Inclusive education in Saudi Arabia/(Review of Literature)

Basmah Fahad Alshahrani/ Assistant professor/ King Khalid University
Bsmh@kku.edu.sa

Abstract:
Inclusive education has experienced a number of positive educational trends and developments in many different countries, typically by recognising that all students, including those who have special educational needs (SEN), have a right to education. Inclusion of children with SEN in mainstream schools, alongside their peers, has become a major concern for interested educators, professionals and parents in many countries around the world. The reasons for this trend are due to a number of factors such as the increasing attention to the role of education in achieving social justice for pupils with SEN; the right of individuals with SEN to be educated along with their typically developing peers in mainstream schools; the benefit of equal opportunities for everyone in achieving self-growth and participating in building society (Al-Quraini, 2011). In terms of both policy and practice, inclusion has various interpretations. One of those interpretations defines inclusion as based on the belief that students with SEN can and should be educated in the same educational setting with typically developing peers, thus emphasising the importance of providing learning opportunities for all students (Ferguson, 2014). This paper aims to shed light on the nature of special education programs and the inclusion programs for people with disabilities in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia by presenting and discussing policies and practices alike.

الدمج وتعليم ذوي الإعاقة في المملكة العربية السعودية

د.بسمة فهد الشهراني/ أستاذ مساعد بقسم التربية الخاصة/ جامعة الملك خالد

ملخص الورقة:

شهد تعليم ذوي الإعاقة عددًا من الاتجاهات والتطورات التعليمية الإيجابية في العديد من البلدان المختلفة ، بما في ذلك المملكة العربية السعودية حيث كان من أوائل البلدان التي اعترفت بأن جميع الطلاب ، بما في ذلك أولئك الذين لديهم احتياجات تعليمية خاصة لديهم الحق في التعليم وعلية بدأت بدمج ذوي الإعاقة في مدارس التعليم العام جنبا الي جنب مع اقرانهم من غير ذوي الإعاقة. تعود أسباب هذا الاتجاه إلى عدد من العوامل مثل الاهتمام المتزايد بدور التعليم في تحقيق العدالة الاجتماعية للتلاميذ ذوي الإعاقة و والحرص على استفادتهم من تكافؤ الفرص في تحقيق النمو الذاتي والمشاركة في بناء المجتمع (القريني ، ٢٠١١). وعلية فقد وضعت المملكة عددا من الأنظمة والتشريعات الخاصة ببرامج التربية الخاصة ودمج ذوي الإعاقة. وتهدف هذه الورقة الي تسليط الضوء على طبيعة برامج التربية الخاصة وبرامج دمج ذوي الإعاقة في المملكة بعرض ومناقشة السياسات والممارسات على حد سواء.

Debate around Inclusive Education

Inclusive education has experienced a number of positive educational trends and developments in many different countries, typically by recognising that all students, including those who have special educational needs (SEN), have a right to education. Inclusion of children with SEN in mainstream schools, alongside their peers, has become a major concern for interested educators, professionals and parents in many countries around the world. The reasons for this trend are due to a number of factors such as the increasing attention to the role of education in achieving social justice for pupils with SEN; the right of individuals with SEN to be educated along with their typically developing peers in mainstream schools; the benefit of equal opportunities for everyone in achieving self-growth and participating in building society (Al-Quraini, 2011). In terms of both policy and practice, inclusion has various interpretations. One of those interpretations defines inclusion as based on the belief that students with SEN can and should be educated in the same educational setting with typically developing peers, thus emphasising the importance of providing learning opportunities for all students (Ferguson, 2014).

