

American University of Armenia

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN ARMENIA

**A MASTER ESSAY SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE SCHOOL OF
POLITICAL SCIENCE AND INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS**

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Abstract

This capstone essay examines what major problems children with disabilities face in inclusive schools. Nowadays, in Armenia children with disabilities can receive education both in special and inclusive schools. However, this study examines only inclusive schools, taking into consideration that by 2025 all public schools will be transformed into inclusive ones and the number of special schools will be decreased. This research investigates to what extent physical, technical and human capacities of inclusive schools are adopted to meet the needs of children with disabilities. It also examines what are the general attitudes of inclusive school teachers towards inclusive education.

The data collected from the survey and in depth interviews showed that inclusive schools in Armenia do not have adequate physical and technical capacities to meet the needs of children with disabilities. Although teachers of inclusive schools have sufficient knowledge to teach children with disabilities, they need more trainings. Also, it was found that inclusive school teachers do not have negative attitudes towards inclusive education in general, however, poor infrastructure and capacities of inclusive schools creates significant obstacles for them, which affects their perception about inclusive education. This study reveals that despite the huge progress made by the RA government for implementing inclusive education in public schools, a lot of work remains to be done.

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Introduction

Historically, education has been a priority for the Armenian society. Since its independence the RA government started to adopt various laws and international conventions in order to insure quality education for everyone. However, very often children with disabilities, who are considered as one of the most marginalized and segregated groups of the society, are deprived from their right of getting an education. According to the 2012 study conducted by UNICEF, 18% of children with disabilities do not attend school. In rural areas this number is even higher (23%) (UNICEF 2015).

Since its independence the RA government started to adopt various laws and international convention aimed to protect human rights of persons with disabilities and ensure their social integration In 2005, after the adoption of the Law on the Education of Persons with Special Educational Needs, the RA Government adopted the concept of inclusive education and embedded it in its National Program for Education Development (Open Society Foundation 2013). Inclusive schools aimed to provide better access to children with disabilities into general educational settings. According to the official statements the RA Government plans to transform the educational system of Armenia into fully inclusive one by 2025 (Armenpress 2015). In Armenia, out of 1,353 public schools, 182 are inclusive as of September 2015 (Ministry of Science and Education of the Republic of Armenia 2015).

Although inclusive education aims to promote and ensure educational right not only of children with disabilities, but also of other marginalized groups of a society, however this research paper examines inclusive schools of Armenia only in regard to children with disabilities. This research paper is conducted as an academic internship with Save the Children

Armenia, aimed to reveal current educational problems of children with disabilities in inclusive schools.

The first section of this paper provides background information about both persons with disabilities and inclusive education in general. Then, the Armenian context was examined. The second part discusses methodology and research design of the study. Both quantitative and qualitative methods were used in order to collect comprehensive and thorough information about the current situation of inclusive schools. Finally, findings are presented based on which recommendations are provided.

Literature Review

Persons with Disabilities

Estimates suggest that approximately ten percent of the world population that is nearly 650 million people is having some type of disability (Disabled World 2016). 93 million of them are children; however, these numbers could be much higher (UNICEF 2015). The majority of these people live in bad economic conditions and face various forms of discrimination and social segregation in their daily life. Widespread negative stereotypes towards them are one of the major reasons for that. That is why finding ways for social inclusion and addressing environmental and social problems of persons with disabilities (PWD) are one of the primary concerns of many countries.

There are various definitions and approaches towards the complex phenomenon of disability. According to the medical model of disability, a person's lack of abilities or impairments are the main causes of their problems and disadvantageous experiences (i.e., impairment is a disability). This model mainly views disability as a bad thing which can be

changed only with medical help or treatment (Gordon 2013). If not, it is the responsibility of persons with disability to adjust with the society and to fit in the world, as they can (UNESCO 2016)

With the struggle for the rights of persons with disabilities social model of disability has emerged. Contrary to the medical model, the social model of disability focuses more on social and environmental barriers which PWDs encounter in their daily life. According to this model, impairment is regarded as just a functional limitation which affects one's body; while "...disability is the loss or limitation of opportunities resulting from direct and indirect discrimination" (Crow 1996, 3). If PWDs have difficulty in accessing any social aspect of their society, for example, public transport, it is not because of their impairment, but because the society is not sufficiently designed to serve the needs of all people. According to the social model of disability, in order to improve livelihoods of PWDs, it is necessary to eliminate social or environmental barriers which are the causes of their disability (UNESCO 2016).

There are many contested definitions of disability. Various organizations and groups have their own definition of the term. According to the World Health Organization's definition "Disabilities is an umbrella term, covering impairments, activity limitations, and participation restrictions. An impairment is a problem in body function or structure; an activity limitation is a difficulty encountered by an individual in executing a task or action; while a participation restriction is a problem experienced by an individual in involvement in life situations" (World Health Organization 2016).

Although the term "disability" does not have single agreed definition, each society has its own definition of who is considered a person with a disability. The law of the Republic of Armenia on Social Protection of Persons with Disabilities defines PWD as persons who need

social assistance and protection as a result of limitations of life activities because of mental and physical incapability. By saying limitations of life activities, the Law implies a partial or full loss of capacity of orientation and mobility, communication, control of self-behavior, as well as engagement in working activities (National Assembly of the RA 1993).

Development of Inclusive Education

The concept of inclusion passed a long way of evolution and nowadays, the number of schools which provide inclusive education gradually increases (Stainback and Stainback 1992). There are various international conventions which come to support the ideas of inclusiveness and foster the emergence and development of inclusive education approach. In 1948, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights stated that education is one of the basic human rights. This statement is further acknowledged in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). However, as only Conventions and various statements are not enough to achieve progress, Education for All (EFA) movement come to help to turn these commitments into reality. In 1990, EFA was launched at the World Conference on Education for All in Jomtien, Thailand. At the end of this conference, World Declaration on Education for All was adopted (the Jomtien Declaration), which aimed to universalize primary education and reduce illiteracy by the end of the decade (UNESCO 2016).

