |
Marina A. Mashovets² | Tetiana M. Shvaliuk³ | Olha A. Telna⁴

¹Department of Special Education and Psychology, Kharkiv Humanitarian-Pedagogical Academy of the Kharkiv Regional Council, Kharkiv, Ukraine

²Department of Preschool Education, Borys Grinchenko Kyiv University, Kyiv, Ukraine

³Department of Speech Therapy and Speech Psychology, National Pedagogical Dragomanov University, Kyiv, Ukraine

⁴Department of Preschool and Correctional Education and History, Kharkiv Humanitarian-Pedagogical Academy of the Kharkiv Regional Council, Kharkiv, Ukraine

Correspondence

Tetiana S. Kalinina, Department of Special Education and Psychology, Kharkiv Humanitarian-Pedagogical Academy of the Kharkiv Regional Council, 61000, 7 Rustaveli Lane, Kharkiv, Ukraine.
Email: kalinina6785@nuos.pro

Funding information

None

Abstract

The right of children with special needs to education is realised through the introduction of inclusive education. Such practice is common in many countries around the world. An inclusive setting in early childhood education protects children from segregation and negative attitudes from others. In Ukraine, in connection with European integration, preschool inclusive education is actively developing. Accordingly, studying of inclusive education and the practice of preschool educational institutions for children with special educational needs in the country is relevant, and determining the specifics of this process became the purpose of this study. Analysis of the legal framework, method of comparative analysis, synthesis and analysis of quantitative indicators, questionnaires, systematisation and generalisation of statistical data were used during the research. A comparison of inclusive preschool education implementation experience in the European Union (EU) and Ukraine was conducted and the main trends in the development and implementation of inclusive education in Ukraine were identified. It was found that membership in the EU has a positive effect on both pre-primary education in the member states and the practice of inclusive education. This study can be useful for educators and policy makers in Ukraine for developing ways to improve the

situation with inclusive education both in preschool educational institutions and in schools, as well as for educators and policy makers from other countries, especially the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) countries, where similar processes are taking place in their educational systems.

KEYWORDS

practical aspects, preschool pupils, protection of rights, special educational needs, special knowledge and skills

Context and implications

Rationale for this study

In many countries around the world, inclusive education realises the right of children with special needs to education while protecting them from segregation and discrimination. Particular attention is paid to this aspect of education in the countries of the European Union, as it influences the promotion of democracy, human rights, strengthening of the world community, tolerance towards citizens, social cohesion and justice, as well as sustainable development. For potential EU members, in the process of their integration, it is necessary to improve the education system generally and in the context of inclusion. Preschool educational institutions play a special role in creating an appropriate environment for the realisation of the rights of children with special needs. So, EU membership definitely affects the level of inclusive education in the country, which explains the need to study the specifics of such an impact, as well as the potential direction of further development of the country's educational system.

Why the new findings matter

The findings contribute to the process of implementation of European best practices in preschool educational institutions, improvements in the inclusive education and practice of preschool educational institutions for children with special educational needs in Ukraine.

Implications for educational researchers and policy makers

The authors propose possible solutions of some major issues that would provide all children with full-fledged, high-quality educational opportunities in Ukraine:

- a comprehensive approach to the integration of children with special needs has to be implemented;
- it is necessary to improve the system of continuous professional development for educators, special teachers, methodologists and principals since there are significant differences in working conditions, wages and the incentive system compared to EU countries;
- there is an urgent need in creating and improving tools and documents for assessment and monitoring of the quality of preschool services of preschool educational institutions;
- the state should control the cost of education in private kindergartens and provide adequate funding for preschool educational institutions at the level of rural communities;

- pre-schoolers with special needs should be provided with appropriate conditions, additional attention and care and, consequently, with psychological, pedagogical and correctional and developmental services;
- explanatory work among parents with children of preschool age about the importance of preschool education.

Thus, a number of regulatory documents, including those that provide a basis for the practical implementation of the rights of children with special needs in preschool educational institutions was studied. The experiences of Ukraine and individual European countries were analysed and compared to assess the quality of preschool education and inclusion in Ukraine and identify prospects for their further development.

INTRODUCTION

The practice of implementing inclusive education in preschool education is quite common in the European Union (EU) countries, forasmuch as one of the directions of democratic society's development is to ensure the right of children to education, including children with special educational needs. UNESCO (2016) considers inclusive education to be a comprehensive and extremely important basis for promoting democracy, human rights, strengthening the world community, tolerance of citizens, social cohesion and justice, and sustainable development. Sucuoğlu et al. (2013) emphasise that children with special needs receive a significant boost in development from inclusive conditions in early childhood education, and belonging, participation and social relationships are meaningful and realistic outcomes of inclusion. Through an inclusive education system, children are protected from segregation and negative attitudes from others. At the same time, inclusive education cannot achieve the expected effect if it remains at the level of theoretical research, regulations, standards and recommendations. In this context, preschool educational institutions play a special role in creating the proper environment. If teachers understand the benefits of inclusive education, they have the knowledge and skills about the educational abilities and needs of children with special educational needs and have received appropriate training and experience in working with all pupils (Brcic et al., 2020; Mirošević et al., 2020; Sunko et al., 2019).

Prospects for Ukraine's membership in the EU include systemic reforms in many areas, including preschool and inclusive education. Inclusive education as a concept should be considered from a scientific approach that interprets the essence of the concept and a legislative approach that ensures the practical implementation of such education at the international and national levels (Zabeli & Gjelaj, 2020). The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006) establish a sound legal framework for the rights of children with special needs including access to care, education, health care, entertainment or any other aspect of their lives.

