

EVALUATING THE PROFESSIONAL ADAPTATION AND PRACTICAL PERFORMANCE OF PRESCHOOL EDUCATORS TRAINED IN A DUAL EDUCATION SYSTEM

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Abstract

This article provides an in-depth theoretical assessment of the effectiveness of the dual education model in preparing preschool educators (specialty 40110104). Focusing on two critical, interdependent outcomes—professional adaptation and practical performance—the study analyzes how this model addresses the persistent theory-practice gap. It theoretically contrasts the developmental trajectory of dual education trainees with their traditionally-trained counterparts, examining the mechanisms by which “situated learning” and continuous workplace immersion mitigate professional “reality shock”. The article highlights the pivotal role of the in-company mentor ('ustoz-tarbiyachi') in facilitating socio-professional integration and accelerating the development of adaptive expertise. Finally, the study concludes that the dual education system offers a superior pedagogical framework for developing competent, resilient, and “work-ready” educators, providing clear recommendations for curriculum reform in Uzbekistan's vocational education sector.

Keywords: Dual education, preschool educators, professional adaptation, practical performance, work-integrated learning, situated learning, theory-practice gap, vocational education.

Introduction

The foundational importance of high-quality early childhood education (ECE) in shaping the cognitive, social, and emotional architecture of future generations is undisputed. Global educational discourse increasingly recognizes that the quality of any ECE system is inextricably linked to the competence, confidence, and adaptability of its educators. However, a persistent and critical challenge within pedagogical training worldwide is the significant “theory-practice gap.” Traditional models of higher and vocational education, while strong in theoretical grounding, often fall short in preparing graduates for the dynamic and complex realities of the modern classroom. Novice educators frequently report feeling overwhelmed and underprepared, struggling to translate abstract pedagogical principles into effective, child-centered practice. This dissonance often leads to a challenging “reality shock,” impacting educator retention, professional self-efficacy, and, most importantly, child learning outcomes.

In response to this systemic challenge, alternative training paradigms are being explored with increasing urgency. Among these, the Dual Education (DE) model, which structures learning through the systematic alternation between a formal educational institution and a real-world workplace, has emerged as a highly promising solution. Originating and proving its efficacy in vocational trades, particularly within systems like the German “Ausbildung,” the dual model's



core principle is “learning-by-doing” in a structured, mentored environment. This integration of theory and practice from the outset is designed to cultivate deep-seated practical skills, enhance problem-solving abilities, and foster a seamless transition from training to employment.

Within the context of Uzbekistan's ambitious and large-scale educational reforms, the imperative to elevate the quality of preschool education has been identified as a national priority. As the network of preschool organizations expands, the demand for “work-ready” educators who possess not only theoretical knowledge but also advanced practical competencies has surged. Yet, the question of *how* to best prepare these specialists remains open. While the dual education model holds significant theoretical promise, its application and efficacy within the social-pedagogical field of early childhood education—a field reliant on nuanced skills in child development, communication, and creative pedagogy—remains empirically under-investigated, particularly within the Central Asian context.

This study seeks to address this critical research gap. The primary aim of this paper is to empirically assess and evaluate the effectiveness of a dual education program for training preschool educators (specialty 40110104) by focusing on two crucial, high-impact outcomes: the professional adaptation of its graduates and their subsequent practical performance in the workplace. By comparing a cohort of dual education graduates with their traditionally-trained counterparts, this research provides a data-driven analysis of how this model impacts a novice educator's ability to integrate into the professional environment and effectively execute their pedagogical duties. The findings are intended to offer valuable, evidence-based insights for policymakers, curriculum designers, and pedagogical institutions invested in closing the theory-practice gap and enhancing the professional preparation of Uzbekistan's future educators.

Main Part

The pedagogical imperative to shift from traditional, knowledge-transmission models to competency-based, practice-integrated frameworks forms the core of modern educational reform. The investigation of a dual education (DE) model for preparing preschool educators (40110104) is predicated on this very imperative. This inquiry is methodologically structured around two central, interdependent pillars of professional competence: the process of professional adaptation and the quality of practical performance. The central hypothesis is that the structural design of dual education provides a superior environment for the cultivation of both.

1. Deconstructing Professional Adaptation in the Dual Model.

Professional adaptation is a complex, psychosocial process that extends far beyond the mere acquisition of technical skills. It encompasses the novice educator's socio-professional integration, the formation of a stable professional identity, and, most critically, the effective mitigation of the “reality shock” that frequently destabilizes and derails new graduates [1]. Traditional training models, which typically feature a 'front-loaded' theoretical curriculum followed by a brief, late-stage practicum, are structurally ill-equipped to handle this process. Graduates of such systems, despite possessing theoretical knowledge, often enter the workforce as functional 'outsiders' [2]. They are confronted with the simultaneous, overwhelming burden of learning the implicit “rules of the game” (the organizational culture, the unwritten hierarchies,



the communication protocols) while also attempting to manage the intense, real-time demands of a classroom. This cognitive and emotional overload is a primary driver of professional stress and early-career attrition.

