

**The Principal's Perspectives on the Role of Non-Governmental Organizations Toward  
the Inclusive Education Reforms in Almaty**

**Mariya Assinskaya**

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**Supervisor: Professor Tsediso Michael Makoelle**



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53 Kabanbay Batyr Ave.  
Astana 010000  
Republic of Kazakhstan  
Date: 22 of October, 2022

Dear Mariya Assinskaya:

This letter now confirms that your research project titled “The Role of NGOs towards Inclusive Education Reform in TVET Institutions of Almaty: Principals’ Perspective” has been approved by the Graduate School of Education, pending the minor changes as specified by the reviewer, with final official approval to be given by the advisor.

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

Yours sincerely,

Tsediso Michael Makoelle

10/22/2022

**On behalf of:**  
Dr Matthew Courtney, *PhD*  
Chair, GSE Ethics Committee  
Graduate School of Education  
Nazarbayev University

Block C3, Room M027  
Office: +7 (7172) 70 6659  
Mobile: +7 708 274 9564  
email: [matthew.courtney@nu.edu.kz](mailto:matthew.courtney@nu.edu.kz), [gse.irec@nu.edu.kz](mailto:gse.irec@nu.edu.kz)

## CITI Training Certificate



Completion Date 13-Jun-2022  
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This is to certify that:

**Mariya Assinskaya**

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

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For the world without war!

## **Abstract**

### **The Principal's Perspectives on the Role of NGOs towards the Inclusive Education**

#### **Reforms in Almaty**

The qualitative study explored TVET principals' perspectives on the role of NGOs in inclusive education reform in Almaty. The phenomenon of collaborative processes was examined through Gray's (1991) theory of collaboration and viewed from the constructivist paradigm. The study applied a qualitative generic research design. Semi-structured interviews were used as a data collection tool. The participants of the study were five TVET principals who had been in charge for at least five years. The data analysis was conducted through coding and categorization and arranged according to the research questions.

The findings demonstrated a moderate level of understanding of inclusive education among the principals. Moreover, TVETs collaborate with several NGOs that raise awareness about inclusion in Almaty. Yet, the findings revealed a lack of knowledge, experience, consistency, and support in building collaboration with NGOs for inclusive education. The study also showed challenges and opportunities for potential collaboration between NGOs and TVET institutions.

This study can inform stakeholders such as TVETs, NGOs, and policy-makers about opportunities and support that can be built from collaboration for the cause. It includes several areas for potential improvement in terms of inclusive education.

*Key words: inclusive education, TVET, principals, NGO, Almaty*

## Аңдатпа

### *Алматы Қаласындағы Инклюзивті Ілім Беру Реформаларындағы ҮЕҰ Рөлі Туралы*

#### *ТжКБ Директорларының Көзқарасы*

Сапалы зерттеуде ТжКБ директорларының Алматы қаласындағы инклюзивті білім беруді реформалаудағы ҮЕҰ рөлі туралы пікірлері зерделенді. Ынтымақтастық процестерінің құбылысы Грейдің (1991) ынтымақтастық теориясының көмегімен зерттеліп, конструктивистік парадигма тұрғысынан қарастырылды. Зерттеуде сапалы жалпы зерттеу әдісі қолданылды. Деректерді жинау құралы ретінде жартылай құрылымдық сұхбат пайдаланылды. Зерттеуге жетекшілік қызметінде кемінде бес жыл атқарған бес ТжКБ директорлары қатысты. Деректерді талдау кодтау және санаттау арқылы жүргізілді және зерттеу сұрақтарына сәйкес жүйеленді.

Нәтижелер мектеп директорларының инклюзивті білім беруді түсінуінің орташа деңгейін көрсетті. Сонымен қатар, Алматыдағы ТжКБ инклюзивтілік туралы хабардарлықты арттыратын бірнеше ҮЕҰ-мен ынтымақтасатындығын тапты. Алайда нәтижелер инклюзивті білім беру үшін ҮЕҰ-мен серіктестік орнатуда білімнің, тәжірибенің, жүйелілік пен қолдаудың жеткіліксіздігін көрсетті. Зерттеу сонымен қатар ҮЕҰ мен ТжКБ институттары арасындағы әлеуетті ынтымақтастығындағы қиындықтар мен мүмкіндіктерді анықтады.

Бұл зерттеу ТжКБ, ҮЕҰ және саясаткерлер сияқты мүдделі тараптарды ортақ мақсат үшін ынтымақтастықтан алуға болатын мүмкіндіктер мен қолдау туралы хабардар ете алады. Ол инклюзивті білім беру тұрғысынан әлеуетті жақсартудың бірнеше бағыттарын қамтиды.

*Негізгі сөздер: инклюзивті білім беру, ТжКБ, көшбасшылар, ҮЕҰ, Алматы*

## Аннотация

### Взгляд Директоров ТиПО на Роль НПО в Реформах Инклюзивного Образования в Алматы

В качественном исследовании были изучены взгляды директоров ТиПО на роль НПО в реформе инклюзивного образования в г.Алматы. Процессы сотрудничества были исследованы с помощью теории сотрудничества Грей (1991) и рассмотрено с точки зрения конструктивистской парадигмы. В исследовании применялся качественный общий дизайн исследования. В качестве инструмента сбора данных использовались полуструктурированные интервью. Участниками исследования стали пять директоров ТиПО, занимавших руководящие должности не менее пяти лет. Анализ данных проводился через кодирование и категоризацию, и систематизировался в соответствии с вопросами исследования.

Результаты продемонстрировали средний уровень понимания инклюзивного образования среди директоров ТиПО. Кроме того, ТиПО сотрудничают с несколькими НПО, которые повышают осведомленность об инклюзии. Тем не менее, результаты выявили недостаток знаний, опыта, последовательности и поддержки в налаживании сотрудничества с НПО. Исследование также выявило проблемы и возможности для потенциального сотрудничества между НПО и учреждениями ТиПО.

Это исследование может информировать заинтересованные стороны, такие как ТиПО, НПО и лиц, определяющих политику, о возможностях и поддержке, которые могут быть получены в результате сотрудничества. Он включает в себя несколько областей для потенциальных улучшений с точки зрения инклюзивного образования.

*Ключевые слова: инклюзивное образование, ТиПО, руководители, НПО, Алматы*



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## **Chapter 1: Introductory Orientation**

### **1.1 Introduction**

This thesis investigates the role of NGOs in inclusive education reform in TVET institutions of Almaty from the principals' perspective. This study aims to explore what contribution non-governmental organizations (NGOs) may have on the inclusive education reform in TVET (Technical and vocational education and training). It is anticipated that the findings generated by this study will reveal new insights and so stimulate further development of inclusive education reform through collaborative actions between TVET and NGOs. This inquiry applies a qualitative semi-structured interview methodology to investigate the phenomenon. Participants in this study include a convenience sampling strategy to select a group consisting of 5 principals who have been in charge for five and more years and are required to implement inclusive education practices at their institutions.

This chapter begins with an overview of the background of the study and the research problem. Following this is the research questions and research objectives, as well as the significance of the study. This chapter concludes with definitions of the main concepts used in the research.

### **1.2 Background of the Study**

After ratifying the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Kazakhstan has willingly acknowledged the duty of ensuring that all students have equitable access to and participation in the mainstream education system (United Nations [UN], 2007). Following that, a variety of State Programs for Education and Science Development were adopted, considering that one of the main growth routes is inclusive education (Bridges, 2014; Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan

[MoES], 2010). According to Kazakhstan's 2011–2020 Education and Science Development Program, by 2020, 70% of all schools in Kazakhstan were expected to be inclusive (MoES, 2010). However, as reported in The State Program for Educational and Scientific Development 2020-2025 (2019), only 30% of TVET institutions accomplished establishing conditions for inclusive practices. Despite all the efforts that the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan is investing in the development of inclusive education, practical results show that the reform has not been fully implemented yet.

International practices have demonstrated effective NGOs' participation in educational reforms. According to Mundy et al. (2008), NGOs actively and effectively implement inclusive education reform by raising awareness through a variety of tools, for instance, inquiries, consultancy, and spreading information through different channels. Rollan and Somerton (2019) note that NGOs do contribute to inclusive practices through capacity building. Additionally, according to Kabdiyeva (2015), the number of civil society organizations (CSOs) and NGOs keeps growing in Kazakhstan. Moreover, around 42% of them are actively focusing on education and public health services, which potentially may contribute to the implementation of inclusive education practices. However, the impact of NGOs on inclusion in TVET remains an under-researched field.

### **1.3 Problem Statement**

According to Kassymova et al. (2008), it is often assumed that reforms are top-down directed, with NGOs and CSOs being the main conductors of the centralized government's laws and policies in Kazakhstan. Although traditional settings for educational policy-making are governmental, NGO organizations are increasingly making a significant contribution (Rollan & Somerton, 2019). Since Kazakhstan's independence in 1991, the number of NGOs

has increased from 400 to 1600 in about 24 years, with around 40% involved in the educational field (Kabdiyeva, 2015). Civil activism has been an important aspect in the implementation of the inclusion of marginalized groups in mainstream settings (Markova & Sultanalieva, 2013).

Even though NGOs in Kazakhstan are already active in social issues and collaborate with a variety of state entities, their contribution to social and educational change often remains undetected (Asian Development Bank [ADB], 2007). Internationally, the subject of NGO's role has been extensively explored; however, fewer researchers are focused on the role of NGOs in inclusive education. Even fewer studies concentrating on TVET institutions have been conducted in Kazakhstan.

#### **1.4 Research Questions**

The central question of this study is, “What is the role of nonprofit organizations toward inclusive education reform in TVETs of Almaty from principals’ perception?”

The sub-questions of the study are as follows:

SQ1. How do principals conceptualize and enact inclusive education reform in TVET?

SQ2. What are principals’ knowledge/experiences about NGOs and their potential for inclusive education reform in TVET?

SQ3. What are the possible challenges (if any) and opportunities of working with NGOs towards inclusion from principals’ perspectives?

#### **1.5 The Objectives of the Study**

- To explore the conceptualization and enactment of the inclusive education reform by principals;

- To describe principals' knowledge and experiences about NGOs' work towards inclusive education;
- To investigate challenges (if any) and opportunities for collaboration with NGOs towards inclusive education in TVET.

### **1.6 Significance of the Study**

The significance of the study is in filling the gap in understanding the role of NGOs towards inclusive education reform in TVET by analyzing TVET principals' experience, barriers, and opportunities for collaboration. This study will also bring a novel perspective to understand ways in how NGOs may contribute to existing inclusive education practices and strengthen them based on principals' opinions. A research-based understanding of the perspectives, barriers, and opportunities, ways to collaborate will provide useful information which can be used by policy-makers, TVET administration and, teachers, educational practitioners. Moreover, it may allow NGO workers to improve and gather efforts toward the establishment and implementation of inclusive education in Kazakhstani TVET institutions.

### **1.7 Definitions of Main Concepts**

This section of chapter 1 discusses the definitions of the main concepts in the study. It first examines the notion of NGO, followed by unfolding the definition of inclusive education. The last section concludes with comprehensive defining information about Technical and Vocational Education and Training.

#### ***1.7.1 Non-Governmental Organizations***

There is an excessive range of different labels in the world of non-governmental organizations. After World War II term, "non-governmental organization," was initially used by the United Nations. Since 1945, the term "NGO" has been widely used, with varying

applications and a wider range of information. The phrase originally referred to society actors with a global scope of activity. Sociological approaches, in contrast, are ambiguous about this and use the term for both local and international organizations (Martens, 2002).

In the years following the end of the Cold War, the international community started to advocate for a new policy goal. This agenda promotes successful interactions between the governmental, private, and nonprofit sectors leading to successful development outcomes. Within this paradigm, NGOs also began to be seen as a part of the emerging civil society (Lewis, 2007).

Non-governmental organizations are broadly defined as private independent bodies that function on the basis of a mutual mission, voluntary in nature, with a pursuit of public benefit (Fisher, 1997; Lissner, 1977; Salamon & Anheier, 1999; Salamon et al., 2000; Vakil, 1997, as cited in Clayton, 2000). The broad mission of NGOs is to pursue the benefit of a variety of vulnerable and marginalized groups rather than profit or any other kind of benefit for members of the organizations (Kilby, 2006). Frankly, NGOs strive for world improvement (Edwards & Sen, 2000; Fowler, 1996; Gerard, 1983; Lissner, 1977, as cited in Clayton, 2000). NGOs are typically thought of as groups without official government participation. NGOs are comprised of individuals or groups and do not include any government representatives (Russett, 1996). NGOs are official, independent, societal groups with a focus on advancing shared objectives at the local, regional, or worldwide levels (Martens, 2002).

