PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS IN INTEGRATING REGGIO EMILIA ELEMENTS INTO THE MODERN PRESCHOOL EDUCATION SYSTEM

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ABSTRACT. This article explores the theoretical and practical aspects of integrating elements of the world-renowned Reggio Emilia pedagogical approach into the modern preschool education system. Based on regulatory documents and decrees of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan aimed at reforming the preschool education system, the issues of improving the quality of education and developing children's cognitive and creative potential are analyzed. During the study, personnel, infrastructural, and methodical barriers to implementing the Reggio approach in national preschool institutions were identified, and scientific-practical recommendations for overcoming them were developed.

Keywords: Reggio Emilia pedagogy, preschool education, integration, third teacher, project-based learning, cognitive development, educational environment.

INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary global educational landscape, learner-centred educational models aimed at developing logical thinking, creativity, independent reasoning and freedom of expression among preschool children are becoming increasingly prominent. These models are based on the recognition of children as active participants in the learning process and emphasise the importance of creating educational environments that support their individual abilities, interests and developmental needs. In Uzbekistan, extensive state reforms have also been undertaken in recent years to fundamentally modernise the preschool education system, expand its coverage and improve the quality of educational services in accordance with international standards.

In particular, Presidential Decree No. PF-5712 of May 8, 2019, entitled "On Approval of the Concept for the Development of the Preschool Education System of the Republic of Uzbekistan until 2030", as well as the Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan "On Preschool Education and Upbringing" (December 16, 2019, No. O‘RQ-595), established the legal and methodological foundations for introducing advanced international practices, innovative pedagogical technologies and alternative educational programmes into preschool educational organisations. These regulatory documents identify the development of children's individual abilities, the promotion of their independence, and the encouragement of initiative and active participation in educational activities as important priorities of the national preschool education system. In implementing these strategic objectives, the Reggio Emilia pedagogical approach, which originated in the Italian city of Reggio Emilia under the leadership of Loris Malaguzzi, has particular significance. The Reggio Emilia approach

recognises the child as an active individual possessing enormous intellectual, creative and developmental potential. One of its fundamental concepts is the theory of "The Hundred Languages of Children", which emphasises the numerous ways through which children understand the world, communicate their ideas and express their experiences. These languages include drawing, painting, sculpture, movement, music, drama, construction, verbal communication and interaction with natural phenomena. From this perspective, children's learning cannot be limited to conventional verbal communication or predetermined academic activities. Instead, it should provide diverse opportunities for exploration, experimentation, creative expression and the construction of knowledge through different forms of interaction. Another essential principle of this approach is the interpretation of the educational environment as the "third teacher", which highlights the significant role of the physical and social learning environment in stimulating children's curiosity, independence, communication and creative exploration.

Although the Reggio Emilia pedagogical approach initially emerged in Italy, its fundamental principles have been adapted and incorporated into preschool education practices in a number of developed countries. At the centre of this approach is the understanding of the child as an active, inquisitive and independent individual whose interests and questions serve as important starting points for organising the educational process. The teacher is not merely a provider of ready-made knowledge but rather a facilitator, researcher and collaborative partner who supports children's investigations, encourages their initiatives and helps them develop their own understanding of the surrounding world. Furthermore, the educational environment is regarded as the "third teacher" and is purposefully organised to encourage children's independent activities, creativity, communication and social interaction.

These pedagogical principles are reflected in various forms of preschool education in the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and Scandinavian countries. For example, preschool programmes influenced by Reggio Emilia principles in the United States and Canada widely employ project-based learning, the selection of educational topics based on children's questions, creative activities and systematic pedagogical observation. In Australia, this approach is integrated with child-centred education, play-based learning and pedagogical documentation, which enables educators to monitor and analyse children's learning experiences and developmental progress. In the United Kingdom, Reggio Emilia principles are reflected in the emphasis placed on developing young children's independent thinking, exploratory activities and aesthetically organised learning environments. In Scandinavian countries, particularly Sweden, Denmark and Norway, certain elements of the approach are integrated into preschool practices that promote children's initiative, interaction with nature, free play and democratic relationships. In these educational contexts, considerable attention is given to observing children's interests and developmental needs, adapting the learning environment accordingly and analysing educational processes through pedagogical documentation rather than requiring children to follow predetermined activities exclusively.

