



Barriers To Inclusion: Insights from Special Education Teachers in Kazakhstan

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: This study examines the barriers faced by special education teachers in Kazakhstan's inclusive classrooms. It addresses the need for a deeper understanding of these barriers to support the successful implementation of inclusive education in Kazakhstan, a context where such practices are still evolving. **Method:** The study employed qualitative research design using semi-structured interviews with 41 special education teachers across eight cities in Kazakhstan. A purposive sampling technique was used to ensure representation of diverse regions and educational settings. Thematic data analysis was employed to uncover the key barriers faced by teachers.

Findings: six major barriers were identified: lack of resources and time, difficulties in engaging with parents, insufficient methodological support, inadequate organizational facilities, complex documentation requirements, and the unpredictability of managing children with behavioral disorders. Additional findings include issues like professional burnout, unrealistic parental expectations, and a lack of training in practical inclusive strategies. **Implications for Research and Practice:** The findings underscore the need for systemic reforms, including targeted policy measures to enhance resources, comprehensive professional development programs tailored to the needs of special educators, and collaborative frameworks to improve stakeholder engagement. Simplifying administrative processes and providing more practical training opportunities for teachers are critical steps to bridge existing gaps. **Limitations:** The study is limited by its qualitative design; future research should consider quantitative or mixed methods approaches.

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Introduction

The concept and practice of inclusive education have gained global recognition as a philosophy for achieving equality, equity, and quality education for all children,

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particularly those historically excluded from mainstream education because of disabilities, ethnicity, gender, or other factors. As defined by UNESCO, inclusive education seeks to address all students' unique needs by fostering greater participation in learning and reducing their exclusion from education (UNESCO, 2008). This entails providing quality education tailored to meet each student's individual needs to the greatest possible extent. Inclusion is often conceptualized as a guiding philosophy that emphasizes the creation of educational environments where all students, regardless of their abilities, needs, or backgrounds, are valued and supported in their learning and development. This approach aligns with definitions that view inclusion as fostering a sense of belonging and equity within the classroom and the broader school community (Ainscow & Miles, 2008) (UNESCO, 2020). Several schools and educational institutions have taken the initiative to make provisions for special and inclusive education system.

Inclusive education is not just a trend but a crucial shift in many education systems, including Kazakhstan. Although many countries have successfully implemented inclusive education, other countries are still in the process of achieving this goal. The absence of sufficient funding, support from administrative and political authorities, and insufficiently trained personnel pose barriers that can impede progress. Consequently, some countries are initiating the inclusive education process by concentrating on one group of excluded children, with the long-term objective of eventually encompassing all marginalized groups. Following this logic, the inclusion movement in Kazakhstan primarily concentrates on children with disabilities. Recent statistics have indicated an increase in the number of children with disabilities in the 0-18 years age group. In 2023, the number of such individuals was 203,7000, as opposed to 188,100 in 2022 (8.3% growth). Efforts to include such children in the general education process are ongoing. According to the Ministry of Education of Kazakhstan, 44% of preschool organizations and 86% of schools have created the necessary conditions for teaching children with disabilities. Additionally, the number of inclusive organizations has increased annually since 2021 (Ministry of Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan, n.d.). Educators, including special education teachers and teachers' assistants, were included in all secondary schools and kindergartens to provide support and professional assistance to children with disabilities. In Kazakhstani secondary schools, a special teacher is the primary person responsible for inclusion in classrooms. The success of inclusion, education, and development of children with disabilities depends largely on the professional actions of those involved.

Previously, there were no specialists in mainstream educational institutions in Kazakhstan that focused specifically on supporting children with disabilities in inclusive environments. Special education teachers primarily worked in specialized organizations such as special schools, special kindergartens, and rehabilitation centers. As a result, the professional activities of special education teachers working with children with disabilities in inclusive environments have unique characteristics that require additional professional competencies. Consequently, special education teachers in Kazakhstan find themselves in new professional conditions they have not encountered previously. Considering these new realities, it is crucial to understand how special education teachers can support children with disabilities in inclusive environments and identify the common barriers they face in their work.

