

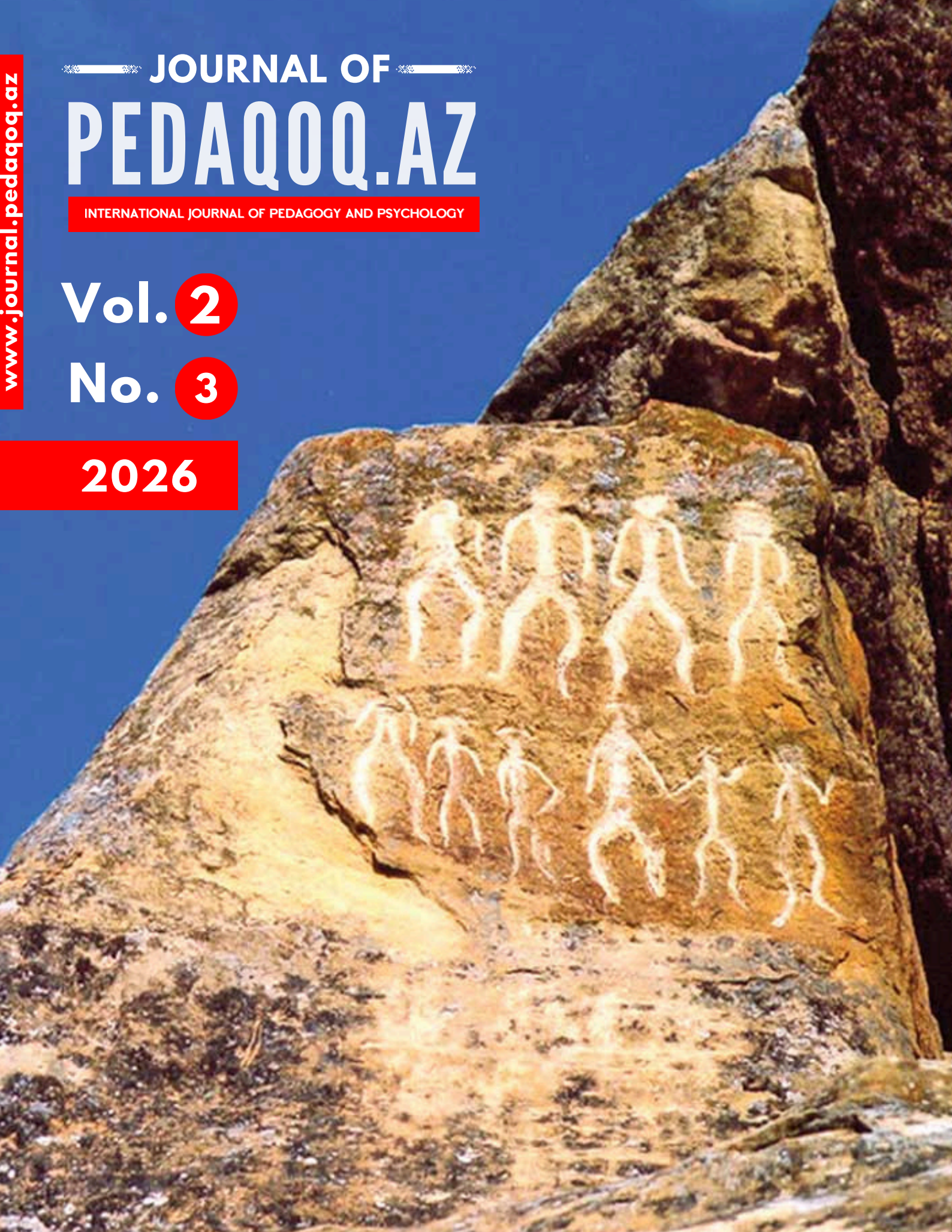
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**PROBLEMS OF ENSURING THE INTERNATIONAL EQUIVALENCE OF ASSESSMENT CRITERIA IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS**

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**Keywords:** higher education, assessment criteria, international equivalence, learning outcomes, educational assessment, quality assurance, Bologna Process, European Higher Education Area (EHEA)

**Abstract.** The internationalization of higher education has significantly increased the need for comparable, transparent, and reliable assessment systems capable of ensuring the mutual recognition of academic qualifications and learning outcomes across different countries. Despite the growing implementation of international quality assurance frameworks, substantial differences remain in assessment criteria, grading practices, competency evaluation, and institutional standards. These differences often create barriers to academic mobility, credit transfer, and the recognition of qualifications within the global educational environment. The present study examines the theoretical and methodological problems associated with ensuring the international equivalence of assessment criteria in higher education institutions. Particular attention is devoted to the influence of the Bologna Process, the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS), the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), and the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) on the harmonization of assessment practices. The article analyzes contemporary approaches to competency-based assessment, learning outcomes evaluation, criterion-referenced assessment, and digital assessment systems.

PEDAGOGY

## Introduction

The rapid internationalization of higher education has fundamentally transformed the organization, management, and evaluation of teaching and learning processes across the world. Universities increasingly participate in international academic cooperation, student and staff mobility programs, joint degree initiatives, transnational education, and collaborative research projects. As a result, ensuring transparency, comparability, and mutual recognition of educational qualifications has become one of the central objectives of contemporary higher education policy. Within this context, assessment systems occupy a particularly important position because they determine the extent to which students achieve intended learning outcomes and demonstrate professional competencies. The globalization of higher education has created unprecedented opportunities for international academic exchange. At the same time, it has exposed significant inconsistencies in assessment practices among higher education institutions operating under different educational traditions, legal systems, and quality assurance frameworks. Even universities offering similar educational programs frequently apply different grading scales, assessment criteria, examination procedures, competency descriptors, and standards for evaluating student achievement. These differences often complicate the recognition of academic credits, hinder student mobility, reduce employer confidence in academic qualifications, and create challenges for international accreditation.