One of the most important stages for promoting inclusive education worldwide was the World Conference on Special Needs Education held in Salamanca, Spain, in 1994. During the Conference 92 governments and 25 international organizations represented by 300 participants met "...to further the objective of Education for All by considering the fundamental policy shifts required to promote the approach of inclusive education, namely enabling schools to serve all

children, particularly those with special educational needs” (UNESCO 2016, 19). As a result of the Conference, it was realized that EFA is far from being reality and that there were many groups of children who were facing various barriers and problems in receiving education, particularly children with special educational needs. Those problems could not be solved by adhering to old policies. Instead, a new course of action and a new way of thinking was required, which recognize different needs and abilities of children and their diversity as normal and could respond to them effectively. These can become a reality if ordinary schools transform into inclusive ones and could serve all children in their communities. Thus, Salamanca Conference stated that all schools should “...accommodate all children regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic or other conditions. This should include disabled and gifted children, street and working children, children from remote or nomadic populations, children from linguistic, ethnic, or cultural minorities and children from other disadvantaged or marginalized areas or groups” (UNESCO 2016, 20).

Furthermore, inclusive schools must “... recognize and respond to the diverse needs of their students, accommodating both different styles and rates of learning and ensuring quality education to all through appropriate curricula, organizational arrangements, teaching strategies, resource use and partnerships with their communities” (UNESCO 2016, 20).

The process of creating inclusive environments in schools is not an easy task and could be very challenging. There are various issues that rise on that path. However, during the conference it was argued that “Regular schools with [an] inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all; moreover, they provide an effective education to the majority of children and improve the efficiency and ultimately the cost-

effectiveness of the entire education system” (UNESCO 2016, 20). That is why nowadays, many countries worldwide, based on their experience, continue to change and adapt their national educational systems and legislation in order to have more inclusive educational settings. Although a lot has been done for having more inclusive schools worldwide since Salamanca Conference, much remains undone. There are various reasons for the slow progress. For example, weak political will, inadequate financial resources and control over the available ones, insufficient attention towards the educational needs of marginalized groups of society, etc. (UNESCO 2016).

To date, much of the attention for developing inclusive education was concentrated on schools, more specifically on classrooms. However, many major issues lie at the national policy level, at the structuring of schools’ system, the organization of teachers’ training and the links between school and its community. In a similar way, significant part of resources which can help to create more inclusive environments in schools lie outside the school. More specifically, they lie in communities and families. Also, it should be highlighted that special schools can play very important role in strengthening and developing more inclusive schools. The resources and skills of teachers in special schools can be very valuable for supporting children’s learning process in inclusive schools. In this sense, policy of reorienting special schools’ systems for serving inclusive ones is one of the greatest ways to foster inclusive schools in a society (UNESCO 2016).

The process of building inclusive educational system and policies can be very challenging. It is impossible to achieve good results only with the help of legislative amendment. Rather, it is an ongoing process. This process can be different from country to country. First of all, for each country, it is necessary to understand its own situation and starting point, identify its

problems and barriers and only then to develop an appropriate plan of developing an inclusive educational system.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Inclusive Education

Education is a major factor responsible for the development of both individuals and societies. The process of getting an education in various educational institutions is not only a process of acquiring knowledge or various skills but also a process which contributes to the overall social and personal development of an individual. Consequently, education helps to reduce poverty, ignorance and exclusion in a society.

An inclusive school is a place, where every citizen and every child has the same equal rights and opportunities (Stainback and Stainback 1992). Although inclusive education is envisaged to protect the educational right of every person, regardless of their different characteristics and needs, however, very often inclusive education focuses more on those groups of people who were frequently excluded from educational settings and/or segregated from society (UNESCO 2016). In this sense, traditionally children with disabilities are one of the most isolated and marginalized groups in many societies. This phenomenon can be noticed nowadays too.

Recently as a result of inclusive reforms in schools, regardless of their type of disability, children with disabilities get a chance to be placed into mainstream schools and thus exercise their right to quality education (Theoharis and Causton 2014). Inclusive educational settings provide children with disabilities with more sophisticated education, possibility to connect with their peers and a chance to integrate into society.

However, by saying inclusive school, one should not only understand a school where children with disabilities can be taught. Inclusive education approach is not only concerned with children with disabilities, but also with such group of children as children living in poverty, ethnic and linguistic minorities, children from remote areas, etc. These groups of children can also experience barriers in a way of getting an education, for example, alien culture, not understandable teaching methods, foreign language, etc. Inclusive education approach aims to acknowledge all these barriers and provide solutions to them, by developing a system which can effectively meet various learning needs of all children (UNESCO 2016).

There are various advantages and benefits that inclusive schools provide. Firstly, inclusiveness provides educational advantage. It helps to develop teaching methods that effectively address different needs of every individual, thus every student will eventually benefit from it. Also, it helps to develop an encouraging and supportive academic environment. Particularly for students with disabilities, studying with their peers and being in the inclusive environment is very beneficial both academically and socially (Bond and Castagnera 2006).

Secondly, it is also important to highlight the social importance of inclusive schools. Educating all children together can help to change attitudes and discriminatory stereotypes towards various marginalized groups of society. One of the most important components of inclusiveness is the process of community building. Although it is hard to define what community is, it is necessary to understand what is meant by inclusive community. In inclusive communities, every child's skills and aptitudes are recognized and encouraged, including those who are defined as having disabilities. In such communities, every person has its unique role and is considered as its equal and important member with own obligations and responsibilities. This will be difficult to achieve if some students are always receiving support, but never giving it to

others. In this sense, it is important to highlight that, interdependence keeps people with various roles and functions together and as a result forms a community (Stainback and Stainback 1992). It is claimed that inclusive educational approach is one of the necessary components of democratic, non-discriminatory and just society (UNESCO 2016).

Thirdly, inclusive education can also be economically more effective. It is likely that the cost of establishing and maintaining inclusive schools' system probably will be less, than the cost of various types of special schools, which are established to serve only a particular group of children (UNESCO 2016).

However, several critics of inclusive education do not agree with the above stated advantages of inclusive education. Many critics argue that placing children with disabilities into inclusive classroom can have negative impacts in their education process. They argue that inclusive education does not have individual-centered approach, and it does not provide children with disabilities sufficient attention and teaching (Savich 2008). Hence, inclusive education prioritizes social advantages of inclusive education over academic. Many inclusive education opponents feel that inclusive education aims only to place children with disabilities in the mainstream schools, in order to be more integrated members of society. However, very often it is done at the expense of their educational quality.

Many critics also argue that in order to have effective and fully working inclusive educational system more funds and resources are needed compared to the special schools. It is financially more burdensome to equip all mainstream school with the necessary physical and technical facilities. These resources are better to be concentrated in special school, where education of children with disabilities can be implemented more professionally and more efficiently (Shannon 2004; Savich 2008).

The last disadvantage of the inclusive education is that, as a result of IE many children with disabilities feel depressed and isolated. Many children with disabilities face vividly expressed discriminatory attitude towards them. Also, their self-esteem decreases when they compare themselves with children without disabilities. They clearly see their academic incompetence or physical differences which leaves negative psychological impact on them (Shannon 2004).

