

## ГОТОВНОСТ НА УЧИТЕЛИТЕ ЗА АДАПТИРАНЕ НА УЧЕБНОТО СЪДЪРЖАНИЕ ЗА ДЕЦА СЪС СПЕЦИАЛНИ ОБРАЗОВАТЕЛНИ ПОТРЕБНОСТИ В ПРЕДУЧИЛИЩНА ВЪЗРАСТ В КОНТЕКСТА НА ПРИОБЩАВАЩОТО ОБРАЗОВАНИЕ

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**Резюме:** В настоящата научна статия се разглеждат увереността и компетентността на детските и ресурсните учители за адаптиране на учебното съдържание за деца със специални образователни потребности в контекста на приобщаващото образование. Изследването, което включва емпирични данни от 20 детски и ресурсни учители от 10 детски градини, разкрива съществени различия в самооценката на учителите за техните способности в зависимост от специфичната им роля и професионална подготовка. Изненадващо, възпитателите оценяват адаптивните си умения по-високо, докато ресурсните учители имат по-ниска самооценка, въпреки специализираната си подготовка. Резултатите подчертават значението на непрекъснатото професионално развитие и допълнителното обучение на ресурсните учители за подобряване на самочувствието им и повишаване на адаптивните им умения. Настоящото проучване подчертава също така значението на по-доброто разбиране и признаване на специфичните предизвикателства и нужди, свързани с адаптирането на учебното съдържание за деца със специални образователни потребности в контекста на приобщаващото образование.

**Ключови думи:** адаптация на образователното съдържание, приобщаващо образование, деца със специални образователни потребности, професионално развитие на учителите

# PREPARING TEACHERS FOR ADAPTING EDUCATIONAL CONTENT FOR PRESCHOOL CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Kaloyan Damyanov

**Abstract:** This research article explores the confidence and competence of preschool educators and resource teachers in adapting educational content for children with special educational needs in the context of inclusive education. The study, which includes empirical data from 20 educators and resource teachers from 10 kindergartens revealed significant differences in teachers' self-perceptions of their abilities based on their specific role and professional training. Surprisingly, educators rate their adaptive skills higher, while resource teachers, have lower self-esteem despite their specialised training. The results highlight the importance of continuous professional development and additional training for resource teachers to improve their self-confidence and increase their adaptive skills. The present study also underlines the importance of better understanding and recognising the specific challenges and needs related to the adaptation of educational content for children with special educational needs in the context of inclusive education.

**Keywords:** adaptation of educational content, inclusive education, children with special educational needs, teachers' professional development

## INTRODUCTION

Social integration and equality in the preschool educational context are essential topics in the contemporary didactic and social setting. Children with special educational needs, who by their nature have unique needs and challenges, require a specially adapted approach to education, especially in pre-school educational institutions.

The central aim of the present study is to analyse the different methods and strategies for adapting educational content in educational institutions, with a particular emphasis on their effectiveness for the integration and education of children with special educational needs. It offers a detailed analysis of existing pedagogical practices and techniques and lays the foundations for future improvements and innovations in the field.

The introduction of the study clarifies several key concepts in the context of Bulgarian educational legislation. Special educational needs are defined as needs that may arise in sensory or physical impairments, intellectual difficulties,

language and speech disorders, specific learning disabilities, autism spectrum disorders, emotional and behavioural disorders (ZPUO, 2015). An innovative feature of modern Bulgarian education policy is the recognition that despite the presence of such impairments and conditions, there is not always an automatic correlation with special educational needs. This approach has a profound impact on the procedures and concepts for supporting personal development.

Inclusive education, on the other hand, is defined as a process of recognizing, accepting, and supporting individuality and diversity of all children through the activation and mobilization of resources aimed at removing barriers to learning and instruction and creating opportunities for development and participation in all aspects of community life (ZPUO, 2015).