According to the report by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (2019), inclusion in education is a system of empowerment of the individual through participation in education, ensuring equal access of children with disabilities to education, individual curricula, providing reasonable accommodation, availability of educational environments and materials, providing adapted training materials, assistive devices, information and communication technologies and support. The Muscat Agreement (UNESCO, 2014) stipulates that the inclusive learning strategy is the creation and improvement of educational

institutions that take into account the interests of children with special educational needs and provide a safe, free from violence and social barriers, and effective learning space for everybody. UNESCO (UNESCO, 2016) considers inclusive education as a process of ensuring quality lifelong learning. In connection with the gradual enlargement of the EU, the number of requests to resolve the issue of the quality of preschool education from the candidate states for accession to the EU is constantly growing (Inclusion Europe, 2020). In 2019, the European Commission published 'Council Recommendation on High-Quality Early Childhood Education and Care Systems', which is based on the quality of preschool education and childcare not only for all EU member states but also for candidate countries.

Thus, the relevance of the research consists in the need to study the impact of EU membership on the level of inclusive education in the country and to determine the direction of further development of the educational system. A significant issue is the current effectiveness of inclusion introduction in preschool education and prospects for its improvement. The purpose of this academic paper is to determine the specifics of the inclusive education and practice of preschool educational institutions for children with special educational needs in Ukraine.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Ledford et al. (2019) emphasise that children grow and develop incredibly and amazingly in early childhood. Consequently, this phenomenon is often studied by scientists and taken into account when developing teaching methods in early childhood educational institutions. Early childhood inclusion combines values, policies and practices that support the right of every young child and their family, regardless of their ability, to participate in a wide range of activities as a full member of society. The expected outcomes of inclusive education for children with special needs provide a sense of community belonging and membership, positive social relationships and friendships, and personal learning and development. Access, participation and support are key determinants of inclusion that can be used to identify high-quality programmes and services for tender-age infants (DEC/NAEYC, 2009). Florian (2019) notes that the concepts of 'special' and 'inclusive' education are extremely important to the policy and practice of many countries around the world. Although the conceptualisation of these concepts has changed, they are not interchangeable and complement each other. Optimising the learning potential and development of various abilities from early childhood is a combination of efforts and expectations of parents, teachers, educational institutions and the government (Kurniah et al., 2018).

Olefir (2019), in the context of studying the features of inclusive education of children in preschool educational institutions, puts forward a number of requirements for educators of such institutions. The teacher should be tolerant towards children with special educational needs and be able to form their sense of usefulness, provide them with individual support, help create a favourable positive climate in the children's team, adapt educational tasks to the needs of such children and actively cooperate with a multidisciplinary commission accompanying such children. Matjukh (2016) proves the feasibility of introducing multimedia technologies in inclusive preschool education in order to improve the education of children with special needs. The advantages of this technology are as follows: polysensory perception of the material; the development of key mental processes (thinking, imagination, memory, speech); the ability to visualise the information; emotional and visual representation of the material; and demonstration of objects, processes and phenomena that are not available in everyday life. Multimedia presentations, educational and game programmes and multimedia films are examples of multimedia technologies in the process of inclusive education of children with special educational needs to which the researcher pays special attention.

A positive experience is the use of a model of multimedia technologies by an educator of a preschool educational institution in educational work with an inclusive group. Such a model consists of target, content, technological and diagnostic blocks, and the result of its implementation centres on improving the quality of educational work with an inclusive group (Matjukh, 2018).

Chernichenko (2017), among the most diverse innovative technologies used by speech therapists in preschool educational institutions during inclusive education, pays special attention to art-therapeutic innovative technologies and cryotherapy. Art-therapeutic innovative technologies include art therapy that combines isotherapy (using art materials), fairy tale therapy, game therapy, music therapy, phototherapy, sand therapy, chromotherapy. Cryotherapy is a pedagogy method aimed at using games with ice. Akalin et al. (2014) prove that teachers of preschool educational institutions are the most important components of inclusion. Therefore, teachers should be more prepared for activities in heterogeneous classes, in which there are children with special educational needs in order to increase the success of inclusive education. At the same time, the results of the research conducted by scientists make it possible to establish that modern teachers require knowledge, skills, support and experience in order to identify changes in children with special educational needs. Also, teachers are encouraged to use various functional programmes to prepare for the implementation of inclusive education.

The study of inclusive education in preschool educational institutions, according to the viewpoint of Sasipin et al. (2013), can be conducted by assessing the current situation, analysing the existing knowledge and experience of preschool teachers, determining the level of perception of inclusive education by teachers and their attitudes towards children with special educational needs, and analysis of interdisciplinary cooperation and prospects for inclusive education in the institution. In addition, Soukakou (2012) recommends assessing the level of quality of inclusive education in preschool educational institutions, based on the results of which an inclusive audience profile should be developed.

The study of the features of educational processes for preschool children makes it possible to find out that the issue of inclusive education has been studied by numerous scientists and scholars. However, the development of the theory and practice of inclusive education in the EU has led to the emergence of different approaches, especially regarding the role of preschools in inclusive education, which caused the necessity to study the specifics of this process in different countries of the EU and to assess the quality of preschool education and inclusion.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study of practical aspects of inclusive education in preschool educational institutions is based on the use of the following research methods:

- analysis of the legal framework for preschool children inclusive education. The analysis includes normative documents that provide the basis for the practical implementation of the right of children with special needs to study in preschool educational institutions, namely: the Law of Ukraine 'On Education' (2017); Law of Ukraine 'On Preschool Education' (2001); Order of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine 'On Approval of the Concept of Inclusive Learning Development' (2010); Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine 'About the Statement of the Order of the Organization of Activity of Inclusive Groups in Establishments of Preschool Education' (2019); and Letter of the Ministry of Health 'Regarding the Organization of Activities of Inclusive Groups in Preschool Education Institutions' (2018);

