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# A Comparative Analysis of Inclusive Education Systems in Ireland and Kazakhstan

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**Abstract:** This article was written based on the results of the author's PhD internship at the Dublin Institute of Technology, Ireland, in April 2016. The article provides an initial comparative analysis of inclusive education systems in Ireland and Kazakhstan related to special educational needs (SEN). Data were gathered for the Irish context through literature reviews, document analysis, site visits and interviews. Data for the Kazakhstan context were accumulated from relevant legal documentation, practice literature review and interviews. The aspects of inclusive education selected for comparative analysis in this article include: enabling legislation; types of schools; supports provided; training of teachers.

**Key words:** inclusive education; special educational needs; disabilities; Kazakhstan; Ireland.

## 1. Introduction

Inclusion has now become a global movement for recognition of the equality of all learners. Inclusion implies not only physical presence of a child with Special Educational Needs (SEN) in the classroom, but also certain deliberate interventions and adjustments to the learning environment in order to meet such children's individual educational needs. Inclusive education is a *“state policy aimed at eliminating the barriers dividing children, full inclusion of all children in mainstream education, and their social adaptation, regardless of their age, gender, ethnicity, religious affiliation, developmental delay or economic status. This is achieved by means of an active participation of the family, targeted educational and social support of the child's personal needs. It is the environment, not the child, that needs changing. The main goal is to create a learning environment that would be well-adapted to the individual peculiarities and educational needs of children”*. (Suleymenova, 2002, p. 16).

This article presents a comparative analysis of selected aspects of inclusive education in Ireland and Kazakhstan including the legislative framework in both countries, types of schools available for children with disabilities, support provided to learners, and training of teachers for inclusive education.

The data collection methods are outlined and all study-visit sites and interviews listed.

The selection of data, analysis of data and conclusions drawn are those of the author only, acknowledging the time-brevity of the opportunity to amass data and the linguistic challenges in articulating analytical impressions.

The author acknowledges the assistance of Internship colleagues with translation and interpretation during and after the study visit.

## 2. Country size, population and legal supports for SEN

**Ireland** is a sovereign, island state in north-western Europe with the total area of 70,273 km<sup>2</sup>. According to the national census of 2006, the country's population is 4.24 million people (Wikipedia, 2016a).

Inclusive education in Ireland has been developing since the 1980s-1990s. A Report of the Special Education Review Committee was published in 1993. That document was of great importance for the development of policy for educating children with SEN. Subsequently, a number of Acts were passed by Government:

The Education Act, 1998; The Equal Status Acts, 2000-2004; The Education Welfare Act, 2004; The Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act (EPSEN), 2004; The Disability Act, 2005. These Acts are the foundation of the legal framework required for the on-going development of inclusive education in Ireland (National Council for Special Education, 2011).

In addition, care, educational and support services are provided by voluntary organizations of charitable legal status and/or by religious orders, some of which receive state support and some of which are self-funded. This mix of voluntary, religious and statutory provision is a key feature of the special education landscape in Ireland since the foundation of the state.

**Kazakhstan** is a country located in the centre of Eurasia. It is the 9th largest country in the world with the total area of 2,724,900 km<sup>2</sup>. The population of the Republic of Kazakhstan is 17,670,957 people as of January 1, 2016) (Wikipedia, 2016b). It is a former member of the USSR and inherited models of care and education from its historic and recent past.

Recent legislation of the Republic of Kazakhstan provides for the principle of equal rights to education for persons with disabilities. The following laws have been adopted: the Law on the Rights of a Child in the Republic of Kazakhstan (2002); the Law on Social, Medical and Educational Support for Children with Disabilities (2002); the Law on Education in the Republic of Kazakhstan (2007). However, there has been no specific document, no Concept of Inclusive Education Development like the EPSEN Act in Ireland which was passed in 2004 adopted in Kazakhstan so far. In 2010, Kazakhstan adopted the State Programme of Education Development for 2011-2020, according to which, it is planned to raise the number of inclusive schools to 70% of the total number of schools by 2020.

