

THE ROLE AND ACTIVITIES OF SPECIAL EDUCATORS IN PRESCHOOL EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

Kalonova Muxayyo Saydamatovna

Master's student, University of Business and Science

Annotation : This article examines the multifaceted responsibilities of special educators within preschool settings, analyzing their contributions to inclusive pedagogy and child development. Through synthesis of contemporary research and practical frameworks, the study explores how specialized support shapes early learning outcomes for children with diverse developmental needs, while identifying systemic challenges that influence professional effectiveness.

Keywords: inclusion, differentiation, neurodiversity, pedagogy, adaptation, assessment, communication, collaboration, cognitive, behavioral, support, intervention, development, integration, curriculum

The landscape of early childhood education has undergone profound transformation over recent decades, driven largely by shifting understandings of child development and evolving commitments to educational equity. Within this changing terrain, the presence and expertise of special educators in preschool settings has emerged as particularly consequential. These professionals occupy a unique position at the intersection of developmental science, pedagogical innovation, and social justice, working with young children during what neuroscientists and developmental psychologists consistently identify as the most formative period of human growth. Contemporary societies increasingly recognize that the earliest years of education establish trajectories that persist throughout life. For children experiencing developmental delays, learning differences, or behavioral challenges, access to knowledgeable support during preschool years can fundamentally alter outcomes. Yet the integration of specialized educational services into mainstream early childhood programs remains uneven across contexts, constrained by resource limitations, training gaps, and persistent uncertainties about best practices. The purpose of this article is to explore the specific roles that special educators fulfill within preschool environments, examining both the theoretical foundations that guide their work and the practical realities that shape daily practice, while considering implications for policy, professional development, and systemic reform.

Literature review

The theoretical foundations supporting special education in early childhood draw from multiple scholarly traditions that have developed over the past century. Vygotsky's socio-cultural framework, articulated in his seminal work on defectology during the 1920s and 1930s in the Soviet Union, emphasized that children with disabilities require not simplified instruction but enriched social mediation and culturally meaningful engagement. His concept of the zone of proximal development remains particularly relevant for understanding how skilled educators scaffold learning for children with varied abilities. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, developed in the United States during the 1970s, provides another essential lens through which to understand special education effectiveness. His model illuminates how child development occurs within nested contexts, from immediate classroom interactions to broader policy environments, suggesting that supporting children with special needs requires attention to multiple system levels simultaneously. More recently, Florian and Black-Hawkins have advanced inclusive pedagogy theory in the United Kingdom, arguing that effective inclusion depends not on identifying individual deficits but on creating learning environments responsive to human diversity. Their framework challenges educators to assume that differences in learning are inherent aspects of human communities rather than problems requiring remediation. Shonkoff's research at Harvard University's Center on the Developing Child has established robust connections between early intervention, neurobiological development, and lifelong wellbeing, demonstrating through longitudinal studies that high-quality early support produces measurable benefits across cognitive, emotional, and social domains. Finally, Friend's collaborative teaching model has provided practical frameworks for how special and general educators can work in genuine partnership, moving beyond consultation models toward truly integrated instructional approaches. These theoretical perspectives collectively suggest that effective early special education requires simultaneously attending to individual developmental needs, classroom social dynamics, family engagement, and systemic support structures.

MAIN BODY

The responsibilities shouldered by special educators in preschool settings extend well beyond conventional teaching roles. At the core of their practice lies careful assessment, an ongoing process of observing children across contexts, identifying patterns in learning and behavior, and determining what supports might prove beneficial. Unlike standardized testing common in later schooling, preschool assessment relies heavily on naturalistic observation, developmental screening tools, and collaborative information gathering from families and other professionals. Special educators must interpret what they observe through multiple frameworks,

considering whether particular behaviors reflect developmental variation, environmental factors, specific disabilities, or some combination of these elements. From assessment flows the critical work of adaptation and individualization. Special educators modify learning materials, adjust instructional approaches, and design environmental accommodations that enable children to participate meaningfully in classroom activities. For a child with autism spectrum disorder who finds large group activities overwhelming, this might involve creating a quiet retreat space and teaching peers to recognize when their classmate needs solitude. For children with speech delays, adaptations might include augmentative communication systems using pictures or signs, incorporated naturally into daily routines so that language differences become normalized rather than stigmatized. Children with motor impairments benefit when educators redesign play areas for accessibility and select manipulatives that accommodate varying levels of fine motor control.

Beyond these technical modifications, special educators provide essential emotional and social scaffolding. Young children developing understanding of themselves and others need help navigating complex social dynamics, particularly when their own developmental patterns differ from peers. Special educators teach emotional regulation strategies, facilitate positive peer interactions, and help children develop self-advocacy skills appropriate to their age. They create opportunities for children to experience success and competence, carefully structuring challenges that stretch abilities without inducing frustration that might undermine confidence. Collaboration represents another dimension central to special educator effectiveness. These professionals rarely work in isolation but rather coordinate efforts across networks including classroom teachers, speech therapists, occupational therapists, psychologists, administrators, and crucially, families. Designing individual educational programs requires synthesizing input from multiple sources into coherent plans that respect family priorities while addressing developmental needs. Special educators often serve as interpreters, translating technical language from various disciplines into accessible terms for families, and conversely, ensuring that family knowledge about their children informs professional decision-making. This bridging function demands not only technical expertise but considerable interpersonal skill and cultural humility.