- studying the practical experience of Ukraine, individual EU member states and developed countries (Bulgaria, Croatia, Latvia, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Switzerland, Norway) that have made significant progress in inclusive education. Practical aspects and activities of preschool education institutions in Ukraine and EU member states have been studied through separate indicators which are included in five groups of components of quality assessment of the preschool education system, adopted by the European Commission, namely: Access to quality Early Childhood Education (ECE) for all children; Workforce quality; Quality curriculum/content; Evaluation and monitoring; Governance and funding;
- method of comparative analysis in relation to the performance of preschool educational institutions and inclusion;
- synthesis and analysis of quantitative indicators that characterise the education of children with special needs in preschool educational institutions;
- systematisation and generalisation of statistical data and progressive experience on inclusive education. In order to determine the prospects for the introduction of inclusive education and development of preschool educational institutions in Ukraine, the experience of individual member states from the last stages of EU enlargement (Poland, Slovakia—2004 accession; Bulgaria, Romania—2007; Croatia—2013) has been studied. The information base for studying European experience and the experience of individual countries includes: Eurostat data; European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education; Official Website of the EU, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

Assessment of the quality of preschool education and inclusion as a component of the educational environment was carried out through the study of the principals (directors), teachers and parents of preschool institutions of Ukraine questionnaire results on the basis of the analytical report of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, 'Research on the quality of preschool education: Components of the educational environment' (2019). The study was conducted based on an online questionnaire in order to assess the quality of preschool education in general and the effectiveness of inclusive education in Ukraine in particular. The formation and distribution of the online questionnaire was carried out using the Google Forms service which provides information about the survey and visualisation of the obtained data in real-time mode. Respondents in the study were principals (directors), teachers and parents of preschool educational institutions of Ukraine pupils with a separate questionnaire used for each category of respondents. Data processing and analysis was performed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS Statistics). The survey covered 702 preschool institutions. 1239 teachers, 677 principals of preschool educational institutions and 5725 parents of children attending such institutions took part in the survey; 98.4% of principals and teachers who participated in the study work in municipal and public preschool educational institutions, 1.6% in private and municipal institutions (Figure 1) (State Statistics Service of Ukraine, 2021).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study of key features of inclusive education in preschool educational institutions is related to the regulations that form the basis for the activities of preschool education, taking into account the rights and features of children with special needs. The system of preschool education in Ukraine is unified and indirectly subordinated to the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine. It is part of the state education system. Children with special educational needs can receive education in preschool educational institutions, in the family (by family/home form of education), with the help of persons with the appropriate education or qualifications of a teacher, or in specialised childcare institutions, for example, nurseries of

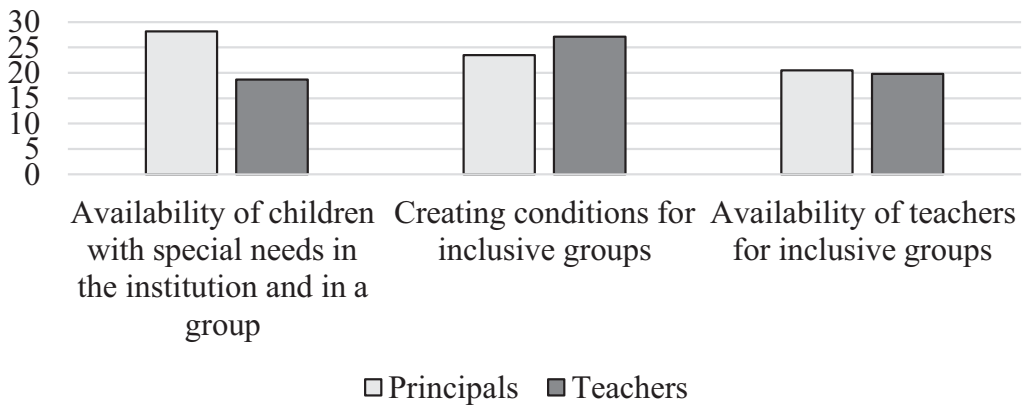


FIGURE 1 Survey results of principals and teachers of preschool educational institutions in Ukraine (%). Source: Compiled by the authors, from the Ministry of Education Science of Ukraine (2019)

compensating type. The Law of Ukraine ‘On Education’ defines inclusive education as a system of state-guaranteed educational services based on the principles of non-discrimination, taking into account human diversity, effective involvement and inclusion of all its participants in the educational process. A child with special educational needs has to receive additional permanent or temporary support in the educational process in order to ensure their right to education. Such support is provided by an inclusive educational environment—a set of conditions, ways and means for joint learning, education and development of pupils taking into account their needs and capabilities.

In Ukraine, children with special educational problems identified due to intellectual disabilities and/or physical and sensory impairments have priority enrolment in preschool educational institutions. It should also be noted that inclusive groups are formed on the basis of age, that is, groups of the same age or different ages can be formed in an educational institution. Though while forming a group, the peculiarities of the educational needs of children are taken into account. It is recommended to enrol in inclusive groups of no more than three children with special educational needs in order to achieve a positive effect from inclusive education. In practice, the educational process in inclusive groups for children with special educational needs is carried out on the basis of the Basic component of preschool education according to special separate programmes (curricula). The programmes were approved by the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine in the prescribed manner and in accordance with the methods that take into account the individual characteristics of children in relation to educational and cognitive activities. A team of specialists in psychological and pedagogical support of children with special educational needs is specially created for them in preschool institutions in order for such children to feel comfortable in inclusive groups. The results of the statistical data on the features of inclusive education in preschool educational institutions in Ukraine analysis indicate positive trends in the development and implementation of inclusive education in Ukraine. Also, the number of preschool educational institutions with inclusive groups has increased and there is a significant increase in the number of inclusive groups (Table 1).

