

Pre-Service Social Educators' Professional Competences: An Inclusive Education Context

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Abstract

The quality of education is increasingly a priority area for state development. In the context of globalisation, the mission of the education system has become to create conditions for the achievement of greater stability in society, by ensuring equal rights and opportunities for all citizens, including individuals with disabilities. Amid efforts towards fully inclusive education, the professional competences of specialists addressing the needs of those with learning disabilities are crucial. High-quality training is required for qualified educator – particularly for social educators – in this field. It aimed the research at identifying the necessary professional competences and personal qualities of pre-service social educators to work in an inclusive education, as well as to identify the difficulties university lecturers face in the training of social educators. A qualitative research design was applied in the study. Fifty-one respondents-university lecturers participated in it. Its results showed that, alongside central competences, emotional-volitional qualities have played a significant role in the social educators' engagement in inclusive education. The research enabled to identify that the professional difficulties have the highest indicator among the difficulties that lecturers face when training pre-service social educators. It can be assumed that these findings will advance improvements in the development of social educators' professional competences and solutions to obstacles during their university-level studies.

Keywords: inclusive education, pre-service social educators, professional competences, quantitative content analysis

Профессиональные компетенции будущих социальных педагогов: контекст инклюзивного образования

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Аннотация

В настоящее время качество образования становится одним из приоритетных направлений развития государства. В условиях глобализации новая миссия системы образования заключается в создании условий для достижения большей социальной стабильности в обществе, путем обеспечения равных прав и возможностей для всех граждан, включая лиц с особыми образовательными потребностями. Для работы в условиях инклюзивного образования важную роль играют профессиональные компетенции специалистов, обеспечивающих развитие и обучение лиц с особыми образовательными потребностями. Растет потребность в качественной подготовке квалифицированных педагогов, в частности, социальных педагогов в данной сфере. Данное исследование направлено на выявление необходимых профессиональных компетенций и личностных качеств будущих социальных педагогов для работы в условиях инклюзивного образования, а также на выявление того, с какими трудностями сталкиваются преподаватели университетов в рамках подготовки социальных педагогов. Применялся качественный метод исследования и в нем приняли участие 51 респондента-преподавателя университетов. Результаты опроса показали, что центральные компетенции, эмоционально-волевые качества играют значительную роль в деятельности социальных педагогов в инклюзивном образовании. Исследование позволило выявить, что профессиональные трудности имеют самый высокий показатель среди трудностей, с которыми сталкиваются преподаватели при подготовке социальных педагогов. Авторы предполагают, что результаты исследования приведут к дальнейшему усовершенствованию развития профессиональных компетенций студентов и устранению трудностей в ходе образовательного процесса во время обучения в университете.

Ключевые слова: инклюзивное образование, будущие социальные педагоги, профессиональные компетенции, количественный контент анализ.

Introduction

The ideas of inclusive education are perhaps more pertinent than ever, as much of civil society has rightly come to condemn discrimination against individuals with disabilities. Such ideas revolve around a commitment to making education accessible to all members of society and creating an agenda for a barrier-free environment that supports all students and maximises their potential.

Inclusion has been recognised as a leading present trend in the development of education systems worldwide. Inclusion is strongly value- and ideology-driven, in the same category as other similar concepts such as democracy and social justice (Haug, 2017). The successful implementation of inclusive education is important in achieving a democratic and just society, with universal access to quality basic education. Inclusive education, as a societal paradigm, is a highly complex phenomenon that demands the

provision of equal opportunities for all learners, regardless of their characteristics and background (Makoelle, 2016).

In the Republic of Kazakhstan, the notion of inclusion corresponds to the objectives of the state educational policy aimed at ensuring access to education for all categories of children, including children with special educational needs (SEN). The Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan (1995) guarantees equal rights for all children, regardless of their origin, gender, race, nationality, language, religion, social or economic status, place of residence, state, health, or other circumstances. The 'State Programme for the Development of Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2011-2020' (Altynsarin National Academy of Education, 2013) emphasised the importance of ensuring equal access for all people to the best educational resources and technologies.

