

Philosophy of independent living as a basis for inclusive education in Kazakhstan

Filosofía de vida independiente como base para la educación inclusiva en Kazajstán

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ABSTRACT:

This paper is a qualitative case study which investigates the issues of inclusive education implementation in Kazakhstan. The study investigates the challenges of integration for children with special educational needs into the school society and administrative issues which are connected with implementation of inclusive education. The findings indicate that inclusive education is based on the philosophy of independent living, which implies the need of creating equal opportunities for students with disabilities and the rest of the students.

Keywords: Philosophy of independent living, students with special educational needs (SED), inclusive education

RESUMEN:

Este documento es un estudio cualitativo que investiga los problemas de la implementación de la educación inclusiva en Kazajstán. El estudio investiga los desafíos de la integración de los niños con necesidades educativas especiales en la sociedad escolar y los problemas administrativos que están relacionados con la implementación de la educación inclusiva. Los resultados indican que la educación inclusiva se basa en la filosofía de la vida independiente, lo que implica la necesidad de crear la igualdad de oportunidades para los estudiantes con discapacidad y el resto de los estudiantes.

Palabras clave: Filosofía de la vida independiente, estudiantes con necesidades educativas especiales (SED), educación inclusiva

1. Introduction

Modern society is characterized by an ever-increasing role of knowledge, education and information, which are necessary preconditions for identity formation and, as a consequence, for the successful development of the entire society. However, Kazakhstan

students with disabilities feel the absence of the necessary conditions for their full participation in the educational process, as well as insufficient teaching methods lead to the fact that the majority of people in this category cannot get good education, profession and prepare for life in the society (Aubakirova, 2016).

2. Literature review

Nowadays, development of inclusive education in Kazakhstan becomes a priority in the different state programs. The Message of President Nursultan Nazarbayev to people of Kazakhstan "Kazakhstan's way - 2050: Common goal, common interests, common future" identified the problems in educational areas and paid attention to the citizens with disabilities. The President claims that Kazakhstan should be a barrier-free zone for people with disabilities. "People with disabilities can work in consumer services, food industry, agriculture ... We will involve them in active life, and they will not just get benefits, but will recognize themselves as members of society, helpful staff", noted the President (Nazarbaev, 2014a). Therefore, the issue is the accessibility and quality of education for people with disabilities.

In other Presidents' messages "NurlyZhol – the Path to the Future" and "Kazakhstan in the new global reality: growth, reform and development" N. Nazarbaev said that Kazakhstan government will not reduce its social obligations despite the fact that the global economy faces a "global test" (Nazarbaev, 2014b), and he called the target support to the most vulnerable segments of the population an important part of the anti-crisis strategy (Nazarbaev, 2015).

The development of an inclusive education system is one of the priorities of the State education development program in the Republic of Kazakhstan for the years of 2011-2020. Kazakhstan law proclaims the rights for children with disabilities to obtain equal and quality education. Kazakhstan educational system provides 39 special kindergartens and 315 special groups and trainings for more than 15 thousand children of preschool age. About 25 thousand children of school age are enrolled in 106 special schools and 1,219 special classes at secondary schools (Aubakirova, 2016).

The distance learning and e-learning systems are important conditions to ensure access to education for children with disabilities. Since 2011, according to the State Program, the disabled children, who are studying at home, get software and hardware for successful completion of an individual educational program (Abdina and Kuchko, 2016).

Similar State programs to develop inclusive education were approved in Belorussia. For instance, a Belarusian researcher notes that in Belarus all efforts to implement the idea of inclusive education were supported by the legal framework enshrining the rights and obligations of participants in the educational process. However, inclusive education in the Post-Soviet countries is in forming stages, thus it is limited and has experimental and unstable character. The unwillingness of the education system to develop and implement individual educational programs as part of the inclusive model is the most important barrier for a disabled person's independent living.

To address these issues the Concept of the persons' inclusive education development was approved in Belarus. The process of implementation of this concept consists of several stages. At the first stage, which is designed for 2015-2017, the government plans to develop the official normative, scientific and methodological supports, studies, experimental and innovative activities, trainings, and to create special conditions for educational institutions. At the second stage (2018-2020), the Concept aim is to implement inclusive education in the educational institutions and at the same time, to continue developing the scientific and methodological supports for inclusive education, trainings for students with different educational needs. The third stage (2020 and subsequent years) proclaims increasing the number of educational establishments offering inclusive education. The document aims at ensuring equal rights and education access for all students and expanding the socialization opportunities. Also program implementation will include maximum involvement of the primary and secondary students with special needs in the educational process, creation of tolerance in the educational environment and society, development of the teachers'

professional competence in the polysubject space.

The experience of some foreign countries shows that in the modern conditions children with disabilities have real opportunities to go through all levels of education. In the United States new technologies of inclusive education are applied in the system of secondary and higher vocational education (Ferguson et al, 1992). The theoretical basis of these technologies includes the philosophy of independent living, which implies the need of creating the same conditions for students with disabilities and for the rest of the students, equal learning environment at the university and participating in life.