The adaptation of educational content represents a complex process of modifying educational materials and methodologies, with the aim of optimizing the learning experience in accordance with the unique needs of each student. This is not an isolated effort, but is carried out in close connection with creating an enriched, supportive educational environment within the inclusive classrooms in preschool education.

Under this broad conceptual framework, the present study will strive to expand understanding of how the adaptation of educational content can improve the education and inclusion of children with special educational needs at the preschool stage of education. A key goal of our work will be to analyse and synthesize existing approaches, identify successful strategies and practices, and propose potential directions for future innovations in this field.

### **TOWARDS A BROADER UNDERSTANDING OF ADAPTATION IN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION**

In order to contribute to a deeper understanding of the adaptation process in the context of inclusive education, it is necessary to conduct a comprehensive review of previous scientific research and publications. This review will focus on educational strategies and methods proposed for working with children with special educational needs, including both theoretical and practical approaches, which are based on scientific research and proven in practice.

Inclusive education is viewed as a broad philosophy and political principle, encompassing a variety of approaches and attitudes towards the education of all children. It is based on the firmly held belief that students of different abilities have the right to meaningful, appropriate, and fair education, equal to the education of their peers (Damyánov, 2019). This point of view is supported by a variety of opinions among experts and researchers who believe that every child has the potential to be valued, respected, and supported within inclusive education.

Inclusive education is defined as a concept that encourages educational institutions to encompass all students, regardless of their physical, intellectual,

social, emotional, linguistic, or other needs (Armstrong, Armstrong & Spandagou, 2011). It represents a framework for learning that strives for equality and participation for all.

According to UNESCO's definition, inclusive education is "a process of continually seeking appropriate strategies to overcome barriers that hinder the learning and participation of all children" (UNESCO, 2020). This requires the development of an educational system that responds to the diverse needs of all children and guarantees quality education for all, without exception.

Inclusive education covers not only children with special educational needs (SEN) and chronic diseases but seeks to include all students, regardless of their origin, ethnic affiliation, socio-economic status, or other individual characteristics. However, within the current study, special emphasis will be placed on children with SEN and chronic diseases, as they pose the greatest challenge for adapting the educational content and teaching methodologies, due to the different levels of perception and learning among them.

Inclusive education at the preschool stage is an important component in early development and the establishment of basic social skills. Kindergartens play a strategic role in the pedagogical process, actively promoting principles of equality, respect for diversity, and full participation of all children.

Education, based on the concept of inclusion in the pre-school period, provides equal opportunities for development, learning, and success for all children. It incorporates appropriate and adapted strategies that help overcome barriers to learning and active participation. Ensuring such education is a top priority for educational specialists in this field, as well as for the entire education system.

Inclusive education is implemented at all educational stages, aiming at maximum inclusion of children in every aspect of the learning process - from learning situations, music programs, and games to the organization of free time. In cases where the child needs additional support, the relevant activities are mainly carried out in the educational environment, along with the other children.

It is essential to note that the practice of inclusion is not necessarily synonymous with absolute integration into standard educational activities. It goes beyond merely accommodating the student and includes meaningful participation and stimulation of interaction with other students.

Inclusive education, with its universal character, supports the holistic development of the child, stimulates social integration, and educates children from different social spheres, thus contributing to a more just and equal society.

The "Index for Inclusion" methodology, developed in the United Kingdom by Booth and Ainscow (2011), is a unique tool that helps educational institutions in developing more inclusive and effective strategies. The methodology is oriented towards three key areas: creating inclusive cultures, developing inclusive policies, and implementing inclusive practices.

Creating inclusive cultures is fundamental to forming a community where every participant feels valued and important. This process encompasses the transformation of relationships and attitudes towards diversity, as well as training staff to accept and respect this diversity.

Formulating inclusive policies is aimed at structuring social models and procedures that actively support inclusion in the educational environment. This process may involve specific strategies for working with children with special educational needs and chronic illnesses (Booth & Ainscow, 2011).

