

 Norah Alzahrani¹
ORCID: 0000-0003-0900-3585

The Development of Inclusive Education Practice: A Review of Literature

Abstract

The idea of inclusive education has become a very important element of educational thinking internationally and has been widely advocated by international organisations such as UNESCO. This paper gives a historical and philosophical review of the concept of inclusive education. The review looks first to the definition of inclusive education, the global movement towards educational inclusion, and the shift in terminology from integration to inclusion. It then discusses some issues raised in the literature about inclusive education and later details the influence of the ideological framework. This paper also identifies two main factors that should be considered to ensure the better implementation of inclusive education. This article concludes that, despite the general agreement on the principle of inclusion, some elements have been widely contested, such as what it means in practice and what should be considered inclusion.

Keywords: inclusive education, special educational needs.

Inclusive Education and the Global Movement toward Educational Inclusion

According to UNESCO (1994), the term special educational needs (SEN) “refers to all those children and youth whose needs arise from disabilities or learning difficulties”. Inclusive education means that those students with disabilities or SEN have the right to be educated with their typically developing peers of the same age (UNESCO, 2005).

There is an emerging consensus that children and youth with special educational needs should be included in the educational arrangements made for the majority of children. This has led to the concept of the inclusive school... school have to find ways of successfully educating all children, including those who have disabilities. (UNESCO, 1994).

Inclusive education is considered an essential component of education for all

children, as it is a process that involves schools and other settings of learning working inclusively in order to offer services for all learners, regardless of their differences in cultural backgrounds, ethnic groups, and learning abilities (UNESCO, 2005). Although the majority of people support inclusion, the notion of inclusion can be contested. For example, although the Salamanca statement on inclusion is a fairly general expression of principle, some researchers have argued that the obstacles to inclusion are very considerable and that inclusion is a complex and very challenging phenomenon characterised by considerable ambiguities (Croll & Moses, 2000; Dyson, 2001).

UNESCO has emphasised inclusion in education since 1960, and other international human rights covenants have occurred since 1948 (Hodkinson, 2016). In 1989, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child initiated the first legally obligatory agreement to provide full human rights to young people (UN, 2007). The most significant element of the 1989

¹M.Ed., University of Reading, Institute of Education, Reading, Berkshire, UNITED KINGDOM.
e-mail: norahza@hotmail.com

agreement was the statement that all countries should give children with disabilities equal opportunity in the education system (Hodkinson, 2016).

The Salamanca statement was an important international agreement, as it encouraged countries throughout the international community to support inclusion by applying practical and strategic changes. In 1994, 92 countries and 25 international organisations signed the agreement regarding the rights of disabled children and called for the inclusion of all disabled children as an educational standard across the world (O'Hanlon, 1995).

Inclusive education was a leading priority of international programmes for education, but in practice, inclusion encountered considerable obstacles. According to the "strong programme" of inclusion advocated by authors such as Ainscow (1999), "inclusive schools for all" necessitate that students with special education needs be educated in mainstream schools, as their right and as a matter of equal opportunity. This position claims that the existence of special schools undermines the possibility of serving special needs appropriately in mainstream settings. However, other authors have taken the view that there may still be a place for special schools and other special settings. According to Farrell (2000), one of the tensions is between the rights of parents to choose where their children are educated and the principle of inclusive education. Educating all children with SEN in mainstream schools as a matter of principle and the right of the child means that parents would be denied the right to choose a school for their children, as special schools would not be an available option even when parents preferred them (Farrell, 2000). Another problem Farrell raised is what should happen if parents choose a mainstream school whereas educational professionals believe that the child's needs can only be met in a special school.

In the UK context, the Warnock Report (DES, 1978) was a major landmark with regard to thinking about and legislation for inclusive education. The Warnock Report emphasised the requirement to educate the majority of students with SEN in mainstream schools. This requirement is reflected in the Education Act of 1981 (DfES, 1981) and later in the Green Paper

of 1997 (DfEE, 1997). However, both the Warnock Report and the government documents illustrated the tensions in thinking between a commitment to the principle of inclusion and the need to find the best possible provision for children with difficulties. As Croll and Moses (2000) demonstrated, the Warnock Report suggested that inclusive education is the ideal, but they also described an important future role for segregated special schools and discussed the circumstances in which a special school placement would be appropriate.

