

DEVELOPMENT OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN AZERBAIJAN

DESARROLLO DE LA EDUCACIÓN INCLUSIVA EN AZERBAIYÁN

Lamia Hajimuradova Nizami¹

E-mail: Lamie.7530@gmail.com

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8169-8513>

Gulshan Eminova Tahir²

E-mail: eminovagulsn@gmail.com

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5736-4276>

Saida Nasibova Nazim¹

E-mail: saide.nesibova@gmail.com

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0002-5366-4778>

Aynur Karimova Farrukh¹

E-mail: karimovaaynur6@gmail.com

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0003-2317-1005>

Vusal Karimli Maharram³

E-mail: vusalkarimli@gmail.com

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9561-478X>

¹ Ganja State University, Azerbaijan.

² Azerbaijan State Pedagogical University, Azerbaijan.

³ Azerbaijan State Economic University, (UNEC).

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ABSTRACT

Inclusive education is fundamental because it promotes equity and equal access to education for all people, regardless of their abilities, characteristics or circumstances. By prioritizing diversity and adapting pedagogical approaches, an environment is created in which each individual can develop their full potential and contribute fully to society. However, in Azerbaijan, disabled children are educated in special schools, boarding schools or homes although in overall experiences children who lack some skills complete all levels of education together with their peers. Such integration, that is, inclusive education prevents discrimination between children, allowing children with disabilities to feel like equal members of society. Considering this, the objective of this work is to analyze the progress, challenges and opportunities for the development of inclusive education in Azerbaijan. As a result of the investigation, it became clear that the reforms are aimed at adapting education to international principles and standards. One of these principles is the humanization of education and its articulation with human rights standards.

Keywords:

Azerbaijan, inclusive education, human rights, disabled children, right to education.

RESUMEN

La educación inclusiva es fundamental porque promueve la equidad y el acceso igualitario a la educación para todas las personas, independientemente de sus habilidades, características o circunstancias. Al priorizar la diversidad y adaptar enfoques pedagógicos, se crea un entorno en el que cada individuo puede desarrollar su máximo potencial y contribuir plenamente a la sociedad. Sin embargo, en Azerbaiyán, los niños discapacitados son educados en escuelas especiales, internados u hogares, aunque en experiencias globales los niños que carecen de algunas habilidades completan todos los niveles de educación junto con sus pares. Tal integración, es decir, la educación inclusiva previene la discriminación entre los niños, permitiendo que los niños con discapacidad se sientan miembros iguales de la sociedad. Considerando esto, el objetivo de este trabajo es analizar los avances, retos y oportunidades para el desarrollo de una educación inclusiva en Azerbaiyán. Como resultado de la investigación, quedó claro que las reformas están dirigidas a adaptar la educación a los principios y estándares internacionales. Uno de estos principios es la humanización de la educación y su articulación con los estándares de derechos humanos.

Palabras clave:

Azerbaiyán, educación inclusiva, derechos humanos, niños discapacitados, derecho a la educación.

INTRODUCTION

Special education is a range of teaching practices specifically designed for the needs of individuals with disabilities, who have special learning needs, that are implemented by well-trained special education teachers and not normally seen or used by untrained teachers in a regular classroom. On the other hand, inclusion is described as offering equitable opportunities for all students, including those with severe disabilities, to receive effective educational services in age-appropriate general education classes in schools, with supplementary aids and support services as needed, toward the outcome of preparing all students for productive lives as full members of the society. Then, Inclusion is more than simply a simple tweak to the current special education system to make it more efficient. Rather, it is a response to the necessity of educating a diverse student body and giving them access to the same opportunities and high-quality education as their peers in the mainstream (Francisco et al., 2020).

Educators worldwide have raised concerns about the effectiveness and fairness of resource allocation for supporting students with disabilities. In most countries, a notable portion of the overall education budget, ranging from 12% to 20%, is allocated to funding for students with disabilities. Interestingly, special education tends to incur higher costs per student compared to regular education, and these costs seem to be on the rise (Banks, 2021). Alongside these considerations, both advocates and educators are challenging the educational and ethical foundation of segregated schooling, as exemplified by Slee (2018). It is evident that the coexistence of mainstream and special schools is impeding the necessary reforms for establishing a comprehensive national inclusive education system. As a proposition, it is contended that special schools themselves pose a substantial obstacle to genuine reform toward inclusive education (Carrington et al., 2022).

Opposed to this, inclusive education offers a multitude of advantages for students with disabilities. It allows disabled students to enhance their academic progress by learning from their fellow peers, fostering opportunities for social interaction and friendship among disabled children. The presence of children with special educational requirements in inclusive classrooms contributes to the enhancement of their proficiency in reading and mathematics. Classrooms that incorporate students with impairments have observed an increase in social engagement, partnerships, and connections. The negative perceptions attached to impairments are diminished as a result, and typically abled children develop greater empathy towards their peers who possess disabilities, all thanks

to the implementation of inclusive education. Moreover, inclusive education promotes the development of diverse and empathetic friendships, as well as a strong sense of self-worth in children with disabilities. Thus, inclusive education yields academic, social, emotional, and behavioral advantages for students with disabilities (Antonova Natalia V. et al., 2021; Florian, 2019; Kauffman & Hornby, 2020).

