

**Teachers' and Students' Perceptions Towards Inclusive Education at University Level:  
Case Study in Kazakhstan**

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## **Teachers' and Students' Perceptions of Inclusive Education at University Level: Case Study in Kazakhstan**

### **Abstract**

Inclusive education aims to ensure that all students, regardless of ability or disability, have equitable access to quality learning opportunities. It has become a central focus of educational reform worldwide, encouraging teaching practices that accommodate diverse learning needs. In Kazakhstan, significant steps have been taken to promote inclusive education, reflecting the nation's commitment to upholding the right of all citizens to quality education. However, the effectiveness of these efforts depends not only on policy but also on the perceptions and experiences of those directly involved in the educational process.

This study explores the perspectives of students with special educational needs (SEN) and teachers who teach students with special educational needs (SEN) within an inclusive higher education environment, specifically in English language courses. Using a qualitative case study approach, interviews were conducted with both groups to identify the challenges they encounter, as well as their suggestions for improving inclusive practices. Thematic analysis was applied to uncover common concerns, such as gaps in teacher training, limited adapted resources, and the need for more supportive institutional structures.

By highlighting these experiences, the research provides insights that can guide educators, administrators, and policymakers in creating more inclusive and responsive university settings. The study concludes with recommendations for practical improvements and directions for future research on inclusive education in higher education contexts.

## **Университет деңгейіндегі инклюзивті білім туралы мұғалімдер мен студенттердің пікірлері: Қазақстандағы кейс-стади**

### **Аңдатпа**

Инклюзивті білім беру – барлық студенттерге, олардың қабілеттері мен мүмкіндіктеріне қарамастан, сапалы білім алуға тең мүмкіндік жасауға бағытталған. Бұл тәсіл қазіргі заманғы білім беру реформаларының басты бағытына айналып отыр және оқушылардың әртүрлі білім алу қажеттіліктерін қанағаттандыратын оқыту тәжірибесін дамытуға ықпал етеді. Қазақстанда инклюзивті білім беруді ілгерілету бойынша маңызды қадамдар жасалып, әр азаматтың сапалы білім алуға құқығын қамтамасыз етуге бағытталған. Дегенмен, бұл бастамалардың тиімді жүзеге асуы тек саясатқа ғана емес, сонымен қатар білім беру үдерісінің тікелей қатысушыларының көзқарастары мен тәжірибесіне де байланысты.

Бұл зерттеу жоғары оқу орындарындағы ағылшын тілі сабақтарында арнайы білім беру қажеттіліктері бар студенттер мен оқытушылардың инклюзивті білім беру үдерісіне қатысты пікірлерін қарастырады. Сапалы деректерді жинау мақсатында студенттер мен оқытушылармен сұхбат жүргізіліп, олар кездесетін қиындықтар мен инклюзияны жақсарту жөніндегі ұсыныстары зерттелді. Тақырыптық талдау барысында мұғалімдерді дайындаудағы олқылықтар, бейімделген ресурстардың жетіспеушілігі және оқу орнындағы қолдаушы құрылымдардың қажеттілігі сияқты ортақ мәселелер анықталды.

Бұл зерттеу нәтижелері білім беру жүйесінде инклюзивті және жауапты орта қалыптастыруда мұғалімдерге, әкімшілікке және білім саясатын әзірлеушілерге бағыт-бағдар береді. Зерттеу соңында инклюзивті тәжірибені жетілдіру бойынша ұсыныстар мен болашақ зерттеулердің бағыттары айқындалды.

## **Отношение преподавателей и студентов к инклюзивному образованию на университетском уровне: Кейс-стади в Казахстане**

### **Аннотация**

Инклюзивное образование направлено на то, чтобы все студенты, независимо от их способностей или ограничений, имели равный доступ к качественному обучению. Этот подход стал важной частью глобальных образовательных реформ и способствует развитию практик преподавания, учитывающих разнообразие потребностей учащихся. В Казахстане предприняты значительные шаги для поддержки инклюзивного образования, что отражает стремление государства обеспечить право каждого гражданина на получение качественного образования. Однако успешная реализация этих инициатив зависит не только от государственной политики, но и от восприятия и опыта непосредственных участников образовательного процесса.

Данное исследование направлено на изучение взглядов студентов с особыми образовательными потребностями и преподавателей в инклюзивной среде высшего образования, в частности на уроках английского языка. В ходе исследования с участниками были проведены интервью для выявления существующих проблем и сбора предложений по улучшению инклюзивной практики. Тематический анализ позволил выделить общие проблемы, включая недостаточную подготовку преподавателей, нехватку адаптированных ресурсов и потребность в создании более поддерживающих структур в университетах.

Полученные результаты могут быть полезны для педагогов, администраторов и разработчиков образовательной политики с целью создания более инклюзивной и гибкой образовательной среды. В заключение даны рекомендации по совершенствованию практики и направлениям дальнейших исследований в области инклюзивного образования.

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **Introduction**

#### **1.1 Topicality of the paper**

Inclusive education is about making sure that all students—no matter their background, abilities, or disabilities—learn together in mainstream classrooms. It's not just about physical access to schools, but about truly participating and thriving in learning. The goal is to create an educational environment where everyone has the same opportunity to succeed, with the right support in place. Inclusive education is widely seen as a crucial element for achieving educational equity and promoting social justice. It values diversity and strives to provide equal opportunities for all children to grow, learn, and thrive, regardless of their background, ethnicity, disability, gender, or language (UNESCO, 2005, 2020; Nind, 2014)

Globally, this approach has been gaining momentum. The Salamanca Statement (1994) and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006) emphasize that education is a basic right and should be inclusive of all learners. Kazakhstan has shown commitment to these ideas by adopting relevant policies and ratifying international agreements.

At the national level, Kazakhstan has taken several steps to support inclusive education. The Constitution (1995) guarantees equal access to education, and various laws—including the Law on Education (2018) and the Law on Social Protection of Persons with Disabilities (2005)—reinforce the right of children with disabilities to study in general education settings. In recent years, efforts have expanded to higher education as well. The updated Law on Education (2018) defines inclusive education as a system that supports all students based on their needs and abilities. The State Program for the Development of Education and Science (2020–2025) also highlights the importance of inclusion across all levels of education.

Despite these policies, putting inclusion into practice is still challenging. Many schools and universities struggle with limited resources, a lack of trained teachers, and buildings or materials that aren't accessible to everyone. For example, recent reports from UNICEF (2024) and the OECD (2020) show that although there's strong legal backing, practical implementation—especially in higher education—remains inconsistent.

This study focuses on one university in Kazakhstan and looks closely at how inclusive education is experienced there, particularly in English language classes. It explores what students with physical disabilities and English language teachers think about inclusion, what challenges they face, and what could help make the learning environment better. By listening to their voices, the research hopes to offer practical insights that support ongoing efforts to make education more inclusive—not just in policy, but in real classrooms.

## **1.2 Aim and Objectives of the study**

This research aims to investigate university teachers' and students' perceptions of inclusive education. Investigating attitudes of students with special educational needs (SEN) and teachers who teach students with special educational needs (SEN) towards inclusive education in English language classes can enable policy-makers and educators to build more effective programs. Understanding their perspectives will help identify existing gaps or misconceptions, leading to the development of strategies to enhance inclusivity in higher education institutions. In addition, identifying any barriers or challenges to the effective implementation of inclusive education at the university level and proposing recommendations for enhancing the inclusiveness of higher education institutions based on the findings are main objectives of this study.

## **1.3 Research questions of the study**

This study tries to answer following research questions:

1. How do students with special educational needs (SEN) perceive inclusive education, and what challenges do they face in English language classes within an inclusive setting?
2. How do English language teachers perceive inclusive education, and what challenges do they encounter when teaching students with special educational needs (SEN) in an inclusive classroom?
3. What suggestions and improvements do students with special educational needs and teachers who teach students with special educational needs (SEN) propose to enhance inclusivity in university English language education?

#### **1.4 Research hypotheses**

While this study is primarily qualitative and exploratory in nature, it is grounded in the expectation that both students with special educational needs (SEN) and their English language teachers offer valuable yet potentially contrasting perspectives on inclusive education. It is anticipated that while inclusive education is viewed positively in principle, its practical application in university English classes may reveal significant challenges—particularly in assessment practices, classroom adaptation, and student engagement. Students with SEN may express appreciation for accommodations but also note experiences of differential treatment or limited access to resources. Likewise, teachers are expected to show willingness to support inclusion but may highlight barriers such as limited training, institutional support, or time constraints. These expectations frame the inquiry and help guide the study's analysis of inclusive practices in Kazakhstani higher education.

#### **1.5 Methodological basis**

This study is grounded in a qualitative research design, using a case study approach to explore the lived experiences and perspectives of students with special educational needs (SEN)

and English language teachers at a university in Kazakhstan. Thematic analysis was employed to identify key patterns across the data collected through semi-structured interviews. This methodological approach allows for an in-depth understanding of inclusive education as it is practiced and perceived in a real-world university setting.

### **1.6. Problem statement**

Although inclusive education has been increasingly emphasized in national and global education agendas, its implementation at the higher education level, particularly in Kazakhstan, remains under-researched. Much of the existing literature focuses on primary and secondary education or on pre-service teacher training, leaving a gap in understanding how inclusion functions in university-level classrooms, especially in English language instruction. Students with special educational needs often face structural and attitudinal barriers that hinder their full participation and learning, while teachers may struggle to balance inclusive teaching with standardized curricula and limited training. The lack of research that captures the voices of both students and teachers in this context creates a pressing need for evidence-based insights. By addressing this gap, the current study aims to shed light on real-life challenges and perceptions, informing future policy and instructional improvements in inclusive higher education.

### **1.7 Significance of the Study**

The examination of inclusive education at universities adds new theoretical value to existing academic knowledge of inclusive learning at this level. The understanding of teachers' and students' perceptions supports improvements in current theories and models about inclusive education. The findings of the research can potentially have some practical implications for higher education and universities. Universities can devise specially tailored interventions and support mechanisms to make the setting more inclusive. This research has the potential to inform policy-making and frame inclusive education practice at the university level.

## **1.8 Novelty of the study**

Inclusive education has received growing attention in Kazakhstan and internationally and there have been studies of teachers' and students' attitudes towards inclusive education, but there is an evident lack of research examining the reality of inclusive education in higher education specifically among the university students with physical disabilities and the in-service English language teachers who teach them. This study aims to address that gap by exploring the real-life perspectives and challenges faced by both groups in a private university setting. The research focuses on the lived experiences of the people who are directly engaged in inclusive learning. Through the voices of students and teachers, the study will aim to present a more complete image of inclusion as it is in practice and give thoughtful recommendations on how the teaching of English in university classes can be done better. Although there is some research regarding the perceptions of in-service teachers about inclusion in the school environment, little is known about the actual experience of university students with physical disabilities and English language teachers - thus this study comes at an opportune time and is a novel idea.

### **The assumptions were that:**

- Both students with special educational needs (SEN) and their English language teachers would be willing to share their honest perspectives and experiences related to inclusive education.
- Participants would have sufficient experience and understanding of inclusive practices within university English classrooms to provide meaningful insights.
- The university selected for the study reflects broader trends in inclusive education in Kazakhstan's higher education system, allowing for transferable findings.