Despite the global emphasis on inclusive education, limited research has explored the specific barriers faced by special education teachers in Kazakhstan. Existing studies often focus on general education teachers, systemic reforms, or structures to support inclusive education (Helmer et al., 2023; Somerton & Rollan, 2019). Some paint a troubling perspective, emphasizing concerns related to human rights (Human Rights Watch, 2019). In addition, providing quality education to all in an inclusive environment is both daunting and necessary. It is crucial to equip special education teachers with the necessary skills for inclusion and to help them overcome the barriers of including students with disabilities, especially when they arise in contexts where inclusive education as a concept has been introduced comparatively recently. A recent study by Passeka and Somerton (2024) highlighted the perceptions of special educators' professional roles. However, a significant gap remains in scholarly literature regarding the unique challenges and needs of professionals specifically trained to support students with disabilities. To close this gap, the present study sought to uncover the specific barriers that educators encounter in inclusive classrooms, understand how these challenges impact their perceived professional efficacy, and identify the types of support needed to address these issues effectively. Guided by a qualitative research approach, the investigation explored three central questions: What barriers do special education teachers face in inclusive classrooms in Kazakhstan? How do these barriers affect their confidence and effectiveness in inclusive educational settings? and finally, what kinds of support are necessary to help educators overcome these barriers?

Literature Review

Past researchers have primarily emphasized the need to consider three key factors: the attitude of special education teachers with respect to the integration of children with disabilities; the process of establishing the content of teacher training programs intended to equip future special education teachers with the requisite skills and knowledge to work in an inclusive setting; and professional development for fostering professionalism. Regarding the first aspect – the attitude of support specialists towards inclusion of children with disabilities – it is often a question of attitude and behavior. Studies in this domain talk of the educational success of inclusivity largely due to the attitude of special education teachers towards inclusion. For instance, Hernandez, Hueck and Charley (2016) reveal that special education teachers' attitudes toward inclusion are significantly more positive than those of general education teachers. Other researchers have identified that the type of teacher and their self-efficacy are important predictors of teachers' attitudes toward inclusion (Feng & Sass, 2013; Tan et al., 2022). In another study, Oyola (2016), convincingly argues that special education teachers possess a unique understanding of the benefits and drawbacks of inclusion, which sets them apart from their regular teacher colleagues. They firmly believe that students with special needs, particularly those with disabilities, should be entitled to the same rights and opportunities as their non-disabled peers and should be provided with equal access to education throughout their academic journey (Oyola, 2016).

Upon examining research related to the second aspect of determining the content of teacher training programs for special education teachers to work in an inclusive environment, it is important to observe the extensive discussions and debates surrounding

the need for structural modifications to training programs for special education teachers. Bacon and Causton-Theoharis (2013), for instance, points out that the objectives and content of special education have evolved in recent years due to the implementation of integrated education for children with special educational needs. These alterations affect the training of special education teachers and necessitate the application of various methodologies. Furthermore, cautionary reports indicate that special education teachers may lack the required attitudes, dispositions, and professional competencies to effectively instruct students in diverse inclusive classrooms. Consequently, Krischler with coauthors found that special education teachers tend to concentrate on addressing the needs of students with disabilities rather than considering inclusivity primarily as a means of fostering their social integration into society (Krischler, Powell, & Pit-Ten Cate, 2019).

Research has shown that the dual system of education, where students with disabilities attend separate special schools or regular schools, results in fragmented and disparate programs that hinder communication between regular and special education teachers. This situation, as Alhossyan (2023) suggests, negatively impacts the education of students with and without disabilities. Developing a common understanding of the objectives of competency and the various avenues that can lead to its attainment is crucial for effective teacher collaboration aimed at promoting academic success, particularly in situations where teachers are responsible for special and regular education collaboration. Collaboration among professionals significantly impacts the quality and innovation of inclusive practices and can foster a sense of satisfaction and commitment (Tan et al., 2022). Cooperation is especially vital when providing services to students with special educational needs (Bacon & Causton-Theoharis, 2013). To address the challenges associated with this second aspect, Mitchell and Sutherland (2020) emphasize the significance of a special teacher's general competence goals at the appropriate grade level and student development stage, as well as the necessity of customizing learning objectives to accommodate each student's individual academic needs and achievement level.