Hence, the Republic of Kazakhstan has been developing a comprehensive system of early psychological, pedagogical, medical, and rehabilitative support for children with developmental disabilities. So far, about 70% of schools have created conditions for inclusive education in the country. Moreover, as of 2016, the country's universities introduced inclusive education as a mandatory discipline for all pedagogical courses and training programmes.

Diverse academic authors have devoted considerable attention to the theme of inclusive education (Baranauskiene & Saveikiene, 2018; Hastings & Oakford, 2003; Haug, 2017; Iskakova et al, 2013; Khitryuk, 2013; Mitchell, 2008; Suntsova, 2013). A wide range of literature has addressed the issue of training specialists to work in the field (Aubakirova, 2018; Kuz'mina, 2015; Loreman, Deppeler, & Harvey, 2005; Oralkanova, 2014; Tichá et al., 2018; Wang, 2009). Like other specialists-in-training, pre-service social educators require quality education to develop the professional competences necessary for their productive activities.

The underlying concept of 'competence' has been widely discussed in scientific literature over the years (Chomsky, 1972; Council Recommendation., 2018; Pukelis & Smetona, 2012; Raven, 2002; Zimnyaya, 2004). However, at its current stage of development, pedagogical science lacks a precise definition of the concepts of 'competency' and 'competence', leaving room for ambiguity in interpretation. Some scholars have proposed hypotheses on this issue. 'Competency' was defined as a specific ability necessary for the effective performance of a specific action in a specific subject area; this includes highly specialised subject-related skills, ways of thinking, and the understanding of the meaning of responsibility for one's actions (Raven, 2002).

Pukelis and Smetona (2012) described 'competence' as the practically tested ability to use acquired knowledge, skills, values, or attitudes integrally and purposefully in a variety of work or study situations, as well as for personal and professional development. Zimnyaya (2004) affirmed that 'competency' was a habitual active manifestation of 'competence'. The former manifests in a person's behaviours and activities, which become their personal qualities and properties. Accordingly, they become 'the competencies' (plural), which are characterised by motivational, semantic, and relational, as well as regulatory components, along with the cognitive (knowledge) and experience' (p. 10). The researcher noted that all competencies were social (in the broad sense of the word), 'because they are developed, formed in society, they are social in their content, they both appear and function in this society' (Zimnyaya, 2004, p. 11).

Competence-based education (CBE) began to form in the 1970s in the United States, in the context of the concept of 'competence' proposed by Chomsky (1972) in relation to the theory of language. This approach in education was the answer to business, so to speak.

The modern interpretation of the competency-based approach to education was determined by the project 'Tuning Educational Structures in Europe', or the Tuning Project (González, J., & Wagenar, 2003). According to González and Wagenar (2003), one of the major tasks of the project *Tuning Educational Structures in Europe* is the development of the required methodology for defining learning outcomes / competences. This methodology should offer the mechanism to cope with recent developments like the internationalization of labour and education, the interruption of academic studies as an effect of the introduction of a two-cycle system and lifelong learning (p. 245). According to Council Recommendation on 'Key Competences for Lifelong Learning', which was developed by the Council of the European Union, the definition of the set of key competences needed for personal fulfilment, health, employability and social inclusion has been shaped not only by societal and economic developments but also by various initiatives in Europe during the last decade. Special attention has been given to improving basic skills, investing in language learning, improving digital and entrepreneurial competences, the relevance of common values in the functioning of our societies, and motivating more young people to engage in science-related careers (Council Recommendation, 2018).

