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**CHALLENGES FOR INCLUSIVE EDUCATION  
IN AZERBAIJAN: TEACHERS'  
PERSPECTIVE**

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## Abstract

Shafiga Gasimzade: Challenges for Inclusive Education in Azerbaijan: Teachers' Perspective.

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Azerbaijan has supported inclusive education initiatives conducted by official and non-official authorities since the turn of the 21st century. However, the improvements have not had a significant effect on national education policy. Regular schools in Azerbaijan are not yet adequately prepared to accept children with disabilities and provide them with an equal and effective education. The Ministry of Education reports that just 37% of people with special needs are formally enrolled in some form of education outside of a classroom environment. There is no formal education provided to the remainder population. Thus, the study examines the challenges teachers in Azerbaijan encounter while attempting to deliver an inclusive education to children with disabilities. It investigated how teachers see inclusive education in Azerbaijan and what challenges they face while teaching students with disabilities along with students without disabilities. Semi-structured interviews with eighteen teachers from diverse schools around Azerbaijan were used to obtain qualitative data. Qualitative content analysis was used to analyse the data. The findings of the study indicate that the primary obstacles instructors experience when attempting to offer an inclusive education for children with disabilities include a lack of resources and knowledge, unfavourable perceptions of parents and the community, and a lack of government assistance. The research also suggested many ways inclusive education may be enhanced in Azerbaijan, such as more support and training for teachers, more funds, and accommodations for children with disabilities, and more parental and community awareness.

Keywords: Inclusive Education, Disability in Learning, Children with Disabilities, Azerbaijan

The originality of this thesis has been checked using the Turnitin Originality Check service.

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education is the practice of accepting and promoting diversity by providing equal educational opportunities for all pupils, regardless of their specific needs (UNESCO, 2007). Importantly, inclusive education aims to avoid exclusion from the educational process. Inclusive education is concerned with international human rights law equally for all individuals who have faced discrimination, such as because of their disabilities, race, language, ethnicity, sexual orientation, migrant status, socioeconomic status, geographical location, and conflict, among others. My research will focus on children with learning disabilities in Azerbaijan and the difficulty of their involvement in the educational process from the perspective of instructors.

Approximately 70,000 children in Azerbaijan are recognized as having a disability (United Nations Development Programme, 2019). According to the country's Ministry of Education, just 37 percent of those with special needs participate in the educational process, although not in classroom settings. The remaining population receives no formal schooling. Consequently, persons with disabilities in Azerbaijan encounter obstacles that deny them their basic rights to education.

Azerbaijan has made several contributions to inclusive education reforms since the beginning of the 21st century. However, the changes have not significantly improved educational policy in the country. Schools in Azerbaijan are not yet equipped to welcome kids with disabilities and offer adequate educational opportunities for them (Mikayilova, 2019).

The purpose of this research is to investigate the state of inclusive education in Azerbaijan. This study is conducted using a qualitative research design, which is a valid way for investigating the topic at hand. In-depth interviews are undertaken in order to determine what obstacles exist in the adaption of an inclusive strategy in the nation. The information is acquired from middle school instructors in several Azerbaijani cities.

# 2 INCLUSION AS AN EDUCATIONAL IDEOLOGY

## *2.1 History of inclusive education*

In March 1990, Jomtien city of Thailand hosted the "Education for All" international conference. This meeting brought together delegates from 155 nations and 160 governments and non-profit organizations (EFA). Education was designated as one of the most essential human rights during this summit, which led to the approval of the World Declaration on Education for All. In addition, delegates demonstrated their support for the Framework for Action, which establishes both short- and long-term objectives and strategies to address the educational needs of all people. In the spring of 2000, during the World Education Forum in Dakar, Senegal, a Millennium Development Goal was established with the goal of giving all children, regardless of their geography, family income, or other considerations, with access to a quality primary education by 2015 (Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization of the United Nations [UNESCO], 2000). This round of the tournament was attended by more than 1,100 competitors from 164 different nations. Since Dakar, United Nations policy texts have acknowledged inclusive education as a crucial tool for addressing marginalization and exclusion in regard to MDG 4. According to the writers, the EFA was inspired by the notion of inclusion (UNESCO, 2002).

World Conference on Special Needs Education was held in 1994, in Salamanca, Spain. The Salamanca Statement, which was accepted by 92 governments and 25 international organizations at the time, included the following elements: Academic institutions with a focus on encouraging inclusion provide an excellent teaching to the majority of children, improve the overall

effectiveness and expense of the quality education, and offer the most efficient way to fight negative perceptions, facilitating a positive atmosphere, fostering an inclusive community, and attaining education for everybody. Using inclusive mainstream institutions is the most effective way to assure that every person has access to quality education.

Utilizing inclusive mainstream schools is the most efficient way to guarantee that everyone has access to education. According to the Salamanca Statement, a social model of disability must prioritize social fairness and educational participation. This framework for inclusive education is based on the four propositions that are given below:

1. Since every kid has a different set of abilities and requirements, no two pupils can be said to be particularly different from one another.
2. All students must get the appropriate accommodations within the school environment.
3. A responsive general education system is identified by high values and standards, an adaptable and appropriate academic curriculum and instruction, a convenient and accessible setting, and teachers who are competent to satisfy the educational requirements of all students.
4. A process that exhibits progress in general education produces people for an inclusive society who are educated to enjoy the whole spectrum of social advantages, rights, and experiences. Collaboration between educational institutions and local communities defines this method.

During the 1990s, in the context of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Different viewpoints on the meanings of the words integration and inclusion have been expressed, and the discussions about the difference between the terms integration and inclusion have arisen. According to Pijl, Meijer, and Hegarty (1997), the terms integration and inclusion are applied to characterize similar processes and outcomes, with wider definitions of integration "approaching the concept of inclusion." (Vislie,2003)

A crucial consideration is, of course, whether the concepts have distinct centres or focal points. Considering the fundamental goals of integration in western nations throughout the prior decades, I would suggest that the two notions have distinct focuses and should not be mixed. Before I can comprehend my perspective, I must analyse the integration's primary aims.

According to Vislie (2003) in the 1960s and 1970s, when integration became a top concern, system reform was the initial step. The reforms are characterized by three key focuses. Integration was challenging due to some factors such as:

1. Access to educational opportunities for children with disabilities. Although it was stated at the time that "all children" had access to school, there was a vast majority of those who did not have this privilege. Due to their disabilities, individuals were either cared for at other institutions (educational, medical, etc.) or excluded as "not educable" by category.
2. Rights to education in public schools for children with disabilities were first defined as a challenge to the state institutions often formed as special schools for specific groups of disadvantaged and marginalized students.
3. Complete restructuring of the special education system, placing emphasis on all facets, from the early diagnosis of its consumers to the economic aspects after the integration, the organization's internal structure of nearby schools, and the management of education and learning, including special education, in integrated classes (Vislie, 2003).

In response to these difficulties, significant policy changes, new legislation, and a comprehensive reorganization of the entire educational system were implemented in the late 20th century. Although the extent of reform measures varied by state, special education eventually become a problem worldwide. In addition to an increase in the number of students in the West who require special education services due to integration, the field of special education has also advanced and grown over this time. As a result of integration's focus focusing so heavily on structural reforms, educators have paid less attention to the ways in which they actually use technology in the classroom to enhance instruction and student outcomes. It's commonly expected, while planning for integration, that

changes made at the system level would trickle down to affect teaching and learning in the classroom (Vislie, 1995).

Integration was developed as a goal for academic institutions that had previously segregated students with different disabilities. The initiative of special education supported this separate educational framework. The objective of integration was to reconstruct the public education system so that all children had access to education, the education was delivered in schools, and the special education system was reorganized (Vislie, 2003)

Based on their research, Nilholm and Goransson (2017) concluded that frequently accepted definitions of inclusion still lack theoretical consistency. Placement, like its predecessor mainstreaming, indicates that inclusion refers to a student's educational environment. Students with impairments or who require additional assistance in school have additional needs besides being put in the appropriate classroom. As with the second definition, all students are included in the third. In the fourth description, school communities are the focus.

It is widely recognized that the phrase "inclusion" has several meanings (e.g., Barton 1997; Slee 2011; Lindqvist & Nilholm 2014; Magnusson 2019). According to the findings of two separate studies, the term "inclusion" was utilized in four distinct ways (Goransson & Nilholm, 2014; Nilholm & Goransson, 2017). Goransson and Nilholm (2014) arrived at four distinct definitions of inclusive education based on their analysis of key perspectives on the topic. Inclusion is the process of integrating students with special needs into classrooms alongside generally functioning students. In an inclusive environment, students with impairments or special support requirements have their social and educational needs handled in accordance with a set of precise and individualized rules. Third, any complete definition of inclusion must emphasize the importance of satisfying the emotional and intellectual needs of all students. Inclusion is viewed as the expansion of groups with shared traits (hence the term "community").

