ADA University

Master of Public Policy Program

CAPSTONE PROJECT SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF PUBLIC POLICY

Current Situation and Future Prospects of Distance Education for Children with Disabilities in Secondary Schools of Azerbaijan – Challenges and Trends

Movlud Aydamir, Elyar Mammadzade, Tural Nasifov

maydamir2018@ada.edu.az; emammadzada2018@ada.edu.az; tnasifov2017@ada.edu.az

Baku, 2018

ADA UNIVERSITY

Master of Public Policy

Movlud Aydamir, Elyar Mammadzade, Tural Nasifov

APPROVED:

Academic Supervisor: _____

Ministry of Educaion, Bureau on ICT for Education: _____/S.Hajizada

Dean of Academic Affairs: _____

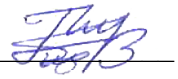
Date: 03/05/2018

STATEMENT OF AUTHENTICITY

I have read ADA's policy on plagiarism and certify that, to the best of my knowledge, the content of this thesis, entitled (insert title here), is all my own work and does not contain any unacknowledged work.

Signed:  /M. Aydamir/

Signed:  / E. Mammadzade/

Signed:  /T. Nasifov/

Date: 02.05.2018

Abstract

Distance education for both secondary and high school students is becoming increasingly common phenomena across the world. Such modern education also considers the people with soecial needs. Today in the era of developed ICT technologies, digitalization many countries have achieved a lot in the field of providing education to their citizens with special needs. This issue has been in agenda of the relative ministy and agencies in recent years. There are some achivements, and still some deficiencies. The authors of this paper did the research to see the current situation, and to help define possible future proceedings.

Introduction

Historically education was available to elite groups of community only. Time by time education became part of the minimum requirements of human life. Nowadays education is more than life minimum. It is used as an important foundation of achieving higher results in future development of both individuals and society. After Azerbaijan gained independence, education policy naturally became one of the key areas to be developed. There are still radical changes being implemented, and there are some areas which have been introduced to the system only in 21st century, such as distance education.

Distance education for both secondary and high school students is becoming increasingly common phenomena across the world. This type of education is characterized where education of a student occurs in a circumstance where educator and student who is not enrolled due to limited abilities. Especially, distance education is one of the most useful methods for those children who need special treatments. According to reports of UNICEF in Azerbaijan only one of each four children with disabilities are receiving secondary education (UNICEF , 2017). Reports indicate that 55% of teachers and 60-70% school directors disagree that building, venue and classrooms are accessible for those children (UNICEF , 2017). Another report from the same agency mentions, despite from the improvements in educational sphere, problems related with opportunities and coverage of distance education in the country still exist. Children who are not able to get education suffer from financial and health issues and most of them get education at home by private tutors which create inefficiency in terms of socio-economic situation.

Azerbaijan government ratified CRC in 1992 and took responsibility to “respect and ensure the rights of each child within their jurisdiction without discrimination of any kind, irrespective of the child`s or his or her parent`s or legal guardian`s race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status” (Convention on the Rights of the Child – Excerpts, 1989). Till 2010, government led the operation of specialized schools for disabled children. In 2010, Ministry of Education declared project about distance education for disabled children and created official committee to deal with electronic materials, web-site, procedure and trainings of teachers. Aim of program is equal,

systematic and permanent education for disabled children. Under the committee some programs including "Electronic School", "One student and one computer", "E-Twinning Plus", "Distance education for disabled children" have been held. Ministry states that during 2010-2017, 210 disabled children and 40 teachers are equipped with computers and required software and two schools were supplied with distance education resources.[1] One of the main advantages of government led-distance education is that it gives freedom to choose place and time, creates intensive relationships between children and tutors and eliminates economic bargaining among them.

Despite from the initiatives, due to newness of terms and model, the state program did not cover the whole country nowadays and failed because of methodological and technical problems. Obviously, in Azerbaijan problems of distance education are not well researched and less examined by scholars. According to 2015 statistics numbers of disabled children are 65,482 (UNICEF, 2017). Comparing numbers with the state program results show existing challenges from both government and society. In this paper the authors would like to analyze distance education for children with special needs in order to identify and overview model practices by looking at practices of successful countries.

Qualitative method is going to be used in this research to analyze case about current situation in secondary distance education. We are going to examine reports and research that were prepared by international agencies and Ministry of Education in this field and analyze scholarly articles to understand practices and trends in the world. Then we will continue the study with the survey among 81 children who currently benefit from distant education. We aimed to get answers on the following research questions:

Research question 1: What are the challenges and barriers that estranged disabled children from distance education in Azerbaijan?

Research question 2: How much, children with disabilities who practice distance education are isolated from environment?

[1] Məsafədən məktəb. (2017). *Layihələr*. [online] Available at: http://mesafedenmekteb.edu.az/az/layiheler.html [Accessed 10 Nov. 2017].

A study of distance secondary education is important for several reasons. First and foremost, shortage of academic articles and materials about the distance education in Azerbaijan is a long lasting gap to be filled. This paper is going to be a practical research for those who are interested in current situation. Secondly, most of the families if they have capability to pay the cost of private tutor for disabled children which toughens their burden. The authors are interested in analyzing the advantages of distance education in secondary schools which are supposed to eliminate such inequality and high cost of those families. Finally, the research aims to support initiatives and put forward that by government and strengthen the capacity of programs in this regard. The research can help related decision-making bodies when making decisions in regard of education policy toward children with disabilities.

Literature Review

Distance education for both secondary and high school students is becoming increasingly common phenomena across the world. Researchers from various fields analyze, define distance education. As a common practice for all research papers, defining the main elements of the field is one of the most important parts of the study. Before getting into the topic of distance education, explanation and discussion on the term will be mentioned for further analysis.

One of the important systematic expert on the field, Borje Holmberg defines distance education as a learning process which occurs without contact of teachers and students in any classroom. He divided distance education into two forms; non-contiguous communication and two-way communication in which former refers to the self-instructional character and latter communication between students, tutors, and representative organization. He avoids analyzing effectiveness and quality of distance education by examining literature but trying to put distance education into theory and let the process made (Holmberg, 1980).

