

PEDAGOGY

UDC 371.84

DOI: 10.23951/2782-2575-2025-2-5-22

DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIAL COMPETENCE IN PRESCHOOL CHILDREN

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Abstract. This study aims to provide the academic community with appropriate pedagogical tools and educational strategies to promote social competence in preschool children. The authors have identified various pedagogical approaches promoting preschool children's social competence. The importance of this study lies in its theoretical and practical contribution. The results can be used to assess and promote preschool children's social competence so that they can integrate into society successfully. In addition, the results can be used in teacher training.

In the practical part of the experimental study, the authors focused on three main objectives: developing social awareness in preschool children, promoting group-based learning among peers, and teaching socially acceptable behavior. The authors suggested using problem-based learning, modeling real-life situations, and case studies to promote social competence. They also presented a framework for social competence that includes four components: cognitive, personal-regulatory, emotional, and behavioral. These components were defined according to preschool children's level of social awareness, with a focus on developing reflective competence and utilizing their sensory experiences. The study shows the importance of practicing new knowledge and transferring skills to new contexts. The results of using pedagogical tools to develop the individual components of preschool children's social competence are presented.

Keywords: *preschool children, individuality, the object of education, structure of social competence, social adaptation, social competence, pedagogical tools of influence*

Funding: The study was conducted under the state order of the Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation as part of the project "Effective Tools for Personality Development in Preschool Children," registration № 1023120800004-3-5.3.1 (agreement № 073-03-2024-005/2 of August 27, 2024).

For citation: Bystrova Yu.A., Lapp E.A. Development of Social Competence in Preschool Children. *Education & Pedagogy Journal*. 2025;2(14):5-22. doi: 10.23951/2782-2575-2025-2-5-22

Relevance of the topic. As the education system evolves, there is a growing awareness of the need to develop targeted social competence that helps individuals to interact and communicate successfully. Preschool age is particularly important as it is here that the foundations are laid for personality development, early world views, and the skills required for later social integration. Various conceptual documents on the education and upbringing of children describe the social and normative skills expected of preschool children. However, despite increasing research interest, many aspects of early personality development have not yet been sufficiently researched. Modern studies also show a lack of well-developed, evidence-based tools to promote preschool children's social skills. The relevance of this study arises from the need to find effective pedagogical tools for developing preschool children's social competence. The challenge for the preschool education system is to justify and select appropriate methods to promote these skills in young learners effectively.

This study aims to propose practical pedagogical tools for developing preschool children's social competence based on the research conducted.

Scientific novelty – the study presents pedagogical tools for developing preschool children's social competence in an educational kindergarten environment. Theoretical significance – the study improves and deepens the psychological understanding of the importance of social competence development in early childhood.

Practical significance – the study results can be used to improve the development of social competence in preschool children and support their social adjustment. The results can also be incorporated into training programs for educators and continuing education courses.

This study's theoretical and methodological foundation is based on several key concepts. These include theories of the social nature of children's personality development (G. Dulnev, V. Kovalenko, et al.) [1, 2]; principles of social-communicative activity within the subject-activity paradigm (K. Verder, A. Leontiev, S. Rubinstein) [3]; core ideas of social competence formation in older preschool children through interpersonal interaction (E. Butyrskaya, V. Kovalenko, L. Sinopalnikova, et al.) [1, 2] and in various socialization environments (L. Abbasova, O. Galimskaya, I. Zotova, et al.) [4, 5]; and basic positions on the relationship between educational processes and children's development (S. Alekhina, V. Maslova, E. Samsonova, A. Shemanov, et al.) [6–8].

The review and analysis of recent research and teaching practice on the development of social competence in preschool children has shown that the opinions of researchers and educators differ widely (see Table 1).

