

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF ARMENIA

DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE AND INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

**INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN ARMENIA: ACADEMIC OR
SOCIAL BENEFITS?**

By

Margarita Gaboyan

May 2016

Master's Essay in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master
of Arts in Political Science and International Relations

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Dr. Vache Gabrielyan, my Faculty advisor for his continuing support during my research. His guidance and advice have contributed much in the successful completion of this study.

I also want to convey my best appreciations to all the members of the Faculty for the knowledge and skills I obtained within the two years of my studies.

I would also like to thank the school administrators for their support in conducting the surveys in the inclusive classrooms.

Table of Contents

Glossary.....	4
Introduction.....	5
Literature Review	7
Disability, Inclusion and Inclusive Education.....	7
Pros and Cons of Inclusive Education	10
Armenian Legal Framework.....	13
Relevance of the Study.....	15
Methodology.....	16
Findings.....	19
Peer Nomination.....	19
Rating Scale.....	20
Academic Benefits.....	24
Discussion and Conclusion.....	25
References.....	31
Appendix 1.....	38
Appendix 2.....	39

Glossary

IE – Inclusive Education

SEDL - Southwest Educational Development Laboratory

SEN – Special Educational Needs

UNESCO - The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

UNICEF - The United Nations Children's Fund

WHO – World Health Organization

Introduction

A basic human right to education is enshrined in the national constitutions across the globe. All the nations recognized everybody's equal right to be educated and to have access to quality education. Thousands of action plans and agendas addressed the importance of educational integration in people's physical and psychological development, participation in job market and their consequent contribution to the countries' sustainable development. It was customary for children to be segregated into different categorical classrooms based on their gender, abilities, race, etc. However, the most common way of segregation is a disability-based one. The case of just being educated was satisfying enough for most policymakers. But when it became obvious that having parallel educational policies further strengthens vulnerable children's segregation and that special education does not meet their educational and social needs, the last alternative remained the principle of mainstreaming. To ensure equality and non-discrimination within the educational institutions, the notion of inclusive education has come into play.

Nowadays, mainstreaming policies are the most prominent ones in the national agendas. They employ different programs and tools to facilitate and foster handicapped children's social inclusion and better academic performance. Over the years, many positive changes have been remarked in the development of IE policies. National legislations endorsed the principle of transforming regular schools into inclusive ones so that no single child is deprived of the right to be educated.

Despite many efforts and attempts, studies show that the success of inclusive education is determined not only by governmental policies but also factors uncontrollable by them. Putting different people in one classroom does not mean integration yet. A huge process of inclusion is

subject to social phenomena such as perceptions, attitudes, as well as maltreatment towards handicapped people. Legal provisions and endorsed responsibilities cannot change peers' mentality and perception about disability and disabled children. Being physically present, inclusive children are often isolated and categorized within the same classroom.

Armenia as one of the signatory states of child rights conventions is implementing IE policy as well. A number of studies have been conducted to see the gaps and implementation challenges of inclusive education in Armenia. The findings show that Armenian context does not differ much from the cases abroad. The main challenges are widely spread and recognized across the globe. There is a little knowledge about children's perception about mainstreaming and the situation through their eyes. Thus, a research with child participants was highly needed for seeing the actual pattern.

The current study is an effort to discuss the integration level and academic benefits of handicapped children in inclusive public elementary schools in Armenia. By understanding the current situation and children's attitudes towards each other, it will be possible to measure the possible progress of recent years.

This research studies integration through tendencies in friendships and neglectful attitudes based on disabilities and its impact on academic performance of disabled children.

Literature Review

The concept of inclusive education has been widely researched and debated with the emergence of advocacy groups in the United States who were claiming the access of disabled children into the mainstream schools since 1980s (Skrtic 1991). As time passed by, the issue was largely recognized as an important agenda point for the national governments to address. Eventually, in 1994 Salamanca World Conference endorsed the idea of inclusive education as a legal responsibility for all the UNESCO member states (Ainscow 2006). Within this framework, states were obliged to harmonize their domestic laws with the international duties so that to ensure the enrollment of every single child in mainstream schools regardless of disability level (UNESCO 1994).

Disability, Inclusion and Inclusive Education

In order to have a better understanding of the policy, three main concepts are worth considering: disability, inclusion and inclusive education. Despite the fact that these terms are frequently used in the literature, there is no consensus about their exact meaning to date (McDonald and Tufue-Dolgoy 2013; César and Santos 2006).

In its simplest formation, disability is “any restriction or lack (resulting from an impairment) of ability to perform an activity in the manner or within the range considered normal for a human being” (WHO 1976). Scholars suggest three primary models of disability and corresponding solutions to them depending on different perspectives. The models can be listed as follows:

1. Individual or medical: In this context it is believed that disability is a deviation from a normal human behavior which, if not healed, brings an extremely difficult situation (Harris 2001).

2. Social: The proponents of this model argue that the crux of the matter is in people's attitudes. Differences between humans do not disable them to socialize with each other. It is society that artificially creates psychological barriers and hinders societal development. Meanwhile those differences should be accepted and considered as ordinary (Finkelstein 1980).

3. Human Rights: The uniqueness of this model lies in the fact that it not only encompasses the second one but also grounds it with the legally binding provisions. Disabled people do have an equal access to social services not due to others' goodwill but due to their legitimate rights (UN 2006).

Although this term embodies a number of concepts, there is a commonly shared view: disability causes certain kind of limitation to a person the actual reflection of which depends on the context (Gordon 2013).

There is a degree of uncertainty around the terminology of inclusion as well. In a narrow sense, it presupposes the facilitation of social communication with non-disabled people (Clement and Bigby 2009). In a broader context, it includes his/her acceptance as an equal member of society, employment, as well as participation in community affairs (Hall 2010; Power 2013). The concept of inclusion overlaps with a number of notions: social capital, community participation, independent life, sense of belonging (Simplican et al. 2015) . However, in the scope of this research the most reasonable component appears to be the sense of belonging since it explains the importance of adjustment to the environment, not just placement in it (Power 2013).

