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INCLUSIVE ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING IN KAZAKHSTAN: PEDAGOGICAL AWARENESS, PRACTICES, AND CHALLENGES

**Izekenova N.N.¹, Smagulova A.S.²*

**¹Kazakh National Women's Teacher Training University, Almaty, Kazakhstan*

²al-Farabi Kazakh National University, Almaty, Kazakhstan

Abstract. In the context of the modernization of education in Kazakhstan, special attention is paid to the development of an inclusive approach that ensures equal access to education for all categories of students, including children with special educational needs (SEN). Teaching English in an inclusive environment is a significant pedagogical task, as it requires taking into account the various cognitive, communicative and behavioral characteristics of students. The purpose of this study is to identify the main difficulties that English teachers face when working with children with SEN and to summarize effective pedagogical practices used in inclusion. The work utilized the methods of survey and analysis of regulatory documents. The study involved 34 teachers from comprehensive schools in three large cities of Kazakhstan: Astana, Almaty, and Shymkent. The results showed that despite the high declared awareness of the principles of inclusion, only a third of teachers use adapted methods in practice. The main barriers include a lack of methodological materials, a lack of special training, and limited support from the administration and specialists. Despite this, there are some cases of successful implementation of visual-sensory support, individualization of tasks, and the use of elements of assistive technologies. The presented data allow us to conclude that it is necessary to develop a comprehensive methodology for teaching English, taking into account the specifics of an inclusive environment and improving the qualifications of teachers in this area.

Keywords: inclusive education, special educational needs (SEN), EFL teaching, pedagogical awareness, challenges in inclusive education, differentiated instruction, methodological materials, learner's diversity

Introduction

The state educational policy of Kazakhstan has set a clear course for developing inclusive education to ensure access to quality education for all categories of students. These students are commonly categorized as follows:

- **First group (Disabilities):** Students with medically recognized disabilities, such as sensory, motor, or neurological disorders.
- **Second group (Difficulties):** Students with behavioral or emotional problems, or specific learning difficulties.

- Third group (Disadvantages): Students whose educational challenges stem from adverse social, psychological, economic, linguistic, or cultural conditions [1, p.3].

Particular attention is paid to children with special educational needs (SEN), which may arise for various reasons: health problems, behavioral and emotional difficulties, as well as social, psychological, linguistic, and cultural factors. In recent years, Kazakhstan has witnessed a positive shift toward the inclusion of children with SEN into mainstream education. According to the *Model Rules for the Activities of General Education Organizations*, children with SEN are permitted to attend general education classes, with no more than three such students per classroom [2]. These students follow the standard curriculum, which teachers may adapt as needed. Since 2020, the government has launched the program “*Expansion of the Network of Resource Rooms to Support Inclusive Education (2020–2025)*”, aimed at increasing institutional support for inclusion. While the number of resource rooms has grown, the demand for specially trained educators has also risen. These specialists are responsible for facilitating students’ social integration and classroom adaptation, rather than delivering academic content.

As a result, the primary responsibility for academic instruction—including the adaptation of content and teaching strategies—continues to fall on subject teachers themselves. This dual role requires not only pedagogical flexibility, but also a strong personal commitment to inclusion. In this context, teachers’ attitudes toward inclusive education become a determining factor in the success or failure of its implementation at the classroom level.

Research on teachers’ attitudes toward inclusive education is actively conducted in both Western and Asian educational contexts. An increasing number of scientific publications emphasize that the successful implementation of an inclusive approach depends not only on state policy and legal frameworks but also on the perception, professional readiness, and internal motivation of the teachers to adapt the learning process to the needs of children with special educational needs [3].

Some studies have shown that teachers who demonstrate a positive attitude toward students with SEN and create a supportive learning environment contribute to higher involvement of such children in the educational process and the development of a sense of self-worth and self-confidence [4]. In contrast, Taylor and Ringlaben (2012) highlighted that teachers’ negative attitudes toward inclusion can negatively impact school culture and, as a result, affect the academic and emotional development of students with SEN [5].

