



Holistic Development of Spiritual and Patriotic Values in Early Childhood: A Comparative Programmatic Approach to Personality Formation in Preschool Education Systems

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Abstract

Early childhood represents a critical period for the formation of fundamental personality traits, social identity, and value orientations that influence an individual's lifelong development. In contemporary educational systems, the integration of spiritual and patriotic values into preschool education has become an important priority for strengthening social cohesion, cultural continuity, and human capital development. This study examines the organizational, legal, and pedagogical foundations of preschool education in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) countries and proposes an effective model for fostering spiritual and patriotic values within a holistic personality development framework. The research analyzes normative documents, educational standards, and comparative practices related to preschool education across CIS countries. Based on this analysis, a comprehensive educational program titled "Curriculum for Preschool Education" was developed and implemented. The program focuses on the integration of national and universal human values through child-centered pedagogical methods, including national games, storytelling, puppet theatre, creative arts, music, dance, historical narratives, and interactive cultural activities. Special attention was given to creating a supportive learning environment that considers children's individual abilities, interests, emotional needs, and inclusive participation. An experimental study was conducted in 83 preschool institutions across ten CIS countries, involving 3,706 children aged 5-7 years. Pre- and post-intervention assessments were carried out through individual play-based interviews and pedagogical observation over a two-month implementation period. The findings demonstrate a significant increase in the level of targeted spiritual and patriotic values, with indicators shifting from low and below-average levels prior to the intervention to predominantly high levels afterward. The results confirm the effectiveness of integrating culturally grounded and experience-based educational practices in early childhood settings. The study highlights the importance of combining national cultural heritage with universal ethical principles, emotional engagement, and active learning methods. The proposed model contributes to the development of socially responsible, culturally aware, and morally grounded individuals and provides practical recommendations for improving preschool education policy and program design in transitional educational systems.

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Introduction

In the contemporary global context, early childhood education has become a strategic priority for both governments and societies due to its long-term impact on human capital formation, social stability, and sustainable development. Increasing attention is being directed toward the role of preschool education not only as a preparatory stage for formal schooling but also as a foundational period for comprehensive personality development. Modern states increasingly recognize that investment in early childhood is not merely a social responsibility but a strategic partnership mechanism that contributes to socio-economic growth, workforce quality, and social cohesion (Heckman, 2006; OECD, 2017). Education, therefore, functions as a key driver of national development and social modernization.

Personality formation begins in early childhood and involves far more than the acquisition of cognitive knowledge. It encompasses the development of emotional, moral, social, and cultural competencies that enable individuals to adapt effectively to their environment and participate meaningfully in society. Contemporary educational paradigms emphasize a holistic, child-centered approach that integrates intellectual development with value formation, socialization, and identity construction (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). Consequently, modern preschool systems require innovative educational programs that combine national pedagogical traditions with international best practices.

The effectiveness of the educational and upbringing process largely depends on the integration of historical, cultural, and moral content into early learning experiences. Traditional cultural practices, national heritage, and community values serve as important resources for strengthening children's identity and sense of belonging while simultaneously supporting the development of universal human values such as respect, empathy, and cooperation (Banks, 2016; Zatsepina, 2004). Ensuring equal access to high-quality and affordable preschool education is a critical starting point for enhancing human capital and reducing social inequality (Khairova & Bechurina, 2016; UNESCO, 2015). As the primary link in the educational system, preschool education provides the most favorable environment for children's self-realization, social adaptation, and early value orientation (Gruzdova, 2012).

The basic foundations of personality, including national self-awareness, cultural identity, and social attitudes, begin to form during the preschool period. At this stage, children develop initial representations of their cultural environment, social roles, and moral norms through interaction with educators, peers, and family members. The sensitive and dynamic inner world of the child is shaped through experiences that integrate emotional perception, cultural symbols, creative activity, and social interaction, forming a holistic worldview that harmonizes relationships with nature, society, and self (Zatsepina, 2004; Vygotsky, 1978).

The quality of early childhood education depends significantly on the professional competence of teachers and the alignment of educational programs with developmental characteristics. Effective preschool education requires individualized approaches that consider children's abilities, interests, emotional needs, and inclusive participation, including children with special educational needs (NAEYC, 2020). International experience also highlights the importance of child protection policies and high-quality teacher preparation, as insufficient pre-service training often results in young educators entering professional practice without adequate pedagogical readiness (OECD, 2019).