Applying these terms into the mainstream environment, social inclusion has come to refer to the interactions between disabled and non-disabled children, their mutual acceptance, as well as

friendships among them (Koster et al. 2010). Cruz-Saco and Hopkin add another important factor in this process: children should be encouraged to be however they want to be enjoying equal rights, opportunities and services at the same time (Amparo Cruz-Saco 2008; Hopkins 1996 in De Silva 2013).

As far as inclusive education is concerned, it encompasses a range of forms and understandings. As well defined by UNESCO (2005, 13), “Inclusive education is a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners through increasing participation in learning, cultures and communities, and reducing exclusion within and from education”.

According to Ballard (1997), inclusive education has four main premises: non-discrimination, involvement with no exceptions, equal access, as well as emphasis on diversity instead of assimilation. Booth (1997) identifies two main processes leading to the inclusion which are an increase of participation and decrease of exclusionary practices within it. In addition, Almazan (2009) underlines three components contributing to the students’ inclusion rather than making them ‘islands in the mainstream’. Those are:

1. Physical inclusion into mainstream classrooms by proper facilities;
2. Social communication and friendship with peers;
3. Full participation in the class activities.

Wu (2007) identifies three major models of inclusive educations all of which are quite applicable across the globe: community-based, corporative and reverse. The first model refers to the case, when the school curriculum and teachers’ background have no specific considerations for disabled children who compose a very small part of the class. Corporative model is more progressive in the sense that combines both special and regular teachers, as well as has certain

curriculum adjustments. The last model suggests the enrollment of non-disabled children into the special settings.

Pros and Cons of Inclusive Education

The bulk of IE scholarship can be divided into three main groups: proponents, opponents and alternative proposers of inclusive education. Each of them is worth considering separately.

The advocates of the inclusion idea assert that education is a basic human right and should be accessible to everyone regardless of any differences. Any attempt of segregation or discrimination among students is a direct violation of law because it presupposes labeling of disabled ones and consequent low expectations from them. As a result children end up benefiting neither academically nor socially (SEDL 2015). Moreover, scholars believe that special education cannot prepare students for the real life challenges inasmuch as the latter is not divided into special and normal parts. That is why students engaged in special schools usually become socially rejected and undereducated (Stainback and Stainback 1992; Bunch 1999; Biklen 1989; Buckley, Bird, and Archer 2002). In contrast, inclusive environments make it feasible for vulnerable children to develop social and behavioral skills in interaction with other students, as well as be ready for higher expectations. As Buckley's study proves, pupils enrolled in mainstream classrooms have better expressive language skills than those in special ones. The major reason for that is the environment of 'competent spoken language users'. As a result, the handicapped children have better academic performance and social status (Buckley, Bird, and Archer 2002; Wauters and Knoors 2007; Coben and Zigmond 1986; Carrington 1999; Teigland 2009). As far as non-disabled children are concerned, those become more accepting and tolerant

due to interaction opportunities with the handicapped ones (Peck and Staub 2004; McGregor 1993; Teigland 2009).

In juxtaposition, the opponents of inclusive education firmly believe that an efficient inclusive education is not feasible in reality. They argue that teachers are forced to focus on ‘underachievers’ sacrificing the potential of the talented students (Robbins 2007; Wiele 2011). The principle of dedicating most of the time and energy to them decreases the balance within classmates. In this sense teachers meet certain challenges in handling the whole class (Tornillo 1994; Sklaroff 1994). Cook and Slee (1993) add that disability is impossible to eliminate by spending time with non-disabled children. Thus, the adoption of inclusive education creates an illusion of social benefit by a simple placement of everybody in the same room (Colker 2006). Even in cases of integration it does not bring an academic achievement to them yet. As a matter of fact, handicapped children have difficulties in the academic struggle and are not capable to keep up with their classmates (Wiele 2011). A short story about a child with autism bears testimony to that fact.

“He felt different and like he didn’t really belong. He also remembered being teased when he couldn’t keep up with other kids. He liked his special education class placement because he didn’t feel different and he could help other kids”(Strout and Coots 2007, 13).

Moreover, disabled children can hinder the learning process of others by their disobedience and sometimes unmanageable behavior (Cook and Slee 1993). Clark and others (1999) posit that executing inclusive practices can unavoidably cause adverse effects since students’ differences will make them segregated within the classroom. It is explained in a sense that a particular activity will be accepted differently by different children marginalizing some of them while

focusing on others. Thus, the crux of the matter is not in the truthfulness or wrongness of inclusion concept but its actual reflection in the real context. Ridsdale and Thompson, as well as Koster and others are in clear support for this argument pointing out the results of their surveys among handicapped children in United Kingdom and Netherlands. The respondents described their actual status as being marginalized and rejected among classmates. This opinion was shared even among those pupils that were deemed to be 'socially popular' by their peers (Thompson 2002; Koster et al. 2010). It stands to reason that the student's inclusion is highly dependent on his/her disability type. For instance, deaf children cannot develop socially because of inability to interact with others (Cohen 1994). The argument about the inclusion through individualization is rejected by this group of scholars too. They insist that it is more likely to happen in the smaller groups with specialized teachers and curricula which are possible only in special settings (SEDL 2015).

As a viable alternative, scholars have found a positive compromise between the inclusion and segregation. They suggest a pull-out program that would help children with different levels of disability to study in the general classroom. This is typical in terms of partial inclusion since children are engaged in the general settings having an optional one for an individualized attention and specialized instructions when needed (Kavale 2002; Wiele 2011). The primary argument is the unavailability of certain services in the mainstream classrooms (Mastropieri and Scruggs 2010).