While "NGO" is a commonly used term, there are also many other names that overlap, including "nonprofit," "volunteer," and "civil society" groups. In the United States, with its developed market system, the term "nonprofit organization" is widely used.

Following a long history of volunteer work influenced by Christian ideals and the establishment of charity law, the terms "voluntary organization" or "charity" are frequently used in the UK (Martens, 2002). NGOs can become more professional because they may have paid employees with specialized training yet are not profit-driven. NGOs are autonomous since membership dues and individual donations provide the majority of their funding. They might obtain a little amount of financial support from formal organizations, ensuring that they are not subject to governmental supervision.

Non-governmental organizations exert a variety of roles and a wide diversity of services they provide. NGOs' functions include the empowerment of marginalized communities in the economic, social, and civic dimensions (Narayan, 1999; AusAID, 2001). According to Lewis (2007), NGOs' responsibilities may be divided into three major domains: "implementer, catalyst, and partner" (p.68-69). The implementer function is in charge of mobilizing resources to provide goods and services to those in need. NGOs provide services in a variety of industries, including healthcare, education, microfinance, disaster relief, and human rights. Moreover, NGOs' work is tightly connected with the context of specific aspects, such as location, culture, traditions, and history, and may change over time (Carrol, 1992).

Therefore, there are various ways that NGOs and social change may interact. NGOs are useful players because they may offer flexible, as well as they are change agents or sources of fresh ideas and solutions to development issues. In the twenty-first century, the power and importance of NGOs are growing. The significant amount of funding they get, along with the fact that NGOs are subject to more public analysis and publicity than ever before, points out their growing significance.

### ***1.7.2 Inclusive Education***

Definitions of inclusive education are constantly changing as the practice spreads to different contexts and cultures. At the AGRA seminar in 1998, twenty-three countries agreed on the following definition of inclusive education: inclusive education is a strategy for promoting inclusive societies through formal and informal education (schools, homes, and communities) with the right of every child to get an education with no regard to age, gender, ethnicity, geographical location, disability, and language. In 1994, UNESCO elaborated on The Salamanca Statement and established the following definition for the inclusive education notion:

Inclusion is seen as a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners through increasing participation in learning, cultures, and communities and reducing exclusion within and from education. It involves changes and modifications in content, approaches, structures, and strategies, with a common vision that covers all children of the appropriate age range and a conviction that it is the responsibility of the regular system to educate all children.

Moreover, according to Lindsey (2003), it is now broadly accepted the consensus that inclusive education is a policy of respecting the rights of children with special educational needs (SEN) or any kind of disability. It includes removing discrimination and barriers, as well as facilitating the achievements of every student. It is also considered to be an ever-changing developing process within each country, context, and culture.

While these definitions reflect a very broad and holistic approach to inclusion as a human right regardless of any difference, there are other definitions that refer specifically to the educational context. For example, the Index for Inclusion, a framework for establishing

inclusive education in school settings as a way to promote school development by Booth and Ainscow (2002). The framework outlines three dimensions for ensuring inclusive education in schools: culture, policy, and practice. The framework claims that inclusive education is an approach that requires the transformation of culture, policy, and school practice in order to address the needs of every learner. Booth and Ainscow (2002) as well suggest that inclusive education is an essential part of moving further toward inclusive societies. The definitions mentioned above consist of the idea that inclusive education must be available for everyone, not only for specific groups.

Inclusive education as an approach constitutes a strategy that is based on a variety of key ideas about the structure, the important players, the procedures, and the available resources. The first idea of inclusive education, according to Stabbs (2008), is that the primary stakeholders of inclusive education are learners who possess the right to education from birth and throughout their lifetime with no regard to differences, supported by teachers, communities, and families. The second important concept is the educational system. Inclusive education is broader than traditional formal schooling. It must be flexible in terms of introduction and welcoming a diverse, friendly, inclusive environment, collaboratively supported by administration and parents. The third key idea of inclusive education, according to Stabbs (2008), is diversity. It is about eliminating discrimination and exclusionary practices and embracing diversity and respecting differences, and addressing them accordingly. The fourth key concept unfolds the importance of inclusive education promotion. Identifying and removing existing barriers to education is a key step in achieving inclusive education and removing obstacles of exclusion. Moreover, it is crucial to establish real collaboration between the stakeholders: learners, parents, teachers, management, and the

leadership of schools. The last important idea about inclusive education by Stabbs (2008) is enabling resources. People are considered to be the main distributors of inclusive education practices. Moreover, identifying new resources, as well as using and diversifying the existing ones according to the needs of children, is an important component of the successful establishment of inclusive education.

While definitions and key concepts of inclusive education keep evolving and reshaping over time, the notion remains a foundation of inclusive, developing, and sustaining societies based on real and important humanistic values and allows them to address social and educational challenges. An inclusive society is one in which all people may participate and contribute with no regard to any peculiarities. Inclusive education is a key component of this strategy. This may seem like a utopia, but in reality, the world requires contributing to and embracing diversity and humanistic values.

### ***1.7.3 Technical and Vocational Education and Training***

The term "Technical and vocational education and training" refers to education, training, and skill development in a variety of occupational spheres. TVET is considered to be a part of lifelong learning and focuses on work-based learning and grants by certification (UNESCO, 2015). UIS (2006, as cited in Sultangaliyeva, 2019) states that TVET is a part of the educational system provider that delivers general education as well as skill-based learning in scientific and technical fields. TVET allows the creation of a skill-based workforce that is required by the labor market and opens opportunities for people to put their expertise in professional settings (Sultangaliyeva, 2019).

The current state of the TVET sector in Kazakhstan can be described as follows: there are 770 TVET institutions (444 public institutions and 326 private ones) currently functioning

in Kazakhstan (MoES, 2022), with a total number of students to be 489 000, with 55% being educated in the public TVET institutions, and 45% obtaining educational provision in private TVET institutions. Around twenty percent of the institutions are located in rural areas (MOES & Nazarbayev University [NU], 2014).

According to Álvarez-Galván (2014), before 2012, the main focus of professional lyceums was to prepare the workforce for construction, agriculture, industry, and transportation sectors, while teachers' training and health industry tended to be the emphasis of colleges. Then, the emergence of private TVET institutions in 1994 created a more competitive environment in the educational field (Sultangaliyeva, 2019).

In 2010, the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan announced the promotion of economic expansion with a well-qualified workforce, which has produced a big demand for TVET institutions to prepare specialists.

From 1991 to 2016, according to Irsaliev et al. (2017), the number of TVET institutions grew: 817 colleges functioned in Kazakhstan, and around 4 892 thousand students were enrolled in these institutions.

The Strategic Plan of Education Development of Kazakhstan (SPED) for 2011-2020 outlined a new direction for education in Kazakhstan to have, by 2020, "a highly qualified labor force" (MoES, 2010, p. 7). TVET institutions have become a part of a new national strategic plan in order to improve the TVET system in relation to global economic demands and integrate the TVET sector into the "global educational space."

According to the "Development of Strategic Directions for Educational Reforms in Kazakhstan, 2015-2020" diagnostic report (2014), to achieve this aim, the SPED identified

three priorities: 1) Updating the curriculum in TVET in accordance with the economic and social demands of the labor market; 2) Empowering teaching staff in TVET through staff training; 3) Increasing the image of TVET institutions. However, there is a misalignment between the vision and strategic goal and the TVET program objectives (Gaskov & Ganimurat, 2014). Thus, according to Álvarez-Galván (2014), despite the expansion of colleges and the number of enrolled students, TVET remains a low-status educational institution and are not tend to be considered a primary educational option for students. Moreover, TVET is left behind in other educational institutions due to poor quality of educational provision that does not respond to the labor market needs (Sultangaliyeva, 2019). To address this program “dual training” approach was adopted to facilitate students’ practical experience by increasing the training and practical hours at working places starting in 2012. In order to improve the implementation of the strategy allowing students to simultaneously go through theoretical and practical training, which is supposed to prepare them to enter the labor market even before the official graduation from TVET.

In 2016 in order to address the problem of the low prestige of TVET, the “Free vocational education for all” project was launched (Torino Process 2016-2017 Kazakhstan report, 2017). The Government of Kazakstan guaranteed free educational provision for all in all public colleges of the country, with all the graduates being employed upon graduation statement.

## **1.8 Chapter Outline**

This paper consists of 6 chapters. The Introduction chapter provides background information on the research topic, followed by the problem statement, research questions and objectives, significance of the study, and definitions of the main concepts in the paper. The

following chapter, the literature review, discusses the review of relevant literature on the topic. The chapter concentrates on the inclusive education and non-governmental organizations concepts, and then it presents reviewed literature on the role of NGOs from three perspectives: international, regional, and local.

The following chapter discusses the research methodology. It explains why the researcher has chosen a constructivist research paradigm and qualitative research design to explore the phenomenon. It also contains information about the research site, sampling procedures, and participants, followed by information about data collection instruments and procedures, as well as information about data analysis.

The fourth chapter of the paper is about the research findings. It provides the principal results of the study structured according to the research questions. The chapter also consists of an interpretation and analysis of the findings.

The fifth chapter contains a discussion of the main findings of the study. The chapter connects and compares findings with existing research, literature, and theories in terms of the phenomenon of the study.

The final chapter, conclusions, and recommendations discuss the major key conclusions of the study. It also illuminates the limitations of the study and provides some recommendations for future research.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### **2.1 Introduction**

The purpose of the study is to explore the role of non-governmental organizations in inclusive education reform in Kazakhstan. To develop a literature review for this study, it is necessary to complete a critical review of related literature. This chapter aims to examine the literature on the role of NGOs in the implementation of inclusive education.

To conduct this selected literature review, the researcher used multiple information sources, including dissertations and professional journals using ERIC, Google Scholar, and the Nazarbayev University library database.

The review of the literature consists of three prominent themes related to the study. The first one is the conceptualization of the inclusive education notion. The second theme unwraps the concept of NGOs. Then, the third part of the chapter examines the literature related to the role of NGOs in the implementation of inclusive education from international, regional, and local perspectives.

### **2.2 Conceptualizing Inclusive Education**

The Republic of Kazakhstan is pursuing the establishment of inclusive education since its independence. In 1992, Kazakhstan became a part of the United Nations, agreeing to address different challenges outlined by the UN, including Sustainable Development Goal #4, which promotes ensuring inclusive and equitable education (The United Nations, 2015). Moreover, from its independence and throughout its development, Kazakhstan has been a signatory of a variety of documents that aim to promote and implement inclusive education, such as The Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994), The Dakar Framework for Action (UNESCO, 2000), and the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities

(UNCRPD, 2006). The ratification of these documents is an indicator of Kazakhstan being willing to share inclusive definitions and values, as well as promote and achieve inclusive education and societies. The definitions in the documents are united by applying a broader approach to inclusive education with no barriers or discrimination in any form. The Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994) outlines that providing education for children in mainstream settings with recognizing and addressing their special needs accordingly is a central idea of the inclusive education notion. The Dakar Framework for Action (UNESCO, 2000) states that inclusive education is access to basic quality education for all children with no regard to types of disabilities, diseases, HIV/AIDS status, and others. Later, in 2006, Article 24 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities expanded the definition of inclusive education, stating that it is important to enabling children to attend general education and eliminate discriminatory practices (UNCRPD, 2006).

Kazakhstan defines inclusive education broadly as providing equal access to education for all, regardless of disparities, at all levels, with no deviations from ratified international agreements on the topic. The Ministry of Education and Science launched “The State Program of Development of Education in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2011-2020” and “The State Program of Development of Education in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2020-2025” which prioritize the development of inclusive education at all levels of the educational system of Kazakhstan, with a goal to have 70% and 100% of Universities and TVETs and schools inclusive accordingly (MoEs, 2011; MoES, 2019). The programs defined the legal framework for ensuring all children are provided with quality education in general educational institutions. Additionally, one of the most recent laws, “On the introduction of amendments and additions to some legislative acts of the Republic of Kazakhstan on

inclusive education," was signed by President Kasym-Zhomart Tokaev, aims to acknowledge and implementation of the rights of persons with special educational needs for quality inclusive education provision (Akorda, 2021). According to Makoelle (2020), Kazakhstan has surpassed all other countries in Central Asia in terms of the speed at which inclusive education is implemented.

