

**Inclusive Education Readiness Among Pre-Service Teachers at One University in
Astana**

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This letter now confirms that your research project titled:

Inclusive Education Preparedness among Pre-Service Teachers at One University in Astana, Kazakhstan

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

You may proceed with contacting your preferred research site and commencing your participant recruitment strategy.

Yours sincerely,

Oliver Mutanga (PhD)

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Abstract

Inclusive Education Readiness among Pre-Service Teachers at One Kazakhstan University in Astana

Despite the efforts to strive for quality teaching in inclusive education, Kazakhstan still faces significant challenges in its journey towards inclusive education. There is a lack of comprehensive understanding of current pre-service teacher training programs in Kazakhstani universities. It is not clear how universities prepare future teachers for inclusive education. This gap may contribute to insufficient teacher readiness and impact the quality of inclusive learning environments. Therefore, this qualitative study aims to explore the experiences of pre-service teachers in learning and practising inclusive education at one Kazakhstani university in Astana. Specifically, the study explores six key questions: (1) pre-service teachers' understanding and conceptualisation of inclusive education, (2) their perceptions and attitudes toward the inclusive education courses within their teacher education program, (3) their feelings of preparedness or unpreparedness to implement inclusive education and the contributing factors, (4) their practical experiences with inclusive education during pedagogical internships at schools, (5) their perceptions of the alignment between the inclusive education theories presented in coursework and the realities encountered during internships, and (6) the broader implications of their experiences and perceptions for inclusive education policy, teacher education practices, and future research in Kazakhstan. The study adopts a qualitative, phenomenological research design. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with eight pre-service teachers enrolled in a teacher education program of different subject specialisations. The findings showed a strong understanding of the concept of inclusion among participants. However, their practical readiness varied significantly. The study also revealed that inclusive education courses were overly theoretical and lacked real classroom exposure. Participants highlighted mentorship,

emotional readiness, and school-level support as critical factors impacting their level of preparedness. The study recommends revising pre-service teacher training programs to include strong mentorship and emotional support from in-service teachers at school, practice-oriented course content, and greater alignment between theoretical instruction and the real classroom environment.

Keywords: pre-service teachers, teacher preparation, teacher readiness, teacher preparedness, pedagogical practice, Kazakhstan, inclusive education

Аңдатпа

Астанадағы бір Қазақстан Университетіндегі Болашақ Мұғалімдердің Инклюзивті Білім Беруге Дайындығы

Инклюзивті білім берудің сапасын арттыруға бағытталған күш-жігерге қарамастан, Қазақстан бұл бағытта әлі де елеулі қиындықтарға тап болуда. Қазіргі уақытта еліміздегі педагогикалық мамандықтарда білім алып жатқан болашақ мұғалімдердің инклюзивті білім беруге қаншалықты дайын екені толық зерттелмеген. Бұл олқылық болашақ мұғалімдердің жеткіліксіз дайындығына және инклюзивті оқыту ортасының сапасына теріс әсер етуі мүмкін. Бұл сапалы зерттеу Астана қаласындағы бір университетте инклюзивті білім беру курстарынан өткен болашақ мұғалімдердің тәжірибесін зерттеуді мақсат етеді. Атап айтқанда, зерттеу алты негізгі сұраққа бағытталған: (1) инклюзивті білім беру туралы болашақ мұғалімдердің түсінігі мен ұғымын, (2) олардың мұғалімдерді даярлау бағдарламасындағы инклюзивті білім беру курстарына деген көзқарасы мен қатынасын, (3) инклюзивті білім беруді жүзеге асыруға дайын немесе дайын еместігі туралы сезімдерін және осыған әсер ететін факторларды, (4) мектептердегі педагогикалық тәжірибе кезінде инклюзивті білім беру бойынша олардың практикалық тәжірибелерін, (5) оқу бағдарламасында ұсынылған инклюзивті білім беру теориялары мен іс жүзінде кездескен шынайылықтың арасындағы сәйкестік туралы олардың қабылдауын және (6) олардың тәжірибелері мен қабылдауларының Қазақстандағы инклюзивті білім беру саясатына, мұғалімдерді даярлау тәжірибесіне және болашақ зерттеулерге ықпалын зерттеу. Зерттеу сапалы, феноменологиялық әдіспен жүргізілді. Деректер әртүрлі пәндік бағыттағы сегіз студентпен жартылай құрылымдалған сұхбат арқылы жиналды. Нәтижелер қатысушылардың инклюзия ұғымын жақсы түсінетінін көрсетті, алайда олардың практикалық дайындығы әртүрлі деңгейде болғанын көрсетті. Зерттеу инклюзивті

білім беру курстарының тым теориялық болғанын және шынайы сыныптық тәжірибе жетіспегенін анықтады. Қатысушылар тәлімгерлік, эмоциялық дайындық және мектеп деңгейіндегі қолдаудың маңызды екенін атап өтті. Зерттеу университеттегі мұғалімдерді даярлау бағдарламаларын қайта қарап, мектептегі тәжірибелі мұғалімдерден мықты тәлімгерлік пен эмоциялық қолдауды қамтамасыз етуді, практикалық мазмұнды күшейтуді және теория мен мектептегі шынайы сынып көрінісінің арасындағы байланысты нығайтуды ұсынады.

Кілт сөздер: болашақ мұғалімдер, мұғалім дайындығы, мұғалімдерді даярлау, педагогикалық практика, Қазақстан, инклюзивті білім беру

Аннотация

Готовность Студентов Педагогических Специальностей к Инклюзивному Образованию в Одним из Университетов Казахстана в Астане

Несмотря на предпринимаемые усилия по повышению качества инклюзивного образования, Казахстан по-прежнему сталкивается с серьезными трудностями в подготовке педагогов к эффективной реализации инклюзивных практик. В настоящее время недостаточно исследовано, как действующие программы подготовки будущих учителей в казахстанских университетах обеспечивают их готовность к инклюзивному обучению. Этот пробел может способствовать недостаточной подготовленности педагогов и отрицательно сказаться на качестве инклюзивной образовательной среды. Этот качественное исследование направлено на изучение опыта будущих учителей, прошедших курсы по инклюзивному образованию в одном из университетов города Астаны. В частности, исследование охватывает шесть ключевых аспекта: (1) понимание и концептуализацию инклюзивного образования будущими учителями, (2) их восприятие и отношение к курсам инклюзивного образования в рамках их программы подготовки педагогов, (3) их ощущение готовности или неготовности к реализации инклюзивного образования и факторы, влияющие на это, (4) их практический опыт в сфере инклюзивного образования во время педагогических стажировок в школах, (5) их восприятие соответствия между теориями инклюзивного образования, представленными в учебной программе, и реальностью, с которой они столкнулись на практике, и (6) более широкие последствия их опыта и восприятия для образовательной политики, практики подготовки учителей и будущих исследований в области инклюзивного образования в Казахстане. В исследовании приняли участие восемь студентов различных педагогических специальностей, с которыми были проведены полуструктурированные интервью. Результаты показали, что участники

хорошо понимают концепцию инклюзивного образования, однако уровень их практической подготовки существенно различается. Кроме того, было выявлено, что курсы носят преимущественно теоретический характер и не обеспечивают достаточного контакта с реальной школьной практикой. Участники отметили, что наставничество, эмоциональная поддержка и условия на уровне школы играют решающую роль в формировании чувства готовности. Исследование рекомендует пересмотреть программы подготовки педагогов, усилив практико-ориентированную направленность, развить систему наставничества и обеспечить более тесную связь между теорией и школьной практикой.

Ключевые слова: будущие учителя, подготовка учителей, готовность учителей, педагогическая практика, Казахстан, инклюзивное образование

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Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter introduces the context, significance, and focus of the present study, which explores the readiness of pre-service teachers in learning and practising inclusive education at a Kazakhstani university. It outlines the historical and policy developments that have shaped inclusive education both globally and nationally, with a particular emphasis on Kazakhstan's efforts and challenges. The chapter presents the research problem, articulates the purpose of the study, and formulates the research questions that guide the inquiry. Additionally, it discusses the significance and potential contributions of the study and provides an overview of the thesis structure. Together, these components establish the foundation for understanding the importance of investigating teacher preparedness for inclusive education within the context of Kazakhstan.

1.1 Introduction and Background of the Study

Inclusive education has had a long yet difficult journey first being emerged as a global concept in the late 20th century. After the 1994 Salamanca Statement which was adopted aiming to overcome the divide between regular and special education, the promotion of inclusive education has made a big leap worldwide (Reindal, 2016). Since then, having overcome many challenges and concepts globally, inclusive education aims to ensure that each child has a 'fundamental right to education' (UNESCO, 2018, p.3).

In Kazakhstan, the move towards inclusive education started when Kazakhstan agreed to follow the guidelines set out in the Salamanca Statement in 1994 (UNESCO, 1994) and has undergone many major shifts since then. Despite significant reforms, the progress has been uneven. The significance of inclusive education has been identified by the State Program for the Development of Education in the Republic of Kazakhstan 2011-2020 (SPED), which aims to improve the inclusive education system in schools and mandates that 70% of schools should be inclusive by 2020 (MES RK, 2010). One of the

objectives of the program requires the preparation of modular programs of integrated education of children with special educational needs, determination of the rules of integrated education of children with disabilities in the general education environment, forms of integration for children with special needs, and rules for organising distance learning for disabled children, which means the idea of inclusion is replaced by the concept of integration (GEM, 2020). The change in emphasis from inclusive education, which focuses on the complete involvement of children with SEN, to integration, which frequently segregates students into distinct programs, undermines the overall objective of inclusivity. Furthermore, the UNICEF report (2017) and the national report (MES RK, 2019) show that only 60% of schools created conditions for inclusive education, which is below the target. Nevertheless, according to Askhat Aimagambetov, the former Minister of Education and Science, 55% of children were included in inclusive education, indicating that although infrastructure might have been developed, the execution of inclusive education was delayed (MES RK, 2019). This gap between policy and implementation causes worries about whether these “inclusive conditions” genuinely support the creation of inclusive learning environments or just fulfil the basic standards.

Despite these advancements, many students are still placed in segregated settings, indicating a slow rate of improvement (Passeka & Somerton, 2022). The problem is especially troublesome because the worldwide tendency indicates a growing population of students with disabilities, with 240 million children needing special education services globally (Ospanova et al., 2024; UNICEF, 2021). Kazakhstan’s progress in this area appears to be limited at most. Though the nation has made significant advancements, the emphasis on segregated educational systems and children with disabilities indicates a failure to implement comprehensive changes in how schools promote inclusivity. In this regard, The State Program for the Development of Education in the Republic of

Kazakhstan 2020-2025 (SPED) sets a goal to increase the conditions for inclusive education by 100% (MES RK, 2019). The objective holds great potential, but the main difficulty lies in changing the mindset from simply supplying physical infrastructure to creating genuinely inclusive educational practices. The government needs to move past integration models and allocate resources for teacher training, curriculum development, and changing attitudes to guarantee that schools can effectively cater to all students, irrespective of their abilities.

Achieving successful inclusion in education necessitates top-notch teaching that addresses the diverse needs of all students (Brooks, 2016). As mentioned above, The Strategic Development Plan of the Republic of Kazakhstan until 2025 elaborates on providing psychological and pedagogical support for inclusive education as well as improving the qualifications of teachers. One of the tasks indicated in the plan is the update of qualification requirements for teachers working in inclusive education settings, which will be based on the professional standard. It highlights the vital role of initial teacher education in implementing inclusive education.

