



Effective strategies for training future preschool education specialists in crises

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Suggested Citation:

Zahorodnia, L. (2025). Effective strategies for training future preschool education specialists in crises. *World Journal on Educational Technology: Current Issues*, 17(1), 49-57. <https://doi.org/10.18844/wjet.v17i1.8580>

Received on July 2, 2024; revised on September 18, 2024; accepted on January 15, 2025.

Selection and peer review under the responsibility of *Prof. Dr. Huseyin Uzunboylu*, University of Kyrenia, Cyprus

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Abstract

Under the conditions of martial law in Ukraine, the organization of work in preschool educational institutions has undergone significant changes, particularly in the processes of professional development and the informational and methodological support provided to pedagogical staff. This study aims to assess the key features of professional and personal training for future preschool education specialists during crises, identify effective forms of such training, and analyze perspectives from both future specialists and their educators on critical practical aspects. The research employed methods of analysis, synthesis, generalization, and bibliographic review. Findings reveal that the training of preschool education specialists requires substantial improvement to adapt to the evolving challenges of modern realities. Ensuring high-quality preschool education in wartime conditions demands additional professional knowledge and skills. This necessitates collaborative efforts among practicing teachers, researchers, methodological services, and educational stakeholders to develop and implement enhanced training programs. The study concludes with recommendations to strengthen professional development frameworks for preschool education specialists, focusing on the integration of practical and theoretical expertise tailored to crisis contexts.

Keywords: Crisis; preschool education; specialists; training.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The inevitable changes taking place in the world economy, science, and technology pose essential and complex tasks for modern education: to educate and cultivate a comprehensively developed, independent, self-sufficient person who is guided in life by his knowledge and beliefs, can live and act effectively in conditions of changing coordinates, directing his efforts to constant self-improvement. Such a person should be able to search for the optimal way of personal development and professional improvement and carry out innovative activities in the conditions of dynamic development of society (Dong, 2018).

In particular, children of preschool age are one of the most vulnerable groups of the population in the conditions of martial law. Consequently, the adults accompanying them must possess the necessary knowledge to ensure normal conditions for an unprotected preschool child who is in a state of constant stress, development, and learning. In new social conditions, children forcibly resettled from the zone of active hostilities face the problem of social adaptation. Therefore, the educator should be able to relieve feelings of anxiety, tension, fear, and insecurity and establish the process of the child's full socialization (Enochsson & Ribaeus, 2021).

Currently, a significant task of preschool education is to unite the efforts of authorities, educational institutions, and the public to ensure the necessary conditions for the development, upbringing, and full socialization of children and the creation of a safe educational environment. In the conditions of the crisis in many world countries, the organization of work with personnel has also changed, particularly, in preschool teachers' professional development, and informational and methodological support (Forsling, 2021). The crisis state of preschool education institutions nowadays is expressed through the deterioration of their activities. They are becoming uncompetitive in the educational market, which can lead to a reduction in work or the liquidation of the educational institution (Lindeman et al., 2021; Mangen et al., 2019).

A preschool educational institution, as the initial link in the educational system, is the establishment ensuring the implementation of the child's right to preschool education, his physical, mental, and spiritual development, social adaptation, and readiness to continue learning (Wang, 2022). Currently, the status of educational institutions is determined by the quality of the educational services they provide. Accordingly, heads and the pedagogical staff are faced with the task of searching for meaningful landmarks, and new forms of learning that determine the identity, "own face", mission, and vision of the institution (Magen-Nagar & Firstater, 2019).

Currently, in the conditions of social change, the role of a teacher, including preschool education institutions, is changing significantly. They are not perceived as the only mentors and sources of knowledge but as coaches, tutors, and moderators on the child's educational path. A modern teacher should constantly acquire and generalize new knowledge from various sources. They should possess knowledge transfer technologies in such a way that children develop the ability to search for information, produce, compare, systematize, and use new knowledge in life. This requires a new way of thinking, and a new perception of the pedagogical process on the part of the teachers (Mertala, 2019; Parker, 2022; Sağlam et al., 2023).