**Main part.** The Bologna Process, initiated in 1999, represented one of the most influential attempts to establish greater compatibility among European higher education systems. Through the introduction of comparable degree structures, the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS), qualifications frameworks, and learning outcomes-based curricula, participating countries sought to facilitate academic mobility and improve educational quality. Nevertheless, despite

substantial progress in harmonizing structural aspects of higher education, assessment practices remain considerably diverse [Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2022]. The implementation of common educational frameworks has not automatically resulted in equivalent assessment methodologies, since educational institutions continue to interpret competency descriptors and learning outcomes according to national traditions and institutional policies. Assessment in higher education has evolved from a traditional examination-oriented model toward more comprehensive systems emphasizing competency development, authentic assessment, formative feedback, and continuous evaluation. Contemporary educational theories recognize assessment not merely as a mechanism for measuring student performance but as an integral component of the learning process itself.

Constructivist pedagogy, competency-based education, outcome-based education, and student-centered learning all require assessment approaches capable of evaluating complex cognitive, practical, social, and professional competencies rather than simple memorization of factual knowledge. Consequently, international equivalence in assessment involves far more than numerical grading scales; it encompasses the comparability of educational objectives, instructional methodologies, learning outcomes, assessment instruments, and quality assurance procedures. The concept of international equivalence has become increasingly significant due to the expansion of cross-border education and international labor markets.

Graduates frequently pursue further education or employment in countries different from those in which they obtained their qualifications. Employers, accreditation agencies, professional organizations, and universities therefore require reliable evidence that academic achievements obtained in different educational systems represent comparable levels of knowledge and competence. However, achieving such comparability remains a complex methodological challenge because assessment reflects not only academic standards but also cultural values, institutional autonomy, disciplinary traditions, and national educational policies. One of the principal difficulties concerns the interpretation of learning outcomes.

Although international frameworks such as the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), Dublin Descriptors, and the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) provide general reference points, individual universities often formulate learning outcomes differently and apply varying performance indicators. Consequently, identical grades awarded by different institutions do not necessarily represent equivalent levels of competence or academic achievement.

This situation limits the reliability of international qualification recognition mechanisms and complicates educational quality assurance. Another significant challenge relates to the diversity of assessment methodologies. Universities employ a wide range of assessment techniques, including written examinations, oral examinations, laboratory work, project-based assessment, portfolios, presentations, practical demonstrations, peer assessment, self-assessment, and workplace-based evaluation. While such diversity enriches educational practice, it also complicates international comparison because assessment validity and reliability depend heavily on institutional implementation.

Furthermore, differences in examiner training, grading moderation, assessment rubrics, and quality assurance procedures may produce substantial variations in student evaluation even within similar academic disciplines. Technological developments have introduced additional dimensions to assessment equivalence. Digital learning environments, artificial intelligence, adaptive testing, learning analytics, virtual laboratories, and online assessment platforms are rapidly transforming higher education assessment worldwide. These innovations create new opportunities for improving objectivity, transparency, and efficiency while simultaneously generating methodological and ethical challenges concerning academic integrity, data security, algorithmic bias, and the validity of automated assessment.

Consequently, international equivalence increasingly requires not only harmonized pedagogical principles but also common technological standards and digital quality assurance mechanisms.

The relevance of this topic is particularly evident for countries actively participating in higher education modernization and international integration processes. Aligning national assessment systems with international standards is essential for improving university competitiveness, enhancing graduate employability, expanding academic mobility, and strengthening international institutional partnerships. However, such alignment should not imply the mechanical adoption of foreign assessment models. Rather, it requires careful adaptation that respects national educational priorities while ensuring compatibility with internationally recognized quality assurance principles. Against this background, the present study aims to analyze the principal theoretical, methodological, institutional, and practical problems associated with ensuring the international equivalence of assessment criteria in higher education institutions. The study also seeks to identify contemporary international approaches to assessment harmonization and formulate recommendations that may contribute to improving the comparability, transparency, and quality of higher education assessment systems within an increasingly global academic environment.

The concept of international equivalence in higher education assessment has become one of the central issues in contemporary educational research due to the rapid expansion of globalization, academic mobility, and international cooperation among universities.

Higher education institutions no longer operate solely within national educational systems; instead, they increasingly participate in a global educational environment where qualifications, competencies, and learning outcomes must be understandable, transparent, and comparable across countries. Consequently, assessment criteria have evolved from institution-specific evaluation tools into internationally significant mechanisms for demonstrating academic achievement and professional competence. International equivalence should not be interpreted as the complete standardization of assessment systems across countries.

Rather, it refers to the establishment of sufficiently comparable principles, standards, and procedures that allow educational achievements obtained in different higher education systems to be recognized with confidence.

Equivalence therefore implies compatibility rather than uniformity. Different educational institutions may continue using various instructional approaches and assessment methods, provided that they evaluate comparable learning outcomes according to transparent and internationally understandable criteria [Ozchelik, 2019]. The theoretical basis of international assessment equivalence is primarily grounded in Outcome-Based Education (OBE).

This educational philosophy shifts attention from teaching activities toward measurable learning outcomes that students are expected to achieve after completing a course or program. Under the outcome-based approach, assessment is designed to determine whether learners have acquired the knowledge, skills, competencies, and attitudes specified by the curriculum. Since learning outcomes can be described using internationally recognized qualification descriptors, they provide an effective foundation for comparing educational achievements across different higher education systems. Constructivist learning theory also provides an important theoretical foundation for internationally comparable assessment. According to constructivism, knowledge is actively constructed by learners through interaction with their environment rather than passively transmitted by instructors. Consequently, assessment should evaluate students' ability to analyze, synthesize, solve problems, communicate ideas, and apply knowledge in authentic contexts. These higher-order cognitive abilities are increasingly recognized as universal competencies that transcend national educational traditions and therefore contribute to international comparability. Competency-based education represents another significant theoretical perspective.

