

**INNOVATIVE APPROACHES TO CREATING AN INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENT  
IN PRESCHOOL EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS: LESSONS FROM THE  
EXPERIENCE OF EUROPEAN COUNTRIES**

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**Abstract**

This article investigates innovative approaches to creating an inclusive environment in preschool educational institutions following the experience of European countries. It emphasizes the value of interdisciplinary cooperation, universal design for learning, and the application of modern technologies in order to meet the individual educational needs of children.

**Keywords:** *inclusive education, interdisciplinary cooperation, modern technologies, individual educational needs, early intervention, adapted learning applications.*

**1. Research context**

Inclusive education is central to strategies aimed at developing education systems around the world, including in Europe. An inclusive environment in pre-school settings is defined as a space in which every child, regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic or other characteristics, can participate fully in the life of the group. Creating such an environment involves the adaptation of physical space, teaching methods, materials and strategies for interacting with children, as well as training of teaching staff.

European countries offer a range of approaches to the implementation of inclusive education in pre-school institutions, from the integration of children with special educational needs into mainstream groups to the creation of specialised inclusive centres. These approaches are based on the principles of equality, respect for diversity, and individualisation of the educational process.

## **2. Literature review**

In pre-school education, inclusive education is a constantly evolving field, as evidenced by scientific research conducted by authors from different countries. One of the key aspects explored in the literature is the integration of children with special educational needs into general education settings.

Buyse and Hollingsworth (2009) propose strategies for inclusion that can be implemented in pre-school settings to support children with a range of educational needs. The authors emphasize the importance of creating a universal design for learning (UDL) that promotes accessibility and inclusion for all children.

Another significant source of information is the research conducted by M.J. Schmitt, M. Priestley, and S. Ebersold (2011), which examines the European strategies for inclusive education. The authors scrutinize the policies and practices implemented in European nations, emphasizing effective models of integration.

In their study, S. Nutbrown and P. Clough (2009) examine the impact of inclusive practices on children's development in preschool settings. They found out that early intervention and adapted learning environments have a positive impact on social interaction and children's academic achievement.

These studies highlight the significance of a comprehensive approach to establishing an inclusive environment in preschools. This includes adapting curricula, training teachers, and creating conditions for equal participation of all children in the learning process.

## **3. Purpose and aims of the study**

The main objective of this study is to analyse innovative approaches to creating an inclusive environment in preschool education through the example of European countries. The study seeks to identify the most effective strategies and methods for including children with special educational needs in the general education settings. The main purposes are to

identify the best practices and initiatives that can be adapted and implemented in other countries to improve the quality of inclusive education in preschool educational institutions. The study also aims at developing recommendations for pre-school educational institutions on how to create and maintain an inclusive learning environment.

#### **4. The study**

This study focuses on a thorough review of innovative approaches to creating inclusive environments in preschools and includes an analysis of the following key aspects:

**1) Universal Design for Learning (UDL).** Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is based on the principle of creating educational programmes and materials that are accessible and effective for all children, regardless of their individual characteristics or educational needs. This approach has developed in response to traditional teaching methods that often fail to take into account the diversity of ways in which students perceive, process information and express knowledge. UDL offers flexibility in teaching and learning to maximise each child's involvement in the educational process.

The principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) include the following components:

- 1) presenting information in a way that considers diverse ways of perceiving it, such as through visual, audio, and kinesthetic materials;
- 2) expressing knowledge in various ways based on children's strengths and preferences, such as allowing oral presentations instead of written ones;
- 3) engagement, which refers to keeping children motivated and interested through a variety of teaching and learning methods and tools, including the use of playful technology.

In the context of early childhood education, educators must create learning environments that adapt to children's different developmental levels, interests, and learning styles. For instance, the use of toys and learning materials with varying textures and colours can help meet the diverse sensory needs of children. Additionally, stories, narratives, and songs can engage both auditory and visual learners.

Implementing UDL involves creating an inclusive environment where every child feels valued and capable of learning, regardless of their characteristics. This includes adapting the physical space of the institution to ensure accessibility for children with

disabilities, and using positive language and support to promote social inclusion and mutual respect among children.

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) plays a crucial role in creating an inclusive framework for pre-school education, ensuring that every child has the opportunity to succeed. By applying UDL principles, a more flexible and open learning environment is created, which supports a variety of learning styles and enables each child to develop at their own pace.