Thus, the Reggio Emilia approach is not implemented in different countries as an exact reproduction of the original Italian model. Rather, its fundamental principles are adapted to the cultural, social, educational and institutional characteristics of national education systems. International experience demonstrates that the recognition of children's individuality, support for their ideas and initiatives, project-based learning, the expansion of creative activities, pedagogical observation and documentation, and the establishment of stimulating developmental environments offer significant methodological opportunities for improving the quality and effectiveness of contemporary preschool education.

Despite the considerable international interest in the Reggio Emilia approach and its potential contribution to children's comprehensive development, integrating its elements into the preschool education system of Uzbekistan, which operates within an established national curriculum framework, including the "Ilk Qadam" State Curriculum, presents several systemic challenges. One of the major difficulties is the predominance of traditional approaches to organising educational activities, in which lesson structures, activity schedules and expected learning outcomes are often predetermined. Such organisational practices may limit opportunities for flexible project-based learning, spontaneous exploration and the consideration of children's individual interests. Another significant challenge concerns the insufficient development of educators' professional competencies in designing and implementing inquiry-based and project-oriented learning activities. The successful application of Reggio Emilia principles requires teachers to possess not only methodological knowledge but also observation, analytical, creative, communication and reflective skills. Educators must be able to identify children's interests, formulate meaningful research questions, organise collaborative activities and document the learning process. Therefore, the transition towards this approach requires systematic professional development, practical training and the creation of opportunities for educators to exchange experiences.

An additional issue is the need to establish effective cooperation between preschool educational organisations, families and the wider community. Within the Reggio Emilia philosophy, parents are considered important participants in children's educational experiences rather than merely recipients of information about their children's progress. Their involvement in projects, discussions, creative activities and educational events contributes to strengthening the relationship between the preschool organisation and the family. However, the practical implementation of such partnerships requires appropriate organisational mechanisms, effective communication and a shared understanding of educational objectives. Another important methodological challenge is determining how Reggio Emilia principles can be incorporated into the national educational framework without undermining the requirements and objectives of the "Ilk Qadam" State Curriculum. The integration process should not be understood as replacing the existing national curriculum with a foreign pedagogical model. Instead, it should involve identifying areas of compatibility between the two approaches and adapting selected pedagogical principles to national educational priorities, children's developmental characteristics and local cultural traditions. In particular,

project-based learning, the principle of the hundred languages of children, pedagogical documentation, child-centred planning and the organisation of stimulating educational environments can be incorporated into existing educational activities.

In this context, particular attention should be paid to developing mechanisms for assessing the effectiveness of the integrated approach. Traditional assessment practices that primarily focus on predetermined learning outcomes may not fully reflect the diversity of children's developmental achievements within the Reggio Emilia framework. Therefore, greater emphasis should be placed on systematic observation, the analysis of children's creative products, portfolios, project documentation and the assessment of their communication, problem-solving, collaborative and independent learning skills. Such an approach would make it possible to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of children's individual developmental trajectories. It is also important to consider that the integration of Reggio Emilia elements should be implemented gradually and systematically. Introducing isolated creative activities or redesigning classroom interiors alone cannot ensure the effective application of this pedagogical philosophy. Genuine integration requires coordinated changes in educational planning, teacher preparation, the organisation of the learning environment, family engagement and the assessment of children's development. Consequently, the effectiveness of this process depends on the consistency of institutional management, methodological support and the professional readiness of educators. From this perspective, adapting the Reggio Emilia approach to the Uzbek preschool education system requires a comprehensive scientific and methodological framework that takes into account national educational priorities, cultural values, institutional capacities and the developmental needs of preschool children. Developing such a framework would contribute to strengthening the child-centred orientation of preschool education, expanding opportunities for creative and independent learning, and improving the professional and methodological capacity of educators.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted comprehensively with the aim of identifying the possibilities of integrating elements of the Reggio Emilia pedagogical approach into the national preschool education system, as well as the systemic barriers that may arise during this process. The research process was based on the combination of theoretical and empirical analytical methods. The methodological framework of the study consisted of the regulatory and legal documents of the Republic of Uzbekistan concerning preschool education, as well as the principles of learner-centred education and the conceptual models of Reggio Emilia pedagogy, particularly the "Hundred Languages of Children" and the "Third Teacher" concepts. A three-stage approach was employed to collect empirical data. At the first stage, surveys were conducted among teaching staff and methodologists of preschool educational organisations to assess their professional knowledge and understanding of the Reggio Emilia approach. At the second stage, the educational environments of preschool group rooms, their provision with natural and alternative learning resources, and the organisational formats of

