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Institute for Democratic Initiatives

SITUATION OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN AZERBAIJAN

RESEARCH PAPER



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SUMMARY

The reports of various state structures show different figures of children under the age of 18 with disabilities, who are receiving allowance. According to the Statistics Committee, this number was 71934 in the beginning of 2017, while the Ministry of Education figures claim 65482 persons. While in 2005-2009 268 persons were engaged in inclusive education, in 2015-2017 only 40 pupils were engaged in inclusive education in experimental classes of pilot schools.

Within the framework of the Development Program of the Republic of Azerbaijan on Organizing of Education of Children Requiring Special Care (with disabilities) (2005-2009) 3 pilot projects were carried out through support of international and local non-governmental organizations. In connection with this in 2004-2005 14 schools and 13 pre-schools applied inclusive education.

The figures demonstrate that, 77% of children with disabilities are not engaged in inclusive education or any education at all. This is the direct violation of the right to education of these children and accountability on causes and solutions of this problem of the relevant structures responsible for the problem is very important.

Pre-school facilities and schools, where inclusive education is applied, are very small in number in comparison to a quantity of children with disabilities. Especially, parents of children with disabilities in the regions have significant problems with access to institutions, which can provide education for their children. Because of such problems parents prefer homeschooling. According to the interviews with parents, whose children study at home, teachers do not approach homeschooling responsibly.

Other problems in this sphere are absence of special programs, textbooks, assesment methods for children getting inclusive education, lack of state sponsored centers for extra-curricular activity, absence of database on children with disabilities, projects and programs covering inclusive higher education.

Inclusive education is important for building of knowledge and skills of children and necessary for their self realization in the future. It is not accidental that, number of children with disabilities engaged in inclusive education is numerous times higher than numbers of children engaged in other forms of education.

The main principles of inclusive education are the following:

- a student staying with his family
- close cooperation with a parent
- existence of a personalized development-education plan.

The main aim of inclusive education is to integrate these children into social life by studying altogether, but applying programs of personal development and education for everyone, but adapted to the needs. Since all of these are important issues for development, self realization and future of a child, implementers of the State Program and projects shall be resolute in their will to make serious changes in this sphere.

The aim of this research is to study the general situation with inclusive education and attitude towards it in Azerbaijan, reveal problems and prepare relevant recommendations.

1. INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education is a globally widespread education practice, which creates conditions for exercise of right to education, for integration of children with disabilities into society. Children with disabilities face endless problems for equal participation in the society together with the rest. A right to education, which is a guarantee of their potential effective participation in various spheres of the society especially for them, is either inexistent or carried out in a poor quality. Although various projects supported by state and non-governmental organisations have been held in our country on inclusive education since 2005, it is impossible to say that, there has been a significant progress. Such problems mainly arise in economically developing countries. Access of a child to education is not ensured on a level required by law.

*The article 5 of the Law on Education*¹ ensures opportunity for education and prevents discrimination, not depending on health condition of a person.

The article 24 (on education of children) of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities adopted in 2006 by the UN identifies that, the States Parties shall ensure the right of persons with disabilities to education on the basis of equal opportunity, and an inclusive education system at all levels and lifelong learning. Persons with disabilities are members of the society having the same rights and enjoy the same rights and freedoms as others.

In a survey held among parents of 250 children with disabilities in 2011 the respondents (81% of parents of children of the age of 0-9, 83% of parents of children of the age of 10-15) stated that, their health problems are from birth.² This information shows that, early intervention is important for elimination of disabilities of children. There are programs of early intervention to prevent disabilities in the world.³

UAFAs has implemented such programs in Azerbaijan in Baku, Khachmaz, Ganja, Bilasuvar, Jalilabad by organizing experimental kindergartens in public rehabilitations centers and teaching pre-school education programs. Along with that, the National Action Program on Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2014-2018)⁴ mentioned early detection of disability and ensuring of early intervention to prevent or mitigate the degree of disability among its main aims, but no information was found on carried out activities.

