

Readiness of Junior English Teachers for Implementing Inclusive Education in Secondary
Educational Institutions in Kazakhstan

Albina Oralbay

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Education and Humanities
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

in Teaching English as a Foreign Language

Suleyman Demirel University

Department of Language Teacher Education

January, 2021

©Copyright by Albina Oralbay, 2021

Suleyman Demirel University

Table of contents

1. Abstract.....	4
2. Аңдатпа.....	5
3. Аннотация.....	6
4. Introduction.....	7
5. Conceptual framework: Teacher readiness and its components.....	9
6. Literature review.....	10
6.1. The legal framework of inclusive education in Kazakhstan.....	10
6.2. Inclusive Education and its principles.....	10
6.3. Lack of relevant literature on teaching English and inclusive education.....	12
7. Methodology.....	13
8. Results.....	15
9. Conclusion.....	19
10. References.....	20
11. Appendix A.....	22
12. Appendix B.....	23

Abstract

The purpose of this research project is to examine the readiness of junior English teachers for the implementation of inclusive education in Kazakhstan. I study the challenges of junior English teachers in working with children who have special needs in Kazakhstani secondary schools. I also explore what could be done to address these challenges of inclusive English teaching in Kazakhstan. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with six junior English teachers who have had experience working in inclusive classrooms across Almaty public secondary schools. The findings suggest that despite having overall positive attitudes towards implementing inclusive instruction of English, junior teachers lack relevant training and resources that would enable them to successfully teach students with special needs. Based on this study, the lack of special education-oriented training could be addressed by introducing inclusive education courses in teacher training curricula and in professional development programs.

Keywords: inclusive education, junior English teachers, teacher readiness.

Андатпа

Бұл зерттеу жобаның мақсаты – ағылшын тілінен беретін жас мамандардың Қазақстандағы инклюзивті білім беруді енгізудегі дайындығын зерттеу болып табылады. Бұл зерттеу жобасында қазақстандық орта мектептерде ерекше қажеттіліктері бар балалармен жұмыс жасауда ағылшын тілінен беретін жас мамандардың мәселелерін зерттеймін. Сондай-ақ, Қазақстанда ағылшын тілін инклюзивті ортада оқыту барысында кездесетін қиыншылықтарды шешу үшін қандай жағдай жасауға болатынын зерттеймін. Зерттеудің мақсатына жету үшін, Алматы қаласындағы мемлекеттік орта мектепте сұхбаттар жүргізілді. Жартылай құрылымдалған сұхбаттар инклюзивті ортада жұмыс жасайтын алты жас мұғалімнен алынды. Алынған нәтижелерге байланысты, ағылшын тілінің жас мұғалімдерінің инклюзивті оқытуға деген көзқарасы жақсы екені анықталды, дегенмен де ерекше қажеттілігі бар оқушыларды оқыту барысында, жас мамандарда тиісті даярлық пен ресурстардың жетіспеушілігінен туындайтын мәселелер көп. Осы зерттеуді негізге ала отырып, арнайы білім беру даярлығының болмауы мен ресурс жетіспеушілік проблемаларын, оқу жоспарлары мен біліктілікті арттыру курстарын енгізу арқылы шешуге болатынына сенемін.

Түйін сөздер: инклюзивті білім беру, ағылшын тілінің жас маманы, педагогикалық дайындық.

Аннотация

Основной целью данного исследовательского проекта является изучение подготовленности молодых учителей английского языка к внедрению инклюзивного образования в Казахстане. В этом проекте, я исследую проблемы молодых учителей английского языка в обучении детей с особыми потребностями в казахстанских средних школах. Я также исследую, способы решения проблем инклюзивного преподавания английского языка в Казахстане. В ходе исследования, было проведено полу структурированные интервью с шестью молодыми учителями английского языка с опытом работы в инклюзивных классах государственных средних школ в городе Алматы. Результаты исследования показывают, что несмотря на общее позитивное отношение к внедрению инклюзивного обучения, молодые преподаватели не имеют соответствующей подготовки и ресурсов, которые позволили бы им успешно обучать детей с особыми потребностями. Исходя из этого исследования, проблему отсутствия специальной образовательной подготовки можно решить путем включения курсов инклюзивного образования в учебные планы учителей и в программы повышения квалификации.

