Understanding Inclusion (National and International Perspective)

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Abstract

There have been a number of positive developments in inclusive education in many different countries, recognizing that all students, including those with disabilities, have a right to education. Around the world, educators, professionals, and parents are concerned about including children with disabilities in mainstream schools along with their peers. As a result of this trend, a number of factors are contributing, including the increasing importance of education in achieving social justice for pupils with special education needs; the right of individuals with disabilities to attend mainstream schools together with their typically developing peers; the benefit of equal opportunities for everyone in achieving self-growth and contributing to society

 (Al-Quraini, 2011). There are various interpretations of inclusion, both in policy and practice. This literature review provides national and international interpretations and perspectives on the issue of inclusion and inclusive education.

Keywords: Understanding Inclusion, National and International Perspective, special education needs, individuals with disabilities

مفهوم الدمج (وجهة نظر محلية وعالمية)

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ملخص:

شهد التعليم الشامل عددًا من الاتجاهات والتطورات التعليمية الإيجابية في العديد من البلدان المختلفة ، عادةً من خلال الاعتراف بأن جميع الطلاب ، بما في ذلك أولئك الأشخاص ذوي الإعاقة، لديهم الحق في التعليم. وأصبح دمج ذوي الإعاقة في المدارس العادية ، إلى جانب أقرانهم ، محط اهتمام للمعلمين والمهنيين وأولياء الأمور المهتمين في العديد من البلدان حول العالم. تعود أسباب هذا الاتجاه إلى عدد من العوامل مثل الاهتمام المتزايد بدور التعليم في تحقيق العدالة الاجتماعية للتلاميذ ذوي الاحتياجات الخاصة. حق الأفراد ذوي الإعاقة في التعلم إلى جانب أقرانهم الذين يتطورون عادةً في المدارس العادية ؛ الاستفادة من تكافؤ الفرص للجميع في تحقيق النمو الذاتي والمشاركة في بناء المجتمع. وعلية فتقدم هذه المقالة مراجعة لتعريفات التعليم الشامل وممارساته وتشريعاته من وجهات نظر محلية ودولية.

الكلمات المفتاحية :

(مفهوم الدمج , المنظور الوطني والدولي , احتياجات التعليم الخاص , الأفراد ذوو الإعاقة)

Discourse and Debate Surrounding the Definitions and Terminologies of Inclusion:

Inclusion is a complex, multi-faceted concept . It is very difficult to define inclusion since there is no international, standardised definition, although the general principles are outlined in official documents (Mitchell, 2014). The definition of inclusion is impacted to different extents by various economic, historical and social factors (Silver, 2015). In a similar way, Dyson (2010) considers inclusion to be a slippery concept that appears to be intricately associated with the histories, structures and cultures of different education systems. For example, in England, inclusion is not considered to refer solely to the placement of students with disabilities in public schools, but rather it is a comprehensive approach towards education that impacts all children (Dyson, 2010, p.2).

There are also evident differences in how inclusion is perceived in different contexts. For instance, Schneider and Harkins (2009) compared the education systems in France and Canada. According to the Inclusive Education Canada organisation, inclusive education is defined as a system in which all students are welcomed in neighbourhood schools in public school classrooms and receive the support they need to learn, contribute and participate in all aspects of school life. Inclusive education required schools, classrooms and learning activities to be designed in a way that facilitates learning and participation for all students.

This Canadian approach to inclusion is very similar to the approach used in the USA. On the other hand, the term 'inclusive education' is not widespread, with the terms 'schooling' and 'scolarisation des jeunes handicaps' being the most common phrases used in the Act of 2005, titled the Loi pour l'égalité des droits et des chances, la participation et la citoyenneté des personnes handicapées' (the law for equal rights and opportunities, participation and citizenship of handicapped persons). The law states that all children should be able to attend local neighbourhood schools irrespective of any disabilities or learning difficulties that they have (Schneider and Harkins, 2009, p. 278). Nonetheless, this does not necessarily mean that children will definitely attend their local school, as the decision regarding the best educational institution for a child is ultimately made by the child's parents and a committee supervised by a 'enseignant referent' [referent teacher]

(Schneider and Harkins, 2009, p. 278). Thus, in some cases, special educational institutions may be chosen for the child. The system used in the UK is also similar, as students can be referred to external institutions if this is deemed suitable following a meeting between educational psychologists, special education teachers, the local school, parents and teachers (Tutt and Williams, 2015)

