

The Role of Technical Vocational Education and Training Institutions for Students with Special Educational Needs

Ybyrayeva Korkem¹, Zhidaikin Vassiliy², Turlibekova Aknur³

¹MSc in Educational Leadership and Inclusive Education, Nazarbayev University, a teacher of English language and Global Perspectives at Nazarbayev Intellectual School of Chemistry and Biology, Shymkent, Kazakhstan.

²MA of Humanitarian Sciences in Translation Case, People's Friendship University named after A. Kuatbekov, an expert teacher of English language at Nazarbayev Intellectual School of Chemistry and Biology, Shymkent, Kazakhstan.

³A teacher of English language at Nazarbayev Intellectual School of Chemistry and Biology, Shymkent, Kazakhstan.

Abstract. The present study outlines the crucial role of Technical Vocational Education and Training Institutions for students with disabilities in both Kazakhstani as well as international contexts. The document analysis on rights of people with disabilities reveals that the concept of equality is considered properly in enrolling educational institutions, however, the concept of equity is still needs to be addressed properly. The study elaborates on the connections between TVET education and employment of SEN students in the Kazakhstani context. In other words, the study sheds the light on the connection of low employment of SEN students and TVET education.

Keywords: people with disabilities, TVET institutions, inclusive education

INTRODUCTION

The study discusses the crucial role of Technical and Vocational Education and Training institutions (hereinafter TVET) for young adults with/without disabilities. The chapter presents an in-depth exploration of the experience of teachers and TVET administration in accommodating and educating young adults with different categories of hearing-impairments. Furthermore, the study scrutinizes various barriers to the teaching and learning processes of students aged 16-19 with mild to severe hearing impairments. These impediments are discussed in the context of both international and Kazakhstani literature. The concept of a hearing impairment is determined and diagnosed on the basis of how hearing-impaired students are being educated. In addition, the definition of the notion of hearing impairment and its categories are provided in accordance with the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan. As the participants of the study are TVET teachers working with SEN students, it is important to describe and analyze the experiences of other countries where TVET inclusion has been implemented. To conclude, the key concepts of the chapter and the existing literature gap are presented.

Access to Technical and Vocational Education and Training Institutions is an issue for young adults with disabilities. Only a limited number of young students are able to participate in TVET for various reasons connected to their disabilities as well as institutional, physical and attitudinal barriers. The issue has been studied internationally in the field of education. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (2017) report points out that there has been a continuous growth in the number of students with disabilities participating in higher educational institutions worldwide (p.118). However, students with special educational needs (SEN students) still remain underrepresented and excluded in-society in comparison with the general student population. Persons with disabilities have lower literacy rates than persons without a disability. In all countries non-disabled adults (93%) acquire basic literacy skills compared to only half (52%) of disabled adults (UN, 2018, p.27).

Technical Vocational Education and Training can play a significant role in the development of one's life. Quality education increases an individual's opportunities for successful employment and an independent life. Acquiring education opens up life opportunities such as employment and career ladder which would not otherwise be available. This is why it is so important to make education accessible to all (UNESCO, 2013, p. 2) According to the study conducted by The Association of the Development of Civil Society, 70 percent of young adults with a disability have already reached employable age, however 67 percent of them are not employed presently for many reasons (Saruar,

2014, para.2). One significant reason is the absence of a diploma; possibly, it makes a barrier for adults trying to enter the labor market.

International studies have reveal that tertiary education graduates with disabilities have higher employment rates than other young adults with disabilities who do not have a degree or some type of certification (Webster, 2004). The OECD statistical report (2011, p.345) states that the majority of young adults with disabilities do not finish their secondary schooling and this is a common international tendency. As a result, being high school dropouts decrease their chances of earning a TVET degree. However, international literature on this topic suggests that with the support of legislative acts, laws and the creation of favorable conditions in TVET institutions, the total number of students with disabilities is expected to increase annually. In recent years, Kazakhstan has launched the State Program for Education Development to improve quality education at all levels. “State Program of Education Development in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2011-2020” clearly aims to modernize the technical and vocational education system in order to match the global educational sphere (MoES, 2010). In this context, inclusive education has been recognized as a crucial element for both developing human capital and enhancing the competitiveness of Technical Vocational Training Education (Wahba, 2012, p.1). In order to implement such human capital it is important to educate young adults with hearing impairments. In the Kazakhstani context having skills as well as a professional qualification ensures that people with disabilities can have more employment opportunities.