Unlike traditional content-based assessment, competency-based approaches focus on learners' demonstrated ability to perform professional tasks successfully in real-life situations.

Competencies integrate knowledge, practical skills, critical thinking, communication abilities, ethical responsibility, teamwork, creativity, and lifelong learning capacities. International qualification frameworks increasingly define educational achievements in terms of competencies rather than merely accumulated knowledge, making competency-based assessment one of the principal instruments for ensuring international equivalence. Student-centered learning further reinforces the theoretical foundation of internationally compatible assessment systems. Modern higher education recognizes students as active participants in the learning process rather than passive recipients of information. Consequently, assessment increasingly incorporates formative evaluation, continuous feedback, self-assessment, peer assessment, project-based learning, portfolios, reflective journals, and authentic performance tasks. These approaches enable more comprehensive evaluation of student achievement while aligning assessment practices with internationally accepted quality assurance principles [European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, 2015].

An additional theoretical dimension concerns the distinction between norm-referenced and criterion-referenced assessment. Traditional norm-referenced assessment compares students with one another, ranking performance according to relative achievement within a group. Such systems often complicate international comparison because grading depends heavily on cohort characteristics rather than objective performance standards. In contrast, criterion-referenced assessment evaluates each student's achievement against predetermined learning outcomes and performance criteria. Since criterion-referenced assessment emphasizes transparency, consistency, and measurable educational objectives, it is widely regarded as more suitable for ensuring international equivalence. Transparency

constitutes another essential theoretical principle underlying internationally recognized assessment systems.

Students, employers, accreditation agencies, and higher education institutions should clearly understand the expectations associated

with assessment, including learning outcomes, grading criteria, performance descriptors, assessment methods, and quality assurance procedures. Transparent assessment increases fairness, strengthens academic integrity, facilitates international recognition of qualifications, and enhances public confidence in higher education. Reliability and validity also occupy central positions within the theoretical framework of international assessment equivalence. Reliability refers to the consistency of assessment results across different evaluators, occasions, and assessment instruments.

Validity concerns the extent to which assessment accurately measures the competencies it is intended to evaluate. Internationally comparable assessment systems require both high reliability and high validity to ensure that qualifications awarded by different institutions genuinely represent equivalent levels of academic achievement.

Quality assurance theory provides another major theoretical foundation. International quality assurance organizations emphasize that assessment should be systematically monitored, periodically reviewed, and continuously improved through internal and external evaluation mechanisms. Standards developed by organizations such as the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) promote institutional accountability while preserving university autonomy. Consequently, assessment equivalence depends not only on grading practices but also on the effectiveness of institutional quality assurance systems that monitor assessment consistency and academic standards.

The concept of fairness further strengthens the theoretical framework. Fair assessment requires equal opportunities for all learners regardless of cultural background, language, disability, socioeconomic status, or educational pathway [Bolotov, 2023].

As international student mobility continues to expand, assessment systems must become increasingly inclusive while maintaining rigorous academic standards. Universal Design for Learning (UDL), accessible assessment practices, and culturally responsive evaluation methods have therefore become increasingly important

components of internationally recognized assessment systems. Finally, international equivalence should be understood as a multidimensional educational construct. It cannot be achieved merely through unified grading scales or standardized examinations. Rather, genuine equivalence emerges from the integration of coherent educational objectives, competency-based curricula, transparent learning outcomes, scientifically valid assessment methodologies, effective quality assurance systems, institutional accountability, technological innovation, and international collaboration.

Only through the interaction of these theoretical foundations can higher education institutions establish assessment systems capable of supporting academic mobility, international recognition of qualifications, and sustainable educational development within the global knowledge society. The increasing complexity of higher education demonstrates that assessment equivalence is no longer solely a pedagogical issue but also an institutional, legal, technological, and policy-oriented challenge.

Consequently, future reforms should continue emphasizing comprehensive harmonization of assessment principles while respecting institutional diversity and national educational traditions. This balanced approach provides the most appropriate theoretical basis for strengthening the international comparability and credibility of higher education assessment systems.

An increasingly significant factor in ensuring the international equivalence of assessment criteria is the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into higher education assessment systems [Aliyev & Mammadov, 2026]. AI-powered technologies provide new opportunities for enhancing assessment accuracy, consistency, transparency, and efficiency through automated grading, adaptive testing, learning analytics, plagiarism detection, and personalized feedback.

These technologies enable educators to analyze large volumes of assessment data, identify learning patterns, and support evidence-based decision-making. Nevertheless, the implementation of AI also raises important ethical and methodological concerns, including algorithmic bias, data privacy, transparency of automated decision-making.

Consequently, higher education institutions should adopt AI-supported assessment tools within clearly defined ethical frameworks and quality assurance standards, ensuring that technological innovation complements rather than replaces professional academic judgment. The balanced integration of artificial intelligence has the potential to strengthen the international comparability of assessment practices while maintaining fairness, validity, and reliability across diverse educational contexts.

The theoretical foundations of ensuring the international equivalence of assessment criteria extend far beyond the simple harmonization of grading scales, assessment procedures, or qualification descriptors. Instead, they represent a comprehensive educational framework that integrates outcome-based education, competency-based learning, constructivist pedagogy, criterion-referenced assessment, quality assurance mechanisms, transparency, validity, reliability, fairness, and continuous quality improvement. This multidimensional approach recognizes that internationally comparable assessment cannot be achieved solely through standardized numerical grading systems but requires the alignment of curricula, learning outcomes, assessment methodologies, institutional policies, and qualification frameworks. Equally important is the consistent application of internationally recognized quality assurance standards, which promote accountability, consistency, and evidence-based educational practices while respecting institutional diversity and academic autonomy.