Studies on the third aspect of fostering inclusive education—professional development for advancing professionalism—have revealed a dearth of opportunities for teachers, particularly special education teachers, to engage in professional development. Despite the continued use of on-the-job training as a primary approach to preparing teachers for inclusive education, there is growing recognition of the significance of training programs for prospective special education teachers to teach in inclusive classrooms (Feng & Sass, 2013; Van Laarhoven et al., 2007). The significance of providing appropriate training to special education teachers for their professional development aims at including children with disabilities in general education. However, there are barriers faced by regular schools in creating suitable conditions for the professional development of teachers and subsequently benefit students with disabilities. These barriers include the provision of special education programs designed for the professional development of teachers for inclusive education. By addressing the research issues related to preparing special education teachers to work in inclusive environments, practical problems related to special teacher-training programs, 'alternative' certification programs for special educators, and the policy of recruiting and retaining special education teachers in regular schools can be resolved.

Methodology

Research Design

The study employs a qualitative methodological approach, specifically chosen to uncover the intricate and nuanced experiences of special education teachers operating in inclusive settings throughout Kazakhstan (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 1990). This study aimed to assess the level of inclusive-oriented training among graduates (special education teachers) and identify the barriers they face in their work as well as gaps in their theoretical knowledge regarding the organization and content of special teacher activities in inclusive education. This focus on the perceptions of professionals aligns with the qualitative research tradition of exploring human experiences within specific contexts (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

Sampling

The sample of the study comprised 41 special education instructors who had graduated from the 'Special Pedagogy' Bachelor of Education program; and who were employed in inclusive schools in Kazakhstan. These special education teachers were sampled from eight cities in Kazakhstan: Almaty, Astana, Pavlodar, Kostanay, Karaganda, Shymkent, Aktobe, and Petropavlovsk, to ensure a wide geographical spread across Kazakhstan. A purposive sampling technique was used to ensure representation of diverse regions and educational settings (Patton, 1990). Participants were informed that their involvement was voluntary and confidential, and collected data were confidential and utilized solely for academic purposes.

Research Instrument and Data Collection

The data was collected through semi-structured interviews, as the primary data collection tool, enabling flexibility while maintaining consistency in addressing key themes (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). The approval for the data collection procedures was obtained prior to conducting the research. These interviews were conducted with all 41 secondary school and preschool special education instructors. The interviews were conducted to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences of special education teachers in Kazakhstan and to explore their educational backgrounds, practical experiences, roles, and responsibilities, as well as the barriers they face in inclusive settings. Our goal was to identify the specific barriers and challenges encountered by special educators in Kazakhstan's inclusive classrooms, evaluate the impact of these barriers on their perceived effectiveness, and determine the support mechanisms essential for overcoming these barriers.

Data Analysis

Thematic data analysis was employed to uncover the key barriers faced by teachers. The qualitative research instruments like semi structured interviews always have room for probing and clarifying responses (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Researchers strictly adhered to personal data protection standards and digital rights guarantees throughout data processing. The interview transcripts were then analyzed to identify the key categories and themes. By integrating the perspectives of the interviewees, the reliability and contextual

relevance of these categories were enhanced, adhering to recommended practices in qualitative studies, where participants' perceptions and insights form the basis of knowledge and analysis. The interview transcripts were analyzed using thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach with the use of qualitative research software.