Ключевые слова: инклюзивное образование, начинающие учителя английского языка, подготовленность учителей

Introduction

The number of children with various physical or mental disabilities is growing steadily worldwide and Kazakhstan is not an exception. In 2015 alone, the number of Kazakhstani children who had developmental disabilities reached 141,952. It is 2,8% of the total number of children (MOES & National Academy for Education, 2015). I feel that this strong statement is a big step towards an inclusive society. These statistics underscore the increasing importance of making Kazakhstan's educational system more inclusive.

Inclusive education is based on an ideology that excludes any discrimination against children with disabilities as well as ensuring equal treatment of all students (Moore et al., 1999; Stainback et al., 1994). Inclusive education is a flexible system that takes into account the needs of all students, not only those with developmental problems, but also different ethnic groups, gender, age, and belonging to a particular social group. In inclusive education, a child with disabilities is integrated into the regular educational process in a way that allows both the school and the student to satisfy the student's special education needs.

Teachers play a crucial role in evaluating any new education program's success in general and comprehensive education in general (Fullan, 1993; Weidman & Nurshatayeva, 2018). Wearmouth et al. (2000) argue that reforms in education have failed too often because there has been little attention given to the existing practices and needs of those required to bring them into action. I completely agree with statement that teacher readiness plays a key role in implementing of any new education policy, therefore this project focuses on the teachers' needs, challenges and ways in which they could be supported and encouraged.

Research problem. Only 27% of children with disabilities in Kazakhstan study in mainstream schools and only 1% in higher education (MOES & National Academy for Education, 2015). Since inclusive education is quite new for Kazakhstan, teacher training in general and English teacher training in particular do not focus much on inclusive education. In

general, in working in and developing an inclusive educational environment, there is a shortage of applicable expertise and experience for junior English teachers.

Aim of research. This project investigates the introduction in Kazakhstan of inclusive education in English teaching and analyzes the difficulties faced by junior English teachers when teaching children with disabilities.

Research questions. This research project is aimed to answer the following questions:

1. What are the challenges of junior English teachers while teaching children with special needs in Kazakhstani secondary schools?
2. What could be done to address the challenges of inclusive English teaching in Kazakhstan?

Significance of the study. With the increasing demand for inclusive education services in Kazakhstan and beyond, there is a growing concern about schools' capacity to provide equal educational opportunities and a proper education for children with various physical and mental disabilities. This study has mostly practical significance as it will investigate the ways employed in inclusive education and provide junior English teachers with some guidelines. For future research in this area, the findings may also serve as secondary data.

Novelty of research. The novelty of this research is two-fold. First, there is limited research evidence about inclusive English teaching in Kazakhstan. By exploring the complexities of inclusive EL teaching in secondary schools in Kazakhstan, this project aims to fill this literature void. Secondly, this study offers guidelines for junior EL teachers and leads to the development of inclusive education in Kazakhstan.

Conceptual framework: Teacher readiness and its components

This study uses the conceptual framework of teacher readiness for inclusive education adapted from Hay (2001). According to Hay (2001), teacher readiness for inclusive education indicates to what extent teachers are able to embrace change required by the transition to inclusive education. Importantly, teacher readiness is seen as different from teacher preparedness.

In the concept of teacher readiness for inclusive education, Hay (2001) distinguishes the following three components:

1. Knowledge
2. Skills
3. Emotional readiness.

Knowledge is theoretical understanding required to perform certain tasks. Having knowledge on how to teach does not mean that teachers can do it well, even if they understand what and how should be taught. In this case, we need skills. Skills can be improved over time through training and working experience. And the emotional readiness is an attitude toward the certain phenomenon. All these three components are basic in teaching process.