However, to build an inclusive education, a teacher must possess a series of fundamental competencies which demands a better preparation. First, it is crucial that the teacher have a keen awareness and deep sensitivity to the diversity of their students' needs, showing respect for their individual differences, whether they be disabilities, cultural backgrounds, or personal experiences. Furthermore, adaptability and flexibility are essential qualities, allowing you to adjust your pedagogical approach and teaching plan appropriately to meet the unique needs of each student. Collaboration and teamwork also play a key role, as the teacher must collaborate with other professionals and parents to provide holistic support. Effective communication skills, early detection of special needs, differentiated assessment, and the promotion of self-esteem and active participation are essential components in cultivating an inclusive environment. Finally, a commitment to continuous updating is vital to keep abreast of best practices and approaches in inclusive education. Taken together, these competencies enable the teacher to create an educational environment where all students, regardless of their differences, have the opportunity to thrive and reach their full potential (Ainscow & Sandill, 2010; Ba, 2022; Dignath et al., 2022; Markelz et al., 2022; McCall et al., 2014; Reeves et al., 2021).

Hernández-Torrano et al., (2022) mapped research on inclusive education (IE) since the Salamanca Statement using metadata extracted from 7,084 Scopus-indexed publications over the last 25 years in terms of the growth trajectory, productivity, collaborative networks, and intellectual structure of the field. It was found that the academic interest in inclusive education has risen, and IE research is a global phenomenon and is produced in most countries around the world, although the bulk of research is still published by a small number of authors and countries. There is a noteworthy level of scientific collaboration in the field, with numerous consolidated research groups and robust research collaborations between countries. Four schools of thought define the intellectual structure of IE research: system and structures, special education, accessibility and participation, and critical research. Four general themes have been addressed in the literature over the last 25 years: IE in higher education settings, pre-service

teacher education and their attitudes towards IE, teaching for inclusion and in-service professional development on IE, and practices and principles of IE.

The experience of academic work for inclusive education in Azerbaijan is limited, however interesting progress has been made, as can be seen from some research (Allahverdieva, 2020; Kazimova, 2020; Lesko et al., 2010; Mubariz, 2019). However, in our opinion, we believe that it is still a new issue and one that requires more focused work. Therefore, the objective of this work is to analyze the improvement of inclusive education in the Republic of Azerbaijan, highlighting advances that have been made as well as limitations and challenges to overcome.

For this, in this research work the organization of the training complex for the involvement of children with different disabilities in inclusive education have been substantiated and the stages of optimizing the management of inclusive education have been realized. In addition, the role, essence, content, principles, structure and functions of inclusive education in the spiritual and professional formation of children with disabilities were investigated, and effective ways and means of the necessary qualities during their future activities were determined.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

To accomplish the objective of this research, the following items were addressed:

- Theoretical analysis of pedagogical, psychological and methodological literature.
- Study of the works of psychologists and didactics related to inclusive education.
- Study of the systematic theoretical model of the motivational inclusive
- education in educational institutions.
- Analysis and study of pedagogical experience.
- Conducting debates with tutors and parents about inclusive education.
- Conducting various types of pedagogical experiments using interviews in order to check the effectiveness of inclusive education in educational institutions.

In the course of the research, pedagogical experiments were conducted in order to check the level of organization of inclusive education in inclusive educational institutions that have just started to operate. Different methods such as observation, interview, discussion, debate, were used during the 2021-2022, and 2022-2023 academic years. The social composition of the people who participated in the study was as follows: Teachers – 50; Children

with disabilities - 50; Children without disabilities - 200; - Parents of disabled children - 70; Parents of children without disabilities - 180. The pedagogical experiments, observations and surveys were conducted in all-inclusive schools operating in the country: Ganja city 8, 39, Baku city 246, 39, 84, 265, 300, Guba city 2, Sumgait city 4, 21, 25 Shirvan city 10, Gazakh city 2, Sheki city 12, Khachmaz city 6, Agjabadi city 5, and Gabala, as well as the participation of parents, teachers and students of elementary school students working in full secondary schools. The conducted experiments were protocolled and recorded in tables.

Our experiments were divided into four purposeful stages for the aim of favorable differentiation of test results, determination of generalized characteristics of children's preparation for involvement in inclusive education. In the first stage the following survey questions were used:

1. Are you familiar with the "State Program for the development of inclusive education for people with disabilities in the Republic of Azerbaijan in 2018-2024"?
2. Is the activity plan of this Program imposed in your institution?
3. Are you aware of inclusive education?
4. Are there children with other mild disabilities in your institution, besides inclusive classes?
5. Do you consider it appropriate for children with serious disabilities to attend the educational institution?
6. Do you participate in the projects implemented in our republic in the field of inclusive education?
7. Do you use thinking process during lessons?
8. Are you satisfied with your children's comprehension?
9. Can a disability hinder the learning process?
10. Can effective arrangement of inclusive education in primary classes depend on inclusive preschool education?

