

ISSUES OF PREPARATION FOR INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN THE PROCESS OF INDEPENDENT LEARNING

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Annotation. This article examines the theoretical and practical dimensions of preparing pre-service teachers to work in inclusive educational settings, with particular emphasis on the role and significance of independent learning in this preparation process. The study investigates students' levels of readiness for inclusive education, their existing professional competencies, and their independent learning skills. The article analyzes the essence of the concept of inclusive education, its implementation within the educational system of the Republic of Uzbekistan, and the pedagogical conditions necessary for preparing pre-service teachers to perform effectively in inclusive environments through independent learning. The findings of the research demonstrate that independent learning constitutes an effective means of forming inclusive competencies in pre-service teachers, fostering their professional autonomy, reflective thinking, and creative approach to pedagogical practice. The article proposes a comprehensive program for preparing pre-service teachers for inclusive education.

Keywords: **inclusive education, independent learning, pedagogical preparation, professional competence, children with special educational needs, integration, differentiated approach, reflective thinking, individual learning trajectory, pedagogical mastery.**

Introduction

The contemporary educational system, grounded in humanistic principles, is oriented toward ensuring the right of every child — including children with special educational needs — to receive quality education. The development of inclusive education has been identified as one of the priority directions in the reform of the educational sector in the Republic of Uzbekistan. The Law "On Education," the "Strategy for the Development of Preschool and School Education," and other normative documents outline significant measures for the implementation of inclusive education.

The Resolution of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan No. PR-4860 dated October 13, 2020, "On Measures for the Further Development of Inclusive Education," marked the beginning of a new stage in state policy in the field of inclusive education. In accordance with the requirements of this resolution, the issue of preparing pre-service teachers for inclusive education in higher education institutions has acquired a position of considerable importance.

The successful implementation of inclusive education depends largely on the professional preparation of teachers, namely on their knowledge, skills, and competencies in working with children who have special educational needs. From this perspective, there arises a clear necessity to prepare pre-service teachers for effective practice within inclusive educational settings. One of the most effective instruments for achieving such preparation is independent learning.

Independent learning serves to develop in students the ability to acquire knowledge autonomously, to apply learned material in practice, and to prepare for professional activity. Independent learning

in the field of inclusive education contributes to the formation of theoretical knowledge, practical skills, and professional competencies in working with children with special educational needs.

The relevance of the present research is determined by the fact that the existing educational and methodological resources, as well as the methodological approaches currently employed in higher education institutions for preparing pre-service teachers for inclusive education, do not fully meet the contemporary demands of this field. The insufficient coverage of inclusive education topics in the organization of independent learning, together with the inadequate level of students' practical readiness, underscores the urgency of the research problem.

Literature Review

The issues of inclusive education have been examined from various perspectives by foreign and domestic scholars. Among foreign researchers, T. Booth and M. Ainscow, in their study "Index for Inclusion," developed the fundamental principles of inclusive education and the mechanisms for its implementation. R. Slee considered inclusive education not only as a means of supporting children with special needs but also as an instrument for the humanization of the entire educational system. Russian scholars including N.N. Malofeev, S.V. Alyokhina, and N.M. Nazarova have conducted substantial research on the theoretical foundations of inclusive education, the pedagogical conditions for its implementation, and the issues of teacher preparation. Their works provide a detailed exposition of the psychological and pedagogical dimensions of inclusive education.

Among Uzbek scholars, M. Ayupova, D. Sharipova, R. Mukhamedova, F. Negmatova, and others have conducted research on the implementation of inclusive education within the national educational system, the preparation of pre-service teachers, and the issues of working with children who have special educational needs. These studies propose approaches that take into account the national characteristics, cultural and spiritual particularities of inclusive education.

The problems of independent learning are reflected in the works of A.V. Khutorskoy, P.I. Pidkasisty, and I.A. Zimnyaya. Among Uzbek scholars, N. Egamberdieva, B. Ziyomukhamedov, and U. Tolipov have examined the pedagogical conditions for organizing independent learning.

Nevertheless, the specific issues concerning the preparation of pre-service teachers for inclusive education through independent learning, along with its methodological support and practical aspects, have not been studied sufficiently. This determines both the novelty and the relevance of the present topic.

