BG Pulse Journal USA
ISSN:1947-2536 http://www.bgpulseusa.com/index.php/bg

CASCADE-MENTORING MODEL OF DEVELOPING TEACHER COMPETENCE IN SUSTAINING INCLUSIVE PRACTICES IN PRESCHOOL EDUCATION

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Doi: https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.22208989

Abstract: The article examines the sustainability of inclusive practice in preschool organisations through continuous development of educator competence. It aims to substantiate a practice-oriented model combining cascade training, workplace mentoring, micro-trials and evidence-informed monitoring. The study uses theoretical and content analysis, review of legal documents, comparative analysis and pedagogical modelling. The model comprises needs diagnosis, preparation of core trainers, a modular cascade, mentored observation, outcome monitoring and corrective renewal. Its novelty lies in linking professional-development results not to course completion but to observable changes in educator action, child participation and the organisation's methodological capacity. The framework is proposed as a conceptual and practical basis for conference discussion and subsequent piloting.

Keywords: inclusive practice, preschool education, educator competence, cascade training, mentoring, micro-trial, professional development, monitoring, individual approach.

Introduction

The effectiveness of inclusive education at the preschool stage is determined not by the fact of accepting a child into a group, but by his/her meaningful participation in daily play, communication and educational activities. Such participation does not occur by itself: the teacher must identify the child's strengths, distinguish obstacles, adapt the tasks and environment, transfer the specialist's recommendations to the life of the group and regularly monitor the result. Therefore, the daily quality of inclusion depends, first of all, on the professional competence of the teacher, which is mobilized in a real situation.

Article 50 of the Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan defines the provision of inclusive education and upbringing for children with special educational needs as a constitutional guarantee [1]. Article 20 of the Law "On Education" defines inclusive education as a process aimed at creating equal opportunities [2], while the Law "On Preschool Education and Upbringing" strengthens the consideration of the individual needs and capabilities of children at the level of a system requirement [3]. The ratification of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities has expanded the international legal basis for these tasks [4].

However, there may be an "implementation gap" between legal guarantees and real pedagogical practice. A one-time seminar provides the teacher with new terms, but it does not automatically form the ability to conduct observation in a complex situation, create adapted tasks,

or make decisions in collaboration with parents. The test result at the end of the course also does not fully indicate the transfer of knowledge to group practice. Therefore, the main question for the conference discussion is posed as follows: how to organize the process of training a teacher so that the learned approach is sustainably transferred to everyday inclusive practice?

The purpose of the article is to substantiate the cascade-mentoring model of developing inclusive competence of preschool teachers, to clarify its stages, organizational conditions and outcome indicators. The study does not intend to declare empirical effectiveness, but to develop a conceptual and practical construct that can be tested in subsequent experiments.

Research methodology and scientific position

The study was built on the integration of systemic, competency-based, activity-based, rights-based and reflexive approaches. The systemic approach allows us to see professional development as an interrelated cycle of courses, on-the-job support and monitoring. The competency-based approach focuses on transferring knowledge into professional action. The activity-based approach requires the teacher to learn through cases, micro-training, observation and the creation of adapted material. The reflexive approach serves to analyze each experiment based on evidence and update the next decision.

F.R. Valiyeva describes the inclusive environment as a complex process that is managed in the stages of diagnostics, adaptation, support, cooperation, monitoring and correction [8]. Abdullayeva, Valiyeva and Rakhimova substantiate the interdependence of early diagnostics, an individual approach, corrective-pedagogical support and multidisciplinary cooperation [9].

Three semantic units were distinguished in the content analysis: the observed professional behavior of the teacher, the intermediate change in the participation and development of the child, the methodological support capacity of the organization. Based on these units, the stages and indicators of the model were developed using the method of pedagogical modeling. The scientific position is that inclusive competence is not a stable characteristic of an individual employee; it is a dynamic professional ability that develops with an appropriate organizational environment, mentoring and evidence-based feedback.

The challenge of sustainability of inclusive practice

The sustainability of inclusive practice relies on the continuous link between the teacher's knowledge of a new method, its testing, and its updating based on the results. If teaching is based solely on the transmission of information, the teacher may repeat the course material, but it will be difficult to choose a method based on the needs of the child. If there is no follow-up and mentoring after the test, the initial mistake will turn into a general conclusion, ending with the decision that "the method did not work". If the leader of the organization does not allocate time and resources, individual initiative will not be maintained in the long term.