On the other hand, Sam Crooks characterizes distance education as a form of education which does not rely on direct contact between teachers and taught. This form of education is based on multi-media teaching packages, audio-visual materials. Researcher claims that it has great advantages in comparison to traditional education. First, it can provide education for a large number of people who are mainly suffering because of isolation regardless of reasons. Secondly, distance education let the government or organization to make better

use of scarce resources and become cost-effective in comparison to a traditional form of education. And thirdly, distance education generates outputs according to needs of society, both teachers and students. In other words, it helps to improve current skills into the further form (Crooks, 1983).

Regardless of the researcher's position, it is a fact that distance education has already mentioned advantages which are mostly not just defined but measured by scholars. Terry Anderson, claims despite formal and tangible advantages of distance education, there is hidden part of the process which he refers "hidden curriculum". He mentioned that beyond the historical meaning of the hidden curriculum – kind of indoctrination of education – today hidden curriculum consists of five elements; learn to learn, learning the profession, learning the game, learning to be expert (Anderson, 2001). Learning to learn and learning to be expert he thinks are the main issues that make distance education. By referring learn to learn he wants to point out the gains like a time management, organizational skills which are getting more importance in distance education. Learning to be expert on the other hand is based less on body language, magnetic personality than truth and expertise.

Some researchers try to distinguish the meaning of distance education from other proxy words such as distributed learning, distance learning and e-learning (Faibisoff, Sylvia; Deborah, Willis, 1987) (Stella & Gnanam, 2004). Stella believes distance education is a restrictive concept and "distributed learning" is much more appropriate to define distance education. For him distributed learning is a process which can occur either in or out of campus, providing students with flexibility and eliminating time barrier. On the other hand, Rosenblit wants to differentiate the distance education from e-learning to analyze the term itself. In most cases, he argues distance education denotes the physical separation of the learner from the instructor which is not essentially seen in e-learning. Additionally, distance education is mostly useful for people who cannot attend a direct gathering, a school or a campus (Guri-Rosenblit, 2005).

Despite varieties of definitions, distance education has common features as well. Distance education that provides exclusive interaction and independence for both teacher and student and most importantly based on student needs (Faibisoff, Sylvia; Deborah, Willis, 1987). Needs of students are understood in terms of disability, high-risk learners, minorities, and bounds as a result of distance and time (Jason, 1984). In this

regard, distance education can be a major destroyer of obstacles for a number of students that suffer exclusion from society.

Some scholars instead of looking for suitable term, want to examine the phenomena by exploring the causes of development in the distance education. This type of education is very popular in developed countries in all stages of education. British Open University in the UK, Open College in Australia, Athabasca University in Canada are most popular distance education centers in the world. In the German Democratic Republic 1.5 million university and college students have attained their qualifications by distance education only in 1987 (Faibisoff & Deborah, 1987, p. 224). Séamus Ó Buachalla, states that world-wide demand for education and development in information and communication technology have assisted the current trend in distance education (Buachalla, 1989). Especially, in high levels of illiteracy countries, distance education become the main counter-reform; in China, Tanzania, India, and Iran. In this sense, technology and society evolve in nonlinear continual form and new technology let people invest on themselves (Lee, 1999).

Question of how to build distance education is a much more complex issue and discussed heavily today. The main laws and regulations in regard of international education for disabled people, currently, are governed with several international treaties and other documents. Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) of 1948, Convention against Discrimination in Education (CADE) of 1960, Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) of 2006 and many more domestic laws and documents of different states are the main base for internal regulations.

Some scholars such as Dan Eastmond is very suspicious about realizing of the distance education in poor countries due to the strict traditional ground and low technological advance (Eastmond, 2000). Eastmond states for basic distance education students access to computers is a minimal condition which should be provided. He suggests by referring Nicaragua, Thailand and Kenya examples for poor countries is to start from mathematics or second-language courses instead of interactive discussion which require strict and comprehensive curriculum. During the designing phase of the program two variables must not be overlooked; quality of content and the support that is provided for students to utilize information. In order to be effective, student's motivation must stay high during the process. Most advantageous way to implement the program is trying to cooperate international distance education centers. Such collaboration will create more opportunities

for nations, leading the government to learn experimented methods and reduce resource cost, obviously (Eastmond, 2000).

The outcome of distance education program cannot be determined due to uncertain initial phase cost and framework of the program. So, distance education is risky business. It looks like doing familiar things in an unfamiliar way (Olcott Jr., 1996). Mary Lee thinks flexibility in the decision-making process will soften the problem for developing countries (Lee, 1999). As Eastmond, she suggests new distance education technologies should be implemented first in technical fields rather than in art and humanities (Lee, 1999, p. 42).

Most of the researchers discuss distance education as a process, structure and, access. Borje Holmberg`s point is to define objectives and target groups and choosing of available media for intended results. Thus, preparation of distance education for disabled children at secondary school is importantly differentiated from Open University structure. Many components, including instructional text, radio, tv-programs, visual illustration, and equipment should be designed practically by taking risks into the account. Two-way communication must be specified in detail for giving adequate feedback to students to correct their mistakes (Holmberg, 1980).

Few scholars give importance to sides of distance education and their ability of adaptation. Christian de Simon, claims making process will not be a case if the program does not require a skillful staff. During the process, teachers need to extend their knowledge beyond how they use technology. Practical training might be one of the solutions for the problem. According to the researcher, all practical trainings must take place in summer months before courses and should be designed to be continues over a period of several weeks (Simone, 2006). Her argument is backed by Ismail Sahin who believes in order to be successful in such kind of education, required equipment for teachers as well as for students play an important part during distance education program. According to Ismail Sahin, before offering distance education, an instructor should be satisfactory about access of student to basic hardware. Students readiness, attitude, enthusiasm are key success factors for the program (Sahin & Mack, 2008). Sam Crook is also one of the thinkers, who believe satisfaction from both sides is important and might become fail reason of the program. For him, motivated students, relevant qualifications based on national needs and logistic are failing and success criteria of distance education

(Crooks, 1983). But most importantly, he insists on stable government office without changing by the government itself for the durable distance education program.