Table 1

The current context of research

Research Focus	Researchers
Specific features of social competence development in preschool children with different levels of intellectual development [2, 11, 13, 15, 17, 31]	Yu. Bystrova, V. Melekhova, O. Mishenina, I. Smolyarchuk, et al.
Pedagogical tools for the development of social competence in preschool children [18, 22, 26, 27]	V. Belyakina, A. Veraksa, V. Plotnikova, P. Ivenskaya, S. Karpova, S. Ivanova, T. Simonova, et al.
Diagnostics of the current level of social competence in preschool children [3, 9, 16, 22, 24]	O. Aygunova, S. Gorshenina, N. Kumanina, I. Neyasova, N. Polkovnikova, T. Savenkova, et al.
Development of social competence in preschool children both in the school environment and at home [10, 12, 29, 32]	E. Akbasheva, N. Beloborodova, M. Gamova, M. Gorelkina, T. Lobzina, N. Filatova, T. Khanova, et al.
Preparation of students and educators to promote social competence of preschool children [30, 33]	I. Martynova, L. Tseeva, B. Panesh, R. Simbuletova, et al.

Researchers define social competence by three aspects: the process and outcome of acquiring cognitive, emotional, and behavioral interaction skills in social contexts; the learned ability to adapt one's behavior to the expectations of others; and personal qualities developed through social relationships. Researchers emphasize that the development of these competencies requires consideration of societal moral values and norms [9, 10].

The effectiveness of these qualities is assessed through constant observation and evaluation. Researchers emphasize the need to diagnose both general social competence in children of different ages and its specific components [9, 10], including cognitive development, social emotions [1, 7], ethical perceptions [11], and social qualities in various geographical and social contexts [12].

The review of various scientific publications made it possible to assess the current state of social competence in modern preschool children and identify tools for their development. The study sample included 123 preschool children from educational institutions in three historical regions of the Russian Federation – the Donetsk People's

Republic, the Lugansk People's Republic, and the city of Berdyansk in the Zaporizhzhia region. In the first stage of practical work, we identified and described the structural components for the diagnosis and development of social competence and communicative skills in older preschool children [13, 14]:

1) Cognitive component – the child shows an awareness of temporal concepts (past, present, and future), understands basic social and everyday matters, can independently make a simple plan for routine tasks or assigned activities, knows how to search for necessary information in communication, and can achieve results within the framework of age-appropriate actions.

2) Emotional component – the child understands social situations, reacts with appropriate emotions, can deal with negative feelings, and recognizes the emotions of peers and adults around them.

3) Personal-regulatory component – the ability to recognize and correct mistakes, behave appropriately in various situations, express opinions, adjust actions when necessary, and understand personal characteristics and traits.

4) Behavioral component – the ability to apply skills in practice, demonstrate independence in everyday situations, and participate in joint activities with others.

In the initial phase of the study, diagnostic instruments, observations of task performance, and structured interviews were used to determine the general developmental levels of social competence. The levels were categorized as high, adequate, average, and minimal.

A high level of social competence can be identified by the fact that the children demonstrate socially acceptable behavior appropriate to their age – they can analyze social situations according to their developmental level, demonstrate basic skills in predicting, planning, and achieving goals, and demonstrate a developed sense of social reflection. They can manage and evaluate their own behavior, demonstrate socially motivated attitudes, show empathy, use acquired skills effectively in practice, and willingly participate in joint activities with others [13, 15].

Children show a partial understanding of socially acceptable behavior at the average level of social competence. Their ability to analyze social situations appears to be occasional, and the basic skills of predicting, planning, and achieving outcomes are only emerging. Social awareness is unstable, and self-regulation skills are weak. Empathic tendencies are generally absent, and children have difficulty applying learned skills in

practice. Their ability to work effectively with peers and adults is also limited [13, 15].

A limited understanding of social behavior characterizes minimal social competence development. At this level, children do not master the socially normative aspects of behavior in public and cannot independently analyze social situations. Children lack social awareness because they cannot predict, plan, or achieve outcomes. They cannot assess or regulate their behavior and show no empathic tendencies. The children cannot apply the acquired competence in interpersonal interactions and show no interest in participating in cooperative activities [13, 15].

In the study on the formation of social competence in preschool children in the kindergarten educational space, the following methods were used, which, together with forms and tools, form the pedagogical toolkit:

- Method of life situations modeling;
- Case study method;
- Problem-based learning method.

