

IRSTI 14.33.07

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47344/8d798p35>

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DIFFERENTIATED EDUCATIONAL CONTENT FOR INCLUSIVE ENGLISH LANGUAGE CLASSROOMS IN KAZAKHSTAN: A SCOPING REVIEW

Abstract. Kazakhstan ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2015, and inclusive education became a national priority. Policy has moved faster than classroom practice, especially in rural schools. This scoping review maps research published from 2016 to 2025 on differentiated instruction and digital tools in inclusive English language teaching in Kazakhstan. We searched eight databases and repositories and screened reference lists. Seventeen studies were included. Seven of them focus directly on English or foreign language teaching. The rest cover inclusive education, differentiated instruction, teacher preparation, and policy in Kazakhstan. The studies describe tiered and multilevel tasks, individualized support, and adapted methods. Reported outcomes are mostly better engagement, participation, and motivation. Evidence on long-term achievement is scarce. Digital tools appear mainly in general terms: ICT platforms, interactive content, accessible resources, and digital literacy. The main barriers are limited teacher preparation, unequal access to technology, and weak links between policy and practice. The review calls for stronger teacher education, better digital infrastructure, and research that measures outcomes.

Keywords: inclusive education, differentiated instruction, digital tools, English language teaching, teacher preparation, student engagement, policy frameworks

Introduction

Inclusive education became a strategic priority in Kazakhstan after the country ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2015 (United Nations Treaty Collection, 2015). The convention committed the country to equitable access to quality education for all learners. National reforms have since moved schools away from a defectology-based model. Implementation, however, remains uneven. Urban schools benefit from pilot projects and international partnerships. Rural schools face a shortage of qualified teachers, limited access to assistive technology, and weak institutional support (Assanova & Konyskara, 2022; Turlubekova et al., 2021).

The post-Soviet legacy also shapes practice. Centralized curricula and only partial decentralization influence how schools interpret inclusion (Makoelle & Somerton, 2021). Many teachers feel unprepared. They report little exposure to inclusive pedagogy during training and few practical tools for adapting lessons (Manuilova et al., 2018). English teachers describe similar problems when they work with learners who have special educational needs (Shalbayeva et al., 2021). Differentiated instruction is one practical response to this diversity.

Differentiated instruction in English language teaching

Tomlinson (2014) defines differentiated instruction (DI) as the proactive adaptation of content, process, product, and learning environment to learners' readiness, interests, and learning profiles. DI does not lower expectations. It offers several routes to the same learning goals. In an inclusive English class, learners may include students with special educational needs, gifted students, and second-language learners. DI helps give each group fair access to the lesson.

Kazakhstani research on DI is still small. In-service teachers generally support differentiated learning in EFL classes, but they cite workload and limited training as obstacles (Akhmetova, 2023). Syrymbetova et al. (2023) found that DI is underused in second language teaching, although it has clear potential. Research on adapted methods shows a similar gap. Zhetpisbayeva and Shalbayeva (2019) report a lack of adapted methods for teaching foreign languages to children with special educational needs.

Digital tools may support DI by offering tiered activities and several ways to present content. Kazakhstani studies, however, discuss digital tools mostly in general terms. Yersultanova et al. (2023), for example, call for accessible digital resources in inclusive classrooms. The link between digital tools and differentiated English teaching has not been mapped.

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is closely related to DI. UDL plans for learner variability at the design stage. DI guides the teacher's decisions during the lesson. Butabayeva et al. (2024) link UDL-based technologies to teachers' inclusive competencies. Used together, the two approaches can support inclusive classrooms.

Implementation remains difficult. Mixed-ability classes include learners with different language levels, learning difficulties, and educational backgrounds. Standard lesson plans rarely fit all of them. Teachers often lack training, resources, and methodological support (Manuilova et al., 2018; Shalbayeva et al., 2021). Unequal access to digital infrastructure adds another barrier, especially in rural schools (Assanova & Konyskara, 2022).