Literature review

The legal framework of inclusive education in Kazakhstan

The rights of people with special needs in Kazakhstan are guaranteed by the Constitution, as is the right to education for every child. After several international conventions were ratified, Kazakhstan voluntarily assumed the burden of ensuring equality in access to and involvement in education for all learners, including children with disabilities (Rollan, 2018). In addition to providing a robust legal structure governing inclusive education programs, Kazakhstan signed the UNESCO 'Dakar Plan of Action' in 2001. Kazakhstan announced its contribution to the inclusive education movement (Suleimenova, 2012). In addition, Kazakhstan has ratified the following international documents that proclaim equal access to education for people with special educational needs:

- Treaty relating to the Rights of the Child (Resolution of the Supreme Council of the Republic of Kazakhstan as of 8 June 1994);
- The United Nations Convention concerning the Protection of People with Disabilities (Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan as of February 20, 2015 No. 288-V ZRK);
- Convention on combating discrimination in education (Jurisdiction of the Republic of Kazakhstan No. 449-V of January 28, 2016).

Inclusive Education and its principles

Disability is one of the primary causes of exclusion, but there are also other obstacles to inclusive education: social, institutional, physical, and attitudinal. Inclusive education means that all children - no matter who they are - will learn together in the same classroom, according to UNESCO's online dictionary. This includes reaching out to all students and eliminating all obstacles that could limit involvement and accomplishment.

Hornby (2015) states that inclusive education is an umbrella term used specifically to encompass the principles of justice and equality, human rights, quality education for all, and the social paradigm of disability has often been referred to. According to Hornby (2015), the central meaning of inclusive education is that children with special needs are included as much as possible in the mainstream school system.

Four core concepts of inclusive education have been developed into practice: organizing students with interesting and adaptable general education curricula; respecting students' varied abilities and their weaknesses; using reflections to customize instruction and education; involving all stakeholders in education (students, teachers, parents, and policymakers) in the educational process (Salend, 2011). Mustapha et al. (2006) suggest that inclusive education increases student social engagement and integration and minimizes negative perceptions of students with special needs. Mustapha et al. (2006) also argued that if teachers are well-educated and policy guidelines are transparent and detailed, inclusive education would be effective.

Shareefa (2016) notes that teachers and the entire school need to be ready and completely prepared with all the requisite facilities and strategies to make inclusive education possible. The level of educators' motivational readiness to adopt inclusive education for children with disabilities was revealed by V.I. Dolgova, N. G. Kutepova, and their colleagues (2017). They have shown evidence that the absolute majority of teachers (75%) are prepared to take part in creative growth. Their study also found that 95% of teachers surveyed had a noted vulnerability to innovations. However, at a lower level, their appropriate motivational readiness is (85%).

Lack of relevant literature on teaching English and inclusive education

I looked for literature about teaching English as a foreign language to students with disabilities. I used the following search terms: “teaching English and inclusive education”, “inclusive EFL teaching”, “inclusion in learning English”, “inclusive TESOL”, “EFL for special education”. The search was conducted in Google Scholar. However, all my search attempts did not yield any results. This suggests that there is a gap in the research literature with regards to issues of teaching or learning English as a foreign language and inclusive education.

Methodology

Semi-structured interviews

I conducted semi-structured interview in my research project, because this particular method can describe feelings in details of each participants. I followed the concept of Strauss and Corbin (1998), who argue that "qualitative approaches can be used to obtain the complex specifics of phenomena such as feelings, thinking processes, and emotions that are difficult to remove or learn from more traditional methods. My interview protocol consisted of 10 questions (see Appendix A).

Participants' background

In the secondary schools in Almaty, I interviewed six junior English teachers with experience teaching children with disabilities at various grade levels. I also interviewed one head of the inclusive education department at a large public school in Almaty.

Procedure and Data Analysis

I invited junior teachers to participate in the study and interviewed them in November-December 2020. Participation in the study was voluntary and I offered every participant the consent form (see Appendix B) which they signed and returned to me.

Some interviews were conducted face-to-face, and some via audio or video calls were done online. The interviews were documented and transcribed using audio.

I used thematic analysis to analyse the interview data. A method for encoding qualitative information is thematic analysis. An explicit 'code' is required for the encoding. This can be a list of topics, a complex model with relevant topics, metrics, qualifications, or something between these two types (Boyatzis, 1998). I identified common themes raised by study participants and synthesized them into study results. I also used some basic descriptive statistics to summarize the demographic background of the participants, such as their age and years of experience.