In general, in Ukraine, the number of preschool institutions and children attending remains virtually unchanged during the study period. However, the qualitative indicator characterising the coverage of children with preschool education is only 58% and does not tend to grow. On average, there are nine children per teacher (State Statistics Service of Ukraine, 2021). According to estimates of UNICEF Ukraine (Letter of the Ministry of Health, 2018), all children have the right to be enrolled and attend preschool institutions

TABLE 1 Key indicators of preschool education in Ukraine

No.	Indicator	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
1	Number of preschool educational institutions	15,002	14,813	14,949	14,907	14,898
2	Number of children in preschool educational institutions	1,294,891	1,291,207	1,300,129	1,303,787	1,278,237
3	Coverage of children by preschool educational institutions, %	55	55	57	61	58
4	Number of preschool educational institutions with inclusive groups	79	210	425	929	1721
5	of them for children aged 3 years and older	78	208	419	916	1694
6	Number of inclusive groups	116	275	578	1284	2617
7	of them for children aged 3 years and older	111	267	564	1246	2525
8	Number of places in inclusive groups	1641	4487	9730	23,475	48,987
9	of them for children aged 3 years and older	1546	4236	9446	22,875	47,272
10	Number of children in inclusive groups	1774	4731	10,437	27,465	57,313
11	of them for children aged 3 years and older	1658	4504	10,180	26,636	55,263

Source: State Statistics Service of Ukraine, 2021.

on a free-of-charge basis. However, many children, especially in rural areas, do not attend kindergartens. One of the reasons is the lack of a comprehensive approach to the integration of children with special needs. Along with this, during the study period in Ukraine, the number of preschool educational institutions with inclusive groups has increased significantly as well as the number of inclusive groups and children with special needs who attend preschool institutions.

The conducted survey shows that preschool educational institutions in Ukraine are attended by children with special educational needs, which is confirmed in their questionnaires by 28.2% of principals and 18.7% of teachers. Preschool institutions with special and inclusive groups and classes create conditions for the education of children with special educational needs. For this purpose, individual curricula are developed and the needs and possibilities of each child are taken into account. This is precisely why children with physical, mental, intellectual and sensory impairments are provided with teaching aids in educational institutions. The answers of the respondents show that the conditions for inclusive education in preschool institutions are partially provided, forasmuch as only 23.5% of principals and 27.1% of teachers state that the necessary conditions for children with special educational needs have been created in groups. It should also be noted that the need for additional permanent or temporary support for children with certain developmental disabilities is due to ensuring their rights to quality preschool education. Preschoolers whose social, physical or psychological characteristics need special support should be provided with appropriate conditions, additional attention and care. Consequently, employees of the relevant specialty provide them with psychological, pedagogical and correctional and developmental services. The obtained data indicate that the level of provision of teachers who provide inclusive education in preschool education is insufficient. After all, only 20% of directors claim that the institution has employees who are able to provide inclusive education while there are even fewer educators who are ready to work with such children (only 19.8%).

The need for qualified personnel and specialised assistance is partially solved by inclusive resource centres (IRCs)—institutions created to implement the right of children with special educational needs aged 2–18 years to receive preschool and general secondary education. Such centres conduct a comprehensive psychological and pedagogical assessment of a child's development; they ensure psychological and pedagogical and correctional and developmental services. They provide systematic and qualified support for a child with special educational needs. According to the data of the Ministry of Education and Science (European Agency for Special Needs & Inclusive Education, 2020), as of May 2020, in Ukraine, 627 inclusive resource centres have been established and are operating in all regions of Ukraine. In the context of rapprochement with the EU, Ukraine continues to implement an ambitious programme of reforms related to various economic, political, social spheres, stimulating economic growth and improving the living standards of citizens. That is why in order to outline the prospects for the development of inclusive education in Ukraine, it is necessary to consider the indicators and practice of preschool educational institutions in the EU.

Preschool education in the EU is defined as the initial stage of organised learning, designed primarily to acquaint young children with the school environment, that is, to provide a bridge between home and a school-based atmosphere. Early childhood educational (ECE) programmes should be centred or school-based, designed to meet the educational and developmental needs of children aged at least three years, and have staff that are adequately trained (qualified) to provide an educational programme for the children (Eurostat, 2020). Inclusive education in accordance with EU law is an ongoing process aimed at providing quality education for all, respecting diversity and different needs and abilities, characteristics and learning expectations, eliminating all forms of discrimination. Children with special educational needs in the EU countries can study through inclusive education, in separate

TABLE 2 Key indicators of preschool and inclusive education in the EU

	EU	Poland	Slovakia	Bulgaria	Romania	Croatia
Number of early childhood and pre-primary education pupils (thousands)	13,657.4	1361.2	166.3	220.9	521.2	114.5
Participation rate	94.8	93	82.2	82.4	86.3	81
Number of teachers in early childhood and pre-primary education (thousands)	1204.9	102.5	14.1	18.0	34.7	9.4
Pupil-teacher ratios in early childhood and pre-primary education	12.7	14.9	11.8	12.3	15.1	11.1
Enrolment rate in inclusive education, based on the enrolled pre-primary population (%)	98.6	99.43	98.62	99.27	n/a	n/a
Percentage of children with an official decision of special educational needs (SEN) in inclusive education, based on the pre-primary population of children with an official decision of SEN (%)	70.64	79.68	64.85	85.6	n/a	n/a
Percentage of children with an official decision of SEN in special groups, based on the pre-primary population of children with an official decision of SEN (%)	12.58	3.43	4.93	11.97	n/a	n/a
Percentage of children with an official decision of SEN in special pre-schools, based on the pre-primary population of children with an official decision of SEN (%)	23.14	16.88	28.32	2.43	n/a	n/a
Percentage of children with an official decision of SEN in fully separate educational settings, based on the pre-school population of children with an official decision of SEN (%)	36.73	20.32	33.25	14.40	n/a	n/a

Source: Compiled by the authors, from Eurostat (2020).

special groups/classes, in separate special preschool institutions, and through non-formal education (Table 2).