The presence of new pedagogical ideas in the professional training of future specialists in preschool education institutions and studying the ways of their implementation does not ensure a complete renewal of the preschool education system. Professional motivation and the implementation of practical skills, formed in the process of professional training of the future specialist, are necessary for successful activity. This process is most effectively conducted under the condition of implementing the competency-based approach in solving pedagogical tasks of preschool education specialists' professional training.

The theoretical part of this research substantiates the components and procedure of training preschool education specialists. The practical part of the research includes an assessment of the most important negative changes in the preschool education system caused by economic, political, and non-security crises. It comprises particular aspects of a pedagogical worker's competence training, considering the need to conduct effective work in preschool education institutions under conditions of crises, and a comparative performance assessment of

methodical approaches to training preschool education specialists. It also highlights the most effective modern forms and the most relevant innovative teaching methods of preschool education specialists' methodical training in crises.

Based on the research results, conclusions were made regarding the issues raised during the survey. In particular, it has been established that the most significant negative changes in the preschool education system are the decline in the material and technical base of preschool educational institutions and the violation of work safety because of social-political and security crises in the world. At the same time, the survey participants consider innovative professional abilities, sociability, the ability for pedagogical interaction, and self-education and self-improvement to be the most significant professional and personal competencies of a pedagogical worker's training. Comparing the effectiveness of the basic methodical approaches to training a preschool education specialist, both students and their teachers singled out activity and competency-based approaches. The survey has also shown that, according to the survey participants' standpoint, the most effective forms of training future preschool education specialists in crises are methodical seminars, pedagogical round tables, and meetings of creative groups. Problem and game technologies, interactive and integrated learning, adaptive learning, and innovative educational and project activities are the most relevant innovative methods of training this category of students.

1.1. Purpose of study

Given the orientation of professional activity in the preschool education sphere, scientists interpret the preschool education specialist's professional competence as the ability to solve problems of professional activity based on professional knowledge and skills integrated into developing personal and professional significant qualities. Scientists define motives, system knowledge, professional skills, and professionally significant personal characteristics as structural components of professional competence (Turner et al., 2017). The purpose of the research is to determine the standpoint of future preschool education specialists and their educators regarding the key features of training future specialists in the field of preschool education in crises.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1. Data collection instrument

A practical study of modern trends in the process of training future preschool education specialists in crises was conducted by survey. The research was conducted using the Mentimeter service.

2.2. Participants

The participants included 342 students and 211 teachers of the specialty "Preschool Education" in 23 higher educational institutions in Chernihiv, Vinnytsia, Zhytomyr, and Kyiv regions of Ukraine.

3. RESULTS

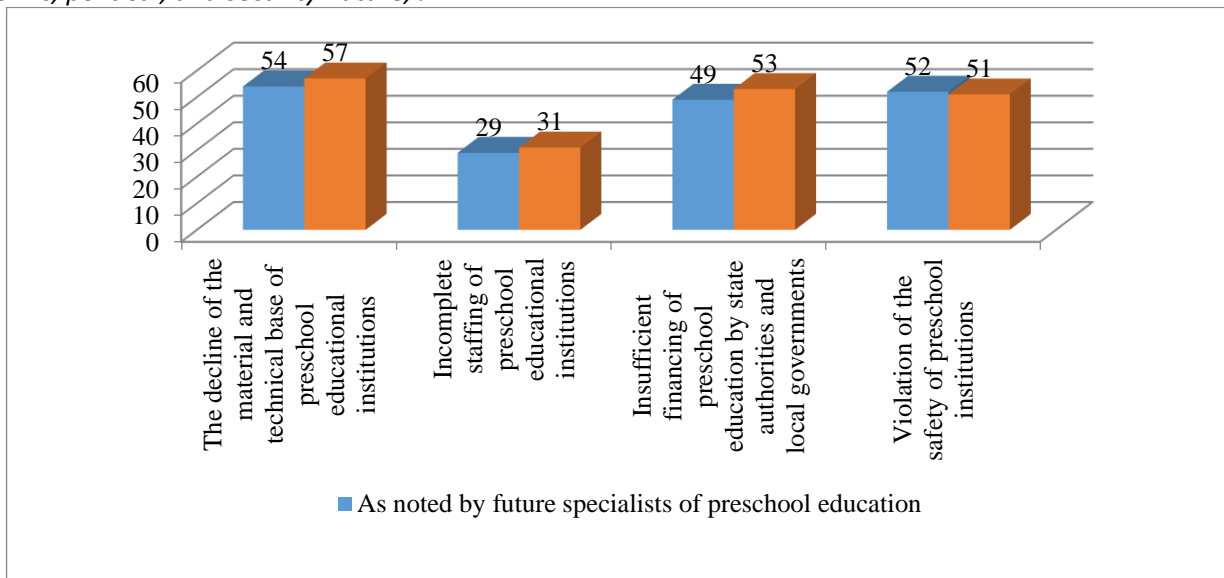
During the online survey, respondents were asked several questions on the research topic. They were able to rate the priority or importance of individual components of the raised issues in percentages from 0% to 100%.