- Participants would interpret and engage with the concept of inclusion in diverse yet valuable ways, contributing to a richer understanding of inclusive practices.

- The qualitative approach, including interviews, would be an effective means of capturing the depth and complexity of their experiences.

### **1.9 Limitations of the study**

- **Limited Context:** The study was conducted at a single private university in Kazakhstan, which may restrict the generalizability of findings to other institutions or regions.

- **Small Student Sample:** Only two students with physical disabilities participated. While their input was meaningful, the small number limits broader representation of students with SEN. However, this limitation was partially addressed through the inclusion of nine English language teachers with direct experience teaching students with physical disabilities, offering a broader perspective on inclusive practices.

- **Focused Participant Group:** The research centered only on students with physical disabilities and English language teachers who teach students with physical disabilities or chronic health conditions affecting physical functioning. Other types of special educational needs were not the primary focus.

- **Narrow Subject Focus:** The study explored inclusive practices only within English language classrooms, which may not reflect the full range of inclusive experiences across other academic disciplines.

### **1.10 The structure of research**

This thesis is structured into six chapters, each designed to contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the research topic: Teachers' and Students' Perceptions of Inclusive Education at University Level: Case Study in Kazakhstan.

**Chapter 1: Introduction** provides the background and context of the study, outlining global movements for inclusive education alongside the national developments and policies in Kazakhstan. The aim, objectives, and research questions are clearly stated, followed by the significance, novelty, and key terms relevant to the research. This chapter also presents the methodological foundation, assumptions, and the overall structure of the thesis, offering the reader a roadmap for the study.

**Chapter 2: Literature Review** examines previous studies related to inclusive education, particularly focusing on teacher and student perspectives. This chapter is organized into two main sections: one examining teachers' perceptions, challenges, and suggestions, and another looking at the same aspects from students with special educational needs (SEN). Key theoretical concepts are discussed, and relevant gaps in the literature are identified, thereby justifying the need for this research in the Kazakhstani higher education context.

**Chapter 3: Methodology** outlines the research design, emphasizing the qualitative nature of the study and its use of an instrumental case study approach. The chapter provides details on participant selection, sampling strategy, data collection tools and procedures, and ethical considerations. The justification for using qualitative methods is discussed in light of the research goals, which seek to uncover rich, personal insights into inclusive education practices.

**Chapter 4: Findings** presents the data collected through thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) phases of coding. It is divided into two main sections: teachers' and students' perspectives. Each section explores perceptions, challenges, and suggestions for improving inclusive education, supported by selected excerpts from interview transcripts. Subthemes are used to illustrate the depth and variety of experiences and interpretations voiced by the participants.

**Chapter 5: Discussion** interprets the key findings in relation to existing literature. It revisits the main themes identified in the findings chapter and discusses how these insights align with or diverge from previous studies. The discussion also reflects on broader implications, considering how local experiences may resonate with global trends in inclusive education. This chapter aims to connect the empirical data with theoretical frameworks and policy implications.

**Chapter 6: Conclusion** summarizes the study and restates its significance. It discusses limitations that may have influenced the scope and generalizability of the findings, and provides practical implications for educators, policymakers, and institutions. The chapter concludes with suggestions for future research, especially in the context of higher education inclusion in Kazakhstan and other similar settings.

Together, these chapters form a coherent and structured exploration of how inclusive education is perceived and practiced in a university English language context, offering both theoretical and practical contributions to the field.

## CHAPTER 2

### Literature Review

#### 2.1 Unfolding Inclusive education

The prime focus of the modern era's international education reforms is providing inclusive education under which students with different needs may mainstream into ordinary school settings. Policies of inclusive education, having started for differently-abled children, now account for extensive pupil diversity that encompasses students of distinct socioeconomic, language, cultural, and religious milieus, gender, and age.

According to Shalbayeva & et al. (2021) inclusive education is the process of integrating children with special needs into regular schools by providing them with necessary resources, infrastructure, and teaching methodologies suited to them. It uses specialized teaching techniques and individual programs to specifically address and cater to their individual learning needs.

Bryer and Beamish (2019) define inclusive education as a holistic approach that recognizes diversity due to numerous factors, including family, social class, gender, language, socioeconomic status, cultural heritage, and abilities of the individual. It is founded on the basis of human rights and social justice and builds a framework of values and beliefs that acknowledges and caters to these differences in the school setting.

One definition of inclusive education according to Lewin (2008) is creating educational settings that deal with diversity, provide for all, and in this way make people feel belonging. Educating everyone is not only about admitting pupils with disabilities and special needs in ordinary classes but also about changing mentality and approaching education to accommodate every one's different learning styles.

According to Movkebayeva and Iskakova (2016) inclusive education starts by recognizing that differences among students exist. By adopting an inclusive approach to teaching and learning, these differences are not only acknowledged but also respected and used as a foundation for shaping the educational experience.

Akhmetova (2013) indicates that inclusive education refers to collaborative learning that encompasses the arrangement of shared educational classes, recreational activities, and a range of supplementary educational opportunities for both students with disabilities and those without. Moreover, a positive educational setting requires inclusive curriculum design to promote inclusivity and address varied student needs within schools. To identify three fundamental standards, Smucker systematically analyzes inclusive curriculum design. These standards address discrimination, the needs of all students, also pedagogy, content with methods of assessment (Smucker, 2024).

Overall, inclusive education is about creating learning spaces where all students feel valued and supported, no matter their abilities or backgrounds. It's an ongoing effort to build classrooms that truly reflect fairness, respect, and opportunity for everyone.

## **2.2 Teachers' Perceptions, Challenges, and Suggestions for Improving Inclusive Education**

### ***2.2.1 Teachers' Perceptions of Inclusive Education***

Teachers' attitudes play a critical role in the successful implementation of inclusive education. Research suggests that these attitudes are shaped by teachers' educational background and professional experience. When teachers believe in their own teaching abilities, they tend to develop a more positive view of inclusion, which in turn fosters greater support for students with special educational needs (SEN) (Emmers et al., 2020; Piccinin & Maso, 2023; Altes et al., 2024).

For instance, in Italy, teachers who had received professional training in inclusive education reported feeling more confident and were more likely to adopt inclusive teaching strategies (Piccinin & Maso, 2023). Similarly, a study in Hong Kong found that teacher attitudes, along with their emotional responses and actions in the classroom, significantly influenced both academic outcomes and peer relationships for students with SEN. When teachers showed a genuine willingness to support inclusive practices, students benefited from improved performance and greater inclusion (Yang et al., 2024).

In the Central Asian context, Prisiazhniuk, Makoelle, and Zangieva (2024) explored teacher perceptions of inclusive education across Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. Their survey of 869 practicing teachers revealed a promising shift away from exclusionary models toward more inclusive approaches, indicating a growing openness to inclusive education in the region.

Closer to the Kazakhstani context, Shaikheslyamova (2018) studied faculty attitudes toward inclusive education at a national university. The findings emphasized the importance of building supportive learning environments and highlighted the need for faculty development programs to strengthen inclusive teaching practices.

According to these findings, teachers' perceptions of inclusive education are strongly shaped by their training, confidence, and experience. Positive attitudes—especially when supported by professional development—can lead to more inclusive teaching practices and improved outcomes for students with special educational needs. The regional studies also suggest a shift toward more inclusive mindsets in Central Asia, highlighting the growing importance of faculty development and supportive learning environments for successful inclusion.

### ***2.2.2 Challenges in Inclusive Education***

Teaching staff face a significant challenge due to their limited understanding of effective inclusive strategies, especially since many of them have not received formal training in this area. The lack of targeted professional development opportunities leaves educators unprepared to support students with special educational needs (SEN) (Paguirigan, 2020; Altes et al., 2024).

Although both groups of pre-service EFL teachers in the study by Mukhitova, Zakarova, and Kassymova (2024) demonstrated a rather good understanding of the general idea and aims of inclusive education, as well as its historical and regulatory context, students from the private university displayed a stronger grasp of instructional strategies, visible and invisible disabilities, and were more aware of the inclusion of gifted children compared to their counterparts from the state university.

Tergeussizova (2024) observed that many teachers in mainstream Kazakhstani schools tend to overlook students with non-visible disabilities. In most cases, support for learning about inclusive practices was minimal, and administrative assistance was largely absent.

Teachers frequently face practical barriers in managing classrooms and adapting the curriculum to accommodate students with diverse needs, abilities, and learning styles. Balancing both tasks simultaneously demands exceptional commitment, flexibility, and institutional support (Moriña, 2017; Paguirigan, 2020).

According to Chávez (2018) and Altes et al. (2024), both internal and systemic barriers continue to obstruct the creation of inclusive environments in higher education. These include insufficient knowledge and skills, poor infrastructure, and limited administrative backing. Similarly, Bilyalov et al. (2024) noted that special education teachers in Kazakhstan struggle

with a lack of time, resources, and methodological guidance, as well as difficulties in parent communication and managing behavioral issues in inclusive settings.

Makoelle and Burmistrova (2021) further emphasized that while some institutions in Kazakhstan offer coursework on inclusion, there is no systematic or well-developed inclusive education curriculum in place. Moreover, pre-service teachers rarely complete their practicum in inclusive environments, which restricts their exposure to real-world inclusive teaching.

Taken together, these findings reveal that the absence of formal training, practical experience, and institutional support contributes significantly to the challenges teachers face in inclusive education. These interconnected issues suggest that without a more structured and supportive system, educators may remain underprepared to effectively serve students with diverse needs.

### ***2.2.3 Suggestions for Improving Inclusive Practice***

Teachers across various contexts emphasize the critical need for targeted training to effectively implement inclusive education. In Hungary, teachers who received comprehensive training in SEN strategies demonstrated greater competence in using inclusive technology tools to support students with special educational needs (Magyar et al., 2020). Similarly, in Singapore, Poon et al. (2016) found that teacher confidence in instructing SEN students significantly influenced their attitudes toward inclusion, highlighting the role of professional development in building the necessary skills and assurance.

To ensure meaningful progress in inclusive education, institutions must offer both thorough training and ongoing support. As noted by Altes et al. (2024) and Yang et al. (2024), comprehensive teacher education enhances the ability to apply inclusive practices effectively. However, training alone is not sufficient. Rahmi et al. (2024) stress the importance of cultivating

a supportive environment that promotes positive attitudes and addresses teacher concerns early in the process.

At the higher education level, Moriña (2017) advocates for policies that address the diverse learning needs of all students. These strategies help create more open and inclusive academic environments. In Kazakhstan, Jangeldinova, Tleuzhanova, and Eskazinova (2024) highlight the importance of practical, methodology-focused instruction in pre-service teacher programs to prepare future educators for inclusive classrooms.

Echoing this, Tussupbekova, Hernandez-Torrano, and Helmer (2024) report teachers' suggestions for improving preparation programs: cultivating mentorship cultures, forming partnerships with mainstream schools, and integrating hands-on training in inclusive methods. Makoelle and Burmistrova (2021) further emphasize the need to design inclusive education courses, include practicum experience in diverse classrooms, and ensure teacher educators themselves are equipped to model inclusive practices.