Clearly, to accomplish more inclusive behaviours, we must first define what such practices may include. Due to the prevalence of the placement definition, the question of whether or not inclusion is advantageous is reduced to a purely empirical one (Nilholm and Goransson, 2017). And then there are the radical academics who envision a new style of education that places a premium on unity and mutual understanding among individuals from diverse backgrounds. In the



mainstream discussion of special needs, the term "inclusion" has entered the lexicon. In terms of professional categorization and the greater framework of education, students are typically characterized by their deficits, and the distinction between typical and abnormal remains. This section contains the majority of the most recent studies on inclusive education. However, a number of academics have used inclusion to critique established approaches to teaching and learning.

Researchers must be exceedingly exact about these values, as different definitions of inclusion convey distinct values. All students are expected to participate in social events and acquire knowledge depending on their specific needs, which is the inclusion principle underlying this effort. In the west, inclusion is considered a larger concept than integration since it encompasses more difficulties. I concur with Pijl (1997), a number of these concerns are not new but were already incorporated in the concept of integration. The inclusion model suggested by Farrell (2000) is more targeted. Farrell, speaking from the perspective of the education of the United Kingdom, states that 10 years ago, "pupils in special schools were separated and those in normal schools were integrated" (p. 153), but nothing was stated about the quality of the integrated offering.

If we consider what Farrell says, the term "inclusion" was created so that educators could more precisely explain the standard of care they give to students with special needs when they are included in general education classrooms. Ainscow's use of phrases like "inclusive schools for everyone" without mentioning kids with special educational needs is something Farrell takes issue with, as does his expansion of the concept of inclusion to describe how regular schools should accommodate all students (Farrell, 2000).

Thus, Farrell establishes a link between British initiatives and those of UNESCO-sponsored creative projects initiated in the early 1990s. Essential ideas and materials for the Salamanca Conference's new directions on special needs education came from the UNESCO teacher education project titled "Special needs in the classroom," which was created by a team of worldwide specialists under the direction of Ainscow. Given this background, it seems that after Salamanca, the United Kingdom is an interesting case study for explaining the idea of inclusion in the west.

Sebba and Ainscow (1996) portray inclusion by referencing integration but seeing the growth of inclusive schooling as a new principle that questions much of the current practice in the field of special needs and provides a criticism of general education. According to the authors, any definition of inclusion needs to make a clear distinction between inclusion and integration. Looking at these variations, we can infer which features they do not consider necessary for inclusion and which they do.

## *2.2 Definitions of learning disabilities*

Learning disability is a term that may be interpreted in a variety of ways by various persons. It is also a term that may be examined from a variety of theoretical angles. Most sources credit Samuel Kirk with coining the phrase learning disability. Kirk (1962) defined learning disorders as follows in the first edition of *Educating Exceptional Children*, which became the most popular college introductory book for special education at the time.

In the United Kingdom, people with a "considerably reduced ability to comprehend innovative or sophisticated knowledge, to acquire specific abilities," and a "declining potential to preserve successfully that starts prior to actually self-awareness and has lengthy effects on their growth are categorized as having a learning disability (Walmsley & Johnson, 2003).

Learning impairment is considered an "illness" according to the International Classification of Diseases (WHO, 2008) and the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5; American Psychiatric Association, 2013). (Al-Yagon et al., 2013; Gates, 2007; Ho, 2004). Physical processes (physiological systems), actions (task and action execution), and experiences (participation) are how social approaches characterize learning disabilities (involvement in life situations). The International Classification of Functioning, Disability, and Health-Children and Adolescents (ICF-CY; WHO, 2007) takes into account both the external (the physical, social, and ideological) and internal (personal factors like temperament and coping strategies) contexts when assessing health and disability. Parents and teachers are significant environmental influencers in this respect (Riva & Antonietti, 2010; Boxall, 2002). On occasion, authors have

presented their own definitions of learning disabilities (Lerner, 2002; Hammill, 1990; Larsen, Hammill, Leigh & Mc Nut, 1981; Bateman, 1965, p. 220; Kirk, 1962, p. 263).

The concept of learning disability has evolved along a variety of dimensions as a result of national legislation and government action. For the purpose of associating neurological causes with learning challenges, Task Force I and II coined the term "minimal brain dysfunction" in the early 1960s (Clements, 1966, pp. 9-10; Haring & Bateman, 1969, pp. 2-3). When the Education of the Handicapped Act was first passed in 1966, it did not include students with learning disabilities among those qualified for special education. In 1975, learning disability was initially recognized as a valid category for inclusion purposes. In contrast to the National Association of Community Health Centre's definition, which prominently featured psychological processes, the National Joint Commission on Learning Disabilities (Hammill et al., 1981) suggested an alternative definition. Most of these organizations did not have clear ways to spot kids who were struggling in school.

A significant gap exists "when attainment in one or more categories falls at or below fifty percent of the child's projected performance level, taking into consideration the child's age and previous educational experience," according to an early operational definition of substantial difference (USOE, 1976). The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act provides yet another description (Apling & Jones, 2005).

It's possible that learning disabilities have different names and concepts in different nations. For instance, the criteria for learning disability in New Zealand (LDANZ, 2016) and Canada (LDAC, 2015) are influenced by American standards. The term "intellectual disability" in the UK is synonymous with "learning disability" (Emerson & Heslop, 2010). A person with a "learning difficulty" in either Australia or the United Kingdom may have no discernible IQ deficit but may have "particular learning obstacles" like dyslexia (Graham & Bailey, 2007). To deflect attention away from the neurological foundation of learning impairment and its relative amenability to educational solutions, some authors prefer the phrase 'learning difficulty' (Thomas & Whitten, 2012; Thapa, 2008). Discussions are "mainly based on findings and observations of pupils attending English-medium schools," despite the fact that learning disability is a

novel concept in India (PRS-India, 2016) and there is no defined definition (Karanth, 2003, p. 134).

### *2.3 Teachers' perceptions and experiences of inclusion around the world*

According to Engelbrecht et al. (1999), several serious functional aspects may need to be modified to eliminate barriers to learning, and all obstructions should be eliminated to enable the school environment accessible to students with disabilities.

Significantly, several nations have established policies favouring early childhood education through promoting the growth of kindergartens. Authorities at all levels, including the secondary schools, should frequently reinforce their dedication to inclusion and foster favourable perceptions among pupils, educators, and the broader population (Ministry of Education and Science – Spain, 1994).

Willingness of school personnel, especially teachers and administrators, to include students with special educational needs and other forms of exceptional learning problems is crucial to the success of any inclusion program (Avramidis & Kalyva, 2007; Drudy & Kinsella, 2009; Forlin, 2005; Sharma et al., 2006). The study is based mostly on a survey of teachers' perspectives on inclusion and an investigation of the teachers' own practices when interacting with kids who have unique educational needs.

According to Travers (2010), instructors face a number of challenges when planning to integrate inclusive education. The main challenges on their way are time limits, absence of cooperation, unclear understanding regarding the role of the teachers' assistants to work with children with disabilities, an inadequate understanding regarding educators' behaviours and expectations, and a lack of competence in these areas.

According to several researchers in the field of inclusive education, the problem of instructors' time limits emerges repeatedly in the inclusion research literature (Drudy & Kinsella, 2009; Horne & Timmons, 2009; Smith & Leonard, 2005; Talmor, Reiter & Feigin, 2005). Instructors find it difficult to contribute to the

administrative duties such planning and connecting with colleagues, thus this is also one of the disruptive elements of inclusive education for the teachers.

Most of the research confirms the concerns expressed by Anderson et al. (2007) regarding teachers and the importance of time. In order to better understand the perspectives and needs of primary school teachers in Australia, Anderson et al. surveyed 162 of them. Using both multiple-choice and free-response questions, the study conductors were able to collect quantitative and qualitative data characterizing the beliefs and actions of these teachers. The majority of teachers (85%) agreed that inclusive classrooms have benefits, but nearly all of them (95%) also point out drawbacks, such as time restraints placed on teachers and time restrictions imposed on students without impairments (Anderson et al., 2007).

Specifically, Hanco (2004) cites difficulties like the time needed to enhance liaison and the difficulty of fostering attitudes and relationships within schools and across service borders as reasons why the difficulty of liaison between professionals is a barrier to inclusion. She argues that "social hierarchies is widespread in formal schooling, medical services, and social work". It has been found that "the absence of resources for, or a reluctance on the part of school personnel to engage in collaborative problem-solving regarding the effective inclusion of students with special educational needs" is a significant obstacle to the successful inclusion of students with special educational needs, as reported by participants in the study by Drudy and Kinsella (2009) and other studies with similar findings.

