

EMBRACING INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: EFL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS AND PRACTICES

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Abstract. Most educational institutions in the world, including colleges and secondary schools, have accepted the recent development in the modern education system whereby children with special educational needs (SEN) attend classes together with their peers. In this regard, the concept of inclusive education means providing equal learning opportunities for all students. Although major organisations such as UNESCO have endorsed definitions of inclusive education, the concept has never been stable worldwide, and how it is understood and conceptualised depends on the regional, national and even school context. Given the fast pace of modern society, educators must adapt and respond to rapid changes and new difficulties in the classroom. In the twenty-first century, educators need to adopt innovative learning and teaching methods that allow learners to express themselves more freely. Using this strategy, SEN children can participate equally with their peers in daily activities, form friendships with other students and feel part of the community, which is a main goal of inclusive education. This study explores the opinions of secondary school English teachers in Kazakhstan about inclusive education in the English classroom, focusing on teachers' perceptions of inclusive education in the EFL environment. The results of this study show that teachers generally have positive attitudes towards inclusion in EFL classrooms. However, some of the findings were contradictory, highlighting the need for more in-depth research in this area. In addition, the results show that teachers working with students with SEN need further training and professional development.

Key words: inclusive education, SEN students, special educational needs, EFL, secondary schools, classroom practice, learning opportunities, equality

Basic provisions

The concept of inclusive education means providing equal learning opportunities for all students. This principle is defined by UNESCO as recognising, understanding and promoting the cultural, social and individual diversity of learners by ensuring equal access to quality education in conjunction with other social policies. According to Article 2 of the Salamanca Declaration, “mainstream schools with this inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all”. Moreover, they provide effective education to the majority of children and improve the efficiency and ultimately the cost-effectiveness of the entire education

system. Consequently, inclusive education as a process focuses on improving the capacity of the education system to adapt to a wide range of student needs.

Introduction

In the twenty-first century, the pace of change in education has accelerated, resulting in rapid change and new challenges in the classroom. In response, educators find themselves at a crossroads between innovation and tradition. The need for creative pedagogical approaches has never been greater, as these methods serve as a bridge that allows students to freely express themselves and meaningfully engage in the curriculum.

It is critical that the implementation of innovative learning and teaching strategies have a profound impact on students with special needs, as the ultimate goal of inclusive education is to create an environment where every student can equally participate in daily activities, form friendships with peers and experience a true sense of belonging to a community.

This article explores a specific aspect of this global discourse by examining the perspectives of secondary school English teachers in Kazakhstan. The study explores English teachers' views on inclusive education in the teaching of English as a foreign language (EFL) and offers valuable insights into the challenges and successes they face. Although the findings reveal commendable attitudes towards inclusive practises, the presence of controversy highlights the complexity of this approach to education. Consequently, this study highlights the urgent need for further in-depth research and highlights the pressing need for continuous professional development for teachers working with students with special needs. Through these efforts, we can illuminate the way forward and ensure that inclusive education becomes not just a concept, but a tangible reality for every student.

In this context, it is important to note that today's classrooms almost always teach students with special needs, but there seem to be a number of challenges. In this context, Malik argues that special education teachers and their learning needs are ignored rather than considered. This is due to factors such as an inappropriate learning environment for students with special educational needs, a lack of resources and time on the part of teachers, and a lack of in-depth knowledge that should be acquired through in-service courses or specialised training [1]. Moreover, according to Chu, students with SEN do not receive enough attention from teachers and are underrepresented in educational activities, which is detrimental to special education [2]. This is due to the unfavourable attitude of teachers. According to Kim, these effects can cause some serious problems in EFL classrooms with children with SEN [3]. These include teachers' attitudes, teachers' lack of training needed to work with children with SEN, poor curricula and ineffective teaching methods that ignore the abilities of most students with SEN [4]. In this context, it is important to mention that there is little research on inclusive education in Kazakhstan. Although teachers' views and attitudes towards inclusion have a significant impact on student achievement, there is not much information about inclusion in EFL classrooms. Therefore, the main aim of this study is to find out how English teachers in the southern part of Kazakhstan perceive

inclusive education in EFL context. In order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the theoretical and practical components of inclusive education, it is essential to investigate teachers' attitudes, as they have a great responsibility in this area. This study focused on teachers' experiences of implementing inclusive education in the context of EFL, as teachers were the target group of the study.

