

Ministry of Education  
 General Directorate of General Education  
 Special Education Directorate

## **Planning the Strategic National Project of Inclusive Education in Iraq**

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*In the Name of Allah, most Gracious, most Merciful*

### **Introduction**

The shift in viewing disability and its affairs from the charity-care orientation to the legal-social orientation has been increasingly developing and gaining momentum. This shift has cast its shadow on the numerous concepts used in the field of disability. The content and objectives of these concepts will change compatibly with the perspective through which they are seen.

### **The legal conception of inclusion**

Activists in the domain of disability agree on the necessity of inclusion as one of the bases of human rights. It is also considered as an actual translation of these rights into real practices through which all principles related to equal opportunity, non-discrimination, active participation, prepared environment, and equality are realized. Accordingly, inclusion can be defined based on relevant international laws, particularly the rights of the disabled agreement, and the standard rules of equal opportunity, etc. as the achievement of complete participation and enjoyment and practice of basic rights and liberties and full access to available services such as the right to education, health and life on equal basis with others.

*May Allah grant us success.*

The concept of Inclusion: Its delimitation and logical basis<sup>1</sup>

Inclusion has been described as a strategy participating in reinforcing the process of constructing an inclusive society enabling<sup>2</sup> all its children and youth despite their ethnicities, ages, capabilities, conventions and weaknesses to participate in the society<sup>3</sup>. Consequently, differences will be respected and acknowledged. Stabz (1998), defined inclusion as the approach that acknowledges the natural variation existing in (and cherished by) all societies. Therefore, inclusion includes all forms of daily life starting from the household, to school, work, society, and politics and law. It involves all concerned bodies and decision-makers in all these aspects. Generally, children with special/additional needs in the region are facing a great discrimination regarding their legibility<sup>4</sup> to join ordinary schools or to participate in the activities allocated to their peers, or to completely participate in issues related to their special life. Moreover, children with special needs do not usually benefit from suitable interferences that allow them the best physical and intellectual growth which might indirectly affect their social and emotional growth, and, consequently, their social inclusion. Furthermore, the traditional medical model of disability that considers disabilities as an illness requiring treatment is still dominant in the region. This model has spread social behaviours and standards discriminating against children and youths with special (additional) needs. It seeped through the educational system which is usually characterized by rigid curricula that do not take into consideration the needs of many children. Moreover, it supported a number of international agreements for inclusion and the acknowledgement of securing the rights and dignity of individuals with special additional needs, chief among these agreements:

#### **1. Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations General Assembly 1989)**

The Convention on the Rights of the Child includes articles specifically addressing the issue of providing suitable educational services to children with special additional needs. However, the main links to inclusion are found in the basic guiding principles of the convention covering all its articles. The Convention on the

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<sup>1</sup> Stylistically speaking, the original Arabic text is poorly composed. Some of its structures are not Arabic at all; others are translated or quoted from non-Arabic sources. Both the composition and the translation are poor.

<sup>2</sup> The original word in Arabic reads (transforming), which makes no sense.

<sup>3</sup> In the original Arabic text this expression (participating in the society) is repeated twice in different forms, which makes it redundant.

<sup>4</sup> In the original Arabic text the word used is (ability)

Rights of the Child is prepared in such a way that the implementation of any of its articles should respect and take into consideration four essential guiding principles:

- a) Survival and development
- b) The best interests of the child
- c) Non-discrimination
- d) Participation

Simply put, inclusion is considered a practice addressing non-discrimination through respecting the importance of children participation. Any programme or intervention that does not respect the differences between children and does not provide them with the suitable means of participation is considered a violation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

**2. Education for all (UNESCO 1990 – 2000): The framework supports the following steps:**

1. Expanding and improving care and early childhood comprehensive education, especially to the most vulnerable and needy children.
2. Ensuring good quality, comprehensive, free and compulsory education to all children, particularly to girls and children who live in difficult circumstances and belong to minor ethnicities.
3. Ensuring addressing the educational needs of all youths and adults through fairly providing them with the suitable education and life skills programmes.
4. Improving all the aspects of the quality of education and ensuring everyone's excellence so that everyone will achieve clear record educational scores on the levels of reading, writing, and mathematics in addition to basic life skills.

However, the Dakar framework included these issues; it included the Salamanka framework of inclusive education in 1994. Accordingly, inclusion and inclusive education have not been considered as merely a special programme or a research. They have been acknowledged as an essential part of any educational process. Moreover, inclusive education formed an integral part participating in ensuring a better quality of educational curricula and services. On its behalf, the United Nations for Education, Science and Culture Organization (UNESCO) considers inclusion as "a dynamic comparison to positively respond to the diversity of pupils and to see individual differences as opportunities to enrich education rather than problems."

Inclusion, then, reinforces children's participation in learning and considers cultures and societies as means of fighting exclusion.

**Planning for inclusive schools:**

In order for our schools to be inclusive and capable of receiving and educating all children including those with special additional needs, every school should undergo a process of change and development starting from its educational vision but not ending with providing educational means to pupils. Even though this process starts with the administration and decision, it later changes into a track in which improvement continues with the intellectual development.

**What makes a school an inclusive school?**

When the efforts of the concerned parties in the school gather to make change and reformation; when this change is based on an executable strategic plan; when the plan with its vision, mission, principles, objectives, outcomes, and indicators makes change in the six bases constituting the inclusive school, then the school becomes an inclusive school through the following:

**1. Adopting policies and principles and being committed to them**

The principles are the educational beliefs in which the concerned parties in the school believe; the policies are like a road map according to which the school moves from where it is now to achieve its vision and objectives.