In Kazakhstan, 43 universities, including one national and six regional state pedagogical universities, train teachers for all levels of education (Tastanbekova, 2018). The curriculum of pre-service teacher training programs consists of a theoretical component and practicum (Makoelle & Burmistrova, 2021). Following the GEM (2020) report, teacher training for secondary schools includes the compulsory discipline of “Inclusive education” for all pedagogical specialities. The objective of the course is to introduce students to pedagogical specialities relating to the development, education, and engagement of different groups of children requiring special educational support. It covers modules such as “Multidisciplinary Interaction of Teachers and Specialists”, “Regulatory Framework for Inclusive Education”, “Creating a Comfortable Educational Environment

in an Inclusive Class”, “Adaptation and Modification of the Educational Process in an Inclusive School”, “Work with the family in an inclusive education environment”, “Assessment of educational results based on the individual capacities of children” (p. 68).

The pedagogical practicum is a key element of pre-service teacher training, bridging theory and practice (Petre et al., 2022; Smith & Lev-Ari, 2005). It offers future teachers the chance to apply theoretical knowledge in classroom settings, promoting professional growth despite the challenges it presents (Chan et al., 2019; Can, 2019). In Kazakhstan, this mandatory practicum includes educational, pedagogical, and pre-diploma stages. The first-year educational practice introduces students to the profession, enhances theoretical understanding, and builds professional skills.

Pedagogical practice consists of two sub-types, psychological-pedagogical practice for second-year students and pedagogical practice for third-year students. They aim to develop students’ practical skills and build connections between theoretical knowledge and practical application. Fourth-year students pass pre-diploma practice at the graduation course in order to collect data for their diploma project and complete it (Ministry of Justice, 2016). According to Polovnikova and Qanay (2023), professional internships or practicums impact a lot on future educators’ professional development as they involve direct student-teacher interactions. Direct communication with children has the additional benefit of enhancing important teaching skills, such as patience, attentiveness, self-restraint, and kindness. This approach also provides students with the valuable opportunity to observe a child with special educational needs, document their observations, and engage in self-reflection based on their observations (Kudarinova et al., 2023).

The training of pre-service teachers is usually considered crucial in readying prospective educators, combining theoretical understanding with hands-on experience. However, it often doesn’t adequately prepare teachers for the challenges of inclusive

education which also delays the successful implementation of inclusive education practices.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

As Kударinova et al. (2023) mentioned, inclusive education is a complex process. Despite these intentions to strive for quality teaching, Kazakhstan still encounters significant challenges in its journey toward inclusive education. One of the key barriers identified in the GEM report (2020) is the lack of adequately trained personnel, insufficient training and development for teachers and the absence of a structured teacher training system of education in the country. A survey shows that nearly 80% of school teachers consider their knowledge of teaching children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) very minimal, and 20% understand that they lack knowledge of Inclusive Education.


Although the mandatory course “Inclusive Education” provides fundamental knowledge, it is only offered as a 2-credit (90-hour) course, which is insufficient for developing necessary practical skills and effective teaching methods for students with special educational needs (SEN) (xxx). Additionally, despite having quality works written by national and foreign scholars, teachers’ readiness is not studied enough in Kazakhstan (Kударinova et al., 2023). There is the lack of comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of the current pre-service teacher training programs in Kazakhstani universities, which might result in inadequate preparedness of future teachers for inclusive education and negatively affect the quality of education. If this problem is not addressed the aim set by the State Program for Education Development may not be achieved. Teachers who are prepared insufficiently through the current pre-service teacher training program may lead to the failure of inclusive education implementation in Kazakhstan.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The study aims to explore the experiences of pre-service teachers in learning and practicing inclusive education at one Kazakhstani university in Astana. In detail, this study focuses on four main components of exploration, which can comprehensively summarise pre-service teachers' experience

- To investigate pre-service teachers' understanding of inclusive education
- To explore their IE practice experiences during pedagogical practice (internships) at schools
- To examine their attitudes and opinions towards inclusive education courses (curriculum)
 - To investigate the implications of the findings.

1.4 Research Questions

This study addresses the following research questions to investigate the  future teachers' understanding, knowledge, and attitude towards IE courses or curricula, which impact their competency for real-world IE practices.

1. How do pre-service teachers at one university in Kazakhstan understand and conceptualise inclusive education?
2. What are the perceptions and attitudes of pre-service teachers at university toward the inclusive education courses within their teacher education program?
3. In what ways do pre-service teachers at university feel prepared or unprepared to implement inclusive education in their future classrooms, and what factors contribute to these feelings?
4. How do pre-service teachers at university describe their experiences of implementing inclusive education practices during their teaching internships in Kazakhstani schools?

5. How do pre-service teachers at university perceive the alignment between the inclusive education theories presented in their coursework and the realities they encounter during their internship experiences?
6. What implications do the experiences and perceptions of these pre-service teachers have for educational policy, teacher education practices, and future research on inclusive education in Kazakhstan?

1.5 Significance and Contribution of the Study

This study is significant because it can contribute to the improvement of pre-service teacher training programs in Kazakhstan, particularly in the field of inclusive education (IE). By exploring the experiences, perceptions, and preparedness of pre-service teachers, the study addresses critical gaps in the current teacher preparation system. It identifies both the strengths and weaknesses of the existing curriculum, offering a detailed analysis of how effectively it prepares future educators to meet the diverse needs of students in inclusive classrooms. The findings from the study are expected to provide evidence-based recommendations and practical implications that can inform curriculum revisions, enhance teaching methodologies, and ultimately shape future policy decisions aimed at strengthening inclusive education practices. Moreover, the study contributes to the broader development of IE implementation in Kazakhstan by raising awareness of the challenges and opportunities within pre-service teacher preparation. By highlighting areas for improvement and advocating for more practice-oriented and competency-based training, the study aims to support the creation of a more inclusive, equitable, and effective educational system for all learners.

1.6 Outline of the Thesis

This thesis consists of six chapters, each contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the research topic. The first chapter provides background information,

outlines the research problem, and states the purpose of the study, which aims to investigate the readiness of pre-service teachers in learning and practising inclusive education (IE) at one university in Kazakhstan. It also introduces the research questions formulated to address the identified problem and purpose, and highlights the significance and potential contributions of the study to the field of inclusive education.

The second chapter presents a review of relevant literature, focusing on global and national perspectives on inclusive education, the challenges and successes of pre-service teacher preparation, and the theoretical framework guiding the study. It critically examines key concepts and previous research, establishing the scholarly context for the study.

The third chapter discusses the methodology employed, including the research design, participant selection, data collection methods, data analysis procedures, and ethical considerations. It explains the rationale behind the methodological choices to ensure the trustworthiness and credibility of the findings.

The fourth chapter presents the findings derived from the analysis of in-depth interviews with the participants. It outlines the major themes that emerged and uses direct quotations from participants to illustrate their experiences and perceptions.

The fifth chapter provides an in-depth discussion of the findings in relation to the research questions and existing literature. It interprets the results, discusses their implications, and situates them within the broader academic and policy debates on inclusive education.

Finally, the sixth chapter concludes the thesis by summarizing the main findings, reflecting on the study's contributions and limitations, and offering recommendations for policy, practice, and future research in the field of inclusive education in Kazakhstan.

Summary

In conclusion, this research focuses on exploring how well future teachers are prepared for inclusive education (IE) in pre-service teacher training programs at universities in Kazakhstan. The background emphasises the growing importance of IE at both global and national levels and outlines the significant efforts made by Kazakhstan to implement inclusive practices through educational reforms and strategic programs. Despite these initiatives, challenges persist, particularly in ensuring that pre-service teachers receive sufficient practical training, develop positive attitudes towards diversity, and build the necessary competencies to create inclusive learning environments.

This study seeks to address these challenges by examining pre-service teachers' conceptual understanding of inclusive education, their experiences during teaching internships, their attitudes toward IE courses, and the perceived effectiveness of their training programs. By identifying both strengths and areas for improvement, the findings are expected to provide valuable insights and evidence-based recommendations that can inform enhancements to pre-service teacher training curricula and pedagogical approaches. Strengthening these programs is essential for supporting the broader national goals of achieving full educational inclusion and equity.

Moving forward, it is essential to establish a strong theoretical and empirical framework to guide this research. The next chapter will review existing literature on inclusive education, both globally and within the Kazakhstani context, to provide a comprehensive understanding of the progress made, the ongoing barriers, and the research gaps that this study aims to address. This review will set the foundation for positioning the current research within the broader scholarly and policy discussions on inclusive education.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The literature review focuses on research that is pertinent to the present study, which investigates teachers' preparedness for inclusive education at one Kazakhstani university located in Astana. The chapter is structured around two overarching themes, with each section encompassing key concepts relevant to exploring the readiness of prospective educators enrolled in pre-service teacher training programs at the university. The literature search was conducted using databases such as ERIC, Google Scholar, NU Library and Consensus. Key terms included "inclusive education," "pre-service teacher training," "teacher readiness," and "inclusive practices in Kazakhstan." The search included sources in English, Kazakh and Russian. Every concept and keyword was supported by empirical and conceptual studies aligned with the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) framework.

Inclusive education offers all students, regardless of their needs, equal learning opportunities. This approach gained global recognition through initiatives such as the Salamanca Statement (1994), which called for policies accommodating learners with special needs (Reindal, 2016). In Kazakhstan, policies such as the State Program for Education Development (2011-2020, 2020-2025) promote inclusive practices to ensure access to quality education for all students (MES RK, 2010). However, challenges like insufficient teacher preparation and lack of resources hinder progress toward these goals (GEM Report, 2020).

2.1 Global and National Perspectives on Inclusive Education

Several global literature sources describe the development of practices of inclusive education worldwide. For instance, Schuelka and Johnstone (2012) and Armstrong et al. (2010) highlight international policies towards the achievement of inclusivity in education. Schuelka and Johnstone (2012) point out that the ratification of the United Nations

Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) has been pivotal in promoting inclusion globally. Such frameworks “even if impossible to enforce, make a difference socially and culturally” because they help people with special needs know their rights and what has been promised (p.10). However, these scholars also underline a very important issue that the implementation of any policy is always significantly different in different regions depending on the local culture, economy and politics. They highlight that there is no “magic bullet” for the successful implementation of inclusive education. Therefore, this dilemma is related to the universality of the frameworks and their effectiveness in diverse educational communities.

Armstrong et al. (2010) also focus on the crucial role of policy in implementing inclusive education, globally. Although many countries have already adopted policies to support inclusion, in practice they do not agree that policy can entirely change inclusive education. Starting from transforming educational practices and attitudes fundamentally, policies have to continue developing sustainably. However, Global South countries encounter several challenges in implementing inclusive education due to “limited resources and the external manipulation of educational policy by external funding agencies” (p. 32). This underscores the need for international policies to be adaptable and sensitive to geographical contexts rather than adopting a one-size-fits-all approach.

Furthermore, Schuelka and Johnstone (2012) critique the tendency of some international policies to impose Western-centric models of inclusive education on non-Western countries. They argue that even though some of the acclaimed models are successful, they may not be appropriate or effective for some cultures. Therefore, they suggest that “the realization of effective solutions must be born locally” (p. 11).