As the second option, scholars propose a peer support program. The primary aim is to integrate disabled children with the academic and social help of their peers. Children with the most developed social skills and eagerness to help are invited to a range of seminars in order to get a better understanding of disabilities and related problems. The next step is the organization of

extracurricular activities with the vulnerable children in order to increase the degree of their proximity. The peer support program makes it feasible for classmates to interact with each other more frequently, help in class activities and consequently brings not only social but also academic benefits (Copeland et al. 2004; Carter et al. 2015).

What most scholars agree upon is that inclusive education is not just a placement of disabled and non-disabled children in one classroom. It is a huge and endless process that requires political will, strong cooperation and common values. All these factors shape the actual relationship between teachers and students, public acceptance, as well as school preparedness for the proper implementation of the policy (Hargreaves 2004; Ainscow 2006).

Armenian legal framework of Inclusive Education

After looking at the global scope of the concept, it is also vital to focus on the national level.

Armenia, as one of the signatory states of the international conventions, endorsed its willingness to ensure an equal access to education by its legal acts and adopted policies.

First and foremost, RA Constitution highlights the principle of everybody's equal right to be educated (RA Government 1995). Secondly, the Education Law (1999) claims the democratic essence of the education and gives legitimate rights to parents to decide the education institution for their children. The Law on Education of Persons in Need of Special Education Conditions (2005) creates several criteria for children's enrollment in regular educational institutions. Only those handicapped children are eligible to study in the inclusive settings that have the following kinds of disability:

1. Speech impediments;
2. Hearing disorders or deafness;

3. Mental retardation;
4. Violations of the musculoskeletal system;
5. Problems of psychological development;
6. Emotional or behavioral disorders.

Eventually, the Law on General Education directly put the concept of inclusive education on the agenda. It requires the transformation of special schools into the inclusive ones (RA National Assembly 2009). As a result, there are 180 inclusive schools operating across Armenia (RA Ministry of Education and Science 2015). In line with the achieved progress, UNICEF points out the main measures to be taken for ensuring the policy's success in the country:

1. School curriculum in a way that encourages full participation of everybody;
2. Provision of psychological and health services for children;
3. Raising public awareness and propagating support towards disabled children (UNICEF 2015).

The above utterances show the need to work harder and fill the missing gaps in the implementation stage of the policy. Along with pros and cons, Armenian government expresses its political will to improve situation in the country and make it feasible for every single child to have access to the general education as one of the basic human rights.

Relevance of Study

Inclusive Education is one of the prominent public policies in Armenia since 2009 which was materialized with the Action Plan of 2011-2015. Hence, it is important to see whether the policy serves its purpose and how it is reflected on the target population.

The topic is relevant in the sense that it not only raises the notion of basic human right to primary education but also the principle of non-discrimination, tolerance and equality in the society. It primarily highlights the importance of inclusive education in societal development since those disabled children that do not see intolerant attitudes and segregation, have higher chances to participate in civic activism, job market, as well as community development in the future.

The abovementioned statements and contradictory experiences highlight the importance of more study in the field so that to ensure a more objective and comprehensive perception of the policy. In order to see how the actual pattern in Armenia is different from the cases described in the literature and how Armenian children benefit from it, it is vital to conduct a research that is based on primary data.

Methodology

The current study aims to assess the academic achievements and social status of disabled children that are already enrolled in the inclusive settings in Armenia. Literature review shows a clear contradiction between different studies conducted abroad. A group of scholars argue that inclusive environment is just a placement of everyone in one classroom which does not bring neither social nor academic benefits (Buckley, Bird, and Archer 2002; Wauters and Knoors 2007; Coben and Zigmond 1986; Carrington 1999; Teigland 2009). Others assert that disabled children have more possibilities to be integrated when they study in mainstream classrooms. In addition, children improve their learning skills by communicating with non-disabled ones (Cook and Slee 1993; Colker 2006; Thompson 2002; Koster et al. 2010). Thus, in order to understand the tendencies in the Armenian context, the addressed research questions are the followings:

RQ 1: Are disabled children socially integrated in the inclusive schools?

RQ 2: Do more integrated disabled children have better academic performance?

Accordingly, the hypotheses of the study are as follows:

H1: Disabled children are socially integrated in the inclusive schools.

H2: More integrated disabled children have better academic performance.

In order to answer the abovementioned research questions, a sample of several inclusive schoolrooms was constructed. Non-probability purposive sampling strategy was used since the target population is school-age children. Thus, the study was conducted in five inclusive classrooms of different public elementary schools in Yerevan. The mainstream settings were

comprised of 20-25 children at average. The children were pupils of four to six grades. The overall sample represents 18 disabled and 109 non-disabled children.

With an eye to answer the first research question, the sociometric assessment measures (Gresham 1981) were employed in those five inclusive settings. Two measurement tools were the rating scale and peer nomination (Appendix 1). The questionnaires were exactly the same for both handicapped and non-handicapped children so that to ensure an equal treatment and non-discrimination towards them. Children were told in advance that those questions were for an independent researcher and would not be recorded for in-school purposes. The utmost attention was given to children's being comfortable with the questionnaire and having no impact on each other's answers.

The peer nomination represents two questions aimed at finding out the priorities in the friendships. Children were asked to nominate three classmates whom they considered as their best friends. Another question was about nominating those with whom they communicate less frequently. As a result, two categories were formed: most and least communicative children.

As far as the rating scale is concerned, it introduces a method of rating the classmates by the corresponding icons. The importance of this questionnaire is in its being available for children in a sense that they can mark a smile that matches their attitude most of all towards a particular classmate. As a result, there are three categories: rejection, neglect and acceptance. T-tests were used to find the differences and gap between handicapped and non-handicapped children's inclusion. These two measurement tools were analyzed separately and merged later on to see the extent of disabled children's social integration. In addition, disabled children's answers were

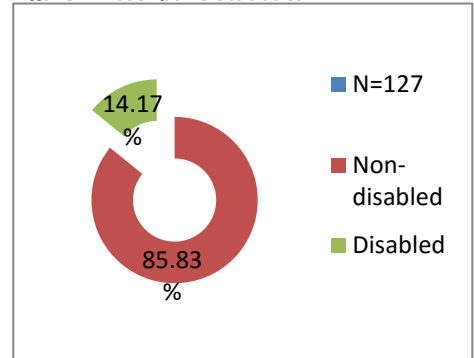
taken into consideration with the purpose to find out their perspective and opinion about their own social status.