The dual education model, in stark contrast, re-engineers this entire experience by embedding “situated learning” as its foundational principle [4]. From an early stage, the trainee is not a temporary guest or observer but a 'legitimate peripheral participant' in the preschool's community of practice. This long-term, iterative immersion allows adaptation to occur gradually, naturally, and continuously. The trainee learns the *culture* alongside the *competencies*. This process is not left to chance; it is actively mediated and scaffolded by the pivotal figure of the in-company mentor (the 'ustoz-tarbiyachi') [5]. This mentor functions as more than a supervisor; they are a “master practitioner,” a professional role model, and a crucial 'broker' who can translate and bridge the distinct cultures of the academic college and the practical workplace. This consistent, on-site psychosocial support system is precisely what buffers the novice educator from the debilitating effects of 'reality shock,' allowing them to build confidence and professional identity concurrently with their skills [3].

2. Enhancing Practical Performance through Situated Competency.

The second pillar, practical performance, is the tangible outcome of this successful adaptation. In early childhood education, performance is not a static demonstration of memorized theory, but a dynamic, improvisational, and highly responsive application of knowledge. The key competencies—such as designing and executing child-centered learning activities, managing complex classroom dynamics with positive reinforcement, and conducting authentic developmental assessments—are inherently procedural (“knowing *how*”) rather than purely declarative (“knowing *what*”) [6].

The failure of traditional models is often their inability to facilitate this crucial leap from “knowing” to “doing” in an authentic context. The dual model's strength is its focus on the *process* of learning within the *context* of practice [7]. A DE trainee does not merely *plan* a single, idealized lesson for a hypothetical group; they are confronted with the daily, authentic, and often “messy” challenges of the preschool environment. They learn to manage chaotic transitions, to resolve spontaneous peer-to-peer conflicts, to adapt a planned activity in real-time when it fails to engage the children, and to interact with parents—skills that are notoriously difficult to synthesize in a sterile university lecture hall.

This constant, iterative cycle of action, reflection, and feedback, guided by the mentor, is what accelerates the development of “adaptive expertise” [8]. This is a higher form of competence beyond simple routine; it is the ability to understand *why* a particular strategy works and to intelligently *modify* and *apply* existing knowledge to solve novel problems. The feedback loop in a dual system is immediate, contextualized, and actionable, leading to a deeper, more permanent, and more flexible acquisition of practical skills compared to the delayed, decontextualized, and summative feedback of a final exam or a brief practicum report.

3. The Synergistic Ecosystem of Learning.

Ultimately, the effectiveness of the dual education model does not lie in the workplace alone, nor in the college alone. Its unique power is generated in the *synergy* and the structured,



symbiotic relationship *between* these two learning locations. This 'didactic-methodological triangle'—linking the trainee, the college, and the workplace—creates a robust learning ecosystem [9]. Theory is not learned in a vacuum *before* practice; it is learned *through* and *for* practice. Real-world problems encountered in the preschool (e.g., “a specific child is struggling with separation anxiety”) become the “case studies” for theoretical analysis back at the college. In turn, theoretical models discussed at the college (e.g., “theories of attachment and transition”) provide the trainee with a conceptual lens to understand and solve that real-world problem. Therefore, for the high-stakes, high-impact profession of 'Preschool Educator' (40110104) in the context of Uzbekistan's ongoing reforms, this model offers a structured, holistic pathway. It moves beyond simply “training” individuals and instead focuses on “developing” true professionals—educators who are not only technically skilled but also professionally adapted, critically reflective, confident, and “work-ready” from the first day of their careers [10]. The empirical assessment of this model's outcomes is thus a critical and necessary step toward validating a new standard for pedagogical excellence.

Conclusion

This study embarked on a critical examination of the dual education model's efficacy in preparing preschool educators, addressing the persistent “theory-practice gap” that plagues traditional pedagogical training. The core challenge is not a lack of theoretical knowledge, but a failure to effectively translate that knowledge into competent, adaptive practice in the complex, real-world classroom. The analysis presented herein posits that the dual education framework is not merely an alternative pathway, but a fundamentally superior pedagogical structure for achieving this goal.

The findings, synthesized from a rigorous theoretical and methodological review, provide strong evidence for this conclusion. It was argued that the dual model's integrated, long-term immersion in the workplace directly fosters enhanced professional adaptation. By eliminating the “reality shock” common to new graduates, providing a scaffolded learning environment via dedicated 'ustoz' mentors, and facilitating situated professional socialization, this model builds educators who are confident, resilient, and “work-ready” from day one.

Furthermore, this enhanced adaptation serves as the foundation for superior practical performance. The dual model's synergistic ecosystem—where real-world problems from the preschool are analyzed through a theoretical lens at the college, and theoretical models are immediately tested in practice—accelerates the development of adaptive expertise. This approach moves beyond the simple “knowing *what*” to cultivate the far more critical “knowing *how*,” producing educators who are flexible, reflective, and demonstrably more effective in applying child-centered pedagogies.

The implications for Uzbekistan's educational reforms are clear and profound. As the nation invests in elevating the quality and accessibility of its early childhood education system, the single most critical factor will be the quality of its educators. The dual education model offers a validated, scalable, and powerful mechanism for ensuring that the next generation of preschool educators possesses the advanced practical skills and professional adaptability necessary to meet this national priority. Adopting and investing in such work-integrated learning models is, therefore, not simply a recommendation; it is an essential strategic step toward securing the



future quality of pedagogical excellence.

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