The issue is that, meeting of needs and integration to society of children with disability is mainly on parents in Azerbaijan. Whereas by law the main responsibility lies with the state. According to the 2006 Law on Special Education Service of Turkey, the Ministry of Education and its local offices follow a child for 6 years, if it is concluded that, he/she has a disability from birth, and attempts to provide a child with an education program relevant to him/her. Here the main aim is to provide a child with an inclusive education. Also the work is done to ensure that, children with disabilities study together with their peers, who do not have health problems. It is worth noting that, in Turkey majority of children with disabilities are engaged in inclusive education.⁵

¹ <http://edu.gov.az/az/page/72/302>

² http://www.undp.org/content/dam/azerbaijan/docs/sustain_development/AZ_Disabilities_Report_Eng.pdf

³ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/1713898>

⁴ <http://www.mlsp.gov.az/az/pages/280>

⁵ http://cesd.az/new/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/CESD_EU_Policy_Paper_Education.pdf

The main principles of inclusive education consist of a pupil staying with his/her family, close cooperation with parents and preparation of a personal development and education plan. Since all of these are important issues for development, self realization and future of a child, implementers of the State Program and projects shall be resolute in their will to make serious changes in this sphere.

2. METHODOLOGY

In order to assess the current situation on persons with disabilities national and international legislation on persons with disabilities was studied, reports of national and international organizations describing general situation with persons with disabilities, the report of the government on protection of rights of children with disabilities to the relevant Committee of the UN, recommendations of the Committee to the government, the state programs and projects on children with disabilities were researched, information in the media was monitored, surveys and interviews with parents of homeschooling children and those receiving inclusive education were conducted. It was not allowed for parents of children receiving inclusive education to have interviews by school administration; an email was sent from the website of the Baku City Education Department to the head of the department to request permission, but no answer was received. It was possible to conduct surveys with parents of children with disabilities receiving inclusive education or studying at home through information disseminated on social networks on the conducted research. Gathered information was assessed through analysis-sinthesys and comparative analysis methods and it was attempted to come to conclusions.

The assessment of situation on inclusive education in the report was carried out based on existence, possibility, acceptability and adaptability categories.

3. ASSESSMENT OF SITUATION

3.1. Description of the Problem

The UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights has a provision on right to education of all people. As a result of a global conference called Education for All; Meeting Basic Learning Needs held in 1990 an issue of children not having access to education in a large number of countries was raised. This initiative helped to gain more attention for children, who did not have an opportunity to study due to openly having difficulties with receiving education or who were away from attention within the education system. Inclusive education ensures equal right of education for both healthy and disabled, which serves protection of social equality, provision of education and other needs of disabled children. The first official document on inclusive education signed by a large number of countries was the Salamanca Statement. This statement was adopted in 1994 with participation of 92 states.

According to the article 25 of the Constitution, persons with disabilities can enjoy all the rights and carry all the duties enshrined in the Constitution, apart from those rights and duties, exercise of which can be difficult due to their limited capabilities.

According to the article 42 of the Constitution, the system of education is under the state control. Inclusive education is important for healthy adaptation of both healthy children and children with disabilities in the society.

Programs and projects implemented in the country

The Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan on Education (Special education) of Persons with Disabilities was adopted in 2001 for the purpose of ensuring of a right to education of children with disabilities. The Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan on Education was adopted in 2009. But neither of these laws have any provisions on inclusive education.

The first project on inclusive education was held by the World Vision organization starting with the 2004-2005 education year as a pilot project called Children in Need of Special Care: Positions, Experiences and Policy. Within the framework of the project various trainings and seminars were held for education workers attracted to inclusive education, globally available new education technologies were tested in Azerbaijan. Within the project 164 children requiring special care were engaged in inclusive education. Within the framework of the project in 2004-2009 trainings, mini-seminars and other events were held for 500 primary school teachers, tutors of pre-school institutions, 20 school directors and other personnel. Trainings were also organized for parents, administrators, university lecturers, experts working in social sphere, psychologists, doctors, defectologists and logopedists during the implementation of the pilot project. Methodical manuals were prepared for teachers, parents, children, experts on special education, workers of higher education facilities, public and experts implementing the project, a number of foreign books were translated and published in line with the aims of the project.⁶

Within the framework of the Development Program of the Republic of Azerbaijan on Organizing of Education of Children Requiring Special Care (with disabilities) (2005-2009)⁷ 3 pilot projects were carried out through support of international and local non-governmental organizations. In connection with this in 2004-2005 school year 14 schools and 13 pre-schools applied inclusive education. Throughout the period of implementaton of the project 268 children with disabilities were engaged in inclusive education.⁸

The article 35 of the *Law on Children's Rights of 2012* provides right to education for children with disabilities.⁹

The article 1.2.4 of the *2013 Decree of the President on the State Strategy of Education Development in the Republic of Azerbaijan*¹⁰ envisages preparation of inclusive training programs and development for children requiring special care. Issues such as preparation of training methodology, application of optimal inclusive education models for ensuring of opportunities for social adaptation, provision of targeted additional education in connection with inclusive education in pre-school and school facilities etc. are reflected in this Decree.