The study of the first stage of the experiment made it possible to determine the main directions of activity:

- Determination the inclusive educational institutions where the experiment will be held related to the problem.
- Using the potential of teachers working in the direction of arrangement of inclusive education.
- Growth of teacher's knowledge and skills in order to teach in inclusive classes using the presented proposals.
- Promotion of inclusive education implementation.

- To provide practical guidelines and strategies for use by teachers.

The second stage of the experiment was conducted in the 2021-2022 academic year. Control and experimental groups with the same level were selected. Teachers working in experimental groups were instructed to focus on several activities:

- to develop knowledge on inclusive education.
- getting acquainted with legal documents related to the implementation of inclusive education.
- study of recommended literature on the problem.
- to set up training sessions on the basis of inclusive values.
- to approach children with disabilities on a social model basis.
- understanding the teaching approach and how it relates to teachers' learning styles.
- to introduce reflective practice as a key element in the application of learning and inclusive education.
- understand that learning is a social activity and how it takes place thanks to collaboration.

The conducted experimental trainings were analyzed together with the teachers, the comprehension and practical level of the children was clarified, and comments were made. In the second stage of the experiment, 50 children with disabilities and 200 children without disabilities participated.

In order to find out the attitude of children to each other, we conducted a survey among them based on the following questions:

1. What do you come to school for?
2. Do you like school?
3. Who do you become friends with, mostly?
4. Who do you play games with?
5. Is your friend's appearance important to you?
6. What do you do if you see a child falling?
7. Do you like to help?
8. Why do you help?
9. Do you want to be helped?
10. Do you think you learn more when you stay at home or at school?

Those questions were selected and used from the point of view of which direction to set up and analyze the results of the research work during the experiment. Thus,

during the experiment course, the development dynamics of bringing up children on the basis of inclusive values were revealed, and their acquisition was accompanied by abilities and skills. Depending on the complexity of the questions, we pay attention to the following requirements for correct answers:

1. Children should be more interested in cooperation.
2. Helping those who need help, loving and valuing their friends.
3. People's appearance may be different, their health may differ, nevertheless everyone is precious, and everyone can demonstrate their abilities.
4. To acquire specific skills and habits in order accept everyone as they are.

During the experiment, such tasks as the practical and professional importance of knowledge about these issues, the formulation of questions, the compliance of children's primary education level to the given questions, the sequence of issues in the questions, etc., also were taken into account.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A snapshot of inclusive education in Azerbaijan

By *inclusiv* (from French "to include", and this from Latin "to come to a conclusion") we mean the inclusion of people with lack of abilities to be engaged in the educational process together with other peers in educational institutions. Inclusive education ensures equal education rights for people with or without disabilities and creates educational environment in order to maintain social equality in society, meet the educational requirements and other special needs of disabled children. So, in official documents of the Council of Europe, the term *democratic society* is gradually substituted by the term *inclusive society*. Here, no one remain beyond of the issue, everyone is developing through their educational needs and abilities. The main principle of inclusive education is to educate the children of the same society together. Successful integration of disabled children into the educational system requires significant changes in the educational system as a whole. That includes the creation of appropriate conditions in educational institutions, the development of training programs and materials for children with disabilities, the differentiation of training methods and strategies, and even the use of different approaches in the evaluation process.

Since the 2004-2005 academic year, the integration of children with disabilities has been put into practice in the form of pilot projects in a number of secondary schools and pre-school educational institutions of Azerbaijan,

and this experience is being tested in inclusive classes and groups. In terms of the implementation of the “State Program for the Development of Inclusive Education for Persons with Disabilities in the Republic of Azerbaijan in 2018-2024” (Aliyev, 2017), inclusive education is being implemented in all preschool groups of the country from the 2020-2021 academic year. Sufficient projects related to the inclusive education at the school level have been carried out, textbooks and teaching aids have been written. However, inclusive education has not yet been researched as a fundamental dissertation.

It is known that the development of society passes through education. The application of qualitative ideas to all areas of human activity, including education, training and education process, is one of the characteristic features of modern society. The primary goal of the educational policy in our republic is to teach people but also to develop their personalities. Currently, state's main policy is to motivate students as a subject of the educational process. In modern days one of the priority issues of the educational policy of the Republic of Azerbaijan is the involvement of children with disabilities in education and the creation of a legal basis for them to get qualitative education. From this point of view, the Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan on Education (Special Education) of Persons with Limited Health Opportunities, approved by the great leader Heydar Aliyev in 2001, makes an importance (Milli Mejlis of the Azerbaijan Republic of Azerbaijan, 2001). The law envisages the development of the psychophysical capabilities of each disabled child under the tuition terms.

But who is a child with disabilities? First of all, we need to find an answer to this question. According to the Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan on prevention of disability, rehabilitation and social protection of the disabled (Milli Mejlis of the Azerbaijan Republic of Azerbaijan, 1992): “Disabled person is a person whose life activity is limited as a result of innate mental or physical defects, illness or injury, and who needs social assistance and protection.” Of course, this definition of disability based on the medical model is not encouraging from the point of view of human rights. When we carefully analyze the law, treating disability as a handicap indicates that their rights are restricted.