Results and Findings

This research indicates that special education teachers confront a multitude of barriers. For example, educators frequently encounter a scarcity of resources and time, face difficulties when interacting with parents, and struggle to access methodological support and materials. Furthermore, the absence of adequate facilities and organizational support exacerbates their difficulties. Additionally, navigating complex documentation processes and managing the unpredictable nature of working with children who have behavioral disorders present significant barriers. The barriers identified in relation to special education teachers, as outlined in the study objectives and related issues, are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Difficulties Experienced by Special Education Teacher in Their Professional Activities (with Different Work Experience)

Difficulties	Novice (%)	Mid-Career (%)	Experienced (%)	Total Average (%)
Lack of resources and time	35	10	8	48
Problems of interaction with parents	28	16	12	19
Insufficient methodological support and access to materials	42	31	21	32
Lack of facilities and support in organizations	15	21	12	16
Difficulties with documentation	23	20	29	24
Unpredictability and difficulties of working with children with behavioral disorders	27	16	12	19

Lack of Resources and Time

Limited resources and time are common problems for special education teachers. In practice, many children require an individual approach and programs, but limited resources and time make it difficult to provide them effectively. The shortage of funding, material resources, qualified personnel, and time poses a significant challenge for educators working in inclusive organizations. This lack of resources and time hinders their ability to work effectively and provides necessary support for children with disabilities. A significant lack of resources and time was reported across experience levels, with the highest impact (100%) seen in educators with 3-4 years of experience. This barrier has been 'quantified' and visualized in Table1, reflecting an overall average of 48% when considering all experience levels.

Similarly, during the qualitative interview, special teacher N. (kindergarten) noted: "Working in general education organizations means that you have to adjust to the schedules of other teachers and educators. That's why I often do not have enough time. Children are different, with different characteristics; group work is difficult". Many children with different characteristics require an individual approach and the development of individual educational programs. Special educators should diagnose, develop, and adapt educational materials and techniques and provide support and corrections during training. However, owing to the lack of resources and limited time, this work often has to be carried out in conditions of a shortage of necessary tools and materials. The study participants highlighted that the insufficient number of specialists in the field of special education and inadequate qualified personnel are factors that make it difficult for special educators to provide adequate support to children with disabilities. As a result, there may be a considerable number of children with disabilities per specialist, which poses challenges for each child to receive personalized attention and support. Generally, the scarcity of resources and time hinders the provision of adequate education and support for children with disabilities. To overcome these barriers, it is crucial to increase funding, provide the necessary resources, and establish more flexible working conditions for special educators.

Problems of Interaction with Parents

Interaction with parents of children with disabilities can be difficult. Parents may have high expectations, be dissatisfied, and do not always understand the importance of support and rehabilitation for their children. The interaction with parents proved challenging for survey participants, especially for less experienced educators, with a reported 28% facing issues. This concern diminishes as experience increases, suggesting a possible correlation between experience and improved communication with parents. A special education teacher from secondary school A. highlighted the problem of interaction with parents of children with disabilities: "The main difficulty in 'communicating' to parents' information about the importance of accompanying such children, correct diagnosis, early rehabilitation, early correction."

Special education teachers face an additional challenge in interacting with parents of children with disabilities. Some parents may possess high expectations and demands that are not always consistent with the actual possibilities and limitations of the educational system. It is possible that they anticipate rapid and substantial outcomes, failing to comprehend that the education and development of children with disabilities demands time, perseverance, and incremental advancement. Some parents may be uninformed about the various inclusive education programs and methods that can provide their children with equal educational opportunities. In such situations, special educators are responsible for providing information and education to parents, enabling them to make well-informed decisions and collaborate effectively with their children's interests. Thus, special educators must exhibit high levels of empathy, tolerance, and communication skills to establish productive interactions with parents and overcome the barriers associated with such interactions. It is crucial to engage in open and trustworthy dialogue with parents, pay attention to their concerns and queries, and inform them about their children's learning and developmental progress. Regular meetings, consultations, and mutual support can also foster positive relationships between educators and parents.

Insufficient Methodological Support and Access to Materials

The limited availability of methodological materials and programs for working with children with various disabilities is a difficulty. The lack of specialized teaching aids and didactic materials makes it difficult to conduct effective classes. Insufficient methodological support was a major concern, with 42% of beginners facing this issue. Notably, this challenge is consistently present regardless of the educators' years of service. During an interview with a special education teacher from Kindergarten L, she emphasized the issue of inadequate methodological support for inclusive education in general education institutions: "The main problems, in my opinion, are the lack of necessary methodological literature, namely on inclusive education, the lack of standard curricula for 'Preschool education and training' for children with intellectual, speech, and visual impairments."

