

**MANAGEMENT PROCESSES AND SYSTEMS OF INTERNAL QUALITY
ASSURANCE OF EDUCATION IN PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS
DURING MARTIAL STATUS**

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Summary

This article addresses issues related to the challenges of organizing management processes and internal quality assurance systems in preschool education institutions within one of the districts of Kyiv during martial law. The study focuses on the implementation of educational processes from the perspective of a kindergarten director. Specifically, it discusses matters concerning child safety, psychological support for teachers and children, adaptation of the learning process to new conditions, collaboration with parents and inclusive resource centers, the importance of teachers' professional development and readiness to work under difficult circumstances, and changes in the composition of the children's group enrolled in the educational program. The authors analyze the situation existing in preschools and propose some recommendations for organizing management processes, including the establishment of an effective communication system and involving parents in decision-making processes. All the research findings and recommendations are based on the practical experience of directors in managing the quality of education during martial law. This article can serve as a valuable source of information for preschool directors, educators, and researchers interested in issues related to managing the quality of education during martial law.

Key words: internal quality assurance system, management processes, martial law, pre-school education institutions, monitoring.

DOI <https://doi.org/10.23856/6002>

1. Introduction

Quality education is currently recognized as one of the essential prerequisites for the successful existence of any country. The global community acknowledges that education, well-being, and health are key factors in determining the quality of life for individuals, and educational quality is a priority in developing a civil society. New challenges of civilization in many countries have led to a true educational boom, deep reforms, and modernization of education systems. Ukraine is no exception.

This issue becomes especially relevant during times of martial law when significant changes occur in the management of educational institutions. Educational management becomes crucial in ensuring changes in the organization of the educational process, influenced not only by internal factors but also by external ones. These external factors may improve the quality of education and contribute to the development of educational institutions, or they may hinder the institution's opportunities. Educational activities in preschool education institutions need to adapt to the influence of external factors, including changes in educational legislation, updates to state standards and curricula, and changes in the status of educational institutions.

Another critical aspect is the change in the demographic situation. In Ukraine during martial law, educational institutions must organize and ensure the enrollment of those who are forced to change their place of learning and/or residence and reside (stay) within or beyond Ukraine.

Contemporary processes of reform in the educational sphere are closely associated with the activities of numerous influential international organizations, including the Council of Europe, the International Board of Standards for Training (IBSTPI), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the United Nations, the European Commission, among others.

Researchers abroad actively discuss issues concerning the state of education in Ukraine during wartime, the right of children to education under these conditions, and the changes and transformations occurring in educational institutions, including the financial problems that arise in the state during wartime. Authors propose mechanisms that would facilitate the restoration of the educational process and ensure its quality (*Moodrick-Even Khen, 2023; Brück et al., 2019*).

Study of the state of education during wartime is a subject of important research. It demonstrates the ability of educational institutions to continue functioning despite significant challenges, such as destruction or damage due to bombings and shelling, forced displacement of educators and parents with children, numerous psychological traumas experienced by educators and children, the occupation of part of Ukrainian territory, and the genocide of the Ukrainian people in the occupied territories.

This became possible by creating of institutional and legal frameworks for regulating the educational sector during the period of martial law by the authorities of Ukraine and the civic position, moral responsibility, and professional qualifications of educators. The active development of distance learning in Ukraine during wartime and the implementation of a systematic government policy to support educators, including psychological support and the development of teaching materials for wartime learning, are noteworthy (*Topuzov et al., 2022*).

Education quality management as a state activity is aimed in two main objectives. Firstly, it ensures the quality of all aspects of the educational process and the educational preparation of graduates as the ultimate outcome of the education system, meeting their educational needs. Secondly, it maximizes the efficient use of capital investments and resources and the effective functioning of the education system as a social system (*Lukina, 2006*).

Equally important is working with the parents whose children attend preschool educational institutions. Close cooperation between management and the pedagogical team ensures a high-quality learning and upbringing process for the children. In times of martial law, interactive forms of work with parents become essential, as they facilitate effective communication and interaction, helping to overcome communication barriers. This positively impacts the quality of educational services (*Babych, 2023*).

Implementing an internal quality assurance system and fostering active collaboration among all stakeholders in the educational process are strategic decisions for preschool education institutions. This can help improve their overall performance and establish a strong foundation for initiatives aimed at effective and sustainable development, especially in times of war.