Despite the discussion on the content, development and types of education, one of a less debated topic is disabled children's position in distance education. Targets of distance education are less agreed topic in this field. For Buachalla, distance education should aim to increase participation from various geography and target groups. In this regard, education should be especially accessible to disadvantaged groups of people. Depending on the scale of project, proper process must be examined in terms of interaction protocol and evaluation program. Researcher is interested in the manner which it is organized, administered, funded and managed. Because most of the programs in European countries are the result of the public initiative, sponsored by the government (Buachalla, 1989).

Today disabled children achieve education by center that provides special education or inclusively with other children in school. However, for those children who are especially in the level of physically disabled position and far away both psychologically and socially from school still are not able to get education. John P. Loegering believes that disabled children who are alienated from society especially well served by distance education course. Having a course available in home represents a significant opportunity for some physically disabled children (Edge & John, 2006). Important researchers such as Patricia Campbell and Jennifor Storo also back this argument, who are mostly pointing out the equipment for schools with physically disadvantaged student is apt to have (Campbell & Storo, 1996).

Despite shortage of both academic and practical materials on disabled children opportunities in distance education, most scholars think each distance education program should analyze firstly target and their age, cultural backgrounds, interests, familiarity of technology. After the analyze, visualizing of information, media selection become an apparent issue (Simonson, Michael, Sharon, & Susan, 2000). Distance education can be applied for those people that are in disadvantaged situation if the conditions will be provided.

In 2010 Ministry of Education of the Republic of Azerbaijan declared project about distance education for disabled children and created official committee to deal with electronic materials, website, procedure, and training of teachers. The aim of program is equal, systematic and permanent education for disabled children.

Under the committee some programs including “Electronic School”, “One student and one computer”, “E-Twinning Plus”, “Distance education for disabled children” have been held. Ministry states that during 2010-2017, 210 disabled children and 40 teachers are equipped by computers and required software, in two schools distance education rooms were prepared (Məsafədən məktəb, 2017).

The characteristics of the people who need distance education programs around the world vary from country to country. Mostly people between the ages of 20 to 40 are interested in such programs. Most of them are unable to practice traditional education programs because of time and location limit, work or family responsibilities and some for their physical disability (Faibisoff, Sylvia; Deborah, Willis, 1987).

David Elkind mentioned two different eras in regard of recognition of disabilities and also provision of special needs for the children with disabilities (Elkind, 1998). The first one is modern era, during which he argues that those disabilities were officially recognized and the children with special needs were sent to special schools. These schools were different from normal schools in that, only children with special needs were studying there. Although education was provided to those children, they were not integrated to the society and their social life besides from just attending these schools was not considered in practice. Postmodernity, he argues which was continuation of modernity with some critical changes in concept of it brought the attention to those children to be treated equally and creating a place for them to be part of the large society. In this regard, distance education and inclusive education are playing pivotal roles (Elkind, 1998).

As a result, covering all targets are missing side of the earlier academic articles and books. Two books - Handbook of Distance Education and Teaching and Learning at a Distance - are one of the most useful sources to analyze all detailed aspect of the distance education.

Summing up this section, the paper takes distance education as a dependent variable to analyze Azerbaijan government initiatives on the disabled children.

Methodology

The quantitative method study will address to test the hypothesis that distance education is one of the useful methods for disabled children and serves an alternative mode of education for disadvantaged people in Azerbaijan. In this study, quantitative data will be used to test the theory of distance education that predicts that disabled children well served by distance education course.

A quantitative method will be used to know the direct view of the disabled children and their parents view regarding with this topic which was done by UNICEF in previous years with the survey form in order to analyze topic detailly. In this research, the survey will be cross-sectional and in the form of online. Lack of cost, availability of making statistics leads us to use this method.

Convenience sampling is considered, and target group of research consisted of 85 disabled who involved distance program and no stratification is considered. Some questions samples will be taken from UNICEF rapport, but most of them will be designed by the researchers. One of the important limitation of the quantitative survey is the biased answer to the questions. In order to diminish bias and misconceptions, researcher allows participants to not define themselves if they will not want, and proxy questions or third-party thoughts will be asked about the specific issue. The timeline of this survey will be least 10 minutes for each participant and questionnaire consist of 15 questions. Questions will be around variables and directed to understand what kind of relationship exists among them.

Following variables are going to be used in this research.

Independent variables; Social challenges, Poverty, Lack of software, Lack of hardware.

Control variables; Income.

The dependent variable; Distance Education.

Both quantitative and qualitative was collected in March and April 2017, during the two months.

Description

As Burea on ICT for Education informs since 2011 “”e-Train System" project has been implemented to develop distance learning and involve pupils with special needs to this process. Main aim of the project is to ensure integration of children with physical constrains into the society and improve their opportunity to education, as well as, develop ability of using e-resources and computer for education purposes.

As Bureau on ICT for Education informs, in order to ensure the implementation of distant learning Manuals about the the usage of ICT equipment and other special devices were prepared and teachers, students and parents were trained. As a result, distance learning has positively affected active involving in the learning process and has increased the public and community involvements of its members.

Financial analysis of the project showed that as distant education is less cost requiring than at home education and ad 4 students are involved in each class in distant education, it is more cost effective and possible to cut the budget 45-50% off comparing to ‘at home study. In the next step, creation of distant education management system is planned.

So far the projects of Bureau on ICT for Education have much contributed to the children with special needs in regard of providing special education to them and also creating the path for such future provision. Below are the main contributions:

1. 210 pupils involved
2. 40 teachers involved
3. Baku, Ganka, Qazax, Samukh, Tovuz, Ismayilli, Agdam, Agstafa, Shamkir regions
4. Computer equipment, software and e-content provided to pupils
5. Joining Azerbaijan Education network and providing access to internet
6. Training programs for teachers, pupils and parents.