However, as was previously mentioned, many research participants have cited a lack of designated non-teaching time as a major barrier to collaborative practice (Harty, 2001). The actual response of schools to the desire to collaborate in the face of such a systemic barrier is much less well understood. Travers (2007) claims that schools use a variety of strategies to cram as much student engagement as possible into the school day. To free up classroom teachers, over half of schools use learning support/resource teachers, and approximately 10% of schools have admitted purchasing replacement coverage in the past year (Travers, 2007).

# 3 EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM IN AZERBAIJAN

## *3.1 Historical perspective of Azerbaijan educational system*

Azerbaijan, a country in the southeast Caucasus region that is west of the Caspian Sea, has land borders with Iran in the south, Turkey in the southwest, Russia in the north, Georgia in the northwest, and Armenia in the west. The "Declaration of Independence" regarding the state independence of Azerbaijan was approved by the National Council of Azerbaijan in Tbilisi on May 28, 1918, thereby establishing the Azerbaijani nation free of Soviet Union. The Azerbaijan Democratic Republic was established, its jurisdiction over the region was defined, and the state's core operating principles were laid forth in this legal and political statement (Isgenderov, 2015).

As in many aspects of the state, the founding of the Republic had a significant impact on education, and national and moral ideals started to be incorporated into the education of the time. In conjunction with education, the Ministry of Public Education and Faith was founded, and its three-branched organization was authorized by the Council of Ministers on 30 June 1918 (Balayev, 1993, quoted in Mammadov, 2008: 21). . However, the existence of the Azerbaijan state was brief. The People's Republic of Azerbaijan, which existed for 23 months, was conquered by Bolshevik soldiers on April 28, 1920, fell under the control of the Soviet Republic, and continued to exist as the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSC) (Isgenderov, 2015).

By resolution number 1 of the ASSC Council of Ministers dated April 28, 1920, the Ministry of Public Education and Faith was reformed as the "People's Commissariat of Education" and all educational institutions in the nation were brought under its jurisdiction (<http://www.azerbaijans.com>). On May 1, 1925, the

Azerbaijan Supreme Soviet issued a decree. The edict eliminated the then-current Arabic alphabet and replaced it with the Latin alphabet. With Turkey's adoption of the Latin alphabet in 1928, however, the Soviet Union outlawed the use of the Latin alphabet in Azerbaijan and introduced the Cyrillic alphabet instead (Ogan, 1992: 23).

In Azerbaijan, education was administered by two ministries (the Public Education Ministry and High and Secondary Specialization Education Ministry) and a committee (the State Technical Vocational Education Committee) from 1959 until 1988. The ASSC Council of Ministers abolished all three entities in 1988, and on their basis, the Ministry of Public Education was established and its structure was authorized.

On October 30, 1991, with the disintegration of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, the Republic of Azerbaijan formally proclaimed its independence. It has been difficult to alter a 70-year-old education system that was based on a single ideology and governed centrally. As the Azerbaijani people transitioned from a class structure to a democratic structure, the Soviet ideology was abandoned and education started to take on a universal character. It was a challenging but essential procedure. First, it was required to identify the theory, philosophy, major orientations of state education policy, conceptual frameworks, operational principles, as well as the materials, purpose, and organization of education. The fall of the Soviet Union demanded modifications to educational and training programs and textbooks. Concurrently, all textbooks published in the Cyrillic script were required to be printed using the Latin alphabet. In addition to these factors, the country's new independence and economic challenges had a detrimental impact on the rate of business (Gezenferolu, 2010; Mammadov, 2008: 23).

The Public Ministry of Education was renamed the Ministry of Education on September 3, 1993, by order of the President of Azerbaijan. Currently, this name is in use. The 42nd article of the Constitution, which was adopted by an independent Azerbaijan on November 12, 1995, deals with laws pertaining to education. There are five subheadings in this item. These; "Every citizen has the right to receive an education; The State provides the right to free, compulsory public secondary education; The Education System is Under State Control; The State Ensures that Talented Individuals Continue Their Education Regardless of

Their Financial Situation; The State Establishes the Minimum Standards for Education," it is stated (Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 1995).

Following independence, Law 324 of the Azerbaijan Republic, which was passed in 1992, controlled the Education System of the Republic of Azerbaijan. On June 19, 2009, the President of Azerbaijan issued the 833-IIIQ decree, which revised this act. The Republic of Azerbaijan's "On Collection" Law defines education as the process of obtaining systematized information, skills, and habits, as well as their outcomes. Education, according to Pashayev and Rustamov (2007), is a broad social activity intended to disseminate recognized information to huge populations or specific social groups. The following educational goals are outlined in Article 4 of the Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan on Education: To develop citizens and individuals who respect national traditions and principles of democracy of the people, human rights, and freedoms; To be loyal to patriotism and Azerbaijani ideas; To think freely and creatively; to train experts who are contemporary, reflective, and competitive and who uphold and advance national traditions and values (Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan on Education, 2009).

In modern Azerbaijan, the advancement of society and the state as a whole is seen as a primary objective of education. Education is also considered the cornerstone of progress. The educational system of the Republic of Azerbaijan is secular and democratic. The educational system is founded on both national and international ideas (Aamalev, 1999). After achieving independence in 1991, the Azerbaijani government began implementing its own free education strategy in 1999. The "Reform Program in the Educational Field of the Republic of Azerbaijan" was approved by the president on June 15, 1999. This effort, which was conceived by the State Commission and endorsed by the President on March 30, 1998, also included the World Bank. The introduction to the reform program stated that, after navigating the difficult paths to independence, Azerbaijan had enormous responsibilities in the field of education as well as all other fields, and that it was essential to implement significant changes and innovations in the field of education as part of the nation's ongoing reform operation (Gezenferolu, 2010; Reform Program in the Field, 1999).

After achieving independence, there was a period of transition from a socialist to a market economy, during which all sectors, including education, saw major transformation. However, the Karabakh conflict and economic issues



presented formidable impediments to implementing this shift. Despite these obstacles, extensive transformation studies were initiated in 1999, and a reform program was launched with assistance from the World Bank. The name of the reform program is secondary education. Lessons were given to pupils in grades 1 through 11 in three levels. Between 1999 and 2002, the first phase should have involved on-site examination and report preparation of a number of nations' educational systems. In the second phase, between 2000 and 2003, the requisite infrastructure and pilot application were established. After 2004, it was intended to evaluate the implementation's outcomes and distribute them throughout the nation. (Merdanov, 1999)

Within the framework of the World Bank's support program, macroeconomic curriculum development, teacher in-service training, participation in international exams that measure student proficiency abroad (PISA, TIMSS), program preparation in accordance with reports, strategic analysis, management support in planning, and financial management are all planned. At the school level, it seeks to enhance school libraries, provide preschool curriculum for children aged three to six, develop school preparation programs for children aged five, and provide incentives for parental engagement (World Bank, 2017).

### *3.2 Locally given teacher education*

Preparing trained educators to apply novel methods of instruction is a high priority in the world of education. The Azerbaijani Ministry of Education has instituted new, well-received policies to support secondary school educators. The "State Strategy for Educational Development" (19 January 2015) Action Plan aimed to create a new structure to ensure the professional growth of educators.

A lot of the planned changes are aimed at improving teacher training in Azerbaijan, and this is reflected in the Action Plan of the Ministry of Education's Educational Developmental Strategy (2015). Teachers of English have a significant impact on the future of our society, the economy, individual behavior, and the lives and education of the next generation. Because of their familiarity with emerging technologies, today's youth play an essential role in society by educating the next generation (Loughran, 2014).

Over the past few years, Azerbaijan has invested in a variety of initiatives to raise the quality of its secondary school instructors. Many non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have implemented diverse training on pedagogical standards and programs for different subject areas in accordance with a World Bank initiative in the Ministry of Education (National Curriculum of Azerbaijan, 2010). By working together, educators in both urban and rural settings can learn about the most up-to-date theoretical models. Teachers are provided with a wealth of resources to help them carry on with project implementation (Curriculum Framework ME, 2010).

There are also international programs managed by the Teacher Development Center, Innovative Technologies in Education, the British Council, and the Azerbaijan English Teachers' Association (ITE). These are part of a larger system with the intention of improving educational institutions' methods of teaching educators. The Ministry of Education has created experimental programs with strategic goals, and teacher-training courses are currently available in several schools. In addition, the diagnostic tests for teachers accurately represented teachers' knowledge and abilities, allowing for targeted interventions and very effective training (ME 2017).

Nonetheless, there remain obstacles to Azerbaijan's new approach to teacher training in the areas of teacher selection, recruitment, retention, teachers' status, qualifications, rankings, pay, etc. Diagnostic tests for teacher development have their advantages and disadvantages, but they could open up new ways of thinking about the relevance of teaching. The general public in Azerbaijan is growing increasingly interested and excited about the policy of improving teacher preparation, and all of these factors contribute to this trend. Most parents and members of the community want schools to hire teachers who are qualified and experienced. Adequate training for educators can lead to improved pedagogy and student outcomes across a range of subject areas (Kwakman, K. 2003; Jurasaitė-Harbison and Rex, 2010).