Nincevic and Vukelic (2019) considered professional competence to be part of a disciplinary-oriented area of ability. Kenworthy (2010) created a model on 'individual variables of competency, competence and performance and organisation core competence', in which he described competency as a personal characteristic and behaviours and competence as the functions and tasks of the job. The description of competences is inseparable from the person to which they belong; that is, a person may or may not have certain knowledge, skills, and abilities. Hence, these are integral personality qualities, manifested in one's general ability and readiness for independent and successful activity in a specific situation, based on knowledge, skills, experience, values, and inclinations acquired in the learning process (Bozadzhiev, 2007).

Any type of professional competence, in the most general sense, characterises the specialist's ability to independently set and solve educational, cognitive, and professional tasks. Thus, the professional competence of a pre-service specialist is a component of professional competency, as an integrative personal quality that characterises a graduate who is willing and able to fulfil their potential through professional activity.

According to Nikolayeva (2010), 'the professional competency of a social educator is an integrative, multi-component phenomenon, as an indicator of their professionalism and proficiency. The invariant component in its structure is knowledge, as the basic educational unit on which professional competency is formed. The professional competency of a social educator is formed, developed, and improved in the activity. In training pre-service social educators, lecturers ought to focus on the formation of professional competences, which can further develop in the course of study of a particular course. It follows that the purpose of this type of educational programme is to prepare highly qualified specialists with professional competences to work in a certain field' (ibid, p. 233).

Social pedagogy concentrates on questions of integration of the individual into society, both in theory and practice, and aims to alleviate social exclusion. It addresses the processes of human growth which tie people to the systems, institutions, and communities that are important to their well-being and life management. The basic idea of social pedagogy is to promote people's social functioning, inclusion, participation, social identity, and social competence as members of society (Hämäläinen, 2003). The category of individuals with special educational needs (SEN) denotes that assistance is required from specialists capable of contributing to such individuals' socialisation, learning, and

success achievement throughout life. Social educators' professional competences have been highlighted in the work of Baigozhina (2014), Bulatbayeva et al. (2016), Indrašiėnė and Sadauskas (2016), Mardakhayev (2005), Timonen-Kallio and Hämäläinen (2019), among others.

Magauova, Makhambetova and Lukashova (2021) conducted a comparative analysis of the training pre-service social educators received to work in inclusive classrooms in the Republic of Kazakhstan, Lithuania, and Germany. The research was based on the document *The professional competences of social educators: a conceptual framework* (Aieji: International Association of Social Educators, 2008). It was emphasised that the State Mandatory Standard of Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan formulates the requirements for the key, subject-related, and special competences of a bachelor's degree in 'Social Pedagogy and Self-Cognition.'

To train pre-service social educators, we follow the theory of a holistic pedagogical process (Khmel, 1998; Magauova, 2007). According to Magauova (2007), 'the essence of the realisation of the unity of the educational and extracurricular activities of students is expressed in the totality of the educational and extracurricular time of the holistic pedagogical process using various types of activities that create a single educational and developmental environment' (p. 103).

The system of continuing education in the Republic of Kazakhstan is meant to train specialists in inclusive education, particularly as social educators. The contradiction between the existing system of inclusive education and the fact that social educators have not been adequately prepared to work in conditions of inclusion actualises the criticality of developing their professional competences.

A holistic approach to the training of social educators – considering the unity of the educational process and applicability to pedagogical practice – should ensure the development of professional competences that will affect their personal and professional qualities and professional competency. This should, in turn, ensure their successful engagement in inclusive education.

The significant contribution of the present study lies in highlighting how pre-service social educators' professional competences and personal qualities should be further developed to prepare them to work in the area of inclusive education. Our research aim was to identify sets of professional competences and professional qualities necessary for this purpose, as well as challenges involved.

Research Methodology

General Background

The survey was carried out in March and April 2020. A qualitative type of research was performed with the aim at identifying the competences, personal qualities necessary for social educators to perform work in the conditions of inclusive education as well as to determine the difficulties university lecturers have encountered in training such students in social pedagogy programmes and courses.

