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ARTICLE

## From Inclusive Education to an Inclusive Society

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## Abstract

This article explores the transition from inclusive education to the development of an inclusive society, emphasizing the conceptual distinction between "inclusion" and "integration" in educational contexts. Inclusive education is presented as a key strategy for ensuring equal access to learning opportunities for all children, including those with special needs, within the general education system. The study highlights international practices in countries such as the United Kingdom, the United States, Switzerland, and Germany, and outlines Azerbaijan's commitment to inclusive education through its adoption of the Human Rights Convention and the implementation of the 2018–2024 State Program. The article underscores the importance of inclusive education in preventing discrimination, fostering integration, and creating a barrier-free environment that supports social participation and vocational development for all individuals. It concludes that achieving a truly inclusive society requires both systemic reforms and societal support for the integration of all learners.

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## Introduction

Many teachers use the terms "inclusion" and "integration" interchangeably, assuming they mean the same thing. However, "inclusion" refers to the involvement of all children in the general education system without exception. The word *inclusion* is derived from Latin, meaning "to include," while *integration* comes from Greek and means "to restore." Though often used synonymously, the two terms are distinct. Thus, it becomes evident that children with different characteristics need to be specially adapted to society [2]. Inclusive education is also a process of developing general education. It aims to make education accessible to everyone by addressing the diverse needs of all children. It ensures that children who require special care also receive an education. As a result, inclusion facilitates the integration of children with and without disabilities, students with diverse educational needs—in short, everyone—into society.

It is worth noting that in many countries (such as the United Kingdom, the United States, Switzerland, Germany, and others), children with special needs are educated alongside their peers in general education schools and attend preschool institutions. The development of inclusive education is one of the main priorities in the education policies of many countries, and it generally aims to align the national education system with international principles and standards [12].

In the modern era, inclusive education refers to the process whereby children attend preschool institutions and general education schools. This process involves many specific requirements. According to teaching methodology, inclusive education prevents any form of discrimination against children and provides opportunities for children with various disabilities to receive a quality education and achieve success. Its primary goal is to create an environment without barriers that facilitates the inte-

gration of marginalized individuals into society and supports their vocational training. In general, integration is a two-way process: on the one hand, the individual must strive to integrate into social life, and on the other hand, society must implement measures that promote successful social integration [11].

As we know, the concept of inclusive education is based on the principle of human rights. According to the Convention on Human Rights, states must establish an education system that ensures the right to education is extended to every child. The Republic of Azerbaijan signed the Human Rights Convention in 1992 and committed itself to protecting the right to education for every child living in the country. The *State Program on the Development of Inclusive Education for Persons with Disabilities in the Republic of Azerbaijan for 2018–2024* specifically aims to develop this field. In line with the Action Plan developed under this program, legal and regulatory frameworks are being improved, pedagogical staff are being trained, and public awareness campaigns are being conducted to ensure that all children have access to education [1].

In addition, the Heydar Aliyev Foundation has carried out targeted activities to organize the education of children who, for various reasons, remain outside the attention of society, and to strengthen the material-technical and educational base of the institutions where these children study [8].

Research in the field of inclusion indicates that society often demonstrates a neutral or passive-compassionate attitude toward the assimilation of children with disabilities. The challenges faced by such children are perceived not as societal responsibilities but as individual difficulties. The majority of society shows passive tolerance toward children with disabilities [3]. In practice, the medical model still predominates. Therefore, when discussing the development of inclusive education and society, the first focus must be on changing these prevailing attitudes. Modern society has revealed the importance of approaching everyone from a social perspective. The social approach requires seeing not a person's disability, but their strengths, building upon those strengths, and respecting the rights of every member of society. In education, this social approach requires identifying the reasons why a student may not be able to learn or attend school within the educational system itself—in the curriculum, in the inadequacy of the physical and psychological environment.

Secondly, establishing inclusive education requires special attention to be paid to **teacher training**. Since the teacher is the driving force of the educational process, they must be well-prepared in terms of inclusive values, concepts, and skills. The mere fact that all children can attend school does not yet indicate the successful estab-

lishment of inclusive education. To ensure continuity in education, the teacher must create a physically, psychologically, and pedagogically supportive classroom environment. Naturally, school leadership also plays a significant role in this area, both in terms of awareness-raising and administration. Currently, various grant and state-level projects related to this are being implemented in the country [7, 15].

Thirdly, building an inclusive education system requires **collaboration among all stakeholders**. These stakeholders include schools, parents, and government agencies. Joint efforts by parents and the wider community are particularly vital for the education of children with disabilities. Positive communication between families and schools improves children's relationships and academic achievements. For families to collaborate effectively with schools, mutual respect must be established from the outset. Engaging families and communities in the support of inclusive education ensures the convergence of different perspectives, thereby increasing the effectiveness of both social and educational integration. Especially during the early years, family participation is a key principle in improving both classroom and extracurricular educational quality. To fulfill this principle, international experiences introduce a "Child and Family Support Plan" to foster collaboration between families, schools, and the community in matters of inclusive education. When developing such plans, all three parties work together to identify the child's strengths, set future development goals, and determine short- and long-term objectives. Community involvement in managing the child's extracurricular activities and providing necessary support is one of the essential requirements during the planning stage. Cooperation between school leadership, psychologists, and other teachers is also a crucial factor for setting effective goals. Implementing such plans in our country could yield significant positive outcomes.

All organizational and legal processes must ensure that, during integration into society, the most important factor is that the child **feels** like an equal member of the community and that their opinions are treated with respect [4]. Only under such circumstances can we ensure the sustainable integration of everyone into education and society [6].

## Conclusion

This article is devoted to studying the role of inclusive education in the integration of children with disabilities into society. The integration of children with disabilities is closely tied to the availability and quality of education. Teaching children with and without disabilities together is a complex and time-consuming process. Nevertheless, inclusive education offers numerous benefits for both groups. The article also emphasizes that inclusivity sup-

ports the successful integration of children with disabilities into society.

From this, we can conclude that **joint efforts between parents and society are particularly important** for the education and development of children with disabilities.

Positive communication between parents and schools enhances children's social relationships and increases their interest in education. In fact, the cooperation between schools and families plays a major role in helping children with disabilities adapt to society, succeed in education, and develop as individuals.

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