

Forms of Leadership Promoting Inclusive Education in Kazakhstan

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in

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(a) has been approved by the Graduate School of Education Ethics Committee of Nazarbayev University.

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Yours sincerely,




Associate Professor,
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ABSTRACT

Forms of Leadership Promoting Inclusive Education in Kazakhstan

School leaders are believed to be key stakeholders in developing inclusion since they play a crucial role in sustaining an inclusive culture and ensuring that all students, regardless of their origins or abilities, feel appreciated. Therefore, it is crucial to explore how school leaders facilitate inclusive education through their practices. This qualitative research study examined how principals, vice principals, and Special Educational Needs (SEN) coordinators in Astana schools develop inclusive practices in their contexts. In this phenomenological inquiry, ten school leaders participated in a semi-structured interview and shared their perceptions, practices, and challenges they encountered while making their schools inclusive. The data was analyzed using Hitt and Tucker's (2016) five dimensions of effective leadership as a theoretical framework. In general, participants have a positive attitude toward inclusive education. The findings indicate that leaders put emphasis on collaboration among different stakeholders in each of the following dimensions: establishing shared vision, building professional capacity, creating a supportive environment, facilitating high-quality learning experiences, and connecting to external partners. In addition, participants' forms of leadership have features of mainly transformational and distributed leadership styles depending on their context. However, the research also noted challenges in executing inclusive policies, reluctance from teaching staff, and a lack of specialists and resources. Overall, the study emphasizes the need for strong leadership in advancing inclusive education and offers practical implications for school administrators to improve the learning environment for all children. Moreover, further in-depth research on the attitudes and practices of school leaders from other regions is recommended.

Keywords: inclusive education, school leadership, inclusive practices, leadership, special educational needs

Аңдатпа

Қазақстандағы Инклюзивті Білім Берудегі Көшбасшылық Нысандар

Мектеп басшылары инклюзивті мәдениетті қолдау мен барлық оқушыларға әртүрлі қабілеттеріне қарамастан ыңғайлы орта қамтамасыз етуде шешуші рөл атқаратындықтан, инклюзияны дамытуда негізгі мүдделі тараптардың бірі болып табылады. Сондықтан мектеп басшыларының өз тәжірибелері арқылы инклюзивті білім беруге қалай көмектесетінін зерттеу өте маңызды. Бұл сапалы зерттеу Астана мектептеріндегі директорлар, директорлардың орынбасарлары және Ерекше Білім Беру (ЕБК) үйлестірушілері инклюзивті тәжірибені өз контекстінде қалай дамытатынын талдайды. Бұл феноменологиялық сауалнамада он мектеп көшбасшысы жартылай құрылымдық сұхбатқа қатысып, инклюзияға қатысты тәжірибелер және қиындықтарымен бөлісті. Деректер Хитт пен Такердің (2016) тиімді көшбасшылықтың бес өлшемін теориялық құрылым ретінде қолдану арқылы талданды. Жалпы қатысушылардың инклюзивті білімге деген көзқарасы оң. Нәтижелер көшбасшылардың әртүрлі мүдделі тараптар арасындағы ынтымақтастыққа баса назар аударатынын көрсетеді: ортақ көзқарасты орнату, кәсіби әлеуетті арттыру, қолайлы орта құру, жоғары сапалы оқу тәжірибесін жеңілдету және сыртқы серіктестермен байланыста болу. Сонымен қатар, қатысушылардың көшбасшылық формалары трансформациялық және бөлінген көшбасшылық стильдеріне тән. Дегенмен, зерттеу инклюзивті саясаттағы қиындықтар, оқытушылар жағынан құлықсыздық, мамандар мен ресурстардың жетіспеушілігін атап өтті. Жалпы алғанда, зерттеу мектеп көшбасшыларына оқу ортасын жақсарту үшін практикалық идеялар ұсынады.

Кілт сөздер: инклюзивті білім беру, мектептегі көшбасшылық, инклюзивті тәжірибе, көшбасшылық, арнайы білім беру қажеттіліктері

Аннотация

Формы Лидерства в Продвижении Инклюзивного Образования в Казахстане

Считается, что руководители школ играют решающую роль в обеспечении того, чтобы все учащиеся, независимо от их происхождения или способностей, чувствовали, что их ценят. Крайне важно изучить, как руководители школ содействуют инклюзивному образованию посредством своей практики. В этом качественном исследовании изучалось, как директора, заместители директоров и координаторы по особым образовательным потребностям (ООП) в школах Астаны развивают инклюзивные практики в своих условиях. В этом феноменологическом опросе десять руководителей школ приняли участие в полуструктурированном интервью и поделились своим восприятием, практикой и проблемами. Данные были проанализированы с использованием пяти измерений эффективного лидерства Хитта и Такера (2016) в качестве теоретической основы. В целом участники положительно относятся к инклюзивному образованию. Результаты показывают, что лидеры уделяют особое внимание сотрудничеству между различными заинтересованными сторонами в каждом из следующих аспектов: установление общего видения, развитие профессионального потенциала, создание благоприятной среды, содействие качественному обучению и установление контактов с внешними партнерами. Кроме того, формы лидерства участников имеют черты трансформационного и распределенного стилей лидерства. Однако исследование отметило проблемы с проведением инклюзивной политики, сопротивление преподавательского состава и нехватку специалистов и ресурсов. В целом, в исследовании предлагаются практические выводы для школьной администрации по улучшению условий обучения для всех детей.

Ключевые слова: инклюзивное образование, школьное лидерство, инклюзивные практики, лидерство, особые образовательные потребности.

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1. Introduction

This chapter provides a general overview of inclusive education from global and Kazakhstani perspectives by interpreting it from both narrow and broad approaches. Moreover, it outlines the history, current state, and barriers towards inclusive education in Kazakhstan with the support of existing literature. Next, it presents the research problem to be investigated, explains the main purpose, states the research questions, and discusses the study's significance.

1.1 Background of the Study

The challenge of making education a universal right that is accessible to everyone has never been more apparent than today. From technological disasters to climate change, conflict, intolerance, and violence, this rapidly changing world faces significant challenges leading to even greater inequalities, which impact educational delivery for decades. Therefore, implementing Inclusive Education has a global essence, as it is aimed at meeting the needs of everyone by eliminating any form of discrimination.

Hornby (2014) provided a comprehensive definition by stating that inclusive education is widely recognized as having multiple aspects, such as respecting human rights, advancing social justice and equality, and adopting a social perspective on disability and education based on political and social factors. Inclusive education is acknowledged globally as giving equal rights to learners regardless of their abilities and background. One of the 17 global goals of Sustainable Development set up by United Nations in 2015 focuses on assuring an equitable environment for quality education and promoting lifelong opportunities (UNESCO, 2015). Moreover, the concept of inclusive education involves identifying and removing barriers that can impede students' participation, involvement, and achievement, including the representatives of vulnerable or marginalized groups (Ainscow, 2020).

Generally, all of these definitions have equity as a common and central idea of inclusive education.

Despite having equity as a central idea, some scholars state that the interpretation of inclusive education differs depending on a particular context. For example, Armstrong et al. (2009) conclude that inclusive education might imply diverse meanings for every individual depending on a context related to race, gender, sexual orientation, cultural background, or disability. Walton (2015) also agrees with this point of view, stating that one's interpretation of inclusive education is determined by their experiences. In addition, Ainscow (2020) found that some countries primarily focus on inclusion as a provider of education to disabled people. Meanwhile, other countries emphasize serving all students with diverse backgrounds. In the same way, Haug (2017) asserts that the group of definitions of inclusive education is categorized into two groups known as narrow and broad approaches.

Concerning the narrow approach, inclusive education mainly concentrates on providing education to students with disability and special educational needs (Arduin, 2015; Norwich, 2014). This approach to defining inclusive education is used dominantly in many countries (Booth, 2017; Norwich, 2014). According to the range of resources, Kazakhstan is also considered one of the countries that perceives inclusive education as a form of education focused on disability and special needs. The paragraph below provides some evidence from the literature regarding this topic.

According to Pons et al. (2015), the notion of inclusive education in Kazakhstan is commonly regarded as narrow since it focuses solely on impairments and extreme socioeconomic conditions, implying that only a small number of pupils may benefit from additional support. Throughout history, the understanding of Inclusive Education in Kazakhstan has come from the USSR model, which considered special education for disabled

people aimed at “correcting their defects” (Makoelle, 2020a, p.2). In the Soviet period, not all children had equal access to schools, and children with disabilities were sometimes isolated from their peers and educated in specialized institutions or at home by defectologist teachers who were especially trained to work with persons with impairments (Rollan & Somerton, 2021). Moreover, Rouse et al. (2014) stated that it has been the duty of specialized commissions known as Psychological-Medical-Pedagogical Commissions (henceforth PMPC) to diagnose children with special needs and determine whether they ought to attend a correctional school or get homeschooled. This approach is related to the medical model of disability, which focuses on treating specific conditions, and continues to predominate the thinking on this topic (Allan & Omarova, 2022). However, it should be noted that this is contradictory to the social model of disability, Oliver (2013) claims that the social model acknowledges that individuals are disabled first because of the society they live in. In addition, the medical model of disability conceptualizes disability as a medical issue unique to each person's body and mind (Dirth & Branscombe, 2017). Thus, prejudice and discrimination against persons with disabilities are built on the premise that disability is a medical pathology. This idea is supported by Rouse and Lapham (2013), who explained that a special or "correctional" educational approach to dealing with children with special needs create many obstacles to inclusive education in Kazakhstan and other post-Soviet governments. Stepaniuk (2019) also stated that the biggest barriers to inclusion are social views and how people see persons with disabilities in Post-Soviet republics and Eastern European nations. Additionally, the terminology used to identify pupils with impairments was found to be one of the significant barriers to the nation's progress toward inclusion (Makoelle, 2020b). Other barriers to reaching a broader context of inclusion include misconceptions about the concept, instructors' attitudes toward students with disabilities and inclusive education, a lack of resources and skilled workers in underdeveloped nations, and

more (UNESCO, 2020). In general, the narrow approach to defining inclusive education comes from focusing solely on students with disability and special needs. However, a range of studies found that some barriers can hinder the process of getting an equal education.

Regarding the broader context of defining inclusive education, Haug (2017) noted that the broader definition of inclusive education encompasses more than only enrolling Special Educational Needs (henceforth SEN) and disabled students in school. It also includes fostering a supportive atmosphere for all students, scaffolding instruction, and raising students' voices. According to Thomas (2013), broader definitions emphasize all children who might be at risk of segregation in addition to disabled pupils. This aligns with The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action, published in 1994, which asserted that regardless of students' intellectual, physical, social, linguistic, and other circumstances, mainstream schools need to accept all students. (UNESCO, 1994). Concerning the local context, The Constitution of Kazakhstan guarantees equal access to educational opportunities for all residents. The Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994), the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN, 2006), and the Convention Against Discrimination in Education (UNESCO, 1960) have all been ratified by Kazakhstan. Moreover, there are numerous reforms and development programs provided by the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan, starting from including the concept of "inclusive education" in the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan "About Education" to the adoption of the State Program for the Development of Education for 2020-2025 (MES, 2019). Although these reforms are intended to establish an inclusive environment and perceive children with special needs as equal members of society, recent studies demonstrate that the reality of inclusive education is still in the form of segregation from society.

Even though interpretations of inclusive education are divided into two groups, such as narrow and broad approaches, Hornby (2014) suggested the concept of inclusive special

education, a mix of the abovementioned approaches. According to the findings of the study, Inclusive special education is about providing the best possible instruction for all children with Special Educational Needs and Disability (henceforth SEND) in the most appropriate setting, throughout all stages of a child's education, with the intention of achieving the highest possible level of inclusion in the community post-school. Nevertheless, there are some contradictory thoughts regarding the practices and definitions. According to Norwich (2014), the broader context of inclusion might sometimes leave disabled students without enough attention. Meanwhile, Kauffman and Badar (2014) explained that this happens because the percentage of children who can be successfully taught in mainstream schools is limited since it is believed that certain SEND students cannot be integrated successfully into mainstream classes. Haug (2017) stated that there is a gap between policy formation and its implementation in real life, and none of the countries worldwide are executing inclusive practices in an ideal way. According to Vislie (2003), 'a country might have an inclusive policy, but not inclusive practices in schools, and vice versa, that is, have inclusive school practices but not an inclusive policy' (as cited in Haug, 2017, p.210). Moreover, there is a common sense in which inclusion is accepted as a "project" (Brokamp, 2017, p.82) with a final destination and definite steps. However, Anderson et al. (2014) claimed that it is a continuous process through which individuals are embedded into a socially constructed environment, and it should not be seen as a goal to be attained. Even though this process of developing inclusive education is confusing in terms of policy and practices, Ainscow and Sandill (2010) suggested that it is significant to value efforts made by many educational administrations to promote inclusion and recognize the role of leadership. Moreover, the term "inclusive practices" in this study was chosen deliberately since, according to Leithwood (2012), it is "the bundles of activities exercised by a person or group of persons with effort and commitment" (p.5). Therefore, this study is focused on school leaders' attitudes and

practices toward moving to inclusive education through their policies and practices in real-life.