UNESCO defines inclusion as the ability of the education system to respond to the participation of all learners [10]. The 2020 Global Report lists gaps in teacher support, management, financing, and the environment among the systemic barriers to inclusion [11]. Article 24 of the UN Convention also defines necessary individual assistance and reasonable accommodation as a means of realizing the right to education [12]. Based on these approaches, it is not enough to limit the development of pedagogical competence to a question of personal qualifications.

Booth and Ainscow explain inclusive development through the unity of culture, policy and practice [13]. When applied to a preschool educational organization, the teacher's open attitude represents an inclusive culture, the leader's allocation of resources and time represents institutional

policy, and adapted play and observation represent everyday practice. Therefore, sustainability should be measured not by the activity of an individual teacher, but by the organization's ability to learn and renew itself.

The content of the cascade-mentoring model

The proposed model combines the comprehensiveness of cascade teaching with the deep practical support of mentoring. In the cascade approach, core trainers are trained on the basis of a single content and criteria and pass on the module to subsequent groups. Mentoring, on the other hand, reduces the risk of content simplification: the teacher tests the learned method in a real group, the mentor asks questions based on observational evidence, and the teacher revises his strategy. As a result, teaching becomes a cycle of "listening - doing - observing - analyzing - retesting".

Diagnostics -> basic trainer -> modular cascade -> microtest -> mentoring -> monitoring -> correction

Table 1. Stages of the Cascade Mentoring Model

Stage	Main activities	Evidence	Expected result
1. Diagnostics	Identification of knowledge, attitudes and practical difficulties.	Case, observation, self-assessment.	Individual professional needs profile.
2. Base trainer	Mastering the common content, ethical criteria and observation protocol.	Trainer micro-lesson and expert assessment.	A trainer ready to consistently transfer content.
3. Modular cascade	Modules on law, observation, adaptation, cooperation and reflection.	Practical assignment and methodological product.	Transformation of knowledge into an algorithm.
4. Microtest	Testing the method in a safe situation, then in a real group.	Video or observation recording.	Practical manifestation of professional action.
5. Mentoring	Planning, observation and reflexive interview.	Feedback on agreed action.	Identification of pedagogical decision.
6. Monitoring-correction	Analysis of pedagogical actions, child participation and methodological support.	Portfolio, child dynamics, team summary.	Further development goal and updated module.

The first distinctive feature of the model is its adaptability to needs. Instead of providing all teachers with the same amount of training, diagnostics determine which modules and to what extent they are needed. The second distinctive feature is the completion of each module with a practical product: a visual chart, an adapted game, an individual goal, a plan for an interview with parents or an observation note. The third distinctive feature is the interpretation of the result not limited to a test score, but through the real actions of the teacher and the participation of the child.

In the step-by-step mechanism proposed by F.R. Valiyeva, diagnostics and correction are shown as interconnected points [8]. In this article, this logic is transferred to the professional development cycle: correction is not the end, but the beginning of a new diagnosis. Thus, the model implies a transition from a one-time professional development event to a system of continuous methodological development within the organization.

Pedagogical and organizational conditions for implementing the model

The first condition is the pedagogical leadership of the leader. The director or methodologist should manage inclusive practice not only as a defectologist's task, but as a criterion for the quality of the organization. To do this, it is necessary to allocate time for peer observation and mentoring, form a methodological resource bank, agree on the role of specialists, and establish confidentiality rules. The Decree No. PF-19 of 2026 provides for the development of mechanisms such as mentor-trainers, cascade training, “Methodological Skills Day” and “Methodological Skills Hour”, which will allow the model to be embedded in the existing infrastructure [6].

The second condition is a single methodological standard for basic trainers. The cascade provides a wide scope, but the content may be simplified or misinterpreted as it progresses to the next stages. Therefore, in addition to the theoretical presentation, the trainer package should include cases, practical tasks, observation criteria, ethical situations, and sample methodological products. The trainer’s readiness is assessed not by giving lectures, but by conducting micro-lessons and providing evidence-based feedback.

