

Training future pre-school professionals in psycho-pedagogical support for early childhood development

Formación de futuros profesionales de preescolar en apoyo psicopedagógico al desarrollo infantil

Antonina Karnaukhova

a.karnaukhova@kubg.edu.ua

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6476-8084>

Candidate of Pedagogical Sciences, Docent, Department of Preschool Education, Pedagogical Institute, Borys Grinchenko Kyiv University, Kyiv, Ukraine.

Olena Polovina

o.polovina@kubg.edu.ua

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6021-5677>

Candidate of Pedagogical Sciences, Associate Professor, Department of Preschool Education, Pedagogical Institute, Borys Grinchenko Kyiv University, Kyiv, Ukraine.

Larysa Harashchenko

l.harashchenko@kubg.edu.ua

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5004-6136>

Candidate of Pedagogical Sciences, Associate Professor, Department of Preschool Education, Pedagogical Institute, Borys Grinchenko Kyiv University, Kyiv, Ukraine.

Inna Kondratets

i.kondratets@kubg.edu.ua

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7816-0766>

Candidate of Pedagogical Sciences, Senior lecturer, Department of Preschool Education, Pedagogical Institute Boris Grinchenko University of Kyiv, Kyiv, Ukraine.

Tatyana Ponomarenko

ponomarenko.tet5@gmail.com

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6801-0403>

Doctor of Pedagogical Sciences, Professor, Department of Preschool Education, Pedagogical Institute, Borys Grinchenko Kyiv University, Kyiv, Ukraine.

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Abstract

The main tasks of pre-school education specialists become the formation of a favourable educational environment for children's development, efficient organization of time and interaction with children. The training of future specialists should be focused on their personal and professional maturity in order to develop the child's personality and improve the quality of preschool education. The aim of the article was to empirically study the approaches to preparing future specialists of preschool education for psychological and pedagogical support of early childhood development. The research methodology includes

content analysis of regulatory documents and standards in the preschool education subsystem, analysis of secondary data from a survey of Ukrainian university students regarding satisfaction with the disciplines that provide training in early childhood psychological and pedagogical support. The results indicate the use of the competent approach in the training of specialists embedded in the main standards of the preschool education subsystem. The standards define the requirements for the child's mandatory competencies and educational outcomes as well as the competencies of the child's educator. The need for alignment and revision of the professional standard for educator as well as the standard for higher education in the context of the alignment of competencies acquired by students in the process of education has been identified. The results of the survey indicate a high level of student satisfaction with the training in the discipline "Psychological and pedagogical foundations of early childhood".

Keywords: psychological and pedagogical support, early childhood development, preschool professionals, competent approach.

Resumen

Las tareas principales de los especialistas en educación preescolar se convierten en la formación de un entorno educativo favorable para el desarrollo de los niños, la organización eficiente del tiempo y la interacción con los niños. La formación de los futuros especialistas debe estar enfocada a su madurez personal y profesional para desarrollar la personalidad del niño y mejorar la calidad de la educación preescolar. El objetivo del artículo fue estudiar empíricamente los enfoques para preparar a los futuros especialistas de educación preescolar para el apoyo psicológico y pedagógico del desarrollo infantil temprano. La metodología de investigación incluye el análisis de contenido de los documentos reglamentarios y las normas en el subsistema de educación preescolar, el análisis de datos secundarios de una encuesta a estudiantes universitarios ucranianos sobre la satisfacción con las disciplinas que brindan formación en apoyo psicológico y pedagógico a la primera infancia. Los resultados indican el uso del enfoque competente en la formación de especialistas inserto en los principales estándares del subsistema de educación preescolar. Los estándares definen los requisitos para las competencias obligatorias del niño y los resultados educativos, así como las competencias del educador del niño. Se ha identificado la necesidad de alineamiento y revisión del estándar profesional del educador así como del estándar para la educación superior en el contexto del alineamiento de competencias adquiridas por los estudiantes en el proceso de formación. Los resultados de la encuesta indican un alto nivel de satisfacción de los estudiantes con la formación en la disciplina "Fundamentos psicológicos y pedagógicos de la primera infancia".

