Perspectives of teachers on their role as agents of change for inclusive education in

Kazakhstan

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Yours sincerely,

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Acknowledgment

THE ROLE OF THE TEACHERS IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN KAZAKHSTANI SCHOOLS

Abstract

Successful implementation of any educational reform requires teacher support. Teachers are the main stakeholders who implement these reforms. In this process, they encounter many diverse obstacles, and they need to be efficient to overcome them. An agent of inclusion is an important role that teachers play to support not only children with special educational needs but also fellow teachers who implement inclusive education in Kazakhstani schools. Agents of change can encourage other educators to overcome struggle with inequalities and inequities in education. The current study examines if teachers at urban schools in Northern Kazakhstan are ready to become agents of inclusion in their schools and what actions should be taken by teachers to implement inclusive education in mainstream schools successfully. The central research question guiding this study asks how do teachers in urban Kazakhstani schools understand their roles as agents of change for inclusive education? A qualitative research design was used to conduct the study, with data collected through semi-structured interviews with seven teachers. Findings reveal that teachers lack proper understanding of inclusive education concept. First, some of the participants believe that there are some barriers on their way of becoming agent of change as they do not have experience working with students with special educational needs. Second, teachers associate inclusive education only with students with special educational needs due to mental or physical disability; they did not mention any other diverse students' characteristics. Thus, teachers lacking knowledge and support in identifying and teaching students with special educational needs. Teachers in North Kazakhstani schools need access to training on questions of inclusive education.

Keywords: inclusive education, agents of change, teacher's attitudes, teachers' collaboration, students with diverse needs in education

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Абстракт

Успешная реализация любой образовательной реформы требует поддержки учителей. Учителя являются основными заинтересованными сторонами, которые осуществляют эти реформы. В этом процессе они сталкиваются со многими разнообразными препятствиями, и им необходимо быть эффективными, чтобы преодолеть их. Агент инклюзии - это важная роль, которую учителя играют в поддержке не только детей с особыми образовательными потребностями, но и коллег-учителей, которые внедряют инклюзивное образование в казахстанских школах. Агенты перемен могут побудить других педагогов преодолеть борьбу с неравенством и неравенством в образовании. В текущем исследовании рассматривается, готовы ли учителя городских школ Северного Казахстана стать агентами инклюзии в своих школах и какие действия должны предпринять учителя для успешного внедрения инклюзивного образования в обычных школах. Центральный исследовательский вопрос, лежащий в основе этого исследования, заключается в том, как учителя в городских казахстанских школах понимают свою роль в качестве проводников изменений в инклюзивном образовании? Для проведения исследования был использован качественный исследовательский подход, данные были собраны с помощью полуструктурированных интервью с семью учителями. Результаты показывают, что учителям не хватает надлежащего понимания концепции инклюзивного образования. Во-первых, участники считают, что существует ряд барьеров для их становления проводниками перемен, поскольку у них нет опыта работы со студентами с особыми образовательными потребностями. Во-вторых, учителя связывают инклюзивное образование только с учащимися с особыми образовательными потребностями из-за умственной или физической

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неполноценности; они не упоминали никаких других разнообразных характеристик учащихся. Таким образом, учителям не хватает знаний и поддержки в выявлении и обучении учащихся с особыми образовательными потребностями. Учителям североказахстанских школ необходим доступ к обучению по вопросам инклюзивного образования.

Ключевые слова: инклюзивное образование, агенты перемен, отношение учителей, сотрудничество учителей, учащиеся с различными потребностями в образовании

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Андатпа

Кез келген білім беру реформасын табысты іске асыру мұғалімдердің қолдауын талап етеді. Мұғалімдер бұл реформаларды жүзеге асыратын негізгі құралы болып табылады. Бұл процесте олар көптеген түрлі кедергілерге тап болады және оларды жеңу үшін олардың жұмысы тиімді болу керек. Инклюзия агенті - бұл мұғалімдердің ерекше білім беру қажеттіліктері бар балаларды ғана емес, сондай-ақ қазақстандық мектептерде инклюзивті білім беруді енгізіп жатқан әріптес мұғалімдерді да қолдаудағы маңызды рөл. Өзгеріс агенттері басқа мұғалімдерді білім берудегі теңсіздік пен теңсіздікке қарсы күресті жеңуге шақыруы мүмкін. Ағымдағы зерттеуде Солтүстік Қазақстан қалалық мектептерінің мұғалімдері өз мектептерінде инклюзия агенті болуға дайын ба және қарапайым мектептерде инклюзивті білім беруді табысты енгізу үшін мұғалімдер қандай іс-әрекеттер жасауы тиіс екендігі қарастырылады. Осы зерттеудің негізгі зерттеу мәселесі - қалалық қазақстандық мектептердегі мұғалімдер инклюзивті білім берудегі өзгерістердің жолсерігі ретіндегі өз рөлін қалай түсінеді? Нәтижелер мұғалімдердің инклюзивті білім беру тұжырымдамасын дұрыс түсінбейтіндігін көрсетті. Біріншіден, қатысушылар оздерин өзгеріс өткізушісі бола алмаймын деп санайды, өйткені оларда ерекше білім беру қажеттіліктері бар студенттермен жұмыс тәжірибесі жоқ. Екіншіден, мұғалімдер инклюзивті білім беруді ақыл-ой немесе физикалық кемістігі салдарынан ерекше білім беру қажеттіліктері бар оқушылармен ғана байланыстырады; олар оқушылардың басқа да әр түрлі сипаттамаларын айтқан жоқ. Осылайша, мұғалімдерге ерекше білім беру қажеттіліктері бар оқушыларды анықтау мен оқытуда білім мен қолдау жетіспейді. Солтүстік Қазақстан мектептерінің мұғалімдеріне инклюзивті білім беру мәселелері бойынша оқуға қолжетімділік қажет.

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Түйінді сөздер: инклюзивті білім беру, өзгеріс агенттері, мұғалімдердің қарым-қатынасы, мұғалімдердің ынтымақтастығы, білім беруде әр түрлі қажеттіліктері бар студенттер

PERSPECTIVES OF TEACHERS ON THEIR ROLE AS AGENTS OF CHANGE FOR

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Introduction

The national educational system of the Republic of Kazakhstan has experienced many diverse educational reforms since the country became independent in 1991. One of such reforms is the implementation of inclusive education in mainstream schools. The State Program of Education Development of the Republic of Kazakhstan for the years 2011-202 estimated that 70 % of Kazakhstani schools would be able to provide appropriate inclusive conditions for SEN students by 2020 (MoESREF, 2010). According to Denivarova and Abdresheva (2015), despite the implementation of inclusive education in mainstream schools, still, there are problems with the qualified staff and teachers who can act as agents of change to encourage and support their colleagues to implement inclusive education.

Background of the Study

Every system or organization requires changes to evolve and encourage the staff to investigate new spheres for the development. According to Lunenburg (2010), agents of change play a significant role in this process and are defined as "The individual or group that undertakes the task of initiating and managing change in an organization is known as a change agent" (p.1). It is also mentioned that "A change agent is anyone who has the skill and power to stimulate, facilitate, and coordinate the change effort" (Lunenburg, 2010, p.1).

Being an agent of inclusion is to support children with special needs and teachers who implement inclusive education in Kazakhstani schools and collaborate purposefully with other stakeholders to overcome obstacles and "develop social justice and inclusion" (Pantic, 2015, p. 2). According to some research made in Kazakhstan in the field of inclusive educations and teachers' perception in this field, it could be argued that many of the teachers in Kazakhstani schools have many misunderstandings into what inclusive education is. Makoelle (2020) mentioned that along with some misunderstandings of diversity of inclusive education by Kazakhstani teachers there are

also problems of lack of teachers' necessary skills and competencies (Abdrasheva et al., 2016 as cited in Makoelle, 2020). Sakaeva and Oleksyuk (2016), who have studied how teachers in Kazakhstan see inclusive education, suggest that inclusive education demands the participation of all the participants of the educational system. However, their research showed that less than 50 percent of the schools staff considers that it is possible and appropriate to teach children with special needs in mainstream schools.

Another research is aimed at studying support among teachers for accepting students with special needs in mainstream schools and demonstrated in the study by Sakaeva and Oleksyuk (2016) might be due to some stereotypes of inclusion and absence of the basic knowledge and skills that allow teachers to work with children who have special educational needs. According to Zhetpisbaeva (2017), there is an acute problem with the professional, psychological, and methodological training of all specialists who work with children with disabilities, including teachers at mainstream schools. Teachers lack knowledge and experience to work in an inclusive educational environment, along with the presence of psychological barriers and professional stereotypes of teachers. Thus, they need a person who is able to share all the necessary information to work productively with children with special educational needs; give responses to the teachers' questions or advise how to manage difficult situations.

UNESCO (2020) defines that "Inclusion cannot be realized unless teachers are empowered agents of change, with values, knowledge and attitudes that permit every student to succeed" (p. 1). UNESCO (2020) suggests that teachers who are agents of change can encourage other educators to overcome struggle with inequalities in education and support teachers to accept the diversity of learners. Operrti and Brady (2011) defines an inclusive teacher as a teacher who plays "a key role by addressing the diversity of learners' expectations and needs through a vast repertoire of innovation teaching and learning strategies that do not marginalize them within the broader

education system" (p. 470). Zwane and Malale (2018) argue that creating supportive environment where all the stakeholders collaborate and support each other is significant for the successful implementation of inclusive education.

According to UNESCO Salamanca statement (1994), the implementation of inclusive education has become one of the priorities for the development of social and educational policies in most developed and developing countries in recent years. According to Pantic´ et al. (2015), the success of inclusion largely depends on the competent use of a whole range of pedagogical and psychological resources. These include the professional competence of inclusive educators and the reorganization of the system for training and professional support of teaching staff. Also, the attitude to the phenomenon of disability among teachers and children with normative development and its impact on the productivity of inclusive education needs to be considered. Finally, changing the structure of curricula and classroom space to meet the needs of all categories of children might be required.

The processes of inclusion in the school system are extremely significant because it is necessary to provide all the children regardless of their race, religion, language, and other types of discrimination with the opportunity to receive appropriate education (UNESCO, 1994). While studying at school, children get the opportunity to understand themselves and their capabilities, the greatest socialization. In other words, they learn how to behave in a society and communicate with its members, and in adolescence, make decisions to become himself or herself as a person and choose the occupation of their entire future life.

According to Boyle et al. (2020), the teachers play the significant roles to perform and develop inclusive education, "… while inclusion in schools begins with the teachers, it is imperative that teachers themselves are supported by the education system through access to appropriate resources, and the provision of supportive leadership and effective policy" (p. 2). Slee

(2010) supposed that teachers must be able to build appropriate relationships with the other participants of the educational process and support students.

Not only teachers have a great impact on their students, they also are in permanent collaboration and interaction with parents, school administration, colleagues, and parents. According to Boyle et al. (2020), the teachers' attitude plays a significant impact on students and form their understandings of what is right and wrong (Loreman et al., 2011 as cited in Boyle et al., 2020). Besides, any reform demands different changes, Fullan (2007) supposes that "Educational change depends on what teachers do and think—it's as simple and as complex as that" (p.129). That is why it is important to encourage teachers to become agent of inclusion or 'agents of change' (Pantic´, 2015). Van der Heijden et al. (2015) state that to become an agent of change for inclusion, a teacher should be of high qualification and develop such competencies as creating appropriate relations among all the participants of the educational process; understanding the impact on inclusion and being able to respond adequately to students' diverse needs. In the research of van der Heijden et al. (2015) investigated the main characteristics of teachers as agent of change and concluded that "These characteristics pertain to lifelong learning (being eager to learn and reflective), mastery (giving guidance, being accessible, positive, committed, trustful, and self-assured), entrepreneurship (being innovative and feeling responsible), and collaboration (being collegial). The category mastery appeared to consist of the most characteristics" (p.1). Fullan (2007) highlighted the six main characteristics "leadership depth and intensity; the mindset of being empowered, proactive, and optimistic; a teaching team modus operandi; the engagement of pupils and their parents; a very efficient and effective organization and management; and mutual support, validation, and valuing between the school and the community" (p.144) and supposed that motivation and collaboration are also significant for people who make changes that would bring positive results.

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Currently, there is limited information on the teachers in North Kazakhstani schools in the role of agents of change and their perception of the implementation of inclusive education in mainstream schools. The existing research in this field is mostly concentrated on the issues of teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education and the characteristics and qualifications teachers should possess in order to work with the students with special educational needs. Moreover, there is lack of information on how teachers should act to implement inclusive education successfully.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the research is to explore actions of Kazakhstani teachers who see themselves as agents of change for inclusive education. This study seeks to examine the way they recognize their role in the implementation of the current educational reforms in inclusive education. This research tries to understand the perspectives of teachers at urban schools in North Kazakhstan on the actions that should be taken by agents of change to implement inclusive education successfully.

