# THE IMPACT OF A LEADER'S EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE ON THE MANAGEMENT OF AN INCLUSIVE EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT IN PRESCHOOL EDUCATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

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**Abstract.** This article examines the impact of the emotional intelligence of the organization's leader on the management of an inclusive educational environment in preschool educational organizations based on an analysis of scientific literature. The relevance of the study is that the implementation of inclusive education is often viewed as a resource or regulatory issue, while foreign studies indicate the personal-psychological, in particular, emotional competence of the leader as one of the main factors determining the success of inclusive practice. Although the general positive attitude of leaders towards inclusion is widespread, this attitude is often implemented without sufficient emotional preparation, as a result of which leaders suffer from a lack of methodological and emotional support. The four components of emotional intelligence — self-awareness, self-management, social sensitivity and relationship management — are relevant to the management of inclusive education.

**Keywords:** emotional intelligence, inclusive education, preschool education, leadership psychology, educational management, children with disabilities, inclusive management, pedagogical leadership, special needs.

Inclusive education is a concept aimed at ensuring the equal participation of children with special educational needs in the general (public) educational environment, and it is proven that inclusive experience, starting in preschool age, has a long-term positive impact on the child's subsequent socio-educational trajectory. The head of an educational organization plays a central role in the successful implementation of inclusive education practices: he or she manages the organizational culture, resource allocation, and professional development of employees. However, the leader's success in this regard depends not only on his or her regulatory and legal knowledge or administrative experience, but also on his or her emotional competence — including the ability to perceive and respond appropriately to the emotional needs of various stakeholders (educators, parents, specialists).

A leader's overall positive attitude towards inclusion is not enough in itself – the quality of an inclusive environment depends more on the leader's level of emotional intelligence, in particular, his or her ability to remain calm in conflict situations and to establish empathetic communication with different parties.

Turkish scholar Balikci and other authors note that leaders perceive their role in inclusive education in two ways: some see themselves as actively influencing, instructive leaders, while others see themselves more as supportive, guiding educators. This diversity in the perception of this role, according to the scholars, indicates the importance of collaboration and flexibility in leadership styles – which are direct manifestations of emotional intelligence.

A study conducted in Turkey examined the attitudes of preschool leaders towards the inclusion of children with disabilities, and found that, in addition to factors such as the leader's level of education, experience, and urban or rural location, their level of intercultural sensitivity and empathy were important determinants of attitudes. Similarly, in a qualitative study conducted with preschool leaders in the United States, leaders identified the emotional readiness of staff and the leader's own psychological readiness, rather than a lack of resources, as the greatest barriers to implementing inclusive education.

A large-scale study conducted at the level of educators (with the participation of 1087 educators in China) found that the attitude of inclusive group educators to inclusion was higher on the dimensions of "resistance" and "advocacy" than that of ordinary group educators, that is, practical experience strengthened the attitude in two directions - both positively and negatively. This result shows that the inclusive experience of educators does not in itself guarantee a positive attitude - the emotional and methodological support provided to them by the leader is of decisive importance. It is here that the emotional intelligence of the leader comes into play as a mediating factor. The concept of "emotional intelligence" is relatively new and is interpreted differently by different authors. In particular, the concept of "emotional intelligence" is considered to be closely related to the concepts of "general (cognitive) intelligence" and "social intelligence". O.K. Tikhomirov, studying the features of emotional thinking, noted that emotional states are directly integrated into the problem-solving process and perform various controlling and heuristic functions in thinking. In particular, he paid special attention to the involvement of emotional activity in the process of searching for a solution to a problem and the phenomenon of emotional anticipation of a solution. Emotional intelligence is usually considered to consist of four components: self-awareness, self-control, social sensitivity (empathy) and relationship management. Educators working in an inclusive environment — due to their additional emotional load (working with children with special needs, delicate communication with parents) — may need this type of emotional support from the leader more than other employees.

Another study also confirmed that the emotional intelligence of the leader directly affects the organizational climate and the style of conflict management. Conflicts are generally more common in inclusive education environments. For example, conflicting expectations between parents (parents of children with special needs and typically developing children) and dissatisfaction of the educator due to additional workload are key indicators. A leader with high emotional intelligence can manage such conflicts in an emotionally safe, collaborative way, which ensures the sustainability of inclusive education practices.

Inclusive education management is, by its very nature, a specific form of transformational leadership - because it encourages employees to abandon traditional practices and adopt new, child-specific approaches, which requires specific emotional competence.

Based on the analyzed sources, the four components of emotional intelligence were linked to specific functional tasks of inclusive education management in a preschool educational organization (Table 1).

| **EI component** | **Role in inclusive education management** | **Expected outcome** |
|---|---|---|
| Self- | Conscious recognition of the leader's | Objective decision- |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| awareness | own expectations and concerns regarding children with disabilities or special needs | making free from stereotypes |
| Self-management | Maintaining calm in complex, conflicting situations (parental objections, lack of resources) | A stable, consistent management style |
| Empathy | Clear perception of the emotional needs of educators, parents and children | A collaborative environment based on trust |
| Relationship management | Coordinating communication between different stakeholders (educator, specialist, parents) | Sustainable implementation of inclusive education practices |

*Table 1. Relevance of emotional intelligence components to inclusive management tasks in preschool education*

The main result of this systematization is that there is a gap between the declarative (verbal) positive attitude of the leader towards inclusion and his practical-managerial competence: as shown in the Balikci review, leaders often recognize the importance of inclusion, but in practice they face difficulties in managing it - especially in conflict situations. This difficulty, according to the analyzed sources, is explained by traditional training programs that focus more on the administrative-normative preparation of the leader, rather than on the emotional (self-management, empathy).

Analysis of data in our republic shows that in recent years, the institutional framework in the field of inclusive education has been significantly strengthened, an example of which is the beginning of the inclusive education reform, which is reflected in the Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan “On Preschool Education and Training” No. 595 adopted on December 16, 2019, and the Resolution of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan “On measures to further improve the system of education and training for children with special educational needs” No. 4860 dated October 13, 2020. In the preschool education system, specialized centers such as “Imkon” and “Umid” provide services to children aged 2–7, and approximately half of the children registered in them are children with disabilities, 91 percent of whom use free services.

The results confirm that the successful implementation of inclusive education is not only an infrastructural or regulatory issue, but also deeply depends on the personal and psychological preparation of the leader. In particular, the emotional intelligence of the leader - his ability to perceive the emotional needs of employees and parents and maintain a calm, cooperative position in conflict situations - is manifested as an "invisible" factor ensuring the stability of inclusive practice.

The specificity of preschool education - daily, high-intensity emotional contact with children and their parents - further increases the demands on the emotional intelligence of the leader compared to a general education school. For parents, a conversation about the special needs of their child is an extremely delicate and emotionally difficult situation, and the skills of conducting such a conversation are almost not covered in standard administrative training programs. The problem of "leaders' own emotional readiness" may be especially relevant in preschool education.

The analysis showed that managing an inclusive learning environment in preschool educational organizations is deeply dependent not only on the administrative and normative knowledge of the leader, but also on his emotional intelligence - self-awareness, self-management, empathy and relationship management skills. In order for the widespread positive attitude of leaders towards inclusion to become a sustainable result in practice, it must be further strengthened by appropriate emotional competence.

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