Materials and methods

The research design chosen for the study is described in this section. A qualitative methodology was used in the study as the paper's aim was to explore in depth the experiences of English language teachers in the classroom to determine their beliefs and practices in relation to inclusive education. According to Elliot and Eisner, qualitative enquiry offers the dual advantage of learning about schools and classrooms that contributes to understanding other schools and classrooms, and learning about particular classrooms and individual teachers that is useful to them. This is precisely the aim of the current study. In addition, according to Elliot and Eisner, it is possible to provide teachers of specific classrooms and teachers in specific schools with feedback through the qualitative study that is fundamentally different from the kind of information they receive from professional development programmes or journal publications.

As we were interested in learning more about the implementation of inclusive education in three mainstream schools that already apply inclusive education in their teaching practices, the qualitative technique was chosen for this study. The participants for this study came from three secondary schools in Kazakhstan, specifically from the southern part of the country. The sample consisted of 15 English teachers whose ages ranged from 31 to 55 years. In this qualitative study, a semi-structured interview was used as a research instrument. Since all participants in the study were native English speakers, all questions were asked in English. A written consent form was given to the head teachers and teachers with all the details of the study. Teachers were made aware of the voluntary nature of their participation and of the anonymity and confidentiality of all materials used in the study.

Findings

This section presents the findings on teachers' attitudes and views towards inclusive education in EFL. After thematic data analysis, two themes were identified: teachers' perceptions of inclusive education in EFL classrooms and EFL teachers' practices in implementing inclusive education in EFL classrooms. The results of the study show that teachers routinely try to improve their inclusive practices with students with SEN in their English classes and that they generally have positive attitudes towards inclusive education, which will be discussed in more detail below.

Theme 1: teachers' perceptions of inclusive education

A remarkable discovery of this study is the generally positive attitude of English teachers towards inclusion in the context of their classrooms. Teachers consistently expressed their willingness to embrace the principles of inclusive

education and to value the integration of students with special educational needs (SEN) into mainstream English language schools. Many teachers (P2, P4, P5, P6, P9, P11) stressed the importance of creating an inclusive atmosphere where every student, regardless of ability, feels a sense of belonging and acceptance. These can be seen from the answers of research participants:

I believe that inclusive education is essential in our classrooms. It is heartening to see that most of my colleagues share this view. Inclusion is not only beneficial for students with special educational needs, but also enriches the learning experience for all students. It is important to create an atmosphere of belonging and acceptance and I am fully committed to these principles (*Participant 2*).

In my opinion, inclusion is a fundamental aspect of modern education. I have always strived to ensure that every student feels welcome and valued in my classroom. It is not only about teaching, but also about creating a supportive environment where everyone can flourish (*Participant 4*).

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The results also showed that the majority of teachers (88%) were willing to help their students learn, while the minority (9%) only partially agreed. Similarly, 76% of teachers mentioned they occasionally deal with parents of children with SEN in their classes and are familiar with their family situation. While only 21% of the teachers fully agreed with the point, more than half of the teachers (64%) said that they made efforts to promote inclusion in their classrooms. Table 1 shows the following results.

Table 1 - Teacher attitudes towards inclusive education in EFL

<i>Item</i>	<i>Statements</i>	<i>Agree (%)</i>	<i>Partially agree (%)</i>	<i>Disagree (%)</i>
1	For my inclusive lessons, I usually put together interesting and engaging tasks and activities.	21	74	5
2	I inform the students of SEN that they can turn to me at any time if they feel desperate or alone.	73	26	21
3	I always include students with SEN in school activities and try to motivate them to participate in class.	7	89	4
4	I am constantly working to impart new knowledge to my SEN children in such a way that they can easily absorb it.	94	6	-
5	When a child with SEN asks me for clarification or explanation, I strive to give the best answer.	71	26	3
6	I am fully behind a student with special needs.	78	12	10
7	I ask my staff to help students with special needs.	88	8	4

8	I regularly work with the parents of my students who have special needs, so I am very familiar with their situation.	21	71	8
9	I do everything I can to promote diversity in my classroom.	64	26	10

Thus, inclusive education is a beacon for equal opportunities and social inclusion. The findings of the study among Kazakhstan's secondary English teachers underline the progress made, but also highlight what still needs to be done that will be discussed further within theme 2. In tackling the complex issue of inclusive education, it is essential to address the contradictions, consolidate positive attitudes and bridge the gap between perception and practice.