The number of children attending preschool educational institutions differs in different EU member states. To some extent, this reflects the demographic structure of the population, as well as the policies of individual countries regarding the involvement of children in early childhood and preschool education. The strategic framework—Education and Training 2020 (DEC/NAEYC, 2009)—has set a benchmark according to which at least 95% of children of preschool age should be involved in preschool education. In fact, this goal has been achieved, forasmuch as the share of children attending preschool in the EU is 94.9%. At the same time, some countries have lower rates, in particular Bulgaria, Slovakia, Croatia involve about 80% of children in preschool education, while Poland has 93%. In 2018, there were 1.2 million preschool teachers in the EU, and the workload per teacher was on average 12.7 children. Among the studied countries, the highest value is observed in Romania and Poland (15.1 and 14.9, respectively), and the lowest in Croatia (11.1). In most EU countries, the rate of involvement of preschool children in inclusive education is 98.6% and its value ranges from 80% to 100%. In the group of analysed countries, the highest value is observed in Poland (99.43%), the lowest in Slovakia (98.62%). Those children who are not involved in education and upbringing in general institutions attend special schools or receive non-formal education under the supervision of official health authorities or social services.

The percentage of children with special educational needs, who study at least 80% of the time in preschool institutions, ranges from 19% to 100%, and the overall average for EU countries is 70.64%. At the same time, some children with special educational needs in the studied countries are brought up and educated in certain special groups (the highest rate in Bulgaria—11.97%), in some preschools (the highest rate in Slovakia—28.32%), and through non-formal education. Taking into account the experience and issues outlined, the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education developed and implemented a project called 'Inclusive Early Childhood Education (IECE)', which lasted from 2015 to 2017. The basic goal of the project was to identify, analyse and promote the identified key characteristics of the quality of inclusive preschool education for all children of EU member states. The result of the project is revealed in meeting the educational needs and, at the same time, the social education of all children from the age of 3 to primary education. The participants and the target group of the project were the member states of the EU (Bulgaria, Croatia, Latvia, Poland, Romania, Slovakia) and Switzerland. The results of the project reflect the general situation in Europe, which shows that most EU countries have created the relevant conditions for the successful development of inclusive preschool education for all children including children with special educational needs. The results of the project, based on a qualitative thematic analysis of 32 examples of IECE descriptions across Europe, were presented in a new model: the Ecosystem Model of Inclusive Early Childhood Education (Figure 2) (State Statistics Service of Ukraine, 2021).

The new model is the result of a combination of two main views on quality inclusive education for preschool children, namely the Outcome-Process-Structure model and the Ecological Systems model. The ecosystem model, based on examples of descriptions of IECE practitioners, researchers and advisors, aims to promote a deeper and broader understanding of IECE-related issues. It is expected that this will improve IECE research, policy and practice in Europe and on an international level. Countries that acquired EU membership have also gradually reformed their pre-primary and inclusive education systems, starting with the accession negotiation phase. In order to approve an application for membership, a country should meet certain criteria including respect for the principles of liberty, democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, the rule of law, the stability of institutions guaranteeing adherence to these principles, and the ability to commit to membership, including commitment to the political, economic and monetary objectives