However, in real school practice, students with SEN often receive less attention, which leads to a decrease in their academic achievement. In a study conducted in China, a significant number of teachers have no basic training in special education, a trend common in many Asian countries, including Kazakhstan

[3]. This leads to gaps in both theoretical understanding of approaches and practical skills in supporting students with SEN.

A study found that Kazakhstani teachers generally exhibit a neutral attitude toward inclusive education. Although they are friendly and open toward children with special needs, the actual support provided is limited by several factors: excessive workload, challenges in managing diverse classrooms, and insufficient knowledge of differentiated instruction [6].

Despite the significant amount of research on inclusive education in general, the literature focusing on inclusive practices in Foreign Language Education (FLE) remains limited, particularly in the context of Central Asian countries. Research conducted in European countries has shown that learning foreign languages can be particularly challenging for students with special educational needs (SEN) due to the high cognitive and communicative demands [7]. These difficulties are particularly aggravated in contexts where learning relies predominantly on oral interaction and active communication.

In Kazakhstan, this problem is compounded by the increasing importance of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in the national curriculum, where students are expected to achieve clearly defined levels of language proficiency. However, as Kazakhstani scholars noted, there is currently a clear shortage of adapted teaching materials and methodological support focused on inclusive education [8]. As a result, many teachers are forced to use trial-and-error methods or resort to informal adaptation of materials, which is usually not supported by scientific or methodological evidence.

Moreover, foreign language teachers often experience higher anxiety about inclusive education compared to teachers of other subjects. This is due to the high degree of dependence of foreign language teaching on oral speech, written and audiovisual perception, as well as on formalized assessment procedures [9]. These concerns are confirmed in the Kazakhstani context: English teachers report difficulties in achieving communicative goals while simultaneously providing linguistic support to students with intellectual and sensory impairments.

These challenges were significantly intensified by the COVID-19 pandemic, which further exposed systemic weaknesses in the provision of inclusive education. Extended periods of distance learning and limited access to remedial and tutoring support have had a particularly negative impact on the academic and social development of students with special educational needs (SEN). In these circumstances, the task of adapting curricula for this category of children has become even more difficult for teachers. This has been especially evident at the level of basic secondary education and in the context of teaching foreign languages, where there are still no standard programs adapted to the needs of students with SEN.

Despite the existence of updated curricular standards for students with intellectual disabilities and motor impairments, there is a notable absence of methodological guidelines for inclusive English language instruction at the secondary level. Teachers often struggle to adjust learning programs, develop individualized support plans, and assess the achievements of students with intellectual limitations.

The findings of this study suggest that the current state of inclusion in foreign language education in Kazakhstan is at a transitional stage, marked by growing awareness and policy support, yet still hindered by systemic limitations in practice. While inclusive education is recognized at the national level as a strategic priority, the implementation of inclusive approaches in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms remains inconsistent and largely dependent on individual teacher initiative.

Materials and Methods

A qualitative approach was used in this study. This choice was due to the need to summarize data on common practices and difficulties of teaching English in an inclusive environment. The study involved 34 English teachers from comprehensive schools in three cities of national significance in Kazakhstan: Astana (n=11), Almaty (n=10) and Shymkent (n=13). The selection of respondents was carried out purposefully, with the main criterion being their involvement in teaching English in classes where children with special educational needs (SEN) are taught. The quantitative data obtained from the questionnaires were processed using descriptive statistics (mean value, standard deviation) and tested for reliability using Cronbach's α coefficient ($\alpha = 0.9004$), indicating high internal consistency of the scale. The nonparametric Kruskal-Wallis test was used to identify differences between the three cities. Statistical significance was assessed at $p < 0.05$.

The survey consisted of 20 statements divided into three categories: pedagogical awareness, pedagogical practices, and challenges. It was developed using a three-point Likert scale to ensure consistency in data collection and analysis. To ensure content validity, the survey was reviewed by three experts: a faculty member from the Department of Inclusive Education, an English language teaching methodologist, and a research advisor specializing in pedagogical studies.

