



## **Perspectives and Problems of Inclusion Education in Kazakhstan during Covid 19**

**Shynar Gabdrakhmanova** <sup>a\*</sup>, K.Zhubanov Aktobe Regional State University, Kazakhstan

**Gulaiym Turetayeve** <sup>b</sup>, K.Zhubanov Aktobe Regional State University, Kazakhstan

**Svetlana Doszhanova** <sup>c</sup>, K.Zhubanov Aktobe Regional State University, Kazakhstan

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### **Abstract**

The XXI century is characterized by the understanding that only individual self-realization is the primary goal of any social development. These changes in public consciousness have caused the emergence of a new paradigm of education based on approaches and concepts developed by modern practice. This includes the idea of "inclusive education." Inclusive education in Kazakhstan is in the formation process, therefore, establishing a system of inclusive education requires a solution at the state level. Coupled with the global pandemic which has affected every person especially the most vulnerable kids, the State Program for the Development of Education and Science in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2020-2025 raises an urgent problem of developing inclusive education. This study conducted a survey using an online poll with participants who are parents of kids with special needs. We asked what kind of challenges they met during Covid 19 pandemic time. Respondents ranked the following topics as the most complicated: lack of funding and resources reduced effectiveness of the educational staff training system, unregulated management and legislative framework, weak coordination of external services, and insufficient participation of the public and private sectors. The results of the research demonstrated that very few schoolchildren with special educational needs receive quality inclusive education.

**Keywords:** Covid 19; inclusive education; special needs, parents.

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\* ADDRESS FOR CORRESPONDENCE: Shynar Gabdrakhmanova , K.Zhubanov Aktobe Regional State University, Kazakhstan  
E-mail address: [alogoritm@bk.ru](mailto:alogoritm@bk.ru)

## 1. Introduction

The modern world is undergoing a radical change in approaches toward education and socio-cultural policy in general (Falanga, De Caroli & Sagone, 2020). This is due to the reorientation of society towards the development and formation of personal qualities (Musa & Bichi, 2019). The XXI century is characterized by the understanding that only individual self-realization is the primary goal of any social development. These public consciousness changes have caused the emergence of a new paradigm of education based on approaches and concepts developed by modern practice. They include the idea of "inclusive education." UNESCO has given the most universal definition of inclusive education as a holistic phenomenon that implies equal access to quality education for all children without exception. It is based, in our opinion, on humanism, the development of intelligence and creativity, the balance of intellectual, ethnic, emotional, and physiological components of personality (Alekhina, Klochko, Avilocheva, & Sedykh, 2020; Ulgener et al., 2020).

In historical development, the educational system of children with disabilities (DD) has gone from isolation to inclusion. The history of children with special developmental needs at school can be divided into the following stages. At the beginning of the 60-s, the leading conception about disability was a "medical model." In the "medical mode" Developmental Disability (DD) should be "cured", so children with DD or Intellectual Disability (ID) were separated. From the mid-60s to mid-80s - "normalization model," integrating people with disabilities in public life. From the mid-80s until now - the "inclusion model," i.e., inclusion (Fetalieva et. Al., 2016).

The development of inclusive education highlights several landmark events. One of the first of such developments and the expression of inclusive education's philosophy was the principle of "normalization." The Nordic countries began referring to this 40 years ago. This was the definition of the process that allowed people with disabilities "to lead everyday lives in conditions as close as possible to those in ordinary society." The 1975 Act on the Education of Children with Disabilities, which included the requirement to educate children with disabilities in the "least restrictive environment", should be highlighted. Moreover, in June 1994 the "Salamanca Declaration" was adopted, demonstrating the international community's commitment to education for all (The Salamanca Statement Framework for Action, *n.d.*). The Declaration includes the following provisions: 'persons with special educational needs should have access to learning in regular schools, which should provide them with an environment based on child-centered pedagogical methods to meet these needs'; 'regular schools with such an inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating an enabling environment in communities, building an inclusive society and providing education for all'. More recently, in December 2006, the 61st session of the United Nations General Assembly endorsed the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which contains significant obligations of States Parties concerning inclusive *education (Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) | United Nations Enable, 2016).*

The United States has enacted the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, which requires teachers to use science-based teaching programs based on research (Mitchell & Sutherland, 2020; Amare & Dagnew, 2020). The main characteristics of these programs:

- 1) the programs are theoretically sound.
- 2) have been independently evaluated.
- 3) have been published in professional journals.

- 4) are sustainable.
- 5) can be replicated in different settings.
- 6) the data demonstrate their effectiveness.