Theme 2: teachers' practices of inclusive education

Amidst the prevailing positivity discussed under the first theme, the study revealed a number of contradictions and challenges that occur during the practice of inclusive education in EFL classroom. Some teachers expressed conflicting views, revealing a discrepancy between their attitudes and actual classroom practice. This discrepancy highlights the complicated nature of implementing inclusive education. Thus, participants point to potential barriers, such as lack of resources, training deficits and varying levels of support, which hinder the seamless integration of students with SEN into EFL classrooms:

I am glad to see that the majority of teachers in our Department are willing to support their students. While I agree with the principles of inclusive education, I think it is important to recognise that some teachers need additional training or resources to implement these practices effectively (*Participant 9*).

Inclusive education is not just a concept; it is a practice that we must actively pursue. I have worked hard to promote inclusion in my classroom, and I am encouraged to know that many other teachers are doing the same. It is a joint effort that benefits everyone involved (*Participant 1*).

I appreciate the positive attitude of my colleagues towards inclusion. However, I believe there is a need for more awareness and training. Inclusive education is a complex area, and teachers need adequate resources and guidance to implement it effectively. Unfortunately, it is not just about willingness; it is also about having the necessary skills and knowledge (*Participant 8*).

The results also showed that the majority of teachers (79%) were willing to acquire specialised knowledge in the area of teaching methods and approaches in inclusive classrooms, while the minority (11%) only partially agreed. In this context, the vast majority of teachers (96%) stated that they had great difficulty practising inclusive teaching in their regular classrooms. While only 7% of the teachers stated that they are constantly learning the teaching methods used in inclusive education, more than half of the teachers (71%) mentioned that the appropriation of teaching approaches for inclusive education cannot be done independently by the teacher, as self-learning and self-application of such methods can sometimes even be dangerous for students with SEN due to the high sensitivity of inclusive education. Therefore, these teachers believe that there should be highly

qualified experts in the field of inclusive education in every school. Table 2 shows the following results.

Table 2 - Teacher practices towards inclusive education in EFL

<i>Item</i>	<i>Statements</i>	<i>Agree (%)</i>	<i>Partially agree (%)</i>	<i>Disagree (%)</i>
1	I have a great desire for acquiring specialised knowledge in the area of teaching methods and approaches in inclusive classrooms	79	11	0
2	I constantly search for the methods implemented in inclusive classrooms	7	65	28
3	I am aware of teaching methods and approaches used in inclusive education and I am ready to share them with my colleagues	11	81	8
4	I face challenges in practicing inclusive education in my EFL classrooms	96	4	0
5	The challenges in the inclusive classrooms can be addressed by self-learning	7	22	71
6	There should be special experts consulting teachers in the field of inclusive education in every school	71	22	7

Hence, it can be concluded that by prioritising targeted research, investing in robust teacher training initiatives and fostering partnerships between educators, institutions and policymakers, Kazakhstan’s education landscape can evolve into a model of inclusive excellence. Only through these concerted efforts can the vision of inclusive education – where every student is valued, supported and empowered to succeed – move from aspiration to reality.

A recurring theme in the findings is the need for improved training and professional development for teachers working with students with special needs. Educators acknowledged the importance of ongoing professional development to adapt their teaching practices and ensure that they are inclusive and accommodate all students. The findings of the study highlight the urgency of investing in comprehensive training programmes, workshops and ongoing support mechanisms to equip teachers with the skills and knowledge needed to promote truly inclusive teaching.

The existence of these contradictions underlines the urgent need for more comprehensive and thorough research in this area. Understanding the reasons for these inequalities is crucial for the formulation of targeted interventions. Further exploration of the specific challenges faced by educators, both in terms of pedagogical strategies and institutional support, can pave the way for more effective solutions.

Discussion

This section focuses on discussing the findings in relation to how teachers view teaching children with SEN. Analysis of the survey participants’ responses revealed both commonalities and differences in their responses. In the multifaceted web of

inclusive education, EFL teachers' perceptions and attitudes play a crucial role in shaping its implementation in the classroom. The contradictions observed in EFL teachers' attitudes and practices highlight the different challenges faced in implementing inclusive education. While many teachers express positive attitudes, it is not always easy to translate these attitudes into consistent classroom practice. Factors such as limited resources, varying levels of support and classroom dynamics can contribute to this discrepancy. Addressing these inconsistencies requires a closer look at the underlying causes, including possible gaps in training, institutional support and awareness of different learning needs.

