



DEVELOPMENT OF INCLUSIVE HIGHER EDUCATION AND TEACHER'S PEDAGOGICAL COMPETENCE IN THE REPUBLIC OF UZBEKISTAN

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Abstract: *The article examines the development of inclusive higher education in the Republic of Uzbekistan and the role of teacher pedagogical competence as a key factor in its effectiveness. The relevance of the study is driven by the expansion of inclusive learning practices and the need to prepare teachers for work in conditions of educational diversity. The methodological basis consists of the theoretical analysis of scientific literature, regulatory documents, and statistical data. It has been established that despite the active development of inclusive education, a gap persists between regulatory implementation and the practical pedagogical readiness of teachers. The necessity of forming inclusive pedagogical competence as a systemic component of the professional training of higher education teachers is substantiated.*

Keywords: *inclusive education, higher school, pedagogical competence, inclusive competence, Uzbekistan, educational policy.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Inclusion is currently considered one of the key directions in the development of the modern education system, reflecting significant social and value transformations in society. It is based on the idea of forming an open and welcoming society in which every person, regardless of their ethnic origin, religious views, cultural characteristics, or health status, has the opportunity to be a full participant in public life. [2, P.15; 31] The term "inclusion" (from English inclusion) originates from the verb include, which has French roots and

conveys the meaning of "to include", "to encompass", "to contain". In modern usage, this term acquires a broader meaning and reflects an updated understanding of not only educational processes but also the role of the individual in society as a whole. It involves the inclusion of all categories of students into a single educational space, regardless of their individual characteristics, health status, or social status.

At the same time, it is fundamentally important that such inclusion contributes not only to social



integration but also to the development of individual independence and the provision of equal rights and opportunities in all spheres of activity. [23, P.9] The inclusive approach also touches upon deeper philosophical aspects related to understanding the relationship between the "I" and the "Other", as well as the formation of human consciousness in the process of social interaction. [24, P.27]

In this context, the integration of the Republic of Uzbekistan into the global educational space necessitates a rethinking of teachers' professional tasks and the search for modern approaches to their resolution. In recent years, reforms aimed at modernizing the education system, including the development of inclusive education, have been consistently implemented in the country. In the regulatory documents adopted by the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan and the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, priority areas related to ensuring equal access to quality education for all categories of students have been defined.

Special attention is paid to creating conditions for the education of children with disabilities, implementing inclusive education principles, and organizing joint training for children with special educational needs and their peers. In this regard, ensuring the right of such children to education is considered one of the key tasks of state policy, which is important not only for the education sector but also

for the sustainable socio-economic development of the country.

The implementation of inclusive education is possible only if the principles of democracy and non-discrimination on any grounds are observed. In this context, the approach proposed by Peter Mittler, who views inclusive education as an important stage on the path to forming an inclusive society, acquires particular significance. In his opinion, such a society ensures the participation of all people-regardless of their gender, age, ethnicity, level of ability, or health-in public life and creates conditions for their full contribution to its development. At the same time, diversity is viewed not as a problem, but as a value worthy of respect and recognition. [19, P.12]

In this regard, the problem of the professional readiness of higher education teachers to work in an inclusive educational environment is becoming particularly relevant. It is precisely pedagogical competence that serves as the key factor determining the effectiveness of implementing inclusion principles in the higher education system.

Based on the above, the purpose of our study is to analyze the essence of teacher pedagogical competence and determine its role in the development of inclusive higher education in Uzbekistan.

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The methodological basis of the research is an interdisciplinary approach that allows for considering inclusive education at the intersection of pedagogy, sociology, and educational policy, as well



as a set of general scientific methods: analysis, synthesis, comparison, and generalization.

The following were used during the study:

- analysis of domestic and foreign scientific literature on issues of inclusive education and pedagogical competence;
- comparative analysis of various theoretical approaches to defining competence;
- analysis of the regulatory legal documents of the Republic of Uzbekistan;
- secondary analysis of statistical data characterizing the development of inclusive education.