According to the survey's participants' standpoint, currently, in the conditions of aggravation of crisis phenomena in societies of numerous world countries, the study of issues related to training preschool education specialists should begin with clarifying the most important negative changes in the preschool sphere caused by crisis phenomena. As a result of social-political and security crises in the world, the most significant negative changes in the preschool education system are as follows (Figure 1):

- decline of the material and technical base of preschool educational institutions;
- violation of the work safety of preschool institutions.

Figure 1

The most significant negative changes in the system of preschool education caused by crisis phenomena of an economic, political, and security nature, %

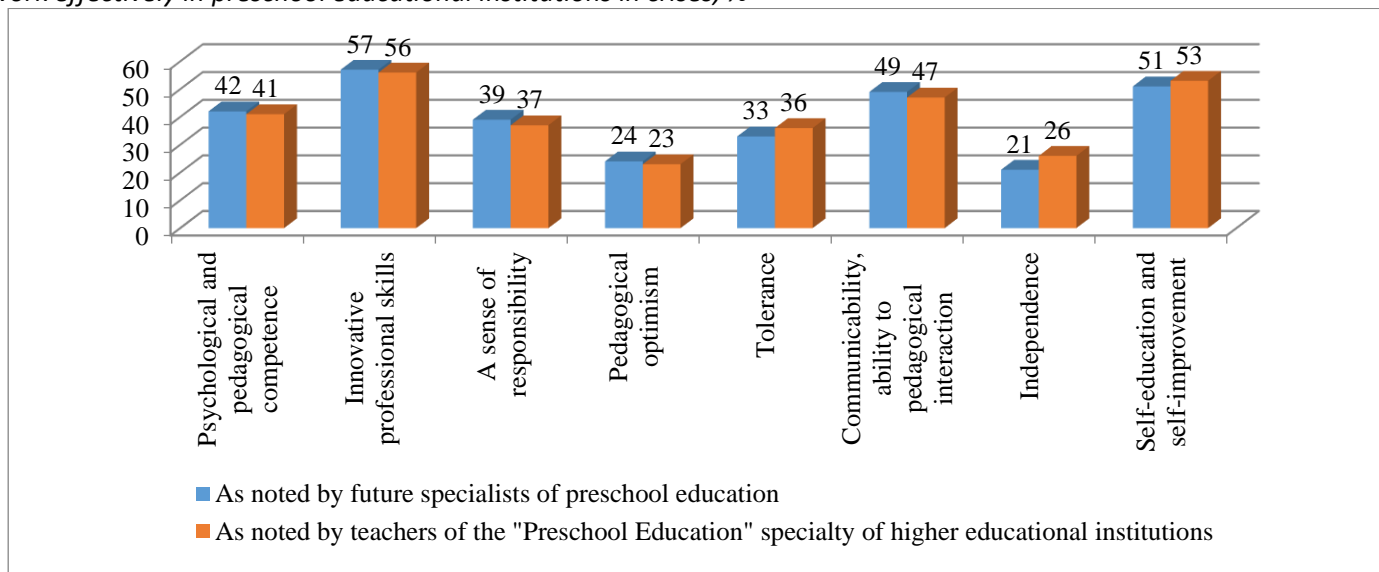


From among the most important professional and personal competencies of teacher training, the survey participants identified the following ones, considering the necessity to work effectively in preschool educational institutions in crises (Figure 2):

- innovative professional skills;
- communicability, ability to pedagogical interaction;
- self-education and self-improvement.