The growing internationalization of higher education further emphasizes the need for assessment systems capable of accurately reflecting students' knowledge, professional competencies, critical thinking abilities, and lifelong learning skills across different educational contexts. Such systems contribute to greater trust among higher education institutions, employers, accreditation agencies, and professional organizations by ensuring that academic qualifications possess comparable educational value regardless of the country or institution in which they were obtained. Furthermore, the integration of digital assessment technologies, learning analytics, and artificial intelligence provides new opportunities for increasing

the objectivity, efficiency, and transparency of assessment processes, although these innovations also require careful ethical regulation and continuous quality monitoring. Consequently, strengthening the theoretical foundations of assessment equivalence constitutes an essential prerequisite for enhancing academic mobility, facilitating international recognition of qualifications, promoting educational quality, supporting cross-border cooperation, and fostering the sustainable development of higher education systems within an increasingly interconnected global academic environment.

### **Conclusion**

Based on the findings of this research, higher education institutions should continue strengthening competency-based assessment, expanding criterion-referenced evaluation, improving assessment transparency, enhancing faculty professional development, promoting digital assessment literacy, and reinforcing both internal and external quality assurance processes. Particular attention should also be devoted to developing internationally compatible assessment rubrics, standardized learning outcome descriptors, and evidence-based assessment practices that facilitate academic mobility and qualification recognition.

In conclusion, ensuring the international equivalence of assessment criteria represents a multidimensional and continuously evolving process that requires coordinated efforts from universities, accreditation agencies, policymakers, and international educational organizations.

By adopting internationally recognized principles while maintaining sensitivity to local educational contexts, higher education institutions can develop assessment systems that are both academically rigorous and globally comparable.

Such an approach will contribute not only to improving educational quality but also to strengthening international cooperation, increasing graduate employability, and

supporting the sustainable development of higher education in an increasingly interconnected world. Moreover, it will facilitate greater transparency and mutual trust among higher education institutions, thereby promoting the international recognition of academic qualifications and the mobility of students and academic staff. In the long term, the continuous alignment of assessment systems with internationally accepted standards will enhance institutional competitiveness, encourage innovation in teaching and learning practices, and better prepare graduates to meet the evolving demands of the global labor market and knowledge-based society.

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## **STAGES OF EFFECTIVE REHABILITATION OF ONCOLOGICAL PATIENTS**

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**Keywords:** psycho-oncology, breast cancer, gynecological cancer, psychological rehabilitation, cancer survivorship, family support, post-traumatic stress disorder

**Abstract.** Cancer remains one of the leading causes of mortality and disability worldwide, creating significant physical, psychological, social, and economic challenges for both patients and their families. According to the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC), more than 19.3 million new cancer cases were diagnosed globally in 2020, and this number continues to increase annually. Among women, gynecological malignancies and breast cancer account for a substantial proportion of all diagnosed cancers. Advances in early diagnosis and multimodal treatment have considerably improved survival rates, enabling many patients to live for years after treatment. However, successful medical treatment alone does not guarantee complete recovery. Cancer diagnosis often produces profound psychological distress, including anxiety, depression, fear of recurrence, post-traumatic stress symptoms, and significant impairment in quality of life. Consequently, rehabilitation has become an indispensable component of comprehensive cancer care.

This article examines the principal stages of effective rehabilitation for oncological patients from a multidisciplinary perspective. Particular attention is devoted to psychological assessment, preoperative and postoperative psychological support, preparation for chemotherapy and radiotherapy, family-centered interventions, social rehabilitation, support groups, and the influence

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of religious and spiritual beliefs on psychological adaptation. The study also analyzes contemporary findings from psycho-oncology and psychosomatic medicine regarding the relationship between chronic stress, emotional trauma, and cancer progression. Based on current international research and clinical practice, the article argues that rehabilitation should begin immediately after diagnosis and continue throughout the entire treatment and survivorship process. Comprehensive rehabilitation not only improves patients' psychological well-being and treatment adherence but also enhances overall quality of life and facilitates long-term social reintegration. The proposed rehabilitation model may serve as a practical framework for healthcare professionals involved in multidisciplinary oncology care.

### Introduction

Cancer has become one of the most serious public health challenges of the twenty-first century. Continuous advances in diagnostic technologies, surgical techniques, chemotherapy, immunotherapy, targeted therapy, radiotherapy, and personalized medicine have substantially increased survival rates for many types of malignant diseases. Nevertheless, despite these medical achievements, cancer continues to impose enormous psychological, social, economic, and emotional burdens on patients, their families, healthcare professionals, and society as a whole. Modern oncology increasingly recognizes that successful treatment should not be limited to eliminating malignant tumors but should also address the complex psychological and social consequences associated with the disease.

**Main part.** According to the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC), approximately 19.3 million new cancer cases and nearly 10 million cancer-related deaths were recorded worldwide in 2020. Epidemiological projections indicate that these numbers will continue to rise over the coming decades due to population growth, increased life expectancy, urbanization, environmental factors, unhealthy lifestyles, and improved diagnostic capabilities.

Consequently, healthcare systems are facing growing demands not only for

effective treatment but also for long-term rehabilitation services capable of supporting cancer survivors throughout the recovery process.

Among women, breast cancer and gynecological malignancies—including cancers of the cervix, endometrium, ovaries, and vulva—represent a considerable proportion of all malignant neoplasms. Owing to improvements in early detection, screening programs, and comprehensive treatment strategies, approximately two-thirds of women diagnosed at early stages survive for more than five years following diagnosis. Although this represents a remarkable medical achievement, long-term survival frequently introduces new psychological, social, and functional challenges requiring continuous rehabilitation and psychosocial support.