Beyond instructional design, Makoelle (2020) draws attention to the importance of reforming educational language to reflect contemporary understandings of inclusion. Updating the terminology in policy and instructional materials can help combat stigma and foster a more inclusive mindset. These views are supported by Jangeldinova et al. (2024), Agavelyan et al. (2020), Magauova et al. (2024), and Amanova et al. (2023), who advocate for specialized training that enhances the confidence and capability of both teachers and university staff in supporting SEN students.

Together, these studies suggest that without structured, ongoing, and practical training—supported by inclusive institutional culture and language—efforts toward inclusive education may remain superficial. The findings make clear that teachers' willingness and

effectiveness are directly tied to how well they are prepared and supported. Therefore, enhancing training programs and fostering inclusive environments are essential steps toward sustainable and meaningful inclusive education.

## **2.3 Students' Perceptions, Challenges, and Suggestions for Improving Inclusive Education**

### ***2.3.1 Perceptions of Inclusive Education***

Inclusive education aims to integrate students with special educational needs (SEN) into mainstream classrooms by ensuring full access to education and creating supportive learning environments. This section reviews how students perceive inclusive education, along with the challenges and solutions they identify.

Research in Kazakhstan's higher education system suggests that inclusive education is still a developing concept. According to Malinovskiy et al. (2023), students with disabilities often choose universities based on practical factors like location or access to state-funded placements, rather than any established reputation for inclusivity. Many reported being unaware of support services at the time of enrollment. Similarly, Gorbunova et al. (2020) noted that while students appreciated the idea of inclusion, they were often disappointed by the limited steps taken by institutions to implement it meaningfully.

Students with SEN often report lower levels of perceived inclusion than their peers. Initial experiences tend to be marked by reduced academic confidence and a weaker emotional connection to the school community. However, these feelings are not static. Over time, and with the right support, students can gain confidence and develop a stronger sense of belonging (DeVries et al., 2018).

The way inclusive practices are implemented also plays a critical role. Alnahdi et al. (2022) highlighted the importance of personalized strategies, such as differentiation and

individual support. These methods help students feel more accepted, both socially and emotionally, and foster greater confidence in their academic abilities.

Positive interaction with educators and peers is another key factor shaping how students with SEN perceive inclusion. Arnaiz-Sanchez et al. (2022) emphasized that school engagement is largely built through meaningful interpersonal relationships, which significantly affect students' overall experience.

In the German context, Heyder et al. (2020) found that students with SEN often reported comparable levels of happiness at school as their non-disabled peers. However, many felt excluded from social activities, which impacted their friendships and sense of group belonging. This highlights the limitation of physical inclusion alone—merely sharing a classroom space does not automatically foster genuine inclusion. True inclusivity requires cultivating a classroom culture where every student feels valued, accepted, and connected.

Overall, these findings suggest that while physical integration is increasingly common, emotional and social inclusion remains a complex and ongoing challenge. Genuine inclusion requires more than accessibility—it depends on awareness, tailored support, and positive relationships that foster a true sense of belonging among all students.

### ***2.3.2 Challenges in Inclusive Education***

Inclusive education faces persistent challenges, particularly in how consistently inclusive practices are applied by educators. While some teachers make deliberate efforts to include all students, others do not, resulting in uneven experiences for students with special educational needs (SEN) (Schwab et al., 2019). The attitudes of peers without SEN also play a role. Students who have had prior contact with individuals with disabilities or more knowledge about disabilities often display more inclusive behaviors (Rahmi et al., 2024). However, differing

perceptions among students, parents, and teachers about how well inclusion is being implemented suggest that underlying biases persist and regular assessments are necessary (Schwab et al., 2020).

At the institutional level, a major obstacle is the absence of a universally accepted definition of inclusion. Without a common understanding, universities adopt varied strategies, often leading to inconsistent outcomes. This lack of clarity causes confusion among staff and students about what inclusion should look like and hampers efforts to implement effective, coherent practices (Dell'Anna et al., 2019).

Students transitioning from inclusive approaches in earlier education stages face difficulties when higher education institutions fail to adapt teaching methods accordingly. Clear strategies and consistent frameworks are needed to ensure a smooth educational experience at the tertiary level (Moriña, 2017).

In Kazakhstan, although the principles of inclusive education are increasingly accepted as a human right and seen as a way to promote social equity (Amanova et al., 2023), many still associate inclusion narrowly with disability, neglecting broader dimensions of diversity (Makoelle, 2020). This limited understanding hinders progress toward building inclusive academic environments.

Structural barriers are also significant. As reported by Malinovskiy et al. (2023), the lack of institutional policies, poor communication about support services, and inadequate guidance leave students feeling unsupported. Similarly, Gorbunova et al. (2020) highlighted physical access issues, such as a lack of ramps or elevators, and the absence of dedicated support units, further excluding students from full academic and social engagement.

Language and conceptual frameworks inherited from the Soviet era continue to reinforce outdated views of disability and diversity, making it harder to shift mindsets toward more inclusive, equitable education (Makoelle, 2020). This contributes to negative or limited perceptions of SEN students and undermines inclusive efforts.

The lack of systematic academic and psychological support also contributes to the learning difficulties and reduced career readiness of SEN students. Universities often fail to offer environments that nurture the holistic development of these students (Magauova et al., 2024; Helmer et al., 2020).

In addition, many educators lack sufficient training and confidence to implement inclusive practices effectively. Their psychological readiness and attitudes—ranging from supportive to hesitant—are strongly influenced by their professional preparation (Jangeldinova et al., 2024; Agavelyan et al., 2020; Amanova et al., 2023). Some resource centers do show promise but remain concentrated in major cities, limiting their reach (Helmer et al., 2020).

Despite supportive legislation, universities in Kazakhstan often lack accessible facilities, adaptive materials, and technology for students with physical disabilities (Maksatova, 2024). While tools like digital media have helped improve language learning (Nurshat et al., 2021), the absence of varied, user-friendly learning methods remains a major barrier.

In conclusion, the challenges identified across studies indicate that inclusive education cannot succeed through policy alone. Its effective realization requires clear definitions, structural support, trained educators, and sustained attitudinal change to ensure equitable academic and social experiences for all students.

### ***2.3.3 Suggestions to Improve Inclusive Education***

Improving inclusive education in higher education requires targeted, student-informed reforms that address both structural and emotional aspects of inclusion. Students across several studies have shared clear suggestions for what can help make their learning environments more inclusive and supportive.

According to Malinovskiy et al. (2023), students expressed a strong desire for better awareness of their rights and available services. They also advocated for expanding distance learning options, which they saw as enhancing accessibility and flexibility. Similarly, Gorbunova et al. (2020) reported that students recommended establishing specialized support services, including dedicated disability offices, counselling centers, and improved campus infrastructure. These suggestions highlight the need for a well-coordinated institutional strategy grounded in inclusive policy and effective implementation.

Students with special educational needs (SEN) frequently emphasized the value of personalized support and flexible teaching approaches. They called for adaptive strategies such as alternative assessments, extended deadlines, and oral feedback—tools that align better with their learning styles and needs (Agavelyan et al., 2020; Amanova et al., 2023).

Another important theme emerging from the literature is the involvement of students in shaping their educational experiences. As suggested by Magauova et al. (2024), students recommended more opportunities to participate in the co-design of teaching processes, including giving feedback on course materials and classroom practices. This participatory approach helps educators understand real challenges while empowering students as equal partners in the learning environment.

Psychological and pedagogical support is also seen as essential. Helmer et al. (2020) and Magauova et al. (2024) stressed the importance of strengthening these services and making them accessible to all SEN students. Universities are encouraged to invest in systems that offer not only academic support but also guidance for professional development and social integration. Beyond the university, broader collaboration is necessary. Working together with government agencies and NGOs can help push policy reforms and drive cultural change. These partnerships can support the creation of more inclusive practices and ensure that student needs are met consistently across institutions (Rollan & Somerton, 2019). Helmer et al. (2020) further suggested expanding the reach of resource centers, particularly outside major cities, to ensure inclusive practices are accessible nationwide.

Finally, continuous evaluation and refinement of inclusion strategies are essential. Amanova et al. (2023) emphasized that without regular monitoring and adaptation, inclusion efforts risk stagnating or failing to address new barriers.

What emerges clearly from these studies is that while technical improvements—like infrastructure and support systems—are vital, inclusion also hinges on social and emotional dimensions. For students with SEN, feeling valued, accepted, and connected is just as important as having access to services or accommodations.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **Methodology**

#### **3.1 Introduction to the Methodology Chapter**

This chapter outlines the research methodology used to explore teachers' and students' perceptions towards inclusive education at the university level, focusing specifically on English language education. The study aims to understand how students with special educational needs (SEN) and teachers who teach students with special educational needs (SEN) perceive and experience inclusive practices and what challenges they face and what suggestions they offer to improve inclusive education. This chapter details the research design, methodology, participant selection, data collection methods, ethical considerations, and limitations of the study.

#### **3.2 Research Design**

A qualitative research design was employed for this study to investigate the perceptions of students with SEN and teachers who teach students with special educational needs (SEN) towards inclusive education and to better understand how inclusive education is experienced in university English classes. Given the nature of the research questions, which seek to understand lived experiences, real-life views, and suggestions for improvement of students with special educational needs (SEN) and English language teachers, a qualitative approach is most appropriate. Qualitative research allows space for personal stories, challenges, and ideas for improvement to be heard in depth that are not easily captured through quantitative methods (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

A case study approach is particularly suitable for this research because it enables a comprehensive and in-depth examination of the specific context in which inclusive education practices are implemented. In this case, it helps explore how inclusive practices are carried out in actual university settings. As Stake (1995) points out, case studies are ideal when researchers want to

understand something in its full context rather than isolate it from everyday life. Similarly, Shrestha and Bhattarai (2022) explain that case studies are useful in inclusive education because they let us look at many layers—student experiences, classroom interactions, and how the broader university environment supports (or limits) inclusion.

Instrumental case study approach was used, focusing on a single university in Kazakhstan. While the study takes place in just one institution, the goal is to understand a wider issue—how inclusive education works in university English classrooms, especially from the perspective of students with special educational needs (SEN) and teachers who teach students with special educational needs (SEN). This approach makes it possible to look closely at real experiences and classroom practices, helping to explore broader patterns and challenges related to inclusion. As Stake (1995) points out, instrumental case studies are useful when the case itself helps researchers better understand a larger topic or issue. This study focuses on both sides of the learning process—students with special educational needs and their English teachers—to get a full picture of what inclusion looks like in practice. It aims to highlight not just perceptions, but also day-to-day difficulties and thoughtful suggestions from those directly involved.

### **3.2.1 Participants**

Participants in this study include two students with special educational needs (physical disabilities) from different academic programs, all of whom have taken English language courses as part of their undergraduate curriculum and nine English language teachers who are currently teaching, or have previously taught, students with special educational needs (physical disabilities or chronic health conditions affecting physical functioning) in this university.