### 3. Data collection methods

Data on the system of inclusive education in Ireland for this article were gathered through pre-selected study visits, interviews and observations of schools and care centres in the South Kildare-Carlow area in April 2016. The area is typical of similar geographical urban and rural areas in Ireland with a mix of historic establishments, new state provision and voluntary/charitable provision. Access was negotiated in advance and consent for visits obtained by letter. Interview question schedules were supplied to Principals/Managers in advance by email and permission to tape-record obtained. Following good research practice protocols, access to children or vulnerable adults was not requested and photographs were taken only after school hours and only of facilities and equipment. Interview transcripts were returned to interviewees for approval in all cases.

Site-visits and interviews with Principals/Managers were held as follows:

Scoil Mhichíl Naofa, Athy; , Irish Language Primary School/Gael Scoil Átha Í; new pre-school unit for children with autism spectrum disorder, St Joseph's School, Carlow; Educate Together Primary School, Carlow; Coláiste Lorcáin, Castledermot, Co Kildare; The Model School, Church of Ireland Primary School Athy; Holy Angels Day Care Centre, Carlow; The Delta Centre for Adults with Disabilities, Carlow.

Interviews were also held with personnel in higher education support services and Government Special Education Support Services as follows:

Disability Support Service at the Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT); Access & Lifelong Learning Centre at University College Dublin (UCD); Teachers' Union of Ireland (TUI), Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO), Special Education Support Service (SESS); Trinity College Dublin; National Council for Special Education (NCSE).

These activities included observing premises, accessibility, and special equipment.

The co-operation and generosity of interviewees is greatly appreciated by the author.

Additional information was obtained from the analysis of documents, reports and websites of the organisations listed above.

The information regarding inclusive education in the Republic of Kazakhstan was obtained from interviews with representatives of the Department of Education of Pavlodar region, analysis of documents, reports, websites of the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan, and organisations of special and inclusive education.

#### 4. Types of schools for children with SEN in Ireland and Kazakhstan

Children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) in **Ireland** have the following options:

- 1) **mainstream classes** where children may get additional support from special needs assistants (SNA) and learning support teachers;
  
- 2) **special classes** in mainstream schools that have been very popular among parents of children with SEN in recent years. There are more than 1,000 of them in the country. The number of students in special classes and classes of special schools may vary from 6 to 11 depending on the type and severity of disability;
  
- 3) **special schools**, each of which is designed for children with a certain type of disability (physical disability, hearing impairment, visual impairment, emotional/disturbance and/or behavioral problems, mild general learning disabilities (GLD), moderate GLD, severe/profound GLD, autism/ autistic spectrum disorders, specific learning disability, multiple disabilities). Currently, there are 120 special schools in Ireland;
  
- 4) **home-based education** for children who cannot attend schools because it may have a detrimental effect on their health. Studying at home can also be a temporary option for children with SEN waiting for a place in an appropriate educational institution. It is the parents who take the decision where their child will study, but options may be limited by geographic location. However, no matter what educational institution they choose, they should be assure that their child will get the support he or she needs. All regular state primary schools in Ireland are, in theory, inclusive, though admission policies and levels of service supports vary.

Children with disabilities in **Kazakhstan** currently have the following options:

- 1) **inclusive schools**. There are 27 of them at the moment (“Inclusive education in Kazakhstan”, 2015). Inclusive schools offer a two-level support model based on the student's needs. There is a tutor whose main task is to provide physical support to the child helping him or her to move around and making sure that the child feels confident in the classroom and in the school. In addition, some children with disabilities require a tutor familiar with special needs education methodologies.
  
- 2) **special schools**. Just like in Ireland, each special school is designed for teaching children with a specific type of disability (National Center for Educational Statistics and Evaluation, 2014). In Kazakhstan, there are:
  - 3 schools for blind children;
  - 7 schools for visually impaired children;
  - 10 schools for deaf children;
  - 9 schools for hearing impaired children;
  - 9 schools for children with speech impairments;
  - 3 schools for children with disorders of the musculoskeletal system;

- 47 schools for children with mental retardation;
- 14 schools for children with developmental delay.

There are 102 special schools in the Republic of Kazakhstan at the moment.

However, the types of special schools in Kazakhstan and Ireland are different. In the Republic of Kazakhstan, there are no special schools for children with autism and autistic spectrum disorders, emotional and behavioral problems, and complex disabilities, although their existence is stipulated by the law.

3) **special classes** at regular schools. There are 1,219 of them in Kazakhstan. However, unlike children in Ireland, students in special classes in Kazakhstan do not get any additional support in the form of tutors.