Research Questions

The goal of the study is to investigate the teachers' recognition of inclusive education and identify their roles as agents of change while implementing inclusive education in mainstream schools in North Kazakhstan. The central research question is as follow:

How do teachers in urban Kazakhstani schools understand their roles as agents of change for inclusive education?

To examine these questions, this study applies qualitative research design, i.e., semi-structured interview. Therefore, the aim of the current study is to examine how the teachers at urban schools in Northern Kazakhstan are prepared to become agents of inclusion at their schools, and what conditions would stimulate teachers to become agents of change.

Definition of Central Concepts

The following concepts that are the central concepts of this study will be briefly explained to give a sense of context and insight while reading this research.

1. According to UNESCO (2007), *inclusive education* overcomes the barriers that limit participation and decreases the success of all students, considering diverse needs and abilities and eliminates all the forms of discriminations in education.

2. Biesta and Tedder (2014) represents a teacher of *agent as agency* and describes the agency that "…is not something that people can have – as a property, capacity or competence – but is something that people do" (p. 2). Rogers (1962) defines agent of change as a professional person who attempts to influence adoption decisions in a direction, he thinks is desirable.

3. Such terms as *diversity, special educational needs* and *disability* are very similar in the meanings and it is efficient to identify them as separate items to recognize better the understanding of the central concepts by the participants. The term "*diversity"* defines a variety of identities of students with special educational needs. Van Knippenberg et al. (2004) defined "*diversity"* as "… almost infinite number of dimensions, ranging from age to nationality, from religious background to functional background, from task skills to relational skills, and from political preference to sexual preference" (p. 1008) and based on other research focusing on gender, age, race/ethnicity, tenure, educational background, and functional background (Van Knippenberg et al., 2004 cited Milliken & Martins, 1996; Williams & O'Reilly, 1998).

4. Bryant et al. (2017) defined the group of students with special educational needs (SEN) as "learners with learning, physical, and developmental disabilities; behavioural, emotional, and communication disorders; and learning deficiencies" (p. 525).

5.   *"A disability* - a physical or mental impairment that has a 'substantial' and 'long-term' negative effect on your ability to do normal daily activities" (the Equality Act 2010). The identification of these terms in the study is helpful as it defines the group of students who possess special educational needs, what disability is and what groups of students are included in diversity and are not considered as SEN students in mainstream schools.

6.   It is supposed that collaboration improves teamwork and helps to solve problem in a more effective way. Being an agent of change means to work closely with a great number of people in order to lead to the success and improvements. *"Collaboration* – involving cooperation, effective communication, shared problem solving, planning, and finding solutions – is the process for ensuring that all students receive the free, appropriate public education mandated by IDEA. The establishment of excellent partnerships among all involved in working with students with disabilities is essential for constructive collaboration" (Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2014).

7.   Implementing any reform, teachers should be confident and ready to accept these reforms and changes as teachers are the key elements of the educational process. Besides, teachers should possess necessary skills and knowledge to implement these reforms successfully. In one of the research teachers' readiness for inclusive education "… refers to teacher's knowledge and understanding, skills and abilities, and attitudes towards inclusive education" (Adams et al., 2020, p.1).

Significance of the Study

First, this study will be significant for the policymakers who can create some regulations to support teachers and provide them with necessary courses on how to work with SEN students in mainstream schools in Kazakhstan.

Secondly, findings might be important for school administration to navigate them in the further development of school management and weak points in the implementation of inclusive education in their schools.

Finally, this study will likely be significant for teachers struggling with teaching SEN students and teachers who identify themselves as agents of change. The findings might encourage them to act more actively and share their problems and experience teaching SEN students with other colleagues.

Thesis Outline

This study consists of six chapters. Chapter 1 (Introduction) presents the background of the study and states the problem. In addition, it provides the research questions that frame the research and the significance of the study.

Chapter 2 (Literature Review) presents the review of the previous studies regarding the problem. Additionally, it clarifies the development of inclusive education in Kazakhstan and explains the concept of agents of change.

Chapter 3 (Methodology) describes the research design and sampling procedure with a detailed description and explanation of selecting procedures. Data collection instruments and data analysis are discussed as well.

Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 (Findings and Discussion) present the analysis of the findings collected via the semi-structured interview conducted with teachers from urban schools in North Kazakhstan and critically discuss them with reference to the previous studies.

Chapter 6 (Conclusion) summarizes the main conclusions obtained from the discussions. It also provides short information about the contribution of the study to the further development of inclusive education from the perspectives of different stakeholders.

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Literature review

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to review literature regarding the main concepts of this study. The first section of the study is focused on the theoretical framework, presents two theories related to the conditions that should be created to implement inclusive education in mainstream schools. The second section provides the definition of inclusive education, and a brief description of inclusive education policies of Kazakhstan and around the world. The third section presents the definitions of agency and agent of change and social justice; the role of agent of inclusion as a leader and the main concepts of leadership in inclusive education. The fourth section describes the characteristic the teachers should possess as agents of change and social justice.

Theoretical Framework

The Sociocultural Theory

Vygotsky (1978) argues that one of the necessary conditions for the implementation of the principles of inclusive education in educational institutions at all levels is the creation of an adaptive or inclusive environment, which implies access to education for all regardless their diverse needs and characteristics. Implementation in the inclusive educational process of the elements of socio-cultural activity will contribute to the development of cultural norms and patterns of behavior, the satisfaction of spiritual requests and the need for communication, a positive perception of each other, a change in the attitude to the phenomenon of disability among the subjects of the inclusive process.

The policy of inclusive education implies the need to change society and its social institutions so that they form favorable conditions for inclusion of any person, including those with diverse characteristics, ensuring equality of their rights, the ability to live independently, satisfying their spiritual needs. The socio-cultural model of the inclusive process implies that all subjects of

the educational system represent a socio-cultural community (Chernukha et al., 2021). The effective functioning of the latter requires the organization of socio-cultural environments, a common worldview, cultural values that are the result of joint activities participants in the inclusive process and promote social integration and inclusion. Levitskaya (2012) notes that social-cultural activity is a purposeful process of introducing a person, specially organized by social institutions to the cultural values of society and the active inclusion of the individual in it.

According to Booth (2002), culture is "the dimension that creates a secure, accepting, collaborating, stimulating community, in which everyone is valued as the foundation for the highest achievements of all" (p.8). Culture is the foundational dimension in creating an inclusive society as it forms inclusive values that are presented to all the stakeholders of the educational process. Moreover, these values and principles influence the development of the school policies and practices in the classrooms. Pantic (2015) argues that "the present conceptualisation of teachers as agents of inclusion and social justice emphasises the need to develop teachers' capacity for working with other agents in order to remove the structural and cultural barriers for some students' learning and participation" (p. 334). The agents of change and social justice are responsible for the cultural development and supporting colleagues, including the school administration, parents, and students in creating an inclusive community inside a school.

Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (Daniels, 2008) focuses on the active participation of minors in their environment, which is the result of a joint process of cognitive development. Vygotsky (1982) argues that individuals develop their learning through social interaction: they acquire new and better cognitive skills as a logical process of immersion in a lifestyle. Those actions that are performed together allow individuals to assimilate the mental and behavioral structures of the society that surrounds them, appropriating them. Hence, the teachers of change have to take into account the abilities of an individual that are in their infancy and have not yet

become his property. The latter, under favorable conditions of training and upbringing, with the skillful guidance of adults in their activities, would become promising opportunities for the individual, which Vygotsky (1978) calls the zone of Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD).

According to Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (1978), the role of adults or more advanced partners is to support, guide and organize the individual's learning at a step before they can master these aspects, having mastered the behavioral and cognitive structures that the activity requires. This orientation is more effective in helping individuals to cross the ZPD, which they can understand as a gap between what they are already able to do and what they still cannot achieve on their own. Individuals who are in ZPD for a specific task are close to doing it on their own, but they still need to integrate some key thoughts. However, with the right support and guidance, they can successfully complete the task. To the extent that cooperation, control, and responsibility for learning are covered, the individual progresses adequately in the formation and consolidation of their new knowledge and learning.

Vygotsky (1995) says that teachers and psychologists consider blindness, deafness, intellectual disability only as physical and mental defects and do not see the most important thing – their social essence. In this regard, he emphasizes "any physical defect whether it is blindness, deafness or congenital dementia-not only changes a person's attitude to the world, but, above all, affects relations with people. An organic defect or vice is realized as a social abnormal behavior" (Vygotsky, 1995, p. 3). Thus, Vygotsky puts forward social compensation of a defect as the primary task of pedagogy in the upbringing of children with developmental disabilities, arguing that every abnormal child has a huge reserve of healthy potentials. Furthermore, Vygotsky sees the task of special pedagogy in "… to link the pedagogy of defective childhood with the general principles and methods of social education, to find a system in which it would be possible to

organically link the pedagogy of defective childhood with the pedagogy of normal childhood" (Vygotsky, 1995, p.112).

As it is seen from Vygotsky's studies, society contributes largely to individual development; moreover, the interactions between people and the culture in the society have a great impact on the social process.

The Change Readiness Theory

In recent years, the Kazakhstani education system has been undergoing significant changes encouraging teachers to participate in innovative activities actively and continuously. The State Program for Education Development 2010-2020 (MoESREF, 2010) embedded education for students with different disabilities in common educational environment. Inclusive educational approaches are presented like innovations that teachers need to master.

Clapham (2003) defines the term "innovation" as the ability to renew, restore or to change and presented it as a phenomenon of deliberate change. Serdyukov (2016) argues that innovations play an essential role in different spheres of the humankind including education.

It is widely believed that countries' social and economic well-being will depend to an ever-greater extent on the quality of their citizens' education: the emergence of the so-called 'knowledge society', the transformation of information and the media, and increasing specialization on the part of organizations all call for high skill profiles and levels of knowledge. Today's education systems are required to be both effective and efficient, or in other words, to reach the goals set for them while making the best use of available resources. (Cornali, 2012, p. 255, as cited in Serdyukov, 2016)

Musurmonov et al. (2021) believe that innovations require the improvement and change in the educational system. Serdyukov (2016) argue that all stakeholders are interested in educational

innovations that are aimed at any educational aspect to "make a positive impact on learning and learners" (p. 8). According to Walinga (2008), "The key question for change agents appears to be how people get ready for changes in their environment in such a way that they are then ready to implement effective changes within their organization" (p.2).

According to Weiner (2009), readiness is presented at different levels, starting from an individual and finishing an organization as a whole system. Weiner (2009) refers to organizational readiness to the staff readiness for changes and commitment to implement these changes. In other words, readiness is "… a state of being both psychologically and behaviorally prepared to take action" (p.2). Rafferty et. al (2013) define the individual readiness for change as of educators' readiness for implementation of inclusive education as a change in the education system. Rafferty et. al (2013) emphasize commitment for the implementation of complicated changes in the organization of each member as each member contributes something for the common success. Howley (2012) considers that individual readiness is one of the most significant elements for the implementation of any changes, in our case, inclusive reforms. However, Drucker (2012) argues that the actions of the participants should be organized by a leader after the data collection and the analysis of the changes to know how they needed to implement these changes.

According to Drucker (2012), changes are like "gaps" in the process that make it impossible to predict the outcomes and lead the change to the desirable outcomes. Drucker states "Unless an organization sees that its task is to lead change. That organization—whether a business, a university, or a hospital—will not survive. In a period of rapid structural change, the only organizations that survive are the 'change leaders'" (as cited in Darroch, 2017). As a result, the organization needs new approaches and methods for the development of an organization. Beckhard and Harris's (1987) present a model of psychological behavior and described the people's reasons for changes. The changes are said to be possible if the factors for these changes are more crucial

than constraint factors. However, Howley (2012) argues about the key role of the leader "the engagement of leadership in preparing for new undertakings is considered vital in many fields to facilitating readiness for change" (p.1). According to Drucker (2012), leaders manage themselves to improve the efficiency of the activities. The leaders who are not able to manage their work and working environment could not effectively manage their colleagues and other employees. Drucker (2012) pays much attention to efficacy as the key element of successful management as the effectiveness of an organization depends on the leaders' efficacy. Drucker (2012) considers that the main role of a leader is to work effectively. Implementing inclusive education in Kazakhstani schools the educators need such a leader, an agent of change, and social justice.