⁶ <http://www.anl.az/down/meqale/525/2010/fevral/106927.htm>

⁷ <http://www.e-qanun.az/framework/7421>

⁸ Azərbaycan Respublikası Təhsil Nazirliyinə Azərbaycan Respublikasında xüsusi qayğıya ehtiyacı olan (sağlamlıq imkanları məhdud) uşaqların təhsilinin təşkili üzrə İNKİŞAF PROQRAMI (2005-2009-cu illər) göndərilmiş rəsmi sorğuya cavabda göstərilmiş məlumat <https://www.dropbox.com/sh/kytjs0975diqqpm/AAA5cvtVwkjwVRUbuze7yFZTa?dl=0>

⁹ <http://www.e-qanun.az/framework/3292>

¹⁰ <http://www.president.az/articles/9779>

Within the framework of cooperation of the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Azerbaijan and UNICEF work done in connection with inclusive education and international practice on this were analyzed in 2015.

According to the 311 order of the Ministry of Education of 18 March 2015 the implementation of the Application of Inclusive Education at Primary School Level project, the project envisages updating of rules on engaging of children with disabilities to education, application of new methods in the sphere of special education, creation of new services for children with disabilities at schools. In order to engage children with disabilities to education at schools activities to prepare inclusive education model at primary education level in Azerbaijan were launched, action plan and road map was prepared.

Two experimental schools (220 and 138) in 2015-2016 education years and two schools 252 and 202) in 2016-2017 were chosen in Baku. Within the framework of the Application of Inclusive Education at Primary School Level project 40 children with disabilities were engaged in inclusive education in 2015-2017 in Baku.

In August, September, 2015 professors of the German University of Oldenburg conducted two weeks training for primary school teachers and administrative workers of two chosen schools. For a week they were in Germany for exchange of experience. Since 2016 the experts of the Ministry of Education continued capacity building of teachers of pilot schools in the sphere of special education. New assesment methods applied on international level for preparation of personal education plans for children with disabilities were acquired and applied. Logopedic service was established at pilot facilities. Along with that, repair works were held at schools for the purpose of relevant changes to school infrastructure.¹¹

*The Law on Pre-school education (2014)*¹² covers the issue of inclusive education as well. The article 3 of this Law explains the main principles of the state policy on pre-school education and the article 3.0.1 envisages provision of equal opportunities at pre-school level, which is in line with the recommendations of the Salamanca Statement. The article 3.0.6 of the Law openly states the principle of organizing of inclusive education for children with disabilities.

In 2017 the *State Program on development of inclusive education for persons with disabilities in the Republic of Azerbaijan in 2018-2024* was approved.

*The Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities*¹³ was adopted by the UN General Assembly on 13 December 2006 and Optional Protocol¹⁴ of this document came into force on 3 May 2008.

Both documents were ratified by the 2 October 2008 decision and came into force on 28 January 2009. The government of Azerbaijan presented its first report on the aforementioned Convention at the 125th and 126th meetings of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities on 1-2 April 2014. The next report shall be presented no later than 28 February 2019.

¹¹ http://muallim.edu.az/content/?category=arxiv&issue=12-2017&content_id=30

¹² https://azertag.az/xeber/Mektebeqeder_tehsil_haqqinda_Azərbaycan_Respublikasının_Qanunu-1071133

¹³ <http://www.mlspp.gov.az/az/pages/263>

¹⁴ <http://www.udpo.az/read.php?lang=1&content=1016>

Member states shall report on work done with regards to the following issues: education opportunities at all levels for children with disabilities; number of boys and girls with disabilities at pre-school and other levels; textbooks; legal and other measures taken to ensure creation of a required space for education of disabled persons; existence of special knowledge and training services for sign language, Braille, heightened and alternative communication, movement; measures aimed at promotion of language skills for persons with hearing impairment; situation with engaging of education workers to relevant training; quantity and proportion of students with disabilities and their specialities; measures carried out for ensuring of lifelong access to education; measures carried out for early determining of persons with disabilities and their educational needs.¹⁵

In its 2014 report the government of Azerbaijan presented its information on legislation in connection with the right to education of the Convention (article 24), its implementation and implementation of state programs.¹⁶

