

PSYCHOPEDAGOGICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF DEVELOPING EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE IN CHILDREN EDUCATED IN INCLUSIVE CLASSROOMS

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Abstract. This study sets out to examine, on a theoretical level, how emotional intelligence (EQ) develops among children who are educated in inclusive classrooms, to pinpoint the core psychological and pedagogical factors that shape this process, and to propose a workable psychopedagogical model for use in inclusive settings. The research relies on systemic and activity-based approaches together with cognitive-affective developmental theories, and applies scientific-theoretical synthesis and comparative-conceptual analysis to contemporary domestic and international literature on inclusive education and emotional intelligence. The findings indicate that the successful inclusion of children cannot be measured by academic outcomes alone; emotional-intelligence competencies that support their socio-psychological adjustment need to be given priority.

Keywords: inclusive education, emotional intelligence, empathy, psychopedagogical mechanisms, social-emotional learning, children, adaptation.

Introduction

Today, amid the humanization, democratization, and restructuring of global and national education systems around the principles of equality, the idea of inclusive education is coming to the forefront. Inclusive education refers to a progressive system that ensures the inclusion of all individuals in equitable, unobstructed, and high-quality education, regardless of physical, psychological,

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cognitive, sensory, or social differences among them. However, contemporary pedagogical practice and empirical observations indicate that simply placing children in the same room within an inclusive classroom, physically adapting the environment to their needs, and having them master the standard curriculum are not sufficient for full socialization [Aliyeva, 2019].

The degree to which adaptation is qualitative and sustainable in such environments—where children with differing developmental needs, characteristics, and behavioral patterns are educated together—depends, first and foremost, on their emotional-social skills. In this regard, the purposeful development of emotional intelligence (EQ) in children studying in inclusive classrooms has become one of the most pressing and urgent tasks of contemporary psychopedagogy. Emotional intelligence refers to the set of skills involved in a person's recognition, differentiation, and regulation of their own emotions, along with the accurate perception of others' feelings and states (empathy) and the ability to build social relationships without generating tension [Goleman, 2005; Jabbarov et al., 2023].

As noted in contemporary psychological research, high emotional intelligence not only strengthens an individual's inner balance and affective stability but also considerably facilitates their integration into the surrounding environment, particularly into heterogeneous groups composed of diverse individuals [Mayer et al., 2008]. In inclusive classrooms, both children with special needs and typically developing children may encounter emotional tension, inner anxiety, the risk of bullying (isolation and rejection), and communication difficulties. For this reason, the development of emotional intelligence in children is regarded as one of the core psychopedagogical conditions for creating an equitable, tolerant, and safe educational environment.

Level of research on the problem. Although the general pedagogical-didactic foundations of inclusive education and the structural composition of emotional intelligence have each been studied fairly extensively in isolation, the intersection of these two areas—specifically, the psychopedagogical mechanisms underlying the development of emotional intelligence in children within inclusive environments—has not yet been examined systematically or monographically. At present, attention in educational institutions is directed mainly toward children's intellectual (IQ) and academic

performance, while their emotional potential, inner world of feelings, and intrinsic motivation remain overshadowed. This imbalance, in turn, creates conditions conducive to children's rapid fatigue, decreased motivation, and the emergence of alienation, conformism, and aggressive behavior among them. A number of studies show that the problem has a wide range of dimensions [Jabbarov et al., 2018]. Resolving these issues within a single, unified context is difficult. Studies conducted in this area show that, in reflective analysis, understanding one's personal motivational strategy and the ineffectiveness of attempting to change it can lay the groundwork for enhancing the effectiveness of the self-awareness process, the principal pathway to which is the development of motivation [Jabbarov and Mammadova, 2024].

Literature Review

The formation of emotional intelligence in children in inclusive classrooms is not a one-sided pedagogical influence but a multifaceted, dynamic, and reciprocal (subject-subject) psychological process. For this process to be effective, both individual-psychological and institutional-pedagogical mechanisms within the learning environment must operate simultaneously and complementarily. A theoretical analysis of existing inclusive practice reveals that a number of fundamental issues and internal contradictions in this field remain unresolved [Jabbarov et al., 2022].

Communicative and affective barriers (psychological aspect). In inclusive classrooms, during the joint activities of children with diverse developmental characteristics and sensory capacities, the risk of an "us" versus "them" division emerging at the initial stage of adaptation is fairly high [Elkoca and Bilgin, 2025].

Typically developing children sometimes fail to correctly read the emotional states, non-verbal cues, and facial expressions of peers with special needs. On the other hand, children with limited health capacities are observed to either suppress their emotions (repression) or, conversely, express them aggressively, against a backdrop of fear of failure, low self-confidence, heightened

sensitivity, and social maladjustment; it is also noted that these children themselves have difficulty adequately interpreting the emotional states of their peers and adults [Akhmetzyanova et al., 2023]. The development of empathy—the ability to enter another person’s emotional world and view events from their perspective—serves as the principal psychological tool for overcoming this contradiction.

Pedagogical environment and the preparedness of education participants. The greatest structural barrier to the development of emotional intelligence is that contemporary curricula are almost entirely cognitively oriented. Teachers’ attention is directed mainly toward the formation of formal knowledge and skills in children, while their emotions, self-regulation, and self-expression capacities are pushed into the background. Yet it is essential that the inclusive-classroom teacher possess a high level of emotional competence (EQ) and be able to manage their own emotions in moments of crisis [Calandri et al., 2025]. Studies show that a teacher’s level of empathy directly determines the quality of the relationships they build with students and, consequently, student outcomes [Aldrup et al., 2022].