In this study, teachers as agents of change and social justice are the main implementers of inclusion. The efficacy and success of inclusion in mainstream schools depend on their readiness to the changes and their abilities to manage the staff and analyze the up-to-date data referring to the future. According to Drucker (2012), any leader is responsible for contributing to work that directly affects the ability of this organization to function and achieve results. The leaders are obliged to make decisions; they cannot simply follow the orders of other people. They need to take responsibility for their contributions to the activities of the organization. Drucker (2012) states that due to their knowledge, they have more chances to make the right decision than any other employee. That is exactly what is expected from agents of change.

Overview of Inclusive Education

First Changes towards Inclusive Society

Inclusive education is a process of developing education that is accessible to all children. Inclusion means that every child has equal rights to receive high-quality knowledge, regardless of special educational needs and individual opportunities. Inclusive education also avoids any discrimination against children, ensures everybody's equal treatment, but creates equal conditions

for children with special educational needs. Inclusion recognises every individual's right to be treated fairly, and to be accorded the same services and opportunities as everybody else (Downing, 1996; Stainback & Stainback, 1990).

Nowadays, the education of children with special needs is one of the main reforms which are widely implemented and attracts much attention. Inclusive education is a reform that is being implemented globally and demands cardinal changes in social and educational fields, so there are still many unresolved aspects that are mainly related to the practice of introducing inclusion in school. Inclusive education is aimed at ensuring equal access to education for all students, considering the diversity of special educational needs and personal opportunities.

According Forlin and Lian (2008), it is supposed that the successful implementation of the inclusive reforms mainly depends on the teachers' positions and attitudes towards it, readiness to collaborate and change the educational system, and stakeholders' views on the policy and develop the culture of inclusion. The following theories have been chosen to guide this study: the sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978) and change readiness theory (Weiner, 2009) are used as appropriate theories to focus on conditions for the teachers' perception of inclusion

It is very crucial to determine the learners' diversity in the educational institutions to develop, encourage and support the implementation of inclusion in society. The diversity in the article is presented can be defined as "… boys and girls, students from various ethnic groups and linguistic minorities, rural populations, those affected by HIV and AIDS, and those who have exceptional learning needs" (Mwajabu & Milinga, 2017, p. 28). Inclusive education is an educational system with equal rights for children of different ages who are actively involved in school life and programs without reference to their diverse characteristics and special needs. The Individuals with Disabilities Educational Act (1991) included thirteen disabilities that create special educational needs for students. These disabilities are having mental retardation, hearing

impairments including deafness, speech or language impairments, visual impairments including blindness, serious emotional disturbance, orthopedic impairments, autism, traumatic brain injury, other health impairments, specific learning disabilities, deaf-blindness, specific learning disabilities and other health impairment (1997). Besides, studying different resources in this field Artiles and Kozleski (2007) claim that inclusive schools are aimed at educating and nurturing children and young people irrespective of their "differences in culture, gender, language, ability, class, and ethnicity (p.1). Inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream schools is one of more visible contemporary trends in inclusive education. Benjamin (2002) identified diversity Approaches to supporting children with disabilities in any historical era, reflect the attitude of society towards this group of people. International conventions indicate a global change in this respect.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC, 1989) highlights equal rights on education and common educational concepts for full child development. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child is a significant agreement ratified by countries that have committed themselves to protect the rights of children. This Convention explains who children are, as well as lists all their rights and obligations of the governments towards children. All rights are interrelated, they are all equally crucial and cannot be separated from children. The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC, 1989) guarantees children with free and compulsory primary education and requires the UN member states to promote the development of various forms of secondary education, both general and vocational. Governments are required to ensure the accessibility of education for all children and to take the necessary measures, such as providing free education.

Another major international document of human rights in the 21st century was signed by representatives of 82 countries. It was the Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

and its Optional Protocol (UN, 2006). According to this convention, "disability is an evolving concept and … disability results from the interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinders their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others" (2006, p.2). The purpose of this Convention is to promote, protect and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all persons with disabilities of all human rights and fundamental freedoms. This Convention also claims to promote respect for their inherent dignity. People with disabilities include persons with persistent physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory disabilities, which, when interacting with various barriers, may interfere with their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others. Article 7 of the Convention says that "States Parties shall ensure that children with disabilities have the right to express their views freely on all matters affecting them, their views being given due weight in accordance with their age and maturity, on an equal basis with other children, and to be provided with disability and age-appropriate assistance to realize that right" (the Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its Optional Protocol (United Nations, 2006, p. 9).

Inclusive Education in Kazakhstan

Kazakhstan's government made a commitment to actively implement the social project "inclusive education" only after establishing the country's independence in 1991. Asian Development Bank (2004) mentions that before the collapse of the USSR, special schools were established on the territory of the Republic for children with disabilities and special educational needs, and only few children with mild disabilities could attend mainstream schools.

The first steps towards the introduction of inclusion in Kazakhstani schools were made after the World Conference on Education for people with special needs, which introduced the term "inclusion" into international usage and proclaimed the principle of inclusive education. Such

education involves not only the active inclusion and participation of children and adolescents with disabilities in the educational process of mainstream schools but also the restructuring of the entire process of mass education as a system to meet the diverse educational needs of all children. However, the implementation of the reform in Kazakhstan started a bit later. In some regions students with disabilities could attend mainstream school only by the end of the 20th century.

According to the report of the international human rights organization Human Rights Watch (2019), Kazakhstan's education system separates and isolates children with special educational needs. It is argued that most children with special needs who are able to attend mainstream schools' study in separate classes with disabled peers. In the report in 2021, a slow progress of the implementation of inclusive education in mainstream schools was also mentioned. Furthermore,

There were no statistics on the number of children with disabilities who attended preschool institutions. Of children with specific needs between ages seven and 18, 20% attended regular schools. The majority attended special education classes or were homeschooled. Some parents refused to send children with disabilities to school and viewed their education as unnecessary. Some children with Down syndrome were able to attend privately funded specialized education centers, but the centers had limited capacity, which resulted in waiting periods of up to a year and one-half (p.39).

According to The Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan (2005) disability in Kazakhstan means a health disorder with persistent impairment of body functions, caused by diseases, injuries (wounds, traumas, concussions), their consequences; defects, which leads to limitation of life and need for his social protection.

PERSPECTIVES OF TEACHERS ON THEIR ROLE AS AGENTS OF CHANGE FOR INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN KAZAKHSTAN

The concept of "inclusive education " in Kazakhstan follow the belief that education is a fundamental human right and provides the basis for a more justice society taken to UNESCO (2003). According to the national laws, all students in Kazakhstan have the right to education, regardless of their characteristics.

Defining Inclusive Education

The definition of inclusive education is quite a complex issue, and the meaning of inclusion may vary depending on the concepts defined in the country. In some countries, the concept of inclusion overs only children with disabilities, while almost all countries in the world emphasize the exclusion of discrimination on any grounds. The concept of special educational needs is also often discussed in relation to inclusive education.

Ireland, as many European countries, follows the definition provided in the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act (MoES, 2004). In this act, the term "special educational needs" is defined as a restriction in the capacity of the person to participate in and benefit from education because of an enduring physical, sensory, mental health or learning disability or any other condition, which results in a person learning differently from a person without that condition. The law "On Education" in Kazakhstan, on the other hand, defines inclusive education is defined as "a process that ensures equal access to education for all students, taking into account special educational needs and individual opportunities" (p. 4).

The most universal definition of inclusive education has been given by UNESCO (2017). "Inclusive education is the process of reinforcing the capacity of education systems to welcome and reach out to all learners" (p. 7). It is 'a process that involves the transformation of schools and other centres of learning to cater for all children – including boys and girls, students from ethnic minorities, those affected by HIV and AIDS, and those with disabilities and learning difficulties (UNESCO, 2008, p. 5).

According to UNESCO (2020), inclusion has been defined as a holistic phenomenon that means equal access to quality education for all children regardless their disparities. Inclusive education is a stream of general education, in which learning becomes available to all categories of children, meeting and satisfying all their specific needs. This approach provides opportunities for teaching children with special educational needs and diverse characteristics. Inclusive education offers different approaches appropriate to the diversity of students ' requests, important of which is the most favorable educational environment. The system-forming foundation of inclusion is the postulate about the acceptance of the characteristics together with other learners. Based on this, the educational process should be organized in such a way as to fully meet the educational needs of each child. UNESCO (2020) the principles of accepting otherness are based on humanism, the development of intelligence and creative abilities, the balance of intellectual, ethnic, emotional, and physiological components of each person reference.

At the international level, there is an accelerated transition to the recognition of persons with disabilities as persons with rights, and not people with problems that need to be solved. Vygotsky (1982) also pointed out the need to create a system of education in which a child with disabilities would not be excluded from the society of children with normal development. He mentioned that a major disadvantage of the special (correctional) schools is that such schools separate these students from the real world and create artificial environment for students with special needs. It means that these children are not ready for real life, such schools develop the children's isolation even more.

UNESCO (2009) defined that "...an "inclusive" education system can only be created if ordinary schools become more inclusive in other words if they become better at educating all children in their communities" (p. 8). According to UNESCO (2012), inclusive education does not mean only students having access to education. Inclusive education means to be proactive in

identifying issues and barriers students contend with in an attempt to obtain access for quality education, as well as overcoming existed obstacles leading to the isolation and marginalization. Grima-Farrell, Bain, and McDonagh (2011) argues that inclusive education is a challenge for the whole school and is aimed at the implementation of inclusion in the education process to make it more effective for students with diverse characteristics and supply all the students with quality education.

The Concept of Personal Agency

The General Notion of the Agency Concept

There are several views on the meaning of "agency". Marshal (1994) presents the agency as the psychological and sociopsychological disposition of the agent and implies her/his capacity for voluntary action. While Emirbayer and Mische (1998) study it as the competence of the participants to analytically identify their reactions to the difficult conditions. Nevertheless, the agency is also presented as the sociocultural negotiated capability to act (Ahearn, 2001). According to Calhoun (2002), defines an agency as the ability of the person to act and function autonomously in a society. Before that, Taylor (1977) saw the agency as the capability to set up the goals that lead an individual to their achievements and evaluate whether they have been gained or not.

These definitions reflect a common core understanding of the "agency" concept and emphasize the power of the individuals. There are four main elements of the agency defined by Paris and Lung (2008) autonomy, self-efficacy vs. efficacy doubt, intentionality, and reflectivity. It is argued that autonomy reflects the ability to make decisions and act based on a person's understanding of moral acceptance and correctness.

Describing the intentionality concept in the definition of an individual agency, Paris and Lung (2008) mean of thoughtful and purposeful actions of an individual while testing their objectives and further participating in accountable planning of crucial actions for their realization.

For example, a teacher's intent is deliberate when their actions are well-planned, well-thought, and fully purposed (Epstein, 2007). Finally, reflectivity helps individuals to recollect previous achievements encountering new challenges and analyzing new decisions about the effectiveness of the further actions (Epstein, 2007).

Teacher Agency

According to Pyhalto et al. (2012), teacher agency can be presented as the ability that discovers the way for the teachers to the intentional and responsible approaches of teaching taking into consideration individual student and community needs. It is called "teachers' capacity to make choices, take principled action, and enact change" (Anderson, 2010, p.541). That includes teacher's commitment and desire to learning, and the activities they use to improve the educational process in their classrooms (Pyhalto et al., 2012; Soini et al., 2016). Toom et al. (2015) define this characteristic as the key one that teachers need to strengthen the learning and professional development to achieve constant progress. If teachers feel free to act, they evaluate the teaching process as "a meaningful profession rather than just a job" (Priestley et al., 2015, p. 149).

Pyhalto et al. (2015) equate the meaning of an active teacher to being an active learner who is able to act purposefully and responsibly and analyze the influence of the taken actions. They also posit themselves as considerable participants of the educational process in the community (Pyhalto et al., 2015). Edwards (2009) presents the agency as the "capacity to align one's thought and actions with those of others in order to interpret problems of practice and to respond to those interpretations" (p.5). And Lipponen and Kumpulainen (2011) defines the teachers' tasks in the agency as having "the skills and will to strengthen their own … capabilities for life-long learning and sustained professional growth" (p.812). That plays a significant role in supporting the professional development of the teachers, their self-realization professional behavior and well-being, and organizational commitment.

Teachers' professional activities are closely connected to the professional social interactions with all the stakeholders including students (Greeno, 2006; Lipponen & Kumpulainen, 2011; Pyhalto et al., 2015). Pyhalto et al. (2015) suggest that the level of agency depends on both unique occasions and resources that a teacher has, consisting of social and personal capital. Kayi-Aydar (2015) states that it is "possible to see the same individual exercising more agency in one context and less in another" (p.95). Biesta and Tedder (2015) see the importance of teachers' beliefs to achieve agency in difficult professional practice in schools.

