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Moving to Inclusive Education for Students with Disabilities in Jordan: Rhetoric, Practice and Prospects

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ABSTRACT

This paper was provided context for understanding the inclusive education and its issues related by reviewing of the legal framework for special education and current situation and practice. Confusions at the levels of inclusion legislations and practice are deeply discussed. The paper was explored the main challenges involved in inclusive education for students with and disabilities that they could not receive their education sufficiently. An effective implementation of the inclusion law compromised their basic learning facilities such as finance, equipment and materials, human resources (trained teachers) as well as attitudes. This study was an attempt to discuss the challenges in implementing this law effectively and the inadequacy of current education system for these students with disabilities. This paper was organized based on secondary data gathered from relevant reports, studies, researches and empirical understanding of this author.

Keywords

Disabled students, inclusive education, resource room, Jordan

1. INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education has recently become a controversial debated topic in education in the world. With the advent of Public Law 94-142 (The Education for All Handicapped Children Act) in 1975, the American law endorsed the educational principles of all children with disabilities; they have the right to an education in the least restrictive environment with students who are not disabled. Today, inclusion also is a worldwide trend that has been growing in popularity during the last three decades [1]. For example, Several developing countries have now formulated policies that support the broader principles of an inclusive philosophy to educate students with and without disabilities together in the public schools [2],[3]. Jordan is committed to enhancing access to equal education to all her citizens, and inclusive education is seen to be the most effective approach in reaching this target [4].

This paper was aimed to contribute to the literature on the Jordanian education system and inclusive/special education field in Jordan by mapping what is known about inclusive education program, including educational policies and laws that have allowed students to have a free appropriate education in the least restrictive environment, and current practices



in terms of how the Jordanian educational system caters for disabled students in light education/inclusion for all. Opportunities and challenges of providing inclusion services in the kingdom are discussed, by this paper.

2. SPECALEDUCATION

It is difficult to estimate the real number in each of the usual special needs categories in Jordan [5]. In 2004, the figures in Department of Statistics indicate that the percentage of people with disabilities is 1.23 8-10 percent of the population, the Higher Council for Affairs of Persons with Disabilities (HCDPD) says that the percentage is 2% of the Jordanian community [6]. According to Alodat and collehues [6], the reasons of these the discrepancy can attribute to the lack of agreement on classifications and definitions of specific categories of disability, the high cost of conducting surveys, masking some of the disabilities because of community perception (fear the stigma and to avoid the feeling of dishonor), and there is no central data collection agency [4].

2.1 Overview of the Development of Special Education

Children with disabilities in Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan did not obtain any type of special education services prior to 1964. The parents of children with disabling conditions were responsible for providing any assistance to their children. Special education services in the kingdom began to emerge in 1964 when the Episcopal Church in the Middle East established the Holy land Institute for the students with Deaf. In the late 1970s, the Ministry of Social Affairs, which called today Ministry of Social Development (MoSD), established the Special Education Directorate to provide education and rehabilitation services for students with disabilities by various sectors in society [7].

The early movement to establish special education services led to increases in these services by establishing regulations, such the first Law for the Welfare of Handicapped Persons in 1993, that guarantee rights for these children with disabilities, increasing the quality of special education services. In 1993, the National Council for the Handicapped was formed to coordinate and promote policies and programs of governmental and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) pertinent to special education and rehabilitation [7],[8].

2.2 The National Educational Laws for Individuals with Disabilities

There was no legal obligation to support the disabled individuals needs in Jordan when the issuance of regular educational laws began. The special education programs for these disabilities was organized and supported by the regular education guidelines. In 1964, Legislation of Disability passed known as Law No. (16), as the first legislation for people with disabilities in the kingdom. The Legislation includes some important provisions, such as item (3/7) of Chapter II, that guarantee disabled individuals rights equal to those of other persons in society. It requires that public agencies must provide equal educational opportunities and rehabilitation services for these disabled students within the limits of their potential [6].

In the beginning 1990s, the Jordan's law has dramatically been undergone to substantial changes in terms of the accommodation and education for disabled students. The Jordanian education policies emphasizes that these students should have the right to an education in regular schools. In 1993, the first Law for the Welfare of Disabled People (WoDP) (No. 12/1993) in Jordan was issued to recognize in their rights, which it's stipulated that equal care, health, work education is a right for people with disabilities each according to his/her own abilities [9],[7]. It also was aimed to organize and expand umbrella the educational services, and moving to a more generic educational system that meet the students' educational needs.