As the result of above mentioned activities, some pupils who did not have access to education were given

opportunity as it is their sole right as citizens of Azerbaijan Republic. This also created the path to continue and enlarge the sphere of this provision so that more pupils with special needs can be involved in such education. Core difference of its from 'at home' education was that, it was less time consuming, more cost effective and it also gave those students a chance to get education not individually but in a group of 4 people at the same time. The system allows the teacher to connect to 4 pupils at the same time and students are also able to see each other though online platform. 'at home' education system made it difficult to ensure that the pupil would get classes from each subject that he had to because of time constraints and cost constraints to the provider, to the teacher and Ministry of Education in this case. But distance education does not have such deficiencies. Another main challenge in 'at home' education was that, pupils with special needs in regions and especialy in remote areas had very little chance for such education. However once his house is connected to internet, then he/she can easily join distance educaton platform. The new system also encourages pupils to be more active and to be competitive as they have classmates now.

One of the important deficiencies can be very little portion of pupils with disabilities joining to distance education. In order to develop more and make mprovements the Bureau on ICT for Education is proposing some changes and improvements to the Ministry of education. Once it is confirmed, the system would run as following:

Components	Bureau on ICT for Education	Third Party service provider	Azerbaijan Education Network
General management	Monitoring	Core manager	Participates in the technical component
Selectıon of teachers	Not participating	Does the selection	Not participating
Working with parents and pupils	Accepts and works on complains	Working directly	Provides technical support
Training programs	-	Helds training programs	Not participating

Technical provisions	Finances	Gives technical services	Does equipment, internet access and maintenance
Finance	Allocates funds from the annual budget for training and technical support	Acts as an implementing agency	Acts as an implementing agency

As seen from the table above, the third party who will be the core manager of the project is responsible for most part of its implementation. This is already creating huge risks for the project. The officials of the bureau informed that they are working on making the structure and functioning of the program better, and hopefully soon they would provide a new, more risk-free structure and program.

Costs for distance education:

As the following estimation by bureau on ICT for Education data shows, by switching to distance education, the cost will decrease. Even the total percentage of savings is calculated to be 46%. Taking into consideration that annual salary for teachers is 1476000, then it is calculated as followng:

Calculation of salary

Number of pupils	300	pupils
Weekly class load	12	class hours
Total class load	3,600	class hours
Class hour quantity per shift	18	class hours
Number of shifts	200	shifts
Avarage salary per month per teacher	410	AZN
Annual salaries	984,000	AZN
Salaries for 3 years	2,952,000	AZN

Per year savings in salaries	492,000	AZN
3-year savings in salaries	1,476,000	AZN

Costs for distance education						
One time investment costs:						
Equipment	150,000	AZN	300 computers			
Electron portal	35,000	AZN	1 portal			
Training services	123,000	AZN	(300 pupils + 300 parents +150 teachers) * 164 AZN			
	308,000	AZN				
Annual program costs						
Internet services	90,000	AZN	300 pupils x 12 months x 25 AZN			
Technical support services	36,000	AZN	300 pupils x 12 months x 10 AZN			
Cost for managing staff	39,216	AZN	(3 ms x 556 AZN + 1 ms x 1600 AZN) x 12 months			
	165,216	AZN				
3 year analysis						
	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Total costs	Total savings	Savings %
One time investment costs	308,000	-	-	308,000	AZN	
Annual	165,216	165,216	165,216	495,648		

program costs						
	473,216	165,216	165,216	803,648	672,352	46%

How education experts see the project and its implementation?

Prof. Ajdar Aghayev, a professor of education, believes that this project of the Ministry of Education should be welcomed by public: "Even until now in Baku, teachers working at schools are gathering in the schools and each goes to houses of those student with disabilities. At home, children are taught basic education - writing, reading, counting, and other skills, and as they move up to the upper classes, as they pass to next levels their class load is also increasing which means that nowadays the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Azerbaijan is implementing such projects in accordance with the requirements of the era. If this project is genuinely fulfilled by executors at a high level, in a responsible manner of course, we must applaud it, because I believe that the use of technology given to us for such purposes is quite a positive one.

You know that at the moment the Internet is used in the education system. For example, any Azerbaijani student has the opportunity to sit in Baku and get a lecturer from London. This project is bringing similar chances for children with disabilities to study. In the project, the student with special need firstly is taught how to use a computer. This includes basic computer knowledge, opening and closing the computer, using the camera and etc,. Naturally, the computer has a great deal of possibilities in this regard. Because the student sitting in the house can ask the opposite side of the computer and hear the answer. In another step, the teacher receives the assignments and then sends his assignments from his home to his students. This is a very important project, which has been launched in practice. I really would like this project to be massively implemented. It is true that only 30 laptops have been distributed. But you know that in our regions there are children with disabilities. That is, this project is actually restricted to space. For example, any child with special need sitting in his/her home in the district may contact a school in Baku. She can get school responses and give answers to them. From this perspective, I think that this project is an important one. But I would love to see the children who are in need of care and attention not to fall back from their education. They should be careful about keeping the handicapped students in a humanistic manner and responsibly taking responsibility. And I would love to see the results of this project after a while and summarize it. So let us know what the effect of this

project is? After that, it may be possible to expand, summarize or conduct research on this project. I welcome this project. In foreign countries, such projects are being carried out by prestige, ie, by some gifted families or by NGOs. But I think that we are In the most effective way and path to prepare such a project by the government. ” (Sharg journal, 2005)

The director of school N 1 in Agstafa said in her interview: “The main goal here is to teach the science, even if it is away from children who are left behind. I think that in the near future this project will cover other cities and regions of the republic.