In the absence of institutional and governmental change, however, teachers will be unable to make the necessary modifications to their lessons.

### *3.3 Inclusive education in Azerbaijan*

Children with disabilities attend kindergarten and secondary school in certain states (the United States, the United Kingdom, Switzerland, etc.). Several nations throughout the globe promote inclusive education as a way to encourage all educational systems to comply to international treaties and agreements.

Azerbaijan has changed since independence. The Azerbaijan Republic's 2022 Law on Children's Rights requires that disabled children get adequate and equal teaching opportunities. Article 41 of the same statute guarantees these children an education and vocational training. Both goals of the Federal Program on Inclusive Education for the Years 2006–2015—providing disabled children with an appropriate education and, where feasible, completely integrating them—have been advanced. Azerbaijan provides specific teachers and classrooms for disabled children. Preschools, kindergartens, boarding schools, and secondary schools around the nation provide visual impairment programs. Azerbaijan offers residential schools for hearing-impaired children, according to legislation.

Positive development: special education teachers must earn pay raises. Azerbaijan has promoted inclusive education since 2004. In 2014–2015, 5,496 special and residential schools served kids with special needs. Only 13,000 of Azerbaijan's 70,000 disabled youngsters are in school. This means that many of these youngsters aren't in school (UNICEF,2022).

The Ministry of Education has suggested a State Program for Inclusive Education for 2012-2019. In 2012, 298 youngsters from 30 secondary and preschool schools around the nation participated in pilot projects to evaluate inclusive education. Article 1.4 of the Action Plan on Implementation of the "State of Educational Development in the Republic of Azerbaijan" specifies inclusive training and development for special-needs children. The President of Azerbaijan approved this provision on January 19, 2015. The May 2018 initiative is called "Improving educators' inclusive education abilities." It'll end in September 2020. UNICEF is executing "Expanding Inclusive Education in Azerbaijan" using EU and Heydar Aliyev Foundation funds. The Heydar Aliyev Foundation's Regional Development Public Union (RDU) is improving teachers' inclusive education abilities. Heydar Aliyev Foundation funds both programs. Baku, Guba, Sheki,

Jalilabad, Agjabadi, and Shamjakhi are improving inclusive education for teachers. Shamjakhi leads this effort.

The project's four main priorities include extending the inclusive education curriculum and delivering supporting materials, revising the inclusive education policy, and providing resources for teachers and support personnel. Guba, Baku, Agjabadi, Jalilabad, Shamakhi, and Sheki have participated so far. The foreign experts presented to the project's working committee their proposals for inclusive education instructors' professional progress. Azerbaijan State Pedagogical Institution and its satellites created inclusive education centers for university faculty and staff. The institution can better serve its varied student group.

Authorized groups have inclusive education training resources. The nation's legislative foundation, inclusive education, was also the topic of a guidebook and other teaching tools. Website has a library. This work is being done with the Azerbaijani Ministry of Education to help execute the "State Program for the Development of Inclusive Education in the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2018-2024." This is done to ensure the smooth implementation of the "State Program for the Development of Inclusive Education for Disabled Children in Azerbaijan in 2018." Azerbaijan State Pedagogical University and its partners have trained over 1000 professors and 1140 pupils. Six accessible training facilities were built to complete the project. The public may now access a website with personalized instructional resources. Best-practice training modules for basic and advanced pedagogy have been designed. As new ideas accumulated, the legal system was altered to conform to the International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Finished!

Azerbaijani schools are adopting cozier classrooms. In Azerbaijan, most educational institutions provide assistance for special needs pupils. In July 2015, UNEC constructed a center for disabled students. Inclusive Education Center helps students with disabilities. On September 20, UNICEF and the Heydar Aliyev Foundation's Regional Development Public Union co-hosted the Inclusive Education Festival.

Three pilot projects were completed with the help of local and international non-governmental organizations as part of Azerbaijan's Development Program on Organizing Education for Children Needing Special Care (with Disabilities). This was part of a broader effort (Ministry of Education, 2005-2009). As a result,

15 schools and 13 pre-schools created inclusive education programs for 270 youngsters with impairments. Despite the end of the programs, some kids have enrolled in inclusive education programs. The Ministry of Education of the Azerbaijan Republic and UNICEF reviewed inclusive education and worldwide experience in 2015, ushering in a new era in the administration of education for individuals with disabilities.

Plans are in place to execute substantial reforms to special education, update the laws controlling impaired kids' enrollment in public schools and participation in inclusive education in secondary schools, and adopt creative ways for inclusive education in the classroom. In 2015–2016, a project called "Inclusive Education in Primary Schools" was introduced. UNICEF collaborated together with the Ministry of Education on the initiative. Administrative workers and teachers from two random elementary schools participated in the training. German scholars oversaw the two-week course. This follows the Project Action Plan. During their week in Germany, they could converse.

Four experimental schools were utilized to test innovative methods to inclusive education (220, 138, 252 and 202). More than 50 disabled students received inclusive education at one of four experimental schools. As part of the selection process for local schools, parents of handicapped children were invited to seminars on special and inclusive education. This was part of the school-selection process. The trial location had logopedic exercises done. The Azerbaijan State Pedagogical University brought 50 trainers and 28 teachers to Baku for training sessions between February 4 and 8. These sessions were 4-8 February. UNICEF and the Azerbaijani Ministry of Education co-hosted these trainings. These trainings aimed to strengthen teachers' skills so they could give an inclusive, high-quality education to all children.

The State Program on Development of Inclusive Education for Persons with Disabilities in the Azerbaijan Republic, 2018–2024, was formed by presidential decree on December 14, 2017. This program runs 2018-2024. This was done to include persons with impairments in normal education settings. This was done to better serve disabled people. A working group will resolve difficulties throughout program implementation, publish articles, conduct research, analyze data, and provide ideas. To achieve this purpose, several trainings involving secondary and higher education faculty have been suggested. The State Program defends the

right of students with disabilities to enjoy an equitable education throughout all schooling stages and provides a barrier-free learning environment. The program ensures that all students, regardless of aptitude, have access to education.

Since 2004, Azerbaijan has made great strides in promoting universal education. In 2014–2015, there were 5,496 special schools and residential schools in the U.S. They were nationwide. More than 60,000 special needs pupils are enrolled in Azerbaijani schools, although most do not attend (UNICEF, 2020). I'm interested in learning more about inclusive education in Azerbaijan's public schools and the challenges instructors face implementing it.

## 4 RESEARCH QUESTION

From the beginning of the 21st century, Azerbaijan has supported inclusive education reforms led by official and non-official authorities. However, the reforms could not have much impact on national education policy. Regular schools in Azerbaijan are still not wellprepared for accepting children with disabilities and creating equal effective education for them (Mikayilova, 2019). So, there is a question, why? Thus, the study is guided by two research questions:

How is inclusive education defined by teachers in Azerbaijan?

What kind of challenges related to inclusive education do teachers identify in Azerbaijan?

# 5 DATA AND METHODS

## *5.1 Research Design*

This study entails the exploitation of qualitative approach. Qualitative research is used to obtain a clear perception of the questions under investigation which involves the viewpoints of research participants (Hennink et al., 2011). The data is gathered through individual interviews. The sample size of the research comprises 18 school-level teachers. This study refers to the perspectives of the study participants to comprehend the character of the educational process and attempts to explicate what is teachers' perspective on inclusive education in Azerbaijan. In this research, the qualitative approach will strive to comprehend and uncover obstacles of inclusive education in Azerbaijan from teachers' angle.

According to Creswell (2003) qualitative research is a method which is quite beneficial while studying and examining the principal issue. The principal issue in this research is implementation of inclusive education in public schools of Azerbaijan. To get better understanding of the phenomenon, the investigator interviews in-service instructors of local schools by asking set of questions and tries to explicit their attitudes towards inclusive education and experiences with implementation of the practices. The gathered data serves as a basis for the researcher to build clearer picture from the separate elements.

Moreover, Best and Kahn (1998) stressed the importance of qualitative approach in data gathering since the setting of the study provides interviewees with a more suitable atmosphere to share their understanding, attitudes and experiences related to the question under investigation. Thus, as the study's focus is on teachers' perspectives of inclusive education methods, teachers were invited to take part in the interviews and shared their own thoughts in connection to how they perceive or interpret the aforementioned issue.

Mertens (2005) claims that vital traits of this research design is to examine how people determine themselves and the surrounding atmosphere. Therefore,



to get clear picture of the present conditions, the research comprises a chosen collection of the basic attributes of a qualitative research design.