Gap in existing research

Research on inclusive education, DI, and digital tools in Kazakhstan exists, but it is scattered. Some studies examine inclusion from a policy or system view (Assanova & Konyskara, 2022; Makoele & Somerton, 2021; Turlubekova et al., 2021). Others address digital resources (Yersultanova et al., 2023) or DI in language teaching (Akhmetova, 2023; Syrymbetova et al., 2023). These strands are rarely combined. No review has brought DI, digital tools, and inclusive English language teaching together in Kazakhstan. A scoping review can map this evidence, show its patterns, and identify gaps. It can also guide future research, teacher education, and policy.

Objective and research questions

This scoping review maps research on differentiated instructional content, including digital tools, in inclusive English language teaching in Kazakhstan. It also identifies wider inclusive education research that shapes this practice. Two questions guided the review.

RQ1. What evidence exists on the design, implementation, and reported outcomes of differentiated instruction and digital tools in inclusive English language teaching in Kazakhstan?

RQ2. Which contextual factors from wider inclusive education research in Kazakhstan, such as teacher preparation, policy, and infrastructure, affect this practice?

Methods and materials

Framework, scope, and eligibility

We followed the five-stage framework of Arksey and O'Malley (2005): identifying the research question, identifying relevant studies, selecting studies, charting the data, and reporting the results. We reported the review according to PRISMA-ScR (Tricco et al., 2018). The Population–Concept–Context (PCC) framework guided the eligibility criteria (Table 1). The population was learners and teachers in inclusive English language classrooms. The concept was differentiated instruction and digital tools. The context was Kazakhstan.

We defined the scope in two layers. Core studies deal directly with differentiated or inclusive instruction in English or foreign language teaching. Contextual studies deal with inclusive education, DI, digital tools, or teacher preparation in Kazakhstan and bear on English language teaching. We

included contextual studies because core evidence is limited. They explain the conditions in which inclusive English teaching takes place. We excluded studies on early childhood settings. We included studies from other countries only when they drew explicit lessons for Kazakhstan. Each of the 17 included studies was classified as either core or contextual in Table 3.

The time frame was 2016 to 2025. It starts one year after Kazakhstan ratified the convention in 2015, which marked a shift toward inclusive education policy.

Table 1
Eligibility criteria

Category	Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Population	Learners in inclusive English language classrooms (students with disabilities, gifted learners, English as an additional language students); English teachers; teacher educators; researchers in English language teaching or inclusive education	Populations not involved in English language education or inclusive classrooms
Geographic scope	Studies conducted in Kazakhstan. Studies from other countries only if they draw explicit lessons for Kazakhstan	Studies with no link to Kazakhstan
Language	Publications in English, Kazakh, or Russian	Other languages without an available translation
Study focus	Core: differentiated or inclusive instruction in English or foreign language teaching. Contextual: inclusive education, differentiated instruction, digital tools, or teacher preparation in Kazakhstan that bear on English language teaching	Studies with no link to inclusion, differentiation, or English language teaching; studies on early childhood settings
Publication type	Peer-reviewed articles, dissertations, theses, government or nongovernmental reports, conference proceedings, other grey literature	Blogs, informal commentary, news articles, opinion-based sources
Time frame	Published between 2016 and 2025	Published before 2016 or after 2025
Methodology	Empirical studies (qualitative, quantitative, mixed methods), theoretical or conceptual papers, literature reviews	Opinion pieces without methodological grounding

Data sources

We searched eight databases and repositories: Scopus (n = 11), Web of Science (n = 6), ERIC (n = 5), Google Scholar (n = 18), the Nazarbayev University Repository (n = 3), the Abai KazNPU Repository (n = 4), the KazNU Digital Library (n = 3), and the Russian Science Citation Index (n = 8). These searches returned 58 records. Screening of reference lists added 12 records. In total, 70 records were identified.

