

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: PEDAGOGICAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR DEVELOPING THE SOCIAL-COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCES OF PRESCHOOL CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

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Annotation. The article analyses the pedagogical opportunities for developing social-communicative competences of preschool children with special educational needs in inclusive education. Through a comparative theoretical analysis, peer-mediated play, an enabling environment, individualized education plans and family partnership are substantiated as key factors. The findings are presented as practical recommendations for educators and specialists.

Keywords: inclusive education; special educational needs; preschool age; social-communicative competence; peer play; individualized education plan.

Annotatsiya. Maqolada inklyuziv maktabgacha ta'lim sharoitida alohida ta'lim ehtiyojlari (ATE) bo'lgan bolalarning ijtimoiy-kommunikativ kompetensiyalarini rivojlantirishning pedagogik imkoniyatlari tahlil qilinadi. Ilmiy adabiyotlarning qiyosiy-nazariy tahlili asosida tengdoshlar vositachiligidagi o'yin, rivojlantiruvchi muhit, individual ta'lim rejasi va oila bilan hamkorlik asosiy pedagogik omillar sifatida asoslandi. Natijalar tarbiyachi va mutaxassislar uchun amaliy tavsiyalar shaklida berildi.

Kalit so'zlar: inklyuziv ta'lim; alohida ta'lim ehtiyojlari; maktabgacha yosh; ijtimoiy-kommunikativ kompetensiya; tengdoshlar bilan o'yin; individual ta'lim rejasi.

Аннотация. В статье анализируются педагогические возможности развития социально-коммуникативных компетенций детей дошкольного возраста с особыми образовательными потребностями в условиях инклюзивного образования. На

основе сравнительно-теоретического анализа обоснованы ключевые факторы: игра при посредничестве сверстников, развивающая среда, индивидуальный образовательный план и сотрудничество с семьёй. Результаты оформлены в виде практических рекомендаций для воспитателей и специалистов.

Ключевые слова: инклюзивное образование; особые образовательные потребности; дошкольный возраст; социально-коммуникативная компетенция; игра со сверстниками; индивидуальный образовательный план.

1.KIRISH

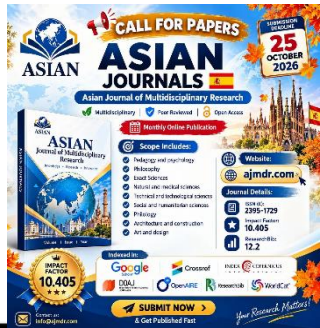
Today, inclusive education is recognized worldwide as the main approach that guarantees every child the right to quality education regardless of their abilities. At the international level, this idea was consolidated in the Salamanca Statement, which emphasizes that all children, including those with special educational needs, should study in mainstream educational institutions.¹

In the Republic of Uzbekistan, too, this direction is one of the priorities of state policy. The Law “On Education” provides for the introduction of inclusive education and the creation of equal opportunities for persons with special educational needs.² In particular, involving children in an inclusive environment at an early stage of preschool education lays the foundation for their later socialization and readiness for school.

The preschool age is a sensitive period for social-communicative development. It is precisely at this age that a child masters the rules of communication, becomes aware of their own feelings, learns to understand the states of others and acquires the skills of cooperating with peers. For children with speech, intellectual or emotional-volitional limitations, or with autism spectrum disorders, this process is accompanied by considerable difficulties, and as a result they are at risk of becoming isolated from the

¹UNESCO. The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education. Paris: UNESCO, 1994. [source 1].

²Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan “On Education.” No. ZRU-637, 23 September 2020. [source 2].



peer environment.³

Relevance of the problem. In practice, even when children in inclusive groups are physically in the same space, their social-communicative interaction is often not purposefully organized. Clear pedagogical mechanisms for working with such children have not been systematized for educators, and methodological materials are insufficient. This determines the scientific and practical relevance of the topic.

Research aim – to theoretically substantiate the pedagogical opportunities for developing the social-communicative competences of children with special educational needs (SEN) in inclusive preschool education and to identify practical directions for this work.

Research objectives: (1) to reveal the essence of the concept of “social-communicative competence”; (2) to identify effective pedagogical factors in an inclusive group; (3) to develop practical recommendations for educators and specialists.

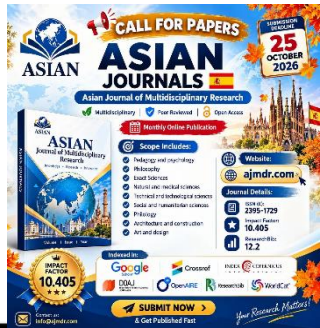
2. METHODOLOGY

The study is theoretical and analytical in nature. The following methods were used: comparative analysis of scientific and normative-legal sources, synthesis and generalization, a systemic approach, and substantive comparison of the results of existing studies. In selecting the literature, the criteria of direct relevance to the topic, publication in international peer-reviewed outlets, and theoretical significance were taken into account.