According to Pyhalto et al. (2015), despite the close connection to the context, school, and the community, teachers are not limited in choosing the main areas that they are eager to change or modify to improve the educational process. Priestley (2011) suggests that dominant teachers' values and leadership's strengthening are crucial aspects for the development of teacher agency. It also assumes that the teachers should not only adjust to the existing structure but can also become enthusiasts in modifying the power structure within the school community. Pyhalto et al. (2015) support the idea that the teacher actively adapts the professional environment implementing diverse approaches thus increasing their opportunities in the society because they are "able to do something not only for oneself but also for other members of the society is one of the elementary freedoms which people have reason to value" (Drèze & Sen 1995, p.106).

Agents of Change and Social Justice

Pantic (2015) contends that the concept 'agents of change' has been included in policies and literature all over the world and aimed at an increase of the educational level for all the participants. Badley (1986) who had studied this concept before, stated "The change agent in any process of innovation may be defined by the number of roles he is expected to fulfil" (Badley, 1986, p.6). Bennis (1976) identified an agent of change as an assistant or a group of people who endeavors to impact changes.

Pantic (2015) considers such competencies as skills, knowledge and understanding, on an equal basis with values and moral sensibilities. It is expected that inclusive teachers collaborate with other agents for the purpose to transform educational system.

Pantic (2015) argues that teachers' agency includes:

*"…*1) a sense of purpose, that is, a commitment to social justice; 2) competence in an inclusive pedagogical approach, including working collaboratively with others; 3) autonomy understanding and making use of one's power, and positioning in relation to other relevant actors; and 4) reflexivity, a capacity to systematically evaluate their own practices and institutional settings…" (p. 15).

The author suggests that to prepare the teachers of inclusion it is better to expand competencies and share the responsibility among several representatives to develop inclusion at schools and improve educational system.

Teacher Leadership

Leithwood et al. (2008) state that school leadership has one of the greatest impacts on the students learning. Northhouse (2007) describes leadership as several personal and professional traits. According to Leithwood et al. (2008), leadership ought to be integrated into the school society to use knowledge, experience, and talents of each participant of the staff. Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001) define teachers' leadership as "center stage in the leadership play" (p. 53). Patterson and Patterson (2004) define a teacher as a leader and a person "who works with colleagues for the purpose of improving teaching and learning" (p.74).

Schott et al. (2020) argue that "Not only teachers themselves seem to benefit from teacher leadership, but also the employing school, students, and even actors beyond school level, such as parents and professional networks" (p. 8). According to Howey (1988), "teacher leadership is a natural and necessary outgrowth of the increased demands" that are placed in schools to implement

educational changes (p. 28). Howey (1988) states that new forms of leadership are required to overcome any problem schools encounter implementing new reforms. The author supports the idea that teachers as leaders are able to model the teaching approaches, coach and mentor colleagues, develop and create appropriate curriculum and instructional materials, and enhance relationships among all stakeholders.

York-Barr and Duke (2004) argue that the concept of teacher leadership has been studied for many years and cite Smylie and Denny (1990) "what is new are increased recognition of teacher leadership, visions of expanded teacher leadership roles, and new hope for the contributions these expanded roles might make in improving schools" (as cited in Smylie and Denny, 1990, p. 255). York-Barr and Duke (2004) argue that expanded roles of teachers vary from management assistants to the assessment of educational changes and facilitating professional teaching communities. That is the main feature that the agent of change should possess to implement new inclusive approaches in mainstream schools. York-Barr and Duke (2004) consider that teacher leadership is a constant improvement of a teaching and learning process in schools to increase students' achievements in their study.

According to Du Four (2007) considers that teacher leadership is significantly important for school development and successful interactions among school staff and administration. York-Barr and Duke (2004) state that teacher leadership is beneficial for the school development and support principals to run schools as it seems to be too hard for principals to run such organizations without any help. Another benefit that they present is that teacher - leaders can "inform management and results in more effective way" (p.258). In other words, teachers have significant knowledge in the way how to present the information and about the interactions inside the school community. Finally, York-Barr and Duke (2004) believe that a greater involvement in the participation conduct to the greater responsibility and obligation to organizational aims. Howey

(1998) argues that lack of teacher leadership can be evidence of inability to develop in accordance with the current demands of the educational system.

Teacher Leaders as Agents of Change

An agent of change is considered a teacher leader who has particular characteristics and orientations toward social justice. Due to transition of more inclusive practice, there are more references to teachers as agents of inclusion (Pantic et al., 2021). Pantic et al. (2021) studied teachers' sense of agency and how they use their social networks to prepare everything for further changes that are crucial for them. The theories of teacher agency and inclusive pedagogy were used in this study to represent teachers' social relationships in their commitment to implement inclusion successfully. The data was gathered via online log completed with the Swedish teachers for six months. The study found that teachers implemented changes through "everyday activities, students support, lesson planning, improvements of programs and working conditions" (Pantic et al., 2021, p. 2). It was concluded that being an agent of inclusion helps teachers expand their networks, diversity, and collaborative skills in comparison with the role of mere implementers of change. Pantic et al. (2021) also discussed teacher working conditions. They found that teachers as agents of inclusion aimed at changing of the environment around them and improving collegiality and collaboration inside their schools.

This study by Pantic et al. (2021) is an excellent example of changes that can be adopted to the Kazakhstani urban schools. It helps to identify what aspects are more effective to implement inclusion successfully, and to identify the conditions that are necessary for a teacher to become an agent of inclusion.

Another inspiring example was the article by French et al. (2006) devoted to an analysis of pedagogical skills, the need for which was revealed in the process of transitioning to inclusive education. An inclusive classroom teacher is responsible for coordinating a comprehensive adult-

child system that includes paraeducators, who are not part of the permanent school staff, but work with the schoolteachers, students, and parents and provide information about the state of school education within the region. The role of an inclusive classroom teacher is similar to that of an executive director in business and involves developing the following skills: leadership, collaboration, and communication skills (French et al., 2006). Teachers who demonstrate skills in five key functional areas (planning, guidance/support, explanation, collaboration, and peer supervision) contribute to a more successful adaptation of students to inclusion. According to French et al. (2006), an inclusive classroom teacher is close to the meaning of "agent of change" as has similar duties at schools. The teachers of inclusion possess extended competences and adopt the development of schools and collaboration not only among the members of the staff but also among teachers, students, and their parents.

Bourn (2016) divides the role of teacher as an agent of inclusion into three distinct locations: within the classroom, the wider school, and within society as a whole. This author, in comparison with the previous articles, is the only who classifies the role of a teacher in such way. In the article by Bourn (2016), teachers are described as people or leaders who are responsible for any changes in a community and within global learning "on global learning and global education, the role of teachers is seen as central to their success" (p.66). The cited opinion of Andreotti, one of the main theorists in global learning, by Bourn is that a teacher is a global citizen and global learner who has to be experienced global learning to be an effective educator. This idea supports the development of teachers as agents of change and social justice as it characterised teachers as global citizens.

Bolam (1975) develops a list of roles for teachers of change - a conveyor (an agent who expresses the main ideas and present information), a consultant (a leader who supports any group of stakeholders), a trainer (an agent who helps the stakeholders develop their specific skills), a

leader (a person who leads the stakeholders to the successful implementation of their ideas), an innovator (a teacher who generates new ideas and practices), a knowledge builder (a person who supplies the stakeholders with the necessary knowledge), a practitioner (an agent who adopts skills and knowledge for the particular school) and a user (a leader who is able to use all the knowledge effectively).

Bourn (2016) states that "teachers who are supportive of the principles of global learning are likely to see it as their role to secure greater engagement with its principles within the school, to be agents of change, ambassadors for global social justice" (p.72). Referring to Cox's (2011) evidence, the perception of the role of distributed leadership has a great impact on teachers' opportunity for change. Also, Cox (2011) mentions the importance of an optimistic worldwide as it "emphasizes the relevance of vision, determination, the ability to empower others and be outward-looking to global learning as well as sustainability" (p.8). According to Broun (2016), global learning means securing a whole-school approach, as a result, attracting a wide range of stakeholders. That is exactly what an agent of change responsible for.

Finally, an important aspect, which is not mentioned in the previous articles, is that a teacher should be politically independent. Broun (2016) argues that this aspect is one of the most challenging and controversial as it is impossible to refuse any political views. Moreover, teachers can influence their political activities and participation and support of social movements for social change. Thus, a teacher could also try the role as an agent for global changes to create a better society and encourage changes not only on a school level.

Teachers' Characteristics as Agents of Change for Social Justice and Inclusive Education

The Importance of Teachers' Attitudes

The UNESCO Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994) is a key document in the

development of inclusive education. Before that, people with special needs were perceived as people outside society and were mostly isolated from society. Two decades later, some people still believe various stereotypes, prejudices, stigma, and misconceptions about people with disabilities (Waligore, 2002). Even though Saloviita and Schaffus (2016) argue that after the introduction of the new concept of "inclusive education", people's attitudes have changed significantly. Since, the Salamanca Statement, people with disabilities have become more perceived as part of society, they have more opportunities to realize themselves and socialize (Saloviita & Schaffus, 2016).

For the past decades, inclusive education is developing all over the world, not only in individual countries. The main factors of the successful implementation of reforms in this area are resources, policies, finances, administration of the educational institutions, students, and, of course, teachers. According to research by Miesera and Gebhardt (2018), teachers play a crucial role not only in the educational process but also in the successful implementation of inclusive programs. Another significant aspect is the attitude of teachers to inclusive practice. That is why numerous studies have focused on this question.

According to Boyle et al. (2020), it is significant to realize teacher attitude towards inclusive education as it helps understand the efficiency of the reform implementation at schools. The author describes several stages of teachers' attitude to inclusion: negative attitude, pre-service attitudes, and in-service attitudes. The attitude is significant as it can stop forwarding the inclusion at urban schools as students are not supported so that has a great impact on their experiences and can be the cause of educational difficulties. Nel et al. (2011) identifies an attitude as "… a tendency to react positively or negatively towards a certain object, be it a person, idea or situation" (Nel et al., 2011, p.4). According to their research attitudes are connected with stakeholders' opinions and are built upon previous experiences. De Boer et al. (2011) supposed that school staff play a key role in implementing inclusive education. Nevertheless, the assumption that the main key to the

successful implementation of inclusion is precisely the positive attitude of teachers towards it. This work is aimed at studying the attitudes of teachers to inclusive education, the variables that are associated with this attitude, and the impact of this attitude on the social interaction of students with special needs in general education schools in the Scandinavian countries. As a result of the findings, most teachers have a neutral or negative attitude towards the inclusion of children with disabilities in the general primary education system.

Gyimah et.al. (2010) believe that the quality of inclusive education directly depends on the attitudes of teachers toward children with diverse characteristics. It is crucial, as their attitudes shape the collaboration and interaction between teachers and students; it is worth noting that it is related not only to students with special needs but also between these children and their classmates and peers, who do not have any disabilities. It is known that teachers do not always perceive the implementation of inclusion positively, very often they are alert negatively to this reform. It is important to note that if a teacher is positive, then the implementation of policies that promote the realization of children's rights to education in ordinary schools is implemented much easier (Valigor, 2002). Leatherman (2007) argues that teachers with positive attitudes involve students with disabilities in all aspects of the educational process. Moreover, the motivation of students and their feelings toward school and learning, in general, depends on the teachers' attitudes. In addition, Titone (2005) suggests that effective inclusive teachers should be ready to take the responsibility for the teaching of students with special needs, have positive attitudes regarding inclusion and desire to teach students with diverse characteristics.

Unfortunately, teachers often have negative attitudes toward children with diverse characteristics and disabilities. According to Ewing et al. (2018), teachers' negative attitudes towards inclusion make students less satisfied and reduce classroom collaboration and interaction among students. A less inclusive environment in the classroom causes more friction, competition,

and difficulties among students. Therefore, it is worth paying special attention to the development of positive attitudes among teachers towards children with disabilities and integration of the reform in general. Avramidis and Norwich (2002) believe that the negative and neutral attitudes of teachers towards inclusion can be changed by developing various aspects of the reform and providing support to teachers.

Teachers' Collaboration

Bronfenbrenner (1986) develops the theory and studied diverse parts and groups in a social environment as systems that collaborate and interact together. He argues that the successful functioning of the group as a system depends on the interaction of all participants inside the system. According to Ashby's deductive theory (1970), a system is a "machine" that cannot work independently, interaction and collaboration are necessary for the system development.

Bronfenbrenner (1986) describes a school as a system with different parts that include administration, teachers, parents, students, and curriculum. If a school is a machine, the school leaders need to realize how this "machine" works and what is necessary to change to make the participants of the educational process interact and collaborate effectively to develop the "machine." So, the development of the system is dependent on the actions of every participant in the system. That is why interaction and collaboration are so significant in the development of inclusive education.