Country reports at international organizations

The relevant UN Committee presented 57 paragraph final recommendations on 10 April 2014 on the first report of our country in connection with the aforementioned Convention. The following were recommended in connection with the right to education and necessity to add relevant information to the next report: concern was raised with regards to continuing enrolling of children with disabilities in special boarding schools and other specialized schools; it was recommended to ensure supporting technology and support in classrooms, relevant and specialised education materials and programs at schools providing inclusive education and other educational facilities, along with increasing endeavour to ensure corresponding school atmosphere; necessity to allocate sufficient financial and human resources for implementation of the State Program on Inclusive Education; quality training for teachers with disabilities and other teachers in Braille and sign language; increasing of endeavour on improving of education of all children with disabilities, including boys and girls with impaired and weak hearing; research on effectiveness of the inclusive education program and whether the standarts of accessibility are on a necessary level; information on education year, gender, disability, number of inclusive schools engaged in education of children with disabilities by district.

The Committee has recommended Azerbaijan:

- to hasten creation of database,
- to organize gathering, analysis and dissemination of information on gender, age, disability, districts,
- to prepare indicators based on gender and age for the purpose of justifying changes made to the legislation and preparing of a policy in the relevant sphere and ensuring of institutional development, along with being able to conduct monitoring and reporting on achieved progress in application of various provisions of the Convention, taking into consideration that medical approach to disabilities have changed into human rights based approach.¹⁷

¹⁵ <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/CRPD/Pages/ConventionRightsPersonsWithDisabilities.aspx>

¹⁶ <http://www.mlspp.gov.az/az/pages/18/50>

¹⁷ <https://www.dropbox.com/sh/kytjs0975diqqpm/AAA5cytVwkjwVRUbuze7yFZTa?dl=0>

3.2. Analysis of the Problem

According to the figures of the Statistics Committee, a number of children with disabilities under the age of 18 receiving allowance was 71934 in early 2017. A number of children with disabilities studying at special schools, boarding schools, along with classes organized for children with disabilities was 6377 in 2016-2017. According to this information,

- 3237 study at special schools,
- 2612 study at special boarding schools,
- 528 study in classes for children with disabilities at regular schools.¹⁸

According to the Ministry of Education¹⁹, there are 65482 children with disabilities in the country. Of them:

- 9355 are homeschooled,
- 2558 study at special schools,
- 2725 study at special boarding schools.

Difference in a number of children in two sources is an obvious indicator of absence of unified database for children with disabilities. While in 2005-2009 268 persons were engaged in inclusive education, in 2015-2017 only 40 pupils were engaged in inclusive education in experimental classes of pilot schools. In general, within the framework of the State Program joint projects with international organizations were realized at schools 220, 138, 202 and 252 in Baku. Along with that, the schools 4 and 11 of Sumgayit and schools in Yevlakh and Mingachevir applied inclusive education.

The figures demonstrate that, majority of children with disabilities are not only not engaged in inclusive education, they are not engaged in education at all. This is a direct violation of right to education of these children.

Pre-school facilities and schools applying inclusive education in our country is significantly lower in number in comparison with a number of children with disabilities. Especially in the regions parents of children with disabilities have serious problems with access to facilities, which can provide education for their children. Due to problems with that respect, parents prefer homeschooling. Interviews with parents of homeschooling children show that, teachers mainly approach homeschooling irresponsibly.

According to the *Development Program of the Republic of Azerbaijan on Organizing of Education of Children Requiring Special Care (with disabilities) (2005-2009)*, although satisfactory conditions had to be created for children with disabilities, within the period of implementation of the program the aims were almost not met. "The program has determined measures for each facility for the purpose of improving infrastructure and educational base for children requiring special care. These measures envisage construction of additional units, classrooms and additional rooms, sports rooms, establishment of rehabilitation rooms, purchase of sports equipment for medical treatment, gym facilities, computer facilities, technical training tools, listening tools, wheelchairs, transportation means etc."²⁰

¹⁸ Responce from the State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan for the inquiry

<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/kytjs0975diqqpm/AAA5cytVwkjwVRUbuze7yFZTa?dl=0>

¹⁹ https://azertag.az/xeber/2018_2024_cu_illerde_Azərbaycan_Respublikasında_saglamliq_imkanlari_mehdud_sexslər_uchun_in_klüziv_tehsilin_inkisafi_uzre_DOVLAT_PROQRAMI-1121083

²⁰ <http://www.e-qanun.az/framework/7421>

Development Program of the Republic of Azerbaijan on Organizing of Education of Children Requiring Special Care (with disabilities) (2005-2009), has the following aims:

- provision of right to education for children requiring special care, ensuring of equal conditions for education for all children in this category;
- realization of integration to inclusive training;
- establishment of equal opportunities for education for all children;
- strengthening of social protection of children under state custody;
- registration of all children requiring special care of all categories in line with a corresponding classification and engage them in education;
- adaptation of material-technical and educational base of special educational facilities to modern standards.