According to this educator's perspective, both insufficient methodological backing and restricted access to resources pose significant challenges for educators working with young people with diverse impairments. Such children's successful instruction and development depend on employing specialized methodological strategies and materials that cater to their unique requirements. As a result, educators may encounter a restricted selection of teaching resources that fully satisfy the needs and expectations of their students. This could complicate the planning and conduct of lessons and restrict the possibilities for personalizing the educational process, making it difficult to execute practical classes and employ innovative techniques and technology that may be crucial for instructing children with impairments.

It is essential to seek alternative resources and teaching materials to address the barriers faced by special educators. By collaborating with colleagues and sharing their experiences, educators can develop teaching aids tailored to their students' individual needs and capabilities. Furthermore, the use of modern information and communication technologies can expand access to online resources and materials that can be useful for working with children with disabilities. It is also crucial to enhance cooperation between special educators, publishers, and developers of educational materials and programs. Joint efforts can lead to the creation of a broader range of special teaching aids and materials that meet the needs of both professionals and children with disabilities. Improving the shortcomings of insufficient methodological support and restricted access to resources necessitates the collaborative efforts of educational institutions, professionals, families, and society. It is possible to enhance education and provide more effective support for children with disabilities by harnessing online resources, creating novel materials and programs, and fortifying partnerships and collaboration.

Lack of Facilities and Support in Organizations

The lack of suitable facilities and support in organizations to work with children with disabilities is a common problem. There is not always sufficient understanding of the importance of such work, and there is insufficient infrastructure and conditions for training. The lack of facilities and institutional support was found to be a barrier for the survey participants, with a total average challenge rating of 16%. For instance, a special education teacher at Secondary School K highlighted a significant challenge based on her

experience: "It is the creation of really comfortable conditions, that is, a special device, equipment, allowance for an accessible environment, it is desirable to increase. The absence of a psychological relaxation room, that is, a place where children can optimally relax, effectively, and quickly relieve emotional overstrain and restore their working capacity. Well, everything-it all comes down to the material and technical base".

One of the main problems faced by educational institutions is inadequate infrastructure and training conditions. Many schools do not have the necessary resources and facilities to cater to children with disabilities, such as special classrooms, adapted furniture, technical facilities, or accessible means of communication. This lack of resources can hinder the learning process and interactions with children. Furthermore, there may be a shortage of specialists and support staff, including special educators, which can result in an overload of specialists, insufficient individualization of the educational process, and limited opportunities to support each child according to their needs. To address this issue, it is crucial to increase awareness and understanding of the importance of working with special educators and creating suitable conditions for children with disabilities. Educational organizations should strive to provide appropriate infrastructure, resources, and staff to work with such children. This may involve creating special classrooms, adapting premises, providing access to necessary equipment and materials, and training and support for staff to work effectively with children with disabilities.

The inadequate provision of resources and support within organizations for children with disabilities represents another significant challenge. Often, educational institutions fail to comprehend the significance of collaborating with special educators and creating suitable environments for the education and development of children with disabilities. This lack of understanding and awareness must be addressed to ensure that these children receive the support and resources necessary to achieve their full potential.

Difficulties with Documentation

Difficulties with preparing necessary documentation and compliance with the requirements of inspections and commissions are significant difficulties for special educators. The complexities of documentation were significantly felt by experienced educators, with 29% citing it as a challenge. Difficulties with maintaining the documentation of a special teacher in general education organizations are well highlighted by special teacher I.: "If you start from the very beginning, first of all, it is related to documentation. Now, there is no one to ask what kind of speech card there is, for example. We are always told that there will be an inspection or a commission. And you do not know what the list of documents should be. You know of some basic documentation, but there are additional logs. How do you fill it out? Many documents were outdated. We asked the Telegram and WhatsApp groups. However, it has a commercial nature everywhere. Everyone says we have everything; we can give you material or advice but for a fee. However, in the end, it turned out to be the same. I got the impression that it turns out, there is no uniform documentation".