In order to answer the second question, the outcome of the first part of the research was highly important. Thus, those disabled children that were found out to be more integrated by the sociometric assessment results, were compared with the rest. Since grades are the main indicators of academic performance, it was decided to measure their academic benefits taking into consideration the average grades of the final semester. T-tests were utilized to see whether there was a statistically significant difference between average grades of integrated and non-integrated handicapped schoolchildren. This helped to see whether the integration in the inclusive environment brought academic benefits or not.

Findings

The overall sample population consists of 127 children enrolled in public elementary inclusive schools of Yerevan (See [Figure 1](#)). Upon consent of school administration, all children of five mainstream classrooms were given questionnaires. Building up the first result to the second one, the comparative analysis of average semester grades was conducted that revealed the necessary information about integration's impact on academic achievements.

Figure 1 Descriptive Statistics



Peer nomination

In order to see the actual social status of disabled children, the questionnaires filled by non-disabled ones were taken into account. Out of eighteen handicapped pupils, only six have been nominated as best friends with the mean frequency of 1-3. Thus, the mean frequency in friendships per disabled child is 0.62 (See [Table 1](#); N=18).

Table 1: Best Friend Nomination

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid 0	12	66.7	66.7	66.7
1	3	16.7	16.7	83.3
2	1	5.6	5.6	88.9
3	2	11.1	11.1	100.0
Total	18	100.0	100.0	

In contrast, almost thirteen disabled children are in the group of people with whom non-disabled ones communicate least of all. The mean frequency of being nominated in that category per child

is 3.23 (See Table 2; N=18). Almost 72.2% of handicapped pupils were nominated in the

Table 2: Least Communicated Nomination

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
0	5	27.8	27.8	27.8
1	1	5.6	5.6	33.3
2	3	16.7	16.7	50.0
3	2	11.1	11.1	61.1
4	2	11.1	11.1	72.2
6	3	16.7	16.7	88.9
9	1	5.6	5.6	94.4
10	1	5.6	5.6	100.0
Valid Total	18	100.0	100.0	

category at least once. The rest of

inclusive children are in neither category.

As a result of these nominations, seven participants found out to be more socially integrated than others. They had more nominations in “Best friend” category and less nominations in “Least Communicated” one.

Rating scale

To measure the level of acceptance, rejection or neglect among regular schoolchildren towards inclusive ones, they were asked to mark the corresponding icons in front of their names. To ensure a more comprehensive and objective result, the comparison of attitudes was conducted among each other, on one hand, and towards disabled children on the other. This comparison was important for understanding the actual gap in their social statuses.

When referring to the rejection category, the mean frequency of being rejected in case of handicapped children (M=5.82) is two times higher than in case of non-handicapped ones (M=2.56). The null hypothesis of T- test assumes equal variance between two samples. Analyzing Table 3, it can be noted that the null hypothesis is rejected. Thus, there is a statistically significant difference between two samples ($p=3.82$; $t \text{ Stat} > t \text{ Critical}$). Accordingly, regular peers are much more

	Disabled	Non-disabled
Mean	5.82352941	2.564814815
Variance	20.0294118	7.706040152
Observations	18	109
Pooled Variance	9.30908036	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
Df	125	
t Stat	4.09330653	
P(T<=t) one-tail	3.8207E-05	
t Critical one-tail	1.6573364	
P(T<=t) two-tail	7.6414E-05	
t Critical two-tail	1.97943869	

accepted than inclusive ones.

As far as the neglect category is concerned, there is no statistically significant difference between attitudes towards disabled and non-disabled children. Thus, there is no correlation between disability and neglect level by the regular classmates. The ones that are non-disabled (M=6.9) have an equal probability to be neglected as disabled ones (M=6.8). Hence, the null hypothesis is accepted (See Table 4; $p=0.45$; $t \text{ Stat} < t \text{ Critical}$).

	5	8
Mean	6.882353	6.962962963
Variance	13.61029	8.316372447
Observations	18	109
Pooled Variance	9.005013	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	125	
t Stat	-0.10295	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.459085	
t Critical one-tail	1.657336	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.91817	
t Critical two-tail	1.979439	

Table 5 shows that children with disabilities (M=6.9) have lower chances to be accepted than their regular classmates (M=9.5). There is a statistically significant difference between two sample means. That is why the null hypothesis is rejected (See Table 5; $p=0.01$; $t \text{ Stat} > t \text{ Critical}$).

Table 5: t-Test: Two-Sample Assuming Equal Variances			
		3	6
Mean	6.941176471	9.537037037	
Variance	23.18382353	19.31637245	
Observations	18	109	
Pooled Variance	19.81945551		
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0		
Df	125		
t Stat	-2.234687674		
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.01362166		
t Critical one-tail	1.657336397		
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.02724332		
t Critical two-tail	1.979438685		

Table 6: Disabled children's perspective		
Nominated classmates	Best Friends	Least communicated classmates
Disabled	1	1
Non-Disabled	32	32
Total	33	33

In addition to the regular classmates' attitude, it is also vital to concentrate on the disabled pupils' perception about their status in the mainstream settings. In the Table 6, there are the nominations by eleven disabled children that were present in the classrooms on the survey days. As well illustrated, the vast majority (96.9 %) of non-handicapped classmates are nominated both as best friends and classmates

with whom inclusive children communicate least of all (See Table 6).

When referring to the neglect, reject and accept categories, it becomes clear that the majority of non-disabled children are accepted by their inclusive peers (58.1 %). Moreover, there is a very low rejection level towards non-disabled children (See [Figure 2](#)).