Following the socio-political transformations that occurred after the dissolution of the Soviet Union and other socialist systems, many countries in Central and Eastern Europe and the CIS initiated large-scale educational reforms based on international conceptual frameworks. One of the key principles of these reforms is the child-centered approach grounded in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which guarantees children's rights to development, education, protection, and participation in matters affecting their lives (Clair et al., 2012; UNICEF, 2019).

Despite these reforms, many CIS countries continue to face structural challenges, including insufficient funding, uneven distribution of preschool institutions, and declining educational infrastructure resulting from economic transitions. These challenges contribute to a broader crisis of social cohesion and unequal access to quality early childhood education (World Bank, 2018). Research also indicates a strong relationship between participation in early childhood programs prior to school entry and later academic readiness and literacy outcomes (Hysell, 2013). In many contexts, private preschool institutions often demonstrate higher program quality due to greater resource availability and organizational flexibility (Ackerman & Sansanelli, 2010).

Preschool education plays a critical role in supporting children's social integration and emotional well-being. Empirical studies emphasize the positive impact of teacher-child emotional interaction, classroom organization, and instructional support on children's learning motivation and developmental outcomes (Casbergue & Bedford, 2014; Pianta et al., 2008). Effective learning environments are created when educators act not only as instructors but also as guides, mentors, and supportive companions in children's exploratory and creative activities (Khairova & Bechurina, 2016).

The development of spiritual and patriotic values during early childhood is closely linked to the formation of social identity and a sense of belonging. Children need to perceive themselves as part of a larger community and develop respect for their culture, traditions, and national heritage while simultaneously cultivating tolerance and openness toward other

cultures (Hao, 2016; Banks, 2016). Moral development, including empathy, responsibility, cooperation, and respect for others, serves as the foundation for spiritual and civic consciousness (Dhillon, 2016).

Young children primarily learn through emotional experiences, play, imitation, and direct interaction with their environment. Play-based learning, creative expression, and exploratory activities enable children to internalize values in a meaningful and experiential manner rather than through memorization (Fortino et al., 2014; Wood, 2013). Spiritual development, therefore, should begin in early childhood and focus on the formation of universal ethical values that support lifelong personal and social development (Nazam & Husain, 2016).

Scholarly discussions continue regarding the role of religion in early spiritual education. While some researchers consider religious traditions an important source of moral and social guidance, others argue that formal religious instruction should remain primarily within the family context. Nevertheless, there is broad agreement that preschool education should focus on universal spiritual principles such as kindness, respect, responsibility, and compassion (Cam, 2014; Islam & Zayed, 2016). Teachers' own value orientations and professional attitudes play a significant role in shaping children's moral development, and value education should be implemented through practical experience and social interaction rather than direct instruction alone (Pandya, 2017; Sigurdardottir & Einarsdottir, 2016).

In addition to strengthening national identity, modern preschool education must promote intercultural tolerance and global awareness. Children should learn to respect cultural diversity while maintaining a positive understanding of their own national identity and cultural heritage.

Socio-economic factors remain a major barrier to the development of preschool education systems in many CIS countries. Poverty, demographic disparities, and uneven territorial distribution of educational institutions limit access to quality early childhood services and reinforce social inequality (World Bank, 2018; UNESCO, 2015).

The analysis of international literature and policy documents confirms the relevance of strengthening spiritual and patriotic education within preschool systems and reveals existing gaps related to program effectiveness and implementation mechanisms. In response to these challenges, the present study aims to develop and evaluate a model for integrating spiritual and patriotic values into preschool education.

The purpose of the study is to develop a spiritual and patriotic foundation in preschool children as a basis for their comprehensive personality development.

The objectives of the study are:

1. To analyze the organizational and legal framework regulating preschool education;
2. To identify current challenges in the development of spiritual and patriotic values among preschool children;
3. To design and implement an effective educational program for spiritual and patriotic upbringing in early childhood.

Research Design

This study employed a mixed-method research design combining qualitative document analysis, comparative legal analysis, and a quasi-experimental pedagogical intervention. The methodological framework was developed to ensure a comprehensive understanding of both the regulatory environment of preschool education in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and the practical effectiveness of a value-oriented educational program. Mixed approaches are widely recommended in educational research to integrate policy context with empirical evaluation of pedagogical interventions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Cohen et al., 2018).

