

# Directions and Practices for Implementing Early Care for Children with Developmental Disabilities in the Ukrainian and Swedish ECEC Systems

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**Abstract:** *Background:* This article explores the strategies and approaches used in Ukraine and Sweden's Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) systems for providing early care to children with developmental disabilities. It examines the similarities and differences in policies, legislation, professional training, family involvement, resource allocation, service provision, integration vs. segregation practices, and cultural attitudes toward disability between the two countries.

*Methods:* This study used questionnaires and surveys, analysis of learning outcomes, performance evaluation, and an expert evaluation method.

*Results:* The authors analyze Ukrainian best practices for implementing early care for children with developmental disabilities. In the example of the Swedish system and the context of a comparative investigation of early care for children with developmental disabilities in the countries under analysis, the authors pointed out the strengths and weaknesses of both systems and distinguished the similarities and differences. The theoretical study allowed the practical perspectives and critical Swedish practices that could be implemented in modern Ukrainian practices, among which the most relevant perspectives are those related to early intervention programs, individualized support plans, and fostering partnerships with community organizations and healthcare providers.

*Research Limitation:* The experimental part of the study included a relatively small sample size (50 respondents) and was characterized by a short duration (three months). This may limit the ability to generalize the results.

*Conclusions:* Additionally, the emphasis on inclusive curriculum and environments, as well as professional development opportunities for educators on inclusive practices, could significantly enhance modern Ukrainian practices in early care for children with developmental disabilities.

**Keywords:** Developmental disabilities, Ukrainian/Swedish, early childhood education and care (ECEC) system.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Promoting the development and support of children with health disabilities is one of modern society's most critical humanitarian missions. Nowadays, the study of the problem of early care and support of children with health disabilities is becoming especially relevant due to the increase in the incidence of these conditions and the expansion of scientific knowledge and technologies in this field. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), more than one billion people in the world

experience some form of disability, of which more than 93 million are children. These statistics indicate the need for urgent measures in the field of organization and provision of support for children with disabilities [1].

In the UN Strategy for Action on Childhood and Special Developmental Needs: All Children, All Rights, it is determined that the strategic priorities and measures of the UN to support the rights of children, including children with special needs, in the field of health care and rehabilitation are as follows: ensuring access to quality medical care, development of inclusive health care systems, supporting families and communities, development of innovative methods and approaches, ensuring access to rehabilitation services.

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Relevant: An analysis of the experience of other countries can help reveal the shortcomings of the Ukrainian system of early care and support for children with special needs. This will improve programs and policies in this area in Ukraine.

Despite the significance of researchers' scientific and practical achievements on the studied issue, there is a pressing need to develop a stable trend of positive dynamics in the effectiveness of early intervention for children with developmental disorders in the Ukrainian and Swedish preschool education systems.

The article aims to shed light on the effectiveness of early care practices for children with developmental disabilities in different cultural and socio-economic contexts, potentially providing insights for improving ECEC systems globally.

Implementing modern technologies, methods, and psychological and pedagogical support for individuals with a disharmonious personality composition involves multidimensionality and variability. Information and communication, gaming, interactive, project-based, and art-pedagogical technologies are appropriate for early corrective education for children with developmental disorders. In particular, gaming technologies promote the development of cognitive abilities and active interaction skills. Information and communication technologies contribute to expanding cognitive activities, communication skills, and the formation of social activity. Interactive technologies support the implementation of acquired skills in various areas. Quest technologies make the educational and corrective process unusual, vivid, and interesting, stimulating the participants' cognitive, speech, and intellectual processes. Artistic technologies help correct the psycho-emotional sphere, behavior, and personality.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In the Ukrainian educational and scientific space, the problem of early assistance and support for children with health disabilities is presented in the writings of Olena Polishchuk, who focuses on the problems of the development of children with special needs and early assistance in their upbringing and education [2]; Natalia Sofii and Yuliya Naida, whose scientific activity is aimed at analyzing the practice of early care and inclusive education in Ukraine [3]; Valentyna Tarasyuk, who studied psychological and pedagogical assistance to preschool children with

special needs: directions of implementation [4]. In a comparative aspect, the problem of optimizing and organizing the environment of children with special needs is partially presented in the works of Inna Rohalska-Yablonska, Natalia Melnyk, Hanna Tsvietkova, and others [5]. Moreover, Zayarnyuk O investigated the social protection problem of vulnerable population groups in Ukraine and abroad [6].