In pedagogical science, the term "collaboration" has the meaning of "cooperation", "partnership". It refers to the process of people working together to achieve common goals, in which the participants of the educational process exchange knowledge and experience and achieve the goals and agreements. According to Pavelieva (2010),

> *"...* collaborative training is an approach in which training is based on close interaction between students or between students and a teacher. The participants of the process gain

knowledge through an active joint search for information, discussion and understanding of meanings" (p. 9).

The organization of collaborative learning involves group work of students in the classroom, in which their joint activities are carried out, aimed at achieving a single educational goal. In this study the collaborative group consists of not only teachers and students.

Collaboration involves a process of joint activity to achieve a common goal, during which decisions are made together, because of exchanging views, knowledge and reaching agreement. The main synonyms are "cooperation", "partnership", joint actions with someone characterized by consistency, coherence of opinions and actions. According to Frisin (2016), collaborative "can be considered as a philosophy of interaction and lifestyle, where people are responsible for their actions, including training, and respect the opportunities and contributions of their partners" (p.10). A similar point of view is shared by Kulikov (2012), who claims that "collaborative learning is most likely the philosophy of education: we work together, study together, change together, improve together" (p. 105). This philosophy fits harmoniously into the development of inclusive education in the modern society. Working collaboratively the participants share all the resources among the group members and use group work to develop and achieve the objectives. Every participant acts as an equal member of the group. The group is a source of motivation, information, a means of self-help and mutual support, a place of interaction for the collective construction of knowledge.

According to Milteniene (2012), it is impossible to collaborate effectively without

"... a readiness to learn from one another, without any identification of the aims of education and distribution of functions/roles, without the joint planning of activities and problem solving, without assuming responsibility for the outcomes of joint activities and joint discussion of the efficiency of these activities" (p.112).

It is crucial to have colleagues' support not only to develop teaching skills and adapt practical activities but also to realize the role in the educational process and recognize equality with other members of the group.

Wiggins and Damore (2006) developed some conditions for the successful collaboration: 1) understanding how to teach SEN, recognize colleagues' qualification and competence and have a positive attitude to inclusion; 2) working in a team; 3) engage each other in different ways of self-study sharing diverse approaches, participating in seminars, courses, and discussions; 4) management and leadership. The last one is one of the most important conditions for successful collaboration as the leader shows his or her firm point of view on the problem, organizes the staff to interact, and provides an opportunity for every member of the group to become and feel a qualified educator and manages the time and material resources to develop quality education.

Being an agent of change and social justice means becoming a leader and understanding the school as a "machine" that needs to improve via interaction with other group members. Vygotsky (1982), considers a person as a complex system of various structures, justifies the position of the leading role of learning in the development of the student. Therefore, in the formation of a socially successful personality of a teacher, special attention is paid to the organization of a collaborative learning environment, the guiding vector of which is the achievement of a successful result of activity.

Characteristics of Teachers as Agents of Change

There are diverse factors that impact the strengthening of inclusive education in mainstream schools. They include teachers who are a crucial element in stimulating and in impending inclusion (OECD, 2005). Thus, appropriate professional development of teachers is a core element for the successful implementation of inclusive education (Fishman et al., 2003, Friend et al., 2010). The need for appropriate professional development of teachers is connected

with the increased number of SEN students in mainstream schools and the necessity for teachers to update the knowledge in this field. Hence, Showers et al. (1987) identified the term "professional development" as a process aimed at enhancing knowledge in a particular field to support new practice till it becomes an embedded part of the current practice.

According to Kennedy and Shiel (2010), significant elements of professional development include supervision and monitoring that are needed to make teachers believe in their teaching skills and practices and persuade them to continue their professional growth over time. Hawkins and Shohet (2012) defined supervision as an educational process and a vital element that is essential in the achievement of higher quality education via concentrating on the process, methods, and procedures that are the foundation for both successful teaching and successful learning. It is crucial for the development of inclusive practices in mainstream schools that involve a deep insight into inclusive education and teachers' capability to adjust different teaching methods to the new demands.

Westwood (1995) states that an effective teacher ought to be a good classroom manager who concentrates on academic skills with positive anticipations, passion implementing efficient methods and techniques to achieve high students results and cover the material content. Also, Furthermore, an effective teacher presents the material in a simple way, and uses appropriate language to explain the tasks clearly, observes the students' actions during the educational process and gives feedback to improve their knowledge (Westwood, 1995). According to Stanovich and Jordan (1998), an effective teacher is not only a good manager and observer but also a person who is able to analyze the previous lessons and improve or adapt them for the students to get higher results.

Personal characteristics are also important for teachers. Van der Heijden et al. (2015) identify four general personal characteristics of agent teachers: (1) lifelong learners, (2) mastery,

(3) human resource manager, (4) collaboration. They suggest that lifelong learners are teachers who improve their learning opportunities continuously and analyze their teaching regularly. They are eager to use the recourses for the reinforcement of the agency. These teachers strive to estimate the impact of their teaching on the students' progress and collect evidence of it. They are demand on the demands and are able to adjust their work inside and outside the classroom. Moreover, mastery means becoming an expert in the field of knowledge and skills of teaching. Agent teachers are talented and efficient as teachers, and they possess both knowledge of subjects and teaching techniques and methods on a high level. They use a great variety of teaching methods to strengthen student learning and achievement.

Chapter Summary

This chapter reviewed literature on the implementation of inclusive education internationally and in Kazakhstan. It also provided the definition of an agent of change and described the characteristics they should possess. The literature review suggests the range of definitions of inclusive education used across the globe. There is rich literature that explores the importance of teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education and collaboration among the staff to implement it successfully in mainstream schools. The focus of the study is the identification of teachers' roles in the implementation of inclusive education in mainstreams schools in North Kazakhstan and the action that have been taken to become agents of change. The next chapter in this thesis presents the methodology for answering the research question that guides this thesis.

Methodology

Introduction

The preceding chapter depicted the literature about the previous studies and research on the topic of implementation of inclusive education in Kazakhstan, teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education, defining a teacher as agent of change and characteristics these teachers should possess. This chapter clarifies methodological approaches that were used in this study and proved the qualitative nature of the research and the choice of the interview as a data collection tool. The participants of the study are seven teachers from different schools of North Kazakhstan who have showed the interest in the implementation of inclusive education in their schools.

Research Design

A qualitative research design was used to state the study the central phenomenon in this research, the teachers' understanding of their role as agents of change in the implementation of educational reforms in inclusive education. Creswell (2012) states that qualitative research is more influenced by the participants' perspectives rather than the course understood by researchers. Furthermore, this research design gave more opportunities for interactions between the researcher and participants. Muijs (2004) states that qualitative research design "really gets under the skin of a phenomenon" (p.9). This type of research design helped the researcher investigate the teachers' attitudes and perceptions of inclusive education, and conditions that were significant for them to implement inclusive education in mainstream schools.

Semi-structured interviews were appropriate for data collection in this research because the general interview guide approach was well structured but at the same time more flexible than some other research approaches. In case the answers of interviewees were not clear enough this method allowed the researcher to ask additional questions to clarify necessary points. The interview allowed a researcher to get very detailed information from the participants about the reasons for

their actions, their attitudes to various issues, get a deeper insight into the respondent and better understand their point of views, behavior, attitudes, and stereotypes. That was significant for the research to determine the conditions under which teachers could become leaders in inclusive education.

Sample

Purposeful sampling was used to select the participants for the current research. Palinkas et al. (2015) states that "Purposeful sampling is widely used in qualitative research for the identification and selection of information-rich cases related to the phenomenon of interest" (p.1). This sampling was used to explore the participants' attitudes towards inclusive education and their experience of working with students with special educational needs. Palinkas et al. (2015) state that purposeful sampling is used to investigate about the phenomenon of interest adding knowledge and experience of the respondents. It is also noted that

> ... the importance of availability and willingness to participate, and the ability to communicate experiences and opinions in an articulate, expressive, and reflective manner. In contrast, probabilistic or random sampling is used to ensure the generalizability of findings by minimizing the potential for bias in selection and to control for the potential influence of known and unknown confounders. (Bernard, 2002; Spradley, 1979, cited in Palinkas et al., 2015, p.2).

A purposeful sampling is well-suited for this research and was used to attract the respondents of different ages, working experience and schools. The following criteria were used to select the participants: 1. interest in the implementation of inclusive education in mainstream schools, 2. place of residence in North Kazakhstan, 3. employment in an urban school.

The participants of the study were teachers of primary and secondary schools in Northern Kazakhstan. The aim was to recruit for the study teachers who saw themselves as agents of change for inclusive education and worked in different schools.

The research was conducted in two stages. The first stage helped the researcher to determine the teachers who were interested in the implementation of inclusive education in North Kazakhstani schools and recruit the participants. After getting the permission from the Nazarbayev University Graduate School of Education Ethic Committee to start the research, a Qualtrics link with a short questionnaire was posted on the personal Instagram page of the researcher to recruit possible participants (Appendix A). This method was chosen to ensure voluntary and confidential participation in the study. The researcher who is a teacher herself, asked colleagues to share this link on their Instagram to attract the teachers of different subjects apply for participation in this research.

Table 1. Personal information about the participants

Personal information	Respondent 1	Respondent 2	Respondent 3	Respondent 4	Respondent 5	Respondent 6	Respondent 7
Age	42	48	38	35	27	46	33
Working experience	13	24	More than 20	25	5	23	12
Subject	English	English	History	Maths	English	Primary school	English
Grades	1-7	5-7	8-11	9-11	1-6	1-4	5-9
Place of work	Mainstream school	Lyceum	gymnasium	Mainstream school	Mainstream school	Lyceum	Mainstream school

The participants nominated themselves for the participation in the research by responding to be brief survey. The participants were of different ages, genders, qualification levels, and working experiences to collect data from diverse individuals. In total, there were seven participants who expressed interest to participate in this the research (Table 1).

The target population of this research was the teachers who were interested in the implementation of inclusive education in urban schools in North Kazakhstan. The main criteria of the nomination of the participants were the readiness to become agents of change or seeing themselves as agents of change, and their willingness to take part in the study. All self-nominated participants were invited to a follow-up interview. Those participants who decided to participate in an interview were contacted to determine a mutually convenient time and place for the interview.

Interview Protocol and Process

The next stage was the one-on-one interview. A one-to-one interview is a method to collect data in health and social research. According to Frances et. al. (2013), this method is used to gain information about people's perceptions, understandings, and experiences of a given phenomenon and allows to study these perspectives more profoundly. This method allowed being flexible and sensitive to the needs and feelings of the participants mentioning potentially concerning aspects (Matthews & Ross, 2010).

A semi-structured interview was used to collect the data for the study. Interviewing is one of the most common methods of data collection in qualitative research. A semi-structured interview is used to ask open-ended questions to respondents. Thus, participants respond to questions that are prepared in advance. According to Opdenakker (2006), semi-structured interviews are usually organized in advance at the appropriate time for both sides. DeJonckheere and Vaughn (2019) describe semi-structured interviews as a method that includes a dialogue

between a researcher and a respondent, the protocol of the interview is flexible and can be added with follow-up questions. Moreover, they say that "The method allows the researcher to collect open-ended data, to explore participant thoughts, feelings and beliefs about a particular topic and to delve deeply into personal and sometimes sensitive issues" (p.1). These characteristics made semi-structure interview very appropriate for this study. DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006) describe a semi-structured interview as "a body of knowledge" (p.314) that focuses on the real-life experience presented by the interviewees. In this research, it was also necessary to gather information about participants' experience and attitudes towards inclusive education.

It was crucial to explain the purpose of the interview to avoid the potential issues that might occur during the data collection. Therefore, before conducting the interviews, the respondents got the consent form and were informed about the purpose and the procedure of the study. In addition, they were informed about their right to stop the interview at any time they wish and about ethical concerns. Each interview lasted about 20 minutes, that was enough for each participant to respond to questions. All the interviews were recorded, transcribed, and translated from Russian, as all interviewees responded in Russian, into English, when it was necessary for inclusion of data in this thesis. All the recordings were transcribed manually by the researcher.

All seven semi-structured interviews were conducted in a city that can be considered a regional center in North Kazakhstan. Interviews took place at convenient time and location suggested by the participants. Three interviews took place at participants' homes. The next three interviews were held at the participants' places of work, and one more interview was conducted via WhatsApp. Although the interviews were conducted in January, there were not any difficulties due to COVID or state of emergency restrictions. The decision to provide the interview via WhatsApp was taken because of the schedule of the participant. The researcher used a mobile recorder on a smartphone to record the interviews.