Despite the international and national legislation to promote and develop inclusive education practices, Kazakhstan faces a variety of challenges in defining inclusive education, its policy, practice, and culture. The Soviet legacy in the educational sphere still influences the perception of children with disabilities. According to Makoelle (2020), in Kazakhstan, inclusive education practice is still perceived as special education. The concept of inclusive education is misunderstood (Makoelle, 2020). The Kazakhstani Law "On social and medical-pedagogical correctional support for children with disabilities" presents definitions and guidelines for diagnosing children with disabilities and placing them in special educational settings (MoES, 2002). Previously, the lens of "correction" was used to examine children with disabilities, and they should have received education in different contexts with a focus on the diagnosis (Makoelle, 2020). Additionally, the term "special education" is also commonly used in place of "inclusive education" (Faragher et al., 2020). The path Kazakhstan is on to successfully implement inclusive education policy is hampered by misunderstanding and a skewed grasp of the concept of inclusive education. Makolle (2020) asserts that in order to promote "true inclusion," the stakeholders should coordinate their efforts to adjust the systems and environments. Aubakirova (2016) also mentions that inclusive education is not only a matter of placement of a child with SEN, but it rather requires modification of the educational system, removing barriers, and adjusting the learning

environment in order to meet the needs of every child according to their individual peculiarities.

Every kindergarten and school in Kazakhstan, as well as 70% of higher education institutions (TVET and universities), shall be inclusive by the year 2025, according to the country's State Program for Education and Science Development for 2020–2025 (MoES, 2019). These ambitious goals, according to Makoelle and Burmistrova (2021), could be a part of the political agenda to quickly develop inclusive education. However, just 31% of TVET institutions and 12% of universities were inclusive in 2018, according to the "National Report on the State of Development of the Education System of the Republic of Kazakhstan" (MoES, 2019). According to Abubakirova and Zhacheva (2021), the majority of disabled children today in Kazakhstan attend residential or home-based special correctional educational facilities for their schooling. Moreover, due to the system's incapacity to address their needs, roughly 15% of students are expelled (Denivarova and Abdresheva, 2015). As a result, it is unclear whether having 100 percent inclusive schools by 2025 implies removing barriers to access, assistance, materials, individualized education plans, and special instruction rather than merely putting SEN children in regular classrooms to follow the "international trend."

### **2.3 Defining the Concept of Non-Governmental Organization**

Lewis (2009) in his book, notes that the term "NGO" may be applied in both a broad and narrower definition. The broader definition of NGOs includes all non-state organizations (professionals, voluntary organizations, charities) that may or may not produce a profit. However, McCoy and McCully (1993) emphasize that NGOs are organizations that fight for social justice and environmental sustainability without receiving any profit. According to

Charnovitz (1997), NGOs are organized communities of people for various causes that involve “human imagination and aspiration” through a belief that they can improve the world by “thinking globally and acting locally” (UNCED NGO Forum, 1993; Pincen & Finger, 1994; p. 6, as cited in Holliday et al., 2000). Although these definitions are logically proper, Lewis (2009) argues that they may be too wide for understanding. He proposes to define the concept of NGOs from a “change” point of view. In other words, NGOs are organizations that actively engage in economic, political, and social agendas and are tightly connected with development. Vakil (1997) expands the definition further, noting that NGOs’ work is directed at enhancing the quality of life of vulnerable groups of the population. Haigh (1998, as cited in Strachan, P. & Moxon, J., 2017) consolidates these definitions by proposing that NGOs’ movements engage people for the sake of a shared mission in political, religious, social, or environmental causes.

Based on the definitions mentioned above, NGOs cover many sectors and spheres and may play a variety of roles through their activities. All the activities of NGOs can be divided into three main roles: implementers, catalysts, and partners (Lewis, 2007, p.68-69). The role of the implementer implies gathering resources and redirecting them in the form of goods and services to disadvantaged groups of people. The catalyst role revolves around the concept of “change” - the activities aim to improve thinking and action towards change. Finally, the partner role of NGOs is to build capacity through collaborative actions with different stakeholders, such as the private sector and the government, and in order to empower and build sustainable, effective communication. Often NGOs play a combination of or all three roles throughout their missions (Lewis, 2007).

Despite the proof of the impact of the NGOs’ working practices, they often become a focus of criticism for several reasons. The first and most popular criticism, according to

Lewis (2009), is that NGOs that work in developing countries may disrupt the state centralization of these countries. NGOs' activities are historically shifting from working with state organizations to private institutions. In other words, they are now more focused on privatized development which causes a lack of collaboration with state representatives. The second criticism is related to the agendas that NGOs propose - they are criticized for lobbying for their own interests rather than the interest of the people they serve (Lewis, 2009). The third reason for criticism is the lack of NGO management and limited understanding of the local contexts where they work, which lead to poor quality of delivered services. Moreover, working in developing countries with their own agenda and superficial immersion in the culture and traditions of the beneficiaries may sustain neocolonial relations and harm even more disadvantaged groups. However, Hearn (2007) mentions that NGOs have expanded dramatically in international development. Mitlins et al. (2005) add that NGOs' actions allow them to challenge the status quo and address the most pressing issues.

NGOs exert much influence in the sphere of education and science globally. They tend to play a key role in recognizing and promoting values and social participation, ensuring education is qualitative and accessible (UNCED NGO Forum, 1993, p. 5). Archer (1994) agrees with that, mentioning that retrospectively NGOs used to be important actors in the provision of education in a non-formal format.

#### **2.4 The Role of NGOs in the Implementation of Inclusive Education**

One of the most heated topics in global education policy in recent years is inclusive education (Ainscow, Booth, and Dyson 2006; Amor et al. 2019). With the aim of ensuring that individuals with disabilities have access to all levels of education, the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006) has given all of its members the working tool

for developing and implementing inclusive education (Lord and Stein 2008). Nevertheless, there are still differences in defining the notion of inclusive education, local contexts, and traditional factors (Powell et al., 2016) that hinder following the standards of inclusive education (Curcic, 2009). These obstacles enable NGOs to become “change agents” in terms of the implementation of inclusive education (Schuster & Kolleck, 2021).

According to Mundy et al. (2016), UN agencies (UNESCO, UNICEF) remain the most important non-governmental agencies that promote human rights in education. Schuster & Kolleck (2021) agreed that adding to the list of the most impactful private agencies the World Bank.

The systematic review study conducted by Schuster & Kolleck (2021) on the impact of non-governmental organizations in inclusive education outlined different forms of involvement of NGOs in inclusive education: advocacy, capacity building, raising awareness, policy making, and implementation. The study showed that NGOs engage to some degree in all of these activities. However, the biggest impact was indicated in raising awareness - NGOs attract public attention and promote inclusive education values to achieve a wider understanding among different audiences. As for the capacity development part, Schuster and Kolleck (2021) illuminate the role of NGOs in providing programs and projects for teaching staff and obtaining financial resources as an important part of NGOs' actions.

#### ***2.4.1 International Perspective***

All children's rights are covered under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, but it also specifically mentions disabled children. Every country in the world has ratified it, with the exception of the US and Somalia. International law mandates that ratifying countries

submit regular reports to the UNHCHR's Committee on Children's Rights and attend its sessions in Geneva. The UN publishes the reports that the Commission has written about each nation. The monitoring role mostly relies on NGOs working in the areas of children with disabilities' rights. Additionally, they are highly supported by the High Commission itself and have established a robust network of communication and collaboration (Mitchell, 2005).

The role of NGOs in the implementation of inclusive education varies much across the globe and is extremely fragmented. For example, Western countries emphasize partnerships between educational institutions (Rose & Coles, 2002; Frederickson et al. 2004), the role of special needs educators (Cole, 2005), and inquire about teachers' perspectives (Avramidis et al., 2000) in order to achieve sustainable inclusion. Moreover, the external involvement of non-state organizations, such as parental communities, is also considered to be a key factor in moving toward and sustaining inclusive education (Pijl and Meijer, 1997). Parents of children with special educational needs in Western countries are actively engaged in the educational processes of their children and ensure their rights (Engelbrecht et al., 2005; Wehbi, 2006; Yssel et al., 2007). However, according to the study by Srivastava et al. (2015), conducted across medium and low human development categories, in so-called developing countries, this practice may be not applicable there, as parents there are not aware of the rights and options they and their SEN children have. Many developing countries show a tendency of high expectations of NGO groups to pioneer and sustain inclusive education (Alur 2002; UNESCO 2009).

The finding of the study by Srivastava (2015) also revealed the important role of NGOs in the implementation of inclusive education as they remain the main actors in

providing services and promoting inclusive education at the grassroots level (Srivastava et al., 2015) and the studies of Alur (2002, 2008) seem to confirm these findings. It makes sense that NGOs are preoccupied with their various roles - including lobbying governments for policy changes, providing services, increasing community awareness, identifying resources, and mobilizing communities (Mitchell, 2005). In Slovenia, for instance, NGOs challenge the government by criticizing it for applying the medical approach to SEN children (Schmidt & Brown, 2015), and countries in Pacific Islands exert pressure on authorities to put limits on efforts toward inclusion (Forlin et al. 2015, p.198).

In some cases, the governments rely too much on NGOs in terms of inclusive education policies and practices, which may lead to a lack of state-public cohesion, as well as the exclusion of SEN children from mainstream schools by creating special centers (Alur, 2000). For example, in India and Singapore, NGOs are expected to provide educational provisions to SEN children, while in Japan and China, the state recognizes its paramount responsibility to do so. Thus, NGOs' involvement remains crucial in developing countries for the further promotion of inclusive education policies and practices (Alur, 2010).

The University of Washington, with its Disability Inclusive Education Initiative, initiated research to examine small to medium-sized NGOs internationally. Despite the proof of the impact of their work, some major obstacles that hinder NGOs from fully participating in activities towards inclusion were identified (Niewohner et al., 2020). These barriers are a lack of awareness of the attitude that SEN children are a separate component of mainstream education, the belief that inclusion is expensive, and the belief that state representatives possess all the responsibility for access rather than NGOs (Niewohner et al., 2020).

### ***2.4.2 Regional Perspective***

The countries of Central Asia are united by a similar historical context that influences all dimensions of education - they are all carrying a Soviet legacy. The collapse of the Soviet Union heavily affected the further development of educational policies and approaches to inclusive education as well, in countries like Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Georgia, and Tajikistan (Inatullah, 2003). Later, these countries demonstrated their commitment to the implementation of inclusive education by ratifying international inclusive education documents, such as the Salamanca Framework (UNESCO, 1994), the Education for All initiative, as well as collaborative actions with NGOs and foreign advisers. However, Mitchell (2005) emphasizes the frequent misuse of the term “inclusive education,” referring to special education or integration. In this regard, Hollings (2021) mentions that the Soviet historical period shaped a variety of “social stigmas” in both Eurasian and Central Asian countries. For example, the articles of Kavelashvili (2017) and Rollan & Somerton (2019) note that “special” or “correctional” approaches, as well as “diagnostic” or “medical” approaches, remain predominant as a Soviet legacy in countries such as Kazakhstan and Georgia. In other words, the notion of inclusive education is often used as a synonymous or substitute term for special education nowadays. According to Mitchell (2005), this barrier in finding a clear definition may create difficulties in policy-practice cohesion in many post-soviet countries.

These newly-formed independent countries of Central Asia face a variety of challenges in terms of the implementation of inclusive education. Hollings (2021), analyzing articles on Central Asian countries, notes that in order to change the perception of inclusive education as special education, public awareness and better involvement of all stakeholders

are required. By stakeholders, the author mentions teachers, parents, schools, and NGOs. NGOs, according to Haas (1992) and Rose (1993), are “transnational epistemic communities” (as cited in Silova & Steiner-Khamsi, 2008) whose beliefs are rights-based and enthusiastic, which resonate with their missions. According to Silova and Steiner-Khamsi (2008), NGOs’ groups are impactful practitioners, but they do lack sustainability if they do not engage in policy-making processes. Holling (2021) adds that Central Asian countries, specifically Tajikistan, face barriers to involving local education parties in policy-making processes. As a result, NGOs keep implementing independently designed educational projects with no or limited sustainable impact on local educational policies due to the lack of capacity-building skills and collaboration with state representatives. Moreover, De-Cordier (2008) and Klees (2010) point out that non-state organizations may be used as tools for establishing dependency on the West. Nevertheless, NGOs are still considered to be dominant stakeholders in educational development (Abdushkurova, 2008).

Despite the limited participation of NGOs in education policy-making in the region, they do exert a positive influence in practice. In their externally developed programs, NGOs, as an example provided by Silova and Steiner-Khamsi (2008), developed a learning approach centered around students that finally led to an educational reform at the state level in the area.

### ***2.4.3 Local Perspective***

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Kazakhstan are promising in terms of impact on education but still face challenges. With the growing number of NGOs and CSOs in Kazakhstan (ADB, 2005), this field deficit (a) state cooperation, (b) trust, and (c) awareness within communities. According to Kabdiyeva (2015), Kazakhstan’s non-

governmental sector has progressed to a new degree of development - during over 20 years of independence, not only has the number of NGOs and CSOs kept growing, and their efficacy is becoming increasingly effective and impactful (Ibrayeva & Nezhina, 2013). NGOs have achieved several significant results in such challenges as women's issues, child, and family welfare, education, as well as the needs and interests of people with disabilities. For instance, in the article "Development of NGOs in Kazakhstan," the author mentions the extension of intersectional collaboration, the creation of international linkages, the diversification of the NGO sector, and the improvement of state-NGO interactions as one of the major results (Kabdiyeva, 2015). However, the author adds that despite some beneficial results in state-NGO cooperation, there is a need for NGOs to work more closely with the government and build trust across different communities. Other authors and studies also emphasize the need for the empowerment of state-NGO cooperation. Lexow (2003) mentions that governments and CSOs should move from co-existence toward active collaboration. Moreover, Lang (2010) unfolds it further and notes that there is a deficit of support from the Ministry of Education. Moreover, the government should see opportunities to collaborate with NGOs, as they provide services for hard-to-reach and marginalized groups of society.