However, the problem of exchanging practices of implementing early care and accompanying children with special needs in Ukraine and abroad received insufficient coverage in the Ukrainian and European scientific space.

In this regard, a scientific study, presented in this article, was needed to consider current issues and challenges related to early care and support of children with health disabilities.

## 3. METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

The research methodology involved a case-control approach. For the theoretical study, a representative period from 2003 to 2023 was selected to analyze the directions of practical implementation of early intervention for children with developmental disorders in the Ukrainian and Swedish preschool education systems. For the experimental part of the study, a representative period of 3 months and a group of 50 respondents were chosen. During the study, questionnaires and surveys were used to assess the quality of educational and corrective work, as well as to check the condition of individuals with developmental disorders, analyze the effectiveness of technological elements, and assess the method of expert assessments.

The methodology of conducting the study included the research methods: questionnaires (surveys among specialists in the field of preschool education, parents of children with developmental disabilities and other interested persons to collect data on practices and directions of early care in both countries); observation (observation of the work of preschool education institutions in Ukraine and Sweden in order to identify the peculiarities of the organization and provide early assistance to children with developmental disabilities); interviews (conducting interviews with key professionals and representatives of education authorities in both countries to gain a deeper understanding of practices and policies related to early care); document analysis (research and analysis of legislation, policy strategies, programs and other

documents related to early care in both countries); comparative analysis (comparison of received data and research results regarding practices and areas of early aid in Ukraine and Sweden in order to identify similarities and differences); expert evaluations (engagement of experts in the field of early care and preschool education to analyse the received data and formulate recommendations for improving the system of early care in Ukraine based on the experience of Sweden).

In the course of the study, several methods were used, including:

- Questionnaires and surveys to assess the quality of educational and corrective work and to check the condition of individuals with disharmonious personalities;
- Analysis of the effectiveness of technological elements;
- A pedagogical experiment conducted with preschool students over three months, with the control group consisting of 25 students and the experimental group consisting of 25 students;
- Experimental research that involved conducting a control experiment to evaluate the effectiveness of the proposed psychological and pedagogical support elements using the Student's t-test.

In the initial stage of the experiment, the condition of individuals with disharmonious personalities was assessed. Responses were analyzed using a 0-2 scale, identifying basic, average, and high levels (see appendix). It was found that the levels of existing corrective educational influence of psychological and pedagogical support in the experimental and control groups are comparable and require effective adjustment.

The experimental method allowed for several improvements. In particular, information and communication technologies were used in multimedia presentations and slide shows, contributing to the expansion of cognitive activity, communication skills, and the formation of social activity.

Interactive technologies, such as situational modeling and collective-group learning, help apply acquired skills in various areas. Pair work, small group methods, "aquarium", "carousel", and "circle of ideas" methods were used.

Quest technologies, in the form of group quests, involve bringing children together into groups to complete specific tasks. In such quests, special attention should be paid to role distribution, developing cooperation skills, listening to others' opinions, and expressing one's opinion. This activity stimulated the participants' cognitive, speech, and intellectual processes.

Art technologies, including sculpting, drawing, and decorative arts, used in art therapy contributed to correcting the psycho-emotional sphere, behavior, and personality.

The effectiveness of the proposed technology was established by comparing the levels of corrective-educational influence of psychological and pedagogical support.

Indicators of the effectiveness of the corrective-educational influence of psychological and pedagogical support in the experimental and control groups were compared (using the Student's t-test), establishing the effectiveness of the proposed technology.

Measures were taken during the study to protect the privacy and confidentiality of the participants and ensure the consent of parents (guardians).

The preschool pedagogy issues were studied under real pedagogical conditions, with the knowledge of parents and educators.

The criteria for selecting respondents were:

- The presence of diagnosed developmental process disorders in children;
- preschool age of the child;
- The ability of the child to regularly attend sessions to ensure the representativeness of the experimental and control samples.

The chosen duration of the study was three months, as the success of a pedagogical study requires its connection with practice. The specific nature of the study is due to the uneven progression of educational and developmental processes and the unpredictability of their outcomes. A three-month study aims to gather diverse data on the dynamics of pedagogical phenomena, considering the conditions in which they operate. Pedagogical study results usually require prolonged verification since they do not manifest immediately. Therefore, three months is the recommended period for implementing significant

innovations in pedagogical practice to form conclusions about their effectiveness.