Article 1 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities provides a more appropriate definition of disability: People with disabilities are people with physical, mental, intellectual or emotional impairments that prevent them from participating fully and effectively in society while they face various barriers” (Grimes et al., 2019). According to this definition, what makes a person disabled is the relationship between their restriction and the obstacles around them.

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities recognizes the educational rights of invalid persons and obligates states to enforce inclusive education. This commitment includes:

- To ensure that children with disabilities are not excluded from comprehensive schools.
- Provide opportunities to get inclusive, quality and free primary and secondary education on an equal basis with others in the community they live.
- Provide with necessary support measures tailored to individual needs in surroundings conducive to academic and social development, in order to fully ensure inclusivity.

Specialized schools for the disabled (for example, special schools for children with intellectual, visual, hearing, and speech disabilities) have been operating in our country since 1932. Most of the children with disabilities study in these specialized schools. Any form of segregation or exclusion from education, such as education of children with disabilities in special schools or special sections within regular schools, or incomplete integration, is not included in an inclusive education. Then, as one of the signatories of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Azerbaijan has undertaken the obligation to encourage inclusive education.

Important steps have been taken to eliminate gaps in the application of inclusive education. The Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan guarantees the right to education of each citizen. In 2017, the “State Program for the Development of Inclusive Education for Disabled Persons in the Republic of Azerbaijan in 2018-2024” (Aliyev, 2017) was adopted in order to ensure equal educational opportunities for persons with disabilities. However, education for invalid children in Azerbaijan is not widely accessible (Grimes et al., 2019).

In the second paragraph of the fifth article of the Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan on Education, it is written: “**The state ensures that each citizen, regardless of gender, race, language, religion, political belief, nationality, social status, origin, or health, has the opportunity to get education and discrimination is not allowed**” (Milli Mejlis of the Azerbaijan Republic of Azerbaijan, 2009). Here the word “health opportunities” attracts attention. Therefore, children with disabilities also have the right to education. But can they take advantage of this right and how do they get an education? World experience shows that children with disabilities are the majority of population groups restricted from education. The exact number of invalid children excluded from education in Azerbaijan is not known. According to the official statistics of 2020, approximately 62,951 children

with disabilities are registered in Azerbaijan. As a result of the research conducted by UNICEF, it was found that only a part of the families of children with disabilities apply to the relevant state institutions to determine the degree of disability, and as a result, it can be noted that the number of invalid children in Azerbaijan is more. Approximately 47,000 children registered with disabilities are primary and secondary school age children. According to the information of the Ministry of Education, 12,400 children with disabilities are involved in primary and secondary education being educated either at home (individual) education (approximately 9,000 children), or in special schools, or in boarding schools (approximately 5,384 children). It is assumed that some children with disabilities were enrolled in comprehensive schools, but due to the fact that they were not registered, the exact number is not available.

Traditional education focuses on the mental and physical disabilities of the child. They experience communication breakdown with other children and feel isolated from society. At the same time, when other peers come across with disabled children with, they look at them with surprise, as if they came from a completely different planet, and sometimes ridicule them. The main reason for this is the lack of communication and cooperation among them and ignorance about persons with disabilities. So they do not understand each other and do not empathize with them. Thus, the desire of a whole and healthy society, goes through the completeness of education. The world experiences is constantly being investigated In order to form the absolute education without shortcomings, necessary options for national system are being examined, and simultaneously are put into effect. Inclusive education makes wide opportunities for children with disabilities. So, how are these opportunities determined?

First, the general educational system should surround all children, provide all children with equal opportunities, and support the individual achievement. Such an opportunity can be created by inclusive education. The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), ratified by the Republic of Azerbaijan in 2008, imposes clear obligations on states to implement inclusive education. The Convention requires that all children, including children with disabilities, not only have the opportunity to study in their cities, regions and villages, but also provide them with appropriate educational opportunities in order to fully reveal their potential. Thus, Inclusive education is the education of children with and without disabilities, rich and poor, as well as all children, regardless of their gender, ethnic, religious and cultural status, in schools that can reveal their potential within their communities.

Let's look through the difference between the concepts of inclusion and integration, that we often encounter in the process of inclusive education: "Are these concepts the same?" the answer to the question is unequivocally "no". Integration is the process of adapting children to the features of society and educational environment. Inclusion, on the other hand, sets the direction of education so that the educational environment supports children's educational needs in a way that suits them.

The educational reforms carried out in the Republic of Azerbaijan in recent years have made it possible to achieve the most significant successes in the field of inclusive education. A number of important factors contribute to the successful implementation of inclusive education in the educational institutions of our country. First of all, it is the professionalism and personal training of teachers that urgently require improvement in the implementation of the full inclusion process. In addition, currently, within the framework of state projects and programs, the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Azerbaijan has adopted a number of decisions regarding the organization of various thematic trainings, professional development courses for teachers, and mandatory courses for the heads of inclusive educational institutions, and they have been gradually taught to teachers working at secondary schools of the republic. Undoubtedly, the implementation of all these measures has raised the level of professionalism of school and university teachers in the framework of inclusion. But still, teachers in inclusive groups are considered special teachers. That is, there is still a difference between a teacher of general groups and a teacher of inclusive groups.