### **3.2.2 Sampling Strategy**

In this study, a purposive sampling strategy was applied to ensure that the participants selected could provide meaningful and relevant insights into the topic. Since the focus is on inclusive education within English language classrooms at the university level, it was important to involve those who are directly engaged in this setting—namely, English language instructors and students with physical disabilities. As Palinkas et al. (2015) suggest, purposive sampling is especially valuable in qualitative research when the goal is to explore specific experiences in depth. By choosing participants based on their direct involvement and knowledge, this approach helped ensure that the data collected would be rich, detailed, and closely aligned with the research questions.

#### **Inclusion Criteria:**

- Students must be officially registered as having special educational needs and have taken English language courses as part of their undergraduate curriculum.
- Teachers must have experience teaching English language classes that include at least one student with special educational needs (physical disabilities or chronic health conditions affecting physical functioning) in this university.

Participation was voluntary, and all participants were informed of the purpose and procedures of the research. All participants are eighteen years of age or older.

### **3.3 Data Collection**

#### **3.3.1 Data Collection Instruments**

Data were collected through individual semi-structured interviews (see Appendices B and C for the interview questions), allowing participants to express their views freely while also ensuring consistency across interviews. Semi-structured interviews made it possible to follow a

clear structure while still leaving room to explore unexpected but meaningful topics that came up during the conversations (Kallio et al., 2016).

Separate interview guides were developed for students and teachers, focusing on:

- Perceptions of inclusive education
- Challenges encountered in English language classrooms
- Suggestions for improving inclusivity

To ensure the data was clear and comprehensive, all interviews were audio recorded with the participants' consent. The recordings were then transcribed to allow for detailed analysis.

### **3.3.2 Data Collection Procedure**

Prior to data collection, participants received information outlining the purpose of the study, their rights as participants, and how their data would be handled. Informed consent (see Appendix A for the consent form) was obtained, and participants were assured that their identities would remain confidential and that their involvement was entirely voluntary. They were also informed that they could withdraw at any point without consequence.

The interviews were conducted in a quiet setting within the university or via video call (zoom), depending on participant preference and accessibility needs. Each session lasted approximately 20-30 minutes. An interview guide was developed based on the main themes of the study—such as perceptions of inclusion, classroom challenges, and recommendations for improvement. This process allowed for both consistency and flexibility—providing a structured approach to cover key themes while also leaving space for participants to share personal experiences and reflect on issues that mattered most to them.

All interviews were audio-recorded with the participants' permission to ensure the accuracy of data. Most of the interviews were conducted in Kazakh or Russian, as these were the

participants' preferred languages. Only one interview was conducted in English. The use of native languages helped participants express their thoughts more comfortably and in greater depth. All interviews were manually transcribed by the researcher, which allowed for close engagement with the data and a deeper understanding of participants' responses. After transcription, each file was reviewed for accuracy. Those interviews in Kazakh or Russian were later translated into English for the purposes of analysis and reporting. Care was taken to ensure that the meaning and tone of participants' responses were preserved during translation.

### **3.4 Data analysis**

The data collected from the interviews was analysed using thematic analysis, following the approach outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2021). This method was selected because it offers flexibility in identifying and interpreting patterns across qualitative data, making it suitable for exploring the perceptions, challenges, and suggestions of both students with special educational needs (SEN) and English language teachers who are currently teaching, or have previously taught, students with special educational needs (physical disabilities or chronic health conditions affecting physical functioning) in an inclusive university setting (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2021). After transcribing the interviews, we familiarised ourselves with the data by reading and re-reading the transcripts. Initial codes were then generated manually, capturing key ideas and repeated patterns. These codes were further organised into potential themes that reflected both the participants' shared experiences and unique viewpoints. Throughout the process, we ensured that the themes were refined and accurately represented the data set. This approach supported a rich and detailed understanding of the issues surrounding inclusive English language education in Kazakhstan's higher education context.

### **3.5 Ethical Considerations**

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the university's research ethics committee. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection. Participants were assured of confidentiality, and codes were used to protect their identities. Special attention was given to the needs of students with disabilities, including offering interview format options, ensuring physical and digital accessibility, and providing accommodations as needed. All collected data was stored securely on password-protected devices. Access to the raw data was limited to the researcher and their academic supervisor, who was involved in overseeing the research process. Both parties handled the data with strict confidentiality in accordance with ethical research guidelines.

## CHAPTER 4

### Findings

This chapter covers the results from the data collection and summarizes what we found in the interviews. The findings shown here match the main goal of the study, which was to understand the experiences and perceptions of students with special educational needs and English language teachers who are currently teaching, or have previously taught, students with special educational needs (physical disabilities or chronic health conditions affecting physical functioning) in this university on the topic of inclusive education.

Once the interview data was analyzed, three main themes were found: perceptions of inclusive education, challenges in English language classes, and suggestions for improvements towards Inclusive education.

The research questions guiding the study were:

How do students with special educational needs (SEN) perceive inclusive education, and what challenges do they face in English language classes within an inclusive setting?

How do English language teachers perceive inclusive education, and what challenges do they encounter when teaching students with special educational needs (SEN) in an inclusive classroom?

What suggestions and improvements do students with special educational needs and English language teachers who teach students with special educational needs (SEN) propose to enhance inclusivity in university English language education?

This research employs a qualitative case study approach to explore university teachers' and students' perceptions of inclusive education in Kazakhstan. A case study design is appropriate as it allows for an in-depth, contextualized understanding of inclusive education practices within a specific setting — the English language teaching context at a university. This approach enables the examination of real-life

experiences, institutional challenges, and the strategies employed by both teachers and students. The case study is bounded by the specific university and academic context, aligning with the principles described by Yin (2018) and Merriam & Tisdell (2016).

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with two students who have special educational needs (physical disability) and nine English language teachers. The flexible interview framework enabled participants to share detailed, experience-based narratives about inclusive teaching and learning.

#### **4.1 Thematic Analysis Phases**

To analyze the data, the researcher applied thematic analysis based on the six-phase process outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2021). This method is well-suited to qualitative research because of its capacity to capture both common patterns and unique perspectives across different participants. Thematic analysis helps to identify and interpret recurring themes while preserving the depth and complexity of individual experiences.

First, we familiarised ourselves with the data by reading and re-reading the interview transcripts to gain an overall understanding and to note initial ideas. This stage allowed us to reflect on both individual and shared perspectives of students with special educational needs (SEN) and teachers who teach students with special educational needs (SEN). In the second phase, we manually generated initial codes by highlighting meaningful statements related to perceptions of inclusion, challenges in inclusive practice, and suggestions for improvement. These codes captured specific points, such as “lack of teacher preparation”, “positive attitude towards inclusive values”, “need for adapted materials”, and “collaborative teaching methods”. During the third phase, we grouped these codes into sub-themes that reflected patterns across the data. These sub-themes were then organised under the main themes of Perceptions of Inclusion,

Challenges to Inclusion, and Suggestions for Improvement. In the fourth and fifth phases, we reviewed and refined the sub-themes to ensure they accurately represented the participants' views and that there was consistency within each theme. We checked that all themes were well-supported by data extracts and relevant to the research questions. Finally, in the sixth phase, we defined and named the sub-themes clearly, ensuring they reflected the essence of the participants' experiences. This process resulted in the main themes and sub-themes that structure the findings chapter. The analysis aimed to present the voices of both students and teachers authentically while highlighting areas for improvement in inclusive English language education in higher education.

#### **4.2 Teachers' Perceptions, Challenges, and Suggestions for Improving Inclusive Education**

This section presents the findings from the thematic analysis of interviews with nine English language teachers (see Table 1) regarding their perceptions and experiences with inclusive education. Findings provide a comprehensive overview of the current state of inclusive education in English language teaching. It highlights the complex and multifaceted nature of inclusivity in higher education and offers recommendations for addressing key challenges.

The analysis aims to address two key research questions:

1. How do English language teachers perceive inclusive education, and what challenges do they face in teaching students with special educational needs (SEN)?
2. What suggestions do teachers offer for improving inclusivity in English language teaching at the university level?

Themes and sub-themes derived from the thematic analysis by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2021) of interviews with teachers are presented in Table 2. These capture their perceptions, the challenges they face, and suggestions for improving inclusive education.

**Table 1***Background information of Teachers*

Partici- pants	Gender	Highest Qualificati on	Teaching experience (in years)	Taught Student with SEN at Current Universi- ty	Prior Experience with Students with Physical Disabilities (Before Current Student)	Type of SEN Taught at Current University
P1	F	Master	2	Yes	No	visual impairments
P2	F	Master	15	Yes	Yes	leukemia
P3	F	Master	8	Yes	No	cerebral palsy
P4	F	Master	10	Yes	Yes	diabetes
P5	F	Master	15	Yes	No	cerebral palsy
P6	F	Master	2	Yes	No	visual impairments
P7	F	Master	12	Yes	Yes	diabetes
P8	M	Candidate of Science	16	Yes	No	leukemia
P9	F	Master	7	Yes	No	visual impairments

*Note.* SEN = Special Educational Needs.

**Table 2**

*Themes and Sub-Themes of Teachers' Perceptions, Challenges, and Suggestions for Improving Inclusive Education*

Themes	Sub-Themes
Teachers' Perceptions of Inclusive Education	Inclusion as Equal Educational Access and Instruction for All Inclusion as Social Integration Inclusion as Safe Learning Environments Inclusion as Psychological and Emotional Support Inclusion as Adapting Materials and Teaching Approaches Inclusion as a Developing Competence
Challenges Faced in Teaching Students with SEN	Teacher training Teaching Materials and Accessibility Classroom Management and Peer Interaction Limitations in Inclusive Participation Due to Activity Design Adaptation to Teaching Methods to Meet Diverse Needs Emotional and Psychological Barriers Assessment Dilemmas and Integrity Concerns Time Constraints and Teacher Workload in Inclusive Practice
Suggestions for Improving Inclusivity	Adaptation and Strategies Employed by Teachers Practical Training, Institutional Support, and Strategic Planning Need for Accessible and Adapted Teaching Materials Personalized Course Design and Individual Learning Plans (ILPs) Establishing Trust and Use of Differentiation

#### **4.2.1 Teacher Perceptions of Inclusive Education**

This section presents the findings from nine university English teachers' interviews, focusing on how they perceive and understand the concept of inclusive education. Based on Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2021) thematic analysis framework, the following sub-themes were

identified. Inclusive education was primarily viewed as an educational approach that emphasizes the integration and equitable participation of students with special educational needs (SEN) within regular classroom settings. However, respondents highlighted the complexity of implementing inclusive education, with each teacher presenting varying degrees of comfort and understanding based on their personal experiences.

#### ***4.2.1.1 Inclusion as Equal Educational Access and Instruction for All***

Several teachers emphasized inclusive education as a matter of equity—ensuring that all students, regardless of background or ability, receive high-quality education.

I view inclusive education as a system that provides the same educational opportunities to everyone—regardless of their circumstances or abilities—whether they are students or pupils.