1.2 Problem Statement

Kazakhstan has ratified several international declarations and established State Programs requiring equal education for all, including people with SEND. The State Program of Education Development (SPED) 2020–2025 (MES, 2019) reports that 60% of Kazakhstani schools have created an environment suitable for inclusive education. However, Angelides (2012) stated that developing schools accessible for everyone involves more than creating a barrier-free access environment, training teachers, and identifying stakeholders' attitudes. According to him, exploring the role of school leaders and headteachers is also considered a crucial topic since they are believed to be the stakeholders that influence the school's inclusive practices. Moreover, Kazakhstan is heavily influenced by the Soviet Legacy, which still impacts independent Kazakhstani education according to some recent study results. For example, Makoelle (2020a) found that some principals related inclusion to educating students with special needs in a correctional class. In addition, there are several recommendations for Kazakhstan to improve inclusive practices through leadership. Makoelle's (2020a) study has shown that Kazakhstani school leadership is required to create coherent school policies and inclusive education structures across all schools. Moreover, Human Rights Watch (2019) report that there is a need to provide training not only to teachers but also to school administrators, principals, vice principals, and other education leaders. According to Somerton et al. (2021), internationally and in the Kazakhstani context, implementing inclusive programs has difficulties in many schools due to insufficient leadership support, negative teacher attitudes, a lack of resources, and limited teacher preparation. Despite adopting the concept of inclusive education in Kazakhstan, there is limited research on how school leaders promote inclusive practices in their schools. As a result, there is a gap in

understanding how school leaders can effectively implement inclusive education and leadership practices to ensure that all students, including those with disabilities, receive equitable access to quality education.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research paper was to explore the school leaders' practices that facilitate inclusive education in schools located in Astana. This study examined how principals, vice principals, and SEN coordinators develop inclusive practices in their contexts. Specifically, this study focused on identifying leaders' general attitudes and knowledge about inclusion, specific practices, and challenges they encounter in their efforts to implementing inclusive education.

1.4 Research Questions

The overarching research question in this study was:

What forms of leadership promote inclusive education in Astana schools?

The sub-questions are:

1. How do school leaders understand the concept of Inclusive Education?
2. What are some specific practices, activities and behaviors of school leaders towards inclusive education?
3. What are some of the challenges experienced by school leaders in implementing inclusive practices?

1.5 Significance of the Study

Inclusive education is a crucial challenge for school improvement, and school leaders must cultivate it to expand learning opportunities for all students. The current study has significance for a number of reasons. Firstly, this research study advances inclusive education

in Kazakhstan by highlighting effective practices and strategies. Other school leaders may employ the practices presented in the findings to build more inclusive cultures in their schools, which help enhance student outcomes. Second, by identifying the skills and strategies leaders use to foster inclusive education, this study may also aid in developing leadership practices. Both policymakers eager to support the growth of effective leadership in education and school leaders seeking to improve their leadership abilities may benefit from this. Finally, by offering suggestions for improving inclusive education in Kazakhstan through evidence-based research, this study helps guide policy. Policymakers may use the research's conclusions to build laws and initiatives that aid in the growth of inclusive schools and effective leadership strategies. Considering the absence of research, particularly on leaders' perspectives, the present study can significantly contribute to the body of literature on inclusive education.

1.6 Summary

Inclusive Education is a global concept that aims to meet the educational needs of everyone without discrimination. It involves identifying and removing barriers that impede students' participation, involvement, and achievement, with equity as a central idea. Despite having various interpretations by many scholars, inclusion can be perceived in different approaches depending on the context. In Kazakhstan, due to its history from the USSR period, inclusive education is commonly regarded narrowly since it focuses solely on disabilities and special educational needs. Despite the ratification of international declarations, barriers still exist on the road to reaching a broader context of inclusion, such as educators' attitudes and misconceptions toward students with disabilities and inclusive education, a lack of resources and specialists, and differences in policy and practice. However, according to some studies, leaders are vital in promoting the inclusive practice and influencing others in an organization (Booth & Ainscow, 2016; Kugelmass and Ainscow,

2004; Ward et al., 2015). Therefore, this study focuses on school leaders' attitudes and strategies to make schools inclusive. The next chapter will provide a review of existing literature regarding this topic.

1.7 Outline of the Study

This research paper consists of six chapters. The first chapter presented 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. The second chapter reviews the previous studies regarding inclusive education and leadership. Additionally, it clarifies the role of leadership in education and discusses inclusive practices and policies. The third chapter describes the research design and sampling procedure with a detailed description and explanation of the selection procedures. Data collection instruments and data analysis are discussed as well. The fourth chapter reveals the findings of the semi-structured interview data analyzed through the theoretical framework. The fifth chapter discusses the findings of this study by providing and supporting the evidence from existing literature. Lastly, the sixth chapter discusses the concluding idea of this study within its implications, recommendations, and limitations.

2. Literature Review

The purpose of this chapter is to review the literature regarding the main concepts of this study. The first section of the study focuses on the theoretical framework and presents the theory related to exploring school leadership toward inclusive education. The second section provides a literature analysis of leadership and management discrepancies. The third section highlights the importance of school leadership in inclusive education. The fourth section presents the role and attitude of school leaders from a global perspective. The fifth section describes the characteristic of successful inclusive practices that school leaders should implement. The last section discusses the current studies regarding leadership in Kazakhstan.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

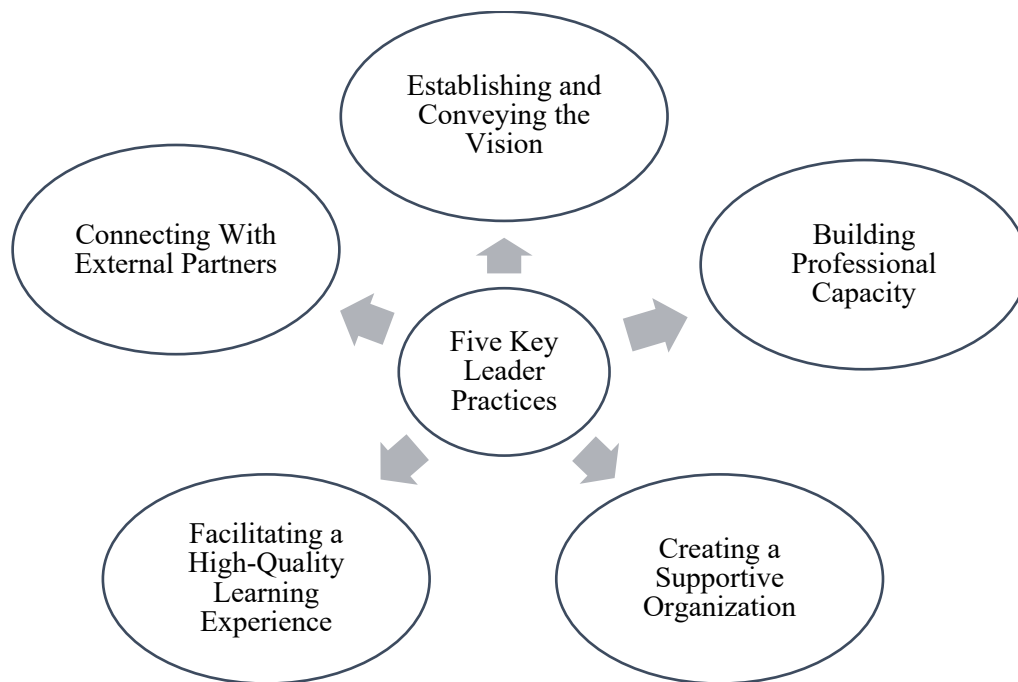
A growing body of knowledge on educational leadership demonstrates how leaders may affect student accomplishment by setting different practices into place. A variety of solid frameworks were aimed at identifying effective school leadership practices. However, there are discrepancies in the framework's core assumptions on the subjects that leaders should focus on. In this regard, Hitt and Tucker (2016) intended to identify, summarize, and offer evidence for how school leaders should focus their efforts based on empirical studies on how leadership affects student accomplishment. Thus, they reviewed 56 empirical research studies from 2000 to 2014 and identified five encompassing domains that unify existing frameworks into cohesive sets of practices for researchers and practitioners. These five dimensions were created to unite effective leadership practices which raise student achievement and other desirable outcomes. Since this study examines the leaders' practices, the current five key practices were used as a theoretical framework.

The research reveals five crucial broad categories of effective leadership practices, which are shown in Figure 1: (a) establishing and conveying the vision, (b) facilitating a

high-quality learning experience for students, (c) building professional capacity, (d) creating a supportive organization for learning, and (e) connecting with external partners.

Figure 1

5 Key Leader Practices: A Unified Framework by Hitt and Tucker (2016)



The practice of establishing and communicating the vision is more about how to give a school direction in a way that motivates teachers first to embrace the vision and then maintain focus on the goal in the long term. As Jacobson et al. (2007) stated, effective leaders recognize that through modeling desired behavior, they may inspire both individual and organizational growth. After embracing the common vision, leaders focus on developing others and themselves professionally. The fact that the leader learns alongside his or her faculty about the approaches and improvements is an important component of this domain (Robinson et al., 2008). It is also critical to convey the value of education and intellectual stimulation to everyone, regardless of position or job. To enable the majority of school members to perform at their highest capacity, affective factors such as support and well-being must be addressed (Grayson & Alvarz, 2008). Effective leaders understand that promoting

student accomplishment is not best accomplished through schools' bureaucratic and hierarchical structure (Tschannen-Moran, 2009). Instead, these leaders foster a sense of community rather than focusing on individuals, encourage collaborative work efforts rather than isolating practitioners, distribute and share leadership and decision-making rather than centralizing these functions, and base authority on expertise rather than the job position (Murphy et al., 2006). Regarding the fourth dimension, leaders must be actively involved by participating in discussions and influencing the vertical and horizontal alignment of the curriculum (Robinson et al., 2008). They are actively engaged in the process of curriculum review and planning since they have a thorough understanding of classroom life and the difficulties that come with their chosen profession. Lastly, effective leaders build relationships with the community to encourage broad involvement from parents, families, and other external stakeholders who may contribute to an excellent student learning experience (Salfi, 2011). Raising pupils' achievement requires establishing fruitful connections with families and communities.

There were a few studies that employed these dimensions as a theoretical framework. One of them is the study that described the evolving context of inclusive education and school leadership in the United States using these dimensions since they found similarities between the Hitt and Tucker domains and the work of leaders in inclusive schools (DeMatthews et al., 2020a). The study was solely based on the principal's experiences and practices. According to the authors, the framework helped evaluate the leaders' practices in promoting inclusive education and the diverse needs of students. Similarly, another study conducted by Gittens (2018) analyzed the role of principals. This qualitative case study analyzed leadership dimensions in an urban elementary school that successfully educated traditionally marginalized students in the district. To determine if the school leader used certain strategies, this research investigated records and conducted interviews with staff

members at the school and district levels. The research discovered that the school leader participated in several practices that support a high-quality learning experience, such as monitoring curriculum, teaching, and evaluation and maintaining a secure atmosphere. Despite the limited number of studies that implemented these principles as a theoretical framework for research, it proposes guidance for practitioners, policymakers, and organizations for developing future leaders.

2.2 Leadership and Management

Leadership and management are two distinct but interrelated educational concepts. Both are vital for the efficient functioning of educational institutions, but they need particular competencies and emphasize different aspects of education. Historically, leadership was a widely-used term in the business world in the 1960s. However, according to Craig (2021), in recent years, 'leadership' has become one of the most prevalent terms in the literature on school education, to the extent that it is now challenging to find comments regarding 'management' anywhere. Moreover, in some cases, their meaning can be confused and used interchangeably. The following paragraphs explain the terms by defining their differences and similarities.

Although leadership has widely varying definitions, generally, it can be described as the process of influencing people to reach desired goals. Bush and Glover (2003) provide the following interpretation:

Leadership is a process of influence leading to the achievement of desired purposes. It involves inspiring and supporting others toward achieving a vision for the school based on clear personal and professional values. (p. 10)

Moreover, Harris (2013) has made the argument that any staff member may serve in a leadership role in particular circumstances and that educational leadership is not the primary responsibility of the head of education institutions. To successfully influence individuals in

the desired direction, some scholars claim that leadership requires managing people's emotions, thoughts, and actions (Diamond & Spillane, 2016; Lumby & Coleman, 2016). In this regard, Spillane and Coldren (2015) characterized leadership as a 'relationship of social influence' (p.76). However, it is worth noting that leadership may be risky without strong structures supporting it (Craig, 2021). Setting a vision and direction for the institution, building a good culture, inspiring and motivating personnel, and implementing new teaching and learning methods are all part of educational leadership. Nevertheless, it must have support from organizational perspectives.

On the other hand, management involves the implementation of school policies and successfully maintaining the school's ongoing activities. Connolly et al. (2019) offer a further definition:

Management entails delegation, which involves being assigned, accepting, and carrying the responsibility for the proper functioning of a system in which others participate in an educational institution and implies an organizational hierarchy. (p. 505)

In comparison with leadership, the management of education necessitates attaining outcomes and taking responsibility for them. Craig (2021) believed that a manager must thoroughly understand budgetary and human resources matters. Moreover, the process of managing the organization "reduces uncertainty and stabilizes the organization" (Lunenburg, 2011, p. 1). However, management puts the ideals of leadership into practice to some extent. The everyday actions of the institution are overseen by educational managers, who ensure that resources are dispersed effectively, procedures are effective, and systems are in place to monitor advancement toward leadership objectives. They supervise employees, manage finances, and ensure compliance. Therefore, these terms are complementary to each other.

In conclusion, management implements strategy and plans, controls resources, and ensures operations run smoothly, whereas leadership establishes direction, motivates and

inspires people, and fosters a positive culture. According to Kotter (1990), management and leadership are two independent and complementary systems, each with its own tasks and specific duties, yet both are essential for complex organizations and maximum effectiveness. Craig (2021) contends that in order to ensure the system's long-term success, educational leaders must concentrate on both management and leadership. Despite having many qualities in common, management and leadership are fundamentally distinct. However, both are necessary for effective educational leaders. The following chapters will provide evidence from literature regarding the importance of leadership in inclusive education.