When it came to the inclusion of children with SEN in the classroom, all participants agreed that this was the case. However, when asked whether SEN actively involves children in the classroom, there were some differences. The majority of teachers said that it takes time to get SEN children to actively participate in all parts of the lesson, but that this often happens when they have the opportunity to participate in pair and group projects. Similar findings were made in the Ferguson study, where Romanian L2 English teachers felt that students with special needs slowed down the pace of the whole class and were the reason why teachers were unable to stick to the curriculum topics [6]. Although teachers in this survey reported engaging children with SEN, this is probably less common than they think given the time constraints.

Teachers often reported that they try to support and motivate students with special needs and teach them the new material in the most efficient way. They also indicated that they support inclusion in EFL classes and ask other students to help them. Teachers showed less support in working with SEN parents. For inclusion to be successful, Hay says teachers and parents of children with SEN need to work together as a team in the classroom. However, the results of our study suggest that this collaboration may be somewhat weak in our situation. Once again, teachers are not able to develop differentiated content and tasks for students with SEN, probably due to lack of time.

It also emerged that most teachers feel that the English curriculum is too demanding for SEN students. A significant proportion also agreed or partially agreed that learning English in a new environment would be beneficial for them, which contradicts the majority support for inclusion. All teachers expressed concern about the development of SEN students. Although teachers generally rated their competence in teaching children with SEN as good, many teachers indicated that it took them a lot of time and effort to create an effective plan and programme for these students.

In this regard, the findings demonstrating the need for teachers' expertise in working with children with SEN are consistent with the findings of previous research in Kazakhstan. Rollan in particular concluded that teachers need more training in dealing with students with special needs [10]. Teachers also lacked some of the professional skills and confidence needed for successful inclusion.

One of the key findings of this study is the identification of an urgent need for further training and professional development among teachers working with students with SEN. In the rapidly evolving educational landscape, continuous learning is of paramount importance. Equipping teachers with specialised skills and strategies tailored to the diverse needs of their students is critical. Professional

development initiatives tailored to the specific challenges of EFL can help teachers create an inclusive learning environment where every student succeeds.

Inclusive education stands at the intersection of attitudes, policies, practices and social perceptions. The findings of the study underscore the positive attitudes of English language teachers in Kazakhstan towards inclusive education, while highlighting the challenges that stand in the way of seamless implementation. By addressing these challenges through targeted training, collaborative partnerships and cultural awareness initiatives, Kazakhstan can pave the way for a more inclusive education landscape.

This study serves as a springboard and calls for further research, policy revisions and concerted efforts from all stakeholders. Together, educators, policy makers, parents and communities can create an educational environment where every student, regardless of ability, is not only included but celebrated for their unique contributions.

Conclusion

In summary, the findings of this study shed light on the multi-faceted landscape of inclusive education in the field of teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) in Kazakhstan. Secondary English teachers; positive attitudes towards inclusive practices underscore a collective commitment to equal opportunities for all students, including those with special educational needs (SEN). However, the presence of contradictions and the identified need for additional training and professional development reveal the difficulties of implementing inclusive education in a diverse and rapidly evolving educational landscape.

While inclusive education in Kazakhstan is addressed in a number of legislative documents, a work on its actual implementation is still ongoing. Although the aim of this study was to focus on the general perceptions of inclusion in the English language classroom, the findings pointed to some particular components that are relevant to this topic. The results of this study indicate that teachers generally have positive attitudes towards inclusion. However, there were also a number of divergent opinions. For example, there were differences in perceptions of how SEN children participated in class activities. The introduction of new materials and tasks was seen as rather insufficient by some teachers, while other educators saw it differently.

One of the shortcomings of this study is a small sample size of participants and schools, which suggests the need for further research with larger sample sizes. In addition, the results of the study would have been more comprehensive and detailed if a longer Likert scale had been used. The findings also highlight the need for more research on inclusive practices in Kazakhstani schools and improvements to the current inclusive education framework for teaching English in secondary schools.

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ИНКЛЮЗИВТІ БІЛІМ БЕРУ: АҒЫЛШЫН ТІЛІ МҰҒАЛІМДЕРІНІҢ ПІКІРЛЕРІ МЕН ТӘЖІРИБЕЛЕРІ