(P1)

Inclusive education means giving equal rights to all students to have high quality education. It's about enabling all students—regardless of ethnicity, religion, or background—to access the highest level of education equally. (P8)

That's how I understand inclusion—equity and equality, treating everyone equally and designing tasks according to their abilities. (P9)

It refers to providing the students with such opportunities so that they could succeed like all other students (P6)

There is a misconception among some teachers and people that 'inclusion' only refers to those with impairments. That's not accurate. The true definition of inclusion is to treat all people equally. (P8)

#### ***4.2.1.2 Inclusion as Social Integration***

Inclusion was understood not only within educational settings but as part of broader social life, where individuals with special needs live and participate fully alongside others.

The goal of inclusion is to integrate those children, not isolate them—support them psychologically and help them adjust to life like other children. A diagnosis should not become a lifelong sentence in their minds. (P7)

#### ***4.2.1.3 Inclusion as Safe Learning Environments***

Several participants emphasized that inclusive education involves not only addressing students' academic needs, but also creating emotionally safe, supportive classroom environments where all learners feel comfortable, respected, and able to participate fully.

Inclusive education... is about creating a comfortable, supportive, and learning-friendly environment. (P4)

It's about trying to reach every student and respond to their needs, organizing a comfortable zone. (P9)

#### ***4.2.1.4 Inclusion as Psychological and Emotional Support***

Many teachers emphasized the psychological dimension of inclusion, arguing that students with SEN need emotional safety, not pity, to succeed in education.

Emotional support is extremely important for them. You have to encourage and praise them — not excessively, of course, but genuinely. (P5)

Psychological support is essential... A relationship based on trust allows the student to open up and succeed. (P7)

#### ***4.2.1.5 Inclusion as Adapting Materials and Teaching Approaches***

Inclusion was commonly linked with the need to adapt materials, lesson design, and classroom practices to individual student needs.

I think it's when a person has some health issues or mental conditions, and they still should receive education, but at a level that is easier for them. If we talk about English language and inclusion, it's just about adapting all the materials provided to meet the needs of these specific individuals. (P3)

It's about using all those modes—audio, visual, kinesthetic—to design tasks that suit everyone. (P9)

#### ***4.2.1.6 Inclusion as a Developing Competence***

Some teachers admitted that inclusive education was still a new and evolving area in their practice. They expressed uncertainty and a need for structured support.

The idea of inclusive education is something I am still trying to understand. I don't really know how to work with students with strong inclusive needs, how to accommodate them, what a syllabus should look like in such cases—I simply have no concrete ideas. (P2)

Initially, I thought of this student as equal to everyone else, but that's not how it works—there are physical, cognitive, and emotional differences that need to be considered. later I realized, no—it's a whole philosophy. (P5)

I had absolutely no preparation. So I started researching online, asking colleagues who had previous experience. (P5)

### **4.2.2 Challenges Faced in Teaching Students with SEN**

All respondents shared experiences of facing significant challenges when teaching students with special educational needs, with some recurring themes across their interviews.

Based on Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2021) thematic analysis framework, the following sub-themes were identified.

#### ***4.2.2.1 Teacher training***

Many participants emphasized the lack of professional preparation for inclusive education. Teachers often reported feeling underprepared and emotionally overwhelmed when working with students with special educational needs (SEN), especially in the absence of training, guidance.

There's no training or guidance on how to work with SEN students, so we are just doing what we can. (P1)

For instance, I don't know if they have memory problems. What if they do? And maybe they need material to be explained several times or follow a spaced repetition system... If this were explained, it would help. (P3)

If at least one or two instructors per department were trained annually, they could serve as points of contact. We could ask them questions like, "I have a student in this situation—should I only assess final exams? Should I do oral exams? If the student has a visual impairment, should I provide audio-only materials?" (P2)

Emotionally, I really struggled at first. I kept asking myself, "What am I doing? Why am I not doing what I should do for this student?" For half the semester, this student just sat there, and I didn't know how to support this student. (P5)

#### ***4.2.2.2 Teaching Materials and Accessibility***

P1, P6, P9 struggled with the availability and adaptability of teaching materials. In particular, they found that coursebooks and other resources were not designed with SEN students in mind, often creating barriers to learning.

There were no tactile or audio materials... Books should have audio versions... some don't... I had to read them myself three or four times. (P1)

Our university gives us books for children with no visual impairments... there's no readable in this book... (P6)

The first issue was textbook adaptation. We teach from Pathway. I searched for a blind-accessible version—there was none. (P9)

There are challenges in ordering materials which are needed for the teaching process.

For example, when we send an order for a book to be brought to the library it took about six months (P6).

#### ***4.2.2.3 Classroom Management and Peer Interaction***

Many respondents highlighted the difficulties in classroom management when including students with SEN, especially concerning peer interactions. But there was positive peer support too. P6 faced peer rejection when asking other students to assist the student with visual impairments, noting that some students were unwilling to engage.

And I asked another student to help this student and she was like no I wouldn't. Her partner had the same point of view, she rejected my suggestion.

P3 shared a similar experience, mentioning that classmates' perceptions of students with disabilities can create additional obstacles for teachers.

Sometimes they don't realize that, for example, the student comes to class, and they all sit down and take the front seats, for example. Or the student's being dragged by a student, and they need to adjust the desk quickly. They don't get it.

But some respondents said that there are students with awareness too:

The students were very understanding. They waited and offered support. (P4)

Students helped this student carry a bag, push a wheelchair, guide through the building—even students who weren't in this student's group. That's a great sign. (P5)

#### ***4.2.2.4 Limitations in Inclusive Participation Due to Activity Design***

Students with SEN may be unintentionally excluded from group or interactive activities (such as games or tasks requiring physical agility or quick response), leading to feelings of isolation and lack of participation. P3 shared such experience with student with cerebral palsy:

We do group work, pair work, and sometimes we play games, like drawing something on the board quickly. This student can't do that, it's uncomfortable for this student. In these situations, this student ends up being excluded from the activity.

Likewise P9 also shared experience with student with visual impairments:

Challenges remained: not using visuals, explaining statistical graphs, etc. Some activities I normally used in other groups weren't possible—especially visual-based tasks like describing pictures. In fairness to other students, I couldn't use certain techniques.

#### ***4.2.2.5 Adaptation to Teaching Methods to Meet Diverse Needs***

Some teachers adjusted or removed interactive classroom activities to avoid exclusion of students with SEN, which may impact overall engagement and classroom dynamics.

For instance, I had to completely remove interactive games like Kahoot since the student wouldn't be able to participate, and I didn't want to exclude them. It would be unfair if everyone else played and that student just sit (P1).

The only tasks the student couldn't do by own were Kahoot and quizzes. In this case I usually made a group consisting of two other students and they played as three so I just asked them to read the question aloud and this was what I did as well (P6).

P7 mentioned adjusting assignment volume for the SEN student, suggesting that differentiation must be handled discreetly and equitably.

For the student, I sometimes reduced the number or volume of questions.

Similarly, P3 noted that teachers often need to adapt assessment to accommodate different needs and learning styles.

The student told me that they needed a bigger font, and someone from the faculty wrote to me about it too, saying that the font should be at least 16 points and preferably the questions should be in a test format so they wouldn't struggle with writing. That's when I started adapting for this student.

P2 had challenges related to adaptation to teaching methods and individualized curriculum planning:

The main issue with the student is the lack of a tailored syllabus. If there are four course topics, I can't expect the student to cover all four due to their health and medical treatments.

Even if I create one adapted syllabus, it wouldn't work for all students.

#### ***4.2.2.6 Emotional and Psychological Barriers***

Emotional challenges were highlighted by P1 and P5, especially in the early stages of teaching students with disabilities.

I wasn't ready... no inclusive student before... nothing was prepared when the student suddenly came (P1).

I thought it was just a leg injury. But it turns out their whole body is physically weak. When I found out, I became stressed and didn't know what to do (P5).

P6 shared that didn't know how to communicate with visually impaired student:

I was baffled because I didn't even know how to communicate with him... we know about inclusive language, but we don't really know how to interact.

P2 similarly mentioned feeling underprepared and apprehensive at first, only gaining some confidence after experience.

#### ***4.2.2.7 Assessment Dilemmas and Integrity Concerns***

Several participants reported challenges in assessing students with special educational needs, especially when standard assessment formats (e.g., oral exams, classroom participation, timed tasks) could not be applied. This led to concerns about academic fairness, reliability of written work, and the inability to fully assess students' language proficiency.

Because the level of language this student used in writing was quite high, and when this student spoke, it didn't match... I couldn't prove anything. It's hard to check each sentence during class because there are other students. (P9)

I gave project-based speaking assignments to the other students, but I couldn't assess this student's speaking. I teach not only grammar, but also listening and speaking. With this student, we were limited to writing only. I felt that was unfair. (P8)

P3 expressed concern about fairness in assessment, stating: "But with this student, one still tends to be less demanding." The teacher explained that while other students receive open-ended tasks, this student is given test-based tasks with answer options. The teacher also admitted being more lenient in speaking assessments due to the student's slower speech and thinking pace. This highlights the ongoing challenge of balancing individualized accommodations with equal academic expectations in inclusive classrooms.

Also, P3 describes trying to adapt, but still feeling that the student struggles to keep up. As a result, the teacher suggests that: "Ideally, it would be great to have a separate group for them,

separate textbooks, specific materials, and most of them should be printed in large font, like flashcards, etc.” This perspective shows a preference for structural solutions over classroom integration, reflecting the challenges teachers face when inclusive support is limited.

#### ***4.2.2.8 Time Constraints and Teacher Workload in Inclusive Practice***

Several teachers reported struggling to adapt materials or instructional approaches for students with special needs due to a lack of time and the demands of an already heavy workload. While they were willing to support inclusion, these constraints often limited their ability to provide fully accessible or individualized instruction.

I would’ve had to prepare a separate set of materials for him, and I didn’t have time—my teaching load is heavy. So I couldn’t get good results. (P8)

So I had to copy each unit into a Word document and send it via Telegram before each lesson. This student could only read Word and PDF files using a special app. Each exercise, reading, writing task—I copied and formatted manually. I even adjusted grammar (spacing, commas, etc.)... Right now, it’s extra work and time for teachers—designing custom activities, games, and content. (P9)

#### **4.2.3 Suggestions for Improving Inclusivity**

This section presents teachers’ recommendations for enhancing inclusive education based on their classroom experiences. Their suggestions span practical adaptations, calls for training, and structural improvements to support diverse learning needs more effectively.

##### ***4.2.3.1 Adaptation and Strategies Employed by Teachers***

Teachers demonstrated flexibility by modifying tasks, deadlines, materials, and formats to accommodate students with SEN. These efforts often required extra time and creativity, particularly in addressing physical, sensory, or cognitive needs.

