

ҚАЗАҚСТАН РЕСПУБЛИКАСЫ ҒЫЛЫМ ЖӘНЕ ЖОҒАРЫ БІЛІМ МИНИСТРЛІГІ

«Л.Н. ГУМИЛЕВ АТЫНДАҒЫ ЕУРАЗИЯ ҰЛТТЫҚ УНИВЕРСИТЕТІ» КЕАҚ

**Студенттер мен жас ғалымдардың
«GYLYM JÁNE BILIM - 2024»
XIX Халықаралық ғылыми конференциясының
БАЯНДАМАЛАР ЖИНАҒЫ**

**СБОРНИК МАТЕРИАЛОВ
XIX Международной научной конференции
студентов и молодых ученых
«GYLYM JÁNE BILIM - 2024»**

**PROCEEDINGS
of the XIX International Scientific Conference
for students and young scholars
«GYLYM JÁNE BILIM - 2024»**

**2024
Астана**

УДК 001

ББК 72

G99

«ǴYLYM JÁNE BILIM – 2024» студенттер мен жас ғалымдардың XIX Халықаралық ғылыми конференциясы = XIX Международная научная конференция студентов и молодых ученых «ǴYLYM JÁNE BILIM – 2024» = The XIX International Scientific Conference for students and young scholars «ǴYLYM JÁNE BILIM – 2024». – Астана: – 7478 б. - қазақша, орысша, ағылшынша.

ISBN 978-601-7697-07-5

Жинаққа студенттердің, магистранттардың, докторанттардың және жас ғалымдардың жаратылыстану-техникалық және гуманитарлық ғылымдардың өзекті мәселелері бойынша баяндамалары енгізілген.

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УДК 001

ББК 72

G99

ISBN 978-601-7697-07-5

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IMPLEMENTATION OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION PROJECTS IN THE REPUBLIC OF TAJIKISTAN

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The article is devoted to the current issue of the inclusive education and steps taken towards the development of inclusivity in Tajikistan. The article mainly focuses on the different educational needs of children and implementation of various national and international projects in this sphere. The relevance of this issue is that the projects provide services in accordance with the special needs of the students especially with disabilities through fuller participation in the educational process, community involvement and the elimination of discrimination in education.

The objectives of the article are to study the topical issues of the inclusive education and analyze the implemented inclusive education projects as well as their achieved results in the Republic of Tajikistan.

Inclusive education – also called inclusion – is education that includes everyone, with non-disabled and disabled people (including those with “special educational needs”) learning together in mainstream schools, colleges and universities. This means the system must adapt to include disabled people – they should not have to adapt to the system. The education system must recognise that it creates limits for disabled learners, for instance, if parts of the school are inaccessible. Disabled pupils and students may require adaptations and support to access the curriculum [1].

“Inclusive education means all children in the same classrooms, in the same schools. It means real learning opportunities for groups who have traditionally been excluded – not only children with disabilities, but speakers of minority languages too” [2].

According to UNESCO, inclusion "is increasingly understood widely as a reform that supports and welcomes diversity amongst all learners." Under this broader definition of inclusion, steps should also be taken to abolish discrimination and provide accommodations for all students who are at a disadvantage because of some reason other than disability [3].

Thus, in this regard, based on the results of international practice (UNESCO), the term “integrated education” has been replaced by “inclusive education” and according to the definitions given above it must be noted that inclusive education values the diversity of all students including those with disabilities or special needs. In other words, inclusive education is a society where every individual is welcomed and supported to fully participate in all kinds of educational opportunities.

Inclusive education is based on the principle of togetherness, equality, participation, acceptance, change, rejection of special classroom, individual differences and opposite of exclusion. One of the basic principles of inclusive education is earlier intervention and integration of children with special needs into mass preschools. And this is very essential not only for the child himself, but also for society as a whole. Early development, learning, preservation and promotion of health, social protection and provision of equal opportunities have an important impact on economic growth. The experience of many countries has shown that investing in early childhood and development will bring great benefits to society, as a prepared and adapted child will be much more successful than someone who has not attended preschool or has not had any other preparation for school. According to the results of various studies, scientists have argued that conducting classes and trainings with parents ultimately improves the social and emotional competence of young children. Inclusive education is based on an ideology that excludes any discrimination against children, which ensures equal treatment of all people, but creates special conditions for children with special educational needs. As experience show some children drop out of any rigid educational

system, because the system is not ready to meet the individual needs of these children in education. This ratio is 15% of the total number of children in school and thus, the children who drop out become isolated and excluded from the system. It needs to be understood that it is not the children who fail but the system that excludes the children. Inclusive approaches can support these children to learn and success, giving them chances and opportunities for a better life. The implementation of inclusive education takes place in a specialized learning environment, which include:

- a set of individual educational programs, plans, methodological materials, literature;
- creation of adequate external conditions (necessary level of comfort, specialized means of transportation and organization of adaptive training places, distance learning facilities, etc.