Document and Comparative Analysis

At the first stage, a systematic analysis of scientific literature, national policy documents, and normative legal acts regulating preschool education was conducted. The analysis covered legislative frameworks, national curricula, and strategic development programs of CIS countries. A comparative approach was applied to identify similarities and differences in regulatory standards, institutional structures, and priority areas of preschool education development (Bray et al., 2014; OECD, 2017).

Special attention was given to legal provisions related to:

- accessibility and financing of preschool education;
- organizational models of early childhood institutions;
- teacher qualifications and professional standards;
- integration of cultural, moral, and value-based education;

- child protection and rights.

Comparative legal analysis is widely used in educational policy research to assess institutional convergence and national specificities in transitional education systems (UNESCO, 2015; World Bank, 2018).

Participants and Research Setting

The empirical component of the study was conducted in 83 preschool institutions across ten CIS countries:

- Azerbaijan (15)
- Armenia (9)
- Belarus (8)
- Kazakhstan (6)
- Kyrgyz Republic (5)
- Moldova (6)
- Russian Federation (14)
- Tajikistan (4)
- Uzbekistan (5)
- Ukraine (10)

A total of 3,706 children aged 5–7 years participated in the study. This age group was selected because late preschool years represent a critical period for the formation of social identity, moral reasoning, and value orientation (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000; Vygotsky, 1978).

Data Collection Procedures

Data collection was carried out in three stages:

Stage 1: Baseline Assessment

Individual semi-structured conversations were conducted with children using a play-based format appropriate for their developmental level. Play-based interviews are considered a reliable method for assessing young children's value orientations, emotional responses, and social understanding (Piaget, 1964; Wood, 2013).

The conversations focused on:

- understanding of national symbols and traditions;
- attitudes toward family, community, and country;
- expressions of empathy, cooperation, and respect;
- awareness of cultural and moral values.

Responses were recorded in structured observation protocols.

Stage 2: Educational Intervention

Following the baseline assessment, a two-month educational and upbringing program on spiritual and patriotic education was implemented within the framework of the comprehensive program *“Curriculum for Preschool Education.”*

The intervention included:

- national games and role-play activities;
- storytelling and interpretation of folk tales;
- puppet theatre and dramatization;
- creative arts (drawing, music, dance);
- historical narratives about the country, culture, and prominent figures;
- interactive discussions encouraging comparison, reasoning, and self-expression.

Experiential and activity-based learning approaches were used, as research shows that young children internalize values more effectively through direct experience and emotional engagement rather than through formal instruction (Fortino et al., 2014; NAEYC, 2020).

During the intervention, continuous pedagogical observation was conducted to monitor behavioral changes and engagement levels.

Stage 3: Post-Intervention Assessment

At the end of the two-month period, a second individual interview was conducted using the same procedures as the baseline assessment. Pre- and post-intervention results were compared to evaluate program effectiveness.

Data Analysis

The collected data were processed using descriptive statistical analysis. The results were presented in percentage form, reflecting the proportion of affirmative responses related to target value indicators before and after the intervention. Descriptive analysis is widely applied in educational intervention studies to assess changes in behavioral and attitudinal indicators in early childhood populations (Cohen et al., 2018; Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Results

Organizational and Legal Framework of Preschool Education in CIS Countries

The analysis showed that preschool education systems in CIS countries are structured according to the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED), where early childhood education corresponds to Level 0 and includes:

- early childhood care (0–3 years);
- pre-primary education (3–6/7 years) (UNESCO, 2015).

The primary objective of early childhood education across these countries is the comprehensive development of the child and preparation for successful integration into primary education.

Early childhood services are delivered through various institutional forms, including:

- nurseries and kindergartens;
- early development centers;
- specialized institutions for children with special needs;
- residential care institutions for orphans;
- medical and rehabilitation facilities (Code of the Republic of Moldova on Education, 2014).

In many CIS countries, preschool education is not compulsory, although it is regulated by national legislation and supported through state programs. Mandatory preschool education is established in Ukraine, while other countries are considering similar reforms.

Legal frameworks emphasize:

- universal access;
- state financial responsibility;
- inclusion of children with special educational needs;
- child-centered educational approaches;
- protection of children's health and well-being.

These provisions align with international standards, particularly the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which guarantees children's rights to development, education, and protection (UNICEF, 2019).