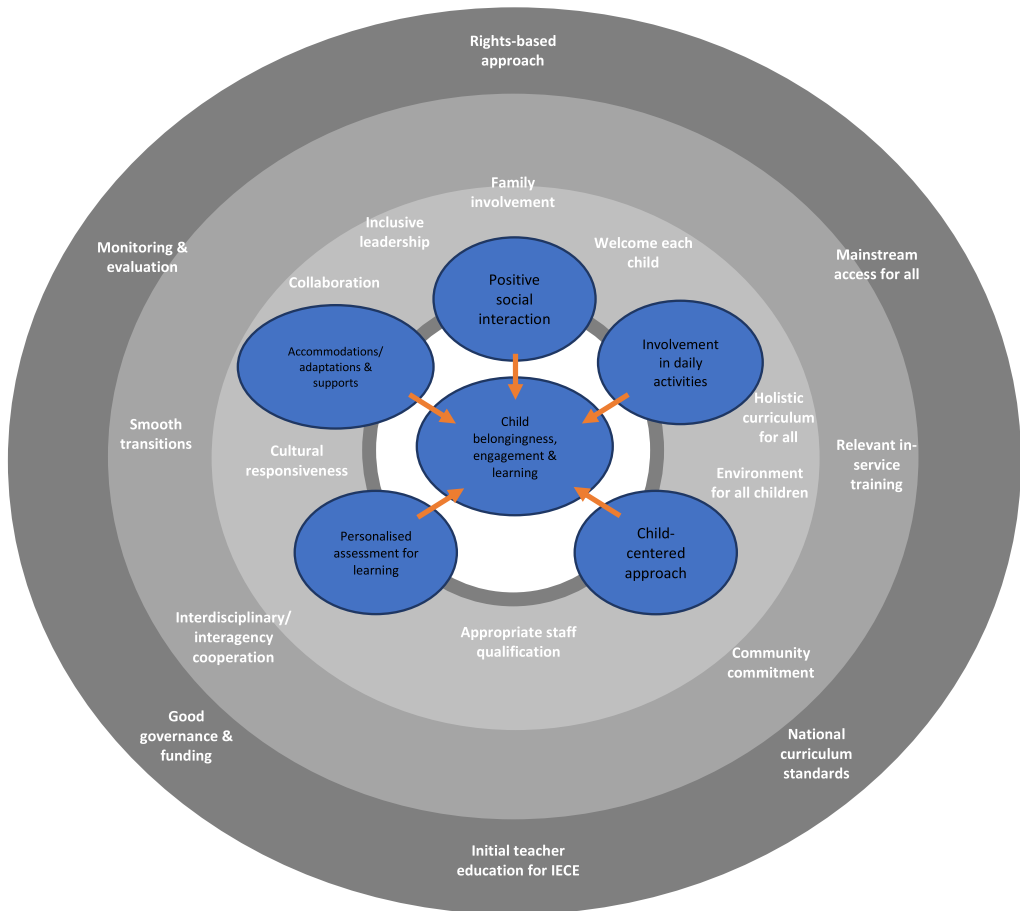


FIGURE 2 The ecosystem model of inclusive early childhood education

of the Union, and so on. The surveyed countries (Poland, Bulgaria, Romania, Slovakia and Croatia) have taken significant steps since the accession to the EU in order to improve inclusive preschool education and generally meet all the EU requirements regarding preschools for children with special educational needs. Along with this, in Bulgaria, Croatia, Latvia, Poland, Romania and Slovakia, during the project implementation specific features have been identified, which are an example of positive experience or, conversely, need to be regulated to ensure compliance with the EU requirements.

The study of five key components of a high-quality system of preschool inclusive education made it possible to determine the basis of the prospects and directions for Ukraine that are important in the context of state integration into the European Community, namely access to quality ECE for all children. In Ukraine, it is necessary to increase the number of children attending preschool educational institutions. Currently, the coverage of children by preschool educational institutions in Ukraine is 58%, while in the EU it is 95%. It is necessary to carry out explanatory work among parents with children of preschool age about the importance of preschool education in general and for children with special educational needs in particular. In addition, in Ukraine, children from families with difficult life circumstances or from national minorities are not paid proper attention. Insufficient attention is paid to diversity related to religion, ethnicity and language. In this context, the experience of Slovakia is interesting, where children with various difficulties attend kindergarten and need individual

adjustments to the programme as well as children of immigrants, socially unprotected children and children from foster families and orphanages who also need inclusive education.

Workforce quality

Professional training of teachers of preschool educational institutions in Ukraine on the basis of the recently developed profile of educational competencies creates numerous opportunities for children with special needs. However, it is necessary to continue towards striving to combine theory with practice, to emphasise child-centred learning as well as inclusiveness. In Ukraine, it is necessary to improve the system of continuous professional development for educators, special teachers, methodologists and principals. Compared to EU countries, there are significant differences in working conditions, wages and the incentive system. A promising direction for Ukraine is the development of cooperation between preschools and universities that train specialists, conduct investigations, and provide assistance in monitoring and evaluating the quality of services.

Quality curriculum/content

The state standard of preschool education in Ukraine is an essential step towards creating a quality preschool education system that meets the EU requirements. The standard describes the competencies that children should have after graduation from the institution. In Ukraine, the list of training programmes (curricula), manuals, and methodological materials approved by the Ministry of Education and Science is updated annually. At the same time, the EU experience in this area suggests that it is necessary to make the curriculum meaningful for every child, to apply a child-centred approach and 'individualisation' of learning. The goal of a quality programme is not doing 'the same for everyone' but instead making 'each to their own', which is the goal of educational work in the EU. The study shows that appropriate conditions are not sufficiently created for children with special educational needs in Ukraine. The problem is partly solved through inclusive resource centres. However, a slightly different approach is needed, which is practised in EU countries. For instance, in Poland, there is a requirement for children with special needs that 'the therapist goes to the child' and not 'the child goes to the therapist'. This means that professionals prefer to work with children in their natural environment, especially when working on improving independence and developing social skills. In most EU countries, parents are actively involved in the process of inclusive education and participate in curriculum development. Their opinion and wishes must be taken into account by educators of preschool institutions and parents are not left alone with the problems of raising children with special needs as they receive comprehensive assistance.

Evaluation and monitoring

Assessing the quality of preschool services of preschool educational institutions in Ukraine is underdeveloped and applied indicators do not comply with the EU requirements. Consequently, sometimes it is difficult to compare them in order to determine the best practice or prospects. In Ukraine, there are almost no tools and documents for assessment and monitoring, unlike the system used in the EU. External monitoring and evaluation of the quality system of preschool education should be carried out on the basis of the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS-R). It will be an important step for Ukraine in the process

of integration into the European Community. The same indicators should be used for self-assessment of preschool educational institutions as well as for assessing the effectiveness of inclusive education and training children with special needs.

Governance and funding

State kindergartens in Ukraine are free of charge but some services remain paid. The state does not control the cost of education in private kindergartens. Along with this, the process of decentralisation in Ukraine creates a number of problems for preschool education, for as much as there is a lack of staff and adequate funding for preschool educational institutions at the level of rural communities. Consequently, the government should support communities with low levels of social-economic development, as is the practice in the EU. In Latvia, funds are created to finance preschool education and local authorities provide financial and social support for children and their families. In Norway, municipal kindergartens (47%) are free of charge and private ones (53%) receive financial grants from the government which cover most of the costs. Therefore, the fee for such institutions is minimal. In Switzerland, preschool institutions are fully funded by the state or municipal authorities and are free of charge for all children. A significant source of funding for preschool institutions and inclusive education for member states is participation in EU projects. In particular, such projects are implemented in Slovakia and Croatia.