Many educators believe that inclusive education allows students with SEN to benefit from equal opportunities in achieving their full potential, learning how to participate in various social settings, contributing to their society and gaining acceptance amongst their peer groups (Forlin and Cole, 1993). Increased participation in society challenges the stereotypes and perceptions which might otherwise stigmatise individuals with disabilities (Allan, 2003). Opponents of inclusion, however, take the argument that inclusive education is detrimental to a child's learning by taking away special and targeted strategies and interventions. They maintain that students with SEN should be taught in special schools that provide specialised and individualised educational services (Hegarty, 2001 Antoinette, 2002). They also argue that inclusion is not always the best way to meet the students' needs and they question whether students with disabilities, especially children with severe educational disabilities, will benefit from inclusion (Imray and Colley, 2017). Critics also argue that inclusion entails the elimination of special educational placements, thus giving no alternative for disabled children's parents, especially if their child is severely disabled (Fuchs and Fuchs, 1998). Another criticism of inclusive settings is the issue of accommodation for all of the children. This accommodation must cater to the fact that students with SEN need additional services and provisions, which may not be readily available in mainstream settings and, even if they are available, they may be costly (Avramidis and Norwich, 2002).

In KSA, the trend is in favour of the inclusion of students with SEN in mainstream schools and therefore, KSA has made changes in its educational provision, with the implementation of the policy of inclusion in mainstream schools as one of its foremost aims. This is based on the principle that education is an essential right for all citizens, with or without SEN, emphasised by the KSA Education Policy Document (2002), which states that the education of people with special educational needs is an

integral part of the general education system (Al-Mousa, 2004). Moreover, Saudi's human rights movement has shifted the attention of stakeholders. Where previously SEN services were regarded as voluntary, they are now considered as a fundamental right in line with equal opportunities, self-respect and dignity (Al-Mousa, 2004).

The policy of KSA of Education established a strategic educational plan in 2000, the primary aim of which was for mainstream schools to begin the process of including and educating students with SEN, in addition to expanding these programmes. Since then inclusion has made considerable progress in educating students with SEN, despite its relatively recent introduction in 2000 (Al-Mousa, 2010).

The Current Setting

The KSA is located in the Arabian Peninsula, and forms the meeting place of Asia, Europe and Africa and is. The approximate population of the state is 27,500,000 as calculated in 2012 (Ministry of Economy and Planning
 (Ministry of Education, 2012). Its neighbours include Kuwait, Jordan and Iraq to the North, and Oman and Yemen to the South. The KSA overlooks the Red Sea on its western border, and finds Bahrain, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates to its Eastern border. Further exemplifying its political, economic and geographic significance, as well as being the largest state in the area, its proximity to the Suez Canal, the Gulf, and its direct access to three different continents has brought KSA to global attention. KSA has also been cited as the historical origin of Islam, home to the holiest shrine known to the religion and the destination for Hajj (pilgrimage) (Ministry of Economy and Planning (Ministry OF Education, 2012).

The KSA government system is a monarchy based on Islamic law. The Council of Ministers operates as the bureaucratic arm of the government, dealing with all organisational and administrative matters. This arrangement, as with most elements of Saudi society, is informed by Islam, which dictates the standards by which Saudi life should be lived. These standards pertain to daily interaction, the home and wider communities, as society subscribes to a collection of connected duties prescribed by the Quran. This influence extends to infrastructure and, in particular, education, which is a key tenet of the Quran for both genders.

Educational System in KSA

Educational policies in KSA a are largely controlled by the government and the administration of education is controlled by the Ministry of Education. The Ministry of Education was established in 1954, and it is the responsible body for the education of all children, including those with special educational needs (Ministry of Education, 2008). In addition to a central Ministry of Education, local educational authorities across the country act as links between the local schools and the central government. The Ministry is responsible for the provision of school buildings, equipment, materials, maintenance and supplies of textbooks. It is also responsible for providing special education services for students with special educational needs in such a way that they are able to practise their activities in the least restrictive environment possible, independently and safely (Ministry of Education, 2008). The Ministry of

Education also consists of a number of different administrations, such as the Administration of Management and Finance, the Administration of Planning, the Administration of General Education and the Administration of Special Education (Ministry of Education, 2008). Education in KSA is divided into three stages:

o The primary stage, which lasts 6 years and provides education for children between the ages of six and twelve.
o The secondary stage, which is three years in duration, focus on adolescents between the ages of twelve and fifteen.
o High school, which is three years in duration and provides education for age of fifteen and eighteen.
o Higher Education, which caters for students aged 18 and above, includes undergraduate university level (Bachelor) and postgraduate university level (Masters and PhD) (Ministry of Education, 2008).