In France, there is a focus on integrating students with disabilities into education, although this does not necessarily refer to inclusive education. On the other hand, inclusion into mainstream classrooms is favoured in Canada, with all school-aged students attending public schools and are being taught under the umbrella of the Department of Education (Schneider and Harkins, 2009). The key objective in

France, however, is to ensure that all students are guaranteed suitable education, albeit in public school classrooms, special classrooms in public schools or external settings. Moreover, this can be in the form of part-time models that take place in mainstream classrooms or as part of special classes. These may take place between the mainstream classroom and the special institution or between the special class and the special institution (Schneider and Harkins, 2009). On the other hand, the key objective of inclusion in Canada is to support the human rights of children with special needs, as inclusive education is deemed to be a significant factor impacting a child's development and future. This is hardly surprising, considering Canada is historically credited as being the first-ever country to include the rights of people with disabilities into their constitution, as outlined in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms in 1982 (Schneider and Harkins, 2009, p.278).

Moreover, in the context of Saudi Arabia, inclusion has been defined by the Ministry of Education (2000) as the integration of students with disabilities into mainstream schools and the provision of any necessary special services to such students. Thus, with regard to inclusive practice, integration into mainstream classrooms seems to be more prominent in KSA than in France and Canada., since Canada focuses predominantly on developing supportive and inclusive classroom environments and France focuses on providing education regardless of the learning condition. Meanwhile, KSA focuses primarily on integrating students into local educational settings at present.

Inclusion and Integration

The vocabulary pertaining to inclusion has evolved through time, making it difficult to define. Moreover, this has contributed to the lack of unanimity in providing a standard definition, particularly when the nature of inclusion is questioned
(Mitchell, 2014). The process of moving children with disabilities from specialised school settings to public schools where they are taught alongside their typically-developing peers is referred to as 'integration' or 'inclusion.' Although these terms are often used interchangeably, they actually have different meanings in practice. For example, Booth (2000) defined integration as a process in which children with disabilities are actively involved in the educational and social spheres of their school settings. Additionally, Foreman (2005) defines integration as a process in which students with disabilities are given access to a less restrictive learning environment, which ultimately allows them to interact with their typically-developing peers rather than only allowing them to integrate with peers in special segregated settings (Wood and Poulson, 2006). Thus, rather than involving the sharing of the same curricula and classes, it focuses heavily on providing social interaction opportunities to children with special educational needs through specially-designed activities. This gives such students a sense of connection with their public-school settings and ensures that they are socially included.

In 1978, the Warnock report was published in the UK. Following this report, Ellis et al. (2008) define integration as the acknowledgement that individuals with disabilities have the right to freely engage in everyday activities and to not be segregated. Integration can take place on three levels, a physical level (in which students with disabilities attend the same schools as other children) a social level (in which students with disabilities with their peers but do not attend the same classes) and a functional level (in which students attend the same classes curriculum structure as their peers) (Ellis et al., 2008). On the other hand, the term integration has been replaced by inclusion and this moved the focus away from a needs-based approach and towards a rights-based approach. This is in line with the UNESCO (1994) initiative which served as a critical point in the use of the term inclusion. In Section 3.3.4 of this chapter, the human rights aspects associated with inclusion will be discussed. There are two key implications of the change in defining different terminologies including segregation, inclusion and integration. First of all, there are shared concerns amongst special education teachers that students with disabilities do not receive sufficient education opportunities. Secondly, it influences changes in public attitudes towards inclusion, which is critical in developing a more inclusive society (Thomas, 1997; Barton, 1999; Reid, 2005; Scanlon et al 2022).

The concept of the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) is often used in definitions of inclusion in the USA (Kauffman et al., 2018). This concept is one of the key IDEA principles, an initiative developed in 1975. Crockett and Kauffman (2013) point out that facilitating education to students with disabilities to a suitable degree compared to their typically-developing peers is a key principle of IDEA. Nonetheless, the exact LRE required for each learning difficulty or disability is not outlined in IDEA, which means it is open to local and situational interpretations. Even though attending general education classes in public schools may be a suitable LRE for some students with disabilities, it may not be suitable for all students. Thus, special schools may be the most suitable LRE for some students (i.e., those with severe learning disabilities) because the necessary resources and equipment can be supplied and students may receive better developmental opportunities. The Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services (OSERS) in the U.S. Department of Education also support this position, as they assert that general education classrooms are not suitable for every student with disabilities and some may need to attend educational settings that are designed to accommodate their specific needs, which may not be possible in mainstream public schools (Yell, 2006).

