

WSPÓŁCZESNE KONTEKSTY EDUKACJI DOROSŁYCH

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ANDRAGOGICAL APPROACH IN SUPPORTING PARENTS OF CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS: THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL JUSTIFICATION AND EDUCATIONAL PRACTICE

Key words: inclusive education, parental involvement, children with special educational needs, school policy, partnership, educational effectiveness.

Summary: The article provides a comprehensive analysis of the theoretical and methodological foundations of the andragogical approach in supporting parents of children with special educational needs (SEN) within the framework of inclusive education. Emphasis is placed on the interdisciplinary nature of the issue, encompassing pedagogy, psychology, and social work. Based on empirical data, the author highlights the positive impact of parental involvement, pedagogical awareness, and cooperation with schools on the academic success of children with SEN. The article substantiates the relevance of systematically implementing andragogical principles – such as autonomy, contextual learning, reflection, and partnership – into adult education practices. Special attention is given to the challenges parents face, including emotional burnout, lack of pedagogical knowledge, and limited access to educational resources, particularly in rural areas. It is concluded that the application of the andragogical approach not only enhances parental competence but also fosters the creation of an inclusive and supportive educational environment for children with SEN.

Introduction

The inclusive transformation of the Ukrainian education system necessitates the development of effective models of support for families raising children with special educational needs (SEN). The success of the inclusive process depends

not only on the professional training of teachers, but also on the degree of parental involvement, their educational readiness to cooperate, competence and psychological stability. In this context, the andragogical approach is becoming increasingly relevant as a basis for organising support for adults, which involves taking into account their personal, social and cognitive characteristics in the learning process (Dernova, 2021; Melnichenko, 2020). Parents play a key role in the socialisation and development of such children, but often lack adequate support and knowledge about the specifics of upbringing, communication, and emotional interaction. That is why the application of the andragogical approach to working with adults (parents of children with SEN) is an important component of modern educational policy.

The purpose of the article is to substantiate the effectiveness of the andragogical approach in educational interaction with parents of children with SEN; to analyse the regulatory, legal and practical basis for support; to consider the contradictions that affect the educational motivation of parents and to summarise empirical evidence of the effectiveness of the principles implemented.

Theoretical and methodological basis of the andragogical approach

According to the latest research (Dubasenyuk & Samoilenko, 2020), the problem of adult education in the context of supporting parents of children with SEN is interdisciplinary: it covers the fields of pedagogy, psychology, social work and law.

Andragogy, as the science of adult education, is based on the belief that adults are subjects of their own learning, rather than passive recipients of knowledge. First conceptualised by M. Knowles (Knowles et al., 2015), andragogy is based on six basic principles: the need for autonomy, orientation towards life experience, relevance of learning material, practical orientation, internal motivation and readiness for immediate application of knowledge. These provisions have been developed in domestic andragogical studies (Dubasenyuk & Samoilenko, 2020; Melnichenko, 2020), which indicate the need for individualisation of learning, the creation of a favourable educational environment and partnership between participants in the process.

According to O. Dubasenyuk and O. Samoilenko (2020), the andragogical model should take into account the specifics of non-formal and informal learning, which are the most acceptable forms for the parental category of the population. In this sense, it is important to create educational environments where parents can not only receive information, but also work with specialists to develop individual educational trajectories for supporting their children. As noted by M. Dernova (2021), andragogy should be viewed not only as a theory of learning, but **as a socio-axiological system** that contributes to the transformation of adult experience into professional and parental self-realisation.

Ukrainian legislation is gradually integrating provisions on adult education. According to Article 78 of the Law of Ukraine “On Education” (2017), funding for adult education programmes is provided both from the state budget and from alternative sources. The draft Law of Ukraine “On Adult Education” (2022) emphasises the importance of developing three forms of education: formal (through educational institutions), non-formal (through training, seminars, consultations) and informal (through self-education, life experience). This opens up opportunities for the widespread application of andragogy in working with parents of children with SEN.

Domestic studies show a trend towards a shift from controlling forms of education to supportive ones, which are focused on meaning-making and the development of parents’ reflective abilities (Denyshchuk, 2023). An important role in this process is played by the contextual adaptation of content, which should be focused on life situations, the needs of the child and the expectations of the family (Kossova-Silina, 2024).

However, an analysis of Ukrainian regulations shows that educational support mechanisms are often universal and do not take into account the individualisation needs of parents with an increased need for information and support. This creates a vacuum in systemic support: although the state guarantees the child’s right to inclusion, ensuring the educational competence of parents remains fragmented and unsystematic.