educational activities were examined using specially designed observation checklists. At the third stage, experimental activities were organised in selected preschool educational organisations to introduce the fundamental elements of the Reggio Emilia approach, including flexible learning environments, project-based learning and pedagogical documentation. Throughout this process, practical mechanisms for incorporating Reggio Emilia elements into the existing national curriculum in an integrated and flexible manner were tested while maintaining the core requirements of the traditional educational programme.

The observations resulted in the development of specific analytical indicators concerning the main challenges associated with introducing Reggio Emilia elements into national preschool educational organisations and the opportunities for overcoming them. Regarding staff readiness and methodological support, the analysis revealed that the majority of educators possessed only theoretical knowledge of the Reggio Emilia approach, while their practical skills in implementing project-based learning and documenting children's activities remained insufficient. However, following the organisation of practical training sessions and targeted seminars, educators demonstrated a considerable improvement in their methodological competencies, particularly in supporting children's initiatives and developing flexible educational plans.

An analysis of curricular and regulatory barriers revealed that rigidly structured daily activity schedules created certain difficulties in implementing long-term educational projects. The introduction of flexible time slots and project-oriented activities within the daily routine, while maintaining compliance with the national curriculum requirements, contributed to improvements in children's cognitive engagement, independent decision-making in problem-solving situations and creative self-expression.

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of the study demonstrate that the direct and mechanical transfer of the Reggio Emilia pedagogical approach into the traditional preschool education system is neither feasible nor methodologically appropriate. However, the integration of its fundamental elements, adapted to national educational standards and the requirements of presidential decrees and resolutions of the Republic of Uzbekistan concerning preschool education reforms, can produce significant educational benefits.

Based on the scientific and practical findings obtained, the following key recommendations are proposed:

1. Professional training and development of pedagogical staff. It is necessary to incorporate practical modules introducing contemporary Reggio Emilia pedagogical technologies, particularly pedagogical documentation and the Atelier (art studio) approach, into the curricula of higher education institutions specialising in preschool education and professional development programmes for educators. Such modules should focus not only on theoretical knowledge but also on developing practical competencies in project-based

learning, pedagogical observation, creative activity planning and the documentation of children's developmental processes.

2. Creating an ecological and flexible educational environment. Preschool educational organisations should strengthen the developmental and educational functions of their environments by making greater use of natural, recycled and open-ended materials instead of relying predominantly on expensive, ready-made toys. The use of locally available resources, natural objects and reusable materials can create opportunities for children's experimentation, construction, artistic expression and independent exploration. This approach can also contribute to developing environmental awareness and responsible attitudes towards natural resources from an early age.

3. Adapting the daily educational schedule. Within the framework of the "Ilk Qadam" State Curriculum, it is recommended that flexible time slots be allocated, particularly during the second half of the day, for long-term project-based activities initiated by children. Such arrangements would provide opportunities for children to investigate topics of personal interest, participate in collaborative activities and develop their ideas through continuous exploration and experimentation. At the same time, flexibility in scheduling should be ensured without compromising the established requirements of children's daily routines, health and developmental needs.

As an overall conclusion, it should be emphasised that the carefully planned integration of Reggio Emilia elements into the national preschool education system can serve as an important factor in developing children's independent and logical thinking, strengthening their creative potential and improving the quality of preschool education in accordance with international educational standards. The successful implementation of this approach depends not on the mechanical adoption of foreign pedagogical practices, but on their scientifically grounded adaptation to national educational priorities, institutional conditions and the individual developmental characteristics of preschool children.

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