National Development Programs

Several countries have implemented targeted programs to expand preschool access and improve quality:

- Kazakhstan's *Balapan* program (World Bank, 2018);
- Uzbekistan's modernization reforms (2016–2021);
- Russia's Federal Target Program for Education Development (2015);
- preparatory school readiness programs in Kyrgyzstan.

Despite differences in implementation strategies, all programs pursue common goals: improving accessibility, quality, and equity in early childhood education (OECD, 2017).

Challenges in Preschool Education Development

The study identified several common challenges across CIS countries:

1. **Limited institutional capacity**
Many preschool facilities were closed or repurposed during economic transitions, resulting in insufficient availability.
2. **Low enrollment rates**
For example, only about 16% of children in Azerbaijan are enrolled in preschool institutions (Draft Curriculum, 2014).
3. **Insufficient funding and infrastructure**
Material and technical resources remain inadequate in many regions.
4. **Inequality in access**
Children from disadvantaged families and rural areas face greater barriers (World Bank, 2018; UNESCO, 2015).
5. **Teacher professional development needs**
Continuous training is required to meet modern educational standards (OECD, 2019).

Structure and Content of Preschool Programs

Despite national differences, preschool curricula across CIS countries generally include four main developmental domains:

- physical development and health;
- language and literacy development;
- cognitive and general knowledge development;
- artistic, aesthetic, and creative development.

Quality standards focus on:

- curriculum content;
- institutional management;
- infrastructure and learning environment;
- teacher qualifications;
- developmental outcomes of children (NAEYC, 2020).

Health monitoring, nutrition, physical activity, and preventive medical care are also integral components of preschool services.

Spiritual and Cultural Education

Artistic and aesthetic development plays a significant role in the educational process. Programs include:

- music and dance;
- visual arts and modeling;
- introduction to national cultural traditions;
- familiarization with traditional musical instruments;
- participation in cultural events and celebrations.

Such activities support emotional development, cultural identity formation, and value internalization (Banks, 2016; Ahmadov, 2021).

Ethical Considerations

The study was conducted in accordance with internationally accepted ethical standards for research involving children. Participation was voluntary, and institutional permissions were obtained from participating preschool establishments in each country. All interactions with children were carried out in a non-invasive, play-based format appropriate to their age and psychological well-being. No personal identifying information was collected, and all data were analyzed in aggregated form to ensure confidentiality and anonymity. The research design complied with the principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and respected the dignity, safety, and best interests of all participants.

Additional Educational Opportunities and the Role of Cultural Environment

In addition to formal preschool education, many families actively involve children in supplementary educational activities that contribute to their artistic, cultural, and intellectual development. After-hours programs include specialized music, choreography, and fine arts schools, where children receive structured training according to their interests and abilities.

In music schools, children learn to play musical instruments and develop vocal skills, while choreographic studios offer training in various dance styles that promote physical coordination, discipline, and aesthetic sensitivity. Art schools provide foundational skills in drawing, modeling, painting, and other forms of visual expression.

Some preschool institutions also organize additional educational sections within their facilities. These programs may include not only artistic disciplines but also foreign language instruction and creative development courses. Such enrichment activities expand children's cognitive and cultural horizons and support the development of multiple intelligences, creativity, and motivation for learning (Gardner, 2011; OECD, 2017).

Large multifunctional educational centers that combine music, choreography, and visual arts departments typically operate in major urban areas, where resources and professional staff are more readily available. In smaller towns, rural areas, and urban-type settlements, single-profile institutions are more common. However, regardless of institutional format, supplementary education plays an important role in strengthening children's cultural identity, emotional development, and aesthetic awareness (UNESCO, 2015).

Social Context and the Need for Spiritual and Patriotic Education

At the current stage of societal development, many countries face increasing social fragmentation and a decline in collective identity. Individuals often experience a sense of social isolation and reduced connection with their national community. These trends are reflected in educational systems worldwide and are particularly evident in post-Soviet societies, where large-scale political and economic transformations have significantly altered social institutions and value systems (World Bank, 2018; Inglehart & Welzel, 2005).

In recent years, however, many CIS countries have demonstrated renewed interest in their historical heritage, cultural traditions, and national identity. This orientation has been gradually incorporated into educational policy and practice. Since the foundations of identity and value orientation are established in early childhood, spiritual and patriotic education should begin at the preschool stage (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000; Vygotsky, 1978).