Before joining the project, we would have difficulties because it would not be possible to monitor the student at home, watch the course, and master the program. Today, it is possible to watch the lesson, the scope of the topic, the student's acquisition status through the remote program. Even if the student is away from his / her place of residence, the distance is shorter due to the project's help. For example, a school-aged child who needs special care is temporarily out of the education if he / she goes to the hospital for treatment at some point due to any illness. However, this project will help resolve the problem. Three schoolchildren in need of special care from our school have joined this project. At present, our second-grader, Pirguliev Elchin Shaig, is being treated at Children's Neurological Hospital in Baku. In addition, he does not have to stay away from the hospital with his computer-assisted education system and connects with the teachers of his "Electronic Learning Systems" project (ISAYEVA, 2013).”

The schoolchildren, who do not go outside his home, first learns to use informatics, that is, computer use. This includes the initial computer knowledge, ie opening and closing the computer, and etc.

Analysis

Survey is sometimes accepted as an easy way of conducting research. However, taking into account that such modern education is new in Azerbaijan and there are few possible ways of gathering information and on that occasion, survey will be the most not the least important part of this paper. Considering that all of the correspondents were disabled children sensitivity was the main issue. But in order to have realistic reports on the topic we used open questions where survey takers could explain their thoughts and how they see distance education in horizon. The main purpose is to support both who benefit from this kind of education and assist strategy makers of the ministry of education in their future plans. Survey intends to provide us as a manual

where correspondents provide common lacks and their individual insights about distance education. It will also play crucial role for avoiding negative aspects and working on credible and valid data which will shape distance education in a better way.

Survey begins from a consent where survey takers acknowledge what they are going to answer. Considering the sensitivity of the topic and there was a possibility of some survey takers not to agree and avoid this survey. But due to the option of staying anonymous all our correspondents agreed on the survey. Moreover, vast majority of them even directly wrote their names without having any kind of fear. We did not have proportionality in the gender distribution. Due to limited number of correspondents it is not possible to make any kind of reductions.

As we have already discussed in the beginning of our paper, secondary education system of the Republic of Azerbaijan is divided into three parts. Analyzing the answers from the correspondents we observe the distribution of all three classes which makes the paper more fruitful. Majority of the survey takers, which make 62.2% continue their distance education in general secondary education (from 5th to 9th class). Only 17 correspondents are examining full secondary education which is the last phase of secondary education. Only 11 from 74 responses are in the first phase, primary secondary education. Observing the answers, we can assume that distance education is more popular in general secondary education than in all others.

Social Economic Status of people is deeply analyzed with the health outcomes or the level of happiness. But yet there is still unknown relation between social economic status and education overall. We can accept social economic status as a variable which can affect the behavioral mechanism of the distance education. Because sometimes parents of pupils who examine distance education have to provide all technological equipment by themselves including pre-training. Usually income or social economic status are used as a control variable instead of dependent. In our case we will use the same approach. We generally examine it as a variable which can affect end product and lead them to fully benefit from distance education. In our case, majority considers themselves with an average status which is 71.6% from all correspondents. 19 of them still think that their suffering from lower social economic status. But 2 survey takers from 74 responded to this question as

high. Even if it does not formulate satisfactory percentage, there is at least some children who think consider their families social economic status higher than others.

Then the authors tried to discover the longest and shortest time correspondents were examining distance education. The longest time was 10 years which is very satisfactory result considering that such kind of education for disabled at secondary schools is very new all around the world. One of the survey takers was lucky to have so long experience in distance education. Her practice can be regarded as a senior of all the ones who took distance education and her thoughts can be considered sufficient towards future progress in this newly establish kind of education. Additionally, we have new comers as well, whose education is already about 4 months. It is the shortest period of distance education in our survey. It can of course be accepted positively from the perspective that distance education continues. But majority of the correspondents which make 38 from 70 are already benefitting from it for 3 years.

Evaluation of the distance education plays an important role in its future progress. The main aim of feedback from correspondents serve for the improvement of the quality as well as the technology of the learning process. Of course, there are different ways of implementing innovations to education but the one of the best ways of assessment is to get feedback from their users. Because there is a unique part of distance education which is the separation of teachers from students. Only virtual methodology can play a role of technique between them. Considering all mentioned issues assessment of the distance education gives a chance to have online and at some cases direct feedback from students about not only teaching materials but also their future expectations. In this regard question “How do you assess your distance education from 1 to 5?” plays an important role. All of correspondents answered this question. No one evaluated below 3 which I guess gives us a small sign of improvement during those years. Vast majority, 71.6% ranks their education to excellent which is 5 while 17 from 74 considers it a bit lower than excellent. Only 4 of the survey takers think that their education is about average. Even if the results of this question is good enough there are still the ones who consider their education normal and hope for better educational experience.

Overall feedback from the survey taken from the students who practice distance education can be useful to provide valuable information, sometimes change the courses taught during distance education, or even add

some more familiarization courses at the beginning. It can also be a tool for making some revisions to already implemented materials and methodology techniques. Additionally, such feedbacks can add a supplement to already used methods and clarify a problem. Information gained during surveys can also prove for a great value when new strategies are planned to new courses (Woodley, Alan, and Adrian Kirkwood, 1988).

Distance education for disabled people does not only play a role of education but also as a rehabilitation field, sort of modern and exciting training and preparation method. Internet in this perspective play extremely important role both as a flexible and efficient way of providing courses, facilities and programs for secondary school children with disabilities. Internet is a medium for delivering outputs of ordinary education to people who can only access it with the help of distance education. Internet is not just to delivery daily course programs it can also be used for storing books and any kind of data and also be very useful to bring life time communication. It opens unlimited opportunities to the distance education learners without going to school or anywhere else. Internet services is both useful for school administrators and children with disabled abilities. Especially when distance education is also considered as a tool for rehabilitation. It also facilitates the meeting of students with their educators (Burgstahler, 1999). Luckily in our survey we got positive feedback from our correspondents. Nearly all of survey takers, 72 from 74 which makes 97.3% have access to internet. Just two children with disabled abilities have a lack of internet access. Internet provides all users an access to fully benefit from distance education. It is the best and efficient tool to deliver flexible and powerful technology to its users. It will help people those people who cannot join traditional way of education and can only benefit and improve their professional abilities and have communication with all other children who take distance education for disabled children and enhance their collaborative efforts (Burgstahler, 1999). It is hard to imagine contemporary electronic distance education without governments support especially when people with disabilities are benefitting from it. The most basic part of such support is internet access. Considering the importance of internet in distance education the primary objective of government is to provide stable and at least medium quality web access which will give users to be able to use it at any possible time for comprehensiveness of their activities. According the survey results 55 from 74 respondents could get internet sponsored by government. But 25.7% of children still cover their internet expenses by themselves in order to lose their chances for better distance education. Discussing internet access to database for distance education it