In order to create the best educational services and environments for these disabled students, the previous law (No. 12/1993) replaced by a new law that it's called the Law on the Rights of Disabled People (RoDP) (No. 31/2007) in 2007. The new law seeks to ensure that theses disabled students have every opportunity to educate to inclusive education in the Jordanian schools and universities [10],[9]. This law directed the MoE and MoHE to adopt inclusive education programs for all students including disabilities and establishing these programs within the national educational system. It was also



mandated that all educational equipment and arrangements required by students in these educational institutions should be inclusive [4]. By this Law, the Jordanian education system has tried to adopt the American education policy, No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in 2002, to provide the best educational opportunities for the all Jordanian disabled children in the least restrictive environment [10].

Under those circumstances, the Higher Council for the Affairs of Persons with Disabilities took the initiative to put the provisions of the law into practical procedures. The HCAPD's initiative was aimed to discuss the articles of the convention through a group of experts to present applicable strategies in Jordan's context [9]. They were developed strategy, starting from 2010, that aimed at directing the all disabled individuals towards appropriate education through an inclusive learning environment in all provinces equally by Jordan's Ministry of Education, which was reflected the local attention to the quality of services and programs of these students.

2.3 Special Education Providers in Jordan

There are several formal educational institutions responsible for providing educational services to students with disabilities in the kingdom's schools. According to Alodat, Almakani and Zumberg [6], for *students* who are *under the age* of 18 year with disabilities, the responsibility rests on the Ministry of Education (MoE), Ministry of Social Development (MoSD), and the Higher Council for Affairs of Persons with Disabilities (HCAPD). For students over the age of 18 year with disabilities, the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) oversee educational services for students with special educational needs in colleges and universities.

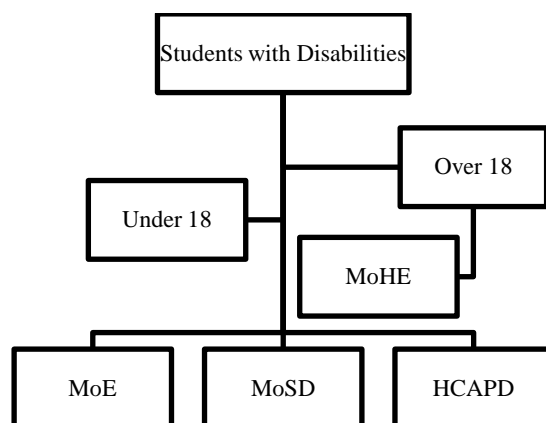


Fig. 1: institutions responsible for providing educational services to disabled students in Jordan by [6]

2.4 Services Provided to Individuals with Disabilities

The governmental educational institutions are freely provided the educational and remedial services of these learners to become effective members in the social and economic activities in their communities. Services at these institutions varied according to type of disability, and the mix of facilities, which ranged from shelter to provision of, education, healthcare, play activities, physiotherapy, family counseling, skill training, physical aids and referral. Usually, these disabled students have been received their education individually by special centers or in public schools[4]. Human resources and equipment in the centers were often insufficient [11].

3. INCLUSIVE EDUCATION PROGRAM

Globally, inclusive education is used as a broader concept that relates many groups of children and youth who are excluded from school and society [12]. Inclusive education as concept refer to coordinate the services of all the students including disabilities to educate them in same the general classrooms by general and special education teachers, with



providing all equipment and materials necessary to meet their needs [13]. The inclusion of the disabled students considers as the educational alternative, which can achieve both their academic and social needs. This concept was applied in Western countries in the 1980s, and it has become a matter for the international agenda [14].