In addition, Croll and Moses (2000) showed the way in which both these views were reflected in subsequent government discussion papers and legislation. They wrote about "The Green Paper, Excellence for All Children" (DfEE, 1997), saying that, This document falls into the pattern, familiar from Warnock onwards, of expressing strong support for the principle of inclusion while, at the same time, qualifying this support to the point where it is hard to see any particular policy direction being indicated. (Croll & Moses, 2000) More recent regulations of SEN provisions have further established the importance of keeping separate special schools (DfES, 2001). The move towards inclusion has been accepted in the UK, but many commentators have argued that it is confusing to support both inclusive schools and special schools (Croll & Moses, 2000). Although these opposing perspectives were presented in the Green Paper as corresponding, rather than conflicting, this is disputed by many inclusion advocates. An unresolved question is how the commitment to inclusion can go together with the continued role of special schools (Croll & Moses, 2000).

In the US, the obligation to provide education in the least restrictive environment (LRE) was put forward in the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EHA) of 1975. According to the EHA, students with SEN must be educated in mainstream schools with their developmentally typical peers (Osgood, 2005). In 1990, the EHA legislation was modified into the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) which, in 2004, highlighted that students with SEN could be segregated in classes if they have a severe disability and are unable to obtain an appropriate level of education in a mainstream classroom with a supplementary assistant (Heward,

2003). The number of students with SEN in mainstream schools increased as a result of the implementation of this law. Although IDEA supported the essential need for all SEN students to be educated in mainstream schools, it also suggested that the services provided did not necessarily meet all disability needs, meaning that a more SEN-specific setting might be required (Yell, 2006). Moreover, IDEA failed to set standard regulations or strategies, such as individual education plans that could assist mainstream teachers (Yell, 2006).

In the Middle East, traditional cultures, values, and beliefs have not generally encouraged the notion of inclusive education professionally; these still have a great deal of influence (Brown, 2005). Children and young people with special needs are educated, with few exceptions, in special schools or centres. These schools illustrate segregation, rather than inclusion. Nevertheless, these ideas are developing. All Arab League countries have signed international documents regarding the principle of the inclusion of the disabled in all civic, social, vocational, and educational settings (Brown, 2005). Most of these countries also claim to conform to region legal agreements adopting a form of legislation for the equality of disabled people (Weber, 2012). However, in practice, Arab countries encounter difficulties in embedding such an application in their cultures due to external effects, such as economic, political, social, and geographical issues, as well as a lack of professional education (Weber, 2012). In addition, there are no comprehensive agreement processes or legislative standards to assist in the development of inclusive educational practices in any of these countries (Weber, 2012). The problematic issue of applying inclusive education in Arab countries is due to diversity in the educational policies and different legislation that these countries have in place, which is attributed to various historical aspects, including the colonial legacy (Al-Kaabi, 2010).

Historically, in the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and United Arab Emirates), which is also known as the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), special needs have been classified in most cultures as blindness, deafness,

physical disability, or mental impairment. Recently, GCC countries have accepted the international definition of inclusion, which has been extended in the last two decades to include young people with intellectual, emotional, linguistic, and social and behavioural difficulties (Al-Kaabi, 2010). In addition, there is the notion that "inclusion for all" includes adult learners—those who did not go to school during childhood—who are categorised as members of a learner population with special needs (Al-Kaabi, 2010).

Until approximately 20 years ago, GCC families often held a local perspective of embarrassment, shame, and negative attitudes towards disabled children. Most disabled children were isolated from society within their families, which Al-Kaabi (2010) attributed to psychological and economic pressures that families with disabled children face. In most cases, parents have insufficient understanding and abilities to raise their disabled children and proactively respond to their special difficulties and needs (Al-Kaabi, 2010). Gaad (2011) suggested that cultural understanding in GCC societies is based on supporting the "weak and vulnerable" from a charity-based perspective, rather than supporting citizens with equal rights. "Rights-based approaches to disability and special needs education are more common in Western cultures, which place emphasis on the individual, while in the Gulf, tribe and family have always taken precedence" (Gaad, 2011).

However, GCC societies have recently shifted their approach to disability with a much greater emphasis on the role of policy direction at the national level and on the role of the state (Weber, 2012). Education systems are rapidly improving in the GCC region, with Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE acting as regional educational centres. Consequently, inclusive education is likely to play a much greater role in the future in the GCC. The GCC accepted the philosophical structure, grounded in international agendas, in addition to increasing knowledge-building faculties in different areas, such as education, science and technology research, mathematics, and languages (Weber, 2011).