Additionally, Armstrong et al. (2010) support a more flexible approach to implementing inclusive education policies. They consider policies successful if they can be

adapted to fit the unique needs and circumstances of different educational settings. This perspective aligns with the concept of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), which highlights flexibility and responsiveness to students' diverse needs.

Despite these arguments, the scholars mentioned above, Armstrong et al. (2010) and Schuelka and Johnstone (2012) consider global frameworks and policies instrumental in raising awareness and promoting inclusive education worldwide. However, they also highlight the need for future research to identify gaps and potential solutions.

Eden et al. (2024) discuss creating learning environments which respect diverse cultures. They present inclusive education as a worldwide concept relying on social justice and equality principles. Every student should receive equal learning opportunities without exclusion regardless of their economic and ethnic background or physical abilities (Eden et al., 2024). They highlight the importance of organizing parent-teacher conferences, workshops and family events to build communication between teachers and families. Another study by Meng (2024) investigated how inclusive teaching, differentiated instruction, and improving teacher-student relationships can actively promote equity and social justice in education.

So, global studies say that a teacher is the epicentre of inclusive education and point to teachers' attitudes and beliefs as decisive factors (Ahsan & Sharma, 2018; Ferreira et al., 2015).

2.1.1 Current Policies and Practices

Kazakhstan's approach to inclusive education has been greatly influenced by national policies such as the State Program for the Development of Education in the Republic of Kazakhstan 2011-2020 and 2020-2025 (MES RK, 2010; MES RK, 2019). These policies emphasise the need for inclusive practices within the local educational system to ensure that all learners, regardless of their abilities, have full access to quality

education. The GEM Report (2020) highlights the key challenges and achievements by providing an overview of the adopted policies.

2.1.2 Successes and Challenges

Since 2015, Kazakhstan has made significant achievements and faced notable challenges in the area of inclusive education. There has been a considerable rise in the enrolment of students with disabilities in mainstream schools. According to the GEM Report (2020), the number of schools offering inclusive education has increased, reflecting the growing awareness and integration of inclusive practices within education settings. Accordingly, the state educational order for teacher training in universities has risen considerably, focusing on inclusive education, increasing from 1,412 places in the 2-16-2017 academic year to 10,697 places in 2019-2020. Incorporating assistant teachers in the standard staff list was also one of the significant achievements as mandated by the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan “On the Status of a Teacher” Annual reports indicate that there has been an increase in the salaries of teachers and state grants for future teachers. More than 256,215 pedagogical personnel have passed continuous professional development.

Despite these incredible successes, challenges still remain regarding teacher training. They involve the shortage of sufficiently trained staff, minimal knowledge of inclusive education, negative attitude towards students with disabilities, and low efficiency in the teacher preparation system (GEM Report, 2020). To address these obstacles, the State Program (2020-2025) highlights the importance of continuous professional development and the inclusion of personnel in schools to support learners with diverse needs. Implications for the future also include the integration of the program “Special Education” in universities and updated pre-service teacher training programs for working with students with special needs. As for attitudinal barriers, Gabdrakhmanova et al. (2020)

suggest that the successful implementation of IE policies within schools is influenced by the willingness of schools and teachers to fully integrate inclusive practices.

To sum up, the literature above demonstrates the perspectives on inclusive education policies globally and nationally. While these policies have laid a strong foundation for promoting inclusive education, the gap between policy development and practical implementation remains a significant challenge. Successful integration of inclusive practices requires not only well-formulated policies but also effective teacher training, sustainable professional development programs, and a shift in attitudes toward learners with special needs. Continuous support, ongoing evaluation, and further research are essential to ensure that inclusive education moves beyond formal policy statements and becomes a lived reality in classrooms. These insights emphasise the importance of developing comprehensive, practice-oriented strategies to strengthen the inclusive education system, particularly through improving pre-service teacher preparation and supporting educators throughout their professional journey.

2.2 Pre-Service Teacher Training for Inclusive Education

Teachers are the epicentre of the inclusion process hence pre-service teacher training is crucial for implementing inclusive practices successfully (Sharma et al., 2023). The training of pre-service teachers is a critical factor in developing the main competencies needed for implementing inclusive education policies effectively. This section focuses on the practical internships and inclusive education curriculum impact.

2.2.1 Practical Experiences Through Internships

Practical internships are essential because they help teachers apply theoretical knowledge to the classroom. Internships allow pre-service teachers to participate in a hands-on learning environment and implement inclusive practices in general education settings.

Petre et al. (2022) argue that internships help future teachers develop the skills and confidence needed to implement inclusive practices. The scholars conducted a study about the experiences of 12 Romanian pre-service teachers during their teaching practicum. The study examined the relationship between the theory learned during courses and the practical situation in educational institutions. They found that future teachers often face tricky challenges when applying theoretical knowledge in real classroom settings. This concerned pre-service teachers about inadequate training, difficulties in recruiting interns for teaching practicum during the COVID-19 pandemic, and different levels of support from mentors. Despite the challenges, pre-service teachers understood how valuable the internship is in closing the gap between theory and practice. The research concluded that practical training is crucial for professional competence development, but its effectiveness often depends on the quality of guidance from mentors and the availability of resources (Gurung & Kumar, 2023; Petre et al., 2022;).

In Malaysia, Chan et al. (2019) conducted research on the beliefs of Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) with 40 pre-service teachers regarding their teaching practice. Although their research was not specifically about inclusive education, it is important for this study as it reveals several barriers future teachers face during their internship. These include concerns about their teaching performance, uncertainty about classroom management, and difficulties of creating lesson plans. However, thanks to effective guidance from mentors and structured feedback from supervisors, and reflective practice, future teachers were able to gain a better teaching practice experience.

Furthermore, Mukhtar et al. (2018) also claim that future teachers benefit from “simulated teaching” and “micro-teaching” experiences. While simulated teaching provides a safe environment for a teacher to practice and refine their teaching skills before entering real classrooms, micro-teaching can serve as a “playground” for pre-service

teachers where they teach a lesson to their colleagues. This preparatory step helps reduce anxiety and build confidence to perform as a teacher. The researchers found that “teaching practicum should have a longer duration than two months” (p. 71). They also highlighted that it is crucial to introduce micro-teaching and simulated teaching earlier to make the teacher training program much more effective (Mukhtar et al., 2018).

2.2.2 Effectiveness of Inclusive Education Curriculum

The curriculum for inclusive education in pre-service teacher training programs is critical for building a strong knowledge foundation and a set of skills for diverse learners. Florian and Linklater (2010) and Loreman et al. (2010) point out best practices in designing the curricula for inclusive education for pre-service teachers, focusing on the need for comprehensive training that involves both theoretical and practical applications. A well-designed curriculum should include differentiated instruction, classroom management, and the use of assistive technologies.

While these useful recommendations were made, the current state of inclusive education curricula in such programs is not adequate. According to Ospanova et al. (2024), the mandatory course on inclusive education in Kazakhstani universities is insufficient in its current form. The course provides basic knowledge about inclusive education but fails to offer in-depth training to fully prepare the teachers. This barrier is also confirmed by Makoelle and Burmistrova (2021), who critique the current inclusive education curricula. They argue that the curricula must go beyond mere theoretical knowledge and actively engage pre-service teachers in hands-on experiences.

2.3 Theoretical Framework

Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) addresses teachers’ attitudes and behaviour towards inclusive education and its curriculum. Considering this theory as a foundation for knowledge is crucial because this framework suggests that if future teachers have a

positive attitude towards inclusive education and feel they can practice inclusion with confidence, they are likely to engage in inclusive teaching (Gilor & Katz, 2019; Schwab & Alnahdi, 2020). According to this theory, a person's intention to engage in a specific behaviour is influenced by three factors: attitudes towards the behaviour, the perception of social norms, and the sense of control over the behaviour (Gilor & Katz, 2019). This formed attitude towards the behaviour consequently leads individuals to the preparedness to teach inclusively.

Given its focus on the relationship between beliefs, intentions, and behaviour, the Theory of Planned Behaviour offers a valuable lens for exploring teacher preparedness for inclusive education.

The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) was used to investigate how the attitudes of future teachers towards inclusive education, the societal norms they experience, and their perceived capability to handle inclusive classrooms impact their intentions to embrace inclusive practices. This structure will aid in evaluating whether their confidence in their ability to implement inclusivity impacts their preparedness to teach inclusively.

TPB suggests that attitudes toward behaviour, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control collectively determine a person's intentions, which in turn predict actual behaviour. In this model, attitudes reflect a teacher's positive or negative evaluation of inclusive education, subjective norms include perceived social pressures (for example, expectations from peers, school administrators, or society) to adopt inclusive practices, and perceived behavioural control (PBC) reflects a teacher's belief in his or her ability and resources to teach inclusively. Importantly, TPB is considered to be the most likely predictor of intended behaviour, an advantage over simple models. In contexts where full control is unrealistic, the PBC component allows TPB to take into account external constraints on behaviour.

Recent empirical studies have confirmed the relevance of TPB in understanding teachers' intentions and behaviours regarding inclusive education.

Researchers have used the TPB extensively to investigate teachers' intentions toward inclusion. The model's components fit well with known factors that influence inclusive education. For example, a study by Yan and Sin (2014) suggests that attitudes toward inclusion are a strong predictor of intentions to teach inclusively. A large-scale study of 841 teachers in Hong Kong found that teachers with positive attitudes toward inclusive education were significantly more likely to plan to implement it. Similarly, complementary findings were reported by Yan and Sin (2014), who found that feeling social pressure from peers and the community to include all students significantly increased teachers' intentions to include. Finally, perceived behavioural control, which essentially is teachers' belief in their own preparedness and skills, was a significant predictor. Teachers who felt well-prepared and capable of delivering inclusive lessons reported higher intentions and were more likely to implement inclusive practices. In short, these studies support the basic TPB model: beliefs (attitudes, norms, control) determine intentions, which in turn motivate inclusive behaviour.

Similarly, Gilor and Katz (2019) surveyed 580 teachers trained in Israel using the TPB questionnaire. They found that attitudes toward inclusion, perceived social norms, and perceived competence explained most of the variance in future teachers' willingness to teach inclusive education. In other words, teachers who viewed inclusion positively, felt approved by others, and perceived competence were significantly more likely to plan inclusive lessons.

Building on these insights, this study adopts the TPB framework to examine how attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control influence pre-service teachers' readiness to implement inclusive practices.

The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) provides a useful lens for understanding how pre-service teachers form intentions to implement inclusive practices. According to TPB, three key components (attitudes toward inclusive education, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control) jointly influence a teacher's intention to act. Positive attitudes towards inclusion can be cultivated through coursework that emphasises diversity and highlights successful inclusive classrooms. Similarly, building strong subjective norms by creating a supportive professional environment, where inclusion is expected and valued, can reinforce pre-service teachers' motivation. Most critically, enhancing perceived behavioural control by offering opportunities for skill development and practice-based experiences strengthens the likelihood that intentions to teach inclusively will be enacted. As Gilor and Katz (2019) argue, TPB-informed interventions can effectively foster teachers' willingness and preparedness for inclusion.

Therefore, this study draws on TPB to explore how participants' attitudes, perceived social norms, and sense of control impact their readiness for inclusive education.