is important to look through basic computer knowledge as well. Being familiar with computer systems enables the ability to fully benefit not only from distance education but also to use technology efficiently. It can also be an ability regarded to the ones confidence level while using various programs and papers in order to enhance and improve their knowledge associated with distance education. Even to be able to get distance education user needs abilities to use programs such as Microsoft Office, Internet Explorer for basic level in order to do simple daily assignments (LaPlant, 2005). Acknowledging the importance of the basic computer skills and its effect in the success of the learners we tried to cover it during our survey. 36 correspondents from 74 had such skills in order to begin distance education. Half of the survey takers, 50.7% did not have any idea about the use of computer and its benefits. As we saw half of the survey takers having lack of initial computer knowledge we broadened our view on this issue and tried to know if there was any kind of support from government in this topic. Only 39 correspondents were supplied by government with basic computer trainings. While 47.3% had to struggle by their own in order to get familiarized with such a new system of education. Such results give us to know that many users are challenged in the beginning of their education which negatively affects their progress. Developmental trainings toward basic computer knowledge significantly affect overall progress of every student. Considering that all the users are with limited physical abilities, government should work on future the increase of basic computer trainings. This will give confidence and better feeling for students to get prepared and be successful in their classes. Even if results of governments support on basic computer knowledge was not as satisfactory as it supposed to be, the vast majority of survey takers responded “satisfied” to the question about the quality of the distance education that is provided by government to them. Only one of the correspondents from 74 was not satisfied and considered it as an “average”, hoping to get better and improved one in the future. But overall the satisfaction of nearly all the survey takers once more shows the increasing need to continue and enhance this kind of modern type of education.

Another important point during distance education is social interaction and it is not only about social life of students but also mutual relations between students and their tutors through events held at school or with the teaching personnel. Even if the progress in information technology has made it possible to share and store database independent of time and place, social life is an inevitable part of modern life (Marie Mörnda and Péter Révay, 2005). But the importance of social life is already discussed, and it is positive impact is already proven

for a success in learning process in Sweden (CLARK, 2001). Considering the importance of the social life authors examined the social events organized by school administrators during the survey. The results were average but gives promise for a better future. 46 from 74 correspondents have already taken part in such social events organized by school. 37.8% still struggles in order to have a chance to integrate to a social life. This shows that a proper environment for disabled children's education require to improve tools for social integration of those students. An integration can also consist of demands which acquired from feedback of those disabled students and also collaboration from school administrators. Another important part of social life is how frequent are those disabled learners attracted to such events. 43 survey takers from 46 who were engaged to social events attend them sometimes which possibly is that it does not happen more than twice a year. 27 persons responded that they have never attended any social events organized by school. Only 5.4% from all 74 survey takers think that they participate frequently in social events. Estrangement of children who benefit from the flexibility of this kind of education because of their disabilities can lead to the lack of interaction to social life which can also be considered as a disability. Social life is an important part of rehabilitation process to the people with disabled abilities. In our case this part of their life needs to be improved. As a continuation of this question we asked the survey takers' opinion if they consider distance education estranges them from social life. Only 6 from 74 respondents think that distance education is an issue for their distance education. According to their explanation distance education partially separates their social life from education. One of the correspondents gave a recommendation to frequent meetings of all children who take distance education in order not to totally lose social life with school mates. This will also enable them to share knowledge and burden of their life with each other and it will also speed up the integration process. Another 8 survey takers prefer to be silent without any idea to respond to this question. Overall majority, 81.1% do not consider distance education as a threat to social life. Some even think that distance education opened a new page for their interaction to social life and they can easily refresh their knowledge and find all information that they need for their life. One of the respondent states that with the help of distance education she was able to find new friends. The conclusion of children's statements was that, it is just a modern way of education. When lessons end we can go back to our daily life. Considering all answers social life is an important part of a human

kind. Especially when we examine thoughts of disabled children we must think of their social interaction. In this occasion government must play key role to ensure periodical integration of disabled children to social life.

Concluding our questionnaire, the authors wanted to know if survey takers are eager to continue their distance education. Thoughts of survey takers were very different. Some of them proposed with recommendations to be implemented in the future. Majority of them asked to increase the number of lessons and modernize the methodology of education. The vast majority of survey takers were struggling with low quality internet access which slowed down their education. Another interesting proposal was the integration of a psychologist to the education year in order to work with the sensitive issues of disabled children. Another group of answers came with a request to have their own special school where all classmates can meet and share thoughts. One of the most sensitive feedback was to have at least to have a class once a month where we will meet our classmates and get in touch with our teachers in real time. This comment shows a clear sign of social isolation of disabled schoolchildren. Even if they are enjoying modern way of education with the help of modern technology, real time education and social interaction is missing from their lives. It is a serious issue that needs to be analyzed.

Overall 70 correspondents from 85 were keen to go further with their distance education. Majority of them were satisfied with this kind of new way of being educated. While others consider as the only way how they can reach education. Some even considered it as a tool for a better motivation to future.

During our research we have discovered that surveys and interviews provide significantly important information to enhance distance education. It brings communication between government and children. Their feedback also fastens the support from government. This modern learning environment needs to be studied deeply in order get efficient results both for students and their respective tutors. Social interaction can also be focused by student’s feedback and mutual collaboration. Through responses collected during the research we can create a clear picture of current situation in distance education and possibly make a comprehensive analysis for the future.