Shift in Terminology from Integration to Inclusion

In the 1970s, at the time of the Warnock Report and the Education of All Handicapped Children Act, integration (or mainstreaming, as it was termed in the US) was the phrase used to define educational provision for students with special needs within mainstream schools. Integration means incorporating students with special needs into the mainstream of regular education (Farrell, 2000). However, integration was often extremely limited, and children could be in classes within a mainstream school while spending most of the day entirely isolated from their peers (Farrell, 2000). Moreover, integration often focused just on the location of children rather on the nature of schools and of curricula (Croll & Moses, 1998). In the 1990s, the Salamanca Conference on Special Needs Education changed the terminology of integration, now described as inclusion (UNESCO, 1994). The Salamanca statement and associated framework for action were signed by 92 participating countries, and many people have argued that they are the most influential documents in recent times concerning inclusive education (Ainscow, 1999). The statement has a strong focus on the development of inclusive schools in relation to the international goal of achieving education for all.

The notion of all was expanded upon and discussed in detail: ... schools should accommodate all children, regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, linguistic or other conditions. This should include disabled and gifted children, street and working children, children from remote or nomadic populations, children from linguistic, ethnic, or cultural minorities, and children from other disadvantaged or marginalized areas and groups. (UNESCO, 1994, p. 6)

The change in terminology was intended to go beyond new labels and involve a more radical approach to the education of children with SEN. Although integration was about fitting all children into mainstream schools, inclusion was about changing mainstream schools so that they became welcoming for all. Nevertheless, researchers have had different views about the value of the ideas presented on integration and inclusion. Pijl, Meijer, and Hegarty (1997) suggested that the two

notions have the same meaning, stating that "the wider notion of integration comes close to the concept of inclusion". Meanwhile, Ainscow (1998) stated that they have different meanings: integration has been used to describe processes by which individual children are supported in order that they can participate in the existing (and largely unchanged) programme of the school, whereas inclusion suggests a willingness to restructure the school's programme in response to the diversity of pupils who attend.

Inclusion means that pupils with SEN should participate fully in school life and that this participation should be valued and appreciated by the school community (Farrell, Jimerson, Howes, & Davies, 2008). The discourse on inclusion has been controlled by two types of development: social-political and empirical (Farrell, 2000; Lindsay, 1997). Social-political development is articulated in the government policy documents and reports and has been largely based on the view of inclusion as a human right (Fox, Farrell, & Davis, 2004). Empirical development has been the focus of debates regarding the existing advantages and outcomes for both schools and pupils (Farrell, Dyson, Polat, Hutcheson, & Gallannaugh, 2007; Kalambouka, Farrell, Dyson, & Kaplan, 2007). Farrell (2000) argued that the right of all pupils to be educated in a mainstream school oversimplifies the issue, as such a basic right can be met if the child is appropriately educated in a special school. Indeed, there has been no precise evidence suggesting that such a basic right cannot be fulfilled by placing pupils with SEN in special schools (Farrell, 2000). "Education is, after all, a means to an end, and special schools may for some children provide the most effective means towards achieving these ends" (Farrell, 2000).

Therefore, the notion of inclusive education can be seen as involving two contrasting views. Farrell (2000) argued that honouring human rights does not mean that all SEN children should go to an inclusive school and that the existence of special schools and mainstream schools is vital to serve the SEN community, whereas Ainscow stated that the human rights argument means that schools must take all children, and mainstream schools are where students with SEN should be.

Meanwhile, the empirical discourse has been characterised by uncertainty about whether the principles of inclusion can be realised in practice (Kalambouka et al., 2007). Although inclusion has been supported in principle by several teachers, parents, and local education authorities (LEAs), this is viewed as being insufficient to judge the real gains of inclusion (Ainscow, Farrell, Twedde & Malki, 2000). The real criteria of judgment have been practically conceived to include the impact of inclusion on school performance, peer learning, achievement outcomes, and social and emotional outcomes for all pupils, including those with SEN (Dyson & Millward, 2000; Farrell, 2000). Sebba and Ainscow (1996) considered the key point as a framework for school improvement toward inclusive education for all students; as inclusion is a process that encourages schools to respond to all students as individuals, schools should reconstruct their curricular provision in order to engage all pupils as individuals.

