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Pedagogical-Psychological Support Of The Educational Process In Inclusive Education Settings

Oygul Ashurova Anvarjonovna Senior Lecturer at the
"Inclusive Education" Department of Fergana State University,
PhD (Doctor of Philosophy in Pedagogical Sciences).

Abstract

This article examines the theoretical and practical dimensions of pedagogical-psychological support within the educational process in inclusive education settings. The study is directed at identifying the psychological and pedagogical conditions necessary for the successful learning of students with special educational needs (SEN) in mainstream educational institutions. Drawing on contemporary approaches in educational psychology, special psychology, and inclusive pedagogy, the article analyses the role of individual educational programmes, multidisciplinary collaboration, and parental engagement in facilitating effective inclusion. A mixed-methods study conducted across general education schools in Uzbekistan (2022–2024) involving 120 inclusive classroom students and 45 teachers revealed that institutions with fully functioning psychological support services demonstrated statistically significantly higher outcomes in academic achievement and social integration ($p < 0.05$). The findings contribute to the growing body of evidence supporting structured psychological support as an indispensable component of quality inclusive education, and offer actionable recommendations for practitioners, school administrators, and policymakers.

Keywords: *inclusive education; educational psychology; special educational needs; individual education programme; psychological support; multidisciplinary team; adaptive teaching; Uzbekistan.*

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INTRODUCTION

Background and Rationale

The global shift towards inclusive education represents one of the most significant transformations in educational policy over recent decades. Rooted in the principles of human rights and social justice, inclusive education advocates for the full participation of all learners, including those with special educational needs (SEN), within mainstream educational environments (UNESCO, 2009). The Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN, 2006) have collectively shaped an international framework that obligates signatory states to develop inclusive educational systems accessible to every child.

In Uzbekistan, legislative and policy reforms have progressively aligned national education with international inclusive education standards. The Law on Education (2020) and the Presidential Decree on Additional Measures for the Development of Inclusive Education (2021) signalled a decisive national commitment to broadening access and equity in education. Despite these structural advances, however, the practical implementation of inclusive education continues to present substantial challenges, particularly with respect to the availability and quality of psychological and pedagogical support services within schools.

Research consistently indicates that the effectiveness of inclusive education is critically dependent not merely on physical integration but on the quality of support provided to students, teachers, and families (Florian, 2023; Mitchell, 2022). Psychological support — encompassing diagnostic assessment, individualised programme development, counselling, and multidisciplinary collaboration — constitutes a foundational pillar upon which meaningful inclusion rests.

Research Problem and Objectives

Notwithstanding the recognised importance of psychological support in inclusive settings, a considerable gap persists between policy ambitions and on-the-ground realities in many educational contexts, including Uzbekistan. Schools frequently lack dedicated psychological services, trained specialists, and structured frameworks for collaboration between teachers, psychologists, and families. This study therefore

addresses the following research problem: How can pedagogical-psychological support be effectively organised to enhance the educational outcomes and social integration of students with SEN in inclusive mainstream schools?

The specific objectives of the study are: (1) to review the theoretical foundations of psychological support in inclusive education; (2) to examine current practices and challenges in Uzbek inclusive schools; (3) to assess the impact of structured psychological support services on student outcomes; and (4) to formulate evidence-based practical recommendations for improving support provision.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Foundations

The conceptual underpinnings of pedagogical-psychological support in inclusive education draw upon several influential theoretical traditions. Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, and particularly the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), provides a foundational rationale for structured adult mediation and scaffolded instruction for learners with diverse needs. The ZPD posits that a child's potential for learning is realised not through independent performance but through supported engagement with a more capable partner — a principle that directly informs the role of the educational psychologist and the design of individualised interventions.

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory further enriches the conceptual framework by highlighting the nested environmental contexts — family, school, community — within which children develop. Effective psychological support must therefore be conceived not as an isolated service directed at the individual student alone, but as a systemic intervention that engages the full ecology of the child's learning environment. This perspective aligns with the Index for Inclusion (Booth & Ainscow, 2002), which conceptualises inclusion as a continuous process of minimising barriers to participation and learning at institutional, curricular, and social levels.