According to report of the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection (2019, Chapter 2, para.12), in Kazakhstan, 674 200 people have different disability categories and 62 % of them (417 700 people) are of employable age. However, only 127 100 people with disabilities are employed. In order to encourage employers to hire persons with disabilities, since 2018, the Government of Kazakhstan has introduced subsidies for the costs of employers related to providing the workplace for workers with disabilities. This year 105.6 million tenge was allocated from the Governmental budget for the purpose of creating 770 jobs positions in different fields where people with disabilities can work effectively. In fact, in the framework of established quota for persons with disabilities only 88 job places (11% of the plan) were created from the amount of 24 million tenge (Timurova, 2018, para.5). The final report about the employment program for SEN people clearly shows that budget utilization was ineffective. The government is only beginning to promote ways to accommodate as many individuals with disabilities as possible with job opportunities.

The statistical data is very low because employment is the most sensitive issue for people with disabilities. Vasily Shimansky, Founder and Chairman of Rehabilitation Center for People with Disabilities, claims that people with disabilities are unable to find employment because of negative social attitude, secondly, it is lack of specialized qualification; thirdly, physical barrier distracts them from enrolling in TVET institutions to acquire professional education (Timurova, 2018, para.12).

Different institutions in Kazkahstan and internationally support special educational needs students through different strategies. One of the examples, six universities in Namibia are facilitating a well-equipped special unit with accommodation, an appointed Braille specialist and students’ guides on a temporary basis and budget to support disability issues (Hugo, 2012). Likewise, deaf and/or hard-of-hearing students in Australia have specialist support programs including interpreting and note taking services (Hyde et al., 2009). Such students are provided with integrated aides and support teachers to facilitate the learning process (Komesaroff, 2005). In Kazakhstan, according to Law “On Social Protection of Disabled Persons” Article 14 “Rights of People with Disabilities” young adults with different forms of hearing impairments receive government financial aid – 30 886 tenge per month, and 30-60 hours of free interpreting service for other social needs (Ministry of Justice, 2005). In fact, studying at TVET requires more than 60 hours of sign language interpreting, so some of the TVET colleges provide a sign language interpreter at an extra charge but not in all regions and colleges.

Vocational Education and Training (VET) is becoming an important political issue. Concerning developing countries, the World Bank and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) recognize Vocational Educational Training Institutions (VET) as a means of reducing a poverty rate, stimulating economic growth, in particular, per capita income, and increasing competitiveness (Comyn & Barnaart, 2010). Moreover, the TVET system is intended to reduce the unemployment rate and support social and economic development goals. As illustrated by Anderson (2009, p.36) as ‘productivism’, this paradigm is built upon two interrelated assumptions: economic growth and work as paid employment. In other words, the former assumption is that professional training leads to productivity which leads to economic growth, and the latter, that skills lead to job opportunities which leads to paid employment (Powell & McGrath, 2014, p.213). However, both assumptions face challenges and the existing literature emphasizes these problems in relation to professional training, poverty alleviation, equality and equity and ironically, also employability and economic growth. Kazakhstan has the same issue, for example, TVET institutions in Kazakhstan offer various disciplines and majors to study, provide scholarships, create opportunities for life-long learning; moreover, all these initiatives have been established on the governmental level, especially by the Ministry of

Education. However, in reality, many disciplines are irrelevant to the existing labor market, SEN students are not aware about offered scholarships, and opportunities to study at TVET institutions cover equality perspectives not equity. As for the teaching practices hindering the process of inclusion, multiple research studies argue that SEN students are not given extra time, differentiated tasks or any other necessary concessions during entrance exams, which means that they are disadvantaged during the entrance exam. It implies that entrance examination requirements consider only equality concept for all applicants, but not the equity.

As it was claimed throughout this study, teachers of TVET colleges need to promote an inclusion of SEN students by providing support and reasonable teaching practices responding to diverse needs of learners.

Law on Social Protection of Disabled Persons in the Republic of Kazakhstan

The rights of disabled persons are clearly protected by the Law on the Social Protection of Disabled Persons in the Republic of Kazakhstan. Before raising questions regarding social, medical, and educational rights, it is required to study the official documents accurately.

A disabled person is defined as a person who has a health problem with a persistent impairment of bodily functions, caused by diseases, injuries (wounds, traumas, concussions), their consequences, and defects, which lead to limitation of life and need social protection (Chapter 1, Article 1). The social protection of disabled persons is a set of measures related to social assistance, rehabilitation, as well as an integration of the disabled persons in society. Part of social integration involves accessing education.

According to Article 5, the state policy of the Republic of Kazakhstan in the field of social protection is governed by the following principles:

- 1) legality, humanity, observance of human rights;
- 2) security of social protection, ensuring an accessibility of medical, social and vocational rehabilitation;
- 3) accessibility and equal rights of disabled persons, along with other citizens, to health protection, education and free choice of form of activity, as well as labour;
- 4) interaction of the state bodies with public associations and other organizations, carrying out functions for protecting the rights and legal interests of disabled persons;
- 5) non-discrimination on grounds of disablement.