The Act also requires all states to ensure all students' progress (including children with special educational needs), that is, continuous and substantial improvement in learning achievement. There is a similar policy in the UK, however, not only about education. The UK Government requires legislators to have up-to-date and extensive information on research and best practice and base all decisions on this. For a long time, using a science-based approach in practice has been common in areas such as medicine, agriculture and technology. In education, it was introduced several decades ago.

In Europe, three main directions can be identified for developing inclusive education (*Special Education across Europe in 2003 Trends in provision in 18 European countries European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education, 2003*). The first one includes developing policies that focus on the inclusion of virtually all students in mainstream education practice. This is confirmed by the wide variety of resources and opportunities in mainstream schools (Spain, Greece, Italy, Portugal, Sweden, Iceland and Norway). The second covers those countries that use several approaches for inclusion. They offer a wide range of services within two education systems: regular and special (Denmark, France, Luxembourg, Austria, Finland, etc.). The third direction includes two different education systems. Pupils with special educational needs are usually taught in special schools or special classes. These systems are regulated by separate legislation for special education and regular education (Belgium, Switzerland, Germany, Netherlands).

The State Program for the Development of Education and Science in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2020-2025 raises an urgent problem of developing inclusive education ("State Program of Education Development until 2025: Updating curricula, supporting science and electronic UNT," n.d.). Thus, according to its data, only 20 percent of kindergartens, 60 percent of schools, and 30 percent of colleges have created inclusive education conditions. Only 28.2 percent of preschool-age children and 46.5 percent of schoolchildren with special educational needs are covered by quality inclusive education (Nogaybaeva, 2017). The deficit of specialists for children's psychological and pedagogical support in an inclusive environment is 64%. However, to address this problem, the priority objective 5.1.3 of the program is to provide a safe and comfortable learning environment. In the "Conceptual Approaches to the Development of Inclusive Education in the Republic of Kazakhstan", the following categories of children relate to persons with special needs:

- children with disabilities.
- migrants, returnees, refugees, and children from families in need.
- children with social adaptation problems in society (orphans, vulnerable children, deviant behavioral children, children with low socio-economic and socio-psychological levels).

Nogaybayeva (2017) highlighted the problems of inclusive education development in Kazakhstan: the OECD conclusions. These include the following.

- lack of funding and resources.
- poor effectiveness of the teacher training system.
- Unregulated management and legislative framework.
- the poor coordination of external services.

- Insufficient involvement of the public and private sectors.

At the same time, the authors propose specific areas of action needed for the quality development of inclusive education:

- normative legal support.
- training, methodological, logistical and personnel support.
- management.
- information and outreach work.
- monitoring at all levels.

## 2. Research Methods

This research was a qualitative study which collected data with the help of a survey. Unlike more traditional methods of conducting interviews in person, this study conducted online polls. The participants for the polls consisted of parents of kids with special needs. The poll questions covered what kind of challenges they met during Covid 19 pandemic time with regards to their wards and inclusive education. The main obstacle for this research was to identify and recruit suitable participants. The medium of conducting the poll was social media. Social Media sites such as Facebook was used to ask parents of special needs what they think about inclusive education especially in a global pandemic period. The group is open, so we used a messenger to communicate with parents. The research collected a total of 1710 responses from parents in Kazakhstan. The respondents were members of an open Facebook group “Autism, therapy, inclusion”. The total number of participants in this group is 68 thousand parents. The group was created 6 year ago and it is a Russian speaking group.

## 3. Results

The following categories of children refer to persons with special needs: children with special needs, migrants, repatriates, refugees, and children from needy families, children with social adaptation problems in society (orphans, vulnerable children, deviant behavioral children, children with low socio-economic and socio-psychological level). We interviewed 1710 parents in Kazakhstan and asked them to name the main problems. The respondents were member of open Facebook group “Autism, therapy, inclusion. The total number of participants is 68 thousand parents. The group was created 6 year ago. It is to be noted that this Facebook group is a Russian speaking group.

The respondent’s answers which we got by creating a poll were:

- lack of reasonable accommodation in general education schools (76%).
- issues with physical accessibility in schools. This problem was specifically theme of extreme complaints for CIS parents (87%).
- not enough assistants to help within the school. This problem was very actual for parents in Russia (43%).
- the need to further develop the individual approach (93%).
- discrimination in the admission of children with disabilities (93%).
- problems related to special schools/low level of education in some special schools (29%).

We knew that School closure affected parents, we requested some participants to answer on a question “What is main problems during Covid 19?”. That was overly sensitive topic because respondents were shocked with number of aggression and homicides in a special population.

