SCHOOL EXPERIENCES OF STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS (SEN) IN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION SETTINGS IN AZERBAIJAN

An ethnographic research

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Programme/course:	VT2021(IMER) PDA184
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Supervisor:	Girma Berhanu
Examiner:	Ernst Thoutenhoofd

Abstract

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Aim: Inclusive education is a new concept applied in the education system of Azerbaijan and not all members of society are familiar with this concept. National legislation guarantees equal, inclusive, and quality education opportunities for everyone. The study aims to examine school experiences of students with special educational needs (SEN) in inclusive education settings in Azerbaijan. The study sheds light on the peer relationship, a sense of school belonging of students with SEN, and enablers and barriers they face in practicing inclusive education. The current study was necessitated due to the lack of sufficient knowledge and limited research on inclusive education in Azerbaijan. In addition, the research paper addresses students' perspectives, and student participants were involved in the study.

Theory: The belongingness and social model of disability theories were adapted to investigate school experiences of students with SEN.

Method: The qualitative ethnographic design approach was used as a method to uncover the research topic. Participant observation, informal interviews were employed to investigate, explore and explain school experience of students with SEN and explore further; document analysis was used to evaluate documentaries and triangulate the study findings to provide credibility. As a significant source of data, participant observation and informal interviews were utilized. In addition, casual conversations were held with class teachers to learn students' medical and educational backgrounds.

Results: The analyzed and discussed study findings show that students with SEN experience positive peer relationships; they interact and develop social relationships with their peers. The results emerged from the findings indicating that students with SEN feel they belong to the school. Although national legislation and the supportive environment somehow accommodate students with SEN in inclusive education, educational establishment, national legislation, education context and teachers were not found to be in favorable to successfully implement inclusive education.

Foreword

I want to pay my regards to individuals who helped me accomplish this thesis.

First and foremost, I want to express my profound gratitude to my family for always believing in me and encouraging and supporting me to pursue my dreams. This thesis could not have been achievable without their patience and encouragement.

I would like to extend my thanks and sincere gratitude to my dad, my mentor, Farrukh Rustamov, honored scientist and professor at the Azerbaijan State Pedagogical University, for inspiring me to study in the field of education and encouraging me during my two years of studies in Sweden. I appreciate his contributions in selecting the research topic and in the writing process.

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List of Abbreviations

SEN	Special educational needs
CWD	Children with disabilities
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UNCRPD	United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
CWD	Children with Disabilities
WHO	World Health Organization
UPIAS	Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation

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CHAPTER ONE

1. Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

To receive an education is an essential factor for every human being in today's world complexity. To get education establishes abilities for individuals to fulfill tasks in life, earning a good living, and make use of life's advanced opportunities (Federici, 2011). The written articles in an existed literature cover the economic benefits of investing in education, and obtaining education enhances a person's self-esteem and simplifies social mobility (de Beco, 2014). Numerous international legislations secure the right to education.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), signed in 1948, is a fundamental document in the history of human rights (Gerber, 2011). Article 26 of UDHR clearly states that everyone has the right to education, and education will be free, in elementary and fundamental stages at the least.

Article 24 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCPRD) recognizes the educational right of persons with disabilities. Article 24 not only indicates removing discrimination against children with disabilities but also the participation of them in the general education system.

UN Standard rules on Equalization of Opportunities of Person with Disabilities (1993) presented that education for persons with disabilities should be an integral component of the national education system, school organization, and curriculum development (de Beco, 2014). It also stated that education is designed to serve the needs of persons with disabilities, and have satisfactory accessibility and support services.

In addition, the Salamanca statement adopted in 1994, supports the process of inclusive education and constitutes achieving a principle of Education for All. The Salamanca statement specifies that all children: a child with deficiencies and ones without deficiencies, should learn together despite having any differences and difficulties they may have. The primary principles of inclusive schools are to meet the diverse needs of their students, maintain quality of education and ensure varied learning styles and learning rates.

For the last few decades, the education system reformed considerably and including children with disabilities in the same regular schools with non-disabled peers has become a significant

goal in many countries (Barow & Berhanu, 2021; Berhanu, 2019; de Boer, Pijl, & Minnaert, 2011). Inclusive education is known as educating students with diverse needs in regular classroom settings along with their peers (Micheletta, 2013; Slee, 2018)

The Republic of Azerbaijan was ruled by the Soviet Union for 70 years and gained its independence on October 18, 1991, before the collapse of the Soviet Union. The following Armenian attack on Azerbaijan's territories during 1988-1994 caused political, economic, and social difficulties (Huseynov, 2012). Correspondingly, UNESCO's 1990 report clearly states that education alongside the economic, social, and political sectors in Azerbaijan encountered tremendous challenges resulting the war and losing 20 % of the territory. Despite all these, the Azerbaijan Government has endorsed major conventions regarding human and child's rights and ensuring the creation of inclusive education such as government approved on 21st of July, 1992, UN Convention on the Right of Child (UNCRC), which was the first document aimed to prevent any discrimination against children based on disability (Macdougall & Darbyshire, 2018).

Inclusive Education is a relatively new concept for the Azerbaijan education system. The latest situation of inclusive education in Azerbaijan is not satisfactory; however, this concept is in public attention recently. Azerbaijan, the former member of the Union, was built its education system on the legacy of Soviet defectology, and especially, the special education has been continued to follow the model founded by the Soviet Union in where vulnerable disabled children were forced to have residential care in special schools or large institutions (Florian & Becirevic, 2011; Mikailova et al., 2009; Mikayilova, 2019). Even after the collapse of the Soviet Union, those institutions have remained as the main model of provision for children with disabilities (CWD) (Florian & Becirevic, 2011), which continued to be an obstacle to the development of inclusive education in Azerbaijan.

Soviet defectology created remedial education as a part of the general Russian education system during the Soviet phase of its existence (Grigorenko, 1998). Lev Semenovich Vygotsky, a founder of Soviet cognitive developmental psychology, is known for creating the discipline of abnormal child psychology in Soviet times. In his text, "The Fundamentals of Defectology" written in 1912, the word defectology was the Soviet term used for studies related to handicapped children, development of them, training for teachers, and methods (Holowinsky, 1988). Moreover, defectology was implied to children considered "difficult to cure," "difficult to discipline," and "difficult to cure." As a matter of fact, Vygotsky's contribution was to give theoretical support to the treatment of psychology and teaching of handicapped children.

1.2 Problem statement

Inclusive education is not yet extensively accessible for all students in Azerbaijan. The studies conducted on Inclusive education in Azerbaijan revealed that isolated models of education provisions are still dominant for students with SEN ((Florian & Becirevic, 2011; Lesko, Ziegler, Mikailova, & Roels, 2010; Mikailova et al., 2009; Mikayilova, 2019). Further,

a study conducted on the knowledge, attitudes, and practices towards students with SEN in Azerbaijan reported that while several educational institutions have a few sufficient facilities for inclusive education in the capital city, the majority of educational institutions, especially in regions, do not have them at all (Grimes, 2018). However, students with SEN who do not attend inclusive education is not excluded from education completely.

In these cases, according to the Law on Education of Persons with Disabilities, there are three forms of education (special education) for them:

- Education in special educational institutions (boarding schools)
- Study at home (homeschooling)
- Special education in general educational institutions (attending special classes with special teachers)

Similarly, educational institutions lacking physical accessibility for students with SEN, and teachers' lack of experience working with them cause challenges in advancing inclusive education. Besides, the curriculum is inflexible and unreachable for students with SEN in mainstream settings. Moreover, society's insufficient information on understanding inclusive education and attitude in society toward those students based upon bias and stereotypes and consequently, these factors prevent those students from fully participating in education. Attitude towards students with SEN generally positive however, those attitudes do not necessarily transform into inclusive practice (Mikayilova, 2019).

Understanding disability as a concept is very low at the level of society as a whole. Laws and policies define disability on based on the medical model of disability. Disability is often defined by focusing on the limitations or differences of persons. According to enacted laws, disability is defined as a physically disabled person who needs help.

Nevertheless, the government of Azerbaijan is undertaking to support the rights of students through inclusive education; launching state programs to improve inclusive education and to ensure that students with SEN have access to education on an equal basis as others and eliminate any obstacles to full inclusion. Despite those attempts, there are still challenges that drag inclusive education back from the development as due to lacking legislative acts and policies (Lesko et al., 2010; Mikayilova, 2019).

Although legislation guarantees that, in general, persons with disabilities can be enrolled in regular schools, there are still many obstacles in carrying out inclusive education. In practice, many students with disabilities do not attend school or are enrolled in special schools (Mikayilova, 2019; Tasch, 2010). The statistic was provided to depict years for the school-aged students with SEN involved in special education given in Chapter 3, in area of study, in detail.

Families of students (SEN) are not well aware of their children's rights and available benefits and support services. 71 % of the families of students with SEN do not have information about the rights of disabled persons, while 85 % of families of students do not know about assistance provided to students with SEN and available support services (Mikayilova, 2019). In that case, the demand for inclusive education is low.

Unfortunately, not all students with SEN are registered. It is a serious concern not to have accurate and reliable information about them. There are minimal options for early intervention for students. Almost all early intervention and rehabilitation services are centralized. 44 % of parents of students with disabilities reported that their children were not formally diagnosed. The statistics of 2016-2017 provided by the Ministry of Education depict that most of the school-aged students with SEN fell behind education. Thus, while 21% of students study at home, respectively 6% in special education, 6% in boarding schools, 67 % of them do not study at all. This may be explained as unawareness or limited understanding of medical workers on the legislation and policy on inclusive education.

Teachers' knowledge of inclusive education is limited. There are significant gaps in the training of teachers on inclusive education. It is a strong sense that many teachers they not sure what to do how they should be doing it, which raises questions on the effectiveness of teacher training in inclusive education. Most the teachers either do not know about inclusive education or have not attended trainings or are insufficiently trained to educate students. At the same time, there is an issue with assistant teachers in which they are not recruited to help the class teachers. Existed legislation does not mention assistant teachers and their presence in schools, so their absence in the classroom is very difficult for teachers in many cases.

1.3 Purpose, relevance and aim of the study

Schools are a central social and learning environment for students to have social relationships (Cemalcilar, 2010; Sam, Odom, Tomaszewski, Perkins, & Cox, 2020). According to Macarthur, Gaffney, Sharp & Kelly (2007), the rights of students with SEN at school were at risk. Even so, students with SEN wanted themselves to be viewed as members of the whole classroom; they felt being treated differently. Some of those students had to confront daily challenges of defending themselves against being bullied and discriminatory attitudes. Macarthur et al. (2007) acknowledge negative experiences of differentiation of students with SEN at school as being bullied, excluded from the peer group, invisible in the classroom, and an absence of engaging in classroom experiences. One of the aspects of inclusive education is teaching students without SEN the diversity of society and improving their caring attitude and gaining their academic skills (Micheletta, 2013). Nevertheless, bullying still plays a common role in the school life of disabled students (Davis & Garfield, 2021; Macarthur, Gaffney, Sharp, & Kelly, 2007).

Most of the research papers concerning inclusive education have been conducted mainly from teachers' or parents' perspectives, there is a limited number of research studies based on students' perspectives. Some researchers argue on children's developmental level, and in this case, this shows a lack of respect for children's knowledge (Ey, 2016). The current study will make contribute to existing literature by adding students' perspectives and promoting crucial information on inclusive education and a better understanding of students with SEN by focusing on their school experiences.

It is now generally acknowledged that the research projects addressing children's (student's) perspectives and experiences should actively involve children in the projects

(Noble-Carr, 2007). However, limited research projects available that cannot be easily conducted since the children involved projects are sensitive and need to be undertaken efficiently and ethically. Nevertheless, taking into account article 12 of UNCRC, assuring children have a right to express their views on the matter that affects them, this planned research paper put aim of participation of children in the research process.

Inclusive education is a new concept and not widely known to all members of the society of Azerbaijan. One of the main contributions of this research paper to existing literature will be to raise awareness on children's rights, inclusive education, remove an existing stigma and bias for disabled people, especially to disabled students, and educate unaware readers.

Another significance of the current study is that there are not many available articles concerning inclusive education in Azerbaijan. Meanwhile, articles written are either out of date or don't show any changes or improvements have been made so far.

Additionally, the current research project aims to gather the most current situation of inclusive education in Azerbaijani schools and find out how students with SEN experience inclusive education in education settings.

1.4 Research questions

The title of the topic that has been chosen to be researched for the master dissertation is "School experience of students with special educational needs (SEN) in inclusive education settings in Azerbaijan and students' perspective". Since the school experience is a broad concept, I break down the school experience term into two specific areas: peer relations and sense of school belonging to have a clear and wide enough scope of the research. This research aims to see the latest situation of inclusive education in the Republic of Azerbaijan and figure out how students with SEN experience inclusive education in educational settings from students' perspectives.

This study will provide an insight into understanding students with SEN's school experiences by investigating their peer relationship and sense of school belonging. The research participants will be primary school aged children. The research questions guiding this research are as followed below:

1. How do students with SEN experience peer relationships and a sense of school belonging in inclusive education settings (schools) in Azerbaijan?
2. What enablers or barriers do these students with SEN experience in inclusive education?

1.5 Theory and methodology

The present study adopts belongingness theory and the social model of disability theory to explore students with SEN's experiences in inclusive education settings in Azerbaijan. While

belongingness theory is planned to answer the first research question and focus on school experiences through school belongingness and peer relationship, the second research question will be investigated barriers and enablers experienced by students and answered by the theory of social model.

A qualitative approach will be used as a study method to explore school experience of students engaged in inclusive primary education settings in Baku. The research study plans to use an ethnographic design that would be optimal and suitable for students to participate in the research process. Participant observations and informal interviews will be employed to collect data in the research process; moreover, document analysis will be beneficial to define the legislative and policy framework of inclusive education. The main focus of the research process will be given to participant observation and planning to be conducted around 1 month. Participant observation is chosen over observation since this considered the most appropriate method to obtain data from child participants. Interviews are not well chosen research method considering participants of the study are young children. However, to receive specific information from them such as their age, do they like to come to school, informal interviews will be conducted with them, and questions will be formed easily, which request answers as "yes" or " no."

The research will be conducted with primary school-aged children (students) participants, aged approximately between 6-10 and in inclusive education functioned schools located in Baku. Moreover, since the students are the research participants and may not provide clear background information depending on their young age, daily meetings (casual conversations) will be held with classroom teachers if needed. There can be benefits of using drawing techniques if participants refuse to engage in informal interviews or provide any information through observation. If needed " about myself" illustration sheets will be given to participants to introduce themselves, their schools, friendships, and teachers. However, I will also consider that some participants (older) may not have drawing skills or not find these activities entertaining.

1.6 Limitations and delimitations of the study

Fundamental delimitations of the study are due to limited time and financial restraints, the study focused on only two governmental and inclusive primary schools (1st and 3rd grades) in Baku city, Azerbaijan. One of the major constraints of the study is not being able to transfer the findings of the study. Since the current research study is based on a qualitative approach, the results obtained from samples cannot be used to generalize all-inclusive schools in Baku. Therefore, the obtained data may not be transferable to other settings or larger populations.

Another delimitation of the study are limited with children's perspectives, even though class teachers acquired some basic background information on students. Moreover, the study is delimited to students' school experience with peer relationship and a sense of school belonging and what enablers or barriers they experience in inclusive education settings.

The limitation of the study is the collected data through observation which may not reflect the actual behavior of children engaged in inclusive education, and it may result influencing the findings. The presence of strangers may make them behave differently than they normally do.

1.7 Organization of the thesis chapters

The study has 6 chapters. Chapter one is the Introduction and presents a brief description of inclusive education in Azerbaijan, the problem statement, the relevance of the study, and the research questions that were provided to guide research findings. In addition, it briefly discusses the theory and methodology used in the study and highlights the limitations of the study.

Chapter two is the Literature Review and deals with various reading and researches conducted on inclusive education and also, the theoretical framework is also presented.

Chapter three is the Methodological framework. In this chapter, research design and methodology are introduced. The chapter deals with a qualitative approach, participant observation and informal interview, document analysis, sampling and participants, and research ethics.

Chapter four is the Presentation of research results and presents research findings more descriptively and answers the research questions one by one.

Chapter five is the Discussion of research results. This part discusses the results obtained from this study concerning the research problem and questions outlined in the introduction and chapter six, last chapter, concludes from the study results and suggests recommendations for further investigation.

CHAPTER TWO

2. Literature review

A literature review has been identified as the foundation of the study (J. R. Turner, 2018). The literature review gives an overview of available knowledge on the research topic in the existing literature. In this chapter, various literature was reviewed related to the research topic. In doing so, the recent reviews on research with children, the definition of disability, inclusive education, school experience of students based on sense of school belonging and peer relationship were provided. Furthermore, the present review obtained of current knowledge on inclusive education in the Azerbaijan context and legislation and policy framework on Inclusive education.