The implementation of inclusive practices encompass the specific methods and techniques applied in the educational environment, aimed at ensuring the full participation of all students.

Adapting the curriculum for children with special educational needs and chronic illnesses requires flexibility and innovative approaches. The educational process must be modified to meet the individual needs of the children, taking into account their physical, cognitive, and emotional abilities (Armstrong, Armstrong & Spandagou, 2011).

Effective inclusive education is not limited to the use of special methods and practices. It requires appropriate pedagogical staff who are capable of teaching and promoting the active and full participation of all children in academic and extracurricular activities. This includes providing suitable educational resources and aids that help children overcome potential obstacles they may face.

It is important for the preschool education system to adopt a holistic approach to inclusive education, which includes not only the formal learning process but also interpersonal relationships, the school environment, and society as a whole. This may involve actions that remove barriers to learning and participation, create a supportive environment that accepts differences, and provide children with the opportunity to develop their skills and abilities as fully as possible.

To achieve effective inclusion, adequate preparation of teachers and other educational specialists is also necessary. They must be prepared to apply innovative and effective strategies, adapt teaching materials, and provide the necessary support for all students, regardless of their individual needs and abilities.

To ensure the quality and efficiency of educational content adaptation in pre-school education for children with special educational needs and chronic illnesses, it is critically important to create an accessible and inclusive environment. The focus of kindergarten teachers and resource teachers should be directed towards the individual abilities of children, as each child is unique, there can be no universal guidelines for creating an educational environment, yet there are some common ones available (Yankova, 2019).

The design of the educational space should be carefully considered and adapted to accommodate the age, typological, and individual characteristics of children. This includes not only the physical environment but also the way the learning process is organized.

Kindergartens do not only serve as an educational space but are also a place for socialization. According to the principles of inclusive education, they should provide all children with a universally accessible environment. This means an environment that offers conditions for learning, playing, and entertainment, shared emotions and experiences, while simultaneously creating a sense of comfort and security.

In the modern process of education, the adaptation of the educational environment is presented as a critical component of inclusive practice. It involves the active engagement of the learner in creating individualized educational trajectories or programs that are adequate to their unique personality (Kolchakova, G, Damyanov, K, 2020). The term "adaptation in education" has gained significant popularity in the context of integrated and inclusive education, especially in relation to students with special educational needs (SEN). However, it also finds successful application in working with gifted students.

The process of adapting educational content should be preceded by a detailed functional assessment of each student in the group. The evaluation of students with Special Educational Needs (SEN) is motivated by four main factors: screening, determining educational needs, placement in a suitable educational environment, and monitoring progress (Tsvetkova-Arsova, 2015).

Based on the assessment and the degree of manifestation of specific conditions, each child may need different types of support, standard or additional, during their time in the educational environment (Damyanov, 2020). For children with SEN, support is essential. Applying these principles requires educational professionals to be well-prepared and trained to implement adapted educational content in their practice.

Adapting educational content for children with SEN or chronic illnesses requires an individualized and flexible approach (Levterova, 2023). This includes acknowledging and recognizing the different ways these children learn and interact with their environment. The adaptation process is dynamic and should be tuned based on the individual learning capabilities of each child.

In order to achieve effective adaptation, educators need to be equipped with knowledge and skills for working with children with SEN and be able to apply multisensory learning strategies that respond to the individual needs of each child. This ensures access to educational content, taking into account the unique capabilities of each child.

## METHODOLOGY

This study explores the understanding and interpretation of meanings that participants ascribe to their experiences in the context of inclusive education. We employ a qualitative research approach, which is particularly suited for examining the complex social dynamics typical in pre-educational settings.

Participants in this study are drawn from ten kindergartens in Sofia, all experienced in the field of inclusive education. The group comprises twenty educational

professionals, equally divided between **ten resource teachers** and **ten kindergarten teachers**, all actively involved in supporting children with special educational needs.