Ensuring quality education, evaluating its effectiveness, and quality management are among the main challenges of today, not only from a pedagogical or purely scientific perspective but also from a social, political, and managerial standpoint. In times of war, it is crucial to monitor the quality of educational services through effective management activities, which have become the subject of this particular study.

2. Research Methodology

The research involved 49 directors of preschool education institutions in the Desnianskyi district of Kyiv, Ukraine. The research was conducted through questionnaires during September-October 2022.

The aim of the study was to monitor management processes and assess the state of the internal quality assurance system in education. The questionnaire included six blocks of questions:

- Organizational Questions: To determine the age of the directors, their teaching experience, and their tenure in managerial positions;
- Safety and Comfort: To assess the state of safety and comfort in the premises, territory, and educational space of the preschool education institution, which is particularly relevant in times of martial law;
- Management Activity: To assess the director's management activities and their impact on the quality of educational services, focusing on the psychological comfort in the institution's staff, the director's openness to suggestions and challenges that arise in crisis situations caused by war, and the freedom of the educational space;
- Interaction with Parents: To determine the director's interaction with parents regarding their children's learning and upbringing during wartime and ensuring effective support for children with special educational needs in cooperation with inclusive resource centers;
- Professional Development: To identify the content and forms of professional development for the teaching staff and to prevent academic dishonesty among them, which is challenging to implement during wartime but crucial for ensuring education quality.
- Working in Wartime Conditions: To identify the specificities of preschool education institutions' work during wartime, the forms of interaction with children, and monitoring the movement of children who receive educational services.

Quantitative and qualitative data analysis using statistical processing methods was used in the research.

3. Results and Discussion

The monitoring of management processes and internal quality assurance system implementation in preschool education institutions in Desniansky district of Kyiv allowed for observing results that highlight the managerial competence of preschool education institution directors in ensuring the quality provision of educational services during a state of war.

In the study participated directors of preschool education institutions of various ages (Fig. 1).

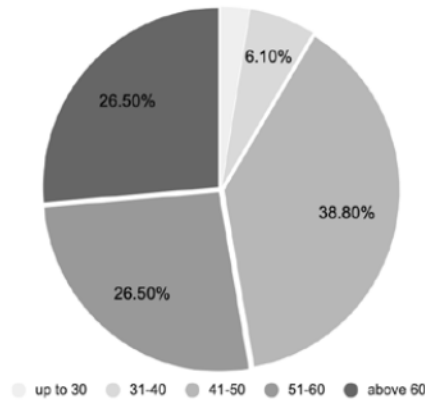


Fig. 1. Preschool Directors Age (%)

Among the respondents, the majority of are individuals up to 50 years old (38.8%), with an equal number of individuals between 50 and 60 years old (26.5%), and another 26.5% being 60 years old or older. Those up to 40 years old accounted for 6.1%, while the smallest group consisted of individuals up to 30 years old, making up only 2.6%. These results indicate that more than half of the respondents (53%) are individuals over the age of 50, suggesting that they have significant life experience.

Teaching experience plays a crucial role in the management experience of preschool education institutions (Fig. 2).

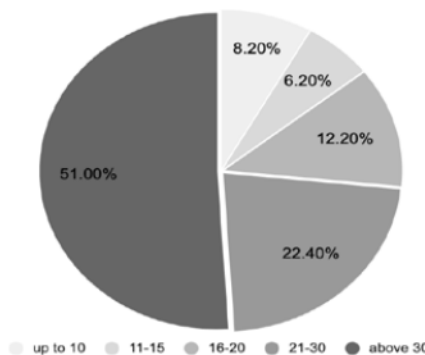


Fig. 2. Teaching Experience of Preschool Directors (%)

It is essential to note that more than half of the directors (51%) possess substantial teaching experience, with over 30 years of experience. 22.4% of the directors have between 20 and 30 years of experience, 12.2% have between 10 and 20 years, 8.2% have up to 10 years, and 6.2% have up to 15 years of teaching experience. These results indicate that the majority of directors have significant pedagogical experience, which they apply in their professional managerial activities.

The experience of working as a preschool director is presented in the diagram (Fig. 3).