**2) Integrated early intervention services** are a comprehensive model of support that aims to provide assistance to children with special needs and to their families. This approach involves coordination between different professionals, such as teachers, doctors, psychologists, social workers and other specialists, to provide holistic support that takes into account all aspects of a child's development.

The main components of integrated early intervention services include a **multidisciplinary assessment**. The first step is a detailed evaluation of the child's needs, including medical, psychological, and educational aspects. This evaluation allows for the creation of an individual support plan that meets the unique needs of each child. Additionally, an **individual development plan** is created to identify specific goals and intervention methods to meet the child's needs. This plan undergoes regular review and updates to align with the child's progress. **Integration of services** requires close collaboration among various professionals and services to ensure coordinated support. This means that education, health, and social services collaborate to establish a coordinated system of care. Family support is crucial to a child's development, and integrated services also encompass family support and counselling, which involves instructing parents on how to support their child's development (Kukuruza, 2013), as well as providing emotional support. **Early intervention in the learning environment** involves adapting the learning environment and teaching methods to ensure inclusivity and accessibility of education.

In Scandinavian countries, integrated early intervention services are often based on close cooperation between preschools, healthcare facilities and social services, which allows for comprehensive support for children with special needs. This contributes not only to the child's development, but also to the support of the family, providing the necessary resources and advice for effective education and development.

**3) The training and professional development of teachers** working in inclusive environments requires a comprehensive approach, covering various aspects of educational activities. The training covers important components such as basic knowledge of inclusion, including a thorough understanding of the principles of inclusive education; knowledge of the rights of children with disabilities; inclusion policies at the national and international levels; the use of assistive technologies, which is essential for acquiring knowledge and skills that can help children with disabilities to be more effectively involved in the learning process (Khursheed, 2015).

Communication and collaboration are also key components of the training, as teachers learn to communicate and collaborate effectively with children's parents, other teachers, specialists (e.g. psychologists, speech therapists) and community members to ensure comprehensive support for the child. The last component is emotional support, which involves preventing emotional burnout, which is key to maintaining a high level of motivation and effectiveness in an inclusive environment.

**4) In the context of inclusive education, the use of technology** is becoming a key element in providing a differentiated and individualised approach to learning. The following are examples of technologies and tools commonly used in inclusive education. Firstly, specialised software designed for children with autism, special programmes available that utilise visualisation and interactivity to enhance communication skills. One such programme is *Proloquo2Go*, an alternative and augmentative communication (AAC) programme that enables the creation of language boards. Another example is *Dyslexia Quest*, an application designed for children with dyslexia that aims to improve reading and comprehension skills through fun and educational games. Secondly, adapted educational applications and platforms, such as *Google Classroom* (Kennedy, 2018), enable the customization of educational materials and tasks to meet the needs of individual students, ensuring accessibility and ease of use for children with diverse educational needs (Khursheed, 2015). Thirdly, the interactive platform for creating educational games, *Kahoot*, promotes children's engagement through play, competition, and fun, making it an effective tool for students who require more dynamic forms of learning.

Moreover, in an inclusive education environment, the use of interactive whiteboards and electronic devices such as *Smart Boards* is important. These tools allow educators, teachers, and children to interact with learning material directly on a large screen, increasing

engagement and interest in learning. Additionally, tablets and *iPads* with specialised educational applications and adapted content can be individualised to the needs of each child. These technologies and tools are essential in promoting inclusive education by creating a more adaptive and accessible learning environment for all children.

**5) Interdisciplinary cooperation.** Interdisciplinary cooperation in the context of inclusive education becomes the basis for creating an effective and adaptive learning environment that takes into account the individual needs of each child. This approach involves close interaction between different professionals working together to provide the child with optimal conditions for development and learning (2009).

The key aspects of interdisciplinary cooperation are joint planning of the educational process; cooperation with parents and their involvement in the educational process, providing them with advice and support in raising a child with special educational needs; integration of courses and services, which is ensured by coordinating efforts between educational institutions, medical and social services to ensure a comprehensive approach to meeting the needs of the child; and professional development of specialists, which includes training and professional development of specialists in the sphere of inclusive education.

#### **4. Summary and conclusion**

We can therefore conclude that effective inclusive education in preschool education requires an integrated approach that combines universal design for learning, interdisciplinary cooperation, teacher training and professional development, and the active use of modern technologies. This approach ensures that the learning environment is adapted to the needs of each child and promotes their full development and integration into society. The success of inclusive education depends on the combined efforts of educators, parents, specialists in different fields and the effective use of educational technologies.

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