#### 4. RESULTS

Investigation of peculiarities of directions and practices for implementing early care for children with developmental disabilities in the Ukrainian and Swedish ECEC systems

##### Ukrainian Context

In recent decades, the education system has created conditions for providing psychological-pedagogical and medical-social assistance to children with developmental disabilities and their parents. In the practical psychology service activities, the principles of corrective-developmental and compensatory training, individual psychological-pedagogical and medical-social assistance to the child are implemented; elements of early diagnosis and correction of deviations in development are being developed; methods of cooperation with the family are being developed. The network of psychological-medical-pedagogical consultations, which carries out a comprehensive, holistic, and systematic study of a child whose developmental abnormalities have been identified by parents, doctors, or psychologists, is receiving further development.

These practices aim to identify developmental delays, disabilities, or other special needs in children at an early age to facilitate timely interventions and support. These assessments are conducted by multidisciplinary teams of professionals such as pediatricians, psychologists, speech therapists, occupational therapists, and special educators. Specialized assessments aim to comprehensively understand the child's strengths, challenges, and support needs: Psychological and Educational Assessments, Parental Involvement, Interdisciplinary Collaboration, and Individualised Intervention Planning. Overall, early diagnostic practices for children with special needs in Ukraine prioritize early identification, interdisciplinary collaboration, parental involvement, and individualized intervention planning to promote optimal developmental outcomes and support the well-being of children with special needs and their families [7-11].

##### Swedish Context

The Swedish universal ECEC system is regulated by the Swedish Education Act (2020) and includes all

children aged 1–5 years. It is the first part of lifelong learning within the Swedish educational system. Over 85% of Swedish children aged one to five are enrolled in preschool, and over 95% of those aged four to five. The preschool curriculum is decided by the government [12] and is based on holistic, inclusive, and ecological approaches. Children's well-being, development, and learning become central issues in an inclusive preschool. All children are entitled to receive support and be presented with the educational challenges they are perceived to need [13]. The concepts of inclusion and inclusive education were central parts of the agreements in the Salamanca Statement [1]. Inclusion can be defined as something qualitatively different from integration since inclusion requires that all children are seen as a part of the whole [14] and that education suits all [15]. Inclusion is closely linked to democracy, equal rights, and participation [14].

Emphases differ across studies, leading to varying presentations of theoretical and analytical foundations. Some researchers employ discourse analysis, while others favor a phenomenological approach or combine phenomenology with hermeneutics. Furthermore, some studies adopt a narrative approach as central, while others conduct statistical analyses to measure significance or assess the effects of interventions without explicit theoretical grounding.

The table provides insights into the diverse theoretical frameworks researchers employ in their studies, ranging from descriptive phenomenology to critical realism, encompassing various sociocultural, poststructuralist, and constructionist perspectives, among others.

In most studies (29 out of 31), researchers prioritized capturing professionals' perspectives, particularly teachers (25). This was achieved through various means, such as conducting interviews with teachers and other professional groups, including special educators, and utilizing surveys and questionnaires (refer to Table 1 for details).

In Sweden, early diagnostic practices for children with special needs are comprehensive and child-centred. They aim to identify developmental challenges as early as possible to facilitate timely interventions and support. Here is an overview of the early diagnostic practices in Sweden: Universal Healthcare System, Developmental Monitoring, Early Intervention Services, Comprehensive Assessment,