The first method – life situations modeling – creates challenging scenarios for preschool children in their proximal developmental zone. This approach is similar to problem-based learning but requires children to act out everyday social situations. These scenarios encourage reflective thinking and the development of social competence by recognizing the situation, comparing it to past experiences, and developing appropriate behaviors. The method is specifically designed to activate visual-active and visual-imaginative thinking. As part of the educational experiment, the children are confronted with a familiar everyday situation for which a deliberately more complex solution is proposed. This approach stimulates the children's thinking, presents a problem, and encourages them to work together to transform the problematic scenario into a typical, manageable scenario. Under the teacher's guidance, the children develop solutions to overcome the situation. This method of modeling everyday situations can be used effectively in preschool as well as in special support and development sessions by speech therapists or psychologist-led training sessions on social and everyday skills.

The tasks developed with this method help preschool children acquire new social skills to more easily recognize and solve similar situations in the future and transfer them to new contexts. To ensure this, the children later work on similar situations presented by the teacher in class during

outdoor play, music lessons, or everyday activities. They can also be taken up and discussed when watching cartoons or set as tasks for the family at home. The more such experiences a child has, the richer their social experiences and the more social skills they acquire. This method is used holistically in preschool lessons and practical activities and in the corrective and developmental work of preschool speech therapists and psychologists.

By modeling everyday situations in class, in outdoor activities, in practical tasks, and in playful interaction, various objectives are to be achieved. The program initially focuses on developing the content component of preschool children's social competence. It helps them to process past, present, and future events, understand relationships, and deal with everyday social and domestic situations. It also promotes their ability to plan activities age-appropriately and verbally describe sequences of actions to achieve a particular goal. For example, children learn how to prepare a salad, what they need for an excursion in winter, how to get from home to kindergarten, or what steps they need to take to buy a chocolate bar.

Secondly, it aims to develop the emotional component of preschool children's social competence: It promotes children's understanding of age-appropriate social and everyday situations and actions, helps them to express their attitudes towards these situations, show emotions appropriately, and deal with negative emotions in a socially acceptable way.

Third, it aims to develop the behavioral component of preschoolers' social competence – the ability to actively communicate with peers and teachers to achieve common goals, engage in shared activities, collaborate on problem-solving tasks, seek help from adults or peers when needed, and offer help to other children in the group.

Fourthly, it aims to develop the personality regulation component of social competence – promoting the early stages of social reflective skills. This includes the ability to evaluate the actions of characters in stories or cartoons, reflect on the behavior of others, and discuss with teachers and peers to find solutions to problems that arise. In doing so, children gradually begin to use language patterns that convey personal attitudes and opinions, such as: 'I think... In my opinion... It seems to me that...'.

Modeling real-life situations consistent with educational programs based on the Federal State Educational Standard for preschool education was conducted according to the approved schedule.

The main techniques used by teachers in applying the situation modeling method include the following scenarios:

- A teacher presents an example of a real or fictional situation in which a character must choose an appropriate, socially acceptable behavior model.
- The teacher describes a situation and asks the children to choose a socially acceptable course of action based on their knowledge and experience.
- The teacher asks the children to describe the sequence of actions a character should perform in the proposed situation (what the character should do first, next, etc.)
- The teacher asks the children to use pictures to identify errors in a sequence of events
- The teacher asks the children to imagine what could happen to a character if an episode or action is removed from the sequence of events
- A teacher encourages the children to correctly arrange the cards, which represent a sequence of events in the given life situation
- A teacher asks the children to continue a situation and describe what will happen next.

The Life Situations Modeling method enables teachers to promote preschoolers' social competence through hands-on experiences such as communication, corrective development activities, outdoor social interactions, and family involvement. At the same time, it provides a valuable way to assess children's social competence and ability to adapt to new situations by acting out similar scenarios in future lessons. Educators can monitor social skill development through various methods, including individualized assessments, peer observations, and parental involvement, by having family members participate in role-plays that mirror everyday situations, such as solving household tasks.

