

Difficulties In Assisting Students With Special Educational Needs In Armenian Schools During History Lessons

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KEYWORDS

Armenian school, inclusive education, students with special educational needs, History subject, History teachers, difficulties of teachers.

ABSTRACT

Inclusive education in Armenia has changed quite much over the years, which were stipulated by various historical, socio-political, and economic changes. The system of inclusive education is oriented toward mainstreaming students with special needs into the common educational process in schools with an equal attitude toward providing all of them with appropriate education. This study is aimed at analyzing the present situation, obstacles, and management peculiarities of inclusive education in Armenia during the History lesson from the viewpoint of the history teachers. Within this frame, the current study used qualitative research methodology as a content-based approach to combine thought, emotions, ideas, and attitudes. It was intended to understand the experiences of history teachers in working with students with special educational needs and go deep to have a richer understanding of the research question. The findings of the study revealed that Armenian inclusive schools are facing various challenges in appropriately supporting students with special educational needs in the History learning environment. These areas of difficulty involve inadequate teaching differentiation to cater to the different learning needs, failure to cope with various students' comprehension levels, and lack of one-on-one attention in a mainstream class. Inadequate resource provision, limited teacher training, and poor specialized support complicate the effective delivery of history education for such learners even further.

1. Introduction

Inclusive education is an approach that aims to ensure that all students, regardless of their abilities, backgrounds, or challenges, are able to participate fully in the educational process. Key features of inclusive education include: diversity, accommodation, integration, individualized support, Universal design for learning, social inclusion, teacher training, collaboration, policy support, as well as callenges that might be resource-intensive and may require significant changes to traditional educational structures (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2015; Mitchell, 2014; UNESCO, 2009).

The text you provided earlier mentions that Armenia has been implementing inclusive education in its general education schools since 2001, with plans to transition to universal inclusiveness by 2025. This aligns with global trends towards more inclusive educational practices. The development of inclusive education in Armenia reflects wider historical trends and continuous efforts to meet international standards. While progress has been made, major problems still exist, notably in societal attitudes, teacher preparation, and resource allocation. Subject teachers, in particular, confront global issues as they transition to an inclusive educational framework. To effectively teach history to children with special educational needs, instructors must have specific training that involves recognizing diverse impairments, implementing inclusive teaching approaches, and utilizing adaptive learning tools. Continuous professional development is essential for preparing teachers with the skills required to meet their students' different needs (Harris, 2005).

To create a more inclusive and equitable education system in Armenia, future initiatives should focus on reducing these barriers and strengthening subject teacher abilities. Studies have shown that, in general, instructors face a number of challenges while attempting to adopt inclusive education. These issues extend beyond psychological concerns and include awareness, knowledge, and experience gaps.

In order to successfully serve kids with exceptional educational needs, significant logistical resources are required. According to research, despite recent efforts to improve Armenia's inclusive education system by focusing on specialists, methodological tools, and organizational aspects, support systems and professional resources for students with cognitive developmental disorders remain insufficient and out of date. According to Saratikyan and Harutyunyan (2024); Borrero and Naidoo (2023); and Saratikyan and Harutyunyan (2023), these challenges are usually interwoven with broader systemic issues.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Historical Transformation of Education Systems indicates that Armenian education system has undergone significant changes from the Soviet era to the present. Historically, Armenia's education was influenced by Soviet policies, which were rigid and lacked inclusive education models. Post-Soviet Armenia has seen reforms aimed at integrating international standards into its education system, particularly after joining the Bologna Process in 2005 (Karakhanyan, 2018).

Although speaking about shift towards inclusive education the international influences are quite obvious. After gaining independence in 1991, Armenia's education system was heavily influenced by international organizations such as the World Bank and the Open Society Institute. These organizations played a crucial role in reforming the national curriculum and promoting inclusive education standards (Terzian, 2014). From this point the era of changes has lunched and never ended.

Besides all this, it is very important to mention that the Soviet legacy still poses challenges in implementing fully inclusive education in Armenia. The current reforms are driven by a mix of internal needs and external pressures to align with European education standards, which include promoting inclusivity in all levels of education (Srapyan, 2020).

While talking about the current status of inclusive education it is necessary firstly to reflect the general implementation process taken place. Inclusive education in Armenia is characterized by varying degrees of success. While some (very few) schools have adopted inclusive practices, many others still face challenges such as insufficient resources, lack of trained staff, and societal resistance (Tadevosyan, 2019). A significant issue in Armenian public schools is the management of inclusive education, which involves dealing with administrative, infrastructural, and resource constraints. Schools struggle with implementing inclusive practices due to limited financial and human resources, highlighting the need for targeted support and improved management strategies (Grigoryan, 2019).