Educational problems of parents of children with SEN in the context of the andragogical approach

The issue of educational interaction with parents of children with special educational needs is extremely relevant in connection with the expansion of inclusion policy in Ukraine. Parents are becoming not only participants but also co- creators of an inclusive educational space, in which they face a number of cognitive, social and emotional barriers: a lack of knowledge about supporting their child, insufficient pedagogical training, psycho-emotional fatigue and low motivation for education (Zakharin, 2023).

Who creates the category of parents of children with SEN? The category of parents of children with SEN, as noted, includes families in which the child has a confirmed status (medical/psychological-medical-pedagogical conclusion) regarding developmental disorders: intellectual, speech, autism spectrum, etc.

This group is characterised by the following challenges:

- insufficient awareness of the child’s developmental characteristics and available educational/social services;
- lack of skills for effective communication with specialists and educational institutions;
- emotional stress, stress, social alienation;

- need for psychological support, adaptation, resources for the child's learning and development;
- the need for self-organisation and self-education skills, planning for the child's development, and proper interaction with educational/social institutions (Lecholotova, 2024).

These challenges show that standard support methods are not enough: a targeted educational programme for parents is needed, one that takes into account their special status and needs and helps them overcome numerous difficulties of a cognitive, emotional, psychological and social nature.

Based on empirical research (Denyshchuk, 2023; Matokhniuk & Maksymenko, 2023) and analysis of the practices of specialists in the field of inclusion (Zinchenko, 2024), it is possible to identify key challenges that reduce parents' educational activity:

- limited awareness of the developmental and learning characteristics of children with SEN;
- unwillingness to interact with teachers;
- feelings of incompetence and emotional burnout;
- limited access to educational resources, particularly in rural areas;
- social stigmatisation, which exacerbates the isolation of families.

These difficulties can be analysed through the prism of the **andragogical contradiction** that arises between the external demands and internal capabilities of adult learners. Based on an analysis of scientific sources, we have systematised the contradictions that allow us to outline the directions of pedagogical influence (see Table 1).

Table 1. Main contradictions in adult education

Contradiction	Characteristic
Mismatch between knowledge and sk	The gap between the amount of information needed to support a child and the actual level of preparation of parents
Contradiction between knowledge and social requirements	Lack of socially acceptable strategies for interacting with the educational environment
Internal reflective contradictions	Desire for change without adequate mechanisms for self-awareness and self assessment
The gap between current knowledge and new tasks	Inability to adapt to changing educational conditions and inclusive requirements

These contradictions directly correlate with M. Knowles' concept, according to which adults learn effectively only when the educational process corresponds to their **life tasks**, takes into account their **experience** and ensures the **practical significance** of knowledge (Knowles et al., 2015). That is why the andragogical

approach involves creating conditions that allow parents to independently determine the pace, content and forms of learning, which is reflected in the principle of **electivity**.

In addition, educational interaction should focus not on correcting the parental position, but on **supporting the process of self-development**. According to Dernova (2021), adult learning should be based not on the reproduction of knowledge, but on **meaning-making** – the ability to reflect, correlate one's own experience with new knowledge and adapt it to the context of education.

Thus, overcoming these contradictions is only possible through the comprehensive implementation of an andragogical approach that involves individualisation, the development of internal motivation, reflection, and involvement in educational decision-making.

Educational activities for parents of children with SEN and their effectiveness

In the context of the implementation of inclusive education in Ukraine, educational activities aimed at supporting parents of children with special educational needs (SEN) are becoming systematic. According to research findings (Denyshchuk, 2023; Zinchenko, 2024), the success of the inclusive process largely depends on the level of awareness of parents, their pedagogical competence and ability to interact constructively with teachers.

The main task of the andragogical approach is to create conditions for the active involvement of parents in their child's educational process through **informal learning**, which includes the following measures:

- **thematic training sessions** (e.g., “Features of the development and support of children with ASD,” “Parental competence in the field of inclusive education”), which are conducted at IRCs, ZZOs, and public organisations;
- **master classes and practical classes** on adaptive teaching methods at home, communicative support, sensory integration;
- **group and individual consultations** with specialists (speech therapists, defec-tologists, psychologists);
- **educational platforms and online courses** (e.g., projects by the Social Syner-gy NGO, Prometheus, Osvitoria) covering topics related to supporting children with SEN;
- **participation in the development of an individual educational trajectory for the child**, which contributes to increased parental responsibility and effective cooperation.

According to Kossova-Silina (2024), the optimal model is that of **andragogical partnership**, which is implemented through a combination of support, mutual learning and joint planning of the educational process. This approach is consistent with the principles of adult education and leads to high

motivation to learn, as confirmed by Melnichenko's (2020) research, which analyses the impact of active parental involvement on the results of inclusive education.

The effectiveness of educational measures is also reflected in changes **in** parents' **educational behaviour**: they participate more actively in pedagogical meetings, better understand their child's needs and become decision-makers. A study by Zinchenko (2024) indicates that parental involvement in education reduces anxiety and increases confidence in one's own abilities. This, in turn, has a positive effect on the psycho-emotional climate in the family and the child's learning outcomes.

