

Supporting children with special educational needs as a socio-pedagogical problem

Sagatbekkyzy Zhansulu^{1, *} L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University, Department of Social Pedagogy and Self-Knowledge, st. Satbaeva, 2, Nur-Sultan city, Kazakhstan <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1708-4090>

Tazhigulova Batima², L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University, Department of Physical Culture and Sports, st. Satbaeva, 2, Nur-Sultan city, Kazakhstan <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3189-3695>

Kuanysh Temirov³, L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University, Department of Social Pedagogy and Self-Knowledge, st. Satbaeva, 2, Nur-Sultan city, Kazakhstan <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7104-9483>

Kadisha Shalgynbayeva⁴, L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University, Department of Social Pedagogy and Self-Knowledge, 2 Satpayev Str., Nur-Sultan, Kazakhstan <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2418-816X>

Orazov Shamurat⁵, Hoca Ahmet Yesevi Uluslararası Türk-Kazak Üniversitesi, Department of Physical Culture and Sports, B. Sattarkhanov st., Turkestan, Kazakhstan <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6976-3466>

Bakhytzhan Mukhamedzhanov⁶, Hoca Ahmet Yesevi Uluslararası Türk-Kazak Üniversitesi, Department of Physical Culture and Sports, B. Sattarkhanov st., Turkestan, Kazakhstan <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6234-1335>

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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to determine the professional competencies of primary schoolteachers in order to support inclusion students with special education needs from a socio-pedagogical point of view. In this study, professional competencies of primary schoolteachers were evaluated by using the survey model, which is one of the quantitative research methods, in order to support the inclusion students with special education needs from a socio-pedagogical point of view. The research was conducted with 320 primary schoolteachers who continued their educational activities in the 2021–2022 academic year in various primary schools in Almaty, Kazakhstan. The research data were collected with the teacher professional competencies scale for inclusive students with special education needs developed by the researcher. As a result of the research, it has been determined that the professional competencies of primary schoolteachers for mainstreaming students with special education needs are moderate in the sub-dimensions of teaching methods and techniques, diagnosis and evaluation, cooperation and socialisation. In addition, it has been determined that the general

* ADDRESS FOR CORRESPONDENCE: Sagatbekkyzy Zhansulu, L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University, Department of Social Pedagogy and Self-Knowledge, st. Satbaeva, 2, Nur-Sultan city, Kazakhstan
Email address: sagatbekkyzy_zh@enu.kz

average of the professional competencies of primary schoolteachers for inclusive students with special education needs is at a moderate level. It has been determined that the professional competencies of the primary schoolteachers participating in the research for inclusive students with special education needs do not differ according to the gender variable. It has been determined that the professional competencies of primary schoolteachers for inclusive students with special education needs show a significant difference according to their education status for inclusive students. It has been determined that the significant difference in terms of primary schoolteachers' education to inclusive students is in favour of the educators.

Keywords: Special education, inclusive education, teacher competencies;

1. Introduction

Individuals who show significant differences from their peers in terms of their individual characteristics and educational qualifications are individuals with special education needs. It is necessary for these individuals to benefit from special education programmes, which are defined as all of the individually planned, systematically applied, carefully evaluated educational services aimed at maximising their independent living skills, and it is necessary to ensure that these individuals become independent and integrate into the society (Uzunboylu & Ozcan, 2019).

1.1. Theoretical and conceptual framework

Since individuals with special needs represent a heterogeneous group between individuals with both typical development and special needs in terms of their inadequacies and competencies, their educational needs also differ. For this reason, the education of individuals with special needs should be multidimensional and individually designed according to their educational needs (Smith, Polloway, Patton, Dowdy, & Doughty, 2004). As a teaching process, special education refers to the teaching process. It refers to the determination, sharing and planning of duties and responsibilities with the answers to the questions of who will teach the process, to whom, where, how and what (Heward, Kimball, Heckaman, & Dunne, 2021). The concept of inclusion can be defined in many different ways in different disciplines. Considering inclusion as an educational concept, Huang and Diamond (2009) expressed the concept of inclusion as individuals with special needs receiving education in environments in which they receive education by providing the educational support needed. Scruggs et al. (2007), on the other hand, define the concept of inclusion as a form of education that maximises the interaction of children with special needs with their typically developing peers and minimises the negativities they encounter.