Persons with Disabilities in Armenia

The laws and policies of the RA concerning PWDs aim to promote their equal and universal human rights. Article 14.1 of the RA Constitution states “Everyone shall be equal before the law. Any discrimination based on any ground such as ... disability, age or other personal or social circumstances shall be prohibited.” In 2007, the RA adopted the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and ratified it in 2010. CRPD adheres to the social model of disability and views disability as a human rights issue. Thereby, it stresses the importance of identification and elimination of various social, environmental, educational and other barriers that PWDs may face. After the adoption of CRPD “the Law of the Republic of Armenia on Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and Their Social Inclusion” was drafted, which is planned to replace current law on “Social Protection of People with Disabilities in the RA”, adopted in 1993. Draft version is not only concerned with social protection, but it also shifts its focus more to the importance of social inclusion and integration of PWDs (The First Armenian Disability Resource Center 2016).

According to National Statistical Service of the RA, there are 195,925 (as of 2014) PWD in Armenia (National Statistical Service of the Republic of Armenia 2014). Among them, 8,120

are children. They are considered as one of the most vulnerable groups of the Armenian society. Most of the children with disabilities live in poverty, isolated from everyone and deprived of any opportunity of social integration. Very often these children do not have any access to educational institutions, because of various reasons, such as lack of necessary equipment, lack of qualified professionals, exclusionary attitudes towards them, etc. (UNICEF 2016). A recent study suggests that in Armenia “one in five children with disabilities do not attend any kind of school” (UNICEF 2016).

Inclusive Education in the Republic of Armenia

Education is the main factor responsible for overall development of an individual and hence for its employment and further social integration. It has always been one of the important factors for Armenian society for preserving its culture and national identity. Armenia has a nearly 1,600 years of educational experience and history. By 1920 Armenian schools were operating under the auspices of the Armenian Church. Current foundations of educational system were formulated mainly during the Soviet period. At that time, Armenia was one of the leading countries in the sphere of education among the former USSR member countries (Balasanjan 2007).

Immediately after its independence, the RA started to implement various policies and regulations in order to provide better education to its citizens. Article 39 of the RA Constitution guarantees the right of education for everyone (National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia 2005). Moreover, newly independent Armenia showed its commitment to improve the livelihood of all children and ensure their equal rights by the ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Article 24 of the Convention states “States Parties recognize

the right of persons with disabilities to education. With a view to realizing this right without discrimination and on the basis of equal opportunity States Parties shall ensure an inclusive education system at all levels and lifelong learning...” (United Nations 2007). Afterwards, in 1996 Armenia passed “the Law of RA on the Rights of the Children”, which reflects and reaffirms provisions enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child accessed by the RA Government in 1992.

Other laws regulating the field of mainstream education and rights of children with disabilities were also adopted in the following order:

- Law on Education in 1999
- Law on Education of Persons in Need of Special Education Conditions in 2005
- Law on Mainstream Education in 2009, etc.

In general, current primary components of the inclusive education system in Armenia are the following:

1. The Medical, Psychological and Pedagogical Assessment Center (MPPAC) evaluates special educational needs of children with disabilities.
2. School specialist and MPAAC develop individual curricula for a child with a disability a month after his/her admission to the inclusive school.
3. The parents of children with special educational needs can participate in the process of designing of the curricula.
4. The inclusive school provides necessary equipment, facilities and resources for a child with a disability.
5. It also requires a team of qualified professionals and teachers (Open Society Foundation 2013).

The RA Government plans to transform the educational system of Armenia into fully inclusive one by 2025. There are 182 inclusive schools in Armenia as of September 2015 (Ministry of Science and Education of the Republic of Armenia 2015).

The Purpose of the Study

The first step for addressing educational problems of children with disabilities is to have comprehensive and thorough information of their current problems at educational institutions. Although in Armenia children with disabilities can get education both in special and inclusive schools, this policy paper only focuses on inclusive schools, as inclusive education is a new phenomenon for the Armenian society and thus needs more detailed examination.

According to Education Development State Project of 2011-2015 in order to provide better education to children with disabilities and promote their social integration Armenia aims to increase the number of schools that provide inclusive education and gradually decrease the number of schools which provide special education. Moreover, according to official statements made by the RA Ministry of Education and Science all public schools of Armenia will be transformed into inclusive schools by 2025 and the majority of special schools will be transformed into resource centers aimed to support and assist working processes of inclusive schools. That is why the main purpose of this policy paper is to examine current problems and barriers that children with disabilities face in inclusive schools.

Within the past decade the RA government underwent significant changes in educational policies of Armenia in order to provide better education to children with disabilities and ensure their social integration. To achieve better progress in this transition stage of implementation of inclusive education in public schools it is important to detect current major issues and problems

related to it. To collect more comprehensive data, this research paper examines the general situation of several fundamental components of inclusive schools. The main components discussed in this paper are the following:

- physical and technical capacities of inclusive schools,
- competence of human resources,
- general attitudes and the level of tolerance of Armenian society towards inclusive education.

Examination of these aspects helped to gain deeper understanding about the current situation in inclusive schools of Armenia. At the end, based on the findings this paper provides policy recommendations.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

The aspects mentioned in the above subchapter are reformulated into more detailed research questions and hypothesis which are presented and discussed below:

RQ1: To what extent are inclusive schools in Armenia equipped with physical capacities to ensure quality education of children with disabilities?

Physical capacities are operationalized here as:

1. presence of ramps outside the school,
2. presence of ramps inside the school,
3. specially adapted classrooms,
4. specially adapted gymnasium,
5. specially adapted cafeteria,
6. specially adapted sanitation facilities.

RQ2: To what extent are inclusive schools in Armenia equipped with technical capacities to ensure quality education of children with disabilities?

Technical capacities are operationalized as didactic and instructional materials necessary for teaching children with disabilities.

RQ3: What is the level of competence of teachers of inclusive schools in Armenia pertaining to issues of children with disabilities?

Level of competence of teachers and administrative staff is defined here as:

1. Experience of teaching children with disabilities,
2. Received trainings regarding teaching methods of children with disabilities.

RQ4: What are the general attitudes and perceptions about the inclusive education among teachers in inclusive schools?

The hypothesis of this study developed from the research questions are the following:

H1: Inclusive schools in Armenia do not have adequate physical capacities to ensure quality education of children with disabilities.

H0: Inclusive schools in Armenia have adequate physical capacities to ensure quality education of children with disabilities.