III. MAIN PART

Education is an inalienable right of every person and is enshrined at the level of the Constitution and national legislation. In the Republic of Uzbekistan, special attention is paid to ensuring equal access to education for all categories of students, including children with disabilities. How their social protection is organized and how they should receive an education along with everyone else is regulated by the Laws of the Republic of Uzbekistan "On Education", "On the Rights of the Child", and "On the Rights of Persons with Disabilities". There are many other bylaws and resolutions of the Cabinet of Ministers of Uzbekistan that also regulate this. [5; 6; 7]

However, despite the fact that everyone should have equal rights under the law, in practice, children with special educational needs still face barriers when

trying to receive a quality education. In this regard, state policy is aimed at creating conditions for their education, developing an inclusive educational environment, and providing psychological, pedagogical, and social support necessary for successful adaptation and integration into society.

According to official data, there has been an expansion of inclusive education coverage in the country in recent years. Thus, in 2023, there were approximately 36,000 children with disabilities in Uzbekistan, a significant portion of whom require special educational conditions.[16] According to the Ministry of Preschool and School Education, inclusive education has been implemented in approximately 1,100 general education schools by 2024-2025, and the number of children enrolled in inclusive education has reached approximately 22,000, with a projected increase to 26,000. [35] Furthermore, within the framework of state programs for the development of education, measures are being implemented to expand infrastructure: resource classrooms are being created, teaching assistant positions are being introduced, and an individual support system for students is being developed. In 2024, it was announced that inclusive practices would be further expanded to 954 schools to improve access to education at a child's place of residence. [32]

In the context of developing inclusive education in the Republic of Uzbekistan, expanding access to higher



education for persons with disabilities is becoming an important direction of state policy. According to the Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan "On the Rights of Persons with Disabilities" and educational development programs, the state strives to ensure equal opportunities for obtaining professional education and creates conditions for studying at universities. In recent years, the higher education system in the country has been expanding significantly, with an increasing number of students with special educational needs entering it. [5; 7]

In recent years, the country has seen a steady expansion of the higher education system and an increase in the engagement of students with special educational needs. According to the Statistics Agency under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, the total number of university students in the 2024/2025 academic year exceeded 1.4 million people. [1] Parallel to this, the practice of inclusive education is developing, including adapting the educational environment and introducing elements of individual support for students with disabilities.

According to data from the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Innovation of the Republic of Uzbekistan and reports from international organizations, approximately 3,000–5,000 students with disabilities are currently studying at the country's universities, with their exact number varying depending on the methodology

for recording disability: officially registered or having special educational needs (for example, hearing, vision, speech impairments, developmental delays, learning difficulties, autism, etc., even without official disability status). [17] For example, 423 students with disabilities are enrolled at Berdakh Karakalpak State University:

- Group I disability - 25 people;
- Group II disability - 347 people;
- Group III disability - 51 people.

Of these, 382 students are enrolled on a grant basis, while 41 are on a contract basis. [3]

There is a trend of annual growth in the number of such students due to the expansion of quotas, distance learning, and the improvement of university infrastructure. International organizations also confirm the development of this direction. UNICEF and World Bank reports emphasize that Uzbekistan is gradually transitioning to an inclusive higher education model, yet the enrollment rate of students with disabilities in universities remains relatively low and requires further development of an accessible educational environment, including architectural, digital, and pedagogical adaptation. [36]

Thus, inclusive education in the higher education system of the Republic of Uzbekistan is gradually being established as one of the key directions of state policy in the field of personnel training. Its development is aimed not only at implementing the principle of equal access to educational resources but



also at forming a socially responsible and humanistic ally-oriented society that takes into account the diversity of educational needs among youth representatives. At the same time, despite the positive dynamics of reforms, the involvement of students with disabilities and special educational needs in higher education remains insufficient, which indicates the need to further improve institutional mechanisms for inclusion, modernize university infrastructure, and strengthen the training of faculty.