Inclusion, which is being promoted at the international level by both legislative initiatives and societal values, is a practice in which educators of preschool institutions are invited to apply new methods adapted to children with special needs in standard curricula. Frankel et al. (2010) state that children with special needs should be developing along with their peers without any restrictions and that this confidence is a common value for numerous programmes for early development and education around the world. It is worth noting that inclusive education for preschool children has been developing unevenly in EU member states, especially in relation to the countries that have become members recently. The context of approaches to inclusive education varies from country to country. However, the basic principles and challenges of implementing inclusive practices are similar. Mitchell and Sutherland (2020) identify the following main obstacles to the introduction of inclusive education: large classes; negative attitude towards disability; focus on exams of the education system; lack of support services; rigid training methods; dominance of the medical model; lack of parental involvement; lack of a clear national policy.

At the same time, not all countries, while trying to promote inclusive education at the level of legislation and government policy, in practice are sufficiently prepared to teach children with special needs (Mitchell & Sutherland, 2020). As for Ukraine, an appropriate regulatory and legal framework has been formed there. It enshrines state guarantees for the provision of educational services to children with special needs. The main international documents have been ratified to ensure the rights of children in accordance with world standards of education, social protection and healthcare. According to the results of the analysis of preschool educational institutions' practical activities, positive changes in the development of inclusive education have been revealed. In Ukraine, the number of preschool educational institutions with inclusive groups and the number of inclusive groups increase every year as well as the number of places in such groups and the number of children attending them. Children with special educational needs study on a free-of-charge basis and have the primary right to be enrolled in preschool institutions. Adapted curricula are developed for them and groups are formed taking into account the peculiarities of children's educational needs. At the same time, most of the quality indicators characterising inclusive education are significantly lower than in the EU countries surveyed.

You et al. (2019) and Sucuoğlu et al. (2013) emphasise the extraordinary role of teachers whose responsibilities have changed, taking into account the inclusive practice of preschool institutions. These teachers are expected to understand the needs and features of children with disabilities and adapt curricula according to their level of development and organise interaction in the classroom with all children. The results of the research make it possible to state that children with special needs attend more than 25% of preschool educational institutions under study in Ukraine. However, conditions for the full development of such children are not created in all institutions and only some of them are provided with teaching staff with the appropriate skills and qualifications. The practice of inclusive education in most European countries also demonstrates the positive results of introducing inclusive education in the educational process as it is evidenced by information sources analysed and the research conducted. However, despite the significant impetus for the introduction of inclusive education in the EU, its practical implementation still remains limited in some countries including Ukraine. There are significant differences in the ways in which countries seek to achieve inclusion as well as the unique challenges that each country faces. Moreover, the resources available for inclusive education vary considerably across Europe (Schwab, 2020). The ultimate goal of forming an inclusive education system in the EU is to provide all children with full-fledged, high-quality educational opportunities in their country. It is important that at the EU level inclusive education is considered as a systemic problem and a necessary component of high-quality education with respect for the principles of freedom, democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, rule of law and stability of institutions that guarantee compliance with these principles.

CONCLUSIONS

Economic, cultural, social development, traditions, hierarchy of the society and other external factors indirectly determine the concept of inclusive education, which has a common goal. However, it acquires different features in individual countries. The creation of an inclusive educational environment in preschool institutions ensures the implementation of the rights of children with special needs for education, physical, psychological and social adaptation, comfortable conditions for learning and development. Implementation of European best practices in preschool educational institutions will make it possible to improve the level of educational material perception by children with special educational needs, which will be reflected in the demonstration of educational achievements, to ensure the positive development of mental processes in children with special educational needs through the improvement of memory, thinking, concentration and attentiveness, to involve children with special educational needs in the educational process.

The procedures that ensure an effective inclusive environment of preschool educational institutions in Ukraine should be as follows: equal access for all children to quality preschool education; accessible and flexible curriculum, friendly educational environment and individual development programmes for children with special educational needs; quality psychological and pedagogical support; monitoring the needs of participants in the educational process, analysis and evaluation of the activities of preschool educational institutions; partnership and close cooperation with parents; responsible management of the institution in order to facilitate cooperation and distribution of responsibilities among all interested parties. The conducted research on the quality of inclusive preschool education in Ukraine and EU countries (Bulgaria, Croatia, Latvia, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Switzerland, Norway) has revealed positive changes in the educational process, which makes it possible to assess the educational space as of high quality and comfortable for children. However, not all institutions can provide conditions for the development of children with special educational

needs. Consequently, the reasons for the inconsistency of public policy, expectations and practical results in inclusive education are quite diverse and require further research.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

None.

ETHICAL APPROVAL

The research has been conducted under BERA ethical guidelines.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are freely available online.