Recommendations and conclusion

As the paper analyzed and put it clearly that like any other educational program, this kind of programs for children with special needs do pay off. They are the most needed programs in any time and any period for all countries. However, the limitation in varieties of program types for children with special needs makes, or should make us to stress on this issue and let the way for those children show brighter and green light. As the number of such children who do get distance education is very low, first of all expansion and reach of this opportunity to all such students should be provided gradually. It is normal that some parents and some pupils choose another way of getting education, however in oder them to be able to choose they should be given options first, and the options should be in full provision. The project has financial savings as well. This should be the greatest motivation for the decision-making bodies.

Parents and society are the second part of the chain here even if the project is prioritized. One of the first tasks to be completeed should be enlightnment and infomation of the society, espeecially parents of children with special needs and their families. It should be designed in a way that they see their children, their family member, and a member of their society as real part of it and should be desiring to support him. Media, newspapers, informative videos, social media can play a vital role in this regarad.

The teachers who teach distance education should be the strongest part in this chain. A secondary school teacher might find it difficult or strange to teach through an online platform from distance. Each of them can be involved in trainings on usage of ICT and special trainings and workshops on distance education. In this regard Bureau on ICT for Education of the Ministry of Education may wither directy or indirectly organize such trainings. It can be by the bureau herself, or by a third arty provider in cooperation with the bureau. Taking into consideration that we expect widely implementation of the project, more teachers should be involved in the process. A great motivation for teachers may be financial motivation – increase in thier salary. As the number of applicant teachers may be high in this case, an examination can be held and the successful teachers with relevant teaching experience and ICT knowledge may be invited to cooperate. Trainings for the children also would help them to intgrate faser to the system. In later stages observation commitees may be created to investigate the situation and improvements in the field. This would make tracking andmaking improvements a lot easier.

One other gap in the roject so far is the period of provision of cmputers to those students. Untill now they are taken back once the student is graduated. However financial situation of families should be taken into account in such decsions. For some families whose socio-economic status is not low computer and other resources might not be a problem, in the other hand the families with low socio-economic income might be not able to purchase one afer the project is done with them. This might leave the student in undesired situation, take away his/her access to the outer world from his window. So it would be better for low-income families children if such hardware remained in their possession after graduation as well.

Looking through the practice of successful countries is another way to make fast changes and improvemets to the project. Israel has been successful in most of its education related projecs and is well-known throughout the world. They have even special colleages where 4 year study programs are offered in the field of 'Teaching to children with special needs'. Investigating successful countries and applying their experience would do much favor.

Some scholars and some policy makers argued that distance education makes the children away from the society. You already saw the responses to this question in the survey in analysis part of this paper. As an addition to their responses the role of disance education as a path to inclusive and other types of 'in class' education should be investigated. Sometimes such children are not really motivated to get education. However as they get it through distance education this makes them excited, more interested and motivated. This way, they end up choosing either inclusive or other such types of in-class education.

During our research we have discovered that surveys and interviews provide significantly important information to enhance distance education. It brings communication between government and children. Their feedback also fastens the support from government. This modern learning environment needs to be studied deeply in order get efficient results both for students and their respective tutors. Social interaction can also be focused by student's feedback and mutual collaboration. Through responses collected during the research we can create a clear picture of current situation in distance education and possibly make a comprehensive analysis for the future.

APPENDIX 1

RESPONDENTS CHARACTERISTICS

Variables	*Freq.*	*Mean*	*Median*	*SD*	*Range*
		%			
Sex					
Male	54				
Female	20				
Income					
Low	19				
Comfortable	2				
Normal	53				
Your classes					
Primary School	19				
Secondary School	2				
High School	53				

UNIVARIATE ANALYSIS

INDEPENDENT VARIABLES (IV)

Variables	*Freq.*	*Mean*	*Median*	*SD*	*Range*
		%			
Evaluate quality of distance education					
Perfect	56				

Good	14
Average	4

Who supplied connection for internet?

Myself	19
Ministry of Education	55

Do you have basic computer skills before program?

Yes	36
No	37

Did you get tranining before program?

Yes	39
No	35

Do you attend to social events in school?

Yes	46
No	28

DEPENDENT VARIABLES (DV)

Variables	*Freq.*	*Percentage*
Do you think distance education estrange you from society?		
Yes	5	5.88%
Don`t know	8	9.41%
No	49	85%
Do you want to pursue distance education in future?		
Yes	70	82.3%
No	4	4.70%

Appendix 2 (survey questions)

1. Your name?

2. Gender?

   ○ Female ○ Male

3. Your class?

   ○ Primary secondary education (1-4)

   ○ Secondary education (5-8)

   ○ Full secondary education (9-11)

4. Your Social Economic Status?

   ○ Good

   ○ Average

○ Low

5. How many years are you engaged to distance education?

6. Evaluate your distance education from 1 to 5?

1 2 3 4 5

7. Do you have internet access at home?

○ Yes ○ No

8. If yes who provided internet access?

○ Ministry of Education

○ Myself

9. Did you have any basic computer knowledge prior to distance education?

○ Yes ○ No

10. Were you provided any basic computer knowledge?

○ Yes ○ No

11. How much are you satisfied with your distance education?

○ Satisfied ○ Not satisfied

12. Which obstacles did you face during your distance education?

13. What can you recommend for the improvement of the distance education in Azerbaijan?

14. Do you participate in social events organized by school administration?

○ Yes ○ No

15. If yes, what was the frequency of your participation?

○ Often

○ Sometimes

○ Never

16. Do you think that distance education estranges you from social life?

(***Please explain your answer***)

○ Yes ○ No

17. Do you think to continue distance education in the future?

(***Please explain your answer***)

○ Yes ○ No

Bibliography

(n.d.).

Anderson, T. (2001). The Hidden Curriculum in Distance Education: An Updated View. *Change*, 30.

Buachalla, S. Ó. (1989). Distance Education as an Element of Policy. *European Journal of Education*, 73.