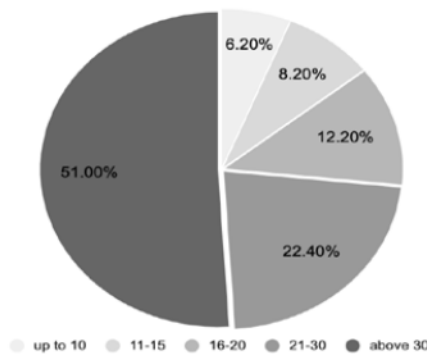


Fig. 3. Working Experience as Preschool Director (%)

The working experience in the position of the director indicates that the majority of respondents (28.6%) have been working in this position for up to 20 years. Similarly, 20.4% have been working for 10 years, and another 20.4% for up to 30 years. 22.4% of the respondents have been serving as directors for less than 3 years. Only 8.2% of the participants have been working as directors for more than 30 years.

These results indicate that among the respondents, there are fewer individuals who have been in a managerial position for an extended period (more than 30 years). Therefore, directors possess not only significant pedagogical experience but also substantial experience in managerial roles.

The next set of questions aimed to assess the state of safety and comfort in the premises, territory, and educational space of the preschool educational institution (Fig. 3).

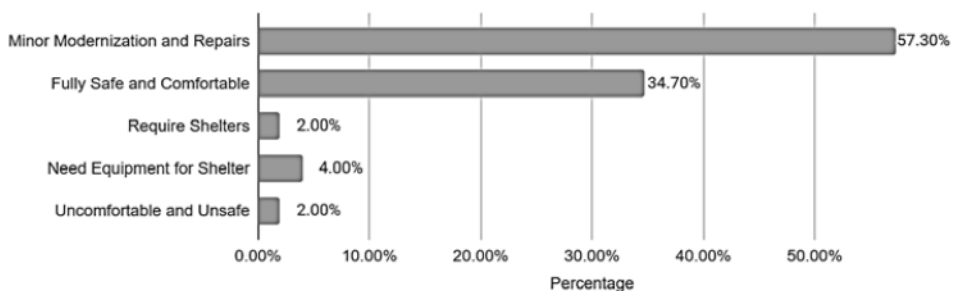


Fig. 4. Security and Comfort Conditions in the Premises and on the Territory of the Preschool (%)

The data regarding the condition of the premises to ensure a safe and comfortable environment for preschool children indicates that 57.3% of the institutions require minor modernization and repairs. 34.7% of the educational institutions are fully safe and comfortable for the educational process. In the context of the military situation, it is essential to provide shelters in preschool education institutions, with 2% of them requiring shelters and 4% needing equipment for shelter. 2% of the preschool education institutions were reported as uncomfortable and unsafe. Thus, 6% of the respondents highlighted the need for shelter arrangements.

More than half of the preschool education institutions, whose directors participated in the survey, require minor modernization and repairs. Over one-third of the respondents reported that kindergartens are safe and comfortable for children's stay. In summary, 92% of preschool education institutions are generally safe and comfortable but may require minor repairs.

To ensure the quality of the educational process, it is essential to consider the availability of necessary equipment for implementing educational activities in the educational institution (Fig. 5).

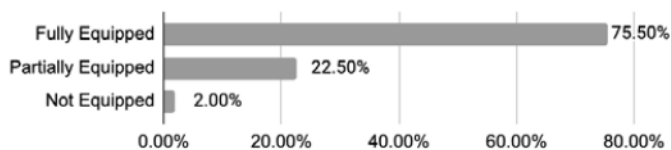


Fig. 5. Equipment Provision for Preschool Education Institutions (%)

The condition of preschool education institutions indicates that 75.5% are fully equipped with the necessary equipment for educational activities, 22.5% are partially equipped, and 2% require significant equipment upgrades. Considering that two-thirds of the educational institutions are equipped and capable of providing quality educational services, it is essential to note that in the context of a state of war, kindergartens also require special equipment to implement educational activities effectively, as the teaching staff utilizes various approaches when working with children.

An essential factor in ensuring the quality of the educational process is creating a positive psychological climate in the educational institution, especially in conditions of a war state (Fig. 6).



Fig. 6. Psychological Climate in Preschool Education Institutions (%)

The state of the psychological climate in preschool education institutions contributes to effective collaboration between educators, children, and parents under the guidance of the institution's director. As a result of the research, it was found that 94% of the conditions for collaboration have been established, positively influencing the psychological climate within the collective. In 6% of cases, collaboration between educators is situational.