Palabras clave: apoyo psicológico y pedagógico, desarrollo infantil temprano, profesionales de preescolar, enfoque competente.

1. Introduction

The preschool education subsystem, as a socio-state form, carries out professional and pedagogical work with the younger generation, in particular dealing with the early childhood development. The development of human resources is therefore one of the most fundamental areas for optimizing the activities of professionals in the modernization of preschool education. Normative documents, particularly those of a strategic nature, recognize the priority given to this area of education (the Preschool Education Development Concept, amendments to the Preschool Education Law, and the introduction of the basic component of preschool education). The main tasks of preschool education specialists are the formation of a favourable educational environment for the development of children, the effective time organization and interaction with children. The processes of pre-school education modernization prioritize the personal position of the educator to form a positive attitude towards psychological and pedagogical work. Modernization processes imply the creation of conditions for the child's all-round development, the display of initiative and creativity, the provision and creation of opportunities for their self-expression and activity. A specialist's most positive attitude towards his or her own work will facilitate effective interaction with children and the educator's understanding of the motives and methods of such interaction. Therefore, the training of future specialists should be focused on their personal and professional maturity in order to develop the child's personality and to improve the quality of preschool education. Taking into account the processes of modernization of preschool education in Ukraine, it is crucial to study in detail the process of preparing future specialists in preschool education for psychological and pedagogical support of early childhood development.

The aim of the article is to empirically investigate approaches to preparing future preschool professionals for psychological and pedagogical support for early childhood development.

2. Literature review

As a result of a theoretical analysis of scientific literature, psychological and pedagogical support is seen as a holistic, systematically organised activity. It creates the socio-psychological and pedagogical conditions for the successful learning and development of each child in the educational environment (Rubtsov & Judina, 2010; Korotaeva & Svyattseva, 2016; Meyliyevna, 2019; Qosimovna, 2021; Mirzamaxmudovna, 2022). A special feature of psychological and pedagogical support in preschool education is to meet the current professional needs of the educator and to ensure conditions for their involvement in the creative search for optimal models of interaction with the students (Babunova et al., 2017). In general, the effectiveness of teacher training for such activities is ensured by the creation and implementation of a set of conditions (Stephen, 2012; Isroildjanovna, 2019; Qizi & Sattorovich, 2022):

- 1) formation of motivation of pedagogical activity, actualization and enrichment of educator's experience (presentation of own activity, professional development courses, open revisions);
- 2) organization of interaction of a psychologist with educators of preschool education institutions (providing reflection of their professional activity);
- 3) organization of methodological support – creation of self-education programme as an important factor in the development of each educator (School of Young Educator, information and communication technologies), mastering of educational technologies (seminars, trainings, coaching consultations);
- 4) organization of a system of comprehensive support for teachers
- 5) existence of an administrative incentive system for preschool teachers;
- 6) development and implementation of information and methodological aids.

Thus, the essence of psychological and pedagogical support for future ECE teachers is to provide assistance and support in making decisions in difficult situations of professional choice based on the study of their interests, potential development field, peculiarities of interaction of subjects of educational process (Mirzajonova & Parpiyeva, 2022). This understanding allows to build support from the educator as well as from other interaction subjects. Such psychological and pedagogical support contributes to the professional development of future ECE teachers, their personal and professional development, as well as solving the problems of preschool education organization (Dilshod, 2021). The main components of psychological and pedagogical accompaniment of professional training of future ECE teachers are psychological and organizational-educational (pedagogical). The psychological component of support is represented by the systematic activity of future educators using the principle of interconnection of diagnostic, correctional and developmental activities (Esonova, 2021; Mirzajonova & Parpiyeva, 2022). Organizational and educational (pedagogical) component provides a unified information field for all participants of psychological and pedagogical support, as well as its analysis and actual evaluation. This component is implemented in the activities of the ECE teacher through educational work with the teaching staff and administration of the preschool organization based on the use of various forms of active multi-subject interaction of all participants (Korotaeva & Chugaeva, 2019; Dilshod, 2021). The analysis and evaluation of the existing support system allows the development and improvement of the system, ensuring its most important characteristics – openness and developmental character (synergy). The training of future specialists should include the development of psychological and pedagogical competence of preschool teachers in the training programmes framework, the implementation of which involves several stages: motivational and constitutive, practice-oriented, prognostic. (Telychko, 2020).