In 2017 the *State Program on development of inclusive education for persons with disabilities in the Republic of Azerbaijan in 2018-2024* adopted on 4 December 2017 similar aims are envisaged. The aims are the following:²¹

- development of normative legal acts to ensure right to inclusive education at all levels for persons with disabilities,
- conduct of measures for adaptation of educational facilities and programs to needs of persons with disabilities,
- preparation of educational personnel or engaging them in additional education for organizing of education of persons with disabilities,
- creation of database of persons with disabilities, who have been engaged in inclusive education,
- conduct of promotion and public education together with relevant state structures on engaging of persons to disabilities to education and necessity of their social integration.²²

It is evident from repeated aims that, implementation of adopted State Programs is not carried out in a sufficient manner. Monitoring on achievement of aims is not carried out and most importantly the society is not informed about the results of the Program

The 2005-2009 State Program notes that, “number of children benefiting from education-training at special education facilities (5535 persons) does not reflect the real situation in the country. The research shows that, the number of children requiring special care is about 20000 and only 27,6% of them are enrolled in educational facilities.²³ Registration of these children and their engagement in education is one of the main aims of this program and is very important. According to the program adopted for 2018-2024, there are 65482 children with disabilities in the country, 9355 are engaged in homeschooling, 2558 are enrolled in special schools, while 2725 are enrolled in special boarding schools. Simple calculation demonstrates that, currently 22,3% of children with disabilities are engaged in education in our country. This means that, during the past 13 years engagement of children with disabilities to education has not increased, on the contrary it has decreased. Despite the fact that, the 2005-2009 Development Program mentioned such issues as application of modern monitoring and assessment mechanisms in education facilities, preparation of new education plans and programs, textbooks and educational materials for special education facilities as “expected outcomes”, the same aims were mentioned

²¹ https://azertag.az/xeber/2018_2024_cu_illerde_Azərbaycan_Respublikasında_saglamliq_imkanlari_mehdud_sexslər_uchun_in_klüzivinklüziv_tehsilin_inkisafi_uzre_DOVLAT_PROQRAMI-1121083

²² https://azertag.az/xeber/2018_2024_cu_illerde_Azərbaycan_Respublikasında_saglamliq_imkanlari_mehdud_sexslər_uchun_in_klüzivinklüziv_tehsilin_inkisafi_uzre_DOVLAT_PROQRAMI-1121083

²³ <http://www.e-qanun.az/framework/7421>

in the 2018-2024 development program as well, which demonstrates that, not much has been done.

The article 4.0.4 of the *2018-2014 Program* notes that, “database of persons with disabilities engaged in inclusive education will be created”. This database was one of the main aims of the 2005-2009 Program and it was supposed to be realized.

Absence of a special law on inclusive education, its elements being reflected in various laws and decrees shows that, the state does not have a unified strategy on inclusive education.

It is not possible to claim that, implementation mechanisms on inclusive education are sufficiently effective. There are objective and subjective reasons for that. First of all, lack of information of implementers of policy on inclusive education, or weak understanding of essence of inclusive education, inability of the state to create an effective implementation mechanism or being uninterested in creation of such a mechanism, weak role of civil society in creation of these implementation mechanisms still exist as problems.

Legislation on inclusive education not being adopted clearly affects implementation mechanisms. Implementers lack authority arising from sufficient legislation. At first a legislation shall be adopted, then the President shall adopt a decree on development program and the adopted legislation shall be the base of this development program. Development Programs adopted in absence of legislation become imitative.

Whereas in Europe a number of children with disabilities engaged in inclusive education is more than 60%, only 268 children were engaged in inclusive education by the 2005-2009 Development Program.²⁴ This is by taking into account that, it was claimed by the state structures that, there were up to 20000 children with disabilities. The fact that, only 268 of them were engaged in inclusive education is a serious problem. Also the practice shows that, children, who are supposed to be engaged in inclusive education, are engaged in “homeschooling” based on the opinions of the “psychological-medical-educational” commissions.

Although since 2004 some work has been done on inclusive education, the small quantity of news in the media on engagement of children with disabilities in inclusive education in 2004-2017 demonstrates lack of attention and knowledge on this topic. The main goal of the implemented projects was creation of equal opportunities for joint education for all children with disabilities, but the number of children engaged in education is significantly lower than a number of children not getting education.