2.3 The Role of School Leadership in Promoting Inclusive Education

Numerous studies have confirmed that making schools inclusive is crucial to school improvement (Attfield & Williams, 2003; Donnelly et al., 2016; Kugelmass & Ainscow, 2004). Waldron et al. (2011) also agreed with this idea, stating that strong school leadership is necessary to implement inclusive education successfully. However, Miškolci et al. (2016) stated that promoting inclusion in schools goes beyond modifying the curriculum or teaching methods. It encompasses the involvement of the entire school community, mainly focusing on how the leadership is organized and implemented through inclusive practices. (Booth & Ainscow, 2016; Ward et al., 2015). Moreover, Mitchell and Sutherland (2020) claimed that leadership is a crucial element required at all levels of education, including government, national education ministries, state departments, districts, school principals, and classroom teachers. It is essential that all of these individuals articulate the guiding principle and demonstrate their commitment to its effective implementation through their actions and behaviors. This notion is consistent with Black and Simon's (2014) study about the role of educational leadership in inclusion. According to Black and Simon (2014), the Ministry of Education, teachers, parents, and students must actively participate in and collaborate to advance inclusive education. The study results indicated that one of the participants, a school

leader, found it challenging to execute inclusive education without the collaboration of all stakeholders.

Several studies recommended the need for strong leadership to develop inclusive schools. One of these studies explored how regular education teachers' perspectives of inclusion may vary based on their experience, abilities, and the accessibility of resources in schools in Spain (Chiner & Cardona, 2013). The findings suggested that teachers who believed they received sufficient assistance from leaders and special education coordinators held more positive attitudes toward inclusion than those who lacked support. Similarly, Cardona's (2012) findings corroborate this notion suggesting that the scarcity of personal support prevents teachers from fostering inclusion and developing positive attitudes. According to Chiner and Cardona (2013), inclusion is a shared responsibility, implying that educational administrations should enhance the conditions for inclusion by providing necessary resources and support for school staff. Another research by Mac Ruairc (2013) reviewed all studies on leadership and inclusion and found that school leadership practices lead to positive student outcomes. Additionally, Óskarsdóttir et al. (2020) argue that school leadership has a strong connection with building an inclusive culture. According to their findings, school administrators must promote teacher morale and professional collaboration to set the tone for an inclusive culture since they are responsible for establishing a collaborative environment and prioritizing the well-being of teachers and learners throughout the educational journey. In the upcoming chapters, leadership styles will be discussed in relation to inclusive education.

2.4 The Leadership Styles in Inclusive Education

In addition to highlighting the significance and benefits of leadership, certain studies have proposed particular leadership styles suitable for implementing inclusive education. There have been many debates around leadership styles discussing which one works best. Among all leadership styles, hierarchical relationships were predominantly used in school contexts (Ryan, 2006). However, several studies highlighted its drawbacks that only consider narrowly defined organizational objectives (Marshall & Ward, 2004; Ryan, 2006). These scholars have confirmed that traditional ways of leading organizations are frequently incompatible with the nature of inclusion. Leadership in schools must recognize the importance of higher morals and social justice for everyone in the community (Ryan, 2006). Óskarsdóttir et al. (2020) pinpointed three primary theories of school leadership that are associated with effective inclusive practices, such as transformational leadership, distributed leadership, and instructional leadership. All three theories emphasize creating a shared vision, promoting shared ownership, and facilitating collaborative decision-making processes. On the other hand, Valdivieso (2020) conducted a study in which the participant school's successful implementation of inclusive education was primarily due to the display of transformational, distributed, and instructional leadership by the school's leaders. These leadership styles played a crucial role in raising students' achievement. The following paragraphs will explain models of leadership linked with inclusion.

2.4.1 Transformational Leadership in Inclusive Education

Since the 1990s, transformational leaders have been considered the best leaders (Kugelmass & Ainscow, 2004). A new transformational paradigm has appeared due to advancing the values of the transactional approach, which relied on rewards or punishments for workers. Instead of leading from the top down, transformational leaders aim to influence others by creating from the bottom up. As Opiyo (2019) explains, transformational leaders

emphasize values, motivations, ongoing teacher professional development, sharing best practices, and fostering relationships with the school community. According to Precey (2008), transformational leaders strive to ‘build a compelling vision of a better future with others underpinned by high moral confidence and inspire others to follow them and offer individualized support’ (p. 57). The link between transformational leadership and inclusive education was presented in the Arnesen et al. (2007) paper. They have claimed that making schools inclusive does not mean 'just adding on to existing structures, but a broad outlook to the transformation of schools' (p. 52). Transformational leaders play a vital role in inclusivity and are prominent culture builders (Hallinger, 2009; Opiyo, 2019). However, there are some controversial opinions about this type of leadership. Rayner (2007) calls transformational leaders "charismatic tyrants" (p. 8). In his opinion, these leaders deliberately tear down structures and completely transform the cultures and practices of the organization. Accordingly, subordinates become highly dependent on the leader, which may lead to complete disintegration if the leader leaves the position. As a result, transformational leadership will only lead to short-term plans and quick wins rather than sustainable organizational growth.

2.4.2 Distributed Leadership in Inclusive Education

Distributed leadership, as a theory, challenges the hierarchical structure of leadership and encourages all individuals to participate in the decision-making process and work together to coordinate tasks successfully and resolve organizational issues (Gumus et al., 2018). In the literature, distributed leadership can be defined as "shared leadership," "collaborative leadership," "delegated leadership," or "dispersed leadership" (Spillane, 2005, p. 144). According to Harris's (2013) definition, leaders of this type are expected to successfully disperse their leadership for long-term educational reform and progress that results in enhanced learning outcomes. Several studies have claimed that distributed

leadership is pivotal in developing inclusion in schools (Spillane, 2005; Ryan, 2006; Angelides et al., 2010). The research done by Angelides et al. (2010) has focused on the headteachers of the school who were in charge of building an inclusive culture. The headteachers who participated in this research succeeded in dispensing their power and engaging all teachers in this effort. Moreover, Kugelmass and Ainscow (2004) stated that leaders in inclusive schools are distinguished by their delegated leadership style and unwavering dedication to inclusive education. There are some barriers to the implementation of distributed leadership. First, powerful bureaucracy limits the opportunity to share responsibilities (Bush, 2008). Furthermore, according to Hairon and Goh (2015), many scholars do not agree that this model represents leadership, given that the principal can "limit" autonomy. Distributed leadership can delay decision-making, complicate accountability, and challenge principals in finding teachers willing to execute relevant tasks (Tahir et al., 2016). Moreover, Miškolci et al. (2016) found some contradictory views. According to the authors, since implementing inclusive practices may require hierarchical structures, such as relying on a principal, distributed leadership may not succeed among those people who lack expertise and proficiency in inclusive education. As a result, in certain circumstances, distributing school leadership may impede the larger goal of promoting school inclusion because it places too much responsibility on staff not equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge.

2.4.3 Instructional Leadership in Inclusive Education

Another essential leadership model suitable for inclusive education is instructional leadership. Bush and Glover (2014) noted that the term instructional leadership is derived from North America, also known as 'learning-centered leadership' (p.560). According to Hallinger's (2003) definition, instructional leadership emphasizes enhancing teaching and learning and is concerned with teachers' behaviors that directly impact student achievement.

Moreover, this type of leadership is centered around the school principal (Daniëls, 2019). Therefore, it is a top-down approach to school leadership because it mainly focuses on the principal's tasks in coordinating and controlling instruction (Aas & Brandmo, 2016). Nevertheless, some scholars pinpointed its disadvantages, such as overemphasizing teaching rather than learning (Bush, 2013) and excessive focus on the principal as the central figure of knowledge, influence, and control (Hallinger, 2003). As a result, it tends to diminish the role of other leaders, such as vice principals, middle managers, headteachers, leadership teams, and classroom teachers (Bush & Glover, 2014).

2.4.4 Features of Leadership for Inclusive Education

Some scholars highlighted particular features of leadership styles, such as values and collaboration. This form of leadership requires leaders to prioritize inclusion as a core value (Winter & O'Raw, 2010) in order to provide the environment for SEN students' inclusion and assistance in regular classroom settings. According to Morrissey (2021), values leadership is necessary for meaningful inclusion since it depends on a range of factors, such as the beliefs and attitudes of the school's community. Other studies have considered collaborative leadership as an important model for leading schools. In the 'Index for Inclusion' context, this indication entails a sort of collaborative leadership within the school community, as opposed to an authoritarian approach to leadership (Booth & Ainscow, 2016). Miškolci et al. (2016) further explain that in collaborative leadership, school members share their knowledge and contribute to decision-making processes where their ideas are valued. The process of collaborating with other stakeholders encourages professional learning and gaining a high level of competence, which is a crucial factor in making inclusive schools (Morrissey, 2021).

2.5 The Role of Leaders

Most studies on school leadership in inclusive education focused mainly on the principal's role. However, only a few studies embrace other leadership positions, such as vice-principals and inclusive education coordinators. This section examines school leaders' roles and general attitudes toward inclusion.

The success of the school largely depends on who leads it. The head of the school is a crucial figure in the field of education, which determines the success of implementing ongoing changes in education. School leaders must create collaborative frameworks, collegiality, and a dedication to fostering diversity among students to create effective inclusive schools (Kugelmass & Ainscow, 2004). Gumus et al. (2018) define who the school leader is. They state that principals challenge traditional competitive and individualistic approaches to learning and inspire a clear shared vision. Since leaders are important figures who impact the school's sustainability and advancement, Fullan (2014) presents three keys for expanding the leader's impact. They involve ensuring that the school's primary tasks are maintaining focus on instruction and ongoing learning, collaborating with district and system players to gain access to the vast array of resources available inside the system to support the development of leadership and inclusion, and acting as a change agent to promote student learning improvement and school effectiveness. According to Fullan (2014), the sustainability of inclusive education depends on school leaders' conceptualization as 'change agents' (p. 58).

Scholars interested in advancing inclusive education through principals' perspectives have developed leadership dimensions. These dimensions introduce the nature and role of principals in inclusive school contexts. One of the most implemented dimensions, the so-called principal's broad type of tasks, was presented by Riehl (2000). Principals should be engaged in three tasks: "fostering new meanings about diversity, promoting inclusive

practices within schools, and building connections between schools and communities (p. 409). According to Lindqvist and Nilholm's (2013) analysis, Riehl's tasks for school leaders align with transformational leadership theory. Besides Riehl's broad type of tasks, other researchers have concluded that principals should be supportive. For example, Friend and Pope (2005) offered five dimensions of supportive leadership. They include being aware of the differentiation of instruction, assisting instructors in attending professional development opportunities, offering to coach, setting up meetings among teachers, and resolving concerns from parents regarding special education. Another leadership dimension by Robinson and Timperley (2007) suggests that principals can be supportive concerning teacher and student learning. Providing educational direction, establishing strategic alignment, building a community focused on student achievement, engaging in constructive discussion of problems, and developing smart tools built into the school routine lead to the improvement of inclusive education. Cardona's (2012) findings showed that teachers who felt they had sufficient support from school leaders had more favorable beliefs and attitudes toward inclusion than teachers without adequate support. The more recent studies compile this list of dimensions by adding such traits as creating high-performance expectations for all, enhancing instructional programs through inclusive practices, and an eagerness to include students with special educational needs (Opiyo, 2019; Van Mieghem et al., 2022).

Even though studies confirming the important role of principals in inclusion exist (Cobb, 2015; Riehl, 2000; Wood, Spandagou & Evans, 2012), Miškolci et al. (2016) asserted that the meaning of school leadership must go beyond the influence of the principals. In this regard, some investigations highlighted the role of SEN coordinators as essential school leaders. For example, Abbott (2007) claimed that SEN coordinators 'with the support of the head teacher and governing body, take responsibility for the day-to-day support for pupils with SEN and provide professional guidance to secure high-quality teaching (p. 5).

Moreover, Layton's (2005) findings pinpointed that SEN coordinators are important senior leadership team members in primary and secondary schools. However, Tissot (2013) identified that it is not a uniform practice where SEN coordinators are in leadership positions even though they are actively involved in several key responsibilities. In general, a limited number of studies emphasize the role of other school leaders besides the principals.

2.5.1 Attitudes of Principals Towards Inclusive Education

School leaders must make sure to improve the environment in which inclusion takes place by providing schools and teachers with the support and resources they need to feel more comfortable with this practice (Chiner & Cardone, 2013). Principals impact teachers' perceptions and understandings of what inclusive education is. There are several studies reflecting on this idea.

Regarding school leaders' attitudes towards inclusive education, the perceptions of principals with prior experience teaching students with disabilities and principals with only general teaching experience were found to be negatively correlated (Fontenot, 2005). According to Martin (2004), inclusive school principals had a positive attitude, devoted time to training, released funding for inclusion, and collaborated with academic staff to create programs for students with disabilities. The findings of Kuyini and Desai's (2006) study revealed that while teachers and principals had a limited understanding of inclusive education, their attitudes toward including students with disabilities in regular classes were largely favorable. The presence of students with disabilities in the classroom and training in special education or inclusion was found to be the most predictive variables for principals' and teachers' attitudes, even though background factors like training, experience working with students with disabilities, and class size were also found to be related. Another quantitative study showed that principals' attitudes toward inclusion were not significantly

impacted by demographic variables, special education teaching experience, or training (Ngwokabuenui, 2013). The findings demonstrated that principals' attitudes toward inclusion significantly influence their knowledge of special and inclusive education. Moreover, the research highlighted how crucial it is to create educational administration programs and incorporate curriculum studies into teacher preparation programs to produce school principals with more positive attitudes toward including students with disabilities in the general education curriculum.

2.6 Inclusive Practices in Schools

Inclusive education is a process of education and upbringing in which all students, regardless of their physical, mental, intellectual, and other characteristics, are included in the general education system and study with their peers without disabilities. Nowadays, this is challenging both for rich and poor countries. Although much research has been done on the importance of inclusive education, it still needs to be clarified what actions are needed to move policies and practices in an inclusive direction (Ainscow & Sandill, 2010). It may not be possible to achieve inclusive education in every sense of its philosophy fully, but the efforts of many educational institutions to move toward inclusion should not be underestimated. Ainscow and Sandill (2010) reviewed various literature on what organizational conditions are needed to encourage inclusive practices and the role of leadership in these practices.