More recent scholarship has consolidated these perspectives into comprehensive models of multi-tiered support. The Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) and Response to Intervention (RTI) frameworks, widely adopted in North American and European contexts, articulate a graduated approach to support in which universal classroom-level

strategies form the first tier, targeted group interventions the second, and intensive individualised support the third (Mitchell, 2022). Such frameworks underscore the importance of data-driven decision-making and collaborative professional practice.

Individual Educational Programmes (IEPs)

A cornerstone of psychological support in inclusive settings is the Individual Educational Programme (IEP), which translates assessment findings into a structured, personalised learning plan for each student with SEN. Research demonstrates that well-designed IEPs, developed collaboratively by psychologists, teachers, and parents, are associated with measurable improvements in academic achievement, social participation, and overall wellbeing (Salend, 2021). Effective IEP development requires a clear articulation of the student's current level of functioning, realistic and measurable goals, specified support strategies, and regular review mechanisms.

Multidisciplinary Collaboration

Effective inclusive education is inherently a collaborative enterprise. The involvement of educational psychologists, speech and language therapists, occupational therapists, special education teachers, classroom teachers, and school administrators in a coordinated multidisciplinary team is widely recognised as essential to meeting the complex and varied needs of students with SEN (Armstrong et al., 2021). Studies indicate that the quality of inter-professional communication and the degree of shared responsibility among team members are among the strongest predictors of positive student outcomes in inclusive settings (Ainscow, 2020).

Parental Engagement

The pivotal role of parents and families in the success of inclusive education is well established in the literature. Families possess intimate knowledge of their child's strengths, needs, preferences, and history that is indispensable to the design of effective support. Moreover, consistency between home and school environments in applying agreed strategies significantly enhances the generalisation of newly acquired skills. Meaningful parental engagement — characterised by genuine partnership, transparent communication, and capacity-building support for parents — has been shown to positively correlate with student outcomes (Salend, 2021; Warnock, 2005).

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopted a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design, combining quantitative data collection and analysis with subsequent qualitative exploration to provide a comprehensive understanding of psychological support practices in Uzbek inclusive schools. This design was selected because it enables statistical generalisation while simultaneously capturing the contextual richness and experiential perspectives that quantitative methods alone cannot provide.

Participants and Setting

The study was conducted between 2022 and 2024 across twelve general education schools in three regions of Uzbekistan that had formally implemented inclusive education provision. The quantitative sample comprised 120 students with SEN enrolled in inclusive classrooms (aged 7–15; 68 male, 52 female) and 45 classroom teachers. SEN categories represented in the sample included learning disabilities (38%), speech and language disorders (27%), mild intellectual disabilities (20%), and autism spectrum conditions (15%). For the qualitative phase, 12 purposively selected teachers, 8 school psychologists, and 10 parents participated in semi-structured interviews.

Data Collection Instruments

Quantitative data were gathered using: (1) a validated Teacher Perception of Inclusion Scale (TPIS; adapted from Florian, 2023); (2) standardised academic achievement assessments aligned with the national curriculum; (3) the Social Skills Improvement System (SSIS) for measuring social integration; and (4) a structured questionnaire on the availability and perceived adequacy of psychological support services. Qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews guided by a topic framework developed from the theoretical literature review.

Analytical Approach

Quantitative data were analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics v.27. Descriptive statistics, independent-samples t-tests, and one-way ANOVA were applied to examine group differences. Statistical significance was set at $p < 0.05$. Qualitative interview data were transcribed verbatim and subjected to reflexive thematic analysis

following the framework of Braun and Clarke (2006), with codes and themes developed iteratively.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Quantitative Findings

Schools in which a fully staffed and systematically organised psychological support service was operational demonstrated statistically significantly higher student outcomes across all measured dimensions compared to schools where such services were absent or minimal. Students in well-supported inclusive classrooms achieved mean academic scores 18.4% higher than their counterparts in under-supported settings ($t(118) = 4.23$, $p < 0.001$, $d = 0.78$). Social integration scores on the SSIS were similarly elevated ($t(118) = 3.91$, $p < 0.001$, $d = 0.72$), indicating substantially stronger peer relationships and classroom participation among students receiving structured psychological support.

Furthermore, classrooms in which IEPs were actively developed and regularly reviewed showed notably superior outcomes compared to those where IEPs were either absent or treated as administrative formalities. Teacher-reported confidence in managing SEN was significantly higher in schools providing regular professional development and consultation support from psychologists ($F(2, 42) = 8.74$, $p < 0.001$).