Inclusion has also been defined by the Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education (2002) as a process enabling all students, regardless of their needs, to take part in life and education in public educational settings. Meanwhile, UNESCO (2005) promotes student participation in learning and state that this involves considering and responding to the needs of all students. This perspective is also supported by Booth and Ainscow (2006), who define inclusion as an ongoing process of promoting students' learning and participation. All of these definitions highlight one clear

common goal, namely to enhance the engagement of all children in schools. Participation has been defined by Booth and Ainscow (2006) as the process of learning and working together with others in shared learning environments. The same researchers also asserted that participation relates to the quality of the students' experiences in the school setting. This means that any obstacles preventing specific groups of individuals from learning must be removed. Inclusion is considered to be a continuing process involving the breakdown of obstacles hindering learning and participation for children (Booth and Ainscow, 2002, p.1). Booth and Ainscow's definition also referred to specific principles, which were summarised in the index of inclusion. This can be used as a guide to creating inclusive schools. These principles are as follows:

- Implementing inclusive values.
- Supporting everyone and making sure all students feel a sense of belonging.
- Increasing the extent to which individuals take part in teaching activities, relationships and communities.
- Minimising any obstacles to learning and participation, especially discrimination.
- Redeveloping cultures, practices and policies to address diversity and to ensure that everyone is valued equally.
- Reducing obstacles faced by some children to ensure that children benefit from learning.
- Using differences between children and adults as learning resources.
- Highlighting the importance of school communities, values and achievements.
- Developing mutually beneficial relationships between schools and the surrounding community.
- Recognising education as an integral part of social inclusion
  (Booth and Ainscow, 2002, p.1).

Although there is a focus on students' participation when defining inclusion, it is important to consider the importance of schools and the efforts that they make when attempting to improve inclusion. For instance, Nittler (2012) defines inclusion as the act of restricting the entire school to ensure that all students can access the socio and educational opportunities that the school offers (Mittler, 2012, p. 2). Likewise, Smith et al. (2005) described inclusion as a process in which students with disabilities are enabled to take part in general learning and provided with adapted modified curriculums that enable them to be taught in alternative and more effective ways. Meanwhile, Glazzard's (2014, p.40) definition of inclusion focuses on the school's duty to modify activities to accommodate the needs of students. Moreover, Kamen, (2012) believes that inclusion is an extension of a school's equal opportunities policy. Thus, it is assumed that inclusion is a continuous process that enhances the acceptance of students with disabilities through the creation of inclusive schools (Avramidis and Norwich, 2002).

Researchers in the United Kingdom have put forward multiple definitions of inclusion, and this has several implications, including the need for complete school changes to create environments that enable children with disabilities to fully participate in school life. One commonality between these various definitions is that they all focus on the need to develop inclusive learning environments and to use different strategies and tailored learning to ensure that all students participate in the learning process. This emphasis on inclusion can also impact the education of typically-developing students and also generates a need for additional resources (i.e., teacher time, training and equipment) (Ainscow, 2020). There are also likely to be several inconsistencies in how special education is delivered to students between different schools and the preparedness of each school to facilitate inclusive practice will play an integral role here. Nonetheless, the process of facilitating equal learning opportunities for all students in the same environment is a step towards developing more positive attitudes, greater understanding, and the establishment of shared culture with regard to inclusion in schools (Ainscow and Sandill, 2010; Ainscow, 2020). Schools and teachers must work together to solve issues, create infrastructure and develop best practices in this area. Additionally, this help schools to overcome potential barriers hindering inclusive practice.

3.1.1 Human Rights Perspective

Ballard (2016) explains that inclusion may also be considered a human rights issue. In other words, students with disabilities are entitled to receive the same opportunities and choices as other members of society. Several international declarations support this view. For instance, in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), it is asserted that everybody is entitled to education and that education should be free (at least at primary and secondary level). Moreover, education should be compulsory, whilst professional and technical education must be available in a general sense and higher education should be accessible to everybody based on merit. Additionally, the declaration outlined that education must be directed towards developing the human personality and strengthening respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. Similarly, it should promote understanding, friendship and tolerance between countries, racial and religious groups, and should work towards the United Nations' goal of maintaining peace (1948: Article 26).