Practice is moral actions that compose a way of life. More specifically, practices are conducted together and refer to fundamental human needs (Riehl, 2000). In terms of inclusive education, these practices are described by Ainscow et al. (2006) as a 'social learning process within a given workplace that influences people's actions and, indeed, the thinking that informs these actions' (p.403). In order to develop inclusive practices in schools, Wenger's community of practice plays a vital role (Lave & Wenger, 2004). A community of practice is

when a group of individuals in a given workplace have a shared vision and interact with one another in order to achieve inclusive practices in schools (Ainscow & Sandill, 2010). Those practices are composed of participation and reification processes. The former implies shared experiences, negotiations, or discussions of one particular group with others. Meanwhile, the latter is about the process when groups of people produce accurate representations of these practices, such as policy documents and action plans (Ainscow, 2005). School leadership is crucial in managing these practices (Riehl, 2000). Therefore, it should not be overlooked.

2.6.1 Organizational Factors

Fostering inclusive practices in schools directly depends on several organizational factors. One is the process of reflection when teachers reconsider their practices to avoid labeling students (Ainscow & Sandill, 2010). The school leaders' role in this process is to motivate and inspire staff. Moreover, distributed leadership is needed in problem-solving since inclusive practice involves staff and student involvement in school life. However, according to Ainscow (2005), it can be modified to delegated leadership in a hierarchical setting because distribution in this circumstance is confused or cannot be entirely achieved. Dyson et al. (2004) argue that an inclusive culture must encourage consensus around inclusive values in school communities to develop inclusive practices. The dedication of school leaders to inclusive principles and a leadership style that emphasizes accepting diversity is the final organizational component that affects inclusive practices (Ainscow & Sandill, 2010).

2.6.2 Cultural Factors

Cultural factors are important in leading schools toward inclusion because they shape the way people perceive and approach this topic. One of the essential cultural factors is developing a common language among the school community to prevent biased assumptions

about students 'having problems' (Ainscow & Sandill, 2010). The concept of having a common language also was explored in Riehl's (2000) paper with the name 'discursive practice.' Since language use is intricately linked to rule-based behaviors that define reality, generate meanings, and establish social forms and relations, the discursive nature of social practices is crucial for principals and the school community.

Building a shared attitude or inclusive culture throughout the school is necessary for leaders to carry out the vision of inclusive schools (Óskarsdóttir et al., 2020). A true sense of belonging, a resolve that all refers to every student, and a presumption of competency for all students are essential components of that inclusive culture (Theoharis & Causton, 2014). Developing policy and practice implementation standards is crucial for attaining a strategic vision, with particular attention paid to the professional development of teachers and staff in their interactions with various learner groups. Moreover, Ryan (2006) states that schools must offer opportunities for people to communicate with one another if everyone feels genuinely appropriately included. The best environments for inclusion are those schools that strongly emphasize teacher practice, student learning, and capacity development. The latter is best accomplished when teachers are allowed to discuss their instruction critically and are aware of effective strategies in various settings.

Networking and sharing expertise and resources are also crucial for developing inclusive practices. Fullan (2014) proposes that networking is one of the kinds of leadership that advances beyond the success of boosting student accomplishment and progresses towards guiding organizations to sustainability. Regarding networking, Fernández et al. (2022) mentioned close connections with parents as it promotes the participation of community members in the educational process and the life of the school. Valdivieso's (2020) study also found that cooperating with parents and other external stakeholders positively influenced students' learning outcomes. According to some data from England,

interschool collaboration and networking increase an organization's capacity to respond to student diversity (Howes & Ainscow, 2006). Additionally, school collaboration impacts teachers' view of their teaching since practice comparisons help them see a new side of their students. As Ainscow and Sandill (2010) claim, 'changing outcomes for all students is unlikely to be achieved unless there are changes in the behaviors of adults' (p. 412).

2.7 School Leadership Towards Inclusive Education in Kazakhstan

Until recently, there has been little research on principals' perspectives on inclusive education. However, some educators have studied their attitudes and perceptions. In Makoelle's (2020a) study, some principals who were the research participants defined inclusive education as a correctional class. He pointed out the legacy of the Soviet educational system, which considers inclusive education from the medical model, which may impact principals' opinions. There are several recommendations for Kazakhstan to improve inclusive practices through leadership. Makoelle's (2020a) study has shown that Kazakhstani school leadership is required to create coherent school policies and inclusive education structures across all schools. Moreover, Human Rights Watch (2019) report that there is a need to provide training not only to teachers but also to school administrators, principals, vice principals, and other education proponents. According to Somerton et al. (2021), both internationally and in the Kazakhstani context, implementing inclusive programs has difficulties in many schools due to insufficient leadership support, negative teacher attitudes, a lack of resources, and limited teacher preparation. Therefore, there is a need to study the area of school leadership in order to gain a better understanding of practices in reality.

2.8 Summary

This chapter presented the theoretical framework of Hitt and Tucker (2016), underpinning the present study in analyzing the school leaders' perspectives and practices. It discussed the distinction between leadership and management by stating that leadership is an

act of influencing others, while management is taking responsibility for attaining goals (Connolly et al., 2019). Moreover, it provided an overview of existing literature on the role of leadership in inclusive education and revealed the attitudes and practices of school leaders. It is important to study the practices of school leaders in Kazakhstan and globally, as many studies have focused primarily on principals' attitudes.

3. Methodology

The preceding chapter described the literature concerning previous studies on the role of leadership in promoting inclusive practices and revealed the gap in research. This chapter addresses the methodological approaches and procedures used in the present study. The chapter comprises different sections, such as research design, sampling, data collection methods, procedures, and ethical considerations. It confirms the qualitative nature of the research and the choice of the semi-structured interview as a data collection tool. The overarching research question in this study was:

What forms of leadership promote inclusive education in Astana schools?

The sub-questions are:

1. How do school leaders understand the concept of Inclusive Education?
2. What are some specific practices, activities, and behaviors of school leaders toward inclusive education?
3. What are some of the challenges experienced by school leaders in implementing inclusive practices?

3.1 Research Design

There are three distinct types of research such as qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-method research designs. A qualitative approach is appropriate for the present study since it relies on an inductive design to generate meaning and produce descriptive data (Leavy, 2017). Stake (2010) states that qualitative research emphasizes human values and lived experiences. It is vital for the study because the research will focus on exploring the school leaders' perspectives on leadership towards inclusive education. As noted by Johnson and Christensen (2019), investigating the inner world of a particular group of people is the primary goal of qualitative research.

As a research design, phenomenology will be applied in this study to discuss the meaning of lived human experiences (Carpenter, 2013; Rossman & Rallis, 2012). According to Finlay (2012), phenomenology is the study of the nature and significance of phenomena. In particular, phenomenological research rigorously and methodically characterizes the views of a diverse range of participants concerning a phenomenon (Carel, 2011). This research design suits my research as I explored leaders' practices toward inclusive education. Based on their experience and context, the significance and meaning of inclusive practices are constructed.

Moreover, this study can be described as an interpretive inquiry since it is intended to understand the meanings, purposes, and intentions people give to their actions (Arnett, 2007). While doing an interpretive study, one essential thing is distinguishing between macro-interpretation and micro-interpretation. The latter focuses on how things generally work, while the former explores how a particular thing works in a particular context (Stake, 2010). This study applies to micro-interpretation because it is commonly used in qualitative studies. The author aims to investigate inclusive practices of a particular school context from the school leaders' viewpoint.

3.2 Research Site

The research sites of the study are state and private schools in Astana. The sampling sites were selected for the following reasons: (1) the author already knows them through their involvement in inclusive education; (2) they are willing to participate in the research (3) the schools have inclusive practices (creating school policy, regular parent-teacher meetings, collaboration, planning students' needs). Initially, the author intended to select one mainstream state school that was well-known for its successful inclusive practices. However, the school declined the offer to participate.

Overall, the study recruited up to ten participants who were eligible and willing to participate in the research. Ten respondents, six from private schools and four from state

schools, participated in the data collection, which is reasonable for this study's scope and design, as qualitative researchers usually study a relatively small number of respondents (Bickman & Rog, 2009). They were responsible for leadership positions such as the principal, vice-principal, and SEN/Inclusive coordinators.

3.3 Research Sample

Since this research is focused on school leaders, there were preliminary criteria for sampling. As mentioned above, the inclusionary criteria for participation in the present study were that school leaders are interested and involved in inclusive education through creating school policy, promoting collaboration, and planning students' needs. According to Etikan et al. (2016), purposive sampling is the name given to this sampling strategy since the participants were selected deliberately based on their characteristics.

Furthermore, the researcher relied on personal connections when recruiting study participants and contacted them via phone or email. As a result, five participants were selected and contacted, and five others were recruited by suggestions of the study participants who had already taken part. This technique is called snowball sampling when the researcher initially selects a small number of key individuals who, in turn, help to access other informants that possess the necessary characteristics (Cohen et al., 2002). Moreover, personal connection with participants is beneficial since a deep, engaging, and open dialogue may be achieved in qualitative interview-based research through developing rapport (Dundon & Ryan, 2009).

3.4 Data Collection Tools

The present study used the semi-structured interview as a data collection tool. The research took in-depth interviews with the school leaders to gather detailed data about participants' thoughts, beliefs, reasoning, practices, and challenges regarding the topic. In-depth interviews are usually inductive and open-ended (Leavy, 2017). Roller and Lavrakas

(2015) suggest that the interview should be organized similarly to a “funnel” of questioning from broad to narrow topics. According to Padilla-Diaz (2015), employing open or semi-structured interviews is the best data-collecting approach for phenomenological research since these enable the phenomenon to be examined by participants’ comments on their experiences. Because of its flexibility and ability to foster rapport between the researcher and a participant (Bell, 2005), a semi-structured interview approach was chosen for this study's data collection.

The interview questions were designed to address the research question of the study. The interview protocol (see Appendix C) included several open-ended questions and was used to monitor the start and end of the interviews. Due to a voluntary participation principle, interviewees had the right to withdraw at any point or to skip questions. In order to analyze the data, the author used an audio recording device and note-making.

Three methods of interview recording are suggested by Merriam and Tisdell (2016): audio recording, note-taking during and after the interview. In addition to taking notes, digital voice recording was used in the face-to-face interviews with the participants' permission. All participants granted permission for the interviews to be recorded on a digital device. Leavy (2017) notes that successful interview research depends on building rapport with the participants. Therefore, before the interview, participants were given consent forms (see Appendix B) containing a self-introduction of the researcher, a summary of the study, its purpose and sampling procedures, and ethical issues.

3.5 Data Collection Procedures

All the required protocols and instruments, such as interview questions, recruitment script, and informed consent letter, were developed before the beginning of the data collection procedure. After receiving ethics approval from the Nazarbayev University review board, the researcher sent an email (see Appendix A) and made phone calls outlining the

goals and purposes of the research to the gatekeepers of each of the suggested research sites. According to Hay (2000), the term gatekeepers refer to the people who provide researchers access to research sites and communication with potential participants. Since the principals and vice principals are usually considered gatekeepers in schools, the researcher directly asked for their consent to participate.

Once school leaders agreed to participate, the researcher arranged face-to-face meetings. Participants' offices were suitable for appointments since they found the place comfortable. However, due to the hectic schedule of leaders, it was challenging to arrange the meeting time. Nevertheless, the researcher tried to be flexible since the participants' convenience and comfort were prioritized in order to promote reflexivity in the interviewing process and build rapport with them (Dundon & Ryan, 2009). Prior to the interview, the purpose, procedures of the study, and consent letter for signing (see Appendix B) were introduced again to participants. The participants were given details regarding ethical concerns and their right to terminate or pause the interview at any time they wanted. Each interview lasted about an hour and was recorded with the participants' permission. Moreover, the necessary interview documents were translated into Kazakh and Russian since only one participant responded in English, one in Kazakh, and the other eight in Russian.

3.6 Data Analysis

This study data was analyzed through thematic analysis, which involves looking through data collection to find, examine, and report recurring themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). According to Kiger and Varpio (2020), six steps are included in the thematic analysis process: becoming familiar with the data, creating preliminary codes, looking for themes, examining themes, defining and labeling themes, and producing the report. In order to be familiarized with the data, the researcher transcribed recorded interviews on a computer. While transcribing, the pseudonyms such as P1, P2 were given to participants leaving out all

the personal information. The next step after transcribing was coding (see Appendix D for the sample of coding). The author decided to use In Vivo Coding since it is considered appropriate for beginner qualitative researchers (Saldaña, 2009). Furthermore, Charmaz (2006) claimed that In Vivo Coding values participants' voice and "help to preserve participants' meanings of their views and actions in the coding itself" (p. 55). The researcher translated Russian and Kazakh codes into English and arranged them into groups based on themes. These thematic categories were drawn from the theoretical framework of Hitt and Tucker (2016). Hitt and Tucker (2016) identified five encompassing domains that unify existing frameworks of effective leadership practices which raise student achievement and other desirable outcomes. They are: establishing and conveying the vision, facilitating a high-quality learning experience for students, building professional capacity, creating a supportive organization for learning, and connecting with external partners.

3.7 Ethical Issues

All the requirements regarding ethical issues are met while conducting the research study. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) describe ethics in research as "the principles of right and wrong that a particular group accepts at a particular time" (p. 48). At first, the research study and interview were introduced to Nazarbayev University's Graduate School of Education's ethics review board. After receiving permission, the researcher informed school administrators of the target population sites through a consent letter. Rossman and Rallis (2012) stated that gaining an informed consent letter is crucial to executing an ethical study. The research purpose, possible risks, and benefits must be fully disclosed to the study participants in order to obtain their informed consent (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Thus, the consent letter included the research title, information about the researcher, the study's purpose and procedures, confidentiality, and voluntary participation. The premise for involvement in the study was informed consent, which the researcher obtained before starting data collection

to ensure that the participant understood the voluntary nature of participation, the risks and rewards, and their rights to participate. These included the freedom to leave at any moment and the option to remove their data from the study at any point during the investigation. On the researcher's laptop, a password-protected Word document with the participant's name and the key was kept separate from the files containing the interview transcripts. The study's prospective benefits were also explained to the participants by the researcher.