Data Analysis

The analysis started with the data organization. Organization of data is critical in qualitative research because of the large amount of information gathered during a study (Creswell, 2014*).*

The next step was to transcribe data as the data were collected through interviewing and had to be copied on the paper from the recordings (Creswell, 2014*),* translated into English and coded to ensure the respondents' anonymity. When coding the interview transcripts, data was organized in a table, divided into several columns and each question of the study was highlighted to group the answers to the research questions and represent them in findings (Table 2). There were seven columns which represented every participant in the table.

Table 2. The way of data organization

Respondent 1	Respondent 2	Respondent 3	Respondent 4	Respondent 5	Respondent 6	Respondent 7
What are the characteristics of agents of inclusion in the opinion of teachers in this research? - What qualities can be helpful for teachers to become agents of inclusion? - What qualifications do they need to have?						
The teacher must be patient. He must have the work skills for inclusive education. Studying aspects of inclusive education, as well as possibly obtaining additional education in this area	Support from the administration, support from higher authorities. If teachers had such support, then each of the teachers could become such an agent. Ignorance and ignorance of how and where to act in what situation.	Professionalism, caring person who loves children and wants to help. Special education, some courses have been completed, some special education can really be, advanced training courses so that the teacher is really in the topic and can help, teach, make learning comfortable for this category of students. Probably the desire to help, education in this environment to be able to help,	High-quality education and external motivation. It is difficult to have an internal one, I do not have external favorable conditions. This is a symbiosis, there can be no internal motivation without external motivation in this particular issue, and there can be no external motivation without internal motivation in principle. Govermental standards.	Insufficient level of education, unwillingness of parents to see obvious problems in children, insufficient equipment of the school with special attributes (ramps, special railings, etc.), unwillingness of the administration to inclusive education. If the teacher sees that the student was able to achieve the	Special education Willingness to change, tolerance, ability to work with such children.	Tolerance, versatility, high level of pedagogical skills. The desire to participate and special training.

		caring and love for children and the desire to make this world a better place.		tasks assigned to him.		

The next stage was to interpret the findings and compare them with the literature and past studies. This chapter describes teachers' responses to questions indicating their understanding of inclusive education and qualities that teachers who can become agents of inclusion need to possess.

Ethical Issues

Conducting qualitative research with participants require a sufficient level of trust due to high level of participant disclosure (Creswell, 2014). First of all, the participants were informed about the purpose and nature of the study so as not to hurt the participants with inconvenient questions. The researcher did not include the information the participants did not want to share (Creswell, 2014). Participants were informed that if they did not want, their real names will not be used in the study, and they will stay anonymous. Moreover, the participants were invited to interviews at different times not to meet each other and keep complete confidentiality of their interviews. As the participants were volunteers, they were informed that they would not receive a fee for their participation.

Chapter Summary

The methodology chapter presents an overview and an argument for the research design, sample, interview protocol and process, data analysis and ethical issues adopted in the current research. The semi-structured interview was identified as an efficient tool to use and explore the teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education and identification their roles in the implementation of inclusive education in mainstream schools in Northern Kazakhstan. The application of the purposeful sampling allowed the researcher to recruit seven participants in the current study who

provided the necessary data about their experience and knowledge about inclusive education and

defined their roles as agents of change in implementing inclusive education in mainstream schools.

Findings

Introduction

This chapter presents findings obtained from data collected via a semi-structured interview about the positions of teachers as agents of change in implementing inclusive education in urban schools in the North Kazakhstan region. The purposes of the study were to explore actions taken by Kazakhstani teachers to see themselves as agents of change for inclusive education, their understanding of inclusive schools and students with special needs, and the recognition of their roles in the implementation of the current educational reforms in inclusive education and characteristics that ought to motivate teachers to become agents of change.

Overall, seven teachers from urban schools in the North Kazakhstan region participated in this study and answered the questions written in the interview protocol (Appendix 1). Seven semi-structured interviews with the participants were conducted face-to-face and one via WhatsApp.

While analyzing interview transcripts, four main themes were defined in the data. The first focused on the perception of inclusive schools from the perspectives of the participants. This additionally addressed participants' insights on students with special needs. The presence of students with special needs plays a crucial role in determining how inclusive the school is and the role of the staff in the implementation of inclusive education. Then, the participants were asked about their contribution to the development of inclusive education in their schools and the essential qualifications teachers should possess to teach in inclusive classrooms. It is significant to investigate the characteristics regarding the teachers as agents of change as it helps teachers define themselves as highly qualified specialists able to support inclusive education in their schools. Finally, questions about the reasons why teachers decide to become agents of change and whether they have already seen themselves in the role of an agent of change were explored.

Teachers Understanding of an Inclusive School and Students with Special Needs

Teachers – participants in the current research can be divided into three groups concerning how they understand the inclusion at their schools and define the concept of an inclusive school. Three teachers out of seven were sure that their schools are not inclusive despite some students with special needs in some classrooms. Other three out of seven respondents said that the schools are inclusive as there are some students with special needs who demand a special curriculum, simpler objectives to achieve, and differentiated tasks in the lessons. Only one participant out of seven teachers was sure that the schools are partly inclusive as there are students with special needs, but the schools are not supplied with special facilities such as lifts, ramps, and special handrails for vision-impaired children.

Respondents 1, 2, and 4 hesitated to portray their schools as inclusive ones. When they were asked whether the school where they work is inclusive or not. A teacher who teaches English at one of the large schools in the city said:

> *Actually, I am not sure that our school is inclusive although we have some students with special needs. There are some facilities for children with disabilities. For example, a ramp for disabled [people with limited mobility] people which was installed before the [national] presidential election.*

Respondent 4, who is a teacher of History in one of the best lyceums in the city with the working experience of more than 20 years, stated:

> *Inclusive education, in my opinion, involves working with children with special needs. I think [my school is] not [inclusive], since we do not have such participants [students with special educational needs].*

Respondents 3, 5, and 6, teachers at primary school, math and English with different working experience from 5 till 25 years, described their schools as inclusive*:*

> *Our school is inclusive. There are some students with special needs for whom we design separate calendar thematic plans and use differentiated tasks in the lessons.*

and

> *The school is inclusive as we have some students with special educational needs for whom we plan separate lessons although they study with ordinary students. Moreover, they [students with special educational needs] have easier lesson objectives to achieve and easier tasks they can do successfully without any support.*

Almost similarly, Respondent 3, a teacher with an extensive working experience, told that it was her first experience teaching students with special educational needs and gave the evidence of school's inclusivity:

> *I work in a gymnasium, in the first and third classes, and there is a child with down syndrome in my classroom. Besides, if there is a need we are provided with a tutor for children with special needs. Also, a special program was designed for this child. Although this child has different student's books, he studies in a community with the children of the same age and collaborate with them on the level he can.*

As Respondent 3 mentioned, it was her first experience working with a student with any disabilities. But the participant stated that she had great support from other staff and help from a tutor who worked to help students with physical disabilities.

Respondent 7, a teacher of English in secondary school, called the school partly inclusive and said:

> *Our school is partially inclusive. There are students with special educational needs, but the school is not equipped with additional ramps, elevators, special railings for the visually impaired.*

These participant quotes show that it was a rather complicated question for them to answer – to identify their schools as inclusive or not depending on their working experience or the subjects they teach. Even in cases when the school has some students with disabilities that are recognized as special educational needs.

Likewise, in each interview, it was requested the teachers describe an inclusive school from their perspectives. Three of the participants, Respondents 1, 3, and 5, argued that there is a need for specialists who work with children with special educational needs including mental and physical problems in mainstream schools. Also, Respondent 2 mentioned that additional courses on how to work with such students, especially those organized by professionals in this field, would be extremely useful and supportive for teachers from mainstream schools helping them in the implementation of inclusive education:

> *To develop inclusive education in our school, specialists of a narrow profile and certain educational standards adapted to such students are needed.*

Also, Respondent 2 paid attention to the teachers' features of character and highlighted that in working with students with special needs, a person ought to possess such personal characteristics as kindness, communicability, have the ability to enter any situation and help to resolve it or offer a suitable solution:

> *[Teachers need to ensure] equal rights to education for all children, regardless of their physical, mental, or intellectual characteristics. Kind, sociable, so that he could enter some situation and help resolve it.*

Only Respondent 4 supports the idea that also we need to concentrate on working with other students in the schools. In other words, to show students of different ages and social levels that all people are different despite having any physical or mental disabilities:

To develop tolerance among other students, to conduct seminars on how to work with such children.

Respondent 6 supposes that bringing up tolerance not only among teachers but also among students of all ages would have a positive impact on the development of inclusive education in mainstream schools in the country.

Another participant claimed that it was better to concentrate on the students with special educational needs with physical disabilities:

It is worth paying more attention to children with special educational needs in physical terms, for example, with diseases of the musculoskeletal system.

Respondent 7, an experienced teacher of English in a mainstream school, believes that more attention should be paid to the students with physical disabilities as they demand much help during lessons and breaks, depending on the disability. It is necessary as these children can be limited in their movements around the classroom or school and need extra help in this case.

Another necessary aspect to identify was to define a group of students with special educational needs from the perspective of the participants. As part of their responses, almost similar definitions of inclusive students were presented. They were mostly focused on SEN students possessing mostly physical and mental disabilities.

With some medical indications that professionals give as recommendations, as a diagnosis, and so on. It's not us who draw these conclusions and, let's say, single out an inclusive group.

Responded 2 and 4 identify this group of students similarly:

Those who cannot cope with learning due to physical or mental characteristics.

And only Respondent 7 mentioned that gifted students as need to consider as an inclusive education target group alongside the students with mental and physical disabilities:

*Having special educational needs: visually impaired, hard of hearing, with diseases
of the musculoskeletal system, geniuses, etc. In other words, any [students] that
differ from typical norms.*

As it is seen, all the participants identify a group of students with special educational needs as students with physical and mental disabilities not paying attention to other diverse characteristics included in this group except a mention of "geniuses" or gifted students by the Respondent 7.

The Recognitions of Their Roles in the Implementation of the Current Educational Reforms in Inclusive Education

Another aim of the face-to-face interview was to ask the participants to identify the people who are responsible for the implementation of inclusive education in their schools and identify their roles in this process. Most of them believed that all the stakeholders of the educational process including the Minister of Education and Sciences, regional, local, and school administration, school staff, SEN, and ordinary students and their parents, are interested in the implementation of inclusive education in their schools. However, most of the participants thought that the school administration is mainly responsible for the implementation of these inclusive education reforms. And only one participant believes that psychologists and social educators should be attracted to the inclusive education implementation in the school. Moreover, the participants identified the role of the school administration and the steps that had been taken by it. As it is seen, all the participants identify a group of students with special educational needs as students with physical and mental disabilities not paying attention to other diverse characteristics included in this group except a mention of "geniuses" or gifted students by the Respondent 7.

Respondent 1 characterized the role of the administration in the school as active participation in the organization of collaboration with different organizations working with students with special educational needs:

The administration cooperates with institutions that work with children with disabilities and sends students there who have similar problems.

Respondent 4 also added that the administration was not only concerned about the teachers' qualifications in teaching students with special needs but also organized the meetings with qualified specialists who could support teachers in working with SEN:

[Administration] Sends teachers to special courses, holds meetings on such children [with special educational needs], psychologists and a health worker organize consultations for teachers on questions about these students.

Respondent 3 also mentioned the collaboration, when it was necessary, with such specialists as defectologists, speech therapists, and oligophrenopedagogas in inclusive education to support teachers and consult them on the problems they faced while teaching SEN students:

They organize consultations on working with such students [with special educational needs], attract support specialists, conduct seminars and courses for teachers.

Respondent 7 said that alongside the special courses and meetings with psychologists, the administration insisted on separate short-term and long-term plans for students with SEN and usage of differentiation in the lessons:

There is a system of working with children with SEN. Separate CTPs (Calendar Thematic plan) are compiled for them, 1 child has an accompanying person. Such students are given separate tasks (simplified). The study topics for them are also simplified.

Respondent 4 added that the administration is responsible for the implementation of inclusive education in mainstream schools due to the given standards, understanding, and adaptation of these standards for the school:

> *The school administration [is responsible for inclusive education], because it implements standards, but again the standards come down from the Ministry of Education [and Science], therefore any person in my school is nothing more than a performer.*

From these interviews, it is seen that participants see the role and the actions taken by the school administration in a quite similar way. Nevertheless, Respondent 2 could not determine the role of the administration and gave a short answer:

> *I find it difficult to answer.*

Then Respondent 2 refused to give any details and give any explanations about the actions taken by the administration to implement or develop inclusive education in the school.

Regarding the roles of teachers in the implementation of inclusive education in mainstream schools, the participants thought that the main responsibility is on the administration and the teacher is a person who follows their instructions and school policy and focuses mostly on the educational process in common rather than on the reforms' implementations.