We removed 7 duplicates, which left 63 records for screening. Screening of titles and abstracts excluded 21 records. The main reasons were no link to inclusive English language teaching, no link to Kazakhstan, and non-empirical status (editorials, commentaries, opinion pieces). Forty-two reports went to full-text review. All 42 were retrieved. Full-text assessment excluded 25 reports: not focused on Kazakhstan (n = 3), wrong population (n = 4), concept mismatch (n = 3), and bibliographic details that could not be verified (n = 15). Seventeen studies were included in the synthesis (Figure 1).

Search strategy

The search followed PRISMA-ScR recommendations. Search strings were adapted to each database (Table 2). We combined controlled vocabulary, such as ERIC descriptors, with free-text keywords. Boolean operators linked terms on differentiated instruction, inclusive education, English language teaching, and Kazakhstan. The core string was: (“differentiated instruction” OR “differentiated content” OR “adaptive teaching”) AND (“inclusive education” OR “inclusive classrooms”) AND (“English language teaching” OR “foreign language education”) AND (“Kazakhstan”).

Filters limited results to 2016–2025 and to English, Kazakh, or Russian. Searches of regional repositories and the Russian Science Citation Index also used Russian search terms.

Table 2
Search strategy by database

Database	Search Fields	Search String / Keywords Used	Filters Applied	Records Retrieved (n)
Scopus	Title, abstract, keywords	(“differentiated instruction” OR “adaptive teaching”) AND (“inclusive education”) AND (“English language teaching” OR “foreign language education”) AND Kazakhstan	2016–2025; English	11
Web of Science	Topic	(“differentiated instruction” OR “differentiated content”) AND (“inclusive classrooms”) AND (“English language teaching”) AND Kazakhstan	2016–2025; English	6
ERIC	Descriptor, abstract	(“Differentiated Instruction”) AND (“Inclusive Education”) AND (“English as a Second Language” OR “Foreign Language Instruction”) AND Kazakhstan	2016–2025; English	5
Google Scholar	Full text	“differentiated instruction” + “inclusive education” + “English language teaching” + Kazakhstan	2016–2025; English, Kazakh, Russian	18
Nazarbayev University Repository	Full text, title	“inclusive education” AND “English language teaching” AND Kazakhstan	2016–2025; <i>all languages</i>	3
Abai KazNPU Repository	Title, abstract	“инклюзивное образование” AND “обучение английскому языку” / “inclusive education” AND “EFL”	2016–2025; Kazakh, Russian	4
KazNU Digital Library	Keywords	“differentiated instruction”, “inclusive classrooms”, “foreign language education”	2016–2025; Kazakh, Russian, English	3
Russian Science Citation Index	Title, abstract, keywords	(“дифференцирован ное обучение”) AND (“инклюзивное образование”) AND	2016–2025; Russian	8

(“английский язык”)
AND Kazakhstan

Total (databases)

58

Study selection

Selection had four stages. First, all records were exported to a spreadsheet. Duplicates were flagged by automated sorting and then checked by hand against titles, authors, years, and sources. Second, two reviewers independently screened titles and abstracts against Table 1. They marked each record as include, exclude, or uncertain. Third, the full texts of the remaining reports were assessed for contextual relevance, methodological adequacy, and link to inclusive English language teaching. Fourth, the reviewers resolved disagreements by discussion. A third reviewer was consulted when needed. Reasons for exclusion were recorded at each stage.

Data extraction

We built a data extraction matrix in Microsoft Excel from the review objectives and PRISMA-ScR recommendations. For each study we extracted: bibliographic information (authors, year, publication type, source database); aims; participants; design and method; differentiated strategies or content adaptations; aspects of inclusion addressed; and key findings on inclusive English language teaching in Kazakhstan. The first author and co-authors checked the extracted data for consistency and completeness. Studies were then grouped by topic to build the summary in Table 3.

Data analysis

We used qualitative thematic synthesis, adapted from Braun and Clarke (2006). Coding was done in the Excel matrix. The analysis had five stages.

Familiarization. The first author read the extracted findings repeatedly.

Initial coding. Segments received descriptive codes for practices, learner needs, teacher preparedness, and inclusive strategies.