Preschool educational programs increasingly include activities aimed at familiarizing children with:

- national history and cultural heritage;
- traditional customs and values;
- prominent historical and contemporary figures;
- the role of national culture within the global context.

At the same time, effective spiritual and patriotic education requires close cooperation between preschool institutions and families. Parents play a decisive role as primary models of behavior and value orientation, and their attitudes significantly influence children's emotional attachment to their culture and country (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006).

Conditions for Modernization of Preschool Institutions

The modernization of preschool education in accordance with contemporary standards requires a systematic approach that includes organizational, pedagogical, and material components. Key factors contributing to the renewal and effectiveness of preschool institutions include:

1. Ensuring a safe and health-promoting environment;
2. Creating a developmentally rich and stimulating learning environment;
3. Improving infrastructure and material resources;
4. Updating educational content and teaching methods.

These measures support the physical, intellectual, emotional, and moral development of children and contribute to the formation of socially responsible, creative, and culturally aware individuals. Longitudinal studies confirm that high-quality preschool education significantly improves school readiness, academic performance, and long-term social outcomes (Heckman, 2006; OECD, 2019).

Educational modernization also requires:

- continuous professional development for teachers;
- the use of innovative pedagogical methods;
- individualized approaches to each child;

- inclusive practices for children with disabilities;
- targeted support for children from low-income families.

Effective implementation depends on coordinated efforts among educational authorities, social services, and health institutions. Special attention should also be given to children without parental care, including those living in orphanages and boarding schools, through foster care programs and social support mechanisms (UNICEF, 2019).

Many CIS countries are currently expanding preschool networks and developing preparatory programs to ensure universal access. One-year school readiness programs are considered particularly important for facilitating children's social adaptation and easing their transition to formal schooling (UNESCO, 2015).

The Program “Curriculum for Preschool Education” and Its Educational Impact

In response to the identified challenges, the program “Curriculum for Preschool Education” was developed to enhance the quality of the educational process and promote the comprehensive development of preschool children. The program focuses on the formation of essential life skills, value orientations, and creative abilities, while ensuring alignment with national educational standards.

The curriculum was designed in accordance with the National Education Quality Standards and is based on the following principles:

1. Integration of national and universal human values;
2. Creation of a positive and inclusive learning environment;
3. Consideration of children's individual abilities, interests, and developmental characteristics;
4. Orientation toward personality development;
5. Focus on learning outcomes and achievement;
6. Integrity and continuity of the educational process;
7. Preparation for successful school adaptation (Ministry of Education of Azerbaijan, 2016).

The program includes methodological components for mental, moral, physical, and aesthetic development. Within this framework, special attention is given to spiritual and patriotic education.

Baseline Findings

Initial assessments conducted at the beginning of the study revealed that preschool children demonstrated:

- low or below-average awareness of national history and culture;
- limited knowledge of local heritage and prominent historical figures;
- low interest in national traditions, cultural symbols, and works of art;
- weak identification of national heroes;
- moderate or low levels of patriotic attitudes.

These findings confirmed the need for systematic educational intervention aimed at strengthening cultural awareness and value orientation.

Table 1. National-Cultural Awareness of Preschool Children Before (Pre) and After (Post) the Intervention (%)

No.	Indicator	Azerbaijan	Armenia	Belarus	Kazakhstan	Kyrgyzstan	Moldova	Russia	Tajikistan	Uzbekistan	Ukraine
		Pre / Post	Pre / Post	Pre / Post	Pre / Post	Pre / Post	Pre / Post	Pre / Post	Pre / Post	Pre / Post	Pre / Post
1	Know the name of their country	100/100	100/100	100/100	100/100	100/100	100/100	100/100	100/100	100/100	100/100

2	Have basic knowledge of national history	15/96	17/94	16/94	13/90	12/92	15/95	20/97	14/89	13/94	21/98
3	Have an idea of national culture	38/100	32/99	40/100	37/100	34/98	35/99	39/100	28/98	29/99	41/100
4	Have an idea of national traditions	11/89	10/85	12/91	11/87	15/85	9/88	14/91	11/89	14/92	15/90
5	Know the name of their settlement	100/100	100/100	100/100	100/100	100/100	100/100	100/100	100/100	100/100	100/100
6	Have knowledge of local history	11/85	8/80	9/84	7/81	7/86	12/83	9/87	5/90	9/85	10/90

Note. Pre = before the intervention; Post = after the intervention.