We use semi-structured interviews to collect data, which is an effective way of asking open-ended questions and getting detailed responses. Each interview is conducted within the kindergarten and lasts about 60 minutes. Additionally, we use self-assessment questionnaires to assess the educators' readiness to adapt educational content.

Following data collection, we perform thematic analysis. This begins with a thorough reading and re-reading of the data to identify potential themes. These initial ideas are then developed into distinct themes that most accurately reflect the data collected.

All participants were fully informed and provided consent for their involvement in the study. The aim of this research is to provide a comprehensive and accurate portrayal of the issue and to propose specific recommendations for optimizing inclusive education practices.

The primary research instrument employed in this study was a carefully designed questionnaire, tailored to explore various dimensions of the adaptation of educational content for children with special educational needs within inclusive education settings. The questionnaire comprised multiple sections, each targeting specific aspects of content adaptation and teacher preparedness.

The analysis of the collected data, as presented in Table 1 and Figure 1, yielded key insights into the teachers' perceptions and experiences regarding the adaptation of instructional content. The questionnaire's findings are further corroborated by empirical observations and the thematic analysis of teachers' responses. Taken together, these elements provide a comprehensive understanding of the current landscape and challenges in this area.

## RESULTS

The analysis of the collected data led to certain key conclusions that underline the importance and impact of the adaptation of the educational content for children with special educational needs in the context of inclusive education.

Empirical observations support the thesis that the adaptation of educational content is essential for the success of children with special educational needs in the educational environment. The teachers' responses suggest that when the educational content is appropriately adapted to the individual needs of the students, they achieve higher efficiency and active participation in the educational process.

The thematic analysis of the teachers' responses reveals certain issues in adapting the educational content, including the lack of resources and support, as well as insufficient training and preparation in the field of special education.

At the same time, many teachers have shared successful strategies for adapting educational content. These include the use of visual supports, learning support technologies, differentiated instruction, and individualized education plans.

Teachers emphasise the need for better support and training for the adaptation of educational content. They expressed a need for additional training and resources to help them improve their ability to meet the individual needs of students with special educational needs in the educational environment.

These observations underline the complexity of the task of adapting educational content for children with special educational needs and outline the need for greater support and training for teachers in this area.

In the re-evaluation of our study's results, particularly the interviews covering five domains, we have now distinctly separated the responses of **resource teachers** from those of kindergarten teachers. This segregation is pivotal to discerning the impact of their different professional training on their perspectives and practices in adapting educational content for children with special educational needs within inclusive education.

Thematic analysis with this distinction provides more tailored insights:

**Resource Teachers:** The responses from resource teachers, who specialize in special education, reveal a deep understanding of the needs of children with special educational needs. They highlighted more specific challenges in adapting educational content, such as the need for specialized resources and advanced training in special education methodologies.

**Kindergarten Teachers:** Kindergarten teachers, on the other hand, emphasized more on general strategies for content adaptation, such as the use of visual aids and differentiated instruction. Their feedback points to a need for broader training that encompasses aspects of special education to better equip them for inclusive settings.

The differentiation in responses underscores the varying levels of preparedness and perspectives between the two groups. It highlights the necessity for tailored professional development programs. For resource teachers, the focus may be on advanced specialized techniques, whereas for kindergarten teachers, a more foundational training in inclusive and special education practices may be beneficial.