Category development. Similar codes were grouped into categories, such as instructional adaptations, teacher competencies, learner support needs, policy implementation, and classroom challenges.

Theme generation. Categories were compared across studies to find patterns, inconsistencies, and gaps.

Interpretation. The final themes were linked to the research questions.

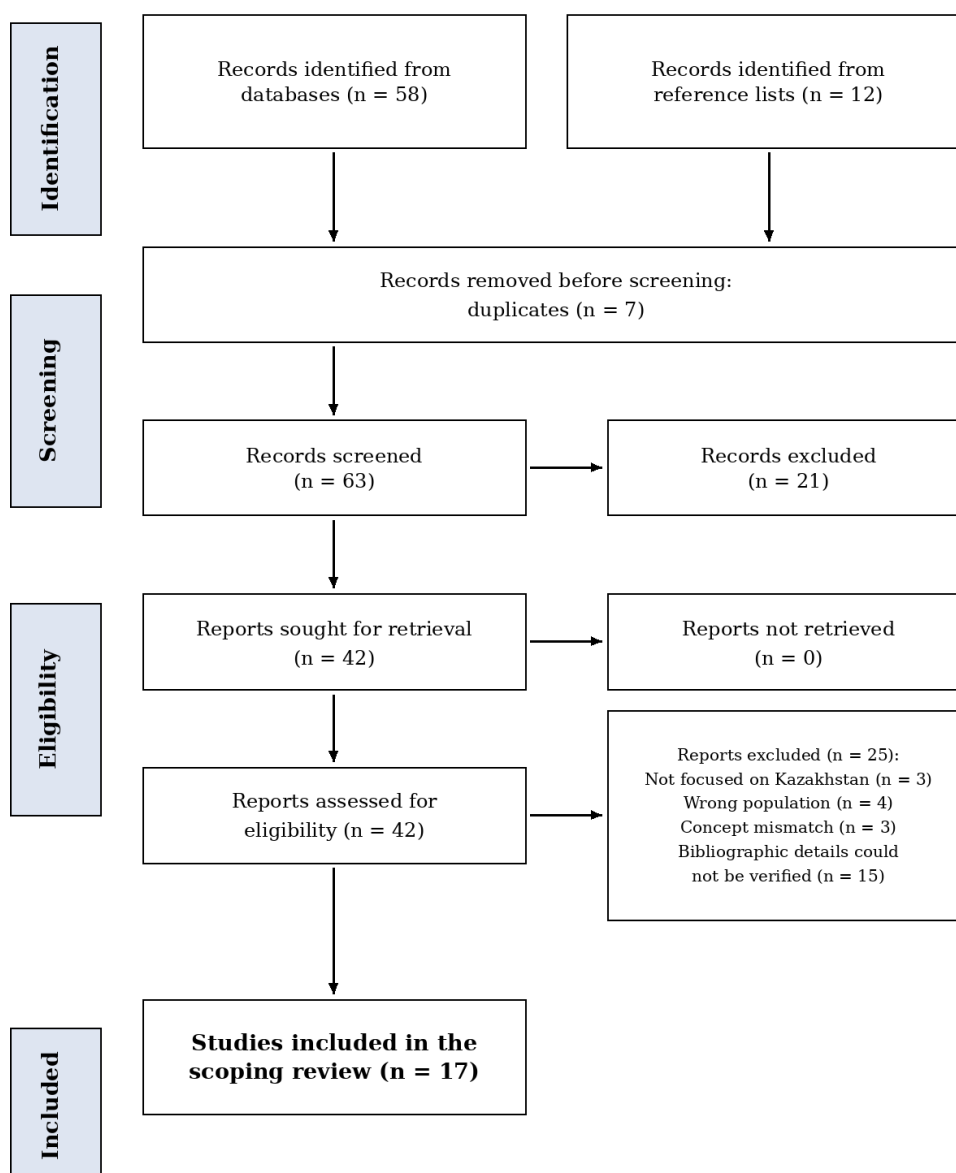
Results and discussion

Study selection and characteristics of included studies

Figure 1 shows the selection process. Of 70 records identified, 63 were screened and 42 were assessed in full text. Seventeen studies met the criteria. Table 3 summarizes them in five groups. Seven studies are core studies. They deal directly with English or foreign language teaching. Ten are contextual studies. They cover general inclusion, digital technologies, differentiated instruction, teacher preparation, and system-level issues in Kazakhstan.