Methods

In the course of the research, a combination of theoretical and empirical methods was applied in order to achieve the scientific objectives. The theoretical foundation of the study was constituted by the following methods:

- Analytical study of pedagogical, psychological, and methodological literature, conducted with the aim of examining existing theoretical approaches to inclusive education and independent learning;
- Analysis of normative documents, including the laws, resolutions, and other documents of the Republic of Uzbekistan in the educational sphere;
- Synthesis and generalization, employed to formulate conclusions on the basis of the obtained data;
- Modeling, applied for the development of a model for preparing pre-service teachers for inclusive education.

The following empirical methods were employed:

- Questionnaire surveys, conducted to identify students' levels of readiness for inclusive education through specially designed instruments;
- Pedagogical interviews with students and faculty members on issues related to inclusive education;
- Pedagogical observation of students' activities during practical sessions;
- Pedagogical experimentation, conducted to test the effectiveness of the proposed model and methods;
- Statistical analysis, applied to the processing of obtained data through mathematical and statistical procedures.

The research was conducted at pedagogical higher education institutions in Uzbekistan during the 2023–2024 academic year. The study involved a total of 240 students and 35 faculty members. Experimental groups (n=120) and control groups (n=120) were formed, and the corresponding pedagogical experiment was carried out among them.

The empirical foundation of the research was structured as follows: at the first stage (ascertaining experiment), the level of students' readiness for inclusive education was determined. At the second stage (formative experiment), a specially designed program of independent learning was introduced for the students of the experimental groups. At the third stage (summative experiment), the changes were analyzed and conclusions were drawn.

The following criteria were applied in evaluating students' readiness for inclusive education: motivational and value-based criterion (positive attitude toward inclusive education, professional interest); cognitive criterion (system of knowledge about inclusive education); activity-based and practical criterion (practical skills and abilities); and reflective criterion (the capacity to analyze one's own professional practice).

Results

The data obtained at the ascertaining stage of the research revealed that students' level of preparation for inclusive education was insufficient. According to the results of the questionnaire survey, 68 percent of students had a general understanding of the concept of inclusive education, yet they did not possess adequate knowledge of its practical aspects or of the methods of working with children with special educational needs.

Interviews conducted with students revealed the following problems: first, a superficial understanding of the theoretical foundations of inclusive education; second, a lack of practical skills for working with children with special educational needs; and third, the scarcity of methodological guidelines for studying this subject within the framework of independent learning.

In order to enhance the effectiveness of preparing pre-service teachers for inclusive education through independent learning, the following comprehensive program was developed and introduced into the experimental groups:

1. Ensuring the Goal-Oriented Nature of Independent Learning

During the experiment, independent learning assignments oriented toward the achievement of clearly defined professional objectives were developed for the students. Each assignment was designed to form a specific competency in the area of inclusive education.

2. Practical Orientation of the Content

The materials of independent learning were enriched not only with theoretical content but also with practical situations, case studies, and examples drawn from real school environments. Students were given the opportunity to analyze authentic pedagogical situations occurring in inclusive classrooms, to develop solutions, and to articulate their own positions.

3. Application of Modern Educational Technologies

Throughout the process of independent learning, digital educational resources, online platforms, and multimedia materials were extensively employed. This enriched students' independent learning activity and substantially enhanced its effectiveness.

4. Outcomes of the Summative Experiment

The comparative analysis of the levels of readiness for inclusive education among students of the experimental and control groups produced the following findings:

- 1) With respect to the motivational and value-based criterion, the proportion of students at the high level in the experimental group rose from 32 percent to 67 percent, while in the control group this indicator increased from 30 percent to 38 percent;
- 2) With respect to the cognitive criterion, the high level in the experimental group increased from 28 percent to 71 percent, whereas in the control group it rose from 27 percent to 41 percent;
- 3) With respect to the activity-based and practical criterion, the high level in the experimental group rose from 18 percent to 64 percent, while in the control group it increased from 19 percent to 35 percent;
- 4) With respect to the reflective criterion, the high level in the experimental group increased from 22 percent to 69 percent, while in the control group it rose from 21 percent to 37 percent.

The obtained results are statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) and confirm the effectiveness of the proposed model of independent learning. Substantial development was observed among the students of the experimental group not only in the area of theoretical knowledge but also in practical skills and professional competencies.

Discussion

The results of the research confirm that the appropriate organization of the process of independent learning constitutes an effective means of preparing pre-service teachers for inclusive education. A comparative analysis of the obtained results in relation to the scientific research of domestic and foreign scholars yields the following conclusions.