2.1 Research with children

The recent reviews on the literature on research with children reveal that there has been swift progress from research on children to research with children (Khoja, 2016; Macdougall & Darbyshire, 2018; Rogers & Labadie, 2018). Darbyshire (2000) underlines that there were times that children were research participants in psychology, public health, and children's nursing, where children were studied, but not heard, researched on them but never with. Moreover, Macdougall &Darbyshire (2018) draw attention to fields of education, child psychology, and child health, when children were framed as objects of adult study and allegedly accepted as immature, unreliable, and incapable of providing relevant data. However, in the 1980s and 1990s, new sociology of childhood emerged (Strandell, 1998) and as a result, all aspects of research with children were fundamentally changed and guaranteed data collection to be respectful and ethical (Khoja, 2016; Macdougall & Darbyshire, 2018). One more reason for the need for change came from parents, careers, or teachers were speaking for children where experts put efforts to understand children's worlds (Khoja, 2016). Additionally, the children's rights movement has led to a major advance in research with children, and as a consequence, it becomes children's fundamental human right to be able to share their views in all aspects affecting them in accordance with article 12 of the UNCRC.

2.2. Disability

As stated in World Health Organization (WHO)'s report (2011), disability is an umbrella term used for a loss of function or ability that limits activities or restricts a person's participation. There are two well-known and prominent models of disability: the medical model and the social model. The medical model of disability sees disability as an individual problem and accepts the disability as an impairment or malfunctioning in the body (Marks, 1997; Martin, 2017; Shepherd, 2021). Furthermore, people accepting the medical model suggest that individuals with the impairments cannot physically function because of both biological and medical difficulties. However, the medical model still views disability as a deficiency and implies that disability must be fixed or cured (Martin, 2017; Shepherd, 2021).

In contrast to the medical model, the social sees disability not as an impairment in the body, but in an oppressive social context (Harris & White, 2018; Marks, 1997; Molineux, 2017b). In the social model, physical restraint is about other people's behavior or attitudes. Moreover, several structural barriers, for example, lack of ramp or bathroom doors too narrow for a wheelchair, can still limit or prevent physical activity. The social model of disability will be further explained in the theoretical framework.

2.3 Inclusive education

Inclusive education is defined as students with learning difficulties or disabilities have access to mainstream education on an equal basis with others for progression (Barow & Berhanu, 2021; Slee, 2018; Wallace, 2015). Thus, learners participate in education to improve the quality of life and integrate into broader society, regardless of their learning difficulties, or disabilities.

The concept of inclusive education mainly covers three aspects (Krischler, Powell, & Pit-Ten Cate, 2019 p.299):

- Children with special needs improve their academic and social skills and as well as their self-esteem. Besides that, other learners who do not have special needs will improve a caring attitude and understand the diversity of society and gain academic skills.
- Most countries almost adopt inclusive education concept that children with special needs have a right to be taught with their peers and have been accepted as a matter of equity and social justice.
- In the last argument, inclusive education is economically applicable including transportation and accommodating of those children.

Inclusive education must not transmit of academic knowledge but strengthen learning capacities (Mihai, 2017; Slee, 2018; Virgina & Kurniawati, 2018). Inclusive education awakes children into the differences of society and teaches them how to live with that. Existed studies show that children with disabilities be enrolled in maintain schools is advantageous for everyone (Barow & Berhanu, 2021; de Beco, 2014; Mihai, 2017). Integration of children with

disabilities into the education system helps to shape the society: evolute of the society and build the tolerant society in which future generation will live in harmony with each other regardless of any differences (Mihai, 2017; Virgina & Kurniawati, 2018)

Equivalent to the process of including children with disabilities into regular schools, the terminology defined those children have been changed (de Beco, 2014; Slee, 2018). The Warnock Report (1979) suggested to switch the terms of handicaps and retarded used for children to the new term of "special educational needs (SEN)"(Warnock, 1979), and consequently, the focus moved from children's disabilities to the special needs of children in education (de Boer et al., 2011; Virgina & Kurniawati, 2018). The major reason to remove those terms and replace them with the new terminology was to eliminate the medical labeling of children, the adverse effect caused people to feel about themselves and the negative focus of those words (Bowen & Ellis, 2015).

The term "SEN" is normally implemented where medical and cognitive disorders occur, which later put obstacles to learning and request assistance on a long–term or ongoing basis (T. Bowen & Ellis, 2015; Davis & Garfield, 2021). Reviewing criteria and guidelines for the assessment of SEN set by The Code of Practice and considering the differences of participants of the present study, it was decided to use the term of students with Special Educational Needs for study participants on the paper. The Code implemented the general rule that learners with SEN should receive an education in mainstream schools if it is not incompatible with family's wants or with other students' competent study (T. Bowen & Ellis, 2015; Gross, 2014; Kocaj, Kuhl, Jansen, Pant, & Stanat, 2018). The term is defined for children with special education who have a learning difficulty (Kocaj et al., 2018; Law & Martin, 2020; Rees, 2004). The Code listed the following criteria to determine children who have learning difficulties:

- Have a high difficulty in learning from the rest of children at the same age; or
- Have a difficulty that prevents them from using educational facilities which are given for children of the same age

2.4 Sense of school belonging

A sense of belonging can be defined as individuals feel personally accepted, respected, included, and supported by others in their social environment (Krischler, Powell, & Pit-Ten Cate, 2019; Li & Jiang, 2018a, 2018b; Palikara, Castro-Kemp, Gaona, & Eirinaki, 2021; Prince & Hadwin, 2013). It is commonly perceived that a sense of belonging is a core psychological need, and if this need is fulfilled, positive emotional and cognitive outcomes happen (Li & Jiang, 2018b; Palikara et al., 2021; Prince & Hadwin, 2013). Prince et al., (2013) highlight a school environment as supportive and caring and further, emphasizing the importance of belonging related to positive academic, psychological, behavioral, and social outcomes.

Schools are a central social and learning environment for children and adolescents to have social relationships (Cemalcilar, 2010; Li & Jiang, 2018). Students with less sense of school belongings tend to suffer from simple anxiety and loneliness to serious mental health problems like depression and associated as well with low academic achievement, adverse school-related behaviors, and low school attendance rate, and dropping out of school, however

having a great sense of school belonging, on the other hand, connected with being more successful in class, successful participation in-class and out-of-class activities, high school attendance rate and especially, having life satisfaction (Cemalcilar, 2010; Krischler et al., 2019; Li & Jiang, 2018a; Prince & Hadwin, 2013).

One of the influencing factors for parents to send their children with SEN to a regular classroom is that those children get to be in contact and interact with typical peers (de Boer et al., 2011; Koster, Nakken, Pijl, & van Houten, 2009; Lynch, Lerner, & Leventhal, 2013; Virgina & Kurniawati, 2018). Parents believe that being in intensive contact with peers will positively affect their children and change negative attitudes of people into long-term positive attitudes about those children (Cemalcilar, 2010; Koster et al., 2009; Lynch et al., 2013). Parents expect that the physical integration of their children will entail the social participation of their child (de Boer et al., 2011; Heah, Case, McGuire, & Law, 2007). Koster et al. (2009) define to the term of social participation as positive contact/interaction and social relationships/friendships between those children and their classmates; the perception that those children accepted by their classmates. Having intensive contact with peers may have a positive effect on the social- emotional development of students with special needs; however, numerous researches show the risks of being teased, abused, and ignored in regular classrooms (de Boer et al., 2011; Han, Kang, Choe, & Kim, 2021; Heah et al., 2007; Koster et al., 2009; Krischler, Pit-Ten Cate, & Krolak-Schwerdt, 2018).

2.5. Peer relationships

According to Broomhead (2019) children between the age of two and five tend to spend more time with their peers than their parents which significantly impacts a children's development. Having a successful relationship with peers is not simply prominent but also essential for students' social and emotional growth (Berndt & Ladd, 1989; Brock, Biggs, Carter, Cattey, & Raley, 2016), as well as intellectual development and personal growths (Cemalcilar, 2010; Palikara et al., 2021). Several studies report that this is essential for a student to be socially accepted by their peers (Koster et al., 2009; Prince & Hadwin, 2013). Students who have friends do not experience loneliness and depression, alternatively to those who do not have friends (Brock et al., 2016; Gifford-Smith & Brownell, 2003; Jiang & Wang, 2020). There is no need for student to have several friends; even having only one friend can still be beneficial for student's successful development. It is believed that social participation in regular education settings will be a motive for students with SEN to become socially active, however attending a regular school does not always cause many contacts and friendships with their peers (Gifford-Smith & Brownell, 2003; Pijl, 2005). Students with SEN encounter difficulties obtaining a good social position in regular schools (de Boer et al., 2011). Various research acknowledges that their peers less accept students with SEN in regular schools and even less being part a network in class (Baines, Blatchford, & Webster, 2015; de Boer et al., 2011; Koster et al., 2009; Kuhne & Wiener, 2000; Li & Jiang, 2018).

According to Blatchford, & Webster (2015) students with differences and non-differences to work together cause interaction among children which later boosts their academic performance, communication, and social skills. Nonetheless, there is a chance that when they sit in the same group, they hardly work together as a whole team, and therefore, a little interaction may happen among students (Baines, Blatchford, & Webster, 2015). And in

the end, they may get isolated from their peers due to that action (Baines et al., 2015) which raises a concern that even students with SEN get educated in mainstream settings are not completely involved in the social life of schools. Moreover, this must be stressed well that non-disabled students should be informed of learners with different needs. One of the fundamental concepts of inclusive education is teaching the other learners who do not have special needs to improve their caring attitude and understand the diversity of society (Micheletta, 2013).

Besides classroom teachers, there are assistant teachers in regular classrooms, appointed to fulfill the needs of students with special requirements (Doležalová, 2018; Macarthur et al., 2007; Radford, Bosanquet, Webster, & Blatchford, 2015). While most students appreciate the help they receive from assistant teachers, some students (SEN) are not happy with the role played by assistant teachers (Doležalová, 2018; Macarthur et al., 2007). The four relationship styles between assistant teachers and students are defined so far: a mother, friend, protector, and primary teacher (Tews, Lupart, & Disabilities, 2008). The assistant teacher having a friendly relationship with those children may carry sympathetic intentions ;however this could cause negative effects and be inadequate peer network for those students (Domović, Vidović Vlasta, & Bouillet, 2017; Tews, Lupart, & Disabilities, 2008). Moreover, assisting teachers to be liked or disliked by students without SEN also impacts students with special needs' socialization and peer networking (Tews et al., 2008). So, if peers dislike the assistant teacher, this straightly and negatively affects those student's relationships with their peers. As it can be seen, students with SEN spend most of their school day with assistant teachers as opposed to their peers (Macarthur et al., 2007; Radford et al., 2015), so it raises questions about the convenience of the current use of assistant teachers for disabled students in regular education settings.

2.6. Inclusive education in Azerbaijan

Although the term inclusive education is widely understood internationally, it was originally specified for students (SEN) in Azerbaijan. (Mikayilova, 2019). National Education Law (2009) states that children special needs regardless of their health status, has a right to education. However, according to National Education Law, the children with special needs is entitled to attend special or integrated education, and the Special Education Law (2001) indicates that can be enrolled in regular schools only if the schools can meet the needs of children (Mikayilova, 2019).

The reformation of Inclusive education in Azerbaijan can be divided into first and second cycles. In the first cycle, the main target was integrating students (SEN) into early childhood education and primary education. However, attempting to add new pieces into the established national education has failed. Additionally, at the early stages of applying inclusive education, students entitled to segregation from education was not considered a problem. Azerbaijan society believed it was an ideal choice to educate them. It should be noted that Azerbaijan's efforts to reform inclusive education started without an accurate understanding of the problem (Mikayilova, 2019). Furthermore, the statistic was not available at the start. The statistic was not released publicly until 2011; only 15 % of students (SEN) were involved in education. Thereby, the first cycle of implementation of inclusive education was not targeted to solve the shortcomings of the segregated education of students (SEN)enrolled but, on the

contrary, to bring inclusive education to the national educational environment (Mikayilova, 2019). Meanwhile, the education community and society's first cycle of inclusive education was not broadly known (Mikayilova, 2019).

The second cycle of inclusive education was started by the adapting of the National Strategy for Educational Development in 2013. The pilot projects were undertaken in the first cycle, despite its shortcomings, and established a positive attitude in society, which was an advantage for the second cycle (Mikayilova, 2019). The second cycle of inclusive education reform is given in the policy framework in detail.

2.7 Legislation and Policy framework on Inclusive Education

2.7.1. Background information on Azerbaijan

Azerbaijan is a mountainous country located in the southeastern part of the Caucasus and situated on Europe and Asian continents, as the Caucasus mountains expand from Europe to Asia. Azerbaijan is well resourced with tremendous oil, gas resources, and the natural beauty of the Caspian Sea (Titterton & Smart, 2019).

The Republic of Azerbaijan restored its freedom on the eve of the Soviet Union's demolition, ceased being the Socialist Soviet Republic, and declared its independence on October 18, 1991 (Tasch, 2010). A newly independent nation found itself confronting with a worsening economy and intensifying political difficulties throughout the 1990s.

The sudden decrease of the economy disadvantaged many aspects of people's lives in Azerbaijan and in particular, decreased in education access and equity, worsening educational quality, unemployment, and poverty spread over the region (Silova, Johnson, & Heyneman, 2007). Moreover, the economic deterioration led to a gradual decreasing in financing education expenditure across the region (Rust, 2008; Silova et al., 2007). Besides that, libraries were in lack of supplying wide resources and knowledge.

Political difficulties started with the deportation of Azeris from Armenia starting in 1988, which was an act of forced resettlement and ethnic cleansing and ended up almost over 250000 Azeris evicted. Moreover, political difficulties were exacerbated by the outbreak of the first Nagorno-Karabakh war in 1991-1994 and resulted in around one million Azerbaijanis expelled from Nagorno-Karabakh and the loss of 20 % of the territory of Azerbaijan.

Despite all, Azerbaijan was ahead of other post-Soviet countries with high literacy rates, and the society was appraised of the importance of education and a strong education system (Bank, 2004). Azerbaijan yet inherited the general structure of the Soviet education system and continued to implement it into the Azerbaijan education system in the freedom years. However, new laws and regulatory frameworks were put forth to reform and modernize

the education system in Azerbaijan to meet international standards. Over the past 30 years, several enacted legislation aimed to shape and operate the education system in Azerbaijan.

2.7.2. Legislative Framework

Adopting and implementing a vast range of legal reforms and joining a number of international aggreements gave a stimulus improving of the protection of the children's rights and rights to education in national legislation.

2.7.2.1. Fundamental human rights in the Republic of Azerbaijan Constitution

The Republic of Azerbaijan constitution was adopted in 1992 and contained an extensive list of the citizens' fundamental rights. According to article 12 of the Constitution, the Constitution guarantees rights and liberties and proper living standards for a person and citizens of the Republic of Azerbaijan. Article 17 of the Constitution, deals with the rights of children protection. Raising the children is the duty of their parents, and the government monitors parents to perform this duty. If children don't have parents or caregivers or are deprived of parental care, they are under the government's protection. Children are not allowed to work under the age of 15, and being involved in activities that may harm their lives, health, or morality are forbidden. The government closely controls how the rights of children are implemented. Article 25 of the Constitution guarantees that everyone is equal before the law and the courts. The VI paragraph of the article emphasizes that persons with impaired health have equal rights and perform all the duties included in the Constitution, unless, in some cases, the rights and duties are obstructed by their limited capacities. Article 27 of the Constitution ensures that everyone has the right to live, and people's right to life shall be untouchable. The death penalty was eliminated in Azerbaijan in 1998. Article 42 of the Constitution emphasizes the right of each citizen to education, guarantees free and compulsory secondary education, and ensures the equality of the rights and freedoms to everyone.

2.7.2.2. Education Law

The National Assembly promulgated an Education Law in 1992 to carry out the provisions of the constitutions regarding education. The new law was indicated the tasks, directions, and purposes to make alterations to the education system. In addition, the 1992 Education law was formed new norms and standards (such as teacher workload, salaries, class size and, etc.) to be used for school facilities and school employees. However, it was impossible to achieve those desired norms through the economic difficulties in the 1990s. So, the Revised Education Law (1995) was issued to revise, correct shortcomings of the law, and highlight the difficulties encountered in implementating of its policies from 1992 until 1995 (Bank, 2004).

2.7.2.3. The Convention on the Rights of the Child and other treaties in the Republic of Azerbaijan legal system

The Republic of Azerbaijan has been implemented various reforms to the national legislation system in pursuit of international agreements on the protection of children's rights. The UN Convention on the Right of the Child (UNCRC) is the first document that equalized children's rights to the standards of international law among all the documents adopted previously on the right of children (Suleymanova, 2010) and The Republic of Azerbaijan joined the United Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) on 21th of July 1992 which was the first document signed to prevent any discrimination against children with disabilities. In the celebration of the 20th anniversary of signing the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan announced the year 2009 as the "Child Year." This measure was issued to increase attention on the protection of children's rights, combine efforts of concerned government bodies, local and international institutions in that area. Numerous public awareness-raising activities, events, seminars, and training courses were conducted to enhance attention on protecting of the children's rights.

In addition to the UNCRC, Azerbaijan acceded to several further international treaties on children's rights protection: ILO "Minimum Age (Agriculture) Convention", "Minimum Age (Trimmers and Stockers) Convention", Minimum Age (Sea) Convention", Minimum Age (Industry) Convention", "Medical Examination of Young Persons (Seafarer) Convention", "Medical Examination of Young Persons (Non-Industrial Occupations)", "Night Work of Young Persons (Industry) Convention", "Night Work of Young Persons (Non- Industrial Occupation) Convention", and European Convention on " Legal Status of Children Born Out of Wedlock" (Suleymanova, 2010).