Figure 1

PRISMA-ScR flow diagram of study selection

**Table 3***Summary of included studies***A. Digital technologies in inclusion**

Authors / year	Context / participants	Focus	Key findings	Scope
Yersultanova et al., 2023	Digital literacy	Resources for learners with SEN	Accessible digital resources are needed	Context

B. Inclusive foreign language / EFL teaching

Authors / year	Context / participants	Focus	Key findings	Scope
Myrzatay & Tussupbekova, 2023	Learners with SEN	Inclusive English teaching	Adapted methods and interactive approaches are effective	Core

Authors / year	Context / participants	Focus	Key findings	Scope
Dashkin, 2023	Learners with SEN	Inclusive foreign language methods	Improves engagement; adoption is limited	Core
Zhetpisbayeva & Shalbayeva, 2019	Children with SEN	Foreign language teaching problems	Adapted methods are lacking	Core
Akhmetova, 2023	In-service EFL teachers	Differentiated learning in EFL	Teachers support DI; motivation effects reported; workload and training are challenges	Core

C. Differentiated instruction

Authors / year	Context / participants	Focus	Key findings	Scope
Aliyeva, 2018	Teachers at a school for gifted students	DI practices	DI is valued; implementation varies	Context
Syrymbetova et al., 2023	Foreign language students	DI in second language acquisition	DI is underused; potential benefits	Core
Akkisev, 2017	Primary EFL	DI in English	Ability-based differentiation	Core

D. Teacher competencies, UDL, and professional development

Authors / year	Context / participants	Focus	Key findings	Scope
Butabayeva et al., 2024	Teachers	UDL technologies	Improve inclusive competencies	Context
Shilibekova, 2025	University faculty	AI-enhanced UDL training course in Kazakh	Design tensions: linguistic mismatch, cultural drift; human review needed	Context
Jangeldinova et al., 2024	Pre-service ESL teachers	Readiness to teach learners with ADHD	Systematic training is needed	Core
Butabayeva et al., 2025	6,186 teachers	Validation of the TEIP scale	Scale is reliable for Kazakhstan; fairly positive efficacy; training raises efficacy	Context

E. System-level inclusion

Authors / year	Context / participants	Focus	Key findings	Scope
Zhetpisbayeva & Asylbek, 2016	Schools in Finland	Inclusive education model	Strong inclusion system and early intervention; lessons for Kazakhstan	Context

Authors / year	Context / participants	Focus	Key findings	Scope
Makoelle, 2020b	Kazakhstani schools	Transition to inclusion	Some progress; concept still poorly understood	Context
Makoelle, 2020a	12 inclusive schools	Terminology	Soviet-era terms persist; reform needed	Context
Assanova & Konyskara, 2022	Schools	Mainstreaming	Uneven progress; training gaps	Context
Turlubekova et al., 2021	National data	Inclusion factors	Teacher numbers correlate with inclusion rates	Context

Note. SEN = special educational needs; DI = differentiated instruction; UDL = Universal Design for Learning; TEIP = Teacher Efficacy for Inclusive Practice. Core = studies on English or foreign language teaching; Context = wider inclusive education studies in Kazakhstan.

Thematic clusters

Five clusters emerged from the analysis (Table 4). They follow the research questions and the recurring content of the studies. Clusters 1 and 2 answer RQ1. Clusters 3 to 5 answer RQ2 and explain the conditions of practice.

