



Article

Development of Teachers' Pedagogical Competence in Inclusive Education Settings

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Abstract: The purpose of this study is to analyze the current state of the process of developing the pedagogical competence of general secondary school teachers within inclusive education settings, to identify the key factors influencing this process, and to formulate effective directions for enhancing such competence. A comprehensive methodological approach was employed, incorporating theoretical analysis, comparative-typological methods, questionnaires (surveys), and observation. The survey involved 186 teachers working in general secondary schools across various regions of Uzbekistan, and the collected data were processed using both quantitative and qualitative analytical techniques. The findings indicate that while the majority of teachers generally support the concept of inclusive education, their practical and methodological preparedness remains insufficient. Significant gaps were identified in special pedagogical knowledge, individualized lesson planning, and psychological-pedagogical support skills. The article proposes a four-component structural model of inclusive competence comprising cognitive (knowledge), practical (skills), motivational-value, and reflective components adapted to the context of the national education system. This model integrates international theoretical approaches with the specific characteristics of the local educational environment.

Keywords: *inclusive education, pedagogical competence, professional development, special educational needs, professional growth, resource teacher.*

1. Introduction

The Over the past decade, the concept of inclusive education has increasingly assumed a central position in educational systems worldwide, not only as a legal imperative but also as a pedagogical and methodological challenge. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, as well as Goal 4 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, emphasize the obligation to ensure every child's right to equitable and quality education, including children with special educational needs. In the Republic of Uzbekistan, consistent reforms have been implemented in this direction. Relevant presidential decrees and resolutions have led to the adoption of regulatory and legal frameworks aimed at creating inclusive environments in general secondary schools, establishing resource rooms, and enhancing teachers' professional qualifications. However, regardless of the extent to which the legal and organizational aspects of these reforms are developed, their practical effectiveness ultimately depends on the pedagogical competence of classroom teachers. Within inclusive classrooms, teachers are expected not

only to provide subject-specific instruction but also to work effectively with learners who differ in developmental characteristics, learning pace, and socio-emotional needs. International studies demonstrate that teachers' positive attitudes toward inclusive education, their sense of self-efficacy, and their specialized methodological preparation are among the most significant determinants of successful inclusive practice [1], [2].

At the same time, numerous scholars have noted that in many countries, particularly in developing contexts, initial teacher education and professional development programs remain largely oriented toward traditional "one-size-fits-all" pedagogical models. Such programs often fail to adequately develop practical competencies related to individualized instruction, differentiated assessment, and the use of specialized pedagogical strategies [3]. Consequently, a discrepancy emerges between teachers' conceptual readiness and their practical readiness: although teachers may support the principles of inclusive education at a theoretical level, they frequently encounter difficulties when implementing these principles in real classroom settings.

A similar trend can be observed within the education system of Uzbekistan. National researchers have emphasized that the professional profile and qualification requirements for an "inclusive educator" within general secondary education have not yet been fully institutionalized, making it challenging to establish a coherent system for preparing teachers to work effectively in inclusive environments [4]. Nevertheless, positive developments have been observed through the introduction of the resource teacher institution, the publication of methodological guidelines for working with students with special educational needs, and the organization of professional development courses [5], [6]. From this perspective, the issue of developing teachers' pedagogical competence in inclusive education settings remains highly relevant both theoretically and practically. The aim of this study is to identify the structural components of teachers' inclusive competence, empirically assess their current level of development, and formulate scientifically grounded directions for enhancing such competence. Specifically, the study pursues the following objectives: first, to develop a theoretical and structural model of inclusive pedagogical competence; second, to assess teachers' self-evaluated levels of competence through a survey; third, to systematize the factors hindering competence development; and fourth, to formulate recommendations for improving teacher professional development and training systems. The article is structured as follows. The second section presents the research methodology. The third section reports the findings of the empirical study through tabular presentation and analysis. The fourth section discusses the results within the context of existing scholarly literature. Finally, the concluding section summarizes the principal findings and implications of the study.

2. Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods research design, integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches to obtain a comprehensive understanding of teachers' pedagogical competence in inclusive education. During the first stage, a theoretical analysis was conducted of national and international scholarly literature, regulatory and legal documents, and empirical studies published within the last five years. A content analysis approach was applied to identify the conceptual foundations of inclusive pedagogical competence. Based on this analysis, a four-component structural model of inclusive competence was developed, comprising the cognitive (knowledge), practical skills, motivational-value, and reflective dimensions.

The second stage involved the collection of empirical data through a structured questionnaire. A total of 186 teachers from general secondary schools in Tashkent City and the Samarkand, Fergana, and Bukhara regions participated in the survey. Respondents were selected using a random cluster sampling technique, taking into account teaching experience, subject specialization, and previous experience in inclusive classrooms. The questionnaire consisted of 24 items measured on a five-point Likert scale, designed to assess teachers' theoretical knowledge, practical competencies, attitudes toward inclusive education, and professional development needs. In the third stage, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 14 teachers and 4 school methodologists to enrich the

qualitative data and facilitate the interpretation of quantitative findings. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including means, standard deviations, and percentages, whereas qualitative data were processed through thematic analysis. To enhance the credibility of the findings, the principle of methodological triangulation was employed by comparing evidence obtained from multiple data sources. The study was conducted between September and December 2025.

3. Results

The survey findings revealed considerable variation across the structural components of teachers' inclusive pedagogical competence. The results are presented below in tabular form. Table 1 Description. Table 1 presents teachers' self-assessments of the four components of inclusive pedagogical competence. The table reports the mean scores (based on a five-point Likert scale) and the percentage of respondents who evaluated themselves as demonstrating a high level of competence. The calculations were based on responses from 186 participants. As shown in the table, the motivational-value component received the highest ratings, whereas the practical-methodological component received the lowest.

Table 1.

Teachers' Self-Assessment of Inclusive Pedagogical Competence

No.	Competence Component	Mean Score (1–5)	Respondents Reporting a High Level (%)
1	Theoretical knowledge	3.4	38.2
2	Practical-methodological skills	2.7	21.5
3	Motivational-value orientation	4.1	67.7
4	Reflective-evaluative competence	3.0	29.6

Another important finding concerned the factors hindering teachers' professional development in inclusive education. Respondents were allowed to select multiple options; therefore, the cumulative percentages exceed 100%.

Table 2 Description. Table 2 summarizes the most frequently reported barriers to the development of inclusive pedagogical competence. The findings are based on a combined analysis of questionnaire responses and interview data. The lack of practice-oriented professional training emerged as the most significant challenge, followed by insufficient methodological resources.

Table 2. Factors Hindering the Development of Inclusive Pedagogical Competence

No.	Hindering Factor	Respondents (%)
1	Insufficient practice-oriented professional training	71.0
2	Lack of specialized methodological resources and instructional materials	58.6
3	Absence of resource teachers or teaching assistants in classrooms	52.2
4	Limited time due to excessive teaching workload	47.8
5	Weak collaboration with psychologists and special education specialists	39.2

Interview results further indicated that teachers with more than ten years of professional experience tended to demonstrate greater initial caution toward inclusive education than their younger colleagues. However, after acquiring practical experience in inclusive classrooms, they generally developed more positive attitudes. This finding highlights the importance of differentiating professional development programs according to teachers' career stage and teaching experience.

4. Discussion

The findings of this study are largely consistent with the existing international literature on inclusive education while also revealing characteristics specific to the national educational context. First, the results presented in Table 1 indicate that teachers scored highly on the motivational-value component but considerably lower on the practical-

methodological component. This pattern corresponds with findings reported in previous international studies. For example, research conducted in Ethiopia similarly identified a substantial discrepancy between teachers' positive attitudes toward inclusive education and their practical readiness to implement inclusive teaching strategies. This gap has been attributed to teacher education programs that emphasize theoretical knowledge while providing insufficient opportunities for practical training. A comparable tendency emerged in the present study: although 67.7% of teachers regarded inclusive education as an important educational value, only 21.5% considered their practical competencies to be highly developed. These findings suggest that the disconnect between knowing and doing represents a common challenge in both developed and developing educational systems.