Receiving a cancer diagnosis is widely recognized as one of the most stressful life events an individual can experience. For many patients, the diagnosis immediately threatens their perception of safety, future plans, personal identity, family relationships, and professional careers. Initial reactions commonly include shock, disbelief, fear, uncertainty, anger, sadness, helplessness, and emotional instability. These reactions often evolve into clinically significant anxiety disorders, depressive symptoms, sleep disturbances, adjustment disorders, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)-like manifestations. Numerous psycho-oncological studies have demonstrated that psychological distress negatively influences treatment adherence, decision-making, immune function, pain perception, quality of life, and overall rehabilitation outcomes. The psychological consequences of cancer extend beyond the patient. Family members frequently experience chronic emotional stress while attempting to provide practical care and emotional support. Partners, children, and close relatives often struggle with fear of losing their loved one, financial difficulties, caregiving responsibilities, uncertainty regarding treatment outcomes, and significant changes in family dynamics. Consequently, contemporary psycho-oncology increasingly considers cancer to be a family-centered crisis rather than solely an individual medical condition. Effective rehabilitation therefore requires interventions targeting both patients and their immediate social environment.

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Psychosomatic medicine has further emphasized the relationship between chronic psychological stress and physical health. Although stress itself is not considered a direct cause of cancer, numerous studies suggest that prolonged emotional distress may influence neuroendocrine regulation, immune system functioning, inflammatory responses, and health-related behaviors. Several researchers have reported that many oncology patients experienced major life stressors—including bereavement, occupational burnout, interpersonal conflicts, or severe emotional trauma—during the months preceding diagnosis. These findings have encouraged greater integration of psychological assessment into comprehensive oncology care.

One of the pioneers emphasizing the psychological dimension of somatic diseases was Professor Nossrat Pezeshkian, founder of Positive Psychotherapy. In his work *Psychosomatics and Positive Psychotherapy*, he described characteristic personality patterns frequently observed among oncology patients, including perfectionism, excessive dedication to work, emotional suppression, difficulties expressing negative emotions, and prolonged experiences of unresolved grief. Although contemporary psycho-oncology recognizes cancer as a multifactorial disease influenced primarily by biological and environmental mechanisms, psychological factors remain important determinants of adaptation, treatment compliance, and rehabilitation success.

For these reasons, rehabilitation has become a fundamental component of modern oncology rather than a supplementary service provided after medical treatment. International clinical guidelines increasingly recommend that rehabilitation begin immediately after diagnosis and continue throughout surgery, chemotherapy, radiotherapy, remission, survivorship, and palliative care when necessary. Multidisciplinary rehabilitation integrates medical treatment with clinical psychology, psychiatry, physiotherapy, occupational therapy, nutrition, social work, spiritual care, and patient education. Such an approach aims not only to prolong survival but also to restore functional independence, emotional stability, social participation, and overall quality of life.

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Against this background, the present study aims to examine the principal stages of effective rehabilitation for oncological patients, emphasizing psychological interventions as an integral component of multidisciplinary cancer care. The article analyzes contemporary rehabilitation approaches and proposes a structured framework capable of improving psychological adaptation, enhancing treatment adherence, strengthening family support, and facilitating successful long-term recovery.

In recent years, growing attention has also been devoted to patient-centered rehabilitation models that integrate psychological care into every stage of oncology treatment. Numerous international studies have demonstrated that early psychological intervention improves emotional resilience, reduces anxiety and depressive symptoms, strengthens treatment adherence, and facilitates social reintegration. Furthermore, multidisciplinary rehabilitation contributes to better communication between healthcare professionals, patients, and family members, ultimately enhancing both clinical outcomes and quality of life. Consequently, psychological rehabilitation should be regarded not as an optional supportive service but as an essential component of comprehensive oncology care.

Against this background, the present study aims to examine the principal stages of effective rehabilitation of oncological patients from a multidisciplinary perspective, with particular emphasis on psychological rehabilitation. The article analyzes contemporary theoretical approaches and practical rehabilitation strategies, including psychological assessment, perioperative psychological support, preparation for chemotherapy and radiotherapy, family counseling, social assistance, peer support groups, and the role of religious and spiritual beliefs in adaptation to illness. By identifying the key components of effective rehabilitation, this study seeks to contribute to the development of holistic, patient-centered rehabilitation programs capable of improving both psychological well-being and long-term treatment outcomes for cancer patients.

## **Conclusion**

Effective rehabilitation of oncological patients is a continuous, multidisciplinary process that should begin at the time of diagnosis and continue throughout treatment, recovery, and long-term survivorship. Comprehensive rehabilitation extends beyond medical interventions by integrating psychological support, family counseling, social assistance, patient education, and spiritual care into routine oncology practice. Such an approach not only alleviates emotional distress and improves patients' quality of life but also enhances treatment adherence, promotes successful social reintegration, and contributes to better clinical outcomes. Therefore, the implementation of structured, patient-centered rehabilitation programs involving clinical psychologists, oncologists, social workers, rehabilitation specialists, and family members should be regarded as an essential standard of modern comprehensive cancer care.

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**Abstract.** Mycology, the scientific study of fungi, has emerged as a significant interdisciplinary field within biological sciences due to its relevance to agriculture, medicine, biotechnology, ecology, and environmental sustainability.

The increasing recognition of fungi as essential components of ecosystems and their applications in various scientific and industrial sectors has intensified the need for effective mycological education at the university level.

The teaching of mycology in higher education institutions requires a comprehensive methodological framework that integrates theoretical knowledge with practical laboratory skills, field-based investigations, and modern educational technologies.

This article examines the theoretical and practical methodological foundations of teaching mycology in higher education institutions, emphasizing pedagogical approaches, curriculum design, instructional methods, assessment strategies, and the integration of innovative technologies into the learning process.