Parents (N=147) mentioned with Covid closure they also face these problems:

- separation from the local community (2).
- isolation (1).
- Home-study problems (3).

The parents mentioned that the main issue was the access to services for children with disabilities and so on.

#### 4. Discussion

Inclusive education is a fundamentally new system where pupils and teachers work on a common goal - affordable and quality education for all children without exception (Alekhina, 2015; Suralaga et al., 2021).

Analysis of research on inclusive education reveals the following principles of inclusion:

- ✓ recognition of equal value to society of all pupils and teachers.
- ✓ increased participation of students in the cultural life of local schools while reducing the level of exclusion of some students from mainstream school life.
- ✓ restructuring the school's methodology so that it can fully accommodate the diverse needs of all students living close to the school.
- ✓ removing barriers to learning and full participation in school life for all students, not just those with disabilities or those with special educational needs (Tehdit, 2020).
- ✓ analyze and examine attempts to overcome barriers and improve school accessibility for individual students and implement reforms and changes that benefit all students in the school as a whole.
- ✓ differences among students are resources that facilitate the pedagogical process, not obstacles that need to be overcome.
- ✓ recognition of students' right to education in schools located in their communities.
- ✓ improvement of the situation in schools in general, both for students and for teachers.
- ✓ recognition of the role of schools not only in increasing students' academic performance but also in developing social values.
- ✓ developing supportive and cooperative relationships between schools and communities, recognizing inclusion in education as an aspect of society.

The essence of these principles is in the accessibility of school education for all children living near the school. There should be physical access to schools for students with disabilities - transportation, ramps, elevators.

Inclusive education in Kazakhstan is in the formation process, so for our country, establishing a system of inclusive education requires a solution at the state level. It is inclusive education that will provide children with special educational needs and offer equal opportunities with their healthy peers for maximum adaptation and full integration into society ("The Strategy for development of the Republic of Kazakhstan — Official site of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan," 2020).

The curriculum should be structured so that it is the most mobile such that the diversity of educational methods can meet all students' needs (Aidarbekova et al., 2021). Of particular importance is extracurricular activities that form a student's personality regardless of their health and development capabilities. Inclusion is not an infringement of healthy students' rights in favor of children with

disabilities, but the next stage of social development, when education becomes a fundamental right for all (Naurzalina et al., 2015). Unfortunately, most of the positive aspects presented in the laws are still only on paper. Like in many progressive legislative acts, there is practically no mechanism for their implementation. For the same reason, there is a biased attitude towards inclusive education in society (Sorokoumova, & Averkin, 2012; Simbarashe & Zirima, 2020).

## 5. Conclusion

Inclusion is recognized as a more developed, humane, and effective education system for children with special educational needs and healthy children. Inclusion gives everyone the right to education, regardless of whether they meet or do not meet the school system's criteria. The school performs not only educational functions but is also the main sphere of a child's life. Through respect and acceptance of each of them's individuality is formed a personality with its own educational trajectory. Pupils at school are in a collective, learn to interact with each other, build relationships, and creatively solve academic problems together with their teacher. It is safe to say that inclusive education expands all children's personal abilities and helps develop such qualities as humanity, tolerance, and willingness to help.

At the heart of inclusive education is the position that it is not children created for school. Still, the school is designed for children, that is, the school must be responsive to children's needs and not the other way round; it is not the children who are required to fit within the school's framework. Previously, inclusive education was enshrined in the Standard Rules. The process of teaching children with disabilities in mainstream schools was called 'integrated education'. But the disabled community, parents of children with disabilities did not like integrated education very much. Because it instead meant there is a person with a disease, he is different, not like everyone else, and there is a society, regular, and this sick person needs to be somehow integrated into this normal society. While inclusive education says that we are all different here, everyone is different in their own way. Still, we all belong to this community.

One of the standard practices is Less Restrictive Environment, a small class (from 6 to 12 people). The curriculum adapted to their unique psychophysical capacities, special didactic, corrective-development equipment, and sometimes a mentor assigned to the child and assist him/her in the classes. The biggest challenge for the school is the qualified staff. The staff should better meet the educational needs and social integration of children and adolescents (DD/ ID) and the optimal implementation of social, psychological, and medical support programs.

Thus, inclusive education is complex and debatable. Still, the main thing is that it is truly social, as the interests of a considerable number of people are affected. Society must give any person the right to choose the type of education depending on their interests, needs, opportunities. According to Summers (2019), the breadth of supply in education should be ensured. There is no doubt that the more complex society's structure, the brighter its social differentiation and social stratification.

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