Table 1. List of survey statements

No	Statement
Pedagogical Awareness	
1	I am familiar with the basic principles of inclusive education.
2	I believe inclusion is important for school education.
3	I received sufficient training in inclusive pedagogy.
4	I feel confident when working with children with SEN.

5	My school conducts methodological seminars on inclusive education.
Pedagogical Practices	
1	I apply adapted methods in English language teaching.
2	I use visual materials and sensory support in my lessons.
3	I adapt grammar and vocabulary tasks for students with SEN.
4	I use group work and pair work to support children with SEN.
5	Students with SEN actively participate in English language lessons.
6	I use digital or assistive technologies to support teaching children with SEN.
7	I independently develop adapted tasks.
Challenges	
1	I face difficulties when teaching children with special educational needs (SEN).
2	I lack methodological guidance on inclusive English language teaching.
3	My school has a resource room or a specialist who supports teaching children with SEN.
4	I would like to take professional development courses on inclusive English language teaching.
5	I have experience working with students with developmental delays.
6	I believe that current teaching approaches are not always suitable for children with SEN.
7	I find it difficult to assess the knowledge of students with SEN.
8	I lack time for an individual approach to students with SEN in lessons.

Results

The purpose of this study was to explore the current state of inclusion in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms in Kazakhstan by analyzing teachers’ pedagogical awareness, practices, and challenges across three major cities—Astana, Almaty, and Shymkent. (Table 1) The findings provide insight into how English teachers perceive and implement inclusive education and whether regional differences exist.

The demographic analysis revealed that the largest proportion of respondents (33.24%) were educators aged 31–40 (Table 2), while 32.2% reported having between 5 and 20 years of teaching experience (Table 3)

Table 2. Age characteristics of the participants

Category	N	
Less than 25	9	26.47%
25-30	7	20.59%
31-40	13	38.24%
41-50	3	8.82%
51 and more	2	5.88%

Table 3. Teaching experience of participants

Category	N	
Less than 5 years	9	26,4%
5-10 years	11	32,3%
11-20years	11	32,3%
21-30 years	1	3%
31 and more	2	6%

1. Pedagogical awareness. Analysis of questionnaire data showed that the majority of surveyed teachers (67.6%) stated that they were familiar with the basic principles of inclusive education. However, 20.5% of teachers found it difficult to answer, and 11.7% disagreed with the statement about their own awareness, which indicates persistent gaps in professional training. Despite the general trend towards awareness of the importance of an inclusive approach, only some respondents had practical experience in teaching children with special educational needs and were proficient in differentiated teaching strategies.

2. Pedagogical practice. The gap between declared awareness and actual practice turned out to be significant. Only 35.2% of teachers noted that they use inclusive methods and adapted technologies in their English lessons. At the same time, 38.2% of respondents answered negatively, and 26.4% took a neutral position, which may indicate uncertainty in the approaches used or a lack of tools. From observations and interviews, it became clear that in practice, teachers use the following forms of adaptation: simplification of vocabulary and grammatical structures; visual supports (cards, illustrations, diagrams); individual assignments with a reduced language load; work in pairs and mini-groups. However, the use of assistive technologies, digital platforms with adaptive functions and specialized methods is almost never encountered.

3. Challenges. Among the main difficulties hindering the implementation of an inclusive approach, teachers named: lack of adapted teaching aids (mentioned by 82% of respondents); lack of special training in inclusive methods of teaching English (76%); curriculum overload and lack of flexibility in assessment (64%); lack of tutoring and psychological support at school (59%). Teachers noted that they often feel alone with the problem: “I want to help my child, but I don’t know how. There are no methodological recommendations, and nothing is said about such children in advanced training courses.”