These results indicate that in the majority of preschool education institutions whose directors participated in the survey, there is a positive psychological climate that fosters

collaboration among educators. However, there are instances of situational collaboration that are unacceptable, as they hinder the quality provision of educational services.

Another crucial factor in the internal quality assurance system of education is the director's openness to effective interpersonal interaction and suggestions from the pedagogical team, especially considering the constantly evolving nature of the educational process under the conditions of a state of war. The educational process continually adapts its working methods and requires prompt responses from the teaching staff (Fig. 7).

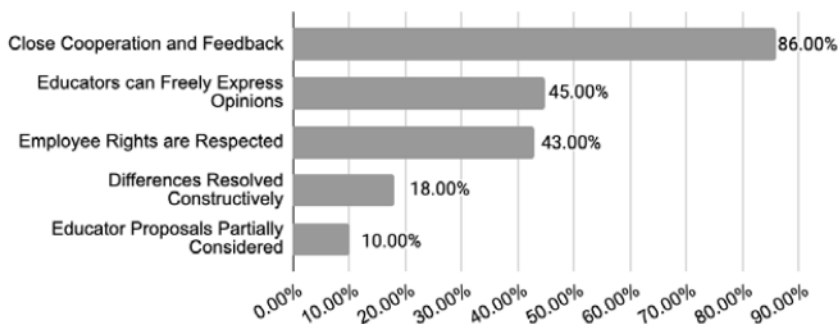


Fig. 7. Director's Openness and Collaboration with Educators (%)

The openness of the preschool education institution's director to suggestions and effective interpersonal interaction is a crucial factor in ensuring the quality of the educational process. Therefore, a positive aspect of the research is that 86% of the respondents confirm close cooperation and the existence of feedback. 45% assert that educators can freely express their opinions, even if they differ from the director's views. 43% note that employee rights are respected in the institution, and their initiatives are supported. However, differences do arise, but 18% emphasize that these differences are resolved constructively. 10% of the respondents claim that the proposals of the teaching staff are partially considered. Thus, we can witness that the directors of preschool education institutions who participated in the survey collaborate with educators and provide feedback regarding their work. Educators have the opportunity to freely express themselves, even when their opinions do not align with the director's position. Employee rights are respected in the institution, and their initiatives are supported; discrepancies among educators are resolved constructively. Only a small portion of the respondents partially consider the proposals of educators. These results indicate effective interaction within the collective.

An important issue in a democratic society, and specifically in preschool education institutions, is the freedom of the educational environment from any form of violence and discrimination (Fig. 8).

In the preschool education institutions of Desnianskyi district, Kyiv city, all conditions have been created to ensure a learning environment free from any form of violence and discrimination. This is evidenced by the following results: 74% of the preschool education institutions regularly plan and implement activities to prevent any manifestations of discrimination and bullying; 59% affirm that participants in the educational process adhere to ethical norms, rights, and freedoms; 51% state that "bullying and violence" are not characteristic of their institution. Thus, the survey identified that preschool education institutions, whose directors participated in the survey, are free from any forms of violence and discrimination.

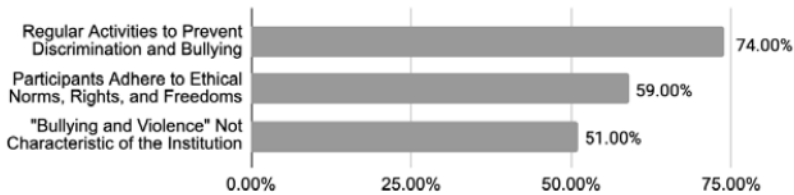


Fig. 8. Freedom from Violence and Discrimination in Preschool Education Institutions (%)

Regarding the question about the role of the director in preventing manifestations of discrimination in the educational institution, all respondents (100%) selected the answer that there are no manifestations of discrimination in the educational institution.

Summarizing the results from the questionnaire block "Safety and Comfort" regarding the provision of a comfortable, violence-free, and discrimination-free educational environment, and collaboration among educators, the following findings have been identified:

1. The majority of the institutions are either safe and comfortable or require minor repairs.

2. Two-thirds of the institutions are fully equipped with the necessary resources to implement the educational program.

3. Most institutions have created a positive psychological climate in the collective, fostering collaboration among educators.