The field of NGOs in Kazakhstan deficits trust and awareness among people. According to Ibrayeva and Nezhina (2013), civil society's efficacy in Kazakhstan has been hampered by a centralized government and historic popular reverence for authority. People in Kazakhstan have minimal trust in and recognition of local NGOs, and when help is needed, they turn to the government and their social networks. The awareness of the nonprofit sector and its benefits used to be low in Kazakhstani society. However, relatively recently,

awareness and trust among people have been increasing (Ibrayeva& Nezhina, 2013). The roles of NGOs should be clearly outlined in the strategies and action plans.

In Kazakhstan and internationally, NGOs are considered important stakeholders in terms of education and inclusive education in particular. Rollan and Somerton (2019) in their research aimed to explore to what extent and how civil society may enhance the implementation of inclusive education reform. The interview-based findings demonstrate that NGOs are actively involved in the inclusive education policy-making process, as well as they ensure the policies are implemented. Moreover, NGOs provide methodological support to schools and professionals, build a culture of perception of people with special needs, collaborate with parents, the state, and the broader audiences about inclusive education, as well as present informational support. These findings revealed a need for further and closer collaboration between NGOs, the government, and schools in order to reinforce the implementation of inclusive education reform in Kazakhstan (Rollan & Somerton, 2019). The authors of the study conclude that NGOs do exert an impact on the promotion of rights of people with disabilities and inclusive education practices, as well as they have influence at the political level. Furthermore, the growing number of NGOs dedicated to social issues, shows that NGOs' participation in social sector development is becoming more responsive and effective (ADB, 2007).

## **2.5 Theoretical Framework**

In order to illuminate the central phenomenon of the study - NGOs' role - a collaborative theory by Gray (1991) is chosen. According to the author, collaboration is defined as a method by which stakeholders who perceive the issue from different angles can

discuss their disagreements and look for answers that expand their own narrow understanding of what is achievable. According to Gadja (2004), organizations are collaborating to tackle challenging societal issues. The majority of purposeful inter-organizational collaboratives emphasize collaboration as the main strategy for accomplishing desirable short- and/or long-term objectives that would not be possible as separate groups functioning individually. Moreover, collaborative actions between different stakeholders such as educational institutions, NGOs, and businesses are promoted as a strategy to accomplish an otherwise impossible vision when independent entities work alone (Gadja, 2004). In other words, collaboration has the power to unite and improve disparate systems for the sake of addressing complex social issues.

It is important that successful collaboration is wrapped around effective communication and an emotional bond toward mutual goals. Austin (2000) mentions that a successful collaboration is only possible when key stakeholders interact with one another on personal and emotional levels and engage in achieving a shared goal. Gadja (2004) notes that building trust, dedicating of a legit amount of time, and efforts toward the development of collaboration and communication are crucial for success.

According to Gray (1991), there are five features of a collaboration process: all the stakeholders remain independent, differences are acknowledged and are part of solutions, mutual decision-making, joint responsibility, and collaboration is perceived as organizations can adapt to their environments' increasing complexity through emergent organizational configurations. Gray's (1991) model of collaboration comprised of three main stages: problem-setting, direction-setting, and implementation. The problem-setting stage consists of identifying issues and stakeholders. The second stage - direction-setting involves recognizing a sense of shared purpose; finding and sharing potential future collaborative meanings. The

parties' divergent value orientations are a major contributor to the challenges in finding a cooperative solution (Brown, 1991; Gray, 1991). The final stage - implementation establishes agreed meanings that develop as the collaboration does.

In the case of this study, policy-makers, educational institutions, businesses, NGOs, and the government are considered to be the main stakeholders in implementing inclusive education reform. It is assumed that these parties may need to build effective and trusty collaboration in order to address the challenges of the implementation of inclusive education in TVETs of Kazakhstan.

## **2.6 Conclusion**

There are various roles and impacts by international and local NGOs that work towards inclusive education both worldwide and in Kazakhstan. They are considered to be high impact in terms of capacity building, raising awareness, and implementing independent projects towards inclusion. Nevertheless, NGOs seem to have a limited sustainable effect on the vulnerable groups they are working for due to the difficulties related to collaboration with other stakeholders such as government and educational institutions. Thus, a closer look at these barriers is required in order to identify possible ways of collaboration between NGOs and TVET institutions in Kazakhstan.

## **Chapter 3: Research Methodology**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This study aims to explore what contribution non-governmental organizations may have on the inclusive education reform in TVET in Almaty from the principals' perspective.

This chapter unwraps the methodology of the the present study. It begins with the choice of research paradigm, research design, and sampling strategies. It will then examine the data collection procedures and data analysis.

### **3.2 Research Paradigm**

The study is grounded on the constructivist paradigm. According to Heisse-Biber and Leavy (2011), this paradigm was developed to focus on people's subjective experiences and perceptions. Neuman (2000) added that respect and empathy are important traits of the researcher within the constructivist paradigm. Additionally, people's interpretations and understandings are the core value of the researcher of this study. Constructivists asserted that the researcher primarily depends on participant feedback from conversations and other facts pertaining to the research questions (Highfield & Bisman, 2012). As a result, all facts discovered and observed during the research are accurate and reliable (Jeffrey, 2004).

### **3.3. Research Approach**

To achieve this, the qualitative research design was chosen to explore broader perspectives, experiences, and beliefs of the TVET principals. According to Leavy (2014), the goal of a qualitative research design is to comprehend a specific area of social life or to reveal the meanings that people connect to behaviors, events, concepts, or objects. Moreover, when addressing a research subject where the factors need to be studied since they are

unknown, qualitative research works best (Creswell, 2012). The focus of this study is on participants' attitudes and experiences; thus, to present them in a wide and comprehensive manner, the qualitative research design is the best suit (Creswell, 2012).

### **3.4 Research Design**

This study applies a generic qualitative research design. The generic qualitative approach, often known as the basic qualitative approach or just interpretive, can be used by itself as the researcher's stated methodology (Merriam, 2009).

Generic qualitative research attempts to comprehend a phenomenon, a process, or the viewpoints and world views of the individuals involved and It gives a full explanation of what happened using phrases that are frequently used to describe those occurrences and presents the case's facts in straightforward language (Percy et al., 2015). Moreover, studies that seek to learn about and comprehend an event, a process, or the viewpoints and world views of the people involved are referred to as taking a general qualitative approach (Caelli et al., 2003).

The research applies semi-structured interviews as a data collection instrument. Such an approach allows the researcher to gain a comprehensive grasp of a phenomenon (Creswell, 2012), which is critical for comprehending people's opinions and perspectives.

### **3.5 Site and Sample**

This study aims to analyze how principals of 5 TVETs (3 public and 2 Private TVET Institutions) in Almaty perceive NGOs' role in terms of the implementation of inclusive education reform in TVETs. The study showcases the perceptions of 5 principals. A convenience sampling strategy is used to implement this study as it entails selecting study participants based on how easily they can be reached by the researcher. (Hesse-Biber &

Leavy, 2011). This strategy is widely employed, for instance, when a researcher has access to participants within a particular institution, firm, business, or group.. According to Creswell (2012), the convenience sampling strategy is used when the researcher identifies participants according to their accessibility and willingness to be studied. In this case, the researcher cannot be confident that the participants represent the population, which is one of the limitations of this study. However, this strategy can provide valuable and useful information for addressing the research questions (Creswell, 2012).

The participants comprised of four female principals and one male principal with at least 5 years of experience as a TVET institution principal. It is crucial for the present study to explore the phenomenon among public and private TVET institutions of Almaty. Thus, participants represent 3 public and 2 private TVET institutions. See Table 1 for the description of the study participants.

***Table 1***

*Description of the Study's Participants*

<b>Participant Number</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Public/Private TVET Institutions</b>	<b>Years of Experience in TVET/years</b>	<b>Claimed as inclusive TVET Institution</b>
Participant #1	Female	Private	6	-
Participant #2	Male	Public	8	+
Participant #3	Female	Public	8	+
Participant #4	Female	Private	30	-
Participant #5	Female	Public	17	-

### **3.6 Data Collection Instruments**

The research applies semi-structured interviews with five principals of TVET institutions in Almaty. Such an approach allows the researcher to gain a comprehensive grasp of a phenomenon (Creswell, 2012), which is critical for comprehending people's opinions and perspectives. Moreover, Fontana and Frey (2000) note that semi-structured interviews is a working tool for a better understanding of individuals. However, this data collection instrument has its disadvantages: (a) pre-building trust with the participants; (b) the assumption that the participants are open and willing to talk; and (c) the interpretation of the data is conducted through the researcher's perspectives; which are also considered as limitations of the study.

Based on the data I needed to investigate, I developed a set of open-ended questions for the participants to explore in-depth their attitudes and perceptions about NGOs' contribution to inclusive education within Gray's theory on collaboration (1991).

Semi-structured interviews were the best choice for the data collection for this research as they ensured open and transparent communication between the principals and the researcher. The interview protocol (Appendix A) consisted of three themes of the questions: (1) Participants' background information; (2) Questions about inclusive education; (3) Questions about NGOs. The first set of questions allowed the researcher to immerse in the professional background and qualifications of the participants. Moreover, these questions took the role of ice-breakers in order to build a comfortable environment and a sense of trust. The questions about inclusive education allowed the participants to think and reflect on their knowledge and feelings about the phenomenon. Moreover, they gave to the researcher valuable information about knowledge, experience, challenges, and opportunities of inclusive education on TVET.

The last set of questions on the NGOs' role in inclusive education revealed the attitudes of participants toward NGOs, their activities, and ways of current and potential collaboration.

### **3.7 Data Collection Procedure**

Data collection began after receiving approval from NUGSE Ethics Committee in October 2022.

The qualitative study started with the site and participants' identification and was followed by gaining permission and access to the site. First, the researcher designed an official letter as a master's degree student at the Graduate School of Education at Nazarbayev University. With the description of the study, I requested the interview on a convenient day, time, and mode (online/offline) for each participant. Then, the researcher sent these emails to the principals and also contacted them to make sure they got the letters. After, the meetings were arranged.

The next step focused on collecting data - in the case of this qualitative study; it is face-to-face or online interviews with the participants.

The formal permission to collect the data was taken prior to the data collection from each participant by reading and signing the consent form (Appendix B).

All the participants of the study were instructed and informed about their confidentiality and anonymity before and after the interviews. They were guaranteed their names and the names of the educational institutions would not be revealed or mentioned at any time.

Every interview started with a description of the study, voluntarily based, confidential, anonymous participation, and signing of the consent form. The next step was

recording the information. I gained permission to record the interview from each participant. The interviews were conducted in a mode the most convenient to the participants. Therefore, four interviews were held online through the ZOOM platform, and one interview was conducted offline, at the participant's TVET institution. All the interviews lasted from 40 to 60 minutes. Finally, the researcher managed the data collection procedures with sensitivity to ethical issues (Creswell, 2012). The researcher thanked the participants for their participation in the study after the interviews were over.

All the interviews were conducted in the Russian language. A few days following the interview, Russian transcripts were emailed to the participants to check for legitimacy, clear up any misunderstandings, and request clarifications. After receiving back the permission, the transcripts were translated into English language.

### **3.8 Data Analysis**

This study aimed to explore the TVET principals' perspective on the role of NGOs in inclusive education. The data that emerged from this research consisted of transcribed interviews. The research questions and the important categories that emerged during data collection were used to frame the study's findings and conclusions.

### **3.9 Interview Analysis**

The transcribed interviews were read several times in order to get more familiar with the data. Then, starting from interview #1 the coding process began. For this study, an open coding type was chosen. According to Merriam (2002), coding identifies emerging themes in the data that may answer specific questions in the research. The repetitive approach of data analysis was used. The most repeated ideas and words were coded to track the number of mentions and repetitions and explore participants' words through their quotes.

After coding all of the interviews, the researcher came back and forth across the data in order to add, delete, correct, and recode. Initially, the number of codes was 38, and then it was reduced to 29 codes. The codes were divided into 3 main categories based on the research questions, and subcategories emerged during data analysis. This approach allowed for better structure and demonstration of the findings of the study.