The research approach was based on the qualitative design methodology proposed by Marshall and Rossman (2011). Isobe (2004) characterised qualitative methods as enabling access to human voices, perceptions, and teachers in individual schools and classrooms where inclusion had been commissioned as practice. Opinion research could be an effective tool to initiate changes and, in this case, to improve quality in developing students' competences and to eliminate difficulties during their studies (Lamauskas & Makarskaitė-Petkevičienė, 2016).

Sample

The sample comprised lecturers from Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, Kazakh National Women's Teacher Training University, Karaganda State University named after E. A. Buketov, and Abai Kazakh National Pedagogical University. A total of 51 lecturers participated in the study. According to Morse (1994), a sample of 30–50 participants is suitable for this type of research.

Although participants were not differentiated by gender, it is worth noting that most were women (94%). The age of lecturers ranged from 30 to 60 years. All participants had a PhD in social sciences. The survey was designed for lecturers teaching courses, which include training modules for pre-service social educators. The survey respondents have taught courses, such as the following:

- 'Age Pedagogy and Psychology'
- 'Designing Socio-Pedagogical Work'
- 'Diagnostics in Education'
- 'Deviantology'
- 'Technologies in Education'
- 'Education in Multicultural Upbringings'
- 'Ethnopedagogics'
- 'Family Counselling'
- 'Fundamentals of Socio-Pedagogical Research'
- 'Inclusive Education'
- 'Methods of Social and Educational Research'
- 'Pedagogy'
- 'Pedagogy of Professional Education'
- 'Practical Psychology'
- 'Psychology and Human Development'
- 'Pedagogical Skills of Social Pedagogues'
- 'Socio-Pedagogical Training'
- 'Scientific Writing'
- 'Self-Cognition'
- 'Socio-Psychological Services in Education'
- 'Socio-Pedagogical Counselling'
- 'Socio-Pedagogical Management'
- 'Spiritual and Moral Education for Schoolchildren'
- 'Special Pedagogics'
- 'History of Social Pedagogy and Self-Cognition'

All the lecturers in our sample have served as supervisors in pre-service social educators' pedagogical internships. This type of role is premised upon the assumption that they have specific insights and knowledge due to their professional position and experience (level of expertise) (Flick, 2014). In addition, these individuals' status (in an organisation or society) allows them to speak on behalf of, or represent, a particular professional field or organisation (Littig & Pöchl, 2014).

Instruments and Procedures

This research applied a questionnaire containing three open-ended questions. More questions were conceptualised initially, but after a discussion with experts during the validation procedure, the following three were selected, which corresponds to the study's main objectives:

1. What professional competences, in your opinion, are most necessary for social educators to work in inclusive education?

2. In your opinion, what personal qualities are necessary for social educators to develop competences to work in an inclusive education environment?

3. What difficulties have you encountered in training social educators to work in inclusive education?

A pre-survey validation of the instrument was performed; the questions were checked and discussed with two experts (lecturers and practitioners in the field of inclusive education). A free online survey tool was used to prepare the online questionnaire (Free online survey tool, 2020).

The principles of anonymity and voluntariness were secured. The invitations were sent to the survey personally to each respondent via email, who took the online questionnaire in the form of written questions. The survey was conducted remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Before the next stage of the research process, 16 questionnaires have been disregarded due to misfiling. A total of 35 questionnaires were admitted for the analysis.

In addition, the coherence of the main elements of the study was assessed. A randomly selected three experts working in the field conducted an inquiry audit (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The coherence between the collection of data, interpretations and conclusions of the study was examined, which is considered appropriate.

Data analysis

Quantitative content analysis is a method based on systematic coding and quantification of content (Huxley, 2020). The survey responses underwent such a coding process. At the first stage, the most frequently repeated semantic units were grouped following the subcategories which emerged. Subcategories were afterwards combined into semantic categories. Once the essential characteristics of the array had been highlighted, we applied quantitative content analysis to the data. Hence, we took an inductive approach (from the particular to the general), examining the verbal data array in the following phases: 1) multiple reading and analysis of answers; 2) searching for semantically close answers; 3) interpretations and coordination of semantic units; and 4) ranking of subcategories and categories.