Taken together, these two results suggest that inclusive peers do not feel different or segregated among regular classmates. They nominate non-disabled children as their best friends having an option to nominate friends among themselves. In addition, they generally accept non-handicapped peers and have positive attitude towards them.

Figure 2: Disabled Children's perspective

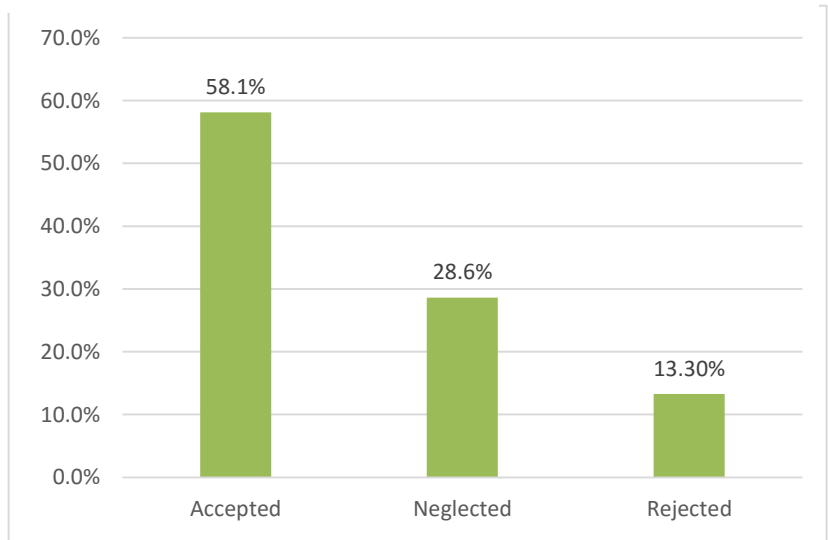


Table 7: t-Test: Two-Sample Assuming Equal Variances		
	Integrated	Non-Integrated
Mean	6.887142857	6.39
Variance	1.54742381	0.938290909
Observations	7	11
Pooled Variance	1.153278992	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
Df	16	
t Stat	0.973367533	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.17200911	
t Critical one-tail	1.739606726	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.34401822	
t Critical two-tail	2.109815578	

Academic benefits

Inferring from the peer nomination measurement results, out of eighteen, seven inclusive pupils were found to be more integrated than other eleven (See Figure 2). Then, the average grades of each category were compared by T-tests to see whether integration in mainstream settings gives academic advantages to them or not. It can be stated from the table on the left, that grades do not differ from each other depending on the integration

level (See Table7; $p=0.1$; $t \text{ Stat} > t \text{ Critical}$). Thus, friendships and more frequent communication with non-disabled children do not bring better academic performance.

Discussion and Conclusion

Inclusive education is a complex and endless process that requires consistent efforts and regularly renewed approaches. The perspectives to look into the policy and its impact are diverse. So are the perceptions. One can hardly state the absolute advantages and disadvantages of inclusive environment and find clear-cut solutions to the mainstreaming problems.

In the scope of the current research, the focus is on the social and academic benefits provided by the inclusive schools. That is why the direct participation of children has been highly required for studying the actual situation more objectively and without any intervention of parents or teachers. It is children that can provide the needed information about what really happens within their settings and how it contributes to their performance. Thus, employing the sociometric methods was one of the possible ways to see the situation through their eyes.

In regard with the limitations of the study, it should be mentioned that five classrooms in Yerevan do not represent a generalizable sample of 180 operating inclusive schools so that to infer about the inclusive education policy in Armenia. Thus, the conclusions are within the small sample size and do not show the overall situation in Armenia.

The results of the peer nomination and rating scale are relatively close to each other. If we judge strictly based on the quantitative data we can state that disabled children are quite segregated within the inclusive settings and the latter further increases their isolation. The findings support the idea that the majority of handicapped schoolchildren is rejected by their peers and has a very low social status in the class. Almost 88.9% of children with disabilities fall under the rejection category up to 14 times per child. This is a clear evidence of the statements mentioned in the literature which suggest that though their daily presence in the classroom and possible

participation give higher chances to be engaged, regular students still have negative attitudes and misperceptions about disabilities. Meanwhile one of the major objectives of the policy was to teach young generation to be tolerant and respectful towards handicapped ones. The opportunity to be in the same room with non-disabled children and being rejected at the same time further strengthens disabled children's physical and psychological isolation.

As far as the neglect category is concerned, with one exception, all the inclusive pupils are ignored by their peers by mean frequency of 6.8 times. Although it is close to non-disabled children's statistical data, the problem is that disabled ones are neglected mainly not because of their personal characteristics or bad behavior but because of their obvious differences.

In line with the third category findings, it can be stated that inclusive schoolchildren tend to be less accepted by their peers than the latter among each other. Despite the fact, that acceptance is not a friendship yet, it is also hardly given to the disabled pupils. This finding even more underlines the negative attitudes towards them.

In addition, it is also vital to see the tendencies of friendships between disabled and non-disabled children, as well as the frequency of their communication. In the given five inclusive settings, 66.7% of inclusive children are excluded from the "best friend" category. The rest of them are mentioned up to three times per child. Within this scope, it is quite encouraging to see that some part of regular classmates prioritizes relations with handicapped children over non-handicapped ones. When a regular peer chooses a disabled child as his/her best friend that means a huge progress in terms of changing attitudes and perceptions behind. It does mean that those few regular students have changed their perceptions about disabilities due to studying in the same setting with inclusive ones. This is clear evidence to the fact, that inclusive education brings an

opportunity for social integration but the latter is a gradual and slow process. Though having a small scale success, the integration process seems to be started.

On the contrary, 72.2 % of disabled pupils are nominated as the ones with whom the respondents communicate least of all. In light of this result the enrolled handicapped peers are quite neglected. This shows that the majority is not ready for engaging disabled people in their settings yet.