Some of the distinctive elements of qualitative research are fieldworks, in which the investigator interviews participants in a natural setting (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). However, due to school holidays, the range of interview setting for a researcher was strictly restricted. Thus, in this study the researcher conducted online interviews.

## *5.2 Participants/Settings/ Data Gathering*

This study was undertaken in public schools of Azerbaijan. Target participants consist of 18 teachers working in the schools located in Baku, Barda, Bilasuvar, Ganja, Lankaran cities. 14 selective schools are scattered across the country covering the most of affected population and represent educational institutions in capacity for implementation of inclusive practices. The schools have majority of local students.

Interviews were used to collect the required information about the topic under investigation. This research employed in-depth interviews since such type of interviews encourage teachers to share their private thoughts and will eliminate the factor of hesitation. 18 teachers were approached to gather multifold perspectives to the issue under investigation. Separate members of the local professional community of middle school teachers were contacted to disseminate information about the study conducted. All the interested candidates were invited to participate in the interview process. The interviews were recorded, and ethical considerations were taken into account. According to Johnson and Christensen (2008) data collection method is a way of accumulating data to be examined under the study. Bouma (1996) states that the use of multiple data collecting methods contributes to more effective and inclusive data that can be used while answering research questions. Thus, in this research interviews have been used to collect the information.

As Anderson and Aresnault (1998) describe it, interviewing is a channel for the information exchange between people on the issue agreed in the commencement. As a result, the interview is a highly targeted activity that encompasses a variety of tactics and goes beyond casual talk. Semi-structured

open-ended interview styles were appealing for this investigation. In an interview guide technique, conversation topics are pre-agreed upon and listened to in a certain order, but the interviewer determines the order (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). It's best to use questions that encourage free-form responses so that the interviewee doesn't feel like they have to memorize their responses. It is flexible (can be altered) and situational (can be modified to adjust to the peculiar conditions). However, it is the topic for debate whether the responses could lead to the expected outcomes or not, therefore the researcher is responsible for keeping it under the slight control (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006). For eliciting more in-depth data, the researcher brings up more follow-up questions.

Indisputably, physically visiting the selected site and research participants are the prevailing and most suitable methods for delving into the natural setting. However, considering the holidays, none of the interviews were held physically in the natural setting, but conducted online. The interview questions were written in English, but translated in Azerbaijani, because the participants' official working language used in the workplace is Azerbaijani. The time for interviews were scheduled before to suit the interest of the interviewees.

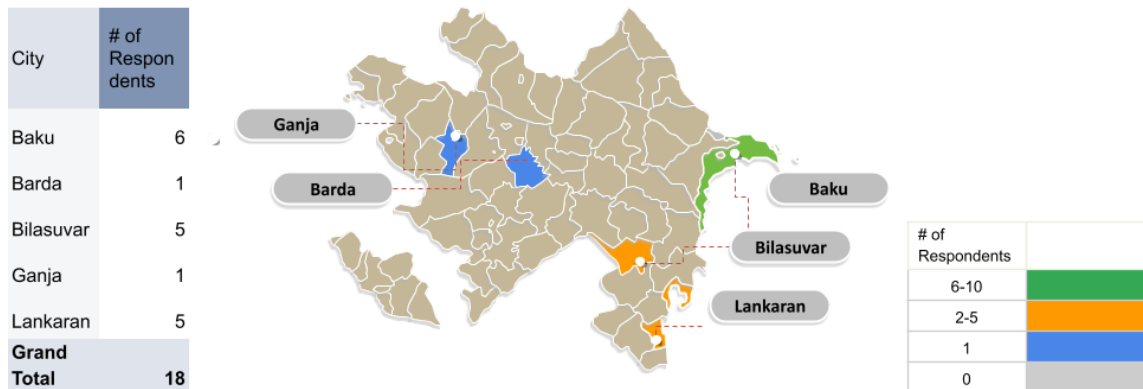
In their role as moderator, researchers spent the first few minutes of the discussion introducing the group to the topic at hand and outlining the ground rules that would govern the rest of the session. Prior to providing their information, they were assured that it would be kept confidential, among other things. Every interview was recorded and subsequently transcribed by the researcher. Everyone involved knew they were going to be recorded.

***Interview questions:***

1. What does the word "Inclusive Education" mean to you?
2. How do we determine a child having a disability for learning?
3. Were you trained in inclusive education? And if yes, how?
4. Were you trained to identify learners experiencing learning challenges in the classrooms?
5. Do you consider your school inclusive? Why "yes" or "no"?
6. If not, what are the barriers to implement? If yes, what kind of challenges do you find while implementation?
7. Do you think inclusive education brings positive effects? If yes, what are advantages?

**Table 1 Participants**

	Gender	Experience	City	Grades	Highest degree	Inclusion training
P1	F	3	Baku	5-11	Master's	No
P2	F	15	Baku	1-4	Bachelor's	Yes
P3	F	32	Bilasuvar	5-11	Master's	No
P4	F	36	Ganja	5-11	Master's	No
P5	F	30	Lankaran	5-11	Bachelor's	No
P6	F	1	Barda	5-11	Bachelor's	No
P7	M	27	Bilasuvar	5-11	Bachelor's	No
P8	F	43	Baku	1-4	Bachelor's	Yes
P9	F	30	Baku	1-11	Bachelor's	Yes
P10	F	31	Lankaran	5-11	Bachelor's	No
P11	M	25	Bilasuvar	5-11	Master's	No
P12	F	44	Lankaran	5-11	Bachelor's	No
P13	F	32	Bilasuvar	5-11	Bachelor's	No
P14	F	25	Baku	5-11	Bachelor's	No
P15	F	4	Baku	1-4	Bachelor's	Yes
P16	F	35	Lankaran	1-11	Bachelor's	No
P17	F	36	Lankaran	1-11	Bachelor's	No
P18	F	23	Bilasuvar	5-11	Bachelor's	No



### 5.3 *Data Analysis*

According to Johnson and Christensen (2008), data analysis entails a methodical approach to delving into, organizing, and drawing conclusions from numerical information. It requires decoding and arranging information until a clear picture emerges. This is supported by the data (Biklen & Bogdan, 2007). A unique ID number is assigned to each expert to ensure their privacy. Using these codes, we may do more in-depth analysis without compromising privacy. The analysis was deductive, drawing conclusions from the study questions, the data, and the researcher's personal background. The procedure used was adapted from one developed by Creswell (2003).

Through interviews with the participants, the central topic was explored. Table 1 gives clear picture of the participants, about profiles of instructors detailing their job experience and age, about the city they work in, grades they teach, and the availability of the inclusion training.

A qualitative data analysis may build a closer understanding of the problem from the human side of perspective, accommodating for different contexts and of a perceived situation. A widely used method of qualitative data analysis - a content analysis was performed here to establish a perspective on the existing situation with inclusive education in Azerbaijan. The inductive type of content analysis was taken as primary to derive the unique conclusion to answer two predefined research questions. The type itself implies a process of extraction to filter and sort data in concepts, categories or themes.

In qualitative research, it is quite usual that data are found on the answers of 1 to 30 informants (Fridlund & Hildingh, 2000). The researcher has to decide the size of the sample within a sample - of a unit of research in this context - to meet the needs to answer a research question with adequate firmness and assurance (Krippendorff, 2004, Patton, 2002). The time and location of the participants being constant, the individual interview respondents are to serve as units of analysis.

The respective codes, then, enabled the evaluation of the data across the different contributors. As stated by Holsti (1968), conclusions were drawn by methodically and objectively identifying particular properties of communications. The codes, basically, served to fit the large chunks of material into manageable

and digestible pieces. The subsequent stage of the content analysis included a creation of categories to narrow the data even further. The research employs broad variables for categories not to miss synonyms or vague variables. For a demonstrative example, Table 2 contains two levels, the inferior level of which are the categories generated through the work with the codes derived from the data. The combination of indicators per a category results in a general theme/trend answering a specific research question.

The conceptual analysis, verifying the presence and frequency of categories in data, is further followed by a surface relational analysis. The latter doesn't involve causation but simply looks deeper into the variance by comparing the categories with each other. The staple aim of the the relational analysis here is to build on and to develop on the findings of preceding conceptual one. In addition, despite the results section building mainly on latent analysis, interpreting underlying meaning of the text, some parts may include a manifest analysis directly reflecting on the excerpt from the transcriptions.

### 5.3.1 Ethical Considerations

To do my job as a qualitative researcher well, I had to be cognizant of the ethical considerations connected to the researcher-participant interaction at every stage of the study process. All references to individual school districts, job titles, and phrases used within such districts have been removed to protect the respondents' privacy as required by law. When conducting interviews with participants, I had to put aside any preconceived notions about them that might have arisen from my own knowledge and experience. To set the stage for the interviews, I explained who I was and why we were doing this. All participants in my study were informed of the study's goals in detail to establish my reputation as a researcher and assure their confidence. Before the interviews began, all of the participants signed a consent form. To protect student anonymity, participants were only identified by a number and not by their school or job. While organizations, the federal government, and professional organisations have set standards, guidelines, and codes of ethics, the responsibility for upholding those codes ultimately falls on the shoulders of the individual researcher, as noted by Merriam (2009).