At the same time, the results of long-term research prove that it is impossible to create a single model of inclusive education. But great importance is that to understand the need for change of educational methodologies. Pedagogical research confirms the need for flexibility in teaching methods and curricula in accordance with children's requirements. Therefore, scientific research conducted in the middle of the 20th century greatly influenced the organization of a new system for understanding the capabilities of children with disabilities and supporting them. Studies in the field of special pedagogy are related to the revelation of the children's potential with intellectual disabilities and the discovery of all children's capabilities and the recognition the fact of learning capacity of the children.

Some issues related to inclusive education that we have examined are reflected in pedagogical-psychological and methodical literature. Most of this literature is related to the implementation of inclusive education in schools. Although they do not mention the ways of implementing

inclusive education in preschool educational institutions, the importance of inclusive education and its role in the formation of children's personality are explained. In recent years, when inclusive education exists in Azerbaijan, most researches are conducted on the basis of translations from foreign literature. In this field, the role of the UN Children's Fund, UNICEF-Azerbaijan and the Regional Development Public Union (RDPU) is indispensable.

One of the valuable studies on inclusive education in world practice is the book "Inclusive Education: Practical Guidelines for Supporting Diversity in the Classroom" written by Tim Loreman, Joanne Deppeler and David Harvey in 2005 and translated into Azerbaijani in 2020 (Loreman et al., 2020). After getting acquainted with the book, we came to the conclusion that it is an essential book, because it expresses visual ideas that help teachers, administrators and parents to visualize real inclusive instructions in a concrete form. The authors' approaches are useful from the point of view multiple perspectives as they provide readers with strategies and tools.

Thus, as a result of the analysis of studies and our research, the main characteristics of the concept of inclusive education can be defined as follows:

- Legislation on inclusive education, a legal framework establishing the social model of disability should be created and an intensive activity plan should be made.
- To identify children with disabilities who are involved in education and those who are left out of education, a single database should be created, their health and rehabilitation, educational development should be monitored accordingly, and if over time it is determined that the program is not suitable for the child, intervention is necessary.
- Considering the number of children with disabilities in the country, including regions, inclusive educational institutions and schools should be determined and universal conditions should be created for children with disabilities in those kindergartens and schools (installing ramps, making appropriate changes to the sidewalk and gymnasium). Information about those inclusive educational institutions should be open to the public.
- Inclusive schools should be assigned a means of transport to take their children to and from school for parents with financial difficulties.
- Free Intervention programs should be implemented to prevent children's disability.

In order to ensure the implementation of the "State Program for the Development of Inclusive Education for Persons with Disabilities in the Republic of Azerbaijan in

2018-2024", guided by item 13.5 of the "Regulation on the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Azerbaijan", since the 2021/2022 academic year were organized inclusive classes in high schools number 246 in Baku and city of Guba, 39 in Ganja city, 4 and 21 in Sumgait city, 10 in Shirvan city, 2 in Gazakh city and 12 in Sheki city. In the 2022-2023 academic year it was extended with Baku city 39, 84, 265, 300, Ganja city 8, Sumgait city 25, Khachmaz city 6, Agjabadi city 5, and Gabala city 3. Inclusive classes were organized in secondary schools No. 3 and high school No. 3 in Khirdalan. Thus, at present, a total of 18 schools with inclusive primary classes are operating in 11 regions across the country.

Based on our observations, we can say that from September 2021, interactive processes are being implemented in the primary inclusive education system, and effective work is being done to improve the quality of inclusive education in the field of developing the creative potential of children with disabilities. It is very gratifying that inclusive education has made it possible to realize the desires of parents of children with disabilities and various spectrum disorders, at least partially. However, for a country like Azerbaijan, which has about 72,000 children with disabilities, inauguration of 18 inclusive schools in only 11 regions is few in number. We are longing for that the Ministry of Education will take serious steps in order to increase the number of inclusive schools for the next academic year because the growth of inclusive schools means that education is accessible to everyone. We believe that it is high time to establish the educational process based on the elements of child-oriented pedagogy.

Decision No. 43 (Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2023) signed by the Prime Minister of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Ali Asadov, on February 11th, 2023, is about the ratification of the "Regulation on the Organization of Inclusive Education". According to the decision, the application of the Law No. 536-VIQD dated May 13th, 2022 of the Republic of Azerbaijan "On education (special education) of persons with disabilities" and "On amendments to the laws of the Republic of Azerbaijan" and "Education of persons with disabilities (special education)" on the application of the Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan" on amending Decree No. 540 of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan dated July 19th, 2001" Ministers of the Republic of Azerbaijan in order to ensure the implementation of clause 2.1 of Decree No. 1711 of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan dated June 8th, 2022 The cabinet decided that: "Regulation on the organization of inclusive education" should be approved (attached). Amendments to this Decision can be made in accordance with item 2.6-1 of the "Regulation

on the Procedure for the Preparation and Adoption of Normative Legal Acts of Executive Power Bodies” approved by Decree No. 772 of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan dated August 24th, 2002. The decision also includes articles on the procedure for organizing inclusive education. It is indicated that this Regulation was prepared in accordance with Article 12.3 of the Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan “On education (special education) of persons with limited health capabilities” and regulates issues related to the organization of inclusive education in general educational institutions.