The following varieties of support in the professional training of future specialists of preschool education institutions are delineated by Nepomniashcha (2019): psychological, pedagogical, communicative, speech, methodological, social, monitoring, etc. The overall goal of psychological and pedagogical support is to ensure comprehensive development of future ECE specialist (subject) based on a combination of scientific-theoretical,

methodological and practical components of training future ECE teachers, which is reflected in curricula. The prior role in the professional training belongs to the cycle of disciplines of professional and practical training, pedagogical practice, which is the main component and result of forming professional preparedness of future ECE specialists.

Ivakh (2016) focuses on an interdisciplinary approach to the training of early childhood education specialists. It provides an optimal combination of normative knowledge, skills, formation of personal-professional qualities, the real level of development of future educators' readiness to work with young children.

As a result of a theoretical analysis of scientific literature, psychological and pedagogical support is seen as a holistic, systematically organized activity in the course of which socio-psychological and pedagogical conditions are created for the successful learning and development of each child in the educational environment. Psychological and pedagogical support in preschool education is characterized by the satisfaction of teachers' actual professional needs and by the provision of conditions for their involvement in the creative search for optimal models of interaction with their students.

The essence of psychological and pedagogical support for future ECE teachers is to provide assistance, support in making decisions in difficult situations of professional choice based on the study of their interests, potential development field, peculiarities of interaction of subjects of the educational process. This understanding allows building support from the educator as well as from other subjects of interaction. Such psychological and pedagogical support contributes to the professional development of future ECE teachers, their personal and professional development, as well as solving the problems of preschool education organization.

3. Methodology

The study used content analysis methods to examine strategic documents in the preschool education subsystem, which form the conceptual, theoretical and practical, and methodological basis for the training of specialists in preschool education. In particular, the Concept of Preschool Education Development, amendments to the Law of Ukraine "On Preschool Education", the Basic Component of Preschool Education, Professional Standard "Early Childhood Educator", Standards of Higher Education of Ukraine: first (bachelor) and second (master) level of knowledge 01 "Education / Pedagogy", specialty 012 "Preschool Education" were considered. The comparative method was used to assess the correspondence between the professional standard defining the key competencies of educators and the higher education standards for training educators of the first and second educational qualification levels.

The second part of the study uses secondary data from a survey of student satisfaction with the discipline "Psychological and pedagogical foundations of early childhood" in the educational programme "Preschool education" of the bachelor degree of full-time education. The sample of students was formed on the basis of secondary data on the

quality of teaching and learning in this discipline of such HEIs of Ukraine: Vinnytsia Mykhailo Kotsiubynskyi State Pedagogical University, Ivan Franko National University of Lviv, Volodymyr Vynnychenko Central Ukrainian State Pedagogical University. Secondary survey data are available on the website of the National Agency for Education Quality Assurance (2022 a; 2022 b; 2022 c).

The alumni survey took place on the e-resource Google Forms. In total, the secondary survey results of 108 full-time students were processed. The survey results contain answers to questions related to determining the level of satisfaction with the discipline “Psychological and pedagogical foundations of early childhood”.