H2: Inclusive schools in Armenia do not have adequate technical capacities to ensure quality education of children with disabilities.

H0: Inclusive schools in Armenia have adequate technical capacities to ensure quality education of children with disabilities.

H3: Inclusive schools in Armenia do not have competent teachers to ensure quality education of children with disabilities.

H0: Inclusive schools in Armenia have competent teachers to ensure quality education of children with disabilities.

H4: Teachers have stereotypes regarding children with disabilities and their role and presence in the classroom.

H0: Teachers have no stereotypes regarding children with disabilities and their role and presence in the classroom.

Methodology

This research uses mixed research method, both quantitative (self-administrated survey with teachers) and qualitative (semi-structured interviews with parents of children with disabilities, in depth interviews with field experts from NGOs and international organizations, with directors and multidisciplinary team members of inclusive schools). The mixed method helped to gather comprehensive and more thorough information about the current situation in inclusive schools of Armenia and general attitudes toward them. Concurrently, quantitative and qualitative approaches were implemented during the data collection phase.

Overall, data from nine out of 11 administrative divisions (including Yerevan) of Armenia was obtained. Specifically, the study was conducted in 19 communities of Armenia. Due to time constrains, a representative study was not feasible. Administrative divisions Armavir and Aragatsotn were not covered by this research.

Data Collection Instruments

Field work of this study was conducted from February to April 2016. Prior to this period an early version of both survey and in depth interview questionnaires were administrated among

all groups of respondents of the study to make sure that questions were appropriate for collecting information needed for answering research questions of this study. Afterwards, several corrections and necessary amendments were made to adjust the data collection instruments to the purpose of this study.

For the quantitative part of the study a self-administered survey questionnaire consisting of both open-ended and close-ended questions was distributed among 72 inclusive school teachers from Yerevan and nine other administrative divisions of Armenia. Survey respondents were chosen based on convenience sampling. Close-ended questions of the questionnaire enable to gather wide-ranging data about the professional qualities of the teachers, while open-ended questions help to understand existing attitudes and perceptions of teachers towards inclusive education and educational needs and problems of children with disabilities.

During the qualitative data collection phase semi-structured and in depth interviews were carried out. The interviews helped to gather exhaustive and detailed information about existing beliefs, attitudes and perceptions about inclusive education and disability. Interviews have been conducted with the following groups of respondents:

1. Parents of inclusive children,
2. Directors of inclusive schools,
3. Multidisciplinary team members (general education teacher, special education teacher, psychologist, speech therapist),
4. Representatives of NGOs and international organizations.

Ten semi-structured interviews were conducted with the parents of children with disabilities whose children attend inclusive schools. The main reason for interviewing parents of children with disabilities and not the children themselves was that the age composition of

children with disabilities varied significantly and disability and inclusive education are considered quite complex and sensitive phenomena to be discussed with students of elementary and basic school ages. On average interviews with parents lasted about 30 minutes, during which various questions were raised, aimed to reveal existent problems and obstacles in the way of children with disabilities towards quality education. The main focus of the interviews was an attempt to gain insight into the daily experiences of children with disabilities and their parents in inclusive school settings.

To depict holistic picture about the general situation of inclusive schools in Armenia in depth interviews were also carried out with field experts and representatives of various NGOs and international organizations. Seven in depth interviews were carried out. Average duration of interviews was 40 minutes. Interviewees were chosen based on purposive sampling, taking into consideration their competence and knowledge on the discussed topic. During the interviews various questions about the general situation and existing problems in the inclusive education schools of Armenia were discussed.

Finally, three in depth interviews with the directors of inclusive schools and four interviews with the multidisciplinary team members were carried out based on convenience sampling. These interviews helped to understand what the major changes were during the transition to inclusive schools and how the whole school community responded to those changes. Also interviews with directors helped to gather deeper information about the quality level of trainings, teachers in inclusive schools received, and what general problems and needs inclusive schools of Armenia have.

During the data collection phase and afterwards all ethical considerations and anonymity of the respondents were kept properly. Although in-depth interviews were recorded, however,

keeping and ensuring anonymity helped to collect more honest responses. This was especially hard with the parents of children with disabilities, as some of the interviews were held inside the inclusive schools which their children attend. However, great deal of effort has been put to achieve confidence of all respondents.

Limitations of the Study

Although the methodology of this study was planned ahead, however it has several limitations. Firstly, sample size of the respondents is small. Secondly, mainly because of time limitations survey with teachers was not administrated in all administrative divisions of Armenia. Thirdly, interview with parents of children with disabilities and with administrative staff of inclusive schools were conducted only in Yerevan. Finally, this research was conducted based on data collected only from elementary and middle schools of Armenia. Inclusive secondary schools of Armenia were not examined during this study.

Results

Demographic Statistics

This subchapter presents demographic statistics of the survey collected from 72 teachers of inclusive schools. Self-administrated survey was conducted in 19 cities from 9 administrative divisions of Armenia. Sociodemographic data collected from the survey is presented in the following categories:

- Gender
- Age group
- Place of residence
- Level of Education

Vast majority of the survey respondents were female. Only one respondent out of 72 was male.

Figure 1 illustrates composition of the age group of the respondents. As it shows, more than half of the respondents, that is 39 teachers, were 26-35 years old. This group is followed by the age group of up to 25 with the number of respondents of 13. It is closely followed by the age group of 36-45 with 11 teachers. Last two groups of respondents consisted of five and four teachers of 46-55 and 56 and above groups respectively.

The survey among teachers was conducted in 19 communities of Armenia, out of which four were villages and rural communities and 15