However, it is important to acknowledge that while TPB effectively predicts behavioural intentions, it may not fully capture actual teaching behaviours, particularly when systemic barriers to inclusion are present.

Summary

This chapter has provided a comprehensive exploration of the key themes and issues related to the readiness of future teachers for inclusive education in pre-service teacher training programs at universities in Kazakhstan. The literature review demonstrated that while Kazakhstan has made significant progress in promoting inclusive education through national policies and increasing awareness, practical challenges remain, particularly in the areas of teacher preparation, curriculum development, and resource availability.

On the global scale, inclusive education has been shaped by influential policies such as the Salamanca Statement and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. However, as scholars such as Schuelka and Johnstone (2012) and Armstrong et al. (2010) argue, policy effectiveness depends heavily on local adaptation to specific cultural, economic, and political contexts. Kazakhstan's efforts to implement inclusive education reflect these global trends but also reveal gaps that must be addressed to ensure meaningful inclusion.

The literature also highlights that pre-service teacher training is a crucial component for the successful implementation of inclusive practices. Practical experiences during internships and the structure of inclusive education curricula play decisive roles in building future teachers' confidence and competence. Although improvements such as increased enrollment in inclusive education courses and the integration of assistant teachers have been made, more systematic and practice-oriented training is needed to prepare teachers effectively.

The chapter additionally introduced the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) as the theoretical framework underpinning this study. TPB provides valuable insights into how attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control shape future teachers' intentions to engage in inclusive education. Recognising the interplay of these factors is essential for designing effective teacher preparation programs that foster readiness for inclusive practice.

In conclusion, while Kazakhstan has laid a strong foundation for the development of inclusive education, sustained efforts are required to overcome existing challenges. Strengthening curriculum content, enhancing internship quality, promoting mentorship, and fostering positive attitudes towards inclusion among pre-service teachers are crucial steps towards achieving more inclusive educational environments. These insights guide the

present study in exploring the preparedness of future teachers for inclusive education at a Kazakhstani university.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter outlines the methodological approach used to investigate pre-service teachers' preparedness for inclusive education. It is organised into five main sections: (1) research design, (2) research site, (3) data collection instruments, (4) data analysis procedures, and (5) ethical considerations. The study adopted a qualitative research methodology within a phenomenological framework, which is appropriate for capturing participants' lived experiences and personal interpretations. This approach enabled a deep exploration of the subjective meanings, challenges, and understandings that pre-service teachers attach to their inclusive education training. The following sections provide a detailed explanation of how participants were selected, how data were collected and analysed, and how ethical standards were upheld throughout the research process.

3.1 Research Design

This study aimed to explore the inclusive education preparedness of pre-service teachers at the universities of Kazakhstan. The study adopted a qualitative phenomenological research design to deeply understand the lived experiences of future teachers regarding their preparedness for inclusive education. Phenomenology was well-suited for this research as it enabled the investigator to thoroughly explore the individual experiences, beliefs, and attitudes of participants. This was crucial when analysing intricate and subjective concepts such as preparedness for inclusive teaching.

Phenomenological research design is a qualitative approach that explores one's lived experiences and perceptions about one phenomenon (Groenewald, 2004; Wilson, 2015).

Phenomenology is widely adopted in educational studies to explore the experiences and opinions of teachers and students (Moustakas, 1994). In the context of this study, it allowed for an in-depth investigation of participants' perspectives and challenges faced during their training. Arseven (2018) finds qualitative studies effective for pre-service

teacher education, especially school experience courses. Wu and Guerra (2017) also found this method beneficial because, through the qualitative content analysis, they found that reflective journals in preparing pre-service teachers are useful. It allows for a deep investigation of future teachers' experiences regarding inclusive education. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), qualitative research is a perfect choice to uncover how individuals interpret their lived experiences, which aligns with the purpose of the study. Therefore, qualitative methodology was appropriate for learning more about the readiness of pre-service teachers for inclusive education teacher training programs.

3.2 Research Site

The study was conducted at a Kazakhstani university in Astana, which was referred to in the study as University A. University A is a non-pedagogical university which has teacher training programs. The university was chosen as the research site due to the provision of inclusive education courses for the pedagogical programs. In addition, Astana was selected due to the researcher's proximity to the site, which facilitated easier access to participants, institutions, ensuring the efficient collection of high-quality data within the study's time and resource constraints. The programs' curriculum and practical training provided a relevant setting for exploring pre-service teachers' experiences of inclusive education in depth.

While there are no strict rules, the sample size of participants often ranges from 1 to 20, depending on the depth of data required (Subedi, 2021). Considering that, the number of participants was 8. To select participants, snowball sampling was used, where pre-teachers introduced the researcher to other teachers (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This method helped to find new participants at both universities who completed inclusive education courses and took part in teaching practicums.

3.3 Data Collection Instruments

Data collection was conducted using semi-structured interviews (See Appendix A, B, C, D), which are well-suited for phenomenological research as they follow an in-depth exploration of participants' experiences and opinions (Peters & Halcomb, 2015). This approach provided flexibility and adaptability, focusing on the research objectives; thus, this type is best suited for this study (Mashuri et al., 2022).

Each participant was interviewed individually in order to deep dive into participants' experiences and understandings of the pre-service teacher training program for inclusive education (Ryan et al., 2009). The interviews were designed to be flexible, with open-ended questions in Kazakh, English and Russian to allow participants to share their thoughts freely. Each interview lasted approximately 30-40 minutes and was audio-recorded with the participant's consent.

3.4 Data Analysis Procedure

Data analysis includes transcribing and arranging the data, reading the database, initial coding and grouping themes, presenting the data, and developing an interpretation of the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this study, a systematic and rigorous approach was followed to ensure the credibility and depth of the analysis process. Thematic analysis, following the inductive approach described by Braun and Clarke (2006), was employed to identify patterns and themes across the dataset. First, audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed verbatim to capture the participants' responses accurately. If necessary, the transcripts were also translated to maintain clarity and consistency across languages. Following transcription, the data were read multiple times in order to achieve a deep familiarity with the content, identify emerging patterns, and immerse fully in the participants' narratives.

Significant statements, keywords, and phrases that directly addressed the research questions were highlighted and manually coded. This initial coding involved categorising meaningful units of data that reflected similar ideas or experiences. The codes were then carefully reviewed and grouped into broader themes that captured the essence of the participants' insights. Special attention was paid to ensuring that these themes were grounded in the data rather than imposed by the researcher's preconceptions.

After the themes were established, they were synthesised and organised coherently to reflect the participants' diverse perspectives. A narrative description was developed, integrating rich, illustrative direct quotes from the participants to provide authenticity and strengthen the readers' understanding of the lived experiences discussed. These narratives are presented in the Findings chapter, offering a detailed portrayal of how the participants experienced and interpreted inclusive education during and after their university coursework. The process aimed not only to report the findings but also to interpret their meanings within the broader context of the research questions.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

This section describes the ethical considerations which are critical in qualitative research to protect the rights and well-being of participants. The first step was to request approval from the NUGSE Research Committee, which allowed the researcher to collect data. Participants of the study were provided with detailed information about the study, including its purpose, significance, potential benefits and risks.

Some participants may react to written consent unfavourably, preferring verbal consent and information (Lewis & Graham, 2007). Therefore, the written consent form was introduced for interested participants who voluntarily signed and confirmed their participation. 5 participants signed the consent, meanwhile 3 of 8 preferred to give their consent verbally.

The participants' identities are kept confidential. Pseudonyms are used in the transcript and reports in the Findings chapter to protect their identities. Furthermore, the university name, history, location and profile were omitted because it was important to ensure participant anonymity, prevent potential bias or judgment about the institution and its programs, and comply with ethical research standards (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Another crucial step is to highlight any potential risks of the study. If the participants felt uncomfortable during the interview, they could freely stop the interview. It was also included in the consent form. However, all the interviews were conducted with no stop successfully. The last step was to identify and mention any benefits. While there was no direct benefit for the participants, this study had recommendations and implications for the development of pre-service teacher training programs for inclusive education. As a token of appreciation, the participants were given a small present, which was a certificate to the store "Marvin". Some participants kindly refused to take the present.

Summary

In summary, this chapter provided an overview of the methodologies employed in the study, including the research design, data collection methods, participant selection, and data analysis procedures. These methods were carefully chosen to ensure a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the participants' experiences regarding their preparedness for inclusive education. Particular attention was given to maintaining ethical standards throughout the research process, including obtaining informed consent, ensuring confidentiality, and respecting the participants' rights and well-being. The methodological choices were aligned with the study's aim to capture authentic insights and produce credible and trustworthy findings. The next chapter will present and discuss the research findings, offering a detailed exploration of the key themes that emerged from the data.

Chapter 4: Findings

This chapter presents the research findings of the study, which investigates the experiences of eight pre-service teachers enrolled at one university in Astana, Kazakhstan, focusing on their engagement with the theory and practice of inclusive education. The findings are based on the analysis of in-depth, semi-structured interviews conducted with these participants, providing detailed insights into their perceptions and experiences. Thematic analysis was employed to systematically code and interpret the data, resulting in the generation of five major themes. These themes capture critical aspects of the participants' experiences, including their conceptual understandings of inclusive education, their perceptions of the course content and its relevance, their practical experiences during internships, their perceived level of preparedness for implementing inclusive practices, and the significant role that mentorship played in shaping their confidence and competence. Together, these themes offer a comprehensive view of how pre-service teachers navigate the challenges and opportunities associated with inclusive education during their training.

4.2 Participants' Profiles

Eight participants, two male and six female, who, at the time of the interviews, were between their second and fourth year of study, participated in this research study. Students in their first year were not considered because the inclusive education course is offered only from the second year onwards. The participants represented various stages in their academic journeys as well as a range of academic programs within the teacher training faculty. They were enrolled in different specialisations, including English, Math, Physics, Kazakh, Russian, and Primary Education programs, which provided a broad perspective on the preparation for inclusive education across disciplines.

An overview of the participants' demographic and academic profiles is presented in Table 1. This table summarises their academic programs, year of study, and type of internship experience they had undertaken at the time of the interviews. As shown in Table 1, the participants had completed different types of practicum experiences, including pedagogical practice, psychological-pedagogical practice, and pre-diploma practice, depending on their year and program of study. These diverse backgrounds allowed for a richer and more comprehensive understanding of their perceptions and experiences related to inclusive education.

Table 1

Participants' Profiles

Participant	Program	Year of Study	Internship Experience
A	English Teacher Training	3 rd year	Pedagogical practice
B	Math Teacher Training	3 rd year	Pedagogical practice
C	Physics Teacher Training	2 nd year	Psychological-pedagogical practice
D	Kazakh Teacher Training	3 rd year	Pedagogical practice
E	Russian Teacher Training	3 rd year	Pedagogical practice
F	Primary Education	3 rd year	Pedagogical practice
G	Math Teacher Training	2 nd year	Psychological-pedagogical practice

H	Physics Teacher Training	4 th year	Pre-diploma practice
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4.3 Understanding and Conceptualisation of Inclusive Education by Pre-Service Teachers

The study shows how these participating pre-service teachers understand and conceptualise inclusive education. A deep analysis of the interviews revealed that most participants understand inclusive education as providing equal opportunities for all learners, regardless of their abilities, characteristics, or background. The participants emphasise the significance of an individual approach to each student and see inclusion as not only an educational but also a social aspect.