2.7.2.4. Law on the Rights of the Child

The Law on the Rights of the Child was adopted on May 19 1998, which defines the rights and freedoms of children, standards of government policy on children, tasks and responsibilities of government authorities, other corporate entities, and private individuals in the field of protecting children's rights. In addition, the Government signed international agreements to combat child trafficking, child prostitution, and child pornography.

2.7.2.5. National Action Plan

On February 18, 2009, National Action Program was enacted to the increase the efficiency of the protection of human rights and freedoms in the territory of the Republic of Azerbaijan. In addition, the Action Program highlighted guaranteeing continuous activities to enhance the regulatory and legal framework, the promotion of legal awareness, and security of the human rights system. National Action Program has provided a powerful impetus to comprehend children's rights efficiently.

2.7.2.6. Changes into the Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan

The referendum was accomplished to make amendments and changes to the Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan on March 18, 2009. The norms were modified on the provision of human rights, comprising children's rights. Important provisions of government protection of children without parents or guardians; children without parental care; children's involvement in working which may cause danger to their lives; morality and health; probation of employing children under the age of 15; government control of implementing children's rights were included into Article 17 of the Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

2.7.2.7. Legislations on Education (special education) of persons with disabilities

The Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan on "Education (special education) of persons with disabilities was adopted on July 21, 2001. The law was accomplished by adopting of "Development program for organizing education for children with special needs (with impaired health) in the Republic of Azerbaijan (2005-2009). The Law on Education (Special education) regulates general provisions; rights and responsibilities of persons with disabilities, their parents or their legal representatives in education; organization of special education; and management of special education system. According to the III chapter of the law, due to children's health condition, education of children can be organized at home, at special pre-school institutions, at vocational schools, at rehabilitation centers, at speech therapy service, at inpatient hospitals, at special educational institutions, at special educational centers in general educational institutions. Moreover, 12.1 provision of III chapter of the Law indicates that if the general educational institutions have the necessary equipment to receive education in accordance with the psychological-pedagogical and medical instructions, the institutions shall organize inclusive education for persons with disabilities.

2.7.2.7. Law on Rights of Persons with Disabilities

A new Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan about "Rights of Persons with Disability" was adopted on May 31, 2018, and amendments were made to the law in 2019. Following the rules of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the new law covered the bases of state policy, discrimination on disability, preventing disability, development of social skills, social security of those people, rehabilitation, and other important concepts. As a result of the implemention the Degree of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan on July 18, 2018, the implementation of the Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities radically transformed a traditional model of disability into a social model of disability.

2.7.3 Policy framework

2.7.3.1. Ombudsman's activity on children's rights

The Ombudsman Institute was founded on December 28, 2001, according to the Constitutional law on the Commissioner for Human Rights (Ombudsman) of the Republic of Azerbaijan. The Ombudsman's responsibility is to restore violated human rights and freedoms envisaged by the Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan and international agreements the Republic of Azerbaijan signatory. Moreover, to prevent and eliminate the violation of human rights and freedoms by the state or local authorities and government officials of the Republic of Azerbaijan were the center of the Ombudsman's responsibility. From the beginning of the Ombudsman's activity, the analyses were conducted to explore the situation on the provision of children's rights and the measures taken to protect children's rights and restore any violated rights. Furthermore, refugee and internally displaced children's rights and freedoms due to the aggregation of Armenia against Azerbaijan were at the center of the Ombudsman's attention and youth offenders.

2.7.3.2. State programs on Inclusive education

Governmental and non-governmental organizations in Azerbaijan inducted multiple projects to innovate inclusive education from the year 2003. However, those innovations had a weak impact on national educational policy (Mikayilova, 2019). Consequently, the limited impact contributed not entirely from segregation of students with (SEN) to inclusive education.

There have been various initiatives to involve people with disabilities in inclusive education. Thus, due to the regulation of inclusive education, the government launched 3 pilot projects in 2005-2009. As a result of projects, 268 students (SEN) were involved in inclusive education in 15 general educational institutions; and 13 kindergartens.

The government of Azerbaijan launched the National Program on the Development of Inclusive Education in the years 2006-2015. The program initiated pilot projects in the four cities of Azerbaijan (Baku, Sumqayit, Mingachevir, and Yevlakh) and was performed by the non-governmental organization "Center for Innovations in Education (CIE) alongside World Vision Azerbaijan and International Medical Corps. The CIE pilot project included 187 children with mild and moderate disabilities in pre-school and primary education (Lesko et al., 2010). Those 187 children with SEN who were included in the project were once educated in separate institutions or at home. The CIE's pilot projects' utilization of Step by Step methodology guaranteed students (SEN), refugee children, and internally displaced children to have equal access to education. The Step by Step methodology supplied teachers with essential structures and a range of instructional tools to meet the needs of students with (SEN)in their classrooms alongside non-disabled children.

However, the Republic of Azerbaijan acquired a new national education improvement strategy to reform inclusive education as a top strategic ambition in 2013. The President

approved the latest reform-related project "State program on the development of Inclusive education" of the Republic of Azerbaijan in 2017.

Besides, the government of the Republic of Azerbaijan started the project of " Inclusive Education Implementation in Primary Education" project in 2015-2016. 4 pilot schools were selected in Baku within the implementation of the project. 40 children with special needs was involved in inclusive classrooms at those schools.

On December 14, 2017, the State Program on the Development of Inclusive Education in the Republic of Azerbaijan 2018-2024 was confirmed by executive order no.3498 of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan. To implement the State Program, the Action Plan, 2018 was approved by the Ministry of Education. Not only persons with disabilities are part of the program, but persons with learning difficulties (dyslexia, dysgraphia, dyscalculia, hyperactivity, and other learning difficulties) are also involved in the program. In implementing of the State Program, "Ensure Teacher Readiness for Inclusive Education for years 2018-2020" project was put into practice. The project is being conducted within the framework of a program "Modernizing the Education System in Azerbaijan through the Involvement of Civil Society and the Introduction of Inclusive Education. The project is targeted Baku, Guba, Shamaki, Shaki, Aghjabadi, Jalilabad regions to implement the project. The program aims to place nearly 5.000 students with special educational needs at general educational institutions by 2020. In addition, 1000 primary school teachers and 400 principals, 400 instructors benefited from the program. However, there were shortcomings of the program; only primary school teachers engaged in the project, involved 6 regions of Azerbaijan, and covered only primary education.

"Expanding Inclusive Education for Children with Disabilities in Azerbaijan" project launched on November 12, 2018, was the collaborative project of the Ministry of Education of Republic of Azerbaijan, UNICEF and European Union. The two projects have been co-implemented by the UNICEF Azerbaijan and Heydar Aliyev "Regional Development" Public Union. The project has been organizing the training to improve teachers' inclusive educational skills at general education institutions and pedagogical universities. As part of the project, social campaigns have been implemented to draw attention to the rights of children with disabilities and change the public behavior toward those children. The project set objectives to contribute to the successful application of the State Program of Development of Inclusive Education.

2.8. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework explains the relevant theories chosen to be used for this research. Furthermore, the selected theories allow the researcher to interpret, explain and generalize research findings with confidence. The theoretical framework used for the present study is the belongingness and the social model of disability theory.

2.8.1. Belongingness theory

A sense of belonging is a basic human need and an essential component of establishing and maintaining relatedness to the system and environment (Hagerty, Lynch-Sauer, Patusky, Bouwsema, & Collier, 1992). While a child grows up, he/she develops a sense of belonging to family and the nation, the society, and the cultural group. According to Hagerty, Lynch-Sauer, Patusky, Bouwsema, & Collier (1992), a sense of belongingness has been defined as an experience of personal commitment in a system and environment in which individuals feel themselves be an integral part of the system and environment.

Belongingness theory refers to understanding the fundamental role of social interactions in human lives (Gao, Liu, & Li, 2017). According to the theory, people need belongingness and, thereby, willing to form strong and stable interpersonal contacts to satisfy their need for belonging. The need is frequent and unalterable interaction in continuing relational connection (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Furthermore, Baumeister & Leary (1995) reveals that belongingness is apparently linked to emotional patterns and cognitive abilities. In other words, a strong sense of belongingness accomplished by individuals can cause positive emotions (Gao et al., 2017) and enhance living standards in family, at work, and in other groups of society (Liu, 2017). However, a lack of self-belongingness appears to have negatively effects on well-being, health, and behavioral consequences (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

Hagerty, Lynch-Sauer, Patusky, Bouwsema & Collier (1992) represented two dimensions of belonging: valued involvement and fit. The valued participation is the experience of feeling valued, accepted, and needed and important to the external referent. However, the fit is the perception of a person to articulate with or complete in the relationship, organization or an environment.

I intend to answer the first research question, how do students with SEN experience peer relationships and sense of school belonging in inclusive education settings in Azerbaijan by using the belongingness theory. Considering that schools are one of the primary locations where peer relationships are formed, and forming a positive and negative sense of school belonging in which impact students' experiences of schools, the belongingness theory seems to fit for the present study.

2.8.2. Social model of disability

The social model of disability sees disability, not as a person's impairment but caused by the way society shaped. There is a distinction between "impairment" and "disability." Impairment refers to the functional limitation of a person, and disability refers to restrictions created socially (Harris & White, 2018). Furthermore, people with disabilities have a limited opportunity to participate and live a regular life in society equally with others due to social, physical, and psychological barriers (Anastasiou & Kauffman, 2013). While the disability

causes social barriers, impairment happens within an individual, which is caused by mental, physical, or sensory impairment (Anastasiou & Kauffman, 2013).

The social model of disability has its origin back to the mid-1970s within a publication by the Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS) which was later adopted and advanced by the Disabled People's Movement and by academicians in disability studies (Harris & White, 2013). Although the early studies of the social model focused on the negative impact of social factors on people with disabilities, academics tried to change the understanding of disability. They were interested in shifting the definition of disability from the intrinsic to the extrinsic, from a personal and individual problem to a public problem that requires social and political solutions.

According to the statement of the UPIAS given in 1976, it was the society that disabled people with physical impairments. Furthermore, disability is imposed on people with disabilities, isolated, and excluded their participation in society. Therefore, disabled people are accepted as an oppressed group in society. In order words, injustice occurs and causes limited involvement in social activities due to social and economic structures.

The strengths of the social model are given in three major themes. The first is the disability movement which was politically effective in building the social movement of people with disabilities. The second is the social barriers disabled people face as a consequence of social exclusion and oppression, which should be eliminated and liberate disabled people. And lastly, the third, that has been psychologically efficient to improve people's self-esteem with disabilities. Having a lack of self-confidence and self-esteem also limits disabled people's participation in society. It is not the disabled person's fault and should not feel sorry; instead, it is the society to be blamed.

I find the social model to be helpful to be used for the present study. Considering the social model has been advantageous in shaping public policy and education for students with disabilities in United Kingdom, Europe, and United Studies, and taking into account the strengths of the social model given above, the social model will be used in the study to answer and explain second research question what barriers and enablers do students with SEN experience in educational settings.

Chapter three

3.Methodological framework

In this chapter, the methods and procedures used for the research study are presented. The chapter starts with research design which explains research methods and techniques chosen to be used for the study. The second part deals with the utilization data collection procedures such as informal interviews, observation, and document analysis. The third part presents a selection of information on the study area, sampling, and participants of the research work. The fourth part of the chapter explains the ways of processing and analyzing data. The last part of the chapter addresses ethical issues that may arise in the research process.

3.1. Research design

Research design is the first step to organize and plan the research process when the research idea and research hypothesis have been defined (Toledo-Pereyra, 2012). Having the best research plan is considered to be getting the most accurate outcomes.

A qualitative approach was used as a study method to discover the school experience of students with SEN involved in inclusive education in primary schools in Baku. The natural setting of the research study was an inclusive classroom where students with differences practiced school experiences. The research study employed an ethnography design that was optimal and suitable for students to participate in the research process.

Informal interviews and participant observations were employed to identity school experience of students with SEN and documents analyzed to detect the legislative and policy framework of inclusive education.

3.1.2 Qualitative research

"What is qualitative research?" The question has been answered through numerous definitions in an existed literature (Hammersley, 2013). It is not easy to find one standard definition accepted by most qualitative research approaches and researchers (Angrosino, 2007). However, even though there several different approaches to qualitative research, some common characteristics can be identified in qualitative research. Qualitative research intently approaches the world "out there," not to the specific research settings, for example, laboratories, with the purpose of understanding, describing, and sometimes explaining the phenomena "from the inside" several ways (Angrosino, 2007). Qualitative research allows for the systematic collection, organization, definition, and interpretation of textual, verbal, and visual data (Hammarberg, Kirkman, & de Lacey, 2016). Additionally, qualitative research is utilized to understand what people experience in their natural environment every day (Wu &

Volker, 2009) and use various humanistic and interactive methods to disclose exploratory and discovery data (Campbell, 2014).

Furthermore, qualitative research methods are suitable for answering questions about experiences, perspectives, and meanings from the participants' standpoints. (Angrosino, 2007; Hammarberg et al., 2016). Qualitative researchers collect open-ended and emerging data, which is later used to develop themes. As an outcome of the qualitative research, the emerged data indicates that there is not much known or written regarding the participants or the topic of research (Campbell, 2014).

However, qualitative research has been broadly considered with suspicion due to involving small samples which may not represent a broader population, and it may not be seen as objective and the outcomes of the research may be evaluated as biased by the researchers' opinions and experiences (Hammarberg et al., 2016). Qualitative research should use appropriate and rigorous methods, be ethical, be of great importance, and be described comprehensibly.

Consequently, considering what is mentioned above, qualitative research was defined to perfectly fit the research process. The research design was formed for the research questions to be researched and settled methods to use to answer them.

3.1.3 Ethnography

Evans (2012) exemplifies the ethnography for the anthropologists as an experience of what it is like to learn over time and how to effectively participate as a member of a social group which experientially teaches them to become a part of the group. Following this, researchers become members of the studied group in the different contexts of the research field, and in such cases, long-term relationships are built with the other people (respondents, participants, informants, consultants) in the work field (Stemberger, 2017). Unlike other research designs, ethnography may form a relationship in different ranges of timeframes and happen in complex and various contexts.

The existing literature underpinning uses a multi-modal approach that is optimum to engage children in research on sensitive issues. Ethnography, methodologically, is considered a multi-modal approach (Wilson, 1977) and, which is optimal for engaging children in researches on sensitive matters (Noble-Carr, 2007). The vast majority of studies in the existed literature were conducted by using the multi-model approach. Ethnography, as being a multi-model approach, is used in both data collection and data analysis. Data collection can be conducted through using various types of observation, interviews, and analyzing documents, however, interview and participatory observation are the most widely used methods (Stemberger, 2017).

Additionally, ethnography should not be categorized as only a qualitative research design. Stemberger (2017) points out that researchers design different research objectives and collect the data quantitatively.

Wilson (1977) defines the procedure of ethnography in educational research by employing three stages. First is the stage of entering the research field and defining what role the researcher carries. The researcher must gain the group members' trust, to which steadily becomes the member of the group, so that cooperation between both parties happens. If the researcher is an external observer, he/she would be able to collect information. Nevertheless, research participants may feel insecure and, thus, guarded in the presence of a stranger during the research, and therefore, the trust has to be gained at the beginning, and it may take a while. This means that the researcher must be prepared to be in the field for quite some time to solve trust issues and gain a rapport between sides.

The second phase of the process of ethnography is data collection. As ethnography is a multi-modal, there are various data collection methods that can be used to achieve the research objectives. A researcher has to know which data will give answers to the research questions and how he will access the information. Additionally, the researcher should consider the place he will gather data and who will be talked or observed to.

The last phase of the stage of ethnography is data analysis. According to Stemberger (2017), ethnography is a practical approach due to a wide range of ethnographic notes, and those notes can be taken and analyze in the depth studies of the field in education. Taken notes can be the basis to examine the social environment of a specific class, intellectual or emotional experiences of children, teachers' attitudes towards students with different backgrounds. Subsequently, ethnography can be used to improve our knowledge of children from less favorable environments.

In this research which technique to be used depending on the available recourses and, more importantly on time. As a multi-modal approach, a combination of participant observation and casual/informal interviews were utilized. These two research methods are optimum to use to gain personal stories and experiences. Choosing the observation option felt particularly advantageous considering the ages of the child participants ranging from 6 to 10. Whereas, if children's ages were from 12-17, the combination of focus group and properly structured interviews would be employed alongside visual and task-based activities to stimulate a discussion and debate with research participants.

3.2. Methods of data collection

Observation notes, casual conversations/informal interviews were conducted with 9 students, 6-10 years of age in 2 governmental schools located in the capital city of Azerbaijan, Baku. Furthermore, I did have casual conversations with class teachers to learn about students' educational, medical backgrounds, and children's involvement in the classroom.

Before starting data collection, I spent a few days in the institution, talking to the head of schools and class teachers to get acquainted and explain the research process. The data collection was conducted following ethical regulations and data anonymization. Since students

who were engaged in the research were minors, informed consent was acquired from their parents.

The study mainly focused on observing child participants in the classroom, their behavior, academic performance, interactions with their peers and teachers.

Informal interviews were conducted with children. Most likely asking open-ended questions and using a special illustration "about myself" sheet where students introduced themselves, have basic details about themselves, school, their friendship, and teachers. It was asked by them to explain their drawings. In this way, they could freely share their thoughts with me, and it continued with follow-up questions.