The effectiveness of inclusive education in Armenia is further complicated by regional disparities. Studies comparing regions show a significant need for pedagogical-psychological support teams to help integrate children with special educational needs into mainstream schools. These teams play a crucial role, but their presence and effectiveness vary widely across the country (Harutyunyan, Svajyan & Antonyan, 2022). In addition, that, the major barrier to inclusive education in Armenia is the lack of awareness and training among teachers. Professional development programs are necessary to equip educators with the skills required to handle diverse classroom environments (Tadevosyan, 2019).

While discussing inclusive education, cultural attitudes and societal resistance are hot points to reflect to. Cultural perceptions and traditional attitudes towards disability and special needs in Armenia also hinder the implementation of inclusive education. There is a need to change societal views and promote the acceptance of inclusive practices (Basco & Derhy Kurtz, 2021).

Teaching within the context of inclusiveness requires very high responsibility, sufficient knowledge, abilities and skills from the teacher. Within the frame of this study particullary History teachers are investigated. Teaching history to children with special educational needs (SEN) presents unique challenges and requires specific approaches to ensure their engagement and understanding. Here are some key insights and recommendations based on relevant literature. Teaching history to children with

SEN often involves adapting traditional teaching methods to meet diverse needs. Effective strategies include using storytelling, visual aids, and physical activities that help make historical concepts more accessible. Engaging students through hands-on experiences and integrating multimodal approaches can enhance their comprehension and participation (Skjæveland, 2017). The effectiveness of inclusive teaching relies heavily on how well the classroom environment is managed. Teachers need to be aware of each child's specific needs and tailor their instructional approaches accordingly. Differentiated instruction, where students receive different levels of support based on their needs, is crucial for success in history lessons (Norwich & Lewis, 2007). Scaffolding techniques are vital in teaching history to children with SEN. This involves breaking down content into manageable parts and providing structured support until students can perform tasks independently. Teaching assistants play a crucial role in this process, as they help maintain engagement, provide immediate feedback, and foster a supportive learning environment (Radford et al., 2015).

Understanding the cultural-historical context of learning for children with SEN can aid in developing appropriate teaching strategies. This perspective emphasizes creating learning settings that consider the child's specific impairments and adapting educational demands to fit their abilities, thereby fostering better engagement and understanding of historical content (Bøttcher & Dammeyer, 2016).

Thus, the research question of this study is formulated as follows: "What are main difficulties and barriers of teaching and organizing History lessons in inclusive classes?"

2. Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore the experiences and perceptions of history teachers in teaching students with SEN. A qualitative approach was chosen because it allows for an in-depth understanding of teachers' lived experiences, providing rich, detailed data that can capture the complexities of inclusive teaching practices. The study utilized semi-structured interviews with history teachers and thematic analysis to identify key themes and patterns in the data.

Participants

The study involved six history teachers who have experience teaching students with SEN in inclusive classroom settings in Yerevan city, capital of Armenia and three different regions (Aragatsotn, Vayots Dzor and Lori). Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure that they had relevant teaching experience with SEN students. The teachers were recruited from various secondary schools (5th to 11th classes) with established inclusive education programs, ensuring a diverse range of perspectives. Detailed data is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Research participants' demographic data.

Region	Number of Participants	Sex of Participant	Class where the History subject is taught
Yerevan	3	Male (2), female	5 th , 6 th , 11 th
Aragatsotn	1	Male	9 th
Vayots Dzor	1	Male	9 th
Lori	1	Male	6 th

Data Collection

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, which were conducted in person. The interview guide included open-ended questions designed to explore the teachers' experiences, challenges, and strategies used when teaching history to students with SEN. Sample questions included:

- *Can you describe your experience teaching history to students with SEN?*
- *What challenges have you encountered in teaching history to these students?*
- *What strategies do you find most effective in engaging SEN students in history lessons?*
- *Are you aware about Individual Learning Plan? How you work with it?*

Each interview lasted approximately 45-60 minutes and was audio-recorded with the participants' consent. The recordings were then transcribed verbatim to ensure the accuracy of the data.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis, which is a systematic approach to identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within qualitative data. Thematic analysis was conducted following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step framework which is shown in the Table 2.