The main concepts used for the purposes of this Regulation have the following meanings (Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2023):

- individual curriculum – a document containing the purpose, tasks, methods and methods of the training, as well as the criteria for evaluating the results, taking into account the adaptation of the educational program or the simplification of the educational program based on the needs and capabilities of the child with disabilities involved in inclusive education.
- adaptation of the educational program - changing the state standards of general education in accordance with the capabilities of children with disabilities (except those with mental retardation).
- simplification of the educational program - changing the state standards of general education in accordance with the needs of children with disabilities with mental retardation.

According to the decision, some criteria about admission of disabled children to Inclusive schools have been determined, and the decision on which children will be admitted to pilot inclusive schools is made by the Psychological-medical-pedagogical commission (hereafter Commission). The selection criteria set limits on the choice of children with physical disabilities, visual and hearing disabilities. Because their admission to school requires setting several “necessary adaptations” in schools.

The Commission’s role and selection criteria are problematic aspects from the point of view of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and General Comment No. 4 on Article 24. Because the Convention and the General Comment state that inclusive education is one of the basic human rights of ALL learners, and countries must provide equal opportunities to all children, regardless of the limitations they may have. Then, firstly parents apply to polyclinics related to their children’s health, and if it is necessary, the doctor fills in Form-27 and refers the parent to the Psychological-Medical-Pedagogical Commission. If there is a need to confirm the diagnosis, the child is directed to a mental health center or a

psycho-neurological dispensary, depending on the state of health, and after the confirmation of diagnosis, the commission is again informed about it. In short, Commissions usually receive information about children with disabilities from polyclinics. In this regard, it is important to cooperate closely with polyclinics.

For identifying the criteria for disabled children’s involvement in inclusive schools the following information is considered:

- The child has to live in an area within the scope of the school.
- The opportunities and difficulties of the child must be assessed:

Absence of moderate or severe mental disability is directly related to Intellectual and learning ability, knowledge, competence, perception of skills and the purposeful organization of activity experience acquisition, impose of acquired knowledge in everyday life and the ability to form lifelong learning motivation. A child can be involved in inclusive education if he/she has the ability to learn and study in educational institutions and other organizations within the framework of state education standards with the help of special auxiliary technical means determined on the basis of the commission’s opinion (if necessary), including the creation of special conditions. The child also has to possess verbal communication skills. According to the criteria for determining disability, communication skills mean the ability to communicate with people through the perception, analysis, storage, expression, and transmission of information. Therefore, is important to determine:

- In case of isolated hearing loss - the ability to communicate using non-verbal communication methods and sign interpretation service.
- The child’s ability to communicate by reducing the pace and volume of receiving and transmitting information and use of auxiliary technical means, if necessary.
- If he/she is able to communicate regularly with the partial help of outsiders and, if necessary, using assistive technology.
- In the above cases the child can be involved in inclusive education because the child’s lack of communication skills and constant need for help from outsiders prevent him/her from being involved in inclusive education. Other conditions that can impede this process are:
- Lack of self-care skills (toilet use, food intake, etc.) - the ability to freely fulfill one’s main physiological needs, engage in daily household activities, personal hygiene skills, etc. But, if he/she has the ability to take care of

- himself regularly with the partial help of outsiders and, if necessary, using auxiliary technical means, it is appropriate to involve him in inclusive education.
- The need for constant help and care of outsiders and the lack of self-care skills due to complete dependence on outsiders. This prevents him/her from being involved in inclusive education.
 - Serious behavior violations (aggression, autoaggression, etc.). To be included the child must possess the ability to control one's behavior (self-awareness, adequate behavior ability taking into account social, legal and moral-ethical norms).
 - If the child who came to the Commission for examination has regularly limited ability to control his behavior in difficult life situations or difficulty in performing decisive functions covering various spheres of life, partly due to the possibility of self-correction. It would be included only if there is a permanent decrease in criticism of one's own behavior and the environment with the possibility of partial self-correction with the regular help of outsiders, it is appropriate to involve it in inclusive education.
 - Absence of severe musculoskeletal disorders. The child should have the ability to move freely, maintain body balance during movement, immobility or change of body position, ability to use public transport, child's ability perform small tasks and the ability to move freely by shortening the distance using technical means. If this can be solved with the partial help of outsiders, if necessary, using auxiliary technical means, can involve them in inclusive education.

Results of pedagogical experiments an interviews

In connection with the first (defining) stage of the experiment, the lessons listened to, conversations with teachers, parents, students, discussions, observations, and anonymous questionnaires made it possible to conclude that some of the educational institutions where the research was conducted have certain problems related to the organization of inclusive education. This is confirmed by their answers to the survey questions. 50 teachers of inclusive classes participated in the survey. The results are given in the Table 1.