**Table 1: Theoretical Frameworks Employed by Researchers**

Author(s)	Theories, Theoretical Analysis Tools, Theoretical Influence(r)s or Similar
Åmot (2012)	Descriptive phenomenology
Arnesen (2014)	There is no prominent theory. Brief mention of learning theory as part of ABA
Björklund (2012)	Variation theory of learning, phenomenography
Bygdeson-Larsson	Activity theory (Engeström, EPR model), hermeneutics, sociocultural theory, object relations theory (Winnicott)
Cameron and Tveit (2011)	Lipsky and Habermas
Drugli, Clifford, and Larsson (2008)	Grounded theory
Fisker (2010)	Metatheoretical developmental perspective, Vygotsky, Sommer
Gjermestad	Theories about dyadic relations, intersubjectivity and learning, phenomenology, and hermeneutics
Hagström (2010)	Range of different theories on teachers' learning, attachment theory, and affect theory.
Hillesøy, Johansson, and Ohna (2014)	Sociocultural theory
Holst (2008)	No obvious theory
Holst and Pihlaja (2011)	No obvious theory
Kristoffersen and Simonsen (2013)	Ethnography, sociocultural theory
Kristoffersen and Simonsen (2014)	Ethnography, sociocultural theory
Lansheim (2010)	Social constructionism, Mead, Foucault, and more
Lillvist (2010)	System theory
Lindqvist (2013)	Critical pragmatism, Cherryholmes, Skrtic, Abbott
Luttrupp (2011)	Developmental ecology
Lutz (2006)	Social constructionism, critical discourse analysis, Fairclough, Foucault, organization theory, Giddens
Lutz (2009)	Social constructionism, critical discourse analysis, Fairclough, Foucault, organization theory, Giddens
Melin (2013)	Critical realism
Palla (2011)	Poststructuralism, discourse analysis, Foucault, Butler
Sajaniemi, Suhonen, and Kontu (2010)	No obvious theory
Sandberg and Ottosson (2010)	Phenomenology
Siljehag (2007)	Critical social theory
Svensson (2013)	Theories regarding child abuse, the ecology model
Tveit and Cameron (2012)	Ethnography, deliberative communication
von Ahlefeld Nisser (2009)	Social constructionism, deliberative communication, theory of argumentation by Habermas, critical theory, discourse analysis
Warming (2011)	Discourse analysis, Fairclough, Foucault, Giddens, Bourdieu
Westman Andersson (2013)	No obvious theory
Wetso (2006)	'Ethnography'. Leading theory: Activity theory (Vygotsky, Leontiev, Elkonin)

Interdisciplinary Collaboration, Family-Centered Approach, Individualised Intervention Planning, Continued Monitoring and Support.

Sweden's early diagnostic practices for children with special needs prioritize early identification, interdisciplinary collaboration, family involvement, and individualized intervention planning to promote optimal

developmental outcomes and support the well-being of children and families.

The ascertaining stage of the experiment showed that the levels of corrective-educational influence of psychological and pedagogical support in the experimental and control groups are comparable and require effective adjustment. Three levels were

identified: high (learning coefficient from 1 to 0.7), medium (learning coefficient from 0.69 to 0.40), and initial (learning coefficient from 0.39 to 0.0).

After completing the experiment, it was found that there were significant changes in the studied subgroups. In particular, in the experimental group, the indicators of the primary learning level increased by 25%, and in the control group, by 18%. Meanwhile, the indicators of the medium level in the experimental groups increased by 24% and in the control groups by 17.1%. At the high level, the indicator in the experimental groups increased by 24.8% and in the control groups by 11%. The result calculated using the Student's t-test is 19.3. Since the empirical value of  $t$  (19.3) falls within the significance zone; the proposed technology's effectiveness can be asserted.

In conclusion, it can be stated that the application of various potentials of corrective-developmental technologies for early intervention for children with developmental disabilities in the Ukrainian preschool education system depends on considering the psychophysical capabilities of students. It will contribute to the intensification and improvement of the quality of the educational process and the preparation of students for social adaptation.

## 5. DISCUSSION

A comparison of the directions and practices for implementing early care for children with developmental disabilities in the Ukrainian and Swedish Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) systems reveals both similarities and differences [16-18].

In summary, while Ukraine and Sweden emphasize multidisciplinary collaboration, the degree of integration of children with developmental disabilities into mainstream classrooms varies between the two countries. This discrepancy reflects differing approaches to inclusive education and highlights the importance of examining policies and their implementation in practice [19-21].

Variations in societal acceptance, stigma, and attitudes towards inclusive education and integration influence the experiences of children with developmental disabilities and their families [22, 23]. Addressing these cultural factors is essential for creating truly inclusive environments where all children feel valued and supported, irrespective of their abilities.

In order to enhance early care for children with developmental disabilities in Ukraine's Early Childhood

Education and Care (ECEC) system, several vital practices could be implemented [25-28]:

1. **Inclusive Policies and Legislation:** Strengthen policies and legislation to ensure the rights of children with developmental disabilities to access inclusive education.
2. **Professional Development:** Provide specialized training and professional development opportunities for educators and caregivers on inclusive practices, strategies for supporting children with developmental disabilities, and early intervention techniques.
3. **Resource Allocation:** Increase funding and resource allocation for special education services within the ECEC system.
4. **Early Intervention Programs:** Implement early intervention programs to identify and support children with developmental disabilities at an early age.
5. **Individualised Support Plans:** Develop individualized support plans tailored to the unique needs and strengths of children with developmental disabilities.
6. **Family Involvement:** Foster collaboration and partnership with families of children with developmental disabilities.
7. **Community Partnerships:** Forge partnerships with community organizations, healthcare providers, and disability advocacy groups to enhance support services and resources available to children with developmental disabilities and their families.
8. **Inclusive Curriculum and Environment:** Ensure that ECEC settings are inclusive and accessible to children with developmental disabilities.