The professional activity of a university teacher, by its nature, combines a high degree of complexity and a creative component. As Vasiliy Aleksandrovich Sukhomlinsky emphasized, the foundation of pedagogical mastery is the spiritual maturity of the individual, developed emotional culture, and the ability to deeply comprehend educational processes and the needs of students. [25, P.45] In the context of higher education, this position acquires particular significance, as work is conducted with formed individuals who possess their own social experience, value orientations, and professional expectations. The humanistic orientation of the educational process at the university entails a respectful attitude toward the individuality of every student and the recognition of their potential.

Especially difficult is the organization of the educational process involving students with disabilities. In higher education, such students often face not only physical but also socio-

psychological barriers, which can limit their academic and social activity. However, for young people studying at universities, it remains critically important not only to acquire professional knowledge but also to fully integrate into the academic community, develop communication skills, and participate in student life.

In this regard, inclusive education in higher education is considered an alternative to segregationist practices and an effective mechanism for ensuring equal participation of all students in the educational process. Its conceptual basis is the principles of non-discrimination, equality of opportunity, and the creation of special learning conditions while maintaining a unified educational space. The inclusive model of higher education involves adapting the educational environment to the individual characteristics of students rather than vice versa, requiring flexibility in curricula and variation in pedagogical approaches.

Inclusive higher education is a dynamically developing system aimed at ensuring the accessibility of education for various categories of students through the transformation of the educational environment. Within this approach, the principles of individualization, flexibility, and interdisciplinarity are implemented, allowing for the consideration of students' academic and social characteristics. Nikolai Nikolaevich Malofeev said that inclusive education is when people with different capabilities study together. This



helps them become a part of society much more easily. [14, P.310]

To implement such a system in universities, it is necessary to approach the matter comprehensively. This includes improving laws and regulations, developing special curricula, and implementing modern technical means for learning. It is also important to create an atmosphere at the university where everyone accepts and understands one another.

Implementing an inclusive model in universities requires a comprehensive approach, including improving the regulatory framework, developing adapted educational programs, implementing modern technical teaching tools, and fostering an inclusive culture in the academic environment. The training of teachers capable of working effectively in educational diversity and providing psychological and pedagogical support to students is of particular importance. In this context, the research of Uzbek scholars emphasizing the need for the systemic development of inclusive education in the country is important, as stated by the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Sh.M. Mirziyoyev. [18; 27, P. 45-52]

It should be emphasized that inclusive education in higher education cannot be viewed solely as an organizational model. Its implementation requires the transformation of value attitudes among teachers and students, the formation of a culture of respect for diversity, and the recognition of the

importance of everyone's participation in the educational process. In this regard, Konstantin Dmitrievich Ushinsky's ideas regarding the role of a teacher's personal convictions remain relevant: the effectiveness of educational interaction is determined not by formal adherence to methodologies, but by the teacher's internal readiness to adopt inclusion principles. [28, P.112]

Modern scientific research confirms that the key element of a teacher's professionalism is their value-based attitude toward students. In higher education settings, this manifests as respect for students' individual characteristics, readiness for pedagogical interaction, and a desire for constant professional development. Pedagogical duty and responsibility become the most important characteristics of a teacher, determining their ability to provide quality education for all categories of students.

In foreign and domestic scientific literature, the phenomenon of the "transformation experience" of a teacher's professional consciousness related to the transition to inclusive practice is also described. This process involves rethinking pedagogical attitudes, mastering new competencies, and fostering a positive attitude toward educational diversity. Practice shows that as experience in interacting with students with special educational needs accumulates, teachers' attitudes toward inclusion become more conscious and constructive. [13]



The inclusive model of higher education focuses on recognizing the value of individual differences and ensuring conditions for students with different educational needs, including representatives of different social, cultural, and age groups. At the same time, the educational process is adapted to the capabilities of students, requiring high professional flexibility from the instructor. In this regard, the training of future specialists in Uzbekistan's pedagogical universities, where the foundations of inclusive competence and readiness to work in diverse educational environments are formed, is of particular importance.