To ensure access to learning materials, teachers adapted books and handouts into more accessible formats:

The content of books like English File should be somehow copy-pasted to a different document and then converted into a PDF format. And that actually took time, so I had to figure out myself that ChatGPT is the helpful idea in this case. (P6)

I provided printed handouts for each lesson, as it was difficult for the student to write. (P5)

Flexibility in assessment methods and deadlines was another widely used strategy:

For the student I would allow extra time to complete written assignments in the class. (P5)

I assigned tasks for all students to shoot a video on a particular topic... But for him... I said okay you can record audios for me. (P6)

I also adjusted the tasks for him... I was also flexible in terms of deadlines... I said okay if you don't have enough time let me know in advance. (P6)

Several teachers also took proactive steps in group activities to promote inclusion and provide direct peer and teacher support. One teacher chose to initially integrate herself into the pair work:

When we did pair work I always positioned myself in the student's group and worked alongside them, acting like another student. Because some of them might meet students with SEN for the first time. That was during the first half of the semester—once everyone had adjusted, I would step back and let them work more independently. (P1)

Another emphasized peer matching as a strategy for inclusion and support:

In group work, I selected patient, kind, strong students who could support him... someone had to guide him and read instructions aloud. (P9)

Despite teachers' efforts, the additional workload and time required to adapt materials presented a significant burden. To address this, participants recommended the employment of dedicated specialists:

It would help to have a specialist to assist in adapting materials. Right now, it's extra work and time for teachers—designing custom activities, games, and content. (P9)

#### ***4.2.3.2 Practical Training, Institutional Support, and Strategic Planning***

Teachers emphasized the critical need for practical, applied training in inclusive education. While theoretical courses exist, they often fall short in preparing educators for the realities of working with students with special educational needs (SEN). Participants advocated for training that includes real-life strategies, case-based workshops, and direct exposure to inclusive classroom settings.

Even though we had a subject called inclusive education, it was mostly theoretical knowledge, but when you see inclusive students in real life, it's totally different. Maybe the institution is to have two semesters of inclusive education: first semester pure theoretical, second... more practical, for example visiting special educational schools. (P6)

Teachers should receive practical, not just theoretical, training in inclusion. For example, strategies, techniques, and case discussions like academic honesty. Workshops should include real-life case scenarios.(P9)

However, institutional constraints such as heavy teaching loads and inflexible schedules were noted as major barriers to attending available training programs.

Training sessions are held, but because of our class schedules, it's sometimes hard to attend. (P4)

Participants also called for better strategic planning and early coordination when placing SEN students in classes. Without early communication, both instructional planning and classroom dynamics suffer.

Ask instructors if they're ready to take on the student... If a student is added suddenly, the whole system collapses. (P8)

Several teachers supported long-term, ongoing professional development, including institutional initiatives such as seminars, sharing successful case studies, and exchange programs with universities abroad.

They should show us results: "We tried this; it worked. Here's the data." Sharing those findings would be incredibly helpful. (P8)

Long-term training is needed. For example, exchange programs or professional visits to see how inclusive education works in other universities and foreign universities would be very helpful. (P7)

Moreover, participants stressed the importance of empirical research and observation to guide inclusive education practices, rather than relying solely on abstract theory.

The real solution lies in proper studies: interviews, observation, and analyzing how different students—male or female—respond to different teaching styles. (P8)

#### ***4.2.3.3 Need for Accessible and Adapted Teaching Materials***

Respondents emphasized the importance of using customizable materials suited for students with visual impairments or processing challenges, and called for department-level guidance on textbook selection.

Even purchasing books for inclusive students... is a time-consuming process. (P6)

I know that our faculty has invested some money into the development of inclusive education by providing a special computer for students with visual impairments... Maybe it should be more computers, more resources for them. (P6)

One of my colleagues once had a visually impaired student, and the question arose: what textbook should be used? That is a real challenge, I think. (P4)

I assume the department will decide how to proceed—such as by selecting suitable books or materials. (P4)

#### ***4.2.3.4 Personalized Course Design and Individual Learning Plans (ILPs)***

Several teachers suggested designing personalized syllabi or Individual Learning Plans (ILPs) for students with SEN, noting that current course structures are too generic to meet diverse needs.

Right now, none of us design syllabi with inclusion in mind. Maybe each department should have two instructors trained specifically for inclusive teaching. Because in the end, no one is really responsible; no one is crafting syllabi for these students. (P2)

The main issue with the student is the lack of a tailored syllabus. If there are four course topics, I can't expect the student to cover all four due to their health and medical treatments. (P2)

I would suggest creating an individual learning plan. Current plans—syllabi, lesson outlines—are general. For inclusion to be effective in English teaching, students need an individual approach from their teacher. (P7)

Each individual with special needs requires a tailored approach, but research must guide that. (P8)

Teachers proposed more accessible training formats to meet diverse needs of students such as online modules or MOOCs to allow self-paced and practical learning.

The subject I teach can be learned independently or online. If inclusion courses or MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses) were made available, they could watch the videos, study the material, and learn without needing to come to campus. (P2)

#### ***4.2.3.5 Establishing Trust and Use of Differentiation***

Establishing a foundation of trust was seen as essential for inclusive teaching. Teachers emphasized the importance of emotional connection, differentiated tasks, and student-informed planning to meet learners' needs and preferences. Teachers emphasized that building a supportive, trusting relationship with SEN students helped foster motivation and engagement in academic tasks.

Before teaching, I worked on building rapport—finding out where the student studied, what books the student used, what difficulties the student had. I told him, “You can trust me, I’m here to support you.” Later, the student started asking me for extra materials, books, even movie recommendations. (P7)

Differentiation—such as varying the quantity or type of task and offering one-on-one support—was widely used to match students’ needs and preferences.

Inviting the student during office hours for one-on-one work was very effective. I used differentiation in assignments for all students. For this student I sometimes reduced the number or volume of questions. As the student enjoyed reading, I sent the student short stories as additional material. (P7)

When students first join, I give them a short survey in English with five or six questions like: What do you expect from this course? What would you like to develop? What difficulties do

you face? Based on their responses, I design a personalized teaching approach. It really helps me.

### 4.3 Students' Perceptions, Challenges, and Suggestions for Improving Inclusive Education

This chapter presents the findings from the thematic analysis of interviews with two university students with physical disability, conducted in the context of exploring inclusive education in English language instruction. The analysis follows Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2021) six-phase framework. It aims to answer the following research questions:

1. How do students with special educational needs (SEN) perceive inclusive education and what challenges do they face in English classes in an inclusive environment?
2. What suggestions for improving inclusivity in English language instruction at universities do students with special educational needs (SEN) propose?

Themes and sub-themes derived from the thematic analysis by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2021) of interviews with students are presented in Table 3. These themes include their perceptions, the challenges they encounter, and suggestions for improving inclusive education.

**Table 3**

*Themes and Sub-Themes of Students' Perceptions, Challenges, and Suggestions for Improving Inclusive Education*

Themes	Sub-Themes
Students' Perceptions of Inclusive Education	Inclusive education as equality of opportunity for all Inclusion as accessibility in both learning and environment Inclusion beyond disability: gender roles and societal expectations

Challenges in an inclusive environment	Barriers to integration Physical accessibility and Infrastructure Learning resource accessibility Design of textbook activities Challenges in the implementation of accommodations
Suggestions for Improving Inclusive Education	Need for accessible learning materials Early inclusion to mainstream education Improvements in infrastructure and physical accessibility The critical role of teacher support and adaptation More involvement in planning and feedback processes Adaptation of assignments and assessment methods Enhanced coordination of support staff and timetabling Use of collaborative and interactive teaching methods Role of the inclusive education department

### 4.3.1 Students' Perceptions of Inclusive Education

Students demonstrated a broad understanding of inclusive education, emphasizing that it extends beyond students with special needs to include all learners regardless of their background.

#### 4.3.1.1 *Inclusive education as equality of opportunity for all*

Both P1 and P2 emphasized that inclusive education is not limited to disability but covers equal opportunity regardless of background, gender, age, or culture:

It encompasses providing equal educational opportunities to everyone, regardless of nationality, age, gender, or any other differences. (P1)

Inclusion isn't only related to people with special educational needs... Age, culture, and many other aspects come into play — not just disability. (P2)

#### 4.3.1.2 *Inclusion as accessibility in both learning and environment*

P2 linked inclusion directly to accessible information, materials, and infrastructure:

Inclusion, to me, is about equal rights to access various types of information — but not only information. It's also about general accessibility: elevators, ramps, and so on, including things like textbooks in Braille for people like us.

#### ***4.3.1.3 Inclusion beyond disability: gender roles and societal expectations***

P2 reflected on gender and societal roles as part of inclusive education and talked about how inclusion means giving everyone equal opportunity, regardless of whether society expects certain roles from them because of their gender.

If a girl wants to study IT or become a mechanic, she absolutely has the right to do so — even if society often sees those as male-dominated fields. Likewise, if a boy wants to become a fashion designer, that's also part of inclusion.

#### **4.3.2 Challenges in an inclusive environment**

Students reported several challenges, some of which stem from institutional factors like barriers to integration and physical accessibility and Infrastructure, while most relate directly to experiences within English classes.

##### ***4.3.2.1 Barriers to integration***

While P1 highlighted the importance of early exposure to inclusive education to ease integration was:

Transitioning to a mainstream environment was challenging due to communication barriers.

##### ***4.3.2.2 Physical accessibility and Infrastructure***

P2 pointed out the lack of ramps beyond the ground floor:

Regarding physical accessibility — we only have ramps on the ground floor.

##### ***4.3.2.3 Learning resource accessibility***

P2 described initial difficulties accessing learning materials in their first year:

In my first year, the teacher couldn't convert the textbook into an accessible electronic format for me — it was unreadable, which caused some difficulties.

However, P2 also highlighted that this situation improved significantly over time:

From the second semester of the first year, things got much better. The teacher began sending all the materials, and now teachers send everything in advance. So I'd say the classes are quite inclusive now — though of course, there's always room for improvement.

The participant struggled to access course materials because they were not available in Braille or electronic formats. The participant described how this created a barrier to full participation in English classes:

We've spoken with the university's inclusion office about printing more books in Braille, but that's a slow process.

But the participant acknowledged that some Braille resources were available in the library, but felt that these were insufficient to meet their needs:

However, if you go to the lower ground floor of the university library, you'll see we already have some Braille textbooks — for example, Educational Psychology. There's also a computer available down there.

#### ***4.3.2.4 Design of textbook activities***

P2 highlights a barrier related to the design of textbook activities — not due to the teacher, but because of how the materials rely on visual elements:

It's not the teacher's fault — it's the textbooks. There are tasks like “describe the picture,” for example, describing a family shopping for clothes. Those are difficult for me.

#### ***4.3.2.5 Challenges in the implementation of accommodations***

P2 reported experiencing challenges during assessments even when formal accommodations, such as extended time, were provided. This reflects how adjustments alone may not fully address the complexities of individual needs, and highlights the role of staff understanding in creating an inclusive assessment environment:

The teacher at the time — she no longer teaches at the university — didn't understand why I needed more time. Technically, I'm entitled to extended time, but I wasn't finishing in time and she questioned me about it.

#### **4.3.3 Suggestions for Improving Inclusive Education**

This theme reflects the students' views on how English classes and the wider university environment could better support inclusive education. The excerpts illustrate both effective practices and areas where further improvements are needed. Students' suggestions focused on enhancing accessibility, improving infrastructure, adapting teaching methods, and strengthening support systems.