4. The majority of the directors closely collaborate with educators, providing feedback on their work and allowing them to freely express their opinions, even when their views differ from the director's position.

5. All preschool education institutions are free from any manifestations of discrimination.

The next block of questions focused on the interaction of preschool education institution directors with parents regarding their children's education and upbringing. Collaboration with inclusive resource centers was also deemed important for effectively supporting children with special educational needs.

An essential aspect of the internal quality assurance system in education is working with families, specifically establishing effective communication. The questionnaire identified the forms of communication that the preschool education institution implements with parents (respondents could choose multiple options) (Fig. 9).

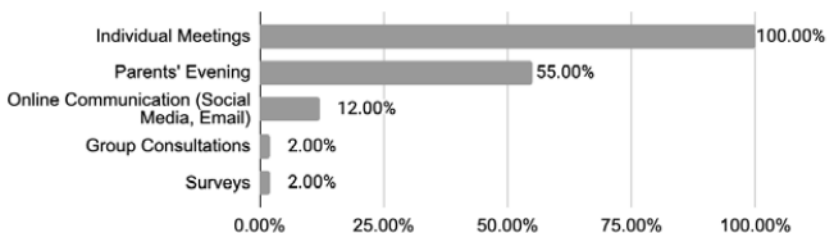


Fig. 9. Preferred Forms of Communication with Parents (%)

The most popular form of communication is individual meetings, chosen by 100% of respondents. Parent meetings as a form of communication were selected by 55% of the participants. Online communication methods, such as social media groups and emailing, were preferred by 12% of the respondents. Group consultations and surveys were chosen by only 2% of the participants. Thus, among the communication forms with parents, directors prioritize individual communication (100%) and parent meetings (55%).

It is important to note that to ensure effective collaboration with parents, interactive communication methods should be used to maximize their engagement and promote joint interaction.

Regarding the interaction with parents of children with special educational needs and specialists from inclusive resource centers for support during education, the results are presented in Figure 10.

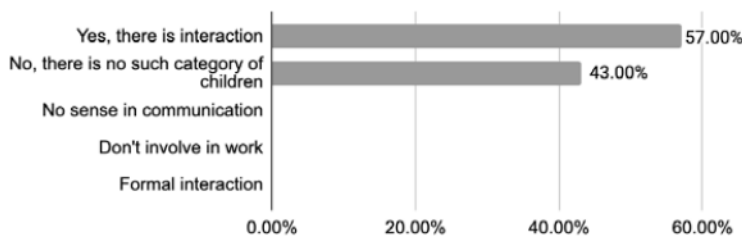


Fig. 10. Interaction of the director with parents, specialists of inclusive resource centers (%)

Regarding the interaction of the director with parents of children with special educational needs and specialists from inclusive resource centers, 57% of directors closely cooperate with them. 43% of directors do not have such children in their institutions. Therefore, all directors who have children with special educational needs in their institution interact with their parents and specialists from the inclusive resource center to ensure effective support during the educational process.

Summarizing the results from the “Interaction with Parents and Inclusive Resource Center Specialists” section, it was found that 100% of respondents prefer individual communication with parents, and 55% use parent meetings for this purpose. All directors of preschool institutions that have children with special educational needs interact with their parents and specialists from the inclusive resource center to provide necessary support during their education.

The next section of the survey, “Professional Growth and Academic Integrity”, focused on the content and form of professional development and measures to prevent academic misconduct among the educational staff. The themes chosen by preschool directors for their professional growth over the past 5 years are presented in Figure 11.

The directors of preschool institutions had the opportunity to choose several answers to the question of choosing a topic for professional growth over the past 5 years. The majority of directors selected topics related to creating a safe environment (65%), legislative support for the educational process (51%), and the use of information technologies (49%). Approximately 43% to 45% chose themes concerning inclusive forms of education, organization of the educational process, and psychological aspects of work. About 38% to 27% opted for topics related to methodological organization of preschoolers’ educational process, fostering civic engagement