## Introduction

The rapid development of biological sciences and environmental research has highlighted the importance of fungal studies in contemporary education. Fungi constitute one of the largest and most diverse groups of organisms on Earth, playing critical roles in nutrient cycling, decomposition, symbiotic relationships, disease dynamics, and industrial biotechnology. Consequently, university students specializing in biology, environmental sciences, agriculture, forestry, biotechnology, and medicine require a solid understanding of mycological principles.

**Main part.** Teaching mycology at the tertiary level presents unique challenges and opportunities. Unlike many other biological disciplines, mycology demands a combination of theoretical understanding and extensive practical experience. Students must not only learn fungal taxonomy, physiology, ecology, and genetics but also acquire laboratory competencies related to fungal isolation, cultivation, identification, and analysis. Therefore, effective mycology education necessitates a pedagogically sound and scientifically rigorous methodology capable of fostering both conceptual understanding and practical expertise. The theoretical framework of mycology teaching is grounded in several educational and scientific principles. Constructivist learning theory suggests that students develop knowledge through active engagement with scientific concepts and experiences. In mycology education, this approach encourages learners to investigate fungal diversity, analyze ecological interactions, and interpret laboratory observations independently.

Another important theoretical foundation is inquiry-based learning. This pedagogical model promotes scientific thinking by encouraging students to formulate hypotheses, conduct experiments, collect data, and draw evidence-based conclusions. Since mycology is inherently experimental and observational, inquiry-based learning provides an effective mechanism for developing scientific literacy and research

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competencies. Experiential learning theory also plays a central role in mycology instruction. Students gain deeper understanding through direct interaction with fungal specimens, laboratory procedures, and field investigations. Through observation, experimentation, reflection, and application, learners develop both theoretical comprehension and practical problem-solving skills. Furthermore, interdisciplinary education serves as a significant theoretical principle in mycology teaching. Modern fungal research intersects with microbiology, genetics, ecology, plant pathology, medicine, biotechnology, and environmental science. Therefore, educational programs should emphasize interdisciplinary connections to enable students to appreciate the broader significance of fungal studies. The development of an effective mycology curriculum requires careful consideration of educational objectives, learning outcomes, and scientific advancements. The curriculum should provide a balanced combination of foundational knowledge and specialized competencies. At the introductory level, students should acquire knowledge of fungal morphology, classification, reproduction, physiology, and ecological roles. Intermediate courses may focus on fungal taxonomy, molecular identification techniques, fungal ecology, and plant- fungal interactions. Advanced modules can explore medical mycology, industrial applications of fungi, biotechnology, fungal genetics, and environmental mycology. A well-structured curriculum should also incorporate contemporary issues such as climate change impacts on fungal communities, fungal biodiversity conservation, emerging fungal pathogens, and the role of fungi in sustainable agriculture and bioremediation.

Practical training represents one of the most important components of mycology education. Laboratory exercises provide students with opportunities to apply theoretical knowledge and develop technical competencies. Common laboratory activities include fungal isolation from environmental samples, microscopic examination of fungal structures, preparation of culture media, cultivation techniques, identification using taxonomic keys, and molecular diagnostic procedures.

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These activities enhance students' observational skills, analytical thinking, and scientific accuracy. Field-based learning constitutes another essential methodological approach. Educational excursions to forests, agricultural fields, botanical gardens, and natural ecosystems enable students to observe fungal diversity in natural habitats. Fieldwork strengthens ecological understanding and promotes environmental awareness. Problem-based learning can also be effectively integrated into mycology courses. Students may be presented with real-world scenarios involving plant diseases, environmental contamination, fungal biodiversity assessment, or medical fungal infections. Through collaborative investigation, learners develop critical thinking and decision-making skills. Technological innovations have significantly transformed biological education, including mycology instruction. Digital microscopes, virtual laboratories, molecular databases, and online learning platforms have expanded opportunities for interactive and flexible learning. Virtual microscopy allows students to examine fungal structures remotely while maintaining high-resolution visualization. Online fungal databases facilitate species identification and taxonomic research.

Learning management systems enable the distribution of instructional materials, assessment activities, and collaborative discussions. Artificial intelligence and bioinformatics tools are increasingly being incorporated into mycology education. These technologies assist students in analyzing genetic sequences, predicting fungal distributions, and interpreting ecological datasets.

The integration of technological resources enhances scientific literacy and prepares students for contemporary research environments. Assessment in mycology education should evaluate both theoretical understanding and practical competencies. Traditional written examinations remain important for measuring conceptual knowledge; however, they should be complemented by alternative assessment methods. Laboratory reports allow students to demonstrate scientific writing skills and analytical abilities. Practical examinations assess technical competencies in fungal identification, microscopy, and culture techniques. Research projects encourage

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independent inquiry and promote the development of investigative skills. Portfolio assessment represents another valuable approach. Students can compile laboratory records, field observations, reflective journals, and research findings throughout the course. This method provides a comprehensive evaluation of learning progress and professional development.

**Table 1. Recommended teaching methods for university-level mycology education**

| Teaching Method            | Educational Purpose                      | Expected Learning Outcomes                              |
|----------------------------|--|---|
| Lectures                   | Introduction of theoretical concepts     | Knowledge acquisition and conceptual understanding      |
| Laboratory Practicals      | Development of technical skills          | Competence in fungal identification and experimentation |
| Field Studies              | Observation of fungi in natural habitats | Ecological awareness and biodiversity assessment        |
| Problem-Based Learning     | Application of scientific reasoning      | Critical thinking and problem-solving skills            |
| Research Projects          | Independent scientific investigation     | Research competence and analytical abilities            |
| Digital Learning Platforms | Flexible and interactive learning        | Technological literacy and self-directed learning       |
| Group Discussions          | Exchange of scientific ideas             | Communication and collaboration skills                  |

Despite its importance, mycology education faces several challenges. Limited laboratory resources, insufficient access to fungal collections, inadequate field opportunities, and the complexity of fungal taxonomy may hinder effective instruction. Another challenge involves student perceptions.