### **3.10 Trustworthiness**

In order to maintain the trustworthiness of this study member checking was used as a technique to enhance the credibility of the study's outcomes. According to Birt et al. (2016), participants receive feedback on data or findings to assess for accuracy and consistency with their experiences. Moreover, according to Lincoln and Guba (1985), member checking can improve the rigor of qualitative research since accurate descriptions or interpretations of occurrences are inherently credible.

A review of the original Russian interviews and their translations into English was done in order to make sure the research was reliable. The categorization of phrases was stressed and solicited to analyze and improve the understanding of principals' perspectives and language (Moustakas, 1994).

### **3.11 Ethical Consideration**

The initial step was getting the study's ethical approval from the NUGSE Research Ethics Committee in order to start fieldwork research.

Although the research had minimal risk to the participants, the researcher tried to minimize any possible harm (emotional or psychological) the participation in the study might cause, therefore, any sensitive questions were avoided or if a participant found a question to

be so, he or she had a right not to answer it. Moreover, participants were notified that they had a right to end the interview at any point and skip questions without explanation.

In addition, all the aforementioned measures were taken in order to protect the participants' private information and provide confidentiality. The participants participated on a voluntary basis only with full confidentiality ensured.

Participants' identities and names of TVET institutions were concealed by changing their names with numbers (e.g. Participant 1/Participant 2), and the information they provided was kept on a researcher's computer which is secured with a password. No names, addresses, or other personal data were not mentioned anywhere.

In order to protect confidentiality the collected data was not shared with anyone. All information provided by the participants was used for research purposes only.

### **3.12 Conclusion**

The methodology chapter of the research discussed and justified the choice of the research paradigm and design, as well as the site and sample of the study. It also described the data collection instruments and procedures, concluding with the data analysis and trustworthiness.

In order to prevent any potential research methodological limitations like bias and subjectivity of the researcher, methods of data collection were carefully designed and chosen.

## **Chapter 4: Findings**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter of the study focuses on the findings that emerged from the collected data in terms of the role of NGOs towards inclusive education reform in TVET institutions of Almaty from the principals' perspective. The chapter aims to present answers to the main research questions about the role of NGOs. The findings from the data gathered for this study were through semi-structured interviews. The data presented describe the respondents' opinions, perceptions, and experiences. The information is arranged in accordance with the research questions. The chapter is organized according to the research questions.

### **4.2 How Do Principals Conceptualize and Enact Inclusive Education Reform in TVET?**

The first set of research findings focuses on the conceptualization and enactment of inclusive education at participants' TVET institutions. It also reviews participants' knowledge about inclusive education policy, practice, and culture, sharing their opinion on opportunities and challenges. It is crucial for the main research questions of the study to explore first principals' definition, level of awareness of policy, practice, and culture of inclusive education.

#### ***4.2.1 Definition of Inclusive Education***

The definition of inclusive education and the language used is very important as they contain and reflect valuable information about attitude, perception, resistance, and feelings towards the phenomenon.

The participants of the study defined inclusive education to some degree differently that has indicated a variety of levels of thinking, perceiving, and reacting to inclusive

education at their institutions. Public TVET institutions representatives, Participant #2 and Participant #3, demonstrated a high level of understanding and definition of the inclusive education concept. Participant #2 told:

We treat inclusive education as the provision of educational services. In fact, inclusive education is a learning opportunity and approach, a methodology for teaching children with disabilities or special educational needs. Taking into account the various available physical capabilities, and social, linguistic, and intellectual characteristics, inclusive education is involved in the learning process. They should not be left out and should be accepted into society.

Participant #3 defined inclusive education as follows:

I believe that inclusive education is the inclusion in a healthy system according to the needs, abilities, and opportunities of these children and the creation of conditions for these children. Inclusion does not mean that we have to change and correct the child. This means that we must tailor it exactly to the needs of these students. Some people think that inclusion, inclusive education, and so on, are like a fashion trend. In fact, this is the need to educate children, to include children in a healthy environment.

It is clear from the quotes that both participants are positive about inclusive education. They perceive it to be highly important and needed. They realize that the system should adjust to the needs of children with special educational needs. SEN students must be included in society. Both participants were emotionally stable and very secure about what they were saying. However, it is important to mention that Participant #2 and Participant #3 are the representatives of the Public TVET Institutions and their institutions claimed to be inclusive.

Thus, their knowledge may be at a more advanced level when comparing it to other TVET institutions.

Participant #1 and Participant #4 are Private TVET principals and their definitions, and language vary. Participant #1 defined inclusive education as “training for kids with specific problems.” This definition reflects an obsolete Soviet perception of SEN children as problematic. Moreover, the choice of the word “training” may unwrap the perception of inclusive education as a temporal activity rather than a long-term strategy for creating an inclusive environment. Participant #4 told:

Inclusive education is such a complex issue. I also always think about it, how to build it correctly. I think that it is impossible to separate them [SEN students]. It seems to me that my version of inclusion is when these children are distributed among healthy children is right. If it is not life-threatening, it does not pose any danger; it seems to me that this is very correct.

First of all, Participant #4 may lack knowledge about the phenomenon. The words “these children” (appealing to SEN children), and “healthy children” confirm it. Participant #4 might never reflect on her own definition of inclusive education and tried to shape it after the question. Although she mentioned the concept to be sophisticated, she came to the idea that SEN children cannot be separated from their peers in case there was no threat to other children. Overall, Participant #1 and Participant #4 were expressing emotions of compassion, sadness, and worry toward SEN children.

The comparison of definitions and tracked emotions of the participants have indicated differences in perception of the phenomenon of inclusive education among Public and Private

TVET principals. Public TVET representatives are positive about inclusive education and SEN children. They are precise in terms and confident about the language applied and definitions mentioned, as well as seem supportive and ready. Whereas Private TVET principals may seem careful in expressions, uncertain about the definition and language, as well as feeling sad and compassionate about SEN children.

#### ***4.2.2 Knowledge of Policy on Inclusive Education***

It is important to reveal policy knowledge on inclusive education in TVET. The acknowledgment and comprehension of legislation and requirements indicate an awareness and responsible attitude toward its implementation. Despite this is not the focus of the present study, it is crucial to highlight some of the thoughts and knowledge of the TVET principals about legislation in order to see the bigger picture.

Participant #1 mentions qualification requirements for TVET, order #64, which states what conditions should be created for people with disabilities in TVET. She also added: “It seems to me that in principle, there should not be a problem, there is no refusal for disabled people. Whoever wants, he/she studies.”

However, Participant #1 mentions that at her previous workplace (private TVET in Almaty) the rector refused to accept SEN children with an argument “Let the Government take care of such children”. Moreover, she further explains that creating conditions such as elevators and toilet rooms for people with disabilities was done with their own resources. Thus, having this experience and stating that there is no refusal is contradicted. Participant #3 notes that despite the Constitutional right to education and acceptance for all, in practice, this is far from being the reality, which also contradicts Participant #1.

Participant #2 unwraps his thoughts about inclusive education policy as follows:

As for inclusive education in general, there are clear regulations. Now our society is building barrier-free access - this is in both educational and social facilities. All facilities are now required to create conditions for barrier-free access. Accordingly, with regard to educational institutions, the mandatory requirements for regulatory legal acts, any college is obliged to create an environment - these must be light signs, and various information signs. I know that all colleges meet these requirements.

Participant #4 tells: “According to the law of education on inclusion, we can teach such children remotely.”

Participant #3 shared the structure of their inclusive education. She mentions that if only a TVET institution has more than 150 SEN students they are allowed to open an inclusive education department with special educators: a department head, an inclusive education methodologist, a sign language interpreter, an assistant teacher, a psychologist, and a social pedagogue. If a TVET institution has less than 150 SEN students they cannot open a department and can only have an assistant teacher and an inclusive education coordinator. She also mentions that starting in the 2022 year, on August 28th, the educational organization has the right to create an individual program and a model curriculum itself and only then coordinate with the Ministry of Education and Science, depending on our capabilities and abilities in the TVET.

The participants share knowledge about policy on inclusive education. They all agree there are qualification requirements for TVET that aim to create a barrier-free environment, specific conditions, and accessibility. Moreover, according to one of the participants these

requirements allow an option of homeschooling for SEN students. However, a few contradictions between theory and practice were identified. First, there is a professional experience of refusal in education for SEN children due to the attitude of management. Secondly, while one participant is positive and states that all TVET institutions have these conditions, another one mentions difficulties in building a barrier-free environment, claiming “I do not see these conditions, believe me”. Third, the structure of inclusive education at TVET’s institution #3 is not in the legislation, but they implement it in practice differently.

#### ***4.2.3 Practice Dimension of Inclusive Education***

The participants of the study shared their thoughts on the implementation of inclusive education in practice. All of them mentioned there are opportunities for SEN students in their TVET Institutions based on the degree of disability. They also shared their opinion about the barriers they encounter in the enactment of inclusive education.

TVET Institutions offer their students working specialties. Most of the participants note there are professions for SEN children that TVET may offer. For example, SEN students may be dentists and learn how to make casts; also, they can create products of wood, and metal. Additionally, they can learn design, floristics, and culinary arts. However, the participants mention these professions are available for students with mild disabilities with preserved intelligence and developed motor skills. All of the participants state psychological support at their TVET institutions for all children, including SEN students. Only one of 5 participants note they also have a set of special educators (social pedagogues, inclusive education specialists, language interpreters). As for the more severe disabilities, two principals mention opportunities for homeschooling due to the parents, and teachers’ attitudes and potential danger for other students in the colleges. Participant #4 articulates special

groups comprised of 8-12 students who graduated from correctional special schools.

Participant #2 adds on correctional groups as follows: “There is confusion in the state bodies and educational institutions about inclusive education being a process of integration into the general educational space, but there are still correctional groups.”

The participants also highlighted the most pressing barriers for them that in their opinion hinder the practical implementation of inclusive education. They noted there is still no physical condition for accessibility, no awareness among SEN students and their parents about educational opportunities, and a heavy paper workload that does not allow them to work harder on inclusive education.

Participant #1 and Participant #2 express their opinion on the lack of accessibility and conditions as follows: “Barriers that we have are physical. I believe that the system is not built” and “I do not see these conditions believe me. In the college, for example, we equipped a toilet room by ourselves.”

Whereas Participant #2 tells that all the TVET institutions have met the requirements for physical accessibility.

Another barrier mentioned was the lack of time to think, reflect, raise awareness and gather stakeholders, and establish inclusive education. Participant #1 claims:

This is the hustle and bustle every day. I am sure that the vast majority of principals do not have time to think about something because there are too many demands from here and from there. Naturally, there should be some kind of incentive from the state for inclusive education. In the meantime, children with SEN will not come en masse

to us. It seems to me that they are sitting at home, undergoing some kind of distance learning at home.

#### ***4.2.4 Cultural Aspect of Inclusive Education***

Cultural attitude is one of the important dimensions for the successful implementation of inclusive education in all educational institutions. How external stakeholders and society as a whole perceive inclusive education reflects its maturity and consciousness. The participants of the study share their worries about the cultural challenges they encounter in terms of inclusive education. The most frequently mentioned are negative attitudes in society toward people with disabilities, as well as challenges in the employment of SEN graduates.

All of the participants note that the main barrier to the implementation of inclusive education is society's perception. Participant #1 compares the state of society in Kazakhstan and Europe and notes that in Europe people with disabilities are independent, socialized, and can live a decent life. Then, she adds that Kazakhstan society as a whole is rather "raw" in this regard. Participant #2 and Participant # 3 expand on this opinion and add: "There is a part of society that misunderstands supporting and helping people with disabilities and therefore does not accept it" and "Society is far from being ready for inclusive education to be introduced. I mean society, and parents, the public, our social partners who work with us are not all happy and agree to work with these children."

Another big barrier to inclusive education is employment, according to the participants. They claim that even if there are opportunities for SEN children to get an education at TVET, they still face barriers to employment due to the attitudes of employers. Participant #3 shares that not all employers agree to work with SEN students, as it is easier

for them to employ and work with “healthy” people rather than creating special conditions. Participant #2 agrees with that, adding that their graduates often have difficulties with employment.

These opinions may mean there is no coherence in terms of the implementation of inclusive education, as well as a lack of support from different stakeholders, like parents, teachers, the state, business organizations, and NGOs.

### **4.3 What Are Principals’ Knowledge/Experiences about NGOs and Their Potential for Inclusive Education Reform in TVET?**

The goal of the study is to explore TVET principals’ perspectives on the role of NGOs in inclusive education in Almaty. Firstly, the researcher tried to understand what is the current knowledge of principals about NGOs operating internationally and locally. Second, principals shared their experience of working with NGOs.

#### ***4.3.1 Knowledge of NGOs***

The data received from TVET principals about collaboration in general and NGOs shows that TVET institutions are open to collaboration with different stakeholders.