Table 1. General information about participants

Participants	Age	Gender	Years of experience	School type
Respondent A	32	Female	5 years of general teaching experience, 1 year in inclusive classroom	Mainstream school with inclusive and correctional classes
Respondent B	22	Female	1 year in inclusive classroom	Mainstream school with inclusive and correctional classes
Respondent C	22	Female	1 year in inclusive classroom	Mainstream school with inclusive and correctional classes
Respondent D	24	Female	2 years of general teaching, 1 year as a tutor	Mainstream school with inclusive and correctional classes
Respondent E	25	Female	2 years of general teaching, 1 year as a tutor	Mainstream school with inclusive and correctional classes
Respondent F	22	Female	1 year in inclusive classroom	Mainstream school with inclusive and correctional classes
Head of inclusive education department	48	Female	5 years in special school	Mainstream school with inclusive and correctional classes

Results

Challenges

Based on the data collected in the interviews, junior English teachers deal with several common challenges. The main challenge for them was adapting their teaching in a way that would allow special education students to learn without getting stuck behind. This can be seen in the following vignette from the interview with Respondent A, who has 5 years of general teaching experience and 1 year in inclusive classroom:

“It is not easy to teach children with special needs according to their level of development. It is important to give such children easier tasks for reading, listening, writing and speaking”.

Because Respondent A works at a school where only children with mental disabilities are enrolled, she view the challenge of adapting her teaching to such children’s needs as a challenge of simplifying the teaching and the instructional materials. This is not necessarily in line with the principles of inclusive education. However, Respondent A’s words (as well as other participants’ responses) demonstrate that the junior teachers struggle with making their English teaching inclusive.

Another common challenge stated by the respondents was the lack of teaching materials. For example, Respondent D, who has 2 years of teaching experience and 1 year as a tutor in an inclusive English course, highlighted that there is a lack of appropriate teaching materials readily available in her daily work:

“It is challenging to find or develop teaching materials that are engaging for special education students: handouts, cartoons, audio, video”.

This extract from Respondent D’s words shows that junior English teachers in inclusive classrooms have different needs in terms of teaching materials. Although these days there are a lot of various English language teaching resources, not all of those could be used readily in

inclusive environments. Selection of resources that could be used in inclusive English language courses requires a certain skillset on behalf of the teachers and takes a lot of time and effort. Importantly, materials development for inclusive English courses is not typically taught in teacher training universities and professional development is limited.

The third common difficulty noted by most of the participants was that they often lacked the support of qualified tutors who would assist them in the classroom. For example, here, the words of Respondent E, who has 2 years of teaching experience and 1 year as a tutor in an inclusive English course, illustrate this common challenge:

“There is a lack of tutors and it poses difficulties. Teachers in inclusive classrooms and tutors should cooperate and work as a one team in order to help children with special needs”.

Tutors are additional instructors whose main duty is to assist the main classroom teacher in working with special education students. These tutors are available only in a few of the schools that the participants work at. Their assistance is viewed as essential in making the inclusive English teaching successful by most of the participants.

The fourth common difficulty for junior English teachers was related to working with the parents. As noted by the head of the inclusive education department at a public school in Almaty, teachers need to improve communication skills that would enable them to communicate and interact with the parents of children with special needs. As she put it:

“Parental engagement will strengthen social skills, boost grades, and increase attendance. They are more likely to participate in familiar ways when parents are viewed as friends, contributing to more participation. However, parents want to be involved, but may not know how to get involved or might not have the time. That’s why teachers should provide feedback to parents through sending report cards or simply sending home a quick note”.

As this vignette illustrates, teachers' work extends beyond the classroom and their skills in building collaborative relations with the parents may contribute to improving the academic achievement of students with special needs.

And finally, teachers find it challenging to maintain a positive attitude during their work in inclusive classrooms. For example, Respondent F with 1 year of teaching experience in inclusive classroom emotional struggles as follows:

“I want to have a positive attitude toward implementing inclusive education, but issues especially a big number students in one classroom demotivates me. Due to the big number of students, it is quite difficult to provide attention equally”.