The benefits of an inclusive approach in higher education extend to all participants in the educational process. The use of innovative pedagogical technologies, individual educational trajectories, and academic support systems contributes to improving the quality of education. Students studying in an inclusive environment demonstrate a higher level of social responsibility, empathy, and communicative culture, which is especially relevant for modern Uzbek society. Furthermore, an inclusive environment contributes to the reduction of social barriers and the formation of more equal relations within the student community.

Of course, it should be emphasized that the key role in implementing inclusive education belongs to the higher school teacher. The success of an inclusive practice largely depends on its

level of professional training, flexibility, and readiness for innovation. In this regard, the improvement of teacher training programs focused on the formation of universal competencies is of particular relevance. Research indicates that even with theoretical knowledge in the field of inclusion, pedagogical students may still face psychological barriers and professional difficulties that require additional attention from educational institutions. [29, P.17-32]

Thus, the further development of inclusive education in the higher education system of Uzbekistan requires not only the improvement of the regulatory framework and resource support but also active work on forming an inclusive culture in society and the professional community. An important role in this process is played by organizing scientific and practical interaction between teachers, conducting joint research, conferences, and trainings aimed at exchanging experience and developing effective practices for inclusive education.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The development of inclusive higher education in the Republic of Uzbekistan naturally raises the issue of the teacher's professional readiness to work in conditions of educational diversity. In this context, the category of pedagogical competence acquires particular importance, which is considered an integrative characteristic of the teacher's personality, reflecting their ability to effectively carry out educational activities



while taking into account the individual characteristics of students, including students with special educational needs. Modern researchers emphasize that pedagogical competence extends beyond narrow professional knowledge and encompasses a set of value orientations, practical skills, reflexive abilities, and readiness for constant professional development. Thus, according to Irina Alexandrovna Zimnyaya, competence is the result of mastering competencies, manifested in an individual's ability to act successfully in various professional situations. [10, P.14-20]

In Uzbekistan's scientific literature, this category is also actively developing. In particular, Uzbek researchers such as R.Kh. Dzhuraev and M.Kh. Tokhtakhodzhaeva consider the pedagogical competence of a university teacher to be a complex of professionally significant qualities that ensure the successful implementation of the educational process in the context of modernizing the higher education system. [4; 26]

In foreign studies, such as Li Shulman's, pedagogical competence is associated with the concept of "pedagogical content knowledge", which combines the subject and methodological training of the teacher. [34, P.4-14]

For a deeper understanding of the nature of pedagogical competence, it is necessary to distinguish between the concepts of competency (as a prescribed set of requirements) and competence (as the actual mastery or ability of a person),

which are often used as synonyms, yet differ in essential ways. Aleksei Viktorovich Khutorskoi explains competency as a set of societal requirements for an individual's education. It encompasses the knowledge, skills, and approaches to work that are necessary for successfully performing tasks in a specific domain. [30, C.59-60] Competence, however, is already what is inherent in a person. It shows how well he has mastered the necessary competencies and, most importantly, how he knows how to use them in life. [11, P.16-31]

A similar position is held by John Raven, who considers competence as a set of cognitive, motivational, and value components that ensure effective behavior in specific activities. [21, P.36-65]

Thus, while competency provides regulatory guidelines for professional training, competence reflects the actual level of their mastery and practical implementation in the professional activities of a university teacher.

In the context of inclusive higher education, this distinction acquires particular significance, as the presence of formally established competencies in educational standards does not yet guarantee the teacher's readiness for effective interaction with students with different educational needs. It is precisely the formed competence that is necessary as an integrative result of professional development, including not only knowledge about inclusion but also



readiness to apply it in real pedagogical practice.