From the perspective of disabled schoolchildren, most of the regular peers are accepted. In like manner, more than 90 percent of best friend nominations are for non-disabled ones. In line with these findings, it can be assumed that disabled children feel integrated in the inclusive settings and look for friendships mostly with the regular ones. On the other hand, the least communicated peers are non-handicapped students as well. Mutually excluding the importance of each other, the results of both categories suggest that inclusive children mostly consider regular ones as their classmates having either negative or positive attitudes towards them while neglecting the peers of their own category. Building upon this assumption, handicapped pupils do not feel segregated and isolated and have a desire to be integrated in the mainstream settings. In other words, inclusive education provides those social opportunities and benefits that disabled children are looking for.

Summing up the results of sociometric assessment, it can be emphasized that the integration process has started with minor success stories but continues to face long-term and quite well-grounded challenges in terms of perceptions and attitudes that are pretty hard to overcome. The evidence suggests the following pattern: the vast majority of disabled children do continue to be isolated psychologically given their physical presence. The latter has seemed to be the major

obstacle on the way to their social integration. Meanwhile it is not. The placement of people with obvious differences is not yet a solution for their social integration. However, a few cases of friendships should not be overlooked inasmuch as they bear testimony to the fact that the policy has reached minor achievements. Over the years, there could be more results but the initial ones are already remarked.

Coming to the academic achievements, it should be claimed that due to time constraints, comparison of grades was the only possible way to measure them. As one of the prominent objectives of inclusive education was to achieve academic advantages through social integration, it was important to see the progress. Since it was impossible to compare the grades of special and inclusive schoolchildren because of different curriculum considerations and approaches, it was decided to compare disabled children in a given setting in line with their integration levels. As data show, there is no statistically significant difference between integrated and non-integrated handicapped children. Thus, social inclusion within the mainstream environment does not bring better academic performance. Those disabled children that interact more with non-disabled ones do not have higher grades. Consequently, friendships and communication are no guarantee of better education.

The current data is worth considering in the global context for measuring the comparative success of mainstreaming in Armenia. To that end, a number of studies of peer sociometric assessment should be referred to. Coben and Zigmond (2001) conducted their research in 4 Pennsylvanian public schools having a sample of 237 children. The results of their study suggest that inclusive students are less accepted and less rejected than their regular peers while they both are equally neglected with no statistically significant difference in sample means. Likewise, there is huge gap in “friendship” and “least communication” nominations. Very few disabled children

are considered to be best friends and the majority of them are the ones with whom the peers interact least of all. The overall data shows the continuous segregation within the mainstream classrooms. The only difference with our sample is that Armenian inclusive peers are more rejected than regular ones in contrast to the abovementioned sample. Thus, integration is less successful in our case. Prillaman's study (1981) in two public elementary schools in Washington shows that there is no statistically significant difference between the social statuses of inclusive and regular students. However, children with disabilities are twice more in the 'isolate' category as those without disabilities. In this category, children either did not get any nomination or got very few. In contrast, Pavri and Luftig (2001) display a totally contradicting pattern in a rural school in Ohio with the sample of 83 children. The data proves that children with handicaps are less popular in the classroom and feel lonelier than regular ones. The same assumption is supported by Avramidis (2009) who did her research in 7 primary schools in the North of England. The assessment measures were directed at self-perception and social status of children with special educational needs (SEN). As a result, those with SEN have been nominated less frequently as friends of the respondents and have lower social status in the classrooms.

To conclude, there is no a clear-cut and definite pattern among the mainstreamed schoolchildren across the globe. Most of the studies suggest that integration process is unsuccessful or has minor positive changes. Although a range of internal and external factors seem to make the case studies incomparable, the overall situation is the same.

Coming back to the hypotheses of the current study, it should be stated:

1. Hypothesis that states that disabled children benefit socially in the inclusive schools is partially accepted taken into consideration “best friend” nominations and disabled children’s self-perception.
2. The second hypothesis assuming that more integrated disabled children have higher grades is rejected since there is no statistically significant difference between two sample means.

As a final point, it is worth referring to the reviewed literature and mentioning a viable solution that was proven to be successful. Peer support programs that were suggested by a number of scholars (Copeland et al. 2004; Carter et al. 2015) suppose regular trainings for those non-handicapped peers that have better interpersonal skills. The trainings are aimed at explaining the disabilities and challenges caused by them so that children have a better understanding of the actual situation of their disabled peers. After the trainings, a number of extracurricular activities are organized with participation of those trained regular students. Those activities foster a better and faster social integration of mainstreamed peers. The program is highly recommended in our inclusive education policy as well, since there is a potential for making it better.

To conclude, IE policy within the scope of current study happens to be ineffective. Though the case study of a few elementary public schools cannot be considered a viable and generalizable sample, it shows that inclusive schoolchildren do continue to be segregated coupled with the negative perceptions of their regular peers. With minor positive outcomes, the integration process is overall unsuccessful and faces a range of challenges that are not dealt with yet.

References

- Ainscow, Mel. 2006. "Inclusive Education Ten Years after Salamanca: Setting the Agenda." *European Journal of Psychology of Education* 21 (3): 231–38
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/23421604>
- Almazan, Selene. 2009. "Inclusive Education and Implications for Policy: The State of the Art and the Promise." *TASH*. <http://www.edlawcenter.org/assets/files/pdfs/issues>
- Amparo Cruz-Saco, Maria. 2008. "Promoting Social Integration: Economic, Social and Political Dimensions with a Focus on Latin America."
http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/social/meetings/egm6_social_integration/documents/Promoting_Social_Integration.pdf
- Avramidis, Elias 2009. "The Social Impacts of inclusion on statemented pupils with SEN and their mainstream peers: Full Research Report"
http://reshare.ukdataservice.ac.uk/851667/5/Report_RES-061-23-0069-A.pdf
- Ballard, Keth. 1997. "Researching Disability and Inclusive Education: Participation, Construction and Interpretation." *International Journal of Inclusive Education* edition
<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/1360311970010302?journalCode=tied20>
- Biklen, Douglas. 1989. "Beyond Obligation: Students' Relations with Each Other in Integrated Classes." *In Beyond Separate Education: Quality Education for All*, pp. 207–21.
- Booth, Tony. 1997. "Understanding Inclusion and Exclusion in the English Competitive Education System." *International Journal of Inclusive Education* 1 (4): 337–55.
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/233236168_Understanding_inclusion_and_exclusion_in_the_English_competitive_education_system

Buckley, Sue, Gillian Bird, and Tamsin Archer. 2002. "A Comparison of Mainstream and Special Education for Teenagers with Down Syndrome: Implications for Parents and Teachers." *Down Syndrome News and Update*.