Figure 2

The most significant directions of a pedagogical worker's competency-based training, considering the necessity to work effectively in preschool educational institutions in crises, %



During the survey, the respondents determined the effectiveness of one of the three most important methodological approaches (Figure 3). Among the methodical approaches to training a preschool education

specialist, the most effective are the activity-based and competency-based approaches, according to the survey participants' standpoint.

During the survey, the most effective modern forms of the educator-pedagogue's methodical training in crisis conditions were determined (Figure 4). The survey participants consider methodical seminars, pedagogical round tables, and meetings of creative groups to be the most effective forms of such training. During the research, respondents were asked to identify the most appropriate and effective innovative teaching methods in educational activities in crises during training future specialists in preschool education (Figure 5). According to the survey results, these types are primarily problem-based and game technologies, interactive, integrated, and adaptive learning, and innovative educational and project activities.

Figure 3

Comparative evaluation of the effectiveness of methodical approaches to training a preschool education specialist, %

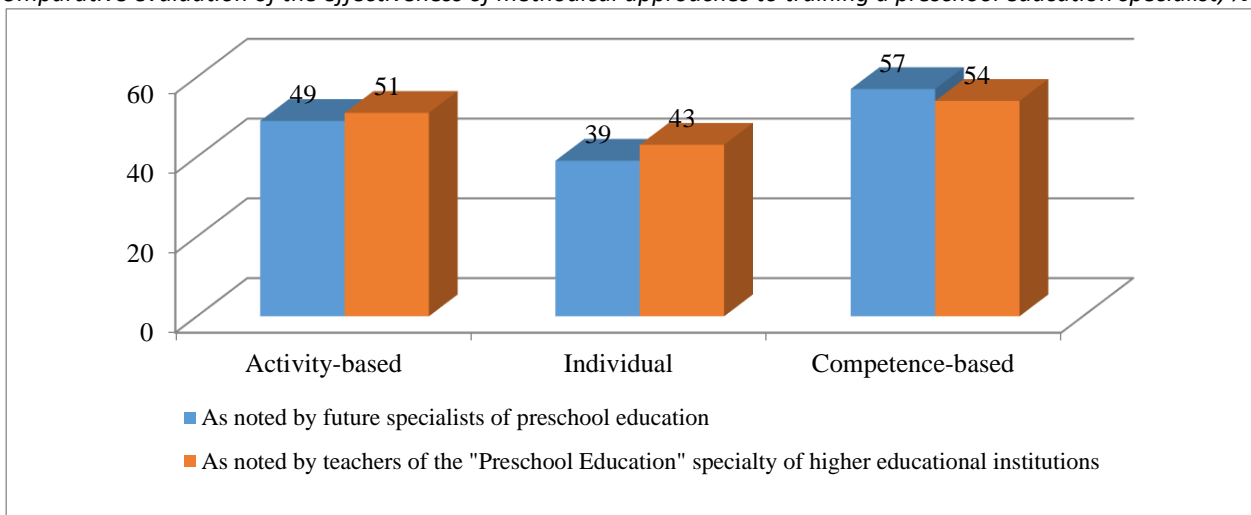


Figure 4

The most influential modern forms of methodical training of a teacher-pedagogue of a preschool education institution in crisis conditions, %.