Table 1. Answers of professors for involvement in inclusive education

Question number	Positive responses		Question number	Positive responses	
	Person	Percentage %		Person	Percentage %
1	50	100	6	50	100
2	40	80	7	25	50
3	50	100	8	25	50
4	50	100	9	0	0
5	10	20	10	50	100

It was found that 90 percent of the teachers who took part in the survey had an average level of knowledge and skills related to inclusive education. The obtained results prove that it is possible to carry out substantial action measures in the arrangement of education in inclusive educational institutions. Children with disabilities easily socialize in inclusive classes, come to school willingly, are far from being stigmatized, and are inclined to learn. Children without disabilities do not focus on their disability, accept everyone as they are, and develop their communication skills.

The analysis of the answers to the questions shows that the general results of involvement rate of (skills and habits in working on various sources, in the field of scientific organization of theoretical knowledge) young schoolchildren in inclusive education were satisfactory. In the experimental groups, the main indicators were from 5.7% to 46.3% compared to the control groups, high results were obtained. Such a result cannot be considered accidental. With their answers, the children proved once again that appearance does not make any difference to learning process and going to school. When children learn together with their peers, it becomes more interesting and fun. Everyone can get into troubles, so we all need to help those who are in hardship.

It should be noted that we take into consideration such criteria as complete and correct answers containing all the main features of the object and clarifying it in detail. We include inaccurate and incomplete answers, weak answers that lead to a misunderstanding of the question, even if the main features are sufficiently reflected, but there are no examples, facts and examples, as well as gross errors. In accordance with all this, we express the answers of the participants of

the experimental and control groups who participated in the survey in the table with two, one and zero points - numbers. The overall quality indicator of the answers received from 7–9-year-old children with and without disabilities (50 in the experimental group and 50 in the control group) who were included in the survey in the inclusive classes involved in the experiment is shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Characteristics of experimental and control groups

Group	Main characteristics	Characteristic features	Experimental group			Control group		
			2	1	0	2	1	0
1	Speech skills	Speaking on picture	32	10	8	25	16	9
		Speaking from memory	20	18	12	13	22	15
2	Ability to express the text in one's own words	Being able to distinguish the main idea	35	11	4	24	16	10
		To speak logically	18	12	20	17	13	20
3	Answer the questions	Based on memory	16	14	20	15	14	21
		by the teacher's instruction	35	12	3	33	17	0
4	Grouping	Recognizes colors	45	3	2	43	4	3
		Groups objects according to their colors and shapes	31	11	8	29	11	10
5	Communicates with younger people, peers and adults.	Adjusts communication according to the social norms of the environment in which he lives (not shouting while speaking; do not insult; address politely; listen to others)	28	12	10	25	13	12
		He compares his actions with others and evaluates	27	13	10	24	20	6
6	Organizational-cognitive skills and habits	Mental labor hygiene	19	25	6	13	27	10
		Day mode	13	18	19	11	19	20
		Organization of the pace and rhythm of work	14	18	18	13	15	22

As can be seen from the table, in both the experimental and control groups participating in the study, the quality indicator related to knowledge, skills and habits of children during their education was significant. In particular, certain differences in all qualities between the experimental and control groups are evident. This shows that, in order to create a complete and advanced system for the involvement of children with various forms of mild disabilities in inclusive educational activities, to increase the efficiency and quality of activity in this direction, to deepen the content, are necessary special or introductory courses for teachers, parents, or providing at least introductory topics and information is useful.

During oral interviews with children, the idea was confirmed that most of them would have acquired various knowledge, skills and habits in school if they were involved in inclusive preschool education based on the social model. Conversations with teachers, interviews, observations, and the question we included in the questionnaires were related to the influence of disabled children's families to their general preparation. To what extent does the family influence the social-emotional development of children with disabilities on the positive side? The result of the responds to the question is given in Table 3.

Table 3. Qualitative indicators of the influence of the family on the positive side of the social-emotional development of children with disabilities

Group	Answers	Experimental group (50)		Control group (50)	
		Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
1	Affected	23	46	20	40
2	Not affected	30	60	27	54

As can be seen from the responses of teachers-educators, not all families had a positive effect on the social-emotional development of children with disabilities. This is the reality. Every family wants their child to be born healthy, they want him to live a happy, healthy, carefree life like other peers. When a child is born with various disabilities in a typical

Azerbaijani family, as a people with mental values, the family brings up that child in need of special care, which leads to a low level social-emotional skills. The course of work was discussed, the level of children's social-emotional skills was analyzed, studied, generalizations were made, and results were obtained. The attitude of the teachers and parents of the inclusive educational institutions where the pedagogical experiment was conducted to the importance of inclusive education is shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Attitude towards inclusive education of children with all types of disabilities in pre-school educational institutions

Respondents	Their number	Very good	Good	No comment
Teachers	50	40 %	45 %	15 %
Parents	250	72 %	25,5 %	2,5 %

The experiments carried out in inclusive schools made possible come to the following findings:

- It is important to start inclusive education from preschool.
- Children see and perceive everyone as they are, they are not aware of the differences in them, which distracts them from asking questions that will hurt their peers who have an unlike appearance in the future.
- The quality indicators in the experimental groups are higher than the results of the control groups.