4. Results

Pre-school education is an integral component and the first level in the education system – the starting platform for the child’s personal development. Approved in January 2021, the Basic Component of Preschool Education, which is the State Standard for Preschool Education in Ukraine, will improve the quality of preschool education in Ukraine and bring it into line with international standards. It is based on the ideas of humanistic pedagogy, patriotic and civic education and the shared responsibility of the state, community, family, teacher educators and other professions involved in the care, care and development of pre-school children (Ministry of Education and Science, 2022 a). The state standard for preschool education reflects the relationship between the values of preschool education, the areas of education (content) and the process of shaping the child’s experience in various activity types. This will ensure the educational result – the competence of the pre-school child, and the conditions under which these competences can be achieved. The basic component of preschool education is based on the competence approach, the key competencies of which are continued in the State Standard of Elementary Education for specific educational areas. The continuity between preschool and primary education can also be traced through the development of cross-curricular skills common to preschool and primary education: to demonstrate creativity and initiative, to manage emotions, to express and justify one’s opinion, to think critically, to make decisions, to solve problems and to cooperate in a team.

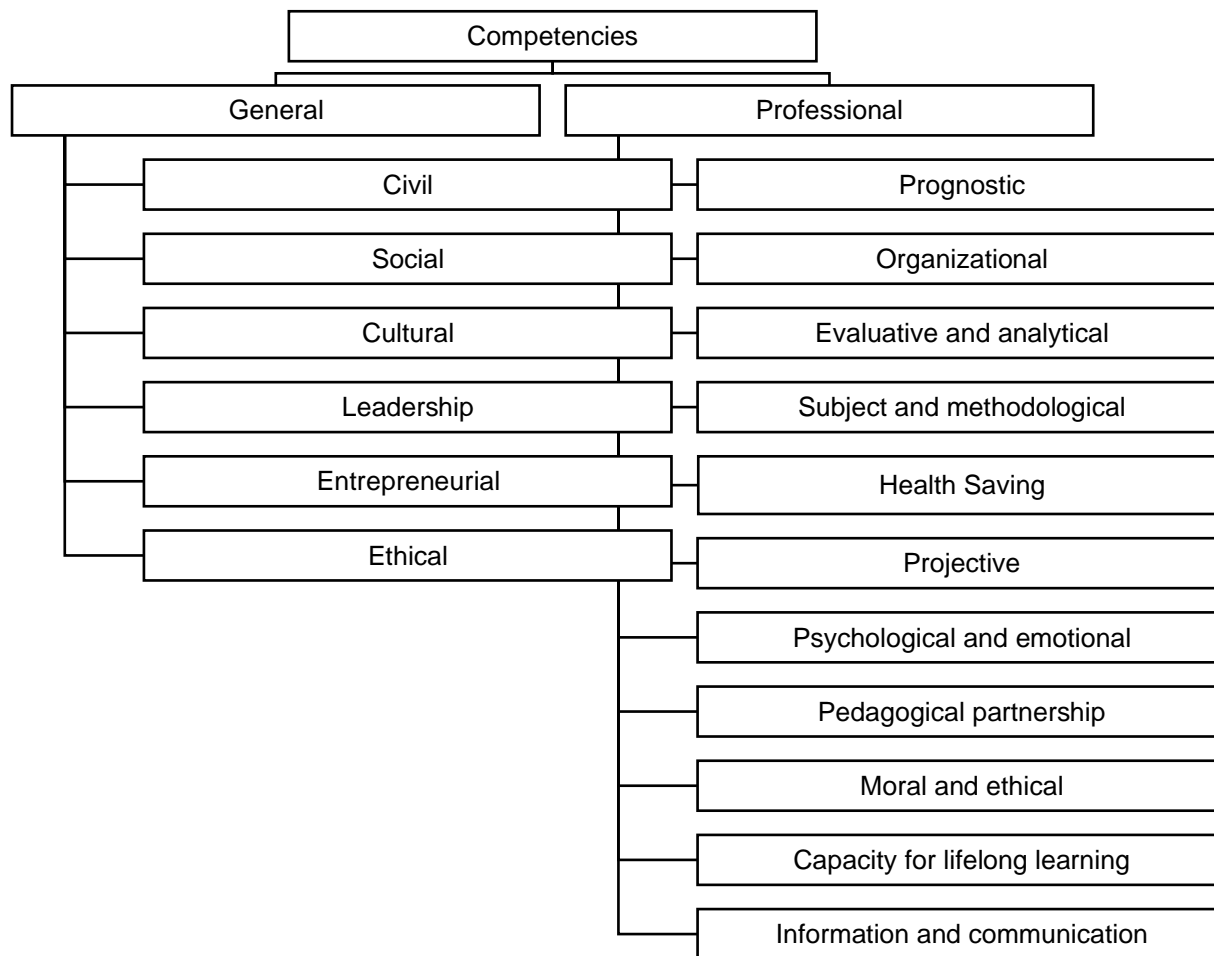


Figure 1. Competencies of a preschool teacher in accordance with the professional standard “Early Childhood Educator”.

Source: Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine (2022 b).

The professional standard “Early Childhood Educator” (Figure 1) defines the main goal of the educator’s activity as the organization of training, education and development of children in pre-school education by developing key competencies in accordance with the state standard (Ministry of Education and Science, 2022). In comparison, the learning objectives of higher education standards define the training of specialists in the development, training and education of children of early childhood and preschool age in the educational system and the family, who are able to solve specialized tasks in the warehouse, characterized by the complexity and uncertainty of the conditions of application of the theory and methodology of preschool education. Consequently, the higher education standards do not include targets for shaping the major competencies of the pupils. The basic component of preschool education also provides for the use of the competence approach and defines the requirements for compulsory competencies of the child and the child’s educational outcomes.