Special Education in KSA

KSA was one of the first Arab countries to include students with SEN in mainstream schools. This has been done by giving children with SEN the same access to educational opportunities as their typically developing peers and considers education of people with SEN as an integral part of the general education system (Al-Mousa, 2004). This section will provide a brief historical overview of special education development in KSA, as well as giving a background to the policy and practices of inclusion in KSA mainstream schools. This will be followed by presenting the targeted group for inclusion, the eligibility assessment for special services and the phases through which inclusion was implemented.

In KSA, unlike many other countries, the education of students with SEN began in informal general settings when both disabled and non-disabled children attended Mosques or community halls, before formal schools were established. However, with the advent of a formal school system in 1960, children with SEN attended segregated schools. The first of these, for students with visual impairments, was the Al-Noor Institute which opened in Riyadh. Following that, in 1946 the Al-Amal institute, the first residential deaf school, was established in Riyadh. Similar projects continue to develop in different part of the country afterwards.

In 1962, a government decision was made to establish the first Administration of Special Education which was tasked with establishing programmes for 'blind, deaf, and mentally retarded' (Al-Mousa, 2010, p.14). The programme resulted in increasing the number of special schools for students with SEN across the country (Al-Mousa, 2010). Following that, in 1946 Al-Amal institution in Riyadh which is the first residential deaf school was established in Riyadh. Similar projects continue to develop in different parts of the country.

In 1990, the kingdom continued its provision of special services and soon started to implement mainstreaming in its schools but on a limited scale. Between 1996 and 2000, the Ministry of Education developed a strategic educational plan that aimed mainly at activating the role of mainstream schools in including and educating

students with special educational needs. This movement of special education in KSA has given rise to laws and regulations that guarantee the rights of people with special educational needs and has increased the quality of special services provided to them (Al-Mousa, 2004). Furthermore, the Ministries of Social Affairs, Health and Education have continued to develop policies and regulations to support this provision.

An example of this legislation is the Saudi Provision Code for Persons with Disabilities, which was established in 2000. The Code guarantees the rights of students with SEN to access appropriate and free health, social, educational and rehabilitation services, and provide for public agencies to assess an individual's eligibility for education, health and allied services (Princess Salman Centre for Disability Research, 2004). Article 8 of this document states that a Supreme Council for the Affairs of Persons with Disabilities shall be established and, in article 9, that this body is charged with full responsibility for formulating policies and monitoring activities in the field of disability: to guarantee appropriate implementation of these policies (Al-Mousa, 2010). This was then followed by establishing one of the most important documents in the country regarding the education of students with SEN, the Regulations of Special Education Programmes and Institutions (RSEPI), which was introduced in 2001. Representatives from the Ministry of Education and a number of academics and professionals developed this by reviewing the United States' policy of special education, including the Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 1990). This document outlines the rights of individuals with disabilities and puts the underlying regulations in place for the provision of special services and inclusive educational. In article eighteen chapter three of this document it reiterates that mainstream schools are the optimal environment for educating students with special educational needs. In the KSA the RSEPI determines the main categories of individuals with disabilities, which are: severe and profound learning difficulties (mental retardation), deafness, blindness, physical disabilities, learning disabilities, multiple disabilities and more recently included autism and giftedness. Assessment into such categories is to be determined by a multi-disciplinary team (Ministry of Education, 2002).