As this excerpt from the interview shows, the risk of burnout for junior English teachers working in inclusive classrooms is quite real. Apparently, junior English teachers are less than fully equipped to deal with the emotional load they experience when teaching English in inclusive classrooms.

At the same time, most of the teachers who participated in the study noted their eagerness to teach English inclusively. For example, respondent B with 1 year of teaching experience in inclusive classroom noted that she is very enthusiastic about inclusive education:

“Since it is my first year of teaching, I am very supportive about implementation of inclusive education and I also desire to be a part of this policy's further development”.

The enthusiasm observed in the study participants is quite encouraging. There is a lot of untapped energy among the junior English teachers that could contribute to the successful implementation of inclusive education in Kazakhstan if supported by proper teacher training and policy-making.

Recommendations

Through analysing the interview data, I summarized the recommendations that the participants of the study proposed for overcoming the challenges they discussed:

- Teacher training is essential. Teachers should attend inclusive education-focused teacher training courses where they can learn skills for teaching children with different disabilities;
- Teachers should learn how to create new strategies for the assessment of Writing, Listening, Reading, Speaking skills of special education students;
- Some participants recommended that school-parent partnerships should be created. Teachers should learn how to organize and maintain such partnerships;
- Most teachers argued that inclusive classroom size for English lessons should be as small as possible.

Based on the results of my research, I have developed my own recommendations for junior EFL teachers working in inclusive classrooms:

- Teacher collaboration. Teacher and tutors should collaborate to better understand one another's roles and work together effectively in the classroom, offering activities and objectives;
- According to children's disability, teaching methods should be individually tailored.

Conclusion

The finding of this project showed that one of the major challenges of teaching English in inclusive classrooms is teacher training limitations. Another important finding is a lack of resources including additional tutors and engaging teaching materials. Moreover, as a result of the gaps in their teacher training and lack of resources, junior English teachers are at risk of burnout in inclusive classrooms.

It is possible to implement inclusive education so that it can benefit all the students. There are main possible solutions such as: offering English as a foreign language teacher training focused on inclusive education and provide sufficient resources on how to work in inclusive environments. Finally, junior English teachers should be trained to manage the stress levels when working in inclusive classrooms.

Further research could look into how inclusion could be implemented in English-medium instruction (Nurshatayeva, 2020; Nurshatayeva & Page, 2020) and how advanced technological solutions such as chatbots (Nurshatayeva et al, 2020) could be used to support inclusion in educational institutions.

References

- Ali, M. M., Mustapha, R., & Jelas, Z. M. (2006). An Empirical Study on Teachers' Perceptions towards Inclusive Education in Malaysia. *International journal of special education*, 21(3), 36-44.
- Boyatzis, R. E. (1998). *Transforming qualitative information: Thematic analysis and code development*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage publications.
- Dolgova, V. I., Kutepova, N. G., Kapitanets, E. G., Kryzhanovskaya, N. V., & Melnik, E. V. (2017). The study of motivational readiness of teachers to implement inclusive education of children with disabilities. *Revista ESPACIOS*, 38(40), 9-15.
- Farrell, M. (2010) *Debating Special Education*. London: Routledge.
- Fullan, M. (1993). *The new meaning of educational change*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Hawley, W. D., Rosenholtz, S., Goodstein, H. J., & Hasselbring, T. (1984). Good schools: What research says about improving student achievement. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 61(4), iii-178.
- Hay, J. F., Smit, J., & Paulsen, M. (2001). Teacher preparedness for inclusive education. *South African Journal of Education*, 21(4), 213-218.
- Hornby, G. (2015). Inclusive special education: Development of a new theory for the education of children with special educational needs and disabilities. *British Journal of Special Education*, 42(3), 234-256.
- Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan & National Academy of Education named after Altynsarin. (2015). *Konceptualniye podhody k razvitiyu inklusivnogo obrazovaniya v Respublike Kazakhstan*. [Conceptual approaches to inclusive education development in the Republic of Kazakhstan]. Retrieved on November 2017, 2018 from <http://specialedu.kz/normativno-pravovaya%20baza/4/mat002.pdf>