Table 4
Thematic clusters

Cluster	Key themes
1. Differentiated instruction in inclusive English language teaching	Multilevel and tiered tasks; individualized learning plans; learner readiness and interests; teacher views of DI
2. Digital tools in inclusive English language teaching	ICT platforms and apps; interactive digital content; AI-enhanced open resources; digital literacy
3. Inclusive pedagogy and curriculum adaptation	Personalized instruction; curriculum modification; inclusive classroom planning
4. Teacher preparation and professional development	Pre-service and in-service training gaps; UDL in teacher education; role of assistants and tutors; development needs and models
5. Policy and system factors	Mainstreaming and structural support; legal and terminological clarity; teacher numbers and inclusion rates; international models such as Finland

Synthesis in relation to the research questions

Design. DI is designed mainly by adapting content, tasks, and assessment. Akhmetova (2023) and Syrymbetova et al. (2023) show that teachers plan lessons with learner diversity in mind. Design practice, however, appears informal. The studies describe no shared institutional framework.

Implementation. Implementation is inconsistent. Teachers try tiered tasks, group work, and individual support. Several studies report limited time, few resources, and little structured training (Akhmetova, 2023; Zhetpisbayeva & Shalbayeva, 2019). Dashkin (2023) notes limited adoption of inclusive methods. Intended design and classroom practice do not match.

Digital tools. Evidence on digital tools is thin and general. Yersultanova et al. (2023) call for accessible digital resources. Shilibekova (2025) describes design tensions in an AI-enhanced course for faculty, including language mismatch and the need for human review. The included studies do not compare named platforms in inclusive English classrooms. Effects therefore cannot be attributed to specific tools. Access to technology and teachers' digital competence also limit use.

Reported outcomes. Studies report gains in engagement, participation, and motivation (Akhmetova, 2023; Dashkin, 2023; Myrzatay & Tussupbekova, 2023). Evidence on long-term achievement is scarce. Outcome evaluation is underdeveloped.

Teacher preparedness. Readiness is a key factor. Jangeldinova et al. (2024) recommend systematic training for pre-service English teachers. Butabayeva et al. (2025) find fairly positive teacher efficacy in a national sample, and they link training and experience to higher efficacy.

System factors. Makoelle (2020a, 2020b) reports progress, but misconceptions and outdated terms persist. Assanova and Konyskara (2022) note uneven progress and training gaps. Turlubekova et al. (2021) link the number of teachers to inclusion rates. These factors affect how consistently and how widely inclusive English teaching can be applied.

Overall. Inclusive English language teaching in Kazakhstan shows emerging but uneven use of DI and digital tools. Differentiation is widely recognized but inconsistently applied. Digital tools support inclusion only where infrastructure and teacher competence allow. Outcome evidence is limited and mostly descriptive. Teacher and system factors are the main barriers.

Limitations

This review did not appraise study quality, which is usual for scoping reviews. Only seven studies deal directly with English language teaching. The ten contextual studies widen the picture but do not directly measure English learning. Some sources are grey literature or regional journals, and their reporting varies. Findings should therefore be read as a map of the evidence, not as proof of effectiveness.

Conclusions

Differentiated instruction is increasingly recognized as a way to support diverse learners in Kazakhstan. The evidence points to gains in engagement and motivation. It is limited on achievement and on the use of specific digital tools.

Barriers persist. They include limited teacher preparation, unequal access to technology, few localized teaching resources, and gaps between policy and practice. Teacher professional development and system support are most needed in rural and under-resourced schools.

Three steps follow. Policy, teacher education, and classroom practice need coordinated action. Future studies should measure the long-term effects of DI in inclusive English classes and test scalable digital interventions. Research should also develop professional development models suited to the Kazakhstani context.

Funding

This research is funded under the 2025–2027 grant project of the Science Committee of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan entitled IRN AP26102527 “Developing Differentiated Digital Educational Content for Teaching and Learning English in Inclusive Classrooms”.