4.3.1 Definition and Conceptualisation of Inclusive Education

Most participants provided various definitions of inclusive education. They see inclusion in a broad context, including not only children with disabilities but also gifted students, orphans, and immigrants. At the same time, their responses also reflected conceptualisations, which can be understood as broader interpretations linking inclusive education to principles such as equity, social inclusion, and individualised support. This demonstrates a deep perception of the concept and definition of inclusive education as a means of ensuring equity in education. For instance, Participant A defines inclusive education as “An opportunity to provide equal education for all learners. It’s not only about children with disabilities, but also orphans or immigrants. We should not limit the definition only to children with special needs.” Similarly, for Participant B, inclusive education means “ensuring every child, regardless of their needs, can receive equally high-quality education.”

Based on their responses, it can be seen that the participants demonstrate an understanding of inclusive education as a comprehensive process aimed at creating equal opportunities for all categories of learners.

Some participants emphasised the need to individualise the educational process, taking the characteristics and needs of each child into consideration. For example, Participant D shared that, “Inclusive education is not just about teaching all children in one classroom, but also about creating conditions for each to develop according to their abilities.” Meanwhile, some participants expressed doubts about the universality of inclusive practices, noting possible challenges for children with SEN: “I think it is not necessary to put students with SEN into one classroom because it would affect their mental health” (Participant C).

Thus, there is a diversity of opinions on the implementation of inclusive education, which underlines the importance of flexible approaches in its implementation.

Some participants see the goals of inclusive education in both educational and social aspects. On the one hand, inclusion is seen as a way of social integration, as this participant states: “Inclusion is necessary so that children with different abilities learn to respect and interact with each other” (Participant F). On the other hand, participants clarify the educational goals of inclusive education: “The main goal of inclusive education is to ensure quality education for everyone, regardless of how quickly they absorb materials” (Participant G).

Therefore, participants recognise the dual nature of inclusive education, encompassing both social and educational aspects.

4.4 Views Regarding the Inclusive Education Course

This section examines how future teachers perceive and evaluate inclusive education courses. The participants shared their views on the content of the courses, their

significance, and impact on the preparation for teaching in inclusive classrooms. The analysis revealed conflicting opinions, which allows for a deeper look at key aspects of the educational process.

4.4.1 Positive View on the Course

Data reveals that most participants noted that the inclusive education course helped them realise the importance of this topic and expanded their knowledge of working with children with special educational needs. To be more specific, Participant D shared, “The course gave me a general understanding of what inclusive education means. Now I know that every child has the right to receive equal opportunities.” Participant F shared about the content of the course: “We discussed strategies for inclusive teaching during the course. Although there wasn’t much practical experience, it was still useful to understand the theory.” Participant B deeply understands the importance of having an inclusive education course at university, “I think inclusive education should be part of every teacher’s preparation. It’s crucial for understanding how to support all students in the classroom.”

4.4.2 Critical Perception of the Course and Identified Shortcomings

Despite the positive feedback from most participants, some of them pointed out the significant disadvantages of the course, mainly related to the lack of practical classes and in-depth discussion of the complex cases.

Participant A revealed honest feedback, saying that “Honestly, I did not enjoy the course very much because it focused mostly on theory. We had lectures and seminars, but there weren’t enough open discussions or practical sessions.” Participant E also shared an opinion, “The course was interesting but too theoretical. I would have liked more real-life examples and practical tasks to see how it all works in practice.” In the same way, Participant B pointed out the absence of core knowledge and the necessity to learn from experience: Before the course, I had never heard the term inclusive education. The course

provided some basic knowledge, but I believe more practical lessons were needed to deepen our understanding.”

4.4.3 Suggestions for Improving the Course

The participants proposed several ideas for the improvement of the course to make it more practice-oriented and useful for future educational activities for future educators. Their recommendations emphasise the need for the active involvement of the course teacher, the use of a variety of lesson formats and the provision of opportunities for practical experience. First, Participant A shared, “I would like the teacher to be more involved in the course. It would be great if the classes took place in a different format, such as debates and practical seminars.”

Secondly, the need for real-world case studies and practical situations is emphasised. The participants think that this will help to understand how to apply theory in practice much better: “More real-life examples and practical scenarios are needed. It would also be helpful if the invited experts- experienced teachers with experience in inclusive education- shared their work strategies” (Participant G).

Another reason for Participant G pointing out the importance of inviting experienced teachers is indicated in Participant H’s suggestion as well: “More structured mentoring and the opportunity to observe experienced teachers would be very helpful. It would be an invaluable experience to see how experienced teachers work in practice.”

4.5 The Experience of Implementing Inclusive Education Practices During Internships

The interview analysis reports that the experience of introducing inclusive education into teaching practice has had both difficulties and successes. Future teachers faced various challenges, and solving them led them to discover important aspects of inclusive learning.

4.5.1 Positive and Negative Experiences

Some participants noted the overall positive experience of working in inclusive classrooms. This experience has contributed to their professional growth and allowed them to see the value of inclusive education in practice:

Yes, in one of my internship schools, there was a student with a hearing impairment. The teacher used visual aids and sign language interpreters, but I noticed that the student still struggled to keep up. It made me realise that inclusion goes beyond just having a student in the classroom; it requires careful planning and continuous support.

(Participant H)

Careful preparation and ongoing support are necessary to create the conditions for the full engagement of students. Participant H's comment shows that the mere presence of students with special needs in the classroom does not make it inclusive.

However, despite the positive aspects, some participants faced several obstacles related to classroom management and the adaptation of educational materials, which is reflected in Participant F's experience:

One major challenge was adapting my lesson plans for students with different learning needs. There were a few students in my class who required additional support, and I struggled to balance my attention between them and the rest of the class. I realised that inclusive teaching requires a lot of planning and adaptation, which I wasn't fully trained for.

Participant F tried his best to apply the knowledge he acquired to real-life practice, but still, his response is the best example to understand that when it comes to managing classrooms with different educational needs, the teacher requires a high level of readiness and flexibility. Thus, as shown in some participants' responses, pre-service teachers lack

the practical skills necessary to effectively conduct classes in inclusive classrooms. Here, the experience of Participant G is worth mentioning:

Classroom management is a big concern. Ensuring that all students are engaged while meeting the needs of those who require additional support can be difficult. I also worry about how to fairly assess students with different abilities while maintaining academic standards.

Participant G's concern about this matter points out the need to develop clear assessment strategies that consider individual student characteristics while maintaining academic standards.

4.5.2 Influence of Mentorship on Practical Implementation of Inclusion

Mentor support played a vital role in shaping pre-service teachers' readiness for inclusive teaching. From the perspective of participants, the lack of mentors or structured help often caused confusion and insecurity among pre-service teachers. Participant G answered the question about readiness:

Not entirely. I think I would need more hands-on experience to feel confident. Understanding inclusive education in theory is one thing, but applying it effectively is another. I would need mentorship and structured support in my early years of teaching.

Participant D also notes: "Having an experienced teacher to observe and learn from would have provided practical insights that no book could offer." Therefore, mentoring and structured support ensure not only the transfer of knowledge but also the formation of practical skills and strategies necessary for successful work in inclusive classrooms.

4.6 Readiness of Pre-Service Teachers to Practice Inclusive Education when they Graduate

The data analysis shows that pre-service teachers' perception of their readiness to implement inclusive education varies depending on their practical and educational

experience, emotional readiness, as well as external factors, including school support and the presence of a mentor.

4.6.1 Perceived Readiness

Despite a basic understanding of the concept of inclusive education, the study participants show differences regarding their preparedness for the practical implementation of inclusive practices. Most participants say that theoretical knowledge is not sufficient without practical experience. For example, Participant C says:

Since the course focused mostly on the theoretical part, I cannot say I am ready for 100% because I have not applied it in practice yet. But I think when I am a teacher, I will try to remember everything I learned throughout the course and take inclusivity into account.

Participant C's response highlights the common concern for prospective teachers – the course is limited to theory without the possibility to experience how it can be applied in practice. A similar view was shared by Participant F:

I feel partially prepared. I understand the concept and the importance of inclusion, but in a real classroom setting, I think it would be challenging. Managing diverse learning needs, especially without prior experience, can be overwhelming. I would have liked more practical sessions to help us develop strategies for engaging all students effectively.

As Participant E further summarised on the broader demands of inclusive teaching by stating: "If we evaluate readiness, I would say that in the early stages, since it will be difficult for any teacher." Together, these responses suggest that even when pre-service teachers hold a positive view of inclusive education, they still feel unprepared to implement it in real classroom contexts. This highlights the importance of incorporating more practice-based components into teacher preparation programs to strengthen readiness and confidence.

4.6.2 Factors Influencing Readiness

When identifying possible factors that affect perceived readiness, participants listed several key dimensions, such as infrastructure and support, emotional readiness, and mentorship experience. Participant A underlines the need for organised support:

Based on the theoretical knowledge, if there is an inclusive child in the classroom ... the level of inclusivity of a child has to be not very high, he has to be able to listen to the teacher...however in some cases, there has to be an assistant teacher because when the teacher is conducting a lesson..., the assistant teacher has to work along with the teacher. ... If a school can provide such a condition, I don't mind teaching that student. ... I have nothing against teaching that child if the school provides all the necessary conditions.

The response indicates that teachers' readiness for teaching in an inclusive classroom mostly depends on whether the educational institution can facilitate the required resources. In the absence of such resources, potential teachers are unsure about how to manage inclusive classrooms effectively. Besides external support, emotional readiness also plays an important role, thinks Participant B:

I think a teacher should be prepared emotionally for teaching inclusive education. If I were to scale myself in this matter, I would say 3 out of 5. Because it requires a lot of preparation, since physics is not an easy subject.

In addition to practical experience, participants mentioned mentorship and direction. Participant D commented on this, saying that, "I think it would be easier if there was a mentor or an experienced teacher who could show you how to adapt the lessons." In Participant D's opinion, an effective mentoring system can increase the confidence of young professionals. In the responders' experience, there was some concern related to the help from the mentor:

But from these people, to be honest, there is no support. Their help sounds as if it says, “Figure it out yourself.” I mean, I am teaching that mentor’s class, so I wish they could have helped. I wish they could have given me some description of the students’ characteristics. Because it is challenging to get to know students in such a short time. I think the responsibility of the mentor should be the same as that of the pre-service teacher. In my case, unfortunately, that person could not support me in gaining confidence as a future teacher.

Other participants expressed their worries about issues with class management, where support from a mentor could have been helpful. For instance, Participant G states:

Classroom management is a big concern. Ensuring that all students are engaged while meeting the needs of those who require additional support can be difficult. I also worry about how to fairly assess students with different abilities while maintaining academic standards.

This idea is also supported by Participant H: “It made me realise that inclusion goes beyond just having a student in the classroom; it requires careful planning and continuous support.”

Therefore, the responses show that future teachers should possess not only theoretical knowledge but also highly developed management abilities, as well as the ability to plan and adapt to diverse educational contexts.

4.7 Matching Theoretical Knowledge of Inclusive Education with Practical Experience

Effective inclusive education requires not only the development of theoretical concepts but also their application in practice. However, an analysis of the interviews revealed a significant gap between the university training of future teachers and their actual work experience in inclusive classrooms. Many participants noted that the training

was mostly theoretical, and they did not feel fully prepared to work with children with special educational needs.