The third condition is the transformation of mentoring from control to developmental communication. The mentor should not be an auditor who provides ready-made solutions, but a partner who monitors and determines the teacher’s decisions. Feedback is focused on the observed action, not on the individual. For example, instead of a general assessment of “you failed to adapt”, a reasoned conclusion is given, such as “the instructions were given only verbally, which made it difficult for two children to engage in the activity; visual support will be used in the next test.” The fourth condition is multidisciplinary cooperation. In a co-authored study, the cooperation of the teacher, defectologist, psychologist and parents is interpreted as a decisive factor in inclusive preschool practice [9]. Practical cooperation is not limited to a general meeting; it is agreed on a single goal, a division of tasks, the boundaries of information exchange about the child and a deadline for reviewing the result. The teacher must be able to pedagogically translate the specialist’s recommendations into daily play, activities in the centers and the agenda.

Outcome assessment and monitoring

The main unit of assessment in the model is not the completion of a certificate or course, but the change observed from the initial state. Monitoring is carried out at three levels: professional

activity at the teacher level, meaningful participation at the child level, and sustainability of methodological support at the organizational level. Such a multi-level approach reduces the risk of tying the outcome solely to the teacher's self-assessment or test score.

Table 2. Matrix for monitoring the results of the cascade mentoring model

Monitoring object	Indicator	Source of evidence	Management decision
Educator's movement	Evidence-based identification of needs; adaptation of tasks and environment; reflection.	Training observation, portfolio, case.	Setting the next individual professional goal.
Child participation	Entry into the activity, choice, communication, independence and continued participation.	Observation record, child activity product, parent opinion.	Updating the level of support or tool.
Collaboration	Shared purpose, division of tasks and regular feedback.	Team protocol, individual orientation, interview plan.	Clarifying coordination and accountability.
Organizational stability	Consistency of mentoring cycle, resource bank and cascade content.	Methodological plan, mentor's account, trainer's expertise.	Adjusting the module, resource, and trainer standard.

Data about the child are collected on the basis of confidentiality and pedagogical expediency. Ranking children against each other is contrary to the inclusive approach; the analysis is carried out in the sequence "initial state - pedagogical impact - intermediate result - further development task". If the expected change is not observed, this is not a reason to judge the child as incapable, but a signal to reconsider the goal, means, environment, instruction or level of support.

UNICEF materials emphasize that the continuous professional development of the educator is strengthened by peer support and support in the workplace [14]. Pijl also indicates the need for the joint formation of attitudes, knowledge and practical confidence in readiness for inclusive education [15]. From this point of view, monitoring should not be a punitive control, but a feedback mechanism that shows the educator the direction of further development.

Discussion. The advantage of the proposed model is that it links the existing cascade training and methodological days in the national system with the real tasks of inclusive practice. The model does not propose to create a separate parallel structure, but to integrate diagnostics, microtesting, mentoring and multi-source monitoring into the existing professional development and internal methodological work of the organization. This approach can provide a balance between territorial coverage and individual practical assistance.

However, cascade training has the risks of content distortion, mentoring turning into administrative control, excessive documentation and confidentiality in digital portfolios. To reduce them, a single trainer standard, a short observation protocol, mentor ethics, practical tasks to be examined and limits on the use of information are required. It is appropriate to assess the effectiveness of training not by the number of course participants, but by the degree to which the selected professional action is stabilized in group practice.

The limitation of the model is that it is still based on theoretical sources and pedagogical modeling. Further research should include pilot testing based on initial and final diagnostics, inter-expert reliability of observation, teacher portfolio, and child participation indicators. Comparing the dynamics of the experimental and control groups will help determine which element of the model - cascade, mentoring, or monitoring - has the greatest impact on the outcome.

Conclusions and practical recommendations. The sustainability of inclusive practice in preschool education is not ensured by simply providing theoretical knowledge to the teacher. A sustainable result requires that knowledge be tested in real situations, analyzed with a mentor, and updated based on evidence of child participation. On this basis, a model combining diagnostics, a base trainer, a modular cascade, microtesting, mentoring, monitoring, and correction was proposed.

Firstly, it is necessary to supplement the initial diagnostics of inclusive competence with case studies, observation, and methodological product analysis, not limited to testing.

Secondly, it is necessary to develop a methodological package for base trainers consisting of a single module, ethical criteria, practical assignments, and an observation protocol.

Thirdly, it is advisable for each teacher to microtest the learned method in a real group and conduct an evidence-based reflexive conversation with a mentor.

Fourthly, monitoring should cover pedagogical action, child participation, multidisciplinary cooperation, and the methodological sustainability of the organization.

Fifth, the next scientific task is to pilot-test the model in preschool educational organizations in several regions and statistically assess the reliability and impact of the indicators.

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