- Moore, D. W., Anderson, A., Timperley, H., Glynn, T., Macfarlane, A., Brown, D. & Thomson, C. (1999). *Caught between stories: Special education in New Zealand*. Wellington, NZ: New Zealand Council for Educational Research.
- Nurshatayeva, A. (2020). *Essays in Higher Education* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Pittsburgh).
- Nurshatayeva, A., & Page, L. C. (2020). Effects of the shift to English-only instruction on college outcomes: Evidence from Central Asia. *Journal of Research on Educational Effectiveness*, 13(1), 92-120.
- Nurshatayeva, A., Page, L. C., White, C. C., & Gehlbach, H. (2020). Proactive student support using artificially intelligent conversational chatbots: The importance of targeting the technology. EdWorking paper, Annenberg University <https://www.edworkingpapers.com/sites/default/files/ai20-208.pdf>.
- Rollan, K., & Somerton, M. (2019). Inclusive education reform in Kazakhstan: Civil society activism from the bottom-up. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 1-16.
- Salend, S. J. (2011). *Creating Inclusive Classrooms: Effective and reflective practices*. Boston, MA: Pearson.
- Shareefa, M. (2016). Institutional and teacher readiness for inclusive education in schools of Hithadhoo, Addu, Maldives: A study of the perceptions of teachers. *International journal of scientific & Technology research*, 5(7), 6-14.
- Strauss, A. L., & Corbin, J. M. (1998). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Suleimenova, R. (2012). Metodologicheskiye podhody k razvitiyu inklusivnogo obrazovaniya v Respublike Kazakhstan. [Methodological approaches to the development of inclusive education in the Republic of Kazakhstan]. *Otrkytaya Shkola [Open School]*, 7(118), 1-20.

- United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in the Republic of Kazakhstan. (2014). Situation Analysis of Children with Disabilities for the Development of an Inclusive Society in the Republic of Kazakhstan. Retrieved from <http://unicef.kz/en/publication.html?id=117>
- Wearmouth, J., Edwards, G. & Richmond, R. (2000). Teachers' professional development to support inclusive practices. *Journal of In-service Education*, 26: 37-48.
- Weidman, J. C., & Nurshatayeva, A. (2018). Jullien's 1817 Esquisse: Toward a "Science" of Comparative Higher Education? *World Studies in Education*, 19(1-2), 29-48.

Appendix A

Interview protocol

1. What is inclusive education in your opinion?
2. What's the importance of inclusive education?
3. Why inclusive education is important?

[Quote: What is the role of inclusive education for the society? The government? The students? The parents?]
4. What were your first impressions in an inclusive EFL class?
5. What methods of teaching English do you use to teach in inclusive classrooms?
6. What difficulties do you face while teaching English to children with special needs?
7. How do you cope with these challenges?
8. What can you recommend other junior English teachers who are about to begin working in inclusive environments?

Appendix B

Consent form for participants

Once again, I want to thank you for participating in the interview portion of my research. I am going to be interviewing you about your experience of teaching English in inclusive classrooms. I would like to ask you about the challenges you face while teaching English to children with special needs. The interview will focus mainly on difficulties while implementing inclusive education, and also we will talk about what could be done to overcome those difficulties. The interview will likely take about thirty minutes.

To protect the privacy of your details, I will make fair efforts. You will withdraw from this research study at any time; you may also withdraw your permission for us to use your identifiable information for the above-described purposes. This means that in this research review, you will also be withdrawn from further participation.

By signing this consent form you indicate that I have your permission to keep recordings and transcripts of your conversation. Please let me know if you want me to turn the recorder off at some point or keep something you've said off the record.

You should feel free to ask questions that occur at any point in this research. My contacts are: Albina Oralbay, 2nd-year master student at Suleyman Demirel University, 191323001@sdu.edu.kz.

I have read the details above about this report, and I agree to participate in this study.

Name _____

Signature _____

Date _____