Issues of Inclusive Education Systems

Smith and Thomas (2006) argued that the international debate about inclusive education has long focused on the location of children with special needs, rather than on the quality of education and care that those children receive. Many authors agree with this argument, but significant differences have emerged between them with regard to the kinds of changes that are needed to support children with disabilities in inclusive contexts. For example, Farrell (2000) argued that the development of inclusive education for children with SEN in mainstream schools should focus on how to practise it, rather than on the complex issues and challenges of policies.

This is essentially a practical argument about what sorts of educational provision are most appropriate and in what circumstances. In contrast, authors such as Ainscow (1993) have argued for more radical changes to educational provision in order to support inclusion: The focus must be on finding ways of creating the conditions that will facilitate and support the learning of all children, instead of the traditional search for specialist techniques that can be used to ameliorate the learning difficulties of individual pupils. Inclusion,

according to Ainscow (2005), is about understanding how to develop the education system in a way that allows it to evolve its capacity to meet all learners' needs. This argument implies major changes in educational provision to make it suitable for all. However, although the principle is clear, what it actually means in practice is not clearly spelt out.

Skidmore (1999) presented a valuable framework for the consideration of approaches to understanding special educational needs and for analysing differing research approaches to SEN. He began by identifying three broad traditions of research into learning difficulties: the psycho-medical, the organisational, and the sociological. The psycho-medical aspect focuses on the individual child and his/her supposed particular deficiencies. This approach is associated with assessments and interventions at a purely individual level and does not consider the broader contexts of school and society that have an impact on apparent special educational needs. It does not consider ideas of inclusion or other wider aspects of the educational experience of children.

The organisational tradition focuses on the institutional or school aspects of learning difficulties and inclusion. It considers how schools can become environments that meet the needs of all their pupils, and it is sometimes located in the context of wider issues of school effectiveness. Aspects of schooling that are considered include how inclusion is defined, approaches to school organisation and development, classroom and teaching processes, and teacher development.

The sociological approach focuses on learning difficulties—not as issues of individual limitations or of school organisation, but as issues framed within social structures and within “structural patterns of discrimination and disadvantage” (Skidmore, 1999). In this approach, inclusion is not a technical issue of school organisation, but rather a “fundamentally political project” (Skidmore, 1999). and requires basic changes in educational practice. Skidmore (1999) saw many strengths in this approach, but he also showed that sociological approaches have very little to say about the processes of teaching and learning or about how the patterns of school organisation and teaching approaches might

be changed to meet the needs of all pupils. He also referred to Slee's (1998) argument that institutional arrangements in schools cannot be simply "read off" from wider social-structural arrangements. Skidmore's (1999) sociological approach has links to the strong programme of inclusion supported by Ainscow's (2005) view and is compatible with Ainscow's perspective, although they are not quite the same.

Influence of Ideological Frameworks

In a similar way to Skidmore (1999), Hodkinson (2016) distinguished three major ideological frameworks. In the psycho-medical model, children's disabilities and their limitations are caused by the inherent nature of their disability (Thomas, 2014). At its core, the psycho-medical model presents the "person with disability as the problem and looks for cures" (Harpur, 2012). Other names for this model are the individual tragedy, deficit, or medical model (Hodkinson, 2016). Meanwhile, the social model rejects the classification of disabled people based on the foundation of their disability (Goodley, 2014). It argues that disability is a product of a society's actions and beliefs, rather than the inherent limitations of disabled people. It is society that is disabling and creating the limitations (Slee, 1998). The psycho-medical model and the social model are both incorporated into the organisational model suggested by Skidmore (1999). Finally, according to the disability movement perspective, disabled people have asserted their human rights to be fully included within society through the use of politics and the legal system. The disability movement perspective incorporates many of the insights of the social model, but pays more attention to the individual circumstances of people with disabilities (Shakespeare & Watson, 2002).

The psycho-medical model, or individual tragedy model, is very important and has shown its significance over time. These ideas are rooted within the conscience of society and are developed by means of the media (Hodkinson, 2016). Within this ideological framework, it is understood that special needs arise from the psychological, neurological, or physiological problems shown by the child (Skidmore, 1996). The psycho-medical model

uses terminology and practices taken from the medical profession to judge a child's limitations against an average individual's developmental and functional norms (Hodkinson, 2016).