Table 2. *Data analyzing process.*

1	Familiarization with the Data	The researchers immersed themselves in the data by reading and re-reading the interview transcripts, noting initial ideas and observations.
2	Generating Initial Codes	The transcripts were systematically coded line-by-line to identify meaningful segments of text. Codes were generated to capture significant statements related to the teachers' experiences, challenges, and strategies.
3	Searching for Themes	Codes were grouped into broader themes that represented patterns across the data. Themes were identified based on recurring ideas that provided insights into the research questions.
4	Reviewing Themes	Themes were reviewed and refined to ensure that they accurately captured the coded data. This step involved checking the themes against the data to confirm their relevance and coherence.
5	Defining and Naming Themes	The final themes were defined and named to succinctly capture the essence of each theme. Clear definitions were established to explain the scope and content of each theme.
6	Producing the Report	A detailed report was generated to present the themes, supported by illustrative quotes from the participants. The findings were interpreted in the context of existing literature on inclusive education and the teaching of history to SEN students.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the Armenian State Pedagogical University Faculty review board (Faculty of Special and Inclusive education). Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to the interviews, ensuring they were aware of the study's purpose, their right to withdraw at any time, and the confidentiality of their responses. Numbers were used in the transcripts and final report to protect participants' identities.

Trustworthiness

To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, the study employed several strategies, including member checking, where participants were given the opportunity to review and confirm the accuracy of their interview transcripts. Peer debriefing was also conducted to enhance the credibility of the thematic analysis. Additionally, a detailed audit trail was maintained throughout the research process to provide transparency and allow for replication of the study.

This methodology ensured a rigorous exploration of history teachers' experiences, offering valuable insights into inclusive teaching practices for students with special educational needs.

3. Result and Discussion

The thematic analysis of the six interviews with history teachers revealed several key themes related to their experiences, challenges, and strategies when teaching students with special educational needs (SEN). The identified themes include Challenges in Inclusive History Teaching (1), Adaptation and Differentiation Strategies (2), Support and Resource Needs (3), and Impact on Student Engagement and Learning (4). Each theme is described below in Table 3 with supporting quotes from the participants.

Table 3. Themes supported with quotes of participants.

Theme	Quote	Participant
Challenges in Inclusive History Teaching	<i>"The biggest challenge is making the content accessible without losing the depth of the subject. History involves a lot of abstract thinking, timelines, and complex texts, which can be overwhelming for students with special needs."</i>	Participant 3
	<i>"It's hard to balance the needs of SEN students with those of other students in the class. You want everyone to get something from the lesson, but the gaps in ability can be quite wide."</i>	Participant 1
Adaptation and Differentiation Strategies	<i>"I often use visual timelines and story maps to help students see the sequence of events. It helps them connect the dots without having to read dense texts."</i>	Participant 2
	<i>"I find that using role-playing and storytelling really helps. It brings history to life and makes it more relatable for students who struggle"</i>	Participant 5

	<i>with traditional teaching methods."</i>	
<i>Support and Resource Needs</i>	<p><i>"We really need more resources that are specifically designed for SEN students. There's a lot out there for general education, but not much that meets the unique needs of these students in history classes."</i></p> <p><i>"Having a teaching assistant would make a world of difference. They could help provide that one-on-one support that some of these students desperately need."</i></p>	<p>Participant 6</p> <p>Participant 4</p>
<i>Impact on Student Engagement and Learning</i>	<p><i>"When I use interactive methods, I see a significant increase in engagement. They participate more, ask questions, and seem to enjoy the lessons."</i></p> <p><i>"I've seen students who initially struggled to grasp basic historical facts start to make connections and think critically about events when we use methods that suit their learning styles."</i></p>	<p>Participant 1</p> <p>Participant 5</p>

One of the most prominent themes was the challenges teachers face in teaching history to students with SEN. Participants highlighted the difficulties in addressing diverse learning needs within a single classroom setting. Teachers noted that traditional history content is often complex, abstract, and requires strong reading and comprehension skills, which can be particularly challenging for students with SEN.

Related to second theme it is important to stress that teachers frequently discussed the various adaptation and differentiation strategies they employed to make history lessons more accessible. Techniques such as simplifying texts, using visual aids, storytelling, and hands-on activities were commonly used to help SEN students engage with historical content. Some teachers also emphasized the importance of breaking down information into smaller, manageable chunks. In this regard teachers also mentioned the importance of providing individualized support and using differentiated worksheets tailored to the varying needs of their students.

The need for additional support and resources was a recurring theme. Teachers expressed a desire for more specialized training in inclusive teaching strategies and more resources, such as adapted materials and teaching assistants, to better support SEN students. Limited access to these resources often left teachers feeling underprepared and overwhelmed.

Teachers noted a positive impact on student engagement when they implemented differentiated teaching strategies. Many reported that SEN students were more engaged and showed improved understanding of historical concepts when lessons were adapted to their needs. However, some teachers

also highlighted the ongoing struggle to maintain this engagement consistently. However, maintaining this engagement required continuous effort and creativity, as traditional teaching methods often failed to capture the interest of SEN students.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study emphasize the varied and numerous obstacles that history instructors confront while educating students with special educational needs (SEN) in inclusive classrooms. The theme analysis yielded important insights into instructors' techniques, the challenges they face, and the influence on student involvement and learning results. This section compares the findings to current literature and considers the implications for practice, policy, and future study.