As can be seen in Table 1 below, the main areas (domains) related to the adaptation of educational content in preschool education were identified:

Domain	Agreement (number of teachers)	Disagreement (number of teachers)
I adapt educational content for children with special educational needs	19	1
Need more training to adapt educational content	15	5
I use additional strategies to support adaptation of educational content	12	8
I encounter difficulties when adapting educational content for children with special educational needs	8	12
I lack support for educational content	10	10

Table 1 Results from interviews with preschool teachers and resource teachers



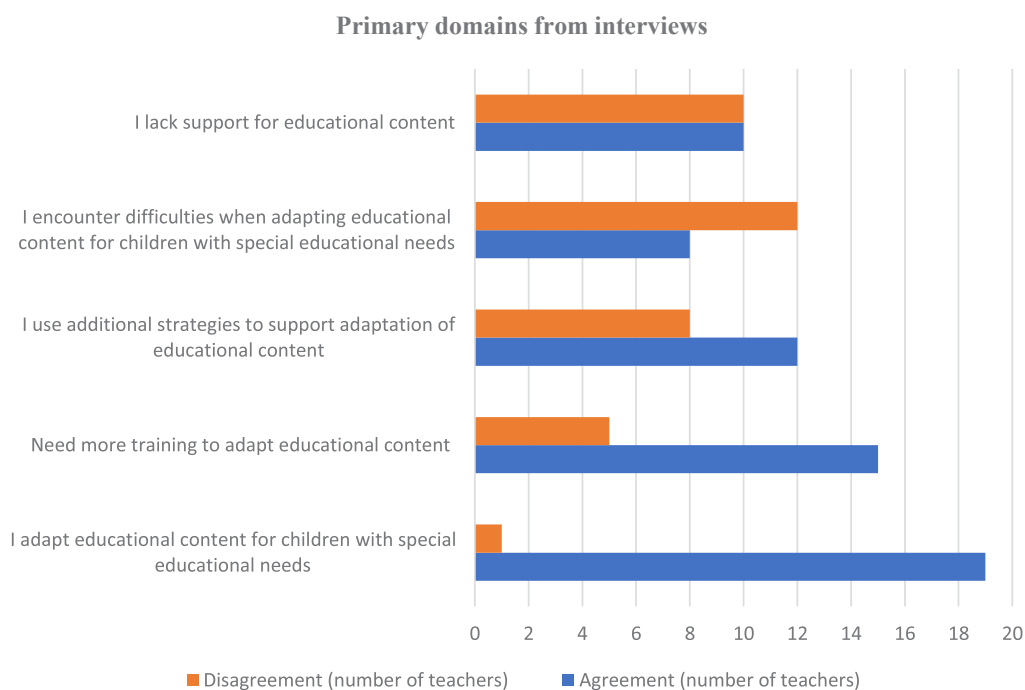


Figure 1 Primary domains form interviews with educational professionals

This detailed analysis of the data (refer to Table 1 and Figure 1) critically examines the differing responses and experiences of two teacher groups in adapting instructional content for children with special educational needs: kindergarten teachers and resource teachers. The latter group is noted for having more specialized adaptation skills.

**Adapting Instructional Content.** Out of 20 teachers, 19 reported adapting instructional content. However, all resource teachers (10 out of 10) demonstrated effective application of this skill, highlighting their proficiency. In contrast, only 6 out of 10 kindergarten teachers indicated they adapt content, showing a notable disparity in their ability to implement these adaptations effectively.

**Training Needs for Content Adaptation.** Among the teachers, 15 recognized the need for additional training. This need was particularly pronounced among kindergarten teachers, with 10 out of 10 expressing a desire for more training, compared to only 5 out of 10 resource teachers. This discrepancy suggests a significant gap in the training and preparedness of kindergarten teachers in special education practices.

**Use of Additional Strategies and Technologies.** While half of the teachers (10 out of 20) use technological tools for adapting content, this practice is predominantly observed among resource teachers. Only 2 out of 10 kindergarten teachers reported using such strategies, indicating a lack of familiarity or access to these resources.

**Difficulties in Adapting Content.** The majority of the 8 teachers who reported difficulties in adapting content were kindergarten teachers. This finding underscores the challenges faced by kindergarten teachers in this area, likely due to less specialized training compared to their resource teacher counterparts.

**Lack of Support for Content Adaptation.** This concern is reported by both groups, but is more acutely felt among kindergarten teachers, with 8 out of 10 expressing a lack of support, in contrast to only 2 out of 10 resource teachers. This reflects the additional challenges and needs for support faced by kindergarten teachers in adapting to the diverse needs of students with special educational needs.