Figure 1: Age Group of Teachers

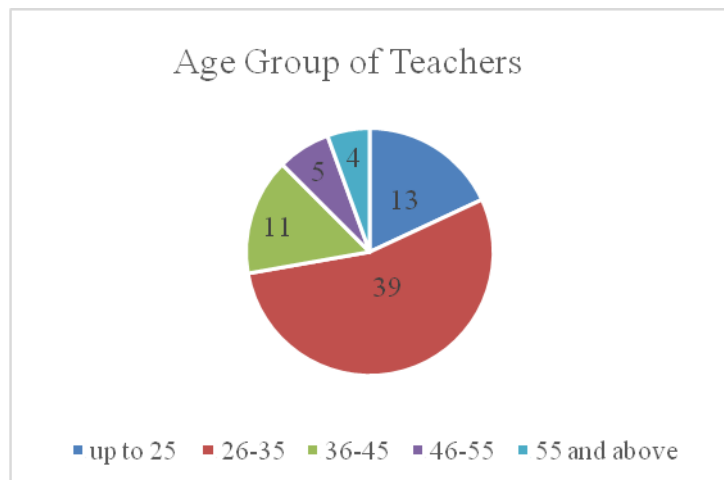
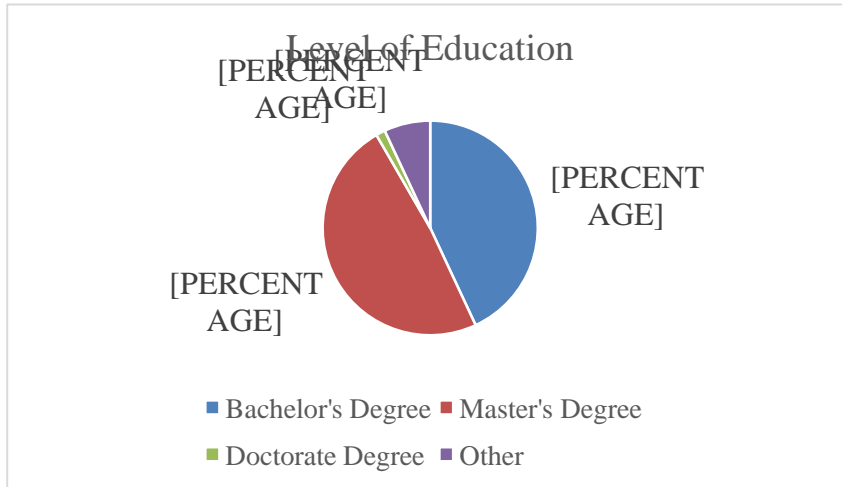


Figure 2: Level of Education



are from Yerevan and Lori, each with 13 representatives. However, in terms of number of schools, Ararat is the only region from which data was collected from four inclusive schools (see Table 1).

The final category presented in this subchapter is the educational level of the respondents which is illustrated in Figure 2. Majority of the survey respondents hold Master's Degree (35 teachers), this is closely followed with the group of teachers who have Bachelor's Degree (31 teachers). Only one teacher has Doctorate Degree. The level of education of the rest of the respondents (5 teachers) was marked as other.

were towns and cities. Overall, data from 9 administrative divisions was collected. Table 1 shows the number of respondents from each region. The biggest group of respondents by regions

Table 1: Number of Respondents and Schools by Regions

Region	Number of Respondents	Number of Schools
Yerevan	13	3
Lori	13	2
Tavush	12	2
Vayots Dzor	8	3
Syunik	7	3
Shirak	6	1
Ararat	6	4
Gegharkunik	4	1
Kotayk	3	1
Total	72	20

Physical and Technical Capacities of Inclusive Schools

Data collected from the survey results and in depth interviews helped to understand to what extent inclusive schools in Armenia are equipped with necessary physical and technical capacities. Although the law of the RA on the education of persons with special educational needs does not exactly indicate what those physical and technical capacities should be, however, in the scope of this research based on the pilot interview results several descriptors were developed in order to better understand and analyze to what extent physical and technical capacities of inclusive schools should be adapted for meeting the needs of children with disabilities.

Table 2: Descriptors Used for the Interviews

#	Descriptors	Intensity	Std. Dev.	N
1	Presence of ramps outside the school	4.4	0.4	17
2	Presence of ramps inside the school	1.0	-	17
3	Specially adapted classrooms	1.0	-	17
4	Specially adapted gymnasium	1.0	-	17
5	Specially adapted cafeteria	3.4	0.6	17
6	Specially adapted sanitation facilities	2.4	0.4	17
7	Didactic and instructional materials	3.1	1.1	17

Table 2 represents interview results with parents of inclusive children, multidisciplinary team members and principals of inclusive schools. Overall the number of the respondents was 17. The scale from one to five was developed in order to measure the intensity of the descriptors listed in the table, where one means the lack of the respective descriptor and five means that the descriptor is in a very good condition. As the table shows all respondents during the interviews stated that their schools have neither specially adapted classrooms nor specially adapted

gymnasium for children with disabilities. All respondents stated that their schools have ramps outside the school. What refers to the ramps inside the school, all respondents stated that their schools lack those. Cafeterias and sanitation facilities were mostly poorly equipped and adapted for children with disabilities.

Table 3: Problems of Inclusive Schools Identified by the Teachers

N Main Problems of Inclusive School Identified by the Teachers		
	Problems	Number of Answers
1	Lack of special materials and devices	65
2	Lack of specially adapted classrooms	54
3	Lack of ramps	49
4	Lack of adapted sanitation facilities	32
5	Lack of adapted gymnasium	21
6	Lack of specially adapted cafeteria	19

Technical capacities of schools were in a comparatively better condition. Interviewees stated that their schools are equipped with didactic and instructional materials, however, the quantity of materials was stated to be unsatisfactory for efficient pedagogical activities.

Survey results are also in line with the interview results. Teachers were asked to mention what problems related to physical and technical capacities their schools have. Table 3 shows the overall answers. As for inclusive school teachers, the most frequently mentioned problem is inadequate quantity of special instructional materials and devices for teaching children with disabilities. The second one is the lack of specially adapted classrooms. Teachers stated that it is hard to achieve good results and efficiently teach children with special educational needs without special pedagogical materials and adapted classrooms. Other major group of problems identified by the teachers which impede effective learning process of children with disabilities is poor

infrastructure of the schools: lack of ramps, specially adapted sanitation facilities, gymnasium, cafeterias, etc. Although during the survey, some teachers did not mention the lack of some specific facilities, however, these results generated from the survey are enough to state that the majority of examined schools are poorly equipped with necessary physical and technical capacities.

Data collected from the interviews with the representatives of NGOs and international organizations also supports findings from the in depth interviews and survey. During the interview one of the NGO representatives stated:

“Armenian government has quantitative, rather qualitative success in implementing inclusive education approach in public schools so far. Although the number of schools officially providing inclusive education is increasing year by year, however quality of education for children with disabilities is not satisfactory.”

Majority of the interviewees expressed their concerns about the fact, that very often, children with disabilities receive special and segregated education inside the inclusive schools because of the lack of specially adapted physical capacities of the school. Their classrooms are mostly situated on the first floor of the school building and especially children with physical disabilities do not have access to the other areas of the building and school facilities. One of the NGO representatives stated: *“During the transition period and afterwards majority of the schools in Armenia have built only ramps at the entrance to the school building.”*

Many NGOs and international organizations were concerned that the majority of inclusive schools in Armenia do not have specially adapted gymnasiums and qualified specialists of physical education. For that reason, very often inclusive children are exempt from the classes of physical education.