In addition to the modeling method, we have also introduced the case study method. This method presents a series of social situations that are challenging for preschoolers but within their zone of proximal development. Each case is a thoroughly illustrated or described scenario accompanied by an algorithm that solves it through a sequence of actions. The development of the cases is based on L. Vygotsky's concept of learning and development and P. Galperin's theory of gradual formation of mental actions [10, 16].

The case study method should be used with life situation modeling and problem-based learning, as the latter two aim to activate children's thinking processes in a group or independently. In contrast, the case study method presents a ready-made, socially recognized solution that children remember and expect to apply in similar real-life situations. By

gaining social experience through case studies, preschoolers gradually learn to draw on this experience when tackling problem-oriented tasks within their zone of proximal development.

The teacher's algorithm for working with a case study: together with the children, determine the situation based on its essential characteristics → give them step-by-step instructions for solving such a situation → follow the instructions together with the children → achieve the result.

This clear algorithm enables preschoolers to

- find their way around the situation
- understand what such a situation consists of and how to recognize it by its essential characteristics
- learn to recognize and understand similar situations
- learn which problems in this situation can be solved independently and which require asking for help
- solve the problem with the help of adults or independently.

Different types of case studies reinforce the social competence preschool children acquire in the classroom. It is recommended that educators use a wide range of teaching tools, including case studies on social and everyday situations, case-based fairy tales, cases on time management and daily routine, cases with photo stories, and cases based on real-life events that are known to the children.

In addition to the methods described above for developing social competence in preschool children, the study also used the method of problem-based learning. This approach enables a shift from passive listening and simple repetition to active problem-solving engagement. The primary focus was creating problem situations for the children through carefully structured questions, encouraging them to give detailed, thoughtful answers. A deliberately challenging situation was created for the children, and they were encouraged to solve it by asking leading questions: "What do you have to do now? Right. Where can you find it? Who can you ask? Let's go and ask. Now you try." In this way, the children learned to ask for help, offer support, communicate with others, establish new social relationships, act independently, and remember how to deal with similar situations later.

The analysis of the pedagogical experiment made it possible to compare the children's communication skills in new situations before and after the introduction of the pedagogical tools:

- High level of communication with peers when solving common tasks: 0.00% before and 1.61% after the experiment.
- Sufficient level: 6.48% before and 16.10% after the experiment.

- Average level: 54.27% before and 64.58% after the experiment.
- Minimum level: 39.25% before and 17.71% after the experiment.

It was observed that older preschoolers showed an increased ability to work in groups when completing joint tasks. They began to actively participate in interpersonal relationships and adhere to shared norms and rules of social behavior (see Table 2).

Table 2

Comparative analysis of the level of joint communication in older preschool children

Levels	Before the experiment	After the experiment	Difference after the methodology implementation
High	0.00%	1,61%	1,61%
Sufficient	6.48%	16,10%	9,62%
Average	54.27%	64,58%	10,31%
Minimum	39.25%	17,71%	-21,54%
Dynamics of changes (module average)			10.77%

In this study, it was essential to develop communicative and social skills in the children and to ensure that these skills were reinforced in their behavior and applied in practice. To achieve this, the children were repeatedly involved in specially designed situations. During these activities, children were asked guiding questions to consolidate their understanding of the skill and the possible sequence of actions and to encourage basic prediction and planning.

Analysis of the educational experiment made it possible to compare how the children applied the newly acquired skills in their behavior before and after the specially organized sessions:

- Older preschool children were not observed to have a high level of ability to apply acquired skills in practice;
- The percentage of children who showed a sufficient level changed from 9.72% before the experiment to 20.93% after;
- The percentage of children who showed an average level increased from 24.30% to 48.48%.
- The number of children with a minimum level decreased from 65.98% to 30.59%.

At the same time, we observed a clearly positive trend in the older preschoolers' use of the skills they had acquired. In particular, their ability to interact with peers, transfer the social skills acquired in various activities to real-life interactions, and choose appropriate ways to resolve conflict situations improved (see Table 3).