The inclusive school is the school whose strategic plan includes the following principles and policies:

- A. Just like how the local community is, the school ensures the social and cultural diversity inside the school.
- B. The school targets all the children in the local community including children with special additional needs.

- C. The school fairly addresses the educational needs of all pupils including children with special needs.
- D. The school takes the responsibility of building the capacity of its workers: teachers and administrative staff.

## **2. The culture of inclusion at the school.**

- i. A culture of inclusion is formed from the information, knowledge of the nature of diversity or disability, principles and legal values, and from the behaviours and common manners in the school community and its system and decisions.
- ii. The inclusive school is the one whose strategic plan and curricula include education on the culture of inclusion through adopting and promulgating these principles and values so that they will be daily practices in the school system and community. These principles are as follows:
  - Principles of human rights and the rights of the disabled and people with special needs such as respecting diversity, non-discrimination, fair and equal opportunity, and equal rights.
  - All children are capable of learning despite their different capacities.
  - Cherishing and enjoying diversity as an enriching source.
  - Unity of the community.
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## **2. Partnership between the school and the family**

The family is among the concerned bodies in educating the pupils in the school, because a family's children are part of the school's pupils. They educate the same children. Therefore, the partnership between the institution of the family and the institution of the school is in the interest of both parties. This partnership also includes families of pupils with special additional needs.

The inclusive school is the school working on involving the families and benefiting from them and benefiting them in the following domains:

1. The school strategic plan
2. The educational process for their grandsons and granddaughters, especially children with special additional needs.
3. The school's assets and resources including special resources.
4. Designing the frames and mechanisms of partnership.

## **3. Partnership between school and local community boards**

The unification of human, ethical and social values between the school and the local community is part of the educational process targeting children. The relationship between the school and the local community is a necessary relationship because of their integrating roles, and because the inclusive school has pupils with special additional needs, and because the community boards have resources and some of them have specializations; because the school plays an essential role in educating the community's children (it is essentially part of the community); and because the community boards have their roles and impact on the community's culture, cooperation between them becomes necessary. Essentially, an inclusive school is the school that enters into partnership with the boards and institutions of the civil society in the following domains:

- The school's strategic plan
- Promulgating inclusion culture
- Assets and resources of the specialized educational school

## **4. Curricula and teaching**

With the existence of individual differences in the aspects of intelligence, physical capabilities, and psychological and social states, the amendment and adaptation of the curricula and teaching become a must in any school committed to cater to all pupils.

The inclusive school is the one that takes measures so that its curricula and teaching be compatible with the capabilities and needs of all pupils including those with special additional needs. The measures should address the following issues:

- The diversity of teaching methods inside the single class

- The adaptation or the amendment of the educational objectives in any class if that were necessary to any pupil.
- Books, educational resources and means, educational facilities should be compatible with the capabilities and needs of every pupil.
- Engineering amendments to facilitate pupils' movement independently inside the class, and a system and means to evaluate pupils' capabilities and performance.

### **5. Human apparatus**

The human apparatus in the school is composed of all the workers; it includes teachers, specialized administrative staff, and professionals. The essential and differential function of this apparatus is educating and teaching all pupils. Therefore, the availability of a sufficient human apparatus and continuously empowering its capabilities is a necessary condition to achieve the education and teaching of all pupils.

The inclusive school is the one that provides a human apparatus possessing the knowledge, proficiency and skills to educate and teach pupils with additional needs. Pupils having differences in their capabilities and needs require the empowerment of the human apparatus in the following:

- A. The availability of professionals and specialized persons (such as the psychological and social researchers) to support the teaching of children with special additional needs.
- B. Providing training and support to improve the capabilities of teachers in teaching children with additional needs.
- C. The availability of clear identification of the roles and responsibilities of the professionals.
- D. The availability of identified opportunities for the human apparatus to benefit of its individuals' expertise.
- E. The availability of opportunities for the human apparatus to benefit from the resources of the local community.

### **Resources Room**

#### **The concept of the Resources Room**

The resources room is considered one of the inclusive options and alternatives in providing services. It is a class room attached to the ordinary school and installed with the necessary tools, educational facilities and toys, supporting technology and suitable furniture to the blind and other disabilities. A specially trained teacher runs this room and works with children with special needs. Pupils partially attend this kind of educational substitute; targeted pupils attend their normal classes during part of their school day, and they attend the resources room during the other part of the day in accordance with a special programme.

#### **Objectives of the resources room**

The objectives of the resources room designed for children with special needs and exclusively for the blind and children with special educational needs such as learning difficulties to achieve the following general objectives of special education:

1. Identifying, measuring and evaluating children who are visually, auditory, and mentally disabled, and identifying their strengths and weaknesses.
2. Planning for teaching and designing individual teaching and educational plans for children with special needs.
3. Designing suitable behaviour amendment programmes to put an end to the unwanted behaviour of children (and exclusively that of the disabled).
4. Employing and using the technology in facilitating the life of the visually disabled and other cases of disability. This will imply the use of technology in the different aspects of life such as education, teaching, behaviour amendment programmes, moving, traveling, discovering, working and many others.
5. Providing supportive services to children, each his/her needs, and physiotherapy in some cases to particular groups.
6. Supporting the families of the children with special needs.

#### **Groups included in the national project for educational inclusion**

1. The blind and the poor-sighted (grade 60/6; 24/6) after correction using glasses.

2. Physically-disabled (limbs, with normal intelligence).
3. The poor-hearing (grade 40–60dcb) using the hearing aid device.
4. Learning difficulties.
5. Slow learning (intelligence is close to normal)
6. Speech and communication difficulties.