3.8 Summary

The methodology chapter provides an overview and justifications for the research design, instrument, sample, and procedures employed in the present study. This qualitative inquiry relying on the semi-structured interview as a data collection tool, examined how participants understand their leadership practice in promoting inclusive practices. The research sites are state and private schools in Astana. Ten respondents, six from private and four from state schools, participated in the data collection. The interview was analyzed through thematic analysis by using Hitt and Tucker's (2016) framework of five effective leadership practices. The researcher obtained informed consent from participants before starting data collection to ensure they understood the voluntary nature of participation, the risks and rewards, and their rights to participate. The next chapter presents the interview findings by categorizing them into leadership dimensions.

4. Findings

In this study, I explored the school leaders' practices that facilitate inclusive education in schools of Astana. This study examined how principals, vice principals and SEN coordinators develop inclusive practices in their contexts. The findings in this chapter contain analyses of the semi-structured interviews conducted with ten school leaders representing various leadership positions. Moreover, it gives demographic data on participants and discusses the study results by categorizing them into the five dimensions of the theoretical framework.

The overarching research question in this study was:

What forms of leadership promote inclusive education in Astana schools?

The sub-questions are:

1. How do school leaders understand the concept of Inclusive Education?
2. What are some specific practices, activities and behaviors of school leaders towards inclusive education?
3. What are some of the challenges experienced by school leaders in implementing inclusive practices?

4.1 Participants Demographic Data

For the purpose of this study, a total of ten participants were interviewed. They were selected through snowballing technique based on their interest in inclusive education. The table presented below shows the participants' background information that is relevant to the study. To ensure ethical considerations, the participants were assigned codes that will be used throughout this and subsequent chapters.

Table 1*Participants Profile*

Codes	Leadership Position	Experience	School
P1	Vice Principal of academic affairs	1 year	Private
P2	SEN coordinator	1 year	Private
P3	Vice Principal of Pastoral care	2 years	Private
P4	Vice Principal of Methodological work	2 years	State
P5	Principal	2 years	State
P6	Principal	2 years	Private
P7	Vice Principal of academic affairs	5 years	State
P8	Inclusive Education coordinator	2 years	Private
P9	Vice Principal of Pastoral care	1 year	State
P10	Vice Principal of Methodological work	1 year	Private

Two of each of the following leadership positions were represented: Vice Principals of Academic Affairs, Pastoral Care, Methodological Work and SEN/Inclusive coordinators. The level of experience of the participants ranges from 1 to 5 years. For several participants this was their first leadership position. Moreover, six out of the ten leaders were from private schools, while the remaining four were from state schools.

4.2 Interview Response Analysis

After coding interview transcripts, five major categories were identified, each containing three to four themes. This was accomplished using Hitt and Tucker's (2016) leadership principles as a framework for this study. Hitt and Tucker (2016) reviewed three well-documented leadership frameworks and 56 empirical studies to identify five overarching leadership domains: establishing and conveying the vision, facilitating a high-quality learning experience for students, building professional capacity, creating a supportive organization for learning, and connecting with external partners. The vision theme refers to communicating shared missions and visions among all stakeholders and the modeling of desired behavior by the leader of an organization. The professional capacity domain is related to providing

opportunities to learn and create a community of practices. The dimension of supportive organizations specifies how leaders demonstrate concern for the well-being of their members and encourage distributed leadership. The learning experiences dimension describes leaders' active curriculum review and assessment involvement. The external partners theme refers to connecting with parents and other external stakeholders to positively influence the learning experiences. These five significant categories were used to rationalize and classify codes developed after the analysis. The results of this analysis are detailed in Table 2, which summarizes the results of the data analysis following the above categories and themes.

Table 2

Matching Data Analysis Themes to Leadership Principles

#	Leadership principles and themes
1	Establishing and conveying the vision <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicating values • The principal's influence • Collegial policy formation • Value-based learning
2	Building professional capacity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher trainings • Regular Professional Development sessions • Teachers as researchers
3	Creating a supportive organization for learning <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Burnout prevention • Support team • Students' voice
4	Facilitating a high-quality learning experience for students <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifying special needs • Adjusting curriculum • Collaboration is key
5	Connecting with external partners <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular parent-teacher meetings • Parents' involvement in events • Networking with schools and NGOs

4.2.1 Establishing and Conveying the Vision

It is essential to know how the participants of this study became curious or interested in implementing inclusive education in their schools without knowing how the vision is established in their school community. All participants had stories to share about their acquaintance with inclusion and the moment when they discovered its genuine meaning.

The most common themes from their stories were related to students with special needs. P1, P3, and P7 shared their teaching experiences, leading them to change their attitudes. When P3 started her first year in teaching, she noticed that the school tended to force students with special needs or behavioral issues to leave after 9th grade for vocational institutions. The school believed that they cannot pass the UNT test and that a vocational college might be the best decision in these cases. Another case shared by P7 relates to the language barrier of one student raised abroad but later came back to her hometown knowing only English and basic Kazakh. The school where P7 was in the role of academic deputy had to refine their curriculum to be more ‘language-inclusive,’ meaning making the content of subjects comprehensive for the student. P4 highlighted that despite having some students with an eating disorder and ADHD, there were no barriers to learning. However, he tried to rethink his practices to make them more inclusive.

Some participants began their journey in inclusive education for personal reasons, like P8, who had a special needs child, and P9, whose mother was a defectologist. P8 did not specify the type of special need. She only stated that it was an inspiration to work in this field. Meanwhile, P9 stated that his mother frequently brought her students home, and he helped and played with them. This experience led him to study this area in-depth and changed his attitude, which is evident from his response:

Most people think of inclusion as something only related to people with disabilities. So did I until I started my master's degree in the UK. At that moment, I first discovered the real meaning of inclusion, that it is not only about special needs and disabilities but also diversity and being open-minded to everyone else.

Similarly, getting a Master's degree in Inclusive Education impacted P2. After this experience, she started to support everything related to inclusion and convey inclusive values to her surroundings:

I noticed that I unconsciously started to translate my vision to my kids. One day when they were playing in the yard, there was a boy with autism. While other children were avoiding him, my children went straight to him to start playing. After I asked them about the boy, they said they saw nothing different.

One study participant became interested in inclusion when volunteering at an international organization that helps students with schizophrenia. P4 explained it as follows:

Personally, it was difficult to accept those students. There were also students with other severe disabilities. I think it was because I've never met anyone with special needs since they were isolated from our society. From that moment, I thought, why should these people be excluded from us?

As seen from this extract, P4 pointed to the main problem in inclusion. The issue is that society isolates disabled people in most cases and that people are not used to seeing difference in their everyday life.

After sharing their stories of how their interests in inclusive education started, participants were asked to define inclusion in their own words. P3 agreed with the idea mentioned above by saying the following:

Inclusion for me is when children with special needs, whether physical or mental, are included in a normal environment. In our society, this concept has not yet been developed because we have specialized schools. This is still not inclusion, we still isolate them. So, we need correct inclusion.

Almost all participant leaders mentioned that inclusive education is both a demanding and topical problem. However, P4 stated that it was not new or trendy, as it has always been important and necessary in our society. Moreover, definitions given by other participants are divided into two groups. One group of participants (P1, P4, P6, P7, P8) defined it as creating equity in education given every learner's different educational background and specific needs. Another group (P2, P3, P5, P9) claimed that inclusive education means building a healthy future for children, not just in terms of giving them knowledge of any particular school subject but also educating them socially and emotionally. Moreover, P5 stressed that it should be comprehensive, meaning that it embraces all aspects of the school community: "Inclusive education is understood differently. But in our school, while discussing inclusion, we do not forget about gifted students, homeschooling students, and the whole school community, too."

When asked how they establish and communicate a common vision about inclusive education, one participant highlighted the importance of the principal. P9 claimed that "it is essential for the principal to model his attitude through his actions and language, and shows interest and discusses inclusive education with his colleagues." P7 also emphasized the importance of language, "especially in describing people with disabilities or labeling students with special needs negatively." Moreover, P8 stated that the school's principal must be open-minded. The following extract supports this idea: "I am, as an SEN coordinator, trying to attend different events about inclusion, and our principal also tries to support these events" (P8).

One of the formal ways of establishing a common vision and mission mentioned by participants was collegial policy formation. This was affirmed by P5's comment: "Despite having leaders appointed to positions responsible for making policies, policies are discussed collectively, meaning that voice of teachers, tutors, parents, and students matters." In

addition, P1 and P2 emphasized student assessment and identifying their special needs as the most important ones to discuss collectively: “One year ago, we started working on Inclusive policy with the Special Educational Needs coordinator. But before making its official document, we conducted several meetings with teachers to develop its content together” (P1). Other participants (P9 and P8) mentioned contributing to the official documents digitally. P9 stated that they use Google Drive to work together on documents such as Inclusion Policy and a student’s IEP, which can be shared with parents later.

When asked about conveying the vision to the whole school, P4, P6, and P7 mentioned the piloting of a project on value-based learning among state schools of Kazakhstan. Since the project is in the pilot phase, it does not include an explicit set of tasks. Thus, P4 has reported that each school manages the project based on its perception of value-based learning. In addition to this idea, P6 also shared some thoughts:

There are probably a lot of materials on value-based learning in English. However, we do not have much information in Kazakh and Russian languages. Despite having explicit methodological directions, we hold seminars on this topic to train teaching staff.

An alternative view of value-based learning was presented by P7. He believes that “transmitting moral values can happen through everyday learning activities, such as reading texts about a particular topic, discussing it through Socratic methods (asking open-ended questions).” P7 also added this comment:

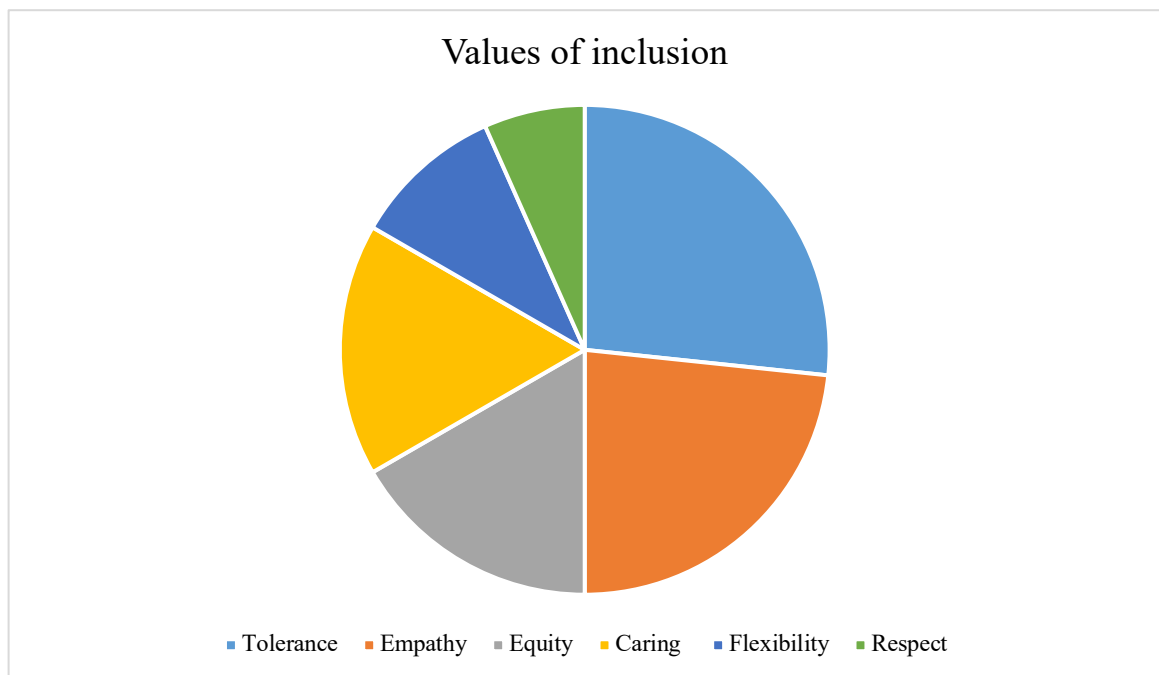
We have moral values such as tolerance, unity, sympathy, and help established in our school. Even though they are not verbally related to inclusion, these values help students to understand inclusion. I think it is a more natural and inductive way of making the school community inclusive.

In addition, the response of P4 indicated that their established school values, vision, and mission statements are constantly reviewed: “If we review mission once in 5 years, then values must be reviewed every 2-3 years.”

As a final question, the first-dimension leaders were also asked to describe values of inclusion in three words. The diagram below shows the most repeated answers and some unique replies.

Figure 2

Values of Inclusion



As can be seen in Figure 1, “tolerance” and “empathy” were the answers most often provided ((88%) among the answers of all participants. “Equity” and “caring” were stated 63% of the time, while “flexibility” and “respect” were mentioned 38% of the time.

While talking about policy formation, P1, P2, P5, and P8 mentioned that they felt hesitant about the content of the policy. The most challenging part is prescribing the teaching methods and assessment, as P1 stated that “it is not in written black and white, so we

sometimes question ourselves if we are doing this correctly or incorrectly.” P5 also highlighted that there are often some ‘wiggle room’ for decisions, meaning they do not have any clear set of actions to solve some issues. However, generally, participants are employing inclusive practices based on their understanding of the concept.

4.2.2 Building Professional Capacity

P1, P5, P6, and P8 mentioned that they train through seminars by external experts and other schools to improve teachers’ awareness and ability in inclusive education. P1 stated that they had a two-day case study seminar from one expert in inclusive education from Almaty.

P1 explained this experience thus:

We discussed the general meaning of inclusion with examples of real individual situations. In general, it was good in raising teachers' general knowledge about inclusive education. She shared her experiences in working with special needs students.