The use of the Kruskal-Wallis criterion did not reveal statistically significant differences between the cities of Astana, Almaty and Shymkent in the three categories studied: level of awareness ($p = 0.0773$), level of practice ($p = 0.59$), perception of difficulties ($p = 0.213$). This allows us to conclude that the identified problems are systemic, not local in nature, and require solutions at the national level.

Discussion

The obtained results confirm that despite the high level of teachers’ awareness of the ideas of inclusive education, the implementation of inclusive practices in English language teaching remains limited. This is consistent with the findings of other studies in Kazakhstan and abroad, according to which the barrier between theory and practice is often associated with insufficient teacher training and the lack of systemic methodological support [6].

One of the main findings of this study is the existence of a systemic gap

between state inclusion policy and the actual conditions in schools. Despite the existence of a regulatory framework and programs for the development of inclusive education, teachers are not provided with the necessary resources, adapted materials and tools to implement these tasks in English language teaching. This entails an increase in professional stress, uncertainty in their own actions and a refusal to introduce innovations in the classroom. It is also important to note that in most cases inclusion is perceived as the physical integration of children with special educational needs into the general educational environment, rather than as a complex pedagogical task requiring individualization of teaching and adaptation of content [10]. This approach limits the possibilities of full inclusion of children with special educational needs in the educational process and hinders their linguistic and social development. However, the study recorded examples of pedagogical initiative: individual teachers use visual materials, adapt tasks, resort to group work and create a comfortable atmosphere in the classroom. This allows us to talk about the potential for developing an inclusive culture in schools, provided there is support, training programs and exchange of experience. Compared to international experience, the Kazakhstani system does not yet have a sufficient number of specialized programs for training foreign language teachers to work in inclusive conditions. At the same time, Western studies emphasize the need for a subject-oriented approach that takes into account the specifics of language teaching: communicative focus, complexity of written and oral speech [11]. Thus, the discussion of the results emphasizes that the solution to the identified problems requires the following model (Figure 1).

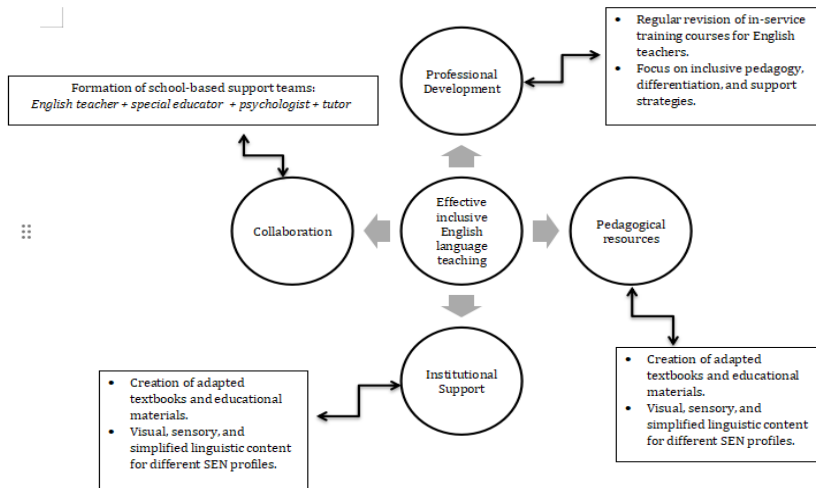


Figure 1 – Visual model representing the four key components supporting inclusive English language instruction for students with SEN

Conclusion

This study reinforces international findings that the successful implementation of inclusive language education depends heavily on the presence

of structured support systems and high-quality teacher training. Kazakhstan, like many other countries, faces the dual challenge of aligning policy-level commitments to inclusion with the practical realities of classroom instruction—particularly in the domain of English as a Foreign Language (EFL).

The research reveals that EFL teachers across major urban centers are increasingly aware of the principles of inclusive education. However, this awareness does not consistently translate into effective practice due to several persistent barriers, including a lack of specialized instructional materials, insufficient training in differentiated pedagogy, and limited institutional support. Teachers often rely on individual improvisation rather than research-based methods to meet the needs of students with special educational needs (SEN).