Independent Living philosophy orients a person with disability to setting himself/herself the same tasks as any other members of society. To become fully independent, the disabled people have to confront many obstacles. Such barriers can be explicit (for example architectural environment), and implicit (the people's attitudes). If the disabled children eliminate these barriers, they become able to achieve many benefits, to make the first step on the life learning way, to live a full life, work, raise a family, have children, engage in sports and politics; in other words to fully participate and be an active member in the society.

Philosophy and independent living movement emerged in the United States. The American social movements in the 1970s influenced the formation of the independent living ideology. They included the movement against the isolation of people with disabilities in the closed institutions, the struggle for the African American and female civil rights, and "self-help" movement (Shakespeare, 1993). The movement for the rights of consumers and the movement for the revision of the authoritarian medical approach to disability were the most important factors which had impact on the formation of independent living philosophy (Gurkina and Novikova, 2014). The supporters of independent living philosophy proclaimed that disability is not a medical problem, but a problem of unequal opportunities. Therefore, inclusive education approach has to base on the idea that equal opportunities should be provided through the establishment of special conditions in mainstream school (Griffin et al, 2011), for instance, the students with hearing problems can participate in the seminar with a sign language interpreter.

Russian sociologists (Gurkina, Novikova, 2014) claim that to create inclusive education for children with disabilities, government, administrators and teachers should design the model where children can smoothly adapt their needs to the learning environment, furthermore stakeholders should provide the necessary support for children with disabilities and healthy children in order to organize united education (Kuchmaeva et al., 2014).

We would like to add that the state and society as a whole should pay more attention to supporting programs which increase the children's access to pre-school, school and higher education and ensuring the social adaptation and integration of children with disabilities. Independent Living philosophy clearly defines the difference between a life in isolation and satisfying participation in society.

3. Methodology

The purpose of this study is to explore how inclusion is perceived and implemented in a mainstream school in an urban city in the North of Kazakhstan.

The researchers want to explore stakeholders' knowledge and perceptions of implementation of inclusion education in Kazakhstani context. In order to explore the inclusive practices at school and investigate the knowledge, perceptions and experiences, qualitative methods were used in this study. This article was done as a case study, where case is a school which has provided inclusion education since 2011 and today eighty four students with special needs study there, the total number of students enrolled is 1,222.

The semi-structured interview and document analysis are the main instruments for data collection. The authors interviewed 5 persons: two administrative officials and three teachers. Administrative managers provided the authors with the documents according to which inclusive education was implemented.

4. Results

The article aim is to investigate the process of inclusive education implementation in Kazakhstan. The collected data were divided into two main themes: the first is the integration challenges of children with special needs into the school society, and the second is technical and administrative issues which hinder their education.

4.1. The integration challenges of children with special needs

Concerning the problems that the children faced, the teachers mentioned many challenges which hinder integration of disabled children to education and one of them is the attitude of the parents towards children with disabilities. As an illustration of this thinking Participant 1 said: "When a normal child's parents see a disabled child, they are dumbfounded and resent, why their child should study with such children". Parents see children with disabilities as a problem; they think that it is better to their children to study with normal classmates, because it is unusual situation in their life. However, school administration tries to eliminate these problems. The school psychologist works with parents during 2-3 months, she explains them that the disabled children are the same as others, and they just need a special help from their teachers and psychologically good relations with their peers.

As opposed, the teachers emphasize positive perception by all children, children with special educational needs (SEN) and other children are more open to the new environment; they want to create a friendly relationship with everybody.

"The positive moment is that our children are grateful to everyone. Children with SEN understand that it is difficult for teachers to deal with them. They understand everything and do not take offense.... Moreover, normal children help children with SEN. They skip them; lift them when elevator does not work."

This finding shows that all children are more close to the philosophy of independent living than adults; they do not feel differences between each other. Children with special needs respect their teachers; they understand that the teachers try to help them and the normal children also feel these sensitive connection.

The next issue is parents' thoughts that if their children are disabled, the government, school and society have to solve all their problems. For instance, participant 2 commented: "... we do not have such conditions and funding, as we are a mainstream school. Parents believe that it is the obligation of a school to support their children, for instance provide service of Wheelchair Accessible Taxis (WATs)."

Such a comment shows that parents have dependency position; they want to delegate some of their caring obligations to school teachers and administrators. This position was formed because some of parents have financial and personal problems and they want to get more support from the stakeholders.

These challenges demonstrate that children with special needs want to integrate to the school society, however the real life shows that people around them have wrong attitudes, they perceive disabled children as people with limited possibilities, but inclusive education is a process where children with special needs can get the same opportunities as other children.