Participant #1 mentions:

My approach is that any partnership is a social partnership. I do not divide into NGOs, private organizations, educational organizations, or employers. For me, social partners are all partners. I believe that any educational institution should be open to cooperation because any cooperation brings good results.

Participant #2 adds: “When our volunteers participate in actions and projects, it is also crucial for us. Because the involvement of our students is significant for the development of inclusion.”

All of the participants mention that any kind of collaboration is important for them, their students, and their development. However, they emphasize that there is no financial support from organizations, except the State.

State-TVET collaboration was mentioned as the most popular kind of collaboration. The participants mention Akimat of Almaty, the “Atameken” Chamber of Entrepreneurs, “Talap” as the main partners in events organization and support different kinds of activities.

Secondly, TVET institutions have tight connections between themselves and international partners from other educational institutions. The form of collaboration is usually conferences, training, and exchange programs.

In terms of knowledge about NGOs and their activities across the country and specific issues, the participants demonstrate a different level of awareness. Participant #1 mentions that she has never come across such organizations, and even more she did not think about it. Participant #3 says that their TVET institution does not work with NGOs and they do not rely on them. Participant #2 notes that they work with NGOs who turn on to them through local executive state bodies to involve TVET institutions in projects and events. Participant #4 has not encountered NGOs yet.

#### ***4.3.2 Experience with NGO***

Despite the fact that most of the participants claim they do not work with NGOs within their TVET institutions, de facto, they do collaborate with some of them in practice.

Participant #2 mentions The Association of Parents of Disabled Children (ARDI). The TVET institution and ARDI implement a creative project in collaboration for children with SEN through TVET teachers and students on developing a variety of skills. Moreover, they partner with the Public Foundation “Foundation of Youth Development on Resolving Social Challenges in The Republic of Kazakhstan - Way to the Young”. The Foundation has been created to provide support to young people from families with low incomes, graduates of social institutions, students from other cities, and people with disabilities. The Foundation also helps in finding employment, internships, and in the implementation of young businessmen's initiatives.

Participant #1 notes that the students and teachers of her TVET institution participate in leadership programs, provided by the Public Foundation “Kazakhstan Foundation for Cultural, Social, and Educational Development’. The Foundation provides teachers with soft-skills training and courses on contemporary teaching tools. The students participate in a variety of programs, directed to develop soft skills, and professionalism; address social challenges and employment.

Participant #3 tells about some of the foundations they are currently working with in terms of inclusive education. She mentions the Charitable Foundation “Azamat Auleti” - The Private non-profit Foundation which aims to increase the participation of SEN children in education (kindergartens, schools, TVETs, and Universities) and social protection. Children who attend this Foundation may enroll in the TVET college, and receive a specialty in order

to continue further education or employment. Participant #3 also notes that this year they have started a collaboration with the Charitable Foundation “Shyrak”. The Foundation supports socially vulnerable segments of the population, especially women with disabilities. The Participant received an invitation to attend an international training course “Clear Language”. Another Foundation that she cooperates with is “The Foundation of the First President”. Supporting youth, creating social projects and civil initiatives, and creating a competitive expert and analytical center are the goals of the Foundation's activity. Participant #3 mentions:

The Foundation of the First President annually holds an inclusive festival called “Aman Keleshyt - "Healthy Life, Healthy Future". They create various kinds of platforms on which 10 inclusive trainings are held. Every year we try to get our children to participate. This is a republican festival.

Participant #4 shares her experience of collaboration with one inclusive center in Almaty for children with disabilities. The Participant invited children from the center to participate in the inclusive theater at the TVET institution. They rehearsed together: TVET students and SEN children from the center, and performed in the theater. Then they went to the city of Astana with this performance. Participants #4 stresses the importance of such collaboration by saying:

When we showed an inclusive performance with such children, you know, students and parents come out of the theatre completely different. Firstly, they always thank mom and dad. They begin to appreciate life. They become more grateful to their

parents and generally become completely different when these children [SEN children] are around.

Additionally, Participant #4 lists some of the NGOs they cooperate with. Among them is the Public Foundations “Success to Youth”, “Alliance of Students”, and “Leader. KZ”. TVET students hold English clubs and participate in volunteer movements. Moreover, she mentions that she helps to raise funds for the “Foundation for Inclusion”.

The participants demonstrated little awareness of the NGOs, operating in Kazakhstan in relation to different social issues in general, and inclusive education in particular. They rather rely on the state, educational institutions, and local executive bodies in terms of collaboration, support, and activities. This may demonstrate the lack of knowledge about available resources from external stakeholders.

The data analysis showed misconception or a complete misunderstanding of the term “NGO”. The participants claimed they did not work with NGOs. However, they gave examples of working with public, private, and charitable foundations, and the inclusive center on different kinds of extra-curricular activities, including the support and development of inclusion. Nevertheless, the collaboration they mentioned was more of their support of inclusion-related activities for other stakeholders, rather than directing this collaboration to establish inclusive education within their institutions. This may lead to a lack of permanent directed action toward inclusive education in TVET and misuse of the resources (human, informational, financial) that may potentially be provided by NGOs.

#### **4.4 What Are the Possible Challenges (if any) and Opportunities of Working with NGOs toward Inclusion from Principals’ Perspectives?**

The data analysis showed that TVET Institutions in Kazakhstan with no regard for whether it is a public or private organization try to collaborate with different stakeholders to support their inclusive initiatives outside of TVET institutions. Few of the participants mentioned how NGOs help them with SEN students. However, the participants of the study outlined the main challenges they are facing with the establishment of inclusive education within their organizations. Opportunities shape from challenges. When participants were talking about the challenges they were also reflecting on opportunities that might emerge in a potential collaboration with stakeholders, including NGOs.

#### ***4.4.1 Challenges***

The participants of the study mention several main challenges they are facing in terms of the development of inclusive education in their TVET institutions. Lack of cohesion, parents' attitudes, lack of professional orientation among students, and further employment of the SEN graduates are among the main challenges mentioned by the study participants.

Concerning the lack of cohesion, several participants share their opinion about challenges in collaboration with the State, NGOs, business field, and individuals.

Participant #1 shares her disappointment in attempts to collaborate with different external stakeholders. She tells:

We approach a lot of different people and organizations to support us. We did not get any help. I doubt that we will find such people because, after all, everything in our country is now set for individual benefit. Everyone wants to have their own benefit from any event.

She also adds that in order to get everything done in TVET there should be an incentive from the State - if the State does a project on inclusive education, people will engage.

However, Participant #3 tells that inclusive education in a TVET institution is impossible to implement if there is no deep understanding of the phenomenon and no cohesion. Participant #3 stresses the importance of collaboration and support. She believes inclusive education will not exist if there is no cohesion and help. She notes:

If something breaks somewhere in this chain [inclusive education], we can assume that there is no inclusive education per se. Why? Because our children must, first of all, socialize, that is, take place in society, and then advance in an independent life. And if there is no such connection, naturally, it turns out that "everyone will boil in his own porridge.

Thus, the participants realize there is a lack of collaboration and have a deep understanding of the importance of collaboration for the inclusive education cause.

The second challenge is parents' attitudes toward SEN children at TVET Institutions. Participants #1 and Participant #4 disagree on the worries of parents both SEN children and children with no SEN. According to Participant #1, parents of SEN children are afraid to put their children into general education due to the potential danger that may occur. Participant #1 notes:

It seems to me that parents are afraid when they enable a SEN child to the environment. How is she/he socialized? They are afraid that their child will be hurt, that the child will fall somewhere, or something like that will happen to her/him.

On the other hand, Participant #4 mentions that often parents of SEN children hide the diagnosis and disabilities of their children in order to enroll in a TVET Institution and study among their peers. She tells: “Parents are trying to hide diagnosis so that she/he studies among normal peers. Parents are extremely interested in putting their SEN children in mixed groups.”

However, Participant #3 notes that there is a misunderstanding among parents about the opportunities that SEN children have in educational institutions among parents. She claims:

An inadequate attitude of parents is a challenge. They read that everyone can learn everything, and everyone has the right to learn, but they do not take into account the opportunities of a child. They know their needs, and their rights, but they do not take into account the capabilities of their children.

This may signal there is low awareness or misconception among parents about opportunities inclusive education may give to their children and society as a whole.

The next challenge that emerges from the data is a lack of professional orientation among SEN children and their parents. Participant #2 and Participant #3 agree on the difficulties in choosing a profession for SEN students at their TVET Institutions. Participant #2 notes:

Difficulties often arise in choosing a profession. There are children with various special needs. Children with visual impairments come to be trained as cooks. Becoming a cook is tough. When working with thermal equipment and switchers, there is work to process raw materials. There are such moments and difficulties.

Therefore, for us, when children come with special educational needs with various disabilities, it is difficult to convince them that this profession is not for them; it is contraindicated, as it has special risks.

Participant #3 adds on that as follows: “There are also, let’s say, contradictions in choosing a specialty. If a student has chosen a specialty and there are contraindications, we, of course, cannot allow these children to study it.”

Thus, the participants express the challenge related to the acceptance and refusal of children with SEN to study a variety of specialties TVET may offer.

Another challenge, according to the participants, is the employment of SEN children. Participant #2 notes:

There are difficulties with employment. It would seem that they (SEN students) have already been trained, they have knowledge and skills, and they have a diploma in their hands, nevertheless, when we talk about work culture, and building work activity, especially in private organizations, it is becoming difficult.

Participant #4 adds:

I mean society, and parents, the public, our social partners who work with us are not all happy and agree to work with children who graduate from our inclusive college. Not everyone agrees that this child should work for them. It is easier for them to work with healthy people than to create some conditions to fulfill their needs. Therefore, society is practically not yet ready. But compared to the years when it started, of course, there is progress.

However, she also adds that the graduates of TVET are being employed by some of the partners of the TVET Institution.

Participant #5 tells that there is a lack of cooperation between different educational levels - kindergartens, schools, TVETs; society, and employers. She mentions that due to the lack of collaboration, SEN children often suffer from unemployment if their parents cannot secure a job for them (individual entrepreneurship, for example).

#### ***4.4.2 Opportunities***

The participants of the study mentioned several forms of collaborating with NGOs. These forms were mostly contests, volunteering opportunities, support for inclusive centers', and non-systematic one-time activities. Moreover, all of the participants demonstrated interest, openness, and willingness to collaborate with NGOs toward the establishment of inclusive education. Thus, several opportunities for potential collaboration between NGOs and TVET Institutions emerged during the data analysis. First of all, they highlighted the importance of quality teachers' training in inclusive education. Secondly, they shared their perspective on the need for professional orientation and career guidance at earlier stages of education of SEN children. Finally, the participants indicated the importance of building cohesion about inclusive education with employers, NGOs, and TVET Institutions.

The participants agree on the necessity of teachers' training. They share their worries that teachers at their institutions lack professional competence in working with SEN students. Participant #1 notes that teachers need to learn how to communicate with SEN children due to the "double responsibility". Moreover, she also adds she would be open to providing

educational opportunities for her teachers if there is an organization that possesses these competencies.

Participant #2 mentions that collaboration with NGOs across Kazakhstan is very crucial not only for SEN children but also for teachers, who may access valuable knowledge and skills through participation in projects toward inclusive education. He notes that currently, his teachers lack the knowledge and skill to work in the field of inclusion effectively, and he requests support in this regard.

Participant #3 shares her thoughts on the availability of programs for the teachers and tells:

Not always, or rather, not everywhere, there are training courses and professional development courses for teachers who are engaged in inclusive education. To be honest, these children studied together with typical children, and many teachers simply did not have any special education.

Therefore, the principals realize the importance of teachers' training as the main conductors of inclusive education practices and ask for support. However, it is important to mention they rather wait for an NGO to approach them and provide them with tools, instead of exploring opportunities and looking for direct support in this regard.

The data analysis showed that the participants of the study face challenges in professional orientation when SEN students enroll in their institutions. The principals note there is a lack of career guidance in kindergartens and schools, thus, SEN students come to TVET and face struggles in choosing a specialty. Principals note, there are often contradictions between the opportunities of an SEN child and a desirable career. As an

example of an opportunity for collaboration with NGOs, participant #2 suggests establishing career-guiding programs in schools. He shares: “Career guidance for children with SEN should be carried out in schools. So that they already know what professions are suitable for them and whether or not they will be able to master the skills.”

Although this suggestion contradicts the notion of inclusive education per se, he justifies his thought by adding there are risks and dangers in some specialties (for example, cooks due to high temperatures and hard tools). Thus, in order not to refuse and/or disappoint a student during the admissions process, it is better to have professional orientation programs in schools.