As a result of the developments in the field of special education, today inclusive students are educated in general education classes (Stambekova et al., 2022). Inclusive education, which is defined as students with normal developmental levels and students with special educational needs receiving education in the same educational environment, has benefits for all stakeholders involved in education. Students with special needs experience the inability to adapt to their environment. In order to overcome this, the society must accept individuals with special educational needs and develop a positive approach towards them (Ogu et al., 2017; Saloviita, 2020). The classroom teacher is the person who is primarily responsible for the academic and psychosocial development of all students in the classroom, including inclusive students. For this reason, the interest and behaviour of the classroom teacher towards her students and the positive attitude she creates in the classroom

have a significant impact on the academic success, social development and self-acquisitions of the students (Smith, Polloway, Patton, Dowdy, & Doughty, 2004).

Classroom teachers, along with students with normal development, are the people who spend the most time with the inclusion students at school. This situation enables the classroom teacher to closely follow the special education needs, academic, social and psychological developments of the mainstreaming student and to have the necessary information about the mainstreaming student for his/her education. In addition, this close relationship between the inclusion student and the classroom teacher helps the teacher to realise the inadequacies that even the family cannot notice in their child in some cases and to find a solution by contacting the family, specialist, guidance teacher or school administration to solve the problem. From this point of view, it can be said that classroom teachers are in a very important position for the success of inclusive practice (Friend & Bursuck, 2006).

1.2. Related research

Ashley (2009) researched the self-efficacy of classroom teachers working in general education classrooms with inclusive practice in her doctoral thesis. Within the scope of the study, mixed method was used to explore the differences in teachers' self-efficacy based on learning and behavioural disorders of inclusion-defined students. Among the research findings, there were great differences in classroom management practice between teachers with high and low self-efficacy according to teaching strategies, behavioural events and student participation.

Horne and Timmons (2009) applied a measurement tool, with a total of 62 items, to measure the attitudes of 20 teachers in order to determine the views of classroom teachers on the effects of mainstreaming students in general education classrooms. At the end of the application, one-on-one interviews were conducted with a total of five teachers. When the findings of the study were examined, it was determined that the classroom teachers were generally optimistic and positive about the inclusion practice, but they needed help even in the most basic issues. Avramidis and Kalyva (2010) conducted a study with 155 classroom teachers working in mainstreaming classrooms within the scope of their research, in which they aimed to examine the effect of professional experience on classroom teachers' attitudes towards inclusion. The striking finding among the research results is that although classroom teachers generally have a positive attitude towards mainstreaming, they experience various difficulties in the education of mainstreaming students.

Boutot and Bryant (2005), in their research titled 'Social integration of students with autism in inclusive settings', concluded that students with autism are increasingly placed in inclusive settings in order to improve their social integration. Charles et al. (2015), in a study named 'Perception of social acceptance, self-development, classroom management, teachers' workload, motor skills of 67 physical education teachers towards students with disabilities in an inclusive classroom environment in a secondary school in Nigeria', analysed physical education teachers' perceptions of disabled students. It was concluded that they had positive perceptions.

The findings of some recent studies show that in the context of inclusion, physical problems such as class sizes and materials are experienced in schools and teacher attitudes depend on teachers'

experiences and professional competencies (Moberg et al., 2020; Nadia, 2012; Qandhi & Kurniawati, 2019).