# 6 RESULTS

## *6.1 The perception of inclusive education by the teachers in Azerbaijan*

The success of any policy program is hugely linked to the extent it is adopted by the target audience. Inclusion stands to be one of the most critical development movements in the education sector and teachers play a great role in its enablement. The perception they hold sets the atmosphere for the assimilation of learners with learning disabilities. Obstructive perceptions of inclusive education may hinder the progress, as general education teachers try to involve individuals with disabilities (Cawley, Hayden, Cade, & BakerKroczyński, 2002).

In that connection, this study looks to determine what comprehension teachers in Azerbaijan hold on the inclusive education, how successful they are in determining the children with learning disability, and if they have received training of any sort on that matter. The findings are assumed to contribute to a better picture of the existing stance on inclusiveness in education in Azerbaijan.

Table 2 bellow shows us categories related to Azerbaijani teachers' understanding of the term inclusive education. All the participants indicated they were familiar with the term "inclusive education". They described inclusive education as the education of students with different abilities in the same class or creating opportunities for everyone, regardless of their disabilities, to study with children without disabilities. The answers of the participants were extremely similar, thus denoting the meaning, which has been accepted worldwide.

**Table 2 The definition of the notion of inclusive education teachers in Azerbaijan.**

<b>What teachers understands by the term "Inclusive education"</b>	<b>Total quotations (N = 18)</b>	<b>Frequency (%)</b>
Education of students with different abilities in the same class	3	16.7%
Creating opportunities for everyone, regardless of their disabilities, to study with children without disabilities	8	44.4%
Involving disabled children in general education	3	16.7%
Where sick and healthy children study in the same class	1	5.5%
Inclusive education means that everyone receives education under equal conditions, regardless of their health status	1	5.5%
Where children with physical disabilities and children with developmental delays receive education in the same conditions as their healthy peers	2	11.1%
<b>Total no. of quotations</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>100%</b>

Inclusive education for the teachers in Azerbaijan also means that everyone receives education under equal conditions, regardless of their health status or where children with physical disabilities and developmental delays receive education in the same conditions as their healthy peers.

As far I as understand, inclusive education was created in the last decade and provides opportunities for children with physical disabilities to study together with their peers in regular classes. (P3)

Inclusive education - children with physical disabilities and children with developmental delays receive education in the same conditions as their healthy peers. (P13)

One of the interesting factors was that one of the participants indicated she is interested in implementation of inclusive education because her granddaughter is a disabled child as well.

Inclusive education is the education setting where disabled children study together with children without disabilities. I am interested in the implementation of this kind of education because my granddaughter is a disabled child as well. (P16)

The answers to the question about recognizing a child with a learning disability were almost similar. Participant teachers indicated that they do recognize a child's learning disability by observing and communicating with a child during the educational process, comparing a child's results to the results of his/her peers,

Without a doubt, communicating with a child, getting to know him/her closely. (P2)

I come to conclusion that a child has a learning disability when I compare the results of this child to the results his peers and see a huge difference. (P3)

I can detect a child having a learning disability by observing the child carefully, by analysing a child's writing, speaking, understanding, and etc. (P10)

Most of the teachers emphasized the role of teaching experience. They mentioned that the more experienced the teacher, the easier it becomes to recognize a disability a child having.



It is not hard to catch a disability in learning in a child, if a teacher is experienced one. (P18)

If a teacher is experienced one, then he/she will understand that a child has some learning disabilities. For example, we can understand it, when we observe a child while he interacts with peers, act in the classroom, or even, for example, the way he/she flips through the book. (P12)

A child's learning disability can be determined at first glance and during the educational process. An experienced teacher determines it faster. (P4)

The teachers in Azerbaijan do face children with disabilities often. In their words, there are the children with physical impairments. A particular case of pleasant sort is of a teacher who had taught a child with a hearing problem that she was able to teach how to read from the lips. Another student had a problem with moving but had no learning difficulties. Thus, he could read, write, and understand very well. According to teachers with the preceding experience, students with ADHD are given easy tasks to help them to cope with concentration insufficiency. Another example demonstrated a case of a boy who had his mouth watering when speaking. All these evident factors serve as an indication for the teachers on the presence a disease or disability that a child is facing.

It is not hard to catch a disability in learning in a child. When such a child is given a task, it is possible to see that they are suffering and not getting results. Also, in homework, it is possible to grasp a disability in children. A decline in the child's speech, listening, or comprehension leads to the conclusion that there is a learning disability in that child. (P3)

The data collected also indicates that the task assignment performs a role of second stronger identifier. When a child is given a task in a classroom setting, it is possible to differentiate and understand that they are trying their best but not

getting good results. The level of success in the completion of assigned homework points out a possible disability present in children, as well. Finally, a gradual decline in a child's speech, listening, or comprehension leads to the conclusion of a prevailing learning disability in that child.

The dilemma for children with learning difficulties is reflected either in their challenges in establishing communication with teachers and other children, or in the absence of a desire or ability to establish communication at all. This makes them feel physically or psychologically isolated, making them consciously distancing and isolating themselves from the community. Students with physical disabilities study at home (under the name of a sick child). But some students come to school and sit in classes without permission. Regular students get along well with them, but some of them bully such children. According to the parents, such children are eager to go to school, although some teachers and students look down on them.

From 18 interviewed, only one had no experience with children with learning difficulties at all, as there were no such children in the classes she taught. The participant is from the city of Bilasuvar, where none of the participants has received a specialized training on the respective issue. Within this city-wide sample, she appears to be a holder of the longest in-service experience with the bachelor's as a highest degree attained.

**Table 3 The share of beneficiaries of training on inclusive education for teachers in Azerbaijan**

<b>Response on whether the teacher was trained in inclusive education</b>	<b>Total quotations (N = 18)</b>	<b>Frequency (%)</b>
I have been trained in inclusive education	2	11.1%
I have not been trained in inclusive education	16	88.9%
<b>Total no. of quotations</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>100%</b>

Andrews and Frankel (2010) in the writing claim for a causality between the adequate training and skills necessary to educate students with special needs and the success of implementation of inclusive teaching programs.

Only two of the 18 respondents agreed that they had training on inclusive education (f = 2), while the rest have not taken any course on inclusive education. Most of those who have not taken any course on inclusive education said they have come to know of the term from TV, the Internet, and as a result of a personal inquiry.

Of the two that have received training on inclusive education mentioned that reading all the theories did not help her fully contribute to the inclusive education. This, according to that participant, is because practicing it is more challenging than reading about it.

**Table 4 The share of beneficiaries of a training for teachers to identify learners with learning challenges**

<b>Responses on whether the teacher was trained to identify learners experiencing learning challenges in the classrooms</b>	<b>Total quotations (N = 18)</b>	<b>Frequency (%)</b>
I have been trained to identify learners experiencing learning challenges in the classrooms	2	11.1%
I have not been trained to identify learners experiencing learning challenges in the classrooms	16	88.9%
<b>Total no. of quotations</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>100%</b>

In establishing the challenges related to inclusive education in Azerbaijan education, the study sought to determine whether the teachers were trained to identify students experiencing hardship in the classrooms and whether they consider their school inclusive. What barriers, if any, did they experience implementing it, and what were the challenges observed?

A notable small share of the teachers from the selected schools in Azerbaijan (11.1%) has been trained to support children having learning disabilities. Many of them had to grasp the education from internet on their own. In inclusive education, as shown by 16(88.9%) respondents. Many of them have learned inclusive education from the Internet. However, they agree that if a teacher is experienced and uses their intuition, experience, and empathy, they will understand when a child has some learning disabilities. In reinforcement of stated earlier, this is seen while a child interacts with peers, acts in the classroom, and even flips through a book.

There are disabled children in the schools, including those with Down syndrome, Autism, speech impairment, mental retardation, and other disabilities. Therefore, even though the term inclusive education is not in our work program, the teachers have always provided an individual approach to children, even in the classroom.

For the two who have received inclusive education training, one was a 36-hour course consisting of 6 days of 6 hours and conducted face-to-face in 2020. Another also got training to work with children with learning disabilities and walking disabilities. A course was held to work with students with slightly impaired mental health.

For example, working with deaf children is necessary to maintain a relationship with a particular language, using gestures, but we do not know them. Visually impaired students have their schemes and their books; they can read by feeling with their hands, and this braille equipment needs to be introduced in the schools.

Students with hearing and visual disabilities and walking disabilities have trouble going to the toilet, making it difficult to work with such students in regular schools. Another challenge the teachers face is trying to stop other children from bullying those children with disabilities while also controlling children with ADHD from hurting other children.