The competencies defined in the Professional Standard correspond to the educator competencies defined in the Standards of Higher Education for Early Childhood Education at the first (Bachelor) and second (Master) levels of education (Table 1). For example, social competence corresponds to professional competence CS-19 – the ability to interact communicatively with children, parents, colleagues, and general competence – CG-6 the ability to interact interpersonally. Cultural competence corresponds to the general competence of preserving and enhancing cultural values. Leadership competence corresponds to professional CS-17 – the ability to take responsibility for decision making in unforeseen work conditions.

Table 1.

List of competencies of a first-level education specialist

Competencies	List
Integral competencies	The ability to solve complex specialised problems and practical problems in pre-school education for the development, learning and education of young and preschool children. It involves the application of general psychological and pedagogical theories and professional methodologies of preschool education and is characterised by a complex and uncertain environment.
General competencies	CG-1. Ability to realise his/her rights and obligations as a member of society, to realise the values of civil (free democratic) society and the need for its sustainable development, the rule of law, human and civil rights and freedoms in Ukraine. CG-2. Ability to preserve and enhance moral, cultural, scientific values and achievements of society, based on the understanding of history and patterns of development of the subject area, its place in the general system of knowledge about nature and society and in the development of society, equipment and technologies, use different types and forms of active leisure and leading a healthy lifestyle. CG-3. An ability to think abstractly, analyse and synthesise. CG-4. An ability to communicate in the national language both orally and in writing. CG-5. Ability to assess and ensure the quality of work performed. CG-6. Ability to interact interpersonally. CG-7. Ability to learn and master modern knowledge. CG-8. Ability to use knowledge in practical situations. CG-9. Performance of safe activities.
Special (professional) competencies	CS-1. Ability to work with sources of educational and scientific information. CS-2. Ability to develop basic qualities of personality (autonomy, independence, creativity, initiative, freedom of behaviour, self-awareness, self-esteem, self-respect) in young and pre-school children. CS-3. Ability to develop curiosity, cognitive motivation and cognitive activities in young and preschool children. CS-4. Ability to form primary ideas of object, natural, social environment, properties and relations of objects; development of self-consciousness (“I” of the child and its place in the environment). CS-5. Ability to develop speech as a means of communication and interaction with peers and adults in the early and preschool years. CS-6. An ability to teach young and preschool children the skills of conscientious following of socially recognized moral norms and behavior rules.