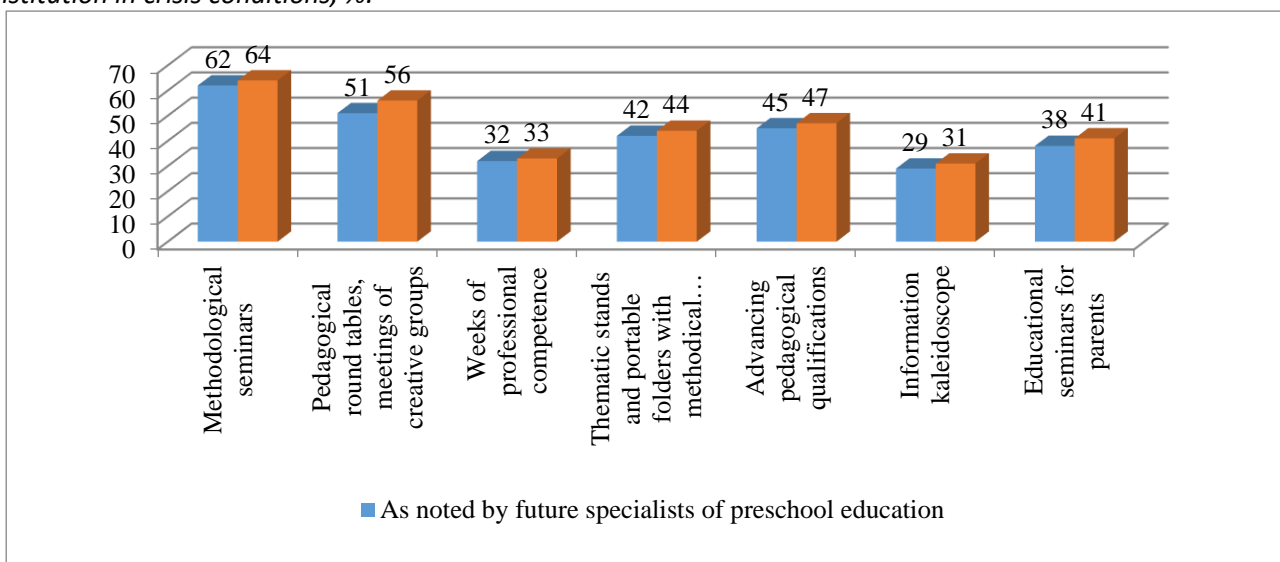
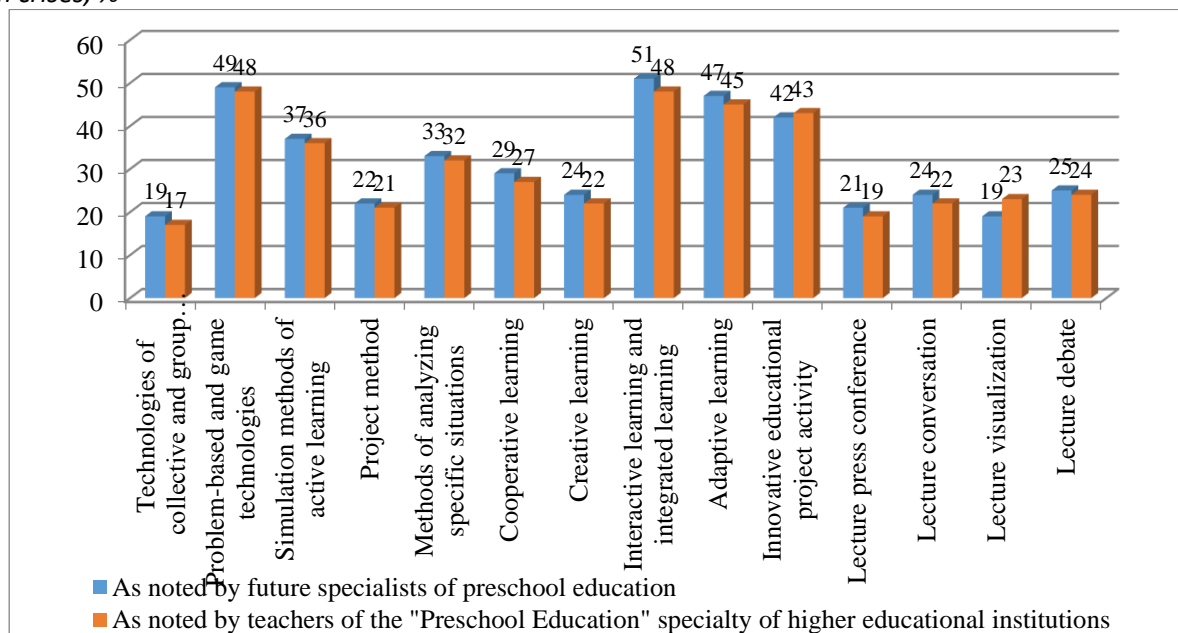


Figure 5

The most relevant and effective innovative teaching methods during training future preschool education specialists in crises, %



4. DISCUSSION

Currently, the issue of comprehensive training of preschool education specialists is becoming more and more urgent. They should be integrally trained to perform the functions of motivation, orientation, regulation, organization, and control of their own professional and educational activities, as well as effective management of a preschool education institution (Allee-Herndon & Roberts, 2021).