The RSEPI also outlined and clarified the duties and responsibilities of professionals who work with students with SEN, and defined the procedure for drafting the Individual Education Plan (IEP). It also outlines the process for assessing the eligibility of students for special services, clarifies how schools should provide for students with SEN, and ensures the importance of effective parental involvement in this process, as well as in the creation of inclusive settings. Chapter six of the document outlines the procedures that teachers should follow in preparing, conducting, reviewing, and recording the lessons. Chapter three asserts the importance of increasing the awareness of special educational needs among families and in the community, as well as the role of SEN teachers in increasing that awareness across the whole school community (Ministry of Education, 2002).

More recently, in 2008, KSA ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and began to take measures to strengthen these rights for those dealing with its main ministries. For example, the Ministry of Education identified a lead role for mainstream schools in including and educating students with SEN: expanding the role of the special schools and making sure it is used as the main source of developing the skilled human resource in educating disabled students, improving the curriculum and schools' educational inclusion programmes, adapting modern technology to assess disabled students and developing the organisational structure of the General Directorate of Special Education. The Ministry of Education also encourages the role of scientific research in the field of special education: cooperating and coordinating with the relevant authorities within the KSA and abroad to promote the education of students with SEN (Al- Mousa, 2010; Al-Saif, 2015).

Definition of Inclusion in the KSA

In the KSA, the general framework for the inclusion of students with SEN is based on that which has been attempted in the United States (US). The main focus is on enabling students with SEN to be educated in the least restrictive environment possible (Al-Mousa, 2010). This concept has been borrowed from the US Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2007). It has been adapted by schools in various ways, with many choosing to place students with SEN in general education classes with extra assistance from a specially-trained teacher and additional teaching aids. Such students learn the same content as their typically developing peers, only with slight changes in teaching methods and resources. In the case of children with more severe disabilities or difficulties, separate learning units within the same school, with simplified content for students with disabilities, have been another way of including them, with social time being shared with typically developing peers in non-curricular activities. This partial-inclusion is observed most frequently in Saudi schools, suggesting that the country has not yet reached the level of full inclusive practice (Al-Quraini, 2011).

When considering the terminologies used to describe inclusive practice, it is important to note that one danger of using these terminologies is that they may reflect the wrong practice in KSA context, and in the Arab world as a whole, due to translation issues: particularly in relation to the terms inclusion, mainstreaming and integration. This is because, although these terms reflect different meanings and indicate different forms of inclusive practice, the Arabic translation of all of them is: 'دمج' *'Damg'* which literally translates as 'inclusion', which in Arabic means mixing or integrating two or more things together (Al-Anazi, 2012). This is to say that, although the terminology used in KSA to describe the practice is the term 'inclusion', this does not equate to the meaning used in other contexts such as the US, Canada or Australia, which holds far broader meaning. The definition of inclusion adopted by Saudi Ministry of Education is '*educating children with special educational needs in regular education schools, and providing them with special education services*'

 (Ministry of Education, 2002, p.8). Throughout this thesis, the terms inclusion and inclusive education are both used to refer to this definition.

Types of Inclusion, Targeted Group and Eligibility Assessment

Inclusion is being implemented in KSA either via partial inclusion - in which students with SEN are educated in separate classes, with shared break times and non- curricular activities, or through full inclusion, in which all students, with and without disabilities, receive their education in the same classroom space and are taught the same content, with any changes for students with SEN being facilitated by a 'resource room' (Al-Mousa, 2010). In KSA, there are two groups who are targeted by inclusion; the first group is that already found in mainstream schools, including talented and gifted children, physically disabled children, children with learning disabilities, low vision students, and children with communication disorders. The other group is that consisting of individuals traditionally taught in special education such as the blind, the deaf, those with cognitive disorders, autistic children and children with multiple disabilities (Al-Mousa, 2010).

Talented and gifted students were also included in the programme of policies by The General Secretariat of Special Education. Indeed, an integral part of KSA policy is based on the view that students with SEN, who are either talented or disabled, ought to be taught at general schools, where they can learn alongside their peers (Al-Khashrmi, 2000). Such students are believed to constitute at least twenty per cent of all students in KSA: all of whom are eligible to receive free education and support in order to meet their unique needs, within the general school system (Al-Mousa, 2010).