## 6.2 Challenges related to inclusive education that teachers identify in Azerbaijan

The goal of inclusive education is to ensure that all students have equal access to the educational opportunities available to their peers. Redesigning schools to accommodate kids from a wide range of backgrounds is an important part of addressing inequality and diversity in the classroom. It's a powerful tool for spreading inclusiveness and tolerance in our community. However, Azerbaijan has a number of obstacles that must be surmounted if inclusive education is to advance. This section presents research findings that investigate the local perspective of one stakeholder, in-service teachers, to shed light on the problems and opportunities in inclusive education.

**Table 5 Inclusive or noninclusive schools**

<b>Response on whether the teacher considers their school inclusive</b>	<b>Total quotations (N = 18)</b>	<b>Frequency (%)</b>
Our school is inclusive	1	5.6%
Our school is not inclusive	15	83.3%
Our school is not fully inclusive	2	11.1%
<b>Total no. of quotations</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>100%</b>

Only one of the respondents indicated that their school was inclusive, while the majority (f = 15) said they were not. Two of them said there was a degree of inclusiveness in the school, but it was not entirely so.

Some said they have one or two students with disabilities in their schools, but inclusive education has not been implemented, while. One preferred to express the idea by claiming that said they have students with a slow path of learning, but no disabilities (P9) Others are aware of an inclusive school in the neighbourhood (f = 2), but theirs is not an inclusive one. The reason given for the schools not being inclusive is captured as follows:

The school is not fully inclusive; because there are no special conditions, teachers, psychologists, or speech therapists. Just because I work in a village, we do not have other places to leave children; thus, when parents need to work, they bring their children to the school, regardless of children's disabilities, even though the school is not ready for inclusion practices (P18).

Another response was as follows:

The school where I work is not inclusive; because there is not any good infrastructure for students with physical disabilities, for example, no elevators. [There are also] no books for those who have visual impairments (P7)

In one of the inclusive schools, the teacher said that almost all classes in the school have children with learning disabilities. One of the teachers said there is no inclusive school in Azerbaijan with full facilities and trained teachers. However, special schools exist for people with severe disabilities (P18). For example, the city of Lankaran has special schools.

The second research question concerns the challenges the teachers in Azerbaijan face while implementing inclusive education. The table 6 below demonstrates us categories related to Azerbaijani teachers' barriers on the way of providing children with disabilities an equal setting for receiving formal education along with children without disabilities.

Most of the study participants have experienced having a student with disability in learning in their class, and, as the table 6 shows, the teachers expressed their thoughts on difficulties they have had while educating children with and without disabilities. Below it is evident what kind of challenges most instructors face.

**Table 6 Barriers to implementation or challenges faced while implementing inclusive education**

<b>Responses on barriers to implementing or challenges in implementing inclusive education</b>	<b>Total number of informants (N = 18)</b>	<b>Share of total (From N, %)</b>
Negative perception among teachers	3	16.7%
Negative perception in society	2	11.1%
Negative perception by parents	2	11.1%
Bad treatment from peers, bullying	1	5.6%
Reluctance of schools to accept the children with disabilities, to accommodate for their needs	1	5.6%
Need for a specialist, a teaching assistant	3	16.7%
Lack of necessary infrastructure, i.e., elevators, literature for visually impaired, etc.	5	27.8%
Inconsiderate approach in the examinations in private schools	1	5.6%
No individually tailored tutoring	1	5.6%
No training	5	27.8%
Age discrimination in training	1	5.6%
Absence of theory in practice	1	5.6%
No appropriate curriculum	1	5.6%
No particular comment	1	5.6%
<b>Total no. of expressed concerns</b>	<b>28</b>	

The negative perception among teachers, as well as scenarios describing adverse approaches from parents and general society were the point of main concern. From the total number of participants, 7 participants ( $\approx 38.9\%$  of all participants) expressed their thoughts of that sort. Three teachers mentioned

their disapproval of the inclusive classes, as according to them, the children with disabilities hinder the progress of a class as a whole. There were also voiced concerns regarding the “embarrassment” of parents of children with disabilities, dissatisfaction of parents of the rest of the class, and aggressive approach from the classmates. A respondent, for instance, said she had a negative experience with inclusive education whereby a child with disability developed aggression towards his classmates and was disruptive in class.

A child was making noises during the class... He was doing things that disrupted the lesson. He wanted strange things from the teachers. He asked strange questions. He was throwing the books. The lesson was disrupted. Other children were also tired of this behavior. When other children were writing tests or reading books, the actions he did were distracting. And the lesson was disrupted.  
(P1)

Thus, according to her, inclusive education harms children without disabilities, and such children need to study in special boarding schools. This is the statement that found its reflection in three other teachers who also indicated a similar proposition.

Involving children with learning disabilities in teaching is sometimes quite difficult and requires patience from the teacher and the students. The behaviours of students with some disabilities affect and hinders other students as well. I don't think inclusive education is right. This prevents children without learning difficulties from getting education in a normal path. Neither healthy nor sick children can benefit from such mixed education. (P4)

A somewhat common idea participants would agree with is that the schools are not yet adequately equipped and/or staffed with qualified personnel. The most frequently indicated concern was regarding the absence of infrastructure necessary for the comfortable movement of students with walking disabilities or the failure of the government to provide the literature for learners



with sight and hearing loss. There should be the requisite facilities like physical infrastructure such as elevators (f = 5).

No, my school is not inclusive. Because there is not any good infrastructure with students with physical disabilities, for example, no elevators. No books for those who have visual impairments. (P8)

In addition to that, some of the teachers pointed out the need to have an assistant teacher with skills such as speech therapy training, as children should be trained by teachers who can do this (f =3). Teachers who have passed the training must handle such children; because some teachers are not yet psychologically ready to deal with it. Worth mentioning, the idea of a need for assistance in teaching was frequently followed by a call to hire specialists, including psychologists, speech therapists, or others.

One of the teachers lamented that they had been taught the ability to work with mentally disabled children and those who are not limited in walking. Still, they have not been trained to work with children with no visual or hearing abilities, and therefore they cannot serve such students.

Organizing or implementing inclusive training requires conducting enough educational activities and theoretical and practical tasks via simulation to teachers about their importance, advantages, and difficulties. Some schools do not register a child as having a disability to avoid problems with the authorities because otherwise, the school should have been legally an inclusive school.

One observation was that, in Azerbaijan, the education system is aimed at passing exams to join a university, and teachers cannot approach everyone individually. Thus, no one pays attention to the children's skills and career choices; no one works with the children individually, creating difficulties in inclusive education.

Special training has also not been given to the educational staff, including the students, and the parents, for the education of individuals with special needs in the school.

**Table 7 The positive of negative effects of inclusive education**

<b>Response on whether teacher thinks inclusive education brings positive effects</b>	<b>Total quotations (N = 18)</b>	<b>Frequency (%)</b>
Inclusive education brings positive effects	15	83.3%
Inclusive education does not bring positive effects	3	16.7%
<b>Total no. of quotations</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>100%</b>

Most of the teachers interviewed said that inclusive schools are good and have positive effects (f = 17) compared to those who said that it does not bring positive effects (f =1).

Among those who said it is good, one of the reasons was that the children with disabilities would be growing together with others, and they could also engage with the school and their peers. It would help them to become socially active outgoing, have fun, and learn, grow, and develop, and makes the children grow up to be much more helpful and humane in their interactions (f= 6)

First, it will give psychological stimulation to the people, it can build self-confidence in them and make them feel that there is no "difference" from others and thus it can be an important step to build a healthy and socially, ethically, psychologically equal society. (P6)

The involvement of those students in regular education has a significant effect. Sometimes it happens that it creates problems for the education of other students in the class, but his classmates work with him and are not separated from him. Students of this type tend to be more social. When those students are involved in special schools or individual education, they have an aggressive attitude toward society and become withdrawn (f = 3).

When they study in the classroom, they are stimulated by the equally distributed attention given to them as figure students, and their health improves significantly. It is a good thing that children with disabilities come to a public

school because they should not be alone; they should be socialized. This evidence is exemplified in the following response.

For example, I had a visually impaired and mentally retarded child. He did not let his parents go to school. We brought the child to school. When he first came, he didn't know the usual rules of behaviour; he didn't even say hello. How much has changed since then? He is now a graduate. When he sees us, he greets us and communicates (T16).

Not only teachers but parents should also be educated. Because some parents condemn the presence of such children in the class of their healthy child, they say that they obstruct the teaching process of the teacher and the whole class. Also, the fact that these children are eager to go to school and want to communicate with their classmates shows that switching to the inclusive education system will positively affect the students.

Children adapt to society, communicate, and their environment expands. Having an individual education keeps them away from society, but the way they come to school, they cooperate more closely with society, expand their environment and socialize. This helps them to develop, grow, and integrate into society.