The theoretical basis of the study consists of two approaches. The first is L.S. Vygotsky’s cultural-historical theory, according to which a child’s mental development takes place in cooperation with adults and peers, within the “zone of proximal development”.⁴ The second is U. Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems model, which

³Odom S.L., Buysse V., Soukakou E. Inclusion for young children with disabilities: A quarter century of research perspectives // Journal of Early Intervention. 2011. Vol. 33(4). P. 344–356. [source 3].

⁴Vygotsky L.S. Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes. Cambridge, MA: Harvard



examines child development within the system of interrelations among the family, the kindergarten group and the broader social environment.⁵

Key concepts. *Special educational needs (SEN)* – the need for adapted educational conditions and additional support arising from a child’s developmental characteristics. *Inclusive education* – the education of all children in a common educational environment together with support appropriate to their needs. *Social-communicative competence* – a set of abilities that includes a child’s capacity to engage in communication, use verbal and non-verbal means, recognize and regulate emotions, follow rules and cooperate with peers.

The study does not present new empirical statistical data; its conclusions are based on the analysis of the results of existing scientific research.

3. RESULTS

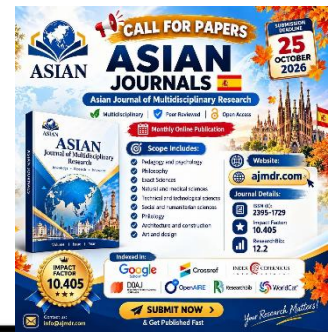
The analysis of the literature identified four main pedagogical opportunities for developing the social-communicative competences of preschool children with SEN.

3.1. Organizing a developmental inclusive environment

According to Vygotsky’s teaching, an important source of a child’s development is interaction with the social environment and its participants.⁶ Classic studies in the field of defectology likewise stress the need to rely not on the child’s impairment but on the child’s opportunities for social inclusion and preserved potential.⁷ An inclusive group is a natural environment in which typically developing peers provide models of speech and behavior.

According to the review by Odom and colleagues, high-quality inclusive programs can have a positive effect on the social skills of children with SEN; however, this result

University Press, 1978. [source 4].
⁵Bronfenbrenner U. The Ecology of Human Development. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979. [source 5].
⁶Vygotsky L.S. Mind in Society. Harvard University Press, 1978. [source 4].
⁷Выготский Л.С. Основы дефектологии. СПб.: Лань, 2003. [source 6].



depends not on simply placing children together but on purposeful pedagogical organization.⁸ In pedagogical terms, this means the following: dividing the group room into centers that encourage social interaction (role-play, construction and creative corners); providing the daily schedule with visual supports; and creating a safe, predictable environment for children.

3.2. *Peer-mediated play and structured activity*

Play is the leading activity at preschool age and the most natural means of developing social-communicative skills. A controlled trial of the LEAP model involving children with autism spectrum disorder showed that an approach based on peer training and structured communication in an inclusive group was associated with improvements in children’s social and language skills.⁹

In practice, the following methods are considered effective:

- **The “buddy-helper” method** – a typically developing child helps a peer with SEN in play and everyday situations and encourages them to initiate communication;
- **role-play and plot-based games** – games such as “family,” “shop” and “doctor” are used to practice verbal communication and role-performance skills;
- **turn-taking games** – teach the rules of waiting, asking, saying thank you and cooperating;
- **folk games and songs** – organize collective activity on the basis of national values;

⁸Odom S.L., Buysse V., Soukakou E. Inclusion for young children with disabilities // Journal of Early Intervention. 2011. Vol. 33(4). P. 344–356. [source 3].

⁹Strain P.S., Bovey T. Randomized, controlled trial of the LEAP model of early intervention for young children with autism spectrum disorders // Topics in Early Childhood Special Education. 2011. Vol. 31(3). P. 133–154. [source 7].



- **visual aids** – picture cards, social stories and daily schedules support communication.

3.3. Individual approach and early support

Research in the field of early intervention emphasizes the importance of programs that are developed jointly with the child’s family and a team of specialists and are adapted to the child’s needs.¹⁰ An individualized education plan (IEP) makes it possible to define social-communicative goals – for example, approaching a peer, joining a game, waiting for a turn, asking for help and naming a feeling – in a clear, measurable and step-by-step form.

Educators, a speech therapist, a psychologist, a defectologist and parents should take part in drawing up the IEP. Regularly assessing the child’s developmental dynamics through observation sheets, anecdotal records and a portfolio makes it possible to adjust the plan in a timely manner.