The students' eligibility assessment procedures begin by meeting with the child's parents, in order to obtain their consent prior to assessing the child; then collecting as much information as possible about the child themselves. If the child needs further assessment, s/he is then referred to a Diagnosis and Assessment Centre, at which the required assessments are conducted by a multi-disciplinary team. Based on this assessment, the committee determines the appropriate stage for the child to attend. This procedure can also take place in the school itself, conducted by the school's psychologist; teachers and external agencies may also be involved in order to determine the student's eligibility for special services (Al-Mousa, 2010).

Phases of Implementing Inclusion

The Ministry of Education implemented inclusion in KSA schools in three main stages, which are as follows: the planning phase, the implementation phase and the evaluation phase. In the planning phase, the Special Education Administration (SEA) began by clarifying the aims and objectives of inclusion programmes in mainstream schools, via regular meetings with school leaders. This was followed by the process of determining the number of students with SEN in various neighbourhoods, in order to calculate the number of programmers required to accommodate them. The SEA then contacted the local education authorities (LEA) to nominate the schools that were most appropriate and suitable for establishing inclusion programmes. The selected schools were then inspected by special education supervisors to determine whether or not they are suitable for opening inclusion programmes. The SEA then contacted the special institutes from which the students were to be transferred and held discussions with the students' parents about the new programmes offered to their children, to allocate the most geographically convenient schools to each child. In addition, during this stage, the LEA made efforts to increase the awareness of

inclusion in mainstream schools, involving students with SEN due to attend these schools in regular workshops and seminars
(Al-Zahrani, 2000).

The implementation phase, on the other hand, begins by providing the school's administration with extensive information about the categories of students' needs and the adjustments required on the part of the school to facilitate integration. The next step is to then allocate special education teachers to schools where students with SEN are to be transferred. This phase also includes preparing and adapting the classes of mainstream schools and providing appropriate teaching aids and furniture to suit students with SEN (Al-Zahrani, 2000). This phase also includes the allocation of a programme Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO), who is responsible for monitoring day-to-day inclusion practice, coordinating provisions for students with SEN and communicating with external agencies, including local educational authorities and the Administration of Special Education Support, as well as educational psychology services, and health and social services.

The final stage is the evaluation phase, which is a continuous process ongoing throughout each phase, and is implemented via weekly visits by inspectors from the Administration of General Education and the Administration of Special Education, who visit schools in which inclusion programmes have been implemented. The aim of these visits is to measure the extent to which students with SEN benefit from inclusion programmes and the extent to which these programmes are effective. It also aims to evaluate the school's efforts to increase awareness about inclusion and SEN programmes, and to create an inclusive culture in the school (Al-Zahrani, 2000).

In order to frame the discussion around special educational needs and inclusion, as well as obstacles to inclusion of students with SEN, two main models that are typically referenced in the literature about disability are discussed.

Models of Disability

These are what are referred to as the medical model, and the social model, of disability (Dewsbury et al., 2004; Al-Turkee, 2005; Frederickson and Cline, 2015). These models reflect specific way in which society views disability and, in turn, have a strong impact on society's responses to disability issues and the way people with disabilities are viewed in education. Throughout this thesis, both models are considered but the focus is mostly on the social model, given that it provides a more holistic view of obstacles to inclusion of students with SEN in the context of KSA. Firstly, however, an analysis will be made of key elements of the medical model, similarly, then, the social model will be analysed.

