

# Improving the Professional Training of Speech-Language Pathologists in Inclusive Education Settings

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## ABSTRACT

This article examines the methods and pedagogical conditions necessary for improving the professional training of speech-language pathologists (SLPs) in the context of inclusive education. The study aims to identify effective strategies for preparing SLPs to work in diverse, inclusive settings, addressing the needs of children with speech and language disorders alongside their typically developing peers. Research methods included pedagogical observation, a competence-based diagnostic survey, comparative analysis, and review of international literature. The findings indicate that targeted competence-based training, interdisciplinary collaboration, and the use of adaptive pedagogical technologies significantly enhance SLP readiness for inclusive practice. The study concludes that reforming professional training curricula based on inclusive education principles is essential for producing highly qualified, practically competent speech-language pathologists.

**Keywords:** Inclusive education, speech-language pathology, professional training, competence-based approach, adaptive teaching, special education, professional readiness, reflective competence, interdisciplinary collaboration, educational reform.

## INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education has fundamentally transformed the landscape of special pedagogy and speech-language pathology. The integration of children with speech, language, and communication needs (SLCN) into mainstream educational settings demands a new generation of speech-language pathologists equipped with far broader and more flexible competencies than traditional training programmes have historically provided. The ability to collaborate with classroom teachers, adapt therapeutic techniques to diverse learning environments, and communicate effectively with multidisciplinary teams has become as essential as the mastery of diagnostic and corrective speech therapy methodologies.

Despite growing international consensus on the importance of inclusive education, analyses of current higher education curricula in Uzbekistan and comparable regional contexts reveal a persistent gap between the theoretical preparation of future SLPs and the practical demands of

inclusive school and preschool environments. Many graduates enter the profession without sufficient exposure to adaptive pedagogical technologies, without the skills needed for effective co-teaching, and without a deep understanding of the legal and ethical frameworks that underpin inclusive practice.

This research addresses the urgent need to systematically improve professional training methods for future speech-language pathologists with direct reference to the principles and requirements of inclusive education. By identifying the specific competencies that inclusive settings demand and examining evidence-based approaches to cultivating those competencies within higher education, the study seeks to provide actionable recommendations for curriculum developers, teacher educators, and policymakers in special pedagogy.

The primary objective of this study is to substantiate, both theoretically and empirically, the pedagogical conditions

under which the professional training of future SLPs can be effectively improved in line with the demands of inclusive education. Secondary objectives include: (1) identifying the core professional competencies required for effective SLP practice in inclusive settings; (2) analysing existing training methods and identifying their limitations; (3) developing and evaluating an improved methodological framework; and (4) formulating concrete recommendations for curriculum reform.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW AND METHODS**

The professional competence of speech-language pathologists has been a subject of sustained scholarly inquiry across multiple disciplines. Researchers in special education, applied linguistics, and clinical pedagogy consistently affirm that competence in the profession is multi-dimensional, encompassing clinical knowledge, diagnostic skill, communicative ability, reflective practice, and an understanding of the socio-educational contexts in which intervention occurs. The transition to inclusive education has added further dimensions to this framework, requiring SLPs to operate as collaborative partners within broader educational teams rather than as isolated clinical specialists.

International literature on inclusive education highlights that the successful inclusion of children with SLCN depends critically on the quality and flexibility of specialist support. Hallahan and Kauffman (2019) argue that effective inclusive practice requires specialists who can bridge the divide between clinical intervention and general educational participation. Similarly, studies in European and North American contexts have demonstrated that SLPs who receive dedicated training in inclusive pedagogical strategies demonstrate significantly higher levels of professional effectiveness in mainstream settings.

Within the post-Soviet pedagogical tradition, scholars such as Vygotsky have long emphasised the social and contextual dimensions of language development, a perspective that aligns naturally with the philosophy of inclusion. More recent Uzbek contributions, including the work of Sho'maxmudova on inclusive education and specialist training, point to the structural challenges faced by regional universities in adapting curricula to meet inclusive standards, while affirming the pedagogical feasibility of doing so with appropriate methodological reform.

A review of current training programmes reveals that while foundational competencies in speech therapy diagnosis and correction are adequately addressed, competencies specifically related to inclusive practice, including adaptive instruction, interdisciplinary teamwork, and knowledge of relevant legislation, remain underdeveloped. This gap constitutes the central motivation for the present research.