Meanwhile, other participants shared some impactful ways of teacher training. For example, P8 mentioned they had a so-called “TeachMeet,” a whole day of training on inclusive education. She responded, “the guest experts conducted diagnostic tests for identifying teachers' awareness and needs regarding this topic to make it more meaningful and productive than simply lecturing” Another participant's comment elaborated by saying that "teachers' feedback after such training was positive, and they stayed engaged in the process, strengthened rapport between teachers and Inclusive Coordinators" (P9). Moreover, non-formal means of training teachers were also mentioned. As reported by P2, a SEN coordinator, teachers can take online courses and internships with the school's support in terms of resources and funding. Thereby, teachers can attend training sessions "at their own pace which is found to be helpful" (P2).

Apart from one-day training, the analysis of responses indicated the regular training sessions. For instance, P10 reported that in-service teachers could share their expertise in

inclusive education, special needs, and differentiation with each other twice a month. On the other hand, P9 remarked that their regular professional development sessions are based on International Baccalaureate (IB) sessions. However, topics concerning inclusion are also added.

Another important theme that emerged from the interview data is that some leaders encourage teachers to be researchers in their own field. Participants believed that involving teachers in action research helps them become experts in their field and develop life-long learning skills. This was confirmed by P9 and P10, who are responsible for managing and helping teachers to conduct their study. According to P10: "school administration, teachers, coordinators, and psychologists have formed groups based on their interests." Moreover, P5 commented thus: "our school has provided the JStor database for teachers so that they can use it for research." Both P5 and P6, who are principals, mentioned that they were ready to provide any resources for professional development.

When mentioning challenges, the interview analysis revealed the difficulties with teachers' fixed mindsets and workload. In P8's view:

Actually, this is a global problem, that we have some stereotypic relationships towards inclusive education. Teachers often call students with special needs "uncomfortable students to teach." Probably, the underlying reason behind this label is that they lack confidence or strong self-efficacy.

The other half of the participants called the reason behind this challenge stigmatization and substitution of concepts because of the Soviet legacy. For example, P3 remarked, "some teachers generalize autism spectrum disorder, which can vary from generally incapacitated to genius ones, as "not comfortable" students. As seen from the interview analysis, there is an orthodox way of thinking among certain teachers because of the Soviet legacy. P1 claimed the following:

Not all colleagues, but a minority still believe in the teaching process from the Soviet Union style when it was more like hardcore study with strictness, and everyone should suit the one standard style. However, right now, it is changing as a paradigm shift. Nowadays, we need teachers to be flexible, as students may have diverse needs. Maybe for younger colleagues or less experienced colleagues, it is not as difficult. Their mindset is much more malleable. However, for the older ones and more experienced ones, it is a challenge.

Another challenge in working with teachers that was mentioned is the heavy workload. According to P2, "it is sometimes difficult to gather teachers and discuss some issues as they may have extra teaching hours or paperwork."

4.2.3 Creating a Supportive Organization for Teaching and Learning

Regarding the supportive environment at school, participants mentioned that they care about teaching staff first. In order to prevent burnout in teaching staff, P8 stated that art therapy sessions are conducted once a month. Another participant shared the following: "We try to demonstrate care for our teachers, especially in holiday breaks, and our psychologists host different events." (P6). Moreover, P5 remarked on the importance of team-building events at the beginning of the year and on holidays since "it helps to build community spirit and culture fit."

Asked about how they foster a supportive culture, participants alluded to an Inclusive support team and separate job positions. Based on P8's response, there is a support team called Psychological and Pedagogical Service (henceforth PPS). The PPS team is comprised of an Inclusive coordinator, psychologist, speech therapist, individual tutors, teachers and sometimes parents. This support team is responsible for identifying students' particular needs and designing and carrying out Individual Educational Plans (henceforth IEP) to facilitate the learning process.

Some participants noted that they have particular leadership positions that are not formed as a group but work in collaboration with others: "these important positions are SEN coordinator, Well-being coordinator, and curators." (P3). Regarding the SEN coordinator leadership, P1 shared the following:

Our first step in an attempt to make our school inclusive was the appointing SEN coordinator, who was in charge of hosting meetings and discussions in order to help teachers understand how inclusion works. Moreover, we think raising teachers' self-efficacy through the coordinator's help is vital.

Another important position mentioned by P3 was the Well-being coordinator: "The person in this position works with children and explains how to communicate, avoid or resolve conflicts if they arise." P3 also noted that the Well-being coordinator has a curriculum for this purpose, and stated that "we need to help children understand the reasons for conflicts, not only the symptoms." The participant believes that it prevents children from bullying others.

Curators (also called homeroom teachers) were highlighted as another significant position. P3 has shared this:

We had an experience when subject teachers were also taking the role of curators. They were responsible for the whole class. However, at the end of the year, we noticed that it is difficult for curator-teachers to observe each student's learning from different subjects. Usually, they care about their subject only. Therefore, we decided to assign it as a separate position.

According to P3's comment, the curator monitors student learning, communicates with parents, and builds team spirit and a positive atmosphere. Concerning support for students, some participants remarked that it is essential to raise students' voices. For instance, P3 and P8 stated that they have a student council that is comprised of high school students, and they are in charge of hosting different events and running student clubs based on their

interests. P8 alluded to this: “They do everything by themselves, we just guide them. For example, they recently held a charity concert to help children in Syria after the earthquake.”

Moreover, P3 highlighted the way students’ voices are heard. Anonymous boxes have been set up in the school for students’ comments, ideas, and complaints. According to the participant’s response, the Well-being coordinator deals with these boxes. In addition, P10 responded that there are mediation clubs that help children solve their conflicts with each other. P10 explained the process like this:

Before starting those clubs, 9th and 10th-grade students were trained by experts from The Astana International Financial Centre (AIFC). Now, every student can approach mediators through a QR code demonstrated in the hall. We think it is beneficial for students to train themselves as conflict-solvers and prevent conflicts and bullying.

Regarding the challenges, P5 shared that they are hesitant about whether the SEN position should be combined or separate. This is affirmed in the following extract: “In our school, we have an SEN coordinator who is also a math teacher. However, if we look at other schools, SEN coordinators work separately.” Another participant shared the common issue among state schools: “There is a problem with a specialist shortage such as psychologists, speech therapists, defectologist or inclusive coordinators. We currently have only two psychologists for 2000 students, which is very difficult to manage” (P6).

4.2.4 Facilitating a High-Quality Learning Experience for Students

Asked about how they provide effective learning experiences, participants first mentioned the importance of identifying students’ needs. For example, P2, P8, and P6 responded that they have students who already came with their medical certificates from PMPC centers. P2 pointed out that these certificates are helpful resources for teachers and SEN coordinators in a way that shows the guidelines and directions in methodology. However, students who have special needs do not always have such documents. This was

affirmed by P3, who stated that some have “hidden diagnoses which do not have any certificates, but it definitely requires certain directions or methods from teachers and inclusive support team.” In these cases, they need to speculate or predict further actions or methodology on how to work with these students.

Moreover, when no certificate is provided, identifying special needs happens due to low achievement. P2 clarified thus: “Usually, teachers and curators warn us that a particular student is underachieving. After, we start discussing the reasons behind it and what actions are needed further. And it’s working well.” However, the participant is uncertain whether this is the best way.

In such cases, other participants (P4 and P5) mentioned the importance of early intervention. P4 and P5 responded that they usually do early intervention tests before students enter the school at the beginning of an academic year. In addition, P8 mentioned that they also conduct diagnostic tests compiled by the Psychological and Pedagogical Service team at school. The test results are discussed among team members and tend to be helpful resources for teachers.

Interview analysis revealed different types of special needs that schools currently have. Some of them are risk-zone students, gifted students, and students with language and culture barriers. One participant (P1) stated that there is a group of students called ‘risk zone students.’ The following extract explains how it works:

Together with teachers, curators, and the whole administration, we collaboratively discuss issues of particular students. And when we say issues, they are not only academic, they can be behavioral. They can even be psychological or mental in nature. So, at the end of each term, we gather and think about creating an accommodating atmosphere.

Alternatively, P6 and P7 mentioned how they work with gifted students. According to the response of P6: “Gifted students usually leave state schools for the highly selective schools or lyceums. However, we also want to give them high-quality knowledge. Therefore, we have an Olympiad coordinator.” On the other hand, P7 claimed that “they usually have a different thinking pattern, so we constantly work with teachers on the curriculum in order to develop specialized instructions.”

Students from different nationalities facing language proficiency challenges were also discussed. For example, the school where P9 works has several students from foreign countries. The response shows efforts made by the school in this regard: “There is a Language Coordinator who helps them with Kazakh and Russian language subjects, and together with the library, we try to provide books in their mother tongue” (P9). Thus, the participant believes that it is a support for their target and native languages. Moreover, P8 highlighted that all the documents and information are provided in 3 languages: Kazakh, Russian, and English. Thereby, “the school supports trilingualism, and it makes communication with parents easier as well” (P8).

Another critical theme that arose from data analysis was the regular revision and improvement of the curriculum. P2's comment affirmed this: "Curriculum review (CR) is conducted biannually: at the end of the academic year and in December, after term 2." P2 also drew attention to the fact that during formal CRs, the whole school, regardless of position, is involved in the process of discussing the ways of optimizing and improving the program:

Even the principal and non-principals, teachers, and tutors are invited to contribute to the open discussion process, whereby promoting open, inclusive, and efficient communication. The school administration's job in this process is not merely participation. Instead, the administration should consider matters of scheduling,

planning, resource allocation, performance evaluation, and teaching feedback from students as variables in the CR process.

Moreover, P5 claimed they are integrating Universal Design for Learning (UDL) into the curriculum to create a more equitable learning environment. Apart from this, participants mentioned everyday actions aimed at establishing an inclusive environment, such as using differentiated instructions (P2), printing materials in bigger font size for students with dyslexia (P4), extending the time for particular tasks (P1), Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) therapy sessions with students (P8), regular one-hour meetings with psychologists in each class (P10). Concerning having diverse levels of knowledge in particular subjects, especially in Language and Math subjects, “students are divided into groups by phases” (P9). Accordingly, students can learn at their own level, making it easier for teachers to differentiate. Moreover, each teacher has time slots for “pull-outs” (P8) or “office hours” (P4), when students are free to approach teachers should they have any concerns to clarify.

When discussing student learning experiences, almost all participants emphasized the significance of collaboration. Whether it is an assessment (P2), planning and working on an IEP (P8), curriculum review at the end of an academic year (P1), or therapy sessions for students and teachers (P9), collaboration plays a critical role between school members.

With the practices mentioned above, participants mentioned some challenges they encountered. Some participants hesitate in their practices, believing that “teaching inclusively is not written black and white, and educators need to be flexible with this term” (P1). Likewise, they are unsure about their actions since there are “not enough explicit methods on how to work with students with diverse needs, this topic is so broad” (P2). From the stakeholders' perspective, parents are actively invited to participate in the Curriculum Review (CR) process but, given the widely known constraints, such as time, unawareness, and lack of involvement, they are rarely directly involved in the CR.

4.2.5 Connecting with External Partners

The data revealed that the inclusive practices leaders undertake are networking with parents, other schools, and Non-Governmental Organizations (henceforth NGOs). For example, P3 mentioned that parents are the most important stakeholders, and all actions toward students are discussed and agreed upon with parents. Another participant's response confirmed this idea: "Whether we conduct diagnostic tests or interventions, or plan IEPs, we always stay in contact with parents" (P8). Moreover, it is essential to hold regular meetings with parents, called Parent-Teacher Meetings (PTM). As P1 stated: "parents are invited to school not only when something bad happens, but to contribute to the student learning process."

Parents are also invited to join different events or concerts conducted by students. In addition, P9 mentioned a project called "Reading time," when parents from each class come to school to read books to primary school children. Thus, P9 believes it encourages children to read and fosters a connection with their parents. Another way of involving parents in school life was a decision by P4 to open "Parents' school." According to his response:

Parents' schools hold events at least once a term as we are slowly cultivating the notion of highly involved parents. Usually, we call experts and host meetings in different formats on topics such as anti-bullying, cybersecurity, and inclusive education.

When talking about stakeholders, participants emphasized networking with other schools and NGOs. For example, P9 mentioned that they recently signed a Memorandum with one state school, which is also focused on developing inclusive education to share experiences and support each other. Cooperation with NGOs such as therapy centers for students with special needs was also mentioned as how to connect with the wider community. Comments from P8 alluded to this: "We recommend parents attend development centers, for instance, therapy centers for students with autism. We keep in touch with those centers in

order to integrate their recommendations into our school curriculum.” Moreover, P9 noted that “they would like parents to work closely with PMPC if there is a need because their recommendations are found to be useful for teachers as seen from their practice.”

Nevertheless, there are some challenges regarding networking with external partners. Several participants pointed out that parents are resistant to certificates from PMPC. According to P7: “parents sometimes avoid attending PMPC, assuming that it will affect their children negatively due to a diagnoses labeling. However, we try to explain that in most cases, their recommendations are indeed helpful.” P2 responded similarly by saying, “parents believe that it is difficult for the child to develop further in society if they attend those centers.” Therefore, P1 stated that this subject is sensitive and delicate to discuss with parents. However, although it is uncomfortable to discuss, participants believe it takes time to systematically change those attitudes.

4.3 Other Dimensions

With regards to the language participants used during the interview, it should be noted that some participants tried to be careful when referring to students with special needs and use of specific terms. For instance, P1 and P4 constantly paused before naming students with SEN, and P6 clarified to the interviewer if the term he used was appropriate in terms of inclusion. Meanwhile, other participants (P4, P7, P9) used the term “inclusive students,” referring to students with special needs and disabilities.

In addition, P6 shared his opinion that all teachers, regardless of their subject, should be taught what inclusive education is during their university degree. From P6’s perspective: “Separating teachers and specialists, such as defectologist and speech therapist, still amounts to exclusion. Therefore, everyone related to education should know at least some basic information about inclusion.”