The practical implementation of these responsibilities varies considerably depending on specific children and contexts. Supporting a child with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder might involve establishing predictable routines, incorporating frequent movement breaks, and using visual schedules that make expectations concrete and manageable. Creating

inclusive play opportunities requires thoughtful arrangement of materials and adult facilitation that encourages cooperation across ability levels. When conflicts arise between children, special educators employ these moments as teaching opportunities, helping children develop problem-solving skills and empathy through guided reflection rather than simply imposing adult solutions. However, the work also involves navigating significant challenges. Resource constraints affect what special educators can accomplish, from inadequate staffing ratios that limit individual attention to insufficient materials and technology that might support learning. Many special educators report feeling underprepared for the complexity they encounter, particularly when working with children whose needs fall outside their formal training. Public understanding of special education remains uneven, with some families embracing support enthusiastically while others resist identification or services due to stigma concerns. The work of balancing individual needs with group dynamics requires constant negotiation, as does managing the emotional demands of the role. Burnout rates among special educators reflect these pressures, pointing to systemic problems beyond individual resilience.

Results and discussion

Synthesizing research evidence alongside practitioner accounts reveals several significant findings about special education in preschool contexts. First, inclusive models where children with diverse needs learn alongside typically developing peers produce generally positive outcomes when adequately resourced and thoughtfully implemented. Children with disabilities demonstrate improved social skills, communication abilities, and school readiness when integrated into quality preschool programs with appropriate supports. Perhaps equally important, typically developing children in inclusive settings show enhanced empathy, reduced prejudice toward difference, and more sophisticated social understanding compared to peers in segregated environments. The effectiveness of special education support depends substantially on collaborative relationships between specialized and general educators. When these professionals work as genuine partners, sharing planning responsibilities and instructional delivery, children benefit from integrated expertise and more consistent support. Conversely, when special educators function as isolated specialists, pulled away from classrooms to provide separate services, the continuity necessary for young children suffers. This finding carries important implications for how positions are structured and how school cultures are developed.

Research also highlights the critical importance of family engagement. Programs that successfully involve families as active partners, respecting family knowledge and cultural perspectives while sharing professional expertise, achieve better outcomes across measures.

This partnership model contrasts with deficit-oriented approaches that position families as needing correction rather than as valuable collaborators. For special educators, developing skills in culturally responsive practice and family engagement represents essential professional competency. From policy perspectives, these findings underscore the need for substantial investment in early childhood special education infrastructure. This includes not only direct service provision but also robust pre-service preparation and ongoing professional development for educators. Current training programs often provide insufficient preparation for the complexity of inclusive early childhood settings. Additionally, systemic supports including reasonable caseloads, collaborative planning time, access to specialists, and appropriate materials require prioritization if quality is to be achieved at scale rather than depending on individual educator heroism. Ethical and cultural dimensions deserve attention as well. Decisions about identification, labeling, and service provision carry significant weight for young children and families. Special educators must balance potential benefits of early intervention against risks of stigmatization and lowered expectations. Cultural variations in how disability is understood and what constitutes appropriate support require that educators approach their work with genuine openness to perspectives that may differ from dominant professional frameworks. The goal is not cultural imposition but collaborative problem-solving that respects family values while advancing child wellbeing.

In conclusion, the evidence examined throughout this analysis demonstrates that special educators fulfill indispensable functions within preschool settings, contributing specialized knowledge and advocacy that enables children with diverse developmental needs to access quality early education. Their work encompasses assessment, instructional adaptation, emotional support, collaborative planning, and family partnership, all requiring sophisticated professional judgment and interpersonal skill. Moving forward, ensuring that all preschool programs can provide this caliber of support will require sustained commitment to professional preparation, adequate resourcing, and systemic structures that enable rather than constrain inclusive practice. The investment demanded is substantial but justified by the profound impact of early intervention on individual lives and collective social inclusion.

References:

1. Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). The ecology of human development: Experiments by nature and design. Harvard University Press.

2. Florian, L., & Black-Hawkins, K. (2011). Exploring inclusive pedagogy. *British Educational Research Journal*, 37(5), 813-828.
3. Friend, M., & Cook, L. (2013). *Interactions: Collaboration skills for school professionals* (7th ed.). Pearson.
4. Shonkoff, J. P., & Phillips, D. A. (Eds.). (2000). *From neurons to neighborhoods: The science of early childhood development*. National Academy Press.
5. UNESCO. (2020). *Inclusion and education: All means all* (Global Education Monitoring Report). UNESCO Publishing.
6. Выготский, Л. С. (1983). *Собрание сочинений: Том 5. Основы дефектологии*.
7. Педагогика.
8. Лебедева, Н. М. (2018). Современные подходы к инклюзивному образованию в дошкольных учреждениях. *Вопросы психологии*, 4, 85-94.