The range and severity of a child's SEN might be determined by comparing that child's performance with the performance of typically developing children of a similar age in a variety of areas, such as cognition, the use of expressive language and vocabulary range, and social and emotional functioning (Dykeman, 2006). The basis of the medical model is that a child's problems will be linked to a shortfall in his or her performance that will need to be dealt with or healed by a professional (Harpur, 2012). Children's problems are characterised and described using scientific terminology, such as the "aetiology of the syndrome" or "the pathology of impairment", and through the use of screening, assessment, and identification (Skidmore, 1996).

As a result, children who do not fit into these learning environments are categorised and frequently withdrawn/excluded from mainstream classrooms. When state provisions for special needs were organised in the 19th century, medical officers took part in selecting and allocating children with special needs within an independent segregated system (Hodkinson, 2016). The literature has revealed that the psycho-medical model is weak from a theoretical point of view. The model places the reasons for the disability with the individuals; therefore, it has been seen as failing to show disability holistically (Swain & French, 2000). Accordingly, the psycho-medical model neither considers the disabled people living in a disabling society nor saves their human rights.

On the other hand, the social model challenges the concept that disability is caused by an impairment of individuals. Within this ideological framework, it is society and the environment that disable people by limiting their actions and their capacity to communicate as successfully as people without impairments (Morgan, 2012). This model's principal idea is that society is the cause of disability, as it places obstacles in the path of people with impairments (Goering, 2010). Oliver (1996), the key originator of this model, stated that disability was not created by

impairments, but rather by disabling barriers erected by society itself. "This was no amazing new insight on my part dreamed up in some ivory tower, but was really an attempt to enable me to make sense of the world from my social work students and other professionals who I taught" (Oliver, 1990). Individuals with disabilities have received more care as the focus has started to shift away from external factors to the way that society creates barriers that limit their access. Most of society is designed by non-disabled people, some of whom have little or no understanding of special needs. For example, a person in a wheelchair only becomes "disabled" due to the society in which that person operates (Morgan, 2012).

It is frequently stated that disabled children are amongst the poorest and most disadvantaged in their societies and are often thoroughly prevented from receiving an education (Miles & Singal, 2010). A key part of the social model is that education is a significant means of conquering the prejudices displayed by society towards people with limitations. Many people claim that the education system encourages children to see disabled people as unusual, which unfortunately and indirectly teaches children how to discriminate against those with disabilities (Hodkinson, 2016). However, the social model is clear in its encouragement of school change (Norwich, 2014). Schools that accept this ideological structure would re-evaluate their curriculum, classroom management and organisation, and expectations of teachers and assistants in order to guarantee that the stereotypical and prejudiced attitudes that society often holds regarding disabilities and people with limitations would be changed (Hodkinson, 2016).

Although the social model has assisted in the movement of individuals with disabilities in societies and the combined acceptance of disabilities, the social model has been criticised by disability charities and organisations as well as disabled individuals themselves (Oliver, 2013). Oliver argued that this model has been heavily criticised because it falls short in explaining key differences, as it displays disabled people as one homogenous group rather than a group of individuals who differ in terms of gender, sexuality, race, age, and limitations (Oliver, 2013).

Shakespeare and Watson (2002) argued that there should be another conceptual shift towards a model that more successfully includes disabled people's experiences. By arguing against the social model, they are not denying that a main concern remains to examine and campaign against social barriers, but rather that a more sophisticated approach towards disability as a whole is necessary. In particular, they accept the argument of the social model that society disables and oppresses people with impairments. However, they also argue that it is important to recognise both the individuality and the reality of impairments and that the problems experienced by people with disabilities are not solely a result of socially imposed barriers. For example, the reality of pain for people with some physical impairments and the difficulty of many types of employment for people with intellectual impairments require recognition.

Nevertheless, disability advocates reject the medical model, which focuses on the individual's body and its limitations, and they instead give their attention to the living experiences of the disabled in society. The disabilities movement in the 1960s was prompted by civil rights movements, similar to those in the US for African-Americans, as well as women's rights movements (Shapiro, 1993). These civil rights movements have occurred in various countries, such as Australia, India, and South Africa. Furthermore, the United Nations produced the Standard Rules on Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities in 1993 to establish the right for all children to be educated in mainstream schools. The main focus of these approaches has been to eliminate discrimination and obstacles through the established civil rights legislation. These pieces of legislation include modifications that must be made in public services, workplaces, and communication systems in order to facilitate access by disabled people. Discriminatory attitudes are forbidden under these pieces of legislation.