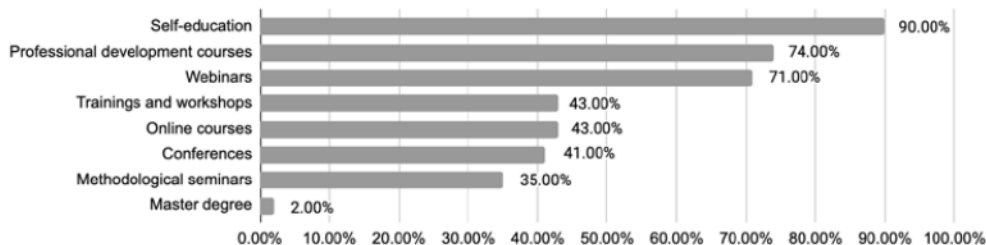


Fig. 11. Ranking of topics for professional growth over the last 5 years (%)

among learners, and developing proficient Ukrainian language skills. The least selected topic (12%) was about education for children of different age groups.

Consequently, directors of preschool institutions prioritize themes focusing on creating a safe educational environment, including legislative measures, and utilizing information and communication technologies in education for their professional development. These topics are relevant and timely.

The questions about the forms of professional development for directors are presented in Figure 12.

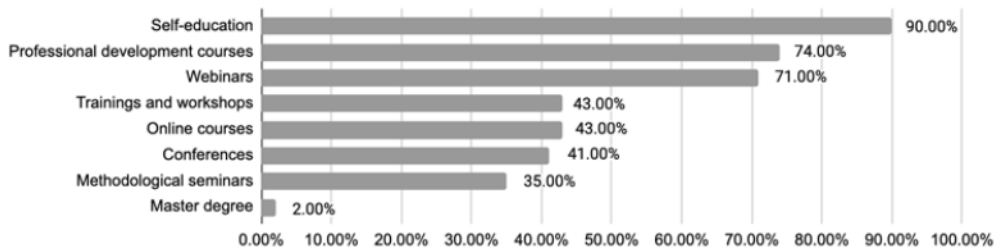


Fig. 12. Preferred Forms of Professional Development (%)

The presented results allow us to state that self-education occupies the first place among the forms of professional growth (90%). In the second place are professional development courses (74%). Webinars rank third among the forms of professional development with 71%. Less than half of the preschool directors (43%) pursue qualification enhancement through training sessions and workshops (43%), online courses, attending conferences (41%), and (35%). Only 2% of respondents chose pursuing a master's degree as a form of professional growth.

Thus, preschool directors prefer self-education and professional development courses as their preferred forms of professional development.

In the work of a preschool director in the context of modern education, adherence to academic integrity by all participants in the educational process is essential (Fig. 13).

Regarding the measures taken by preschool directors to ensure academic integrity, 80% conduct discussions on academic integrity, and 63% familiarize their staff with the basics of copyright. It is important to note that none of the respondents consider such activities unnecessary. These data indicate that directors recognize the significance of adhering to academic integrity norms and carry out appropriate work.

Summarizing the results of the “Professional Development and Academic Integrity” block, the following findings are established:

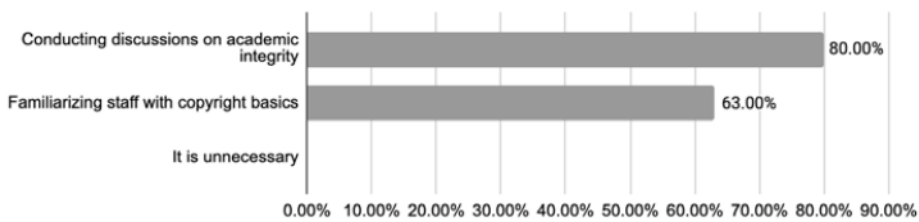


Fig. 13. Prevention of Academic Integrity Violations (%)

– Over the past 5 years, preschool directors prioritize topics related to creating a safe educational environment, including legislative aspects, and the use of information and communication technologies in education.

– The surveyed directors prefer self-education and professional development courses; various forms of online education are also popular.

– Preschool directors conduct discussions on academic integrity and provide information on copyright basics.

The next section of the survey “Operation of Institutions During Martial Law” focuses on the specific features of the operation of preschool institutions during martial law. At the beginning of the survey, it was determined whether the preschool institutions provide educational services during martial law (Fig. 14).

It was found that less than half of the preschool education institutions (47%) provide offline educational services, while 53% operate online. Next, it was necessary to determine the format in which services are provided during the state of war (Fig. 15).