1.3. Purpose of the research

The purpose of this research is to determine the professional competencies of primary schoolteachers in order to support inclusion students with special education needs from a socio-pedagogical point of view. In this direction, the following sub-objectives have been determined:

1. What are the scores of primary schoolteachers regarding the scale of professional competencies and sub-dimensions of socio-pedagogical support of mainstreaming students?
2. What is the distribution of primary schoolteachers' professional competencies for socio-pedagogical support of mainstreaming students according to gender variable?
3. What is the distribution of primary schoolteachers' professional competencies for socio-pedagogical support of mainstreaming students according to their educational status of mainstreaming students?

2. Method and materials

In this part of the research, the research method, study group, process and data analysis are explained. The development processes of the scale, which was developed to measure the professional competencies of primary schoolteachers and inclusion students with special education needs, are also included in order to support them socio-pedagogically.

2.1. Research method

In this study, professional competencies of primary schoolteachers were evaluated by using the survey model, which is one of the quantitative research methods, in order to support the inclusion students with special education needs from a socio-pedagogical point of view. Researches in which the opinions of the participants about a subject or their characteristics such as interests, skills, abilities and attitudes are determined and to reveal the existing situation are called survey researches. In survey studies, the abilities, skills and attitudes of certain populations are examined (Schwarz & Strack, 1991). With this method, the professional competencies of primary schoolteachers for mainstreaming students with special educational needs were handled in accordance with the screening model.

2.2. Participants

This research was carried out with 320 primary schoolteachers who continue their educational activities in the 2021–2022 academic year in various primary schools in Almaty, Kazakhstan. Primary schoolteachers voluntarily participated in the research. The teacher professional competencies scale for inclusive students with special education needs, which was prepared as the data collection tool of the research, was applied to the primary schoolteachers who constituted the sample group of the research.

2.3. Data collection tools

The research data were collected with the teacher professional competencies scale for inclusive students with special education needs developed by the researcher. Teacher professional

competencies scale for mainstreaming students with special education needs was prepared by following various stages in scale development after the literature review was conducted for the inclusive students who need special education of primary schoolteachers.

2.3.1. Establishment of the item pool and expert opinion

After a literature review for mainstreaming students with special education needs, an item pool was created. The created item pool consists of 35 items and a content validity analysis was applied for this pool of 36 items. For the content validity analysis, the opinions of five experts in the field were taken. Experts gave their opinions on each item such as 'the item measures the determined structure', 'the item measures the determined structure but should be improved' and 'the item does not measure the determined structure'. In line with the experts' opinions, 23 items were included in the scope of the scale, which were stated as 'the item measures the determined structure'.

2.3.2. Data collection with pilot application

252 primary schoolteachers were employed for the pilot application of the teacher professional competencies scale for mainstreaming students with special education needs. Primary schoolteachers who participated in the pilot application agreed to participate in the research voluntarily. In addition, 252 primary schoolteachers who formed the study group of the pilot application were not included in the study group of the research. Of the primary schoolteachers who constituted the study group of the pilot study, 177 were female and 75 were male.

2.3.3. Analysis of the pilot application data

SPSS 20.0 programmes were used for exploratory factor analysis of the data collected after the pilot application, and SPSS 25.0 programmes were used for confirmatory factor analysis. Before performing factor analysis, the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) coefficient and Bartlett's sphericity test were applied to evaluate the suitability of the data set. It was determined that the KMO value was 0.821. As a result of the Bartlett test, it was found to be (0.000) <0.05. Accordingly, it was understood that the data set was suitable for factor analysis. In the exploratory factor analysis, the eigenvalue and variance ratios related to the scale were found. The cumulative distribution was found to be 92,184, and 3 factors with eigenvalues greater than 1 were determined in the exploratory factor analysis.