4.4 Summary

This chapter presented the results of the data collection process for this study. The responses of participant leaders were grouped according to the dimensions of the theoretical framework. Concerning establishing a shared vision, participants mentioned how they communicate values among schools, how principals influence others, how policy is formed, and the importance of value-based learning project. Regarding professional capacity, participants found regular teacher training and action research valuable tools. In order to create a supportive environment, participants try to care about school members and raise students' voices. Identifying special needs and adjusting the curriculum in collaboration helps leaders to facilitate a high-quality learning experience. Finally, connecting with parents, NGOs, and other schools were also found to be effective in developing inclusive schools. The next chapter discusses those findings by supporting them with evidence from the literature.

5. Discussion

This section presents a comprehensive analysis and a comprehensive discussion of the findings described in the previous chapter. It aims to answer the primary research question about how leaders promote inclusive education in their practices. The chapter concludes with an overview of the importance of this study concerning the existing literature on school leadership and inclusive education. This study was guided by the theoretical framework derived from Hitt and Tucker's (2016) analysis of effective leadership dimensions. Thus, in this chapter, the data is interpreted and synthesized as a response to research questions in relation to the theoretical framework.

5.1 RQ1. How do school leaders understand the concept of Inclusive Education?

The first research question in this study aimed to determine what participants understand about the term inclusive education. Before talking about their perception of inclusive education, participants shared their personal stories regarding how they became interested in this area. Reflecting on their practices sparked leaders' arousal of curiosity in inclusion. Several studies have shown that reflecting on practices is a critical component of leadership since it helps to think strategically about how to lead and direct the organization (Senge, 2006; Thanaraj, 2016). The prevailing theme was relevant to their teaching experiences of students with diverse needs. Yet, one participant mentioned her curiosity was due to having a special child, while another noted her volunteering experiences with disabled people. These findings are similar to Rollan and Somerton's (2021) study, where NGO representatives started becoming interested and advocates for inclusive education due to family or charity events, which is similar to the leaders in this research.

In general, the result of the study showed that these school leaders have a positive attitude towards inclusive education. More than half of the participants claimed that they try to encourage values such as empathy and open-mindedness, considered essential attributes of

effective school leaders (Meier, 1997). In addition, the data suggest that participants understand inclusive education from diverse perspectives, as they have provided broad definitions. They all mentioned that inclusion is about creating equity among all learners regardless of their mental and physical abilities, special needs, and educational backgrounds. This aligns with Thomas's (2013) claim that inclusion regards all students with diverse needs, including the ones with disability (as cited in Haug, 2017). Some respondents came to the idea that inclusive education is currently topical, but others believe it has always been a significant topic in education.

The analysed data revealed that participants they are aware of traditional and biased attitudes towards inclusion in terms of segregating and labeling people with special needs. This was apparent from their use of language throughout the interview process. Participants tried to be careful while referring to people with special needs and disabilities by using respectful language (Haller et al., 2006), pausing to think, and asking the interviewer if the term was appropriate. Since exclusive language from the Soviet era impacted educators' mindsets (Makoelle, 2020a), leaders must model proper language. Two participants mentioned that their negative attitude toward inclusion changed after studying for a Master's degree abroad and in one of the international universities in Kazakhstan.

Overall, findings suggest that the study participants have a comprehensive grasp of inclusive education since they define it as involving all types of diversity and special needs. The following sub-sections discuss the results concerning specific practices and challenges toward making schools inclusive.

5.2 RQ2. What are some specific practices and activities of school leaders toward inclusive education?

The second question in this research sought to identify what explicit school practices participants conduct to make their schools more inclusive. From the interview analysis, key dimensions aligned with the theoretical framework of Hitt and Tucker (2016), such as establishing a shared vision, building professional capacity, creating a supportive environment, facilitating high-quality learning, and connecting with external partners.

5.2.1 Establishing and Conveying the Vision

The findings indicate that establishing a common vision and values among school members is the most important step toward inclusion. Edmonds and Spradlin (2010) stated that leaders are essential in sharing vision, values, and missions in effective inclusive schools. According to participants, developing a shared vision helps schools build an inclusive culture. The critical aspects of building an inclusive culture mentioned in this study are aligned with what Theoharis and Causton (2014) have compiled. For example, leaders try to build a common definition of inclusion through teacher training and collaborative participation in policy formation, an authentic sense of belonging through raising team spirit and supporting teachers from burnout, and encouraging the commitment of ‘all,’ including students, parents, and other key stakeholders. Each of these practices will be discussed further in alignment with existing literature.

It is notable from participants’ responses that their way of conveying the vision had features of a collegial leadership model, such as transformational and distributed leadership styles (Bush, 2020). Óskarsdóttir et al. (2020) found that these two types of leadership correlated with successful inclusive practices. Participant leaders from state schools stressed the importance of the principal’s influence on others through his behavior and actions. They

believed that the principal's curiosity and firm intention towards making the school inclusive impacted the change of attitude in other members. One participant noted that their principal is actively involved in curriculum review meetings or school events with teachers and students. These findings are consistent with Opiyo's (2019) study which showed that leaders interested in inclusive education display attributes of transformational leadership styles. However, even though key responsibilities in workflow management fall on transformational principals (Huber, 2004), such a style of leadership makes the coworkers of an organization highly dependent on the leader, which may result in achieving only short-term goals or even a total collapse if the leader resigns (Rayner, 2007).

Other participants who were leading private schools mentioned distributed leadership style as they believe that by making schools inclusive, it is important to share responsibilities among school members so that they will take a particular position and create changes towards inclusion. For example, one participant noted that they have positions like SEN / Inclusive and Well-being coordinators. Subject teachers feel free to start initiatives such as training to share expertise or start new events. Moreover, participants highlighted that all policy processes are performed collegially, which means they are discussed with teachers, psychologists, and other school members. This confirms the results of Edmonds and Spradlin's (2010) study that effective leaders involve members in policy development and implementation processes. However, Bush (2020) argues that creating an environment for distributed leadership could be challenging without Principals and Vice-Principals as they must actively delegate tasks. Thus, formal leaders play a key role in both styles. Whether the leadership falls on the principal as a primary responsibility or is delegated among the school members, findings generally indicated that leaders emphasized establishing vision through different actions.

One interesting finding of this research is the connection between inclusive practices and value-based learning. As some participants mentioned, they are attempting to nurture the values of inclusive education with teachers and students by piloting a project called value-based learning. This is done through several steps, such as identifying the school's own values and integrating them into the learning environment. Despite having a lack of explicit tasks for state schools, they are taking several actions, such as formal training for teachers or conveying a set of values through everyday activities in a classroom. Among the mentioned values, the most common were open-mindedness, tolerance, and kindness. Participants believed that they could inductively transmit those values of inclusion through integrating curriculum content with those values, as teachers have different ways of implementing and teaching it. This confirms the idea presented in OECD's (2021) report that cultivating values can be informal and formal through discussing values in a class, conducting case studies, or role plays. The existing literature on the interrelation between value-based learning and inclusion is sparse. However, the findings of this research concur with Maphalala and Mpofu's (2018) study illustrated that school leaders hold a pivotal role in developing a value-based system in a school.

5.2.2 Building Professional Capacity

Participants of this research contended that it is necessary to offer training to all staff members so they gain genuine meaning and understanding of the significance of inclusive education as one of the crucial steps in making schools inclusive. According to the findings, there are some biased attitudes toward inclusion that require attention. To address these issues, leaders conduct regular professional development sessions. Although there were some attempts at one-day training by experts, most of the time, they found it ineffective. In order to make all the staff interested in inclusion and make training productive for everyone, they conduct diagnostic tests to find out the challenges of the school and teachers. Afterward, they

invite experts to provide meaningful information according to teachers' needs. Leithwood and McAdie (2007) found that meaningful professional development will create a positive environment and a sense of professional efficacy in inclusion. An essential quality of PD sessions should emphasize teachers' identified needs (McLeskey, 2014). Thus, participants believe that in this way, they can raise teachers' awareness and self-efficacy.

Participants highlighted that professional development (PD) sessions should not just be a one-day event but also be held on a monthly basis. These regular sessions can be facilitated by both external experts and experienced teachers who are willing to share their knowledge. It has been revealed that collaborative interactions with knowledgeable colleagues are a powerful instrument for teacher learning (Kraft & Papay, 2014). Furthermore, informal PD activities that let teachers study at their own speed, such as online courses and internships, have been proven to be successful. Leaders are essential in providing financing, resources, and a conducive environment for efficient professional development.

Another notable finding of this research is that leaders must encourage teachers to be action researchers. As one participant stated, Action Research is a development tool for educational institutions where educators explore their practice, reflect, learn from their mistakes, and develop. This confirms the theory of Carpio et al. (2020), who stated that enabling teachers to research their practice is one of the best ways of developing teachers' competence (as cited in Fernández et al., 2022). Participants believe this is the best way to learn by doing, analyzing their practices, collaborating, and learning in groups. Black and Simon (2014) found that critical reflection is necessary to move toward inclusive practices since it helps teachers boost their self-efficacy with the school administration's support.

5.2.3 Creating a Supportive Organization for Teaching and Learning

Research findings revealed that, besides training teachers to become experts in their areas, they also attempt to create a supportive environment for teachers and students. It was mentioned that these school leaders conduct regular art therapy sessions and team-building events on holiday breaks for teachers in order to prevent burnout. As Bettini et al. (2016) noted, administrative support is one factor that impacts teachers' efficiency and students' academic achievement. Moreover, participants believed that this kind of support might inspire teachers to work harder to accomplish their assignments quickly, raising the standard and efficacy of their instruction. This confirms the theory of Leithwood and McAdie (2007) that teachers who work in supportive surroundings are more likely to feel motivated and content with their work.

Creating a supportive atmosphere for students is also viewed as a critical practice. According to some participants, they are support teams called Psychological and Pedagogical Service (PPS), which includes an inclusive coordinator, psychologist, speech therapist, individual tutors, subject teachers, and sometimes parents. The team collaborates and makes shared decisions on how to best deliver education to particular students with special needs. It can be Participants try to look at each student's case individually. Besides the support team, some participants mentioned separate positions such as a SEN and Well-being Coordinator and curators who are not subject teachers as then the role is too big. Regarding the latter, participants believe that the traditional way of having subject teachers as homeroom teachers is ineffective. Therefore, the best way of supporting students is when there is a separate position as curator.

SEN coordinators play an important role in bridging the gap between teachers, parents, and administration when it comes to meeting students' special needs. Meanwhile,

Well-being coordinators help to raise students' voices. Fernández et al. (2022) describe one of the features of the inclusive school as when students are free to voice their opinion and need about the educational process, rules, and how the school functions. This position includes antibullying events, anonymous suggestion boxes for students, and mediation clubs for resolving conflicts. This is similar to the findings of Hatzichristou et al. (2020) in which they found that such intervention programs have a critical role in promoting a positive school atmosphere.

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5.2.4 Facilitating a High-Quality Learning Experience for Students

In providing an effective learning experience, it is important to consider collaboration between different stakeholders. All participants highlighted the importance of collaboration in meeting students' needs by identifying and discussing the curriculum to fit individual needs. In the same case study by Gamero-Burón and Lassibille (2018) wrote that when all members are involved in reviewing and planning documents, it promotes the participatory values of the community. Thus, participants highlighted that principals, non-principals, teachers, and curators are encouraged to participate in open discussions to promote inclusive,

effective communication. The school administration is involved beyond participation in the flexible curriculum review process. This is similar to the study done by Fernández et al. (2022), who found that a flexible and revisable curriculum is more likely to lead to attending to students' needs.

While discussing students' needs and how to meet them, the collaboration also plays an important role. According to participants, students' needs are identified through official medical certificates from PMPC or sometimes by the diagnostic test of PPS support teams. However, participants were hesitant about the latter as sometimes it may seem to be subjective decisions. Most importantly, almost all participants mentioned that they pay attention to even sub-groups of students, such as risk zone students who have academic and behavioral issues, gifted students, and students with diverse cultural and language backgrounds. This is similar to McLeskey's (2014) study in which the school administration was devoted to fulfilling the needs of all students, including "subgroups" (e.g., gifted children, pupils from high-poverty homes) and disability categories. The fact that participants mentioned diverse student needs, which were not limited by disability forms, demonstrated their broad viewpoints toward inclusion (Haug, 2017). Generally, collaboration is important in facilitating the learning process since including all stakeholders in the learning environment helps children succeed. Several studies have stated that in order to promote successful inclusive practices such as planning, training, support, and policy development, it is essential that key stakeholders work collectively (Boyle et al., 2011; Poon-McBrayer, 2012; Sharma et al., 2012).

5.2.5 *Connecting with External Partners*

The findings of this study indicate that networking with parents, other schools, and NGOs is essential for inclusive practices. According to participants, parents are considered the most important stakeholders, and all actions toward students are discussed and agreed upon with them. Moreover, leaders stated that they actively involve parents in meaningful communication by inviting them to different school events, regular parent-teacher meetings each term, and parent school. This is similar to the study findings of Goldman and Burke (2017), where two-way communication is highlighted, enabling parents to provide meaningful input into their child's academic and social success at home and in school. Leaders expressed their ideas of involving parents to raise parents' knowledge about special needs, inclusion, well-being, and bullying issues.

In addition to collaborating with parents, one participant mentioned networking with one inclusive state school to share experiences and resources. Meanwhile, another participant noted the importance of collaborating with PMPC and NGO such as therapy centers. In the Kazakhstani context, it was found that some NGOs actively support schools from methodological perspectives and inform parents about the broader meaning of inclusion (Rollan & Somerton, 2021). Moreover, Valdivieso's (2020) study found out the role of leaders is essential in creating opportunities for partnership with external stakeholders. It is critical for fostering an inclusive environment to encourage community members to participate in the school's educational process and daily aspects (Fernández et al.,2022). The term community members refer to parents, NGOs or schools which are ready to share their expertise. Another interesting finding from this study is that participants highlighted that certificate recommendations from the specialized centers are helpful for the teaching process. Therefore, they would like to strengthen this networking in the future.