Azerbaijani language was used with students and teachers in the process of the data collection. However, field notes were taken both in English and Azerbaijani languages.

It has been repeatedly argued that children need to have at least partially acquaintances with researchers before letting them relate to their experiences. So that, it was essential to build trust and a rapport with the child participants. There are ways of how to do it on the existed literature, and the followings are the ones that were used in the data collection process:

1. Spending time with them during break time or after class, talking to them what they would like to talk and helping them in their assignments;
2. Introducing myself to the class and substituting the class teacher from time to time;
3. Not getting answers to the questions at once instead leaving difficult or unanswered questions for the later ;
4. Talking to the class teacher to gain an awareness of the child's family, personal, intellectual background;
5. Getting to know children.

3.2.1. Participant observation

Researcher was inspired by ethnographic study with a focus on participant observation. The current research was not a complete ethnographic approach in the traditional sense. In American anthropological studies, however, ethnography is conceived as a synonymous with participant observation (Sandiford, 2015).

Zahle and Julie (2017) defined participant observation as a data generating research method that extensively used the social sciences and humanities study. Participant observation has also been defined as the involvement of social interaction between researcher and participants during data collection systematically and inconspicuously (Noble-Carr, 2007). The

components of participant observation are participation and observation. Those components require a researcher to be involved in the ways of life is being explored. However, there are varying degrees to which the participation is relative to the degree of observation (*Participant Observation*, 1989). As an example, the researcher may simply hang around in a low sense or actively engage in the activities taking place in the field. Participant observation can be completed by either highly observational or highly participatory, and while the previous involves a less visible researcher role, the subsequent one follows a more visible researcher role. Depending on the researcher's role plays, different types of activities can be used to enable maximizing data collection. For instance, while available activities in highly observational are watching or attending a meeting or event, recording images, video, and sounds or counting small scale surveys, etc. for highly participatory are casual conversation, acting as a visitor, guest, customer, or audience member or acting as a co-worker, member, teammate, and conducting a semi-structured or structured interview, or a group discussion.

It is believed that research involving participant observation should be carried out over a long period. Initially, in anthropology, the standard time to conduct research was for at least a year. At this time, the researcher would have gained access to the group, stayed with individuals, and implement intense observation for months or years. Nevertheless, researches performed nowadays during a shorter period are also considered acceptable (Zahle, 2017). Therefore, if the research project involves a limited timeframe, it might be helpful to merge participant observation with other techniques, for instance, play or task-based activities. Specifically, using those techniques while working with children can be helpful to understand children's behavior, interactions, and experiences (Noble-Carr, 2007).

Participant observation has been identified as the most appropriate method to collect data from young children. It is widely believed that participant observation is the process of feeling relaxed and comfortable considering they are in their own space (Noble-Carr, 2007). To elaborate, the researcher can establish interaction with the children and obtain what children think and what goes on in the research venue.

One advantage of participant observation is that the observer directly records observations and conducts informal interviews with chosen research subjects (Chandler & Munday, 2020). The scope of the participant observation to understand the subjective worlds of research participants from their viewpoint. Bornislaw Malinowski, considered as one of the chief founders of participant observation, stated that the method enables a researcher to comprehend informants' points of view, their relation to life, and to realize their vision of their world (Zahle, 2017). Participant observation precisely involves observing altogether with the researcher's participation, who turns into a primary research tool (Evans, 2012). However, it can be challenging for an observer to balance empathic subjectivity and impartial objectivity (Chandler & Munday, 2020). Another existed difficulty of deploying participant observation can be the researcher's struggle with the bias brought to the research field from the researcher's own cultural or social background (Evans, 2012).

The intense observation was conducted over one month period considering the thesis writing timeframe. Conducting participant observation enabled me to collect valuable information from minor participants. The study involved me highly participating collecting data that was completed by a more visible researcher role. Highly participating in the school activities allowed me to understand better participant students' viewpoints on school

experiences. I assumed a teaching role in a few cases and substituted class teachers in drawing lessons. These occasions were used to have group discussions with students to discuss friendships and peer relations. In addition, it was asked from the students to draw their friends or school in those lessons. Besides, I collaborated with teachers to organize school events, decorating classrooms, staying after class to practice the event's content with students. Furthermore, I did spend time with them during break time and lesson time and helped them with assignments. In general, I was available and accessible for students if they wanted to talk to me or ask me any questions.

3.2.2. Informal/Casual interview

The informal interview which was defined as a type of interview that does not follow a structured format, is conducted in a more conversational and relaxed (Molineux, 2017a). Considering child participants' age, using informal interviews was appropriate rather than using formal interviews.

Involving children effectively in the research project and, more importantly, gathering data from them can be even challenging to the most experienced of researchers (Noble-Carr, 2007). Researchers may have "what if" nightmare scenarios about the process of data collection. My deepest concern was that what if children do not say anything in an interview, what if they just walk away or do not understand what is asked them. In such cases, those unanswered questions were answered through observation.

Questions in informal interviews focused on student's interaction with their teachers and their peers. During the interview process, information was planned to be obtained from child participants was whether they like school, they are willing to come to school every day, if they have at least one friend at or outside of school, and participate in after school activities. Questions were formed in the easiest way and were answered as "yes" or "no", considering the ages of child participants. Follow-up questions were employed where it was possible.

Researchers must be aware of their language with children (Noble-Carr, 2006, 2007). So that, the words were used with child participants to which they are familiar and comfortable. However, though many children might be comfortable with the idea of simply talking for other children, especially younger children, visual and task-based activities are crucial to be used to maintain children's interests and to provoke discussion in the interview process (Noble-Carr, 2007). So, visual activities were used for the students aged between 6-7 (first grade students). Not all of them were keening on answers to open-ended questions. Those cases asked them to draw themselves and give basic information about them and their school. This technique elicited discussion, and they keep explaining and expand their responses. However, the child participants aged 8-10 (third grade) tended to give answers to open-ended questions, and time limitation was not allowed to use visual tasks for them.

3.2.3 Differences between interview and observation

The following paragraph distinguish the differences between an interview and participant observation.

An interview is primarily drawing on taking and listening to people, while participant observation comprises watching, feeling, sensing, and being in the presence of the world with people and things (Aagaard & Matthiesen, 2016; Noble-Carr, 2007; Zahle, 2017). Similarly, Hojholt and Kousholt (2014) stated that a position beside the children gives a different angle and perspective to what we are trying to know in a classroom than a position by blackboard. In other words, interviews encompass verbal interactions (Aagaard & Matthiesen, 2016), thus, not necessarily considering how many people bodily or perhaps silently undertake and participate in research settings. Likewise, engaging in an interview may risk the research failing to capture the everyday interactions of informants and what is happening in the situation (Evans, 2012). More importantly, Evan (2012) highlights that the participant observation researcher captures the detailed descriptions of continuous unfolding social interaction of informants, apart from its importance and meaning for participants.

3.2.4 Document analysis

Document analysis is a qualitative research method in which a researcher evaluates documentary evidence and answers to research questions (Frey, 2018). As a research method, analyzing documents can help a researcher produce, develop an understanding rich description of the studied phenomenon, and uncover depth knowledge related to the research problem (G. Bowen, 2009). Regarding other qualitative research methods, document analysis has advantages such as time-consuming, easy access to the public domain, stable documents, no need for human interaction, low cost, broad coverage, easy reach to large sample size (G. Bowen, 2009; Kılıç, 2019). However, there are several limitations in document analysis. Documents may not provide sufficient information, not the availability of recent updates on the matter, difficult access to recourses, and biased collection of documents (G. Bowen, 2009; Kılıç, 2019). Documents can contribute to the research process with a rich source of data, however, a researcher should be cautious of using documents in the study, not to use any available document before evaluating it. Documents were chosen track change and development of inclusive education in Azerbaijan, which provided supplementary research data for the present study.

Document analysis can be employed as a stand-alone study or as a part of other methods study. Document analysis was used to triangulate findings supplemented from participant's observation and informal interviews in the present study.

Document analysis was employed in the present study for two reasons. The primary reason searched for existed national legislation and policy framework on children's rights and education and inclusive education, implementation UN Convention and other international agreements into national legislation, and changes and developments over the years. The other reason was for triangulating purposes to provide credibility of findings of collected data.

Verification of findings can lessen the influence of biased information accumulated through informal interviews and participant observation.

The present study utilized public records, which consist of the official records of activities of non-governmental and governmental including annual reports and statistics, national legislation, in particular, constitution, education law, the activity of Ombudsman of the Republic of Azerbaijan, approved national state programs, and projects, and international agreements.

3.2.5 Drawing techniques

The usage of a variety of visual or task-based techniques to elicit discussion in the interview process between interviewer and interviewers is commonly conducted in recent times (Noble-Carr, 2007). The benefits of using the visual techniques with child participants appeared to be endless in the existed literature. Despite advantages, there are still some researchers who are uncomfortable using visual techniques.

Drawing is one of the most adequate and popular techniques used for child participants in the research. The drawing activities have been recognized as fun activities that ease children's anxiety and enable researchers to gather the primary data in the research process. More importantly, drawing gives children time to think and easily express their thoughts on their terms. However, drawing or other artwork activities may not be suitable or work effectively for all children. Some children (older) may not find the activities fun and not have the artistic competence to draw (Noble-Carr, 2007).

Most of the child participants studying in third grade had the competence to draw. I was asked them to draw me a picture of the school building they are studying in. However, this technique did not fit to be used for child participants in first grade; instead of school buildings, they drew me themselves; their parents, home, and friends, which was still used to get acquainted with them. Drawings are listed in an appendix.

3.2.6 Field notes

Field notes are a qualitative technique widely used in ethnography (Allen, 2017). Field notes are taking notes during or immediately following observations in the research field. It is also considered to be crucial to understand the phenomena being observed in the research field. Field notes are commonly incorporated with scratch notes, journals, and diaries. In the ethnographic process, a researcher intends to carefully observe and records what taking place within a particular community or event (Allen, 2017).

As I was not comfortable taking notes and casually chats with children or with teachers at the same time, so, once the conversation was over, I would write down information obtained from them. Besides, notes taken during the period of observation were expanded on the field notes or after the observation is done as soon as possible.

It was important for me to give attention to the physical space in the classroom, course content, children being included in class activities, teachers-children interactions, peer interactions in taking field notes. There are several ways to take field notes; however, descriptive and reflective fields note are mostly used. Descriptive field note is the tangible, physical and objective explanation of what is observed during the observation process, whereas researchers in reflective field notes offers critical insights and reflects on the events observed. In the process of the field notes, both descriptive and reflective field notes were used. Descriptive field notes were thought of such as interpretation of class organization (the setup of the room), seating arrangements (physical space), how the subject was delivered, number of children in the classroom, and their attendance rate. But, reflective field notes were allowed me to write additional thoughts and questions that arose during the observation.

3.3 Area of study, sampling and participants

3.3.1. Area of study

The present study was conducted in Baku, involving two primary governmental schools where students with SEN were engaged in the education process. Baku is to be chosen for the study area because Baku is the capital and largest city of Azerbaijan. I was familiar with the surroundings of the city since I grew up and now live in Baku. The total population of Azerbaijan in 2019 was 10.02 million, and the population of Baku was 2,236 million in 2016.

According to the 2018/2019 General Education Schools statistics of the Ministry of Education, 4443 general education schools were functioning in Azerbaijan 2018/2019. Out of the total number of general education schools in Azerbaijan, 4418 were governmental and 25 non-governmental schools. This was obvious from the fact that government owned schools were higher than non-governmental schools. Unfortunately, there was not available statistic specifying the number of primary schools functioning in Baku. According to 2018/2019 statistics of Ministry of Education, a total number of students studying in general educational school were 1567016, 1554799 students were attended in governmental and 12217 in non-governmental schools in Azerbaijan. Unluckily, statistics presenting a number of students studying in primary schools located in Baku were not found.

Various state structures report a different number of students involved in inclusive education, whereas those statistics do not match with statistics presented from the Ministry of Education. According to State Statistics Committee, the number of students with disabilities under the age of 18 was 71934 in 2017, while the number presented by the Ministry of Education was 65482. Out of 65482 students, 9355 were involved in education at home, 2558 at special schools, and 2725 at special boarding schools. According to the Ministry of Labour

and Social Protection of Population's official statistics in 2011, 59,207 students with SEN were registered in Azerbaijan. The official data presented by the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Azerbaijan for 2011, 7,750 CWD at home, 1,105 CWD at special schools, and 2,664 at special boarding schools (McCabe, 2011). According to the Ministry of Education statistic in 2005-2009, 268 people and in 2015-2017 40 students were involved in inclusive education in experimental classes of pilot schools. Other statistics show that at the beginning of the 2016-2017 school year, the number of students with SEN were engaged in education was 6377, 3237 at special schools, 2612 at special boarding schools, and 528 at general secondary schools. The statistics of 2016-2017 depict that the most of the school-aged students (SEN) fell behind in education. Thus, while 21% of disabled students with SEN study at home, respectively 6% in special education, 6% in boarding schools, 67 % of them do not study at all.

3.3.2. Sampling

A researcher specifies target populations to make inferences about them when designing a study. In my case, the study population was primary school-aged children engaged in inclusive education. Sampling is the process of selecting a specific group of the entire population that data will be collected from (D. P. Turner, 2020). This is more practical to use sampling from the whole population such as, contacting and collecting data faster and at a low cost with a specific group rather than reaching every member of the population. Because identifying primary school-aged children engaged in inclusive education wouldn't be easy, snowball and purposive sampling were chosen to be used for the study. Researchers chose purposive intending to select specific individuals with certain characteristics in the study (D. P. Turner, 2020). Snowball sampling is employed to target rare or hidden populations where members of the population are not easy to find and contact (D. P. Turner, 2020).

After obtaining official permission from the Baku city Education Department, I contacted the school principal whom I knew personally and was directed to teachers who could help me. Thus, the first school was identified to start collecting data. However, only one primary school-aged student was involved in inclusive education in the whole school. Having a small sample size would reduce the power of the study, so new schools were searched.

I contacted one of the specialists of the project of "The improving teachers' skills in inclusive education in Azerbaijan" in research design. Luckily, I was invited by him to attend one of the teachers' training in the capital city of Baku. I was introduced to the teachers at the end of the training and I had small chats explaining the research study I was working on. Later, I asked them if they would let me collect data in their classrooms. Teachers, who were willing, wrote down the address of the schools they work at and a name and impairment of a student had in the classroom. After examining the addresses, the school was selected where I live close by and the classroom teacher was contacted. The teacher introduced me to other classroom teachers who also had children engaged in inclusive education in their classroom.

3.3.3. Participants

The participants of the study were primary school-aged students with special educational needs involved in the inclusive education process. The number of student participants was up to 9, including 8 male and 1 female. The age of students was ranged from 6 to 10 and lived in Baku. 1 student was from school A, 8 students were from school B. However, 5 out of 8 B students were in the 3rd grade, and 3 were in the 1st grade. The table given below gives a summary of information on participants.

Table 1: primary school-aged children as research participants

Name of child participants	Gender of children	Grade of child participants	Impairment of child participants	Age of child participants	Name of schools
Camal	Male	1st	Attention deficit, mild disability	7	A
Hasan	Male	1st	Attention deficit, mild disability	6	B
Fatma	Female	1st	Developmental (cognitive) delay	6	B
Hamid	Male	1st	Mild disability	6	B
Kamal	Male	3rd	Dyslexia	10	B
Kamil	Male	3rd	Mild disability	8	B
Ali	Male	3rd	Attention deficit, mild disability	9	B
Cavad	Male	3rd	Developmental (cognitive) delay	8	B
Sadi	Male	3rd	Developmental (cognitive) delay	9	B

Three classroom teachers were informally interviewed to have information on educational history, backgrounds of child participants, and their engagement in the classroom. Three of the classroom teachers were female. 1 female teacher was from school A and 2 female teachers were from school B. All the schools chosen to have data to be collected at were regular governmental schools located in Baku.

Table 2:   the class teachers of participant students

Name of teachers	Gender of teachers	Schools working at	Types of school	Classes they are teaching at	Total number of children in classroom	Number of children with impairments in classroom
Aydan	Female	A	Governmental	1st	20	1
Kamala	Female	B	Governmental	1st	34	3
Xayala	Female	B	Governmental	3rd	30	5

3.4 Data processing and analysis

Thematic analysis is one of the most used qualitative data analysis approaches (Bryman, 2012). Thematic analysis was applied to analyze the collected data of this study. As a first phase, the gathered data was read over which helped the researcher familiarize herself with the data. While reading the data collected, salient points were identified and highlighted. The highlighted points were generated into codes, which were accompanied by identifying potential themes. The next phase was to review the identified themes and check if the themes correspond to the gathered data and accurately represent the data. After having a list of themes, the name and the meaning of the themes were defined. The last phase was finalized by reporting the emerged findings from the current study. Reporting of the findings in relation to research questions and theories was presented in Chapter 4. Moreover, document analysis was used to triangulate the evidence explored through interviews and observation.