Two items with an item factor load above 30 and which were found to indicate more than one factor were removed from the scale. Then, confirmatory factor analysis was performed. Goodness-of-fit index was calculated in confirmatory factor analysis. Acceptability value of the model CMIN/df ($\chi^2/df < 5$) = 1.667, GFI (Goodness-of-fit Index), (>0.90) = 1.570, CFI (Comperative Fit Index) (>0.90) = 1.109, NFI-TLI (Normed Fit Index - Turker-Lewis Index) (>0.80) = 1.552–0.615 and RMSA (Root Mean Square Error of Approximation) (<0.07) = 0.052. As a result of the calculation, it was determined that the goodness-of-fit index was high. After the factor analysis, reliability study was conducted for the sub-dimensions and general of the scale. The Cronbach alpha internal consistency coefficient was calculated. The sub-dimensions determined for the scale are 'teaching methods and techniques', 'identification and evaluation' and 'collaboration and socialisation'. The internal consistency coefficient for the teaching methods and techniques sub-dimension was 0.81; the internal consistency coefficient for the diagnosis and evaluation sub-dimension was 0.79; and

the internal consistency coefficient for the cooperation and socialisation sub-dimension was 0.82. In addition, the internal consistency coefficient of the overall scale was determined as 0.84.

2.3.4. Creating the final version of the scale

The teacher professional competencies scale for mainstreaming students with special education needs, after the pilot application, was made ready to be applied to the study group of the research. The scale consists of three sub-dimensions. The scale was prepared in a 5-point Likert type.

It is scored on 'strongly agree', 'agree', 'undecided', 'disagree' and 'strongly disagree' intervals. Item score ranges are considered to be equal, with 5.00–4.20 = strongly agree, 4.19–3.40 = agree, 3.39–2.60 = partially agree, 2.59–1.80 = disagree and 1.79–1.00 = strongly disagree. The teacher professional competence scale for mainstreaming students with special educational needs, developed for use in the research, is given in Table 1.

Table 1. Teacher professional competencies scale for inclusion students with special education needs

Teacher professional competencies scale for mainstreaming students with special education needs
<i>Dimension 1: Teaching methods and techniques</i>
I am competent in using appropriate teaching methods and techniques in teaching concepts to mainstreaming students.
I am competent in using appropriate teaching methods and techniques in teaching academic skills to mainstreaming students.
I am competent in using appropriate teaching methods and techniques in teaching communication skills to mainstreaming students.
I am proficient in using appropriate teaching methods and techniques related to eliminating undesirable behaviours in the classroom in inclusive education.
I am competent in designing educational materials for mainstreaming students in accordance with their purpose.
I am competent in making the materials designed for the mainstreaming student suitable for use.
I am competent in using appropriate equipment for materials designed for mainstreaming students.
I am competent in preparing materials economically for the mainstreaming student.
<i>Dimension 2: Diagnosis and evaluation</i>
I have sufficient knowledge about screening studies to identify students with special needs.
I have sufficient knowledge about the stages of psychological diagnosis for the mainstreaming student
I have sufficient knowledge about the stages of medical diagnosis for the mainstreaming student.
I have sufficient knowledge about the stages of educational diagnosis and evaluation for the mainstreaming student.
I have sufficient knowledge about the most appropriate orientation of mainstreaming students.
I have sufficient knowledge about monitoring the progress of mainstreaming students.
I have sufficient knowledge about the classification of mainstreaming students.
<i>Dimension 3: Cooperation and socialisation</i>
I am competent in providing family training on gaining self-care skills to mainstreaming students.
I am competent in giving family education about the acquisition of social life skills to the mainstreaming student.

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- I am competent in providing family training on gaining academic skills to mainstreaming students.
 - I am competent in establishing cooperation with families regarding inclusive education.
 - I am competent in providing family training on the positive development of social relations for mainstreaming students.
 - I am competent in establishing cooperation with my colleagues in the inclusive education process.
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^aItems in the scale were measured with a 5-point Likert scale in the range of 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree.

2.4. Data collection process

The data collection process of the research consists of the stages of literature review, scale development, pilot applications and analysis, creating the final version of the scale, applying the scale and evaluating the data. The process from preparing the teacher professional competencies scale for mainstreaming students with special education needs to be ready for implementation, and collecting data takes about 2 months.