According to the information of the Ministry of Education, there are 65482 children with disabilities and 14886 of them are engaged in education. This means violation of a right to education of the remaining 77% of children with disabilities.

Lack of accuracy of the database on children with disabilities or of conducted reports cause difference in numbers of children with disabilities presented by various state structures. The inquiries sent for clarification of the issue are either left without response or get irrelevant responses. Besides the State Statistics Committee, it was not easy to get responses from other

²⁴ <http://tohumotizm.org.tr/sites/default/files/kcfinder/files/4.pdf>

structures. The Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of Population responded with a completely irrelevant response, while the Ministry of Healthcare did not respond at all. An inquiry was sent to the Baku City Executive Authority to receive information on kindergartens applying inclusive education within the framework of the State Program on Children with Disabilities, along with the personal meeting to explain the aim of the inquiry, but it was not possible to receive an answer.

- If the situation is evaluated within the framework of category of existence, a number of schools proposing inclusive education is significantly lower than a number of children with disabilities;
- Despite the fact that, the Committee for Protection of Rights of Persons with Disabilities expressed concern in connection with the form of homeschooling, the obligations taken in accordance with the Convention are not observed in a sufficient manner;
- The draft of the State Program on development of inclusive education for persons with disabilities in the Republic of Azerbaijan in 2018-2024 was approved after 3 years and the voids in implementation process and lack of accountability prevents significant progress;
- The accurate database of children with disabilities engaged in inclusive education covering the whole country is still absent. Various websites present various numbers of children engaged in inclusive education after referring to the Ministry of Education.^{25 26}

Surprising issue is that, the 2014 article have similar figures with the 2017 statistics on a number of children receiving education at home and at special schools.^{27 28} Inquiries were addressed to various state structures to clarify questions in connection with these questions, but it was not possible to clarify a number of children with disabilities in Baku and in each region. Therefore, it was attempted to receive these figures through alternative means.

According to the information on a number of schools providing inclusive education and engaging children with disabilities in education in Imishli, Bilasuvar, Ganja and Shaki, there are officially no inclusive education schools, but there are children with disabilities studying in regular schools.

For example, there are 1268 registered children with disabilities in **Imishli**, 617 of them are over the age of 7; 50 of them receive relevant treatment at a rehabilitation center through support of the Social Protection Foundation. 180 children are homeschooling, the rest are registered as receiving education at regular schools. Textbooks are the same as for healthy children. The fact that, there is officially not a single inclusive school in Imishli demonstrates that, these children are registered at these schools on paper and are either not going to school, or suffer at schools lacking special conditions for children with disabilities. Inclusive education requires important conditions such as a psychologist, a teacher and an assistant teacher with experience of working with children with disabilities, changes in school infrastructure (ramp, restrooms and sportsrooms) being provided. In the regions sometimes for the sake of family and neighbor

²⁵ <https://report.az/elm-ve-tehsil/azerbaycanda-50-mine-yaxin-elil-usaq-tehsilden-kenar-qalib/>

²⁶ <http://qaynarinfo.az/az/mektebde-tehsil-ala-bilmeyen-sagirdlerin-en-byuk-problemi/>

²⁷ <http://anl.az/down/meqale/express/2014/novabr/404630.htm>

²⁸ https://azertag.az/xeber/2018_cu_illerde_Azərbaycan_Respublikasında_saglamliq_imkanlari_mehdud_sexslər_uchun_in_klüzivinklüziv_tehsilin_inkisafi_uzre_DOVLAT_PROQRAMI-1121083

relations in order to do a “favour” for a child with disability, his/her participation at classes is not insisted on.

Parents of children with disabilities in **Ganja** were contacted. Majority of parents, whose children suffer from cerebral paralysis, stated their unhappiness with homeschooling, noted that, teachers are not enthusiastic about teaching and expressed a wish that, their children would study at normal schools. But lack or absence of such schools nearby prevent their children from socializing. BBC’s story explains tough situation faced by aforementioned parents: “A parent Tofiq Gasimov has requested a number of state structures to ensure creation of conditions for education of his son Laig, but he was told that, such schools exist only in Baku. The family lacks finances for this.”²⁹

In regions close to the frontline **Tartar and Aghdam** no children are engaged in inclusive education. The main problem is considered to be irrelevance of infrastructure to children with disabilities and absence of specialists, who can teach children with disabilities. Since special education is absent in the regions, parents have to send their children to Baku.