When considering the main approaches to the classification of pedagogical competencies, it should be noted that there is no single universal model in modern pedagogical science, which is due to the multidimensional nature of the pedagogical activity itself. Nevertheless, a number of the most common approaches can be identified. Thus, I.A. Zimnyaya proposes distinguishing key, general professional, and special competencies, where key competencies are super-subject-specific and ensure successful personality socialization, general professional competencies are related to the specifics of pedagogical activity, and special competencies reflect the specifics of a specific subject area. [10, P.4]

Also, in Russian pedagogy, Evgeny Fedorovich Zeer made a significant contribution to the development of classifications, distinguishing socio-personal, general professional, and professional-specialized competencies. [8, P.26] Competency, according to the correct assertion of E.F. Zeer and E.E. Simanyuk, is "a person's ability to realize their competence in practice". [9, P.23-30]

Consequently, the concept of "competency" is closely linked to the concept of "competence". According to I.A. Zimnyaya, competency is "a relevant, formative personal quality based on knowledge, an intellectually and personally conditioned socio-professional

characteristic of a person". [12, P.20] And competence is the ability to apply competencies. [22, P.7] Therefore, this approach allows for the consideration of pedagogical competence as a multi-level system that encompasses both the teacher's personal characteristics and their professional skills.

In our domestic scientific tradition, our own models of classification are also proposed. For example, in the works of N.A. Muslimov, pedagogical competencies are divided into methodological, communicative, informational, and reflexive, which is especially relevant in the context of digitalization and the internationalization of higher education. [20, P.45-52] Such classification emphasizes the need for comprehensive training of a teacher capable of effectively using modern educational technologies and establishing productive interaction with students.

Some foreign scholars, such as Philippe P. Perrenou, believe that pedagogical skills should be viewed as specific professional actions. For example, they talk about such skills as organizing the educational process, leading a class (or a student group), evaluating what students have learned, and communicating with them. [33, P.12-25]

When it comes to higher education, these skills change, of course, because it is necessary to consider the specifics of working with adult students and the need to develop their autonomy.



Thus, an analysis of scientific literature shows that there is no unified approach to defining the structure and content of pedagogical competence in modern pedagogical science. Various researchers offer their own classifications, reflecting the complexity and multidimensionality of this phenomenon.

The gap between the normative requirements for inclusive education and the actual practice of their implementation is also a significant problem. Despite the existence of a legislative framework, educational institutions do not always have sufficient resources and human resources to fully implement inclusion.

The issue of teachers' professional readiness deserves special attention. The presence of formal competencies does not guarantee their effective application in practice, which makes the problem of forming competence as an integrative quality of the individual relevant.

V. CONCLUSION

In the context of inclusive education, it is of particular importance to distinguish inclusive competence as an independent component of pedagogical competence. It includes knowledge about the specifics of various educational needs, the ability to adapt educational material, and value attitudes aimed at accepting diversity. In the studies of Uzbek authors, it is emphasized that the formation of this competence should be carried out at the

stage of teacher training in master's programs and the professional development system. [15, pp.45-52]

Thus, the pedagogical competence of a higher education teacher under the conditions of developing inclusive education in Uzbekistan is a complex, multi-component education that encompasses a combination of professional knowledge, skills, value orientations, and personal qualities. The distinction between the concepts of "competency" and "competence" allows for a more precise definition of the goals and results of professional training, while the diversity of approaches to the classification of pedagogical competencies reflects the multifaceted nature of pedagogical activity and the need for its adaptation to modern social challenges.

The teacher's pedagogical competence serves as a key factor in the successful implementation of an inclusive education model. Its formation involves not only mastering professional knowledge and skills but also developing a value-based attitude toward educational diversity, readiness for innovation, and reflective activity.

The prospects for the further development of inclusive education are linked to improving the system of pedagogical personnel training, modernizing the educational environment, and forming an inclusive culture in society.



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