If the teacher fails to create an emotionally safe environment (psychological comfort) and an inclusive culture in the classroom, mutual tolerance and emotional adjustment among children become difficult to achieve. Collaborative activity and cooperative-learning mechanisms. From a psychopedagogical standpoint, emotional intelligence does not develop in isolation but only through real activity and social interaction. Collaborative learning methods applied in inclusive classrooms—role play, storytelling therapy, elements of art therapy, and joint projects—foster a sense of teamwork, mutual support, and emotional solidarity among children. Through such activities, children gain shared experience, learning both to manage their own feelings and to respond sensitively to the emotional needs of their peers. Table 1 summarizes the key psychopedagogical factors influencing this process and their practical application.

Table 1. Key psychopedagogical factors influencing EQ development in inclusive classrooms

Factor	Psychological significance	Pedagogical application (teacher's role)
Empathetic environment	Fosters tolerance toward differences among children.	Role play, storytelling therapy, joint group tasks.
Affective self-regulation	Reduces anxiety related to failure among children with limited health capacities.	Setting up an “emotion corner” in the classroom; breathing and relaxation exercises.
Social adaptation	Facilitates the acceptance of the child with special needs by the peer group.	Cooperative learning methods.

At the same time, the absence of a unified and flexible psychopedagogical monitoring system for tracking the development of emotional intelligence in inclusive classrooms remains a serious problem. There is a clear need to develop standardized diagnostic methods, adapted to inclusive realities, for monitoring the dynamics of children's emotional development.

Methodology

The methodological basis of this theoretical-conceptual study consists of systemic, humanistic, subject-subject, and activity-oriented scientific approaches. In examining the development and management of emotional intelligence in children in inclusive classrooms, the study is grounded in the following scientific principles:

- Systemic approach: The inclusive educational environment and the child's emotional sphere are considered as a unified, integral system consisting of closely interconnected elements. The child's emotional intelligence functions not merely as an individual adaptive mechanism but also as a direct outcome of the classroom's micro-social environment and pedagogical relationships.
- Activity-based approach: According to this approach, the formation of emotional intelligence and the refinement of internal emotional-regulation mechanisms in children can occur only through active social interaction and joint activity (learning, play, communication, cooperation) [Vygotsky, 1991].

- Cognitive-affective theory of emotional intelligence (D. Goleman, J. Mayer, P. Salovey):

According to this theory, emotions are not separate from cognitive processes; rather, in an inclusive environment, a child's cognitive activity and academic outcomes largely depend on how they recognize and regulate their own emotions [Goleman, 2005; Mayer et al., 2008; Elkoca and Bilgin, 2025]. The study makes extensive use of scientific-theoretical generalization, comparative analysis, synthesis of the psychopedagogical literature, and scientific modeling methods.

Results

The theoretical analysis conducted and the review of the existing literature indicate that, for the effective development of emotional intelligence in children in inclusive classrooms, the educational process must move away from the traditional “knowledge transmission” model and rely instead on the internationally recognized “Social-Emotional Learning” (SEL) approach [7]. Notably, recent meta-analytic studies confirm that SEL programs demonstrate higher effectiveness specifically in inclusive (mixed) groups compared with separate groups [9], although the majority of research in the SEL field still does not sufficiently address children with disabilities [10]. Within this study, the conceptual model proposed for the inclusive environment is based on the interdependence of three main components:

1. Internal adaptation component: The child's timely recognition and naming of their own negative and positive feelings (fear, anxiety, aggression, joy) and learning to manage them in a harmless way, in accordance with the rules of the inclusive classroom.
2. External-communicative component (empathy): The mutual empathy and tolerance shown by children with limited health capacities and their typically developing peers toward one another's emotional states, and the formation of a natural mutual-support environment in the classroom.
3. Pedagogical-facilitation component: The teacher's move away from an authoritarian

management style toward building equitable partnership (subject-subject) relationships and creating a supportive environment that protects every child's emotional safety.

The theoretical application of this model offers a conceptual resolution to the contradiction frequently encountered in inclusive-education practice, whereby “formal academic integration exists, but genuine social-emotional integration does not.”

Conclusion

This theoretical-conceptual analysis, devoted to the psychopedagogical issues of developing emotional intelligence (EQ) in children studying in inclusive classrooms, allows the following main scientific conclusions to be drawn:

1. The ultimate success of inclusive education cannot be measured solely by children's physical presence in the same classroom or by their mastery of the standard curriculum (IQ). Emotional intelligence is a crucial factor that ensures children's socio-psychological adaptation, reduces internal tension, and accelerates their full integration into the inclusive environment.

2. Serious difficulties arising from differences in inclusive classrooms—such as alienation, weak emotional self-regulation, depressive mood, and internal fears—can be significantly reduced through the consistent, systematic development of empathy and affective-management skills in children.

3. Traditional cognitively oriented teaching methods do not fully meet the emotional-psychological needs of inclusive classrooms. A shift toward subject-subject relationships and the “Social-Emotional Learning” (SEL) model in the educational process is one of the essential requirements of contemporary inclusive pedagogy.

Practical-Pedagogical Recommendations

- Visual and interactive modules, role play, storytelling therapy, and corrective psychological exercises that develop children's emotional sphere should be continuously incorporated into the curricula of inclusive classrooms.
- Professional development courses and training sessions aimed at enhancing the emotional competence of teaching staff and tutors working in inclusive classrooms, and at strengthening their emotional-support skills during moments of crisis, should be organized.
- Coordinated action among the school psychologist, class teacher, and parents should be ensured, and the dynamics of children's emotional development (fear, aggression, level of empathy) should be regularly monitored—for example, through quarterly diagnostic assessments.

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