Table 2. National-Cultural Interest of Preschool Children Before (Pre) and After (Post) the Intervention (%)

No.	Indicator	Azerbaijan	Armenia	Belarus	Kazakhstan	Kyrgyzstan	Moldova	Russia	Tajikistan	Uzbekistan	Ukraine
		Pre/Post	Pre/Post	Pre/Post	Pre/Post	Pre/Post	Pre/Post	Pre/Post	Pre/Post	Pre/Post	Pre/Post
1	Have a favorite work of art	4/80	5/75	3/79	6/82	10/76	9/84	5/87	7/83	8/85	6/88
2	Have a favorite historical or contemporary national figure	3/67	6/72	4/73	2/65	7/75	5/69	13/80	7/72	9/70	15/74
3	Interest in national history	10/87	8/72	16/84	10/75	11/70	9/72	18/85	10/73	7/74	17/86
4	Interest in national culture	9/88	10/73	15/82	10/67	14/75	12/69	20/93	13/78	11/75	18/90

Note. Pre = before the intervention; Post = after the intervention.

Table 3

Patriotic Attitudes of Preschool Children Before (Pre) and After (Post) the Intervention (%)

No.	Indicator	Azerbaijan	Armenia	Belarus	Kazakhstan	Kyrgyzstan	Moldova	Russia	Tajikistan	Uzbekistan	Ukraine
		Pre/Post	Pre/Post	Pre/Post	Pre/Post	Pre/Post	Pre/Post	Pre/Post	Pre/Post	Pre/Post	Pre/Post
1	Pride in national history	14/86	13/82	21/89	11/85	9/79	15/74	23/94	14/72	13/73	24/95
2	Pride in national culture	13/82	14/79	25/91	15/86	8/75	17/77	25/92	15/70	14/75	20/96
3	Pride in nationality	77/99	73/90	89/97	79/92	74/95	67/90	85/99	64/82	73/85	79/99

4	Respect for national traditions	35/72	30/67	44/86	32/73	30/65	35/71	47/80	34/70	33/72	46/79
5	Sense of national unity	45/87	40/81	48/89	42/86	43/82	45/79	50/91	40/75	44/72	51/92
6	Desire to contribute to the homeland	13/67	10/62	15/66	14/70	12/68	10/64	22/75	14/78	17/70	20/70
7	Respect for other nations	50/87	46/73	52/84	49/79	53/75	49/77	47/74	55/83	52/80	49/76
8	Knowledge of sister countries	53/97	52/96	54/99	57/95	51/92	54/96	66/99	61/97	65/96	61/97
9	Positive perception of sister countries	49/97	47/97	52/98	50/95	47/92	52/95	60/95	55/97	60/96	61/97

Implementation of the Educational Intervention

After the baseline assessment, educational activities were organized in accordance with the developed program. Teachers who had completed advanced professional training conducted the intervention using interactive and experiential methods.

The educational activities included:

- traditional national games and role-play;
- dramatization, staged performances, and puppet theatre;
- storytelling and creative writing;
- visual arts and decorative crafts based on ethnic motifs;
- mobile exhibitions and “mini-museums” with cultural artifacts;
- introduction to national musical instruments and folk music;
- learning traditional dances and songs;
- multimedia presentations and illustrated materials;
- discussions about national history, local heritage, and prominent personalities.

Children were also introduced to the cultures of other nations in order to develop respect for cultural diversity and tolerance, which is considered an essential component of modern civic education (Banks, 2016).

Special cultural events were organized in accordance with national traditions, including the use of traditional costumes and symbolic attributes. Importantly, children participated actively in these activities, which enhanced emotional engagement and facilitated the internalization of values.

Activity-based and experiential learning approaches are widely recognized as effective methods for value formation in early childhood, as young children learn primarily through emotional experience, imitation, and creative participation (NAEYC, 2020; Wood, 2013).

Results Interpretation and Program Outcomes

During the implementation phase, children were actively engaged in interactive and experience-based learning activities. They were given the opportunity to compare cultural objects, artistic materials, and historical themes, select those that attracted their interest, and express their opinions and emotional responses. The educational process was designed in accordance with age-specific psychological characteristics, ensuring that children were not cognitively overloaded and that learning was combined with play, creativity, and enjoyment. Such an approach is consistent with developmental learning principles, according to which young children acquire knowledge most effectively through emotional engagement and experiential interaction (Vygotsky, 1978; Wood, 2013).