First, the effectiveness of independent learning is associated with its goal-oriented and practice-oriented nature. This corresponds to the principle of the practical dimension of inclusive education advanced by T. Booth and M. Ainscow. As demonstrated in the experiment, when students engage with authentic pedagogical situations, their professional competencies are formed at a more rapid pace.

Second, the use of digital technologies in independent learning yields considerable benefits. Through internet resources, online courses, and video lectures, students gain access to contemporary forms of knowledge acquisition. This dimension is particularly significant in the present era of the digital economy.

Third, the development of reflective thinking constitutes an important aspect in the preparation of specialists in the field of inclusive education. The systematic analysis by students of their own professional practice, decisions, and pedagogical actions contributes to the continuous improvement

of their professional mastery. This dimension is also reflected in the works of D.A. Schön, particularly in his concept of the "reflective practitioner."

Fourth, an individualized approach is of considerable importance in the process of independent learning. Each student possesses a distinct learning style, set of interests, and range of capabilities. Taking these into account requires the development of individual learning trajectories. In the experimental work, this approach yielded notable results.

Fifth, it is necessary to strengthen cooperation between higher education institutions and general education schools — particularly those schools where inclusive classes have been established. The acquisition of practical experience by students in authentic inclusive environments contributes substantially to their preparedness for future professional activity.

Several problems were also identified in the course of the research: the inadequacy of educational and methodological materials necessary for independent learning; the low level of independent learning skills among certain students; and the insufficient qualifications of some faculty members in the field of inclusive education. The resolution of these problems requires a comprehensive set of measures.

A comparison of the research findings with international experience indicates that in developed countries, independent learning occupies a central position in the preparation of pre-service teachers for inclusive education. In Finland and Norway, for example, it has become standard practice for students to undertake independent practical training in actual schools and to carry out research projects.

The findings presented in this study also enabled the identification of promising directions for further research in this field. Among these are the preparation of specialists in inclusive education at the master's and doctoral levels of higher education, the formation of inclusive competencies in digital learning environments, and the integration of family education with inclusive education in working with children who have special educational needs. These directions warrant further investigation.

Pedagogical Conditions

On the basis of the research findings, the following pedagogical conditions for preparing pre-service teachers for inclusive education through independent learning have been established:

- 5) The professional orientation and practical relevance of the content of independent learning;
- 6) The establishment of subject-to-subject relations between teacher and student;
- 7) The systematic monitoring and evaluation of students' independent learning activity;
- 8) The extensive use of contemporary educational technologies, including digital tools;
- 9) The development of students' reflective thinking;
- 10) The strengthening of cooperation with inclusive educational institutions;
- 11) The development of contemporary educational and methodological resources for independent learning;
- 12) The application of differentiated approaches that take into account students' individual characteristics.

Conclusion

The conducted research has enabled the formulation of the following conclusions.

First, inclusive education represents one of the most pressing pedagogical issues of the contemporary era, and its successful implementation depends substantially on the professional

preparation of teachers. The preparation of pre-service teachers for inclusive education thus constitutes a significant task confronting institutions of higher pedagogical education.

Second, independent learning serves as an effective means of forming inclusive competencies in pre-service teachers. It develops in students the capacity to acquire knowledge autonomously, to apply acquired knowledge in practice, and to plan and implement professional activities independently.

Third, in order to enhance the effectiveness of preparing pre-service teachers for inclusive education through independent learning, specific pedagogical conditions must be established. These include the professional orientation and practical relevance of the content of independent learning, the application of contemporary educational technologies, and the development of students' reflective thinking.

Fourth, the effectiveness of the proposed comprehensive program has been confirmed in the course of the pedagogical experiment. Significant changes across all criteria of readiness for inclusive education were observed among students in the experimental group as compared with those in the control group.

Fifth, future research on the preparation of pre-service teachers for inclusive education through independent learning should be conducted along the following lines: the formation of inclusive competencies in digital learning environments; the in-depth preparation of specialists in inclusive education at the master's and doctoral levels; the adaptation of international experience to national conditions; and the interrelation between family education and inclusive education.

The scientific and practical findings obtained in this study may be employed in organizing independent learning at higher pedagogical education institutions, in improving curricula and educational and methodological resources, and in implementing comprehensive measures for preparing students to work in inclusive educational settings.

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