Table 3

Comparative analysis of older preschoolers' ability to apply acquired skills in practice

Levels	Before the experiment	After the experiment	Difference after the methodology implementation
High	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Sufficient	9.72%	20.93%	11.21%
Average	24.30%	48.48%	24.18%
Minimum	65.98%	30.59%	-35.39%
Dynamics of changes (module average)			17.70%

The pedagogical experiment has shown that teaching challenging tasks significantly stimulates the cognitive activity of preschoolers. Continuous work on similar tasks in a group of peers, whether in play, outdoor games, or recreational activities, helps to strengthen children's curiosity and stimulate them to learn [15, 17]. The overall results of the pedagogical toolkit are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4

The level of development of social competence in preschool children

Components	Levels	Preschoolers			φ/p
		Before the experiment	After the experiment	Difference after the methodology implementation	
Cognitive	high	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	–
	suff.	17.55%	26.83%	9.28%	-0.17/0.05
	avg.	35.37%	43.11%	7.74%	-0.09/0.05
	min.	47.08%	30.05%	-17.03%	0.11/0.05
Dynamics of changes (module average)				8,51%	
Personal-Regulatory	high	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	–
	suff.	2.03%	11.27%	9.24%	0/0.05
	avg.	31.53%	52.51%	20.98%	0.12/0.05
	min.	66.45%	36.23%	-30.22%	-0.19/0.05
Dynamics of changes (module average)				15,11%	
Emotional	high	0.00%	0.81%	0.81%	–
	suff.	2.43%	22.54%	20.11%	-1.16/0.01
	avg.	37.64%	53.31%	15.67%	-0.19/0.05
	min.	59.94%	23.35%	-36.59%	0.14/0.05
Dynamics of changes (module average)				18.30%	
Behavioral	high	0.00%	0.81%	0.81%	-
	suff.	8.10%	18.52%	10.42%	-0.27/0.01
	avg.	39.29%	56.53%	17.24%	-0.81/0.01
	min.	52.62%	24.15%	-28.47%	0.23/0.01
Dynamics of changes (module average)				24.63%	

Where 'high' – is the high level, 'suff.' – is the sufficient level, 'avg.' – is the average level, 'min.' – is the minimum level.

As shown in Table 4, the most significant positive changes in skills related to the emotional aspect of social competence were observed in preschool children. This underlines how well young children respond to the proposed pedagogical tools. These tools help children to develop an appropriate emotional understanding of age-relevant social and everyday situations as well as the actions of others – whether they are real people, fairy tale characters, or animated characters in educational media. The results also confirm the effectiveness of promoting children's ability to express emotions, show empathy, show appropriate emotional reactions in different social contexts, and gradually learn to manage negative emotions. The dynamics observed in the behavioral component indicate that the preschoolers were increasingly able to transfer the acquired skills to new contexts – especially to similar situations in real life – and to cope with them by choosing a behavioral style appropriate to the circumstances (see Table 4).

The cognitive component of social competence showed the least progress in preschool children after introducing the proposed teaching methods (see Table 4). This could be due to the children's limited social awareness and their still-developing ability to analyze social situations at this age. The use of problem-based learning and life situation modeling methods showed only the first signs of skills, such as predicting outcomes and planning actions to achieve an outcome in preschoolers. The most effective approach when working with preschoolers proved to be the use of case studies with a clear, step-by-step algorithm of actions suggested by the teacher. Further work continues to refine and justify pedagogical tools to develop the cognitive (content) aspect of social skills. A high level of social competence in the cognitive component was found in only 0.81% of children after implementing the proposed methods – a statistically expected result [13]. Therefore, we consider this study's results to be meaningful and the pedagogical tools used to be effective for preschool children.

Similar studies by Russian researchers partly support the data presented in this article. They have emphasized the positive effects of role-playing games and project-based activities on promoting the development of social competence in preschool children (A. Veraksa, V. Plotnikova, P. Ivinskaya, 2024) [18]. In these studies, role-playing games were also used as real-life case studies, while project activities allowed children to predict and plan their actions independently. However, the authors considered these methods primarily as tools for developing the regulatory component of social competence, particularly the ability to deal with anxiety [18].