Nevertheless, some participants pointed to successful cases of theory integration into practice, such as situational tasks, examples of adaptation of educational material and discussion of specific cases. This confirms the need for a balanced approach that combines academic learning with practical training.

4.7.1 Gap Between Theory and Practice

Many participants noted a significant gap between the theoretical knowledge about inclusive education acquired at the university and practical work skills. According to them, the training courses turned out to be overloaded with abstract information and did not provide an opportunity to apply this knowledge in practice. For example, Participant B directly pointed out the lack of practical training: “We spent much time on the theoretical part, but applying the knowledge into practice took little time, which was not enough” (Participant B). Participant A expressed similar disappointment, acknowledging, “I cannot say I enjoyed it much. Because the focus was mostly on the theoretical part.” As a result of such training, future educators did not feel confident in real classrooms. As Participant C frankly admitted: “Since the course focused mostly on the theoretical part, I cannot say I am ready for 100% because I have not applied it into practice yet.”

These evidences show that the predominance of theory without practice leaves students insufficiently prepared to work in an inclusive environment.

4.7.2 Examples of Effective Integration of Theory into Practice

Despite the difficulties noted, some participants provided positive examples of the application of theoretical knowledge in practice. For example, Participant B realised the value of the information he received during the course when he encountered different levels of student training during the internship: “I did not realise the importance of IE

before the course, I realised that when I had an internship at school since the levels and needs of students were different.”

In addition, Participant C emphasised that during his studies, he had mastered specific techniques for working with different student needs: “We learned about the methods of how to teach in an inclusive classroom, the co-teaching method, and individual learning plans. Also, to engage them in the lesson using various games.”

Having acquired the first pedagogical skills, future teachers are ready to apply the theory they have mastered. As Participant A noted, having acquired a basic understanding of inclusive education, he will enthusiastically transfer this knowledge to work: “In the future, I would gladly apply in practice the knowledge I received.”

Thus, individual graduates demonstrate the ability and willingness to integrate theoretical knowledge into real pedagogical situations, turning the learned concepts of inclusive learning into effective practice.

4.8 Implications for Educational Policy

The experiences and perceptions of prospective teachers are paramount in informing educational policy and shaping teacher preparation programs, particularly in the area of inclusive education. Reflection and assessment by them incorporate the actual needs and concerns associated with the delivery of inclusive practice, enabling them to identify the necessary changes at the system level to enhance the quality of inclusive education. Based on this, the next section provides recommendations for strengthening education policy and teacher preparation programs.

Recommendations For Educational Policy

Many participants emphasised the need to support inclusive education at the school and education system levels. In particular, they noted that for the successful education of

children with special educational needs, schools should provide special conditions, additional staff and resources. As one of the participants said:

If there is such a child in my classroom, then depending on the development level of the student, if there are assistant teachers, speech therapists and psychologists at school, if a school can provide such a condition, I don't mind teaching that student. I mean, inclusive children have the right to get an equal education like other children (Participant A).

Thus, future teachers recommend that the level of educational policy provide for teaching assistants, defectologists and psychologists in schools where children with disabilities study, to ensure the realisation of every child's right to education on an equal basis with others.

In addition, recommendations were made related to the formation of an inclusive culture in schools and changing the attitude of teachers towards students with special needs. One of the participants shared an instance when a school teacher openly preferred not to work with a class with several weak students, demonstrating a pessimistic attitude:

"She did not show any motivation, hope or belief towards those students"
(Participant A).

Such observations lead participants to believe that changes are needed at the level of policy and school leadership: teachers should be encouraged to have a positive attitude towards all students, regardless of their abilities, and mentors should be provided to support young teachers in learning the principles of inclusive learning.

Some participants expressed doubts about the expediency of fully including all children with special needs in general education classes without taking into account individual characteristics. For example, one participant noted that without proper conditions, such integration can negatively affect the emotional state of special needs

children themselves: “I think it is not necessary to put students with SEN into one classroom because it would affect their mental health” (Participant C).

This indicates the need for a balanced approach in educational policy – the creation of flexible models of inclusive learning, providing for both co-education and special classes or resource rooms to meet the needs of all students. In general, the participants’ recommendations for educational policy are to ensure the necessary conditions and support in schools, as well as to work on the attitude of teachers and structural aspects of the implementation of inclusive education.

Suggestions For Improving Teacher Training Programs

Pre-service teachers agree that teacher training programs should be improved to meet the requirements of inclusive learning. One of the most frequent recommendations is to increase the proportion of practical exercises and practice in real conditions. The participants noted that the current training is too theoretical, which makes them not feel fully prepared to work in an inclusive classroom. One participant shared: “We spent much time on the theoretical part, but applying the knowledge into practice ... took little time, which was not enough” (Participant B).

Another participant directly pointed out what was missing in the training course: “I think to improve that basic knowledge, there would have been more practical lessons, too” (Participant B).

These statements reflect a request to increase the number of workshops, internships, and case studies in the program—forms of education that allow pre-service teachers to practice working with different children. In addition to building up the practical component, the participants suggest making the inclusive education training courses themselves more interactive and oriented towards student engagement. One of the participants pointed out the lack of variety of teaching methods and the livelier

participation of the course teacher. She noted: “I would like the instructor to guide us on how to work with students. I would like the course to have various format lessons, such as debates, for example” (Participant A).

This indicates the need to move away from monotonous lectures in favour of interactive formats – discussions, role–playing games, and situation analysis – where future teachers could participate more actively and gain a deeper understanding of the importance of inclusive education. It is also important that university teachers themselves show more enthusiasm and personal involvement and serve as a model for inclusive practice. As the same participant noted, in her course, the teacher did not encourage free discussion of students’ ideas: “The teacher doesn’t say ‘your idea is good, let’s consider it, too,’ ... does not listen to students and consider thoughts or ideas” (Participant A).

From this experience, she concludes that there is a need for a more open dialogue in the audience. As part of improving teacher training, the participants recommend that university teachers listen to students’ opinions, encourage the exchange of ideas, and jointly seek solutions. This experience of discussion and collaboration will be useful to them later in school when working in an inclusive environment.

Finally, some participants emphasised that the foundations of inclusive education should be an integral part of the training of every teacher, regardless of subject specialisation. The future teacher should receive high-quality knowledge and skills to work with different children. As Participant A aptly noted: “...any pre-service teacher, regardless of the subject, should be provided with quality knowledge”.

Summary

These findings show that even if students who are preparing to be teachers recognise the principles of inclusive education, many of them still feel unprepared due to the lack of practical experience and mentorship. Key recommendations indicate

strengthening educational policy through providing university programs with resources, initiating positive attitudes among students, and improving the teacher training programs, considering the opportunity of improving the practicum as well. Solving the gap between theory and practice plays a vital role in training high-quality teachers working in inclusive classrooms.

Chapter 5: Discussion

This chapter critically discusses the study's findings regarding pre-service teachers' readiness for inclusive education in Kazakhstan. The analysis is framed using the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), which helps interpret how participants' attitudes, social norms, and perceived behavioural control influenced their preparedness for inclusive teaching. The discussion is organised into three main areas: (1) Readiness of pre-service teachers for inclusive education, (2) Challenges in bridging theory and practice, (3) The role of mentorship and support systems.

The findings are compared with existing literature and interpreted through the lens of TPB to highlight agreements, contradictions, and implications for improvement.

5.1 Readiness of Pre-Service Teachers for Inclusive Education

The findings suggest that Kazakhstani pre-service teachers feel only partially prepared to implement inclusive education. Participants reported gaining basic theoretical knowledge from their coursework (e.g. an "Inclusive Education" course) but had minimal practical exposure to students with special needs during training. This is in line with the findings of Kudarinova et al. (2023), who observed that Kazakhstani teacher education programs often fall short in equipping future teachers with the practical competencies required for inclusive practice. Their study emphasised that effective inclusive teaching requires not only theoretical knowledge but also a "wide range of personal characteristics, as well as pedagogical and psychological readiness" (p. 145). In other words, teachers need competencies like patience, adaptability, and confidence to address diverse learners' needs. This study confirms that many pre-service teachers have begun developing such competencies, for example, recognising the need to differentiate instruction, but it also exposes gaps in their confidence and practical readiness.

Participants in this study defined inclusive education in broad terms, extending beyond disabilities to include “orphan students... immigrants... genius children.” This understanding reflects Kazakhstan’s national policy emphasis on inclusive access for all learners (GEM Report, 2020). The fact that pre-service teachers expressed this comprehensive view suggests that the course successfully conveyed core values of inclusion.

The findings further show that many participants emphasised the importance of planning lessons based on students’ individual needs and capacities. These reflections demonstrate a positive attitude toward inclusive education, one of the central components of the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). However, several participants also expressed uncertainty about their ability to implement inclusive practices in real classrooms. According to TPB, this reflects low perceived behavioural control, which may weaken their intention to act inclusively even when attitudes are supportive.

Several participants rated their preparedness modestly (e.g., “3 out of 5”), voicing concerns about managing real classroom challenges such as behaviour issues or differentiated instruction. Previous studies have similarly found that positive beliefs about inclusion do not always translate into implementation confidence (O’Toole & Burke, 2013).

According to TPB, a person’s intention to perform a behaviour (like inclusive teaching) is influenced by their attitudes and their perceived behavioural control – that is, their confidence in having the skills and opportunities to carry it out. In this study, the pre-service teachers’ attitudes toward inclusive education were largely supportive, especially after taking the course and experiencing internships, which is a promising foundation. Indeed, some studies (Ahsan & Sharma, 2018; Laranjeira et al., 2022) assert that teacher preparedness is a “vital factor” for the success of inclusion and that positive belief in

inclusion is necessary for its implementation. Yet, the participants' mixed self-assessments of readiness are shown by their being unsure how well they could manage a real-life inclusive classroom. This nuance moment is critical, it confirms the research outcomes found by Makoelle and Burmistrova (2021) that teacher education institutions have not yet achieved graduating confident, ready-for-inclusion teachers. The findings of the study show that the current pre-service teachers with the practical competence or self-efficacy, which is a TPB-linked trait, needed for inclusive practice. In conclusion, the preparedness of pre-service teachers in this case is a work in progress, which portrays the elements of cautious optimism layered by practical skill deficits.

5.2 Challenges in Bridging Theory and Practice

A prominent theme from the study is the gap between the theory taught in university courses and the realities of teaching practice. Participants commonly noted that their inclusive education coursework was heavy on theory – definitions, legislation, general principles – but offered limited opportunities to apply these concepts in authentic settings. These reflections illustrate the classic theory-practice divide: knowledge acquired in isolation may not translate into action without guided practice. Unfortunately, this divide is not unique to Kazakhstan. For example, in Australia, Sharma et al. (2023, p. 1102) observe that “universities often struggle to translate theory of inclusive education into real life practices for pre-service teachers”.

From a TPB perspective, this gap is significant. Even when pre-service teachers hold positive attitudes towards inclusion, which many participants in this study did, their perceived behavioural control may still be low. In other words, they may lack confidence in their ability to apply what they have learned. When pre-service teachers are not given adequate opportunities to practice inclusive strategies, their intention to implement these strategies in the future is weakened. According to TPB, intention is more likely to lead to

action when individuals believe they have both the necessary skills and the support to carry out the behaviour.