3.1 Inclusive Education Definition in National Framework

Despite the concept of inclusive education is highly received by Jordanian laws such as of 2007 and is considered an appropriate instructional model for students with special educational needs within the regular classrooms, “the laws did not specifically define the concept of IE, but it implicitly indicated this concept in some articles by mentioning the right of education for all people” [6]. However, the Jordanian law – 2007 indicates of the term of inclusive education as an independent concept. This law, in some its articles as (H/3), articulates that all students in a school, regardless of their strengths or weaknesses in any area have the right to receive their education and higher education with their counterparts, and it stipulates that they also have the equal opportunities, as their peers, in terms of program planning, application, and follow-up based on the principle of inclusive education for all [6],[9].

3.2 Current Practice of Inclusive Education

The Jordanian education system has attempted in some ways to adopt the American education policy of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in order to develop full-inclusion. The complicated NCLB Act, legislated on January 8, 2002, was generally targeted to create the best educational opportunities for all United States children, including those with disabilities in order to ensure that all children have every opportunity to succeed while having a decent life with opportunities to work within their society [4]. Jordan, as mentioned above, enacted similar legislation in 2007 – the Law for the Rights of People with Disabilities (LRPD), for this purpose.

In order to implement this law, the MoE has been trying to implement the law through providing the educational services for these disabled students to integrate them gradually in the Jordan’s schools. These services have been presented by special settings called resource rooms into the public schools for these students [15]. These resource rooms are seen as providing inclusion services since they have been established in the general education settings [9].

Indeed, the only category that receives this kind of service are students with learning disabilities (LD), other disabilities have not received similar education yet [6]. There are 831-resource rooms supporting 16, 803 students with LD in 2012 [4]. The special education services in these rooms are provided by specialized teachers in special education field. These teacher receives the students referring to them by a general classroom teacher. They conduct the different assessments to determine the kind of disability or learn barrier and its degree for each student [11]. They then develop an IEP student, determining how to develop the knowledge and mental skills, which in turn affect the academic and social subjects [15].

Accordingly, these students are separated from regular classes and sent to the resource rooms to receive their educational services [9]. A study done by [6] indicates there are no other category of special education receiving inclusive services in the Jordanian regular schools except few individual attempts of some schools, such as the experiment of Abdul Hameed Sharaf secondary school with some students with mental disabilities and visual impairment, and the experiment of the MOE’s schools with hearing disabilities in Amman and Irbid.

There are other educational services such as schools and centers for disabled students that are not completely supervised by the MoE [6],[5]. The MOE’s mission is limited to the schools affiliated with it, but other institutions that provide remedial and educational services are belonging to but multiple agencies supervising them. These agencies include the MoSD and HCDPD, in addition to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) for Palestine Refugees in the Near East run about 3% of the regular schools in the kingdom [6].

The Ministry of Higher Education (MHE) has been assumed full responsibility in providing the stubble services, and developing the universal programs by its colleges and universities for students with disabilities. However, these universities only practice on the grounded the inclusive services with individuals with disabilities, according to their abilities, with their counterparts [6]. A study conducted by [16] has been confirmed such services provided in Jordanian universities.



In summary, the idea of the inclusive education still is in an embryonic stage in Jordan context, where many disabled students are educated in the segregated settings, and the intervention patterns for these students also are insufficient to meet their different needs, both academically and socially. Regular schools (e.g., resource rooms or special class), special day centers, and residential schools remain the most common settings used as the educational alternatives to meet their education needs.

3.3 Confusions about Inclusion Policy and Practice in Jordan

The previous literature has highlighted that there are some confusions about policy and current practices in terms of inclusive/special education services for disabled students. These confusions are included:

3.3.1 Inclusive Education Definition

There is no specifically definition in the Jordanian law regarding to concept of the inclusive education of all students including disabilities [6]. While the effective implementation of inclusion needed to clearly formulate a specific definition to determine the appropriate educational intervention and support designed to address disabled student needs and their peers [17].

The literature was generally mentioned that there is some confusion about what is meant by inclusive education definition and its use is seriously problematic. This term is utilized in different ways, for instance, it describes as “inclusive schools” or “inclusive society” [18]. Some studies refer to the inclusion as a model to increasing the numbers of disabled students in regular schools with maintaining special education schools or centers for remaining cases from these students. Other studies, in contrast, use this term to refer to education of all disabled students with their peers within inclusive classrooms regardless their problem with only temporary withdrawal from this situation envisaged [19].