In global practice, the concept of "empowered parenting" – teaching parents to be active partners – is recognised as a key factor in successful inclusion (UNESCO, 2022). That is why UNESCO's adult education projects focus on creating **flexible educational pathways** that take into account the circumstances of families and are based on a needs-oriented approach.

Empirical and theoretical justification of the effectiveness of andragogical principles

An analysis of research shows that the implementation of andragogical principles in the education of parents of children with special educational needs has not only a theoretical but also an empirical basis.

Denyshchuk (2023) emphasises that implementing **the principle of contextuality** (learning linked to real-life situations) promotes better knowledge acquisition and increases parents' ability to respond flexibly to challenges related to their child's specific characteristics. According to a study by Zinchenko (2024), **the individualisation of educational pathways** allows for the previous experience, educational needs and resources of each family to be taken into account, which increases parents' motivation and involvement in the process.

The works of Dubasenyuk and Samoilenko (2020) prove that **the principle of independence**, in which adults act as active agents of change, shapes a responsible attitude towards the parental role. This is consistent with the classical provisions of M. Knowles, who argued that adults are capable of effective learning only when they can independently determine the goals, content, and forms of education (Knowles et al., 2015).

At the international level, the effectiveness of such approaches is confirmed by the results of UNESCO's fourth global report on adult education (GRALE 4), which states that countries with the highest levels of parental involvement demonstrate better results in inclusive education (UNESCO, 2022). Particular emphasis is placed on the importance of **parent competence development programmes** that have an andragogical structure – including training, reflection, experience sharing and psychosocial support.

Data from a survey conducted among parents who participated in informal programmes in 2023 (Matokhnyuk & Maksymenko, 2023) show that 82% of participants reported an improved understanding of their child's needs; 76% reported a reduction in feelings of helplessness; 69% reported an increase in their willingness to cooperate with educational institutions.

Thus, empirical data confirm that the implementation of andragogical principles not only increases the level of pedagogical competence of parents, but also contributes to the formation of a positive educational environment around children with SEN.

Conclusions

The modern system of support for parents of children with special educational needs should be based on the principles of andragogy as the theoretical and methodological basis of adult education. An analysis of the regulatory framework, educational practices and empirical research shows that the principles of independence, individualisation, contextualisation, reflection and partnership are effective mechanisms for creating an educated, socially active and psychologically stable parental environment.

Successful implementation of inclusion requires a shift from informing parents to their active participation in the educational process – as learners, partners in shaping their child's educational trajectory, and co-creators of an inclusive environment.

Promising areas for further research include the development of institutional models of andragogical support in communities, the improvement of methods for assessing parental competence, and the adaptation of international practices to the Ukrainian context, taking into account the post-war transformation of the educational space.

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**ANDRAGOGICZNE PODEJŚCIE WE WSPIERANIU RODZICÓW
DZIECI ZE SPECJALNYMI POTRZEBAMI EDUKACYJNYMI:
TEORETYCZNE I METODOLOGICZNE UZASADNIENIE
ORAZ PRAKTYKA EDUKACYJNA**

Słowa kluczowe: edukacja włączająca, zaangażowanie rodziców, dzieci ze specjalnymi potrzebami edukacyjnymi, polityka oświatowa, partnerstwo, wyniki edukacyjne.

Streszczenie: Artykuł zawiera pogłębioną analizę teoretycznych i metodologicznych podstaw podejścia andragogicznego we wspieraniu rodziców dzieci ze specjalnymi potrzebami edukacyjnymi (SPE) w warunkach edukacji włączającej. Podkreślono interdyscyplinarny charakter problematyki, obejmujący pedagogikę, psychologię i pracę socjalną. Na podstawie danych empirycznych autorka wskazuje na pozytywny wpływ zaangażowania rodziców, ich świadomości pedagogicznej oraz współpracy ze szkołą na sukces edukacyjny dzieci ze SPE. Uzasadniono potrzebę systemowego wdrażania zasad andragogiki – takich jak autonomia, kontekstualne uczenie się, refleksyjność i partnerstwo – do praktyki edukacji dorosłych. Szczególną uwagę poświęcono trudnościom, z jakimi borykają się rodzice: wypaleniu emocjonalnemu, brakowi wiedzy pedagogicznej oraz ograniczonemu dostępowi do zasobów edukacyjnych, szczególnie na obszarach wiejskich. W konkluzji stwierdzono, że zastosowanie podejścia andragogicznego nie tylko zwiększa kompetencje rodziców, ale także sprzyja tworzeniu środowiska edukacyjnego sprzyjającego inkluzji i wsparciu dzieci ze SPE.

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