5.3 RQ3. What are some of the challenges experienced by school leaders in implementing inclusive practices?

When discussing the third research question, participants highlighted the five most critical challenges they are currently facing in their position. The first is related to policy formation. Participants stated that they feel hesitant when it comes to creating an inclusive education policy for schools as it may be too broad to cover all the sets of actions toward the diverse needs of students. They believe it is challenging since teaching in an inclusive setting is less explicit than ‘black and white.’ However, it should be noted that many scholars have debated on the topic of the discrepancy between policy and practice and that there is no country implementing inclusion without any barriers or stumbling blocks to implementation (Haug, 2017; Norway, 2014). The second challenge is the stigmatization and substitution of concepts because of the Soviet legacy among teachers as well as parents (Rollan & Somerton, 2021). According to participants, students with particular needs might be labeled negatively and seen as ‘uncomfortable’ students to teach. Moreover, one participant mentioned that there is a tendency to force students with special needs or behavioral issues to leave school after 9th grade. However, one participant mentioned that this way of thinking is shifting because of teachers of the younger generation. The third challenge is the shortage of specialists such as speech therapists, psychologists, and inclusive education coordinators. This problem is mainly happening in state schools. The fourth challenge is that parents are not always actively involved in school life. Some participants mentioned that they would like parents to take part in curriculum reviews or to plan IEPs as it may improve the success of a student’s academic life. Unfortunately, a range of studies in the literature also found the low participation of parents in school events, planning processes (IEPs), and regular meetings (Goldman & Burke, 2017; Martin, 2004). The fifth challenge noted by participants regards the need to teach inclusive education at a Bachelor's degree level while in the university to all

types of educators. One participant emphasized a need to prepare educators to be ready for inclusion as they need to know at least some basic knowledge about it. It was recommended by Makoelle (2020a) that the university curriculum in Kazakhstan had to be reconsidered in order to address the inclusive pedagogical preparedness of pre-service teachers. From a global perspective, several researchers discovered that school leaders do not possess sufficient knowledge and confidence in inclusive education due to a lack of preparation at most universities (Ball & Green, 2014; DeMatthews et al., 2020b). In addition, Barakat et al. (2019) and Melloy et al. (2022) noted that universities' preparation programs could significantly influence the education of students with disabilities and other marginalized students and the development of leaders' capacities for school leadership.

5.4 Summary

This chapter discussed the main findings regarding how leaders understand inclusive education, and how they actually experience leadership for inclusion, and what challenges they encounter. Generally, participants hold a positive attitude towards inclusive education and a broad and diverse understanding of inclusion. Moreover, they highlighted key themes such as collaboration, networking, value-based learning, and supporting school members as essential practices toward successful inclusive education.

6. Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to explore the school leaders' practices that facilitate inclusive education in schools of Astana. This study examined how principals, vice principals and SEN coordinators develop inclusive practices in their contexts. This chapter concludes the study findings according to the research questions. In addition, the current study's limitations, implications, and recommendations for future research are described.

6.1 Summary of the Major Findings

The first question of this research sought to identify participants' perceptions of inclusion. Despite the dominance of the medical model of inclusive education in Kazakhstan (Allan & Omarova, 2022), the study participants went beyond the narrow understanding. According to the participant leaders, inclusion means creating equal opportunities for students with diverse needs, including disability, special needs, giftedness, language, or cultural differences. Moreover, the leaders demonstrated respectful language when referring to students with special needs. The study's findings indicate that the reflective attributes of school leaders lead them to foster their curiosity in inclusive education (Ayers et al., 2020).

The second question addressed specific practices and activities of school leaders toward inclusive education. First and foremost, building an inclusive culture through sharing a common vision and values was the primary goal in participants' practices. The findings revealed that leaders encourage collective policy formation so that everyone's voice will be heard. Moreover, in order to promote inclusive values, some participants mentioned integrating new projects such as value-based learning. While discussing the establishment of shared goals, the features of transformational and distributed leadership styles were apparent. For example, participants from state schools noted that most responsibilities are carried by the positive leadership of the principal who influences other members at school. However, private school leaders emphasized delegating leadership positions among teachers, which was

possible due to available resources. Regardless of the type of school, participants mentioned the importance of meaningful and regular professional training based on teachers' needs in terms of the challenges they face. Furthermore, encouraging teachers to be researchers promotes reflection and life-long learning concepts. However, leaders do not neglect their support for teachers by creating a positive atmosphere and preventing burnout. There are also support teams and student clubs that aim to advocate for students academically and socially. In all of these practices mentioned by participants, collaboration is thought to be a key ingredient. Collaboration among different stakeholders was evident in almost all practices, such as policy formation, curriculum review, planning, and networking with external partners. From the participant leaders' point of view, the joint effort of all key stakeholders will lead to the improvement of inclusive education.

The third question pertained to challenges experienced by school leaders in implementing inclusive practices. Overall, participants claimed that they struggle with policy formation, the fixed mindset about inclusion, the shortage of specialists, parents' lack of participation in school life, and the need to revise the curriculum to prepare educators for inclusive education. However, despite these challenges, school leaders' efforts and practices should not be underestimated (Ainscow & Sandill, 2010).

Taking into account of the above, it is worth noting the practices that leaders take in their own context in order to promote inclusion. The main question was about what form of leadership promotes inclusive education. The study has not found one single response. The findings suggest that the form of leadership aimed at developing inclusive schools depends on a range of interrelated dimensions that need to be done collaboratively. These dimensions are sharing a common vision, building professional capacity, creating a supportive environment, facilitating high-quality learning experiences, and networking with external partners.

6.2 Strengths of the Research

This study has several strengths in its in-depth data analysis, contextualized findings, and collaborative approach. As a qualitative study, detailed data from interviews were collected. This is a strength because it allowed the researchers to understand the practices deeply. Furthermore, this study is focused on a school leaders' context (private and state schools), which made it possible to have a more nuanced understanding of the practices and how they are implemented in different settings. Finally, this study highlighted the importance of collaborative practices in creating an inclusive school environment. This is an advantage of the study because it is consistent with the current trend in education that emphasizes the importance of working together to achieve common goals (Bouillet, 2013).

6.3 Limitations of the Research

Limitations of this study are inevitable due to the study sample. Since leaders of only one large city in Kazakhstan were involved, this research does not contain enough information about other regional situations. Moreover, the participants of this research were mainly young leaders from private schools with one to two years of experience. Exploring mainstream schools with more experienced school leaders may reveal more information.

6.4 Implications

Nevertheless, the study results have significant implications for future research and practice. The findings provide important insights for school leaders who are also keen on developing inclusive schools, and they may employ these practices. In addition, the study results underscore the suggestions for improving inclusive education in Kazakhstan supported by evidence that may help policymakers to build laws and initiatives in leadership and inclusion.

6.5 Recommendations for Future Research

Although this study showed effective leadership strategies, other factors should be thoroughly investigated. Given the qualitative nature of this study, the next logical step would be large-scale quantitative research to generate more representative results. Alternatively, a case study of mainstream schools, which will embrace experienced leaders, headteachers, teachers, parents, and with additional data collection tools such as observation and field notes, is recommended.

6.6 Personal Reflection

I am pleased to have completed my thesis dissertation, which provided me with a comprehensive understanding of how to conduct research. During the research process, I gained numerous insights. One of them is that inclusive practices do not require anything extraordinary. What matters is the simple everyday actions intended to create a better environment for our students. When we hear about inclusive education, we tend to consider only the disability model. However, I hope this research will give a broader understanding of inclusion. Being mindful of your practices and thoughts is very important.

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Appendices

Appendix A. Written Recruitment Script

Dear _____,

My name is Nazerke Abdikarimova, and I am a Master's student in the Graduate School of Education at Nazarbayev University. I am conducting a research study examining the school leaders' practices that promote inclusive education in Astana, and you are invited to participate in the study. If you agree, you are invited to participate in an interview that takes no more than an hour and which will be audio recorded to ensure the accuracy of the interview.

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your identity as a participant will remain confidential during and after the study. The personal characteristics, name of the school, and participants will be excluded from the research. The interview transcripts and interview protocols will be kept in the researcher's personal computer, which is coded.

If you have questions or would like to participate, please contact me at nazerke.abdikarimova@nu.edu.kz or phone number +7 778 202 67 70.

Thank you for your participation,

Abdikarimova Nazerke

Master's student

Nazarbayev University

Graduate School of Education

Appendix B. Consent form (English version)

Forms of Leadership Promoting Inclusive Education in Kazakhstan

DESCRIPTION: You are invited to participate in a research study exploring the school leaders' practices that promote inclusive education. This study examines how principals, vice principals, and Special Educational Needs (SEN) coordinators develop inclusive practices in their school. You are asked to participate in a face-to-face interview that with your permission will be audio recorded. If you do not agree to be recorded, I will take notes.

TIME INVOLVEMENT: Your participation will take approximately 1 hour.

RISKS AND BENEFITS: The risks associated with this study are minimal. Participating will in no way have an impact on your current employment status. Nothing you say will be shared with your employer. There are no other risks associated with this study. I will collect information that is essential to the research activity only. The research is interested in the school where inclusion is being implemented and aims to describe the process in detail to understand this topic in greater detail. In order to minimize the risk of loss of confidentiality, personal characteristics, the name of the school, and participants' name will not be included in any reporting.

PARTICIPANT'S RIGHTS: If you have read this form and have decided to participate in this project, please understand your participation is voluntary. You have the right to withdraw your consent or discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. The alternative is not to participate. You have the right to refuse to answer particular questions. The results of this research study will be written up in my Masters' Thesis. They may also be presented at scientific or professional meetings or published in scientific journals.

CONTACT INFORMATION:

Questions: If you have any questions, concerns, or complaints about this research, its procedures, risks, and benefits, contact the Master's Thesis Supervisor, Associate Professor Janet Helmer at janet.helmer@nu.edu.kz

Independent Contact: If you are not satisfied with how this study is being conducted, or if you have any concerns, complaints, or general questions about the research or your rights as a participant, please contact the NUGSE Research Committee to at gse_researchcommittee@nu.edu.kz

Please sign this consent form if you agree to participate in this study.

- I have carefully read the information provided;
- I have been given full information regarding the purpose and procedures of the study;
- I understand how the data collected will be used, and that any confidential information will be seen only by the researchers and will not be revealed to anyone else;
- I understand that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason;
- With full knowledge of all foregoing, I agree, of my own free will, to participate in this study.

Signature: _____

Researcher's Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix C. Interview protocol (English version)

Project title: Forms of Leadership Promoting Inclusive Education in Kazakhstan

Interviewee:

Date:

Time:

Place:

Preliminary procedures: introducing self, the purpose of the study, and anonymity protection; getting permission to audio record; signing the consent form.

Dear Participant,

Thank you for taking the time to participate in the interview. This research is part of my master's program. The following questions will help me learn more about your attitudes, leadership, and practices that promote inclusive education in your school. During the interview, there may be some additional questions that will help me to further clarify your answers. I would like to remind you that your responses will keep in confidence. Your name or any other identifying factors will not be used.

Interview Questions:

1. How long have you been a school principal/vice principal/SEN coordinator?
2. How long have you served in the same position in this particular place?
3. Is this the first institution for you to be in the position of a school principal/vice principal/SEN coordinator?
4. Please describe inclusion in your own words.
5. What do you know about Inclusive Education?
6. How do you promote or in what ways do you nurture the concept of IE in your position? In practice
7. Do you have a school policy for Inclusive Education?
8. What are some practices that you have developed toward inclusion?
9. Do you consider the learner's physical and academic abilities during enrolment?
10. What challenges have you encountered during the implementation process of inclusive education?

Thank the participant for the interview. Assure them again about the confidentiality of received information.

Appendix D. Sample of Coding

Participant P1	Coding
<p>Can you please describe inclusion in your own words, how do you understand it?</p> <p><i>Okay, I guess my understanding may not be in accord with what textbooks say, but I think that inclusion is creating equity in education given different educational backgrounds and I guess specifics of every learner.</i></p>	<p>Attitude: careful and hesitant while giving definitions Knowledge: equity, diversity of educational backgrounds</p>
<p>What kind of practices are you implementing or going to implement in the future?</p> <p><i>Okay, so we sure have lots of plans. I can most certainly say that our school, given the student budget size, we don't have many students, and thus it's maybe less likely that we will have someone who is an inclusive student, if I can use such a term. But I think one of the major steps was that we have a special educational needs coordinator who's the person who's been trained. I believe it's the same program as yours, if I can mention that. And also last year we had a two-day course on inclusive education, but if I recall it correctly, that was more like a case study where a lady from Almaty, from a school for special educational needs, she shared her experience with kids who I guess can be characterized as needing or requiring special attention. So the school also has special educational needs policy. And this year, for the first time, we had a student who had an official diagnosis. What do you call it? Like a doctor's report or I'm not sure if you can disclose exactly what it was all about, but I think you know what we're talking about here.</i></p>	<p>Attitude: P1 is attentive while using language Practices: School has SEN coordinator Practices: Raising teachers' awareness Practices: School has policy Attitude: P1 is attentive while using language</p>
<p>What kind of challenges are you facing?</p> <p><i>Okay, that's a very good one. So I think the challenge that we face has to do with certain, I guess, predisposition or what do you call it? Like an orthodox way of thinking among certain colleagues. I'm not seeing all of them. And it's the minority that we're talking about here. Another thing that we are witnessing is that we have to educate the parents because oftentimes what we see is that parents may I'm not saying gaslight, but they may devalue the issue, right? I'm not saying that they don't think it's an issue.</i></p>	<p>Challenges: Traditional way of thinking among colleagues Challenges: parents' awareness and education</p>