To sum up, data collected from the interviews and survey suggests that the physical and technical capacities in inclusive schools are in a bad condition and inadequate for effective teaching and learning processes of children with disabilities. Consequently, both H₁ and H₂ are accepted.

Human Resources of Inclusive Schools

Besides specially adapted physical and technical capacities, another necessary component for ensuring quality education for children with disabilities is human resources. In the scope of this research, professional qualities of only inclusive school teachers were examined. Data collected from the survey with the inclusive school teachers revealed various information about their professional qualities and needs. In order to better understand to what extent teachers in inclusive schools are qualified for teaching children with special educational needs two following criteria were used:

1. Experience of teaching children with disabilities
2. Trainings received

Table 4: Teaching Experience to Children with Disabilities

Teaching Experience to Children with Disabilities	N	Percent (%)
Less than one year	19	26.3
1-2 years	16	22.2
3-5 years	20	27.7
6-9 years	13	18
10 and more	4	5.5
Total	72	100

Table 4 shows the level of respondents' experience (in years) of teaching children with disabilities. Although the biggest group of the respondents are teachers who have 3-5 years of experience in teaching with children with disabilities, however, 26.4 % of the respondents have less than one year experience. 13 teachers have experience of 6-9 years and only four teachers ten and more years.

Table 5: Participation in Trainings and their Effectiveness

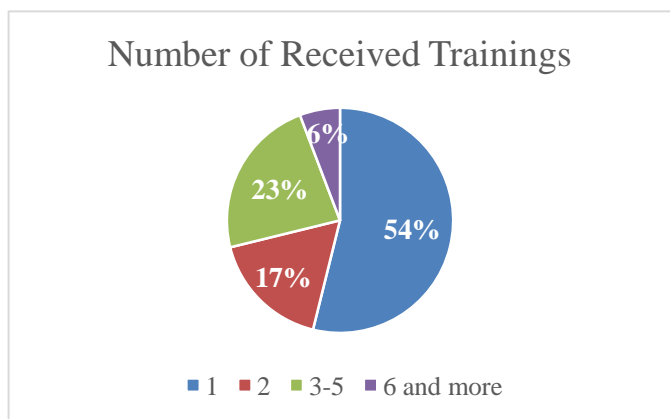
		Effectiveness of Trainings		Total
		Yes	No	
Participation in Trainings	Yes	48	4	52
	No	20	–	20
Total				72

Data gathered from the survey with teachers also revealed that 20 respondents out of 72 did not receive any kind of training on inclusive education or teaching methods of children with disabilities. Moreover, four teachers out of 52 who participated do not find them effective (see Table 5).

Figure 3 shows how many trainings teachers received. 54 %, that is 28 teachers out of 52, received only one training on inclusive

Figure 3: Number of Received Trainings

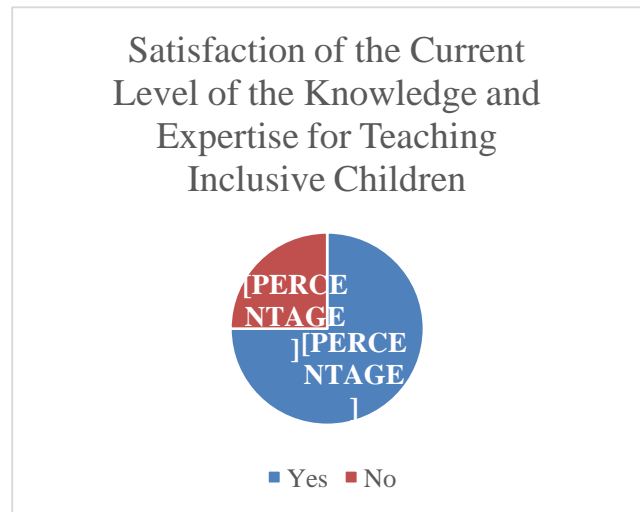
education. The second most frequently appeared group of respondents are teachers who received 3-5 trainings (23% or 12 teachers). Nine teachers received two trainings and only three teachers participated in six and more trainings.



Data gathered from interviews and survey also revealed that in Armenia particularly NGOs and International Organizations are very active in organizing and providing trainings to teachers of inclusive schools.

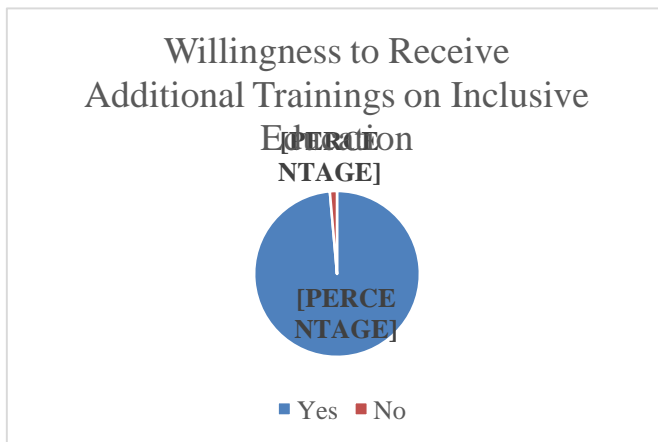
In order to better understand educational needs of inclusive school teachers, teachers were asked whether they find their level of knowledge on teaching methods to children with disabilities satisfactory (see Figure 4). 18 teachers do not find that their level of knowledge is enough, while the rest of the respondents (54 teachers) were satisfied with it.

Figure 4: Satisfaction of the Current Level of the Knowledge and Expertise for Teaching Inclusive Children



However, this picture does not seem to be consistent with the reality, as nearly half of the respondents (35 teachers) stated that teachers of special schools are more competent and can better educate children with special educational needs. They highlighted that they need

Figure 5: Willingness to Receive Additional Trainings on Inclusive Education



additional knowledge and methods on inclusive education, in order to increase their effectiveness in the inclusive classrooms. That is why, taking into consideration all findings stated above, it is not surprising that the vast majority of the respondents (98.6 % or 71 teachers) expressed their willingness to receive

additional trainings on inclusive education (see Figure 5).

During the interviews with representatives of NGOs and international organizations, majority of the interviewees expressed their concerns on the professional qualities of inclusive school teachers. It was mainly connected with the fact that they think, that there are inadequate numbers of mandatory state organized trainings. Also, it was highlighted that there is no effective evaluation and control mechanisms of inclusive school teachers.