Inclusive education in the Republic of Tajikistan is based on the following principles:

- Inclusiveness (universality) of education;
- Responsibility of the state and civil society for ensuring access to education;
- Identification and consideration of individual peculiarities and needs of a person when organizing the education process;
- Ensuring equal rights and equal opportunities of access to education;
- Creation of appropriate conditions for inclusive education
- Ensuring the priority of individual needs of the child's personality in obtaining appropriate (special) education
- Taking into account the child's abilities (talent and giftedness) when organizing the education process [4].

However, there are still many international and local organisations that are making various projects and conduct different programs to support and fund the inclusive education in Tajikistan.

The project was launched by Deutscher Volkshochschul-Verband (DVV) International in Tajikistan on April 1, 2018. The project was funded by the European Union with the aim to support structures and policies of inclusive (vocational) education with a focus on the needs of young people with disabilities. Deutscher Volkshochschul-Verband International and its partner organizations worked to strengthen the rights of people with disabilities, to improve the national and local community for inclusive vocational education and to guarantee a better access to quality vocational and non-formal education services for young people with disabilities in the three main pilot areas: Rasht, Panjakent, and Dushanbe. Together with the Adult Education Association of Tajikistan and the League of Women with Disabilities “Ishtirok”. Deutscher Volkshochschul-Verband International designed and offered vocational training courses that were especially adapted to the needs of people with disabilities. Improved vocational skills would foster their integration into the local labor market. Participants also learned how to claim their right to education in relation to local and national authorities. In cooperation with the network of Adult Training Centers (ATCs) under the Ministry of Labor, Employment and Migration with over 36 branches throughout the country as well as the local governments of Rasht, Panjakent and Dushanbe, DVV International developed a pilot inclusive curriculum at three Adult Training Centers. In addition, an accessible infrastructure had been constructed in these centers. The experience in these three centers later could be used to improve the accessibility of all Adult Training Centers in the country. The project ran until the end of 2020 with an overall budget of around 690.000 Euro, including a contribution of 10% of the German Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development. Furthermore, the project would advocate for inclusive education and raise awareness for the rights of people with disabilities, for instance, through publications and public events especially on social media [5].

On December 7, 2023 - The United States Agency for International Development (USAID), in partnership with UNICEF, has launched a new five-year “Inclusive Preschool Education in Tajikistan 2023-2028” \$7.5 million project to develop inclusive preschool education in Jaloliddini Balkhi, Khatlon Province. The new project will help the Government of Tajikistan improve school readiness by providing modern, inclusive, learner-centered, and population-specific preschool education in Tajikistan. It will cover more than 200 preschool education centers across the country and reach all children, including girls and children with disabilities.

It should be also highlighted that the U.S. Government, through USAID, has been assisting the Ministry of Education and Science of Tajikistan in modernizing the education system for more than 20 years. The Inclusive Early Childhood Education Project will promote innovative approaches to improving children's basic literacy and numeracy skills in the early grades through an improved inclusive, child-centered pedagogical program and the use of technology, beginning at the preschool level. All necessary measures are being taken to improve activities in preschool education, universal education and health care, talent search, equipping child development centers and technical classes [2].

Another Grant Agreement was signed on February 2, 2024 between H.E. Toshihiro Aiki, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Japan to Tajikistan and Shunsuke Nagano Program Coordinator, Association for Aid and Relief, Japan (AAR Japan) for “Developing Curricula of Teacher Training Course at Higher Education for Promotion of Inclusive Education” with the total amount of 344,835 US dollars to implement this project at Pedagogical College in Tursunzoda City which is provided by the Government of Japan as part of international humanitarian assistance. The first phase of the project, “Developing Curricula of Teacher Training Course at Higher Education for Promotion of Inclusive Education” had been reportedly implemented by AAR Japan from December 2, 2020 till January 31, 2022 at Tajik State Pedagogical University named after Sadriddin Aini in Dushanbe City, its second phase from February 4, 2022 till February 3, 2023 at Tajik Pedagogical Institute in Rasht District, and its third phase from February 10, 2023 till December 20, 2023 in Pedagogical College of Hisor City. The current signed project is the concluding phase of the previous projects to promote inclusive education throughout the country of Tajikistan by developing teacher training course at higher education with perspectives on inclusive education, and to increase the access to education for all students with different special learning needs, including those with disabilities [6].

Within the conclusive phase of the project, AAR Japan will implement the following activities in close cooperation with Pedagogical College in Tursunzoda City, to:

- 1) make the College barrier-free, which includes installation of slopes at the entrances and inside of College buildings, as well as construction of an accessible toilet block in order to make the College premises accessible for all students including students with disabilities;
- 2) develop and dispense barrier-free construction guideline in order to summarize the main points of barrier-free arrangements and use it for future maintenance of barrier-free arrangements;
- 3) develop and distribute IE teaching guide booklet for teachers so that they can be used in lectures by future trainers and trained specialists in the field of inclusive education;
- 4) provide 2 kinds of trainings on training of trainers (ToT) among college lecturers in order to develop human resource capacities in the field of inclusive education in Tursunzoda Pedagogical College and furthermore spread it all over around Tajikistan;
- 5) provide training by Japanese experts on universal design and reasonable accommodation related issues in the classrooms in order to assure quality of education for all students;
- 6) hold awareness raising activities on access to colleges among people with disabilities, their parents and community in Tursunzoda City and Shahrinav district in order to increase PWDs’ motivation in enrolment into higher education and promote awareness of this project as well;
- 7) expand IE network and symposium on Tajikistan IE policies in order to contribute to the establishment of a foundation for IE dissemination throughout the country [6].