Qualitative Findings

Thematic analysis of interview data yielded four overarching themes: (1) the indispensability of dedicated psychological specialists; (2) the transformative impact of multidisciplinary collaboration on professional confidence and student wellbeing; (3) the critical but frequently unrealised potential of parental partnerships; and (4) systemic barriers including workload, resource scarcity, and insufficient pre-service training.

Teachers consistently reported that access to a school psychologist transformed not merely individual student trajectories but the overall classroom climate. As one participant expressed, working alongside a psychologist who understood both the child's profile and the curriculum enabled a kind of professional dialogue that fundamentally changed teaching practice. Parents, for their part, frequently described feeling peripheral to decision-making processes, highlighting a

significant gap between the stated inclusive education policy commitment to partnership and the lived experience of families.

Discussion

The findings of this study reinforce and extend the existing international evidence base, confirming that psychological support is not an optional supplement to inclusive education but an essential structural component. The effect sizes observed ($d = 0.72\text{--}0.78$) are consistent with those reported in comparable international studies (Mitchell, 2022; Florian, 2023), suggesting that the relationship between structured support and improved outcomes holds across diverse national contexts.

The qualitative data add important nuance by revealing the mechanisms through which support operates: enhanced teacher confidence, more responsive pedagogy, stronger home-school communication, and a shared professional commitment to every student's success. Conversely, the barriers identified — inadequate specialist staffing, high caseloads, and limited family engagement infrastructure — point to systemic vulnerabilities that neither individual goodwill nor isolated interventions can adequately address.

PRACTICAL RECOMMENDATIONS

On the basis of the present findings, the following evidence-based recommendations are advanced for educational practitioners, school leaders, and policymakers:

- (1) **Institutional Commitment to Psychological Staffing:** Every school implementing inclusive education should employ at least one full-time educational psychologist with specialised training in SEN assessment and support. The current practice of part-time or itinerant provision is insufficient to meet the sustained demands of inclusive school communities.
- (2) **Systematic IEP Development and Review:** Schools should establish clear protocols for the collaborative development, implementation, and termination review of IEPs for all students with SEN. IEPs must be living documents, revisited at regular intervals (at minimum termly) and adjusted in response to ongoing assessment data.
- (3) **Structured Multidisciplinary Team Meetings:** Regular, scheduled meetings of the multidisciplinary support team — including the psychologist, class teacher, special education coordinator, and relevant

therapists — should be institutionalised as a non-negotiable feature of school organisation, not left to ad hoc arrangement.

(4) Meaningful Parental Partnership Frameworks: Schools should move beyond tokenistic parental involvement towards genuine co-production of support plans. Dedicated parent liaison roles, accessible family support workshops, and transparent communication channels are essential elements of this shift.

(5) Universal Design for Learning (UDL) Implementation: Teachers should receive sustained professional development in UDL principles, enabling them to design lessons that are accessible to all learners from the outset, thereby reducing the remedial workload downstream and fostering a genuinely inclusive classroom culture.

(6) Whole-School Inclusive Culture: Psychological and pedagogical support cannot be conceived as the sole responsibility of specialists. School leadership must actively cultivate an institution-wide culture of inclusion, belonging, and high aspiration for every learner, reinforced through regular staff training, reflective practice communities, and clear leadership commitment.

CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated that pedagogical-psychological support of the educational process in inclusive settings is a complex, multi-level, and irreplaceable component of effective inclusive education. Across quantitative and qualitative data, a coherent and convergent picture emerges: where structured, professionally staffed, and collaboratively delivered support is present, students with SEN achieve more, participate more fully, and experience their educational environment more positively.

The implications extend well beyond the Uzbek context. As educational systems worldwide continue to develop their inclusive capacities, the evidence presented here reinforces the imperative of investing in psychological infrastructure, specialist training, and systemic collaboration — not as supplementary enhancements but as foundational requirements of any credible commitment to inclusion.

Future research should investigate the long-term trajectories of students who received structured psychological support through their inclusive schooling, the comparative effectiveness of different models of

support organisation, and the specific competencies required for effective multidisciplinary practice in culturally diverse inclusive settings.

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