Although interviewed parents of inclusive children did not express any concerns connected with the professional qualities and expertise of the teachers in their respective schools, however, there were some instances when parents mentioned about some discriminatory attitudes of teachers towards their child, which was mainly expressed by assigning less homework to children with disabilities, compared to the rest of the class. Although this fact can be connected with the existing stereotypes of the teachers, however, it is also a sign that teachers need increased amounts of trainings and there is a lot of work to be done in this regard. Thus, based on the findings H₃ is partially accepted.

General Attitudes and Perceptions about Inclusive Education among Teachers of Inclusive Schools

Existing attitudes among inclusive school teachers towards inclusive education is a very important factor for successful implementation of inclusive education approach. One of the interviewed principals of inclusive schools stated that the majority of ineffective and unfortunate cases of inclusive education is coming from existing bad attitudes and negative perceptions towards inclusive education among pedagogical and administrative staff of the school. The principal argued that if a principle of inclusive school can manage to change the stereotypes of

teachers and create caring and supporting environment, then many problems can be avoided or easily solved.

One of the frequently expressed opinions about IE in Armenian society is the belief that the educational quality of children without disabilities is suffering because of IE. The surveyed teachers also have a similar opinion. Majority of the teachers who participated in the survey think that, as a result of inclusive education, quality of education of children without disabilities can sometimes suffer. However, this opinion was mainly connected with the fact that inclusive schools lack adequate physical and technical capacities, because of which it is hard to achieve effective educational process in the classroom and, as a result, both children with disabilities and without suffer. Moreover, many teachers also stated that the educational process of children without disabilities cannot suffer at all if teachers of inclusive classrooms have high pedagogical qualities and adequate knowledge on new teaching methods. Teachers mentioned that only the lack of sufficient experience and knowledge of teachers can lead to unsatisfactory results and outcomes in inclusive classrooms for children with and without disabilities.

Besides negative impacts that inclusive education may have on children without disabilities due to the factors discussed above, many teachers also mentioned that in reality inclusive education also has positive but non-academic impact on them. Majority of the respondents stated that inclusive education promotes tolerance and, as a result, children without disabilities become more responsible and caring members of the society.

Data collected from the survey also revealed that from the teachers' point of view the primary purpose of inclusive education is to promote social integration of children with disabilities. The concern of importance of ensuring quality education for those children was not mentioned at all. Similar view was also frequently expressed during the interviews with the

representatives of NGO and international organizations. Many inclusive education experts argued that social benefits of inclusive education for children with and without disabilities is more important compared to academic ones.

In order to deeper understand what inclusive school teachers think about inclusive education approach in general, teachers' attitude to whether studying in special schools or in inclusive ones would be more effective for children with disabilities were examined. Data collected from the survey illustrates that the majority of the respondents (70.8 % or 51 teachers) agreed with the statement that all children regardless of their type of disability should receive education in inclusive classrooms. The rest of the respondents disagreed claiming that it would be more effective if children with severe mental disabilities study in special schools. Also, many teachers stated that educational needs of children with disabilities currently can be better met at special schools, rather than in inclusive ones, taking into consideration poor condition of physical and technical capacities of inclusive schools in Armenia.

Another remarkable finding, which is connected with the existing attitudes towards IE in Armenian society has emerged during the data collection phase with the parents of disabled children and with school principals. Although this research does not examine parents' attitudes and perceptions, however as many interviewees stated that negative attitude of parents was one of the worrisome issues that they had faced during the transition period, it was decided to include their experiences in this study, as well.

During the interviews many respondents frequently mentioned that sometimes parents of children without disabilities were against the transformation of their children's schools into inclusive ones. The majority of the interviewed principals of inclusive schools stated that during

the transition period it was equally challenging and important to change negative attitudes and perceptions of both inclusive school teachers and parents of children without disabilities.

Almost all interviewed parents of inclusive children stated that in the beginning they have witnessed strong opposition from the parents of children without disabilities when their children started to study together. They stated that children without disabilities surprisingly did not show discriminatory attitude towards their new peers, but the quite contrary. Parents stated that in general children without disabilities are very kind and caring with the children with disabilities. This was especially the case at the elementary classes. Interviewed parents mentioned that children without disabilities, unlike their parents, do not have negative attitudes or perceptions. Even if some of them have, it is because of their parents. One of the parents of children with disabilities stated:

“Who shape children’s perceptions? Of course their parents! They learn what they see in their homes or what their parents teach them.”

Data gathered from the interviews revealed that one of the major reasons of strong opposition coming from parents of children without disabilities, is that they believe that educational process of their children would suffer if children with disabilities started to study with their children. Interviewed principals stated that very often opposing parents think that children with disabilities are weak, uncontrollable and they need more attention from the teacher, which would be at the expense of their children’s educational progress.

However, the level of opposition and negative attitudes of parents started to gradually decrease with the provided trainings on the topic of inclusive education and after the frequently organized meetings of parents of children with and without disabilities. One of the interviewed parents stated: *“Trainings changed everything. Some organization came to our school and after*

those trainings parents started to realize that inclusive children also have rights similar to their children. And that their child also could have had disability and they could have been in our place.” Although in the beginning the majority of the parents showed strong opposition to the transformation of their child’s school into inclusive one, however, this situation started to change in the future, when various trainings and meetings were organized with them.

Overall, data revealed that in general inclusive school teachers do not have explicitly negative attitudes and stereotypes towards inclusive education. Although some negative attitudes can be found among the responses, however, it is not directly referred to the concept of inclusiveness, but it was rather justified with the fact of inadequate resources of inclusive schools in Armenia, which creates significant problems for both teachers and students. The attitudes of inclusive school teachers can be vividly illustrated by the fact that the majority of the respondents think that inclusive education is a good idea, however, it does not work well in existing poor conditions of Armenian public schools. Thus, H_4 is rejected and its H_0 is accepted.

Conclusion

To conclude, the aim of this research paper was to examine current educational problems that children with disabilities face in inclusive schools. Specifically, physical, technical and human capacities of inclusive schools were examined, in order to understand whether their current status meets the educational needs of children with disabilities. Human capacities of inclusive school were examined both in light of their professional qualities and general attitudes towards IE.