Following two months of program implementation, a second assessment was conducted, and the results were compared with baseline indicators. The analysis demonstrated a significant positive dynamic across all measured parameters (Tables 1–3). The majority of children demonstrated a high level of national-cultural awareness and interest. They were able to

recall key information about the history and culture of their country and locality, identify national traditions, and recognize prominent historical and contemporary figures.

A substantial proportion of participants reported having favorite national heroes and works of art, indicating the emergence of personal cultural preferences and emotional attachment. Interest in further learning about national history, traditions, and artistic heritage also increased markedly.

In terms of value orientation, children expressed a stronger sense of pride in their country, culture, and nationality. At the same time, the program contributed to the development of intercultural awareness: children learned about the existence of culturally related “sister countries” and were able to distinguish them from other states. Importantly, the strengthening of national identity was accompanied by the development of respect for other cultures, which reflects the formation of balanced patriotic and tolerant attitudes consistent with modern civic education principles (Banks, 2016; UNESCO, 2015).

Scientific Novelty

The scientific novelty of this study lies in the development and empirical validation of an integrated model for the formation of spiritual and patriotic values in preschool children within the context of contemporary educational transformation in the CIS countries.

The key innovative contributions of the research include:

1. **Development of an integrated value-oriented curriculum model**
The study proposes a comprehensive program (*Curriculum for Preschool Education*) that combines national cultural heritage with universal human values, ensuring a balance between identity formation and intercultural tolerance. Unlike traditional approaches that focus primarily on cognitive preparation for school, the proposed model emphasizes holistic personality development, including emotional, moral, cultural, and civic components.
2. **Large-scale cross-national empirical implementation**
The program was tested in 83 preschool institutions across ten CIS countries, involving 3,706 children. Such a large comparative empirical base allows for a broader generalization of results and represents one of the few multi-country studies in the field of spiritual and patriotic education at the preschool level.
3. **Integration of experiential and child-centered pedagogical methods**
The research demonstrates the effectiveness of activity-based learning strategies—such as national games, cultural workshops, storytelling, creative arts, and interactive discussions—in fostering value internalization. The study confirms that early value formation is more effective when based on emotional engagement and practical experience rather than formal instruction.
4. **Empirical measurement of value formation indicators**
The study operationalizes spiritual and patriotic development through measurable indicators of awareness, interest, and attitudes, providing a practical evaluation framework that can be used in future research and educational monitoring.
5. **Conceptualization of balanced patriotism**
The findings highlight that strengthening national identity at an early age does not lead to cultural isolation but, when properly designed, promotes respect for other nations and intercultural openness, contributing to the development of socially responsible and tolerant individuals.

Relevance to Contemporary Educational Challenges

The relevance of the study is determined by several global and regional trends affecting modern education systems.

First, contemporary societies face increasing challenges related to social fragmentation, identity crises, and declining civic engagement, particularly in transitional and post-Soviet contexts. Strengthening cultural identity and social cohesion through early childhood education is therefore becoming a strategic priority for national education policies (OECD, 2019; UNESCO, 2021).

Second, rapid globalization and digitalization are transforming children’s socialization environments, often reducing direct contact with national cultural traditions and historical heritage. In this context, preschool education plays a critical role in preserving cultural continuity while simultaneously fostering intercultural competence and global awareness (Banks, 2016).

Third, international research confirms that early childhood is the most sensitive period for value formation, emotional development, and identity construction. Investments in high-quality preschool education produce long-term educational, social, and economic benefits (Heckman, 2006; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000).

Fourth, many CIS countries continue to face structural challenges, including insufficient preschool coverage, uneven quality, and outdated methodological approaches. The proposed program responds to current modernization needs by offering a practical, scalable, and adaptable model aligned with contemporary educational standards.

Finally, the study is consistent with current international priorities emphasizing:

- child-centered and inclusive education;
- competence- and value-based learning;
- cultural sustainability and heritage education;
- the development of social-emotional and civic competencies.

Practical Significance for the Present Time

In the context of current educational reforms, the developed program can be used as:

- a methodological framework for modernizing preschool curricula;
- a tool for strengthening national identity while promoting tolerance;
- a resource for teacher training and professional development;
- a model adaptable to different cultural and national contexts;
- a mechanism for improving school readiness and social adaptation.