The next opportunity for collaborating NGOs with TVET Institutions, according to the principals, is developing strong connections and support between different stakeholders towards one cause - inclusive education. They tell about the importance of connectedness and eagerness to receive and provide support. Participant #1 mentions:

If we decide to have more SEN students here, then, of course, I will have to look for people who will teach us and support us in establishing an inclusive education system. It would be great if some organization approaches us to provide high-quality social support to our students and teachers.

Participant #5 tells she is more than open to collaborating on several important moments. She mentions as follows:

If there is an organization I would love to collaborate with it. First, I would probably train teachers to work with such children correctly. Secondly, I would probably hold a meeting or a conference with the student community in order to prepare them too, so

that there would be no discrimination on their part. Thirdly, I would invite employers so that they can also participate and hear that it is worth working with such children, it is worth hiring them. Sometimes they [SEN students] will be even more capable, I would say. I think that in general, we would be open to cooperation because I noticed that this is such an urgent problem and, unfortunately, there are a lot of such children now.

Thus, overall the principals feel positive and excited about the collaboration with NGOs who work in the field of inclusive education. Moreover, there is no resistance and prejudices about NGOs per se, and vice versa, they feel there are potential and opportunities in engaging and supporting each other in order to prepare society and other stakeholders for inclusive education.

#### **4.5 Conclusion**

The findings of the data gathered during the course of this study of semi-structured interviews about the contribution of NGOs to inclusive education at TVET Institutions were presented in Chapter 4. The respondents showed their favorable opinions about the phenomena by endorsing the notion of working together for the cause, but they lacked information and comprehension of NGOs functioning in Kazakhstan as well as a proactive strategy to begin the action.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion**

### **5.1 Introduction**

This study researched the phenomenon of the role of NGOs towards inclusive education at TVET Institutions through TVET principals' lenses. This chapter discusses the synthesized main findings of the study in connection with the theoretical framework used in this paper, as well as other literature, available research, and theories in relation to the topic of the study.

### **5.2 Restating the Research Questions and Objectives**

The study was aimed at answering the following questions and achieving the following objectives:

#### ***5.2.1 Research Questions***

The central question of this study is, "What is the role of nonprofit organizations toward inclusive education reform in TVETs of Almaty from principals' perception?"

The *sub-questions* of the study are as follows:

SQ1. How do principals conceptualize and enact inclusive education reform in TVET?

SQ2. What are principals' knowledge/experiences about NGOs and their potential for inclusive education reform in TVET?

SQ3. What are the possible challenges (if any) and opportunities of working with NGOs towards inclusion from principals' perspectives?

#### ***5.2.2 The Research Objectives***

- To explore the conceptualization and enactment of the inclusive education reform by principals;
- To describe principals' knowledge and experiences about NGOs' work towards inclusive education;
- To investigate challenges (if any) and opportunities for collaboration with NGOs towards inclusive education in TVET.

### **5.3 Discussion of Findings**

The discussion chapter is arranged according to the research questions of the study. It, firstly, demonstrates the perception by the principals of the notion of inclusive education in TVET. Secondly, it presents principals' opinions, knowledge, and experience of collaboration with NGOs. Third, this chapter discusses principals' opinions about NGOs' potential collaboration with TVET toward inclusive education by presenting their thoughts on the challenges and opportunities of this collaboration.

#### ***5.3.1 How Do Principals Conceptualize and Enact Inclusive Education Reform in TVET?***

The respondents of the study demonstrated relatively good knowledge about the definition of inclusive education notion. The representatives of the public TVET Institutions were precise and accurate about defining inclusive education: when the environment must be adjusted to the needs of a SEN child, a barrier-free environment must be set, and acknowledgment of the Human Right to education was given regardless of disability. However, the principals of the private TVETs did not give such precise answers. Their definitions were hampered by the words "children with problems", "wheelchair users" and "unhealthy". Nevertheless, this indicates not a negative attitude but a lack of professional knowledge in the sphere and also the footprint of the Soviet legacy of special and correctional

education. Further, the representatives of the private TVET explained in their own words what inclusive education is. They were talking about educational opportunities, further employment, and social integration as the main features of inclusion in the educational field for students with disabilities.

Despite the fact that TVET principals answer about the definition of inclusive education, mentioning barrier-free environment, teachers' training, and education of SEN children in mainstream classrooms, they still refer to inclusive education as an educational provision for people with disabilities. None of the participants mentioned a broader internationally recognized definition of the phenomenon. What they refer to is rather "special education". Makoelle (2020) mentions that inclusive education is still being misinterpreted with special education in Kazakhstan. According to Faragher et al. (2020), the term "inclusive education" is often substituted by the term "special education". In other words, TVET principals define inclusive education in a narrower sense.

In terms of the practice of inclusive education, there are also differences between private and public TVETs. Private TVET institutions' principals believed their organizations were not inclusive, whereas, de facto, they have SEN students in the mainstream classrooms studying among their peers. Moreover, they realized the necessity of building an accessible physical environment (elevators, ramps, toilet rooms). The principals believed that a part of inclusive education in TVET was having a separate group comprised of only SEN students. Whilst, the representatives of the public TVETs claimed their institutions to be inclusive due to some SEN students being educated in mainstream groups and also having a special classroom consisting only of SEN children. Both groups of principals are still being affected by the obsolete Soviet paradigm in regard to inclusive education - they use the terms

“special” and “correctional” education and do not use the term inclusive education if there are no special separate classrooms for SEN students.

The participants of the study indicated society as one of the most pressing challenges in terms of the implementation of inclusive education. They noted that parents, peers, employers, and teachers may be resistant to accepting SEN children in wider societies. They also noticed that there is not enough collaborative action between TVETs and external stakeholders.

In terms of the cultural aspect, the respondent mentioned resistance and lack of awareness among parents, teachers, employers, and wider audiences toward inclusive education. Parents of SEN students want their children to study in general classrooms with their peers. However, parents of students with no SEN tend to be resilient due to the “potential danger”. More so, teachers at TVETs do not possess special education and training to work with SEN children to fully address their educational needs. According to the TVET principals, teachers lack professional training in inclusive education. Concerning employment opportunities the same situation can be viewed - employers would rather employ a graduate without disabilities than create an environment at a working place to employ a graduate with a disability. Malle et al. (2015, p57) note that TVET graduates with disabilities are hampered to enter the labor market due the disabilities.

The understanding and implementation of inclusive education by TVET principals are crucial for this study due to the theory on collaboration and realizing opportunities TVET and NGOs may establish. The first stage of the collaboration process is problem-setting according to Gray (1991). The stakeholders need to share similar vision, values, and perspectives

toward an issue. In this study, the principals demonstrated a narrower understanding of the concept of inclusive education, and challenges in practice and society, which may be a space for raising awareness among TVET staff by NGOs who work in the field.

### ***5.3.2 What are Principals' Knowledge/Experiences about NGOs and Their Potential for Inclusive Education Reform in TVET?***

In terms of the current collaboration between TVETs and NGOs toward inclusive education the knowledge and experiences of the principals vary, but they are overarched by a similar pattern. The principals struggled to define NGOs, name their activities, and remember whether they have NGOs as their partners. Nevertheless, unwrapping their thoughts throughout the interviews they began listing a few of the NGOs operating in Kazakhstan for different social causes, as well as NGOs dedicated to inclusion they collaborate with. Thus, the principals may not know the legal status of their partners, but when it comes to the practice side, they do collaborate with NGOs.

The most common form of collaboration between TVETs and NGOs mentioned by the respondents is mutual volunteering activities. It may take the form of charity events: bringing gifts to SEN children in specialized centers, organizing field trips for TVET students to the centers, and performing theatre with SEN children being invited. Another form of collaboration between NGOs and TVET institutions is local and international educational contests and conferences. If an NGO organizes a contest or conference they call for the participation of SEN children from TVET.

The term “NGO” is often used as a synonym of the term “volunteering” and “volunteer work”. Martens (2002) explains that this misinterpretation may be connected to a

long legacy of volunteer work impacted by religious ideals - Christian organizations and charities. Although volunteering activities are often a part of the NGOs agenda, this interpretation of NGOs limits their impact and opportunities for building deeper collaboration between the stakeholders.

Despite the lack of inclusive education practices within TVET, they exert their desire to support and help NGOs dedicated to inclusive education. They refer to volunteering activities as raising awareness events and claim their openness to such kind of collaboration. NGOs access support and TVET students, parents, and teachers immersed in the topic learn and question their attitude toward SEN children. Schuster and Kolleck (2021) emphasized that the most influential role of NGOs is raising awareness. NGOs draw the general public's attention and advocate for inclusive educational principles to foster a greater understanding among various audiences.

### ***5.3.3 What are the Possible Challenges (if any) and Opportunities of Working with NGOs towards Inclusion from Principals' Perspectives?***

NGOs' role internationally is recognized as raising awareness and moving towards social justice. NGOs use different channels, tools, and approaches in order to fight the stigma associated with disabilities, advance the rights of those who have them, and solve the issues they encounter in society (Rollan, 2018). NGOs reach out to marginalized communities, work on the grass root level, and promote inclusion on a policy and practice level (Srivastava et al., 2015).

The study showed that despite the existing collaboration between NGOs and TVET institutions, the influence of the collaboration remains limited. TVET institutions are

relatively open to welcoming SEN students into their educational organizations. However, they face environmental, professional, and attitudinal challenges internally. TVET principals' outlined several examples of collaboration with NGOs toward inclusive education. However, these collaborations remain in a form of TVET institutions supporting one-time activities for inclusive centers. Whilst these events do impact the overall perception of principals and teachers, destigmatize people with disabilities, the collaboration cannot be considered long-term. Gray's theory on collaboration (1991) emphasized the importance of the direction-setting stage in order to achieve impactful results in any collaboration. The study reveals one-way occasional efforts of TVET towards NGOs initiatives in inclusion. The respondents noted that they do not expect support from NGOs in terms of inclusive education. Additionally, they do not know what is available for them, and they rather turn to the government for support than rely on NGOs and other external partners. This may happen due to the heavy dependence of TVET on the state in terms of decision-making. Despite the increasing amount of NGOs and their impact becoming more effective in Kazakhstan, the field still has low trust and awareness among people (Ibrayeva & Nezhina, 2013). Moreover, according to Rollan (2018), NGOs in Kazakhstan mostly focus on working toward social inclusion in general rather than inclusive education in particular, which may hamper collaboration within educational processes.

NGOs and CSOs are relatively new concepts in Kazakhstan and, thus, may lack trust and cooperation. According to Markova & Sultanalieva (2013), the role of NGOs has been raising awareness and promotion of SEN students from marginalized communities about their rights and accessibility in mainstream education. Nevertheless, the impact of NGOs on inclusive education remains an under-explored field in Kazakhstan. Rollan (2018) noted that

there is no research on how NGOs operate for inclusive education development, their approaches, challenges, and on the level of their participation in policy-making.

Historically, people in Kazakhstan deficit of trust in NGOs, and rather rely on the state (Ibrayeva & Nezhina, 2013). The respondents of the study demonstrated absence or limited knowledge about NGOs operating in general and for inclusive education specifically. Moreover, the respondents were not aware of the UN agencies, and World Bank which are considered the most impactful and important agencies for human rights promotion in the educational field (Mundy et al., 2016; Schuster & Kolleck, 2021). The barrier to further and fruitful collaboration may be hampered by the lack of collective coping with complexities in Gray's theory on collaboration. Although according to Kabdiyeva (2015), there is an improvement in state-NGO collaboration in Kazakhstan, there is still an urge to cooperate closely in order to build trust among communities and engage in the policy-making process. Lexow (2003) notes that NGOs and the government should work collaboratively by moving from co-existence toward active collaboration. Moreover, the government should see opportunities to collaborate with NGOs, as they provide services for hard-to-reach and marginalized groups of society. In other words, in order to address such a multi-dimensional phenomenon as inclusive education the stakeholders should engage, ensure joint decision-making and responsibility, as well as deal jointly with complex environments throughout the implementation process. According to Rollan (2018), the collaboration between the state and NGOs has the potential: it may have a more significant impact on educational reforms. More so, there is a need for collaboration between NGOs, the government, and educational institutions in order to strengthen the practice of inclusive education (Rollan & Somerton, 2019).

Thus, NGOs are efficient in promoting human rights, raising awareness about inclusion, and working with hard-to-reach communities, but lack recognition, narrowing down from inclusion in general to inclusive education in particular, and deficit collaboration with the state and educational institutions.

#### **5.4 Conclusion**

Chapter 5 discussed the main findings of the study in relation to the existing literature on the topic. Firstly, TVET principals perceive inclusive education in a narrower sense as an educational provision for children with disabilities, which is the common case in post-soviet countries. Secondly, knowledge and experiences about NGOs remain limited among TVET's principals' due to several reasons. NGOs in Kazakhstan have limited interactions in the policy-making processes, people lack trust and awareness about the work NGOs do, and educational institutions have tight connections with the MoES, and do not actively look for collaboration beyond. Third, TVET principals are open to accepting support and expertise from NGOs in terms of the implementation of inclusive education.