These findings can be seen more clearly from the results of Table 5.

Table 5. Answers about the necessity of pre-school educational institutions for inclusive education

Concept of inclusive education	Answers in percentage					
	Teachers		Children		Parents	
	Expert group	Control group	Expert group	Control group	Expert group	Control group
Inclusive education is important	82	63	100	85	78	55
Children's disability does not hinder their moral development	90	65	95	65	75	58
Inclusive preschool programs should be developed	78	80	-	-	85	62
Independent activity	75	65	60	55	52	45
Intellectual activity	65	45	52	41	48	36
Critical thinking	56	43	45	39	47	38
Principles of activity on speech	76	43	78	62	76	42
Access to school and learning environment	82	45	42	33	58	47
Universal training design	57	27	54	35	65	33
The pace and rhythm of activity	86	47	76	46	77	65
Moral and voluntary preparation	74	59	62	48	76	50
Self – test	87	57	55	41	68	54
Self - esteem	75	62	73	54	65	51
Self – control	76	53	35	21	36	23
Social model of disability	85	46	70	50	80	65

As it can be seen, the general results of the questionnaire surveys conducted with everyone involved in the inclusive education experiment also confirm the working hypothesis that we put forward. This allows us to come to the conclusion that the preschool period creates fertile opportunities for the implementation of inclusive education.

Final remarks

The first point of concern regarding children with disabilities is the inadequacy of the legislative framework. It is true that, although a number of provisions related to inclusive education are reflected in the laws, the absence of a principles

related to preschool inclusive education as a whole is evidence of the lack of general overview by the state in this field. Unfortunately, the creation of a single base for inclusive educational institutions for children with disabilities, which is one of the most important goals set in the State Program covering the years 2018-2024, has not been fulfilled.

In world practice, health problems of children with disabilities are detected earlier, and constant communication is maintained with them. Then, during pre-school and school period, each child is provided with education in kindergarten and school according to his problem. This allows children to better develop their knowledge and skills. In Azerbaijan, aside from inclusive education, there is poor activity done in the pre-school period for children with disabilities. This prevents the classification of children with disabilities by state bodies in the later period.

Since inclusive education is a new concept for our country, there are various misunderstandings about it both in state bodies and in society. In some cases, parents are against their children studying together with children involved in inclusive education. On the other hand, parents of children involved in inclusive education avoid studying together with their peers and note that they are ashamed of their children's inadequacy. The reason for all this is the lack of educational activities of the state in this field. Some social media, news, and information about inclusive education are rarely found on television, radio, and the press. Since there is not enough information about inclusive education in the society, the process of training personnel in this field is also significantly delayed.

It is known that most of the applicants in our country choose their specialty with the guidance of their parents and friends. In such a case, there will be very little support even if the applicant wants to acquire a specialty that is not known by parents and society in general. For this reason, the state can attract the interest of applicants by declaring this type of field as a priority field and offering additional incentives and scholarships. Also, in the rural regions there are few pre-school and general education institutions suitable for inclusive education, even in some places, there are none at all. In this situation, they have to give priority to home schooling. Since there is no special control over the home schooling, the issue of quality in its implementation raises doubts. Summarizing all this, the state's approach to inclusive education is opaque, the society is not sufficiently informed, not enough personnel, pedagogical materials have not been prepared, and the essential areas such as legislation and database have not yet been formed.

CONCLUSIONS

The basis of the practice of inclusive education is the acceptance of the activity of each child. For this reason, education should be organized in such a way as to satisfy the unique needs of each child. In order to be able to identify children with disabilities who are involved in education and those who are left out of education, a single database should be created, their health and rehabilitation, educational development should be monitored accordingly, and if it is determined that the program is not suitable for the child over time, intervention should be done. Taking into account the number of children with disabilities in the country, including regions, inclusive educational institutions should be determined and universal conditions for children with disabilities should be created there (installing ramps, making appropriate changes in the sidewalk and gymnasium). Information about that inclusive measures should be publicly available. Also, parents with financial troubles should be assigned a vehicle to take their children to and from kindergarten and school (this shuttle service is available in private institutions, it would be good if things were done in this direction in public institutions as well. Because most parents of children with disabilities have financial problems, they cannot take their children to private institutions they don't know).

Free early intervention programs should be implemented to prevent disability in children. In addition, sufficient number of personnel who can work with children with disabilities should be trained, teachers already working with them should be involved in additional professional development courses and the issue of their financial incentives should be taken into account. In order to inform the public about inclusive education, training should be also held to educate parents about inclusive education, programs and assessment methods.

However, this is insufficient if there is not a change in legislation. A legal framework establishing the social model of disability should be created and an intensive action plan should be set up. In recent times, enough projects have been implemented in the direction of implementation of inclusive education in primary classes, textbooks, teaching aids, and programs are prepared, but fundamental research has not yet been conducted on the methodology of inclusive education in preschool education, so work should be done in this direction.

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