- CS-7. An ability to promote national patriotism among young children and preschool children.
- CS-8. The ability to form the skills of ecologically safe behavior and activities in the home, nature and environment in early childhood and preschool age children.
- CS-9. Ability to develop perceptual, mnemonic processes, different forms of thinking and consciousness in young and preschool children.
- CS-10. Ability to prepare Individual Development Program and documents necessary for the education of children with special educational needs, familiarity with universal design in education and reasonable accommodation.
- CS-11. The ability to form an elementary understanding of different forms of art and means of artistic expression (word, sound, paint, etc.) and the experience of independent creative activity in young and pre-school children.
- CS-12. The ability to develop young and preschool children physically, to correct and improve their health by means of physical exercises and motor activity.
- CS-13. The ability to organize and supervise play (conducting), art, speech, and art-productive (visual, musical, theatrical) activities of early childhood and preschool age children.
- CS-14. The ability to form healthy lifestyle skills of preschool and early childhood children as a basis of health culture (vital culture) of the individual.
- CS-15. Ability to individual and differentiated development of early childhood and preschool children with special educational needs, according to their abilities.
- CS-16. Ability to educate early childhood and preschool children in tolerant attitude and respect for others, preventing and counteracting bullying.
- CS-17. The ability to take responsibility for decision-making in unforeseen work situations.
- CS-18. The ability to find and elaborate the necessary educational information and apply it in the work with children, parents.
- CS-19. The ability to communicate with children, parents and colleagues.
- CS-20. The ability for self-education, self-development, continuity in education for constant deepening of general and vocational training, making education a lifelong process.

Source: Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine (2022 c).

At the same time, competencies that correlate with entrepreneurial competence as the ability to creatively search for and implement new ideas, self-presentation and results of own activities, ability to plan own career, management of cultural and social projects are missing in the Standard of Higher Education. Integral competence in solving complex problems in practice can partially correlate with entrepreneurial competence. This requires alignment and revision of the standards with the requirements of the educator and specialist whose training takes place according to the approved standards of higher education.

The training of pre-school education specialists in psychological and pedagogical support of early childhood development includes the study, knowledge acquisition and skills formation within the discipline "Psychological and pedagogical principles of early childhood". The quality of training is assessed on the basis of a questionnaire on the discipline, where the overall level of student satisfaction is determined.

Table 2.

Results of a student satisfaction survey on the discipline “Psychological and pedagogical principles of early childhood”

Questions	Answer options					Satisfaction
	1	2	3	4	5	
1) Rate the level of workload of the discipline, where 1 is the absence of tasks for independent study of the discipline, 5 is an excessive load of additional tasks	0	0	0	50	50	100 %
2) I've had enough time to master the learning discipline	Yes 100 %	No	Rather yes	Rather no	-	100 %
3) I have had enough extracurricular time to complete the self-study tasks of the course	Yes 100 %	No	Rather yes	Rather no	-	100 %
4) Rate the level of compliance of the content of the course with the chosen speciality on a scale of 1 – not compliant at all, 5 – fully compliant	0	0	0	0	100 %	100 %
5) The content of the educational discipline provides an opportunity to acquire the competencies needed for further professional activity	Yes 100 %	No	Rather yes	Rather no	-	100 %
6) The content of the academic discipline is relevant and modern	Yes	No	Rather yes	Rather no		Satisfaction 100 %
7) Have you had the opportunity to develop “soft skills” (debating and public speaking skills, communication with colleagues and supervisors, interpersonal communication, negotiating, teamwork, time management, creativity, ability to organise and conduct classes, writing grant proposals, managing research projects, etc.) while studying this discipline?	Yes	No				Satisfaction 100 %
8) Rate the level of teaching in the subject and the methods used by the educator to improve learning, on a scale where 1 is low, 5 is high				50 %	50 %	Satisfaction 100 %
9) I have always had feedback from the educator while studying the subject and have	Yes 100 %	No				Satisfaction 100 %