The research results confirm the effectiveness of early intervention for children with developmental disabilities in preschool education systems. According to scientists [29], it should include the comprehensive implementation of assistance. The main psychological and pedagogical support task for a child with developmental disabilities is to conduct corrective developmental activities using interactive, communicative technologies.

As scientific developments [30] indicate, it is essential to involve all participants in the educational

**Table 2: Comparison of Early Care Practices for Children with Developmental Disabilities in Ukraine and Sweden**

Aspect	Ukraine	Sweden
<b>Similarities</b>		
Inclusive Policies	Emphasises inclusive education	Emphasises inclusive education
Legislation	Supports the rights of children with disabilities	Supports the rights of children with disabilities
Professional Training	Educators receive training on inclusive practices	Educators receive training on inclusive practices
Family Involvement	Encourages family involvement	Encourages family involvement
<b>Differences</b>		
Resource Allocation	May face budget constraints and shortages	Generous social welfare system, potentially more resources available
Service Provision	Services may be limited in scope and accessibility	A more comprehensive range of specialized services, including early intervention programs, therapy, and assistive technology
Integration vs. Segregation	May rely on segregated, unique education settings	Strong emphasis on integration into mainstream classrooms
Cultural Attitudes	Cultural attitudes may vary, influencing societal acceptance and stigma	Cultural attitudes may vary, influencing societal acceptance and stigma

process and corrective psychological activities to optimize the processes of personal development, communication, learning, social adaptation, and the realization of individual potential. The data obtained for diagnosing and treating intellectual disabilities indicate that psychological and pedagogical support should be implemented according to a specific algorithmic sequence, which includes a social and psychological adaptation of children with developmental disabilities, development of an individual educational and corrective process, monitoring the dynamics of psychosocial development, and developing long-term personal development planning [31-34].

The study is characterized by limitations in sample size and data collection methods, considering the respondents' age.

The proposed innovative adaptive technologies for teaching children with disharmonious personal composition require further scientific development.

## 6. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, comparing the directions and practices for implementing early care for children with developmental disabilities in the Ukrainian and Swedish Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) systems reveals several essential insights.

Firstly, both countries are committed to inclusive education, emphasizing the importance of integrating children with developmental disabilities into mainstream educational settings whenever feasible [35-37].

However, differences exist in the implementation of inclusive practices. Sweden, with its well-established social welfare system, may have more excellent resources for supporting children with disabilities than Ukraine, where budget constraints and resource shortages may pose challenges [38-40].

Moreover, the degree of integration of children with developmental disabilities into mainstream classrooms may vary between the two countries. While Sweden may prioritize integration, Ukraine may still rely on segregated, unique education settings for some children. Additionally, cultural attitudes and perceptions towards disability may differ, influencing societal acceptance, stigma, and attitudes toward inclusive education and integration [41-45].

In summary, while both Ukraine and Sweden strive towards inclusive education for children with developmental disabilities, there are differences in resource allocation, service provision, integration practices, and cultural attitudes. By recognizing these differences and sharing best practices, both countries can work towards creating more inclusive and equitable Early Childhood Education and Care systems that meet the diverse needs of all children.

The proposed concept of early intervention for children with developmental disabilities in preschool education systems includes various tools, such as introducing adaptive individualized learning technologies, using stimulation practices and multimedia materials, and implementing problem-oriented correction methods.

After the experiment, it was found that significant changes occurred in the concept of increasing learning indicators in the studied subgroups. According to the Student's t-test, the result of the calculation lies within the significance zone, indicating the effectiveness of the proposed technology. Clearly, with the effective implementation of early intervention for children with developmental disabilities in preschool education systems, it is quite possible to improve the level of mastery of communication skills and social behavior, which is an indicator and result of the overall mental development of the child.

## RESEARCH LIMITATION

The article investigates the potential of modern methods for providing early intervention to children with developmental disorders and the approaches used in early childhood education and care systems. The experimental part of the study included a relatively small sample size (50 respondents) and was characterized by a short duration (three months). This may limit the ability to generalize the results.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors confirm no conflict of interest concerning the data presented in this paper.

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