3.3.2 Legislation and policy

The inclusive education system needs to a group of the necessary instructional reforms including enacting new legislations. Such these reforms will help in teacher education development for inclusion, and ensure the necessary arrangements and equipment for the correct implementation of inclusive education process. However, recent government legislations related to education have focused on ensuring that all Jordanian schools are inclusive for all students including disabilities [9]. These legislations did not determine the role the special schools or centers if will continue to exist or what their role will be after inclusion. It therefore appears to be supporting a continuum of provision for disabled students but exactly what this includes is not made clear. There has also been contrast between rhetoric and reality regarding the practice of inclusion in the kingdom. There has been an adopted policy of inclusion practices since 2007 but, given the challenges outlined above, it is not surprising that the practical practice of education for disabled students and special educational needs in integrated schools varies widely between schools in terms of equipment, materials and services provided.

Because the Jordanian schooling system has no specific legislation on provision for disabled children in the regular schools and thus no legal education guidance to educate these students, the lack of a coherent policy on inclusive education settings for these disabled students leaves schools to develop their educational practices based on their interpretation of the non-legal guidance. However, such these learners need to special accommodation and support, which should be insured by specific policies and implemented.

3.3.3 Teacher Preparation

For Jordanian schools that do have coordinators or teachers to provide special education services, there is no requirement for them to have qualifications on inclusive education or to receive relevant training once they are assigned this a new role, as well as limited in-service training on special educational needs available to these teachers [9],[4]. There also is no requirement for teacher education institutions to include relevant training on teaching all students in regular classes regardless their needs [9]. This is in contrast to US or UK where relevant training is compulsory for these teachers at most their universities.



Since beginning 1990s, as kind of the inclusive services of LD and other disabilities, they are being taught in the resource rooms or special classes into the general education schools. This change in the education system is happening without developing the teacher education programs of preparing and educating educators to interact and deal with these students needs in the schools. Referring and assessing, planning and delivery of educational interventions and programs of student with disabilities are needed to experienced and skilled teachers. Unfortunately, the pre and in service teachers in Jordan are not able to fulfill these work requirements in the inclusive education environment [10].

3.3.4 *Special Setting Provision*

The special setting provision (presented by resources room or special class in public schools) a model of inclusion some disabled students, such as learning disabilities and hearing impairment in Jordan, but there are many varied conditions regarding this model that should be considered. They are included: First, the complexity and diversity of disabled student's needs; second, the training of general and special education teachers [10],[9]; thirdly, the collaboration between different educational administrations, parental involvement, and main community members; finally, the funding of mainstream programs and training staff, where a few students can be accepted into these settings [9]. However, The Jordanian education system should provide appropriate educational opportunities and services for every disabled student to maximize development potential of these learners.

3.3.5 *Guideline*

Despite the consensus on the right of the disabled students to be included in inclusive classrooms, practical responses on how to create and implement such inclusion policies are still vague in the Jordanian context. There is no guidance on what form it should take to this process, nor are there suggestions or support models on the roles and responsibilities of the educational process members (i.e., educational authorities, schools, teachers and society) of implementing this provision [9],[6].

Guidelines for many disabled students such as learning disabilities and hearing impairment issues are provided by the ministry of education, but what schools provide for these students varies widely between these schools in terms of equipment and materials and is usually inadequate. This is in contrast with the requirements specified in international legislations, such as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in the US [19]. This guideline for the procedures that should be followed and the equipment and materials that should be provided for disabled students and their parents. According to Liu [20], the policy makers needed to guidance on how to support and implement educational rights for disabled children, particularly in screening and evaluation, training of teachers, resource management, and a valid evaluation mechanism. However, in developed countries, Farrell [21] reported that special education interventions of disabled students have been supported and provided by medical, psychological and several other treatment models. These practices have involved a wide range of scientific contributions by related research and methods informing evidence based practice by professionals.

3.4 Challenges and Limitations for Inclusive Education System

The most important challenges facing an inclusive education system are included, as follows:

3.4.1 *Finance*

The lack of finance, as previously mentioned, is a key concern to implement the disabled student programs, including inclusive education in Jordan that is a poor in natural resources [6],[22],[9], impacting on an education and bringing an equipment necessary to improve the special education services, and the program development like inclusion.