had the opportunity to consult (get help from) him/her on various substantive and organisational issues.						
10) During the course, I and other students had the opportunity to choose certain tasks, topics (subtopics, individual substantive issues of the topic), topics of coursework or to propose our own topics, forms and methods of performing the chosen tasks, etc.	Yes 100 %	No				Satisfaction 100 %
11) Specialised laboratory equipment and specialised software were used in the study of the discipline	Yes	No				Satisfaction 50 % 50 % A psychodiagnostic and corrective developmental laboratory is available for the educational process.
12) The discipline is adequately provided with teaching materials available in the electronic library and on the university's distance learning platform	Yes 100 %	No				Satisfaction 100 %
13) Rate the quality of a distance learning course in an academic discipline, where 1 is a poor course, 5 is a course that is informative and as full of learning material as possible	1	2	3	4 100 %	5 100 %	Satisfaction 100 %
14) I have been informed in advance about the criteria, procedures, forms and deadlines for the current and final control of knowledge in the discipline	Yes	No				Satisfaction 100 %
15) I consider the current assessment of knowledge in this subject to be objective	Yes	No	Rather yes	Rather no		Satisfaction 100 %
16) Rate the overall level of satisfaction with the quality of teaching in the discipline on a scale where 1 is low teaching quality, 5 is a high one	1	2	3	4	5	Satisfaction 100 %

Source: National Agency for Education Quality Assurance (2022 a; 2022 b; 2022 c).

5. Discussion

Within the framework of a certain study programme, students acquire general competences, which are also of a universal nature. This category includes knowledge, understanding, skills and the ability to apply them in practice. The list of recommended special (professional, subject-specific) competences correlates with the description of the corresponding qualification level of the NQF (Kravets, 2018).

Professional training is a process of students' active assimilation of knowledge, skills and abilities in the relevant area, as well as a system of various activities focused on the student's personal development, where the result is the readiness to perform their professional duties (Avramenko, 2018). This study identifies a certain level of inconsistency between the competencies defined in the professional standard of a pre-school teacher and the standards of teacher training. As defined by the Basic Component of Preschool Education, practitioners in the preschool sector are required to provide psychological and pedagogical support for child development during the preschool years. The higher education system instead is not sufficiently aligned with the needs of pre-school educational institutions in the context of the abilities and skills of professionals.

The gradual system of education implemented in Ukraine is aimed at continuous improvement of the professional competence of a specialist, which should be carried out by him/her both in educational institutions and in the process of independent work on oneself in practical activities (Melnyk, 2015). The competencies of preschool education specialists formed in the process of training should meet the professional requirements defined in the professional standard of an educator based on the competency-based approach. In addition, the skills and abilities of the specialist necessary for psychological and pedagogical support should take into account the features of preschool children. Characteristic features of modern preschool children are emotional sensitivity, unbalanced nervous system; mental activity and considerable intellectual awareness; steady interest and attraction to computer games, household appliances; differences in value orientations, which is caused by their belonging to families with different levels of well-being (Melnyk, 2015). As in the work of other specialists, this article reveals a mismatch between the abilities of specialists who are formed in the process of learning and the requirements of pre-school education institutions. Therefore, most pre-school educators lack preparedness to take these children's characteristics into account in the pre-school educational process. The professional knowledge and skills they have acquired through basic vocational training and practical experience of working with children do not fully meet the child development goals. The professional competences of educators need to be revised and improved according to the challenges of modern society and the needs of children. Undoubtedly, professional competence is not a constant value. The process of professional competence formation is never finished and can be constantly improved (Konovalchuk, 2015; Myskova, 2018).

6. Conclusion

The results of the study indicate the use of a competency-based approach in the training of professionals, which is embedded in the core standards of the preschool education subsystem. The standards define requirements for the child's compulsory competencies and educational outcomes, as well as the competencies of the educator. At the same time, there is a mismatch between the abilities of the professionals being formed in the process of training and the skills requirements for early childhood educators. Thus, the professional knowledge and skills acquired by them in the process of basic professional training and practical work experience with children do not provide full implementation of the child development objectives. The need for harmonization and revision of the professional standard for educators and the standard for higher education in the context of harmonization of the competences acquired by students in the process of training has been revealed. The results of the survey demonstrate a high level of student satisfaction with the training in the discipline "Psycho-pedagogical foundations of early childhood".

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