

## Inclusive Education in Early Childhood: Play-Based Learning

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### **Abstract:**

Social, economic, and cultural changes occurring on a global scale have led to an increasing need for inclusive education. This has also accelerated studies on inclusive education in the literature (UNESCO, 2020). Inclusive education aims to ensure equal opportunities in education by making education accessible and suitable for all individuals (Ainscow & Miles, 2009). In achieving this goal, exposing children to inclusive practices in educational settings from the earliest ages plays a critical role (Mitchell, 2014). Inclusive education practices provided during early childhood, the first stage of education, with the support of teachers, are crucial in enhancing acceptance and social cohesion among children (Guralnick, 2001). In the educational process, play serves not only as a natural learning tool that supports children's cognitive, emotional, and social development but also plays a significant role in fostering interaction and collaboration among children with diverse abilities and needs within the context of inclusivity (Fleer, 2018). This research aims to examine the contributions of the play-based learning method during early childhood to the developmental processes of children with special needs in inclusive education settings and the sustainability of these contributions. The research was conducted using a qualitative research design. The research was carried out with ten preschool teachers working in public and private early childhood education institutions. Data were collected using a "Personal Information Form" and an "Inclusive Education-Play-Based Learning Interview Form." The research findings revealed that play-based learning contributes to children's cognitive, emotional, and social development and highlighted the importance and necessity of teacher-supported inclusive practices in this process. Additionally, it was found that teachers need more exposure to practical examples to effectively implement play-based methods in their classrooms.

### **Keywords:**

Inclusive education, play-based learning, early childhood education.