4) **general education (regular) schools** are open to children without severe disabilities. There are 7,307 regular schools in Kazakhstan at the moment. There is no additional support there as well.

5) **home-based education** can be advised based on the results of the psychological, medical and educational evaluation when a child cannot attend school for a long time for health reasons.

It should also be noted that in Ireland there are various development and care centres for children of different ages with SEN, such as Holy Angels Day Care Centre, Carlow and The Delta Centre, Carlow.

Holy Angels Day Care Centre in Carlow is currently attended by 35 children with special needs/multiple disabilities aged 2 to 6. It caters for children with range of disabilities such as Down Syndrome, Cerebral Palsy, Spinal Bifida, Autism and rarer conditions such as Pierre Robin Syndrome, Wagr Syndrome and Rhett Syndrome. There are 22 employees. The list of services provided includes hydrotherapy, physiotherapy, occupational therapy, speech and language therap.

The Delta Centre in Carlow caters for adults with special needs who are over 18 years of age who may have congenital or acquired physical or intellectual disabilities. The Centre has a vocational school, after which people with disabilities can proceed to the further education level. There is also a Community Employment Scheme through which 60 people have been employed in supportive roles.

There are 17 rehabilitation centers in the Republic of **Kazakhstan** where children receive complex rehabilitation treatment: diagnosis, treatment, counseling, sessions with special needs education specialists (speech therapists, psychologists, ergotherapists, play therapists, music therapists, specialists in therapeutic exercises). However, children can stay there for 1 month only.

There are private centres for children with disabilities, including ASDs. However, there are very few of them.

There are no care centers or post-school training centers for people with disabilities aged over 18.

## 5. Support

In Ireland, children with SEN can get support depending on their needs.

The **Visiting Teacher Service** is available for children with impaired hearing and vision from the moment they contact the service and until they reach third level education/higher education. This service provides advice and support to pre-school children and their parents, support and monitoring during the school period; it works with parents, teachers and other specialists; advises the State Examination Commission on applications regarding provision of special conditions for children with SEN during the state exams; advises on the need of support at third level.

**SNAs (special needs assistants)** are allocated to schools by the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) to facilitate the inclusion of children with SEN in the educational process. SNAs primary objective is providing care: helping with activities like clothing, feeding, personal care and mobility / orientation. Allocation of SNAs is based on individual applications and depends on several criteria. To qualify for an SNA support, students' disability and need for care must be confirmed documentally. A report from a psychologist or occupational therapist is required. The number of SNAs is determined by stage budgets.

Each school also has a **Learning Support Service**. Learning support teachers work with children with milder leaning needs or mild special educational needs, such as dyslexia. Learning support teachers are assigned to children who have learning difficulties (academic needs).

Additional resource teaching hours may be allocated by SENO (Special Educational Needs Organiser). The number of allocated hours depends on the type of disability. A **resource teacher** is a qualified teacher whose task is to provide additional educational support to students with SEN who have been fully integrated into mainstream schools.

Inclusive education in **Kazakhstan** is at a very early stage of its development at the moment. Children with SEN can get additional support only in inclusive schools, the number of which remains low. Depending on their specific needs, 2 tutors can be allocated per child: one as a care assistant and one for specific activities (e.g. a visual impairment specialist).

Other children with SEN who attend special classes and general education (regular) schools are deprived of any additional educational support.

Funding originates from the state, both in Ireland and Kazakhstan. Teachers do not receive any additional payments for having children with SEN in their classes and working with them.

## 6. Training of teachers for working with children with SEN

The EPSEN Act passed in Ireland in 2004 provides for a mandatory additional training for teachers and additional resources. For example, it is not recommended that current teachers who have not undergone additional training draw up individual educational plans (IEP).

The training of future teachers for working with children with SEN starts at a college or university. They study a compulsory module on special education and work with special education teachers during their practical training period.

There are various forms of professional development for teachers working with children with SEN in Ireland: distance learning, online learning, face-to-face programmes, short seminars.

All interviewees noted the high quality of the courses offered by SESS (Special Education Support Service). This organisation provides a wide range of services to schools and teachers working with children with SEN.