Thus, it can be concluded that difficulties with documentation are a significant aspect of special educators' work. Completing the necessary documentation and complying with the inspection and commission requirements can be a complex and time-consuming

process. The documentation requirements for special educators in inclusive settings involve producing and maintaining various documents, including individualized educational programs (IEP), individualized correction and development plans (ICDP), and progress reports. This requires teachers to possess not only specialized knowledge and experience in special education but also the ability to create appropriate documentation that adheres to established guidelines and regulations. This process can be challenging, particularly for new professionals or those navigating legislation changes.

Study results show that experienced educators (5 years or more) reported difficulties with documentation (29%), which may suggest an increased administrative burden or a reflection of the complexity of compliance as experience grows (for novice and mid-career teachers this indicator is lower, 23 and 20 percent respectively). Compliance with the requirements of inspections and commissions is a crucial aspect of working with children with disabilities. Such work often involves undergoing various assessments and certifications and interacting with organizations responsible for evaluating needs and providing appropriate support. This may include participation in the assessment procedures, attending meetings, and collaborating with other professionals. To ensure proper documentation and compliance, it is essential to dedicate time and effort and pay close attention to detail.

Updating and modifying documentation is a crucial aspect of working with children with disabilities, particularly when their needs or progress change. Revising the Individualized Education Program (IEP), Individualized Placement and Support Plan (IPSP), progress reports, and communicating with parents and other professionals may be necessary to ensure that the documentation remains current and relevant. This process is time-consuming and requires exceptional organizational and communication skills from special educators. Special education teachers can use diverse techniques to overcome these difficulties. This may involve attending professional development workshops and seminars to stay current on documentation and legislative guidelines. Moreover, it is crucial to maintain open lines of communication with parents and other educators to ensure uniformity and collaboration during documentation.

Unpredictability and Difficulties in Working with Children with Behavioral Disorders

Working with children with behavioral disorders can be quite challenging to predict. These children often exhibit aggressive behavior, anxiety, inappropriate responses, and unpredictable behavior, which can make it difficult for educators to manage their classrooms. Working with children with behavioral disorders presented a challenge across all experience levels. Notably, this challenge is most pronounced for novice teachers (27%), while this becomes a less critical challenge as experience levels increase (16% of mid-career teachers and only 12% of seasoned teachers indicate this as a significant challenge). A special education teacher A., based on her experience in secondary schools, gave an example: "... when it comes to children, each child has his own behavior, you need to be able to attract him to yourself, and when he studies at school, he must understand how other colleagues look at the child, because there will be many such of course, teachers will not understand children who are in an inclusive world".

Based on the opinions of the interviewed teachers, it should be noted that the unpredictability and complexity of working with children with behavioral disorders pose serious challenges for special educators. Managing children with behavioral disorders presents a complex challenge for educators, involving aggressive tendencies, anxiety-driven reactions, erratic behavior, and communication difficulties, all of which disrupt classroom dynamics and demand significant effort and adaptability to address effectively. Children with behavioral disorders may exhibit aggressive behavior, which can include physical or verbal attacks such as fights, assaults on peers or teachers, disruptive actions, and rule violations. Teachers must effectively manage and prevent such behavior to ensure the safety of everyone involved in the educational process. High levels of anxiety and inappropriate reactions to various situations are also common among these children. They might display avoidant behavior, break rules, or act inappropriately during social interactions, creating tension in the classroom and hindering both learning and interaction with others.

Additionally, their behavior can be erratic, marked by fluctuating moods, emotional instability, and impulsive actions. This unpredictability complicates lesson planning and execution, often requiring teachers to respond swiftly to sudden changes in behavior. Establishing communication and interaction with these children poses another challenge. Their frequently negative attitudes toward learning and authority demand significant time and effort from educators to build trust and connections, which are essential for supporting their learning and development. Working with children who have behavioral disorders calls for special educators who possess a range of qualities, including flexibility, emotional stability, and versatility, as well as proficiency in managing problematic behaviors and promoting the emotional well-being of these young individuals. In addition, the participants of the semi-structured interviews emphasized the difficulties of professional development, such as a negative attitude towards on-the-job training courses and inconvenient course time. Moral qualities, constant self-improvement, cooperation with other specialists, understanding of the needs of parents, the ability to take responsibility, and delegate functions in certain situations are also important. Among the additional challenges identified, though not universally reported, were heavy workloads, difficulties in time management, and the absence of positive recognition or feedback from the administration.