Burgstahler, S. (1999). *Disabilities, Opportunities, Internetworking, and Technology*. Retrieved from University of Washington: https://www.washington.edu/doit/distance-learning-and-information-highway

Campbell, P. B., & Storo, J. (1996). Reducing the Distance: Equity Issues in Distance Learning in Public Education. *Journal of Science Education and Technology*, Springer.

CLARK, J. (2001). Stimulating collaboration and discussion in online learning. *Internet and Higher Education, 4*, 119-124.

Convention on the Rights of the Child – Excerpts. (1989). Retrieved from https://www.humanium.org/en/convention/excerpts/

Crooks, S. (1983). Distance Education and the Developing World. *European Journal of Education*, 332.

Eastmond, D. (2000). Realizing the Promise of Distance Education in Low Technology Countries. *Educational Technology Research and Development*, 105.

Edge, D., & John, L. (2006). Distance Education: Expanding Learning Opportunities. *Distance Education: Expanding Learning Opportunities*, 524.

Education, M. o. (1993a). Milli Egitim Bakanlzgi Film Radyo Televizyonla Egitim Bakanligi Girev ve Teskilatlanma Yonergesi. Ankara, Turkey: FRTEB Yayini.

Elkind, D. (1998). Children with Special Needs: A Postmodern Perspective. *The Journal of Education*, 1-16.

Faibisoff, Sylvia; Deborah, Willis. (1987). Distance Education: Definition and Overview. *Journal of Education for Library and Information Science, Vol. 27, No. 4*, 223-232.

Frieden, S. (1999). Support Services for Distance Education. *Learning by Doing"State of Distance Education*, 48-54.

Gagne, R. (1965). The Conditions of Learning (New. 363.

Guri-Rosenblit, S. (2005). 'Distance Education' and 'E-Learning': Not the Same Thing. *Higher Education*, 469.

Holmberg, B. (1980). Aspects of Distance Education. *Comparative Education*, 107.

Ismail Sahin and Mack Shelley. (2008). Considering Students' Perceptions: The Distance Education Student Satisfaction Model. *Journal of Educational Technology & Society, Vol. 11, No. 3*, 216-223.

Jason, O. (1984). Why Distance Education? *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 23.

Jones, P., Packham, G., Miller, C., & Jones, A. (2004). An initial evaluation of student withdrawals within an e-learning, Wales. *Electronic Journal on e-Learning, 2 (1)*, 113-120.

Keegan, D., Sewart, D., Keegan, D., and Holmberg, B. (1983). On Defining Distance Education. *Distance Education: International Perspectives*, 9.

LaPlant, K. (2005). *Why Computer Skills Are Important in Achieving Academic Success and Improving Retention*. Retrieved from Computer Skills Placement: www.csplacement.com/downloads/WhyComputerSkillsareImportant.pdf

Lee, M. E. (1999). Distance Learning as “Learning by Doing”. *Journal of Educational Technology & Society*, 42.

Ljosa, E. (1975). The System of Distance Education. Papers to the ICCE International. *International Council on Correspondence*.

Marie Mörnda and Péter Révay. (2005). *DISTANCE EDUCATION - SOCIAL INTERACTION IN A LEARNING ENVIRONMENT.* Västerås: Mälardalen University.

Məsafədən məktəb. (2017). *Layihələr*. Retrieved from http://mesafedenmekteb.edu.az/az/layiheler.html

Michael Young, Hilary Perraton, Janet Jenkins, and Tony Dodds. (1980). Distance Teaching for the Third World. *Alternative Routes to Formal Education*.

Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of Population of the Republic of Azerbaijan. (2011). Baku: MSPRA.

Mitchell, T. J. F., Chen, S. Y., & Macredie, R. D. (2005). The relationship between web enjoyment and student. *Learning, Media and Technology 30 (1)*, 27-40.

Murphy, P. (1993). Costs of an Alternative Form of Second-Level Education in Malawi. *Comparative Education Review, Vol. 37, No. 2* , 107-122.

Ohler, J. (1984). Why Distance Education? *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 23.

Ohler, J. (1991). Why Distance Education? *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, Vol. 514,Electronic Links for Learning*, 22-34.

Olcott Jr., D. J. (1996). ligning Distance Education Practice and Academic Policy: A Framework for Institutional Change. *Continuing Higher Education Review*, 27-41.

Perraton H, .. (1988). A theory for distance education. *Distance education: International perspectives*, 34-45.

Rubiales D, S. M. (1998). Distance Learning. *Political Science and Politics*, 31-32.

Sahin, I., & Mack, S. (2008). Considering Students' Perceptions: The Distance Education Student Satisfaction Model. *Journal of Educational Technology & Society*, 220.

Sharg journal. (2005). Retrieved from http://www.sherg.az/pre.php?id=46472

Simone, C. D. (2006). Preparing Our Teachers for Distance Education. *College Teaching*, 183.

Simonson, M., Michael, A., Sharon, S., & Susan, Z. (2000). *Teaching and Learning at a Distance.* London: Pearson.

Stella, A., & Gnanam. (2004). Quality Assurance in Distance Education: The Challenges to be Addressed. *Higher Education*, 145.

Sylvia G. Faibisoff and Deborah J. Willis. (n.d.). Distance Education: Definition and Overview.

Uluğ, F. (1994). Distance Education in Turkish Educational System. *Educational Technology Research and Development, Vol. 42, No. 4*, 116-119.

UNICEF . (2017). *Study on Educational Provision for Children with Disabilities in Azerbaijan.* Baku: UNICEF.

UNICEF. (2017). *Children by numbers.* Baku: UNICEF.

Urtel, M. (2008). Assessing academic performance between traditional and distance education course formats. *Journal of Educational Technology & Society*, 322.

Woodley, Alan, and Adrian Kirkwood. (1988). "Evaluation in Distance Learning.". *Commonwealth Co-operation in Open Learning: Background Papers, London: Commonwealth Secretariat,*, 291-298.

Zigerell, J. (1984). Distance Education: An Information Age Approach to Adult Education. *National Center for Research in Vocational Education*, 2.