Another issue highlighted by participants was the short length and format of the inclusive education course. At the university, the course lasted only several weeks (seven weeks) and followed a conventional lecture format throughout the course. Participants felt this was inadequate to internalise and apply inclusive teaching methods. They suggested improvements like having “more open discussions”, varied lesson formats such as debates, workshops, and especially dedicating time to “adapting the theory into their subject” by practicing lesson planning for diverse learners (Participant A). In essence, they were eager for experiential learning to complement the theory. This feedback is related to contemporary approaches in teacher education that emphasise experiential components – for example, service-learning, simulations, or guided teaching practice – as ways to connect theory to practice (Resch & Schritteser, 2023). Without such components, pre-service teachers may leave university with inclusive education ideals but little idea how to enact them once they face a crowded, heterogeneous classroom. The findings thus support the argument that initial teacher education must balance knowledge and skills. As Sharma et al. (2023) put it, universities should “co-design and co-teach” inclusive education courses with school partners to ensure relevance and practical skill development.

The lack of authentic practice opportunities not only limits skill development but also affects pre-service teachers’ confidence (perceived behavioural control in TPB terms). Several participants shared that without having tried inclusive strategies in a real classroom, they felt unsure about managing certain challenges – for example, differentiating a physics lesson for a visually impaired student or handling disruptive behaviour from a student with emotional difficulties. It shows that even when attitudes

toward inclusion are positive, low perceived self-efficacy can hinder the intention to implement inclusive practices (Laranjeira et al., 2022).

Another important point that some participants observed was the incompatibility between what they learned about inclusion and what they saw in schools. For instance, Participant A recalled that during an internship, the school's classes were stratified by academic performance, and a mentor teacher advised interns to avoid the lower-performing group as it would be "easier" to work with higher performers. This runs directly counter to inclusive philosophy, which would instead seek to support the weaker students rather than marginalise them (Sheeran et al., 2007). Such experiences can create confusion or cognitive dissonance for pre-service teachers; the theory advocated inclusion, but the practice in the field did not always mirror it. If the *subjective norm* (another TPB component) in schools does not favour inclusion, it can weaken novice teachers' resolve to apply inclusive methods (Yan & Sin, 2015). In some cases, Participant A noted, "there was hope for the students with lower performance" despite the mentor's low expectations, but the incident underscores how crucial it is to align theory and practice. A disconnect sends mixed messages to trainees about whether inclusive education is truly valued or merely rhetoric. This gap between theory and actual school practice has been observed in post-Soviet contexts, and it highlights the need for systemic change so that pre-service internships reinforce rather than contradict inclusive principles (Makeolle & Burmistrova, 2021).

5.3 Mentorship and Support

Mentorship emerged in the findings as a key factor in pre-service teacher readiness for inclusive education. Some participants spoke positively about their mentors, noting that clear explanations, guidance on procedures, and consistent feedback were helpful during their teaching practice. These experiences contributed to a greater sense of confidence and

preparedness for inclusive teaching. Other participants, however, encountered mentors who showed limited engagement with inclusive values. In several cases, mentors avoided working with students who had learning difficulties or failed to model inclusive strategies. This created confusion for the trainees and left them feeling unsupported and uncertain about how to apply what they had learned. This reflects what Petre et al. (2022) mentioned, “professional development that creates the environment wherein students practice teaching methods, strategies, and techniques learned in theory under the mentors’ guidance and receive feedback for improvement”. When mentorship was present and positive, participants felt more prepared to apply their inclusive education training in practice, thus, “recruiting best schools and mentors is essential” (as cited in Petre et al., 2022, p. 199). When pre-service teachers have the chance to observe inclusive methods in real classrooms and receive guidance while practising those methods, it enhances both their practical skills and their confidence. These two elements are central to what the Theory of Planned Behaviour refers to as perceived behavioural control. In this study, participants who received strong support from mentors expressed a greater willingness to teach inclusively in the future. This shows that mentorship plays a direct role in strengthening a teacher’s intention to act inclusively.

On the other hand, the study also found cases where mentorship and support were lacking or even counterproductive. As mentioned, Participant A encountered another mentor teacher resistant to working with lower-performing students, demonstrating a dismissive attitude toward struggling learners. Additionally, a few participants implied that while they had general support in their internship, for classroom management or planning in general, they did not receive specific guidance on inclusive practices, likely because many mentors themselves had limited experience with inclusive education. Gurung and Kumar (2023) note that we need to “have a closer look at mentoring and how it can be

maximised for effective inclusive education,” exploring ways to better prepare pre-service teachers and support in-service teachers through mentoring (p. 220). In the context of this study, their insight reinforces the finding that mentorship is not just a helpful addition to teacher training but a critical component that significantly shapes whether inclusive teaching practices are likely to be adopted. When pre-service teachers are placed with mentors who lack inclusive teaching skills, the opportunities for modelling inclusive approaches, giving feedback, and reinforcing inclusive values are lost. This is particularly concerning given that, under the Theory of Planned Behaviour, perceived behavioural control and subjective norms both influence whether new teachers intend to practice inclusion. If mentors dismiss inclusion or avoid struggling students, they signal that inclusion is neither valued nor expected in real classrooms. This weakens novice teachers’ confidence and undermines the inclusive mindset universities try to develop. In Kazakhstan’s context, this could involve providing mentors with training on inclusive strategies or pairing pre-service teachers with teachers who have experience or professional development in inclusive education. Otherwise, the burden falls entirely on the university coursework, and interns may not see inclusive techniques modelled during their school practice.

Summary

In conclusion, this study focused on pre-service teachers at one university in Astana and highlighted that the teachers generally had positive attitudes toward inclusive education, but their readiness to implement inclusive practices was limited by several factors. They had inadequate practical experience, a persistent gap between theory and practice, as well as uneven quality of mentorship during their internship. Adopting the Theory of Planned Behaviour as a theoretical framework, the research demonstrates how attitudes alone are insufficient; perceived control over behaviours, as well as social norms,

are instrumental for determining whether pre-service teachers are set to apply inclusion practices to their classrooms. The findings highlight that the development of confident teachers goes beyond strong foundations in theory, while a genuine, supported application of those principles within real-life classroom settings is equally important.

The final chapter concludes the research by summing up its overall limitations, implications and recommendations for policy, practice and research as well as personal reflection on thesis writing process.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

This chapter concludes the research by summarising key findings and highlighting key implications for policy, practice, and future research. The purpose of the study was to investigate the readiness of pre-service teachers to implement inclusive education. The focus was on their understanding, practice experiences, and opinions about IE. The research answered the following questions: (1) *How do pre-service teachers at one university in Kazakhstan understand and conceptualise inclusive education?* (2) *What are the perceptions and attitudes of pre-service teachers at university toward the inclusive education courses within their teacher education program?* (3) *In what ways do pre-service teachers at university feel prepared or unprepared to implement inclusive education in their future classrooms, and what factors contribute to these feelings?* (4) *How do pre-service teachers at university describe their experiences of implementing inclusive education practices during their teaching internships in Kazakhstani schools?* (5) *How do pre-service teachers at university perceive the alignment between the inclusive education theories presented in their coursework and the realities they encounter during their internship experiences?* (6) *What implications do the experiences and perceptions of these pre-service teachers have for educational policy, teacher education practices, and future research on inclusive education in Kazakhstan?*

The study involved eight pre-service teachers, with whom semi-structured interviews were conducted. The data were analysed using a phenomenological approach. During the study, these main findings were identified: firstly, the participants understand inclusive education as a social and pedagogical goal; secondly, university courses, despite the presence of theoretical knowledge, lack a practical focus; thirdly, emotional and institutional support (especially from mentors) affects the sense of readiness; Finally, the

gap between theory and practice. School practice weakens the general preparation of students. In the next section, the limitations and practical conclusions of the study are presented below.

6.2 Limitations

The study has two main limitations. One of the limitations concerns the translation of interviews from Kazakh and Russian into English, which may have led to the loss of some subtle semantic nuances and culturally specific expressions. Although careful measures were taken to enhance the accuracy of the translation process, including reverse translation and validation checks, it is acknowledged that some depth of meaning may have been inadvertently altered or simplified. As a result, the interpretation of participants' experiences might not fully capture the richness and complexity of their original narratives.

In addition, another limitation relates to the timing of data collection. The data were gathered only at a single point along the participants' educational journeys, specifically during their pre-service teacher training period. Therefore, the findings primarily reflect the participants' early perceptions, conceptual understanding, and self-assessed readiness to implement inclusive practices. These early reflections may differ considerably from their future attitudes and practices once they enter the professional teaching workforce and gain real classroom experience. A longitudinal study that follows these pre-service teachers into their initial years of professional practice would offer deeper insights into how their conceptualisations of inclusive education evolve and how theoretical knowledge is translated into practical application over time. Such an approach could strengthen the understanding of how teacher preparation impacts long-term professional development and inclusive practice implementation.

6.3 Implications and Recommendations for Policy

The findings of the study indicate the need to revise the educational policy of teachers for Inclusive Education, particularly at the national (Ministry of Education) level. First, it is necessary to provide permanent institutional support: compulsory inclusion courses must not only be formal, but also substantive, with a mandatory practice-oriented component. Increasing the duration of such courses, the introduction of practical tasks, case studies and practices significantly increases the level of training of students.

Secondly, it is necessary to reform the personnel distribution system: the state program should provide for the presence of assistants, school psychologists, speech therapists and speech therapists in general education schools, especially those designated as inclusive. This will remove part of the burden on teachers and create a sustainable ecosystem for supporting students with special educational needs.

Thirdly, it is necessary to regulate the quality of mentoring activities at the state level: when appointing mentors to students in practice, a mandatory criterion should be the selection of experienced teachers trained in inclusive strategies. In addition, it is important to encourage the participation of inclusive-oriented schools in the student placement system.

6.4 Implications and Recommendations for Practice

At a practical level, the study revealed a series of gaps that could be eliminated through specific steps. First of all, university teachers need to revise the methodology of teaching inclusive education disciplines. Courses should be based on interactive formats: teamwork, project learning, solving a practical situation, role-playing games and using real-life examples from school practice, discussing case studies. Involving practitioners and graduates with experience in inclusive education can strengthen the relationship between theory and reality.

School experience also needs modernization. It is necessary not only to send students to school, but also to purposefully organise their participation in inclusive classes, where they can observe, participate in teaching and receive constructive feedback. In this sense, mentoring should be an informal application, but a systemic development tool.

In addition, it is worth paying attention to the emotional readiness of students. Creating a favourable environment in universities, implementing control and discussing the personal problems of future teachers will significantly increase their confidence and readiness to work in an inclusive environment.

6.5 Implications and Recommendations for Research

This study contributes to the growing body of literature on inclusive education in Central Asia by highlighting the micro-level processes involved in teacher education in Kazakhstan. It offers insights into the readiness of pre-service teachers for inclusive education and underscores the importance of strengthening teacher training programs to promote inclusive practices. However, to fully understand how teacher competencies develop and are sustained over time, additional empirical research is needed. In particular, longitudinal studies that track pre-service teachers from their initial training through their early years of professional teaching would provide valuable information about the long-term impacts of teacher education programs on actual classroom practices.