3.5 Research ethics

There is a large number of studies that draw attention to the ethical issues in research with children. Children are perceived as vulnerable and incompetent, so their parents and gatekeepers prevent them from participating in the research. Therefore, they may want to protect children, either during or following the research, from distress, harm and anxiety. Protecting the rights and well-being of research participants is one of the cornerstones of the research process, however, more importantly, it focuses more on ethical concerns when it comes to child participants. The decisions made by most researchers on these ethical issues were based on fundamental theoretical assumptions derived from the sociology of childhood, emphasizing the importance of respecting children and their diverse competencies (Noble-

Carr, 2006). Therefore, children should have the opportunity to evaluate the risks and benefits of being involved in the research project emphasizing the importance of informed consent.

3.5.1 Informed consent

Informed consent is a consent form in which the purpose and the consequence of research are interpreted to research participants, who must sign it before research is conducted (Chandler & Munday, 2016). The purpose of the usage of informed consent is to protect research participants' privacy, to protect them from harm, and to ensure that they are not deceived, pressured, or manipulated (Zahle, 2017). More importantly, informed consent is a continual process and does not end with the agreement given at the beginning of the research a project. Research participants must know and be aware of the fact that they can withdraw from research project at any time. The individual's competence determined the key elements of valid informed consent, provide with adequate information about research project, voluntary participation (Lambert & Glacken, 2011; Zahle, 2017). If these conditions are not accomplished, the informed consent is not valid. Individual competence means that the research participant is in a position to comprehending and reflect on information about a research study (Zahle, 2017). On the informed consent, identification information was given, a name, email address, or and IP address; however, in such circumstances, that information should be separated or removed from the data.

Seeking parents' consent first is a traditional way of obtaining permission which can be explained through children being not competent and dependent on adult gatekeepers to participate in any research (Zahle, 2017). There is a lack of explicit guidelines to determine the age at which children are accepted as competent to consent. But it may vary for countries. For example, 16 years old children and over are legally competent to give valid consent to medicine, surgery and dental treatment in Ireland and England and parents are responsible for giving consent on their children's behalf until they reach the age of majority (Lambert & Glacken, 2011). Furthermore, though there are extensive discussions and debates in the literature, there is uncertainty about the consent of children's to participate. However, age is often considered as important factor in determining children's competence or incompetence to consent.

The first stage of the research process was to send mail to Baku City Education Department to obtain permission to access schools where inclusive education was applied. The way of how the schools were chosen to be included in the research process will be explained in a sampling section. The second stage was to enter the research field to understand the context and develop a relationship with teachers whose contributions were essential for data collection. Before starting data collection, I spent a few days in the institution, talking to the head of schools and class teachers to get acquainted and explain the research process. Planning the first stage of research is always practical and has ethical benefits. Thereby, teachers were informed of the stages of the data collection process, how the data will be collected without interfering with the whole lesson process, objectives, and benefits of conducting this research.

Since children who were engaged in the research were minors, informed consent was acquired from their parents. Parents of child participants received a copy of consent forms and signed it who confirmed their child to participate in the research process. On the informed consents, the purpose and consequences of the research, benefits, and risks of the study, and protection of child participants' confidentiality and privacy were outlined. Signed consent forms were stored safely.

3.5.2 Anonymity and confidentiality

Researchers are expected to protect the privacy of human subjects in the process of collecting, analyzing, and reporting data. As such, confidentiality and anonymity are ethical practices designed to respect and protect the participants' privacy (Coffelt, 2017). Participants of research learn about anonymity and confidentiality through informed consent. Anonymity, and confidentiality and level of confidentiality explained to them on informed consent before the decision of the participant whether to take part or not in the research project. These two terms can be often used interchangeably. Anonymity, commonly, is commonly pursued in the quantitative study, and confidentiality is employed in qualitative research (Coffelt, 2017).

Anonymity is related to collecting data without any personal and identifying information. This implies that any study performed face-to-face or over the phone cannot be accepted anonymously. In anonymous study, a researcher cannot track the information back to an individual participant.

By contrast, confidentiality applies to separating and changing any identifying information given by participants. In a confidential study, the researcher knows the participants' names and may even see the address and other identifying information. I assigned pseudonyms to the children participants in order not to get identified. Only schools are given in aggregate. Observation venues, research schools were described as any governmental schools in Baku where inclusive education is applied. Since I held casual chats with teachers, I used to them pseudonyms too.

3.5.3 Deception

While some ethicists dispute that using deception in the research should not be done, others claim that data value of data could not be gathered without using that (Chakraborty, Nansen, Gibbs, & Macdougall, 2012). To not pose an ethical dilemma, I presented my true identity to the head of schools and class teachers. Even if I did not reveal my true identity, my actions as taking notes and observing would give me away at some data collection point. Children, however, who were engaged in the research process knew me as an intern sent from the university where I study my master's.

Normally, senior students studying education are being sent to schools to practice their teaching skills at the last term of their senior years. So, students are used to seeing the presence of university students in the class. Therefore, students did not see me in the classroom as a stranger and keep their distance, instead built positive relationships.

Chapter Four

4.Presentation of research results

In this chapter, findings obtained from participant observation, casual interviews with students and background chats with teachers and document analysis were presented. The study aimed to explore school experiences of students with SEN, peer relationship and a sense of school belonging, and enablers and barriers they face in educational settings in Azerbaijani primary schools. Two research questions guided the present study.

4.1 Identified themes

Table 3. Identified themes

4.1 Identified themes
4.1.1 Friendship network
4.1.2 Enablers detected
4.1.3 Challenged encountered
4.2 Document analysis
4.2.1Curriculum
4.2.2 National legislation
4.2.2.1 Inclusive education regulated by law

The present study has two research questions, which are:

Research question 1: How do students with SEN experience peer relationship and a sense of school belonging in inclusive education settings (schools) in Azerbaijan?

4.1.1 Friendship network

Findings achieved from the first research question are presented below.

Table 4. Friendship network

| a. Friendship |
| b. Student participation in extracurricular activities |
| c. Peer acceptance |
| d. Peer victimization/bullying |
| e. Relationship between the class teachers and participants |
| f. Participants' self-perception of acceptance |
| g. Participants' relationships with others |
| h. Academic achievement |

a. Friendships

Each of the students with SEN were interviewed had mentioned at least one student's name as their friend from their classrooms and one from their neighborhood who play with them after school. The observation indicated that students with SEN were more likely to be close with classmates sitting next to them. 3rd -grade student Sadi from school B said, *I have a friend from the class that we go to the painting school together, we also live in each other's neighborhoods, and we also play football at a football stadium on weekends.*

b. Student participation in school activities

Students with SEN are not excluded from peer activities. All three teachers in two schools showed me video clips and photos taken at different times from school holidays, children's birthdays, museum tours, and various events in which students with SEN participated. Xayala teacher from 3rd grade in school B said *it is helpful for students with SEN to engage and interact with their classmates in this way* and also emphasized, *there is no distinction among students with SEN and each of them assigned to roles and tasks according to their abilities in the preparation of events.*

1st-grade teacher Kamala at school B showed me pictures taken at the event prepared by the participation of the whole class for World Children's Day. Other photographs were showed which were taken at the museum of the famous Azerbaijani philanthropist Haji Zeynalabdin Taghiyev.

During my presence, an event was held in 1st grade in school B. The event was dedicated to the people who lost their lives Khojaly massacre in 1992. At the event, all students sang patriotic songs and poems, holding red carnations and national flags. The children

prepared for the event a couple of weeks in advance. Every day after the school, they stayed and practiced the lyrics of the song and poems with the help of their class teacher. Even though Hasan and Hamid were not able to sing the songs and poems, they were in military uniform, holding red carnations and waving national flags.

c. Peer acceptance

There would not be any break time between lessons that students will not run to schoolyard to play games or to the canteen to get something to eat before the next class started. Not any students with SEN were observed playing by herself/himself. Their classmates always accompanied them. The study participants were not observed even once to be ignored, not chosen as playmates by their peers, or excluded from peers' activities.

Students were sitting in two-seater school desks; each student had a peer sitting next to him/her. Unsurprisingly, students with SEN named as their friend peers sitting next to them in the interview. It emerged through observation that students sitting next to students with SEN help them by taking textbooks or notebooks from their bags and putting them on the desk, and put them back after the lesson is over, moreover, giving them guidance on what to do with a given task, pretty much substituting assistant teachers.

In one observation, participant Kamal from 3rd grade wanted to draw a picture on his drawing album during the math lesson; however, his peer, Aysha, sitting next to him, put aside the drawing album, put his math notebook on the desk, and guided him to accomplish the given assignment, said, *copy what is written on the board to your notebook.*

In another observation, participant Camal in 1st grade from school A had a collection of animal pictures, and Aydan, sitting next to him, would bring him the animal images add to his collection. Camal even made fairytales out of pictures and told to the whole class.

d. Peer victimization/bullying

Participant students engaged in inclusive education were socially active in school life; rejection, bullying, or victimization were not observed. Small fights and disagreements yet happened among students, however, solved quickly by the class teachers.

Three out of all-inclusive children were seated alone, one in School A and two in School B. It was asked from class teachers and commented, *those children hit their peers sitting next to them and so, I decided to make them sit alone for some time. But it is not permanently, and I will change their seats to sit with peers.*

e. Relationship between the class teachers and participants

The class teachers especially the ones in primary schools, play a dual role: teacher and mother roles. In each of the first grades in schools A and B, it was not unusual to see students with SEN running towards their class teachers and hugging them, even arguing among them who will sit at the teacher's seat. When the question of *"do you like your class teacher"* asked students (SEN), they all answered, *"how much they adore their teachers and wants to come to school to see their teachers every day."*

f. Participants' self-perception of acceptance

3rd-grade student Kamal in school B approached me before the lesson started and said, *today is his birthday*. Kamal, unlike other students, he greeted teachers and janitors separately, not waiting for the entire class. As a rule, all students in Azerbaijan stand up when the teacher enter the classroom and greets the teacher. It was not so different for me. He always greeted me when I appeared at the threshold and shook my hands.

Once, Kamal's birthday was celebrated after the class. Her mom brought a cake, and a mini-party was held. His classmates inflated balloons during break time and decorated the classroom. All of his groupmates gave him the car pictures they have drawn for him, or posters that had car pictures on them. First, the class teacher congratulated Kamal, and then all students congratulated him. Afterward, the class teacher put some music for students dance. The party ended by taking photos and videos.

g. Participants' relationships with others

It was observed students with SEN close relationships with school janitors. They would come near the end of the class to clean the classroom and would greet students. They knew all students' names. Students in the 1st grade in school B called school janitor Rana auntie. She would generally talk to kids in class and ask how the lessons were. Hasan once did show her his drawing from art class. Fatma did tell her the fish documentary she watched with her younger brother the last weekend. She did listen to her and ask some questions about the documentary.

h. Academic achievement

Participants were only present in the classroom, seating during class, and socializing with their peers during break time or group activities. However, from an academical aspect, they were passive. They could only either copy what was written on the board to their notebook or simply sit in their seats and draw pictures.

Some of participants were staying after the class, and the class teachers would help them with their homework. Others had private tutors who

helped them with homework. However, they could not compete with their peers.

Research question 2: What enablers or barriers do these students with SEN experience in inclusive education?

4.1.2 Enablers detected

Table 5. Enablers detected

a. Parent-teacher collaboration
b. Teachers' attitude

a. Parent-teacher collaboration

Students' parents were in constant contact with teachers. In one case, I observed one parent be called to the school. Luckily, the parent was living close to the school and came in a short period.

Because of the young age of the students, parents brought their children to school and came to pick them up from school. There would be short conversations between teachers and parents at that time. Apart from that, teachers frequently held parent-teacher meetings at school and gave them with up-to-date information on their child's learning. There were other ways to communicate with parents, such as: home-school notebooks and online school magazines.

b. Teachers' attitude

The class teachers showed a positive attitude to students with special education needs. Teachers showed respect, kindness and even gave priority to these students.

However, they complained about students with SEN' poor academic performances and specified that they could not much help students possess the required educational skills. Teachers did not show support for implementation of inclusive education. They supported segregated education by saying, *these students would benefit more if they are engaged in special education with special education teachers*. The teachers emphasized the students' achievement to reach at the end of the academic year and stated that *these students cannot compete with other students since the learning environment, curriculum, textbooks, and assessments are not designed to meet requirements of these students. Before putting heavy burden on our shoulders, legislation and educational context (curriculum) have to be changed first*.

4.1.3 Challenges encountered

Under this theme, findings regarding barriers obtained from the second research question are presented.

Table 6. Challenges encountered

Theme 1.1 Challenges in study venue
a. Unbalanced replacement of students
b. Structure of school buildings
c. Size of classrooms
Theme 1.2 Challenges in educational context
a. Curriculum
b. Assignments
c. Group work
d. Insufficient teaching and learning materials
Theme 1.3 Challenges encountered with teachers
a. Teachers' professionalism
b. Absence of assistant teachers

Theme 1.1. Challenges in study venue

a. Unbalanced replacement of students

Except in the class in school A (20), there were many students in the both classes of school B (34 and 30 respectively). Moreover, students involved in inclusive education in school B were not placed in the classroom in a balanced way. There were 6 students with SEN in 3rd grade and 3 were placed in the 1st grade in school B. However, the situation for school A was different, and only one student was engaged in the study process. Xayala teacher who teaches 3rd grade in school B, has 6 students in her classroom and said, *It's like forming two different classes in one class. Having many children (30) in class and having students with SEN(6) do not let me set up the learning process properly.*

b. Structure of school buildings

The schools in which observations conducted were constructed considering students engaged in inclusive education. Both schools had two other school buildings located in each other's neighborhood. Primary school students study in one building, and students from the 5th to 11th grades study in the other building. Both schools consisted of four-floor buildings, and elevators were not provided in the construction of schools.

The one observed classroom was on the third floor in School A, and the other two classrooms were on the second floor in School B. The study participants had not had physical impairments, so they were not challenged by the structure of school buildings. They could simply go to their classrooms by using stairs; and the canteen on the ground floor and could access there without anyone assisting them. However, those schools would be challenging for students with physical, hearing, and sight impairments.

c. Size of classrooms

The classroom designs of the schools did not complement inclusivity; on the contrary, were continued to implement the traditional structure of classrooms. Rooms were narrow and long, colored in white, and having windows with one exit door. The students sit behind rows of two-person desks facing a whiteboard. The teacher's desk was in the left of the classroom corner, situated next to the whiteboard, facing student's desks. The only change was that the whiteboards replaced the blackboards. Even though desk (including teacher's desk) and classroom furniture (bookcases) could easily be carried and moved so that they could be arranged into any learning style. However, a size of classroom and a space left from furniture and desks was not suitable. In one of the classes of School B, a piano was narrowing the classroom's space. Additionally, students were hanging their winter coats at the back of the classroom and a pile of coats obstructed an aisle for students to move to back desks. Wide bookshelves were placed at the back of the classroom, covering the whole backspace of the classroom.

Theme 1.2. Challenges in educational context

a. Curriculum

Teachers mentioned the ineffectiveness of the curriculum on students with educational needs. All three teachers generally commented, *the current curriculum is not designed to integrate inclusive education. Methodological guides were provided alongside school textbooks for each subject that does not explain what and how students with SEN should be taught. With the current curriculum content, those students are not able to meet their educational needs.*

Kamal, 3rd grade student from school B, neither meet learning objectives of the 3rd grade level nor learning methods was adjusted due to his learning competence. Kamal had dyslexia which was a learning difficulty affected his ability to read and write. As a 3rd grade student, he was expected to write orthography, read texts and freely memorize subject content. However, he could not do any of the given above and therefore, was assessed with low grades.

The same class teacher would complain a lot about teaching process, *I do not know how to engage those students in class activities. Methodological guidelines provided for each school subject do not take them into account and acknowledge methods and study styles to be used in each subject.*

b. Assignments

In addition, exercises and assignments were not modified for students with SEN. All students were supposed to follow the same structure. Students could only copy the text given on the board to their notebooks. Curriculum and assessment standards were troubling and causing frustrating experiences for those students. Given homework assignments were not meet the needs of all the students. Homework assignments were completed with either the help of parents or private tutors. However, not all parents were able financially to hire a private tutor, and also, not all parents of students with SEN were educated or had time because of work.

Xayala teacher, in 3rd grade from school B, said *Kamil has a private tutor who helps him complete his homework; however, he doesn't complete any assignments during a lesson. Kamal's parents closely assist him in accomplishing his assignment. But Farid's, Ali's, Cavad's and Sadi's parents cannot hire private tutors due to their financial status, an, they cannot help children in their lessons because they are illiterate.* And she further commented, *Students with SEN cannot keep up with the class's speed. I cannot prepare separate assignments for those students due to the short class time and high workload.*

However, in both first grade observations, the class teachers prepared separate assignments for those students but not all the time.

c. Group work

During observations, I did not observe the desks to be rearranged into a group of desk in any of classes. Later, it was asked to Xayala teacher, teaching 3rd grade in school B and answered that *when students works in groups, they keep talking and distract each other, so I do not prefer to make them work in groups but rather individually.* The other two first-grade teachers commented that *we do not prefer implementing group works due to the number of students. Changing desks into a group of desks takes time, and it is not easy to control student; they keep talking and distract each other.*

d. insufficient teaching and learning materials

There was lack textbook and learning materials in an accessible format for students with educational needs. The class teachers emphasized insufficient teaching materials as a

barrier to implement inclusive education. Additionally, the classrooms observed was not facilitated with the necessary equipment for students.