Directors indicated that 61% provide services in a blended format, which means a combination of offline as a base and online. Meanwhile, 39% work solely in a remote mode.

Next, the number of children who were involved in the educational process in the preschool education institution before the state of war was clarified (Fig. 16).

Before the state of war, preschool education institutions were attended by 100 to 300 children (77%). 18% of institutions had up to 100 children, and only 5% had more than 300 children.

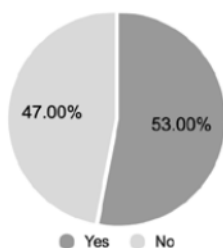


Fig. 14. Provision of Preschool Education Services During the State of War (%)

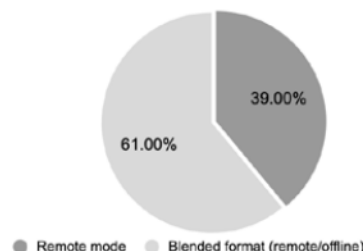


Fig. 15. Learning Format During the State of War (%)

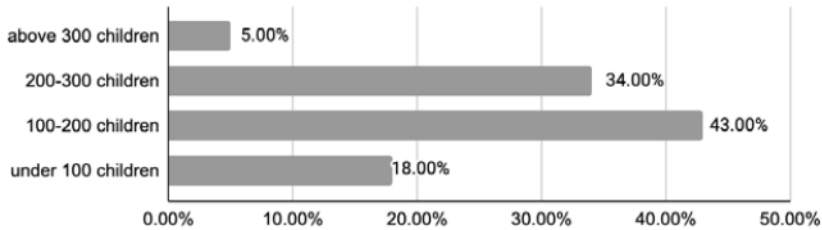


Fig. 16. Number of Children in Preschool before the State of War (%)

After the state of war, the situation changed dramatically (Fig. 17).

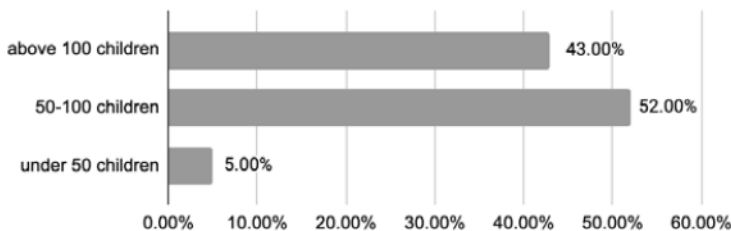


Fig. 17. Number of Children in Preschool during the State of War (%)

The data indicate that during the state of war, 52% of core preschool education institutions are attended by 50 to 100 children, 43% have more than 100 children, and 5% have fewer than 50 children.

Thus, after the introduction of martial law, the number of children in preschool institutions significantly decreased, but 95% of preschools still have between 50 and 100 children or more than 100. This indicates the existence of a societal demand for providing educational services to children of this age group.

Next, the number of children participating in online classes during the state of war was determined (Fig. 18).

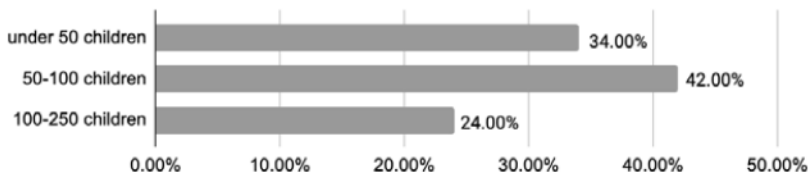


Fig. 18. Participation of Online Classes During the State of War (%)

The summarized data indicates that during the state of war, 42% of preschool educational institutions were able to provide educational services online to 50–100 children, 34% served up to 50 children, and 24% catered to 100–250 preschool-aged children. Thus, during the state of war, the majority of preschool educational institutions, whose directors participated in the survey, were able to conduct distance learning for a significant number of children (76%).

Summarizing the results of the “Institutional Operations During the State of War” block, it is evident that nearly half of the institutions continue to provide educational services during the state of war. Essential preschools have an attendance ranging from 50 to 100 children, and two-thirds of the institutions conduct remote learning for up to 100 children.