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Аңдатпа. Әлемдегі көптеген оқу орындары, соның ішінде колледждер мен орта мектептер, қазіргі білім беру жүйесіндегі соңғы өзгерістерді қабылдады, осыған сәйкес ерекше білім беру қажеттіліктері бар балалар өз құрдастарымен бірге сабақ оқу мүмкіндігіне ие. Осыған байланысты инклюзивті білім беру тұжырымдамасы барлық оқушыларға бірдей оқу мүмкіндіктерін ұсынуды білдіреді. ЮНЕСКО сияқты ірі ұйымдар инклюзивті білім берудің анықтамаларын бірауыздан мақұлдағанымен, бұл тұжырымдама бүкіл әлемде ешқашан тұрақты болған емес және оны түсіну мен тұжырымдау аймақтық, ұлттық және тіпті мектеп контекстіне байланысты құбылып отырады. Қазіргі қоғамның даму қарқынын ескере отырып, мұғалімдер сыныптағы өзгерістер мен қиындықтарға бейімделіп әрекет етуі тиіс. ХХІ ғасырда мұғалімдер оқушыларға өз ойларын еркін білдіруге мүмкіндік беретін оқу мен оқытудың инновациялық әдістерін қолдануы қажет. Инклюзивтілік стратегиясын қолдана отырып, ерекше білім беру қажеттіліктері бар балалар құрдастарымен күнделікті іс-шараларға қатыса

алады, өзге оқушылармен достық қарым-қатынас орната алады және өздерін инклюзивті білім берудің басты мақсаты болып табылатын қоғамдастықтың бір бөлігі ретінде сезіне алады. Бұл зерттеу ағылшын тілін шет тілі ретінде оқыту барысында мұғалімдердің инклюзивті білім беруді қалай қабылдайтынына назар аудара отырып, Қазақстандық орта мектептердегі ағылшын тілі мұғалімдерінің ағылшын тілі сабақтарында инклюзивті білім беру туралы пікірлерін зерттейді. Осы зерттеудің нәтижелері мұғалімдер ағылшын тілін оқытуда инклюзияны енгізуге оң көзқараспен қарайтынын көрсетті. Алайда, кейбір тұжырымдарда қарама-қайшылықтар болды, бұл қайшылықтар осы салада тереңірек зерттеу қажеттілігін көрсетеді. Сонымен қатар, нәтижелер ерекше білім беру қажеттіліктері бар балалармен жұмыс істейтін мұғалімдерге қосымша дайындық пен кәсіби даму қажет екенін көрсетті.

Тірек сөздер: инклюзивті білім беру, ерекше білім беру қажеттіліктері бар оқушылар, арнайы білім беру қажеттіліктері, ағылшын тілі шетел тілі ретінде, орта мектептер, сынып тәжірибесі, оқу мүмкіндіктері, теңдік

ВНЕДРЕНИЕ ИНКЛЮЗИВНОГО ОБРАЗОВАНИЯ: МНЕНИЯ И ПРАКТИКИ УЧИТЕЛЕЙ АНГЛИЙСКОГО ЯЗЫКА

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Аннотация. Большинство учебных заведений в мире, включая колледжи и средние школы, приняли недавнее изменения в нынешней системе образования, согласно которому дети с особыми образовательными потребностями посещают занятия вместе со своими сверстниками. В связи с этим, концепция инклюзивного образования означает предоставление равных возможностей обучения всем учащимся. Хотя крупные организации, такие как ЮНЕСКО, одобрили определения инклюзивного образования, эта концепция никогда не была стабильной во всем мире, а ее понимание и концептуализация варьируются в зависимости от регионального, национального и даже школьного контекста. Принимая во внимание быстрые темпы развития современного общества, учителя должны действовать, адаптируясь к изменениям и трудностям в классе. В XXI веке учителям необходимо использовать инновационные методы обучения и преподавания, которые позволяют учащимся свободно выражать свои мысли. Используя стратегию инклюзивности, дети с особыми образовательными потребностями могут наравне со своими сверстниками участвовать в повседневной деятельности, заводить дружеские отношения с другими учащимися и чувствовать себя частью сообщества, что является главной целью инклюзивного образования. В этом исследовании изучаются мнения учителей английского языка средних школ в Казахстане об инклюзивном образовании на уроках английского языка, уделяя особое внимание восприятию учителями инклюзивного образования при преподавании английского языка как иностранного. Результаты этого исследования показывают, что учителя в целом положительно относятся к внедрению инклюзии в обучении английского языка как иностранного. Однако некоторые выводы были противоречивыми, что подчеркивает необходимость более глубоких исследований в этой области. Кроме того, результаты

показывают, что учителя, работающие с детьми с особыми образовательными потребностями, нуждаются в дальнейшем обучении и профессиональном развитии.

Ключевые слова: инклюзивное образование, учащиеся с особыми образовательными потребностями, особые образовательные потребности, английский как иностранный язык, средние школы, классный опыт, возможности обучения, равенство

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