##### ***4.3.3.1 Need for accessible learning materials***

Participants emphasized the importance of providing learning resources in accessible formats, such as Braille, audio, or electronic versions. These materials are essential for ensuring equal participation and independent learning.

If the university had enough funding to produce all textbooks in Braille, that would significantly improve the quality of education. (P2)

The teacher would take a photo of the textbook page and send it to me via WhatsApp or Telegram, allowing me to access the content in a way that suits me best. (P1)

#### ***4.3.3.2 Early inclusion to mainstream education***

P1 highlighted that early exposure to inclusive education could ease the transition into mainstream environments. P1 suggested that beginning inclusion efforts in primary and secondary schools would reduce communication and social barriers at the university level:

Before joining this university, I attended a special school and then a college... In other countries, inclusive education starts earlier, helping students adapt more easily...Early inclusion in regular schools can help children adapt better socially.

#### ***4.3.3.3 Improvements in infrastructure and physical accessibility***

Both participants pointed to physical barriers in educational settings, recommending better infrastructure such as ramps, elevators, and accessible classrooms to support mobility and participation for students with disabilities.

Infrastructure is another critical area. Our university has good facilities, but other institutions, especially in regions, lack essential features like ramps, elevators, and computers in classrooms. Improving infrastructure would benefit all students. (P1)

It would be great to have ramps on the second and third floors too. (P2)

#### ***4.3.3.4 The critical role of teacher support and adaptation***

Both participants highlighted that supportive, proactive teachers were central to their positive experiences in English classes. Their comments show how inclusion often relied on teacher initiative rather than a consistent system.

The second teacher provided quality instruction and offered me additional time during midterms and final exams, recognizing that I needed more time to process information. This support was crucial for me. (P1)

The teacher would approach me personally to ensure I understood the topics. (P1)

She also found audio versions of the lessons online and sent me the links, which was very helpful. (P1)

When working in groups, the teacher facilitated my integration, helping me communicate more effectively with other students. (P1)

Teachers supported me by providing audio and video materials, which made learning more accessible. (P1)

In the first semester I had problems because materials weren't accessible. Later, teachers sent everything electronically or in audio format, and this was much better. (P2)

One teacher prepared all materials in advance, sent them before class — that was a great experience. (P2)

#### ***4.3.3.5 More involvement in planning and feedback processes***

Students expressed a desire to be more involved in shaping the delivery of English lessons. They suggested that teachers seek their input on preferred formats, adaptations, and learning strategies to ensure more responsive and inclusive teaching.

-We follow a syllabus - that's it.

- Would you like to be more involved in the process of planning or shaping English lessons?

- Yes, that would be great. (P2)

At the beginning of lessons, the teacher informs us of the topic and then asks me personally how I would prefer to receive the material — whether through audio or by reading it aloud to me. (P1)

#### ***4.3.3.6 Adaptation of assignments and assessment methods***

The participants proposed that assignments and tests should be adapted to their needs—for example, converting written assignments into oral exams or modifying visual tasks.

This would help provide fair opportunities to demonstrate knowledge.

Perhaps adjusting some assignments — for example, those with pictures — either removing or modifying them if there's a student like me in class. Maybe adding audio descriptions.

(P2)

Written assignments were often conducted orally. While others took written tests, the teacher would sit beside me, ask questions orally, and record my answers. If I wasn't ready, she gave me extra time to prepare. (P1)

From my perspective, oral exams are more effective. They allow me to demonstrate my knowledge more accurately. (P1)

#### ***4.3.3.7 Enhanced coordination of support staff and timetabling***

Students recommended that universities better coordinate their and student assistants' schedules and create more compact timetables. These changes would help balance support needs with the assistants' own academic responsibilities and reduce fatigue caused by long gaps between classes.

It would be helpful if the administration could coordinate \[student assistants'] schedules with ours, so they could help us and still manage their own academic responsibilities. (P2)

It would be better if the schedule could be more compact — like having all classes in the morning with no long gaps. I understand it's hard with so many students, but it would help a lot. (P2)

Also, I often get headaches - I've undergone eight rounds of chemotherapy - so when I have a schedule with two classes and then three long breaks, it's very hard for me. It would be better if the schedule could be more compact. I understand it's hard with so many students, but it would help a lot. (P2)

#### ***4.3.3.8 Use of collaborative and interactive teaching methods***

Both participants highlighted how collaborative activities—such as group work, pair work, and dialogue analysis—supported their inclusion and enhanced their language learning. These approaches fostered communication, participation, and confidence in English classes.

Group work in English classes has been beneficial. Dividing the class into small groups encourages communication and collaboration. We discuss tasks together, and one person writes down our collective ideas. (P1)

Additionally, constructing and analyzing dialogues using video materials helps improve our language skills. These methods have significantly enhanced my learning experience. (P1)

I think the best method this year has been pair work. For example, I work with another student to discuss a topic — like clothes or history — in English. It helps develop speaking skills, and I really enjoy that method. (P2)

#### ***4.3.3.9 Role of the inclusive education department***

Participants acknowledged that proactive efforts by the inclusion office made a significant difference to their educational experience. They also offered suggestions for further improvements:

When I joined the university, the inclusion center contacted me within the first few days. They conducted an interview to understand my needs and developed an adaptation plan, which included psychological support and communication strategies with teachers and peers. This proactive approach was very beneficial. (P1)

Later, the Inclusion Department was established, and we worked together to establish that I should get extra time — for example, if other students have 60 minutes, I get 120

minutes. Of course, I don't always use the full time, but it's helpful to have that flexibility. (P2)

I also suggested to our inclusion center to acquire a special computer with a voice assistant. They supported the idea, and now we have such a device in our library, which is very helpful for accessing information. (P1)

## CHAPTER 5

### Discussion

#### 5.1 Teachers' Perceptions, Challenges, and Suggestions for Improving Inclusive Education

##### 5.1.1 Teachers' Perceptions of Inclusive Education

The findings from the teacher interviews revealed that many educators held generally positive views toward inclusive education, aligning with international research. Teachers often described inclusion as the right of every student—regardless of ability—to receive quality education in an equitable learning environment. This reflects earlier research by Emmers et al. (2020) and Altes et al. (2024), which found that teachers who had a strong sense of teaching efficacy were more likely to support inclusive practices.

However, perceptions also varied depending on teachers' professional experience and training backgrounds. In the current study, some teachers admitted to initially misunderstanding inclusive education, equating it solely with physical disabilities. This misconception mirrors earlier findings in Kazakhstan by Shaikheslyamova (2018), who emphasized the need for professional development to reshape faculty attitudes toward disability and inclusion. Similarly, Prisiazhniuk et al. (2024) observed a growing shift in Central Asian educators from exclusionary practices to more inclusive mindsets, consistent with how respondents in this study began to embrace adaptation and student-centered teaching approaches over time.

Some teachers expressed uncertainty and emotional strain when working with students with special educational needs (SEN) for the first time, particularly due to lack of preparation. These reactions echo the findings of Yang et al. (2024), who reported that teacher attitudes and emotions significantly influence students' academic and social outcomes in inclusive classrooms. Confidence and competence appear to be key factors in shaping teacher beliefs, as also

demonstrated by Piccinin and Maso (2023), who found that trained teachers were more willing to make inclusive decisions.

### ***5.1.2 Challenges in Implementing Inclusive Education***

Despite positive attitudes, a range of implementation challenges emerged. Teachers reported difficulty adapting lesson plans and materials to accommodate SEN students—especially when they lacked access to proper training or resources. This is consistent with Paguirigan (2020) and Altes et al. (2024), who found that insufficient training is a major barrier to inclusive teaching.

The burden of managing diverse learners while handling classroom control was frequently mentioned by participants. Teachers in this study shared their struggle with balancing curriculum demands and classroom management, particularly when SEN students required individual attention or alternative assessments. This echoes similar concerns raised by Moriña (2017) and Bilyalov et al. (2024), who identified time constraints, lack of facilities, and minimal methodological support as common challenges.

Some challenges appeared systemic. A few teachers in this study noted that students were added to their classes without prior consultation, which disrupted classroom planning. These observations align with findings by Chávez (2018) and Makoelle and Burmistrova (2021), who criticized the lack of coordinated strategies or inclusive curricula in Kazakhstani higher education institutions. Notably, several respondents also echoed Tergeussizova's (2024) conclusion that students with non-visible disabilities are often overlooked, due in part to limited administrative and peer support.

### ***5.1.3 Suggestions for Improving Inclusive Practice***

To move toward more effective inclusion, teachers suggested practical steps at both institutional and classroom levels. One key recommendation was more structured and practical training in inclusive methods—highlighting the gap between theoretical courses and real classroom needs. This resonates with international calls for reform in teacher training (Magyar et al., 2020; Makoelle & Burmistrova, 2021). In particular, educators in this study proposed the inclusion of practicum-based learning, case discussions, and scenario-based training, echoing suggestions by Jangeldinova et al. (2024) and Tussupbekova et al. (2024) for practical methodology-focused programs.

Another recurring suggestion was for teachers to have access to tailored syllabi and support in adapting materials, especially for students with sensory or physical challenges. Respondents highlighted the need for specialists or coordinators who could assist in customizing instructional content—similar to recommendations from Moraña (2017) and Magauova et al. (2024). This points to the importance of developing institutional infrastructure to support inclusion, not just relying on individual teacher efforts.

Additionally, several teachers emphasized the value of building trust and rapport with students, which was seen as critical for motivation and learning. These findings echo Rahmi et al. (2024), who emphasized the importance of emotionally supportive learning environments as a foundation for inclusive education.

In line with the literature, the findings of this study affirm that inclusive education cannot succeed through individual goodwill alone. It requires system-wide support, coordinated planning, and sustained professional development. While teacher attitudes are largely positive,

effective implementation demands that institutions equip educators with the tools, time, and confidence to make inclusion a lived practice rather than an aspirational goal.

## **5.2 Students' Perceptions, Challenges, and Suggestions for Improving Inclusive Education**

### ***5.2.1 Perceptions of Inclusive Education***

The participants in this study shared broad and thoughtful understandings of inclusive education, extending beyond disability to encompass principles of equal opportunity and accessibility for all learners. This aligns with what Alnahdi et al. (2022) describe as inclusive teaching that considers individual learning styles and fosters emotional and social inclusion. Both participants emphasized that inclusion should ensure equitable access regardless of factors such as gender, culture, age, or nationality. This perspective is consistent with Amanova et al. (2023) and Makoelle (2020), who found that while Kazakhstan's inclusive education efforts are progressing, the concept of inclusion is often narrowly linked to disability rather than diversity more broadly.

Positive interactions with peers and educators emerged as central to students' perceptions of inclusion, echoing Arnaiz-Sanchez et al. (2022), who highlighted the significance of these relationships in shaping students' sense of belonging. However, participants' experiences also reflected how inclusion is not uniformly practiced across contexts, a pattern noted in international studies such as Schwab et al. (2019), which found variability in teachers' use of inclusive strategies.