2.5. Data collection analysis

SPSS 20.0 programme was used in the analysis of the data obtained after the teacher professional competencies scale for inclusive students with special education needs was applied to the study group of the research. The Kolmogorov–Smirnov normality test was calculated in the first stage of the analysis of the data obtained from the teacher professional competencies scale for mainstreaming students with special education needs. Since $p > 0.05$ was found as a result of the test, it was determined that the data set showed a normal distribution. Based on this, parametric tests were applied. Tables containing frequency, percentage, standard deviation, weighted average and *t*-test results were arranged in the findings.

3. Results

The findings of the study were revealed as a result of the evaluation of the data obtained from the teacher professional competencies scale for inclusive students with special education needs developed by the researchers.

In Table 2, demographic information about the gender of the university students participating in the research and their educational status for mainstreaming students are given.

Table 2. Demographic distribution of primary schoolteachers

Gender	<i>F</i>	%
Female	193	60.3
Male	127	39.7
Sum	320	100
Status of providing education to mainstreaming students	<i>F</i>	%
I taught mainstreaming students	182	56.8
I did not train inclusive students	138	43.2
Sum	320	100

In Table 2, demographic distributions of primary schoolteachers participating in the research are given according to their gender and educational status for mainstreaming students. 60.3% of the teachers participating in the research are female and 39.7% are male. While 56.8% of primary schoolteachers stated that they gave education to inclusive students, 43.2% stated that they had not given training to inclusive students before.

In Table 3, the sub-dimensions of the teacher professional competencies scale for mainstreaming students with special education needs and the mean and standard deviations for the overall scale are given.

Table 3. Teacher Professional Competencies Scale and sub-dimensions for inclusion students with special education needs

	X	SS
Teaching methods and techniques sub-dimension	2.97	0.992
Diagnosis and evaluation sub-dimension	2.88	0.921
Cooperation and socialisation sub-dimension	3.26	0.665
Overall scale	3.04	0.865

Table 3 shows the primary schoolteachers participating in the research in the sub-dimension of teaching methods and techniques ($X = 2.97$), in the sub-dimension of diagnosis and evaluation ($X = 2.88$) and in the sub-dimension of cooperation and socialisation ($X = 2.97$) for inclusive students with special educational needs. A score of 3.26 was determined to have a medium level of professional competence. In addition, it was determined that primary schoolteachers for inclusive students with special education needs have moderate proficiency in the overall scale ($X = 3.04$).

In Table 4, the distribution of the professional competencies of the primary schoolteachers participating in the research regarding the socio-pedagogical support of the inclusive students according to the gender variable is given. Teacher professional competencies for inclusive students with special education needs are given by the results of the *t*-test for the overall scale, according to their gender distribution.

Table 4. t-test results of primary schoolteachers by gender variable

Gender	N	X	SS	F	p
Female	193	3.09	0.669	13.182	0.208
Male	127	2.96	0.657		

When Table 4 is examined; It is seen that the professional competencies of primary schoolteachers participating in the research for inclusive students with special education needs ($F = 13.182$, $p > 0.05$) do not make a significant difference according to the gender variable.

In Table 5, the distribution of professional competencies of the primary schoolteachers participating in the research on socio-psychological support of inclusive students according to their educational status for inclusive students is given. Teacher professional competencies for inclusive students with

special education needs were given with the *t*-test results of the overall scale, according to their educational status for inclusive students.

Table 5. *t*-test results according to primary schoolteachers giving education to inclusion students

Status of providing education to mainstreaming students	<i>N</i>	<i>X</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
I taught mainstreaming students	182	3.35	0.449	18.551	0.000*
I did not train inclusive students	138	2.63	0.573		

* $P < 0.005$

When Table 5 is examined, it is seen that the professional competencies of primary schoolteachers participating in the research for inclusive students with special education needs ($F = 18.551$, $P = .000$, $P < 0.005$) make a significant difference according to the variable of teaching inclusive students. It has been determined that the significant difference is in favour of the primary schoolteachers who teach inclusive students.