In conclusion, it can be asserted that special educators face a multitude of barriers, including inadequate resources and time, problems in collaborating with parents, restricted methodological support and access to materials, insufficient conditions and support within organizations, difficulties in documentation, and challenges in working with children with behavioral disorders. These difficulties necessitate additional efforts and resources to guarantee effective education and support for children with disabilities.

Discussion

The analysis of the responses from the interview participants - university graduates who work as special educators in inclusive settings-revealed several common barriers in their professional activities. These barriers include difficulties in interacting with parents of children with disabilities, peers, and other stakeholders, as well as issues with

organizing partnerships and distributing responsibilities to prevent professional burnout. Special education teachers also face a heavy workload, difficulties with time management, and a lack of positive assessment from the administration. Additionally, working with parents and teachers can be challenging as they often bear misunderstandings and unrealistic expectations. The issue of special education teachers' preparation to work with a particular category of children, such as those with impaired hearing, vision, and speech, is problematic. This is exacerbated by the dearth of opportunities for professional development to deepen teachers' knowledge or gain additional specialized skills for working with other categories of disability. Working with children with different disabilities in various classes can pose significant challenges, particularly regarding the limited availability of logistical and educational resources. Moreover, there is often a scarcity of time to develop tailored materials for all children with disabilities, and there are few inclusive associations or communities in which educators can seek guidance and discuss the difficulties they face in fostering an inclusive learning environment. According to participants, the practical training they received was inadequate. Despite possessing theoretical knowledge, they struggled to apply it to real-life situations. One major challenge they faced was addressing the unique needs of each child, further exacerbating their difficulties. Similar findings related to difficulties of interacting with parents are well-documented in other studies (Pozdnyakova & Belluyan, 2022).

Special education teachers are cognizant of the need for ongoing training and development in the field of inclusive education. They recognize the importance of studying, attending courses, and collaborating with colleagues to achieve better outcomes when working with children with disabilities. This finding aligns with research that has also revealed that a lack of practical training in managing inclusive classrooms can impede the effective learning of children with disabilities in inclusive settings (Lampert, Graves, & Ward, 2012). Graduates often encounter difficulties in their work, such as managing paperwork, creating individualized programs, and consulting colleagues from other fields. These challenges can be compounded by a lack of preparation for inclusive education, with many special educators acknowledging that they have not received sufficient training in this area during their university studies. Furthermore, there is a need for more practical work experience in secondary schools and the integration of 'Inclusive Education' courses in the curriculum. These findings are consistent with those of previous studies, which have shown that kindergarten teachers are more likely to express concerns about the inclusion of children with severe mental retardation, autism, and behavioral disorders. These teachers often lack sufficient support and training, which can exacerbate the challenges they face (Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 2003).

Special educators have highly valued the university's theoretical training despite the limitations of practical training. These educators recognize that acquired knowledge and skills serve as the foundation for their work in specialized organizations and inclusive environments. Other studies support this assessment. Acedo, Ferrer and Pamies (2009) for instance, emphasize that the implementation of inclusion policies requires a comprehensive understanding that inclusive education is an ongoing process that involves daily maintenance, including the identification and elimination of barriers and the establishment of a strong foundation for an inclusive organization in practical application. In this study, special educators identified the absence of special assistants in inclusive

classrooms as a significant challenge to implementing inclusive education in kindergartens and schools. All participants reported that the lack of special assistants in inclusive settings posed significant difficulties, and special education teachers required the assistance of teaching assistants to successfully include children with disabilities in the educational process and meet the individual needs of these children. This view is consistent with the findings of previous international studies, which have shown that a shortage of special assistants can hinder the successful implementation of inclusive education in kindergartens (Gezer & Aksoy, 2019).