Challenges in Inclusive History Teaching

The teachers' reported obstacles are consistent with prior literature emphasizing the difficulty of making traditional historical curriculum accessible to SEN students (Saratikyan & Harutyunyan, 2024; Saratikyan & Harutyunyan, 2023).

History can be challenging for pupils with different learning styles due to complex concepts, considerable reading, and emphasis on chronological reasoning (Bøttcher & Dammeyer, 2016). The participants' experiences highlight the significance of adjusting the curriculum so that all students may access and benefit from history instruction.

Previous research indicates that inclusive education necessitates not just curricular changes but also a fundamental shift in teaching strategies to suit various learning styles (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The instructors' worries about combining the requirements of SEN pupils with the rest of the class highlight the larger issues of differentiation in inclusive education, where a one-size-fits-all approach is frequently insufficient.

Adaptation and Differentiation Strategies

The use of adaptive teaching methods such as storytelling, visual aids, and hands-on activities was found to be effective in engaging students with special educational needs in history lessons. This finding supports the work of Skjæveland (2017), who found that experiential learning and blended teaching approaches significantly improve young learners' historical understanding and engagement.

The emphasis on breaking down complex content into small, manageable pieces is consistent with the principles of scaffolding, which helps students build confidence and proficiency over time. These strategies not only facilitate the learning of students with special educational needs, but also benefit the entire class by making historical content more engaging and accessible to all learners.

This finding is consistent with research on inclusive education, which has shown that differentiated instruction and inclusive practices can improve learning outcomes for all students, not just those with special needs (Radford et al., 2015).

Support and Resource Needs

The expressed need for additional support and resources highlights significant gaps in the implementation of inclusive education strategies. Teachers often reported feeling underfunded and inadequately trained to effectively teach students with special educational needs. This reflects a common problem in inclusive education, where teachers are expected to integrate students with diverse needs without appropriate support (Norwich & Lewis, 2007).

Professional development should be a priority for schools that want to improve inclusive practice, as they require more specialised training and teaching assistants. Training programmes focusing on specific strategies for teaching complex subjects such as history to students with special educational needs could bridge the gap between policy and practice and provide teachers with the tools they need to be successful.

Impact on Student Engagement and Learning

The positive impact of adapted teaching methods on student engagement and understanding confirms the importance of inclusive pedagogical approaches. Teachers reported that when they employed creative and interactive methods, SEN students were more likely to participate and demonstrate a deeper understanding of historical concepts. This supports the idea that student-centered teaching approaches, which focus on active engagement and personalized learning, are crucial in inclusive education settings (Bøttcher & Dammeyer, 2016).

However, the challenge of maintaining consistent engagement highlights the need for ongoing innovation and adaptation in teaching practices. It also points to the broader issue of sustainability in inclusive education—ensuring that teachers have the ongoing support and resources they need to continue these efforts.

The findings of this study have several implications for educational practice and policy. First, there is a need for targeted professional development programs that provide history teachers with specific strategies for teaching SEN students. Schools should also consider increasing the availability of teaching assistants to support individualized instruction in inclusive classrooms.

Policy-makers must recognize the resource gaps highlighted by teachers and work towards allocating funds and support structures that facilitate truly inclusive education. This includes providing access to specialized teaching materials, training opportunities, and additional classroom support.

4. Conclusion and future scope

The findings reveal that history teachers face substantial challenges in teaching students with SEN, primarily due to the complex nature of history content and the diverse needs of their students. However, through adaptive strategies, differentiation, and a focus on engaging teaching methods, teachers can enhance the learning experiences of SEN students. The results highlight the critical need for additional support and resources to enable teachers to better meet the needs of these students in inclusive history classrooms.

Supporting students with SEN in Armenian inclusive schools, especially during history lessons, presents numerous challenges. Teachers often struggle with adapting complex historical content to suit diverse learning needs, managing varying levels of student engagement, and providing personalized support within the constraints of a standard classroom environment. Additionally, there is a lack of specialized training and resources, making it difficult to implement effective teaching strategies tailored to students with learning disabilities.

Thus, this study underscores the importance of adapting history education to meet the diverse needs of SEN students and highlights the critical role of teacher support and resources in achieving inclusive education. By addressing the challenges and embracing effective differentiation strategies, schools can enhance the learning experiences of all students and move closer to achieving the goals of inclusive education.

Future research could expand on these findings by exploring the experiences of teachers in different educational contexts, such as primary schools or alternative education settings. Additionally, studies could examine the long-term effects of specific inclusive teaching strategies on SEN students' academic outcomes in history. Further investigation into the impact of teacher training programs on the effectiveness of inclusive education would also provide valuable insights into how best to support educators.

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