Equally important are studies examining the development of social competence in children with special educational needs (V. Kovalenko, 2021; O. Zan, 2022) [2, 17]. In their work, researchers emphasize the importance of developing both the cognitive (understanding) and emotional (attitude) components of social competence in children with special needs [2, 17].

It is important to point out that the study presented in this article takes a comprehensive approach to the process of developing social competence in preschool children – a combination of cognitive understanding of social situations, regulation of actions and emotions (including anxiety), and practical consolidation of these competencies through their application in everyday behavior. Both international and Russian results demonstrate the positive effects of similar educational tools, especially when used in the form of preschool activities such as children's participation in role-playing. Studies have shown that such practices help foster respectful attitudes toward others, form teamwork skills, work under guidance, and a willingness to seek help from peers and adults (M. Başaran, 2023; J. Mahoney) [19–21].

The results of this study extend previous Russian and international research. In particular, they show that using case studies, problem-based learning, modeling of life situations, and role-playing contributes significantly to developing an important integrative personality trait in older preschoolers: social competence. These results provide clearer insights into how these pedagogical tools can promote social competence in preschool children in the context of early childhood education.

This study does not answer all questions about the search for pedagogical tools to develop social skills in preschool children. Future research on this topic could include the development of specific case studies based on real-life situations in combination with other methods to improve preschool children's communicative and social skills. An unresolved issue is the diagnosis and development of social competence in preschool children from diverse backgrounds in inclusive preschool groups. In addition, further research is needed on specific components of social competence, especially those related to the development of social experiences in preschool children.

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ПЕДАГОГИКА

СПЕЦИФИКА ФОРМИРОВАНИЯ СОЦИАЛЬНЫХ КОМПЕТЕНЦИЙ У ВОСПИТАННИКОВ ДЕТСКОГО САДА

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Аннотация. Настоящее исследование направлено на предъявление научному сообществу адекватных педагогических инструментов и средств воспитания для формирования социальной компетентности у дошкольников. Авторами определены средства воспитательного воздействия на индивидуальность воспитанника для развития социальных навыков детей в образовательном пространстве детского сада. Значимость результатов проведенного исследования определяется в теоретическом и практическом плане, что позволяет использовать их в практике изучения и развития социальных навыков у дошкольников с целью их успешной социализации, а также для включения в программы повышения квалификации педагогов.

В качестве целевых ориентиров практической части экспериментальной работы авторами избраны развитие социально направленного мышления воспитанников детского сада, запуск коллективных мыслительных процессов в группе дошкольников и усвоение ими алгоритмов социально одобряемого поведения. Средствами формирования социальных навыков определены метод проблемного обучения; метод моделирования жизненных ситуаций и метод кейсов. Авторами представлена структура социальной компетентности, включающая содержательный, личностно-регуляторный, эмоциональный и поведенческий компоненты. Компоненты определены с учетом показателей социальной осведомленности дошкольников, с опорой на развитие рефлексии у воспитанников и их чувственный опыт; а также закрепление новых знаний на практике и перенос сформированных навыков в новые условия. Представлены результаты использования педагогического инструментария для развития каждого компонента социальной компетентности у дошкольников.

Ключевые слова: *воспитанники детского сада, индивидуальность, субъект воспитания, структура социальной компетентности, социальная адаптация, социальная компетентность, средства воспитательного воздействия*

Финансирование: Исследование выполнено в рамках государственного задания Министерства просвещения Российской

Федерации по теме «Эффективные инструменты формирования личности ребёнка дошкольного возраста», рег. № 1023120800004-3-5.3.1 (соглашение № 073-03-2024-005/2 от 27 августа 2024 г.).

Для цитирования: Bystrova Yu.A., Lapp E.A. Development of Social Competence in Preschool Children // Education & Pedagogy Journal. 2025. Issue 2 (14). P. 5–22. doi: 10.23951/2782-2575-2025-2-5-22

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Submitted February 25, 2025