The disability movement detected the obstacles that disabled people experience and explained how these obstructions could limit their satisfaction and their opportunities to participate in society (Tomlinson, 1982). This included making decisions regarding education placement,

work environment, public services, and transportation as well as their own personal decisions in life.

Factors Influencing Inclusive Education

Farrell (2000) identified two difficulties regarding the methodological issues in conducting research on inclusive education, which in turn affect the level of certainty of any conclusions. First, the generalisability of the research conclusion is difficult to guarantee unless the researcher is sure that the participants—students with SEN—in the two groups being compared have a similar level of disability. As Lewis (1995) argued, “it is not clear whether, for example, pupils designated ‘trainable mentally retarded’ (USA), having ‘moderate learning difficulties’ (Australia and New Zealand) or ‘severe learning difficulties’ (UK) represent similar groups”. The second issue is that students with SEN experience different inclusive provisions in different settings, making it difficult to compare findings from different research studies based on these differences in forms of inclusion. Therefore, the factors influencing inclusive education can be varied in different contexts. The two main factors focus on teachers’ attitudes and parents’ attitudes.

Teachers’ attitudes and knowledge

Teachers’ attitudes toward inclusion have been deliberated in many countries around the world with, generally, rather varied results (Jassanein, 2015). Although the conclusions of the various studies have differed, there tends to be a common awareness of how vital it is to consider the teachers’ views, thoughts, and apprehensions with regard to enhancing the pursuit of inclusion. However, despite this general agreement on the importance of teachers, teachers’ representatives are not always positive about inclusion. According to the Centre for Studies in Inclusive Education (CSIE) (1989), which supports a strong inclusion programme, inclusion is an important concern of human rights. CSIE suggests that children, regardless of their abilities and background, should have the right to equality in education in local mainstream schools, and mainstream schools

must be prepared for this request. This is in line with the findings of numerous other researchers (Dupoux, Wolman, & Estada, 2005; Fayez, Dababneh, & Jumiaan, 2011).

On the other hand, some teachers’ unions argue that an inclusive policy places more pressure on teachers and that special schools are a better placement for children with special needs (Alghazo & Gaad, 2004; Kalyva, Georgiadi, & Tsakiris, 2007; National Union of Teachers [NUT], 1997). McGregor and Campbell (2001) demonstrated that the study of teachers’ attitudes about the inclusion of students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is considered an essential source of data that can be used to improve teacher training courses. Moreover, teachers’ attitudes can influence their expectations of these students’ performance, which will affect those students’ self-esteem and educational achievement (Alexander & Strain, 1978). Teachers with negative attitudes towards the inclusion of students with ASD might affect those students negatively (Hannah & Pliner, 1983).

Avramidis and Norwich (2002) suggested that teachers’ beliefs have a significant effect on their attitudes towards inclusion, which define their acceptance of students with SEN in their classrooms. Teachers have positive attitudes towards inclusion when they perceive themselves as capable teachers (Rizzo & Vispoel, 1991), when they have special needs teaching qualifications (Ali, Mustapha, & Jelas, 2006; Loreman, Forlin, & Sharma, 2007; Mukhopadhyay, 2014), and when they are experienced in teaching students with SEN (Hastings & Oakford, 2003; Marston & Leslie, 1983; Rizzo & Vispoel, 1991; Roberts & Lindsell, 1997). Teachers are more supportive of the inclusion of students with less severe disabilities than they are of the inclusion of those students with more severe disabilities (Rizzo & Vispoel, 1991). There is no confirming evidence that teachers’ age and gender affect their attitude (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; Lindsay, 2007). Research has shown that teachers’ positive attitudes depend on training and experiences with inclusive education (Avramidis & Kalyva, 2007); in the absence of training, teachers stated that they are not qualified to teach

SEN, which in turn results in negative attitudes.

Although teachers are considered a key element in inclusive education, some research has suggested that teachers tend to avoid accepting the responsibility of including students with special needs in their class (Pijl, 2010). Teachers justified their disagreement with inclusive education by indicating their shortage of knowledge and insufficient experience in teaching students with SEN (Florian, 2009). Similarly, Symes and Humphrey (2010) found that general education teachers stated that they are not qualified to teach students with ASD as they are not able to manage students' social, behavioural, and academic needs. Research has referred to teachers' insufficient knowledge about ASD and the shortage of support and advice provided to teachers in order to meet those children's needs (De Boer & Simpson, 2009).