3.4. Cooperation with the family and the community

According to Bronfenbrenner’s model, child development depends on the quality of microsystems (family, group) and of the connections between them.¹¹ For this reason, actively involving parents in the pedagogical process and teaching them simple play and communication methods that can be applied at home ensure consistency between kindergarten and family approaches. Conducting explanatory work on the idea of inclusion with the parents of typically developing children also contributes to the formation of a positive social environment.

Table 1. Pedagogical opportunities and practical tools

Opportunity	Main tools	Expected result
Developmental	Cooperation corners, visual	A safe and predictable

¹⁰Guralnick M.J. Early intervention for children with intellectual disabilities: An update // Journal of Applied Research in Intellectual Disabilities. 2017. Vol. 30(2). P. 211–229. [source 8].
¹¹Bronfenbrenner U. The Ecology of Human Development. Harvard University Press, 1979. [source 5].



Opportunity	Main tools	Expected result
environment	signs, daily schedule	communication environment
Play with peers	Role-play, “buddy-helper,” turn-taking games	Cooperation, speech activity, following rules
Individual approach	IEP, step-by-step goals, observation sheets	Growth of specific skills and monitoring
Cooperation with the family	Consultations, joint activities, home assignments	Consolidation and transfer of skills

3.5. Components of social-communicative competence

On the basis of the sources analyzed, the social-communicative competence of a preschool child can be represented as four interrelated components. **The communicative component** includes the child’s ability to express needs, ask questions and respond through verbal and non-verbal means (gestures, facial expressions, pictorial cards). **The emotional component** means recognizing, naming and expressing one’s own and others’ feelings. **The behavioral component** includes the skills of following rules, waiting for one’s turn and regulating one’s own behavior. **The cooperation component** is the ability to play together with peers, complete a task jointly, and ask for or give help.

Depending on the type of SEN, difficulties in the development of these components manifest differently. Children with delayed speech development need priority support first of all in the communicative component; in autism spectrum disorder, in the emotional and cooperation components; and children with problems in the emotional-volitional sphere, in the behavioral component. Therefore, pedagogical support should not be “the same for everyone” but should be selected according to the child’s needs.

From a pedagogical standpoint, it is advisable to develop the competence step by step: the child is first taught to be near a peer (parallel play), then to observe and imitate, then to engage in brief interaction, and finally to take part in joint plot-based play. This sequence helps preserve the child’s sense of success and prevents excessive stress.

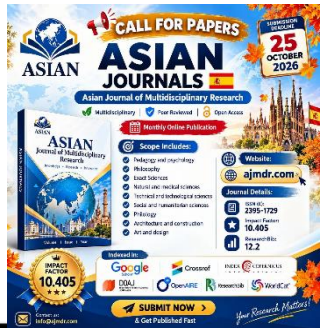


Table 2. Components of competence and directions of pedagogical support

Component	Developmental indicator	Pedagogical support method
Communicative	Approaches others, answers questions, asks	Picture cards, modeling, speech games
Emotional	Recognizes and names feelings	“Mood corner,” social stories, emotion cards
Behavioral	Follows rules, waits for a turn	Visual schedule, encouragement, repeated practice
Cooperation	Plays together with a peer, asks for help	“Buddy-helper,” work in pairs and groups

3.6. Professional preparation of educators and specialists

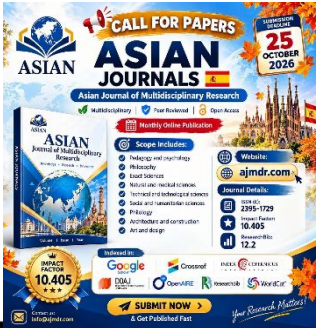
The effectiveness of the inclusive process depends largely on the educator’s professional competence. The educator must understand the child’s developmental characteristics, be able to organize play and everyday situations in ways that stimulate communication, and work as part of a team with specialists.¹² For this reason, establishing a system of professional development courses, practical seminars, exchange of experience and methodological support is one of the important conditions of an inclusive environment.

In the training of future educators at pedagogical higher education institutions, it is also recommended to increase the share of practical classes on inclusive pedagogy, special psychology and methods of developing communication, and to have students undertake pedagogical placements in inclusive groups. This forms in future specialists a positive attitude toward children with SEN and practical skills.

3.7. Practical example: a fragment of an individualized education plan

To clarify the proposed approach, a conditional fragment of the social-

¹²Odom S.L., Buysse V., Soukakou E. Inclusion for young children with disabilities. 2011. [source 3]; Guralnick M.J. Early intervention for children with intellectual disabilities. 2017. [source 8].



communicative section of an IEP for a 5-year-old child with difficulties in speech and social communication is given below. The example is of a recommendatory nature and is based on a typical situation rather than on a specific child.