Respondent 4, a person who has faced a great variety of educational reforms, said that both administration and teachers are responsible for the implementation of any reform following their duties:

> *The administration at the school is responsible, and of course the teacher is personally responsible in any case.*

Only Respondent 6 mentioned the importance of involving parents in the educational process and the necessity of collaboration with them as they play an important role in the lives of their children and have an influence on them:

> *Working with these children in the classroom, organizing support, constant cooperation with parents, choosing the right strategy in working with children of the SEN.*

Few participants considered that teachers play a significant role in the implementation of inclusive education in mainstreams school as they are the key people who have a great impact on the educational process and students.

Respondent 4 supposed that only teachers are responsible for the "real" implementation of inclusive education in mainstream schools, not formally as it often happens in schools in Kazakhstan. Teachers are always overloaded with different reports and duties that take much time and impede the successful implementation of any reform:

> *The role of the teacher is one [in implementing inclusive education] of the key ones. After all, it depends on him whether education will be inclusive in reality or formally.*

Respondent 1 supposed that a teacher is the first person who notices students' problems or concerns and supports students in difficult situations:

> *Teachers should see if children have problems, identify them, contact the right specialists.*

Respondent 3 supposed the teachers' role is not only to educate SEN but also to create a friendly and supportive atmosphere in the classroom that would have a positive impact on both education and upbringing.

> *The teacher in this situation probably regulates just the processes that occur during the education of children, somewhere it is necessary to correct some attitude, somewhere to create some specific situation, it may be successful for the child to somehow support him with a child with inclusive education and upbringing.*

Another important finding from the conducted interviews was that most of the participants had difficulties in the identification of their roles and even presenting any professional experience in the implementation of inclusive education and working with students with special educational needs. Some of them responded that they had never had such experience in their teaching career although most of them had been working in the educational sphere for over twenty years. One of the participants saw the contribution to the development of inclusive education in a school as:

> *Conducting classes, organizing round tables to solve problem situations with inclusive students.*

Two participants, Respondents 3 and 5, mentioned that they had taught students with special educational needs. Although Respondent 3 described this experience as something new as it was the first time when it had become possible to work with such a student:

> *I worked with children with developmental disabilities on adaptation in the classroom and taught them.*

Overall, the participants underestimate their contribution to the development of inclusive education in their schools as most of them suppose that they have a lack of experience working with this group of SEN students. When talking about students who are the inclusive education target group, teachers in this study focused only on students with physical and mental disabilities not taking into consideration other student characteristics such as the different ethnic or socioeconomic backgrounds. Besides, the identification of themselves as agents of change posed

difficulties for most participants in this study as most of them thought that the school administration is the one mainly responsible for the implementation of inclusive education reforms.

Characteristics that Should Motivate Teachers to Become Agents of Change

While considering the characteristics the teachers ought to possess to become agents of change, it was also mentioned that collaboration among teachers plays a significant role in the implementation of inclusive education in mainstream schools. Despite the importance and benefits of collaboration among teachers, there are some difficulties to find the time and energy for discussions of the current issues with students as the teachers are busy with planning, preparing for the lessons, and other paperwork. At the same time, the participants mentioned that the collaboration and sharing of teaching experience allow teachers to build up the educational process to choose the most appropriate approaches and create a friendlier atmosphere in the classroom. If there is a need the participants are always supported by their colleagues. Respondent 3 described the collaboration with the colleagues in the following way:

> *If any questions arise or advice is needed or help is needed, including methodological and psychological, or just the advice of a colleague, then we turn to each other and find answers to our questions.*

Respondents 5 and 6 described the collaboration as meetings and consultations held by psychologists or medical presenters. They talked about the collaboration not only with their colleagues from their schools but also close cooperation with other specialists working with students with special educational needs:

> *We (administration and teachers) conduct various training seminars, receive consultations from specialists, organize round tables on difficulties in working with children of the SEN.*

Regarding the personal and professional characteristics an agent of change should possess, the participants highlighted not only professional but also personal qualities the agents of change should possess. Some participants considered special education and readiness essential for teaching students with special needs.

Respondent 1 supposed that personal characteristics are also important as professional features:

> *The teacher should be patient and should have professional skills for inclusive education.*

Respondent 3 also mentioned the importance of both possessing positive emotions towards children and high qualification in inclusive education:

> *Professionalism, caring person who loves children and wants to help. Special education, some courses have been completed, some special education can really be, advanced training courses so that the teacher is really in the topic and can help, teach, make learning comfortable for this category of students.*

The possession of tolerance, versatility, and flexibility are also crucial for teachers as agents of change.

During interviews, the participants also portrayed the conditions that contribute to becoming agents of change. These conditions are similar to the given characteristics and include professional and personal features presented by Respondents 5 and 6:

> *Special education, knowledge in the field of psychology and defectology, willingness to overcome difficulties, a high degree of patience.*

Respondent 1 supposed that an agent of change needs to study all the aspects of inclusive education and obtain additional education in this field. Furthermore, support from the school administration is also important.

*Support from the [school] administration, support from higher authorities. If
teachers had such support, then each of the teachers could become such an agent
[of change for inclusion].*

From the perspective of Respondent 4, motivation is also crucial for becoming agents of
change as a person who is not interested in something or not inspired by something cannot
implement any change successfully:

*High-quality education and external motivation. It is difficult to have an internal
one, I do not have external favorable conditions. This is a symbiosis, there can be
no internal motivation without external motivation in this particular issue, and
there can be no external motivation without internal motivation in principle.*

These findings also include some obstacles that teachers can encounter on their way to
becomimg agents of change. The participants referred to diverse barriers starting with the state
educational program and finishing with parents and teachers' negative attitudes towards inclusive
education.

Respondent 6 stated that barriers appear not only because of the administration or teachers'
actions or inactions but also due to the lack of funding for special attributes:

*Insufficient level of education, unwillingness of parents to see obvious problems in
children, insufficient equipment of the school with special attributes [ramps, special
railings, etc.], unwillingness of the administration to [support] inclusive education.*

Respondent 7 supposed that the main barriers to the implementation of inclusive education
in mainstream schools are teachers' overload at work and lack of knowledge in this field:

*Unwillingness of teachers to spend their own resources [such as time], insufficient
qualifications in this matter.*

Yet, unlike her colleagues, Respondent 1 was sure that there are not any obstacles to being an agent of change, although knowledge in the field of inclusive education is important.

At the end of the interview, after asking a question about whether they had any additional comments on the topic, only Respondent 4 shared the opinion. This participant said that there are many current problems in the educational institutions with ordinary students, and there is no time and resources to implement inclusive education in mainstream schools. Besides, most of the teachers are puzzled about how to resolve current issues in the updated curriculum. Four participants out of seven were ready to continue working with the students with special educational needs and develop inclusive education in their schools. Teo of the participants hesitated whether they were ready to become agents of change and work with the students with mental and physical disabilities, although they had been working with gifted, talented, and highly motivated students for more than ten years. And only one participant showed strong disagreement with being an agent of change as she believed that the current educational system is not too beneficial even for students without health any disabilities. The participant considered that it was efficient to resolve current educational issues only after implementing inclusive education in mainstream schools.

Chapter Summary

This chapter analyzed and interpreted the qualitative data related to defining students with special educational needs. First, almost all the participants hesitated to identify whether their schools are inclusive or not. Moreover, defining the group of students with special educational needs mostly mentioned children with special educational needs as students with mental and physical disabilities. Second, findings have highlighted the people who are responsible for implementing inclusive reforms and any other changes creating appropriate conditions for students with special educational needs in mainstream schools. Finally, the findings present the characteristics that agents of change ought to possess and some obstacles they can encounter in

developing inclusive education in their schools. The next chapter will interpret the findings of the current study in the context of literature.

Discussion

Introduction

The previous chapter described the findings drawn from the face-to-face interviews with the participants interested in the implementation of inclusive education and positioning themselves as agents of change or showing the readiness to become agents of change in mainstreams schools in Northern Kazakhstan. This chapter concentrates on findings that appeared from the collected data and presents the research findings in terms of teachers on inclusive education. The findings are discussed by interpreting them regarding the studied literature and research questions and sub-questions. The main points highlighted in this chapter are the teachers' understanding of the concept of inclusive education; the students included in the group with diverse characteristics and diverse learning needs and teachers' actions to promote inclusive education practice at school and the characteristics of agents of change.

The Teachers Understanding of the Concept of Inclusive Education

According to the data collected, there is no common understanding of inclusive education among the participants. It is not surprising to observe limited explanations and points on inclusive education, as a primary problem is the variety of definitions and diverse interpretations of it in the world. Although the participants support the idea of inclusive education by providing equal educational conditions for all students.

This analysis supports the idea that educational global institutions are struggling to provide efficient and equal education for all children and young people (Ainscow & Miles, 2009). In this research, the definition of inclusive education is significant as there is some confusion in the determination of its meaning. According to the data, the recognition of inclusive education is limited to the knowledge obtained on the territory of post-Soviet countries, not referring to the research from other countries. The definitions of inclusive education were discussed in Salamanca

in 1994. According to it, all the children despite any difficulties and students' diverse needs ought to learn together to provide equal and high-quality education for everyone. In the Kazakhstani context in Law on Education (2007), inclusive education is defined as "the process that provides equal access for students with special individual abilities to relevant education training" (p.1). These findings confirm that the definition of inclusive education in Kazakhstan is very close to one given by the Salamanca Statement in 1994.

These findings provide evidence that mainstream schools are aimed at the development and creation of equal conditions for all students including students with diverse characteristics. Conceptual approaches to the development of Inclusive Education in the Republic of Kazakhstan (2015) define inclusive education as "a transformative process of the education system based on the equal right of quality education for all" (p. 1). This concept ties well with the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC, 1989) which is aimed at the necessity of creating equal educational rights and conditions for students.

As to the data collected for the research, for some of the participants, it was difficult to identify whether the school where they work is inclusive or not. Since the majority of the participants in this study were confident that they have never had such an experience. Besides, they believe that most SEN students do not attend the schools where they work. Some participants SEN students have been homeschooled and do not attend school. According to the Human Rights Report (2021), in Kazakhstan "many children with disabilities remain isolated in segregated special schools or residential institutions, where they can face violence, neglect, physical restraint, and overmedication" (p.5). A few participants mentioned that working in the educational system for more than twenty years has never taught SEN students. Although these teachers work or have worked in lyceums and taught gifted and talented students and students of diverse religious views and nationalities. Nevertheless, the schools identified as inclusive in the Law of Education (2007)

are aimed at creating comfortable conditions for students with special educational needs. Besides, teachers working there use different teaching techniques and approaches so that these children could achieve their learning objectives.

Participants in this research also mentioned that one of the issues SEN students face in mainstream schools is the absence of special facilities for them, as only one participant mentioned that there is a ramp and special signs in the school. Regarding special conditions for education, the Law about Education (2007) identified them as conditions that include educational, as well as special, individually developing and correctional-developing programs and teaching methods, technical, educational and other means, life environment, psychological and pedagogical support, medical, social and other services, without which it is impossible to master educational programs by persons (children) with special educational needs, as well as children with disabilities.

Considering the findings of this study, the following may be concluded. The analysis suggested that the teachers in urban schools in Northern Kazakhstan need to improve their knowledge of inclusive education via studying foreign inclusive education experiences. Despite a lack of knowledge and experience in teaching SEN students the participants are ready to work with students with special educational needs and become an agent of change as some of them have already taken some actions towards it.

The Students Included in the Group with Diverse Characteristics and Diverse Learning Needs

In the previous chapters, participants' definitions of students with diverse characteristics and diverse learning needs were given regarding more to their personal experience rather than deep knowledge in this field. During the interview, the participants identified the group of SEN students as students possessing any mental or physical disabilities, and only one participant mentioned gifted students. It seems that international and national definitions seem to be not well known

among teachers. That the understanding that teachers have seems to be based on their personal experience and encounters with information.

The main goal of inclusive education is creating equal conditions for diverse student groups (McDonnel et.al, 1997). However, different national and international laws define students with diverse characteristics differently. Mwajabu & Milinga (2017) identify students with diverse characteristics students of different nationalities speaking on different languages, students from rural areas, with HIV and AIDS diagnosis, and other students with "exceptional learning needs" (p. 28). According to Law Insider "Diverse Learning Needs mean the needs of all learners including: females as well as males; members of ethnic and racial minorities as well as ethnic and racial majorities; learners who are socioeconomically disadvantaged, as well as those who are more advantaged; learners who have not been successful in school as well as those who have been successful; and learners who have been denied access in any way to educational opportunities as well as those who have not."