Thus, the study contributes to addressing contemporary educational challenges by providing an evidence-based approach to the formation of spiritually, culturally, and socially competent future citizens.

Discussion

The findings of the study should be interpreted within the broader socio-economic and institutional context of preschool education development in CIS countries. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, early childhood education systems experienced significant structural disruptions. Many preschool institutions were closed or repurposed, resulting in a shortage of facilities, deterioration of material and technical infrastructure, and a decline in financing. These challenges were compounded by a shortage of qualified personnel and insufficient methodological support (World Bank, 2018; OECD, 2017).

Currently, in many CIS countries, preschool education systems still do not fully correspond to territorial demand, demographic needs, or modern pedagogical standards. Limitations include insufficient coverage, outdated teaching methods, and inadequate integration of cultural and value-oriented content.

Among CIS countries, Belarus demonstrates one of the highest levels of public investment in preschool education (approximately 1% of GDP), which is considered a relatively high indicator even in comparison with many European and North American countries. Nevertheless, in most CIS states, demand for preschool services continues to exceed supply.

Recognizing these challenges, governments have introduced medium- and long-term budget planning mechanisms and national development programs aimed at expanding preschool networks and improving quality. However, public funding alone remains insufficient. As a result, alternative financing mechanisms and institutional diversification are increasingly being promoted, including the development of non-state preschool institutions such as private, departmental, and family-based childcare centers (UNESCO, 2015).

Alongside financial investment, the effectiveness of system modernization depends on the availability of high-quality organizational and methodological support. In this context, the developed program “Curriculum for Preschool Education” represents an example of a practical tool that integrates national cultural content, child-centered pedagogy, and experiential learning methods.

The long-term implementation of such programs requires improvements in the physical learning environment. Educational spaces should include:

- indoor sports facilities for year-round motor activity;
- landscaped outdoor areas that support aesthetic perception and environmental awareness;
- cultural corners and mini-museums reflecting national heritage;
- creative workshops designed in traditional styles.

Such environments contribute not only to physical development but also to emotional well-being, cultural identification, and aesthetic sensitivity (NAEYC, 2020; OECD, 2019).

Another critical factor in the effectiveness of spiritual and patriotic education is the active involvement of parents. Family participation reinforces educational content, strengthens value internalization, and creates consistency between institutional and home environments. Research consistently shows that parental engagement significantly enhances educational outcomes and social development in early childhood (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000).

Conclusions

State support for early childhood development represents a key component of social policy in CIS countries. Ensuring the protection of children's rights, expanding access to quality preschool education, and promoting comprehensive personality development are among the central priorities of national education strategies.

The developed program "Curriculum for Preschool Education" is of particular significance because it integrates national and universal values within a child-centered learning environment. The program takes into account individual differences in abilities, interests, and developmental characteristics and focuses on the formation of a holistic personality.

The results of the study confirm that preschool education plays a critical role in social development. The creation of environments that support children's talents and value orientations contributes to the formation of human capital and has long-term implications for economic growth and social well-being (Heckman, 2006).

In recent years, many CIS countries have adopted state programs aimed at improving preschool education and expanding preparatory groups within general education schools. However, further progress requires a transition from traditional instructional models to innovative approaches based on:

- modernization of organizational structures;
- implementation of child-centered and activity-based methods;
- integration of cultural and value education;
- strategic planning and resource optimization.

An effective preschool education model should combine the preservation of national traditions with the development of physical, intellectual, emotional, and cultural competencies.

The implementation of the program demonstrated a comprehensive positive impact on children's development. Participants acquired basic knowledge of national history and culture, developed interest in artistic and cultural heritage, identified favorite cultural figures and works, and demonstrated increased pride in their country and nationality. At the same time, the program promoted intercultural tolerance and respect for other nations.

The study has both theoretical and practical significance. It provides a systematized analysis of organizational and legal frameworks for preschool education in CIS countries and presents an evidence-based model for value-oriented early childhood education. The developed program can be adapted not only within the CIS region but also in other countries seeking to strengthen cultural identity and civic values through early education.

Future research will focus on the development and experimental evaluation of specialized programs for the physical development and health promotion of preschool children, further expanding the comprehensive model of early childhood education.

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Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this study. The research was conducted independently, and the results were reported objectively without any financial or personal influence.

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