However, the law and current situation in the education system of Kazakhstan have divergent directions. This is because young adults with hearing impairments are ignored by college administrations in terms of choice of educational majors. They are limited to two or three specializations; most of which are related to manual work such as hair-dressing, shoe-making or tailoring. In fact, the principle of non-discrimination on grounds of disability is unrealistic, because the attitude towards people with physical/mental disabilities is formed by society and its mentality, not by the law. Though the law and constitution are official documents, the public has its own vision.

Article 9 states that an authorized body in the field of education shall:

- 1) provide access to education for people with disabilities in accordance with the legislation of the Republic of Kazakhstan;
- 2) develop a procedure of assessment and exam requirements to facilitate the diverse needs of persons with disabilities, and provide scholarships or grants for people with disabilities in accordance with the legislation of the Republic of Kazakhstan;
- 3) develop and approve the regulatory legal acts of the Republic of Kazakhstan, regulating the educational activity of institutions implementing education programs for people with disabilities;
- 4) execute laws of the Republic of Kazakhstan, acts of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan and the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

Based on the policy documents on TVET education in Kazakhstan, only certain colleges provide state scholarships/grants to enable disabled people to carry out their education. The main reason is that governmental colleges are fewer in number than private training colleges. As Pokidayev (2019) argued, there are 821 colleges in Kazakhstan and 479 are run by the state. Furthermore, as the Minister of Education and Science of Kazakhstan cited in Pokidayev (2019, para.5) about 174 colleges are not efficient and cost-effective. Although, they are not cost-effective these private colleges provide financial support of up to fifty percent of financial incentives maximum to disabled students for their studies.

Barriers to studying at Technical and Vocational Education and Training Institutions

The literature review of this paper is based on an international experience of TVET students with hearing difficulties and consequently the framework on barriers has been generalized. Educational barriers consist of specific institutional barriers of TVET such as access problems, curriculum design, and choice of specializations, while non-educational barriers are physical and architectural, attitudinal, and disability disclosure.

First of all, access to TVET is difficult for young adults with hearing disabilities without secondary schooling which is why a student's previous educational background is a deciding factor in their transition to further professional

education. The success of students with disabilities in college depends on a student's knowledge, abilities and skills obtained during secondary education (Webster, 2004). As a consequence, in order for SEN students to fully participate in TVET, upper-secondary schooling is important. Inclusion at the secondary level is crucial. However, in specialized schools students with disabilities have peers with the same level of physical adaptation, which causes, in most cases, results in failure in continuing further education (OECD, 2011, p.342).

Secondly, curriculum design is not aligned with different abilities as well as disabilities of young learners. There could be many approaches but three of them should be considered. They are Accommodation, Adaptation, Modification: In other words, accommodation denotes physical accessibility for students; adaptation means adapting the task to the ability of students such as limiting quantity, giving extra time, differentiating the level of support, adapting the instruction, lowering the difficulty, participation, alternate goals, and substitute curriculum; modification implies changing the task depending on students' needs and abilities. Another thorny issue in curriculum implementation is imbalance (Rose, 2007, pp.298-305). When the curriculum is focused on subject content and the academic achievements of students, it fails to respond to the diverse needs of all learners. Another disadvantage, the content of course materials and handouts is lack of advance access to these materials for students with disabilities. For students who are hard of hearing it is difficult to be competitive if printed or electronic versions of learning materials are only available in audio recordings. As the research asserts, in Kazakhstan having equal opportunities to classes does not provide equity of opportunities. Students with hearing difficulties were dissatisfied with the lack of resources to support them during their studies, simply indicating the shortage of sign language interpreters (Strnadova, Hajkova and Kvetonova, 2015).

Thirdly, students with disabilities have a very limited choice of careers, which is why they remain marginalised (Shevlin, Kenny, & Me Neela, 2004). Basically, TVET institutions can offer a very limited number of specializations for students' with hearing impairments. These are usually limited to painting and design, programming, craft making, carpet making, and hairdressing.

Essentially, both vocational education and training institutions and higher educational institutions can offer very few career options for students with disabilities. However, TVET institutions have a lot of programs, which are free and they can also offer grants and scholarships. This is the main point of which career guidance centers need to be aware and better inform students with disabilities (Shevlin et al., 2004). Most often such centers can facilitate their transition to tertiary education. King, Baldwin, Currie, & Evans (2005) described programs to transition students with disabilities from secondary education to further education and working life. One of the successful transitions can be achieved by "prevocational and vocational guidance" at the school level. This approach includes self-awareness and self-assessment strategies, guidance and counseling, planning and goal setting, and also job related social skill instruction. Apart from the transition programs it was suggested by Wagner (1993) that career-oriented curricula for students with disabilities should be implemented at the school level. These approaches assist marginalized individuals to make informed decisions.