Regarding the data obtained from the study, speaking about students with special educational needs or diverse characteristics the participants implied only students with mental and physical disabilities that shows the limitations and lack of knowledge in this field. It cannot be denied that all the participants have worked with this group of students but did not identify them as students with special educational needs. Although the participants study students of different ethnic groups and religious views, with not successful and talented students.

Only one person out of seven mentioned that gifted students are also students who demand special conditions for their education and nurturing. Nevertheless, most of the participants work in lyceums and gymnasiums whose goals are to identify and educate highly motivated and gifted students. Besides, in the Law about Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan teaching talented students is separated from teaching students with special educational needs and is presented as a

separate strand. According to the Concept of Education Development of the Republic of Kazakhstan until 2025 (2021), the special program aimed at identifying and educating talented and highly motivated students will have been developed by 2025 in order to support this group of students.

One of the points was to investigate how teachers define the students with special educational needs in the schools. Summing up the finding, teachers showed some difficulties while defining SEN students in their schools. Although they all have worked with students of different nationalities, gender, religious views, and mental disabilities that were not proven by a medical organization and gifted students.

Teachers Act to Promote Inclusive Education Practice at School

Going back to the previous sections, the findings indicate that some steps to implement and develop inclusive education in mainstream schools have been already taken. For example, some participants had courses on inclusive education and the administration organized meetings with specialists working with SEN students. Also, they mentioned that the administration creates equal learning conditions for all students taking into account their needs.

As it has been mentioned before, the Law about Education in the Republic of Kazakhstan (2018) is aimed at the implementation of inclusive education in mainstream schools to provide all student with equal rights in getting appropriate education and socialization in a community. According to the findings, all students have equal opportunities in the schools where participant work. Besides, the administration has taken some actions to create appropriate conditions for students with physical disabilities installing ramps and placing special signs for visually impaired students. As a teacher is a key element of the educational process, it is supposed that teachers have to teach SEN student despite any difficulties and misunderstandings. To avoid misunderstandings of inclusive education, the administration sends teachers to special courses and organize meetings

with psychologists and specialist who have already worked with SEN students. According to the Methodological Recommendations (2018) for teaching assistants to accompany children with special educational needs in the educational process, to create appropriate educational conditions aimed at formation of harmonic and intelligent individuals combining diverse personal and professional features. The administration and teachers are to solve serious issues to create comfortable environments for all students; to support students to follow their individual program of development; to develop professionally and create effective educational programs for each student.

The participants were asked to describe the actions to promote inclusive education in their schools. Most of the participants agreed that they hadn't had any experience in teaching SEN students. Only two of them gave some information about their experience in this sphere. However, they didn't pay much attention to this experience as they supposed that it could not be called a contribution to the development of inclusive education at their schools.

The findings of this study show that the obstacles to the implementation of inclusive education in mainstream schools exist not only inside the schools but also in controversial reforms in education in common. Human Rights Watch (2019) reports that the Kazakhstani educational system still separates and isolates students with mental or physical disabilities. But the report in 2021 shows slow progress in the attendance of SEN students in mainstream schools.

Other important aspects are the successful implementation of these reforms and the analysis of weak and strong points of the taken measures. It is supposed that the success of these tasks at school is directly proportional to the quality of the organization of the system of support and support for children with special educational needs (NU, 2018). Besides, one of the challenges the teachers encounter today is lack of the essential professional competencies and qualifications to become agents of change.

Overall, the participants describe some steps taken by the administration toward the development of inclusive education in the schools. But some of them do not believe that it is possible to contribute to inclusive education with the current conditions and changes in the educational system. On the other hand, some participants try to overcome the difficulties by using different approaches and methods for teaching SEN students.

The Characteristics of Agents of Change and Evaluation of Themselves as Possessing Characteristics of Agents of Inclusion

In the previous chapters, some characteristics agents of change should possess were discussed. During the interview, the participants highlighted the necessity of having special qualifications and deep knowledge about inclusive education and ways of working with SEN students. As was already mentioned, due to the lack of knowledge in this field they have been some misunderstandings about inclusive education and students with diverse characteristics. As a result, these misunderstandings are the main obstacles to the way of successful implementation of inclusive education in mainstream schools.

To implement any reforms, a teacher as a key person of the educational process, ought to possess appropriate knowledge and qualifications. Danişman et al. (2020) support the idea that essential knowledge to educate students on a particular topic or concept are necessary to increase the teachers' effectiveness. Data analysis in the current research on teachers as agents of change in urban schools in Northern Kazakhstan showed that the participants supported the idea of possessing ideally special education to become an agent of change. Moreover, they mentioned that if there was not an opportunity to get inclusive education, it could be informative to enroll on special courses or seminars on inclusive education. Pantic and Florian (2015) also mentioned the necessity in relevant knowledge and perception of educational change that have an impact on their beliefs and values. The participants believe that they are not enough qualified for teaching SEN

students in mainstream schools, and they are not confidents whether they could manage with this challenge.

On the other hand, they have all the necessary personal and professional characteristics for becoming an agent of change. Besides, they mentioned that they feel comfortable working in collaboration with their colleagues and administration in case they face any difficult situations. in addition, the participants understand the importance of parents' involvement in the educational process. Authors who made research in this field defined a great number of characteristics for teachers of inclusion including collaborative skills (Frost 2012; Nevin et al. 2009), positive attitudes towards change (Slee, 2010), the ability of reflection and investigation (Liston & Zeichner 1990; Zeichner 2009), collaboration with administration and colleagues (Ainsworth, 1982) and even developed social skills (Košir & Tement, 2014; O'Connor et al., 2011).

The findings of the study show that the participants presented diverse characteristics for being an agent of change. Although they did not identify themselves as professionals who were able to become or had become an agent of change. Despite their experience and qualification, they supposed that they lack knowledge in this field and did not do any contribution in the development of inclusive education in their schools.

Chapter Summary

This chapter discussed the main findings described the understanding of inclusive education from teachers' perception in urban schools in the North of Kazakhstan. The chapter also presented the different points of view of the participants on the students who are included in the group of students with special educational needs. Finally, the study reflects teachers' perception of their roles in the implementation of inclusive education and characteristics the agents of change ought to possess to become successful in this role.

According to the data of the research, the participants had the similar ideas on how evaluate the effectiveness of the educational process. First, teachers ought to use their knowledge on practice and not to be afraid of using new techniques and approaches. Another point mentioned in the interview is that the outcomes should be monitored constantly to investigate a positive or negative dynamic. One of the participants believes that even a tiny progress is a good sign that shows we are on the right way. Most of the participants mentioned that the main problem of evaluation is appropriate criteria that can be used for the assessment of the efficiency of the methods and approaches especially in the terms of inclusive education.

Conclusion

This chapter presents the major conclusions that provide final ideas on the researched topic. This chapter consists of three parts. The first part concludes the research and provides a common overview. The second part contains a few possible proposals about the further usage of research data. The third part informs about the possible limitations of the current research and gives recommendations for further study.

This study examined the teachers' understanding of the concept of inclusive education and the identification of a group of students with special educational needs. The proposed research question, which led to this study, was to recognize the teachers' roles as an agent of change for inclusive education in urban Kazakhstani schools.

There are several points of view presented by the participants, and most of them are very close or similar to each other. I identified them as crucial for addressing my research questions. First, many participants have a limited understanding of what inclusive education is and what students are included in the group of students with special educational needs. It is necessary to mention that these are students with mental or physical disabilities who are a bit different from their peers and have unique characteristics and special needs. However, mentioning special needs the participants did not take into account their students' needs as most of them work with gifted and talented students in their schools and adjust the educational program for them. Mostly, they consider that their schools are not inclusive ones as they do not include their students in the group with the special educational needs as they do not work with the student with mental or physical disabilities.

Despite their working experience, the participants do not identify themselves as teachers who have experience in the implementation of inclusive education and do not define themselves as agents of change. Besides, even the participants who have taught or are teaching students with

physical disabilities consider that they do not contribute to the development of inclusive education in their schools. Moreover, they supposed that they are not enough qualified to become agents of change and work with the SEN students as they do not have enough knowledge or special education in this field. Although they do not deny possessing the personal characteristics of agents of change. Furthermore, they mentioned some obstacles that agents of change might encounter in implementing inclusive education in mainstream schools. In addition, it was highlighted that the current educational system has too many problematic points and that the realization of inclusive reforms would have many barriers and would not be successful. Generally, it could be said that the participants are not ready to become agents of change and do not believe in the successful implementation of these reforms.

All the data collected during this study infers that even though inclusive education is now one of the central spotlights in Kazakhstan, there is no clear perception from teachers of inclusive education and students with special educational needs. If even teachers work with gifted and talented students identified as students with special educational needs do not identify themselves as agents of change, what can be said about the teachers who work in regular classes? Such questions might be a reason for action for the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan to think about the level of knowledge of teachers in this field. It might be necessary to create courses, workshops, or training aimed at providing teachers with the efficient knowledge and skills to deal with various problems they can encounter while teaching students with special educational needs to implement inclusive education in mainstream schools in Kazakhstan.

Recommendations

A few proposals for the stakeholders interested in the implementation of the inclusive reforms would be useful in tackling the issues highlighted in this research:

1. To the policymakers: to create courses, workshops, or training specifically aimed at providing teachers with the necessary knowledge and skills to overcome diverse problems they face working with the SEN students.

2. To the school administration: engage specialists working with the SEN students to support teachers with the necessary advice and share experience in working with this group of students. All the teachers at mainstream schools should be involved in the process of identifying students with special educational needs.

3. To the teachers: their experience in working with the SEN students could be good support for other teachers in the implementation of inclusive education in mainstream schools. That might be helpful for them to hold some kind of community and share their experience.

4. To the agents of change: the data that emerged from the study could be helpful for the agents of change to highlight the main issues in the knowledge and qualifications of teachers from mainstream schools which will help agents of change to hold different courses and workshops.

Limitations of the Study

The present study has a few limitations. The limitation is the number of participants and data received during the research. There were only seven participants engaged in the qualitative study. Theoretically, seven participants are enough for qualitative research; however, a question about data's reliability occurs here. Perhaps, a mixed-method would be more appropriate here to cover a larger number of the participants.

Another limitation is that the participants were teachers only from Northern Kazakhstan. As a result, there is no general understanding of the researched questions around the country.

Besides, it is not clear whether only the teachers of Northern Kazakhstan have different misunderstandings about inclusive education.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Survey for recruitment

The following questions will be included in the short questionnaire:

Dear, colleagues. I invite you to take part in my research aimed at investigating the role of teachers in the implementation of the current reforms in inclusive education. This research is conducted as part of MSc thesis research at Nazarbayev University Graduate School of Education. If you suppose you are or could be an agent of change and social justice, please take this short survey.

1. For how many years have you worked as a teacher?

- less than a year

- 1 – 5 years

- 6 -10 years

- 11-20 years

- More than 20 years

2. Which subject(s) do you teach?

- STEM (Math, physics, chemistry, biology)

- Humanities band arts (literature, history, music)

- Language (English, Russian, Kazakh)

- Sports

3. Which grade level(s) do you teach?

- 1-4

- 5-9

- 10-11

4. Have you ever worked with students with special needs?

- Yes

- No

- I don't know

5. Do you teachers in mainstream schools need a leader to support them in the implementation of inclusive education?

- Yes

- No

- I don't know

If you agree to participate in this research on teachers as agents of change for inclusive education, please leave your contact information and the researcher will contact you. Please know that all data in this research, including your response to this survey, will be kept only between you and the researcher. The researcher will not share the information that you have provided with anyone else. If you are interested to participate in this research, please share your contact information here for the researcher to contact you for participation in this study:

Name _____

Phone number _____

Email address _____

Appendix B

Interview questions

How do teachers in an urban Kazakhstani school understand their role as agents of inclusion?

The sub-questions are as follows:

1.   How do teachers understand inclusion?

- What is inclusive education?

- What do teachers do to work inclusively in your school?

2.   What students do teachers include in the group of students with diverse characteristics

and diverse learning needs?

- What are diverse characteristics and learning needs?

3.   How do these teachers act to promote inclusive practice at school?

- What events have your organized to implement inclusive practice at school?

4.   Who are agents of inclusion from the perspectives of teachers at urban Kazakhstani

schools?

5.   What are the characteristics of agents of inclusion in the opinion of teachers in this

research?

- What qualities can be helpful for teachers to become agents of inclusion?

- What qualifications do they need to have?

6.   How do teachers in this research evaluate themselves as possessing characteristics of

agents of inclusion they have identified?

- What qualities, qualifications or characteristics do you have to become an agent of inclusion?

- If teachers are ready to become agents of change?

7.   How do teachers evaluate their success as agents of inclusion?