Theme 1.3. Challenges encountered with teachers

    a. Teachers' professionalism

The class teachers observed had been participants in the training of Developing teachers' skills in inclusive education. The teachers acquired the necessary knowledge, skills, and habits to teach in an inclusive environment. Those training focuses on identifying children with disabilities and learning the specific adaptations that children with disabilities should be taught. The teachers had sufficient knowledge in theory, however, they had shortcomings in practice. Kamala, 1st grade teacher in school B, said *They (students with SEN) lower the whole class level. Students with SEN cannot compete with their peers. Even though those students get help with their studies (taking private lessons), they still need someone to be with them all the time and give them the guidance of given tasks. They are in the 1st grade and have a lot of teaching material to be taught. I cannot spare time for each student with SEN separately, and I don't even have time for it. The lesson time is not long.*

    b. Absence of assistant teachers

The presence of assistant teachers were not observed in each of the two schools. In general, assistant teachers are not yet involved in the current phase of inclusive education.

The classroom teachers could not take care of the students with SEN one by one; neither the number of children nor the lesson hours did not allow it. Moreover, the absence of assistant teachers in the classrooms prevented students from engaging in various in a variety of educational experiences. As a result, neither of those children paid attention to the lesson nor participated in the learning process. They were rather distracting their classmates by talking to peers sitting next to him or at the back desk or wandered into the class during lesson time.

Camal, 1st grade student observed in the School A, either sat on or under the desk, and wandered in the classroom during lesson time. The 3rd grade student in school B, Cavad, would be quiet during lesson time, sit still the whole lesson time, and listen to the lesson, but did not participate in the learning process. Additionally, the rest of the students with SEN in the same class did not attend or join in the learning process, however, they drew pictures through lesson time. The class teacher of the class later showed me drawing of the students and commented, *they feel like they are in the drawing lesson all day. How can I teach them if they keep drawing in the class?*

There were 3 students of 1st grade in school B; one student listened to their teachers, while 2 students were not even sat in their seats, instead wandered in the classroom and kept changing their seats. All three teachers reported that those students interfere with the lesson process from time to time.

4.2 Document analysis

The national curriculum was revised and given the following findings.

4.2.1 Curriculum

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Azerbaijan has embarked on reforming the current curriculum within the Soviet context starting from the 1990s. The Marxist-Leninist ideology was laying in the foundation of the Soviet pedagogy, and the curriculum was predominantly theoretical and scientific. Education was focused on acquisitions of knowledge through fact memorization with excessive independence of teachers on school textbooks (Karimova, E, & I, 2014). In other words, teachers' job was to transmit standardized materials to students, and students' job was to memorize them rather than think critically or reflect on them. The curriculum was teacher-centered, and teachers would teach students a standardized context from the same methods from same school textbook.

The curriculum reforms were mainly intended to eliminate Soviet ideology from existing curriculum content and introduced new school subjects in the 1990s. The post-Soviet curriculum was aimed at meeting the need for high-level skills, critical thinking, problem-solving and creativity, and learning skills in Azerbaijan. Students' learning was put at the center. The national curriculum was approved in 2006 by the Cabinet of Ministers and has been implemented at primary education level in schools since 2008. Unlike the Soviet curriculum, the new national curriculum was focused on standard achievements of students so that students could demonstrate at all grade levels. With the new curriculum, the role of the teachers was reformulated, and they were expected to deliver the new curriculum, to attend closely in the teaching and learning process. The curriculum was rearranged mainly in six areas in, particularly in evaluating students' achievements, determining of learning outcomes for each subject, teaching materials (school textbooks and methodological guides for teachers), teacher education, and school structure and libraries.

The principles of the Azerbaijani curriculum are as followed:

1. Considering national and universal values in education
2. Creating a learning environment suitable to all students by considering their general development level, inclinations, and interests.
3. Outcomes-based
4. Integration
5. Student-centered learning

The national curriculum of the Azerbaijan Republic was prepared content standards of general education for school subjects with learning outcomes. The content standards are designed to include general primary education(1-4 grades), general basic education (5-9 grades) and general secondary education (10-11 grades).

The national curriculum aims to take everyone's talents and skills into account and implement the necessary knowledge and competencies to transform them into productive members of the community in a market economy. It is essential to the point that the curriculum considers the age, physiological, psychological, and individual characteristics and potential capacity of students. Despite that, the national curriculum does not mention inclusive education and students with special educational needs or difficulties. Yet, the curriculum does address to a student as all students however does not specify who is meant under that term.

Student assessment is applied through 3 components:

a. monitoring student achievement,
b. curriculum-based assessment which determines student's learning achievement to appropriate content standards for school subjects
c. final assessment per levels of education.

The student assessment in general education does not include inclusive assessment for students with special educational needs. More importantly, the current student evaluation does not consideration of special needs of students and therefore there is no exceptional student assessment for these students. All students are expected to meet the same assessment criteria.

The curriculum stipulates that the teaching and learning process is implemented by establishing an equal learning environment for all students taking into account the potential of students' capacity. Moreover, the curriculum locates students in the center of the learning process and further aims to meet the child's interests and requirement and improve child's skills and capacity. While the curriculum provides the value of each student's potential, do not address the adjustment of different learning methods and teaching tools that consider students' abilities and learning potential. Thus, even the current curriculum represents taking into account the learning competencies of all students and respect different capacities and potentials but expects all students to achieve the same learning objectives and general outcomes of the obligatory content at each grade level.

According to General Education Law, the curriculum represent a special education program for students with limited health conditions. However, special education program was not found in the revision of the curriculum.

4.2.2 National legislation

a. Constitution in the Republic of Azerbaijan

Article 42 (1) of the Constitution emphasizes the right of each citizen to education. However, the constitution does not specifically refer to the rights of children with disabilities to education. In general, the Republic of Azerbaijan does not guarantee inclusive education to children with disabilities under the constitution. Even though there is no constitutional guarantee to inclusive education, the constitution addresses the right to equality and ensures that persons with disabilities are eligible for all rights given in the constitution.

b. Education Law

Article 5.2 of Education law secures equal opportunities for every citizen in the constitution regarding educational rights, but specifically addresses intolerance to any discrimination regardless of individual's health condition.

Although it was not given in the curriculum, article 10 sub-article 10.6 of education law indicates that special curriculum shall be implemented for students with health issues and learners who are in long-duration of treatment. Despite the fact that the curriculum was revised as a separate document that does not address to special curricula.

Article 14.5 provides information on which educational institutions operate in the Republic of Azerbaijan, and while the sub-article of 14.5.1 mentions pre-school educational institutions, special kindergarten was also listed as one of them. However, there is no further explanation as to whom these kindergartens are referred. Furthermore, sub-article of 14.5.2 list general education institutions (primary, secondary, general secondary education institutions) with general education boarding schools, special schools and special boarding schools, special schools and boarding schools for children with limited health status, institutions for children with special needs. No additional or exploratory information was provided on sub-article.

While the stages and levels of education were listed in article 17 of the education law, the inclusive education was not mentioned there, moreover, according to the regulation, each level of education had to implement following the curriculum.

c. Rights of Person with Disabilities

Article 18.1 of the preschool and extracurricular education for children with disabilities states that education of children with disabilities is carried out in state, municipal and private special kindergartens or other kindergartens within the principle of inclusion, according to the Individual Rehabilitation Program approved under article 11 of this law. According to article 20.2 of education and vocational training of persons with disabilities, education of persons with disabilities can be provided in the form of special or inclusive education.

The Implementation of both articles of the law still paves the way for special education to prevail and entirely delays inclusive education.

d. Education (Special education) of persons with disabilities

The law (5.0.1) defines the right of persons with disabilities to education (special education) free of charge and according to the examination of the psychological-medical-pedagogical commission and the relevant executive authority. Unfortunately, the provision of the legislation still supports the medical model of disability in Azerbaijan.

In sub-article 9.1 of the law, education of those who cannot study in educational institutions due to their restrained health conditions is organized at home through relevant educational institutions. The section of the law still maintains the isolation and homeschooling of people.

Article 12 of the law covers the organization of inclusive education. The legislation comprises of 30 articles, and only one provision and 3 sub-articles are devoted to the organization of inclusive education. However, the rest of the law determines special education, which delays the replacement of special education with inclusive education. Sub-article 12.1 states that if the educational institution has special conditions for receiving education according to psychological-pedagogical and medical instructions, inclusive education for persons with disabilities is arranged in that institution. There is a shortcoming in the law; instead of creating conditions for the implementing of inclusive education in all school, it provides inclusive education in schools at which have conditions. Moreover, the law highlights the dominance of the medical model of disability one more time. In the legislation, the criteria of the psychological-medical-pedagogical commission and the relevant executive authority for the participation of persons with disabilities in inclusive education are not included. Moreover, the list of diseases for individuals was not defined to assess their eligibility for inclusive education.

However, Article 13 of the law provides a list of impairments and disorders of persons who can study in special education institutions. The list includes (13.1):

13.1.1 speech disorders;

13.1.2. hearing impaired;

13.1.3. visually impaired;

13.1.4. mental disorders;

13.1.5. people with musculoskeletal disorders and scoliosis;

13.1.6. those with severe disabilities, including the deaf-blind;

13.1.7. those who are deficient in emotional-voluntary sphere and behavior;

13.1.8. those with chronic somatic diseases.

Furthermore, 13.2 of the law stipulates that special education can be established for people with disorders specified in 13.1 in general educational institutions. According to the article, persons with disabilities are stimulated to attend special education or special education organized in general educational institutions. But there are no indication people with disorders to study inclusive education.

Article 1.016 of the law defines the term of assistant teacher. A teacher assistant is defined as a qualified specialist who assists the teacher in the organization of the pedagogical process

of inclusive education in general education institutions. However, the article ends by simply indicating a definition without implying additional information. Article 11.2 yet mentions that educational institutions should arrange the necessary support for persons with disabilities in the teaching process but does not explain what the required assistance means.

4.2.2.1. Inclusive education regulated by law

Table 7. Inclusive education regulated by law

a. Infrastructure
b. Recourses and services
c. Relationship among students
d. Assessment
e. Allocation
f. Inclusive classrooms
g. Bullying/protection of children

a. Infrastructure

The legislation of the Republic of Azerbaijan provides a suitable educational environment for persons with disabilities. Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Decree No. 62 on State Standards in Preschool Education for Children with Disabilities, Law on Children' Rights, Decree No. 5 on the Regulations of Secondary Schools, Law on General Education, Education Law, Education (Special Education) of Persons with Disabilities and Law on Pre-school Education supports supplying appropriate educational environment for persons with disabilities.

The Law of Rights of Person with Disabilities explicitly states to create barrier-free conditions for physically disabled people. In particular, sub-article of 13.3 of the law ensures that buildings, environments, and products are designed in accordance with Universal Design and are taken into account by the relevant executive authority. However, the concept of Universal Design is not yet been adopted a significant extent.

According to sub-article 4.2 of State Standards in Preschool Education for Children with disabilities, accessible school buildings and schoolyards, safe provision of sports facilities, ramps, and handles should be compulsory in special pre-schools. Although the law properly regulates the education environment with Universal Design, the law supports segregated (special) pre-school education.

 The given laws above provide a suitable educational environment for persons with disabilities but do not clearly indicate how to be regulated. General education institutions are not built in line with Universal Design, and schools do not provide an accessible education environment for students with disabilities.

b. Recourses and services

The legislation reviewed does not provide recourses and services for children with disabilities. Teaching aid, hearing and visual devices, and technical equipment for children in need is not clearly stated in the legislation. Despite this, the legislation determines hearing and vision equipment provision to preschool children with disabilities as a special educational tool. However, the legislation is designed only for special pre-school education institutions.

Providing special education tools for children with disabilities in general education institutions is not mentioned in any of the laws adopted. Since these resources are not available for children with disabilities in all general education institutions, this leads to the exclusion of disabled children from inclusive education. The legislative gap continues to maintain special and segregated education.

c. Relationship among students

The legislation does not confirm the importance of establishing friendly and positive relationships between students. Moreover, the adopted laws do not demonstrate the creation of a positive and inclusive school community for children with disabilities in which they feel safe, supported, and encouraged, and can to express themselves without fear. Currently, the only law adopted on this matter is the Law on Pre-school Education. The law provides development of children in pre-school education, whereas establishing positive relationships and forming friendships with children is not explicitly mentioned.

d. Assessment

The legislation does not state the principles of the evaluation process, and the legislation does not meet the principles of universal education design. In addition, the assessment procedure is not clearly given in the Education Law. According to General Education law, a diagnostic evaluation is carried out by general education institutions. However, it is not specified how the diagnostic evaluation will be applied to children with disabilities. Therefore, this causes another barrier to the accessibility of inclusive education for children with disabilities.

Additionally, the current legislation on the diagnostic evaluation is not in accordance with International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health and nothing has been specified on how to support schools in the process (p.69).

The Republic of Azerbaijan has acceded to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its General Comment No.4 and has complied with general principles of inclusive education; however, the assessment process fail to employ the assessment criteria determined by the convention. This is another obstacle to the inclusion of children with disabilities in inclusive education.

e. Allocation

The budget of general education institutions is determined by the state, and this is clearly stated in the legislation. Regarding to UN convention Article 24, the current legislation does not indicate governance allocation system and financial mechanism to support children's education.

Ministry of Education allocates funds to implement inclusive education, and this was indicated in the State Program the Development of Inclusive Education in the Republic of Azerbaijan in 2018-2024. Besides the Ministry of Education, the other relevant government agencies provide financial support.

Generally, the cost of education for children with disabilities is covered by the Ministry of Education by the Law of Free Special Education for Children with Disabilities. However, according to the law only special education fees are covered.

f. Inclusive classrooms

The legislation does not determine to set up inclusive classrooms for children with disabilities. In addition, the legislation does not even support the existence of inclusive classrooms. Disabled children are supported only in special schools (preschool and general). The law that addresses this issue in Decree No. 62 on State Standards in Preschool Education for Children with Disabilities. The accessible environment only provided in special schools with available inclusive opportunities and available recourses for children with disabilities.

g. Bullying/protection of children

The legislation determines appropriate procedures to protect children and prevent bullying. Azerbaijan adopted the Law on the Rights of Child in line with UN Convention on the Rights of Child. The law provides a safe education environment for all children.

The law on the Rights of Persons with disabilities ensures the protection of persons with disabilities. The law also states that discrimination against a person with disabilities is prohibited and controlled by law. In addition, the law states that it protects all children from moral, psychological, and harmful actions. However, the law does not explicitly mention children with disabilities in inclusive education and addresses any events that during inclusive education.

Chapter Five

The present chapter discusses the findings from the study regarding the research problem and research questions outlined in the first chapter. The discussion of the findings was given according to theoretical framework, belongingness and social model of disability theory, and literature review. The first, the discussion addressed the school experience of students with special educational needs practicing inclusive education, peer relationship and a sense of school belonging, and then the discussion focused on enablers or barriers students (SEN) face in inclusive education.

5.Discussion of the findings

The first research question was intended to answer how students with SEN experience peer relationship and a sense of school belonging in inclusive education settings. The findings regarding the first research question indicated that students with SEN positively experience peer relationships and feel themselves belong to school. However, the data gathered and analyzed from two primary schools in Baku with 9 participants, so the findings obtained from the analysis cannot generalize for all-inclusive primary schools in Azerbaijan.

The study's findings concluded that research participants with SEN were not completely functionally included or involved in the educational process. In accordance with sense of belonging, having a sense of belonging to the school helped students with SEN establish and maintain relatedness to the school. These students developed their sense of school belonging during their primary school years in which those individuals felt themselves to be integral part of the education process and the educational environment. According to sense of belonging theory, people need belongingness. So, positive and kind attitude of teachers and other school staff towards students with SEN, these students being accepted by their peers in their classrooms, having a peer friend and being in stable friendship, not exposing to bullying, and participating in school activities helped them to establish strong and stable interpersonal contacts to fulfill their need for belongingness. In other words, students with SEN experienced of feeling valued, accepted, needed and being important to external referent(Gao et al., 2017; Prince & Hadwin, 2013), and this resulted in those students somehow functionally included in the education process.

However, the findings related to students with SEN not functionally included in the education process were imposed socially, which caused these students' partial involvement. In line with the social model of disability theory, research participants' impairments were caused by society and the way society was shaped. The social model of disability theory sees disability as a restriction created socially. Society caused social barriers which limited and restricted these students' fully function in the education process. Furthermore, those social barriers limited students with SEN's participation in the education process equally with students without SEN. A lack of clarification or not a direct reference to inclusive education in national legislation, the failure of the education context to adjust to the educational needs of all

categories of students in the school, the unsuitable and inaccessible educational establishments, and the negative attitude of teachers towards the practice of inclusive education happened to be consequence for students with SEN's limited and ineffective participation in education the process. In other words, the mentioned findings caused little involvement in the education process for these students with SEN due to social structures, which is a public problem that demands social and political solutions (Anastasiou & Kauffman, 2013; Harris & White, 2018; Molineux, 2017b).

The results in line with peer relationship and a sense of school belonging in detail are listed below.