4.2. Technical and administrative issues

The teachers and administrative officials replied that the school does not have teaching aids, lacks special rooms, for instance they have only one correction office where five specialists cater to children. Only the educational psychologist has her independent office, moreover these specialists are overloaded with the number of children: one speech pathologist should teach eighteen children, but she works with eighty four. The next problem is that many teachers are very young; they do not have enough job experience. Participant 3 said that "all teachers completed special training, however they mostly learn theory and there was not enough practical training..." Also there were problems with multidisciplinary teachers from

five to nine grades, because they were afraid of teaching children with special needs. The other question was raised to know about the process of assessment which the teachers used for children with special needs. The teachers emphasized that officially disabled children are exempt from exams; however some of them want to pass this process. Therefore, there are problems with assessment how to create relevant criteria for children with different health possibilities.

Overall, the school wants to improve its technical and methodological capabilities. They plan to open offices where each specialist such as a speech pathologist, a speech therapist, a teacher of hearing impaired children and others can be work individually with children.

5. Discussion

There is an urban school in the North of Kazakhstan that implements the practice of inclusive education. Interviews with the administrators and teachers of the school have shown the following.

Inclusive education does not involve the education of children with disabilities under special programs. The practice of inclusive education involves special children learning according to the usual general school curriculum with the help of accompanying teachers. The school employs 2 speech pathologists, 2 speech therapists, a teacher of hearing impaired children, a teacher of oligophrenic children, a teacher for physical therapy exercises and an educational psychologist. An individual educational plan is drawn up for each special child, corresponding to his or her capabilities and abilities. For example, if there are 10 tasks in the training topic, then, according to the individual plan, the child can master from 2 to 5 tasks.

However, despite the fact that teachers who work in inclusive classes are paid 40% of the basic salary additionally for special working conditions, professionals who help children with disabilities are sorely lacking. For example, according to the state educational standards, one speech pathologist's labor rate is designed to care for 18 children. In reality, two speech pathologists in school cover 84 children. As we can see, the workload of teachers is more than twice the norm.

As for the qualitative level of educators, every year subject teachers who teach in grades 1 through 4 (primary school) are 100% certified (serve internships). There are teachers with good work experience, those who love their work, and there are teachers working only for money. According to the school's administrators, the problem arises with the subject teachers who work in grades 5 through 9 (middle school). Unlike primary school teachers, middle school teachers have very little experience with disabled children.

In addition, there is an issue of the quality level of accompanying teachers. Due to the shortage of staff, it is a usual practice the people are just sent from the department of education, from the employment center to work as accompanying teachers. Essentially, these are young people who did not find another, more promising, in their opinion, job, they could not get a job in their own profession. Of course, these people have a basic education and serve internships and refresher courses. But, from the point of view of the interviewed specialists, the 2- to 3-week courses of the "Orleu" National Center for Continuing Education, where the accompanying teachers undertake internships, focus mainly on theory and the practical part is only 2 days long.

This is completely inadequate because working with disabled children demands constant practice.

A matter of funding, which is ambiguous is another important point voiced by the school administrators and educators. On the one hand, since the school is one of general education and is a public one, it receives the necessary minimum from the state and can count on the help of sponsors. The institute of sponsorship is not very developed in Kazakhstan. Parents of special children initially rely on the help of the state and sponsors, and begin to show a dependent mentality, demanding special attention. On the other hand, the philosophy of an independent life, as mentioned above, guides a person with a disability to set the same tasks as any other member of society. The help of the state and sponsors is, of course,

necessary, but the basis of the philosophy of an independent life lies in the desire of a person to create his or her life as they see it in the long run and to make their own efforts. In our opinion, both positions need improvement. The state should pay more attention to people with disabilities. It should be manifested in the creation of innovative technologies for inclusive education, training of personnel to work with people having disabilities, provision for technical equipment of educational institutions that train special children. It is necessary to develop the institute of sponsorship in the Republic of Kazakhstan. At the same time, one should not forget that no technology can help people if they do not try to change their own life and their consciousness.

6. Conclusion

The issues of inclusive education, as discussed above, lead to a demand for understanding stakeholders' and parental behaviors towards children with special educational needs. The authors, as an insider of the Kazakhstani community, explored the complex formation of inclusive education through administrators' and teachers' eyes, which is a novelty in Kazakhstan.

In order to improve the quality of implementation of inclusive education in the Republic of Kazakhstan it is necessary to explore the following tasks:

- To analyze the quality of education for people with disabilities;
- To develop recommendations for improving the process of implementation of inclusive education in the Republic of Kazakhstan;
- To invite foreign and local experts to conduct practical trainings aimed at improving social adaptation of people with disabilities;
- To develop adaptation educational technologies and special educational programs for people with disabilities;
- To conduct sociological research among experts and people with special educational needs.

Therefore, it is important to continue the research in the inclusive education field especially in Kazakhstan where the entire society is not ready for the concept of independent living.

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