Nowadays, the head should be an expert and a strategist in managing a preschool institution's activities. He should be able to ensure establishing, forecasting, and assessing the degree of compliance with the goals and results of a child's education, as well as the activities of employees and the entire preschool as a social unit. That is, he should be able to control the quality of the educational process (Ernst & Reynolds, 2021; Wolf et al., 2018).

Professional competence training of future preschool education specialists begins within the walls of the educational institution. It involves the integration of three main components: deep theoretical knowledge, practical application of skills, and professionally significant qualities. Practice as an integral part of the educational process of the educational institution plays a special role in implementing the educational goal. It allows students to take the first important steps in the profession, to productively combine theoretical knowledge of academic disciplines with educational ones, and to acquire the necessary personal practical experience (Nilsson et al., 2018). At the same time, current social challenges pose new challenges for teachers in organizing the theoretical training and work practice of future educators (Pyle et al., 2017).

The outlined features of preschool education functioning in crisis conditions emphasize several key areas for the professional development of preschool education specialists. These include developing skills to ensure children's safety during crises and enhancing the national-patriotic component in the training of future educators. Additionally, it involves acquiring proficiency in psychological assistance and pedagogical support technologies to address the needs of children in challenging situations. Another critical area is fostering emotionally supportive interpersonal communication between teachers and children (Tilbe & Xiaosong, 2024; Broderick et al., 2023). Finally, mastering distance learning tools and technologies is essential for organizing effective online interactions with children (Van der Heijden et al., 2018; Neuman & Powers, 2021; Rakhmetov et al., 2024). These areas

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collectively ensure that preschool educators are better equipped to meet the demands of modern crisis contexts. Nowadays, the organization of the educational process, determined by the urgent needs of the crisis period, is undergoing changes characterized by dynamism, certain uncertainty, and at the same time the desire of teachers and students to develop and gain new experiences (Bruns et al., 2019; Crouch et al., 2020).

Given the above, training specialists for preschool educational institutions necessitates improvement, which, in turn, requires analysis, justification, and approval in the changing conditions of modern reality (Crouch, Olefir et al., 2020; Crouch & Merseth, 2017). Accordingly, it is expected to shift the emphasis in the educators' professional training from forming professional knowledge, abilities, and skills to forming their professional competencies, in particular, the ability to self-educate, and self-improv. An effective means of accomplishing this task is innovative technologies. Their introduction will ensure the relevant cultural and personal development of the future preschool education teacher, form his readiness to perform professional tasks, and search for ways to improve the educational process in preschool educational institutions (Bailey et al., 2017; Larsson et al., 2024).

5. CONCLUSIONS

Therefore, conducting educational activities in preschool educational institutions in wartime conditions and ensuring obtaining high-quality preschool education by children requires additional professional knowledge and skills on the part of the preschool institution's specialists. Consequently, for their acquisition, it is necessary to accumulate the efforts of practicing teachers and scientists, methodical services, and subjects of educational activity in the preschool specialists' professional development sphere.

Thus, educators face issues regarding organizing high-quality educational processes, solving pedagogical tasks, and methods of effective pedagogical influence. Attention should also be paid to solving the tasks of developing effective modern teaching methods, their rapid mastering, and implementation. Effective professional motivation and practical skills are necessary and especially relevant nowadays for preschool education specialists' successful activity. This process is most effectively conducted under the condition of implementing the competency-based approach in solving pedagogical tasks of preschool specialists' professional training.

Conflict of interest: On behalf of all authors, the corresponding author states that there is no conflict of interest.

Ethical Approval: The study adheres to the ethical guidelines for conducting research.

Funding: This research received no external funding

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