5.1 The friend network

The result found out that students with SEN had a positive relationships with their peers. The observation and informal interviews with students with SEN showed that involving in inclusive education gave opportunities for them to interact with their peers, improve their social skills and develop their social relationships. The informal chats with class teachers revealed that students' friendship grew and improved for 4 four years since primary education last that long. The existing literature states that students with SEN give and receive upper-level social support and form broad friendship networks with their peers compared to students involved in segregated settings (Dietrich, 2005; Grütter, Gasser, & Malti, 2017; Østvik, Ytterhus, & Balandin, 2018). The informal conversations with the participant students disclosed that each of the students with SEN had at least one friend studying in the same class. Moreover, the observation was exposed that students with SEN were likely to be friend with their peers sitting next to them. Meanwhile, the observation represented that students with SEN except their peer friends sitting beside them also interacted with the rest of the classmates and formed social relationships. The studies suggest that including students with SEN in inclusive education with students without SEN produce positive social outcomes for both sides (Dietrich, 2005; Grütter et al., 2017; Østvik et al., 2018; Seymour, Reid, & Bloom, 2009). Regarding this, the students without SEN were observed to be aware and meet their friends with SEN' needs and provided support and companionship. On the contrary, having positive peer relationships enables a student to build sense of school belonging (DiGennaro Reed, McIntyre, Dusek, & Quintero, 2011; Østvik et al., 2018; Seymour et al., 2009). According to the belongingness theory, being stable and strong connection is enough to satisfy people's need for belonging. In other words, students with SEN established a sense of school belonging by forming and developing positive social relationship with their peers. Moreover, the interviews with students with SEN revealed that they were enthusiasts to come to school every day.

Education is an essential and valuable tool to ensure the social inclusion of children with disabilities (Graham, 2020; Robo, 2014; Szumski, Smogorzewska, & Grygiel, 2020). The studies suggest that participation in extracurricular activities creates connections and develops social friendships with students (Dymond, Rooney-Kron, Burke, & Agran, 2020; Mitchell, 2020). The results showed that students with SEN had a higher participation in school activities. The informal chats with the class teachers revealed that they ensured the participation of students with SEN in extracurricular activities. The participation of the students with SEN was also observed in one extracurricular activity. Extracurricular activities make opportunities

for children to connect with other children and make friends (Dymond et al., 2020; Mitchell, 2020). The majority and types of extracurricular activities were organized for the national days and holidays, and age and grade level of students were considered. The context of the organized events were modified to the level of students with SEN.

The findings showed that students with disabilities experienced being accepted by their peers. The result indicated that students with disabilities benefited socially in inclusive schools, and their learning disabilities did not cause difficulties for them in peer acceptance. As it has been stated, friendships are an essential component of belonging (Grütter et al., 2017). Moreover, in lie with belongingness theory, the participant students were familiar with their classmates and friends who understood and respected their needs, leading to students feeling themselves to belong a group or whole class.

Students with disabilities are more exposed to bullying than students without disabilities (Hartley, Bauman, Nixon, & Davis, 2017; Healy, 2014; Schwab, 2018). However, the observation was not reported incident of bullying. Moreover, the observation and informal chats with the class teachers showed that bullying free education environment was created. So, students' educational needs did not make them victims of bullying. The studies highlight that bullying often happens within the school environment and involves interaction with peers which may reduce students' connectedness to school (Han et al., 2021; Hartley et al., 2017). However, the participant students did not experience bullying and negative interaction with their classmates which did not diminish their school belongings.

The class teachers played a double role in the classroom: teacher and mother. Teachers are a central element to shape and develop students' engagement and academic achievement in school environment (Büssing, Menzel, Schnieders, Beckmann, & Basten, 2019; Engels, Spilt, Denies, & Verschueren, 2021). The observation and informal chats with class teachers depicted that the positive relationships did not contribute to students with SEN academic achievement, but shaped students with SEN engagement at school. The class teachers developed with students with SEN positive relationship. Moreover, the studies indicate that affective teacher student relationships contribute to students' engagement in schools (Emmers, Baeyens, & Petry, 2020; Engels et al., 2021; Szumski et al., 2020). During observation that teachers and students with SEN had close, positive relationships, negativizes and conflicts between them were not observed. The class teachers created a safe, supportive, and welcoming environment, which served as an essential attachment between teachers and students with SEN.

Self-perception is defined as a persons' assessment of self-worth (Devries, Voß, & Gebhardt, 2018; Strickland, 2002). The studies suggest that students with SEN integrated into inclusive education may affect their self-perception (Heyman, 1990; Koster, Minnaert, Nakken, Jan Pijl, & van Houten, 2011). The observations revealed that students with SEN' social relationships with their peers contributed positively to their self-perception of acceptance. Children develop self-perception on a number of factors. One factor is social competence which comprises communication skills, social communication, and interpersonal communication. The study findings indicated that their peers had socially accepted students with SEN.

The observation and informal chats with teachers exposed that students with SEN had a low academic achievement. Existing obstacles due to low academic achievement are discussed in detail in the second research question. However, the low academical achievement did not affect students with SEN' peer relationship and school engagement.

The study findings showed that not only class teachers but the other school staff also developed positive relationships with students with SEN in inclusive schools. Students' school relationships in and out of classroom can improve academic achievement in inclusive environments (Rukavina, Doolittle, Li, Beale-Tawfeeq, & Manson, 2019; Sánchez-Martí & Ramírez-Iñiguez, 2012). Establishing relationships with school staff, apart from class teachers contributed to social relationships and social acceptance of students with SEN.

The second research question aimed to cover enablers or barriers students with SEN experience in inclusive education. The research results showed that there is number of impediments students with SEN practice in inclusive education. The study could only cover two primary schools in Baku city with 9 student participants from a government school. So, the result may not generalize for the whole country. Inclusive education applied at other regions' schools may expose different obstacles students face. However, the barriers discovered from the collected data and listed below are the common barriers since they are mostly linked to drawbacks in legislative and policy frameworks.

As discovered in the results of findings and literature review chapters, this part first addresses the enablers students with SEN experience in practicing inclusive education.

5.2 The legislation

Azerbaijan has been signed a number of international documents which affirm education as a basic human right. The Salamanca Statement and several further international treaties, Convention on the Right of Children and Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and other conventions listed in the literature review part stipulates a commitment to providing education to all children within regular classrooms. As one of state parties, Azerbaijan endorsed education for all in accordance with the Salamanca Statement and the other Conventions and have been adopted or adjusted the legislation and joined to international agreements which gave stimulus to be transformed from segregated education toward inclusive education. Azerbaijan has identified inclusive education as a main educational goal (Mikayilova, 2019) and has been fulfilled and continuing to fulfill certain obligations regarding measures ensured by general principles of the Convention and Salamanca Statement.

Azerbaijan has been adopted and implemented the laws regarded to inclusive education. With regard to international cooperation, some laws have been reformulated or adopted to promote the inclusion of all students at all levels on an equal basis and opportunities. According to Education law, Education (Special education) law, Rights of Persons with disabilities ensures rights of students with disabilities to education, and implement inclusive education one way or another to students with disabilities in general educational institutions.

Besides, in recent years, several initiatives have been implemented to support inclusive education in Azerbaijan. One of the current initiatives is the state program of Developing inclusive education for persons with disabilities. The program was designed in line with the general principles of UN convention Article 24. Additionally, the state program aims to eliminate any obstacles in the education environment for persons with disabilities. Moreover, ensures the protection of rights of persons with disabilities to education and presents rights of persons with disabilities to education on an equal basis with persons without disabilities in the legislation. Furthermore, the state program aimed at enhancing the legislation on inclusive education in the country.

The legislation and joined agreements enable students with disabilities to enroll in regular schools in the same class with their peers. Following the legislation, the research participants were ensured to inclusive education and registered in regular schools regardless of their intellectual and psychological retardations. Consistent with the legislation, the research participants perceive education on equal terms with others. It involves them accessing education without discrimination and enabling them to participate and overcome obstacles to learning.

5.3 Enablers detected

Students experienced another enabler was a positive attitude toward them. The observation demonstrated that the class teachers in all 3 classes showed a positive attitude toward students with SEN. The class teachers were often expressed how much they care about students with SEN and their academic achievements in informal chats. The data collected in primary school, which lasts 4 years and provides enough time to develop positive relationships with students with SEN.

However, those teachers had negative attitudes towards inclusive education. The literature states that teachers' attitude toward inclusive education aligns with how successfully inclusive education is implemented (Marhamah, Kurniawati, & Mangunsong, 2018; Rukavina et al., 2019; Warren, 2014; Weiss, Markowetz, & Kiel, 2018). They supported integration at which students with SEN placed in special classrooms with special teachers within the same schools. It may be explained that the teachers are not well equipped with adequate information and have not gained teaching experiences in inclusive teaching. Most of the time, teachers experienced challenges in inclusive education was not being able to link theoretical knowledge in real classroom environment. Further, the reasons for teachers' negative attitude were inadequacy in legislation, curriculum, inappropriate teaching methods, and insufficient educational materials

In accordance with paragraph 2(b) of article 24 of the Convention, the participant students attended primary schools within the communities in their area of residence. The schools were in safe physical reach for students with SEN. The participant students were not sent away from home. Besides, the students' parents and the class teachers were in constant

contact with each other. So that parents could quickly reach school in emergencies. The existing literature suggests that parents and teachers' positive have an positive connections have a positive impact on students' academic achievement and social interaction (Adams, Harris, & Jones, 2016; Schultz, Sreckovic, Able, & White, 2016; Soodak & Erwin, 1995). The observation revealed that parents of the research the participants were in solid communication and collaboration with the class teachers. The informal chats with teachers disclosed that parents and teachers held constant conversations about students with SEN academic and behavioral difficulties. Teachers guided parents to facilitate students' education at home. Parental solid involvement was observed, which lead them be informed and advocated to support their children support. Parents were also involved in the organization of class events.

The findings concerning the barriers acquired from the study were listed as below:

5.4 Challenges encountered

Theme 1. Barriers in legislation:

Education law ensures children's rights with disabilities to education and specifically exposes intolerance to the discrimination of children with limited health conditions. Additionally, the Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, General Education Law, and Education (Special Education) Law ensures any discrimination toward persons with disabilities. However, the general legislation prevails the usage of the medical model of disability in Azerbaijan and still defines persons with disabilities to education (special education) by examination of the psychological-medical-pedagogical commission.

Moreover, the common legislation defines students enrolled in special educational institutions, homeschooling, and inclusive education as person with disabilities. Further, the definition expanded that a person with physical disabilities, mental or psychological retardation, cannot study without special conditions.

Meanwhile, Education law provides that persons with disabilities are eligible special or integrated education. Yet, Education (Special) law and General education law indicates that persons with disabilities could be enrolled in inclusive education in mainstream schools if the schools have appropriate conditions. Moreover, the General education law indicates establishing a special education departments in general education institutions for persons with disabilities. Placing students with disabilities in regular schools without any changes to standardized requirement does not constitute to inclusive education rather to integration.

The legislation ensures that persons with disabilities have access to special education, which causes barriers to the equal inclusion of all mainstream schools. Even though Azerbaijan ensures students' rights with disabilities have access to inclusive education, the legislation fails to guarantee full inclusion and effective participation of them in inclusive education. Therefore, national legislation needs to be enacted to phase the use of special education out gradually and

transform the education system to be inclusive, including learners at all levels, on the basis of equality with others.

Theme 2. Barriers in Education Context:

The national curriculum emphasizes the importance of creating an accessible learning environment for all students considering their general development level, aspirations, and interests. The curriculum forms the basis of including national and universal values into education and being student-centered learning, outcome-based and integrative. However, the curriculum is not flexible, and teaching and learning methods are not adjusted to students' capacities, requirements, and learning styles. According to General education law, the curriculum presents special education programs for disabled students enrolled in special education. Moreover, the curriculum still accommodates all learners to the standardized content and teaching methods in general educational institutions.

The national curriculum states that it was designed considering students' development level and interests, however in practice did not meet their strengths and needs, on the contrary, students with SEN were in the learning process following general curriculum. The curriculum hasn't been adapted and modified in contents, assessment, and pedagogy. These lead to the class teachers being reluctant to accommodate curriculum accessible to students with SEN and make changes in their instructions, activities, and teaching methods. They might have prepared different tasks for students with SEN from time to time, but they did not accommodate the teaching process for students with SEN. Students with SEN were provided with the same content and subjects at the same level as their peers. The education plan for each subject and subject textbooks were not chosen appropriately for students with SEN.

Students with SEN are not provided with accessible educational materials. Textbooks and learning materials were insufficient and not in accessible formats for students with SEN. The way education materials were prepared creates another learning barrier for students with SEN. Regarding article 24 of the Convention, Azerbaijan must apply the Universal Design for Learning approach to adapt the learning environment to meet diverse needs of students. However, the findings obtained from the study showed that learning environment, specifically educational materials were not adjusted to the requirement of students with SEN. The document analysis also showed that the legislation do not mention for educational materials to be modified for the needs of all students. Textbooks were only available in print formats and assignments and language of the textbooks were not accessible to students with SEN' developmental level. The observation showed that the computer was used from time to time to show pictures and videos to assist the learning process but, it was not that effective.

An assignment is given at home or in the lesson often went uncompleted by students with SEN. Students with SEN at home completed their homework with the help of their parents or private tutors. As it has been stated that while some of the students' parents are well-educated and have educational recourses at home, others may have family duties and work even at night and not have available recourses at home (Hamblet, 2016; Remerowski, 2010). Ultimately, students with SEN may and may not receive help from their parents to get their homework done. Casual chats with the class teachers revealed that there are students who have private tutors help them with homework. It was obtained from the observation that the class teachers

gave instructions for the assignment in the class. However, they neither walk around the class nor write the instructions on the board and made sure that all students clear with the instructions. Teachers did not seem interested to ensure the participation of students with SEN in class activities. On the other hand, they complained about students with SEN did not complete assignments and being passive whole study process. Furthermore, observation showed that students sitting next to students with SEN helped them at least copy what is written on the board to their notebook.

There are two reasons for students with disabilities not to complete the given assignment: characteristics of students or problems regarded to teachers' ability (Hamblet, 2016; Remerowski, 2010). Students can lack motivation, have attention problems, or miss organization skills. Another cause can be the teacher's inability to meet student's needs. Further, the observation is related to the fact that the class teachers did not come up with assignments that were right for the students with SEN. Either the assignments were time consuming or too difficult for students with SEN. Moreover, they did not check if students with SEN have materials and noted the assignments in correctly.

Studies indicate that well-structured group works contribute to academic and socio-emotional benefits for students with SEN (Lafont, Rivière, Darnis, & Legrain, 2017). However, the observation exposed that the class teachers were not eager and did not use group work. During informal chats with the class teachers, they explained that they do not see the point in using group work. They further explained that students with disabilities either do not behave appropriately in group or distract their peers. They justified their action because using group work does not extent students with SEN participation in the learning process and they cannot keep up with their peers. However, if the students with disabilities participate in group work activities, they can participate fully and effectively in the learning process. Moreover, well-organized group work can enhance students with SEN' sense of belonging, peer relationship, and communication skills.

Theme 3. Barriers in educational establishment

The school buildings the data collected at were not designed to accommodate inclusion. In accordance with article 9 of the Convention, State Parties should prohibit inaccessible education infrastructures and guarantee safe and accessible educational buildings in line with Universal Design to everyone, including students with disabilities. However, with regard to articles 9 and 24 of the Convention, Azerbaijan does not fulfill its obligation to design and implement educational institutions to be inclusive. Since the participant students were not physically disabled, they were not challenged by the inaccessible infrastructure of the school buildings. They easily had access to classroom, toilet, school cafeteria and entertainment space by using school stairs. Furthermore, document analysis confirms that the legislation indicates regular schools must be accessible to everyone, including learners with disabilities. However, the legislation does not provide guidelines and directives on how to build accessible school buildings. On the other hand, sub-article 4.2 of State Standards in Preschool Education for children with disabilities underlies the school building to be designed to foster inclusion. Nevertheless, the law specifically addresses pre-school-aged children with disabilities, which

still endorse the presence of special education. Additionally, the Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities states forming barrier-free environments for persons with disabilities. However, creating an accessible environment for a student with disabilities were not mentioned.

One of the barriers that challenged the participant students was the unbalanced replacement of them in the classes. The condition was good in two out of three classes observed. However, in one class, 6 students with SEN were placed in the class. The class was already crowded with 30 students, and 6 students out of 30 had educational needs. The observation showed that the class teacher struggled to provide necessary services to students with SEN. The informal chats with teachers confirmed that they were also worried about overcrowded classrooms and the number of students with SEN. She further complained about not properly setting the teaching process and meet each student's need due to a large number of students. Overcrowded classrooms are considered to cause poor learning outcomes (Jones, 2016). The national legislation prohibits students' exclusion from education due to their disabilities and makes it clear that everyone, despite their disabilities, has access to education. However, the legislation does not provide information on how and how many students with disabilities should be placed in inclusive classrooms.

Classroom size effects to individual's learning (Graham, 2020; Jones, 2016). As discovered and analyzed from document analysis, the legislation does not give adequate support to set up inclusive classrooms for students with disabilities. Only one law, Decree No. 62 on State Standards in Preschool Education for children with disabilities address to creating inclusive classroom with available recourses for children with disabilities. However, this law is limited to special pre-schools. Moreover, the national legislation does not mention how the class size should be. The observed classrooms were small; however students' desks and other furniture, especially a piano in school B, narrowed the classroom's space and formed obstacles for students to move easily. Existing literature suggests that classroom conditions can be essential for academic achievement (Hamblet, 2016; Mitchell, 2020). Moreover, the studies indicate that small class sizes and insufficient teaching infrastructure are considered to attributed to poor learning outcomes.