Key findings indicate that students with SEN benefit from clearly sequenced instructions, extended time to process and retain new information, and consistent use of visual aids and demonstrative teaching techniques. Teachers must account for the unique cognitive characteristics of these learners, and individualized lesson planning should be based on students' prior knowledge, the stage of learning, and alignment with educational goals.

Inclusive education must be deliberate, systematic, and integrated within a lifelong learning framework. In this context, the professional preparation of teachers is not merely a support mechanism—it is a cornerstone of effective inclusion. Teachers must be equipped with both the theoretical foundation and the practical tools to address the diverse needs of learners in EFL classrooms.

While Kazakhstan has made significant strides in developing inclusive education at the policy level, the classroom implementation of these ideals, especially in foreign language education, remains a work in progress.

Limitations and Future Directions

It is also necessary to note a number of limitations that determined the nature of the data obtained. Firstly, the study covered only schools in three cities of national significance, which limits the possibility of generalizing the results. The problem of inclusive English language teaching is especially acute in rural schools, where the staffing and resource deficit is significantly higher. In these conditions, the need for additional study of the situation in the regions becomes especially urgent.

Secondly, it is worth noting that it was originally planned to cover a wider sample, but some potential participants refused to participate due to lack of time, lack of support from the administration, or fear of evaluation of their professional activities. This confirms the need to create a safer and more supportive research culture in the school environment. For further research, it is recommended to use mixed methods (questionnaires, interviews, observation) to obtain a more complete and contextualized understanding of teaching practices. In addition, longitudinal studies will allow tracking the dynamics of changes in inclusive education as reforms develop and new educational standards are introduced.

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ҚАЗАҚСТАНДА АҒЫЛШЫН ТІЛІН ИНКЛЮЗИВТІ ОҚЫТУ: ПЕДАГОГИКАЛЫҚ ТҮСІНІК, ТӘЖІРИБЕ ЖӘНЕ ҚИЫНДЫҚТАР

*Изекенова Н.Н.¹, Смагулова А.С.²

¹Қазақ ұлттық қыздар педагогикалық университеті, Алматы, Қазақстан

²әл-Фараби атындағы Қазақ ұлттық университеті, Алматы, Қазақстан

Аңдатпа. Қазақстанда білім беруді жаңғырту жағдайында барлық санаттағы оқушыларға, соның ішінде ерекше білім беру қажеттіліктері (ЕББҚ) бар балалар үшін, білім алуға бірдей қолжетімділікті қамтамасыз етуге бағытталған инклюзивті тәсілді дамытуға ерекше көңіл бөлінуде. Инклюзивті ортада ағылшын тілін оқыту — бұл маңызды педагогикалық міндет, өйткені ол оқушылардың әртүрлі когнитивтік, коммуникативтік және мінез-құлықтық ерекшеліктерін ескеруді талап етеді. Бұл зерттеудің мақсаты — ЕББҚ бар балалармен жұмыс жасау барысында ағылшын тілі мұғалімдерінің жиі тап болатын қиындықтарын анықтау, сонымен қатар инклюзия жағдайында қолданылатын тиімді педагогикалық тәжірибелерін жинақтау. Зерттеу барысында сауалнама және нормативтік құжаттарды талдау әдістері қолданылды. Зерттеуге Қазақстанның үш ірі қаласындағы (Астана, Алматы, Шымкент) жалпы білім беретін мектептерінен 34 мұғалім қатысты. Нәтижелер көрсеткендей, инклюзивті қағидалар туралы хабардарлықтың жоғары деңгейіне қарамастан, мұғалімдердің үштен бір бөлігі ғана бейімделген әдістерді тәжірибеде қолданатынын көрсетті. Басты кедергілер — әдістемелік материалдардың тапшылығы, арнайы дайындықтың болмауы, әкімшілік пен мамандар тарапынан қолдаудың жеткіліксіздігі. Дегенмен, көру-сезімдік қолдаудың, тапсырмаларды дараландырудың және көмекші технологиялардың элементтерін қолданудың оң мысалдары кездеседі. Ұсынылған деректер инклюзивті ортаның ерекшеліктерін ескере отырып, ағылшын тілін оқытудың кешенді

әдістемесін әзірлеу және мұғалімдердің біліктілігін арттыру қажеттігі бар туралы қорытынды жасауға мүмкіндік береді.