In summary, the survey results reveal a clear distinction between kindergarten and resource teachers in terms of proficiency and challenges faced in adapting instructional content. Kindergarten teachers, in particular, demonstrate a need for enhanced training and support to effectively adapt curriculum content within inclusive education settings. The use of self-assessment cards (N20) supports these findings, with kindergarten teachers generally reporting lower self-efficacy for content adaptation than resource teachers.

Rating (1-5)	Number of Teachers
1	5
2	6
3	4
4	3
5	2

Table 2. Self-assessment survey card for teachers

The results from the survey card in Table 2 indicate that teachers rated their capabilities to adapt educational content from 1 (low confidence) to 5 (high confidence). Out of a total of 20 teachers, five rated themselves a 1, six rated a 2, four rated a 3, three rated a 4, and two rated a 5.

The mean score can be calculated by summing all the ratings and dividing by the number of teachers, which in our case is 20. The mean score is 2.6, the mode is 2, the median is 2, and the standard deviation is 1.2. These figures suggest that teachers as a whole do not feel confident in their ability to adapt the curriculum, with a substantial dispersion in responses.

In light of these results, it is recommended that additional training and workshops be conducted to enhance teachers' skills in adapting curriculum. This could include specialized courses designed to assist teachers in developing and implementing a variety of strategies to adapt curriculum to the needs of children with special educational needs. Furthermore, the findings highlight the need for more robust institutional support, such as provision of appropriate

resources and encouragement of a network for sharing best practices among teachers.

In Figure 2, we observe a certain disproportion regarding teachers' self-assessment of their own abilities to differentiate curriculum content. A deeper cross-section reveals that this is due to the markedly different profiles of general education preschool teachers and resource teachers, who are specially trained educational specialists for children with special educational needs.

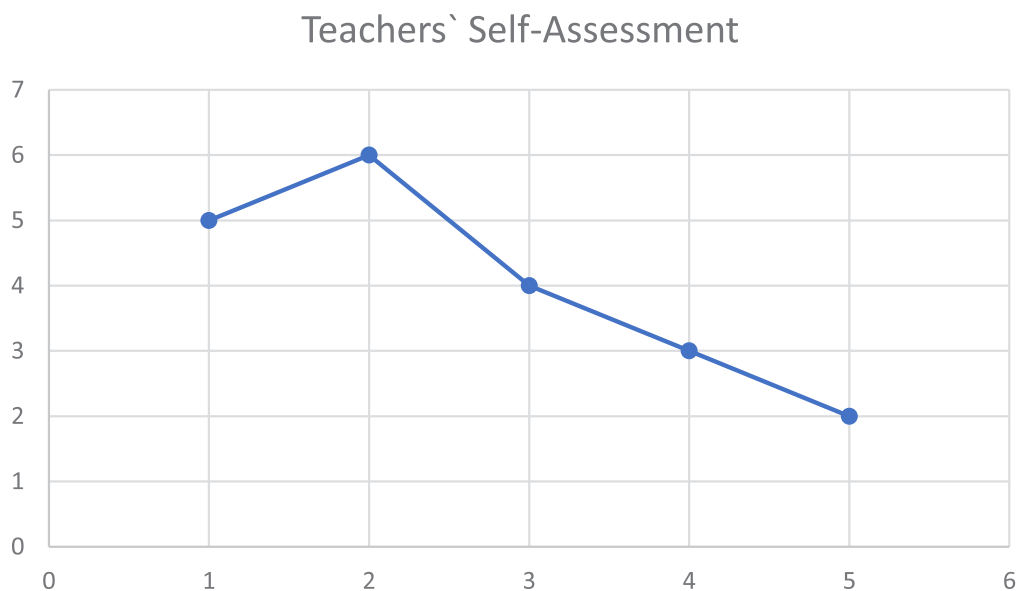


Figure 2 Teachers` Self-Assessment

To make this differentiation between the self-assessment of the two types of educational specialists participating in the study, we have data that show the differences between the self-assessment of the skills of pre-school teachers and resource teachers (special needs teachers) regarding the adaptation of educational content. Once we have the data, we can analyse their distribution, the mean, median, mode, and standard deviation for each group.