The following institutions are responsible for training teachers to work in the system of inclusive education in the Republic of **Kazakhstan**:

1) National Scientific and Practical Centre for Special Education;  
 2) Center for Social Adaptation and Vocational Rehabilitation of Children and Adolescents with Mental and Physical Development Disorders which:

- offers short-term training courses for professionals working in the field of special education: disability specialists, speech therapists, teachers working with oligophrenic children, teachers of persons who are hearing impaired or visually impaired, psychologists and social care teachers;

- refresher courses for teachers with higher pedagogical education working or wishing to work in special and inclusive education (duration of courses is 1 year) (Center for Social Adaptation and Vocational Rehabilitation of Children and Adolescents with Mental and Physical Development Disorders, n.d.).

3) School for Everyone PEF (Public Educational Foundation) which developed a course in Fundamentals of Inclusive Education for pedagogical higher education institutions (HEIs) in 2013. This course focuses on theoretical foundations of inclusive education, problems of creating a learning environment, strategies for adaptation and modification of teaching and learning in inclusive education.

It should be **noted** that the existing teacher training programmes have no special course aimed at preparing future teachers for working with various categories of children with SEN in the system of inclusive education.



## 7. Higher education

In Ireland, there are special schemes designed to provide access to higher education for children with SEN called DARE (Disability Access Route to Education) and HEAR (Higher Education Access Route). These schemes allow students with disabilities (DARE) or from socio-economically disadvantaged families (HEAR) to enter colleges and universities.

It should be noted that there is a National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education for 2015-2019 where specific targets are outlined for the national system of higher education. One of those targets is 5 % participation for students with disabilities in full- time undergraduate programmes. This target has been achieved at DIT.

Students also get support after admission. Universities and colleges have special units for supporting students with disabilities (e.g., Disability Support Service at DIT, Access Centre at UCD). Members of these units make reasonable accommodations for students with SEN, so that they could learn equally with other students. Having registered with the disability service, students get support with academic skills. Working individually or within groups, students learn note-taking skills, effective reading strategies, organisational and research skills, time management and examination preparation skills.

Moreover, there are assistive technology officers who provide such students with the equipment and software necessary in learning, and teach them how to use the allocated resources effectively.

Irish universities and colleges have the necessary infrastructure, equipment and staff for teaching students with SEN and disabilities.

In the Republic of **Kazakhstan**, there is an admission quota of 0.5 percent for children with disabilities in categories 1 and 2 entering institutions of higher education (“Social support for persons with disabilities”, 2015). 680 people entered higher education institutions under this quota from 2012 to 2014, with another 1,146 disabled persons entering organization of technical and vocational education during the same period (“Barrier-free learning environment’, 2014). Colleges and universities have no disability support services or assistive technologies officers.

Only 2 private HEIs in Kazakhstan have a barrier-free access: D. Kunayev Eurasian Academy of Law and the International Business Academy. Such HEIs as S. Toraihyrov Pavlodar State University, Ye. Buketov Karaganda State University, and Taraz State Pedagogical Institute only partially provide barrier-free access.

## 8. Conclusion

A comparative analysis of inclusive education systems based on such criteria as types of educational institutions for children with SEN, their support, and training of teachers to work in inclusive education has shown that children with SEN in the Republic of Kazakhstan have limited access to quality education. The main factors impeding children's access to quality education are the shortage of well-trained teaching staff, poor accessibility of school, college and university buildings, lack of individualised training models and programs, and absence of support services for students with SEN at different levels of education.

A legislative basis for teaching children with SEN and disabilities which complies with international documents in the field of education of children with SEN has been formed in Kazakhstan. A goal has been set to raise the number of inclusive schools to 70 percent by the year 2020. However, in Kazakhstan, there is no specific document on inclusive education, like the EPSEN Act in Ireland. It is necessary to establish a clear system of inclusive education determining functional responsibilities of each member organisation and employees.

It is necessary to establish and develop care centers and support services for children with SEN that would be able to support them from birth and throughout their lives, especially children with autism spectrum disorders; it is also important to study modern methodologies of working with various categories of children with SEN, adapt them to the realities of Kazakhstan's education system and use them in Kazakhstani HEIs.

There is no system of post-school education for children with SEN in Kazakhstan.

Ireland can be a great example of a child-centered model of inclusive education for Kazakhstan and other developing countries.

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