Table 3. Social-communicative section of an IEP (conditional example)

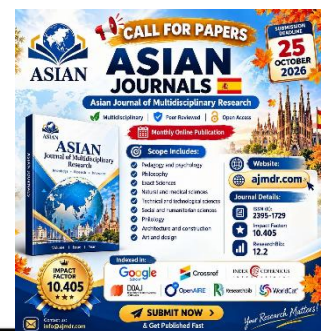
Goal	Activity and method	Assessment criterion
Approaches a peer	Practicing the phrase “May I play with you?” with a picture card; modeling in play situations	The number of independent approaches during the day is recorded on the observation sheet
Waits for a turn	Turn-taking board games, a sand timer and a visual signal	Proportion of situations of waiting for a turn without prompting
Names feelings	Emotion cards, social stories, “mood corner”	How many of 4 given feelings the child names correctly
Joins group play	Role-play in pairs with a “buddy-helper”	Duration of joint play with peers

Each goal of the plan is set for a period of 6–8 weeks, and at the end of the period the results are discussed at a team meeting. When a goal is achieved, the child moves on to a more complex task; if it is not achieved, the method or the level of support is reconsidered. In this way, the educational process adapts to the child’s real abilities.

3.8. Encouraging communication in the daily routine

Social-communicative skills develop not only in specially organized sessions but also during daily routines – mealtimes, dressing, going out for a walk and handwashing. In such situations the educator gives the child a choice (“Which cup would you like?”) and uses a waiting pause, creating conditions for the child to respond verbally or non-verbally on their own. This method makes it easier to transfer skills acquired in a natural environment to other situations.

In addition, in group activities (reading fairy tales, dramatization, creative work,



shared projects) it is important to give each child a role suited to their strengths. For example, a child with limited speech can take part in a fairy-tale dramatization through movement and gesture and thus feel like an equal member of the group.

4. DISCUSSION

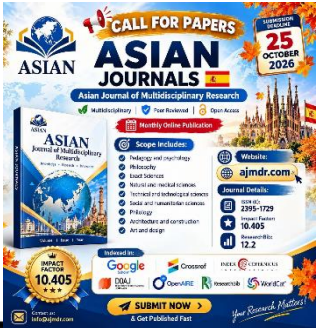
The results of the analysis show that the mere presence of children together in an inclusive group does not in itself guarantee social-communicative development. Effectiveness depends on the quality of the organization of the pedagogical process: the educator's methodological preparation, the flexibility of the environment and coordinated work with specialists are of decisive importance.¹³

An important point is that the four identified factors operate not in isolation but as an interrelated system. For example, play with peers yields purposeful results only when an adapted environment and clearly defined individual goals are in place, while cooperation with the family consolidates these results outside the kindergarten. In this sense, inclusive preschool education requires a systemic approach.

Because most existing studies were carried out in foreign contexts, their results cannot be mechanically transferred to the conditions of Uzbekistan. National values, family traditions, Uzbek-language play folklore (folk games, lullabies, songs, riddles) and the characteristics of a multilingual environment must be taken into account. In addition, organizational factors such as educators' qualifications in inclusive pedagogy and the number of children in a group also affect practical outcomes.

Limitation of the study. The article is theoretical in nature, and its conclusions require experimental verification in the local context. In future research, it would be advisable to evaluate the effectiveness of the proposed directions quantitatively and qualitatively through pilot experiments, observation and surveys.

¹³Odom S.L., Buysse V., Soukakou E. Inclusion for young children with disabilities. 2011. P. 344–356; Guralnick M.J. Early intervention for children with intellectual disabilities. 2017. P. 211–229. [sources 3, 8].



Practical recommendations:

- regularly improve educators’ qualifications in inclusive pedagogy and in methods of developing communication skills;
- include clear social-communicative goals in the IEP of every child with SEN;
- set aside separate time in the daily schedule for structured play and cooperative activity with peers;
- equip the group environment with visual support tools;
- organize practical sessions and consultations for parents;
- regularly assess children’s development through observation sheets and a portfolio.

5. CONCLUSION

As a result of the study, the pedagogical opportunities for developing the social-communicative competences of children with SEN in inclusive preschool education were theoretically substantiated. It was established that this process requires a systemic approach that combines a developmental environment, peer-mediated play, individual planning and cooperation with the family.

When these factors are implemented in harmony, an inclusive group becomes an effective pedagogical space for forming social inclusion, a culture of communication and cooperation skills in a child with SEN. The recommendations developed can be used in their work by preschool educators, speech therapists and defectologists, as well as by students of pedagogical higher education institutions.

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