<http://www.down-syndrome.org/reports/295/>

Bunch, George. 1999. *Inclusion: How to: Essential Classroom Strategies*. Toronto Inclusion Press.

Carrington, Suzanne. 1999. "Inclusion Needs a Different School Culture," sec. *International Journal of Inclusive Education* 3(3). <https://core.ac.uk/download/files/310/10873856.pdf>

Carter, Erik W., Colleen K. Moss, Jennifer Asmus, Ethan Fesperman, Molly Cooney, Matthew E. Brock, Gregory Lyons, Heartley B. Huber, and Lori B. Vincent. 2015.

"Promoting Inclusion, Social Connections, and Learning Through Peer Support Arrangements." *Teaching Exceptional Children* 48 (1): 9–18.

<http://tcx.sagepub.com/content/48/1/9.extract>

César, Margarida, and Nuno Santos. 2006. "From Exclusion to Inclusion: Collaborative Work Contributions to More Inclusive Learning Settings." *European Journal of Psychology of Education - EJPE (Instituto Superior de Psicologia Aplicada)* 21 (3): 333–46.

<http://link.springer.com/article/10.1007%2F978-3-70-017342-0>

Clark, Catherine, Alan Dyson, Alan Millward, and Sue Robson. 1999. "Theories of Inclusion, Theories of Schools: Deconstructing and Reconstructing the 'Inclusive School.'" *British Educational Research Journal* 25 (2): 157–77

<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1080/0141192990250203/abstract>

Clement, Teodor, and Christine Bigby. 2009. "Breaking out of a Distinct Social Space: Reflections on Supporting Community Participation for People with Severe and Profound

Intellectual Disability.” *Journal of Applied Research in Intellectual Disability*, sec. 22.

<http://arrow.latrobe.edu.au:8080/vital/access/manager/Repository/latrobe:32243>

Coben, Sharon S., and Naomi Zigmond. 1986. “The Social Integration of Learning Disabled Students from Self-Contained to Mainstream Elementary School Settings.” *Journal of Learning Disabilities* 19 (10). <http://ldx.sagepub.com/content/19/10/614.abstract>

Cohen, Elisabeth. 1994. *Designing Groupwork: Strategies for the Heterogeneous Classroom*. New York: Teachers College.

Colker, Ruth. 2006. “The Disability Integration Presumption: Thirty Years Later.” *University of Pennsylvania Law Review* 154 (4): 789–862.

[https://www.law.upenn.edu/journals/lawreview/articles/volume154/issue4/Colker154U.Pa.L.Rev.789\(2006\).pdf](https://www.law.upenn.edu/journals/lawreview/articles/volume154/issue4/Colker154U.Pa.L.Rev.789(2006).pdf)

Cook, Sandy, and Slee, Roger. 1993. “Removing Dust from Flowers: A Chinese Model for Correctional Education.” *Yearbook of Correctional Education*.

Copeland, Susan R., Carolyn Hughes, Erik W. Carter, Carol Guth, Judith A. Presley,

Cherwanda R. Williams, and Stephanie E. Fowler. 2004. “Increasing Access to General Education.” *Remedial & Special Education* 25 (6): 342–52.

<http://rse.sagepub.com/content/25/6/342.abstract>

De Silva, Nilani Ljunggren. 2013. “Inclusive Pedagogy in Light of Social Justice. Special Educational Rights and Inclusive Classrooms: On Whose Terms? A Field Study in Stockholm Suburbs.” *European Journal of Education* 48 (3): 419–35.

<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/ejed.12032/abstract>

Finkelstein, Victor. 1980. “Attitudes and Disabled People.” <http://disability-studies.leeds.ac.uk/files/library/finkelstein-attitudes.pdf>.

Gordon, John-Stewart. 2013. "Is Inclusive Education a Human Right?" *Journal of Law, Medicine & Ethics* 41 (4): 754–67. <http://philpapers.org/rec/GORIII>

Hall, Edward. 2010. "Spaces of Social Inclusion and Belonging for People with Intellectual Disabilities." *Journal of Intellectual Disability Research*, sec. 54(1).

Hargreaves, Andy. 2004. "Inclusive and Exclusive Educational Change: Emotional Responses of Teachers and Implications for Leadership," Carfax Publishing edition, sec. Vol 24 No 2. <http://www.psychosphere.com/Inclusive%20&%20exclusive>

Harris, John. 2001. "One Principle and Three Fallacies of Disability Studies." *Journal of Medical Ethics* 27 (6): 383–87. <http://jme.bmj.com/content/27/6/383.full>

Kavale, Kenneth. 2002. "Mainstreaming to Full Inclusion: From Orthogenesis to Pathogenesis," *International Journal of Disability, Development and Education* 49, , 201–14. <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/103491220141776>

Koster, Marloes, Sip Jan Pijl, Han Nakken, and Els Van Houten. 2010. "Social Participation of Students with Special Needs in Regular Primary Education in the Netherlands." *International Journal of Disability, Development & Education* 57 (1): 59–75. <https://mondo.su.se/access/content/group/c8c9a17d-44f1-4a82-b758-d249a686f258/SipJan%20studie%20av%20sociala%20kontakter.pdf>

Mastropieri, Margo, and Thomas Scruggs. 2010. *Inclusive Classroom, The, Video-Enhanced Pearson eText with Loose-Leaf Version (5th Edition)*.