3.4.2 *Physical Facilities*

Another limitation to implement an inclusive education is a shortage of the infrastructures and physical facilities [22], [4], such as a weakness in the schooling infrastructures, lack of resource rooms and the charter schooling buildings are still existing, especially in rural and remote areas.

3.4.3 *Inclusive Training*



The lacking of the qualified teachers who can provide inclusive/special education services in regular classrooms, which are the greatest challenge to implement inclusion [4]. A study done by [9] has been confirmed such training did not fond in Jordanian teacher educational inductions.

3.4.4 Attitudes

Many teachers and parents hold negative attitudes about an inclusive education system of disabled students in Jordan [23]. These attitudes could be resulted from the disadvantages of process, Al-Khateeb [24] reported that inclusion of students with disabilities is more complex than it might appear to general education systems. A study conducted by [25] has revealed that there is negative attitudes among public education teachers towards implementing of inclusion program in Jordan.

4. FUTURE SUGGESTIONS

There are several important recommendations and strategies about the issues related to developing inclusive education settings in the Jordanian context. The most important factors that needed to address in this discussion are included:

- Adopting a new definition of the concept of inclusive education due to there is uncertainty about what is meant by the inclusive education term in the Jordanian educational environment. Policy makers in Jordan need to be very clear about how they define this term “inclusive education” to plan and ensure successful implementation of it. They should clearly formulate a new definition for inclusion these students. The definition should be facilitated and the support for these students in the inclusive classes and the development to the idea of the inclusion into practices should be provided based on this new definition.
- It is important for the Jordanian educational system to attempt to adopt model for inclusive schools used in western countries such as US, taking into account the existing social, economic and political differences in these developed countries, in addition, it is necessary to consider what stage current education system and what resources (human and material) are available should be also considered to implement a more balanced model or plane of inclusion that is suitable education system in the Kingdom.
- Inclusive education as a global trend need from Jordan’s officials issued the new policies that ensure the rights all parties of the education process, including students, educators, and parents. These legislations should stipulate in integrating of students with mild disabilities like learning disabilities, hearing and visually impairments gradually in public classrooms, both primary and secondary phase with activating the role of specialist in creating the appropriate environment.
- Developing of teachers’ performance and skills by give them training courses about how to deal with all students and how to organize of education environment and to use co-teaching strategies in inclusive education. Develop the plans and programs that are compatible with the abilities of disabled students, allow them to participate with other peers, the involvement of students in all school activities and trips, and reward them in the school celebrations.
- Initializing and developing of current infrastructures and buildings with all equipment and materials necessary to implement the inclusion. This can be achieved by activating role the private institutions and NGOs through share in the discussion-making to create a financial support and improve the schooling services; it also could substantive resources of this system.
- There is a strong need for all relevant educational parties, including government, private sector, and Non-Governmental Organization to cooperation and coordination their efforts together; to enforce implementation of these legislations; to engage the parents and community and raise awareness of disability and their rights.



5. CONCLUSION

Although inclusive education approach has been rapidly gaining acceptance in the Jordanian education circles, government texts, and mass media, there is absence of common understanding of the implication of the concept, as neither the government nor educators have been able to engage critically with the meanings and relevance of the concept within the local context, in addition to there are no clear mechanism in the previously legal articles to pursue this application. Empirical research in this area has been a rare and the small amount of existing published literature review extremely consists of personal views [9],[24],[6]. The limited studies that is available in Kingdome has mostly concentrated on the integration of students with specific types of disabilities. Researchers [10],[26],[27],[25] investigated attitudes of Jordanian teachers toward inclusive education classrooms and found that teachers held non-consistent attitudes toward inclusion. In addition, some of these studies also indicate a gap between recommended practice and the reality of application of inclusive education policy. However, most research has focused on teachers' attitudes and has ignored other critical stakeholders' involvement in the process, such as students with disabilities and their non-disabled counterparts. There is currently a growing trend to take steps forward in relation to HCAPD's strategy (2010 to 2015 strategy) to integrate these students in regular classrooms, especially moderate to mild disability like students' LD [22]. Amr [9] concluded that the idea of inclusive education is not difficult to implement in Jordan context, by careful planning, supporting and cooperation between the concerned sides can lead to gradually toward applying the idea of inclusive education system.

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