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Many learners initially underestimate the significance of fungi compared with plants or animals. Therefore, educators must emphasize the ecological, medical, agricultural, and industrial importance of fungi to enhance student engagement and motivation.

The future of mycology education is likely to be shaped by advances in genomics, biotechnology, artificial intelligence, and digital learning environments. Greater emphasis on interdisciplinary research, sustainability, and global environmental challenges will further increase the relevance of fungal studies. Universities should continue developing innovative teaching strategies that integrate laboratory experiences, field investigations, digital technologies, and research-based learning. International collaboration and access to global fungal databases may further enrich educational opportunities and support the development of highly qualified mycologists.

### **Conclusion**

The teaching of mycology in higher education institutions requires a comprehensive methodological framework that combines theoretical instruction with practical experience. Effective mycology education should be grounded in constructivist, inquiry-based, experiential, and interdisciplinary learning principles. A balanced integration of these approaches enables students to acquire both fundamental scientific knowledge and practical competencies that support their academic development and professional growth. Furthermore, the continuous modernization of teaching methodologies, the incorporation of innovative educational technologies, and the promotion of research-oriented learning contribute to improving the overall quality and effectiveness of mycology education.

Higher education institutions should therefore encourage flexible curricula that respond to contemporary scientific developments while fostering critical thinking, problem-solving abilities, independent learning, and collaborative research skills

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among students. Through well-designed curricula, laboratory training, field studies, technological integration, and diverse assessment methods, students can develop the knowledge and competencies necessary for scientific research and professional practice.

As biological sciences continue to evolve and interdisciplinary collaboration becomes increasingly important, mycology education is expected to play an increasingly significant role in preparing future specialists capable of addressing various scientific, educational, and professional challenges. Continuous curriculum development, international academic cooperation, and the adoption of evidence-based teaching practices will further strengthen the quality of mycology education and contribute to the advancement of higher education in the biological sciences.

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INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION AS A MODEL OF EQUAL LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES IN  
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**Keywords:** special educational needs, disability, educational inclusion, individualized learning, psychological support, educational equity, school inclusion

**Abstract.** Inclusive education has become one of the fundamental priorities of contemporary educational systems, aiming to ensure equal access to quality education for all learners regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, or developmental characteristics. During the last decade, the Republic of Moldova has undertaken substantial educational reforms directed toward the development of an inclusive education system consistent with international standards and the principles established by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Salamanca Statement. One of the most successful practical examples of these reforms is the establishment of the Inclusive Education Unit (IEU) at the Petre Ştefănuţă Theoretical Lyceum in the town of Ialoveni. The present article examines the theoretical foundations of inclusive education together with the practical implementation of the Inclusive Education Unit model in Moldova. Particular attention is devoted to the organization of multidisciplinary support services, individualized educational planning, teacher preparation, cooperation between school staff and families, and the educational outcomes achieved through inclusive practice. The article also discusses existing challenges related to sustainable financing, professional development, and the expansion of inclusive education services throughout the country. The findings demonstrate that the Moldovan experience provides a valuable model for strengthening inclusive educational systems and promoting equal learning opportunities for all children.

## **Introduction**

The concept of inclusive education has undergone significant transformation over the past three decades, evolving from a specialized educational approach into one of the core principles of educational policy worldwide. Contemporary education systems increasingly recognize that every child, regardless of disability, health condition, learning difficulty, or social background, possesses the fundamental right to receive high-quality education within mainstream educational environments. Inclusive education therefore extends beyond physical access to schools; it represents a comprehensive educational philosophy based on equality, participation, diversity, respect for human rights, and social justice. International organizations, including UNESCO, UNICEF, the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, and the United Nations, have consistently emphasized that inclusive education contributes not only to improved academic outcomes but also to stronger social cohesion and equal opportunities. Educational inclusion supports children's cognitive, emotional, social, and personal development while simultaneously reducing discrimination and social exclusion. Consequently, many countries have incorporated inclusive education into national educational legislation and strategic development programs as a fundamental component of educational modernization.

**Main part.** The Republic of Moldova represents one of the most remarkable examples of educational transformation in Eastern Europe regarding the implementation of inclusive education. Following independence, the country inherited a highly centralized educational system in which many children with disabilities and special educational needs were educated in segregated residential institutions. Beginning in the late 2000s, comprehensive reforms initiated by the Ministry of Education and supported by international organizations gradually shifted the educational system toward inclusive community-based education. These reforms introduced legislative

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changes, teacher training programs, psycho-pedagogical support services, resource centers, individualized educational planning, and multidisciplinary cooperation among educational, health, and social service providers.

One of the most successful practical outcomes of these reforms has been the establishment of the Inclusive Education Unit (IEU) at the Petre Ștefănuță Theoretical Lyceum in Ialoveni, located near Chișinău. The Unit was developed through cooperation between the Moldovan Ministry of Education and Research and the Lumos Foundation to provide children with profound disabilities and complex educational needs access to mainstream education within their local community. Rather than separating learners into specialized institutions, the model enables them to participate in regular classroom activities while receiving individualized educational, psychological, speech therapy, occupational therapy, and social support according to their specific needs. Independent evaluations of the project concluded that the model significantly improved educational participation, social integration, and family satisfaction, leading the Ministry of Education to recommend its replication across other regions of Moldova [United Nations Children's Fund, 2021].

The implementation of the Inclusive Education Unit has demonstrated that inclusive education is not merely an educational reform but a comprehensive process requiring coordinated collaboration among teachers, psychologists, therapists, administrators, families, local authorities, and policymakers. The success of this approach depends on continuous professional development, individualized educational planning, accessible learning environments, appropriate teaching methodologies, and effective interdisciplinary cooperation. Furthermore, the Moldovan experience illustrates that inclusive education benefits not only children with disabilities but also their peers, who develop greater empathy, tolerance, cooperation, and respect for diversity through everyday interaction within inclusive classrooms.