Тірек сөздер: инклюзивті білім беру, ерекше білім беру қажеттіліктері (ЕБҚ), ағылшын тілін шет тілі ретінде оқыту, педагогикалық хабардарлық, инклюзивті білім берудегі қиындықтар, саралап оқыту, әдістемелік материалдар, оқушылардың әртүрлілігі

ИНКЛЮЗИВНОЕ ОБУЧЕНИЕ АНГЛИЙСКОМУ ЯЗЫКУ В КАЗАХСТАНЕ: ПЕДАГОГИЧЕСКАЯ ОСВЕДОМЛЕННОСТЬ, ПЕДАГОГИЧЕСКИЕ ПРАКТИКИ И ТРУДНОСТИ

*Изекенова Н.Н.¹, Смагулова А.С.²

*¹Казахский национальный женский педагогический университет,
Алматы, Казахстан

²Казахский национальный университет имени аль-Фараби,
Алматы, Казахстан

Аннотация. В условиях модернизации образования Казахстана особое внимание уделяется развитию инклюзивного подхода, обеспечивающего равный доступ к обучению для всех категорий учащихся, включая детей с особыми образовательными потребностями (ООП). Обучение английскому языку в инклюзивной среде — это значимая педагогическая задача, поскольку требует учета различных когнитивных, коммуникативных и поведенческих особенностей учащихся. Целью настоящего исследования является выявление основных трудностей, с которыми сталкиваются учителя английского языка при работе с детьми с ООП, а также обобщение эффективных педагогических практик, применяемых в условиях инклюзии. В работе использовались методы анкетирования и анализа нормативных документов. В исследовании приняли участие 34 учителя из общеобразовательных школ трёх крупных городов Казахстана: Астаны, Алматы и Шымкента. Результаты показали, что несмотря на высокую заявленную осведомленность об инклюзивных принципах, только треть учителей применяют адаптированные методы на практике. Основные барьеры включают нехватку методических материалов, отсутствие специальной подготовки и ограниченную поддержку со стороны администрации и специалистов. Тем не менее, встречаются успешные примеры внедрения визуально-сенсорной поддержки, индивидуализации заданий и использования элементов вспомогательных технологий. Представленные данные позволяют сделать выводы о необходимости разработки комплексной методики преподавания английского языка с учетом специфики инклюзивной среды и повышения квалификации учителей в данной области.

Ключевые слова: инклюзивное образование, особые образовательные потребности (ООП), преподавание английского языка как иностранного, педагогическая осведомлённость, трудности инклюзивного образования, дифференцированное обучение, методические материалы, разнообразие обучающихся

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Information about authors:

Izekenova N.N. – doctoral student, Kazakh National Women’s Teacher Training University, usergreit06@mail.ru

Smagulova A.S. – candidate of philology, associate professor, al-Farabi Kazakh National University, aigerim0715@mail.ru

Авторлар туралы мәлімет:

Изекенова Н.Н. – докторант, Қазақ ұлттық қыздар педагогикалық университеті, usergreit06@mail.ru

Смагулова А.С. – ф.ғ.к., қауымдастырылған профессор, әл-Фараби атындағы Қазақ ұлттық университеті, aigerim0715@mail.ru

Информация об авторах:

Изекенова Н.Н. – докторант, Казахский национальный женский педагогический университет, usergreit06@mail.ru

Смагулова А.С. – к.ф.н., ассоциированный профессор, Казахский национальный университет им. аль-Фараби, aigerim0715@mail.ru