To ensure methodological reliability, two researchers independently engaged in the distinction of semantic units and the grouping process. Coe and Scacco (2017) identified this measure as an essential condition for reliability in content analysis. The researchers of the current study have eventually come to this consensus.

Research Results

Following analysis of the survey respondents' input in relation to the competences most necessary for social educators to work in inclusive education (Question 1), the corresponding categories were distinguished (see Table 1).

The survey responses resulted in two categories: 'central competences' and 'fundamental competences'. As Table 1 shows, the 'central competences' category bears the highest indicator (88.34 %) among the professional competences considered as most essential to enable social educators to work in inclusive classrooms. Based on the responses, the sub-categories of 'central competences' emerged as 'social and communicative competences'; 'personal and relational competences'; 'competences generated by the professional practice'; 'organisational competences'; and 'development and learning competences'. According to Aieji: International Association of Social Educators (2008), professional competences for social educators include fundamental and central competences.

Table 1. Social educators' professional competences to work in inclusive education

Category	N (%)	Subcategory	N (%)	Subcategory components	N (%)	
Central competences	65 (88.34)	Social and communicative competences	20 (27.79)	Communication competences	8 (11.11)	
				Work in team	7 (9.73)	
				Establishing and maintaining relationships with parents, social groups, and organisations	5 (6.95)	
		Personal and relational competences	15 (20.85)		Loving children	5 (6.95)
					Empathy	4 (5.56)
					Considering the characteristics of children with SEN and their parents	3 (4.17)
					Personal commitment to the work	3 (4.17)
		Competences generated by the professional practice	13 (18.07)		Cultural competences	5 (6.95)
					Theoretical knowledge and methodological competences	4 (5.56)
					Creative competences	4 (5.56)
		Organisational competences	10 (11.9)		Knowledge of administrative routines (documentation, possession of IT)	6 (6.34)
					Organisation of a safe school space	2 (2.78)
					Planning and implementation of social educational activities	2 (2.78)
					Development and learning competences	7 (9.73)
Fundamental competences	7 (9.73)	Competence of intervening	7 (9.73)	Knowledge of correctional pedagogy, psychology, and other courses	4 (5.56)	
				Quick response, mobility	3 (4.17)	
In total, 72 semantic units were extracted.						

Further categories were outlined after a review of the lecturers' responses to Question 2: 'In your opinion, what personal qualities are necessary for social educators to develop competences to work in an inclusive education environment?' These results can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2. Social educators' personal qualities

Category	N (%)	Subcategory	N (%)	Subcategory components	N (%)
Qualities	64 (100)	Emotional-volitional qualities	31 (48.36)	Tolerance	10 (15.6)
				Empathy	8 (12.48)
				Patience	4 (6.24)
				Emotional intellect	2 (3.12)
				Willpower	2 (3.12)
				Decency	1 (1.56)
				Stress tolerance	1 (1.56)
				Mobility	1 (1.56)
				Perseverance	1 (1.56)
				Punctuality	1 (1.56)
		Moral-humanistic qualities	25 (39)	Loving children	6 (9.36)
				Humanity	4 (6.24)
				Kindness	3 (4.68)
				Conscientiousness, justice, honesty	3 (4.68)
				Mercy	3 (4.68)
				Loving the work	1 (1.56)
				Respect for the personality of the student	1 (1.56)
				Adherence to principles	1 (1.56)
				Responsiveness	1 (1.56)
				Compassion	1 (1.56)
Social-perceptual qualities	8 (12.48)	Responsibility (social)	5 (7.8)		
		Perceptual skills	1 (1.56)		
		Critical thinking	1 (1.56)		
		Innovative thinking	1 (1.56)		
In total, 64 semantic units were extracted.					