The study's findings indicate that the class size impedes the successful integration of children with disabilities. This is corroborated by the observation that overcrowded classrooms pose considerable barriers to the inclusion of children with disabilities in regular classrooms. Various studies have alluded to this (Acedo et al., 2009; Gezer & Aksoy, 2019), generally concluding that classes with more than 30 students made it difficult to manage the inclusion of children with different types of disabilities effectively. Additionally, the presence of a large number of students in the classroom hinders the efficiency of special educators' work with children with disabilities. Researchers believe this is particularly true when students with behavioral disorders in the classroom require significant time and attention from a special educator. The study's results align with the findings of other studies showing that large classrooms pose a significant challenge for kindergarten and schoolteachers seeking to implement inclusive education in regular classrooms.

Last, but not the least, the study results indicate that to succeed in an inclusive organization, special education teachers must possess a range of skills and qualities, including psychological preparedness, effective communication skills, emotional stability, adaptability, and the ability to work with the unique characteristics of each child. Additionally, moral virtues, continuous self-improvement, collaboration with other professionals, and understanding the needs of parents are crucial. These points emphasize the importance of enhancing the training of special education teachers to ensure that they can function effectively in an inclusive environment. Furthermore, it emphasizes the need to provide additional practical experience, training, and support to effectively address the needs of children with disabilities and their parents. These points underscore the need to improve the education and support provided to special educators to ensure they are equipped to create inclusive learning environments and provide the necessary resources and support to children with disabilities and their families.

Conclusion

The present research on the barriers faced by special education teachers face in inclusive classrooms in Kazakhstan has uncovered systemic issues that demand immediate attention and action. The findings highlight the complex nature of these barriers, which encompass but are not limited to inadequate resources, insufficient methodological support, and problematic interactions with parents and administrative staff. The consequences of these barriers are far-reaching, affecting not only the quality of education for children with disabilities but also the professional well-being and effectiveness of educators themselves. The most pressing barrier identified in this investigation is the critical shortage of resources and time, which hinders educators from

providing individualized instruction and attention to children with disabilities. This scarcity is exacerbated by a lack of professional development opportunities, which is essential for educators to stay current on the best practices in inclusive education. Furthermore, the study emphasizes the dire need for a more collaborative and supportive relationship between special educators, parents, and school administration. Without mutual understanding and concerted effort from all parties involved, the objective of inclusive education remains elusive.

The study has several limitations inherent in the choice of methodology and the contextual character of the inquiry. The focus on Kazakhstani educators offers valuable insights specific to this context; however, these findings may not necessarily reflect the experiences of educators in other regions or countries. Therefore, future research should be conducted in diverse settings to broaden our understanding of the barriers to implementing inclusive education globally. The qualitative approach used in the study allowed for an in-depth exploration of educators' experiences. However, future research should consider quantitative or mixed methods approaches that include more extensive, more diverse samples from more regions and schools and allow for more generalization of the findings. Such studies could help assess the broader applicability of these findings and refine strategies for improving inclusive education with more precision. That said, the present study provides a solid foundation for future quantitative or mixed methods studies.

Based on the barriers identified, this study offers several practical recommendations. First, policymakers should prioritize the allocation of adequate resources and infrastructure to meet the basic requirements for inclusive education. Second, professional development programs must be expanded and tailored to the diverse needs of teachers working in inclusive settings. Simplifying documentation processes is another critical step to reduce the administrative load and allow teachers to focus on teaching and student engagement. Finally, fostering collaboration among educators, parents, and administrators is essential for creating a unified and supportive environment that promotes the success of inclusive practices. To address the barriers identified in the study, future research should explore in detail the development and implementation of the proposed strategic interventions. At the same time, policymakers should devise and implement clear strategies to overcome them.

In conclusion, this research highlights the pressing need for systemic reform to address the barriers encountered by special education teachers in Kazakhstan. By enhancing support structures, increasing resources, and fostering collaborative partnerships, stakeholders can move closer to realizing the vision of inclusive education that benefits both educators and learners. This study contributes to the growing body of literature on inclusive education and serves as a foundation for policymakers and practitioners seeking to implement meaningful and impactful change in Kazakhstan and similar contexts.

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