However, three of the teachers said they thought inclusive education was not a proper idea. One said this is because inclusive education harms children without disabilities and prevents healthy children from getting an average education. According to them, neither healthy nor sick children can benefit from such mixed education.

# 7 DISCUSSIONS

## *7.1 Review of the findings*

A school is a microcosm of communities (Haupt, 2010) and inclusive education there can be instrumental in altering discriminatory attitudes in society. School environments provide a helpful scaffolding for children's first experiences with people and places outside their immediate circles of family and friends. Students of varying skills and backgrounds benefit from socializing and learning together. The overarching goal is to provide a space where students of all backgrounds and abilities may learn and grow in a supportive setting that also presents suitable challenges. Parents, educators, and other people working in schools have a vested interest in seeing this succeed.

How you implement an inclusive classroom could change based on the school and its location. However, there are a few key goals to keep in mind while developing an inclusive lesson plan for the classroom. The cornerstone to effective inclusive education is accepting, understanding, and responding to student diversity and differences. These can include physical, cognitive, academic, social, and emotional challenges. Depending on context and prior knowledge, the phrase "learning disability" may have varying levels of specificity in its use.

Despite some lacking formal training, the instructors included in the research usually had awareness of inclusive education. TV, the Internet, and individualized research have all contributed to this understanding. They defined inclusive education as the teaching of pupils with various learning styles in the same classroom or the creation of chances for everyone, regardless of their disability, to study alongside pupils who are not disabled. The findings support Goransson and Nilholm's (2014) assertion that inclusion refers to the placement of kids who need special assistance or who have impairments in classrooms with typically developing kids. Radical scholars, however, foresee a new style of

education that places an emphasis on community and collaboration across varied groups, and they disagree with this placement criteria, despite it being widely accepted (Nilholl and Goransson, 2017).

The majority of instructors lack the knowledge necessary to assess whether a kid has a learning problem. To identify and categorize the youngsters with learning issues, they draw on their experience or interactions with colleagues. The result demonstrates the widespread difficulty in identifying kids with learning disabilities and supports Emerson & Heslop's (2010) assertion that the British concept of intellectual impairment and learning disability are identical. Inclusionary training and development for kids with special needs are outlined in Article 1.4 of the Action Plan on Implementing the "State of Educational Development in the Republic of Azerbaijan." This clause was accepted by the Azerbaijani president on January 19, 2015. "Improving educators' inclusive education skills" is the name of the May 2018–September 2020 effort, yet it seems that few instructors have taken part in it.

The objective of inclusive education is to accomplish the aim of societal justice by broadening access to educational opportunities for all individuals, irrespective of the types of learning difficulties they may have. It emphasizes the idea that children with special needs may be integrated into a system without encountering any type of discrimination or exclusionary treatment of any kind. However, the expansion of the idea of inclusive education in Azerbaijan is being hampered by a number of issues, such as a lack of positive attitude among teachers, a lack of infrastructure and resources, and parental ignorance. One of the schools is the only one that has an inclusive educational setting; the others are not, though several are to some extent inclusive. The absence of particular circumstances like instructors, psychologists, or speech therapists as well as elevator training is the cause of the lack of inclusion.

The presence of instructors who have received training in speech therapy is one of the obstacles to inclusive education. The instructors would then be mentally prepared to cope with these kids. As stated by Jurasaitė-Harison and Rex (2010) and Kwakman, K. (2003), sufficient teacher preparation greatly impacts the resolution of problems in a variety of areas and, as a consequence, may lead to professional teaching and learning.

The necessary amenities, such as physical infrastructure like elevators, should be there. Only with the help of the school administration, and of the government action in case of public school setting in Azerbaijan, can such infrastructure, like elevators, be built. According to the findings of Drudy and Kinsella's research (2009), one of the challenges that must be overcome is the lack of opportunities for, or a reluctance on the part of, school employees to participate in collaboration regarding the successful inclusion of children with special educational needs. This is a barrier that must be overcome.

There is also a gap in the training; one of the instructors bemoaned the fact that they had been trained how to deal with both youngsters with mental disabilities and those who do not have mobility limitations. However, they are unable to assist kids who lack the ability to see or hear since they are not prepared to interact with them. The findings are consistent with those of Engelbrecht et al. (1999), who discovered that a number of significant functional aspects may need to be changed in order to remove obstacles to learning. It is also recommended that all barriers be removed in order to make the school environment accessible to students with disabilities.

Lack of time, according to some instructors, is an obstacle to inclusion. The results are consistent with those of Drudy & Kinsella (2009) and Smith & Leonard (2005), who found that instructors complain about not having enough time for administrative duties including planning, differentiating teaching, and communicating with coworkers.

Most of the instructors whose opinions were sought out agreed that inclusive schools are excellent and have favorable outcomes. One of the causes was the fact that the disabled children would develop alongside others and could interact with the classroom and their classmates. As a result, the kids would grow up to be considerably more kind and helpful in their relationships, as well as more socially engaged and outgoing. They would also study, grow, and develop.

The participation of such pupils in normal school has a big impact. Their health greatly improves when they learn in a classroom because they are motivated by the evenly dispersed attention offered to them as individual pupils. Children communicate, adapt to society, and their surroundings change. While receiving an individual education isolates children from society, the way they

approach school encourages cooperation with a community, broadens their horizons, and fosters social interaction. They may grow, mature, and assimilate into society because to this.

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However, according to three instructors, inclusive education is flawed. All of them make the claim that this is because it prevents healthy kids from receiving a conventional education. Such a blended education is not advantageous to either healthy or ill children. To prevent interfering with the education of students without impairments, these teachers advised that such kids should attend special boarding schools. According to the study's findings, Azerbaijani instructors are knowledgeable about inclusive education to some degree. Despite the fact that most instructors have not received training in inclusive education, they are nonetheless capable of identifying the students in their classes who are having difficulties learning. In order to provide teachers the knowledge and capacities to eliminate barriers to learning for people with disabilities in Azerbaijan, the government may improve teacher training in inclusive education.

The administration of schools must increase funding for additional provisions to enable facilities for inclusive education, such as having elevators that can help students with walking disabilities access classrooms on the higher floors. Many schools do not offer inclusive education, and this situation calls for increased funding from the government.

## *7.2 Reliability and Validity*

In qualitative research, reliability is defined by the consistency of responses to varying data set coders. A human aspect is a primary worry that has a significant impact on the level of dependability. In this context, a frequently accepted

threshold is 80%. Keeping accurate written field records and employing digital recording equipment can increase reliability. Due to the fact that the prior recommendations were followed, we may assert that the study's reliability is sufficient. However, validity is a somewhat broader idea. Lincoln and Guba (1985) determined that dependability is the closest parallel to validity. Credibility, authenticity, and transferability can increase the level of trust. This takes extensive knowledge and a detailed breakdown of data sources, methodologies, and investigators in order to demonstrate credibility. A comprehensive description is essential to ensure that the investigator and those being probed may exchange accurate information. The lack of long-term field experience may reduce the validity of the research results, but it may also act as motivation for the area's future development.

### *7.3 Conclusion/ Future research/ Recommendations*

Regardless of the level of coverage in the literature on special education, the inclusion has not yet gotten adequate attention and has not been thoroughly examined on general education in Azerbaijan. Numerous educators, parents, and decision-makers lack adequate awareness of the philosophy, practice, and possible impacts of inclusion on all pupils. This study's objective was to analyze the inclusive education landscape in Azerbaijan.

It would appear that a lack of understanding, comprehension, and acceptance of inclusion among teachers and society as a whole is the fundamental reason of the difficulties faced by teachers in Azerbaijan while seeking to provide an inclusive education to students with disabilities. This is one of the key challenges faced by educators in Azerbaijan. Others view inclusive education as a problem or an unattainable endeavor, but others view it as a means to enhance the educational experience for all of their pupils.

Before implementing any additional fundamental modifications to the strategy for educating children with learning disabilities, the researcher recommends undertaking more in-depth study, such as defining the parameters of inclusion and determining the barriers for inclusion on a nationwide level. Therefore, the work serves as a signal to stimulate greater in-depth research and deliberative dialogue among all relevant groups.



The most important recommendation is that a comprehensive strategy on inclusive education be created to accommodate all of the disabled children in Azerbaijan. The administrators of the school will also offer the necessary infrastructure for the school based on these consistent policies. To effectively execute the policy, teachers, parents, and students should collaborate. Children's problems must be seen as collective issues that the larger community must address; this will encourage constructive relationships. Furthermore, the value of inclusive education needs to be widely publicized. Implementing inclusive education is hampered by parents' and teachers' persisted negative views. This guidance will help remove the social stigma connected to disability. Additionally, providing teachers with a comprehensive set of training and seminars on inclusive training will improve their comprehension of how to put this theory into practice.

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