Qualities based on input for Question 2 were split into three sub-categories: 'emotional-volitional qualities', 'moral-humanistic qualities', and 'social-perceptual qualities'. We classified the following blocks as 'personal qualities' of social educators: 'emotional-volitional qualities', 'moral-humanistic qualities' and 'social-perceptual qualities'. The resulting subcategories were combined into one category, the category 'qualities'.

The study demonstrates that 'emotional-volitional qualities' resulted in the highest indicator (48.36%). This subcategory includes statements as to 'personal qualities', such as tolerance, empathy, patience, emotional intellect, will power, decency, stress tolerance, mobility, perseverance, and punctuality as shown in Table 2. Hence, according to the lecturers surveyed, 'emotional-volitional qualities' are particularly important for social educators to perform optimally in inclusive classrooms.

Regarding the difficulties lecturers may encounter in training pre-service educators for work in inclusive environments (Question 3), the outcomes are outlined in Table 3.

Table 3. Difficulties during the training of social educators

Category	N (%)	Subcategory	N (%)	Subcategory components	N (%)
Professional difficulties	20 (74)	Lack of professional training	15 (55.5)	Lack of specialised knowledge	7 (25.9)
				The novelty for the audience	5 (18.5)
				Poor training on the basics of educational psychology	1 (3.70)
				Considering children with SEN as sick	1 (3.70)
				Lack of desire to teach students with SEN	1 (3.70)
		Difficulties in social and communicative competences	5 (18.5)	Psychological unavailability	1 (3.70)
				Fear of the unknown	2 (7.4)
				Fear of children with SEN	2 (7.4)
Methodological difficulties	4 (14.8)	Lack of didactic literature	2 (7.4)	Lack of methodical manuals	2 (7.4)
		Insufficient educational and research material on IE	2 (7.4)	Lack of research literature	2 (7.4)
Not indicated	3 (11.1)	Did not have any difficulties	3 (11.1)	Did not have any difficulties	3 (11.1)
In total, 27 semantic units were extracted.					

The difficulties lecturers reported in their preparation of pre-service social educators for inclusive classrooms were placed into two categories: ‘professional difficulties’ and ‘methodological difficulties’. Professional difficulties display the highest indicator (74%). As illustrated in Table 3, they cover the subcategories of ‘lack of professional training’ and ‘difficulties in social and communicative competences’.

Discussion

The aim of the research was to identify the professional competences and personal qualities necessary for social educators to work in inclusive classrooms, as well as to determine difficulties university lecturers confront in the course of training such educators.

Our analysis of 35 lecturers’ survey responses indicated that they saw ‘central competences’ as the ‘most necessary’ for social educators’ work in inclusive classrooms (67.49%) (Table 1). Among the personal qualities these respondents described, ‘emotional-volitional qualities’ showed the highest indicator (48.41%). The statements pointed to ‘tolerance’ and ‘empathy’ as the most essential qualities in the work of social educators in inclusive environments (Table 2). Lastly, the highest indicator among the difficulties faced in the training of pre-service social educators was associated with professional difficulties (74%) (Table 3). In respondents’ opinion, a lack of specialised knowledge could be the main difficulty involved in training social educators.

This research has identified critical areas for the development of the professional competences of pre-service social educators. In the context of inclusive education, it is necessary to develop both social educators' professional competences (Table 1) and personal qualities (Table 2).

Magauova and Makhambetova (2020) researched the other side, that of difficulties pre-service social educators have encountered (e.g., lack of professional training and psychological unpreparedness) and the qualities (e.g., personal, professional) needed in working with students with disabilities, confirming our results regarding lecturers. It is crucial to improve the set of professional competences and readiness corresponding to the functions of a social educator in the 'SEN' system of assistance for children (Prilepskaya, 2016; Romashina, 2007). Such research has been dedicated to matters of quality training in multiple capacities, which is essential in this area of education.

Although Kazakhstan can move with speed to implement inclusive education and although some commendable action has been taken, it must be borne in mind that inclusive education cannot be achieved overnight, and will require a process that is systematic and well planned (Makoelle, 2020). A study of teaching and research practices at the universities in the Republic showed that some lecturers have earned expertise in inclusive education.