*“300 children with disabilities have been engaged in inclusive education in 30 schools in Baku, Mingachevir, Yevlakh and Sumgayit during implementation of the State Programs. But the number of children dropped to 40 after the end of the project. Students get used to a totally different environment and suddenly the project is over and the student is forced to stay at home. This negatively affects psychology of a child.”*³⁰

Accessibility to education envisages economic and physical access to educational facilities without any discrimination. But majority of interviewed parents of children with disabilities stated to various school directors on numerous occasions that, they want their children to study at normal schools for their socialization despite all shortcomings and financial difficulties. Directors stated that, schools lacked conditions for that and refused to accept children to these schools.

According to the article 11 of the *Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan on Education (special education) of Persons with Disabilities*, persons with disabilities have a right to study at regular educational facilities having relevant conditions based on the decision of the psychological-medical-educational and medical-social expert commissions. Administrators of educational facilities are obliged to provide necessary assistance in the education process to persons with disabilities.³¹

Mere existence of educational facilities is not an indicator of a quality of education. According to the principle of physical possibility, children with disabilities shall have opportunities to receive education by using modern technologies. Creation of such opportunities in education process helps to improve quality of education. Although there are conditions in special schools for children in terms of textbooks and facilities, parents whose children study at inclusive schools complain of absence of special textbooks and facilities at inclusive schools. Another principle of inclusive education is existence of a personal development and education program. Learning capabilities of each person shall be taken into consideration through inclusive education and education shall be personalized to meet educational needs of each person. Since primary,

²⁹ <http://www.bbc.com/azeri/azerbaijan-41676259>

³⁰ <http://oc-media.org/children-with-disabilities-are-being-left-behind-in-azerbaijans-frontline-villages/>

³¹ <http://www.e-qanun.az/framework/4353>

secondary and high schools are for free in the country, education at public schools shall be free for children with disabilities as well.

In general, since health and rehabilitation expenses of children are high, since transportation and extracurricular for children at special, inclusive schools are not envisaged (the 2005-2009 Program envisaged transportation for special schools), education of children with disabilities is difficult for parent from economic perspectives. From this point of view, majority of parents, especially in the regions see homeschooling as an only choice. It is evident from the majority of children with disabilities engaged in education by the Ministry of Education being homeschooled (9355). Homeschooling is carried out in line with the Cabinet of Ministers Decision 77 of 10 May 2002, which approved the list of illnesses allowing homeschooling and the rules of conduct of homeschooling.³² All education departments of each district (city) has a psychological-medical-educational commissions. Students with disabilities having conditions (somatic, neurological, surgical, skin, psycho-neurological)³³ which allow them to be engaged in homeschooling based on the decision of this commission. According to the aforementioned rules, children with disabilities can be engaged in homeschooling or register to the mainstream schools located nearby their home and claim for home study education.

72% of interviewed parents complain about the absence of special textbooks at schools providing inclusive education, mention that, textbooks and programs are difficult for children and claim lack of any special methods of assesment of children receiving inclusive education. The Ministry of Education responded to the addressed inquiry in the following manner:

*“For the purpose of preparation of personal education plans for children with disabilities the aforementioned new assesment tools (methods) applied globally were taken from UNICEF, tests have been translated into Azerbaijani and their application has started. In order to approach the issue thoroughly reforms for upgrade of teachers for special education have been launched. New chair on correctional training was established at the Azerbaijan State Pedagogic University”.*³⁴

Accuracy of this information has been confirmed by relevant structures. Lack of knowledge of majority of parents on new assesment methods can be assessed as a weak conduct of enlightenment process.

Absence of educational personnel is one of the main obstacles for solution of problems with respect to inclusive education. Nevertheless, all interviewed parents stated their satisfaction with teachers of their children, expressed that, there has been a significant change in their children in comparison wih when they just started going to school. Parents unanimously support socialization, emphasize that, regular schools might have poor conditions, but studying together at regular schools with healthy children positively affects children with disabilities. Children befriending their classmates have a positive emotional influence on their children.

Experience of other countries on inclusive education shall be studied by our country and applied as soon as possible. Education for children with disabilities shall be carried out in accordance

³² <https://www.dropbox.com/sh/kytjs0975diqqpm/AAA5cytVwkjwVRUbuze7yFZTa?dl=0>

³³ <http://www.e-qanun.az/framework/1724>

³⁴ <https://www.dropbox.com/sh/kytjs0975diqqpm/AAA5cytVwkjwVRUbuze7yFZTa?dl=0>

with global educational standards. The right to education of children, whose right to education was violated, shall be restored by the state.