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ҚАЗАҚСТАНДАҒЫ ИНКЛЮЗИВТІ АҒЫЛШЫН ТІЛІ САБАҚТАРЫНА АРНАЛҒАН САРАЛАНҒАН БІЛІМ БЕРУ МАЗМҰНЫ: АУҚЫМДЫ ШОЛУ ЗЕРТТЕУІ

Аңдатпа. Қазақстан 2015 жылы БҰҰ-ның Мүгедектердің құқықтары туралы конвенциясын ратификациялады, содан кейін инклюзивті білім беру ұлттық басымдыққа айналды. Саясат сыныптағы тәжірибеден озып кетті, әсіресе ауылдық мектептерде. Бұл ауқымды шолу Қазақстандағы инклюзивті ағылшын тілін оқытуда саралап оқыту мен цифрлық құралдар туралы 2016–2025 жылдардағы зерттеулерді жүйелейді. Сегіз дерекқор мен репозиторийде іздеу жүргізіліп, әдебиеттер тізімі қаралды. Шолуға он жеті зерттеу енгізілді. Соның ішінде жеті зерттеу ағылшын не шет тілін оқытуға тікелей арналған. Қалғандары Қазақстандағы инклюзивті білім беруді, саралап оқытуды, мұғалімдерді даярлауды және саясатты қамтиды. Зерттеулерде деңгейлі және көпдеңгейлі тапсырмалар, жекелендірілген қолдау және бейімделген әдістер сипатталады. Хабарланған нәтижелер негізінен оқушылардың белсенділігі, қатысуы және уәжі артқанын көрсетеді. Ұзақ мерзімді жетістіктер туралы дәлел аз. Цифрлық құралдар жалпы сипатта ғана қарастырылады: АКТ платформалары, интерактивті контент, қолжетімді ресурстар және цифрлық сауаттылық. Негізгі кедергілер: мұғалімдердің жеткіліксіз дайындығы, технологияға тең қолжетімділіктің болмауы және саясат пен практика арасындағы алшақтық. Шолу мұғалімдерді даярлауды күшейтуді, цифрлық инфрақұрылымды жақсартуды және нәтижені өлшейтін зерттеулерді қажет етеді.

Түйін сөздер: инклюзивті білім беру, саралап оқыту, цифрлық құралдар, ағылшын тілін оқыту, мұғалімдерді даярлау, оқушылардың қатысуы, саяси-нормативтік негіздер

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ДИФФЕРЕНЦИРОВАННОЕ ОБРАЗОВАТЕЛЬНОЕ СОДЕРЖАНИЕ ДЛЯ ИНКЛЮЗИВНЫХ УРОКОВ АНГЛИЙСКОГО ЯЗЫКА В КАЗАХСТАНЕ: ОБЗОР ЛИТЕРАТУРЫ

Аннотация. Казахстан ратифицировал Конвенцию ООН о правах инвалидов в 2015 году, и инклюзивное образование стало национальным приоритетом. Политика опережает практику в классе, особенно в сельских школах. Данный обзор по типу scoring review систематизирует исследований 2016–2025 годов о дифференцированном обучении и цифровых инструментах в инклюзивном преподавании английского языка в Казахстане. Поиск проведён в восьми базах данных и репозиториях, также просмотрены списки литературы. В обзор включены семнадцать исследований.. Семь из них посвящены непосредственно преподаванию английского или иностранного языка. Остальные охватывают инклюзивное образование, дифференцированное обучение, подготовку учителей и политику в Казахстане. В работах описаны уровневые и многоуровневые задания, индивидуальная поддержка и адаптированные методы. Сообщаемые результаты в основном связаны с ростом вовлечённости, участия и мотивации. Данных о долгосрочной успеваемости мало. Цифровые инструменты рассматриваются в общем виде: ИКТ-платформы, интерактивный контент, доступные ресурсы и цифровая грамотность. Главные барьеры — недостаточная подготовка учителей, неравный доступ к технологиям и разрыв между политикой и практикой. Обзор указывает на необходимость усилить подготовку учителей, улучшить цифровую инфраструктуру и проводить исследования, измеряющие результаты.

Ключевые слова: инклюзивное образование, дифференцированное обучение, цифровые инструменты, обучение английскому языку, подготовка учителей, вовлечённость студентов, нормативно-правовые модели

Received 14 April 2026

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