### ***5.2.2 Challenges in an inclusive environment***

While one participant reported relatively few challenges in English classes — attributing this to prior preparation and use of self-selected resources — the other described notable barriers, particularly related to accessible materials and assessments. Difficulties accessing textbooks in

suitable formats, as well as inconsistent staff understanding of accommodations like extended time during exams, illustrate ongoing gaps in inclusive practice. These findings resonate with Heyder et al. (2020), who observed that even where physical inclusion is achieved, social and educational participation may still fall short without appropriate support measures.

The data also highlight structural challenges seen in the broader higher education landscape in Kazakhstan. As noted by Makoelle (2020) and Magauova et al. (2024), a lack of systematic pedagogical and psychological support continues to hinder SEN students' full participation. The inconsistency in applying inclusive practices, often linked to inadequate training and confidence among educators (Jangeldinova et al., 2024; Agavelyan et al., 2020), further compounds these difficulties.

### ***5.2.2 Suggestions for Improving Inclusive Education***

Participants proposed clear, practical recommendations that reflect both their lived experience and broader needs identified in the literature. These included producing more learning materials in accessible formats such as Braille and digital text, improving infrastructure, and ensuring that teaching methods are flexible and responsive to individual needs. Such suggestions align with calls in the literature for universities to strengthen their resource centers and support systems (Helmer et al., 2020), and for targeted funding to enhance the availability of inclusive technologies and services (Magauova et al., 2024).

Importantly, both participants highlighted the value of proactive communication and preparation by instructors — for example, sending materials in advance — as a simple yet effective way to support inclusion. This reflects the broader recommendation for higher education institutions to combine technical solutions with a cultural commitment to inclusion, as emphasized by Dell'Anna et al. (2019) and Amanova et al. (2023).

The findings of this study, considered alongside the literature, suggest that while inclusive education in Kazakhstan's higher education sector is developing, significant work remains. Consistent with national and international studies, this research underscores the importance of moving beyond policy to implementation: ensuring that inclusive principles translate into daily teaching practices, accessible materials, and supportive classroom environments. A recurring theme in both participants' accounts and the literature is that true inclusion requires more than formal accommodations — it demands understanding, flexibility, and collaboration at all levels.

## CHAPTER 6

### Conclusion

This study explored the perceptions, challenges, and suggestions of both teachers and students in relation to inclusive education in a Kazakhstani higher education context, specifically within English language instruction. Across both groups, a shared understanding of inclusive education emerged—one that transcends disability to emphasize equitable access to learning opportunities, emotional support, and a sense of belonging for all students. Teachers often viewed inclusion as providing high-quality education to every student regardless of background, emphasizing the importance of adjusting materials and approaches to suit diverse learning needs. Similarly, students expressed that inclusion should not be limited to physical impairments, but should involve respect for all learners, regardless of gender, culture, or nationality. For both teachers and students, the social and emotional dimensions of inclusion—such as trust, teacher-student rapport, and peer support—were essential elements in creating inclusive environments.

Despite this broad and thoughtful understanding, a range of practical challenges continues to hinder effective inclusive practice. Teachers frequently cited the absence of tailored training, lack of adapted materials, and time constraints as key barriers. Many felt unprepared to meet the specific needs of students with SEN, particularly when inclusive education was introduced without prior planning or consultation. Some struggled with balancing fairness in group tasks and assessments, while others reported emotional stress and uncertainty when trying to adapt on their own without institutional guidance. These findings mirror students' concerns, particularly around the lack of accessible textbooks, inconsistent accommodation practices, and gaps in staff awareness regarding their needs. The misalignment between students' expectations

and institutional practices reflects a broader issue in the system—where inclusion is often promoted in policy but inconsistently implemented in classrooms.

Nonetheless, both teachers and students offered meaningful and realistic suggestions for improving inclusivity. Teachers emphasized the need for ongoing, practical professional development that goes beyond theory and includes real-life case studies, strategies, and collaborative planning. Many advocated for the development of individualized learning plans (ILPs), adapted syllabi, and the availability of expert support to help design inclusive materials. Students, too, stressed the value of simple but impactful practices, such as receiving materials in advance or having content provided in accessible formats. Both groups highlighted the need for institutional support, whether through increased training opportunities, technological resources, or clear policy guidance. These suggestions point toward a vision of inclusive education that is both proactive and relational—grounded in empathy, preparation, and collaboration.

In sum, the findings suggest that inclusive education is not merely a set of accommodations or policies, but a philosophy that must be enacted at every level of the educational system. Teachers and students alike recognize that successful inclusion depends not only on the presence of resources, but also on the attitudes, competencies, and willingness of educators to create responsive and supportive learning environments. For inclusion to be truly meaningful, efforts must be made to align institutional support with everyday classroom realities, ensuring that all learners—regardless of ability—can thrive academically, socially, and emotionally.

The focus was on the perceptions of students with physical disabilities and English language teachers who teach students with physical disabilities or chronic health conditions affecting physical functioning within this specific setting.

## 6.1 Implications of the study

The findings of this study highlight several important points for practice, policy, and teacher preparation in Kazakhstan. First, they show that teachers need more practical, hands-on training to feel confident in creating inclusive classrooms and adapting their teaching to meet the different needs of their students. This suggests that teacher education programs—both for future teachers and those already working in university—should offer stronger training in inclusive methods, with more chances to gain real experience in inclusive settings.

Second, the study draws attention to gaps in resources and infrastructure, especially in universities that lack adapted facilities or suitable learning materials for students with special educational needs. This makes clear that policymakers and university leaders should prioritise investments that help make higher education institutions more accessible, both in physical spaces and in the learning environment.

Finally, both students and teachers made it clear that real inclusion isn't just about buildings or materials. It also depends on building positive, supportive university cultures—where staff work together, and everyone shares the goal of making learning accessible to all. The study suggests that along with structural changes, universities and educational authorities should also focus on shaping attitudes and creating communities that truly value inclusion.

Based on these findings, it would be important for policymakers not only to design inclusive education policies but also to ensure their implementation is regularly monitored and supported, so that policies lead to real change in practice. Listening to ongoing feedback from students and teachers can help schools and universities keep improving their inclusive approaches over time.

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## **Appendices**

### **Appendix A**

#### **Informed Consent Form**

You are invited to participate in a research study entitled **“Teachers’ and students’ perceptions towards inclusive education at university level: Case study in Kazakhstan”**.

**Research Purpose and Procedures.** You are being asked to participate in a research study of teachers' and students' perceptions of inclusive education at university level in Kazakhstan. As with all research studies, participation is voluntary. The purpose of this study is to examine the perceptions of both teachers and students of inclusive education at the university level. By studying their perspectives, it is possible to identify any gaps or problems that exist and develop strategies or recommendations to enhance the inclusiveness of higher education institutions.

This interview should take **approximately 20-30 minutes** to complete.

**Possible risks and discomfort related to participation in this research.** This study poses no physical, economic, or social risks to participants. We believe this study has no more than minimal risk (the amount of time required to complete procedures, length of time participants may be required to sit or stand).

**Possible advantages of participation.** By sharing your views, beliefs, and experiences on inclusive education, this study aims to gain a deeper understanding of the perceptions held by both students and teachers. Such insights are essential for enhancing the effectiveness of inclusive education practices and addressing potential challenges in their implementation.

**Confidentiality & Privacy.** With your consent, the interview will be audio-recorded to ensure an accurate and comprehensive record. All personal identifiers, including your name, will remain confidential. The institution's name will be anonymized and utilized solely for research purposes. Should you prefer not to be recorded, the researcher will take written notes, which will be stored securely with other related documents. Access to all data will be restricted to the researcher and the

supervisor. All study records with identifiable information, including approved transcripts, and consent forms, will be destroyed in five years by shredding and/or deleting. The findings from this study may be presented or published for scientific or professional purposes, with strict measures in place to ensure the confidentiality of all participants.

**Contacts for additional information.** If you have questions, you are encouraged to contact the researcher Aigerim Raissova, [aigerim.raissova@sdu.edu.kz](mailto:aigerim.raissova@sdu.edu.kz), +7 778 43 33 992 or the Master's Thesis Supervisor for this research work, prof. Yakup Doganay, [yakup.doganay@sdu.edu.kz](mailto:yakup.doganay@sdu.edu.kz).

For any concerns regarding this study/or if you feel that your rights as a participant (or the rights of another participant) have been violated or caused you undue distress (physical or emotional distress), please contact the IREC administrator at SDU University Research Committee or write an email to [rethics@sdu.edu.kz](mailto:rethics@sdu.edu.kz)

**Voluntary Nature of the Study.** It is strictly voluntary as to whether to participate in this study or not. You have a right to withdraw your agreement to participate at any time. If you experience any distress or discomfort, you have the right to decline to answer specific questions or to discontinue your participation at any time.

**Estimated duration of the research:** April 2025-June 2025

**Statement of Consent.**

I, (initials/code) \_\_\_\_\_, agree to participate in this study voluntarily. I have been made aware of the research purpose and objectives and clearly understand what is expected from me.

I know that it is voluntary to participate in this study and I have complete freedom to withdraw my consent at any time without providing any reasons and in this case there will be no negative consequences to me.

I understand that any personal information obtained in this study will be kept confidential.

Participant's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher's signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix B

### Interview Questions for Teachers who teaches Students with SEN

#### *Teachers' Perceptions of inclusive education*

1. How do you personally understand the idea of inclusive education? What does inclusive education mean to you in the context of teaching English at university?
2. How would you describe your experiences teaching students with special educational needs in your English language classes? Have you received any training or support from your institution regarding inclusive education?

#### *Teachers' Challenges in English language classrooms*

3. What challenges have you encountered while teaching students with special educational needs in an inclusive setting? Are there any specific challenges related to teaching materials, methods, classroom management, peer interactions, communication or physical/classroom accessibility when teaching inclusively?
4. Have you faced any difficulties with assessment to meet diverse learning needs of students? Could you give an example?

#### *Teachers' Suggestions for improving inclusivity*

5. What assessment formats do you think would work better for students with special educational needs?
6. What strategies have you found effective in supporting students with special educational needs in your English classes?
7. Do you involve students in decisions about learning goals, feedback on materials, or lesson planning? If so, how?
8. What changes or improvements would you recommend to make English language teaching at the university level more inclusive and supportive of students with special educational needs?

## Appendix C

### Interview questions for Students with SEN

#### *Students' Perceptions of inclusive education*

1. How do you personally understand the idea of inclusive education? In your experience, how inclusive do you feel your English language classes are? Why?
2. Can you share any good experiences where your teacher or classmates made learning easier and when you felt especially supported in your English classes?

#### *Students' Challenges in English language classrooms*

3. What challenges or difficulties have you faced in your English classes at university? Can you describe specific issues related to teaching methods, classroom activities, peer interactions, communication or physical/classroom accessibility?
4. Have you experienced any difficulties with the way your learning is assessed — for example, with timed tests, oral exams, or written assignments?

#### *Students' Suggestions for improving inclusivity*

5. What assessment formats would work better for you?
6. What types of teaching strategies or classroom approaches help you learn best?
7. Have you ever been asked for feedback or involved in discussions about how English classes are planned and taught? Would you like to be more involved?
8. What changes or suggestions would you offer to make English language classes more inclusive?