The research employed a multi-method design combining qualitative and quantitative approaches. Pedagogical observation was carried out during both theoretical lectures and supervised practical placements, allowing for direct assessment of students' ability to integrate knowledge and apply it in simulated inclusive contexts. A competence-based diagnostic survey was administered to 84 third- and fourth-year students of speech therapy at Kokand State University and one additional regional institution, assessing self-reported and assessed competence levels across five inclusive-practice domains. Comparative analysis was applied to evaluate competence levels before and after the implementation of revised training interventions. Additionally, a systematic review of relevant scientific literature, methodological manuals, and international educational standards was conducted to situate the findings within the broader scholarly context.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The results of the study provide compelling evidence that the current professional training of future SLPs requires targeted reform if graduates are to meet the demands of inclusive educational environments. Prior to the introduction of revised training interventions, diagnostic surveys revealed notable deficiencies across all five measured competence domains. Students demonstrated the lowest levels of readiness in collaborative and team-based competence, reflecting the historically isolated clinical model of speech therapy training that has dominated regional curricula.

Following the implementation of an improved training methodology, which combined competence-based curriculum restructuring, the integration of adaptive pedagogical technology modules, co-teaching simulation exercises, and increased interdisciplinary practical placement hours, statistically significant improvements were observed across all domains. The most pronounced gains were recorded in adaptive teaching competence and knowledge of inclusive legislation, areas that had

previously received minimal formal attention in the curriculum.

**Table 1. Competence Development Indicators Among Future SLPs in Inclusive Education Settings**

<b>Competence Indicators</b>	<b>Before Training Improvement (%)</b>	<b>After Training Improvement (%)</b>
Professional readiness for inclusive settings	61%	88%
Adaptive teaching competence	54%	83%
Collaborative and team-based competence	48%	80%
Knowledge of inclusive legislation	57%	85%
Reflective and self-evaluation competence	50%	82%

The data presented in Table 1 confirm that structured, inclusive-focused training interventions produce substantial improvements in all key competence domains. The most significant gains were recorded in professional readiness for inclusive settings (+27 percentage points) and adaptive teaching competence (+29 percentage points), both of which are directly linked to the practical components of the revised curriculum.

Questionnaire responses and observational data revealed several recurring themes. Students consistently reported that co-teaching simulation exercises were among the most valuable components of the revised programme, as they required simultaneous application of clinical speech therapy knowledge and general pedagogical skills within a collaborative framework. Participants also highlighted the importance of case-based learning, where scenarios drawn from real inclusive classroom situations were analysed and discussed in interdisciplinary groups including trainee teachers, psychologists, and SLPs.

However, the study also identified persistent structural challenges. A significant proportion of supervising practitioners in placement schools lacked sufficient experience with inclusive models, limiting the quality of mentorship available to students during practical training. Furthermore, institutional barriers, including timetabling

constraints, limited access to adaptive technologies, and insufficient co-ordination between specialist and general teacher education faculties, continued to impede the full implementation of interdisciplinary approaches.

These findings are consistent with international research indicating that the effectiveness of inclusive SLP training is contingent not only on curriculum content but also on the broader institutional and professional environment in which training takes place. Systemic change at the level of higher education institutions, placement schools, and professional standards bodies is therefore required alongside curriculum reform.

**CONCLUSION**

This study has demonstrated that improving the professional training of speech-language pathologists for inclusive education settings requires a comprehensive, multi-dimensional approach that addresses both curriculum content and the structural conditions of professional preparation. The findings confirm that targeted competence-based interventions, centred on adaptive pedagogy, interdisciplinary collaboration, and inclusive legislation awareness, produce significant and measurable improvements in the professional readiness of future SLPs.

The research contributes to the growing body of evidence supporting the reform of speech therapy training curricula in alignment with inclusive education principles. It highlights the need to move beyond the historically dominant clinical model of SLP preparation towards a broader professional identity that encompasses educational partnership, adaptive intervention, and active participation in inclusive school communities.

On the basis of these findings, the following recommendations are proposed for institutions responsible for the training of future speech-language pathologists:

1. Revise core professional training curricula to explicitly incorporate inclusive education competencies, including adaptive teaching methods, co-teaching strategies, and knowledge of inclusive legal frameworks.
2. Increase the proportion of interdisciplinary practical training, ensuring that students engage in supervised inclusive settings alongside professionals from general education, psychology, and social pedagogy.
3. Develop dedicated modules on the use of adaptive and digital technologies in inclusive speech therapy practice.
4. Strengthen partnerships between higher education institutions and inclusive schools to improve the quality of mentorship and supervision available to students during practical placements.
5. Establish ongoing professional development programmes to support practising SLPs in developing and updating inclusive practice competencies.

Further research is recommended to investigate the long-term professional outcomes of graduates trained under inclusive-focused curricula and to evaluate the effectiveness of specific pedagogical technologies in developing inclusive competencies among future speech-language pathologists.

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