REFERENCES

- Akalın, S., Demir, S., Sucuoğlu, B., Bakkaloğlu, H., & İscen, F. (2014). The needs of inclusive preschool teachers about inclusive practices. *Eurasian Journal of Educational Research*, *54*, 39–60. <https://doi.org/10.14689/ejer.2014.54.3>
- Brcic, M. K., Petani, R., & Miodić, M. (2020). Inclusive culture in preschool institution – Pedagogical competences of preschool teachers in Croatia. *Sodobna Pedagogika/Journal of Contemporary Educational Studies*, *71*(1), 156–173.
- Chernichenko, L. A. (2017). Experience of innovative diagnostics of logical management of preschool educational institutions in the conditions of inclusive education. *Proceedings. Series: Pedagogical Sciences*, *156*, 239–243.
- DEC/NAEYC (2009). *Early childhood inclusion: A summary*. University of North Carolina, FPG Child Development Institute. https://npdci.fpg.unc.edu/sites/npdci.fpg.unc.edu/files/resources/EarlyChildhoodInclusion-Summary-LargePrint_0.pdf
- European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (2020). *Inclusive Early Childhood Education*. <https://www.european-agency.org/projects/iece>
- European Commission (2019). Council Recommendation on High-Quality Early Childhood Education and Care Systems. https://eurlex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CONSIL:ST_9014_2019_INIT&from=EN
- Eurostat (2020). *Early childhood and primary education statistics*. https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Early_childhood_and_primary_education_statistics
- Florian, L. (2019). On the necessary co-existence of special and inclusive education. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, *23*(7–8), 691–704. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2019.1622801>
- Frankel, E. B., Gold, S., & Ajodhia-Andrews, A. (2010). International preschool inclusion: Bridging the gap between vision and practices. *Young Exceptional Children*, *13*(5), 2–16. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1096250610379983>
- Inclusion Europe (2020) *Towards inclusive education: examples of good practices of inclusive education*. https://inclusion-europe.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Best-Practice-Education_EN-FINALWEB.pdf
- Kurniah, N., Andreswari, D., & Kusumah, R. G. T. (2018). Achievement of development on early childhood based on national education standard. In *Proceedings of the international conference on educational sciences and teacher profession (ICETeP 2018)*. <https://doi.org/10.2991/icetep-18.2019.82>
- Law of Ukraine 'On Education' (2017). <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2145-19>
- Law of Ukraine 'On Preschool Education' (2001). <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2628-14>
- Ledford, J., Lane, J. D., & Barton, E. E. (2019). *Methods for teaching in early education: Contexts for inclusive classrooms*. Routledge.
- Letter of the Ministry of Health. 'Regarding the Organization of Activities of Inclusive Groups in Preschool Education Institutions' (2018). <https://mon.gov.ua/ua/npa/list-mon-shodo-organizaciyi-diyalnosti-inklyuzivnih-grup-v-zakladah-doshkilnoyi-osviti>
- Matjukh, Z. V. (2016). Problems and prospects of introduction of multimedia technologies in inclusive preschool education. *New Learning Technologies*, *88*, 65–69.
- Matjukh, Z. V. (2018). Model of use of multimedia technologies by educators of preschool education institution in educational work with inclusive group. *Bulletin of the Alfred Nobel University. Series "pedagogy and Psychology"*. *Pedagogical Sciences*, *1*(15), 80–86.
- Ministry of Education Science of Ukraine (2019) *Research on the Quality of Preschool Education: Components of the Educational Environment*. <https://iea.gov.ua/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/DO-1.pdf>
- Mirošević, J. K., Tot, D., & Lozančić, A. J. (2020). Designing an inclusive educational process: Preschool and primary school teachers' self-assessment. *Nova Prisetnost*, *18*(3), 547–560.

- Mitchell, D., & Sutherland, D. (2020). *What really works in special and inclusive education: Using evidence-based teaching strategies*. Routledge.
- Olefir, N. (2019). Features of inclusive education of children with special educational needs in preschool institutions. *New Pedagogical Thought*, 2(98), 143–146.
- Order of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine 'On Approval of the Concept of Inclusive Learning Development' (2010). <https://mon.gov.ua/ua/npa/pro-zatverdzhennya-kontseptsii-rozvitku-inklyuzivnogo-navchannya>
- Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine 'About the Statement of the Order of the Organization of Activity of Inclusive Groups in Establishments of Preschool Education' (2019). <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/530-2019>
- Sasipin, S., Arthur-Kelly, M., & Dempsey, I. (2013). Thai preschool teachers' views about inclusive education for young children with disabilities. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 17(10), 1106–1118. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2012.741146>
- Schwab, S. (2020). *Inclusive and special education in Europe*. <https://oxfordre.com/education/view/> <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190264093.001.0001/acrefore-9780190264093-e-1230>
- Soukakou, E. P. (2012). Measuring quality in inclusive preschool classrooms: Development and validation of the Inclusive Classroom Profile (ICP). *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 27(3), 478–488.
- State Statistics Service of Ukraine (2021). <http://www.ukrstat.gov.ua/>
- Sucuoğlu, B., Bakkaloğlu, H., Karasu, I. F., Demir, Ş., & Akalın, S. (2013). Inclusive preschool teachers: Attitudes and knowledge. *International Journal of Early Childhood Special Education (INT-JECSE)*, 5(2), 107–128. <https://doi.org/10.20489/intjecse.107929>
- Sunko, E., Rogulj, E., & Živković, A. (2019). Kindergarten teachers' competences regarding the inclusion of children with autism spectrum disorder in early childhood and preschool education institutions. *Croatian Journal of Education*, 21(Special Edition 1), 181–197.
- UNESCO (2014) *Global Education for All Meeting, Final Statement: The Muscat Agreement*. <http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/FIELD/Santiago/pdf/Muscat-Agreement-ENG.pdf>
- UNESCO (2016) *Education 2030. Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action for the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 4*. http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/education-2030-incheon-framework-for-action-implementation-of-sdg4-2016-en_2.pdf
- United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) (2006). <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities.html>
- United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>
- United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (2019). *Empowering children with disabilities for the enjoyment of their human rights, including through inclusive education: report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights*. <https://www.inclusive-education-in-action.org/resources/empowering-children-disabilities-enjoyment-their-human-rights-including-through-inclusive>
- You, S., Kim, E., & Shin, K. (2019). Teachers' belief and efficacy toward inclusive education in early childhood settings in Korea. *Sustainability*, 11(5), 1489. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su11051489>
- Zabeli, N., & Gjelaj, M. (2020). Preschool teacher's awareness, attitudes and challenges towards inclusive early childhood education: A qualitative study. *Cogent Education*, 7(1), 1791560. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2020.1791560>

How to cite this article: Kalinina, T. S., Karnaukhova, A. V., Mashovets, M. A., Shvaliuk, T. M., & Telná, O. A. (2022). Practical implementation of inclusive preschool education in Ukraine. *Review of Education*, 10, e3311. <https://doi.org/10.1002/rev3.3311>