Let's assume we have the following data:

Teacher Type	Rating (1-5)	Number of Teachers
Pre-school teacher	1	0
Pre-school teacher	2	1
Pre-school teacher	3	1
Pre-school teacher	4	4
Pre-school teacher	5	4

Resource teacher	1	1
Resource teacher	2	1
Resource teacher	3	2
Resource teacher	4	4
Resource teacher	5	2

Table 3: Self-assessment survey of pre-school teachers and resource teachers (N=20)

Analysing the data collected from the self-assessment survey completed by both preschool teachers and resource teachers, we can deduce that, on average, preschool teachers rate their ability to adapt educational content higher (mean rating of 4.2) compared to resource teachers (mean rating of 3.6). However, it is important to note that the distribution of ratings is different for both groups, with resource teachers demonstrating a greater variability in their self-assessments (standard deviation of 1.2) in comparison to preschool teachers (standard deviation of 0.8).

These discrepancies may be due to the differences in roles, training, or experience between the two groups of educators. Resource teachers might have a more realistic perception of the challenges involved in adapting curriculum for children with special educational needs, which could account for their lower self-rating. Furthermore, resource teachers may exhibit a heightened awareness that the regular classroom teacher has a more direct role in handling the curriculum, whereas their own role is supportive, not primary. Additionally, resource teachers could have higher expectations of their skills, based on their training and experience in special education. Conversely, preschool teachers may have less experience with children with special educational needs, which could lead to a higher self-assessment of their ability to adapt the curriculum.

However, this analysis should be interpreted without claim to generalizability as the number of teachers participating in the survey is relatively small. A larger study could provide a more accurate depiction of the differences between preschool and resource teachers.

Our analysis of the survey data shows that resource teachers as a whole rate their curriculum adaptation skills lower than preschool teachers. This result may seem counterintuitive as resource teachers typically undergo specialized training that equips them with the skills and knowledge to support children with special educational needs and have a realistic evaluation of the level of inclusive education, unlike general education teachers.

However, the specialized training of resource teachers could provide them with a better understanding of the complexities and challenges associated with adapting curriculum for these children. This may explain their lower self-assessment of ability compared to preschool teachers who may not have the same level of understanding or experience.

Despite their lower self-rating, resource teachers may in fact be better prepared to adapt curriculum for children with special educational needs due

to their specialized training. They may have superior skills and strategies for adaptation, as well as a better understanding of these children's needs.

For this reason, it's important to consider methods for enhancing the self-assessment and confidence of resource teachers, such as support for professional development, participation in work groups, or mentorship. All these initiatives can help resource teachers develop and enhance their skills, share experiences, and boost confidence in their abilities.

## CONCLUSION

The study explores curriculum adaptation for children with special educational needs within the context of inclusive education. It highlights the importance of enhancing the abilities of preschool and resource teachers to adapt the curriculum while simultaneously assessing them for this purpose. The survey results reveal that a large proportion of teachers feel confident in their abilities to adapt the curriculum for children with special educational needs. However, there is a significant difference between preschool and resource teachers in terms of these skills and self-assessment.

Based on the study findings, we can conclude that further training and support for teachers, especially those in preschools, is necessary to more effectively handle curriculum adaptation for children with special educational needs. Furthermore, it is important to encourage and strengthen the skills of resource teachers, as they are pivotal figures in inclusive education. Ultimately, effective inclusive education requires a collective effort, enhanced skills, and mutual support from all teachers and professionals working within the education system.

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