Second, the barriers identified in Table 2 reinforce conclusions drawn from previous systematic reviews. The shortage of practice-oriented professional training (71.0%) emerged as the most significant obstacle. Previous studies have noted that professional development in inclusive education is often delivered through isolated seminars rather than sustained learning opportunities, limiting teachers' long-term professional growth. In contrast, continuous, practice-based professional development models incorporating mentoring and collaborative learning have been shown to be considerably more effective. The present findings indicate that Uzbekistan's teacher professional development system would similarly benefit from transitioning from one-time training events to continuous, modular, and practice-oriented programs.

Third, the absence of resource teachers or teaching assistants (52.2%) represents an institutional challenge within the national education system. Previous national studies have emphasized that the professional role and qualification standards for inclusive education specialists have not yet been fully institutionalized, creating ambiguity regarding the responsibilities and authority of resource teachers within schools [7]. International evidence demonstrates that the presence of a second educator in inclusive classrooms not only reduces teachers' workload but also significantly enhances opportunities for individualized instruction [8]. Consequently, strengthening the legal and financial foundations of the resource teacher system should remain a policy priority in Uzbekistan.

Fourth, limited collaboration with psychologists and special education professionals (39.2%) reflects insufficient implementation of the multidisciplinary approach that is fundamental to inclusive education. A large-scale study conducted in Belgium emphasized that teachers' competence should be evaluated not solely at the individual level but also within the broader context of institutional support, including a collaborative culture among educational specialists [9]. Therefore, alongside enhancing individual teachers' competencies, educational policy should promote systematic interdisciplinary collaboration within schools.

Fifth, the observed differences associated with teaching experience can be interpreted through the concept of teacher self-efficacy. Previous studies suggest that teachers' confidence in implementing inclusive practices develops primarily through practical experience and successful classroom outcomes rather than through theoretical instruction alone [10, 11]. This finding underscores the importance of incorporating practical workshops, classroom observation, reflective practice, and peer coaching into teacher professional development programs.

Furthermore, evidence from innovative professional development initiatives in mathematics education demonstrates that teachers' ability to notice students' learning needs and respond appropriately can be substantially improved through targeted training [12]. This finding is particularly relevant to the relatively low mean score obtained for the reflective-evaluative component (3.0). Incorporating structured reflective activities and classroom observation exercises into professional development programs may significantly enhance teachers' capacity to identify and respond effectively to students' diverse educational needs [13].

Overall, the findings indicate that developing inclusive pedagogical competence is a multidimensional process that depends not only on teachers' individual knowledge and skills but also on institutional support within schools, professional learning communities,

and the broader regulatory framework established by educational authorities. Consequently, competence development requires a comprehensive, multi-level strategy rather than isolated professional training initiatives [14, 15].

5. Conclusion

The findings of this study reaffirm the theoretical and practical significance of developing teachers' pedagogical competence within the context of inclusive education. Although most teachers demonstrated a strong commitment to the values of inclusive education, their practical and methodological preparedness remained substantially lower than their theoretical knowledge and motivational orientation. This discrepancy clearly illustrates the persistent gap between teachers' conceptual understanding and their capacity to implement inclusive practices effectively. The study identified several major barriers to competence development, including the shortage of practice-oriented professional training, limited availability of methodological resources, insufficient institutionalization of the resource teacher system, excessive teaching workload, and weak interdisciplinary collaboration. These factors should serve as key considerations in designing future strategies for professional competence development. Based on these findings, the study proposes several practical recommendations. First, teacher professional development programs should move beyond one-time seminars toward continuous, practice-based, modular programs incorporating mentoring. Second, undergraduate teacher education curricula should include practice-oriented modules in inclusive pedagogy. Third, the professional role and qualification standards for resource teachers should be fully institutionalized through appropriate regulatory frameworks. Fourth, schools should establish systematic mechanisms to facilitate collaboration among teachers, psychologists, and special education professionals. Finally, professional development programs should be differentiated according to teachers' experience and career stage. In conclusion, the development of inclusive pedagogical competence cannot be achieved through isolated interventions alone. Rather, it requires coordinated efforts at the governmental, institutional, and individual teacher levels. Future research should employ broader geographical coverage, longitudinal research designs, and comprehensive evaluation models incorporating student learning outcomes to further strengthen the evidence base for inclusive teacher education.

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