Against this background, the present study aims to analyze the theoretical principles of inclusive education while examining the practical implementation of the

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Inclusive Education Unit at the Petre Țefănuță Theoretical Lyceum in Ialoveni as a representative example of successful educational inclusion in the Republic of Moldova. The study explores the organizational structure of the model, multidisciplinary support mechanisms, educational outcomes, existing challenges, and future development prospects. By analyzing this case study, the article seeks to demonstrate how evidence-based inclusive educational practices can contribute to improving educational quality, ensuring equal learning opportunities, and supporting the sustainable development of inclusive education both in Moldova and internationally.

Another important theoretical foundation is inquiry-based learning. This pedagogical model promotes scientific thinking by encouraging students to formulate hypotheses, conduct experiments, collect data, and draw evidence-based conclusions. Since mycology is inherently experimental and observational, inquiry-based learning provides an effective mechanism for developing scientific literacy and research competencies. Experiential learning theory also plays a central role in mycology instruction. Students gain deeper understanding through direct interaction with fungal specimens, laboratory procedures, and field investigations. Through observation, experimentation, reflection, and application, learners develop both theoretical comprehension and practical problem-solving skills. Furthermore, interdisciplinary education serves as a significant theoretical principle in mycology teaching. Modern fungal research intersects with microbiology, genetics, ecology, plant pathology, medicine, biotechnology, and environmental science [Ainscow, Mel, M, 2020].

Therefore, educational programs should emphasize interdisciplinary connections to enable students to appreciate the broader significance of fungal studies. The development of an effective mycology curriculum requires careful consideration of educational objectives, learning outcomes, and scientific advancements. The curriculum should provide a balanced combination of foundational knowledge and specialized competencies. At the introductory level, students should acquire knowledge of fungal morphology, classification, reproduction, physiology, and ecological roles. Intermediate courses may focus on fungal taxonomy, molecular

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identification techniques, fungal ecology, and plant- fungal interactions. Advanced modules can explore medical mycology, industrial applications of fungi, biotechnology, fungal genetics, and environmental mycology. A well-structured curriculum should also incorporate contemporary issues such as climate change impacts on fungal communities, fungal biodiversity conservation, emerging fungal pathogens, and the role of fungi in sustainable agriculture and bioremediation.

Language and educational discourse constitute essential components of inclusive education because they shape communication, classroom interaction, and students' perception of participation. The terminology, semantic structures, and discourse strategies employed by teachers directly influence the creation of an inclusive learning environment where every learner feels respected and actively involved. Contemporary educational research increasingly emphasizes that discourse is not merely a linguistic phenomenon but also a pedagogical instrument that constructs social reality and educational relationships. Similar conclusions have been drawn in linguistic studies investigating semantic transformations in different discourse environments, where language is viewed as a cognitive and communicative mechanism extending beyond its grammatical functions [Mammadov & Hasanli, 2025]. Consequently, the analysis of educational discourse provides valuable methodological insights for improving inclusive teaching practices and strengthening effective communication within diverse classrooms.

The analysis presented in this study demonstrates that the successful implementation of inclusive education requires a holistic approach that combines educational policy, effective school leadership, qualified teaching staff, multidisciplinary cooperation, and active family involvement. The experience of the Petre Ștefănuță Theoretical Lyceum confirms that inclusive education is most effective when individualized educational planning is supported by accessible learning environments, psychological and pedagogical assistance, and continuous collaboration among teachers, psychologists, speech therapists, and social workers. Such coordinated support enables learners with special educational needs to participate

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fully in school life while developing their academic, social, and emotional potential alongside their peers.

Furthermore, the case examined in this article illustrates that inclusive education produces positive outcomes not only for learners with special educational needs but also for the entire school community. Daily interaction among students with diverse abilities fosters empathy, mutual respect, cooperation, and social responsibility, thereby strengthening an inclusive school culture. Although challenges related to teacher preparation, resource allocation, and sustainable funding remain, the successful practices implemented at the school demonstrate that inclusive education can be effectively integrated into mainstream educational settings when supported by coherent educational policies, professional commitment, and evidence-based pedagogical strategies. These findings further emphasize the importance of expanding similar inclusive models to other educational institutions seeking to ensure equal learning opportunities and high-quality education for every learner.

### **Conclusion**

Inclusive education has evolved from a policy objective into a fundamental principle of modern educational systems, promoting equal access to quality education for all learners regardless of their individual abilities, disabilities, or social backgrounds. The findings of this study demonstrate that successful inclusion requires more than the physical placement of students with special educational needs in mainstream classrooms. It depends on the establishment of a comprehensive educational environment characterized by individualized instruction, multidisciplinary collaboration, psychological support, accessible learning resources, continuous teacher professional development, and active family participation. The practical experience of the Petre Ștefănuță Theoretical Lyceum in Ialoveni illustrates that when these components function in an integrated manner, inclusive education

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contributes significantly to students' academic achievement, social participation, emotional well-being, and overall quality of life.

At the same time, the study confirms that the sustainability of inclusive education depends on continuous educational reform, adequate financial resources, institutional commitment, and evidence-based pedagogical practices. Strengthening cooperation among educators, psychologists, social workers, healthcare professionals, families, and local communities remains essential for responding effectively to the diverse needs of learners.

Furthermore, the integration of innovative teaching strategies, digital technologies, and inclusive educational policies can further improve learning outcomes and strengthen educational equity. Consequently, the experience analyzed in this article demonstrates that inclusive education is not only a mechanism for protecting the educational rights of children with special educational needs but also an effective strategy for building more equitable, participatory, and socially cohesive educational systems capable of preparing all learners for successful participation in contemporary society.

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