Aidarbekova (2013) states that these types of TVET education are not accessible for most students with disabilities due to various educational barriers. The education is facilitated on payment basis and there is free education only for certain categories of people. Although, free education at TVET and Higher Education Institutions is considered only for individuals belonging to the first and second group of disability. Therefore, the third grouping of students with hearing impairments must cope with all financial burdens themselves in addition to other barriers to education. Moreover, the choice of profession for people with disabilities is extremely limited in the existing professional 15 colleges in Kazakhstan; the curriculum is not adapted, teachers implement any changes at their own discretion; vocational colleges do not offer students medical and psychological support. The final goal of being employed and getting permanent salary is extremely important for graduates with disabilities, but in reality, many remain unemployed.

Most companies and organizations in the labor market prefer to hire those with higher education rather than those from professional colleges. The reason is that there is little demand in the labour market for those specializations offered by TVET institutions. One of the reasons why young adults with disabilities are disadvantaged by the demands of the labor market is they have less education in comparison with people without disabilities (Pritvorova & Gazizova, 2013, Polidano & Mavromaras, 2010). In the case of employment, people with disabilities have low-paying and low-skilled jobs, such as that of a janitor, cleaning woman, watchman and other similar occupations (Pritvorova & Gazizova, 2013). Taking into consideration all of these factors it is reasonable to conclude that it is problematic and challenging for TVET graduates with special needs to be employed (OECD, 2009, p.84).

Despite the fact that TVET in Kazakhstan has many drawbacks, there is still hope and a statistical forecast that by providing special professional education for young adults with disabilities will increase per capita income up to 30% and bring promising economic development.

Non-educational Barriers to Studying at Technical and Vocational Education and Training Institutions

Physical and architectural barriers prevail at institutions, but for the third category of disabled people this is not major issue. There is the more serious matter of stereotyped attitudes towards students with disabilities; teaching staff

hold biased opinions about academic achievements and future prospects of SEN students. This aspect has been studied over and over from different perspectives therefore most researchers highlight the need to implement a “social model” (Oliver and Barnes, 2010). According to a social model, society should adapt to people with disabilities and avoid social segregation. That is why the philosophy of the social model stresses that it is the society who needs to be treated and cured, not individuals with disabilities (Hodkinson, 2015). This model sheds light not on an individual student’s problems, but on the teaching process and curricula of an institution, in other words focusing not on what is “wrong” with students, but what is “wrong” with educational institutions (Ainscow, 2001, Riefe, 2006 as cited in Ryan, 2011).

Ryan (2011) points out that expectation and reality are not always aligned so students with disabilities are unsatisfied after accessing TVET. Research on Irish students with disabilities showed that they are troubled by a lack of knowledge, an underdeveloped system, and lack of support and low expectations from teachers’ perspectives. They stated that teachers being aware of special needs of those students, sometimes did not know what to do, so pedagogical experience and theoretical framework were substandard; supportive devices were not available, meaning parents had to buy extra materials themselves; and teaching staff members themselves persuade students not to apply the college, as they do not expect them to gain access to TVET education (Shevlin et al., 2004).

This literature review revealed that most students with disabilities complain about discriminatory attitudes from teaching staff. They face difficulties in gaining lecture notes, presentations and other necessary materials in advance. If students try to approach the professors with these requests, teaching staff are reluctant to accommodate them; this reluctance extends also to adopting differentiated teaching methods and adapting assessment criteria (Morina et al., 2014, Strnadova et al., 2015).

CONCLUSION

This literature review elaborates on the role of TVET education in relation to acquiring vocational skills and getting meaningful employment for people with disabilities globally. It has been discovered that access to TVET education is still a problem to people with disabilities not only in Kazakhstan and in many governments. More specifically, students with disabilities are obliged to pay for SEN students in Kazakhstan and the cost is the barrier for them. Non-availability of free education causes the barrier associated with the access to education to SEN students. The study also makes an attempt to define the hearing impairment connected with the Kazakhstani context. The attitudes towards SEN students are discussed and they led to discussions about attitudinal barriers which also decrease their potential to succeed in educational opportunities. Finally, the study outlines the connections between TVET education and employment of SEN students in the Kazakhstani context. In other words, the study tries to connect low employment of SEN students and TVET education.

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