Based on the monitoring research results, certain measures can be implemented to improve the management system of preschool educational institutions, particularly at the administrative district level of the city. Firstly, it is crucial to establish district-level Councils of Preschool Educational Institution Directors and delegate them specific responsibilities that are currently assigned to the district educational administration. These responsibilities may include:

- gathering and disseminating information;
- creating an information database through information analysis;
- identifying innovative needs, providing advisory support for newly appointed preschool educational institution directors;
- organizing competitions, seminars, round-table discussions, and charity events.

Secondly, district-level Parents’ Councils should also be established and endowed with specific duties, which may include:

- establishing connections with local executive authorities and local self-government, law enforcement agencies, public organizations, and enterprises to provide financial and material-technical assistance to institutions, protect the health and safety of pupils, and improve the institution’s amenities;

- creating charitable funds in accordance with existing law;
- controlling the allocation and distribution of funds;
- participating in solving issues stipulated in the statutes of these funds;
- promoting innovative and experimental activities in educational institutions.

Thirdly, the wide implementation of fee-based services should be adopted, such as:

- providing home-based services through agreements;
- caregiving during evenings, nights, and weekends;
- offering special courses and customized sessions upon parental request.

By implementing the above-mentioned measures, the educational activities can be optimized, and the quality of educational services, including those provided during the state of war, can be ensured throughout the country.

4. Conclusions

The analysis of the development of preschool education in the Desnianskyi district of Kyiv has revealed a positive trend in the functioning of kindergartens under the conditions of wartime in Ukraine.

The managerial competence of the directors of preschool institutions, as a set of personal qualities and professional abilities of a manager capable of continuous professional self-improvement, with a high level of intellectual development and moral culture, has ensured the effective functioning of preschool education institutions during the war, as confirmed by the results of the conducted research.

A safe and comfortable educational environment has been created for both preschoolers and educators, equipped with necessary facilities for educational activities. However, a considerable number of educational institutions in the Desnianskyi district of Kyiv require

equipment and modernization of their educational spaces. The directors of kindergartens foster a favorable psychological climate in their institutions and are open to suggestions from educators and parents.

Notably, in the context of population displacement due to military actions and the formation of new children's groups, preventing any form of violence and discrimination towards all participants in the educational process has been fully achieved.

Effective communication between management and parents, whose children attend kindergartens, plays a crucial role. The research findings indicate that directors prefer individual communication with parents and parental meetings. In the current blended learning conditions, interactive forms of working with parents should be used to motivate them to participate in their children's education and upbringing, as wartime may lead to crisis moments when education and childcare become secondary priorities for families.

Some kindergartens cater to children with special educational needs, necessitating greater attention from both the pedagogical team and experts from inclusive-resource centers to provide the necessary support during their education. The positive aspect is that such cooperation in educational institutions where such children attend is fully established.

Continuing education for educators and administrators is equally important for ensuring the quality of education. Directors of preschool institutions have been choosing modern topics for their professional development in recent years, such as creating a safe educational environment and using information and communication technologies in education.

The introduction of martial law in Ukraine has led to changes in the operation of preschool education institutions. Almost half of the institutions that were operational before the war continue to function and provide educational services. A significant number of institutions operate online, which reflects both their quick adaptation to the challenges of the present and the lack of necessary offline conditions (e.g., bomb shelters, special equipment). This issue is essential as communication with peers is crucial for preschool children; thus, it requires special attention from the Desnianskyi district education management and the Kyiv city administration. Moreover, the reduced number of children attending educational institutions impacts the economy as parents unable to send their preschool children to kindergarten are forced to stay at home and not work, leading to reduced income and tax revenue for the state.

Overall, the findings indicate that preschool education has swiftly adapted to the challenges of wartime, with institutions proving their ability to provide quality educational services. However, the issue of ensuring education for all children, including the reopening of institutions that are currently non-functional due to the war, remains an open question.

In the context of this issue, future research should focus on developing and experimentally testing the reasons behind the closure of preschool education institutions and devising mechanisms for their restoration.

Acknowledgments

The authors are grateful to the directors of preschool education institutions in the Desnianskyi district of Kyiv, who participated in the study, as well as to their staff members who continue to work in their positions and provide educational services in conditions of martial law. Additionally, special thanks are expressed to the management of the Education Department of the Desnianskyi district of Kyiv for their assistance and support in conducting the research. The authors extend their gratitude for the assistance provided by Dmytrii Ivanov in editing the English text during the preparation of this article.

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