Data gathered during this study has revealed that the physical and technical capacities of inclusive schools in Armenia are not adequate for ensuring quality education for children with

disabilities. In general, schools have only ramps outside the building, the rest of the examined facilities are either missing or in a bad condition. This widespread situation impedes the educational process of children with disabilities. It also creates significant problems for teachers and the rest of the inclusive school community. Very often, because of inadequate physical capacities of inclusive schools, inclusive students experience exclusive and segregated education inside inclusive schools. As a result, educational process of all children suffers. That is why the first recommendation of this paper is the following:

Recommendation 1: Allocate more resources for adapting physical and technical capacities of the inclusive schools to satisfy educational needs of children with disabilities. If there are no sufficient resources, it is more preferable to extend the target year of 2025 and to focus more on the physical and technical preparedness of the inclusive school, instead of rapidly increasing the numbers of schools providing IE, which are not ready to serve the educational needs of children with disabilities.

This study also revealed that teachers of inclusive schools lack adequate trainings on inclusive education. Most of the teachers stated that additional knowledge on new teaching methods of children with disabilities would help them to increase their efficiency in the classroom.

Recommendation 2: Increase the number of provided trainings to inclusive school teachers. It is also important to pay special attention to the monitoring system of teachers and frequently evaluate them.

Recommendation 3: According to many interviewed inclusive school experts it is also important to have teacher's assistant position in schools, which will help to increase the quality of education provided to children with disabilities.

Although during this study widespread negative attitudes towards inclusive education were not revealed, however as during the interviews with the principles of inclusive schools and parents of children with disabilities it was stated that during the transition period both teachers and parents of children without disabilities had some negative attitudes or difficulties in understanding what is inclusive education the next recommendation is the following:

Recommendation 3: Organize more trainings for the whole inclusive school community in order to raise awareness about the advantages of inclusive education. Special attention to the relationship of parents of children with and without disabilities should be given as parents in their turn shape the attitude of their children.

These recommendations are mostly directed to the RA government. However, other parties of the society, such as NGOs and international organization can also contribute to the implementation of inclusive education in Armenian schools. It should be noted that they are particularly active in providing trainings to the inclusive schools teachers. Significant part of the surveyed teachers have participated in such training.

In general, the implementation of inclusive education is a continuous process, which needs constant attention and considerable human and financial resources. To date, Armenian government showed serious commitment and progress in adapting the educational system of Armenia to serve the needs of children with disabilities. However, this study argued that a lot of work remains undone.

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Appendix A: Survey Questionnaire for Teachers of Inclusive Schools

Please indicate your gender:

1. Male
2. Female

Please mention your age: _____

Please mention your place of residence (region, city): _____

Please indicate your educational level:

1. Bachelor's Degree
2. Master's Degree
3. Doctorate Degree
4. Other _____

Please indicate in what grades you are teaching now:

1. Elementary
2. Middle
3. High

Please indicate how long you teach in your mentioned classes: _____

Please indicate how long you teach in general: _____

Please indicate how many children with disabilities you are teaching now: _____

Please indicate how long you teach children with disabilities in general: _____

Did you ever participated in any training on inclusive education and new teaching methods of children with disabilities?

1. Yes
2. No

If yes, please specify how many trainings have you received? By whom they were organized?

Do you find those trainings effective?

1. Yes
2. No

Please mention whether you are satisfied with your current level of knowledge and expertise for teaching children with disabilities?

1. Yes
2. No

Would you like to receive more trainings on inclusive education?

1. Yes
2. No

If yes, please specify in what kind of trainings and on what topics would you like to participate?

All children regardless of their type of disability should receive education in inclusive classrooms.

1. Agree
2. Disagree

Please specify why you disagree with this statement? Children with what type of disabilities should be educated in special schools? Why?

Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the statements of this table.	Agree	Disagree
Educational needs of children with disabilities can be better met in special schools.		
Teachers of special schools can better teach children with disabilities.		
Inclusive education positively influence social integration of children with disabilities.		
Children without disabilities become more responsible and good member of society because of inclusive education.		
Inclusive education is a good idea, but in reality it does not work.		

In your opinion what impact inclusive education has on educational progress of children with disabilities?

In your opinion what are the main problems in inclusive schools for children with disabilities or which you face while teaching in inclusive classrooms?

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Do you succeed in solving those problems? If yes how? Do the administrative staff, multidisciplinary team members or other teachers help you to solve those issues? If yes, who helps and how?

In your opinion what your school needs which would help to improve inclusive education for children with disabilities.

Appendix B: Interview Questionnaire for Parents of Children with Disabilities

1. How does your child feel about his/her school?
2. How would you assess physical capacities of your child's school? (ramps outside and inside the school, specially adapted classrooms, specially adapted gymnasium, specially adapted cafeteria, specially adapted sanitation facilities)
3. How would you assess technical capacities of your child's school? (pedagogic and instructional materials necessary for effective teaching of your child)
4. How would you assess the professional level of teachers? Are you satisfied with educational quality that your child receives at school?
5. Does your child ever feel uncomfortable at his/her school and what are the main reasons for that?
6. Has your child ever been discriminated by others in school? (parents of other children, classmates, teachers) If yes how and how often it occurs? Can it be a reason for not attending school?
7. How adults or teachers at school respond to such kind of acts?
8. Do you feel that there are any barriers that stand in the way of your child's learning process at school? What are the main barriers?
9. Are you satisfied with the steps your school has taken to integrate children with disabilities into school community and the learning process?
10. What else can be done to improve education quality of your child? Who should do it?

Appendix C: Interview Questionnaire for Principals and Multidisciplinary Team Members of Inclusive Schools

1. If you have been in the school before it became inclusive, can you please tell a bit more about the process of change? How is the school different now?
2. In your opinion what are the main advantages and disadvantages in inclusive schools for pupils? (both with disabilities and without)
3. Do you think inclusive education should be for children with every kind of disability or no? Should there be limitations? Why?
4. How would you assess physical capacities of your school? (ramps outside and inside the school, specially adapted classrooms, specially adapted gymnasium, specially adapted cafeteria, specially adapted sanitation facilities)
5. How would you assess technical capacities of your school? (Pedagogic and instructional materials necessary for effective teaching of your child)
6. How would you assess the professional level of teachers in your school? Have they ever participated in any training on inclusive education? If yes, how often? In your opinion do they need more trainings?
7. What else can be done to improve education quality for children with disabilities in inclusive schools? Who should do it?

Appendix D: Interview Questionnaire for Representatives of NGOs and International Organizations

1. How would you evaluate current situation in inclusive schools in Armenia? (in regard of its physical, technical and human resources)
2. What are the main alarming problems regarding inclusive schools that need attention?
3. Does your NGO do anything to solve those issues?
4. Do you see any progress towards inclusive education during the recent years in Armenia?
5. What would be your recommendations to the government of the RA for improving educational quality for children with disabilities?
6. If you had as much funding as you want/need, what would you do in this field? Please be specific.