Future research should also focus on evaluating the outcomes of inclusive education, not only from the perspective of teachers but also in terms of students' academic achievements, social integration, and overall well-being. Understanding the direct impact of inclusive teaching on diverse learners would offer a more comprehensive view of the effectiveness of current practices.

Moreover, conducting comparative studies between different regions within Kazakhstan, or between Kazakhstan and other countries with similar socio-economic and

educational contexts, could help identify successful strategies and challenges unique to different environments. Such comparisons would allow for a better contextualisation of best practices and inform the development of locally adapted approaches to inclusive education.

In addition, further research should examine the effectiveness of various mentoring models, internship structures, and continuous professional development formats.

Investigating different approaches to supporting both pre-service and early-career teachers will help identify best practices that can enhance the practical readiness and confidence of educators in implementing inclusive practices. Strengthening these support mechanisms is essential to bridging the gap between theoretical preparation and real-world application in inclusive education settings.

Personal Reflection

Writing this research was such a valuable experience for both me as a student-researcher and as a teacher-practitioner. My first introduction to the subject of inclusive education was purely academic, focusing mainly on the theoretical foundations I had learned during the course. Thanks to the experiences of the participants, I was able to gain a deeper and better understanding of the complexity of preparing teachers for Inclusive Education. By listening to the participants talk about the gap between theory and practice and the importance of mentoring, I became more aware of the emotional and professional dilemmas teachers face. Thanks to this research, I found out how valuable empathy, patience, and flexibility are not only as qualities of inclusive education but also as qualities of a responsible researcher.

I realise that my own educational background may have influenced the way I understood the participants' stories. As a supporter of inclusive practices, I noticed that participants were frustrated by the lack of practical training. However, I made sure that the

approach to the analysis would be determined by the stories of the participants, and not by my expectations.

During this research, I improved my skills in qualitative data collection, thematic analysis and academic writing. In addition, my commitment to inclusive education has strengthened in my professional career as a teacher. If I were to conduct a similar study again, I would use a longitudinal approach to track changes in participants' perceptions as they transitioned from pre-service training to workplace training. This research was an educational process for me, both professionally as a researcher and personally as a teacher. In the future, I would like to enhance my knowledge of Inclusive Education and help pre-service teachers learn about Inclusive Education more effectively and deeply at an institutional level.

Summary

This study included four main components identified for research purposes. To begin with, the ideas of future teachers about inclusive education were studied, and it was found that the majority of participants understood inclusive education as a social and educational need. Secondly, the study examined their experience in educational practice and revealed the gap between theoretical knowledge and the specific conditions for IE. Thirdly, the attitude of students to inclusive courses was analysed: many of them noted the theoretical orientation and lack of practical value. Fourth, based on the data obtained, specific recommendations were presented to the educational policy in Kazakhstan aimed at strengthening the preparation of future teachers for inclusive practice.

The conclusions have important implications in three main areas. At the policy level, the results indicate the need for a review of the duration and content of inclusive courses, as well as systematic support for mentoring and staff provision in schools. In pedagogical practice, the study revealed the urgent need to introduce practice-oriented

teaching methods, involve students in truly inclusive processes and strengthen the role of university teachers as models of inclusive pedagogy. From a research point of view, the work demonstrates the value of the micro-level analysis of teacher knowledge and opens up areas for further empirical research in longitudinal and comparative contexts.

The purpose of the study was successfully achieved: to explore the experience and readiness of pre-service teachers for inclusive education in one of the universities of Astana. Despite the limited experience, participants showed that they understood the importance of inclusion. Emotional support and mentoring have played an important role in building trust and competence.

Research has important implications for policy, practice, and scientific developments. To increase the effectiveness of pedagogical education, it is necessary to combine theory and practice, create conditions that contribute to inclusive learning in schools. The results obtained are relevant not only for Kazakhstan, but also for countries with similar conditions, emphasising the importance of teacher education as an important element of inclusive education.

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Appendix A: AI Declaration Form



Thesis Title: Inclusive Education Readiness among Pre-Service Teachers at One University in Astana

Declaration of the Use of Generative AI

I hereby declare that I have read and understood NUGSE's policy concerning appropriate use of AI and composed this work independently (please check one):

- with the use of artificial intelligence tools, or
 without the use of artificial intelligence tools.


(If you have used AI tools as defined in the GSE policy document, please complete the rest of this form.)

During the preparation of this thesis/examination, I used Chat GPT [NAME of TOOL] to
paraphrase, edit and refine the data [REASON].

I also declare that I

- am aware of the capabilities and limitations of AI tool(s),
 have verified that the content generated by AI systems and adopted by me is factually correct,
 am aware that as the author of this thesis I bear full responsibility for the statements and assertions made in it,
 have submitted complete and accurate information about my use of AI tools in this work, and
 acknowledge that there may be disciplinary consequences if I have not followed NUGSE's guidelines regarding AI appropriate use.

Name: Guldana Bazarbayeva

Signature: 

Date: 25.04.2025

Appendix B: Consent Letters

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Inclusive Education Preparedness among Pre-Service Teachers at One University in Astana, Kazakhstan

DESCRIPTION: You are invited to participate in a **research study** that explores the experiences of pre-service teachers in Inclusive Education course at one university in Astana, Kazakhstan. The study aims to investigate how well these pre-service teachers are prepared to implement inclusive education practices in their future classrooms and the challenges they encounter during their training and internships.

TIME INVOLVEMENT: Your participation in this study will take approximately **60 to 80 minutes**. The interview will be scheduled at a time and location convenient for you, ensuring your comfort throughout the process.

RISKS AND BENEFITS: This study does not pose any significant risks. However, discussing challenges related to inclusive education might cause some emotional discomfort or recall difficult experiences. If this occurs, you may pause the interview or withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences.

As a participant, you may benefit from reflecting on and evaluating your experiences with learning and implementing inclusive education. This could provide valuable personal and professional insights. Additionally, your feedback will contribute to a deeper understanding of the challenges and successes in inclusive education in Kazakhstan, potentially informing future educational practices and policies.

PARTICIPANT'S RIGHTS: Your participation in this study is entirely 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. You are also free to refuse to answer any specific questions without consequence. The results of this research study may be presented at academic conferences or published in scientific journals, but your identity and any identifiable information will remain confidential.

CONTACT INFORMATION:

Questions: If you have any questions, concerns, or complaints about this research or its procedures, please contact:

Thesis Supervisor:

Dr. Oliver Mutanga

Email: oliver.mutanga@nu.edu.kz

Researcher:

Guldana Bazarbayeva

Email: guldana.bazarbayeva@nu.edu.kz

Phone: 8 (707) 6960930

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 by writing to gse_researchcommittee@nu.edu.kz.

CONSENT

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

Signature: 

Date: _____

Appendix C: Recruitment Emails

INFORMATION SHEET

Inclusive Education Preparedness among Pre-Service Teachers at One University in Astana, Kazakhstan

Myself

Hello, my name is Guldana Bazarbayeva. I am a second-year master's student at Nazarbayev University in Astana, specializing in Educational Leadership with a focus on Inclusive Education.

What am I doing?

As part of my master's degree requirements, I am conducting research on the **perceptions and experiences of pre-service teachers** regarding inclusive education at one university in Astana, Kazakhstan. The purpose of this research is to explore how well pre-service teachers are prepared to implement inclusive education in their future classrooms.

Your participation

I am reaching out to ask if you would be willing to participate in an in-depth interview about your perceptions and experiences related to inclusive education. The interview will last approximately **60 to 80 minutes**, and your participation is entirely voluntary. You are under no obligation to take part, and there will be no negative consequences if you decide not to participate. Should you agree to participate and later decide to withdraw, you may do so without any impact on your standing.

Confidentiality

All identifying information will be securely stored on a password-protected device and will not be accessible to anyone except the researcher. The data will be kept confidential to the fullest extent permitted by law. Records from your participation may be reviewed by authorized individuals responsible for ensuring the correctness of the research, such as members of the ethics committee at Nazarbayev University. (These individuals are also obligated to maintain confidentiality). Otherwise, only I will have access to the records that identify you.

Additionally, I would like to seek your permission to audio-record the interview to accurately capture your responses. Your responses will be stored electronically on a secure drive and used for research or academic purposes now and in the future, without disclosing your identity. Any future use of the stored data will be subject to further review and approval by the Research Ethics Committee.

Your name will not be recorded anywhere, and no one will be able to link you to the answers you provide. Your responses will be associated with a pseudonym, which I will use in all data analysis, publications, reports, or other research outputs.

Risks/discomforts

I anticipate no risk of harm from your participation. The risks associated with participating in this study are no greater than those encountered in daily life. The timing and location of meetings will be carefully arranged in consultation with you. Advice on safety will be continuously sought. Privacy will also be ensured by scheduling meetings at venues and times that are convenient and safe for you. Every effort will be made to minimize disruption to your activities.

Benefits

Participating in this study may not offer immediate benefits, but it will significantly contribute to improving educational practices and advancing inclusive education in Kazakhstan. If you would like to receive feedback on this study, I will keep a record of your phone number and can send you the completed study report in 2025.

Who to contact if you have been harmed or have any concerns

If there are any questions or concerns regarding this study, kindly contact the thesis supervisor, Oliver Mutanga (Ph.D.), oliver.mutanga@nu.edu.kz, or the researcher (Guldana Bazarbayeva guldana.bazarbayeva@nu.edu.kz), (87076960930)

Institutional Contact: Please reach out to the NUGSE Research Committee at +7 7172 709359 or gseresearchcommittee@nu.edu.kz if you are dissatisfied with the way this study is being carried out or any complaints or general inquiries concerning the research or your rights as a participant.

Appendix D: Data Analysis – Transcripts, Coding Samples

Participant A	First Cycle Coding	Second Cycle Coding
Inclusive education is about giving equal education to all learners. It's not just for students with disabilities, but also for orphans, immigrants...	Broad definition of inclusive education; Inclusive education beyond disabilities	Conceptual understanding of inclusive education (Equity and Diversity)
Honestly, I did not enjoy the course very much because it focused mostly on theory. We had lectures and seminars, but there weren't enough open discussions or practical sessions.	Dissatisfaction with theory-heavy course; Lack of practical experience	Perception of course content (Criticism of course practicality)
I would like the teacher to be more involved in the course. It would be great if the classes took place in a different format, such as debates and practical seminars.	Suggestion for active teaching methods: Need for more interactive lessons	Recommendations for course improvement (Active learning methods)
In the future, I would gladly apply in practice the knowledge I received.	Willingness to apply knowledge; Positive attitude toward future implementation	Intent to practice inclusive education (Positive future orientation)
Based on the theoretical knowledge, if there is an inclusive child in the classroom... there has to be an assistant teacher...	Conditioned willingness based on available support; Infrastructure dependency	Factors influencing readiness (Institutional support needed)
She (mentor teacher) did not show any motivation, hope or belief towards those students.	Observation of negative attitude of mentor; Disappointment with mentor's approach	Mentorship quality concern (Negative role modelling)
The teacher doesn't say 'your idea is good, let's consider it too,' ... does not listen to students and consider thoughts or ideas.	Lack of dialogue and encouragement from a university course instructor	Critique of instructional approach (Need for participatory learning)
...any pre-service teacher, regardless of the subject, should be provided with quality knowledge.	Inclusive education is essential for all subject teachers	Recommendation for teacher training curriculum