For instance, Abai Kazakh National Pedagogical University (Abai KazNPU) provides training in inclusive education within the framework of programme '7M01906-Training Special Educators in Inclusive Education' (Abai Kazakh National Pedagogical University, 2021). Abai KazNPU also runs the Resource Advisory Centre on Inclusive Education and Personality Psychology for universities across Kazakhstan.

The Department of Pedagogy and Educational Management at Al-Farabi Kazakh National University (Al-Farabi KazNU) trains specialists to work in inclusive education via two programmes: '7M01103-Modern Technologies in Inclusive Education' and '7M01106 -Medical and Pedagogical Support of Inclusive Education' (Al-Farabi Kazakh National University. Admissions 2022, 2022). The educational program "6B01801-Social pedagogy and self-cognition" includes the module "Inclusion in the educational environment", consisting of the courses: "Tutor in inclusive education" and "Innovative technologies in the activity of a tutor to support students with SEN in inclusive education", which undoubtedly will support the development of pre-service social educators' professional competences indicated in the study (Al-Farabi Kazakh National University. Admissions 2022, 2022). The university also hosts the 'Support Centre for the Students with Disabilities of Al-Farabi KazNU'.

The development of professional competences for pre-service social educators is considered a necessity in the context of inclusive education, and not only for children with disabilities. After all, 'inclusive education' is a state policy aimed at removing barriers that divide children, at fully involving all children in education, and at ensuring their social adaptation regardless of age, gender, ethnic background, religion, developmental disabilities, or socioeconomic status. Active participation by their families, coupled with rehabilitative, pedagogical, and social schemes, are essential to ensuring full inclusion and support for the personal needs of each child, including the appropriate adaptation of their educational environment (Suleimenova, 2002). In this sense, the most important task of vocational education is the design of professional competences and, through this, the development of the specialist's personality (Algozhayeva & Bashirova, 2015).

Although previous works (Aubakirova, 2018; Hastings & Oakford, 2003; Järvis et al., 2022; Movkebaieva et al., 2013; Oralkanova, 2014; Shkutina et al., 2017) had considered the theme of training educators for inclusive education, they had not studied pre-service social educators' professional development in the context of inclusive education.

But despite its clear contribution to the literature, the study has some limitations. For instance, although the study was qualitative, it could have benefitted from a larger sample size. Also, restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic forced us to conduct the survey entirely online.

Conclusions and Implications

This study indicates that both professional competences and personal qualities may be crucial for social educators to serve in inclusive classrooms. Via lecturers' survey responses, this research identified a set of professional competences seen as required for specialists' successful work in inclusive education: 'central competences' and 'fundamental competences'. The personal qualities determined in the study pertain to 'emotional-volitional qualities', 'moral-humanistic qualities', and 'social-perceptual qualities'.

The results also illustrated potential difficulties in the professional development of pre-service social educators, such as pre-service social educators' lack of specialised knowledge, insufficient awareness of inclusive education, the problems of children with special educational needs (SEN), and insufficient methodological support. To address these issues, the Centre of Pedagogical Excellence and Innovative Technologies at the Department of Pedagogy and Educational Management at Al-Farabi KazNU is offering advanced training courses for educators, lecturers of the Republic.

Thus, the empirical data sourced through the survey leads to the assumption that the appropriate training of social educators would require an established policy of inclusive education training and development of professional competences and personal qualities. The study was important, for the reason that it was revealed the structural components of professional competences of pre-service social educators to work in an inclusive education. Hopefully, the results of the study will be used in educational programs, updating methodological materials on the training pre-service social educators, for advanced training courses for specialists for inclusive education. The data will further be used to develop a structural and content-related model for the advancement of professional competences as a foundation for further research on the training of specialists for inclusive education in the Republic of Kazakhstan.

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