In a study on teachers' attitudes in the Netherlands, Pijl (2010) argued that teacher training courses focused on the introductory level module for teaching students with SEN, in general, and teachers stated that they were unequipped for the responsibility of inclusion. As long as the training courses do not provide relevant experience in educating students with SEN, teachers expressed uncertainty in accepting the responsibility of inclusion. Thus, the probability of experiencing successful inclusion is low (Pijl, 2010). Teachers might feel unconfident and inefficient in terms of their performance when dealing with SEN, so their identity as professional educators might lose credibility (Glazzard, 2011; Lipsky & Gartner, 1997). In addition, Glazzard (2011) argued that parents may object to inclusive education, as it threatens the academic achievement of their typically developing children. Therefore, teachers need satisfactory skills and a sufficient understanding of the nature of different disabilities in order to properly control and manage their students' behaviour, provide them with support, and reduce the gaps in the abilities of students in the class with and without SEN (Glazzard, 2011).

The literature has also valued the element of the organisational paradigm from different perspectives. In the context of the UK, Giangreco, Edelman, Luiselli, and MacFarland (1997) suggested that there

are common structures in schools where inclusion has succeeded. As Giangreco et al. explained, first, the procedure of developing a common agenda for inclusion should be achieved by setting distinct common goals. Second, the setting should support inclusion by providing all involved teachers with appropriate training that improves both their skills and their attitudes. Third, the educators' roles in schools must be defined to confirm that all individuals are accountable for the management of students with SEN.

In order to develop effective inclusion practices, Rose (2001) emphasised that it is essential for the school environment to apply effective inclusion; cooperation among teachers, school staff, parents, and students increases the ability of teachers and schools to apply inclusion effectively (Smith & Smith, 2000). The absence of collaboration and support from the school creates obstacles for teachers in their practice of inclusive education (Ainscow & Miles, 2008; UNESCO, 2005) and the experience of the students with SEN in that inclusive school. For example, in a systematic observation study on the overall support and interactions experienced by SEN students with statements in a primary mainstream school, Webster and Blatchford (2013) found that students with statements experienced a high degree of separation from the classroom; more than one-quarter of their school day was spent in an individual support lesson within the class, where they were segregated from their peers in order to be supported at an individual workstation. Students with statements experienced less whole class interaction with teachers and fewer interactions with their peers. The role of students with statements in the classroom was passive, as they spent most of the time listening to the teacher in one-way interactions (Webster & Blatchford, 2013).

Parents' attitudes and source of information

In recent years, a number of legislative changes have occurred in education systems related to the policies of inclusive education; children with special needs are gradually joining their typically developing peers in mainstream schools (Whitaker, 2007). Theoretically, in the last decade in

the UK and the US, legislation has empowered parents to choose their preferences in educational settings and has created options to address the educational needs of their children with SEN (Whitaker, 2007). In many education systems, parental views and parental rights are assuming greater importance. Therefore, understanding the perceptions of parents of children with SEN about the value of inclusion is essential, as the parents may be decision-makers when choosing their children's educational placement. Parents can contribute significantly to the success of inclusive education for their children (Garrick Duhaney & Salend, 2000). Parental involvement with school staff can support the provision of inclusive educational programmes by providing a view into their children's abilities and requirements. Furthermore, having continuous communication with teachers could spread awareness of inclusive education in society by sharing information about the vision of inclusive education programmes (Reichart et al., 1989).

Relatively little research has examined parental views concerning the inclusion of children with special educational needs in mainstream classrooms. Research has shown that parents should be considered as vital decision-makers who critically influence the future provision of educational services for their children with significant disabilities (Garrick Duhaney & Salend, 2000). In a special education service, parents must be included in the educational decision-making and arrangement procedures (Ryndak, Orlando, Storch, Denney, & Huffman, 2011). Generally, research on inclusive education has revealed different perspectives among parents in terms of the placement of children with SEN in educational settings. Some parents favour and promote inclusive education in mainstream schools whereas others prefer separate placement in special education centres (Grove & Fisher, 1999).

A study conducted in the US by Palmer, Fuller, Arora, and Nelson (2001) explored parental perceptions regarding inclusive education for their children with SEN. Of 140 participants, half had positive perceptions and half had negative attitudes regarding inclusion. Positive parental statements about inclusion related to improving their children's attainment and

the development of improved practical skills due to higher expectations and additional motivation in regular classrooms. Parents who had negative attitudes regarding inclusion felt that mainstream classrooms were not sufficiently prepared for their children and that the teachers could not give enough attention to those students with SEN in their classes (Palmer et al., 2001). Parents were also anxious about the class size, teaching methods, and the stresses of teaching that might lead to the neglect of SEN students. Parents who had negative attitudes regarding inclusion were also concerned about the fact that regular classes are focused on academic achievement, rather than on fundamental living, socialisation, and functional skills (Palmer et al., 2001).