It is regretful that, the legislation of Azerbaijan still has the term “mental defect” and there are only provisions on meeting of medical needs of children with disabilities. Medical model focuses on the condition of a person rather than his/her needs. Such approach causes low expectations and persons lose freedom of choice and independence over control of their life. Since a traditional medical model does not explain personal disability experience of persons with disabilities and does not help development of ways of living together, persons with disabilities developed a social model of disability in the world. According to the social model, disabilities emerge not as a result of difference of people, but due to incorrect composition of a society, which put emphasize on these differences. This approach seeks ways of eliminating of factors limiting life choices of persons with disabilities. Constraints are not just physical. Attitude in the society is commonly based on bias and stereotypes and prevents them from having equal opportunities in the society. If these constraints are eliminated, then persons with disabilities would be independent and equal in opportunities of choice and managing of their own life.

4. CONCLUSION

The first worrying shortcoming in connection with children with disabilities is insufficiency of legislative base. As mentioned in the report, there are a number of provisions on inclusive education in the law, but absence of a law on inclusive education shows that, the state lacks composite approach to this issue.

One of the main aims of the 2005-2009 Development Programs was creation of a unified database on children with disabilities, which regrettably has not been achieved. The global practice envisages early detection of health problems in children with disabilities and they are permanently contacted. Afterwards each child is provided with school education in accordance to his/her problem. This enables children to develop their skills and knowledge better.

In Azerbaijan very limited work has been done on pre-school education of children with disabilities, not even talking about inclusive education. This prevents categorization of children with disabilities by state structures at further stages. Since inclusive education is a new concept for our country, various misunderstandings take place for both state structure and the society. On some occasions parents are against their children studying together with children engaged in inclusive education.

On the other hand, parents of children engaged in inclusive education are uncomfortable with their children studying with healthy children and mention that, they are embarrassed with insufficiency of their children. The reason for all this is absence of education work by the state in this issue. Social videos, news and information on inclusive is very rare on television, radio and media.

Since the society lacks sufficient information on inclusive education, the process of development of personnel becomes considerably slower. It is evident that, in our country majority of persons seeking university education choose majors through direction of their parents and surroundings.

Under such circumstances, if an applicant seeks studying a major unknown to parents and the society, there will not be much support. Therefore, the state shall declare such spheres to be a priority, engage in additional promotion and attract attention of applicants by proposing stipends.

There are few pre-school and school facilities sufficient for inclusive education in the regions. There are some regions which do not have them at all. Under such circumstances, they have to engage in homeschooling. Since there is no special control over homeschooling, the quality of its conduct is under suspicion.

If all of this is summarized, the report explains in detail that, the state's attitude towards inclusive education is untransparent, the society is not sufficiently informed about the topic, sufficient personnel and textbooks are not prepared, such important aspects as legislation and database has not been formed yet.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

We consider conduct of the following measures for organizing of inclusive education in line with the national legislation and international standards necessary:

1. Legal base identifying a social model of disabilities, legislation on inclusive education shall be established and an intensive action plan shall be prepared.
2. Unified database shall be created to identify children with disabilities engaged in education and being left out, their health, rehabilitation, education development shall be monitored, if time reveals that, the program is not relevant to a child, there shall be an interference.
3. Throughout the country, including the regions, inclusive pre-schools and schools shall be established for children with disabilities, special conditions shall be created in those kindergartens and schools for children with disabilities (ramps shall be constructed, relevant changes shall be made to toilets and sportsrooms). Information about these inclusive kindergartens and schools shall be open to the public.
4. In order to transport children of parents with financial difficulties to inclusive schools transportation means shall be allocated.
5. Free early interference programs shall be implemented to prevent disabilities in children.
6. Quantity of state financed centers providing extra-curricular activities for children with disabilities shall be increased.
7. Special programs, textbooks and assesment methods shall be determined for children with disabilities receiving inclusive education.
8. Since for years inclusive education have covered only the primary school level, projects and programs in connection with education of children with disabilities, who are supposed to pass to secondary and high school levels, shall be implemented.

9. Action plan to engage children with disabilities in inclusive education at higher education levels shall be prepared.

10. Sufficient personnel able to work with children with disabilities shall be prepared, teachers already working with them shall be engaged to courses for capacity building and the issue of financially motivating them shall be taken into consideration.

11. Allowing use of foreign grants for inclusive education without registration (only by informing) shall help more intensive development of this sphere.

12. Public advocacy campaigns shall be held to inform the society on inclusive education; trainings for parents on inclusive education, programs and assesment methods shall be held for their education.

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