4. Discussion

It has been determined that the professional competencies of the primary schoolteachers participating in the research for inclusive students with special education needs are at a moderate level in the sub-dimensions of teaching methods and techniques, diagnosis and evaluation, cooperation and socialisation. In addition, it has been determined that the general average of the professional competencies of primary schoolteachers for inclusive students with special education needs is at a moderate level. The aim of the study by Saloviita (2020) is to examine the attitudes of teachers towards inclusive education. Within the scope of the research, data were collected from special education teachers, classroom teachers and branch teachers. According to the results of the research, it was seen that while special education teachers had the highest attitude score, classroom teachers and branch teachers had significantly lower attitude scores. Again, Vaz et al. (2015), in their study with a very high number of teachers, it was found that not having the necessary knowledge and experience for the education of students with special needs has a negative effect on teachers.

It has been determined that the professional competencies of the primary schoolteachers participating in the research for inclusive students with special education needs do not differ according to the gender variable. Menlove, Hudson, and Suter (2001) did not find a significant difference in terms of gender variable in their study examining teachers' self-efficacy levels regarding inclusion. Hofman and Kilimo (2014) similarly concluded in their research that teachers' competencies towards inclusive students do not differ according to the gender variable. In the study conducted by Guner (2011), it was found that the knowledge levels of classroom teachers working in classrooms with inclusive practices were similar and limited to each other. It was determined that demographic characteristics of teachers such as age, experience and department graduated were related to teachers' classroom management knowledge, but gender was not. In the research conducted by Yada and Savolainen (2017) on inclusive education teacher competencies with teachers, it was found that the gender variable did not make a significant difference.

It has been determined that the professional competencies of the primary schoolteachers participating in the research for the inclusive students with special education needs show a significant difference according to their educational status for inclusive students. It has been

determined that the significant difference in terms of primary schoolteachers' education to inclusive students is in favour of the educators. Sogut and Deniz (2018) also concluded that in terms of the scores obtained from the level of knowledge of students with special education needs, the average of those who have never been mainstreaming students is higher than the average of those who have been mainstreaming students. Monsen, Ewing, and Kwoka (2014) stated that the support provided to teachers is important for the success of inclusion practices.

5. Conclusion

Social developments are changing our education system in a dynamic way and at the same time providing its renewal. The reflections of the change that started in all fields began to be seen in the field of education as well. One of the features that makes today's education system modern is that it gives importance to individual differences and that education can take shape according to these differences. One of the most concrete examples of this formation is the adoption and implementation of inclusion for children with special needs. For this reason, in this study, it was aimed to determine the professional competencies of primary schoolteachers in order to support inclusive students with special education needs from a socio-pedagogical point of view. As a result of the research, it has been determined that the professional competencies of primary schoolteachers for mainstreaming students with special education needs are moderate in the sub-dimensions of teaching methods and techniques, diagnosis and evaluation, cooperation and socialisation. In addition, it has been determined that the general average of the professional competencies of primary schoolteachers for inclusive students with special education needs is at a moderate level. It has been determined that the professional competencies of the primary schoolteachers participating in the research for inclusive students with special education needs do not differ according to the gender variable. It has been determined that the professional competencies of primary schoolteachers for inclusive students with special education needs show a significant difference according to their education status for inclusive students. It has been determined that the significant difference in terms of primary schoolteachers' education to inclusive students is in favour of the educators.

6. Recommendations

1. Teachers who are graduates of special education undergraduate programmes can be appointed in order to increase the quality of education in the support education classes where students with special education needs receive education.
2. The level of knowledge about students with special needs and their education can be increased by in-service training of classroom teachers who are currently working as support education teachers and with the consultancy of special education teachers.
3. Classroom teaching and other branch teaching undergraduate programmes should include courses on children with special needs and their education. Teaching methods, activities, adaptations and behaviour management titles that can be used for children with special needs should be included in the content of the courses. In addition, the practical competencies of teachers should be increased before completing their undergraduate programmes through practical training.

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