## **Chapter 6: Conclusions and Recommendations**

### **6.1 Introduction**

This study was aimed at exploring the role of NGOs toward inclusive education in TVET institutions from the TVET principals' perspective in Almaty that was chosen for the study. This chapter summarizes the research findings and suggests recommendations.

### **6.2 Summary of the Major Findings**

There are several conclusions that can be drawn from the findings. The respondents of the study shared their definitions of inclusive education, as well as barriers they face in the implementation of inclusive education practices in TVETs. Then, they exposed their knowledge and existing experiences about NGOs in general, and inclusive education in particular in their educational institutions. Finally, they reflected on opportunities and challenges in building collaborations with NGOs toward inclusive education.

TVET principals defined inclusive education notion as educational provision for children with disabilities, as a basic human right for education, as accessibility, and as a barrier-free environment. Whilst this is a surprisingly complete definition of inclusive education, it still remains focused on disability and children. On the practice side, there are still no physical conditions and qualified special educators and teachers for the establishment of inclusive education in TVET. There were cases of refusal to a SEN child in educational provision: some respondents mentioned refusals because of the negative attitudes from the administration of TVET, and other cases of refusal were due to the incompatibility between chosen profession and the type of disability. Moreover, according to the principals, they still face attitudinal challenges from teachers, parents, and employers. Additionally, there are still special classrooms for SEN children in TVET organizations, mostly public ones. The public

TVET has SEN children to be placed in both mainstream and special classrooms. The respondents of two private TVETs indicated that they did not have a special classroom, and all the SEN children study with their peers in mainstream classrooms. It is worth mentioning that SEN children do not come en masse to private TVETs due to the lack of information about opportunities, and socioeconomic status. Thus, to what extent private TVETs may be considered “inclusive” is arguable due to the matter it is only placement and a low number of SEN students approaching private TVET organizations.

The knowledge about NGOs stays limited among TVET principals. They do not possess information about NGOs operating internationally and locally. Some of the respondents of the study have never thought about looking for any kind of support from NGOs working in education and inclusive education. The principals do not know what is available for them. However, their experiences contradict their knowledge of NGOs. In fact, they collaborate with several NGOs for different social challenges, for example, corruption, leadership, teachers training, and promotion of human rights. More so, TVETs partner with several foundations, charities, and inclusive centers toward inclusion causes. They host contests and conferences together, implement inclusive theatre in TVET, promote tolerance among the students, and volunteer for inclusive centers with games, workshops, and gifts. While these activities challenge negative attitudes, raise awareness about people with disabilities, and promote inclusion, no efforts are directed to enhance inclusive education practices within TVETs in partnership with NGOs.

In Kazakhstan, the number of NGOs keeps growing over the past 20 years, which may signal their efficacy and impact (Ibrayeva & Nezhina, 2013). However, according to Holling (2021), it is a challenge for NGOs to engage in local educational policy-making processes. Thus, they lack sustainability in their initiatives and miss collaboration

opportunities due to the deficit of state-NGO collaboration. NGOs and TVETs remain independent providers of social and educational services accordingly.

As mentioned earlier, NGOs possess resources, qualifications, and expertise in different fields, including education. They hold raising awareness initiatives, promote human rights, and implement projects for inclusion. Based on the findings of the study, it is more reliable for TVETs to collaborate with the state in terms of inclusive education implementation. They gain resources, support, and tools from the government. It is uncertain whether it happens due to the low trust in NGOs, little awareness about what is available, or because NGOs in Kazakhstan work mostly for inclusion, not inclusive education in particular. Nevertheless, all the TVET principals of the study demonstrated an openness to collaboration with NGOs. Moreover, they noted support is very much needed. This openness and seeking for support can be divided into main areas: raising awareness about opportunities for inclusive education among parents, children, teachers, and employers; training teachers, and providing experts and informational consultation for TVET about inclusive education policy, practice, and culture. NGOs historically are the most powerful in raising awareness and challenging social stigmas. This is the first step in any collaboration process - to establish understanding and shared values among the stakeholders. Inclusive education is such a complex phenomenon that requires engaging all the stakeholders - administration, teaching staff, employers, businesses, NGOs, and parents - in the implementation process. The TVET principals realize the lack of qualifications of their teachers in terms of inclusive education at their educational institutions. They asked for support in this regard. Moreover, they look for an expert who may help and guide them through the process of establishing inclusive education in their institutions. This indicates the willingness of TVET to collaborate with

NGOs, change their practices, and move together toward inclusive education development in their educational organizations.

To conclude, there is limited collaboration between TVET and NGOs. The organizations seem to be on different pages in terms of defining the notion, practicing, and implementing it. The impact of the collaboration so far is raising awareness about people with disabilities and promoting human rights in education. Nevertheless, there is a huge potential for future collaboration if NGOs become more active in inclusive education in particular and partner closely with the state on the policy-making level. NGOs and TVETs have the potential to “move from co-existence to long-term collaboration” (Lexow, 2003).

### **6.3 Recommendations**

What the study identified about the role of NGOs toward inclusive education in TVET is the need for support to TVETs during their journey to the establishment of inclusive education. NGOs may become more active in approaching TVET institutions and providing them with support, raising awareness, resources, information, teachers training, and consultancy about the policy and practice of inclusive education. The collaboration between NGOs and TVET may potentially lead to involving more stakeholders, like parents and employers, in building inclusive education and social justice.

In order to make the impact of the NGOs more sustainable and long-term, as well as to gain an access to building partnerships with TVETs, NGOs should collaborate with the state on the policy-making level. As Rollan (2018, p.59) mentioned: “After all, both the state and the civil society have a purpose to achieve inclusive education, and mutual support is essential to an effective and fruitful work in this direction.” Moreover, NGOs may consider zooming in on inclusive education specifically rather than inclusion in general.

TVETs' representatives should be more active in terms of establishing new long-term collaborations with NGOs toward inclusive education.

#### **6.4 Limitations of the Study**

The researcher aimed to explore principals' perspectives on the role of NGOs toward inclusive education reform in TVET institutions of Almaty. The limitations are inevitable in any study. The first limitation is the sample size comprised of five TVET principals in Almaty. It is unfeasible to apply the knowledge acquired during the study to all TVET institutions across the country. The second limitation is the chosen research design. Despite all efforts to be as objective as possible, the chosen study design is based on perspectives, opinions, personal beliefs, and experiences that are challenging to measure. Further, the data collection instruments were chosen to gather valuable information about the perspectives, attitudes, and opinions of the participants. However, semi-structured interviews have their disadvantages, which may influence the way participants of the study talk and behave. The data collection instrument assumes high trust and honesty, willingness to talk which are hard to measure and are also considered one of the limitations of the study.

#### **6.5 Areas for Further Research**

TVET institutions in Kazakhstan remain the under-researched field in Kazakhstan. More so, NGOs in Kazakhstan in the field of inclusive education may also be considered as a focus for further research. I suggest exploring other TVET institutions both in urban and rural areas on a national level and investigating the best experiences and practices of collaboration with NGOs toward the establishment of inclusive education. Moreover, the present study focused on the principals' perception of the role of NGOs in TVET, I would

suggest exploring more in detail other stakeholders: TVET teachers, students, and parents in regard to discovering their opinion about NGOs, inclusive education, and potential collaboration.

## **6.6 Conclusion of the Study**

The present study aimed to explore TVET principals' perspectives on the role of NGOs toward inclusive education in TVETs of Almaty. It was crucial for the understanding of challenges and opportunities for current and potential collaboration to investigate what principals think and do about inclusive education and what collaboration means for them. Principals are the main decision-makers in TVET and successful collaboration toward mutual goals heavily depends on their attitudes and values.

The findings of the research unwrapped how the principals define inclusive education, the amount of knowledge and experience they possess about NGOs, and the challenges and opportunities they have in building collaborative processes in establishing inclusive education in their institutions.

As a novice researcher, this experience has been enriching and valuable for me. Working for the past year on the study, I immersed myself deeper in the inclusive education notion, learned more in detail about NGOs, and identified opportunities for further potential work that may lead to fruitful collaborations between NGOs and TVET for inclusive education in Kazakhstan.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A

#### INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

##### THE ROLE OF NGOS TOWARDS INCLUSIVE EDUCATION REFORM IN TVET INSTITUTIONS OF ALMATY: PRINCIPALS' PERSPECTIVE

Interviewee:

Date:

Time:

Place:

MODE: online zoom interview/face-to-face interview

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

**Dear Participant,**

**Thank you for taking the time to participate in the interview, which is part of my thesis master's program. The following questions will help me learn more about your perspective on the role of NGOs towards inclusive education reform in TVET institutions. During the interview, there may be some additional questions that will help me to clarify your answers. You have the right to skip questions or to finish the interview at any point. The interview will be audio-recorded. The transcribed interview version will be sent to you one week after the interview for clarification and to avoid any**

**misunderstandings. I would like to remind you that the confidentiality and anonymity of your responses will be kept, and no personal data will be revealed.**

**Participant Background Interview Questions:**

(1) How long and in what capacity(es) have you been in education? (2) Tell me about your experience and professional qualifications. **Inclusion-related questions:**

(3) What is inclusive education in your own words?

(4) What is your opinion of inclusive education and its implementation?

(5) Can you share your concerns about its implementation?

(6) Do you get any support from the different stakeholders (The Ministry, parents, teachers) in introducing and implementing inclusive education in your institution?

(7) To implement inclusive education in your institution, what do you think is needed?

**NGOs related questions**

(8) Do you think an NGO has a role in implementing inclusive education?

(9) Which NGOs have you come across which had an interest in implementing inclusive education?

(10) What is your opinion about NGOs operating in Kazakhstan?

(11) What have they done to support inclusive education?

(12) Which practices have NGOs promoted in TVET to enhance inclusive education?

(13) In what way are TVET and NGOs worked together to promote inclusive education?

(14) What opportunities (if any) do you see in collaborating with NGOs towards implementing inclusive education?

(15) What barriers (if any) can you point to in collaborating with NGOs for inclusive education?

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

## **Appendix B**

### **Consent Form**

#### **INFORMED CONSENT FORM**

##### **THE ROLE OF NGOS TOWARDS INCLUSIVE EDUCATION REFORM IN TVET INSTITUTIONS OF ALMATY: PRINCIPALS' PERSPECTIVE**

**DESCRIPTION:** You are invited to participate in a research study exploring the role of NGOs towards inclusive education in TVET institutions in Almaty. You will be asked to participate in a face-to-face or Zoom interview, which will last about up to 1 hour and will be audio taped. Your name, name and address of your job in the data will be coded and will not be associated with any part of my written research report. All the information and interview responses will be preserved confidential.

**TIME INVOLVEMENT:** Your participation will take 40-60 minutes.

**RISKS AND BENEFITS:** The risks associated with this study are minimal. Participants will in no way have an impact on their current employment status or further career. There are no other risks associated with this study. The research is interested in TVET institutions, where inclusion is either being implemented or required to be introduced, and it aims to describe perspectives of collaboration with NGOs on this cause. We are interested in your opinion a lot. However, your decision on whether to participate or not in this study will not affect your career.

**PARTICIPANT'S RIGHTS:** If you have read this form and have decided to participate in this

research, please, understand that your participation is voluntary, and you have the right to withdraw your consent or discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. The alternative is not to participate. You have the right to

refuse to answer particular questions. The results of this research study will be written up in my Masters! Thesis. They may also be presented at scientific or professional meetings or published in scientific journals.

### **CONTACT INFORMATION:**

Questions: If you have any questions, concerns, or complaints about this research, its procedures, risks, and benefits, contact Mariya Assinskaya - Master thesis student, and her supervisor Tsediso Michael Makoelle through their emails:

[mariya.assinskaya@nu.edu.kz](mailto:mariya.assinskaya@nu.edu.kz); [tsediso.makoelle@nu.edu.kz](mailto:tsediso.makoelle@nu.edu.kz)

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

[gse\\_researchcommittee@nu.edu.kz](mailto:gse_researchcommittee@nu.edu.kz)

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

- I have carefully read the information provided;
- I have been given full information regarding the purpose and procedures of the study;
- I understand how the data collected will be used and that any confidential information will be seen only by the researchers and will not be revealed to anyone else;

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- I understand that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason;
- With full knowledge of all foregoing, I agree, of my own free will, to participate in this study.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**The extra copy of this signed and dated consent form is for you to keep.**

**According to the law of the Republic of Kazakhstan, an individual under the age of 18 is considered a child. Any participant falling into that category should be given the Parental Consent Form and have it signed by at least one of his/her parent(s) or guardian(s).**