The next project -USAID’s Learn Together Activity (LTA) is a five-year project (2020-2025) including \$24,794,232 with the aim to improve Tajik primary students’ learning skills and focuses on improving reading comprehension, critical thinking skills, and mathematics. Intended coverage is in at least 80% of Tajik and Russian language primary schools to improve student learning outcomes. The five-year activity will use an evidence-based instructional approach to improve literacy and numeracy outcomes and will provide training, coaching, and materials to teachers in grades 1-4. Supplementary reading and math materials will be made available to students to complement instruction and build academic and content-specific vocabulary and numeracy skills.

The USAID Learn Together Activity (LTA) will support Tajikistan’s Ministry of Education and Science’s (MoES) efficiency to develop and implement adhesive primary education policies

and programs, including system strengthening and public-private partnerships. The Activity will directly invoke the key objectives in the republic in Tajikistan's National Strategy for Education Development (2021 - 2030): professionalize teacher education, develop and implement quality and assurance measures for competency-based learning, and utilize relevant data to inform policies and programs. These partnerships, including with the private sector, will be key drivers to improve the primary education system in Tajikistan.

USAID LTA signed a Memorandum of Understanding with MoES on July 25, 2022 and received a list of 3,115 target schools to support nationwide. The project is still being implemented and below some achieved results are highlighted, such as:

- Conducted Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA), Early Grade Math Assessment (EGMA), Social Emotional

- Learning (SEL), and Snapshot of School Management Effectiveness (SSME) baseline data collection in 286 schools.

- Received MoES approval for standards and syllabi developed for all primary subjects and pre-service syllabus for methodology of teaching mathematics, Tajik language, pedagogy, and psychology.

- In collaboration with the Republican In-service Teacher Training Institute (RITTI), initiated a pilot of the teacher training program in 400 schools across the country. To deliver this pilot program, USAID LTA prepared 249 Community Based Methodological Units (CBMU)-level trainers. As a result, 3,604 teachers improved their instructional planning skills, designed students' learning exemplars, defined the knowledge and skills for each competency, and differentiated classroom instructions to meet the range of different student needs.

- Developed 140 literacy cards in Tajik and 52 in Russian languages, and 140 numeracy cards.

- Developed 20 different titles of famous books (12 titles in Tajik and 8 titles in Russian), and printed 10 titles in braille and large print.

Designed a mobile application for grades 3-4 students with 50 USAID developed stories from the "best collection of children's literature" and 10 interesting educational games aligned with Tajikistan's primary subject standards [7].

Providing access to inclusive education for persons with disabilities is a challenge for many countries, including Tajikistan. Ensuring equal education opportunities for everyone is however, necessary for professional and personal development. This is also reflected in Sustainable Development Goal 4, which mentions inclusive education for all. In 2018, Tajikistan signed the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Even so, providing inclusive education to young people and adults with disabilities still remains a tremendous challenge in Tajikistan, both for the State and for civil society organisations [8].

Inclusive education, as a strategic direction and trend of education development in the modern world, provides for the realization of the rights of each child in terms of providing them with quality education based on their cognitive abilities in accordance with the environment adequate for their health at the place of residence [9, p.167].

In conclusion, we would like to mention that inclusive education in Tajikistan is a crucial concept seeking to ensure that all children, including those with disabilities or special needs, have equal access to quality education. The government, along with non-governmental organizations and international partners, has made significant efforts to promote inclusive education through policy development, teacher training, and the creation of inclusive learning environments. Moving forward, sustained efforts and collaboration among all stakeholders are essential to fully implement inclusive education practices in Tajikistan. By addressing these challenges and working together to create a more inclusive education system, Tajikistan can provide all children with the opportunity to learn, grow, and reach their goals in the future. Inclusive education is not only a matter of social justice but also a key driver of sustainable development and prosperity for the country as a whole.

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УДК 341.1/8

МЕЖДУНАРОДНО-ПРАВОВОЙ СТАТУС ЮЖНО-КИТАЙСКОГО МОРЯ

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Южно-Китайское море представляет собой полузамкнутое море в западной части Тихого океана площадью 3,5 млн кв. км., которое находится в юго-восточной части Азии, окруженное побережьями нескольких стран, включая Китай, Вьетнам, Филиппины, Малайзию, Бруней и Индонезию. Это море является стратегически значимым районом из-за своего географического положения, богатых рыбных запасов, энергетических ресурсов и маршрутов морского транспорта. Однако споры о суверенитете над островами и морскими территориями в Южно-Китайском море вызывают напряженность между соседними странами и международными игроками, такими как США и Китай. Этот регион стал