In accordance with theoretical framework, the social model of disability indicates that people are challenged by the barriers shaped by society, not due to their impairments. From the findings of the present study, it was observed and confirmed by document analysis that inadequate school building, crowded classrooms, and unbalanced replacement of students with SEN in inclusive classroom and classroom sizes which narrowed by a number of desks and furniture caused social barriers students with SEN faced in practicing inclusive education.

Theme 4. Barriers encountered with teachers

Document analysis revealed that no ways in which the national legislation addresses teachers' training in inclusive education. However, according to article 24 of the Convention, State Parties must ensure that teachers are trained in inclusive education. Following the article, State program on the development of inclusive education in Azerbaijan was adopted, and so that teachers were supported with continuous trainings in inclusive education. Generally,

primary school teachers are engaged in the training of developing teachers' skills in inclusive education. The studies suggest that teachers qualified in inclusive teaching attribute to advantages of inclusive education (Chamberlain, Kasari, & Rotheram-Fuller, 2007; Nwoko, Crowe, Malau-Aduli, & Malau-Aduli, 2019; Szumski et al., 2020). Furthermore, the observations and informal chats with teachers revealed that the class teachers were not employed to work effectively in inclusive education. One class teacher out of three class teachers was a participant in training. Nevertheless, she did not meet the educational needs of students in the classroom. As a result, teachers' lack of understanding and incompetency in inclusive education remains a significant barrier to inclusive education.

It was apparent from the observation that assistant teachers were not involved in the teaching process. Meanwhile, the document analysis showed that the legislation does not show a guideline how to employ assistant teachers in the classroom. The legislation is only limited to the definition of assistant teachers. It can be explained by the lack of teachers with sufficient inclusive knowledge or that the Ministry of Education has not yet allocated a budget to recruit assistant teachers. The findings underlined that the class teachers could not fulfill students with SEN' needs by themselves. But the lesson time, workload, and several students that caused obstacles for the class teachers. The research studies reveal that assistant teachers impact on enhancing students' academic achievement in regular school (Doležalová, 2018; Graham, 2020; Viktorin, 2018). The current study rather indicates that the presence of assistant teachers in the regular classrooms may have positive effects not only on students with impairments but also on all students. Available researches indicate that the collaboration of class teachers and assistant teachers is a crucial asset to inclusion. Assistant teachers share the class teacher's workload and have the main responsibility for students with SEN, providing adequate information on completing assignments and homework corrections (Doležalová, 2018; Nwoko et al., 2019; Viktorin, 2018). So, it concludes that not presence of assistant teachers in the observed classrooms provokes barriers for teacher to implement and for students with SEN to practice inclusive education.

CHAPTER SIX

6.Conclusion & Recommendations

The last chapter readdresses the whole research process and draws the following conclusions based on the study findings. In addition, the previous section of the chapter highlights its contribution to existing studies and recommendations to be applied to potential areas to review and enact laws for future actions and future studies.

6.1. Conclusions

The present study investigated and explained school experiences of students with special educational needs (SEN) in Azerbaijan. The study was necessitated due to the lack of sufficient information and limited research on inclusive education in Azerbaijan. Furthermore, the existing research was either outdated or did not show advances have been made until now. The study's objectivity was to explore the latest situation of inclusive education and examine the students with SEN's school experiences in inclusive education settings in Azerbaijan. The study provided insight into the peer relationship, a sense of school belonging to students with SEN and facilitators, and barriers they confront in implementing inclusive education. The research paper contributed to the existing literature by adding students' perspectives and promoted a better understanding of their school experiences. The current study commenced by providing background information on educational rights for persons with difficulties secured by numerous international legislations and the general education and inclusive education system of Azerbaijan after gaining independence from the Soviet Union. Despite the implementation of inclusive education in Azerbaijan's education system, the Soviet legacy of special schools continued to be used mainly, causing obstacles to the successful development of inclusive education in Azerbaijan.

The study was conducted in two government primary inclusive schools in the capital city of Azerbaijan by utilizing qualitative ethnographic design, and collected data using participant observation, informal interview, and document analysis. The research was conducted based on two research questions, and all the findings obtained enabled the research to answer the research questions. To show how the research questions are answered, it is better to see results from each research question's findings.

The first research question of this study was intended to investigate how students with special educational needs (SEN) experience peer relationships and a sense of school belonging in educationally inclusive settings. The findings of this study emphasized the importance of including students with SEN in inclusive schools, which led to positive students peer relationships. The existing research revealed that inclusive education settings allow for students with SEN to form and amplify peer relations with their peers. The social exclusion of students

with SEN was not observed, which could be significant hindrance to develop inclusive education. The study's findings depicted that the participant students had at least one friend from the class, which was in long-term stable relationships over primary school year. In addition, they were in constant contact and interaction with their other classroom peers. This was drawn from the findings that the participant students interacted with their peers in school breaks and during lessons. Some studies show that cooperating learning methods foster students' peer relationships and manage students with SEN socially accepted. The group works and projects than enhance students' collaboration were not preferred by the class teachers because students distract each other and do not behave appropriately. Nevertheless, despite existing studies highlighting lower social acceptance of students with SEN, it was evident that they were accepted by their peers, participated in extracurricular activities and school projects and collaborated with their peers. Further, it was observed that students' learning difficulties did not cause social exclusion by their peers. Though, students with SEN are at high risk of victimization and bullying compared to their peers without SEN (Schwab, 2018), the participant students were not exposed to bullying.

It is essential to understand that teachers' attitudes towards students with SEN affect students' social behavior. Therefore, teachers having positive attitudes toward participant students shaped their social inclusion in the classroom. The participant students, alongside their class teachers developed positive relationships with other school staff.

It is beneficial to place students with SEN with students without SEN in the same classroom, which boost their positive peer relations and social self-conception. Self-perception of loneliness of students with SEN was not found. While positive peer relations and successful school engagement make students motivated in given assignments and thus, have higher academic achievement, this study found that students with SEN had a lower academic achievement despite those factors.

The second research question was to assess existed enablers and barriers students with SEN confront in inclusive education settings. The study outcomes exhibited that participants attended schools in their residence area and their parents were in strong collaboration with the class teachers which indicated a supportive environment for students with SEN fostering inclusive education.

While the legislation has presented multiple articles and sub-articles on the implementation of inclusive education, a lack of clarification in the regulation is a significant barrier to the successful implementation of inclusive education. National legislation does not address directly or school experience of students with SEN and any barriers and enablers they face in inclusive education. The Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan ensures that everyone has an equal rights to education in the country; however, it do not specifically address to educational rights of persons with disabilities. Moreover, the constitution fails to mention and yet does not guarantee inclusive education the regarding rights of persons with disabilities. Education Law, General Education Law, Rights of Persons with Disabilities and Education (Special education) of Persons with Disabilities do somehow address inclusive education, even impose conditions if the general education institutions have special conditions then inclusive education can be organized. However, these laws do not indicate any changes to standardized requirements in placing students in mainstream schools.

The study results disclosed that the curriculum does mention inclusive education, however, does not address and meet educational needs of students with SEN. The curriculum in the Azerbaijan education system does not adjust to all categories of students in schools. As a result, teaching and learning materials were not adapted to students' development and learning styles with SEN which caused major impediment for students with SEN to practice inclusive education. Thus, the context of school subjects and given assignments were not accessible for students with SEN and discouraged their learning motivation. Furthermore, students with SEN were challenged by insufficient and unmodified learning, and teaching materials, high a number of student enrollment, unsuitable school facilities and inaccessible school infrastructure.

The study's findings presented that teachers had a positive attitude toward students with SEN and teachers' positive interactions with them affected students with SEN school engagement. It was observed that teachers cared about their students and created a safe, supportive environment for them. However, the current study's findings reported that teachers had a negative attitude regarding practicing inclusive education. This can be explained that teachers had either limited knowledge or no training in inclusive teachings. Hence, it was understandable that teachers showed negative attitudes as they struggled with a lack of required skills to accommodate students with SEN and needed additional assistance and modified teaching strategies.

6.2 Recommendations

This research has contributed new knowledge to existing studies on the latest situation of inclusive education and how students with SEN practice and foster inclusive education in inclusive educational settings in Azerbaijan context. According to the findings of the study, the following recommendations are suggested for future actions.

The national legislation emphasizes equitable education for all citizens. However, the legislation is not sufficiently addressed or slightly touched on education for persons with disabilities and the concept of inclusive education. This implies a need for the legislation to be reviewed and make changes or erase any laws or provisions that cause barriers to the successful implementation of inclusive education. It is advisable that the legislation be reviewed generally, develop and enact law regarding international conventions and treaties Azerbaijan joined.

The study showed that government inclusive schools do not have assistance teachers in the classrooms. This could be easily seen that the class teachers and students with SEN were in need of assistance in the classrooms. It is recommended that government allocates a budget to employ assistant teachers to assist class teachers in inclusive classrooms at government inclusive schools. It is also recommended that the national legislation be reviewed and develop provisions related to assistant teachers according with international legislation.

The curriculum of education system in Azerbaijan address to all learners taking into consideration of their development level. However, in fact, the curriculum does not deal with all types of students, especially the ones in inclusive classrooms and the education content is not accessible for them. Therefore, the curriculum should consider the students engaged in inclusive education at all educational levels. It is recommendable the curriculum be reviewed and make flexible for all learners.

The current study discovered that one of the three class teachers involved in the research was the participant of the trainings in inclusive education. It should be ensured and monitored that all the class teachers involved in inclusive education teaching have been participants of the training and have sufficient knowledge to employ inclusive teaching. Moreover, the findings revealed that even the class teacher had been in training, she had enough knowledge but did not know how to handle inclusive classrooms. It is recommendable that teachers be provided with regular training and further monitored to control effectiveness of their inclusive teaching.

The research findings exposed that neither the school infrastructure nor educational materials were designed to accommodate inclusion. The school buildings and educational materials need to be sufficient for the implementation of inclusive education. Therefore, the government should reconsider sketch of the school infrastructure and prohibit the construction of inaccessible and insufficient school buildings. Moreover, there should be a revision of educational materials, make adjustments considering students involved in inclusive classrooms.

6.3 For further studies:

The findings of the study underlined several points to be explored for further studies.

The present study only covered the schools applied inclusive education in Baku city which is the capital city and only represents an urban area. It is necessary to conduct other studies in other cities and regions (villages, small towns) to compare inclusive education conditions in urban and rural areas of Azerbaijan. In addition, the research findings were gathered from primary education, and further studies should be conducted, including at all educational levels.

The present research paper was focused on the school experience of students with SEN in inclusive education, and the topic was explored, consideration of students' perspectives. Further studies could be conducted by utilizing teachers' perspectives on the implementing inclusive education and the challenges or barriers educators face in practicing inclusive education at general education institutions.

The present study participants were 9, including 8 male and 1 female student with special educational needs. When the research participants were selected for the study, they were chosen according to them studying in primary education, not by gender. It might be a coincidence that only one participant was a female student; however this still raises interest

specifically to research female students' enrollment in inclusive education: are their barriers for female students to participate in inclusive education.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Letter to Baku city Education Department

To whom it may concern,

Permission to data collection and the research project

Me, Sevinj Rustamova is a master student in the Department of Education and Special Education at the University of Gothenburg, Sweden and pursuing International Master in Educational Research Programme. I am in my second year and am in the process of writing my master's thesis in inclusive education. The research project investigates school experiences of students with special educational needs (SEN) in Azerbaijan which involves observation and interviewing of students with SEN and the class teachers.

The research project will contribute to empirical studies on how students with SEN experience school; shed light on peer relationships and sense of school belongings, enablers and barriers they face in practicing inclusive education. Your cooperation will be helpful to accomplish the project. I guarantee that the research project will be conducted under the research ethics and confidentiality and anonymity of the research participants will be ensured.

I am writing to kindly request you allow me to collect data at schools in Baku at which inclusive education is applied. The research is carried out under the supervision of Girma Berhanu; professor at the University of Gothenburg. His recommendation letter is included with this letter, please see the letter of recommendation.

I look forward hearing from you,
Sincerely,
Sevinj Rustamova

Telephone: xxxxx
Email: xxxxx
Home address: xxxxx
International Master's Programme in Educational Research
Department of Education and Special Education
University of Gothenburg
Sweden.

Appendix 2: Informed Consent

Informed consent form

My name is Sevinj Rustamova, a second year master student in the Department of Education and Special Education at the University of Gothenburg, Sweden. I am writing my master thesis about school experiences of students with special educational needs (SEN) in inclusive education settings in Azerbaijan. The research project focuses on students' perspectives to better understand their school experiences in inclusive education. The participating students who are planning to engage in the research project are minors, therefore you are requested to give permission as a parent or guardian. The study is conducted under the supervision of professor Girma Berhanu from University of Gothenburg, you can be assured that the research will be conducted taking ethical considerations into account. The official permission was obtained from Baku city Education Department to collect data at inclusive education applied schools in Baku. You are asked to allow your child to take part in the research and contribute to existing knowledge about their school experiences in inclusive education in Azerbaijan. Informed consent outlines the purpose and consequences of the research: benefits and risks of participation, confidentiality and protection of privacy. Please read and sign a copy of informed consent if you let your child participate in the study. More information about the research project provided below.

Objective of the study

The purpose of the research project is to explore school experiences of students with SEN in inclusive education applied schools in Baku. The study provides insight on the peer relationship, sense of school belongings of students with SEN and enablers and barriers challenge them in practicing inclusive education. Additionally, the study draws attention to the latest situation of inclusive education in Azerbaijan.

Procedure and duration

The data collection is planned to take around one month and will mainly focus on observation of the participant students in the classroom. Informal interviews with open-ended questions in easiest language will be employed. If there is a need "about myself" sheets will be given to students to draw.

Benefits of participation

The study is expected to benefit society by providing new information on the latest situation of inclusive education. The research focuses on students' perspectives and lets their voices be heard.

Risks of participation

There is a possibility that the participating students do not feel comfortable or wish to answer any questions or share information. It is fine if they become uncomfortable in the process of gathering information.

Confidentiality and protection of participants

The collected information from this study will be anonymous and confidential. The researcher may have access to the participants' name and provided information, however any identifying information on participants will not be given in the research paper. The participants and sample schools' names will be replaced by pseudonyms. The collected information will be kept private and stored locked with password and may be erased after the completion of the study.

Right to withdraw

Participation in the study is voluntary. You can refuse your child to participate in the study while the study is in progress. If the participant student is unwilling to continue to participate in this study, he/she may withdraw at any time.

Contact information

If you have any questions or concerns regarding the research project, please feel free to contact me.

Telephone: xxxxx
Email: xxxxx

Participant consent

I have read information given on informed consent, and permit my child to participate in this study.

Name of Participant or Guardian   _____

Signature of Participant or Guardian   _____

Date   _____

I verify that parents or guardians are not forced to give consent, permission has been given voluntarily.

                                         Sevinj Rustamova
Name of Researcher   _____
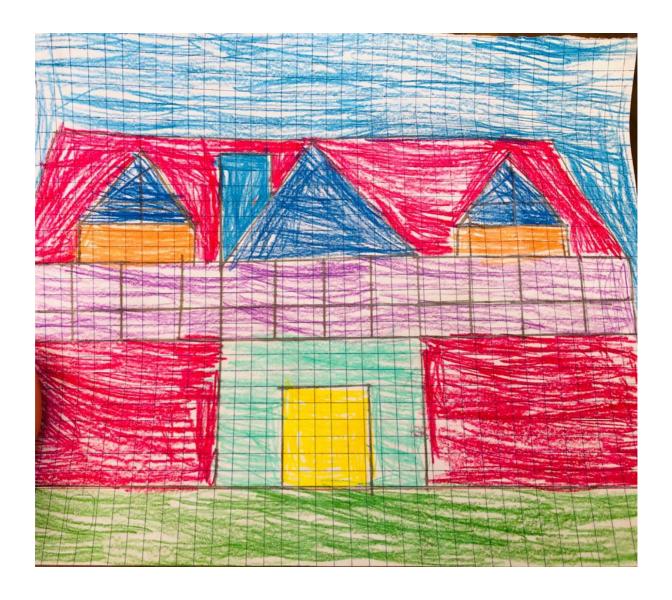
Signature of Researcher.   _____

Date   _____

Appendix 3. Observation Guide

Name   _____

Subject _____

Grade   _____

Date   _____

1. Observing classroom arrangement and organization, and school infrastructure whether facilitates inclusive education.

2. Observing the interactions between participants and other students in inclusive classroom.

3. Observing interactions between participants and the class teachers and other school staff.

4. Observing the class teachers' knowledge and ability to work in inclusive education.

5. Observing behaviors of peers' without disabilities towards participants

6. Observing classroom activities; how subjects are delivered and being taught, adapted or modified to accommodate participants.

7. Observing participants to be included or not included in class activities

8. Observing participants academic achievement in inclusive education.

Appendix 4: Interview questions for participants (students)

1. Can you tell me about yourself?

2. Can you tell me about school?

3. Can you tell me about your teacher?

4. Can you tell me about your friends?

Appendix 5: Participant's drawing, 3rd grade (1)

Participant's drawings, 1ˢᵗ grade (2)

Participant with class friend going to school ♡.

Me, researcher

close friend.

other student

→ Participant

→ teacher

→ School