McDonald, Lex, and Rasela Tufue-Dolgoy. 2013. "Moving Forwards, Sideways or Backwards? Inclusive Education in Samoa." *International Journal of Disability, Development & Education* 60 (3): 270–84. <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/1034912X.2013.812187>

McGregor, Gail. 1993. "Inclusion: A Powerful Pedagogy," *Front Line* 2(1), , 8–10.

Peck, Virginia, and Deb Staub. 2004. "Parent Perception of the Impacts of Inclusion on Their Nondisabled Child," *Research & Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities*, 29(2): 135–43

Pavri, Shireen, and Luftig, Richard. 2001. "The Social Face of Inclusive Education: Are Students with Learning Disabilities Really Included in the Classroom?"
<http://www.ldonline.org/article/5855?theme=print>

Power, Andrew. 2013. "Making Space for Belonging: Critical Reflections on the Implementation of Personalized Adult Social Care under the Veil of Meaningful Inclusion." *Social Science & Medicine* (88)
<http://connection.ebscohost.com/c/articles/15068085/parent-perception-impacts-inclusion-their-nondisabled-child>

Prillaman, Douglas. 1981. "Acceptance of Learning Disabled Students in the Mainstream Environment: A Failure to Replicate" *Journal of Learning Disabilities* 14, 344-6
<http://ldx.sagepub.com/content/14/6/344.short>

RA Government.1995. *Constitution of the Republic of Armenia*.

RA Ministry of Education and Science. 2015. "Inclusive Schools in Armenia."

RA National Assembly.1999. *Law on Education*.

RA National Assembly.2009. *Law on Mainstream Education*.

Robbins, Christopher. 2007. *Developing Culturally Inclusive Educational Multimedia in the South Pacific*. Idea Group Inc.

SEDL. 2015. "Inclusion: Pros and Cons." <http://www.sedl.org/change/issues/issues43.html>.

Simplican, Stacy Clifford, Geraldine Leader, John Kosciulek, and Michael Leahy. 2015. "Defining Social Inclusion of People with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities: An

Ecological Model of Social Networks and Community Participation.” *Research in Developmental Disabilities* 38 (March): 18–29.

<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0891422214004223>

Sklaroff, Sara. 1994. “A.F.T. Urges Halt to ‘Full Inclusion’ Movement.” *Education week* 13 (16),7. <http://connection.ebscohost.com/c/articles/9410103701/a-f-t-urges-halt-full-inclusion-movement>

Skrtic, Thomas. 1991. “The Special Education Paradox: Equity as the Way to Excellence.” *Harvard Educational Review* 61 (2): 148–207.

https://www.academia.edu/3635275/The_Special_Education_Paradox_Equity_as_the_Way_to_Excellence

Stainback, Susan, and William Stainback. 1992. *Curriculum Considerations in Inclusive Classrooms: Facilitating Learning for All Students*. Paul H Brookes Pub Co.

Strout, Joe, and Coots, Victoria. 2007. *Critical Reflections of Students with Disabilities: Stories from the Classroom*. Boston: Pearson.

Teigland, Carolyn. 2009. “What Inclusive Education Means for Overall Student Achievement.” *TASH*. <http://www.edlawcenter.org/assets/files/pdfs>

Thompson, David. 2002. “Perceptions of Social Adjustment of Hearing-Impaired Pupils in an Integrated Secondary School Unit.” *Educational Psychology in Practice* 18 (1): 21. <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/02667360120122796?journalCode=cepp20>

Tornillo, Pat. 1994. *A Lightweight Fad Bad for Our Schools?* Orlando Sentinel.

UN. 2006. “Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.”

<http://www.un.org/disabilities/documents/convention/convoptprot-e.pdf>

- UNESCO. 1994. "The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education." <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0009/000984/098427eo.pdf>.
- UNESCO. 2005. "Guidelines for Inclusion: Ensuring Access to Education for All." France. <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0014/001402/140224e.pdf>.
- UNICEF. 2015. "Fact Sheet: Inclusive Education in Armenia." [http://www.unicef.org/armenia/Factsheet_-_Inclusive_Education_Armenia\(2\).pdf](http://www.unicef.org/armenia/Factsheet_-_Inclusive_Education_Armenia(2).pdf).
- Wauters, Loes, and Harry Knoors. 2007. "Social Integration of Deaf Children in Inclusive Settings." <http://jdsde.oxfordjournals.org/content/13/1/21.full.pdf+html>
- WHO. 1976. "International Classification of Impairments, Disabilities, and Handicaps." http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/41003/1/9241541261_eng.pdf.
- Wiele, Lindsay. 2011. "The Pros and Cons of Inclusion for Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders: What Constitutes the Least Restrictive Environment?" <http://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1265&context=honors>
- Wu, Wu-Tien. 2007. "Inclusive Education in Taiwan." *Chinese Education & Society* 40 (4): 76–96. <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.2753/CED1061-1932400406>

Appendix 1 - Questionnaire (English)

Your name _____

Mention three classmates:

Your best friends _____

With whom you communicate least of all _____

Choose the icon that corresponds to your attitude:

Classmate 1 (name, surname)



Classmate 2 (name, surname)



Appendix 2 - Questionnaire (Armenian)

Քո անունը _____

Նշիր 3 հոգու անուն, ում համարում ես քեզ մոտ ընկեր

Նշիր 3 հոգու անուն ում հետ ամենից քիչն ես
շփվում _____

Նշիր քո վերաբերմունքին համապատասխանող պատկերը.

Համադասարանցի 1 (անուն, ազգանուն)



Համադասարանցի 2 (անուն, ազգանուն)