In 1994, ninety-two governments (including Saudi Arabia) and twenty-five international organisations signed the UNESCO Salamanca Statement at the World Conference on Special Needs Education in Salamanca, Spain. This statement urges the international community to support inclusive education through practical and strategic improvements. The Salamanca Declaration is a key component of the wider human rights agenda. It clearly portrays inclusive education as being the most

successful way to counteract discriminatory attitudes, create welcoming communities, develop inclusive societies and ensure that everybody has access to education (UNESCO, 1994, p.11). Moreover, it highlights that education systems must consider a wide variety of characteristics and needs when developing new policies and practices (UNESCO, 1994, p.11).

Declarations like this have led to significant reductions in segregated educational provisions for students with disabilities. Nonetheless, there is still an ongoing debate regarding the extent to which inclusive settings are better than separate special education institutions for individuals with severe and complicated needs (Brussion, 2020; Argan et al., 2020; Billingsley, 2019). A further human rights concern with regard to inclusion is the question of who best represents a child's rights-the child themselves, their parents, the state or other adults (Whitburn & Thomas, 2020). If this responsibility falls on the parents or another adult, then we must consider whether they will accept that the child needs to attend a special school. For instance, if a child with a significant disability finds it difficult to learn in mainstream public schools (i.e., they are unhappy there are do not integrate with their typically-developing peers), then it may not be possible (or humane) to uphold the rights of the child or any concerned adults. Nonetheless, the UDHR statement in article 26 seems to address this issue, stating that parents have a right to select the education that is provided to their children (United Nations, 1948). However, as Wertheimer (1997) points out, this may be interpreted as enabling adults to make important decisions on a child's behalf that may or may not be in line with the child's own opinions and desires.

In Saudi Arabia, the ethical considerations of Islamic law allow children to choose their preferred educational setting. Nonetheless, the parents often make the decision on their behalf because they are responsible for raising their children and it making sure that they receive suitable religious and moral education. This is outlined in the Cairo Declaration on Human Rights in Islam (1990, Article 18), where it is stated that parents (and legal guardians) have the right to select the type of education given to their children, so long as they consider the child's future and best interests and take into account the ethical values and the principles of Shari'a
(The Arab Charter on Human Rights, 2004, p. 24).

More recently, the United Nations Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities was established with the key task of promoting and protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms of individuals with disabilities and promoting respect for their dignity (United Nations, 2006, p.3). Rights to education have been detailed by the CRPD, who assert that parties must ensure the following when putting

schemes and policies in place that address the rights of individuals with disabilities in educational settings:

A. Individuals with disabilities must not be excluded from general education systems due to their disability and children with disabilities must be included in free, compulsory primary and secondary education regardless of their disability (United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities).

B. Individuals with disabilities must be able to access inclusive, free and high-quality primary and secondary education in an equal manner to their peers in their respective communities.

C. The individual's specific needs must be reasonably accommodated.

D. Individuals with disabilities must receive the necessary support within the boundaries of the general education system in order to ensure that they receive effective education.

E. Support measures must be tailored to suit individuals with disabilities in learning environments to ensure optimal academic and social development, and this is in line with the objective of achieving full inclusion (United Nations, 2006, p.14).

In 2008, Saudi Arabia signed and authorised the CRPD to highlight its commitment to achieving these objectives. This upholds the rights of disabled individuals and implies that such individuals must be treated equally to their non-disabled counterparts. Moreover, this highlights support for the inclusion of disabled students into mainstream education settings, with significant efforts being made to overcome any barriers hindering learning and participation whilst simultaneously ensuring that the education received by such students is equal to that received by their peers. In response to that, recently, Saudi Arabia in its vision of 2030 has considered inclusive education as one of the most important goals to be achieved and developed t in the whole country by provide the best services for people with disabilities in the same educational environment with people without disabilities. This was done through the King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz project for the development of education (Tatweer), represented by the Tatweer Company for Educational Services. This project is a qualitative and unique leap in the education of people with disabilities in particular and in the general education in general.

In fact, many questions have been raised throughout the debate on human rights. Although some answers have been provided, the door is always opening to new possibilities. Thus, it is fair to say that human rights discourse promotes a strong and ethical rationale for inclusion, meaning that everybody should be able to enjoy their human rights, irrespective of their ability and needs.

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