Although some parents believe inclusion offers advantageous social consequences, they maintain that their children with severe disabilities can be more easily rejected and bullied (Freeman & Alkin, 2000). Ainscow et al. (2000) found that parents of children with SEN did not support the inclusion setting because they believed that special schools provided their children with the requisite security and attention.

A review of empirically based research in the field found just 38 studies that addressed the issue of parental views of inclusion in some way, and only 10 of these provided sufficient evidence to be included in the review (De Boer, Pijl & Minnaert, 2010). The results of these studies showed that parents were, in general, either positive or neutral with regard to inclusion. Parents of typically developing children were slightly more positive than parents of children with special educational needs, who were somewhat more inclined to be neutral. Parents of children with special educational needs were more positive about the general principle of inclusion than they were about practical inclusion for their own child, although it was also the case that they became more positive when they had experienced inclusion.

The concerns that parents expressed when they were less positive about inclusion concerned, first of all, the level of teacher expertise for teaching such children in mainstream schools. Moreover, parents' satisfaction with their children's school situation was also associated with

their trust in the teachers and the school (Stoner et al., 2005). A second issue was the possibility of bullying and the lack of acceptance from other children (De Boer et al., 2010). This review of the research did not lead to any ASD-specific conclusions. However, it did emerge that parents were more positive about the inclusion of children with physical and sensory difficulties than they were about the inclusion of children with cognitive and emotional difficulties, including ASD.

Buysse and Bailey (1993) and Guralnick and Groom (1988) showed that parents preferred inclusive education settings for their children because they had identified the social involvement benefits of inclusion. Compared to the children in special education schools, children with SEN in inclusive schools engaged more frequently in social situations and were more accepted by their typically developing peers (Buysse & Bailey, 1993; Guralnick & Groom, 1988). Moreover, teachers reported that the inclusion environment gave students with SEN the opportunity to build relationships with other students and improved the self-esteem and confidence in children with SEN (Copeland, Hughes, Agran, Wehmeyer, & Rodi, 2002).

Furthermore, research has shown that in an inclusive environment, children with SEN have a chance to learn social skills and social norms. These children experience everyday situations and learn from their peers' behaviour (Guralnick, Connor, & Hammond, 1995). The findings of maternal interviews in Guralnick et al.'s study showed that mothers witnessed improvement in their children's social communication, such as their ability to share activities with others and cooperatively play with their peers in the inclusive school, demonstrate self-modified behaviours, and learn more effectively from their peers than from adults (McDonnell et al., 2003). Few studies have reported that an inclusive education environment can help students with SEN improve their academic achievement or increase their engagement in classroom activities as well as increase time spent doing in-class tasks (Ritter, Michel, & Irby, 1999).

Conclusion

With regard to inclusion, what has mainly emerged are broad sets of support for the principle of inclusion, but very little agreement as to how it should be implemented and even what it consists of. Overall, it is clear that broad support for inclusive education exists, as indicated by UNESCO documents and the Salamanca statement, but there is less clarity on what inclusive education means in practice in terms of what an education system should look like. These issues are particularly acute in the Middle East and GCC countries, where inclusion is a recent development, although the same issues with regard to what inclusion means in practice are still apparent in countries like the UK and US, which have a longer history of inclusive provisions.

Parents and teachers showed mixed views about inclusion for students with special educational needs and the multiple factors that can be identified to support inclusion and prevent barriers. Some research demonstrated that teachers tend to avoid accepting responsibility for including students with special needs in their class due to a shortage in knowledge and insufficient experience teaching students with SEN. However, research has shown that teachers should be supported by providing them with appropriate training that improves both their skills and their attitudes.

Parents are vital decision-makers who can critically influence the future provision of educational services for their children with significant disabilities. Generally, research on inclusive education has revealed different perspectives among parents in terms of the placement of children with SEN in educational settings. Parents' satisfaction about their children's school situation is associated with their trust in the teachers and the school (Stoner et al., 2005) as well as the possibility of bullying and the lack of acceptance from other children.

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