The Medical Model

The medical model views students with disabilities as medically impaired such as those with neurological impairment or cerebral palsy (Campbell and Oliver, 1996; Dewsbury et al., 2004). Blustein (2012) argued that the implication of the medical model was that impairments entailed inherited incapacitation that meant that disabled people could never have the same chances as people without disabilities, even with modifications to the built environment or the structure of society. In other words, the premise of the medical model is that broader social, cultural, physical and political factors have no bearing on the issues confronting disabled people (Brittain, 2004).The disability is therefore removed from the societal context and is viewed as a constitutional problem within a particular child, directly related to the health condition. Obstacles to learning are viewed not as a function of poor

teaching techniques or inadequate resources, but more the limitations of the children themselves (Villa and Thousand, 2005). Overcoming these obstacles becomes a question of how adequately one can treat and/or ameliorate the health condition whether through medical intervention or education
(Hodkinson and Vickerman, 2009; Bingham et al., 2013).

The major criticism of this model is that it exists in a vacuum that neglects the factors that affect education, such as the type of school, the quality of instruction, and the surrounding cultures, values and attitudes that can either empower or disable these children (Lynas, 2002). Additionally, since this model relies so heavily on the individual's dysfunction, it groups those who appear unable to learn normally into diverse types according to their degree of deviation from the norm and tailors treatment and education accordingly. Within this framework, for these children to gain any benefit from general education, it is they who have to be changed to fit into the system, rather than changing and adapting the system to accommodate them (Reindal, 2008). The medical model assumes that human beings are flexible and easily alterable, whereas society is a fixed and unalterable. People with disabilities are burdened with the responsibility of adapting himself to an environment that may be less than welcoming (Roush and Sharby, 2011). The medical model has also been criticised because it presents disability in a negatively, portraying disability as a sickness and addressing it from the perspective of a deficit (Mitra, 2006). Brittain (2004) warned that such language could shape interactions with and perceptions towards disabled people within the whole society.

The Social Model

According to Oliver (1996), the obstacles a student with disabilities faces are a factor of his or her environment and not his or her particular characteristics. Society is responsible for removing all obstacles that could lead to the isolation of a child with special needs. Instead of perceiving the child as a deviation that needs to be corrected, the social model perceives them as a minority with additional needs that can be catered for through adaptation of their environment. The model, therefore, challenges the community and educators alike to alter their beliefs, and adapt the educational techniques and strategies to create an environment that caters to the needs of all its students and not just those who already fit in to their environment. This is an important stepping stone in the drive to have successful and effective inclusion for students with SEN (Smith et al., 2004; Villa and Thousand, 2005). Frederickson and Cline (2015) summed up a central theme of the social model of disability by stating; 'there are no students with learning difficulties, only adults with teaching difficulties' (Frederickson and Cline, 2015, p. 40). By redefining disability as a spectrum of and not separate from everyday life experience, the social model shifts the prevailing medical views on disability and in this way, can and has impacted legislations on discrimination. The model's implied superiority lies in the fact that its benefits are not limited to students with SEN but to any oppressed group, thereby creating a more tolerant and inclusive world in which to live and learn (Rieser and Mason, 1992).

The social model, however, is not without its criticisms. This is because by normalising disability, the model ignores the individual characteristics and abilities of a child which help to inform why they can or cannot perform in education (Bingham et al., 2013; Frederickson and Cline, 2015). Further, the social model dictates that the society must conform to accommodate the individual's needs, but it does not always lay out practical steps with

which to do that (Palmer and Harley, 2012). This can lead to frustration from teachers faced with learning difficulties that are deeply rooted in an individual's particular characteristics (DeSimone and Parmar, 2006).

Neither the medical model nor the social model is sufficient in its own and neither of these models wholly encapsulates the needs of a child with SEN. However, in the context of Saudi Arabia, the social model may be more useful in that it provides a framework to change a way of thinking as education provision for learners with SEN is still in its infancy (Al-Quraini, 2011). By arguing for the application of the social model in an analysis of Saudi Arabia, I include the importance of medical interventions and their positive effects on individuals, but I also argue that, in addition to providing whatever medical intervention is needed, the barriers that society itself imposes should be removed, giving these children a chance not only to cope with everyday life, but also to be a part of it.

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